

DEADLINE

Written By

Jonathan Peace

TEL: +44 (0) 7858 832551  
EMAIL: [jpg1138@gmail.com](mailto:jpg1138@gmail.com)

FADE IN:

INT. FLAT

All in shadow.

A single lamp throws dirty light onto a wall.

Daubed in red paint, the words WALL OF COURAGE. Long rivulets of red stream down from the jagged letters to cover

PHOTOS

of the same man. Stuck to the wall in haphazard fashion. Ripped from newspapers. Torn from magazines.

Faded. Crumpled.

Tearing sounds.

AN ISSUE OF VARIETY

The headline reads: 'Bestselling Author Takes To Hollywood.'

Rough dirty fingers rip the

PHOTO

of a smiling man - white hair, glasses - from the page. A caption beneath reads: 'Publisher To Be Honoured.'

THE FAN

steps into the half light. A shock of pink hair. Pale skin. He wears a dirty longcoat. His face holds thirty-eight years of hardship.

He dabs glue to the photo. Jams it onto the wall. Takes a thick black marker pen.

Underneath the new addition he stabs HARVEY in scratchy letters of black.

He steps back. Knocks a tower of books over. Each one identical. The back cover is an author photo.

The Fan picks up one book. Looks at it.

A beat.

In a frenzy he tears the photo free. Dabs glue. Shoves it to the wall. Scratches JOE in black letters.

Looks at the other photos. Each one named:

ERNIE

smiles. One hand raised in a wave. He stands beside Joe. The caption beneath: 'Agent Discovers New Talent.'

LUCY

is sat at a computer. The caption: 'Oscar Winning Screenwriter To Collaborate On Book Adaptation.'

The Fan lets out a laugh of derision. Looks at

TOM

Heavy set. Jolly. He walks beside Joe, the pair snapped at a book signing.

He lingers on the last picture. A WOMAN in a bathing suit. Pretty. Sexy. 'Honeymooning HELENA' the caption.

The Fan runs his finger along the picture. A lovers caress.

A beat.

He picks up a red marker. Touches each photo in turn.

THE FAN

Eenie... Meenie... Miney... Mo.  
Catch... the... thief... by...  
the... toe! When... he...  
screams... let... him... go!  
Eenie... Meenie... Miney... Mo!

His finger rests on the photo of

HARVEY.

The Fan draws a red circle around it.

WIPE TO:

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

HARVEY GOLDSTEIN (49) stands on stage amidst a wave of applause. Looks out at dozens of tables. At least a hundred people packed into the hall.

Above him a banner: PUBLISHING CONFERENCE 2011

HARVEY  
Thank you. Thank you.

The applause dies down.

HARVEY  
I know you all want to get back to  
drinking --

JOE (O.S)  
Damn right we do!

A scattering of laughter.

Harvey looks to the nearest table where

JOE PITTMAN

sits, his glass raised in an empty toast. Beside him Helena,  
gorgeous in a strapless black dress, tugs on his arm.

HELENA  
(whispers)  
You said you'd take it easy.

Joe turns a scowl to his wife.

HARVEY  
You know it's not a free bar, right  
Joe?

A chorus of laughter. More applause. Joe waves Harvey away.

HARVEY  
But seriously folks, without Joe I  
wouldn't be here tonight to be  
honoured with this...

He lifts a marble statuette. Heavy.

HARVEY (CONT'D)  
... whatever the hell this is.

More laughter.

HARVEY (CONT'D)  
Then it again, it could be argued  
that Joe wouldn't be where he is  
today if I hadn't discovered his  
talent.

He pulls out a copy of Joe's book.

HARVEY (CONT'D)  
Deadline caught me, as it did over  
two hundred thousand others on its  
first week of release, from page  
one and never let go. Joe... I  
don't know how you did it, but you  
spun literary gold.

Harvey lifts his champagne glass.

HARVEY  
To Joe.

The hall rise as one. Toast.

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - LATER

A band plays. People dance.

Joe drinks. Helena sighs.

Harvey studies the statuette.

HARVEY  
Seriously... what is it?

JOE  
(slurred)  
A real expensive doorstop?

He breaks out into drunken laughter.

Helena grimaces at her husband's antics.

HELENA  
Well, I think it's lovely.

Harvey laughs. Puts it on the table.

HARVEY  
I suppose its the thought that  
counts. I just don't know what they  
were thinking.  
(beat)  
So... Joe. How's the script coming?

Joe fills his glass. Again.

JOE  
Slowly.

HARVEY

How so? I thought you and Lucy were riding high on the draft.

Helena's lips purse. Joe looks to her. She turns away.

HARVEY

Ah...

HELENA

Would you like to dance?

Harvey looks between the pair.

A beat.

HARVEY

Joe?

JOE

You go ahead.

Helena gets up. Harvey escorts her. As they pass Joe

HARVEY

You can be a prick at times, Joe.

Joe shrugs. Takes his Blackberry out.

INT. DANCEFLOOR - NIGHT

Harvey spins Helena round. Pulls her close.

HARVEY

What happened?

HELENA

I'd rather not. Tonight's your night. Let's not spoil it.

HARVEY

You know you can talk to me.

She puts her arms about his neck.

HELENA

I know.

They dance.

Joe watches.

INT. HOTEL BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

They return to the table.

HARVEY

Thank you for the dance, but I'm  
afraid I must depart. Cinderella  
and all that.

(beat)

Where's the thing?

The statuette has gone.

HELENA

Joe... didn't you see who took it?

JOE

I was on the phone.

HELENA

We all know who to, as well.

JOE

Babe...

Harvey grabs his coat.

HARVEY

I don't mind. It's not about the  
statue.

(grins)

It's about the cash prize! I'll  
call you tomorrow about the script.

JOE

Can't you leave it for a few days?

HARVEY

It's a script based on our  
publishing house's most successful  
book. We have a stake in the matter  
too, you know.

JOE

Well, leave it till after lunch.

HARVEY

I'll call you at nine. Get your  
head sorted. Helena... always a  
pleasure my dear.

He pecks her cheek. Walks away.

Helena scowls at Joe.

INT. HOTEL UNDERGROUND CAR PARK - NIGHT

Quiet. Dark.

Harvey takes a fob from a pocket. Punches the button.

A double-beep from within the shadows. He does it again.  
Searches for his car.

HARVEY

Damn thing. What's the point of  
beeping if you don't show me where  
you are?

He walks the aisles of dark cars. His footsteps echo in the  
underground garage.

Another aisle. Another failure.

HARVEY

Damn it!

THE FAN (O.S)

Mr Goldstein?

Spooked, Harvey spins. Drops the keys.

The Fan stands in the aisle. A yellow envelope in one hand.  
A large shape under the other.

HARVEY

Jesus Christ, lad. You gave me a  
near on heart attack! What the hell  
are you doing skulking around in  
the dark?

(beat)

Hey... that's my statue!

The Fan holds out the envelope. READ ME written across it.

THE FAN

I need you to read this.

HARVEY

Give me that!

He swipes for the statuette. The Fan moves aside.

THE FAN

After you've read this.

HARVEY  
I don't read unsolicited  
manuscripts given to me by a freak  
in a hotel car park.

The Fan's face hardens.

THE FAN  
I'm not a freak.

Harvey scoffs.

HARVEY  
Course not. It's perfectly natural  
to lurk in car parks.

The Fan throws the package. The publisher has no choice but  
to catch it.

He doesn't hesitate. Simply tears the envelope into pieces.  
Throws them to the floor.

HARVEY  
There. What do you think about  
that?

THE FAN

takes a breath. A beat. His voice now a bare whisper.

THE FAN  
You shouldn't have done that.

Before Harvey can respond, the Fan moves to him. Raises the  
statuette high... brings it down... hard.

BLOOD spurts.

Harvey falls to the ground. Groans. Holds a blood speckled  
hand up.

HARVEY  
Wait...

THE FAN looms over the stricken publisher.

Smiles...

CUT TO:

INT. FLAT

A red X is drawn through Harvey's photo.

The Fan, his face blood streaked, starts to move a bloody finger across the other photos.

THE FAN  
Eenie... Meenie... Miney... Mo...

FADE TO:

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

A cluttered mess. Towers of books make a small cityscape. Some lie like bombed ruins across the wooden floor.

Nick Caves "Easy Money" plays. Plays low.

Across his desk seven upturned shot glasses. Three upright.

From a bottle of Jack Daniels he pours a shot... slugs it... slams the glass down. Upturned. Eight.

A clock beside a cluttered notice board: 07:35

Joe stares as the cursor blinks on an empty page.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - LATER

The clock now reads: 11:55

The cursor still blinks.

Joe turns his eyes to the wall above the desk. Notes, newspaper clippings, other scribbled notes. All stuck together in a messy collage.

A beat.

JOE  
Helena!

His glazed eyes wander captured memories.

FRAMED MAGAZINE ARTICLES: "Best Debut Novel"; "Horror Writer Hits Big"; "Going Hollywood".

VARIOUS PHOTOS: Joe at a book signing, all smiles and handshakes; A mixed group of people, all hold certificates. The caption: 'Creative Writing Class - '94'.

JOE  
(calls out)  
Helena!

A beat.

The door opens. She comes in, his back to her. Doesn't see she's crying.

JOE  
About bloody time. What do you...  
what's wrong?

She holds the phone to him.

HELENA  
It's Ernie.

He takes the phone.

JOE  
What's up?

He listens.

A beat.

JOE  
Holy shit!

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

ERNIE CATTS (52) stares out onto a sunny NYC day. He talks loudly for the speakerphone.

ERNIE  
He was found in the car park.  
Beaten to death with that damn  
statue.

He spins in the chair to face a cluttered desk. He pulls his glasses down. Rubs the bridge of his nose.

A blue plastic in-tray overflows: Contracts. Letters.

JOE  
(on speakerphone)  
Jesus Christ. We were there. Didn't  
anyone see anything?

ERNIE

No.

INT. HOTEL UNDERGROUND CAR PARK - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

An ATTENDANT walks down the aisle of cars. Kicks a set of keys.

ERNIE (V.O)

He was found by an attendant...

The young man bends to pick the keys up.

Under the car, the body of Harvey rammed into a twisted position. His face mangled. Blood everywhere.

The attendant falls back.

(END FLASHBACK)

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

Ernie rummages through the pile.

ERNIE

I know you only had the one book with him but I think it might be a good idea to go to his funeral.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe swivels to look at Helena. She wipes at her eyes.

JOE

I don't know. We weren't that close and like you said, it was only one book. Besides, I've this damn script to get finished.

HELENA

Started more like!

He waves her quiet.

She storms out.

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

Ernie pulls a yellow envelope from the pile. Padded. Dirty.  
"READ ME" slashed across the front in thick letters.

ERNIE

You've only written one book.  
You've gone all Hollywood now,  
writing scripts. I thought Harvey  
was a friend?

JOE

(on speakerphone)

He gave me my break. The sales  
commission has repaid him that many  
times over.

THE ENVELOPE

is bare save the scratched letters on the front. No stamp.

ERNIE

Like I said, it's your call. You're  
a harsh man, Joe. I hope I fair  
better when it comes to my funeral.

JOE

(on speakerphone)

Ha... you're nearly a thousand.  
You're going to outlive God!

ERNIE

Don't drink. Don't smoke.

JOE

(on speakerphone)

Don't have any fun by the sounds of  
it.

Ernie turns the envelope round. No address.

ERNIE

How's the script coming?

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe stares at the blank screen.

JOE

Fine.

He starts to pour another drink.

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

The door opens. A SECRETARY enters. Taps her watch.

ERNIE

That's good to hear. Can't wait to read it. I've a midday meeting so I'll call you tonight. You can read me some pages.

A clink of glass on glass over the speakerphone.

ERNIE

You'd write more if you drank less.

He hangs up.

SECRETARY

He's been waiting for an hour.

ERNIE

Eager. I like that. Where did this come from?

He holds up the envelope. The Secretary shakes her head.

SECRETARY

Don't remember that.

Ernie opens a drawer.

ERNIE

Hand delivered, hmm?

Drops the envelope inside.

Grinding sounds from the drawer as a shredder feeds.

ERNIE

No exceptions.

He grabs a notepad. Leaves the office.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe looks over his old memories. A smile blossoms first in his mouth. Then his eyes.

He looks back to the framed photo by his computer. A younger Joe in a charcoal suit stands beside a radiant Helena in a gorgeous wedding gown.

The smile fades from his eyes.

THE CURSOR

continues to blink.

JOE  
Fuck!... Craig!  
(beat)  
Craig!

The door opens.

CRAIG TREAT, (36) smiles with over-white teeth as he enters.  
Action man hair. Super tanned face.

The P.A talks like an oil slick.

CRAIG  
Hey boss. What's up?

JOE  
Stop calling me boss for a start.  
Where's Helena?

CRAIG  
Downstairs Bo--  
(grins)  
She's downstairs. Getting things  
finished for Billy's birthday on  
Saturday. Can't believe he's ten  
already.

JOE  
Yeah. Ten. I need you to get Tom  
and Lucy here for a meeting.  
Saturday will be best for everyone.

Craig looks uncomfortable.

CRAIG  
Not for everyone.  
(beat)  
Helena's going to be pissed, boss.

JOE  
She's always pissed about something  
lately. Work doesn't stop just  
because it's my son's birthday.  
I've a deadline coming. This script  
has to be finished on time or else  
there's no money. She'll get over  
it.

CRAIG  
She won't like Mrs Hayes coming.

JOE  
Miss.

CRAIG  
Boss?

JOE  
(softly)  
She's a miss. Not a Mrs.  
(beat)  
Just get it organised. And Craig...  
(beat)  
... stop calling me boss.

Craig waits a beat. Leaves.

Joe pours another shot. Downs it. Slams the glass.

Stares at the cursor.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Ernie pours coffee for two. Walks back to the large table.

Sat at one side, The Fan takes his cup with a smile.

THE FAN  
Thank you.

Ernie sits.

ERNIE  
So... how exactly can I be of help,  
Mr...?

The Fan gives a weak grin.

THE FAN  
It's no secret that you represent  
one of the most successful authors  
in the last ten years. Almost as  
big as J.K. Rowling.

ERNIE  
(grins)  
Bigger. At least compared like for  
like with their debut novels. Joe's  
outstripped Rowling's by forty  
percent.

THE FAN

Ah, yes. The debut novel.

ERNIE

Deadline. Such a wonderful, highly original take on the horror genre. Joe has been compared to early Stephen King. It's no surprise Hollywood came calling. I'm sorry... but you haven't said which paper you're from.

THE FAN

I'm not with a paper.

A beat.

ERNIE

My secretary said this was an interview?

THE FAN

She was wrong. I take it you haven't read it yet?

ERNIE

Read what? I'm sorry. I'm confused. Who are you exactly?

The Fan puts his coffee down.

THE FAN

The envelope. I left it on your desk this morning.

Ernie stares in stunned silence.

A beat.

ERNIE

My desk? You were in my office?

THE FAN

I wanted to make sure you got the chance to read my manuscript before we met. I'm somewhat disappointed you haven't read it. But not entirely surprised.

Ernie stands.

ERNIE

I don't know what this is all about  
but I want you to leave.

THE FAN

So you haven't read it. It would be  
in your best interests to jog back  
to your office, open my manuscript  
and read what's inside...

He picks up his coffee. Leans back.

THE FAN (CONT'D)

... I can wait.

ERNIE

If you're talking about that smelly  
yellow envelope. I shredded it.

The coffee cup pauses at the Fan's lips.

A beat.

He puts the cup down. Leans forward.

THE FAN

(cold)

I really hope that's not the case.  
For your own well being I hope you  
haven't destroyed it.

Ernie storms over. Grabs the Fan's elbow.

ERNIE

Threats now is it?

He hauls the Fan to his feet. Frog marches him to the doors.

ERNIE

I don't know what school of writing  
you went to, but threatening a  
potential publisher is not the best  
way of getting your book published.

THE FAN

I don't want you to publish it. I  
want you to read it.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Ernie strongarms the Fan past the reception desk. The Secretary stares open mouthed.

ERNIE  
If I see you back here again, I'm  
calling the Police.

He heaves the Fan outside into the street. He hits the pavement. Hard. Glares back.

THE FAN  
You should have read it!

ERNIE  
Fuck off!

Ernie walks back to the receptionist desk. His back to the door. He gets himself back under control.

ERNIE  
What's he doing?

EXT. STREET - DAY

The Fan brushes himself down. Takes a step forward. Stops.

SECRETARY (O.S)  
He's just stood there.

ERNIE (O.S)  
If he starts towards the building,  
call the Police.

People stare as they walk past. The Fan scowls.

THE FAN  
(shouts)  
Maybe you should ask your star  
client why you had to throw someone  
out your office?

Through the doors the Fan watches Ernie walks away.

A beat.

With another angry pat of his clothes, the Fan stalks off.

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

Ernie pulls open the drawer. Pulls the shredder bin out.  
Rummages through it.

Pulls strips of paper out, mixed with padded yellow.

He puts several strips together, the black lines of ink  
slowly form the words: DEADLINE BY

ERNIES EYES

narrow.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Loud music. Guns 'N' Roses: "Sweet Child of Mine".

Joe paces. Air guitars.

The phone rings.

JOE

Hello?

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

Ernie drinks bourbon. His hands shake. A stack of shredded  
papers on his desk.

ERNIE

Tell me about Deadline.

JOE

(on speakerphone)

It's nearly done, Ernie. Jesus...  
how badly do you need this  
commission. It'll be finished on  
time.

ERNIE

Not the script. The book. You know,  
your debut novel. The one book  
you've written.

JOE

(on speakerphone)

Is this really important? I'm  
trying to work, you know?

Ernie toys with the scraps of shredded paper.

ERNIE

You've not written a second book  
yet have you? Not even a rough  
draft? Why is that?

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe turns the music off. Sits.

JOE

What's this about, Ernie?

INT. AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

His face flushed. His eyes watery. Ernie struggles to keep  
his composure.

ERNIE

We need to talk. Right now.  
(checks diary)  
I can meet you at Dorseys Bar. An  
hour.

JOE

(on speakerphone)  
This sounds serious.

ERNIE

Plagerism is serious.

He hangs up.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

Open mouthed shock.

He hangs up.

JOE

Shit!

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Ernie storms to the door. The Secretary looks up.

SECRETARY

Where are you going, sir?

ERNIE  
Personal errand.

SECRETARY  
When will you be back?

ERNIE  
Later.

He's gone.

EXT. NYC STREET - DAY

Pedestrians jostle each other - a typical New York day.

Ernie stalks the street. Mutters to himself.

ERNIE  
Idiot! Idiot! What was he thinking?

A WOMAN thumps into him. Spins round. Drops her bags.

Oblivious. Lost in his own worries, Ernie storms on.

The woman is instantly white hot.

WOMAN  
Hey! Hey! You... I'm talking to  
you, you jerk!

Ernie is unaware.

WOMAN  
(following)  
Hey! Jerk-Face! Don't ignore me!

He walks on.

WOMAN  
Oh, Mr Big Man! Mr Ignorant.

People stare as she follows Ernie down the street.

Ahead people wait to cross the road.

The sign: DON'T WALK

Ernie walks up to the crossing. Stops.

The woman right behind him.

WOMAN

Don't think I'm gonna give up, cos  
I ain't.

ERNIE

(mutters)

Can't believe I didn't see it...

She grabs his arm. Hauls him around.

ERNIE

Hey! What's your problem?

WOMAN

You! You're my problem. You barged  
right through me without a sorry or  
a care. I could sue.

ERNIE

I assure you I didn't.

WOMAN

You damn well did. You stormed out  
of that buidling --

She points. Sees her bags being lifted by two teenagers.

She starts off at a run.

WOMAN

Those are mine you little bastards!

She fights through the crowd.

Ernie shakes his head.

ERNIE

Freaks coming out the woodwork  
today.

The sign changes to: WALK

He steps out.

THE TRUCK

hits him at 40mph. The grille smashes into Ernie's face...  
he disappears underneath... a front tyre crushes his  
chest... a rear tyre smashes his skull.

The truck roars away. Ernie's body bounces out into the  
street. Twisted horribly. Bloody.

Screams.

FADE TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A small gathering. They stand. Hushed voices sing along to bad organ music.

Between two columns of seats, dead centre of the aisle a coffin. Closed.

A picture of Ernie upon it.

The voices trail away as the music stops.

The VICAR raises his hands. A pleasant smile stretches his thick lips.

VICAR

Be seated.

They do. Low murmurs. Hushed whispers.

VICAR

Ernie Catts was a good man, but we mustn't mourn his passing...

His voice fades away.

JOE

wipes at red eyes. Helena sits stony faced beside him. Looks down at the boy beside her.

BILLY PITTMAN (9) reads a comic book. Unconcerned by what goes on around him.

She looks at Joe.

He offers her a weak smile.

She turns back to listen to the Vicar.

EXT. CHURCHGATE - DAY

Everyone files out into the overcast day. They all briefly shake hands with each other. Head to waiting cars.

Helena watches Joe shake hands with the vicar.

Billy gets his mother's attention.

BILLY  
What's Dad doing?

Joe now talks with a tall blonde. She's obviously distressed. He puts his arm around her.

Helena scowls.

HELENA  
Stalling.

EXT. CHURCH ENTRANCE - DAY

The blonde - LUCY HAYES (34) - leans into Joe's shoulder. He lets her cry.

After a beat, he pulls back.

JOE  
It's okay, Lucy. Are you okay?

Her sniffles, her sobs are his answer.

Black lines of mascara run down her flushed cheeks. Her eyes are as red as his. Different reasons.

She nods.

JOE  
(softly)  
Good. That's good.

She steps into him.

JOE  
Don't forget the meeting on Saturday.

She steps away.

LUCY  
You're kidding, right?

JOE  
Life goes on.

EXT. CHURCHGATE - DAY

Helena watches Lucy run past. Loud sobs.

Joe walks up.

JOE  
You ready?

HELENA  
What was that all about?

JOE  
Work stuff.

They walk to their car. Helena helps Billy in. Looks over the car at Joe.

He stares at Lucy being consoled by friends.

HELENA  
So what now?

JOE  
I guess we go watch him burn.

HELENA  
I meant us.

JOE  
I know.

He reaches for her hand.

JOE (CONT'D)  
We'll work it out babe. I promise.  
(beat)  
I love you.

She removes her hand.

HELENA  
I know.

They get in the car.

INT. FLAT

A giant red X through Ernie's photo.

THE FAN (O.S)  
Eenie... Meenie... Miney... Mo!

CUT TO:

INT. BILLYS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe looks down at his sleeping son from the doorway. He quietly closes the door.

INT. MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Helena asleep in bed. Bathed in soft moonlight.

A large empty space beside her.

INT JOE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A long sofa. Bedding scrunched in one corner: duvet, pillow.

Joe sits at his desk bathed in sterile computer light.

The cursor continues to blink on an empty screen.

Joe slumps forward.

Quietly cries in the dark.

FADE TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Children with bright party hats kick a football with varying degrees of success.

A long banner is slung between two trees: "Happy Birthday Billy - 10 Today".

Parents stand around. Some make chit-chat. Some tell jokes. Some gather at a long table filled with food.

Helena takes a plate of cakes to the table. Smiles at those there. Sips wine from a Transformers cup. Watches the children play.

Watches the couples.

Some cast furtive glances at her. Offer sympathetic smiles.

HELENA

Alone at her son's birthday.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

He gathers papers together. A copy of his book.

Craig looks at Joe's back with hard eyes.

JOE

Get the Den ready, will you?

CRAIG

What about the party? What about  
Billy?

Joe stares out the window. Watches his son kick a football.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Billy waves to his mum. She smiles at his enthusiasm.

BILLY

Hey mum! Watch this!

Billy's kick is a beaut. The ball hits the back of the net  
like a Korean missile test.

Billy lifts his shirt over his head. Slides along the grass  
on his knees.

BILLY

Gooooal!

Other kids laugh as Billy continues his goal scoring  
celebrations.

A few parents join in.

The Clown does a funky dance.

Helena's smile is hallow, not quite reaching her eyes.

She turns. Looks up at a window - HIS window. His shadow  
moves back.

HELENA

Oh... Joe.

She walks back to the drinks table. Refills her cup with a  
bottle of Chardonnay.

Sighs.

A beat.

CRAIG (O.S)  
Can I have some of that?

Craig steps out from the main house. Picks up a cup.

CRAIG  
Great party. The kids are loving  
it.

HELENA  
They are.

She pours wine.

CRAIG  
Aren't you?

HELENA  
What do you think? He's left me  
again to deal with it all.  
(she drinks deep)  
Bastard.

Craig sips. Waits.

HELENA  
I know he's got deadlines coming  
but he knew that. He knew that and  
didn't do anything about it.  
(looks over at Billy)  
And his son plays alone.  
(beat)  
Again.

Craig raises his glass.

CRAIG  
A toast to the goal scorer.

He grabs Helena's hand. Pulls her out into the garden.

CRAIG  
Ladies and gentlemen. And clowns...

Craig tips his head to the balloon fiddling clown. The clown  
does another funky dance in response.

Everyone pauses. Look to Craig.

CRAIG  
Please... everyone raise your glass  
to the next leading striker for LA  
Galaxy... Mr Billy Pittman!

A glorious round of applause. Billy blushes.

Craig 'chinks' Helenas cup. He makes the sound. She laughs.

They drink.

Billy starts doing tricks with the football. Kicks it to the  
clown. The clown swings an oversized shoe. Falls down.

Everyone laughs.

Craig upends his empty cup.

CRAIG  
Thirsty work... parties.

Helena pours him another. A beat.

She leans in. Kisses her cheek.

HELENA  
(softly)  
Thank you.

He starts to say something. Stops. Starts again... smiles.

CRAIG  
You're welcome.

The doorbell CHIMES.

JOE (O.S)  
Craig! Get that! They're here!

Craig looks at Helena.

Looks trapped.

CRAIG  
I'm sorry. I thought you knew.

HELENA

looks pissed.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Helena throws the door open.

TOM CHAMBERS (42). Frazzled hair. Dark moustache. British.

TOM  
And here she is... the mother of  
the birthday boy. Always a  
pleasure, my dear.

HELENA  
Why are you here?

An uncomfortable beat.

TOM  
I take it you weren't foretold of  
our arrival.

Helena takes a beat. Tries the word for size.

HELENA  
Our?

TOM  
Oh dear.

Lucy appears beside Tom.

LUCY  
Here you daft coot. You forgot his  
present.

She wears a stunning black dress. Carries a package wrapped  
in gold.

Holds it to Helena.

LUCY  
I swear... men! If we weren't  
around to sort out their mess, just  
what would they do?  
(beat)  
Sorry for the sparklies, but I've  
an awards thing to go to tonight.  
(to Tom)  
Why you're making me go, I'll never  
know.

TOM  
Because I'm a wonder agent and as  
well as repping best selling  
(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)  
authors I look after pop culture  
icons such as yourself.

LUCY  
Oh, stop it!

Helena glares at Tom.

He offers a wan smile.

Without taking the present, Helena stalks back inside.

A surprised beat.

Tom lets out a breath.

Lucy looks stunned.

Tom shakes his head.

TOM  
It's not you. Not really.  
(indicates the open door)  
After you.

Lucy floats inside. All glitz. All glamour.

Tom takes a deep breath.

TOM  
Friend or not... that bastard's  
going to be the death of me.

He goes inside.

INT. THE DEN - DAY

Papers cover the coffee table.

Lucy scribbles into a notebook.

Tom tugs on his moustache.

Joe - drink in hand - paces.

JOE  
It needs to be faster. More  
intense. More --

He searches for the word. Struggles. Gives up.

JOE  
You know what I mean.

TOM  
Actually I don't. How about you  
show us what you've got.

Joe freezes.

A beat.

LUCY  
I can show you what I've managed to  
get down. It's only the opening  
act, but --

TOM  
I'm more interested in what Joe  
has. It is his book after all.

A quiet silent stand off between them.

TOM  
But we have to start somewhere.  
Okay, Lucy... what have you got?

Tom gives Joe a knowing look.

Joe squirms under the gaze. Goes to pour another drink.

INT. THE DEN - LATER

Lucy now sits beside Joe. He thumbs through his book. Lucy  
leans in. Marks a passage with a highlighter.

LUCY  
By getting rid of all this, we open  
the structure to work some more  
hightened visuals in.

Joe breathes her in as she continues.

LUCY  
We don't need this character  
either. Their only purpose is to  
set up a whole subplot that just  
slows the main story down.

Her voice takes on a gleeful, conspiritorial tone.

LUCY (CONT'D)  
Let's kill her off.

JOE  
But she's important to the main  
character.

LUCY  
And her death will be the catalyst  
the hero needs. Don't worry, we'll  
make it a good strong midpoint  
action sequence. It'll work great.  
Besides... the hero doesn't really  
need her.

Joe's hand falls on hers as they turn the page.

They look at each other.

JOE  
Yes he does.

Tom coughs.

They move apart.

Tom reclines. Strokes his moustache.

Lucy writes.

JOE  
You looking forward to tonight?

Lucy checks her watch.

LUCY  
Damn. Thanks for reminding me. I'm  
going to have to get going.

She stands. GASPS!

Stood in the doorway... the clown.

LUCY  
Jesus!

CLOWN  
Not quite. Sorry. I didn't mean to  
be rude but are you the writer of  
Down The Darkened Path?

LUCY  
I am actually.

CLOWN  
I thought I recognised you as I was heading to the bathroom. I have the DVD and remember you from the 'making of' feature. That is my all time favourite film. I love it. And you wrote it.

TOM  
And tonight down at the Cannongate she wins an award for it.

CLOWN  
Wow. Congratualations. you so deserve it.

He fires off a barrage of horns then showers her with sparkle dust.

Helena walks in. The clown gives another honk.

CLOWN  
Slay you later, dominator.

More horns. He walks away.

LUCY  
What a funny little man.

HELENA  
Sorry to interupt.

JOE  
You're not interrupting. Mr Clown was just fan worshipping Lucy.

A cold beat.

HELENA  
Well, I'm sure he's not the last. Or the first.

LUCY  
Which reminds me Tom. I got another submission. Left at the flat this time.

TOM  
Pesky, aren't they?

HELENA

What are?

JOE

Wanna be writers. Sending their manuscripts to be read.

HELENA

Not so long ago you were doing the same thing, trying to get read.

LUCY

Well, it's weird.

HELENA

What's weird is that people are leaving and you haven't even said hello yet, Joe.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Parents escort children out.

Craig hands out party bags.

Joe tidies up.

The last guest leaves.

CRAIG

Finally! What a day.

JOE

Billy loved it.

HELENA

I'm surprised you noticed.

JOE

I did my part. Sorry I had to work as well but I still pulled my weight.

HELENA

The clown was a nice touch.

JOE

I thought so too. Where did you get him?

HELENA

Me? I thought that was your idea?

They look to Craig.

CRAIG

Not me.

Puzzled looks all round.

INT. A CAR - NIGHT

The Fan wipes off his makeup. He leaves the pink hair. All cleaned up, he starts the car.

Beside him on the seat a ticket to the awards.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The car pulls away.

INT. LANDING - NIGHT

Helena closes the door to Billy's room.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe sits in bed, the laptop open.

Helena comes in, starts to undress. Music PLAYS -- Nick Cave's "There she Goes, My Beautiful World."

He flips the laptop shut, watches her start to remove make-up.

HELENA

He's sparked out, poor lad.

JOE

He's had a busy day.

Helena turns. Looks at Joe.

A beat.

They hold each others gaze.

HELENA

How come you're not going to the awards ceremony?

JOE

You're kidding right? I go to that and I'm wearing my nuts for earrings.

(beat)

I told you. It's over.

HELENA

Is it?

JOE

Yes.

(beat)

Besides... I can't find my ticket!

HELENA

You!

She throws a pillow at him.

For the first time, both their smiles are genuine.

She turns back to the mirror. Her back to Joe. Strips down.

He watches. She has a beautiful body.

HELENA

Why are we always arguing?

JOE

We're not.

She turns round. He goons.

HELENA

Yes... we are. We never used to.

JOE

There's a lot of things we do now we never used to...

He gets off the bed. Moves behind her.

JOE (CONT'D)

... and a lot of things we used to do that we don't anymore.

He reaches out to caress her back.

She closes her eyes. Sighs.

He stands behind her... lips graze her shoulder...

She sighs as his hands travel down her back... she pushes against him...

HELENA

It's been so long...

His hands travel up her sides... she takes them, lays them on her breasts...

He licks her neck, bites her... she turns, they kiss.

Tongues dance... he moves down, kisses her breasts... takes a breast into his mouth... her hands in his hair...

The SONG plays.

JOE

I was a fool.

HELENA

Shush... no more of the past. Make love to me. Here. Now.

They fall together on the bed.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB -NIGHT

A vast crowd has gathered, a resplendent mix of journalists, movie fans and autograph hunters, all braving the cold and the rain for that quick glimpse of a hero.

Names are shouted, photos snapped as magnificently dressed people begin to emerge.

Banners slung across metal crowd control barriers declares this: THE 4TH ANNUAL INDEPENDANT FILM AWARDS.

EXT. CROWD - NIGHT

Standing in the shadows, his shock of pink hair oblivious to the rain, the Fan waits.

Ageless, an emaciated Terminator, his eyes never leave the nightclub doorway.

He doesn't blink -- not once.

He waits.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A roar from the crowd... heads turn... flashbulbs pop, a paparrazzi version of shock and awe.

EXT. CROWD - NIGHT

The Fan smiles, takes one hand from a pocket. He holds a yellow envelope. "READ ME" written across it.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Lucy exits the club. She waves a strange metal award, her smile a supernova in the rain.

She jumps down the steps. Oblivious to the rain, she walks down the line of the crowd.

EXT. CROWD - NIGHT

The Fan follows - parallel.

A flash of silver in his other hand.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A female PR AGENT, (24) steers Lucy with gentle words through the madness.

The PRESS CORE waits.

They move down the red carpeted street. Through the wave of cries. Flashbulbs pop like lightning flashes.

EXT. CROWD - NIGHT

Shrieks sound all about the Fan. He mirrors Lucy. Almost side by side.

His unwavering stare never leaves her.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The REPORTER looks harassed. Tired. In need of coffee.

He struggles to be heard over the noise of the crowd.

REPORTER

So how does it feel to be finally recognised for your work?

LUCY

You'll have to repeat that. Bit noisy tonight.

REPORTER

It's all for you! I said, how does it feel to be recognised for your writing?

LUCY

Well, it has been a while. I started writing screenplays seven years ago.

(laughs)

This is the first one that went into production.

REPORTER

This has opened new doors though, right? Rumour has it you're working on an adaptation of Joe Pittman's bestselling debut novel "Deadline". A tale about a stalker is a bit of a change from writing about Jewish prison camps.

LUCY

Well, like any work of fiction they all have their own appeal. His book spoke to me on a whole new level.

INT. CROWD - NIGHT

The Fan stands almost within touching distance of Lucy. He leans forward. Rests on the barrier.

LUCY

Its a story about the darkest part of human behaviour, that of the obsessed. What we hope to do with the movie is bring Joe's amazing story to a whole new audience.

THE FAN

Ms Haye!

His cry is drowned out by the roar of the crowd.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The shouts are unbelievable. Everyone wants a piece of Lucy.

The Reporters smile never falters.

REPORTER

It must have been a trying time for everyone concerned following the deaths of Joe's agent and publisher in the span of a few days.

Lucy's face hardens. Her smile locked in place.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

Has this affected either yourself or Joe who, rumours say, is helping write the screenplay of his own book alongside you.

LUCY

We were all shocked at the senseless deaths of Harvey Goldstein and Ernie Catts.

REPORTER

Some say there is a connection between the murders.

LUCY

Mr Goldstein was murdered, a brutal senseless death. Mr Catts was the victim of an unfortunate hit and run accident. I don't see how the two could possibly be related. Thank you. That's all.

THE FAN (O.S)

Ms Haye! Ms Haye!

The PR Agent leans in.

PR AGENT

Miss Haye. Your taxi waits.

THE FAN (O.S)

Ms Haye!

Lucy signals the PR Agent to wait. Turns to the crowd.

To the Fan.

LUCY  
How you doing?

He thrusts the envelope to her. She stares at it. At the Fan.

THE FAN  
I need you to read this. Please.

She shakes her head.

LUCY  
Sorry. I don't read other people's work. You understand.

THE FAN  
Read it!

He grabs her arm.

LUCY  
Hey! Not cool man!

Seeing this, the PR Agent indicates to a nearby guard.

SECURITY GUARD  
Do we have a problem here?

The guard is six feet forever. Twice as wide. He towers over the Fan.

The Fan lets go of Lucy.

THE FAN  
No. No problem.

SECURITY GUARD  
I didn't think so.

Lucy walks away.

PR AGENT  
Freak. Events like this bring them all out. I apologise for the disruption. Are you okay?

LUCY  
I'm fine. He just wanted me to read his writing. What I'm pissed about is that damned reporter. What the hell was he thinking trying to link their deaths together.

(beat)

(MORE)

LUCY (cont'd)  
Totally ruined my night.

PR AGENT  
Jerk. Again, I apologise. Here you  
go, Ms Haye.

She holds the taxi door open.

LUCY  
Thank you.

EXT. CROWD - NIGHT

Stood amidst the cheering crowd, the Fan watches the taxi  
drive away.

He pushes his way through the crowd.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT (TRAVELLING)

Lucy checks her phone.

The small screen light illuminates the back of the cab: NO  
MESSAGES

She sighs.

TAXI DRIVER  
We're here.

Lucy puts the phone down on the seat. Opens her purse.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The up-market area of the city. High rise, high rent. They  
look like warehouses but are in fact new-age apartments.  
They glisten under the falling rain.

The pavement is a polished rainbow mix of lamplight and  
silver moonlight.

The taxi pulls up.

Lucy gets out. Walks up to the doorway.

THE INTERCOM

is a mass of buttons. She presses: L.HAYE FLAT 22. A warning  
sound, she keys a code.

A buzz... the door clicks open.

Movement in the alley behind her, a shift in the shadows.

It clacks shut behind her just as a drenched cat scurries into the entrance.

It paws at the door, lets loose a pathetic meow.

A shadow falls over the cat.

The cat looks up. Meows.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shutting the door, Lucy struggles with the lock. It finally clicks shut.

LUCY

Lucas?

She dumps her coat over the sofa.

The open planned apartment is cast in a faint, soft light augmented by the warm glow of city lights through the large wall window.

INT. KITCHENETTE - NIGHT

Over the sink a Buster Keaton clock. He hangs from 10:30pm.

LUCY

Lucas... where are you?

By the sink, an empty cat basket.

She goes to the fridge. 'TO-DO' post it notes cover it like wallpaper: COLLECT AWARD; FIX LOCK; PAY BILLS.

She takes a bottle of wine, starts hunting for a corkscrew... finds one... realises its a screwcap.

She pours. Drops a couple of ice cubes from the overflowing fridge ice-maker. The sound is like two coins together.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

With wine in hand she goes to the main window. Opens it.

LUCY  
Lucas?

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The cat is held. Stroked. It purrs.

LUCY (O.S)  
Lucas... mummy's home!

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shivering with cold, she closes the window.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A finger scrolls down the apartment numbers. Rests on L.  
HAYE - FLAT 22

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lucy dances to music. She drinks wine.

She picks up her statuette, dances with it. It really is an ugly construction, thick and bulky, an Oscar for the insane.

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lucy discards clothes, pulls on PJ's. Jumps into bed.

Puts her glass down, picks up 'Deadline' by Joe Pittman. She also takes a notebook from the bedside cabinet.

She starts to read. To make notes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - LATER

Lucy lies back in bed, eyes closed, one arm behind her head, the other beneath the covers.

She sighs... the duvet moves... she moves... a breathless whisper.

Her movements speed, her breathing speeds... she bites down on her lip, a sigh, a moan...

Faster now, hips move beneath the covers... so close now... small-twitching-movements...

A sound from the darkened apartment.

She stops... freezes.

Listens.

A beat...

Nothing.

Everything is dark shadow, the only light now that of the moon flowing through lace window covers.

LUCY

(breathless)

Lucas... is that you girl? Damn it,  
your timing is lousy.

(pats the bed)

Here girl...

Nothing.

She sits, listening...

Nothing but the sound of her own breath.

She takes a sip of wine... lies back...

Hand beneath the covers once more... a soft sigh.

Another SOUND... louder this time.

She sits up.

LUCY

Lucas?

Her feet slide out onto the wooden floor. She shivers at the touch, at the cold.

She pulls on a robe.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's quiet... pindrop quiet.

She comes from the bedroom. Pauses, unsure.

LUCY

Lucas?

She moves further in.

LUCY

You're starting to scare mummy now.

A sound from the kitchenette.

A gasp from Lucy, it forces her back.

She hits the table, rocks her award. She grabs it. Weighs it.

Courageous smile.

INT. KITCHENETTE - NIGHT

The room is in dark shadow. Ominous.

LUCY (O.S)

If there's someone in there, you  
better fucking make it known now.

I'm armed

(looks at the statuette)

Sort of.

No answer.

She rushes in, statuette held high.

She flicks on the lights to reveal...

... the empty kitchenette. No broken window. No cat. Buster Keaton hangs from 23:32pm.

The sound again as ice falls from the fridge, bounces out of the holder to skitter across the floor.

Her tension is let out in a long release of held breath which becomes a self conscious laugh.

LUCY

Fuck!

She takes the ice bucket, empties it in the sink, turns water on for a few moments.

For a beat she watches the ice melt.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

The second landing.

Two directions, two doors. To the left: Flats 20-28; to the right Flats 21-29.

The left hand door swings shut...

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

As she heads back to the bedroom a buzz from the door.

She switches direction, almost dances over.

LUCY

Hello?

THE FAN (O.S.)

Delivery for Ms Haye.

LUCY

At this time?

She looks through the peephole.

THE FAN

wears non-descript brown coveralls, his face covered by a baseball cap.

He holds a colorful package as well as a bouquet of flowers

THE FAN (O.S.)

It's a gift from... just a second,  
the rain's made the card run. It  
looks like Tim and Jon.

LUCY

Tom and Joe.

THE FAN (O.S.)

That's it.

LUCY  
Oh bless them.

She unfastens the chain, turns the lock.

Starts to open the door.

THE FAN

kicks the door hard. It splinters under the force.

Lucy falls to the ground with a sharp shocked gasp.

The Fan enters, shuts the door.

Stalks towards her as she scuttles back.

He grabs her leg, pulls her towards him.

LUCY

starts to scream.

He clamps a hand about her mouth.

THE FAN  
Please don't. Please.

She kneels. Cowed. Sobs.

He stands behind her. Hand about her mouth. Hand about her waist. Grim determination.

THE FAN  
I don't want to hurt you. I will if  
I need to, but I don't want to.  
That all depends on you.

He carries her towards a chair. Forces her into it. Her struggles are useless against his determination.

THE FAN  
Now... just to make sure I get your  
full attention and co-operation,  
I'm going to make a few adjustments  
to your living arrangements.

From a pocket he drops the yellow envelope to the floor. A knife - long blade, sharp, quickly follows.

THE FAN  
Now, this doesn't have to go this  
way... but I will make you bleed if  
you don't co-operate.

He lifts the envelope in one hand. The blade in the other.

THE FAN  
Now... which will it be?

INT. MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe lies in Helena's arms. She gently strokes his hair. Puts a glass of juice back to the bedside table.

HELENA  
I needed that. You wore me out!

JOE  
Why can't it always be like this?

HELENA  
You tell me.

He hugs her close.

JOE  
I... I want to...

Joe burrows his face against her chest.

HELENA  
Joe... what is it? What's wrong?

JOE  
I want to tell you something... but  
I'm scared. Scared it will hurt us.  
Hurt you.

Helena sits up. Holds Joe.

HELENA  
Joe, you have to realise. Only your  
lies can hurt those closest to you.

Joe turns away. Too fast. His arm knocks a glass of fruit juice from the bedside table to the floor.

It SMASHES

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

GLASS SMASHES!

Lucy falls through open air surrounded by shattered glass.

She screams all the way down... hits the pavement... her body shatters. Blood FOUNTAINS around the body like a rock thrown into water.

CLOSEUP OF LUCY'S RUINED BODY

as a bloody pool spreads beneath her.

Distant shouts, running footsteps.

A cat moves into frame to start licking at the fractured face. A collar designed like film frames holds a gold nametag: LUCAS.

INT. MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe looks at the broken glass. Red juice stains the carpet.

JOE

Jesus...

HELENA

Don't worry about it. What were you going to tell me?

A beat.

JOE

It doesn't matter.

Joe pulls her tighter to him.

She snuggles into his embrace.

HELENA

I love you.

JOE

I know.

Their mutual smile is content.

INT. FLAT

The Fan enters in a fury. Dumps his coveralls into a black bin bag.

He goes to the Wall... scratches a red X through Lucy's photo with jagged strokes.

THE FAN  
Fucking bitch! Why wouldn't she  
listen! Why won't any of 'em listen  
to me?

To the computer, switches it on.

THE FAN  
You'll listen though.

While it hums to life he goes to the fridge. Inside old  
pizza, cans of beer. Half a green loaf.

He takes a beer.

Sits at the computer. Opens email. Taps a message. Drinks  
beer.

Pushes SEND.

A beat then a BEEP. Email sent. He sits back.

Waits.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe strokes her hair, her face lost in his chest. They  
breathe deeply, they breathe together.

JOE  
You know I've got that signing  
coming up, right?

HELENA  
When?

JOE  
Next weekend I think.

HELENA  
Jesus Joe. It's all work lately.  
When are you going to have time for  
me? For us?

JOE  
We have time together. What about  
this?

HELENA  
This is the first time in months  
we've not been at each others  
throats. I hardly call it quality,  
(MORE)

HELENA (cont'd)  
though. I thought you were  
concentrating on the script?

JOE  
The book still has its own life. I  
can't just ignore that or sales  
will drop.

HELENA  
You're going to burn yourself out.  
(beat)  
Promise me you'll take a break when  
this is all over?

JOE  
Not a problem.

HELENA  
Wait... next weekend?

Joe is about three seconds away from sleep.

JOE  
Uh-huh.

HELENA  
(sits up)  
You were taking Billy  
paint-balling. For his birthday. A  
late gift. We had to change it  
because of Linda's son. You knew  
about this.

JOE  
You're right. I did. I forgot to  
change it.

He starts to get out of bed.

HELENA  
Wait... where are you going now?

JOE  
I'm going to send Tom an email.  
Tell him to move it.

HELENA  
Really? You'll do that?

JOE  
Course I will... babe, I messed up  
before. I'm not going to do that  
again.

(kisses her)  
Be right back!

She pats his naked butt as he jumps away.

HELENA  
You better hurry back, big boy!

JOE  
Yes, ma'am.

He runs out, Helena laughs. Snuggles into the warm duvet.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

He falls into the chair. Switches on the laptop.

Waits.

He takes down from the wall a frame. Inside a cheque. He peels away white masking tape on which is written: "First Ever Sale".

He takes the cheque out. Drops it in a drawer. Puts in their marriage photo. Stands the frame on his desk.

Smiles.

The chime of new email.

COMPUTER SCREEN SHOWS WINDOWS MAIL

Three messages. "READ ME"; "JOE - IMPORTANT" and "TWITTER NEW FOLLOWER".

The cursor moves over Read Me. Moves it to the Recycle Bin.

INT. FLAT

The Fan wears a microphone headset. He stares at his computer screen. A video chat room. A large woman - BBW - plays with her tits. She moans. We hear her.

He drinks a beer.

THE FAN  
Suck your tits bitch!

She does.

The ping of email. He opens email. The message: "Your email was deleted without opening."

THE FAN  
Fucking cunt!

On the computer screen the BBW stops what she's doing... reaches out of frame. The picture fades, replaced with the message: <YOU HAVE BEEN LOCKED OUT>

He screams, throws his beer can.

Starts tapping on the keyboard.

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

He moves the cursor to the Twitter message.

COMPUTER SCREEN IMAGE

of Joe's Twitter account. "silent\_voice wants to follow you"

Joe clicks delete just as a message appears in the stream.

TWITTER PAGE

from @liveforu: why won't you read it? She wouldn't read it either and look what happened to him. I only want to help you.

Joe sits back.

JOE  
What the fuck?

TWITTER PAGE

again from @liveforu: You should read it. I'm only looking out for you. Ask Lucy. Oh, wait...

Joe clicks BLOCK SENDER.

INT. FLAT

The Fan types in another message. Hits send.

COMPUTER SCREEN

The message: The Recipient has prevented further messages being sent.

The Fan goes mental. Throws the keyboard across the room... kicks the chair over...

He rushes to the Wall.

THE FAN  
Eenie... meenie... miney... mo!

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Twitter closed down he moves the cursor over the last message.

It opens. He starts to read.

His eyes widen, a hand shakes to his open mouth.

JOE  
Oh, God.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Mourners file away, led by the Vicar. A pair of graveyard workers stand at a discreet distance.

Joe stands with Helena's hand entwined with his. She turns to him. His stare is locked on the fresh grave.

The tombstone: LUCY HAYE

Tom stands on one side, Craig the other.

JOE  
I can't believe it. I really can't.  
This is turning into a fucking  
nightmare.

HELENA  
I know we had our... differences,  
but she didn't deserve this.

VOICE (O.S)  
Mr Pittman?

Everyone turns to see a man in a suit walk towards them. He fishes a wallet from a pocket, holds it out.

MILLS  
David Mills, Violent Crimes Unit.  
I'm sorry for intruding on such an  
occasion but I really need to talk  
with you.

JOE  
Is it about Lucy?

MILLS

Well, not just Ms Haye but also Mr Catts.

HELENA

Ernie? Ernie wasn't murdered.

MILLS

We have reason to believe he was.

They all start back towards the cars. Craig goes on ahead.

MILLS

Do you know of anyone who might have a grudge against you Mr Pittman?

JOE

No. Not at all. I'm nobody.

MILLS

You're a writer. A pretty successful one at that. you'd be surprised what sort of feelings that can elicit in some folks.

(beat)

You've not had any strange phone calls, visitors to the house or emails?

JOE

Emails?

MILLS

We found some pretty disturbing emails on Mr Catts computer. Couldn't trace them as they'd been sent through many different servers and Mr Catts hadn't just deleted them but shredded them as well.

JOE

I can't say I have. I mean I get a lot of spam and some fan stuff but nothing weird. To be honest I thought I'd get a lot more crap. Ernie was always against me putting out my personal email address but I like to interact with the fans, you know.

(pause)

Oh wait. Last night, or more likely this morning, I got a few strange Tweets.

MILLS

Tweets?

JOE

You know... Twitter.

MILLS

Oh right. Yes. My daughter keeps saying I should start Twittering. I don't see the point, to be perfectly honest.

HELENA

You and about a million others.

JOE

I didn't think anything of them. Just someone making a joke.

MILLS

Can you remember what they said?

JOE

No. I deleted them. I do remember the name they came from though. At-live-for-you.

Mills notes this down.

MILLS

Well, its a start. I'll look into it, Anything else?

JOE

No.

TOM

And I've not had anything since taking over from Ernie.

MILLS

Well if you do, please get in touch immediately. We think there might be someone with a grudge against you. A pretty twisted grudge as well. Their M.O is unique to you.

HELENA

In what way? You're starting to scare me now Detective.

They stand at the cars.

Craig holds the door for Helena to get in.

She doesn't... she waits for Mills to reply.

MILLS

I would have thought you of all people would have seen it by now. Three people all connected with you have been killed in the last week.

JOE

Can it be just a coincidence?

MILLS

It could but then I'd have to start believing in Santa Clause.

JOE

You don't believe in Santa Clause? Sorry... I... I don't know why I said that.

MILLS

It's okay, sir. Grief can have a strange effect on people. Grief and guilt. No... I don't believe in Santa Clause but I do believe in the boogy-man and this particular boogy-man believes in you. He also read your book.

JOE

I don't -- No. Jesus, no...

HELENA

What? What's wrong?

Joe's face is pale.

JOE

You think he's a copycat?

MILLS

Very likely. He's read your book and for some twisted reason is now killing people close to you in the same characteristic as those in your book. Agent, colleague... same relationships. Same manner of death, a hit and run and thrown from a building.

HELENA

Oh Joe. Joe, that's terrible.

MILLS  
The question is why?

A long beat. Mills' eyes locked onto Joe like a homing target. Joe barely blinks.

MILLS  
But that's what we're going to find out.

He hands Joe a business card.

MILLS  
If you think of anything that might help, please get in touch. The sooner the better.

JOE  
I will.

TOM  
What about Police protection?

MILLS  
Until we're certain that Mr Pittman really is a target there's nothing we can do. Not yet. That's why you need to think really hard about what could be motivating this nut-job.

JOE  
Trust me, I will be.

Mills gives a brief nod. Walks away.

Helena turns to her husband.

HELENA  
What if he's right? what if someone has got a thing for you. There's a lot of crazies out there. I told you to be careful with the internet. You don't know who's watching.

The image shifts to become as though viewed through binoculars.

They lower to reveal

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

THE FAN

stood on a rise at the far end. He lets out a breath.

He raises the binoculars again.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Helena looks directly at Joe, a deep concern in her eyes.

HELENA

What about this signing you're  
going on? What if they try  
something then?

JOE

I'll be fine. I've got Tom with me.

HELENA

No offence but he's hardly going to  
be able to defend you.

(beat)

What about Craig?

Joe turns to his assistant.

JOE

What about it Craig? Fancy a night  
in the big city? Paid of course.

CRAIG

I don't think anyone's going to be  
stupid enough to try anything but,  
yeah. Okay. I'll do it.

TOM

And it's a low key thing anyway. No  
one'll be there.

JOE

Satisfied?

HELENA

Not really. Not until this gets  
sorted out, but it'll have to do, I  
suppose. Now you hurry home.  
Billy's staying over at Linda's  
tonight so you know what that  
means?

He leans in for a kiss.

HELENA

It means you forgot to tell him you were going away today. He's sulking.

JOE

I didn't forget anything. Why's he sulking?

HELENA

You better ask him.

INT. BILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Billy sits on his bed, kills computer zombies. A noise at the door. He doesn't turn.

A beat.

The door creeps open.

Billy kills more zombies. A shadow falls over the boy as arms grab him.

JOE

Gotcha!

BILLY

Dad! I'm playing. Oh, look-it. You got me killed.

(presses reset)

I thought you had to go out?

JOE

I do, but I couldn't go without giving you a ruffle sandwich.

He grabs the boy. Ruffles his hair but good.

Billy breaks away.

BILLY

Bye then.

Joe sits back.

A beat.

Billy restarts the game.

EXT. PITTMAN HOME - DAY

Helena leans on the car. In the passenger seat Tom fiddles with the radio. Craig in back checks his phone.

HELENA

Is this really going to be worth it  
if no one's there?

TOM

Yeah. After what happened it's all  
the more important for Joe to show  
his face. Let everyone - namely the  
film producers - know it's business  
as usual.

HELENA

There are times I wish he never  
started writing that damn book in  
the first place. What if there  
really is a nut out there, gunning  
for him?

CRAIG

I wouldn't worry about it 'Lena.  
You know what the cops are like  
these days. A few bad spots of  
publicity with some high profile  
murders and they get all 1884.

TOM

You mean 1984?

CRAIG

Do I? Whatever. They want to make  
sure nothing happens and are  
probably seeing connections where  
there aren't any. Seriously 'Lena,  
don't worry.

HELENA

Easier said than done. Right, have  
fun. I'll go see where he is.

She walks away.

Tom turns to look at Craig.

TOM

'Lena?

INT. BILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Joe watches a beat longer, reaches forward, clicks the OFF button.

BILLY

Hey! I was on for clearing the level.

JOE

And I'm on for clearing the air. What's up?

BILLY

I spent ages getting to that point.

JOE

You spent ten minutes and you'll do it again probably twice as fast next time. I want to talk to you.

BILLY

But--

JOE

Look at me, sprout.

Billy does, though reluctant.

BILLY

What?

JOE

I know when there's something wrong 'cos you do just the same things that I do when there's something bothering me. So come on... out with it.

A beat.

BILLY

I heard you and mum talking the other night.

JOE

Which night?

BILLY

Last night. After Mrs Hayes got killed.

JOE  
Ms.

BILLY  
What?

JOE  
She's not... she wasn't married so  
she's a Ms not a Mrs.

BILLY  
Oh.

JOE  
I'm glad you're sad because that  
means you care. I want you to care.  
You should care about people you  
know.

BILLY  
I didn't know her very well, but I  
thought she was nice.

JOE  
She was.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Helena comes to the top of the stairs. Hears voices.

Stops outside Billy's room, against the wall where she can't  
be seen.

INT. BILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Billy turns to look at his Dad.

BILLY  
You liked her didn't you?

JOE  
I did.

BILLY  
More than mum?

A shocked beat.

Joe scoots over to Billy. An arm about the boy's shoulder.

JOE

I love your mum. Very much. Yes, I liked Lucy too but not the way I like your mum. I love your mum. I didn't love Lucy, not in the same way.

(beat)

You like Lisa Henderson, right?

BILLY

Dad!

JOE

Hey, it's okay. You should like girls at your age. I know I did. But you like Debbie from next door as well, don't you?

BILLY

Debbie with the lisp Debbie? Dad! Come on I might only be ten but I'm not blind.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Helena stifles a laugh. Smiles.

INT. BILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Joe gives his sons hair another ruffle.

JOE

What I mean is You like two girls but in different ways, right. You don't mind hanging out with Debbie, but if you had the choice you'd spend all your time with Lisa, right?

BILLY

Right.

JOE

Well, that's the same thing with Lucy and your Mum. Your mum is my Lisa Henderson.

Billy turns to look at his dad for the first time throughout the whole conversation.

BILLY

(soft)

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)  
Really?

JOE  
Really.

Billy hugs his dad.

JOE  
Got to get going now, sprout. You  
have a good time over at Alan's  
tonight.

BILLY  
Will do.

Billy starts playing his game again.

Joe gets up. Walks to the door. Stops.

JOE  
Love you sprout.

A beat.

BILLY  
Love you too, Dad.

Joe smiles.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Joe nearly walks into Helena. She wipes at her eyes.

JOE  
Are you okay?

HELENA  
Ahuh. I was just coming to get you.  
What were you two talking about.

JOE  
Guy stuff.

HELENA  
Guy stuff?

JOE  
Yup.

She leans in. Kisses him.

HELENA  
You're sweet at times.

EXT. PITTMAN HOME - DAY

Joe walks round the other side of the car. Gets in.

TOM  
About bloody time.

JOE  
Oh shut up. It only takes ten minutes to drive there.

TOM  
Well, I want to stop off on the way. I'm hungry.

CRAIG  
Me too.

JOE  
Jesus. A right pair you make.

Helena and Billy watch as Joe starts the car, backs it down the drive. They follow, waving.

INT. A CAR - DAY

The Fan watches as Joe's car - a PEUGEOT - turns round and drives away.

He watches as Helena leads Billy back up the drive.

A beat, then he starts the car.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

The Peugeot travels along accompanied to a soundtrack of radio stations, the channels being changed after brief samples of music.

INT. JOE'S CAR - DAY - TRAVELLING

Joe drives while Tom fiddles with the radio. Craig still checks his phone.

JOE  
Will you leave it?

TOM  
I can't find anything.

CRAIG  
That country and western channel  
sounded good.

TOM  
Can't you pick up Talk Sport on  
this thing? Jesus, when are you  
going to get a decent car?

JOE  
When you get me a decent sale.

CRAIG  
What about the script deal?

TOM  
That's split fifty-fifty with Lucy  
and it wasn't that much anyway.

CRAIG  
Erm... do I have to be the guy to  
say she's dead? Don't you get it  
all now?

JOE  
Deal still stands. Her half goes to  
her family.

TOM  
I still think --

JOE  
I know what you think. The deal  
still stands. It's only right.

Tom fiddles with the radio again.

JOE  
Are you going to be like this all  
day?

TOM  
What?

JOE  
Like this... antsy. We've only been  
in the car 2 minutes and already  
you're starting to piss me off.

TOM  
That's rich coming from you.

JOE  
Come on, spill it. What's up?

TOM  
Nothing's up. I just can't find  
anything worth listening to.

He gives the dial another twist then gives up in disgust.

CRAIG  
Bollocks. You're up to something.  
Like that time you tried to fix me  
up with that waitress when we went  
to Arizona.

TOM  
Oh, I remember her. She was nice.  
She was perfect for you. Big tits,  
nice plump ass.

CRAIG  
Well, if she was that perfect for  
me how come you ended up taking her  
back to the hotel?

TOM  
You let the moment pass you by. I  
don't do that.

CRAIG  
I know. You used my bed!

He gives the back of Tom's seat a playful kick.

TOM  
Oh yeah.  
(smiles)  
It was a long session if I remember  
right.

JOE  
I lied to that Police man.

A beat.

TOM  
What?

JOE  
I got another email the night she  
was killed.

A long beat.

Tom stares straight ahead. Craig is open mouthed.

JOE  
Did you hear what I said?

TOM  
I heard. What did you do?

JOE  
What you told me to do. I deleted  
it.

TOM  
Good.

CRAIG  
Do you think there's anything to  
what that guy said?

JOE  
I bloody hope not.

Another beat of silence.

TOM  
I'm hungry.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

The Peugeot passes a sign: REST STOP 3 MILES

The car moves across the lanes getting ready to turn off.

The sound of the radio being scrambled again.

JOE (O.S.)  
Tom!

CRAIG (O.S.)  
Jesus!

The car drives out of frame.

A few trucks and cars pass by.

Then the Fans car appears...

INT. REST STOP - DAY

Salesmen grab a quick bite. Company Reps talk loudly into their cell phones, making deals.

Craig and Joe eat burgers. Tom eats a salad butty.

CRAIG

Whats with the rabbit food?

TOM

I don't eat meat.

JOE

That's not what I heard.

Craig laughs so hard he splutters sauce down his shirt.

Tom leans forward, a napkin poised.

CRAIG

What you doing?

TOM

You're like a big kid. Can't take you anywhere.

CRAIG

(sees the stain)

Well, tell me about it, don't be a mum about it.

(dabs it)

Shit. That's gonna stain. It's a new shirt.

TOM

Not just the shirt.

He points to a stain of sauce on Craigs trousers.

CRAIG

Trust you to notice.

Craig stands.

JOE

Where you going?

CRAIG

Toilet. I can't go to the event like this. What if there's hot girls there?

TOM  
Thinking with his meat again.

JOE  
Well, hurry up. I'm going as soon  
as I've finished this.

CRAIG  
(rushing away)  
I'll meet you back at the car.

He heads off at pace to the toilets.

A beat.

JOE  
Kids.

INT. REST STOP TOILETS - DAY

Craig stands at the sink, dabs at his shirt. He does nothing more than spread it around.

The door opens.

The Fan enters.

He stands at a sink. Washes his hands.

Craig looks over. Sees the Fan looking at him.

CRAIG  
Damn burgers. Tasty but messy as  
hell, right?

The Fan says nothing. He washes his hands.

Finishes. Walks away.

CRAIG  
Okay.

Craig dabs again at the spot.

Behind him the dryer starts like an F1 engine.

Craig jumps, looks in the mirror.

The Fan stares at him, a hand deep in a pocket, fishing around.

CRAIG

Oh, hell man. I'm not into that sort of thing. You get your freak on with someone else, okay.

The Fan steps towards him.

Craig backs away.

The door opens. An attendant comes in with a mop.

ATTENDANT

Oh, sorry gents. I'll give you five minutes but keep the noise down alright.

CRAIG

Like fuck you will. He's some kind of pervert. Wacking his jerky while watching me.

ATTENDANT

Whatever floats your boat.

CRAIG

That sortta shit sinks my boat faster than the Titanic. Aren't you going to do something?

The Fan pushes past, drags open the door. Runs.

CRAIG

Yeah you better run.  
(beat)  
Fucking freak.

The attendant is looking at the stain on his trousers.

A beat.

CRAIG

It's burger sauce.

INT. JOE'S CAR - DAY

Craig's the last one in. Takes up driving duty.

Joe unwraps a CD. Tom roots through a bag.

JOE

What took you so long?

CRAIG  
Don't fucking ask. What's that?

JOE  
Some Huey Lewis and The News.

TOM  
Oh God.

CRAIG  
Anything's better than you  
twiddling the radio like a hookers  
nipple.

JOE  
What's up with you?

CRAIG  
Nothing. Just a weird guy in the  
toilet trying to jerk off to me.

TOM  
Really?

CRAIG  
That's just some fucked up shit.

JOE  
Did you let him finish?

CRAIG  
Fuck off. That shit ain't funny.  
And I didn't get to finish my  
burger.

He passes him a bag of sweets.

Craig peers inside. Takes one.

CRAIG  
Kola Kubes... why Ambassador,  
you're spoiling us.

TOM  
And we might even have time for a  
drink before-hand.

JOE  
Now you're talking.

TOM  
Might.

Craig starts the engine.

EXT. SERVICE STATION CAR PARK - DAY

The Peugeot pulls out.

Drives past

THE FAN

sat in his own car.

A beat.

A second later, his car pulls out into traffic.

EXT. OAKEN BAR - DAY

The sign is a giant tree. Branches spread wide.

Craig goes straight inside.

Joe pauses.

JOE

I don't know Tom. I don't want to  
do this thing pissed.

TOM

Who said anything about getting  
pissed? You're working so that just  
won't happen. I won't let it, but  
we've all been through a lot of  
shit in the last few days and some  
'us' time is in order.

(a beat)

I promise I won't tell the wife.

JOE

That's not what I'm worried about.

TOM

Well, what are you worried about?  
I'm buying?

JOE

That's what worries me. You only  
buy a round when there's bad news.

Tom laughs, claps Joe on the back.

Holds the door open.

INT. OAKEN BAR - DAY

Dark. Atmospheric. The Oaken Bar is a stark contrast to the bright sunshine.

A dozen people sit in the dark, nursing various drinks.

Johnny Cash sings "Cry Cry Cry" on the jukebox.

Craig already has the drinks in: Jack for Joe; beer for Craig. Wine spritzer for Tom.

TOM  
Funny bugger.

JOE  
Seriously, don't tell Helena I was drinking. I made a promise.

CRAIG  
It's just one. It can't hurt.

TOM  
It's never just one.

JOE  
It is now. It is from now on. I fucked up before. That thing with Lucy was a mistake.

TOM  
To Lucy.

They raise their glasses.

The umbrella falls out of Tom's glass.

TOM  
Fuck this. I'm getting a real drink.

He walks off into the darkened interior.

A beat.

Joe drinks.

Craig looks at his phone.

Another beat.

Craig looks at Joe.

CRAIG  
There's something I need to tell  
you.

Joe stares straight ahead.

JOE  
No, you don't.

CRAIG  
I think I do.

JOE  
No. You don't.

A beat.

They drink.

CRAIG  
So you think what that cop said is  
true? You think there's some whacko  
out there copying you?

JOE  
I didn't go around killing people.

CRAIG  
No, but you wrote about it, so it's  
kind of your responsibility, don't  
you think?

JOE  
I didn't...  
(pause)  
... think anyone would do what I  
wrote.

Joe turns. Stares directly at Craig who wilts under the  
power of the look.

JOE  
It's crazy. They're crazy!

CRAIG  
But...

JOE  
No. No buts, no if's and certainly  
no maybes. Just because someone  
writes about killing, doesn't mean  
another person has to go out there  
and do it.

CRAIG  
Fair enough.

JOE  
So no... I'm not taking the heat  
for this. This isn't my fault.

CRAIG  
I know. I just thought... man, it's  
fucked up.

JOE  
Yes. Fucked all the way up.

They raise glasses. Drink.

Tom returns. He holds a martini. His look passes from Joe to  
Craig.

TOM  
What are you two smirking about.

JOE  
Private joke.

TOM  
Care to let me in on it?

CRAIG  
Care to get a man's drink? What the  
fuck is that?

Tom twirls his glass. It catches the light.

TOM  
Shaken, not stirred.

He sits.

TOM  
So you ready?

JOE  
I think so. What do I do if someone  
asks about Lucy?

TOM  
Give that solemn bullshit look you  
do, spout your condolences and move  
on. Don't get drawn. And don't say  
a damn thing about the possibility  
of some fucking psycho stalking  
you.

JOE  
Sounds like good publicity to me.  
It's what I write after all. It's  
why they're making it into a movie.

TOM  
All the more reason not to say a  
fucking word.

They drink.

CRAIG  
Nearly time to go.

They finish their drinks.

JOE  
How big's the store?

TOM  
Huge. It's gonna look bad when they  
don't fill all the seats.

EXT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

A long line of eager customers stretches around the  
bookstore. An excited nervous hum of conversation.

Joe, Tom and Craig stare in amazement.

CRAIG  
Don't fill all the seats?

TOM  
Helena's going to kill me.

BISHOP, 46, waits at the door. A long face, glasses perched  
on the end of his birdlike nose.

He talks at a million miles an hour.

MR BISHOP  
There you are. Thank you for  
coming. Thank you. Shall we move  
this along?  
(a beat)  
I thought a few early autographs?

TOM  
That's not our usual--

JOE  
 (scowls at Tom)  
 Sure. Why not.

Bishop grins.

BISHOP  
 If you'll please come this way?

He leads them inside.

TOM  
 We're trying to limit your exposure  
 to the public, remember? I promised  
 Helena.

JOE  
 What she won't know won't kill her,  
 right?

TOM  
 Let's hope it doesn't kill you.

EXT. IN THE CROWD - DAY

The Fan watches the group walk into the store. He looks down  
 at the ticket in his hand:

TICKET IMAGE

Joe, book in hand stood against a gravestone. The caption: Q  
 & A WITH BESTSELLING HORROR WRITER. Ticket #1

With rapid strokes, the Fan rips through Joe's grinning face  
 with a silver pen.

The line starts to move.

INT. BOOKSHOP - MAIN FLOOR

Mr Bishop leads everyone across the shop floor.

MR BISHOP  
 I'm quite certain you'll be pleased  
 with tonight's arrangements. I have  
 overseen everything myself. We're  
 all very excited to have you here,  
 Mr Pittman. As soon as we  
 advertised that you were coming, we  
 got such a rush of inquiries. One  
 person kept ringing nearly every  
 (MORE)

MR BISHOP (cont'd)  
day until we released the tickets,  
making sure he got one. He bought  
the very first one. Now that's  
dedication.

Tom gives Joe an "I told you" look.

Joe shrugs it away.

JOE  
Well, I've been looking forward to  
it for a long time. You know, this  
was the first store to stock my  
book. Seems only fitting I come  
here to push the next one.

BISHOP  
And we're honoured. Ah, here we  
are. I hope everything is to your  
satisfaction.

They stop at a table covered with black lace. A lectern in  
the shape of an eagle stands in the middle of the table.

Copies of Joe's book stand in a huge tower.

Tom sits on a plastic chair, his face like thunder.

Craig looks excited.

TOM  
They could have at least got a  
couple of comfy seats. My ass is  
killing me already. These things  
always drag, especially when you  
get into the zone.  
(to Craig)  
You haven't been to one of these  
before, so I'll tell you now how it  
works. He gives a few jokes, reads  
from a passage then answers every  
nonsensical question. It goes on  
for hours or at least feels like it  
does. You best go to the toilet  
before it begins cos you won't get  
another chance for at least an  
hour.  
(sees Joe's face)  
What?

JOE  
Whose idea was this in the first  
place?

TOM  
Ernie's.

JOE  
That's it. Blame the dead man.

Craig stands.

TOM  
Where you going? I was joking.

CRAIG  
I do need the loo. And besides, it  
looks like fun.

He walks away.

TOM  
You know he's going to do a runner,  
don't you? He'll be home before  
either of us. Lucky bastard.

JOE  
I'm going to pretend I didn't hear  
that.

INT. BOOKSHOP - MAIN FLOOR

The Fan pretends to read a book as he watches Craig move  
away from the reading area and head inside the toilets.

He puts the book down. Starts towards the toilets as the  
lights dim.

Applause like thunder.

JOE

stands behind the lectern. Raises his arms for quiet.

JOE  
Thanks. Thanks everyone for coming.  
Let me start by reading a quick  
passage from Deadline, soon to be a  
major Hollywood blockbuster...

Cheers from the crowd.

INT. BOOKSHOP - MEN'S TOILETS

Craig looks in the mirror. Grooms himself

INT. BOOKSHOP - MAIN FLOOR

The Fan walks to the toilets. A mop and bucket stand outside.

He takes a sign: TOILET BEING CLEANED. Stands it across the door.

He goes inside.

INT. BOOKSHOP - MAIN FLOOR

The crowd are in rapt awe.

JOE

reads from his book.

TOM

flicks through his mobile phone.

Joe sees this, scowls.

Tom smirks... puts the phone away.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MEN'S TOILETS - CUBICLE

Craig flicks through the comic book as he works a tissue in his nose.

He lets out a quick bark of laughter.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MEN'S TOILETS

The Fan hears the laugh. Moves over to the only closed cubicle.

From his pocket he takes a silver pen, removes the cap. The nib is pointed, sharp.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MAIN FLOOR

Joe finishes, closes his book. The crowd erupt into thunderous applause.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MEN'S TOILETS - CUBICLE

Craig flips another page.

The door bursts open, the hinges snap... it strikes Craig across the knees, rips his skin. Blood flows.

CRAIG  
What the fuck!

The Fan lunges, his arm stabs down.

Craig raises a hand, the nib punctures his palm. The Fan pushes forward. Punctures through the other side.

Craig cries out.

The Fan stabs down again... again...

INT. BOOKSTORE - EVENT AREA

Joe signs copies of his book. The crowd has thinned, just a few remain.

Tom saunters over, stands behind him.

JOE  
Any sign?

Tom lets out a laugh, shakes his head.

TOM  
I told you he'd do a runner. I don't blame him.

Joe hands another book back. Laughs.

JOE  
Me neither.

TOM  
You just about done?

JOE  
A few more.

TOM  
I'm gonna hit the loo myself then.

JOE  
Don't you be doing a runner as well.

TOM  
Fat chance of that. Someone's got to look out for you.

INT. BOOKSHOP - MEN'S TOILETS - CUBICLE

The Fan has stopped his attack.

Craig is slumped on the toilet. A dozen wounds to his neck, face, hands. Blood runs freely.

The Fan reaches down, grabs him, hauls him upright. A low moan escapes Craigs ruined face.

THE FAN  
Not so pretty now, are you? Guess Mrs Pittman won't be wanting kisses from you anymore.

From a pocket he takes the yellow envelope.

THE FAN  
Remember this? I'm guessing you didn't give it to him, did you?

CRAIG  
Fuck... fuck you.

He spits blood.

The Fan wipes it free.

Punches Craig hard.

THE FAN  
Now that's not nice. Is it? But you reap what you sow, and reap you shall.

With a powerful punch he jams the silver pen into Craig's cheek. His hand clamps over the battered man's mouth, silences his moans of anguish.

THE FAN

Why won't anyone just do what I ask  
of them? They've always got to go  
and make everything so fucking  
complicated.

The Fan sneers... stabs the pen into Craig's shoulder. Blood  
gushes when he pulls it free.

THE FAN

Keep it simple. That's my motto.  
Keep...  
(stabs again - left cheek)  
... it...  
(stabs again - left neck)  
... simple.

The final punch thrusts the pen into Craig's left hand.

The Fan pushes his blood streaked hand over Craig's mouth to  
stifle his scream.

A beat.

The Fan lets his hand drop.

CRAIG

(barely audible)

Why?

THE FAN

I ask the questions. I'm always  
asking questions and no one never  
gives me any answers. No one gives  
me any time.

(beat)

But I bet he will after I've had a  
chat with her. Just like in the  
book. Everything changes when he  
talks to the wife.

He lowers the pen so that the nib is poised over Craig's  
right eye.

THE FAN

Where is she?

INT. BOOKSTORE - MAIN FLOOR

Tom heads to the toilet. He's about to enter when he sees the sign. Pauses.

The door bursts open. A figure rushes out. Bumps into Tom but doesn't stop.

TOM  
Oh, don't mind me I'm sure.

Tom goes inside.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MEN'S TOILETS

Tom washes his hands in the sink. Moves to the hand dryer, starts it.

In the mirror a red trickle on the floor.

His eyes follow it to a cubicle, the door hangs from broken hinges.

He heads over. Looks inside.

CRAIG

slumped on the toilet. A silver pen sticks from his eye... his shirt open... into his chest carved the words: READ ME

Below that a sheet of paper pinned into Craigs belly by another pen.

Tom rips the paper free. Reads.

When he runs from the toilet he slips in the blood.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MAIN FLOOR

Tom bursts from the toilets, red foot prints left behind him. His screams make everyone stop.

TOM  
JOE! JOE!

He dashes through the aisles, bloody footprints behind him.

Joe hears him, stands. Chaos amongst the customers.

JOE

Tom?

TOM

Craig. He killed Craig... and he's  
after Helena next. He thinks he's  
who you based Deadline on.

He thrusts the paper into Joe's hand.

PAPER

the words are scrawled scratches. We read:

"Thought you were so clever. Stealing my life. Well I can  
steal yours just as easily. One final Deadline..."

Joe looks up. Stunned.

JOE

No.

TOM

What does he mean, you stole his  
life? Do you know who this is?

JOE

Fuck!  
(reads again)  
Fuck!

TOM

The cop was right, Joe. This fucker  
thinks you based your book on him.  
He's re-enacting the killings.

JOE

He doesn't think I based the book  
on him. I stole the book from him!

TOM

is a frozen, shocked form.

TOM

You idiot! I knew something like  
this was up. I just fucking knew  
it!

(beat)

Oh fuck!

JOE

What?

TOM

The last one in the book... it was  
the family member.

JOE

Helena!

They rush out of the bookstore.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Helena pours a glass of wine with one hand, the other holds  
the phone. The music playing is Nick Cave's "Spell."

HELENA (INTO PHONE)

A large bolognaise deep pan. Yes.  
Side salad. Caesar dressing,  
please.

(laughs)

Oh, go on then, better make it a  
large tub. How much? Great. How  
long?

She looks at the microwave clock. 18:35

HELENA

Fine. Thanks.

She hangs up, refills her glass, drinks deeply.

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

Helena turns the bath water on. Adds some bubble-bath.  
Swishes it around.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Cast in shadow, the only sound is the running water from the  
bath upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM - DUSK

She slowly undresses. Heads to the bedroom.

Pauses.

Turns her phone off.

INT. CAR -NIGHT - TRAVELING

Joe stares at the phone with disbelief. Tom drives.

JOE  
Damn it! It keeps going to answer  
phone.

TOM  
What about her cell?

JOE  
This is her cell. We only have one.

TOM  
Why the hell do you only have one?

JOE  
I don't make calls. I Tweet.

TOM  
Fucking ridiculous.

Joe starts fishing through his pockets. Pulls a card out.

JOE  
I know who to call.

Starts to punch buttons.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Helena wears a bathrobe, her hair wrapped in a towel. She  
drinks wine.

A knock sounds.

Still with wine glass in hand, Helena dances to the door.

HELENA  
(singing)  
Pizzeria Mama-Mia...  
(at the door)  
Who is it?

VOICE (O.S)  
Pizza delivery.

She opens the door.

Holds the door half open.

The Fan smiles, the pizzabox balanced in one hand.

THE FAN  
I got a hot delivery for you.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

The car screams through traffic.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - TRAVELLING

Joe tries the home phone again.

Tom's eyes are fixed on the road.

JOE  
Can't you go any faster?

TOM  
We're nearly there.

INT. LIVING ROOM -NIGHT

Helena crashes through the coffee table, her face slashed, her arms flayed by the glass.

The Fan drags her up by her hair... throws her into the mantelpiece... the clock smashes apart... the candlesticks crash to the floor.

She falls back... twists round, right into a powerful punch.

Her head rocks back... blood sprays from bust lips. Her legs give out... she falls to the floor.

He looms over her, his shadow thrown around the room as a car passes outside.

THE FAN  
He stole my life. I should have had  
what he had. It should have been  
mine. It should have been mine!

HELENA  
You fucking freak!

Her face - puffy, bruised - is defiant.

She glares at him through one eye, the other is already swollen shut.

THE FAN  
I'm not a freak... I'm a writer!

Her fingers close round a shard of broken glass, grips it tight, blood runs from her hand.

HELENA  
Get out now or by God I'm going to fuck you up.

THE FAN  
Now there's a thought.

The Fan reaches down, rubs his crotch. Leers at her.

HELENA  
Fucking try it.

He grabs for the lapels of her robe.

She takes a swipe, misses. Struggles as he hauls her up.

THE FAN  
Gonna enjoy this.

She swipes at his face... cuts a long furrow in his flesh, rips it open with the glass shard.

He falls back, clutches at his blood soaked face.

THE FAN  
You cunt!

She scrambles to escape through the broken glass.

Behind her, the Fan continues to claw at his face.

He wipes blood from his eyes, clears them just as she tries to get past him.

He grabs her, throws her onto the sofa.

THE FAN  
Fucking bitch. I'm gonna make you pay for that. I'm gonna hurt you in ways you never imagined.

He punches her... again... again... the sound like wet meat.

The sound of an approaching car makes him stop.

Helena is limp, broken. She collapses onto the sofa, moans softly.

Light fills the room briefly as a car pulls into the drive.  
Doors open.

JOE (O.S.)  
HELENA!

The Fan moves off her, to stand behind the door.  
As he goes he reaches for the lamp. Turns it off.  
The room is now lit only by the flicker of the fire.  
She tries to rise, blood runs from her wounds.  
Running footsteps on the gravel path outside.  
Helena moans...

JOE (O.S.)  
HELENA! ANSWER ME!

The Fan moves back, further into shadow.

HELENA  
(moans -soft)  
Joe... no... no...

The door bursts opens, a figure steps inside.

HELENA  
Joe...

The figure moves in, closes the door.

The Fan lunges, throws a heavy punch that knocks the figure fully into the room to sprawl on the floor.

The Fan rushes after, grabs the figure hauls him up.

A beat.

THE FAN  
Who the fuck are you?

Tom looks over at Helena lying on the sofa. She lifts a bloody hand to him.

HELENA  
Please...

THE FAN  
I said... who the fu--

Tom knocks the Fan's hands aside, bats them away easily.

A punch to the temple... to the face... to the gut...

Fast, fluid... Tom turns on The Fan... liquid violence.

Tom unleashes his inner Bruce Lee, an extended sequence that Helena can only witness with increasing awe until The Fan lies on the floor, shattered, broken.

TOM  
And fucking stay down!

Tom stands over him... breathes heavy. No movement.

He prods him with his foot... no reaction.

Helena puts her face in her hands as tears flood from her.

TOM  
Where's the lights?

She points.

He fumbles for them.

The room fills with light. It's a mess of broken glass, overturned chairs, books knocked from shelves, the cabinets smashed, curtains ripped.

Helena lies on the blood soaked sofa. Her tattered robe lies half open, revealing naked, bloody flesh.

HELENA  
Where's Joe?

JOE (O.S.)  
I'm here babe.

Joe rushes in from the kitchen. He holds one of Billy's cricket stumps.

JOE  
I went the back way just in case.  
Oh babe...

He drops to his knees beside his wife... pulls her to him, carefully. He dabs at the blood, wipes it away.

JOE  
Oh babe. I'm so sorry. It's all my  
fault.

HELENA  
This one's going to take some  
making up for.

Her laugh brings a bubble of blood to her mouth.

JOE  
Oh shit... babe you're bad. Tom the  
phone...

Tom searches.

TOM  
Where is it?

Helena points upstairs.

HELENA  
I took a bath.

Joe gives a hollow laugh.

JOE  
You and your baths, babe.

THE FAN (O.S.)  
Very fucking touching.

They turn.

THE FAN

holds a gun. Pointed right at Helena.

TOM  
You got to be fucking kidding me?

THE FAN  
If I can't fuck her, I can kill  
her.

No preamble -- he fires.

Tom jumps in the line of fire, his chest bursts with blood.

He grunts, hits the floor beside Joe.

JOE

Tom!

Blood gushes from the wound. Froths about Tom's lips.

TOM

I tried...

JOE

What?

TOM

... tried to keep him from you. I  
knew. Knew you'd taken... taken his  
book. I'm... sorry.

THE FAN

stares in mute shock. It lasts a second. He moves the gun  
back to Helena. Takes aim.

JOE

leaps to his feet, snatches up the cricket stump.

MILLS (O.S)

Everybody freeze!

THE FAN

turns to the voice.

MILLS

stands in the doorway, gun raised.

THE FAN

fires. Mills ducks back. Wood splinters explode from the  
door-frame.

The Fan brings the gun back towards Helena.

JOE

lunges. Stabs the cricket stump into the Fan's chest. The  
tip pierces his shirt.

THE FAN

You fucking idiot!

He levels the gun.

MILLS

fires into the Fans exposed back.

His body jerks, his limbs flail. His hand spasms, the gun fires into the ceiling.

He falls forward... the stump is plunged through his chest when he strikes the floor, impales him.

Mills runs to the Fan's side. Turns him over.

THE CRICKET STUMP

twitches in time to his heart beat.

Joe beside him.

JOE

Why?

The Fan just grins through blood.

THE CRICKET STUMP

stops twitching.

He dies.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PITTMAN HOME - NIGHT

Flashing emergency lights. Red. Blue. White.

A rush of Police. Tape everywhere.

TOM

is wheeled out on a gurney to an ambulance. Joe at his side.

JOE

What the hell were you thinking?  
Jumping in front of him like that?

TOM

Couldn't... let him. My fault.

Joe holds the man's hand.

JOE

Not your fault. It was mine. My  
arrogance. My need to be published.  
All my stuff kept coming back

(MORE)

JOE (cont'd)  
unread. His was brilliant but no  
one would listen to him. I can't  
think why.

Tom starts to laugh. Winces in pain.

PARAMEDIC  
He has to go now.

Joe lets him go.

Tom is lifted into the ambulance. The doors shut.

It drives away.

Mills appears.

MILLS  
Busy night.

JOE  
Busy week. Jesus... I never thought  
it would come to this.

MILLS  
They say the publishing world can  
be murder.

Helena joins them. She holds the Creative Writing Class  
photo. Passes it to Mills.

JOE  
That's him there. The one on the  
far left.

THE PHOTO

shows the man known only as the Fan. He doesn't stand on the  
stage. Just glares at those that do.

JOE  
He failed the course.

A bodybag is wheeled out of the house.

MILLS  
And his name?

A beat.

JOE  
I don't remember. How sad is that?

They watch as the bag is wheeled towards a coroners car.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CINEMA THEATRE

The semi-bored face of Billy as he fingers his ear,  
squirreling it deep inside.

His face is illuminated by the flickering images of the  
cinema screen.

SUPER: 18 MONTHS LATER

He sees the faces of his mum and dad. Helena gives a smile;  
Joe ruffles his hair.

JOE  
How you doing sprout?

BILLY  
Fine. Is it nearly over?

JOE  
Just about. What did you think?

BILLY  
It's okay.

HELENA  
I think the best part's coming up.

Joe looks at his wife. Tears fill his eyes.

JOE  
I think so too.

TOM  
(leans in)  
Shush. Some of us are still  
watching this you know.

She grins. Nick Cave's "Messiah Ward" starts to PLAY. They  
all turn to

THE CINEMA SCREEN

as large white letters appear: IN MEMORY AND DEDICATED TO  
HARVEY; ERNIE; LUCY; & TOM

Helena grips Joe's hand, squeezes it. Kisses him.

HELENA  
That was nice adding their names.  
(a beat)  
I love you.

JOE  
I love you too.

Billy jumps to his feet.

BILLY  
Can we go now?

Laughter.

FADE TO:

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dark shadows. Joe stares down at the Police presence outside as it winds down.

HELENA (O.S)  
Joe... are you coming to bed?

Joe opens a drawer.

JOE  
Soon!

He takes out a yellow envelope. "READ ME" written across the front. He opens it.

HELENA (O.S)  
Don't be long.

JOE  
I won't.

Pulls out a thick manuscript. The top sheet reads: DEADLINE  
BY MATTY CENT - 1984

Page by page he feeds it into a shredder.

FADE OUT:

THE END