

The Ruse
by
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Black screen. Voices.

WOMAN (V.O.)
The word is "tarboosh."

MAN (V.O.)
Spell it.

WOMAN (V.O.)
T-A, R-B, double-O, S-H.
"Tarboosh."

INT. LOW-RENT APARTMENT DAY

Three men and a woman sit around a card table in what is otherwise an almost completely unfurnished apartment. They are sitting on chairs such as one might expect to find at a flea market, marked down three times. There is a small portable refrigerator visible. Not much else.

The men are in their twenties and dressed very casually in jeans and t-shirts. The woman is also in her twenties, and very beautiful. She is dressed in a robe, and her name is ALICE. For now, let's just call the men BLOOD, SWEAT and TEARS (though the audience will never hear these names). The woman who spoke above was Alice, and the man was Blood.

The men are each writing on a legal pad. Alice is holding an enormous dictionary in her lap.

SWEAT
Good golly.

TEARS
R-B double-O...?

ALICE
S-H.

BLOOD
Can we get a part of speech on this?

TEARS
Don't be a wuss.

BLOOD
That could be a noun or a verb, I can't tell.

TEARS
Pick one and stop whining.

SWEAT

A "wuss"?

TEARS

He is a wuss. Moan moan moan, if he keeps up I'm gonna stick him in there with Ackerman.

ALICE

Shut up and think.

The men stare at their legal pads or into space. Alice idly flips a couple of pages in her dictionary.

CUT TO BLACK

ANGLE

On Sweat, who finishes writing on his legal pad, rips the top sheet of paper off, carefully folds it in half four times, and hands it to Alice, out of frame.

CUT TO BLACK

ANGLE

On Tears this time. He is already folding his sheet of paper and holds it out to the offscreen Alice.

CUT TO BLACK

ANGLE

Blood stares at the ceiling. HOLD for a few seconds as he doesn't move or blink. Finally:

TEARS (O.S.)

C'mon.

CUT TO BLACK

ALICE (V.O.)

Okay, everyone ready?

WIDE ANGLE

All four visible. Alice unfolds the first piece of paper and reads from it aloud.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Number one. "Tarboosh. Noun. The fine, powdery residue which accumulates in lumber mills and other places where wood is cut."

TEARS

Whoever wrote that, it's called "sawdust."

ALICE

Quiet. Number two. "Tarboosh. Noun. A red hat similar to the fez, worn especially by Muslim men."

A pause. A faint THUMPING is heard from offscreen.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Number three. "Tarboosh. Noun. The sound made by a boulder plunging into hot asphalt."

This gets general snickering from the group.

BLOOD

Gee, I wonder whose that is.

SWEAT

I couldn't think of anything. I don't believe that's a real word.

BLOOD

What was the first one again?

TEARS

The powdery resi -- the sawdust.

BLOOD

No, I meant the second, was that the Muslim --

ALICE

Muslim hat, yes. Wait 'til I finish and I'll do a recap.

A THUMPING is heard again from offscreen, louder this time. It's rhythmic and persistent, and sounds like somebody kicking a door with their heel.

TEARS

Jesus, not again.

ALICE

Let's finish this round first.
What number am I up to?

SWEAT

Four.

ALICE

Okay, number four. "Tarboosh.
Noun. A cudgel."

BLOOD

Straightforward enough.

The THUMPING now begins again, still louder, and continues at a regular 4/4 pace throughout the following dialogue.

ALICE

Hold on, we'll finish the round.
Last one. "Tarboosh. Noun. Any
of a group of receptors or cell
membranes that are held to be
associated especially with positive
effects on the beat and muscular
contractility of the heart, with
vasodilation, and with inhibition
of smooth muscle in the bronchi,
intestine, and muscular layer of
the wall of the uterus."

A brief pause during which the THUMPING does not cease.

BLOOD

Could you repeat that, please?

TEARS

Dude. You're not fooling anybody.

ALICE

"Any of a group of cell receptors
or cell -- "

She stops in exasperation and turns to look at the source of the THUMPING, which is behind her.

SWEAT

We should find out what he wants.

ALICE

Fine, okay. I know you guys are
enjoying this.

TEARS

We all avert our eyes.

ALICE

Right.

She stands and removes her robe, beneath which she is naked. She walks into the kitchen and out of frame, carrying the robe. The men in fact studiously avoid looking at her whenever possible.

The three men reach into their pockets and pull out ski masks. They put them on. We HEAR cabinets being opened and closed from offscreen. The THUMPING has not stopped.

BLOOD

I think he's doing the beat from
"Seven Nation Army."

Sweat chuckles, then sort of nods his head along while humming something to himself.

SWEAT

Little slow. Close.

Alice walks back into the room, without the robe and still naked, holding a length of rope and a handkerchief. She tosses the rope onto the card table and begins tying the handkerchief into a gag around her mouth.

BLOOD

How does he even know we're still here? We could all have gone out to...do something nefarious.

Tears, oddly, replies in a crisp British accent.

TEARS

Gentlemen. Might I suggest that we not squander this regrettably brief opportunity for mental preparation?

Alice, the gag intact, picks up the rope and hands it to Sweat, then turns her back to him and extends her clasped hands behind her back. He ties her hands together while looking in another direction.

SWEAT

I'm gonna get gut-ID'd.

BLOOD

You're what now?

SWEAT

Standing in the lineup and it'll be
"I'd know that pudg anywhere."

(MORE)

SWEAT (CONT'D)

(to Alice)

How's that, is that too tight?

Alice shakes her head "no." She walks over to a corner of the room which we have not previously seen and curls into a fetal position on the floor. There is a door in the wall next to her, and it is from behind this door that the THUMPS are coming.

Tears, now masked, walks over to the door and RAPS sharply on it three times.

The THUMPING stops.

A brief pause, then Tears opens the door. Behind it is a MAN, late thirties or early forties, bound, gagged, and naked. The room is otherwise completely empty. When Tears speaks to the man, it's with the BBC English accent.

TEARS

Have we got to visit the loo again?

The man responds by briefly jerking his head from side to side, not in a "no" gesture, but twitching his ears toward his shoulders.

TEARS (CONT'D)

Oh, sorry.

He goes to the man and removes an earplug from one of his ears.

TEARS (CONT'D)

Have we got to visit the loo again?

The man nods. Tears replaces the earplug, unties the rope binding his legs, and helps him to his feet.

As they walk to the bathroom, the man looks over at Alice, who half-rises from her fetal position to look back at him. There is intense fear and pain in her eyes.

Tears and the man walk out of frame, and we HEAR a door close. Tears walks back into frame. He speaks normally again.

TEARS (CONT'D)

It's gonna be a few minutes. He's gotta take a dump this time.

Alice motions with her head for him to come over to her. He does, and pulls the gag down to her chin. The fear and pain we saw in her eyes a moment ago are gone, replaced by concern. She nods her head toward the bathroom.

TEARS (CONT'D)
S'okay, plugs are in.

ALICE
Um...I think "loo" is a bit much.

TEARS
Why?

ALICE
You're using an upperclass sort of BBC sort of accent. I don't think people in that class say "loo." I think that's a lower-class thing.

TEARS
Right, like he's gonna know that.

ALICE
He watches a lot of PBS. Anyway, I just think that's laying it on a bit thick.

TEARS
(BBC accent)
Well, I think you're a bit thick, frankly.

ALICE
Put it back.

He replaces the gag and leaves frame.

Alice stares off into space. She looks utterly bored. Music begins, ideally the J. Geils Band's "Piss on the Wall."

CUT TO BLACK

And superimpose the TITLE of the film: The Ruse.

INT. NY SUBWAY CAR DAY/NIGHT (DOESN'T MATTER)

Song continues. Sitting on one of the long benches is a MAN in his early 40s, wearing a t-shirt that reads BLOW ME TAX in huge red letters. He stares directly at the viewer with a look of sheer contempt, and is also flipping us the bird. OPENING TITLES run over this shot, during the entirety of which the man stares straight at us, flipping us off.

The meaning of this won't become clear until later.

INT. OFFICE LATE AFTERNOON

Large and expensively furnished, with an enormous window that looks out on the street numerous stories below.

Sitting in a chair behind the desk is JANICE AXELROD, late thirties or early forties, dressed in conservative business clothes. She's staring off into space as Alice was in the shot before last, and in her hand she holds a computer mouse, which she is CLICKING with her thumb at the rate of two or three clicks per second. Her arms are folded across her chest and the hand holding the mouse is near her face; she is clearly not using the mouse in a conventional way.

This continues for several seconds, with no movement save for the small motions of Janice's thumb on the mouse button.

There is a short RAP on a door from out of frame. Janice stops CLICKING for a moment and looks in the direction of the knocking.

JANICE

Don. Come in, Don. Watch me sink.

DON, a man in his forties, suit and tie, steps tentatively into the office.

DON

How bad is it?

JANICE

It's bad.

DON

Well how bad is that?

JANICE

Bad.

DON

Are we talking bad like parting gift bad?

JANICE

Try bad like funeral wreath bad.

A pause. Janice begins CLICKING the mouse again.

DON

What'd they say?

JANICE

They asked me to step down voluntarily.

DON
Will you?

JANICE
No.

Another pause. Don motions to the computer, which is off.

DON
You'll find that's more effective
if you turn the thing on.

A pause.

JANICE
Thanks, Don. I appreciate your
concern.

DON
I haven't expressed any concern.

JANICE
Are you concerned?

DON
Of course I am.

JANICE
I appreciate it.
(beat)
What time is it?

She looks at her watch before he can respond, and immediately stands and begins to put on her jacket, which had been hanging on the back of her chair.

DON
It's ab --

JANICE
I hafta be somewhere. Excuse me.
How many people are out there?

She goes to the window and peers out onto the street, standing on her toes to get a better angle, her jacket only half-on.

DON
I'd say between seventy-five and a
hundred.

JANICE
(it's not great)
Great.

She steps away from the window and shrugs into her jacket.

DON
Are you okay?

JANICE
Not hardly.

We HEAR a 'ding' as of elevator doors closing.

INT. ELEVATOR LATE AFTERNOON

Surprise, surprise. Janice is alone in the elevator. A brief pause as it descends, then Janice speaks to herself, quietly.

JANICE
Oh my god.
(beat)
Oh my god.
(beat)
Is this a joke? Who is this?
(beat; panic)
Oh god. Oh god.
(sigh; sarcastically)
Oh god.

INT. OFFICE LOBBY DAY

The elevator doors open and Janice steps out into the lobby. She immediately walks over to the guard's desk. Behind it sits a man, CAL.

JANICE
Cal?

Cal instantly reaches below him and pulls out a picket sign which reads THE 86% SAY '86' AXELROD. Also on the sign is a picture of Janice with the standard circle-with-a-cross indicating that whatever's within the circle is not permitted. He hands it to Janice. She holds it up in front of her face and moves toward the doors.

CAL
See you Monday.

JANICE
No, I'll be right back.

CAL
Best of luck.

Through the glass doors we can now see a large mass of people holding picket signs gathered in front of the building. They are slightly out of focus and we cannot read the signs. There are also some press people scattered about, with cameras.

Janice walks to the doors, still holding the sign in front of her face, and steps outside, and out of focus. She pushes her way into the mass of picketers.

INT. OFFICE LATE AFTERNOON

We see the picketers from high above the street, through the window of Janice's office, as when she looked down at them a moment ago. We are very high up and can only see a potpourri of heads and signs. This building is located in the center of a block, not on a corner.

After a moment, one Head With Sign breaks away from the mass by stepping off the curb and into the street. It is a busy street, with plenty of traffic. The lone picketer waits for traffic to die down, then quickly dashes across the street, in the middle of the block, against the light. None of the other picketers move or otherwise notice.

Once across the street, the picketer (who is probably recognizable by her clothes as Janice, but if we're too high up to see that, that's okay) begins to stride quickly toward the corner, still holding the sign in front of her face.

EXT. STREET CORNER LATE AFTERNOON

Janice walks hurriedly down the street toward a phone booth in the foreground, still carrying her sign but not in front of her face anymore. When she's about 40 feet away, a TEENAGE MALE steps into frame from the opposite direction and heads for the phone. Janice breaks into a run when she sees him.

JANICE

Excuse me! Excuse me. I'm expecting a call.

TEEN

So am I.

JANICE

No, I mean I'm expecting someone to call me right this second. On this phone.

TEEN

Yeah, so am I.

JANICE

Are you serious?

TEEN

(holding up cell phone)
Yeah, battery's dead so she's checking the movie time and she's calling me back. Who's calling you back? You just got here.

JANICE

I, uh...

The phone RINGS. They look at each other. A pause.

TEEN

Twenty bucks says it's Nicole Farrell calling for John.

JANICE

Can I please answer it? John? If it's Nicole I'll give it right to you.

JOHN

Yeah, I don't care.

Janice picks up the receiver.

JANICE

Hello?

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

...hi, um, I think maybe I have the wrong number, I was trying to reach a pay phone and --

JANICE

Hi Nicole, hang on, here's John.

She hands the phone to John and walks to a nearby mailbox or lamppost, against which she leans. CAMERA FOLLOWS her and leaves John out of frame, but we HEAR his conversation as we DOLLY very slowly in on Janice, who looks anxiety-ridden.

JOHN (O.S.)

Hi.

(pause)

I don't know, some lady wants to use the phone when I'm done.

(pause)

(MORE)

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

I told her.

(pause)

We were chatting, it's a long story, what time is it playing?

(pause)

I can't do the 9:25.

(pause)

'Cause I'm sposta meet John at 10:30 to work on his freakin' ass clutch that he destroyed again.

(pause)

I did tell you that. I told you twice.

(pause)

Once at lunch, and then again just now.

(pause)

No, Nicole, just now before you called back. During Part A of the conversation, this being Part B. Listen, this lady's expecting a call, I gotta go. I can do the 7:30, yes or no?

(pause)

Okay, which theater, the dome things? The left dome or the right dome?

(pause)

Okay, I'll see you there about quarter after.

(pause)

'Cause I have things to do.

(pause)

Okay, b --

We HEAR him hang up the phone. We are now close on Janice, who over the course of this long DOLLY SHOT has drifted off somewhere, as if she's shut down from the stress.

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

Bye, Jesus.

The phone immediately begins to RING again.

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

There's your call. Or if it's Nicole, tell her I left.

Janice does not seem to hear this. John walks into frame and taps her on the shoulder. She jumps.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey. Phone.

JANICE
 What? Oh, thank you. Thanks.

John walks away. Janice watches him go as the phone continues RINGING. When he has turned a corner, she picks up the receiver.

JANICE (CONT'D)
 Hello?

BLOOD (V.O.)
 (English accent)
 Is this Janice Axelrod?

JANICE
 This is she.

BLOOD (V.O.)
 Listen carefully. Your husband --

JANICE
 Hold on, hold on, hold on.

BLOOD (V.O.)
 (accent gone)
 What?

JANICE
 Can we, I wasn't prepared, can we do it again?

BLOOD (V.O.)
 Sure. Was that you tying up the line? It was busy for five minutes.

JANICE
 No, no, there was this kid, that's why I'm not, could you just start from the --

BLOOD (V.O.)
 No problem.
 (beat; English accent)
 Is this Janice Axelrod --

JANICE
 I'm sorry, could we hang up and start completely over?

BLOOD (V.O.)
 (accent gone)
 Yeah, I'll call you right back.

JANICE
Give me thirty seconds.

The line GOES DEAD. Janice replaces the receiver.

A pause. She takes a couple of deep breaths.

JANICE (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Is this a joke?

INT. LOW-RENT APARTMENT NIGHT

Blood, Sweat, Tears and Alice sit around the room. Alice is back in the robe; the guys are not wearing the masks. For some reason, there is now an IRS 1040 form tacked to one of the otherwise bare walls; Blood throws darts at it.

BLOOD
I got one, I got one. Okay. Guy's on the roof of his house during a massive flood.

SWEAT
Katrina?

BLOOD
Doesn't matter. Generic flood.

TEARS
'Cause those happen all the time.

BLOOD
Fine, it's New Orleans, it's August '05, do you need the precise street address? Lemme see if I can find a view of the house on Google Earth.

ALICE
(to Tears)
Do you ever stop?
(to Alice)
Tell the joke.

A very brief pause, punctuated by one of Tears' darts hitting the 1040 tax form on the wall.

BLOOD
Guy's on the roof, flood waters rising, he's gonna drown. Boat comes along but the guy says no, I have faith in God, He will provide. Another boat comes along.
(MORE)

BLOOD (CONT'D)

No, I have faith in God, He will provide. Water's up to his chin, a helicopter tosses down a ladder for him, no, glub glub, I have faith in God, He will provide. So he --

A KNOCKING is heard. It is a standard rap on the door, not the steady thumping of the guy in the other room.

Everybody freezes. A pause.

JANICE (O.S.)

(muffled, through door)

Oops, sorry, forgot.

Another KNOCK, only this time instead of a few random taps we hear a more elaborate knocking that sounds like a prearranged signal.

Alice gets up and opens the door. Janice walks in.

ALICE

Hi.

Janice looks around the room and twirls a finger around her mouth. Her demeanor is anxious, troubled.

ALICE (CONT'D)

It's okay, he can't hear you.

JANICE

How is he?

ALICE

He's pretty scared. He's okay. But he's scared. He looks so frightened every time I see him that I start tearing up. Which is perfect, of course, so....

SWEAT

What happens to the guy?

JANICE

(to Alice)

But he's okay, he's not in any --

(to Sweat)

What guy?

BLOOD

Quick punchline: "I don't know what you're bitching about, we sent you two boats and a helicopter."

ALICE

Guys.

TEARS

Is that God or St. Peter?

JANICE

(to Alice)

He's not in any...medical danger,
you don't think?

(to Blood)

Have you looked at him?

BLOOD (O.S.)

Yeah, he's doin' okay, far's I can
tell.

ALICE

He seems okay, he's just really
scared. You sure you don't wanna
tell him?

JANICE

I can't. I can't. He'd never hold
up, they'd ask him two questions
and he'd fall to pieces. He can't
act to save his life.

ALICE

Can we put some clothes on him?
Not to mention me?

JANICE

After the first call. Then get him
some clothes that don't quite fit.
A size too big or a size too small.
Or, no, make it too big, that'll be
more comfortable. I'll give you
his sizes. Same goes for you. Has
it been dreadful?

ALICE

No. I was in Passion. Starkers in
front of nine hundred people every
night. And they're being very
gentlemanly, actually.

JANICE

Really? Averting their eyes?

ALICE

Yep.

BLOOD (O.S.)
We're not animals.

A brief pause.

JANICE
He isn't asleep right now, is he?

ALICE
I don't know.

TEARS (O.S.)
He was out when I checked on him an hour ago.

JANICE
Check and see if he is still.

Janice walks to the door of the room where the man is being held and stands against the wall to the side of it. Tears puts on his mask and follows her. He opens the door very slowly and peers in, then just as slowly closes it.

TEARS
Sound asleep.

JANICE
Which way is he facing?

ALICE
Janice, no.

TEARS
Facing the door.

JANICE
Shit.
(to Alice)
I wanna see him.

ALICE
Too risky, Jan, he's facing you.

JANICE
We haven't made the call yet, we can pull out if we have to. He sleeps like a log.
(beat)
I need to see him.

A pause, then Alice nods to Tears, who reopens the door, wider this time. The man is curled in a fetal position on the floor, facing the door, still naked, earplugs visible, eyes closed. Janice moves into the doorway and looks at him.

REVERSE

On Janice's face as she watches him sleep. She closes her eyes. Opens them. Turns to Alice, who is standing just out of frame.

JANICE (CONT'D)
He sleeps like a log.

ALICE (O.S.)
No, don't be stupid.

JANICE
Shhh. Trust me.

ORIGINAL ANGLE

Janice starts to move into the room, slowly.

ALICE
Put a mask on at least.

JANICE
Shh. He'd recognize the suit.
Don't worry. I've slept next to
the guy for fourteen years.

She continues into the room until she reaches the man on the floor, then slowly moves around him until she is facing his back. She squats down on her heels and looks at him.

After a moment she very softly brushes the hair on the back of his head with the back of her hand. He does not stir.

She watches him for a moment longer, then slowly stands and walks quietly out of the room. Tears closes the door behind her.

ALICE
That was really dumb.

Tears removes his mask. Janice sits down on one of the chairs. She closes her eyes again. A brief pause.

ALICE (CONT'D)
We should --

JANICE
I want to get him some puzzle
magazines.

ALICE
What?

JANICE

Just regular newsstand puzzle magazines. You can find 'em anywhere. Get ones that say "Variety" on the cover. He gets bored doing the same thing over and over.

Alice glances worriedly at one of the guys, who gives a quick grimace in return. Janice notices the exchange.

JANICE (CONT'D)

What?

ALICE

Jan, you're startin' to worry me. We can't do that. What would it be, a lucky guess?

(English accent)

"You look like the sort of chap who enjoys a good anacrostic, have a go."

(normally)

Just a wee bit suspicious, don't you think?

JANICE

Yeah, you're right.

(beat; to the guys)

I want one of you guys to engage him in conversation later.

SWEAT

I thought we were to say as little as possible.

JANICE

I know I said that, but I wanna do this for him. Somebody go in later and chat with him. Ask him what he does for fun. If he has any hobbies. Don't mention puzzle books. Let him bring it up. He will eventually. When he does you can get him some.

A pause. Janice closes her eyes again.

ALICE

Are you okay with this?

JANICE

I'm okay.

She opens her eyes.

JANICE (CONT'D)

I'm okay.

INT. DRUGSTORE NIGHT

Janice walks down an aisle filled with various over-the-counter medicines and health care products until she comes to a magazine rack at the back of the drugstore. She crouches down to the bottom rows of magazines, where the puzzle magazines are located, and rapidly grabs a copy of three or four different variety-style issues.

She stands and walks to the counter, rapidly. As she does so, she passes a shelf on which various kinds of aspirin are located. Without pausing or breaking stride, she grabs a bottle of aspirin and continues toward the register.

EXT. JANICE'S BACKYARD NIGHT

There is a small swingset in Janice's backyard, with two swings. Janice sits on one of them, rocking slowly back and forth. She has a glass of wine in one hand.

CAMERA begins to gradually DOLLY around to the other side of her.

After a few seconds, in which nothing happens save for Janice swaying silently back and forth, we HEAR, faintly, a DOORBELL. Janice does not respond to it in any way.

A brief pause. More swinging. Janice takes a sip of her wine.

The doorbell RINGS again, accompanied this time by KNOCKING, also somewhat faint. This time Janice glances toward the source of the knocking, which is out of frame, then returns her gaze to where it had been before.

A briefer pause, then louder KNOCKING, without the doorbell. No response at all to this.

Another pause. By this time the CAMERA is behind Janice and we can see the back of the house, and also a gate which leads to the front yard.

There is a loud BANGING now on this gate. Janice waves at the gate, but says nothing.

After a moment's pause, Don's head appears above the gate for a second, then vanishes, as of someone jumping to get a better view.

JANICE
(to the gate)
Hi, Don.

Don's head reappears above the gate, vanishes.

DON (O.S.)
Janice, you okay?
(beat)
Can I talk to you for a second?

JANICE
The latch is on your left.

A hand reaches over the gate and fumbles around until it finds the latch. The gate opens and Don walks into the backyard, closing the gate behind him. He is still dressed in the same clothes as he was when last we saw him in Janice's office.

JANICE (CONT'D)
Come in, Don. Watch me swing.
(beat)
Are you the envoy?

DON
Yeah, basically. But I'm me, too.
I mean, I'd be here as me even if I weren't here as the envoy.

JANICE
And what do you have to say, in your dual role?
(beat)
You think I should resign.

DON
Definitely.

JANICE
You can sit if you want.

Don sits down on the other swing, awkwardly, facing the same direction as Janice. He quickly stands again.

DON
No, I think it's better if I'm facing you.

JANICE
Sit the other way.

DON
I talked to Walter.

JANICE
I was certain you would.

DON
Their offer is very generous. It's very generous, given the circumstances. I'm amazed at how generous it is, actually. Coming from Walter and Bill and them. They really like you.

JANICE
I like them too.

DON
But see, that's not as apparent to them as it might be.

JANICE
Given the circumstances.

DON
That's right. Given the way the apology went. There's a feeling that you deliberately...that you did that deliberately. Though nobody can imagine why.
(beat)
Aren't you cold out here?

A pause.

JANICE
I won't resign.

DON
Jan, they are fully prepared to fire you. Fully. Prepared. They don't want to. But they definitely will.

JANICE
I won't resign.

DON

It will look much better if you do. You might be able to emerge from this with...you might be able to emerge from this. But you need to accept that you don't work for this corporation anymore.

(beat)

Now how that fact is communicated to the press and public is up to you.

JANICE

I'll fight it.

DON

I guess you can let them fire you and try taking it to court afterwards. But you don't find a lot of atheists on the bench. I wouldn't bet on you.

(beat)

It's not the end of the world, Janice.

JANICE

It's close enough.

(beat)

Tell them I said I'm thinking about it.

DON

Are you?

JANICE

Tell them I said I am.

A pause.

DON

All right.

He walks out of frame. We HEAR the gate open and close. Janice looks around her with an expression of mild surprise.

JANICE

It is cold out here.

INT. HOLDING ROOM NIGHT

A pair of hands and arms set up a folding chair. When it is set up properly, the owner of the hands and arms sits down on it, comfortably, legs crossed, as CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal that it is Tears, masked. He speaks throughout this scene with the BBC accent.

TEARS

Now. If you will promise to behave, if you will promise not to begin banshee practice the moment I do, I'll remove your gag so we can have a bit of a chat. If you do so promise, signify this by nodding your head.

A pause. We can't see the man's response, as he's out of frame, but Tears gets up from his chair and moves out of frame, then returns and sits down holding the gag.

MAN (O.S.)

Thank you.

TEARS

Not at all.

(beat)

Are you frightened?

MAN (O.S.)

Yeah.

TEARS

I assure you there's no need to be. You've been kidnapped, that's all. I recognize it's a bit of a bother, but as we said before, you're in no danger. We shan't harm you. Even should your wife refuse to pay we shan't harm you. That's confidential, mind you, we'll be telling her we'll blow your brains out, that sort of thing, it's incentive, but it's rubbish, we're not that sort.

MAN (O.S.)

What about Alice?

INT. LOW-RENT APARTMENT NIGHT

Alice stands on the opposite side of the door with her ear against the doorjamb. We can HEAR the conversation from within, though somewhat muffled.

TEARS (O.S.)

Alice. Is that the pretty young
lass in the other room?

MAN (O.S.)

Yes. Why are you holding her?
What good is she to you?

A hand appears in the frame, holding a plastic cup out to Alice. She takes it without looking, then immediately turns from the door and hands it back, mouthing the word "glass" very deliberately. The hand withdraws and Alice puts her ear back to the doorjamb.

TEARS (O.S.)

That's been a point of much
contention, actually. What good is
she to us? She's rather a bonus,
really. Hadn't expected her at
all. Sadly, her family's worth
nothing, apparently.

MAN (O.S.)

So let her go.

INT. HOLDING ROOM NIGHT

As before, only now we can see both Tears and the man, who is still bound and naked and is huddled against a wall.

TEARS

We think perhaps your wife might be
willing to ransom her as well. At
a considerably cheaper price than
yourself, naturally.

A pause.

MAN

I have been cheating on my wife
with her.

Tears chuckles.

TEARS

Yes, we gathered that.

MAN

My wife doesn't know about her.

TEARS

That would be the definition of "cheating," yes.

MAN

So if you tell her, she's liable to...she won't --

TEARS

We considered that. But surely she'll forgive this little dalliance given that your life is at stake? Not that your life is at stake, of course, but she'll think it is. I think she'll forgive you.

MAN

She won't pay for Alice.

TEARS

Your ransom will be conditional on hers. A package deal. Believe me, we've had plenty of time to think this through.

A pause.

MAN

Can I ask a question?

TEARS

Certainly.

MAN

Why are you people wearing masks?

Tears looks around him in the I-can't-believe-you-asked-that gesture.

TEARS

To disguise our identities.

MAN

Yes, I know that, but wouldn't it be easier just to blindfold me than to have all three of you wearing masks?

A fairly long pause.

TEARS

I've changed my mind. I'm asking
the questions here.

MAN

Okay.

TEARS

We didn't have a blindfold.

MAN

Okay.

TEARS

Do you want to be blindfolded?

MAN

No.

TEARS

Then shut up.

(beat)

Let's get a bit better acquainted,
shall we, you and I? Tell me what
you like to do in your spare time.

CUT TO BLACK

HOLD on black for about five seconds.

INT. JANICE'S HOUSE MORNING

The house, like her office, is expensively and tastefully furnished. Janice sits cross-legged in her pajamas on the couch in her living room. A telephone is in her lap. She stares down at it.

Opposite her is a television set. She looks up from the phone to the TV, which is off. She picks up the remote control from the end table and clicks it on.

We see and HEAR a Saturday-morning cartoon. Janice watches this for a moment, then clicks the TV off again and stares back down at the phone.

She picks up the receiver.

INT. SHOE STORE DAY

Big downscale mall chain store. Sweat, a couple of large shopping bags from other stores slung over one shoulder, examines a pair of men's running shoes, flipping the box over or around to confirm the size.

AT THE REGISTER

Stands a 16-year-old girl, clearly bored out of her skull, just completing a transaction. Sweat moves forward and slides the shoe box to her. She scans it, mind elsewhere.

CLERK
\$24.99

SWEAT
Plus?

CLERK
What?

SWEAT
\$24.99 plus? I assume.

The girl instantly awakens from her McJob stupor. Her tone becomes angry, bitter.

CLERK
Plus nothing.

SWEAT
Really?

CLERK
(increasingly vicious)
Plus less than nothing. Plus a big fucking joke, actually. Plus a borderline goddamn sociopath in my personal opinion. Plus what kind of person would keep that shit up for months and months and months and be able to face the mirror every day to comb her fucking hair.

Sweat just stands there gaping at her, baffled.

CLERK (CONT'D)
That will be precisely 24 dollars and 99 cents.

EXT. HOUSE DAY

A pretty suburban house with a lawn. Visible in the front window of the house, looking out, is a woman in her thirties. Her name is HALEY. She has drawn the curtain aside and is staring out her window with a worried expression.

After a moment she lets the curtain go and disappears from the window.

A moment later the front door opens and Haley walks out, still with the worried expression. She walks briskly down her front walk and across the residential street.

We FOLLOW her, and as she nears the opposite side of the street we see a police car parked in front of the house opposite Haley's. A policeman is just getting into the car and shutting the door. He starts the engine and pulls out as Haley walks by to the front door of the house. We FOLLOW her to the door.

She KNOCKS on the door. After a moment, Janice answers, still in her pajamas.

JANICE

Hi.

HALEY

What happened?

JANICE

I filed a missing persons report. Or I tried to. He hasn't been missing long enough. Come on in.

Haley walks in and Janice shuts the door.

INT. JANICE'S HOUSE DAY

CONTINUOUS with the previous scene. Janice walks into the living room. Haley follows. As they walk:

HALEY

You don't really think something's happened to him?

JANICE

No. I think he's just upset about the press conference. He probably spent the night in a hotel. Did you ask Casey?

Both sit on the couch.

HALEY

Yeah, he hasn't heard from him either. That's not like him not to call, is it?

JANICE

That's why I figured I'd do missing persons just in case. If he hasn't turned up by tonight I'll be worried.

HALEY

Like you don't have enough to worry about right now.

JANICE

Yeah.
(big sigh)
Yeah.

A brief pause, then a quizzical expression appears on Janice's face, and she stands.

HALEY

How are you holding up?

JANICE

Hold on a sec.

She walks out of the living room and into the front room next to the entryway, where there is a large window similar to the one we first saw Haley in. Janice goes to the window and steps behind the flimsy curtain so that she can see out.

HALEY (O.S.)

What's up?

INT. CAR DAY

Through the open passenger-side window we can see Janice standing at the window of her house, looking right at us.

INT. JANICE'S HOUSE DAY

From Janice's POV we can see a beat-up car parked on the opposite side of the street. Sitting in the passenger's seat is Sweat, looking directly at the camera. There is nobody else in the vehicle. Janice speaks her next line so softly we can barely hear her.

JANICE

Thought I heard a car.

INT. CAR DAY

From Sweat's POV we can again see Janice standing at the window.

After a brief pause, Sweat's right arm and hand enter the frame. We see Janice briefly look behind her, then turn back.

The hand churns spirals in the air in a "get-on-with-it" way.

A brief pause, as Janice looks down and places her thumb and forefinger in her eyes. Then, leaving her head down and with eyes closed, she removes the thumb and forefinger from her eyes and gives an "okay" signal with them. She then closes that hand into a fist and beats it softly and repeatedly against the bridge of her nose. Then glances at her watch.

INT. JANICE'S HOUSE DAY

From Janice's POV. Sweat nods and picks up a cell phone. We can see him pushing the buttons with his thumb.

ON JANICE

Facing her as she stares out the window. Haley is standing right behind her, visible gauzily through the curtain.

HALEY
(she didn't hear)
What?

This startles the hell out of Janice, and we can see it in her face, but she doesn't jump. Her next line is spoken casually and calmly, despite the fear we can see in her eyes.

JANICE
I thought I heard a car. I did
hear a car, but it isn't him.

By the end of that speech, she has composed her features, and she now turns from the window and emerges from behind the curtain. We see the remainder of the shot through the curtain.

HALEY
Where's his car? Did you check to
see if it was still at the office?

JANICE
Drove by last night. Not there.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT DAY

The lot is nearly empty. In the center of the frame, sitting alone, is a white sports car.

HALEY (V.O.)

You might -- I don't mean to alarm you, I'm sure he's fine, but you might wanna check and see if there were any traffic acci --

JANICE (V.O.)

He's got I.D., they'd've called me. No, he's sulking or pouting or whatever the hell. He's the least of my worries right now.

A police car pulls into frame and parks next to the white sports car. A uniformed officer emerges from the driver's side and peers into the sports car's windshield.

HALEY (V.O.)

You were worried enough to call.

JANICE (V.O.)

Just to do something. It was half an hour I didn't have to think about what I'll do on Monday. And this is another opportunity not to think about it, so can we change the subject, please?

The officer walks back to his car, gets in, and picks up his police radio.

HALEY (V.O.)

I don't mean to --

JANICE (V.O.)

I know you don't, but you are, love, so let's just change the subject.

We HEAR a phone RING, loudly. Quick cut on the ring to

EXT. PAY PHONE DAY

Blood, unmasked, picks it up before the first ring has finished. He speaks in his own voice. We're very tight on Blood so it doesn't matter much where we are, except that it's not the pay phone we saw Janice at earlier.

BLOOD

Yeah.

(pause)

Okay. Here we go.

(pause)

You nervous? I'm really nervous.

(pause)

What time does your watch say?

He looks at his own watch, a digital one. A pause.

BLOOD (CONT'D)

We're two seconds off. How can we be two seconds off already?

(pause)

All right, this is it. You're sure she definitely gave you the signal? She wasn't just swatting a fly or something, right?

(pause)

All right, here we go here we go here we go. Cross your fingers.

He hangs up. Looks at his watch again for a beat.

INT. JANICE'S HOUSE DAY

A view from the front window. Sweat, in the car across the street, puts the cellular phone down and looks at his own watch.

CAMERA CIRCLES, PASSES through the curtain, and MOVES toward the kitchen, from which we can HEAR Janice and Haley.

JANICE (O.S.)

No, really, this's the greatest, you'll love it. It'll only take a second.

HALEY (O.S.)

'Cause I tried that diet shake goop thing and it was the most hideous --

JANICE (O.S.)

No, oh no, this is a totally different -- this would be a very poor dieting choice. You'll love this, trust me.

HALEY (O.S.)

Can I do anything?

JANICE (O.S.)

No no no. Go sit down, it'll be
just a second.

We've reached the kitchen now, and can see Janice pulling various items from cupboards and setting them next to a blender. Haley hovers nearby. During Haley's speech below, Janice pours milk into the blender.

HALEY

You never did the two shakes and a
sensible dinner thing, did you?

JANICE

Does it look like it?

CLOSE ON JANICE'S HAND AND ARM

as she pours the milk into the blender. Her watch is on this wrist, and she slowly shifts the angle at which she's pouring to make the face of the watch visible.

HALEY (O.S.)

I can always tell which girls in my
class are on the liquid diets,
without fail, they all look really
frighteningly --

Janice's hand quickly slams down on the "liquify" button on the blender's console. The resulting NOISE drowns out the rest of Haley's sentence.

BACK TO SCENE

Janice, whose back is to Haley, holds up a "just-a-minute" finger. Haley nods.

After a beat, the phone RINGS. There's no phone in the kitchen; it's the phone in the living room we hear, and we can barely hear it over the NOISE of the blender.

HALEY (CONT'D)

(barely audible)
Phone's ringin'.

JANICE

What?

HALEY

(yelling)
Phone's ringin'!

JANICE
 (yelling)
 Would you grab that for me please?

Haley walks into the living room. CAMERA FOLLOWS. She picks up the phone. The blender NOISE continues in the background.

HALEY
 Hello, home of Janice and Carl.

BLOOD (V.O.)
 (BBC accent)
 Is this Janice Axelrod?

HALEY
 (mock secretarial)
 Janice is blending at the moment,
 can you hold for a --

BLOOD (V.O.)
 Listen very carefully:

INT. JANICE'S KITCHEN DAY

The blender NOISE is now extremely loud. Unrealistically loud. We see Janice head-on, staring at the blender. Haley is visible, out of focus, in the living room behind her, still on the phone.

In the background we see Haley take the receiver away from her ear, cup her hand over the mouthpiece, and yell something at Janice. We cannot even faintly hear her over the deafeningly loud blender NOISE, however, and Janice does not turn.

We see in the background Haley moving a bit closer, as much as the phone cord will allow, and yelling again, putting more body language into it this time, leaning forward and such. We still can't hear her, though, and again Janice does not respond.

The blender NOISE has become even louder during all this. It should be shaking people's fillings in the theaters.

Without turning around, Janice now slowly and deliberately lowers one finger and hits the "off" button on the blender console, just as we see Haley go into a third yell. Janice turns the blender off slightly before Haley yells, so as the NOISE dies down we can HEAR just the tail end of the yell.

HALEY
 JANICE!!!

When the NOISE has completely died away, Janice turns around to look at Haley, who holds the receiver out toward her.

HALEY (CONT'D)

This is for you.

INT. HOLDING ROOM DAY

CLOSE on the pages of a puzzle magazine. A hand holding a pencil fills in the clues. The ideal choice for this shot would be a puzzle called a "laddergram," which involves adding a single letter to the word before and anagramming it to make a new word. (Example: east to state to attest.)

WIDER

The man, hereafter known as CARL, lies naked on his stomach on the floor, working at the puzzle. His hands are bound together, but loosely enough that he can manipulate the pencil without too much trouble. He is alone in the room. We watch him work for a moment. He gets stuck and places the pencil in his mouth as he thinks.

We hear APPLAUSE.

INT. BIG HOTEL RECEPTION ROOM NIGHT

Shot with a handheld and very cheap video camera.

It's a huge room, and the person holding the camera is far in the back. At the front, past rows and rows of well-dressed, applauding people seated at luncheon tables, Janice is being handed an award of some sort by a well-dressed and (after she hands Janice the award) applauding woman.

Janice steps to the dais, holding her award. She speaks into a microphone.

JANICE

Thank you very much. Thanks. This
is a very --

The image suddenly goes into blurry fast-motion.

VOICE (O.S.)

It's a very boring speech is what
it is.

VOICE 2 (O.S.)

What kind of an....

The briefest pause as the image continues fast-forwarding. Janice is speaking, her head moving jerkily to and fro. Now and then she points at someone in the audience. Voice 2 is not interrupted; the speech above just trails off.

VOICE (O.S.)

Award did she win? Some sorta women's business achievement business women's thing. Here we go.

The image returns to normal speed. Janice is still speaking at the dais.

JANICE

-- really kind of problematic, to be honest, that there's still a need for an award of this sort. I mean, this is a celebration and I'm deeply honored, but at the same time the very fact that we're here right now is evidence that there's still a lot of work to be done. Ideally this organization would be defunct, it would have no purpose. That's what I would truly like to see, and then you'd all be free to devote your energy to another isn't-the-stone-age-over-yet cause like say gay marriage. Which I support.
(gesturing)
Yeah, uh-huh?

A woman speaks from the audience.

WOMAN

Yes, I was wondering what your opinion was on women fighting to become priests. I assume that you support that effort?

JANICE

Yes, reluctantly.

WOMAN

Why reluctantly?

JANICE

I'm sorry, I shouldn't've said that. I wholeheartedly support the

--

WOMAN

I'd be very interested to know why you said reluctantly.

A pause. The image ineptly zooms in on Janice, so that her face now blurrily fills the screen.

VOICE (O.S.)

If he'd known this was gonna air on national TV he'd've probably spent more time reading the fucking manual.

JANICE

I said reluctantly because I'm not very keen on organized religion. However, my feelings have no bearing on whether --

WOMAN

May I ask why you're not keen?

JANICE

No, I'm sorry, it's very personal and I don't think it's appropriate for this forum.

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

We won't immediately know that this is her bedroom, because this is the first time we've seen it, and she isn't there. Instead, sitting on the bed, facing a television set with a VCR atop it, and facing the CAMERA, are two men.

On the left is a thirtyish guy holding a remote control; this is SEAN. On the right, a somewhat older man, forties or fifties, staring intently at the screen: BOBBY. Sean was the first voice we heard; Bobby voice 2.

Sean taps the pause button on the remote control.

SEAN

That was a big sound bite. "Not appropriate for this forum." News loved that. "And then she said something inappropriate!" Irony! Hose me down.

BOBBY

Play it.

Sean hits Play. Bobby leans forward.

JANICE (O.S.)
 Yes, in the white sweater. That's
 right.

A voice says something inaudible.

JANICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, we don't have a
 microphone, you'll have to speak
 up.

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)
 Sorry. A recent poll that was
 printed in the Tribune indicated
 that 63% of those surveyed felt
 that the word "feminism" now has
 primarily negative connotations.
 What is your response to that?

JANICE (O.S.)
 I'm glad that 37% of the population
 isn't so blatantly misinformed.

Without looking away from the TV screen, Bobby reaches over
 and takes the remote control out of Sean's hands.

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)
 So you don't feel that terminology
 alone can play an important role in
 shaping --

JANICE (O.S.)
 Absolutely not.
 (beat)
 Yes?

WOMAN 3 (O.S.)
 I'm -- I had my own question, but
 actually I'd like to follow up on
 this thing of...does it concern you
 that, what was it, 63% of the
 country seems to think that --

JANICE (O.S.)
 And something like 86% of the
 population thinks there's a God.
 People believe a lot of stupid
 things.

A pause.

Bobby hits the pause button, but not before ten or fifteen
 seconds have elapsed with no sound but the VCR MOTOR and some
 random MURMURING from the audience on the tape.

BOBBY
She didn't just....

A general note about Bobby: he is never interrupted. Those ellipses indicate that he just trails off. He does this a lot. There is always a brief silence while people wait to see if he's going to continue. The pause is shorter from people who know him better.

SEAN
Say that? Oh yeah. That's what I'm telling you. I don't make this shit up. We have the little portable TV's now, you know, so you can go watch the moose bathe in the river and still know that the earth is meanwhile rotating.

BOBBY
There were no....

SEAN
Moose?

Bobby points to him in affirmation. He is still looking at the TV screen.

BOBBY
Antelope.

SEAN
And you don't hunt them.

BOBBY
No.

SEAN
Doesn't make sense.

BOBBY
I'm on vacation.

SEAN
Not anymore.

Bobby pushes Play. The silence continues for a beat, then:

JANICE (O.S.)
Pardon me. I, I, I didn't mean to snap like that, I'm so sorry. Could you, could you ask your question again?

SEAN

That's it.

Bobby stops the tape.

BOBBY

That's it?

SEAN

Yeah, she just sorta forges ahead after that. A few people walked out, we can look at that if you want. It was the press conference that really blew the gasket.

BOBBY

I wonder....

SEAN

What the mighty fuck she was thinking?

BOBBY

No.

SEAN

If her hubby's abduction is related to this fiasco?

BOBBY

No.

SEAN

If there's an Arby's near here somewhere?

Bobby points in affirmation, still looking at the TV.

INT. HOLDING ROOM NIGHT

Carl stands in the center of the room, wearing a pair of jeans at least a size too big for him and buttoning a shirt equally oversized. Sweat trains a gun at Carl's head and holds the rope used to bind Carl's wrists in the other hand; Tears stands watching on the opposite side. Both are masked and speak with accents. Two puzzle magazines are on the floor, and a pencil.

TEARS

I never did have the knack of guesstimating people's sizes. Still, it's better than nothing.

SWEAT

Literally.

TEARS

And frankly we were rather tired of your John Thomas dangling in our faces all the live long day.

CARL

Is that why I'm in here and Alice is out there?

TEARS

More or less. Pick it up, please. Haven't got all day, et cetera.

Carl speeds up his buttoning. His hands are trembling slightly. He is looking down at his hands buttoning the shirt, his chin against his chest.

CARL

Where'd you get this stuff, Goodwill?

Without warning, Tears takes a couple of short steps forward and viciously slaps Carl's face, which is still turned down toward his shirt buttons. Carl falls to the ground, more from sheer surprise than the force of the blow, though the blow is pretty forceful.

SWEAT

(with no accent)

Jesus, what was that for?

Tears walks over and stands over Carl, who's sort of half-sitting, still staring at his shirt buttons.

TEARS

Was that meant to be humourous?

(beat)

I must tell you I think we've been very friendly and very accomodating, as much as can be in this situation, and I don't imagine it would be too horrifically painful for you to express some appreciation rather than carping that you'd look out of place in the pages of GQ.

A pause. Nobody moves. Sweat's gun is no longer pointed at Carl but is merely dangling at his side.

CARL

I'm sorry.

TEARS

I'd intended to give you the dictionary you asked for but now I'm not much inclined. I don't know that you've earned such a -- actually on second thought, wait just a moment.

He exits frame, and we HEAR the door open and close. A pause.

SWEAT

(accent back)

Are you all right?

Carl nods.

SWEAT (CONT'D)

We'd agreed that...don't know what's gotten into him.

A pause. We HEAR the door open, and Tears returns, carrying the dictionary, a small college edition. He tosses it at, rather than to, Carl, striking him on the shoulder.

TEARS

Here. Might I suggest that the first word you look up be "gratitude"?

He walks out of the room again, and we HEAR the door slam. Carl holds out his hands, wrists crossed, and Sweat starts toward him with the rope.

INT. LOW-RENT APARTMENT NIGHT

Tears sits in a chair and removes his mask. He is sweating heavily and his face is flushed. Blood sits on another chair, reading a paperback.

After a pause, the bathroom door opens and Alice steps out, wearing a t-shirt and jeans, both too large. Blood looks up from his book and holds a 'quiet' finger to his lips, nodding his head toward the door to Carl's room. Alice nods, then turns around in a circle, modelling her outfit in mock runway fashion. Blood silently expresses approval. Tears is staring into space.

Sweat opens the door to the holding room and walks out, closing the door behind him. He holds the gun but not the rope.

SWEAT
(no accent)
Plugs are in.

ALICE
I think I like this oversized look.
I think I'm adopting it.

TEARS
(no accent; very quiet)
Jesus christ, I just hit the guy.

Alice turns to look at him.

SWEAT
Hard, too.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT

A couple of TECHNICIANS busily set up phone-tracing equipment. Sean is talking to Haley, taking notes on a little pad.

HALEY
No, I know the difference between an Irish accent and an English one, and this guy was English. Or, I shouldn't say, he sounded English. Either he was or he was affecting it.

SEAN
What about Scottish?

HALEY
English. Can you tell the difference between...Monty Python and Sean Connery?

TECHNICIAN (O.S.)
Quick head count might do it.

HALEY
English. For sure.

SEAN
Okay, and what exactly did he say before you gave the phone to Ms. Axelrod?

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Bobby sits alone on the bed, looking at the TV, remote control in hand. From the TV we hear Janice's voice.

JANICE (O.S.)

I deeply regret any offense this unplanned and mean-spirited remark may have caused. I have the greatest respect for all of the world's religious faiths, and whatever my own beliefs may be, I did not intend to insult the beliefs of anybody else. I spoke stupidly, without thinking, and I wish to extend my sincerest and most profound apologies to all concerned. Thank you.

ON THE TV SCREEN

Janice stands at another dais, a sheet of paper in front of her upon it. This was shot by professional news cameras, not the jerky, unsteady Camcorder we saw in the previous footage of Janice.

We see the image of Janice at the dais freeze and shrink to a small corner of the screen, revealing a news anchor at her desk.

ANCHOR

A graceful apology, eloquently spoken. But in the question and answer session that followed, Janice Axelrod revealed a bit more of her personal worldview than she'd probably intended.

The image of Janice zooms back out to fill the screen and unfreezes. Janice picks up her sheet of paper and looks as though she intends to leave the dais.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Were your remarks prompted by your experiences with your own religious upbringing?

Janice starts to wave the reporter off, then changes her mind and steps back to the microphone.

JANICE

That's not something I care to discuss in public.

(MORE)

JANICE (CONT'D)

And it's irrelevant, because what I said was wrong regardless of my reasons.

She starts to leave again, but hasn't taken more than a step before the next question is barked out.

REPORTER 2 (O.S.)

From what study did you get the 86% figure?

JANICE

Um...I don't know. That number might not be right, it was just something I read once. Maybe it was 92%. It's a large majority. I don't have a citation, and the point, the point is that I shouldn't have said it in the first place.

REPORTER 3 (O.S.)

But you think that what that large majority believes is "stupid"?

BACK TO SCENE

Janice is now standing in the doorway behind Bobby, who is still intent on the television screen. He reaches below frame and pulls up an Arby's bag, into which he reaches for some fries.

JANICE

Turn it off.

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

No, it unquestionably serves some purp --

Bobby does not turn around to see who has spoken, but simply points the remote at the VCR and pushes Stop. We hear STATIC, and Bobby leans forward to turn down the volume knob on the TV.

BOBBY

(agreeably)

Okay.

Now he turns around. There is a brief pause.

JANICE

I'm sorry.

BOBBY

No.

(beat)

How expensive is this thing?

He refers to the bedspread on which he is sitting, which in turning to face Janice he has evidently only just noticed.

JANICE

What?

BOBBY

Should I not be sitting on this?
It looks expensive.

JANICE

No, that's fine. I told you to
make yourself at home.

BOBBY

Well, you know, "at home" is one
thing, bedspreads are frequently
another.

JANICE

I -- no, I didn't know that,
actually.

BOBBY

It's been my experience.

A pause.

JANICE

I'm sorry, I know you have to do
your job and everything. It's
just...it just hurts.

BOBBY

Mm-hmm.

JANICE

I'm sorry, I'm just gonna...

She turns and starts to exit the room.

BOBBY

Why don't you tell me what you
said?

Janice stops and turns to face him. Then she takes a few tentative steps back into the room.

JANICE
Instead of you watching it?

BOBBY
No, I have to watch it. But why
don't you tell me first?

JANICE
What for?

BOBBY
No idea. Just a thought I had.

A brief pause. Janice looks quizzically at Bobby.

JANICE
I just want Carl back safe. You
don't have to be nice to me.

BOBBY
I guess not.

A pause. Janice steps fully into the room and closes the door behind her.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT

Haley and Sean are still talking, sitting down now. The technicians continue to work in the background, moving in and out of frame.

SEAN
And then she hung up.

HALEY
Yes.

SEAN
Why didn't she answer the phone in
the first place? Do you usually
answer her phone?

HALEY
She was blending.

SEAN
She was blending?

HALEY
Yes, blending.

Sean carefully writes this down in his little notebook.

The technician who spoke before wanders over to Sean and taps him on the shoulder.

HEAD TECHNICIAN
We're all set.

SEAN
You're sure.

HEAD TECHNICIAN
Yes, it's plugged in. You're never gonna let that drop, are you?

He walks away. After a beat, to himself:

SEAN
No.
(beat)
And what precisely were the substances being blended?

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Janice is sitting on the bed. Bobby is now seated on the floor, with his Arby's bag in front of him. As this conversation continues, he removes a handful of napkins from the bag and spreads them out on the floor and in his lap.

JANICE
So I've said sorry, the firm's satisfied, it blows over and life goes on. All that happy ending required was three words: No More Questions. All I had to say was "No more questions." I didn't say it. Why didn't I say that?

BOBBY
Maybe you were....

A pause. Bobby takes a bite of a roast-beef sandwich.

JANICE
Do you believe in God?

Bobby finishes chewing and swallows before answering. This takes what seems like forever.

BOBBY
I'm undecided.

JANICE
I don't believe you.

BOBBY

No?

JANICE

No. I think you affect indecision
to get what you want.

Bobby takes another bite of his sandwich and ponders this as
he chews and swallows.

BOBBY

You may be right.

JANICE

But you're not sure.

Bobby shakes his head "no."

JANICE (CONT'D)

Do you wanna know what I said?

Bobby nods his head "yes."

JANICE (CONT'D)

I said -- do you remember the
question?

BOBBY

Mm-hmm. Do you think what the
majority believes is stupid?

JANICE

I said no, it clearly has some
purpose, it allows the weak and
insecure to avoid taking any
responsibility for their own
lives. And that it's a blessing
for people who need someone else to
be in control, and that 86% sounded
about right to me, and that in that
sense, no, I didn't think it was
stupid.

A long pause. Bobby sips at an Arby's drink container.

BOBBY

Some people would call that
arrogant.

JANICE

Stop by my office on Monday, I'll
introduce you to a hundred or so.

Bobby stands up, wanders over to a low dresser on which stand several framed photographs. The photo furthest from him (and us) shows what appears to be a woman and a dog, but the woman's face is being electronically obscured. He picks up the one closest to him, a wedding portrait.

BOBBY

I take it this is him.

JANICE

Happiest day of my life. Or pretty close. I smiled a lot.

BOBBY

You love him.

JANICE

(simple conviction)

Hell yes.

Bobby sets the photo down, picks up another, also of Janice and Carl, taken in Hawaii or some other exotic locale.

BOBBY

No kids?

JANICE

No.

BOBBY

I saw a swingset in the backyard.

JANICE

Yes you did.

Bobby puts the second photo down, peers quizzically at the one of the dog and the electronically obscured woman.

BOBBY

Who's the woman with the pug?

JANICE

That is some crazy psycho bitch with nothing better to do but waste years of people's lives on an emotional wild goose chase.

An awkward pause. Sean sticks his head in the doorway.

SEAN

We're set.

BOBBY

Is it plugged in?

A brief pause.

SEAN

I'll go make sure. By the way?
Batteries are still going.

And with that cryptic phrase, he disappears. Another pause.

BOBBY

So you're being picketed now?

JANICE

Vigorously.

BOBBY

Still? The press conference was
almost a month ago.

JANICE

Tell me. I was sure it'd die down
after a week or so, but if anything
they've stepped it up. There are
petitions now, too.

BOBBY

Any death threats, violent
anything?

JANICE

Well, everybody seems pretty sure
that I'm gonna burn in hell, but
nobody's actually offered me a one-
way pass yet. Oh, except the
board. They want me to resign.

BOBBY

Will you?

JANICE

No.

BOBBY

I'm wondering whether....

During the expectant pause, the phone RINGS. Janice immediately starts to her feet. Bobby holds up a finger indicating that she should wait. He neatly picks up the napkins from his lap and the floor.

SEAN (O.S.)

Bobby! Yo!

Second RING. Bobby slowly rises to his feet. Sean appears in the doorway.

BOBBY
 (to Janice)
 Pick up after the fourth ring and
 keep 'em talking.

SEAN
 That was ring two, perhaps leaving
 the bedr --

Third RING.

SEAN (CONT'D)
 That's three.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT

The two technicians sit at a card table with Janice's phone
 and tracing equipment set up on top. Haley is curled up in
 an anxious ball on the sofa.

On the cut, Sean and Janice barrel into the room from the
 hallway, heading for the phone. Janice reaches it just as it
 begins the fourth RING, and places her hand in the air just
 above the receiver, hovering expectantly.

As the fourth ring dies away, Bobby saunters in from the
 hallway.

BOBBY
 Wait.

Janice takes her hand away. Bobby turns to the head
 technician.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
 Is it plugged in?

The head technician half-rises out of his seat, his face red.

HEAD TECHNICIAN
 Anybody fuckin' asks me that one
 more time, fuck you Bobby, one fuck-
 up in eleven --

Fifth RING.

SEAN
 (over the ring)
 That's five.

HEAD TECHNICIAN

Thank you, Count.
 (as The Count from Sesame
 St.)
 Five! Five rings! A-ha-ha --

BOBBY

Gordon, shut up and sit down.

Gordon, the technician, shuts up and sits down. Bobby gives Janice a slight nod. Janice picks up the receiver on RING six.

JANICE

Hello?

There is a speaker set up on the card table so that all can hear both sides of the conversation. All now hear a DIAL TONE. Janice replaces the receiver in its cradle. A long pause.

GORDON

Now that one was not my fault.

SEAN

Just get us the location.
 (to Bobby)
 This might be a bit presumptuous,
 but I really think that if our goal
 is to Catch the Kidnapper, a very
 good start might be Answering the
 Phone.

BOBBY

I....

Everyone looks at him expectantly (except Gordon, who is busy with his equipment). A pause.

EXT. PAY PHONE NIGHT

A different location than the previous two phones. Blood and Sweat stand close together, both wearing gloves. Blood's hand is on the receiver, which is resting in its cradle. They speak in normal voices.

BLOOD

So should I call back or what?

SWEAT

I think we should split.

BLOOD

You think it's some kind of a set-up or something?

SWEAT

I think we should split now.

BLOOD

Maybe they don't actually hafta answer the phone to trace a call.

SWEAT

Bye.

Sweat swiftly leaves frame. Blood follows.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT -- A BIT LATER

A silent tableau. People are staring at the floor, the ceiling, their fingernails -- anywhere, in fact, but at each other.

After a beat, the phone RINGS again. Everybody looks up. Nobody moves.

SEAN

Okay. This time, let's pick it up following ring four. You set?

JANICE

Yeah.

SEAN

(to Gordon)

You've -- never mind.

GORDON

Fuck you.

BOBBY

All right.

Second RING. Janice places her hand on the receiver.

CLOSE ON HER HAND

Her knuckles are white.

Third RING. The rings are getting successively louder.

CLOSE ON THE 'OPERATOR' BUTTON

The numeral zero and the letters 'OPER' fill the screen.

Fourth RING. As the sound of ring four dies away:

SEAN (O.S.)

And...now.

CLOSER

Now all we can see is 'OPER' . . . except we don't see 'OPER'; we see 'ROPE.'

Fifth RING. Quite loud now.

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

Now.

CLOSER STILL

What fills the screen now, inexplicably, is 'OR'.

Sixth RING. Deafening.

EXT. PAY PHONE NIGHT

Blood and Sweat stand by yet another phone. Something in the lighting or the background immediately indicates that it's a different location than last time. Blood holds the receiver again; through it, we can hear, tinnily, the tail end of ring six. This shot lasts all of one second.

SWEAT

This is stupid.

BLOOD

This is useless.

SWEAT

We are losers.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT

CUT on the seventh RING. We are again close on Janice's hand, which now lifts the receiver from the cradle in mid-ring. CAMERA FOLLOWS the receiver up to Janice's face, which is perfectly composed.

JANICE

Hello?

CUT TO BLACK

We HEAR scissors cutting paper.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM NIGHT

The scissors are cutting a story and photograph from a daily newspaper. The headline of the story reads: "Cheating Axelrod Spouse Kidnapped," and a sub-head reads: "\$2.5 Million Ransom Demanded For Husband And Mistress."

The photograph accompanying the story shows Janice at her front door, surrounded by a sea of journalists. Bobby is visible in the background.

WIDER

The scissors are being wielded by a 16-year-old girl, NICOLE. She sits cross-legged on her bed, the newspaper open on her lap, a scrapbook on the floor beside her.

We HEAR a door open and close in the distance. Nicole doesn't look up. She finishes cutting the article and photo out, grabs the scrapbook from the floor, and starts pasting it in.

Bobby enters the room. The door is open, but he knocks on it anyway before stepping inside. Nicole will not look up at him throughout this scene, though her tone is genial.

NICOLE

Hi.

BOBBY

Is that popcorn I smell?

NICOLE

Yes.

BOBBY

Why is it, um, why is it such an unpleasant smell?

NICOLE

If we got a bigger microwave it wouldn't always burn.

BOBBY

Or you could cook it less.

NICOLE
That doesn't work.

BOBBY
Clearly neither does this, so....

NICOLE
We need a bigger microwave.

BOBBY
So until we get one, if you
could....

NICOLE
You know how big Mom and Joshua's
microwave is?

A brief pause.

BOBBY
I have seen it, yes.

INT. BOBBY'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN NIGHT

Bobby and Nicole sit at the small kitchen table, eating
dinner.

NICOLE
Is she gonna pay?

BOBBY
I don't know.

NICOLE
I wouldn't.

BOBBY
Well, you don't know that.

NICOLE
Yes I do. If somebody did that to
me he could go to hell for all I
cared. I wouldn't give up a cent.

BOBBY
It's --

NICOLE
If the ransom were a nickel I
wouldn't pay it.

BOBBY

Somebody wrongs you and you're prepared to forfeit their life?

NICOLE

Maybe.

BOBBY

I taught you that?

NICOLE

Pass me the salt. Please.

He passes her the salt.

BOBBY

Nicole, that's not what I tried to....

NICOLE

Well, it was a valiant effort.

Turns out I'm scum, though.

(beat)

Good picture of you in the Chronicle.

BOBBY

I'm squinting.

They both chew their food for a moment.

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Janice sits alone on her bed, her bedroom door closed. We can faintly HEAR muffled voices coming from the other side of the door, but can make out no individual words. Janice appears reasonably composed. Her eyes are dry.

She reaches into a pocket and removes a small vial containing some unspecified liquid, and an eyedropper. She then carefully places a small amount of the liquid from the vial into the eyedropper, lies down on her back on the bed, and puts several drops into each eye. This is apparently somewhat painful, as her face contorts the moment a drop hits her eye, but she makes no sound.

Still lying down, she replaces the vial and the eyedropper in her pocket.

After a moment, she sits up. Her eyes are red and faintly swollen, and tears leak out of the corners. It looks as if she's been crying for some time.

She smiles weakly. We hear a light RAPPING at the bedroom door.

HALEY (O.S.)
 (through door)
 Janice? He's here. You awake?

Janice takes a deep breath, then exhales sharply. Cut on the sound of exhalation to:

INT. HOLDING ROOM NIGHT

This scene is to take place in complete and utter silence. There should be no sound of any kind whatsoever, with one exception, which will be noted. The audience could conceivably wonder, if only for a moment, whether something has gone wrong with the sound system in the theater.

The room is completely dark, except for light creeping in from the crack between the door and the floor. We can see, just barely, the outline of Carl, dressed in his oversized clothing, his hands bound behind his back, a gag around his mouth. It's too dark to tell whether his earplugs are in.

Carl lies in the center of the room. Slowly and deliberately, he begins to roll toward the door, and the light.

CLOSE ON THE FLOOR

Carl rolls into frame, and the lower half of his face is illuminated by the light seeping under the door from the adjoining room. Carl places his ear as close to the crack as he can possibly get it. We can now see that his earplugs are firmly in place. There is still no sound at all.

Carl strains to get his ear even closer.

INT. LOW-RENT APARTMENT NIGHT

The other side of the door. Bright light. Sound suddenly back on, loudly. All we see is the lower half of the door, where it meets the floor.

ALICE (O.S.)
 -- fucking lunatic!

SWEAT (O.S.)
 There's no harm done yet.

ALICE (O.S.)
(incredulous)
There's no har --

INT. HOLDING ROOM NIGHT

Sound out again, for the rest of the scene.

Carl rolls back toward the center of the room, apparently in defeat.

He pauses in mid-roll.

He then rolls back to the door, again moving slowly and carefully. This time, he positions his head so that his eye is as close to the crack as possible.

CARL'S POV

We see feet. Because Carl's head is resting on the floor, we see them as if they were resting on the wall, rather than the floor. Two pairs of feet in tennis shoes are visible, both motionless. A pair of bare feet paces back and forth (from our perspective, up and down). It is impossible to tell whether the bare feet belong to a man or a woman; they never stop moving, and there's no toenail polish or other glaring indication.

CARL'S EYE

As seen through the crack in the door. His pupil focuses.

CARL'S POV

The bare feet continue pacing. One pair of tennis shoes moves towards them briefly, then turns and returns to where it had been previously.

CARL'S EYE

Blinking.

CARL'S POV

The bare feet stop. A third pair of tennis shoes enters the narrow frame.

CARL'S EYE

Widening.

CARL'S POV

The third pair of tennis shoes instantly turns and leaves the narrow frame. The bare feet follow. One of the remaining shoes disappears from the side of the frame, as if the person wearing it had just propped it on a chair or his/her other leg.

CARL'S EYE

Staring.

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM NIGHT

Janice, in tears, sits on her couch. Next to her sits Don, from her office. Haley sits apart from them, and Bobby, Sean, and two or three other MEN can be seen talking in the distant background. They are in another room, or perhaps even outside.

Don is leaning toward Janice in the most solicitous way imaginable, and speaking in a low, confidential tone.

DON

I mean, you know, I don't really know him, I only met him briefly at the picnics and stuff, but he didn't...he seemed like a decent guy, to me, when I talked to him, he seemed like...and, and, and this wasn't decent of him, certainly, but at the same time, you know, he's not the first, not by a...which doesn't excuse anything, I'm not...but, I'm saying, to let him possibly be, okay?, murdered ...that's not...

REVERSE ANGLE

Bobby, Sean, and the other men in the foreground; Janice and Don and maybe Haley, no longer audible, in the background.

MAN 1

No physical evidence at either of the phones.

(MORE)

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Door-to-door canvas of both neighborhoods, nobody saw jackshit. We got nothin'.

BOBBY

That's not good. That's....

SEAN

I would've bet cash money there were no pay phones left anywhere.

BOBBY

(ignoring this)

I don't think she's gonna pay.

BACK TO SCENE

Don replies to something Janice apparently said while we were away.

DON

Try not to think of her at all. The money is to release Carl. And then, her, they'll let her go or they won't, doesn't matter, she's not your concern. Seven million for him, three mil for her, that's just semantics. Just lump it all together. I do that at the office every day. Several times a day, usually.

REVERSE

Bobby, Sean, and the others, still in conversation.

MAN 2

Does she know about the poll?

BOBBY

What poll?

SEAN

CBS/Times asked people should she pay or not. 62 yes, I think like 29 no, the rest undecided or didn't care.

MAN 2

But split by gender. Large majority of men said yes, slight majority of women said no.

BOBBY
What do you think?

MAN 2
What, me personally?

BOBBY
Yeah.

MAN 2
I wouldn't pay it.

BACK TO SCENE

Don is still at it. Janice is still brushing tears away.

DON
Tell you the good news though, if nothing else comes of this? The goddamn protesters finally split.

HALEY (MAYBE OS)
Really?

In the background, we see another man arrive with a couple of large pizza boxes. He hands them to Sean, who sets them down nearby and pays, getting a receipt. Bobby picks up a slice.

DON
Yeah. I mean, no, there are like eight or ten still around, muttering about how this is God's punishment and whatever, but most of 'em went home, haven't come back.

Janice shoots Don an incredulous look; places her hands out, palms up, to signify "am I supposed to give a shit?"

DON (CONT'D)
I know, I know. Just thought it might cheer you up a little. And of course the whole...resignation issue is tabled. Obviously. Until this is all straightened out.

JANICE
(bitterly sarcastic)
That's wonderful.

DON

Okay, okay. I just thought you'd
wanna know, you don't wanna know,
okay. Forget about it.

REVERSE

Bobby takes a bit of his slice and speaks with his mouth
full.

BOBBY

That doesn't bother me. What
troubles me is the deadline.

MAN 1

What about it?

BOBBY

There were supposed to be olives on
this. Does the other one have
olives?

SEAN

The other one's plain cheese.

BOBBY

Run and go get that guy.

SEAN

It's just olives.

BOBBY

Nothing is just olives.

Sean leaves frame, looking irritated. Bobby continues
eating, as do the others.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

They give her a week to decide.
Why a week? That's seven days for
them to screw up or for us to get
lucky before the drop.

MAN 2

Arrogance is underrated, I find.
At least professionally.

BOBBY

It's so stupid there must be a
reason for it. They must be....

A thoughtful pause, as all three munch pizza.

BACK TO SCENE

Haley seems to have taken over for Don, who has sunk deep into the couch's cushions in apparent defeat.

HALEY
But what if they do?

JANICE
Then they do.

HALEY
And you could live with yourself.

JANICE
I have no idea why I'm alive right now.

DON
I know that feeling.

HALEY
(to Don)
This is how funny you're not:

She doesn't actually make a gesture to accompany this statement, which is left hanging; maybe her glare is supposed to suffice.

JANICE
I think it was like ten or fifteen years ago this plane crashed over water, in the middle of the ocean somewhere.

This non sequitur immediately gets both Haley and Don's attention. It also elicits a puzzled look in passing from Sean, who walks through the room at this point with the pizza delivery guy in tow. Possibly we can see Bobby and the pizza dude conversing in the background throughout the following.

(Ideally, this monologue should sound a little bit practiced. Not enough to be jarring -- just enough to give alert viewers the impression that it's been rehearsed, if only mentally.)

JANICE (CONT'D)
I think I read this in Reader's Digest, waiting room timekiller kinda thing. Plane crashes, survivors treading water, rescue helicopter shows up. They toss down a ladder or something.

Don sits up and looks as if he's about to interrupt. Haley shoots him a look that stops him in his tracks.

JANICE (CONT'D)

But the thing is, the catch is, they can only take up one person at a time. I guess -- actually not a ladder, I guess, but some...rescue receptacle. So they toss it to this guy who's treading water, and he passes it to somebody else, and that person is saved. And then they toss it to him again, the same guy, and he lets somebody else go up ahead of him, again. I don't...my memory is hazy, but not strictly women and children, like a chivalry thing, as I recall. Just anybody, anybody who was nearby. And this happens maybe five, six times, the guy has an opportunity to save himself and chooses to save somebody else instead. He just keeps treading water as the others ascend. And he drowned. They have no idea who it was, which of the dead.

(beat)

Do you know why he did that? Why he was willing to do it?

Nobody answers. [True story, by the way.]

JANICE (CONT'D)

Because he didn't know those people. They were complete strangers to him. He had no idea who they were, what they'd done, how they'd sinned or...failed. Or transgressed. It was all totally abstract.

(beat)

I could do that. I think I would do that.

Long pause. Bobby sticks his head in the room, takes the room's pulse, silently withdraws. After he's gone:

HALEY

I think that's bullshit.

Janice half-smiles, half-shrugs.

JANICE
World's full of it.

The three of them sit there.

The number '7' slams onto the screen, superimposed over the image, accompanied by a loud CLANGING sound as of a cell door slamming shut.

A split second later, one corner of the frame is covered by a TV screen depicting a newscast. Janice's face appears in boxwipe.

Another CLANG. The number '6' slams onto the '7,' replacing it.

A different corner of the frame now sports an image of a person we've never seen before riding on a bus or subway, holding a newspaper. The first superimposed image remains (and all subsequent images will remain until the screen goes black).

CLANG. '5' now.

Image: A group of people talking animatedly at the dinner table. Again, these are all superimposed on top of Janice, Haley, and Don sitting in Janice's living room.

CLANG. '4'

Image: A computer monitor. A .jpg of Janice is just visible. The cursor moves and starts scrolling downward, past text that's too small to read.

CLANG. '3'

Image: Another TV screen, this time showing a group of pundits (preferably faces we'll recognize) engaged in heated discussion.

CLANG. '2'

Image: Nicole, Bobby's daughter, sits on her bed, clipping a story from Time or Newsweek or whoever's willing to cough up the big product-placement smackeros. A national magazine.

CLANG. '1'

Image: Janice fighting her way past a phalanx of journalists en route from her front door to her car.

CLANG. '0'...and on zero, we abruptly

CUT TO BLACK

There is a very brief pause.

Then the number '-1' slams onto the black screen, right where the previous numbers had been (probably dead center). Yes, that's a negative one. There is no accompanying image, and instead of the CLANG, we hear what sounds like kind of a THUD. We can also hear a crackling sound, which lingers.

Another brief pause, then '-1' is replaced by '-2'. THUD.

A bit faster now. THUD. '-3'

THUD '-4'

EXT. WOODS DAY

We can't really tell that it's the woods yet, though, because we're close on a bonfire. This is the source of the crackling sound that was audible between and behind the loud THUDS.

There's now another THUD as a banded stack of \$100 bills is tossed onto the fire. Charred money is all over the place.

Another stack of bills lands in the flames with a THUD.

WIDER

We can now see that we're way out in the middle of nowhere, in a heavily wooded area that looks pretty secluded. Sweat squats in front of the fire next to a large duffel bag. Every few seconds he reaches into the bag, pulls out another stack of bills, and chucks it into the flames.

Blood stands a few feet away, holding a gun, facing away from the fire, as if keeping watch.

Alice, fully dressed for the first time since the movie began, also stands nearby, facing in the opposite direction from Blood.

Tears is nowhere in sight.

After a couple more THUDS (no accents in this scene):

SWEAT

I kinda see his point, actually.

He tosses another stack.

SWEAT (CONT'D)

In a way.

And another.

SWEAT (CONT'D)

In terms of the sheer --

BLOOD

(without turning)

Just finish. Please.

ALICE

(likewise)

Fuck I'm cold.

SWEAT

I was just saying.

He tosses another stack. THUD.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR DAY

It's a nice hotel -- not swanky, but clean and well-appointed. Janice, carrying a large shopping bag, strides down the corridor, occasionally glancing at signs on the walls that indicate which direction one should go to find a particular set of rooms.

Eventually she stops before a door. Pauses for a moment. Knocks lightly, maybe three tentative taps.

A pause.

The door opens. Standing behind it, dressed in clothes that actually fit him, is Carl. He has about a 12-day growth of beard working at the moment. He looks neither surprised nor pleased to see Janice.

JANICE

Hi.

Carl nods.

JANICE (CONT'D)

I...

She lifts the hand holding the shopping bag by way of explanation.

CARL
What's that?

JANICE
A few items you neglected to pack.
That I thought you maybe could use.

Carl takes the bag from her, opens it, peers inside. Closes it.

JANICE (CONT'D)
Or I could offer you something a
little less abstract.

CARL
Did you just now find these?

JANICE
How about I come in and we look at
them together?

CARL
How long have you known?

JANICE
Honey, forever, for like a million
years. You thought it was a big
secret? You thought I would
object?

CARL
To be honest.

JANICE
Maybe if they were violent I'd be a
little worried. Basic tits and
ass, hey, you're a human male.

CARL
So the objectification of the --

JANICE
Carl, can I come in? Or can't I?

Carl looks at her for a beat, then opens the door wider. Janice walks in, and he closes the door after her.

INT. HOTEL ROOM DAY

The room has two double beds; the one nearer the door has a couple of large suitcases on top of it. The shades or blinds or whatever are closed, and the lights are out, so the room is lit only by very diffuse sunlight.

There's a small table near the window, and a chair. Carl gestures for Janice to sit. She sits instead on the bed (the one without the suitcases), cross-legged, removing her shoes.

CARL
I guess I deserve this.

JANICE
Deserve what?

CARL
This.

He gestures to her, to the bag he's set on the other bed, to what can only be intended to represent the universe at large.

JANICE
Sweetie, I'm trying to seduce you.

CARL
No doubt.

JANICE
No, I am. Come over here, huh?

CARL
And, you know, you're away on business, I need some release, there was no comparison being made, it's not like that's why I eventually wound up --

JANICE
Carl. That was not an accusation. It was strictly an excuse to come here. I was being cute. Trying, anyway. C'mere.

Carl slumps to the floor several feet away, back against the wall, knees drawn to his chest.

CARL
I can't even really look at you.

JANICE
I want you to.

CARL
I'm so sorry.

JANICE
What did I say about that phrase?

CARL

You not being angry makes it worse.
I don't know why.

JANICE

Then you're a fucking asshole
dirtbag and I hope you burn in
hell. Now get over here and do me.
That is your penance.

CARL

Didn't you always say sex is not a
magical problem-solver?

JANICE

'Cause I didn't wanna have sex
right then! Fine, forget sex.
Just please come home. This is
silly. This is bogus martyr crap
and it's beneath you.

Carl has started to cry, very quietly. Janice slides down
from the edge of the bed and crawls across the floor to him.

CARL

I tried. I don't know what it was.
Her desire was just overpowering,
it'd been so long since anybody'd --

Janice places her hand over his mouth. Then she takes his
head in both of her hands and speaks to him in the intense
tone you usually hear when someone's telling some wounded
grunt to hang on dammit, help is on the way and he's gonna
pull through.

JANICE

Listen to me. Shut up. Okay?
Shut the fuck up. I don't care.
All I care about is you're alive
and intact. Whatever reason you
felt like you needed to be with
someone else, fine. It happened,
it's over, end of story. I am not
gonna use this as a weapon and
neither should you. I truly truly
truly do not care. I forgive you.
Okay? You are one hundred percent
forgiven.

There's a brief pause as Janice waits for some kind of
acknowledgement. Then Carl gently removes her hands from his
head, stands, goes to the room's nightstand and pulls a
newspaper from the top drawer. He tosses it to Janice.

CARL
 'cording to that, I'm lucky you
 didn't just let 'em put a bullet in
 me. Which I wish they had.

Janice stares blankly at the paper from her kneeling position while Carl walks to the closet and shrugs into a jacket.

CARL (CONT'D)
 I have to go talk to the cops
 again. Door locks automatically
 when you shut it.
 (beat)
 I'm sorry. I don't know what it
 was.

He leaves, the door making that sad clicking noise hotel doors always make.

Janice sits still for a moment. Then she slides herself over to the suitcase bed, to where the bag she brought sits, reaches in, and pulls out a porn magazine. She flips through it.

INT. BOBBY'S FAMILY ROOM DAY

Nicole, Bobby's daughter, sits on the couch watching TV. We can hear offscreen CLATTER coming from behind her. The voice we now hear may sound familiar.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
 Where?

NICOLE
 Second. Cupboard. From the right.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
 Yeah, I'm looking there and fuck
 no. I see cups, I see plates, I
 see a frickin' cheese grater...

NICOLE
 From the right.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
 I said I'm...yeah okay hold on.

A pause. Nicole watches TV. We hear more NOISES.

Into the living room, carrying an open box of Pop Tarts in one hand and a half-eaten Tart in the other, steps John, the guy who was using the pay phone Janice needed way the hell back on page 12.

He tosses Nicole the box, sits next to her on the couch.

NICOLE
Want an easy way to remember?

JOHN
Whatever.

NICOLE
You hang to the left.

JOHN
Yuk yuk yuk.

NICOLE
No, I'm serious. If you're not
sure, just remember left is the
side the bulge is on.

She reaches over and pats his bulge.

JOHN
Don't do that shit.

NICOLE
What?

JOHN
Is this pleasant?

He reaches over and pats one of Nicole's breasts three or
four times with the palm of his hand.

NICOLE
Ow.

JOHN
My point exactly.
(of the TV)
Jesus christ, get that fucking
bitch off the screen already!

NICOLE
Shut up, I want to see if they talk
to Dad.

JOHN
I swear to god she taught me social
studies or something.

NICOLE
(umpteenth time)
She runs one of the world's largest

--

JOHN

Then she used to play bridge with my mom. Or I don't know what, but I promise you I've seen her around. In the flesh, in person, and my memory is she's a total space cadet. All I'm saying.

NICOLE

I still can't believe she paid.

JOHN

That took some stuff, I'll give her that. So when's your old man gonna snare the cul-prits?

NICOLE

Shut up.

JOHN

When's he gonna bust the perps?

Nicole reaches over to pat John's bulge again, presumably with greater force this time, but he swings his pelvis out of the way at the last second, shifting onto his knees.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Ha!

INT. POLICE STATION DAY

A small, cluttered office with one large desk and one smaller desk. Behind the large desk sits Bobby, thoughtfully bending a paper clip. Opposite him in a folding chair sits Carl. Sean sort of paces around the perimeter, going in and out of frame.

CARL

No, I'm telling you, I couldn't hear a damn thing. The blood rushing in my ears, that's it.

BOBBY

Did you recognize whose shoes were whose, or....?

CARL

That's the kind of detail I should've been...no. No, I paid no attention, I'm sorry.

BOBBY

Well, the circumstances were trying.

CARL

Yeah still. No.

SEAN

Isn't it possible, I mean I don't mean to trash this lead or anything, great lead, but isn't it possible that it was just the four of them?

CARL

How do you mean?

SEAN

Well there were four people in the other room, right? The three Brits plus Alice. And you saw four pairs of feet. So $4 = 4$.

BOBBY

(as to a child)

But he's saying Alice wouldn't have been visible to him from where she was being held.

CARL

She was tied up the whole time. She wasn't strolling about.

SEAN

As far as you know.

BOBBY

I'm sorry, Carl, do you want something to drink? Coffee or apple juice or....?

CARL

No, I'm good.

BOBBY

Sure?

CARL

I'm good, thanks.

BOBBY

I could use some coffee.

A pause.

SEAN
(over-emphatic)
I'll get that for you, shall I?

BOBBY
That'd be very kind.

Sean leaves the office, slamming the door behind him. Bobby leans over or rises, depending upon the layout of the office, to follow his progress. He then opens the top drawer of his desk and removes a package of AA batteries, which he opens.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Mr. Ackerman, would you do me a small favor?

CARL
Okay.

BOBBY
I need you to keep watch for just a moment.

He stuffs the empty battery package into his pocket rather than tossing it into the trash, then rises and walks to the smaller desk. A backpack or some other small bag rests on the desk.

CARL
I'm sorry?

BOBBY
Go stand by the door and let me know if you see my colleague returning. Break room's way down the hall, it should take him a few minutes, but....

Carl, clearly puzzled, walks to the door and looks out, but can't help glancing over at Bobby every few seconds.

Bobby, meanwhile, has extracted a portable CD player from the backpack on the smaller desk and is replacing the batteries in the compartment with the ones from his desk (which are the same brand). He pockets the old ones.

CARL
I'm supposed to be confused right now, right?

BOBBY
It's just a bit of a prank. Keep looking.

Carl returns his attention to the space beyond the door. Bobby replaces the CD player in the backpack, carefully rearranges everything so that it appears not to have been disturbed, and returns to his seat behind the larger desk.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

About ten months ago, I think now, my colleague expressed some dissatisfaction with the life span of the batteries he was using at that time. Apparently the advertisements for this particular brand made certain claims that he felt were spurious. Now as you may have noticed my colleague is not one to keep his opinions to himself, and so he voiced aloud his intention of changing brands. He would by god no longer waste his hard-earned the blah blah blah, from now on the generic this this that would more than suffice. So on so forth and....

Bobby makes the standard yakkity-yak gesture, consisting of pressing the fingers and thumb of one hand together rapidly right next to one of his ears.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

One grows weary. Anyway I grow weary. So for the past however many months, ever since he made the switch, I have been secretly replacing his batteries every couple or three days. And he now believes that a single pair of double A's purchased from a street vendor for one lousy dollar have lasted for almost a year of near-daily use.

CARL

But doesn't that just make him that much more irritating?

BOBBY

You'd think so. And superficially, yes, he's insufferable on that subject. But here's what's interesting:

The door opens, and Sean walks in bearing a cup of coffee and a small bag of chips, already open. He sets the coffee down in front of Bobby with a defiant thunk.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
(to Carl, without a beat)
So after that point you never saw
the third kidnapper again?

CARL
Sorry?

BOBBY
If I understand correctly, you
never saw him again after that
point. It was as if he'd never
been there in the first place.

SEAN
This is the guy who decked him?

CARL
(to Sean)
That's correct.
(to Bobby)
That's correct.

INT. JANICE'S OFFICE EVENING

Janice sits behind her desk, apparently not doing much of anything. Occasionally she runs her hands over some object or another, as if to reassure herself that it's still there.

Don walks by, catches sight of her, pokes his head in.

DON
Hey. What're you doin' here?

JANICE
Hello.

DON
Thought they gave you a month's
leave-of.

JANICE
That's right.

DON
Just enjoying the atmosphere, huh?

JANICE
Something like that.

Don steps into the office, closes the door behind him.

DON

It's just money, kid. First of all I'm sure they'll recover it 'cause these guys sound like major dolts. But even if not. I mean, which was more important to you, the ten million or Carl?

JANICE

Carl.

DON

The ten million or your job with this firm?

JANICE

My job. With this firm.

DON

I don't know if you're one of those things-happen-for-a-reason people? But if you are you might actually think about thanking whatever entity you consider responsible. Because I really think otherwise they would've fired you. They didn't know who you are. Now they do.

He leans over and kisses her on the forehead.

DON (CONT'D)

Do you wanna go somewhere? I mean you and Carl, during your leave. I can lend you some --

JANICE

That's all right. But thanks.

DON

Okay. Go fuckin' rest or somethin', wouldja?

He heads for the door.

JANICE

Don?

DON

Yo.

JANICE

Carl, or my job with this firm?

DON
What's that?

JANICE
Happiness, or understanding?

DON
I don't follow.

JANICE
McCartney, P., or Lennon, J.?

DON
Is this a riddle?

JANICE
A conundrum.

INT. SMALL APARTMENT EVENING

From this angle we can see a tiny kitchen area and the front door, which we hear being unlocked from the outside. The door opens and Sweat steps inside, but instantly stops short, transfixed by something out of frame. He pulls a cell phone from his pocket and speed-dials.

SWEAT
You need to get over here.
(beat)
He was there.
(beat)
I know, but trust me, he was there.
My entire place is now decorated in
charred ransom.

Sweat moves forward into the apartment, and as WE FOLLOW him we see that the entire living area is blanketed with the charred remains of \$100 bills. In the middle of the floor sits a large garbage bag from which they evidently came.

SWEAT (CONT'D)
Yeah, he fucking dug it up. It's
here, I'm staring at it. I'm
walking in it. This little pile
I'm standing on used to be more
money than this building is worth.
(beat)
I don't know, but I'm pretty sure
the subtext is I've Lost My Mind.
(beat)
Yeah, and call Alice. And we need
to decide do we contact Jan.
(beat)
(MORE)

SWEAT (CONT'D)

Okay but when she said that? I don't think she anticipated that one of her fake henchmen would --

(beat)

Whatever, just --

(beat)

Yeah.

He hangs up, pockets the phone. Looks around the disaster area. Expels a little chuff of air.

INT. SUPERMARKET NIGHT

Janice walks slowly along the back aisle with a cart, browsing through frozen foods. We can see the main aisles to her left, each of which has an overhead sign with four items listed, like so:

PASTA		SOUPS
RICE		CANNED MEATS

Not that we're presumably looking at these, but they're visible. CAMERA FOLLOWS Janice as she walks past three such aisles, stopping once to place an item in her cart. It's late, so the store is on the deserted side.

At the third aisle, she's passed by a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN carrying a small shopping basket and walking in the opposite direction. The woman leaves frame, but as Janice reaches the fourth aisle she reappears, walking directly up to Janice.

Janice stops as she sees the woman approach. To their left, just visible to sharp-eyed viewers, is the sign for the perpendicular aisle across from them, which reads:

JESUS		FUCKING
CHRIST		TAX

WOMAN

Excuse me, I don't mean to intrude, but...you're Janice Axelrod.

JANICE

(she wishes she weren't)

Yes.

WOMAN

I just wanted to tell you that was a courageous thing you did.

Janice immediately begins shaking her head.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

No, I mean it. I know you're not a Christian, but you understand what forgiveness means better than most practicing Christians I know. Including me, I'm ashamed to say.

JANICE

I don't understand anything.

She wheels her cart forward along the back aisle, and CAMERA FOLLOWS, as does the woman. The next perpendicular aisle now becomes visible, and its overhead SIGN reads:

SADISM		DOESN'T
BECOME		YOU

WOMAN

And I had kids. You know? Two overwhelming reasons to try to make it work and I still chose to be wounded and spiteful.

Janice is still walking, looking straight ahead. We can now see another perpendicular aisle, with a sign that reads:

FAKE		PHONY
LIAR		PHANTOM

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Anyway, I can see that you're, okay. Sorry. Thank you.

She stops following Janice, and the CAMERA STOPS with her. The woman leaves frame. Janice keeps walking away.

INT. BEDROOM DAY

Typical teenage bedroom. John and Nicole are having sex, missionary, John on top. Nicole looks up at him, but he's staring straight ahead at the wall behind them.

NICOLE

Look at me.

JOHN

We're still in the 'look at me' phase? Really?

NICOLE

Then close your eyes or something. You just staring into space creeps me out.

JOHN
I'm actually trying not to drip
sweat on your face.

NICOLE
Oh bullshit.

Nonetheless, she reaches up and wipes his brow with her hand,
then wipes her hand on the sheet with a disgusted look.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
You're not even goin' that hard.

JOHN
'Cause I don't want to hear another
cervix lecture, thank you.

NICOLE
Just look like you know I'm here.

He moves down and kisses her. They make out for a moment,
still fucking. Then John abruptly stops thrusting.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
What?

JOHN
(realization)
Oh shit.

NICOLE
Did it break?

JOHN
No no no, I just remembered
something. Remind me.

He starts thrusting again. Nicole moves up onto her elbows.

NICOLE
Remind you what?

JOHN
It's not important. Just what-the-
fuck me after we're done.

NICOLE
After we're "done"?

JOHN
(heading her off)
However that's defined.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR DAY

Same one as before, where Carl is staying. Janice is at his door, very dolled up. A large takeout bag sits on the floor beside the door. She KNOCKS softly several times.

JANICE

Baby? C'mon, I saw your car.

She waits for a response. There is none.

JANICE (CONT'D)

I don't understand why you're doing this. It doesn't make sense.

She KNOCKS again, pretty halfheartedly. Nothing.

JANICE (CONT'D)

I brought Ming's. That's the best I can do. Now I wish I cooked. I have no culinary bargaining chip. Here's takeout you could go get yourself. But I did bring it.

Rather than knock again, she just caresses the door with the palm of her hand. Then she turns and slides down the door into a sitting position, knees bent upward.

JANICE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna assume you can hear me. May never know, but. Nonetheless.
(beat)

I had a girlfriend once who for some reason really wanted to shave my chest. Now obviously you don't know this, but I'm pretty hairy. Typical Italian guy. Big mat of fur, basically. Which she didn't object to, necessarily, but she wanted to see what I would look like without it. And it was a good excuse for us to be naked together in the shower so I said fine, okay. This was early enough in the relationship that just her taking her clothes off still got me hard.

She reaches into the takeout bag and pulls out a carton of Chinese food, starts eating.

JANICE (CONT'D)

So she shaves it all off. Not as erotic an experience as I'd hoped.

(MORE)

JANICE (CONT'D)

Turns out, and I really did not know this and I don't think she did either?, I have kind of absurdly small nipples. Which you normally can't see through the dense thicket of hair covering that area. But when my chest is bare I look like an 11-year-old boy. She found it hee-larious. Could not stop laughing. I pretty much kept my shirt on for a month solid until the hair grew back, she would try to tug it off during sex and I'd just slap her hand away.

(beat)

So that's an embarrassing memory. But you know what? At least it's a fucking memory. It's something that she and I shared, 'cause we were in the same goddamn room. As opposed to years of nothing. Do you understand that? Nothing. It's like we agreed to meet at the restaurant and I arrived first and you called to say you were running a little behind, on your way, just be patient, and then I sat there in the booth, alone, for years. And every day you would call and promise you'd be there soon. Flat tire. Sudden emergency. You're clinically goddamn depressed. And now I can't even get up and leave, because then I'm the asshole who abandoned you in your time of need. So I sit there, alone, clinging to the calls and the e-mails and the texts, for years, until I finally realize you're never going to show up. You never had any intention of showing up. There is no you as I understand you. I'm in love with a hologram. Which means I have a history but no memories, because nothing was shared. The girl who shaved my chest, it crashed and burned but I remember her biting her lip in the shower because she had promised not to laugh. I get to keep that. And that's deliberately choosing something mortifying. With you I don't even have that. Just a broken promise.

She closes the takeout container, replaces it in the bag, gets to her feet. She does not turn back to the door.

JANICE (CONT'D)

And so this...

(sweeping gesture)

...is the edifice that I've constructed to fill that void. But, you know, why? What does that accomplish? All the time and money and energy, months of work, hundreds of people, to do what?

She looks around the corridor.

JANICE (CONT'D)

I dunno, though. Maybe they're all like this.

She walks out of frame. We hear the DING of an elevator, and the doors opening and closing.

After a beat, the hotel room door opens, and Carl looks out into the corridor with a thoroughly baffled expression.

EXT.. SIDEWALK CAFE DAY

Blood and Sweat sit silently at a table, looking about anxiously. After a moment, Alice appears and sits down.

ALICE

I have...

(she checks her phone)

21 minutes.

SWEAT

Well that should be ample time to flail around at a total loss.

BLOOD

What we need to know is, is he in fact dangerous? And then what would that even mean?

(to Alice)

You've known him the longest.

ALICE

Still not that long, and not that well. The shows we did together he was a complete professional. At worst maybe a little flaky.

SWEAT
Which parts?

ALICE
Huh?

SWEAT
What were you in with him?

ALICE
Accidental Death of an Anarchist.

BLOOD
Really?

SWEAT
I don't know that.

BLOOD
It's pretty severe.
(to Alice)
Playing the maniac?

ALICE
No, the inspector.

BLOOD
Did he become, I dunno, super
authoritative?

ALICE
No, but that character's kind of a
dolt. He didn't get doltier. And
then he was Alex Trebek in that
shitty adaptation of "Little
Expressionless Animals," which who
cares. It's not that simple.

Visible just beside the café, since the shot began, is a taxi parked at the curb. We see it from the front or the rear, not in profile. There's a big sign reading TAXI on top of the cab, except that the 'I' is cut off by the right side of the frame. At this moment, an anvil falls from the sky directly onto the sign, SMASHING IT to pieces.

Alice, Blood and Sweat look over at the cab, as does anybody else visible onscreen. A short beat as they regard it, then:

ALICE (CONT'D)
Anyway.

SWEAT
What I would like to know is can I
ever go home again?
(MORE)

SWEAT (CONT'D)

Given that calling the cops: out,
living in fear: no thanks, getting
some kind of restraining order: see
police, above, plus does that even
apply?

BLOOD

What I saw at your place qualifies
as domestic violence.

ALICE

Do we call Janice?

BLOOD

To what? Warn her?

ALICE

Don't you think?

SWEAT

"Hey, listen, we don't know what
he's doing or what he wants or
anything really but, you know,
heads up."

ALICE

Better than head down.

EXT. STREET CORNER DAY

It's the corner with the phone booth where Janice and John fought over use of the phone way back at the beginning. Sean stands before it, arms crossed on his chest, shifting his weight from one leg to the other. John sits in the passenger seat of a car parked nearby.

After a moment, Sean takes a notepad from his pocket, walks over to look up at the street sign, jots something down.

He walks back to the phone booth, stares at it again.

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH DAY

Tight on the priest's face through the usual patterned screen. We see Janice in rear 3/4 profile.

PRIEST

I guess I'm just a little confused
as to why you're here.

JANICE

Me of all people.

PRIEST
Something like that.

JANICE
Would you believe my entire life is
now a foxhole?

PRIEST
So you're experiencing doubt.

JANICE
No. I'm actually not. But I wish
I were, which is something new.

PRIEST
I told my congregation the other
day that they should ignore your
words and follow your example.

JANICE
See, you think you mean that, but
you don't.

PRIEST
I don't?

JANICE
I mean you mean it, but...you've
drawn a conclusion in ignorance of
the facts. And now you're selling
that conclusion to other people.
And if you knew what was actually
going on? You would be horrified.

PRIEST
What don't I know?

JANICE
Just -- trust me when I say nobody
should be following my example.

PRIEST
Ms. Axelrod, why are you here? To
tell me I'm stupid?

JANICE
To see if you're stupid. Which
you're not. Or if you're cynical,
which you're also not. I guess I
wanted you to be one of those two
things.

PRIEST
What would that make easier?

JANICE
Knowing it's all bullshit.

He gives her a questioning look.

JANICE (CONT'D)
You name it. God. Love. Art.

PRIEST
You believe those are separate things.

JANICE
Not necessarily.

He shrugs.

PRIEST
Well, they say only one thing is certain in life.

JANICE
Two things.

PRIEST
One.

JANICE
Death and --

PRIEST
That's it. Just death.

JANICE
And --

PRIEST
No.

He leans forward and gazes at her intently, shaking his head. The next word is spoken with soul-searing passion.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
No.

EXT. A DIFFERENT STREET DAY

Various nondescript office buildings in what is clearly not this city's most affluent corner. WE FOLLOW Sean as he walks toward one building in particular, checking the street addresses against a slip of paper in his hand as he goes.

STILL FOLLOWING as he enters the correct building, which bears neither name nor corporate logo. We observe him from the side as he inspects a lobby directory.

STILL FOLLOWING onto the elevator. He rides alone. Just a few floors. His expression is placid, unconcerned. This is routine gruntwork for him, a means of killing the day.

STILL FOLLOWING as he exits the elevator and walks down the hallway, passing various bland small offices until he arrives at two glass doors with a sign reading HAMMOCK THEATER CO.

STILL FOLLOWING as he enters this office and walks up to the reception desk, where Blood sits writing in a spiral notebook. He looks up at Sean brightly and closes the notebook, clearly happy to see anyone walk in.

BLOOD

Hi. Can I help you?

SEAN

You bet.

EXT. JANICE'S BACKYARD NIGHT

At first we see just an expanse of stars, broken by a metal bar that cuts through the frame horizontally. (It's the top bar of the swingset.) Crickets CHIRP. The swing SQUEAKS.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Janice sits on the swing as before, moving very slightly. There's a fairly long pause during which nothing happens, except that the CAMERA DOLLIES AROUND HER in exactly the same movement that it did in the earlier backyard scene.

Then, distantly, we hear a PHONE RING from inside the house. Janice in no way acknowledges it, continues to swing. It rings perhaps four times, with the final ring cut off midway as when an answering machine picks up.

Another pause, briefer this time.

The PHONE RINGS again. Janice continues to ignore it. The machine again cuts it off after a few rings.

Another pause. Again, by this time the CAMERA has circled around Janice so that we can see the back of the house and the side gate where Don made his entrance the last time.

This time, however, the sliding glass door at the back of the house OPENS. This gets Janice's attention immediately. She uses her feet to stop the swing, stands unsteadily.

JANICE

Carl?

It's too dark to see inside the house; at most we can see a shadowy figure at the door. Then a foot, wearing a man's shoe, slowly pushes a telephone over the threshold and onto the back porch area, shoving it several feet out.

The sliding glass door slowly CLOSES again, albeit not quite all the way due to the length of phone cord in the doorway.

Janice sits back down on the swing.

A brief pause. The PHONE RINGS again. Now that it's outside with us it seems deafeningly loud.

Janice still doesn't move. After the usual four RINGS the phone gets cut off by the machine, but this time we can hear the outgoing message:

JANICE'S VOICE

Hi, you've reached Janice and Carl,
please leave --

The message is abruptly cut off in concert with a LOUD CLATTER from inside the house. A moment later, the sliding glass door OPENS and an answering machine with trailing cords flies out onto the lawn, causing Janice to leap to her feet again. The sliding glass immediately CLOSES (mostly) again.

Janice now begins moving toward the side gate, keeping her eye on the back of the house as she goes. When she's about halfway there, the PHONE STARTS RINGING again. She stops.

It RINGS six or seven times. She stares at it.

Finally, she walks briskly over and picks up the receiver, holding it to her ear without speaking. Her eyes are glued to the sliding glass door. The voice we hear on the other end speaks in a pronounced English accent.

VOICE ON PHONE

Listen very carefully:

CUT TO BLACK

HOLD on black for about five seconds.

INT. POLICE STATION DAY

Bobby and Sean office area. Bobby sits behind his desk.
Sean paces about.

BOBBY

So the phone booth is where?

SEAN

About four-and-a-half blocks from
her office.

BOBBY

And who called it?

SEAN

Okay look.

He goes to his desk, grabs a sheaf of papers, walks around
Bobby's desk, sets them down, leaning over Bobby's shoulder
and shuffling through until he finds the page he wants.

SEAN (CONT'D)

CDRs show a call from your house to
that pay phone at 4:22 p.m. on
November 10th. Which is Nicole
calling her lunkhead boyfriend.

BOBBY

He's not that....

SEAN

Gets on my nerves. Everything's a
pain in his ass. She can do
better. Anyway, she calls,
according to him Janice Axelrod,
swears it was her, shows up and
demands to answer herself, she's
expecting a call. In fact it's
Nicole, gab gab, they hang up, he
says phone immediately rings again.
He just leaves. Is there another
call to that phone booth
immediately after Nicole's? Yes.
4:24 p.m. from this number here.

He points to a circled item on the page.

BOBBY

Which is who?

SEAN

Hammock Theater Company.

BOBBY
A theater company called.

SEAN
According to this.

BOBBY
Do we give a shit?

SEAN
I momentarily did, because the
alternative was coming back here
and looking at you. So I went over
there.

BOBBY
And?

SEAN
It's a dinky little theater
company. They do half a dozen
shows a year.

Bobby throws up one hand in a gesture that says, more or
less, what the hell is your fucking point.

SEAN (CONT'D)
Janice Axelrod is on the board of
directors.

He goes back to his desk, grabs a brochure, tosses it to
Bobby, who leafs through it, then looks up.

BOBBY
Since when?

SEAN
2002. She did some acting, high
school, college. Takes a
philanthropical interest.

BOBBY
Philanthropic. You're thinking
tropical. I wish I even had a
sense of where you were going with
this. Even if she....

SEAN
You want the leap now?

Bobby turns both palms upward in a 'please' gesture.

INT. HAMMOCK THEATER COMPANY DAY

Janice and Alice sit at a table in a small conference room, from which the lobby area we saw earlier is visible. Alice looks a bit distraught.

JANICE

Just answer the question. Do you find him attractive?

ALICE

(with reluctance)

Yes.

JANICE

Let's say he isn't my husband, he's just some guy. Would you do him?

ALICE

(exasperated now)

I...possibly.

JANICE

Okay, well, I'm giving you my express permission. You want to anyway. How is that prostitution?

ALICE

I don't know if it's prostitution. It's just gross. Right?

JANICE

It's not...ideal.

Alice gives a little derisive snort.

JANICE (CONT'D)

This has to be real for him. It never works otherwise. You need to seduce him, and you need to fuck him. I need you to do that for me.

ALICE

What if he's not interested?

JANICE

Don't worry about that.

ALICE

I think you overesti--

There's a RAP on the door, which immediately opens. Tears sticks his head into the room.

TEARS

I've got the --
 (seeing Janice)
 Oh, sorry.

ALICE

Steve, this is Janice Axelrod.

TEARS

Hi.

ALICE

(hey dumbass)
 She's on the board.

Tears immediately opens the door all the way and extends his hand to Janice. Under the other arm is a sheaf of headshots, though the face of the one on top is digitized out.

TEARS

Pleasure to meet you. Really appreciate the support.

JANICE

You do good work.

TEARS

They do, I just got here.

ALICE

Those the headshots?

TEARS

Yeah, I can just put 'em on your desk, and...

ALICE

No no.

She reaches out for them and he hands them to her. She places them in a neat pile on the table. We can now see that the top photo is the photo of the woman with the pug that Bobby asked about in Janice's bedroom, though Janice doesn't acknowledge this in any way. The woman's face is still electronically obscured. Her name, visible at the bottom, is K_____ Tax, with most of the first name blacked out.

TEARS

Nice meeting you.

Janice raises a hand by way of a polite goodbye. Tears withdraws and closes the door.

JANICE

He'd make a good thug.

ALICE

He's a pussycat. You're a lunatic.

Alice picks up the top headshot on the pile, tears it in half multiple times, throws it on the floor. Janice ignores this. The next headshot on the pile is the exact same photo, face electronically obscured, first name blacked out. [NOTE: Action for the rest of the scene will be concurrent with dialogue; its placement on the page is an approximation.]

JANICE

Carl is a wonderful man. Quite possibly he's never cheated on me. And he might never if it were left up to him. But a brainy knockout grabs his tie and says C'mere? He hasn't got that kind of will power.

ALICE

I just...this is insane. It's an insane plan. Supervillain insane.

Alice picks up the top headshot on the pile, tears it in half multiple times, throws it on the floor. Janice ignores this. The third headshot on the pile is, again, the same photo.

JANICE

I don't know what else to do.

ALICE

Jan, it's gonna blow over.

JANICE

Not fast enough.

ALICE

This isn't necessary.

Alice picks up the top headshot on the pile, folds it in half, and stands up. She sticks the headshot up the back of her skirt, as if using it to wipe her ass, then tosses it to the floor and sits down again. Janice ignores this. The next headshot on the pile is of course the exact same photo.

JANICE

I will not lose everything I built to a bunch of children who are angry that I told them there's no Santa Claus.

ALICE
So instead I get to go to jail.

JANICE
(laughing)
You're not gonna do time for a fake kidnapping. I might. Not you.

ALICE
That's your expert legal opinion?

Alice picks up the next headshot on the pile and simply holds it high over her head with one hand, looking straight ahead at Janice. An arrow, shot from out of frame (even though the room seems nowhere near big enough for that to be plausible), sails through and pins it to the wall behind them. The next headshot on the pile is the exact same photo.

JANICE
Nobody's even gonna tumble to this.
It's too deranged.

ALICE
(mock dramatic)
"That's the beauty of it."
(normally)
Are you kidding me? The damn I.R.S. is gonna figure it out. You pay the ransom and the next day that same amount magically appears in the Hammock bank account?

Alice reaches down near her feet, below the frame, and picks up a small can of lighter fluid. She douses the remaining pile of headshots, pulls a lighter from her pocket, sets the pile aflame. It burns for the remainder of the scene.

JANICE
Oh no no no no no. Sweetie, you misunderstood me. The money for Hammock will be a legitimate donation. I've got a hundred thousand dollars earmarked for you guys. But you're not gonna see that for a couple of years. For precisely that reason. I'll do what I can to make sure you don't go under in the meantime.

ALICE
So the ransom is completely different money?

Janice nods.

ALICE (CONT'D)
How much different money?

JANICE
Well, it has to hurt. It has to really hurt. I think like \$10 million. Which is most of it. Most of what's liquid, anyway.

ALICE
So what do we do with that?

They stare at each other. The headshots burn on the table between them. A pause.

JANICE
That's your theory.

ALICE
Well it's one theory. It's in process.

Janice now leans back in her chair, adopting a posture that seems more masculine than feminine: legs splayed wide, hands drumming idly on chest.

JANICE
You think she hired an actress to have an affair with her husband. Hired some more actors to kidnap her husband. Paid the actors \$10 million in ransom, which they then burned. Because months or years from now, you predict, she'll make a small donation to their theater.

ALICE
I concede that it's not airtight.

JANICE
It's not even....

INT. POLICE STATION DAY

Bobby and Sean as before, with Bobby behind the desk, in the same posture we just saw Janice in, and Sean now sitting opposite him in the same relative position as Alice.

SEAN
Think about what it explains. It explains the voiceprint analysis, 'cause they're not actually English.

(MORE)

SEAN (CONT'D)

It explains why they're wearing masks all the time instead of just blindfolding the victims.

BOBBY

How is that?

SEAN

They need him to see her. He sells the story. And it explains, I never understood this, why they've got him locked in a room by himself and she's out there with them. 'Cause they like looking at her tits? If she's in on it that makes perfect sense.

BOBBY

We checked Alice Teeter. She's not an actress, she's a...what does she do again? Something useless.

SEAN

She runs a business out of her apartment reselling stuff on eBay. And we bought that. That face, that body, that's her job. And she conveniently has, aha, no family to pay the ransom, or, or, to be frantically worried on her behalf.

BOBBY

This doesn't....

SEAN

We barely looked at Alice. She was supposedly kidnapped by accident. So she wasn't the focus. But she became the focus for the public.

He goes to his desk again, grabs a Post-it, hands it to Bobby.

SEAN (CONT'D)

That's her number. Call her.

BOBBY

So it's disconnected.

SEAN

What do you wanna bet we go back to her apartment, she's gone, no forwarding address, no references?

A pause. Bobby makes a perplexed shrugging motion.

BOBBY
I'm missing the Why here.

SEAN
What why?

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT NIGHT

The same motel parking lot seen previously (when the police car showed up to investigate), with the same white sports car parked in the same location. Last time it was alone in the frame, pretty much; this time a small U-Haul or similar vehicle is parked nearby, two or three spaces away.

TEARS (O.S.)
Okay fine but why burn it? I don't really even know what this means but can't it be laundered somehow?

BLOOD (O.S.)
I suppose, if she were a criminal.

TEARS (O.S.)
As opposed to?

BLOOD (O.S.)
Somebody really fucking desperate.

INT. U-HAUL OR SIMILAR VEHICLE NIGHT

Tears and Blood in the front seat, dressed as they were the first time we saw them. Shot from behind with a view of several motel rooms through the windshield.

TEARS
Or donate it to charity.
Anonymously. I mean, something.

BLOOD
There's no charity for people who are sick of working at Foot Locker.

TEARS
(English accent)
Piss off.

BLOOD
Dude, she doesn't give a shit about the money. She can earn more, she's set.

(MORE)

BLOOD (CONT'D)

What she wants is to pay the world ten million bucks to forget she called most of them idiots and leave her alone. Problem is that's like ten dollars per offended believer. So instead she's spending \$10 million in bulk to buy the perception that she's a decent human being. That the actual bills end up in a landfill or whatever? Not relevant.

TEARS

So it doesn't matter where they end up, really.

BLOOD

Forget it. Seriously. If we weren't burning the money I wouldn't be doing this. That's what's gonna keep our asses outta jail if the whole thing goes south.

TEARS

It's just an acting exercise.

BLOOD

We were told he was a willing participant.

TEARS

You mean the money wasn't fake?

BLOOD

Holy shit etc.

He slaps himself lightly on the wrist. A pause.

TEARS

You don't think Alice is actually fucking him, do you?

BLOOD

Not thinking about that.

TEARS

Actually, you know, why would that be worse? It's sort of a --

BLOOD

(alarmed)
Fuck.

TEARS

What?

BLOOD

That looked like a cop car just pulled in around back.

TEARS

Where?

BLOOD

Behind the building. I'm not positive. Go take a look.

TEARS

You take a look.

BLOOD

She's texting my phone. Just poke your head around the corner and make sure.

Tears stares at him, uncertain.

BLOOD (CONT'D)

There's no danger, we haven't done anything yet.

With a huff, Tears exits the vehicle, crossing in front of the windshield before disappearing from the frame. Blood watches him intently, leaning to one side to follow his progress.

Then, with great speed, Blood reaches into his jacket pocket, pulls out a gun, sets it on the seat beside him. Reaches into his pocket again, pulls out the ski mask we've previously seen him wear, sets it on the seat beside him. Reaches one more time into the same pocket, pulls out a sealed pack of AA batteries, quickly opens it, pockets the wrapper, repockets the gun and the ski mask. Peers out the windshield, leaning to one side again and craning his neck.

He then reaches down near his feet and pulls up a small bag or backpack, identical to the one Sean uses. Quickly unzips it, pulls out the same CD player that was in Sean's bag, replaces its batteries with the new ones, replaces the CD player in the bag, drops it back to the floor. He does this almost entirely by feel, keeping his eyes on the windshield.

And in fact no sooner does he drop the bag on the floor than Tears reappears in the windshield, opens his door, gets in.

TEARS

You're talkin' about an ordinary
marked two-tone police car that
says Hey hi we're the police on it.

BLOOD

Yeah.

TEARS

No. Nothin'.

BLOOD

Okay good.

A pause.

BLOOD (CONT'D)

This continues to be the single
dumbest theory ever concocted, but
let me humor you a little further.

TEARS

Go.

BLOOD

So she's manufacturing a heart-
tugging scenario in which we the
people forgive her for being smug
and intolerant and condescending
and obnoxious because now she's the
reincarnation of St. Francis.

TEARS

It worked, man, look around. All
the protests stopped.

BLOOD

And that scenario required that her
husband be having an affair.

TEARS

I know where you're headed.

INT. POLICE STATION DAY

As before, except that Bobby and Sean's physical positions
have shifted slightly to mirror Blood and Tears' side-by-side
placement in the front of the U-Haul.

BOBBY

You do?

SEAN

No way the husband was in on it.

BOBBY

You do. Why is that?
Insufficiently ridiculous?

SEAN

He'd be poking holes in his own story. He told us four pairs of feet walking around in the main room and one of them was barefoot. Which obviously that was Alice, unless you seriously think one of the kidnapers just decided to get comfy in the middle of the job. That was a by god clue, Bobby. So he if nobody else is on the level.

BOBBY

Okay then. So Janice needs her husband to be actually having an affair. Like, now.

He sticks his wrist directly in front of his face as if looking at a watch, though there isn't a watch on it.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

But you're telling me Alice is not Alice, she's an actress playing Alice. So the husband doesn't already know her. They're meeting from scratch. In the middle of his wife's professional meltdown.

SEAN

That could easily grease the wheels. Stress, whatnot.

BOBBY

But. She doesn't work with him, he doesn't already know her socially, they can't possibly count on him finding her online or something. Does she just walk up to him on the street and drop her ker-cheef?

SEAN

You don't know much about much, do you?

EXT. PARK DAY

A fairly large urban park abutting a commercial plaza of some kind; from this initial angle we can see much more of the plaza than of the park, though enough to establish both. Carl, dressed in business attire, sits alone on a bench facing a small fountain, his back to the park, eating his lunch and reading a folded magazine.

After a moment, Alice walks into frame, dressed very girl-next-door, and stands a few feet away from him.

ALICE

Hi.

Carl looks up from his magazine, shields his eyes from the sun with his left hand. No sign of recognition.

CARL

Uh, hi.

Alice looks at his hand over his brow, smiles.

ALICE

Aaaaand you're married. Okay.

She claps her hands together in a little mock-Chinese gesture of respect and deference.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Sorry. Bye.

She immediately turns her heel and walks away. Carl looks after her, setting his magazine down, flustered.

CARL

Um...
(incredulous laugh)
Hold up there.

She stops, turns back to him.

ALICE

What? Is there any point?

CARL

I don't...that depends on your definition of "point."

ALICE

I'm not interested in breaking up somebody's home.

CARL
There's no danger of that.

ALICE
You are one naïve fucker.

CARL
"Fucker"?

She slowly starts walking back toward him.

ALICE
You like 'em ladylike.

CARL
Can we start from "hi" again? I
thought that was going well.

ALICE
Hi, married guy.

CARL
Hello, would-be seductress.

ALICE
Do you have a physical ideal?

CARL
Do I have...sit down.

She sits next to him on the bench, close but not too close.

CARL (CONT'D)
My name is Carl, by the way.

ALICE
Alice.

CARL
Alice. Nonplussed to meet you,
Alice.

ALICE
If I can't say "fucker" you can't
say "nonplussed."

CARL
Do I have a physical ideal, is your
question. Kind of. I dunno about
ideal, there's definitely a look.

ALICE
Does your wife fit the look?

CARL
Yeah, smack-dab.

ALICE
The first time you saw her was it
an immediate Holy shit?

CARL
Pretty much.

ALICE
So clearly there was something
already in your head that she
triggered. How close is she?

CARL
This is a weird sort of lust-guilt
combination you're working here.

By "combination" he means as in boxing, which he illustrates
by miming a quick one-two punch on "lust-guilt."

ALICE
Just... You. Trigger.
(shrugs)
Doesn't happen often.

CARL
That is...unduly flattering.

ALICE
"Unduly"? Okay, I'm gonna jump you
in a second, so...

She stands. Carl also immediately stands.

CARL
Listen --

ALICE
I should go. I'm sorry if that
embarrassed you.

She starts walking in the direction of the park. Carl,
leaving the remnants of his lunch behind, follows. CAMERA
FOLLOWS as well.

CARL
You can't just walk up to someone,
blurt that out and then walk away.

ALICE
I don't think you want the
alternative.

CARL
What, a conversation?

Alice just laughs, still walking. As she and Carl continue into the park, moving right to left, an enormous letter X becomes visible in the background, maybe 10 or 12 feet tall, just standing there in the middle of the grass.

CARL (CONT'D)
Can I ask what you do?

ALICE
No.

CARL
Not just out of curiosity?

ALICE
But it isn't.

As they continue moving right to left, the expected letters A and T, standing just as tall and looking just as incongruous, are revealed. Alice stops, placing herself and Carl directly in front of the word, which now dominates the screen.

CARL
I just kinda wanna know who this...
(gestures at himself)
...enthalls.

ALICE
Look, I'll make you a deal:

But we never hear the terms of this deal, because her next sentence is drowned by the sound of a CHAINSAW. Seconds later, the GUY wielding the chainsaw enters frame and proceeds to cut the giant letter T in half, horizontally across the middle.

He then moves to the letter A and cuts it in half vertically, up from the crossbar. The letter X goes vertically as well.

Nobody onscreen reacts to this demolition in any way. Alice and Carl continue talking throughout, but we can't hear anything they're saying over the chainsaw noise.

Once all three letters are in pieces, the guy turns off his chainsaw and walks out of frame, at which point we pick up Alice and Carl's conversation again.

CARL
-- ludicrous in and of itself. And then she's gonna fuck the guy. For the good of her theater company.

ALICE
And to help her friend.

CARL
Nobody would do that. Nobody.
It's beyond absurd.

ALICE
No, lemme show you what's absurd.

She begins to turn. The instant she does:

INT. POLICE STATION DAY

As before. Bobby is standing in the same relative position as Carl was; Sean might have been in Alice's relative position but is now heading toward his desk.

When he gets there, he grabs his bag or backpack, opens it, pulls out the portable CD player, tosses the bag down. Walks back toward Bobby, CD player in hand.

BOBBY
Oh for fuck's sake.

SEAN
Think about this for a second.

BOBBY
I know, the magic batteries. Okay
look, Sean, I hate to br --

SEAN
Forget the batteries. Tell me what
this is.

He holds up the CD player as if modeling it on TV. This
throws Bobby for a moment.

BOBBY
Sorry, what now?

SEAN
What am I holding?

BOBBY
Seriously.

SEAN
Dead seriously.

BOBBY
A CD player.

SEAN

That is correct. It's a CD player.
It's a player...

He opens the lid. The player is empty.

SEAN (CONT'D)

...into which you place a compact disc. Which I would demonstrate for you if I knew where one was. Or had seen one in years. The idea being, you walk around and listen to your music, or like .001% of your music, on this device that's almost as big as your fucking head.

He holds the CD player next to his head to demonstrate.

SEAN (CONT'D)

How old am I? I can't even be 30 yet, can I? I wouldn't think.

BOBBY

Um....

SEAN

Did I inherit this thing? I think Chinese dissidents awaiting execution have iPods now.

BOBBY

I don't....

SEAN

Didn't even occur to me until I was standing on the corner looking at the phone booth. The phone booth.

BOBBY

Huh.

Sean tosses the CD player onto his desk, sits down, motions for Bobby to sit as well. Bobby does.

SEAN

I'm just gonna throw something at you.

BOBBY

All right.

SEAN

This may blow your mind a little.

Bobby mimes the explosion of his head, then holds his hands up as if to catch a ball.

SEAN (CONT'D)
We're assuming all this is
happening now. What if it isn't?

BOBBY
Start over.

SEAN
We just naturally assumed this is
the present, 'cause it more or less
looks like the present. What if
it's the past?

Bobby just stares at him. Then he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a current iPhone, holds it up, assumes a facial expression that asks "Are you on crack?"

SEAN (CONT'D)
No, yeah, 'cause that's not
essential. You don't even use
that, it's just in your pocket.
I'm talking about the stuff that
matters. And the stuff that
matters feels like it got pulled
out of a musty drawer somewhere.

BOBBY
Sean.

SEAN
We're investigating something that
used to be the point.

BOBBY
Sean.

SEAN
So now everything connected to that
original idea is slightly archaic --

BOBBY
Stop.
(beat)
This is self-defeating.

Sean thinks about this for a moment, nods.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
As far as the Janice Axelrod thing
is concerned....

SEAN

All right, okay.

BOBBY

I'm sorry, it's just preposterous. The whole thing. Every aspect of this theory is almost impossible to swallow. And then all of them put together? There's no way.

SEAN

But nothing else fits.

BOBBY

It could not have happened that way. People do not behave like that. You're making it needlessly convoluted.

SEAN

So where's the money? Not one bill has turned up anywhere.

BOBBY

They're sitting on it.

SEAN

You're postulating criminals who are too ignorant to demand that the bills be non-sequential but also smart enough not to spend them.

BOBBY

I'm not postulating anything.

SEAN

And. Okay? Give us ten million dollars...a week from now. You said yourself that made no sense. Here's seven more days to find us. That was camera time, man. She needs the entire country watching when she makes her big sacrifice.

BOBBY

You're postulating. Pal. I'm saying, I don't necessarily know what happened, but it ain't that.

SEAN

It's improbable. It's not impossible.

Bobby waves his hand dismissively, leans back in his chair. A brief pause. Then he sits up again.

BOBBY

Let's pretend there actually is a non-James-Bond-villain who's deranged enough to hatch this alleged plan. And she somehow manages to find a group of people insane enough to execute it. There's still not enough time.

SEAN

Time to do what?

BOBBY

Any of it. What date was the press conference?

SEAN

Where she melted down?

BOBBY

Yeah.

Sean goes to his desk, finds a file, opens it, leafs through.

SEAN

October 19th.

BOBBY

And he's kidnapped when?

SEAN

(he knows this one)
November 10th.

BOBBY

So that's roughly 800 million years.

SEAN

It's what?

BOBBY

Give or take. To get from this planet first coalescing from an accretion disk all the way to oxygenic photosynthesis, which appears 3.7 billion years ago. Do you know how many nucleotides are in a molecule of bacterial DNA?

SEAN

No I do not.

BOBBY

Around 100,000. Joined in specific three-unit sequences to encode amino acids. And then you need say 300 amino acids joined together in just the right sequence to create a particular protein like an enzyme. Right?

SEAN

That's...probably right.

Bobby stands up and starts to pace around the room as he talks. This reveals a sign taped to the back of the chair in which he'd been sitting, which reads: THIS IS ALL BULLSHIT INCIDENTALLY. p.s. fuck yourself twice Tax.

BOBBY

And there are 20 amino acids, so the odds of let's say Glucose-6-phosphate isomerase spontaneously forming in the primordial soup or whatever is one in 20 to the 300th power, which is the same as one in 2.04 times 10 to the 390th power. The number of elementary particles in the observable universe is only 2.5 times 10 to the 89th power.

SEAN

(who's given up)
Them's low odds.

BOBBY

There's just no way. According to the math it still hasn't happened.

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

But certainly 800 million years is nowhere near long enough for random chance to produce the necessary building blocks that are eventually going to lead to nucleotides and then amino acids and then proteins and then RNA and then DNA and then prokaryotes and then photosynthesis and then eukaryotes and then multicellular organisms and then vertebrates and then land-dwelling mammals and then the cerebral goddamn cortex and then ultimately a severely damaged woman who decides it would be fun to destroy some poor guy's will to live one long slow day at a time forever.

(beat)

I don't buy it.

Bobby sits back down as he says the last line, ignoring the sign taped to the back of the chair. Sean repeatedly looks as if he's about to say something, then repeatedly decides against it. An awkward pause.

It's broken by the sound of a KNOCK at the door of their office.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Yeah.

The door opens, revealing the man from the subway car in the opening credits sequence, still wearing the BLOW ME TAX t-shirt.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

What?

The man doesn't respond, or even look in Bobby or Sean's direction. He seems somewhat ill at ease.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Hello? Something I can do for you?

MAN

No.

BOBBY

You wanna close the door then?

The man does. A pause.

SEAN

But here's my question.

ANGLE ON THE DOOR

It opens again, revealing the same man, now with a more determined expression.

BOBBY (O.S.)

What?

MAN

Shut up. I'm not talking to you.

He looks directly into the camera lens, speaking confidently but with an audible edge to his voice.

MAN (CONT'D)

Hey.

(beat)

Now we're even.

The instant he says this, a raucous blues-rock number begins. (Ideally, the J. Geils Band's "Till the Walls Come Tumblin' Down.")

Immediately, the confident, determined expression vanishes. He just stands there as the music plays, his eyes darting around uncertainly. Eventually he gives a little shrug and turns to look to one side, speaking to someone offscreen.

MAN (CONT'D)

Okay, cut.

CUT TO BLACK

End credits. Raucous music continues.