

BURY THE LEAD

Written by

Justin Kremer

Madhouse Entertainment
CAA

FADE IN:

A satellite view of New York. The Empire State. We PUSH IN, moving fast. The giant green mass grows more defined. With each moment, our vision is clearer.

We increase our speed. Move past MANHATTAN, PAN TO THE RIGHT.

Our target: Long Island.

We SWOOP IN at a breathtaking pace, hurtle toward the ground.

A SMALL TOWN comes into view. We're flying into the heart of suburbia, descending slowly toward a tree lined street.

CUT TO:

A PAIR OF DARK BROWN EYES. Probing. There are bags under them. They hint at interminably long, sleepless nights. They belong to ERIC CHANDLER, 38. He's in --

INT. CAR- DAY

-- where he flips through a copy of The New York Times, sips a cup of coffee. A morning tradition.

Eric checks his watch. Puts the paper down. Through the windshield, we see the offices of:

NEWSDAY.

A well respected Long Island paper, albeit a publication teetering on the brink of insolvency for the better part of a decade.

A ROUSING CHEER carries us to --

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

TIGHT ON ERIC. A thin smile purses his lips. Is he the subject of this adoration?

WE PUSH BACK TO REVEAL that Eric is just one in a crowd, a dozen coworkers at his side. He's not the center of attention.

KAREN HIRSCH is. She's 35. Ambitious. Intelligent. And now award winning.

She holds a POLK AWARD PLAQUE in her hand. A high honor.

Eric's smile fades. He can't feign joy much longer.

He watches on with envy. A staffer cuts a decorative cake.

Eric keeps his eyes trained on his cell phone. Can't go more than a minute without taking a glance. No new calls, emails. A tinge of disappointment crosses his face.

INT. BATHROOM- DAY

Water rushes out of a faucet. Eric splashes it on his face. Catches his reflection in the mirror. Doesn't particularly like what he sees.

He dries himself off and exits. Steps into --

INT. NEWSDAY BULLPEN- CONTINUOUS

Televisions BLARE. Phones RING. Keys are PUNCHED furiously.

It's a typical morning at the office. The cubicles are only half full, a by-product of yet another round of layoffs.

Executive offices overlook the bullpen. Eric approaches the one occupied by FRANK BLAINE, 55. He's an old school newsman, a relic, with Murrow's integrity and Peter Jennings' warmth.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- CONTINUOUS

Eric enters without knocking. Removes a USB Drive from his pocket and tosses it to Frank.

ERIC

Cut the third and fifth graphs.
Tightened the rest up. I need 140
inches.

FRANK BLAINE

Not again --

ERIC

You've got to trust me.

FRANK BLAINE

I said 80. That wasn't a
suggestion. It was an order.

ERIC

This is the one.

FRANK BLAINE

I thought the Rifkin profile was
"the one".

ERIC
I mean it this time.

FRANK BLAINE
I'll see what I can do.

Eric's attention shifts to the treasured hardware on Frank's wall. A Pulitzer Prize.

ERIC
17 years since we won.

FRANK BLAINE
And this'll break the slump?

Eric shrugs as if to feign modesty.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)
This better not be the last thing
you write for me.

ERIC
Still haven't heard anything.

FRANK BLAINE
We don't have a lot of money lying
around. And by a lot, I mean any...

ERIC
You know it's not about that.

FRANK BLAINE
...but I could cobble something
together. A nice little raise.

ERIC
It's The New York fucking Times.

FRANK BLAINE
If I could squeeze another fifteen
thousand --

ERIC
I love you, but I'd mop the floors
for minimum wage if they'd have me.

FRANK BLAINE
I'd miss you.

ERIC
Feeling's mutual. You don't have
anything to worry about yet. Not a
peep since Tuesday.

FRANK BLAINE

I could put in a call over there,
see who the other candidates are...

ERIC

Don't worry about it.

FRANK BLAINE

You sure? I can be subtle.
Charming, even. I'll schmooze them.

ERIC

No schmoozing necessary. I hope.

FRANK BLAINE

As you wish. Get out of here, Mr.
Pulitzer.

CUT TO:

ERIC'S DESK.

A picture rests next to Eric's laptop: a happy family. Eric with his arm around a brunette, two children at their side.

Eric's focus is his email. A subject heading: CRIME DESK POSITION. The recipient has a NEW YORK TIMES email address.

INT. TODD HOLLANDER FAMILY LAW OFFICE- DAY

Plaques. Degrees. Framed articles. The Todd Hollander family law office is a shrine to TODD HOLLANDER.

The apparently distinguished attorney, 56, flips through photos of a newly constructed children's room. It's pristine. Neatly assembled. And completely untouched.

TODD HOLLANDER

Beautiful. You should take the
plastic off.

ERIC

When's it going to get some use?

TODD HOLLANDER

I'll have the kids in there by the
weekend.

ERIC

Sounds too good to be true.

TODD HOLLANDER

You paid for the best. That's what you get. The Judge will grant us a trial period of joint custody.

ERIC

And then what?

TODD HOLLANDER

After six months, if Kyle and Robin are happy...

ERIC

Kevin.

TODD HOLLANDER

Excuse me?

ERIC

My son's name is Kevin.

TODD HOLLANDER

If Kevin and Robin are happy and everything's going smoothly, the arrangement becomes permanent.

ERIC

And there's nothing she can do at the hearing to stop --

TODD HOLLANDER

It's just a formality.

(a beat)

Smile. Good things are coming.

No smile. Eric doesn't quite share his lawyer's optimism.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

The largest space in this cozy two bedroom apartment. There are discarded beers on a coffee table. Baseball on the TV.

Eric watches from the couch, drink in hand.

The clock strikes midnight.

His cell rings. He answers, and is serenaded with Happy Birthday by two high pitched voices. Children singing loudly, and in unison. The ones from the photo.

This is ROBIN, 6, & KEVIN, 9. When they're finished:

KEVIN
Happy Birthday.

ROBIN
Happy Birthday, Dad!

ERIC
Love you guys. Go to bed. I'll see
you tomorrow.

KIDS
Night.

Eric hangs up. Takes a swig of beer. A WHIMPER from outside,
followed by A FERAL SCREECH. Eric rises from his seat.

ERIC
I'm coming.

EXT. ERIC'S APARTMENT- MOMENTS LATER

Eric drops a bowl full of tuna in front of MOLLY, the
neighborhood's stray cat. She laps it up, satisfied. He
nuzzles her with affection.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- DAY

Eric enters to find Frank seated at his desk, USB in hand and
an unusually dour expression on his face. Something's up.

FRANK BLAINE
Don't hate me.

Eric shuts the door. Braces himself for the worst.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)
I can't run it like this.

ERIC
Yes. You can.

FRANK BLAINE
Best I can do is 90 on Sunday.
Maybe 95.

ERIC
I can't cut it. It's as tight as
it's going to get. If you lose any
more, the whole thing unravels.

FRANK BLAINE
We'll find a way to make it work.

ERIC
Please. I need this one.

FRANK BLAINE

I'm giving you all I have. Pushed Karen's piece a week...

ERIC

How awful. She might not be able to win an award for another month.

FRANK BLAINE

...chopped the Board of Ed story in half, sliced the Robert Moses op ed. I don't have the space. Cut it down and get me a new draft.

ON ERIC -- caving. Frustrated.

ERIC

Picking up the kids at 3. I'll get you something later tonight.

FRANK BLAINE

It can wait until tomorrow. Enjoy the birthday.

EXT. AMANDA'S HOUSE- DAY

A beautiful two-story Victorian nestled in the heart of suburbia. A sharp contrast to Eric's hovel.

Eric waits at the door. It is guarded by ROGER. 35. Tall. Well built. A bit intimidating. Wears an NYPD tee.

ROGER

They'll be out in a minute.
(a beat, begrudgingly)
Happy Birthday.

Eric nods. There's clearly tension between these two. An awkward silence is shattered when --

Kevin and Robin burst through the door. They hug their father. For the first time, we see Eric smile.

INT. CHUCK E CHEESE- DAY

An arcade. Kids run wild. Eric is at the skee-ball lane with Kevin & Robin. They're struggling, can't get a high score.

Eric grabs a ball, leans across the lane. Drops it directly into the 50 point hole. Tickets spurt out of the machine. The kids laugh, overjoyed.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Eric sits in silence, sifts through emails on his laptop.

A NOTIFICATION. There's a new message in his inbox.

It's from The New York Times. He opens it.

We see key phrases: "regret to inform you", "strong candidate", "appreciate your interest".

Eric glares at the page, rereads in disbelief. He hits REPLY. Asks for specifics as to why he was denied. Hits send.

He slumps in his seat. Happy fucking Birthday.

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

Eric is at his desk, predictably hungover and pissed off. Frank approaches. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

FRANK BLAINE

Hey. I'm sorry.

Eric nods his thanks.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)

I've got something.

ERIC

They said my writing lacked color.

FRANK BLAINE

It's Joel Harris.

ERIC

...that it was "a little dry". What do they expect? This isn't the fucking Post.

FRANK BLAINE

He's dead.

ERIC

And the guy they hired -- Issacson. 3 years at HuffPo and no print experience. It's a joke.

Eric processes what Frank just said. He perks up. Intrigued.

ERIC (CONT'D)

What happened?

FRANK BLAINE
Looks like suicide.

ERIC
I'll get right down there.

FRANK BLAINE
Karen asked to cover this one. So
did Lucas. A few of the others.

ERIC
It's local crime. This is mine. How
could they possibly try to --

FRANK BLAINE
It's bigger than that. He was a
public figure. Karen spent six
months inside the department when
he was Commissioner. Lucas has a
few good sources --

Eric's resigned to his fate. He's going to lose this one too.

ERIC
Who are you giving it to?

FRANK BLAINE
Figured I owe you one after the
other day. It's yours.

ERIC
Thank you.

Eric's been so wrapped up in his own world that it's only now
he takes note of Frank's demeanor. The sadness in his eyes.

ERIC (CONT'D)
When's the last time you saw him?

FRANK BLAINE
The day he got Commissioner. Drank
our asses off. Never made time to
catch up after. He was busy and I --

ERIC
I'm sorry. There anything I can do?

FRANK BLAINE
Get out there. Cover the story.

Frank trudges back to his office, shuts the door.

EXT. EAST HAMPTON HOME- DAY

A gorgeous manor. Two stories. Ivy covers a healthy portion of the exterior. Police cars and an ambulance idle outside.

Eric stalks up the driveway. He approaches CHRIS BISHOP, 40s, commanding officer on the scene. An old friend. The two hug.

CHRIS BISHOP
They're sending you all the way out
to the boonies now?

ERIC
Couldn't resist a chance to see
your pretty face. How you doing?

CHRIS BISHOP
Good, man. Mara's in her second
trimester.

ERIC
Holy shit. Congrats.

CHRIS BISHOP
What's new with you?

ERIC
Same old. What the hell happened
here?

CHRIS BISHOP
Found him two hours ago. GSW to the
head.

ERIC
Jesus. He leave a note?

CHRIS BISHOP
Nope.

ERIC
Why'd he do it?

CHRIS BISHOP
We're not sure.

ERIC
...depressed? Bad breakup? Low on
cash?

CHRIS BISHOP
We're looking into it. He kept to
himself after he left the force.
Liked his privacy.

Eric's intrigued. He looks to the front door - officers shuffle in and out.

ERIC
When can I get inside?

CHRIS BISHOP
Can't help you there.

ERIC
Since when --

CHRIS BISHOP
This one is different. He was a cop, not some corporate jerkoff. Deserves some respect. Privacy.

ERIC
Give me five minutes. In and out.

Chris shakes his head.

ERIC (CONT'D)
What's it going to take?

CHRIS BISHOP
A badge. You got one?

Eric reaches into his pocket, removes his middle finger and holds it up to Chris. A playful, but semi serious gesture.

ERIC
Probably better off anyway. I can smell the stench from here. Don't need to spend a month trying to get it out of my clothes. You better crack a few windows open.

CHRIS BISHOP
Fifth suicide this month. I can barely smell it anymore.

ERIC
It reeks.

A fleeting silence --

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hey. Let's grab a beer later and catch up. Unless it's gonna be a late night here...

CHRIS BISHOP
We'll be out soon but Mara's
cooking. Gimme a rain check.

Eric nods casually.

DISSOLVE TO:

Harris's driveway. Four hours later. It's empty.

Eric creeps his way to the front door. Turns the knob. It's locked. He walks around to the...

SIDE OF THE HOUSE --

The first floor windows are bolted shut. However, he spots a second floor window that is slightly ajar.

A bulky air conditioning unit rests a few feet to Eric's right. It hums quietly. He props himself up on it.

INT. HARRIS HOME - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

A GRUNT. The sound of strain.

Eric wiggles through the window and lands in the dark corridor with a thud. He stands up, brushes himself off. Activates the flashlight app on his phone.

He moves down the hallway and spots Harris's office. It's cordoned off with tape.

Eric thinks for a moment, then continues on to...

INT. HARRIS HOME - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...which is also cordoned off. Eric stands at the doorway and shines his light onto the white carpet - blood all over it.

Otherwise, the room is bare. The night stand is empty.

Eric spots SHARDS OF GLASS near a dresser. A lamp sits atop of it, cracked.

He surveys it with curiosity. Snaps a photo.

INT. HARRIS HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Pristine. Eric moves past a series of pictures on the wall. We see Harris, in NYPD regalia, alongside Mayor Bloomberg.

INT. HARRIS HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Eric swings open the refrigerator. It floods the room with light. Contains nothing but condiments and water.

CUT TO:

THE MAIN FOYER --

Eric heads for the front door. He stops. Reconsiders. A beat.

INT. HARRIS HOME - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Eric slides under the police tape. Rummages through papers on Harris's desk. Little of interest. He opens a laptop.

The wallpaper: an NYPD Shield.

He clicks on Harris's inbox when the SHRILL RING of his cell phone interrupts him. He almost jumps at the surprise.

He silences the phone. Sifts through Harris's emails.

Seconds later -- another BEEP. A text message. Eric reads it, clenches his jaw in anger. Slams the laptop shut.

EXT. HARRIS HOME- MOMENTS LATER

Eric reaches the foot of the driveway, cell glued to his ear.

ERIC

What happened?

AMANDA (O.S.)

There was an accident. Kev's getting x-rays. They think he broke his arm.

ERIC

Shit. How?

AMANDA (O.S.)

He was playing basketball with Roger and --

ERIC

I'll be there in 20.

As he hangs up, A GREEN SEDAN passes by. Taps its brakes. Slows for a moment.

Eric walks to his car quickly. The sedan drives on. Eric watches it fade into the horizon.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR- NIGHT

We peer through glass into a HOSPITAL ROOM. A voyeuristic look. Kevin is being fitted for a cast. Eric gives him a kiss, worry on his face.

He approaches Amanda and Roger, who stand in the corner of the room. A few words are exchanged. Within moments, the awkward trio exit the room and enter the hallway.

AMANDA

They were playing, horsing around.
The boys went up for a rebound and
Roger outboxed Kev --

ROGER

(correcting her)
Boxed out --

AMANDA

-- a little hard. Kev fell, landed
on it funny. It was a freak
accident.

ROGER

It's my fault. We shouldn't have
been so rough. Won't happen again.

Eric's stare could burn a hole right through Roger. His gaze shifts to his ex-wife.

ERIC

Give us a minute.

Amanda looks to Roger, who nods as if to say "it's okay". She returns to the room.

ERIC (CONT'D)

If you ever hurt one of my kids
again, you'll be the one in this
fucking hospital. Understood?

Eric marches back into the room, a phony smile plastered on his face. Roger trails behind, far less enthused.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

There are already a few beers at Eric's side. He's on his laptop. On the screen: a Word document. Eric has composed a lengthy article about Harris's death.

The headline: FORMER NYPD COMMISSIONER COMMITS SUICIDE.

It's a standard profile. Perhaps it's "a little dry".

Eric opens his browser and visits The New York Times website. Finds a short piece about Harris's death.

Its headline: SUICIDE LIKELY IN DEATH OF EX-COMMISSIONER.

The article is nearly identical to Eric's.

He moves to his inbox and reopens The Times rejection letter. Rereads. An audible sigh of frustration, followed by a moment of contemplation. A beat.

Eric returns to his article. Deletes the headline.

He types a new one.

SOURCE: MURDER SUSPECTED IN DEATH OF EX NYPD COMMISSIONER.

He stirs in his seat for a moment, finger hovering over the delete key.

But instead, Eric begins to edit the piece, repurpose it.

We see phrases flash by us -- "no note", "overturned lamp", "mysterious resignation", "mercurial", "made enemies".

He drags the document into an email. Types in Frank's address. Stops. Thinks for a moment. And hits send.

A telephone immediately begins to RING and we're in...

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

Eric reaches for the phone at his desk. He's hungover and exhausted, which helps mask the nervousness that he feels.

ERIC
Chandler.

FRANK BLAINE (O.S.)
Get in here.

Eric hangs up, marches toward his Frank's office. Short, hesitant steps like a man walking the green mile. He enters --

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- CONTINUOUS

-- without closing the door, to provide him with an escape.

ERIC
Morning.

FRANK BLAINE
Shut the door.

Eric complies. Takes a seat across from Frank, who has a copy of the Harris piece printed out in front of him.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)
Is this solid?

ERIC
Yeah. Source is good.

FRANK BLAINE
Why would somebody --

ERIC
I don't know.

FRANK BLAINE
Cops say it's open and shut. Clean suicide.

ERIC
They're wrong.

FRANK BLAINE
Who's your source?

Silence that serves as an answer to the question.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)
I don't like to ask that. You realize how much shit this is going to stir up?

ERIC
I do.

FRANK BLAINE
...we've got The Times, Post, and Daily News all saying the same thing as the cops. We can't get burned here. I need to know that this is legit before we throw it on the front page. Is it real?

If Eric expresses the slightest reservation here, this story could disappear. A mistake erased. But the temptation of his own cover story...

ERIC
It's real.

FRANK BLAINE

Okay.

(beat, shifting gears)

I ran it by legal. We're clear.

Eric nods. He tries to suppress a smile, already dreaming of the attention. Salivating.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)

We'll leak the story at 4. Nightly news will want you to do a few remotes when it hits. Get yourself cleaned up. You got a suit here? Something nice you can wear...

ERIC

Amanda 'misplaced' all of my decent ones during the split. I can run down the block, pick something up.

Frank nods. He moves to exit...

FRANK BLAINE

Good work. This could be something.

INT. CAR- DAY

Eric cruises down an empty street. There's a suit carefully laid out on his passenger seat.

He dials a number on his cell. No answer.

A moment of contemplation. Eric hastily makes a u-turn.

EXT. EAST HAMPTON POLICE STATION- DAY

A posh, well manicured building. More resort than police station. Eric stands outside with Chris Bishop.

ERIC

I need to give you a heads up on something.

CHRIS BISHOP

What's that?

ERIC

We're running a story today.

CHRIS BISHOP

I'd hope so.

ERIC

It's going to suggest that Harris
may have been murdered.

Chris's tone shifts from lighthearted to apoplectic.

CHRIS BISHOP

Why the fuck would you say that?

ERIC

You don't think it's possible you
guys rushed to a conclusion here?

CHRIS BISHOP

No.

ERIC

He had enemies.

CHRIS BISHOP

Everybody does.

ERIC

Didn't leave a note.

CHRIS BISHOP

You think every sad sack of shit
takes the time to write something
before they pull the trigger?

ERIC

How did that lamp fall by the bed?
He have time to smack it down after
he offed himself?

CHRIS BISHOP

How did you see that?

ERIC

What happened to the lamp?

CHRIS BISHOP

...it wasn't in the report.

ERIC

And why's that?

CHRIS BISHOP

Wait. You went into the house?

ERIC

Why wasn't it in the report?

CHRIS BISHOP
Are you fucking kidding --

ERIC
Chris...

CHRIS BISHOP
Come within 100 yards of my crime
scene again and I'll put your ass
in jail.

That was loud. A few passersby take notice, gawk at the men.

ERIC
I'm sorry. I had to check it out.

Chris lowers his voice. In a hushed tone --

CHRIS BISHOP
One of my rookies was clumsy. As we
swept the room, he knocked the lamp
over. Has nothing to do with the
case.

ERIC
(mutters inaudibly)
Shit.
(to Bishop)
I need a favor.

CHRIS BISHOP
You're asking for a favor...now.

ERIC
Let the story circulate for a few
hours before you issue a denial.

CHRIS BISHOP
Fuck you.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

An editorial meeting comes to a halt. Staffers rush out of the room, assignments in hand. Eric lingers, accosts Frank.

ERIC
Wanted to give you a heads up.
Spoke to my guy inside the
department. They're going to issue
a denial as soon as we go public.

FRANK BLAINE

Source is still sticking to the story though, right?

Eric glances outside. We see the suit draped on his chair. In a corner of the office, a green screen has been assembled with a camera in front of it.

BACK ON ERIC -- whose eyes fill with excitement.

ERIC

Yeah.

CUT TO:

A LIGHT. Incredibly bright. It blinds us for a moment. Dims and we're tight on Eric's face, drenched in makeup...

INT. BULLPEN- MOMENTS LATER

He's in front of the camera, moments from his first interview. Eric adjusts his earpiece, uncomfortable.

The cameraman signals. It's showtime.

An ANCHOR's soothing monotone emanates from the earpiece.

ANCHOR (O.S.)

We're here with Newsday reporter Eric Chandler, the man who broke this story. Thanks for joining us.

Eric smiles. Stares into the black hole that is the camera.

ERIC

Hi Tom. Thanks for having me.

INT. BATHROOM- NIGHT

Eric dabs his face with a wet paper towel, removes his makeup. He catches his reflection in the mirror. Smiles.

INT. BULLPEN- NIGHT

Surprisingly well populated for this hour. A television replays Eric's interview on NBC. We catch a glimpse of it.

ERIC

Commissioner Harris made plenty of enemies.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

His first year on the job, he waged war on our city's drug trade. He even wrangled with other law enforcement entities -- state and government officials who sought jurisdiction in...

Eric stares at the television for a moment. It's surreal. He heads for the exit. Locks eyes with Karen, pouring over copy.

KAREN

Nice work.

Eric nods, thankful.

EXT. FAIRFIELD APARTMENT COMPLEX- NIGHT

Drab and depressing. Full of divorcees, single parents, and others struggling to make ends meet. Eric's car comes to a halt outside of the community mailbox.

He exits the vehicle and unlocks his mailbox.

INSIDE: A SINGLE BULLET.

Eric looks around. It's dark, quiet. There's no one in sight. He's puzzled.

INT. HALLWAY- MOMENTS LATER

Eric pounds on a door. It swings open to reveal GUS, 50, in a white tee and boxers. A rather unenthusiastic landlord.

ERIC

Hey. I have a question.

GUS

Not the dryer again --

ERIC

No, not that. Did you see anybody near my mailbox today?

GUS

No.

ERIC

Nothing strange or out of the ordinary...

GUS

I wasn't around when the post office came.

ERIC

I don't mean the post office. I mean anybody. You didn't see anybody over there today?

GUS

Can't say I did.

ERIC

Maybe a tall guy about six four. Well built. Brown hair.

He's describing Roger. Gus shakes his head.

GUS

You looking for someone?

ERIC

Forget it. Thanks.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

The door creaks open. Eric enters with apprehension, flips on the light. Everything is as he left it. Nothing unusual here.

He places the bullet on a table. Dials a number on his cell.

AMANDA (O.S.)

Hi, I'm not here right now but...

EXT. AMANDA'S HOUSE- NIGHT

It's late. The witching hour in suburbia. Lights are out. Eric stands at the front door. Raises his fist to knock. Rings the doorbell instead. It's loud.

The sound of SHUFFLING inside. Confusion. A moment later, Amanda answers the door in a robe.

AMANDA

What are you doing here?

ERIC

I need to speak with Roger.

AMANDA

You've said enough.

ERIC
He's not gonna scare me away from
my kids.

AMANDA
What are you talking about?

ERIC
The bullet.

AMANDA
Bullet...?

ERIC
In my mailbox.

AMANDA
...what?

ERIC
Not a very subtle message. The
judge is going to hear about this.

AMANDA
When did this happen?

ERIC
Today.

AMANDA
Roger's been with me. All day. He
had off so we went to -- if you're
in trouble, the kids aren't going
anywhere near there.

Eric is slowly coming to grips with the enormity of his
mistake. Begins to backtrack...

ERIC
Everything's fine.

AMANDA
Maybe the judge does need to hear
about this.

ERIC
It...it must have been Gus.

AMANDA
Who the hell is that?

ERIC
My landlord. He's a big practical
joker. Real character.

AMANDA

You really think so?

ERIC

Yeah, we're close. I just...it was a good one. Sorry to wake you. Give the kids a kiss.

CUT TO:

IMAGES OF BULLETS by the dozen. All shapes and sizes. Boat tails, hollow points. A cursor scrolls past them. We're in --

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Eric stares at the pictures on his computer. Looks at the bullet in his hand, comparing the two. Tries to find a match.

It's a tedious task, but he keeps searching...

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

...and searching. Still browsing through pictures the following morning at his desk. Eric looks haggard, exhausted.

He rises from his seat and walks to the...

INT. OFFICE KITCHEN- CONTINUOUS

Eric puts on a pot of coffee. Slumps against the counter while it brews. Frank enters, makes himself a cup of tea.

FRANK BLAINE

Morning. What's the latest on Harris?

ERIC

Nothing yet.

FRANK BLAINE

Who have you spoken to?

ERIC

NBC, ABC, & News 12.

FRANK BLAINE

Not what I meant. You talk to his old co-workers?

ERIC

Not yet.

FRANK BLAINE
 Head out there today. And take
 Karen with you.

ERIC
 I can handle it on my own.

FRANK BLAINE
 Bring her. She's a good
 interrogator. They like her over
 there.

ERIC
 This is my story.

FRANK BLAINE
 It is. She's just here to help.

EXT. PARKING LOT- DAY

Karen strides towards Eric's car. She opens the passenger door. Eric brushes papers off of the front seat, makes room.

KAREN
 Morning.

ERIC
 Hey.

Eric pulls out of the lot. The two ride off in silence.

INT. CAR- MOMENTS LATER

Bumper to bumper traffic on the BQE. Eric taps his fingers against the steering wheel. Karen breaks a long silence.

KAREN
 Thanks for taking me along.

ERIC
 Frank thought it'd be a good idea.

KAREN
 And you...?

Eric remains mum. His feelings are evident.

KAREN (CONT'D)
 Let's cut the territorial shit. I'm
 not here to take your story.

ERIC
Then why are you here?

KAREN
To do what I do. Have you ever been
lead on anything remotely this big?

The answer is an obvious, resounding no.

KAREN (CONT'D)
I was scared shitless on my first
investigative. Didn't know what the
hell I was doing. Don't want you to
feel the same, no matter how much
of an asshole you're going to be.

He looks at Karen, impressed by her gall.

EXT. POLICE PLAZA- DAY

A towering structure.

INT. POLICE PLAZA, LOBBY- DAY

Eric and Karen approach a RECEPTIONIST at the check in desk.
Hand over their licenses and Newsday credentials.

The RECEPTIONIST pauses when she sees Eric's name.

RECEPTIONIST
Hirsch and...Chandler?

Eric nods. The receptionist punches a few keys. Moves to a
printer nearby. Hands Eric and Karen their press badges.

The receptionist watches Eric, picks up the phone.

CUT TO

Eric and Karen approach an elevator bank.

ERIC
Let's split up. Cover more ground.

KAREN
Good idea. Where do you need me?

ERIC
15th floor. Talk to his old
buddies. Secretary. Anybody who
knows anything.

KAREN

I'm on it.

An elevator swings open. Karen enters. Eric doesn't follow.

ERIC

Gotta make a quick call.

Before the doors shut --

ERIC (CONT'D)

Hey. Thanks.

Karen nods. Eric looks at a directory alongside the elevator. Finds a listing for: FORENSICS. 7th Floor.

INT. POLICE PLAZA, FORENSICS DEPARTMENT- MOMENTS LATER

A FORENSIC ANALYST inspects the bullet as Eric watches with anticipation. Doesn't take more than a few seconds before --

ANALYST

It's a Speer. 125 grain. Hollow point. Probably for a SIG Sauer.

ERIC

Common?

He returns the bullet to its unfortunate new owner.

ANALYST

Not particularly. It's professional grade. Homicides we get are usually the generic stuff. A Model 10 or an M1911. SIG's not a gun you see on the street.

ERIC

Where do you see it then?

ANALYST

Assassinations. Targeted killings.

Eric tries to suppress the wave of panic that's erupting inside of him. He turns to walk away.

ANALYST (CONT'D)

You can print my name if you want. Whenever the article comes out.

ERIC

Yeah. Definitely.

INT. POLICE PLAZA, CAFETERIA- MOMENTS LATER

Mediocre food and vending machines galore. Eric sits at a table alone, sips a cup of coffee. He's lost in thought.

FIVE OFFICERS march into the room with purpose. They head straight for Eric's table. THE LEADER of the group towers over him. Stares a hole through Eric.

ERIC

Can I help you, Officer?

LEADER

You got a badge?

Eric presents his visitors pass to the leader, who crumples it in his hand. A few other cops mosey over. He's surrounded.

LEADER (CONT'D)

It's time for you to go.

ERIC

I think you're right.

Eric raises his hands in defeat. Rises. Reaches for his coffee, but the officer smacks it over. It spills everywhere, including on Eric's pants.

LEADER

Don't come back here again.

INT. CAR- SUNSET

Eric cruises down a local road. Karen scans her phone.

She has the 'Notes' application open. Recites her findings.

KAREN

Lieutenant Dan Billingsly.
Homicide. Worked with him for 20
years. Wouldn't comment.
(scrolling down)
Vince Daddario, Deputy Commissioner
of Operations. Wouldn't comment.
The secretary, Amy Mitchum.
Wouldn't comment...

ERIC

Fantastic.

KAREN

...on the record. Privately, she says Harris was distressed his last few months on the force. That's when things changed.

ERIC

Why?

KAREN

No clue. What'd you find out?

ERIC

Coffee stains on khakis are a bad look.

KAREN

What's your next move?

ERIC

I'll figure something out.

Eric pulls into the Newsday parking lot. The car comes to a stop. He kills the engine. As Karen gathers her things --

KAREN

I saw you reading the Daily News piece yesterday.

ERIC

I'm a masochist.

KAREN

It must piss you off.

ERIC

I've been called a lot of things. "A third rate hack" is a new one.

KAREN

Brush it off. Make them eat shit. You need any more help, I'm around.

And with that, she exits.

EXT. NORTHERN STATE PARKWAY- NIGHT

Narrow. Two lanes, poorly lit. Empty except for one lonely vehicle. Eric's car cruises down the road, its brights shine.

INT. CAR- MOMENTS LATER

He fiddles with the radio. Turns on a sports broadcast. We hear the soothing, monotonous tones of AM radio commentators.

Eric spots a car behind him in the rearview. A GREEN SEDAN. Looks a lot like the one we saw outside of Harris's place.

It approaches rapidly. Eric looks at his dashboard - he's doing 70. How fast is this guy going?

Eric moves to the right lane, out of the vehicle's path.

The sedan changes lanes as well.

Now it's 50 yards away and closing fast.

Eric punches the accelerator. The needle inches past 80.

The driver shifts back into the left lane. Speeds up. Evens the car with Eric's.

Eric tries to get a look at the driver, but the cars windows are tinted. As he tries to peer through the tint --

THE SEDAN SMASHES INTO HIS CAR. SENDS IT TUMBLING OFF THE PARKWAY, INTO A RAVINE.

AS ERIC'S VEHICLE FLIPS ON ITS FRONT...

It's then that everything goes --

BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. RAVINE- MOMENTS LATER

A plume of smoke rises from the wreckage. We PULL BACK to reveal the totality of the crash.

Crumpled metal. Shattered glass.

A GROAN from inside the vehicle. With great effort, Eric squeezes out of the car. Pulls himself to his feet.

His face is nicked, cuts everywhere. He clutches his right shoulder in pain. Backs away from the wreckage. Surveys it.

And then -- Eric begins to laugh.

EXT. NORTHERN STATE PARKWAY- NIGHT

The shoulder of the road is cordoned off - three police cars and an ambulance occupy it. Eric is questioned by a genial DETECTIVE, who takes a copious amount of notes.

DETECTIVE

...green sedan. You can't be more specific than that? Remember a logo? If the car looked new or like an older model --

ERIC

It happened quickly. You guys have cameras here? If you could grab the plate number --

DETECTIVE

Nope, dead zone. Here to 110. Keep telling 'em we need to fix that. Nobody listens.

ERIC

So this was the perfect place to do it...

DETECTIVE

Got a few standard questions I have to ask. Don't like 'em but...it's the job. You did nothing to irritate the guy, right? Cut him off, honk your horn --

ERIC

No.

DETECTIVE

Any drugs or alcohol in your system?

ERIC

No.

DETECTIVE

Need to call anyone? Family...?

Eric shakes his head.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Alright. Give us a few minutes and we'll get somebody to dig you out.

The Detective walks back to his vehicle.

He's approached by a colleague, handed a piece of paper. The two exchange words, glance at Eric. They make no attempt to hide the fact that they're talking about him.

The Detective's face darkens. Uh oh. He returns to Eric, hands him back his license and registration.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
On second thought, call a tow.

EXT. FAIRFIELD APARTMENT COMPLEX- NIGHT

A taxi grinds to a halt. Eric exits, right shoulder in a sling. He approaches his mailbox with apprehension.

Opens it. Takes a half step back.

Inside: nothing but bills.

He breathes a momentary sigh of relief.

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

Eric attracts stares from his colleagues as he enters the office. They're used to seeing him hungover. This is worse.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- MOMENTS LATER

Frank scans a document intently. His focus is interrupted when Eric barges in. He surveys Eric's face with worry.

ERIC
I know I've said it before but I mean it this time...this is the one.

FRANK BLAINE
What the hell happened to you?

ERIC
I'm fine.

FRANK BLAINE
Doesn't look like it.

ERIC
Two nights ago, I found a bullet in my mailbox. Thought it was Amanda's boyfriend. I was wrong. Last night, somebody tried to kill me. Run me off the road.

FRANK BLAINE
Jesus Christ.

ERIC
It's Harris. The story.

FRANK BLAINE
How do you know they're connected?

ERIC
Car that hit me -- I saw it outside
of his place. It's the only thing
that makes sense.

FRANK BLAINE
You get an ID on the driver?

Eric shakes his head.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)
You're staying at my house tonight.
Nora will make the guest room.

ERIC
I'm fine.

FRANK BLAINE
Then we'll speak to the cops. Get
you some protection.

ERIC
Tried that. They weren't too
helpful.

FRANK BLAINE
This story isn't worth dying for.

ERIC
It's the one.

Frank exhales, frustrated. Shifts gears --

FRANK BLAINE
Have you started drafting the
follow up? We need to go public
with this.

ERIC
Not happening.

FRANK BLAINE
Department is taking out a full
page in the Times tomorrow. They
want a retraction and an apology.

ERIC

Shit.

FRANK BLAINE

They need to see that we're right.

ERIC

We can't do that.

FRANK BLAINE

Why not?

ERIC

My hearing's on Friday. Got no chance of getting joint custody if the court thinks I'm in danger.

FRANK BLAINE

...or if you're unemployed.

ERIC

I'll have something. Soon.

FRANK BLAINE

You should keep your distance from the kids until this settles down.

ERIC

I can protect them.

FRANK BLAINE

You can barely keep yourself in one piece.

Eric is silent, unsure of how to defend himself here...

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)

If you can't get me a smoking gun, I need something solid. Something to keep the wolves at bay. Physical evidence would be a start.

EXT. HARRIS HOME- DAY

Eric stops in front of two trash cans at the edge of Harris's driveway. Opens them. They're full. Someone has been here.

He strides up the driveway, tries the front door again. Knocks. No answer. Reaches for the handle. It's locked.

Eric returns to the --

SIDE OF THE HOUSE

To his dismay, the 2nd floor window is now shut.

He approaches the fence that leads to the backyard. Scales it in agony, forced to put pressure on his injured shoulder.

EXT. HARRIS BACKYARD- CONTINUOUS

Eric lands with a thud and finds a beautiful pool, waterfall and all, muddied with leaves and dirt. He approaches a glass door that leads inside the house. It's locked.

He balls up his fist and swings at it. Hard. The glass doesn't break, and Eric only injures himself further.

He shakes the pain away, looks toward a shed across the yard.

CUT TO:

A pair of hedge trimmers, as they're violently thrust into the glass. It shatters.

INT. HARRIS HOME, KITCHEN- MOMENTS LATER

Eric pinches his nose as he enters the house. The place reeks of bleach and anti-oxidants. He spots a brochure on the kitchen table. "Coram Crime Cleanup". That would explain it.

INT. HARRIS HOME, OFFICE- CONTINUOUS

Eric opens Harris's laptop and powers it on. He's puzzled when he reaches the home screen. The NYPD background is gone.

Eric opens the C: Drive. Looks through it.

There are no documents or files. Only a few default programs.

It's as if the laptop has never been used...

...or it's been wiped clean.

He shifts his focus to the desk drawers. Nothing exciting.

INT. HARRIS HOME, BEDROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Eric isn't faring much better here. He parses through a wardrobe. Moves to the night stand adjacent to the bed. Opens the drawer. Empty.

Frustrated, he slams it shut with force.

A moment after the drawer closes, we hear A SOFT THUD.

Eric stops in his tracks. He crouches in front of the night stand. Reaches behind it. His eyes light up.

He finds a compact case, with a velcro strip attached to it. Opens it.

Inside: an LED Torch. It's a blacklight, the size of a small flashlight.

Eric turns off the lights. Shines the torch on the floor, the bed. When he moves the light to the ceiling, he sees...

A message, scrawled in bright yellow ink.

DON'T LET THEM HURT ME. 0001637158.

He stares at the ominous warning, his eyes awash with wonder...and fear. WE PUSH IN ON THE MESSAGE. Haunting.

INT. DINER- NIGHT

Eric sits at a booth, an empty cup of coffee and a legal pad in front of him. There are iterations of the number from the ceiling scribbled all over the pages. Dozens of combinations.

None of them are particularly meaningful. It's all gibberish.

A WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS

Need anything else, hon?

ERIC

I'm good.

As she heads back into the kitchen, Eric removes a flask from his jacket pocket. Pours its contents into his cup. Drinks.

A BELL CHIMES. A new customer has arrived.

Eric doesn't bother to look up until --

THE CUSTOMER takes a seat in the booth across from his. Eric locks eyes with the man. The Customer nods.

Eric's focus returns to the pad. A BEAT.

The Customer arches his neck, stares in Eric's direction.

Eric senses the unwanted attention. He crowds around the pad, tries to block it from The Customer's view.

The Customer continues to ogle him.

THE CUSTOMER
Burning the midnight oil?

Eric nods, doesn't give the man much. A silence.

THE CUSTOMER (CONT'D)
Lotta' numbers there. You an
accountant or something?

ERIC
Or something.

Silence. The Customer's cell RINGS. He exits, steps outside to take the call. Remains visible through the glass window. The Waitress reappears, approaches Eric's table.

ERIC (CONT'D)
The guy on the phone -- he ever
come in here before?

The Waitress gives The Customer a once over.

WAITRESS
Not that I can remember.

ERIC
Is he looking at us right now?

WAITRESS
Yeah.

ERIC
Okay. Laugh like I said something
funny and refill my coffee.

The Waitress does as instructed. Overdoes the laugh. Eric covertly slides a few twenties across the table.

ERIC (CONT'D)
When he comes back in, take his
order. If he tries to get up,
distract him.

The Waitress pockets the cash. The Customer reenters, returns to his seat. She saunters over to his table.

WAITRESS
Hey hon. What can I get ya? I hope
you saw our specials. We've got --

Eric rips several pages from the pad. He scribbles a note. Rises from his seat. Exits with haste.

The Waitress pours The Customer a cup of coffee. When he sees Eric exit --

THE CUSTOMER

You know what, I think I'm okay --

As he gets up, The Waitress knocks the coffee over. Spills it all over The Customer's pants. He recoils. It's hot.

WAITRESS

Oh my gosh. I'm so sorry, sir.

The Customer shoves her to the side. Snatches the pad from the adjacent table. It reads --

FUCK OFF.

He flips through the other pages. All blank.

EXT. DINER- MOMENTS LATER

THE SCREECH OF TIRES. Eric speeds out of the parking lot. Moments later, The Customer exits. He looks around, irked.

EXT. EAST HAMPTON POLICE STATION- DAY

Chris Bishop strolls toward the entrance, a smile on his face. Ready to start the day. And then he sees Eric, who approaches with a coffee in hand. The smile disappears.

CHRIS BISHOP

Fuck off.

ERIC

I'm sorry.

CHRIS BISHOP

You're not.

ERIC

I feel awful about it. I fucked up.
And I apologize.

(hands coffee to Bishop)

Two sugars and a little cinnamon.

Bishop accepts the drink, but by no means is this a panacea.

CHRIS BISHOP

What do you want?

Eric hands Chris a piece of paper with the numbers on it.

ERIC
What do those mean to you?

CHRIS BISHOP
Nothing.

ERIC
Are you sure?

CHRIS BISHOP
No. Could be anything. Serial
number, bank account, case
number...

ERIC
Case number? That's ten digits.

CHRIS BISHOP
Some boroughs use ten. We don't.
But some do.

ERIC
Manhattan?

Chris nods. Eric snatches the paper back with excitement.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Thanks. Oh, and one more thing --
Harris. No note, right?

CHRIS BISHOP
We're not having this conversation.

ERIC
Humor me.

CHRIS BISHOP
No fuckin' note.

ERIC
Checked the computer too?

CHRIS BISHOP
Of course.

ERIC
Went through all his files, huh?

CHRIS BISHOP
(nods)
We covered it. Drop this. You've
got no idea what you're doing. Just
stick to the petty larcenies.

TIGHT ON ERIC - a smile creases his lips as he walks away.

INT. POLICE PLAZA, MAIN LOBBY- DAY

We're back at the check-in desk. Eric has a baseball cap on. Brim low. He approaches the receptionist once again. Hands her his license, credentials, and a crumpled \$100 bill.

ERIC
How bout we don't tell the boys I'm
here this time, okay?

INT. POLICE PLAZA, DEPARTMENT OF RECORDS- DAY

A glass partition. Behind it sits PENNY, 45, a no-nonsense administrator. She's buried in a file. Eric approaches.

ERIC
Hey. How ya doing?

Penny doesn't even look up. A fleeting silence.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I'm with Newsday...Eric Chandler.
I'm looking for a case file.

PENNY
Number?

ERIC
0001637158.

After a few keystrokes --

PENNY
I've got nothing for you.

ERIC
I don't need much.

PENNY
Good, cause I've got nothing.

ERIC
It's a footnote for this story I'm
working on. The boss is a stickler
for the little stuff. Real pain in
the ass. I just need a name.

PENNY
I'm sorry.

ERIC
It won't trace back to you.

PENNY
No, it won't.

ERIC
I'd really appreciate some help.

PENNY
No can do.

ERIC
Maybe you need to grab a coffee.

PENNY
I'm not thirsty.

ERIC
Maybe you are. And maybe you tilted
your screen a little to the right.
Maybe I caught a glimpse by
accident.

PENNY
Maybe I told you to fuck off.

A man enters the room. There's a press badge around his neck.
New York Times logo. This is ZACK ISSACSON, 35.

ZACK ISSACSON
Penny baby, you're a ball of
sunshine today.

PENNY
Not you again.

ZACK ISSACSON
You remember me! See, I told you
we'd become fast friends. Now give
this poor guy something.

PENNY
I can't. And we're not friends.

ZACK ISSACSON
When he leaves, give me the scoop.
Gotta impress the new bosses.

PENNY
This one's above my pay grade.
Can't get it open.

Zack playfully pats Eric on the shoulder, extends his hand.

ZACK ISSACSON
Zack Issacson. Nice to meet you.

ERIC
Eric Chandler.

Zack dramatically pulls his hand back as if he's been burnt.

ZACK ISSACSON
You're quite the celebrity these days.

ERIC
It's the winning smile. Congrats on the job. Heard it was in high demand.

ZACK ISSACSON
Got lucky, I guess.

ERIC
I'm sure you did.

ZACK ISSACSON
So when are you retracting this Harris thing?

ERIC
I'm not.

ZACK ISSACSON
The autopsy puts a damper on your little theory.

ERIC
We'll see what the results say.

ZACK ISSACSON
Oh, you haven't heard...

ERIC
Nothing to hear. M.E. won't announce until tomorrow.

ZACK ISSACSON
Unless your college buddy happens to be his lab tech.

Zack milks the silence. He's going to make Eric ask. Grovel.

ERIC
...and?

ZACK ISSACSON
Suicide.

ERIC
Bullshit.

ZACK ISSACSON
Hey, I just listen to the pros.

Zack removes a pen & pad from his pocket. Flashes it at Eric.

ZACK ISSACSON (CONT'D)
Anyway, back to work. Good meeting
you, buddy.

Eric nods. He exits the room, frustrated.

PRELAP --

ERIC (O.S.)
Who do you know in the department?

INT. POLICE PLAZA, HALLWAY- DAY

Eric paces down the hallway, cell glued to his ear.

KAREN (O.S.)
Couple patrolmen in the 5th.

ERIC
I need someone with access.

KAREN (O.S.)
Had Ramirez, but he transferred to
Nassau in January. Twice the pay,
half the work.

ERIC
Shit. That's it?

KAREN (O.S.)
Best I had. Let me see what I can
dig up.

ERIC
Forget it. I've got somebody.

The dread on Eric's face is apparent.

CUT TO:

A FIST, as it knocks meekly...reluctantly...on a door.

MAN (O.S.)

Come in.

The door swings open to reveal --

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE- DAY

-- Roger, Amanda's boyfriend. He sits at his desk, buried in paperwork. Tries to conceal his surprise when he sees Eric.

ERIC

Hey. Can I have a word?

Roger motions him inside. He glances at the sling.

ROGER

What happened?

ERIC

Fender bender.

Roger nods. As Eric takes a seat, he spots a picture of Amanda & the kids on Roger's desk. Tries not to wince.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I wanted to apologize for the other night. I overreacted. I was just worried about Kev.

ROGER

Thanks. So why are you actually here?

This is the part Eric can't stand. The humbling, the begging.

ERIC

I need a little information for a story. I'd be...grateful if you could help me out.

ROGER

Must be pretty important if you're asking me.

ERIC

It is.

ROGER

I'd love to help. What can I do?

Shock. Eric didn't expect it to be this easy.

ERIC

I have a case number. I need the file that corresponds to it.

ROGER

You went down to Records and it's sealed.

ERIC

Yes.

ROGER

Happy to lend a hand.

ERIC

...thank you.

ROGER

And you're going to do something for me.

ERIC

What's that?

ROGER

The hearing on Friday...

ERIC

...yes.

ROGER

You're going to drop the petition for custody.

ERIC

You're kidding.

ROGER

We'll work out a flexible visitation schedule. You'll see the kids plenty. They can stay over a weekend or two.

ERIC

Fuck off.

ROGER

This can work for all of us.

ERIC

No, it can't. They're my kids.

ROGER

And this is my job. You know what happens to me if I get caught passing you a sealed file?

Eric rises from his seat, dismissive --

ERIC

Thanks for the time.

INT. POLICE PLAZA, MAIN LOBBY- DAY

We're just a few feet from the exit. Eric is prepared to storm out of the building, but he stops. Turns around.

There's desperation in his eyes. He's frozen in place...

INT. ROGER'S OFFICE- MOMENTS LATER

Eric stands in front of Roger, shoulders slumped ever so slightly. He's defeated.

ERIC

You win.

He extends his hand. They shake.

ROGER

Thank you. Really.

ERIC

(hands Roger a paper)
Here it is.

ROGER

What are you doing tonight?

ERIC

Nothing.

ROGER

Why don't you take the kids out for dinner. I'll have it for you then.

Eric nods, jaw clenched. He turns to exit the room.

PRELAP --

ROBIN (O.S.)

Dad. Are you okay?

EXT. AMANDA'S HOUSE- NIGHT

Eric greets the kids at the door. Robin sees his shoulder for the first time. She's concerned. Kevin isn't. He's excited.

ROBIN
What happened?

KEVIN
We match.

ERIC
A little accident. I'm fine. But
look, we've got a cool new car for
the week. Want to check it out?

The kids gaze at the plain Toyota idling in the driveway. It's not very exciting. Well, to a 9 year old, it might be.

KEVIN
Yeah!

ROBIN
Does it have new car smell?

ERIC
You've got to find out.

The kids run to the car. Roger appears in the doorway, a file in hand. He passes it to Eric with reluctance.

ROGER
We never spoke about this.

Eric nods. Immediately opens the folder and begins to read.

HONK! Kevin impatiently sounds the car's horn. Eric closes the file, tucks it under his arm.

EXT. APPLEBEE'S- NIGHT

Bustling. Kids loiter outside on benches. Cars circle the lot looking for spots. Eric leads the kids to the entrance.

Before he steps inside, Eric looks back to his car. The Toyota is inconspicuous amongst the other vehicles.

INT. APPLEBEE'S- MOMENTS LATER

Eric surveys the crowded restaurant from his booth. He keeps his eyes trained on the entrance, paranoid.

The kids are occupied by the word search puzzle on their menu. Robin takes the lead, crayon in hand.

ROBIN
I can't find 'chicken', Dad.

Eric's attention is elsewhere. Kevin points to a series of letters that form the word. Robin is jealous.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
How'd you see that?

Kevin shrugs. Eric rises from the booth.

ERIC
I'll be back in a sec, okay?

The kids nod, barely paying attention.

EXT. APPLEBEE'S- MOMENTS LATER

Eric rushes to the car. Exhales when he sees the file, untouched, in the passenger seat. Safe & sound. He unlocks his car and grabs it. Scrambles back inside.

INT. APPLEBEE'S- MOMENTS LATER

Eric takes his seat, tucks the file into his jacket. He leans over to the kids, still entranced by the word search.

ERIC
What's our next word?

INT. CAR- NIGHT

The kids are fast asleep. Eric glances at the children, smiles. His focus shifts to the road. Checks his rearview.

A car is getting awfully close to Eric's. Riding his bumper. Its lights blind him. He can't decipher the make or model.

Is it the Green Sedan again?

Eric slows down, pulls off the road and onto its shoulder.

The vehicle speeds past him. He breathes a sigh of relief. Pulls back onto the road and continues driving.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Eric's predictably buried in the file. WE PUSH IN ON THE TEXT. A series of phrases dart past us -- "no suspects", "four bullets", "headshot", "SIG Sauer".

At the foot of the page, a name: Detective Danny Morales.

There's a picture of the victim: he's blonde. Blue eyes. 20s. Boy next door type. This is MATT JOHNSON.

Eric grabs his cell, dials a number.

OFFICER (O.S.)
8th Precinct.

ERIC
Hi, is Detective Morales in?

OFFICER (O.S.)
Sorry, can you repeat that?

ERIC
I'm looking for Danny Morales.

OFFICER (O.S.)
Morales? No one by that name works here. I'm sorry sir.

ERIC
Can I speak with your supervisor?

A brief pause. Followed by a booming voice...

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
Hello?

ERIC
Hi, I'm looking for Detective Morales.

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
He's no longer with the Department.

ERIC
Who is he with?

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
May I ask who I'm speaking to?

ERIC
I'm a reporter. Cover the crime beat at Newsday. Eric Chandler.

An audible grumble.

SUPERVISOR (O.S.)
This part of another conspiracy?

ERIC

No, I'd just like to ask him a few questions and...

CLICK. The line goes dead. Eric shakes his head, frustrated. Glances at the victim's picture again, the wheels turning...

INT. BRIEFING ROOM, POLICE PLAZA- DAY

Packed to the rafters with reporters. A distinguished DEPUTY, 50, addresses the crowd.

DEPUTY

I'd like to address one more thing. Turn to Page 9 of your packets. You'll find a copy of Commissioner Harris's autopsy report.

Pages turn.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

In light of today's findings by the M.E., we demand that Newsday, who printed an inaccurate and irresponsible story, immediately retract their report. Joel Harris was a member of our family. And we don't like it when people mess with our family.

INT. PARK SLOPE BROWNSTONE, HALLWAY- DAY

Dimly lit. A bit dirty. Eric knocks on an apartment door. Waits. A WOMAN's frightened voice emanates from inside.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Yes?

ERIC

Hi Mrs. Johnson, this is Eric Chandler from Newsday. I'm sorry to bother you but I was wondering if I could have a moment. It's about your son.

WOMAN (O.S.)

What about him?

ERIC

I'd like to ask you a few questions.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Talk to Detective Morales.

ERIC
I can't find him.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Well that makes two of us.

ERIC
Maybe he's given up. But I haven't.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Matt is gone.

ERIC
He is. And I'm sorry for your loss.
But I want to help you find out
why.

A beat. The door swings open.

INT. JOHNSON APARTMENT- MOMENTS LATER

A two bedroom that may as well function as a a mausoleum.
Framed photos of Matt cover the living room wall to wall.

EMMA JOHNSON sets a cup of coffee down in front of Eric.
She's 57, years of baggage evident on her wrinkled face.

EMMA JOHNSON
Fourteen months. That's when
Morales stopped calling. Gave up.

ERIC
It's not right. You deserve
answers.

EMMA JOHNSON
You're the one who will give them
to me?

ERIC
I'll try.

EMMA JOHNSON
What's in it for you?

ERIC
A story.

EMMA JOHNSON

Is that what you care about?
Finding something to splash on the
cover?

ERIC

With all due respect ma'am, it
doesn't matter what I care about.
We want the same thing.

EMMA JOHNSON

Maybe I don't want to know why he
died. Maybe I just want to forget.

Eric looks around the room -- that's clearly not the case.

ERIC

I'd understand.

A beat. And then Emma continues --

EMMA JOHNSON

Things weren't great towards the
end. He had a habit.

ERIC

Drugs?

EMMA JOHNSON

Pills.

ERIC

Which?

EMMA JOHNSON

Any. He wasn't well.

ERIC

I'm sorry.

EMMA JOHNSON

He was paranoid. Always looking
over his shoulder.

ERIC

Who was he afraid of?

EMMA JOHNSON

He would come home filthy.
Covered in soot.

The remark catches Eric off guard.

ERIC

Soot?

EMMA JOHNSON

Don't know what he was doing.

ERIC

Did he have a regular group of friends? People who would know --

EMMA JOHNSON

Just one.

ERIC

And who was that?

INT. CAR- NIGHT

It's late. The clock reads 2:30. Eric's parked on a Manhattan street, across from a run down 24 hour diner.

A man exits. This is DANNY. Late 20s. Bearded.

He proceeds down the block. Eric exits the car in pursuit.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET- CONTINUOUS

Eric crosses the street, walks quickly. Danny moves at a similarly brisk pace. He approaches a subway entrance. CHAMBERS STREET. Proceeds down its steps and out of sight.

INT. CHAMBERS STREET STATION- MOMENTS LATER

Empty. Eerily quiet. The lights are dim.

Danny is nowhere to be found. He's already on the platform.

Eric rushes to the turnstile - realizes he doesn't have a Metrocard. Runs to a machine. Purchases one. Sprints to --

THE PLATFORM.

Danny walks down it, nearing the end.

Eric quietly pursues him. Fifty feet away and getting closer.

Danny reaches the end. Eric's going to catch up with him.

And then, to Eric's disbelief, Danny lowers himself onto the tracks. Walks down them casually.

Where the hell is he going?

Eric looks at a sign ahead:

(6) PELHAM BAY PARK: 8 MINS.

As the clock ticks down to 7 minutes, THE ANNOUNCER'S CHEERY VOICE RINGS OUT.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

An uptown local 6 train approaches
the station in...seven minutes.

Eric considers his options. Scurries to the end of the platform and jumps onto the tracks as well.

INT. SUBWAY TUNNEL- CONTINUOUS

He rushes into the impenetrable darkness. Only makes it a few feet before he steps in a puddle of strange liquid. SPLASH.

He continues to move forward, undaunted.

Danny's figure is barely visible in the distance.

A RUMBLE. DISTANT, BUT LOUD. OMINOUS.

Eric's frightened. Stares ahead. Danny is moving further away, out of his reach. He follows.

A light gust of wind breezes through the tunnel. Eric quickens his pace.

He walks. And walks. Minutes pass. It feels like an eternity.

The MUFFLED, DISEMBODIED VOICE OF THE ANNOUNCER AGAIN...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

An uptown local 6 train approaches
the station in...two minutes.

Eric is nervous. The clock is ticking.

A moment later, he spots a light in the distance. Red-ish hue. Danny cuts left into it. Disappears.

Eric runs toward it.

ANOTHER RUMBLE.

This time, it's not distant at all. The ground shakes.

A SECOND LIGHT emerges on the horizon. It's unbearably bright. It can only be one thing.

A train. And it's coming right at us.

Eric panics. Can he make it to wherever Danny went in time?

The train pushes forward. It's two hundred yards away.

Eric must think fast.

One hundred yards.

The rumble grows into A THUNDEROUS ROAR.

Eric has nowhere to go. He presses his body tightly against the subway wall. He's only a few inches away from the track.

If the train is the slightest bit off center, he'll be in trouble.

CHUG. CHUG. The train is upon us.

Eric shuts his eyes, terrified.

He waits for impact.

But there is none. His body barely escapes this flying hunk of steel. A strong gust of winds flies in his face. And just like that, the train disappears.

Eric bends down, hands on his knees. He takes a second to catch his breath. Continues on toward the light.

He reaches it and finds himself at the edge of a new platform. In a new station. A sign ahead reveals we're in --

INT. CITY HALL STATION- CONTINUOUS

Abandoned for nearly sixty years. The place is well kempt and unusually elegant. Artfully tiled walls, iron chandeliers.

Danny's footsteps ECHO in the distance.

Eric hoists himself onto the empty platform. It's painful. He pauses a moment to rub his shoulder. Looks at his clothes. *They're covered in soot.*

He wipes himself down, and ascends a set of stairs. A door slam shut. It's labeled MAINTENANCE.

Eric presses his ear to the door. Can't hear a thing. It's too late to turn back now. He turns the knob and enters --

INT. MAINTENANCE ROOM- CONTINUOUS

-- where he finds four men, Danny included, staring at him.

They're sitting at a table, laptops open - alongside innumerable hard drives & other devices. A complex setup.

ONE OF THE MEN GRABS THE DOUBLE BARREL SHOTGUN AT HIS SIDE. POINTS IT AT ERIC.

The others rise, startled. Their eyes shift to Danny - he's the alpha male here. Eric raises his hands, a bit panicked.

ERIC
Hey. Hey. It's okay.

DANNY
Who the fuck are you?

ERIC
I'm a reporter. Drop the gun.
Please. Here. Look.

He slowly lowers his right hand. Reaches into his shirt pocket. Retrieves a Newsday ID. Flashes it at the men.

DANNY
What's that supposed to prove? They can easily make a dummy paper ID.

ERIC
They?

DANNY
Are you working for them?

ERIC
I'm a writer for Newsday, and I --

DANNY
How long have they known about this place?

ERIC
Please, just lower the gun.

DANNY
How did you find us?

ERIC
I followed you. From the diner.

DANNY
You're alone...?

ERIC
Yes. I swear.

DANNY
Why are you here?

ERIC
Matt Johnson. I'm working on a
story. I want to know why he died.

There's a look of confusion on Danny's face at the mention of
Matt's name. Some vulnerability. Paranoia slowly recedes.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I'm just grabbing my wallet.

Eric reaches into his pocket. Tosses the wallet to Danny.

ERIC (CONT'D)
It's all there. License, business
cards. Just drop the gun.

Danny inspects it all. After a long silence, he nods. Sold.
This guy is okay. The gunman lowers his weapon.

DANNY
You have my attention.

ERIC
Who wanted to hurt him?

DANNY
The last few weeks were different.
We shared everything.

ERIC
He stopped talking.

DANNY
Yes.

ERIC
About what?

DANNY
Our work.

ERIC
What is it that you do here?

DANNY
(paranoia rising again)
I thought we were talking about
Matt.

ERIC
We are.

DANNY
Then none of those questions.

ERIC
Forget it. Sorry.

DANNY
He started a new project.

ERIC
A hack?

DANNY
I didn't say that.

ERIC
Didn't deny it either. What was he
hacking?

DANNY
I'm not sure.

ERIC
And then he was gone.

Danny nods.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Have you checked his computer?

DANNY
Can't. It's at his house. Mrs.
Johnson...she thinks I'm
responsible.

Before he can process any sort of guilt, a switch flips...

DANNY (CONT'D)
She doesn't understand the forces
we're contending with. The people
that are out there watching,
waiting for us to slip up...

ERIC
Who are these forces?

DANNY
If you get the laptop, I'll get you
what you need.

ERIC
How do I know I can trust you?

Danny motions to their surroundings.

DANNY
You know our secret.

Eric is cornered. What other options does he have?

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

Eric's soot covered clothes are scattered across the floor. He's fast asleep -- until he's awoken by A SCREECH, followed by the sound of rustling.

He sits upright, unnerved. Then...A WHIMPER.

This time, its cadence is recognizable. As he rises from bed -

ERIC
Damnit, Molly.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Eric heads for the door, a bowl of tuna in hand. He swings it open to find --

MOLLY, at his doorstep. She's hemorrhaging blood.

Those weren't cries of hunger. They were whimpers of death.

This was no accident either. There's a deep, precise laceration on Molly's side. Perhaps a knife wound.

Eric looks around. There's no one in sight. He takes Molly in his arms, tries to sooth her as the life fades from her eyes.

Blood seeps onto his hands --

CUT TO:

A bright red tie, in a perfect Windsor knot, as its fastened.

INT. BEDROOM- DAY

Eric is in a three piece suit. He brushes a barely visible piece of lint from his jacket, self conscious.

INT. JOHNSON APARTMENT- DAY

Eric greets Emma with a friendly nod, unsure if a handshake or hug is appropriate. Takes a seat on the couch with her.

EMMA JOHNSON
You look nice.

ERIC
Thank you.

EMMA JOHNSON
Have somewhere fancy to be?

ERIC
Custody hearing.

EMMA JOHNSON
I'm sorry.

ERIC
I need to ask you for something.

EMMA JOHNSON
Okay --

ERIC
Matt's laptop.

EMMA JOHNSON
Why?

ERIC
It would really help.

EMMA JOHNSON
The police already went through it.

ERIC
I'd like to take a look for myself.

EMMA JOHNSON
You spoke to Danny?

ERIC
Not yet. Went to the diner but he
wasn't working.

EMMA JOHNSON
He's been trying to get his hands
on the thing for a year.

ERIC
I had no idea.

EMMA JOHNSON
If there was something there, they
would have found it.

ERIC

Last year, there were these guys, three of 'em, on a home invasion spree in Suffolk. Would hold housewives at knife point when the kids were in school and the husbands at work. Make off with electronics, jewelry, the works. One day, they hold up this woman. Scare her half to death. Cops come to the place, catalogue what's missing. I talk to her a few hours later. Mentions she heard one of the perps on her computer. What he was doing - she has no clue.

A dramatic pause. Emma is engaged.

ERIC (CONT'D)

And she says the cops checked it for prints. I asked if they turned the damn thing on. She doesn't know. We walk over to her study. Power on the computer. Check the browser history. The idiot was googling the nearest Home Depot. Needed lumber, a hammer, who knows what. I tell the cops. They get security footage from the store. The guys are in custody 24 hours later.

EMMA JOHNSON

So you were the hero.

ERIC

Just used my head. You trust those guys with Matt's computer?

Emma's caving. There's palpable doubt on her face...

EXT. NASSAU FAMILY COURTHOUSE- DAY

A fairly plain looking building. From it emerge broken families - single mothers, deadbeat dads, children too young to understand why they're here. Cops mill about.

INT. CAR- DAY

Eric lingers in his seat, Matt's laptop in front of him. He punches keys. Finds a file: password protected.

Removes a piece of paper from his pocket. Password combinations, courtesy of Danny. He punches them in.

After a few unsuccessful tries --

A FILE OPENS. IT'S A DOCUMENT. CIA STATIONERY.

Eric stares at the page.

His attention wavers when he hears A BURST OF LAUGHTER behind him. A gaggle of police officers stroll through the parking lot, just feet away from Eric's car.

He shuts the laptop. The officers pass. He reopens it.

The document contains 4 names. Nothing else.

SOLOMON FISHER. OMAR HABIB. FREDERICK BAGROV. RAJ DHAWAN

Eric stares at it, puzzled. Grabs his cell & dials a number.

ERIC
Hey. I need a favor.

INT. FAMILY COURTROOM- DAY

An intimate room, which only makes this more uncomfortable. Eric sits next to Todd Hollander; Amanda is with her counsel, REBECCA GREEN. 45. Intelligent.

Roger occupies the first row of the gallery. He and Eric lock eyes. Roger nods pleasantly, with gratitude. Excited.

JUDGE BAKER, 62, presides over the hearing. He's either sleepy, disinterested, or both. Flips through a file.

JUDGE BAKER
Any motions before we begin?
(silence)
Mr. Chandler. Six months ago, you petitioned The Court for joint custody.

ERIC
(rises)
Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE BAKER
And you're here seeking that today?

ERIC
Yes, Your Honor. I am.

Roger is in total disbelief. What is going on?

JUDGE BAKER

At your last hearing, you were in between residences. It says here that you have secured a two bedroom apartment.

Eric nods.

JUDGE BAKER (CONT'D)

And in conjunction with the requests of the Court, the apartment is properly furnished and suitable for the children?

Todd rises, motions for Eric to take his seat. It's his turn.

TODD HOLLANDER

Your honor, we've included photos of the apartment and the children's room. My client has complied with all of the courts demands. We see no reason why --

Rebecca jumps out of her seat, interrupts --

REBECCA GREEN

We're not convinced that the apartment is a suitable home for the children, bedding or not.

JUDGE BAKER

Proceed.

REBECCA GREEN

Just days ago, Mr. Chandler found a bullet in his mailbox. He accosted my client in the middle of the night to accuse her of planting it there. This is not a healthy environment.

Eric shakes his head, knew this was coming.

TODD HOLLANDER

My client has already acknowledged that this was a harmless and senseless practical joke perpetrated by a friend. Eric has spoken to the man. It won't happen again. This is a non issue.

REBECCA GREEN

What kind of community does Mr. Chandler live in where this type of behavior is okay?

TODD HOLLANDER

A reputable and safe one. The children would only benefit from spending time there.

JUDGE BAKER

Mr. Chandler, I'd like to hear from you directly.

ERIC

It was a stupid prank. If I thought there was the slightest chance the kids weren't safe, I wouldn't be here. I protect them. Always.

JUDGE BAKER

This hearing -- forgive me for speaking so plainly -- was supposed to be a formality. If you met the requirements specified by the court, we'd have a trial period of joint custody. Now, I'm uncertain.

ERIC

Please, Your Honor. I've done everything you've asked. I've waited so long.

REBECCA GREEN

You're right to have reservations, Judge. As do we. At this juncture, it's only prudent that we keep Kevin and Robin where they are.

JUDGE BAKER

I'll decide what's prudent, Ms. Green.

REBECCA GREEN

Of course, Your Honor.

The Judge takes a moment. Eric stirs in his seat.

JUDGE BAKER

In light of recent developments, I won't sanction a standard trial period of six months.

He's crushed. Until --

JUDGE BAKER (CONT'D)

However, I do believe Mr. Chandler will provide the children with a safe, loving home. I'll grant a trial period of joint custody for eight weeks, at which point we will reconvene and assess the situation. No more pranks, Mr. Chandler. I won't be so forgiving next time.

Eric can't suppress his smile. He's thrilled.

INT. COURTHOUSE LOBBY- MOMENTS LATER

Eric and Roger argue heatedly in a corner of the foyer. Eric's desperately trying to avoid a scene.

ROGER

What the hell was that? You gave me your word.

ERIC

Look, I'm sorry. They're my kids. I could never...

ROGER

This is bullshit. I should...

ERIC

Should what? You tell anyone you gave me that file and you're in deeper shit than I am.

Roger shakes his head, but he knows Eric is right.

ERIC (CONT'D)

When can I see them?

ROGER

Saturday. Afternoon.

ERIC

We'll make this work. It'll be good for the kids. For all of us.

ROGER

Since when do you give a shit about anyone other than yourself?

Roger storms away. Eric reaches into his pocket. Turns on his cell. He has five missed calls from Frank. Something's up.

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

Karen taps her finely manicured nails against her desk, anxious. There's a manila folder in front of her.

She breathes a sigh of relief when Eric makes his way into the bullpen. Grabs the folder and approaches him.

KAREN

You need to see this.

ERIC

Just give me two minutes.

Eric continues walking, heads straight for Frank's office. Karen grabs him by the arm. He stops. She leans in, quietly --

KAREN

The names you gave me -- these guys have something in common.

ERIC

What's that?

KAREN

They're all dead.

ERIC

You're kidding.

KAREN

Same pattern. Four GSW's. One headshot. Mark of a pro.

Eric snatches the folder from her hands, flips through it.

ERIC

They find casings?

KAREN

Barely. A few SIG shells.

ERIC

Of course.

KAREN

This isn't local. Only one in the tristate. Others in Atlanta, Salt Lake City, and Dearborn.

ERIC

Thank you for this.

Karen nods dutifully. There's a look of concern on her face.

KAREN
Be careful.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- DAY

Frank paces around his desk, exasperated. There's an EXECUTIVE on speakerphone. The conversation isn't going well.

EXECUTIVE (O.S.)
We're not the fucking Post. We have standards. We need to back up the shit we print.

FRANK BLAINE
Who do you think upholds those standards? I do. Every goddamn day.

EXECUTIVE (O.S.)
You're doing an excellent job.

FRANK BLAINE
You need to give me some rope here.

EXECUTIVE (O.S.)
We've done the best we can.

Eric opens the door and enters. Shuts the door behind him. Frank moves his finger to his lips - "be quiet".

FRANK BLAINE
One more week.

EXECUTIVE (O.S.)
That's not something the Board is comfortable with.

FRANK BLAINE
Is the Board comfortable with a Pulitzer? Because that's what we'll end up with if we're allowed to do our jobs --

EXECUTIVE (O.S.)
I'm sorry, Frank. That's our final decision.

Frank slams the receiver down. Shifts his focus to Eric.

FRANK BLAINE
You've got 72 hours.

ERIC
You're kidding me.

FRANK BLAINE

Corporate is beyond pissed. The Times ad was bad. It's about to get worse.

A beat.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)

In three days, there's going to be a media blitz from the PBA and The New York Association for Police Officers. They'll picket the building. Make rounds on the local news shows.

ERIC

Let them do what they want. It'll only make 'em look like bigger assholes when we publish.

FRANK BLAINE

I fought this one. I did.

ERIC

It's not over.

FRANK BLAINE

Corporate's call. You've got until Monday morning.

ERIC

What happens then?

FRANK BLAINE

We retract. And apologize. Corporate gets rid of you by lunch to save face.

ERIC

This is bullshit. They wouldn't hang us out to dry like that.

FRANK BLAINE

Yeah. They would.

ERIC

This thing is big. It's not a Long Island thing, it's not even an NYPD thing...we have a national story.

FRANK BLAINE

They say they've got 8,000 of ours lined up, ready to cancel their subscriptions. That's big.

ERIC

If we nail this, we'll double our audience overnight. 8,000 will look like peanuts.

FRANK BLAINE

Board doesn't want to take the chance.

(a beat)

Go. You're on the clock. Let's get something to shut them up.

Eric nods. He's daunted, frightened... but determined.

PRELAP --

ERIC (O.S.)

How good are you at what you do?

INT. MAINTENANCE ROOM- NIGHT

Eric stands behind Danny, who mans Matt's laptop. The hacker is supremely focused, taps keys without a word.

DANNY

The best.

The CIA stationary reappears. The four names.

ERIC

How hard is it to hack into the CIA's database?

DANNY

For most hackers, impossible. But I'm not most hackers.

ERIC

They've got case files on these guys. We figure out the connection, we'll understand why Matt was killed.

Danny opens a program on the computer. Stares at the screen. Hesitates. Then starts coding. His cronies do the same.

DANNY

You may want to sit down. Takes longer than five minutes to hack into the server.

ERIC

How long do you need?

DANNY
 Nine, maybe ten hours.

ERIC
 I'll be back.

DANNY
 Something more important to do?

ERIC
 You do your work. I'll do mine.

INT. CAR- MOMENTS LATER

Eric weaves through traffic on the George Washington Bridge.

In the passenger seat - a page from Karen's file. Background on Omar Habib, one of the names listed on the CIA document. WE PUSH IN ON OMAR'S PHOTO. His piercing stare...

EXT. HABIB RESIDENCE- NIGHT

A duplex in a dicey neighborhood. Eric is in the midst of a conversation with MIRA HABIB, 58. She wears a burka.

ERIC
 I know it's late, but if I could have two minutes --

MIRA HABIB
 I can't.

ERIC
 Please. I want to help you.

MIRA HABIB
 There's nothing to be done.

ERIC
 There is.

MIRA HABIB
 We must make peace. Goodnight.

Mira tries to shut the door. Eric instinctively places his foot in its path, stops her. She recoils, frightened.

ERIC
 Why was your son killed?

He takes a step back to ease Mira's worry.

MIRA HABIB
Please stop.

ERIC
Who wanted to hurt him?

MIRA HABIB
Enough of this. I didn't know.

ERIC
Didn't know what?

MIRA HABIB
Don't know. Don't know. Sometimes
my English...

ERIC
That's not what you meant.

MIRA HABIB
I'm going to bed.

ERIC
I need answers.

MIRA HABIB
I told him everything.

ERIC
Him?

MIRA HABIB
Leave. Now.

ERIC
Who did you tell?

Eric grabs his phone from his pocket. Pulls up a picture of
Joel Harris. Holds it in front of Mira for inspection.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Is that who you spoke to?

Mira doesn't say it, but her eyes betray the answer: yes.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Do you know what happened to this
man? He was killed. I can stop --

MIRA HABIB
I said nothing. Leave or I'll call
police.

The door slams shut.

INT. MAINTENANCE ROOM- NIGHT

Danny and his colleagues are still hard at work. They show no signs of wear, accustomed to ten hour shifts at the computer. They don't even bother to look up when Eric enters the room.

ERIC
Any of you have kids?

It's an odd question. The men are silent. Answer is clear.

DANNY
Too late for small talk.

ERIC
It's not -- what would a kid have
to do for you to disown them?

The man who held Eric at gunpoint mutters a response. Let's call him SHOTGUN.

DANNY	SHOTGUN
Fuck up my computer?	Bomb a marathon?

ERIC (CONT'D)
Seriously.
(beat)
Wait. What did you say?

DANNY
I'm messing around.

Eric walks toward Shotgun with curiosity.

SHOTGUN
...bomb a marathon?

ERIC
No shit. Habib was born in
Jersey...

DANNY
Correct.

ERIC
Ever travel overseas? Mideast,
Europe?

DANNY
Not that I know of.

ERIC
What about the others?

DANNY
Same thing. Good old American boys.

ERIC
Any connections to radical groups?

DANNY
We don't know.

Eric's lost in thought. Slowly returns to his seat.

ERIC
How far are we?

DANNY
Need a few more hours.

ERIC
Can we try to move a little faster?

Danny stops typing, shoots Eric a look that makes him squirm.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Okay. Sorry.

Eric rests his head on the wall behind him. Shuts his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

HOURS LATER. Eric wakes with a start.

Danny and his team are finally beginning to show signs of fatigue. They're slumped in their seats, eyelids heavy.

DANNY
Almost there.

WE PUSH IN on his laptop display...

THE LOGO OF THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY APPEARS, AS DO A DOZEN FOLDERS.

Danny lets out an exasperated whoop.

DANNY (CONT'D)
We're in.

Eric leans over Danny's shoulder. There are files all over the screen. It's hard to know where to even begin.

ERIC
Fuck.

He points to something. Danny enlarges it. Habib's file. There's one sentence in particular that catches the eye.

SUSPECTED AFFILIATION: AL QAEDA

Beneath are detailed notes of Habib's meetings and contacts.

Onto Solomon's file. SUSPECTED AFFILIATION: HEZBOLLAH

Frederick's. SUSPECTED AFFILIATION: CAUCASUS EMIRATE

Raj's. SUSPECTED AFFILIATION: AL QAEDA.

DANNY

They killed them. Matt knew it.

ERIC

So did Harris.

DANNY

Who's Harris?

ERIC

Ex cop.

DANNY

Is he...okay?

ERIC

They made it look like a suicide.

Concern on the faces of Shotgun and the others. Eric plugs a USB into Matt's computer. Transfers the files onto it.

DANNY

And now we know.

ERIC

Now we know. And we're gonna' nail them.

DANNY

Nobody will believe us.

ERIC

They will.

DANNY

Why?

ERIC

Because I don't work for the fucking Post. My paper has standards. People trust us.

DANNY

Sure hope so.

Danny returns to the computer. Sifts through a host of other documents on Matt's laptop - classified NSA and FBI files.

ERIC

What's this? We got what we needed.

DANNY

You got what you needed. We're not done.

ERIC

Yes, you are.

DANNY

Go write your story.

ERIC

I want Matt's computer.

DANNY

We'll be holding onto it.

ERIC

Why?

DANNY

There were other projects he worked on. Documents he obtained. Things that will cause a ripple.

ERIC

We're already causing a shitstorm. The Bureau and the NSA didn't kill your friend.

DANNY

Maybe not.

ERIC

So let them be.

DANNY

What is it you think we did here before you barged into this room?

ERIC

I don't know.

DANNY

Because you didn't ask. You waited until you got what you wanted, and then you suddenly grew a conscience. Isn't that cute.

Eric removes his USB from Matt's laptop. Slams the screen shut. Danny laughs, reopens the laptop and resumes his work.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Pandora's Box is open. You can't just expect us to pack up and go home now.

ERIC

So what's the plan?

DANNY

That's no longer your concern.

ERIC

Out a few undercovers? Disable our cyber-defenses? Sell government secrets to the highest bidder?

DANNY

Something like that.

ERIC

That's not gonna happen.

DANNY

What are you gonna do about it?

Eric eyes Shotgun's trusty weapon, which rests in the corner. Shotgun rises from his chair, alarmed by the furtive glance.

They have the same thought. BOTH MAKE A MAD DASH FOR THE GUN.

Eric grabs it a millisecond before Shotgun. Trains it on him.

Danny keeps typing. Barely glances in Eric's direction.

ERIC

It doesn't have to be this way. Shut it down and hand it over.

DANNY

No.

Without a moment's hesitation --

ERIC FIRES A ROUND at Matt's computer. It shatters. Fragments of metal fly in Danny's face. He's bleeding. And angry.

ERIC
 (mutters)
 Oh, fuck. I didn't mean -- I
 couldn't let you...

DANNY
 Shit.

Danny's men rush to his side, inspect the wounds. He slams his fist against the table. Eric backs toward the exit.

SHOTGUN
 That was a very stupid thing to do.

INT. CITY HALL STATION- MOMENTS LATER

Eric empties the shotgun with difficulty as he rushes down the platform. He pockets the bullets, tosses the weapon onto the tracks.

INT. SUBWAY TUNNEL- MOMENTS LATER

THE PITTER-PATTER OF FOOTSTEPS. Eric sprints into the tunnel, a relentless dash into the black hole.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET- DAY

Eric is nearly blinded by the sunlight as he emerges from the Chambers Street station. His cell BEEPS. A flood of messages. Voicemails and missed calls from: Amanda.

AMANDA (O.S.)
 You're already late. Great start --

Shit. Eric hangs up, darts across the street to his car.

EXT. AMANDA'S HOUSE- DAY

Roger is at the front door. He's not happy to see Eric.

ROGER
 What do you mean you can't take
 them? This is what you wanted...

ERIC
 Please stay with them.

ROGER
 Tell me what's going on.

ERIC
Just watch them. I'll call when I
can. When it's clear.

ROGER
"When it's clear"...

ERIC
...and arm the security system.

Roger's demeanor shifts. He's more frightened than angry.

ROGER
Why? Who's coming?

ERIC
Nobody. Just be vigilant.

ROGER
I need more than that.

ERIC
I'm asking for your help.

ROGER
Is this about the file?
(silence betrays 'yes')
I should have never given it to
you.

ERIC
They want me. Just me.

ROGER
"They"? You sound like a --

ERIC
I need to know that you'll keep
Robin & Kev safe. Promise me.

ROGER
Of course.

ERIC
Everything will be fine. Just tell
them --

Robin and Kevin appear in the doorway, bags packed, ready for
the first sleepover. Eric's expression softens. He hugs them.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hey guys.

KEVIN
We're ready.

ERIC
I've got some bad news. Something came up at work and I can't -- I'm sorry. You guys need to stay with Mom and Roger.

Palpable disappointment.

KEVIN
When are you coming back?

ERIC
Soon. Really soon. Everything's ready too. Your room's all set, I got the mac & cheese you like -- the one with the Spongebob shapes. And as soon as you walk inside, there will be presents waiting for you. Hold on a few more days...then we'll be home.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- DAY

Dark. Eerily quiet. Eric enters. He grabs his laptop and a few files. Tucks them under his arm. Exits with haste.

INT. CAR- DAY

Eric speeds down an intersection, GPS navigating him, when his cell RINGS. The caller ID reads "Unknown". He answers.

ERIC
Chandler.

DANNY (O.S.)
Intersection of Wantagh & Jerusalem. Where are we headed?

Eric's eyes dart to the street signs in front of him. Wantagh & Jerusalem.

ERIC
What do you want?

DANNY (O.S.)
You hurt me.

Eric makes a u-turn and quickly changes direction.

ERIC
And I'm sorry about that.

DANNY (O.S.)
It's time I repay the favor.

ERIC
Where are you?

The line goes dead. Eric stares at the phone, confounded. He pulls into a convenience store parking lot. Exits the car...

EXT. CAR- CONTINUOUS

...and stomps on the phone until it's just bits and pieces.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE- MOMENTS LATER

Eric tosses a pair of disposable cell phones on the counter. Hands the cashier a wad of cash.

INT. CAR- MOMENTS LATER

He reverses out of the parking lot. The GPS reactivates, guides him to his destination. Another device tracking him. Eric stops the car. Exits.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE- MOMENTS LATER

Eric presses the burner to his ear. He stands inside the store, behind its glass. Slightly protected. Sheltered.

ERIC
I need a cab to 141 Jerusalem. Now.

He waits, stares at each car that enters the lot. Are they coming for him?

EXT. RAMADA INN- SUNSET

A two star motel. Nobody stays here by choice. A cab slows to a halt in front of the entrance. Eric exits with his laptop.

INT. ERIC'S MOTEL ROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Eric takes a seat in front of a generic, wood paneled desk.

He opens his computer. It's time to work.

But first, he moves to the coffee pot stationed atop his mini fridge. Fills it.

MONTAGE --

- Eric peruses a series of articles. The CIA's targeted killing program. Debates. Legal opinions. One headline:

ATTORNEY GENERAL: US GOVT. HAS AUTHORITY TO TARGET & KILL US CITIZENS ON AMERICAN SOIL

- The coffee pot is full. Eric pours its contents into a cup. Doesn't even take a sip before he starts brewing more.

- A blank white screen. Eric takes a deep breath. Types.

- He stands in front of the window, keeping watch. Monitors the guests comings and goings.

- Eric's still typing. Completely focused. In the zone. He reaches the last sentence. Finishes it.

- He's rereading, and beaming. Thrilled with his work.

END MONTAGE.

The following morning.

Eric's in a t-shirt and boxers. Hasn't shaved or eaten. He's parked in front of the computer, editing the article.

He reaches the last sentence. Nods approvingly.

INT. BATHROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Steam clouds the room. Eric emerges from the shower. Wipes down a fogged up mirror. Gazes at his reflection. Smiles.

He opens the door.

INT. ERIC'S MOTEL ROOM- CONTINUOUS

A very strange sight. He looks across the room to find --

A MAN, HUNCHED OVER HIS COMPUTER. Danny? Shotgun?

THE BATHROOM DOOR CREAKS.

THE MAN SPINS AROUND. He's 40. Clean cut. A stranger to us.

He locks eyes with Eric AND REACHES FOR A HOLSTERED WEAPON.

Eric charges at him, full speed. Spears the man into the wall. The gun flies out of reach.

The Man recovers. Raises his elbow and pummels it into Eric's back. Eric recoils in pain.

The Man delivers a right hook. A left jab.

He knows how to fight. Eric returns with a few weak punches.

The Man blocks them with ease. He's toying with Eric, circles him like prey. He's ready to deliver a crushing blow when --

HE SLIPS ON THE LAPTOP'S THICK POWER CORD. Loses his balance.

Eric seizes the opportunity. HE SPEARS THE MAN DIRECTLY INTO THE SIDE OF THE DESK. THE MAN'S SKULL SLAMS AGAINST IT. HARD.

A sickening thud, followed by a deafening silence.

The Man drops to the floor, unconscious.

Eric backs away, frightened. What the hell did he just do?

He fishes through The Man's pockets. Finds an ID.

PHILLIP WALKER, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

Panic. Eric retrieves the gun from the floor.

THERE'S A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

VOICE (O.S.)
Mr. Chandler?

Eric moves to the peephole. He sees TWO MEN. Suits. They're flanked by A CLERK, a set of keys in his hand.

Eric runs across the room to the window - it's bolted shut.

He's trapped. ANOTHER KNOCK. More forceful this time.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Mr. Chandler, open up.

Eric grabs Walker's body and drags it into the bathroom.

It's only then that he spots a POOL OF BLOOD underneath Walker's skull. It has congealed on the carpet.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Mr. Chandler, we're coming in.

Eric rushes to his laptop. It wasn't tampered with...yet. He sets the gun down. Uploads a series of file to a server.

The SCRATCH of a key entering a keyhole.

Eric ejects the USB drive.

He looks around the room for a hiding spot. Rushes to the dresser. Reaches behind it.

The doorknob turns.

Eric lodges the USB in its recesses, and then --

TWO MEN BURST INTO THE ROOM, GUNS DRAWN. They swarm.

AGENT FOX, 45, takes the lead. His partner, AGENT CARROLL, trails behind him.

AGENT FOX

Freeze. Put your hands above your head. Now.

Fox throws Eric against the wall with force. Frisks him.

Agent Carroll empties the gun next to the computer. He moves to the bathroom. Finds his colleague's lifeless body.

AGENT CARROLL

Oh shit. Walker.

ERIC

It's not what you think.

Agent Carroll's expression says it all. Walker is dead.

ERIC (CONT'D)

He tried to kill me. I tackled him. I didn't know it would -- I didn't mean to. I swear to you.

Fox presses the barrel of his gun against Eric's temple.

AGENT FOX

Stop talking and sit down. Now. If you disobey a single command, I will kill you.

Eric nods, follows the order. He takes a seat. The laptop is a foot away from him. His article is still on the screen.

Agent Fox seizes the computer and begins to read the piece.

AGENT FOX (CONT'D)
My name is Agent Fox.
(motions to his partner)
This is Agent Carroll.

Fox doesn't lift his eyes from the screen. Still reading. He smirks, amused by something in the article.

ERIC
You want to give me a quote for it?
Could really give the article some
color.

AGENT FOX
I think I'll pass.

ERIC
How did I do? Capture it all?

AGENT FOX
Not too bad.

ERIC
Why kill them? Why not try them,
lock them up? Ship them off to
Guantanamo...

AGENT FOX
Every war has its phases. This is a
new one. A more aggressive
approach.

ERIC
Am I gonna be the latest victim of
the aggressive approach?

AGENT FOX
Not exactly.

ERIC
Sell it as a suicide, maybe a car
accident...

AGENT FOX
There are always options. And you
have two of them.

Agent Fox is done reading. He places the laptop in front of Eric, inches from his grasp. Taunting him.

AGENT FOX (CONT'D)
You want to send this thing to your
editor? Get it in tomorrow's paper?

ERIC

Yes.

AGENT FOX

You can do that. You can press a few little buttons. Go for it.

Eric reaches for the keyboard, reluctantly. Is this some kind of trick? His question is answered when --

AGENT FOX (CONT'D)

Hit send, and we're going to take you into custody for the murder of an officer of the Central Intelligence Agency. Your arrest will not be publicized, nor will any statement you're stupid enough to make. For all intents and purposes, you will enter a black hole. You'll have your day in court, but you'll be tried by a military tribunal. Closed courtroom. If you're lucky, you'll spend the rest of your miserable life in a maximum security facility and never see your children outside of a glass box.

ERIC

It was self defense. Forensics will prove that.

He flashes defensive wounds on his arms. Cuts and scratches.

AGENT FOX

Forensics won't change the fact that Walker is dead and his blood is on your hands.

(a pause, rehearsed)

Agent Walker came to question you regarding accusations you were preparing to print in your newspaper. You're a desperate man. An unstable one. Didn't get your dream job and can barely hold onto your kids. You're a heavy drinker. You've been paranoid. Volatile. Hell, you threatened to assault your wife's boyfriend just this past week. An upstanding officer of the law.

ERIC

How do you know --

AGENT FOX

You panicked. Walker wound up dead.

ERIC

This is bullshit. What about the article?

AGENT FOX

We'll speak to your editor. Implore him to trash the piece. If he trusts you enough to run this drivel, we'll deny it. It's the work of a desperate, attention hungry drunk.

ERIC

There will be blow back. A shitstorm. You'll be held accountable.

AGENT FOX

Someone will fall on the sword. There will be 'an internal review'. A 'far reaching investigation'...

ERIC

Yes.

AGENT FOX

...but the program will continue to function as is. Nothing will change.

ERIC

That's where you're wrong. Everything will change.

AGENT FOX

Perhaps. For a few weeks. Maybe even a few months. And then it's back to business as usual.

ERIC

They'll remember what I wrote. Study it. Might even teach it.

AGENT FOX

Don't flatter yourself.

ERIC

They'll give me a Pulitzer. A place in history.

AGENT FOX
...a place in history?

ERIC
Yes.

AGENT FOX
You think that will make your kids feel better when you're in prison? It sure won't tuck 'em in at night, see 'em drive for the first time, go to college, get married...

Eric stares a hole into Fox. He's right.

AGENT FOX (CONT'D)
Now don't you want to see what's behind door number two?

(pause)
I'll take that as a yes. We'll take care of Agent Walker's body, and in return, you'll give us everything you have. Every file. Every contact. Every scrap of paper. You will fill in every little detail until we are satisfied. And then we'll go our separate ways.

ERIC
And what -- I'll walk into work and tell my editor to just...forget this one? Onto the next story...

AGENT FOX
You'll tell him the truth.

ERIC
We have different versions of the truth.

AGENT FOX
You fabricated the Harris murder story. There was no source. No Deep Throat. You were desperate and you made it up. You planted that bullet in your mailbox. The night of the accident, you were drinking...as usual.

ERIC
The police report won't jive. I didn't have a drop --

AGENT FOX
That can be fixed.

Fox shoots Eric a look as if to say "any more questions?"

AGENT FOX (CONT'D)
You'll issue a formal apology that will run in Monday's edition, pack up your stuff, and leave the paper. That is how this ends.

ERIC
As simple as that?

AGENT FOX
Yes.

ERIC
You'll keep following me.

AGENT FOX
We will.

ERIC
Until when?

AGENT FOX
Until we're satisfied. Once you leave the paper, you won't ever speak of this again. If you say a word, or even drop a hint, you will be killed. Your body will never be found. Your children will think that you've abandoned them. And that will be their final memory of their father.

(a beat)
So Mr. Chandler, what would you like to do?

TIGHT ON ERIC -- trapped, his world crashing down...

ERIC
Let me show you the files.

EXT. RAMADA INN- NIGHT

Agents Fox and Carroll force a heavy, human sized black bag into the trunk. Not too difficult to guess what's inside.

AGENT FOX (V.O.)
What about the backups?

ERIC (V.O.)
They're hosted on a server.
Encrypted. Password protected.

INT. ERIC'S MOTEL ROOM- NIGHT

The bed is tossed. Drawers are open. The agents have stripped the place clean to ensure Eric isn't hiding anything.

CUT TO:

THE USB. It rests on a small patch of carpet behind the dresser, untouched. Barely visible to the naked eye.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Similarly ransacked. Clutter everywhere. Eric sits on the couch, waits. Fox emerges from his bedroom.

AGENT FOX

Good.

INT. SUBWAY TUNNEL- NIGHT

A pair of flashlights probe the darkness.

INT. MAINTENANCE ROOM- NIGHT

There are no computers, hard drives. Danny and his group have evidently moved on. They were prepared for this.

AGENT FOX

Don't worry. They can't run far.

CUT TO:

A computer screen. We're on the server Eric was referring to. All of his files & notes are deleted, erased from existence.

EXT. FAIRFIELD APARTMENT COMPLEX- DAWN

Agent Fox's sedan rolls to a stop in front of Eric's apartment. He exits, trudges toward it.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Eric is finally alone, but still terrified. Feels as if he's being watched. He disassembles every piece of electronic equipment in his home. Phone. Television. The works.

When he's finished, he sits on the couch. A moment of quiet contemplation.

INT. CAR- SUNRISE

Eric speeds down a local road. Checks his rearview.

There's a car very obviously following him, 100 feet away. Eric locks eyes with THE TAIL, who gives him a courteous nod.

EXT. NEWSDAY OFFICE- MOMENTS LATER

Eric takes slow, hesitant steps. Looks over his shoulder. The Tail is parked across the street, watching.

INT. BULLPEN- DAYS

Staffers are socializing, trading stories of the weekend. The office is full of life. Eric trudges past them.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- MOMENTS LATER

A KNOCK. Eric enters with a piece of paper in hand.

FRANK BLAINE

It's D Day. What do you have for me? Let's print.

Eric's at a loss for words. Glances at Frank's cell phone, the tiny webcam on his computer. Other devices in the room. Are they listening?

He reluctantly hands the paper to his boss. Takes a seat.

Frank scans it for a moment. His expression darkens.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)

What is this?

ERIC

My resignation.

FRANK BLAINE

This is a joke.

ERIC

No.

FRANK BLAINE

It must be.

ERIC

I'm sorry.

Frank keeps reading. We can almost hear his heart breaking.

FRANK BLAINE

This isn't -- no. Harris was my friend. You made me believe --

ERIC

I can't excuse what I've done.

FRANK BLAINE

But you were almost killed. You said you were in danger. The accident...

ERIC

I had too much to drink. It was dark. The road took a sharp turn. It was my fault.

FRANK BLAINE

No. This can't be.

ERIC

I can, uh, pack up pretty quickly. Need an hour or two.

FRANK BLAINE

How could you?

ERIC

I'll speak to The Board. Tell them you had nothing to do with this.

FRANK BLAINE

You had to know you'd be exposed.

ERIC

There's nothing I can say to make up --

FRANK BLAINE

Tell me. Why?

ERIC

I'm sorry. I'll get my things.

He rises from his seat. With a thunderous tenor in his voice -

FRANK BLAINE

SIT.

(Eric sits.)

I want an explanation. You owe me that.

Eric directs his gaze to the Pulitzer on Frank's wall.

ERIC

I wanted to be noticed.

Frank rises from his desk, violently pulls the Prize off of its hinges and slams it on the desk in front of Eric.

FRANK BLAINE

Take it. It's the closest you'll ever come to touching one. And enjoy the newsroom while you're at it. You won't step foot in one of those again.

ERIC

I know I won't.

This blow is particularly painful. Eric bows his head. Frank sees the hurt. His anger softens to colossal disappointment.

FRANK BLAINE

Sixteen years building this paper's reputation.

ERIC

You've done incredible work.

FRANK BLAINE

It doesn't matter anymore.

ERIC

Don't say that.

FRANK BLAINE

Tried to separate us from the gossip rags. To give us credibility. And then this.

ERIC

I'm sorry.

A silence. It feels like an eternity. Eric rises, slowly.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I'll be out by noon.

He exits. Frank is frozen in place.

FRANK BLAINE
Goddamnit.

CUT TO:

The family photo of Eric, Amanda, and the kids. It dances in the air. Falls into the abyss of a cardboard box. We're in --

INT. BULLPEN- MOMENTS LATER

The office is quiet, its cheery air extinguished. Colleagues speak in hushed tones. Eric finishes packing. Hoists a box over his shoulder.

He brushes past Karen's desk and stealthily drops a small, carefully folded piece of paper in front of her.

He casually continues toward the exit.

Karen snatches the paper. Looks around. None of the gawking staffers noticed. She reads it.

EXT. PARKING LOT- MOMENTS LATER

Eric jams the box into his trunk. The Tail watches, satisfied. Eric removes the burner from his pocket. Dials Amanda's number. Reaches voicemail.

ERIC
Hey. It's me. I just wanted to
check in. Everything is fine.

Eric subtly tinkers with the phone as he speaks. He's not just making a call. The phone is in camera mode. He covertly snaps photos of The Tail and his vehicle.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Say hi to the kids. See you.

Eric hangs up. Judging by his stoicism, The Tail appears to think nothing of the conversation.

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

Karen rises from her desk, slings her purse over her shoulder. She makes a discrete exit, Eric's note in hand.

INT. RAMADA INN, LOBBY- MOMENTS LATER

We're back at the scene of the crime. The Clerk gazes at a small TV planted on his desk. Karen enters. Approaches him.

KAREN

Hey. I'm looking for a single for the night.

CLERK

Okay. Let me see what we have here.

The Clerk punches a few keys on the computer.

KAREN

This is kinda stupid, but I'm a little superstitious. Big believer in lucky numbers and all that. I was wondering if you might have a certain room available.

CLERK

Which might that be?

KAREN

315.

The Clerk registers the number. He's not that stupid.

CLERK

We had some commotion in that room last night.

KAREN

Oh, did you?

She's playing dumb, and boy does it show.

CLERK

You're not a cop.

KAREN

No, I'm not. Is the room available?

CLERK

Needs to be cleaned.

KAREN

How much is it?

CLERK

139.99. Plus tax.

KAREN

Give me five minutes inside and
I've got 500 for you.

CLERK

Make it 750.

INT. ERIC'S MOTEL ROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Karen crouches in front of the dresser, reaches behind it. At first, she finds nothing. She keeps groping blindly. Feels something. Grabs it. It's the USB.

INT. BARNES & NOBLE, CAFE- DAY

Blue ink bleeds onto manila paper. Eric scribbles furiously into a journal. Pages are already filled. What is he writing?

EXT. LONG ISLAND EXPRESSWAY- DAY

Packed. Construction has shut down the left lane. Cars plod down the highway, eager for the jam to clear.

INT. CAR- MOMENTS LATER

Eric is trapped in the middle lane. Looks ahead. Drivers accelerate. An exit is visible in the distance.

The Tail is two cars behind us. Aggravated.

Eric inches forward. He's fifty feet from the exit.

Forty feet. Thirty.

He swerves into the right lane. Nearly collides with an oncoming vehicle. Speeds towards the exit.

The Tail HONKS HIS HORN to no avail, stuck in gridlock. He desperately tries to maneuver his vehicle out of it.

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER- MOMENTS LATER

Suburban tranquility is shattered by THE SCREECH OF BRAKES. Eric's vehicle comes to an abrupt halt in the parking lot.

He rolls down his window. Karen is in the spot alongside him. Eric hands her the journal and his cell phone.

KAREN

It's already 2. Thought you bailed.

ERIC

Everything's there. How long to print?

KAREN

Three, maybe four hours.

ERIC

Good. Is Frank okay?

KAREN

He will be.

ERIC

I don't want my name on the byline. The story is yours.

KAREN

What are you talking about?

ERIC

Your name needs to be on the front page. This is too big. They'll try to discredit us. We need someone with credibility. Someone unimpeachable. That's you.

KAREN

You're credible.

ERIC

They'd sling mud. Say I'm a drunk. Unstable. A two bit hack. They can't do that to you.

KAREN

Those things -- they're not true.

Eric's silent. It's almost an admission of guilt.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You've earned this.

ERIC

We're out of time. Go.

She nods, a hint of fear in her eyes. Drives away.

Eric exits the car, strides into a Starbucks.

INT. THE TAIL'S CAR- MOMENTS LATER

The Tail peers at Eric through the Starbucks window, puzzled. What the hell was that?

He probes the lot for any sign of a disturbance. Nothing.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- DAY

Frank stares out his window, eager to escape this hellish day. His door swings open, no knock. Karen rushes through it.

KAREN

Please tell me you didn't retract.

FRANK BLAINE

Apology goes live in thirty.

KAREN

You might want to hold off on that.

CUT TO:

THE JOURNAL, as it lands on Frank's desk with a SOFT THUD. A hand opens it. Peruses the pages. After a moment --

FRANK (O.S.)

Jesus Christ.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

Usually pristine. Now it's a war room. Hordes of documents & photos are spread across the table. Staffers file in and out. Frank sits at the head.

Karen is at his side, gaze fixed on her laptop - its word processor open.

FRANK BLAINE

Get me Jordan at CNN. Where's legal?

A staffer -- LUCAS -- chirps up.

LUCAS

On the way. Fifteen minutes.

FRANK BLAINE

Tell 'em to speed. Make it ten.

Lucas scurries out of the room. Frank turns to Karen --

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)
Is there anything else I can do?

KAREN
(shakes head)
I've got it.

She starts typing. Lucas returns.

LUCAS
Chris just joined. You've got all
the Board on the line.

Frank nods, picks up the telephone at his side.

FRANK BLAINE
Gentleman, we have a change of
plans.

INT. STARBUCKS- DAY

Eric sips on a latte, stares at the TV on the wall. CNN. A mundane report: are muffins a healthy snack? He waits.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM- DAY

Karen pounds the keys. Sentences pile up on the screen.

The journal rests at her side - dozens of pages of notes. Every detail of the last week.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- DAY

Eric paces around the room, anxious. He's completely out of the loop. Powerless. And not particularly enjoying it.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM- SUNSET

Now it's Karen who paces, a bundle of nerves. Frank reads a copy of her report, pen in hand. No marks on the paper...yet.

FRANK BLAINE
Okay.

KAREN
...okay?

FRANK BLAINE
It's great, but you forgot
something.

KAREN

What's that?

FRANK BLAINE

Look at the byline. Where's Eric?
Can't take all the credit.

KAREN

He doesn't want it there.

FRANK BLAINE

Yeah, right.

KAREN

I'm serious.

Frank stops dead in his tracks. He's heard a lot of unbelievable things today, but this may take the cake.

FRANK BLAINE

It's his Pulitzer.

KAREN

He wouldn't budge. He's convinced it won't be good for the story.

FRANK BLAINE

Since when does he --

KAREN

They'd drag him through the mud. Distract the public. Make this about the reporter. He wanted someone...

FRANK BLAINE

Experienced.

KAREN

"Unimpeachable" was his word.

FRANK BLAINE

And that's you.

KAREN

I guess so.

CUT TO:

A TEXT MESSAGE. The sender: KAREN. "Go. We're live in 30."

BRRRR. BRRRR. The muffled ring of a telephone takes us to --

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- DAY

Eric has a new burner pressed against his ear. Chris Bishop's gruff voice emanates from the other line.

ERIC
Hey. It's Chandler. I need you.

CHRIS BISHOP (O.S.)
What now?

ERIC
There's a guy outside my place.
He's been following me all day. I
don't know what to do.

CHRIS BISHOP (O.S.)
Take it easy. You sure you're not
exaggerating?

ERIC
No. He's sitting in his car right
now, watching.

CHRIS BISHOP (O.S.)
Give me a plate number. Let me run
it and see what's what.

ERIC
Wait. Shit. He's getting out.

The Tail hasn't moved an inch. Eric sells it convincingly.
His voice tremors.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Oh god. I think I see a gun. Holy
shit. He's coming up.

CHRIS BISHOP (O.S.)
Don't open the door. Stay put.

ERIC
I need your help.

CHRIS BISHOP (O.S.)
Fairfield, right?

ERIC
Apartment 211. Hurry.

CHRIS BISHOP (O.S.)
I'll be there as soon as I can.

INT. CAR- DAY

The Tail sips a cup of coffee, peruses an automotive magazine. Glances at the apartment window. No movement.

Quiet. And then, A SIREN BLARES. RED AND BLUE LIGHTS FLASH.

THE TAIL

What the fuck.

EXT. FAIRFIELD APARTMENT COMPLEX- MOMENTS LATER

Bishop exits his squad car. Beelines for Eric's apartment until he spots The Tail in his car.

He approaches with caution, hand on his nightstick. As he inches toward the driver's door, it swings open.

Bishop grabs his nightstick and prepares to strike.

The Tail exits the vehicle, hands raised. Calm and collected.

CHRIS BISHOP

Don't move, asshole. Suffolk PD.

THE TAIL

How can I help you, officer?

CHRIS BISHOP

You can start by telling me what you're doing here.

The Tail attempts to reach into his pants.

THE TAIL

My badge is in my pocket.

CHRIS BISHOP

What badge might that be?

THE TAIL

I'm CIA.

CHRIS BISHOP

And I'm the Queen of England.

Chris reaches into The Tail's pocket. Finds the ID.

CHRIS BISHOP (CONT'D)

Motherfucker.

He looks to Eric's window, puzzled. What is going on?

MORE SIRENS. Other vehicles responding to the call.

If we were to look closely, we'd see Eric's car cruise past in the background. He makes a discrete, hasty exit.

The Tail rushes toward the apartment.

PRELAP --

STAFFER (O.S.)
Live in thirty seconds.

INT. BULLPEN- NIGHT

Tense. Crowded. Staffers glued to their desks.

Karen refreshes the Newsday home page on her browser. Again. Frank stands behind her; he's on the phone.

FRANK BLAINE
You'll know what it's about
in...twenty five seconds. Trust me.
Take whatever you've got scheduled
and cancel it. Karen's ready to hit
air immediately. Okay?

Karen takes a deep breath. She locks eyes with Frank.

STAFFER
Ten.

He gives her a nod of encouragement. It'll be okay.

Karen refreshes the page again and...

The story is splashed on the homepage. It reads --

A NEWSDAY EXCLUSIVE.

*CIA'S TARGETED KILLING PROGRAM HITS US SOIL. 6 DEAD,
INCLUDING EX NYPD COMMISSIONER.*

INT. CAR- NIGHT

The needle pushes 80. Eric cruises down a highway, AM radio on blast. A commercial. It's interrupted by a COMMENTATOR.

COMMENTATOR (O.S.)
1010 Wins. The time is 8:13, and
this is a breaking news alert.
(MORE)

COMMENTATOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 According to a stunning report
 coming out of Newsday, the Central
 Intelligence Agency --

Eric smashes his fist against the wheel in excitement.

Honks the horn. Multiple times. It drowns out the broadcast.

ERIC
 YES!

INT. NEWSDAY PRINTING PRESS- NIGHT

THWACK! Hordes of newspapers fly down an assembly line.
 Photos of our victims grace the front page.

EXT. GARDEN STATE MOTEL- NIGHT

Tucked in an alcove off the Jersey Turnpike. It's a shithole,
 albeit a good place to hide.

INT. GARDEN STATE MOTEL ROOM- MOMENTS LATER

Two locks are bolted tight. The curtains are drawn.

Eric lays on the bed, drink in hand. Flips through cable news
 broadcasts. Every channel is covering the story.

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER- NIGHT

A delivery truck, emblazoned with the Newsday logo, circles
 the place. A large stack of papers fly out of it, land in
 front of the Starbucks entrance.

BEGIN MONTAGE: The impact.

- Karen chats with Anderson Cooper on CNN.
- A deli. Eric's being rung up with a coffee. There are a
 half dozen customers around him. All are reading Newsday.
- The WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY addresses the media. He
 tells us that The President is shocked by these allegations.
- Pictures of AGENT WALKER, AGENT CARROLL, & THE TAIL on the
 news. Men detained for questioning re: the assassinations.
 "Lone wolves", "radicals" working outside the system.
- REPORTERS swarm MIRA HABIB's home. She shields her face
 from the cameras.

- KAREN is on MEET THE PRESS. She's articulate, charming. Made for the spotlight.

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

A SKEE BALL as it shoots up a ramp. We're in --

INT. CHUCK E CHEESE- DAY

The ball drops in the fifty point hole. Victory.

Amanda high fives Kevin and Robin. Tickets spurt out of the machine.

Roger sits a few feet away, sips a cup of coffee. His eyes dart back and forth between the entrance and the kids.

He's surprised when ERIC enters. Approaches him.

ERIC

Hey.

ROGER

Hey.

ERIC

Everything is okay. It's all over.

ROGER

The story -- you were a part of that thing?

ERIC

A little bit.

ROGER

Those bastards. Glad you got 'em.

ERIC

Me too. You look tired.

ROGER

Haven't slept since you called.

ERIC

Thank you. Really.

ROGER

Yeah.

ERIC

Maybe I could take the kids off
your hands tonight. You could sleep
in. No disturbances.

The kids spot Eric and reluctantly migrate over. They're
still disappointed from their last encounter.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Hi guys. I've missed you.

He hugs them tightly. Eric and Amanda exchange a terse nod.

KEVIN

Hi.

ROBIN

You're not at work?

ERIC

Nope. Have the rest of the day off.

KEVIN

Oh. Cool.

ERIC

And I've got an apartment all to
myself and I was thinking...I'm
gonna' be real lonely. I need some
company. Maybe you guys want to
sleep over?

The kids turn to Amanda, search for her approval.

AMANDA

Okay.

Their faces light up in excitement.

ERIC

Thank you.

ROBIN

But we're not done here.

Kevin proudly flashes an overflowing cup of tickets.

KEVIN

We've got to cash them in. And
choose our prizes.

ERIC

Mom could help you find something
cool. She's got a great eye.

AMANDA

Come on. Let's go look.

She shepherds the children away. Eric and Roger stand side by side, watch them go.

INT. ERIC'S LIVING ROOM- SUNSET

Still a mess. Papers strewn about. Electronics unhooked. It's not exactly the den Robin and Kevin expected.

The kids creep into the room. Eric enters behind them.

ERIC

Dad made a little bit of a mess in here, but why don't you go on and check out your room.

The kids comply, exit the frame. Eric opens a closet and removes a few presents. Not wrapped, but they'll do.

ROBIN (O.S.)

It's pretty.

KEVIN (O.S.)

I got top bunk.

ROBIN (O.S.)

That's no fair!

His cell RINGS. The caller ID reads: NEW YORK TIMES.

Eric drops the presents, stares at the phone. Thinks. A beat.

He hits IGNORE. The call goes to voicemail. Eric slides his phone back into his pocket, enters the kids room.

INT. BULLPEN- DAY

Unbelievably busy. There's constant CHIRPING -- phones, email, printers. Frenetic movement. Staffers shuffle about.

Eric enters. In contrast to his last appearance in the bullpen, not a soul appears to notice him. He's invisible.

INT. FRANK BLAINE'S OFFICE- MOMENTS LATER

Eric sits across from his boss, who is in the middle of lunch. There's a half eaten salad on the desk.

FRANK BLAINE

I can't tell you how good it is to see you.

ERIC

It's good to be back.

FRANK BLAINE

I'm sorry about this ---
(motions to food)
Haven't had a moment to breathe since it broke.

ERIC

We found 'the one'.

FRANK BLAINE

No 'we' about it. All you.

ERIC

I'm sorry about Monday. I didn't know who was watching...or listening. I had to make it convincing. Real.

FRANK BLAINE

No apology necessary. You're safe. All that matters.

ERIC

Thank you.

FRANK BLAINE

Knew you weren't dumb enough to concoct a story anyway.

An uncomfortable laugh. A brief, awkward silence.

FRANK BLAINE (CONT'D)

You didn't bring your boxes.

ERIC

I didn't want to presume --

FRANK BLAINE

Your desk is waiting for you.

ERIC

The Times called.

FRANK BLAINE

Oh?

ERIC

When they approached Karen, she shared our little secret. Told 'em I broke the story.

FRANK BLAINE

Did they make an offer?

ERIC

Six figures.

FRANK BLAINE

Congratulations. When do you start?

ERIC

I don't. Turned it down.

FRANK BLAINE

You know I can't match that number -

ERIC

It's not about the number. I don't think it's the best fit. My writing is "a little dry" for them.

FRANK BLAINE

Why'd you really say no?

ERIC

There's still time to reconsider if you think I should --

FRANK BLAINE

(smiles)

No. Let's get to work. It's no CIA conspiracy but we've got a robbery at the Sleepy's on 25A and no reporter to cover it. Feel like making the trip?

ERIC

I'd like that.

PRE-LAP --

The BOOMING BARITONE of A SPEAKER.

SPEAKER (O.S.)

There are great works of journalism, and then there are those -- the select few, every decade or two -- that shake the very foundation of our society.

INT. BANQUET HALL, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY- DAY

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER.

The Speaker stands in front of a podium. There's a banner behind him.

Pulitzer Prize Luncheon.

It's a large room. There are a few dozen tables. Various papers and their reporters seated at each.

Karen, Jamie, and a host of Newsday executives are seated directly in front of the stage. Eric is nowhere to be found.

SPEAKER

We salute Newsday's Karen Hirsch
and honor her with the Pulitzer
Prize for investigate journalism.

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

Karen rises from her seat and humbly ascends to the podium. She clears her throat. Gazes out at the crowd.

INT. FOYER, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY- DAY

An exodus. The luncheon has ended. Karen fights her way through a lingering crowd, politely pauses to accept compliments and congratulations from those around her.

She spots Eric across the way. Makes a beeline for him.

ERIC

Congratulations.

KAREN

You came --

ERIC

Of course. Sorry I'm late.

KAREN

Just happy to see you.

ERIC

Got held up in Riverhead.
Comptroller's deposition lasted six
hours. Real pulse pounding stuff.

KAREN

I'm jealous I missed it.

ERIC

As you should be. Caught the end of the speech though. Damn good job.

KAREN

It felt -- strange. Dirty.

Eric glances at the case in Karen's hand. It holds the Pulitzer medallion.

ERIC

Do you mind if I --

Karen happily forks it over. Eric opens the case. Stares at the prize for a moment. His expression is tough to read. Something hides behind those eyes.

ERIC (CONT'D)

It's beautiful.

KAREN

If only I had actually earned it.

ERIC

You did. Don't say that.

KAREN

No, I didn't.

ERIC

We're not having this conversation again.

KAREN

One thing.

ERIC

Don't start.

KAREN

Just tell me why.

ERIC

It doesn't matter.

KAREN

Once Fox and his guys were put away, you could have come out and taken credit. Told the world your story.

ERIC

I'm not much of a public speaker. You're easier on the eyes, anyway.

KAREN
Stop. Seriously.

ERIC
This is not the time --

KAREN
It's exactly the time.

ERIC
You've probably got another hundred
hands to shake.

KAREN
Tell me. Or my special day will be
ruined. You wouldn't do that to me.

ERIC
Come on.

Karen shoots him a look as if to say "I'm serious".

ERIC (CONT'D)
You remember that Dedeman piece
twenty five years ago...

KAREN
The Color of Money.

ERIC
Right. It was published in...

KAREN
The AJC.

ERIC
Studied it in college.

KAREN
So did I. That and --

ERIC
All The President's Men.

Karen nods.

ERIC (CONT'D)
When I read that thing, I
understood perfection. The adverbs,
descriptors -- every sentence,
graph, and page. I tried to match
it, to chase that high with
everything I filed.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

Never quite nailed it. And then I read what you wrote.

KAREN

Please. I botched the third graph. I shouldn't have lead with Habib --

ERIC

Some people have the gift.

KAREN

Yeah. You do.

ERIC

Nah. I cover larcenies & 10-75's. You write news. I don't belong at The Times. You do.

KAREN

That's not true.

ERIC

It is. Maybe it's not such a bad thing. There are worse gigs.

KAREN

There definitely are.

ERIC

Well, I don't want to keep you too long. Catch up with you at the office.

KAREN

I'll be in around four.

ERIC

Won't even take one day off...

KAREN

No rest for the wicked.

ERIC

I'll see you there.

The two exchange smiles. There's clearly a spark here. Karen can barely move before she's accosted by a group of admirers. They gawk at the Pulitzer with wonder.

TIGHT ON ERIC as he watches -- a quiet moment of introspection. Fleeting melancholy is quickly replaced by acceptance. Eric's lips purse into a smile as we...

FADE OUT.