

THE WRONG WAKE

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN CEMETERY - DAY

A tasteful burial under low gray clouds and the last of the leaves.

WALLY KRAUSE, 71, trim in a second-best black suit, stands three rows back among the mourners. He knows exactly how sad to look.

He removes a folded program from another funeral and swaps it for today's.

At the graveside, he bows his head at all the correct moments.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

A buffet table of finger sandwiches, pasta salad, coffee, and sheet cake.

Wally moves with quiet professionalism. He signs the guest book with experienced confidence.

INSERT - GUEST BOOK

"Walter Bennett."

Wally squeezes the hand of the **DECEASED MAN'S WIDOW**.

WALLY
He spoke very warmly of family.

The widow tears up, grateful.

Wally takes one sandwich. Then another. Then wraps a third in a napkin with the ethics of a man clipping coupons.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - PARKING LOT - DAY

Wally gets into an old BUICK. On the passenger seat: three ties, condolence cards, a black notebook of obituary clippings.

He chews slowly. Alone.

MONTAGE - WALLY'S CIRCUIT

-- At a Lutheran church basement reception, Wally praises a dead softball coach he has never met, while preparing a plateful of savory casserole.

-- At a modest funeral home, Wally examines and judges dry ham on white bread sandwiches with disappointment.

-- At a veteran's service, Wally salutes a half a beat late but with feeling.

-- At a Catholic wake, Wally discovers a delicious baked ziti and almost weeps.

END MONTAGE

INT. ANOTHER FUNERAL HOME - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

An **ELDERLY WIDOW** takes Wally's hand.

ELDERLY WIDOW
Thank you for coming. I wish more
people had.

Wally is suddenly naked inside his suit.

WALLY
I wish I had known him better.

ELDERLY WIDOW
Me too.

That lands.

EXT. WALLY'S BUICK - DAY

Wally sits behind the wheel, unable to start the car.

WALLY
There has to be more than this.

INT. WALLY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A small, neat house on a South Allentown block, made neat by grief.

One plate. One fork. One chair pulled out.

Wally eats soup from a can. Across from him, in the place where memory lives, **MARILYN KRAUSE**, late 60s, appears as she was before illness withered her away.

She is not quite a ghost. She is memory with lipstick.

MARILYN
You need some fresh bread.

WALLY
I had bread.

MARILYN
At another stranger's funeral?

WALLY
They had lasagna.

MARILYN
Classy mourners.

Wally almost smiles.

WALLY
I don't know who needs me anymore.

That one she cannot fix.

INT. DISCOUNT SUPERMARKET - EVENING

A tired fluorescent kingdom of buy-one-get-one despair.

Wally moves a squeaky cart with mathematical caution.

Store-brand soup. Discount bread. Bruised bananas. Frozen meat patties with a label that treats its ingredients like national security secrets.

He reaches for a familiar brand of coffee. Sees the price. Puts it back. Goes generic.

INT. DISCOUNT SUPERMARKET - CHECKOUT LANE - MOMENTS LATER

The **CASHIER**, twenties, tattooed, scans his groceries with contemptuous efficiency.

CASHIER
Corn loaf mix?

Beep.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
My cat has higher standards.

WALLY
Then your cat has done very well.

The total flashes. Wally checks the cash in his wallet.
Counts once. Then again.

He is short.

A long beat.

WALLY (CONT'D)
All right. The coffee can go back.
And the cheese.

The cashier smirks, taps a key.

CASHIER
Anything else, Elon Musk?

WALLY
Let's not overstate the empire.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Wally loads one thin bag into the Buick.

He looks at the bright store, at other people with full
carts, at a species he almost remembers.

INT. MONTAMBLE'S DINER - MORNING

Wally studies obituaries over eggs and weak coffee.

DONNA, 50s, career waitress, refills him without asking.

DONNA
Anything good?

WALLY
Methodists. Two o'clock. Nice
church ladies usually bring potato
salad.

DONNA
You are a strange old man, Walter.

WALLY
Retired chemistry teacher. We're
all strange.

He circles an obituary address. Coffee drips over the number.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Forty-one or seventy-one?

He studies the page. Hesitates.

Then, making an actual choice:

WALLY (CONT'D)
One more. I am not eating soup
again tonight.

EXT. SALVATI FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Black sedans. Men in long coats. Floral displays the size of compact cars.

Wally checks the smudged obituary against the address on the awning. He has driven ninety minutes east for this sandwich.

Wally parks, impressed.

WALLY
Postal workers did well.

At the door, two thick-necked men, **LUCA** and **FRANKIE**, stop him and give him the once-over. He passes the test. No threat.

INT. SALVATI FUNERAL HOME - MAIN PARLOR - DAY

An opulent wake. Murmured prayers. Gold-framed photos. Men with shoulder holsters concealed by fine tailoring.

And a buffet of mythic proportions.

Roasted peppers. Baked clams. Silver trays of manicotti. Whole fish. Pastries. Espresso service.

Wally has walked into heaven run by extortionists.

He drifts toward the food. A **WOMAN IN BLACK** approaches.

WOMAN IN BLACK
Cousin Alberto. From Palermo, yes?

WALLY
I grew up in Pal--

He means Pennsylvania. What comes out is:

WALLY (CONT'D)

Palermo.

The woman's eyes widen.

Across the room, **CARMINE VENTRESCA**, 60s, the family's consigliere, a man who has spent forty years delivering other people's decisions in a voice that makes them sound like weather, clocks Wally's movement.

A beat later, Carmine materializes at Wally's shoulder.

CARMINE

Cousin Alberto. Finally.

Wally turns slowly, a meatball midway to his mouth.

WALLY

Terrible traffic.

Carmine takes him firmly by the arm.

CARMINE

Mrs. Salvati has been waiting.

They cross toward **GINA**.

Gina sees Wally once. She knows.

Not cousin. Not Sicilian. Not any of it.

But she also sees Tommy watching from across the room. **TOMMY MARCELLO**, 50s, underboss, built like a man who used to lift things for a living and dressed like a man who would rather you did not bring it up.

The room is warm and loud.

Wally is greeted by **GINA SALVATI**, late 50s, the widow, accepting condolences with the composure of a woman who has already moved past grief and on to arithmetic.

GINA

Thank you for coming.

She takes Wally's hand like she's knighting him.

Wally stares, confused.

TOMMY

About time blood showed up.

GINA

Family comes when family can.

She never breaks eye contact with Wally.

GINA (CONT'D)
You must be exhausted.

WALLY
I am carrying a lot, yes.

GINA
Of course you are.

INT. SALVATI TOWN CAR - MOVING - DUSK

Wally in the back seat between Carmine and a window, holding a paper plate of manicotti he was never given permission to bring.

The neighborhoods get better. Then they get suspicious.

WALLY
I should mention I have a car in
your parking lot.

CARMINE
It's being brought.

WALLY
By whom?

CARMINE
By someone whose job that is.

Wally looks out at gates going by.

WALLY
I only came for the food.

Carmine does not look at him.

CARMINE
Everybody says that the first
night.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE, BUCKS COUNTY - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

A guest room bigger than Wally's living room and ninety minutes from it.

On the bed: an envelope of cash, a pistol, a house key, and a folded suit.

Wally stares at the pistol like it's a snake doing algebra.

He picks up the envelope. Thick.

He sits on the bed, overcome.

WALLY
I should leave.

No movement.

WALLY (CONT'D)
I should definitely leave.

Still no movement.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Wally lifts the house phone. Thinks better of it. Sets it down, closes the bathroom door, and dials Danny on his own. Voicemail.

DANNY (V.O.)
Hey, it's Danny. Leave a message.

WALLY
Hi Danny. Just wanted to hear your voice.

He hangs up before the beep finishes.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - SUNROOM - MORNING

Gina enters. No guards.

Wally stands, ready to confess, faint, or apologize in bulk.

WALLY
I am not who they think I am.

GINA
I know.

Wally blinks.

GINA (CONT'D)
I know who you are not. I do not yet know who you are.

WALLY
Walter Krause. Allentown. Chemistry teacher. Widower. Accidental trespasser.

GINA

Good. Then there is one honest person in this house.

She pours coffee.

GINA (CONT'D)

Tommy Marcello means to kill my son Dominic before the leaves turn. My husband's cousin was supposed to arrive from Sicily and hold the family together until the lawyers stop chewing. Instead, I got you.

WALLY

How would you know a thing like that?

GINA

Carmin's nephew drives for Tommy. Three weeks ago Tommy asked him what Dominic's Tuesdays look like. That is the entire warning I am ever going to get.

WALLY

That feels like a downgrade.

GINA

Maybe. But no one who truly knew my husband would help me. They were all fed by him. You were fed from grief and manicotti.

Wally lowers his eyes.

GINA (CONT'D)

Help me bury Tommy before Tommy buries Dominic. You will leave alive.

WALLY

Why would anyone listen to me?

GINA

Because they want to believe blood matters. And because men hear accents even when there are none.

A long beat.

Wally thinks about his empty kitchen. His silent phone. The first room in years where people have said his name with haste.

WALLY

How long?

GINA

Until Dominic takes the bar exam.
Six weeks. Then the lawyers are
finished, the boy is licensed, and
nobody needs a cousin.

WALLY

I taught sophomore chemistry for
thirty-eight years.

GINA

Then you are overqualified for
organized crime.

WALLY

Do I have a last name?

GINA

Belladonna.

WALLY

That means "beautiful woman."

GINA

It also means a poison that stops
the heart. Try not to introduce
yourself.

He nods. Terrified.

WALLY

All right.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - DAY

Organized crime photos on a board. Strings. Names. Old
coffee.

AGENT NICK RUSSO, early 60s, trench-coat soul in a modern
bureau, watches wake surveillance on a monitor. **AGENT ANGELA
PEREZ**, 30s, who reads details for a living and is usually
about four minutes ahead of her boss, sits at a computer
scrolling through information.

Angelo's funeral. Mourners. Gina. Tommy.

Then Wally, entering frame.

Russo pauses.

RUSSO
Who's the substitute math teacher?

PEREZ
Chemistry, actually.

RUSSO
How would you possibly know that?

PEREZ
The pens in his pocket. Three of them.

RUSSO
Anything on him?

PEREZ
No hit in the system.

RUSSO
Run him again.

PEREZ
Already did.

RUSSO
Then run him with glasses.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - LIBRARY - DAY

Around a table: Carmine, Tommy, **DOMINIC SALVATI**, 28, law student behind bloodshot eyes and solid family instincts more than his inheritance, and several **CAPOS**.

Men are yelling about a distribution dispute involving New Jersey vending routes, missing invoices, and somebody's brother-in-law.

Wally sits at the head, sweating into authority.

TOMMY
Cousin Alberto should decide.

All eyes on Wally.

WALLY
Well. Has anyone tried writing down what each side believes the other side promised?

Silence.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Because in school, if two boys
insisted the other started it, I'd
have them each write a paragraph.
Once it's on paper, most people get
embarrassed.

CAPO #1
A paragraph.

WALLY
A short paragraph. No one's
publishing.

Tommy snorts.

CARMINE
(surprisingly)
It's not absurd.

DOMINIC
Actually, if both parties signed a
statement, we'd have leverage if
either side breached.

Wally sees daylight.

WALLY
Thank-you notes. Simple, courteous,
documentary.

TOMMY
Thank-you notes.

WALLY
Or threat-adjacent business
correspondence.

The room considers it.

Amazingly, tempers cool.

Tommy stares at Wally, newly irritated.

Wally lowers himself back into his chair.

For a second, the rising noise of mob grievances morphs into
shouted accusations, a slamming desk, and a room full of
dangerous boys with guns.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. ALLENTOWN HIGH SCHOOL - CHEMISTRY LAB - DAY - FLASHBACK

Thirty years earlier.

YOUNGER WALLY, same careful eyes, more hair, stands at the front of a chemistry lab in shirtsleeves and tie.

Two **TEENAGE BOYS -- MANNY LOPEZ**, 16, furious and hot-blooded, and **CECIL MALACARNE**, 17, smug and needling -- are in a standoff near a counter of glass beakers.

MANNY grips a bottle of diluted **ACID** like it is a holy threat.

Cecil has a second bottle raised in self-defense and very poor judgment.

The rest of the class has gone still.

MANNY
Tell him to say it again.

CECIL
It was a joke.

MANNY
About my mother.

CECIL
About your haircut.

MANNY
You changed the subject because
you're scared.

YOUNGER WALLY
Gentlemen.

Nobody lowers anything.

Wally steps between lab tables with the calm of a man who knows panic only makes chemicals ambitious.

YOUNGER WALLY (CONT'D)
Put the bottles down.

MANNY
He started it.

CECIL
He shoved me.

YOUNGER WALLY
Marvelous. We have chronology. Now
let's try intelligence.

A beat.

Wally takes out a roll sheet and tears off two blank pages.

YOUNGER WALLY (CONT'D)
Manny, you write what happened.
(turning to Don)
Don, you write what you think
happened. If either version
includes acid on school property,
both of you fail the semester and
spend spring explaining yourselves
to the principal, your parents, and
possibly the local newspaper.

That lands.

CECIL
He can't write when he's mad.

YOUNGER WALLY
Then this becomes remedial English,
too.

A few **STUDENTS** laugh nervously.

Manny does not, but the sound breaks the spell.

YOUNGER WALLY (CONT'D)
You are both holding substances
that can scar a human face. Over a
sentence neither of you will
remember in ten years.

MANNY
I'll remember.

YOUNGER WALLY
No. You'll remember whether you
behaved like a fool in front of
witnesses.

That goes in.

Wally holds out his hand.

Manny looks at the acid bottle. Then at Don.

Finally, Manny gives it to Wally.

Cecil follows a beat later, unwilling to be the last idiot standing.

Wally places both bottles carefully in the sink.

YOUNGER WALLY (CONT'D)
Good. Now we have moved from felony
to paperwork.

The class exhales.

**SMASH CUT BACK
TO:**

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - LIBRARY - DAY

A **CAPO** is still complaining about vending routes.

Wally blinks, back in the present.

CAPO #1
So who's paying for the missing
machines?

Wally folds his hands, utterly certain now.

WALLY
The side with the weakest story
usually pays first.

Carmine clocks that. Dominic too.

Tommy narrows his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI GARAGE - NIGHT

Luca opens a trunk. Inside: **MURRAY**, a frightened, bespectacled, quivering bookkeeper.

LUCA
Orders are Tommy wants him gone.

WALLY
Gone where?

LUCA
"Gone" gone.

MURRAY

I rounded things. I panicked.
Please don't let them shoot me in a
garage.

Wally studies him. Terrified. Soft. Harmless.

WALLY

When students cheated, I found
punishment worked best when it
taught them something. Educational.

LUCA

Educational? Such as?

WALLY

Tucson. New name. No accounts. He
sells ceiling fans until death
feels like a promotion.

MURRAY

I can do ceiling fans.

Luca considers it.

LUCA

I'll ask Carmine.

Wally exhales. So does Murray. One life redeemed.

INT. SALVATI DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A dinner with Tommy.

Tommy smiles like a knife renting a tuxedo.

TOMMY

So, cousin, tell me about Sicily.

WALLY

It's Windy.

TOMMY

Which part?

WALLY

The outside.

Gina hides a smile behind a wineglass.

TOMMY

And your uncle? Angelo's side or
Gina's?

WALLY
The dead side.

Tommy leans in.

TOMMY
You don't talk like Sicily.

WALLY
I've been disappointed before too.

Dominic laughs before he can stop himself.

Tommy hears that and files it away.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - STUDY - LATE NIGHT

Dominic has textbooks spread everywhere.

Wally passes, unable to ignore the panic he recognizes.

WALLY
Exam?

DOMINIC
Contracts law. Apparently the law
enjoys making normal people
miserable.

WALLY
Only the normal ones.

Dominic softens.

DOMINIC
My father never understood why I
wanted school.

WALLY
Your father ran an empire. They
don't usually encourage footnotes.

Dominic smiles despite himself.

Wally sits.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Offer. Acceptance. Consideration.
That's chemistry too.

DOMINIC
Chemistry?

WALLY
Everything is. People collide,
bonds form, heat gets released,
someone ends up unstable. That's
chemistry 101.

They begin to study.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - TERRACE - NIGHT

French doors stand open off the study.

Beyond them, the grounds are dark and expensive.

Wally steps outside with two cups of coffee he clearly did not ask permission to take.

Gina is already there, wrapped in a shawl, looking out over the lawn like a woman reviewing a kingdom she never wanted.

Wally offers her a cup.

She accepts.

For once, no one is performing.

GINA
Dominic likes you.

WALLY
That suggests weak judgment.

GINA
No. It suggests hunger.

She sips.

GINA (CONT'D)
He spent his life with men who only
spoke to him when they needed
obedience.

Wally looks out into the dark.

WALLY
My wife talked to me when she
needed the mayonnaise moved one
inch to the left in the fridge.

Gina smiles faintly.

GINA
That sounds intimate.

WALLY

It was.

A long beat.

WALLY (CONT'D)

I retired, and we had plans. Small ones. Better ones. Breakfast out on Tuesdays. A trip we kept postponing because there was always time. Then she got sick so fast it felt impolite.

Gina turns toward him.

Wally keeps going because stopping would be worse.

WALLY (CONT'D)

People talk about grief like it's one large event. It isn't. It's administrative. It's passwords and soup and half a bed and no one asking where you put the good scissors.

Gina nods, taking it in with unusual care.

GINA

Angelo was alive for forty years and absent for most of them.

Wally says nothing.

GINA (CONT'D)

He gave me houses. Cars. Jewelry. Security men. A vacation home I hated and a dining room table no one ever relaxed at.

Takes another sip

GINA (CONT'D)

He also gave me the habit of listening for tires in the driveway and guessing from the engine whether my evening would be lonely or dangerous.

That sits between them.

WALLY

I'm sorry.

GINA
Don't be. He was what he was. I
married a weather system and kept
wondering why the furniture shook.

That gets a quiet laugh from Wally.

GINA (CONT'D)
You had love and not enough money.
I had money and not enough love.

Wally looks at her, then finally sees the shape of her
loneliness.

WALLY
Seems inefficient.

GINA
Men build entire lives around
inefficiency.

A soft beat.

WALLY
Marilyn used to say poor people
can't afford mystery. When the
bills are due, everyone has to
become very clear very quickly.

GINA
Rich people buy mystery and call it
privacy.

They share a look. Real recognition. There's no seduction in
it. Just two veterans of life comparing scars.

WALLY
She knew where everything was.
Marilyn. In the house. In me.

Gina lowers her eyes.

GINA
No one ever knew where Angelo was,
even when he was sitting across
from me.

Wally absorbs that.

He sets his cup down.

WALLY
For what it's worth, you seem less
lonely than you probably were.

GINA
For what it's worth, you seem more
useful than you think you are.

That lands deeply.

Wally looks out at the dark for a while.

WALLY
Can I ask for something?

GINA
That is a sentence with a bill
attached.

WALLY
Your son takes his bar exam in five
weeks.

GINA
He does.

WALLY
I'd like him gone a month after
that.

Gina turns.

GINA
Gone?

WALLY
Gone the boring way. Not hiding.
Not disowned. With a firm, a lease,
in a city where nobody knows what
his last name buys. I'll stay as
long as you need the cousin. That's
the fee.

A long silence. She does not say yes.

GINA
You have been in this house nine
days.

WALLY
Yes.

GINA
And you are already negotiating.

WALLY
I taught public school. Everything
is a negotiation and none of it is
with the person in front of you.

Gina looks at him a long moment.

GINA
Ask me again when you have earned
it.

WALLY
I intend to.

Inside, somewhere in the house, men start arguing again.
The spell breaks, but not completely.

GINA
We should go back in before they
invent a war over napkins.

WALLY
I've supervised worse cafeterias.

She almost laughs.

They head inside together.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - WALLY AS "ALBERTO"

-- Wally receives whispered reports as if he were a don and
answers them like a guidance counselor.

-- He reroutes a collection schedule because "Tuesday has a
calmer emotional profile." -- He corrects a capo's grammar in
a threat letter.

-- Dominic starts seeking him out.

-- Wally calls Danny's voicemail nightly and says nothing,
listening only to the greeting.

-- A postcard from Tucson arrives with no message, just a
photograph of a ceiling fan.

-- Russo watches diner surveillance of Wally eating pie
alone.

END MONTAGE

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - GINA'S OFFICE - DAY

Gina sits behind Angelo's old desk, reading a folder without any illusion that paper has ever truly controlled the men in this family.

Across from her: CARMINE and TOMMY. Both standing. Both tense in different ways.

Carmine does the speaking.

CARMINE
Atlantic City called again.

GINA
Can I assume they had phones for gambling, not whining?

Tommy leans forward.

TOMMY
Distribution problem.

GINA
That phrase has covered theft, adultery, warehouse fires, and a cocaine shipment mislabeled as olive oil. Narrow it down.

Carmine opens the folder.

CARMINE
Some of our product is arriving light. Some is arriving late. Some is arriving diverted by people who have become ambitious.

GINA
And Atlantic City believes this is our fault.

CARMINE
Atlantic City believes fault is a renewable resource.

Tommy paces.

TOMMY
This needs to be handled in person. Face to face. No phones. No intermediaries. They're already insulting us politely. In another day they'll drop the manners.

Gina studies him.

GINA
And what do you intend to bring to
Atlantic City? Diplomacy? Or your
usual hobby of converting
irritation into felonies and toe
tags?

Tommy puts on offense to hide that the answer is obvious.

TOMMY
They respect strength.

GINA
No. They exploit insecurity. People
often confuse the two because both
wear nice shoes.

Carmine suppresses the faintest smile.

CARMINE
We should go.

Gina nods once.

GINA
Fine. Go.

Tommy and Carmine both relax a fraction.

Then:

GINA (CONT'D)
Take Wally.

The men freeze.

TOMMY
No way.

CARMINE
Mrs. Salvati--

GINA
My son is not the only man in this
family who can hear a full sentence
before interrupting it.

Tommy spreads his hands.

TOMMY

We are not taking a retired chemistry teacher into a room full of Atlantic City psychos.

GINA

That is precisely why you are taking him. He has a cool head, no appetite for chest-thumping, and a mysterious ability to make armed men feel childish.

TOMMY

That's not a skill set. That's witchcraft.

GINA

Then be grateful someone on my payroll practices it.

Carmine remains cautious.

CARMINE

He is still learning the room.

GINA

Which means he still hears what all of you stopped hearing years ago.

She closes the folder.

GINA (CONT'D)

You two mistake heat for leverage. This situation requires a cool head. You are taking Walter.

Tommy looks to Carmine for support. Carmine offers none, shrugging his shoulders.

TOMMY

He'll look ridiculous.

GINA

Then buy him better clothes.

That lands with the dead certainty of an order.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - STUDY - AFTERNOON

Wally is tutoring Dominic through contract language with the grave patience of a man who no longer believes any subject should require this many Latin phrases.

Out of frustration, Dominic slams his book shut.

DOMINIC
Consideration in a contract. It
just sounds fake.

WALLY
Most legal language is just
ordinary disappointment in a
necktie.

The door opens. Tommy enters first, Carmine behind him.

Wally looks up and immediately suspects weather.

WALLY (CONT'D)
That is not a good face to see in a
doorway.

TOMMY
Pack a bag.

WALLY
That's a sentence doctors and
kidnappers use. I dislike the
overlap.

Dominic looks between them.

DOMINIC
For what?

CARMINE
Atlantic City.

Wally blinks.

WALLY
I'm sorry, I thought you said
Atlantic City.

TOMMY
You heard correctly.

WALLY
Why?

TOMMY
Because your fan club of one has
expanded beyond reason.

Dominic almost smiles. Wally does not.

WALLY
I don't own luggage appropriate for
organized crime.

TOMMY
We're fixing that.

WALLY
That's more alarming than the
kidnapping part.

Tommy exits. Carmine lingers.

CARMINE
Mrs. Salvati believes your presence
may prevent an argument from
becoming an obituary.

WALLY
That's flattering in a deeply
burdensome way.

Carmine nods once.

CARMINE
Be ready in twenty minutes.

He leaves.

Dominic watches Wally absorb the insanity.

DOMINIC
You'll be fine.

WALLY
People say that right before boats
capsize.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - GINA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Wally stands in the doorway, seeking appeal.

Gina does not look up at first.

GINA

No.

WALLY

I haven't said anything.

GINA

You came here to ask why you have to go. The answer is because those men can escalate a wrong glance into a vendetta, and you cannot.

Wally steps in.

WALLY

You want me to negotiate with Atlantic City gangsters.

GINA

I want you to keep my gangsters from becoming Atlantic City folklore.

A beat.

WALLY

I look like a substitute teacher at a funeral home.

Gina finally looks up.

GINA

Yes. That will not do.

She studies him clinically.

GINA (CONT'D)

Do you own anything that suggests prosperity?

WALLY

A wristwatch from 1987 that still functions if I threaten it.

GINA

Do you own anything that suggests unlawful prosperity?

WALLY

Absolutely not.

Gina stands.

GINA
You need to look like a successful
businessman.

WALLY
I was a public-school chemistry
teacher. The closest I got to a
successful businessman was a parent
who sued over grading.

Gina circles him once like a wardrobe department with trust
issues.

GINA
The suit is wrong. The shoes are
apologizing. And your glasses say
coupons.

WALLY
They help me see.

GINA
Today they need to help others
assume and misjudge you.

She presses the intercom.

GINA (CONT'D)
Tommy. Carmine. Take Walter into
town and buy him clothes.

WALLY
That sounds expensive.

GINA
Then enjoy it while it still
offends you.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH - END MEN'S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

A shrine to lacquered wood, heavy mirrors, and men who have
done questionable things in excellent wool.

The **SALESMAN**, 50s, elegant, quick-eyed, recognizes Tommy and
Carmine and instantly shifts into his specialized
professional register: discreet criminal luxury.

SALESMAN
Gentlemen. Welcome back. Always a
pleasure. And how may I be of
service?

TOMMY

Our associate here needs to look like money with a temper.

WALLY

I prefer to look like money with restraint.

SALESMAN

Restraint is extra, but we can suggest it.

He drapes jackets across Wally with ruthless speed.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

If I understand, we need authority, but relaxed authority. A man who could order calamari or a kneecapping and expects both to arrive warm.

Wally stares. Tommy nods affirmatively.

The salesman holds up a dark-gray suit with a subtle pinstripe.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

This says inherited power, not flashy insecurity.

Tommy considers. Accepts the logic.

Moments later, Wally emerges from the dressing room in the suit. Tailored. Dark. Expensive. Shoes polished into a brilliant reflection.

Tommy gives another approving nod.

TOMMY

Look at that. He's depressing, but credible.

The salesman adjusts the tie knot.

SALESMAN

Exactly.

Turns to Carmine

SALESMAN (CONT'D)

Will he be 'carrying'?

WALLY

Carrying? Carrying what?

CARMINE
A piece.

WALLY
A piece of what?

Carmine to the salesman

CARMINE
No piece. No tailoring needed.

SALESMAN
Just one final touch.

He swaps Wally's old glasses for sleeker frames.

SALESMAN (CONT'D)
These say private schools and high-end boutiques.

Wally turns to the mirror to appraise the final ensemble.

WALLY
I think it's a bit much.

Tommy grins.

TOMMY
Wait till you see the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALVATI ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

A stretch LIMOUSINE waits in front of the mansion like prosperity became a submarine.

Wally stops dead at the top of the steps.

WALLY
No.

TOMMY
Get in the limo. There's a bar inside.

WALLY
That makes it worse.

Frankie opens the door with ceremony. Wally bends in and sees leather seats, hidden lighting, crystal tumblers, and enough room to host a regrettable city council meeting.

WALLY (CONT'D)
This is not transportation. This is
a moving confession.

Tommy claps him on the back and ushers him in.

INT. LIMOUSINE - MOVING - LATE AFTERNOON

Wally sits rigidly, hands on knees, trying not to touch
anything that looks billable.

Tommy pours himself a drink.

Carmine reviews folders.

WALLY
I don't even have a clue as to
where we are going. What we are
doing.

CARMINE
The issue is simple. Atlantic City
thinks we are bleeding their side
of the line.

WALLY
And are you?

Carmine shoots him a look.

CARMINE
That is not a limousine question.
If this goes bad, we don't just
lose product. We lose territory,
and the story people tell about us
after.

TOMMY
You just stand there and listen.
You talk only if someone starts
confusing volume and threats with
strategy.

WALLY
That does sound like my specialty
now, which is depressing.

Tommy studies him.

Wally fidgets a bit.

TOMMY
You really that uncomfortable?

WALLY
I'm uneasy riding in a vehicle
longer than my first apartment.

That unexpectedly gets a laugh from Carmine.

The limo glides on.

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY CASINO - EVENING

Lights. Glass. Noise. Every square inch of the place is screaming that leaving broke is simply a part of the plan.

The limo pulls up under a VIP awning. VALETS hurry over. A **VIP HOST** in an immaculate suit opens the door before the vehicle fully stops.

VIP HOST
Mr. Ventresca. Mr. Marcello.
Welcome.

Then he sees Wally in the fitted suit and instinctively adds an inflection of deference.

VIP HOST (CONT'D)
Sir.

The host extends his business card to Wally.

VIP HOST (CONT'D)
Feel free to contact me should
there be anything you need to make
your visit more pleasurable, sir.

Wally nods as if being called sir by casino staff is a thing he has survived before.

Inside, the place is a cathedral to manufactured luck.

Slot machines sing. Chandeliers glitter. Carpet attacks the eyes.

Wally turns in a slow circle.

WALLY
This is what would happen if a bank
developed a drinking problem.

Tommy smiles despite himself.

As they move toward the elevators, two **YOUNG WOMEN** peel off from a lounge area and intercept them with the swift confidence of professionals working under fluorescent temptation.

BRITTANY, 20s, blonde, bright, practiced.

NIKKI, 20s, dark-haired, quick smile, sharper eyes than the room deserves.

BRITTANY
Well, hello, gentlemen.

NIKKI
Atlantic City believes in
hospitality.

Tommy, instantly delighted by attention, opens his coat a little wider.

Carmine barely slows.

CARMINE
We're in a hurry.

Nikki teeters in towering heels toward Wally, expecting awkwardness and therefore easy fun.

NIKKI
And what about you, handsome? You
look like you came to win quietly.

Wally looks at her. Something catches.

He narrows his eyes.

WALLY
Nicole DeSantis?

Nikki freezes. Her eyes widen.

The performance drops an inch.

NIKKI
Mr. Krause?

Tommy turns. Carmine too.

Wally is now painfully, genuinely happy.

WALLY
You sat third row by the windows.
Terrible lab handwriting. Excellent
on stoichiometry.

Nikki blinks, stunned into actual memory.

NIKKI

Oh my God!

WALLY

You built that model fuel cell out of spare parts because the school wouldn't fund a decent science fair kit. It was brilliant.

She laughs once simply out of reflex, then realizes where she is and who she is being right now.

NIKKI

You remember that?

WALLY

You were gifted.

That lands harder than flirtation could.

A small silence forms around them, strange and private in the casino noise.

WALLY (CONT'D)

I had very high hopes for you.

Nikki's smile softens and breaks at the edges.

NIKKI

Yeah. Well. Atlantic City had a vote.

Wally takes that in with no judgment, which is somehow worse.

WALLY

It frequently does.

Tommy, intensely fascinated:

TOMMY

You know hookers from chemistry class?

WALLY

Former students. Please use educational terminology.

Even Carmine nearly smiles.

Nikki looks at Wally's suit, then at Tommy and Carmine.

NIKKI
You with these guys?

WALLY
Against all available evidence.

Brittany, to Tommy:

BRITTANY
You gentlemen need company later?

Tommy is about to answer when Carmine cuts in.

CARMINE
No.

Tommy looks offended on behalf of his evening.

Wally reaches gently into his pocket, pulls out the business card from the casino's VIP Host when he arrived, and writes on the back.

WALLY
Nicole.

She looks at him.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Community college outside Atlantic City has a night certification program in medical lab technology. If they still have Professor Heller, tell him I said you were the smartest student who ever mislabeled sodium hydroxide.

She takes the card.

Her eyes shine, but she is far too trained to cry in a casino lobby.

NIKKI
You're still grading people, huh?

WALLY
Only the promising ones.

The elevator dings.

Carmine gestures. Time.

Nikki steps back.

NIKKI
Good to see you, Mr. Krause.

WALLY
You too, Nicole.

She watches him go, unsettled in a new direction.

Tommy stares at Wally as the elevator doors close.

TOMMY
That may be the weirdest five
minutes of my life.

WALLY
Then your life lacks proper public
education.

INT. CASINO ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

As the doors shut, Tommy leans toward Carmine.

TOMMY
Did he just try to rehab an escort
between the blackjack tables and
extortion?

CARMINE
Apparently.

TOMMY
I can't decide if he's brave,
delusional, or Lutheran.

WALLY
Methodist-adjacent, actually.

The elevator opens.

INT. HOTEL PENTHOUSE FLOOR - NIGHT

Two **ATLANTIC CITY ENFORCERS** guard a suite entrance wide
enough to suggest either luxury or federal seizure.

Carmine steps forward.

CARMINE
Ventresca. Marcello. Salvati
family.

The two doorkeeper thugs eye Wally.

ENFORCER #1

And him?

Tommy answers before Carmine can.

TOMMY

Family counsel.

Wally clocks the phrase but lets it pass.

The enforcer nods. Opens the door.

INT. CASINO SUITE - CONTINUOUS

A large suite with a private bar, ocean view, two poker tables, and the smell of money trying to look legitimate.

Inside sit the **ATLANTIC CITY BOSSES**:

MARTY SANTORO, late 50s, smooth, smiling, shark-fin calm.

LENNY CARUSO, 60s, red-faced, thick-wristed, temper first, sentence later.

Two younger **ASSOCIATES** stand nearby, making menace available if needed.

Santoro rises first.

SANTORO

Carmine. Tommy.

They shake hands without warmth.

Santoro sees Wally.

SANTORO (CONT'D)

And who's this?

Tommy gestures.

TOMMY

Walter. Advisory side.

SANTORO

Advisory? On what?

WALLY

Unpleasantness, apparently.

Lenny snorts.

LENNY

Then you came to the right shore.

They sit. Drinks are offered. Wally declines. Tommy accepts. Carmine waves his off.

Santoro opens with polished hostility.

SANTORO

I'll get right to the point. We've got product disappearing, timing slipping, and dealers on our side claiming your people are treating regional boundaries like suggestions.

CARMINE

Our manifests don't show shrinkage.

LENNY

Then your manifests are liars.

TOMMY

Careful.

LENNY

Or what?

Tommy leans forward.

TOMMY

Or your carpet gets blood on it and your suite gets wrapped in crime scene tape.

The room chills instantly.

Santoro lifts a hand to keep Lenny seated.

SANTORO

We invited conversation, Tommy. Try not to turn vocabulary into homicide.

Carmine opens the folder.

CARMINE

Our drivers left full. Seals intact. Timelines documented.

Lenny pounds the table.

LENNY

Then somebody between your dock and
my floor is skimming.

TOMMY

Maybe somebody in your house
developed sticky fingers and
expensive taste.

Now everyone is standing or nearly standing. Chairs scrape.
The younger associates flex. Frankie, outside the door, can
be felt more than seen.

Wally has said nothing. He watches hands, not faces. Eyes.
Timing. Who is angriest and who is pretending to be.

Then he stands.

No one notices at first because he does it quietly.

When he speaks, the volume is modest. The effect is not.

WALLY

I have a question.

The room pauses largely because the question is so absurdly
civilized. Out of the norm.

Lenny turns to him.

LENNY

This a bad time for trivia,
grandpa.

WALLY

(unphased)

When a chemistry experiment keeps
producing smoke, there are usually
only three possibilities.

Tommy winces; closes his eyes briefly. Not chemistry again.

WALLY (CONT'D)

One: the formula is wrong. Two: the
measurements are wrong. Three:
someone touched the beaker when no
one was looking.

Santoro studies him despite himself.

SANTORO

You saying our people are clumsy or
crooked?

WALLY

What I'm saying is everyone here is too experienced to be this emotional over facts nobody has isolated.

He gestures to the documents.

WALLY (CONT'D)

If Salvati shipments left full, and Atlantic City received them light, then either records are false, routes are compromised, or middle transfer points have become entrepreneurial.

Lenny scoffs.

LENNY

Entrepreneurial?

WALLY

I taught teenagers. I developed euphemisms to avoid despair.

SANTORO

Eupha-whats?

A few involuntary smiles flicker, then evaporate.

Wally continues, building because the room is listening.

WALLY

Right now, both sides are doing something very expensive. You are assuming theft by hierarchy. That leads to retaliation, then counter-retaliation, then funerals for men who were too stupid to steal this elegantly.

Tommy mutters, but not loudly enough to break him.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Instead, pick three upcoming shipments. Joint seal inspection at departure. Joint escort at midpoint. Joint inventory at arrival. Same three men each time, agreed in advance, and none of them relatives.

Santoro leans back.

SANTORO
Neutral witnesses?

WALLY
People with boring faces and no
imagination.

CARMINE
That would isolate the breach
within a week.

LENNY
And if it's your side?

WALLY
Then Salvati pays the shortage and
hands you the name.

Tommy looks sharply at Wally. That is a serious concession.

LENNY
And if it's ours?

Wally turns to Santoro.

WALLY
Then Atlantic City pays the
shortage and stops speaking as
though insult were an accounting
method.

Santoro almost smiles.

SANTORO
You talk funny for family counsel.

WALLY
I was educated in the north. It
ruins the music.

Lenny sits back down at last.

LENNY
Three shipments.

Santoro thinks, calculating all the ways this protects him if
his own people are the leak.

SANTORO
Three shipments. Joint eyes. Joint
count. Neutral transit witnesses.

Carmine nods.

CARMINE

Agreed.

All look to Tommy.

He hates that the room calmed around Wally, but he also recognizes a win when it keeps him from needing a gun.

TOMMY

Fine.

Santoro raises his glass.

SANTORO

To commerce.

WALLY

That is not the word I would have chosen.

Lenny laughs once despite himself. The tension breaks just enough to prevent blood.

CUT TO:

INT. CASINO SUITE HALLWAY - LATER

The meeting is over. The suite door closes behind them.

Tommy exhales like a man who has just talked himself back from a cliff and resents whoever pointed out the edge.

TOMMY

You offered repayment.

WALLY

Yes.

TOMMY

That's not small.

WALLY

Neither is a body in a penthouse.

Carmine watches Wally differently now.

CARMINE

He's right, Tommy.

Tommy adjusts his cuffs.

TOMMY

I was handling it.

WALLY
With the subtle touch of a
blacksmith.

Tommy stares at him. Then unexpectedly laughs.

TOMMY
You really don't know when to shut
up.

WALLY
Thirty-eight years in a classroom.
It left me with scars.

Carmine places a hand briefly on Wally's shoulder.

CARMINE
That room goes bad without you.

Tommy does not contradict him.

That matters.

INT. ATLANTIC CITY CASINO - LOUNGE - NIGHT

On the way out, they pass the lounge. Nikki is there again, now off to the side with a tray of drinks and a look that says the evening has resumed its normal disappointments.

Wally slows.

Tommy and Carmine continue ahead, giving him a few feet.

WALLY
Nicole.

She turns.

NIKKI
You survive your board meeting?

WALLY
Barely. I recommended less
shouting. It was controversial.

She smiles.

He reaches into his pocket and hands her a folded cocktail napkin taken from the suite.

High in the corner of the lounge, a ceiling camera pivots a few degrees and holds on them.

On it, in his careful teacher handwriting, is the name of the community college program and a time.

WALLY (CONT'D)
If you ever want a reference from
someone who remembers you before
all this glitter attacked your
judgment, call me.

She looks at the napkin like it might be heavier than paper should allow.

NIKKI
You still think I could do
something else?

WALLY
I think most people are smarter
before the world starts pricing
them.

That hits.

NIKKI
Good night, Mr. Krause.

WALLY
Good night, Nicole.

He rejoins Tommy and Carmine.

Tommy looks over.

TOMMY
Did you just assign homework to a
casino escort?

WALLY
Optional reading.

EXT. SALVATI ESTATE - NIGHT

The limousine rolls up. The house glows in the dark like an expensive oasis.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - GINA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Gina waits as Carmine, Tommy, and Wally enter.

She reads the room before anyone speaks. No blood. No sirens. No fresh war. Better than average.

GINA

Well?

Carmine sets the folder on her desk.

CARMINE

(Matter-of-factly)

Three monitored shipments. Joint seals. Neutral transit witnesses. If there's leakage, we'll isolate it.

Tommy nods, recovering ownership fast.

TOMMY

Atlantic City backed off.

Gina looks to Wally.

He shrugs in the new suit that still does not belong to his bones.

WALLY

Carmine had the records. Tommy had the leverage. I mostly prevented adjectives from becoming casualties.

Tommy eyes him.

A beat.

TOMMY

He's not wrong.

That admission costs Tommy money somewhere in his soul.

Carmine adds, direct and plain:

CARMINE

The professor, here... He saved the meeting.

Gina knows. Of course she knows.

GINA

And Atlantic City?

Wally hesitates.

CARMINE

Oh, and Wally reformed a hooker.

Gina's eyes widen a bit.

GINA
Really?

WALLY
I ran into a former student.

Tommy laughs, sits, and pours himself a drink.

TOMMY
You left that out. Tell her. Please tell her.

CARMINE
A young woman in the lobby approached us professionally.

GINA
Professionally?

TOMMY
Walter recognized her from chemistry class. One of his students.

Gina turns to Wally with genuine interest.

GINA
Of course you did.

WALLY
She was gifted.

GINA
I bet she was.

WALLY
As a student.

Gina's expression softens as she hears what he means beneath the words.

GINA
You carry too many people with you.

WALLY
Only the promising ones.

Tommy LIFTS HIS GLASS toward Wally. A toast.

TOMMY
To the professor.

Carmine, after a beat, does the same.

CARMINE
To the professor.

Wally looks deeply uncomfortable being toasted in a mob office while wearing a suit worth more than his first car.

WALLY
This is still a deeply suspicious chapter of my life.

Tommy laughs. Real laughter this time.

That, too, matters.

Tommy's laughter finally fades. Carmine and Tommy exit, leaving Gina and Wally alone.

But then, the mood turns serious.

Wally watches them go, uneasy in the expensive suit, the glass in his hand.

Gina studies him for a long moment, then sets her glass down.

GINA
Walter, have you ever heard the saying "in for a penny - in for a pound"?

Wally exhales, half a rueful smile.

WALLY
Yes. I taught it to seniors who thought late homework didn't count.

GINA
Then you know what it means. You stepped in for a penny tonight.

She picks up the folder from Atlantic City, the room they just survived.

GINA (CONT'D)
Now you're in for the pound.

Wally straightens a little, almost defensive.

WALLY
I gave them paperwork and neutral witnesses. A path of least resistance. I did not give them blood.

GINA
You gave them a new way to keep
score. That is family business,
Walter.

She moves closer, not threatening, but without softness.

GINA (CONT'D)
Until now, you were an accident. An
anomaly. A widower who slinked
uninvited into a wake and survived
on faked condolences and good
grammar. Men overlooked you because
you looked like a substitute
teacher at the wrong address.

Wally swallows.

WALLY
I preferred being overlooked.

GINA
That ship has sailed, Walter.

She turns away, pacing once, measuring her words.

GINA (CONT'D)
You are no longer the strange old
man who eats pie alone in a diner.
You are the man whose name was
spoken in a room full of armed
egos, and the shouting stopped.
That puts a target on you.

Wally looks up at her.

WALLY
Would you let them kill me for
that?

Gina's answer is immediate, but not comforting.

GINA
Not easily.

She takes her glass again, but doesn't drink.

GINA (CONT'D)
So when you speak in those rooms,
speak as though you might have to
die believing what you just said.
Because you might.

Wally takes that in. Deeply.

He nods once, the tiniest concession.

WALLY
In for a penny...

He looks toward the corridor where Tommy vanished, toward the halls where Dominic studies.

WALLY (CONT'D)
...in for a pound.

Gina watches him a moment, then turns back to her desk.

Wally exits, leaving her alone with the folder and the cost of the chapter she has just invited him into.

MONTAGE - JOINT SHIPMENTS - DAYS LATER

INT. SALVATI WAREHOUSE - DAWN

Mixed crews from SALVATI and ATLANTIC CITY stand at a loading dock. A pallet of sealed product waits.

A **SALVATI DRIVER** and an **ATLANTIC CITY MAN** check seals together, numbers called out and written on a shared manifest.

Both initial the form, reluctant but thorough.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Two TRUCKS roll down a nearly empty stretch of highway.

In the lead cab, a **NEUTRAL ESCORT** with a clipboard watches the road instead of the scenery.

Behind him, another neutral man does the same.

CUT TO:

INT. MIDPOINT DEPOT - LATE AFTERNOON

The same mixed crew meets at a small depot. Seals are popped in full view of both sides.

They sign and initial. No one looks happy about it. That's the point.

CUT TO:

INT. ATLANTIC CITY RECEIVING FLOOR - NIGHT

Under harsh fluorescents, a **RECEIVING CLERK**, a **SALVATI MAN**, and an **ATLANTIC CITY BOSS** stand over opened crates and paperwork.

RECEIVING CLERK
Twenty-one. No missing weight.
Timeline clean.

A short silence. Men stare at the numbers like they expected a fight instead of math.

The boss grunts, grudging.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - GINA'S OFFICE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Gina sits behind Angelo's desk, a small stack of manifests in front of her.

Carmine stands reading from the top sheet.

CARMINE
First shipment. No leak.

Gina looks up, cautious hope in her eyes.

GINA
And the witnesses?

CARMINE
Boring. Grudging. Just how Walter described them.

A faint, rare smile.

CARMINE (CONT'D)
If this holds, Walter bought us a month.

Gina nods once. Breathing room, not victory.

GINA
Then make sure the next two are just as boring.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - STUDY - MORNING

Wally and Dominic at the books. Carmine appears in the doorway with a folded newspaper, which is never how good news arrives.

CARMINE
Walter. A minute.

Dominic reads the room and goes.

Carmine hands over the paper, folded to a two-inch item in the back of a regional section.

INSERT - NEWSPAPER

"TUCSON MAN, 58, KILLED IN HIT-AND-RUN OUTSIDE HOME IMPROVEMENT STORE."

BACK TO SCENE

Wally reads it twice. His hands are very steady, which is how you can tell.

WALLY
He was selling ceiling fans.

CARMINE
He was.

WALLY
That was the arrangement. That was the whole arrangement.

CARMINE
It was your arrangement. Tommy made a different one.

Wally sets the paper down on the desk, squares its edges. Squares them again.

WALLY
Does Mrs. Salvati know?

CARMINE
Mrs. Salvati reads the paper.

A long beat.

WALLY
In thirty-eight years I lost four students. Two cars, one lake, one boy who never told anybody anything.

He looks up.

WALLY (CONT'D)
This is the first one I handed over
myself.

Carmine, who has never once said anything soft, does not say anything soft now.

CARMINE
Then you understand the building
you're in.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

Tommy pours a drink while Luca lingers in the doorway.

TOMMY
You know what I hate about men like
Walter?

LUCA
Men who talk in paragraphs?

TOMMY
Men who make everyone else feel
reasonable.
(beat)
That's contagious.

Luca says nothing.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
If Dominic starts sounding like
him, my seat at this table gets
very temporary, very quickly.

Tommy turns, smiles without warmth.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Temporary arrangements require
planning.

CUT TO:

EXT. INDUSTRIAL SIDE STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

A black CADILLAC idles near a shuttered warehouse.

Inside: Wally in back with LUCA and FRANKIE. Up front, a
DRIVER and jittery SOLDIER PETEY.

Wally wears the old black funeral coat over the expensive suit. He has not yet worked out that he is allowed to throw the coat away.

Wally holds a bakery box tied with string on his lap.

WALLY
You said this was a pickup.

LUCA
It is.

Through the windshield, TWO CARS pull up. Men get out. Wrong men.

Dark coats. Hard faces. Rival-family posture.

FRANKIE
(with disdain)
Crespi.

PETHEY
This is our block.

LUCA
Apparently zoning changed.

Luca counts **SIX RIVALS**. Does not like the number. He turns to Wally.

LUCA (CONT'D)
We need you.

WALLY
For what?

Frankie offers a pistol butt-first. Wally recoils.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Absolutely not.

FRANKIE
Then pocket gun.

WALLY
I don't know what that means.

Luca grabs Wally's hand, folds two fingers into a shape, and tucks it into Wally's coat pocket.

LUCA
It means you keep that there and
look like you buried people for
less.

WALLY
I have buried people for less.
Sandwiches, usually.

No one has time for that.

LUCA
Listen. They don't know you. That
helps.

Before Wally can object, doors open.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Salvati men spread out with rehearsed menace.

Wally steps out last, hand jammed in pocket, trying to look like death has office hours.

Across from them, the **CRESPI CREW** fans out.

Their leader, **NICKY CRESPI**, 40s, wolfish and amused, clocks Wally immediately.

NICKY CRESPI
Who's Grandpa Mourning Coat?

Luca smiles without warmth.

LUCA
You don't know Alberto Belladonna?

Wally hears this for the first time. Does not react. A miracle.

FRANKIE
Came over from Palermo after a
sanitation problem in Naples.

PETHEY
Three brothers dead and a customs
officer disappeared.

Luca shoots Petey a look: too much.

Nicky studies Wally.

NICKY CRESPI
He doesn't look like Naples.

LUCA
That's because you only notice loud
criminals. Alberto's old school.

Wally says nothing. Just stares.

A stern, flat teacher stare that somehow reads as fatal.

Nicky shifts.

JOJO, one of Nicky's men, leans in.

JOJO
What's in his pocket?

FRANKIE
The part of the conversation you
don't survive.

That lands.

PETHEY
He doesn't like repeating himself.

NICKY CRESPI
Never heard of Belladonna.

LUCA
That's why you're still alive.

A long beat. No one looks away.

Nicky tries one last angle.

NICKY CRESPI
So what, Salvati's importing ghosts
now?

Luca nods toward Wally.

LUCA
Only for special occasions.

Inside his pocket, Wally extends one finger, making the "gun" shape more pointed.

He locks eyes with Nicky.

Then gives the slightest disappointed shake of the head, like a principal deciding expulsion might be merciful.

It unnerves everybody.

Nicky lifts both hands.

NICKY CRESPI
Relax. We were leaving.

FRANKIE

You should've started with that.

The Crespi crew backs off toward their cars.

JOJO

He looked at me like a priest.

NICKY CRESPI

Get in the car.

They peel away.

Silence.

PETHEY

Did you see that? They bought it!

Luca turns to Wally, genuinely impressed.

LUCA

That look you gave him? That was ice.

FRANKIE

Terrifying.

Wally slowly removes his hand from his pocket. Two cramped fingers, nothing more.

WALLY

I was trying not to faint.

Frankie claps him on the shoulder like Wally just made varsity.

FRANKIE

Same thing, sometimes.

Luca nods toward the bakery box in the car.

LUCA

Get back in. The cannoli survived the war.

Wally climbs in and settles the box on his lap.

For the first time, he is not cargo.

He is one of them—or near enough to be dangerous.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - BULLPEN - DAY

A grainy STREET CAMERA STILL on a monitor: two groups facing off on an industrial block. One frame catches Wally in his mourning coat, hand in his pocket, staring down Nicky Crespi.

Perez gestures at the screen.

PEREZ
That's him again. The teacher. Same
block Crespi's been sniffing around
for weeks.

Russo leans closer.

RUSSO
Run it back.

Perez scrubs a few seconds of video. The Crespi crew backs off to their cars.

PEREZ
No shots. No bodies. No sirens.

Russo notes this, not happy about it.

RUSSO
So we've got Crespi on one side,
Salvati on the other and Mister
Retirement Plan standing in the
middle while everybody walks away.

Perez shrugs.

PEREZ
Luck?

Russo eyes the screen a beat longer.

RUSSO
Luck doesn't repeat.

He taps the monitor where Wally is frozen mid-stare.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
Pull stills. Put him on the board.

RUSSO pins Wally's DMV photo, then the Crespi still, then a casino still.

PEREZ
Walter Krause. Retired teacher.
Widower. No priors.
(MORE)

PEREZ (CONT'D)

Shows up at a mob funeral, an Atlantic City sit-down, and a Crespi standoff, and nobody dies.

RUSSO

And he is not one man. Atlantic City calls him Walter. Crespi's people are saying Belladonna. Two names, no record, no arrests. That is not a teacher, that is a legend.

PEREZ

Meaning somebody built him.

Russo steps back, taking in the web.

RUSSO

Then why is he having cannoli with murderers?

He circles Wally's photo.

RUSSO (CONT'D)

I just don't know yet if he's the reason or the coincidence.

Perez looks at the board, then at Russo.

PEREZ

You want him off the street?

Russo studies the pattern one more beat.

RUSSO

I want to know which side of the line he's on before I decide whether to pull him off it.

INT. RESTAURANT PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

Tommy has arranged a test.

Gina, Carmine, Dominic, Tommy, and **VITO BELLAFORTE**, 70s, hardened Sicilian, sit around a table.

TOMMY

Vito knew the real Alberto as a boy.

Wally goes pale.

Vito studies him.

VITO
 (in Italian / subtitled)
 Cousin. It has been too long.

Wally swallows. Reaches for fragments from an adult-education course and whatever survived Godfather osmosis.

WALLY
 (in halting Italian / subtitled)
 Yes. Very long. The... the sea was wide.

Silence. It is not the right sentence. It is not even the right century.

Tommy's grin widens: caught him.

Vito looks at Wally for a long, unhurried moment. Then at Gina. Then at the four inches of tablecloth between his hands.

VITO
 (finally, in English)
 He speaks like his mother. She was from the hills. Nobody could understand her either.

Tommy sits back as if hit by invisible furniture.

VITO (CONT'D)
 (to Wally, warmly, raising his glass)
 Cugino.

Wally raises his hand, not entirely steady.

Gina raises hers.

GINA
 To family. However found.

Dominic follows her lead. Tommy drinks because not drinking would be louder.

Under the table, Tommy is already doing arithmetic.

INT. RESTAURANT - BACK CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Vito intercepts Wally on the way to the men's room. Up close, he is much older and much less kind.

VITO

The real Alberto died six months ago. Fishing accident, they said. He could not swim, so the fishing was optimistic to begin with.

Wally says nothing.

VITO (CONT'D)

Nobody in Sicily wanted this job enough to mention it. Which tells you what the job is.

WALLY

Why didn't you say so in there?

Vito considers him the way a man considers weather he has to walk through.

VITO

Because the widow needs a cousin, and you are the only one who applied.

He straightens Wally's collar. It is not a kind gesture.

VITO (CONT'D)

When they find out, and they will find out, do not look at me.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

The main room is busy with low card games and quieter bravado.

In a small side room, Tommy stands alone, a drink in hand. A folded BLUE TARP leans in the corner, ugly and ordinary.

Tommy stares at the tarp for a long beat.

TOMMY

(to the tarp)

Two weeks. That's all you had to wait.

He takes a sip, grim.

Through the half-open door, he sees Wally in the main room, talking quietly with Dominic and Luca. Capos nod at the professor in ways they used to reserve for him.

Tommy watches as loyalties intangibly shift.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Guidance counselors and widowers.
That's the new royalty.

He sets the glass down harder than he needs to.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
The boy first.
(a beat)
Boy first, then the accident, then
the vote.

He straightens his jacket, leaving the tarp where it is.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
And then you and me have a very
relaxed afternoon.

He exits toward the main room, destination already written on his face.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - NIGHT

Tommy has called a public meeting.

Capos ring the room. Dominic sits near Gina. Carmine stands by the bar.

Tommy paces.

TOMMY
Our Sicilian cousin has some
curious ideas. These notes.
Arbitration. Tucson.

Mild laughter.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Maybe we ask him to explain
himself.

All eyes to Wally.

WALLY
All right. Perhaps a bit of clarity
is needed.

He stands. Hands quivering ever so slightly.

WALLY (CONT'D)
 In every group of men I've ever
 known, the loudest one thinks
 volume is leadership. It isn't.
 It's usually indigestion.

Some capos bristle.

WALLY (CONT'D)
 You are all waiting to see who gets
 to be feared next. However, fear is
 expensive. It requires maintenance.

Tommy's smile fades.

WALLY (CONT'D)
 Respect is cheaper. Also tax-
 deductible, if any of you ever
 learn bookkeeping.

Unexpected laughs.

WALLY (CONT'D)
 I am not asking you to become
 better people. That would be
 unrealistic and frankly insulting
 to everyone's schedule. What I am
 recommending is stability.

The room shifts. Men nod in spite of themselves.

TOMMY
 Our widow just put a retired
 chemistry teacher under the same
 protection as her son. You still
 think this is the same family you
 signed up for?

Tommy does not win. Wally does not exactly win either. But he
 survives.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - COAT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wally reaches for his coat. Tommy is already holding it.

Tommy helps him into it. Genuinely helps. Smooths the
 shoulders.

TOMMY
 You know what I did before this?

WALLY
 I've been afraid to ask.

TOMMY
Meat. Sixteen years. My uncle's
place on Ninth.

He turns Wally around by the shoulders, facing him, and
straightens his collar exactly the way Wally straightens
Dominic's notes.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
You learn something in a meat
house. Everything's the same
underneath. Pig, cow, guy. Same
architecture. Nobody's special on
the inside.

WALLY
That's an unusually bleak takeaway
from a job with an apron.

TOMMY
You keep making them laugh. That's
fine. Laughing's cheap.

He pats Wally's lapel flat. Twice.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
But when it stops being funny, and
it stops, professor, it always
stops, you're going to look around
this room for the one guy who'll
stand next to you.

A beat.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
And I want you to remember that
tonight you had the chance to make
that guy me, and you made a joke
about indigestion instead.

He walks out.

Wally stands alone in a room full of other men's coats.

He is not shaking. That's the frightening part. He's
thinking.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

The meeting we've just seen is over. The main room vibe
features low-profile posturing and card games.

In the back, behind a half-closed door, TOMMY stands with LUCA, FRANKIE, VINCE, 30s, Tommy's own man and the only one in the room who is not nervous, and a thin, nervous SOLDIER named PETEY.

TOMMY

He's got a pattern. Law school, library, late-night tutoring, diner parking lot. We don't have to hunt him. We just have to stop believing in coincidence.

Tommy slaps a stack of route sheets down on a small table.

He spreads a crude map of Dominic's routines - arrows, scribbled times, a diner logo coffee-stained.

Tommy, Luca, Frankie, VINCE and PETEY huddle around the crude map of Dominic's routines.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Wednesday night. Law library, nine o'clock. No straight shot home. We take him through the industrial side. Less witnesses, more geometry.

He taps the route.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Luca on pickup, Petey at the wheel, second car behind.

VINCE

Second car is ours. Salvati boys only. No freelancers, no unknowns. They move when you move, they stop when you stop.

PETEY swallows. FRANKIE looks at LUCA. VINCE smirks.

PETEY

Nine. Library. Got it.

LUCA's jaw tightens.

LUCA

And after?

TOMMY

After, grief muddies detail and Gina has one fewer heir.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - STUDY - NIGHT

Dominic closes a textbook, exhausted. Wally gathers a stack of stray notes.

DOMINIC

If I ace this exam, I get a semester closer to not needing any of this.

WALLY

That's the healthiest motive I've heard in this house.

Dominic glances at the clock.

DOMINIC

Exam's at eight Thursday. I'll be in the library till they throw me out. They're sending Luca to pick me up. Tommy says I need to be "seen" more, whatever that means.

Wally looks up.

WALLY

Tommy requested that?

DOMINIC

Said a Salvati shouldn't be walking alone after dark. Protection and optics.

Wally hears the wrong note in it.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - TERRACE - CONTINUOUS

Gina stands with coffee and a shawl.

WALLY

Dominic mentioned Tommy arranged his ride tomorrow night. Luca. Car. Optics.

GINA

Tommy does not care whether my son studies. He cares whether my son is available.

WALLY

Available for what?

GINA
Reconfiguration.

WALLY
That is an extremely elegant word
for murder.

She meets his eyes.

GINA
Can you stop it?

WALLY
I am seventy-one, and my most
recent criminal skill is picking
and crashing funeral buffets. But I
can read patterns. This has the
shape of a test I've failed once
before.

GINA
Then pass it now.

EXT. UNIVERSITY LAW LIBRARY - NIGHT

A campus building under sodium light. Students drift out in clumps.

Dominic exits with a backpack and casebook, eyes tired but satisfied.

A SALVATI SEDAN idles at the curb. Luca at the wheel. Petey up front, jittery, watching mirrors more than the door.

Dominic spots the car, frowns slightly.

DOMINIC
You're early.

Luca forces casual.

LUCA
Tommy wanted you "seen" leaving the
library. Protection and optics.

Dominic hesitates, then gets in the back.

INT. SALVATI SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Dominic settles in. Petey keeps checking the side mirror, eyes too wide.

DOMINIC
Protection?

LUCA
It makes paperwork easier if you're
in one piece.

Dominic half-laughs, uneasy.

Luca pulls away from the curb.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT - LATER

The SALVATI SEDAN moves off campus into thinner traffic.
Streetlights thin out.

A SECOND CAR appears in the mirror. Close. Too close to be
casual.

INT. SALVATI SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Petey watches the mirror; his throat tightens a bit.

PETEY
We got a tail.

LUCA glances back.

LUCA
Stay on the route.

Petey swallows hard, beginning to worry.

PETEY
This isn't the route Tommy gave me.

DOMINIC
That's our guys back there, right?
Salvati car?

LUCA doesn't answer. His silence is an answer.

Dominic hears that. His fingers tighten on his casebook.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Wally's Buick turns onto the same corridor, following at a
careful distance.

INT. BUICK - CONTINUOUS

A cheap campus map and Dominic's printed schedule sit on the passenger seat.

Wally spots Luca's sedan ahead and the car following behind it.

WALLY

That's too much escort for one law student.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL STREET - CONTINUOUS

Luca turns down a narrower block lined with hollowed-out buildings and shuttered shops.

The car following Luca blacks out its headlights.

Wally sees the geometry and floors the Buick.

WALLY

(To himself)

In for a pound.

He swings the Buick across the lane and HONKS. A wounded, ridiculous horn that destroys the setup.

Luca's sedan stops. The second car brakes hard, forcing it out of position.

Wally parks diagonally, ruining any clean line.

He gets out. Hands empty. Posture small. Completely certain.

He walks to the second car and taps the hood with two fingers.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Boys.

A window cracks. A gun shows in the driver's lap.

WALLY (CONT'D)

If you're planning to shoot someone on a quiet street over an argument you barely understand, I'd like you to consider paperwork.

DRIVER

Who are you?

WALLY

The substitute adult nobody
invited.

He points, calm, toward Dominic's car.

WALLY (CONT'D)

That is a law student in the back
seat. If he dies tonight, nobody
wins. You get grief, panic, twelve
bad versions of the same story, and
a room full of men trying to prove
they're still dangerous.

DRIVER

We got instructions.

The passenger door of the second car opens. A SECOND SHOOTER
gets out, gun low against his thigh, and starts walking
toward Luca's sedan. Toward Dominic.

He is not listening to Wally at all.

Wally sees the whole geometry resolve: he has been talking to
the wrong man.

A beat. Then Wally does the only thing he has ever known how
to do.

WALLY

(full classroom voice,
cracking the street open)

YOUNG MAN.

The second shooter stops. Actually stops. Thirty-eight years
of that voice have stopped better men than him.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Come back here.

And, unbelievably, he does. Two steps. Then a third. His face
is furious about it.

SECOND SHOOTER

Who the hell are you?

WALLY

Somebody's grandfather. Standing in
your headlights.

The second shooter stays where he is, which is all Wally
needed.

WALLY (CONT'D)
I taught for thirty-eight years.
I've heard that from boys who later
regretted sharing a brain with
their friends.

A beat.

WALLY (CONT'D)
You leave now. You tell whoever
sent you the street was wrong, the
timing was wrong, and the cousin
was in the way.

DRIVER
Cousin?

WALLY
Apparently.

Wally gives him that flat, patient, utterly exhausted stare.

The driver looks at the Buick, then at Luca's car. This is
not worth the confusion.

DRIVER
We go.

The car backs off and disappears.

Dominic opens his door, shaken.

DOMINIC
What was that?

WALLY
A canceled field trip.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - BACK HALL - NIGHT

A narrow hallway behind the main room's low card games and
muted bravado.

TOMMY strides in from the front, jacket still on, mood
already sour. LUCA and PETEY wait near a coat rack that has
seen too many winters. Petey looks like he might bolt; Luca
looks like he might forbid it.

TOMMY
Well?

Petey glances at Luca. Luca does not rescue him.

PETHEY
It... didn't happen.

TOMMY
I gathered that from the absence of
sirens. Why?

PETHEY
The street was good. Quiet. No
cameras. Second car was in
position. Then—

He falters. Luca steps in.

LUCA
Then the cousin walked into it.

Tommy stares.

TOMMY
Walked into what?

LUCA
The geometry. Buick sideways in the
lane. Horn like a dying animal. He
blocked the shot.

Tommy absorbs this, furious and fascinated.

TOMMY
So you had Dominic in the front
car, my shooters in the second,
clean line, clean story—

LUCA
Until Walter Krause decided
'absolutely not' was his business.

PETHEY nods, eager and ashamed.

PETHEY
He tapped on our hood, called us
'boys,' and said we were about to
kill a law student over an argument
we barely understood.

TOMMY's jaw tightens.

TOMMY
And you left?

LUCA

You told us no changes, no improvisation. He was a change. So we pulled out.

PETHEY

He said to tell whoever sent us the street was wrong, the timing was wrong, and the cousin was in the way.

That line lands. It's Tommy's own language, turned back on him.

Tommy takes one long breath that does not calm him.

TOMMY

The cousin walked into the street... and my plan vanished.

LUCA

Yes.

TOMMY

Get out.

Luca and Petey go. Tommy is left alone with that sentence and his drink.

EXT. DINER - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ninety minutes west of the Salvati house, in the only county where nobody calls him cousin, the Buick sits alone in a sodium-yellow lot.

Across the street, RUSSO watches from an unmarked sedan.

A sodium-yellow lot. Few cars. Too much silence.

Wally exits the diner carrying a paper bag and wearing the exhausted caution of a man who has recently learned the phrase execution-style may no longer be theoretical. He stops.

He stops in the doorway light and glances into the bag. Once. Just enough.

Across the street, Russo sees it.

His BUICK sits alone under a flickering street light.

WALLY
(seeing his Buick, under
his breath)
Speak like you might have to die.
And check the car anyway.

Classic movie geometry.

He looks around.

No one is visible. An uneasy feeling.

A beat.

He approaches his Buick as if nearing a venomous appliance.

He circles it once.

Peers through the windows.

Checks the back seat.

Nothing.

He crouches and looks underneath.

Only rust, an oil stain, and old-man knees objecting to the weather.

He stands and cautiously opens the hood.

Stares into an engine bay he does not understand.

WALLY (CONT'D)
This proves nothing. No useful
empirical data.

He pokes at a hose with a napkin taken from the diner.

Still nothing.

Across the lot, **DONNA**, mid-40's, the diner waitress, steps outside to dump trash and catches him in full paranoid inspection mode.

DONNA
Walter?

Wally slams the hood in fright.

WALLY
God!

DONNA
You checking for bombs?

Wally tries dignity. It fails immediately.

WALLY
Well, that's what one does
nowadays.

Donna leans by the doorway.

DONNA
You know who checks for bombs?

WALLY
People who don't want to explode?

DONNA
Mobsters.

Wally freezes for half a beat.

DONNA (CONT'D)
And men who watch too many movies.

Wally exhales.

WALLY
That too.

Donna eyes the Buick.

DONNA
If anyone wanted to kill you,
Walter, they wouldn't waste
explosives on that car. It looks
pre-defeated.

Wally considers this.

WALLY
That is strangely reassuring.

He closes the hood fully, gets in, then gets back out to
inspect under the car one more time.

Donna watches, deadpan.

DONNA
Very normal behavior.

Wally stands, brushes off his pants, and gets in for real.

He turns the key.

The Buick coughs.

Backfires once. **KABOOM!**

Wally YELPS and DUCKS below the steering wheel.

Donna LAUGHS so hard she has to grab the dumpster.

The engine settles into a shabby, harmless rumble.

Wally slowly RISES BACK INTO VIEW, humiliated.

Donna salutes him with the trash lid.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Drive safe, Scarface.

Across the street, Russo watches him pull away with wounded dignity.

RUSSO
(to himself)
What the hell are you?

CUT TO:

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

A small, tired room. Table. Two chairs. A camera in the corner that has seen better suspects. WALLY sits on one side, coat off, hands folded with substitute-teacher dignity. A paper cup of water sweats next to him.

Russo enters, closing the door behind him.

WALLY
Am I under arrest?

RUSSO
Depends who you ask.

He drops a folder on the table: stills from the Crespi standoff, the Atlantic City suite lobby, the industrial street attempt. Wally in all of them.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
Crespi on one side, Salvati on the other. You in the middle. No bodies, no sirens, no ambulances.

He taps the industrial-street still: Wally's Buick sideways, second car braking, geometry ruined.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
Tonight, a law student almost
becomes an accident. Somebody's
plan gets canceled. You walk into
the street, the shooters go home.
Help me out, Mr. Krause. What do we
call that?

WALLY
Bad timing. Good reflexes. A Buick
with poor brakes.

Russo doesn't smile.

RUSSO
I can hold you on a material
witness claim, obstruction of
justice, or even pure bureaucratic
paranoia.
(a beat)
Or I can admit I dragged you in
here because I keep seeing your
face in rooms where my guys come
back with fewer bodies.

Wally considers that, uneasy but not offended.

WALLY
You think I'm dangerous?

RUSSO
I think you're standing in the
middle of men who get paid to
convert irritation into toe tags.

He sits opposite Wally.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
Right now, the safest place for you
might be on my side of the glass.

Wally looks at the cheap walls, the camera, the fluorescent
hum.

WALLY
With respect, Agent Russo, I've
spent my career in rooms slightly
more depressing than this. The
danger isn't here.

RUSSO
No, it's wherever you go next that
concerns me.

Wally exhales.

WALLY

Those men do not see me as a threat. They see me as furniture that occasionally talks. If you arrest me, you change that story.

RUSSO

How so?

WALLY

You put a badge-shaped spotlight on a man who has been surviving by being underestimated.

That lands.

WALLY (CONT'D)

You'll make me look like an informant. Which I am not. And when the FBI lets me go, I go back to a house where people with better suits and worse judgment are deciding who counts as family.

Russo studies him.

RUSSO

You could walk away. Different town. Quiet job. Maybe a hobby, but with no limousines or law students in your back seat.

WALLY

I tried quiet. It came with cheap soup, forgotten passwords, and funeral buffets.

A beat.

WALLY (CONT'D)

There is a boy over there who thinks law can be used for something other than extortion.

RUSSO

Go on.

WALLY

Then there's a woman who has money
and no peace.

RUSSO

Peace comes with a price.

WALLY

Agreed. But when I sit in those
rooms, the shouting drops. I don't
know why. But if I run, all that
shouting comes back without anyone
in the middle to remind them about
paperwork.

Russo hears it. It sounds alarmingly like ethics.

RUSSO

You understand that what you just
said makes you a very bad candidate
for witness protection.

WALLY

I'm a worse candidate for
isolation.

Russo leans back.

RUSSO

You think you're not in danger?

WALLY

I think I'm in exactly the amount
of danger that comes with being
useful. Right now, they need me
more than they want to shoot me.
You arrest me, you take that
usefulness away and leave me with
the danger.

That logic, sadly, checks out.

Russo taps the folder once more, then closes it.

RUSSO

You're free to go, Mr. Krause.

WALLY

Just like that?

RUSSO

Just like that. But I didn't pull
you off the street because you're
clean.

(MORE)

RUSSO (CONT'D)
I pulled you in because I don't
know which side of the line you're
on.

He stands.

RUSSO (CONT'D)
I'm still watching. Try not to make
my job harder by dying.

WALLY rises too, awkward dignity intact.

WALLY
I've been trying not to die for
some time. Ill add your request to
the list.

Russo opens the door. For a moment, he hesitates.

RUSSO
If you ever decide you want out,
really out, you come find me before
you find a bus ticket.

WALLY
If I decide I want out, I'll need a
map. But I appreciate the offer.

Wally exits. Russo watches him go, then looks back at the
stills on the table. Whatever Wally is, he's still a
question.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET / SALVATI TERRITORY - NIGHT

Wally's Buick returns to familiar streets, carrying him back
into the orbit of the Salvati house and its dangers.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Wally finally calls Danny. Danny answers.

DANNY (V.O.)
Dad?

Wally nearly hangs up from the shock.

WALLY
Hi.

DANNY (V.O.)
Everything okay?

WALLY
Yes. No. Fine enough.

DANNY (V.O.)
You sound weird.

WALLY
I've had a complicated week.

DANNY (V.O.)
You want to talk?

Wally looks at the pistol on the dresser, at the suit hanging from the wardrobe, at the life he could never explain.

WALLY
No. I just wanted to hear about the weather.

Danny laughs softly.

DANNY (V.O.)
Colorado still has weather. She's good. Rachel's good.

A beat.

DANNY (V.O.)
I love you, Dad.

Wally closes his eyes.

WALLY
I love you too.

He is wrecked by how easy that should have been.

INT. LAW SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Dominic exits an exam classroom, relieved. Wally waits with a contraband muffin.

DOMINIC
I think I crushed it.

WALLY
Then this is a victory muffin.

Dominic doesn't take it.

DOMINIC
You're not my cousin, are you?

Wally cannot dodge it.

WALLY
No.

A long silence.

WALLY (CONT'D)
I meant to tell the truth the first day. Then your mother asked for help. Then you asked me about contracts.

DOMINIC
Who are you?

WALLY
A lonely, worn-out man who was finally useful for once.

Dominic absorbs that.

DOMINIC
My father never helped me study for anything.

He walks away, hurt more than angry.

The muffin remains in Wally's hand like evidence.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - STUDY - NIGHT

Dominic, Wally, Gina, Carmine, LUCA, FRANKIE, and PETEY gather. The room feels smaller than usual; this is a tribunal, not a business meeting.

Gina closes the door herself.

GINA
Dominic, tell me what happened.

Dominic looks shaken but alive. He glances once at Wally, then back to his mother.

DOMINIC
Luca picked me up from the library. Route changed. Street felt wrong. There was a car behind us with its lights doing... movie things.

Gina's eyes cut to Luca at "movie things." He stays still.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

And then Cous—

(correcting himself)

Walter blocked them. Horn. His Buick, parked sideways. Got out, talked to the other car like they were dangerous students, and they left.

He says "Walter" cleanly. The name matters.

Carmine turns to Wally.

CARMINE

Did you see weapons?

WALLY

I saw one gun. One impulse. Several bad careers waiting to happen.

He folds his hands, teacher-serious.

WALLY (CONT'D)

I have watched boys turn lab accidents into lifelong scars because no one told them to put the chemicals down. Tonight looked just like that, but with more Italian leather.

Gina steps closer.

GINA

You saved my son.

Wally shakes his head slightly.

WALLY

I got in the way of the easiest version of someone else's mistake. That's all.

Dominic contradicts him, quietly but firmly.

DOMINIC

No. You saved my life.

That truth hangs in the room.

Carmine, translating into family language:

CARMINE

The widow placed you under protection once because you were useful. From this moment, any hand raised against you in this family is raised against Dominic and Gina both.

Luca exhales, shoulders slackening. Frankie nods. Petey swallows.

Gina takes it further.

GINA

You are no longer tolerated as a fraud who happens to stabilize idiots. You are trusted. Do you understand the difference.

Wally looks genuinely overwhelmed.

WALLY

That sounds like tenure.

Dominic half-smiles, despite himself.

DOMINIC

Welcome to the faculty, professor.

Gina softens just a fraction.

GINA

Tommy moved to kill my son. You moved quick enough to intervene. Anything that happens next, you are not alone in it.

She extends her hand. It's not a coronation, but it is an oath.

Wally takes it.

WALLY

I am still, technically, a man who walked into the wrong funeral for food.

GINA

Yes. And now you walk into the right room for family.

Carmine nods once. Luca and Frankie absorb the new rule: Wally is now family.

Gina turns to Luca and Petey.

GINA (CONT'D)
If anyone ever gives you half a
plan involving my son and an empty
street again, you say no. Do you
understand?

LUCA
Yes, Mrs. Salvati.

PETHEY
Yes.

GINA
Good. Go home. All of you.

They begin to disperse. Dominic lingers, giving Wally a look
that says more than thanks.

Gina watches Wally as the room empties.

GINA (CONT'D)
You complicated my life tonight.

WALLY
I thought I was preventing
complications.

GINA
In this house, those are the same
thing.

She exits. Carmine follows. Wally stands alone a moment,
feeling the weight of "family" settle on his shoulders.

CUT TO:

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

The guest room is still, lit only by the street glow outside.
Somewhere in the house, pipes sigh. A refrigerator hums.

Wally lies on top of the covers in his shirt and trousers,
one shoe off, one shoe still on, as if he meant to rest for a
moment and accidentally slept through a decade.

A soft THUMP. He opens his eyes.

MARILYN sits at the edge of the bed. Not the hollowed-out
woman from hospital beds and late-stage chemo.

The version his memory loves most: late 60s, hair set the way she liked it when she expected company, mouth already poised somewhere between a smile and a scolding.

She is not quite solid. Light seems to remember her before the furniture does. But she is real enough for him.

MARILYN

You're sleeping in your shoes.

Wally blinks at her. His hand goes automatically to his glasses, finds them already on.

WALLY

I... must have passed out.

MARILYN

You lay down "for a minute." You've been doing that since Carter.

He almost laughs. It comes out shaky. He pushes himself up on his elbows, afraid that any sudden movement might scatter her.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Have you eaten?

WALLY

They feed me. Constantly. In courses.

MARILYN

Of course they do. Italians and widows. The only people who really understand food.

She reaches out as if straightening a tie that isn't there.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

You look tired.

WALLY

I am... involved in organized crime.

MARILYN

Oh, good. Finally, a new hobby.

He winces, slightly amused.

WALLY

It wasn't on the retirement brochure.

A quiet beat. He drinks her in. Every line of her face is a geography he has been walking in his head for years.

WALLY (CONT'D)

I miss you.

MARILYN

I know.

She says it not like comfort, but like fact. Like gravity.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

But you're not the only one.

He frowns, confused.

WALLY

What?

MARILYN

You act like you cornered the market on missing. Like no one else in the world could possibly be as lonely as you in your little house, sadly slurping up your cheap soup.

She tilts her head.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Wally, I miss you.

That lands. Deep. He swallows.

WALLY

You...?

MARILYN

What did you think? That I climbed some golden escalator and forgot where the good scissors were?

He looks away, because looking at her is dangerous.

WALLY

I just... I didn't want to be selfish. Missing you felt like stealing time from whatever happens next.

MARILYN

You always think love is a finite resource. Like your classroom lab supplies.

She shifts, turning more fully toward him.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
I miss you when you sit in that
kitchen and eat standing up because
you don't want to pull out both
chairs.

He flinches; she's seen.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
I miss the sound you make when you
read the obituaries and pretend
you're not checking how old they
were.

He lowers his eyes.

WALLY
It's habit. Occupational curiosity.

MARILYN
It's you trying to measure how much
time you stole by still being here.
You're not stealing anything,
Walter.

He rubs his face.

WALLY
It's dangerous here.

She leans closer.

MARILYN
You think staying home is safe
because it's quiet. But you weren't
safe there, Wally. You were
drowning in place.

He thinks of the soup, the single plate, the empty half of
the bed.

WALLY
I didn't want to bother anyone.

MARILYN
You were bothering me.

He looks up, startled.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
Do you have any idea how loud your
loneliness is from the other side?
(MORE)

MARILYN (CONT'D)

It clangs. It blares like a klaxon horn. It sits at the edge of the bed and refuses to take off its shoes.

She taps the mattress. He looks down at his one still-on shoe.

WALLY

I don't know how to do this without you.

MARILYN

You already are.

She says it gently, not as a rebuke but as a diagnosis.

He gives a small, helpless smile.

WALLY

They think I'm from Palermo.

MARILYN

Darling, you're from Allentown. It's much worse.

She reaches up, brushes an imaginary speck from his shoulder.

WALLY

What if I fail them?

MARILYN

You will. Sometimes. Everyone does.

She takes his hand. It feels like memory and skin at once.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

But listen to me. Very carefully. You are allowed to keep living.

He tries to look away. She holds his gaze.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

You are allowed to laugh with a widow who isn't me.

That cuts through him. He shakes his head.

WALLY

I'm not--

MARILYN

I didn't say marry. I said laugh.

She smiles, small and sad.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
You are allowed to care whether a
law student gets home alive. You
are allowed to argue with a man
like Tommy and then come up here
and complain about the suit.

He laughs despite himself, mildly blended with tears.

WALLY
I hate the suit.

MARILYN
No, you hate that it works.

She squeezes his hand.

WALLY
I don't know how to be alive
without feeling like I'm betraying
you.

She leans in, forehead nearly touching his.

MARILYN
You betray me by stopping. Not by
going.

He closes his eyes. A tear escapes. She watches it, then
lifts her hand and catches it with a thumb, like she used to.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
I am not asking you to be happy. I
am asking you to be present.

A long, hushed moment.

WALLY
And when I'm done?

She smiles.

MARILYN
Then you come find me. I will be
the one rearranging the chairs.

That undoes him. He laughs and sobs at the same time, a sound
he didn't know he could make.

He reaches out. His hand meets her shoulder. Warm. Or close
enough.

WALLY
Don't go yet.

MARILYN
I'm not going far.

The room seems to flicker slightly, like bad reception. She stands, smoothing the bedspread like she's resetting a room.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
Promise me one thing.

WALLY
Anything.

MARILYN
When Danny opens the door, don't make a joke first.

He lets out a helpless, broken chuckle.

WALLY
I'll try.

She bends, kisses his forehead.

MARILYN
You were the safest place I ever lived. Now go be that for someone else.

The room doesn't explode in light. There is no thunder, no angelic choir. She just isn't there anymore.

Wally sits alone on the bed, hand still lifted, his heartbeat still pounding.

He wipes his face. Takes a breath that sounds like a man trying on lungs for the first time.

WALLY
All right.

It is not courage exactly. But it is motion.

He swings his feet to the floor, takes off the last shoe, and for the first time in a long time, stands up like a man who might still have somewhere to go.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Capos murmur in clusters. Wally moves through, catching nods he never used to get.

At the back, Tommy watches him. Every nod is another theft of Tommy's authority.

Tommy drains his glass and heads toward the back room.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - TOMMY'S CORNER - LATER THAT NIGHT

Tommy sits with a drink. Petey stands before him, nervous.

PETEY
We couldn't do it.

TOMMY
Repeat that sentence very
carefully.

PETEY
The cousin blocked the street.
Horn. Buick. Talked the other car
out of it.

Tommy stares.

TOMMY
You let a worn-out, retired
schoolteacher talk you out of
murder.

PETEY
He made it sound stupid.

That lands harder than defiance would.

Tommy stands.

TOMMY
Gina will know. Carmine will know.
And Dominic will think the fraud is
his guardian angel.

A dangerous beat.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Fine. Then we take the fraud first.

INT. SALVATI SOCIAL CLUB - MAIN ROOM - LATER

Tommy slams a binder onto the table.

TOMMY
 Proof. Walter Krause. Allentown.
 Public school pensioner. Funeral
 parasite.

Murmurs explode. Guns shift under jackets. Dominic looks
 shattered. Gina remains still.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
 He conned this family.

WALLY
 That part is fair.

TOMMY
 And now he dies for it.

A beat. Nobody moves until Gina does.

GINA
 Take him. He lives or dies after I
 hear him, not before.

Even Wally is stunned.

CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Concrete floor. Sodium lights. End-of-the-road acoustics.

Wally kneels between two gunmen. Strangely calm.

He is not thinking about the gunmen. He is thinking about a
 front door in Colorado he has driven past in his head nine
 hundred times and never once walked up to.

WALLY
 (to nobody)
 Well, that's a stupid thing to have
 saved for last.

The nearer GUNMAN shifts his weight.

WALLY (CONT'D)
 Can I ask one thing?

GUNMAN
 What?

WALLY
 Where's the blue tarp?

GUNMAN
Blue tarp?

WALLY
I assumed there'd be a system.
Aren't these things typically done
on a blue tarp?

This all feels surprisingly casual.

MARILYN sits on a crate nearby, impossible and tender.

MARILYN
Oh, Wally.

WALLY
Really?

MARILYN
You finally did something dumb.

WALLY
I finally did something.

The gunmen raise their weapons.

WALLY (CONT'D)
One more. Then I'll stop, I
promise, I know I talk.

The GUNMAN waits. That is a mistake and both of them know it.

WALLY (CONT'D)
You've been in the room. Every
time. So you know Mr. Marcello's
version, and you know mine, and you
know the two of them can't both be
true.

GUNMAN
I know what I was told.

WALLY
You were told. Right. Who told the
other guy?

The gunman's eyes flick, involuntarily, to the SECOND GUNMAN.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Different person, wasn't it.

Silence.

WALLY (CONT'D)

That's the part I'd want to know.
Not whether I'm from Sicily.
Whether the two of you were given
the same sentence, by the same man,
in the same room, at the same time.
Because if you weren't, one of you
is the shooter and one of you is
the witness, and only one of those
two goes home.

The second gunman looks at the first gunman.

That look is the whole scene.

WALLY (CONT'D)

(gently, the way he'd say
it to a sophomore)

Write it down. Both of you.
Separately. What you were told, who
told you, what time. It takes four
minutes and it will save your
lives, and I say that as a man
currently on his knees.

GUNMAN

You're out of your mind.

WALLY

I'm out of options. Those aren't
the same, though I grant you they
rhyme.

Neither gunman has lowered his weapon.

Neither one has fired, either.

And into that four-second gap, the gap Wally made, the
warehouse doors BURST OPEN.

Gina enters with Dominic, Carmine, Luca, Frankie, Vito, and
several capos.

GINA

Put those down. Unless the plan is
to start a civil war in front of
imported olive oil.

Weapons lower halfway. Tommy storms in behind them.

TOMMY

He's a fake.

GINA

Yes.

That freezes the room.

GINA (CONT'D)

He is not my husband's cousin. He is not from Sicily. He is not blood.

She steps beside Wally.

GINA (CONT'D)

He is, however, the only man in this orbit who helped my son without charging interest.

DOMINIC

He also kept me alive. And half of you still have routes because he stopped you from behaving like toddlers with handguns.

CARMINE

The widow places him under family protection.

TOMMY

You can't protect an impostor.

GINA

Watch me.

A beat.

GINA (CONT'D)

My husband built this family on fear. I am not burying another decent man to preserve the habit.

One by one, the capos stay where they are.

That is the vote.

Tommy looks around and realizes the arithmetic is over.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

TOMMY sits cornered but breathing. GINA presides at the head of the table. CARMINE has a legal pad open. DOMINIC watches from Gina's right, alive enough to make this whole room different.

WALLY sits beside Gina, somewhat bewildered about still being alive and included.

No one speaks at first. The quiet is awkward, but procedural. Deliberate. It's worse than shouting.

GINA
Arizona.

Tommy blinks once. Then leans back, almost relieved.

TOMMY
Arizona.

A beat. He adjusts his cuffs, regaining some swagger.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Phoenix operation.

Carmine does not help him.

CARMINE
It needs supervision.

Tommy nods, taking this as recovery.

TOMMY
So that's it.
(to the room)
You want me out there rebuilding, I
rebuild. Fine. Sun, heat, idiots,
new books. I can work with that.

Gina studies him with cool pity.

GINA
You misunderstand me.

Tommy's smile holds a second too long.

GINA (CONT'D)
This is not an expansion of your
authority.

Now the room stills further.

GINA (CONT'D)
This is distance.

Tommy's face tightens.

TOMMY
Distance from what.

GINA
From my son.

That lands.

GINA (CONT'D)
From this house. From this table.
From the illusion that you get to
fail upward because you confuse
aggression with leadership.

Tommy looks around for support. Finds none.

TOMMY
I held this family together.

DOMINIC
You tried to have me killed.

Tommy turns to him.

TOMMY
I tried to preserve continuity.

WALLY
That is an unusually ugly synonym.

Tommy shoots him a look.

TOMMY
You don't get to talk to me like
you belong here.

WALLY
No. But apparently I do get a vote.

Carmine almost lets himself smile. Almost.

GINA
You wanted to be king, Tommy.

She leans forward.

GINA (CONT'D)
Instead, you will be a caretaker.
In a desert. Far from my son, far
from my business, and far from any
room where loyalty can still be
mistaken for fear.

Tommy laughs once. Short, hard.

TOMMY
This is punishment.

WALLY

Yes.

All eyes turn to Wally.

WALLY (CONT'D)

Dry climate. Long memories. Weak
sauces.

CARMINE

Phoenix is revenue without
inheritance. Work without audience.
That is the offer.

TOMMY

Offer?

DOMINIC

Take it as mercy.

Tommy looks at Dominic, then Gina.

TOMMY

And if I don't?

Before Gina can answer, Carmine reaches down beside his
chair, lifts a folded BLUE TARP, and tosses it onto the open
floor.

It lands with a flat, ugly SNAP.

Nobody in the room reacts like this is surprising. That is
the surprising part.

Tommy looks at the tarp. Then at Carmine.

CARMINE

Then the room discusses less
administrative options.

A long beat.

Wally stares at the tarp, genuinely offended.

WALLY

There it is.

All eyes turn to him.

WALLY (CONT'D)

I knew it. Every time with the blue
tarp.

Even now, Dominic nearly smiles. Gina does not.

GINA
Take the offer, Tommy.

Tommy keeps looking at the tarp.

TOMMY
Jesus Christ.

CARMINE
That would be the merciful version.

Nobody moves. Nobody needs to.

That answer is enough.

Tommy reads the faces. Luca. Frankie. Carmine. Dominic. Wally.

The arithmetic is over.

TOMMY
So that's my reward.

GINA
No.

A beat.

GINA (CONT'D)
It is the amount of grace available
to you.

Tommy absorbs that like a slap he can't return.

Carmine closes the legal pad.

CARMINE
Car's at six. You're on the eleven-
forty out of Philadelphia tomorrow.

Tommy looks at Gina one last time, still hoping for a private amendment, some signal that this is temporary.

There is none.

TOMMY
Phoenix is exile.

GINA
Phoenix is what happens when this
family cannot trust you enough to
keep you close and does not yet
wish to bury you.

Tommy stands slowly.

TOMMY
You send me out there, they'll say
I got promoted.

GINA
For maybe a week.

Tommy's jaw flexes.

GINA (CONT'D)
After that they'll understand.

He looks to Wally.

TOMMY
You were never supposed to matter
this much.

WALLY
Neither were you.

That one gets through.

Tommy nods once. Bitter. Respectful. Murderous. Tired.

TOMMY
Enjoy the table, professor.

WALLY
I intend to use a coaster.

Tommy almost smiles despite himself. Almost.

He turns and walks to the door.

At the threshold:

TOMMY
(to Gina)
You honest-to-God trust him that
much?

GINA
More than I trust anyone who needed
my son dead to feel tall.

Tommy takes that, opens the door, and exits.

The door closes.

No triumph. Just the sound of a problem being moved instead
of solved.

CARMINE
Phoenix is far.

Wally watches the door, then the tarp lying folded by Carmine's chair.

WALLY
Not far enough to become a fairy tale.

Gina looks at him.

GINA
No.

She does not elaborate. Wally waits for her to. She doesn't.

EXT. PHOENIX SKY HARBOR AIRPORT - LATE AFTERNOON

Heat shimmers off the tarmac. Planes taxi under a bleached-out desert sky. Inside the terminal, TOMMY MARCELLO steps off the jet bridge, carrying one small carry-on and oozing with the arrogance of a man who refuses to believe he's been demoted.

He strides through the concourse with the practiced swagger of someone who expects eyes to follow him. Almost nobody does.

At the end of the security corridor, two **LOCAL ASSOCIATES** wait: **RAY**, 40s, sunburned charm over a coiled temper, and **MIGUEL**, 30s, soft-spoken with watchful eyes.

RAY spots Tommy first and lifts a hand.

RAY
Mr. Marcello?

Tommy clocks them, adjusts his cuffs as if this were a red carpet instead of a relocation.

TOMMY
That depends. Who's asking?

Miguel steps forward a half beat, showing courtesy but not deferential.

MIGUEL
Phoenix crew. We've been briefed.

Tommy almost relaxes.

TOMMY
So the desert still takes orders.

Ray grins.

RAY
The desert takes what it's given.
Today that's you.

Tommy's smile holds, brittle.

TOMMY
You boys know I was running half
the room back east?

Miguel nods, polite.

MIGUEL
We heard things like "supervision"
and "transition." Sounds important.

Tommy absorbs the phrasing; it's exactly what he wants to hear.

TOMMY
Yeah. That's about right.

They start walking toward the curbside.

RAY
Car's out front. House is ready.

TOMMY
House?

Ray leans in just enough to sell it.

RAY
Big place. Edge of town. Built for
a man who likes space... And a bit
of privacy.

Tommy's ego takes the bait. Some part of him decides this might be a win after all.

EXT. AIRPORT PICKUP ZONE - CONTINUOUS

A black SUV idles at the curb, windows tinted against the sun. Ray opens the rear door for Tommy with discreet ceremony.

MIGUEL
We'll get you settled before we
talk shop. Gina wanted—

He cuts himself off, small but noticeable. Tommy hears the name anyway.

TOMMY
Gina wanted what?

Ray slides in beside him.

RAY
You comfortable. That's what we got
told.

Tommy smirks, half-pleased, half suspicious.

TOMMY
She ever say that without a
trapdoor?

The SUV pulls out into traffic.

INT. SUV - MOVING - LATE AFTERNOON

Phoenix rolls by: cinderblock strip malls, palm trees, distant mountains, the particular emptiness only desert suburbs have after rush hour.

Tommy watches it all with an amalgam of contempt and appraisal.

TOMMY
This what passes for empire out
here?

Miguel drives, eyes on the road.

MIGUEL
Empire's different in the heat.
People get tired faster.

Ray nods toward the horizon.

RAY
Out there, no neighbors. No noise
complaints. You yell, only the
coyotes hear you.

Tommy smirks.

TOMMY
I don't yell. I direct.

Ray's smile has just a trace of irony.

RAY
Sure.

A beat.

TOMMY
Crew size? Routes?

MIGUEL
We'll walk you through it. Local
suppliers, distribution, options.
Nothing moves without your say.

TOMMY
Good. I'm not here to babysit a
cactus.

Ray glances over, takes his measure.

RAY
You're here because the family
decided you're the right man for
this landscape.

MIGUEL
You're here to keep numbers clean
and yourself invisible.

Tommy relaxes another notch. The words sound like promotion.
He lets them.

EXT. DESERT EDGE SUBDIVISION - DUSK

The SUV turns off the main road and into a quiet development where houses sit far apart, low and wide, stone and sun-bleached stucco trying to look expensive underneath the fading daylight.

They pass a few ordinary homes before reaching one set back farther than the rest: an expansive, contemporary house with a long driveway and minimal landscaping. The desert presses close behind it, a blank, waiting expanse.

Ray gestures toward it.

RAY
Here we are. Your new address.

Tommy studies the place, trying not to look impressed.

TOMMY
Looks like money trying not to
admit it.

Miguel parks in front of a three-car garage. The house is quiet. Too quiet.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Gina signed off on this?

Ray unbuckles.

RAY
Every inch.

Tommy lets that sink in. Being sent here doesn't feel like punishment. Not yet.

He gets out, stretches, squints up at the sky.

TOMMY
Could do worse.

Miguel joins him, keys in hand.

MIGUEL
We'll show you the inside. Layout's
clean. Good sightlines. You'll like
the view.

Tommy adjusts his jacket and walks toward the garage door with them.

For the first time all day, he looks almost content.

INT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The garage door rolls up with a mechanical groan, revealing a deep, empty space: bare concrete, white walls, no shelves, no tools. Just a square of raw room waiting to be used.

The SUV comes to a stop a few yards from the interior door. Miguel hits the door remote; the garage door begins to close behind them, letting in the last strip of daylight.

The scene darkens as the door lowers. By the time it seals shut, the only light is from the SUV's twin headlights.

In the beams, everything is silhouette and shine.

Ray turns in his seat.

RAY

Take a look, Tommy. Get a feel for it.

Tommy opens the door and steps out, one foot, then the other.

His shoe hits something that doesn't sound like concrete.

A subtle plastic crinkle.

He looks down.

The headlights cast enough light to reveal the unmistakable: he's standing on a large, spread-out blue tarp covering most of the garage floor.

Tommy's bravado flickers. Just a flash.

TOMMY

What's this?

Miguel kills the engine. The headlights stay on, but suddenly the silence feels thick.

Ray exits the passenger side. He stands a few feet away from Tommy, staying in the half-dark, his face dissected between light and shadow.

Ray glances at Tommy's shoes, then up at his eyes.

RAY

Preparation.

Tommy's voice tightens.

TOMMY

For what?

Miguel gets out as well, closing his door gently. He's a darker silhouette now, moving around the rear of the SUV, no hurry, no wasted motion.

Miguel's hand rests at his waistband. Not yet visible. Enough.

MIGUEL

For distance.

Tommy hears the word, remembers Gina's tone when she used it.

TOMMY

I thought this was... supervision.
The Phoenix operation. New
territory.

Ray takes a few slow steps closer, not invading Tommy's personal space, but narrowing the circle.

RAY
Phoenix is what happens when the
family can't trust you being close.

Tommy's breath shortens.

TOMMY
Gina said exile.

Ray shrugs, minor and chilling.

RAY
She said Arizona.

There's a quiet beat. Tommy finally, fully understands.

His shoulders square, but this time it's not swagger; it's reflex. Old habit against fear.

TOMMY
You two know who I am?

Miguel answers, calm.

MIGUEL
We know enough. You tried to kill
Dominic Salvati.

TOMMY
I tried to keep continuity.

Ray's expression hardens.

RAY
You tried to put a law student in
the ground and made his mother
watch you plan it.

Tommy's eyes flick down at his own feet, the plastic crinkling under his weight.

TOMMY
Gina doesn't do it like this. She's
not Angelo.

Ray's face remains stoic, emotionless.

RAY
Angelo built the habit.

Miguel steps just close enough that Tommy can feel him at his back, a presence in the dark.

MIGUEL
She chooses it when the habit
applies.

Tommy swallows. The desert outside presses against the walls,
vast and indifferent.

TOMMY
She sent you?

Miguel's voice is almost gentle.

MIGUEL
She sent a decision, Tommy.

Tommy lets out a short, irony-filled laugh.

TOMMY
The professor did this.

Ray's answer is quiet and precise.

RAY
The professor saved her son. That
changed the equation.

Tommy finally turns half toward Miguel, half toward Ray,
trying to keep both in view, failing.

TOMMY
So this is it. After everything I
did for that table—

His protest collapses into something smaller.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
You ever run a family?

Miguel's tone stays level.

MIGUEL
We're soldiers, Tommy. We run the
orders we're given.

Ray's eyes soften for just a heartbeat.

RAY
She thought about it for a long
time. That's more than you gave the
kid.

Tommy flashes a hollow grin.

TOMMY

Guess she decided to export.

Miguel lifts the gun. In the beam of the headlights, the metal catches just enough light to make it real.

Tommy's bravado dies. What remains is something human: a man standing on plastic, in a garage he will never live in, in a state whose name he'll never remember on a headstone.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

You tell her anything?

Miguel cocks the weapon. The sound is intimate and final.

MIGUEL

She already knows.

Ray glances once at Tommy's profile, at the jaw that's clenched, the pride that refuses to beg, then steps back, giving Miguel a clean line.

RAY

Gina sends her regards.

TOMMY

Bullshit! She sends a decision.

There's a difference. You'll learn.

RAY

We already did.

The gunshot is a brutal punctuation.

The headlights outline a shape that doesn't move. The tarp crackles once, then goes still.

Miguel lowers the gun. No emotion. No triumph. Just completion.

He reaches over and kills the headlights.

Darkness. The desert on the other side of the wall, quiet and uninterested.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALVATI ESTATE - MORNING - SOME DAYS LATER

FBI vehicles roll up. The house looks quieter than usual, like a storm has already passed.

INT. SALVATI ESTATE - SITTING ROOM - MORNING

RUSSO

A month ago I had your license
pinned on my board. Today I'm
sitting in your boss's living room
trying to decide what kind of
problem you are.

Russo glances at the file in his lap. It's thinner than it
should be for what he's seen.

RUSSO (CONT'D)

There's a world where I drag you
downtown, put your name on every
form I can find, and spend the rest
of the month explaining you to men
who don't believe in accidents.

Wally listens, hands folded.

RUSSO (CONT'D)

There's another world where I write
"witness" instead of "suspect" and
let you keep grading people from a
distance.

WALLY

You don't seem like a man who loves
fantasy.

RUSSO

No. I like paperwork.

He closes the file. That, more than anything, makes it seem
like some type of verdict.

RUSSO (CONT'D)

You kept a war from starting in my
district. That complicates my urge
to be offended.

WALLY

Complications are underrated.

A beat.

RUSSO

You going to stay with them?

WALLY

Do you know why I was there? At the
wake?

Russo waits.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Coffee spilled on the newspaper.
Forty-one Chestnut or seventy-one.
I picked wrong.

RUSSO
You're telling me a federal
organized crime file turns on a
numeral.

WALLY
I'm telling you I've been graded my
whole life on showing my work.
That's the work.

Wally looks around the room at the sheer mass of the
lacquered wood, the specter of Angelo, and the faint sound of
men arguing down the hall.

Then he thinks of a kitchen in Pennsylvania and a front door
in Colorado.

WALLY (CONT'D)
No. I think I've supervised enough
school cafeterias.

RUSSO
And if they call?

WALLY
Then I'll answer the phone. I'm
just not obligated to stay for
dessert.

Russo nods once. It's not approval. It's comprehension.

RUSSO
Go see your son, Mr. Krause.

Wally rises.

WALLY
I decided that on my knees in a
warehouse, Agent Russo. But thank
you for the encouragement.

He moves toward the door, then pauses.

WALLY (CONT'D)
For what it's worth, Agent Russo,
you looked like you wanted to help
more than you were allowed.

Russo absorbs that.

RUSSO
For what it's worth, Mr. Krause, I
think you're the strangest thing
that's happened to this file.

Wally almost smiles.

WALLY
That's a competitive category.

He exits.

Russo sits a moment longer, staring at the closed door, then
writes one neat word on the front of the file before setting
it aside: "RESOLVED."

EXT. SALVATI ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - LATER

The FBI vehicles are gone. The house looks smaller. Wally's
suitcase waits by the Buick.

Gina and Dominic approach.

Dominic loads Wally's suitcase into the Buick.

He comes back out with a foil tray the size of a car door and
slides it onto the passenger seat where the notebook of
obituary clippings used to live.

DOMINIC
Manicotti. My mother's, not the
caterer's. Don't let it tip.

WALLY
I have never in my life let one
tip.

Dominic goes back inside for the last bag.

Wally and Gina alone in the driveway.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Has he called?

Gina does not ask who.

GINA
No.

WALLY

He's been out there eleven days. A man like that doesn't go eleven days without telling somebody how well he's doing.

Gina looks at the gravel.

GINA

No. He doesn't.

Nothing in her face changes. That is the answer.

Wally looks at her for a long moment. Something in him gets very quiet.

WALLY

I'd like to hear you say the word "Arizona."

GINA

(evenly)

Arizona.

A beat.

WALLY

That's what I thought.

He looks out at the grounds, at the gates, at the house. He is not shocked. He is something much worse: unsurprised.

WALLY (CONT'D)

I spent six weeks in your house explaining to grown men that there is always a version where nobody has to die.

GINA

Yes.

WALLY

And you let me. You let me stand up in that club and say it out loud.

GINA

Every word of it was true when you said it.

WALLY

That is a very careful sentence.

GINA

I've had thirty years of practice.

Wally nods slowly. Not forgiving. Filing.

WALLY

He'd have come back. Tommy. You know that's what you're going to tell yourself, and you'll be right, and it won't help.

GINA

It doesn't have to help. It has to hold.

A long silence in the driveway.

WALLY

I'm not going to say I understand.

GINA

I never asked you to. That was the whole point of you.

Gina hands Wally an envelope.

WALLY

If it's money, I can't--

GINA

It's not money. Your son mailed it to this house eleven years ago. Angelo answered every letter that came here. He never answered that one.

He opens it. Inside: an old condolence note in Marilyn's handwriting, never delivered.

INSERT - LETTER

"In case I go first, somebody tell Walter he was the safest place I ever lived."

Wally breaks.

Gina holds him, not romantically, not maternally, but as family made late.

WALLY

A month.

Gina holds his eyes.

GINA

Two.

That is the whole conversation. It is also the largest thing anyone has ever given him.

GINA (CONT'D)
Now go see your son.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COLORADO SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Thin light. A neighborhood that has never heard the word "consigliere" said out loud.

Wally stands at the foot of the driveway with the same small suitcase that has seen funeral buffets, limousine bars, and guest rooms that weren't his.

A wreath hangs crooked on the mailbox post. Nobody has fixed it. Somebody lives here.

He starts up the walk.

Halfway, he stops. The suitcase is heavier than it should be.

He looks at the door the way he has looked at conference rooms full of armed men: as a place where words can explode.

WALLY
(soft, to himself)
This is a room too.

He climbs the last step. His hand hovers over the bell. It shakes, a little.

MARILYN (V.O.)
When Danny opens the door, don't
make a joke first.

Wally lowers his hand. Rests his palm flat against the wood instead. Feels the barrier of it.

Then he rings the bell.

A muffled chime. Footsteps.

The door opens.

Danny stands there. Older than Wally remembers from the last time they weren't separated by a phone.

Danny's eyes search his father's face for the joke, for the deflection, for the familiar dodge.

There is a very long second in which Wally could still take it.

He doesn't.

WALLY
(quiet, direct)
I have been gone too long, and I am
sorry.

Danny blinks, stunned by how clean the sentence is.

DANNY
Hi, Dad. We're glad you're here.

Wally steps over the threshold like a man walking into another dangerous room. This time the danger is intimacy.

Down the hall, a LITTLE GIRL peeks around the corner.

Wally sets the suitcase down.

He does not check his shoes.

He picks her up, with an embrace that says more than any paragraph ever could.

FADE OUT.