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INT. ABANDONED HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Wind BLASTS the door open. Porch chimes rattle out a groan.

Moonlight slices across the floor -- catching a limp doll, its arm torn off. A cracked family photo frame lies nearby.

Broken beer bottles glitter in the corner.

A MAN slumps against the wall. His safety vest is filthy. A long nail juts from his ear. Blood drips, steady as a metronome.

EXT. ABANDONED HOME - CONTINUOUS

Medics haul a gurney across what used to be a lawn. Now just cracked dirt and weeds.

A battered "TRUWAVE" NEWS VAN fishtails to a stop.

JESSICA RUSH, 35, battle-hardened yet camera-ready, storms out. Her coat whips in the wind. Eyes scanning like a weapon. She spots the sign:

"MIBANK AUCTION. HOUSE FORECLOSED."

Her jaw clenches. A breath escapes, turning to mist.

JESSICA  
(sotto)  
Not done with you, Steele.

INT. STEELE MANSION - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

BENEDICT STEELE, 42, precision-cut, soul vacuum-sealed. He studies a gilded birdcage.

BENEDICT  
Let today bring a worthy challenge.

A parrot grooms inside. All plume, no purpose.

He taps the bars.

BENEDICT  
Come on.

Silence. He knocks again. Harder.

BENEDICT  
Say something.

Finally...

PARROT  
Hello, sweet pea.

He smirks. Drops caviar through the bars.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Benedict steps out. Rosebushes line the path; his daily ritual, in bloom.

Opera plays softly from a nearby alcove, watching --

AMY STEELE, 40, held in a yoga pose, all balance and control.

Something in him loosens.

SNIP. He clips a rose. Gently strips the thorns.

EXT. LEAFY ALCOVE - MOMENTS LATER

The rose brushes Amy's lips. She smiles, reaches for Benedict, pulls him into a kiss.

It's not rushed. Not desperate. Just... grateful.

AMY  
Let's go to the lake house for  
Thanksgiving. Just us. No work. No  
ghosts.

BENEDICT  
All I end up doing there is help  
you translate ancient texts. *Fun.*

AMY  
(taps his temple)  
Can't let this go to waste, can we,  
Benedict Steele?

He laughs softly. His fingers slide down her arm. They kiss again. Eyes closed. A rare moment of peace. Then --

WHUP-WHUP-WHUP. A helicopter passes overhead. The sound cuts through the courtyard, drowning out the opera.

AMY  
(sighing)  
Can't you get rid of that *thing*?

He looks up. Already gone.

BENEDICT  
It's quieter in the sky.

He turns back to her, but something's shifted. He's distracted.

She studies him. Her smile tightens.

AMY  
Don't be late for the function.  
(off his look)  
You promised...

He lowers his gaze. She squeezes his hand.

AMY  
You'll be fine...

He nods, but the look on his face says otherwise.

EXT. NEW YORK SKYLINE - CONTINUOUS

The helicopter cuts across the sky, closing in on Mibank headquarters. Benedict's battlefield.

EXT. MIBANK TOWER - CONTINUOUS

A sleek monolith of glass and steel, crowned by a glowing blood-red logo: MIBANK.

The helicopter touches down.

EXT. MIBANK TOWER - ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Benedict jumps out, face like stone. His expression hides years of locked-away truths.

INT. MIBANK - EXECUTIVE LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Marble. Chrome. Surgical. On a giant screen: Jessica -- live. Incensed.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
Mibank profits soar while suicides  
mount. And nothing's done to stop  
the rot.

Three execs watch:

PIERCE CARVER, 40, COO. Flashy, ruthless. Lives for the camera.

PIERCE  
Tell 'em to skip the six-pack an'  
pay their fuckin' mortgages.

TIMOTHY BLUNT, 42, CFO. Gaunt, twitchy. Hides behind thick glasses and a trembling hand.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
Banks foreclose on more than three  
hundred thousand homes a year.

ROSALIND PAIGE, 40, CIO. Impeccable. Reserved. The kind of woman who bakes apple pies no one here's ever tasted.

Sprawled across the couch, ZACK MARINO, 38, CLO. Beardy and checked out. Phone in hand, eyeing the screen.

DING. Rosalind kills the feed.

Elevator opens. Benedict strides out.

EXECS (IN UNISON)  
'Morning, Ben.

Benedict stops. Sniffs the air like he's searching for weakness.

Pierce hands him a printout. Benedict scans it. Timothy clutches a folder tight, like armor.

BENEDICT  
Down thirty million.

He looks up. The room freezes under his gaze.

BENEDICT  
For the quarter. Pierce?

PIERCE  
Foreclosures are up. I'd say we  
ease off --

BENEDICT  
Ramp up home valuations. Two  
percent.

TIMOTHY  
(nervous)  
That puts us thirteen percent over  
market. It's... it's not  
sustainable. People will --

BENEDICT  
Raise them, Timothy.

Timothy shrinks. Stares at his shoes.

Benedict strides off. Pierce flips him the bird as Rosalind trails after him.

ROSALIND

Ben, if I may... one of our clients  
took his life last night.

BENEDICT

Not my problem.

ROSALIND

We foreclosed his house. Truwave's  
already spinning the story.

BENEDICT

(halts; turns)

Screw Truwave, Rosalind. Quit  
burning time on small fry.

ROSALIND

You told me to track Jessica Rush.  
She's with Truwave now.

He snorts. She clicks the remote. The screen flickers on.

JESSICA (V.O.)

They call it business, but what  
they mean is using power to crush  
the weak.

(beat)

But real power? That's having the  
guts to do what's right. We owe  
people that much --

BENEDICT

Turn her off.

ROSALIND

(flicks remote)

She's on Global later. Interview.  
Book promo.

BENEDICT

Get me a slot. Wire them the usual,  
but not a dollar more.

INT. RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Benedict strides through. INDIGO, 30s, approaches -- his  
executive assistant. Neat, composed, her smile polite, but  
vacant.

INDIGO

Morning, Mr. Steele.

He doesn't slow. Doesn't look at her. She watches him pass.  
The smile fades. Eyes cool, unreadable.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

A VALET, 60s, gaunt and gray, hums a faded Woodstock tune as he wipes down a sleek steel effigy of Benedict.

The door hisses open. Benedict enters.

VALET  
Hiya, Mr. Steele.

A curt nod.

BENEDICT  
You owe me.

VALET  
Guess I do, huh?

He slides a black envelope from his cart and hands it over.

Benedict takes it, his face tight.

INT. GLOBAL TV STUDIO - DAY

Studio lights blast down. Overlit, unnatural. Everything gleams: white teeth, lacquered hair, airbrushed skin.

Two ANCHORS sit across from Jessica, trading polished smiles.

MALE ANCHOR  
(holds up Jessica's book)  
So, Jessica. In your book you  
claim... *money doesn't exist*.

JESSICA  
That's right. It's not wealth. So-  
called liquidity is just debt at  
the end of the day.

The anchors swap knowing smirks. Faux surprise.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
That's a fantasy.

Jessica stiffens. Her eyes snap to the video wall.

Benedict's face fills the screen. Smooth, poised, a man engineered for control.

JESSICA  
(barbed)  
Not in the least. Banks hold  
nothing but empty promises and air.

FEMALE ANCHOR  
Sounds like a tired bit from some  
late-night comedy hack.

A stifled smirk from the Male Anchor.

JESSICA  
(growing heated)  
Is it? Banks loan us numbers on a  
screen... and we spend decades of  
labor paying them back. That's  
enslavement.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Correction, sweetie. Without banks,  
there's no order. No roads. No  
medicine. No civilization.  
(points)  
Just look at you. Is that Donna  
Karan?

FEMALE ANCHOR  
Hard to say. Bit of vintage vibe.

Male Anchor chuckles.

Jessica visibly seethes, but tries her best to bury it.

JESSICA  
Can we stick to the book?

The anchors shrug.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict leans toward the monitor. Smirk fading into measured  
contempt.

BENEDICT  
Without banks, you'd still be  
gnawing raw meat in a cave. No  
ketchup. No Wi-Fi. Worshipping  
fire. Be grateful we traded mud  
huts for Microsoft. For Coke. For  
Double-D implants.

INT. GLOBAL TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Benedict booms from the video wall.

BENEDICT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
You ought to thank us for  
sweetening the American dream.



JESSICA

Is that what you tell families when you take their homes and force them out onto the street?

BENEDICT (V.O.)

They defaulted. Like... well, sort of like you. Still living in that condo on Marina Avenue?

Her fury coils. Fingernails dig like hooks.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

KYLE BUTCHER, 40s, Ivy League smug, watches Jessica come undone.

KYLE

That's a Botox case if I ever saw one.

EXT. GLOBAL TV STUDIO - LATER

Jessica storms out. Phone to her ear. Fist twitching, hunting for something to break.

JESSICA

They own it all. The system, the story. Everything.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

A cluttered warzone of paper stacks, protest buttons, and empty coffee cups.

CHRISTOPHER NOBLE, 35, all sharp edges and sleepless conviction, hammers at his keyboard while juggling a call on speaker. He wears a threadbare hoodie over a T-shirt.

CHRISTOPHER

I told you, Jess. You walk into their house, they cut you open and serve you for supper.

EXT. GLOBAL TV STUDIO - SAME TIME

Jessica stops dead on the sidewalk. Traffic hums. Pedestrians drift past, indifferent.

She claws at the air, then SCREAMS. Raw. Unfiltered. Like something tearing loose inside her.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)  
Feel better?

JESSICA  
Save it.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)  
But you never listen. You weren't  
built for war. Stick to the side-  
lines. Let someone else bleed.

She screams again. A noise ripped from bone. Passersby stare.

INT. CLUB - LOUNGE - DAY

Benedict strides into a room lined in oak and arrogance.  
Crystal sparkles. Oil portraits leer from the walls of men  
who never paid a bill in their lives.

Four BANKERS lounge; bloated in custom suits, mid-laugh,  
drinks in hand.

In the corner beside the bankers sits MAXIMILIAN CONN, 55.  
Lean. Slick. A lizard with law degrees.

BANKER #1  
How do you get her crawling back  
like a bitch on heat?

BENEDICT  
(doesn't break stride)  
Thinks she's cavalry, but forgot  
the horse. People don't want bad  
news. They want Big Macs. Air  
Jordans. And whatever perfume says  
fuck me on the label.

Crude laughter spikes.

CONN  
They want to be us. So we give them  
the dream: buy now, pay later. We  
take our cut.

Another laugh. Benedict spins. Shoots a finger.

BENEDICT  
Wrong. We don't take a cut. We take  
the whole damn dollar. You, Conn,  
you grease the wheels. That's what  
we pay you for.

A hush. Conn's grin falters.

Benedict turns, gazes up at a looming portrait of J.P. Morgan. The old titan stares back, unmoved.

BENEDICT  
Everyone bump home valuations?

BANKER #1  
To thirteen percent.

BANKER #2  
Kept ours to eleven, but even that  
feels steep.

BENEDICT  
No law on the books says that.

Silence drops like a gavel.

INT. MIBANK - PA'S RECEPTION - NIGHT

A low helicopter rumble vibrates through the glass.

Indigo sits at her desk; perfect posture, smile stapled in place. Whatever was left of her spirit... long gone.

Benedict enters, coat half-off, still moving.

INDIGO  
Evening, Mr. Steele. The Macallan  
18 arrived. There's urgent mail on  
your desk... and two gifts.

He strides on. Frowns.

INDIGO (O.S.)  
Happy Thanksgiving.

He doesn't stop.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

POP! Benedict uncorks the fine bottle of Scotch. Inhales deeply. Pours a glass.

His eyes drift to the whisky's million-dollar plaque. He scoffs. A Cuban cigar crackles to life between his fingers.

He moves to the window. Raises his glass to the skyline. A sneer. A sip. A long drag. Then, he turns back to the desk.

Two gift boxes. One envelope.

He tears the envelope open.

Inside: a PHOTO: A woman. Buttoned-up, librarian-type, straddling him on the floor. Background: toppled furniture. Chaos. His face. Clear as day.

He recoils. Eyes widen. Typed in blocky letters beneath the photo: "OPEN THE GREEN BOX AND BOOT THE COMPUTER."

He rips open the box. Thumps the power button. Drops into the chair. Winces.

ON SCREEN: A VIDEO launches: the librarian-type straddles him. A rhythm.

He looks away. Draws on the cigar. Exhales.

The video freezes.

ZOOM boots. A figure appears -- cloaked, masked, with a face that looks almost insectoid. Unreadable. Unhuman. This is BUG.

Benedict stiffens. A visible shudder runs down his spine.

BENEDICT

(gruff)

Who are you? What do you want?

BUG (V.O.)

(voice garbled)

Moronic questions from a man of your alleged aptitude. Try --

BENEDICT

I don't play games. How much --

BUG (V.O.)

Given...

(video resumes)

... I hold the bargaining chip, you'll let me lead.

Benedict's jaw tightens. The video freezes again.

BUG (V.O.)

Now. Ask yourself... who am I... and why do I want more?

Benedict puffs the cigar.

BUG (V.O.)

Five seconds. Or your lovely wife gets the highlight reel.

Benedict blows smoke rings.

Bug hangs its head, holding the fury in.

A VIDEO FEED launches: driver's POV approaching a high gate --  
BENEDICT'S MANSION.

Benedict jolts.

The DRIVER's hand reaches for the gate buzzer.

BENEDICT

Stop!

Bug doesn't flinch.

The hand hovers... closer...

BENEDICT

Who am I? Why do I want more?

The hand pauses.

BUG (V.O.)

Again. Like you mean it!

BENEDICT

(swallowing)

Who am I? Why do I want more?

Bug nods. A subtle gesture. The hand retracts from view.  
Benedict slumps back. Breath shallow. Eyes darting.

BUG (V.O.)

Treat that sideshow as my insurance  
plan, Mr. Steele.

(beat)

Now let's dig.

HISS! The office door seals shut. An airtight lock.

Benedict jolts. Tries the door to no avail. Grabs his cell.  
Punches a number. Nothing. Dead line.

He dives for the desk. Slams the panic switch.

An ALARM shrieks -- on the screen.

Bug tilts its head. Watching. Enjoying.

Benedict scrambles for his cigar. Lights it. Inhales deep.

BENEDICT

Two million to end this now.

Bug leans in. Chin on glove. Amused.

BENEDICT

That's a Lambo, a beach house, and  
a blonde buffet.

Bug's eyeholes betray nothing.

BENEDICT  
Three million. Imagine all those  
Gucci suits.

BUG (V.O.)  
Insult noted.

BENEDICT  
Alright. Five million.

BUG (V.O.)  
This is not a negotiation.

BENEDICT  
Call it gratitude. Ten million.

BUG (V.O.)  
Sadly for you... I have scruples.

Benedict winces.

BUG (V.O.)  
I'm a voice for the lives you ruin.

BENEDICT  
No, that's not fair! I give people  
their dreams.

BUG (V.O.)  
Nightmares, Mr. Steele... they wake  
up screaming your name. And not for  
the reasons you think.

BENEDICT  
No, bullshit --

BUG (V.O.)  
Watched you for two years.

Benedict chokes on smoke.

BUG (V.O.)  
Watched you inflate home valuations  
to squeeze more interest from your  
clients.  
(leaning in)  
It's time you crooked bankers were  
brought down. And you...  
(points)  
You're first in line.

Benedict blinks, stunned.

BUG (V.O.)  
Open the red gift.

He rises. Tears it open.

A BOOK: "THE POWER WITHIN WILL BLOW YOUR MIND".

He frowns. Flips the cover, then RECOILS.

BENEDICT  
Jesus!

REVEAL: DYNAMITE wired to a TIMER stares back from cut-out pages. Benedict's jugular pumps fear.

BUG (V.O.)  
What scares you more? Being dead in  
the ground... dead in your heart...  
or dead in the eyes of the world?

Benedict presses a hand to his chest. Checks for failure.

BUG (V.O.)  
We'll soon see. Sit.

He drops the book. Sinks. Lips trembling. Mouthing curses.

A SPREADSHEET appears beside Zoom. Names. Amounts.

BUG (V.O.)  
Your debt ledger. Every victim.  
Every dime. Every scream. You're  
going to pay what you owe. Nine  
point two billion.

BENEDICT  
I can't pay that!

BUG (V.O.)  
Which puts the cost of one hour  
at... three hundred eighty-three  
million.

BENEDICT  
(leaping up)  
I handle big ideas. Not backend!

PLINK! He whirls around.

The bomb's TIMER lights up: "00:05:00."

BUG (V.O.)  
Let it hit zero... and your next  
stop? The afterlife's gutter.

BEEP! The timer bleeds: "00:04:59 - 58".

Benedict scrambles to the keyboard. Hacks into his bank account.

Bug leans back. Rubs its hands. The countdown continues.

Benedict's fingers fly -- copy, paste. Frenzy. CLICK. CLACK. Numbers blur. ENTER.

The TIMER resets "00:59:59 - 58".

BENEDICT  
(exhaling deeply)  
Got to get my crisis team in. The  
bank will pay the rest. They're --

RING. The phone.

He jolts, checks caller ID. Groans.

BENEDICT  
It's my wife.

BUG (V.O.)  
Put it on speaker. And choose your  
words carefully.

He answers.

BENEDICT  
Hey...

AMY (V.O.)  
Hi, sweet pea. It's ten past.

He glances at the photo. Winces.

BENEDICT  
I... I've got a crisis here.

AMY (V.O.)  
No. You promised.

He thumps his forehead.

AMY (V.O.)  
Cold feet again?

Bug perks up.

BENEDICT  
(side-eyes Bug)  
No... no...

Bug tilts its head, processing.



BENEDICT  
I'll... meet you there. In an hour.

AMY (V.O.)  
(hesitates)  
Don't be late.

He ends the call. Rattled.

BUG (V.O.)  
Where's the rendezvous?

BENEDICT  
(groans)  
The museum.

BUG (V.O.)  
Ah. One of your pet projects?

BENEDICT  
She's getting an award. For her  
work in philology.

BUG (V.O.)  
But the cold feet?  
(leans in; taunting)  
Do dinosaurs make you nervous? Or  
something else...

Benedict's jaw grinds.

ENTER FLASHBACK:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

JUNIOR BENEDICT, 9, frail, thick glasses slipping down his  
nose, hunches over a chessboard, locked in silent focus.  
He nudges a pawn forward --

SMASH! A football crashes onto the table, shattering the  
board. Chess pieces scatter like shrapnel.

LAUGHTER erupts. BULLIES close in like sharks in sneakers.

Behind Junior Benedict's lenses, raw panic registers.

END FLASHBACK.

Laughter echoes. Benedict clenches a fist.

BUG (V.O.)  
Is that a phobia surfacing?

BENEDICT  
I'm calling my crisis team.

BUG (V.O.)  
 (nodding)  
 You do that. On speaker.

He thumps the phone.

The TIMER hemorrhages: "00:57:42 - 41".

PIERCE (V.O.)  
 (music blaring)  
 Ben?

BENEDICT  
 Get the team in. Now.

PIERCE (V.O.)  
 What's --

He hangs up. Props his feet. Lights the cigar and retreats into apathy.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug weaves a figure out of string. Its eyeholes stay locked on Zoom, calm as a predator coiling its trap.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict sits in stillness, smoke curling around him.

BENEDICT  
 You won't get away with this.

BUG (V.O.)  
 Oh, spare me the cliché.

BENEDICT  
 They'll find you.

BUG  
 Another one. Come on. You should be sharper than this.

Bug draws the string tight, creating a spider web.

BUG (V.O.)  
 You know, clichés aside... what surprises me most is...  
 (leans in; lifts the web)  
 You can't see the whole picture.

A flicker. His sneer slips.

INT. MIBANK - PARKING BASEMENT - LATER

A Ferrari SCREAMS in. Tires SCREECH.

PIERCE stumbles out, eyes bloodshot, shirt clinging with party sweat. He slams the door, rakes a hand through his hair.

PIERCE

Fuck!

He staggers toward the elevator. Phone RINGS. He checks it. Scowls. Answers.

PIERCE

I told you to call me after lunch.

FOREIGN ACCENT (V.O.)

Time zones, brother. The Sheikh wants twelve million. USD.

PIERCE

That bootleg jitney's not worth twelve.

FOREIGN ACCENT (V.O.)

It's a floating palace. Gold taps. Helipad --

PIERCE

Not dropping twelve million on a tub. Ten. Tops. Sheikh or no fuckin' Sheikh.

INT. MIBANK - CRISIS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A glass bunker, soundproof but humming with tension. Monitors flicker, glowing with red-line charts and breaking headlines.

MANAGERS, all uniform in sleek black, huddle around the coffee station with ROSALIND, whispering low.

ZACK slouches in the corner, phone in hand, scrolling.

TIMOTHY stands at the window. Pale, sweat blooming at his collar. He fidgets with his bow tie, over and over.

Pierce stomps in, glowering.

PIERCE

Where's Ben?

Shrugs. Blank stares.

PIERCE  
Someone get me coffee. And sit the  
hell down.

Scramble. Chairs scrape across the floor. Pierce dials the phone.

Benedict's voice booms through the speaker...

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Team in place?

PIERCE  
Yes. We're waiting --

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Execute this: pay nine point one  
billion across three hundred  
thousand accounts. Immediately.

Pierce turns white. Clamps the desk.

BENEDICT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
The list is in your inbox. I'll  
expect a timeline in two minutes.

CLICK!

A shared mind-fuck sweeps the room.

Timothy wrings his hands, fingers twitching.

Rosalind writes furiously. Doesn't speak. Doesn't blink.

ZACK  
There go our bonuses.

Pierce snaps to Zack like watching a margin crash.

ZACK  
Had my eye on a pad in the  
Hamptons... but --

PIERCE  
Quit bitching and get with the  
fuckin' program.

Zack swallows as Rosalind shoots daggers.

Pierce whips to the IT MANAGER.

PIERCE  
Tick-tock, fuck.

The IT Manager gulps. Grabs his phone.

TIMOTHY  
This'll wipe... wipe the balance  
sheet.

PIERCE  
(glares at Timothy)  
Tell me something I don't know,  
genius.

Timothy shuts down, temple pulsing like a silent alarm.  
Pierce paces, muttering, nearly foaming at the mouth.  
Rosalind stays still. Arms crossed. Holding the line.

PIERCE  
This is insane.

ROSALIND  
Frankly, I think he might be under  
duress.

SECURITY MANAGER  
Then he'd have hit the panic  
button.

ROSALIND  
Well, why hasn't he left his office?

ZACK  
(slouched)  
Does he ever?

Heads swivel. Zack shrugs.

PIERCE  
Yeah. The guy's a certified bunker  
rat.

He spins on the ASSETS MANAGER -- linebacker build, morgue  
face.

PIERCE (CONT'D)  
Assets. What can we dump to raise  
capital?

ASSETS MANAGER  
(shrugging)  
It's Thanksgiving. Market's down.

PIERCE  
(rakes his scalp)  
Fuck!

Rosalind and Timothy trade looks fit for a murder mystery.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Benedict strides to the desk, whisky in hand. His movements tight, controlled. Barely.

Bug watches through the screen. Head cocked, like a therapist... or a butcher with a clipboard.

BUG (V.O.)  
Celebrating already?

Benedict glares. Downs a swig.

BUG (V.O.)  
I'm trying to cultivate a healthy  
hostage-captor bond here. Play  
nice, we could be roommates for a  
while.

BENEDICT  
They do what I say.

BUG (V.O.)  
I see that, Mr... Banker of the  
Decade.

Eyes dart to a FORBES PLAQUE: "BANKER OF THE DECADE".

BUG (V.O.)  
Or does the Big Apple's Man of  
Steel have a better ring?

Eyes shift to the FRAMED NEW YORK TIMES HEADLINE: "THE BIG  
APPLE'S MAN OF STEEL".

BUG (V.O.)  
(leans in; taunting)  
A bit hyperbolic, but there's more  
to a man than a headline.

Benedict's knuckles tense.

BUG (V.O.)  
(leaning back)  
Time to make that call.

INT. CRISIS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RING. Pierce lunges for the phone. Slams it.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
How long?

PIERCE  
IT claims five minutes. But --

BENEDICT (V.O.)

Do it.

CLICK!

Dead air. The room freezes.

PIERCE

(low; shaken)

Shit's hitting the fan here.

Helpless stares.

PIERCE

Better find the source or we're all  
over a barrel.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

RING. Benedict grabs the phone.

BENEDICT

What?

PIERCE (V.O.)

We're not doing it.

BENEDICT

Make the payments --

PIERCE (V.O.)

Look, we can't go along with this  
unless you explain --

BENEDICT

Pay or you're fired!

CLICK!

Benedict stares at the phone, incredulous.

A WHINE slices the silence. WOWOWOW.

He spins. Eyes wide.

TIMER flashes: "00:02:59 - 58".

He dives for the keyboard.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug reclines, hands laced behind its head.

A low chuckle escapes as it spins another web of string.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict hammers the keyboard -- copy, paste, transfer.

TIMER resets: "01:00:00". Ticks down.

BUG (V.O.)  
Think an hour buys loyalty?

Benedict stabs redial. Jaw clenched. Teeth bared.

BUG (V.O.)  
It appears I may have overestimated  
you.

BENEDICT  
Without me, they're nothing.  
Overpaid lapdogs chasing commission  
checks.

The line rings on. Benedict's expression droops.

BUG (V.O.)  
Let's just hope they don't bite.

A chill coils up his spine.

INT. CRISIS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The phone RINGS on. Rosalind eyes it. Takes a step.

PIERCE  
Don't.

She stops. Rage bottled behind her eyes.

PIERCE  
(to IT Manager)  
Shut down the servers. Lock the  
phones.  
(to Security Manager)  
Trace all traffic to Ben's office.  
(to Zack)  
Get Indigo and his valet in here.  
(to Accounts Manager)  
And you. Find out why his list of  
clients is so special.

The room scrambles as the phone keeps ringing.

PIERCE  
Shut the fuck up!

He rips out the cord.



INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Silence screams through the phone. Benedict thumps it. Drops into the chair. Swivels his back to Bug. Cracked.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug snorts, then turns to a steel MANNEQUIN covered in sticky notes scrawled with words like CONTROL, LEGACY, FORTUNE.

It rips one off: "AUTHORITY", then crushes it.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Bug turns back to Benedict, simmering in his chair, lips twitching with unsaid curses.

BUG (V.O.)

Mr. Mighty Benedict Steele... your moment of truth has arrived. But look on the plus side. You finally get to really test that unmatched genius of yours.

(leans in)

'Cause it's going to take some doing to put the brakes on this.

He swivels. Jabs the screen.

BENEDICT

Think again, moron. I'll walk free in under an hour.

BUG (V.O.)

(wagging a finger)

Not without settling your debts.

BENEDICT

(rises; rips off jacket)

Watch this space.

BUG (V.O.)

Careful, fly-boy. Parachutes don't work in space.

INT. MEN'S WASHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Marble gleams. Pierce and Zack at the urinals, side-by-side.

ZACK

Let's just do what he says and bounce, bro.

PIERCE  
You outta your fuckin' skull? He's  
lining us up for the shit-pile.

ZACK  
C'mon... got three hotties queued.  
And a six-liter Dom Perignon.

PIERCE  
(snaps a look)  
Three?

Zack grins. Pierce deflates. Turns back to the stream.

PIERCE  
Save the parade. If Ben tanks, your  
cash goes up in smoke -- and the  
only thing you'll be banging is  
your own fist.

FLUSH.

INT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Pierce barrels in. Jerks a drawer open.

Dumps a mound of coke into his palm. Snorts hard. Exhales.

Pupils flare. Jaw sets. King-mode activated.

He grabs a putter from the corner and marches out, eyes  
buzzing, posture deranged.

PIERCE  
I-O-U, motherfucker.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Benedict looms over the desk, glaring at the cell like it  
owes him blood.

BENEDICT  
I don't care if it's a dinner with  
the World Bank. Get over here. Fire  
Pierce and fix this. Now.

He kills the call. Breath heaving.

Bug suppresses a chuckle.

BUG (V.O.)  
So... your vice-chairman to the  
rescue? You two close?

BENEDICT  
I made him. He knows it.

BUG (V.O.)  
But do you know *him*?

BENEDICT  
Like I said! I made him. And  
there's a whole lot of him.

BUG (V.O.)  
As in?

BENEDICT  
Hundred pounds a leg --

BUZZ. The cell.

Benedict freezes. Frown deepens. He strides to the desk.  
Checks the cell. Turns white.

INT. MUSEUM - CONTINUOUS

AMY, elegant in pastels, glides through a sea of academics  
and wine-stemmed small talk.

She ducks into a quiet corner, phone to her ear. Her smile  
falters.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict stares at the BUZZING cell. Bites his lip.

BUG (V.O.)  
Answer her.

He exhales. Does so.

BENEDICT  
Amy...

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

AMY  
(flat, controlled)  
It's starting. Where are you?

BENEDICT  
There's... a complication.

AMY  
Always is. Can we do one thing  
without the bank hanging over us?

He slumps into his chair. Guilt etched.

AMY  
So is it cold feet or not?

BENEDICT  
(weak)  
No... no...

Bug's head tilts.

AMY  
Then let someone else handle it.

BENEDICT  
I... I can't.

AMY  
(jolts)  
That's new.

Bug sits up like a signal's been tripped.

AMY  
Something's wrong.

Bug rasps. Benedict glances sideways. Bug drags a gloved finger across its throat.

BENEDICT  
Nothing I can't handle. I'll...  
I'll make it up to you.

AMY  
Let me guess. Another necklace I'll  
never wear?

Bug rasps louder. Benedict rubs his brow.

BENEDICT  
I need to go.

AMY  
I carried you for years, Ben. And  
the one time I've got --

He hangs up. Drops the phone like it burns. Slumps over the desk. Breathing heavy.

Bug nods, slow. Turns to its keyboard, typing.

BUG (V.O.)  
Might this have something to do  
with those cold feet?

Benedict lifts his eyes to the screen.

A PHOTO: STUDENT BENEDICT. Glasses too big. Grinning awkwardly. Flanked by two other NERDS, all elbows and acne. A chess trophy between them.

BUG (V.O.)  
Tyrone's an aeronautics engineer  
now. And... Abel. The historian.  
Still allergic to everything.  
(shakes head)  
Sad, really.

Benedict drifts to the window, cringing.

BUG (V.O.)  
Two buddies you ditched because  
they reminded you who you were back  
when you couldn't throw a football.  
Back before you learned to hide  
behind a slick suit.

Benedict stares into the glass. His reflection stares back.  
Distant ECHOES rise; laughter, jeers.

ENTER FLASHBACK:

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - DAY

BULLIES are the ones doing the jeering.

They pin down FRESHMAN BENEDICT, 13, glasses crooked, panic in his eyes.

One of them steps back. Winds up. Hurls a football RIGHT AT HIS HEAD as --

END FLASHBACK.

A THUD echoes.

Benedict stiffens. Eyes locked on the city.

BUG (V.O.)  
And the matter of your old man.  
Chained to a parking booth. Wrist  
wrecked from making change.

Benedict's jaw clenches.

ENTER FLASHBACK:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A cramped kitchen. Yellowed walls. A chipped table.

Benedict's FATHER, 40s, wiry and sunken, pours Kool-Aid into a cloudy glass.

Across from him, Student Benedict presses an ice pack to a bruised cheek.

FATHER

They beat on you 'cause they can't  
match your brains.

STUDENT BENEDICT

Bullshit! I've got loser stamped on  
my forehead.

FATHER

Watch your mouth.  
(sets the glass down)  
Be strong, son. It'll end.

STUDENT BENEDICT

Oh yeah? When did it end for you?

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - STREET - DAY

SENIOR BENEDICT, 17, climbs out of a sun-bleached Hyundai.  
Mirrors duct-taped. STUDENTS heckle from the lawn.

STUDENT #1

Nice ride, hobo!

END FLASHBACK.

Benedict's reflection flickers in the glass -- all rage and unraveling.

BUG (V.O.)

(taunting)

I see you, little boy...

WHAM! He slams the glass.

Bug leans back. Satisfied.

INT. CRISIS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Pierce lines up a putt. Calm on the surface, coke buzzing underneath.

Rosalind watches, composed, indignation buried deep.

Timothy crunches numbers, close to hyperventilating. His legs jackhammer beneath the desk.

Pierce putts. The ball clinks into a coffee mug.

PIERCE  
(pumps fist)  
Booyah!

He turns, expecting applause. Spots the Valet instead.

PIERCE  
What took you so long?

VALET  
Had to starch my shirt, sir.

PIERCE  
You're shitting me.

VALET  
Impeccable grooming is protocol,  
sir.

Pierce stomps over. Eyes dilate; switch flipped.

PIERCE  
This is a crisis. Which means you  
get here on the double. Even if  
you're butt-fuckin' naked.

VALET  
I'm not on the crisis team.

PIERCE  
But you and Indigo are the only  
ones with access to the boss man's  
office.

The Valet frowns, suspicious. Rosalind steps forward.

ROSALIND  
(soft)  
See anything unusual in Mr.  
Steele's office today, George?

VALET  
No...

A beat. His gaze drifts, uncertain.

Managers trickle in.

VALET  
Is Mr. Steele alright?

ROSALIND  
He's fine. Thank you.

Valet shuffles out, unsettled.

PIERCE  
 (to Security Manager)  
 What've you got?

SECURITY MANAGER  
 No panic alarm. One call.

PIERCE  
 Visitors?

SECURITY MANAGER  
 Just his valet and Indigo.

PIERCE  
 (snaps to Zack)  
 Where the fuck is she?

ZACK  
 Phone's off.

PIERCE  
Then go analog, Sherlock. Knock on  
 her door.

Zack nods faintly.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER  
 (stepping in; grim)  
 Mr. Steele's account moved, sir.

Pierce frowns.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER (CONT'D)  
 Six hundred sixty-five million.  
 Transferred to seven thousand  
 accounts.

A wave of pale hits the room.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER (CONT'D)  
 All on his list. All tied to  
 foreclosures.

Pierce reels. Timothy throws up his arms.

TIMOTHY  
 What did I tell you?!

ZACK  
 Chill. It's not the bank's problem.

TIMOTHY  
I say it is.

Heads turn.



TIMOTHY  
We've been... in... inflating --

PIERCE  
Shut the fuck up!

Timothy wilts. The Managers switch to corporate autopilot.

Pierce meets Rosalind's gaze and jerks his head toward the far door.

INT. BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anemic light seeps across the room. The air is tense.

PIERCE  
(slams door shut; to Zack)  
Get off your fuckin' phone.

Zack grins. Pockets it. Slouches.

PIERCE  
Maybe the regulators are circling.  
And he caught the scent.

ZACK  
No way, bro. I wine 'em, dine 'em  
and whisper sweet blackmail.  
(grins)  
We're tight like a nineteen-year  
old's --

ROSALIND  
(cutting)  
Stay on task.

ZACK  
None of 'em said a word.  
(winks at Pierce)  
Mind you, the one doesn't talk  
much. But she knows how --

ROSALIND  
(no patience left)  
Let's move on.

PIERCE  
To what?

He paces. Edge fraying. Timothy tugs his bow-tie.

TIMOTHY  
Maybe he's... making amends --

PIERCE  
 (turns; scathing)  
 Amends? What shit is this?

Timothy shrinks. Pierce glares. Thumps the putter against his skull.

ROSALIND  
 Maybe he is. Could be tied to that client's suicide.

PIERCE  
 Nah...

ROSALIND  
 We foreclose. He offs himself. Now this.

A long horrified beat.

ZACK  
 Way I figure it, one of those crazy cults got its tendrils into him. Happens all the time to rich guys.

PIERCE  
 No way. The man only worships him-fuckin' self.

ROSALIND  
 (mild huff)  
 Talking in circles won't solve this crisis. Can we --

PIERCE  
 (stomps to her)  
 We don't *have* a crisis.  
 (inches from her)  
 He has. And he's dragging us down with him.

Rosalind's lips harden.

Timothy looks like his guts are chewing themselves.

WHUP-WHUP-WHUP. A helicopter rips overhead.

EXT. MIBANK - ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

SLATER MALLISCH, 50, vice-chairman, polished predator, emerges from the helicopter, coat flapping like a flag of power.

Three DIRECTORS follow. Sharp coats. Sharper eyes.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

WHUP-WHUP-WHUP. On it thrums.

Benedict drills a fist into his palm, pacing.

Bug taps its chin -- a butcher sizing up the cut.

BUG (V.O.)

So... *your* vice chairman. Aside from that pumpkin pie kink, what else gets his gears turning? What's his cologne? Does Mozart move him? Or Metallica? And tonight's dinner? Any guess?

He freezes mid-stride. Brow tightens.

BUG (V.O.)

No? Well... every Thanksgiving eve it's lobster bisque. Then veal. Porcinis. And arugula with a splash of Lambrusco. A creature of ritual. But you wouldn't know. You're never invited.

(wagging a finger)

You don't know your people.

Benedict sneers in disdain, snorting.

BUG (V.O.)

Then prove me wrong. Ask him what he ate.

RING. Benedict flinches, eyes the phone.

BUG (V.O.)

Go on. Ask him.

He slinks over. Hesitates. Hits speaker.

Slater's voice crackles...

SLATER (V.O.)

Benjie boy! I got --

BENEDICT

What'd you eat for dinner?

INT. BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Slater, Directors, and Execs freeze. Confused stares.

SLATER

Pardon me?

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
What. Did. You. Eat?

SLATER  
Uh, let's see... Lobster bisque...  
veal...

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict's head drops.

Bug tilts its own; slow, gloating.

SLATER (V.O.)  
What's going on?

BENEDICT  
(low)  
Execute those payments, Slater.

SLATER (V.O.)  
That'll destroy the bank.

BENEDICT  
I *said* --

SLATER (V.O.)  
We've called an emergency board  
meeting to review your directive.

BENEDICT  
It's not up for debate!

SLATER (V.O.)  
Protocol, Ben. We expect your  
presence.

BENEDICT  
(explodes from chair)  
Move the money. Or you're out.

SLATER (V.O.)  
Hold on.

BENEDICT  
(jabbing finger)  
Now!

Silence. He leans in. Blood roaring.

BENEDICT  
Hello?

Dead air.

BENEDICT

Slater?

Nothing.

BENEDICT

Fuck!

WHAM! He bludgeons the desk.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug chuckles. Turns to a MONITOR: the boardroom. Hands rise.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict gapes at the TIMER: "00:17:34".

SLATER (V.O.)

So Ben, all staff have been  
instructed to disregard your  
directive.

BENEDICT

Who the fuck do you think you are?

SLATER (V.O.)

Chairman of the bank.

He flinches as if the world blinked and came back wrong.

SLATER (V.O.)

You've been voted off the board,  
effective immediately --

BENEDICT

Can't... can't do that.

SLATER (V.O.)

You pose a significant threat to  
the bank --

BENEDICT

Which I built --

SLATER (V.O.)

And are about to burn down.

BENEDICT

You listen to me, you --

SLATER (V.O.)

We therefore deem you unfit to hold  
your position.

BENEDICT  
You cock-sucking piece of --

CLICK.

He gapes at the cell. Rage and disbelief jammed in his throat.

WHAM! He slams the desk.

The timer ticks: "00:16:21".

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug throws up its hands. Shakes its head. Plucks a NOTE off the mannequin: "STATUS". Crumples it.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict stands frozen.

BUG (V.O.) (O.S)  
 Could've thrown him a bone... But  
 no... fuck this, fuck that. From  
 titan to tantrum in two hours flat.

Benedict's eye twitches.

BUG (V.O.)  
 Or maybe it's Tourette's.  
 (fingering chin)  
 Could it be?

The twitch sharpens. Spreads into a snarl.

BUG (V.O.)  
 A dormant Tourette's case...  
 finally breaking free.

Benedict storms the screen. Jabs a finger.

BENEDICT  
Think you're smart?  
 (thumps screen)  
You don't have the balls to blow  
the bomb.

BUG (V.O.)  
 You lack the credentials to lecture  
 me on courage, Mr. Steele.

BENEDICT  
 Fucking fraud --

BUG (V.O.)  
A conclusion born of panic and  
blind hope.

Benedict grabs his cell.

BUG (V.O.)  
If I blow it, no one gets paid. But  
if I must...

Benedict freezes. Doubt creeps in.

BUG (V.O.)  
Boom.

Benedict jolts. Sweat beading.

BUG (V.O.)  
Still think I'm bluffing?

Benedict BARKS in primal rage, lunging at the screen.

BUG (V.O.)  
(tut-tutting)  
There it is again.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Benedict's snarling face fills the monitor.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
I'm going to bang that fucking door  
until they get me out.

Bug exhales. Almost bored.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict barrels for the door.

BANG!

He flinches as the Forbes plaque EXPLODES. Shrapnel rains.

He's frozen. Chest pounding.

BUG (V.O.) (O.S)  
Melodrama bores me, Mr. Steele.

BANG!

He ducks. The New York Times frame DETONATES. Glass sprays.

BUG (V.O.) (O.S.)  
But I do need that brilliant mind  
of yours firing on all neurons.

Benedict cowers. Knees bent. Breath shallow.

BUG (V.O.) (O.S.)  
Three strikes... and you're out.

BENEDICT  
Wait... please...

BUG (V.O.)  
(wagging a finger)  
Common courtesy doesn't mean I  
won't crush you.

It reclines. Begins weaving a fresh web.

Benedict deflates visibly.

BUG (V.O.) (O.S.)  
Now, clean all that up.

He staggers to the wreckage.

INT. EXECUTIVE LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Slater and Pierce at the window, sipping Cognac.

SLATER  
The nerve. Talking to me like I'm  
some goddam intern. Kid was a zit  
farm when I dragged him up.

PIERCE  
Why did you?

Slater taps his temple.

SLATER  
Equations. Sure as hell wasn't  
charm. Wet piece of whole-wheat  
toast's got more charisma.

Pierce chuckles. Low. Predatory.

SLATER  
(sips; deadpan)  
Had him to dinner once. Sat  
there... stared at his plate like  
the caviar was a crime scene. And  
when he did talk, it was all  
calculus. No nouns. No verbs.



Pierce wheezes and slaps his thigh.

SLATER  
Don't want to know the shit I  
dodged to keep him from meetings.

He pins Pierce with a cold, dead stare.

SLATER  
You're CEO now.

PIERCE  
(stunned)  
For real?

Slater nods. No smile.

Pierce grins. But it's crooked, like a kid handed the keys to a wrecking ball.

SLATER  
Comes with five mil' of his bonus.  
On top of yours.

Pierce's grin tightens. One muscle too tense.

SLATER  
But if this blows, you're dead  
meat.

Pierce drains the glass. Swallows what's left.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

On his knees, Benedict gathers shards. Movements stiff.

Bug watches from the screen. Eyeholes void, web whispering into form.

The last fragments clink into the trash can.

Benedict staggers upright. Slinks to the desk. Drops into the chair like a marionette with cut strings.

The TIMER glares: "00:14:23".

His gaze drifts. Lands on a framed PHOTO of Amy sporting a mousy smile, wind teasing her hair.

Behind her, a lake; still, perfect, untouched. A life outside the blast radius.

He touches the glass. Thumbprint smears the memory.

ENTER FLASHBACK:

EXT. LAKE - DAY

The water glistens like poured glass, mirroring mountains and cedar forest.

On the shore, BACHELOR BENEDICT, 28, and YOUNGER AMY, 28, lie on a sun-dappled blanket beneath the trees. Both gazing skyward. Still. Quiet.

YOUNGER AMY  
We should do this more.

BACHELOR BENEDICT  
Can't. I'm on a mission.

YOUNGER AMY  
To?

BACHELOR BENEDICT  
Crack a billion.

YOUNGER AMY  
Nine zeroes and then what?

BACHELOR BENEDICT  
(turns; bristles)  
What do you mean, "*then what*"?

She shrugs. He turns back to the sky. Ego stirred. Distracted.

BACHELOR BENEDICT  
It gets you things.

YOUNGER AMY  
What things?

BACHELOR BENEDICT  
*Things.*

A silent beat.

YOUNGER AMY  
I want a husband. Not just another guy chasing numbers and things like they'll love him back.

He sits up, affected.

BACHELOR BENEDICT  
That's a... a...

She waits. Smiling.

He turns to the lake. Like he just won something sacred -- and doesn't know how to hold.

She kisses his cheek. Forehead to his temple. Eyes closed.

END FLASHBACK.

Benedict clutches the PHOTO. Eyes dulled.

BENEDICT  
I want to call my wife.

BUG (V.O.)  
No.

BENEDICT  
Please...

BUG (V.O.) (O.S.)  
Spare me the grovel! Focus.

He sets the photo down. Slumps. Eyes shut.

Bug unspools its web. Leans in.

A long beat.

Benedict's eyes snap open. He straightens.

BENEDICT  
I'm going to blackmail them.

BUG (V.O.)  
Conscience doesn't seem to bother  
you. Why would theirs?

BENEDICT  
(rising)  
When they see what I've got.

BUG (V.O.)  
Why now? Why not before you gutted  
your bank account?

He shrugs. Defiance cracked by fatigue.

BUG (V.O.)  
You thought they might have dirt on  
you.  
(taps keyboard)  
Like the Regulator here.

The VIDEO launches: the librarian-type straddling him.

He winces. Shame stings. The video vanishes.

BUG (V.O.)  
Show me what makes you think you  
still matter.

Benedict slinks to the steel effigy on the wall.

BENEDICT  
It's in my safe. Behind this.

BUG (V.O.)  
(mock awe)  
The place where you keep your soul.  
Allow me.

It taps its keyboard.

The effigy retracts. Benedict opens the safe. Pulls out a wad of BLACK ENVELOPES.

He strides to the desk. Slams them down.

BENEDICT  
They're going to burn.

BUG (V.O.)  
Don't start a fire you can't put  
out.

He rips one open. A PHOTO. A FLASH DRIVE. Holds them up.

BENEDICT  
Let them in.

BUG (V.O.)  
Careful what you wish for...

BENEDICT  
You don't get what you came for  
unless I do this.

Bug sways, calculating.

Benedict checks the TIMER: "00:08:42".

BENEDICT  
It's your last roll of the dice.

BUG (V.O.)  
No. It's *yours*.  
(settling back)  
There are two tragedies in life.  
Mr. Steele. One... to lose your  
heart's desire. The other... to  
gain it.

Benedict's face cracks. Unsure.

BUG (V.O.)  
What are you worth?

BENEDICT  
Roughly... two point one billion.

Bug bobs its head. Slow. Amused.

BUG (V.O.)  
(leans in)  
My price then... for giving you  
slack... iiiiiiiis... two point one  
billion.

Benedict nearly buckles.

BENEDICT  
No... no...

BUG (V.O.)  
You just said your life's worth two  
point one billion.

BENEDICT  
Can't... please...

BUG (V.O.)  
My price stands!

Benedict slumps, face in hands.

INT. BOARDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Zack hangs up. Turns to the lounging sharks.

ZACK  
Indigo's off the grid.

SLATER  
No one leaves until she surfaces.

Grumbles. Eyes roll. Then, a knock.

SLATER  
In.

The Accounts Manager enters -- pale, wide-eyed.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER  
Mr. Steele's account's active  
again. Two hundred eighty  
million... and climbing.

Silence.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER  
Should I freeze it?

SLATER

No.

(waves her off)

That'll be all.

She frowns. Exits.

Timothy picks at the cupcake in his hands. He stays quiet.

ROSALIND

May I remind you, we're obligated  
to freeze his account at the first  
sign of foul play.

PIERCE

What foul play?

ROSALIND

(whips to him)

We're already off protocol --

SLATER

Drop it.

Rosalind clamps shut. But the fire behind her eyes flares.

Pierce grins.

SLATER

Pass me the pastries and get out  
there.

INT. CRISIS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The boardroom door flies open. Pierce barrels in, fueled and  
frothing. Rosalind, Zack, and Timothy hustle behind.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER

Mr. Steele's account's down nine  
hundred eighty million now.

Pierce clocks the screen. Benedict's balance nosedives.

He grins.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER

We need to freeze --

PIERCE

(spins; points the putter)

Don't question me again.

ACCOUNTS MANAGER

But Mr. Steele's --

PIERCE  
You're fired. Get out.

She bursts into tears, grabs her things.

Rosalind stares, disgust held barely at bay.

Timothy stares at the floor, glasses magnifying his horror.

PIERCE  
Break your NDA and you'll be bussing  
fuckin' tables at Applebee's 'til  
your teeth fall out.

Zack blinks -- smirk gone. Swagger sucker-punched.

PIERCE  
Anyone else got a problem?

Powerless silence as the Accounts manager leaves. He turns  
back to the screen. Benedict's balance craters.

PIERCE  
Holy shit. He's going for broke.

He lifts his arms like a conductor as the numbers plummet.

His arms rise higher... higher...

PIERCE  
(slams arms down)  
*Boom!*

Benedict's balance: zero.

Silence. Even the monitors seem stunned.

PIERCE  
Poor fuck.  
(beat; frowns)  
No. Scratch that.  
(turns; lifts the putter)  
Fuck the poor.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Benedict slumps over his desk. Fingers clawed into his scalp.  
Breathing shallow.

The TIMER pulses: "12:16:44"

BUG (V.O.)  
That's a sizeable investment you've  
got there. Should carry you to  
lunchtime... barring infractions.

Benedict doesn't move.

BUG (V.O.)  
Come now. The bank will pay you  
back.  
(rubbing its hands)  
It's time to roll the dice.

Benedict rises. Eyes glassed over.

INT. BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A cell BUZZES. Another joins.

Slater brushes crumbs from his lips. Checks his screen and freezes mid-chew.

Director #1 pales.

On his screen: footage of him cavorting with naked girls on a yacht. Compromising angles abound.

Slater's cell BUZZES. He jerks upright.

The door bursts open. Pierce storms in, cell aloft. Zack trails, grinning.

PIERCE  
The fucker's leaking dirt like a  
sieve --

SLATER  
Get out here.

He yanks the side door open.

INT. EXECUTIVE LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Slater thunders out with Pierce, Zack and Director #1 in tow. He answers his cell.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict looms over the cell. Venom loaded.

BENEDICT  
Those girls looked underage,  
Slater.

Silence. Bug leans in -- eyeholes fixed.

Benedict yanks his tie loose.



BENEDICT  
Yours too --

DIRECTOR #1 (V.O.)  
(panicked)  
College girls, Ben --

BENEDICT  
Who should I get to confirm that?

DIRECTOR #1 (V.O.)  
Ben, wait --

BENEDICT  
No. You listen --

PIERCE (V.O.)  
Get fucked, ass-clown...

Benedict flinches.

INT. EXECUTIVE LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Pierce snarls spit into the call.

PIERCE (CONT'D FROM V.O.)  
Candy's seen more action than a  
Vegas poker table --

SLATER  
(raises a fist)  
Zip it or you're gone.

Pierce clamps shut. Snarling. Eyes wild.

SLATER  
Ignore him, Ben.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict exhales. A crooked grin curls.

BENEDICT  
Reinstate me as chairman. Make the  
payments. Repay every dollar I  
covered. You've got ten minutes.

SLATER (V.O.)  
I built your throne and you know  
it. Without me --

BENEDICT  
You don't have the brains to do  
what I did. Just the gut.

SLATER (V.O.)  
Go to hell, you --

BENEDICT  
Ten minutes or you're a tabloid  
headline.

He kills the call. Turns to Bug.

BENEDICT  
Didn't go how you planned, huh?  
Bug looks away. Quiet. No reply. No gloat.

BENEDICT  
Like I said... watch this space.  
He closes the book housing the bomb.

INT. EXECUTIVE LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Pierce stomps to his office, dialing.

Slater, Director #1, and Zack scramble after him.

PIERCE  
You just gonna let him bend you --

SLATER  
I'm warning you --

Benedict's voice crackles through Pierce's cell.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
What?

PIERCE  
Leak that shit and you burn.

SLATER  
Goddam punk --

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict jerks like a reboot gone wrong.

PIERCE (V.O.)  
You hear me? Leak and I tell the  
whole fuckin' world what's going on  
here.

CLICK.

He stares at the cell. Eyes hollowed.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug jitters. Rips a note off the mannequin. Crushes it.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict stares down at the book housing the bomb.

Its title glows: "THE POWER WITHIN WILL BLOW YOUR MIND."

He slumps forward. Face buried in his palms. No tears. No rage. Just hollowed-out ruin.

INT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Pierce lounges in his chair, boots up, fingers drumming on the desk. Smug. High on the illusion of control.

Slater looms over the desk — fists clenched, jaw tight, eyes blazing.

SLATER

You're finished. Get --

PIERCE

I hold the aces. Trash me and I spill your shit and the bank's --

SLATER

You --

PIERCE

Yeah. Still the smartest guy in the room.

Slater's eyes flick to Director #1 -- a silent "we're fucked".

SLATER

Let's muzzle the media.

DIRECTOR #1

Which outlets?

SLATER

All of them.

DIRECTOR #1

(white)

That's eight million easy.

SLATER

We each cover two.

PIERCE  
I ain't paying a fuckin' cent. Your  
circus, your monkeys.

Silence weighs heavy.

EXT. MIBANK - SAME TIME

The building looms against the black sky. Dim light bleeds from Benedict's office.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Benedict stands before the oversized canvas: a still lake. Cedar-lined. Mountains spined along the horizon.

His eyes drift, unfocused.

BUG (V.O.) (O.S.)  
At least you've still got your  
house. And the painting. Might even  
fetch you a condo in Van Nuys.

BENEDICT  
(low; cracked)  
My... Amy painted it.

BUG (V.O.)  
You say that like it makes it  
worthless.

Benedict shakes his head. A flicker of love, loss, regret.

BUG (V.O.)  
Your Amy...

Bug strokes its mask.

Benedict strips off his tie. Wanders to the fireplace. Drops onto the couch.

On the table -- a chessboard. Untouched pieces.

His eyes flick between them.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug mutes Zoom. Swivels to a monitor: PIERCE'S OFFICE -- Pierce, Slater, Zack, and Director #1 yell into phones.

Bug presses a gloved finger to its headset. Listens.

INT. MIBANK - CRISIS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Timothy stands at the window. A white pill trembles in his fingers. He dry-swallows. Eyes locked on the void forty stories below.

Rosalind approaches, cautious. Like she's tiptoeing through glass.

ROSALIND

Something's off, Tim. Why's half the board holed up in Pierce's office? We should be in there.

TIMOTHY

I'm rather glad I'm not. You know, I keep telling myself I work the numbers. But... I don't think I believe that anymore.

His shoulders drop.

ROSALIND

It's a job, Tim.

He turns to her. Eyes glazed.

TIMOTHY

Not if I keep counting down to Fridays. Every week... same confession. Then Monday hits...

(turns to the glass)

He said we had to show them. I thought we did... but Ben... always wants more.

(beat)

We used to teach chess, you know.

ROSALIND

Really?

TIMOTHY

(shrugs; sheepish)

His dad always said... got to give back. And Ben... he did. Until one night --

ENTER FLASHBACK:

EXT. QUEENS - COMMUNITY HALL - NIGHT

SOPHOMORE BENEDICT, 19, curled on concrete. Boots hammer his body.

A GANG of teens. Howling. Kicking. Vicious.

The gang picks up Sophomore Benedict and hurls him into a dumpster.

Lid slams.

END FLASHBACK:

Timothy blinks.

TIMOTHY

They beat him... just because they could.

Rosalind exhales.

TIMOTHY

That's how it was... everywhere.  
But that night --

ENTER FLASHBACK:

EXT. QUEENS - COMMUNITY HALL - NIGHT

SOPHOMORE TIMOTHY lifts the lid.

Inside: Sophomore Benedict. Swollen eyes granite. Radiating revenge.

SOPHOMORE BENEDICT

Now I take what's due to me.

END FLASHBACK:

Timothy bows his head. Like the memory's too heavy to hold.

TIMOTHY

Didn't see him again... for twelve years. Then out of the blue he calls. Says he started a bank... says it's payback season.

They look out into the void.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Benedict hunches over the chessboard. Twirls the king between his fingers, then slams it down. He rises.

BENEDICT

I'll call the networks.

He strides to the desk. Brain firing. Game back on.

BUG (V.O.)  
Your runts are buying them off as  
we speak.

BENEDICT  
I'll call my guy at Global.

BUG (V.O.)  
Your powers of persuasion have  
expired.

BENEDICT  
I paid him a whopper yesterday.  
He'll --

BUG (V.O.)  
For what?

He stalls. Thumps his temple, realizing his mistake.

BUG (V.O.)  
(sharper)  
For *what*?

BENEDICT  
A panel discussion.

BUG (V.O.)  
You paid Global to sit on a panel?

BENEDICT  
A second-rate journalist launched a  
book. I --

BUG (V.O.)  
Why pay Global to spotlight a dud?

He shrinks. Guilt flickers.

BUG (V.O.)  
*Who's* the journalist?

Benedict exhales. Heavy.

BENEDICT  
Jessica Rush.

Bug spins to the keyboard. CLACK. CLACK.

BENEDICT  
(throwing arms up)  
Just give me a call.

A YOUTUBE WINDOW loads: Jessica in the GLOBAL STUDIO.

Benedict winces.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
Banks loan us numbers on a  
screen... and we spend decades of  
labor paying them back. That's  
enslavement.

Bug freezes the clip. Jessica mid-flare, eyes burning.

BUG (V.O.)  
Astute. And cute, to boot.

BENEDICT  
Let. Me. Call --

BUG (V.O.)  
If you insist.

He dials. One ring.

KYLE (V.O.)  
Slater said you'd call.

BENEDICT  
(grimaces)  
I've got --

KYLE (V.O.)  
Said you're broke.

Hope drains from his eyes.

BENEDICT  
I've got a story.

KYLE (V.O.)  
One million. And I'll need a down  
payment.

BENEDICT  
(shutting eyes)  
You know I'm good for it.

KYLE (V.O.)  
No. I don't. You pay, I play.

BENEDICT  
After the millions I gave you --

KYLE (V.O.)  
*Paid* me, Ben. For services  
rendered. Call me when you're  
flush.

CLICK.

Benedict exhales, leans on the desk, pinches his eyes closed.



BUG (V.O.) (O.S.)  
That seals it. You're just a  
transaction. Always were.

Bug peels a note off the mannequin. Throws it over its  
shoulder.

Benedict clasps his hands on his lips. Thinks.

His gaze lands on the book: "THE POWER WITHIN WILL BLOW YOUR  
MIND".

A long breath. He eyes Jessica's image.

Bug leans in, fingers twitching.

INT. JAZZ CLUB - SAME TIME

Jessica sits alone. Shoulders slack. Eyes on a candle. Soul  
raw.

On stage, a weathered MUSO, 60s, bends sorrow into a sax  
solo. The club's all amber haze and shadowed corners -- a  
speakeasy from another era. The Muso winds up the solo.

MUSO  
This one's for my Jess. Still  
standing after another round with  
the wolves.

She half-smiles. Rolls her eyes. Her cell BUZZES.

MUSO  
(to Jessica)  
But baby, ain't called Thanksgiving  
for nothing. Thanks for sticking  
your neck out. Again. For us.

She snorts, barely. He slips into another solo. She answers.

JESSICA  
Hello?

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict sits statue-still. Hands steepled.

BENEDICT  
Hello, Ms. Rush. Benedict Steele.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

Jessica jolts. Eyes flare.

JESSICA

You.

BENEDICT

I kind of... have a story --

JESSICA

How dare you --

BENEDICT

Please. Just... listen to --

JESSICA

Go to hell! You ruined me. Got me  
fired. Three times!

BENEDICT

I'm sorry.

The words hang. She stares, thrown.

Bug slow-claps. Mocking. Cruel.

JESSICA

What'd you pay them?

He flinches.

JESSICA

To erase me! How much?

BENEDICT

(exhales; reluctant)

Two hundred thousand each.

A tear slips down her cheek.

JESSICA

Ever eat peanut butter on toast for  
dinner every night... alone?

BENEDICT

I was wrong. You're good. That's  
why I played so hard.

JESSICA

This is not a game.

Benedict winces.

Bug shakes its head. Eyeholes brimming with scorn.

BENEDICT

This is in your interest.

She blinks. Rage softens ever so slightly.

BENEDICT  
Help me... and you help yourself.

JESSICA  
With what?

BENEDICT  
Your career. I've got more stories.  
If you break this one.

INT. JAZZ CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Jessica wipes the tear, straightening in her seat. She glances toward the Muso, still swaying, sax sighing in the background.

A flicker of guilt passes over her face. She leans back, exhales sharply.

JESSICA  
(calmer)  
This better be good.

MUSO'S POV:

Jessica listens.

Beat.

She bolts up. Downs her drink. Blows Muso a kiss, then exits.

EXT. TRUWAVE TV STATION - LATER

A sputtering hatchback jerks to a stop in front of a low brick building.

The TRUWAVE sign above the door flickers, barely alive.

Jessica leaps out of the car, slams the door. It bounces open. She kicks it shut and storms inside.

INT. TRUWAVE TV STATION - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Peeling walls. Yellowed posters. The CHIEF, late 60s, paces -- grey beard. Paunch. Worn jumper. Eyes like unpaid bills.

Jessica storms in.

CHIEF  
So you did it, Jess. Wasn't sure  
you --

JESSICA  
He called me.

CHIEF  
... Then he's playing you.

JESSICA  
My gut says he's desperate.

He hurries after her.

CHIEF  
When'd you swap your pen for a  
crystal ball?

JESSICA  
He's desperate, okay.

CHIEF  
And what he did yesterday? Slow  
down --

JESSICA  
Can't drag our feet on this one.  
Ratings will go through the roof.

They stop at a peeling door. EDIT SUITE.

CHIEF  
What's with you and ratings?

She rolls her eyes.

He studies her, then sighs. Too tired to stop her.

INT. EDIT SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Jessica bursts in. Fluorescents hum. The EDITOR, 40s -- bald,  
barefoot, Hare Krishna robe -- types with monk-like calm.

JESSICA  
Hey Sky. Feed up?

EDITOR  
Namaste, Jess. We are ready to  
soar.

JESSICA  
We've got this!

EXT. WALL STREET - MORNING

A concrete canyon. Desolate. Hungover.

INT. MIBANK - BOARDROOM - SAME TIME

Slater, Zack, and the Directors slouch in their chairs, marinated in cognac and burnout.

Pierce, wired on coke and conquest, lines up a putt. Sinks the ball into a coffee mug.

INT. CRISIS ROOM - MORNING

Sunlight cuts across sleeping bodies.

Timothy plods in. Drops into a chair.

A beat.

The boardroom door opens. Pierce stomps in.

WHAM! He slams the putter on the desk.

Everyone jerks awake.

PIERCE

Show me some fuckin' signs of life  
around here!

Timothy blanches; like he might hurl.

ROSALIND

(sharp; unraveling)  
Can't you see we're past finished?!

PIERCE

You're finished when I say you're  
finished.

RING. The phone. Pierce stabs the button.

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Benedict looms over the phone. Venom loaded.

BENEDICT

Turn on Truwave.

INT. BOARDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door bursts open.

PIERCE

He's on TV!

Slater and Directors snap up.

INT. CRISIS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosalind flicks the remote.

On TV: BREAKING NEWS slashes the screen.

Slater, Zack, and Directors shuffle in, then freeze.

CHIEF (V.O.)  
Coming up... Billionaire Benedict  
Steele turns... on his own board.

Faces stare like ghosts at their own autopsies.

CHIEF (V.O.)  
Jessica Rush has the exclusive  
story.

TV cuts to: Jessica outside Mibank, all charged up.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
I'm live at Mibank HQ --

PIERCE  
(bolting to the window)  
Fuckin' hell. They're here.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
And just like that. The man who  
masterminded the bank's rise is  
out. This was his response.

TV cuts to: Benedict in his office. Cold. Composed.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Last night, I was ousted by  
Mibank's board --

PIERCE  
Fuckin' asshole.

SLATER  
(to Pierce)  
Get your shit together.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
A bloated board feasting on  
decadent lifestyles. Recently... I  
discovered --

SLATER  
Goddamn you, Ben.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Mibank overvalued homes.

Jaws drop.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Higher house prices meant larger  
loans... more interest. To rectify  
the error, I ordered full refunds  
to every affected client.

Timothy blinks. A quiet smile tugs at his lips.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Their response? They removed me.

RING. Slater snatches the phone.

SLATER  
You've finally lost it, huh?

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Send the payments. Or I go to the  
next level.

CLICK.

All eyes on Slater. He stares at the phone. Stunned.

ROSALIND  
What's the next level?

INT. BENEDICT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Benedict sits. Still. Haggard. Eyes pinned on the TV.

Bug watches him, savoring.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
... I spent my fortune refunding  
eighty-one thousand clients, and  
remain committed to ensuring Mibank  
compensates every affected client.

He exhales. Long. Clicks off the TV. Shuts his eyes.

BUG (V.O.)  
Absolute genius. Knew you had it in  
you.

INT. BUG'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Bug plucks a note off the mannequin. Crushes it.

Two remain.

INT. MIBANK - BENEDICT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Bug's eyeholes lock on Benedict.

BUG (V.O.)  
I've enjoyed your suffering. More  
than you'll ever know. But alas...  
other commitments beckon. So this is  
where I bow out.

Benedict startles, starts to rise --

BUG (V.O.)  
Not so fast!

He freezes.

The VIDEO of the librarian riding him flashes onto screen.

BUG (V.O.)  
I'm the keeper of your secret... as  
you are of mine. So let's keep our  
soiree between us.  
(beat)  
Remove the timer from the bomb.

He hesitates. Then unhooks it. Pulls the wires.

BUG (V.O.)  
Now for the bombshell.  
(leans in)  
This isn't the finale. It's the  
opening act.

A chill coils down Benedict's spine.

BUG (V.O.)  
How it ends... is up to you.

BENEDICT  
(murmurs)  
Jesus...

BUG (V.O.)  
Yes, dead in the eyes of the world.  
But not in your heart. Or six feet  
under. Yet.  
(wags a finger)  
So if you want to dodge heartbreak  
or a hole in the ground... keep  
your promise. Do what's right.

Zoom dies. The cursor blinks. Files vanish.

Benedict stares. Screen goes black.



He grabs the photo. Trudges to the fireplace. Drops it in. Watches it curl. Blacken. Disappear.

He exhales. Long. Shaky.

EXT. MIBANK - STREET - SAME TIME

Jessica stands in front of the towering bank, camera lights dancing off her cheeks. Adrenaline pulses through her voice.

JESSICA  
What's unfolding here raises urgent questions. How did Mibank evade scrutiny for so long? Is the system blind... or complicit?

INT. PALATIAL STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Marble floors. Mahogany shelves. The air thick with old money.

BANKER #1, wrapped in a silk nightgown, paces before a glowing TV, phone pressed to his ear. Veins in his temple throb.

JESSICA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Which begs another question... is this a lone scandal... or one piece of a rotten puzzle?

BANKER #1  
(into phone)  
Move it, Conn. Before this shit-storm goes Category 5.

INT. MIBANK - CRISIS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A hush clamps down, thick and sudden. Benedict stands in the doorway. His presence slices the room open.

BENEDICT  
(to Slater; cold)  
Did you make the payments?

Slater scowls. Shakes his head.

BENEDICT  
(raising his phone)  
What did I say?

PIERCE  
(lurching)  
Go fuck yourself.

TIMOTHY  
(bursts to his feet)  
What the hell is wrong with you?

Heads whip. Timothy's eyes dart wildly, then settle on Benedict.

TIMOTHY  
What's wrong with all of you?

ROSALIND  
(steps forward; soft)  
Timothy, let's --

TIMOTHY  
Don't.

She stops. A crack in her calm.

TIMOTHY  
We did it all --

PIERCE  
Zip your fuckin' lip, freak.

TIMOTHY  
Tell that to the psycho you see in  
the mirror.

BENEDICT  
(to Slater)  
Make the payments!

SLATER  
We haven't set up the system.

TIMOTHY  
I did.

He slams ENTER.

Eyes snap to the SCREEN: NUMBERS TUMBLE. PAYMENTS FLOW.

BENEDICT  
(to Timothy)  
Now move the billions I fronted...  
back into my account.

Pierce lunges. CRACK. The putter smashes the laptop into pieces.

Gasps ripple across the room. Chaos erupts. Timothy stumbles back as shards scatter.

But on the screen across the room, numbers keep falling. The payments are still moving.

Pierce swings again, wild-eyed and foaming with rage. The desk splinters.

TIMOTHY  
(stands firm; proud)  
You can't stop it.

Pierce raises the putter for another blow.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Hold it.

He freezes mid-manic-swing.

A suited F.B.I. AGENT steps in. Badge gleaming. Voice to match.

F.B.I. AGENT (VOICE)  
Federal Bureau of Investigation.  
This is now our jurisdiction, along  
with the SEC.

Behind him, a wall of SUITS. Black ties. Blank stares. An SEC OFFICIAL among them.

Benedict's shoulders cave. Pierce drops the putter.

BENEDICT  
(to Agent)  
You've got no business here.

SEC OFFICIAL  
(frowning; raising phone)  
You invited us.

Benedict flinches. Catches himself. Points to the boardroom.

He strides off. Like he still owns the room. The F.B.I. Agent and SEC Official follow.

SEC SUIT  
(eyeing the screen)  
Live activity.

They pause. Clock the screen. Trade looks. Move on.

INT. BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The F.B.I. Agent and SEC Official enter and shut the door behind them.

At the head of the table, Benedict stands rigid. His skin pale, eyes steeled, pulse hammering in his neck.

SEC OFFICIAL  
Care to shed light on last night?

BENEDICT  
I distributed capital. Stimulated  
the economy.

SEC OFFICIAL  
Not how we read it. You breached  
federal guidelines.

BENEDICT  
They're obsolete. I redefined value.  
The market agreed. Then I leveraged  
Mibank's reserves, temporarily.

The door creaks open. The SEC Suit leans in, clipped:

SEC AGENT  
Reserves just tanked. Bank's belly-  
up.

Benedict grips the chair for support. His knuckles go white.

SEC OFFICIAL  
(turning to Benedict)  
That makes you liable. Or is *that*  
fiction too?

CONN (O.S.)  
Right on the money.

Conn swaggers in, shoulders the Suit aside.

CONN  
Bankruptcy's not a crime.

F.B.I. AGENT  
You don't belong here, Conn.

Conn slides the pastry tray down the table.

CONN  
Have a Danish. See you on the Hill.  
(to Benedict)  
Let's go.

Benedict's mouth curls. A twisted edge of defiance laced with  
defeat.

INT. EXECUTIVE LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Conn leads Benedict out, savoring the fall. They stop at the  
elevator. Conn turns, eyes blazing.

CONN

Jesus, what were you thinking? Some  
Zen dropout scramble your brain?  
Your bank's toast. Your name's  
poison. You've got nothing.

BENEDICT

And you're here to save yourself.

CONN

No. You're the nobody now.

DING. The elevator yawns open.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Conn glides in.

Benedict follows; a ghost in a tailored shell. Doors seal. A  
tomb snapping shut.

Conn glances at his reflection. Wipes sweat.

CONN

Get ready for impact.

They descend. Benedict gulps. Locks eyes on the panel:

"6" - "5" - "4" -- each floor tolls like a funeral bell.

CONN

Heard you never touched ground in  
New York. Never hustled a cab.  
Never ate a hotdog on the curb. Or  
screwed in Central Park. That  
true?

No answer. Just the stare.

INT. GROUND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The doors part. Conn struts out, triumphant.

CONN

Show's over. No more god in the  
sky.

Benedict doesn't move. A moment. Then a single step.

CLOP!

He walks forward. The sunlight pours in like judgment.

His eyes squint. He swallows hard.

INTERCUT FLASHBACKS:

MONTAGE

- Blurred football. Screaming hooligans.
- Fists flying. Boots stomping. Blood.
- A dumpster lid slamming shut with a final thud.

END FLASHBACK:

EXT. MIBANK - MOMENTS LATER

The doors swing open. Conn strides out and hits the pavement. Benedict follows, blinking into a harsh, glowing dawn.

Across the street, Jessica spots him.

JESSICA  
Shit. He's out. Get this.

CAMERAMAN swings the lens.

JESSICA  
Mr. Steele!

Benedict lowers his head. Shuffles past black SUVs. Heads for a Bentley.

JESSICA (O.S.)  
Mr. Steele!

He climbs in. Door SLAMS.

JESSICA  
Shit.  
(to Cameraman)  
Pack it up.

INT. BENTLEY - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Conn drives, gripping the wheel like he owns the road -- and Benedict's fate.

Benedict slouches low in the passenger seat. His eyes are glassy, but his brain is ticking.

BENEDICT  
Fifty million.

CONN

Huh?

BENEDICT

For my silence.

CONN

(laughs; dry)

You're out of your mind.

BENEDICT

Then make it a hundred million.

(beat)

And get me a burner.

INT. LAVISH STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Banker #1 lowers his phone. Turns to the others, all half-sunk in leather chairs, glazed from Cubans and cognac.

BANKER #1

Son of a bitch wants a hundred mil'. Or he talks.

BANKER #2

Told you he'd flip.

BANKER #3

You still rode his wave. Cashed out like the rest of us.

BANKER #1

No haggling. Twenty-five each.

Mouths hang. Nobody breathes.

BANKER #1

What's the problem? It's less than a year's bonus.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - STREET - LATER

The Bentley stops. Lets Benedict out and glides off.

He clocks the house. Exhales, dread tangled with relief.

Dials a number on the burner.

EXT. VALET'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - SAME TIME

A Bohemian barbecue. Kids shriek while a bro strums a guitar. Valet flips a corn cob on the grill.

His phone BUZZES. He answers.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
George.

VALET  
(startled)  
Mr. Steele? Happy Thanksgiving --

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
I was held hostage.

VALET  
What? But no one --

EXT. STEELE MANSION - STREET - SAME TIME

Benedict trudges up the drive. The iron gate CLANGS shut.

BENEDICT  
Did it online. But there was a  
bomb. In my office.

VALET (V.O.)  
That's...

BENEDICT  
And my accolades on the wall... Who  
had them framed?

VALET (V.O.)  
No idea. Indigo handled it.

A HORN BLASTS.

Benedict turns.

The TRUWAVE van skids to a stop.

BENEDICT  
(eyes narrow)  
Find out. Indigo. The framer. Get  
the bastard who did it. One million  
if you deliver.

He hangs up.

Jessica bursts from the van, full of beans.

JESSICA  
Mr. Steele!

He looks at her, deadpan.



JESSICA  
You said you had more stories.

BENEDICT  
It's Thanksgiving --

JESSICA  
(snapping)  
We had a deal.

BENEDICT  
I gave you a story.

JESSICA  
Not *the* story. Other banks were in  
on it.

BENEDICT  
That's speculation, sweetie. Go  
home. Eat some turkey.

He turns, strides off.

JESSICA  
You promised... you...

He doesn't stop.

JESSICA  
... Bastard!

She slams the gate. BAM. BAM. BAM.

INT. STEELE MANSION - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Opera floods the room, sharp and mournful. Benedict slips  
inside, moving like a man afraid to be seen.

Through the tall window, he sees Amy standing alone in the  
courtyard.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Benedict steps outside. His heart feels like it might stop.

The stone path is littered with rose heads, cleanly severed.  
Amy stands in the middle, garden shears in hand, calmly  
clipping more.

She doesn't look up.

BENEDICT  
Amy...

She looks up. Eyes wet.

BENEDICT

I...

AMY

(raises a finger)

Listen.

The opera swells. A lament knifing through the air.

He looks down.

She turns to the bush. SNIP. Another bloom falls.

BENEDICT

I... I'm sorry!

AMY

(calm; eyes on the bush)

Save it. For the people you ruined.

BENEDICT

We got it wrong.

AMY

You expect me to buy that?

His gaze drops.

SNIP. SNIP. The shears decapitate.

AMY

A genius... botching the math.

(beat)

For twelve years.

(shakes her head)

All this time, married to a criminal.

BENEDICT

I didn't break the law.

AMY

(eyes snap to him)

You broke *people*!

He flinches.

AMY

Tell me why. Even after you had more money than God.

He stares at the red wreckage at her feet.

AMY

And look at me. I want to see who  
you really are.

He lifts his gaze. Their eyes lock.

BENEDICT

(long breath; meek)

The more I made... the... the safer  
I felt.

She stares at him for a stunned beat.

AMY

How many lives were you going to  
ruin before you felt safe enough?

He exhales. Shattered.

AMY

(points the shears)

Doesn't look like safety. It looks  
like you've been punishing the  
world for something you never got  
over.

Their eyes lock. A storm between them.

She turns. SNIP.

Another bloom falls.

INT. STEELE MANSION - SHOWER - DAY

Water hammers Benedict. Hand on the tile. Head bowed. Steam  
coils around him like judgement.

ENTER FLASHBACK:

EXT. HOUSE - LAWN - NIGHT

A garden hose blasts Sophomore Benedict. Soaked in grime,  
lettuce clings to his shirt.

His father stands behind the hose, face streaked with tears.

Sophomore Benedict picks a soggy leaf from his hair and  
flicks it away. His eyes burn.

SOPHOMORE BENEDICT

I'll settle the score.

FATHER

That right? With what?

SOPHOMORE BENEDICT  
 (tapping his temple)  
 This.

FATHER  
 Don't chase their shadow, son.  
 Shine your own light.

SOPHOMORE BENEDICT  
Shine?  
 (snarls)  
 I'm gonna burn like hellfire!

Father just sighs.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. STEELE MANSION - BATHROOM - DAY

Benedict stares into the mirror. Vacant eyes. Regret stares back. He looks away, trying to unsee himself.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK - LATER

The tenement building creaks in the wind, begging for a mercy kill.

INT. JESSICA'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Jessica yanks a cheap bottle of wine from her barren fridge.

JESSICA  
 Why do I even bother?

Christopher leans on the counter. The apartment is scattered with secondhand furniture and pawn shop castoffs.

CHRISTOPHER  
 You'll get the rest, Jess --

JESSICA  
 (pouring)  
 So they can walk free? Like him?  
 I'm done bleeding for cowards.  
 Sixteen hours a day... screaming  
 into a void...

A train BLASTS past. Walls quake. Wine ripples.

JESSICA  
 (mock toast)  
 To journalism, shaking walls, and  
 discount vouchers.

CHRISTOPHER  
Could be worse. White picket fence.  
Mortgage. Fridge full of regrets.

JESSICA  
Spare me the sermon, okay.

He shrugs. Raises his glass.

CHRISTOPHER  
(wry)  
Happy Thanksgiving.

The toaster POPS. She grabs the toast. Smears peanut butter like war paint.

He sips. Watches her.

CHRISTOPHER  
Lined up a watchdog gig at three.

JESSICA  
What gig?

She bites the toast. Chews.

CHRISTOPHER  
Finishing what you started.  
(beat)  
Want to twist the knife?

Her jaw clamps mid-chew. Eyes flick to the knife.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - HOURS LATER

Charter coaches wind through a narrow forest road, flanked by pine trees.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Charter coaches hiss as they come to a stop.

Doors swing open. Dozens of ACTIVISTS pour out, all wearing black "WALL STREET WATCHDOGS" t-shirts.

Christopher steps forward, rallying them with a raised fist. The crowd follows him toward --

EXT. STEELE MANSION GATE - CONTINUOUS

A crowd surges. Placards stab the sky. Chants rip through the air.

CHANTING ACTIVISTS  
Crooked banker... tell the truth!

Jessica's Cameraman cues her.

INT. STEELE MANSION - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Benedict, now dressed down in jeans and a turtleneck, watches from the window.

The TV plays behind him. Jessica appears onscreen, live.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
Reporting from the estate of  
Benedict Steele, where Watchdogs  
are demanding answers.

BENEDICT'S POV:

The mob thickens. Chanting grows louder.

JESSICA (V.O.) (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
From a man who never produced a  
thing. Yet amassed a sixty million  
dollar palace...

Benedict twitches. Turns to the screen.

JESSICA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
A mansion packed with rare  
antiques... collected to satisfy  
his wife's expensive taste.

Benedict stiffens. The blood leaves his face.

INT. AMY'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Amy sits surrounded by relics and ancient scrolls. Her eyes are locked on the TV.

Her face appears onscreen.

JESSICA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Privileged lives... built on a  
paper trail of pain.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Benedict bolts down the stairs.

Amy stamps in. Furious.

He stops halfway.

BENEDICT  
She's a has-been chasing headlines.

AMY  
She called me a gold-digging bitch?

BENEDICT  
She's trying to reboot her career.

AMY  
Don't lie to me!

He flinches.

AMY  
Man up, get out there and tell her  
what she wants to hear.

BENEDICT  
I already did. I --

AMY  
End it.

His throat clenches.

AMY  
End it or lose me.

BENEDICT  
You d-didn't mean that.

She doesn't blink. Not once. Cold. Absolute.

She turns and walks away. Each step echoing like a countdown  
to the moment he stops being whole.

He stumbles after her.

BENEDICT  
Amy... don't... I need --

AMY  
(spins; hand raised)  
You!

He stops dead.

AMY  
Yes. You. You don't need me. You  
need a mirror. Because...  
(draws breath)  
And I'll say it...

He gulps.

AMY  
You're a coward.

BENEDICT  
No --

AMY  
A coward.

The word cuts clean. He deflates. His body sags.

AMY  
Locked in a vault. Too scared to  
step out.

BENEDICT  
(blurts)  
You *know* why.

AMY  
Let me finish.

A single tear slides down her cheek. She doesn't wipe it  
away.

AMY  
You thought pain and *things* would  
make you matter. But none of it  
changed who you really are. You're  
still just a scared little boy.  
Pretending to be a man you don't  
know how to become.

He folds. Gutted. Gone.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - LATER

A weathered Jeep roars from the garage.

INT. JEEP - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Amy grips the wheel. Sobs shake her -- raw, uncontrollable.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Benedict watches from the window.

BENEDICT'S POV:

The Jeep shrinks toward the gate. Vanishes.



INT. STEELE MANSION - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Benedict turns. Staggers to the oak pedestal. On it -- an antique chessboard. He leans on it. Shaking.

His gut revolts. Vomits. Once. Then again. Violent. He gasps. Grabs the pedestal.

BENEDICT

What were you thinking?!

He swipes the chessboard. Pieces skitter like shrapnel.

He sinks. Crushed.

EXT. STREET - STEELE MANSION GATE - MOMENTS LATER

Amy's Jeep disappears into the horizon.

Jessica watches. Breath sharp. Fists buried in her coat. Christopher slips an arm around her.

JESSICA

That's that. No more nails.

CHRISTOPHER

There's more. Keep hammering.

She doesn't answer. Keeps watching the road.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Rosebush carcasses claw the moonlit air. Inside, Benedict stares at them. Distant. Unblinking.

INT. STEELE MANSION - SMOKING LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

The parrot watches Benedict from its cage -- a mute jury.

He turns from the window. Trudges to the whisky altar. Pulls a bottle.

A plaque gleams: "MACALLAN VALERIO ADAMI - \$1,000,000".

BENEDICT

(lifting bottle to parrot)

Million dollar malt. Just for us.

He pops the cork. Pours.

BENEDICT

Cheers to a million dollar  
lobotomy.

He downs it. Refills. Drifts past the cage.

BENEDICT  
Tried Reiki once. Guy said my  
chakras had a firewall. Military  
grade.  
(beat)  
Never went back.

He drops into the chair.

BENEDICT  
Can't see Amy.

He closes his eyes.

Beat.

BENEDICT  
Can't see her face.

The parrot stirs.

PARROT  
Hello... sweet-pea.

He snorts. Bitter. Drains the glass. Slumps back.

Beat.

PARROT  
Sweet-pea... hello.

The words cut through the fog. His eyes snap open. Focused.  
Alive.

He grabs the burner. Dials.

INT. BENTLEY - TRAVELING - SAME TIME

Conn drives, answers his cell.

CONN  
Ben.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

BENEDICT  
Give that Rush reporter a reason to  
smile.

CONN  
Sentimental now? It's beneath you.

BENEDICT

*Make her smile.* Or I talk.

CONN

Do that and you'll be pissing  
behind a trailer, chasing white  
trash good-time-girls on meth and --

BENEDICT

They already paid me. Do it.

CLICK.

Conn snorts. Dials.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK - LATER

Jessica's hatchback sputters and jerks to a stop.

She rests her forehead against the steering wheel. Completely drained.

She forces herself out of the car. Slams the door. It bounces open. She kicks it shut and trudges past overflowing trash bins.

Her phone buzzes in her pocket. She answers.

JESSICA

Yeah.

KYLE (V.O.)

(silken; deliberate)  
Jessica Rush.

JESSICA

Who is this?

KYLE (V.O.)

Kyle Butcher. Global News.

She stops. Granite-faced.

KYLE (V.O.)

We've been watching your work. That  
fire of yours... it's cutting  
through the noise.

JESSICA

Meaning?

KYLE (V.O.)

We've got a senior slot with your  
name on it. Ready to step out of  
the shadows?

She climbs the cracked steps.

JESSICA  
(suspicious)  
Maybe.

KYLE (V.O.)  
Fabulous.  
(beat; cools)  
Be at Global. Tomorrow. Ten sharp.

INT. APARTMENT BLOCK - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

A ratttrap. Peeling walls. The kind of stench you can see.

Jessica bursts in. Slams the door. Leans back, clamps her mouth, barely caging a smile.

INT. STEELE MANSION - SMOKING LOUNGE - LATER

The burner BUZZES. Benedict grabs it without hesitation.

CONN (V.O.)  
Global bit. Your little bloodhound  
made senior.

Benedict kills the call. Drops the burner. Grabs his own phone. Dials.

AMY'S CELL PHONE (V.O.)  
Please leave a message.

BENEDICT  
(voice wavering)  
Amy... I gave her what she  
deserved. Please...

He hangs up. Stares into nothing.

EXT. WALL STREET WATCHDOGS DEN - MORNING

Faded protest posters flap in the breeze. Graffiti screams across the brick walls. The street hums with Saturday shoppers -- blind to the battle sprayed across the bricks.

Christopher pedals up on a bike and hops off.

A SPUTTER breaks the calm. Jessica's hatchback wheezes to a stop and dies.

She steps out in pinned-up hair, sharp makeup, and heels that don't belong on cracked pavement. In her hands, two Starbucks cups.

CHRISTOPHER  
Yo, Jess. What's with the glam?

JESSICA  
(edgy)  
Hey...

She hands him a cup. He eyes it. Grimaces.

CHRISTOPHER  
Starbucks, huh? Marching to the  
corporate drumbeat now?

She rolls her eyes.

CHRISTOPHER  
Is this "privilege"? Paying six  
bucks to sip coffee in a gutter?

Her fingers tighten around her cup.

JESSICA  
Global offered me a senior  
position.

His face drops.

JESSICA  
(eyes on the street)  
Interview's today.

CHRISTOPHER  
And today's protest?

JESSICA  
Find someone else.

CHRISTOPHER  
Who? You're the spark --

JESSICA  
(snapping)  
I've done my time, okay?

CHRISTOPHER  
Trading peanut butter on toast for  
sashimi and a leash?

JESSICA  
Jesus. Spare me the sermon. I'm  
done being broke.

Her voice cracks. She catches it fast, turns, and storms off -  
- heels striking the pavement like gunshots.

He watches her go. Groans. Looks to the sky.

INT. HATCHBACK - CONTINUOUS

Jessica drops into the seat. Slams the door. It bounces open. She yanks it shut and locks it.

Her jaw clenches. She stares at the steering wheel.

A long breath escapes.

She turns the key. The engine coughs. Sputters.

A knock on the window startles her.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't do it. They'll dump you in  
Africa on permanent poaching beat  
'til the malaria clocks you out.

The engine catches.

EXT. WALL STREET WATCHDOGS DEN - CONTINUOUS

She pulls away.

CHRISTOPHER

(yelling)  
Or Ebola!

The hatchback vanishes into traffic.

He glares at the cup. Hurls it to the ground.

INT. GLOBAL NEWS HQ - KYLE'S OFFICE - LATER

Floor-to-ceiling windows. Designer furniture. Abstract art hung like trophies. The skyline gleams behind glass.

Kyle stands behind his desk, pouring grappa into a demitasse.

Jessica sits across from him. Lipstick perfect. Back straight. Composed.

KYLE

Grappa?

JESSICA

I'm good.

He pours anyway.

KYLE

What's life without perks?

He sits. Sips. Watches her. Then nods; slow, smug.

KYLE

You've got the look for the  
channel. Just enough heat.

She half-smiles.

KYLE

And the outfit...  
(eyes grazing her  
cleavage)  
Perfect. Just enough to keep the ad-  
men drooling without spooking the  
sponsors.  
(locks on her eyes)  
Don't change that. It's layered  
news. Viewers stay for the tease.  
But the Brooklyn brogue? Doesn't  
translate. We'll smooth it out.

Her eyes drop for a moment. She nods once. Muted. Mechanical.

KYLE

(leans in)  
Your stories too. We keep a clean  
narrative here. No stray edges.

JESSICA

I know.

KYLE

Then we're aligned.  
(reclines)  
Perks are solid. Prada account.  
Car. You strike me as a Beemer  
girl.

Her smile twitches. But her eyes are already gone.

INT. STEELE MANSION - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A silk robe hangs from Benedict's shoulders like dead weight.  
His head tilts at an awkward angle, neck stiff. He holds a  
phone to his ear, hungover and hollow.

He steps over scattered chess pieces toward the window.

BENEDICT'S POV:

The garden. Silent. Rosebush stumps jut like bones.

AMY'S CELL PHONE (V.O.)

Please leave a message.

He lowers the phone. Blank.

DING! Gate intercom.

He frowns. Crosses over.

On the MONITOR: A psychedelic hippy van idles at the gate. Valet's behind the wheel.

BENEDICT  
George? What's with the ride?

VALET (V.O.)  
Morning, sir. I struck gold.

EXT. STEELE MANSION - FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Benedict hurtles down the steps. Robe flapping.

The van rolls up. Stops. The Valet hops out. Calm, amused.

BENEDICT  
That was fast.

VALET  
Looks rather like Darth Vader.

BENEDICT  
Spare me the *Star Wars* crap. Where is he?

The Valet slides the cargo door open.

REVEAL: BUG. Cloaked. Masked.

BENEDICT  
You.

BUG  
(garbled)  
In the flesh.

BENEDICT  
(spins to Valet)  
You goddamn bastard. After all I've done for you.

The Valet shrugs.

VALET  
You haven't done much of anything, sir.

BUG  
You were looking for me.

Benedict whirls back. Ears pounding.



Bug dangles a PHOTO: the Regulator straddling him.

BUG

Get in.

Benedict bolts for the steps.

BUG

(sighs; drops photo)

There goes my bargaining chip.

Benedict scrambles up the steps.

THWACK! A dart hits his back.

He jerks. Eyes wide.

Valet lowers a dart gun -- deadpan.

Benedict staggers. Buckles.

Collapses.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

The van speeds toward New York's skyline.

INT. VAN - TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS

The engine hums. Fumes cling to the air.

Bug sits on a crate, looping string into a heart. Fingers nimble, focused.

Benedict lies crumpled on the floor, face slick with sweat. He stirs. Groans.

BUG

(pulls the string taut)

Ah. Dead in the eyes of the world... dead in your heart. But still breathing.

(crushes the heart)

Shame.

Benedict coughs, swallows.

BUG

Cut you loose to do right. But you rerouted back to hell. Again.

BENEDICT

(straining up)

I gave you what you wanted.

BUG  
Not quite. *You owe me.*

BENEDICT  
Owe you *what!?*

Bug leans in.

BUG  
Empathy.

Benedict shudders. Fear coils up his spine.

EXT. DESOLATE ROAD - LATER

The van veers off. Dead leaves scatter. Fall still.

INT. VAN - LATER

It slows. Stops. Engine dies. Benedict's eyelids sag.

The door slides open.

Benedict's eyes widen.

Behind the Valet. A grave. Yawning.

EXT. CEMETERY - CONTINUOUS

Dust ghosts across cut-rate headstones.

Inside the van, Bug hauls Benedict up by the collar.

BENEDICT  
I... wait... let's talk --

BUG  
(finger to mouth hole)  
Shh.

It shoves him out. He stumbles. Locks on the grave.

Bug jumps out.

The Valet shuts the door.

Bug clamps Benedict's arm. Drags him to the edge.

BUG  
Now you're going to experience what  
you created.

They reach the grave.

BENEDICT  
I made amends...

BUG  
Danny never got to know that.

BENEDICT  
I... I don't know a Danny.

BUG  
Who do you know?  
(off Benedict's look)  
No one.  
(leans in)  
Danny drove a nail in his skull.  
After you took his home.

Bug gestures to the dirt.

BUG  
(turns to the grave)  
See, this hole was his. But he  
missed a funeral insurance payment.  
So they repossessed his coffin.  
Burned him.  
(turns back)  
And resold the plot.

Benedict's eyes dart. No escape.

Suddenly, Bug SHOVES him in.

THUD. He lands hard. Dirt walls around him.

He crawls up on his elbows.

BUG (O.S.)  
Feel what Danny felt. The despair  
of being relegated to a statistic.

It draws a nail gun from its cloak.

BUG  
Like all the rest. Numbers on a  
spreadsheet.

It lifts the PHOTO: the Regulator straddling Benedict.

BUG  
Like her.

It taps the photo with the muzzle.

Benedict's head drops, pulse thrashing.

BUG

Do you even know her name? The  
regulator you screwed. So you could  
keep screwing the world.

BENEDICT

It... it was just once --

BUG

Once too many!

BENEDICT

She came onto me. It meant nothing.

BUG

But it might have meant everything  
to someone else!

A tremor runs through him. Nerves raw.

BUG

Tell. Me. Her. Name!

Beat.

BUG

Her name. Is Erin.

The name burns in his gut like poison.

BUG

She was my wife!

If Benedict's skin could peel off, it would.

THUD! Bug drops into the grave.

Benedict blinks. Slow. The fight has left him. He stays  
slumped, limp with shame.

BUG

You wrecked my life. And Danny's.

A step forward. It towers over him.

BUG

And your wife's.

He shakes his head, gutted by guilt.

BUG

And you promised that reporter  
more. But I see no headlines.

BENEDICT

I got her a job --

BUG  
Which serves no one.  
(points the nail gun)  
Only you. Her. And the machine.

His head drops. Quiet admission.

Bug's eyeholes stay fixed. Then shift to the nail gun.

BUG  
Now... do I take what you owe me?  
Or give you what I owe you? Either  
way... the world collects.

It jams the muzzle to his temple.

BUG  
Give me a reason not to pull.

Benedict's eyes glaze. Bug nudges his skull with the muzzle.

BENEDICT  
There isn't one.

Bug freezes. Didn't expect that.

BENEDICT  
I'm already dead. End it.

BUG  
Coward's talk, Mr. Steele.

BENEDICT  
No. I'm a nobody no one sees.

BUG  
Because you never let them look.

BENEDICT  
Had to keep the monsters off me.

BUG  
Did screwing my wife help!?

BENEDICT  
She came onto me.

BUG  
And you obliged her.

BENEDICT  
I never...  
(low; cracked)  
I never knew what it was like to be  
wanted.

Scorched silence. A tear spills from his eye.

BENEDICT

I just wanted to feel wanted.

Bug eyeholes track the tear as it splashes to the soil.

BENEDICT

Every day felt like... like target practice. Lunch in the janitor's closet... better than watching them spit in it. Some days I pissed myself... just waiting for the hit. Waiting for the moment they'd drag me to a dumpster. Same place, every time. Only Amy made me feel... like it was good to be born.

BUG

And still you betrayed her.

Benedict sobs now.

BENEDICT

Just pull it.

BUG

What'll that fix?

BENEDICT

Do it.

It whips the nail gun from his temple.

BUG

The world needs a man you never dared to be!

The words hit harder than any weapon.

BUG

Because true power is having the guts to do right... even when monsters hollow you out.

(leans in)

You want to be seen? Then mean something. To the people no one sees. You owe them that.

Benedict collapses at Bug's boots. Not begging. Not resisting.

Seen at last.

Bug watches. Rage gone.

ABOVE THE GRAVE

A flock of birds lifts into the sky, wings slicing through the quiet. They scatter across the headstones.

EXT. NEW YORK - LATER

Monoliths rise. Steel and glass claw at the clouds.

EXT. GLOBAL NEWS HQ - CONTINUOUS

Jessica bursts through the doors, glowing like she just cashed a winning ticket.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Her hatchback sputters down the lane, coughing smoke like it's on its last breath.

EXT. TRUWAVE TV STATION - CONTINUOUS

The hatchback coughs around a corner. Lurches. Dies.

INT. TRUWAVE TV STATION - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Jessica storms in. Eyes like coals.

EDITOR

Where've you been, Jess? We've --

JESSICA

Not now.

EDITOR

But Benedict Steele's --

JESSICA

Fuck Steele. I'm done.

INT. CHIEF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She crashes in. Freezes.

REVERSE: Benedict, slumped in a chair, clad in a robe.

CHIEF

Been waiting for you.

She whips to him.

BENEDICT  
... They bought my silence.

She reels. Then hardens.

JESSICA  
(points to Chief)  
Take it up with him. I quit.

CHIEF  
What?

JESSICA  
Keep the desk.

The Chief throws up his arms.

BENEDICT  
She got a job at Global.

Her jaw drops.

JESSICA  
No one's talking to you, asshole.

BENEDICT  
I arranged it.

She chokes like peanut butter just caught in her throat.

JESSICA  
Don't ever speak to me again.

INT. RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

She storms out. Past the Editor and Cameraman. Out the door.

They gape like a tremor just hit the building.

INT. JESSICA'S HATCHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

Jessica collapses into the seat. Slams the steering wheel.

BAM. BAM.

Tears streak her makeup. Breath choppy. Chest tight.

She turns the key.

The engine sputters. Coughs.

The TRUWAVE sign glitches in sync with the sputter.



Her eyes dart to it -- to her book on the passenger seat:  
"DUPED".

She exhales. Cuts the engine. Grabs her phone.

INT. TRENDY BISTRO - SAME TIME

Crystal. Leather. Ego. Kyle sips champagne. His phone rings.  
He answers smoothly.

KYLE

Jessica Rush. Thought you'd be  
raiding Prada by now.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

Jessica tries to stay composed.

JESSICA

Soon as I finish a story.

KYLE

(sits up)

Oh!?

JESSICA

In light of my appointment to  
Global, figured you'd want the  
feed. It's big.

KYLE

How big?

JESSICA

Benedict Steele big.

KYLE

(cool)

Wouldn't do that if I were you.

A tear slips down her cheek.

KYLE

You're flying first class now.  
Don't ditch that for a headline.

She wipes the tear. Clenches her jaw.

JESSICA

I broadcast truth. Not cleavage. If  
you want someone to play dress-up  
for your ad sponsors, call a  
pageant.

KYLE  
PR isn't charity.

JESSICA  
No. It's filth. Tell your owners at  
the trough... Truwave lit the fuse.

She hangs up.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - PUTTING GREEN - MOMENTS LATER

Banker #1, pale, phone to his ear. Waves other Bankers in.

ON THE SCREEN: A NEWS BANNER flashes -- cuts to Jessica.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
The rot thickens in the Benedict  
Steele saga. He now alleges...  
other banks colluded in this  
scheme.

BANKER #1  
Suicidal fuck.

INT. TRUWAVE STUDIO - SAME TIME

Jessica faces Benedict, now in Cameraman's rebel t-shirt.

JESSICA  
So, Mr. Steele... the question  
remains, can you prove it?

BENEDICT  
They paid me one hundred million  
for my silence.

JESSICA  
Who?

BENEDICT  
Eezy Bank. Hothouse Loans. Apex...

EXT. GOLF COURSE - PUTTING GREEN - SAME TIME

The Bankers panic. Yell into phones.

BANKER #2  
Shut it down! Now.

INT. TRUWAVE STUDIO - SAME TIME

Benedict's eyes droop.

BENEDICT  
We rigged property valuations.  
Bigger loans meant more debt. More  
interest.

JESSICA  
How much more?

INT. ELECTRONICS STORE - SAME TIME

Rows of TV's glow with Benedict's face. Shoppers freeze.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Up to fifteen percent.

Rage erupts.

INT. BISTRO - SAME TIME

Diners stare up at the TVs. Forks frozen halfway to their  
mouths. No one blinks.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
How long did this go on?

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Twelve years.

Forks drop. Mouths hang. Fury simmers.

INT. TRUWAVE STUDIO - SAME TIME

Jessica leans in. Stunned.

JESSICA  
And no one noticed?

BENEDICT  
There was nothing to catch. No law.  
Just... suggested guidelines. If  
you can't prove intent, there's no  
crime.

JESSICA  
And no prison time.

BENEDICT  
Some. But not enough to matter.

EXT. NEW YORK - TIMES SQUARE - SAME TIME

The Jumbotron flashes Jessica's face.

Below, a crowd of Wall Street Watchdogs. Fists raised.  
Banners waving. Angry murmurs.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
But surely the regulators --

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
We fed them carrots. Watched them  
chase careers.

Christopher watches. Something behind his eyes sharpens.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
So how much did your circle profit?

Placards lower. A hush falls. They wait. Benedict hesitates,  
shame pooling.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
Roughly twelve billion.

The crowd erupts. Fists launch. A roar swallows the square.

INT. COTTAGE - SAME TIME

Amy stares at the TV. Silent tears trace her cheeks.

BENEDICT (V.O.)  
(exhales heavy)  
But that's the tip of the iceberg.  
Forex. Libor. Swaps... we fixed  
them for years.

JESSICA (V.O.)  
All with air in your vaults.

He nods. Grim. Looks down.

Amy covers her face.

EXT. EEZY BANK - DAY

Glass doors rattle. Fists slam. Screams rise.

EXT. HOTHOUSE LOANS - DAY

Bank cards rain. Shutters slam. Anger.

EXT. BIG APPLE MORTGAGES - DAY

Spray paint hisses on glass: "CROOKS".

EXT. BANKER #1'S ESTATE - DAY

F.B.I. AGENTS march Banker #1 to a black SUV.

EXT. BANKER #2'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Lights strobe. Black SUVs block a Porsche. Doors fly open.

EXT. NEW YORK - DAY

Sirens wail. Rage echoes across the skyline.

EXT. LAKE - SUNSET

The water lies still, glowing gold in the low light.

A cottage sits nestled among cedar trees. A taxi pulls into the drive.

Benedict steps out, a single rose in his hand.

EXT. COTTAGE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

He tries the door. Locked. A hollow exhale. He knocks.

Footsteps approach.

Amy opens the door. Her face is streaked with tears, but calm.

He takes a step forward.

She doesn't move, holding the door in place between them.

He offers the rose.

She looks at it. Then at him. Shakes her head.

BENEDICT  
I'm going to mean to the world what  
you mean to me.

A tear wells and slides down her cheek.

Gently, he sets the rose on the step. Turns and walks away.

Amy watches for a moment, then steps back inside, leaving the door slightly open.

At the edge of the path, Benedict stops. Looks out at the lake. Exhales. Remembers.

INT. JESSICA'S HATCHBACK - MOVING - SUNSET

Jessica rounds a corner and groans.

JESSICA'S POV:

Christopher stands tucked behind a pillar near her apartment steps.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

She parks. Kills the engine. Takes a moment. Breathes.

Christopher looks up as she gets out, gripping her book against her chest like armor.

She walks toward him, the book cradled in her arms.

CHRISTOPHER

What a day.

She nods, hesitates, then lifts her book.

JESSICA

It's selling faster than they can print.

CHRISTOPHER

(grinning)

Guess the universe is paying you back.

He rises, holding a string figure star. She studies it. Her smile blooms.

EXT. NEW YORK - MORNING

Corporate towers. Blurred by a snowflake haze.

INT. CAB - MOVING - SAME TIME

Timothy stares out the window.

People on the sidewalk. Lost in the flurry. Chasing bucks and neon brands. On his phone:

BENEDICT (V.O.)

You're a number borrowing dollars  
banks don't even have. And when you  
give them that power... you never  
get it back.

INT. STARK WHITE ROOM - SAME TIME

Close on a microphone. Benedict continues...

BENEDICT

I know. I was there. Also used to think power lay in *things*. Things money could buy. From caviar to control.

He wears prison orange. Hair cropped.

BENEDICT

Turns out... the power was in me all along. Now I'm free.

Through the barred window now, into the snowflake haze. His voice morphs into a LOUDSPEAKER'S METALLIC BLARE.

BENEDICT (V.O.)

So, to the crooked banks out there,  
I know what you do and I know how  
you do it.

On the loudspeaker now. Echoing. Undeniable.

BENEDICT (V.O.)

*So wake up and smell the roses!*

FADE TO BLACK.