

T h e B i g S t o n e Grid

by
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First Draft

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Titlecard: Early spring. The Hamptons. New York

EXT. MANSION / POOL DECK - NIGHT

Behind a large white house, LANA, a slender twenty-four-year-old blonde woman wearing a vanilla bikini, swims across the surface of a kidney-shaped pool, the interior of which is decorated with blue tiles. Seated upon a wooden patio recliner watching the swimmer is PERRY, a muscular, albeit slightly droopy, forty-seven-year-old with silk shorts and long silver hair that is pulled back in a ponytail.

PERRY

You navigate the water quite well.

LANA

(thick Ukrainian accent)

Thank you.

The woman glides in smooth arc toward the shallow end.

PERRY

Perhaps your ancestors were aquatic apes?

Lana places the soles of her feet upon the tiles; the water retreats until it encircles her waist and laps at her navel. She faces the seated man and wrinkles her brow, befuddled.

LANA

I have not heard of these.

PERRY

Assuming that you believe in evolution--and feel free not to tell me if you don't--we're all descended from apes. But there's this other theory that the reason human beings don't have furry monkey bodies--which would be beneficial on dry land and in the sun and in the cold--is because there was an amphibious stage in our evolution.

Lana, ruminating, wipes beads of water from her skin.

LANA

Do the scientists believe this?

PERRY

A small minority do. But the way you zip around in that pool--and that webbing you've got between your little toes--makes me wonder if there was a concentration in the Ukraine.

LANA

My ancestors were not swimming apes.

PERRY

You're probably right. Still, I'm curious what would happen if I threw a banana in the deep end.

Lana SPLASHES water onto Perry. He LAUGHS.

LANA

You are--

Lana sees something, GASPS and drops into the water so that only her head and neck remain above the surface.

PERRY

What's wrong?

Lana points a dripping index finger.

LANA

There are men.

Perry turns around and looks down the hill, toward the woods that line the eastern perimeter of his property. Three silhouetted MEN stride from the trees, their shoes SQUEAKING upon the damp grass. Perry's stomach sinks.

PERRY

Lana, get inside the--

White light flashes in front of the man in the middle; a bullet WHISTLES through the air. A porch light BURSTS and goes dark; sparks HISS.

SILHOUETTED MAN

Stay where you are or you will be shot.

Lana is terrified; Perry's face becomes bright red with anger. Upon the damp grass, the shoes of the approaching trio SQUEAK like rodents.

PERRY

Get the hell off of my--

Muted gunfire flashes, SNAP. Beneath Perry, a wooden chair leg BURSTS. The solid man falls to the concrete; his palms and knees SMACK the stone. He GRUNTS.

LANA
Who are they?

PERRY
I don't know.

Perry rises to his feet, wipes bloody palms upon his dense stomach and watches the three Men climb the hill. Into the patio light walks a BURNED MAN WITH MISMATCHED EYES; he wears a black sweat suit and holds a semi-automatic pistol that is fitted with a silencer. He is flanked by two big men--one is BALD and the other is BLONDE--who wear jeans, sweatshirts and backpacks of a charcoal color.

PERRY (CONT'D)
Take whatever you want and get the hell out of here.

The Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes walks toward Perry; the big men walk toward the pool shed.

BURNED MAN
Perry Danton.

Perry is surprised by the utterance of his name, but does not remark upon it. The big men disappear inside the pool shed.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)
You did not pay the required amount into the system.

Disbelief and anger flash across Perry's face.

PERRY
That's what this is about? You're the guy who sent me that letter and those sick Polaroids?
(he SNORTS)
I gave those things to the cops.

BURNED MAN
We know.

Something metallic CLANKS within the pool shed. Perry's eyes flicker to the open portal of the small white building. Summarily, the big men emerge, carrying long-handled pool poles. They pull the blue nets from the ends of the cylinders, discard them, CLACK-CLACK, extend the telescopic tools and twist the pegs into place, CLICK-CLICK.

Perry looks over at Lana; there is terror in her eyes.

LANA

Perry? What is going on?

The big men, each holding a ten foot long metal pole, walk on either side of the kidney-shaped pool. Perry advances toward the Burned Man.

PERRY

She has nothing to-

The Burned Man points his gun at Perry's face.

BURNED MAN

Sit down.

Trembling with anger, Perry walks to the patio chair, upon which Lana a white towel is draped, and seats himself.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

The Big Blonde Man nestles his pool pole beneath his armpit, reaches into his backpack, withdraws a very large silver thermos, unscrews the top and pours its lime green contents into the water. Green fog rises from the combined liquids.

Perry's stomach sinks.

PERRY

Lana. Get out of the pool.

Lana swims toward the side of the pool and climbs onto the metal ladder. A pool pole SMACKS into her throat; she CHOKES, tumbles backward and SPLASHES into the water.

Perry looks at the Burned Man.

PERRY (CONT'D)

She's got nothing to do with anything! Let her go.

The Burned Man does not respond. Lana surfaces, SPITS out tainted water and rubs her closed eyes. Her skin is pink.

LANA

Is burning.

PERRY

Get out of the pool!

Lana swims toward the south side of the pool. A pole SMACKS into her shoulder and drives her back; she swims in the opposite direction; the other pole impacts her neck, and she COUGHS. Frantic and blind, she treads water in the middle of the pool, CHOKING. Her skin reddens.

LANA

Let me out. Is burning!

Perry's entire body shakes; his eyes sparkle with tears.

PERRY

Let her out, goddammit-- I'll pay whatever you want. Anything.

The Burned Man does not respond to his plea.

Lana ducks underneath the surface and swims toward the deep end. The big men track alongside her and thrust their pool poles, as if spear-fishing. Lana is pinned to the tiles; a welter of red bubbles bursts from her mouth. She wriggles frantically; blisters cover her red skin.

Tears pour down Perry's face. He looks away from the pool and stares down at the dry concrete, shocked.

PERRY (CONT'D)

I...I...why...?

BURNED MAN

When you receive a bill from us, you pay. That's how it works.

The big men withdraw their poles from the water. Lana's lifeless body rises to the surface, where it floats, facedown. Her back and buttocks are red and covered with welts. Her hair is white, stripped of color.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

Turn her over.

The Big blonde Man slides his pole underneath the body and rolls the dead woman onto her back. Her face is dark red and swollen; her tongue and eyes are purple.

The Burned Man looks at Perry.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

If you go to the police or if you ever again disobey your instructions, your wife and children will swim in acid.

The Burned Man backs away from Perry, turns around and walks downhill, toward the woods. The big men follow.

PERRY

Who...who d-do you work for? Who's in charge of this?

The trio of intruders retreat beyond the porch lights and are absorbed by the dark woods. Shoes SQUEAK upon wet grass.

Titlecard: Seven months later. Autumn. New York City.

INT. GENTLE CARESSES - NIGHT

Lavender and rose lights divine smooth and provocative parts of the female form, two raised stages and the hungry gazes of the enthralled men who inhabit the strip club. The abused loudspeakers are distorted to such an extent that bass frequencies sound like amplified flatulence. GARRET WINTER, a lean thirty-nine-year-old blonde man with a scar above his left ear and a crooked nose, sits in the back of the club, dressed in blue slacks and a gray shirt. A full bottle of beer sits beside his left elbow. His thoughts are in a distant and unhappy place.

The music gets louder. Winter looks down, pulls a half-inch wide strip from his napkin, RIP, and then tears a second swatch loose, RIP. He rolls the first piece into a cylinder and inserts it into his left ear.

WOMAN'S VOICE

For a second, I thought you were rolling a joint.

TARA, a twenty-two-year-old brunette dancer wearing a black sequin dress, sits in the plush lavender chair beside Winter.

WINTER

Hello.

Winter rolls a second stopper and inserts it into his right ear. Tara places a soft palm upon the man's right shoulder, rubs him gently and extends her free hand.

TARA

I'm Tara.

Winter takes her hand and shakes it as if a business deal has just been corporeally concluded. The woman smirks.

TARA (CONT'D)

You seem uncomfortable. Relax. There's nothing wrong with appreciating the human body.

Winter does not respond to her proclamation, but instead raises his beer and watches it pendulously swing by its neck from his fingertips. Rose and lavender lights orbit like a solar system within the sepia fluid.

TARA (CONT'D)

You think there's something wrong with coming to a place like this?

WINTER

I don't want to offend you.

TARA

I won't be offended.

WINTER

I see a lot of troubled women in my line of work, and it seems like a place like this...takes advantage of their issues.

TARA

If there wasn't a place like this, half of these girls--or more--would become escorts or Holland tunnel hookers. At least here there're bouncers and some rules--not that all the girls follow the rules--but it's a safe way for a girl like me to make money using my natural advantages.

WINTER

"Natural advantages."
(he glances at her figure)
That's apt.

TARA

Everybody has issues--I do and I'd bet you do--but most people don't have the ability to make money off of their looks. You really don't need to feel bad for us.

A BLONDE DANCER wearing translucent stiletto heels walks past the table. Tara points at Winter's untouched bottle of beer.

TARA (CONT'D)

How about you drink that, and I give you a private dance?

WINTER

You are very pretty, but...but no thank you. I apologize if I wasted your time-- I'm not sure how this is supposed to go.

The THROBBING bass drum is replaced by the HISSING clamor of distorted electric guitars. Tara leans closer to Winter.

TARA

Why'd you come here if you feel so weird about it?

WINTER
I'm acting out.

A somber grin comes to Winter's face.

WINTER (CONT'D)
And I suppose I was hoping I'd feel something in here...a surge, maybe...that magnetic pull you feel in your stomach when you're attracted to somebody-- even just superficially.

Winter looks down at his beer bottle. Tara glances at the man's scintillating wedding band.

TARA
Problems with your wife?

WINTER
We had a bad conversation.

TARA
Want to talk about it?

WINTER
I think I've wasted enough of your time

Winter twists off his gold wedding band and ponders it. Lavender and rose lights dance across its surface.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Here--

Winter presses the wedding band into Tara's palm. The woman is stunned.

TARA
I can't--

WINTER
Take it. Wear it or give it to somebody or sell it-- I just...I just don't want--

Winter pauses, reaches into his pocket and withdraws his BUZZING cellphone. He glances at the display, which reads 'Benjamin,' and extracts wadded napkin from his right ear.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Sorry, I have to take this.
(he brings his phone to his open ear)
Yeah.
(he listens)
(MORE)

WINTER (CONT'D)

Okay. Pick me up at forty-ninth and tenth in fifteen minutes.

Winter SNAPS his phone shut, secrets it in his slacks, rises from the table and looks at Tara.

WINTER (CONT'D)

I need to get to a crime scene. It was nice talking to you.

TARA

Crime scene? You're a cop?

WINTER

Detective.

EXT. DELI DELIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, wearing a blue blazer that matches his slacks and a black tie around his gray collar, exits the Korean grocery carrying two cups of coffee. A brown sedan with tinted windows pulls up to the curb.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

BENJAMIN WILLIAMS, a strikingly handsome forty-three-year-old black man with a thin mustache, close-cropped hair, significant sideburns and a brown suit, leans across the leather interior of his sedan and opens the door, CLNK.

BENJAMIN

You didn't put any of that fake sugar shit in mine?

WINTER

It's authentic.

Winter sits in the passenger seat. Benjamin unscrews the lid of the travel mug that is nestled in his dashboard. The blonde man pours a cup of coffee into the mug and sets his full cup inside the empty one. He shuts the door, THUNK.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Sounds like he ate a gun.

Benjamin screws the lid onto his travel mug and checks his rearview mirrors.

BENJAMIN

Sure does.

(he accelerates)

Why're you in this area at night?

WINTER

Sightseeing.

Benjamin looks at Winter; the blonde man stares at the road, his blank blue eyes illuminated by the lights of oncoming cars. The black man returns his gaze forward.

BENJAMIN

Are you okay to do this? Seems like a formality-- us being there.

WINTER

The distraction is welcome.

INT. ZENITH TOWER / LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Winter and Benjamin walk into the white and gold marble lobby of the condominium complex, where two OFFICERS in uniform, a black thirty-year-old female and an older white male, stand beside the DOORMAN, a Hispanic man with slicked back silver hair and bright white dentures. The striding detectives display their badges and laminates.

MALE OFFICER

Detectives.

BENJAMIN

Officers.

WINTER

Where's the scene?

FEMALE OFFICER

Twenty-second floor.

WINTER

What's the room number?

FEMALE OFFICER

There isn't one.

WINTER

He owns the entire floor?

The Female Officer nods. Benjamin looks at the Doorman, who is both sad and anxious, and reads his name tag.

BENJAMIN

Hugo. Can you take us up there?

DOORMAN

Yes. I take you.

INT. ZENITH TOWER / ELEVATOR - SAME

Winter and Benjamin walk into the large elevator, the walls of which are fluted like Greco-Roman pillars. The Doorman enters and presses the button marked, 'PH.' The door shuts.

BENJAMIN

Detective Winter-- what do you think of this building? Nice, isn't it?

WINTER

It's like a preview of heaven.

BENJAMIN

Hugo?

DOORMAN

Yes.

BENJAMIN

Do the people who live here treat you well?

DOORMAN

They are very nice to me. Polite.

BENJAMIN

Was Mr. O'Connor a nice man?

DOORMAN

Yes. Very nice. Always nice.

BENJAMIN

Was he happy?

The Doorman becomes quiet. The numbers 12, 14 and 15 shine upon the wall. The detectives watch Hugo ruminates.

DOORMAN

Not since his niece died.

Winter and Benjamin exchange a surreptitious glance.

BENJAMIN

When was that?

DOORMAN

Three years ago. He change after that. And his wife leave him too.

Winter withdraws a note pad and pen from his jacket.

BENJAMIN

How did he change?

DOORMAN

He was sad. And nervous.

Upon the wall, the letters, 'PH' shine. A bell BINGS.

INT. PENTHOUSE / FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, secreting his pad, and Benjamin walk through the open door of the penthouse and into a foyer, the rose walls of which are covered with photographs of buildings. SERGEANT ARTHUR, a plump black man with gray hair and a blue uniform, approaches the detectives.

SERGEANT ARTHUR

Detectives.

BENJAMIN

Sergeant. Why're you on this?

SERGEANT ARTHUR

I was in the area when it was reported.

BENJAMIN

Who's been notified?

SERGEANT ARTHUR

We left a message for his daughter, but we haven't heard back yet. She's in Nebraska.

The Sergeant turns around and leads the detectives forward.

INT. PENTHOUSE / LIVING ROOM - SAME

The Sergeant escorts Winter and Benjamin into a large living room that has rose and pink wallpaper and a carpeted sunken area furnished with white leather sofas. On the far wall is a huge window that admits a view of the southern half of Manhattan, a gray grid from which sprout dark obelisks covered with luminous rectilinear stars. Splattered upon a portion of the glass are clumps of brownish-red matter.

SERGEANT ARTHUR

The view is great, though his brains get in the way of the Empire State Building.

Benjamin looks at the skyline.

BENJAMIN

It's been years, but I'm still not used to the towers being gone.

SERGEANT ARTHUR
That's not something you should
ever get used to.

BENJAMIN
I hear you.

The detectives walk toward the carpet, where lies a toppled human corpse.

WINTER
Forensics on the way?

SERGEANT ARTHUR
They are.

The detectives walk onto the white carpet and stride toward the body-- a bearded, white-haired man in his sixties, lying face down beside a dislodged sofa cushion. The back of his head is a gaping cavity that looks as if it is filled with red cabbage and gravel; clutched in his right hand is a long revolver sticky with dried gore.

At the edge of the crimson perimeter, Winter and Benjamin pause and kneel.

SERGEANT ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Thoughts?

BENJAMIN
He's dead.

WINTER
Looks like two exit wounds. The
initial shot and a second one,
slightly off axis.

Surprised, Sergeant Arthur glances at Winter.

SERGEANT ARTHUR
He pulled the trigger twice?

WINTER
Looks like it.

The blonde man circles around the body, pulls a penlight from his belt, CLICKS it on, kneels and shines the beam into the dead man's open mouth. The ray glimmers upon metal fillings and the deep hole in the corpse's hard palate. Benjamin and the Sergeant flank Winter and look over his back.

BENJAMIN
I only see one entrance wound.

SERGEANT ARTHUR
That's all I saw.

WINTER
There's only one. See that nick on
the side of it?

BENJAMIN
Yeah.

WINTER
That's from the sighting of the
revolver-- it cut a groove as it
entered the hole.

BENJAMIN
You think he shoved a gun through
the roof of his own mouth?

WINTER
Not exactly. It looks like he had
the gun jammed into his mouth with
so much force that it didn't kick
after the first shot, but slid up
into the bullet hole. And then he
fired the second shot-- or his
reflexes did.

SERGEANT ARTHUR
You don't think he had a helping
hand?

WINTER
I don't.
(he stands upright)
Benjamin and I will sniff around,
but I'm certain he did it himself.
This man...he wanted out.

Benjamin notices the solemn tone of his partner's remark.
Winter CLICKS off his penlight, replaces it on his belt and
looks away from the corpse, toward the city outside.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Benjamin guides his sedan into traffic. Winter gazes through
the windshield, aloof and inscrutable.

BENJAMIN
Is the absence of your wedding ring
something from which I can draw a
meaningful conclusion?

Winter looks through the passenger window. The silhouetted
forms of doormen are the only signs of life along the quiet
avenue, each man separate, encased in a glass display.

WINTER
Evelyn's seeing somebody else.

BENJAMIN
Fuck.

WINTER
And she's pregnant.

BENJAMIN
Double fuck. How long's this been going on?

WINTER
Started when I was convalescing.

Anger flashes across Benjamin's face.

BENJAMIN
While you were recovering from being shot? Christ that's treacherous.
(he shakes his head)
I hope you broke some shit and shouted vulgarities.

WINTER
There didn't seem to be any point in bickering-- she's having another man's kid. She and I had a lot of good years, there's no reason to-

BENJAMIN
Take my gun from my belt. Take it and hide it right now.

WINTER
Why?

BENJAMIN
Because if you tell me that you want to be friends with her, I'm going to shoot you in the face.

WINTER
She and I haven't been friends for a long time. Adultery isn't going to make us pals.

Benjamin slows the car; the facades outside drift and stop. Red traffic and taillights illuminate the men's faces. Benjamin appraises his partner for a moment.

BENJAMIN

You want to stay at my place?
You're welcome to. And Isabella
made banana bread.

The men's red faces become green; Benjamin accelerates.

WINTER

Thanks, but I want to go home.

BENJAMIN

Evelyn going to be there?

WINTER

No. She was packing when I left.

Benjamin steers the car around a corner.

BENJAMIN

You coming in tomorrow?

WINTER

Yeah. Better to keep busy. We'll
look into O'Connor-- something
isn't quite right there. And bring
the banana bread.

INT. BLACK CARGO VAN - NIGHT

The black cargo van RUMBLES along a dark street in a bleak, run-down industrial area. Sitting upon the torn vinyl bench is the Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes, wearing a gray sweat suit and latex gloves, and the Big Blonde Man, wearing jeans, a sweatshirt and latex gloves. At their feet lies a blonde and blindfolded male TEEN who wears ripped clothing and has handcuffs on his wrists and ankles. At the wheel sits the FRECKLED DRIVER, a square-faced thirty-six-year-old with red hair and hands like boxing gloves.

The van rolls into a dark portal, RUMBLING. Upon the corrugated floor, the Teen WEEPS.

INT. DILAPIDATED WAREHOUSE - SAME

The dented black cargo van rolls into the cavernous warehouse, headlights glaring in the eyes of six caged Rottweiler dogs. Amidst the BARKING beasts lie the gnawed bones of a seventh and eighth animal.

The Freckled Driver stops the van, shifts into park, CLICK-CLICK, rises from his seat, turns around and walks into the body of the vehicle, where he is absorbed by darkness.

The idling engine RUMBLES. Within the vehicle, fabric RIPS.

TEEN (O.S.)

Stop! What're you doing!?! What-

Nearby, the caged dogs BARK and paw their cage with muscular limbs. Toenails CLICK-CLICK-CLICK across metal; slobber sparkles in the headlights as it falls from their mouths.

TEEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Fucking faggots, what're you gonna do? Fucking rape me, you goddamn-

A SMACK precludes any more commentary from the youth; the darkened van wobbles. Within the cage, the dogs BARK and slobber. A bright white light flashes behind the windshield.

The side door of the vehicle slides open, THUNK. The Teen, nude excepting his handcuffs and fetters, rolls from the van and drops to the concrete, SMACK.

Seated upon the bench, the Big Blonde Man and the Freckled Driver twist metal apparatuses in their hands, SQUEAK, SQUEAK, SQUEAK. Metal disks rise from turning cylinders. They are opening large cans of wet dog food.

The teen raises his head, turns to the van and opens his mouth; blood pours down his chin and neck.

TEEN (CONT'D)

J-j-just l-let me go...please.

The Teen begins to SOB. Within the van, a light flashes. A rectangle extrudes from the bottom of the Polaroid camera held by the Burned Man.

Ten feet from the prone Teen, the dogs press against chain links, BARKING, GROWLING, slobbering.

TEEN (CONT'D)

Please just let me-

Dog food SMACKS against the Teen's face and fills his mouth. He SPITS.

TEEN (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Dog food SPLATTERS across the Teen's pale chest. From the can, the Freckled Driver extracts more wet matter. The camera flashes; an embryonic picture extrudes from the slit. The Rottweilers smell the wet, aromatic food and lunge at the walls of their cage, WHAM, WHAM, WHAM.

Dog food SLAPS the Teen in the neck. The Freckled Driver climbs out of the van, discards his empty can, CLANK, shuts the side door of the vehicle, THUNK, and walks to the cages.

The confined dogs expel glittering saliva and BARK a red frenzy, boiling with hunger.

The SOBBING Teen rises to his feet; wet and cold clumps of dog food slide down his nude body like snails. The Polaroid camera flashes through the open passenger window.

The Freckled Driver hoists himself to the top of the dog cage and sits. Below him, the starved and furious Rottweilers BARK and GROWL and SNAP at the fence and each other.

The nude, dog food-splattered Teen takes a step forward; the chain connecting his fetters SNAPS taut; he teeters, food sliding down his body. Dogs BARK and HOWL.

The Freckled Driver undoes the top latch, CLICK, and raises the gate, CREAK. The Rottweilers pour through the opening, ecstatic and frenzied, slavering, BARKING, HOWLING.

The Teen raises his right foot and advances one inch. Teeth sink into his left thigh; the young man SHRIEKS and falls to the stone, SMACK. Teeth burrow into the youth's neck; his SHRIEK become a wet SKIRL. Teeth dig into his calf and yank the muscle loose; his toes wriggle.

The Polaroid flashes.

INT. LOWER EAST SIDE APARTMENT BUILDING / STAIRWELL - SAME

Winter walks past brass mailboxes and climbs the stairwell.

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE APARTMENT BUILDING / SECOND FLOOR - SAME

Winter enters the beige and brown second floor hallway. Lying in front of the doors are the menus for a restaurant called Happy Panda Chinese Food. The blonde man picks up the papers as he walks, irked. He folds the collection and places them into his jacket pocket.

In front of apartment 2J, he stops and fishes out his keys.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - SAME

The lock CLICKS and the door opens. Winter walks into the apartment, an exposed brick enclosure with brown furniture and a score of framed 1970s concert posters upon the walls-- Yes, King Crimson, Hawkwind, Wishbone Ash, Nectar, Budgie, Thin Lizzy and Blue Oyster Cult.

WINTER

I thought you'd be gone by now.

From the hall closet emerges EVELYN, a thirty-seven-year-old woman with light brown hair, an athletic build, a kind face and large green eyes. She wears jeans, sneakers and a t-shirt that says Amnesty International.

EVELYN

Sorry. It's taking longer than I thought. How were the strippers? Insightful?

WINTER

I'm not going to banter with you. How much longer will you need?

EVELYN

Fifteen minutes. Twenty at most.

WINTER

I'll be back in thirty.

EVELYN

I know what I did was terrible, but-

WINTER

There's no "but" in that sentence.

EVELYN

Well...did you want things to continue like they were? I don't think either of us has said, "I love you" since the fight in Costa Rica, and if I didn't end it, you never would have. You'd just keep going deeper and deeper into your work, compartmentalizing-

WINTER

You're criticizing me? With some random baby in your stomach?

EVELYN

I'm just saying that this will be good for you too-- you don't have assume the role of the victim.

Anger flashes behind Winter's eyes, but quickly grows cold. He turns around and walks toward the door.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Garret, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have-

Winter exits the apartment and shuts the door, THUNK.

EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Winter walks through the entrance of the old brown building and onto the sidewalk.

WINTER
Unbelievable.

He puts his hands inside his pockets; paper CRINKLES.

EXT. HAPPY PANDA CHINESE FOOD - MOMENTS LATER

Winter enters a small take-out restaurant, the walls of which are covered with faded images of Chinese food that looks lacquered rather than cooked. A thirty-year-old CHINESE MAN with a wispy mustache stands at the register, staring.

WINTER
I'm in building two-forty-five on this street. We have a sign up that says 'No Menus.'

CHINESE MAN
Then throw in the garbage.

WINTER
There are lots of old people in my building and they can slip on them-- that's happened twice--and I'm tired of picking up after you guys.

Winter reaches into his pockets, pulls out two handfuls of ripped-up menus and throws them into the air; they scatter like confetti all about the restaurant.

INT. SUBWAY / LEXINGTON LINE - MOMENTS LATER

Winter enters a nearly empty Uptown train and sits down. Prone upon a bench at the far end of the glowing car is a VAGRANT, a black man in his forties who wears a dingy parka and grimy jeans. The car doors close.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Next stop, Union Square.

The detective opens his note pad; the Vagrant sits up and appraises the stranger who has entered his public bedroom.

VAGRANT
Excuse me sir.

Winter looks at the homeless man; the train RATTLES forward.

VAGRANT (CONT'D)

Could you help get me something to eat?

WINTER

Sure. Get off at my stop and I'll buy you something-- fruit, a hot dog, some soup-- whatever you want.

VAGRANT

Just give me a dollar.

WINTER

I'm not giving you money. I'm a cop and I know exactly where that'll go.

With bleary red eyes, the homeless man glares at Winter. The detective replaces his gaze upon his note pad and writes. The Vagrant, annoyed, SPITS upon the floor.

WINTER (CONT'D)

I rescind the hot dog.

INT. ZENITH TOWER / LOBBY - LATER

The Female Officer and the Older Officer, both weary and bored, sit upon plush benches in the lobby of the condominium complex. The Doorman pulls the door wide for Winter.

WINTER

Thanks.

OFFICERS

Detective.

WINTER

Officers. Did forensics finish up?

FEMALE OFFICER

Yes. PMS are taking the body now.

WINTER

Has O'Connor's daughter been in touch?

FEMALE OFFICER

No.

WINTER

When did you last call her?

FEMALE OFFICER

Midnight. And we left three messages before that.

WINTER
Give me her number.

INT. PENTHOUSE / LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Two PARAMEDICS carry the covered body out of the apartment with a drop-wheel gurney. Winter withdraws his cellphone and walks toward an open doorway.

INT. PENTHOUSE / BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A large four poster bed with silken sheets stands in the center of the vanilla and gold bedroom. Upon the east wall are two paintings. One depicts O'Connor and his Wife, both in their late thirties, standing behind a Girl who resembles her father more than her mother. Beside the family portrait hangs another acrylic, a romantic portrait of O'Connor's Wife, painted when she was in her fifties, reclining on a divan by a window that shows a view of a beach. Winter appraises the paintings, his phone pressed to his ear.

WINTER
I'd like to leave a message for Elizabeth O'Connor. This is Detective Garret Winter in New York. I'm sorry to call you at this hour, but I need to speak with you regarding a very urgent matter. Please get back to me as quickly as possible at two-one-two, five-five-five, two-nine-one-nine. Thank you.

Winter cuts the connection, replaces his phone, opens his note pad and writes: '*Portraits of Ex-Wife on Bedroom Wall?'

He walks to a closed door and slides it open; automatic lights brighten the adjacent space. Before him hang fine garments-- scores of shirts and at least forty suits. He kneels and looks around; shiny black and brown shoes sit upon the lowermost shelves like a phalanx of enormous beetles.

Something CRACKS behind Winter. He turns around and surveys the dark space underneath the mattress, pulling his jacket open so that the handle of his pistol is accessible.

From his belt he withdraws his penlight. He CLICKS it on and shines the beam into the darkness. Two eyes glow. Winter's stomach lurches...and an instant later, he grins.

The hidden cat scampers out from underneath the bed-- a plump white feline with the distinctive pushed-in face of the Persian breed. The haughty animal leaves the room.

The detective returns his gaze to the underside of the bed, pans his penlight back and forth and sees a cardboard box. He pulls the container out from underneath the mattress.

Winter CLICKS off his penlight, clips it to his belt, places the box upon the bed and raises the lid. Inside lie sunglasses, a dingy gray sweat suit, a baseball cap and ragged blue sneakers. He lifts the ratty sweatshirt from the box and examines it. The left cuff is stained and the collar has a two-inch tear.

Upon his note pad, Winter writes: '*Dirty garment separate from other clothing. Disguise???'

INT. ZENITH TOWER / LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Cradling the porcine Persian cat in his right arm, Winter emerges from the elevator. The Doorman and the Female Officer see him and (wearily) rise.

FEMALE OFFICER
Are you finished?

WINTER
Yes. You can lock up.

The Doorman sees the cat.

DOORMAN
I forget about Empress.

WINTER
Empress, huh? The cat's a girl?

DOORMAN
You can't tell?

WINTER
Not sure she can.

The cat suspects that it has been insulted.

DOORMAN
You take her home?

WINTER
(nodding)
My wife's allergic.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - LATER

Winter walks into the apartment, holding the indignant feline and a plastic bag that contains ten cans of cat food.

He shuts the door behind him, locks it, CLACK, and sets the animal down. Empress haughtily surveys the living room.

WINTER

Consider the economy.

Empress retreats underneath the sofa. Winter sets the cat food upon the dinner table and sees a thrice-folded piece of paper that is addressed, 'Garret.' He reaches for the letter, stops, shakes his head and fingers the switch of the standing lamp, CLICK. Darkness expands.

Winter walks toward the bedroom, which is a chiaroscuro of yellow streetlight and shadow. The aquatic sound of a neighbor's television BUZZES through the thin walls. At the bedroom doorway, he hesitates.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Winter CLICKS on the desk lamp; white light glares. The walls of the study are covered with framed newspaper clippings, including, 'Talbot Murder Case Reopened,' 'Lionel Ward Receives Three Life Sentences,' 'Central Park Rapist Apprehended,' and 'Conviction in Rosa Gonzalez Killing.' Photographs of unhappy men accompany all of these headlines.

Removing his jacket, the detective walks toward the small sofa that is wedged in-between two gray file cabinets.

INT. BENJAMIN AND ISABELLA'S APARTMENT / KITCHEN - MORNING

The kitchen is bright yellow. Behind the sink is a window that admits a view of the Brooklyn Bridge, some questionable water and a slice of the Manhattan skyline. Benjamin, wearing a plaid apron over his blue slacks and black shirt, WHISKS raw eggs, adjusts the flame beneath a cast iron pan in which bacon SIZZLES and sets six English muffin halves into a toaster oven.

ISABELLA, a petite thirty-six-year-old Spanish-American woman wearing a burgundy man's robe, enters the room, brushing a knot from her hair. Her vulpine eyes appraise Benjamin.

ISABELLA

(light Spanish accent)

You're making breakfast during the week? Is it Gopher Day?

BENJAMIN

Wrong month. And that's a groundhog, not a gopher. Technically, I think he's a woodchuck. But there isn't a holiday. I am making breakfast because I'm depleted.

ISABELLA
 (feigning innocence)
 Why is that?

BENJAMIN
 You are aware of what happened last
 night? What you made me do when I
 got in from work? Three times?

A lascivious grin shines upon the woman's sharp features.
 She walks beside Benjamin and KISSES his neck while he prods
 CRACKLING bacon.

ISABELLA
 I was sleeping when you got in.
 Very innocently.

BENJAMIN
 "Innocently?" You were on top of
 the blanket, wearing that camisole--
 the red one--and you'd lit candles.
 It was a Spanish sex trap.

Isabella KISSES Benjamin's left cheek, walks to the table and
 seats herself. The black man withdraws English muffin halves
 from the toaster oven and sets them onto a plate. With fork
 tines, he flips the trembling bacon.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 Evelyn is leaving Winter.

ISABELLA
 When is the party?

BENJAMIN
 He's not celebrating. She's been
 having an affair and--I'm not sure
 that I'm allowed to tell you this
 but--but she's pregnant too.

ISABELLA
 (grimacing)
 Puta traidora.

BENJAMIN
 Yeah.

Benjamin pours eggs into the buttered skillet; they whiten.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Just to let you know--and I have no reason to suspect that this will ever happen--but if you did that to me--had an affair--I would remove your head, fly to Europe and roll it into the middle of the World Cup.

Isabella contemplates the fate of her treacherous head.

ISABELLA

I accept. That is fair. And if you are the cheater, I will take a knife--a dull butter knife, not a sharp chef knife--and cut-

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

Mommy?

Isabella and Benjamin look to the doorway. Into the portal walks SOFIA, a biracial nine-year-old girl wearing jeans, a red t-shirt and sneakers equipped with flashing lights.

ISABELLA

Yes?

SOFIA

I can't go to school today.

ISABELLA

Why is that?

Sofia looks over at her father. Benjamin presses fluffy eggs to the far side of the tilted pan and adds grated Gruyere cheese. The girl approaches her mother.

SOFIA

Mrs. Kupperberg is making us watch mollusks.

Isabella looks over at Benjamin; the man upends the pan and slides the large omelette onto a serving plate.

ISABELLA

Does Sofia have to watch the mollusks?

Benjamin withdraws strips of jittery bacon from the other skillet and sets them on a bed of paper towels.

BENJAMIN

Mollusks are essential.

SOFIA
That's what you said about
crustaceans!

BENJAMIN
Perhaps.

EXT. WESTFIELD BANK AND INVESTMENT - MORNING

The gray bank rises toward a drab sky of the same color. As with many edifices in the financial district, the windows are protected by grids of black cast iron. From a revolving door emerges MRS. LONGFORD, a fifty-six-year-old woman wearing a sharp black suit, matching heels and short, dyed-blond hair. Although she exudes confidence and wealth, her right hand rigidly clutches her large, heavy purse, betraying an otherwise well-suppressed anxiety.

INT. SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MALL - MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Longford walks past storefronts and myriad New Yorkers, most of whom hasten in the opposite direction toward their jobs on Wall Street.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Longford, wearing dirty sneakers, worn jeans and a sweatshirt with a stained left cuff and a torn collar, emerges from a bathroom stall. She looks at herself in the scratched mirror, frowns and puts a baseball cap upon her head. When she releases the visor, she sees that her hands are trembling.

Two HEAVY PUERTO RICAN WOMEN enter the bathroom. Mrs. Longford grips her purse tightly.

EXT. PEARL STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Shops and vendors line the financial district side street. Mrs. Longford, wearing her dingy outfit and clutching her purse, hails a taxi. The KOREAN-AMERICAN CABBIE, a solemn fellow of forty, pulls up to the curb. She appraises him momentarily, exhales a breath of air and grabs the handle.

INT. TAXI CAB - SAME

Mrs. Longford opens the door, sits upon the green vinyl seat and shuts the door, THUNK.

MRS. LONGFORD

I would like to go to one hundred and sixtieth--that's six-zero--and Broadway. Drive to the west side and take the Hudson so we don't sit in traffic for an eternity.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / STUDY - SAME

An alarm BUZZES. Winter, asleep on the small couch that is wedged in-between file cabinets, awakens and SLAPS the clock. Standing in the doorway is Empress. The cat has doubts.

INT. TAXI CAB - SAME

Mrs. Longford looks through the side window of the taxi cab. The Hudson River and Jersey shore recede, replaced by tenement housing, open lots surrounded by rusty gates, dented vehicles, garish neon vehicles and sporadic clusters of PEOPLE with dark skin.

EXT. BROADWAY IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - MOMENTS LATER

The Cabbie steers his vehicle toward the west side of the avenue. Two DOMINICAN-AMERICAN TEENAGERS who wear gold skullies, black denim outfits and gold sneakers watch the vehicle from the stoop of a boarded-up building that has the phrase, 'Da Peeplez will Rize' painted upon it.

Within the cab, Mrs. Longford pays the driver and grips her bag. She rises into the drear day and shuts the door, THUNK. The cab departs.

DOMINICAN MAN

Come up here for a little somethin' somethin'?

The witty man's contemporary GIGGLES. Mrs. Longford walks past the duo, toward the corner of the block.

EXT. DESOLATE STREET IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - SAME

Mrs. Longford strides down the sloped sidewalk, avoiding gum, condom wrappers, condoms and dark clumps that originated in stray animals. Upon either side of her are crumbling brownstones, gated lots and abandoned project buildings.

The woman stops in front of an unnumbered three-story brownstone that has boarded-up windows and an exposed upper floor, from which rusty pipes jut like bones.

Mrs. Longford glances up and down the desolate block and determines that she is the only person in the vicinity. Toward the front door, she hastens.

The fifty-six-year-old woman ascends five steps, surveys her surroundings, determines that she is still alone, fishes two keys from her sweat pants and inserts the larger of the pair into the new stainless steel lock located upon the old door. She twists the key, CLICK, replaces it in her pocket, surveys her surroundings, determines that she is still alone and pushes the door. The hinges CREAK.

Mrs. Longford glances up at the gray sky.

MRS. LONGFORD
Please keep me safe.

The drear vault remains silent. Into the dark enclosure, the anxious woman walks.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FRONT ROOM - SAME

The hallway walls are of cracked paint, exposed brick and yawning black spaces. Mrs. Longford closes the door behind her, THUNK, and locks it, CLACK. She waits for her eyes to adjust to the weak light; somewhere within, water DRIPS.

Up the dark hallway, she walks. Feeble light glows at the far end of the passage; something SCRATCHES a nether surface.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FIRST FLOOR LANDING - SAME

Anxious and wary, the fifty-six-year-old woman strides onto the landing, which is illuminated by the light that creeps around the edges of wooden boards. To her right is a warped stairwell that ascends into pure darkness and to her left is a row of rusty mailboxes.

Mrs. Longford, sweating, withdraws the pair of keys, inserts the smaller one into the middle mailbox and twists her hand, CLICK. She pulls the rusty door wide, CREAK. The inside of the receptacle is pristine stainless steel.

She leaves the key in the lock, reaches into her black purse, withdraws a folded manila envelope, opens the parcel, withdraws a half-inch thick bundle of new one hundred dollar bills and places it inside the mailbox.

Upon this first pile, she sets a second stack and a third and a fourth and a fifth and a sixth and a seventh. She CRUMPLES up the manila envelope and stuffs it deep into her purse.

Mrs. Longford looks at the pile of bills, which is larger than a brick, and shuts the door of the mailbox, CLINK.

Within the wall, a metal gear CLANKS. Mrs. Longford reopens the mailbox and looks inside. The stainless steel compartment is now empty.

She closes and locks the mailbox, CLICK, replaces the keys in her pocket and walks toward the entrance. Somewhere within the building water DRIPS and vermin SCRATCH old wood.

EXT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 - SAME

Benjamin, wearing a blue suit and carrying a plastic container, walks up the front steps of the five-story building. Engraved in stone over the front door are the words, 'New York City Police Precinct 19'. An American flag depends from a brass pole at the top of the edifice, still beneath the gray sky.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 / RECEIVING AREA - SAME

The receiving area has brown walls and pale mint linoleum tiles. Benjamin walks past a watchful OFFICER (with whom he exchanges nods) and two rows of pine green plastic seats and draws near the front desk, behind which sits a RECEPTIONIST, a Chinese-American woman with short blonde hair.

BENJAMIN

Good morning Amy.

RECEPTIONIST

Good morning detective.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 / MAIN POOL - SAME

Benjamin navigates the main pool, an area congested with OFFICERS and CLERKS, desks and file cabinets, and walks toward a closed wooden door, upon which sits a placard with the name, 'Detectives Garret L. Winter.' He glances through the window, grabs the doorknob, twists it and walks inside.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 / WINTER'S OFFICE - SAME

Framed clippings and degrees hang upon the wall, and a human skeleton dangles from a stand, a fedora atop its head and a plastic cigar in its mouth. At the desk and holding a corded phone to his ear is Winter. He raises an index finger and points to the chair opposite him. Benjamin takes a seat.

WINTER

(into the phone)

I understand that this is a shock to you, but do you think that you are well enough to answer a few questions?

(MORE)

WINTER (CONT'D)
 (he listens)
 When would you like for us to make
 our visit?

Listening to the phone, Winter rises from his chair, grabs
 his gray suit jacket and points to the door.

WINTER (CONT'D)
 Thank you Miss O'Connor. We will
 see you shortly. Goodbye.

Winter hangs up the phone, CLKCL.

BENJAMIN
 Should I get overalls?

WINTER
 That was O'Connor's wife--his ex-
 wife. She's in Midtown. The
 daughter in Nebraska is still
 missing.

BENJAMIN
 Still?

Winter flings on his jacket and nods.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
 Maybe she wrecked her tractor?

Winter buttons his jacket and walks toward the door.

WINTER
 She didn't show up for work
 yesterday and nobody's heard from
 her today.

BENJAMIN
 Did you tell her mother?

WINTER
 I told her we'd left word with
 Elizabeth--that's the daughter's
 name--and not heard back. It could
 be a coincidence, but it's starting
 to smell.

BENJAMIN
 Like a Frenchman in a greenhouse.

INT. MISS O'CONNOR'S LIVING ROOM - LATE MORNING

The living room has dark mustard walls and a curtained window
 that admits a view of the East River.

The woman from the portraits, MISS O'CONNOR, slightly heavier and with short hair, adjusts her violet sarong, opens the front door and admits the detectives. She is composed, albeit removed.

WINTER

I'm Detective Garret Winter and this is Detective Benjamin Williams. We'd like to extend our condolences to you.

BENJAMIN

We're very sorry about what happened.

MISS O'CONNOR

Okay. I don't know why you would want to talk to me, but I suppose that you have your procedures.

The detectives enter. Miss O'Connor shuts the door, CLICK, and leads the men across lacquered wood, toward opposing plush sofas that are separated by a marble table.

MISS O'CONNOR (CONT'D)

I had Juanita remove the rugs before you arrived-- I didn't want to make you take off your shoes.

BENJAMIN

Thank you ma'am.

WINTER

We won't be very long-- we just have a few questions about your late husband.

MISS O'CONNOR

(she points)

You can sit there.

The detectives sit on the indicated sofa and Miss O'Connor puts herself opposite them. Benjamin withdraws a note pad.

WINTER

When was the last time that you spoke to your ex-husband?

MISS O'CONNOR

About a year ago. Or a little longer, maybe. And that was only about some bonds that were due.

WINTER

Are you surprised that he decided to take his own life?

MISS O'CONNOR

I haven't understood anything about that man for a very long time.

WINTER

Was there a point--back when you were still married--when he exhibited a noticeable change in behavior?

MISS O'CONNOR

That whole last year we were together he was strange.

WINTER

Did his change in behavior coincide with the death of his niece?

MISS O'CONNOR

What does Jennifer have to do with anything? She was my niece--my sister's daughter--and he only met her two or three times. They weren't close.

WINTER

But after her death, his behavior changed? It was around that time?

The woman ponders the question for a moment.

MISS O'CONNOR

I suppose it was around that time.

WINTER

How was Mr. O'Connor different?

MISS O'CONNOR

Moody. And...and unsociable. And he stopped seeing Dr. Howards.

WINTER

Was that his psychiatrist?

MISS O'CONNOR

Yes.

Benjamin draws a line through the word 'Psychiatrist.'

WINTER

Did he ever exhibit any signs of paranoia or guilt?

MISS O'CONNOR
 Guilt? For what? For my niece?
 We were in Ireland when she was
 murdered.

Winter and Benjamin freeze upon hearing the word "murdered."

WINTER
 What was her name-- your niece?

MISS O'CONNOR
 Jennifer Tappert.

Upon the note pad, Benjamin writes, 'Jennifer Tappert.' Miss O'Connor grows anxious.

MISS O'CONNOR (CONT'D)
 I don't know what this had to do
 with anything.

WINTER
 Perhaps nothing. We don't know
 much about your husband and are
 simply trying to understand why he
 chose to commit suicide.

BENJAMIN
 This is all standard procedure.

MISS O'CONNOR
 Okay.

WINTER
 Was there a particular incident
 that precipitated your separation?

MISS O'CONNOR
 He was taking money.

Benjamin CLEARS his throat; Winter leans forward in his seat.

WINTER
 From whom?

MISS O'CONNOR
 From us-- from our account. He was
 withdrawing large amounts of money--
 cash--and putting it somewhere.
 When I found out--it's hard to keep
 secrets from me--I told him to tell
 me what he was doing with all that
 money, but he wouldn't say. Even
 when I gave him the ultimatum, he
 wouldn't say.

An unexpected sadness burgeons within the woman.

MISS O'CONNOR (CONT'D)

I thought he had a mistress or- or something and I couldn't...I felt I didn't know him anymore.

Miss O'Connor folds her hands together and stares at her rugose digits.

WINTER

You are not in any way responsible for what happened. It sounds as if he had become mentally unstable and pushed away all of his support systems-- you, your daughter, his doctor.

Miss O'Connor nods.

MISS O'CONNOR

It's true, what you're saying. I know. But there were a lot of good years before the bad ones.

The remark impacts Winter on a personal level, and he nods.

INT. WINTER'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Winter drives his compact blue hybrid onto the street; Benjamin has his cellphone pressed to his ear.

BENJAMIN

(into the phone)

Talk to his accountant, broker--all his money people--and find out if there was anything wrong with his finances.

(he listens)

And bring up a file on his niece-

WINTER

Jennifer Tappert.

BENJAMIN

Jennifer Tappert. Should be a murder file.

(he listens)

Thanks. We'll be in after lunch to go over everything. Bye.

(he folds his phone and

sets it on the dashboard)

O'Connor was schizophrenic? Or paranoid?

WINTER

Maybe both, maybe neither. But he functioned on his own for an amount of time that suggests some competency. I think something real was happening. Banana bread?

Benjamin opens the plastic container and withdraws a segment of the loaf. He sets the speckled piece upon a napkin and hands it over to Winter. The blonde man guides the car onto Madison Avenue, takes a bite and chews.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Christ this is good.
(chewing)
Blackmail.

BENJAMIN

That's a bit formal. Call me Benjamin.

WINTER

Huh?
(he chews and considers)
Oh. "Black male."

BENJAMIN

That follows-- some type of extortion. Even more so if there's a recent problem with his finances and he wasn't able to access what funds he needed. You think this is connected to the murdered niece?

WINTER

Not sure--
(he chews)
Let's see what her corpse looked like.

BENJAMIN

Maybe don't say that with a mouth full of banana bread.

Winter nods, swallows and bites off another mouthful. A large white truck rolls up alongside the hybrid, RUMBLING and belching dark smoke.

WINTER

I'd swear that your wife is sending me a love letter through this thing--
(he swallows)
Speaking of which...

Winter reaches into his pocket, withdraws the note that was left for him last evening, hands it over to Benjamin and bites off another hunk of banana bread.

BENJAMIN
This from Evelyn?

WINTER
Yup.

BENJAMIN
You want me to read it?

WINTER
Aloud.
(he chews)
Curious what it says.

Benjamin opens the letter and examines it. Winter tries to pass the spewing white truck, but is blocked by a yellow smear that is an aggressive taxi van.

BENJAMIN
You want me to do a voice when I read it?

WINTER
What're my options?

BENJAMIN
Ghetto girl. Vietnamese hooker.
Country girl who keeps failing kindergarten and is taller than her peers.

WINTER
No thanks.

BENJAMIN
(reading)
"Garret,
I will collect the rest of my things tomorrow, when you're away at work. I'm sorry about what I said when you came back. I didn't know what to say and was trying to justify what I did and relieve my guilt."
(he looks up)
Seems like she's doing that right now-- in the letter.

The white truck jockeys in front of Winter's blue hybrid and belches grimy exhaust at his windshield. The blonde man shuts the air conditioning vents, CLACK, CLACK.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

(reading)

"I'm very sorry about what I did to you-- it was selfish and wrong. Hopefully you'll be able to move on from this bad experience and find true happiness.

Sincerely, Evelyn."

Benjamin CRUMPLES up the paper and tosses it into the back.

WINTER

"Hopefully." I hate when that word is used like that.

BENJAMIN

What's wrong with it?

WINTER

Hopefully is an adverb, it means to do something in a hopeful manner. "Benjamin Williams hopefully scratched his lottery ticket." But the way she used it, was instead of "I hope."

BENJAMIN

That's how most people use it now. I use it like that-- language isn't a fixed thing.

Winter guides his hybrid into another lane and escapes the rolling, RUMBLING, spewing white wall.

WINTER

Sure, but this is different. Language usually changes by becoming less elaborate, quicker, but in this case, people say "hopefully," which is three syllables and wrong, instead of saying, "I hope," which is only two syllables and correct.

BENJAMIN

Do we need to ration syllables? Is there a crisis?

WINTER

No. I just think it's meaningful-- and sad--that people in this country are uncomfortable with saying the phrase, "I hope."

The white truck RUMBLES in front of Winter's hybrid car and spews dark smoke.

EXT. EASTERN PERIMETER OF CENTRAL PARK - AFTERNOON

NEW YORKERS, wearing suits or exercise clothing, stroll or scurry or bike along the tangled paths that weave through the green slab of nature that has been imprisoned within the middle of Manhattan and named Central Park.

BALBIR, an Indian-American man with neatly-parted hair, a round face and an olive suit, walks along the pavement, his eyes glazed, his gaze desultory, a black leather briefcase in his right hand. After letting an aggressive bicyclist WHISH in front of him, he walks onto a dirt path.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK / BESIDE A FOOTBRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Balbir emerges from the underpass of a footbridge and enters a flat, isolated area where stands one stone bench. He sits. He opens his briefcase. He looks at a white envelope, one side of which has been torn open. For a moment, Balbir surveys the surrounding woods.

The man RIPS opens the envelope and from it withdraws a typewritten note.

"Examine the enclosed pictures. They are of Thomas Anders, the teenage boy who lives next door to you."

After surveying his surroundings once more, Balbir withdraws three Polaroid pictures from the envelope. The first image is of the Teen, nude and covered with dog food; the second image is of the Teen's shrieking face; the third image is of the Teen's iridescent entrails, which have been unearthed by the gory mouths of frenzied Rottweilers.

Balbir convulses, turns his head and vomits ochre soup onto the grass. He wipes the detritus from his lips and nostrils, sets the Polaroid images down and raises the note.

"If you disregard our demands, one of your children will be stripped, handcuffed and thrown to the dogs. If you tell anybody about this note, you are endangering that person's life. If you contact the police, we will find out and execute your entire family."

Balbir, shaking, wipes tears from his eyes. He looks down.

"Destroy this letter and these images. We will contact you with our demands in the near future."

Balbir's eyes return to the hideous pictures. The eyes of the Teen are wide with terror as a Rottweiler rends his neck.

Something CRACKS in the woods nearby. Balbir's stomach twists; he hastily secrets the letter, pictures and envelope inside his briefcase.

Two Asian COLLEGE GIRLS walk into the area, holding hands. The Indian-American watches them pass by. Excepting the tears which track down his cheeks, Balbir is utterly still.

INT. JEREMY'S JEWISH DELICATESSEN - ONE O'CLOCK

Evelyn, wearing a black suit and carrying a briefcase, walks through the delicatessen's front door, which is being held open for her by SHELLEY GOLDSTEIN, a tall man with black hair, a neat beard and strong features oddly contrasted by his feminine eyelashes and full lips. He gestures at the interior with a large hand and bows his head deferentially.

EVELYN

You don't need to make such a show of it.

GOLDSTEIN

I'm happy.

Goldstein releases the door and sets an olive tweed arm upon Evelyn's shoulders.

GOLDSTEIN (CONT'D)

And this isn't a show-- this is me. Before--when we were out together in public and I treated you like a buddy--that was the show.

EVELYN

Technically, I'm still married t-

Goldstein KISSES Evelyn upon the lips. Her cheeks redden and she turns her face away from the tall man.

GOLDSTEIN

You told him. You have your yoga mat and underwear in my apartment. You're single. The rest is clerical.

A small and rugose OLD WAITRESS who wears no small amount of bright makeup sees Goldstein and waddles toward him, glancing obliquely at Evelyn.

OLD WAITRESS

(to Goldstein)

So this is the one.

GOLDSTEIN

Let me know if you approve.

EVELYN
You must be Sylvia.

OLD WAITRESS
I am. Mr. Goldstein's a good man,
so you'd better treat him right.

EVELYN
I don't know that I can possibly
compete with you.

GOLDSTEIN
(to the Old Waitress)
How many knishes?

Sylvia slides her bifocal glasses up her nose and orbits Evelyn, surveying the younger woman's physique with narrowed eyes. After a momentary pause, the Old Waitress proclaims-

OLD WAITRESS
Eight-and-a-half knishes.

EVELYN
Was I just rated?

GOLDSTEIN
Quite highly.

INT. JEREMY'S JEWISH DELICATESSEN - MOMENTS LATER

Evelyn and Goldstein sit in an orange vinyl booth. The Old Waitress unleashes two enormous menus, SNAP-SNAP!

OLD WAITRESS
I'll bring pickles.
(to Goldstein)
Extra half-sours, I know.

The little woman pivots, and on black sneakers, departs.

EVELYN
She's adorable. I bet she makes it
to one hundred.

GOLDSTEIN
That's what my grandmother Frances
was like-- a little Jewish walnut.
(he watches the woman
depart and nods)
She's half the reason I come here.
(he TAPS the menus)
This is the other.

Goldstein gives one of the enormous menus to Evelyn; when she opens it, half of the table disappears.

EVELYN

There're three thousand things on this.

Evelyn reads the options--derma, lox, whitefish, smoked sable, corned beef, pastrami, chicken in a pot, chopped liver, etc.--but soon becomes distracted. For an overlong moment, she stares at the menu, preoccupied and distant.

GOLDSTEIN

Do you want to talk about it?

EVELYN

The menu? It would take-

GOLDSTEIN

Not the menu.

Evelyn nods her head and closes the menu.

EVELYN

It was fine. I felt terrible of course, but I told him everything--even about the baby, though I didn't plan on mentioning that. He just sort of took it in--witnessed the end of our marriage. In the third person.

GOLDSTEIN

Maybe he's relieved?

EVELYN

He's detached. And I'm worried that it's just going to get worse and worse for him. He's spent a lot of years looking at corpses, a lot of time contemplating death--the actual agony of dying.

GOLDSTEIN

That's his job.

EVELYN

But somewhere it became his entire life. When we were at grad school, he wanted kids and I didn't, but by the time we got to the right age, he had no interest in children anymore. He said, "It's better to clean up the mess that's already here rather than make it bigger."

GOLDSTEIN

An optimist.

Evelyn smirks; Goldstein takes her hand. The Old Waitress reappears and slides a metal bucket of bright green pickles onto the table and two cans of black cherry soda.

GOLDSTEIN (CONT'D)

Give us a couple of minutes Sylvia.

OLD WAITRESS

In one hundred and twenty seconds,
I shall return.

GOLDSTEIN

Thanks.

The Old Waitress departs.

GOLDSTEIN (CONT'D)

You don't think he'll remarry?

EVELYN

I don't think he views people that way anymore. I remember going to a party with him, and he pointed out three people who looked like corpses he'd seen at murder scenes. And when he spoke to one of them-- an African-American woman at my old firm--I could tell he was distracted the entire time, thinking about the dead woman she resembled.

Goldstein grimaces.

GOLDSTEIN

Let me tell you why you should get the pastrami.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 / WINTER'S OFFICE - TWO O'CLOCK

R.W., an obese bald man who wears brown corduroy pants and a mint green sweater-vest, enters the office. Winter and Benjamin, seated at the desk, look up. In the clerk's hands are a black folder and a legal note pad.

R.W.

I smell her banana bread.

BENJAMIN

I really don't like how that sounds.

Benjamin points to the top of the file cabinet, the near side of which is covered by a map of Manhattan. R.W. drops the folder onto Winter's desk, SMACK, and walks to the cabinet.

R.W.
 O'Connor's portfolio bottomed out
 in the second quarter, so he
 invested the remainder into a high
 yield mutual fund.

R.W. peels back the lid of the plastic container; half of the
 loaf remains.

WINTER
 Let me guess: It didn't yield high.

R.W.
 It didn't.
 (he examines the loaf)
 She ever put that white frosting on
 it? Like you get with carrot cake?

BENJAMIN
 That cream cheese shit? Never.

R.W.
 It was just a suggestion.

R.W. withdraws a piece from the container, raises it to his
 mouth and faces the detectives.

WINTER
 There are napkins up there.

R.W.
 No thanks.

BENJAMIN
 So O'Connor was broke?

R.W.
 He had assets, some land and that
 apartment-

BENJAMIN
 But he had no cash, nothing liquid?

R.W.
 Nope.

The clerk chews. The detectives look at each other.

BENJAMIN
 Not easy to pay an extortionist
 with a plot of land or a credit
 card.

R.W.
 He was being blackmailed?

WINTER

Maybe.

Winter reaches for the black folder and opens it. The face of a fourteen-year-old girl stares up from a glossy color photograph; her eyes are empty black sockets from which gore drips; her elongate neck is dark purple, flecked with red and black abrasions.

WINTER (CONT'D)

This is the niece?

R.W.

Close that while I'm eating.

Benjamin glances at the photo, grimaces and looks away. Winter shuts the folder and rises from his seat.

WINTER

(to Benjamin)

We should get over there.

BENJAMIN

O'Connor's?

Pulling on his gray jacket, Winter nods. He looks at R.W.

WINTER

Get O'Connor's phone sheets for the last six months and have Sheryl sift them. Anonymous, unlisted, off-hours, etcetera.

R.W.

Sheryl's underneath a mountain. You want this to be a priority?

WINTER

It is a priority.

R.W.

I'll need this.

R.W. takes the container that has the remainder of the banana bread, nestles it under his arm like a football and departs.

BENJAMIN

I didn't have any of that.

INT. ZENITH TOWER / LOBBY - FOUR THIRTY

Winter and Benjamin approach the building. Hugo the Doorman smiles, rises from his seat and pulls wide the heavy door.

DOORMAN
Good afternoon Detectives.

WINTER
Good afternoon.

BENJAMIN
Hugo. Estas bueno?

DOORMAN
Bueno, si. You are here to see
your friends?

Winter and Benjamin pause, exchange a glance and look at the
Doorman. Hugo sees their confusion and elaborates-

DOORMAN (CONT'D)
The other police detectives.

BENJAMIN
Did these detectives show you
identification?

DOORMAN
Yes, just like yours. I take them
up and let them inside.

BENJAMIN
They're still up there now?

DOORMAN
Yes.

WINTER
If they happen to come down before
us, let them know that Detectives
Winter and Williams of Precinct 19
want to speak to them.

DOORMAN
Did I doing something wrong?

BENJAMIN
No. We just don't want to miss
them.

WINTER
Do you have the spare key for the
penthouse?

DOORMAN
The other detectives have it.

WINTER
Okay. Thanks.

The detectives hasten to the private elevator, their eyes locked on the closed sliding door.

Winter presses the call button and surreptitiously places his left hand underneath his jacket. Benjamin takes a step to the side of the elevator door and SNAPS open the leather buckle that fastens his semi-automatic pistol.

A bell BINGS. The poised detectives wait with watchful eyes.

The sliding door opens...and reveals an empty elevator.

INT. ZENITH TOWER / ELEVATOR - SAME

Winter and Benjamin enter the elevator. The blonde man presses the 'PH' button, and the door slides shut. Upon the panel, a light flashes behind the numbers 2, 3, 4...

WINTER

Lucas and Briggs or Danford and Friedman?

BENJAMIN

Briggs is on vacation and Danford and Friedman are in court wrapping up the Alvarez case. Could be Lucas, but she would've told us. It's not a gumshoe from Precinct Nineteen.

Upon the panel, the numbers 12, 13, 14 shine; the men, hands upon their weapons, ruminates.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

They're from another Precinct or private dicks...or something else.

The numbers 19, 20 and 21 shine, followed by the 'PH' button. A bell BINGS. The door slides open. Hands on their weapons, the detectives exit.

INT. ZENITH TOWER / HALLWAY ON PENTHOUSE FLOOR - SAME

The floor and walls of the hallway are of white marble, illuminated by dim track lighting. Across the cool surface stride Winter and Benjamin.

The two men reach the oaken front door. Benjamin steps to the left, into a small Japanese rock garden. Beneath his shoes, stones CRACKLE.

Winter withdraws his revolver from his shoulder holster, reaches his free right hand to the doorknob, grabs it and twists. The door is locked.

Winter glances at his partner and receives a nod of assent. The blonde man presses the doorbell; glassine chimes RING within the penthouse.

The detectives listen. In the hallway sits a heavy silence.

Winter presses the doorbell again; the glassine chimes RING.

Silence follows. The detectives exchange a nod.

Winter withdraws his brass star from underneath his shirt and lets it hang by its chain like a pendant. Presently, he clenches his right fist and KNOCKS.

WINTER

This is the police! Open this door
right now!

FOOTSTEPS resound inside the penthouse; a distant door SLAMS.

WINTER (CONT'D)

(whispered to Benjamin)
Two gaits. One's heavy.

The FOOTSTEPS grow louder and suddenly stop. A ponderous silence expands.

Winter takes a step to the right; Benjamin trains the muzzle of his weapon upon the door. With a clenched fist, the blonde man POUNDS, POUNDS, POUNDS the oak.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Open this door right now or we'll
force it open!

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Don't ulcerate. It's gumshoes in
here-- Lawrence and Menendez from
Precinct Twenty-Four.

Winter and Benjamin relax. The bolt lock CLICKS and CLACKS.

WINTER

(whispered to Benjamin)
Play it tight.

The door slides open to reveal MENENDEZ, a heavysset forty-six year old Mexican-American with a thin mustache and sad eyes. His substantial physique--which is equal parts muscle and flab--is covered by a dark burgundy suit. At the far end of the foyer stands LAWRENCE, a pale and gaunt man with a teal jacket, silver hair and weary blue eyes.

MENENDEZ

Great. Now we can play volleyball.

INT. PENTHOUSE / FOYER - SAME

Through the foyer, Winter and Benjamin follow Menendez. Ahead of them, Lawrence disappears into the next room.

BENJAMIN

Think I left my charger here last night. What brings you guys down from the Heights?

INT. PENTHOUSE / LIVING ROOM - SAME

Winter, Benjamin and Menendez walk into the living room.

MENENDEZ

Anonymous tip. Narcotics. Sounded unlikely, but we were in the area and decided to sniff.

(to Lawrence)

We're about done here, right?

Lawrence nods.

MENENDEZ (CONT'D)

Want us to help you look for your charger?

BENJAMIN

Two detectives should suffice.

Lawrence disappears into the foyer; Menendez nods at Benjamin and Winter.

MENENDEZ

See you.

WINTER

Can you give us the keys?

Irritation flashes momentarily upon the Mexican-American's face. From his pocket he fishes out a metal ring with three steel keys. He hands the CLINKING trio to Winter.

MENENDEZ

Here you go.

WINTER

Thanks.

Winter secrets the keys into his pocket, where they CLINK.

MENENDEZ

Be home by eleven or you're grounded.

Winter conjures an unconvincing smile. The Mexican-American looks away.

BENJAMIN

If you get any more tips about O'Connor, pass them along to us.

MENENDEZ

Certainly. We were just in the area.

WINTER

Sure. Thanks for checking in.

After an awkward pause, Menendez joins his partner in the foyer; the two depart through the front door and close it behind them, THUNK.

Winter and Benjamin are stunned and disturbed by the implications of their interaction. For a ponderous moment, they stare at the door.

BENJAMIN

Fuck and double fuck.

INT. WINTER'S CAR - TWILIGHT

Winter drives the blue hybrid, his mind racing. Benjamin is on his cellphone.

BENJAMIN

R.W.? You still there...? The connection's not-

(he listens)

Don't talk about the O'Connor case with anybody, okay?

(he listens)

If I wanted to tell you the reason, I would've told you the reason.

(he listens)

Thanks. And tell Sheryl to keep it cinched.

(he listens)

Depends on who they've got in the bullpen-- their closers have been gift-wrapping pitches for the last ten games.

(he listens)

Bye.

Benjamin SNAPS his phone shut and glances at Winter.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

You think R.W. or Sheryl tipped our investigation to P Twenty-Four?

WINTER

I don't, but those gumshoes certainly weren't there on some "anonymous tip." I bet they're connected to the blackmailers in some way.

BENJAMIN

Blackmailers? It's a plural?

WINTER

I've ruled out singular.

Winter guides his blue hybrid onto Seventy-Second Street; twilight turns the windshield bright gold. The detectives lower their visors; black shadows cover over their faces, and for a moment, they both appear to be headless.

BENJAMIN

Where do we go with this?

Pondering the situation, Winter stares at the red and white car lights, which are frozen by rush hour congestion. His ruminations are dark. Dismayed, he rubs his face and shakes his head.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

What?

Winter looks at his partner and returns his gaze to the inert cars that lie before him, stuck in traffic.

WINTER

We need to go off the grid.

Benjamin is surprised by the suggestion.

BENJAMIN

That seem drastic-- especially this close to the World Series. Maybe we should bring it to Sergeant Arthur?

WINTER

I'm uneasy with why he was at O'Connor's the night of. At the time he said that he-

BENJAMIN

"Was in the area."

(he frowns)

I didn't think anything of it then. You think he's involved?

WINTER
I'm not allowing for any
coincidences right now. We know
these blackmailers have sway.

Benjamin ponders the tableau and shakes his head, grimacing.

BENJAMIN
"Off the grid."

WINTER
Officially, we let the case fizzle--
move on to something else--but
privately we watch Menendez, maybe
Lawrence, see where they lead us.

BENJAMIN
Yankee stadium would be nice.

Winter turns the hybrid south, onto Lexington Avenue; a
building throws a heavy shadow over the entire vehicle.
Benjamin surveys the street and furrows his brow.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Why're you going this way?

WINTER
Let's talk to Olivetti.

BENJAMIN
Do I have to shake its hand?

WINTER
Be nice.

INT. CROOKED STAIRWELL - EARLY EVENING

The door at the bottom of the stairwell BUZZES and the lock
CLICKS. From the blue dusk walk Winter and Benjamin. They
climb crooked steps, each of which CREAKS a different pitch.

The detectives round the landing and ascend toward the third
floor, teetering occasionally upon the tilted stairs.

BENJAMIN
It's like a funhouse-- sans fun.

Winter reaches the third floor landing, followed by Benjamin.

INT. IMPASTO HALLWAY - SAME

The green walls have been covered with so many layers of
paint that they resemble cake frosting.

Across CREAKING boards, the two detectives walk. They stop before a gray door labelled 'A.G. Olivetti' by a strip of blue plastic.

BENJAMIN
Is that a sticker?

Benjamin presses the doorbell, eliciting a sound akin to that of an angry hornet-- BUZZZZZZZZZ...

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
(Brooklyn Accent)
Don't be egregious!

Benjamin withdraws his finger. FOOTSTEPS sound within the space beyond, and wood CREAKS. A bolt CLACKS; a bolt SQUEAKS and CLACKS; a metal gate CREAKS; a chain RATTLES; a bolt CLACKS; a doorknob SQUEAKS. The door retreats from the hallway and reveals OLIVETTI, a short man with black and silver hair, a big nose, large eyes and thin black eyebrows that seem like the offspring of his mustache. He wears gray slacks and a blue cashmere sweater.

OLIVETTI
Detective Winter.

Olivetti extends one of his oversized hands; Winter clasps the proffered appendage and shakes it.

WINTER
Mr. Olivetti.

The men release each other. Olivetti looks at Benjamin and then glances back at Winter.

OLIVETTI
Is he going to behave?

Benjamin extends his hand and Olivetti clasps it for a moment. The diminutive man steps back from his door and motions for the detectives to enter.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)
Welcome to World War II.

INT. OLIVETTI'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - SAME

The detectives walk into Olivetti's living room, the walls of which are covered with glass display cases that are filled with painted miniature tanks and planes (Panzers, Zeros, Oscars, Mustangs, Corsairs, etc.) and 1/24 scale soldiers.

WINTER
Looks like the Germans are going to win this time.

OLIVETTI

I'll admit that I've a disproportionate amount of Panzers in my collection.

Olivetti shuts the door, THUNK, pulls the chain, RATTLE-RATTLE, twists a bolt, CLACK, closes a metal gate and bolts it twice, CLACK-CLACK. He faces the detectives.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

Non-alcoholic beer? I know you're on duty.

Benjamin suppresses a shudder and shakes his head.

WINTER

No thank you.

Olivetti walks to a small desk, sits down and points out the two folding chairs on the opposite side. The detectives walk underneath the Luftwaffe, which depends from the ceiling by fishing line (ready to bomb England), and seat themselves.

OLIVETTI

(to Winter)

Whenever you visit, you sit on my right side and Williams sits on my left. Like a married couple going to sleep at night, you each have your place.

BENJAMIN

I prefer holding his right hand when things get romantic.

Olivetti's smile disappears, and his face hardens.

OLIVETTI

Is that a gay joke?

BENJAMIN

Don't get diagonal-- you were comparing us to a married couple.

Olivetti's face does not soften.

OLIVETTI

And how would you feel if I made a remark about African Americans?

(Winter shuts his eyes and shakes his head.)

BENJAMIN

Actually, I feel that that term you just used--African American--is racist: It presupposes a person's heritage based on his or her skin color. My dad was born in England and my mother's parents were from Barbados: I didn't swing here from the dark continent.

WINTER

(to Olivetti)

We want to hire you to observe a detective named Menendez.

OLIVETTI

What am I looking for?

WINTER

Illicit meetings. Phone calls at odd hours. A second address.

BENJAMIN

A second car. A P.O. box. Junk cellphones. An evil cape.

OLIVETTI

It'll help if you say what you suspect him of. If you can't, you can't.

BENJAMIN

(to Winter)

Your call.

WINTER

He might be connected to some very mean extortionists.

OLIVETTI

How mean?

WINTER

We believe that they mutilated and killed a fourteen year-old girl simply to set the hook for their blackmail. And that they pulled that hook until their fish shot himself in the head.

BENJAMIN

Twice.

Olivetti leans back in his seat; he picks up a half-assembled Zero (a Japanese war plane) and contemplates it for a moment.

OLIVETTI

Do you think Menendez is behind this blackmail operation or that he's been coerced into helping out?

BENJAMIN

Could go either way. We don't know him very well and can't speak for his character.

WINTER

We'd like for you to start tonight.

Olivetti sets the plane down, nods his head and slides a card with a phone number on it across the table.

OLIVETTI

Put all calls to me through my virtual switchboard-- it goes to an unlisted I have.

Winter takes the card.

EXT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 - EVENING

Winter's blue hybrid is double-parked alongside Benjamin's brown sedan. Between the vehicles stand the two detectives, gazing across the street at their precinct, an edifice of old and worn stone. The majority of its windows are dark.

BENJAMIN

Isabella's making paella if you want to come over. Chorizo and shrimp.

Upon the third floor of the precinct, a dark window turns into green fluorescent light.

WINTER

Thanks for the invitation, but I've got to feed Empress.

BENJAMIN

I'm please you've hired an Asian hooker, but the best ones can feed themselves.

WINTER

Empress is O'Connor's cat. Mine now, I suppose. Unless his daughter turns up.

BENJAMIN

I don't think she's still got a pulse.

WINTER
Neither do I.

The handsome black man scratches his sideburns with a thumb and index finger and looks at his partner.

BENJAMIN
Are you sure you want to do this?
This way?
(quietly)
Off the grid--hiring a P.I.--going
after police?

Winter looks down from the facade of the building, folds his hands together and nods his head.

WINTER
I knew that she was cheating on me.

Benjamin, surprised, turns his head and looks at his partner.

WINTER (CONT'D)
I didn't know that the affair was
ongoing, but I knew that she'd been
unfaithful.

Winter looks up from his hands and at the precinct; two illuminated windows on the top floor flicker and go dark.

WINTER (CONT'D)
There was a night about six months
ago when she came home late and
stirred things up-- pushed me to be
aggressive with her during
intercourse. Next day, I saw some
minor bruises on her wrists and
thighs, but I knew I didn't use
enough force to cause them-- I'm
not really into dominance games.
(he shakes his head)
I knew she'd been with somebody
else.

BENJAMIN
Why didn't you say anything to her?

WINTER
Same reason I didn't say anything
to you-- I hoped I was wrong. I
wanted to believe I was wrong. And
as upset as I was with her, I was
embarrassed-- I felt I was
partially to blame for it. I
hadn't touched her much since the
Lisa Grand case.

BENJAMIN

It's understandable-- that woman
could've been Evelyn's twin sister.

WINTER

Raped and mutilated.

Tears sparkle in Winter's eyes and he exhales slowly.

WINTER (CONT'D)

I couldn't shake that image--you
remember that awful scene--and I
couldn't tell Evelyn about it
either. I hoped her indiscretion
was a single bad moment, but
afterwards, I tuned her out even
more-- I just didn't want to know.
I didn't want my marriage to become
a case-- some investigation. I
hoped it would get better, but...

Winter shakes his head and points at the precinct.

WINTER (CONT'D)

That's my home. This job--what we
do--this is my life, this is what I
am. I will not look the other way
while gumshoes and our Sergeant
collude with some blackmail
organization. If you want, I can
do this on my own and-

BENJAMIN

Fuck you. That's not how it is
with us.

WINTER

This one's different.

BENJAMIN

That's like saying I don't have to
be married to Isabella when a fancy
escort throws her ass at me. I am
a faithful husband and I am your
partner. These are my unqualified
absolutes. Fuck you for suggesting
otherwise.

Winter looks at Benjamin, grins morosely and nods.

WINTER

Thank you.

BENJAMIN

And I want to get these guys, same
as you do.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Any organization that does something like that to a fourteen year-old girl-
 (he shakes his head)
 It's terrifying to think that they exist and can sway police.

INT. KEARNEY'S TAVERN - SAME

Seated in the back of the dimly-lit tavern and by himself at a booth for two is JOSEPH ANDERS, a fifty-year-old man with blonde hair and glassy red eyes. He stares at the typewritten note that is clutched in his shaking hands.

"Examine the enclosed pictures. They are of Thomas Anders, your nephew. If you disregard our demands, one of your children will be stripped, handcuffed and thrown to the dogs.

If you tell anybody about this note, you are endangering that person's life. If you contact the police, we will find out and execute your entire family."

Trembling and ill, Joseph Anders secrets the letter inside an envelope that contains Polaroid pictures depicting his nephew's evisceration and dismemberment by frenzied, starving Rottweilers. The hooked man GULPS a glass of Scotch.

INT. BENJAMIN AND ISABELLA'S APARTMENT / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Candlelight shines upon the burgundy walls, the rose curtains and the nude occupants of the bed, Isabella and Benjamin, who lie atop a maroon blanket, intertwined.

ISABELLA

You were distracted.

Isabella's fingertips play across her husband's chest.

BENJAMIN

I took you to the crystal castle.
 Twice, I believe.

Isabella ruminates and looks into her husband's eyes.

ISABELLA

I have seen you bolt the front door and pull the chain and lock the windows and check on Sofia four times. You will talk about it now.

Benjamin nods, acquiescing.

BENJAMIN

I want you to take Sofia to school tomorrow and pick her up.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

And I want you both to have some luggage packed-- in case you need to go somewhere.

Isabella appraises Benjamin's face for a serious moment.

ISABELLA

You would like for me to call you every two hours? Like when Bornelli was on trial?

BENJAMIN

I would. And set the DVR thing to record the game-- last time I tried, I spent twenty minutes and recorded some show about wombats.

ISABELLA

Is it very likely? That Sofia and I will need to hide?

BENJAMIN

No, but I'd like for you to be prepared-- I don't know where this investigation's going. Sorry.

Assailed by guilt, Benjamin looks away from Isabella and at the burning candles. The petite woman puts her hands on his square chin and reclaims his attention.

ISABELLA

This is the price. To be married to a wonderful man who makes the city safe. It does not happen very often, and I accept this.

Benjamin looks into Isabella's eyes.

BENJAMIN

I love you.

Isabella places Benjamin's right hand upon her left breast and wraps her legs around him.

ISABELLA

Show me.
(she smiles)
Slow.

INT. HAPPY PANDA CHINESE FOOD - SAME

Winter walks into the take-out restaurant where he formerly returned the ripped-up menus. The Chinese Man at the counter eyes him warily.

CHINESE MAN

I told delivery boy not to put the menu in two four five.

WINTER

Thanks. I'd like the number thirty-seven-- it's great here.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - SAME

Winter, carrying a bag decorated with a green panda and a Chinese ideogram, enters the dark apartment, reaches for the light switch and CLICKS it up. Light burgeons.

From the study strides Empress, MEWLING piteously. Winter shuts the front door, SNIFFS the air and grimaces.

WINTER

So you're not one of those prodigies that can use a human toilet?

Empress glares at Winter and the man grows defensive.

WINTER (CONT'D)

There's a website.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Sitting at his work desk, Winter listens to the phone that is pressed to his left ear. He opens a plump takeout container and reveals perspiring brown rice.

WINTER

He's home?

(he listens)

Good. Most likely he's not going to make contact with his associates until his family's asleep, but keep on him.

(he listens)

Don't get diagonal-- I know that you know what you're doing.

Winter opens another takeout container: It is filled with rice and torn up menus.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Dammit.

(he listens)

No, nothing. Call if there's an event-- my phone'll be on. I've gotta go get dinner again.

INT. OLIVETTI'S BLACK VOLKSWAGON - LATER

Olivetti, wearing an earplug in his left ear and his charcoal outfit, sits in the front seat of a black Volkswagon, which is parked upon a residential Harlem block. Across the dashboard lies an umbrella within which is nestled a hyperfocal cardioid microphone that points through the half-open window to the three-story brownstone on the other side of the street.

The little private investigator raises his matte-black binoculars to his bulbous eyes and glances at an illuminated window on the second floor of the building. He sees a smiling MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN walk past the kitchen window. A hand lands upon her buttocks, followed by an arm and the heavysset Mexican-American to whom they are attached-- Detective Menendez, clothed in a sleeveless t-shirt and boxer shorts covered with cupids.

OLIVETTI

This isn't a good look for you.

The light within goes dark. Olivetti pans his binoculars and observes the adjacent window. The room brightens, but becomes a dim watercolor when the woman draws a diaphanous curtain across the pane. Olivetti sucks his teeth.

The private investigator lowers his binoculars and glances at the clock; it is 12:16. From the seat next to him he claims a magazine entitled, 'World War II...Today!' He flips to a dog-eared article, 'Il Duce Deluxe Model Kit. A 1/8 Scale Figure with 28 Points of Articulation.' Upon the right side of the page is a picture of a Benito Mussolini action figure. In one of the images, the Italian dictator is break-dancing.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

Il Duce's got moves.

INT. OLIVETTI'S BLACK VOLKSWAGON - LATER

A light shines upon the second floor. In an instant, Olivetti has his black binoculars pointed across the way. Menendez's YAWNING head fills a small open window that is between the bedroom and den. Presently, he shimmies and reaches down. The muted sound of a toilet FLUSHING is audible through Olivetti's earpiece.

The bathroom window goes dark. Olivetti surveys the facade of the brownstone. He glances at his clock; it is 3:23.

INT. OLIVETTI'S BLACK VOLKSWAGON - LATER

Olivetti SNAPS the cap onto a container into which he has just urinated and sets the receptacle on the floor of the back seat. He plucks a sanitary wipe from the door and cleans his hands.

Across the street, the front door opens. Menendez, wearing a gray jogging outfit with a stained left sleeve and a torn collar, emerges and descends the front steps. Olivetti glances at the clock; it is 4:42. The Latin detective hits the pavement and jogs west. Olivetti watches.

Menendez reaches the end of the street and hastens north. Olivetti twists his ignition, shifts into drive, CLICK-CLICK, and rolls onto the street in the opposite direction.

With calm and precise movements, Olivetti guides his car onto the adjacent avenue and up the street that runs parallel to the one on which Menendez lives. Parked cars, unlighted buildings and leafless trees glide past.

Olivetti reaches the intersection, brakes and surveys Lenox Avenue. On the opposite side of the road and three blocks to the north stands Menendez with his right hand in the air. A yellow cab pulls to the curb beside him and he climbs inside.

OLIVETTI

Not gonna get in shape like that.

Olivetti follows the cab. He plucks out his cardioid earplug, inserts a hands-free device and punches two numbers on the phone that is mounted on his dashboard.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

Connect to line six.

(he listens)

Winter. The subject came out of his apartment in jogging attire, ran three blocks and got in a cab.

(he listens)

Yes, yes, I'm following-- don't be pedantic. I'll call when I'm somewhere.

Olivetti CLICKS off his phone, his large eyes focused on the rear of the cab that is ten car-lengths in front of him.

EXT. BROADWAY IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - JUST BEFORE DAWN

The city is azure, but flecked with lights from last night. Olivetti watches the cab stop beside a boarded-up building that has the phrase 'Da Peeplez will Rize' written upon it.

The private investigator parks his Volkswagon near an Off Track Betting facility, raises his binoculars and observes. Across the avenue, Menendez walks onto a desolate and unlighted block that slopes downhill. The quarry drops from Olivetti's line of sight.

OLIVETTI

Sheiza.

Olivetti shifts his car into drive, CLICK-CLICK, steps on the gas, sweeps his car around a median of bleak plant-life and cigarette butts and shoots down a parallel street.

Vacant lots and crumbling tenement buildings blur past on either side of the car. The perpendicular avenue ahead expands; Olivetti slows, turns a corner and parks his vehicle. The private investigator looks up from the bottom of the hill and sees his descending quarry.

Menendez surveys the area and walks off of the street, toward a decaying three-story brownstone that has boarded-up windows and an exposed upper floor from which pipes jut like bones. The man climbs five steps, inserts a key into a lock and enters the abandoned building.

Olivetti raises his binoculars and examines the blank facade of the decaying brownstone. He dials a connection.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

Connect to line six.

(he listens)

Guten morgen. The subject entered an unnumbered three-story brownstone on one-six-one street.

(he listens)

Right, right. West of Broadway. South side.

Olivetti pans his binoculars to the north side of the street and sees a tall gray building with gates on every window and a ruined playground.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

It's across the street from a gray building. Twelve stories. Abandoned project. The-

Something glints within a top window of the gray building.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

Wait a second. I'll call you back.

Olivetti CLICKS off his phone and focuses his binoculars on the twelve-story project building. His view suddenly goes black; he lowers his binoculars.

Standing directly outside of the car is a SILHOUETTED MAN, pointing a gun at Olivetti's head.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, wearing boxer shorts and a King Crimson t-shirt, GRINDS coffee beans. His cellphone lies beside a window that is foggy with dark blue early dawn.

He dumps the coffee grounds into his steaming French press, secures the lid, CLICK, and eyes the silent cellphone. The detective is anxious.

WINTER

Call back.

Winter grabs his home phone from the wall and begins to dial.

INT. BENJAMIN AND ISABELLA'S APARTMENT / BEDROOM - SAME

Benjamin sleeps alongside Isabella, his arms wrapped around her back, her head nestled underneath his chin. A cellphone BUZZES.

BENJAMIN

Fuck.

The device BUZZES again.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Double fuck.

Benjamin sits up, grabs his cellphone, flips it open and SLAPS it to his ear.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - DAWN

Benjamin, wearing jeans and a loose olive sweatshirt, YAWNS enormously and rubs his red eyes as he drives toward the lower east side apartment building, where stands Winter, clothed in black jeans and a gray long-sleeve t-shirt, holding two travel mugs. The black man stops the car, leans over and opens the door for his partner.

BENJAMIN

None of that fake sugar shit in there?

WINTER

It's authentic.

Winter sits down, hands Benjamin one of the two travel mugs and shuts the door, THUNK.

BENJAMIN
Olivetti hasn't been in touch?

WINTER
No. And when I called, I got voicemail. It could be a dead phone battery or a problem with the virtual switchboard, but-

BENJAMIN
He doesn't make mistakes like that.

With one hand, Benjamin guides the vehicle onto the street.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I'm still hoping this's a dream. I didn't even get four hours of sleep last night-
(he YAWNS enormously)
You know how Isabella gets whenever I'm imperiled.

WINTER
Playful.

BENJAMIN
With a capital F.

Winter sips his coffee, closes the latch, CLICK, and sets his travel mug into a cup holder. He pulls off his loose long sleeve t-shirt, sets it in his lap and turns to face the backseat. Lying upon the leather upholstery is a white bullet-resistant vest.

WINTER
Yours is on?

Benjamin KNOCKS upon his chest and guides the brown sedan onto a wide avenue that is empty, excepting sporadic freight trucks and taxi cabs.

BENJAMIN
Washington Heights?

WINTER
Unless we hear from him.

Winter dons the white vest and cinches its straps tight.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN ROOM - SAME

Water DRIPS. Olivetti awakens, seated in an iron chair, arms handcuffed behind his back, and surveys his prison. Flickering florescent light shines upon the turquoise tiles that cover the walls, floor and ceiling;

beside a steel door hangs a coiled black hose that DRIPS. Underneath his fettered bare feet is a large rusty drain. Fear seizes the private investigator, but he suppresses it.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

The faggot's awake.

Metal CLANKS. The florescent light flickers and dies. Darkness swallows the room. Hinges GROAN. The sound of Olivetti's tense WHEEZING resounds throughout the enclosure.

The florescent light burgeons, pushing back the darkness. A fifty-year-old JAPANESE MAN WITH WHITE HAIR stands opposite Olivetti. Atop the Asian man's black pants and shirt is a dark green rubber apron.

Olivetti manages an unconvincing smile.

OLIVETTI

Konichiwa.

From underneath the rubber apron, the Japanese Man withdraws an empty syringe. Olivetti stops breathing. The tacit captor passes by his captive and continues toward the far side of the room. Olivetti attempts to turn around and observe the man, but the legs of the iron chair are bolted to the ground and do not yield.

The private investigator turns his gaze forward and looks at the open door, beyond which lies pure darkness. In an adjacent room, something SQUEAKS rhythmically.

Olivetti stares into the darkness, fists clenched, gritting his teeth. SQUEAKS follow SQUEAKS in steady oscillations. A pungent odor causes the private investigator to wrinkle his nose and COUGH out foul air.

Light strikes a wheelchair and the misshapen person who is seated within it. Olivetti pales and averts his gaze.

Wheels SQUEAK. Olivetti stares at the ground, his body shaking as if thrust naked into a blizzard. A shadow covers the rusty drain and his feet. For a moment, the room is silent, excepting the private investigator's WHEEZING.

The Japanese Man grabs Olivetti's hair and yanks his head up, forcing him to look forward. Sitting directly before the private investigator is a person in a hospital gown whose legs have been amputated at the knee and whose arms have been wholly removed. Teardrops drip from the individual's empty eye sockets, and his ratty silver hair is pulled back in a ponytail. (This is the wealthy man who watched his girlfriend swim in acid seven months prior.) Olivetti stares at the AMPUTEE, terrified.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)

My God.

Standing directly behind the wheelchair is the Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes, wearing slacks and a black sweatshirt.

BURNED MAN

This is an example of what happens to an uncooperative individual.

The Burned Man withdraws a handkerchief from his pocket, wipes tears from the Amputee's cheeks and pushes the cloth into the mutilated individual's left eye socket.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

He's been here for seven months.

Nauseated and fearful, Olivetti focuses upon the rusty drain.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

If you cooperate, we will let you go-- though you'll have an obligation to our group. If you are obstinate, you'll become the next example.

OLIVETTI

I'll cooperate.

BURNED MAN

Look at me.

Olivetti raises his gaze from the drain and stares forward with frightened, glimmering eyes.

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

Are you a police detective or a private investigator?

OLIVETTI

P.I.

The Burned Man reaches into his rear pocket and withdraws Olivetti's cellphone.

BURNED MAN

There are no numbers in here or any records of incoming calls. Why?

OLIVETTI

I go through a virtual switchboard.

The Burned Man wedges the phone in-between the Amputee's gums, which no longer contain any teeth.

BURNED MAN

What is your name?

OLIVETTI
Angelo Olivetti.

BURNED MAN
Why were you on one-sixty-one?

OLIVETTI
I was observing Detective Menendez.

BURNED MAN
Why?

OLIVETTI
His wife believed that he was playing around.

BURNED MAN
At five o'clock in the morning?

OLIVETTI
I was hired to monitor all of his suspicious activities. He went for a morning jog, but hopped into a cab after three blocks-- that's suspicious.

BURNED MAN
You were hired by his wife?

OLIVETTI
I was.

BURNED MAN
Her name is?

Olivetti's eyes widen momentarily.

OLIVETTI
Marta.

The phone lodged in-between the Amputee's gums BUZZES. The Burned Man and Olivetti look at the device. It BUZZES a second time and wiggles forward, extruding like a tongue. Olivetti's heart pounds. The phone BUZZES a third time, tilts and falls into the Amputee's lap, CLACK.

The phone is silent. The Burned Man gazes at Olivetti.

BURNED MAN
That must have been "Marta."

OLIVETTI
Possibly.

The Burned Man looks over Olivetti's shoulder.

BURNED MAN

Right eye.

OLIVETTI

No!

The Japanese Man pokes his needle into Olivetti's right eye. The private investigator YELLS.

The Japanese Man pulls the plunger, drawing ocular fluid into the syringe. Olivetti SHRIEKS.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

Benjamin drives. Winter SNAPS his cellphone shut and clips it to his belt.

WINTER

Goddammit.

A heavy silence sucks the air from the car. Outside the vehicle, dawn has broken. Tenement houses, garbage cans, cracked sidewalks and store facades glow blue.

BENJAMIN

Let's circle the area, look for his VW. If we don't see anything, we'll hit the building he detailed.

Winter nods his weary head.

EXT. BROADWAY IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - MOMENTS LATER

Benjamin's brown sedan passes by the two Dominican-American Teenagers who sit upon the stoop of the boarded-up building that proclaims 'Da Peeplez will Rize'. Today, their skullies and sneakers are bright orange.

DOMINICAN MAN

(to the sedan)

Get a spoiler on that!

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

Benjamin and Winter monitor their respective sides of the avenue. Upon the wires that suspend traffic lights, perched pigeons have ideas.

Winter observes. Several PEOPLE stand outside an Off Track Betting storefront, drinking beer wrapped in brown bags or sipping coffee. Upon a bench, a VAGRANT imitates a corpse.

Benjamin surveys rows of run down buildings. He reaches an intersection, steers onto a side street and drives downhill.

Winter sees a black car parked behind a building, but the vehicle is revealed to be a hatchback with chrome rims. The blonde man sits back in his seat, concerned and frustrated.

EXT. BROADWAY IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - MOMENTS LATER

For the second time in five minutes, Benjamin's brown sedan passes by the Dominican duo.

DOMINICAN MAN
Where's the spoiler nigga?

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

Benjamin guides his car up the avenue and turns onto a side street. Winter checks his revolver, slides it into his waist holster and pulls the bottom of his shirt over the firearm.

Ahead of them, the avenue expands. Benjamin applies the brakes, turns to the left and stops the car. Both detectives insert wireless devices into their ears and look through the driver's window, uphill.

Winter sees the decaying three-story brownstone, looks across the street and notes the gray twelve-story project complex. At the smaller building, he points.

WINTER
It's that one.

Benjamin draws his semi-automatic pistol, CLICKS the safety off, slots a bullet into the chamber, CLICK-CLACK, and holsters the live weapon. The black man clips his badge to his collar; the blonde man pulls out the chain that holds his badge and lets it dangle like a pendant.

The detectives unbuckle their seat-belts, CLACK, CLACK. Benjamin shifts the car into drive, CLICK-CLACK, and pulls the wheel around. The vehicle climbs up the incline, toward the abandoned three-story brownstone, engine THRUMMING.

Winter puts his left palm on the dashboard and grabs the strap with his right fist. Benjamin cuts the wheel hard right; the tires strike the curb, THUD; the hood bounces. The brownstone expands across the windshield.

EXT. DESOLATE STREET IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - SAME

The sedan stops. The passenger door swings open, and Winter runs out of the vehicle, across the cracked pavement and up the stoop steps.

Within the car, Benjamin draws his gun; after a momentary assessment of the surroundings, he glances at the facade.

Winter presses his shoulder to the wall beside the front door. He reaches out, tries the knob, finds that it is locked and POUNDS a fist against the wood.

WINTER
Open up! Police!

Benjamin, seated in the car, aims his semi-automatic pistol at the front door. Again, Winter POUNDS the door.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Police! Open up right now!

No sounds emanate from within the brownstone.

Winter eyes the lock, which is reinforced stainless steel, and gauges the door frame, which is old wood. He points his gun at the latter and squeezes his trigger, BANG; wood CRACKLES; splinters fly pell-mell. He fires again, BANG; rotten wood BURSTS apart. He squeezes off a third shot, BANG; metal CLANKS-- the housing for the bolt is exposed.

Winter opens his revolver, dumps shells into his pocket, reloads with an autoloader and CLICKS the full cylinder into place. He kicks the door; wood BURSTS; hinges CREAK.

Winter withdraws from the open doorway and SLAMS his right shoulder against the outside wall.

WINTER (CONT'D)
This is the police! I will shoot
any person who does not identify
himself right now!

Benjamin, gun raised, looks into the dark hallway of the brownstone. He does not see anything.

BENJAMIN
(into his wireless)
Front area's empty.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FRONT ROOM - SAME

A pointed revolver stabs into the dark space, held aloft by Winter.

He advances two strides and waits for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. At the far end of the hallway, shards of blue dawn shine like pieces of stained glass.

Calmly, the detective strides up the hallway.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FIRST FLOOR LANDING - SAME

Winter reaches the landing. To his left are rusty mailboxes and to his right is a stairwell that leads up into pure darkness. He points his gun up the steps.

WINTER

This is the police! I will shoot
any person who does not identify
himself right now!

The brownstone is silent, excepting the sounds of DRIPPING water. From his belt, Winter plucks his penlight. He CLICKS it on and shines it up the stairwell; thick cobwebs glow. The first seven steps look solid, but beyond them lies a black chasm. A drop of water falls through the void, glinting. A tiny tin voice BUZZES in the detective's ear.

WINTER (CONT'D)

(into his wireless)

I'm okay.

Winter turns from the stairwell and trains his beam upon the rusty mailboxes; light glares upon their stainless steel locks. He puts the penlight in his mouth, and with his free right hand, tries to open the left door. It remains shut.

He SLAMS the butt of his revolver into the mailbox; something CLANKS upon the other side. Winter's brow wrinkles.

EXT. DESOLATE STREET IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - MOMENTS LATER

Winter SLAMS the trunk of the sedan. In his right hand, he hold a crowbar, and in his left hand, he grips his revolver. Benjamin monitors the block from within the car, his semi-automatic down in his lap.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FIRST FLOOR LANDING - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, holding the penlight in his mouth, holsters his pistol and swings the crowbar against the left mailbox, CLANK; the sound ECHOES behind the wall. He swings the crowbar again, CLANK; the sound ECHOES. The edge of the rusty mailbox is warped, no longer flush with its setting.

Winter jams the edge of the crowbar into the niche and presses forward. The mailbox bulges and GROANS.

He applies more force. The lock SNAPS. Sparks spray and the door swings open. He sets the crowbar down, CLINK.

Into the mailbox, Winter shines his penlight. The interior is a receptacle of bright stainless steel.

Winter examines the edges of the mailbox and sees a small round button. With his index finger, he presses the raised circle, CLICK. The bottom of the mailbox drops away, CLANK.

Winter looks into the opening and sees a chute that goes deep into the ground, far beyond the reach of his penlight.

EXT. DESOLATE STREET IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - SAME

Benjamin surveys the gray twelve-story building across the street and the adjacent playground, which looks as if it (barely) survived a wartime bombing. Something catches the detective's eye, further up the road. He looks west. At the end of the block, a MAN rolls a RATTLING shopping cart.

BENJAMIN

(into his wireless)

A guy just eyed me-- a penniless shopper. Could be a lookout. Or a member of the Red Sox.

Benjamin watches the Man push his cart to the next block.

From the front door, Winter emerges, his gun hidden by his shirt, the crowbar in his hands. He walks down the stoop steps, surveys the lot and strides to the two metal doors that lie upon the ground beneath a boarded-up window.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Watch out for rats-- up here they're jumbos.

Winter opens the basement doors; metal hinges SQUEAK.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / BASEMENT - SAME

Winter walks down stone steps and into the dark enclosure. He pans his penlight around and sees cobwebs, a soiled mattress, some sodden boxes, several used condoms, a collection of wine bottles (one of which contains a dead mouse) and a mildewed head that once sat prestigiously atop a stone statue. A pink tail slides between cinder blocks.

Holding his breath, Winter walks toward the far wall. He shines his light on the five metal tubes that run from the brownstone above down into the stone floor.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

Benjamin surveys the barred and dark windows of the twelve-story building that is across the street. Behind him, Winter emerges from the basement and closes the doors, CLANG-CLANG.

The black man watches his partner enter the vehicle and shut the door, THUNK. Both men remove their wireless earplugs.

WINTER

No idea where Olivetti is.

BENJAMIN

Fuck.

(he points to the
brownstone)

What's in there?

WINTER

It's drop-off. Chutes carry whatever's put in the mailboxes to some underground receptacle.

BENJAMIN

That's where O'Connor dumped his pots o' gold?

WINTER

And other people, I'd bet.

BENJAMIN

How deep do they go-- these chutes?

WINTER

Don't know, but past the basement. Probably someplace that's not accessible through the brownstone.

The detectives ruminate for a moment.

BENJAMIN

The project building across the street-- it would be a good place to watch the drop-off. Might have a tunnel to the receptacle too.

WINTER

It would have a deeper foundation.

BENJAMIN

Maybe that's where they took Olivetti?

The detectives look at the twelve-story project building. Benjamin shifts into drive, CLICK-CLACK, and steps on the gas. The sedan rolls forward, engine THRUMMING.

The car climbs and Winter gauges the bleak gray edifice. Presently, Benjamin brakes and looks at his partner.

WINTER

Back way?

Benjamin nods. Winter unfolds his phone, dials and presses the device to his ear.

WINTER (CONT'D)

R.W.? Get a pen and-

(he listens)

I know. But when you are awake, I want you to pull up info on four-four-five west one-six-one street-- it's an abandoned project building. See who's responsible, if it was sold to private sector, etcetera.

(he listens)

And see if there's a deed on the brownstone across the way. Doesn't have a number, but should be four-four-six or four-four-four.

BENJAMIN

Unless it's got a fucking fraction.

WINTER

Check for a fraction if neither-

(he listens)

Nobody likes those.

(he listens)

And keep all of this tight. Okay?

This is dangerous.

(he listens)

I'll try to get her to put cream cheese frosting on it next time.

Winter dials off, CLICK.

BENJAMIN

Never.

WINTER

I tried.

EXT. CHURCH OF THE HOLY CHRIST - MOMENTS LATER

The brown sedan glides into the empty lot of an old stone church that is surmounted by four lichen-covered spires.

Benjamin turns the wheel, stops and backs into a space beside a display case wherein plastic letters arranged on delineated felt proclaim, 'Join Us For Services and Feel His Voice.' Numerous flyers have been taped to the rear of the board, depicting cats, bikes, dogs and children.

The THRUMMING engine stops. The trunk yawns like an alligator. Car doors open and admit the detectives, both of whom have their weapons concealed by their shirts. They shut the doors, THUNK, THUNK. Winter grips the crowbar in his left hand. Benjamin walks to the rear of his car, withdraws bolt cutters and shuts the trunk, THUNK. Toward the side of the building--which is the entrance--the detectives stride.

Winter and Benjamin pass the closed doors of the church, where stands a headless stone statue of Jesus Christ.

BENJAMIN

That doesn't seem like an endorsement.

Winter looks away from the decapitated savior, toward the adjoining property in which stands the gray project building. Surrounding the weedy lot is a rusty iron gate, adorned with sodden and sun-bleached newspapers, rags and boxes. Atop the fence are narrow spikes.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

That'll keep the Negroes in.

WINTER

Vlad Tepes did good work.

EXT. BEHIND THE GRAY PROJECT BUILDING - SAME

The detectives reach the gate, which is nearly a yard taller than they are, and look through. The mildewed back of the gray building is riven and gripped by lichens; all of the dark windows are either barred or boarded-up or both. After a brief survey, the men slide their tools through the bars of the gate and drop them.

Winter withdraws his gun, but keeps it close to his side. Benjamin jumps up and grabs a spike with his right hand; his sneakers SLAM the bars. He grabs another protrusion, raises himself and swings his left leg over two sharp points.

WINTER

Be fucking careful.

Benjamin leans on his planted left foot, lifts his other leg, sets his right foot, balances and jumps down. Sneakers impact the terrain on the far side, THUMP. Benjamin rises and withdraws his gun; Winter holsters his revolver.

The blonde man grips the iron bars and rises, hand-over-hand. At the top, he grabs two upthrust spikes and raises the lower half of his body. He sets his feet on the crossbar, turns around and lowers himself to the ground, gently.

The detectives reclaim their tools and hasten toward the pair of chained doors upon the rear face of the building, sneakers flinging dirt as they jog.

Presently, they reach the back entrance. Benjamin pulls the handles, but the doors do not open. Winter points out a boarded-up window on the second floor and the air-conditioner that juts from the wall directly below it.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN ROOM - SAME

Olivetti trembles and his collapsed eye drips. The Japanese Man with white hair squirts the ocular contents of his syringe into the rusty drain. Nearby, the Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes writes upon a note pad, which is resting upon the Amputee's head.

BURNED MAN

Garret Winter and Benjamin Williams. Both married. One has a daughter.

(he looks up at Olivetti)
How old is the daughter?

OLIVETTI

D-don't know. Young.

BURNED MAN

Would she fit in a suitcase?

Olivetti, horrified, looks at the man with his remaining eye.

OLIVETTI

She's a f-fucking ch-child! A little girl.

The Freckled Driver (the square-faced fellow who drove the van to the hungry dogs two nights prior) walks into the room.

FRECKLED DRIVER

I'm going. Gotta get to work.

The Burned Man tears the top sheet of paper from the note pad, RIP, and examines it momentarily.

"Detective Garret Winter, married. Detective Benjamin Williams, married, one young daughter. They were investigating Menendez and the 161 drop-off. Coerce or Execute? -Y4"

He folds the neatly-written note in half and writes the letter 'Z' upon it.

BURNED MAN
Give this to the Typist.

The Freckled Driver takes the note from the Burned Man, enters the hallway and is absorbed by darkness.

EXT. BEHIND THE GRAY PROJECT BUILDING - SAME

Standing atop the security bars of a first floor air conditioner, Winter twists his upraised crowbar. The wood covering the second floor window CRACKS; grit falls. He turns away from the airborne detritus.

Upon the ground nearby, Benjamin watches the open lot with quick eyes. His gun is out, but held close and pointed down.

Winter repositions the crowbar, SNEEZES and presses forward; the wood CRACKS and falls to the ground, THUMP. He drops the tool, THUD, grips the edges of the sill and pulls himself toward the window.

Benjamin looks up at his partner's dangling legs. A moment later, the limbs disappear inside the dark window.

INT. ABANDONED LIVING ROOM - SAME

Covering his nose, Winter surveys the room he has just entered. It is dirty, covered with cracked mint-green paint and furnished with an overturned sofa and a rolled-up rug.

He returns to the window, reaches out, grabs the upraised crowbar and bolt cutters and carries them inside. A moment later, Benjamin hoists himself through the window.

BENJAMIN
Stank.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN ROOM - SAME

The Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes turns away from Olivetti and rolls the Amputee toward the dark hallway; the wheelchair SQUEAKS. The captive watches the duo depart.

OLIVETTI
Pizza face. Hey. Listen to me.
I'm a private eye, connected to
cops and loaded with intel. I can
help your organization in a big,
big way. I promise.

The Burned Man does not respond. He enters the hallway and is absorbed by darkness; the wheelchair SQUEAKS. On the far side of the room stands the Japanese Man with White Hair.

BURNED MAN (O.S.)
Hose down everything when you're through.

Olivetti pales.

JAPANESE MAN
I will.

The wheelchair SQUEAKS like a distant rodent. Presently, an unseen door CREAKS.

A fury builds within Olivetti, replacing his fear. He SPITS and looks over at the Japanese Man.

OLIVETTI
After you do this, you should swing by my place and take a look at my collection of pewter figurines.

The Japanese Man withdraws a syringe from beneath his apron.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)
I have Japanese Zeros and a one ninety-sixth scale model of downtown Hiroshima that's fun to play with.

Japanese Man walks forward, frowning.

OLIVETTI (CONT'D)
The victims' faces are so detailed and realistic-
(he shakes his head)
-it's like you were there.

The Japanese Man draws the plunger and the needle WHISTLES. Olivetti forces a grin to his face.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - SAME

The door to apartment 2H opens, CREAK. A gun and the blonde detective who wields it advance into a long blue hallway that is illuminated by barred windows. The floor is covered with warped and curling pieces of gray linoleum. Winter scans either end of the passage and sees that he is alone.

WINTER
(quietly)
Clear.

Benjamin enters the hall, gun in hand. He points to the nearby stairwell and proceeds toward it. Winter follows.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / STAIRWELL - SAME

The detectives hasten down the steps, toward a landing that is illuminated by a narrow cracked window. Presently, an upright shape moves across the broken glass.

The detectives race to the shattered pane and look through. Outside, a big man with a square head and fair skin covered with freckles walks away from the building, toward the street. He is smoking a cigarette.

BENJAMIN

(whispered)

I'll tickle him. You look for Olivetti.

WINTER

Fine. Meet in the lobby in ten minutes.

BENJAMIN

Yep.

The detectives glance at their watches--it is 7:38--and hasten down the stairwell. At the next landing, Benjamin opens a door labelled, 'Ground Floor.' Winter continues into the dark ground.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / LOBBY - SAME

From the stairwell, Benjamin emerges. He hurdles a turn-style, circumvents a dented security booth and races through a corroded metal detector. As he nears the front door, he describes the thick chain that is wrapped around the crossbars (and mouths the word, 'fuck').

Benjamin opens his bolt cutters, wedges a link and shears it, CLANK. The chain drains away like water, RATTLING. He opens the door, sets the bolt cutters on the ground (to keep the door from closing all the way) and runs outside.

EXT. PROJECT BUILDING / PAVED COURTYARD - SAME

Benjamin withdraws his pistol as he races toward the fair-skinned man, sneakers SCUFFING the pavement. The Freckled Driver turns around. Benjamin points his gun.

BENJAMIN

Hands in the air! Police!

The Freckled Driver raises his hands.

FRECKLED DRIVER
Don't ulcerate.

Benjamin jogs toward him, gun upraised.

BENJAMIN
Keep your hands up and identify
yourself!

FRECKLED DRIVER
Can I pull out my badge? Or do you
want to do that?

BENJAMIN
You're an officer?

The Freckled Driver drags on his cigarette and nods. Benjamin, wary, keeps his gun forward, but no longer points it directly at the man's chest. The suspect flexes his meaty upraised hands, CRACKING knuckles.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Why're you out here?

FRECKLED DRIVER
Looking for a missing kid.

Benjamin, doubtful, reaches the Freckled Driver, whose head is diffused by exhaled smoke.

BENJAMIN
Produce your badge. Slowly.

The Freckled Driver reaches his right hand into a rear pocket of his jeans and withdraws a wallet to which a brass badge is affixed. A folded piece of paper--the Burned Man's note--falls to the ground.

FRECKLED DRIVER
Here.

The Freckled Driver gives his wallet over to the detective, leans over and picks up the fallen note. Benjamin inspects the badge and looks at the man's driver's license.

The Freckled Driver replaces the note in his pocket and drags upon his cigarette. Benjamin returns the wallet.

BENJAMIN
Lieutenant Janacek.

JANACEK
What're you doing out here--
running around with a gun?
(MORE)

JANACEK (CONT'D)
(he exhales a cloud)
This isn't your district.

BENJAMIN
I'm not at liberty to discuss it.

Janacek TAPS his cigarette; ash falls to the cracked pavement and bursts.

JANACEK
That's okay.
(he shrugs)
Wasn't really interested.

Janacek looks away and drags on his cigarette; Benjamin sees that the man's hands are shaking. An exhaled cloud thickens the air in-between the police officers.

BENJAMIN
Don't listen to what the doctors
say-- those're healthy.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / BOILER ROOM - SAME

Winter CLICKS his penlight and shines the beam upon boxes, heaps of fabric, the skeletons of chained bicycles, corroded canisters, cobwebs and a tipped-over washing machine. Behind the water heater stands an upright white shape.

The detective puts the penlight in his mouth, grips the crowbar and withdraws his revolver. Cautiously, he circles around the water heater. The beam of light illuminates an open, moldering refrigerator.

Winter approaches the appliance, shines the light on the ground nearby and sees scuff marks. Presently, he looks behind the refrigerator and sees a dark vertical line.

EXT. PROJECT BUILDING / PAVED COURTYARD - SAME

Benjamin watches Lieutenant Janacek (the Freckled Driver) climb the hill. The fair-skinned man walks toward a blue sedan that is parked at the end of the block, a phone pressed to his right ear.

BENJAMIN
(muttered)
"Don't ulcerate."

INT. JANACEK'S BLUE SEDAN - MOMENTS LATER

Janacek sits upon a Mets seat-cover and shuts the door, THUNK.

JANACEK

He identified me, I didn't have-
 (he listens)
 After work? I was going to get a
 pie, do laundry, nothing sp-
 (he listens)
 Okay. See you then.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / BOILER ROOM - SAME

Winter, holding his penlight in his mouth, shoves the refrigerator aside--it SCRATCHES stone--and reveals a hidden door. He sets the crowbar into the doorjamb and presses forward. The lock GROANS. He repositions the claw and pulls. Metal SNAPS. The door swings wide. Beyond the portal lies a dark hallway.

Winter steps aside, sets his penlight upon the floor and slides it up the pitch black passage.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / PASSAGE BEHIND BOILER ROOM - SAME

The penlight SKIDS up the hallway, illuminating the mildewed cinder block walls as if it were a miniature motorcycle. It halts and glares brightly upon the metal door at the far end of the passage.

Winter emerges from the dark, gun upraised, crowbar in his right hand. He collects his penlight and examines the door, which has a bolt on the side facing him. He slides the latch, CLICK.

The door shifts. Winter CLICKS his penlight and is swallowed by absolute darkness. The door CREAKS. Water DRIPS. Quiet FOOTSTEPS follow.

A moment later, something CLICKS. The penlight beam stabs through the dark, illuminating the turquoise tiles of the subterranean room.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN ROOM - SAME

Winter finds a switch upon the wall and flips it, CLICK; dim fluorescent light illuminates the enclosure. Standing in the center of the room and bolted to the floor is an iron chair from which water DRIPS. The detective's stomach sinks.

WINTER

Hell.

Winter CLICKS his penlight, pockets it and walks across the wet tiles to the draconian furnishing.

After a brief visual inspection, he presses his palm to the underside of the chair and withdraws his damp hand. A silver, six-inch long strand of hair lies in his palm. He examines the underside of the chair once more and claims two darker hairs of a similar length.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Goddammit. Goddammit.

Winter sets the hairs upon the chair, SLAMS the crowbar into the drain and yanks it hard. The grating warps, WHINES, SNAPS and comes loose. He flips the latticework over, withdraws a white handkerchief and rubs it along the filthy metal. Amidst the grime and algae is a bright red streak.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Fuck.

The discovery weighs heavily upon the detective. His blue eyes sparkle sadly. He shakes his head and SNORTS.

Presently, he puts the strands of hair into the sodden handkerchief and rises. He inserts the bundle into his pocket, grabs the crowbar and hastens from the room.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / BOILER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Penlight in hand, the detective strides past dead bikes, the tipped-over washing machine and a door with four locks and a warped sign that reads, "Electrical Room: Authorized Persons Only!" He glances at the door, looks at his watch and continues toward the stairwell. He CLICKS off his penlight.

INT. PROJECT BUILDING / LOBBY - SAME

Benjamin, seated atop a security turnstile, watches the stairwell, within which FOOTSTEPS echo. He raises his gun.

BENJAMIN
Identify yourself.

WINTER (O.S.)
Julius Caesar.

Winter emerges from the darkness and points to the exit.

WINTER (CONT'D)
In the car.

Winter hastens toward the front door; Benjamin follows.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

The detectives, glazed with sweat and breathing heavily, sit inside the vehicle and shut their doors, THUNK, THUNK.

BENJAMIN

Yeah?

WINTER

Olivetti's hurt or dead. Looks like they interrogated him. Tortured him.

A terrible fear expands within Benjamin's stomach. His mouth goes dry.

WINTER (CONT'D)

We should assume that he divulged.

Benjamin yanks his cellphone from his belt, scrolls down a menu to the name 'Isabella' and thumbs the connection. He opens his door, steps outside of the vehicle and walks toward the headless Christ.

Winter looks away from Benjamin and withdraws his own phone.

EXT. CHURCH OF THE HOLY CHRIST - SAME

Benjamin presses his cellphone to his ear and SLAPS the wall of the church with his free hand.

BENJAMIN

(muttering)

Pick up, pick up, pick-

(he listens)

Isabella? Thank fucking God.

(he KISSES the church wall)

Where are you?

(he listens)

Okay. Stop. Don't drop her off.

Take her directly to Lisa's-

(he listens)

No. I'll pick up the luggage. I will. Do not go back home. Go to Lisa's and call me when you get there. And don't talk to anybody else, okay? Nobody. No cops, nobody, but me.

(he listens)

I love you.

The detective folds up his cellphone and wipes tears of relief from his eyes. His entire body is shaking.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

For a ponderous moment, Winter stares at the name 'Evelyn,' which is highlighted upon his cellphone menu. He SNORTS and thumbs the connect button.

INT. GOLDSTEIN'S APARTMENT / BEDROOM - SAME

Evelyn SNEEZES. She lies alone in a large tan bed that is set against the west wall of Goldstein's beige bedroom. From a nearby carton, she snatches a tissue.

GOLDSTEIN (O.S.)

Bless you.

Evelyn blows her red nose and glances at the bedroom door, which is ajar.

EVELYN

Thanks.

From the adjacent room comes the sound of a phone RINGING.

GOLDSTEIN (O.S.)

That's yours.

Evelyn wipes her nose.

EVELYN

See who it is.

FOOTSTEPS resound beyond the door. The phone RINGS.

GOLDSTEIN (O.S.)

It's the cat owner.

EVELYN

Fuck him. He can leave a message.
And turn off the ringer.

Evelyn blows her nose again. Outside the window, dark clouds coalesce.

INT. ISABELLA'S LIME GREEN HYBRID - LATER

Isabella, wearing blue jeans and a black sweater, drives a lime green hybrid up Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. In the seat beside her is Sofia, wearing denim overalls, sparkling sneakers and a bright smile. The Spanish-American woman eyes her mirrors more than she typically would, but is otherwise wholly composed. She glances at her daughter.

ISABELLA

You are happy that we are going to Lisa's.

SOFIA

Today was arachnids.

ISABELLA

What if Bryan Chan gives his chips to some other girl?

SOFIA

Salt and vinegar is disgusting.

A red light glares. Isabella applies her brakes and stops the car. She surveys the neighboring vehicles, sees nothing that concerns her and KISSES her daughter upon the forehead. The light turns green.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - LATER

Benjamin steers onto an avenue. Winter SNAPS his phone shut and shakes his head, frustrated and concerned.

WINTER

She's not picking up her cell, and she's not at work. They said she's out for the day.

Benjamin ponders an unsavory idea.

WINTER (CONT'D)

What?

BENJAMIN

Do you know his name? The guy?

Winter grimaces and nods.

WINTER

It's Goldstein. They work together.

BENJAMIN

I can call him if you'd rather-

WINTER

No. I'll talk to him.

Winter scrolls down his cellphone menu, highlights 'Evelyn Work: Front Desk' and presses the connect button.

BENJAMIN

"Don't ulcerate."

Winter puts his phone against his ear and looks at Benjamin.

WINTER
"Don't ulcerate"...?

BENJAMIN
That's what Janacek said.

WINTER
Somebody else- Wait.
(into the phone)
I'd like for you to connect me with
Shelley Goldstein.

BENJAMIN
Shelley?

WINTER
This is Detective Winters from
Precinct Nineteen.
(he listens)
Thank you.
(he covers over the
receiver)
Jewish people use that name for
men.
(into the phone)
This is an urgent police matter. I
need to speak with him immediately.

BENJAMIN
Or his brother Rachel.

WINTER
I do not want to wait for him to
return my call. Please connect me
to him right-
(he listens and becomes
frustrated)
Then I will come in and show you my
badge.

Annoyed, Winter SNAPS his phone shut.

BENJAMIN
Want me to call and do my smooth
black man thing? I can-

WINTER
Menendez. He's the one who said
that. "Don't ulcerate." When we
goosed him at O'Connor's.

Benjamin recalls the moment and nods.

BENJAMIN

So Janacek knows Menendez-- they share a catchphrase and hang out at one-sixty-one.

WINTER

That's the arithmetic.

BENJAMIN

Christ. How many cops are tied to this thing? How big is it?

EXT. WASHINGTON HEIGHTS / UNDERPASS NEAR - LATER

Cars RUMBLE above the blocked-off underpass, the walls of which are comprised of porous riven stone. Within a recessed area stands a thick metal door. Something CLANKS behind it.

The door opens, GROANING. From the darkened portal emerges the Japanese Man with White Hair and the Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes. Behind them is a stone stairwell that leads down into the earth.

INT. FRONT ROOM OF TAYLOR, GATINO, GOLDSTEIN & FERGUSON, LLC. - LATE MORNING

Winter, wearing his black jeans and begrimed gray t-shirt, strides into the carpeted front room of the law firm at which his wife works. The SECRETARY, a twenty-six-year-old black woman with short wavy hair, looks up from her desk and grows anxious. The detective withdraws his badge and changes the woman's initial concern into a second--and more serious--one.

WINTER

I'm Detective Winter. I need to speak to Shelley Goldstein right now.

Two LAWYERS in iridescent suits stride from a room holding glasses of sparkling water. They glance at Winter.

KOREAN-AMERICAN LAWYER

Garret? How are you?

WINTER

Fine.
(he holds up his badge)
Official business.

The Secretary dials an inside line.

KOREAN-AMERICAN LAWYER

Oh...okay. Tell Evelyn I hope she's feeling better.

Winter considers the remark and nods a polite affirmation.

INT. TAYLOR, GATINO, GOLDSTEIN & FERGUSON, LLC. / CONFERENCE ROOM FOUR - MOMENTS LATER

Winter enters a conference room that is furnished with leather chairs and an oval table. On the far wall is a picture window that admits a view of other tall midtown buildings. The detective stops a foot from his own reflection and looks north, towards Washington Heights, where he spent the morning. Sullen clouds gather overhead.

GOLDSTEIN (O.S.)
Detective Winter.

Winter turns around and faces the tall, neatly-bearded man with whom his wife has been having an affair. A coolness spreads throughout the detective's interiors.

GOLDSTEIN (CONT'D)
My secretary said that you are here on official business.

Goldstein adjusts his green tie and clears his throat.

WINTER
Close the door.

Goldstein gauges Winter for a long moment. The detective remains still, silhouetted against the gray city. The lawyer shuts the door to the room, CLUNK, and motions to the table.

GOLDSTEIN
Please have a seat.

WINTER
Is Evelyn at your apartment?

GOLDSTEIN
She is.

Winter is unsettled by the presented image, but relieved to know the whereabouts of his ex-wife.

GOLDSTEIN (CONT'D)
Her allergies are acting up. For reasons unknown.

Winter cannot tell if Goldstein is being facetious, and he lets the remark go.

WINTER
I am currently involved in a case that may put her life in jeopardy.

Concern flashes upon Goldstein's face.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Are the people here--at the firm--
aware of your relationship with
her?

GOLDSTEIN

They are not.

WINTER

Who knows about it and where do
they live? This is important.

GOLDSTEIN

Some friends of mine in Jersey. My
mother, who's down in Boca Raton.
(he thinks)
Sylvia-- a waitress at Jeremy's
Delicatessen.

WINTER

Do any of these people know that
Evelyn's at your place?

GOLDSTEIN

No.

WINTER

Then she should stay there until
the situation's been resolved.
Check on her, make sure she's okay.
Don't go more than two hours
without some contact.

GOLDSTEIN

Okay.

Winter walks toward Goldstein. The tall lawyer grows tense,
but holds his ground. The detective flings the door wide and
exits the room without another word.

INT. OAKS FINE DINING - LATE MORNING

The walls of the restaurant are burnished mahogany and the
ceiling is supported by curved oak arches from which depend
asymmetrical brass chandeliers. Seated at the two score
tables are BUSINESSMEN and WOMEN.

A SOMMELIER, a handsome thirty-three-year-old French fellow
carrying two bottles of wine, walks toward a closed door
marked, 'Reserved.' He removes a key from his belt, inserts
it into a bronze lock and twists; the mechanism CLICKS. Into
the amber space beyond, the man escorts the bottles.

INT. OAKS FINE DINING / PRIVATE ROOM - SAME

The Sommelier enters a luxurious chandelier-illuminated room and shuts the door. Seated at a cloth-covered table in a wheelchair of brass and ivory is VICTOR, a sixty-seven-year-old man with a prosthetic left hand, a glass eye and a gray suit. Opposite him sits CANDACE JONES, a slender black woman of a similar age who has sad eyes, silver hair, a blue dress and plentiful pearls. In front of the woman lies a half-eaten steak and before the disabled man rests an untouched mixed green salad.

CANDACE JONES
Were you a vegetarian before
Vietnam?

VICTOR
No.

Candace Jones sympathetically appraises the disabled man.

CANDACE JONES
Was it because of what happened
over there?

Victor pokes the small forest of variegated lettuces with the tines of his silver fork.

VICTOR
Yes.
(he nods)
Those experiences changed my
beliefs.

CANDACE JONES
Paul had nightmares about it.
Especially the prison camp.

VICTOR
I still do. Sometimes, even when
I'm awake.

Candace Jones has no reply for this remark.

Victor motions to the waiting Sommelier. The server walks to the table, presents the label, pours a tablespoon of red wine into the bulb, swirls it around and dumps the liquid into a metal cup, SPLASH. Candace is perplexed by the ritual.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
That removes the residues without
adding any new impurities.

CANDACE JONES
Oh. I see.

The Sommelier pours a small amount of wine into the bulb. Victor drinks, glances at the Sommelier and nods. Summarily, two inches of wine grow inside the crystal glass. The server gestures toward Candace Jones, but she politely declines.

The Frenchman hastily departs. After the door shuts, Victor leans to the right side of his wheelchair, grips the handle of a black briefcase, raises it and sets it upon the table.

VICTOR

This is the amount owed to your husband.

Candace Jones cracks open the briefcase; it is filled with tall bundles of one hundred dollar bills. Taken aback, she closes the lid and fastens its latches, CLACK-CLACK.

CANDACE JONES

Paul made sure I was provided for before he died. I don't need-

VICTOR

Paul helped me set up the system.

Victor TAPS the briefcase with his prosthetic hand.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

This is his. Yours. Paid in full on the fifteenth anniversary of his passing.

CANDACE JONES

This "system" still makes money? After all of these years...and in this economy?

With his prosthetic hand, Victor raises his bulb of wine.

VICTOR

It's not connected to the economy or the government.

(he SIPS)

It is a separate thing that lives and endures.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 / WINTER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, wearing a gray suit, and Benjamin, wearing a mustard colored button-up shirt and brown corduroys, sit at the desk, looking at the interior window. On the far side of the precinct, Sergeant Arthur emerges from an office. In his hands is a thick manila envelope.

BENJAMIN

Fuck.

When the gray-haired Sergeant departs, he reveals R.W., the obese clerk who is fond of woolen sweater-vests, slumped forward in his chair, unhappy.

Winter picks up his desk phone and dials an extension. After a moment, R.W. picks up his receiver.

WINTER
That was the O'Connor file?

Across the hallway, R.W. nods and says the word 'yes.'

WINTER (CONT'D)
Don't come in here and don't fuss--
just do whatever the Sergeant
detailed.

Across the hallway, R.W. asks a question.

WINTER (CONT'D)
For your own safety, I'm not going
to answer that.

Winter hangs up his telephone, CLICK.

BENJAMIN
Double fuck.

Through the window, the detectives survey the CLERKS and OFFICERS who mill about the central area, uncertain whom they can trust. Benjamin rises from his chair and snatches his brown jacket; Winter stands and slots his revolver into his shoulder holster. Towards the door, the partners walk.

INT. OAKS FINE DINING / PRIVATE ROOM - LATER

Victor is alone in the private room. From his pocket, he withdraws a typed letter, which he unfolds and peruses.

"Detective Garret Winter, married. Detective Benjamin Williams, married, one young daughter. They were investigating Menendez and the 161 drop-off. Coerce or Execute? -Y4"

Victor ruminates.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - LATER

Benjamin, seated on the sofa, drinks a glass of tomato juice. Empress lands on a cushion, THUMP, and glares at Winter, who sits on an opposing chair. Benjamin pats the cat's head and it PURRS.

WINTER

I wasn't aware she could make that noise.

BENJAMIN

What're you thinking?

WINTER

We should grab your buddy from this morning and step on his neck.

Benjamin is stunned by the suggestion.

BENJAMIN

No. Underlined and in bold. No.

WINTER

We need to reach them before they can leverage us. Our-

BENJAMIN

But we can't do that to a cop-- interrogate him like...like that.

WINTER

Our wives might be safe right now, but we certainly can't hide every single person we care about for some indefinite period. Remember O'Connor's niece?

BENJAMIN

Don't do that. Don't try to manipulate me.

WINTER

This is what I meant by "off the grid."

Benjamin sets down his glass and ponders the grim tableau.

WINTER (CONT'D)

If Janacek was coerced, he'll crack quickly-- he will want to confess. If he's a willing member...fuck him.

BENJAMIN

"Fuck him?" You're okay to torture him?

WINTER

We don't have the luxury of being nice.

Benjamin looks away from Winter's cold gaze and pets Empress.
The cat PURRS.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Will you call the Dhanikovs?

Benjamin frowns and SIGHS.

BENJAMIN
I'll call the Dhanikovs.

INT. LISA KILNER'S DEN - DUSK

LISA KILNER, a stout woman with spiky platinum hair, walks from the kitchen into the shag-carpeted den, carrying a tray with broccoli, carrot sticks and a bright yellow dip. She approaches the plaid sofa upon which Isabella and Sofia sit and look at a children's book that has illustrations of an adorable octopus in a fireman's uniform holding four hoses and four axes as it enters a burning skyscraper.

SOFIA
(to Isabella)
You drew- I mean drew him?

ISABELLA
Yes. And Lisa wrote the words.

SOFIA
He's got a lot of hatchets.

Lisa sets the platter on the table, CLICK.

LISA
Snacks.

Sofia appraises the "snacks."

SOFIA
Is that paint?

LISA
Saffron aoli.

ISABELLA
Say thank you to-

Isabella's phone RINGS. She looks down at the digital display and sees the name 'Ben.' The Spanish-American woman places the receiver to her ear.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
Hello.
(she listens)
Okay.
(MORE)

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
 (she closes her phone and
 looks at Lisa)
 He's here with the luggage. Will
 you take Sofia?

Lisa scoops up Sofia, but the little girl proclaims-

SOFIA
 I want to see Daddy!

ISABELLA
 Sofia. Go with Lisa. Behave.

The chime RINGS. Isabella walks to the peephole, looks through, smiles, undoes the chain, unbolts the lock, CLACK, twists the handle and opens the door.

In the hallway outside stands Benjamin, holding a heavy suitcase in each hand. Parked on the quaint cobblestone street behind the detective is the brown sedan, tenanted by Winter.

Isabella KISSES Benjamin as he enters the apartment and waves at her husband's partner, who returns the salutation. After she shuts the door, she twists the bolt, CLACK.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
 How serious is this?

Benjamin sets the suitcases upon the carpet, directly beside the paisley couch, and turns to look at his wife.

BENJAMIN
 Very.

Concerned, Isabella walks toward Benjamin.

ISABELLA
 Be careful. Please. What you do
 is important...but it is your job.
 (her hands shake and she
 clasps them together)
 I do not want to be like Nancy,
 raising her child alone.

Benjamin glares at Isabella.

BENJAMIN
 I don't need to hear something like
 that right now. I really don't.

ISABELLA
 I think you do.
 (she points at the window)
 Garret gives it all to his job--
 look at what his wife did--but you
 have a life.

BENJAMIN

Thanks to him.

Isabella shakes her head in refutation.

ISABELLA

No, Ben. No. You cannot-

BENJAMIN

It's a fact. If he didn't spot that shooter it would've been me in the hospital instead of him. Or the morgue.

Isabella takes Benjamin's hand and looks into his eyes.

ISABELLA

Ben...mi rey...please. You cannot ever repay that kind of debt.

Benjamin nods his head and averts his gaze. For a heavy moment, he ruminates.

BENJAMIN

I don't have a choice. Not anymore. The organization that we're going after, it's like...it's like a mollusk. It's slimy, repulsive and hidden, and it doesn't exist until you go looking for it in a dark place. But once you know it's there...

(he looks into Isabella's eyes)

I have to do this. Please don't make me defend myself to you.

Isabella presses her face to her husband's chest and hugs him.

ISABELLA

Okay. Okay.

Benjamin pulls her closer, his eyes sparkling with concern.

BENJAMIN

Next time it's mollusks, I'll let Sofia skip.

INT. SPANISH HARLEM APARTMENT BUILDING / STAIRWELL - EVENING

Lieutenant Janacek (the Freckled Driver) climbs up the brown and red stairwell of the Spanish Harlem apartment building. He is wearing jeans, sneakers and a shiny blue and orange New York Mets jacket. In his arms is a pizza box with a moist mark besmirching the face of a grinning Italian caricature.

He rounds the fourth floor landing, rebalances the pie and withdraws his keys, which are attached to a NY Mets pendant.

INT. JANACEK'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - SAME

The apartment is pitch black. The lock CLICKS and the front door opens, CREAK. Janacek looks inside the unlit enclosure, puzzled. The silencer of a gun presses against his neck.

RUSSIAN-ACCENTED MALE VOICE
Be quiet. Walk inside.

DEEPER VOICE
Now.

Janacek wrangles his fears and enters the apartment. A jet black hand shuts the door, THUNK.

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, wearing a black windbreaker and jeans, and Benjamin, wearing an olive sweater and slacks, sit in the sedan, which is parked down the street from Janacek's red and brown building. From the edifice emerge the DHANIKOV BROTHERS, two strong men with serious eyebrows, gray trench coats and long black ponytails. The older sibling holds Janacek's pizza box and eats a lengthwise-folded slice; the younger fellow tosses a roll of duct tape into a garbage can, CLANG.

WINTER
(to Benjamin)
If there's a problem call.

Benjamin, frustrated, nods his head.

WINTER (CONT'D)
You met him already. If this gets ugly and somebody puts you at the scene, Isabella is going to be married to a security guard.

The Dhanikovs pass by the sedan; the older sibling tosses the pizza box onto the roof, THUMP.

Winter opens his door and exits the vehicle. He lifts the lid of the pizza box and sees, replacing the purloined slice, a NY Mets key chain and a separate, smaller handcuff key.

INT. JANACEK'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Winter walks into Janacek's unlighted apartment, shuts the door, locks it, CLICK, and draws the chain. For a moment, the darkness is absolute.

A switch CLICKS and an overhead light glares. Winter adjusts the black ski mask that now covers his face.

He surveys the apartment. The windows are covered by black garbage bags that are secured with duct tape. Upon the ground in the corner sits the freckled lieutenant; his arms are bound behind his back, handcuffed to a HISSING radiator; a black hood covers his head.

The blonde detective walks toward the officer; boards CREAK beneath his feet. Janacek MUMBLES.

WINTER

I'm going to remove your gag. If you yell, I will break your front teeth with a hammer. Do you understand?

Janacek MUMBLES and nods. Winter lifts the bottom of the hood, yanks the gag and pulls out what appears to be a long white tongue, but is actually a sock, and discards it.

After lowering the hood, Winter walks away from the bound man, toward the kitchen. Janacek clears his throat.

JANACEK

What...what do you want?

Winter opens a drawer filled with utensils; cutlery CLINKS. From the metal collection he withdraws a long chef's knife.

WINTER

I know that you work with a group that blackmails, tortures and murders people.

Winter reenters the living room, drags a chair beside the bound man and sits upon it.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Your group murdered my wife. Took her away from me.

JANACEK

I never-

Winter TAPS the tip of the knife into Janacek's forehead. The captive jerks away.

JANACEK (CONT'D)

Hey! Stop, I-

WINTER

Tell me what you know. I would rather torture somebody more significant than you.

Janacek raises his covered head.

JANACEK
You don't know shit from bullion if
you think you can go against them.

Winter sets the point of the knife against the man's forehead
and presses it in. Janacek YELPS and jerks back.

WINTER
Edify me.

For a long moment, the hood covers an inert, cogitating lump.
Blood drips from the tiny aperture.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Does this group have a name?

A mirthless CHUCKLE emerges from beneath the hood. Janacek
shakes his head, 'no.'

JANACEK
A name would be a way to identify
them. This thing...it's nebulous.
Big and nebulous.

WINTER
Who runs it?

JANACEK
I don't know.

WINTER
How'd you get pulled in?

JANACEK
Pictures. They sent Polaroids of
my girlfriend. They'd dismembered
her...and...well...worse.

The hooded head sags forward; a crimson drop slides from the
forehead aperture like a tear.

JANACEK (CONT'D)
And they sent me a photo of my
sister that was taken beside her
bed, while she was sleeping. And a
list of names--about twenty people
I know--friends, relatives.

WINTER
Targets they'd go after if you
didn't go along?

JANACEK

Yeah. How can you protect that many people from some invisible fucking evil? You can't. So you go along.

INT. BENJAMIN'S CAR - SAME

Benjamin watches a MAN who has an odd limp walk toward the brown and red apartment building at the end of the block. Concerned, Benjamin reaches for his phone. The car window SHATTERS, and a gun presses against his forehead.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Police. Don't move.

Benjamin looks to his left. Upon the other side of the pistol is the Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes, dressed in a dark gray suit.

BENJAMIN

Let me see some-

BURNED MAN

Hands on the wheel. Now.

The passenger door swings open and a Big Blonde Man wearing a black jogging suit climbs inside the car. He points a pistol at Benjamin's stomach, holding it below the dashboard so that it cannot be seen from outside. The Burned Man holsters his gun and looks up and down the street; the distant pedestrians are oblivious. The Big Blonde Man shuts his door, THUNK.

BENJAMIN

Show me your identification.

The Blonde Man pistol-whips Benjamin; his nose SNAPS. The detective drops his cellphone and admits a pained GRUNT.

BIG BLONDE MAN

Wanna see it again?

The Burned Man stabs a syringe into Benjamin's shoulder and presses the plunger. The detective pulls away--residual fluid squirts from the needle into the air--and elbows the Big Blonde Man in the neck. An open hand SLAPS Benjamin's face, and he punches the Big Blonde Man's mouth, SMACK.

Benjamin wavers, loses consciousness and collapses. The Big Blonde Man spits blood. The Burned Man opens the rear door, sits inside and pulls the handle, THUNK.

BURNED MAN

Give me his cellphone.

The Big Blonde Man reaches beside Benjamin's right foot, picks up the cellphone and hands it over. The Burned Man opens the device and reads the menu, 'Contacts, Missed Calls, Emails, Text Messaging,' and highlights 'Text Messaging.'

'From: Isabella 7:46 B, Things r quiet here. Going to help Lisa w dinner now. Plz be careful. Love u, I.'

The Burned Man thumbs back to the main menu and highlights the word 'Contacts.'

BURNED MAN (CONT'D)

Lisa...

INT. JANACEK'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Winter sets a bandage upon the hooded man's pricked forehead.

WINTER

What do they have you do?

JANACEK

At first, I gave them information-- police intel. I botched some evidence and steered some investigations. But after a couple of years, they forced me to become more directly involved.

WINTER

With the coercions?

Janacek tilts his head down. Winter looks at the man and sees his shoulders hitch a couple of times.

JANACEK

I work with a guy who picks targets, sets the hooks, who does the...the...

(he SNIFFS)

You ever want proof that no higher power's looking out for us-- he's the fucking proof.

WINTER

What'd you do for him?

JANACEK

Drive. Clean up. Deliver his messages to the Typist.

WINTER

Who's the Typist?

JANACEK
 He's the hub-- all of the
 communications go through him.

Winter's pulse races; he leans forward.

WINTER
 Where is he?

INT. SPANISH HARLEM APARTMENT BUILDING / STAIRWELL - LATER

Winter enters the hall, shoves his ski mask into his windbreaker's left pocket and removes a piece of gray putty. He jams the malleable material into the door lock, wipes off the excess and strides away from Janacek's apartment.

As he descends the stairwell, he opens his cellphone, thumbs a preset and presses the device to his ear. He traverses a landing, cuts the connection and dials again, concerned.

Presently, he descends the remaining flights and reaches the front door. He SNAPS his cellphone shut and pockets it. Into his windbreaker, he slides his left hand. He looks through the narrow window that is beside the entrance, wary.

An OLD SPANISH WOMAN pushes a cart filled with groceries past the glass, glances at him and continues toward the end of the block. The moment that she turns the corner, Winter throws the door wide and strides onto the sidewalk.

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

Winter's stomach sinks. A red car sits in the space previously occupied by Benjamin's brown sedan. Cautiously, he approaches the decked-out vehicle, glancing in all directions, looking for any sign of his partner.

Winter reaches the red car and inspects it, circling. Upon the street by the driver's side are several shards of glass. The detective kneels, hears FOOTSTEPS behind him and spins, pointing his gun. A TEENAGE LATINO throws his arms up.

TEENAGE LATINO
 Yikes, nigga, yikes!

Winter appraises the youth momentarily.

TEENAGE LATINO (CONT'D)
 Don't take my honey.

Winter lowers his gun.

WINTER
 This is your car?

TEENAGE LATINO

No, nigga. That's my wife!

WINTER

When did you park your spouse?

TEENAGE LATINO

'Bout ten minutes 'go.

WINTER

Did you see the car that was here before?

TEENAGE LATINO

No, nigga. This space was wide-da-fuck open when I gives it to my shorty.

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM / SECOND AVENUE - MOMENTS LATER

Winter walks from the side street onto the wide avenue. He surveys the area, looking for Benjamin and the brown sedan, but does not see either. Within the blonde detective's stomach expands a terrible dread.

He raises his hand. A taxi driven by a frowning Indian-American CABBIE veers across three lanes and stops directly beside him.

INT. TAXI CAB - SAME

Winter pulls the handle, climbs into the vehicle and shuts the door, THUNK.

WINTER

Circle around the block.

The Cabbie SIGHS, shifts gears, CLICK-CLACK, and accelerates. Through the windows, Winter surveys the parked vehicles all along the avenue; the brown sedan is not amongst them.

The Cabbie turns east onto the next side street; apartment buildings and irrelevant cars scroll past. The avenue ahead expands and the Cabbie guides the vehicle north. Winter scans the environs, but sees no sign of Benjamin or his vehicle. His eyes sparkle and he shakes his head.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Goddammit. Goddammit. Goddammit.

(The Cabbie glances at the blasphemer, but says nothing.)

The vehicle turns west onto the next street; Winter sees the red car, its protective Latino husband and the brown and red apartment building whence he emerged five minutes earlier. The Cabbie applies the brakes and looks in the mirror.

CABBIE
Finished?

Winter removes his note pad and looks at it.

WINTER
Take me to Fort Washington and one hundred and eighty-seventh street.

The Driver SIGHS. The vehicle rolls forward.

Winter replaces his note pad, withdraws his cellphone, scrolls down the menu and thumbs a connection. As he listens, he CLEARS his throat and steadies himself.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Hello Isabella, this is Garret. I know Benjamin told you not to call or talk to anybody, but please make an exception and call me when you get this. Thanks.

Winter SNAPS the phone shut; his deep dread burgeons.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Goddammit.

Something SMACKS the windshield. Winter flinches.

CABBIE
Your words bring precipitation.

Winter looks forward. A drop of rain SMACKS the glass, followed by another, SMACK. Windshield wipers SQUEAK.

EXT. TURQUOISE BUILDING - LATER

Rain HISSSES. Upon the cracked street before a turquoise building sits the yellow cab. Winter pays the driver and looks outside. Blue light glows behind a handful of barred windows and nearby, the turgid water within the Hudson River bubbles as if boiling.

The detective opens the door and shuts it, THUNK. Rain soaks his uncovered head and strikes his windbreaker, CRACKLING like popcorn. Across the flagstones, he hastens.

Rain ROARS. Underneath the cover of the overhang, Winter withdraws the NY Mets key chain and selects a steel key.

INT. TURQUOISE BUILDING / FRONT ENTRYWAY - SAME

The lock CLICKS. Winter pushes the door open and enters the front hall. A plaintive gust of wind flings the door into his arm; a towel-wrapped oblong falls from his jacket to the ground, THUMP.

Winter shuts the door, CLACK. Rain SPLATTERS upon the wire-reinforced glass. He picks up the fallen bundle and replaces it inside his windbreaker. With the same key that he used outside, Winter opens an inner blue door.

The detective enters a foyer. Dim light from a shielded bulb illuminates the blue tiles that cover the walls. Ahead of him is a stairwell that leads up into the building and to his left is a row of slender mailboxes.

Winter raises the key chain, selects a small bronze key labelled '4B,' and inserts it into the corresponding mailbox. He opens the door, SQUEAK, reaches to the back of the cavity and opens a hidden panel, revealing three metal switches. He flips the middle one, CLICK.

Winter shuts the mailbox door, SQUEAK, and locks it, CLACK.

He steps back, closes the blue door most of the way and hides behind it. Presently, he withdraws his ski mask, pulls it over his head and grips his revolver.

FOOTSTEPS sound on the stairs on the other side of the door. Winter listens. The FOOTSTEPS get louder. Winter holds his breath. The FOOTSTEPS grow louder and stop.

The mailbox door SQUEAKS. Winter throws open the blue door and points his gun forward. At the other end of his weapon is a small OLD MAN who wears a yellow robe atop his pajamas.

OLD MAN

Don't sh-

WINTER

Take me up to your apartment. If we're seen by somebody, I'll shoot you and leave.

Tears fill the Old Man's eyes. He appraises the masked assailant, nods, turns and walks up the stairwell. Winter secrets his gun in his jacket pocket and follows.

INT. TURQUOISE BUILDING / 4TH FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Old Man leads Winter across the fourth floor hallway, which is wallpapered with blue and gray fabric.

The floorboards are old wood that CREAK beneath Winter's boots, but not the slipper-shod feet of the lightweight Old Man.

WINTER

If you press a panic button or make a commotion I will execute you.

The Old Man withdraws a key-ring from his robe. In his trembling hands, the keys JINGLE.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Don't stall.

OLD MAN

I'm not stalling-- I'm scared.

The tip of a trembling brass key circles the lock. Winter steadies the Old Man's hands. The key slides home, CLICK.

WINTER

Open it slowly. Tell everybody inside to remain seated.

OLD MAN

There's nobody else here.

The Old Man twists the key, CLACK, and pushes the door open; hinges CREAK. CRACKLING DOO-WOP MUSIC spills into the hall like saccharine deja-vu.

INT. WINDOWLESS APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - SAME

Winter follows the Old Man inside, shuts the door, THUNK, locks it, CLACK, and withdraws his gun. He surveys the apartment. A standing lamp with a rose-hued silk shade illuminates an enclosure that is covered by maroon wallpaper, whereupon hang several sepia images of a handsome woman wearing a dress that would have been fashionable in the late fifties. Winter looks west.

WINTER

Is the typewriter in there?

The Old Man blanches and his eyes widen. Winter points to the closed door on the west wall with the muzzle of his gun.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Show me.

The Old Man walks toward the door; Winter follows. Upon the nearby turntable, the Doo-Wop singers harmonize richly. The Old Man grabs the doorknob.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Slow.

The Old Man slowly turns the knob and pushes open the door, CREAK. Winter surveys the revealed space, which contains a narrow twin bed, a rolling chair and a large metal desk upon which rests a glaring lamp and a black cast-iron typewriter.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Get inside.

The Typist leads Winter into the room.

INT. THE TYPIST'S PRIVATE ROOM - SAME

The detective focuses on the north wall, where sits a stone fireplace that is filled with black ashes and charred bits of paper. For a moment, he ruminates.

WINTER

People in the organization drop off letters--anonymous ones or with fake names--and you retype them, burn the originals, and put the new ones in pickup boxes.

(he approaches the Typist)

There are no names, no direct communications, no fingerprints or DNA samples-- nothing that can tie the bosses to the thugs or the thugs to the people who're being blackmailed. It's all wiped clean by this-

Winter KICKS the desk; the typewriter RINGS. The Typist, frightened, stares at the masked intruder.

THE TYPIST

I n-never did anything wrong. All- all- all I did was type. I just-

WINTER

Who runs this organization?

THE TYPIST

I don't know.

Winter takes the bundle from his jacket, unrolls it, withdraws Janacek's chef knife and pokes the point of the blade into the Typist's forehead. The old man YELLS, stumbles back and falls onto his buttocks, THUMP.

WINTER

Tell me!

THE TYPIST

I don't know, I swear!

Winters believes the Typist.

WINTER

How are the letters sorted? Each is from somebody and to somebody.

THE TYPIST

A letter--X, Y or Z--followed by a number.

WINTER

Are the letters separate groups-- a hierarchy?

THE TYPIST

Yes.

WINTER

Which one gives the orders?

A line of blood steals down the Typist's mottled forehead, pools in his left eyebrow and drips down his cheek.

THE TYPIST

Z.

WINTER

How many in that group?

THE TYPIST

There's only one now. Been that way for fifteen years.

Winter secrets the knife, helps the Typist to his feet, walks him to the rolling chair and sits him down.

WINTER

When's Z's next pickup?

The Typist looks at a slim grandfather clock; it reads 9:43.

THE TYPIST

Seventeen minutes. Every two hours they check their box.

WINTER

Do they come by car?

The Typist nods his head. With the tip of his gun, Winter points to a door on the far side of the twin mattress.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Is that a closet?

INT. TURQUOISE BUILDING / FRONT ENTRYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Car headlights shine through the HISSING rain and into the hallway. The dual beacons die.

A moment later, a car door shuts, THUNK. Hard-soled shoes SPLASH and CLACK upon flooded flagstones. The front door CLICKS and swings open. A BLACK MAN of thirty, wearing a trench coat and collapsing a wet umbrella, walks inside.

BLACK MAN
(into his wireless phone)
And how did that make you feel?

He shuts the door, sets the umbrella down, slots a key into the next lock and twists.

BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
And how did that make you feel?

The Black Man enters the tiled foyer. From his JINGLING keys, he selects one marked 4C and inserts it into the mailbox next to the one that Winter examined. He opens the door--it SQUEAKS--raises a hidden flap in the rear and sees two small sealed envelopes, each of which is marked, 'Z.'

BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
And why do you think you did that?

The Black Man closes the mailbox, locks it, CLICK, and pockets his keys. He walks through the blue door, picks up his umbrella and exits the building. The deluge ROARS.

EXT. TURQUOISE BUILDING - SAME

Underneath the overhang, the Black Man opens his umbrella, and raises it. He SPLASHES across the wet flagstones to his blue truck, opens the door and climbs inside.

BLACK MAN
And why do you think you did that?

INT. BLUE TRUCK - SAME

The Black Man closes his umbrella, shakes it, tosses it in the backseat and shuts the driver's door, THUNK.

BLACK MAN
And how did that make you feel?

A hand grabs the Black Man's wireless device and phone; the muzzle of a gun presses into his nape. He glances into the rearview mirror and sees a person wearing a black ski mask.

WINTER
Be still and be quiet.

Winter opens a back door and tosses out the phone; it skips across the flooded street and is submerged. He shuts the door, THUNK.

BLACK MAN
Take the keys-- it's a rental and y-

WINTER
Where are you taking those letters?

BLACK MAN
Over to the mansion.

WINTER
Whose mansion?

BLACK MAN
I don't know.

WINTER
You don't know who you work for?

BLACK MAN
I'm a therapist-- I'm covering for Chris while he's in Thailand. He didn't tell me who lives there-- I just drop the letters off at the gate and go.

Winter points his gun at the windshield.

WINTER
Drive. Do the regular drop-off.

The Black Man starts the engine. Winter sits back, points his gun at the driver's leg, and with his right hand withdraws his cellphone. He opens it, dials to the 'Contact' menu, highlights the name 'Benjamin' and presses connect. As the truck glides forward, Winter sets the phone to his ear.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Call me.

Winter cuts the line. He looks at the menu, scrolls down, highlights the name, 'Isabella' and presses connect. After he CLEARS his throat, he presses the phone to his ear.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Please call me as soon as you get this message-- it's urgent. Your husband has gone missing and I want to make sure you're okay.

Winter SNAPS the cellphone shut and looks out into the HISSING night.

BLACK MAN
Sounds like you're involved with
some situations.

Winter ignores the comment.

BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
How does that make you feel?

WINTER
Shut up.

EXT. WESTCHESTER / WINDING ROAD - LATER

Headlights flash upon a dripping sign that reads, 'Westchester'. Along the winding and flooded road, the blue truck ROARS; HISSING water sprays from its thick tires.

INT. BLUE TRUCK - LATER

The Black Man guides the vehicle toward a wooded area. Winter (holding his gun with his right hand) writes on his note pad, "--make left @ sunken pond --follow winding road."

WINTER
No street names in this area?

Headlights play upon dripping trees, but cannot penetrate the deep woods. Rain HISSES.

BLACK MAN
None.

Onto an unlighted side street, the Black Man steers the vehicle. Branches CLICK against the windows like arboreal fingers. The truck tilts backward as it ascends.

Winter looks ahead. Through the windshield he sees a huge white mansion that is surrounded by a ten foot tall stone wall of the same color. Neither display a numerical address.

WINTER
Go slow.

The blue truck creeps at a speed no faster than that of walking; the driver points to the rolling iron gate.

BLACK MAN
The box is next to that.

WINTER
There's a camera?

BLACK MAN
Yes.

WINTER
Lock the doors.

The Black Man presses a button; locks constrict, CLACK, CLACK, CLACK, CLACK. Winter looks forward. Beyond the windshield, the white wall and the mansion grow. The detective crouches behind the driver's seat, out of view.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Drive up to the mailbox, drop off the letters and drive away. If you unlock these doors or give a signal, I will shoot you.

BLACK MAN
I'm not an idiot.

Winter watches skeletal tree branches glide past the windows. In his pocket, his cellphone BUZZES. He pulls out the device, looks at it and is stunned. Flashing upon the display is the name 'Benjamin.' The cellphone BUZZES again.

The Black Man lowers his window and raises the letters. Winter unfolds his phone and presses it to his ear. In front of the gate, the blue truck stops.

WINTER
(whispered into the phone)
Are you okay?

BLACK MAN
I'm here drop off some letters.

MALE VOICE THROUGH SPEAKER (O.S.)
Go ahead.

Relief floods through Winter as he listens to his partner.

WINTER
(whispered into the phone)
Where are you?

Winter glances forward; the Black Man slides the letters into a stainless steel mailbox.

BLACK MAN
Thanks. 'Night.

The truck veers around the driveway. Winter observes the driver as he listens to his partner.

WINTER
 (whispered into the phone)
 You shot them?
 (he listens)
 But your family's okay? Your wife
 and girl are-
 (he listens)
 Thank God.

The rain dwindles. Wet tree limbs reach toward the windows and claw at the glass, CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK.

WINTER (CONT'D)
 (whispered into the phone)
 Any officers on the scene yet?
 (he listens)
 You're right. I'll head down there
 right now.
 (he listens)
 Twenty, twenty-five minutes.

Relieved, Winter SNAPS his phone shut. The blue truck emerges from the trees; rain CRACKLES upon the glass. The crouching detective reclaims his seat.

WINTER (CONT'D)
 Do you have any more pickups
 tonight?

BLACK MAN
 No. Somebody else starts at
 midnight.

WINTER
 Drive to Brooklyn.

The Black Man mutters inaudible imprecations and accelerates onto the cross street. Winter looks at the pale circle that his wedding band left upon his ring finger and ruminates.

INT. BLUE TRUCK - LATER

Rain HISSES. The truck speeds down Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive, which is flooded and nearly empty. Winter, wearing his ski mask, watches the watery lights of the Manhattan skyline. He looks down, highlights the name 'Isabella,' thumbs a connection and raises the cellphone to his left ear.

WINTER
 It's me again. Call whenever you
 get this-- it's urgent. Bye.

The detective cuts off the connection and pockets the phone inside his windbreaker. Suspicion clouds his eyes.

Rain CRACKLES upon the windows and turns the city into stained glass. The cuckolded man stares at his naked ring finger.

EXT. COBBLESTONE STREET WITH GAS LANTERNS - LATER

Rain HISSES. Winter secrets his ski mask as he walks onto the quiet Brooklyn street, his left hand nestled within the pocket of his windbreaker, his mind full of dark suspicions. Upon the cobblestones, his shoes SPLASH. The gas flames of street lanterns flicker behind dappled glass, turning the Victorian facades into amber and black bas reliefs. He surveys the shadows as he strides.

From a darkened space at the end of the block emerges a MAN whose top half is thrown into black shadow by the umbrella he holds. Winter pauses, adjusts his left hand within his jacket and appraises the wraith through the HISSING rain.

WINTER

Benjamin?

Water runs down Winter's face as he gauges the distant, shadow-obscured Man who holds the umbrella. The rain HISSES.

BENJAMIN

It's me. You okay?

WINTER

Wet, but fine.

Winter walks toward his partner. His shoes impact the flooded cobblestones, SPLASH, SPLASH, SPLASH.

BENJAMIN

There's a device that helps defend against precipitation.

WINTER

A roof?

BENJAMIN

Smaller. You can carry it around and poke people with it. Do musicals.

Winter forces a grin. Across the flooded stones, his shoes SPLASH. Benjamin's top half remains concealed by shadow.

WINTER

You must mean an umbrella.

A distance of sixty feet separates the two men.

BENJAMIN

You've heard of it?

WINTER
There's a website.

A distance of fifty-five feet separates the detectives. Winter looks underneath the umbrella, but can see neither Benjamin's face nor hands.

WINTER (CONT'D)
How's Isabella doing?

Rain HISSES. Winter walks, shoes SPLASHING. The silhouette underneath the umbrella is silent for a brief duration.

BENJAMIN
She's fine. Shaken up...but doing better.

A distance of forty-five feet separates the detectives. Winter walks, shoes SPLASHING. Apprehension tugs his guts.

WINTER
Thank God you were able to get free and overpower the guys.

BENJAMIN
Yeah.

The shadowed-obscured man pivots and extends his left arm. He points at the nearby brownstone.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
It's a mess in there.

WINTER
Whatever's in there we can take care of together.

A distance of thirty-five feet separates the two detectives.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Right?

Reflected lamp light glimmers underneath the umbrella.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Don't!

A gun barrel emerges from the shadow.

Winter's left pocket bursts, BANG.

Benjamin GRUNTS and tumbles backward. The umbrella falls away and reveals his red-eyed face, covered with tears. His back SLAMS into a street lantern, and he raises his gun.

WINTER (CONT'D)

No!

Winter squeezes his trigger, BANG. The bullet slices across the side of Benjamin's head; blood sprays. The black detective stumbles to the side, falls upon his back, SPLASH, and fires his gun into the air, CRACK. A lantern SHATTERS.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Ben!

Winter races to Benjamin's side and drops to his knees, SPLASH. Agonized eyes stare up at the blonde man.

BENJAMIN

Th-three guys in there. They have...have Isabella, Sofia and Lisa.

Winter looks at the side of Benjamin's skull and sees white bone and the matter that lies beyond. A terrible despair fills the blonde detective. Rain POPS as it strikes the open flames of the broken gas lantern.

WINTER

You're going to be okay.

BENJAMIN

The fuck I will. Save them. Now. Please, please.

WINTER

I will.

Benjamin closes his eyes and trembles. Rain POPS.

BENJAMIN

I'm sorry that I-

WINTER

You don't need to apologize. I know what happened.

BENJAMIN

Thanks.

(he trembles)

I'll...I'll see you in-

Benjamin does not complete his sentence.

For a horrible moment, Winter is suffocated by the death of his partner and closest friend. Rain POPS and HISSES.

Winter inhales and looks at the brownstone in which Lisa Kilner lives. Across the sidewalk and into the enclosed patio, the detective drags the body.

Falling rain washes Benjamin's wounds clean, revealing white bone and pink tissue.

EXT. ALLEYWAY BEHIND LISA'S BROWNSTONE - MOMENTS LATER

Rain HISSES. Winter reaches a dripping iron gate against which swollen plastic bags of garbage and recyclables are huddled like obese jellyfish. He climbs up the bars, throws his right leg over the top and slips on the wet metal, SQUEAK. A spike pierces his left thigh. He grimaces, suppressing the yell that would normally come.

After repositioning his grip, Winter jerks his leg free, GRUNTS and leaps to the far side. His feet strike plastic bags; his knees buckle, and he keels over, THUMP.

Winter stands up, wobbles, pulls a jutting pencil out of his shoulder and tosses it. From his punctured left thigh drains dark blood. He tears open a garbage bag and surveys its contents: Amidst rotten vegetables and fruit is an old shirt. He takes the garment and ties it around his leg wound.

Gun in his left hand, Winter limps forward, gritting his teeth, pained. He passes a window, two blue mopeds, another window and reaches his destination, the far apartment.

He peers through the window. The room beyond--Lisa's den--is dark and quiet. Winter tries to open the pane, but finds that it is locked.

The detective presses his right shoulder against the adjacent wall, withdraws the chef knife and taps the edge of the pane with its tip, CLICK-CLICK.

Holding the blade in his left hand and the gun in his right, he waits. Water drips from his face and the knife and the revolver; nearby, rain washes his blood from the spike.

Muted FOOTSTEPS sound within the apartment. Presently, a dense shadow fills the window. A latch CLICKS. The window slides open. Winter, flush against the adjacent wall, watches. The Big Blonde Man, holding a gun in his right hand, leans his head outside and surveys the alley.

Winter plunges the chef knife into his throat. The Big Blonde Man tries to scream, but his severed vocal cords only admit a brief wet SQUEAK.

The detective releases the knife handle, grabs the GURGLING fellow's hair and yanks him outside. The large man SLAMS onto the alley floor. Winter kicks the man's jaw; bone SNAPS. The Big Blonde Man loses consciousness.

Winter looks into the dark den: It is quiet and still.

He turns back to the Big Blonde Man, draws the knife from his neck and turns him over. Blood drains from his sliced throat into the garbage-strewn alley.

Presently, Winter sets his knife and revolver upon the window ledge, grabs the sides of the frame and pulls himself up. The exertion causes his hurt leg to twitch.

INT. LISA KILNER'S DEN - SAME

Winter climbs through the portal, steps onto the shag rug, shuts the window, reclaims his weapons and examines the dark den. Upon the far side of the room, he sees a closed door. Light glows at its bottom edge.

Gun raised, Winter limps forward. He passes by the children's book that features the fire-fighting octopus.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Go check.

Winter pauses. Beyond the closed door, FOOTSTEPS echo.

The detective prostrates himself beside the paisley couch. The FOOTSTEPS stop and a doorknob RATTLES.

MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Leave it open.

A door CREAKS. Winter peers around the bottom of the sofa.

The Japanese Man with White Hair, holding a semi-automatic pistol, walks into the den. Inside the lighted bedroom and facedown on the floor are Sofia and Isabella, stripped naked. Upright syringes jut from their backs, filled with drawn blood or--above their kidneys--urine. Upon the bed lies Lisa, unconscious, her face covered with blood, a piece of cartilage jutting from her right nostril and a syringe in her left eye.

Sickened and enraged, Winter turns from the hideous tableau.

The Japanese Man cautiously walks toward the couch. He describes the wet marks on the carpet--Winter's footprints--and pauses.

A hand reaches out, grabs the Japanese Man's right wrist and points his gun at the ground. A knife pierces his throat. The Japanese Man GURGLES and fires a muted shot into the rug, POP. Winter twists the buried blade; vertebrae separate, CRACKLING. The horrified Asian falls onto his back, THUMP.

Winter looks at the bedroom.

The Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes SLAMS the door.

A lock CLICKS.

Winter points his gun, runs to the door, raises his boot and KICKS the handle. Wood CRACKS. On the other side of the barrier, something CREAKS and CLACKS.

Again, Winter KICKS the knob. Wood CRACKS. He SLAMS his shoulder into the middle of the door.

INT. LISA KILNER'S BEDROOM - SAME

The frame bulges. Wood SHATTERS and the door flies open. The detective, pointing his gun forward, surveys the room.

Across from him is a large window that faces an alleyway. Slanted rain HISSES through the open portal. Outside, a red light shines.

Winter races to the open window and looks through. On the far side of an abutting alley are two red taillights, bright demon eyes. A moment later, they vanish, accompanied by the sound of SQUEALING tires. Rain HISSES.

WINTER

Goddammit.

Winter turns around and kneels beside Isabella. The gagged woman lifts her head and looks at the detective, her eyes wide with fear. Upon her back, red and yellow syringes quiver like porcupine quills.

Winter removes the gag from Isabella's mouth.

WINTER (CONT'D)

Let me take these out before you try to get up.

ISABELLA

Okay.

Winter plucks a urine-filled syringe from her right kidney and sets it aside. Isabella glances at her pale and unconscious daughter and Lisa, who is beaten but breathing. After a brief appraisal, the Hispanic woman glances at her husband's partner. He draws and discards a second syringe.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

You were not fooled...by Benjamin.

WINTER

I wasn't.

ISABELLA

He is...he is gone?

Winter opens his mouth to reply, but is momentarily speechless. He pulls another syringe from Isabella's back and discards it.

WINTER

He's gone.

Isabella lowers her face to the floor. Upon the wood below her eyes, tears DRIP and collect in small pools. Her shoulders hitch. Winter withdraws another syringe.

WINTER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

ISABELLA

You had to push and push and push until...until...this...

(she SNIFFS and shakes her head)

I wish...I wish you weren't such a good detective.

Winter extracts the remaining two syringes from Isabella's back and discards them. Tears sparkle in his eyes.

WINTER

Me too.

INT. WINTER'S CAR - LATER

Numb and withdrawn, Winter drives his blue hybrid up the West Side Highway. The windshield wipers struggle against the precipitation, and the Hudson river percolates. The additive meter instrumental section of a progressive rock song combats the sound of CRACKLING rain.

Winter glances at the CD player and CLICKS a button. The music dies, and he drives in silence.

INT. THE TYPIST'S PRIVATE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Winter, wet and wearing the ski mask, enters the Typist's private room. He walks to the closet, twists the turn-key, CLACK, and opens the door. Handcuffed and fettered to the rolling chair is the gagged Typist. The trembling old man squints. Winter yanks the gag.

THE TYPIST

I was-

WINTER

Group X. These are rich people and policemen who were coerced, right?

The Typist nods. Winter grabs the back of the chair and rolls the old man out of the closet.

WINTER (CONT'D)
How many people are in group X?

TYPIST
Three hundred and eighty-nine.

Winter is surprised by the figure.

WINTER
All of them pick up here?

TYPIST
No. The X letters are picked up en masse--at noon and midnight--and distributed to other drop-offs.

WINTER
You're going to type letters to the people in group X and inform them that organization has folded.

Winter rolls the Typist to the desk.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Group Y. These are the guys who pick the targets, set the hooks, right? The thugs who profit?

The Typist nods.

WINTER (CONT'D)
How many of them are there?

TYPIST
Twenty-nine.

WINTER
Tell them to halt operations and refrain from any further correspondence. On January second, two thousand twelve, they are to contact Sergeant Arthur of Precinct Nineteen. He is part of the group and will explain the new communications system to them.

The Typist opens a deep metal drawer that contains thousands of blank envelopes and twelve reams of paper. He takes a single sheet, slides it into the cast iron typewriter and twists the roller, CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK.

WINTER (CONT'D)
 First, you're going to type a
 letter to Z.

INT. VICTOR'S MANSION / LIBRARY - JUST BEFORE DAWN

Upon the oblong skylight that is embedded in the ceiling of the dark library, erratic raindrops SPLATTER. Victor, seated in his brass-and-ivory wheelchair, stares at the protective glass; the dark purple light of the predawn sky colors his face, highlighting veins. The disabled herbivore wears neither his glass eye nor his prosthetic left hand, but instead a weathered gray robe.

VICTOR
 What time is it over there?

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 About midnight.

Victor glances at the white speakerphone that sits upon a table of petrified wood.

VICTOR
 Did I wake you?

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 It's okay. Did you have another
 nightmare?

VICTOR
 I did.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Was it about the war? In the camp?

Victor's lone eye surveys the massive private library and fixes upon the stump at the terminus of his left arm. Above him, raindrops TAP the glass.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Victor?

VICTOR
 It was so real. So much more vivid
 than all of this. Like this life
 is the dream- or the afterlife of
 back then.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 (concerned)
 Do you want me to come back? I can-

VICTOR

No, absolutely not. You and Aunt Beatrice should enjoy Hawaii. I just...I just wanted to hear your voice.

(he rubs the end of his truncated arm)

It helps me tell what's real.

Victor looks at the east wall, upon which hang six framed black-and-white pictures of his army platoon.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Thank you for flying us out here. It's so gorgeous, you wouldn't believe it.

VICTOR

You're welcome.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

You should come out next time.

VICTOR

Maybe. Go back to sleep Ma-- I'm sorry that I woke you.

ELDERLY WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

You can always call. I love you.

Victor looks at the white speakerphone.

VICTOR

I love you too.

Victor reaches out and cuts the connection, CLICK. Upon the skylight, rain TAPS like an insistent insect.

INT. VICTOR'S MANSION / DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Victor emerges from an elevator and rolls into the vast dining room, equally employing his stump and right hand for the task. Upon the table lies a cup of steaming coffee, a sectioned grapefruit, an envelope that is marked with the letter 'Z' and a letter opener. He glances at the missive.

VICTOR

Gloria?

GLORIA (O.S.)

Yes, Mr. Victor?

VICTOR

When did this letter arrive?

GLORIA (O.S.)
About two hours ago.

Victor reaches the dining room table, withdraws a pair of glasses (which have a regular lens and a black lens) and slides them onto his weathered face.

GLORIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Should I have gotten you up?

VICTOR
No, no. It's hard enough for me to sleep as it is.

Victor claims the letter opener, inserts it into the sealed envelope and slices open the flap, RIP. A folded letter and two driver's licences fall upon the table. The faces that stare up at him are those of the Japanese Man with White Hair and the Big Blonde Man. The laminates are flecked with dried blood.

Victor slides the driver's licenses into the left pocket of his gray robe and examines the type-written letter.

"October 17. We will kill these two men unless you meet us today in front of the Typist's building at 3PM. Come alone."

Calmly accepting the threat, Victor secrets the letter in his robe pocket. He looks at the kitchen doorway.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Gloria?

GLORIA (O.S.)
Mr. Victor?

VICTOR
Set the fire in the parlor. And please pack my suitcase.
(he rolls back from the dining room table)
I am going to meet my Mother and Aunt Beatrice in Hawaii.

EXT. WHITE MANSION SURROUNDED BY TEN FOOT WALL - DAWN

The dawn sky is a deep lavender hue that paints the wall and limousine the color of a bruise. In the center of the barbican is an iron gate that slowly rolls to the east. Like something aquatic, the luxury vehicle glides forward and passes through the opening.

INT. VICTOR'S WHITE LIMOUSINE - SAME

Victor, seated in the isolated rear of the limousine and wearing a dark gray suit, opens the wooden box that lies in his lap, revealing a Smith and Wesson .38 Army revolver.

The car tilts forward. The disabled man looks at the bank of television monitors embedded in the ceiling and sees the purple wall, the purple street and the purple woods. Outside the tinted windows, leafless tree branches sweep past.

The luxury vehicle continues down the wooded road, smoothly, as if afloat. The monitor that depicts the rearview shows the gate reverse directions and close. Victor's lone eye observes the digital images and the sides of the road.

The vehicle slows down. Victor looks at the forward monitor and sees something lying across the road-- a dark oblong. He CLICKS the intercom button.

VICTOR
Do not slow down.

DRIVER (O.S.)
There's a tree in the middle of the road.

Victor looks at the rearview monitor; the iron gate closes, CLANK. He presses the intercom button, CLICK.

VICTOR
Drive onto the side of the-

A dark blue cargo van emerges from the woods, ROARING, and blocks off the street.

INT. BROWN CARGO VAN - SAME

Tires SCREECH. Seated on the bench of the van is Winter, wearing his ski mask and gripping the Japanese Man's pistol. The Dhanikov brothers, wearing stockings over their faces and coiled ponytails, sit up front.

The younger sibling leans through the passenger window, aims his machine gun and squeezes the trigger. Gunfire CRACKLES and scores of expelled shells CLINK against the interior roof. Outside, the limousine's tires BURST. Lavender smoke rises from the perforated hood.

Winter throws the sliding door wide and presses his right shoulder to it, gun in his left hand.

WINTER
Come out right now! Hands raised!

The limousine's front door opens. From the vehicle emerges a silver-haired DRIVER, a Hispanic man with a bloody nose and a busted lip. His trembling hands are upraised.

DRIVER
Please don't hurt us! You can-

WINTER
Tell your passenger to step outside
of the vehicle right now!

DRIVER
He can't.

WINTER
Why not?

DRIVER
He's disabled. He has a wheelchair
in the trunk.

WINTER
Then go help him.

The Driver walks toward the rear of the limousine. Winter watches him closely, as does the younger Dhanikov. The Hispanic man reaches the trunk.

Two gunshots ring out, BANG, BANG. Winter and the Dhanikovs shield themselves; the Driver drops to the pavement.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Throw down your weapon or we will
obliterate your fucking car!

A ponderous silence follows.

Winter glances outside and sees two bullet holes in the roof of the limousine, from which climb dual wisps of lavender smoke. A grim thought occurs to the detective.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Driver.

The prone Hispanic lifts his head and looks at the van.

DRIVER
Yes?

WINTER
Go check on your passenger.

The Driver, shaken and fearful, rises to his feet and walks to the rear door. Inside the van, Winter and the Dhanikovs watch. The Hispanic fellow looks into the tinted window and freezes. His face pales.

DRIVER
No. He...he...he-

WINTER
Open up the door and step away.

The Driver opens the door and withdraws. Inside the vehicle is a dead man who has one hand and thin warped legs; the top of his head is a blasted crater in which the barrel of a revolver is lodged. Gore drips from the car ceiling.

Winter SLAMS the sliding door, looks at the older Dhanikov and nods. The Russian-American shifts the van into drive, CLACK-CLICK, and steps on the accelerator. Bare branches SCRATCH against the hull. Winter sits on the bench.

WINTER (CONT'D)
Drop me off at my car and chop this van.

The engine ROARS. Skeletal branches release the vehicle.

EXT. POLICE PRECINCT 19 - EARLY MORNING

The blue hybrid is parked on the street outside Precinct 19. Seated within the vehicle is Winter, alone, cradling a travel mug of coffee, his eyes focused on his rearview mirror. Sergeant Arthur, wearing corduroys pants and a brown sweater with blue stripes, approaches the detective's car.

INT. WINTER'S CAR - SAME

The gray-haired black man enters the vehicle, sits down and shuts the door, THUNK. He looks at the weary blonde detective and shakes his head.

SERGEANT ARTHUR
I'm sorry about Benjamin. I can't believe these guys went after his family like-

WINTER
I know about the extortion ring, and I know that you were involved.

Sergeant Arthur freezes. He look at his top detective, guarded and fearful.

WINTER (CONT'D)
I know you didn't have a choice. I was at your wedding-- what do you have, about sixty people in your family?

SERGEANT

More now.

WINTER

Benjamin and I got at the source.
The group's been dismantled.

Hope glimmers in the Sergeant's eyes.

WINTER (CONT'D)

The next letter that you get will
confirm this.

The Sergeant wipes tears from his eyes, SNIFFS and nods.

SERGEANT

Thank you. Thank you. My God.
This-

(he pats his gray hair)

This was black when those creeps
first hooked me.

WINTER

On January second, the remaining
kidnappers and murderers will
contact you. Twenty-six guys, I
believe.

The Sergeant is unsettled by this information.

SERGEANT

For what...?

WINTER

They've been told that the group is
reorganizing and that you are their
new contact.

The Sergeant's eyes narrow. After a moment of dark
contemplation, he nods his head.

SERGEANT

I understand.

INT. TAYLOR, GATINO, GOLDSTEIN & FERGUSON, LLC. / CONFERENCE
ROOM FOUR - MORNING

Winter stands in the conference room at the law firm where
his ex-wife and Goldstein work. He stares at the city
outside, which scintillates after its long bath.

GOLDSTEIN (O.S.)

Come back to punch me in the nose?

Winter turns around and faces Goldstein, who enters the room wearing a brown tweed suit and a guarded grin. The tall lawyer shuts the door, THUNK, and approaches the detective.

WINTER

By Monday it'll be safe for Evelyn to come back to work-- the situation's been resolved.

Relief lightens Goldstein's face; his smile is young, boyish.

GOLDSTEIN

Thank you for telling me this. I know it can't be easy to deal with me directly.

WINTER

It's not easy. But...well...it's obvious that you care for her.

GOLDSTEIN

Deeply.

WINTER

She should have that.
(he nods his head)
Is...is it a boy or a girl?

GOLDSTEIN

It's a girl.

WINTER

That's-

Winter's voice catches. He turns away and faces the window. Outside, the washed city shines. Goldstein looks at the weary detective and feels a deep pang of remorse.

INT. WINTER AND EVELYN'S APARTMENT / BEDROOM - MORNING

Winter, wearing bandages on his hurt thigh and shoulder and also boxer shorts, limps across the sunlit bedroom and lowers the blinds, CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK. Darkness expands.

He looks at the empty bed and climbs underneath the blanket. A white blur bounds onto the mattress, THUMP, and solidifies as Empress. The Persian cat walks in a circle, nestles beside Winter's hurt leg and PURRS.

Titlecard: January 2, 2012. New York City.

EXT. GENTLE CARESSES - AFTERNOON

Upon the gray concrete facade of the strip club is a woman's glove rendered in lavender neon. The front door opens and the Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes, wearing a long gray coat and sunglasses, emerges. After a momentary appraisal of the area, he pulls leather gloves over his hands and walks east.

The Burned Man stops beside a pay phone, withdraws a folded note, opens it up, examines it and replaces it in his pocket.

Ten yards away, Tara, the dancer who inherited Winter's wedding band, STOMPS on a cigarette--eliciting sparks that SIZZLE in the gray snow--and enters the club.

The Burned Man raises the yellow receiver, surveys his surroundings and reaches into his pocket. Metal JINGLES. Into the coin slot, he slides two quarters, which CLICK and CLACK in the guts of the device.

The Burned Man dials and presses the phone to his purplish-red left ear.

BURNED MAN

Sergeant Arthur. This is Y4.

(he listens)

Yes.

(he listens)

Yes. I am familiar with that drop-off.

EXT. DESOLATE STREET IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS - TWILIGHT

Twilight turns the dingy blankets of snow into gold clay. The Burned Man with Mismatched Eyes walks downhill, navigating a narrow, badly-rendered path in the accumulation.

In front of the unnumbered three-story brownstone, he pauses. He examines the boarded-up facade with his mismatched eyes, wherein suns sit like dots of gold fire. At the top of the stoop stands the repaired front door.

After a quick appraisal of his environs, the Burned Man strides toward the building, snow CRUNCHING beneath his black leather shoes. He reaches the stoop, removes his sunglasses, secrets his right hand underneath his coat and ascends five steps, watchful.

Withdrawing his silencer-fitted gun, he grabs the doorknob and twists counterclockwise, CLACK. It opens.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FRONT ROOM - SAME

Gun pointing forward, the Burned Man enters the building. He surveys the dilapidate enclosure, but sees nothing that concerns him. Somewhere within, water DRIPS.

Up the dark hall, he walks. Twilight glows at the far end of the passage, highlighting cracked paint and missing bricks.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FIRST FLOOR LANDING - SAME

The Burned Man reaches the landing. He looks to the right, where lies the incomplete stairwell, and points his gun up into the darkness. He thumbs the hammer, CLICK-CLICK and waits. Nothing happens. Water drips through the void created by missing steps. He lowers the hammer, CLICK-CLICK.

With his free left hand, the Burned Man fishes inside his pocket and withdraws a metal ring, which holds sixty JINGLING mailbox keys, every one of which is numbered.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / SECOND FLOOR LANDING - SAME

Standing on the landing above the chasm and concealed by darkness are Janacek and Menendez, wearing bulletproof vests and holding machine guns. They aim their weapons at the Burned Man, who is twenty feet away.

The target selects a key from his JINGLING ring and turns toward the mailboxes, secreting his gun. Twilight glimmers upon his waxy skin.

The Burned Man inserts his key, CLICK. Janacek and Menendez squeeze their triggers. White gunfire CRACKLES.

The Burned Man SLAMS into the metal mailboxes; his nose SNAPS. Bullets CRACK his spine. The gunfire stops.

JANACEK

Fuck you, you sick fuck!

Tears roll down Janacek's face. He points his gun at the target's head.

INT. DECAYING BROWNSTONE / FIRST FLOOR LANDING

Gunfire CRACKLES. The Burned Man's skull bursts open. He drops onto his knees and starts to fall, but his splayed head snags upon a mailbox door and holds him upright.

Into the landing strides Winter, wearing black rubber boots, a black slicker, black rubber gloves and a grimace.

He drops a sprayer, which is attached to a long turquoise hose, and approaches the dangling corpse. The amber light plays upon his gaunt face and haunted eyes.

With SQUEAKING rubber fingers, Winter pulls the Burned Man's distended head skin from the mailbox. The body drops, THUMP.

Winter grabs the Burned Man's right ankle and drags him toward the incomplete stairwell. Above the chasm and beyond the veil of smoke, something CLICKS. A flashlight beam glares upon the Burned Man's pulpy head.

MENENDEZ

He didn't get uglier.

Gripping the Burned Man's right ankle, Winter climbs the CREAKING stairwell. He stops on the seventh step and hoists the body up to the precipice. Dead legs dangle over the edge. In the darkness, Janacek weeps.

JANACEK

Go to fucking hell!

Winter sets his foot underneath the Burned Man's back and rolls him into the hole. The body falls thirty feet, into a boiler room and SLAMS onto a pile of corpses.

From the abyss, frozen and agonized faces stare up at Winter.

Menendez CLICKS off his flashlight. Darkness conceals the charnel room. Winter turns away, walks down the stairs and picks up the end of the hose.

WINTER

Turn on those fans and clear out as much smoke as you can. The Sergeant said that the next one's coming in twenty minutes.

Winter squeezes the sprayer. A jet of water removes the remains of the Burned Man from the rusty mailboxes.

INT. BENJAMIN AND ISABELLA'S APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A bell RINGS. Isabella, wearing a black sweater and gray jeans, strides across the room toward the door. Her face has grown lean in the last few months, and gray circles haunt her eyes. She reaches the door and looks through the peephole. The sight unearths myriad bittersweet memories, and she is momentarily overwhelmed. Trembling, she clasps her hands together and clears her throat.

ISABELLA

Just a moment.

After a several deep breaths, she wipes her eyes, throws the chain, unlocks the bolt, CLACK, twists the knob and opens the door. Standing in the hall and wearing clean jeans and a woolen overcoat is Winter, holding a large brown briefcase.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
Hi. Come inside.

WINTER
I was just going to drop th-

ISABELLA
Come inside. Please.

Winter, thoroughly uncomfortable, enters the apartment where his partner and closest friend once lived. Isabella shuts the door, twists the bolt, CLACK, and pulls the chain.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
You smell like gunpowder.
(she points to the sofa)
Sit.

Winter walks toward the sofa, sits and looks at the ground. Isabella surveys the gaunt man and shakes her head.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
Garret, please. I do not hold you responsible-- I told you at his funeral.
(she sits)
If you didn't do what you did...perhaps none of us would be here. Almost certainly things would be worse.

Winter has no words.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)
I am sure that he was not angry with you in the end.

Winter sets the heavy briefcase upon the table. Isabella eyes it, circumspectly.

WINTER
This is for you and Sofia.

The Spanish American presses the latch release buttons, CLICK-CLICK, and raises the lid. Inside are fifteen tall, neat stacks of one hundred dollar bills. Heart pounding, the woman shuts the briefcase and locks it, CLICK.

ISABELLA
Where...? Where did you get this?

WINTER

It's lost money-- nobody's looking for it. Keep it in your safety deposit box or exchange it for Euros when you visit your family.

Winter rises from the sofa.

ISABELLA

Wait, wait.

The petite woman stands up, puts her arms around the gaunt detective and hugs him tightly.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

Thank you, Garret, thank you. You give too much...but you have made things better.

WINTER

Good.

Winter withdraws, turns and walks toward the front door.

ISABELLA

I have a friend I would like for you to meet-- a pretty blonde woman with a very cute body.

Facing the door, the detective pauses.

ISABELLA (CONT'D)

Do you think you can show her a good time? Have some fun?

WINTER

I'm not sure.

Winter nods his head.

WINTER (CONT'D)

But I hope so.

CUT TO BLACK:

The End.