

THE MADNESS

Written by

Stephen Belber

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BIRD'S EYE SHOT OF CENTRAL CITY PHILADELPHIA AT NIGHT--
GLITTERING TOWERS, TWINKLING TRAFFIC, A CITY VERY MUCH ALIVE.

SHOT NOW *DIVES AND DRIVES* WEST--CAREENING PAST THE
OBSERVATION DECK AT ONE LIBERTY, THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, THE
ROCKY STAIRS AT THE MUSEUM OF ART...ACROSS THE SCHUYLKILL
RIVER AND INTO WEST PHILLY, WHERE LIFE'S NOT QUITE AS
GLITTERING, WHERE PEOPLE LIVE HARDER LIVES, WHERE FOLKS STAND
ON CORNERS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT TOMORROW, WHERE DREAMS AREN'T
EASY AND A DAY'S WORK IS HARD...WELL--MOSTLY. CUT TO:

INT. BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU STUDIO - WEST PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

CLOSE ON MUNCIE DANIELS--40's, Black, charming, assured--
locked on the ground in deep jiu-jitsu battle with JOHNNY, an
overweight white guy who's got him by 60 pounds. But Muncie's
no beginner--and he maneuvers his legs into position for a
Crucifix Choke Leg Lock, freeing his arms to attack Johnny's
neck--quick, decisive and strong, as the INSTRUCTOR steps in--

INSTRUCTOR

Great let's stop it right there!

Muncie and Johnny separate, sucking air and bowing
respectfully to one another. Johnny is indeed massive.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

OK, what Muncie just did there--
classic Crucifix choke, and as you
saw, submission with the legs gave
him quick access to Johnny's neck--
(to the big guy)
Johnny, you OK?

Johnny fights his breath to get the words out--

JOHNNY

He definitely caught me off guard
with that.

INSTRUCTOR

That's because he preceded the move
with an Omoplata, which gave him a
quick in for the Crucifix.

JOHNNY

(to Muncie)
You're not normally in this class.

MUNCIE

Yeah, I usually do mornings but I'm travelling tomorrow.

JOHNNY

Or maybe you just wanted to try the LGBTQ class.

MUNCIE

(looking around)

Is that what this is?

INSTRUCTOR

Monday's at 7 is BJJ Queer Night.
(off Muncie's confusion)
Brazilian Jiu-Jitso.

MUNCIE

Gotcha. Not the West Philly of my youth, but hey--it all works.

INSTRUCTOR

So I want you two to engage once more, but this time let's see if Johnny can counter the Omoplata with a Guillotine and then get out of it with a Cross Collar Choke.

MUNCIE

I'm not sure that's gonna work.

INSTRUCTOR

Let's let Johnny's give it a try.

MUNCIE

No, I'm not trying to sound cocky but I'll just cut to a Heel Hook.

INSTRUCTOR

Should we just see what happens?

MUNCIE

All right, I'm just saying--

JOHNNY

Johnny doesn't like this.

MUNCIE

Johnny's right to worry.

--as the two men assume the starter position.

INSTRUCTOR

All right, when you're ready!

They engage, feeling each other out, looking for openings, Muncie quickly spotting one and going in for a Double Leg Takedown. Both men hit the floor hard, each vying for position as Muncie indeed goes for the Omoplata. Johnny tries to counter but Muncie sees it coming and sets up for the Heel Hook--only to have Johnny quickly *collapse* into a Turtle--lulling Muncie into false victory--*before JOLTING out and trapping Muncie with a Kimura Arm Lock, aka the Chicken Wing!* Johnny then *quick-pivots the Kimura into a Kneebar*, the whole weight of his body clamping Muncie's leg, *rotating it--then pivoting his own hips until Muncie is in full submission!--*

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

OK release! *There it is!* I knew you had it, Johnny! Muncie, you OK?

MUNCIE

(breathing hard)

...Yeah.

JOHNNY

(to Muncie, with attitude)

I'm not trying to be cocky...

INSTRUCTOR

(patting Muncie's back)

Maybe you should go back to your morning class!

Off Muncie, nodding humbly, as he touches his nose, checks his hand, sees blood--and smiles, accepting the shit-giving.

EXT. LANCASTER AVENUE - WEST PHILLY - NIGHT

LONG SHOT of a black 2020 Audi Q7 sailing south--music:

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - SAME

"Threat" from Jay-Z's *Black Album* blasts as Muncie, tissue stanching his bloody nostril, drives and dials a number off an owner email from Airbnb--

TELEPHONE VOICE (CAR SPEAKER)

Hi, you've reached Jean, please leave a message!

MUNCIE

Jean, Muncie Daniels, confirming my arrival tomorrow at 11. Crazy question: Will there be wood for the fireplace or do I need to bring my own? Let me know?

He disconnects just as another call is coming in. He clicks--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)
Hey Boogie, how you doin'?

BOOGIE (O.S.)
Munce! I'm good! You?

MUNCIE
Looking forward to a break.

BOOGIE (O.S.)
Well on *that* note, Giraldi wants to make sure she can still reach you.

MUNCIE
We already went through this--

BOOGIE (O.S.)
I understand--

MUNCIE
It's 3 weeks, I'm good for weekends, election's not 'til fall--

BOOGIE (O.S.)
Hey, she values your advice--

MUNCIE
Tell her she can call whenever.

BOOGIE (O.S.)
You're the best.

MUNCIE
I'm out.

He clicks off and pulls into an underground garage.

INT. LOBBY - WCAU TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

A RECEPTIONIST working late as Muncie strolls in--

RECEPTIONIST
Good evening, Mr. Daniels.

MUNCIE
Your hair is fantastic.

RECEPTIONIST
(deadpan)
That's great.

MUNCIE
 (missing her sarcasm)
 Sorry I'm late--honestly.

RECEPTIONIST
 I'm sure you'll do great.

INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

Muncie gets last-second touches from a hair/makeup person as he sits before a camera with a green screen background in a relatively empty studio. He keeps an eye on a monitor where a HOST from New York tees up the segment--

MSNBC HOST
 I'm pleased to welcome freshman congressman Adam Jennings, who represents suburban Philadelphia's Chester County--

Muncie eyes the screen where we see ADAM JENNINGS--35, white, movie star looks blended with "nonpartisan" humility--

MSNBC HOST (CONT'D)
 --also Simone Simmons, founder and leader of the New York nonprofit activist group "Let Us Not Forget"--

Monitor shows SIMONE SIMMONS--28, Black, confident--

MSNBC HOST (CONT'D)
 And MSNBC political contributor Muncie Daniels, professor of Africana-American Governance at the University of Pennsylvania, and an informal advisor to Pennsylvania senate candidate Felicia Giraldi--

Hair/makeup has stepped back just as Muncie nods to the camera with a mix of solemnity and bemusement--

MSNBC HOST (CONT'D)
 Thank you all 3 of you for being here, Muncie I'd like to start with you--given the national spotlight that's only getting stronger on next fall's senate race: Why is it important that democrats elect Ms. Giraldi, who's clearly a moderate within a party whose progressive wing is very much on the rise.

MUNCIE

Thanks for having me, Ron, and what I'll say is that Felicia Giraldi doesn't consider herself a moderate or a progressive, she sees herself as a *person who represents people*, as a Black woman with a white father; a mother of two Black-Pakistani daughters; a former social worker who cares about supply-side economics; and a lifelong city-dweller who believes in government subsidies for family farms in Iowa.

MSNBC HOST

Congressman Jennings, your response?

ADAM JENNINGS

I think Mr. Daniels couldn't be more correct: Ms. Giraldi stands for the same ideals many of us in the republican party stand for, which come down to, *Are we helping individual Americans or not?* Truth be told, I could eventually see myself reaching across the aisle to endorse her campaign, which I'm sure will garner me flack from my right, but at day's end you *have* to go with your heart.

SIMONE SIMMONS

May I jump in?

ADAM JENNINGS

(a smug smile)

By all means--

SIMONE SIMMONS

Great, because I don't think you're gonna set the internet on fire with a tentative half-endorsement of a candidate who's refused to question the efficacy of police unions, whose campaign coffers are brimming with hedge fund contributions, and whose "informal advisor" has consistently refused to posit a position on the validity of reparations for fear of "taking too strong a side."

MUNCIE

That's blatantly untrue--

SIMONE SIMMONS

Oh, are you ready to weigh in?--

MUNCIE

I'll weigh in when I weigh in--

SIMONE SIMMONS

You *won't* weigh in because you want a way *out*, and you're too busy "finding common ground" with the likes of Congressman Jennings.

MUNCIE

Excuse me, Simone--

SIMONE SIMMONS

Oh, we on a first name basis?--

MUNCIE

We are when we're gettin' real and when I'm telling you to do your homework, because if you look at my academic history you will see an undeniable record of pro-reparation--

SIMONE SIMMONS

I *have* seen that record, which goes back to when they had *record players*, but since you started showin' up on shows like this, you stopped *playing* that kinda music. Instead, you sittin' here breakin' bread with the "congressman" is just a modern day Neville Chamberlin telling Brother Adolph, "Go ahead, take Czechoslovakia while you're at it!"

Muncie is momentarily stunned, and tries to cover it with a smile, as Jennings attempts to defend him--

ADAM JENNINGS

If I can just comment on this--

SIMONE SIMMONS

I don't actually think you should--

ADAM JENNINGS

Why not?--

SIMONE SIMMONS

Because unless you're about to "see yourself endorsing" reparations, you should probably zip-tie your mouth.

MUNCIE

Ms. Simmons clearly is uninterested in having a spirited debate.

SIMONE SIMMONS

Oh I like spirit and I like debate--

MUNCIE

No--you like self righteousness and didacticism, which works in *grad school* but not in life. And so while I do not agree with the majority of Congressman Jennings' positions, I am *willing* to hear the man out. So lemme say this--

(gaining momentum)

Ms. Simmons--you need to step into the real world, where substantial change actually finds *fulfillment*--which does not belie integrity, for action indeed transcends a million words when helping folks in need.

Off Muncie, having gotten in the last word--for now.

INT. GREEN ROOM - TV STUDIO - NIGHT

A deadpan PRODUCTION ASSISTANT sips tea, having just watched the segment on a monitor in the corner. Muncie cuts through on his way out, stopping to peruse the snack spread.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

That was alive with strife.

MUNCIE

Everyone wants their moment.

(re: his favorite snack)

Yes!

--triumphantly displaying a snack pack of Cheddar Goldfish.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

I heard you're leaving town.

MUNCIE

Gonna finally write that novel.

PA

Which one?

MUNCIE

The great American one.

(turning to go)

Or at least I'm gonna *start* it.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

See you in a couple weeks.

--as he stuffs the Goldfish in his coat and heads out.

EXT. CENTER CITY - NIGHT

Muncie's Audi drifts through the empty late-night streets, Jay-Z still on his system, but filtered and distant.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN AREA - MUNCIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Muncie finishes packing a suitcase, grabbing items from his kitchen: Pasta, "instant" Indian food, a bottle of Maker's Mark. Remembering something else, he finds a dusty tupperware in his pantry, opens it, smells the bud of weed in it, decides it's still good and chucks it in the bag--just as a FaceTime call comes in. He checks his phone, smiles and answers it on his kitchen flatscreen, where we now see the smiling face of his 10-year-old son DEMETRIUS a light-skinned kid with a genuinely sweet personality.

MUNCIE

It's 11 o'clock at night, Dem!

DEMETRIUS

We don't have school tomorrow.

MUNCIE

How come?

DEMETRIUS

Teacher conferences.

MUNCIE

OK, well I'm glad you called 'cause I've been meaning to tell you something *massively* important.

DEMETRIUS

What is it?

MUNCIE

I love you very very big time.

DEMETRIUS
I love you too, Dad.

As he speaks, Muncie grabs an engraved Montegrappa pen box off a shelf, chucks it in his suitcase and zips it up--

MUNCIE
And I love your sister but I hope she's asleep even without school.

DEMETRIUS
She is. Are you still leaving?

MUNCIE
I am but I'll be on Zoom, phone, SnapChat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, FaceTime, SnapTime, Tumblr-Time, Insta-book, and just a 90 minute drive away.

DEMETRIUS
OK--

MUNCIE
OK!--How's your mother?

DEMETRIUS
She's awesome.

MUNCIE
(masking disappointment)
Really?

DEMETRIUS
Yep.

MUNCIE
Good. Mom's *should* be awesome.

DEMETRIUS
You're good too, Dad. Good night.

MUNCIE
You're the bestest in the world.

Demetrius smiles--and clicks off. Muncie relishes...

INT. KITCHEN - LUCIE'S HOUSE - FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP, NJ - DAY

LUCIE SNIPES--35, white, a rose tattoo with the word *BEAUTY* sneaking up her forearm--makes breakfast for her two young kids, TANNER and BLAKE, 7 & 5, as NPR's *Morning Edition* plays and a muted Fox news shimmers on the TV.

LUCIE
Scrambled or fried, Tanner?

TANNER
Fried please.

BLAKE
Fried please too please!

LUCIE
Comin' up hold your horses.

BLAKE
I don't have horses!

Lucie smiles, as we get a better look of her Arcade Fire t-shirt and ripped jeans.

TANNER
Phone Mom!

Lucie's phone flashing--she turns down the eggs and picks up--

LUCIE
Hey Sally...Not tonight... 'Cause that was always Mark's thing and Mark and I are done and Mark's a--I dunno--an asshole with a gold heart wrapped in a rubber membrane.
(a smile; then, to Blake)
Don't gurgle your orange juice.
(voice lowered, into phone)
No... 'Cause no matter what he'll always be fucking toxic...OK. Bye.

She hangs up, looks at her kids...and attends to the eggs.

EXT. RURAL COUNTRY ROAD - POCONOS, PA - DAY

Muncie's Audi winds its way through the stoic winter trees of the Poconos foothills, slowing by a pair of mailboxes at the foot of a long gravel driveway. He turns and heads up a slight incline through a heavy tangle of trees, eventually arriving at a fork in the gravel where a weathered slab of plywood spells out two addresses, an arrow next to each.

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - CONTINUOUS

Muncie double-checks his phone--and steers left. As he continues, he spots the *other* house through the woods, a hyper-modern 3-story "cabin" with mammoth glass windows, porch jacuzzi and 4-door 2016 Dodge Ram pickup out front.

He then turns a bend in the driveway and sees *his* house--or at least the one he'll be renting, which is far more ramshackle one-story than high-end luxury cabin...

MUNCIE

Well...you wanted rustic.

EXT. POCONOS CABIN - SAME

Muncie parks, heads for the front door, finds the code on his phone, punches it in and enters.

INT. POCONOS CABIN - CONTINUOUS

It's pretty bleak but not without charm: Fireplace, crude dining table, wood-burning stove, lanterns... Muncie works hard to make peace with it, checking the kitchen cabinets, unloading his provisions--3 bags of groceries picked up on the way--and *wood!* He places his bourbon on the counter, already looking forward to tonight, sets his laptop on the table, takes the 14K Montegrappa fountain pen from the pen box he packed and lays it neatly on a blank legal pad. He's gonna start this fucking novel if it kills him.

INT. POCONOS CABIN - LATER

Muncie at the table staring at the laptop, gentle Gene Ammons playing from his portable speaker. He glances at the legal pad: An elaborate doodle of a *football*. He ponders a container of unsalted almonds, then debates the nearby bourbon bottle. Naw, too early.

EXT. RURAL COUNTRY ROAD - POCONOS, PA - DAY

Muncie finishing a gorgeous run along the empty winding road, spotting the turnoff to his driveway and making a semi-successful effort to sprint the last 50 yards. Sucking air, he turns and walks up the driveway... As he approaches the split-off he sees the Dodge Ram pickup heading toward him on its way to the main road. The driver, a HANDSOME WHITE GUY in his 40's, slows to a stop and rolls down the window.

HANDSOME WHITE GUY

Hey there, you my new neighbor?

MUNCIE

Yeah, for the next three weeks.

HANDSOME WHITE GUY

Sounds great. I'm Rick.

MUNCIE
 (shaking his hand)
 Muncie. Good to meet you.

HANDSOME WHITE GUY
 (re: his house)
 I'm right there if you need
 anything.

MUNCIE
 I appreciate that.

HANDSOME WHITE GUY
 You get a good run in?

MUNCIE
 Lucky to get 3 miles.

HANDSOME WHITE GUY
 Hey man, at our age, it all works.
 (slight pause)
 What brings you out here?

MUNCIE
 Trying to start a novel. Longtime
 dream, so...

HANDSOME WHITE GUY
 Hey. Now or never, right? *Seize it.*

Muncie nods and smiles--as the guy winks and drives off.

INT. POCONOS CABIN - NIGHT

With a decent fire going, Muncie is back at his laptop but this time the bourbon's there too, as are a half-eaten box of *Mega Stuf Oreos* and a mostly-smoked joint. CAMERA REVEALS he's rapturously streaming an early episode of *The Wire*...

MUNCIE
 (stonily mumbled)
 Fuckin' greatest show ever...

He watches for several more hazy moments, including one in which he absently picks up his Montegrappa pen and vaguely adds a few more touches to his by-now quite elaborate football, then absent-mindedly tries replacing the pen in the breast pocket of his Adidas Tiro 19 sweatsuit--which doesn't have a breast pocket, so he settles for a side pocket. THEN:

SUDDENLY EVERY LIGHT GOES OUT. A moment later the streaming stops too, leaving just the computer glow and firelight.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

...Shit.

He checks the computer wifi but all bars are gone. He reaches for his phone, hits its flashlight app and starts looking for a fuse box. Finding it, he flips every switch, to no avail. He then locates the "House Instructions" manual, flips to the *Backup Generator* page--scans it--and heads out the back door.

EXT. STORAGE SHED - BACKYARD - POCONOS CABIN - SAME

It's cold as fuck and dark as shit as Muncie shines his phone on the paint-chipped door of this unattached shed, 30 yards behind the house. He yanks at its door.

EXT. STORAGE SHED - BACKYARD - POCONOS CABIN - SAME

The door creaks open and he shines his light, soon locating the generator. He checks the instructions and looks for where the propane tank should be--only to find no tank. He shines his light around the cluttered shed--rakes, ropes, weird Halloween skulls--and finally spots a tank--rusted, dented, mildewed. He tries connecting but it's the totally wrong fit. Then he sees a Post-It: "*NEED TO BUY NEW TANK!*" Fuck this.

INT. POCONOS CABIN - SAME

Muncie enters and grabs his jacket.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - POCONOS CABIN - NIGHT

Muncie using his phone to guide his way down to where the driveway splits off to the other house. He turns up it.

EXT. OUT FRONT OF HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - SAME

The house is dark--no electricity either--but the pickup still out front. Muncie sees a moving flashlight beam on the second floor. He knocks on the front door. Nothing. Another knock.

MUNCIE

*Hello!?! Rick?! It's Muncie from
next door!*

Still nothing. He tries the door. It opens. He enters.

INT. LIVING AREA - HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - CONTINUOUS

The house is high class, someone furnished the hell out of it, at least from what Muncie can see with his phone. The first floor is all one space, with an open laptop on a marble kitchen counter, a crackling fire in a hearth 3 times the size of Muncie's, and a glazed pork chop sitting on a plate at a sprawling dining room table.

MUNCIE

Rick, you upstairs? It's your neighbor from up the driveway.

(nothing)

I'm looking for some propane, or a generator that works, I'm not really good with technical shit!

Still nothing. The house completely silent but for the fire's gentle crackling. Muncie thinks...then slowly heads upstairs.

SECOND FLOOR LANDING--as Muncie reaches the top stair.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Now you got me worried, man, just wanna make sure you're good.

The phone light's not very bright and Muncie can't see far in front of him. The floor creaks. Several closed doors. He comes to one that's only half-closed and gives it a knock--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Rick, you in here?

He *slowly* nudges the door further open--

BEDROOM--as Muncie shines the light: A four poster-bed, lace curtains, moonlight sneaking in...and then something on the floor catches his eye: **A cordless Makita chain saw**. Then--

RICK'S BLOODIED AND PARTIALLY DISMEMBERED BODY, laid out on a plastic tarp on the floor.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Fuck me--

--as we get a better look of **Rick's lower left arm--alone on the tarp**; an industrial garbage bag...Rick's bloody face.

Muncie quickly shines his light around, then thinks better and shuts it off, listening for noise--hesitant to even move.

He quietly steps to the window and looks out--sees only the Ram pickup. Another look around as he heads for the door--

SECOND FLOOR LANDING--as Muncie hits the first stair he hears a DOOR OPEN FROM BEHIND--and then, calm:

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, hold on.

Muncie starts running--

BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS--Muncie races out the front door, footsteps now pounding behind him--

EXT. OUT FRONT OF HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - CONTINUOUS

Muncie sprints out the door and hears **A HUGE THUD**--looks up--

--and sees a **GUY IN A BLACK BALACLAVA** who's just jumped from a window onto the deck and is now hurling himself from the deck to block Muncie's path--

Muncie veers left and heads for the woods behind the house--

CLOSE ON MUNCIE RUNNING AS **TWO GUNSHOTS PIERCE THE NIGHT**--

MUNCIE HITS THE WOODS, trying to use his phone light but the trees are packed tight and he's running full speed--

MORE GUNSHOTS--MUNCIE IN A FULL FUCKING SPRINT--

BALACLAVA GUY #1M (O.S.)
GET THE FUCK BACK HERE!

MUNCIE DODGING TREES AND DUCKING BRANCHES--

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.)
YOU'RE FUCKING DEAD, DUDE!

BALACLAVA GUY #2 (O.S.)
I GOT A LIGHT ON HIM!

--a HUGE BEAM OF LIGHT FINDS MUNCIE'S BACK--he swerves to try to lose it---

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.)
WE FUCKIN' GOT YOU, MAN!

Muncie looks back, trying to lose the light--and TRIPS OVER A LOG WHICH SENDS HIM **AIRBORNE AND STRAIGHT INTO A TREE**--

BALACLAVA GUY #2 (O.S.)
HE'S DOWN!

CLOSE on Muncie writhing in pain, trying to breathe--seeing the light get closer.

He drags himself up and keeps running--

NOW ON A SMALL DECLINE which helps him lose the light AS HE SLALOMS LEFT AND RIGHT--PUTTING DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM.

He pauses, wiping blood from his eyes, trying to catch breath
--**ANOTHER GUN SHOT**--HE TAKES OFF.

Looking for a path that's not there, Muncie veers sharply to his right, thinking he can lose them--

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.)
He's over there---cut him off!

Muncie shuts off his phone and tries to quiet his steps while not losing speed, but BRANCHES KEEP SNAPPING AND HIS BREATHING GIVES HIM AWAY--

THE LIGHT BEAM AGAIN PICKS HIM UP--MUNCIE DIGS DEEP FOR SPEED

MUNCIE'S LEG RIPS AGAINST A TREE BRANCH AND TEARS A MASSIVE GASH IN HIS CALF. CLOSE ON HIS RIPPED FLESH as he stifles a scream and lets adrenaline do the rest--

--actually finding A SLIGHT SECOND WIND, USING ALL THE GAS HE'S GOT AND SOMEHOW PULLING AWAY--

WHEN SUDDENLY HE FALTERS--STUMBLES--AND *SINKS ON A DIME*--

MUNCIE SUBMERGED IN 5 FEET OF SWAMP WATER--SOUND DROPS OUT...

...FINALLY HE REARS HIS HEAD FROM BENEATH, GASPING FOR BREATH WHILE TRYING TO STAY SILENT--**CHOKING ON FREEZING SWAMP WATER.** He reaches around for his phone but it's lost in the water. He peers out, realizing he's at the edge of what appears to be an **enormous and dark 30 square yard swamp.** He quickly realizes this may be his best chance to survive--as the men's voices keep getting closer, the light beam shining brighter--

BALACLAVA GUY #2 (O.S.)
What you think, Bare?

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.)
He's around here somewhere.

More light, the men now walking, careful to avoid an ambush.

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)
We got all night, fucker. And we know you're here.

As they approach, Muncie takes a deep breath and quietly submerges beneath the water.

CLOSE ON MUNCIE BENEATH THE SURFACE, EYES CLOSED...

And then, slowly, emerging for breath, denying even a ripple.

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm gonna check this little ridge.
He might've snuck himself up there.

BALACLAVA GUY #2 (O.S.)
Copy that, holler if he is.

SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS DEPARTING. Muncie steals another furtive breath. The **LIGHT BEAM SCANS THE WATER**, the nearby land...

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.)
Can't just walk into people's
houses, bro'. Called trespassing.

Muncie winces as he touches his leg underwater, sees the water-mixed blood on his hand when it comes back out.

BALACLAVA GUY #1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Where you at? You over here?

The light comes closer--15 feet from where Muncie lies...

...10 feet. The guy doesn't realize he's this close.

Muncie ducks again...feels the light on the water above.

When he comes back up for air, **the guy is LITERALLY RIGHT THERE--AT THE WATER'S EDGE**, SCANNING THE FOREST WITH A HIGH-POWERED FLASHLIGHT IN ONE HAND AND A GLOCK 19 in the other.

Muncie tries not to move...before doing the only thing he can think of: Reaching his hand beneath the surface as gently as possible...and coming back up with the **gold Montegrappa pen---**

THEN IN ONE QUICK MOVE, HE RISES FROM THE WATER LIKE A PHOENIX FROM BEHIND, AND **STABS THE GUY IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE PEN WHILE AT THE SAME TIME SEIZING HIM IN A GUILLOTINE HEAD LOCK THAT COVERS THE GUY'S MOUTH TO PREVENT ANY NOISE.**

The guy's body folds--collapsing into Muncie's arms

MUNCIE QUICKLY NAILS HIM WITH 3 RAPID PUNCHES TO THE HEAD--

THEN TOSSES HIM INTO THE WATER, LEAVING HIM GROANING LOUDLY, TRYING TO PULL THE PEN FROM HIS HEAD--AS MUNCIE TAKES OFF.

EXT. POCONOS FOREST - 5 MINUTES LATER

Muncie running through the woods, finally with some distance. He comes to a stop, barely able to stand, hands on knees, desperate for breath. He again feels his leg, his hand comes up bloody--fragments of meaty flesh.

He finds a small spot behind a huge rock and crouches down, still breathing heavily, pained and utterly depleted...

FADE TO:

EXT. POCONOS FOREST - DAWN

Muncie's eyes slowly open. He wonders where the fuck he is. It doesn't take long, the scant morning light a stark and vivid reminder that he's hiding from killers in the woods.

He stands, careful not to rustle leaves, his eyes now alert. The morning mist is gorgeous, nearly mystical. He checks his leg--only now seeing that his sweatpants are shredded.

CLOSE ON HIS LEG, which beyond being a bloody gash is now host to dark green PUS PUSTULES, some of them oozing a thick, yellow, tissue-debris paste. Deciding to ignore, he walks.

It's still fucking cold. Muncie zips his jacket and shoves his hands into its pockets--only to discover the soggy Cheddar Goldfish snack pack. He opens and eats as he walks...

EXT. RURAL COUNTRY ROAD - POCONOS, PA - DAWN

Muncie slowly approaches the driveway turnoff to his house, hugging the woods by the road's edge, trying to stay hidden.

Near the mailboxes he stares at the hard shoulder between the road and woods--where a TIRE TRACK--jagged and interlocking lines--clearly indicates a recently parked vehicle. Muncie looks up the driveway, thinks a moment, then continues up it.

As he comes to the driveway fork, Muncie peers through the woods: The roof of the hyper-modern house *just* beginning to catch the first rays of sun. The Dodge Ram is still there but nothing else. The only sound is that of a thousand birds.

EXT. POCONOS CABIN - DAWN

Muncie now slowly approaches his cabin, where his Audi sits out front and the house itself stands placid and peaceful.

He approaches the Audi, peers inside, opens the door. Nothing strange. He looks at the house, wondering if it's safe to go in. He looks back at the Audi. Something strange about it...

Then he sees it: BOTH FRONT TIRES ARE SLASHED. Muncie quickly looks around. Silence everywhere but for the birds.

Slowly Muncie walks around to the backyard, his eyes registering every sound and movement--the wind-rustled grass; a crow's caw; a black rabbit that darts across the yard.

And then he spots it, barely jutting out from behind the storage shed: *A very light blue 2015 Ford Focus.*

Muncie's eyes quickly scan the yard, the house, the woods, sure he's being watched, slowly backing himself toward the shed, keeping the yard and house before him, eyeing every window, prepared to see the killers--but finding only glass.

At the shed he turns quickly to inspect the car, clearly parked there to conceal its presence. He checks the plates: *There are none--both bumpers devoid of tags.* He glances at the front tire imprint--jagged and interlocking lines. A quick look *inside* the car reveals a Slurpee cup, a reel of 3-strand Polypropylene rope, and the *cordless Makita chain saw.*

Muncie steps back, turns, and quickly ducks into the woods.

EXT. RURAL COUNTRY ROAD - POCONOS, PA - SAME

Muncie walks, head down, pace quick, still hugging the woods. No car, no wallet, no phone--the modern definition of *fucked.*

SOUND OF A TRUCK APPROACHING. Muncie turns, sticks out his thumb, tries for an expression of amicable harmlessness.

As the truck ambles by him, its white driver seems amused as he smilingly shakes his head. Muncie keeps walking.

EXT. STATE ROUTE 115 - POCONOS - DAY

A busier road--an auto repair shop, a garden center. The sun now hitting the road, still early morning but folks making their way to work. Muncie approaches a downtrodden diner.

INT. SWEET SUE'S BREAKFAST PALACE - POCONOS - SAME

As Muncie enters, it's safe to say he's not merely the only Black person there, he's the first in many a moon.

He goes to the counter, where a WAITRESS "neutrally" eyeballs him in all his freakish appearance: Wet clothes, dried blood, torn pants, weedy hair, Adidas tracksuit with nothing beneath-

MUNCIE

Hi, could I use your phone please?

She regards him...then nods at the cash register by the door.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

I appreciate it.

EXT. SWEET SUE'S BREAKFAST PALACE - POCONOS - DAY

Muncie sits on a bench out front trying to collect his thoughts. After a moment, a POCONOS MOUNTAIN REGIONAL POLICE car pulls up. Two white deputies, WAGNER and LUTZ, get out.

OFFICER WAGNER

You the one who called?

MUNCIE

Yes sir.

OFFICER WAGNER

So what's goin' on?

MUNCIE

Well as I told dispatch, I, ah, I'm renting a house up on Noble Tree Road, and I was there last night and lost electricity, and I went to the neighbor's and, ah, and I think he was dead. And then I was *chased* by whoever was in there, and they-- I got fired at, with guns, and I finally outran 'em in the woods but then I went back this morning to get my car I think they were still there but this time at *my* house.

The cops regard him without comment, Lutz staring at his torn and bloody pants leg, Wagner at his wet, swampy clothes.

OFFICER WAGNER

Should we go take a look?

MUNCIE

Well, I gotta say, I'm not too keen on going back there.

OFFICER LUTZ

I'm afraid we'll need you to show us what you're talking about. If you're gonna report a crime, you gotta take us to the crime scene.

MUNCIE

Well I can *tell* you where it is.

OFFICER WAGNER

But you might be calling fire in a movie theater. No?

MUNCIE

That's not what I'm doing--

OFFICER WAGNER

Why don't you just come with us. We'll protect you; and that way you can get your car back.

Off Muncie, not digging their vibe, but not much choice.

INT. POCONOS MOUNTAIN POLICE CAR - POCONOS CABIN - DAY

Muncie in the backseat of the cop car as it crawls around the driveway of Muncie's cabin, then into the backyard--

MUNCIE

It was parked behind that shed.

The cops and Muncie all look--but the Ford Focus is gone.

OFFICER WAGNER

Not there anymore?

MUNCIE

No. I just wanted to make sure.

The cops nod, "technically" withholding judgement.

EXT. HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - DAY

The police car now parks outside the fancier house. Muncie and the officers get out, Muncie looking around nervously.

OFFICER WAGNER

So you entered by the front?

MUNCIE

Yeah, the door was open.

OFFICER LUTZ
Opened or unlocked?

MUNCIE
...Unlocked.
(Lutz nods)
He had told me to come by if I
needed anything.

OFFICER LUTZ
(ignoring; to Wagner)
Isn't this the place owned by the
Wall Street guy?

OFFICER WAGNER
Stu Magnusson.

Wagner has pulled up a phone photo of STU MAGNUSSON, a bald man with a confident smile in his *Delta Advisors* head shot.

OFFICER WAGNER (CONT'D)
This the guy you spoke to?

MUNCIE
No. Definitely not.

OFFICER WAGNER
(another dubious nod)
Should we go in?

INT. LIVING AREA - HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - SAME

Muncie, Wagner and Lutz enter the house which appears even more well-appointed in the bright daylight. The cops scan the scene, similar to last night: The laptop, the fireplace--now just embers, the glazed pork chop still sitting on its plate.

MUNCIE
The body was upstairs.

The cops absorb, then nod and take the lead.

INT. SECOND FLOOR LANDING - HYPER-MODERN HOUSE - SAME

The cops proceed with hands on holsters as Muncie points to the bedroom door where he saw Rick's body.

INT. BEDROOM - HYPER-MODERN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Wagner and Lutz enter, Muncie hanging slightly back. On the floor where Rick's body had been is just an area rug.

OFFICER WAGNER
Where'd you say it was?

MUNCIE
On the rug right there. It's, ah,
obviously it's gone.
(entering fully)
I think there was like a tarp here.

Muncie studies the rug, looks around, looks back down.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)
Is that blood right there?

He's pointing to deep red droplets on the floor near the rug.
The cops step over and examine.

OFFICER WAGNER
Looks like it.

MUNCIE
And here?

Muncie is pointing at the bed sheet, which also has spatter.

OFFICER WAGNER
...Yeah. If I was guessing.

OFFICER LUTZ
But no body?

MUNCIE
I'm telling you, they had a fucking
saw. Was a saw right there, same
saw I saw in the car behind the
shed, and they musta' come back and
cleaned up after they chased me.

OFFICER LUTZ
..."Same saw you saw"?

MUNCIE
What--you trying to be funny?

OFFICER LUTZ
You're the one who said it.

MUNCIE
(to Wagner)
Is this not blood? You think I'm
making this shit up? I'm over there
trying to write a novel, I got no
interest in walking in on a murder.

OFFICER WAGNER
I thought you were a TV guy.

MUNCIE
I do part-time TV work.

OFFICER WAGNER
(again in his phone)
This you, right?

He shows Muncie a photo of himself under an MSNBC logo.

MUNCIE
Yeah.

OFFICER WAGNER
Not my channel of choice.

OFFICER LUTZ
So as a novelist you must have an
active imagination?

MUNCIE
(re: spatter)
Is this not fucking blood!

OFFICER WAGNER
It is.
(then)
So you took off running and you
said one of the assailants jumped
out the window?

MUNCIE
Yeah, to cut me off outside.

OFFICER WAGNER
And then you hid in a *swamp*?

MUNCIE
Yeah.

OFFICER WAGNER
Did you get a good look at them?

MUNCIE
No. At one point one was really
close to me, where I was hiding, so
I...took him down, then took off.

OFFICER LUTZ
"Took him down"?

Muncie doesn't like where this is going...

MUNCIE

Got him in a head lock, then tried to knock him out, with my fist.

OFFICER LUTZ

Gotcha. And did you? Knock him out?

MUNCIE

No. He was groaning when I left.

Wagner nods slowly, absorbing this information.

OFFICER WAGNER

And you lost your phone out there?

MUNCIE

Yeah. In the swamp.

OFFICER WAGNER

Do you wanna go look for it?

MUNCIE

I can't imagine it's fixable.

Officer Lutz is inspecting the floor near the bed.

OFFICER LUTZ

Anyone like jewelry?

He holds up a man's silver clasp bracelet, examines it...

OFFICER LUTZ (CONT'D)

Actually also got a couple drops.

Muncie and Wagner come closer, studying it, Muncie starting to feel a touch more validated, when Wagner turns to him:

OFFICER WAGNER

We're not gonna end up arresting you for this, are we?

MUNCIE

Are you fucking kidding me?

A slight stand-off...then, with a small grin:

OFFICER WAGNER

Let's go look at your house.

INT. LIVING AREA - HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - SAME

The 3 men near the front door, Wagner turns back inside--

OFFICER WAGNER
Gimem a sec'.

He heads over to the counter where the laptop sits and taps it awake, only to see it requires a password. CLOSE ON MUNCIE, still near the door, as he spots a business card on the floor. With Lutz watching Wagner, Muncie quickly grabs the card and stuffs it in his pocket.

EXT. HYPER-MODERN CABIN - POCONOS - SAME

Muncie and the cops head for the police car.

OFFICER WAGNER
Lutz, run his plates real quick?

Lutz nods and gets into the cruiser to run the plates, which Muncie himself now looks at, trying to memorize...

OFFICER WAGNER (CONT'D)
Guy didn't tell you anything about himself?

MUNCIE
Just that his name was Rick.

OFFICER WAGNER
...Your first time in the Poconos?

MUNCIE
Yeah.

OFFICER WAGNER
Welcome.

Silence. Then Lutz sticks his head out the cruiser window--

OFFICER LUTZ
Pickup's on a 3 month lease from a dealer over in Bridgewater.

OFFICER WAGNER
Jersey?

OFFICER LUTZ
Yeah. Leased by a *Richard Silk*.

OFFICER WAGNER
(to Muncie)
At least you got the Rick right.

EXT. POCONOS CABIN - DAY

The police cruiser parks in front of Muncie's house and the 3 men get out. Muncie shows them his car's slashed tires--

MUNCIE
Definitely wasn't like this
yesterday.

Wagner leans down to inspect the damage. Then, to Lutz--

OFFICER WAGNER
Find anything on Rick Silk?

OFFICER LUTZ
Nothin' near here and no one still
alive. Richard, Rick... There's a
porn dude named *Dick* Silk, but...

MUNCIE
(impatient)
Listen, man, people tried to kill
me, they know I'm staying here and
for all I know they went inside
this morning and took all my shit,
so can you help me figure this out?

OFFICER WAGNER
(a smug look)
...Sure thing, Mr. Daniels.

INT. LIVING AREA - POCONOS CABIN - DAY

Muncie, Lutz and Wagner inside the "rustic" house, where Muncie sees his laptop, wallet, suitcase, bourbon...

OFFICER WAGNER
Any sign of a break-in?

MUNCIE
...No.

OFFICER WAGNER
So all your "shit" is still here?

MUNCIE
(a quick wallet check)
Yeah.

OFFICER WAGNER

Good--so we're gonna go, and I'm gonna ask you to remain very accessible to me in the following days. If I call you, you answer, if I email, you respond, if I--

MUNCIE

I don't have a phone--

OFFICER WAGNER

Then I'll take your email, because I'm not sure what's going on here so I'm gonna keep every option open as to who did what when--if indeed a deed got done, you understand?

MUNCIE

By all means, do your job--

OFFICER WAGNER

Keep your attitude to yourself--

MUNCIE

Don't fucking use the word "attitude" with me--

OFFICER WAGNER

I'll use any word I want--

MUNCIE

The *fuck* you will--

OFFICER LUTZ

(up in Muncie's face)
Hey--calm down--

MUNCIE

Oh I'm calm motherfucker.

They are eyeball-to-eyeball, Muncie *this* close to exploding.

OFFICER WAGNER

OK, let's all take a breath.

(pause; to Muncie)

I'm gonna find out who Richard Silk is or was; I'm gonna find out who was staying at Stu Magnusson's house. I'm gonna do some homework on you. And if any of that leads to anything I need help with, I'll take it to a higher authority.

MUNCIE

Like who?

OFFICER WAGNER

Like a multi-jurisdictional one.
Sound like a plan?

MUNCIE

(steady)
...Sounds good.

EXT. FAR ROCKAWAY BEACH - NEW YORK - DAY

LONG SHOT OF THE SPRAWLING ROCKAWAY SHORELINE WHERE THE REMAINING MORNING SURF CROWD GETS IN THEIR "ONE LAST RUN" BEFORE HEADING OFF TO TEACH KIDS OR DRIVE A BUS OR AUDITION FOR A FILM OR PILLAGE FROM A PERCH HIGH ATOP WALL STREET...

CLOSE ON MANNY QUINONES--46, Puerto Rican--riding the Rockaways version of a supertube like it's his last day on earth, the smile on his face a million miles wide.

AND THEN THE WAVE BREAKS AND HE *SPECTACULARLY* WIPES OUT--HIS BODY *HURLED* THROUGH THE AIR--THEN BURIED DEEP INSIDE THE FOAM

EXT. BEACH - FAR ROCKAWAY BEACH - NEW YORK - LATER

Manny, now recovered, limps from the shore carrying his Olaian 900 board, his wet suit dripping, his smile less radiant due to the pain caused by trying to hide the limp.

ROCKAWAY PARKING LOT--Manny now at his 2017 GMC Terrain, his cell phone ringing inside as he tries to unlock and answer--

MANNY

(finally getting it)
Hey Bobby, what's up?...Rockaways
...I'm fuckin' *surfing*...I am
working, I'm on surveillance!
(peering across the lot)
Yeah, he's been here since 6, so we
both got about 30 runs in, in fact
I did my first Turtle Roll.

Manny's POV of a guy across the lot changing out of his wet suit: A White Guy in his 50's, great hair. As Manny talks, he changes clothes as well, and we maybe notice a gun.

MANNY (CONT'D)

I'll let you know, meantime do me a favor and check who our boy's talkin' to now, first call outta the water, looks pretty intense.

CLOSE ON THE WHITE GUY speaking vociferously into his cell.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Thanks pal, talk soon.

Manny hangs up, continues changing, one eye on the guy...

EXT. GAS STATION - STATE ROUTE 115 - POCONOS - DAY

Muncie with a MECHANIC who's just worked on his Audi.

MECHANIC

All righty, 2 new all-season P-Zero's. 147 each plus 60 for labor.

MUNCIE

(handing his credit card)
I appreciate the quick work.

EXT. MUNCIE'S AUDI DAY

DRONE SHOT of the Audi on its way back to Philly--no music.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN AREA - MUNCIE'S APARTMENT - DAY

An exhausted Muncie enters, chucks his keys on the counter and sits on a stool. A sudden pang makes him roll up his torn pants leg to examine the leg wound--which is now way worse, the pustules all popped, each oozing dark greenish yellow pus that's like anchovy paste gone bad. He touches one, holds his hand to his nose--and tries not to gag.

He closes his eyes and attempts calm breathing. Suddenly remembering, he takes from his pocket the business card he found at "Rick's"--and gives it a look:

"SIMON HOME FURNISHINGS, Celebrate Your Life! 1304 Amboy Ave. Edison New Jersey. 08818 ph: 732-443-0908"

He flips the card over and sees handwriting: *"Buy cereal"*

Muncie grabs his laptop and pulls up the *SIMON HOME FURNISHINGS* website, and right there at the top is the smiling face of the man Muncie saw dismembered:

"Owner Mark David Simon started his store for the sensible spender who wants a bit more"...and on like that.

Muncie closes his eyes to think, then leans back and stares at the ceiling, trying to make sense of the horror.

MUNCIE'S POV ON THE CEILING--SPECIFICALLY HIS CEILING FAN.

What the fuck is that?

C.U. on the fan where it connects to the ceiling: Almost imperceptible, wedged in the base, barely bigger than a marble. He stands to get a better look, eyes squinted...

Is he paranoid or is it some kinda wireless remote...camera?

Muncie grabs his wallet and tosses its contents on the table: Credit cards, U-Penn ID, insurance...searching the pile--

MUNCIE

...Where the fuck's my license?

It's not there. He stops--looks again at the ceiling. He grabs a stool and stands on it to reach for the "marble"--yanking it from the fan base: *It is* a fucking camera. Its tiny lens embedded in a round magnetic base.

Muncie just stands there on the stool in the middle of the room, suddenly vulnerable as fuck. His eyes dart to the front door--then to his balcony entrance. He hops down and goes to the sliding glass door, **inspects the latch and discovers it's been forcibly bent**--to where it no long catches the frame.

Fuck. He pockets the camera, grabs his laptop, suitcase, the cards from the counter--a garlic clove from a basket--and heads out the door.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - MUNCIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Muncie crosses to his car, his FOOTFALLS echoing loudly in the deserted garage, eyes scanning for any and all danger.

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - DAY

Muncie pulls into a West Philly Best Buy, gets out, nervously looks around, then locks and heads inside.

INT. BEST BUY - WEST PHILLY - DAY

Muncie approaches a sulkily sultry BEST BUY CLERK.

MUNCIE
I'm looking for a burner phone?
(the clerk looks blank)
Like a prepaid or disposable--

BEST BUY CLERK
A *burner*.

MUNCIE
Right. So I need one.

The clerk winks at him--*or does she?*--then opens a drawer and places a small flip phone and 3 Sim cards on the counter--

BEST BUY CLERK
Phone is 20, cards 20, 40, 60.

MUNCIE
What's the 40 get me?

BEST BUY CLERK
200 minutes, 50 texts, photos but
no data.

MUNCIE
So not traceable?

BEST BUY CLERK
Anyone you call can get your IMEI
number once the SIM's plugged in,
and they can of course track your
SIM serial to the nearest tower,
but you can always replace either.

Muncie absorbs, takes a credit card from his wallet--

BEST BUY CLERK (CONT'D)
You might wanna pay cash.
(off his look)
If you're worried about tracing.

He agrees--and takes out cash. As the clerk rings it up,
Muncie takes the tiny "marble" camera from his pocket.

MUNCIE
Can you tell me what this is?

BEST BUY CLERK
Surveillance camera.

MUNCIE
I know, but--

BEST BUY CLERK

Works off a remote router, probably
up to 25 yards away.

MUNCIE

Is it fairly standard or is it,
like, CIA-type fucking level?

The clerk smiles at his flailing lingo, inspects the camera.

BEST BUY CLERK

High end but anyone could buy it.

MUNCIE

If I had the router, could I trace
where it was routing *too*?

BEST BUY CLERK

Only if you reinstall the camera;
otherwise they'd shut it down.

(Muncie nods, thinking)

Feeling a little worried?

MUNCIE

Yeah.

BEST BUY CLERK

It's a mad world.

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - DAY

Muncie pulls off Rt. 287 and stops for a light at the bottom of the ramp. He glances in his rear view and sees a black SUV, though sun glare prevents him from seeing its driver.

The light changes and Muncie takes a left. So does the SUV. Muncie doesn't want to default to paranoia, but when he takes the next right--onto a quiet street, the SUV follows suit.

Muncie pulls a sudden and awkward--3-point turn, making the SUV wait for him to finish--allowing Muncie a look at the driver--a quite tall woman who might just be a man--or else just a very tall, very stern, buzz-cut soccer mom. They lock eyes...until Muncie drives one way--and she drives the other.

EXT. SIMON HOME FURNISHINGS - EDISON, NJ - DAY

Muncie's Audi pulls into the small lot of this boutique store along a commercial strip of Edison. He rifles through his suitcase to find pants that aren't ripped and a clean sweatshirt;

he smooths his hair in the rearview--then gets out and heads for the store, with its window display of coffee tables, love seats, desks and *bins*.

INT. SIMON HOME FURNISHINGS - EDISON, NJ - SAME

A one-room store for the middle-class consumer who wants to feel special--above Ikea but well below Roche Bobois. In here you can monogram a washcloth, buy a \$60 candle and find a sectional that's comfortable *and* chic. The employee today is ROGER, a deeply affable white man in his 50's.

ROGER

How are you today, sir, anything I can help you with?

MUNCIE

I was actually wondering if Mark is in?

ROGER

Mark Simon?

MUNCIE

Yeah.

ROGER

(a broad smile)

Oh no, Mark is not--he's the *owner*, he's only in once a week, if that.

MUNCIE

I see. Know where I might find him?

ROGER

Your bet's as good as mine! May I ask who's asking?

MUNCIE

Of course. My name's Archie Betts and believe it or not, Mark and I were actually frat brothers together at Rutgers.

QUICK-FLASH to Muncie talking with "Rick Silk" through the window of Rick's pickup, as Muncie clocks a "*RUTGERS*" travel coffee mug in his cup holder. **RETURN TO PRESENT--**

ROGER

You're kiddin' me!

MUNCIE

Isn't that somethin'?

ROGER
Never had him pegged as a frat boy!

MUNCIE
Believe me we'd all just as well
forget it! Lucky they didn't have
Facebook back then!

The men share a laugh as Muncie scans the counter behind Roger, looking for anything he can glean.

ROGER
You know, you *do* look familiar.
Have you stopped by before?

MUNCIE
I actually haven't seen Mark in
years, which is why I don't have
his cell. I just happened to be
driving by, saw the store, thought
I'd pop in.

ROGER
Gotcha! Well I wish I could help,
but if you wanna leave a note--

MUNCIE
I'd love to, thanks.

Roger goes behind the counter for pen and paper...as Muncie finally spots a glass-encased photo of MARK being presented a plaque that reads: "2015 Northern New Jersey Small Business Retailer Of The Year." Next to him is a woman we recognize: The NPR-listening Mom, *Lucie Snipes*, visibly pregnant.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)
How's Mark's family doin'?

ROGER
(handing Muncie the pen)
Well, not sure you know, but
they're--well, I'll just say it:
They're recently separated.

MUNCIE
Oh no--

ROGER
Yeah, it's a--it's a real bummer.

MUNCIE
I can imagine--

ROGER

Now that said, sometimes these things are for the best. As you may recall, Mark's a strong-headed guy, likes to do things his way, and I think Lucie just needed a break.

MUNCIE

Wow, well I know how he's feeling.

ROGER

You been down that road?

MUNCIE

Down it, across it, got hit by a car in the *middle* of it--

They share another laugh as Muncie writes his note...

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Did she at least get the house?

ROGER

Of course, it's the only way with the kids. So she's still over in Franklin, and Mark's been sort of shufflin' from place-to-place.

Muncie nods solemnly and hands Roger the note.

MUNCIE

No one said life was easy.
(extending his hand)
It was good talking to you, sir.

ROGER

You too, my friend. I'll make sure he gets this.

Muncie looks at him, doubting this, then nods and leaves.

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - SAME

Muncie on his laptop pirating wifi from the store, looking up LUCIE SIMON, FRANKLIN NJ. Finding nothing, he adds "Mark Robert Simon wife"--and gets a 2012 marriage announcement for Mark Simon and Lucie Snipes in *The Somerset County News*.

Muncie Googles "Lucie Snipes, Franklin Township, address," and quickly gets a hit: "37 Cedar Grove Lane, Franklin Twp."

NEW ANGLE: What Muncie *doesn't* see is that Roger is now watching him from inside the home furnishing store, his look less congenial as he worries he maybe just made a mistake.

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - LATER

Muncie sits parked across the street from 37 Cedar Grove Lane, a tidy 2 bed/2 bath house with a small yard and a kid's *heart* drawing on its door. A moment later, an orange Chevy hatchback pulls into the driveway, and Lucie, Blake and Tanner get out and head inside--as Muncie quickly heads over--

MUNCIE

Excuse me!

Lucie and the kids turn, and she watches without expression as Muncie tries to present as "non-threatening"--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Hi--sorry to disturb you--but I was wondering if I could ask a question.

(Lucie waits for more)

It'll only take a second.

She regards him, her thoughts impossible to discern...

LUCIE

(holding out her keys)

Tanner, take Blake inside?

Tanner obediently takes the keys and goes to the door; he expertly unlocks and enters, Blake follow his every move.

LUCIE (CONT'D)

Who are you?

MUNCIE

I know your husband a little bit.

Mark Simon?

(she waits)

We were neighbors, very briefly.

LUCIE

Where?

MUNCIE

In the Poconos. Monroe County.

They take each other in: She utterly neutral, he trying to determine if she's progressive, conservative, libertarian...

Also not lost on him is that she's definitely his "type"--cute, cool and collected--the kind who on most days he'd be working hard to charm.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Have you spoken to him recently?

LUCIE

Why are you asking?

MUNCIE

Because I think he might be hurt.

Her face now, *barely*, betrays a sense of shock and worry.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

There was a break-in at the house he was staying. It was pretty bad.

LUCIE

Did you call the cops?

MUNCIE

Yeah, but he wasn't there when they came, so I don't think they believed me.

(then)

There was blood but--Mark was gone.

Beat. She again tries to mask evident fear--as she takes out her phone, hits a number, calmly waits...then clicks off.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Straight to voicemail?

(no answer)

Did he have enemies?

LUCIE

Who the fuck are you?

MUNCIE

I was renting the house next door, I swear I didn't hurt him, but I went to ask his help and I saw him ...attacked. By some very bad dudes.

She still doesn't trust him...but *maybe* she believes him. He takes out the business card for Simon Home Furnishing--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

I found this in his house.

LUCIE

You could've found that anywhere.

Muncie flips it and shows her the writing on the back.

MUNCIE

Is that his handwriting?

Her non-answer is clearly a yes.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

I'm just trying to find out who he is, 'cause I'm telling you: *The only part of him still there is his bracelet.*

LUCIE

I suppose you have that too?

MUNCIE

No, but it was a silver clasp bracelet. Did he have one of those?
(another no-answer yes)
Why does he go by Richard Silk?

LUCIE

...Because he's controversial.

MUNCIE

In what way?
(no answer)
To where people would hurt him?
(she shrugs a little)
Why?

LUCIE

...He's an influencer.

MUNCIE

For what?

She looks away, hesitant. Muncie's getting impatient--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

You need to tell me. Whoever got him is after me too--they shot at me, slashed my tires, put a camera in my house, they fucked up my leg--

He rolls up his pants leg and shows her the festering wound, which nearly makes her puke on sight... Then, calmer:

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Please. I'm just trying to figure out what the fuck's going on.

LUCIE

(pause)

Have you heard of *Tomorrow Reborn*?

MUNCIE

Yeah. I mean--the *newsletter*?

LUCIE

Yeah.

MUNCIE

What about it?

LUCIE

...He's affiliated.

MUNCIE

Like how?

LUCIE

He helps out.

MUNCIE

How so?

(no answer)

It's like a one-man newsletter.

(no answer)

...Is he--?

LUCIE

No.

Muncie is studying her. He can't fucking believe it.

MUNCIE

Is he "Brother14"?

(no answer)

Is Brother14 your fucking husband?!

LUCIE

...Not for long.

MUNCIE

Are you *kidding* me?!

LUCIE

Can you lower your voice?--

MUNCIE
That guy's a fuckin' white
supremacist!--

LUCIE
No he's not--

MUNCIE
Do you know what "14" *stands* for?

LUCIE
Yeah--

MUNCIE
It's for the 14 words "*We must
secure the existence of our people--*

LUCIE
I know what it means--

MUNCIE
--and a future for white children"!

It sits in the air; she doesn't try to answer.

LUCIE
...Yes; he has enemies.

Muncie absorbs this, and all that it could mean. Then--

LUCIE (CONT'D)
If you've read him the last few
weeks you'd also know he's
renounced some of that. Which has
created a different *kind* of enemy.

News to Muncie, who clearly doesn't read him everyday...

MUNCIE
When did you last speak?

LUCIE
...Thursday.

MUNCIE
Why?--

LUCIE
Can you stop fucking grilling me
with questions?
(then, calmer)
He has 2 sons. He called to say hi.

MUNCIE

I'm sorry, I just...
 (looking around, at a loss)
 Can you call me if you hear
 anything? From the police, or--
 (then, emptily)
 Or if *he* calls?

Beat; she takes a pen from her pocket, offers it, and extends her hand, palm up. He looks at it--and realizes she wants him to write *on* it. He locates his new phone number and jots it down on the palm of her hand, oddly intimate, JUST AS:

A NJ State Trooper's Chevy Tahoe pulls into the driveway. Muncie watches as TROOPER JOHN DIGGINS gets out.

LUCIE

(to Muncie)
 That's my boyfriend.

MUNCIE

You fucking serious?

LUCIE

He doesn't know what Mark does.
 (and then)
 He wouldn't like it, so please
 don't say anything.

TROOPER DIGGINS

(approaching)
 Everything OK here?

LUCIE

Yeah.

TROOPER DIGGINS

(to Muncie)
 How we doin'?

MUNCIE

We doin' great.

The Trooper doesn't dig this response. He looks to Lucie.

LUCIE

...He's a friend of Mark's.

TROOPER DIGGINS

That right? Who woulda' thought?

MUNCIE

Everyone's got *one*. Negro friend.

The Trooper doesn't smile. Muncie doesn't care. This seems too uphill a battle for right now, so he heads for his car.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)
 (leaving, to Lucie)
 I'll let you know what I find out.

When Muncie gets to his Audi, he looks back to where Lucie and John still stand. She and Muncie catch eyes a moment--a connection--before he gets into his Audi and takes off.

INT. STARBUCKS - NORTHERN NEW JERSEY - DAY

Muncie on his laptop scanning a recent *Tomorrow Reborn* newsletter on a Telegram channel called "**THE NEO-GUARD.**"

We glimpse fragments of the post:

"...but our real battle is with the global autocracies--who from the reactor core power fulcrums of Beijing, Moscow, Washington and Riyadh--derive their billions from the destruction/domination of our average American lives..."

And then the simple sign-off: "Yours in battle--*Brother14.*"

Muncie shuts the laptop. His calf is fucking killing him. He lift his pants leg, digs the garlic clove from his pocket, peels it and gingerly rubs it into the oozing, maturing, now-whitening septic wound. Despite his attempt at discretion, and no matter the weird shit that happens in any Starbucks, he nonetheless gets some viewers. To one onlooker:

MUNCIE
 Sorry about this.

But he doesn't stop and the onlooker keeps looking. Muncie tries to explain, even as the smell almost makes him wretch.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)
 It's got good antimicrobials. Least that's what my Mom used to say.

EXT. PARKING LOT - STARBUCKS - JERSERY - DAY

Muncie limps to his car, the garlic ineffective for pain.

MANNY (O.S.)
 Muncie Daniels, right?

Muncie turns to find Manny Quinones, who we last saw changing from a wet suit, but he's now dressed like the FBI agent that he is, and he flashes his badge so that Muncie has no doubt.

MANNY (CONT'D)
Special Agent Quinones, NYC FBI.
Got a few minutes to talk?

MUNCIE
...About what?

MANNY
Incident at your Poconos rental. Or
next door, I should say. Or both.

MUNCIE
...How'd you find me?

MANNY
Starbucks wifi. We're very friendly
with their dedicated ISP's. And
your email's not exactly private.
(a smile)
Cost of being a celebrity.

MUNCIE
I wasn't using that address.

MANNY
(re: his badge)
The "I" stands for *investigation*.
(pointing to a bench)
Wanna sit? Leg looks like it hurts.

EXT. PUBLIC BENCH - NORTH JERSEY - MOMENTS LATER

Manny and Muncie. Manny bemused and a bit inscrutable.

MANNY
Bureau received a call this a.m.
from Poconos Regional Police. I was
alerted due to a task force I run
on white collar shenanigans, one of
which concerns a *Stu Magnusson*,
owner of the house where you *didn't*
find a dead body.

MUNCIE
So you believe me?

MANNY
I believe there's something to
believe.
(off Muncie)
It's possible someone wanted Simon
dead. It's possible you crossed
paths with him.

MUNCIE
That's it?

MANNY
Tell me what I'm missing.

MUNCIE
Guy was a fucking alt-right *idol*--

MANNY
Indeed--

MUNCIE
Someone shut off his lights, walked
into his house and chopped him up--

MANNY
No one knew he was there--

MUNCIE
Stu Magnusson knew he was there--

MANNY
Stu Magnusson *maybe* knew that.

MUNCIE
Stu Magnusson *maybe* didn't like
that *Simon* was softening his views--

MANNY
How do you know that?

MUNCIE
I read his posts.

MANNY
Longtime fan?

MUNCIE
No--Just now in fucking Starbucks!--

MANNY
You didn't know who he was before?

MUNCIE
I'd *heard* of him.

MANNY
Did you want him dead?

MUNCIE
Why would I want him--?

MANNY

You're big into Black Lives Matter. Isn't it possible the movement thought, "Hey, let's just take him out?"

MUNCIE

Maybe the FBI to thought that too.

MANNY

May-be.

MUNCIE

And now you need someone to blame.

MANNY

You watch too many movies.

MUNCIE

Based on true stories about the FBI.

MANNY

(a smile...)

Mark Simon used a VPN to scramble his location, and Telegram has domain fronts that circumvent our ability to identify whereabouts--

MUNCIE

But the "I" is for *investigation*.

MANNY

Sure. It's conceivable the U.S. government could take out enemies, foreign or domestic, who threaten our democracy. Could even find out where they're staying and do it prejudicially. But *would* we? No.

Muncie just looks at him; shakes his head.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Let's get back to your BLM ties.

MUNCIE

I don't *have* BLM ties.

MANNY

You've defended them on TV.

MUNCIE

I've defended the Cleveland Browns but I ain't on their roster.

MANNY

You have a history of complaints
against the police.

MUNCIE

What's that gotta do with some
white supremacist motherfucker?

MANNY

You don't like oppressive
organizations.

MUNCIE

(standing)
You outta your fucking mind?!--

MANNY

Easy cowboy--

MUNCIE

*I don't like oppression but I ain't
gonna chop it into little pieces!--*

MANNY

Fair enough--

MUNCIE

*An' by the way--that Nazi muhfucka'
probably wasn't too crazy about
your Puerto Rican ass either!*

MANNY

(extremely calm)
What makes you think I'm Puerto
Rican?
(no answer)
I am. And you're right, Mr. Simon
likely didn't love me either.
(he stands)
I'm gonna need your burner number.

MUNCIE

...What makes you think I have a
burner?

MANNY

I've been to a couple rodeos.
(then)
Look, I'm here to help. If I find
stuff out, I'll wanna reach you.
...You can have mine too.

Manny offers his card. Muncie looks at it...and accepts.

MUNCIE
I'll text you.

MANNY
(a smile)
Fair enough.
(heading for his car)
You should see someone about that
leg. You got pus comin' out your
pants.

Manny heads for his car, as Muncie looks down at his pants.

EXT. EMERGENCY ROOM PARKING - JEFFERSON HOSPITAL - PA - DAY
Muncie parks, limps out of his Audi, and into the ER.

INT. WAITING ROOM - JEFFERSON HOSPITAL - DUSK

A packed room, the wait long. Muncie tries for low profile but folks are staring--maybe because he's on TV, or maybe he looks a bit insane; or maybe it's just his noxious leg. Some seem to be tweeting; and maybe he's paranoid, but one seems to snap a photo. Muncie slides down in his chair and writes a one-word text to the number on Manny's card: "MUNCIE".

EXT. POCONOS FOREST - DUSK

A MAN IN HIS 60'S walks his Siberian Husky in the woods. The dog starts barking, takes off ahead. The man follows, turns a bend and comes upon a SWAMP. The dog is sniffing at something that's half-sticking out of the water. The man approaches--

MAN IN HIS 60'S
What you got there, Slider? What've
you gone an' found now?

Man gets closer. Dog licking hard at something. Man's POV:

DEAD GUY IN A BALACLAVA, A GOLDEN PEN STICKING FROM HIS HEAD.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM - ER - JEFFERSON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Muncie with a DOCTOR--white, 20's--looking at his leg.

DOCTOR
Yeah this is pretty frickin' gross.

MUNCIE
Infected?

DOCTOR

Oh, yeah--no question. *Where'd* you say you landed?

MUNCIE

A swamp.

DOCTOR

A *swamp*?

MUNCIE

A *swamp*. Like, muddy water--

DOCTOR

Yeah--no--I got it, but in the *woods*, right? Tripped in the *woods*?

MUNCIE

Yeah--the Poconos. Last night.

DOCTOR

Gotcha. So--yeah, no doubt a lotta *animal fecal matter* in there, lotta *rodent slurry*, which is probably what we're dealing with, and you likely got a pretty heavy load to be pusin' up so quick like this.
(paternal)

Were you in the swamp for a while?

MUNCIE

Yeah.

DOCTOR

(downright gentle)

I understand. How's *your stool*?

MUNCIE

Haven't had the chance today.

DOCTOR

Great--so no diarrhea?

MUNCIE

No--

DOCTOR

Great--How about yellow skin, red eye, muscle ache, a severe *burning* sensation while urinating?--

MUNCIE

Yeah.

DOCTOR
Yeah burning urine?!

MUNCIE
Yeah--

DOCTOR
Great!--Good to know! So yeah, this can be serious if not treated pronto--we're talkin' E coli, yersiniosis, psittacosis, *hookworm*-- your basic zoonotic disease portfolio, or "*buffet*" as we say.
(swabbing the wound)
I'm gonna start you on a 30 minute IV drip that you can then take home and self-administer, although it's a lot easier if you have a loved one or a partner of some sort to help out. Do you have loved one?

MUNCIE
Not on me.

DOCTOR
You're funny. Partner?
(Muncie shakes his head)
Roommate? Neighbor? Dog? I'm kidding! No worries, you can do it on your own. I'll be back.

He pats Muncie on the back and leaves.

INT. CORRIDOR - JEFFERSON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Muncie in a wheelchair in a bustling corridor, an IV drip hanging from a bar and connected to his arm. Someone's handed him a back issue of *People* and he's trying to get through an article about Lee Majors turning 80.

VOICE (O.S.)
You're on TV, right?

Muncie looks up to see TWO WHITE GUYS standing before him, both fairly clean-cut, though one has a beard--the kind that could pass for either hipster or redneck. Same with the Dickies boots: Could be for fashion, could be for work.

MUNCIE
Sometimes.

WHITE GUY #1
We're fans.

MUNCIE
Is that right?

WHITE GUY #1
Sorta.

He follows with a goofy grin, as if to say "Yeah, I'm a fan-boy," or--"I'm not even *close* to a fan." Muncie glances down the corridor, wondering how they got back here.

WHITE GUY #2
Is it true?

MUNCIE
Is *what* true?

WHITE GUY #2
That you knew Brother14?

This sets Muncie back, to where he'd probably walk away if he wasn't tied to a drip.

MUNCIE
I don't know who you mean.

WHITE GUY #1
You haven't heard the rumor?

MUNCIE
Which one?

WHITE GUY #1
That Brother14's not well.
(Muncie doesn't answer)
Look man, we're just wonderin' what you know. People are curious.

MUNCIE
How'd you find me?

WHITE GUY #2
(holding out his phone)
Remember? You're famous.

Another goofy smile, as Muncie looks at a photo of himself in the emergency waiting room. Muncie looks back up--firm:

MUNCIE
I don't know shit.

They absorb, withholding evident judgement...

WHITE GUY #1
Would your family know?

Muncie hears this--and TAKES A HUGE SWING AT THE GUY--but his arm's attached to the IV, which FLIES OFF ITS HOOK as Muncie nearly tumbles off the wheelchair. A NURSE hurries over--

NURSE

You OK, Mr. Daniels?!

MUNCIE

Yeah--

--but by the time he's disentangled himself, the 2 men are gone. Muncie looks around--pissed and fucking scared.

EXT. EMERGENCY ROOM PARKING - JEFFERSON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Muncie run-limps towards his Audi, the IV pouch in one hand--unlocking, getting in and peeling out in mere seconds.

INT. MUNCIE'S AUDI - NIGHT

Muncie pushes the Audi hard while dialing his burner--

MUNCIE

(into phone)

Liza, it's me, I'm on my way and I want you to get the kids ready, we're goin' to a hotel. It's fucked up and I'll explain later but please just be ready in 10 minutes. OK? I love you.

He clicks off just as a POLICE SIREN roars from behind.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

(into rear view)

For fuck's sake.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - WEST PHILLY - NIGHT

Muncie rolls down his window as a PHILLY COP--30's, white--saunters over from his cruiser.

PHILLY COP

License and registration.

MUNCIE

(pulling out his wallet)

I didn't realize I was going that fast.

PHILLY COP
Never heard *that* before.

MUNCIE
Oh fuck--

--as Muncie remembers his license was stolen...

MUNCIE (CONT'D)
You're not gonna believe this.

PHILLY COP
Dog ate your license?

MUNCIE
It was stolen.

PHILLY COP
Mind stepping out of the car?

Muncie warily unbuckles, opens the door, as the officer steps back, creating distance, hand on holster. Muncie to himself--

MUNCIE
You don't gotta go all Chauvin.

PHILLY COP
Excuse me?

MUNCIE
Nothing--sorry.
(things now tense...)
Sir, can I give you another form of ID so you can run a check on me? I also have the card of an FBI agent in my wallet who can attest to the license robbery that occurred.

PHILLY COP
Is that right?

MUNCIE
Yes sir, may I open my wallet--

PHILLY COP
You can't drive without a license--

MUNCIE
I realize that--

PHILLY COP
Do you?--

MUNCIE

Sir, there's an emergency with my kids at my house, so I'm trying to--

PHILLY COP

Name please.

MUNCIE

Muncie Jamal Daniels.

PHILLY COP

Let's see your other ID.

Muncie, trying not to lose it, takes out his U-Penn ID.

PHILLY COP (CONT'D)

Stay right there, hands on roof.

The cop returns to his cruiser with the ID. Muncie puts his hands on his roof and contemplates his next move. He watches the cop take his sweet-ass time walking back to the car.

Once inside with his door half open, the cop types on a dashboard laptop. Muncie looks back at his keys--still in his ignition. This is a tough one. JUST THEN--a TEXT pops up on his burner, which sits in the passenger seat:

"JUST FOUND A BODY BUT NOT THE ONE WE DISCUSSED. U WOULDN'T BE MISSING A PEN, WOULD U? --SPECIAL AGENT QUINONES"

CLOSE on Muncie, shutting his eyes in dismay. He checks the cop, who's listening hard on his cell phone. Muncie can't fucking believe he's in this situation. JUST THEN HIS BURNER PHONE RINGS. Muncie sees the number and reaches for it--

MUNCIE

Liza, you get my message?--

PHILLY COP (ON POLICE CAR PA)

PUT THE PHONE DOWN! NOW!

MUNCIE

(to cop)

It's my wife, man! It's an emergen--

PHILLY COP

(out of car, gun raised)

PUT IT DOWN AND PUT YOUR HANDS ON THE ROOF!!!

(Muncie still hesitates)

NOW MOTHERFUCKER!!

LIZA (O.S.)

Muncie?... Hello?!

Beat. Muncie quite reluctantly clicks off and tosses the phone into his car, then replaces his hands on the roof. The cop, satisfied with his power, sits back into his cruiser.

Muncie gives it another second of thought--then OPENS HIS CAR DOOR, JAMS INTO DRIVE AND TAKES OFF.

THE COP TOSSES HIS PHONE AND JAMS HIS CAR INTO DRIVE TOO

CHASE--MUNCIE AND THE COP--WEST PHILLY

MUNCIE'S GOT A HEAD START AND HE KNOWS THE STREETS BETTER

A SUDDEN LEFT OFF LANCASTER INTO THE CAMPUS OF OVERBROOK HIGH--AROUND THE MASSIVE STRUCTURE AND OUT THE BACK ONTO OXFORD--

THEN QUICKLY VEERS INTO TUSTIN PLAYGROUND--SKIMMING ACROSS THE INFIELD, PAST THE HOOP COURTS--

THEN ZIG-ZAGS THROUGH THE SPRAY FOUNTAINS--EMPTY TONIGHT BUT FRESH AS YESTERDAY IN THE CHILDHOOD OF MUNCIE'S MIND

AS HE BUMPS OUT OF TUSTIN HE'S NOW GOT 100 YARDS ON THE COP

QUICK LEFT ONTO HAZLENUT, RIGHT INTO THE ALLEY, LEFT INTO THE BACK OF DJ'S TIRES, SCREECHING TO A HALT BETWEEN THE BACK OF THE GARAGE AND A TRACTORLESS SEMI--AS HE **SLAMS OFF THE LIGHTS**

Silence. Not enough to outrun 'em forever, but good for now.

He gets out. The place is deserted. If ever a time to know how to hot rod--now would be it. He tries a couple car doors. All locked; and Muncie never was a thief. Fuck.

EXT. NORTH 63RD STREET - WEST PHILLY - NIGHT

Muncie walks the side street, low key, SIRENS in distance.

EXT. LIZA'S HOUSE - WYNDALE AVE. - WEST PHILLY - NIGHT

Muncie quickly approaches the house he used to live in with his wife and kids. Bittersweet, but bigger fish to fry. He half runs up the yard, peering in the bay window--and **sees LIZA, his ex--40, Colombian--standing with a WHITE GUY whose back is to the window.** It looks tense--the guy talking animatedly with his hands, Liza concerned. Muncie tries the front door but it's locked. He fumbles for keys, shouting--

MUNCIE

LIZA--I'M RIGHT HERE--I GOT YOU!!

--finally finding his key, jamming it in the door and then
busting into the living room--

Where he finds Liza standing with Adam Jennings, the republican congressman we saw on the MSNBC segment. Both stare at Muncie like he's a freak-on-wheels, one who's currently trying *not* to have a heart attack in front of them.

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

(to Jennings)

Why the...why the fuck're you here?

ADAM JENNINGS

I needed to speak and I couldn't reach you--so I tried your ex-wife.

(re: Liza)

Whose reputation precedes her.
 Drove up from D.C. just now.

MUNCIE

(to Liza)

We gotta get you outta here.

LIZA

Why? What's going on?--

(Muncie sucking air)

Muncie?! I have congressmen showing up at my house, you leaving insane messages from unknown numbers--

MUNCIE

(trying for calm)

I just wanna get us away from here, OK? Please--there's messed up people doin' very bad shit.

ADAM JENNINGS

Why don't I drive us to a hotel?--

MUNCIE

Excuse me--shut the fuck up--I don't "trust" you!--I don't know you and I don't like you showin' up here un-a-fuckin'-nounced. So you're not driving me *anywhere*--

ADAM JENNINGS

Fine--

MUNCIE

You understand that?--

ADAM JENNINGS

I *do*, but I'm telling you--we need to talk. Like you said, there's bad stuff happening and maybe *together* we can get to the bottom of--

MUNCIE

How'd you even hear about this?

ADAM JENNINGS

I can tell you when we talk--

MUNCIE

(to Liza)

Are the kids upstairs?

LIZA

Yeah--

MUNCIE

(shouting up)

Dem, Tanya, get down here!

(to Liza)

You got your keys?

ADAM JENNINGS

Muncie, when can we speak?--

MUNCIE

Tomorrow--

ADAM JENNINGS

Just give me 20 minutes--

MUNCIE

TOMORROW! Now leave me alone!

DEMETRIUS and 8-year-old TANYA are coming down the stairs, taken aback by their Dad's intensity and the drama generally--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Hey you guys, sorry for all this, I love you so much and I'll explain it all later, but we gotta go.

He's guiding them to the door, looking for hidden cameras, watching the street, trying to get Jennings out too--

MUNCIE (CONT'D)

Yo, Congressman, get outta here, man, we'll talk in the morning.

(to kids)

Let's go, guys, c'mon.

EXT. DAYS INN - ROUTE 76 NEAR CONSHOHOCKEN PA - NIGHT

Liza's Honda Hybrid pulls in and parks. Muncie, Liza and the kids get out and hurriedly head inside.

INT. ROOM 317 - DAYS INN - ROUTE 76 - SAME

Muncie, Liza and the kids settle in but it's not easy. Muncie and Liza not on great terms and she's not into sharing a bed.

LIZA

Should you and Dem take that one?

MUNCIE

You serious?

LIZA

Or Tanya and I can take it.

MUNCIE

(too tired to object)
...Fine.

DEMETRIUS

I hope you don't fart, Dad.

MUNCIE

I've never farted in my life.

DEMETRIUS

Mom said you farted at your wedding
and all the guests had to leave.

TANYA

She said everyone knew it was you.

MUNCIE

You all weren't even frickin' *born*.

Liza almost smiles, and for a second they're a family again.

LIZA

All right guys, brush teeth.

The kids find their brushes and go to the bathroom...

MUNCIE

(genuine, formal, to Liza)
I'm sorry.

LIZA

...What the fuck's going on?

MUNCIE

...I saw something last night. That people didn't want me to see.

(pause)

What'd Jennings say to you?

LIZA

Just that he needed to talk.

MUNCIE

I shouldn't stay here. If they track me, it'll endanger you more--

LIZA

We paid cash for the room--

MUNCIE

I have a burner phone.

LIZA

OK but aren't those untraceable?--

MUNCIE

I gave its number to the FBI.

LIZA

So now the *FBI* is after you?

She looks at him, a mix of sympathy...and wariness.

LIZA (CONT'D)

I have an argument at 9 a.m.

MUNCIE

On what?

LIZA

Same as always: The Yukos merger.

Muncie absorbs, trying not to spin out on conspiracy...

LIZA (CONT'D)

Sleep here. It'll be fine.

INT. ROOM 317 - DAYS INN - ROUTE 76 - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Everyone asleep except for Muncie, his leg in pain and his mind on high alert, convinced every sound is an attack. He stands and checks his phone. Another text from Manny:

"Running from cops makes you look guilty. CALL ME --Quinones"

Muncie takes out the SIM card... He looks out the window:

His POV on the half-full Days Inn back lot that abuts a vast stretch of unused land, the kind that's hard to sell because it's so close to the highway. He looks at the sliver of moon, then down at the lonely cars. He sees something moving...but it turns out to just be a skunk.

INT. BEDROOM - LUCIE'S HOUSE - DAWN

Lucie wakes up, her state trooper boyfriend asleep beside her. She heads downstairs in just her t-shirt.

INT. KITCHEN - LUCIE'S HOUSE - SAME

Lucie makes intensely-strong coffee and watches out the window as the coffee drips. The street out front is empty and eerie. She looks at the palm of her hand, where Muncie's number is faded but still there, wondering if she should. But then she shakes it off...and grabs herself a mug.

INT. BREAKFAST AREA - DAYS IN - ROUTE 76 - DAY

The early morning guests pour pre-mixed waffle batter out of dixie cups and grab their complimentary plastic-wrapped Sarah Lee muffins. CAMERA FINDS Muncie in a corner sipping shitty coffee, watching local news and trying not to be seen.

A MAN OF MIDDLE EASTERN DESCENT enters and heads for the coffee, pours a cup, grabs a banana and sits a little too close to Muncie. Beat. Then, on the local news:

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

A shocking story this morning just coming in, Congressman Adam Jennings was hospitalized late last night after falling violently ill in his Chester County home. Officials are unsure of the cause, but early reports indicate Jennings was possibly *poisoned*.

CLOSE on Muncie, his jaw on the floor as the TV shows several photos of Jennings in happier days--

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

This is a breaking story that we'll continue to cover throughout the morning, but boy--

The man sitting near Muncie glances over at him--

LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

(to her co-anchor)

We've certainly seen this kind of thing overseas, but here in the U.S., with one of our own--*scary*.

CO-NEWS ANCHOR

Indeed. Again, other causes aren't being ruled out, but *whatever* it was, Jennings remains in the ICU in what doctors are calling "*an extremely precarious state*."

The Arab man near Muncie is still watching him:

MAN OF MIDDLE EASTERN DESCENT

(very slight accent)

How horrible is that?

MUNCIE

...It's pretty horrible.

MAN OF MIDDLE EASTERN DESCENT

Has it ever happened to you?

MUNCIE

(looks at the guy)

Poisoned? No. You?

MAN OF MIDDLE EASTERN DESCENT

Once. It's very painful.

(he stands)

Do you want the rest of my coffee?

(off Muncie's look)

I'm kiddin', friend!

As he walks away. Muncie watches...then replaces the SIM in his burner, finds the missed calls from Quinones, and leaves.

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT - DAYS INN - ROUTE 76 - SAME

Muncie on the phone in the half-full lot, no one else around. He punches the number for Quinones and waits as it rings.

EXT. INDEPENDENCE MALL - HISTORIC DISTRICT - DAY

Manny Quinones on an early morning run, Independence Hall before him, the Liberty Bell Center looming in the deep BG.

As his CELL PHONE RINGS, cutting off his favorite Counting Crows song, he checks it, knows immediately, debates...and declines. An imperceptible head shake as he keeps running--

MANNY
 (to himself)
 Too late, amigo.

EXT. BACK PARKING LOT - DAYS INN - ROUTE 76 - CONTINUOUS

Muncie, frustrated with the voicemail, leaves a message:

MUNCIE
 Hey, it's Muncie Daniels.
 (strong)
*Can you tell me what the fuck is
 goin' on?*

He pauses, wondering what else to say, then decides that does it. He clicks off and stands...and then he gets a TEXT:

"Hi. It's Lucie Snipes. Call me?"

Muncie stands, unsure what to do...as CAMERA PULLS BACK--

ABOVE THE DAYS INN LOT AND ITS ABUTTING USELESS FIELDS...

ABOVE ROUTE 76 AND THE TINY TOWN OF CONSHOHOKEN...

ABOVE THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER AND THE FOOTHILLS OF THE POCONOS--

UNTIL MUNCIE IS JUST A SPECK...

A GUY WITH A CHEAP BURNER AND A TARGET ON HIS BACK...

IN THE BACK LOT OF A MOTEL THAT'S JUST LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE.

END OF PILOT