

PERSONS UNKNOWN

written by
Christopher McQuarrie

Brass Tacks Ink
Executive Producers
Heather McQuarrie & Christopher McQuarrie

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BLACK

The sound of children playing, having fun. An occasional scream makes you tense, but that always turns out to be nothing on a playground.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - PLAYGROUND - DAY

Mayhem. Chaos. Kids running in every direction, climbing, chasing, tagging. A BALLOON MAN in coveralls hands out the latest in balloon fashion - making hats, crowns, etc. It has led to an explosion of imagination and, in the case of the balloon swords, mock violence. In the middle of it all we find JANET, age 27 - single mother of:

JANET

MEGAN.

MEGAN, age 5, wears a set of balloon angel wings. A yellow balloon extends straight up from the middle of her back and ends in a halo over her head. She stands precariously at the top of a tall slide. She looks at her mom as if to say: "What's wrong?"

JANET (CONT'D)

You cannot fly.

MEGAN

Aw, mom.

Megan sits down and uses the slide the lame old-fashioned way. Her exaggerated malaise is adorable.

(Note: Throughout the scene, Janet watches Megan run here and there around the park. At times, all she can see in the crowd of children is Megan's halo.)

ANDY EDICK, a thick and nondescript man in a dark blazer comes up behind Janet. Just as we think he's going to do something bad she turns with a gasp.

JANET

Mr. Edick. You startled me.

EDICK

We need to talk, Janet.

JANET

Could we do this another time? I'd rather my daughter didn't-

EDICK

You have not been returning my calls, Janet. That's why I came to see you.

Janet realizes she cannot see Megan or her halo.

JANET

MEGAN.

Megan appears from behind a wooden playhouse.

MEGAN

No flying. I know.

(Note: Frequent cuts to Megan moving in and out of the crowd tell us something bad is bound to happen.)

JANET

How is it you can find me in the middle of Manhattan and yet you can't find my husband?

EDICK

Your husband doesn't want to be found. I told you. It takes time. And money. Money you owe us.

JANET

And I told you, I gave you all I could. Now you find my husband and I'll see to it you get your money, your bonus - everything.

EDICK

It doesn't work that way, Janet.

JANET

Maybe it doesn't work that way because my husband is already paying you.

EDICK

What sorta guy you take me for?

JANET

We already know you're the sorta guy who comes to a playground and tries to muscle a working mother for her kid's milk money. What's left to work out is what sorta private investigator you are. The sort who's so dumb he can't find his hands in his own pockets? Or so low that he'd sell out a client to the highest bidder? What's my husband paying you, Mr. Edick?

EDICK

Lady, I don't even know where he-

She takes a step forward. Edick backs up.

JANET

You go tell my husband I don't have to choose between child support and my child. I'm keeping Megan, and all he has to pay is his fair share. But if he keeps this up - if he makes me come looking any more - I'm not just going to take him to the cleaners, Mr. Edick, I am going to have him *Martinized*. Do I make myself clear-

(realizing)

Megan?

Janet looks in all directions. No Megan. No halo. She turns back to Edick, but he is gone.

JANET (CONT'D)

MEGAN.

Janet walks toward the wooden playhouse, circling it a few times, only slightly concerned at first. But it does not take long for concern to turn to nerves.

JANET (CONT'D)

MEGAN.

Other mothers are looking at Janet now. She moves further into the park, weaving through a seething mass of children and their balloons - the setting suddenly scary.

JANET (CONT'D)

MEGAN... ANSWER ME. MEGAN.

Nerves invite panic. And then the halo. There above the other children and moving away from us. The halo bobs alongside A MAN IN BLUE COVERALLS.

JANET (CONT'D)

My God, Megan. MEGAN.

Janet runs now, stumbling to avoid knocking children over - the living version of the nightmare where you need to run but just can't seem to. Finally she gets close enough to see the back of the man in blue coveralls entirely. He holds the balloon halo. But there are no wings. No Megan.

He turns a corner, disappearing behind a public restroom. Janet follows grabbing the man's shoulder, turning him.

JANET (CONT'D)

Where is my daught-

ACT I

INT. SMALL ROOM - DAY

P.O.V. Blurry, hard to focus for a moment, finally making out a plain white ceiling.

Janet manages to sit up and finds herself in a room with two doors, two windows, a bed and a dresser. After a moment she remembers, sits up-

JANET

MEGAN.

Where the hell am I? She stands and moves for the door. Locked. She goes to the window. It opens to locked metal shutters. Same thing in the bathroom. Then we notice what is missing. No phone. No clock. No radio. She looks at her wrist - her watch is gone. She is scared now, close to tears.

SHE VERY CLEARLY HEARS A DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE O.S.
Footsteps in the hall - a shadow under the door indicates someone walking past.

JANET (CONT'D)

Hello? HELLO?

She goes for the door again, banging on it.

JANET (CONT'D)

HELLO? SOMEONE ANSWER ME.

(banging with each syllable)

ANSWER ME.

(sliding to the floor, crying)

Megan. What have you done with my little g...

She trails off into tears when she notices the small black dome on the ceiling in the corner. The kind that hides a camera. She stands, moving closer. The dome is small, showing us only Janet's distorted reflection.

JANET (CONT'D)

Please... I just want to see my little girl. At least tell me she is all right.

The black dome in the ceiling stares back like a bulging, emotionless, dead eye. Janet's eyes fill with tears, she trembles. But just as we think she is going to lose it completely, she does what any mother would do... She pulls herself together and goes to work.

First, she notices the hinges on the door. It opens inward. But even if she had a tool to work the hinge pins, they are welded wrought iron.

She inspects the lock on the door, finding a keyhole. She looks around the room for something, anything to fit in it. There is no hairpin, no letter opener, no nail-clipper. Janet opens the drawers to the small dresser. Nothing in them but a bible. She pulls a drawer out and inspects it. Tongue and groove construction.

JANET (CONT'D)

No nails. Of course.

She tosses the drawer on the floor, inspecting the dresser. Ripping out the drawers, she finds the dresser itself has some nails in it. She looks up at the camera dome - nervous, but then determined.

JANET (CONT'D)

Try and stop me.

CRASH. In quick cuts we see Janet smash the dresser with her feet, all the while stealing glances at the camera, then at the door, waiting for someone to come and stop her. But no one does. Sweating and breathless, she finds:

A single thin nail.

Guess what? It's too big for the lock by any stretch. Undeterred, Janet picks up the top of the dresser, still intact and very heavy. Holding it like a ram, she charges the door.

CRASH. Remarkably solid construction. Frustrated, Janet turns her anger toward the eye in the corner. She hefts the dresser top and readies to smash the camera dome when a NOISE O.S. stops her. She presses her ear to the wall.

Noises, so faint as to make us strain. Voices? Yes. Talking? Moaning? Can't be sure.

JANET (CONT'D)

Hello? HELLO? WHO IS THERE? CAN YOU HEAR ME?

The voice in the other room stops. Then more noises O.S. Janet listens, following the sound. She runs into the bathroom, pressing her ear to the wall. Sobbing? Or is it laughing? Eerie. She backs away from the wall, sitting on the bed for a moment, haunted by the faintest sounds of life around her, unable to make out anything clear.

Emotions take over. Janet lies on the bed and weeps. The black eye of the camera dome watches - uncaring.

INT. THE INQUISITOR - NEWSROOM - DAY

A cramped reporter pool of the tabloid variety. Scandalous and humiliating headlines adorn the walls - trophies of *THE INQUISITOR's* dubious triumphs.

It is a vivid if not very savory picture of the other side of news. Hard facts. Ugly facts. Facts that will never make even the darkest pages of *The Times*.

And in the middle of it all we meet the muckiest of muckrakers:

MARK RENBE - late 30's - reporter, dog lover, menthol smoker. Not because he likes them.

VOICE (O.S.)

Renbe, you got a smo-

A hand picks up the pack on his desk. Renbe looks up at JULIE PLEC, the female version of Renbe and his editor. She regards the smokes with disgust.

JULIE

Ugh. Why do you insists on smoking menthols?

RENBE

Because no one ever bums them.

JULIE

This transvestite hooker thing... Who is it? I'm dying to know?

RENBE

I need one more confirmation.

JULIE

Is it who I think?

RENBE

Better.

JULIE

Come on. A hint?

RENBE

I'll tell you when it's true. You see this?

He hands Julie a sheet of paper.

JULIE

What's this?

RENBE

Police blotter. Missing person at a playground in the park this morning.

JULIE

(so what?)

Kiddie-thief's hardly our bit.

RENBE

It was a *mom* got herself picked off. They never touched her kid.

Julie raises an eyebrow, interested. But still:

JULIE

Mom abandons her kid. Again I say-

RENBE

Single mom. Good mom. Runs a day-care out of her house. Sound like the sort that would-

JULIE

If it's happened, it's happened in New York. And if it hasn't happened in New York-

RENBE/JULIE

(together)

It hasn't happened.

RENBE

I have tape.

JULIE

Of course you have tape.

RENBE

Don't take me for granted, Julie. Cops don't give up evidence like they used to.

(popping tape in)

Security camera caught the whole thing. Networks won't get this for another few hours.

Renbe hits a button on a small TV/VCR combo and we see the grainy black and white images from a security camera - frames taken every few seconds, leaving out crucial bits. Frustrating. We see Janet walk up to a man holding something in his hand we cannot make out (the halo balloon). Next frame she puts a hand on his shoulder. In the next, she is already in the clutches of a man from behind. In the next frame, she has simply vanished.

Renbe turns to Julie, smiling. "Huh? Right?"

JULIE

Vague.

RENBE

Not vague. *Tantalizing.*

JULIE

Anybody claim her?

RENBE

Just the kid. Five years old.
Daddy left. Grandmother on the
mother's side but the kid doesn't
know mommy's maiden name.

Poor kid. Pause.

JULIE

You're looking at me.

RENBE

I'm looking at you.

JULIE

Stick to the transvestite thing. I
like transvestites.

RENBE

Did I or did I not call Jon Benet
from day one? This has legs. I can
feel it.

JULIE

This mom of yours is gonna show up
in a garbage bag, Mark. You know
that.

But Renbe is just staring at her, grinning like a cat.
Finally, Julie relents:

JULIE (CONT'D)

Gimme my transvestite first. Then
you can have your missing mom.

Renbe is happy.

INT. SMALL ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON: The bible lying on the floor amidst the debris.
Janet picks it up, opens it. She reads:

Placed here by the Gideons.

And a plastic bookmark. Perfect for-

Janet is on her knees at the door, working the bookmark like a jimmy in the lock. After a few tries, we hear a triumphant CLICK. Janet holds back a shout.

She grabs the handle and pulls. Still locked. Peering closer into the crack she sees a dead-bolt. Dammit.

JANET

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME? WHAT IS THIS? SOMEONE PLEASE HELP M-

She bites her tongue to the sound of feet coming down the hall outside. They stop at her door, evidenced by the shadow sneaking under the bottom crack. Janet moves away from the door quickly and quietly, reaching for anything she can use as a weapon.

Someone knocks. Janet is speechless, terrified. The doorknob jiggles followed by more knocking. Louder.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hello? Can you hear me? HELLO?

Janet opens her mouth to answer but stops herself. She doesn't know what to do, so she just waits.

VOICE (O.S.)

(CONT'D)

Listen, I know you're in there. Speak up.

Janet hesitates. When she finally goes to answer her voice is cut short by a loud BANG - someone throwing their full weight against the door. Another BANG, and another. With each one, Janet gets more and more scared, moving deeper and deeper into the corner of the room.

BANG, BANG, BANG... BANG... CRASH

The door explodes inward, the jam splitting. A SWEATING, WINDED, WILD-EYED MAN IN HIS 20's stands in the doorway. Janet's eyes go wide with fear.

JANET'S P.O.V. The madman comes right at us, hands outstretched. Janet screams frantically. The man grabs her by the shoulders. She lashes out. He takes a few hits before he can restrain her, shaking her until she stops.

MAN

Hey-hey-HEY. GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF. I'm here to help.

JANET

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

The wild-eyed man is only understandably so. Upon closer inspection we see a kind face. One we trust.

MAN

My name is Joe. It's okay. I'm not one of them.

JANET

One of who? Where are we?

JOE

I don't know. I woke up five minutes ago. Last thing I remember- You're bleeding.

Huh? Janet sees a large splinter protruding from her palm. Joe takes her hand and gently works it out. Almost intimate.

JANET

How did you get out of your room?

JOE

There's a key. You don't have one?

JANET

A key...

Joe looks around the trashed room, finds the bible. Opening it he reveals a key taped to the inside of the back cover. Janet shakes her head. "Of course."

JOE

Do you know why you're here? Why someone would-

JANET

I owe people some money.

JOE

How much money?

JANET

About eleven hundred dollars.

Joe manages to smile.

JOE

Seems like an awful lot of trouble to go to. Anyone else?

JANET

My husband. He wants our daughter.

JOE

Well what would he want with me?

Good point.

JANET

Where are we?

JOE

Haven't been farther than your door. What's the last thing you remember?

JANET

I was in Central Park and-

JOE

Central Park?

(more to himself)

I was all the way in Portland.

(to Janet)

What day?

JANET

(thinks a moment)

Wed- Thursday. Thursday.

JOE

It's Friday now. We've been out for-

JANET

How do you know?

Joe rubs the stubble on his chin. She understands.

JANET (CONT'D)

Ow.

Joe tosses the splinter, holds up her hand.

JOE

Suck on that.

He helps her up and grabs a hefty piece of the smashed dresser to use as a weapon, heading for the door.

JANET

I think I heard other people.

JOE

Me too. We're gonna go find 'em.

Janet hesitates.

JOE (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

JANET

What if it's... What if it's them?
The people who took us.

JOE

We can leave 'em. Of course, I
could have left you.

Janet nods. Joe is right. They move for the door.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Janet gets her first look at the hallway outside her room. A long hallway with evenly spaced doors on either side. Janet points to the door next to hers.

JANET

In there.

Joe puts his ear to the door, listening intently.

JOE

Is anyone there? Can you hear me?

No answer. Joe raises a hand to knock on the door. The moment is tense. Milk it. Just before he knocks:

The knob shakes violently, startling us. Joe shields Janet with his body. But the door doesn't open. The shaking increases, becoming frantic. Whoever is on the other side of that door is locked in. A voice calls out.

VOICE (BEHIND DOOR)

Hello? HELLO? CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?
(tugging on the door)
FOR GOD SAKE, LET ME OUT.

Before Joe and Janet can react, another doorknob starts jiggling, then another and another. The hallway is suddenly alive with the sounds of frightened people calling out for help from someone. Anyone.

JANET

My God... What is this place?

Joe yells through one of the locked doors. He nods, motioning for Janet to get the next one.

JOE

In the dresser there should be a
bible.

JANET

Look for a key taped to the back
cover.

VOICE (BEHIND DOOR)
I got it.

Some fumbling with the lock and the first door opens. Joe comes face to face with CHARLIE MORSE, early forties, dress pants and shirt. Over his bewildered face we:

FLASH:

PLAYBACK - CHARLIE'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A fleeting glimpse in grainy black and white taken from a hidden camera - not unlike the image of Janet's abduction. Charlie is in a large bedroom with his back to the camera. He stands over a woman sleeping in the bed. He is sobbing. We cannot say what, but something is terribly wrong. Suddenly:

SHADOWY MEN IN OVERALLS enter the frame and grab him. He struggles, but a rag is placed over his face.

And just as quickly as the image comes we go back to:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Charlie sizes Joe up and offers a hand. He speaks in a rushed, hushed voice.

CHARLIE
Charlie Morse, Capitol
Investments.

JOE
I'm Joe.

CHARLIE
Tell me you're a cop, Joe. Tell me
this is over.

JOE
It's not over.

CHARLIE
If they want money I have it.

JOE
I'm still not sure who *they* are.
Gimme a hand.

Another door opens and Janet comes face to face with MOIRA, middle thirties. She has found her key despite being noticeably groggy. She is wearing a nightgown.

MOIRA

Did I miss my wake-up call?

Janet and Joe share a confused look. Poor woman has no idea what's happened.

Another door opens. Powerful hands shoot out and grab Joe by the throat. From the man's uniform we know the 19 year-old African-American is CORPORAL McNAIR.

Joe manages to stay cool, raising his hands.

JOE

Take it easy there, soldier. We're on your side.

McNair studies Joe for an instant. The rage and fear in his eyes subsides quickly. Joe notices he is covered with a layer of fine, yellow dust. He is wary - hair-triggered and ready to fight.

MCNAIR

You're a hostage, too?

Joe thinks about his answer, going for easy and fast.

JOE

Yeah. Yeah, we're all hostages. You feel all right?

McNair's eyes glaze over as he remembers...

FLASH:

PLAYBACK - SANDSTONE ROOM - DAY

More grainy video. Fallujah? Kandahar? McNair is in a small room dressed in full combat gear, rifle in hand. He stands over FIVE DEAD BODIES - a mother, a father and three children.

He is trembling, winded. Amped. What has he done?

He realizes he should go. He turns for the door but:

VOICE (O.S.)

(in Arabic)

[Drop your gun. Hands in the air.]

McNair does it. SEVERAL MUSLIM MEN rush into frame, throwing him to the ground.

Then two shadowy figures enter the frame. These are not Muslims. Not locals.

They are MEN IN DARK OVERALLS - totally out of place. One of them holds what looks to be a hypodermic needle.

MCNAIR

What is this... WHAT IS THIS?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

We have a very different impression of McNair now. He scares us.

JOE

I said do you feel all right?

McNair snaps out of it. He lets Joe go.

MCNAIR

Good enough to fight, sir.

One more door. This one opens to reveal TORI - a young, blonde, very attractive socialite in a revealing cocktail dress. She rubs her eyes, unfazed by the odd mob of people outside her door.

TORI

I don't remember drinking *that* much.

Joe is the first one she sees. She sizes him up.

TORI (CONT'D)

My standards must really be slipping.

(shrugs)

Was it good for you, lover?

JOE

I've had better.

Janet snaps her fingers in Tori's face, annoying her.

JANET

Do you know where you are? Do you know what's happening?

Tori tries to focus. Her hand drifts up to her neck as she remembers...

FLASH:

PLAYBACK - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

TORI

Slow down, will you? Could you please-

The black and white image of Tori being dragged across a parking lot by TWO LARGE BOUNCERS.

CRACK, CRACK. Taser guns. The Bouncers collapse. Tori tries to scream but her mouth is covered by a MAN IN DARK COVERALLS. Another enters with a needle, looking for a vein on Tori's neck. Just before the needle goes in we jump back to:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

TORI
(dazed)

I think I need to get to a phone.

Janet takes her by the arm and guides her.

CHARLIE

I don't get it. Where the hell are the guys that took us?

JOE

I'm not waiting around to find out.

The group nods in agreement. They quickly and quietly head down the hall. A confused Moira turns to Tori.

MOIRA

Did he say somebody took us?

TORI
(nodding)

I've been kidnapped before. It's no big thing.

Moira blinks, confused. Imagine starting your day this way.

BLACK

END ACT I

ACT II

INT. HALLWAY - ELEVATOR - DAY

The group comes to an elevator. An old-fashioned needle-style indicator sign shows the building has six floors. The elevator is parked in the lobby.

MOIRA

(realizing)

Wait. This is not my hotel.

Janet pulls Moira aside and tries to explain things to her privately.

Joe reaches for the button. McNair's hand lashes out and stops him. Just as we think the Marine might be doing something violent:

MCNAIR

In the corps we call that a kill-box, sir. If someone is waiting for you on the other end you have nowhere to run.

He nods to a nearby door with an illustrated stairwell sign. Joe understands. They move toward it cautiously. McNair reaches for the handle when a loud voice startles everyone.

MOIRA (O.S.)

KIDNAPPED? What do you mean we've been kidnapped? What is this?

Clearly Janet's explanation of things didn't do much good. She looks to the others for help. Charlie steps forward and takes Moira by the arm.

CHARLIE

What's your name?

MOIRA

Moira.

CHARLIE

Moira, I'm Charlie. I'm going to take care of you.

Something in his eyes, his voice, comforts her. Charlie steals a look at Joe and McNair. "Open the damn door."

But when McNair tries to open it, the door to the stairwell holds fast. He puts his shoulder to it. This time Joe stops him - pointing to the metal box in the upper corner of the door.

JOE

Magnetically sealed. You'll never
get it open.

Everyone looks back at the elevator with dread.

CHARLIE

So. Who is for taking a ride in
the kill-box?

No one wants to. They all look at the mundane elevator
button like it could kill them. While they are still
deciding what to do, Joe pushes it. We almost recoil.

Long pause. They all look at the needle above the door
but nothing happens. Joe pushes the button again. The
elevator is not coming. Joe traces his fingers over a key-
hole just under the button.

JOE

Damn thing must be locked.

Charlie points to a black dome camera above the elevator.

CHARLIE

Why don't they just come and get
us? I don't get it.

(at the camera)

WHAT KIND OF KIDNAPPING IS THIS?

He kicks the elevator with a loud bang. McNair grabs
Charlie and restrains him.

MCNAIR

That sort of behavior is
contagious, sir. You need to keep
your powder dry.

Charlie realizes everyone is staring at him.

CHARLIE

I'm... I'm sorry. I just... It's
my wife. She has... emotional
problems. She's lost without me.
If I'm not there to look after her
she'll... I don't even want to
think about what could happen.

Moira touches his shoulder. Now she is comforting him.

MOIRA

We'll get through this, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I don't see how.

Something next to the camera catches Joe's eye. He studies it, realizing:

JOE

Fire alarm. Up there, on the ceiling.

(pointing to stairwell)
Those magnets should shut off if there's an alarm.

CHARLIE

What are you saying?

JOE

I'm saying if we start a fire in here we should be able to get out.

MOIRA

And what if the door doesn't open? Then we're trapped in here.

JOE

I'm not talking about setting the building on fire. Holding a little flame to that sensor up there should do it.

CHARLIE

Sure. No sweat. Anybody got any matches?

Of course not. Joe thinks, then he heads back to Janet's room, waving for McNair to follow.

JANET

There are no matches in there. I went through the whole-

Joe and McNair come out with the shattered pieces of Janet's dresser. Joe sifts through the debris for two smaller pieces of wood. He hands a very splintered piece to McNair.

JOE

Break that down as small as you can. I mean splinters.

McNair nods and starts to pick away at the wood with his fingers. Meanwhile, Joe starts to rub the point on one piece of wood in the groove on another.

CHARLIE

This is ridiculous.

Joe and McNair ignore him, working away.

PUSH IN ON the sticks tighter and tighter as they are rubbed together faster and faster. The sound in the otherwise silent hallway is enough to make you mad.

Imagine having to make fire this way. Now imagine your life depended on it.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

With bloody fingers, McNair neatens up a pile of tiny splinters. Joe has rubbed the wood until it has blackened. His knuckles ache and his face is beaded with sweat. The others sit in the hallway, waiting.

CHARLIE

Any sign of fire there, Injun Joe?

Joe ignores him. Charlie looks up at the elevator and shakes his head.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I just don't get it. Where the hell are we? Everyone think. What's the last thing you remember?

MOIRA

I don't remember anything. I went to sleep like any other night and woke up here.

It's finally hitting Moira now. Her eyes well with tears.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

Who would do this? Why?

CHARLIE

What are you worth?

MOIRA

Worth? In dollars? I'm a counsellor. Crisis intervention. For a teachers' union. I have eleven thousand dollars in an I.R.A. and I make thirty-eight thousand a year.

CHARLIE

Lot of money in teacher pensions. You ever counsel someone who worked in pension and welfare? People who control the money?

Moira thinks. Nods. Sure.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Any of them have dirty secrets
they might have told you?

Moira nods again.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
There you go.
(beat)
Soldier...

MCNAIR
The corps doesn't pay much, sir.

Charlie looks at Joe, still rubbing his damn sticks together.

CHARLIE
What about you?

JOE
I'm not worth anything to anyone
but me.

CHARLIE
Maybe, maybe not. What do you do?
Why do you think they would want
to grab you?

JOE
Why doesn't matter. *Who* doesn't
matter. No point in talking about
it. All that matters is getting
out.

CHARLIE
Just answer the question. Who are
you? What do you do?

JOE
I'd rather not say.

Reactions from all. "What's this bullshit?"

JOE (CONT'D)
Hey, no offense, but I don't know
who you people are. We're all
sitting here wondering where the
bad guys went - how do we know the
bad guys aren't right here?

Suddenly, paranoia takes root. Everyone is looking at each other differently.

TORI

He's right. Any one of us could be one of them.

CHARLIE

But Joe's the only one I don't know anything about.

(to Joe)

Now come on. Everybody is worth something to someone.

JANET

What makes you so sure this is about money? I have no money. No family. I'm not worth anything to anyone. No one except-

CHARLIE

Life insurance, maybe?

JANET

None.

CHARLIE

Then what? Think. There's only one reason why you kidnap someone, far as I know.

JOE

Not everyone is abducted for money.

(to McNair)

Ain't that right, soldier?

MCNAIR

Sir, yessir.

TORI

Oh God. Are you telling me someone's gonna cut our heads off?

JOE

Hard to cut it off if you're moving. Hey, hey, hey...

Smoke begins to curl up from the sticks in Joe's hands. A tiny spark. The others are shocked.

JOE (CONT'D)

McNair.

McNair picks up the tiny splinters and pours some in the smoking groove of the stick. More smoke and then some embers. Joe blows on the embers, then nods. McNair puts more splinters in.

The others gather round, holding their breath. This may have seemed ridiculous to them a minute ago, but not now.

CHARLIE

Come on... come on...

Puff. A flicker of flame. Everyone stifles a cheer.

JOE

Hand me that little sliver. Right there.

McNair hands Joe a long, thin sliver of wood. He touches it to the flame and stands very carefully as if about to light an altar candle. When the flame has enough life, Joe holds it up to the fire alarm. The others wait in silence. The tension is unbearable.

The flame literally licks the fire alarm but nothing happens. Nothing.

Never to be beaten, Joe takes the flame back to the floor. He starts making a pile of wood - smallest bits on the bottom, larger ones on top. McNair helps.

CHARLIE

What the hell are you doing?

JOE

What's it look like I'm doing?
Building a fire.

MOIRA

I knew this would happen. He's going to burn the building down.

CHARLIE

Hold on a second. Let's talk about this.

JOE

Fire's going out, Charlie. No time to talk about it.

CHARLIE

This building is nothing but wood and sheet-rock. Tell him, soldier.

MCNAIR

Sir, I have to get back to my unit. If that means setting fire to this building, so be it.

Joe moves to touch flame to wood. Charlie reaches to stop him. McNair grabs Charlie.

A moment later the hallway erupts into an argument. Half are scared they will never get out and half are scared they will be burned alive.

Only Janet is not in the fray. She is looking up at something, her eyes wide. She has to yell above the others to be heard.

JANET

LOOK.

Everyone stops and looks at Janet who is pointing.

JANET (CONT'D)

Someone is coming...

Sure enough, the needle above the elevator is creeping higher. The elevator is coming up...

The men spring into action. Joe and McNair take ambush positions on either side of the elevator door.

CHARLIE

You ladies get back in that room there. Don't come out unless we tell you-

MOIRA

Now hold on-

CHARLIE

MOVE.

Moira, Tori and Janet head back to the nearest open room, but they linger in the doorway, watching. Charlie stands in the center of the hallway, crouching like a racer, ready to charge whoever comes out. McNair and Joe psyche themselves up. Everyone waits for what seems like forever.

DING. The elevator arrives. The door OPENS TO REVEAL:

Nothing. No one inside. Not a soul. Everyone looks at each other, more confused than ever. McNair and Joe share a nod before getting on the elevator.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing?

JOE

You ask that a lot, Charlie. Do your eyes not reach all the way to your brain?

CHARLIE

The grunt said that was a kill-box.

JOE

Well now it's an elevator. You coming?

Janet jumps on just like that. After a beat everyone piles in.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Joe punches the first floor button. The doors close. Moira stifles a scream. They ride down together in silence - into the unknown. The men move themselves between the women and the doors.

DING. The elevator doors open slowly. HOLD ON the faces of the confused group.

CHARLIE

What the hell...

And they all step out into:

INT. LOBBY - DAY

A large lobby bathed in warm sunlight. Aside from being completely deserted it has all the marks of an older but no less than three star:

JANET

A hotel?

P.O.V. Through the windows beyond we see a wide, empty main street. Not a soul in sight.

MOIRA

Where are the cars? The people?

CHARLIE

Where are the phones?

Looking around the lobby there is not one.

INT. LOBBY - FRONT WINDOW - DAY

The group peers out the front window into the street of what looks to be Small-town, U.S.A. circa some happier, simpler time. They can see a general store, a movie theater, a doctor's office and:

TORI

Chinese food.

They all look, confused. Tori points. Just across the way there is a small building with Chinese characters over the front door. Oddly out of place here.

EXT. HOTEL - FRONT DOOR - DAY

The hotel has no name, but a wooden plaque over the door shows a dolphin in blue and gold. Odd considering the surrounding landscape looks more like mid-western farmland - the main road seems to go on in a straight line forever through corn and wheat fields.

The front door opens and the group comes out, looking around, a little more relaxed now that they are out.

Not a soul in sight, no one is trying to stop them. The town is truly and utterly deserted.

MOIRA

Maybe they got scared. Maybe they just... left.

CHARLIE

Sheriff's office.

They follow his pointing finger. Sure enough there is a sheriff's office just down the way.

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

No sign of a cop anywhere. The small building has a front office and a row of cells in the back. The place looks like Andy and Barney just left.

A window has been smashed. The door has been forced open. No sign of a phone.

CHARLIE

Well somebody's been here.

Only Tori notices the broken wooden rack with a padlock on it. A rack for what, she wonders.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I don't get it. A sheriff's office with no sheriff, no phone, no radio.

JANET

Got one of those, though.

She points to the small black dome on the ceiling in the corner. A camera. It gives everyone the creeps.

INT. MONITOR ROOM - DAY

SOMEONE WE CANNOT SEE is watching them on a TV screen.

CHARLIE (ON TV)

Who do you suppose is watching us?

JOE (ON TV)

The Gideons?

Everyone shoots him a look. He shrugs.

PULLING BACK FURTHER we can see more TV screens - at least a dozen. Each is playing back video from security cameras - grainy black and white from high angles.

Moira is on one screen, Janet on another and so on - images of them going about their daily routine; stopping at the ATM, buying gas, etc. Someone has been watching them all for a long time.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

MOIRA

I wish they'd just come out and get us. This is almost worse.

JOE

We better get moving. We only have a few hours until dark.

CHARLIE

You mean... Just walk?

JOE

Until someone tries to stop us.

Joe turns to leave. Tori is still staring at the broken rack when it occurs to her.

TORI

Is that a gun rack?

Everyone freezes at the sound of a shotgun pumping. The group turns ever so slowly to find themselves confronted by a MAN IN A SUIT holding a shotgun. He has apparently been hiding this entire time.

SUIT

Nobody move.

BLACK

END ACT II

ACT III**INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY**

No one moves except to hold up their hands. Long pause. Ten seconds or more. The tension of the moment melts slowly into confusion. Finally:

JANET

What now?

SUIT

What?

JANET

What do you want us to do?

The man with the shotgun thinks, hesitant.

SUIT

Get... Get on the ground. NOW.

JOE

Take it easy now-

SUIT

Shut up. On the floor.

Moira shakes her hands, making a funny noise in her throat, about to lose it completely.

JOE

Just do what he says.

TORI

Do you know how much I paid for this dress?

Janet takes Tori by the arm, pulling her down.

JANET

That dress is gonna look a lot worse with blood on it. Get down.

Everyone is about to get down but then:

SUIT

Which one of you is in charge?

JOE

We thought... Aren't you in charge?

SUIT

You mean you're not them?

JANET

You mean *you're* not them?

SUIT

Lady, I don't know who *them* is.

Meanwhile, Joe steals a look at McNair - making hand signals only the soldier can understand. McNair studies the Suit and gives a slight nod. "Let's take this guy." Only Janet witnesses this.

JOE

Take it easy. We were taken - same as y-

SUIT

I don't know that. NOW GET DOWN.

Janet grabs Tori and pulls her down. Moira locks up. The funny noise she makes is getting louder. She can't handle this. Charlie is trying to calm her. But there is a look in Charlie's eye - almost like he has a death wish. He stares at the Suit, defiant. The Suit steps closer, aiming at Charlie's face.

SUIT (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna tell you again, man.

CHARLIE

You wanna shoot me, do it. I got nothing to lose.

FLASH:

PLAYBACK - CHARLIE'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

That grainy black and white image of Charlie standing over the woman in bed just before he was grabbed. Only this time we've gone a little further back. We understand why Charlie is weeping now. He holds a revolver in his hand. With the other hand he takes a pillow and covers the woman's head and cocks the revolver.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...

On the monitor beside this we see what is happening in the sheriff's office right now. We jump back:

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

Standoff. The others are stunned by Charlie's defiance but we understand it a little better. The Suit steps closer. Close enough that Joe could reach out and...

SUIT

For the last time. GET... ON...
THE GROUN-

Joe grabs the barrel of the gun and points it up in the air. BOOM. It goes off and everyone freaks. Moira is shrieking. The Suit yanks the barrel free, stepping back and reloading. But before he can aim at Joe:

OOF. McNair grabs the Suit from behind. Charlie reacts now. The men dog-pile on the Suit and take him down. After a brief scuffle, McNair grabs the gun and Charlie has the Suit in a headlock.

ANGLE ON: McNair levels the shotgun at the Suit. Given what only we know about him, we're not sure he should have the gun. And only we notice McNair's eyes blinking back a terrible rage...

As Joe nurses a stinging hand he notices Janet looking at him, studying him. Curious.

SUIT (CONT'D)

Alright, ALRIGHT - UNCLE. Hey, man, if you squeeze any tighter I'm gonna need a diaper, huh?

CHARLIE

I'm gonna keep squeezing until I get some answers. Who are you?

SUIT

My name's Bill Blackham. I'm a car salesman.

TORI

Now I *really* hate him.

CHARLIE

Where are we? How do we get out of here?

BLACKHAM

I don't know, man. Last thing I remember I was getting pulled over by the cops. Red lights, anyway. I woke up in that hotel over there.

CHARLIE

How'd you get out here?

BLACKHAM

There was a key in the elevator. It's in my pocket.

Joe reaches into Blackham's jacket pocket and, sure enough, he finds the elevator key.

JOE

That would have come in handy a while back.

JANET

You're the one I heard earlier - you walked past my room.

BLACKHAM

Was that you screaming for help?

CHARLIE

You mean you just left her?

BLACKHAM

No hard feelings? GACK.

Charlie squeezes harder.

MOIRA

Enough. Just let him go. Please.

Charlie does so.

CHARLIE

What do we do with him?

JOE

Does that really matter?

CHARLIE

He could be one of them.

JOE

You can all stand around here trying to figure out who's who, but I'm getting out of here.

CHARLIE

On foot?

JOE

Yes, Charlie. On foot. While there's still daylight. Now who's with me?

JANET

I am.

Without hesitation she takes her place next to Joe.

TORI

I can't walk in these shoes.

She means her high heels. Moira points to her bare feet.

MOIRA

Me neither.

Sure enough, Charlie is wearing nothing but socks. Joe looks at McNair's boots.

JOE

Corporal.

MCNAIR

Begging your pardon, sir. We don't know what's out there.

JOE

So we just stand here?

MCNAIR

All I'm saying is we exercise caution. Wait until dark. I'll take the gun and do a recon - stay in the cornfield...

CHARLIE

And suppose you get capped out there in the dark?

MCNAIR

I'm willing to take that risk.

CHARLIE

Well that's your job, isn't it, Jar-head? But you'll be dead out there with the one weapon we got.

MCNAIR

Well if that's how you feel, I'll-

JOE

I'm not waiting for dark. I'm going home. Now.

(to McNair)

You stay here and look after the others.

BLACKHAM

Who put the grunt in charge?

McNair waves the shotgun he took from Blackham.

MCNAIR

You did.

JOE

If I'm not back by tomorrow...
Well... Do your recon.

McNair nods. He offers the shotgun but Joe refuses.

MCNAIR

Stay out of the street. Stay close
to the buildings but keep a foot
away from the walls. If someone
starts shooting when you're past
the edge of town, take cover in
the corn and stop. I'll come and
get you.

JOE

Much appreciated. I'll be back
with help.

As Joe and Janet leave, Moira takes Janet by the hand,
stopping her. Moira looks scared to death.

MOIRA

Don't... Don't go.

She wants to say more but can't.

JANET

I have to go. My daughter...

CHARLIE

Maybe Moira's right. If anything
happens to you out there-

JANET

I'm going. I have to go.

Her urgency makes everyone curious, but it's clear they
shouldn't push. Janet has to pull herself free. Then she
and Joe are gone.

MOIRA

I don't trust that man. The way he
wouldn't tell us about himself
it's... it's just wrong.

CHARLIE

Relax. He's a good man. A little
nuts, maybe. But good.

BLACKHAM

Like you know.

CHARLIE

I oversee three-hundred employees investing half a billion dollars in other people's money. It's my job to know the scrubs on sight. And I've never been wrong.

BLACKHAM

Yet.

TORI

If you ask me, it's the girl I don't trust.

CHARLIE

I don't know. She seems all right.

Tori rolls her eyes. "You guys are all so thick."

TORI

You may know your employees, mister, but I know a desperate woman when I see one. And you should never trust your back to a desperate woman.

Off Tori's surprisingly cold expression we:

FLASH:

INT. MONITOR ROOM - DAY

The video of Tori being abducted suddenly freezes and rewinds. We go back to what led her to the parking lot in the first place, finding ourselves in:

PLAYBACK - EMBASSY - NIGHT

Tori on the dance-floor at a state dinner. An OLDER, ELEGANT MAN with grey hair we'll call THE AMBASSADOR holds her by the arm.

The security camera watching them ZOOMS IN tight. Tori speaks, not quite the ditz we take her for.

TORI

I know the truth.

AMBASSADOR

You have no idea what you're say-

TORI

I *know* the *truth*. And you're going to pay.

The Ambassador gestures. The TWO BOUNCERS we saw getting zapped in the parking lot come out of the crowd. They each take an arm. Tori struggles. As she is dragged away, she smiles at a SHOCKED PARTY GUEST.

TORI (CONT'D)

He's really a very nice man if you don't get to know him.

As she is hauled off, the video speeds forward again to the end of the tape.

In the parking lot outside a needle pierces the flesh of Tori's neck. As she screams we PAN OVER TO:

Another monitor watches Joe and Janet heading for the edge of town.

EXT. MAIN STREET - HEADING OUT OF TOWN - DAY

Joe and Janet do as McNair has instructed, staying close to the buildings and moving with caution, stopping at the place where the town gives way to cornfields under a clear blue sky.

Joe crouches down, pulling Janet with him. They study the surrounding field. In another situation it would look positively peaceful, but the endless sea of corn and wheat fields are forboding. Joe is working up the nerve.

JANET

Where do you think we are?

JOE

Hard to say. When it gets dark and I can see some stars I'll have a better idea. At least what hemisphere we're in?

JANET

Hemi- You really think we're-

JOE

Nothing would surprise me at this point.

JANET

Were you in the military?

JOE

Me? You kidding? Where'd you get an idea like that?

JANET

Things you say. Things you seem to know. Like the way you signalled the Marine back there.

JOE

That? You pick up a lot of funny things in my line of work.

JANET

What line of work is-

JOE

You know your daughter is probably perfectly fine.

This catches Janet off guard. Is he being evasive by changing the subject?

JANET

My daughter is five. She has allergies. A special diet-

JOE

And if anything happens to you out there-

JANET

She isn't safe. I have to get home.

JOE

You have family, right? Someone to take care of-

The mention of family sets her off.

JANET

Your life sure can't seem to wait, Joe. Who is waiting for you back home?

JOE

Nobody.

JANET

No one?

JOE

That's right.

JANET

No family, no friends... no girlfriend.

JOE

Nothing that can't wait.

JANET

Then why are you so hell-bent to get out?

JOE

For the same reason I've got no one waiting at home, Janet. I never play the cards I'm dealt.

JANET

Sounds like a fancy way of telling me you spend your life running from things.

For just a second we think she's touched a nerve. Then:

JOE

Well then you should be happy you're working with a professional.

He walks. We wait for a shot, a siren - something.

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

McNair clutches the shotgun, eyes trained on Joe and Janet. In the window behind him we see Moira, Charlie and Blackham watching, waiting. Tense. Tori comes out and stands next to McNair.

MCNAIR

You should wait inside, ma'am.

TORI

(smiling)

Call me to Tori, huh? We're a long way from the front line.

MCNAIR

Trust me. There's a front line and we're on it... Tori.

TORI

That's why I'm standing here.

MCNAIR

I don't think I follow.

TORI

I like you, McNair. I'm starting to think you're the only one here with his eye on the ball.

She puts a hand on his arm and smiles in way that makes us wonder if maybe Tori is dumb like a fox.

TORI (CONT'D)
That's why I think you and I
should be friends...

From what we know so far, they should make quite a pair.

EXT. MAIN STREET - HEADING OUT OF TOWN - DAY

Joe walks a little further. He turns to Janet and smiles, waves. Coast is clear. Janet sighs, relieved.

Until Joe collapses in the road with a crash. Janet is speechless for a moment, then she runs to him.

JANET
JOE.

Janet reaches Joe, dropping to her knees. His eyes are glassy, fading.

JANET (CONT'D)
Joe, can you hear me? J-

Suddenly, Janet's eyelids flutter and she collapses.

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - PORCH - DAY

Stunned reactions from the others. A beat before they can process what has happened. Moira screams. McNair runs.

CHARLIE
STAY HERE.

Charlie runs after McNair. Moira, in her bare feet, starts after them both.

EXT. MAIN STREET - OUTSIDE HOTEL - DAY

CLOSE ON McNair's eyes as he runs. Emotionless. Calm.

FLASH:

PLAYBACK - SANDSTONE ROOM - DAY

Once again in grainy black and white from a spy-camera. McNair stands among the bodies of the slain family. He aims his rifle at the head of a YOUNG BOY. The boy is on his knees, hands clasped. He is praying, crying, begging for his life.

PAN OVER TO: The monitor watching Charlie and McNair run. We can no longer see the monitor with McNair and the boy, but the sound of the child's weeping is enough. Then we hear McNair say to the boy in a cold, ruthless voice:

MCNAIR (ON MONITOR)
A salaam aleichem.

The boy screams. We cut before the inevitable shot.

EXT. MAIN STREET - EDGE OF TOWN - DAY

McNair reaches the edge of town first, taking cover like a good soldier would against the last building. He stops Charlie from running past - like he knows something...

MCNAIR
Sir, SIR. Hold on. Just give it a minute.

CHARLIE
But we can't just-

MCNAIR
No one's getting left behind. But there is a way to do this. Trust me. This is what I do.

Charlie relents. McNair studies Joe and Janet, then the surrounding terrain.

CHARLIE
Were they shot, you think?

MCNAIR
I didn't hear anything. I don't see any blood. There would be a lot of blood.

He would know.

CHARLIE
What the hell happened to them? I mean they just... They just went down.

But McNair has no answer. Instead he checks the chamber on the shotgun and stands to go out there but now Charlie stops him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Let me go with you at least.

MCNAIR

You watch me. Only me. If I'm hit
you'll need to figure out where it
came from.

McNair pulls free of Charlie. He runs low and fast,
keeping the shotgun ready.

McNair's gait gets wobbly, but to his credit he reaches
Janet and picks her up, hoisting her over his shoulder
and turning back. Then his eyes roll and he crashes with
Janet on top of him.

CHARLIE

MCNAIR. Dammit.

Charlie takes a step toward them but Moira reaches him
first, grabbing his arm. Her feet are raw from running on
the pavement.

MOIRA

STOP. THIS IS OBVIOUSLY NOT
WORKING. WE'VE GOT TO GO BACK.

Charlie pulls himself away. He looks around nervously at
the surrounding buildings, the cornfields - everywhere -
for who, or what, might be watching.

BLACK

END ACT III

ACT IV

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DUSK

The lobby is cast in shadow, the lights off as the sun goes down. Moira sits half dazed, talking to someone O.S.

MOIRA

Do you think they're dead? They must be dead.

She looks around, lowers her voice.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

I think I know what this is. I think I know why we're here. It's genius really. No torture, no violence, no threat of any kind. To all outward appearances the atmosphere is almost pastoral, serene. And yet everything is a contradiction. No power but no rules. No rules but no freedom. Freedom but no escape. Complete safety amidst total uncertainty.

(whispering now)

This is how you brainwash someone. Believe me. I know... And when they're done with us we'll be that neighbor. The one who was quiet and kept to themselves. Until the day they snapped. Until the day they did the unthinkable. You know what I'm talking about. Say the word. Sleeper.

She pulls her robe around her, thrusting her hands in her pockets. She finds something there:

A hospital I.D. bracelet. Before we can get a good look at it, she hears a noise. Someone is coming. She quickly puts the bracelet away, winking.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

Just between you and me.

COME AROUND TO REVEAL no one there. Moira is crazy.

Tori enters carrying plastic bottles.

TORI

There's no food anywhere. I found some water.

MOIRA

Water will do.

Blackham and Charlie come through the front door looking dejected.

BLACKHAM

General store is empty.

MOIRA

What about...

CHARLIE

They're just... lying out there.

TORI

Do you think they're... dead?

BLACKHAM

You say that like it's a bad thing.

CHARLIE

Come on, will you?

BLACKHAM

I'm just saying-

Everyone freezes. The sound of a car's engine O.S. They rush to the window and see headlights coming this way. Blackham reaches for the door - Charlie grabs him.

CHARLIE

Are you an idiot? It could be them.

TORI

The Gideons?

Her ignorance is sort of endearing at this point.

BLACKHAM

It could be the cops. Or maybe just someone passing by.

MOIRA

The only someone... Ever.

Awful pause. What do they do? In the end they wait. Through the window they watch a white van come to a stop across the street. The back doors open and:

CHARLIE

You gotta be kidding me.

EIGHT CHINESE MEN in white kitchen outfits hop out of the van. Six of them unload supplies for the Chinese restaurant and open for business. The other two help a very groggy Joe, Janet and McNair out of the van.

MOIRA

Oh my God.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Charlie, Blackham, Tori and Moira are rushing toward the van when one of the workers comes out with the shotgun, shouting something in Chinese.

Everyone halts, raising their hands in the air. But the Chinese worker offers the shotgun up like Dim Sum. He smiles a friendly smile. From his gestures we gather he is saying something about Joe, Janet and McNair.

MOIRA

Do you speak English?

Obviously not, because he keeps jabbering on in Chinese. He finally gives up trying to communicate. He leans the shotgun on the van and gets back to unloading. Realizing this guy is not a threat, the group moves to Joe, Janet and McNair, offering them water which they gladly drink.

CHARLIE

What happened?

JOE

I blinked my eyes and I was in that van looking up at Hop Sing here.

JANET

It was like... Ever have Demerol?

Joe nods. Good comparison. This gets Moira thinking...

TORI

But how did they knock you out?

CHARLIE

(re: Chinese)

And where in the hell did they come from?

MOIRA

(to Joe)

Stand up. Get undressed.

JOE

Pardon?

MOIRA

(taking his arm)

You heard me. Do what I say. Down to your skivvies. If you were drugged there should be marks.

Joe reluctantly pulls off his shirt. Moira inspects him closely. Blackham chuckles.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

Pants, too. Come on.

Joe undoes his belt and lets his pants fall. In the headlights of the van, Moira looks Joe up and down, finally crouching behind him, this makes Joe very uncomfortable but Moira thinks nothing of it.

CHARLIE

Say, Moira, maybe you and Joe should get a room back at the-

MOIRA

Look at this.

She points to Joe's backside. Everyone comes around.

JOE

Ah, hey now. We selling tickets to this?

CLOSE UP ON: The back of Joe's thigh. There is a mysterious abrasion, some discoloration and the skin is slightly raised.

CHARLIE

What is that?

MOIRA

(poking)

That hurt?

JOE

It's a little tender.

MOIRA

Janet. McNair. Drop your pants.

They do. Moira and the others look closely. They have the same marks.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

Everyone now.

Charlie and Blackham awkwardly drop trou. Tori hikes up her gown to reveal phenomenal legs. Blackham gawks.

MOIRA (CONT'D)
Eyes front, pervert.

Moira inspects them, then raises her own robe in the back, feeling her thigh.

MOIRA (CONT'D)
We've all got one.

JOE
What are they?

MOIRA
If I'm right they're implants. Biometric implants. They're used for administering medicine over extended periods. And they can be operated remotely. I'm guessing we're all carrying a load of tranquilizer around. Walk past a certain point out there and we trigger the implant. Lights out.

JANET
You know a lot about this.

MOIRA
Medication is my life.

I'll say.

JOE
Can we take them out?

MOIRA
Feels like they're pretty deep in the muscle. Even if we had the tools to cut you open and sew you back up, you wouldn't feel much like walking for a while.

Before Joe can respond, one of the Chinese workers has donned a black coat and tie. He is the MAITRE D'.

MAITRE D'
Come in. Please.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The group enters to find the workers have gotten the kitchen fired up and they are already cooking.

MAITRE D'
Please, sit. You eat.

The Maitre D' points to a small sign by the door.

HOTEL GUESTS MAY CHARGE MEALS TO THEIR ROOMS.

CHARLIE
Do you speak English?

MAITRE D'
Yes.

CHARLIE
Can you tell us where we-

MAITRE D'
You sit, you eat.

CHARLIE
No thank you. We just want to know
where we-

MAITRE D'
You sit. You eat, please.

JOE
I gotta say... If that was the
only English people knew the world
would be a much better place.

MAITRE D'
English, yes. Please... Sit. Sit.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

The group sits around a large table with a lazy Susan in the center. The Maitre D' hands them menus, bows and leaves. An awkward silence hangs over the table.

BLACKHAM
It all makes sense to me now.

Everyone looks at him. "Oh really?" A funny moment.

BLACKHAM (CONT'D)
Don't you get it? They're *Chinese*.

He waits for them to get it. They don't.

BLACKHAM (CONT'D)
(pointing to the cooks)
Not them.
(making a big gesture)
Them. The big them.

TORI

I'm confused. These guys aren't Chinese?

BLACKHAM

Of course these guys are Chinese. I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about *them*.

He points to a camera dome in the corner. Everyone processes this for a moment.

JOE

You're saying China is behind this?

BLACKHAM

Communist China.

CHARLIE

Communists. You're really still afraid of Communists?

BLACKHAM

Say what you will but China is the new Soviet Union. Sooner or later-

JOE

Uhhh... I dunno.

BLACKHAM

Maybe they want to see just how soft we are. Maybe -
(shouting over ridicule)
MAYBE this is a - what do you call it - a re-education camp. Like they had in Cambodia.

JANET

And they are going to re-educate America seven people at a time?

BLACKHAM

We could be just the first. Hell, we could be just one camp. China's a big place.

CHARLIE

(laughing)

You're trying to say we're in China?

BLACKHAM

How do you know we're not?

Everyone laughs now. But the laughing stops when FIVE CHINESE WAITERS appear and place heaping dishes of food on the table. They bow and vanish into the back. Our group stares at the food. Paranoid but starving.

MOIRA

Is anyone gonna eat that?

TORI

Do you think it has MSG?
(off everyone's look)
That's a legitimate question.

McNair heaps some of everything on his plate. Then he crosses himself and starts shovelling the food in his mouth. It takes a minute for him to realize the rest of the table is watching, expecting him to die.

MOIRA

How do you feel?

MCNAIR

Some of the best Chinese I've ever had. I could eat it every day.

He goes on eating. The others share uncertain looks. But they can take it no longer. As if on cue they all dive in. We pull away as, one by one, they take their first taste of the food. It is divine.

Only Janet picks at her food. Despite the day she has had for herself, her mind is miles away. Joe sees this and whispers.

JOE

Hang in there, Janet. We'll get you back to-

JANET

What if they took her? What if they have my daughter in some place like this?

JOE

Don't think like that, Janet.

JANET

You don't understand. I *hope* they took her. At least then she'd be safe.

Joe doesn't know what to make of this. Off his concerned expression.

RENBE (O.S.)
Can you recall the last time you
saw your daughter?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Renbe, the reporter, note pad in hand, sits across from:

ELEANOR - cold, elegant and maintained in her late fifties, sits somewhat dazed on a silk-covered couch in a handsome home. We don't like her.

Among the pictures on the mantle is one of Janet and Megan. We realize Eleanor is Janet's mother.

ELEANOR
Not for some time.

Renbe looks at her, waiting. Sometimes not saying anything gets right to the point. Eleanor sighs.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
We've both been very busy. She had
her day-care and I had...

Long, chilly pause. Renbe stares.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
To be perfectly honest... my
daughter and I were not speaking
to one another. That is to say,
she was not speaking to me. Until
recently I was shut out of her
life completely. I never even met
her husband. She tried to
reconnect after Megan was born.
She felt she should know her
grandmother even if I was...

Renbe keeps staring, waiting.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
She never felt I was a good
parent. The word she used was
abusive. But I never hit her.
(off Renbe's stare)
One time... I will admit the one
time was enough. I hit her with a
hairbrush... Until it broke. My
daughter and I were- Well, we are
both very strong willed, you see.

Just then, Megan comes running into the room, holding a doll in her arms.

Renbe tries to smile like there is nothing to worry about but his eyes betray a deep sympathy for what may await this poor child.

MEGAN

Granny. I found this in your room.
Is it yours?

Eleanor transforms into the picture of the ideal grandparent - warm and loving.

ELEANOR

No. No it isn't mine.

MEGAN

Then whose is it?

ELEANOR

Well, it was mine. But it's yours
now, angel.

Megan gasps, throwing her arms around Eleanor's neck.

MEGAN

Thank you, Granny. I can't wait
for mommy to come home so I can
show her.

ELEANOR

Yes. Yes, I am sure she'll be
thrilled. Go play now, angel. I
have to finish talking to Mr.
Renbe.

Megan runs out of the room with her precious doll.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

I suppose if there is a silver
lining to this it's that I've been
given a second chance. A chance to
be the parent I never was.

Renbe stares for one brief moment more, then stands.

RENBE

It is indeed a blessing. Thank you
very much for your time, ma'am.

ELEANOR

(shaking his hand)
My pleasure.

RENBE

And try not to worry about your
daughter. I'm sure she'll turn up
in no time. That's usually the
case.

ELEANOR

Oh, I'm quite sure it will all end well.

But the way the old woman says that gives us chills.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Janet has barely touched her food. But the others are stuffed - plates picked clean. Charlie is scraping the last of the serving plates, still hungry.

JOE

First thing tomorrow we'll look for something to take this implant out of my leg. Then I can-

CHARLIE

You're a glutton for punishment, Joe.

JOE

(nodding to Charlie's plate)
And you're a glutton. That mean I can trust you to do the cutting?

Before Charlie can answer, the check arrives complete with a fortune cookie for each of them. A normally mundane thing has eerie significance in this setting.

TORI

You're supposed to take the one pointing at you.

And indeed, the cookies are arranged in such a way that one is pointing at each of them. Charlie reaches for his, but Tori spins the lazy Susan before he can grab it.

TORI (CONT'D)

Let fate decide.

The lazy Susan spins for the longest time, finally stopping. One by one, they reluctantly take their fortune cookies and open them. Except Moira. She discreetly, nervously shoves the cookie in the pocket of her robe.

CHARLIE

(reading)

"Your wife is waiting for you."

Silence. Charlie looks ashen. Long pause.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

That's what mine says.

MOIRA

Let me see that.

She takes it, reads it and passes it around.

CHARLIE

Am I the only one that-

The others read from their own fortunes:

JOE

"You judgement is a little off at this time."

TORI

"You will soon win some high prize or award."

BLACKHAM

"By helping someone else you also help yourself."

MCNAIR

Mine is in Chinese.

CHARLIE

Moira?

With everyone looking, Moira has no choice. She reluctantly takes the cookie out of her pocket. Janet, who is seated right next to her, catches just a glimpse of the hospital bracelet in there. She almost says something but decides to bite her tongue.

Moira cracks her cookie as if it might explode.

MOIRA

Mine just has numbers.

She passes hers around. A series of double digits like a lottery number and nothing else.

TORI

That's weird.

But Moira seems shaken, as if she can read some significance in those numbers. She does her best to hide her anxiety. But Janet sees it, knowing a little more about Moira than the others now.

CHARLIE

Janet?

JANET

Wha-

CHARLIE

What does yours say?

JANET

It just says: "May the road rise
to meet you."

But does it? We wonder...

JOE

An Irish fortune cookie?

CHARLIE

Any other men here married?

The other men all shake their heads. No. Charlie is visibly upset by the fortune, but only we know why.

MOIRA

Come on. She spun the thing. You can't really think it was for-

JOE

It's just a fortune, Charlie.
Don't kill yourself over it.

And off of Charlie's dark expression we CUT TO:

(Note: This time the backstory is seen not from the P.O.V. of hidden cameras but as a traditional flashback.)

INT. CHARLIE'S HOME - MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Speaking of killing yourself, Charlie stands in his bathroom at home, looking in the mirror with a revolver to his head. Just as he is about to pull the trigger he looks down at the his and hers sinks in front of him. His is clean, orderly. Sparse.

Hers is row after row of medications. You name a problem and there is a treatment here. After some thought, Charlie takes the gun from his temple.

With trembling hands, Charlie opens the cylinder to reveal a bullet and five empty chambers. He takes one round from a box of shells on the counter and adds it to the one already in the gun. Then he moves into the bedroom toward his sleeping wife.

INT. EMBASSY - NIGHT

Tori is on the dance floor, glass in hand, making out with a DRUNKEN YOUNG OFFICER IN NAVAL DRESS WHITES.

The shocked crowd parts for the Ambassador. The band stops. Tori sees the Ambassador and smiles.

TORI

Daddy...

The Ambassador takes Tori by the arm before the Naval Officer can ever say good night.

AMBASSADOR

What would your mother say?

TORI

She'd say you killed her.

The Ambassador freezes. For a second we think he's going to hit her. She sticks her chin out, daring.

TORI (CONT'D)

I know the truth.

INT. SANDSTONE CORRIDOR - DAY

A SMALL PATROL OF MARINES creep along on a room-to-room search. McNair is on point.

An explosion of dust and lead - bullets flying everywhere. In an instant, the soldiers are cut down by an unseen shooter. Only McNair survives the ambush to give chase.

INT. CORRIDORS - VARIOUS - DAY

The shooter is always just out of reach, just around the corner, but McNair will not give up. Suddenly he hears yelling up ahead. A WOMAN SCREAMS O.S. Shots are fired.

McNair comes to a doorway and drops to one knee. This is where we found him before - looking in at the dead family on the floor. He didn't kill them after all. The shooter did. He musters the courage and charges into the room.

INT. SANDSTONE ROOM - DAY

The shooter comes out from cover and opens fire at point-blank range. In that same instant, McNair grabs the barrel and aims it away. He yanks the gun from the shooter's hands and tosses it, grabbing the shooter by the collar and pulling him into view.

To our surprise, the shooter is the Little Boy we saw McNair aiming at before. Now as he begs for his life we understand the story a little better. McNair looks at the praying boy, wanting to kill him, but then:

MCNAIR

A salaam aleichem.

McNair, you see, is a Muslim. Despite his more primal emotions, he lowers his weapon and gestures for the kid to take off. The kid runs. McNair says a small Muslim prayer under his breath and turns to leave the room...

But an ANGRY MOB is waiting for him. He is trapped.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

The group comes into the lobby to find it brightly lit, almost cozy. They turn with a start when:

VOICE (O.S.)

Did you enjoy your meal?

CHARLIE

Who the hell are you?

A MAN stands behind the front desk, peeling an apple with a small pocket knife - a man in a shirt and vest with a polite, simple smile. He seems a little drunk or just punchy. He is certainly not surprised to see them. He is:

NIGHT MANAGER

I am the Night Manager.

MOIRA

What are you doing here?

NIGHT MANAGER

I... manage the hotel. At night.
Is that gun loaded?

They slowly approach him. McNair keeps the shotgun ready.

BLACKHAM

How long have you worked here?

NIGHT MANAGER

I started last night.

TORI

Then you would have seen who brought us here.

NIGHT MANAGER

I beg your pardon, ma'am, but you were already checked in when I started. Here. Yesterday's register.

The Night Manager opens a crisp new registry and turns it on a lazy Susan to reveal page one. It contains seven names in the same neat handwriting.

MOIRA

It says we checked in at nine p.m.

NIGHT MANAGER

That's right, ma'am. I start at ten.

Charlie reaches across the counter taking the Night Manager's knife away before grabbing his shirt.

CHARLIE

Listen, bud. We've had a very long, very weird day and I think I speak for the group when I say we're not against breaking your eye-sockets if we don't get some answers.

The Night Manager is more confused than threatened.

NIGHT MANAGER

I'm at your service, sir. What would you like to-

BLACKHAM

Where are we?

NIGHT MANAGER

I'm afraid I don't know-

CHARLIE

(jerking the man's collar)
Ah, ah, ah. That's not an answer.

JANET

Let me try, Charlie.
(to Night Manager)
Where did you come from?

NIGHT MANAGER

My apartment. Behind the hotel.

JOE

I think she means before that.

NIGHT MANAGER

I - I'm from Minneapolis if that's what you mean?

TORI

We're in Ohio?

MOIRA
Minneapolis is in Minnesota, Tori.

TORI
What's the difference?

NIGHT MANAGER
I don't know where we-

CHARLIE
(shaking him)
You know damn well, guy. NOW GIVE.

NIGHT MANAGER
A woman called to tell me I had
the job starting the next day. I
went to bed and woke up here.

TORI
And that didn't seem *funny* to you?

NIGHT MANAGER
I'm used to it by now.

What the hell does he mean by that? Before anyone can ask we hear a noise upstairs. A desperate banging and a woman's voice calling out in anguish:

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
SOMEBODY HELP ME. LET ME OUT.

There are others in the hotel. Moira, Tori, Charlie and Blackham rush for the stairs.

Janet and Joe stay behind. Janet moves toward the registry with a dreadful expression on her face. With a trembling hand she reaches out and turns the page in the registry to page two. Today.

The page is filled with new names in the same perfect handwriting. Tears well up in Janet's eyes.

Joe sighs, picking up the Night Manager's pocket knife and walking to the far side of the lobby. He undoes his pants and lets them fall. He opens the pocket knife and feels for the lump on the back of his leg.

CLOSE ON JOE'S FACE. A look of deep concentration, bracing for the pain. He winces. So do we.

ANGLE ON: Janet is unable to watch, turning away. The Night Manager seems genuinely concerned for her.

NIGHT MANAGER
Is there anything I can get you,
Miss?

She shakes her head, backing away. She looks down at her hand. There we find a crumpled fortune, slightly inky from sweat. But we can still read it clearly:

KILL YOUR NEIGHBOR AND YOU'LL GO FREE.

PULL BACK, leaving the lobby and finally the hotel...

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

CRANE UP AND AWAY from the hotel, affording us a look at this once deserted town whose population seems to be rapidly growing. In the distance we see the moon rising over mile after mile of wheat and corn. In the immediate foreground we see the out of place blue dolphin symbol on the front of the hotel.

And then one more thing...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - PLAYGROUND - MORNING

Renbe is at the scene of the crime - the place where Janet was abducted. The place is deserted now, waiting for the first kids to arrive. He leans on the slide where Megan played. What is he looking for?

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - PLAYGROUND - RESTROOM - DAY

By the restroom door he finds it. The camera that taped Janet being grabbed - a small, black plastic dome looking down like a bulging, lifeless eye. Renbe notices in his reflection that someone is behind him. He turns.

There, in blue overalls, is a BALLOON VENDER. The sort that makes animals and swords... and halos. He is just getting his cart ready for the day. The Vendor realizes Renbe is looking at him and he smiles. He inflates a balloon and twists it, making that awful sound balloons do when you are sure they are going to break. The Vendor hands Renbe an odd shape, tips his hat and pushes his cart deeper into the park. Renbe regards the blue blob in his hand with confusion. It doesn't look like anything.

Until he turns it the right way around. Renbe holds the balloon up and regards it with a smile. Cute.

A blue dolphin. And not a bad likeness, either.

Renbe walks away, but we remain, turning to take one last look at the camera dome which may or may not be looking back...

BLACK