

MOTIVES 2

by
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INT. MULTI-LEVEL PARKING GARAGE - LATE NIGHT

A flash of light cuts through the darkness. Capturing a PICTURE of ANDY RYAN. Dirty, blonde hair. Lanky. Dead. A hypodermic needle still stuck in his arm.

DETECTIVE ERIC MORGAN strolls toward Andy's ancient Dodge Neon with the confident swagger of a seasoned cop.

Tenderfoot OFFICER ROD WILLIAMS appears at Morgan's side.

WILLIAMS

Had a piece on him. But it was cold. Looks like he O.D.'d on some bad smack.

Morgan eyes the evidence bag in Williams' hand. Gun inside.

MORGAN

I don't get called for O.D.'s.

WILLIAMS

He's one of ours.

This gets Morgan's attention. He takes a better look at Andy's face. Something flashes briefly across his own.

WILLIAMS (cont'd)

Forensics.

Morgan uses a tissue to extract Andy's wallet from his pocket. A few dollars peek out. Morgan skims the I.D. Surveys Andy's track-laden arm.

MORGAN

He's definitely an expert at something.

WILLIAMS

Maybe you're the cleaner.

Williams enjoys his joke discreetly. Morgan takes the money from Andy's wallet. Hands it to Williams.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Go find me a decent cup of coffee.

Williams takes the money hesitantly. Shuffles off. Morgan takes a closer look at the gun.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - GOLF COURSE - DAY

DONOVAN COOK climbs out of the golf cart. His physique boasts a definition born of more physically challenging sports. But he's playing two games right now. He sizes up his competitor.

JIM ROBINSON - a good ole' Southern boy - maneuvers out of the driver's seat. Despite the beer-bulge in his mid-section.

JIM

I'm telling you, they're gonna think you're holding back on the real estate options.

Jim chooses a club with almost comic seriousness.

DONOVAN

That's why you have to translate this for them, Jim. The market is nasty right now. If you're not already in the boat, this isn't the time to suit up. I'm offering your people a broader and potentially more lucrative investment.

Jim settles in. Swings. Grimaces at the result.

JIM

Damn wind.

DONOVAN

We hit black in less than a year. My profit tripled last year alone.

JIM

No shit.

DONOVAN

We targeted the high income areas.

Donovan lines up his shot. Keeps an eye on both targets.

DONOVAN (cont'd)

Told you. I'm doing your folks a favor. I already have three, thriving locations. If I wasn't tied up in a couple other deals, at the moment, I'd keep all this to myself.

Donovan swings. A cooperative breeze lands him just ten feet shy of the cup. He looks back. Jim wipes his brow with a monogrammed handkerchief. His forehead slightly sunburned.

JIM

Day Spas, hunh?

DONOVAN

Every man loves a well-kept woman.

Jim glances back at Donovan's golf ball. Smiles slightly.

INT. SERENITY SPA - FRONT DESK - DAY

Luxury. No fifteen-buck pedicures here. We float into the...

HEART OF THE SPA

...Where an enormous fountain trickles with a subtlety that belies its size. And business is good. Beautiful ladies, in various stages of relaxation, roam the spa. We maneuver our way behind a frosted glass door that reads simply: Manager.

INT. SERENITY SPA - MANAGER'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

With legs up to her ears and not a hair out of place, it's only fitting that SAUNDRA DENNIS runs this place of beauty. Hooded eyes regard Donovan from the other side of her desk.

DONOVAN

What's the bottom line difference?

Saundra pushes a sheet across the desk. Her hand lingers a second longer than necessary. As does Donovan's gaze.

SAUNDRA

It's a significant jump. But it's their new line and it's the best.

A subtle humming interrupts the brief silence. Donovan's Blackberry glows from his hip. He checks it. Rises.

DONOVAN

Draw me up some concrete numbers?

She nods. His mind is already on the next meeting. Her eyes are still on his physique. Donovan grabs his jacket from a couch across the room. Hurries out.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - LATE AFTERNOON

Morgan types up his report. A few words jump out at us: Andy Ryan. Forensics Specialist. Heroin overdose.

Williams strolls behind Morgan's desk. Balancing a file folder and a cup of coffee. Morgan presses 'Save'. Slides back from his desk. Williams dodges. Sloshing coffee everywhere.

Morgan snatches up the falling folder. Saving it from the coffee. His shoes aren't so lucky.

MORGAN

Dammit.

WILLIAMS

Sorry, Detective.

Morgan glances at the file.

MORGAN
This the work-up I asked for?

WILLIAMS
Yeah. Yes.

Morgan looks at it more closely. Smirks a little. Then notices that Williams is still hovering. He raises a brow. Contrite, Williams starts off. Morgan rolls his eyes.

MORGAN
You been paying attention to the news lately?

Williams turns back.

WILLIAMS
Sir?

A PUDGY OFFICER strides through the gap between Morgan and Williams. Morgan edges toward Williams as he speaks.

MORGAN
Get High or Die Trying? Flatline? FeFe? They're dealer tags. The newest craze has suppliers mixing the smack with fentanyl. Fentanyl by itself is about eighty times stronger than morphine. Stuff's been killing its way down the east coast.

Morgan hands the file back to Williams. A SWEATY BEAT COP crosses behind them. Williams skims the file.

MORGAN (cont'd)
Andy didn't O.D. on bad heroin. He O.D.'d on the good shit.

A BEAN-POLE COP nearly bumps Williams on his way past. Williams tosses him an irritated look.

WILLIAMS
(calling after him)
Damn, Simmons.

Morgan looks past Williams to the break room. Where several officers hover around the television. He takes a step closer.

MORGAN
The hell's going on?

INT. DONOVAN'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

Donovan leans forward at his desk. Phone gripped in his hand.

DONOVAN
I'm emailing the stats right now.

He does. Then closes the email program.

A caramel-complexioned BEAUTY smiles at him from behind various desktop icons. The image gives him pause.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
That's great, Jim. Let's talk
tomorrow. Okay... bye.

Donovan hangs up. The beauty disappears as he turns the computer off. The phone rings. He picks up.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
Hello?

SAUNDRA (V.O.)
What color is your cell phone?

DONOVAN
My cell? It's silver. Wh-?

Donovan turns to the jacket draped on the back of his chair. Checks the pocket. Sighs disgustedly.

SAUNDRA
I wondered why my couch kept
vibrating. Want me to hold on to it
til tomorrow?

Donovan looks at the clock.

DONOVAN
I better swing back by. You gonna
be there a while?

SAUNDRA
You need me to be?

Donovan hesitates.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Donovan trudges through the door. He drops his keys on a nearby table. Rifles through mail on his way to the...

BEDROOM

The Game Show Network broadcasts a syndicated episode of Jeopardy. RENE MARTIN sits up in bed. A round-the-way girl. Real ride-or-die. Desktop pixilation doesn't do her justice. Except it's more forgiving of the sadness in her eyes.

She looks up as Donovan strolls in. He drops a kiss on her lips.

RENE
You smell good.

DONOVAN
Golf with a colleague. Had to wash
away the funk.

He unloads his watch and cuff links onto the dresser.

RENE
Left you a plate in the oven.

DONOVAN
What'd you make?

RENE
Picked up some ziti from Mick's on
my way home.

Donovan sheds his tie. Starts on his shirt.

RENE (cont'd)
My mom called. Did you check your
schedule for the fifteenth?

His glance reeks of irritation. She notices.

DONOVAN
Not yet.

RENE
I asked you about my parents'
anniversary party three weeks ago.
Don't act like I'm up in your face.

DONOVAN
Did you hear me say anything?

RENE
Could you just lemme know as soon
as possible please.

She throws back the covers.

RENE (cont'd)
I'll heat up your ziti.

She's halfway down the hall by the time his remorse sets in.

INT. ANOTHER HOUSE - OPULENT BATHROOM - NIGHT

CONSTANCE SIMMS COLLIER pulls her robe tightly around her. Her manicured features speak of a well-bred woman. Her pensive expression explains her slight pacing.

She nears the culprit of her angst. A home pregnancy test.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Brandon stands at his bedroom window. Looks out over an empty street on a silent night. Instinct makes him turn. Connie stands in the doorway. Her expression, not blank enough.

Brandon's at a temporary loss. Then...

BRANDON
Want some tea?

CONNIE
No, Brandon. I want a baby.

BRANDON
I know you do, honey.

Her eyes flash at his wording.

CONNIE
But just me, right?

BRANDON
Don't do it, Connie.

The frustration seeps out of her. Brandon wraps her up in his arms. She melts in his embrace.

BRANDON (cont'd)
Everything for a reason.

CONNIE
I'm trying to believe that.

He buries his face in her neck. Then playfully dives to the other side. Nibbling. She pushes him at him. Not in the mood.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Stop, Brandon.

He holds her tight. Despite her wriggles. Swoops her legs out from under her. She lets loose a girlish giggle.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Boy! If you don't put me-

His lips cut her short. He finally lets them both up for air.

BRANDON
Our family is coming.

He puts her on the bed. Crawls atop her.

CONNIE
When?

His lips hover above hers.

BRANDON

The Lord helps those who help
themselves.

He swoops in for a deeper kiss. She matches his fervor. It takes a second for the RINGING phone to register. Connie's sigh blows out passion's flame. She reaches for the phone.

CONNIE

(to Brandon)
Everything for a reason, right?
(into phone)
Hello?

RAY (V.O.)

It's Ray.

Connie's eyes dart to Brandon's inquisitive stare.

CONNIE

(to Ray)
What is it?

RAY (V.O.)

Have you seen the news?

TV SCREEN

RAYMOND WALLACE is as slow to anger as molasses on an incline. But the ravenous reporters blocking his path are beginning to piss him off. He bulldozes his way through the news mongers. The Atlanta Penitentiary looms in the background.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

Neither authorities nor Simms' long-time attorney are releasing details in the death. Only saying that it was the result of a brawl within the prison. Emery Simms was convicted of the murder of Alannah James over three years ago. He sat down with our own Monica Kaufman, only weeks ago, to talk about his recent appeal.

Old footage of EMERY SIMMS fills the screen. Even prison grime can't dilute his handsome features. Or the intensity of his gaze. MONICA KAUFMAN listens, just as sharply. Her elegant grey hair touting her years in journalism.

MONICA

You believe you can trust the same
system that let you down?

EMERY

You ask that as if I have other options.

MONICA

Is that why you're speaking out?

EMERY

I'm speaking out to put a face on the injustice. I'm not some lifeless social security number on a manila folder. For years, I was a part of the growth of this city. I'm not supposed to be here.

MONICA

Isn't that what every felon says?

EMERY

Certainly every innocent one.

The footage flies into a small box beside an EAGER BEAVER ANCHOR'S head. Just as MUTE appears on the TV screen. We pull back to reveal we are in...

INT. DONOVAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He hands the remote to Rene.

DONOVAN

Shoulda kept it on Jeopardy.

The phone SHRILLS. Donovan stares at it. Rene looks between him and the phone. Confused. Donovan finally snatches it up.

DONOVAN (cont'd)

Yes?

RAY (V.O.)

Donovan, it's Ray.

DONOVAN

Uh hunh.

RAY (V.O.)

Have you seen the news?

DONOVAN

Yeah.

RAY (V.O.)

I wanted to get to you first.

Donovan lets the words hang without comment.

RAY (V.O.) (cont'd)
I didn't know if you wanted to take
part in the arrangements.

DONOVAN
No.

Silence drifts from the other end of the line.

RAY (V.O.)
Alright. I'll let you know when
everything's in place.

DONOVAN
No need.

RAY (V.O.)
Donovan-

DONOVAN
Goodnight, Ray.

Click.

Donovan is up and out of bed. Rene watches silently. Hears him shuffle down the hall. She looks back at the television. Emery sits across from Monica again. Rene adjusts the TV volume to a whisper above silence.

EMERY
(on television)
There's a world many people have
never witnessed. Much fiercer than
any street corner you'd decline to
walk alone.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

A mass of nameless, faceless people, crowd around the grave site. A shiny black casket lowers slowly into the ground.

EMERY (V.O.)
But a great many of the men in this
world have earned my respect.
Because, for all our differences -
age, race, upbringing - we all
share a single plight. We've been
abandoned.

The crowd disperses slowly. A disproportionate number of beautiful women in attendance.

Donovan watches them from his position by his car. A WOMAN places a single, white lily onto Emery's casket. She turns and links her hand in her husband's elbow. Shields her eyes against the sun. Maybe that's what helps her spot Donovan.

He locks eyes with Connie. Her step stutters. Brandon tries to follow her gaze. Donovan turns away. Slips into...

HIS CAR

Starts it. A KNOCK at the window startles him. Ray leans close to the window. Donovan hesitates before he lowers it.

RAY
How are you?

DONOVAN
I'm fine, Ray.

Ray stands tall. His discomfort showing.

RAY
He had a Will.

DONOVAN
I can't use anything Emery had to give.

He jumps in before Ray can protest.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
I'd appreciate it if you'd stop trying to create a family where there isn't one.

Ray's mouth tightens.

RAY
Doing my job.

DONOVAN
Emery's dead. Your job's done.

Donovan puts the car in gear.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
Take care of yourself.

Ray lingers as Donovan drives away. He looks up. Catches Connie's eye before she averts her gaze.

INT. COLLIER HOME - EARLY MORNING

The alarm BLARES into the morning silence. Connie moans lightly. Reaches for an already rising Brandon.

CONNIE
What time is it?

BRANDON
Early.

She leans up on one elbow. Smiles sleepily.

CONNIE

There are more creative ways of working out.

BRANDON

Rain check, sweetheart.

Disappointment visits her eyes. He sees it. Plants a lingering kiss on her lips.

BRANDON (cont'd)

And I *will* cash it in.

Her smile returns.

CONNIE

See you tonight.

Brandon grabs his gym bag. Connie's lids close easily.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

The morning routine. Donovan puts the finishing touches on his tie. Rene stands in the full-length mirror. A different color shoe on each foot. She turns to Donovan.

RENE

Which?

DONOVAN

Why do you always ask me things like that?

Eyes on the mirror, she holds one leg up. Pelican-like.

RENE

Same reason I ask you when we're getting married. One day you might answer me.

He doesn't respond. Finishes with his tie.

RENE (cont'd)

It was a joke, Donovan.

He slips into his own shoes.

RENE (cont'd)

Donovan-

DONOVAN

I'm running late, Rene.

He moves past her and out of the bedroom.

INT. DONOVAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

The Line 1 light is a steady green on Donovan's office phone. Jim's voice booms from the speaker.

JIM (V.O.)
Number-wise, your expansion is a
bigger deal than they anticipated.

Donovan's PERKY ASSISTANT hovers in the doorway. He waves her in. She hands him the morning paper, a takeout menu and a message slip. Stands by as he skims the menu.

DONOVAN
What needs to happen for us to keep
this deal on the table?

Donovan circles a couple of items. Hands the menu back. Perky scurries out.

JIM (V.O.)
I don't know that it's that simple.

DONOVAN
Hot-cold, black-white, Jim.

The pause comes from the other end, now.

JIM (V.O.)
I think that if you show them some
good faith. It might light a fire.

DONOVAN
Meaning more of my own capital.

JIM (V.O.)
Wouldn't hurt. Can it happen?

A newspaper headline catches Donovan's attention: "No Suspect In Simms Death. Inmates Tight-Lipped."

JIM (V.O.) (cont'd)
Donovan?

DONOVAN
It's not the money that's the
issue. If they're skittish at these
numbers, what happens when we're in
the middle of this thing?

JIM (V.O.)
Can it happen?

Donovan massages a headache out of his temples.

DONOVAN
Lemme see what I can work out.

JIM (V.O.)
Sounds good. Take it easy, Don.

DONOVAN
You too.

Donovan disconnects. Scans the article. He tosses the paper aside. His eyes fall on the message slip. The "Please Call" box, checked. And "Ray" scrawled in feminine handwriting.

Donovan turns to his computer. A web browser page is open to the archives page of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution website. An article about Emery's murder conviction fills the screen. Donovan pushes a button. Puts the computer to sleep.

He grabs the phone. Dials an extension.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
I'll be back in an hour.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Ray sits behind his desk. A few chairs face him. Their OCCUPANTS unfamiliar to us. Ray glances at an empty chair. The clock. The expectant faces across from him.

RAY
Let's begin.

INT. SERENITY SPA - AFTERNOON

Saundra's only half dressed. Her eyes devour Donovan's semi-naked form. Even as he continues to clothe it.

SAUNDRA
Feel better?

DONOVAN
Yeah.

She rolls her eyes.

SAUNDRA
As much as I let you in, it
wouldn't kill you to return the
favor.

DONOVAN
It might.

SAUNDRA
Don't be an ass.

She snatches up clothes. He looks up from buttoning his shirt. Goes to her. Delicately slips her blouse onto her shoulders. It's almost as sensual as if he was taking it off.

DONOVAN

I don't come here to talk. Is that becoming a problem?

Exposed in a different way, she squares her shoulders. Buttoning her blouse on the way to her desk chair.

SAUNDRA

Gimme some notice next time, please. This is a business.

Donovan nods. Unlocks the office door. Heads out.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - WAITING AREA - AFTERNOON

Ray's office door opens. The small group of unfamiliar faces files out. Ray starts to turn back. He spots Donovan sitting across the room. One leg casually crossed over the other.

A NO-NONSENSE LAWYER sticks her head around the corner.

NO-NONSENSE

Ray, can you do a notary for me?

RAY

Give me a minute?

NO-NONSENSE

That's alright. I need to get it now. I'll check with Nikki.

Ray looks back toward Donovan. Steps aside. Donovan gets up and lumbers past him into...

THE OFFICE

Ray rounds his desk. Shuffles some papers. Donovan waits. Standing. Ray picks up a clasp envelope. Hands it over.

RAY

Emery was generous with the Distinction shares. That's almost as much as Connie got in the divorce.

Donovan opens it. Skims the top page. Looks at Ray.

DONOVAN

He leave this much to anybody else?

RAY

Not that much, no.

DONOVAN
Not even you?

RAY
I was trustee over Emery's assets
during his incarceration. I
collected my standard fee.

DONOVAN
Why'd he leave it to me?

RAY
You're asking questions from the
wrong man.

Donovan shifts the envelope from hand to hand.

RAY (cont'd)
There's something else.

Ray lays a file folder on the desk in front of him. Donovan
flips through the folder's contents.

RAY (cont'd)
It was in the safe deposit box of the
forensic scientist who recorded it.
His widow found it.

DONOVAN
Forensic?

RAY
A second blood type on the murder
weapon. It places someone else at the
scene of Alannah's murder. Just like
Emery'd been saying, for years.

Donovan pulls his eyes from the folder.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - CAPTAIN'S OFFICE

CAPTAIN ABRAHAM is a brick wall of a man. His forehead,
indelibly creased. His brow, forever furrowed. But Morgan's
got his own problems. He's feeling a knife in his back.

MORGAN
I'm sure IAD wants to hang *me* out.

ABRAHAM
When this goes public, the heat'll
be on the Department for more than
unjustly putting away Atlanta's
golden boy. We're in wrongful death
territory, son.

MORGAN
How could I possibly know the guy
was withholding?

ABRAHAM
Doesn't matter. The D.A. had to
turn it over to Simms' attorney.
The existence of a second suspect
is exculpatory evidence.

MORGAN
Where do you stand?

Abraham leans against his desk.

ABRAHAM
Behind my men. Always.

A bit of weight lifts from Morgan's shoulders. He looks at
Abraham. His eyes intense.

MORGAN
Simms was a legitimate collar.

ABRAHAM
Lemme work on it. Just keep your
head down for a while. Focus on
saving your pension.

Morgan's huffs out a non-laugh.

MORGAN
Yeah. That sounds like me.

ABRAHAM
(a warning)
Morgan.

MORGAN
I heard you.

He's careful not to punch a wall on his way out.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE

Donovan closes the folder.

DONOVAN
So what's your end game? You
looking to sue?

RAY
Just thought it was your right to know.

Donovan shakes his head. Processing some unspoken thought.

DONOVAN
It's been a long time.

RAY
Yet here you are.

DONOVAN
I'm a businessman, Ray.

RAY
You don't need the money.

DONOVAN
Maybe I just want it.

RAY
Maybe. Either way, it's all in there.

He puts out a hand. Donovan takes it.

RAY (cont'd)
Whatever falling out you two had,
you're still his brother.

Donovan pulls back. But Ray won't let go.

RAY (cont'd)
I could be very helpful.

DONOVAN
I'm not a detective.

Donovan deliberately removes his hand. Ray suddenly becomes the antithesis of his normally laid-back demeanor.

RAY
Emery went to prison because of one man. He died because of one man. Now that same guy is enjoying everything your brother worked for.

Donovan nods toward the envelope tucked under his arm.

DONOVAN
Not everything.

He strides out.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Donovan unlocks a hanging file drawer. Shoves the front files back to reveal a bound stack of letters in the bottom of the drawer. He grabs them. Spreads them on his desk.

We get a closer look at the one on top. It's addressed to Donovan. And has a prison return address. Donovan absently flips it over. The envelope is still sealed.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - MORNING

Morgan peruses a rap sheet. His phone RINGS.

MORGAN
(into phone)
Morgan.

MALE VOICE
You got a visitor.

MORGAN
Be right up.

Morgan closes the folder and heads to the...

RECEPTION AREA

A DESK SERGEANT nods toward the visitor. Morgan offers a hand to the stranger.

MORGAN
Detective Morgan.

DONOVAN
Donovan Cook.

MORGAN
What can I do for you?

DONOVAN
You worked the Emery Simms case
four years ago?

MORGAN
I did.

DONOVAN
I'm his brother.

Morgan's face is professionally poker.

MORGAN
Come on back.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - MORGAN'S DESK

The men sit across from each other.

MORGAN
Again. What can I do for you?

DONOVAN
I'm trying to find out what happened.

Morgan starts to speak.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
I've read the police report.

MORGAN
I'm not sure what you want from me,
then.

DONOVAN
A firsthand account. A theory on
where the ball was dropped. For you
to reopen the case.

Morgan takes a moment.

MORGAN
Although there's no statute of
limitations on murder. At present,
we don't have reason to-

DONOVAN
The forensic evidence puts someone
else there.

MORGAN
Could have been an accomplice.

A muscle twitches in Donovan's jaw.

DONOVAN
Or the killer.

MORGAN
Again, we don't have reason-

DONOVAN
You've guessed by now I wasn't around
when all this happened. But even I
got wind of Emery naming Brandon
Collier all through the press.

MORGAN
And it was so convincing that
Emery's ex-wife married the guy.

It's a standoff.

MORGAN (cont'd)
I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Cook.
But unless Mr. Collier volunteers a
blood sample or is arrested, his
DNA's as off-limits as yours.

Donovan rises. Turns away. Then back.

DONOVAN
What do you believe?

MORGAN
I believe in the job I did.

Donovan eyebrows fly up for a moment.

DONOVAN
Yes. Your reputation precedes you.

Morgan's brows plummet as Donovan makes his exit.

INT. DONOVAN'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - AFTERNOON

Donovan's expression hasn't changed much from his meeting with Morgan. Perky becomes even perkier when she spots him get off the elevator. She holds an envelope out to him.

PERKY
Came by messenger. Jim Robinson says please call him. And Rene called. She needs you to pick her up from work.

Donovan looks up from the envelope.

DONOVAN
Why?

PERKY
She didn't say.

DONOVAN
Get her on the line for me?

Perky nods. Donovan heads into his...

OFFICE

He tears into the envelope as he sits at his desk. A second, more ornate envelope rests inside. A sticky attached to it.

PERKY (V.O.)
Line two.

Donovan picks up. Reads the sticky: "A peace offering. -Ray"

DONOVAN
(into phone)
What's wrong?

RENE (V.O.)
Hey, baby. Got towed.

DONOVAN

Rene...

Donovan opens the second envelope. It's an invitation to a private restaurant opening. Black tie.

RENE (V.O.)

I work too hard to park on the bottom level of hell. And I was just there for a minute because I left my dry cleaning ticket at my desk.

DONOVAN

Rene-

RENE (V.O.)

I swear they've been trying to catch me for weeks.

DONOVAN

RENE.

RENE (V.O.)

Hunh

DONOVAN

You still have that yellow dress?

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

There's a reason it's named Ambience. The motif is circa 1955. The age of the beatniks. But this is no coffee house hangout. It's an elegant time capsule, with fine cuisine. And a sizable best-dressed guest list.

A small, circular stage sits dead center of the room. A boxing ring styled microphone suspended from the ceiling.

Brandon pecks Connie's cheek. Takes the stage. With era-appropriate black turtleneck and shades that sit low on his face, he's easily the sexiest Beatnik you've ever seen.

BRANDON

One day, years ago, somebody dared me to do something different. I won that dare. And I never stepped back into the box. Here, we combine soulful art with the best cuisine in the city. In an atmosphere still peaceful enough that you don't get indigestion.

Laughter ripples through the room.

Ray sips a glass of champagne. His eyes fall on the entrance. Just as Donovan and Rene adorn it.

BRANDON (cont'd)
 So the applause of choice at this
 establishment is a flashback to the
 days of the Beatniks.

Brandon raises his hands and snaps repeatedly. Heads nod and
 smiles broaden as the crowd recognizes the bygone expression.

AT THE ENTRANCE

Donovan is dapper and Rene is lovely. He scopes the room. He
 finds Connie first. Then Brandon. His hand tightens slightly
 around Rene's waist. She tosses him a curious look.

Ray finds his way over.

DONOVAN
 Didn't know 'peace offering' and
 'set-up' were synonymous.

Ray shrugs it off.

RAY
 Legal jargon.

His gaze shifts to Rene.

RAY (cont'd)
 Raymond Wallace.

RENE
 Rene. Nice to meet you.

RAY
 That's a beautiful dress.

RENE
 Thank you.
 (to Donovan)
 He's smooth.

DONOVAN
 I'm sure he'd like to think so.

ON THE STAGE

Brandon has the crowd in his palm.

BRANDON
 I'mma give this a shot. So don't
 ya'll laugh at me.
 (in spoken word style)
 Welcome, my friends. Let the
 feeling descend on your ears like
 light notes of a moody melody.
 (MORE)

BRANDON(cont'd)

Reminders that times of woe know
their time is short. Bursts of
sunshine in line to warm your
hearts and feed your soul.

Brandon flashes a winning smile.

BRANDON (cont'd)

Right off I-20. A left on Ponce. I
welcome you to Ambience.

The crowd erupts into enthusiastic snaps. All but the trio in
the back of the room.

INT. AMBIENCE - LATER

Clusters of guests mingle in the upper crust gathering.
Donovan surreptitiously tracks Brandon's networking savvy.

RAY

How do you like the house that
Emery built?

Donovan doesn't acknowledge the comment. But he does take a
gander. Especially at the woman headed toward them...

NINA WELCH sports striking features and intelligent eyes. She
crosses the distance on long, sculpted legs.

NINA

Ray. I'm sorry to interrupt.

RAY

No harm. Nina, this is Donovan
Cook. Donovan, this is Nina Welch.
Director of Business Development at
Distinction.

DONOVAN

Pleasure.

NINA

Mine as well.

(to Ray)

Brandon just wanted to know if
you'd had a chance to look at the
purchase offer he sent over for the
leased property.

(to Donovan)

Everyday's a workday.

Donovan nods.

RAY

I did. Donovan, would you like to
join me?

The two share a look.

DONOVAN
I should wait for Rene.

RAY
I'm sure she can find her way back
from the ladies room.

He initiates polite laughter. Donovan reluctantly follows Ray's lead. Just missing Rene's return...

AT THE DOOR

Rene scours the room with her eyes. Sees Donovan just as he finds his way to Brandon and... Connie. The woman wears class like a subtle perfume. Rene peers down at her own attire.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Brandon snags a wine glass from a passing WAITER and hands it to Connie. She hides glances to Donovan behind sips.

RAY
(to Brandon)
Congratulations on a hitch-free
opening.

BRANDON
Thank you. Hard work often shows.

RAY
This is Donovan Cook.
(to Donovan)
And this is the man of the hour,
Brandon Collier. And you know
Connie, of course.

Brandon looks between the two, in mild surprise.

CONNIE
Donovan is-

DONOVAN
An old family friend.

She accepts the 'out'.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
But I think I've abandoned my
girlfriend long enough.

BRANDON
Well, the bills are paid and the
liquor's legal.
(MORE)

BRANDON(cont'd)

So I do hope you and your girlfriend stay around and celebrate with us.

DONOVAN

Thank you. It was nice meeting you all. Ray, I think we're... settled. I'll leave you all to your business.

Ray nods tightly. Donovan makes his way across the room.

EXT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - SECOND STORY PORCH - LATE NIGHT

Donovan sits in a lounge chair, nursing a beer. His feet propped up on the railing. The letters lay in a pile beside the chair. Unbound. He doesn't even look up at the sound of the sliding glass door opening.

Rene places a fresh beer beside him. Opens one of her own.

DONOVAN

I never wrote back.

RENE

You were angry.

DONOVAN

I still am.

RENE

Then walk away.

He finishes off the first beer. Grabs the fresh one. She straddles him gently. Looks him in the eye.

RENE (cont'd)

You can't get his life back. But maybe you can keep it in the family.

His eyes connect with hers.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Already on his way out, Ray cuts the office light. The phone RINGS. He starts to close the door. Changes his mind. Stalks over to his desk.

RAY

Raymond Wallace.

DONOVAN (V.O.)

You like Chinese?

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT

Ray strolls in. Loaded down with Chinese take-out.

RAY
Mu gu or Mu shu?

Donovan peruses a mound of paperwork.

DONOVAN
Collier doesn't own any of the shares?

RAY
You're right. Mu shu.

Ray starts arranging food on the coffee table.

DONOVAN
What's his claim?

RAY
He has proxy for Connie's shares. He gets to run the company. She gets to focus on the Youth Center.

DONOVAN
But she could yank his chain at any time.

Ray sucks duck sauce off his finger.

RAY
Once bitten...

DONOVAN
So how do I take something he doesn't have?

RAY
As of the opening the other night, you don't have that problem.

INT. COLLIER HOME - EARLY MORNING

That damn ALARM gets louder every morning. Brandon dresses quietly. Connie waves 'goodbye' without taking her face out of the pillow. Brandon grabs his gym bag and rushes out.

INT. GYM - EARLY MORNING

Brandon approaches the desk. A RECEPTIONIST scans his membership card. Our gaze lingers on the receptionist as ANOTHER GYM MEMBER steps to the desk.

INT. ANDY RYAN'S HOUSE - DAY

A kid cries in the back. Morgan looks around the living room. Some family photos with smiling faces. Couple of bowling trophies on the mantle. The distant crying dies down.

PATRICIA RYAN joins Morgan. Dark circles under her eyes. Sallow cheeks. Andy didn't marry the prom queen.

PATRICIA
 Sorry about that. Does all this mean we don't get any money? 'Cause I ain't worked since the baby.

MORGAN
 I really don't know.

Terror rounds her eyes. Morgan jumps back in.

MORGAN (cont'd)
 But the department takes care of its own.

PATRICIA
 Oh. Cause I was afraid with the- Well, with the-

MORGAN
 I'm just here to make sure we handle everything by the book.

Patricia glances at a family photo.

PATRICIA
 That man that got killed. He really didn't do it? That's what them papers in Andy's box said?

MORGAN
 We're looking into it. Did Andy keep any other... work-related notebooks or things like that at the house?

PATRICIA
 I don't know. That office is a mess. I haven't touched it yet. Probably go through it on-

A cry bursts from the back. Patricia jumps up. Morgan sighs.

PATRICIA (cont'd)
 I'll be right back.

Morgan takes out his card. Puts it on the coffee table.

MORGAN
 How 'bout you come down to the station on a better day. We'll wrap things up then.

PATRICIA
Okay. Thanks for the house call.

Morgan nods. Starts out.

PATRICIA (cont'd)
Can you check on the money for me?

Morgan regards her with frustrated pity.

MORGAN
Sure.

She smiles genuinely.

PATRICIA
Thank you, Detective.

His smile dims as she turns away. Morgan takes one last mental snapshot of the room. Then turns for the door.

INT. DISTINCTION - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Chairman RON TERSA helms the meeting. His glass-half-full attitude shines through in his ready smile. Brandon and Connie sit among the other SUITS. A few chairs sit empty.

RON
I'm told Raymond is running behind.
So I'll skip my first announcement
and get us started. On behalf of
the board, I want to congratulate
Brandon on the Ambience opening.

The board members applaud.

RON (cont'd)
As the older board members know,
Distinction went through a bit of
an upheaval after Emery's
incarceration. Brandon's leadership
over the past several years has
been significant. Such that we
attached a bit of a carrot to this
latest accomplishment.

He grants Brandon an almost fatherly smile.

RON (cont'd)
In light of Ambience's stellar
opening, the board would like to
make good on our word, and grant
you part ownership in Distinction.
A recognition that's long overdue.

The applause kicks in again.

BRANDON

Thank you very much, Ron. I'll take
this moment to let you know-

Ray and Donovan stride in. Take seats at the table. Confusion registers on Brandon's face. Tempered shock on Connie's.

RAY

Sorry we're late, Ron.

RON

That's fine. We were just
acknowledging Brandon for a
successful opening.

(to Brandon)

Please continue.

Brandon's eyes shift to Donovan. Then back to the board.

BRANDON

I was just letting the board know
that we are very close to acquiring
the property Ambience sits on. Even
beyond the restaurant, it's prime
real estate we'd be fortunate to own.

RON

We look forward to your progress
reports. Now. Working backwards to
my first announcement. Raymond
Wallace has served as trustee of
Emery Simms shares for several
years now. But with Emery's
passing, he has handed those shares
to their intended beneficiary -
Emery's brother. Mr. Donovan Cook.
As such, Donovan now joins us on
this board.

The fellow members murmur 'congratulations' and 'welcome' to Donovan. Brandon looks across the table in disbelief. Connie avoids all eye contact.

BRANDON

Excuse me.

Brandon eyes Ray and Donovan.

BRANDON (cont'd)

I'm not sure how to keep this
polite, but just what are you
gentlemen trying to pull? I've
known Emery since college. Connie
was married to the man, for God's
sake. He didn't have a brother.

CONNIE
Brandon.

Brandon looks to Connie. Her expression says it all.

RAY
(to Brandon)
Surely Emery didn't tell you
everything.

Donovan addresses the group.

DONOVAN
Let me say this up front, I'm not
here to disrupt a well-oiled
machine. I had no idea I was a
beneficiary of any of my brother's
holdings. Now that I do, I just
want to provide whatever assistance
I can to continue the growth of
this company.

He looks directly at Brandon.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
Anything you need, you just let me
know.

INT. DISTINCTION - HALLWAY

The board members filter down the hallway toward the elevator
bay. Donovan spots Connie ahead. He turns to Ray.

DONOVAN
I'll meet you downstairs.

AT THE CONFERENCE ROOM DOORWAY

Brandon sees Donovan step up to Connie as Ray walks on.

DOWN THE HALL

Donovan falls in step beside Connie.

DONOVAN
Would you be willing to give me a
primer on 'the world of
Distinction'?

CONNIE
I don't want to be a part of
whatever game you're playing.

DONOVAN
I want what's best for this
company.

CONNIE
Since when?

DONOVAN
Things change.

CONNIE
Don't you mean 'money changes
people'?

DONOVAN
That's a question for your husband.

She stops short.

CONNIE
You know what, Donovan? Don't ride
in here on your high horse. I was
there through all of it. Murders
and arrests and trials and-

DONOVAN
Funerals?

CONNIE
Yes, funerals. But of the two of
us, I had seniority in caring about
Emery. Shared paternity doesn't get
you any brownie points.

Brandon passes by the pair. He never even grants them a
glance. Connie looks at Donovan. Graceful in a crisis.

CONNIE (cont'd)
He's late for a conference call.

Donovan pretends to buy the excuse.

CONNIE (cont'd)
I need to go.

Donovan watches her stride down the hallway.

INT. DISTINCTION - BRANDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Brandon's at his desk when Connie walks in. She migrates
toward the window.

CONNIE
I had no idea he was coming here.

BRANDON
But you know who he is, Connie.

She turns to him.

CONNIE
 When he didn't say anything at
 Ambience, I assumed he didn't want
 it to be known.

BRANDON
 Of course he wanted it to be known.
 Why else would he introduce himself
 in the first place?

She starts to argue. Stops herself.

CONNIE
 I'm sorry. I should have told you.

He turns his full attention to his computer.

CONNIE (cont'd)
 I apologized, Brandon. Don't be rude.

BRANDON
 You just helped the enemy pull off
 a surprise attack.

CONNIE
 The enemy-?

BRANDON
 I will *not* pretend not to be upset
 about that. That would be dishonest.

He lets the last word hang in the air. Their eyes meet.

CONNIE
 I'll be at the Youth Center if you
 need to reach me.

His eyes dip back to the computer. Dismissing her even before
 she heads out.

INT. DISTINCTION - ELEVATOR

The doors close on the blessedly empty elevator. Connie
 stands ramrod straight. Her hand trembles only slightly as
 she pushes the button for the lobby.

The elevator stops on the next floor. Connie sighs in
 frustration. The doors open. It's a workplace daycare. Huge
 windows show kids playing and drawing and causing trouble.

A CORPORATE WOMAN slips into the elevator. The doors begin to
 close. Connie reaches out for the 'door open' button. But
 stops just shy of it. She watches as the doors seal tightly.

EXT. DISTINCTION - PARKING LOT - DAY

Ray and Donovan prepare to part ways.

DONOVAN

Let's give it a couple of days.
Then I want you to turn up the
heat. You get that number for me?

RAY

There's no number. This one has to
be a house call.

EXT. SEEDY BAR - ALLEY - EARLY EVENING

WHAM! The CHUBBY VICTIM's face flies unnaturally to the left.
DERRICK THOMPSON rears back again. His fist connects with gut.

DERRICK

See, you don't understand good
business. All I asked you for was
for my cut. That's it. How you ever
gonna come, acting like a scrub?

Suddenly, an arm wraps around Derrick's throat from behind.
CHUBBY'S FRIEND drags Derrick backward. Derrick kicks out.
Slamming the friend into the opposite wall.

Chubby surges forward. Catching a distracted Derrick,
unaware. He lets loose on him. Derrick has nowhere to run.

CHUBBY'S FRIEND

Come on, man. Let's go!

Chubby ceases. The friend drops Derrick's body. Derrick
doesn't even try to stand. He reaches into his jacket. Pulls
out a box of cigarettes. Calmly lights one.

A pair of wing tips step up bedside his seated form. He
follows the line of expensive clothing up to Donovan's face.

DONOVAN

Looks like you need work.

DERRICK

Who the fuck are you?

DONOVAN

Someone with a proposition.

Derrick refuses the hand Donovan puts out. Stands. Brushes
dirt off his suit. Refined thug. That's the look he's got.

DERRICK

If you ain't a chick in four-inch
heels, I ain't buyin'.

DONOVAN
I thought you'd be interested in
punishing the man who killed your wife.

Derrick gives Donovan the once-over. Smirks.

DERRICK
The dude who off'd my girl is
breathing dirt. The way his punk
ass should be.

He starts down the alley.

DONOVAN
(calling after him)
You don't look like the kind of man
who trusts what the police say.

No dice. Derrick keeps walking.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
I have proof... and deep pockets.

Derrick stops. Looks back.

INT. SEEDY BAR - NIGHT

A convention of riff-raff. Shady characters from all walks of life. Derrick sinks the six ball. He polishes his cue stick in preparation for the next shot. Donovan, shirt sleeves rolled up, jacket over a nearby chair, watches closely.

DERRICK
What was the beef wit you and your
boy?

DONOVAN
Is it relevant?

DERRICK
Nope. I'm nosy. Now what?

Derrick sinks another ball. Donovan sizes up his competitor.

DONOVAN
Nothing romantic. I'm the bastard
son. I grew up knowing it.

DERRICK
So why you so interested in evening
a score you don't care about?

Derrick misses the next shot. Donovan steps up.

DONOVAN
I'm pretty sure you won't be
worried about my intentions on the
way to the bank.

Donovan easily pockets the shot.

DERRICK
What's your plan?

DONOVAN
Shake some trees. See what falls
out.

DERRICK
That why you call me? To do the
dirty work?

DONOVAN
It's all dirty.

INT. COLLIER HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Connie checks her reflection. Her nightgown is elegantly
alluring. She adjusts the neckline for a bit more appeal.

INT. COLLIER HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Connie comes in from the bathroom. Eyes Brandon's sleeping
form. A late night TV talk show audience LAUGHS at her. She
turns the television off.

CONNIE
Brandon?

He sleeps soundly. Connie slides into bed. Close to him.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Brandon?

He's a goner. She rolls back to her own side.

INT. COLLIER HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Connie dunks a tea bag in hot water. Brandon rushes in.

CONNIE
Morning.

BRANDON
Morning.

He grabs an orange from the fridge.

CONNIE
Late?

BRANDON
Early meeting.

He passes by her on the way to a set of keys on a wall hook. She places her mug on top of something on the counter.

CONNIE
Lunch today?

BRANDON
Can't. Plans. Dinner?

CONNIE
Okay.

He starts out.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Hey.

He turns back.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Have a good day.

It's an olive branch. He sees it. Allows it.

BRANDON
You too, baby.

And he's gone. Connie surveys the brightly colored brochures beneath her mug: "Planning a Family" and "Fertility Q&A".

EXT. ANDY RYAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Patricia gets in her car. She cranks up and drives off. A car door opens around our view of the house. We realize we were watching Patricia through the open window of...

A CAR

The driver walks toward the house. He gets far enough away for us to see Morgan's full form.

EXT. COLLIER HOME - SAME

Connie greets a MAID at the door. She ushers the woman inside. Grabs her portfolio from just inside the door and waves goodbye. Quickly walks toward her car.

INT. ANDY RYAN'S HOUSE - SAME

Morgan slips in through the back door. Pockets his lock pick. He scurries down the hallway. Looks around the corner at...

THE COLLIERS' MAID

Derrick scopes her through the back, french doors. She pulls out a vacuum cleaner. Derrick pulls a lock pick from his pocket. Just as the Maid turns the vacuum on. He makes quick work of the lock. Slithers inside the house. Closes the...

DOOR TO ANDY'S OFFICE

Morgan shuffles inside. Juggles through papers in Andy's desk. Nothing interesting. He runs his finger down shelf after shelf of files and books on forensic study.

He opens a file drawer. Skims the contents. A screensaver lights up the computer monitor. Morgan presses a key...

ON BRANDON'S COMPUTER

Derrick pulls out a neon-colored flash drive as the screen pops up. The vacuum echoes in the background. Derrick watches as the computer copies files from Brandon's hard drive to his disk. He pulls another flash drive out in preparation.

The vacuum stops. FOOTSTEPS echo down...

ANDY'S HALLWAY

Morgan is still perched behind the desk. Patricia talks on her cell as she passes the office doorway.

PATRICIA (O.S.)

No, I'm still on my way, Momma. Well
I can't leave until I find it. So
tell Daddy he has to wait a minute...

Morgan scurries toward the door. A light glows from down the hallway. Morgan slinks in the opposite direction.

DERRICK

Sits crouched behind Brandon's desk. Something wedged beneath the desk leg catches his eye. A stamp bag with a yellow smiley face on it. The vacuum roars to life. Derrick grabs the bag, pockets the flash drive and scurries out.

INT. YOUTH CENTER - CONNIE'S OFFICE - DAY

ANNA sets a huge breakfast basket on Connie's desk.

CONNIE

What's this?

Anna shrugs. The office phone rings. She prances out.

Connie spies fresh orange juice, muffins and the morning newspaper. Red marks on the newspaper catch her eye. She pulls it out to find a headline circled in red.

INT. DISTINCTION - BRANDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Brandon marches in. The paper is neatly laid out on his desk. The front page headline is unmistakable: Lost Forensic Evidence Could Clear Murdered Prisoner. Brandon frowns.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - DAY

Abraham is livid. He struggles to keep his voice down as he and Morgan walk through the precinct.

ABRAHAM

I told you to keep your head down.

MORGAN

And I did.

ABRAHAM

You didn't tell Donovan Cook that the department wouldn't consider reopening the Simms case because...

He stops. Skims the newspaper in his hand. Reads...

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

"I did my job,"?

MORGAN

That's not how that went down.

Abraham looks around for eager ears. Starts toward his office.

ABRAHAM

You should have sent him to me.

MORGAN

He was fishing. He didn't make any kind of formal request.

ABRAHAM

It was formal enough for his attorney to go public.

The men make it behind the closed doors of...

ABRAHAM'S OFFICE

Abraham trashes the paper.

MORGAN

He's trying to manipulate procedure through the press.

ABRAHAM
 And I'm trying to stay in your
 corner, Morgan. But you're in no
 position to be on a soapbox.

Abraham takes a slow seat.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)
 They've scheduled a hearing. It
 could mean your job, Morgan. Stop
 screwing around.

Morgan's gaze is intense.

INT. BRANDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Brandon has the phone to his ear. He checks his watch.

BRANDON
 (into phone)
 An hour. Same spot.

He hangs up.

NINA (O.S.)
 Bad time?

His fierce expression softens a bit at the sight of Nina. Just a
 bit. He checks his watch again.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

A neon-colored flash drive sits nestled in Donovan's
 computer. A private printer spits out page after page.
 Donovan pours over an already sizable stack of documents on
 his desk. He puts a page aside. Picks it up again. Re-reads.

It's a bank ledger. As if from a Quicken-like program. He
 flips the pages listlessly. He's about to turn away when he
 notices the type at the top of the printed page: BRANDON
 COLLIER ACCOUNT.

Donovan shuffles for another page. Compares the two. The
 first reads: BRANDON COLLIER ACCOUNT. The second reads:
 BRANDON, COLLIER ACCOUNT. Donovan circles the comma.

Turns to his computer. Googles COLLIER BRANDON. Skims the
 links. One catches his eye. He clicks.

Not what he's looking for. Tries another link. Same luck.
 Scrolls toward the bottom of the page. Clicks a link.

A much younger photo of Brandon pops up, clearly in his
 teens, beside an internet article: UGA Freshman Convicted On
 Assault Charge.

Donovan frowns. Opens a new window. Googles BRANDON COLLIER. FLORIDA A&M. DISTINCTION. Then clicks the first link.

A recent photo of Brandon pops up beside a business profile. Donovan zeros in on a particular sentence: "Brandon Collier received his MBA from Florida A & M University."

Donovan checks the photos again. Picks up the phone. Dials.

DONOVAN

Barney, it's Donovan... I know.
Forgive me. Bugged down in the day-
to-day. How's Natalie?... That's
great. Listen, I'm thinking of
branching out into food services.
And I had a question for you.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Brandon pulls up alongside a grey Altima. Morgan looks up from the other vehicle. Both men get out.

MORGAN

You said an hour.

BRANDON

And you said this was under control.

MORGAN

Simms' attorney went to the press
when I blew off the brother.

Brandon looks away in frustration.

MORGAN (cont'd)

There are bigger things happening.
This guy keeps poking around, he's
gonna bump into something else. If
Andy kept private notes on the
James' crime scene, no telling what
else he's got stashed elsewhere.

BRANDON

Can you find out if he has anything
else?

MORGAN

I tried. Didn't get far.

BRANDON

Try again.

MORGAN

It's better if it's you. They're
watching me.

BRANDON
You've got a badge. Use it.

MORGAN
Don't get above yourself, Collier.
This all started with you.

Brandon walks back toward his car.

BRANDON
Keep me in the loop.

MORGAN
(tongue-in-cheek)
Yeah. Same.

Brandon opens his car door.

MORGAN (cont'd)
Hey. I heard about your little
business accolades. Should I say
congratulations? Or just snap?

Brandon ducks inside his own. Morgan gets in his car.

INT. SPORTS BAR - DAY

Derrick sinks the eight ball. Collects his money from his
LOUD MOUTH competitor.

DERRICK
That's it.

LOUD MOUTH
Double or no?

DERRICK
Nah. I got business.

LOUD MOUTH
Come on, man. You got my whole
check in your pocket.

DERRICK
Today's lesson in financial
planning.

The ONLOOKERS get a good laugh. Derrick pushes on the door.

EXT. SPORTS BAR - DAY

Derrick steps out into the sun. Walks toward his car. He's
about to cross an alley entrance when a grey Altima shoots
out. Nearly running him down. Derrick jumps back.

DERRICK

Mutha-

An SUV roars up next. Derrick is just short of a tirade, when he recognizes the driver. Brandon. Derrick steps out of sight. Brandon turns out into the street. Derrick bolts for his car.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

The young and old photos still clutter Donovan's computer screen. He takes a look at his watch. Hastily puts the bank documents in a pile on his desk.

He moves to the computer. Closes out the browser window with the new photo. Poises to do the same with the second window. Stops. Reads something on screen: "...18-year-old Hill Eddings was charged as an adult."

Donovan shuffles through a few papers on the desk. Picks one. Another. Then a third. Puts the three side-by-side.

He grabs a highlighter. Marks the same name in each ledger entry: Veronica Eddings. A \$1000 payment here. Another there. He spots at least four payments on different dates. Then...

A single \$4K payment. Then a \$7K. Then a \$9K.

Donovan writes "\$20,000" at the bottom of the page. Circles the figure. Sits back. Stares at the papers in thought.

Donovan's computer CHIMES. He clicks the email icon. The email's from DDAWGT. There's no message. But there's an attachment. Donovan clicks it. We don't see what he sees. But his expression is telling. His cell RINGS.

DONOVAN

(into phone)

Yes?

DERRICK (V.O.)

You get it?

DONOVAN

Yeah.

DERRICK (v.O.)

That oughta be worth a cool nickel.

Something, almost melancholy, passes over Donovan's face.

DONOVAN

We're after dollars. I'm working on something else right now anyway. I'll call you later.

Donovan hangs up. We look at the computer screen just as he closes the attachment. And deletes it.

EXT. AMBIENCE - NIGHT

So far, so good. The parking lot is full. The entrance, heavy with foot traffic. Brandon's car pulls into the lot.

INT. AMBIENCE - MAIN DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A LIVE VOCALIST is center stage. Crooning to the full diners.

INT. AMBIENCE - PRIVATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Apparently, the entire room has been reserved. Connie sits at the table of focus. Alone. She prepares a smile as the partition slides back. Donovan parades in. Connie scrutinizes Donovan as he sits at the table.

DONOVAN
Enjoy the basket?

CONNIE
That's not your seat.

DONOVAN
I'm curious. You actually still believe in him?

She turns incredulous eyes to him.

CONNIE
Why don't you get it? I love my husband. I trust my husband. That doesn't have to be okay with you.

INT. AMBIENCE - NIGHT

Brandon strolls in. He's the man. It's obvious. Greeted with deference by every employee who sees him.

PRIVATE DINING AREA

Donovan looks around at the cozy dining set-up.

DONOVAN
I hope he's worthy of that type of loyalty.

CONNIE
I'm not worried about it.

Her hand trembles slightly as she sips some water. Donovan eyes her closely. Almost visibly backs off a bit.

DONOVAN

Then I won't worry about you.

She almost laughs at his boldness. Almost.

CONNIE

You never worried about me,
Donovan.

DONOVAN

I did more than that.

CONNIE

You just wanted to be like your big
brother.

DONOVAN

And Collier's different?

Her eyes burn into his. Hurt, hidden in the embers.

CONNIE

That's a mean thing to say.

DONOVAN

I don't think you're the enemy,
Connie. But, for the life of me, I
can't figure out why you continue
to let yourself be the victim.

She grips her wine glass. Desperately clinging to her temper.

MAIN DINING AREA

Brandon stands with the MANAGER. He laughs at a joke we
didn't hear. Smoothly transitions into the...

PRIVATE DINING ROOM

Where Connie awaits. Alone. Brandon kisses her briefly. Takes
a seat. A WAITER pours wine and vanishes discreetly.

Connie smiles at Brandon.

CONNIE

Long day?

BRANDON

A lot going on at the office.

CONNIE

There've been a lot of distractions
lately. Even for us. I asked the
chef to bring us his personal
recommendation.

BRANDON

Good.

MAIN DINING AREA - AT THE BAR

Donovan checks his watch. He waves the BARTENDER over.

DONOVAN

Scotch.

Donovan's Blackberry vibrates. He checks it: "Please call Jim. Need to talk."

Voices at the door pull Donovan's attention. A UNIFORMED OFFICER speaks to the Manager. Conversation hushed. The manager looks back toward the private dining area. A tad nervous. Finally, the duo cross the distance.

IN THE PRIVATE DINING AREA

Connie and Brandon are mid-wine sip.

WAITER (O.S.)

Mr. Collier?

Both Colliers turn their attention to the door.

WAITER (cont'd)

Please excuse the interruption.
There's an officer asking for you.

Brandon's brows bridge. The manager steps aside. The officer walks into the room. A letter in hand. Brandon stands.

OFFICER

Brandon Collier?

BRANDON

Yes?

He hands over the letter.

OFFICER

Have a good evening.

Brandon opens the envelope. Connie cranes her neck.

CONNIE

What's that?

AT THE BAR

Donovan watches the officer leave. He throws back the rest of his Scotch. Leaves a few bills on the counter.

PRIVATE DINING AREA

Brandon meets Connie's unsettled expression.

BRANDON
They want to revoke the
restaurant's liquor license.

CONNIE
Why?

BRANDON
They're claiming I falsified
information on the application.

CONNIE
Let me see.

Brandon reluctantly hands it over.

CONNIE (cont'd)
(reading)
"Your presence is requested before
the Atlanta License Review Board to
defend yourself against these
allegations."

She looks up at him.

CONNIE (cont'd)
This is ridiculous.

But she sees something in his face.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Brandon? This *is* ridiculous. Right?

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donovan crawls into bed.

RENE
How was it?

DONOVAN
Uneventful.

RENE
I'm sorry.

DONOVAN
I'll keep pushing.

Inhale. Exhale. Inha-

RENE
How did she look?

Deep exhale.

DONOVAN
Dressed up.

Donovan rolls over. On the other side of the chasm between him and Rene.

INT. DISTINCTION - CONFERENCE ROOM

Connie, Donovan, Ron, Ray and a few other board members surround the table. Brandon stands at the head of the table. The tension is palpable.

BRANDON
I was a hot-headed, seventeen-year-old freshman. Out, where I shouldn't have been. Doing things I shouldn't have been doing.

Brandon looks to Connie. Her back is impenetrably straight. She stares ahead. Her gaze landing on nothing in particular.

BRANDON (cont'd)
An older buddy and I were at a bar. My buddy'd had a few. There was a fight. It got ugly. I got the lesser charge because of my age. The state didn't release my name. But that didn't stop people from knowing what happened. It made school, life, in general, complicated.

Donovan glances at the pensive faces around the table. His own face unreadable. Brandon looks for allies among the board.

BRANDON (cont'd)
So, when I turned eighteen, I changed my name, enrolled in another school, started fresh. Until this thing with the liquor license, I'd never looked back. I truly regret any embarrassment this may have caused the company.

THERESA JONES shakes her head. Worry splashed on her face.

THERESA
While we admire your somewhat belated honesty, it's not just company embarrassment.

RON
(to Brandon)
There's no such animal as a fine dining restaurant that doesn't serve alcohol.

BRANDON
This doesn't have to be complicated. I simply didn't account for the name change on the application. It's more like a clerical error.

RAY
Not quite.

All eyes turn to Ray.

RAY (cont'd)
Applicants undergo a background check. If you are, essentially, someone else, that's more than clerical.

Brandon starts to speak.

RAY (cont'd)
Additionally, the 'person in good moral standing' stipulation of the application comes into play with your past conviction.

BRANDON
It was a juvie offense.

DONOVAN
It was a juvie defense.

Brandon's eyes bore through Donovan's.

CONNIE
Okay, let's all take it down a notch. There's a problem. We'll deal with it. In the meantime, let's not forget Brandon's service to this company. Very soon, we'll own the property Ambience sits on. Giving us an even stronger, long-term, financial foothold.

RON
That's all well and good, Connie. But what happens if the License board votes against Brandon?

DONOVAN

We can use my name for the license.

Heads turns like tennis spectators.

DONOVAN (cont'd)

I don't have anything to hide.

The silence is thick. But the group opinion is lucid.

RON

Maybe we should make this official.

INT. DISTINCTION - BRANDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Brandon seethes. Connie is the calm in the storm's eye.

BRANDON

This is what he wanted.

CONNIE

The board won't turn against you
for one incident.

He whirls around.

BRANDON

This is a coup, Connie.

CONNIE

You seem very sure he initiated all
of this.

BRANDON

Is it that you don't want to see that?

Her tone is measured.

CONNIE

Honestly, I'm stuck on other things.

Brandon takes a breath.

BRANDON

This isn't the time.

CONNIE

You had the nerve to lecture me about
honesty and keeping secrets from you.
I don't even know who you are.

BRANDON

It's just a name.

CONNIE

Is it? Should I just believe you?

He doesn't answer.

CONNIE (cont'd)
Do what you need to do here,
Brandon. And then your wife needs
you at home. So we can talk.

She takes her time leaving. It takes only seconds for Nina to materialize at Brandon's door. Hesitantly step inside.

BRANDON
Close the door.

She does.

BRANDON (cont'd)
I need information on Donovan.
Before he does more damage. Dirt.
Something personal.

She sends him a questioning look.

NINA
I wouldn't know where to start on
something like that. Especially if
it's not business-related.

BRANDON
Get close to him. Get him to talk.

His words drip with subtext. Nina's face darkens.

NINA
That's not what I do. Maybe you
should find someone who charges by
the hour.

She swishes to the door. Hand on the knob she speak to him with her back still turned.

NINA (cont'd)
I came in to tell you Ron wants to
talk to you. He's still in the
conference room.

BRANDON
Have you followed up with INKOSA
about the offer?

NINA
I'll get on that right now.

INT. DISTINCTION - CONFERENCE ROOM

Ron stands at the window. Looks out over the city. He turns at Brandon's entry. The colleagues regard each other a moment.

RON
I'm one of your biggest fans. You
work hard to make things happen.

BRANDON
Thank you.

RON
But this is big. The board has to
trust the person we put into power.
Don't give the rest of them any
more reasons to second-guess
themselves. The real estate deal'll
go a long way.

BRANDON
I understand.

RON
I know you do.

Ron leaves. Brandon takes a seat at the head of the
conference table.

INT. SERENITY SPA - MASSAGE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Donovan lay face down on the table. A towel covering his
hips. ANDREA steps away from the table.

DONOVAN
Thanks, Andrea.

ANDREA
You're welcome.

She quietly slips out. The door reopens in mere seconds.

WOMAN'S VOICE
What'd you do?

Donovan looks up. Sandra looks fabulous. Donovan puts his
head back down.

DONOVAN
What are you talking about?

SAUNDRA
Never known you to need a third
woman's hands on you.

Donovan sighs. Sits up. Sandra smiles as he covers himself.

SAUNDRA (cont'd)
Either you're having a helluva day
or you really pissed her off.

DONOVAN
 You volunteering to make it all
 better?

She smiles again.

SAUNDRA
 No. Just curious.

She sidles out. Donovan shakes his head. Grabs his clothes.

EXT. SERENITY DAY SPA - AFTERNOON

Donovan dons designer shades on the way to his car. A grey Altima pulls into the road from its parking spot on the curb. Donovan comes to a slow stop halfway across the street.

INT. PARKED CAR - SAME

Morgan hits the accelerator.

IN THE STREET

The Altima heads straight for Donovan. A momentary deer in headlights, Donovan locks eyes with Morgan. The car speeds up. Donovan reacts belatedly. Barely dashes out of the way.

The Altima skids to a stop mere feet away. Donovan closes the distance as Morgan emerges from the vehicle. All business.

MORGAN
 Are you all right sir?

DONOVAN
 Are you crazy?!

MORGAN
 Sir, I'm gonna need you to stay out
 of the road.

DONOVAN
 You saw me!

MORGAN
 You're mistaken.

Donovan sends Morgan a hard stare.

DONOVAN
 This how you handle all requests to
 reopen cases you fuck up?

Morgan never loses his cool. But his tone is venomous.

MORGAN
 Just stay out of the way. Sir.

DONOVAN
Get from behind your badge,
Detective. If you wanna do this,
let's do it.

Morgan looks around. Steps close to Donovan.

MORGAN
You wanted to play hard ball.
Welcome to the game.

Morgan steps back. Looks around again. Strides away. Donovan glares at his retreating car.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DUSK

A YUPPIE walks away from two guys at the mouth of an alley. Derrick's elbow comes down hard on the back of Chubby's neck.

DERRICK
'Sup Chubby?

Chubby's doubled over in pain. His friend's eyes go wide.

CHUBBY
Come on, D. I'mma get you your shit.

DERRICK
Oh, I know that. I need something
else right now.

He pushes Chubby down by his neck. Keeping an eye on his fidgety friend. Derrick whips out the stamp bag from Brandon's.

DERRICK (cont'd)
Who's tag is this?

CHUBBY
You addin' to your resume?

Derrick digs his thumb into Chubby's neck.

CHUBBY (cont'd)
Ow, shit, ow, shit! Cassius. That's
Cassius' tag.

DERRICK
See a lotta suits coming for it?

CHUBBY
All suits man. That's top of the
line. It ain't for punks neither.

Derrick releases Chubby's neck. Chubby massages it gingerly.

DERRICK
 'Preciate you. You just bought
 yourself an extension.
 (to Chubby's friend)
 But you...

Derrick steps forward. Chubby's friend backs up.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM

Rene stands in the mirror. Her nightgown pulled up under her breasts. She puts a gentle hand to her abdomen. Checks her side profile. Tries to suck in the ever-so-slight bulge.

She drops the nightgown. Smooths the fabric. Wipes at tears only the mirror made her aware of. Cuts the light.

INT. COLLIER HOME - NIGHT

Brandon's sitting up in bed when Connie saunters through the bedroom door. She turns off the television. She ignores him. Walks into the bathroom. Running water echoes into the bedroom.

IN THE BATHROOM

Connie splashes her face with water. She stands up to see Brandon's reflection behind her.

BRANDON
 It's pretty late.

She takes a hand towel. Blots at her face.

CONNIE
 I needed some time to myself after work.

BRANDON
 I thought you wanted to talk.

CONNIE
 I thought I did too.

She walks into the...

BEDROOM

Pulls a nightgown from the dresser drawer.

BRANDON
 What's going on?

She chuckles to herself. Shakes her head.

BRANDON (cont'd)
 Connie.

CONNIE

I don't get why I always feel like the crazy one. It seems like I'm making the right decisions at the time. But they're always... not the right decisions.

BRANDON

Sweetheart, you're gonna have to spell this out for me.

CONNIE

Don't call me sweetheart, Brandon. Don't lie to me for years and then call me sweetheart.

BRANDON

All this is about the name thing?

Her anger flares.

CONNIE

This is about everything. About opening myself up to you in every way. Standing with you and by you no matter what anybody else says. Only to find out, you didn't give me the courtesy of your real name. How could I have expected you to want a child with me?

BRANDON

I do want a child with you.

CONNIE

You haven't touched me since that madness at the board meeting. I'm starting to feel like I have to put in a request.

He closes the distance between them. But she shoves him back.

CONNIE (cont'd)

That was not a request. I'm tired of playing the victim.

BRANDON

I've never looked at you that way. You know how long I've loved you.

CONNIE

I'm glad you know what I know. Cause I'm not sure I believe either of us anymore.

Connie walks past him. He grabs her around the waist. Cradles her from behind. She lets him bury his face in her neck. But just for a moment. She pulls away. Closing the bathroom door behind her.

INT. COLLIER HOME - EARLY MORNING

Brandon gets dressed in workout clothes. So focused, that he doesn't notice Connie's open eyes.

INT. NINA'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The alarm BLARES into the quiet. Nina stares up at the ceiling. She finally reaches over and kills the noise.

INT. GYM - EARLY MORNING

Brandon approaches the desk. Digging through his gym bag.

EXT. GYM - PARKING LOT - SAME

Connie pulls into the lot. She scopes out the parked cars.

IN THE GYM

Brandon pockets his gym card. Frowns at his open gym bag.

BRANDON
(to receptionist)
Forgot my towel in the car.

The Receptionist half smiles. Yeah, right.

Brandon starts toward the door.

IN THE PARKING LOT

Connie stands by Brandon's car. Suddenly chagrined, she heads back to her car. As she drives away, we see Brandon stroll out of the gym entrance.

INT. NINA'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Nina stares at her RINGING cell phone. She picks it up. Mutes it. Rolls back over.

INT. DISTINCTION - BRANDON'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Still in workout gear. Brandon sits in his office. Alone.

EXT. URBAN STREET - DAY

Derrick and Donovan commandeer the sidewalk. Derrick swishes his toothpick from one side of his mouth to other.

DERRICK
 Why you don't never invite me to your
 side of town. You ashamed of me?

Donovan shoots him a look.

DERRICK (cont'd)
 What's up with that email?

Donovan almost shrugs casually. But not quite.

DERRICK (cont'd)
 You smokin' it, man. Collier can't
 let chick see those pics.

DONOVAN
 I told you we need something stronger.

DERRICK
 She got history with this shit!

DONOVAN
 And she took Emery back. We can't rely
 on what she might forgive Collier.

DERRICK
 You messin' wit my payday.

DONOVAN
 Your check is guaranteed. For now,
 just stay on top of Collier.

Derrick slows to a stop. Donovan reluctantly follows suit.

DERRICK
 I don't take checks.

The two regard each other warily.

DONOVAN
 Lemme go one more route first. How
 far do your contacts reach?

INT. PRISON - CELL - DAY

HILL EDDINGS - a walking rap sheet with the veneer of a
 seasoned timer - does crunches in his cell. A BEADY-EYED
 GUARD raps on the cell bars with his club. Hill looks over.

BEADY-EYED GUARD
 Your lawyer's here.

Hill sends him an odd look. Beady-eyed strolls off.

INT. PRISON - LAUNDRY ROOM

Huge dryers create a visible heat in the deserted room. Beady-eyed nods to the corner. Donovan walks out of the haze. Beady walks over to Donovan. Donovan hands him significant cash.

DONOVAN

May we have some privacy?

BEADY-EYED GUARD

Not the deal.

Donovan peels off a few more bills. Beady takes them.

BEADY-EYED GUARD (cont'd)

Five.

He closes the door behind him. A lock CLUNKS into place.

HILL

I ain't got no damn lawyer.

DONOVAN

I'm not surprised.

HILL

You talkin big for a man behind locked doors.

DONOVAN

I'm looking for some information on a friend of yours.

HILL

I don't have friends.

DONOVAN

You used to. Back at UGA.

Hill studies Donovan.

HILL

I don't have friends.

DONOVAN

Then let's be associates.

Hill doesn't even blink. Donovan forges ahead.

DONOVAN (cont'd)

Let's say you've got a cash flow of about... a grand, coming in fairly regularly. Maybe even a bonus every now and then. Something for the wife. That's not a bad deal. Does the job.

(MORE)

DONOVAN(cont'd)

But if there was a counteroffer on the table. One that might allow you to enjoy your profits outside of certain...

Donovan pointedly looks around the room.

DONOVAN (cont'd)

...parameters. How friendly would that make you?

HILL

I might could be down. To 'negotiate.'

DONOVAN

What happened when you and Bra- When you and Collier went out that night? Why's he been so... generous to your people?

HILL

You need to slow up. It's gon' take more than a c-note for these muthafuckas to unlock the door for real. Whatchoo got in your pocket?

DONOVAN

To start, a gifted lawyer who believes in nurturing friendships.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - HOME OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Donovan hovers over the mound of papers on his desk.

RENE (O.S.)

Donovan?

He doesn't look up.

DONOVAN

Hey, babe. You feeling better?

She hesitates.

RENE

Why don't you come to bed?

DONOVAN

I will.

He looks over, after a second. She's still there.

RENE

I need to talk to you.

DONOVAN
I promise I'll be in, in a minute.

She nods to the papers in front of him.

RENE
All that about Connie?

DONOVAN
Rene, don't pull this on me right now.
Please. There's too much going on.

RENE
You don't know shit about what's
going on Donovan.

She turns on her heel and disappears down the hall. Donovan sighs. A door LOCK echoes down the hall. He looks down at the papers. Back at the door.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Rene pours hot coffee into a travel mug. Donovan strolls in. In the clothes from the night before. He moves closer. She evades him. Donovan takes the coffee pot. Begins to fill a mug. Donovan grabs cream and sugar.

RENE
My mother called again.

DONOVAN
Yeah. I heard the voicemail.

The silence drags out.

RENE
Well?

He's too tired to fake it.

DONOVAN
I honestly don't have the patience
to be interrogated by your family,
right now. And, at an anniversary
party? I'd have to be crazy.

RENE
You don't have to go, Donovan. But
don't talk about my family just
because they care about my future.

DONOVAN
Like you have such a bad deal here.

Rene's mug lands hard on the counter. She whirls.

RENE
 Negro, you didn't pick my ass up
 off the street. I had job, a key
 and a car, before I met you.

DONOVAN
 And why do you always have to talk
 that way?

Rene stops in the middle of twisting the travel mug cap.

RENE
 Are you serious?

DONOVAN
 It's just not ladylike.

RENE
 The hell do you care? Apparently,
 you're not leasing to buy.

DONOVAN
 And yet you wonder why.

Rene stands immobile. Finally drawing Donovan's gaze.

RENE
 You're looking at a good woman,
 Donovan Cook. Educated, driven and in
 love with the same man for two years.
 Shame on you for treating me like I'm
 not worth an anniversary party of my
 own. Is that fuckin' ladylike enough
 for you?

She grabs her mug and storms out.

INT. DISTINCTION - RECEPTION AREA - LATE MORNING

Brandon's BUXOM ASSISTANT hands over messages.

BUXOM
 Your eleven o'clock asked if he
 could wait in your office.

BRANDON
 I don't have an eleven o'clock.

Her eyes go saucer-round.

BUXOM
 A Mr. Thompson? He said we was an
 old friend. I'm so sorry.

Brandon's already walking toward...

HIS OFFICE

Derrick lounges in one of Brandon's guest chairs. Per the occasion, Derrick dons corporate apparel. Down to the shoes.

BRANDON

I've got work to do, Mr. Thompson.

DERRICK

See, that's what's up. Put on a suit and motherfuckers start calling you by your last name and shit. We could get along fine, Collier. If you hadn't killed my wife.

BRANDON

That what you call all your tricks?

Brandon picks up the phone. Dials.

DERRICK

Slow your roll, Collier.

BRANDON

Emery Simms killed Alannah.

DERRICK

Is he fucking the honey down the hall, too?

Brandon stops dialing. Glances at his open office door. Derrick follows his look.

DERRICK (cont'd)

You want me to get that?

BRANDON

On your way out.

Derrick rises.

DERRICK

No doubt.

He checks his watch.

DERRICK (cont'd)

I'm late for my twelve o'clock anyway. I just wanted to have a *preliminary meeting*. Let you know I'll be in touch.

BRANDON

I'll make sure security's waiting.

DERRICK

I hope they like pictures. Cause I got a few juicy ones. Maybe I'll show you some next time we hook up. You might even know some of the folks in 'em.

Brandon watches Derrick slither out. He cradles the phone. Then snatches it back up.

BRANDON

(into phone)
Clear your lunch.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - AFTERNOON

Nina rubs her temples agitatedly.

NINA

Did he show them to you?

BRANDON

No.

NINA

But you think he has them?

Brandon doesn't answer.

NINA (cont'd)

What are you going to do?

BRANDON

I'm not about to let some small-time thug, punk me, Nina. That's not the man I am.

NINA

Hey, if you think your marriage and Distinction could weather this, that's great. But how about *my* career? My reputation?

BRANDON

Well, I certainly can't give you the VP position right now. If this blows up, promoting you would only make things look worse.

Nina goes very still.

NINA

I earned that promotion during office hours.

BRANDON
Something has to give.

Nina absorbs the blow silently. But for her eyes.

BRANDON (cont'd)
Give me credit for trying to make
this work.

NINA
You came after me, Brandon.

BRANDON
Guess you cut us off too late.

NINA
Stick to saving yourself, Brandon.
It's your strong suit.

The quiet click of the door belies Nina's fury.

INT. DONOVAN OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Donovan beelines from the elevator. He slows to a stop in
front of Jim. Who sits in the waiting area.

JIM
I don't usually have to stalk folks
to close a deal.

DONOVAN
Jim, I'm sorry. Come on in.

Jim follows Donovan into...

HIS OFFICE

Donovan gets situated behind his desk. Jim takes a seat.

JIM
All I've been trying to tell you is
that these folks are ready to buy-in.

DONOVAN
Great.

Jim cocks his head at Donovan's tone.

JIM
Clue me in.

DONOVAN
It's just that the expansion is
kind of on hold. I'm working on a
really big project that's eaten up
all of my time.

JIM
I worked hard on these folks,
Donovan. You told me to show them
the light.

DONOVAN
I know.

JIM
I even pulled them away from this
Buckhead property bid they were
gung ho about.

Donovan looks up.

DONOVAN
Where, in Buckhead?

INT. DISTINCTION - DAY

Nina grabs a sheet from the fax machine. The top of the page
reads INKOSA Realty. Nina walks and reads. She suddenly stops
short. Reads more closely.

INT. BRANDON'S OFFICE - DAY

Brandon navigates a banking website. A KNOCK draws his
attention. He puts the computer to sleep. Nina walks in. Fax
in hand. Features are tight. She closes the door behind her.

NINA
He outbid us on the Ambience property.

BRANDON
Who?

Nina holds out the fax.

Brandon takes the page from her.

BRANDON (cont'd)
Donovan doesn't have the capital to
outbid that property.

NINA
Maybe not by himself. He brought in
a group of West Coast investors. I
checked into it.

Brandon shoves the paper back at her.

BRANDON
Little late for you to start doing
your job.

NINA
This isn't my screw-up.

BRANDON
You're Director of Business
Development, Nina. You were
supposed to be on top of this.

Nina whispers fiercely.

NINA
Don't try to get your rocks off,
yelling at me. You're the one who
wanted to lowball the offer. I
advised you otherwise. And I
definitely didn't destroy your
relationship with the board.

BRANDON
If you were where you're supposed
to be-

NINA
What? Back underneath you?

Brandon's intercom CHIMES.

BUXOM ASSISTANT (V.O.)
Mrs. Collier's here for your lunch.

Brandon barely has time to hide his confusion before Connie
strolls in. She and Nina exchange polite nods.

CONNIE
(to Brandon)
Got your email.

Brandon's eyes flit to Nina. Just as his cell SHRILLS. He
puts up a 'hold on' finger. Grateful for the distraction.

BRANDON
(into phone)
Hello?

INT. STARBUCKS - SAME

Derrick lounges in one of the 'comfy chairs' by the window.

DERRICK
You know, I usedta think these little
coffee places were just for bougie
muthafuckas. But I'm kinda feelin'
this Caramel Macchiato shit.

BRANDON (V.O.)
Congratulations.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION

DERRICK
 (into phone)
 I'm right across the street. You
 should come kick it.

BRANDON
 No, thank you.

DERRICK
 You must not of checked your email.

Brandon glances at the computer. Then Nina. Then Connie.

DERRICK (cont'd)
 Tell you what, I'mma be here about
 another ten minutes. After that,
 I'mma show these pictures to
 somebody. Unless you want it to be
 somebody else, you might wanna make
 it here before I leave.

CLICK.

IN BRANDON'S OFFICE

Brandon strides to his computer. Navigates a few keys. His
 face goes granite. And we finally see why.

Pictures lay strewn across Brandon's screen like fallen
 dominoes. Grainy but identifiable pics of Brandon and Nina
 having sex. Each new photo like the next page of a flip book.

CONNIE
 Everything all right?

She takes a step forward. Brandon tries desperately to close
 the multiple windows. But they're like internet pop-ups.

BRANDON
 Yeah. I may need to... postpone lunch.

Both women frown. Connie stops short. She glances at Nina.

CONNIE
 (softly. tersely.)
 My office isn't around the corner.

Brandon's finger mouse-clicks like it has a twitch.

BRANDON
 I know. I'm sorry, sweetheart.

He finally navigates to the 'shut down' button.

BRANDON (cont'd)
 Let me just take care of something.
 Can you hang around here for a moment?

Her mouth forms thin line. Nina seems to catch on.

CONNIE
 Fine.

NINA
 (to Brandon)
 I'll touch base with after lunch.
 (to Connie)
 See you soon.

CONNIE
 See you soon.

Brandon gives the computer one last glance. Steps out.

INT. DONOVAN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Donovan peruses a real estate bill of sale. Perky pops in.

PERKY
 Not at the office either.

DONOVAN
 Try her cell again. Know what?
 Nevermind. I'll be back in an hour.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE

Derrick sips on his Macchiato. Flips through the AJC. Brandon steps into the coffee shop. Sits across from Derrick.

BRANDON
 Just for the sake of argument...

DERRICK
 Fifty g's.

Brandon's laugh is incredulous. Then it disappears.

BRANDON
 Show 'em to whoever you want. You
 ain't playing enough music to make
 me dance.

DERRICK
 But you here at the party. You
 tryin' to bluff me, Collier?

BRANDON
 Don't let the suit fool you, my
 friend.

(MORE)

BRANDON(cont'd)

I threw down with cats like you,
back in the day. I'm the one still
standing.

Derrick glances out the window at Brandon's office building.

DERRICK

Connie ain't comin' to kick it with us?

Anger flares in Brandon's eyes. Silence eats away the seconds.

BRANDON

Come at me with a real figure. Maybe
we'll have something to talk about.

Derrick finishes his drink.

DERRICK

I gave you my figure. You come at
me with cash.

He rises. Casually takes his leave.

EXT. COFFEE HOUSE

Derrick surfaces from the shop. We see Brandon through the
glass window. He takes out his cell and dials.

INSIDE COFFEE HOUSE

Brandon's tone is terse.

BRANDON

(into phone)
Time to clear the room.

INT. DISTINCTION - RECEPTION AREA - SAME

Connie strides past Buxom on her way to the elevator.

INT. DONOVAN'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Donovan stands in the center of the room. Something's
different. He finally eyes Rene's night stand. It's empty.

INT. DONOVAN'S BEDROOM - CLOSET

The light flicks on. Only empty hangers remain of Rene's
clothes. Donovan stares at the abyss. Turns the light off.

INT. DISTINCTION CORPORATION - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Brandon steps off the elevator. Buxom looks up. Phone in hand.

BUXOM

Ron Tersa on one.

BRANDON
Tell'im I'm having lunch with my wife.

Buxom looks at his office. Shakes her head. Brandon grimaces.

BRANDON (cont'd)
Put him through.

IN HIS OFFICE

The line emits a double ring. Brandon presses the speaker.

BRANDON
How are you Ron?

RON (V.O.)
I'm well, Brandon.

BRANDON
Good to hear it.

RON (V.O.)
I called to let you know the board
has called a special session.

The veins in Brandon's forehead spring to life.

BRANDON
Really?

RON (V.O.)
Yes. A quorum approved it. We'll
convene on Tuesday.

BRANDON
Any particular reason why?

Brandon suffers through the pause.

RON (V.O.)
Quite a few members were concerned
about a fax that was distributed
this morning.

Another painful pause.

RON (V.O.) (cont'd)
I just called to let you know.

BRANDON
Fine. I'll see you at the meeting.

RON (V.O.)
Yes.

Brandon disconnects. More pensive than ever.

INT. SERENITY SPA - LOBBY - AFTERNOON

Connie breezes through the door. The front desk is unmanned.

CONNIE

Hello?

Connie peeks around the corner. Steps tentatively into the...

SPA HALLWAY

The manager's office looms ahead. She makes her way to it. Knocks. No response. Knocks again. Pushes the door open.

IN THE OFFICE

Donovan sits on the couch. Alone.

CONNIE

Your assistant couldn't reach you.
She said to try here.

He smiles sadly.

DONOVAN

She's gone.

Connie takes a tentative seat. Not really able to read him.

CONNIE

Who?

He looks at her. Closely. His eyes going almost black. He leans toward her. She leans back, just in time. He smiles at her evasion. Shrugs with the same sad smile.

DONOVAN

Worth a shot.

Connie stands. Pissed.

CONNIE

What is it about you Simms men?

His eyes harden.

DONOVAN

You tell me.

She leaves, instead.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - EVENING

Donovan stalks in. Ringing emanates from somewhere. It cycles through to voicemail without him answering.

IN THE BEDROOM

Donovan crosses the threshold. His cell lights up from its spot on the bed. Rings. He answers on ring five.

DONOVAN
(into phone)
Yes?

BRANDON (V.O.)
There's a lot you don't know.

DONOVAN
And you're offering answers.

BRANDON (V.O.)
Some. About Emery. How he died.

INT. DISTINCTION CORPORATION - BRANDON'S OFFICE - SAME

Brandon sits at his desk. A revolver lay on top of the paperwork. Its distinctive silver handle, reflects in the light. He picks it up. Turns it from side to side.

There's a great pause.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
Don't fuck with me, Collier.

BRANDON
Midnight.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
Come correct.

INT. DONOVAN'S BEDROOM - SAME

BRANDON (V.O.)
That's how I do it.

DERRICK (V.O.)
You need a piece?

INT. SPORTS BAR - LATER

Derrick lines up a shot. His cell balanced between shoulder and ear.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
I do deals, not guns.

DERRICK
Your call.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
Wouldn't mind you havin' my back
though.

DERRICK
I got business 'bout an hour before
that. It oughta be wrapped by then.

Derrick hangs up. Sinks a ball.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Derrick walks up. Brandon is already waiting for him. He reaches for his pocket, Derrick's hand goes to the small of his back. Brandon puts his hands up. Then slowly removes a bulky envelope from his pocket. Opens it to reveal the cash.

Derrick pulls a digital memory card from his pocket. Shows it. Puts it on the ground. Brandon does the same for the money. They circle each other slowly. Ever watchful.

BRANDON
What's my guarantee that you don't
have copies of the pictures hidden
somewhere?

DERRICK
Honor among thugs.

Brandon's eyes narrow. They continue to circle.

BRANDON
This is a one-time transaction.

DERRICK
I ain't greedy.

The circle is complete. Each man reaches down for his prize. Derrick counts the money. Brandon inspects the memory card. Each appears satisfied. They back away from each other. And disappear into the night.

EXT. AMBIENCE - PARKING LOT - LATE NIGHT

Donovan pulls into the lot. No other car's in sight.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Derrick drifts down the sidewalk. Suddenly, blue lights cut through the night. A plain car with a detachable police light on the top, pulls up alongside Derrick. A brief siren sounds.

It takes Derrick a moment to comply. But he finally stops walking. The cop gets out of the car. Derrick eyes Morgan.

DERRICK
They let your ass stay on the job?

MORGAN
Put your hands on the car please.

DERRICK
For what?

MORGAN
We had a call about possible
illegal activity in the area.

DERRICK
Tha fuck is we? You tha only one here.

MORGAN
Hands on the car.

DERRICK
This is some bullshit, man.

Morgan pushes Derrick against the car. His actions are rough.
But his words are official. Professional.

MORGAN
Do you have any weapons or sharp
objects I should know about?

DERRICK
Why don't you ease the-fuck up?!

Morgan gives Derrick a quick punch to the spine. Derrick
arches back in pain. Quiets considerably. Morgan extracts a
gun from Derrick's waistband.

MORGAN
Is this a registered firearm?

Derrick doesn't answer. Morgan pockets the gun. Pulls Derrick
upright. Mashes his face to the car. Frisks him. Comes across
the bulky envelope.

MORGAN (cont'd)
What's this?

DERRICK
Bus fare.

Morgan takes the envelope. Fingers through the cash.

MORGAN
I need to hold on to this and your
gun for evidence.

Derrick spins around.

DERRICK
That's my shit!

Morgan pulls his gun. Points it right at Derrick's forehead.

MORGAN
A threat to an officer's safety
justifies deadly force.

Derrick backs down.

MORGAN (cont'd)
For the future, I suggest you find
an alternative method of getting
your bus fare.

Morgan hauls back and whacks Derrick with the butt of the
gun. Derrick falls limp to the ground. Hidden by the car.

INT. AMBIENCE - LATE NIGHT

Donovan walks through the unlocked door. But for the dimly
lit circular stage and a couple of decorative lamps, darkness
clings to the restaurant. Donovan sticks close to the wall.

A light switches on. Brandon sits at a table in the corner.
Donovan takes a slow walk. An even slower seat.

BRANDON
You're smarter than Emery.

DONOVAN
Thanks, Mom.

BRANDON
You wired?

DONOVAN
I know better than to expect a
confession out of you.

Brandon sits back in his chair.

BRANDON
I haven't done anything wrong. Ask
anyone who's ever tried to prove
otherwise.

DONOVAN
Most of them are dead.

Brandon shrugs.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
Most.

BRANDON
Why do you care? Where the fuck did
you even come from? Is this all
about the almighty dollar?

DONOVAN
You want me to answer those in any
particular order?

Brandon chuckles to himself.

BRANDON
You have no idea what's happening
around you. This ain't the boardroom.
There are no rules. Ask your boy.

DONOVAN
What boy is that?

BRANDON
Did he tell you he made me an offer?

Donovan's eyes narrow to slits.

BRANDON (cont'd)
You oughta look closer to home for
your enemies. Even your precious
evidence puts two people at the scene
of the crime. Maybe Emery and Derrick
took care of Alannah together.

Donovan lunges. Brandon brandishes a gun. Donovan sits.

BRANDON (cont'd)
You're a visible man. But not
untouchable. It would benefit both
of us to come to an understanding.

DONOVAN
I understand you're a murdering,
piece of shit.

BRANDON
Says you.

Brandon's hand moves to the trigger. Donovan upends the
table. Silverware flies everywhere. Brandon stumbles
backward. Gun still in his hand. Donovan dives for him.

Knocks him down and backward. Depositing the two on the floor
of the circular stage. Brandon's gun slides across the floor.

Out of reach.

A flash of metal catches Donovan's eye. He grabs a strewn steak knife. Turns right into Brandon's fist. Donovan flies backward. Brandon snatches up the gun. Stands over Donovan.

BRANDON (cont'd)
You're smarter. But he fights better.

Donovan breathes heavily. Brandon raises the gun.

Pulls the trigger.

CLICK.

Donovan flinches. Brandon smiles.

BRANDON (cont'd)
Reconsider my offer. Or I'll bring accessories next time.

Brandon strolls away. Donovan heaves a sigh. Closes his eyes.

INT. RAY'S HOME - BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Ray fumbles in the darkness for the RINGING phone.

RAY
(into phone)
Hello?

DONOVAN (V.O.)
It's me.

Ray looks at the clock.

RAY
What's going on?

EXT. CEMETERY - SAME

Donovan sits in the grass beside Emery's headstone. Illuminated by the sharp glare of his car headlights.

DONOVAN
He bankrolled my first deal.

RAY'S HOUSE

Ray's face shows instant recognition of the subject matter.

RAY
I know.

AT THE CEMETARY

This isn't the dejected Donovan of earlier. This one's fueled by something darker. Angrier.

DONOVAN
When none of them would even
acknowledge my existence. He did. And
I still treated him like one of them.

RAY (V.O.)
He understood, Donovan.

DONOVAN
He shouldn't have had to.

Donovan hangs up.

RAY'S HOUSE

Ray starts to dial back. Stops. Puts the phone down and lays in bed. Eyes wide open.

EXT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Donovan screeches into the driveway. Slams the car door on his way out. Another car door closes behind him. He turns.

DERRICK
Took you long enough.

DONOVAN
Where were you?

DERRICK
My business ran long.

Donovan walks toward his house.

DERRICK (cont'd)
Don't punk out now. We too close
for that cry baby shit.

Donovan keeps going.

DONOVAN
I'm not trying to end up dead.

DERRICK
Like Alannah? Like Simms?

Donovan doesn't stop. Derrick holds his ground.

DERRICK (cont'd)
HEY!

Donovan turns. Derrick walks toward him.

DERRICK (cont'd)
 You came to me. You said we could
 take him down. Now that you not
 playing with your little laptop and
 shit, you want out?

They're almost face-to-face. Donovan steps into the heat.

DONOVAN
 I'm not the one striking side deals
 with Collier.

Derrick looks off a second.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
 How do I know what team you're on?

DERRICK
 While you tryin to figure out
 stupid shit, Collier's got 5-0 in
 his pocket.

DONOVAN
 Whaddayou mean?

DERRICK
 Soon as I copped the loot from
 Collier, here come 5-0 to shake me
 down. For nothing. Same fool who
 hauled me when they found Alannah.

Donovan stops.

DONOVAN
 Morgan?

DERRICK
 Took me for the stash and my gun.
 Talkin bout finding another *method*
 of getting my cash. Dude's dirty.

Donovan cocks his head in thought.

DONOVAN
 I had a run-in with Morgan not too
 long ago. Right after I had
 Collier's liquor license yanked.

DERRICK
 Whatchoo gon' do now *Cletus*?

DONOVAN
 Figure out how to shake the tree.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Donovan looks at a legal pad. There's a triangle in the center of the page. Each corner has a name. *Alannah* is written at the top. *Collier* on one of the base corners.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 Connie. I realize asking you to trust me is unfair. So I won't. Instead, I'm sending you proof of everything I write here.

Donovan writes *Morgan* at the last corner.

EXT. YOUTH CENTER - MORNING

Connie sashays into her office. Coffee in one hand. Mail in the other. She starts to sit. Stops short at a bulky white envelope in her chair.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 About a fight in a bar a long time ago where a freshman named Michelle died at Brandon's hands.

EXT. URBAN STREET - DAY

Derrick talks to a trio of SHADY-LOOKING CHARACTERS. Looks like he's not getting what he wants. He moves on.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 They followed her there because Brandon thought she was cheating on him. She was. Hill - the 'buddy' Brandon referred to - wasn't drunk.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

The chart's been filled in a bit. *Murdered* is written on the line between Brandon and Alannah. Donovan writes *Investigated* on the line between Alannah and Morgan. Then puts a huge dollar sign in the center of the triangle.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 Brandon had the knife. But his story was more convincing to the cops. And he was a juvie. He's been sending money to Hill's family ever since. But Hill never got over the betrayal.

INT. BISTRO - DAY

Connie walks through the door. Steps to the HOSTESS. Who leads her toward the back of the Bistro.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 I started out wanting to do right
 by someone I hardly knew. Only to
 find I'm every foul thing I accused
 him of being.

INT. YOUTH CENTER - CONNIE'S OFFICE - EARLIER

The contents of the envelope lay spread out on Connie's desk. She looks through hordes of documents with Donovan's handwriting in the margins.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 I want you to know the man you're
 married to. Not out of spite or
 malice. But because I picked up
 something important when I visited
 Hill in prison.

Connie frowns at a single piece of paper. It's a visitor's log for the Atlanta Penitentiary. Her name is highlighted on several pages. Beside the prisoner's name: Emery Simms.

INT. RAY'S OFFICE - DAY

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 And I've had my fill of funerals.

A fax comes through the machine. The header reads: FULTON COUNTY AUTOPSY REPORT: ANDY RYAN. Ray snatches it off.

INT. BISTRO - REAR SEATING AREA - DAY

As Connie and the hostess near a table. Connie locks eyes with SOMEONE WE DON'T SEE.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
 I wish that was all. But there's
 one more thing.

INT. YOUTH CENTER - CONNIE'S OFFICE - EARLIER

Connie fingers a digital camera memory card.

INT. DONOVAN'S HOUSE - HOME OFFICE

Donovan signs his name to the bottom of the letter. Seals it.

INT. COLLIER HOME - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

The demonic alarm WAILS it's 'good morning'. But it's not the alarm. Brandon scrambles for his cell phone in the darkness.

BRANDON
 (into phone)
 Hello?

NINA (V.O.)
Can you meet?

Brandon glances at Connie's sleeping form. He pauses.

BRANDON
(into phone)
Ask 'em if they can make it ten. I
work out in the mornings.

NINA (V.O.)
Got it.

Brandon slips out of bed. Connie doesn't even stir.

INT. GYM - EARLY MORNING

Brandon approaches the desk. The receptionist scans his membership card. He turns around and walks back out.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Nina opens the door to Brandon. He doesn't come in.

BRANDON
Why?

NINA
Same reason as always.

Permission granted, he nearly shoves her into the room. They crash to the bed. Giving in to the attraction.

EXT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

The sound of a shower escapes the room as Brandon closes the door behind him. Pulls out car keys.

EXT. HOTEL - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Brandon stops at his car. Puts his key in the door. He suddenly comes to a dead stop. His brows bridging. We follow his eye-line. Through the car window. Where a single bullet sits carefully balanced on the curve of the steering wheel.

Brandon turns to face the parking lot behind him. His gaze swinging left and right. Then back to the car.

Brandon carefully unlocks and opens the door. Removes a folded paper from the driver's seat. Reads...

Ain't no honor with thugs or thieves. Ask your boy.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - SAME

Morgan sits down at his desk. Reaches for his coffee. Notices a folded piece of paper beneath it. Reads...

Ashes Cassius, all three go down.

Morgan frowns at the paper. Nearly jumps at his RINGING cell.

MORGAN
(into phone)
Morgan.

BRANDON (V.O.)
Who've you been talking to?

INTERCUT SCENES

MORGAN
Nobody.

BRANDON
You got other business I need to know about?

MORGAN
The fuck you talking about?

BRANDON
Where's my money?

MORGAN
(harsh whisper)
Hold up. Don't call me up with this shit. I said I ain't talked to nobody.

BRANDON
Stay smart, Morgan. You shaft me for that girl and I'm taking you with me.

Morgan glances at the note.

MORGAN
You need to calm that down, Collier.

BRANDON
Just don't fuck with me!

MORGAN
(another harsh whisper)
Don't you fuck with me!

They're both silent a moment.

BRANDON
 Alright, then.

MORGAN
 (sarcastically)
 Yeah, alright then.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - MORNING

Morgan's line goes silent. He sits back a moment. Picks up the note. Turns to his computer. Types *Cassius* into the system. Scrolls. Scrolls. Scrolls. Stops.

Cassius Washington.

It's a long rap sheet. All drug related. Morgan considers the screen. The note. Cassius' address. Grabs his jacket.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - INTERROGATION ROOM

Brandon leans forward. A STIFF-BACKED LAWYER at his side. Captain Abraham regards him skeptically from across the room.

ABRAHAM
 And you didn't know Andy Ryan?

BRANDON
 I knew of him. His name was in the newspapers.

ABRAHAM
 That was the first you'd heard of him?

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - HALLWAY

Morgan and Abraham face each other from opposite walls.

MORGAN
 Ryan had access to information that was potentially damaging to Collier.

ABRAHAM
 Ryan O.D.'d.

MORGAN
 But we both know Andy couldn't afford that grade heroin on his salary. Especially with most of his money going into a needle.

INTERROGATION ROOM

ABRAHAM
 Cassius will testify to your transaction.

BRANDON
You want me to be afraid of the
word of a drug dealer?

ABRAHAM
And a cop.

PRECINCT HALLWAY

ABRAHAM
It's circumstantial. We could only
nail him on the purchase.

MORGAN
Unless we establish motive.

INTERROGATION ROOM

BRANDON
What cop?

ABRAHAM
You know what cop.

Abraham pulls out a tape recorder.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)
You wanna talk before or after I
push 'play'?

PRECINCT HALLWAY

MORGAN
I admit, I dropped the ball with
the brother's request. So I wanted
to make sure I had reason enough to
nail Collier before I came to you.

INTERROGATION ROOM

Brandon eyes the recorder.

PRECINCT HALLWAY

MORGAN
Ryan had a monster habit. Habits
require money. If Collier paid off
Ryan to suppress the blood type
evidence, what's the easiest way to
off a junkie cop?

Abraham lets Morgan fill in the blank.

MORGAN (cont'd)
Give him some shit he ain't used
to. The good shit.

INTERROGATION ROOM

Brandon looks Abraham in the eye.

MORGAN (V.O.)
And let him do the dirty work.

Brandon's lawyer puts a hand on Brandon's arm. Brandon rolls the dice, anyway.

BRANDON
(to Abraham)
Press it.

Abraham presses play.

BRANDON'S VOICE
You got other business I need to know about?

Brandon closes his eyes. His lawyer sits back in her chair.

PRECINCT HALLWAY

Abraham regards Morgan steadily.

MORGAN'S VOICE
Hold up. Don't call me up with this shit. I said I ain't talked to nobody.

Proud of his acting, Morgan pulls out his ace.

MORGAN
You might wanna check Collier's blood against that second type on the box cutter.

BRANDON'S VOICE
Stay smart, Morgan. You shaft me for that girl and I'm taking you with me.

Abraham stands up off the wall.

ABRAHAM
Good work, Morgan.

MORGAN
Thank you, Captain.

ABRAHAM
Meet me in my office in about ten?

MORGAN
Yes, sir.

Abraham watches him a moment. Then cracks a door on his left. Donovan looks up from his stance by the window.

DONOVAN
How'd I do?

ABRAHAM
Damn near verbatim.

Donovan nods.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)
Gimme a minute.

Abraham shuts the door. Walks across the hall to another door.

INT. SPORTS BAR - BACK ROOM

A PETITE WAITRESS puts a drink in front of Donovan and scurries back out. Nearly running into Derrick, on his way in.

DERRICK
(to waitress)
Bring me one a those.
(to Donovan)
'Sup D-man?

DONOVAN
(re: waitress)
Still the gentleman.

Derrick pops in a toothpick.

DERRICK
When's this poppin' off?

DONOVAN
Shortly.

DERRICK
Say it with cash.

Ray walks in from the private bathroom. Takes a seat.

RAY
You mind not saying things like
that while I'm in the room? I have
enough to close my ears to.

DERRICK
Aaight. What's the word on ole' girl?

The door opens. Connie waltzes in.

CONNIE
Ole' girl?

Derrick tosses her an irritated look.

DERRICK
 (to no one in particular)
 Ya'll some eavesdropping
 muthafuckers.

RAY
 Let's get this done, everyone.

He pulls a document from his briefcase. Lays it on the table in full view of the three. Brandon's signature is at the bottom. A notary seal beside it.

RAY (cont'd)
 These papers legally transfer
 Brandon's newly acquired shares to
 Connie. They're pre-dated to the
 day after his acquisition. That
 should head off any red flags.

DERRICK
 When do I get paid?

Ray slides the top document over to reveal stock transfer papers. He puts them in front of Connie.

RAY
 As soon as Connie signs over two-
 thirds of the stock to you and
 Donovan. You can cash in your share or-

DONOVAN
 Go legit.

DERRICK
 Shi-i-i-t.

RAY
 Right. Well, that's up to you. With
 Connie regaining control over the
 share she'd granted Brandon proxy,
 this document would give you two...

He looks between Connie and Donovan.

RAY (cont'd)
 ...equal ownership.

Donovan hands Connie a pen. Connie takes it. But hesitates. Derrick looks at her like she's crazy.

DERRICK
 Oh, hell naw.

INT. DISTINCTION CORPORATION - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Connie stands at the head of the table. Her voice impassioned. Her face filling our view.

CONNIE

You all know where my heart is.
It's a couple of miles from here.
With those incredible kids who
never get a second look from most
people. And while I don't regret
the time I spent nurturing each and
every one of them, I see now that I
left Distinction with a less-than-
qualified babysitter.

INT. PERFORMANCE REVIEW HEARING ROOM - DAY

Morgan sits opposite a panel of SUITED OFFICIALS. His badge lay on the table in front of them. Captain Abraham gets up from his chair and closes the door in our face.

INT. DISTINCTION CORPORATION - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Connie's eyes burn passionately.

CONNIE

Ladies and gentlemen, Mama's home.

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Abraham walks in with two UNIFORMED OFFICERS. They handcuff a stone-faced Brandon. Usher him out of the room into the...

HALLWAY

Brandon and the officers start down the hallway. The door across the hall opens. Connie steps out. Brandon stops. He smiles a little.

BRANDON

Feeling good, Connie? This where
you wanted me all along?

Connie starts to go back into the room. But then...

BRANDON (cont'd)

Don't even bother divorcing me.
Cause I want a divorce! Hear me? I
divorce you Constance Collier-

Nina walks out of the room behind Connie. Brandon chokes on his rant as. His eyes wide with... hurt? His eyes shift between the two women.

FLASH TO:

INT. BISTRO - REAR SEATING AREA - DAY

Connie and a hostess near a table. Connie locks eyes with the person already seated there. Nina.

FLASH TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EARLIER

The shower runs in the bathroom. Nina looks toward the bathroom door. Swipes a cell phone from Brandon's gym bag.

FLASH TO:

INT. BISTRO - REAR SEATING AREA - DAY

Nina's confused expression struggles to eke out a polite smile to Connie.

NINA

I'm sorry, I... got a message to meet Brandon.

Connie takes a seat. Places a digital memory card on the table between them.

CONNIE

I know. But I wanted the two of us to have a chance to talk. Woman to woman.

FLASH TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EARLIER

Nina has Brandon's phone open. She places a small device inside. Closes it up just as the shower stops. Brandon steps out of the bathroom in a towel. Nina smiles up at him.

NINA

My turn?

FLASH TO:

INT. ATLANTA POLICE PRECINCT - HALLWAY

Brandon's eyes. Nina's eyes. Connie's eyes.

Donovan steps into the hallway behind the women. Brandon's eye narrow to the point of disappearing.

He suddenly struggles against the guards.

BRANDON
 You can't beat me. I'm Brandon
 Collier! Brandon muthufuckin'
 Collier! I'm coming back for you!

The guards drag him in one direction. Donovan and the ladies walk in the other.

INT. DISTINCTION - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A little more of the room comes into view. Our view of the room-long table includes new faces and familiar ones.

CONNIE
 There's room for the heart in
 business. And the new Distinction
 will embody that concept.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Donovan sits in his car. Rene waltzes out of the building. Donovan steps out of the car. Rene sees him. Stops.

INT. DISTINCTION - CONFERENCE ROOM

We see the full room now. Donovan sits at the other end of the table. Derrick is just a couple of chairs away.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Connie signs the stock transfer papers.

RAY
 I've opted to take only my standard
 fee. For which the invoice is in
 the mail. Questions?

Silence.

RAY (cont'd)
 Good. I'll make sure all the
 paperwork is in order from here.

Donovan finishes off his drink and leads Connie out. Ray looks up to find Derrick still lounging.

DERRICK
 That's kinda hot how you made all
 that shit look like Collier signed
 it. With the little *pre-date* shit.
 Even got the little seal thingy.

Ray closes his briefcase. Glances at the closed door.

RAY
 Just doing my job.

DERRICK
 Who'd a thought Simms would leave
 all them shares to a brother he
 didn't even kick it with like that.
 You know?

Ray stops. Looks Derrick in the eye.

RAY
 I try never to answer a question
 that isn't asked.

DERRICK
 Yeah. Me neither.

Ray closes his portfolio as the absentee waitress comes in
 with Derrick's drink. Ray sidles out.

WAITRESS
 (to Derrick)
 Sorry. We were backed up.

Derrick props his feet on the table.

DERRICK
 That's aight, gir-.

He glances at his stock certificate. Considers.

DERRICK (cont'd)
 No problem, Miss.

She smiles and hurries out. Derrick sips his drink.

INT. PRISON - GYM

CONNIE (V.O.)
 Whatever you think of Emery Simms,
 thought of him, or believe about
 him, you wouldn't be in this room
 without his efforts.

Brandon walks in. Heads for the bench press. Hill is just
 finishing. The two men eye each other.

HILL
 Heard they had you over in B House.
 Need a spot?

Brandon lays back. Hill glances at the weight on the bar.

HILL (cont'd)
 How much can you handle?

BRANDON
 Lay it on.

Hill hands him the bar.

HILL

You shoulda seen Simms' face when he went down. Too bad that shit didn't work out for you.

BRANDON

You did what you were supposed to.

Brandon pushes up on the bar. But Hill stops it halfway. Brandon frowns.

HILL

Yeah, I meant to ask you what was up with the rest of my money. Since I 'did what I was suppose to'.

Brandon locks eyes with Hill. Tries to push against the enormous weight of the bar.

BRANDON

I was dealing with pressing matters.

Brandon's left shoulder looks like it'll pop out of socket. Hill pushes down on the bar even more.

HILL

But you got the money now, right?

Brandon sports his best poker face.

BRANDON

Absolutely.

Hill grabs the bar. Relieving Brandon of the pressure. Brandon breathes hard. Reeling. Hill looks down at him.

HILL

All these years. And you still a liar.

Hill raises the bar in the air. Then drops it. Brandon's eyes spring wide as we...

CUT TO BLACK:

CREDITS ROLL... THEN

FADE IN:

INT. BAR - NIGHT - FOUR YEARS AGO

SUPERIMPOSED TITLE: Four Years Ago

Brandon sits at a bar. Watches as someone approaches.

BRANDON
 (to bartender)
 Hey, Jerry. Lemme get a couple of beers.

Reveal Morgan as he takes a seat beside Brandon.

MORGAN
 What's going on?

BRANDON
 The James girl. She's in too deep.
 Thinks she's in love with Emery for
 real. She's straying from the plan.

Morgan thinks on it.

MORGAN
 Take care of it. I know a guy who
 can handle the paperwork. Trust me.

INT. MULTI-LEVEL PARKING GARAGE - LATE NIGHT

Andy's in withdrawal. His bloodshot eyes plead with Brandon's.

ANDY
 Look, I had some problems at work.
 Things are tight. I gotta be able
 to take care of-

BRANDON
 Your family?

Andy belated realizes he's scratching his arm. Stops.

ANDY
 They'd of nailed you with that
 report. I saved you!

BRANDON
 And I paid you. This meeting is a
 breach of contract.

Brandon opens his car door. Retrieves a pair of gloves.
 Slowly dons them as he moves toward Andy.

BRANDON (cont'd)
 You picked a chilly night to meet.
 Aren't you cold, Andy?

FADE OUT.