

TOWER OF BABEL

Written By

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BLACK SCREEN

"Society honors its living conformist and its dead troublemakers." - Mignon McLaughlin

FADE IN:

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

A BUSTLING OFFICE filled with people working on various newspaper stories.

People TYPING at computers.

A woman answering the PHONE.

A man PHOTOCOPYING a file.

A self-confident woman, mid-twenties in a business suit sits at her desk typing at a computer. This is ANNE GREEN.

Anne's pager BEEPS. She takes it out of her pocket and holds it up in front of her.

She STARES determinedly at the screen, taking in every detail of the news.

She gets up and WALKS across the office. People move out of the way to let her past.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The EDITOR, an uptight man in his early fifties sits at his desk, listening to a PHONE.

Anne walks into the room, closing the door behind her.

The editor gives her a hand gesture, telling her to wait.

EDITOR
(into phone)
Sorry, I'll call you back.
Something's come up.

The editor hangs up the phone. These two are quite familiar.

EDITOR
What have you got?

ANNE
Dead girl. Cassandra Ryan.
Suicide. The club on Markham
Street.

(CONTINUED)

EDITOR
Drug influence?

ANNE
Possibly.

EDITOR
(beat)
All right then. Story's yours.

ANNE
Thanks.

EDITOR
How are you going to handle it?

ANNE
The usual. I'll talk to the
associated, might even visit the
scene. I'll write what I learn.

EDITOR
I knew I hired you for something.

ANNE
You hired me because I write
articles that people read.
There's nothing more than that.

EDITOR
Maybe.
(picks up phone again)
Keep up the high standards and
you'll rise fast.

ANNE
You tell me that every time I get
paged.

EDITOR
That's because it's true every
time.
(beat)
Are you going to write this thing
or are you going to stand there
waving your talent in my face?
Off you go.

He dials a number into the phone with one hand and gives a
"go away" gesture with the other.

Anne pushes open the door and walk out in one swift
movement.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

Anne sits at her desk, working on her computer.

She is looking at Cassie's FACEBOOK page. She clicks through several photos. They show Cassie posing with her friends, having fun.

She clicks onto the "Information" tab. She scrolls down through the parts of the page. Cassie's favorite band was *The Whitlams*, her favorite film was *Hard Candy*.

Anne is fascinated.

She scrolls down to the bottom of the page. Cassie worked at *The Coffee Club*.

Anne grabs a PHONE BOOK from under her desk.

She flicks through the book until she finds *The Coffee Club*. She takes note of the address.

Anne grabs a NOTEPAD from her desk and puts it into her bag. She picks up her bag and walks away.

EXT. MALL - DAY

Anne walks through a crowded mall. She is keenly observing her surroundings. She spies the entrance to a SHOPPING CENTRE.

She takes her notebook out of her bag and checks the address. It's correct. She walks into the shopping centre.

INT. SHOPPING CENTRE - DAY

Anne walks through the shopping centre. People are moving around everywhere, shopping, making phone calls. This place is alive.

Anne checks the big plastic MAP stood in the middle of the hall.

Her finger traces across the map and stops over *The Coffee Club*.

Satisfied, Anne walks off down the hall.

INT. COFFEE CLUB - DAY

A WAITRESS is standing at the counter, serving a customer.

Anne walks into the cafe.

The customer walks away from the counter, making room for Anne to approach.

ANNE

Hi, do you know a girl called
Cassandra Ryan?

WAITRESS

Yeah. She worked here. Why?

ANNE

Do you know where she lived?

WAITRESS

45 Kenworth Avenue. Why?

ANNE

I'm investigating an incident.

WAITRESS

(annoyed)

Who are you?

ANNE

I'm Anne Green, a journalist. I'm
investigating the recent suicide
of Cassandra Ryan.

WAITRESS

Suicide?

ANNE

Yes, suicide. She jumped off the
roof of the Markham Street club
last night.

WAITRESS

Shit. Isn't it the police's job
to investigate?

ANNE

It's my job to find out the
truth. That's what I aim to do.

(beat)

Were you friends with Cassie?

WAITRESS

(disgruntled)

Yeah. We had the same shift.
She's supposed to be working now.

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

Then I guess you'd better tell
your boss she's dead.

WAITRESS

Yeah.

(beat)

Can I get you anything?

ANNE

I'll be fine, thanks. I've got
everything I need.

WAITRESS

Okay.

Anne walks out the shop, leaving the waitress standing,
horrified.

INT. CAR - DAY

Anne drives down a high class street, big, expensive
houses on every street.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY

Anne parks out the front of the McMansion. She gets out of
the car and walks up to the front door.

She rings the doorbell. She waits at the door.

A woman, mid-forties answers the door in her dressing
gown. She is SMOKING and looks terrible.

ANNE

Mrs. Ryan?

MRS. RYAN looks at Anne sceptically.

MRS. RYAN

Who the fuck are you? You're not
the police are you?

ANNE

I'm not the police. I'm a
journalist. I'd like to talk to
you about Cassie.

MRS. RYAN

What else would you want to talk
about. Little Miss Big kills
herself. Big story.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MRS. RYAN (cont'd)
Ugh, fuck it. Come in. See if I
care.

She wanders back inside the house and Anne follows her.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY

Mrs. Ryan wanders into the kitchen and picks up a glass of wine from the bench. She DRINKS it as Anne walks into the room.

MRS. RYAN
Go on then. Quiz me.

ANNE
Do you want to sit down?

MRS. RYAN
This isn't *Mystic River* darling.
Just ask your questions and get
the fuck out of my house.

ANNE
All right. Do you know why Cassie
killed herself?

MRS. RYAN
Not really. We were good to her.
Doug can be a bit of a prick
sometimes. Perhaps that's it.

ANNE
Where is your husband?

MRS. RYAN
Fuck if I know.

ANNE
Right. Was Cassie taking any kind
of drugs?

MRS. RYAN
No. She wasn't.

ANNE
Are you sure? Teen suicide is
often linked to drug addiction.

MRS. RYAN
She wasn't. Even if she was, you
are not writing a story about it.
You won't turn my daughter into a
fucking martyr.

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

I just want to to find the truth.

MRS. RYAN

And I just want my daughter to come home. But that's not going to fucking happen now, is it?

ANNE

I don't think that attitude is helping you very much.

MRS. RYAN

Do you?

(beat)

Whoop-dee-fucking-doo.

ANNE

I'm trying to help you.

MRS. RYAN

Don't lie. You're trying to make money. You don't really give a shit. Those cops that told me didn't really give a shit. And I don't really give a shit about your article.

ANNE

I don't expect you to. Just tell me how you want people to remember your daughter.

MRS. RYAN

She was a good girl that did brilliantly in everything. Except netball, she was rubbish at that. Someone fucked her up and she killed herself. That's what you write.

ANNE

I'm going to write the truth.

MRS. RYAN

Someone fucked her up and she killed herself. That's what you're going to write.

ANNE

(beat)

All right.

MRS. RYAN

Get the fuck out of my house.

Anne, annoyed walks out of the room.

EXT. MARKHAM ST. CLUB - DAY

Anne stands outside the club, cordoned off by the police.

Inside, the CLUB OWNER is being interviewed by the police.

There is an drawn OUTLINE of a body around a pool of BLOOD on the footpath where Cassie fell. It has it's arms and legs extended, as though the departed tried to make a snow angel.

Anne tried to get the attention of a male forensic police OFFICER in a white forensic suit, working on the scene.

ANNE

Hey! You in the white!

The officer reluctantly gets up.

OFFICER

Excuse me?

ANNE

Can I ask you a few questions about the incident?

OFFICER

How many officers have actually said "yes" to that question?

ANNE

Sometimes I get the dumb ones. I take it that you won't?

OFFICER

There's be a press release later today.

ANNE

Fat lot of good that is. Oh well, it was worth a try.

OFFICER

Have a nice day mam.

ANNE

Are you kidding? I'm having a really great day. I know more about this thing than you lot do already.

OFFICER

Oh really?

ANNE

Definitely. I could probably share it with you over lunch.

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER

When would that liaison take place?

ANNE

(after looking at watch)
Tomorrow. *The Coffee Club*.

OFFICER

I'll see you then.

Anne SMILES and walks away from the scene.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Anne stands outside the front gates of a school.

After a few seconds, TEENAGERS come spewing out of the main building.

Anne spies three teenage girls, chatting.

She waits until they leave the school and joins the group.

ANNE

Excuse me.

The girls STOP and face Anne.

ANNE

Did you three know Cassandra Ryan?

One GIRL responds.

GIRL

Yeah. Me and her were good friends.

ANNE

I take it you are aware of the fact that she died last night.

GIRL

Yeah. What of it?

ANNE

I was hoping you could give me some information on why she killed herself.

GIRL

Didn't the cops tell you?

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

Tell me what?

GIRL

Cassie did smack.

ANNE

She was a heroin addict?

GIRL

Yeah, she did shloads of the stuff.

ANOTHER GIRL pipes up.

OTHER GIRL

Amy, are you sure you should be telling her that?

AMY

It shouldn't be a secret. Maybe this will make people stop doing it.

ANNE

I doubt that. One last thing, did Cassie have a boyfriend?

AMY

Yeah, James Kennedy. He's not here today though.

ANNE

Can you tell me where he lives?

EXT. KENNEDY HOUSE - DAY

Anne stands outside a generic, middle-class suburban house.

She walks up to the front door. She RINGS the doorbell.

After a while FOOTSTEPS approach the door. Someone slumps against the door.

ANNE

Are you James Kennedy?

JAMES

Yes. Who are you?

ANNE

I'm a journalist. I'd like to talk to you about Cassie.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Really? Fuck off!

JAMES is heard WALKING AWAY into the house. Anne stands at the door, disgruntled.

She walks back towards the road.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Anne walks into the office. She stands at the door, satisfied with her day's work.

The editor looks up from his book, *The Lovely Bones*.

EDITOR
That was quick.

ANNE
I'm the best.

EDITOR
Did you get everything you need?

ANNE
I did.

EDITOR
Is this going to cause anyone
"immense displeasure"?

ANNE
Only if they want it to.

EDITOR
Then get to writing.

The conversation is over as quickly as it began. Anne LEAVES.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

Anne sits at her computer, TYPING.

People zoom in and out of the office in super fast motion but Anne just sits and types. In super-fast-motion, we watch the sun set.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - NIGHT

Anne finishes her article. She sends it to be published. She gets up and walks off, finally finishing her day's work.

INT. COFFEE CLUB - DAY

Anne sits at her scheduled lunch with the forensic officer, now wearing a plain suit. Now that we see his face, he is a handsome, bearded man in his late-twenties with combed hair. Anne is happier than we have seen her.

OFFICER
(flirtatious)
So did you find out anything that would help in our investigation?

ANNE
I might have. You'd have to interrogate me to find out though.

OFFICER
I just do the crime scenes. It's not like in CSI where I'd be doing everything and I'd be doing it in a very fashionable coat.

ANNE
You could stand to use the coat. The whole "hazard suit" look doesn't really suit you.

OFFICER
I don't really think I need to dress up when I go to work. I prefer the whites to the "let's invade Poland" uniforms.

ANNE
Maybe I like a man in uniform.

OFFICER
Then maybe you should go and get one of the buffed uniform cops, fresh out of the academy.

ANNE
I also like a man with a brain.

OFFICER
And I seem to like women that pounce on me when I'm cleaning up dead people.

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

(chuckles)

Is that in the police brochure?
Solve murders, fight criminals
and pick up chicks.

OFFICER

I actually got a lecture on how
policing can help you get laid
once.

Anne begins to laugh just as MRS. RYAN WALKS IN the modest
cafe.

Anne double-takes.

She keeps listening to her date talking, trying to hide
from Mrs. Ryan. She fails.

Mrs. Ryan sees Anne and power-walks over to her as though
she is about to tear her into pieces.

MRS. RYAN

You bitch!

ANNE

I don't really think this is
appro...

MRS. RYAN

You lying bitch!

ANNE

I think we should take this
outside.

MRS. RYAN

So do I!

Anne stands calmly until Mrs. Ryan has left the shop.

She turns to her date.

ANNE

I'll be back in a minute.

She follows Mrs. Ryan out.

INT. SHOPPING CENTRE - DAY

Anne walks out of the shop and is greeted by Mrs. Ryan,
furious. She isn't drunk like last time though.

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

What did I do?

MRS. RYAN

You wrote a big article about how big a fucking junkie my daughter was.

ANNE

She was a heroin addict.

MRS. RYAN

Says who?

ANNE

Her school friends, her lifestyle, her death.

MRS. RYAN

And you just decided to tell the world.

ANNE

I'm a journalist. It's my job.

MRS. RYAN

You could have written about how she was a smart and beautiful girl. Why didn't you write about that?

ANNE

Because I write the truth.

MRS. RYAN

And does that make you happy?

ANNE

Yes.

MRS. RYAN

(beat)

You're not special. You're just another fucking corporate puppet.

Anne stands in an impenetrable shell of self-assurance as Mrs. Ryan flings insults at her.

MRS. RYAN (CONT.D)

You ruin people's lives to make money and live a "high flyer" corporate lifestyle! You suck your editor's dick for a living! Someone fucked up my daughter and told the world a lie!

Anne finally cracks.

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

Your daughter fucked herself up!

Anne regains her composition.

ANNE (CONT.D)

And I told the truth about it. If you can't take what your daughter was then that's no one's fault but yours and you'd better have another look at your life because it looks pretty bad from where I'm standing.

Mrs. Ryan has nothing to say. Anne has won.

Anne walks back inside the club.

INT. COFFEE CLUB - DAY

Anne, satisfied walks back into the shop and sits down opposite her date, keen to get back to business.

OFFICER

What was that all about?

ANNE

An article I wrote yesterday.

OFFICER

What was her problem?

ANNE

I told the truth.

OFFICER

What's so horrible about that?

ANNE

The truth hurts.

OFFICER

And yet you still told it.

ANNE

You're a police officer. You understand.

OFFICER

True.

(re: Mrs. Ryan)

But I don't think she does.

This cuts Anne more deeply than anything Mrs. Ryan has said. She doesn't respond.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

Anne once again sits at her desk, typing. She is less enthusiastic now, though.

An INTERN walks up to her.

INTERN

Anne? The editor wants to see you.

Anne lets out a resigned sigh and gets up to see the editor.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Anne walks through the door and pulls a chair up opposite the editor, who is still sitting at his desk. She sits down.

EDITOR

I've received complaints from a Mrs. M. Ryan about your article in today's paper. Several other members of her family have expressed their concern as well. Would you be able to explain to me why this is?

ANNE

I wrote an article about a drug addict that killed herself.

EDITOR

Was it inflammatory?

ANNE

Did you even read it? You're the editor.

EDITOR

I don't normally need to read your work Anne, it's always up to a certain standard. I'm starting to have qualms about that policy, though.

ANNE

The article wasn't inflammatory. It simply told the story as it happened.

EDITOR

Those are two not-entirely-dissimilar concepts Miss Green.

(CONTINUED)

ANNE

I wrote an honest article. I did my job.

EDITOR

Honesty is not always synonymous with the truth.

ANNE

What would you have preferred I'd done? Did you want me to write a pack of lies about how great this girl was and how big a tragedy this is?

EDITOR

Grow up Anne. You're a journalist.

ANNE

What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

EDITOR

It means that if you write for me then you write what people want to hear.

ANNE

What is this, a propaganda paper?

EDITOR

We're a tabloid Anne.

ANNE

Then maybe I'm working for the wrong paper.

EDITOR

Every paper you go to will tell the same thing. Even the Herald is turning tabloid.

ANNE

Well I'm going to keep telling the truth. Hell, I might even start a blog, become an internet weirdo.

EDITOR

Are you dissatisfied with our practices? Because if you are then you can leave.

ANNE

Then I guess that's what I'll do.

Anne defiantly leaves the room.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

Anne STORMS over to her desk and begins to put her stuff into her bag.

BEEP

It's Anne's pager. She takes it out of her pocket and reads the screen. Something sparks in her eye.

She finishes packing up and leaves.

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

Anne walks out of the building and towards the road.

She reaches her CAR and gets in.

INT. CAR - DAY

Anne sits in the driver's seat. She puts the pager down on the passenger seat.

The screen reads...

"HOSPITAL DEATH. DAVID FOSTER. 35."

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

The car drives away, leaving the city street bustling with activity.

FADE OUT.