

WRITTEN OFF

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First Draft

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FADE IN:

I/E. LAPD POLICE CRUISER, CIRCA 2008 - DAY

LANDRY (V.O.)
Remember your breathing... these
are just memories, they can't hurt
you anymore.

A standard police vehicle drives down a central street in a seedier part of Los Angeles.

The sun shines down on the city, the bright tones giving the tenement buildings a facade of cheerfulness.

The officer in the driver's seat is SELENA FRANCO (27), Hispanic, fit, and attractive.

Next to her in the passenger seat is PAUL DAVIS (45), muscular and imposing but with a 'Papa Bear' demeanor.

Both officers appear calm and relaxed, a sassy smile playing about Franco's lips.

FRANCO
How's it feel to finally be on
active duty, kid?

Franco glances in the rearview mirror at BYRON WALSH (23), lanky, intelligent, and excited.

BYRON
It uh... It feels good, ma'am.

FRANCO
Don't call me ma'am, kid. Makes me
feel old.

DAVIS
Come on, Selena. Don't bust his
chops, you'll scare him off.

FRANCO
(grinning)
Look at him, Paul. He's so cute
when he's terrified.

Byron chuckles and looks out the window, his fingers drumming rapidly on his knee.

DAVIS
Don't listen to her, Walsh. You're
going to do fine.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING, CIRCA 2008 - DAY

The police cruiser pulls to a stop outside of a ten-story apartment complex. The building appears to barely be standing, riddled with broken windows and bullet holes. The street in front is littered with trash and debris from crumbling mortar.

The three officers exit the vehicle and pause to look up at the building.

DAVIS

Not particularly inviting, is it?

FRANCO

Relax. What floor do we want?

BYRON

Eighth, ma'am. I mean, Officer Franko.

Franco rolls her eyes, and starts up the steps to the building's entrance.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING STAIRWELL - DAY

The three of them march up the stairwell of the run-down apartment building. The walls of the stairwell show cracks where the paint has chipped and peeled, and the dirty windows let in only a dim light.

Franco leads the trio up the steps, pausing for a moment to catch her breath.

FRANCO

Fucking elevator. What the hell are we doing here again?

Byron pulls his notebook from his pocket, flipping a few pages before reading out loud from it.

BYRON

Parole violation. Marcus Weems didn't check in last week, so we're to serve his arrest warrant.

FRANCO

I knew that, but why isn't his parole officer here walking up eight flights of stairs?

Davis clumps up the stairs behind them, looking a little more winded than the other two.

BYRON
He's on vacation, ma'am.

FRANCO
Of fucking course he is.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

The trio of uniformed officers huff and wheeze toward a door in the middle of the hall, pausing to catch their breath outside.

FRANCO
Oh Christ, that sucked.

DAVIS
You remember your Miranda rights,
Walsh?

BYRON
Yes, sir, Officer Davis.

Officer Franco knocks on the door firmly.

The three officers wait for a beat, with Byron fiddling with the holster strap on his belt nervously.

Franco knocks again, louder.

FRANCO
Marcus Weems! Open up!

Beat.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Weems! LAPD! We have a warrant,
open the door!

The sound of CRASHING and people SCRAMBLING comes through the door.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Shit, he's running!

Franco nods to Davis, who kicks in the door with one large boot, and the three officers rush inside with weapons drawn.

INT. DOCTOR LANDRY'S OFFICE, PRESENT - DAY

Byron (29), older and more careworn, lies on a leather couch. He shakes and gasps for air, caught in the throes of a panic attack.

DOCTOR MIKO LANDRY (35), a professionally dressed Japanese-American woman, kneels at his side, comforting him. She wears a cheap but pretty knockoff WATCH with a dolphin on it.

LANDRY
Breathe, Byron! It's just a
memory!

Byron wheezes, struggling to slow his breathing down to a more normal rate.

LANDRY (CONT'D)
You're not there anymore. We're
going to count now, okay? Breathe
in...

BYRON
(gasping)
Five...

LANDRY
Breathe out...

BYRON
Ten...

Byron's breathing slows down a bit, and his trembling becomes less noticeable.

LANDRY
Good. Keep going. You're doing
well, we got much further that
time.

BYRON
Fifteen.

LANDRY
Have you been taking your
medication?

Byron nods.

BYRON
Twenty five.

LANDRY
Good. I'll give you a prescription
for a refill.

Landry picks a prescription PAD up off the desk and scribbles out a prescription for ANTI-ANXIETY medication.

BYRON

Thirty.

Byron's breathing is almost completely back to normal, his trembling barely noticeable at all, though his eyes are haunted.

Doctor Landry pats him lightly on the knee.

LANDRY

You're doing well, Byron. You're one of my best patients you know.

Landry checks her watch.

LANDRY (CONT'D)

I think that's about it for today. I'll see you next week at two o'clock, alright?

Byron stands up, nodding again.

BYRON

Thanks, Doctor.

INT. B&P PUBLISHING BULLPEN - DAY

SOPHIE GROVE (25), black, confident, and intelligent, strides purposefully toward her office, a stack of manila folders in her hand.

She passes between row after row of cubicles in a typical office setting, where dozens of OFFICE EMPLOYEES sit at computers either speaking on the phone or typing away. Her crisp black blazer and pencil skirt convey authority in the otherwise drab room.

SANDERS THE FLUNKY (30's), short, overweight, and a bit sweaty, approaches and walks beside her, matching her pace. He hands her another folder.

SANDERS

The boss wants you to take this.

Sophie opens the folder and glances through it quickly.

SOPHIE

The ex-cop? I read it, the book's good but I've got a lot on my plate already. Give it to someone else.

SANDERS

No can do, the boss would have my ass. Besides, she's already in your office.

SOPHIE

Shit. What do we have?

Sanders flips through a notebook.

SANDERS

Television interview, local PBS-type thing. Book signing at Black Label. Commercial on Channel 47.

SOPHIE

Set them up.

INT. SOPHIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Sophie enters her small, meticulously clean office. MRS. PENDLETON (50's), CEO and the "P" in B&P Publishing, a tall, almost regal woman in an expensive outfit, sits at Sophie's desk.

MRS. PENDLETON

Sophie.

SOPHIE

Mrs. Pendleton, how nice of you to--

MRS. PENDLETON

I'm giving you the Walsh book.

Sophie takes a few steps forward, speaking quickly and gesturing with her stack of folders.

SOPHIE

The author's a recluse, ma'am. With my other clients, I don't have time to hold his hand through--

MRS. PENDLETON

Which is precisely why I'm giving it to you.

Sophie stops, confused.

SOPHIE

I don't think I understand.

Mrs. Pendleton stands up and steps out from behind the desk, approaching Sophie.

MRS. PENDLETON
I like you, Sophie. You're hard
working, dedicated, and very good
at what you do.

She picks up a FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH off of Sophie's desk,
admiring it.

The photo is of Sophie and another woman, smiling and dressed
in skiing outfits, with a big fluffy dog between them.

MRS. PENDLETON (CONT'D)
I want you to move up in the world.
But being a publicist is about more
than being dedicated. It's about
spinning gold out of old yarn.

SOPHIE
I don't think Walsh is--

MRS. PENDLETON
Prove to me that you can spin gold,
Miss Grove.

SOPHIE
(sighing)
I won't let you down, ma'am.

MRS. PENDLETON
See that you don't.

INT. SOPHIE'S OFFICE, LATER - DAY

Sophie sits at her desk, rapidly typing at her keyboard.

She pauses to rub her eyes, the stack of manila folders still
on her desk, along with another stack of paperwork beside it.

There is a KNOCK on the door, and Byron leans in, looking a
little lost.

SOPHIE
Good afternoon, Mister Walsh.
Please, come in.

Byron steps into the room and closes the door. At Sophie's
gesture, he takes a seat in one of the chairs in front of her
desk.

BYRON
Thanks for seeing me.

SOPHIE

I've read your book, Mister Walsh.

BYRON

You can call me Byron. What did you think?

SOPHIE

To be honest with you, Byron, I think we've got a winner here. You write with some real passion.

BYRON

Thanks.

SOPHIE

You mentioned that it's based on a true story.

BYRON

Yes.

SOPHIE

When books are based on true stories, the readers are going to want to know what the real story is, what your connection to it is. Put simply, we have to sell you just as much as we sell the book. Does that make sense?

BYRON

Yeah, I suppose. So you'll need to take my picture, then?

SOPHIE

It's a bit more involved than that, but yes. We'll need something for the cover.

Byron glances down at his outfit, slacks and a wrinkled dress shirt, then looks back up with an apologetic smile.

BYRON

That uh... that sounds good, Miss Grove. But I'm not exactly--

SOPHIE

(smiling)

Sophie, please. The photo shoot will be done by a professional at a later date. The first few copies of the book have already hit the shelves, correct?

BYRON

Yeah. I tried self-publishing a few weeks ago, but it's not going well so far.

SOPHIE

We'll fix that. Now, I'm sorry to be blunt, but am I to understand correctly that you suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Byron nods.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Will that be a problem? We'll be doing interviews and book signings, things that put you around crowds.

Byron shakes his head.

BYRON

I've got it under control.

SOPHIE

You're sure? I can set you up with an interview this week to coincide with mass publication, and do the photo shoot after. If you think you're ready.

BYRON

Completely ready, Miss-- um, Sophie.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Byron steps out of his car, a beat up old clunker, in front of a long gravel driveway leading to a two-story house in rural Oak Ridge, New York. Once beautiful, the home is on obvious need of repair.

Byron checks his mailbox, tucking a couple of letters under his arm.

He begins walking toward the building, when MRS. NEIL, his sweet and elderly neighbor, waves to him from her own mailbox across the street.

BYRON

Good afternoon, Mrs. Neil!

MRS. NEIL

Hello, dear! It's nice to have you
back in the neighborhood!

BYRON

It's only been a year, Mrs. Neil.

Mrs. Neil waves again, oblivious, and turns away. Byron
turns back toward his house.

ANTHONY MALLONE (27), tall, lithe, and attractive, mows the
lawn near the fence that separates his property from Byron's.

Anthony waves with a big smile, and Byron hesitantly waves
back.

INT. BYRON'S HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Byron sits in a leather recliner, writing idly into a
notebook. Around him are the accoutrements of a writer,
stacks of notebooks, empty pens, a steaming mug.

On the coffee table lie a number of out-of-date magazines,
their covers showing policemen, evidence photos, and other
True Crime images.

On the end table next to the chair, a half-dozen empty pill
bottles lie scattered, some prescription and some over-the-
counter.

There's a KNOCK on the door, loud and energetic, and Byron
stands up.

Crossing to the door, Byron opens it to reveal Anthony.

ANTHONY

Hello, neighbor!

BYRON

Hi Anthony. What can I do for you?

ANTHONY

Well I've just finished up my yard
work, but I noticed your lawn's a
little shaggy.

BYRON

(confused)

Is it? I hadn't noticed.

ANTHONY

I've got the day off tomorrow.
I'll give it a quick cut for you.
If you don't mind, anyway.

BYRON

I guess that'd be fine. I'll be
gone most of the day, but I could
pay you when I get back.

ANTHONY

Oh, no charge, Byron. It's what
good neighbors are for. Say, I was
about to get a drink at Schaffer's.
Want to come?

BYRON

I really couldn't. I've got this
thing--

ANTHONY

Come on, we've been neighbors for
more than six months and we've
spoken maybe three times. I'll
buy!

Anthony puts an arm around Byron's shoulders familiarly,
trying to steer him out of the house.

Byron looks uncomfortable and confused, but doesn't resist.

BYRON

I guess it couldn't hurt to have
one beer.

INT. SCHAFFER'S POND PUB - NIGHT

Dim and smoky, Schaffer's Pond appears to be a dive bar that
hasn't changed in a hundred years. THE BARTENDER cleans mugs
and is ignored by the sparse weeknight crowd.

Anthony and Byron sit at the bar on stools, an open bottle of
beer in front of each of them.

ANTHONY

But why a pen name? Don't you want
to be famous? You're a hero, after
all.

BYRON

I didn't do anything special.

ANTHONY

You're too hard on yourself. You took a bullet for your city. All I did was sit in a tent and sweat for six months in Iraq.

BYRON

But none of that means anything. Nothing changes. People died, I quit the force, and no one cares.

ANTHONY

And that's why you're publishing this book.

BYRON

It was really just a way to get my thoughts and feelings out.

ANTHONY

All the better, right? Cathartic and rewarding.

Anthony flags down the bartender, and pays for two more beers.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

And an interview coming up? How cool is that? You're going to be famous.

BYRON

I'd rather not be--

ANTHONY

Maybe, but you're not going to be "celebrity famous." You're going to be "best selling author famous." The fame of having everyone know who you are, and all the anonymity of no one knowing what you look like. Sounds pretty great to me.

BYRON

I guess we'll see.

Byron steps off the bar stool, reaching into his pocket to take out his WALLET.

Anthony puts his hand on Byron's wrist, stopping him.

ANTHONY

Don't worry, I've got it.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Byron steps out of his house wearing a dress shirt and slacks, tugging on his old LAPD UNIFORM JACKET.

Byron approaches his CAR, his eyes haunted and his hands trembling. He drops his KEYS with a clatter.

Byron picks his keys back up off the ground, fumbling with them for a beat.

ANTHONY (O.S.)
Are you alright, neighbor?

Byron looks up, startled, and drops his keys again. Anthony stands next to him, wearing a dirty t-shirt, jeans, and work gloves.

Before Byron can get them, Anthony leans down and scoops them up.

BYRON
I'm fine.

ANTHONY
You don't look so good. Maybe I should drive you.

BYRON
No, I couldn't possibly--

ANTHONY
It's fine, let me get changed real quick, and I'll take you.

EXT. DAMASCUS THEATRE IN NEW YORK - DAY

Byron's old car looks suited to it's surroundings as it pulls up to this small, somewhat run-down theatre.

A tattered poster flaps in the slight breeze, saying FILMING TODAY! CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS 9/20-10/07.

Byron steps out of the car and heads for the theatre's main doors.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE LOBBY - DAY

A small CROWD OF LOCALS partially fill the small theatre, and the SOUND OF CHATTER takes up the rest of the space.

Through a set of open double-doors, Byron looks over the stage, which hosts a pair of comfortable CHAIRS, a COFFEE TABLE, and a number of CAMERAS, while bright overhead lights beat down.

Sophie taps on Byron's arm, and leads him through a side door marked STAFF ONLY.

SOPHIE

You're just in time, come on.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE BACKSTAGE - DAY

A STAGE MANAGER (45), balding and conservatively dressed, meets the trio in the dimly-lit hall and leads them backstage.

STAGE MANAGER

Mister Silver will introduce you soon. You just go through here.

The stage manager gestures toward a short set of stairs that lead to the stage. The CHATTER of the crowd drowns out Byron's counting, and as he looks out at the hot stage, perspiration begins to appear on his forehead.

SOPHIE

Remember to smile and wave before you sit down.

Sophie quickly fusses with Byron's outfit, smoothing out the dress shirt and adjusting his tie.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

We want you to look like the epitome of Good Guy Police Officer. Look sad if he asks if you ever shot anybody, look humble when talking about your service and your book.

Byron closes his eyes tightly for a beat, taking a deep breath.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Are you going to be alright?

Byron and Sophie turn quickly in surprise, to find Anthony standing just a few feet away. Anthony is wearing slacks and a dress shirt as well.

SOPHIE

Who's this?

BYRON
Uh, Sophie, this is my neighbor,
Anthony Mallone.

Anthony shakes her hand, smiling.

ANTHONY
(to Sophie)
Nice to meet you.
(to Byron)
You didn't say anything about a
live audience. You sure you can do
this?

Sophie dismisses Anthony, turning back to Byron and trying to ignore the other man.

SOPHIE
He'll be fine. You still want to
do this, right?

Byron nods, his breathing becoming more labored, starting his counting again.

ANTHONY
The lights, the flashing cameras, I
think it'll be too much for him.

SOPHIE
That's his decision, now isn't it?
Byron, I want you to--

ANTHONY
You know he suffers from PTSD
right? What if he has an attack on
stage?

SOPHIE
Who the hell are you, anyway?
You're NOT helping--

A cold sweat breaks out on Byron's forehead, and he steps in between Sophie and Anthony, placing a hand on either of their shoulders.

BYRON
It's FINE, I've got this.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE MAIN STAGE - DAY

BOB SILVER (55), a Mister Rogers type older gentleman dressed in slacks and a sweater-vest similar to that of what Byron would have worn, steps out into the bright lights to a SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE.

He smiles and waves before sitting, a small stack of white note cards in hand.

BOB SILVER

Hello viewers. Are we all seated comfortably? It's time once again where we meet someone in our local community. A person, perhaps like you, who's come from ordinary beginnings to do something extraordinary.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE BACKSTAGE - DAY

Byron hears his cue from Bob Silver, and starts to walk toward the entrance to the stage. Suddenly, a powerful spotlight swivels and shines directly into his face, and he staggers back a step.

BOB SILVER (O.S.)

Please welcome a very good friend of mine, Sergeant B. L. Walsh!

A chorus of LOUD APPLAUSE erupts from the audience in the main theatre.

Byron stands frozen just offstage, mopping the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief hastily yanked from his pocket.

SOPHIE

(whispering)

What are you waiting for?!

From beyond the curtain, Bob Silver stares at the entrance to the back stage area, an expectant smile on his face.

Byron takes a few steps backwards and slides to the floor, breathing heavily. Sophie fans him rapidly as he peels off his policeman's jacket.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Shit! Don't do this to me, Byron!

BYRON

I can't... I'm sorry...

SOPHIE

I need you to get up!

Crew members hurry to Byron's aid, but Anthony pushes them back forcefully.

ANTHONY

Give him some air!

BOB SILVER (O.S.)

It would seem that he's a little shy, folks. Let's give another warm round of applause for my good friend, Sergeant Walsh!

The APPLAUSE from the audience echoes through the backstage area again, and time slows down for Byron.

His eyes close tightly as the staccato CLAPPING changes to the CRACKING of GUNFIRE.

Sophie and Bob Silver's muffled voices become garbled shouts.

Anthony takes Byron's coat off his arm, pulling it on as he walks toward the stage entrance.

Sophie looks up at him in confusion, reaching out to try and grab his arm as he passes, but missing.

SOPHIE

What are you doing? Get back here!

INT. MARCUS WEEMS' APARTMENT, CIRCA 2008 - DAY

Six GANGBANGERS stand in stunned silence as the officers charge in.

ANTHONY (V.O.)

It's a pleasure to be here, Bob.

One of them is MARCUS WEEMS (28), a thin, neurotic drug dealer.

Kilos of COCAINE are stacked on a table, and one of the gangbangers is frozen in the act of stuffing them into a bag.

BOB SILVER (V.O.)

Would you mind telling us about the fateful day you received your injury?

The officers stare back at the gang members in silence for a moment.

ANTHONY (V.O.)

Sure, Bob. We'd been ordered to serve a warrant on a parole violator. But when we entered the apartment he was staying in, we interrupted a major drug deal going down.

Franco steps forward, leveling her weapon at the closest and shouting something, but the words are muffled.

The room explodes into activity. The gang members all draw WEAPONS and GUNFIRE erupts on all sides.

Byron stays frozen, the world slowing down to a crawl.

Franco dives behind a chair, returning fire.

Davis stands in the doorway, FIRING his weapon.

Red blossoms on his chest and face as he's riddled with bullets, falling backwards through the door.

ANTHONY (V.O.)

They opened fire on us, and I did what I'd been trained to do. I ducked for cover and returned fire, but we were completely outnumbered.

Panic crosses Byron's face as he watches his partner die.

Franco sees him unmoving, and jumps up.

She grabs him by the shirt and shoves him backwards toward the open door.

Red splashes across Byron's face as Franco takes a bullet in the back.

Byron trips over Davis' body, falling backwards as a bullet pierces his shoulder.

ANTHONY (V.O.)

I held them off the best I could while Franco, my partner, attempted to retreat to a more secure location.

Byron lies on his side on the floor, a bright trickle of red oozing from one shoulder.

Bullets chip the drywall above him, BUZZING like angry bees in the surreal landscape of the flashback.

Byron looks toward the apartment door, and sees Franco lying face down on the carpet, halfway out into the hallway.

She meets his eyes, and motions for him to run as she tries to roll over and raise her gun.

Byron pushes himself to a crouched position, but falls back down as one of the gang members shoves past him, fleeing.

ANTHONY (V.O.)
Franco fought valaintly, but
eventually she was cut down...

A flower of red blooms on Franco's arm, and she drops her gun, screaming in pain.

Byron crawls away, toward the stairwell. Another gang member runs down the hallway, duffel bag in hand.

Byron curls up against the wall, clutching at his shoulder.

He looks over at Franco and watches as she takes another bullet in the chest.

ANTHONY (V.O.)
When I took a hit to the shoulder,
I knew I couldn't protect her on my
own anymore, so I radioed for
backup.

Byron tears the radio off his shoulder, silently shouting into it.

He looks up as a shadow falls over him.

ANTHONY (V.O.)
And that's when one of them got the
drop on me.

The gang member standing over Byron slams his fist into Byron's face.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE BACKSTAGE - DAY

Byron sits on a chair in the backstage area, breathing into a paper bag.

Sophie paces in front of him, worriedly biting at one nail.

SOPHIE
(muttering)
We are fucked. We are so fucked.
She's going to fire me.

Anthony enters the area from the stage, waving behind him as the audience APPLAUDS excitedly.

Smiling, Anthony approaches Byron and Sophie, his smile fading when he sees their faces.

ANTHONY

How are you doing, Byron?

SOPHIE

What the hell were you thinking?!
Do you have any idea how screwed we
are?

ANTHONY

Woah, calm down. I made a
decision, and it seems to be
working out so far.

SOPHIE

Working out?! As soon as the media
finds out you publicly lied about
who Byron is, they'll crucify him!

ANTHONY

It's not that bad. The crowd loved
me.

SOPHIE

When you try to sell a memoir or a
true crime novel, you CANNOT lie or
misrepresent yourself! And Byron's
book is both!

BYRON

So what do we do?

Sophie frowns, crossing to a nearby table and taking her
EVENT PLANNER out of her purse. She flips through the pages
rapidly.

SOPHIE

If we come clean right away, maybe
another interview in the next few
days... I'll have to try to get
Bob Silver to help me spin--

Sophie's cellphone rings, the caller ID reading "PENDLETON"
with skull-and-crossbones emoticons next to it.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Shit.

Sophie presses the button to answer the phone, holding it to her ear and smiling a crooked, very fake smile. She walks some distance away, so the noise from the stage won't make it hard to hear her call.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Hello Mrs. Pendleton!
(beat)
Yes, ma'am.

Anthony sits down next to Byron, and leans over to whisper to him.

ANTHONY
God, she's hot.

BYRON
Your point?

ANTHONY
Are you hitting that?

BYRON
Of course not. It's strictly business.

ANTHONY
So you're saying she's available.

BYRON
I'm professional with her out of respect. You should be, too.

ANTHONY
I always respect women in my bed.

Byron stares at him incredulously, and Anthony winks.

Sophie walks back over to them, still on the phone.

SOPHIE
Thank you very much, ma'am.
(beat)
I look forward to it.

She closes her phone and scowls at it.

BYRON
What's up?

SOPHIE
We have no choice now, we have to keep this up.

BYRON
(concerned)
Why? What happened?

Anthony sits up, more alert.

SOPHIE
My boss called. Anthony was a hit.
Channel four just picked up the
interview and will be
rebroadcasting it on the 11 o'clock
news.

ANTHONY
That's fantastic! You're going to
be huge, buddy!

He claps Byron on the shoulder, who winces a little.

BYRON
No. You are.

ANTHONY
Same thing, right? People see me,
buy your book, win-win.

SOPHIE
And I suppose you'll be wanting
compensation.

ANTHONY
I'm on disability from the army, so
I don't need much. A percentage of
what Byron would make, whatever you
think is fair.

INT. BYRON'S BEDROOM - DAY

Located on the second floor of the old house, Byron's bedroom has a conservative decor, with muted colors and old-fashioned style.

Several PICTURE FRAMES sit atop his dresser, showing images of his parents and his old partners, Franco and Davis, meeting for the first time in the precinct.

Anthony stands in the center of the room, wearing Byron's full dress uniform.

Byron, dressed in slacks and a sweater vest, fusses with Anthony's tie until it's perfect.

Sophie sits on the edge of the bed in a professional looking skirt and blouse, tapping on her PDA.

Anthony turns toward Sophie, holding his arms wide.

ANTHONY

What do you think?

SOPHIE

Not bad. Fortunately you two are almost the same size.

BYRON

Remember there's a lot of respect that goes along with this uniform. Don't stain it, don't wrinkle it if you can help it. No food or drinks while you're wearing it.

ANTHONY

Scout's honor. Don't worry, I know how to take care of a uniform. Do you still have the gun belt?

BYRON

It's not usually worn with this one. This is for special events and... funerals.

Anthony nods.

ANTHONY

Do you still have your gun?

BYRON

Not the official service pistol. I had to give it back when I left the Force, but I bought another of the same model. Why do you ask?

ANTHONY

Just curious. Your service pistols are different than the ones we were given in Iraq. Can I see it?

Byron frowns, but nods and crosses over to his bed.

He pulls a small wooden BOX out from under the bed, and sets it on the coverlet. Fishing a set of KEYS out of his pocket, he unlocks the box and opens it.

Inside is a POLICEMAN'S SIDEARM and two CLIPS.

BYRON

Just having it around is
comforting, in a way. Even if it
isn't the original.

Anthony reaches for the gun, but Byron stops him.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Sorry, but I don't let anyone
handle it but me.

ANTHONY

It's smaller than I was expecting.

BYRON

Efficiency, I suppose. We don't
have to worry so much about body
armor or ammo capacity, not like
the military.

ANTHONY

Right, makes sense.

Byron nods and closes the box, locking it and putting it back
under his bed.

Sophie pulls a small CAMERA out of her bag and hands it to
Anthony.

SOPHIE

Take a few selfies at the shoot.
We'll want to establish an online
presence for you as soon as
possible.

INT. MARCUS WEEMS' WAREHOUSE - DAY

Marcus Weems, now 34 and dressed in a black suit, has not
aged well. He's still neurotic looking, but years of stress
and poor eating habits have left his skin saggy, pale, and
bloated.

He oversees the packing of hundreds of kilos of cocaine,
wrapped tightly in plastic, into large crates labeled KING
JOHN'S FRESH FISH.

Men also dressed in work clothes then place a BOARD over the
cocaine, then fill the crate the rest of the way with ice and
fish.

VINNIE BURKE (30's), shaved head, muscular, wearing a white
suit that looks like it's out of *Miami Vice*, hurries up to
Marcus, holding a hardback book.

Vinnie holds the book out to his boss. The cover reads, "WRITTEN OFF, by B. L. Walsh. Based on a true story".

MARCUS
What's this?

Marcus glances at the cover of the book.

VINNIE
You remember those three cops that killed some of our boys about six years back?

Marcus looks up at Vinnie, narrowing his eyes.

MARCUS
Explain.

VINNIE
This book details what happened pretty well.

MARCUS
(angrily)
Are you telling me this asshole is making money off the backs of my dead fucking men?

VINNIE
Sorry sir, I didn't realize they were friends.

MARCUS
They weren't, but this sets a bad precedent. I don't want our bosses getting nervous over some schmuck who should've been dead years ago.

Marcus turns over the book, looking at the inside flap. The photo of the author shows a black and white IMAGE of Anthony, dressed in Byron's uniform and smiling.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
This ain't the guy.

VINNIE
Are you sure?

MARCUS
Of course I'm fucking sure. But I bet he knows where that fucker is.

Marcus shoves the book back into Vinnie's hands.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Take a couple of the boys and go pay Mister Walsh a visit. Persuade him that taking this book off the shelves and shutting the fuck up is better for his continued good health.

EXT. BLACK LABEL BOOKS - DAY

Anthony, Byron, and Sophie exit Sophie's car, a sleek black sedan, on the street outside the large and popular chain bookstore.

A big poster proclaiming, "AUTHOR OF WRITTEN OFF, BOOK SIGNING 11AM TO 1PM" is taped to one of the storefront windows.

Sophie leads the way inside, Byron nervously counting under his breath and Anthony looking calm and collected.

INT. BLACK LABEL BOOKS - DAY

A small crowd gathers in the bookstore, a line that weaves it's way between row after row of popular books.

The line leads to a table where Anthony sits, smiling and signing books, one at a time.

A prominent display next to the table features dozens of copies of Byron's book and a cardboard cutout of Anthony in uniform.

Off to one side, Sophie and Byron watch the proceedings.

BYRON

What do you think?

SOPHIE

He certainly looks the part.

BYRON

Definitely enjoying himself.

SOPHIE

You're certain he knows what to say?

BYRON

He told me he's read my book cover to cover, three times.

SOPHIE
Already? Fast reader.

BYRON
No, that was before... all this.

SOPHIE
That seems a little excessive. The first edition only hit the shelves two weeks ago.

BYRON
He's a little odd, I guess. But then, so am I.

INT. DOCTOR LANDRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Byron sits on the leather couch, with Doctor Landry in a comfortable chair nearby. A FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of Landry and her husband hangs on the wall.

LANDRY
I don't think this is helping you, Byron. You wrote this memoir as a way of expressing your emotions.

BYRON
That's what I did, and it's selling really well, thanks to Anthony.

LANDRY
That's what I'm talking about. I don't think this is healthy for you.

BYRON
I'm out there, I'm meeting people. Coming out of my shell.

Landry frowns, concerned.

LANDRY
Are you? Or are you hiding behind this person so you don't have to face your fears?

BYRON
(frustrated)
Would having a panic attack and collapsing in front of a crowd be any better?

LANDRY

No, but gradually working toward the point where you can stand on your own would be. This Anthony person is keeping you from healing.

BYRON

What would you have me do then? I can't do it without him.

LANDRY

Then maybe you shouldn't be doing it.

Landry places her hand on Byron's arm, comfortingly.

LANDRY (CONT'D)

Think about it, Byron. Please?

Byron nods, looking unsure of himself.

INT. MAGGIE SUMMERS SHOW MAIN STAGE - DAY

A daytime syndicated talk show, the Maggie Summers stage is decorated with a series of comfortable beige chairs, a coffee table, and a few potted plants for color.

MAGGIE SUMMERS (33), an attractive and overly cheerful woman, sits in the chair on the far right, slight separated from the other three chairs.

Sitting in the chair closest to her is Anthony, dressed in a sharp, well-tailored suit. Both are smiling broadly.

Another GUEST sits in the chair on the far side of Byron, the fourth chair remains empty.

Sophie and Byron sit in the front row of the STUDIO AUDIENCE, watching the proceedings.

A CREW MEMBER (20's), wearing oversized headphones and a black shirt with the show's logo on it, holds up a hand with his fingers spread. Silently counting down, he points at Maggie when he reaches one.

MAGGIE

And we're back! If you're just tuning in, our special guest today is B. L. Walsh, former Los Angeles police officer, and author of the book *Written Off: Life Behind the Shield*. Thanks for coming, Mister Walsh.

ANTHONY

It's good to be here, Maggie.

MAGGIE

So B. L., before the break we were talking about the contents of the book, and now I think we're ready to take some questions from the audience.

The STAGE CAMERAS swing around to pan across the audience, with several people raising their hands.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You there, the young woman in the green shirt. What's your question, love?

A WOMAN IN A GREEN SHIRT (40's), stands up and smiles awkwardly. The crew member hurries up the steps and hands her a MICROPHONE.

LADY IN GREEN

Yes, um, Mister Walsh? Are you, by any chance, still single?

The audience LAUGHS.

ANTHONY

Uh... heh. Yes, I happen to be a bachelor at the moment.

MAGGIE

Ooooh, look out ladies. Next question... you sir, in the grey.

The crew member hurries to bring the microphone to a MAN IN A GREY SHIRT (40's), overweight and balding.

MAN IN GREY

Mister Walsh, how do you justify quitting the police force?

ANTHONY

I'm... not sure I understand the question.

MAN IN GREY

You say that you took a bullet in the shoulder, right? And that your partner was gunned down by hoodlums. Wouldn't you want to catch them?

Anthony shifts uncomfortably, glancing over to Byron.

Maggie shoots a glance at her stage manager, who shrugs apologetically.

ANTHONY

Of course. Some of the people responsible were arrested.

MAN IN GREY

But not all of them, right? So why leave the police force? Why come all the way out to New York and write a book when you should be looking for those responsible?

Anthony grips the arms of his chair, the knuckles turning white with anger.

ANTHONY

I was placed on indefinite medical leave. But I came here to talk about my book--

MAN IN GREY

So you're a coward then, nothing like the hero in your book? That's--
-

MAGGIE

Alright, let's move on. We have--

Anthony stands up, smoothing out the front of his suit and speaking coldly, harshly.

ANTHONY

How dare you? How dare you come here and accuse me of cowardice in front of all these people?

MAGGIE

I don't think--

ANTHONY

How would you like to wear the uniform, sir? How would you like to watch your friends die?

Sophie turns to Byron, grabbing him by the shoulder.

SOPHIE

(harsh whisper)
What the hell is he doing?!

Byron stares at Anthony, frozen and breathing heavily, caught in the beginning of another panic attack.

Anthony takes a few hostile steps toward the audience. The cameras follow.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Go to commercial!

ANTHONY
I earned a medal of valor for my
service. Where's yours?

Anthony stalks up the stairs toward the man in grey, who recoils in fear.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Maybe I should put a round in your
shoulder, to see how brave you are.

He jabs two fingers into the other man's shoulder forcefully, his eyes locked onto the terrified man's.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
What do you think, audience? Shall
I put a bullet into this asshole?
Make him rethink who he does and
does not call a coward?

MAGGIE
Jesus! Go to goddamn commercial!

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

Rain falls heavily as Anthony storms out of the front entrance of a large building, the studio where the Maggie Winters show is filmed.

Byron and Sophie quickly follow.

SOPHIE
What the fuck was that?!

Anthony wheels to face her, and the three of them stop walking.

ANTHONY
I don't know, alright? I lost my
temper.

SOPHIE
Obviously! You could have blown
this entire thing for us!
(MORE)

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

You wanted late-night talkshows?
We'll be lucky to get Jerry fucking
Springer after this!

ANTHONY

Christ, I'm sorry, okay? I just
couldn't stand someone insulting
Byron like that. It won't happen
again.

Sophie sighs heavily, running her fingers through her rain-soaked hair.

BYRON

Are we completely fucked, Sophie?

SOPHIE

I don't know. I need to make a LOT
of phone calls and see if I can
contain this. If we're very very
lucky, it won't go viral.

BYRON

What do you want us to do?

SOPHIE

Go home. Decide if you really want
to keep going with this charade.
Another stunt like that and all our
careers are over.

Byron nods.

Sophie looks around, then flags down a TAXI.

Anthony and Byron watch as she climbs inside and the taxi
pulls away.

ANTHONY

I'm really sorry, man. I just lost
my head.

Byron turns away, walking down the street, and Anthony
follows.

BYRON

I think Doctor Landry is right.

ANTHONY

What do you mean?

BYRON

She says that this whole mess isn't working out, that it's doing more harm than good.

The two of them stop under the awning of a convenience store.

ANTHONY

Come on, I need this. YOU need this!

BYRON

You threatened to shoot a guy! No, this... this has to stop.

Anthony puts a hand on Byron's shoulder, but Byron pushes it off.

ANTHONY

Byron, please! I don't know if you've noticed, but... I don't have a lot going on for me right now. Since I got out of the military, things have been... pretty rough.

BYRON

What do you mean?

Anthony turns, staring out at the rain, his voice full of emotion.

ANTHONY

I don't have a family. You and Sophie are the only friends I've got.

(beat)

I was a nobody until I walked out on that stage, buddy. Now I'm a somebody! People are finally looking at me as more than just worthless trash.

(beat)

Sure, it's all fake but... at least I'm not invisible anymore.

Byron sighs, staring at Anthony for a beat. Finally he awkwardly pats Anthony on the shoulder.

BYRON

Let me talk to Dr. Landry one more time, okay?

(MORE)

BYRON (CONT'D)

I'll lay it all out for her, and if she still thinks the charade should end... we'll have to call it off. Okay?

Anthony sighs, but nods.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Maybe you should go see her. We all need somebody to talk to sometimes, you know?

ANTHONY

Yeah, that's not a bad idea.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Shadows lurk on the rain-dampened streets, the heavy downpour having ceased hours ago, but water still drips from roofs and drain spouts.

Doctor Landry hurries toward the entrance to a large parking garage, an UMBRELLA held tightly in one hand and a BRIEFCASE in the other. The neon lights of the city reflect off her dolphin wristwatch.

Thunder PEALS overhead as she steps inside.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Landry strides quickly toward her car, eager to get home after a long day at the office.

Fluorescent lights buzz overhead, casting long and eerie shadows from the pillars of the deserted parking garage.

As she reaches her small white PRIUS, Landry fumbles for her CAR KEYS in her pocket, trying to juggle her umbrella and briefcase as she does so.

The keys slip from her hand, and she kneels down to pick them up.

As she does, she notices that her front driver's side TIRE is completely flat. She groans in exasperation.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Need a hand?

Landry jumps in surprise, hastily grabbing her keys and straightening back up.

Anthony stands close by, wearing jeans, a t-shirt, and a disarming smile.

LANDRY

Oh no, I'll be fine. I've changed flats before.

Landry moves to her trunk and unlocks it, watching Anthony cautiously as she does.

Anthony takes a step toward her.

ANTHONY

Are you sure? I'm pretty good with my hands. I could have it done quick.

LANDRY

It's okay, really. I'll take care of it. Thanks though.

Anthony nods, but doesn't leave.

Landry sets her umbrella and briefcase down, then takes a TIRE IRON and JACK out of her trunk.

She crosses back to the flat tire and sets the jack down, then turns toward Anthony, the tire iron still held loosely in her hand.

LANDRY (CONT'D)

Was there something else?

ANTHONY

Well, uh... I'm sorry, you are Doctor Miko Landry, right?

Landry tightens her grip on the tire iron.

LANDRY

Yes...?

ANTHONY

I'm a friend of Byron's. Byron Walsh? I'm Anthony Mallone, he asked me to talk to you.

Landry visibly relaxes, and sets the tire iron down by the jack, sighing with relief.

LANDRY

You had me worried there for a second.

(MORE)

LANDRY (CONT'D)

If you call my office tomorrow, I
can set up an appointment--

ANTHONY

I wanted to talk to you about
Byron, specifically. Could we talk
now?

Landry crosses back toward her trunk, and leans into it.

LANDRY

I can't discuss my patients, I'm
sorry.

ANTHONY

He's going to ask you whether or
not you think he should stop with
the book tour.

Landry straightens back up, looking at Anthony a bit angrily.

LANDRY

Listen, I know you're concerned,
but I really cannot discuss this
with you. The doctor-patient
relationship--

ANTHONY

I can't let you separate us.

LANDRY

What was that?

Anthony reaches down and picks up the tire iron, the metal
SCRAPING against the cement ominously.

ANTHONY

I won't let you take this away from
me.

Landry backs away apprehensively, but Anthony rushes forward,
swinging the tire iron.

It strikes her in the head viciously, and she spins and
falls, crying out in pain.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

YOU WON'T TAKE HIM AWAY FROM ME!

Anthony begins to rain blows down on Landry, raising the tire
iron again and again.

The sickening sound of metal hitting meat echoes through the
parking garage.

A thin rivulet of blood slowly leaks into a drain, as the sound of Anthony WHISTLING smooth jazz begins.

INT. SCHAFFER'S POND PUB - NIGHT

Byron sits on a stool at the counter, an untouched pint of beer in front of him. His head rests in his hands, and he broods at the bubbling brew.

His CELLPHONE, resting on the counter next to the beer, BUZZES.

Opening it, he reads a text message from Sophie that says, "BOOK SIGN @ BARNES N NOBLE TOMORROW NOON. ANTHONY BETTER BE ON BEST BEHAVIOR."

Anthony slips through the door of the bar, glancing around at the crowd as he approaches Byron.

He slides onto the bar stool next to Byron, and KNOCKS on the bar with one knuckle.

The bartender pours a pint and places it in front of Anthony.

Beat.

BYRON

You get Sophie's text?

ANTHONY

Barnes and Noble, yeah. Best behavior on pain of death.

BYRON

That goes double tomorrow, okay? This is our one chance to salvage our careers.

ANTHONY

Don't you have your meeting with Landry tomorrow though?

BYRON

Think you can do the signing without me? You know the book almost as well as I do by now.

ANTHONY

Sure thing. It'll be--

FRANCO (O.S.)

Hey rookie!

Byron and Anthony turn quickly.

Franco walks toward them from the bar entrance, limping and leaning heavily on a cane. She's wearing civilian clothes and looks tired, but smiles at Byron.

BYRON

Jesus, Selena? I didn't think I'd ever see you again.

Byron crosses to her quickly, and the two embrace. Franco pats him on the shoulder.

FRANCO

You think I'm going to let a couple of old war wounds keep me from my favorite bookworm?

Anthony pulls a small PILL CONTAINER out of his pocket and pops it open.

BYRON (O.S.)

You came all this way, just to see me? Come on, let me buy you a drink.

Anthony drops a WHITE PILL into Byron's beer, which dissolves almost instantly.

Anthony hides his movements by picking up his own beer and taking a long drink, stuffing the pill bottle back into his pocket.

Byron and Franco move back to the bar, and Franco looks Anthony up and down suspiciously.

FRANCO

I heard about you through the grapevine, and picked up your book. You should've told me it was finished, ass.

She lightly punches Byron in the arm.

Byron chuckles apologetically and orders another beer.

Franco eases herself onto the bar stool on the other side of Byron's seat, wincing as she does so.

BYRON

Still acting up?

FRANCO
Never stops. It gets worse when
it's cold.

BYRON
And yet you came to New York
anyway? I'm touched.

FRANCO
I had to, when I got on the
internet to look up your T.V.
interview and saw this fucker
pretending to be you.

ANTHONY
(angry)
Hey!

BYRON
Oh, Anthony. This is Selena
Franco. Selena, this is Anthony.
He works for me.

Anthony offers her his hand to shake, but she ignores it to
stare at him coldly.

ANTHONY
The fuck is your problem?

FRANCO
You. Capitalizing off my friend.

BYRON
Whoa, hold on. He's doing all this
with my permission.

FRANCO
Yeah but I bet it was his idea.

Anthony's hands close into fists and he sets his jaw,
silently fuming.

BYRON
That's beside the point. He's ex-
military, he knows what it's like.
We're all on the same side.

FRANCO
(hesitantly)
We'll see.

BYRON
I hired him, really. It's all
okay, promise.

FRANCO

Alright, I'll trust you, kiddo.
But I'm keeping an eye on him.

BYRON

So how long are you in town?

As Franco replies, Byron takes a long drink of his beer.

INT. BYRON'S HOUSE LIVINGROOM - DAY

Birds CHIRP cheerfully outside as sunlight filters through Byron's blinds, leaving alternating stripes of light and shadow across his sleeping face.

His head rests on the old carpet of his living room, and he GROANS as he begins to stir.

He slowly opens his eyes, wincing against the light.

Rolling over, he comes face to face with Doctor Landry's CORPSE.

Byron lets out a startled CRY and scrambles away from the body.

He sees her twisted and battered form lying on the living room carpet, then looks around in a panic.

He hears a NOISE from outside, and crawls to the window to peek through the blinds.

Anthony walks up the driveway toward the front door.

Byron scrambles back from the window, clutching at his chest and beginning to wheeze.

A cold sweat breaks out on his brow, and he crawls over to his comfortable leather chair.

Byron curls up in it, his breathing coming in ragged gasps as he stares at Landry's corpse.

Anthony KNOCKS on the front door.

Byron wheezes, trembling.

BYRON

(whispering)

Oh no... oh fuck... oh no no no
no no...

ANTHONY (O.S.)
Byron? It's me, can I come in?

Beat.

Anthony KNOCKS again. Byron flinches at the hard sound, covering his head with his hands.

ANTHONY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Are you alright in there?

Byron snatches up a crumpled PAPER BAG and begins breathing into it heavily, the paper CRUNCHING with each breath.

Anthony RATTLES the doorhandle.

ANTHONY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Byron? Byron!

Anthony throws his shoulder into the door, which pops open with a loud BANG.

Anthony pauses in the doorway, looking around.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Byron, are you--
(beat)
Oh christ!

Anthony stares at Landry's corpse.

BYRON
(muffled)
I didn't do it! I woke up and
found her like this!

Anthony continues to stare, horrified.

ANTHONY
Oh shit, this is bad...

BYRON
We-- We have to call the police.

Byron looks around for his cellphone, but can't find it.

ANTHONY
No, we can't. We'll-- We'll
just... clean it up.

Anthony closes the door behind him and begins to pace back and forth.

BYRON

We can't just clean it up! It's a fucking crime scene! Don't touch anything!

ANTHONY

No, you know how this works. The first witness is always the first suspect. She's dead in your house, you have a history of mental health problems, a violent outburst on T.V.--

BYRON

That was you!

ANTHONY

It won't matter. They'll have you in handcuffs immediately. You know as well as I do that they won't even look for someone else.

BYRON

Anthony, no! There are procedures--

ANTHONY

Headline: Crazy Author Kills Own Psychiatrist. Best-seller Murder Scandal. The media will have a field day with this.

BYRON

I'm an officer of the law. I HAVE to--

ANTHONY

Everything is ruined if you do. You lose the book deals, the fans, your FREEDOM. Your career is over, and you know what they do to cops in prison.

BYRON

The evidence will show that--

ANTHONY

There won't even be an investigation!

Byron slumps down in his chair, breathing into the paper bag again.

BYRON

Oh god, Anthony... what happened last night? I remember meeting Selena at the bar--

ANTHONY

I ordered a round of shots, and the two of you were knocking them back pretty hard. I'm not surprised you don't remember anything.

BYRON

Selena? Did she--

ANTHONY

I called her a cab before I drove you home. You had an attack on the way, but you seemed pretty calm when I dropped you off. You... you said you were going to call your doctor. I assume this is her.

BYRON

She must have come here to see me, and--

ANTHONY

We can worry about the whys later, right now we need to deal with this.

Anthony gestures to Landry's body.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I'll take care of the body, you... you clean up in here. I mean really clean, Byron. Bleach and scrub the hell out of--

A light RAPPING pulls both of their attention to the front door.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

(whispered)

Shit!

MRS. NEIL (O.S.)

Byron, dear, are you feeling alright?

Byron and Anthony stare at one another for a moment. Anthony gestures wildly at the front door, then bends down and scoops the corpse up into his arms.

He hurries out of the room.

Byron breathes into the paper bag as Mrs. Neil RAPS on the door again.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)
May I come in, dear?

Heaving himself to his feet, Byron shuffles over to the door. He casts a long look over his shoulder in the direction Anthony went, then turns the handle.

Mrs. Neil stands just on the other side of the door.

BYRON
How are you, Mrs. Neil?

MRS. NEIL
Fine, just fine, dear. Are you feeling well? You look like you've seen a ghost.

BYRON
A little under the weather is all.

Mrs. Neil bustles into the house, tottering over to the couch and sitting down.

MRS. NEIL
I've got just the thing for you.

She removes a small JAR out of her purse, full of tea.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)
An herbal tea blend of my own creation. Sure to fix what ails you.

BYRON
That's very nice of you, Mrs. Neil, but--

Anthony comes back into the room, looking grim.

MRS. NEIL
Oh, hello young man. We were just about to have some tea. Would you care to join us?

ANTHONY
Uh... sure, I gueNeils. Neil nods and totters into the kitchen.

Byron gestures at Anthony wildly, and the two have a whispered conversation.

BYRON
Why did you agree to tea?

ANTHONY
I don't know, I panicked!

BYRON
YOU panicked? How do you think I feel?

Mrs. Neil pokes her head back into the room.

MRS. NEIL
Where do you keep the teapot, dear?

BYRON
Um, in the cabinet to the left of the fridge, Mrs. Neil.

MRS. NEIL
You can call me Gladys.

As soon as she's gone, Byron steps up to Anthony and they continue their conversation.

BYRON
What did you do with the body?

ANTHONY
It's in your shed. We'll bury it later.

Mrs. Neil totters back into the room, heading toward the couch. She sits, and smiles up at the men.

MRS. NEIL
I remember, I used to come over here every Sunday for tea. Your mother was such a sweet lady, Byron.

BYRON
Yes, she was.

MRS. NEIL
Such a tragedy.
(beat)
I was overjoyed to hear that you were moving in, though. I know you've been here a while already.

BYRON

Almost a year.

MRS. NEIL

Has it been so long? Well, now that I know you like tea, I can start coming over on Sundays again. That will be just lovely.

Mrs. Neil fishes some cookies out of her large purse as well.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)

Oh, Byron dear, would you mind getting us some cups?

Byron nods and exits the room.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)

Such a sweet boy. With such a hard life.

Anthony slowly moves behind Mrs. Neil. He reaches into his back pocket and removes a length of WIRE.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)

You're a good friend to him, young man. I can tell.

Anthony slowly winds the wire around his hands.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)

He needs someone like you around. Someone to keep him safe.

Byron returns to the room, carrying the steaming teapot and three mugs. He sets them on the coffee table and sits down next to the old woman.

Anthony quickly hides the wire behind his back.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)

Splendid, dear. Could you get us a bit of sugar as well?

BYRON

Sure, Misses-- Gladys.

Byron stands back up and heads out into the kitchen.

Anthony quickly rewraps the wire around his hands and steps forward, close behind Mrs. Neil again.

The elderly woman busies herself with filling the teacups.

MRS. NEIL
Oh, do sit down, dear.

BYRON (O.S.)
Here we are.

Anthony hides the wire again as Byron returns to the room with a CUP of sugar.

Mrs. Neil scoops some sugar into all three cups and takes a small sip of her own glass.

Behind his back, Anthony unwinds the wire and stuffs it back into his pocket.

MRS. NEIL
Oh, wonderful. Go ahead, drink up
you two.

The two men reluctantly pick up the teacups and sip at them.

MRS. NEIL (CONT'D)
Well, I can't stay. I've got my
bridge club meeting in an hour.

BYRON
That's a shame. You'll have to
come over again soon.

Mrs. Neil stands and totters toward the front door.

MRS. NEIL
I will, dear.

Anthony crosses over to the door to open it for her, smiling as she steps through.

Anthony closes it behind her, grinning and winking at Byron.

Byron gasps, once again picking up his paper bag and breathing into it.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Little sunlight filters through the leaves of the deeply shadowed forest. Anthony and Byron, wearing clothes smeared with grime, throw shovelfuls of dirt out of a makeshift grave. The only sound that can be heard is the harsh scraping of the shovels.

Their faces grim, they wordlessly lift Landry's corpse and place it in the hole.

Byron and Anthony climb out.

Anthony takes a scoop of earth, and tosses it onto the body.

Byron sinks to the ground, staring at the body as tears begin to slide down his cheek.

Black dirt slowly begins to obscure the body.

EXT. THE STAND BOOKSTORE - DAY

Sophie waits impatiently under an umbrella in front of The Stand, a major bookstore on Broadway.

Rain falls on the line of people waiting to get in.

A large sign plastered to one window of the giant bookstore chain reads, "B.L. Walsh, Author of Written Off, Book Signing Event One Day Only!"

A white limousine rolls up to the curb.

The crowd watches as Anthony, dressed in an expensive grey suit, steps out with an umbrella. Anthony smiles and waves to them, then approaches Sophie.

SOPHIE

Where the hell have you been?

ANTHONY

Calm down, I'm not that late.

SOPHIE

Where's Byron?

ANTHONY

He decided to stay home. Wasn't feeling well.

SOPHIE

Alright, get inside.

EXT. B&P PUBLISHING FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Sanders the Flunky steps out of the entrance to B&P Publishing, pausing for a moment to glare out at the rain.

He holds his briefcase over his head, hurrying out to the street to flag down a TAXI.

He climbs inside, and the cab pulls out into traffic.

A sleek black RENTAL CAR pulls out after a beat, following.

INT. GREASY SPOON DINER - DAY

Sanders the Flunky sits in a booth alone in a 1950's style diner.

A WAITRESS (20's), wearing a pink outfit, sets a burger and fries in front of him, then walks away.

Sanders watches her go, staring at her ass.

VINNIE (O.S.)

Cute.

Sanders turns back around quickly, as Vinnie slides into the booth across from him.

Vinnie smiles at him, relaxing into the seat with a friendly attitude.

GEORGIE (30's), even bigger than Vinnie and wearing a grey suit, looms over Sanders at the side of the table.

Sanders looks between the two men nervously.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

Mister Sanders. Let's talk.

INT. THE STAND BOOKSTORE - DAY

A crowd of people mill about the long book-filled shelves of The Stand. The building is massive, containing thousands and thousands of books. People sit and read on comfortable chairs and couches, sip coffee, and talk quietly.

Sophie and Anthony stand behind a row of shelves. Sophie, wearing a black pencil skirt and blue blouse, fixes Anthony's tie.

SOPHIE

I cannot stress enough how much you messed up.

ANTHONY

So I was late, so what?

SOPHIE

This is a delicate time. The book is starting to pick up speed.

(MORE)

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

If you damage your reputation now,
you could derail the whole thing.
You can NOT have a repeat of last
week.

ANTHONY

Don't worry so much, that won't
happen. Scout's honor.

Sophie frowns and smooths out his shirt and tie.

She starts to step back, but Anthony puts his arms around her
waist and pulls her close.

SOPHIE

What are you--

Anthony leans in and tries to kiss her. She attempts to
resist, shoving at his chest.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

No, stop--

Far stronger than her, Anthony locks his lips with hers
despite her fighting.

When the kiss breaks, Sophie slaps him hard.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Let go of me, now!

Anthony drops his arms, scowling.

ANTHONY

What the hell is your problem?

SOPHIE

No one touches me without my
consent!

ANTHONY

You gave me signals!

SOPHIE

Bullshit! Don't do that again,
Anthony. I have ZERO interest in
men like you.

Anthony angrily pulls back his fist in a threatening manner.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

You wouldn't dare.

Anthony slowly lowers his fist, his jaw still clenched in anger.

He turns on his heel and stalks away.

Sophie breathes a small sigh of relief.

As she watches, Anthony strides out into the crowd, his demeanor changing instantly to smiling and talking excitedly as if the brief exchange had never happened.

Sophie frowns deeply.

EXT. NEW YORK SHOPPING DISTRICT STREET - DAY

Byron, wearing a button down shirt and jeans, and Anthony, still in his expensive suit, walk down a street in an upscale shopping district in New York.

BYRON

I'm really not in the mood for this.

ANTHONY

Come on, this will take your mind off of things.

BYRON

But shopping? Really? After what happened--

ANTHONY

Yes, exactly. You need to act normal, just in case, right? And you've got lots of money coming in. Most normal people would try to enjoy it.

BYRON

But--

ANTHONY

No buts! We're doing this.

INT. MENSWEAR STORE - DAY

Byron stands in front of a trio of mirrors, looking uncomfortable as a TAILOR (45), measures him for a suit.

Anthony stands off to one side, smiling and watching.

ANTHONY

Every man needs at least one good suit. Makes you feel almost like someone else while wearing one.

BYRON

Very funny.

ANTHONY

Don't you want to impress your little senorita?

BYRON

Selena? It's not like that between me and her.

ANTHONY

Why not?

BYRON

I've got too much on my mind right now.

EXT. AUTO DEALERSHIP - DAY

Anthony and Byron walk through row upon row of expensive cars, admiring them as they pass.

BYRON

I don't need a new car. Public transit gets me where I need to go.

ANTHONY

It's not about what you need, man. It's about what you want!

BYRON

I don't really want a new car, either.

ANTHONY

Just test drive one. We're supposed to be having fun today. And don't you think Selena would be impressed if you rolled up in a 'vette and took her to dinner?

BYRON

Enough about Selena. Can we just go, please?

INT. GREASY SPOON DINER - DAY

Byron and Anthony sit across from each other at a cheap, 1950's style diner. Anthony munches on fries, while Byron nurses a tall milk-shake.

ANTHONY

You know what your problem is?
You're afraid to live.

BYRON

Excuse me?

ANTHONY

You need to relax, cut loose. Wake up and see the world around you.

BYRON

I was a cop. I know what the world is like.

ANTHONY

Yeah, I agree that there's a lot of bad shit out there. But there's a lot of good shit, too. You just have to reach out and take it.

BYRON

But at what cost? Jesus, we--
(quieter)
We buried a body yesterday.

ANTHONY

That's what I'm talking about though. You see all these people?

Anthony gestures expansively to the semi-crowded diner.

Byron glances around, trying to see if anyone is paying attention to their conversation.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

These people are all sheep. They eat when they're told, they sleep when they're told, they fuck and have babies when they're told, and spend the rest of their time pretending terrible things don't happen. Not like us.

BYRON

How are we so different?

ANTHONY

You and I? We know how things really are. We can see, you know?

BYRON

So what? I think I'd rather be a sheep.

ANTHONY

It's too late for that, though. You crossed over into a whole new world when you put on the badge, my friend. Like I did when I got shipped overseas. We've both been a part of the system, we've seen how it works from the inside.

BYRON

What are you saying?

ANTHONY

I'm saying that you and I can change things, Byron. We're not sheep. We could become the wolves if we wanted to, there's no limit to what you and I can accomplish.

BYRON

I don't believe that. Yes, perhaps, we could change things in a small way. Open a few more eyes.

ANTHONY

There's so much more to it than that. I mean--

(quieter)

You got away with murder. Think about what else you could get away with.

Byron sits back, his face troubled.

Anthony pulls a CELLPHONE out of his jacket pocket. He offers it to Byron.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Now call Selena.

Hesitantly, Byron takes the phone and sighs.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Anthony slides Franco's CRUTCHES into the trunk of a taxi, then closes it.

Byron and Franco sit in the back seat of the cab.

Anthony moves to the back passenger window, bending over to smile at Byron and Franco.

ANTHONY

You kids have fun now, alright?

Byron smiles nervously.

Franco chuckles.

FRANCO

Don't wait up.

Anthony straightens and TAPS the roof of the car.

The taxi pulls out onto the street.

Anthony watches with a happy smile until the car rounds the corner, which instantly drops to a neutral expression as soon as the car is out of view.

He walks toward his own house.

INT. ANTHONY'S LABORATORY - NIGHT

An entirely stainless steel room, with a drain on the floor and a large operating table.

Looking more like a surgery room than a place in someone's house, the fluorescent lighting flickers a little, revealing a tray with several rows of SURGICAL IMPLEMENTS.

Smooth jazz plays on an old-fashioned RECORD PLAYER.

Anthony sits on a stool and hums along to the music, a LAPTOP open in front of him.

An image of Byron's driver's license fills the screen.

Anthony uses an image manipulation program to make Byron's old picture look more like him.

Faintly, the sound of THREE CAR DOORS CLOSING comes from above.

Anthony looks up toward a small blacked-out WINDOW near the ceiling.

He then looks toward a CLOCK on the wall, that reads 9:37pm.

ANTHONY
(muttering)
You didn't strike out already, did
you buddy?

Anthony stands up and heads for the door, pausing to slip a SCALPEL into his back pocket.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A beautiful, expensive restaurant with red carpeting and white tablecloths. The elegant china sparkles, and two empty wine glasses sit on either side of a candle on a table for two.

Byron sits on one side and Franco sits on the other, both looking uncomfortable and nervous.

They're wearing their best outfits, which are on the low end of classy, especially compared to the elegant dresses and expensive suits of the other patrons.

They smile when they meet each other's eyes, but quickly look away.

A long, awkward beat passes.

A WAITER (30's), dressed better than either Byron or Franco, approaches the table.

WAITER
The wine list, sir?

Byron takes the WINE LIST, opening it and coughing uncomfortably.

He stares at it in confusion for a moment, then looks up at Franco.

BYRON
So um... what uh-- What do you
like?

Franco shrugs, then smiles at Byron.

FRANCO
I'll have a beer.

Byron smiles back, visibly relaxing.

BYRON
Make it two.

The waiter sniffs and takes the wine list back, stalking off without a word.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

A BIG MAN (20's) in a cheap suit stands next to the open driver's side door of a SLEEK BLACK RENTAL CAR.

Two more stand next to Byron's front door. One of them is a MAN (20's) in another cheap suit with a BASEBALL BAT in hand.

The other is Vinnie Burke, Marcus Weems' right hand man.

Vinnie BANGS on the door loudly a final time.

VINNIE
He ain't home, I guess.
(louder)
Alright boys, let's trash the
place.

Vinnie turns around and crosses in front of the car, but freezes when he finds himself face to face with Anthony.

ANTHONY
Can I help you gentlemen?

VINNIE
Yeah, are you Walsh?

Anthony looks at each of the three men, as the man with the bat moves to Vinnie's side.

Anthony smiles.

ANTHONY
I am today.

The man at Vinnie's side suddenly swings the baseball bat at Anthony's head.

Anthony drops to one knee, and in the same movement cuts the man's hamstring.

The man falls forward with a SCREAM, and Anthony rises to dip the scalpel into his throat.

The scream becomes a gurgle, as the man lies on the driveway, clutching his neck.

Vinnie turns to look at the big guy by the car door as Anthony almost casually throws the scalpel.

The blade nails the big guy directly in the eye, and he falls backward silently.

Vinnie turns back to Anthony, staring in shock.

Anthony reaches into Vinnie's jacket just as casually, and takes out his PISTOL.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Run.

Vinnie stares for a beat longer, then turns and sprints away.

Anthony with practiced ease, removes the CLIP and chambered ROUND from Vinnie's gun, then sets them on the hood of the rental car.

He kneels briefly next to the man clutching his neck.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Keep pressure on that, I don't want to have to pressure wash the entire driveway.

Anthony pats him lightly on the shoulder, then stands back up and starts walking in the direction Vinnie ran.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

FRANCO

You don't think he's weird?

Byron and Franco sit at the same table, dirty plates in front of them and an empty beer bottle each.

BYRON

He's a little odd, I'll give you that, but he's really been helping me out.

FRANCO

I don't know, there's something creepy about him.

Byron shifts awkwardly.

BYRON

Could we... not talk about
Anthony? It seems like he's all
that's on everyone's minds these
days.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Vinnie sprints through the forest, tree branches snagging his
clothes.

He trips over a pile of fresh dirt, muddying up the front of
his white suit.

Scrambling to his feet, he keeps running.

Vinnie ducks behind a thick tree, wheezing like a dying pig.

Anthony jogs up to the pile of fresh dirt, and kneels,
looking at the marks made by Vinnie's fall. He smiles,
straightens, and jogs on.

INT. SCHAFFER'S POND PUB - NIGHT

Still in their classy clothes, Byron and Franco sit on stools
at the bar, a couple of bottles between them.

Byron lets out a genuine, heartfelt laugh for the first time.

BYRON

Seriously?

FRANCO

I swear! A pony tattoo, every inch
of his back! Called it Fluttercry,
or something.

BYRON

Did he give a reason?

FRANCO

(deepening her voice)
It ain't for little girls, yo.
Bronies for life, homes.

Byron laughs again, shaking his head in amusement.

Franco laughs as well, putting her hand on his knee to steady
herself on the bar stool.

Byron looks down at her hand, then back up at her smiling
face.

She turns to take a drink of her beer, leaving her hand where it is.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Vinnie darts into a small clearing, looking around fearfully.

He picks a direction at random, and sprints off.

Anthony follows a beat later.

ANTHONY
(calling out)
Are we having fun yet?

Vinnie looks back over his shoulder at Anthony close behind him, and gets smacked in the head by a tree branch.

He falls, quickly turning and scrambling backwards away from Anthony.

VINNIE
Who are you?!

ANTHONY
Oooh, what's the cliché answer?

Anthony stops, standing over Vinnie threateningly.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Your worst nightmare? Your
dooooom?

Anthony jumps onto Vinnie, pinning him down. He grabs his tie and yanks it tight.

Vinnie begins to choke, struggling and failing to pull Anthony's hands off his neck.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Oh, I know!

Anthony leans in close to Vinnie's terrified face.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
(whispering, gravelly)
I'm Batman.

Anthony chuckles as Vinnie continues to choke.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Anthony stands at the back of the sleek black rental car, and closes the trunk with Vinnie's body inside.

The other bodies are gone as well, but dark stains remain on the sidewalk.

Anthony crosses to the driver's side of the car, WHISTLING a relaxed tune.

He climbs into the driver's seat and starts the car.

The rental pulls out of the driveway and down the street.

A long beat passes.

A taxi pulls into the driveway.

I/E. TAXI CAB - NIGHT

Byron and Franco sit in the back seat, kissing passionately, their hands all over one another.

The DRIVER (40's) taps on the window separating him from the two lovebirds.

Byron leans back, embarrassed, and hands money through the slot.

He slides out of the taxi, and crosses over to Franco's side to open the door for her.

He smiles down at her for a beat, while she stares up at him.

She makes walking motions with her hands.

BYRON

Oh, shit! Right, sorry!

He hurries around to the trunk, and takes her crutches out.

Handing them to Franco, he helps her stand, and she kisses him again.

FRANCO

Come on, rookie. Let's go inside.

BYRON

Yes, ma'am.

INT. BYRON'S HOUSE STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Byron carries Franco piggyback up the stairs. She holds tightly to him, arms around his neck. It's a sweet moment for the two of them.

Byron stumbles, crashing to the carpeted stairs.

The two laugh and kiss again, lying side by side, the chemistry between them palpable.

BYRON

I think I'm a little drunk.

Franco shakes her crutches at him.

FRANCO

I think we just suck. Six legs and we can't even navigate stairs.

Byron laughs again, and Franco pulls him in for another kiss.

INT. BYRON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Byron carries Franco into the room, setting her gently on the bed.

The two kiss again, and begin to remove each other's clothes.

FRANCO

Be gentle, okay? I haven't-- Not since--

BYRON

Me either.

Franco takes hold of his shirt, and pulls him in for more passionate kissing.

Through the window, Anthony can be seen dragging a body wrapped in a plastic sheet through the yard.

Neither Byron or Franco notice.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Anthony whistles a tune, using a GARDEN HOSE to spray down the driveway.

The water removes all traces of the bloodstains from the night before.

Byron emerges from the house, and approaches Anthony.

ANTHONY
What's up, stud?

BYRON
It's six a.m., why are you washing
my driveway?

Anthony turns the washer off.

ANTHONY
Some guys came by last night,
asking about you. I told them you
weren't home, but they wouldn't
leave. Things got a little rough,
and I sent them packing.

Byron stares at him for a beat.

BYRON
You hurt someone.

ANTHONY
I was protecting you. That's what
friends are for.

BYRON
I don't want you to hurt people for
me, Anthony! If there's a problem,
you call the police!

ANTHONY
They were going to wreck your
house! They were here to wreck
YOU.

BYRON
Excuse me?

ANTHONY
I said I took care of it. They
won't be back.

The door to the house opens, and Franco steps outside,
wearing the dress she had on before and one of Byron's shirts
over it.

BYRON
(whispering)
This isn't over. We'll talk later
tonight.

ANTHONY
Can't tonight, buddy. I'm busy.

Franco walks up to them slowly.

FRANCO
Everything alright?

ANTHONY
Everything's just fine.

Anthony smiles warmly at her. Byron nods.

BYRON
Let me get my keys, I'll take you home.

INT. SOPHIE'S CONDO - DAY

Byron and Sophie sit at a table in Sophie's condo. The condo is as clean and organized as her office, decorated in middle-upper class art chic.

A beer and a half-eaten salad sit in front of Sophie, and an untouched burger and fries sit in front of Byron.

SOPHIE
He's unstable, Byron. The audience member, trying to force himself on me, and now this?

BYRON
He's... just stressed right now. He thought he was protecting me, or something.

SOPHIE
I know he's your friend, but I think this whole situation is starting to scare me.

Byron nods, picking at his food.

BYRON
I want to call off the book tour and the next couple interviews I need time to clear my head. Anthony does too, I think.

SOPHIE
If it comes down to it, are you willing to come clean to the media?
(MORE)

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
We still might be able to salvage
this.

Byron nods again.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
But... what do we do about Anthony?

BYRON
I'll tell him we're taking a
vacation. Give the fame time to
breathe, sink into the minds of the
public, you know? Tell him not to
burn himself out too fast.
(beat)
And hope he buys that line of bull.

INT. SOPHIE'S CONDO - NIGHT (LATER)

Sophie opens the door to her condo, letting Byron leave.

She closes the door and clicks off the light, letting the
flickering light of a flat-screen television provides the
only illumination.

Outside, rain falls heavily against the window panes.

Sophie slips off her heels and sets them neatly by the door,
then crosses to the couch.

Sophie stretches out, placing her feet on the coffee table.

Sophie picks up the remote and flips a few channels before
settling back, opening a BOTTLE of water and taking a drink.

The television displays images from the CRAIG FERGUSON SHOW,
the grey-haired host sitting at his desk and talking with his
guests. He turns toward the camera.

CRAIG FERGUSON
Our next guest is an author who's
just hit the best-seller list for
his first book, "Written Off."

Sophie immediately sits up in surprise, nearly spitting out
her drink.

CRAIG FERGUSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Have you read this? Really
intense. Anyway, let's welcome B.
L. Walsh!

The television shows Anthony in an expensive suit, strolling across the stage of the Craig Ferguson show. He shakes hands with the other guests and Craig as well, then sits down in the chair closest to the host's desk.

SOPHIE

No. No no no no!

Sophie picks up her cellphone and begins dialing rapidly as the show continues.

CRAIG FERGUSON

Mister Walsh, good to have you with us tonight.

ANTHONY

It's good to be here, Craig.

CRAIG FERGUSON

Now, tell us about this book of yours. It's based on real events, isn't it?

Sophie holds the phone to her ear, glaring at the television.

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Yes. My protagonist has some of the same experiences I had in the Los Angeles Police Department.

CRAIG FERGUSON

I don't want to give too much away, but it also talks about why you left the Force, right?

ANTHONY

That's correct, Craig.

CRAIG FERGUSON

It's a pretty dark book. I've read it, it's a brutal portrayal of crime in L.A.

Sophie turns away from the television, furious.

SOPHIE

Yes, hello?

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Accurate though. And that's not the main point of the book. The real meat comes after that.

SOPHIE

Did you authorize this?

CRAIG FERGUSON (O.S.)

Right, when the protagonist deals with the corruption in the mental health organization.

SOPHIE

The bullshit I'm seeing on television right now! The Craig Ferguson show?

ANTHONY (O.S.)

Not just that, but society as a whole.

CRAIG FERGUSON (O.S.)

You've got a couple big announcements for us tonight too, don't you?

SOPHIE

Entirely on his own? Shit.
Thanks.

Sophie closes the cellphone and flops back onto the couch, rubbing her temples.

ANTHONY

I do, actually. The first is that I've been contacted, I can't tell you by who yet, but I'm in negotiation for the movie rights.

CRAIG FERGUSON

Congratulations! Any idea who's going to play the lead?

ANTHONY

Not yet, no.

CRAIG FERGUSON

Well, if you had to pick?

ANTHONY

I think you'd make a great LAPD officer, Craig.

CRAIG FERGUSON

Me? I can make you a nice B.L.T.

The studio audience LAUGHS.

ANTHONY

My other announcement is that I'm working on a second book. It's going to be in stores in November.

CRAIG FERGUSON

Oh yeah? What's this one about?

ANTHONY

It's another crime thriller, this one from the perspective of a serial killer.

EXT. BYRON'S HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Byron exits the house wearing jeans, button down shirt, and a jacket, locking the door behind him.

As he puts the keys in his pocket and takes a few steps, he's approached by CARL LANDRY (40), disheveled, tired, and worried. Carl holds a thick stack of slightly wrinkled flyers in his hands.

CARL

Are you Byron Walsh?

BYRON

I... N-no, I'm Anthony, Byron's friend.

CARL

I'm looking for Mister Walsh, is he home? He's a patient of my wife's.

BYRON

Uh, no. No, he's not home right now.

CARL

I know I'm not supposed to, but I need to talk to him.

Carl offers one of the flyers to Byron. It reads, "MISSING: MIKO LANDRY" and shows a picture of Doctor Landry.

CARL (CONT'D)

I can't find my wife. She's been missing for almost a week now.

BYRON

And you think By-- one of her patients might know something?

CARL

I don't know. I hope so. The police told me it's a missing persons case. That they have their hands full. They say that her bank card was used to buy a plane ticket!

BYRON

It's probably best left to the profess--

CARL

You don't understand. Something's happened to her! They found her car in her normal parking garage. Someone had slashed one of the tires! I know something bad has happened. She wouldn't just run out on me like that. She wouldn't!

Carl hands Byron another flyer with a trembling hand.

CARL (CONT'D)

Please, just give this to Byron. I need to find her. Please.

Carl shuffles away, climbing into a small sedan and starting the engine.

Byron watches as Carl drives away.

INT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - DAY

Byron hurries up the driveway toward Anthony's house. Anthony's car is parked in the driveway, the run-down old vehicle seeming out of place at the nice, well-maintained home.

Byron KNOCKS on the front door. He's still holding the flyers.

Anthony opens the door and steps out, closing it behind him.

ANTHONY

What's wrong, buddy? You look like you've seen a ghost.

Byron wordlessly hands Anthony the flyers. Anthony looks them over briefly and then crumples them up.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

So what?

BYRON

We've got to stop this, Anthony.
We have to go to the police before
this gets any worse.

ANTHONY

No, we don't. We don't have to do
anything.

BYRON

It's over, alright? I'm going to
the authorities and telling them
everything.

ANTHONY

And you'll lose everything, Byron.
Everything you've been working for,
gone.

BYRON

Sophie called me.

Anthony frowns, confused.

ANTHONY

What did you tell her?

BYRON

Nothing. Nothing about this. She
said she saw you on some late night
talk show.

ANTHONY

Okay, but--

BYRON

She didn't book that interview,
Anthony.

ANTHONY

Yeah, I know. I did.

BYRON

She also said you went to a book
signing without me, and made up a
story about me being sick!

ANTHONY

It was a book signing, I didn't
want to bother--

BYRON

What the hell? You can't do that!
It's MY book, MY story.

ANTHONY

I'm doing this for you! I'm out there under the hot lights, pretending to be someone I'm not, for you!

BYRON

No, it ends now. This whole charade ends now.

ANTHONY

I don't think so.

BYRON

It's not your decision, Anthony.

ANTHONY

At this point, do you think anyone will believe you?

Beat.

BYRON

Excuse me?

ANTHONY

Everyone thinks I'm you, Byron. The only people who know the difference are you and Sophie and Selena.

BYRON

We'll go to the media, Anthony. Expose you.

ANTHONY

And I'll tell them you're a deranged fan, and Sophie is a jealous PR rep who's bitter about me going with a different firm.

BYRON

Your story won't add up. There are records, photos--

ANTHONY

All changed. You'd be surprised what the internet and a few online courses can teach you. And it won't matter anyway. The police don't investigate their own, and I can charm everyone else. Face it, Byron. We're in this together.

Byron takes a few steps back, stumbling off the porch in a daze.

INT. ANTHONY'S BASEMENT - DAY

Anthony walks down the stairs into his laboratory. The stainless-steel walls and floors are clean, the lights dimmed

The stage manager from the Damascus Theatre, strapped into the operating table and gagged, WHIMPERS in fear. His clothing is bloody, hair matted and damp with sweat.

He stirs as Anthony comes up to him, duct tape across her mouth preventing her from making much noise.

Anthony picks up a bone saw, testing the edge with his thumb.

ANTHONY

Now, where were we?

INT. BYRON'S HOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Byron sits once again in his comfortable leather chair, a steaming mug of tea next to him on the nightstand. He worriedly gnaws on one fingernail, while tapping on a notebook in his lap with a pencil.

After a few moments of hesitation, he picks up his cellphone and dials.

The phone RINGS twice before picking up.

OPERATOR (V.O.)

New York Police Department, non-emergency services. How can I help you?

BYRON

Yes, hello. I was wondering if you might be able to answer a few questions for me.

OPERATOR (V.O.)

I can try.

BYRON

I'm looking into a person named Anthony Mallone, resident of 206 Merced Drive, Oak Ridge, New York.

OPERATOR (V.O.)

Can I get your name?

BYRON

Oh, yes. My name is By-- B.L. Walsh, formerly LAPD. My badge number is 51147.

OPERATOR (V.O.)

One moment please.

(beat)

You're that famous author, aren't you?

BYRON

Um, yes, that's me.

OPERATOR

I'm a huge fan. Is this research for another book?

BYRON

It is, actually.

OPERATOR

This is so cool! Okay. I don't see any record of an Anthony Mallone at that residence.

BYRON

Are you sure?

OPERATOR

Positive. There are a number of Tony Mallones in our system, but none have residences in Oak Ridge.

BYRON

He'd be ex-military, if that helps. Anthony Arthur Mallone.

OPERATOR

No, I'm sorry. No one by that name is in our database. In fact, the registered owner of that address is you.

BYRON

Excuse me?

OPERATOR

206 Merced Drive, the owner listed is Byron Walsh, purchased about nine months ago.

Byron stares at the phone in shock.

OPERATOR (CONT'D)
Sir? Are you still there, sir?

Byron hangs up the phone, standing quickly and grabbing his coat.

EXT. FORT HAMILTON MILITARY BASE - DAY

Byron steps off a bus and walks up to Fort Hamilton, an Army base in southern New York. Cadets run here and there across the fields.

Byron speaks briefly with a guard at the gate, who points and then opens the gate for him.

INT. FORT HAMILTON OFFICE - DAY

BYRON (V.O.)
Thank you for seeing me, Major.

MAJOR DAVIN BRIGGS (55), stern and commanding in his officer's uniform, sits behind a desk.

Byron sits in front of the desk.

MAJOR BRIGGS
Always happy to help the boys in blue. I figured it must be important if you're going to come all this way.

BYRON
It is, yes.

Byron hands a photograph of Anthony across the table to Major Briggs.

BYRON (CONT'D)
I'm hoping you can tell me about this man, Anthony Mallone. He would have gone through basic here, six or seven years ago.

Briggs looks over the photo, then looks up at Byron.

Beat.

MAJOR BRIGGS
I recognize him-- but not as Anthony Mallone.
(beat)
(MORE)

MAJOR BRIGGS (CONT'D)

He was here about seven years ago, yes, but he was going by the name Samuel Clark.

Byron raises an eyebrow, and scribbles quickly onto a notepad.

MAJOR BRIGGS (CONT'D)

He just showed up one day, said he wanted to enlist. His paperwork checked out, so we signed him up. Everything was fine at first, exemplary soldier. But then two weeks into basic training, he nearly beat his commanding officer to death.

BYRON

Jesus...

MAJOR BRIGGS

It was entirely out of nowhere. Everyone liked him, even talked himself out of prison time. But with an incident like that, we have to give a mandatory psych eval.

BYRON

Did he pass?

MAJOR BRIGGS

Failed spectacularly. Obsessive compulsions and disassociative tendencies is what they called it. Full blown psychopath is more like it.

(beat)

Now, you be careful if you run into this fellow, son. I've seen enough of this world to know that everyone's got a little evil in them.

(beat)

But this man? He embraced it. Made it a part of him. Let it consume him.

Major Briggs hands the photograph back to Byron.

MAJOR BRIGGS (CONT'D)

We threw him out, of course. Gave him his discharge papers myself.

(MORE)

MAJOR BRIGGS (CONT'D)
I'll never forget the look in his
eyes. Empty. Black. A man like
that is capable of anything.

INT. BYRON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Byron rushes into his bedroom and over to the bed,
frantically feeling around underneath it.

He pulls the wooden box that houses his sidearm out and sets
it on the bed, then fumbles with his keys.

Finding the right key, Byron unlocks the box and opens it,
staring into it in silence.

Byron drops his head to the coverlet, his breathing ragged.

BYRON
Oh, shit...

The wooden box is empty.

EXT. ANTHONY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Byron waits behind a tree in the yard of a house across the
street from Anthony's home, hiding in the shadows and
watching the house.

Anthony emerges and heads to his car, climbing inside.

The engine starts and the car pulls out onto the street,
disappearing into the night.

As soon as the car is no longer visible, Byron looks up and
down the street and then jogs up to Anthony's door.

He tries the doorhandle, but it doesn't budge.

Byron circles around to the back of the house, and moves to
the back door.

Kneeling, he pulls a set of lockpicks out of his pocket and
inserts them into the door handle.

INT. ANTHONY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lit only by moonlight coming in from the window and now open
door, Anthony's kitchen is clean but sparse.

Byron slips inside and closes the door behind him as quietly
as he can, before moving into the next room.

INT. ANTHONY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Anthony's living room is much like the kitchen, clean and sparse, possessing only a couch, a coffee table, and a television.

An empty take-out container sits on the coffee table. Beside it, dozens of neatly organized photographs of Byron lay spread out.

Byron sits on the edge of the couch and looks through them. They show him going about his daily life.

One image is of him walking down a street in New York.

Another shows him entering Doctor Landry's office.

A third shows him in his comfortable leather chair, sleeping.

All of the photos look like they were taken from a place of concealment.

Byron puts the photos down and stands, looking around. He turns and heads down a hallway.

INT. ANTHONY'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

The short hallway is plastered with photographs and newspaper clippings, post-it notes, and hand written messages. Most of the photos include Byron or Anthony.

One of the newspaper clippings has the headline, "THREE OFFICERS GUNNED DOWN IN LA APARTMENT."

Another reads, "WRITTEN OFF FLIES OFF SHELVES."

Yet another reads, "AUTHOR THREATENS AUDIENCE MEMBER DURING INTERVIEW."

A fourth reads, "RISING STAR WEARS A BADGE."

Byron slowly walks through, looking at the photographs and clippings in horror.

INT. ANTHONY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door opens on Anthony's bedroom, and Byron creeps in.

He clicks on the light and looks around, moving quietly through the room.

A bed, carefully made, rests on the far side of the room. Next to it sits a night stand, and across from those is a dresser.

Byron moves to the dresser, carefully opening it.

Inside is a number of medals, including a Silver Star and a Purple Heart. They're inside glass frames, with little plaques on them.

Scattered about next to them are dozens of nametags from all kinds of different establishments, each with a different name.

Byron picks up the Purple Heart, and sees that the plaque on it reads, "FOR VALOR IN THE FACE OF DANGER - LEONARD SCOTT."

Byron puts the medal back, and pushes the drawer closed.

Opening another drawer, which is full of odds and ends, he spots a dolphin watch.

Byron takes the watch out of the drawer, looking it over carefully. It's the same watch Doctor Landry always wore.

He crosses over to the closet and slides the door open. Inside are dozens of uniforms, everything from a cable repair technician to a policeman's blues to a nurse's scrubs. All hang meticulously on their hooks.

BYRON
(mutters)
Jesus christ...

INT. ANTHONY'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

Back out in the hallway, Byron opens another door, revealing stairs that lead down into darkness.

INT. ANTHONY'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Byron feels his way down the stairs in near total darkness. He fumbles for a light switch and clicks it on, revealing an empty cement room.

Pushed to one side, the operating table is splattered with blood. On the other side of the basement, a large section of the steel floor has been raised on hinges, and a six foot by three foot area of recently churned earth lies exposed. Next to it are a dirty pickaxe and shovel, a wheelbarrow, and an unopened bag of quick-drying cement.

Byron stares at the churned earth for a moment, his breath coming in shallower and shallower GASPS.

He rushes over to the hole and begins digging in the soft earth with his bare hands.

BYRON
Five... Ten...

His digging exposes first a hand, then a shoulder, and finally a face.

Byron cries out in alarm, stumbling back as the lifeless visage of Mrs. Neil stares up at him.

BYRON (CONT'D)
Fifteen... fuck...

He wheezes, gasping for air.

ANTHONY (O.S.)
I had to.

Byron wheels, and sees Anthony standing at the bottom of the stairs. Anthony's shoulders are slumped, he looks sad.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
She would have come between us,
Byron.

BYRON
You're insane.

ANTHONY
No more than you. Don't you see?
She needed to die. She was too
much of a risk for you.

Anthony takes a single slow step closer.

Byron wheezes, struggling to control his breathing.

BYRON
I found Landry's watch. You killed
her too, didn't you?

ANTHONY
Regrettably. Anyone who can tell
us apart is a potential threat.
And Doctor Landry was going to ruin
everything.

Anthony takes another step closer.

Byron scoots back, trying to keep a reasonable distance away from Anthony.

BYRON

How many others, Anthony? How many have you killed?

ANTHONY

Four. All for you. The stage manager from the Damascus, three men who came the other night. They wanted to hurt you, Byron. They wanted to take you from me.

Byron glances at the stairs and then back up at his former friend, panting.

Anthony looks back over his shoulder toward the stairs, then back at Byron.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Relax. You're my friend, Byron. I'm not going to hurt you, we're partners in this.

BYRON

They'll know. They'll find the bodies. Your fingerprints are everywhere down here.

Anthony looks down at his hand and rubs his fingertips together.

ANTHONY

Oh, I got rid of those years ago. Burnt them off. Ghastly business, hurt like hell.

Beat.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

So no, the only fingerprints they'll find down here are yours.

BYRON

Sophie knows. We'll go to the police, tell them everything.

ANTHONY

I really wish you wouldn't. Worst case scenario, they investigate and find you guilty for a double homicide.

(MORE)

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Best case scenario, they believe
you and I simply disappear again.
I've done it before.

BYRON

At least then I'll be rid of you.

ANTHONY

But will you? I've spent years
blending into society, Byron.
You'll spend the rest of your life
looking fearfully over your
shoulder, waiting for the day when
I'll appear. I will haunt you to
the end of your life.

BYRON

Why? Why are you doing all this?

Anthony looks away for a moment, sighing heavily.

ANTHONY

I could tell you a long, tragic
story about being rejected by
society. About being cast out,
forgotten, abused for having a
mental illness. But you're no
stranger to that tale, my friend.

(beat)

I've always wanted to be a hero,
Byron. I wanted to help people,
save them. Listen to the throngs
chant my name as I go by.

(beat)

Alas, it was not meant to be.
Police, military, medical, I
applied at them all, and was cast
out for my mental illness. So,
when they refused me-- I simply
became someone they would accept.

BYRON

You're sick, Anthony. We-- we
could get help for you. The best
psychiatric care.

ANTHONY

You mean padded walls, straight
jackets, and mouldy food for the
rest of my life? I think not.

Byron shift backwards even more, away from Anthony. As he
does so, his hand touches the shovel. He grips it tightly.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Don't do that. You don't need it.
Please, hear me out, and then
you're free to go.

BYRON

What? You'll just--

ANTHONY

Let you go, yes. Whether or not
you go to the police is entirely
your decision.

Byron looks between Anthony and the stairs indecisively,
still panting for air.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I'm offering you a deal, Byron.
Continue to work with me. Write to
your heart's content. Let me play
you to the outside world. With
your writing abilities and my
acting skill, we can have the
public eating out of the palm of
our hands.

(beat)

I'm offering you wealth, Byron.
Wealth and access to an adoring
public. You could change the
world, Byron.

(beat)

Millions will hear your words.
Think of what we could do. Think
of the lives we'll save.

Byron looks away, hesitating.

Beat.

Byron looks back at Anthony, glaring.

BYRON

No. It's not worth it. It's not
worth--

Byron gestures at Mrs. Neil's body.

BYRON (CONT'D)

-- this!

Anthony sighs and nods.

ANTHONY

I was afraid you might say that.

He steps to one side, gesturing to the stairs.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
 Goodbye, Byron. Please, take some
 time to think over my offer before
 you go to the police. Talk it over
 with someone-- Sophie, perhaps?

Byron pushes himself to his feet, holding the shovel.

He keeps the tool between himself and Anthony, moving slowly
 toward the stairs.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
 Watch your back, Byron. I'm not
 the only dangerous person in your
 life.

When Byron reaches the first step, he drops the shovel and
 runs up them.

Anthony sighs.

INT. ANTHONY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Byron runs through the kitchen, but pauses and turns back.
 Anthony's car keys sit on the kitchen counter. Byron
 snatches them up and continues running.

EXT. ANTHONY'S - NIGHT

Anthony's car, with Byron at the wheel, pulls out onto the
 street. The tires SQUEAL as Byron stomps the gas, quickly
 disappearing into the night.

Beat.

The garage door slowly opens, revealing another car that then
 pulls out onto the street.

INT. ANTHONY'S CAR - NIGHT

Byron drives at high speeds, sweat breaking out on his
 forehead. He puts his cellphone to his ear.

The phone RINGS several times.

BYRON
 Pick up the phone, Sophie. Pick it
 up!

The phone clicks over to voicemail.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
You've reached--

Byron tosses the phone into the passenger seat.

BYRON
Shit!

INT. SOPHIE'S CONDO BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

The elevator doors open on a short hallway, the deep blue carpet and white walls reflecting back the harsh fluorescent lighting.

Byron jogs up to the door of Sophie's condo, KNOCKING firmly on it.

Beat.

Byron KNOCKS on the door again. He waits another half-beat, and then tries the handle.

The door swings open easily, revealing the ransacked apartment inside.

INT. SOPHIE'S CONDO - NIGHT

Byron rushes into the condo, looking around. Signs of a struggle are everywhere.

The art decor is tossed about, the coffee table overturned, a large crack spiderwebs across the television.

Byron rushes through the condo, opening doors and looking into rooms.

BYRON
Sophie? Sophie, are you here?!

Byron pulls a paper bag out of his pocket, stumbling backward to lean against the wall. He breathes into the bag for a few moments, trying to collect himself.

As he hyperventilates into the paper bag, he spots Sophie's LAPTOP sitting amidst the wreckage, open.

Her desktop is empty save for a single file titled PLAY ME.

Byron rushes over to it, clicking on the file.

Anthony's face appears, standing in the remains of Sophie's condo.

ANTHONY

Hello, Byron. If you're watching this, then I'm already dead.

A beat. Anthony chuckles.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Just kidding, buddy. I knew you'd break into my house and find my things. I know everything about you! You're so easy to predict now, it's almost spooky.

The perspective shifts as Anthony tilts the laptop's webcam to show an unconscious Sophie on the floor.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Man she put up a fight. Fun though, it'll be a shame to kill somebody that pretty. But I suppose it'll technically be you killing her, won't it?

The perspective shifts again to Anthony's face on the webcam.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

But if you think you can stop me, come to the Damascus at midnight.

A beat.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I wish things could be different, buddy. I'll see you there.

Another beat.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Oh, and no police. Other than you and me, right buddy? By the way, did you remember gloves? Didn't think so.

Anthony grins, and the video ends.

Byron looks around, realizing his fingerprints are all over the apartment, and screams in impotent rage.

EXT. DAMASCUS THEATRE FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Thunder rumbles overhead as Anthony's car pulls up to the Damascus Theatre. The windows are boarded up, and the front door has a heavy chain and combination lock on it.

The sign reading CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS 9/20-10/07 is now tacked in a more prominent position on the front door.

Byron steps out of the car just as the first drops of rain begin to fall.

He hurries over to the door and yanks on the combination padlock, then jogs around to the alley beside the theatre.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The backstage area of the Damascus Theatre is dark and eerie, with very little lighting.

Plastic sheets hang from the walls to cover windows and furniture, giving the area an even more haunting and claustrophobic appearance.

A door opens, revealing a rain-dampened Byron, who quickly slips inside.

BYRON
(whispering)
Twenty five... thirty...

Byron sneaks through the area as quietly as possible.

He stops at the base of the stairs leading to the main stage, where Sophie is barely visible in the dim lighting.

A FLASH of lightning reveals her more fully, tied to a chair and gagged, back to back with Selena Franco, also similarly bound.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE MAIN STAGE - NIGHT

Plastic sheeting hangs at the back of the stage to cover the set paintings, billowing in a breeze from the storm outside.

Byron quickly steps out onto the stage, counting quietly to himself as he hurries over to Franco and Sophie.

Just before he reaches them, Anthony steps out from the shadows of the far side of the stage. He's wearing Byron's police uniform and aiming Byron's gun at him.

ANTHONY

That's quite far enough.

Byron freezes, then takes a few more deliberate steps to put himself between Anthony and the two women.

BYRON

Let them go, Anthony.

ANTHONY

And why should I do that?

BYRON

They're not a part of this anymore.
It's just you and me.

ANTHONY

It was supposed to be, Byron. But
you ruined it!

BYRON

You can't get away with this.
There are DNA records, photos,
social media. It's not going to
work.

ANTHONY

Of course it will. I could explain
exactly how and why I'm going to
kill you three and blame it on you,
the deranged fan, but that's rather
cliché, don't you think?

Byron turns and removes Franco's gag. She flexes her jaw painfully.

Anthony pulls back the hammer on the gun with a loud CLICK.

Byron ignores him, and starts untying Selena's hands.

BYRON

Are you okay?

SELENA

I'll be fine. Go get him, rookie.

ANTHONY

DON'T IGNORE ME!

Anthony FIRES a shot into the ceiling.

Byron slowly turns to face Anthony, and takes a deliberate step toward him.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

That's enough, Byron! You know you don't have what it takes to stop me. Remember the last time you had a gun pointed at you?

FRANCO

Don't listen to him!

Selena tugs at the loosened ropes, getting one hand free.

ANTHONY

You froze. Your friends got shot.

Byron stops, his breathing becoming more labored.

Anthony raises the gun higher, a manic grin spreading across his face.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

You panicked, remember? People DIED because you couldn't take it!

Byron shakes his head, counting rapidly.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

It was just like this, wasn't it? A gun pointed at you and your friends. You failed them, Byron. You failed them then, just like you're failing now!

BYRON

No!

ANTHONY

That's what you do, isn't it, Byron? You fail. You're worthless. You let your friends die and they gave you a medal for it!

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MARCUS WEEMS' APARTMENT (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Anthony is replaced by the image of Marcus Weems, pointing a gun at Byron.

Byron, back in his old uniform, stands frozen as the other two officers are shot.

BYRON

No...

Davis falls, red flowers of blood springing from hi.

BYRON (CONT'D)

No!

Byron roars in rage and charges Marcus, who fires.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE MAIN STAGE - NIGHT

Anthony's gun flashes as Byron charges forward. Byron staggers a little as he's shot in the same shoulder, but his momentum carries him to Anthony.

The two men collide, slamming into each other, and the impact knocks them down.

The gun CLATTERS out of Anthony's hand, and both men reach for it.

Anthony hits it with his hand, and it slides off into the darkness.

Byron struggles to hold onto Anthony, keeping him from getting to the gun.

Anthony snarls in anger and punches Byron.

The two trade several more blows, until Anthony slams his fist into Byron's bullet wound.

Byron cries out in pain, and Anthony shoves him off, running after the gun.

Byron turns to Selena, who has just finished untying herself.

BYRON

Get out of here! Go!

Byron wheels and chases after Anthony.

INT. DAMASCUS THEATRE BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Byron quickly moves through the darkness and billowing plastic sheets, looking for Anthony.

He passes through an opening in the sheets, moving much more slowly and cautiously when there's no sign of Anthony.

Byron spots an open doorway, where rain is pouring down in a heavy deluge. He steps toward it, when he steps on something that CLATTERS by his feet.

He looks down, and picks up the GUN.

Aiming it ahead, he cautiously approaches the open door. Through which, a flash of lightning reveals Anthony approaching him from behind, holding a thick wooden BOARD.

Anthony BASHES Byron in the back. Byron falls with a grunt, and drops the gun.

Anthony raises the board again, but Sophie and Franco appear out of the shadows and jump on him, trying to wrestle him away from Byron.

The trio stumble through the open doorway out into the rain.

Anthony falls with Sophie and Franco, the two women trying to pin him down.

Anthony throws an elbow into Franco's face and kicks Sophie off of him.

Anthony pushes himself to his feet and picks up the wooden plank, then raises the board to hit Sophie.

A FLASH of lightning and a PEAL of thunder ring out.

Anthony freezes, then looks down as blood begins to seep through a hole in his chest.

Byron slowly emerges from the open doorway, gun pointed at Anthony with a rock-steady hand.

Anthony drops the board and takes a staggering step forward.

As he falls, Byron catches him and eases him to the floor.

ANTHONY

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

BYRON

No, it wasn't.

ANTHONY

We could have made it work, you know...

(beat)

The two of us. Partners. But you just had to be the hero.

Blood mingles with rainwater, flowing away from Anthony's body toward a drain.

Byron stands up, rushing over to Franco and Sophie.

BYRON
Are you hurt?

FRANCO
I'm okay.

She looks over at Sophie, who nods.

SOPHIE
(panicked)
Where did he go?!

Byron and Franco quickly turn. Anthony's body is gone.

Sirens echo in the distance, rapidly approaching.

INT. CRAIG FERGUSON SHOW BACKSTAGE - DAY

Sophie stands backstage of the Craig Ferguson show, surrounded by cameras and equipment. Her pencil skirt, blouse, and jacket are expensive-looking and pristine.

She watches Craig interviewing Byron, a smile on her face.

CRAIG FERGUSON
--hear you're getting married.

BYRON
The date is going to coincide with the release of my next book.

CRAIG FERGUSON
Well we can't wait to get our hands on that. Your book, I mean. Not your fiancée.

He pauses for the audience's laughter.

CRAIG FERGUSON (CONT'D)
I mean, she's an attractive woman. Wouldn't mind getting my hands on her, either!

INT. VETERAN'S HOSPITAL COUNSELING ROOM - DAY

Franco pushes open a door labeled PTSD SUPPORT GROUP and goes inside, wearing a pretty blouse and jeans.

Inside the clean, brightly lit room are four men and two women, sitting around a table.

Franco idly toys with her engagement ring as she walks around the group with a smile.

They watch Franco as she takes the only empty chair remaining, at the head of the group.

FRANCO

Sorry about that. We left off with Vickie, didn't we?

VICKIE (26), short hair and camo pants, nods.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Why don't you tell us what happened? There's no judgement here, this is a safe place.

Vickie fidgets in her seat.

VICKIE

It-- It was June, in 2007. My unit had just come over a hill...

INT. VETERAN'S HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Outside the counseling room, a MAN pushes a broom across the floor. He wears a janitor's uniform and a baseball cap pulled low over his eyes.

The NAME TAG he's wearing reads REGGIE.

As he sweeps slowly past the counseling room, Anthony grins.

FADE OUT.