

NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE

written by

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*An evil deed is not redeemed by an evil
deed in retaliation.*

Coretta Scott King

*One good act of vengeance deserves
another.*

John Jefferson

SNAP IN ON:

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Detective VIOLET "VI" CHENG, sits in front of her computer.

Early-50s, Asian-American. Shoulder is wrapped in a bandage, arm in a sling. Blood splatter on her white shirt. She's had one hell of a day.

VI (V.O.)

If you were sitting here, a slug in your shoulder after the day I just had, would you do what's right? Or would you do what they want?

Jaw muscles working, Vi stares at her computer screen. Starts to type. Stops. Deep, cleansing breath. Closes her eyes, tries to focus.

QUICK FLASHES OF:

- Strobing red and blue lights.
- A blur of bodies as gunshots ring out.
- A sheet is draped over a body whose face we can't see.

VI (V.O.)

(chuckles)

You'd do what's right. Easy, sure. Believe me, I used to think so too.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

RICARDO MARTINEZ, sleeps. Early 40s, he stirs on the bed in the shabby, no frills room. Closed eyes flit and we see --

QUICK FLASHES OF:

- A splash and a scream of joy.
- Two young men laugh.
- A river at sunset.

Ricardo's eyes snap open. Bolts upright, gasps for air.

VI (V.O.)

I've seen people do crazy things. But always kept my head on straight, saw through the shit to be able to say, "this is right, that's wrong."

Shakes off the nightmare, rises and pads to the bathroom and we glimpse his taut, muscular frame. As the sound of the shower blasts we linger on --

A DESK: Stacks of neatly labeled VHS video tapes. A LAPTOP connected to an honest-to-god VCR. On the laptop screen a PROGRESS BAR and "TRANSFER IN PROGRESS".

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Freshly showered, Ricardo slips a pressed shirt over a U.S. Army infantry tattoo.

VI (V.O.)

We're told there's always a good guy
and a bad guy. But, what do we do when
the good guy does a bad thing?

Ricardo glances at --

ON TV: **KYLE BLACK**, 40s, white. The kind of handsome that movies tell us to trust. He speaks with practiced ease --

KYLE (ON TV)

My father died when I was five. For
thirty years, my mother worked in
school cafeterias. She never bought a
house or took a vacation. I flipped
burgers to put myself through college
and law school. We were the working
class. I'm proud I pulled myself up
by my bootstraps to give my kid a
better life than I had.

REPORTER (O.S. ON TV)

One more question, Mr. Black.

IN MOTEL ROOM: Ricardo moves closer to the TV to watch --

REPORTER (O.S. ON TV)

Your immigration stance is pretty
radical. What do you have to say
to someone who looks like me?

KYLE (ON TV)

I've spent the last year listening
to teachers, cops, and nurses. And
what they're worried about is being
able to pay their mortgages. Send
their kids to a good school and
give them a decent future. No one
thinks any of those are radical.

(to all press)

(MORE)

KYLE (ON TV) (CONT'D)
 Funny how none of that ever makes
 your headlines.

ON TV: Kyle gives a practiced, sly grin - so much charm.

Ricardo releases the breath he didn't realize he was holding.

KYLE (ON TV)
 Normally I close with, 'I hope I can
 count on your vote.' But since you're
 the press... that would be a bit like
 pissing in the wind, wouldn't it?

ON TV: With a wink, Kyle's image freezes and shrinks down
 next to glossy news anchor **BILL BLANTON**, 50s, white.

BILL BLANTON (ON TV)
 And that friends, is what I believe
 kids today call "a sick burn."

Ricardo points the remote at the TV, turns it off.

VI (V.O.)
 (heavy sigh)
 Times have changed. Or maybe I have.
 But after thirty-plus years as a cop,
 I'm just not sure anymore.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Ricardo slips a SILVER NECKLACE over his head, kisses the
 MEDALLION, and tucks it under his shirt.

DING! He turns to look at the laptop on the desk.

ON SCREEN: ***Transfer Complete 100%***

Plucks the USB drive from the laptop.

VI (V.O.)
 But two things I am certain of? One:
 If you were in my shoes, you'd have
 already taken the deal.

He grabs a worn, desert camouflage backpack, shoulders it.
 Goes to the door, snaps off the light and --

INT. VI'S OFFICE

Vi stares at the computer screen --

A Crime Scene Report:

COLLECTING OFFICER'S NAME: DETECTIVE VIOLET CHENG

NATURE OF INCIDENT: |

The cursor sits there: *Blink-blink-blink*.

VI (V.O.)

And two: Whoever said that time heals
all wounds didn't know what the fuck
they were talking about.

Off the glow of Vi's computer, MATCH TO:

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Dark. Just the bluish glow of a laptop screen.

Someone paces in the shadows. They step into the screen's
glow revealing --

Kyle Black, from the TV. In person. Hair mussed, unshaven.
Yanks his bathrobe belt tight around his waist.

He leans close to the laptop, reads. Grunts at what he sees.

The laptop gets snapped closed, revealing --

JULIA BLACK, 40s, white. Kyle's wife. Smart, resourceful, and
supportive. The kind of person you want in your corner.

JULIA

Stop obsessing.

KYLE

Our lead's been cut to half a point -

JULIA

Unless hell freezes over, we'll win.
So finish your acceptance speech.

She grabs a LEGAL PAD filled with lots of SCRATCH-OUTS.

Frustrated, he flicks the notepad as he flops on the sofa.

KYLE

I can say the words. But I can't
seem to come up with the right
ones on my own -

JULIA

(reading)

No, this is solid. We can make it
work. Change 'coming together' to
'unite.' Let's hit the bootstrap
moment even harder...

Kyle stretches. Stifles a yawn.

JULIA
You been to bed?

KYLE
Ask the bags under my eyes.

JULIA
Go grab an hour. Going to be a
long day.

Kyle slumps forward, head in his hands.

Julia snaps open the drapes. The room floods with sunlight.

He squints as she crouches in front of him. Raises his chin.

JULIA
It's not just the words you say. How
you say them? It inspires people,
makes them believe in something bigger
than themselves. That's special.

KYLE
Sometimes I think you want this more
than I do.

She takes his face in her hands. Her eyes search his.

JULIA
What I want is for things to change.
And you're the one to do that.

Kyle hugs Julia, kisses her forehead. A quiet moment.

JULIA
Seriously, get some sleep. Enjoy not
having to get our hurricane Frances
ready for school.

She swats his ass, shooing him. Kyle smiles, yawns as he
ambles out the door.

Julia waits. As soon as he's gone, she opens his laptop.
Pulls up KYLE'S EMAIL and starts scanning with an eagle eye.

RADIO D.J. (PRELAP)
...and don't forget, polls are open
until eight this evening. So get out
there and do your civic duty.

INT./EXT. RICARDO'S CAR - DAY

Ricardo's beat up old Honda idles in front of a bank.

In the front seat, he drops stacks of cash into two brown paper bags. Rolls one up tight.

With a marker, he prints on the bag:

Mariella - Past due alimony, plus some. I'm sorry.

EXT. COUNTRY GARDENS CARE FACILITY - DAY

Drab, cinder block building. Neither the country nor the gardens the name promises.

Ricardo's car is parked in the lot.

NEAR THE BUILDING Ricardo sits on a bench. He talks to --

EDUARDO MARTINEZ, in a wheelchair, legs covered with thick, wool blankets. Gnarled hands clutch a rosary. Frail, he looks a decade older than mid-60s.

RICARDO (IN SPANISH)

Can't stay long today.

EDUARDO (IN SPANISH)

Busy, busy. Making your movies. Tell me about your next one.

RICARDO (IN SPANISH)

It's about... revenge.

EDUARDO (IN SPANISH)

Does the hero win?

RICARDO (IN SPANISH)

Not sure yet. But I hope so.

EDUARDO (IN SPANISH)

Mom would be so proud of you, Ricardo.

The younger man checks his frustration. Swipes at an unexpected tear.

RICARDO (IN SPANISH)

Come on, let's get you back inside.

Ricardo re-tucks the blanket on his father's lap and slips the second brown paper PACKAGE OF MONEY into the folds of it.

RICARDO (IN SPANISH)

Love you, Dad.

He kisses his father's forehead, stands and wheels him towards the front door as Eduardo prays with his rosary.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Lots of beige and muted color. The art matches the furniture.

One wall is filled with framed, FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS of Kyle, Julia and their adopted daughter FRANCES, 6, Black.

KYLE (O.S.)

Let's swing by my mom's tonight and pick up Frances. Instead of tomorrow.

JULIA (O.S.)

You're going to be giving interviews until the sun comes up. She'll be fine.

There's Kyle, looking trimmer in his tailored suit. She hands him a few printed pages.

JULIA

Your updated speech. Give the new stuff a test run today. We can tweak it for tonight.

He glances at it, but is distracted by --

The muted TV in the next room. Local news - the same clip of Kyle we saw Ricardo watch earlier.

Julia grabs Kyle's chin and turns him to face her.

KYLE

New stuff. Test run. Tweak it.

Kyle folds the pages and slips them into his jacket pocket. Something catches his eye --

At the foot of the stairs, a CRAYON DRAWING on the wall.

KYLE

Can we finally take care of this? Before we host a U.S. senator tonight?

JULIA

Adelaide will clean it off.

Kyle rubs at the crayon on the wall --

KYLE

We should have just rented out Tambellini's.

JULIA

Tonight's guests are our bread and butter. We'll need them in Washington. Welcoming them into our home is how we make them feel special... Right?

Julia offers him her cheek. He kisses it, then heads for the front door --

JULIA

One more thing!

Julia hurries to him looking at her phone.

JULIA

We added an interview at three-thirty.

KYLE

By "we" do you mean you or Olivia?
(off her look)
Who's it with?

JULIA

Sarah Strolley.

KYLE

(WTF?)
And her sixty-two viewers?

JULIA

She's local. She's banged the drum for us since the moment we declared and -

KYLE

It's election day.

JULIA

It's a friendly interview.
(then)
Even if no one sees it, we cement a young, tech-native ally who may be very useful.

Kyle checks the calendar on his phone.

KYLE

It's not on my calendar. Where is it?

JULIA

Strolley said she'll text you the address.

Julia moves close, adjusts his tie.

JULIA

Matt and Olivia will be here early.
Everyone else arrives at six. And as
charming as our guests tonight find
me, you're the main attraction. So get
your ass home.

With a dramatic sigh and smile, Kyle relents.

KYLE

You're the boss.

He turns away before she sees his smile falter.

KYLE (PRELAP)

...my commitment to ensure that what
you've worked for won't be devoured by
an insatiable bureaucracy.

INT. KYLE'S CAR - DAY

Kyle reads out loud as he scribbles changes onto the speech
Julia gave him.

KYLE

...together we'll harness the power of
truth. Thank you, I hope I can count
on your vote... Better.

Nods, pleased.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME, DINING ROOM - DAY

Elegant table set with china, silver, and crystal for twenty.

At one end sits their housekeeper **ADELAIDE** AGUILAR, 30,
Latinx. Gray shirt tucked into black pants. Her alert eyes
miss NOTHING. In front of her, an open textbook.

JULIA (O.S.)

Adelaide?

Adelaide slips the books into her tote bag just as --

Julia arrives, juggling grocery bags and fresh flowers.

JULIA

Oh, the table's just lovely.

Adelaide grabs the grocery bags.

JULIA

What a morning. Freeway construction.
Total chaos.

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)

The butcher got my order wrong. Took forever to cut another prime rib -

OLIVIA (O.S.)

Love Frances' new artwork on the wall.
(off Julia's look)
Breathe, Jules.

OLIVIA HILGARD, 40s in the doorway. Julia's BFF. Her quick smile is welcoming. But she's always a step ahead and plans to stay there.

OLIVIA

Tonight will be spectacular. Even your crusty former boss will see you were right. If not, I'll deal with him.

Olivia giggles and gives Julia's shoulder a comforting squeeze as Julia scrolls on her phone.

JULIA

I've got a to-do list.

OLIVIA

Of course you do.

Adelaide spies Olivia adjusting some silverware on the table.

JULIA

(to Adelaide)

Let's get the roast in the oven. And please figure out how to erase my daughter's artwork from that wall.

ADELAIDE

Yes, ma'am.

Julia leads Olivia out of the room.

JULIA

Is Matt still able to make it?

OLIVIA

His plane left D.C. ten minutes ago.

Adelaide re-adjusts the silverware Olivia moved. Smiles.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

An LED panel light snaps on illuminating --

Political junkie **SARAH STROLLEY**, white, mid-20s. Her ambition is often underestimated thanks to a carefully cultivated look for her dream job: Cable News Host.

BILL BLANTON (V.O.)
 ...today's most surprising
 Congressional race is District 13
 where last year, Kyle Black was just
 another citizen, content in his life
 as a small town lawyer.

She adjusts the lights. (We'll see her "studio" soon.)

BILL BLANTON (V.O.)
 But today, his message of individual
 freedom and truth resonates with
 voters who say they've been left
 behind.

SARAH
 Jesus, Bill, you think?

She sits behind a desk. Opens up a laptop. Next to her, an iPad streams Bill Blanton's newscast.

BILL BLANTON (ON SCREEN)
 Many attribute Black's primary upset
 to a relentless grass roots campaign
 run out of their basement by his wife,
 Julia Black. Now, his race against
 opponent Ronda Larchmont who was once
 favored to win by double-digits, is
 too close to call.

PING! On Sarah's LAPTOP SCREEN, an email notification --

From: Antifa170839
Re: CUNT - U WILL SUFFER WHEN I
FIND U!!!

Unfazed, Sarah taps 'block sender' and just keeps working.

KYLE (V.O. PRELAP)
 These commitments are my priority.

SERIES OF DISSOLVES

As Kyle delivers his stump speech throughout the day at different locations --

KYLE
 A commitment to ensure our hardworking
 police officers have every opportunity
 to thrive. A commitment that
 everything you work for won't be taken
 by a bloated bureaucracy.

The speech repeats, overlapping and building into an unbearable noise as 'police officers' becomes --

'teachers' then --

'nurses' then --

'small business owners'

KYLE (V.O.)

Thank you. I hope I can count on your vote today.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Kyle's car stops. Just one other vehicle - a red pickup.

GPS VOICE (V.O.)

You have arrived at your destination.

INT. KYLE'S CAR - DAY

Kyle glances around - is this the right place? Must be.

He spies the time 3:24 pm - yikes!

Catches his reflection in the rearview. Tightens his tie, smooths his hair. Checks his breath - god, no. Pops a mint.

Yanks the door handle and --

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

The door opens. Kyle strides down the long, dim hallway.

Passes by a circuit breaker box on the wall.

At the other end, he stops at a reinforced door. Tries the handle - locked. Knocks. Calls out --

KYLE

It's Kyle Black.

(irritated, to himself)

Jesus.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO DOORWAY - DAY

Sarah takes a deep breath, mutters a quick prayer and --

ON A SECURITY KEYPAD, she enters a code. A heavy thunk and --

She swings open the door with an enthusiastic smile.

SARAH

Mr. Black. Ohmigod, so great to finally meet you.

KYLE

Likewise, Sarah. Appreciate the invite.

SARAH

Seriously? A congressional candidate is like, the biggest guest my little show's ever had.

She steps aside, motions him in. Closes the door and enters the code **2-4-3-1** to lock it.

She sees Kyle clock this.

SARAH

There's always some totally whack viewer trying to find me. Locks and VPNs are my BFFs.

Nervous and excited, she leads him into the space.

SARAH

So like, yay for what my parents said would be a "frivolous degree" in Info and Communications Tech.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Cavernous room. Raw, unfinished, mostly empty. In the back --

A small, makeshift studio. Fifteen-foot wide red curtain backdrop. In front of it, a sleek desk with the show's logo, a stars and stripes motif - ***The American Way***.

SARAH

Sweet, huh? Designed so the whole set fits in my truck bed. I can stream from anywhere with a day's notice.

KYLE

Pretty clever.

Kyle follows Sarah behind the desk.

SARAH

Right, um. Behind the desk. Obvs. I'll focus on your talking points. Education, immigration, religious freedom. Just chat. Easy-peasy.

KYLE
Sounds good.

SARAH
This clips onto your jacket. Shit!

A clip-on mic springs from her nervous hands. Kyle grabs the mic, clips it on his lapel.

KYLE
Relax, I've done this before.

PRELAP sound of a doorbell chime --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S FOYER - DAY

Julia, radiant in a tailored, white pantsuit opens the door. It's U.S. SENATOR HILGARD, 70's, oozing confidence and power.

JULIA
Senator. This is it.

Hugs and air kisses.

SENATOR HILGARD
I know I taught you not to count your chickens.

As Julia leads him into the house --

JULIA
The eggs have hatched, the chickens counted. We've got this.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Olivia extends her empty glass.

With a smirk, Adelaide fills it up to the rim. Olivia's annoyance evaporates when she sees --

Julia and Hilgard enter.

Olivia makes a beeline for them, slips her arm through his.

OLIVIA
Fashionably late as always.

SENATOR HILGARD
(with a wink)
Talk to my wife.

He kisses her and gives her ass a pat. She boops his nose --

OLIVIA

Your wife will deal with you when she gets home.

As Adelaide hands the senator a tumbler of bourbon, Olivia leans close to Julia, excited and conspiratorial.

OLIVIA

God I've been dying to tell you all day. Kyle's school reform initiative?

Julia's eyes flare with excitement and she turns to Hilgard --

JULIA

It's in?!

SENATOR HILGARD

We'll amend the party platform. Legislation for the states is already being drafted.

Zing! This is amazing news to Julia.

JULIA

Kyle will be thrilled.

(playful)

Does this mean you're ready to admit I was right about him all along?

Hilgard leans close --

SENATOR HILGARD

It means I think his campaign manager did a great goddamn job.

He winks as he slurps his bourbon.

Julia catches Olivia's eye - OMG!

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Sarah and Kyle seated behind the desk. She points to a TV monitor about ten feet directly ahead - on it is them.

SARAH

That's what viewers see. Unless we go to a video.

He nods - got it.

SARAH

Don't glance at the cameras. You'll look shifty. Just focus on me.

KYLE

Don't look shifty. Check.

She points to a TOUCHSCREEN on the desk between them. The interface has several sections --

SARAH

Command central. Camera, sound, video control. This shows viewer count, where they're watching from, social media stats, the usual [usual].

Kyle gets it. He points to a blank column on one side.

SARAH

Viewer comments. But not till we're live. People love to hear themselves talk. Spoiler alert: It's boring.

KYLE

Get tired of hearing myself talk, too.

SARAH

What? No, I didn't mean you.

Kyle winks. Sarah's relieved to realize he's kidding. Ping!

KYLE

Shit. Sorry. I'll silence it.

Kyle takes out his phone. Silences it. Sees Julia's text:

Matt says school choice is a GO! <3

He grins and sets the phone on a small shelf behind the desk.

SARAH

Okay, here we go in three, two...

Sarah touches her control screen and --

SMASH TO:

FULL SCREEN - 'THE AMERICAN WAY' SHOW INTRO

Music, graphics, colors are all a bit garish, over the top.

The short intro ends with an image of Sarah speaking to a crowd in front of a massive American flag. DISSOLVES TO:

Sarah and Kyle behind the desk in the studio. Sarah turns dramatically to the camera.

SARAH

I'm Sarah Strolley and welcome to 'The American Way.' My guest today? Congressional candidate, Kyle Black.

PULL BACK and reveal we're in --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia, Olivia and Senator Hilgard watch the TV.

OLIVIA

All those years ago in our dorm room first day of freshman year. Who'd have thought this is where we'd be?

JULIA

I did.

SARAH (ON TV)

Thanks for stopping by on a busy day.

KYLE (ON TV)

Grateful for a chance to chat.

SARAH (ON TV)

Let's dive in. Education reform. Your personal crusade?

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Sarah glances at her touch screen - **132 viewers**, comments scroll by...

KYLE

When we learned our daughter required more than our public school could or was willing to provide, that was day I knew I needed to help bring about change.

SARAH

Your opponent argues that minority students are being purposefully left behind in underfunded public schools. Don't vouchers make it worse?

KYLE

Every parent, rich or poor, deserves to choose the best school for their child. My plan ensures that. This is the civil rights issue of our time.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Olivia winks at Julia whose face explodes into a smile.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

KYLE

And I'm happy to share with you first,
that my plan's being adopted by the
national party.

SARAH

Who can argue with that?

Sarah glances down at her touch screen - the viewer count has
dropped to **97**. One comment catches her eye:

blah blah policy BS.
boring questions.
boring answers.
boring show.

Sarah faces Kyle -

SARAH

For your next question, I've asked a
special guest to join us.

Kyle's confused.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia and Olivia look at each other, also confused --

OLIVIA

She didn't mention a special guest.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

SARAH

My viewers know I like to keep things
surprising here on The American Way.

Kyle's in full charm mode.

KYLE

Who doesn't like a good surprise?

SARAH

Great. At your press conference
yesterday, I met a journalist. Talking
with him, his eyes totally lit up when
he heard you were coming on my show.

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

He said you two were so close back in the day. High school. And I thought, what a great way to get to know a candidate!

KYLE

(still charming)
Our high school was so big. I can't imagine who this might be.

SARAH

(to camera)
And with folks heading to the polls to make a big decision, my job is to help you see the full picture. My guest has some insight into Mr. Black as a young man that might help us understand him in full.

From behind the curtain steps Ricardo.

Kyle's even more confused as --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME - DAY

Olivia is still confused. Not, Hilgard, he's pissed. Spins to face his wife --

SENATOR HILGARD

Who the hell is this guy?

OLIVIA

Darling, I have no idea.

As Hilgard fumes --

Julia's frozen - eyes riveted on screen.

JULIA

(under her breath)
What the fuck...

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle stares in disbelief as Ricardo sits on the other side of Sarah behind the desk.

RICARDO

Thank you for having me on.

SARAH

So, we all do crazy things in high school. Mr. Black, is there anything from back then that you regret?

Kyle recovers his charm, back to being the calm politician.

KYLE

I regret breaking my ankle that kept
me from playing college football.

No response from Ricardo, who's eyes don't leave Kyle's.

Nervous chuckle from Kyle.

KYLE

Also regret that C-plus in Geometry
that dropped me out of the top five
percent of my class.

RICARDO

You don't remember me?

KYLE

I'm sorry -

RICARDO

What if I had longer hair?

(no response)

With purple streaks?

(still nothing)

What if you saw me at the river?

Now Kyle's eyes widen in surprise as HIS MEMORY FLASHES --

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A YOUNG MAN, video camera obscures his face. Purple streaks
in longish, dark hair. Laughing, he backs away from YOUNG
KYLE, 16.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

Back with Sarah and Kyle --

SARAH

Oooh.

(to Kyle)

Let's unpack some of this!

Kyle's mind churns.

KYLE

(realizing)

Wait, Ricardo Martinez? Wow. You're a
lot... sturdier than I remember.

RICARDO
Army. Twenty-five years as a tech
specialist.

KYLE
Thank you for your service -

Ricardo waves that away --

RICARDO
Do you want to tell everyone what
happened. Or should I? Your choice.

KYLE
I don't follow?

SARAH
Tell us what happened Mr. Black?

KYLE
No idea what he's talking about. I
haven't seen him in twenty-five years.

SARAH
Well then Mr. Martinez, looks like the
ball's in your court.

Ricardo holds out a small USB drive.

RICARDO
Connect this so the videos on it will
play for your viewers.

Sarah bristles at his demand --

SARAH
That's not how my show works.

KYLE
(to Sarah)
Look, I'm sorry. But I've got a busy
campaign schedule today. So...

Kyle and Sarah's annoyance melts to fear as --

Ricardo's other hand comes out of his messenger bag with --

A gun - Ruger Blackhawk revolver.

SARAH
Oh, shit.

Both Sarah and Kyle put their hands up.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hilgard chokes on bourbon as Olivia turns to a shocked Julia.

JULIA
Oh my god.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Sarah snatches the USB off the desk. Her voice shakes as she looks to the camera --

SARAH
Folks watching. This was not planned.
I would never do anything like this.
(to Kyle)
I swear.

RICARDO
Connect it. Now.

She jams the USB in. Hits buttons on the touch screen. As she does, the VIEWER COUNT is rising - **passing 800**.

Kyle, hands still up in front of him, glances down at --

His phone on a small shelf behind the desk. Silent texts pop up from Julia:

r u okay?

Kyle glances at Ricardo, then to Sarah who shakes with fear.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

All eyes are glued to --

ON TV: Sarah talks to Ricardo.

SARAH (ON TV)
The files are ready.

OLIVIA
Jules, I swear I had no idea -

Olivia reaches for Julia's hand. Julia snatches it back, jumps up. Paces.

JULIA
(under her breath)
I can't believe this.

SENATOR HILGARD
Can't believe what?

For just a moment, she's a deer caught in the headlights.
Then, recovers and stumbles her way through --

JULIA
That... some asshole has taken Kyle
hostage!

Senator Hilgard watches her with a curious eye.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Ricardo leans close to Sarah. She gulps, nervous.

RICARDO
Show me.

She motions to the touchscreen.

VIDEO FILE ICONS, in numbered order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

SARAH
Touch the green dot to play. At the
end, it auto-cuts back to live feed.

Sarah glances at the viewer count - now **passing 2,200**.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia and guests watch Kyle and Sarah eye Ricardo's gun.

KYLE (ON TV)
Ricardo, I have resources. Whatever
you need, I can help.

RICARDO (ON TV)
Yes you can.

KYLE (ON TV)
Great. How?

RICARDO (ON TV)
Tell the truth. Or you won't leave
here alive.

Olivia gasps. Julia's knees buckle, she drops to the sofa.

INT. POLICE STATION OFFICE - DAY

Cell phone lies on a desk. Neglected. A news alert:

**@CNN U.S. Congressional candidate
taken hostage during live interview.**

There's detective Vi Cheng. At the moment, she's at a copier, scanning a mountain of old paper files.

Vi grabs the next folder off the top of the pile, opens it. A folded piece of paper is scrawled a badly penned poem --

***Our old lady Copper,
couldn't hack it with boys.
So here's more files to scan,
have fun with your toys.***

Vi stares at the page, jaw clenches. Swallows her rising anger and then unfolds the paper to find --

A crudely drawn stick figure of an old woman wearing a police badge, hunched over and using a cane. The eyes are simple slashes - the age old, racist depiction of Asians.

LAUGHTER.

Vi looks up to see two COPS, 30s, white, hunched in the doorway cackling.

Vi wads up the paper, strides to the cops, gets nose to nose.

VI

I'm assuming your rodent brains
honestly believe this kind of nonsense
will make me leave. But here's a
secret: the shit I saw with my family
before I was ten years old -

CHIEF BOOKER (O.S.)

Hey!

VI

- shit that, boys, would make your
underdeveloped little balls shrivel up
into raisins.

POLICE CHIEF BENTON **BOOKER** arrives. Late 60s, Black, Vi's boss is swayed too much by the job's politics, but he's not a bad guy.

CHIEF BOOKER

Enough.

(to cops)

You two, get the fuck outta my sight.

The two cops scramble away as Vi grabs the paper, un-wads it and hands it to the Booker. He looks at the drawing, his face falls. Shit.

VI

Booker, either you stop those dicks,
or I do. And if I do, you'll be down
two men.

CHIEF BOOKER

Filing a lawsuit against your own
department didn't earn you friends.

VI

Isn't there a town council member
somewhere you should be fellating?

Booker laughs, releasing some of the tension.

CHIEF BOOKER

Council meeting's not till next week.
(then, re: the paper)
I'll deal with this. But first -

He holds out his phone for Vi to see. On it --

The KLFB newscast. A photo of Kyle and a chyron: **TERRIFYING
HOSTAGE SITUATION.**

VI

Where?

CHIEF BOOKER

That's problem number one - don't
know. Second problem, it's being
streamed. Live.

VI

The hell is wrong with people?

CHIEF BOOKER

As usual, the Feds need sixty-two
approvals and an act of Congress
before they can take a shit. Here.

Vi drops into her chair. Reads an IP address from an email on
Booker's phone as her fingers fly across the keyboard.

VI

Whoever's doing this knows their shit.

CHIEF BOOKER

Not what I wanted to hear.

On screen, a digital map of the world. Dots appear showing
dozens of servers routing the signal. None in the U.S.

VI

Scrambled, a global goose chase. We got Russia, Chile... All the Baltic states no one knows how to pronounce.

CHIEF BOOKER

Fucking technology.

VI

"A useful servant, but dangerous master."

(off Chief's look)

Christian Lous Lange? Norwegian historian and political scientist?

Booker exhales, irritated.

CHIEF BOOKER

No one understands half of what you say. Which is the least of your problems.

(anyway)

Talk to the hostage's wife. Background. Anything to help us locate him and negotiate with the piece of shit who has him. If it comes to that.

VI

You want me on this?

CHIEF BOOKER

It's a lot like the one back in '04.

Vi leans back in her chair - shit. Then --

VI

So, everyone's gotta come out alive?

CHIEF BOOKER

I need someone who's good with people.

(off Vi's look)

When they want to be.

Booker drops a folder on the desk.

CHIEF BOOKER

And you'll get to ride back in a hero, like John Wayne. You need that.

VI

John Wayne was a racist prick.

CHIEF BOOKER

It's already picking up eyes - news, internet viewers.

VI
And a life's at stake?

CHIEF BOOKER
Updates every hour.

Booker waves as he turns and leaves. Vi flips him off.

CHIEF BOOKER (O.S.)
(calling)
What you're doing right now is not
free speech when directed at an
officer of the law.

Up goes Vi's other middle finger.

INT. VI'S CAR - DAY

Vi climbs into her police cruiser. Puts her phone on the dash mount. Key in the ignition. Before she can crank the engine --

A FaceTime call from DOLORES, 50s. A cop's wife for thirty years, she's a smart, reliable person you want in your corner. Unless you've crossed her - which Vi has.

Vi takes a deep breath and answers.

VI
Hello my love -

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
Just checking in for tonight.

VI
Bistro Beaujolais. On Route 51.

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
Seven o'clock. It's our son's wedding rehearsal dinner. You wore out the work excuse a long time ago.

VI
Sweetheart -

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
You have a toast to give.

VI
I said I'd be there.

Dolores just stares at her. Vi takes a deep inhale and --

VI
I'm out.

Dolores' anger turns to surprise.

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
On a call?

VI
That hostage situation.

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
For god's sake, be careful. As much as
I'd love your life insurance payout,
I'd rather spend retirement on the
beach in Hawaii with you.

They both laugh a bit.

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
Vi? Be safe.

VI
Always. Love you.

DOLORES (ON PHONE SCREEN)
Love you, too.

Vi ends the call. Starts the car, drops it in gear and --

SMASH TO:

RAPID-FIRE STREAM OF IMAGES

LARCHMONT CAMPAIGN OFFICE: RONDA LARCHMONT, 50s, Black, and
her KEY STAFFERS (5) watch the hostage livestream.

RONDA LARCHMONT
Oh, shit...
(to staffers)
What's our response to this?

POLLING LOCATION: A female, Filipina, EMT, 40s, yaps on the
phone, waiting in line to vote.

EMT
Not yet. The line's around the
flipping block.
(listens)
What? Send me the link.
(sees her phone)
Oh, damn.

IN A TRUCK: A CONSTRUCTION WORKER, 20s, Latinx, on his phone
adding #TakeBackOurCountry to his selfie with an 'I Voted'
sticker on his shirt. On the truck radio we hear --

NEWS GUEST (V.O. ON RADIO)
 - is holding him hostage! How much
 more proof do we need that
 "multiculturalism" is destroying...

LARCHMONT CAMPAIGN OFFICE: Ronda dictates a tweet to her
 STAFFER, who types on her phone:

RONDA LARCHMONT
 ...with Kyle Black for his safe
 return. He may be my opponent, but we
 are fellow Americans and... what do I
 do? "Condemn" is a bit heavy...
 Denounce? Yes. And I denounce the
 actions of -

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME - DAY

Adelaide refills Senator Hilgard's glass as they watch --

TV SPLIT SCREEN: Live Stream | KLFB News with Bill Blanton

BILL BLANTON (ON TV)
 Details are still sketchy...

JULIA (PRELAP)
 ...and I've told you twice already, it
 was a last minute addition!

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME, KITCHEN - SAME

Concerned, Olivia watches Julia on the phone, patience
 running out and fear getting the best of her --

Julia on the phone, paces, tries to stay calm.

JULIA
 No, I don't understand how you can't
 know where a live show is shot.
 (listens)
 Pick another day to lecture me about
 the differences between streaming and
 TV broadcasting.
 (listens)
 Yes! I said YES, I understand!
 Goddammit!

Julia boils over and flings her phone. It slides along the
 room and SMACK! as stops at a wall.

Olivia grabs it, hands it to Julia. But she holds on,
 waiting. Finally, Julia takes a deep, calming breath.

JULIA

They said to stay put in case they need to reach me.

OLIVIA

Okay, good. There we go. They're the FBI, they know what they're doing. Kyle going to be fine. Monsters like this guy don't win.

Olivia lets go of the phone and puts an arm around Julia.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

On the touch screen, viewer count soars higher and higher - **179,000, 180,000, 181,000.** Word is out.

Sarah spins her chair to face Ricardo.

SARAH

What's this "truth" you want Mr. Black to share?

Kyle shoots her a look of disbelief: *What are you doing?*

RICARDO

(nods at Kyle)
He knows.

While Sarah talks to Ricardo --

Kyle peeks at his phone on the shelf next to him. A TEXT from Julia! Tries to get a little closer to read it.

SARAH

But you're the one making demands. With a gun. And this is still my show. I'm allowed to ask questions.

RICARDO

Ask. Him.

In a flash, the gun's moved from the desktop to pointing at Kyle, right in front of Sarah's face. She yelps.

RICARDO

Show me, Sarah.

SARAH

Sh-show you what?

RICARDO

His phone. Now.

Sarah grabs it, gives it to Ricardo who sees Julia's text:

FBI has ur #. Trying to find you.

RICARDO

Put it over there. That chair. Go.

Ricardo nods to a chair in the far corner of the room.

He tracks Kyle with the gun as Kyle grabs the phone and hurries across the room.

RICARDO

Yours.

SARAH

I always turn it off for a show. See?

She digs her phone from her pocket. Shows him it's off.

He grabs her phone and flings it like a frisbee - it skitters across the floor, hits the exit door - SMACK!

Sarah peeks at her touch screen. Almost smiles at what she sees - **312,000; 365,000; 386,000** viewers and rising.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hilgard paces, phone pressed to his ear.

Julia and Olivia on the couch watch --

ON TV: Kyle with his phone, runs past camera, out of frame.

JULIA

What's he doing? Where's he going?

RICARDO (ON TV)

Prop it up on the chair. Screen facing me. Good. Back here, sit.

ON TV: Kyle reappears behind the desk, sits where he was on the other side of Sarah.

In a swift, expert set of micro-moves, Ricardo points the gun offscreen (at phone), aims, and **BANG!** Sarah and Kyle flinch.

IN THE ROOM: Julia reaches for Olivia --

HILGARD

Goddammit! They lost the signal before getting his location.

JULIA
No, no, no.

OLIVIA
It's okay, they'll find him -

JULIA
No. I texted Kyle. About the FBI.

HILGARD
That sonofabitch must have seen it.

Adelaide enters.

ADELAIDE
Ma'am? Someone's here to see you.

Julia's frantic eyes find Olivia's.

OLIVIA
Not now.

ADELAIDE
It's the police. A detective.

Julia follows Adelaide as --

Senator's eyes track Julia leaving the room.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Pieces of the destroyed phone on the chair. A bullet hole in the chair's back. Ricardo knows how to use a gun.

BEHIND THE DESK, Sarah and Kyle share a glance: "Now what?"

Kyle covertly glances to the door - they have to get out.

Hesitant, Sarah nods.

JULIA (PRELAP)
Again, Detective, I don't know.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Vi's across the room from Julia, who spins a glass of water around and around on the counter in front of her.

JULIA
He's never mentioned a Ricardo.

Vi's phone rings. Julia releases a frustrated sigh.

Caller is 'Charles.' Torn, Vi sends it to voicemail --

VI

Walk me through this morning.

JULIA

Frances to school, prep for this event. It was hectic.

(pauses, then)

Since the day we declared, this is the only time I haven't known exactly where he is every second of the day. The first time...

Her voice cracks.

VI

Ma'am, don't blame yourself -

JULIA

I don't. I blame that psychopath who has him. Who just shot his phone. And maybe I blame you for asking the same questions the FBI already has.

Julia sinks into a chair. Deep breath.

OLIVIA (O.S.)

They're talking about videos again!

Julia's head snaps up, eyes wide with fear --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Ricardo nods to Sarah.

RICARDO (ON TV)

Play number one. Now. Show him how.

Sarah points at the touch screen.

SARAH

Just touch the green dot.

Kyle presses **file #1** and we see --

ON THE TV MONITOR: *A grainy and voyeuristic POV near a high school. In the corner, the date: **MAR 03 1997.***

SERIES OF SHOTS: Handheld, furtive. Groups of STUDENTS. The common person is one ALPHA BOY. Is he glancing back at the camera? Hard to be sure.

NEXT SHOT: Still and steady. Camera's on a tripod. A few STUDENTS go about their day. No Alpha Boy. Silent. Until, angry voices. Then...

Another boy, 15, stumbles to the ground. Purple-streaked hair peeks out from under a ski cap. Small frame draped in Grunge - flannel shirt over a hoodie, torn baggy jeans, Doc Martens.

This is **YOUNG RICARDO**.

Two bigger, clean-cut BOYS follow. Both 17, wearing football practice uniforms. They pounce on him. Shoving, kicking.

FRIEND #1

Fuckin' flannel -wearing faggot. Sick of you and your gay-ass camera.

YOUNG RICARDO

How can a camera be gay?

FRIEND #1

Shut up, Mexcrement.

YOUNG RICARDO

My parents are from Guatemala, so -

Another shove. Another kick. Then --

YOUNG KYLE (O.S.)

Hey!

YOUNG KYLE, 16, arrives - the Alpha boy. Tall and strong. Easy, fluid movement of an athlete. Grabs each of the Boys by the shirt, hauls them back. Gets between them and Ricardo.

YOUNG KYLE

We're late for practice. Let's go.

Boys mumble expletives as they amble off.

Young Kyle and Young Ricardo's eyes meet --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY (PRESENT)

Ricardo closely watches --

Kyle, bright, shiny eyes riveted on the video, and --

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY (1997)

Back to the same moment in the past. But grainy footage is now the dynamic, sharp, saturated version in **Kyle's memory**.

YOUNG KYLE

You okay?

YOUNG RICARDO

Just another day in paradise.

YOUNG KYLE

Sorry. The guys get kinda wound up.
Need to blow off steam. That's why we
play sports. Safer for everyone.

YOUNG RICARDO

Beg to differ.

Kyle extends a hand to help him up. Ricardo's leery.

YOUNG RICARDO

Now you're my white knight?

YOUNG KYLE

Just tryna to do the right thing.

He grasps Kyle's hand, and is hauled to his feet.

Ricardo touches his neck, realizes something's not there.
Glances around.

YOUNG RICARDO

See a necklace? Silver, round
medallion.

YOUNG KYLE

Uh... Here.

Kyle picks up the necklace, studies the medallion.

YOUNG RICARDO

St. Anthony. Patron saint of lost
things.

YOUNG KYLE

He sounds like a total bummer.

Ricardo laughs - the tension breaks. Kyle laughs, too as
Ricardo ambles towards the camera.

YOUNG KYLE

Why do you always have a camera?

YOUNG RICARDO

Making a short film.

YOUNG KYLE

Like Men in Black? I freaking loved
that movie.

BACK IN GRAINY CAMERA POV: Ricardo's right in front of us. A
genuine smile blooms as he reaches for the camera and --

STATIC.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

The moment hangs. Ricardo stares at Kyle, who won't meet him in the eye.

But Sarah's gears are turning. She glances at her touch screen: **722,000 viewers** and still rising fast.

SARAH

So you do know each other. I thought you were just yanking my chain.

Kyle nods, still a bit lost in the memory.

KYLE

High School. We were acquaintances.

Kyle clocks Ricardo's smug smile.

KYLE

(to Ricardo)

How are your folks?

Under the desk Kyle's foot nudges Sarah's.

His eyes catch hers, then glance to the exit door.

RICARDO

Mom passed a while ago. Dad's not so good.

KYLE

I'm sorry. How about your brother?

Ricardo stares at Kyle, who swallows hard - did Ricardo see those looks shoot between Kyle and Sarah?

RICARDO

We haven't spoken in over a year.

Kyle makes a show of trying to remember something. As he talks, Sarah slides her hand out of Ricardo's eye line. Using her fingers, she furtively feeds Kyle the door code, **2-4-3-1**.

KYLE

(to Ricardo)

What was that movie you made me watch with you like twenty times? It was in Spanish with subtitles. People were camping and pigs overran them?

RICARDO

I watched a lot of movies. Don't remember them all.

Kyle's eyes meet Sarah's - got it.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S FOYER - DAY

Julia opens the front door for Vi.

VI

Mrs. Black. One last thing? The video?
There was a date in the corner. March
third. Nineteen ninety-seven.

Julia's confused - no idea what Vi's asking.

JULIA

Does it mean something? The date?

VI

Not sure. That's why I'm asking.

Julia shakes her head - nothing.

JULIA

Didn't meet Kyle till two-thousand, in
college.

VI

Think of anything, call. Even if it
seems unrelated.

(then)

Ma'am, we'll find your husband.

Senator Hilgard appears next to Julia. Drapes a protective
arm around her shoulders

SENATOR HILGARD

Detective, I've spoken with the FBI.
They'll find Kyle -

VI

Senator, I don't give two shits who
finds him. Just that it happens.

Vi leaves and Julia closes the door as --

Hilgard's smile vanishes. He leans close to Julia --

SENATOR HILGARD

What aren't you telling me?

JULIA

What do you mean? Nothing -

SENATOR HILGARD

I've known you since you were eighteen working as a page in my office.

JULIA

Matt, have I ever lied to you?

SENATOR HILGARD

No, which is why I'm not going to ask again. What the fuck is going on?

Off Julia's look of fear, we move to --

INT. VI'S CAR - DAY

Vi flips through her notepad, reviewing notes. Something catches her eye.

She turns to the mounted laptop, her fingers flying over the keyboard.

ON SCREEN: A long list of men named RICARDO MARTINEZ.

She sorts by age range, 35-45. The list shrinks a lot.

She scans through the rest, glancing at a variety of statuses after each name, "charges dropped," "awaiting trial," "currently incarcerated," etc.

Stops on one: **DEPORTED**. The date, just over a year ago.

Hmm. Vi's gears are turning - FAST.

Vi pulls up another number on her phone and dials.

VI

(into phone)

It's Cheng. I need an address for Bassanio Huxley. Retired regional border patrol chief.

She hangs up, drops the phone on the passenger seat. Cranks the engine and speeds off as we hear --

BILL BLANTON (PRELAP)

...and we've been told that the location of congressional candidate Kyle Black is still unknown.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia sits between Hilgard and Olivia on the sofa watching.

BILL BLANTON (ON TV)
 Meanwhile, early exit polls have Black
 leading opponent Ronda Larchmont -

Adelaide comes up behind Julia and whispers to her --

ADELAIDE
 Mrs. Black?

Julia turns, distress colors her face. Before she can
 respond, Olivia shoos her away --

OLIVIA
 Not now.

Stung, Adelaide turns and heads out of the room --

ADELAIDE
 (under her breath)
 Pendeja.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Ricardo stares at Kyle, who's a little lost in the memory.

Sarah glances down at the touch screen: **845,000** viewers and
 rising. One scrolling comment catches her eye:

***@LiveFreeOrDie8612: fucker STALKED
 him way back then!!!***

Sarah processes this in an instant, turns to Ricardo and --

SARAH
 Honestly, this footage seems kinda
 like... an obsession. Stalking.

Ricardo scoffs.

Before Sarah can respond, Kyle cuts her off, facing Ricardo.

KYLE
 Do you have footage of the river?

As Kyle talks, he glances at Ricardo's hand with the gun
 resting on the desk in front of them. Loose, comfortable.

KYLE
 That day we cut school? I snagged
 tequila from my dad's liquor cabinet.
 You brought sandwiches from your
 parent's restaurant. We swam all day.

Ricardo's a bit flustered by Kyle's question.

RICARDO

I... don't remember that.

Sarah clocks --

Kyle eyeing the gun. He flexes his hand, getting ready --

KYLE

You filmed the sunset. Was a great day.

RICARDO

Enough.

KYLE

You have that footage?

RICARDO

Shut up!

But Ricardo's frustration is enough of a distraction.

Sarah realizes what Kyle's about to do and screams --

SARAH

No!

-- as he lunges across her to grab the gun --

It flies off the desk and hits the floor with a SMACK!

Ricardo tries to stand, but Kyle yanks him back --

His chair topples backwards, Ricardo tangled in it.

Now on his feet, Kyle shoves Sarah --

KYLE

Go!

They clear the desk and run, but --

Kyle trips over a cord, falls forward and slaps the ground hard, face down as --

Sarah slams into the door full force. Phone and keys tumble from her blazer pocket.

She grabs her phone as she sees --

Ricardo, on his feet now, scrambling to the gun.

Sarah frantically enters the unlock code on the door. Shaking hands miss the right key.

SARAH
 (whispered)
 Ohgodohgodohgod.

Kyle leaps to his feet --

BEEP! Sarah finally yanks the door open just as --

RICARDO
 Stop.

Ricardo aims, moves the gun between Kyle and Sarah.

RICARDO
 Our interview isn't over yet.

No one moves. Just the sound of their ragged breaths.

Sarah's hands are up, body holds the door open behind her.

Frozen just a few feet from Sarah, Kyle whispers to her --

KYLE
 Tell my wife I love her.

Sarah's not sure what he means, but can't ask because --

Kyle lunges, shoving her out the door --

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sarah tumbles on the floor as the door slams closed and --

BANG! A gunshot. In the studio, Kyle screams.

Panicked, Sarah scrambles down the hallway for the exit.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME - DAY

Julia is frantic, seeing just the empty desk on TV.

JULIA
 Oh my god! Kyle!

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

On the floor, Kyle clutches his bleeding thigh.

Ricardo looms over him, extends his hand. Kyle grabs it and hauls him to his feet as --

KYLE'S MEMORY FLASHES: *On a riverbank, Young Kyle in shorts, glistening from a swim. He grabs hold of Young Ricardo's hand and hauls him up out of the river onto a dock.*

Now on his feet, Kyle steadies himself, winces in pain.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Sarah races to her red Ford F150. Thinks. Pulls out her phone.

Enters 9-1-1. Pauses, finger over the green button. Then, tap-swipe-tap. Pulls up her live stream. No one behind the desk.

SARAH

Shit. Shit. Shit.

But she sees the viewer count blow right past 1,000,000.

She takes stock. Searches her mind for the opportunity.

Then she squares her shoulders... decision made. Opens the camera's phone and records herself:

SARAH

I'm safe and sound. Gonna tell a whole other side of this harrowing story - stay tuned! Right Voice subscribers will be the first to hear!

Pulls up Twitter, attaches the video. Hits send. And watches as... Likes and re-tweets take off.

Crouches down, reaches under the wheel well and finds a SPARE KEY held by a magnet. Grabs it and unlocks the truck.

As she climbs in, off Sarah's devilish smile --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

In pain, Kyle clutches his thigh, blood seeps through his pant leg. Ricardo guides him towards the desk revealing --

The door Sarah just left through. Move closer and on the floor, trapped between the door and frame are Sarah's keys.

The door's open - just barely a sliver.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

By the sofa, Julia chews a fingernail, desperate. Olivia next to her. They stare at the TV.

Nearby, Senator Hilgard paces, barking into his phone.

SENATOR HILGARD

No more excuses. He's been shot for
fuck's sake. Find him!

As he disconnects the call, Olivia lightly touches his elbow.
A calming gesture that doesn't work.

SENATOR HILGARD

Thirty five thousand employees, nine
billion dollar budget and they can't
find where this hack streams from?

OLIVIA

There he is.

ON TV: Ricardo helps a limping Kyle back behind the desk.

Julia sinks onto the couch relieved.

Hilgard clocks this as his phone rings. He answers --

SENATOR HILGARD

Hilgard.
(listens, then)
My office has no comment.

INT. VI'S CAR - DAY (MOVING)

Vi drives. Live stream's on her phone in a dashboard mount.
She's shocked when she sees wounded Kyle --

VI

Oh, Jesus...

Vi stomps the gas, pushing the car even faster.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle's back behind the desk in his chair. His necktie is now
gone. That's because --

Ricardo's wrapped it around Kyle's thigh over the wound.

RICARDO

Not gonna lie, this'll hurt.

Ricardo ties it tight. Kyle growls in pain.

Ricardo drops in the chair next to Kyle. Faces the camera.

RICARDO

For those playing along at home, I made sure the bullet hit the side of his thigh. Bleeding's controlled. For now.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia gasps, relieved as everyone's riveted on the TV.

RICARDO

Mr. Black's got about an hour before the shit hits the fan.

Silence. Julia's focused on Kyle - a new level of concern.

RICARDO (ON TV)

Now, ready to confess your sins and beg for absolution?

KYLE (ON TV)

I don't know what you want!

RICARDO (ON TV)

I'm giving you one last chance to make things right. To tell the truth.

KYLE (ON TV)

The truth about what!

RICARDO (ON TV)

Start with the shed.

Hilgard looks to Julia who shakes her head - no idea.

KYLE (ON TV)

I can get you money.

RICARDO (ON TV)

Spoken like a true politician.

KYLE (ON TV)

Please, you have my word -

RICARDO (ON TV)

Your word?

KYLE (ON TV)

We can both walk away. Safe.

RICARDO (ON TV)

See, that's the problem. I can't walk away from this.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

As Ricardo reaches for the play button, Kyle grabs his hand.

KYLE

Don't!

Ricardo shoves Kyle off him and jabs the play button.

Kyle watches, eyes wide, as we hear --

YOUNG RICARDO (O.S. ON TV)
*- the shadow and light create a sense
of mystery. Makes the audience want to
look past what they see and ask
'what's really happening here?'*

Memory floods Kyle's mind. He squeezes his eyes shut.

INT. THE SHED - DAY (1997)

Full, saturated color - we're in Kyle's memory.

A storage shed turned into a small sound stage. Black drapes cover the walls. Makeshift lighting equipment's set up.

In the middle, Young Ricardo meticulously stages a shot. A wood chair on its side. Draped over it, a red silk scarf.

Young Kyle stands next to a 16 mm camera on a tripod.

YOUNG RICARDO

*Inspired by something I saw in an old
Fritz Lang movie.*

YOUNG KYLE

Who?

YOUNG RICARDO

*Fritz Lang. Master of Darkness?
Expressionist genius?*

Kyle shrugs.

YOUNG RICARDO

Just hand me a clamp.

Kyle holds a clamp out, pulls it away when Ricardo reaches for it. Then again. Ricardo snatches it from him.

YOUNG KYLE

You're more uptight than normal.

YOUNG RICARDO
Cause I only have one reel of film.

YOUNG KYLE
Isn't the video camera your "safety?"

YOUNG RICARDO
So you have learned something.

YOUNG KYLE
Just buy more film, dork.

Kyle gives Ricardo's shoulder a playful nudge. Ricardo pushes him back - not as playful.

YOUNG RICARDO
Not all of us have an unlimited allowance. Dork.

Kyle shoves him, harder. Ricardo shoves back. A tussle.

They stumble and find themselves nose to nose, breathing hard. Kyle quietly offers...

YOUNG KYLE
I'll buy you more film, okay?

The moment hangs until... Ricardo kisses Kyle.

After a moment, Kyle's not responding.

Young Ricardo steps back. Terrified he's misread the moment, maybe their whole friendship.

Young Kyle steps close to Young Ricardo, grabs his shirtfront. His anger seems to build...

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle stares at the screen, eyes wide, breath shallow.

ON TV: Young Kyle pulls Young Ricardo's shirt and --

INT. THE SHED - KYLE'S MEMORY

The two smash together. Mouths find an urgent kiss.

Hands roam across chests, necks, arms, down the back. Shirts untucked, belt buckles undone, jeans unzipped.

STAY ON Kyle and Ricardo's faces as they touch each other for the first time. Faces pressed together, eyes closed, the two begin slowly. It builds until they climax together.

Silence. Just their breath. Then, Kyle touches Ricardo's face, kisses him and --

STATIC.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Everyone stares at the static on TV, so stunned it's comical.

Bzz! Ding! Ping! Phones come to life at once, like a digital eruption.

KYLE (PRELAP)
Please... what do you want?

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle stares at the blood stain on his pant leg. It's spread.

RICARDO
Good politicians listen to what their constituents need -

KYLE
You need a job? I'll get you a job. Is this PTSD? You need health care? I have a contact at the V.A. They -

RICARDO
But your problem is, you listen to the wrong people. Always have.

KYLE
I'll help however I can. Just stop this. Please. I need a doctor -

RICARDO
Drop out of the race.

Kyle's confused.

RICARDO
You said, "I'll help however I can" -

KYLE
It's election day.

RICARDO
- and I want your influence over any lives other than your family's to end. Today. Officially withdraw. Or...

Ricardo gestures at --

The touchscreen. Still more videos to share.

KYLE

Yes. Fine. Okay. I'll do it. I just...
Can I call my wife first?

RICARDO

I'm sure she has a few questions.

Ricardo pulls out his phone, tap-swipe-tap. Sets it by Kyle.

Julia's contact info displayed.

Kyle reaches for the phone, but Ricardo slides it away.

RICARDO

On second thought, no call.

Kyle's anger flares. He's on his feet, grimacing from pain.

KYLE

Fuck you. You knew my schedule.
Julia's contact info. You impersonated
a journalist. You stalk people. Even
as kids - all that filming. This is
what you did with your Army training?
Disgusting. When this is over -

Ricardo punches Kyle in the jaw --

Kyle drops back into the chair.

RICARDO

Whatever you think's gonna happen when
this is over, likely will not. That's
something I learned in army training.

Kyle growls in pain. Thinks. Then --

KYLE

If I drop out of the race, you promise
to let me go?

Ricardo nods. Gestures to the camera. But Kyle hesitates.

RICARDO

The blood loss may be slow, but your
clock's ticking, man.

The two men hold one another's gaze until --

A RAPID-FIRE STREAM OF IMAGES

POLLING LOCATION: EMT is still in line and on the phone.

EMT

Girl the stuff I did when I was a teenager? If that shit was on film, I'd never get a job.

BEHIND HIS TRUCK: Construction Worker, distressed, frantically peels off a bumper sticker for Kyle --

NEWS VIDEO CLIP: Ronda Larchmont is mid-statement --

RONDA LARCHMONT

- and I say this not as his opponent, but as a fellow citizen. Given his obvious lies and deception, we should all question Mr. Black's ability to serve.

EXT. HUXLEY'S HOUSE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

A well-tended house in a gated community.

INT. HUXLEY'S GREENHOUSE - DAY

Shelves and tables crammed with ceramic pots, piles of dirt and canisters of plant food. A cluttered sanctuary.

A pair of weathered hands trim a plant, slow and meticulous.

HUXLEY (O.S.)

This would be but a simple hostage situation.

Leaning against a table listening, Vi taps into her patience.

VI

Sir?

Across from her, working on the plant is --

BASSANIO **HUXLEY**, white, 60s. Swathed in a flannel shirt covered by a cardigan and a beard. An expansive man who spent a lifetime calling the shots. So he thinks he still does.

HUXLEY

Technology has transformed it into a macabre spectacle for anyone with a phone.

VI

I do know technology's made this situation much more urgent.

HUXLEY

One of the beautiful things about retirement, nothing is urgent.

He sips his drink, then goes back to fussing over his plant.

Vi takes a deep, calming breath and squeezes out --

VI

I need your help.

HUXLEY

My how things change, two decades on.

VI

Your border patrol jurisdiction had dirty agents.

HUXLEY

According to a brand new detective who herself had come here undocumented.

She ignores his baiting and plows ahead --

VI

If I wanted to get rid of a U.S. citizen and make it look like a deportation, how would I do that?

HUXLEY

Finally tired of your parents?

Vi swallows her anger.

VI

Off the record. You have my word.

As Huxley lifts a bottle of scotch, fills his tumbler --

HUXLEY

I'd find a border patrol agent who is amenable to the persuasiveness of a large sum of untraceable cash to look the other way as you hand off the poor citizen to an unsavory foreigner from the country in which you want them to disappear.

VI

And where would that unsavory foreigner be from?

HUXLEY

Any number of places - perhaps Asia?

Huxley finishes off his glass of scotch.

VI

Closer to home? If it had to be quick?

Huxley rummages around for a scrap of paper. He finds a receipt from a garden center. Pats himself down.

Vi gives him her pen. He puts on the reading glasses hanging from his neck. Peers over them and scribbles on the paper.

HUXLEY

These three countries? In my thirty five years with the patrol, I never once saw a person return from any of them who was sent under the circumstances you've described.

Hands the scrap of paper and pen back to Vi. She grabs it, but he holds on.

HUXLEY

And detective, I have your word this was off the record.

VI

I've always been a woman of my word.

She takes the scrap of paper and pen. Scans the paper.

VI

Unlike most men I know.

Wads it up and tosses it onto the table.

HUXLEY

Retirement, I highly recommend it.

VI

I look forward to it.

She strides out, leaving him to caring for his plants and pouring another drink.

INT. VI'S CAR - DAY

On her phone as she gets in and pulls the door shut.

VI

Me again. I need you to search DMV, state income taxes. For a Ricardo Martinez who was deported...

(flips through her notes)

(MORE)

VI (CONT'D)

...between July and October of last year. Name and address of any family member still in the area.

Vi hangs up. As she cranks the car's engine and pulls away --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Olivia clocks Julia staring at the elegant dining table.

OLIVIA

They'll be here. People will show.

JULIA

Rats always flee a sinking ship.

OLIVIA

Don't overreact -

JULIA

I would.

SENATOR HILGARD (O.S.)

Don't piss down my back and tell me it's raining!

OLIVIA

Matt's on with the governor.

JULIA

Shit.

Julia strides away, a concerned Olivia watches --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S FOYER - DAY

Hilgard paces, barking into his phone.

SENATOR HILGARD

Be there in fifteen. And I want a hundred ways we come through this smelling like a fucking rose.

He disconnects, Julia's there.

JULIA

Don't go.

SENATOR HILGARD

Your instincts got Kyle this far. But the optics of this are -

Julia whips around him to block his exit --

JULIA

The optics of my husband being taken hostage?

SENATOR HILGARD

Don't play dumb. It's beneath you.

JULIA

My six year old could have made that video on her iPad. Hell, there's an internet full of porn that's worse -

He grabs her arm, yanks her close. His voice controlled rage.

SENATOR HILGARD

You used my name, abused my office. To disappear some goddamn fag beaner your husband fucked twenty five years ago?

JULIA

It was necessary.

SENATOR HILGARD

You better pray to fucking god that the FBI is as inept as we all believe they are. Because I will not take the fall for you on this.

Hilgard spins and heads for the door. Yanks it open. Levels her with one last icy gaze --

SENATOR HILGARD

You wonder why I never supported you as a possible candidate? Because you can't tell the difference between ambition and ego.

(calls)

OLIVIA!

Before Julia can respond, Olivia scurries to her husband's side. As he ushers her out the door, her eyes catch Julia's and she mouths, "It'll be okay." SLAM! They're gone.

Julia's anger starts to replace her fear and worry.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Back with Kyle and Ricardo behind the desk.

RICARDO

...I can play another video if you need more inspiration?

KYLE

No. No more. I'll do what you want.
And then you'll let me go?

RICARDO

That's what I said.

Kyle winces in pain as he turns to face the camera. His words are hesitant, searching.

KYLE

Been my honor to run in this campaign.
I'm deeply grateful for the support of
fellow citizens. Especially to my wife
Julia and our daughter. But now, in
light of... Given what's... I want
to... What's best for all of us is to
pull out of the race. Thank you.

Here in a silent studio, it's weirdly anticlimactic.

RICARDO

See, that wasn't so hard.

Kyle stares at his hands. Slowly turns his wedding ring.

KYLE

Now let me go. I'm done with this
game.

RICARDO

But I'm not.

Kyle's head snaps up, alarmed.

RICARDO

Everyone changes their mind. You
change yours about a lot of things.

Kyle pushes himself to stand, limps in pain around the desk.
Away from Ricardo, towards the exit.

Ricardo watches - amused? Impressed?

Unhurried, he stands and intercepts Kyle. They're right in front of the camera.

Kyle tries to push past, but he can't exert much effort.

KYLE

You lied.

RICARDO

Can't appreciate the pain of betrayal
until you've experienced it yourself.

KYLE

If you kill me. All these witnesses?

RICARDO

What do I have left to lose?

KYLE

Then what do you want?!

Ricardo gestures back to the desk.

RICARDO

Have a seat. You look like shit.

KYLE

'Cause you fucking shot me!

RICARDO

Wonder what your mom thinks about all this? you think she's been watching?

The question's so out of the blue, Kyle freezes.

RICARDO

While babysitting Frances?

Now Kyle gets it. Adrenaline surges --

KYLE

Don't go anywhere near my family. I'll fucking kill you!

CUT TO:

CAMPAIGN POSTER: A graphic of Kyle's face, beneath it his slogan: "The Power of Truth."

REVEAL that poster is on the wall in --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S GARAGE - DAY

One side is Kyle's campaign "headquarters." Posters, bumper stickers, mailers.

A wall of shelves with labeled storage tubs of family stuff.

In a corner - Adelaide exhales a plume of smoke. Somewhere, a door opens and --

JULIA (O.S.)

Adelaide?

ADELAIDE
 (calling)
 Just putting some stuff away.

She stubs out the cig, waves away the smoke as --

Julia appears. Sniffs.

ADELAIDE
 Sorry, I -

JULIA
 God, I miss cigarettes.

Adelaide hesitates. Digs the pack from her pocket and offers.

JULIA
 Kyle hates it.

Julia takes one and Adelaide lights it. Deep inhale.

JULIA
 You're so good with Frances. And such
 a help to me. I'm glad you're here.

ADELAIDE
 (cautious)
 Thank you?

Julia grabs a bumper sticker. Fidgets with it as she paces.

JULIA
 I need you to be honest. Have you ever
 heard or seen anything? With Kyle.
 Maybe in his suit pocket when you're
 taking them to the cleaners? Or heard
 him on the phone? Lately, with all his
 travel. Meeting so many people...

Adelaide's silent. She studies her hands, uncomfortable.

JULIA
 I've been meaning to talk with you.
 About a raise. And a bonus. For the
 rest of your tuition. Books.

Adelaide's surprised. Takes a moment. Deep breath, then --

ADELAIDE
 We need a good lawyer. Immigration.
 (off Julia's confusion)
 Maritza. My wife. She was deported.

Julia's genuinely stunned.

JULIA

Oh my god.
(realizing)
You're married?

Adelaide hides her disbelief.

Julia realizes the stupidity of her own question.

JULIA

Where is she?

ADELAIDE

Across the border, a refugee camp for
six months.

Adelaide's voice cracks with emotion.

Julia thinks a moment. Deep breath.

JULIA

We'll take care of it. First thing, as
soon as we get through this...

Adelaide grabs her boss's hand, squeezes. Then crosses the
room. Stops at a shelf. Opens a storage tub labeled 'K - high
school/college stuff.'

ADELAIDE

Found it when you asked me to look for
the photo of Mr. Black in his football
uniform for the campaign poster.

From the tub, she removes - a cheap phone in a red case. She
hands it to Julia, who powers up the phone.

CHIME! The phone's on.

Julia urgently taps the **photo app**.

ON PHONE: Nudes, semi-nudes. Light bondage. Selfies, in-the-
moment stuff. Women and men. Some with Kyle. And then --

Julia presses the phone to her chest. Adelaide nods for Julia
to continue. She looks at the phone and swipes --

ON PHONE:

Kyle with another man and two women, one of whom is OLIVIA.
She's the one taking the selfie.

JULIA

Are you fucking kidding me?

Julia and Adelaide's eyes find one another for a long moment.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Ricardo shoves Kyle back in the chair. He tries not to yelp from the pain in his leg.

RICARDO

Let's chat. Just you and me.

Kyle's wide-eyed as --

Ricardo unclips the microphone from Kyle's lapel. Removes the battery pack from his pocket.

Switches the mic's power off and sets it on the desk.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia joins Adelaide, who's confused.

JULIA

What's wrong?

Adelaide picks up the remote. Tries a button. Nothing.

ADELAIDE

The sound's cut out.

INT. SARAH'S TRUCK - DAY

Sarah watches the live stream on her phone.

SARAH

Fuck.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Back with Kyle and Ricardo behind the desk.

RICARDO

Your kid's safe. I'd never harm anyone who's innocent.

Kyle slowly exhales, at least a bit relieved.

RICARDO

But your time? It's running out.

The blood stain on his pant leg now covers his entire thigh. It's starting to pool by his foot.

Off Kyle's look of fear --

VI (PRELAP)
Please, ma'am. It's urgent.

EXT. COUNTRY GARDENS CARE FACILITY - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Vi is talking with **TALMA RAY**, 50s, Black. Like many caretakers, patients outweigh being underpaid and overworked.

TALMA
If you're not on his approved visitor list or you don't have a warrant, then you're not getting in here and I'm not giving you any information.

Vi checks her frustration and pulls out her phone. Pulls something up and shows it to Talma.

ON PHONE: KLFB newscast. Ricardo's photo and name.

VI
Can you at least tell me, has this man been here recently? To visit the Eduardo Martinez who lives here?

Talma crosses her arms. Gives nothing away.

TALMA
I don't make the rules, I'm just doing my job. Not problem you can't appreciate the work we do here.

EXT. COUNTRY GARDENS CARE FACILITY - PARKING LOT - DAY

Vi gets in her car, slams the door closed. Sits... Pounds the steering wheel, screams. Then, deep breath. Grabs her notebook. Flips pages, looking for anything she missed --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME, BEDROOM - DAY

Julia closes the door. Sits on the bed. Grabs a pillow, hugs it tight. Breath shallow. Tears well. She fights the emotion. Buries her mouth in the pillow and releases a primal scream.

Soft knocking.

JULIA
Not now, Adelaide.

The door swings open - it's Olivia.

OLIVIA
(wry)
Now you're confusing me with the help?

Olivia sits next her, throws a comforting arm around her friend. Julia's spine stiffens.

JULIA
I thought you jumped ship.

OLIVIA
You know me better than that.

JULIA
I thought I did.

OLIVIA
What do you mean?

Julia pulls out the red phone.

Olivia swallows. Eyes dart between the phone and Julia.

JULIA
You were the one person I trusted.

OLIVIA
Jules, it didn't mean anything -

JULIA
Get out.
(nothing)
Adelaide! Adelaide!!

Olivia jumps up, pleads with her oldest friend --

OLIVIA
It was just sex. You know Matt, he's over seventy...gone so much...I couldn't just... pick up some guy at a bar. I'm a senator's wife.

Adelaide bursts in --

ADELAIDE
Ma'am, what's wrong?

JULIA
Get Mrs. Hilgard the fuck out of my house!

Adelaide grabs Olivia's arm and won't let go as she hauls her out the door.

Julia seethes.

SARAH (PRELAP)
Sorry Bill, this is like, way bigger than your local affiliate station.

INT. SARAH'S TRUCK - DAY

Sarah's on the phone, making a deal.

SARAH

I want hundred grand and a national network feed. Those are my terms.

BILL BLANTON (ON PHONE)

We can offer you twenty-five.

SARAH

Nope. Two other networks want this interview. So I need your answer in ten minutes. Tick-tock, Bill.

Sarah hangs up the phone. Pulls up the **live stream**. Viewer count: **1,423,000**. Whoa.

Ping! Sarah glances at the text from anchor Bill Blanton:

\$75K & national network feed

Sarah types her response:

good choice!

She sits back, settles in, and smiles.

REVEAL that she's parked on the street in front of Kyle and Julia's house. Olivia comes out the door and hurries down the driveway.

VI (PRELAP)

The nursing home's a dead end.

INT./EXT. VI'S CAR - DAY

In the parking lot, Vi sits in her car on the phone.

VI

The duty nurse think she's a prison guard. I'll need a warrant.

Talma's tapping on the window.

VI

I gotta call you back.

Vi lowers the window. Nervous, Talma glances back at the building.

TALMA

Eduardo's son was here this morning.

Vi's phone rings - it's Chief Booker. Declines the call.

TALMA

Before my shift. He left a bag of cash. About fifty grand. Note said to apply it to his father's account. Mr. Martinez won't be around for half of that.

Talma slips Vi a folded piece of paper.

VI

Thank you.

TALMA

My boss finds out, he'll fire me. And I'll hunt your ass down.

VI

And ma'am? Growing up, my grandma lived with us till the bitter end. I appreciate what you do here.

Without a nod, Talma scurries back inside.

Vi scans the paper: A printout of Eduardo's resident info. Highlighted - an EMERGENCY CONTACT AND PHONE NUMBER.

On her phone, Vi dashes off a text then starts the car.

Phone rings - Chief Booker again. This time Vi answers, on speaker.

CHIEF BOOKER (OVER SPEAKER)

Don't fucking hang up on me -

VI

Just texted you a phone number. Trace it. I'll bet my pension he's our guy.

CHIEF BOOKER (OVER SPEAKER)

The hero returns -

As Vi backs her car out with a squeal --

JULIA (PRELAP)

You ran off. Didn't tell anyone -

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME, FOYER - DAY

Julia at the front door. A heated discussion with Sarah.

SARAH

No, I called nine-one-one and -

JULIA

Bullshit. No one's called me. There's nothing on the news.

SARAH

- and the police told me not to tell anyone where they are. That would tip off every single psycho in the state!

JULIA

I'm not a psycho. I'm his wife!

She tries to slam the door closed, but Sarah shoulders it.

SARAH

And his campaign manager. What if this guy's hacked your phone? Email?

Julia shoves the door. Sarah resists.

SARAH

Election's a toss up. The longer they're streaming, the more damage it does.

Sarah turns and holds the door open with her back while she finds her phone - tap, swipe.

SARAH

And I didn't run. Kyle said, "Tell my wife I love her" and shoved me out the door. I'm here to help you. Look!

Sarah holds the phone to the opening between door and frame.

Julia spies the call list: **911**. Stops trying to close the door. Sarah exhales, relieved.

SMASH TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Back in 1997. A shaky, handheld video of an agitated, amped Young Kyle. He strides, focused, surrounded by his friends who egg him on:

FRIENDS (O.S.)
 Prove it man./About loyalty, bro./
 There it is!

The camera whips around to find --

Ricardo, walking alone - startled to see Kyle.

RICARDO
 Is that my camera? How'd you get it?

But he trails off as the group crowds around him.

FRIENDS (O.S.)
 Here's your chance./Get the faggot.

Hearing 'get the faggot', Ricardo freezes.

RICARDO
 Seriously, Kyle. I stopped filming all
 the time. Like you told me.

The circle closes around him and Kyle. They yell and taunt.

A GIRL is part of the group. She lays her hand on Kyle's arm.
 An intimate gesture meant for Ricardo to see.

Friend #1 steps forward and tries to pull Young Kyle away.
 Kyle shrugs him off.

FRIEND #1
 C'mon, he's not worth your time.

Ricardo freezes. Anger rises.

RICARDO
 That right, Kyle? Am I not worth all
 the time we spent together?

Kyle's breath comes ragged. Fists clench and unclench as the
 crowd's taunting reaches a fever pitch:

FRIENDS (O.S.)
 Come on, man!/Teach him a lesson!/Get
 him already!

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

Kyle's breath is shallow as he watches the video play.

YOUNG RICARDO (ON MONITOR)
 What's a matter Kyle? You afraid to
 hit me? Faggot?

ON MONITOR: Young Kyle roars, rushes at Young Ricardo.

Kyle's eyes widen in horror as he watches --

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Dynamic, rich color - back in Kyle's memory.

Kyle slams Ricardo to the ground, kneels on top, pins him.
Hammers the smaller boy.

The crowd's cheers taper off as the beating grows more
vicious. It's unhinged and horrible. Finally --

They grab Kyle, yank him off as he keeps punching.

FRIEND #1

Dude! C'mon! He's had enough.

They manage to drag Kyle off. Stand him up.

Kyle looks around. Gaze stops, looking right at us. He grabs
the camera from whoever's recording.

CAMERA POV: Set on the ground right next to Ricardo's face:
blood mixed with tears. His face a map of cuts and wounds.

KYLE (O.S.)

There's your precious fucking camera.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

Kyle gapes at what he's seen, his face a mask of horror and
shame. Lips tremble, tears well.

INT. VI'S CAR - DAY (MOVING)

Vi glances at the live stream from her phone on the dash.

VI

Just hold on.

She pushes the car to go faster.

JULIA (PRELAP)

My god. That can't be real.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

ON TV: Ricardo and Kyle live

Viewer count is now **3,002,000**. Comments scroll by.

On the sofa, Julia's quiet, eyes on the screen. In her lap, she grips the red phone.

SARAH (O.S.)

This guy's stuff? Don't buy any of it.
Camera phone and fifty dollar
software.

REVEAL Sarah, hurrying to set up a makeshift 'set' with the sofa and a couple of lamps.

JULIA

That was Kyle as a kid. Those videos
look real.

Sarah doesn't look up, just keeps arranging things.

SARAH

Happy to explain deep-fake technology
another time.

JULIA

The comments are like a fever dream.

SARAH (O.S.)

Just noise. Comments, likes, shares?
Lets people believe they have some
control. Truth is...

Sarah grabs her phone. Pulls something up. Shows it to Julia.

ON PHONE: Crowdsourced campaign for Ricardo's legal defense.
It has \$143,000 and rising.

Julia's repulsed. Sarah just shrugs, adjusts a lamp. Julia
grabs it.

SARAH

News is currency.

JULIA

This isn't news.

SARAH

Everything is news. You know that.

Sarah yanks the lamp back.

SARAH

Look, I know three things: One, Kyle
will be a good congressman because
you're running his show.

Julia's eyes meet Sarah's. She's listening.

SARAH

Two, we need to go live now.
Otherwise, it looks sketch. Like
making shit up after the fact.

JULIA

And three?

SARAH

He's framed Kyle as unreliable. You do
the opposite.

Julia sees the TV, the awful comments scrolling.

SARAH

Then his claim and yours are too far
apart for people to make sense of. The
news cycle moves on. That's our goal.

Julia stares at the red phone she's clutching.

Sarah crouches in front of Julia. Gets in her eye line.

SARAH

Is any of what this guy's saying true?

Julia doesn't look up from the phone.

SARAH

I don't give a shit who or what
consenting adults do in their bedroom.
(off Julia's surprise)
We all know that's just an easy play
to fire up the base. But to help you
with this interview, I need to know
the truth. So...

Julia squares her shoulders, meets Sarah's gaze --

JULIA

Kyle's always been a good husband and
provider. Kind. Loving. Cared for me,
our family. That's what I know to be
true. That's what matters.

Sarah's smile blooms.

SARAH

God yes. Say it just like that when
we're live.

Julia nods, a bit of her own confidence returning.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Vi's parked on the street outside the warehouse. She's on the phone, looking at Kyle's car.

VI

Tags match. It's Black's.

CHIEF BOOKER (ON SPEAKER)

Bingo. My E.T.A. is...

INT. POLICE VEHICLE - DAY (MOVING)

A UNIFORM COP drives. Chief Booker is shotgun, on his phone. The driver flashes five fingers.

CHIEF BOOKER

Five minutes. SWAT's on our tail.

INTERCUT - VI'S CAR / POLICE VEHICLE

VI

Hostage Negotiation?

CHIEF BOOKER

Thirty minutes.

VI

Christ, they finishing dinner first?

CHIEF BOOKER

Just get set up across the street.

VI

He's unraveling. Mother's dead, father's just about. Last vid he played? That was a point of no return.

CHIEF BOOKER

Monitor the building's entrance -

VI

Dishonorable discharge. Stripped of service and pension. This revenge? It's all he's got left -

CHIEF BOOKER

Cheng -

VI

He wanted us to find him. He left his phone on for god's sake!

CHIEF BOOKER
I gave you an order.

Vi grips the steering wheel. Deep breath.

VI
Yes, sir.

She disconnects. Thinks. Pulls up Julia's phone number. Sends a quick text. Then, pulls up the live stream --

ON PHONE: Ricardo and Kyle behind the desk. Kyle looks shaken.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Ricardo and Kyle behind the desk.

RICARDO
Just one video left.

Flash of KYLE'S MEMORY: A culmination of memories - Young Kyle and Young Ricardo together. It ends on the river bank.

KYLE
No goddammit, don't. I'll tell everyone the truth.

RICARDO
Good boy.

Ricardo clips the mic back onto Kyle's lapel. Turns the mic on, drops the battery pack in Kyle's jacket pocket.

INT. VI'S CAR - DAY

Vi watches the phone: Kyle winces in pain as he adjusts in his seat. Turns to the camera.

VI
Fuck it.

Vi silences the phone's audio. Shoves the car door open.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Vi scurries to the warehouse front door. Crouches beside it. Tries the handle - it turns.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sarah's phone is propped up on the mantle. She taps the screen settings, connecting to the network feed.

SARAH
Aaaaaalmost... theeeere...

Behind her, Julia paces. In one hand, her phone. In the other, the red phone from the basement.

ON TV: Kyle faces the camera. Hesitant, searches for words.

KYLE (ON TV)
I've done some... things. Things I never talked about.

Julia stops pacing, spins to Sarah --

JULIA
Let's go, let's go -

SARAH
Go go go! Sit!

The two scurry to the sofa. What Julia doesn't see is --

The text on her phone from Vi:

***This is Detective Cheng.
Found him - 1783 N County Hwy
Stand by for more instruction.***

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Vi eases the door closed. On the wall by the door are several utility meters and the massive circuit breaker box.

Staying low and quiet, she creeps down the hallway.

At the security door, she sees a sliver of light between the door and frame - not completely closed. Holding it open --

Sarah's key ring.

Vi moves closer. Leans in. Through the open sliver, sees --

Ricardo and Kyle behind the desk.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

At the end of the street, two police vehicles and a SWAT van idle, waiting.

EXT. BEHIND SWAT VEHICLE - DAY

An IMPROMPTU COMMAND CENTER has been setup.

Chief Booker has one eye on a tablet - the live stream. He points at a MAP, speaks to SWAT LEADER, 40s, female in tactical gear.

CHIEF BOOKER

Send teams up side streets. North, south. Cover every door, window, air vent. Every possible point of escape. You take a team to the front.

She nods and races off as Booker looks around, calling out to anyone -

CHIEF BOOKER

Still waiting for fucking blueprints to that building.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle speaks directly to the camera --

KYLE

The things I did are very personal.

Kyle stops. Listens. Are those faint police sirens?

Ricardo looks over at the door and --

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Vi flattens against the wall, out of sight. She strains, listening to Kyle. Waits.

Hears faint sirens. Mouths an angry 'shit.'

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Booker grabs his walkie-talkie and barks into it.

CHIEF BOOKER

Did I not ask for a code 1? Might as well call this guy and tell him we're on our way.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle hears the faint sound of SIRENS disappear abruptly.

KYLE

Ricardo, we can still walk away.

RICARDO

I can't.

KYLE
Come on. Everyone has a price.

RICARDO
The only people who believe that are
the ones who have a price.

But before Ricardo can push play, an explosion of static as --
Julia and Sarah appear on the TV MONITOR in front of them.

KYLE
Jules?

INTERCUT - THE BLACK'S LIVING ROOM / WAREHOUSE STUDIO

Julia and Sarah see Kyle and Ricardo in studio via the live
stream on TV. Julia's re-energized talking with Kyle.

JULIA
Stop talking!

KYLE
Jules?!

JULIA
We're responding to this insanity.

RICARDO
A bad choice -

SARAH
And we're patched into KLFB's
national network feed.

KYLE
No -

SARAH
Mr. Black. Trust me.

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Vi peers through the sliver between the door and frame.

SARAH (O.S. ON MONITOR)
And Mr. Martinez, you can't get rid of
me this time unless you cut power to
the building.

RICARDO
(realizing)
You can control the studio remotely.

SARAH (O.S. ON MONITOR)
Gotta stay ahead of the crazies right?

Vi glances around. Shines her phone's flashlight on --
The breaker box on the wall at the end of the hall.
She scrambles towards it as we --

CUT TO:

FULL SCREEN

There's Bill Blanton in his anchor chair. All gravitas.

BILL BLANTON
Just an hour ago, Sarah Strolley
escaped a terrifying hostage
situation. With authorities finally en
route, Ms. Strolley is with Julia
Black, wife and campaign manager of
Kyle Black, the congressional
candidate still held captive.

Screen splits: **Bill | Julia & Sarah | Kyle & Ricardo**

BILL BLANTON
Mrs. Black, thank you for joining us
in this difficult time. What would you
like to say?

JULIA
I want everyone to know Kyle has
always been a loving father, husband.
If this man will just let Kyle go.
We'll help him. He has my word.

SARAH
Look Bill, Mrs. Black - and anyone
with half a brain - knows the truth:
This hostage situation is a highly
orchestrated attack by the Larchmont
campaign -

Julia throws a shocked look to Sarah.

SARAH
- fully funded by an opposing party,
unhinged from reality -

BILL BLANTON
I'm being told police have arrived at
the hostage location.

Julia looks into the camera, talks to Kyle.

JULIA
 Kyle, please listen to the police.

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

A text appears on Vi's phone from Chief Booker:

BOOKER: *Where are you?*

She replies:

VI: *inside. hallway.*

. . .

BOOKER: *get out. NOW!*

. . .

BOOKER: *won't back you this time.*

Vi stares at the last message. Pockets the phone. Makes a decision, scurries for the exit door.

Stops at the end of the hallway by the circuit breaker box. She debates: exit or breaker box --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

KYLE
 All of this. Just to kill me?

Ricardo jams the gun barrel into Kyle's wound and presses down, twisting. Kyle shrieks in pain, tries to shove Ricardo's arm away.

RICARDO
 All of this to get you to finally do what's right. You've had decades. Now everyone's paying attention. They can see who they're really voting for.

Ricardo sets his gun hand on the desk as he reaches for the touch screen with his other hand to play the last video.

Desperate, Kyle lunges for the pistol. Misses.

JULIA (ON MONITOR)
 No!

The two scuffle behind the desk.

Kyle tries to reach for the gun again, but can't get it.

Ricardo slugs Kyle's jaw. He falls back into his chair.
Ricardo snags the gun and shoves it against Kyle's temple.

RICARDO
Fucking done with this.

JULIA (ON MONITOR)
Stop! Please. No.

Both men, out of breath. Desperate.

RICARDO
You got a five count. One.

KYLE
Why me? You couldn't find a murderer?
A rapist? Pedophile? A politician
who's already gaming the system?

RICARDO
Two.

KYLE
Not a small-town lawyer who tells
people what they want to hear so they
don't look too closely at him?

RICARDO
I already know. Tell them. Three.

Kyle's breath is ragged. He looks at Ricardo.

FLASH OF MEMORY: *Young Ricardo smiles at him.*

RICARDO
Want more blood on your hands? Four.

Ricardo moves the gun from Kyle's head to his own.

FLASH OF MEMORY: *Young Ricardo, face swollen and beaten.*

Kyle begins to tremble as the words tumble out.

KYLE
We were so young...

SARAH (ON MONITOR)
David, this stunt is -

Julia shoves Sarah hard to quiet her.

KYLE
I didn't know...

SARAH (ON MONITOR)
Find an illegal, pay him to claim Mr.
Black's a homosexual -

JULIA (ON MONITOR)
Shut up!

KYLE
Didn't know how much -

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME - DAY

Julia's becoming frantic, watching Kyle come apart.

JULIA
(to Sarah)
Cut the feed!

Sarah glances at the live stream on the TV: Viewer count
passes **3,989,000**.

RICARDO (ON TV)
Five.

Finally it all starts to pour out of Kyle.

KYLE (ON TV)
(to Ricardo)
Everything I've done was to make
people believe I'm someone I'm not.
Football, law school, church. Running
in this election. I've allowed things
to be suggested and said about my
opponent. Things that aren't true.
Ronda Larchmont has decades of public
service. She's the right choice.

INT. LARCHMONT CAMPAIGN HQ - SAME

Ronda Larchmont watches the livestream. A smile of excitement
tugs at the corner of her mouth - maybe they can win this?

KYLE (ON TV)
(still to Ricardo)
I lie. Every day. To my wife. To our
daughter, my mom, our minister. I lie
in every campaign interview. To
everyone I asked to vote for me.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Julia's riveted to the TV. Behind her, Adelaide watches.

KYLE (ON TV)
 (still to Ricardo)
 Our system has become a way to make
 people feel bad enough about
 themselves so they just scream at one
 another and let others decide what's
 right for them. Others who don't
 really care. Is this what you want?

Ricardo presses the gun barrel to Kyle's cheek and turns his
 face directly to the camera.

RICARDO
 Don't tell me, tell them.

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Vi at the far end of the hallway by the circuit breaker box.
 Uses her phone as flashlight. Finds the handle, pulls the
 front open and inside --

TWENTY CIRCUIT BREAKERS - none labeled. Each breaker is
 secured tightly with a plastic ziptie.

VI
 (whispered)
 Goddammit.

Yanks keys from her pocket. On the keychain, a small
 penknife. She opens it. Touches the blade - dull.

Wedges the tiny knife's blade under the first ziptie. Saws
 back and forth... finally, pop! The ziptie and plastic lock
 fall off. She flips the breaker. Glances to the studio door --

Lights are still on.

Vi jams the pen under the next ziptie and starts again.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle faces the camera. He speaks, hesitant.

KYLE
 I work so hard pretending to be Kyle
 Black, the perfect son, husband,
 father. Perfect candidate. The guy you
 can trust. But I'm still just a scared
 kid. Believed if I looked normal,
 acted normal, I'd feel normal. But I
 don't. I never have. I'm broken. I
 slept with other women. None meant
 anything. They were just a way to try
 and forget that I want men too.

Through tears and choking sobs, Kyle spits out the words.

KYLE

I've been pretending to be someone I'm not for so long, I don't even know who I am. All I know is that I lie and hurt people. There's nothing in me but weakness and shame. I've done everything to try and not think about it. Sex, booze, pills.

Kyle looks into the camera. Right at Julia.

KYLE

Jules, I love you. I do. But I can't trust my feelings. All I've ever done is betray you. In my thoughts. Words. What I do. Every day I'm terrified of losing you and our little girl. I want to change. For things to be better. To be better. But I don't know how. I never did. Everything always came easy for me. I never had to work for anything. You deserve so much more.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sarah glances at Julia, stoic and frozen. Eyes on the TV. Face a neutral mask.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle, slumps in his chair. Chin to chest. In pain.

RICARDO

Did you love me?

KYLE

We were sixteen... just kids -

RICARDO

Did you love me?

Kyle nods, voice barely a whisper.

KYLE

I did.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julia's own phone BUZZES. She grabs it off the end table --
Vi's text with the address. Before she can react --

SARAH

Mrs. Black, are you aware that your husband loved another man?

JULIA

If I am, why's it anyone's business besides mine and his?

She strides to Sarah's phone propped up, streaming them.

SARAH

No!

Julia snatches the phone, hurls it into the foyer. It slides across the tile and smacks against the front door - *crack!*

ON TV: Their section fritzes and goes black.

BILL BLANTON (ON TV)

We seem to have lost connection with Julia Black and Sarah Strolley.

JULIA

(to Sarah)

Get out.

Sarah scurries away and throws a shit-eating grin to Julia.

SARAH

Remember, everything's news.

As Adelaide hustles Sarah to the front door, Sarah snags her phone off the floor. And then she's gone. As Adelaide shuts the door behind her Julia bolts to --

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The bedroom door flies open, Julia rushes in, fumbling with the red phone. Pries the back off and rips out the SIM CARD.

She looks around and zeroes in on their FRAMED WEDDING PHOTO.

Removes the frame's back, tucks the sim card in behind the photo. Replaces the frame, sets the photo on the dresser.

ADELAIDE (O.S.)

Are you okay?

JULIA

They found Kyle.

ADELAIDE

Go. I got things here.

With a nod of thanks, Julia grabs her purse and is gone.

RICARDO (PRELAP)
Last video. You do the honors.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Kyle stares at the green play button on the touch screen. He's shaking.

KYLE
No... no more... How can... there be more? I never saw you after that -

Ricardo lays his hand on Kyle's shoulder. Kyle flinches. Ricardo squeezes Kyle's shoulder. With a trembling hand, Kyle pushes play --

ON SCREEN

Handheld video. Ricardo sits on a river bank. Talks to us.

RICARDO
*Last year, I'm walking down the street
and see this billboard: "Kyle Black
for Congress-The Power of Truth."*

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

We're with Ricardo as he records this. He looks right at us.

RICARDO
*That glint in your eye, that smile.
The smile I've seen in my mind every
day since... There you were up there,
larger than life and - boom! - the
dam I'd carefully built in my mind
blew open, and all those memories
flooded back. Like -*

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

Kyle watches --

RICARDO (ON SCREEN)
- those long afternoons, was just us.

KYLE'S MEMORY FLASHES of the memories Ricardo mentions -

RICARDO (V.O.)
Laughing. Swimming. When our eyes
would meet and I didn't have to look
away or worry.
(MORE)

RICARDO (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When I'd slip inside you and you'd hold me so tight, telling me, "I love you." I remembered how you made everything feel right and safe. And then it wasn't. Ever again.

EXT. RIVERBANK- DAY

RICARDO

Not when my parents moved us away. Not when I joined the army and nearly got blown to bits, and certainly not when painkillers became my only friend. When I finally got clean a couple of years ago, I could finally look myself in the eye for the first time since you stomped me like yesterday's trash.

With one hand, Ricardo fingers the necklace around his neck, a calming talisman.

RICARDO

So much I'd finally managed to lock away. Then that fucking billboard. And you - running around telling people you have the answers that will keep them safe? That you can help them live their best lives? How? Hell, you wouldn't read even one of the letters I wrote you. Or answer a phone call, or an email. Not one.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO

We push on Kyle's eyes --

KYLE

What letters or emails? I never got a thing from you. No photos. Nothing for twenty five years. I swear.

RICARDO (ON SCREEN)

How can you make decisions in the best interest of strangers when you won't even do that for someone you claim to have loved?

Kyle can't speak, his eyes glued to the monitor as --

SERIES OF SHOTS

Young Kyle and Young Ricardo together in all sorts of different locations - happy, laughing, in love.

RICARDO (V.O.)

Do you even understand why you did what you did? Cause I do. I've been with enough people to learn the difference between hormones and feelings. Between lust and love. Trust me, the line between them isn't that fine. Makes me sad you never even tried to understand.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Adult Ricardo turns to face us --

RICARDO

But I want you to know that I forgive you. And hope you're happy.

He smiles and --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

ON THE MONITOR: Ricardo holds his smile, then asks --

RICARDO

How was that?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Perfect. He doesn't deserve it. Where's the off button again?

RICARDO

(laughing)

Give it here, I got it.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Don't film me. Don't.

Ricardo grabs the camera, turns it to face the other man.

He looks exactly like Ricardo.

MAN

Bro.

(laughs, then)

Seriously, Ricky. I'm proud of you. For doing this.

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

You can forget about him once and for all. Now stop recording.

The screen cuts to black.

ON KYLE, his face is a mask of horror. He slowly turns to look at the man sitting next to him who --

KYLE

Ohjesusgod. Are you... You're Diego...

Diego offers a smile and shrugs.

DIEGO

Nice to see you again, Kyle.

KYLE

You're pretending to be your brother?
This is so fucked up!

DIEGO

So was what you did to Ricky in high school. And now he's gone.

KYLE

What do you mean?

DIEGO

Like he never fucking existed!

KYLE

I don't know anything about -

DIEGO

BULLSHIT!

Diego grabs Kyle by the lapels and yanks him close.

DIEGO

WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM, MOTHERFUCKER!?

KYLE

I swear, I don't know -

Diego shoves Kyle back into his chair.

INT. JULIA'S SUV - DAY (MOVING)

Julia drives like a bat out of hell. Her eyes dart between the road ahead and the phone mounted on her dash:

ON PHONE: Kyle's pale, a bit woozy. He trembles as he speaks.

KYLE (ON PHONE SCREEN)
 Nothing! I never... heard from him
 after your family left town back in
 high school... I swear to god.

She jams the gas pedal and surges ahead as --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

Diego strides around the desk so he's facing Kyle, his back to the camera. He leans close to Kyle, whispers.

DIEGO
 Now everyone knows the truth and we
 can finish this.

Diego gently lays the gun on the desk in front of Kyle. He steps back, spreads his arms wide. Waiting.

DIEGO
 Your move. Kyle.

Kyle looks down at the gun and next to it is --

Ricardo's necklace. The one he found all those years ago. The patron saint of lost things. He picks it up and --

CLICK! The space plunges into black.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Chief Booker sees the live stream go black on the tablet in his hands. He grabs his walkie talkie --

CHIEF BOOKER
 Update! Now!

SWAT LEADER (OVER WALKIE)
 Power's cut. Looks like from inside.

WHAM! Booker slams the hood of the car. Rolled out on the hood are warehouse blueprints. Slides it closer.

CHIEF BOOKER
 (into radio)
 Alpha team - go in. The entry. Long hallway. Get me an idea of where they are inside.

SWAT LEADER (ON RADIO)
 Copy that.

Across the street - the four SWAT OFFICERS in black, head-to-toe tactical gear at the front entrance.

Booker's phone rings - Vi. He answers.

CHIEF BOOKER

Cheng.

(no response)

Cheng! Get the fuck out here! Now!

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Click! The dim, amber wash of backup lights comes on.

Diego and Kyle squint as eyes adjust. Kyle sees --

The red light of the camera turns on. They're live again.

VI (O.S.)

Mr. Martinez. Nice to finally meet
you. I'm Detective Cheng.

In the open doorway is Vi, gun leveled at Diego. He instinctively takes a few steps back. Vi matches him step for step and she's in the room.

VI

Hands behind your head and kneel.

Diego sinks to his knees. Hands go up. Eyes never leave Vi's.

VI

Good. Just like that.

As Vi strides to Diego, we glimpse in her jacket pocket --

Her phone - it's on and connected to Chief Booker.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Booker listens to his phone.

VI (OVER PHONE)

Mr. Black? You okay?

Just a muffled response from Kyle.

VI (OVER PHONE)

Hang on for me, okay?

Booker switches from phone to walkie-talkie.

CHIEF BOOKER (INTO WALKIE)

Hostage confirmed alive. Black is
alive. Keep it that way.

INT. WAREHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

SWAT LEADER signals. Team stops, flanks the secure door.

Leader spies the key ring holding the door open. Glances through the crack and sees --

Diego kneeling, hands behind him. Vi, gun trained on him.

RAPID FIRE SERIES OF SHOTS

150A LARCHMONT CAMPAIGN OFFICE: Ronda paces, talks on the phone --

RONDA LARCHMONT
...and work mental health into my
acceptance speech.

150B IN LINE AT POLLING PLACE: The EMT speaks into her phone.

EMT
Still in line but I gotta bail. My
shift starts like, right now.

Hangs up and brings up the livestream as she leaves.

150C BEHIND HIS TRUCK: Construction Worker frantically tries to peel off a bumper stick for Kyle's campaign.

150D SARAH'S TRUCK: Enthralled, Sarah watches her livestream viewer count keeps going up, up, up. She cranks the engine --

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Vi's gun and eyes are on Diego as she talks to Kyle.

VI
Mr. Black, you're going to be alright.

Kyle nods. Blood loss starting to catch up.

VI
We're all going to be alright.

DIEGO
Optimistic, detective.

VI
I'd like to talk. That okay?

Diego shrugs - sure.

VI
What you did today? Pretty brave.

DIEGO

I've seen enough therapists at the V.A., I can teach a course on reverse psychology.

The two share a moment of understanding.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Chief's got the phone to one ear, the walkie to the other.

SWAT LEADER (OVER WALKIE)

(whispered)

Cheng's engaged the abductor. We have access.

CHIEF BOOKER (INTO WALKIE)

Hold position. On my word.

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

Vi continues - relaxed, conversational. But eyes alert.

VI

You remind me of my kid. Same focus. Sense of responsibility. Did three tours in Afghanistan. You did five?

DIEGO

Six. None of this has to do with that.

Vi nods her understanding, appreciation.

VI

When my kid came home, he'd changed. Barely recognized him. I handled it... poorly.

DIEGO

No one who makes it back is the same. Like my brother. Who wouldn't have even joined if I hadn't pushed him. Help him learn to stand up for himself. To be "a man." So no one could treat him the way -

(re: Kyle)

- he did, ever again. But the army... Ricky wasn't a soldier and I didn't realize it until it was too late. The IED. It fucked him and that was my fault. In the hospital bed. I realized it was all my fault.

(starting to crack)

He wasn't a soldier... an artist.

(MORE)

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Tried to make it up to him. I did, I swear. Ricky forgave me. I didn't deserve it, but THAT'S who he was. We started over again, clean slate. Tried to be the brother he deserved. And then... he was... he just disappeared. I can't lose him. My brother...

She lays her free hand on his shoulder. A small gesture of understanding. Nods towards out front.

VI

You trust me or them?

DIEGO

Wanna trust you.

VI

Good. Cause I want all of us to walk outta here. Safe and sound. We do that, I can help you.

She throws a quick glance to Kyle in the chair.

VI

Hang in there. We're almost done.

KYLE

M'okay.

DIEGO

You said you'd help me. How?

Vi pulls out her handcuffs.

VI

Step one, you and me walk you outta here together. No fuss, no muss.

Diego nods. Extends his hands behind him. Waits as Vi cuffs his wrists. She lets out a silent exhale of relief.

She helps Diego to his feet. Diego turns to face her.

DIEGO

When I close my eyes tonight, I'll see my brother's face. Just like I do every night since he disappeared.

VI

We get outta here, I'll help you find your brother. You have my word.

DIEGO

When I shot him I thought he'd do the right thing. But even then...

VI

Can't make someone care. Can only give them a chance to.

DIEGO

How many chances does he get?

VI

Not your decision. Or mine.

Diego fights to control his emotions.

VI

I get what you want. I respect it.

KYLE (O.S.)

I don't respect it. Not at all.

Vi and Diego spin to find --

Kyle. Pale, sweaty. Eyes wild. Shaky hands grip Diego's gun.

Vi instinctively steps in front of Diego, puts herself between him and Kyle.

VI

Lay the gun down, Mr. Black.

KYLE

Don't tell me what to do.

VI

(to Diego)

Gun yours?

DIEGO

Six rounds. Fired twice.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Chief Booker barks into his walkie.

CHIEF BOOKER

Go, go GO!

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - DAY

In an instant, SWAT Team is in, fanned out, low. Rifles trained on Kyle and Diego.

SWAT LEADER

Detective, we'll take it from here.

Vi waves off the SWAT Leader who signals her team to hold.

VI

Mr. Black, let's get you out now.

KYLE

Move. I want him.

VI

We have a doctor waiting for you -

Kyle's hand shakes. Adjusts his grip.

KYLE

Kids do stupid stuff, right?

VI

Absolutely.

KYLE

I'm more than that! Better than that.

DIEGO

No, you're a weak piece of shit, you are NOTHING!

KYLE

Shut up! SHUT UP!

In a flash, Diego kicks the back of Vi's knees and she tumbles backwards, knocking over the camera --

INT. JULIA'S CAR - SAME

Julia sees the feed go black.

JULIA

NO!

INT. WAREHOUSE STUDIO - SAME

VI

No!

And all at once:

- Kyle screams, fires wildly - bang! bang! bang! --
- SWAT leader fires, bang! as --
- Diego stumbles back, falls back on top of Vi and --

Kyle hits the ground. His eyes flutter.

PRELAP sounds of rushing water.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY - KYLE'S MEMORY (1997)

Warm, saturated. *Sunset burns the river's surface a fire-red.*

Ricardo and Kyle sit side by side on a river bank. Shirtless, skin still wet from a swim. Shoulders pressed together.

YOUNG KYLE

Your film's gonna be amazing.

Hands behind them, propping them up. Kyle's thumb finds Ricardo's. Hooks them together.

YOUNG RICARDO (O.S.)

Just want a scholarship. Got my whole life to become amazing. Statistically it takes five films before a director finds their voice, so -

YOUNG KYLE (O.S.)

I take it back. You won't be amazing.

The two young men smile and watch as the sun sinks past the horizon. It's quiet. Just the soft, steady sound of the river. Kyle lays his head on Ricardo's shoulder as we...

SNAP TO BLACK.

INT. KYLE & JULIA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM

Adelaide's curled up on the sofa watching the news coverage.

Her phone pings with a text. She checks it --

MARITZA: a lawyer? STFU!!!!

Adelaide fires off her response with a smile:

ADELAIDE: see?? they're not ALL bad! <3

On the end table, Adelaide pours herself a tumbler of very expensive bourbon, sits back and settles in with a smile.

PRELAP: The hum of voices. Not urgent, but focused --

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Shadows stretch as the sun kisses the horizon.

The aftermath: Emergency vehicles. Lights strobe. People talk, pack up. Fill out reports. Phone calls. Jokes.

FIND Vi by an ambulance. Shoulder bandaged and in a sling. Booker talks to her.

CHIEF BOOKER

...will be a formal investigation. And given how it shook out...

Booker lets the moment hang there.

VI

You want me to call this self-defense.

CHIEF BOOKER

The Martinez guy took him hostage.

Vi scoffs in disbelief. Booker steps close.

CHIEF BOOKER

Last thing we need is a murder investigation into a congressman-elect.

Vi scoffs, starts to turn away. Booker grabs Vi's good arm.

CHIEF BOOKER

What if you didn't have to wait three years to retire?

(off Vi's surprise)

Effective tomorrow. Full pension and benefits? I can make it happen.

(then)

You think your life's been difficult because of this lawsuit?

Vi yanks her arm back, spins and strides away.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Across the street from the warehouse, REPORTERS and GAWKERS gather behind a POLICE BARRIER.

Julia rushes up. She's stopped by a COP, who won't let her pass. Julia freezes when she spots --

A CORONER TECH pushes a covered stretcher from the warehouse.

Julia shoves past the cop, races across the street --

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Out of breath, eyes wide, Julia stops. Stares the stretcher.

VI (O.S.)
Mrs. Black!

She spins to find --

Vi by the open back doors of an ambulance. She steps aside revealing --

Kyle in the back. Shirt off, pant leg cut off, wound dressed.

VI
He's gonna be okay.

An EMT checks the IV he's hooked up to. (Same EMT who stood in line to vote.)

EMT
Gave him something for the pain. Gonna be soaring real soon.

Kyle mumbles and Vi watches as --

INT. AMBULANCE BACK - DAY

Julia scrambles in next to Kyle.

Sees his thigh, bandaged where he got shot. She gently touches a fierce bruise on his chest. Kyle gasps.

JULIA
What happened?

VI
Non-lethal bullets. Standard hostage protocol since an asshole detective sued her own department last year.

Outside the ambulance, Vi feigns modesty with a shrug.

Julia nods at the bloody bandage on Vi's shoulder.

JULIA
That doesn't look non-lethal.

VI
Abductor's gun. Fired by your husband whose aim by the way, is terrible.

JULIA
Not everyone gets their target.

VI
But some do, don't they?

Vi holds Julia's gaze. Julia's smile is as warm as a mid-winter Arctic sun.

JULIA

If there's ever anything we can do...

VI

I'd rather take a hundred bullets than owe you or your husband a single fucking thing.

As Vi leaves and we follow her around the ambulance to --

EXT. AMBULANCE SIDE - DAY

A CORONER TECH, 30s, female, Native American, pushes the gurney with a covered body. Vi stops them.

VI

May I?

Coroner Tech nods. Vi slides the sheet back to find --

Diego, in death. Vi lays a hand on his shoulder. Offers a moment of silence.

VI (V.O.)

The difference between a dilemma and a problem - a problem can be solved.

Vi nods. Coroner Tech covers Diego and moves on. The ambulance's engine roar life, pulls away revealing --

ACROSS THE STREET: Sarah at the barricade. REPORTERS surround her, shouting questions.

Vi clocks this, shakes her head in disbelief.

VI (V.O.)

But with a dilemma, the best we can hope for is survival.

INT. AMBULANCE BACK - DAY (MOVING)

EMT monitors Kyle's vitals, who's starting to doze. On the other side of Kyle, Julia leans close to him.

JULIA

They called the race. You won.

KYLE

No, no, no.

Kyle shakes his head, tries to rise. Julia takes his face in one hand. Makes him look at her.

The EMT pretends not to watch or listen.

JULIA

News cycles are shorter than voter's memories.

KYLE

Jus' want to forget it all.

She takes out the RED PHONE.

JULIA

I could divorce you. Run in the next election. If the contents of this phone were to go public, the sympathy vote for me would bury you forever. But we've come too far, haven't we?

Julia lays the red phone on his chest.

JULIA

Everything you said? It was because he had a gun. Wasn't it?

Even in his fog, Kyle gets it. Licks his parched lips. Swallows, finds his voice.

KYLE

Was so scared of losing you and Frances. I'd have said anything.

JULIA

Anyone would have. Anyone. But babe, what you did in front of all of us? They're calling you a hero.

KYLE

Want to tell you everything -

JULIA

Yes. But now, sleep. Heal. We have important work to do. Together.

She leans close, whispering to Kyle, her warmth returns...

JULIA

That's why I burned the letters he sent. Deleted his emails from the server. It's why he's gone.

KYLE

Gone?

JULIA

Like he never even existed.

As a smile of satisfaction tugs on her lips, she kisses his forehead, Kyle's eyes flutter closed, painkillers kicking in.

VI (V.O.)

And I guess now it's my turn.

FADE TO:

INT. VI'S OFFICE - NIGHT

On a computer monitor, a Crime Scene Report:

COLLECTING OFFICER'S NAME: DETECTIVE VIOLET CHENG

NATURE OF INCIDENT:

The cursor sits there: *Blink-blink-blink*. Then --

VI (V.O.)

Cause from where I sit, the difference
between truth and fiction isn't
getting clearer any time soon.

Typing starts --

NATURE OF INCIDENT: S E L F - D E F E N S E

Vi at her computer. CLICKS 'submit' and the report is sent.

Lays her gun and badge on the desk. Grabs her cell phone and dials as she ambles to the door. Looks around one last time.

VI

Hey, hon. Running late. But on my way.

As she leaves, Vi flicks off the light and we --

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END

*