

THE LAST CALL

Written by

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FADE IN:

BLACK. A DIAL TONE. Then the soft electronic chirp of a call connecting.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(warm, gravelly,
unhurried)

Every story about a theft starts somewhere. Most people think it starts with the thief. It doesn't. This story starts with a phone ringing in a kitchen where somebody was raised to pick up.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS PVT LTD - FLOOR - MUMBAI - MORNING

Hard morning light shines through dirty glass on eighty heads. Eighty headsets. A wall of cubicles under a banner: **"TURNING PROBLEMS INTO PROFITS."** A dry-erase leaderboard, a crown drawn next to one name.

Nobody is shouting. That is the unsettling part. The room hums like a bank.

VIKRAM SEN, forties, moves down the aisle in a bespoke suit that fits better than anything in his life. Not a screamer -- a manager. He takes an empty cubicle and dials.

VIKRAM
(to the floor, mild)
I do twenty calls a night. Keeps me honest.

A CLOSER named **YOGESH**, thirties, all teeth, gives him a thumbs up. Vikram doesn't return it.

The line rings. Somewhere far away, a phone picks up.

INT. VERA'S KITCHEN - OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA - EVENING

A warm, cluttered kitchen. Photographs of six children and too many grandchildren cover the refrigerator, the windowsill, the wall above the stove. Gospel radio, low.

VERA, seventy-three, answers the wall phone with the automatic courtesy of a woman raised to be polite.

VERA
Hello?

VIKRAM

Good evening, ma'am. Am I speaking with Vera?

VERA

You are.

VIKRAM

Vera. My name is Michael. I'm with the customer protection desk at your electric utility. I'm calling because I don't want you to be surprised tomorrow morning.

Vera's hand stops on the pill organizer.

VERA

Surprised? Surprised, how?

VIKRAM

There's a disconnection order in the system for your address. Dated tomorrow, six A.M. Most people find out only when the lights go off.

Off of Vera. Through the doorway behind her, in the living room, two small children are asleep under a blanket in front of a television.

VERA

I have grandbabies in this house.

VIKRAM

I know. That's why I called you.

CUT BETWEEN. Vikram, in that fluorescent sea, leans back. Comfortable. His voice is the voice of a good son.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)

Vera, I'm not supposed to do this. I'll hold your order manually while we fix it. We only have eleven minutes; then it goes back in the queue.

VERA

Eleven minutes.

VIKRAM

Eleven minutes. Do you have your card, ma'am?

Vera looks at the sleeping children. At the thermostat. At the pill organizer.

She goes to her purse.

VERA
Just let me get my glasses.

Vikram's monitor: a green field fills with numbers. He does not look at it.

VIKRAM
Take your time. I'm right here.

HOLD on Vera at the table, reading a debit card number aloud into a telephone in her own kitchen, doing everything right, and losing everything she has.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Twelve thousand. Vera's whole cushion. Nine minutes, and he was polite the whole time -- which should frighten you much more than the money.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS PVT LTD - FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Vikram pulls the headset off and stands. He doesn't celebrate. He hands the cubicle back to a young agent with a nod, like a veteran surgeon handing back a scalpel.

VIKRAM
Log it. And put her on the sixty-day list.

YOGESH
She's tapped, boss.

VIKRAM
She's a woman who blames herself. In sixty days she'll be lonely and ashamed, and she will pick up the phone anyway. That's not a tapped account. That's an annuity.

He walks off. The room hums with activity.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Now, let me be clear. Nobody in this story is stupid. That's the lie the industry sells -- that the ones who answer are fools. They're not foolish. They're reachable.

EXT. OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA - DAWN

Pacific light. Palms. Freeway already thickening. A city that looks beautiful and indifferent in the same glance.

SUPER: "OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA. SIXTY-ONE DAYS LATER."

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Sixty-one days later. Four extraordinary people, cancer patients, every one. You'll meet the other four soon enough, in a room nobody ever chooses to enter.

INT. CARSON'S STUDIO APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAWN

Military-neat. One toothbrush at attention. A crack in the mirror nobody has bothered to fix. On the wall behind him: a single LAPD commendation. No family photographs.

CARSON, seventy-five, built like a fire hydrant, lifts a straight razor to a jaw half-covered in shaving cream. His hand TREMBLES.

He braces it with the other hand. Draws the blade along his jaw - and NICKS himself.

CARSON

Son of a bitch.

He dabs and covers it with tissue. Tries again. NICKS himself somewhere new. Two white flags of surrender stuck to his jaw.

CARSON (CONT'D)

(to his own hand)

Thirty years. Thirty GOD-DAMNED years I used you to defuse bombs. Exposed wires, mercury switches, pressure plates -- never flinched. Now you can't hold a fucking razor.

He tosses the razor down, takes out an electric razor, and attacks his face with it like a man sanding drywall.

INT. CANDY'S CONDO - BEDROOM - DAWN

CANDY, seventy-eight, at a vanity ringed with bulbs, four of them burnt out, and enough makeup to supply a decade of drag brunches. Dusty boas. Eyelashes long enough to fan a child.

Framed photos of a luminous showgirl in ornate sequined showgirl costumes adorn the bedroom walls - embraced by Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr.

She looks at herself for a long moment. Not performing. She is bald. A silk scarf lies in her lap.

Then she opens a drawer. Inside, on a foam head, a honey-blond wig, immaculately maintained. She lifts it out with two hands, the way you'd lift a crown.

She puts it on. Adjusts it a quarter inch. Applies cherry-red lipstick with surgical precision.

And the woman in the mirror arrives.

CANDY
(to her reflection)
There she is.

She finishes with enough perfume to set off a smoke detector. Strikes a pose and flutters her eyelashes, ending with a long wink.

INT. VERA'S KITCHEN - DAWN

The same kitchen. Different weather in it.

Vera pours coffee into a WORLD'S GREATEST GRANDMA mug. Sips. Grimaces. Retrieves a bottle of Jameson from behind the flour and pours a generous, unrepentant splash.

VERA
(to herself)
Medicinal purposes. Praise Jesus.

She opens a pill organizer the size of a tackle box, pops a fistful, and washes them down with her "coffee." The radio switches from gospel to a PRESCRIPTION DRUG COMMERCIAL.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
... may cause dizziness, nausea,
dry mouth, and in rare cases,
lethargy, and even death.

Vera switches it off.

VERA
Baby, I got all that and then some.

EXT. BUFORD'S SON'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAWN

Suburban tract home. A beat-up 1992 Ford F-150 dominates the driveway, a fishing rod in the window rack. Bumper sticker:
"IF YOU CAN READ THIS, YOU'RE IN RANGE."

BUFORD, seventy-five, big and rumped, trucker cap, suspenders, a Viking-like red beard gone mostly white, comes out with a thermos and a paper bag.

He climbs in and turns the key. The engine sounds like a dying walrus.

BUFORD

Come on, Bernadette. Don't be ugly.

Third try. It COUGHS, BACKFIRES, startles a cat into a tree, and rumbles to life in a cloud of black smoke.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

That's my girl.

He backs out, clips the garbage can, does not notice, and sings along to the radio, badly.

EXT. ANGELS OF MERCY HOSPITAL - MORNING

A large regional hospital. *"HEALING WITH COMPASSION SINCE 1962."* Into the lot: Carson's colorless sedan. Candy's pink Cadillac. Vera's Honda. Buford's truck, still smoking.

INT. ANGELS OF MERCY HOSPITAL - INFUSION CENTER - MORNING

A long room of reclining chairs, IV poles, monitors. Somebody has tried: cheerful curtains, a television, coffee, shortbread, airline sick bags. Appreciated and insufficient.

CARSON is already in his chair, IV line in, reading on a tablet with the intensity of a man memorizing a tactical field manual. Two bits of tissue still on his jaw.

VERA settles beside him, thermos in hand.

VERA

Morning, Carson.

CARSON

(not looking up)

Vera.

VERA
I see you lost another fight with
your razor.

CARSON
I see you brought your "coffee."

Vera takes a deliberate sip.

VERA
This is just coffee.

CARSON
Vera, I was a cop for thirty years.
I can smell Jameson through a
thermos at twenty paces.

VERA
Then your nose works better than
your hands.

Carson almost smiles. Almost.

CANDY arrives in a CLOUD of perfume, bedazzled tracksuit,
sunglasses indoors, and more cleavage than should be allowed.
Every male head in the room swivels.

CANDY
Good morning, my darlings! Your
favorite showgirl has arrived.

She settles into her chair with the practiced grace of
someone lowered onto stages via harness for decades.

CARSON
We know you've arrived. My sinuses
know you've arrived. People in
Bakersfield know you've arrived.

CANDY
Oh, Carson, honey. Frank Sinatra
used to say the same thing about my
perfume. Right before he asked me
to stay the night.

CARSON
Sinatra said a lot of things he
didn't mean. It's called show
business.

CANDY
And yet I have the autographed
pillowcase to prove it.

CHANDLER, seventy, the youngest of them all, sweeps in and removes a silk scarf with a flourish that has been rehearsed for fifty years.

CHANDLER
Hello, people. Another morning to
poison ourselves back to health.

VERA
Sit down before you pull something.

CHANDLER
Vera, darling, I don't PULL things.
I make ENTRANCES.

EDDIE, seventy-nine, is already in his chair. His IV line in. Nobody saw him arrive. He is studying an iPad tablet.

CANDY
Hey, Eddie. When did you get here?

EDDIE
Seven minutes ago. Long enough to
know the corridor camera runs a
twelve-second loop, the nurses'
station password is still
"healing2024", and some guy in room
three-twelve is watching a video of
something he should only watch at
home.

Everyone looks at him.

BUFORD lumbers in, boots clomping, cap in hand.

BUFORD
Mornin', folks. Sorry. Bernadette
threw a rod on the interstate.

CHANDLER
Who is Bernadette? Is she okay?

BUFORD
My truck. She's fine. Just needs
sweet-talkin' and a whack with a
tire iron from time to time.

CHANDLER
(under his breath)
Don't we all.

A **NURSE**, forties, unflappable, arrives with her own tablet.

NURSE

Everyone. Before we start -- two new people are joining your group today.

Heads turn. **DELLA**, seventy-six, has the confidence of a woman who made problems disappear without ever raising her voice. She reads the room: exits, cameras, sight lines.

Behind her, **RALPH**, eighty, enters like a salesman walking onto a car lot sales floor. Plaid slacks in colors not found in nature. Handshake cocked and loaded.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Everyone, this is Della Marchetti and Ralph -

RALPH

(interrupting)

Ralph Winslow. Pleasure. And may I say -- best-looking infusion suite I have ever been in. Sets a tone.

CARSON

Great. A salesman.

RALPH

Retired. Forty-two years in automotive retail.

CARSON

So a used car salesman.

RALPH

I prefer pre-owned vehicle relocation specialist.

VERA

Sit down, baby. Save the pitch.

RALPH

(easing into a chair)

That's what they all say. At first.

Della takes the chair beside Eddie. Looks at his tablet. Then at the security panel across the room. Then at him.

DELLA

Government? You a "spook"?

EDDIE

What gave it away?

DELLA

You've been in that chair long enough to map two exits, and you're sitting with your back to a load-bearing wall. Fingers dancing across the keyboard. After forty-four years with a trucking company in Jersey, I notice things.

EDDIE

Trucking?

DELLA

Logistics.

EDDIE

Oh, mob.

DELLA

If you say so.

A small, mutual nod. Two professionals acknowledging each other.

CHANDLER

Well. Introductions are in order. I'm Chandler Vance. Movie makeup and prosthetics, thirty years. I've made A-listers look twenty years younger and one very famous action star look eight inches taller. Colon cancer. Which I decline to discuss, because I have standards.

CANDY

I'm Candy Delacroix. Vegas via The Sands, Flamingo, Caesars. Fourteen shows a week in nine pounds of feathers, on a raked stage, in five-inch heels. Lung cancer for me. Which is ironic, because I never smoked a day in my life.

VERA

Vera Williams. Widow. Raised six children alone on the South Side of Chicago. Breast cancer. Third time.

BUFORD

I'm Buford Pruitt. Out here from Miss'sippi to be near my boy, Cletus. Liver cancer. And before anybody asks, yes, been sippin' moonshine since I was nine.

RALPH

Bladder, for me. Not the most glamorous cancer. Then again, nothing about me is subtle.

CARSON

Carson Brennan. Retired LAPD. Bomb squad. Thirty years. Pancreatic.

The room goes quiet. Everybody in a room like this knows that number.

CARSON (CONT'D)

It's fine. I know the odds. I've been statistically unlikely my whole career.

RALPH

Bomb squad? That's it? No hobbies?

CARSON

When your job is explosives, you don't need a hobby.

EDDIE

(not looking up)

I'm Eddie Petrosky. Signals and communications. Government. Classified. Prostate cancer. My last civilian job was managing a Radio Shack in Oxnard.

BUFORD

Radio Shack! Got my first CB there in sixty-two.

EDDIE

(looking to Buford)

They're gone now. All of them. Every last one.

A pause of real mourning. Radio Shack apparently lands harder than the cancer.

The Nurse connects Ralph's line. He watches the drip start.

RALPH

So what do we talk about while the joy juice goes in?

CARSON

We sit, we get poisoned, we go home, we throw up, we come back.

(MORE)

CARSON (CONT'D)
A little slice of heaven. What
about you, Della?

DELLA
Non-Hodgkin lymphoma. My oncologist
likes the protocol. My bookie gives
me three-to-one.

Carson's phone RINGS. He pulls out a battered flip phone.

CHANDLER
Is that a flip phone? They still
make those?

CARSON
It makes calls. It takes calls.
What else does a phone need to do?

He answers.

CARSON (CONT'D)
This is Carson.

A voice on the line -- fast, urgent, an American name in an
Indian accent.

SCAMMER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Hello, sir. This is Michael Johnson
with the Internal Revenue Service.
We have detected delinquent
activity on your tax account. You
must pay the past-due amount
immediately, or we will issue a
warrant for your arrest.

Carson jumps to his feet; his face goes from neutral to
volcanic in about two seconds. His trembling hand grips the
phone until the plastic creaks.

The whole room is watching.

CARSON
A warrant. For my arrest.

SCAMMER (V.O.)
Yes, sir. Federal marshals are en
route to your residence unless you
make an immediate payment of three
thousand --

CARSON
Son, I was a peace officer for
thirty years.

(MORE)

CARSON (CONT'D)
The IRS does not call people. The
IRS writes letters. On paper. Like
cowards.

SCAMMER (V.O.)
Sir, if you do not cooperate --

CARSON
IF I DO NOT COOPERATE?! I spent
thirty fucking years defusing
bombs. You wanna know what I'd do
to YOU if I could reach through
this phone, dickhead? I would take
your little headset and shove it so
far up your ASS that you'd be
picking up radio signals from your
god-damned COLON!

The line goes dead. Carson stands there, red-faced and
breathing hard, IV pole swaying. His hand shakes --
Parkinson's and rage, indistinguishable.

He snaps the phone shut. Sits back down. The room is silent.

VERA
You too?

CARSON
What do you mean, me too?

VERA
Twelve thousand dollars. Sixty-one
days ago. A man named Michael from
the electric company. He was kind
to me. That's the part I can't --

She stops. Starts again, steadier.

VERA (CONT'D)
He was kind to me for nine minutes,
and I gave him everything.

Nobody says anything smart. Nobody says anything at all.

CANDY
Six thousand.

They turn to her.

CANDY (CONT'D)
Man from my bank. Had my account
number, my mother's maiden name. He
said my name twice.
(MORE)

CANDY (CONT'D)

Do you know how long it had been
since a man said my name twice?

CHANDLER

Eleven thousand. I responded to an
email I thought was from my agent.
I wired the money from a hair
appointment. Can you believe it?

BUFORD

Fella told me I'd won a dadgum
sweepstakes. Just needed five
hundred for the processin' fee.

VERA

And you sent it?

BUFORD

I sent it TWICE. Those bastards
called me back and told me the
first one got lost in the mail.

Everyone stares at Buford.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

The man said I won a gosh-darned
FISHIN' BOAT! Course I sent it!

EDDIE

Twenty-two hundred. They
compromised my email and rerouted a
payment I made to a parts supplier.
I traced it to a commercial
building in Mumbai. Fourth floor.
Eighty workstations on the night
shift. Serious firewalls. Trail
went cold.

CARSON

You traced them?

EDDIE

Of course. Old habits die hard.

RALPH

Nobody's taken a dollar off me yet.
(the charm drops)
Although in my line of work I was
generally the one doing the
talking. Forty-two years. And I
want to say something, and then I'd
like to never say it again.

They wait.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I sold undercoating to a woman on a fixed income four days after her husband died. Nine hundred dollars for a can of tar. I remember her name. So when you talk about these people -- I'm not confused about which side of the desk I sat on.

CHANDLER

Ralph.

RALPH

(back on, bright)

Anyway. Bladder cancer. It seems Karma has a filing system.

DELLA

Four thousand, for me. A man impersonating Medicare.

A beat. Della looks at her hands.

DELLA (CONT'D)

In forty-four years nobody took a dollar off that organization without permission. I made problems go away for a living. And I sat in my kitchen and gave four thousand dollars to a stranger because he stayed on the line nine minutes and asked how my day was going.

Silence. The most dangerous person in the room has just said the most vulnerable thing in it.

DELLA (CONT'D)

So. Yes. I'm angry. But mostly I'm embarrassed, and I've discovered that those two things live in the same house.

CARSON

And the cops don't do a god-damned thing. I called my old division when it happened to my buddy, Frank. You know what they told me? File a report online. Like that's going to get his money back from some guy operating out of a building six thousand miles away.

VERA

The news says they steal billions a year. Mostly from people like us who answer the phone, just because we were raised to.

CANDY

It isn't even the money. It's the way my granddaughter looked at me. Like I'd forgotten my own address. *"Grandma, you should have known."*

CHANDLER

They prey on us because they believe we're already gone. They think old and sick means finished.

A beat. The chemo drips. Something is building in the room, and everybody can feel it.

CARSON

You know what I think about sometimes? What I'd do if I could get my hands on one of those motherfuckers.

VERA

Carson! Your language! Please!

CARSON

Vera, I'm dying of pancreatic cancer, and I just got a scam call DURING MY CHEMOTHERAPY! I think I've earned the god-damned right to say "motherfucker."

VERA

You make a fair point.

CARSON

If I had the chance, I'd wire a little "calling card" to their front door. Nothing lethal -- I'm not a monster. Just enough C4 to blow their god damned phone center into the Ganges.

DELLA

I'd make a phone call. I still know people who know people. Give me a name, an address, and enough blue tarps, and inside seventy-two hours it's like they were never born.

(MORE)

DELLA (CONT'D)
(pleasantly)
Hypothetically, that is.

RALPH
Me? I'd walk in the front door with
a smile and a handshake and tell
them I was there to help them
expand. Get inside. Get trusted.
Find out where every dollar sits.
(beat)
And then I'd show them you can't
con a con man.

Nobody laughs. They look at each other. The venting has
quietly turned into something with a pulse.

CARSON
So let me ask all of you something,
and I want you to actually answer
it. What exactly have we got to
lose?

That lands. Hard.

CARSON (CONT'D)
What could they possibly do to us?
Arrest us? I'll be dead before my
arraignment. Prison? The damned
healthcare's free. So is the food.
Bonus!

CHANDLER
Carson. Are you suggesting what I
believe you are suggesting?

CARSON
I'm suggesting that between the
eight of us we have a cop, a
showgirl, a con man --

RALPH
Retired.

CARSON
An electronics expert, a mob
secretary, a prosthetics artist, a
marksman, and a woman who raised
six children in Chicago, which was
more dangerous than anything I did
on the bomb squad.

VERA
You're damn right it was.

CARSON

So instead of sitting here every week talking about what we'd do -- let's do something about it.

A beat. The machines beep.

RALPH

Now that is a solid pitch!

DELLA

It's also not the craziest thing I've heard. I once sat in on a plan to hijack a cheese truck on the Jersey Turnpike in broad daylight.

Seven acknowledgments. But waiting for Vera's last.

Vera has not said anything. Everybody notices.

VERA

Hold on. Y'all are talking about what, exactly? Flying somewhere. Chasing criminals. We can't even get through a Wednesday without somebody falling asleep in the chair or vomiting into a bag.

CARSON

Vera. You raised six kids alone on Chicago's South Side. You ever been shot at?

VERA

Twice.

CARSON

Stabbed?

VERA

Once. At bingo. A misunderstanding.

CARSON

You survived that. You survived cancer twice. What's one more?

Vera looks around the room at these stubborn, damaged, furious people. Then pulls a folded pharmacy receipt from her pocket.

VERA

It's not just one more fight. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

She waves the pharmacy receipt for everyone to see.

VERA (CONT'D)
Dorothy Kessler. My tenant
upstairs, same house. Eighty-one.
Her husband was a lineman for
thirty-four years, and this is what
he left her. Same call. Same man.
Same nine minutes. Twenty-six
thousand dollars, which was
everything.

CANDY
Vera --

VERA
She's got thirty days of medication
left because I've been buying it.
That's the receipt. And on the
twelfth of next month the
management company puts her out,
because I can either buy pills or
pay rent, not both.

Nobody moves.

VERA (CONT'D)
So when Carson asks what we have
got to lose -- Carson, baby, I
don't have anything to lose either.
But Dorothy does. Dorothy's got
about thirty days.

Long silence. The machines beep.

VERA (CONT'D)
(she sits back, closes her
eyes)
Lord, forgive me. I'm in.

The group exchanges a look: nervous, terrified, and
fundamentally, permanently angry.

RALPH
So when do we start?

CARSON
We start by not talking about it in
a room with a wall-mounted camera
and a roomful of witnesses.

DELLA
I know a place. Off the books.

CARSON
Of course you do.

PUSH IN on Carson. Jaw set. Two bits of tissue still stuck to his shaving cuts, which somehow makes him look more dangerous, not less.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS PVT LTD - FLOOR - MUMBAI - NIGHT

RAJIV PATEL, early twenties, sits in cubicle 27 with his headset half off, staring at a monitor where a red banner has appeared: **"TARGET LOST -- SUPERVISOR ALERTED."**

RAJIV
No, no, no.

Down the aisle, **VIKRAM** arrives. He does not raise his voice. He never has to.

RAJIV (CONT'D)
Sir. I can call him back --

VIKRAM
You had a seventy-five-year-old man in a chemotherapy chair who believed he was about to be arrested, and you could not extract three thousand dollars.

RAJIV
He knew, sir. He wasn't afraid.

VIKRAM
Of course he knew. They all know. We don't need them to believe us. We need them to be tired.

He reaches past Rajiv and taps the keyboard. Carson's file: **"DO NOT CALL -- FLAG: HIGHLY REACTIVE."**

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
Carson. Retired police. Bomb disposal. Reactive men always have a weak spot.

He straightens. Turns to the floor. Nobody is looking at him. Everybody is listening.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
When one of you loses a call, someone else will make it. Someone else will collect.
(MORE)

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
 (back to Rajiv, almost
 kind)
 It will not be you.

He snaps his fingers. Two **SECURITY MEN** appear, hands out.

SECURITY MAN
 Lanyard.

Rajiv gives it up.

They walk him out. Eighty heads stay down. Yogesh smirks.
 Vikram sits, picks up the phone.

VIKRAM
 (into phone)
 Get me a new body in twenty-seven.
 I want the firewall doubled by
 morning and move the security sweep
 up. I want everything on the floor
 cleared to Dubai at two-twenty A.M.
 nightly, not weekly. Cash that sits
 still is cash somebody can find.

He hangs up. The numbers on his wall of monitors keep
 climbing.

INT. ANGELS OF MERCY HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Vera walks slowly, IV pole in hand, beside her daughter
TANYA, forty-five, reading glasses pushed up on her head, a
 tote of Tupperware on her arm. Aggressively ordinary.

TANYA
 Mama, you're pale.

VERA
 I'm always pale on Wednesdays.

TANYA
 You're never pale.

They reach a bench. Sit.

TANYA (CONT'D)
 Is this about Miss Dorothy's
 medication?

VERA
 Who told you about that?

TANYA

Nobody. Your grocery bill went down forty dollars a week, and your pharmacy bill went up by two hundred. I balanced your checkbook in April. Like I do every month.

Vera pats Tanya's hand and pauses a moment.

VERA

Baby, you are the most boring one of my six children, and I thank God for it every single day.

TANYA

That's me. "Boring" Tanya.

VERA

How's the consulting, going?

TANYA

Slides. Meetings. Airports. (a beat) Mama, twelve thousand dollars came out of your savings in April.

A beat. Vera looks at the far end of the corridor.

VERA

That was the roof.

TANYA

The roof?

VERA

Your father's roof. It needed doing.

Tanya does not move for a moment. Something in her goes very still, and very cold, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with a roof.

TANYA

Then it needed doing.

Tanya kisses her mother's forehead and stands, and for one second, as she scans the corridor -- both ends, ceiling corner, exit sign -- she is not a woman carrying soup.

Then she is again.

INT. VARIOUS - THE ARGUMENTS - DAY

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I could spend twenty pages on eight families and friends trying to talk eight old people out of the craziest thing they'd ever done. But time is a finite resource for everyone in this story. So, here's the short version.

CARSON'S KITCHEN TABLE. Carson cleans a well-worn service revolver that has very clearly seen its better days. Across from him, **FRANK**, seventy-two, his LAPD partner for twenty-two years.

FRANK

India? For Christ's sake, Carson, you have Parkinson's, AND friggin' pancreatic cancer. You can't go halfway around the world to fight telephone criminals.

CARSON

Why not?

FRANK

Because you are seventy-five!

CARSON

And those bastards are stealing from people BECAUSE THEY'RE SEVENTY-FIVE!

Frank leans forward.

FRANK

You really think this ends well?

CARSON

No. But I spent thirty years showing up when somebody was in trouble, and nobody ever told me how to stop just because my body got tired of keeping up.

Frank studies him. The joke is gone.

CANDY'S CONDO. Candy is calmly redoing her lipstick. Her daughter **ROCHELLE**, fifty, pacing.

ROCHELLE

Mother... I will call a lawyer. I will have you evaluated.

CANDY

Sit down, Rochelle. When I was twenty-four, I could hold a room of eight hundred people spellbound for ninety minutes with just my boobs and legs. But somebody sweet-talked me on the phone for less than ten minutes, and I paid him six thousand dollars.

Rochelle's mouth opens. Nothing comes out.

CANDY (CONT'D)

(gently)

So no, baby. I'm not confused. I have never been less confused in my life. I'm angry.

BUFORD'S PORCH. Buford and his son **CLETUS**, fifty.

CLETUS

Daddy, is there anything I can say?

BUFORD

Not a dadgum thing, boy.

CLETUS

Then at least promise me you'll leave Geraldine home.

A long, tortured pause.

BUFORD

Now you're just talkin' crazy, son.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And that is how it started. Eight people with nothing to lose, everything to prove, and a combined age of six hundred and six. God help the scammers. God help us all.

INT. EDDIE'S HOUSE - BASEMENT WORKSHOP - NIGHT

A cramped electronics lab: Radio Shack meets Cold War bunker. Three ten-year-old monitors, forty years of soldering, a coffee can of resistors, capacitors and transistors.

The other SEVEN crowd behind Eddie's chair. Ralph touches things he should not. Candy checks her lipstick in a fourth dead monitor. Della takes mental notes.

EDDIE
I found the payment server that
handles their receipts. And I am,
at this moment, halfway inside it.

Green text scrolls. Transaction codes, thousands of them.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Look at this. Americans, Canadians,
British. We are not special. We are
a Tuesday.

VERA
Lord have mercy.

EDDIE
I've written a reversal script.
Chargeback on every transaction
tagged to our eight accounts.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER. The last data field fills.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
That's it. Here we go.

CHANDLER
So exciting. This is real-life
'Mission Impossible' stuff.

Eddie hits ENTER. A progress bar appears. The room goes
absolutely silent. Eight people lean in, and for a moment
every one of them looks and feels twenty-five and hopeful.

EDDIE
Reversal initiated.

Buford leans in closer, squinting at the screen. As he does,
a tin of chewing tobacco slips out of his flannel shirt
pocket and LANDS FLAT ON THE KEYBOARD. WHACK!

A command executes. A string of garbage floods the terminal.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Buford! God dammit!

BUFORD
(snatching his tin back)
I didn't do nothin'!

The screen flashes RED. An alert TONE.

EDDIE

Oh my god! They've seen it. They're taking countermeasures.

VERA

Was that supposed to happen?

EDDIE

Nothing that is happening right now is SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN! Shit!

Eddie's hands fly across his keyboard. It doesn't help. The progress bar reverses direction.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

No, no, no. They've turned it around. They're pulling money OUT of our accounts.

BUFORD

Well. THAT ain't good.

All three monitors go dark. Then, in unison, they display the same red line:

"TRANSFER COMPLETE. AMOUNT: \$8,400. ACCOUNTS ACCESSED: 8."

Dead silence. Eight old people looking at three screens.

VERA

Did we just get taken again?

EDDIE

Eight thousand four hundred dollars. Combined.

And then a new window opens. Nobody touched anything.

On screen: a remote file browser, opening THEIR files. Eddie's service record. Della's tax returns. Carson's neurology report. Vera's mortgage. All eight of them.

Eddie goes very still.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Oh, no.

CARSON

What? What the hell is all that?

EDDIE

That's a mirror. They didn't just reverse it -- they slipped in behind me while the virtual 'door' was open. They have it all.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

All of our names, addresses,
medical records, and the fact that
the eight of us are in treatment at
the same hospital.

Silence.

CARSON

Buford, you ignorant hillbilly!
Your god-damned tobacco just --

DELLA

(calm, absolute)

Enough.

Everyone stops. Della has the tone. The one that could quiet
a room of drunk Teamsters at three in the morning.

DELLA (CONT'D)

It wasn't the tobacco, Carson. It
was the battlefield. We tried to
fight global professionals from a
musty basement with three crappy
monitors and a strip mall Radio
Shack mentality.

EDDIE

Hey! I managed that Radio Shack
VERY efficiently.

DELLA

Eddie, it's not you. Nobody wins a
war by faxing the enemy. It's
tactical warfare.

She looks at each of them.

DELLA (CONT'D)

And now they know who we are.

CHANDLER

What does that mean, exactly?

DELLA

It means we're at war... and the
next move is theirs.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS PVT LTD - VIKRAM'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A glass-box executive suite on the top floor. City lights. On
Vikram's monitor: eight photographs in a grid. Eight names.
Eight medical summaries. Yogesh stands at his shoulder,
delighted.

YOGESH

Boss. They're all in chemotherapy.
At the same hospital. Do you want
the whole floor put on them? Ten
calls a day each --

VIKRAM

No.

He studies the grid like a man studies the stock market.

He taps Vera's photo, revealing her personal details.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)

Park a car on this street. Nothing
else. Just a car, for three days.
High visibility, where she can see
it. 24/7. A bit of quiet, but
effective, intimidation.

INT. DOROTHY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Small, immaculate, four decades of the same wallpaper. Framed
photograph of a man in a utility company jacket up high, on a
pole, in 1971.

DOROTHY KESSLER, eighty-one, sits in an armchair with an
oxygen line at her nose and a taped envelope in her lap:
"THIRTY (30) DAY NOTICE TO VACATE."

Vera sits across from her, holding both her hands.

DOROTHY

Don't you make that face at me,
Vera Williams.

VERA

I'm not making a face.

DOROTHY

You're making the face you use to
make the church deacons feel
uneasy.

Vera laughs despite herself. Dorothy squeezes her hands.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

Fifty-one years I was married to a
man who climbed poles in the rain
so the rest of you could watch
television. And I gave it to a boy
on the telephone in nine minutes.

VERA

Dorothy --

DOROTHY

I'm not asking for pity. I'm asking you to stop paying for my pills.

VERA

No. Absolutely not.

DOROTHY

Vera, please.

VERA

I said no.

A beat. Dorothy looks at the eviction notice in her lap.

DOROTHY

My son says I should come live with him in Reno.

VERA

That's good, isn't it?

DOROTHY

His wife hates me. And I have never once in eighty-one years lived somewhere I wasn't wanted, and I would rather not start now.

Silence. The oxygen concentrator hums.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

Can I tell you the worst part? It isn't the money, and it isn't the apartment.

VERA

What is it?

DOROTHY

Everybody's very sorry for me, but nobody's angry.

She looks at Vera.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

I would give anything for somebody to be angry.

HOLD on Vera's face.

INT. ENZO'S TAVERN - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A borrowed party room behind a bar that has not changed its wallpaper or its clientele since 1978. Vinyl booths. Two enormous mastiffs, **CAPONE** and **GOTTI**, doze against the wall.

All eight around the table. A whiteboard on an easel. Carson has written "**PLAN**" at the top and nothing underneath.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Eight people with cancer held a brainstorming meeting to plan an international felony. It did not go well. Carson wanted a chain of command. Ralph wanted face time with the scammers. Vera just wanted common sense. Della wanted a manifest, a route, and somebody on the ground who wasn't them. Buford wanted firepower. Chandler wanted a certain "look." And Capone and Gotti slept through it all. Progress made: ZERO.

Carson SLAMS the marker down, then picks it back up.

CARSON

Everybody stop!

Everybody stops.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Show of hands. Who here has ever planned an operation on foreign soil? Who's been to India? Who speaks a language spoken in Mumbai?

No hands.

CHANDLER

I did a film in Marathi. I was in the makeup trailer.

CARSON

That's not a 'yes', Chandler.

He puts the marker down.

CARSON (CONT'D)

Eight thousand four hundred dollars came out of our own accounts because we thought being angry was the same thing as being competent.

(MORE)

CARSON (CONT'D)
It is not. I've watched three men
die of that exact same mistake.

A hard silence.

DELLA
He's right. We need a professional.

RALPH
Where do you buy one of those?

Della is quiet. Everybody watches her think, and it takes
longer than they expect.

DELLA
I can get us moved. Bodies,
luggage, a place to sleep, a
vehicle, a room nobody looks at.
That I can do with one call.

CARSON
Then make it.

DELLA
Carson, when I retired, I told a
family in Bayonne I was finished.
They accepted that graciously,
which for them is an investment.
The second I dial their number, I'm
a resource for them the rest of my
life. There is no version where I
make this call and go back to just
knitting and gardening.

Nobody speaks.

VERA
Della. Don't you do that for us.

Della takes out an actual address book, cloth-bound, older
than most of the room.

DELLA
I'm not doing it for you. I spent
forty-four years making sure that
nobody ever got taken advantage of
on my watch. And then somebody took
advantage of me. On my watch.

She stands.

DELLA (CONT'D)
I'll be at the payphone.

CHANDLER

The what?

DELLA

The payphone. Behind the bar. Enzo keeps it working for exactly this type of call. Untappable.

She winks and goes. Carson turns back to the whiteboard.

CARSON

Which leaves the actual problem. Somebody has to run this. In my old circles there are rumors about an independent black-ops contractor. They call him the "Phantom."

CHANDLER

That sounds like a badass Bond villain. Or a very long-running Broadway musical.

CARSON

He's an 'Independent'. Governments hire him when they need something that can never be connected to them. Nobody knows what he looks like, where he is, or how to reach him.

CANDY

Wonderful. So he's a ghost.

EDDIE

Ghosts leave trails. All of them.

He looks up from his tablet.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

There's still a dead-drop protocol from the eighties. Message board infrastructure that never got decommissioned because nobody remembers it exists. If he's still working, he still reads it.

CARSON

How long?

EDDIE

Six hours to post. After that it's not up to me.

INT. EDDIE'S BASEMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Eddie alone, typing with two fingers, glasses down his nose. On screen, a plain text field. He types: **"EIGHT PRINCIPALS. NO ASSETS. NO TRAINING. TARGET: TELEPHONE FRAUD OPERATION, MUMBAI. FORTY-SEVEN MILLION. WE ARE ALL TERMINAL. WE ARE NOT LOOKING FOR REVENGE. WE ARE LOOKING FOR THE MONEY TO GO BACK."**

He hesitates. Adds one more line. **"WE CANNOT PAY YOU."**

He sends it. Sits back. Looks at the dark screen.

EDDIE
(to himself)
That's forty years of tradecraft
used to send a personal ad.

EXT. ANGELS OF MERCY HOSPITAL - PARKING STRUCTURE - ROOF - DAY

Parking level six. Half-empty. Heat coming off the concrete. Below, the flat sprawl of the city and the ocean past it.

The EIGHT stand in a ragged cluster near the stairwell, failing to look casual. Carson scans every car. Eddie holds a small signal meter.

Nothing happens. Somewhere below, a car alarm chirps.

BUFORD
Maybe we got catfished by a
teenager in his mama's basement.

Eddie's tablet CHIMES. An incoming call, encrypted, a pulsing green ring.

EDDIE
That's -- that's a military-grade
key exchange. Remarkable stuff.

CARSON
Answer it.

Eddie taps ACCEPT. The screen fills with an **AI-GENERATED AVATAR** -- smooth, ageless, genderless. A digital face with just enough personality to be unsettling.

THE VOICE of THE PHANTOM is electronically altered. Deep. Modulated. Unplaceable.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
You weren't catfished.

They crowd in.

BUFORD

Is that a person or a screensaver?

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)

I'm the person you contacted. This is how I meet.

CARSON

We drove up six levels of a parking structure to look at a tablet?

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)

You drove up six levels because it has one vehicle entrance, no interior cameras above level four, and a stairwell that exits onto two different streets. You're welcome.

Carson shuts up.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)

So, we have Carson: Bomb disposal, Parkinson's, early stage, and a neurology appointment you missed in March. Della: Forty-four years, zero indictments, which is not luck. Vera: six children, all employed, all law-abiding. Buford: whose truck is a public health threat. Chandler: three Academy Award nominations. Zero wins.

CHANDLER

That is just rude.

Eight faces, one glowing screen, California sun.

BUFORD

How in the world did you --

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)

Because I accessed everything about you nine minutes after Eddie posted it. So did somebody in Mumbai, within the hour, which is the part that should be keeping you up at night.

A silence.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)

Let me see if I grasp the situation. You all want to fly to a city none of you have seen, much less find on a globe, locate an operation protected by money and two people in local government, get inside, take back forty-seven million dollars, and come home in one piece. No training, no legal standing, and a combined age of six hundred and six. That about it?

RALPH

Well -- Said out loud, it almost sounds insane.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)

It IS insane. Which is why it just might work. Nobody defends against this type of lunacy.

Hope flickers across eight faces.

CARSON

What's insane is, why would you do this for free?

A pause. Long enough that Eddie glances at the signal meter to make sure the call is still live.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)

Ten weeks ago somebody called my mother. She's eighty. The same operation, same script, same nine minutes of kindness. Nine thousand dollars gone. Everything she had that was hers.

VERA

What did you do?

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)

Everything I'm permitted to do, which is nothing.

A beat. The modulated voice does something almost human.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)

I'll be honest up front about my limits, because your lives will depend on them. I cannot use a single resource connected to my employment to help you.

(MORE)

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)
 I can't put a foot on that foreign
 ground. If I'm seen within a
 thousand miles of this, I don't
 just lose my job. I go to federal
 prison.

DELLA
 So you need hands.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
 I need eight people nobody on earth
 would ever suspect are part of an
 operation.

CHANDLER
 So we're the disguise. I love it!

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
 You're the best one I've ever had
 access to.

A beat.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)
 But there's one condition. Non-
 negotiable. You do exactly WHAT I
 tell you, WHEN I tell you. No "*I-
 know-better-because-I've-been-alive-
 longer*" crap. And you'd better tell
 me the truth about your bodies;
 your conditions... every single
 day, even when it's humiliating.
 Especially then.

CARSON
 Why that last one?

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
 Because the thing that gets you
 killed will not be a guard. It will
 be one of you not saying he was
 dizzy, in pain, or just worn out.

Silence.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)
 So, say it. One at a time. Say,
 "*I'm in, no questions.*"

Eddie. Vera. Della. Three flat matters-of-fact, "*I'm in. No
 questions,*" one after another.

RALPH
I'm in -- but I reserve the right
to renegotiate...

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
Goodbye and good luck.

The tablet screen GOES DARK.

RALPH
(panicked; loudly)
I'M IN! NO QUESTIONS! I'M IN!!

The screen image restores.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
Ralph, don't let your mouth write
checks your body can't cash. Got
it?

RALPH
Loud and crystal clear.

CANDY
I'm in, too. Although you should
know I photograph poorly in
camouflage.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
That's a matter of opinion.

CHANDLER
I'm in. This is the most dramatic
moment of my life, and I include my
own diagnosis.

BUFORD
I'm in. But if anybody touches my
guns we're gonna have a problem.

CARSON
(last, with reluctance)
I'm in. No questions.

The avatar almost manages an expression.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
Good. Sixteen days. Then you fly.

VERA
Sixteen days?

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
Your friend Dorothy has a thirty-day notice, and you have already burned fourteen of them arguing in a mob bar. That's your clock. It was never mine.

Vera averts her eyes as her hand goes to her mouth.

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET) (CONT'D)
Della, I'm sending you a manifest. Eddie, an equipment list -- build it and nothing else. Everybody else: your oncologists sign travel clearances, or you don't board the plane. I'll be checking, and I'll know if you forge it.

CHANDLER
And if one of us can't get cleared?

THE PHANTOM (ON TABLET)
Then that person stays home and lives, Chandler, which is not a punishment. It's the whole point.

The screen goes BLACK.

Eight stunned people on a parking roof, holding a tablet.

BUFORD
Did we just take orders from a gosh darned cartoon?

EDDIE
That wasn't a cartoon. That was an encryption stack I have never seen on a civilian device.

VERA
I don't care if it was a singing telegram. That person knows exactly what was done to us and wants to help.

CARSON
Or that person is going to get us all killed. Well. What the hell? Let the adventure begin. But, first...I need a drink.

INT. CARSON'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Carson at the kitchen table. A pill sorter, a legal pad, a travel clearance form half-filled. His hand trembles over the signature line.

His flip phone RINGS. Unknown number. He answers.

CARSON

Carson.

VIKRAM

(filtered, unhurried)

Mister Brennan. I hope I'm not calling too late.

Carson goes rigid.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)

Please don't hang up. I'm not selling you anything. I want to have one conversation with you, adult to adult, and then I will never call you again.

CARSON

Who is this?

VIKRAM

You know who this is. You've been trying to find me for two weeks. I found you in an afternoon. Twenty-two millimeters at the head of your pancreas. Borderline resectable in March, and no longer described that way in the June notes. Your oncologist wrote a sentence nobody has read to you out loud.

CARSON

Don't.

VIKRAM

"Median overall survival with first-line combination chemotherapy is eight to eleven months. Three-year survival remains under five percent."

Silence on the line. Carson's hand on the table, trembling.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
I read files for a living. That is
the whole job. I find the sentence
a person cannot say to himself.

CARSON
And what's mine?

VIKRAM
That you would rather die doing
something loud than sit in that
apartment with a commendation on
the wall and no photographs on it.

Carson doesn't answer. The silence is an answer.

Vikram replies gently, and this is the terrifying part:

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
I'm going to make you an offer, and
I want you to hear it as
generosity, because that's how I
mean it. Thirty-six thousand
dollars, wired tonight. Your eight
accounts made whole with interest.
And the woman who rents the unit
above Vera Williams -- Kessler --
her twenty-six thousand dollars
returned as well.

Carson closes his eyes.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
Sixty-two thousand dollars returned
within the hour, and everybody goes
back to their lives. Including me.

CARSON
In exchange for what?

VIKRAM
Nothing. You simply go to your
appointments. You do not board an
airplane. That's all.

CARSON
And the four thousand other people.

VIKRAM
There are fifteen thousand other
people, and I cannot help any of
them, and neither can you.

(MORE)

VIKRAM (CONT'D)

This is the part in our relationship where I tell you to be brave, because bravery is the most expensive product I sell.

Long silence. Carson looks at the travel clearance form on the table. At the empty wall.

CARSON

Can I ask you something?

VIKRAM

Please, do.

CARSON

Your voice. On the phone with Vera. That gentleness. Did you learn that or did you already have it?

A pause on the line. The first one Vikram hasn't controlled.

VIKRAM

My father had it. He answered phones for thirty years and never once raised his voice. His name was Manish. On the floor, we call him Mike.

CARSON

You took it off him and sold it.

VIKRAM

I monetized the only thing this country ever thanked him for.

CARSON

See, that's your problem. You think that makes you a businessman. Son, I sat in a crawlspace in Panorama City with a pipe bomb between my knees and a scared mother screaming upstairs. I've thought about that woman every day for thirty-two years. Not the bomb. The woman. You've thought about your father every day of your life and turned him into a god-damned script. That's not business. That's the loneliest thing I've ever heard.

Silence.

VIKRAM
(quietly and sincere)
Sixty-two thousand dollars, Mister
Carson.

CARSON
No. And, by the way, fuck you!

VIKRAM
Fair enough, sir. But I'd like you
to remember, later, that I offered.

CLICK. Dial tone.

Carson sits with the dead phone in his shaking hand for a long moment. Then he picks up the pen, braces his wrist with his other hand, and signs the travel clearance form.

It is the ugliest signature of his life.

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Vera asleep. The phone RINGS. She fumbles for it.

VERA
Hello?

She listens. She says nothing for a long time.

VERA (CONT'D)
Thank you for calling me.

She hangs up.

Then she sets the phone down on the nightstand very carefully, the way you set down something that might break, and she puts both hands flat on the bedspread.

She sits in the dark.

She does not cry. She gets up, puts on her robe, and goes upstairs and stands outside Dorothy's door, her hand flat against it.

INT. VERA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - A WHILE LATER

Vera stands at her front window, curtain in her fist.

She notices a gray sedan is parked across from her house. Nobody is visible inside. It has not moved in two days.

Behind her, in the reflection, her two grandchildren watch television. She lets the curtain fall. Goes to the kitchen.

Takes down the Jameson. Then puts it back. Unopened.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

A small church, blazing white in the sun. A hearse. Fifty mourners. And the EIGHT, in the back row, in dark clothes that do not fit any of them anymore.

INT. NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

A modest casket. A photograph of Dorothy at forty on an easel. At the podium, **DOROTHY'S SON**, fifty-five, is trying.

DOROTHY'S SON
My mother was coming to live with
us in Reno. We had the room ready.

He stops. Looks at the paper in his hand.

DOROTHY'S SON (CONT'D)
She wouldn't take money. Not from
me. Not from anybody. She said
she'd made her own mistake.

He folds the paper.

DOROTHY'S SON (CONT'D)
She didn't make a mistake. Somebody
did something to her.

He steps down. The organ plays. The congregation stands.

In the back row: eight people, not standing.

CANDY has her hand over her mouth. CHANDLER's eyes are streaming, and he doesn't wipe them. BUFORD holds his cap in two fists. RALPH stares at the floor, and for once in eighty years has nothing to say. EDDIE is completely still. DELLA sits like a stone. CARSON's hand shakes on the pew back.

VERA SINGS. Alone at first, then the room joins her.

EXT. NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH - PARKING LOT - LATER

The eight around Buford's truck. The hearse pulling out.

Nobody has said anything for a while.

VERA

The management company was going to put her out on the twelfth of next month. Instead, they put her in the ground this morning.

She looks at them.

VERA (CONT'D)

So she beat 'em by twelve days. That's what I've been telling myself all morning, and I want everybody to understand that is a filthy, disgusting thing to have to tell yourself.

She takes a breath.

VERA (CONT'D)

I have buried a husband, two brothers, and a grandchild, and I have never once in my life wanted to hurt anybody -- until now.

She looks at each of them in turn.

VERA (CONT'D)

I really want to hurt somebody.

Carson steps forward.

CARSON

Vera. I need to tell you all something, and I need to do it here, before we get on a plane.

They turn.

CARSON (CONT'D)

He called me. Three nights ago. Him. The top of it. Your guy.

DELLA

What did he want?

CARSON

He offered me sixty-two thousand dollars. Ours, made whole, plus Dorothy's twenty-six.

Absolute silence.

CARSON (CONT'D)
But, only if we stayed home.

CANDY
Sixty-two thousand dollars?

CARSON
I said no. I didn't ask any of you,
and I'm not going to pretend that
was my right.

A long beat. Buford SPITS.

BUFORD
Wouldn't have paid it anyway.

EDDIE
No. He would have. He'd have paid
it in an hour. For him, it's only
four days of receipts on one floor.

That is somehow much worse. Everyone absorbs it.

RALPH
Three days ago that money would
have kept Dorothy in her apartment.

CARSON
Yes.

Ralph nods slowly. Doesn't accuse him. Which is worse.

VERA
Carson. Look at me.

He does.

VERA (CONT'D)
You did right. Because if we'd have
taken it, we'd have taken it to
bury her.

She puts her hand on the hood of Buford's truck.

VERA (CONT'D)
Now. Which one of you is going to
teach me how to get on an airplane
without crying, because I have not
flown since nineteen eighty-four.

SUPER: "TWELVE DAYS UNTIL DEPARTURE."

INT. GALANTE FREIGHT TERMINAL - DAY

A shuttered trucking terminal. Two acres of concrete under a corrugated roof. Loading bays, a broken dispatch window, forty years of diesel. Pigeons in the rafters. Perfect.

DELLA walks in first, and stops.

On the wall in faded paint: GALANTE FREIGHT & CARTAGE -- EST. 1961.

DELLA
(to nobody; voice echoes)
Hello, Sal. I'm back.

The others file in behind her. Eddie sets up three monitors and plugs a tablet into a projector. The PHANTOM's avatar appears, ten feet tall, on the beige concrete wall.

BUFORD
Well, that's terrifyin'.

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL)
Sit down. Everyone.

They sit on milk crates, rusty folding chairs, and one bus bench of unclear origin.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Twelve days remaining. The Phantom laid it all out fast. Real names, real passports, real e-visas, and a real sister-clinic relationship between Vera's own hospital and the Dharavi Community Clinic, signed by a pastor who prayed over the paperwork and meant it. No aliases - - a forged passport is a felony on both ends, and eight elderly cancer patients on a medical mission is better armor than any alias.

RALPH
No fake names? I've got a whole personality ready. Reginald Thorne. Ophthalmological supplies.

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL)
You will still be Reginald Thorne, Ralph. In that office, for fifteen minutes, with no documents.

RALPH
Fifteen minutes is all I need.

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL)
Now we get to the part you're going
to hate. The rules of engagement.

The slide changes. A list. Big letters.

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL) (CONT'D)
No firearms. No explosives. Nothing
crossing any border that turns a
fraud prosecution into an
international incident with eight
American defendants.

BUFORD
Now hold on just a damned minute.
You're sendin' us into a buildin'
full of criminals, buck-naked and
bare-handed!

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL)
I'm sending you into a building
full of twenty-four-year-olds in
headsets. The moment there's one
gun in that building, this stops
being about fifteen thousand robbed
pensioners and becomes a story
about armed American terrorists --
and every dollar disappears into a
legal proceeding that outlives all
of you.

Buford jumps to his feet, breathing hard.

BUFORD
This is bullshit!

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL)
Buford. Look at me.

BUFORD
You ain't even got a face to look
at.

THE PHANTOM (ON WALL)
Look at me anyway. I need your
eyes, your hands, and forty years
of knowing how weather moves and
where a man will step. I need the
best spotter in this room. I do NOT
need Geraldine.

A long, terrible silence. Buford sits down heavily.

BUFORD

She's been in my family a hundred
and nine years. She's my go-to gal!

VERA

Then she'll be there when you get
home, baby.

INT. GALANTE FREIGHT TERMINAL - TRAINING - DAY

TRAINING MONTAGE. One location. Twelve days. Practical,
unglamorous, and frequently humiliating.

A wordless cutaway: DELLA runs a PVC turnstile and a
laminated fake badge, over and over, teaching pure posture --
chin up, badge low, don't show it, show boredom.

Chandler transforms Ralph at a table of prosthetics and
airbrush: used-car legend into pressed, expensively boring
executive. Respectability applied with a sponge.

Practicing a different voice entirely, clipped, mid-Atlantic:

RALPH

Reginald Thorne. I'm here to talk
to you about scale.

DELLA

That's the man who sold my mother a
mausoleum.

Buford crashes a camera drone in the loading bay. Twice. The
third time it holds a perfect hover.

Carson, on the stairwell mockup, trying to disarm a practice
device Eddie has built. His hand TREMBLES so badly he cannot
seat the probe. He tries four times. He puts the tool down,
walks away, presses his forehead against a support column,
and nobody says a word.

Chandler, in the stairwell mockup, on flight two, has to sit.
He looks at his chemo treatment schedule in his hand -- a
cycle he is going to miss to be on that plane -- folds it up,
and puts it in his pocket.

THE COMPETENCE. The far end of the terminal. A row of paper
targets clipped to a wire at forty yards. An air rifle on the
table -- pellet gun, entirely legal, entirely unglamorous.

BUFORD

All right, now this here's the only
tool I'm allowed to bring, so let's
see who can --

VERA picks it up.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Vera, honey, you gotta seat the
butt against your --

Vera fires. Center hit. Fires. Center hit. Fires, and plinks
the clip off the wire so the target drops.

Silence in the terminal. Buford takes off his cap.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Where in the world did you learn to
shoot like that?

VERA
Sixty-third and Halsted Street in
Chicago. My daddy had a range in
the back of his shop, six children,
and absolutely no patience.

She sets the rifle down on the table.

VERA (CONT'D)
And I want everybody to hear this
next part.

She pushes it away from her.

VERA (CONT'D)
I will not be carrying anything.
Not a rifle, not a pistol, not a
blessed baseball bat.

CARSON
Vera, you're the best damned shot
in the room.

VERA
I know I am. That's exactly why. I
raised six Black children in
Chicago, and I got all six of them
to forty. You know how I did it? I
never once let anybody in my house
believe that hurting somebody was a
solution that was available to us.

She looks at them.

VERA (CONT'D)
I'm not going to unlearn that at
seventy-three -- even for forty-
seven million dollars.

A beat.

CARSON
Understood.

THE PHANTOM (V.O.)
Vera. Be sure to say that again on
the fourth floor. Word for word.

VERA
Why?

THE PHANTOM (V.O.)
Because on the fourth floor there
are eighty people who have been
told all their lives that hurting
somebody is the only solution
available to them.

EXT. GALANTE FREIGHT TERMINAL - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT

Buford sits on the loading dock edge, boots dangling, a
thermos of something 180 proof beside him. Vera comes out and
sits down next to him, which takes her a while.

BUFORD
You gonna preach at me?

VERA
I'm seventy-three, and I climbed
onto a loading dock. You're gonna
let me sit here a minute first.

A beat. He hands her the thermos. She sniffs it, considers
her values, and drinks.

VERA (CONT'D)
Sweet Lord.

BUFORD
Cletus makes it. He ain't good at
much -- but this'll do.

They look out at the lot. Both are quiet for a moment.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
My daddy had a shotgun and strong
opinions about who belonged where.
One night in sixty-four, I was
thirteen. Three trucks left our
yard after dark, and he was in the
second one.
(MORE)

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Come back at four in the mornin'
and washed his hands at the pump a
real long time.

Vera says nothing.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
And in the mornin' my mama put out
breakfast, and nobody said one word
about it. Not that day. Not ever.
That's how it worked. Not the
yellin'. The quiet. I ain't never
told nobody that. Not Cletus. Not
even my wife, God rest her.

VERA
Why are you telling me?

BUFORD
'Cause you're the only person I
ever met who knowed exactly what
them trucks was used for, and
you're settin' here drinkin' my
boy's moonshine anyway.

Vera hands the thermos back.

VERA
Buford, I'm not going to tell you
that's all right.

BUFORD
I ain't askin' you to.

VERA
Good.

A long silence, and it is not a hostile one.

BUFORD
When I was comin' up, a man like my
daddy would've told you the eight
of us couldn't never even sit at
the same table. And here I am
fixin' to fly across the world with
a Black church lady, a Vegas
showgirl, a Jersey mob secretary,
and a fella who did makeup on Cats,
and the truth is you people are --

He stops himself. Hears it. Physically flinches.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
 No. Not "you people." That's my
 daddy's mouth. You're my crew.
 Hopefully my friends. That's all.
 That's the whole sentence.

Vera looks at him for a long moment. Then she reaches over
 and pats his enormous hand once.

VERA
 That'll do.

She starts the difficult process of getting off the dock.

VERA (CONT'D)
 Buford. The shotgun stays home.

BUFORD
 Yes, ma'am.

**EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DEPARTURES CURB -
 DAY**

Two vehicles at the curb: Della's town car and Buford's
 truck, made almost respectable. Eight people, eight bags,
 four cartons stenciled "*ANGELS OF MERCY MEDICAL DONATION.*"

SUPER: "DAY ONE."

Buford stands at the open door of his truck, holding a long
 soft gun case. Cletus is in the driver's seat.

BUFORD
 (to the case, quietly)
 Geraldine...Now you mind Cletus.

He hands it over. Cletus takes her.

CLETUS
 Daddy.

BUFORD
 Don't. Not a word.

He shuts the door and walks toward the terminal without
 looking back, and it costs him.

RALPH bounces out of the town car in the plaid slacks,
 carrying a garment bag with a suit in it worth more than the
 slacks by a factor of forty.

DELLA
 Ralph. The boarding passes.

RALPH
 (patting his pockets)
 They're -- hold on --

Everyone goes still. And then,

RALPH (CONT'D)
 Right here. Never in doubt.

CARSON stands at the curb, looking up at the terminal. VERA comes up beside him with a paper cup of coffee.

VERA
 You all right?

CARSON
 I've never been out of the country.

VERA
 Never?

CARSON
 Thirty years on the job. Never took
 my vacations; Didn't have anybody
 to take'em with.

Vera hands him the coffee.

VERA
 Well. You do now.

INT. AIRPLANE - ECONOMY CABIN - NIGHT

A wide-body cabin, cabin lights down. Eight elderly people distributed across a middle block.

EDDIE has three seat-back screens on the flight map and is doing arithmetic on a napkin.

EDDIE
 Los Angeles to Doha, sixteen hours
 ten. Layover, two forty. Doha to
 Mumbai, three fifty. Twenty-three
 hours door to door, one stop, and
 no way to do it with none.

CHANDLER
 I have a colostomy and a hip.
 Twenty-three hours. BRU-TUL!

Della looks up from reviewing a hand-drawn schedule.

DELLA

Chandler, walk the aisle every ninety minutes, or you'll throw a clot and die somewhere over Turkey.

CHANDLER

That is a horrifying sentence, and I will comply.

CANDY, in the window seat, wig off, silk scarf on, watching the dark ocean. CARSON in the seat beside her, wide awake.

CANDY

Can I tell you the truth about something?

CARSON

Sure.

CANDY

I'm not afraid of the criminals.
I'm afraid of the fourth floor.
Eighty people all looking at me.

CARSON

You did fourteen shows a week.

CANDY

I did fourteen shows a week when I looked like the reason they came.

Carson considers this longer than a man like Carson usually considers anything.

CARSON

Candy. When I walked into a room with a bomb in it, nobody looked at me either. They all just looked at the device. Turns out that's the job. You just have to be the calmest thing in the room. Be you.

Candy looks at him.

CANDY

Carson, that is nearly a compliment.

Across the aisle, BUFORD is asleep with his mouth open. RALPH runs his Reginald Thorne voice under his breath, over and over.

And VERA, in an aisle seat, is looking at a small photograph in her hand: Dorothy and her, in church hats, laughing.

She puts it in her breast pocket.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT -
IMMIGRATION - DAY**

A long, orderly, air-conditioned hall. Queues under signage. The eight of them, gray with jet lag, shuffle forward with their donation cartons on two carts.

SUPER: "MUMBAI. DAY TWO."

They split to separate booths. We stay with CARSON.

An **IMMIGRATION OFFICER**, thirties, professional, unhurried, examines his passport and e-visa.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
Purpose of your visit?

CARSON
Medical supply donation. Church mission. There's a letter.

He slides it across. The officer reads it properly, which is worse than not reading it.

Then his eyes move to Carson's hands on the counter. They are TREMBLING. Visibly.

A beat. The officer's manner changes -- not suspicious. More attentive and personal.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
Sir, are you well?

CARSON
I've got Parkinson's. And a walnut-sized tumor on my pancreas. And I've been on an airplane for twenty-three hours, which I do not highly recommend.

The officer flips to the medical clearance page. Reads the oncologist's line. Reads it again.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
Your doctor has cleared you for international travel with this diagnosis?

CARSON

He cleared me. And he also asked me not to go.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Why are you going?

A beat. Carson decides on the truth, which is the only thing he has that will survive this counter.

CARSON

A woman in my building died two weeks ago because somebody took her money over the telephone. Eighty-one years old. Her husband climbed power poles for thirty-four years to earn it. I can't fix that. But I'm too old to sit in a chair and pretend it didn't happen.

The officer holds his eyes for a long moment. Then he takes up his stamp.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

My grandmother was called a dozen times last year.

STAMP.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (CONT'D)

Welcome to Mumbai, sir. Drink water. Be well.

EXT. MUMBAI - STREET - DAY

The city, not as spectacle -- as a working place. Traffic that solves itself. Vendors, tiffin carriers, a woman in a suit stepping over a sleeping dog.

A single hired van, unremarkable and white, moves slowly through it. Inside: eight jetlagged Americans with their faces at the windows.

BUFORD

How many folks live here?

AMIT (O.C.)

Twenty-one million.

REVEAL: AMIT SHARMA, thirty-eight, in the front passenger seat, turned to face them. Expensive glasses, and a reporter's notebook that has been rained on more than once.

AMIT (CONT'D)

More people in this city than in the state of Florida, and every one of them younger than the eight of you. And I am aware you were all imagining something else, because everyone does.

(a beat)

AMIT (CONT'D)

I'm Amit Sharma. Mumbai Ledger. Four years in this industry -- twenty-six feature articles, two arrests, and both men reopened under new company names inside ninety days.

CARSON

Why help us?

AMIT

Because twenty-six articles achieved nothing and I'd like to try something stupid. Also, my mother-in-law lost her retirement to a man on the fourth floor of that building. So understand: I'm not your guide. I'm the ninth one of you.

VERA

Then sit back here with us.

AMIT

The seat is broken.

BUFORD

Sit on the cooler.

Amit climbs back and sits on a cooler, and something in the van changes shape.

INT. DHARAVI COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY

A working clinic: two rooms, a curtain, a queue, a ceiling fan doing its best. **DR. MEERA JOSHI**, forties, directs traffic with total authority while the eight unload the cartons -- and it is real. Vera unpacks blood pressure cuffs. Chandler assembles an examination lamp with a screwdriver in his teeth.

DR. JOSHI
Mrs. Williams. Are you a church
mission, or the other thing Amit
would not explain to me?

A beat. Vera does not lie.

VERA
We're both.

Dr. Joshi absorbs that. Then she picks up a glucometer and
turns away.

DR. JOSHI
Then the equipment is real, I have
thirty patients waiting, and I have
decided not to know anything else.
Can you take blood pressures?

VERA
Been doin' em since nineteen seventy-
one.

MONTAGE, brief and warm: Vera at the BP cuff. Candy holding a
toddler on her hip, singing something from a Vegas revue
while a nurse draws blood, and the child stops crying. Carson
sits with an old man who also has a tremor.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Let the record show: they did the
work. Every morning for eight days.
It began as a cover story. It
stopped being one by the second
afternoon.

EXT. TEA STALL - NEAR THE TARGET BUILDING - DAY

A narrow lane. A tea stall with four plastic stools. Across
the street, sixty yards off: a seven-story commercial block.
Tinted windows. A sign shows: GLOBAL SOLUTIONS PVT LTD.

CARSON, DELLA, AMIT and BUFORD on the stools with cutting
chai, doing exactly what three old tourists and a friend
would do.

BUFORD
(not looking at it)
Two men on the door. One's a real
one, and one's a kid.

DELLA
Deliveries at the side. Nine, two.

CARSON
Cameras. Front, side, roofline, and
one on a pole across the street
that isn't theirs.

AMIT
That one is municipal. It works
about half the time.

Buford sips.

BUFORD
Ain't no fence. Ain't no dogs.
Ain't no razor wire.

AMIT
Why would there be? On paper, this
is a legitimate company that pays
taxes and sponsors a cricket team.

Carson watches the doors. It's a shift change, with fifty
young people flowing out, fifty flowing in. A flood of
backpacks, earbuds, laughter.

CARSON
Those aren't criminals. Those are
kids getting off work.

AMIT
Second and third floors. Genuine
business. They handle billing
questions for a Canadian internet
provider.

CARSON
And the fourth?

AMIT
The fourth floor has its own
elevator card, its own supervisor,
and a door that locks inside.

Down the lane, a young man in a cheap shirt sits alone at the
far stool of the same stall, staring at a phone with a
cracked screen. He has been there a while.

AMIT (CONT'D)
And that is the other reason I
brought you here.

He gets up and crosses to the young man. It is **RAJIV PATEL**.

INT. SAFEHOUSE - GUEST HOUSE APARTMENT - EVENING

A rented flat above a printing shop. Whitewashed walls, ceiling fans, a long table. The war room: floor plans taped up, butcher paper, the PHANTOM on a propped laptop.

RAJIV stands just inside the door, twenty-two years old and terrified of everyone in the room.

RAJIV

I am not going to be a witness. I want to say that first. My mother lives in Pune. I won't put her at risk.

AMIT

Nobody asked you to be a witness.

RAJIV

Then what?

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

Rajiv. Sit down.

Rajiv looks at the avatar and does not sit down.

RAJIV

What is that?

EDDIE

We've stopped asking.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

You worked cubicle twenty-seven for fourteen months. They terminated you on a Thursday, and confiscated your passport that afternoon.

Rajiv goes very still.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP) (CONT'D)

How much of your pay was withheld against your training bond?

RAJIV

Eleven months.

VERA

Baby, sit down.

He sits down. Vera puts a cup of tea in front of him because that is simply what she does.

RAJIV
You want to know about the servers.

CARSON
We want to know about the doors.

RAJIV
Then let me tell you the thing
nobody outside believes.

He looks around at them.

RAJIV (CONT'D)
I read from a script. Somebody
wrote it. Somebody in a meeting
decided which sentence works on a
widow. I did not write it. And I
said it four hundred times a night
for fourteen months. So I'm not
asking you to think I'm a good
person. I'm telling you that on
that floor there are eighty people
and maybe six of them are what you
think they are.

CANDY
And the rest?

RAJIV
The rest are in a room they cannot
leave with a document they cannot
get back.

A long beat. Buford, of all people, speaks.

BUFORD
Son. What'd they pay you?

RAJIV
Sixteen thousand rupees a month.
About two hundred dollars.

Buford sets down his cup.

BUFORD
Two hundred dollars a month to take
five hundred bucks off an old man
in Miss'sippi in less than fifteen
minutes? Twice?

RAJIV
Yes.

BUFORD
Sons of bitches. What's the layout?

RAJIV
Upstairs. Fifth and sixth are empty. Vikram Sen's office is on seven.

Carson and Della look at each other.

CARSON
All right. Rajiv. What can you actually get us?

RAJIV
I can get you a vendor keycard for the service elevator -- the vendor cards were never deactivated when the contract changed in April. A maintenance uniform; the housekeeping supplier is my cousin's company. The fire panel key, because it hangs on a nail.

CARSON
What else?

RAJIV
And I can tell you the fourth-floor door is propped open with a wooden wedge every night at eleven because the air conditioning on that floor has been broken since March, and Sen will not pay to fix it.

EDDIE
A wedge?

RAJIV
A wooden wedge.

INT. MUMBAI POLICE - CYBER CELL - DAY

A small office of overloaded desks and stacked case files. **INSPECTOR PRIYA KULKARNI**, forties, sharp, exhausted, sits across from CARSON, DELLA and AMIT. She does not offer tea.

KULKARNI
Mister Amit has brought me many things over four years. This is the first time he has brought me Americans.

CARSON

We're not asking you to do anything.

KULKARNI

Good, because I cannot.

She holds up a file.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)

For two years I've had a case open on Global Solutions. Call recordings, shell registrations, and four complainants who withdrew - - because the man who owns that building owns a great deal of goodwill, and because my seizure warrant requires me to name the specific accounts, and the accounts move nightly.

CARSON

Two-twenty in the morning.

Kulkarni's eyes narrow.

KULKARNI

How do you know that?

CARSON

Because a man told me on the telephone that cash which sits still is cash somebody can find.

Kulkarni sits back.

KULKARNI

Then you understand my problem. Every night at two-twenty everything on that floor clears to a corporate account in Dubai, and at two-twenty-one it all becomes a treaty request that takes sixteen months.

AMIT

And if somebody put the account numbers in your hands around midnight?

KULKARNI

Then I would have ninety minutes or so to file an emergency freeze with the banking ombudsman and the processors, and for the first time in two years I would be ahead of him instead of behind him.

A beat as Kulkarni ponders her next move.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)

I want to be clear about the rest. If eight foreign nationals are found on that fourth floor without lawful business there, I will arrest them all. I will not be able to avoid it, and I will not try. A pre-cleared visitor on a lobby list, in and out the front door under her own name, is not the same person to me, and I would ask you not to make me pretend otherwise.

CARSON

Understood.

KULKARNI

Do you? Because there's a version of this where you are all heroes in your American newspapers and all defendants in mine.

She stands and goes to the window.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)

My mother is sixty-eight. Last November a man called her and told her that I had been suspended from the police service and that she needed to pay a bond.

She turns around.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)

She believed it for nine minutes. My mother. About me; her daughter. So if a package of account numbers arrived at this office at two in the morning from an anonymous source, I wouldn't be able to explain where it came from. But I would be awake.

She sits back down and opens a file, which is her way of ending a meeting.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)

Mister Carson. There is one more thing you should know, and I am telling you because I do not want to attend your funeral.

CARSON

Go ahead.

KULKARNI

Two years ago the Pune cyber cell raided a similar operation. When the team reached the server room, the racks were already burning. Not just a fire. A device. Thermite, on a timer, wired to the door.

The room goes cold.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)

Everything was ash in ninety seconds. Eleven thousand victims and no evidence at all.

CARSON

Who built it?

KULKARNI

A contractor who now works exclusively for Vikram Sen.

Carson looks at his own trembling hand on his knee.

CARSON

Well. Isn't that something.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS PVT LTD - VIKRAM'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Yogesh sets a manila envelope on the desk. Vikram does not open it.

VIKRAM

I asked you for a parked car.

YOGESH

I got you better than a car, sir.
Four hundred dollars a day for a
gray sedan parked on a residential
street in California, and a man
inside with a camera patient enough
to sit in it.

Vikram opens the envelope. Assorted photographs. Long lens,
grainy, shot through a windshield.

INSERT: VERA WILLIAMS on her own front step in a housecoat,
bending for a newspaper.

INSERT: CARSON coming out of a hardware store with a length
of conduit and a paper bag.

INSERT: eight people on the roof of a hospital parking
structure. Folding chairs. A laptop propped on an overturned
bucket.

Vikram lays that last one flat on the desk and looks at it
for a long time. He counts them with the tip of a pen.

VIKRAM

Eight.

YOGESH

Old people, sir.

VIKRAM

Yes.

He circles the images of Carson and Vera with the pen.

YOGESH

My contact says the woman filed a
chargeback and lost. That's all it
is. It's nothing.

VIKRAM

Yogesh. In seventeen years I have
been threatened by two governments,
four banks, and a nephew. Not one
of them ever took my photo first.

He sets the pen down. And what happens to his face is not
fear. It is a manager identifying a process failure.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)

Three things. Every badge, every
vendor keycard, every floor,
reconciled against payroll. Not
next month. Friday.

YOGESH
Friday is four days.

VIKRAM
Then begin tonight.

He takes a work order out of his in-tray and signs it without reading it.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
Second. That fourth-floor vestibule door has been propped with a wooden wedge since March because the air handling is broken and nobody wanted to spend the money. Spend the money. I want it closing on its own by Wednesday morning.

YOGESH
And third, sir?

VIKRAM
That journalist. Sharma. He has written twenty-six articles about me, and I have never once minded.

He finally looks up.

VIKRAM (CONT'D)
Mind him.

INT. SAFEHOUSE - WAR ROOM - NIGHT

The full team plus AMIT, RAJIV, and the LAPTOP. Butcher paper on the wall now holds a hand-drawn timeline. Della has made it, and it is beautiful.

SUPER: "DAY EIGHT. TWENTY-FIVE HOURS TO GO."

RAJIV comes in fast, still in his call-center shirt, and he is grey.

RAJIV
They are reconciling the cards. All of them. Against payroll. Yogesh walked the floor at nine o'clock tonight and wrote down every badge number by hand.

Everyone turns.

RAJIV (CONT'D)

By Friday there is no vendor keycard. There is no cubicle twenty-seven. Only a man from Kanpur who does not exist.

AMIT

There is more. A man photographed me at the tea stall on Sunday and made sure I saw him do it.

A silence with weight in it.

DELLA

Then it isn't Friday. It's tomorrow.

CARSON

Della, tomorrow is Tuesday.

DELLA

I'm aware of what tomorrow is.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

Something has spooked him. Four days ago he was a man collecting money. Tonight he is a man counting badges.

And Carson sets down his coffee, because he has just worked out what.

CARSON

Vera. That gray car outside your house.

VERA

Two days it sat there. I told you about it.

CARSON

You did. You told me about that gray sedan on your street, and I wrote it on a whiteboard in a tavern under the word 'PLAN', and then did nothing about it -- because I've spent thirty years being the man they send in and I have never once been the man being watched.

Nobody says anything. Buford takes his hat off.

CHANDLER

So he has photographs of us.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

He has your names, your addresses, and your charts. What he does not have is any reason to believe eight people with those charts are already in his city. Tomorrow night is the last night on earth that will be true.

A beat.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP) (CONT'D)

Sit down, all of you. I'm going to tell you the plan, then what's wrong with it, and then Carson is going to tell me I'm wrong about that, and he'll be right.

CARSON

That's ominous.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

But expected. Twenty-three hundred hours. Night shift, minimum staffing. Second and third floors are dark. Fourth floor is running eighty seats.

Della moves a magnet on the butcher paper at each phase.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP) (CONT'D)

Phase one. Ralph goes in the front door at eleven o'clock.

RALPH

Check.

CARSON

Hold on. How does a used-car legend from three states away get a face-to-face appointment with Vikram Sen?

DELLA

I spent forty-four years getting men into rooms they didn't want to be in. Sen's assistant thinks Meridian Pacific Group is real, because at nine o'clock this morning, it was.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Phase two. Service elevator, twenty-three-oh-eight, Rajiv's vendor card in hand. Carson, Eddie, Chandler and Candy go up in housekeeping coveralls with a cleaning cart.

CARSON
I'll play along, for now.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Phase three. Twenty-three-fifteen. Vera enters the front door, under her own name. Amit is with her.

VERA
And what do I do in there?

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
You are the reason nobody screams. When that floor understands what's happening, eighty frightened people will either stampede a fire door and kill somebody's grandmother on a landing -- or --

VERA
Or what?

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Or they will listen to you -- the one person in the building who is obviously not police, not management, and not a threat; and no weapons.

Silence.

VERA
Well. All right then.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Della runs the vehicle and the clock from the maintenance van in the side lane. Buford is on the roof of the parking structure across the street with the drone and a spotting scope.

BUFORD
And an air rifle.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Fine -- but for the scope, not the trigger. You use it to watch, not to shoot. If a single shot goes off anywhere near that block tonight, this stops being a fraud case and becomes an international incident with eight American names attached. You do not have a green light to fire. Not at the floodlight. Not at anything.

BUFORD
Understood.

DELLA
The rifle and the drone are here. They came from someone who now knows my name. Add it to the account.

A beat. Everyone looks at the timeline. It is clean, elegant, and fifteen minutes.

EDDIE
May I say something?

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Go ahead.

EDDIE
It can't be done in fifteen minutes.

Della's marker stops.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Sixteen nodes, mirrored, and the ledger isn't a spreadsheet; it's a live database. To pull a consistent copy, I quiesce it, dump it, verify it. Twenty-two minutes, best case, on hardware I've never touched, with hands that are seventy-nine years old.

CANDY
So we take twenty-two.

EDDIE

We can't. Sen reviews that badge reconciliation himself, in his own office, at eleven-thirty every night, before the supervisor's allowed to act on it -- he ordered it that way four days ago and he does not delegate it. If he's not sitting still to do that at eleven-thirty, the review runs late. If he is, the whole building knows at eleven-thirty-one.

Silence.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

Then we take the fifteen, and only the routing table. No ledger.

AMIT

No!

Everyone looks at him.

AMIT (CONT'D)

The routing table only freezes the money. And in two years a lawyer in a nice suit stands up in a courtroom and says: whose money? Prove it. And there are fifteen thousand people who cannot prove it, because the only document on this earth that connects Mrs. Kessler's twenty-six thousand dollars to that account is the ledger on the fourth floor. If we take the money and not the names, we have not recovered a single person's savings. We have created a very large frozen account with no owner. And I have already watched that happen twice.

A long, awful pause.

RALPH

So somebody's got to buy Eddie seven more minutes.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

There is no mechanism to --

RALPH

There's one.

Everybody turns.

RALPH (CONT'D)

The consolidation sweep runs off Sen's own terminal too. It clears at two-twenty. If I've got him arguing about that at eleven-thirty, he's not looking at badges. Rajiv said he never lets go of either screen once he's sitting down.

RAJIV

Both of them. Same screen, back to back, every night before midnight. He does not let anybody else touch either one.

RALPH

Then the man who's already sitting in front of Sen at eleven-thirty makes sure he's still arguing about the first screen when the second one comes due.

DELLA

Why on God's earth would he sit there arguing with a stranger instead of doing his own badge check?

RALPH

Because I'll tell him my Nevada list posts on a twelve-hour settlement cycle, and if his sweep clears before my batch lands, twelve hundred clients hit his ledger as unreconciled and the whole file's garbage. It's nonsense. But it's beautiful nonsense, and it only has to hold him in that chair, arguing with me, for seven minutes longer than he thinks. I'll sell it. Della, I have sold worthless undercoating for nine hundred dollars. This'll be a piece of cake.

A silence.

CARSON

Ralph. Walk it forward. He holds the sweep. Then what?

RALPH
(and the charm drops all
the way off)
Then at eleven-thirty-one the
supervisor's reconciliation comes
up short by four badges, and the
only unexplained man in the
building is the one sitting in
Vikram Sen's office.

Nobody breathes.

RALPH (CONT'D)
I'm not going out the service
elevator. That's what I'm telling
you. There's no version where I'm
on the street at eleven thirty.

VERA
Ralph, no.

RALPH
Vera.

VERA
No. Absolutely not!

RALPH
Ma'am, I have bladder cancer, two
ex-wives, a daughter in Tucson who
screens my calls, and forty-two
years of taking money off people
who trusted my face.

He looks around the room.

RALPH (CONT'D)
You all keep saying we've got
nothing to lose. Everybody says it
like it's a joke. It's the only
legit qualification I've got.

A brief moment of silent thought, and then

RALPH (CONT'D)
This is a reckoning.

A long beat. Carson looks at the timeline. Then at Ralph.

CARSON

If you're taken in that building,
you're in an Indian jail with an
American passport and a cancer
diagnosis, and nobody can help you
for a very long time.

RALPH

I know.

CARSON

Say it back to me. All of it.

RALPH

I will be arrested on the top floor
of that building. I will not be on
the street with you. And it will be
a while.

Silence.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

Ralph. I need to say something, and
it is not going to sound like me.

RALPH

Go ahead.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

I did not plan for you. I built
this around eight people leaving
that building. My plan was wrong,
and it was wrong because I assumed
the con man was the least important
person in the room. Twenty-one
years, and that's the first time
I've had to say that out loud.

RALPH

Now that's a compliment.

CANDY

I was going to say your slacks are
hideous and you're the best of us.

RALPH

Both of those things are true.

Carson takes the marker from Della and writes on the butcher
paper, under Phase One: "**RALPH -- 22 MINUTES.**"

Then, under it, he adds: "**RALPH DOES NOT COME OUT.**"

Nobody objects, and that is the worst part.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Now the other thing that's wrong
with my plan, and Carson, this is
all yours.

CARSON
The kill switch.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Carson. Tell them what is behind
that server room door.

CARSON
Pune. Same builder. Same tray, same
timer, same ninety seconds.

EDDIE
So if I open that door.

CARSON
If you open that door, the ledger
burns before you've read one line
along with your face and hands.

The room absorbs this.

DELLA
Then we don't open the door.

CARSON
Somebody opens the god damned door.
That's the whole operation.

A beat. Everyone slowly turns to look at Carson.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Thirty years. Four hundred and
nineteen call-outs. Seventeen live
devices with my hands on them.

He holds up his right hand. It TREMBLES. Everybody watches.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Yeah. I know.

VERA
Carson, baby --

CARSON
Vera, let me finish, because I've
been putting this speech together
for three days.

He lowers the hand.

CARSON (CONT'D)

The evidence is the whole damned point. The paper with Dorothy Kessler's name on it. Not the money. So my job in that building is not to blow anything up. My job is to keep the only proof that fifteen thousand people were robbed from being turned into ash.

A long silence.

CARSON (CONT'D)

I'm going to walk into a server room and defuse an incendiary device with two hands that don't work. Thirty years of training for a job I get to do back-assward. If that's not why I'm still alive, I don't know what is.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

Carson. Your tremor.

CARSON

Is worse under adrenaline. Yes.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)

Then you need a second set of hands, and you need to be honest with me about whose is best.

A beat. Carson looks at Chandler.

CHANDLER

Me?

CARSON

Thirty years applying eyelashes to movie stars under time pressure.

CHANDLER

Carson, those were just eyelashes.

CARSON

How many times did you have a two-hundred-thousand-dollar-an-hour movie set waiting on YOUR HANDS?

CHANDLER

Every day for thirty years.

CARSON

Then I'll tell you exactly where to put the probe and you'll put it there, and neither of us is going to talk about how we feel about it.

CHANDLER

Well. That's a relief.

Carson turns back to the room.

CARSON

One more thing. It's not the big finish. It's a Tuesday night at an office building, and fifteen thousand people we'll never meet will find out in four months whether we did it right. So, no speeches in there. No jokes on the comms. Nobody dies for a fucking punchline.

BUFORD

Now, that's a speech!

CARSON

And, it's the last one. Get some sleep, everyone.

INT. SAFEHOUSE - BALCONY - NIGHT - LATER

City noise below. CANDY stands at the rail; wig off, scarf on. CHANDLER enters and stands next to her.

CHANDLER

You alright, sweetie?

CANDY

Just thinking about my life and the mission. It's just a bit overwhelming.

CHANDLER

It's quite an adventure.

(a beat)

Candy, I want to ask you something, since we're being appallingly honest.

CANDY

Please.

CHANDLER

Why are you actually afraid of tomorrow? It isn't the guards. You told Carson on the plane.

Candy looks out at the city a long moment.

CANDY

Twenty-one years I walked out in front of eight hundred people, and every one of them looked at me. And I have spent thirty-seven years being looked past. Waitresses. Doctors. My own granddaughter. Tomorrow night I have to make eighty strangers look AT ME! And the only version of ME that ever knew how has been dead since nineteen eighty-nine.

CHANDLER

Candy. Look at me.

She does.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)

For thirty years I made people look like the version of themselves they could stand. I put a face on Bette Davis and a nose on a man who was terrified of his own reflection. And I am telling you as the most senior technical authority in this building: you were never the wig.

Candy's eyes fill. She doesn't let it get any further.

CANDY

Chandler, you are so gay and so wise, and I love you very much.

CHANDLER

(with a flourish)

I know. I'm flamboyant and quite adorable. I've had a lovely career.

They stand there, holding hands. Below, Mumbai keeps working.

INT. SAFEHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - LATER

VERA at the table alone with a cup of tea, the photograph of Dorothy propped against the sugar tin.

The laptop on the counter GLOWS to life. The avatar.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
You should be asleep.

VERA
So should you.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
I don't, much.

Vera studies the screen.

VERA
Can I ask you something without you
doing the voice at me?

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
You can ask.

VERA
Your mother. The one they took the
nine thousand off of. Is she all
right?

A longer pause. Long enough that Vera leans forward slightly.

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
She's stubborn. She won't let
anybody give the money back. She's
been buying somebody else's
medication with what she has left.

Vera's hand stops moving on the cup.

Very slowly, she sits back.

VERA
Is that right?

THE PHANTOM (ON LAPTOP)
Get some sleep, Mrs. Williams.

The screen goes dark.

Vera sits in the kitchen for a long time. Then she picks up the photograph of Dorothy and holds it against her chest, and she says nothing at all, and her face does about four things at once.

She sits at the table instead, alone, and folds her hands, and does not pray so much as negotiate.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUMBAI - NIGHT

The city after eleven. Fewer horns. Sodium light. Heat still coming up off the pavement.

SUPER: *"DAY NINE. 22:51."*

INT. MAINTENANCE VAN - SIDE LANE - NIGHT

A white maintenance van with a magnetic decal. DELLA in the driver's seat with a clipboard, a stopwatch, and the calm of a woman who has dispatched drivers in a snowstorm.

Beside her on the seat: a handheld radio and a hard drive in a padded envelope, pre-addressed.

DELLA
(into comms)
All stations. Della. The mission is
a "GO"!

EXT. PARKING STRUCTURE ROOF - ACROSS THE STREET - NIGHT

BUFORD prone behind a low parapet, spotting scope on a bag, drone controller beside him, air rifle at his elbow. Sixty yards of open air, then the target building.

BUFORD
Spotter has the front door, the
side lane, the loading bay, and
four windows on the fourth floor.
Wind's nothin'. It's like sittin'
in a deer stand in a gosh derved
parkin' lot.

DELLA
Cut the chatter, Buford!

BUFORD
Yes, Ma'am.

INT. TEA STALL - NIGHT

CANDY, CHANDLER, CARSON, and EDDIE in housekeeping coveralls sit on plastic stools with a cleaning cart beside them, drinking tea, invisible.

Carson's hands are around the cup. Both of them.

EDDIE
Carson.

CARSON
Don't ask me.

EDDIE
The Phantom said we tell the truth
about our bodies every day.
Especially when it's humiliating.

A beat. Carson sets the cup down. It rattles as he does.

CARSON
It's bad tonight. Worst it's been.

CHANDLER
Then it's my hands.

CARSON
Then it's your hands.

Chandler takes a breath and does something with his shoulders that is thirty years of walking onto a set.

CHANDLER
Fine. It's a face. It's just a very
ugly face.

EXT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS BUILDING - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A black hired car pulls up. The door opens, and **REGINALD THORNE** gets out.

Silver-haired. Pressed. Unhurried. A slim leather portfolio under one arm. He does not look at the building. He looks at his watch as though the building is late.

DELLA (V.O.)
Phase one. Twenty-three hundred.
The clock is running.

Ralph walks in the front door.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Cheap marble everywhere that looks expensive. A security desk. **TWO GUARDS** -- one senior, one about nineteen.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
(not stopping, holding out
a card)
Thorne. Meridian Pacific Group.
(MORE)

RALPH (AS THORNE) (CONT'D)
 Mister Sen is expecting me, and I
 am four minutes late, which is
 unforgivable.

The senior guard takes the card, checks a screen, and the mere existence of the appointment does the rest. He gestures to the elevator.

RALPH (AS THORNE) (CONT'D)
 Seventh?

GUARD
 Top floor, sir.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
 Of course it is.

INT. VIKRAM SEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The glass box. The city behind it. VIKRAM at a desk with four monitors, sleeves rolled, absolutely at home.

Ralph enters and does not extend his hand, which immediately makes Vikram want to shake it.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
 Mister Sen, I'll be direct, because
 I flew seventeen hours and I'm too
 old for foreplay. Twelve hundred
 and forty households in a solar
 rebate program across four states.
 Average age seventy-one. Average
 liquid position forty-four thousand
 dollars. Every one of them has
 already voluntarily given us their
 utility account, their bank, and
 their date of birth.

He sets the portfolio down and does not open it.

RALPH (AS THORNE) (CONT'D)
 And an internal compliance
 department consisting of one woman
 named Sherry who works Tuesdays.

Vikram laughs. Genuinely.

VIKRAM
 And you are offering it to me.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
 I'm offering to license it to you.
 I'm seventy-eight years old with a
 bad heart, Mister Sen, and I would
 like to be paid in a currency my
 daughter cannot find.

Vikram leans back, delighted, and gestures at the chair.

VIKRAM
 Sit down, Mister Thorne.

Ralph sits. Behind him, out the window, sixty yards away, the
 parking structure roof.

BUFORD (V.O.)
 Spotter. Ralph's in the chair. Top
 floor, north side.

DELLA (V.O.)
 Copy. Phase two.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A concrete back-of-house corridor. Fluorescent tubes, one of
 them dying. CARSON, EDDIE, CHANDLER and CANDY push the
 cleaning cart. Coveralls. Rubber gloves. Caps.

A VENDOR CARD swipes. The service elevator opens.

Inside the elevator, they stand facing the doors. Nobody
 speaks. Chandler adjusts nothing, touches nothing, and looks
 bored with a genuinely masterful discipline.

The doors open on FOUR.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - FOURTH FLOOR - SERVICE VESTIBULE - NIGHT

Behind a partition. Ahead: the wooden wedge. Still propping
 the door. And beyond it the HUM of eighty voices working.

A **GUARD** sits on a stool by the vestibule, on his phone.

Chandler pushes the cart forward, stops, and holds out a
 clipboard with a sigh so authentically weary that the guard
 signs it without looking up.

GUARD
 (in Marathi, not looking)
 Toilets are that way.

Chandler nods. They pass.

CHANDLER
(under his breath,
delighted)
I'm completely uninteresting.

CANDY
Congratulations.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - FOURTH FLOOR - THE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

And here it is. Eighty cubicles. Eighty headsets on eighty agents. The banner. The leaderboard with the crown drawn on it.

And the sound, which is the thing nobody was ready for -- eighty **AGENTS** in simultaneous conversations in flat American accents.

AGENT 1
Ma'am, stay on the line with me
while you go to the bank --

AGENT 2
Sir, the warrant is already issued,
I'm trying to help you --

AGENT 3
Mrs. Halloran, don't hang up. Don't
hang up on me, sweetheart --

CANDY stops walking.

She stands in the middle of an aisle and listens to a room full of young people talking to her contemporaries the exact way somebody talked to her. She's mesmerized.

EDDIE
Candy. Move.

CANDY
(not moving)
Eddie, I can hear them.

EDDIE
I know.

CANDY
I can hear the women on the line.

Carson takes her elbow, gently, and walks her forward.

CARSON
Focus. Fifteen minutes. Then we
take their phones away.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - SERVER ROOM DOOR - CONTINUOUS

A steel door at the end of the floor, set in a glass partition. A card reader. Through the glass: racks, blinking amber, a cold-air haze.

Eddie swipes. The reader goes GREEN. He reaches out.

CARSON
Stop.

Eddie freezes.

Carson goes to one knee. Takes out a small inspection mirror on a telescoping wand and a penlight and runs the door frame -
- top, hinge side, latch side, bottom.

At the bottom, a hair-thin wire, tucked in the door sweep, running to the inside.

CARSON (CONT'D)
There it is. Same build as Pune.

EDDIE
Can you --

CARSON
Don't talk to me. Chandler, glove up and stand at my right shoulder. Candy, watch the aisle and tell me only about people.

CANDY
Copy.

CARSON
(to Eddie)
Get the crack in the hinge side.
Half an inch. No more.

INT. VIKRAM SEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ralph has the portfolio open now. A tablet turned toward Vikram, showing a spreadsheet of eleven hundred fabricated households.

VIKRAM
These addresses are real.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
 Every one. Verified against county
 tax rolls, which are public, which
 is the great American loophole.

Vikram scrolls. He is enjoying himself.

VIKRAM
 Mister Thorne. Everybody who comes
 to this office pretends they are
 not doing what they are doing.
 Bankers. Processors. A gentleman
 from a payment gateway in Cyprus
 who called it "reputational
 arbitrage." You are the first man
 in four years to simply sit down
 and offer to sell me old people.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
 (smiling, and the smile
 costs him everything)
 I've been in sales a long time.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - SERVER ROOM DOOR - NIGHT

The door is open half an inch, held on a shim. Carson has the mirror inside.

REVEAL, in the mirror: a shallow steel tray on top of the third rack. Gray-silver powder, packed level. Two igniter wires. A small circuit board with a green LED.

And a mercury tilt switch mounted on the inside of the door.

CARSON
 Thermite. About four kilos. Enough
 to turn sixteen racks into a
 puddle.

CHANDLER
 And the little glass thing?

CARSON
 Mercury switch on the door. It
 doesn't care about the card reader.
 It cares about the door swinging
 past fifteen degrees. Somebody arms
 it at the end of every shift and
 disarms it at the start.

EDDIE
 Then it's armed now.

CARSON
It's armed now.

Carson sets down the mirror. Sits back on his heels. Holds up his right hand.

It is shaking. Badly.

He looks at it. Then, deliberately, he lowers it, puts it flat on his own knee, and presses down.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Chandler. Right hand, thumb and
finger. Take the alligator clip.

Chandler takes it. His hand is steady. Absolutely steady.

CARSON (CONT'D)
The board's got a shunt pad, left
of the LED. Two millimeters. You're
going to bridge the shunt to the
ground plane before we move that
door one degree.

CHANDLER
Two millimeters? Metric? Really?

CARSON
About the width of an eyelash.

CHANDLER
(a small, unhinged laugh)
Oh, you son of a bitch.

CARSON
Chandler, I need you to be a
technician for ninety seconds and a
person afterward.

CHANDLER
(and he is suddenly
totally professional)
Understood. Light.

Eddie holds the penlight. Chandler slides his hand and the clip through the half-inch gap. Carson's face is six inches from his, guiding by voice alone.

CARSON
Down. Down. Stop. Left two. You
feel the resistor?

CHANDLER
I feel something.

CARSON
That's the resistor. Past it. Two
millimeters left is bare copper.

Chandler's hand. The clip. The board.

CANDY
(low, from the aisle)
Person. Supervisor's up and moving.

CARSON
Where's he going?

CANDY
Water cooler.

CARSON
Tell me when he sits.

Chandler's fingers. A bead of sweat on his temple.

CHANDLER
Carson, I can't see it.

CARSON
You never could see an eyelash root
either. You went by feel, and you
were right for thirty years.

A beat.

CHANDLER
I was, wasn't I...

CLICK. The clip seats. The green LED goes DARK.

Nobody moves for a full second.

CARSON
Shunted.

CANDY
He's sitting.

CARSON
10-4, Candy. Eddie. Open the door
slow, pull the mercury switch off
the frame, and hand it to me like
it's a bird.

Eddie opens the door. He lifts the switch off its bracket
with two fingers and passes it over.

Carson takes it in his shaking hand and, very carefully, sets it down on the floor in an upright coffee cup, packed with a rolled-up latex glove.

CARSON (CONT'D)
All stations. Carson. The door is safe. Nothing burns tonight.

DELLA (V.O.)
(there's something in her voice)
Copy that, Carson. Twenty-three-nineteen. Phase four. Go.

Eddie is already inside, at a console, drive in hand.

EDDIE
Quiescing. Twenty-two minutes on my mark. Mark.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - LOBBY - NIGHT

VERA and AMIT at the desk, signing a visitor log with real pens under real names. Vera is wearing a church hat. She has never looked less threatening to anybody.

AMIT
(to the guard, cheerfully)
Sharma. Mumbai Ledger. Corporate social responsibility feature, cleared with your head office last week. Mrs. Williams has flown a very long way, and I would rather not tell her no.

The guard checks a list -- a head-office list, e-mailed down from Delhi, nothing to do with Sen's building at all -- finds them, and hands over two badges.

VERA
(to the guard, warmly)
Baby, is there an elevator? My knees are seventy-three years old, and they have opinions.

The guard, entirely charmed, escorts them to the elevator himself.

INT. VIKRAM SEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Vikram checks his watch. 23:28.

VIKRAM

Mister Thorne, I have a small
housekeeping matter at half past.
Two minutes.

He turns to a monitor. A window: **NIGHTLY CONSOLIDATION --
AUTHORIZE WINDOW 02:20.** And a field awaiting initials.

Ralph does not look at the screen. This is the most important
thing he has ever not done.

RALPH (AS THORNE)

Is that your sweep?

VIKRAM

(hand hovering)

It is.

RALPH (AS THORNE)

Then don't initial it.

Vikram's hand stops. He turns.

VIKRAM

I beg your pardon.

RALPH (AS THORNE)

My batch posts on a twelve-hour
settlement cycle out of a processor
in Belize. If your consolidation
clears before my file lands, twelve
hundred households hit your ledger
as unreconciled receipts with no
originating merchant. Which means
when you look at your own numbers
on Friday, forty-eight million
dollars will appear to have come
from nowhere. Every gateway you use
flags exactly that.

Vikram studies him.

VIKRAM

You are telling me how to run my
accounts.

RALPH (AS THORNE)

I'm telling you I've watched two
very smart men lose everything to a
reconciliation error.

(beat, and now the close)

Hold it twenty-four hours. Let my
file land. Sweep them together, and
it's one clean line item.

A long pause. Vikram's hand over the keyboard.

RALPH (AS THORNE) (CONT'D)
 (shrugging, standing
 halfway up)
 Or initial it and I'll take the
 list to the gentleman in Cyprus. He
 called it 'reputational arbitrage',
 which tells me everything I need to
 know, but his money spends just
 fine.

A beat.

Vikram closes the window WITHOUT initialing.

VIKRAM
 Sit down, Mister Thorne.

RALPH (AS THORNE)
 Wise, Mr. Sen.

Vikram checks his watch. 23:31 already -- his own rule broken
 for the first time in four years. He starts to reach for the
 second window.

RALPH (AS THORNE) (CONT'D)
 Tell me something, since we're
 already being honest. What does a
 man like you actually do with forty-
 seven million dollars he can never
 spend in his own country?

It is a terrible question, and it works exactly the way a
 terrible question is supposed to. Vikram's hand comes off the
 keyboard.

BUFORD (V.O.)
 Spotter. Ralph just sat back down.
 Whatever he done, he done it good.

DELLA (V.O.)
 Eddie, you have your twenty-two
 minutes.

EDDIE (V.O.)
 Copy. Eleven remaining.

**INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - FOURTH FLOOR - SUPERVISOR'S STATION -
 23:31**

The **FLOOR SUPERVISOR**, thirties, sweating, has been watching
 the clock for a full minute.

Sen has never once failed to come down and do this himself. He pulls it up alone. A list populates.

Four entries in red. **VENDOR CARD -- HOUSEKEEPING -- UNSCHEDULED.**

He frowns. Picks up a phone.

INT. VIKRAM SEN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Vikram's desk phone lights. He answers, listens for four seconds, and every ounce of charm leaves his face at once.

He turns and looks at Ralph.

And Ralph, who has been read by professionals his entire life, knows exactly what has happened, and he does not run, and he does not flinch.

He picks up his tea.

RALPH

Well. That's a shame. We were getting on so well.

VIKRAM

Who are you?

RALPH

Ralph Winslow. Oceanside, California. Forty-two years in pre-owned vehicle relocation.

He sets the cup down.

RALPH (CONT'D)

You took four thousand dollars off a woman in New Jersey because you talked to her for nine minutes and asked how her day was going.

Vikram stares at him.

RALPH (CONT'D)

By the way. Bladder cancer. Stage two. In case you were planning to threaten me with anything. Feel free.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - FOURTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The overhead lights change. The HUM stops. Eighty headsets come off at once.

Over the PA, in Marathi and then English:

PA VOICE (V.O.)
All agents remain seated. Security
to fourth floor.

Panic starts the way panic starts: one stands, then a dozen.

Somebody bolts for the stairwell door. Then four more. A chair goes over. A young woman is knocked into a partition.

And VERA walks out of the elevator into the middle of it, in a church hat, with AMIT behind her.

She sees the stairwell. She sees eighty terrified twenty-four-year-olds about to crush each other in a fire door.

She plants herself in front of it.

VERA
(enormous; totally calm)
STOP!

It does not work. Not yet. Bodies still moving.

And then CANDY climbs onto a desk.

She is seventy-eight, in housekeeping coveralls, and she has spent thirty-seven years being looked past.

She reaches up and takes off her wig, and drops it on the floor.

And stands there, bald, under fluorescent light, in front of eighty people.

The room STOPS. Every single face turns, and her voice fills the floor like it filled The Sands' showroom.

CANDY
LOOK AT ME!

Silence. Total.

CANDY (CONT'D)
Thank you. My name is Candy
Delacroix.
(MORE)

CANDY (CONT'D)

I am seventy-eight years old, I have lung cancer, and I never smoked a cigarette in my life. And a boy on the phone took six thousand dollars from me by saying my name twice.

She looks around the room. Points at the exit door.

CANDY (CONT'D)

Now. That door is a fire door, and there are eighty of you and one of you is going to die on those stairs in about nine seconds if you don't all sit down.

A beat. And then the showgirl takes center stage.

CANDY (CONT'D)

Sit DOWN. SHUT UP! And LISTEN!

Eighty people sit down. The room falls silent.

BUFORD (V.O.)

Well, I'll be damned.

CANDY steps off the desk. Vera takes the floor.

VERA

My name is Vera Williams. I'm from Chicago. I'm not police, and I'm not from your management.

She turns slowly, taking them in.

VERA (CONT'D)

I know most of you can't leave. I know somebody upstairs has your papers in a drawer.

A murmur. Something shifts in the room -- the specific shock of being correctly described.

VERA (CONT'D)

The police will be in this building in about five minutes, and when they come, I want every one of you to stay exactly where you are with your hands on your desk, because there are two kinds of people on this floor tonight and the officers coming up those stairs need time to tell them apart.

She stops.

VERA (CONT'D)
Now I'm going to say the only other
thing I came here to say. So pay
attention.

She has the whole room.

VERA (CONT'D)
I raised six children by myself on
the South Side of Chicago, and I
never once let anybody in my house
believe hurting somebody was a
solution available to us. Somebody
told all of you that it was. They
lied to you. And they got rich on
it. And tonight they stop.

Absolute silence on the fourth floor.

And then, in cubicle nine, a young woman puts her headset
down on her desk, deliberately, and pushes it away from her.

Then another. Then a dozen. Then most of the room.

Eighty headsets, off. Eighty sets of hands applaud.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Nobody made them do that. Eighty
people just stopped, all at once.
And that's the sentence that never
made it into any newspaper, because
some things you had to be standing
there and see to believe.

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - SERVER ROOM - 23:38

EDDIE
Dump complete. Verifying.

A progress bar. Carson at the door. Chandler sitting on the
floor against a rack, hands finally shaking now that they are
allowed to.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Ledger. Fifteen thousand two
hundred and six unique victims.
Routing table. Twenty-three
accounts across four jurisdictions.

He pulls the drive.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Got it.

He holds it up. A small piece of plastic.

CARSON

That's it? Fifteen thousand people?

EDDIE

That's fifteen thousand people?

INT. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS - LOADING BAY - CONTINUOUS

YOGESH comes through the loading bay fast, and he is not a manager; he is the other thing. He has a length of steel pipe in his hand.

He corners CARSON near the service door with the drive in his hand, and CHANDLER and EDDIE not far behind him.

YOGESH

Give me that!

CARSON

No.

YOGESH SWINGS.

And Carson, seventy-five years old, with Parkinson's and a tumor and thirty years of doing this in confined spaces, does the only thing left in his toolbox: he steps INTO it, takes the pipe on his shoulder, and puts his whole body weight into Yogesh's chest. They both go down hard on the concrete.

It is not choreographed. It is ugly and slow, and it hurts.

BUFORD

Carson's down! I need to take the shot!

On the comms, DELLA's voice cracks through, sharp and immediate.

DELLA (V.O.)

Buford, negative! Negative! That is NOT the target -- stand down!

BUFORD (V.O.)

Ma'am, with all due respect -- no.

Yogesh gets up first. Of course he does. He raises the pipe over Carson, just as a small, hard THWACK hits the floodlight housing above them, EXPLODING in a shower of sparks and glass. The loading bay goes very dark.

BUFORD (V.O.)
Spotter here. Floodlight's out.

Carson applies a swift but well-placed kick to Yogesh's groin. The kick sends Yogesh tumbling backward into a stack of empty storage pallets.

As Chandler and Eddie arrive, they find Carson coming to his senses, while Yogesh is out cold.

CARSON
About god damned time! Help me up.

Chandler and Eddie haul Carson up. He holds his shoulder and laughs, which is horrifying.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Buford. Was that you?

BUFORD (V.O.)
Yes, sir. Sixty yards, cross-lane, in the dark. Easier than plinkin' possums off a tree branch in the moonlight. And Miss Della, I heard you just fine. I made my own call. Meant no disrespect.

EXT. SIDE LANE - MAINTENANCE VAN - 23:44

Eddie, Chandler, Candy and Carson come out of the service door. Candy holds her wig in her hand and doesn't put it on.

Eddie hands DELLA the padded envelope through the window.

DELLA
Where's Vera?

CANDY
Front door. With Amit. Walking out the way she came in, signing out of the log.

DELLA
And Ralph?

Nobody answers.

Della looks up at the top floor. One lit window.

DELLA (CONT'D)

All right.

She puts the van in gear.

DELLA (CONT'D)

Two hours to Kulkarni. I am going the long way, and I am going to be seen doing something boring. Get in the car and go to the guest house, and if any one of you turns on a television I will know.

She pulls out.

INT. VIKRAM SEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Two **SECURITY MEN** hold Ralph's arms. Vikram is at his monitors, and they show him something he cannot stop.
"EXPORT COMPLETE. EXPORT COMPLETE. SESSION TERMINATED."

Beneath it, an activity log: sixteen nodes, all read, all copied, from a device that was never issued to anyone on his staff.

VIKRAM

What did you do?

RALPH

Me? I held a conversation.

Vikram crosses to him. For the very first time, he is not smooth. He is a man watching seventeen years become paperwork.

VIKRAM

Do you understand what you have taken from me?

RALPH

Yeah. About the same as you took off a lineman's widow in Oceanside, times fifteen thousand.

Vikram stares at him.

VIKRAM

You're a pathetic old man in a rented suit.

RALPH

(and he means it)

Son, I'm a used car salesman.

(MORE)

RALPH (CONT'D)
You should never have let one in
the building.

Somewhere below, a guard who has worked in this building for nine years and has never once been told what happens on the fourth floor picks up a telephone and dials three digits.

SIRENS, faint, then closer, then everywhere.

Through the glass, seven floors down, the street fills with blue light.

INT. MUMBAI POLICE - CYBER CELL - 01:58 THE NEXT MORNING

Fluorescent light. Four officers at four phones. KULKARNI at her desk, a hard drive plugged into a laptop and a fax machine that is genuinely, actually being used.

DELLA sits in a plastic chair against the wall with her handbag in her lap, because nobody told her to leave.

KULKARNI
(into phone)
Twenty-three accounts. Schedule is
coming now. The consolidation is
authorized for two-twenty, and I
need the freeze to land before it.

She hangs up. Dials again.

Her desk phone RINGS before she can dial the fourth number. She picks it up.

KULKARNI (CONT'D)
Kulkarni.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER (V.O.)
Inspector. I am told you are about
to freeze personal accounts
belonging to Vikram Sen. I would
like that filing held until
morning.

KULKARNI
By morning the money has moved
twice.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER (V.O.)
Then you will hold it anyway, until
I have made a call.

KULKARNI

Then you can explain it to the
magistrate. I am filing it now.

She hangs up before he can answer, and turns back to the
laptop.

On the laptop screen: a spreadsheet, scrolling. Names.
Thousands of them. American, Canadian, British, Australian.
One in particular grabs her attention.

KESSLER, DOROTHY -- OCEANSIDE CA -- \$26,000.00

Kulkarni stops scrolling. Reads the name. Looks at Della.

DELLA

That's the one.

Kulkarni nods once and keeps working.

02:19. The room goes quiet. Everyone watches the wall clock.

02:20. Nothing happens.

02:21. A phone rings. An officer picks it up, listens, and
looks up.

OFFICER

Ma'am. The window closed at two-
twenty. Nobody was left to
authorize it. All twenty-three
accounts, frozen.

Kulkarni closes her eyes for one second. Then opens them.

KULKARNI

Now the hard part.

DELLA

Which is?

KULKARNI

Four months of forms, Mrs. Galante.
Possibly ten. Did you think it
ended with the sirens?

DELLA

No, Inspector. I did logistics for
forty-four years. Nothing ever ends
with the sirens.

INT. MUMBAI POLICE - HOLDING AREA - DAWN

A bench. A metal grille. RALPH sits in the ruins of a very good suit, hair no longer silver at the roots. He looks eighty.

KULKARNI sits down across from him with two cups of tea and pushes one through.

KULKARNI

Mister Winslow. You are charged with criminal trespass, impersonation, and conspiracy. You will be in this country some time.

RALPH

How long's some time?

KULKARNI

If you cooperate and your embassy is efficient, and I do not use the word efficient with confidence -- eight months. Perhaps a year.

Ralph does the arithmetic on his own body and arrives somewhere he doesn't say out loud.

RALPH

Have they got a decent hospital here?

KULKARNI

Yes. And I'll make sure you are treated well. (a beat) Now. I have a request, and you may refuse it.

RALPH

Go ahead.

KULKARNI

The defense will argue that fifteen thousand names on a stolen hard drive prove nothing, because nobody can say where the drive came from. Anonymous evidence is a gift to a good lawyer. Unless somebody signs a statement. On the record. With his real name and his real face, in a courtroom and in a newspaper.

Ralph looks at his hands.

RALPH

Everybody would know who I am?

KULKARNI

Yes.

RALPH

My daughter in Tucson? My grandkids? Everybody in Oceanside?

KULKARNI

Yes.

A long silence.

RALPH

Inspector, can I tell you the truth about my life? For forty-two years, I made a living being a face people trusted, and I never once put my name to anything. Every contract I wrote had somebody else's signature at the bottom.

He picks up the tea. Takes a sip and savors the moment.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Fifteen thousand people are gonna get a letter in about four months that says the money might be coming back, and every one of 'em is gonna assume it's another scam. Because that's what we do now. We don't believe anybody. Unless there's a name on it.

He sets the cup down.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Where do I sign?

INT. GUEST HOUSE - COMMON ROOM - MORNING

Seven of them around a table with tea nobody is drinking. The eighth chair is empty, and everybody has arranged themselves so they don't have to look at it.

CARSON has his arm in a sling, improvised from a pillowcase. CHANDLER is asleep, sitting up. CANDY has not put the wig back on, and nobody has mentioned it.

AMIT comes in fast with a laptop.

AMIT

Twenty-three accounts frozen at two twenty-one this morning.

(MORE)

AMIT (CONT'D)

Sen was arrested at ten past midnight in the lobby of his own building, waiting for his lawyer. Yogesh at one, found unconscious under a pile of pallets. The floor supervisor was arrested at two.

VERA

And us? We walked in the front door with our own names on a visitor log.

AMIT

Which is exactly why Kulkarni's report calls it a corporate social responsibility visit, not an infiltration. You signed a real log, under a real name, for a cover story her own department approved. She has no charge to bring, and I don't think she's looking for one.

VERA

And the young people?

AMIT

Twenty-nine passports recovered from the Human Resources office. Seventy-one employees released without charge by eight this morning.

A small, exhausted laugh around the table.

CARSON

And Rajiv?

AMIT

His passport was one of the twenty-nine. Kulkarni has listed him as a witness, not a suspect. He testifies against Sen from a witness stand, not from a cell.

EDDIE

And the money?

Amit's face changes. This is the part he has to say carefully.

AMIT

Forty-seven million, two hundred thirteen thousand dollars is frozen in twenty-three accounts across four jurisdictions. Frozen. Not returned...yet. The administrator's first estimate is twenty-two million actually reaching people, hidden in tranches, over the next eight to sixteen months.

Nobody says anything. Vera puts her hands flat on the table.

VERA

Twenty-two million dollars is going back to grandmothers. I have spent my whole life in churches where the offering plate came back with thirty-six dollars in it, and I have never once heard anybody stand up and say it should have been more.

EDDIE

Sen's operation ran for seventeen years because nobody could ever produce a document. Now there is a document with fifteen thousand two hundred and six names on it, in a court file, with a signature under it. Every one of those people is about to receive a letter from a government that says: *"We know what was done to you, and we know exactly how much."*

He looks around the table.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

I've read a lot of classified material. That's the only document I ever wanted to really exist.

A long pause.

CARSON

Amit. What happens to Sen?

AMIT

He has retained the best criminal firm in Maharashtra. He will be out on bail within a week. There will be a trial. It will take three years, and he may serve four;

(MORE)

AMIT (CONT'D)
there's also a version where he
serves none.

Carson nods slowly. He does not seem surprised.

CHANDLER
That's monstrous.

CARSON
Chandler, I was a cop for thirty
years. I never once arrested a man
and thought, well, that's fixed.
You don't get to finish it. You
just get to be the one who showed
up.

EXT. MUMBAI POLICE - STREET - DAY

A police van at the curb. VIKRAM SEN comes out in handcuffs,
flanked by officers, an expensive lawyer already at his elbow
talking into a phone.

Across the street: VERA, stands alone.

Vikram sees her. He stops.

And he recognizes her, not by name -- by kind. And he
understands.

They look at each other across a street in Mumbai. The old
woman on the debit card, and the paperwork.

He does not smirk. He does not apologize. Something in his
face does the arithmetic of seventeen years and comes out the
other side confused. He calls across the street with a
genuine question.

VIKRAM
Was it you?

Vera does not shout. She just says it, and somehow it
carries.

VERA
Twelve thousand dollars. And you
were kind to me for nine minutes.

A beat.

VERA (CONT'D)
 I forgive you. I'm not going to be
 at your trial, and I'm not going to
 think about you again, and I want
 you to understand that those two
 things are the whole punishment.

They put him in the van. He's looking at her when it closes.

Vera stands on the sidewalk a moment. Then she opens her
 purse, takes out the photograph of Dorothy, looks at it, and
 puts it away.

And walks off into twenty-one million people.

INT. AIRPLANE - ECONOMY CABIN - NIGHT

Inside a darkened cabin, seven of them, wrecked. CHANDLER
 asleep on CANDY's shoulder. DELLA awake, staring at nothing,
 doing arithmetic she will never share.

CARSON in an aisle seat, awake, his arm in a real sling now.

VERA settles beside him with two paper cups of airline tea.

VERA
 How's the shoulder?

CARSON
 Broken in two places. The doctor in
 Mumbai said I should be dead.

VERA
 Doctors keep saying that about you.

CARSON
 They do.

A beat. He looks at the seat-back screen: a little plane
 crossing an ocean.

CARSON (CONT'D)
 Vera, can I tell you something I've
 never said to anybody?

VERA
 Go ahead.

CARSON
 For thirty years I went into rooms
 with bombs in them. And the entire
 time -- every single call-out --
 some part of me was quietly hoping.

Vera turns to look at him.

CARSON (CONT'D)
Not for the bang. For it to just
matter. For somebody to be there
afterward, glad. And I'd walk out,
and the fire crew would be packing
up, and everybody would go home to
somebody. And I'd go home to a
studio apartment with one
toothbrush in it.

He looks at his shaking hand.

CARSON (CONT'D)
A few weeks ago I got a phone call
from a kid reading from a script,
and I have been happier since that
phone call than I was for the
entire thirty years. Isn't that the
damnedest thing?

Vera reaches over, takes his shaking hand in both of hers,
and holds it; it stops shaking, and neither of them says one
word about it.

VERA
Carson. When we get back, you're
going to come to Sunday dinner.

CARSON
Vera, you know I'm not a church
man.

VERA
I didn't say church. I said dinner.
There'll be twenty-nine people,
four of them will be screaming, and
one of my sons-in-law is going to
try to sell you a timeshare.

A beat.

CARSON
What time?

EXT. OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Pacific light again. The same palms. The same freeway.
Nothing has changed, and everything has.

SUPER: "FOUR MONTHS LATER."

INT. VERA'S KITCHEN - DAY

The same kitchen where it started. Same photographs on the refrigerator. Same pill organizer.

Vera opens an envelope. Official. Multiple pages. She reads.

Then she sits down slowly at the table.

She reaches up, takes the photograph of Dorothy off the refrigerator, and sets it on the table facing the letter so that Dorothy can see it.

VERA

There you go, girl.

INSERT: the letter. *"UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT -- COURT-SUPERVISED RESTITUTION FUND. CLAIMANT: KESSLER, DOROTHY (DECEASED) -- ESTATE OF. AMOUNT: \$10,900.00."*

She reaches over and turns on the little television on the counter, the way she does at this hour, without looking at it.

ON THE TV: a local news two-shot. A **REPORTER** and an **ELDERLY WOMAN**, eighty-one, in a cardigan.

REPORTER (ON TV)

So, you got your money back.

ELDERLY WOMAN (ON TV)

Some of it. Forty-six cents on the dollar.

REPORTER (ON TV)

How long did it take?

ELDERLY WOMAN (ON TV)

Four months and seventeen forms. And I would like to say something to whoever did this. They don't know who did it. But somebody did it.

She looks straight into the camera, which means she is looking straight into a kitchen in Oceanside, California.

ELDERLY WOMAN (ON TV) (CONT'D)

Thank you for being angry.

Vera sits very still at her own kitchen table with a court letter in her hand and a photograph of her friend propped against the sugar tin.

VERA
(to Dorothy)
You hear that, girl?

EXT. VERA'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - SUNDAY - DAY

Sunday dinner. Two folding tables end to end under a canopy. Twenty-nine people, four of them screaming. One speaker plays gospel; another plays something else.

And there they are.

BUFORD at a grill he has commandeered, arguing about heat levels with one of Vera's sons.

CHANDLER holding court with three of Vera's daughters, doing something with a napkin that has them shrieking.

CANDY in enormous sunglasses, wig on, teaching four grandchildren a chorus-line kick step, badly, on grass, and still in her five-inch heels.

DELLA in a lawn chair with a plate on her knee, entirely at peace, her two mastiffs asleep at her feet.

Her phone, face-down in her lap, buzzes once. A Bayonne area code. She turns it further face-down against her thigh without looking, and for exactly one second, the peace on her face costs her something.

EDDIE at the end of the table, showing an eleven-year-old the inside of a transistor radio, and the eleven-year-old is genuinely interested.

CARSON, in a clean shirt, thinner than he was, sitting next to Vera's grandson, being talked at about baseball, and listening.

An empty chair at the end with a plate set at it, a placemat, and a photograph of RALPH in the plaid slacks propped against a glass.

VERA
(calling from the door)
Somebody take these rolls before I
drop 'em!

Carson gets up. Takes the rolls. Nearly drops them. Everybody yells. He puts them on the table.

CARSON
I'd like it noted that I have
Parkinson's.

VERA
Nobody in this yard cares, baby.
Just don't drop the rolls.

Laughter. And then a car door slams out front.

TANYA comes around the side of the house with a foil tray and a canvas tote, reading glasses on her head, cardigan, sensible shoes.

VERA (CONT'D)
There she is. Everybody, this is my
Tanya. My boring one.

CHANDLER
Tanya! Your mother says you do
consulting.

TANYA
Slides. Meetings. Airports. All
very boring.

CHANDLER
How dreadful. Sit here.

She sits. She puts the tray down. She is completely ordinary.

EDDIE looks up from the transistor radio. And stops.

He looks at Tanya. Then at the tote bag. Then at how she is sitting -- back to the fence, both exits in her sight line.

He sets the radio down.

EDDIE
Ma'am. What model of laptop do you
use for your slides?

TANYA
Nothing interesting. Just basic.
Why?

EDDIE
Because the encryption stack on the
device that contacted us at a
parking structure in July was a key
exchange I last saw in a briefing
room in nineteen ninety-one, and it
is not commercially available.

The table goes quiet in patches. Carson has turned around.

TANYA
Mister Petrosky, that sounds like
two beers talking.

EDDIE
I've had one beer, but forty years
of counterintelligence.

Silence at that end of the table now. Candy stops kicking.
Chandler's napkin freezes.

Vera has come out onto the step with a serving dish and has
not moved.

CARSON
(very carefully)
Tanya. On the roof of that parking
structure, whoever we spoke to told
us about their mother. Eighty years
old. Nine thousand dollars.

TANYA
Did they?

CARSON
Ma'am, I have read every claim in
that restitution fund. Fifteen
thousand two hundred and six names.
I read all of them, because I can't
sleep anymore, and it was something
to do with the nights.

He sets down his fork.

CARSON (CONT'D)
There's no woman in that file who
is eighty and lost nine thousand
dollars. Nobody's mother is
anywhere near that number.

A long, long beat.

CARSON (CONT'D)
But there is a Vera Williams at
twelve grand. Your thoughts?

Tanya takes the reading glasses off her head, folds them, and
sets them on the table.

And she becomes, without moving, a different person.

TANYA
Twenty-one years. Directorate of
Operations. CIA.

Nobody breathes. She turns toward Vera.

TANYA (CONT'D)
Mama, sit down.

Vera sits down on the step. Very slowly.

TANYA (CONT'D)
I couldn't touch it. Not one asset,
not one hour of Agency time. It
would have been a federal crime,
and it would have ended with a
woman getting robbed and her
daughter in Leavenworth. So I found
eight people nobody on earth would
ever suspect were part of an
operation.

CANDY
I said I photograph poorly in
camouflage. And you said that's a
matter of opinion.

TANYA
And I meant it. Candy, you held a
floor of eighty people captive with
a bald head and a desk.

Candy puts her hand over her mouth.

BUFORD
Hold on now. That voice on the
tablet -- the deep one, sounded
like a danged robot that could kill
me -- that was YOU? Vera's
daughter. The one who brought us
the gosh darned Tupperware.

TANYA
Voice modulation. Four hundred
dollars, off the shelf.

Buford sits hard on a cooler, hat off, shaking his head.

BUFORD
Ma'am, I have killed forty deer,
three hogs, and one alligator, and
you are the single most frightenin'
thing I have ever encountered.

TANYA
Thank you, Buford.

And then VERA stands up off the step.

Everybody sees it coming. Even the grandchildren go quiet.

VERA
Tanya Renee Williams.

TANYA
Yes, ma'am?

VERA
For twenty-one years I have sat in
a church pew listening to Denise
Parker brag about her son, the
DENTIST.

A ripple through the yard.

VERA (CONT'D)
And I sat there and said, "*That's wonderful, Denise,*" and I thought
about my Tanya with her slides and
her airports, and I prayed she'd
find some joy in it all.

TANYA
Mama, I couldn't --

VERA
Do NOT tell me about clearances.

Then Vera's voice cracks, and she is not angry at all.

VERA (CONT'D)
Baby, they took my twelve thousand
dollars, and I sat in my kitchen
for sixty-one days, and I could not
tell one single living soul because
I was so ashamed.

She looks at her daughter.

VERA (CONT'D)
And you knew. The whole time. You
knew, and you couldn't say a word
to me either.

Tanya's face finally goes. Twenty-one years of it.

TANYA
I balanced your checkbook in April.

VERA
I know you did. And I sat on a
bench in that hospital and lied to
you about a roof.

TANYA

Mama, I have overthrown dictat--

She stops. Recalibrates.

TANYA (CONT'D)

I have had a VERY SERIOUS career doing things I can never discuss, and the worst nine minutes of my life were listening to a recording of a man being kind to my mother.

Silence in the yard.

And Vera starts across the grass toward her daughter. And stops. Because she has just understood something, the way she understands everything -- late, and all at once, and completely.

VERA

Tanya. What did it cost you?

A beat. Tanya does not lie to her mother twice in one lifetime.

TANYA

There was a polygraph in August. Full scope. A man named Hollis asked me the same question about a hospital parking structure in Oceanside, California, nine different ways.

CARSON

What did you tell him?

TANYA

The truth. For four hours. Then I wrote it all down and signed it, because I wasn't going to let them find it.

DELLA

(very quietly)

Oh, honey.

TANYA

My clearance is suspended. There is a hearing in February, and I am paying a lawyer myself, and a very decent man who cannot help me.

She turns the reading glasses over in her hands. It is the only nervous thing she has ever done in front of any of them.

TANYA (CONT'D)

I may lose twenty-one years, Mama.

Nobody at that table says it will be fine. Seven of them have cancer. None of them lie about outcomes anymore.

CHANDLER

My dear girl. Was it worth it?

Tanya looks down the length of two folding tables at seven people and an empty chair with a lone empty plate setting.

TANYA

Mister Vance, I have spent twenty-one years being told that what I do matters and never once being allowed to see it. I watched my mother hold a floor. Ask me again in February, and I'll give you the same answer.

And VERA crosses the rest of the grass and takes her daughter's face in both hands.

VERA

Next Sunday you are going to walk into New Hope Baptist Church with me and sit in the third pew.

TANYA

Mama, I can't discuss --

VERA

You will not discuss anything. You will sit there, and you will let ME discuss it. Denise Parker's son cleans teeth. My daughter is a secret agent spy. Praise Jesus!

She kisses her daughter's forehead.

VERA (CONT'D)

Now go get the potato salad out of the car.

Tanya goes to get the potato salad out of the car, crying, and nobody mentions it.

Later, plates cleared, CANDY tops off glasses while DELLA taps at a laptop and TANYA, glasses back on, stacks folding chairs like she's done it her whole life.

CANDY

I'm giving a talk Thursday. Senior center on Coast Highway. Scam awareness. Free coffee.

DELLA

I'm doing restitution-claim paperwork three afternoons a week. Notary forms, mostly. I have never liked doing anything more.

TANYA

I told them I'd help set up chairs. It's the least suspicious thing I have ever volunteered for in my life.

Candy laughs so hard she has to sit down on a cooler.

CARSON, DELLA, EDDIE, CANDY, CHANDLER and BUFORD look at each other across a folding table in a backyard in Oceanside, California.

CARSON

(raising his shaking glass)

To Ralph.

Everybody stands, even the grandchildren, who don't know why.

ALL

To Ralph.

They drink. And the empty chair stays empty, and the plate stays set.

INT. MUMBAI CENTRAL PRISON - LIBRARY - DAY

RALPH, in a prison shirt, at a table with nine young inmates around him and a cardboard sign taped to the wall: "**BASIC BUSINESS ENGLISH.**"

RALPH

No, no. When you say "*I understand your concern,*" you have to actually stop talking. That's the whole trick. Anybody can say the words.

A young inmate raises a hand.

INMATE

Sir, what did you sell?

RALPH
Cars, mostly. And one time,
worthless undercoating to a widow,
and I want each of you to write
that down as an example of what NOT
to do.

The lesson breaks up. The guard steps back and lets them in
anyway -- ALL SEVEN, crowding around the table, because the
guard gave up enforcing anything a week ago.

RALPH (CONT'D)
Well, look at this. My people.

DELLA
Ralph. The firm in Bayonne has a
correspondent here. You will have
money on your books, a great lawyer
who returns his calls, and a doctor
who is not a volunteer.

RALPH
Della, what's that costing you?

DELLA
Nothing at all. (with a wink)
Forget about it.

Everyone knows she is lying. Nobody says it.

RALPH
Vera. When my daughter calls you --
and she will, because she'll call
everybody but me -- tell her the
truth. All of it. The undercoating.
Everything.

VERA
I will, baby.

The guard checks his watch. Time's up. Ralph doesn't let go
of the table edge.

RALPH
Hey. What did we get? Actual
number. Nobody in here will tell me
a number.

A beat. Eddie steps forward.

EDDIE
Fifteen thousand two hundred and
six names.

Ralph absorbs it. Then he nods, slowly, and something like peace crosses a face that has never once been sincere for this long.

RALPH

That's the biggest deal I ever closed!

A smile comes to his face with a look of satisfaction.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I used to think the score was the score. Fifteen thousand two hundred and six names, and a document nobody could make disappear. But I have spent my whole life walking into rooms because somebody wanted to see a version of me that wasn't real. That backyard in Oceanside is the only room I ever wanted to walk into as myself -- and they set me a chair anyway. Turns out that was the whole deal. I just never read the fine print.

INT. CARSON'S STUDIO APARTMENT - MORNING

The same military-neat studio. The same LAPD commendation on the wall. But now, taped up beside it: a photograph from the backyard. Twenty-nine people. Four of them screaming.

And beside that, a printed news article with a headline in a Mumbai paper.

And beside that, a photograph of Ralph in the plaid slacks.

Carson stands in the bathroom, looking at himself in the cracked mirror. He lifts the straight razor.

His hand trembles.

He looks at it a moment. Then he sets the razor down.

CARSON

(To himself)

Wonder how I'd look with a beard?

He opens the cabinet, takes out the electric razor, uses it, and doesn't seem to mind at all.

His flip phone RINGS on the counter.

He looks at it. Unknown number.

He picks it up and answers.

CARSON (CONT'D)
This is Carson.

SCAMMER 2 (V.O.)
(filtered, bright, brand
new)
Good evening, sir! Am I speaking
with the homeowner? I'm calling
from the Federal Solar Rebate
Recovery Program regarding an
overpayment on your account --

Carson stands in his bathroom with half his face shaved.

And smiles. Slowly. Like a shark.

CARSON
Son. Where are you calling from?

SCAMMER 2 (V.O.)
Henderson, Nevada, sir.

A beat.

CARSON
Henderson, Nevada. Hold, please.

He lowers the phone. Presses a speed dial.

CARSON (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Vera? Get everybody. We're going to
Nevada.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END