

FOREVER KNIGHT

"Spin Doctor"

Episode 92-015

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SECOND DRAFT
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TEASER

INT. - LUXURY HOTEL BATH - NIGHT

TRACK slowly into the bath from the hallway.

HEAR O.S. the soft drone of a television news program.

CLOSE on bath towels, emblazoned with gold-flocked logo, "HOTEL PERCEVAL".

SEE a SMALL, hotel-issue TELEVISION atop a marble counter.

ON TV. Nightly news reporter doing a remote from the lobby of the Hotel Perceval.

REPORTER

...as election night draws near,
both candidates in the
gubernatorial run-off have set up
headquarters here at the Perceval.

INSERT: on TV. Side-by-side photos of smiling, gubernatorial candidates, BARBARA NORTON and CLIFFORD HIATT. CUT TO taped remote coverage of Cliff Hiatt's arrival in the hotel lobby. Newspeople cluster around, barking questions.

REPORTER

Senator Hiatt, senator! You're the
clear leader in the latest polls.
Would you speculate on the outcome
of Tuesday's election?

HIATT

(wading through the
throng)

I'm not going to get comfortable in
the lead. Ballots count. Not polls.

ANOTHER REPORTER

Do you think the Roth Contract
issue will hurt your chances?

Hiatt chills him with a stony glare.

HIATT

People don't take hearsay into the
voting booth. They take their
hearts and their minds.

PULL BACK to reveal a man, soaking in a steaming tub. He's handsome, thirty-ish GILBERT REEVES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Has a washcloth over his eyes that he removes to glance at the television. ON TV: SEE BARBARA NORTON in a similar live remote. Fielding questions.

REPORTER

Judge Norton! What do you say to people who call this campaign a "battle of the sexes?"

BARBARA

I say: wake up and smell the oatmeal. It's 1992!

Chuckles from the assembly.

BARBARA (cont'd)

Gender is not an issue. The lack of jobs is. The budget deficit is.

ANOTHER REPORTER

How are you going to celebrate your victory on Tuesday night?

Laughter.

SEE LAURA NEAL, Barbara Norton's campaign manager, her "right hand" standing beside her. She smiles, flashes both "thumbs up" off the reporter's question.

BARBARA

(beat)
With a prayer of thanks.

More chuckles from the group.

ON Gilbert Reeves. He sighs, exhausted. Slips down into the tub. SEE him in the tub from an approaching POV. Gilbert reacts. A flash of surprise. Embarrassment that sours instantly to horror as

SPLASH!

The TELEVISION splats into the bathwater. CLOSE ON the TV. Sinking slowly into the water. PAN UP to Gilbert Reeves.

CLOSE ON his face. Submerged. Frozen in a death-mask of shock. Air bubbles trickle out of his mouth. A beat and

a TV REMOTE CONTROL, floating on the surface of the bathwater, BOBS into the frame.

FADE OUT

END TEASE

ACT ONE

INT. - HOTEL BATH - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

ON the sodden TV as it's gingerly hoisted out of the bath tub by a forensic technician and transferred to a large, plastic bag marked "Evidence". Camera tracks out of the bath, through the bustle of investigative activity

FINDS NICK pacing slowly around the bedroom. Studying the crime scene. He stops at Gilbert Reeves' open, half-unpacked suitcase.

CLOSE ON the suitcase. Nick probing with a pen, finds a small, silver, double-sided medallion on a chain. Deep in the folds of a suitcase compartment. Carefully, he lifts it out.

CLOSE ON the medallion. SEE a slogan: "Make Luck..." Nick turns it over. On the other side, another maxim: "...Steer Fate."

SCHANKE and NATALIE.

SCHANKE

Name was Gilbert Reeves. An undistinguished member of the Fourth Estate--

NICK

A journalist?

SCHANKE

Freelance. Had a press pass but no real professional affiliation. Checked in yesterday with his girl...a Mona Wayne.

NICK

At least he died clean.
(beat)
Have they found her yet?

SCHANKE

Still checking.

NICK

Here to cover the campaign, I suppose.

SCHANKE

Who isn't? Except for us. This place is a regular media circus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATALIE joins them.

NATALIE

I'm callin' it: our guy died of electrocution. Meaning, he wasn't dead before the TV hit the water.

SCHANKE

You know what they say: the bathroom's the most dangerous room in the house..

NATALIE

(to Nick, re: Skank)
Sherlock Holmes.

(beat)

This was definitely no accident.

NICK

Unless the TV spontaneously levitated into the tub.

(sighs)

What do you make of this, Skank?

Nick holds up the silver medallion. Skank squints at it. Reads.

SCHANKE

"Make Luck?" Very Confucious.
Sounds like a Chinese proverb.

Natalie peers at the medallion, spinning slowly from the chain.

NATALIE

"Steer Fate?" That's something that happens to cattle, right?

NICK

Or advice from a "New Age" horoscope.

(beat)

Found it in Reeves'. effects. Might be something.

Nick carefully wraps the medallion in his handkerchief and pockets it.

NICK (cont'd)

Let's get started. Phone logs, background check.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

I gathered up Reeves' paperwork.
We'll weed through it back at the
station.

(beat)

Reeves had a thick black book of
contacts. An old book with
hundreds of numbers. It'll take a
while to run 'em all down.

From O.S. we HEAR a sudden commotion. Nick, Nat and Skank
follow the noise to the HALLWAY...

OUT IN THE HALL: excitement and confusion. TV newshounds
barking questions at the CANDIDATES who have been roused
from sleep by their campaign managers and propped up in
front of the cameras to take advantage of this free "video
op."

ON Nick. The klieg lights and camera flashes strobing in his
face taking him back in memory to:

FLASHBACK

INT. - CHICAGO COURTROOM, 1954 - NIGHT

POP! A FLASHBULB goes off in Nick's face as he's hustled
through the noisy rabble. Nick looks confused, even
terrified. A crazy looking woman runs up and screams into
his face.

CRAZY LADY

Dirty Communist!!

Authorities pull her away. Drag Nick along.

OFF his reaction,

FLASH FORWARD to

INT. - HOTEL HALLWAY -CONTINUOUS

ON NICK watching as CLIFFORD HIATT in a white, Hotel
Perceval bathrobe, gets grim with the reporters. His
campaign manager FRED BIRCH stands silently alongside,
occasionally leans in to whisper something in his ear.

HIATT

...this is what I've been talking
about all along.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HIATT (cont'd)

Frankly, I'm sick of it and I know
I'm not alone with that feeling.

(beat)

We're out to take back our streets.
We won't tolerate it. As a family
man, I worry about the future of my
children--

ANOTHER REPORTER

(interrupting)

Senator Hiatt! Where do you stand
on capital punishment?

Again, "spin doctor" Fred Birch leans in and whispers
something sage to his boss.

HIATT

My answer is a question: does the
deterrent deter?

(beat)

Sensitive issues are better
discussed in a more appropriate
forum.

ON NICK as he whispers to Natalie.

NICK

(sotto)

He dodged that one well.

Nat shrugs.

NATALIE

He's a master.

(beat; sotto to Nick)

His head is much bigger in
person, isn't it?

ON SKANK: vacuuming all this rhetoric up.

SCHANKE

He's got my vote. We need somebody
tough in office--

NATALIE

--he's as phony as his hair-weave,
Skanky!

SCHANKE

(patting his scalp
enviously)

That's a weave?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PULL BACK, track through the hallway assembly and find candidate BARBARA NORTON. In a similar bathrobe. Flanked by flacks. SEE her right-hand woman, LAURA NEAL, standing next to her as Norton speaks to a different camera crew. Reporters yell questions; Laura Neal makes a "settle down" gesture with her hands, to newspeople O.S.

BARBARA

(ad-libbing)

My heart goes out to those members of the community who live with this kind of mayhem as part of their everyday routine. The decent people in crime-ridden neighborhoods who are impacted by this sort of thing constantly.

CLOSE ON LAURA NEAL, watching off-camera. Watching...

ON Nick, Nat and Skanky.

NATALIE

(fervent)

Barbara Norton is the best thing that could happen for this state.

NICK

(smiling)

She's better looking, too.

SCHANKE

(disparaging)

A broad for governor? Yeah. Right.

NATALIE

Excuse me? A woman for governor. What's wrong with that?

SCHANKE

Who am I? What do I know? I only pay taxes in this town--

NICK

(interrupting)

Will you two chill out on the politics? We're "on duty" here, remember? We've got policework to do.

A UNIFORMED POLICEWOMAN escorts a confused-looking woman into the picture. MONA WAYNE, sweetheart of the lately lamented Gilbert Reeves, seems dazed by the hoopla in the hallway. Maybe even a little tipsy...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POLICEWOMAN
Detective Knight? This is Mona
Wayne--

NICK
Ms. Wayne? I'm Lieutenant Knight.

MONA
Uh, nice to meet you Lieutenant.

SCHANKE
(introducing himself)
Lt. Schanke, Metro Police.

MONA
Am I...in trouble or something?

NICK
It's about Gilbert Reeves.

MONA
Yes?

A beat. Nick looks to Skanky. Neither really wants to break
the news.

SCHANKE
Ms. Wayne. There was a...uh, a
problem. Gilbert was, uh, taking a
bath--

MONA
Yes?

SCHANKE
--and, uh, watching television.

NICK
Somehow the television wound up in
the tub.

MONA
(not getting it)
Uh-huh?

SCHANKE
And, uh...Gilbert was in the tub.

Nick and Skank look at her pointedly. A long beat and

MONA
...is he okay?

OFF Nick and Skank

INT. - PRECINCT - LATER

MONA WAYNE being grilled / consoled by Nick and Skank as Stonetree looks on.

CLOSE ON the silver medallion dangling from its silver chain as Mona passes it back to Nick.

MONA

Never saw that before. Heard Gilbert say it a few times, though. He believed in all that stuff. In "possibilities".

(sniffling)

Gilbert only told me we were here to close a big deal. One that would make us a lot of money.

(beat)

We were going to get married.

Nick and Don look on solemnly.

STONETREE

(softly)

I'm very sorry.

MONA

Money was a problem. Freelance political analysis doesn't pay that well.

NICK

Did Gilbert say what the deal was?

MONA

He wanted it to be a surprise or something.

(beat)

I don't know that much about politics. It... confuses me. But it was Gilbert's passion.

SCHANKE

He shoulda run for office.

MONA

Oh, he was a junior alderman once. Years ago--

STONETREE

I remember. 54th ward. About ten years ago.

MONA

He had a lot of promise. Once.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STONETREE

(long reflective beat)
 You can go back to the hotel now.
 We'll have an officer escort you.
 Thank you for coming down.

MONA

(getting up to leave)
 I'll be here a few more days. I
 have to take care of ...the
 details.

(beat)

Then I guess I'll head home.

NICK

Where's that?

MONA

Chicago. I still have some family
 there.

NICK

Great town, Chicago.

Mona EXITS.

NICK (cont'd)

I'll have the hotel security look
 in on her. Track her movements.

SCHANKE

She's a suspect?

STONETREE

She shouldn't be? She had access to
 the room. In the meantime,
 gentlemen...none of this has
 anything to do with the campaign.

NICK

Captain, Reeves was covering the
 election--

STONETREE

What are you telling me?

NICK

It'll be hard to keep a lid on it.

STONETREE

It's called "spin control",
 detective. Somebody pokes a
 microphone in your face...and they
 might...you offer "no comment".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

According to the hotel phone logs,
Reeves had been talking to press
already--

STONETREE

Who?

NICK

Frank Titus.

SCHANKE

Publisher of the National Intruder.

STONETREE

(disgusted)

Frank Titus.

(beat)

No comment.

(beat)

Go to it, gentlemen. Do what you do
best and do it carefully.

INT. - MORGUE - LATER

Natalie, Nick, Schanke. Dissecting. Natalie wears a "Norton
For Governor" button on her smock as she peers through an
ILLUMINATED MAGNIFIER and wields her surgical tools.

NATALIE

Hiatt's always up to his earlobes
in muck. It wouldn't surprise me
if Hiatt had his goons go in and
wash Gilbert's back for him. So to
speak.

(beat)

Can't get it. Here, Skank. You give
it a try.

She hands her forceps to Skank.

SCHANKE

(peering down into the
magnifier)

Why's everyone so down on Hiatt?
He's a cool guy.

NATALIE

You only say that 'cause he shook
your hand. Don't forget he was
involved in that big banking probe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

So was everyone else.

NATALIE

Yeah but mud doesn't stick to his shoes.

(to Nick)

Too bad you don't work the day shift. You could get in there and find something on him.

NICK

Natalie, I'm a detective not a character assassin.

NATALIE

C'mon, Nick! Hiatt's a notorious tool of special interests.

SCHANKE

He's a politician, not an altar boy.

(beat)

And that's really his own hair!

NATALIE

(back to work)

I'll give him that. He's got great hair.

NICK

(angrier now)

Okay! So Hiatt's got a bad rep. And Norton's the patron saint of suffragettes. I'm telling you: we can't care about any of that right now.

(beat)

I mean, look at it: murder's messier than the obvious option: Reeves was in a tight spot, according to his fiance. Hiatt could have easily rubbed a few bucks on Gilbert's sore subjects.

NATALIE

(beat)

Wait! There's something.

She takes the forceps from Skank and we PULL BACK and reveal they are performing a post-mortem on the killer TV.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - HIATT'S HOTEL HEADQUARTERS - NEXT DAY

Bleating phones and the buzz of pre-election campaign activity.

ON a PRETTY GIRL, a volunteer, manning a desk. She hands a styrofoam straw hat and a "Hiatt For Governor" campaign button across the desk to a new recruit.

PRETTY GIRL

(smiling)

We can always use volunteers.

REVERSE to show she's handing the campaign paraphernalia to DON SCHANKE, political novice.

SCHANKE

(taking the kit)

It's like my Dad used to say: if you don't care about your government, it don't care about you.

The pretty girl volunteer smiles.

SCHANKE (cont'd)

(sloganeering)

Yep. Get involved or get out. That's what I say. Liberty's not for the lazy. Freedom isn't free--

PRETTY GIRL

(interrupting)

Uh, Mr. Schanke?

Skank comes down off his soapbox.

PRETTY GIRL (cont'd)

Here's your list of registered voters. You can take that desk over there. Let's get out the vote!

SCHANKE

Just one question.

(gesturing O.S.)

Those donuts over there? Are they for us?

She smiles and nods, "Sure." Skank takes his kit over to an empty desk, snagging a couple donuts on his way. He sits and dials the phone. After a beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE
 (whispering into the
 phone)
 Myra? It's me. Listen, I can't
 remember...
 (beat)
 Am I registered to vote?

INT. - NATIONAL INTRUDER OFFICES - LATE NIGHT

The office of FRANK TITUS, scandal monger; rag-sheet editor. The walls wear screaming enlargements of front-pages past: "Marilyn Was An Alien!!"; "Roseanne is a Cannibal: Startling Proof!"...that sort of stuff. No Pulitzer Prize buzz in this office. Frank is on the phone.

A nervous junior editor stands by with a sheaf of photos as Nick ENTERS.

TITUS
 (on the phone)
 ...right. He's got all that money
 and he married a chimpanzee?
 (beat; listening)
 Did you get pictures?
 (beat)
 Then you don't get paid!

He gestures for Nick to have a seat and smashes the phone into its cradle.

TITUS (cont'd)
 Jesus. If I get one more story
 about that guy--

His timid aide pushes some photos at him for his approval. He thumbs through them quickly, frowning as he goes.

TITUS (cont'd)
 (frowning)
 Take this down to the lab and have
 them draw some wrinkles in there.
 Tell 'em to do something to her
 eyes so she really looks like
 she's on lithium. Don't we have one
 where she's throwing up or
 something?

The aide gathers up the pictures and hustles off.

TITUS
 (to Nick)
 What can I do you for?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK
I'm here about Gilbert Reeves.

TITUS
Don't know him.

Nick flashes his badge and a smug smile.

NICK
Lieutenant Knight. Metro Homicide.

TITUS
What'd he do?

NICK
He died.

TITUS
Too bad for him.

NICK
We have phone records that show you spoke with him. Recently.

TITUS
Lemme see. Gilbert Reeves? Oh yeah.
Now I remember. Crop circles or something. Right?

Nick wags his head, "No."

TITUS (cont'd)
No? Oh, I remember. He'd been callin' me. Hawking a sex scandal about a certain gubernatorial candidate. I said, sure. I'll look at what you got.

NICK
Which candidate?

TITUS
Didn't say.
(beat)
Nine'll get you ten, it's Hiatt.
He's got a sackfull of ghosts--

NICK
You didn't ask him?

TITUS
I don't deal in specifics.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

Only rumors.

Nick instinctively doesn't like this guy. He's met people like him before.

TITUS

I don't substantiate 'em. I only spread 'em.

NICK

And you don't care who gets hurt.

TITUS

Hey. You're in the public eye, you take your lumps. Reeves was just another pimp with a scoop. Story like that, we'll pay 25 G's for it.

(beat)

Hey! Maybe Gilbert's girlfriend might still feel like flappin' her gums.

(beat; off Nick's incredulous look)

I mean, after an appropriate mourning period, of course. When they gonna plant the guy?

NICK

(shaking his head in disbelief)

And people say you're an insensitive guy.

(beat)

How come you didn't buy the story from Reeves when you had a chance?

TITUS

He never got back to me.

(beat)

Look, I don't know Gilbert Reeves from the whole world and his wife. Somebody snuffed the guy, I don't know why.

(beat)

But truth will out. That's our motto. The truth will out.

NICK

Yeah, right. Even if it's not the truth.

EXT. - STREET - LATE NIGHT

Nick driving alone in his Caddy. Stops at an intersection where some construction work is going on. Throbbing machinery and the monotonous clang of a pile driver

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - CHICAGO COURTROOM, 1954 - NIGHT

Courtroom buzz and a gavel banging to bring the rabble to order.

ON a PANEL MEMBER. The head of this particular inquisition.

PANEL MEMBER

...we're here tonight to get at the truth.

PAN the court and find NICK. Sitting quietly at a table. Move in CLOSE on NICK as the panel members' words are heard O.S.

PANEL MEMBER

Truth will out...

SNAP BACK TO:

EXT. -STREET- NIGHT

Nick in his Caddy at a FLASHING RED light. CAUGHT in bad traffic. CLOSE ON his hand. He's holding the medallion he recovered at the scene of Reeves' murder. Fingering it.

HEAR Frank Titus' voice, ringing in Nick's memory.

TITUS

(V.O.)

...maybe Gilbert's girlfriend will feel like flappin' her gums...

Something clicks for Nick. He pulls his Caddy off the street. Abandons the car, races down an alley and

SOARS AWAY into the night.

INT. - PERCEVAL HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON a satin pillow, garnished with a pink rose and a CHOCOLATE MINT. The satin-sheeted bed is turned down. SEE Mona Wayne slipping out of her clothes, into next to nothing. She sits on the edge of the bed, weeping softly as she gazes at a photo of Gilbert and her in happier times.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Absently, she unwraps the chocolate mint and pops it into her mouth. Wipes away her tears and turns out the light. A beat and we HEAR a cough. And another. She snaps up in bed, clicks on the light. We see her wheezing and coughing. She stands and reels, staggers a few steps

And collapses into a heap on the floor.

PULL BACK. Through the window.

OUTSIDE, Nick alights softly on the ledge, a dark figure on the night wind. He peers in the window.

SEES MONA SPRAWLED on the carpet

NICK SMASHES THROUGH the window

Rolls Mona over on her back with one hand and reaches for the phone with other. Checks her pulse, STARTS CPR.

NICK

(into the phone)

I've got a medical emergency in room 1208. I need paramedics. Right away!

(beat; to Mona)

C'mon, Mona! Come back, damn it. Come back...

FADE OUT

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. - HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a vinyl body bag.

FOLLOW the zipper to

MONA WAYNE'S FACE. Pretty. Serene. Dead.

CLOSE ON Nick's hand. Holding the long-stemmed rose with a handkerchief. He pops it into a plastic bag and seals it.

OFF Nick. Anger in his eyes. Cold determination.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - MORGUE - LATER

Nick and Nat. And Mona Wayne's final exam. Natalie drapes the white-sheet shroud up over her head and delicately slides Mona's drawer into the refrigerator.

NATALIE

She was pretty.

NICK

They'd have made a nice couple.

NATALIE

(gesturing to the
refrigerator)

They do.

CLOSE ON the refrigerator doors. Side-by-side, "his n' hers" drawers bearing labels: "Wayne, M." and "Reeves, G."

NICK

She died in my arms.

NATALIE

(consoling)
You did all you could.

NICK

Whatever Reeves was planning, Mona Wayne had no part in it. She was a loose end somebody felt should be tied up.

(angry)
It's a damn shame.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nick heads for the door.

NICK (cont'd)
What can I tell Stonetree?

NATALIE
Two things: it was definitely
cyanide and...
(beat)
Yelling won't help the situation.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. - STONETREE'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Stonetree pacing like a circus bear facing a curtain call on the "Tonight Show."

STONETREE
(loud)
When the Mayor calls me, I'll put
him on the speakerphone and let you
all listen while he chews my ears
off.

Nick ENTERS and meets a very drowsy Don Schanke. Skank flashes open his overcoat to show Nick that he's got his robe and pajamas on underneath. (And his shoulder-holster.)

Skank shrugs at Nick and YAWNS big.

NICK
Captain, I just came from the
morgue--

STONETREE
Have they got a space for me?

NICK
Natalie confirmed cyanide.

STONETREE
(weary; to Schanke)
All the hotels in town know this?

SCHANKE
It's done. They've all been
notified. No mints on the pillow
tonight. Maybe never.
(beat)
I'm gonna miss that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

Captain, uh, this thing with the press--

(beat)

If we have to catch a killer and be politically correct at the same time--

STONETREE

Bugs you, doesn't it?

NICK

Makes it a lot tougher.

Our job here is as much diplomatic as detective. The way the press is watching, we might as well be hatching the world's last dinosaur egg. Everybody's holding their breath to see what comes out.

SCHANKE

A careless word in the wrong ear could tip the election.

NICK

(to Skank)

Oh, will you stop with that!

SCHANKE

(shrugging)

I'm civic-minded.

STONETREE

Lay off him, Nick. Just keep in mind that we're up on the wire in this case. Gotta stay balanced.

NICK

It won't be easy.

STONETREE

(smiling)

It's not supposed to be.

A beat. And Schanke speaks up.

SCHANKE

Uh, Captain?

STONETREE

What is it, Detective Schanke?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

I was wondering: are you registered
to vote?

STONETREE

(confused)
Yes, I am.

SCHANKE

(enthusiatic)
Well, sir. I was just thinking
that, maybe if you hadn't made up
your mind --

Skank hands his Captain some Hiatt for Gov. literature.
Stonetree looks puzzled.

And NICK YANKS Skanky out the door.

INT. - HIATT'S HOTEL HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Schanke in the office, going through the files after the
rest of the volunteer staff has left. He's sifting through a
drawer as the PRETTY GIRL ENTERS.

PRETTY GIRL

(smiling)
Oh, Mr. Schanke! You're still here?

SCHANKE

(a little embarrassed)
Well, I...hey!
(beat)
And so are you!

PRETTY GIRL

I forgot something in my desk.
Geez, I thought you'd be home
asleep by now. Hard as you've been
working.

SCHANKE

Elections aren't won in bed, honey.

PRETTY GIRL

(breezing by him)
No but they can be lost in bed.

OFF Schanke, quietly sliding the file drawer closed

INT. - PUBLIC LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Nick at work. After hours. Engrossed in a microfiche machine. Scanning old periodicals. Printed pages flash past him. Every so often, he stops at a headline and reads an article. SEE the headlines as they flash past: "HIATT PROBED FOR PAYOFFS"; "HIATT ANSWERS CRITICS"; stop and linger on one: "HIATT: THE MAN AND HIS MACHINE." GO IN CLOSE on the page. SEE the byline: "By Gilbert Reeves." Nick pauses and rubs his eyes. He's tired. A beat. He stares at the microfilm viewer, then punches in another code ...let's assume it's a computerized device...which brings up the front page of a much older newspaper: Chicago Sun-Times. SEE a headline: "University Communists Unmasked".

MOVE IN CLOSE on the photograph that accompanies the story. Blurry at first but coming clearer: it's NICK at the hearing. Sitting at the table before old-style microphones. In an instant

the PHOTO becomes LIVE ACTION and we

FLASH BACK:

INT. - COURTROOM, CHICAGO, 1954

A squeal of microphone feedback as the mike is adjusted on its stand. SEE scholarly-looking Nick at a large table before a panel of paranoid Commie-hunters.

PANEL MEMBER

Mr. Nicholas Girard? Will you please state your occupation for the record?

NICK

I am the night curator at the archeological museum of the University of Chicago. I also teach some classes and I'm writing a thesis.

PANEL MEMBER

Mr. Girard? Are you now, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

NICK

I am an associate professor of archeology--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PANEL MEMBER

(cutting him off)

Mr. Girard, bearing in mind that you are under oath, answer the question that was put to you.

ON Nick, sitting silently. Reluctant or defiant?

DISSOLVE TO:

PRESENT:

INT. - MORGUE - NEXT AFTERNOON

Natalie conducting tests. With one eye on the clock. She's got somewhere more important to be. Seems hurried. She packs away her experiment, locks the cabinet and peels off her gloves.

INT. - HOTEL LOBBY - EVENING

Buzzing with convention activity. Nick strides through, heading for the ballroom.

INT. - HOTEL BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Snare drums, trumpets and confetti. Political rally underway. Schanke dispensing pamphlets. Bobbing to the music and smiling at the pretty girls, he absently pushes a Hiatt pamphlet into Nick's hands. As he enters the ballroom. Skank's surprised.

SCHANKE

Nick Knight! Quel surprise!

NICK

Overtime, Skank?

SCHANKE

Nah. Strictly extracurricular. I'm here as a volunteer.

(off Nick's glare)

Hey, it's my country, too. 'Bout time I took an interest.

NICK

You're supposed to be conducting an unbiased investigation.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

(reassuring)
C'mon, Nick. It's me, Don "The Open Mind" Schanke. Look up "unbiased" in the dictionary--there's a little picture of Don Schanke next to the definition.

Nick PLUCKS the styrofoam Hiatt hat off Skank's head and hands it to him.

NICK

I'm sure.
(beat)
What did you find out about Hiatt?

The PRETTY GIRL slinks by. Skank smiles at her.

SCHANKE

(off the pretty girl)
Well, you know the article Reeves was working on?

NICK

The expose he never finished?

Skank glances around furtively; makes sure no one is listening.

SCHANKE

Naturally, this is all off the record as my entry into said premises was--

NICK

Not by invitation.

SCHANKE

Exactly. And I feel really guilty. I didn't find a thing. Nothing. You remember the Roth thing? It was in the news last year.

NICK

Right. Roth wanted to drill test wells in Banff National park--

SCHANKE

And Hiatt authored the legislation in return for what many people think was "special financial consideration."

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE (cont'd)

Guess whose name is not anywhere
on the list of contributors to
Hiatt's gubernatorial campaign?
(beat)

Besides Doctor Natalie Lambert's,
of course.

NICK

Roth's?.

SCHANKE

Doesn't that seem odd to you? I
mean, if Roth was hangin' in the
hammock with Hiatt, don't you think
he'd chip in for some bumper
stickers at least?

Skank brandishes the handful of Hiatt bumper stickers he's
been passing out.

NICK

Titus said that Reeves was flogging
a sex scandal.

SCHANKE

(offended)
Well you'd have to prove it to me!

NICK

Hero worship, Skank? I thought you
weren't emotionally involved?

SCHANKE

I'm tellin' you as a cop...not a
voter. Everyone I talked to says
Hiatt is super-devoted to his
family. Nick...the guy has nothing
to hide.

NICK

Are you totally convinced of that?
(beat)
Or is that the "true believer"
talking?

A rimshot and a drum roll break their conversation. CHEERS
go up as Clifford Hiatt takes the podium, waving. Flashbulbs
pop and cameramen cluster. Hiatt smiles and adjusts the
microphone. Feedback squeals.

ON Nick. Lost in thought. Identifying with Hiatt in the
spotlight as SUDDENLY All hell breaks loose. The "pep rally"
becomes an inquisition.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Reporters waving copies of today's "National Intruder" bark questions. A very poised Clifford Hiatt fields probing questions.

HIATT

...I have nothing to hide. My record is clear. It's public.

REPORTER

That's what you said about Roth Industries.

HIATT

(cool)

You're referring to allegations that were never proven. Accusations totally without merit.

ON Nick. Suddenly he can identify with Clifford Hiatt very strongly. A reporter in the crowd holds a copy of the National Intruder ALOFT. As we go in close on the headline, "CAMPAIGN CADAVER?"

A reporter in the crowd yells above the rest. A pointed question, direct to Hiatt.

REPORTER

Senator Hiatt! Please answer the question: do you have anything to do with these murders?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. - STONETREE'S OFFICE - EVENING

Matching shot of National Intruder in the air and

THWACK!

It comes down HARD on Stonetree's desktop. Natalie, Nick and Skanky are there. The latter two looking a bit sheepish as Stonetree chews them out.

STONETREE

This is exactly what I did not want to happen!

NICK

Hey, we're with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

They take this Freedom of the Press thing way over the top. Newspapers do whatever they want.

NICK

The National Intruder is not a newspaper, Skank. It's a criminal waste of trees.

Natalie is preoccupied with a TV. She tunes in news coverage of Babara Norton's press conference.

INT. - HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where Norton is facing down her detractors.

Norton looks nervous. Distracted. Not handling this well. Next to her, on the podium, SEE Laura Neal. She scribbles something on a piece of paper and THRUSTS it in front of Barbara Norton who takes a beat to read it. Turns to her "spin doctor" and CONSPICUOUSLY FROWNS at her.

REPORTER

Mrs. Norton! According to the National Intruder, the double homicide at the Perceval Hotel was, somehow linked to your bid for governor--

BARBARA

(interrupting)
Not specifically to my bid, sir. The Intruder article suggested that Mister Reeves' murder was circumstantially--

ANOTHER REPORTER

(interrupting her)
Mrs. Norton!

BARBARA

(uncool)
Just a minute, please. I was saying--

INT. - STONETREE'S OFFICE

PULL BACK from the TV to the cops and Natalie watching Norton wrestle with the press.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATALIE

Yesterday it was a coincidence.
Today it's a conspiracy.

SCHANKE

I don't know, Natalie. She looks pretty nervous to me. Hiatt was a lot cooler when he met the press.

NATALIE

(ticked off)
They're picking on her.

NICK

You know, I'm beginning to think both of you should be off this case.

NATALIE

So what are we waiting for? Let's just go down there and slap on the cuffs. She didn't pass your TV charisma lie detector test!

(beat)
Hiatt's a better liar, that's all.

SCHANKE

So you think Norton's lying about something?

NATALIE

I didn't say she was lying.

SCHANKE

(savoring Natalie's frustration)
You said Hiatt's a better liar. Which implies that you think she's a liar but not quite as good a liar as Hiatt but a liar nonetheless--

NICK

(to Skank)
Hey, counselor? Give it a rest. Come on people! This isn't about politics. This isn't about soundbites and spin control. Frank Titus and his sleazy rag sheet have just made our job doubly-hard to do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STONETREE

Nick's right. Let's stop believing
what we read in these crappy papers
and get back to doing our jobs!
NOW!

OFF their reactions,

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - FORENSICS LAB - NIGHT

Nick running down a clue. Talks with Lab Technician FOSTER.

NICK

How about that stuff we recovered
from the television set?

FOSTER

Fingernail fragment. That's what
Nat said anyway.

NICK

What came up in your DNA test?

FOSTER

Haven't done one yet.

NICK

Why not?

FOSTER

Natalie put the specimen in her
evidence locker. Couldn't get the
key from her before she left.

ON Nick: he look's really pissed off.

NICK

Where'd she go?

FOSTER

She went down to the hotel. Barbara
Norton rally.

Nick hastens out the door.

FOSTER

(calling after him)
Man, she's crazy about that lady.

INT. - HOTEL BALLROOM

Norton rally in progress. Pre-election circus atmosphere charged by rumors of the unfolding scandal.

FIND NATALIE. Manning the phones at the volunteer's table. NICK ENTERS, crosses to Natalie's table. She sees him. He crooks his finger at her as if to say, "Come here..."

Natie reacts to his stern look and hangs up her phone. Joins Nick and they repair to an alcove off the ballroom, away from the crowd.

NICK

You didn't do the DNA on the fingernail.

NATALIE

(guilty)

I was going to run it in the morning.

(beat)

Okay. I blew it off. Thought it would keep overnight.

NICK

You thought wrong

(beat)

Really wrong.

He takes her by the elbow, steers her out.

NATALIE

Nick! I've made a commitment here--

NICK

(parroting her)

--that'll "keep 'til the morning."
Damn it, Natalie. Don't screw this up!

Natalie PULLS away from him, angrily.

NATALIE

Why are you so intent on this? Why aren't you on Hiatt's back. Everything we have points to him. You should be over there turning up the dirt in his garden instead of trying to run Barbara Norton into the ground.

NICK

This isn't about Norton. It's about who killed two people--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATALIE

You just don't want to believe
that Hiatt had it done--

NICK

And what don't you want believe,
Natalie?

(beat)

Look, this is a personal issue for
me, too. I can't stand by and watch
someone railroaded by empty
accusations.

NATALIE

And what if it's true?

NICK

That's what we're supposed to be
finding out.

(beat)

Let's get out of here.

ANGLE ON: VIDEO NEWSTEAM, cameraman and reporter, roaming
the ballroom floor, working the crowd for soundbites of
rumor. They spot Nick and Natlalie in the corner, nod to
each other. Hustle over to Nick and Nataie. Hit 'em with the
video lights and roll tape.

REPORTER

Hey! You were at the hotel the
night of Reeves' murder.

Nick strains to pull Natalie away. Before more newshounds
notice their small commotion and surround them.

NICK

No comment.

Too late. Journalists start to cluster around.

REPORTER

(pulling Natalie into the
camera's frame)

You're Natalie Lambert, the County
Coroner. What can you tell us about
the ongoing investigation?

Nat TRAPPED. Flustered. She looks uncertainly at Nick.

NATALIE

(confused)

I'm...I'm not at liberty to
discuss--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REPORTER

(to Nick)
Detective? Are you here to
investigate the Norton campaign?

NICK

No.

REPORTER

Then Hiatt is the focus of your
investigation?

NICK

I did not say that!

REPORTER

(to Natalie)
Doctor Lambert, are you a Barbara
Norton supporter?

NATALIE

Yes, I am...
(off Nick's look)
But...but that shouldn't count as
an endorsement--

REPORTER

Is it true that the focus of the
current investigation is on Hiatt?

Natalie truly on the spot. A hush on the assembly. A
long, pregnant beat. Nick is tight-lipped and serious.
Natalie glances at him. Trying to read his reaction. She
pauses, pulls herself together and

NATALIE

(long beat)
...no comment.

And pandemonium erupts. Reporters start to pepper her with
questions. OFF Nick's angry slow-burn

FADE OUT.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. - PRECINCT BULLPEN - NIGHT

Stonetree ENTERS, madder than a cat in a cold bath.

CHUNK! He SLAMS the evening edition down on the desk angrily. SEE the headline, "SLEUTH HIATT IN MURDER PROBE!"

STONETREE

(to Natalie)
What the hell were you thinking?

Distraught Natalie sits in a chair, wringing her hands.

NATALIE

I didn't think.
(beat)
All I said was, "No comment."

NICK

(angry)
Yes, but it's the way you said it!

NATALIE

The way I said what?

NICK

You shouldn't have said anything!

NATALIE

(flustered)
I didn't!

SCHANKE

You didn't say anything but you made it sound like it was something.(beat)
You know, maybe you should run for office. You've got a gift for political gab.

STONETREE

You shouldn't have been there at all. Do you hear me? Neither of you should have been there!

NATALIE

(softly)
I volunteered.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STONETREE

And why were you there, Nick?

A tricky moment for Nick. He could rat Natalie out. Tell the Captain that she hadn't done her job but...

NICK

I was...

(beat)

...following a lead.

STONETREE

The mayor's putting together a firing squad right now. And none of us are getting a blindfold--

SCHANKE

Does that include me?

STONETREE

(menacing glare)

You are part of this investigation. They turn up the furnace on me and you sweat, too.

SCHANKE

(to Natalie)

Smooth move, Doctor Diplomacy! Hiatt's career is in the can now--

NATALIE

(arguing)

I didn't do anything wrong!

NICK

Both of you are wrong. We may never find out who killed Reeves and his girlfriend.

STONETREE'S FIST SLAMS onto his metal desktop.

STONETREE

(to Nat and Skank)

fighting)

This isn't kindergarten! Skanky, get back out there and run this thing down. And Natalie...do your damn job or start looking for another one!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - BARBARA NORTON'S CAMPAIGN HQ - NIGHT

Laura Neal's long day shows in the fatigue on her face. She sits in the glow of a computer monitor. Barbara Norton comes up behind her.

BARBARA

Whatever it is, it'll keep until morning.

LAURA

Too many other things to do tomorrow.

BARBARA

Knock off. You're no good to me dead.

(beat; motherly)

Laura, relax.

(beat)

We'll get there.

CLOSE ON LAURA. Wide-eyed. Lost in thought.

LAURA

Damn right we will.

INT. - MORGUE - LATER

Nick and Natalie...and a TV glowing in the background. Natalie finishing up a test.

NATALIE

Okay, that's it. The DNA confirms it. We're looking for a woman.

NICK

And she broke her fingernail when she picked up the TV.

NATALIE

Seems logical. The way it was jammed into a vent on the back of the cabinet.

(beat; disappointed)

I guess Hiatt's in the clear. Since we're looking for a woman.

NICK

I hope that's not disappointment I hear in your voice.

Natalie hesitates.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK (cont'd)

Natalie?

Something on TV interrupts them. Clifford Hiatt coming on to face a hastily improvised press conference. Has his wife and kids in tow and none of them looks too happy.

HIATT (V.O)

(on TV)

I know I'm innocent and I can prove my innocence. But the seed of doubt has been planted.

NATALIE

(off Hiatt)

Oh, man, they're going to crucify him now and all because of me.

Nick remembers Natalie's gaffe.

NICK

Suddenly you care.

NATALIE

(sincerely)

Nick, I'm sorry. I didn't want this happen.

ON NICK. Suddenly flashing back...

INT. - CHICAGO COURTROOM - PAST

A SHADY LOOKING GUY steps up to the panel member at the podium, hands him a paper and shoots a hostile look at Nick.

PANEL MEMBER

(reading)

Mr. Girard, would you kindly explain to this panel why you keep bottles filled with animal blood in your refrigerator?

Courtroom buzz. Murmurs of shock circle the crowd.

NICK

(beat)

I choose not to answer that question under the protection of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The rabble erupts. Cries of "Commie Monster!" fill the air.

CUT HARD TO:

PRESENT: back to Hiatt on TV:

HIATT (V.O)

It's too close to the election...I
can only hope that my supporters
will not let this taint of scandal
sway their decisions when they come
to the polls--

Trailing off.

PULL BACK and we're in

INT. - BARBARA NORTON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Norton and Laura. Watching Hiatt meet the press on TV.

LAURA

He's on the ropes. He's all but
conceding--

BARBARA

This isn't right.

LAURA

We should call a press conference
immediately. We can still make the
eleven o'clock news. You'll play it
humble. Urge the voters to wait for
the police to complete their case
before they hold anything against
Hiatt.

(beat)

Which, of course, they won't.

BARBARA

(softly; resigned)

We'll have a press conference--

Back to the TV. Hiatt on TV has escorted his young son to
the microphone.

HIATT

I'd like you all to consider the
consequences of your
scandal-mongering. I'd like you
all to look into the disillusioned
eyes of my family and see ,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HIATT (cont'd)
 first-hand, the damage that you are
 wreaking in our lives--

PULL BACK from the TV. Nick and Natalie watching IN THE
 MORGUE.

ON Natalie. She's feeling just awful. Ashamed. Almost in
 tears...

INT. - PRECINCT BULLPEN - NIGHT

Skank and Nick are poring over Gilbert Reeves' stuff.

NICK
 (hanging up the phone)
 Well, that's wonderful. One of the
 old, out of service numbers in
 Reeves' book was once listed to
 Congresswoman Barbara Norton.

SCHANKE
 How long ago?

NICK
 Almost ten years ago. When Reeves
 was an alderman.

SCHANKE
 And he'd have reason to call her
 office now and then. SO?

NICK
 Not her office. Not even her home
 number at the time. An apartment
 she kept in town.

SCHANKE
 Oh baby! This is getting better by
 the minute.

NICK
 (admonishing)
 "Better?" I thought we'd gotten
 past the partisan stuff.

SCHANKE
 I meant better for us. For the
 case. Honest.
 (beat)
 Okay, look here. This is a draft of
 the article Reeves was working on
 about Hiatt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

The one he never finished about the Roth Scandal.

SCHANKE

And this is a draft of another article he was writing about the campaign. Look at this typo...over and over, he misspells "from". Types it F-O-R-M. Six times out ten.

NICK

Like a bad typing habit.

SCHANKE

And look at this. The great, unfinished Roth expose. Hey, the typing tutor paid off! NO MORE typo.

NICK

These were dummied up.

SCHANKE

And planted by our killer.

NICK

Who wants us to believe that Hiatt or somebody working for him, snuffed Reeves to shut him up.

SCHANKE

Somebody, oh let's say, maybe who had a prior roll in the hot, satin sheets with Gilbert, the joy-boy alderman?

NICK

Or someone who had an even bigger stake in all of this.

INT. - BARBARA NORTON'S OFFICE - LATER

Don Schanke, Watergate Plumber. He's disguised as a phone technician. A wary volunteer eyes him as he runs cable. He pauses and smiles. Resumes his work.

ON Laura Neal's nameplate. On her desk. Skank lifts up the phone and pretends to fuss with it. He rifles quietly through her desk. FINDS a Daily Planner. Thumbs through it

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

to the day of Reeves' murder. CLOSE ON the page. Numerous doodlings and something scrawled boldly and circled: the words: "Steer Fate!"

OFF Skanky's reaction

INT. - VIDEOTAPE NEWS LIBRARY - NIGHT

ON a bank of TV MONITORS. Three televisions rolling tape at hyperspeed.

HEAR the high-pitched chatter of accelerated audio tracks.

PULL BACK and REVEAL NICK at the console. SCANNING all three screens simultaneously with VAMP-VISION.

CLICK! He hits the pause button and the spooling images freeze like a Vegas slot machine.

Nick rubs his tired YELLOW EYES and rolls tape again. Images and soundbites blur past until

he FREEZES the tape again on one of the monitors. Peers in close to

SEE Barbara Norton onscreen, with Laura Neal at her side. At the opening of a new government building or social agency... in the past. ZOOM IN with Nick and SEE

Barbra PINNING a MEDALLION ON Laura Neal's sweater. A silver brooch bearing a slogan: "Make Luck Happen." A gift.

Nick hurriedly punches in a time code. The VTR'S whir again and freeze frame on

Barbara Norton arriving at the Perceval Hotel, two nights ago. Same coverage that Gilbert Reeves was watching from his final tub.

ON TV MONITOR:

REPORTER

How are you going to celebrate your victory on Tuesday night?

CLOSE ON LAURA NEAL. Extreme slow-motion. She flashes double "Thumbs-up". XCU: TWO Thumbnails very evident. NICK FREEZES FRAME. Peers in close. Then punches in another time-code. Images zip by onscreen and slow to a stop: ONSCREEN: Barbara Norton in the hallway after the murder. With Laura Neal by her side, waving the dogged reporters down. Nick SLOWS THE TAPE to a crawl and FREEZES IT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VERY CLOSE ON HER HANDS: a missing thumbnail...

PULL BACK from the TV and REVERSE TO SEE an open window.

Mini-blinds FLAPPING in Nick's turbulence...

INT. - HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Norton's press conference. Natalie is there, front-row as her candidate lambastes the assembled media.

BARBARA

This is the poorest excuse for journalism. And it's undermining the electoral process in this country.

(beat)

This contest is not being played out on a level field. If Senator Hiatt is guilty by association, then I must also be.

(beat)

Because I knew Gilbert Reeves... some years ago.

(beat)

Does that make me a criminal?

INTERCUT:

INT. - BACKSTAGE FROM PRESS CONFERENCE -CONTINUOUS

ON Laura Neal. Reeling in a shock wave of disbelief. Watching her candidate on TV, self-destructing.

BARBARA

(on TV; stoic)

...I hope that Mr. Hiatt will stay in the race. And I trust that the voters will not let these events influence their decisions on election day--

ON LAURA. Utterly astonished. On the brink of tears. Staring hard at the TV.

EXT. - BACKSTAGE FROM PRESS CONFERENCE - CONTINUOUS

Norton and Laura Neal. OUTSIDE. Away from the hoopla. A heated exchange.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

You didn't do what I said.

Her anger surprises Barbara Norton. Never seen her like this.

LAURA (cont'd)

Damn it. Why didn't you play it like I coached you?

BARBARA

(tired)

I did what I thought was right.

LAURA

You betrayed me.

BARBARA

This is a personal issue, Laura. This is about my life.

LAURA

(angry)

No, it's not!

(beat)

It's about the country. The governorship.

(beat)

It's about everything we've worked for.

BARBARA

(beat)

I'm so sorry.

LAURA

(in tears now)

You can't give up now, Barbara.

And she PULLS A GUN on her boss. A stainless-steel .32 semi-automatic.

LAURA (cont'd)

I won't let you.

OFF Barbara Norton's astonishment

FADE OUT.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INTERCUT:

EXT. - HOTEL ROOFTOP -NIGHT

Nick flutters to the roof of the Perceval Hotel.

PULLS OUT a cellular "flip-phone" and calls Schanke.

INT. - NORTON'S HQ

Skanky the phony "technician" is finishing up his business at Laura Neal's desk.

HEAR the soft beep of his portable phone. The lone, remaining volunteer reacts to the sound of Skank's portable phone.

SCHANKE
 (apologetically, to the
 volunteer)
 ...telephone.
 (into his phone)
 Repairs.

NICK (V.O.)
 Who?

Skank turns away, shielding himself from the curious volunteer.

SCHANKE
 (sotto)
 It's me. Whatta you got?

NICK (V.O.)
 I've got some videotape that makes
 a pretty good case against Laura
 Neal, Norton's campaign manager.

SCHANKE
 There's some stuff here, too. Looks
 like they were practicing some
 drastic "spin control" to keep
 Reeves' romantic memoirs from
 hitting the supermarket checkout--

NICK
 Or Laura Neal took matters into her
 own hands. Literally.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK (cont'd)

I don't think Norton was involved.
(beat)
I'll call in for a warrant.

SCHANKE

Meet me at the hotel. How fast can you get here?

EXT. - ROOFTOP

ON Nick standing under the Perceval sign.

NICK

Fast enough. Find Norton. And then find Neal. Keep 'em apart if you can.

SCHANKE (V.O.)

Right.
(beat)
Where are you, anyway?

NICK

Let's just say...I'm on top of the situation.

Nick hangs up.

INT. - NORTON'S OFFICE

Skank abandons his handiwork and heads for the door. The lone volunteer stops him.

VOLUNTEER

Hey, are you finished?

SCHANKE

I'll be back in the morning.

VOLUNTEER

You can't leave all these wires and things around here.

Skank flashes his badge.

SCHANKE

Yes I can.

EXT. - ALLEY BEHIND THE HOTEL

Barbara Norton at Laura Neal's gunpoint. Laura herds her toward her car.

LAURA
MOVE! Into the car.

At the car now. Laura opens the door and prods Barbara into the front seat with her gun.

BARBARA
Where are you taking me?

LAURA
To the capitol.
(beat)
Like I promised.

INT. - HOTEL BALLROOM

ON Skanky running across the ballroom floor. He jumps up on the podium and races backstage, through the throng of dejected Norton supporters who've just watched their boss throw the election away.

SCHANKE
(to a disappointed woman)
Where's Mrs. Norton?

DISAPPOINTED WOMAN
(confused)
She...stepped out back. For some air, I think.

SCHANKE
And Laura Neal?

DISAPPOINTED WOMAN
Right with her. Like always.
(beat)
Why?

SCHANKE
Damn!

He whips out his pistol. Gasps of horror from onlookers.

SCHANKE
(showing his badge)
I'm a cop!
(to the woman)
Call the police. Now! Get the hotel security to seal the building.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DISAPPOINTED WOMAN
Is Mrs. Norton in trouble?

SCHANKE
I hope not.

Schanke is out the door. HIS POV: he SEES Laura Neal pushing Barbara Norton into the car.

SCHANKE
Police! Hold it right there!
(beat; sotto)
I sure hope she doesn't know how to use that thing.

ON Laura, angry and tearful. She turns to Skank and PULLS OFF a wild shot. Skank ducks back in the door.

SCHANKE (cont'd)
She knows. She knows.

EXT. - ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Nick REACTS to the sound of the gunshot. Races to the edge and peers over.

HIS VAMP-VISION POV: SEES Neal and Norton peeling out in the car.

Nick SOARS OFF the ledge, following.

EXT. - BACKALLEY

Down on the ground, Skank gives more conventional chase. Pistol drawn, he dashes out of the alley into traffic. Frantically, FLAGS DOWN A TAXI. Yanks open the door and wrenches the driver from behind the wheel. Jumps into his place.

SCHANKE
(to the driver)
Police business! I need the car.

TAXI DRIVER
Hey! My cab...

SCHANKE
Look...
(he tips the meter flag over)
The meter's running! You can bill the city.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And he burns rubber in pursuit.

AERIAL POV: Nick in flight, following Neal's car and Skank's taxi as they weave in and out of traffic.

INT. - NEAL'S CAR

Laura behind the wheel. Weeping. Driving like a maniac. Barbara Norton is holding her face in her hands and looks frightened out of her wits.

They CAREEN AROUND a corner, bounce up onto the sidewalk and drive partway up the steps of the

CAPITOL BUILDING, a large, stately structure.

A few people on the sidewalk scatter for cover.

NICK'S AERIAL POV: SEE Laura Neal dragging Barbara Norton out of the car.

ON Barbara and Laura, stumbling up the steps now.

BARBARA

Give this up, Laura.

LAURA

(prodding her boss up the steps)

Whatta you mean we can't win?

(beat)

Here we are! We made it.

NICK LANDS softly in the shadows behind the large columns at the top of the stairs. Leans back into the shadow for cover and draws his pistol.

ON Laura and Barbara Norton, pausing in the middle of the staircase. Barbara turns and confronts her captor.

BARBARA

You killed Gilbert, didn't you?

LAURA

(tears)

He was going to blackmail you. He was waiting until election week. We...we wouldn't have been able to "fix it" so close to the election.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARBARA

And the girl?

LAURA

I poisoned a rat. She might have been in on it. I couldn't take that chance. I had to insulate you.

(beat)

That's always been my job, hasn't it? "Spin control?"

BARBARA

Oh, God. Laura

ON Barbara. The wind in her hair. Looking down at Laura.

BARBARA

(very motherly)

For God's sake, Laura! Please don't go through with this.

LAURA

Don't you get it? Everything you represent really means something to me.

ON NICK: creeping slowly out of his cover now. He SEE Laura lift the pistol to Barbara's head and COCK the HAMMER. She'll shoot. Nick has to act. Has no choice.

HE VAMPS and FLIES down the steps

LANDS BEHIND THE TWO WOMEN and trains his gun on Laura.

NICK

Drop the gun and back away, Laura!

The women whip around, stunned by Nick's sudden appearance.

LAURA

(to Barbara)

You don't understand! I believed in you.

(beat)

I was doing it for a greater good--

NICK

(interrupting)

Two people died for what you believed in, Laura. You had no right to sacrifice them.

He SLOWLY ADVANCES on the two women. His pistol still zeroed in on Laura.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK (cont'd)

None of us has the right to force
our conviction to a cause on others
and make them suffer for it.

LAURA

(brandishing her gun at
Nick)

Don't!

NICK

(advancing)

Whatever the cause and however
right it feels.

ANGLE ON: Skank's cab arriving, SKIDDING to a halt in the
street at the bottom of the stairs. Skanky bounds out of the
cab, takes cover behind the taxi and aims his gun at LAURA.

SCHANKE

Give it up, Laura!

(beat; sotto as he spots
Nick)

Knight! How the hell--?

On Barbara. Talking calmly to Laura. Talking her down.

BARBARA

Believe me now if you need to
believe: I love you and I don't
want to see you hurt.

LAURA

Don't!

NICK

Listen to her, Laura. It's all
over.

In the B.G., approaching sirens. First of half-a-dozen
cruisers screeches to a halt at the bottom of the steps.
Cops jump out, guns drawn.

BARBARA

They'll kill you, Laura.

NICK

Drop the gun, Laura. DO IT NOW!

Laura's losing it now. Breaking down. Tears coming.

LAURA

We made it. I knew we would.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Softly, Nick steps in and relieves her of the gun. She collapses into Barbara's arms, weeping.

LAURA (cont'd)
We made it.

BARBARA
(crying now)
We did, didn't we?

She looks up at Nick helplessly. He pockets Laura's gun and holsters his own.

OFF Nick

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. - CAPITOL BUILDING / STREET -LATER

Mop-up in progress. A very shaken Barbara Norton is helped into a police car and driven away.

ON Nick and Skanky.

NICK
It's sad, isn't it? She was a smart woman.

SCHANKE
Too smart, I'd say.
(beat)
Control freak.

NICK
She got desperate. She was fighting out of a corner.

SCHANKE
For a minute there, it looked like Natalie Lambert might determine the outcome of the election.

They walk together.

SCHANKE (cont'd)
Hey, Knight? Tell me something.
How'd you beat me here?

NICK
(smiling)
I took a cab.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCHANKE

So did I.

NICK

I took a faster one.

(beat)

Now, how 'bout a lift back to the precinct?

They get into Skanky's taxi. Skank looks at the meter and does a double-take. Looks at Nick who shrugs wearily. Skank starts the car.

As the cab pulls away, we

FADE OUT.

END ACT FOUR

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TAG

INT. - UNIVERSITY BUILDING - NIGHT

ON A GLASS DOOR: "Archeology Department"

PUSH IN through the door. Find Nicholas Girard, packing a suitcase.

CLOSE ON the suitcase. He throws in a newspaper. Chicago Sun-Times. SEE the headline: "University Communists Unmasked." Then another paper thrown on top. A "less reputable" gazette, Chicago Globe, with the screaming, two-inch banner: "Vampire Commies In Our Schools?"

Nick CLOSES the suitcase. Takes one, last, sad look around his archeology lab. At a life he loved and is being forced to abandon. Yet again... in his eternity.

He pulls the collar of his black coat around him. Dons his hat and quietly slips out the door.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. - CEMETERY - TWILIGHT

Windswept and gray. Just before it rains. SEE Nick's Caddy parked along the road.

ON Nick standing before a grave. He is quiet, just staring. He sighs. Takes out a single rose. A beat. He bends down and places the flower on the grave.

REVERSE to reveal MONA WAYNE'S headstone.

Nick turns and walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - STONETREE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

ON TV: Barbara Norton delivers an eleventh-hour address to her weary supporters.

BARBARA

We fought the good fight. We won a few important battles but we've lost this war.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PULL BACK to see Stonetree, Nick and Natalie watching Norton's concession on TV.

STONETREE

She got creamed.
(sighs)
Tried and convicted by the press.

NICK

A trial you can never hope to win.
It's a damn shame.

NATALIE

Barbara Norton would have made a
great governor.
(a beat then hopeful)
She might make it yet. Stuff like
this blows over.

STONETREE

She'll be back. Maybe better for
all of it.

NICK

I hope we're all better for it.
(beat; pointedly)
Right, Doctor Lambert?

NATALIE

(sheepishly)
Right.

NICK

And in the future, we won't put our
political passions before our duty.
Will we?

NATALIE

(softly)
I promise.

ON TV: election coverage distracts them. A roar goes up from a crowd of celebrants in the hotel ballroom as it's carried live on TV.

REPORTER

(on TV)
That's all she wrote! Word just
came through this crowd like a
runaway freight: Barbara Norton has
conceded the election. Clifford
Hiatt is the new governor---

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ON Stonetree in his chair. He picks up a National Intruder and starts to read.

Nick and Natalie react: can't believe their Captain reads such trash.

NATALIE

The National Intruder?

NICK

Honestly, Captain. I thought you had better taste.

STONETREE

I only buy it for the Celebrity Crossword.

(beat)

It's the easiest one around.

Nick and Natalie shake their heads incredulously.

STONETREE (cont'd)

(from behind his paper)

Where's Detective Schanke anyway?

ON NICK and Natalie watching TV. They look at each other dead-pan. REVERSE to show TV: SEE exuberant Schanke at the victory celebration. Hooting, hollering and hamming it up.

Dancing with pretty Cliff Hiatt supporters, wagging a "We're Number One!" finger into the camera.

NATALIE

(dryly)

Off somewhere.

(beat)

Being a terrible winner.

OFF Natalie

FADE OUT.

THE END