

CITY ON FIRE

EPISODE 101

We Have Met the Enemy, and He is Us

written by

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based on the novel by
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REVISED DRAFT
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We OPEN on a series of TIGHT SHOTS:

-- METAL SALTS and BLACK POWDER are sifted by SOOT-COVERED HANDS. THESE SAME HANDS knead the POWDER and SALT mixture.

-- CLAY BRIQUETTES are cut into tiny STARS. These STARS are packed in a PAPER SHELL.

-- THE SHELLS are WRAPPED in wet, sticky, pastecoat paper, sealing them tight. A FUSE is attached to each.

-- A DELIVERY TRUCK door SLIDES OPEN. Parked on a loud NYC STREET. Inside, ROWS of BOXES are perfectly lined up.

-- A BLADE slices open a box top. SHELLS are unboxed and sorted.

-- MORTAR LAUNCHING TUBES are set in a garbage bin filled with sand. We follow WIRES from the bins that run to a CONSOLE. There, a GLOVED HAND hits a switch.

Are we about to witness a bomb going off in NYC?

Suddenly, the mortar tubes IGNITE and LAUNCH into the night sky setting off a dazzling FIREWORKS SHOW.

EXT. EAST RIVER, WATERFRONT - NIGHT (4TH OF JULY, 2003)

With the memory of 9/11 still fresh in everyone's mind, people are celebrating with full force. Many wave AMERICAN FLAGS, wear STATUE OF LIBERTY crowns. T-shirts that say "Never Forget," "Ladder Company 3," "I heart NYPD." Everyone united by a defiant sense of patriotism and pride.

The fireworks show EXPLODES over the city, taking us to --

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT (4TH OF JULY, 2003)

MERCER GOODMAN (25, African American) stumbles out onto Central Park West. He's handsome, stylish, wearing a bow tie and seersucker suit pants. But he's covered in blood. Despite the fireworks, his eyes are on another light show --

CHERRY LIGHTS spin. SIRENS wail. POLICE CARS race uptown. Mercer waves them down, panicked --

MERCER
Help! Over here!

IN THE PARK

A teenage boy. CHARLIE WEISBARGER (17, Caucasian), arms hugging himself, shaking with fear. He's got a mohawk of red hair, but there's nothing punk about Charlie right now. He's scared. *His eyes fixed on something we don't see.*

BACK TO MERCER

The POLICE follow him, flashlights crisscrossing the darkened ground. Charlie is gone. The flashlight beams land on --

THE BODY OF A TEENAGE GIRL

She's on her back. Covered by a seersucker suit jacket. A clean BULLET HOLE above her eyebrow.

SAMANTHA "SAM" CICCIO, (17, Caucasian) lays there, arms spread wide. Her eyes try to stay fixed on the fireworks above, before finally closing...

TITLE CARD: **TWO WEEKS EARLIER**

DR. ALTSCHUL (O.S.)
Tell me about the girl.

INT. DR. ALTSCHUL'S OFFICE - DAY (JUNE 2003)

Charlie slumps on a velvet sofa, clutching a throw pillow. He's pre-mohawk, displaying a full head of floppy hair. (His therapist, DR. ALTSCHUL, is always unseen.)

CHARLIE
Well, I never would've become friends with her if it weren't for you. So, in a way, this is all your fault.

DR. ALTSCHUL (O.S.)
Please enlighten me, Charlie.

CHARLIE
If I'm being 100% totally honest here, Dr. Altschul, these weekly sessions aren't exactly my favorite afternoon activity...

EXT. SIXTH AVENUE - DAY (FLASHBACK - FALL 2002)

Charlie, fresh from a therapy session, walks through the West Village.

He approaches SEÑOR WAX, a neighborhood record store. He stops, taking in the flyers, posters, records in the window. THE STROKES, LCD SOUNDSYSTEM, YEAH YEAH YEAHS...

CHARLIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 But the plus side is... I get to drive my mom's car into the city for our appointments. Which means, when we're done here, I'm free to roam...

And then something inside catches his attention --

INT. SEÑOR WAX - DAY (FLASHBACK - FALL 2002)

It's Samantha. She pulls a bulky film camera up to her face, taking photos of ephemera in the store, album covers, grabbing a shot of a jaded SALES CLERK...

CHARLIE (O.S.) We had gone to high school together. Well, not together. She was a year ahead of me, already graduated and started at NYU. We weren't friends or anything, but she was hard to forget.

Suddenly Sam spins, zooming right in on --

Charlie. Watching from the safety of the JAZZ section. He's caught like a deer in headlights. She snaps his photo. Sam lowers the camera, observes him.

SAM
 I know you. How do I know you?

She moves in towards Charlie. His back is against a wall of records -- nowhere to run.

CHARLIE
 Uh, we both went to Flower Hill High. Well, I still do. Charles Weisbarger. Uh, Charlie.

Sam nods, at least pretending to remember.

SAM
 Well, Charles -- what are you doing all the way out here?

Charlie shrugs, trying to look casual.

CHARLIE

What is anyone doing here? Getting
the hell off Long Island.

Sam relaxes, smiles.

SAM

That is the right answer.

EXT. WEST VILLAGE - DAY (FLASHBACK - FALL 2002)

Sam and Charlie share a bench. Charlie highly aware of the
proximity of their bodies, her knee grazing his.

SAM

So... what's wrong with you?
(off Charlie)
Your doctor's appointment?

CHARLIE

Oh. It's not that kind of doctor.

SAM

No shit. If you're coming into the
city solo, it must be a shrink.
Your folks splitting up? That's
when I had my first brush with a
mental health professional. I
started acting out. Stole a car,
crashed it. In my defense, I was
eleven.

Charlie smiles. Realizes Sam's still waiting for his answer.

CHARLIE

My dad died. Last September.

Sam's eyes widen, understanding the significance of the date
and full of sympathy. But Charlie doesn't meet her gaze,
doesn't want to talk about it. She moves on.

SAM

You want to see my 'zine?

CHARLIE

What's a 'zine?

SAM

Can't say I'm surprised. Everyone's
in such a rush to embrace the
digital revolution -- the pleasures
of analogue, of the tactile, are in
jeopardy of vanishing.

Sam fishes a copy of her 'zine-in-progress from her bag. One part graphic novel, one part memoir, a collage of photos, drawings and text. Titled "Land of a Thousand Dances."

SAM (CONT'D)

These guys I know are in a band and I'm trying to document their whole scene. But they're weird about photos and privacy. So this is all thinly veiled. Names changed to protect the guilty...

Flipping through the pages, Charlie is blown away.

CHARLIE

This is... amazing.

Sam studies him, making a decision: Charlie is a lost soul in need of saving.

SAM

Us Flower Hill kids need to stick together. From now on, Charles, you are going to be my project.

Charlie looks up; this is the best news he's heard in a while. Maybe ever.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

I met up with her every week after I left here with you. And I guess you can say that's when my real education began.

A BLAST OF FUZZED OUT GUITAR as a song begins. A song we've never heard before, sung with passion and fury. "City on Fire/One is a Gas/Two is a Match/And we too are a City on Fire..." The song plays over:

A MONTAGE OF CHARLIE AND SAM hanging out in the city:

In ALPHABET CITY, Charlie watches Sam snap photos of GRAFFITI ART and HOMELESS KIDS. On the GREAT LAWN, they lie on their backs on a pile of leaves, sharing a joint... At a VILLAGE THRIFT STORE, Sam approves Charlie's new Lou Reed Transformer t-shirt and skinny jeans...

INT. SEÑOR WAX - DAY (FLASHBACK - FALL 2002)

Back at the record store where they first met. Sam oversees Charlie at a LISTENING STATION. He's wearing headphones, body bouncing to the record we've been hearing.

CHARLIE
IT'S REALLY GOOD!

Sam yanks the headphones off of him, both so he will stop yelling and also listen to her.

SAM
Really good? Ex Post Facto are brilliant!

Sam waves their album Brass Tactics at Charlie.

SAM (CONT'D)
Brass Tactics is the only record they made before Billy Three Sticks broke up the band. Before they ever had a chance to get big. You have to appreciate the integrity. And in a weird way, only making one record makes it even more special. You must own it.

CHARLIE
I don't have any money. I could probably download it off Limewire?

SAM
Listen to me, Charles. The collection and curation of physical objects cannot become a lost art. I'm buying.

She slides the headphones back over his ears, and cranks up the volume. His eyes scan the Ex Post Facto album cover in her hand... while also stealing furtive glances at her. From this moment on, this will be his favorite song.

INT. DR. ALTSCHUL'S OFFICE - BACK TO SCENE

DR. ALTSCHUL (O.S.)
That sounds like a wonderful way to spend autumn in New York.

CHARLIE
It was. Until it wasn't. Though I guess I've got no one to blame for that but me. Well, my mom. Obviously.

DR. ALTSCHUL (O.S.)
 Didn't you tell me you stayed out
 all night, then drove home in the
 morning, shirtless and vomiting
 from a hangover?

CHARLIE
 (sheepish)
 I didn't say it in those words. But
 yeah. New Year's Eve... Shit
 happens.

DR. ALTSCHUL (O.S.)
 And do you think your mother's
 decision to ground you for six
 months was unreasonable?

CHARLIE
 This isn't about my mom. It's about
 Sam. About how... I love her. And I
 think she loves me. But before I
 could totally sort it all out, I
 wasn't allowed to see her anymore.

He looks up. We see how desperate he is, how totally lost.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 My story just... stopped. But hers
 didn't. And now, even if I'm not
 grounded anymore, I don't see how I
 can ever catch up to her. She's
 just... moved on.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANGELIKA THEATER - DAY (JUNE 2003)

Sam exits a matinee of *Capturing the Friedmans* on the arm of
 KEITH LAMPLIGHTER (40, Caucasian). He's average in all the
 ways that count -- intellect, morality, grit -- but his
 handsome All-Americanness keeps you from noticing. Sam's in a
 sundress, NYU sweatshirt draped over her shoulders.

KEITH
 That was the most depressing shit
 I've ever seen. They should sell
 razor blades with the popcorn.
 Thought you said this movie was
 about clowns?

SAM
 Pretty sure I didn't say that.
 (smiles)
 (MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

I know it's a tough pivot from a documentary about incest to making out with me, but here goes --

She kisses him. It starts to grow. Keith, self-conscious about their public display of affection, pulls back.

SAM (CONT'D)

We should get a room.

KEITH

I cannot go to your dorm room again.

SAM

Uh-uh. Today I want to go to a hotel. With a big bathtub. And room service. Maybe a view. Where we can take our time. Not have to rush. Nice and slow...

Sam leans back in. Not that Keith needs anymore convincing.

KEITH

Sold. But that's going to require more cash than I have on me. And I left my wallet at home.

SAM

Then let's go get it.

INT./EXT. TAXI - LATER

Sam looks out the window at the beautiful UPPER EAST SIDE STREET, lined by stone buildings and immaculate boxwoods. They pull up to Keith's apartment building.

KEITH

Wait in the car.

Keith climbs out. But a moment after he exits, she tosses a few dollars at the cabbie and bolts after him.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Sam rushes into the LOBBY, quickly passing the DOORMAN --

SAM

HeyhiI'mwithhim!

She jumps on the elevator just as it closes.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT BUILDING - ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

They ride up together. Keith doesn't look at her.

KEITH

Not cool.

SAM

I just want to see where you live.
No one's home, right?

She slips her hand into his and we now notice, if we haven't already, that he's wearing a wedding ring.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Inside the vestibule, he parks her at the FRONT DOOR.

KEITH

Now you see it. Happy? Stay here.

As he moves inside to hunt for his wallet, Sam's eyes take in the evidence of his domestic life. The small sneakers -- a boy's and a girl's -- tossed in a basket, slippers that certainly belong to his wife. Now Sam has to see more...

IN THE LIVING ROOM

She takes in the framed photos of a life well-lived. Keith in sporty situations, his BEAUTIFUL WIFE (she is genuinely stunning) and TWO KIDS, summers at the shore.

KEITH

What the hell did I tell you?

SAM

What are you going to do? Punish me?

She falls down onto the couch, smiles. He is not smiling.

KEITH

This is my home where I live with my wife.

SAM

Obviously.

KEITH

And you don't find anything awkward about that?

SAM

I don't want to take anything away from you. Or your wife. When we're done -- which, at some point, we will be -- it'll be like we never happened. She won't know what you did. Who you did it with. Or where. The only one who will get hurt is me.

KEITH

That's kinda fucked up.

SAM

Yeah. But not your problem.

Sam grabs him, pulls him onto the couch. Things build quickly. She undoes his pants, straddles him. But... she looks down at his crotch, then back at him, thrown.

KEITH

Sorry. I... it's just weird here.

He gently pushes her off him. Sam nods, cheeks flushed, suddenly ashamed. As Keith zips his pants, Sam thinks she hears a floorboard CREAK. Her eyes dart to the hall. But no one is there. Sam rises, smoothing herself.

SAM

Think I'll go now.

AN UNSEEN POV watches Sam exit. REVEAL:

IN A DOORWAY, WILL (Keith's 12 year old son, well bred handsome, in a private school uniform) watches. Taking it all in. Keith rises, heading down the hallway --

Will ducks into his ROOM and hides as his father passes. He is unseen, but shaking with confusion and anger.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

A childhood room (baseball theme, framed Bar Mitzvah photo) with a layer of memories from the fall of Sam (copies of her 'zine, photos she took in the record store, a small vinyl collection including *Brass Tactics* by Ex Post Facto).

Charlie is in front of his mirror, shaving his head, giving himself the mohawk we saw in the opening.

DR. ALTSCHUL'S VOICE

It's encouraging, Charlie, that you're able to speak so clearly about your sense of loss. I just wish you would talk about the loss of your father in the same perceptive way...

With grim satisfaction, Charlie watches as clumps of his hair hit the ground. Hanging off his mirror is a baseball hat from the 1998 Cantor Fitzgerald golf tournament, adorned by an "Always In Our Memory" Twin Towers pin.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - ATTIC - DAY

Mohawk complete, Charlie opens the attic window.

DR. ALTSCHUL'S VOICE Do

you think it's possible that focusing on Samantha is a way of deflecting your feelings about your dad? It's easier to feel what you're feeling about a vibrant young girl living a few miles away than it is to process the deep, permanent loss of your father...

Charlie climbs out on the windowsill. Glances down at the long fall into the yard below. The view is VERTIGINOUS. Charlie's heart races. He squeezes his eyes shut.

As he wills his feet closer to the edge, battling a pretty intense fear of heights, it becomes clear that Charlie is here to commit suicide. Tears roll down his cheeks.

CHARLIE'S VOICE

Trust me, Doc. There is nothing easy about it.

He only needs to heave himself over the side and it will all be over. All his suffering will cease. One, two, three --

Suddenly, his flip phone starts RINGING.

This gives him pause. He slowly opens his eyes. Fishes the phone from his pocket. Squatting in the window, he answers.

CHARLIE

Hello...?

And then he hears a voice, quiet, almost apologetic.

SAM (O.S.)
 Hey stranger. You still grounded?

EXT. STOREFRONT CHURCH (THE BRONX) - INTERCUT

Sam sits alone, her camera around her neck.

SAM
 The answer better be no 'cause Ex
 Post Facto -- who I hope even in my
 absence is still your favorite band
 -- is reuniting for a show on the
 4th. I mean, it's not a total
 reunion. Not really the band
 without Billy Three Sticks. And
 they've changed the name. But
 they're doing all the songs and
 it's going to be epic. You would
 pretty much kill yourself if you
 missed it.

Charlie, will to live restored by the sound of her voice,
 tries to find his own. Overwhelmed with gratitude.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Hello? Charles? Are you in?

CHARLIE
 Yeah. Yes. Wouldn't miss it.

SAM
 That's what I like to hear. Details
 to follow.

She hangs up. Relieved, Charlie attempts to make his way back
 inside. But his foot slips, breaking a shingle off the roof.
 It falls, shattering on the ground below.

Charlie, knowing how close he was to sharing the same fate,
 pulls himself back into the window.

BACK WITH SAM

She pockets her phone when SEWER GIRL (20s, curvy, wearing an
 oversized Rangers Jersey like a dress) comes running out from
 behind the church.

SEWER GIRL
 Sam! Let's go!

Samantha looks up as Sewer Girl barrels past, heading for the
 street as A WHITE VAN comes screeching around the corner.

Then Sam looks back to the church. Where smoke starts to billow out a window.

SAM

Holy shit. You guys set a church on fire?

SEWER GIRL

What did you think we were doing?

At the curb, the white van stops and the panel door is slammed open by SOLOMON GRUNGY (20s, inhumanly large, tattooed).

SOL

Now ladies!

Sam hurries to the van, but not before SNAPPING a PHOTO of the church as FLAMES start to lick the windows. Fresh graffiti adorns a wall -- a CROWN WITH THREE POINTS, as if Basquiat's SAMO took a whack at the Burger King logo.

INT. WENCESLAS-MOCKINGBIRD SCHOOL - CHAPEL - DAY

It's the Lower School Stepping Up Ceremony, first grade currently gathered on stage. Proud, perfectly put-together parents beam at their children.

Keith sits with his wife REGAN HAMILTON-SWEENEY-LAMPLIGHTER (40, Caucasian). Will (last seen hiding in his room) looks back and forth between his parents suspiciously.

Regan has an air of sophistication that only comes with experience... or family money. Her eyes are wet with tears as she watches her daughter CATE (6) and her class sing the school hymn.

Regan sweetly touches Keith's arm. Reveal: *he's crying too.*

ANGLE ON

Sitting with the faculty is Mercer Goodman (whom we briefly met, blood-covered, in the opening). He wears a corduroy blazer and patterned tie, tortoise-shell glasses. Scholarly, stylish, intentionally non-threatening.

He's the youngest teacher on staff, one of the few who's not white. Trying not to look bored, his gaze drifts down to the program in his hands and lands on one particular first-grade name: **CATE HAMILTON-SWEENEY-LAMPLIGHTER**. As he looks up, suddenly intrigued --

LATER

Keith holds a sleepy Cate as Regan wrangles Will into his sport coat and shepherds them all toward the door.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Mercer makes his way to MARGOT (late 20s), a first-grade teacher, who's talking to a PARENT. Mercer has a soft, Southern accent.

MERCER

Margot, is Cate Hamilton-Sweeney-Lamplighter in your class?
 (off her distracted nod)
 Her mother here? Can you point her out?

MARGOT

She's right over there --

But the family has just slipped out.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Well, she was.

She shrugs, but Mercer can't hide his disappointment at the missed connection. Margot narrows her eyes at him.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Why are you asking?

MERCER

I think I know her brother.

This gets an eyebrow.

MARGOT

You know a Hamilton-Sweeney?

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Regan opens the mail, separating bills from junk mail on top of the grand piano, while Keith leafs through a *New York Review of Books*, drink in hand. She teases him --

REGAN

Why do you pretend to read that?
 Whenever I try to talk to you about any of the books, you have no idea.

KEITH

I like knowing what I don't know.
It's reassuring.

(then)

Did Will seem off to you tonight?

REGAN

He's been like that for a while.
Could just be puberty.

KEITH

He used to love the last day of
school.

Keith rises from his chair, pours himself another scotch.

REGAN

He used to love a lot of things.
Baseball cards, *Pokémon*, his
parents.

KEITH

Maybe he got a girlfriend..?

Regan doesn't answer, her eyes pinned on AN ENVELOPE in her hands. Addressed to her, with no postmark or address. She glances at Keith, pulse racing.

PRE-LAP: A DOOR LOCKING.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT - MASTER BATH - MOMENTS LATER

As if anticipating that she might be about to cry, Regan turns on the faucet before perching on the edge of the tub. She uses her index finger as a letter opener and reacts to what she finds inside.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT - MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

The lights are out. Regan and Keith lie in bed, Regan wide awake. Staring at the ceiling.

REGAN

So. Are we going to discuss it?

KEITH

It..?

REGAN

How you've been lying to me.

KEITH
Lying..?

REGAN
You heard me.

He sits up, turns on the lamp next to his bed, and attempts to project confusion.

KEITH
What have I been lying to you about, Regan?

REGAN
Please. The window where you could bullshit your way out of this has closed.
(then)
She wrote me a note.

Regan reaches over to her bedside table and passes him a folded piece of loose-leaf paper.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Not that I didn't already suspect.

She fixes him with her gaze. He panics. And does what he's always done when he's caught: blame someone else.

KEITH
Fine. But are we going to pretend this is all my fault?

Regan looks at him for a long beat, then covers her face with a pillow and starts to SOB. Keith doesn't look up. He just reads the note over and over again, the five typed words that have ended his marriage:

he is lying to you

INT. WENCESLAS-MOCKINGBIRD SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Mercer packs up his desk for the summer break. There's a KNOCK at the door and he looks up to see Regan entering.

REGAN
Mr. Goodman? I'm sorry for showing up without an appointment. I'm Regan Hamilton-Sweeney-Lamplighter.

She's dressed impeccably but her eyes are red-rimmed.

REGAN (CONT'D)

I was dropping off a gift for my daughter's teacher and she mentioned you were looking for me?

Despite her warmth, Mercer stiffens, self-conscious of his battered leather satchel and his canvas Ralph Lauren lace-ups which are caked with last spring's sidewalk salt.

MERCER

What? No, there must've been some kind of a mix-up --

REGAN

I think you might know my brother William. I'm actually hoping that you might.

She looks at him meaningfully. Even desperately. Longing to be right about this. Mercer opens up.

MERCER

Why yes, William is a friend. A good friend. Although maybe not that good, since I didn't know he had a sister.

REGAN

We haven't spoken in years. I didn't know if he was still in the city or even...

She trails off. Then just says --

REGAN (CONT'D)

I'm relieved.

Mercer screws up his courage to inquire --

MERCER

Would you like to go somewhere we can talk? With comfortable chairs and hot coffee, or possibly something stronger.

REGAN

I'd love that more than you know. But I've got to get home. I'm meeting movers at my house.

MERCER

Moving is always the worst.

REGAN
Especially when it's unplanned.

MERCER
Everything okay, I hope?

REGAN
Everything is shit, thanks for asking. You're very sweet.
(then, curious)
How long have you lived here, Mr. Goodman?

MERCER
Mercer, please. Came here last summer, from Altana, Georgia.

REGAN
Atlanta's a great city! The food --

MERCER
Al-tana.
(off her, embarrassed)
It's okay. Everyone does that. I should stop correcting folks and just go with it...

REGAN
Not at all. My mistake.

She smiles, apologetic, then reaches into her Chanel bag and pulls out an ENVELOPE. Creamy card stock, addressed in calligraphy to **William Hamilton-Sweeney III**.

REGAN (CONT'D)
If you see William before the 4th, please give him this. And tell him I really need him there this year.
(then)
Love for you to join us. It's been a pleasure meeting you, Mercer.

She holds his hand a beat as she shakes it.

REGAN (CONT'D)
I'm glad William's got someone.

And before he can decide whether to pretend he doesn't know what she's getting at, or to acknowledge that he does, she's disappeared out the door.

CUT TO:

TIGHT ON: A LARGE BOX, wrapped in paper that's been beautifully hand-illustrated, intricate drawings that bring to mind Warhol's early work. We're --

INT. MERCER AND WILLIAM'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Mercer holds the box in his hands, eyes filled with childlike wonder.

MAN (O.S.)
Happy Birthday.

Mercer looks up to see WILLIAM HAMILTON-SWEENEY (early 30s, Caucasian) emerging with a smile from the cramped sleeping area. He's got the same aristocratic features as Regan, but the long, wild hair and tattooed torso are definitely south of 14th Street.

MERCER
These illustrations are beautiful.
(then, realizing)
Is this... us?

WILLIAM
Our courtship. If you can call it that. My art show... our weekend at Bruno's cabin. All those nights we sat up on the roof...

Mercer is speechless.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Hey, there's gotta be some upside to living with a temperamental artist.

He stretches and scoops a cat, EARTHA KITTY, into his arms.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
But open it. There's an actual present inside.

Mercer undoes the tape, careful to not rip the paper as he reveals a boxed, BLUE iMAC. He smiles. Overwhelmed.

MERCER
Thank you, truly. You didn't have to get me something so extravagant.

WILLIAM
As an investment in your future, it came cheap.

He hugs Mercer tight, taking his face in his hands and kissing him. Then he breaks away and pulls on his jeans.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go out for a bit...

MERCER

On my birthday?

WILLIAM

Just to the studio. I'll be home for dinner. You can set up your new computer.

He steps into Gesso-covered army boots, starts to root around in a drawer. UNSEEN BY MERCER, William finds a beat-up LEATHER SUNGLASSES CASE and slips it into a pocket.

Mercer follows him to the door. William grabs a straw hat then stops --

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Please don't look at me like that.

MERCER

I'm not looking at you any particular way. It's just... this is my first birthday away from home.

WILLIAM

As you've mentioned. A couple of times.

(then)

Look, I'm sorry if today is falling short of whatever was in your head. But does it strike you as revealing that you still refer to Georgia as "home"?

MERCER

Home, as in where I came from. At least I talk about it.

William's tone shifts from placating to annoyed.

WILLIAM

Tell me this isn't about that envelope you keep shoving into my field of vision?

Okay, since he brought it up --

MERCER

Well are you ever going to open it?
It's from your family.

WILLIAM

What I want to know is how it got
into our apartment.

MERCER

And what I want to know is why you
don't talk to them. They're --

WILLIAM

(cuts him off, sharp)
Rich?

MERCER

I was going to say "nice." At least
your sister is.

William doesn't even ask how he knows.

WILLIAM

I'm going out. We're grown men,
Mercer. Birthdays are a little
ridiculous at our age.

And with that, the door SLAMS.

TITLE CARD: **4TH OF JULY**

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The place has been cleared out of its nicest furniture. All
traces of Regan and the kids are gone.

Keith, unshaven and likely hungover, answers his RINGING
CELL.

KEITH

Hey. I was hoping you'd call. That
you might be ready to talk --

INT. REGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - INTERCUT

Regan's in a robe, on her CELL. She has her make-up done,
hair in perfect loose curls. She stares out the front window
of a majestic Brooklyn Heights brownstone, surrounded by
partially-unpacked boxes.

REGAN

Stop. I'm just checking what time you're coming to my Dad's tonight.

KEITH

You still want me to go?

REGAN

I mean, why wouldn't you? It's a big deal; we go every year. And you were invited.

Keith smiles as he exits the apartment and heads for --

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT BUILDING - ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

KEITH

Oh shit Reggie, you haven't told them yet.

She's busted. But plays it off. Sits on the bottom step of the staircase.

REGAN

I felt like it should be in person. And Dad's been in Minneapolis at the Clinic. I didn't want to bother him.

KEITH

Or? You're still hoping we can work it out.

REGAN

You are in deep denial. Or outright delusional.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Keith nods as he heads past the DOORMAN, who puts down the box of chocolates he's been sampling to get the door for him.

KEITH

Maybe I'm an optimist.

REGAN

Keith, we are over.

EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Keith exits and walks down the street.

KEITH

But we don't have to be. I'm sorry
I fucked up.

Regan glances upstairs and moves off as she lowers her voice.

REGAN

Which time? When you had an affair?
Or when you blamed me for it?

INT. REGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

She pulls two heavy pocket doors closed behind her --

REGAN

If you'd ever been in therapy, or
read a self-help book, or even
Googled "why am I such an asshole?"
you'd understand why we are done.

KEITH

I did a terrible thing. And when
you found out, I panicked. But I
want to do better. I love you. I
love our kids --

REGAN

Keith, tonight I am going to tell
my father that I am ending my
marriage. You are welcome to be a
part of that conversation. I'm not
looking to go behind your back or
hurt you professionally. I know how
much Dad and Amory help you with
work...

KEITH

You mean you won't tell him
about..?

REGAN

No. I'll keep it simple. Fourteen
good years, co-parenting, both
adults, etcetera, etcetera.

KEITH

He won't believe you. He knows the
only reason you'd destroy our
family is if I cheated on you.

REGAN

You destroyed our family. And I
can't control what he believes.

(MORE)

REGAN (CONT'D)
 (off his silence)
 Will I see you there or not?

KEITH
 Yeah... I'll be there...

REGAN
 Thank you.

Just then, a car horn BLARES as a CYCLIST runs a light in front of Keith.

REGAN (CONT'D)
 You okay? Where are you?

KEITH
 I'm fine. That wasn't me. I'm by Serendipity, heading to Gristedes since you took all my food, toothpaste and toilet paper.

REGAN
 If you're at Serendipity, you've gone the wrong way. Gristedes is North.

KEITH
 I think I know where Gristedes is.

He looks around. *Fuck*. She's right. Regan is always right.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 I gotta go.

He ends the call. And starts walking the other way.

EXT. SAMANTHA'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - EVENING

Samantha stands outside a LARGE WORKSHOP at the back of the property, nervous in a hoodie and sneakers. The Cicciaros live on the edge of town, in a clapboard bungalow on a big, unkempt lot.

She glances back toward the door.

SAM
 Hurry up! You've been in there way too --

Suddenly Solomon Grungy barrels out in his Rangers jersey, swinging a large DUFFLE BAG filled with something really heavy. Sam's eyes widen, panicking --

SAM (CONT'D)

You filled that thing? You said my dad would never notice --

SOL

He won't! Plus you said he doesn't even work much anymore, so it's not like he needs it. Guy's semi-retired. It's a victimless crime.

(grinning)

Don't worry about it, Sam. I was never here.

He starts to hike toward the road. Sam doesn't follow. She watches him, suddenly gripped by a rising panic...

INT. GRISTEDES - EVENING

Keith stands in line with his sad cart of bachelor supplies. He waits for an addled OLD MAN to pay using only change. Finally, the FEMALE CASHIER takes the coins from his hand.

As Keith starts to place his items on the counter, his CELL RINGS. He looks at the CALLER ID. Answers, his voice tight.

KEITH

I told you never to call me again.

The cashier looks at him.

INT. WORKSHOP - INTERCUT

Sam's on her cell. Examining the aisles of her father Carmine's workshop. Rows of what look like LITTLE PAPER BOMBS lining the shelves, DRAWERS with Latin names on them concealing reserves of GLITTERY POWDER.

SAM

We need to talk. I'm not pregnant or anything, but it's serious. It has to be in person.

KEITH

Now's not a good time.

The Cashier actually rolls her eyes at this. So does the woman behind him in line. He's suddenly aware that he's the only man in sight.

SAM

Later. Tonight.

KEITH

Tonight I have to go to a party at my father-in-law's where he'll undoubtedly discover that I cheated on his daughter with a college student.

He looks at the Cashier, *yeah you heard me right.*

SAM

Then meet me before the party. Come to Don Hill's at nine. It's a club. Spring and Greenwich.

KEITH

Sam, we have nothing to talk about.

SAM

If you don't come to me, I'll have to come to you. You showed me the building once, when we went to The Natural History Museum.

KEITH

Please don't. Haven't you done enough to ruin my life?

SAM

I already told you I didn't send that note to your wife! But maybe I know who did... There are people who don't want us to be together. I didn't tell you because I didn't understand. But I think I'm starting to, and now I'm worried something really bad is going to happen.

He swipes his credit card and exits with his bag.

EXT. FIRST AVENUE - CONTINUOUS

KEITH

Something bad already happened. What could be worse than blowing up my marriage?

ON SAMANTHA'S SIDE

SAM

Blowing up something else?

But Keith's side of the call is dead.

REVEAL: Samantha has plied the top off A LARGE DRUM OF BLACK POWDER. Looking inside, it's empty. Just dust.

CUT TO:

TIGHT ON an ARM, tied off and being injected with heroin.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL - MEN'S ROOM STALL - EVENING

William's head falls forward with ecstatic relief as he unties his arm.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL - MAIN CONCOURSE - EVENING

Travel is light today so there's no missing Solomon Grungy. His Rangers jersey (last seen on Sewer Girl) and enormous duffle bag don't make him any less conspicuous.

William eases out of the men's room into the terminal, wearing an old leather jacket tagged with **EX POST FACTO** in acrylic paint. He immediately spots Sol, who sees him --

SOL

Billy! Billy fucking Three Sticks!

WILLIAM

Solomon Grungy. Of all the terminals in the world.

(glances at Sol's bag)

You got a body in there? Anyone I know?

Sol falters for a moment.

SOL

Uh. Hockey practice. Only free ice was in Queens.

WILLIAM

On Independence Day? Admire your dedication. Not that I give a shit. How are you? How's Nicky?

SOL

Why is it that every time anyone sees me, they ask how Nicky is?

WILLIAM

It's a pleasantry, Sol. Half-assed, by the way.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Just wondering how you're all
surviving without the band.

SOL
Wait, Nicky hasn't reached out?

WILLIAM
Why would he?

SOL
He booked a gig at Don Hill's.
Tonight. We're getting the band
back together, calling it Ex
Nihilo.

Sol pulls a flyer out of his pocket, hands it to William.

WILLIAM
That's a shitty idea with an even
shittier name.

SOL
Don't knock it til you've tried it.
I'll put you on the list?

WILLIAM
It's July 4th, Sol. I've got plans.
Big plans.

SOL
Cruising the train station?
(then, earnest)
Show up tonight. You might be
surprised.

Sol walks off. William starts to unfold the flyer...

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - CHARLIE'S ROOM - EVENING

IN QUICK CUTS:

-- Hair still wet from the shower, Charlie stands in front of the mirror in his tighty-whities and t-shirt. First he combs his mohawk up, then he combs it down. Down, definitely.

-- He pulls on pajama bottoms over his spindly legs, then puts on his jeans. He poses. Looks good. Jeans tight, legs solid.

-- He selects his Richard Hell t-shirt (always foolproof) and a denim jacket. Then he checks his wallet. Behind the driver's license and student ID, a condom. Standing by, ready for Charlie's big (first) night.

-- He shoves laundry in an overnight bag. Bag over his shoulder, he heads out of his room, hollering down the hallway --

CHARLIE

Bye mom! I'm sleeping at Mickey's house.

CHARLIE'S MOM (O.S.)

Bye, hon!

EXT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Charlie ditches the overnight bag behind the trash bins and grabs his bike. He pedals down the driveway and up the street. A smile spreads across his face.

TIGHT ON:

Mercer's new computer. Set up, turned on. Open Word doc with the heading, "Chapter One." Underneath it, a blinking cursor on a blank page.

INT. MERCER AND WILLIAM'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Mercer sits in front of his computer. Hoping for inspiration to strike. It is not. Mercifully, the phone rings. He eagerly answers it, happy for the distraction.

MERCER

Hello?

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - PAYPHONE - INTERCUT

It's William. DAYDRINKERS and TOURISTS mill in the street, strains of "Proud to Be An American," blasting from cars.

WILLIAM

Hey. So something's come up and I need to see a band tonight. Well, my band. Minus me. And anyone else who fucking matters. Not that Nicky cares.

Mercer doesn't even try to hide his disappointment.

MERCER

I thought we were going to watch the fireworks?

WILLIAM

Come with me. I can't not be there,
Merce. I have to see this travesty
unfold with my own eyes. At least
Nicky was smart enough to change
the name, though it's fucking
awful...

Mercer knows he'll be hopelessly out of place, and that no
matter how hard he tries, they'll end up in a fight.

MERCER

You know, I'm feeling a little
under the weather. Achey. Fluey.
Have you read about SARS? Wouldn't
want to infect anyone.

WILLIAM

You don't have SARS, Mercer.

MERCER

Even a mild flu in a crowded club
seems ill-advised. Alcohol lowers
the immune system.

William decides to let it go.

WILLIAM

Well be good to yourself, Merce.
Drink fluids.

And with that, he hangs up. We STAY with Mercer. He stews for
a moment. Then gets an idea.

QUICK CUTS:

-- Mercer goes to THE RADIATOR and RIPS OPEN the creamy
envelope addressed to William. Inside is an engraved
invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton-Sweeney II's Upper West
Side penthouse. *"Please join us in celebrating Independence
Day. Attire: Summer Whites."*

-- Mercer goes to the closet and flips through his own
selection of tweeds and denim. If it's something in an elbow
patch you're looking for, Mercer's got you covered. But
summer whites not so much. He moves to William's section. An
eclectic mix of vintage. Mercer's hands go to a seersucker
suit.

-- Mercer now wears the suit, ties his own bowtie. Adds a
pocket square. He's a regular dandy. He smiles.

INT. REGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - EVENING

Regan, now dressed in a white linen sundress, enters to find Cate wearing headphones and dancing two Barbies while Will sits in front of the TV, playing *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*.

REGAN

Will, Mrs. Santos is on her way up.
Legally she's in charge but look
out for your sister, okay?

CATE

Guys! Look at the bird --

Outside the window, a large blue bird rests on a branch. It's beautiful, exotic. The three of them take it in for a moment. Then Will turns his attention to Regan.

WILL

Is Dad going to be at the party?

REGAN

That's the plan. Why?

WILL

No reason. Just don't get back
together with him. You can be with
anyone but him. Okay?

Regan tries to hide her surprise.

REGAN

Your dad loves you, Will. None of
this has anything to do with you.

WILL

No shit.
(before she can respond)
Say hi to Grandpa for me.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - PLATFORM - NIGHT

Charlie, now on foot, bounds up the stairs two at a time. He sees Sam, already waiting. Red lipstick and black eyeliner. She gnaws on her thumbnail, distracted.

Charlie hurries down the platform. A little too eager. Sam doesn't notice. She's in her own world.

CHARLIE

Sam!

Sam looks up, smiles. More than anything, Charlie wants to hug her. But he holds back, trying to be cool. He gently punches her in the arm instead.

SAM
Charles. Been a while.

CHARLIE
Yeah. Been keeping busy.

SAM
Thought you said you were grounded.

CHARLIE
(deflates)
Yeah. That too.

Sam assesses his mohawk.

SAM
You've definitely been busy with
your hair.

She runs her hands along the shaved sides of his head.

SAM (CONT'D)
Sorry for any role I played in your
incarceration.

CHARLIE
It's been a period of real growth
and introspection. I'm kidding. It
sucked. You have the tickets?

SAM
For the train?

CHARLIE
For Ex Post Facto.

SAM
It's Ex Nihilo now.

She hands him a crumpled flyer.

SAM (CONT'D)
And it's not the opera, rookie.
There are no tickets.

The sound of the approaching TRAIN as she smiles and says --

SAM (CONT'D)
How have you survived without me?

He jams the flyer into his jeans pocket and smiles back.

INT. TRAIN - MOVING - NIGHT

Sam and Charlie move down the aisle, finding seats. Sam almost sits, then stops herself, motions to alternative seats across the aisle --

SAM

Those ones. You get nauseous if you sit backward.

CHARLIE

What..? That's not, no --
(then, relieved)
But yeah, those are good.

They drop down, sitting thigh to thigh. Charlie fights the urge to put an arm around her. Sam stares out the dark window, lost in introspection.

Charlie tries to keep the conversation alive.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Where's your camera? I mean, surely you're going to document the band's reunion for your 'zine.

SAM

Camera's missing.

CHARLIE

What happened?

SAM

If I knew that, it wouldn't be missing.

CHARLIE

But you lost it? Or someone took it --?

SAM

Jesus Christ, Charlie. I just said I don't know.

Charlie is taken aback.

CHARLIE

Sam, are you okay?

A beat. Sam considers this.

SAM

You know, you're the only one who
ever asks me that.

It doesn't answer his question, but it makes him feel a
little better.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

Sam's bare legs move quickly toward Hudson. Charlie is
sweating as he tries to keep up.

CHARLIE

Hey, hold up. I gotta pee.

SAM

We're kinda on a schedule here.

CHARLIE

I'll be quick.

Sam stops in front of a PIZZERIA. Gestures for him to go.

MOMENTS LATER

Charlie exits, shoving his PJs into his pocket. Sam sees.

SAM

Are those your pajamas?

CHARLIE

(yes)

No. Why would I bring my pajamas?

SAM

Because you wore them under your
jeans to make your legs look a
little more buff. Which they did,
by the way. But then you realized
it doesn't cool off in the city,
even at night, and it was only
gonna get warmer once we were in
the club, so you pretended you had
to pee and took them off.

CHARLIE

(a beat, then)

That is... completely accurate.

Satisfied, Sam turns and keeps walking.

EXT. DON HILL'S - NIGHT

Sam elbows her way to the front of the line with Charlie trying to keep up. He's suddenly worried.

CHARLIE

You know I don't have ID?

SAM

You don't need ID. You're with me.

Sam looks around, increasingly agitated, stops when she gets to BULLET (20s, African American), the beefy and beloved bouncer. Seeing her, he breaks into a smile.

BULLET

Knew we'd be seeing you tonight,
Sammy. Who's the beanpole?

SAM

This is Charlie. He looked less
skinny when he was wearing his
pajamas under his jeans. But don't
worry. He's cool. Metaphorically,
and temperature-wise.

BULLET

Your friends are my friends.

SAM

Was hoping you'd say that.
(then, turning to him)
Charles, if I had to run uptown
would you be okay on your own for
an hour?

Before he can actually answer, she throws her arms around him, kissing his cheek, hoping that this will soften the blow. *It doesn't.*

CHARLIE

What the fuck, Sam? I thought you
wanted to spend tonight with me?

SAM

I do! But there's a problem I have
to deal with and it can't wait.

From inside, the sound of a crowd CHEERING as MUSIC begins.

SAM (CONT'D)

Opening band is starting and
they're supposed to be really good.
(then)

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)
 If I'm not back, come find me.
 There's a bench by the 72nd Street
 C Station. You'll see it.

Sam's already backed away from him, lost in the crowd.
 Charlie glances to Bullet, who swings open the door.

BULLET
 C'mon, Boss. You heard the lady.

As Charlie nervously enters, suddenly very alone --

INT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT

An anxious Regan enters the magisterial lobby of her father's
 Upper West Side building, passing the CONCIERGE.

CONCIERGE
 Evening, Mrs. Lamplighter.

REGAN
 Actually it's Ms. Hamilton-Sweeney.
 Again. Going back to my maiden
 name. Long story...
 (off his look)
 Never mind. I've got my fob.

She hurries to the elevator bank.

INT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY PENTHOUSE - ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER

Regan steps off the private elevator onto a staggering, multi-
 level terrace. Lush foliage, twinkle lights, and MANHATTAN'S
 WEALTHIEST CITIZENS -- all in white -- sipping cocktails and
 sampling the buffet.

Regan smiles at a WAITER and takes a glass of champagne off a
 silver tray. She downs it quickly. Switches her empty glass
 for a full one, gives the WAITER a don't-judge-me look.

Regan's gaze lands on FELICIA GOULD-HAMILTON-SWEENEY (50s,
 elegant, sleeveless dress revealing well-toned arms). Regan's
 step-mother. Felicia is mid-conversation, earnestly pressing
 her hands into the hands of a DIGNITARY.

BACK WITH REGAN

Nerves steeled, and the stem of her champagne flute clutched
 tight, she approaches. Felicia sees her, waves a tiny
 American flag.

FELICIA

Regan, darling. You look wonderful.

REGAN

Yet another fabulous party.
Congratulations Felicia.

FELICIA

Thank you! You know how I love fireworks in the city! My first summer in Manhattan as just a teen I looked up at a rooftop party and said, "Some day that will be me!" Little did I know everyone who mattered was in the Hamptons and it was probably the gardeners up there! But now if you want to matter, you must be here! And everyone one is.

(then, with a wink)

I got Billy Joel this year. P Diddy will be furious!

Regan tips her glass in a "cheers" and gulps it down.

REGAN

Where's Daddy? I want to hear how everything went at the Clinic.

FELICIA

Health-wise, the news was very good. But unfortunately there was a lightning storm in Minneapolis and the G-4 is grounded.

REGAN

(thrown)

So he's not here? And you decided to have the party anyway?

FELICIA

I had no choice! It would have been selfish. Irresponsible. All these people are depending on me!

(then, noticing)

Where's your handsome husband?

REGAN

He's going to be here. I think. But I may as well tell you now... We're separating. Have separated. The kids and I are renting a brownstone in Brooklyn Heights.

Felicia responds without emotion. Only wondering --

FELICIA
Does your father know?

REGAN
I wanted to tell him in person.
Preferably after he received a
clean bill of health.

FELICIA
I'm wondering if this is why your
Uncle Amory is looking for you...

REGAN
I'm not sure how Amory would
know..? I mean, we haven't told
anyone.

FELICIA
You know Amory. He has a way of
finding out everything.

Then she takes Regan's hands in hers, emotional.

FELICIA (CONT'D)
We are very sorry to be losing
Keith from the family. But we must
keep our chins up, mustn't we?
That's our lot in life as women --
to keep our chins up, home and
children cared for, and everyone
marching onward. Men do what men
do. They're incorrigible.

Regan is confused.

REGAN
So you do know?

FELICIA
I know men, Regan.
(done with the exchange)
Fabulous to see you. Go find your
Uncle Amory. He was adamant about
speaking with you tonight.

And she greets some arriving GUESTS. Leaving Regan spinning.

INT. DON HILL'S - NIGHT

QUICK CUTS: Charlie swipes an unattended drink off a ledge
and chokes it down.

He jumps up and down semi-rhythmically to the OPENING BAND. Sweating, he strips down to his T-shirt and knots his jacket around his waist. It quickly falls to the ground. He looks to see if anyone saw, keeps jumping until they finish their final song.

GIRL (O.S.)

I think you're standing on
someone's jacket.

Charlie turns to see the girl in a Rangers jersey whom we know as Sewer Girl.

CHARLIE

Oh, that's mine.

Charlie picks it up out of a puddle of what he can only hope is beer. She looks him in the eye and takes his wrist.

SEWER GIRL

I like how you dance. Like you
don't give a shit.

Charlie's thrown. It's rare for a strange girl to like anything about him. She smiles. Her wrist dangles tantalizingly close to his crotch --

SEWER GIRL (CONT'D) So

are you holding? Because
whatever you're on, I definitely
want some.

Oh... Charlie gets it now. But even if her intention is to use him for drugs, it still pains him to lie and say --

CHARLIE

Uh, sorry. Fresh out.

SEWER GIRL

Bummer. Woulda made it worth your
while. I could probably get you
backstage. My boyfriend's with the
band.

Just then, the LIGHTS DIM and the crowd ROARS to life as NICKY CHAOS (20s) and the rest of EX NIHILO -- a four piece with ragtag Gogol Bordello vibes -- takes the stage.

INT. REGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

MRS. SANTOS (50s, Latina) is asleep in front of the TV, *Dolly Parton performing on A Capital Fourth*. Cate is also conked out.

Will takes a cautious look back as he slips out of the room.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

Will kneels over his backpack. Before he zips it closed, we see the metallic glint of a gun inside. Then Will slips the bag over his shoulders and silently exits the house.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK WEST - NIGHT

Keith *in his summer whites* steps out of a cab. He glances up to the Hamilton-Sweeney high rise, dreading what awaits him. Then something catches his eye across the street. It's Sam.

She's waiting on a bus bench, watching the front door of the building. *Fuck*. A BUS approaches and stops, blocks him from view.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK WEST - BUS STOP - SAME

Mercer Goodman, looking sharp in William's seersucker, steps off the bus. He smiles at Sam and steps aside so she can board, but she doesn't move.

MERCER

Apologies. I thought you were waiting.

SAM

I am waiting. Just not for a bus.
(then)
Actually not sure what I'm waiting for...

MERCER

A sign, maybe? That's what I'm always waiting for.
(off Sam's smile)
Why don't I be yours and you be mine? Let us both be reassured that we are exactly where we're supposed to be.

Sam nods, a pact made.

SAM

I'll keep my butt stuck to this bench.

MERCER

And I will cross the street into an
unknown world.

Mercer hesitates, trying to get himself psyched.

MERCER (CONT'D)

Why is it I never feel lonelier
than right before I enter a crowded
party?

(then, determined)

You only live once...

SAM

Once is enough if you do it right.

And with a shared, hopeful look, the two strangers part. As
she glances back across the street -- it's empty.

ANGLE ON KEITH

He's cut across the street, heading into the Park.

EXT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Regan moves through the party, smiling fuzzily at WELL-
WISHERS. A SOCIETY MATRON and her HUSBAND recognize her --

MATRON

Regan, dear! You look amazing. Have
you been to a spa?

HUSBAND

How's Keith? Love that guy.

REGAN

He's terrible. We're separating --

Before they can respond, she's darted off to the elevator.

INT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY PENTHOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Despite a small army of COOKS and CATERERS swirling around,
Regan feels safe here. As soon as the Dutch door swings shut
behind her, she visibly relaxes. Then she sees Mercer sitting
alone at a kitchen table.

REGAN

Mr. Goodman, is that you?

Regan moves to him, smile breaking across her face.

REGAN (CONT'D)

I can't believe you got him to come. Where is he? Where's William?

MERCER

I'm embarrassed to say I'm here alone. I tried, but...

REGAN

And you're hiding down here?

MERCER

Respectfully, so are you.

(he smiles shyly)

My attempt to mix and mingle in William's world has been soundly defeated. Wasn't here ten minutes before a guest handed me a used skewer and a crumpled napkin, mistaking me for a waiter.

REGAN

(making light)

At least you get a funny story to tell when you go back to your other life. Unfortunately, this is my other life.

MERCER

Am I supposed to feel bad for you?

REGAN

Sorry. That was completely tone-deaf. I'm drunk. But currently drinkless, so --

(grabs a bottle)

Join me?

MERCER

You don't need that.

REGAN

True. But there are so many things I do need that I can't have, and this is right here...

She picks up a knife and starts to slice at the label.

MERCER

Let me --

REGAN

I'm fine --

But she isn't.

MERCER

Uh -- Regan --?

And Regan looks down at her hand, alarmed to see a deep cut and blood pouring out --

PRE-LAP: *"City on fire/City on fire/One is a gas, two is a match/and we too are a City on Fire!"*

INT. DON HILL'S - NIGHT

The crowd CHEERS. The band stomps off stage with an EXPLOSION OF PYROTECHNICS. Smoke hangs in the air as we find Charlie sweaty, amped up. He grabs another half-empty drink before catching up with Sewer Girl.

CHARLIE

That was incredible!

SEWER GIRL

(smiling at the BOUNCER)

Cool if my friend comes too?

INT. DON HILL'S - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Nicky Chaos's mustache (Ironic? Unironic? Who can say with Nicky...) drips with sweat as he uses his shirt to wipe himself down. Noticeably, he has a LARGE CROWN TATTOO across his chest. (The crown matches the graffiti by the church.)

He collapses into a snot-green couch just as Sewer Girl enters and SQUEALS.

SEWER GIRL

Holy shit Nicky that was intense!
You guys were sooo good. Like Billy wishes he was ever that good --

She throws herself onto the couch, settling her head in his lap.

NICKY

You never saw Billy live. But I'll take the praise. We killed it and fuck everyone who said we were nothing without the original band. Fuck Billy. Fuck Venus. Fuck Nastanovich --

SEWER GIRL

Nasty died, Nick. Don't fuck him.

She crosses herself. He laughs and slides his hand up her shirt. Then he sees Charlie, staring from the doorway.

NICKY

You gonna say something kid, or you just gonna watch?

CHARLIE

Which do you want me to do?

Charlie didn't mean to sound like a smart ass, but that's how it comes out. Nicky just smiles --

NICKY

I love this dude. Someone get his skinny ass a beer.

And sure enough, a cold beer gets put in Charlie's hand by a TATTOOED ACOLYTE in hockey pants. He drinks thirstily.

NICKY (CONT'D)

(to Sewer Girl)

So how do you know our young friend here?

SEWER GIRL

We just met --

DELIRIUM TREMENS (aka DT, 20s, Black, Ex Nihilo's green-haired guitarist) enters from the back --

DELIRIUM TREMENS

Sewer Girl is always making new friends.

(then, to Charlie)

Just watch out for her boyfriend. He's got a jealous streak and a metal plate in his jaw.

CHARLIE

(to Nicky)

What happened to your jaw?

SEWER GIRL

(laughing)

Nicky? He's not my boyfriend.

VOICE (O.S.)

I am.

Charlie spins to see Solomon Grungy entering. Sewer Girl stays in Nicky's lap as he continues to park his hand under her shirt. Charlie processes the disconnect. Guess life is good when you're Nicky Chaos...

SOL

I could barely hear DT on "Brass Tactics." Need to tweak the board before the second set.

(then)

Who the fuck is this skinny kid drinking all the beer?

NICKY

This is --?

He looks at Sewer Girl. She doesn't know.

CHARLIE

Charlie. Uh, hi.

Sol squints at him.

SOL

I've seen you before. New Year's Eve. You're Sam's friend.

CHARLIE

That night is kind of a blur, but yeah... could be.

Sewer Girl sits up, suddenly miffed.

SEWER GIRL

You didn't say you knew Sam.

CHARLIE

You didn't ask. We're basically best friends.

NICKY

(interested)

Sammy here?

CHARLIE

Was. But she said she had to do something uptown. Do you know where the 72nd Street C Station is? I'm supposed to meet her there.

SOL

It's on 72nd Street. I'm gonna hit that board. SG, come with.

She rises and he reaches around and stuffs his beefy hand in her waistband. She shrugs at Charlie as they head back into the club. Charlie's ready to disappear, but Nicky rises --

NICKY

Come on, Charlie-man.

And he motions for Charlie to follow him deeper backstage.

INT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY PENTHOUSE - REGAN'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Regan runs cold water on her hand in the sink. Mercer searches through drawers --

MERCER

I don't think you need stitches,
but some antiseptic, a Band Aid --

REGAN

You won't find any of that in here.
In fact, don't expect to find
anything under the surface. It's
staged. Like a play. I haven't
slept here since college. Felicia
just likes it to look inhabited.

Mercer grabs a monogrammed "HS" washcloth and makes it into a tourniquet. He gently wraps her palm.

REGAN (CONT'D)

Here -- use this.
(re: her brooch)
Felicia gave it to me. I only wore
it so Daddy would see me wearing
it.

He fumbles, trying to undo it without groping her.

MERCER

Sorry. It's tricky --

REGAN

Don't worry. This is the most fun
I've had in a while.
(off him)
Talking, I mean. I feel like I can
be myself around you. That's rarer
than I'd like to admit.

Mercer clasps the brooch on the washcloth and it holds tight.

MERCER

There you go. That's a high-class
Ace bandage right there.

She smiles, grateful.

REGAN

Come with me.

EXT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY PENTHOUSE - BALCONY - MOMENTS LATER

People talk about a million-dollar view. But this one is worth about 35 million. Regan and Mercer stand on the balcony outside her room. Central Park stretches out beneath them.

MERCER

Talk about a room with a view...

Regan has pulled a JOINT out of her purse.

REGAN

The woman who did my blow-out gave me this. Wanna..?

MERCER

I don't normally partake, but there's been nothing normal about this night, so what the hell.

He takes the lighter from her gimpy hand and does the honors. Passes it back. She takes a hit, exhaling slowly.

REGAN

What exactly is the deal with you and William? You're obviously more than friends. Dating. Living together..? Is it serious?

MERCER

Is to me. Is it to William? That I do not know. He keeps so much to himself. His past, his family, his feelings. And he's careless with words. Told me he loved me the first night we met. When he knew it wouldn't mean anything.

REGAN

Classic William. Now you can't say he never said it --

MERCER

But I can never know what he means
by it.

REGAN

Why did you come here tonight?

MERCER

Because I knew it would piss him
off. Why'd you invite me?

REGAN

Same.

(they both smile)

All either of us wants is William's
attention and instead we've found
each other. Here's to us.

She passes him the joint. Novice that he is, he inhales and
then explodes into a coughing fit.

CUT TO:

TIGHT ON: a line of white powder. Being sucked down by
Nicky's nostrils. We're --

INT. DON HILL'S - PRIVATE AREA - NIGHT

Nicky raises his head and shivers with pleasure.

NICKY

You ever done coke before, Charlie?

CHARLIE

(lies)

Sure, yeah. One time.

NICKY

Have at it.

Charlie takes a deep breath and lowers his head, putting his
finger over both nostrils. Nicky LAUGHS, but not unkindly.

NICKY (CONT'D)

(pantomimes)

Like this, Scarface.

MAN (O.S.)

Give the kid a break, Nicholas.

Nicky and Charlie turn to see William entering. They both
light up. Nicky may have just been on stage, but William is
the star. Charlie has never met him, but he knows who he is.

CHARLIE

Billy Three Sticks. Holy shit.

NICKY

I knew you couldn't stay away, you old bastard.

WILLIAM

Had to make sure you weren't ruining my good name.

NICKY

We've got our own name. Ex Nihilo, means "out of nothing." As in how God fashioned life --

WILLIAM

Jesusfuckingchrist I am so glad I don't have to listen to your pretentious bullshit anymore.

But William is just hazing him. He brings him in for a dude hug, which Nicky savors, basking in William's attention.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You weren't half bad out there. I actually kinda liked it.

Charlie can't contain himself.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. You two guys meeting up like this? I've read Sam's 'zine about the history of the band and this is totally epic. She is going to shit herself when I tell her.

(off their looks)

Speaking of Sam, I should go meet her. She's probably waiting.

Charlie awkwardly nods goodbye. Then stoops to inhale the line of coke laid out for him. Then sprints for the door. Nicky and William laugh.

WILLIAM

Who the fuck was that guy?

EXT. UPPER WEST SIDE STREET - BUS STOP - NIGHT

Sam paces by the bench. The cars have stopped arriving across the street. Charlie isn't here. And it seems like Keith isn't coming. She's upset, fighting tears.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hey. Sam. C'mere. It's me --

It's impossible to tell if the voice is old or young, male or female, but it's coming from INSIDE THE PARK. She turns to see a SHADOW IN THE SHADOWS, motioning to her.

A beat, and then she walks toward it.

INT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY PENTHOUSE - BALCONY - NIGHT

Regan burns the joint down to its filter and then flicks it out into the night. Mercer watches, impressed.

MERCER

Regan Hamilton-Sweeney-Lamplighter,
you are a badass.

REGAN

You can drop the Lamplighter. I
have.

(off his look)

Don't judge me. I hardly ever touch
the stuff.

MERCER

Of course.

They laugh, stoned, when suddenly --

POP! Regan and Mercer turn. It came from the park below. But they can't see anything besides trees and darkness.

REGAN

Must have been a firework. Which
means... the show will be starting
soon.

MERCER

Then we should get back to the
roof. Besides, who will the guests
hand their napkins and empty
glasses to..?

Regan smiles, until --

POP! Their heads turn again at the sound. Mercer's face
clouds, concerned.

MERCER (CONT'D)

That was definitely gun shots.

REGAN

Please. It's Central Park West.

MERCER

I'm from the South. We know guns.

(off her)

Everyone in Atlanta thought I was crazy moving here... but I figured it was still safer than being gay and Black in Georgia.

Regan takes this in, then asks --

REGAN

There are some people up there I really don't want to talk to. One person, actually. Will you come with me?

(off him)

I've been summoned by Felicia's brother, Amory. Or as William and I call him -- The Demon Brother.

MERCER

This family's dysfunction knows no bounds.

REGAN

You can see why William stays away. And protect me...

MERCER

Protect you from what?

But Regan takes his hand and sweeps him back inside.

EXT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Regan is much more at ease than when she arrived. She doles out big smiles and clumsily throws air kisses to STRANGERS she pretends to recognize. Mercer follows, big goofy grin plastered on his face.

Suddenly Regan pulls up, smile fading. Mercer follows her gaze to the terrace above.

AMORY GOULD

Looks down upon the party, like a Duke overseeing his domain. Compact build, close-shorn hair. Penetrating gaze which is locked on his step-niece.

BACK TO REGAN AND MERCER

REGAN

There he is.

MERCER

Getting the whole Demon Brother thing...

Regan loops her arm through Mercer's and they head up to --

THE UPPER TERRACE

Where Amory greets them, a bright smile on his face. But his stare is *intense*.

AMORY

My dear. I had so hoped we would find each other tonight.

REGAN

Amory Gould, allow me to present Mercer Goodman.

AMORY

Mr. Goodman. I wasn't aware Regan was bringing a guest. How do you two know each other?

REGAN

From school.

AMORY

You're a fellow parent?

MERCER

A teacher.

(blurts out)

But I'm also a writer.

As soon as it's left his mouth, Mercer wishes he could take it back. Amory pounces. Inquiring in his friendly but vaguely hostile way.

AMORY

Is that right? What have you written? Anything I've read? Novels? Non-fiction? Perhaps a piece in the *New Yorker*? I admit I don't get to the fiction in every issue, but I've read more than most.

Mercer is suddenly aware of how dry his mouth is.

MERCER

I haven't written anything yet.

AMORY

Oh no?

MERCER

No. But. I'm planning to. Soon.

Amory barks out a laugh. Regan bristles; she knows when Amory laughs at something, it's not actually funny.

AMORY

Regan! What a delightful guest you've brought. Mercer Goodman has not written a word, yet calls himself a writer! I too once considered myself a writer. Granted, I actually wrote. Unfortunately most of what I churned out was shit. One night I took all my notebooks to a homeless camp, threw them into a barrel and watched them burn. Warming those poor unfortunates on a chilly night was all they were good for. Realizing that was the moment I finally became an adult. I hope you're never forced to grow up. And that your words don't serve their best purpose as kindling. Only one way to find out. Yes?

Mercer isn't sure if he's supposed to answer. Instead he shrinks, embarrassed.

MERCER

Well, excuse me. Nice to meet you.

Mercer backs away. Regan feels bad, starts to follow.

REGAN

Mercer, wait --

Amory takes a graceful step forward. Blocking her path.

AMORY

Not so fast. We need to talk.

REGAN

Please. If it's about my marriage--

AMORY

It's about your father.

(off her, surprised)

Regan, as William Senior's daughter and The Hamilton-Sweeney Group's head of PR, there's no sugarcoating this. When your father steps off the plane tomorrow, he's going to be arrested. Financial crimes. Undervaluing certain assets for tax purposes. Overvaluing them to get loans... The bank blew the whistle to the Feds...

Regan is stunned, disbelieving --

REGAN

Daddy would never. It's some kind of mistake. Or someone else's wrongdoing.

AMORY

It's his signature on all those checks, his family name on all those buildings. If they take one, they can take them all.

(then)

You know your father has not been well. Who can say what he might have done..?

Amory pats her arm, a gesture only. A facsimile of comfort.

AMORY (CONT'D)

We'll fight it of course. The best defense money can buy...

His lips keep moving, but Regan can't hear him. All the sound has gone out of the room.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK WEST - BUS STOP - NIGHT

Mercer waits for the bus. Distant sounds from the party above.

Then Mercer hears SOMETHING CLOSER, like a dying animal. Coming from the Park. He tries to ignore it. Glancing down the street for the bus. Until he hears it again. It's human.

Despite himself, Mercer decides to follow it. Suddenly, there's the BOOM of FIREWORKS as the show begins. Mercer startles, catches his breath.

MERCER
 (to himself)
 Just go home.

But he can't.

INSIDE THE PARK

Mercer enters, looks around. A lull in the fireworks. Then he hears the awful sound again, only louder. It's close.

BOOM! Fireworks EXPLODE, illuminating the space around him. Mercer's eyes go to the ground. And that's when he sees --

Sam, sprawled out in the grass, bleeding out.

MERCER
 Omigod.

Mercer goes to her. Stands over her, in shock. A hole above her eyebrow. Blood leaking out her shoulder. Her eyes open, but glassy. Making that same awful guttural moan.

MERCER (CONT'D)
 Help! HELP!

Mercer fumbles, pulling out his cell phone. He flips it open, dials 9-1-1.

MERCER (CONT'D)
 I need help. There's been a shooting in the park!

Mercer kneels at Sam's side. Despite the warm night, her body is shivering. He pulls off his suit jacket, covering Sam.

MERCER (CONT'D) Please
 come as soon as you can. She's
 dying. Omigod I think she's going
 to die...

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Charlie unzips his fly, about to pee behind a tree --

MERCER (O.S.)
Help!

Just one word -- swallowed by the fireworks exploding -- but clear enough for Charlie to put his dick back in his pants and move toward where it came from.

MERCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Anyone! Please help!

Charlie speeds up. He follows this voice, heading down a slope behind some trees. He follows them until he sees --

A STRANGER (we know it's Mercer, but he doesn't), bent over a body. A body he recognizes as Sam. Charlie staggers back, his world coming off its axis.

The sound of POLICE SIRENS rises in the near distance. Mercer gets to his feet, runs out of the park. As soon as he's gone, Charlie bee-lines to Sam. He drops to his knees.

CHARLIE
 Oh God. Sam. What did he do to you?
 Wake up! It's Charlie!

Sam doesn't stir. Charlie looks up, now sees police lights in the distance, hears DOORS SLAMMING and RADIOS REPORTING. FIREWORKS boom, jolting Charlie --

And at last, his bladder releases. Urine spreads across his pants as he bites his lips, fighting tears. Humiliated, Charlie reaches into his pocket, pulls out his pajama pants. He begins to unbutton his jeans --

MERCER (O.S.)
 She's over here!

Charlie realizes he needs to go now. Pants half-on. He runs off, stumbles, falling out of view, as we --

STAY WITH SAM

Her face is cut with the beam of a FLASHLIGHT, wielded by DETECTIVE LARRY PULASKI (48 but long gone grey, a metal crutch under one arm). He's slight but sharp, with a look that is almost always bemused. Almost always. Not now.

DETECTIVE PULASKI
 Christ. She's just a kid...

EXT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY BUILDING - NIGHT

A visibly-shaken Regan comes outside. Sees the POLICE CARS gathered. Her TOWN CAR glides up, she hurries toward it. She's on her cell phone, it's RINGING, then picks up --

KEITH (O.S.)
 I know I bailed on the party. I'm a
 coward. Add it to the list.

REGAN
 Shut up, Keith. My father is in
 trouble. Legal trouble. It's
 serious. I'm scared.

The DRIVER opens the door for her and Regan drops inside.

INT./EXT. REGAN'S TOWN CAR - (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Regan is in her seat, fighting tears.

KEITH (O.S.)
 Your dad is a good man, Regan. He
 would never do anything illegal.

REGAN
 But Amory would. And then blame it
 on him. Daddy's not on top of
 things like he used to be. He can't
 go on trial. To prison. This will
 kill him!

Regan is growing more emotional. Until she hears SIRENS
 through the phone, on Keith's side of the call.

REGAN (CONT'D)
 Keith? Where are you?

EXT. COLUMBUS AVENUE - INTERCUT

Keith walks head down, as more POLICE CARS streak past him,
 heading to the crime scene a few blocks away. Keith steps
 quickly into a doorway --

INT. LICKETY SPLITZ STRIP CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Dark. Muffled music playing in the background. Keith leans
 against the door, not aware of his surroundings.

KEITH
 I'm at home. TV's too loud.

Keith looks around, sees in the next room STRIPPERS on POLES.
 A BOUNCER points to the "\$20 Cover Charge" sign.

KEITH (CONT'D)
 Benefit of living alone.

Keith reaches for his wallet.

BACK TO REGAN'S TOWN CAR

Regan isn't listening anymore. A heady mix of everything she's drank, smoked and heard tonight hitting her at once.

REGAN

I have to go.

(tosses phone down)

Pull over! Please! Right now!

The Town Car SCREECHES to a stop. Regan opens the door, stumbles onto the street and vomits. Doubled over, she doesn't notice (but we do) --

THE WHITE VAN driving past...

INT. HAMILTON-SWEENEY PENTHOUSE - MEZZANINE - SAME

Amory stands alone at the window. The party rages around him. But his eyes are fixed on THE PARK below. The police lights, an arriving ambulance. Watching it all, unreadable.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - CRIME SCENE - NIGHT

Mercer gives his statement to Pulaski, who leans on his crutch as he takes notes.

MERCER

...and that's when I saw her.

PULASKI

And you didn't see anyone else in the area?

Before Mercer answers, another Detective approaches. MCFADDEN (30s), burly and short-tempered, holds William's suit jacket.

MCFADDEN

Hey, Larry. We found this on the girl.

MERCER

It's mine. She was shaking. Probably in shock...

MCFADDEN

Then I suppose this is yours too?

McFadden reaches into the jacket pocket and pulls out a bag of white powder inside.

MCFADDEN (CONT'D)
 (to Pulaski)
 Heroin.
 (to Mercer)
 Oops.

Mercer's stomach drops. *William's been using.*

INT. SUBWAY CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Charlie sits alone, shell-shocked. In his pajama bottoms. The subway car's rattle takes us to --

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Charlie's piss-soaked jeans. Half-hidden in the underbrush... undiscovered by the police (for now). McFadden escorts Mercer, in handcuffs, out of the park.

MERCER
 I called you. I was just trying to
 help!

As McFadden hustles Mercer along, his eyes land back on --

Sam. EMTs load her limp body onto a gurney. They quickly exit the park, where an AMBULANCE waits. She's lifted inside. EMTs jump in after her and the doors SLAM SHUT.

And as the siren sounds and the ambulance speeds off, a final burst of FIREWORKS fills the sky above.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE 101