

ETHEREAL

Written by  
Anton Pisotski

Copyright (c) 2020

antonpisotski@gmail.com, +79057775150

FADE IN:

EXT. GARDEN OF EDEN - NIGHT

The sun sets on the ancient orchard spread over the rugged, wind-swept terrain. A lonely FARMER in shabby clothes tills the soil around a struggling little tree.

A short distance away, a vintage TV set with 4 legs, rabbit ears antenna and no wires in sight shows a cheering crowd in costumes and tinsel hats.

The "Millennium NBC News" logo is seen in the corner of the screen and its host Tom Brokaw is heard in the background.

TOM BROKAW (V.O.)

We're back in Times Square. One hour and twenty minutes as you can see there on the countdown clock before they drop a Waterford crystal ball. The crowd is becoming increasingly restless, increasingly eager for this New Year ...

The farmer straightens his back, puts aside his hoe and gets in a lawn chair in front of the TV.

TOM BROKAW (V.O.) (cont'd)

A man who has made a lot of money in this city but has taken his Millennium celebration south is Donald Trump.

The TV shows young Donald Trump, wearing a suit and a bow tie.

TOM BROKAW (V.O.) (cont'd)

What do you think the future is gonna mean for this country, Donald, in terms of economic trends?

DONALD TRUMP (ON TV)

Well, I think the country is gonna be great. It's the greatest country ever in the world and I think we have a great future.

The farmer picks up a can of "God's Favorite" cider from a case next to him.

TOM BROKAW (ON TV)

And does that mean that you're gonna run for President or has it just been a putting your toe in the water or gaining a little more publicity for the Trump Empire?

DONALD TRUMP (ON TV)

Ha-ha, well, I'm looking at it, I'm looking at it seriously, Tom. I mean, the polls have shown good, the ratings certainly show good. A lot of things show good. So we're looking at it and I think I do a good job ...

As Donald Trump keeps bragging in the background, the farmer puts aside his drink and breaks the fourth wall.

FARMER

Self-regard - is one thing I always admire about men. In this Millennium I've heard just about everything. Man is the crown of creation. Man is the measure of all things. Man was made in God's image, while woman was made in man's ...

The TV flickers and starts showing images: an all-male G7 summit; a UN Security Council; a crowd of agitated male traders on the floor of the NY Exchange ...

FARMER (O.S.)

Men create true change in the world. They form nations and build the empires ...

On TV: A young male producer seals a deal with the male studio executives, the Columbia Pictures logo seen in the background ...

FARMER (O.S.) (cont'd)

And after a hard day's labor, what does a man dream of ...?

That same man, in the dark of a cinema hall, exchanges glances with his lady friend, his palm makes warm contact with hers as he watches ...

FARMER (O.S.) (cont'd)

He wants to be like no other man ...

The Spider-Man swoop upside down on the drenched but happy Kirsten Dunst.

FARMER

But then growing spinnerets and jumping off the buildings won't land you a perfect mate in real life. So for the new Millennium I've decided to give him something more potent. You hear about the male walking fish spewing pheromones to arouse the female ...?

The farmer picks up another can and watches mating amphibians going into a frenzy on his TV screen.

FARMER (cont'd)

But man is not fish. He has feelings. Love, anger, pride, fear ... And how do you work out all those chemistries that entail those feelings? And then how do you preserve this ability throughout generations ...? Well, your men of science will tell you better than me. And there he is ...

The TV flickers and shows a smiling Latino man JESÚS, in a snow-white chef's kit, working on his gastronomy masterpiece.

FARMER (O.S.)

Not the brightest bulb in the pack but I have a good feeling about him.

On TV: Encouraged by the cheers and gasps from the audience, Jesús skillfully blends his ingredients, making them coagulate to a luminous jelly and evaporate to a blanket of mist atop the jelly.

He finishes cooking, fondly places his piece on a silver tray.

HOLLY, a lovely TV presenter, cheerfully joins him.

HOLLY (ON TV)

Amazing, all those little tricks you did ...

INT. TV STUDIO - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The CAMERA follows Holly.

HOLLY

Now give me the secret. How did you manage this cloudy little thing on top? It just won't go away!

JESÚS

(solemnly)

It's Magic.

Holly gets confused but plays it off.

HOLLY

Ladies and Gentlemen, Jesús Martínez and his kitchen magic!

The audience bursts into applause. Jesús, fascinated by it all, stares at the beaming spotlights.

HOLLY (cont'd)

And we'll see you next week on Cooking Wonders!

DIRECTOR

Cut!

The spotlights switch off. The audience members hurry to get in line for the paycheck.

Holly drops her happy face as the crew goes about the business of wrapping up.

Jesús, smiling and holding out the tray, approaches Holly.

JESÚS

Did you know there are forty nine ways to cook Dôme Au Citron? I think I have a number fifty here.

Holly barely glances at him, goes back to her routine.

JESÚS (cont'd)

The restaurant I work for is just a few blocks away. I could give you a tour. I mean - show you some tricks.

Holly locks on to Jesús.

HOLLY

You bet - when you have a big car, a nice little chain and a few million in your bank account ... but I don't see that happening, do you?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BALLROOM - NEW YORK - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

A large expensive restaurant. The waiters scurry between the tables carrying sumptuous dishes.

Sitting at a table are two men in suits and two women in evening dresses. MARTY, in his early 50s, does the talking.

MARTY

... no, I'm not getting political. I'm talking about common sense and rational thinking. Because rationality is the last public good I'm willing to buy into. If you get pox, you don't go to a soothsayer. If someone unloads an AR-15 into a crowd, it's not about what kind of snakes he's got in his head. It's about where he got that AR-15 -

The WAITER approaches.

WAITER

Here you go, Caesar Salad, beef steak, gazpacho and ...

He places a large plate in front of Marty.

WAITER (cont'd)

Taboulé de Chou-Fleur! Enjoy.

The Waiter leaves. JOSH, a fellow guest ...

JOSH

Taboulé de Chou-Fleur, huh ...?

ALICE, an elegant and attractive woman in her mid-30s, Marty's companion, comes to rescue.

ALICE

It actually sounds more complicated than it is. You take the original Taboulé recipe and change the gluten-rich semolina to a healthy little cauliflower, chou-fleur that is.

JOSH

Interesting ... if only I knew what Taboulé is.

MARTY

I don't care how it's pronounced. As long as it tastes good.

JOSH

Well she's the cook, I guess she's treating you well now that she quit.

MARTY

You can't imagine...

(fake whisper)

Every night she thinks up something better ... it's like the belly of the beast on a daily basis.

Josh glances to his wife ELEANOR.

ELEANOR

Sure I'd love to start cooking, but three kids, who has the time?

ALICE'S KNIFE suddenly digs into the plate, making a SCREECHING sound.

Silence.

JOSH

Marty says you're writing a book. Is it about healthy squashes too?

ALICE

I'm just - feeling my way at the moment.

MARTY

She's very coy about the whole thing. I'll tell you a secret though. Day after tomorrow, she'll be on Food Network. Bobby Flay.

JOSH

Wow, that's -

The PRESENTER on stage suddenly takes the mic.

PRESENTER

And now the moment we've all been waiting for. The award that celebrates the best in American journalism.

(MORE)

PRESENTER (cont'd)

Our final nominee is an individual who has achieved the highest standards in editorial success and he reigns at the top of one of the most renown media organizations. This year the award goes to ... the chief editor of the New York Times, Marty Haden.

Marty stands to APPLAUSE. He makes his way through the ballroom, shakes hands and accepts congratulations.

INT./EXT. MARTY'S CAR - NIGHT

Marty, slightly tipsy, bids farewell to a few others.

FELLOW

Hey, don't lose your Oscar!

Marty climbs in the back seat of a limousine where Alice waits. The car starts and off they go.

MARTY

Bozos. But you know what, I think I'm getting to like these bashes ...

(turns to Alice)

Am I getting old?

Alice glances back indifferently.

MARTY (cont'd)

What's wrong? You didn't like the soup?

Marty's joke hangs in the air.

ALICE

Josh's wife ... you think she knows?

MARTY

Knows what?

ALICE

About the baby.

MARTY

For Christ's sake, Alice. How could she know?



ALICE

Seems everyone does. You think your stooges don't gossip around that office?

MARTY

Come on, honey. Even if she knew, it was offhand. I'm sure there was nothing behind it.

Clearly, Alice remains adamant.

MARTY (cont'd)

Did you know she had an affair with a married staffer? Just before getting pregnant with her second?

A faint smile on Alice's face.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

An ALARM. Alice silences it. She gets out of bed. Next to her, Marty stirs to life.

INT.MARTY'S HOUSE - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

Alice, in a dressing gown, grabs the mail. On her way to the kitchen, she sorts through it, picks out an envelop addressed to Marty and a couple of newspapers. She starts making cappuccinos.

Marty comes down, already dressed and ready to go. She passes him a thermo cup along with his newspapers.

MARTY

Oh, here, this one's for you.

Marty holds out an envelop. Alice hesitates, then unseals it. Inside is a cook book.

MARTY (cont'd)

Julia Child, first edition. Don't overcook! You need to get out more.

Marty kisses her and leaves.

Alice tosses the book aside.

INT. LES AMIS RESTAURANT - NEW YORK - DAY

Alice steps into an empty restaurant. A young waitress leads her to a table.

SHOT - ALICE glances at the menu.

ALICE  
Caprese and a glass of Chardonnay.

SHOT - LATER as Alice, glass half empty, types on her notebook.

"Dining can be like a great theater ...".

She hesitates, deletes, writes again, "Fine-dining culture is by no means ..."

She deletes again. She sips her glass as the WAITRESS sets the salad on the table.

WAITRESS  
Throes of creation, huh?

ALICE  
(glances up)  
Kind of.

WAITRESS  
Same here. Stayed up all night  
cooking my quote soup.

Alice forces a grin.

WAITRESS (cont'd)  
What's yours about ...? I'm sorry, I  
shouldn't have -

ALICE  
No, no. It's actually a book. About  
the restaurant scene here in New York  
and how it's ... different.

WAITRESS  
Oh ... cool.

The Waitress leaves.

SHOT - THE HEAD WAITER approaches Alice's table.

HEAD WAITER

I hope you enjoyed your meal. Is there anything else we can do for you, ma'am?

ALICE

Yes, Cobb Salad and two servings of Champignon Parmentier. For takeaway, please.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marty and Alice dine across from each other.

MARTY

... you know me, I'm not stingy. But hey, you can't show up every six months just because you feel under-appreciated. You ought to give something back once in a while. Show your competence, respect the deadlines ...

Alice listens. Uninterested. He notices ... sorta.

MARTY (cont'd)

This casserole. I mean the salad was good, but this one - sends shivers down my spine. What did you put in here?

ALICE

Sage leaf - I think - and nutmeg.

MARTY

Yeah, thought so.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Alice removes her makeup.

Marty, in his bathrobe, sees Alice's door ajar.

MARTY

So tomorrow ... a big day.

ALICE

Yes ... Do you think you could ask Danny to drive me to the studio?

MARTY

Why? Something wrong with your car?

ALICE

No, nothing. It's just I'd feel more confident if I didn't have to worry about parking.

MARTY (O.S.)

Yeah, well, you know how the word spreads. Misuse of company resources and all that ... Why don't you call the cab?

ALICE

Yes, I will. After all, I don't want you to get into any more trouble because of me.

MARTY (O.S.)

(beat)

You know what, I'll be stuck in the office and he's just laying around anyway, so I'll ask him.

Alice finishes removing her face wash, heads towards a door.

MARTY (O.S.) (cont'd)

You'll make a splash there, *Smartie*.

Alice freezes, then heads to the bedroom.

INT. FOOD NETWORK - TV STUDIO - DAY

BOBBY FLAY works alongside two young actresses.

Alice watches from backstage and feels desperately old.

BOBBY

Now cut the tomatoes ... good, you should finish that up in less than a year.

(audience laughs)

Now let's give them good company and mix them with the beans ... nah, nah, wrong pan.

(audience laughs)

Here we go. Now what should we do next?

ACTRESS

I don't know. I'm lost.

BOBBY

Of course you're lost. But I know someone who can help us find our way out of the weeds. She has spent nearly a decade as the chief food critic for the New York Times. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome, Alice Reed.

The audience APPLAUDS. Alice walks out on stage.

SHOT - LATER as Bobby holds Alice's hands, says warm thanks.

SHOT - ALICE, contented, heads towards the exit. Bobby's ASSISTANT catches up.

ASSISTANT

Miss Reed. Bobby asked me to give you this.

(hands the bag)

A treat for your loved ones.

Alice takes the bag.

INT. TOWN CAR - DAY

As the car pushes through Manhattan traffic, Alice looks at the paper bag resting beside her.

ALICE

(to the driver)

Danny, I think I'll walk from here.

EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY

Alice wanders aimlessly through the lunchtime crowds.

She waits for the light next to SAN ELIAS BOTANICA SHOP, refusing to risk crossing like everyone else.

But someone in their rush BUMPS Alice, knocking her against the bargain stall outside the botanica shop. WE HEAR the sound of broken glass. Alice looks at her feet.

A smashed vial lies in the muddy pavement.

INT. SAN ELIAS BOTANICA SHOP - DAY

Alice steps inside.

HELENA, a middle-aged Mexican lady, stands before her.

On the shelves behind her is an assortment of herbs, votive candles, amulets, and statues of catholic saints.

Helena, gesticulating wildly, heads to the corner where teenage MANUEL is messing with some herbs. A small TV playing beach volley ball keeps grabbing his attention.

She gives him what for in Spanish, not a word of which we understand ...

ALICE  
(interrupting)  
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to -

Alice tugs out her credit card. Stuck to an old cash register are the hand-written notes "Cash only" and "Buy 1, get 1 free".

ALICE (cont'd)  
I'd like to pay for that broken bottle. Outside.

Helena glances at her wallet.

HELENA  
Wait.

Helena disappears in back, leaving Alice alone with the boy.

Manuel draws a dried INSECT from the jar with tweezers. He cringes, then hastily grinds it up in the spice crusher.

Helena returns with the POS terminal.

HELENA (cont'd)  
Aqui tengo uno... El Verifone!

Helena struggles to switch on the terminal as Manuel watches on cheerfully.

MANUEL  
Si quieres, puedo encenderla.

HELENA  
Puedo manejarlo, vuelve a tu televisor ... Ajá!

The terminal produces a starting peep.

MANUEL  
No el verifone ... La señora.

Helena looks appraisingly at Alice.

HELENA  
You have a problem with your husband?

ALICE  
What ...?

HELENA  
Your husband does not treat you well.  
He can help you.

ALICE  
He? Who's he?

Perplexed, Helena motions to Manuel.

HELENA  
El curandero... the healer.

ALICE  
Healer? Oh is he now? I just want to  
pay for the vial and go ...

Manuel starts filling a vial, speaking out the names.

MANUEL  
Un poco de damiana, una pizca de  
salvia, cabeza de negro...

HELENA  
Habla Inglés!

MANUEL  
... y finalmente el ingrediente  
secreto...

Manuel adds a vaporous colorless liquid from a bottle decorated with skull and bones, screws a cap onto the vial, then slides it down the counter.

MANUEL (cont'd)  
Break one, get one free.

Helena tears off a receipt, hands it back together with the credit card and the bottle to Alice.

HELENA  
(nods to the street)  
That one was the free one.

EXT: OUTSIDE THE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Alice steps out of the shop. She crumples the receipt and throws it in the trash can. She stuffs the little bottle in her hand bag.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Alice watches Marty gorging on Bobby Flay's falafels.

MARTY

... I don't mind someone bringing in a lunch box, but can you be a little more discreet? We have a nice dining hall but they'd rather sneak their mulligatawny in and stink up the whole place -

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - BATHROOM/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marty studies his face in the mirror.

MARTY

You didn't tell me about the show.  
How'd it go?

As Alice sorts through her handbag. She comes across Manuel's vial, sets it aside.

ALICE

Yeah ... good.

Marty heads to the bedroom.

MARTY

Cooking shows. Bit shallow for my taste. I mean, you can't expect them to do much career-wise. Just housewives watching ...

Marty yawns, takes off his robe, climbs into bed.

MARTY (cont'd)

It's freezing in here. Turn down the aircon, will you, Smartie?

Alice lifts that vial. She TAKES A SHOT.



INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Alice wakes up stretching luxuriously. She feels for the alarm on the nightstand. It's 11 a.m. already.

Marty is gone.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

Alice looks around. There's spilled coffee on the kitchen countertop, a heap of unsorted mail on the table.

She faces herself in the mirror. She adjusts her hair. She feels good. She feels ...

Different.

Something has changed.

INT. LES AMIS RESTAURANT - DAY

Alice sits at a table with a view of the garden. She types a message on her phone, "What's gotten into you ...?"

She thinks, discards the message.

The HEAD WAITER steps up.

HEAD WAITER  
Anything else, ma'am?

ALICE  
The check, please.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Alice cuts the vegetables, glances to Marty's cook book, mixes the vegetables with creamy sauce, puts them in a baking dish.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Once again, Marty and Alice at the table.

MARTY  
You should have seen me this morning  
fighting that coffee-spitting monster  
in our kitchen.

ALICE  
Sorry I couldn't help you with that.

MARTY  
No, no. It was fun. Enlightening in a strange sort of way. You take everything for granted and never think how much effort you put into all of this.

Marty gestures to the table and the dishes.

ALICE  
I was going to ask you about last night. Did I get - a little carried away?

MARTY  
What do you mean?

ALICE  
Well, I felt weird, it wasn't like our normal - you know -

MARTY  
It's just the fatigue building up. You need to give yourself a break. Relax, take a walk.

ALICE  
Yeah -

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alice takes out Manuel's vial from the nightstand, unscrews it, smells the content. She cautiously takes a sip.

Marty struggles with the aircon control.

MARTY  
How on earth do you deal with this shit?

Alice takes ANOTHER shot.

Marty climbs into bed as she hastily stuffs the vial under her pillow.

SHOT - ALICE AND MARTY lie in bed together. Marty yawns.

Alice rolls over. Suddenly, she gets on top of Marty.

She sways, getting more and more aroused, leaning into Marty. He has a happy surprised smile. But she's not returning it. She's lost in herself.

Her hand reaches under the pillow. Knocking open the vial. A wet stain spreads on the bed sheet.

Eyes closed, she drags the soaked bed sheet to her face, starts to contract from the incoming ORGASM.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Alice wakes up. Marty's gone. She finds the empty vial. She gets out of bed.

EXT. SAN ELIAS BOTANICA SHOP - DAY

The taxi drops her in front of the botanica shop. But the doors are closed. Alice peeks through the windows. Everything's dark.

She spies the Mexican restaurant next door.

INT. EL HORNO RESTAURANT - DAY

Alice enters the restaurant. JORGE, with a bright red Mexican bow tie and name tag, rushes up.

JORGE

Bienvenido al Horno, senora. I can see it in your beautiful eyes that you're craving a perfect midday burrito.

ALICE

Actually - I was wondering if you could help me. The herb shop next door? Do you know what time it opens?

JORGE

Oh ... I don't think it will, senora.

ALICE

What do you mean?

JORGE

(beat)

Police. Yesterday. They took Manuel.

ALICE  
The boy who worked there?

JORGE  
Si, senora.

ALICE  
What about the woman? The woman who worked there too?

JORGE  
(long beat)  
We haven't seen her.

ALICE  
Do you know - does anybody know where she lives?

JORGE  
(tense)  
I'm not sure, senora.

ALICE  
Listen - Jorge? I really need to find her.

Alice takes out her wallet.

ALICE (cont'd)  
I'm not going to do any harm. I just want to talk to her.

Jorge hesitates. Then he signals for Alice to follow him out of the restaurant.

EXT: STREET - CONTINUOUS

They walk past the shop and around the corner.

INT. BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

They enter the same building from the rear and climb the stairs. Jorge KNOCKS on a door. Nothing. He knocks again.

HELENA (O.S.)  
(barely audible)  
Quién está ahí?

JORGE  
Helena, soy yo, Jorge.

Helena opens the door. There she stands, staring at Alice.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marty munches on a guacamole burrito.

MARTY

... I mean, he wants to sue us for an opinion piece? Well, good luck with that. There's no law against expressing an opinion. Why do Republicans struggle with that? And it's getting hard to be non-judgmental. First the elections, now this border disgrace.

Alice merely appraises the chewing Marty.

ALICE

I saw a young kid today. ICE took him in front of the shop he worked at. In broad daylight.

MARTY

There, that's what I'm talking about. This administration is painting itself into a corner. These people, they're poised to make a contribution. Yet instead of finding a way to assimilate them, we find a way to marginalize them.

Marty digs right back into his burrito.

ALICE

This is different I think.

MARTY

Mm hm ...

Marty chews and nods.

ALICE

This boy, he worked twelve hour days seven days a week to provide for his elderly mother. Now he's got no one to stand up for him. I mean, isn't that what you should write about?

MARTY

Mm. Of course we should ... only we can't write about every one of them.

ALICE

Why not?

MARTY

That's a phone book, honey.

ALICE

(beat)

At least we could try to find him a lawyer.

Marty raises his head to really look at Alice. She's serious.

MARTY

Well - yeah we could do that. But there's every chance it won't make a difference. Even if he doesn't speak a word in his mother's tongue, they're still gonna want to send him straight back to where he was born. Unfair, but that's how it works ... pass me that bowl, would you?

Alice stays put.

ALICE

He was born here, in the States.

MARTY

Um - okay ... could you pass me that bowl, please?

INT. MARTY'S OFFICE - DAY

Alice, Helena, Marty and his LAWYER, not to mention the TRANSLATOR, are all crowded into Marty's glass-fronted office.

The Lawyer studies Manuel's birth certificate.

The name of the father on the certificate reads "JESÚS MARTINEZ". The Translator explains.

TRANSLATOR

They worked at the same restaurant in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. After Manuel was born, he moved out.

LAWYER

But he left his name on the papers. Does she know where he is now?

Helena listens to the translator, utters something back.

TRANSLATOR

She says she doesn't know. But she's got his photo, if you need it.

Helena pulls out a photo.

LAWYER

It might not be relevant ...

Alice picks up the photo.

There's JESÚS, the man from the opening, smiling and wearing a chef's hat. The sign in the b.g. reads "CHUCK & CHUY".

LAWYER (cont'd)

... what matters is that your son Manuel is an American citizen by his birthright and no government body has the right to detain him without probable cause, let alone -

Marty's right hand man RYAN peeks into the office.

RYAN

Marty, can I have a word with you?

MARTY

Yeah, just a sec.

Ryan glances at Alice.

RYAN

It's just, we have a problem with the lead and we have to go to print in like -

MARTY

All right, all right, I'm coming.

SHOT - Through the glass wall, Alice watches Marty hanging over a desk top and directing some of his employees.

LAWYER (O.S.)

So, as I said, we'll file the Habeas Corpus, you'll show up in court and I'm fairly confident that the judge -

Alice catches on.

ALICE  
I'm sorry, you said that she'll need  
to be present in court?

LAWYER  
Correct.

ALICE  
But she's not here legally. What if  
she gets arrested?

LAWYER  
In court? That's not going to happen.  
The state has a clear policy. No  
immigration enforcement in the  
courthouses.

INT. NEW YORK COURTHOUSE - DAY

The courtroom is almost empty. Helena sits next to the  
Lawyer as they watch the bailiff escort Manuel to his place.

The JUDGE reads from his file.

JUDGE  
Next - Hernandez versus State of New  
York. Counsel, you can state your  
case.

LAWYER  
Your Honor, my client Manuel  
Hernandez is a minor who has been  
unlawfully detained by immigration  
enforcement authorities and held at  
an unknown location for over a week.  
We have enclosed in our petition the  
birth certificate of Manuel Hernandez  
issued by the State of Pennsylvania.  
The copy has also been sent to the  
ICE field office in New York. We ask  
for immediate release of my client  
and his return to the custody of his  
mother, Helena Hernandez.

JUDGE  
Mister Brown, what's your take on  
this? Did you receive the documents  
counsel is referencing?

BROWN, a gangly man on the prosecutor's side, stands.



BROWN

Yes, your Honor, we did. Our take on this is that Helena Hernandez is in the United States illegally...

JUDGE

That isn't the issue at hand.

BROWN

Yes your honor. Our point is, Ms. Hernandez does not have the legal or financial means to represent the interests of her child, who is just about to reach age of majority. Her housing conditions and her source of income remain unconfirmed. In this situation, we would insist that her custody remains a potential risk for the child and we'd like to request that he be referred to the special care facility administered by the U.S. Department of Health.

LAWYER

Your Honor, if I may.

JUDGE

Proceed.

LAWYER

Helena Hernandez has been caring for her child for the last sixteen years and never once had a problem with the law. As a parent of a citizen ...

BROWN

She has broken the law your honor.

LAWYER

... she must have the legal right to apply for relief from deportation.

BROWN

She risked that when she came to this country.

JUDGE

Stand down. Mr. Sanford, I believe you are clouding the issue. Whether Ms. Hernandez is here legally or not is not in play.

(MORE)

JUDGE (cont'd)

Mr. Brown, does your office have reasonable grounds to believe that the child will be in danger if returned to his mother?

BROWN

Your Honor, the responsibility of my agency is to ensure that the best interests of the child are considered when making decisions related to his custody ...

During this, a fit, bald-headed man in a black suit (HARRIS) walks down the aisle, passes Alice, and sits a couple of rows in front of her.

BROWN (cont'd)

... which implies providing a safe and appropriate environment -

JUDGE

I'm not asking you to recount the statute, Mr. Brown, that will suffice. I am asking, do you have reason to believe that this child will be in danger in the continued and consistent care of his own mother?

Brown casts a wary glance at Harris.

BROWN

No, your Honor.

JUDGE

Fine ... I'm ordering Manuel Hernandez to be returned to the custody of his mother immediately. Court is adjourned.

Everybody gets up. Helena hurries to Manuel.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

As they step outside, Helena alternates between kissing and squeezing Manuel and then lecturing him in Spanish.

LAWYER

Sorry, but I'll have to leave you now. Does anyone need a ride?

ALICE  
No, I'll take care of them.

The Lawyer shakes Alice's hand and passes her the folder. He then offers a quick handshake to Helena, then freezes as Helena gives him a full hug. Oddly, she makes wary eye contact with Alice.

They walk down the stairs.

ALICE (cont'd)  
(to Helena)  
Look, I know we didn't exactly get off to a good start and you might find it strange that I'm helping you. But when we get to know each other -

As they're about to reach the sidewalk, suddenly ...

OFFICIALS step out of a sedan parked in front of the courthouse and approach Helena.

They read her the Miranda and quickly handcuff her.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Wait, what are you -

They escort Helena to the car while two others RUSH Manuel to an unmarked vehicle nearby.

Harris, a bald-headed man from the court, walks slowly past the frozen Alice, eyeing her down, all but daring her to react ... as he too climbs into a car.

The cars drive away.

INT. MARTY'S OFFICE - DAY

Alice exits the elevator and heads to JENN's desk.

ALICE  
Hello, Jenn. Marty here?

JENN  
Yes. Let me see if he -

Alice spots Marty behind the glass wall of his office and walks straight to him. Jenn rushes after her.

As Alice enters the office.

ALICE  
I just talked to people from the  
Immigration Lawyers Association -

There's Ryan spread out on the couch. Another staffer (RICK)  
is behind the desk.

RYAN  
Hello, Alice.

Jenn looks to Marty with an apologetic look.

MARTY  
It's ok, Jenn.

She closes the door. Marty takes a seat.

ALICE  
They kidnapped this family right in  
front of the courthouse.

MARTY  
They brought charges.

ALICE  
What are you talking about? What  
charges?

Ryan speaks up.

RYAN  
Drug related. Apparently, she's  
facing ten to life.

ALICE  
That's bullshit!

The men are baffled.

ALICE (cont'd)  
What about the boy?

MARTY  
(checks with Ryan)  
Well, we think this immigration thing  
was not really about immigration. It  
looks like they watched that shop,  
thought something funny was going on.  
They caught the kid and decided not  
to press charges but book him as  
illegal, then wait till Helena tried  
to pull him out.

ALICE  
That's not - It can't be drugs.

Ryan leaps up from his couch.

RYAN  
Come on, she's been playing you,  
Alice. Call it what it is.

ALICE  
I need to see him.

MARTY  
Why? - He's a minor. Let the services  
handle him.

ALICE  
Handle him? We don't even know where  
he is. They carried him away like -

Rick, the staffer, harrumphs from behind the desk.

RICK  
In fact we do know where he is. I got  
an answer from DEA. They put him in  
Hopeful Horizons Facility.

ALICE  
Hopeful Horizons. What the hell is  
that?

RICK  
It's a temporary shelter for  
children, run by a private contractor  
(reads from notebook)  
Novel Healthcare Services.

MARTY  
Sounds familiar.

RYAN  
They have Ron Harris on the board.  
Ex-CIA.

MARTY  
Oh yeah, did we run something?

ALICE  
CIA? Are you kidding me?

RYAN

(to Marty)

Not us, some local news ... And he made them apologize ...

(turns to Alice)

Look, I understand it didn't quite go as you imagined. But I don't think we should search for conspiracies here. For all we know, the people are just doing their job.

Ryan looks for Marty to decide.

MARTY

Yep, that's what we do. Rick, make a follow-up call, let's say in a week. Make sure the kid has settled in and then try to get a sit-down. Perhaps he'll give us something on his mother's side business. Who knows?

ALICE

Do you not hear what I'm saying? She was not selling drugs.

MARTY

Drugs, no drugs. Unless we get to know more, there's not much of a scoop here, Smartie.

INT. CAR - DAY

Alice gets in the car, she searches the glove box and the center console. She thinks for a second, then reaches for the sunglass holder - there's her old New York Times PRESS PASS.

INT. HOPEFUL HORIZONS FACILITY - DAY

Alice walks into a small lobby. On the wall behind the SECRETARY is: "Hopeful Horizons".

SECRETARY

Hello, ma'am. How may I help you?

ALICE

I'm here to see Mr. Ron Harris.

SECRETARY

I'm afraid he's off site. Would you like to leave him a message?

ALICE

Yes. Tell him a reporter from the New York Times is sitting in his lobby, waiting for him to walk by.

SHOT - ALICE sits on the couch.

When finally Ron HARRIS steps into the lobby.

HARRIS

It's always such a unique pleasure to meet a news person. Miss ...?

A shadow of recognition as he approaches Alice.

ALICE

Reed.

HARRIS

I hate to be rude, but before we continue, would you mind me checking your credentials.

Alice shows him her press pass. Harris takes a glance.

HARRIS (cont'd)

Interesting. But I had your driver's in mind.

She hesitates.

HARRIS (cont'd)

Please?

Alice nervously hands him her license. He looks it over.

HARRIS (cont'd)

And how can I help you, Ms. Reed?

ALICE

I'd like to see Manuel Hernandez.

HARRIS

I'm afraid that's not possible. We have strict internal regulations.

ALICE

Mr. Harris, the custody standards ensure the right of every child in foster care to receive frequent and regular visits.

HARRIS

I appreciate your strict adherence to the law, Ms. Reed, but that statute applies primarily to family members. Do you happen to be a relative?

ALICE

You're violating the constitutional rights of a sixteen year -

HARRIS

Good-bye, Ms. Reed.

And off he goes.

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Harris and his assistant walk down a hall lined with steel-reinforced doors with built-in windows.

HARRIS

Find out what you can about Alice Reed, license number nine five seven three five ...

As they pass a cell ... WE SEE, through the sliver of a window, a lab person connecting wires to a TEENAGER.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marty and Alice dine in silence. Marty struggles with the undercooked gnocchis on his plate.

MARTY

These dumplings ... man.

Alice sips red wine.

MARTY (cont'd)

I think I'm getting to like all things Italian. Maybe we should go to Italy this summer.

Marty's no fool, he knows something's wrong.

MARTY (cont'd)

Something you want to say to me, sweet?

ALICE

In regards to ...?



MARTY

You name it.

ALICE

No, darling.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marty, huffin' and puffin', does his missionary job on top of Alice. Alice stares vacantly at the ceiling.

SHOT - LATER. Alice is awake next to the snoring Marty. She climbs out.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

In the dark, Alice looks at her laptop.

"Fordham Observer" headline reads: "Who Runs Hopeful Horizons?"

Alice scrolls through the article:

WE SEE FLASHES OF ...

"The temporary shelter facility ... mother Catalina Rivera accused DCFS of forceful removal of her 15 year-old son ... Novel Healthcare, a private equity firm ... before 2017, Harris worked as a deputy director for Advanced Research Projects ..."

Alice scrolls to the bottom to find a photo and name -

MITCH LEWANDOWSKI.

INT. JIMBO'S BAR & GRILL - FORDHAM - DAY

Alice steps inside. The place is dark and empty. At a table sits a disheveled 40-something man gorging on a burger.  
MITCH.

Alice approaches.

ALICE

Hello, I'm Alice Reed.

MITCH

Hi there ...

He hastily wipes his mouth with a tissue and nods to a chair. Alice takes a seat.

MITCH (cont'd)  
So, New York Times, huh? What brings you to our neck of the woods?

ALICE  
You authored an article about Hopeful Horizons facility.

Mitch's expression instantly goes dark.

MITCH  
Silly me ... I thought this was a job offer.

ALICE  
In your article, you accused the facility and its owner, Novel Healthcare -

Mitch snaps a look around.

MITCH  
All right, slow down. You know I had to retract, don't you?

ALICE  
Yes. I'd like to hear your version of what happened.

MITCH  
Who cares what happened? Well, there was a woman -  
(struggling)  
Cat - something ...

ALICE  
Catalina Rivera.

MITCH  
Right. So this Catalina Rivera was accusing the child services and the company you just named. She thought they somehow colluded to get her son locked up.

He shrugs, sips his beer.

ALICE  
Did they?

MITCH

Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. I never had the chance to find out. Turns out, she was full of shit anyway. Couldn't keep her nose clean, literally.

ALICE

What did she do exactly?

MITCH

Exactly? She was sending her son to clinical trials and used the money - it shouldn't have come as a surprise when they finally took the kid from her.

Alice digests his words.

ALICE

Why would she agree to have her son subjected to clinical trials?

MITCH

How the hell do I know? She was so high, she claimed her son was magic.

ALICE

Magic?

Mitch shrugs.

ALICE (cont'd)

What about Hopeful Horizons? It seems you had your own doubts about them.

MITCH

Theories. Rumors. You know how it is, you're building a layer cake, you put a cherry on top ...

(examines Alice)

So what's your interest? You can't build much of a story based on what a crackhead had to say.

ALICE

We've got reason to believe she wasn't the only one.

MITCH

Jeez, I knew they were full of crap.

ALICE

But before we go to print, I need to talk to your source.

MITCH

Well, I'm not sure that's such a good idea ... I've gone through enough shit.

ALICE

You do want to put an end to this, don't you?

MITCH

I already did.

ALICE

What about getting your good name back, Mitch?

MITCH

(beat)

Ten grand. And a by-line.

INT. CATALINA'S HOUSE - DAY

Alice wades through a long filthy corridor, the noises of a public housing block echoing around her.

She finds a door and knocks. Nobody answers. She knocks again. A MOAN comes from behind the door. Alice knocks harder.

CATALINA (O.S.)

Oh - what the hell ...

Catalina, 30-something, a clear user, opens the door.

CATALINA

Wrong door.

She tries to close it.

ALICE

Please, wait -

CATALINA

Keep your hands off, lady. I'm not buying shit.

ALICE  
I'm not selling. I'm here about your son, Mateo.

A pause. She opens the door a crack.

CATALINA  
What about him?

ALICE  
I know he's in Hopeful Horizons.

CATALINA  
Yeah, tell me something new.

Catalina steps back. Alice, carefully steps over the piles of junk, finds her way inside.

ALICE  
I'm writing for a newspaper and I'd like to ...

Alice looks around the room. The floor is littered with empty bottles and filthy clothes.

CATALINA  
Like to what?

ALICE  
I'd like to hear your side of the story.

CATALINA  
I've already talked to one of your kind. Didn't do me any good.

Catalina lights a cigarette.

ALICE  
I know how hard it can be - when you lose a child. I really do. But if you could give it some thought and perhaps recall -

The sudden patter of a child's feet. A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL runs into the room with a bag from a liquor store.

CATALINA  
Don't you run in here!

The Girl obediently hands Catalina the bag and the change.

Catalina glances at Alice, pulls out a carton of cigarettes and hands the bag back to the girl.

CATALINA (cont'd)  
Put that away. And go make yourself scarce.

Alice watches as the girl runs away.

ALICE  
Is that your - ?

CATALINA  
(taking a drag)  
My kid? You thought Mateo was the only one?

Catalina smokes and watches her.

CATALINA (cont'd)  
We all want someone to take care of us when we old, right?

Alice steps back, then reaches for a wallet.

ALICE  
Look. I'm sorry I've taken your time. Please take this - for your daughter.

Alice hands her money. Catalina snatches it from her.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Is there - anyone to look after her?

Catalina counts the bills, then stashes them in her pocket.

CATALINA  
Really? That why you here? Oh sure, her daddy will be here any minute. Make her a nice lemon cake, smooch her goodnight.

Alice turns to leave, pauses.

ALICE  
I'm sorry. Mateo's father, was he - ?

She pulls JESÚS's photo from her handbag and hands it over.

CATALINA  
You know this piece of shit?

Alice takes back the photo.

ALICE  
What can you tell me about him?

CATALINA  
Tell him - HE FUCKING OWES ME!

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marty eats a cottage pie. Alice is lost in her thoughts.

MARTY  
... thank god I have Ryan to deal  
with them. This whole digital-first  
thing is really beyond me. I mean,  
sending the morgue to the cloud?  
Fitting tags to a century of  
articles? Easy. Just like stuffing a  
six pound lobster!

Alice glances up questioningly.

MARTY (cont'd)  
I was just talking about our digital  
presence.

ALICE  
(beat)  
I'll be going to Philly tomorrow. To  
do some work on my book.

MARTY  
Oh ...

ALICE  
I won't be home till late. I'll get  
you a table at Daniel's.

EXT. HAZLETON - GOOD DAYS DISHES - DAY

Alice drives along a street lined up with worn row-houses  
and storefronts. She pulls up in front of an eatery. She  
tugs out the photo, compares the place to the one in the  
shot.

The building and the street sign match. But what was once  
"Chuck & Chuy" has turned into "Spencers' Good Days Dishes".

INT. GOOD DAYS DISHES - DAY

Alice steps inside. It's a classic diner with a counter and a single row of booths by the windows.

She takes a seat in a booth, examines the menu.

A middle-age HOSTESS steps up.

HOSTESS  
What will it be, darling?

ALICE  
A coffee, please.

HOSTESS  
That it?

ALICE  
Can I ask you something? Do you know what happened to the restaurant that was here before?

Alice shows the photo of Jesús. The Hostess sighs.

HOSTESS  
(yells)  
Chuck! Someone here to see you!

A heavysset man in an apron peers out from the pass-through.

SHOT - CHUCK sits across from Alice looking at the photo.

CHUCK  
There were times we had a line all the way down Maple ... not exactly what we have nowadays.

Chuck glances around an empty eatery.

ALICE  
This man, Jesús, did he work as a chef here?

CHUCK  
Chuy ...? Yeah, one hell of a chef. Came from nowhere, no references, no training. But once he started, he was like a godsend. Jeez, he made stuff no one here even knew existed. Turned everyone nuts with his dainties. Most of all, the ladies ...  
(MORE)



CHUCK (cont'd)  
(focuses on Alice)  
So what are you, some kind a foodie?

ALICE  
Not exactly. I came on behalf of the woman who worked here. Helena Rodriguez? Jesús' name was on her child's birth certificate.

CHUCK  
Well - I'm not going to lie and say I remember her but ... this kid story? Comes as no surprise.

ALICE  
What do you mean?

CHUCK  
The guy was some lady's man. But not in a good way, you know. More like, you turn me down, I'll screw your friends type of guy.

ALICE  
Mr. Spencer ...

CHUCK  
Chuck.

ALICE  
Chuck, do you know any of the women he went out with - personally?

CHUCK  
No, God forbid. I've had enough acquaintance with the last one ... cost me an arm and a leg.

ALICE  
What happened?

CHUCK  
We - uh - okay, we had this regular French themed night ...

INT. CHUCK & CHUY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The place looks different. The entire space is occupied with dining tables covered with plain white cloths. Every table taken.

Jesús, in chef's apron, courts the regulars.

JESÚS

Thank you, ma'am. It is my pleasure.

At another table, a FRENCHMAN wearing a blazer entertains his beautiful date, reading the menu in his native tongue.

FRENCHMAN

Gratin dauphinois. Coq au vin, oh là là ...

Jesús steps up to the table.

JESÚS

Welcome to Chuck and Chuy. Is there anything I can help you with? I am the chef.

The Frenchman puts on a serious face while his date tries to suppress her laughter.

FRENCHMAN

Oui, monsieur. We'd like to try Cassoulet de Carcassonne ... and Boeuf Bourguignon ...

JESÚS

Excellent choice, sir.

Oui, oui ... And for the drinks ... coca-cola or margarita. A votre choix.

Jesús knows when he's been ridiculed. He carries away the menus. As the Girl dissolves in laughter.

SHOT - LATER. The Frenchman and the Girl eat their meals. Jesús steps up with a tiny chocolate mousse on a plate.

JESÚS (cont'd)

I hope you don't mind trying one of our specialty desserts. It's on the house.

Jesús walks away. The Girl tries the dessert.

FRENCHMAN

I think he's got a crush on you.

GIRL

(suddenly)

I need to use the restroom.

SHOT - THE FRENCHMAN sits alone, waiting. He spots Jesús, in high spirits, stepping out of the restroom.

Then the Frenchman's Girl steps out of the same restroom, grinning, adjusting her top and fixing her hair.

She returns to the table. The Frenchman watches her as she tries to seem unfazed.

FRENCHMAN  
Your collar's turned up.

GIRL  
Is it ...?

She fixes it, sips her margarita.

FRENCHMAN  
Enjoyed your little extra?

GIRL  
How's that ...?

The Frenchman nods to the chocolate mousse on her plate.

GIRL (cont'd)  
Yeah ... can we go?

She stands, looks about, as though somehow stoned.

FRENCHMAN  
But you're not finished?

She seems out of it.

FRENCHMAN (cont'd)  
Then I'll finish it.

In one scoop, the Frenchman devours the dessert. He swallows it, all the while staring at her. When ... his expression changes. He suddenly looks ENRAGED. He slaps the plate off the table, bounds to his feet.

FRENCHMAN (cont'd)  
C'est quoi cette merde. Tu te moques de moi? Alors, qu'est ce que tu regardes? Je vais t'achever maintenant ...

Chuck and a waiter rush to the Frenchman to calm him down. He quickly raises his arms, shows them that he is cool and all's fine.

But the moment Chuck releases him ... the Frenchman dashes to the back.

He STORMS into the kitchen, grabs a large carving knife.

There's Jesús as though expecting him. He CHUCKS a pan at him.

The Frenchman slices through the air, cuts Jesús' forearm.

Jesús bashes him off his feet with a frying pan.

The Frenchman is on all fours, still holding the knife.

When OIL spills around him, evaporating in an odd haze.

Jesús backs into the corner.

The Frenchman half-rises, clutching the knife.

Terrified, Jesús PINCHES his eyes shut.

And at that moment, the ooze around the Frenchman flares up, engulfing him and the kitchen IN FLAMES.

INT. GOOD DAYS DISHES - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Chuck gazes at the Jesús' photo on the table.

CHUCK

A cooking gas explosion they called it. We've been lucky the tank was near empty and no one else got hurt. The Frenchman, oh well ...

ALICE

What happened to Jesús?

CHUCK

Nothing. He was just sitting there, unharmed, talking some drivel - that he has failed, that it's all his fault ...

(shrugs)

I should have set him straight but then the firemen came and I had other things to take care of. And when the smoke cleared - he was gone. That was the last I saw of him.

He hands back the photo.

ALICE

Chuck, do you know if he had any relatives living around here?

CHUCK

Relatives? I don't think so. To me he was like a street urchin. Bounced around the whole East Coast before he came here. Now that I think of it ...

(remembers)

I do know one of his ladies. Holly Eckelberry, a talking head on some local TV show in North Carolina. Bragged about her each time he had a drink. Holly this, Holly that ... Well, maybe there wasn't any Holly. But if there was, he'd sure have brought her here for a meet-the-parents kind of thing.

Chuck laughs, meets eyes with his glaring Hostess.

CHUCK (cont'd)

I talk too much. I think I better get back to work.

(stands)

Look. If you manage to find him, tell him that I don't blame him for anything. And if he needs a job, you know, I'd be happy to - yeah you get it.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Alice and Marty dine.

MARTY

You didn't have a Philly Cheesesteak? Seriously? I was hoping you'd bring me one. I can't imagine going to Philly and not going to either Pat's or Geno's. Man, what kind of foodie are you?

Marty wipes his mouth with a napkin.

MARTY (cont'd)

By the way, some guy called the office yesterday, asked for you. Something about the cherries on the cake? I gave him your number.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

Alice, in the dark, is back behind her notebook.

ON SCREEN

Alice googles "Holly Eckelberry." She finds a Facebook page. There's Holly's photos from her glory days. The intro states she's married to STEVE AIGER.

She follows the link to Steve Aiger's page.

A wealthy-looking guy, intro stating he's CEO of a company.

So Alice Googles "Steve Aiger's address".

INT. ALICE'S CAR - DAY

Alice stops in the middle of the road. On one side of the road is forest, on the other a seemingly endless fence with a discreet entryway leading up to automatic gates.

Alice checks the address, then steps out of the car.

EXT. STEVE AIGER'S MANSION - DAY

Alice approaches the gates, presses the call box.

A man's VOICE responds.

VOICE

Hello.

ALICE

Oh Hi, I came to see Mrs. Holly Eckelberry.

VOICE

(pause)

Your name, please?

ALICE

Alice Reed. I'm the reporter. I'd like to arrange an interview with her.

The call box goes silent.

ALICE (cont'd)

Hello ...?

Alice presses the button again. No answer.

A service van approaches the gates from inside. The driver presses the button on the control column. The gates SWING OPEN and the van leaves.

As the gates start to close ... Alice darts inside.

She walks down a paved road towards the house, spots a Gardener crossing her path.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Excuse me ...?

The gardener keeps walking.

Alice approaches a Georgian style house. No other people outside and no sound but the birds.

As she comes closer, a loud POP breaks the silence and a powerful light illuminates the main entrance.

Alice instinctively crouches.

When her phone starts DINGING. She frantically searches her handbag for it.

She HEARS men's voices and dogs BARKING behind the doors.

Alice BOLTS back towards the main gates. As she runs back to the car, her phone RINGS again. This time she answers.

ALICE (cont'd)  
(out of breath)  
Hey Mitch, now is not the best time -

MITCH (V.O.)  
Hey, I think I might have dug up something on our friend we have in common. Can you pick me up?

INT. ALICE'S CAR - DAY

Alice pulls over. Mitch, holding a McDonald's bag, climbs in.

MITCH  
You know this address?

He hands her a piece of paper.

ALICE  
What are we up to?

MITCH  
I'll explain on the way. We need to  
be there at five.

Alice puts the address into the GPS and off they go.

MITCH (cont'd)  
(looks around)  
The Times sure takes care of you.  
(opens his bag)  
You mind if I strap on the feed bag?

Alice side-eyes Mitch as he starts to gulp back his food.

MITCH (cont'd)  
Anyway. After we met and - discussed  
being partners - I called in sick,  
pulled everything I had on Novel  
Healthcare and this guy, Ron Harris.  
Only to ended up with the same odd  
question. What is the guy like him, a  
high-ranking security official,  
twenty years of exemplary service,  
what the hell is he suddenly doing in  
healthcare?

ALICE  
Maybe he wants to earn some.

MITCH  
Earn some what? He's not involved in  
any business besides Hopeful Horizons  
and you can hardly make a fortune  
running a charity ward, right?

ALICE  
Maybe not.

MITCH  
So I go through my records, yeah? And  
suddenly, it hits me. What if instead  
of trying to see what's behind the  
Horizons, we look at it from a  
different angle? What exactly was  
Novel Healthcare before Harris came  
on board? You with me?

Mitch goes back to his food. Alice loses patience.



ALICE  
Are you going to finish?

MITCH  
Mm ...?

ALICE  
Finish your thought. Then you can go  
back to - whatever you're consuming  
there.

MITCH  
Hey, they told me you're a foodie.  
Come on, now this is food!  
(puts away the  
McChicken)  
Turns out he rented a lab at the same  
building in Fordham Heights, took  
some contracts from corporate  
players. No biggies. Then, in two  
thousand seventeen, a fire breaks  
out, destroys the place.

ALICE  
A fire?

MITCH  
Yeah, yeah. The stakeholders are in a  
panic, blame the manager. But instead  
of going bust, they miraculously get  
an investment from an unnamed company  
and with it, a new manager - Rob  
Harris.

ALICE  
Where did you get all this?

MITCH  
Ripoff dot com. The guy posted a  
complaint about illegal dismissal  
three years ago. But listen to this -  
they didn't just buy them out, they  
somehow managed to take over the  
entire building from HHS soon after  
Harris took command. Now who would be  
able to do *that*?

Alice nods at the high-rise in front of them.

MITCH (cont'd)  
Okay, down to parking.

Her phone starts RINGING. She glances at it. MARTY. She ignores it, drives down into the underground garage.

Alice parks the car and kills the engine.

Mitch is tucked into his laptop now.

ALICE  
Frankly, I'd feel more comfortable if you'd tell me what the hell the plan is.

MITCH  
(perplexed)  
We're talking to the guy.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATOR - DAY

Alice and Mitch stand side by side in an elevator. Alice reads from Mitch's laptop. On the screen is RIPOFF.COM.

MITCH  
He doesn't know us from Adam. So at this stage, we're just prospective buyers. Whatever he tries to sell, don't question him, just smile and let me do the talking.

ALICE  
How did you find him?

MITCH  
That was an easy part. I spent time convincing him to let me drop by with my wife.

ALICE  
Your wife?

MITCH  
Yes. We're a happy couple going through a difficult time.

INT. DR. RATZINGER'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Alice and Mitch step out of the elevator. Mitch walks straight to the reception desk.

MITCH

Hello, we have an appointment with  
Dr. Ratzinger. Mr and Mrs - um -  
Arbagast.

The lady at the reception desk passes him a paper.

RECEPTION LADY

Please sign here. The doctor will see  
you soon.

As they talk, Alice spots a large LCD screen showing a  
colorful video ad.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Do you feel stressed out? Overwhelmed  
by your inner fears? There is a way  
out ... Ether. A mythical substance.  
Long rumored, never discovered ...  
Open your mind to the unconscious -  
your primal instincts - survival -  
procreation - *desire*. Ether 2.0.

As DR. RATZINGER steps in, tall, in white lab coat.

DR. RATZINGER

(German accent)

Hello. Dr. Ratzinger.

INT. DR.RATZINGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Ratzinger's behind his desk, Mitch and Alice across from  
him, as he waxes on ...

DR.RATZINGER

Same old story. The rulers are unable  
and the ruled unwilling. Karl Marx.  
But lucky for you, the medicine does  
not stand still. We have solutions.

Dr. Ratzinger slowly rises and goes to a locker. He takes  
out a vial, places it on the desk.

MITCH

Dr. Ratzinger - sir. Clearly, you are  
the real authority in your ...

When Alice picks up the vial from the desk, opens it and  
smells the content.

DR. RATZINGER  
I'm afraid that's only for men,  
madame.

ALICE  
What's this?

DR. RATZINGER  
It's called Ether. A proprietary  
blend of testosterone and adrenal  
cortex hormones.

Alice examines the content. No smell and no vapor.

ALICE  
And it works?

DR. RATZINGER  
(proudly)  
We have a proven twenty percent  
increase in sex drive in our male  
patients.

Alice hands it back to him.

ALICE  
Mr. Ratzinger, did you ever work at  
the Novel Healthcare Services?

DR. RATZINGER  
Doctor Ratzinger. Yes, I did and it  
helped me to gain an invaluable  
experience -

ALICE  
I've heard you were fired.

DR. RATZINGER  
Nonsense!

MITCH  
Alice, stop ...

Alice grabs Mitch's notepad and reads from the page.

ALICE  
A gross violation of fire safety  
regulations, endangering the lives of  
staff members, destruction of  
property ...

DR. RATZINGER  
Lies!

ALICE

They shut you out and you started  
this little business of yours,  
selling "magic pills" to the elderly.

DR. RATZINGER

Who are you? How dare you ...?

MITCH

Okay, everyone, just -

DR. RATZINGER

I have ten years of research behind  
me. I know what a *man* can do!

MITCH

Doctor, we believe you -

DR. RATZINGER

This lousy company you tell me about,  
a bunch of idiots. They have no idea  
what they're dealing with -

MITCH

Doctor Ratzinger, we came to hear  
your side of the story.

DR. RATZINGER

I refuse to speak while this woman is  
present.

MITCH

She didn't mean -

ALICE

Mr. Ratzinger, my name is Alice Reed  
and I'm a correspondent ...

(shows her ID)

... for the New York Times. You can  
tell me what happened at Novel  
Healthcare or you can see your name  
and the name of your enterprise  
bandied about in tomorrow's papers.

Dr. Ratzinger sinks into silence, then starts to cuss.

DR. RATZINGER

Scheiße, verdammte Reporter, das muss  
mir passieren... Hätte im verdammten  
DDR bleiben sollen... Ein super  
Labor, freie kochklopse...  
Schwanzlutscher!

MITCH  
(whispers to Alice)  
I think we should leave -

ALICE  
Stay where you are.

Ratzinger finishes his fit.

DR.RATZINGER  
We were testing CHMD two thousand.

ALICE  
What's that?

DR.RATZINGER  
Continuous hormone levels monitoring  
device.

INT. NOVEL HEALTHCARE LAB - DAY (FLASHBACK)

MATEO, a terrified 15-year-old Mexican kid, sits at the table with his arms extended.

Next to the table stands an infusion stand with a mount. The device has a container filled with saline, a small display and a few outgoing tubes.

As one nurse injects the catheters into Mateo's arms, another, SANDY, pushes a consent form under his nose. The form has his name on it "Mateo Rivera".

SANDY  
(reads his name)  
Okay. Mateo, we'll be showing you  
some visuals. Short films. Comprendre?

Mateo obediently nods.

SANDY (cont'd)  
And we'll measure your hormonal  
responses. Okay, sign here.

Mateo signs with an arm attached to the tubes.

As doctoral student MIKE sets up the DVD projector.

Dr. Ratzinger, holding a plastic food container, heads towards the exit door.

MIKE

Dr. Ratzinger, sir ... I can't find  
the puberty collection.

DR. RATZINGER

(opens the door)  
Show him the post-pube then.

MIKE

But - it's not here either.

DR. RATZINGER

Just show him what you've got! Jesus!  
I have to take your hand?

CUT TO:

The lights are out. Mateo watches video fragments projected on the wall: faded office clerks on their way to work; a middle-age lady in lingerie with an inviting smile; a funeral; a family under a Christmas tree; little kids cuddling a big white Labrador ...

Suddenly - Mateo's knee twitches, a drop of sweat on his forehead.

In an adjoining observation room, Mike checks the readings. He switches display modes. His face becomes troubled. He turns to the nurse.

MIKE

Sandy, call Fritz.

INT. NOVEL HEALTHCARE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Dr. Ratzinger enters the observation room.

DR.RATZINGER

Scheiße, can't you leave me alone for  
ten minutes ...?

MIKE

Doctor, we have outliers. Cortisol at  
two hundred and fifty ...

DR.RATZINGER

Impossible. With cortisol at two  
hundred, you'd have a rush of  
adrenaline that would kill -

MIKE

Adrenaline at five thousand.

Ratzinger looks at Mateo. The kid's alive but terrified.

DR.RATZINGER  
Check the calibrations.

MIKE  
I already did, sir.

Dr.Ratzinger goes to the panel, checks the measurements.

Together they watch Mateo responding to: a full-breasted nurse; a walk in the park; a dog fetching a stick ...

DR.RATZINGER  
(musingly)  
The young man gets spooked by the  
busty females?

MIKE  
Doctor, may I - I think the kid might  
be scared of dogs.

DR.RATZINGER  
(considers)  
We need a primary stimulant.

He turns to Sandy, looks her up and down, changes his mind.

DR.RATZINGER (cont'd)  
Maik, can you bring Fred?

MIKE  
Fred, sir ...?

DR.RATZINGER  
You heard me.

CUT TO:

Mateo, sweating and squirming, watches the video on the wall.

When a door opens and a large DOBERMAN steps inside.

Mateo LEAPS up, knocks over his chair, rips off the catheters.

SHOT - MIKE AND SANDY are on the other side of the door, on all fours, holding the leash.

MIKE  
I can't see ... what's going on?



But Ratzinger can see. He watches Mateo pressed against the wall, his catheters torn out.

He then looks at the electronic device, still pumping and spitting Mateo's blood.

The numbers on the display KEEP CLIMBING: 9000, 9500, 10000 ... As Mateo staggers back.

DR. RATZINGER  
Es ist unmöglich ...

The dog yaps. Mateo leaps over the chair, hits the projector with his head, loses balance, knocks over the infusion stand.

The stand CRASHES to the floor, the blood spills everywhere, emitting ... a VAPOR.

Mateo comes to his feet. The tilted projector now throws a charming little spitz to the corridor door behind his back.

The doberman sees the spitz, presses its croup to the floor, aiming for prey.

Mateo faces the doberman, a pool of smoking blood between them.

The doberman lashes out. Mateo jumps aside as the pool of blood ... BURSTS INTO FLAME!

The doberman races through the blaze towards the spitz, knocks down the door panel and ...

Engulfed IN FLAME, it sprints down the long corridor making the people in white coats jump aside and run for their lives.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - PRESENT DAY

Alice and Mitch walk silently down the hallway.

MITCH  
Hell of a story, huh?

Alice keeps walking.

MITCH (cont'd)  
Look, I don't want to sound overenthusiastic and - I'm sure the guy is a bit nuts - but there are things, you know, that add up.

ALICE  
What things?

MITCH  
The fire. This Mexican kid. It could  
just as well have been Catalina's  
son.

They enter the elevator. Alice hits a button.

MITCH (cont'd)  
What do you think?

ALICE  
I think the guy holds a grudge  
against his former employers and will  
make up any story you're willing to  
print. If I were you, I'd think twice  
before taking this poop to my editor.

The doors open. Alice heads outside, Mitch goes after her.  
Alice turns to Mitch.

ALICE (cont'd)  
And Mitch, you'll have to take a taxi  
now.

As Alice walks away, Mitch shouts out ...

MITCH  
Hey what if these kids are magic or  
something?! What if they're, like,  
living Warlocks!? Or .. Gods!?

Alice doesn't look back ... but she heard it.

MITCH (O.S.)  
What if they're fucking Gods!!

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Marty and Alice dine yet again.

MARTY  
There's just so much blather around  
this. Nobody cares about page one  
anymore. Ashton Kutcher retweets the  
Times article? Now, that's the real  
deal. I miss the times when we loaded  
it on the trucks and just let the  
paperboys take care of that content  
delivery -

ALICE  
I need a favor.

Marty looks at Alice in surprise.

ALICE (cont'd)  
There's someone I'd like to interview  
for my book. She hosted a cooking  
show back in the nineties.

MARTY  
Cooking show? I thought it's all  
about bloggers now.

ALICE  
It is but pre-bloggers, there was  
Holly Eckelberry and she's seen by  
many as a kind of, um, trailblazer.

MARTY  
Yeah? Never heard of her.

ALICE  
Well, she's not exactly like Bobby  
Flay in terms of name recognition.

MARTY  
Ask her ...?

ALICE  
She's now married to Steve Aiger.

MARTY  
Ah ...

ALICE  
If you could call on behalf of the  
paper and ask for an interview ...

MARTY  
Yeah ... I could do that.

INT. HOPEFUL HORIZONS FACILITY - DAY

Harris' assistant SMITH strides through the long corridor,  
stops by the door marked "Access Prohibited".

He enters the observation room and stands discreetly next to  
Harris.

SHOT - Across the glass partition, Manuel, PANTING, crawls away from the two men in white coats who seem to have just released their grip on him.

A few feet away the FIRE burns away the agonizing BUGS AND INSECTS inside a huge killing jar with no lid.

The man in white coat picks up one of the row of fire extinguishers and puts out the flame.

Manuel weeps. A stain of urine spreads down his pants.

SMITH  
(to Harris)  
You should stock up on nappies too.

Harris heads to the door. As they start along the corridor:

HARRIS  
What you got?

Smith passes him a printout from the security footage. Alice and Mitch walking into Dr.Ratzinger's office.

SMITH  
Do you remember that scribbler in Fordham? It looks like he's just had an appointment with the good Dr.Ratzinger.

Harris studies the photo.

HARRIS  
Some men spend a lifetime barking up the wrong tree ...  
(hands it back)  
only to find themselves on the wrong side of the grass.

SMITH  
(puts it away)  
What about the girl?

HARRIS  
I think it's time we give miss Reed a fair warning.

SMITH  
A warning, sir?

HARRIS  
Just make her appreciate the comforts of her home.

INT. STEVE AIGER'S MANSION - DAY

Holly walks Alice into a huge front parlor.

HOLLY

We had this part completely remodeled. Steve had a truckload of wood brought in from Borneo and Ronn Mann, who is by the way a close friend of Steve, he has designed all of the interiors here, including the fireplace. Are you familiar with his work?

ALICE

No, I'm afraid I'm in entirely different field.

HOLLY

Of course. Steve told me that you're writing about culinary arts. To be frank, I was a little surprised when you called. Of course it was an exciting period in my life but it seems like a long way off for me now.

ALICE

I think you were a wonderful host, Mrs. Aiger.

HOLLY

You can call me Holly.

Holly stops by an ornate fireplace. Hanging above the fireplace is an assortment of family photos.

HOLLY (cont'd)

Tell me about this article.

ALICE

I'm investigating cases of inappropriate sexual behavior in the food service industry.

HOLLY

(freezes)

What? I'm - not sure how -

ALICE

Holly, are you familiar with this man?

Alice hands her Jesús' photo. She watches her face change.

HOLLY

No. I'm afraid I don't know -

ALICE

His name is Jesús Martínez. Two days ago, I talked to his former employer and he said you had a relationship.

HOLLY

He's mistaken. Now if you'll ...

Holly goes to leave.

ALICE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to overstep. Your relationship is really none of my business...

HOLLY

Exactly!

ALICE

What I meant to say is ... We're going to run an article and there are many good names that may find their way into it. I never wanted it to be this way ... but now circumstances force me to do things that I wouldn't ordinarily do.

Alice looks at the family photos. One is Holly, Steve and a smiling youngster between them.

Holly grows nervous.

HOLLY

I don't understand.

Alice shifts her gaze to Holly.

ALICE

If you help me now, I guarantee that your name will never come up.

HOLLY

I don't know how I can help. I haven't seen him in forever.

ALICE

Didn't he try to reach you?

HOLLY

No.

ALICE

Holly, it's hard for me to believe that. From what I've heard, he was obsessed with you.

HOLLY

Well, maybe he called a couple of times, sent some stupid letters. Look, it was such a short fling, some sort of meltdown happened to me, okay? I never wanted anything to do with him.

ALICE

Do you think you could find some of those letters?

HOLLY

No! Why?

Alice examines Holly.

ALICE

I need to feed my editor with something.

EXT. CHELSEA MARKET - NEW YORK - DAY

The seafood market is busy. Marty faces a king lobster on a pile of ice. He's on his phone.

MARTY

You won't believe who I'm looking at right now. We finished off that web thing, so I left early and went straight to the lobster place. Have we got one of those shell crackers?

INT. JFK AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Alice stands in line for boarding, on her phone.

ALICE

No, sorry Marty. I've just arranged for an interview with someone. A head chef from ...

She looks at the monitor displaying her flight to ANCHORAGE ... then looks at another monitor nearby.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Charleston. I should be back Monday.

INT./EXT. TAXI - ANCHORAGE AIRPORT - DAY

In the early morning light Alice climbs in a taxi. She hands the DRIVER an envelop with an address on it.

The Driver, baffled, briefly studies Alice in the back seat.

DRIVER  
It's gonna cost you ...

INT. TAXI - NIKISKI BAY - DAY

Alice awakens and catches a sight of a huge oil rig wedged between the rocks, sticking out of the water at a 45° angle.

ALICE  
What happened there?

DRIVER  
The rig? I think they tried to tow it to some ship-breaking yard in China. I guess he didn't feel like going. There used to be dozens of them. Now the whole place is drained.

EXT. NIKISKI BAR & RESTAURANT - DAY

Alice climbs out of the taxi before a shabby looking bar. She checks the name on the envelop.

DRIVER  
Hey. You sure you don't want me to come in with you?

ALICE  
I'm sure.

The taxi pulls away. Alice looks again at the grimy entrance, braces herself and goes inside.

INT. NIKISKI BAR & RESTO - DAY

Wearing a bright red parka, Alice treads through a poorly lit barroom, past a few sleepy regulars, bringing back to life those who are still able to witness her arrival.



There's no one behind the bar counter. She chooses an Old Man who looks the most harmless. She shows him Jesús' photo.

ALICE  
Excuse me. I'm looking for this man.

The Old Man focuses on Alice, mutters something in a foreign tongue and goes back to his glass.

Alice moves to a pair of men at the next table.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Do you know where I can find this man?

One of the pair makes a whistle while another gazes at her like she's a phenomenon.

ALICE (cont'd)  
(out loud)  
Is there anyone in charge here? A barman?

One of the card players at another table (POLLY) gives voice without turning his head to Alice.

POLLY  
Ain't no barman in here, lady. It's a free-drinking society. Pay with what you feel comfortable to part with.

His partners chuckle. Alice approaches their table.

ALICE  
Look, I didn't come all the way from New York to hear your cheap jibes.

The heavysset man turns to face Alice.

POLLY  
Oh, I'm sorry, ma'am. What is it that you came here for?

Alice puts the photo on the table.

ALICE  
This man, I know he worked as a Chef here.

Polly glances at the photo, then back at Alice.

POLLY  
Chef?! Why didn't you say so?  
Everyone knows Chef!

He hurries to the bar, looks behind the counter.

POLLY (cont'd)  
Where is he? He's got to be in here  
somewhere.

He asks one of the card players (RICK).

POLLY (cont'd)  
Hey, Ricky, have you seen Chef?

Rick, amused, shakes his head.

BIG POLLY  
Oh, what the hell. He must be in the  
storeroom. Check that door, will you?

Polly nods at the door behind Alice.

Alice tries the doorknob, it doesn't budge.

POLLY  
Yeah, that door. Just push harder.

Alice tries again, the door won't move.

Polly comes up behind her.

POLLY (cont'd)  
Let me help you.

He reaches for the doorknob, wrapping his hands around  
Alice.

POLLY (cont'd)  
Yeah - let me just ...

He starts to push the doorknob, pressing his body against  
Alice, miming intercourse.

The boozers go mad.

Alice tries to break free. She forcefully steps on Polly's  
toe with her heel. Polly screams and releases his grip.

Alice slaps him once, goes to slap him again but Polly,  
infuriated, blocks her arm and reaches for her throat.

The patrons drag him away from Alice.

SHOT - ALICE, disheveled and a bit drunk, sits at the bar counter with her saviors - JEFF, a sturdy Scotsman, and RICK.

Alice knocks back a shot. Jesús' photo is tucked under another empty glass.

JEFF

Don't get mad at Polly. He can be a badass joker but, all in all, he's a decent fellow. Trust me, he now feels worse than you do.

Alice glances at Polly snoozing at the bar counter.

JEFF (cont'd)

Look, you don't see a lot of women around here. With no work, people start acting crazy. - It used to be a busy place, now everyone's gone, including the barman. So that Chef thing of yours, it really hit the nail on the head.

The boozers laugh. Jeff's tipsy friend Rick examines Jesús' photo.

RICK

If you ask me, the Chef here, he looks like Sauced Pepe, after a trip to the hair salon.

Jeff takes a look.

JEFF

You're damn right.

ALICE

Who is he talking about?

JEFF

The Mexican fellow. We called him Sauced Pepe.

Seeing confusion on Alice's face:

JEFF (cont'd)

Used to get weird with his chicken fingers, soaked them in all kinds of sauces.

ALICE

He liked chicken fingers?

JEFF

Nah, he cooked them. When he was not on a bender.

ALICE

Where is he now?!

JEFF

I don't know. Left.

ALICE

When did he leave?

JEFF

Three - four years ago.

Alice drops her head in hands.

JEFF (cont'd)

So what you need him for?

Alice doesn't answer. Rick finishes his glass, sotto whispers to Jeff.

RICK

Looks like Sauced Pepe got someone else knocked up.

Alice looks up.

ALICE

Why does he say that?

JEFF

Hey, don't mind the blabbermouth. He's got it all wrong -

ALICE

Who did he get knocked up?

Jeff considers.

JEFF

It's - he had a woman back home.

RICK

Holly.

JEFF

Yeah. Holly!

INT. NIKISKI BAR & RESTO - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A gaggle of oilmen, just off shift, barge into the bar. Jeff, with the rest of the crowd, sees ...

JESÚS sits at the counter with his glass half-empty, bent over a piece of paper.

Jeff slaps him on the back.

JEFF

Hey, why frown at paper? Leave it in the shitty so we have something to wipe our asses with.

Everyone in earshot howls. Jeff takes a stool next to Jesús.

The BARMAN tries to deal with the incoming crowd.

BARMAN

Pepe, get your ass over here! Start pouring.

Jeff finally sees what Jesús is looking at.

It's a photo of a YOUNG KID next to a hand-written letter.

JEFF

Who's that?

JESÚS

It's from Holly. My son.

BARMAN (O.S.)

Step up Pepe, Goddamn it!

JEFF

That's good news, isn't it? - He looks highbred. You sure he's yours?

Jesús gets behind the bar and starts to pour. Beers. One after another, slapping them down on the bar with a mission.

The Barman struggles to keep up. When an old man in a moth-eaten coat steps up.

BARMAN

No more credit for you, buddy. I need cash up front.

JESÚS

Hey, let my people drink. It's on me.

BARMAN

You're off you're fucking nut.

JESÚS

Hey, everyone, drinks on me!

They CHEER and snatch them off the bar.

BARMAN

Fine. You asked for it. This will  
come out of your quittance, bud.

He serves what Jesús sets on the pour.

The funny thing is, the beer looks a bit like it has a MIST.  
As though it's incredibly cold ... or ...

The happy boozers salute Jesús.

BOOZER #1

Long live Pepe!

BOOZER #2

To Pepe! Don't freeze your ass off  
when they kick you out.

The boozers laugh and drink from their glasses.

When slowly, ever so slowly, a look comes over their faces.  
Suddenly, no one looks all that happy. The bonhomie has  
evaporated.

BOOZER #3

What the fuck?

The Barman is confused.

BOOZER #4

What is this? You tryin to screw me?

BARMAN

Shut the fuck up, Charlie. Free beer  
and yer bitchin? Go fuck yourself.

Charlie CHUCKS the glass right at the Barman's head,  
SHATTERING the mirror behind him.

Someone SMASHES a mug over Charlie's head and down he goes.

Now everyone's in on it.

BOOZER #5

Get your hands off!

Chairs start FLYING. It's a flat out BRAWL, bottles barstools, glasses ... not to mention FISTS and BOOTS.

As Jesús, pleased with himself, crosses his arms and leans back, watching the chaos. Then he pulls out that letter again.

INT./EXT. TAXI - JFK AIRPORT - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Alice climbs in a taxi. She dials Holly. After a few long beeps, the call is dropped. She tries again, same result.

EXT. MARTY'S HOUSE - DAY

The taxi drops her in front of Marty's townhouse.

INT. MARTY'S HOUSE - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

Alice, exhausted, drops her stuff and makes her way to the kitchen. She opens the fridge, grabs a container, closes the door, then turns to find ...

Marty sitting quietly in a corner.

ALICE  
God, you scared me.  
(looks at her watch)  
Why aren't you at work?

MARTY  
I didn't go in.

Alice digs for salad dressing.

ALICE  
I won't stay long, I've got to go to the Hamptons for an interview.

MARTY  
Please, have a seat.

Alice turns to Marty.

MARTY (cont'd)  
I insist.

ALICE  
Listen - I'm not in the mood for this. I had a red-eye flight and now I have to drive a hundred miles -

MARTY  
From where again? Charleston?  
(beat)  
They won't talk to you.

ALICE  
Who?

MARTY  
Holly Aiger. And her husband. Who  
called me this morning to say that  
you tried to blackmail his wife.

ALICE  
Look. I don't know what she said or  
thought but - I did nothing wrong. I  
just asked about our friend in  
common -

MARTY  
You threaten her?

ALICE  
It wasn't a threat.

MARTY  
What about Hopeful Horizons? You just  
happened to drive by?

ALICE  
They called you - ?

MARTY  
Of course they called me! You went to  
them pretending to work for the very  
newspaper I happen to run ...

ALICE  
I'd still work there -

MARTY  
(doesn't hear her)  
Do you have any idea how  
embarrassed - ?

ALICE  
I'd still work at *your* newspaper, if  
it wasn't for *you*.

MARTY  
And what is that supposed to mean?



ALICE  
When I got pregnant, you chickened out.

MARTY  
Don't talk crap, you know I wanted that baby.

ALICE  
I'm not talking about the baby. I'm talking about *me*. I had a life and you bullied me into quitting so you could spare yourself a necktie party with your workmates.

MARTY  
That's not - We talked about that. I had to make a choice.

ALICE  
You could choose me.

Alice heads out. Marty follows on her heels.

MARTY  
For Christ's sake, Alice, I earn the living so you don't have to worry about it. How else would you afford this whole writing thing?

ALICE  
Don't belittle yourself. I'm no Julia Child. More like a scullery maid.

MARTY  
Oh, come on now ... So is that your way of feeling better about yourself? Hassle innocent housewives and chase ex-CIA agents?

Alice picks up her bag. Marty suddenly turns contrite.

MARTY (cont'd)  
Look, I only want what's best for you. I mean - if it's some middle-age thing, we can work it out together. I've got a good friend who specializes in hormone replace-

ALICE  
Go fuck yourself, Marty.

Alice slams the door behind her.

INT. SURVEILLANCE CAR - DAY

From the driver's seat, Smith watches Alice get in her car and pull out.

INT. ALICE'S CAR - DAY

Alice is parked down the road from Steven Aiger's driveway.

She spots an Audi pulling out, Holly Eckelberry behind the wheel. Alice crouches down. Then she starts the engine and follows.

INT. ALICE'S CAR - (MOVING) - DAY

Alice drives down a street lined up with fancy boutiques. She spots Holly's car parked in front of Hildreth Department Store and pulls over. She waits.

Finally, Holly steps out of the shop. Alice quickly opens the door and follows after her.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON MAIN STREET - DAY

As Holly is about to put her shopping bag in the backseat of her car, she spots Alice approaching.

HOLLY

I have nothing to say to you.

ALICE

Just give me a minute.

HOLLY

You lied to me!

ALICE

Want to talk about lies? Does your husband know about your son?

HOLLY

I'll call the police, bitch.

ALICE

Holly, I went to fucking Alaska and back. I know Jesús is the father.

HOLLY

You're - delirious.

ALICE

Holly, you have no idea what's going on. Your child is in danger.

HOLLY

That's impossible.

ALICE

How is that impossible? You have to let me talk to him -

HOLLY

Because there's no child! He died when he was twelve.

Alice is dumbfounded.

ALICE

That's not - but you sent Jesús a letter, telling him about the boy ...

HOLLY

I sent him a letter because I knew he wouldn't come otherwise. My boy had a blood disease. Something weird in his Y chromosome. *His* fucking chromosome! He could have saved him. But when he came, there was nobody left to save here.

Holly wipes away a tear, lets out a neurotic laugh and climbs in her car.

ALICE

Wait. Where is he now?

HOLLY

What - puking his brains out? Ask around Hunts Point.

She starts to pull out.

ALICE

How do you know?

HOLLY

My name is Mrs. Aiger. If I need *something*, they bring it to me on a fucking silver platter.

INT. ALICE'S CAR - DAY

Alice stops her white Mercedes SUV on Hunts Point. A passing woman peers in through the tinted window. Alice pulls out.

Alice drives along the street, spots a sign of a second-hand store.

She looks for a place to park, sees a blind alley and pulls into it.

She locks the car and heads to the shop.

INT. SURVEILLANCE CAR - DAY

From across the street, Smith watches Alice enter the shop. He exchanges glances with his enforcer JOE. Joe gets out.

INT. SECOND-HAND STORE - HUNTS POINT - DAY

Alice picks up clothes of a more rugged appearance.

When Joe approaches her.

JOE

Miss, do you know if they sell some nice lingerie up here.

Confused, Alice looks around for a salesgirl.

JOE (cont'd)

Never mind, just tell me what size you are.

Alice grabs her clothes and carries them to the counter.

As the cashier woman weighs the clothes, Alice glances back. Joe's still there, STARING at her.

EXT. HUNTS POINT - DAY

Alice exits the shop and heads to her car. Joe follows behind.

She quickens her step, turns into an alleyway and jumps into her car.

INT./EXT. ALICE'S CAR - DAY

In the rear-view mirror, Alice sees Joe in the opening of the alleyway. She crouches down.

She lays low a minute, then lifts her head to check the mirrors ...

When Joe SMASHES the side window.

She shifts in reverse and starts driving back to the street.

Smith, at the wheel of the surveillance sedan, pulls forward, BLOCKING the exit.

Alice SLAMS on the breaks.

Paralyzed by fear, she sits and watches Joe, a metal pipe in his hand and a smug look on his face, heading right at her.

She puts it in drive and starts moving forward, past Joe with his grin still on, and into the dead-end of the alley.

She stops, fastens the belt, then shifts in reverse and PUSHES the throttle through the floor.

The big Mercedes picks up speed and CRASHES into the sedan, throwing it back into the roadway.

For a few seconds the cars stand still in the cloud of dust. Then, the Mercedes fires back up and drives away.

EXT. ALICE'S CAR - UNDERGROUND LOT - LATER

Scratching the tarmac with its mangled back bumper, the Mercedes pulls into an underground parking lot.

INT. ALICE'S CAR - UNDERGROUND LOT

Alice calms her breath, looks in the visor mirror, then starts to frantically wipe her face clean of makeup.

She grabs a shopping bag from the backseat and changes into a dark hoodie. She then picks up a few dollar bills from her wallet and puts the rest into the glove box.

She studies her new look one last time and gets out of the car.

EXT. HUNTS POINT - DAY

With the hood over her head and her hands in the pockets, Alice emerges from the car park and steps into the unknown.

SHOT - ALICE shows the photo of Jesús to a street vendor, then a cashier at a grocery shop. Nobody knows him.

SHOT - ALICE walks down the street lined with repair shops and strip bars. She sees a group of hookers standing at the edge of the road. She approaches.

ALICE  
I'm sorry. I'm looking for someone.

A Hooker glances at the photo, passes it to another girl.

HOOKER #1  
What's he to you?

ALICE  
Just a friend. Have you seen him?

HOOKER #1  
Maybe.

Alice retrieves \$20 and hands it over.

HOOKER #1 (cont'd)  
I saw him hanging out with Candy once.

She turns to the car pulling in.

HOOKER #1 (cont'd)  
Hey, muscle man! You wanna treat me with your big piece of meat?

ALICE  
Who's Candy?

HOOKER #1  
She used to work at Satin Dolls.

ALICE  
Where's that?

The Hooker motions to the abandoned building behind her. It's clearly no more. The Hooker gets in the car.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Where can I find her now?

HOOKER #1

How the fuck would I know? Good luck  
gettin those support payments,  
sister!

The car takes off. Alice turns to another hooker, who simply turns away and goes about her come-hither business.

SHOT - ALICE shows the photo to a car mechanic on a smoke break. He shakes his head.

SHOT - ALICE walks around, at a dead end, when she HEARS Mexican rap wafting from somewhere behind the trees.

She follows the sound and finds herself in a lot filled with used cars. In the middle is a group of Latino hoodlums leaning on the bumper of the custom BMW, doors wide open.

Alice looks around, pulls herself together. Hands in pockets, she heads to the car. The hoods go silent.

As she approaches, she spots a drugged teenage girl lying in the backseat of the car.

No turning back now, she pulls the photo out of her pocket.

ALICE

I'm looking for a friend.

The hoods burst into laughter.

HOODLUM #1

Mami solo buscando un amigo.

HOODLUM #2

Tomame como amigo, señora!

They laugh and pass the photo around.

Then one of the hoods seems to recognize Jesús.

HOODLUM 3

Se ve como El Mago, solo con una  
gorra loca.

HOODLUM 1

El Mago? Está muerto, no?

The laughter gives way to a lively discussion.

Alice has no idea what's going on. She pulls the photo out of the hoods' hands.

ALICE  
Are you gonna tell me?

The hoods look at her as if she just materialized.

The backseat GIRL explains.

GIRL  
They say El Mago is gone ... You  
can't get no magic here anymore.

ALICE  
Magic?

GIRL  
That's why you looking for him, si?  
The magic?

SHOT - ALICE walks along, catches a glimpse of a man dealing  
drugs in the alley. She stops, watches as the dealer,  
MARCOS, discreetly exchanges something with an addict.

She waits till the addict leaves. Then heads to the recessed  
doorway where Marcos stands. As she approaches, Marcos lifts  
his chin with a "What do you want" gesture. Alice slows.

ALICE  
I need magic.

MARCOS  
(looks around)  
No magic. I got glass.

ALICE  
Actually, I'm looking for a man who  
was selling it. El Mago ...?  
(reaches in her  
pocket)  
I'm happy to pay -

Marcos PUNCHES her in the face and she hits the ground. He  
gets on top of her, frisks her everywhere, hand up her top,  
down her pants. Then he takes her cash, gets to his feet,  
tosses a sachet of meth on her chest.

MARCOS  
Take your shit and fuck off.

Alice stumbles to her feet and hobbles away, holding the  
sachet in her hands.

SHOT - FACE BLEEDING, Alice makes her way back to her car.  
But stops when she spots a fire at the end of beaten path.



SHOT - A GROUP of rough sleepers sit around a fire as Alice approaches. She quietly sits down next to one of the homeless men.

Someone fries a piece of meat over the flame. The man sitting next to Alice, BEAVER, grabs a joint from his neighbor and takes a drag. He then discovers Alice by his side and passes her the joint.

Alice takes a puff and starts coughing.

BEAVER

Hey Candy, you wanna teach this one how to blow?

The men laugh. CANDY, a washed-out woman sitting a few people down, replies ...

CANDY

Eat shit, Beaver.

SHOT - LATER. As the others get drowsy, Alice discreetly moves closer to Candy. Candy searches for a good-night smoke.

CANDY (cont'd)

Beaver, you blew all of it, motherfucker. You work your own ass off to buy this shit.

BEAVER

(drowsy)

... blow me.

Alice pulls the sachet from her pocket. Whispers ...

ALICE

Hey. I got some.

Candy folds the foil and lights up. She grudgingly offers a hit to Alice. Alice refuses. After a few drags, Candy starts to nod off. Alice shakes her.

CANDY

What?

ALICE

Tell me about the magic.

CANDY

Magic ...

INT. SATIN DOLLS - HUNTS POINT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The strippers perform on the main stage.

Jesús, sitting at the tip rail, finishes his whiskey and stares blankly at Candy doing her pole dance.

SHOT - LATER, the place is closing. Candy, out of costume, a duffel over her shoulder, sees Jesús and tries to shake him awake.

CANDY

Hey, buddy, we're closing, time to go home.

Jesús tries to get to his feet, loses balance. His wallet and his son's photo drop to the floor.

Candy picks it up. Another STRIPPER calls out.

STRIPPER

You want me to call Roy?

Candy takes another look at Jesús.

CANDY

No. I'll handle it.

INT. CANDY'S APARTMENT - HUNTS POINT - DAY

Candy sits on the edge of a bed next to Jesús and fills a large glass vaporizer on the coffee table.

CANDY

This will make you feel better.

Jesús inhales and lays back to rest. Candy takes her hit.

SHOT - CANDY stuffs the stage costumes in her bag. She glances at Jesús laying naked in bed, face down.

CANDY (cont'd)

Hey, you wanna stay here, you gotta earn your keep.

Jesús doesn't respond.

SHOT - CANDY returns home to find a half-dressed Jesús dozing on the sofa. A few emptied meth sachets lay next to the vaporizer.

Candy rushes to a kitchen drawer, searches for her stash. Nothing left but a pack of sleeping pills and a vial of Diazepam.

CANDY (cont'd)  
 Fuck. You smoked all of it?! What am I supposed to do? Stuff myself with the fucking valium?

She throws the vial at Jesús, waking him up, then marches to the bathroom and sits on the toilet.

CANDY (cont'd)  
 I fucking knew it.  
 (out the door)  
 When I step out, I want your dumb fuckin ass gone - Motherfucker.

Candy gets up and flushes. She walks out and sees Jesús sucking on the vaporizer.

CANDY (cont'd)  
 Is there more?

JESÚS  
 Try this.

Candy takes a seat. She inhales ... then slumps back in a euphoric haze.

CANDY  
 What in fuck was that?

JESÚS  
 Magic. Pure magic.

She offers him a drag. Jesús declines. Candy takes another drag, then clambers on top of him ...

EXT. HUNTS POINT - DAY

Candy, in a sun dress, and Jesús walk casually down a sunlit alley, side by side.

As they pass Marcos, standing in his usual spot, he makes an appreciative whistle. Candy glances his way with a smile.

INT. CANDY'S APARTMENT - HUNTS POINT - DAY

Jesús tinkers with the vaporizer while Candy sits at a dressing table sprucing herself up.

She snaps a quick glance Jesús' way, frowns at what he's doing. He has nothing but a can of soda on the table.

CANDY  
What is that, Fresca? You can't fuck  
around, honey.

JESÚS  
Don't worry about it.

CANDY  
I don't see any other ingredients.  
(no reply)  
Make mine a double.

JESÚS  
Take it slow, sweet. I don't want you  
to skip work again.

CANDY  
I'm not going to work. Not after  
tonight's ...

A KNOCK and hurries to the door.

CANDY (cont'd)  
... invitation only.

MARCOS steps right past Candy and joins Jesús in the living room, moving his chair to sit with his back to the wall.

Candy nervously gestures for Jesús to pass her the vaporizer. But he doesn't.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Honey ...?

JESÚS  
This is not for a man.

CANDY  
(incredulous)  
What?

Even Marcos laughs at that.

JESÚS  
You can't give it to him.

MARCOS  
(to Candy)  
You like it?

CANDY  
 Me? Yeah! There's NOTHING like it.  
 (to Jesús)  
 What the fuck is wrong with you? Just  
 give him a pull.

JESÚS  
 This will ... all get real ugly.

CANDY  
 I'll get ugly myself if you don't  
 give me that fucking thing.

She snatches away the vaporizer and places it before Marcos.  
 Marcos picks it up - then hesitates. He holds it out to  
 Candy.

MARCOS  
 You first.

So Candy eager grabs it and takes a big pull. Her eyes all  
 but roll into the back of her head and she suddenly looks  
 like she's in a dream world. She moves toward Marcos, tries  
 to KISS him ... he SHOVES her face away and takes that  
 vaporizer from her.

Marcos looks to Jesús, then back to Candy who's in bliss. So  
 he takes a pull. Candy smiles at him beatifically.

CANDY  
 Huh ... What did I tell you ..?

As Marcos suddenly SWIPES all the contents off the dressing  
 table, smashing everything against the wall.

Candy just keeps grinning her foolish smile, but she's  
 struggling with what's going on.

CANDY (cont'd)  
 Marcos ...? What the fuck?

Jesús YANKS her away just as a CHAIR FLIES right at her  
 head.

He drags her to the kitchen where he barricades the door  
 with a chair. WE CAN HEAR MARCOS in a rage, trashing the  
 place.

CANDY (cont'd)  
 What's happening? He's going fucking  
 berserk. What did you put in that?

JESÚS  
I tried to tell you -

CANDY  
You didn't tell me shit. How do you  
turn him off?

JESÚS  
I don't know. I never -

CANDY  
Jesus fucking Christ ...

JESÚS  
We could give him something - like  
sleeping pills? That might help him  
to cool down a little.

GLASS SMASHES against the kitchen door.

CANDY  
Give me the fucking valium.

SHOT - LATER. Marcos is panting, on all fours, drenched with sweat but the rage in his eyes remains. He gets up on his knees and tries to SMASH his way through the coffee table. Then he lifts it, tries to throw it through the window.

When JESÚS tries to TACKLE him.

Marcos ROLLS Jesús off, gets on top of him, wraps his hands around his neck as ...

Candy STICKS a syringe into his neck.

Marcos goes limp as Jesús desperately tries to catch his breath.

SHOT LATER - Marcos wakes up in the same chair, next to the empty mirror frame.

He rubs his neck and looks suspiciously at Candy and Jesús sitting in front of him with servile looks on their faces.

Jesús sees a piece of broken glass at his feet. As he pushes it discreetly under the sofa, Candy gives Marcos a reassuring smile.

Marcos cringes.

MARCOS  
That's some crazy shit.

## MONTAGE:

- Candy slips a pile of scrips to the pharmacist. The pharmacist glances around, hands her a batch of Diazepam bottles.
- Candy's apartment, as Jesús carefully pours in the Diazepam solution to the smoking volumetric flask.
- Jesús takes one of the vials filled with the finished product, attaches a sticker and signs the letter "M" with a red marker.
- Marcos' henchmen unload boxes marked with the letter "M" from a van and carry them to the recessed doorway ...
- As Marcos, covering their backs, watches a skinny junkie pass by, waving his arms and stretching his jaw madly ... like he's on the RING WALK.
- Jewelry stores, as Jesús helps Candy try on a nice little chain with a Playboy Bunny on it.
- Used car lot, as Candy and Jesús sit in a '64 Chevy Impala. Candy, in the driver's seat, flips a switch and the car starts to hop and bounce. Candy laughs gleefully.

## EXT. HUNTS POINT - DAY

Standing in front of his stash house, Marcos watches as the rattletrap Chevy Impala comes to a halt, the suspension squeaking.

Jesús and Candy get out of the car and head to Marcos.

Candy simply holds out her hand. Marcos grudgingly hands her an envelope. But before they leave ...

MARCOS

Why don't you wait in the car, luv.  
We'll have some man-to-man talk.

Candy shrugs, heads to the car, counting the cash.

Marcos pulls Jesús inside. Then he stares at him a moment, sizing him up, like a maladjusted son.

MARCOS (cont'd)

I don't know how you do what you do  
but - you really blow my brains out  
with this shit.

(MORE)

MARCOS (cont'd)  
 I never felt so much - pure anger.  
 God, it's like I'm a fucking viking  
 now ...  
 (catches himself)  
 Anyway, I got word from someone.  
 Someone high up. He wants to say  
 hello.

INT. CHEVROLET IMPALA - LATER

Jesús returns to the passenger seat.

CANDY  
 So? What did he say?

JESÚS  
 He wants me to meet someone.

CANDY  
 Yeah, fuck him.

JESÚS  
 Some guy called Teddy. Greencoin?

CANDY  
 Teddy. Who invented Dope Road?

Jesús shrugs.

CANDY (cont'd)  
 Holy shit you dumb yokel, he's a  
 billionaire. We're gonna make  
 millions. When do we meet him?

JESÚS  
 We? I don't know if Marcos is going  
 to like that.

CANDY  
 Marcos is your employee, not the  
 other way around.

She starts the car.

INT. CANDY'S FLAT - DAY

Jesús does his magic while Candy stares nervously at the  
 phone.

She loses it, grabs the phone. No calls missing. She stands  
 up, walks back and forth.



CANDY  
What did he say, exactly?

JESÚS  
He said, make a batch and wait for a  
call.

Candy picks up a vial of Diazepam from the table and empties  
it into the flask.

JESÚS (cont'd)  
Hey ... I already did that.

CANDY  
Just to be on the safe side.

She empties another one.

The phone starts to vibrate.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Candy and Jesús step out of the car and look up at the high-  
rise in front of them.

INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Candy and Jesús ride the elevator.

JESÚS  
Hey, if all goes well, what do you  
say to moving?

CANDY  
I saw an ad for a condo in Fordham -

JESÚS  
No, no. I was thinking more like -  
overseas. Like Asia?

CANDY  
What the fuck are you talking about?  
What the hell are you gonna do in  
Asia?

JESÚS  
I just, I think there's more I need  
to understand. I don't think - that I  
really have a grasp of things and  
baby - I don't know, but I think  
maybe I'm not - I need learning ...

CANDY  
Cause you're dumb as bag of hair,  
honey. Just cut the crap.

Beat.

JESÚS  
What if I told you I booked us two  
tickets to Nepal, leaving tomorrow?

CANDY  
I'd say you wasted OUR money,  
dipshit.

The elevator doors open.

INT. TEDDY GREENGOLD'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Candy and Jesús face two huge Guards wearing earphones,  
shielding the monumental doors of the office.

JESÚS  
(whispers)  
What if I told you I already got us  
passports?

CANDY  
(whispers)  
Oh sweetie, I can tell you where to  
stick those passports. And maybe your  
asshole can stamp them. This is our  
fucking moment right here, dopey.

JESÚS  
I guess, it's just -

A GUARD touches his earphone. Then he swings open the doors.

INT. TEDDY GREENGOLD'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

TEDDY is skinny, a soft-boy man with a soul patch.

TEDDY  
And here's the world famous El Mago!

He takes Jesús' hand in both of his and bows in reverence.

TEDDY (cont'd)  
And this is, I believe, his devoted  
follower.

He kisses Candy's hand.

CANDY

I ain't no follower, I'm full partner. It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Greengold.

TEDDY

Call me Teddy, since we're all going to be full partners. Now how was your ride? No, don't tell me. Impala? And ... oh I can just envision so much more for us.

Candy looks at the platinum frame hanging on the wall. Mounted inside is gold coin with an engraved cannabis leaf.

CANDY

Is that ...?

TEDDY

The one and only pre-ICO greencoin. I would let you touch the little thing but it cost the earth. Hey, let's not talk about the mundane.

(turns to Jesús)

Show me the magic!

They move to the lounge area. Jesús pulls out a box full of magic vials. Teddy takes one and examines it.

TEDDY (cont'd)

You mind taking it first?

JESÚS

I'm not really ...

Teddy glances questioningly at Candy, then back at Jesús.

TEDDY

(apologetically)

Part of the trade ...

Jesús looks again at Candy, then grudgingly opens the vial and pounds it back.

Teddy waits for a second, then, satisfied, does the same.

Candy watches tensely as Teddy tilts his head back with a strangler's smile.

For a second he grits his teeth and his eyes flash with RAGE - then he starts to convulse and ...

His body goes limp. No motion. Nothing.

CANDY  
Mr. Greengold? Teddy ...?

She taps on his shoulder.

CANDY (cont'd)  
(to Jesús)  
I think I need help here ...

Jesús doesn't answer. Doesn't move. She tries to detect a pulse on Teddy's neck.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Oh fuck ...

She shakes Teddy. His head hangs down lifelessly.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Fuck! Fuck!

Candy turns to Jesús who sits still, his eyes closed. She tries to shake him up, slaps his face.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Do something! He stopped breathing!

Jesús opens his eyes for a moment, then goes back to his trance.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Jesus! Fuck! They're going to fucking  
kill us!

She dashes to the doors, desperately looks around, sees the frame with the coin. She sticks it between the door handles.

She crosses back to Jesús, slaps him again.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Wake up, you bastard!

VOICES behind the door. Someone SHOVES on it. It doesn't budge.

CANDY (cont'd)  
Jesus, you got us killed now ...

SHOT - IN HIS TRANCE Jesús is INSIDE Teddy's body.

He observes his tissues, his blood vessels, his heart. Everything stands still ... but still FUMING.

POUNDING from the door. With every blow, a slight tremble spreads through the frozen bloodstreams.

Candy cries, grabs Jesús by his shirt.

CANDY (cont'd)  
It's your fucking fault! Your  
goddamned magic!

SHOT - The pounding becomes more powerful and the tremble INSIDE Teddy more intense.

SHOT - The coin frame is about to break. BANG! BANG!

SHOT - THE HEART catches the BEAT.

The frame COLLAPSES and the guards BURST INSIDE.

And that golden coin ROLLS right up to the feet of Teddy ...

AS HE GASPS back to life.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Alice wakes up in her business class seat, wincing. A hostess mindfully tucks her blanket in.

INT. KATHMANDU AIRPORT - ARRIVAL HALL - DAY

A tourist banner - "Nepal: gateway to a mystical journey."

Alice spots a plaque with her name on it, held up by MANISH, a Nepalese man in a formal suit.

INT./EXT. MANISH'S CAR - KATHMANDU AIRPORT - DAY

Manish puts Alice's suitcase in the trunk of his limousine and climbs in. The press pass tucked under the windshield reads "The Himalayan Times (International News Network)."

MANISH  
(with heavy accent)  
It's a fine pleasure to have the wife  
of such a great man in Nepal.

ALICE  
Did you manage to find out what I  
asked for?

MANISH

Of course. I have many friends ...  
The man you seek, he came here last  
year. November twenty-six. I asked my  
man in the border control. He is  
almost certain he didn't leave the  
country.

ALICE

Almost? What does that mean?

MANISH

It means that if he left the country  
on a plane, my friend would have him  
in his database. But with land  
crossings?

He merely shrugs.

ALICE

Do you have any idea where he could  
go from here?

MANISH

Oh yes. We know he used his name to  
buy a train ticket to Terai.

ALICE

Terai. What's in Terai?

MANISH

Oh it's beautiful, bordering India. A  
lot of nice meadows.

ALICE

I don't think he came all this way to  
see nice meadows.

MANISH

He could go to India.

Alice is skeptical.

MANISH (cont'd)

Or he could go see Swami Baba. The  
famous guru.

INT. SWAMI BABA'S ASHRAM - DAY

SWAMI BABA, a 50-ish man wearing a white robe, a neat beard  
and a handlebar mustache, sits on a cushion behind a low  
desk and examines Jesús' photo.

SWAMI BABA

Yes. I remember him. Troubled young man. Said he came for a guidance, begged to show him the path. But as is often the case with the young people nowadays, he was not prepared to make the sacrifices. As I say - and say often - there are no shortcuts to enlightenment.

A DISCIPLE in an orange robe brings a tray with the tea, sits next to the desk and starts to pour.

ALICE

How long did he stay here?

SWAMI BABA

Oh, days. You see, we are a tiny community and we usually don't accept random people. Of course, for you I was more than happy to make an exception. Perhaps you might want to stay with us for an evening meal. Then I could give you a tour of our chambers.

Alice glances at the Disciple who now sits a few feet away and pretends to be invisible.

ALICE

Maybe next time. When he left, did he say where he was going?

SWAMI BABA

I think he mentioned something about crossing to India.

ALICE

If he crossed the border ...?

Alice pulls out her tourist map of Nepal.

ALICE (cont'd)

Where would be the place to do that?

She shows him the map. Swami Baba glances at it.

SWAMI BABA

You have to go to Dhangadhi.

He moves away a heap of papers on the table to fold out the map. When an EMPTY VIAL marked with an "M" rolls out from under the papers. Swami Baba nervously glances at Alice.

SWAMI BABA (cont'd)  
 (to the Disciple)  
 Get this table cleared already.

The Disciple RAKES the cups and empty vial onto the tea tray.

SWAMI BABA (cont'd)  
 So, as I said, you need to go to -

ALICE  
 I've changed my mind about the tour.  
 I think I'll take it now.

She's up and immediately heads down the corridor. Swami Baba jumps to his feet and rushes after her.

Alice opens the first door. In a dimly-lit room, an adept sits on the straw mat and meditates.

SWAMI BABA  
 Miss. It's meditation hour, you can not ...

Alice moves to the next door.

SWAMI BABA (cont'd)  
 Please stop right there.

She swings open the door and sees the same. She keeps walking. Swami Baba, trailing, clutching his heart.

SWAMI BABA (cont'd)  
 Miss! Please!

At the end of the corridor, Alice sees a doorway hidden behind a curtain and she heads for it.

The Disciple stands in her way.

DISCIPLE  
 No! It's Master's sanctum!

ALICE  
 Back off!

DISCIPLE  
 I will not!

So the Swami pushes past, and simply opens the door so Alice can look inside ... she steps in to find. Nobody.



Above a bed are numerous posters of Aamir Khan, a Bollywood action hero, sporting the same haircut and mustache as Swami Baba.

ALICE

Did you ever ask him about the source of that *magic*?

SWAMI BABA

What difference does -

ALICE

Maybe there wasn't any source. Maybe he himself was the source.

SWAMI BABA

(chuckles)

You Americans, always looking for your Messiah. How sad. Go to Israel. Maybe he still hangs from some cross for you.

Alice heads out, but stops with ...

ALICE

Yet you wanted something from him too, didn't you?

And off she goes.

EXT. HOPEFUL HORIZONS FACILITY - DAY

A black limo pulls over and stops in front of agent Harris.

The window rolls down and a well-groomed STATESMAN gestures for him to get in.

INT. STATESMAN'S LIMOUSINE - DAY

Harris is in the backseat next to the statesman.

STATESMAN

I've heard there was an issue with one of your personnel.

HARRIS

A minor traffic accident. Nothing to worry about.

STATESMAN

(beat)

How's your research going? Anything you care to enlighten us on?

HARRIS

Nothing of substance yet. They're trying to figure it out.

STATESMAN

Public relations?

HARRIS

It's all under control.

STATESMAN

Does the name Alice Reed ring any bell for you?

HARRIS

I don't -

STATESMAN

The woman who'd put your man in the hospital. And as it turns out, that same woman has checked in for a flight to Colombo two days ago.

Harris digests his words.

STATESMAN (cont'd)

Look, Harris, we're a god-fearing country. We don't want some wetback to show up and start muddying the water -

HARRIS

There's nothing to find there. *He* is gone.

STATESMAN

I guess you sound too confident for someone who is still trying to *figure it out*.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

Alice climbs out of the taxi stuck in the long line of cars on the approach to the Nepalese-Indian border. She walks down a dusty road to the crossing guard, pulls out the photo of Jesús, tries to ask him something. He motions irritably to the gray building across the way.

INT. CUSTOMS - MOMENTS LATER

Alice squeezes through the local merchants and peasants to one of the counters and presses the photo to the glass.

ALICE

Do you speak English? I'm looking for a missing person. Is there anyone I can talk to?

The inspector doesn't understand, asks his fellow worker at another counter. The fellow worker explains to him in a few words. The inspector snarls, throws up his hands in exasperation. The crowd pushes her away from the counter.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - CONTINUOUS

Alice steps out of the building. She dials Manish but gets a "couldn't connect" message in Nepali.

On the other side of the road, she sees a small shop with the signs "Welcome to Nepal" and "Cheap Calls Abroad".

INT. SHOP - DAY

Alice steps inside and finds herself in an oasis of calm. On the shelves are travel guides, t-shirts, organic foods.

The beautiful Nepalese SHOP LADY behind the counter shows a map to a European couple.

SHOP LADY

... take H-1, then watch for the big sign. It's a nice one, they even make their own mozzarella cheese ...

ALICE

Excuse me? Phone?

SHOP LADY

Yes, make a call, pay afterwards.

SHOT - ALICE in a booth. Still no answer. She thinks for a moment, then dials another number.

She hears her own voice, still full of enthusiasm.

ALICE (V.O.)

You have reached Marty and Alice. I have probably gone shopping while Marty's busy taking on the world.

(MORE)

ALICE (V.O.) (cont'd)  
If your matter is urgent, you know  
how to reach him. Otherwise leave  
your message after the beep.

Alice hears the beep, then hangs up.

SHOT - ALICE pays at the counter.

SHOP LADY  
Please take our leaflet. It has a map  
with all Terai's sights inside.

Alice takes a map, heads for the exit, then comes back.

ALICE  
I'm sorry. I'm searching for someone.  
He might have come through here.

She shows Jesús' photo, expecting the usual. When ...

SHOP LADY  
I know him.

ALICE  
You know him?!

Alice's heart starts pounding.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Did he cross the border here?

SHOP LADY  
No. He works just here. On a farm.

ALICE  
His name is Jesús -

SHOP LADY  
Yes, the Mexican. Come. If you want,  
I can drive you there. I was going to  
take my lunch anyway.

ALICE  
If it's not too much trouble.

SHOP LADY  
No, no trouble. They'll probably  
treat me with a nice pulao when they  
see you.

INT. SHOP LADY'S JEEP - (MOVING) - DAY

The road winds through a beautiful meadow. Alice watches as the sun lights up the golden wheat fields.

The Jeep stops in front of a barn.

SHOP LADY  
I'll check if he's here or taking  
snacks to the wheat cutters.

The Shop Lady heads to the barn and Alice stays in the car. She blissfully watches as ... farm workers approach her car. She smiles at them. When one of the men JAMS A HOOD over her head.

INT. TERAJ LIBERATION ARMY'S BASE - NIGHT

The hood is removed. A dozen men wearing paramilitary gear evaluate Alice, then start arguing, jostling and passing each other stacks of cash ... like they're BIDDING for something.

A younger man picks his moment, sneaks up on Alice and starts to stroke her head. Alice, hands tied, wriggles and kicks. The man gets angry and PULLS her hair, making her SCREAM. His peers quickly drag him away.

Alice is hooded again. She screams and bites her captors' hands as they drag her away.

INT. LOCK-UP - NIGHT

The men throw her into a dark cell. No bed and a bucket for a toilet. They leave. Alice clings to the door and screams.

ALICE  
Let me out! Bastards!

SHOT - ALICE sits on the floor, muttering, angry and afraid. A little slot at the bottom of the door opens up and a bowl of mush is pushed through. Alice rushes to the door.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Wait! Let me make a phone call. Hey -

She HEARS footsteps leaving and KICKS the door in despair.

Alice eats with disgust.

SHOT - ALICE, drained, hears the squeak of the opening slot and crawls towards the door. She quickly gobbles down the mush and mutters helplessly.

ALICE (cont'd)  
That's not enough - Not enough ...

SHOT - THE DOOR OPENS. Alice, curled up on the floor, whispers.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Water ... give me water ...

They grab her and drag her out of the cell.

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

They throw her to the ground and leave. Alice gropes around in dark, then hears ... The rustling of someone nearby. A flame flares up and there appears the bearded face of ...

JESÚS. He holds out a chalice. The liquid inside mists.

ALICE  
Jesús ...?

His expression changes and he pulls back the chalice.

As Alice passes out.

SHOT - A FIRE lights up a large natural cavern. Jesús watches as Alice devours a casserole from his plate. He fills a cup of water from a jug and passes it to her. She drains the cup.

ALICE (cont'd)  
Who are they?

JESÚS  
They call themselves Terai's  
Liberation Army.

ALICE  
What do they want?

JESÚS  
(shrugs)  
Some sort of communism or just want  
to join India?

ALICE  
What do they want from me?

An awkward pause.

JESÚS

Same thing they want from all women.

Alice looks at the chalice resting on a rock.

ALICE

Is that why they keep you here?

Jesús hangs his head in shame.

JESÚS

Not just that - they drink it when they need to go outside - puts them in the right mood.

Jesús looks up and talks, fighting back tears.

JESÚS (cont'd)

I didn't want this. I came here looking for answers ... to learn to use what he gave me.

ALICE

He ...?

JESÚS

God. Who else? I don't know. I'm not smart enough to know. I just wanted to put it to good use, but time and again, I get it wrong.

ALICE

But - it's not God who gave you this. It's biology. It's your genes.

JESÚS

What are you talking about? Who are you? Do you even know me?

ALICE

Your two sons have the same - abilities. I talked to Holly, she said that her son - your son - had a mutation in his Y chromosome. I'm not an expert, but these things are clearly connected ...

JESÚS

What kind of bullshit are you selling?

ALICE

If it's your paternal chromosome, all  
your sons will possess the same. And  
the sons of your sons. Your father  
must have had it too -

JESÚS

He had fuck all!

ALICE

And yet ironically your name is  
Jesús.

JESÚS

I was fuckin born Hector. I changed  
it to Jesús when I realized what I  
could ...

Jesús grabs the poker and suddenly starts BANGING it on a  
rock.

The guerrillas rush in, grab Alice, and drag her away.

Jesús sobs out loud.

JESÚS (cont'd)

Taiyaar nahee. She's not ready. I  
tried! She's not ready ...

INT. LOCK-UP - NIGHT

They shove her back in her cell. She throws herself at the  
closing door, howling.

ALICE

No! Please no ...!

SHOT - ALICE, tears dry, sits on the floor, thinking. She  
gets up, approaches the door and yells.

ALICE (cont'd)

Take me back to him! I'm ready!

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

Alice faces Jesús in a dimly lit space. Jesús, crying and  
sniffling, holds out a chalice.

ALICE

Before I take this from you...



She wipes a tear from her face. She takes a breath and starts talking with a determined voice.

ALICE (cont'd)

When I get back home, I will pull out all the stops and I will do anything to get you out of this. I will take care of you and - I will worship you. - and when they come for me, you don't let them touch a single hair on me.

JESÚS

(sobs)

They're gonna kill me ...

ALICE

They won't.

JESÚS

WHAT IF THEY DO?!

ALICE

You're gonna have to take your chances.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NY TIMES BUILDING - DAY

Marty, folder under his arm, steps out of his newspaper's ultra-modern building.

INT. DEAN & DELUCA CAFE - DAY

He spots Alice the moment he enters, looking healthy, wearing a light-colored toga. He approaches her table.

MARTY

(craving for a hug)

Hey.

Alice smiles at him, remains seated. Marty takes a seat.

MARTY (cont'd)

You look ... great.

ALICE

How are things at the office?

MARTY

Oh, fine, good. We finished that cooking section, tagged everything with ingredients and cooking times. You got your by-lines.

Alice keeps silent.

MARTY (cont'd)

I read your story, it's uh - curious. I really wish we could publish it but - you know how it works.

ALICE

Yes. I do.

MARTY

Even if it all checks out - and I'm not saying it won't - we need to corroborate things.

(opens the folder)

You're writing about children with altered DNA. Yet nobody knows where those children are. And even if we did, we wouldn't be able to carry out an examination ...

ALICE

I understand.

She hangs a tote bag over her shoulder, gets ready to leave.

MARTY

And if we publish that, we'll just find ourselves in the position of not being able to prove ourselves.

Alice stands ... exposing her second trimester BELLY.

ALICE

You need proof, here's your proof.

She heads to the exit, leaving Marty speechless.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS NEWS BROADCASTS (ON TV)

A succession of TV anchors read the news.

## ANCHOR #1

An article came out today in the New York Times claiming the government was running a secret detention facility for children with confirmed supernatural abilities - linked to their DNA ...

(to his editor)

Are you kiddin' me? What's going on here? It's not April Fools now?!

## ANCHOR #2

A New York Times article that came out two days ago has received mixed to negative response and has already been called unsubstantiated by major academic and religious figures. The backlash has prompted the newspaper's long-time editor Marty Haden to resign today.

The TV camera follows Marty as he leaves the Times building carrying a cardboard box and loading it into the trunk of his white Mercedes.

EXT. HOPEFUL HORIZONS FACILITY - DAY

A TV anchor with the Hopeful Horizons Facility behind her.

## ANCHOR #4

Last week's article has become the subject of a growing debate and spawned numerous conspiracy theories. Now the pressure is mounting on the government to release all information regarding the so-called "children of Jesús".

INT. HOPEFUL HORIZONS FACILITY - DAY

Ron Harris' new ASSISTANT walks down the corridor, opens the door to the observation room.

HARRIS watches from behind the glass as his men remove catheters from Manuel's arms.

## ASSISTANT

I've got four more inquiries and a TV van outside.

Harris has the resigned air of a commander losing a battle.

ASSISTANT (cont'd)  
Should I confirm ... or - ?

HARRIS  
How many you got?

ASSISTANT  
Six. They're looking for another two.

HARRIS  
And God knows how many he knocked up  
in the god damned Hindustan.

The Assistant waits. Harris catches his eye, gets angry.

HARRIS (cont'd)  
You don't think we're gonna drown  
them in a tub, do you?  
(heads to the door)  
We're not some savages, for Christ's  
sake.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS NEWS BROADCASTS (ON TV)

Various TV anchors read the news.

ANCHOR #1  
Just minutes ago, in a sudden turn of  
events, a spokesman for the U.S.  
Department of Health has acknowledged  
some of the facts laid down in last  
week's New York Times article ...

ANCHOR #2  
After the government essentially  
recognized the existence of a  
genetically exceptional group of  
people, now being referred to as  
ETHEREALS, all eyes are on the  
reporter who first made public this  
amazing story.

INT. ABC STUDIO - DAY

TAMRON interviews Alice.

TAMRON  
You talk about Jesús Martinez and  
your desperate search to find him.  
(MORE)

TAMRON (cont'd)

He does look like an extraordinary person - I mean, besides being extraordinary as he is, the first of his own kind ...

Alice nods.

TAMRON (cont'd)

He did the relief work in the not-so-favored district of New York, healed the others while being himself imprisoned by the rebel forces in Nepal. Forgive me but - it seems like you're rather fond of him.

ALICE

(beat)

Yes. I am.

TAMRON

Do you hope to see him again, someday?

ALICE

I think it's our duty to get him out.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS NEWS BROADCASTS (ON TV)

Various TV anchors read the news.

ANCHOR #1

Today mass demonstrations were held throughout the country demanding the government take a more pro-active role in the fate of Jesús Martínez, an American naturalized citizen held captive in Nepal.

The TV clip shows a chanting crowd of demonstrators on Capitol Hill, one of them carrying a sign "Bring him home".

ANCHOR #2

It was announced today that Secretary of State Jones will adjust his schedule to take part in the emergency consultations regarding the ongoing crisis in Terai.

A live feed shows Secretary Jones.

JONES

I can assure you, the government is prepared to go to great lengths to secure the release of Mr. Martinez.

EXT. HYPERABAD HOUSE - NEW DELHI - DAY

An ANCHORWOMAN reports from the summit's venue.

ANCHORWOMAN

Reporting live from New Delhi where the intense negotiations between the government of Nepal and the self-proclaimed state of Terai -

A group of Terai insurgents head outside. One of them rudely pushes her away. She composes herself and, excited, delivers her message.

ANCHORWOMAN (cont'd)

The Secretary of State has just issued a statement ... Jesús is coming home.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY

A NEWSWOMAN reports live from overcrowded Times Square.

NEWSWOMAN

Unprecedented security measures are put in place today as Secretary of State Jones and Jesús Martinez are expected to arrive here, on Times Square, in a matter of minutes. As you can see, tens of thousands of people have come to welcome him home and finally lay eyes on this man suitably named "Jesús."

SHOT - ALICE, surrounded by reporters and assistants, pushes through the police checkpoint.

Marty watches her from the crowd. He dials her number.

Alice looks at his name on the phone and discards the call.

MARTY

I just wanna talk, just talk ...

Mumbling to himself, Marty makes his way through the crowd as the escort vehicles approach.

SHOT - The limousine stops. JESÚS, dressed in a white kurta, steps out of the car. The CROWD GOES WILD.

Spooked by the crowd, he spots Alice.

Agent Harris lends a helping hand to Secretary Jones stepping out next. Jones gives him a cold shoulder.

SHOT - Marty sees Alice a few yards away behind the barricade. He tries to get through to her but the crowd is too dense. People push him around ...

Infuriated, Marty draws a gun from his pocket, struggles to set the trigger.

MARTY (cont'd)

Shit ...

The trigger finally CLICKS into place. Marty points the gun into the air and SHOOTS.

The panic ensues. People flee in terror, flip the barricade. Someone knocks over the pregnant Alice.

Jesús hurries to Alice. He tries to get her on her feet ...

When Marty emerges from the crowd with the GUN in his hand.

Marty points the gun at Jesús.

Jesús stands up to FACE HIM.

For a moment Marty stares at Jesús and the bruised Alice behind him. He LOWERS his gun.

Jesús goes back to Alice. Distraught, Marty keeps looking at Jesús bent over Alice ...

When Agent Harris takes him on. He tackles him to the ground, grabs his gun, guides his hand ...

The gun DISCHARGES.

Harris handcuffs Marty, facedown on the ground, watching ...

JESÚS, at Alice's feet, BLEEDING from a gunshot wound.

The crowd slowly swarms around Jesús and Alice.

There he lies on the pavement. Flowing all around him is the simple, plain blood of a man.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GARDEN OF EDEN - DAY

The farmer cultivates the soil around the grown-up tree in the orchard, its first fruits hanging low on the branches.

In the b.g. the TV set shows an old-fashioned BBC gardening programme.

The farmer notices a fallen apple. He puts it gently into his basket, then continues on his path.

FARMER

(to audience)

If there's one thing I've learned while growing the trees, it's that you can't judge them by their pretties. Your seed can look like best-of-breed and enjoy all the gifts of Mother Nature but still not yield a single apple. While the wild seed carried by the wind to some barren land will one day turn it into the perennial garden.

He passes a gnarled old tree, its immense lower branches broken off at the trunk.

FARMER (cont'd)

This was a great tree. But in the end it fell under its own weight. The word has it that Eve tempted the righteous Adam in this very spot.

(shrugs)

But that was a long time ago. Whoever remembers now what happened?

The farmer walks out of sight.

SHOT - The TV set flickers and shows a lovely country house.

On its front porch is Alice. Surrounded by all of Jesús' sons, she reads a large illustrated book.

In her lap is a sweet four-year-old GIRL.

ALICE (ON TV)

And he faced the Lord and asked him "Sovereign Lord, why are you taking me now when I just beheld my true purpose?"

(MORE)



ALICE (ON TV) (cont'd)  
And the Lord God answered "Have no qualms. Your cause shall not end with you. It will be carried on by your wife - the most beautiful and decent living being I had ever put on earth..."

The little girl looks on proudly at Alice.

ALICE (ON TV) (cont'd)  
Now may your children and their children become thousands and thousands and let all your sons stand by their women just like you, *Jesús*, stood by your wife."

EXT. ALICE'S HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Alice wipes a lonely tear from her face, closes her book.

ALICE  
Now, young men, will you stand by your little sister?

JESÚS' CHILDREN  
Yes, ma'am!

ALICE  
Good. Now make yourself scarce.

The teenagers jump up from their seats and rush outside.

ALICE (cont'd)  
And don't forget, you should be home by midnight. Stay off alcohol. That means you, Manuel. I gave my word to your mother. And keep your magic flask shut at all times, you hear me...?

FADE OUT