

A PERSON OF INTEREST

by

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EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

In a dark driveway sits the silhouette of a police car, engine idling, lights off. The outline of a figure sits behind the wheel, and an argument can be heard coming from the talk RADIO playing from inside the car. After a moment, a car WHIZZES by. The figure snaps off the RADIO, hits the ROLLERS, and tears out after the car.

POLICE CAR POV - BACK OF THE SPEEDING CAR

LONGHAIR BURNOUT FACES in the back seat turn and squint in the lights. They furtively deal with something in their laps as the car pulls to the shoulder. We pull in behind it.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Four BURNOUTS with North Carolina accents try and stay still while panicking and disposing of drugs. Blue POLICE LIGHTS play on them from behind. Burnout #1 is behind the wheel, Burnout #2 is in the back, #3 is riding shotgun.

BURNOUT #3
(looking in the mirror)
Oh fuck, he's comin' up here.

BURNOUT #2
(to Burnout #3)
What did you do with the coke?

BURNOUT #3
(remembering)
Oh *shit*.

BURNOUT #1
What coke? You guys got coke?

A FLASHLIGHT hits Burnout #1 from outside his window, and he turns to it --

BURNOUT #1'S POV

Bright glaring light, and a dark FIGURE behind it.

FIGURE
Going kinda fast back there.

BURNOUT #1
I was?

FIGURE
Can I see your license and
registration please.

Burnout #1 flips down his visor and produces the docs. The flashlight goes down to the license, and we see the uniformed cop in the ambient light:

He is JAMES BALLARD. Could be 30, could be 40. From across the street he's a husky Southern cop -- he's carrying extra weight, has a wispy attempt at a mustache, and wears glasses. Get closer, though, as few do, and in his eyes are decency and optimism.

James looks hard at Burnout #3, who doesn't know whether to look back at him or avert his eyes.

JAMES
(to Burnout #3)
Hey. What you got in your shirt
pocket there?

BURNOUT #3
My shirt pocket?

JAMES
Your shirt pocket.

Burnout #3 looks in his shirt pocket. His life begins to flash before his eyes when A POLICE CRUISER pulls up next to James.

The COP in the passenger seat looks up to James.

COP
Everything okay?

JAMES
Yep. Just checking these guys out.
They were 22350 so I was checking
them for 11300. Possible narcotics.

The Cop exchanges a look with his partner behind the wheel (COP #2), then turns back to James.

COP
What kind of uniform is that?

JAMES
Campus Security, Foley Community
College.

COP
Right.

BURNOUT #1
Wait. What?

The Cops get out of the car, and gesture James away from the Burnout's car.

COP
Lemme talk to you over here for a second.

BURNOUT #1
Hey. I ain't in college.

JAMES
These guys were --

COP
Just come over here.

James grudgingly goes toward the cops.

JAMES
(to the Burnouts)
Y'all stay put.

COP
(to the Burnouts)
Y'all can go now.

Burnout #1 starts his engine and calls out after James.

BURNOUT #1
You're lucky I don't sue you! Fat-ass fake cop!

The Burnouts peel off into the night. James sighs.

JAMES
You guys just blew a possible 11300. Now, I don't know about you, but --

COP
Just what the fuck are you doing?

JAMES
Excuse me?

COP

You are not a police officer. You are a campus security guard for a campus that's a mile away from here.

JAMES

Foley's athletic field is right over there, which is where my surveillance position was--

COP

Your what?

JAMES

And, sir, I have passed the North Carolina State Police examinations and as such have been sworn to uphold the law. Now just because I don't currently work for a police department doesn't mean that I can just let things go down if they're right in front of me. I take the oath as seriously as you do.

The Cop looks at his partner, then back at James --

CUT TO:

INT. FOLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE - DEAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

DEAN MICHAEL LOWITZ sits behind his desk, looking up at James, the Cop, and a POLICE CAPTAIN. Lowitz is an unhappy man in general -- a failed '70s New York intellectual, stuck in a dead-end low-rent down-South academic position -- and even less happy to have had to come into the office tonight.

POLICE CAPTAIN

...I mean, it undermines our authority and I would say exposes your school to a lot of liability risk probably. I mean, he's not a police officer.

DEAN LOWITZ

Yes, Captain, that's why we're all here at 10:45 at night.

JAMES

His men let a possible 11300 go.

POLICE CAPTAIN

(to James)

Now you stop using police codes.
Right now.

DEAN LOWITZ

Captain, I'll take care of this.
We're very sorry. It will not
happen again.

POLICE CAPTAIN

Better not.

The cops leave. Dean Lowitz gestures toward a chair. James
sits.

DEAN LOWITZ

James, you're fired.

JAMES

Why?

DEAN LOWITZ

In the four months you've worked
here you have asked students
inappropriate questions. You have
commenced unauthorized
investigations into activities of
students and teachers. You have
illegally searched dorm rooms --

JAMES

-- For *pot*, that I found --

DEAN LOWITZ

All of which you have been
reprimanded for. And now, now you
have taken it into the public
streets.

JAMES

Dean Lowitz, I think it's fair to
say that tailing the participants
of a witnessed drug deal on campus
property is part of my job here.

DEAN LOWITZ

No. No it is not fair to say that.
It is fair to say that ticketing
illegally parked cars is part of
your job here, as is moving traffic
horses during football games, and
telling students to turn down their
stereos. You are not a police
officer. And now, you are not a
security guard, either.

Dean Lowitz stands.

DEAN LOWITZ (cont'd)

That's it. Now if you'll excuse me.

James stands, takes his badge off, and gravely offers it to
Lowitz.

DEAN LOWITZ (cont'd)

I don't want that. That's not even
issued by us. You bought that in a
uniform store.

JAMES

I did the right thing.

DEAN LOWITZ

Great. Goodbye.

James shrugs, and walks out.

CREDITS OVER:

SHOTS OF THE RALEIGH/DURHAM/CHAPEL HILL AREA, AKA "THE
TRIANGLE"...

An area shifting -- sometimes gracefully, sometimes at a
lurch -- from a rusting Southern agrarian culture to a global
center of research and tech, and not a moment too soon.
OVERGROWN, WEEDY LOTS with illegally dumped garbage stand in
the shadows of SHINY NEW GLASS OFFICE TOWERS...

BILLBOARD: A collage of happy family faces, amusement park
rides, clustered around a looming glass-and-steel tower.
"RALEIGH WELCOMES THE 2004 WORLD EXPOSITION! THIS SUMMER,
ALL'S 'FAIR' IN RALEIGH! DON'T MISS THE FREEDOM NEEDLE!"

The young, employed, and new-to-town ride pricey mountain
bikes with coffee cups holders to work, whizzing by the older
Raleigh, in its pickup trucks and screen-doored barber
shops...

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FOLLOW ONE SUCH PICKUP TRUCK, because it's driven by JAMES BALLARD... On the tailgate is a bumper sticker that instructs us: "9/11: NEVER FORGET." The truck passes us and heads on down the road toward the Raleigh skyline...

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - MORNING

James's blue Toyota pickup pulls into a parking space in the midst of a modest, slightly run-down apartment complex, sitting off of a highway among pine trees. He gets out, pulls a duffel bag from the passenger seat and heads up the walk to a ground-level door.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

The door opens to reveal James. He smiles.

REVERSE - JOELLE BALLARD, JAMES'S MOM

In a housecoat, a mug of coffee in her hand. She's in her late fifties, no-nonsense and very caring.

JOELLE
(surprised)
James!

JAMES
Hi, Mom. Surprise.

INT. KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Joelle is dressed for work. She and James sit across from each other. Behind her on the counter, a TV bleats "MORNING IN AMERICA," a soft-news morning show.

JOELLE
I can't believe it. It's just
really unfair.

JAMES
They hire me then tie my hands.
It's just... crazy.

JOELLE
So what are you going to do?

JAMES

I figure I'd stay here in Raleigh for awhile and look for another job. Maybe re-apply to the Sheriff's Department. Their budget's up because of Homeland Security. See what's going on there.

JOELLE

What about Marcy?

JAMES

Me and Marcy aren't dating anymore.

JOELLE

Oh. I didn't know that. I liked her. What was wrong with her?

JAMES

Nothing at all. I liked her too.

JOELLE

Oh. Well. Are you gonna get a place?

JAMES

When I get a job, sure. I was thinking I'd just bunk here with you for the time being.

Joelle still smiling, but with a little effort.

JAMES (cont'd)

I know you missed me.

JOELLE

I did. I sure did. But I've sort of gotten on with things now. You know? I've gotten very used to "my space," as they say.

JAMES

Yes, Ma'am.

JOELLE

So it'd be good if you found your own place as soon as you can. But take your time.

JAMES

Yes, Ma'am.

Joelle stands, grabs her purse, kisses James on the head.

JOELLE

I gotta get to work. I am really
happy you're gonna be around,
sweetie. I really am.

She means it. He knows it. She tousles his hair and heads out the door.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM

Clean and orderly, the way he left it, there is a bed, a dresser, and a lot of police-oriented items. The door opens and James enters. He tosses his duffel on the bed, pulls out a chunky old Dell laptop and goes to the desk. He sits down and fires up the laptop --

PC SCREEN

"Dear Sanders County Sheriff's Department..."

FADE OUT.

SUPER: "TWO MONTHS LATER"

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

James sits in front of the TV with a bucket of ice cream resting on a towel on his thigh. Joelle enters through the front door.

JAMES

Hi.

She puts down her keys and looks disapprovingly at the ice cream, then goes into the kitchen area.

JAMES (cont'd)

What? I'm hungry.

He sighs and puts the ice cream aside.

JOELLE

Any interviews this week?

JAMES

There's nothing out there.

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JOELLE

C'mon. You've had a couple of nibbles.

JAMES

I think there's something wrong with me.

(beat, thinks)

I feel like maybe there's something they see in me when I interview that I don't know about. Something... un-police-like or... not good. I don't know. If I knew I wouldn't be saying it.

JOELLE

James, all you ever did wrong was try and do the right thing. That doesn't always fly with some of these idiots we got out there.

He nods in reluctant agreement. She taps his knee.

JOELLE (cont'd)

You want me to make you a turkey sandwich on whole wheat?

JAMES

That sounds good.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - AFTERNOON

James sits on the front steps, on the cordless phone.

JAMES

May? This is James. James Ballard... I'm great, thanks. You?

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - INTERCUT

Small, cluttered upstairs office suite. MAY, the assistant, is at a desk in front of an interior door. She leans back and opens it, revealing a more cluttered room.

At the desk is MASON ASHETON, attorney at law. 50's, taught and bald, his desk is crowded with enough boring real estate closings to bore a stadium full of people.

MAY

Mason? It's James Ballard on the phone.

Mason sighs and picks up the phone.

MASON

James.

JAMES

Hey, Mason! Guess who's back in town?

MASON

(kind of pissed)

Is it the same guy who's still got my goddamn circular saw?

JAMES

Oh. Sorry. I got it here someplace. I'll get it over to you.

MASON

That would be great. You've had it for two goddamn years. So what's up.

JAMES

Well. I'm back. As I said. Kinda poking around for a new job.

MASON

What was wrong with the thing there up at the college.

JAMES

Eh. You know. Just... super boring. I was overqualified.

MASON

So you're wondering if I know of anything for you?

JAMES

Yeah, sure, or, you know, maybe we could grab some lunch or something.

MASON

Things are pretty slow around here right now, but I'll keep a lookout.
(MORE)

MASON (cont'd)
And you can always use me a
reference. Call me next week and
I'll buy you lunch.

JAMES
No, I'll take you out.

MASON
Just bring the saw.

Mason hangs up, smiles a little, and gets back to work.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING

James is in a deep slumber as the PHONE RINGS and RINGS...
Then stops. James's eyes open and he rolls over on his back.
He stares at the ceiling, absently rubbing his belly, then
looks at the phone on the night stand. He grabs it and sits
up fast in bed. He reads the caller ID, and springs out of
bed --

INT. BATHROOM

James brushes his teeth --

INT. LIVING ROOM

James finishes button his shirt. He takes a breath and dials
his phone --

JAMES
Hello, this is James Ballard
calling you back? I was --
(then)
Yeah. Yes, sir... Well, that would
be good. Absolutely. Wait, lemme
get a pen --

INT. SMALL DINER - DAY

James sits across from his mother at a table full of
massacred carbs. He's manically happy.

JAMES
The guy's like, "No, we don't even
need to interview you. I like this
resumé. When can you start?"

JOELLE

This is so great! And the pay's good?

JAMES

Great. It's okay. It's not good. But it's the World Expo! This is going to be the biggest event to ever take place in North Carolina. Did you know that?

JOELLE

No. Did you know that Callie Cannon's going to be broadcasting live from here for the first three days?

JAMES

No. I mean, the eyes of the world are upon us, you know? And I'm talking about the good eyes *and* the bad eyes. It's real. I mean, this is going to be the front line of homeland security, and I'm going to be right in the middle of it.

JOELLE

You should call Marcy and tell her the good news.

JAMES

I don't really, I don't know. I'm trying to put her behind me. That's what she asked me to do. So.

JOELLE

Oh. Okay.

JAMES

Anyway. I mean, talk about a learning opportunity. Working with the Feds, and all of the specialized training that'll be going on --

JOELLE

The Feds?

JAMES

Who do you think's running this bad boy? Okay, follow me: The Barnes Security Company's who hired me.

(MORE)

JAMES (cont'd)
CT&T hired them. CT&T's an official
sponsor of the World Expo. Man. I'm
glad the other stuff never panned
out. Screw 'em.

JOELLE
So. Is it a policeman's job or a
security guard's job?

James sighs.

JOELLE (cont'd)
It's important either way, and if
it's just a guard job that could
lead to other things.

JAMES
That's what I think.

JOELLE
Well, there you go!

She raises a glass, and he sheepishly clinks it with his.

CUT TO:

POV - A FIELD

Full of black-clad SWAT TEAM badasses, doing drills.

MR. AMES (O.S.)
...and with an intoxicated
individual, your main objective is
to call in for your police
support...

... PULL BACK THROUGH THE WINDOW INTO:

INT. TRAINING ROOM - DAY

Stark. Desks and chairs. A blackboard. A varied group of
nondescript TRAINEES look to the front of the room toward
their instructor, MR. AMES.

MR. AMES
...and contain the subject until
your police support arrives.

James is in the front row, looking out the window at the SWAT
guys. He turns to Mr. Ames and raises his hand.

MR. AMES (cont'd)

James?

JAMES

Sir, in the manual here there's no detail as to containment. Can normal police procedures be used?

MR. AMES

Such as?

JAMES

Such as baton holds. Or restraints such as handcuffs or zip bindings. I only ask because I'm a --

MR. AMES

I know, you're a sworn officer of the State of North Carolina, and that's great. But your capacity, all of you here, as security guards, is really to be the eyes and the ears of the actual police. Actually, that's a really good way of thinking of it. You are the eyes and the ears. Not so much the hands. Or the batons.

JAMES

Or guns.

MR. AMES

No way. Not the guns either. No guns. Everybody clear on that?

Nods. James looks maybe a little disappointed.

MR. AMES (cont'd)

Good. Okay. You are armed with a radio and a smile.

(smiles)

So if you see an intoxicated individual who seems to be either, shall we say, belligerent or rowdy, or getting that way, then what do you do?

Several hands, including James's, go up. Ames calls on REGINALD, a long, laconic Black man a few rows back.

REGINALD

Radio in. And stick with him.

MR. AMES

Okay. Now --

JAMES

Okay, what if the drunk guy's like, "F you, rent-a-cop. What're gonna do about it?" And then he pushes something over a concession stand, and he's like, "you're not even F-ing authorized to do jack," and then he hits somebody.

MR. AMES

Well, then, I guess you would try to isolate him. Like any citizen.

JAMES

Physically.

MR. AMES

Until the police arrive.

JAMES

Okay, sir. Got it.

James smiles, satisfied. Mr. Ames points his laser pointer to a crude drawing of a duffel bag on the blackboard.

MR. AMES

Okay, next is unattended bags, and then we'll take a coffee break.

James looks at the page in front of him: "Unattended Bags." There are pictures of about five different kinds of bags. They are all unattended.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY

Ames sits on a bench, drinking machine coffee and smoking a cigarette. Clusters of Trainees chit-chat on the sidewalk. James approaches Ames, who sighs slightly at the sight of him.

JAMES

Mr. Ames? I know you're on break, I just wanted to let you know that I am completely up for whatever is the most rigorous detail you're putting together.

Ames squints up at him.

JAMES (cont'd)

I know the tactics of event control have changed enormously since 9/11, and I'm conscious of that, and I'm willing to be put wherever you might need my skills. I'd be willing to back you up at the command center, for instance.

Ames drains his coffee.

MR. AMES

Well. I'm thinking maybe I should put you as far away from me as possible. For, you know, balance of experience.

JAMES

Right. Makes sense. Of course.

MR. AMES

So, let's see... that'd be Expo Park. Yeah. We could really use you there. All your experience and stuff.

Ames stands, snuffs out his smoke, and pats James on the shoulder as he heads for the door. James looks at the Expo map...

MR. AMES (cont'd)

(over his shoulder,
walking away)

Night shift.

JAMES

Huh. Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - NIGHT

James sits on the couch with a bowl of lowfat ice cream, watching NEWS COVERAGE of the Expo on TV, his training manual open on his lap. CALLIE CANNON, a pert beaming talk-show icon speaks to the camera.

CALLIE CANNON

...It's great down here, Scott. The energy is that of a coming out party for this beautiful city.

(MORE)

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CALLIE CANNON (cont'd)
Walking down the packed streets
here you can see the enthusiasm of
visitors from over 69 countries...

Joelle comes in the door, carrying groceries. James turns off the TV, gets up and grabs two bags from her and takes them to the kitchen table. They start unpacking groceries.

JOELLE
How was orientation?

JAMES
Fine. Great. If you're a moron who
should be working at MacDonald's.

JOELLE
There's nothing wrong with working
at MacDonald's.

JAMES
(aping Ames)
"Here's a situation. Okay. Now.
Whatever happens, don't do
anything. Heaven forbid. Call the
police. Stay there and watch until
they come and do something."
"You're the eyes and ears," he
says, like that's real important,
like I'm some kind of dipshit.

JOELLE
Well, it's not really law
enforcement.

James looks up at her, wounded.

JOELLE (cont'd)
Well it's not, James. You knew that
going in. It's a paycheck. And if
this is going to eat at you like
this maybe you should find
something else that's not so close
to what you want to do.

James leans back, sighs.

JOELLE (cont'd)
I'm sorry. But I know you and I can
see how this could drive you crazy.
Just don't get into your police
brain right now.

She tries to squeeze his cheek but he bats her away, smiling.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

James stands in front of the mirror, dressed in a brand-new dark blue BARNES SECURITY COMPANY UNIFORM. On his waist is a hand-tooled police-style leather utility belt, loaded up with handcuffs, mace, radio holster, ammo pouches, and a .9MM AUTOMATIC HANDGUN.

James stares for a moment longer, sighs, then unbuckles the belt full of cop stuff and goes to the closet and opens it. Inside is a GUN SAFE, which he opens. He places the belt in the safe, next to several other guns.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

James comes out the door onto the front porch. He is in full uniform, and looks really happy. He starts down the stairs and toward his pickup on the other side of the lot and encounters GARY, a hulking, skanky, sun-leathered neighbor.

GARY

Well looky looky. Sharp duds, officer Ballard.

JAMES

Hey, Gary. It's not a police uniform.

GARY

(snorts)

Yeah, I put that together, James.

Gary walks on. Two KIDS ride by --

KID

What's up, rent-a-cop?

James smiles, beleaguered but still up.

JAMES

Hey, y'all.

KID #2 (O.S.)

Faggot-ass!

James shakes his head and gets in his truck.

EXT. RALEIGH EXPO PARK - TWILIGHT

SHAPES, FORMS, FIGURES, abstracted through heat dilation, lack of focus... Focus in, the shapes getting SHARPER... Through the heat, a sea of cut-offs, baby strollers, open containers and international citizens of all shapes and sizes stream into the park, everybody happy.

It's a vast, wide-open grass and concrete area dotted with kiosks, plywood buildings, signage, fountains, fresh planters and benches -- a municipal pre-fab designed to handle a lot of people. At one end is a stage adorned with lighting gear. On either side of the empty area are small promotional shacks put up by CT&T, Swatch, Budweiser, etc.

Hear "FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN." JAMES stands under a tall drywall Corinthian archway entrance, upon which is proclaimed the theme of the Expo:

"THE POWER OF FREEDOM, THE FREEDOM OF POWER"

Framed in the background is the glass-and-steel "Freedom Needle," which looks a good bit smaller than it does on the billboards.

James breathes, taking in the moment, looking out over the park. He smiles and walks through the arches, disappearing into the throng -- garbage, T-shirts, PA systems, yells, happy kid shrieks, rock n' roll. It's thundering and dizzying.

CAMERA TRUCKS line the perimeter, REPORTERS doing stand-ups.

Every hundred feet or so, there are SWAT TEAM MEMBERS in black cammo, carrying submachine guns and scanning the crowd. James regards them with a shy reverence.

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA

James arrives at his post, where he finds Terry and Reginald, leaning against the hastily-constructed CT&T kiosk/ TV camera tower, made of scaffolding and plastered with big signs advertising sports drinks, casual clothing, and a radio station.

JAMES

Hey, Terry. Reginald.

They nod. James looks across the park at the Freedom Needle.

JAMES (cont'd)

Man. Look at that thing. Pretty cool, huh?

REGINALD

Pft. What's it supposed to do?

TERRY

You can't even go in it. It's not even a ride or something. There's no elevator.

REGINALD

Just metal and glass and it's not even that big.

JAMES

It's a symbol. Like a sculpture. Like the Washington Monument. It's the Freedom Needle.

They're not impressed.

TERRY

Hey, you know how far away's the barbecue stand?

JAMES

Why?

REGINALD

Break's comin' up.

JAMES

Really? You mean, like, in three hours?

TERRY

Yeah.

They look at each other, and start giggling. James can't figure out what's so funny, then he does.

JAMES

Aw, man. Were you guys smoking reefer before your shift?

TERRY

It ain't no big deal. We just gotta stand here.

JAMES

It's the first day. How do you know
what's it going to be like?

TERRY

They told us. Just stand right here.

JAMES

I'm going to walk the perimeter.
I'll be back.

TERRY

We'll be standing right here.

James walks away from them, into the crowd. He takes his
time, stays to the edges of the plaza, watches and walks.

JAMES'S POV

Two KIDS running around, whipping each other with plastic
tubes that make a tone when they go through the air.

Two PRETTY GIRLS, in matching new Expo-themed T-shirts
knotted at the navel.

Classic NASCAR DEAD-BEAT DADS weave through the crowds
carrying Freedom-Needle-shaped drink containers.

James keeps walking, scanning the crowd.

EXT. EXPO SUPERSTORE - NIGHT

On the other side of the plaza. James comes by, now almost
done with his round. He stops in front of the souvenir shop
window, and looks in at the wares -- Every kind of official
World Expo anything: nail clippers with a Russian flag, cheap
Whirling Dervish costumes from Turkey, commemorative German
beer steins, various countries' flags emblazoning jewelry,
boxer shorts, sweatbands, bike flags --

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD KITCHEN - MORNING

CLOSE - AN OFFICIAL 2004 RALEIGH WORLD'S FAIR EXPOSITION
PILLOW EMBROIDERY PATTERN.

Joelle caresses it.

JOELLE

Thank you, James! This is beautiful!

JAMES

It comes with the right colors of string, too.

JOELLE

I know!

EXT. EXPO PARK PLAZA - NIGHT

James stands next to Terry and Reginald. They absently watch a ten-piece R&B band, led by a MALE AND FEMALE VOCAL TEAM, as they wrap up a version of Lionel Richie's "All Night Long" on the huge STAGE. The LEAD SINGER, a slick entertainer ala Ben Vereen, mops a gallon of sweat off of his big grin. His voice booms out through the park-wide PA system.

LEAD SINGER

WHOOOO. Alright. Alright. Ladies and gentlemen of all lands and countries, we are so happy to have you here at our brand-new Exposition Park, gettin' it on with us to get this World's Fair party *started right!* Yessir, the *great big ol' world* right here in Raleigh, talking 'bout "The Power of Freedom, and the Freedom of Power." Now that sounds good to me. One, two, three, four --

The band jumps into a wailing rendition of Devo's "Whip It."

James rubs his eyes and looks at Terry and Reginald, who are severely baked.

REGINALD

(to James)

You gonna do the thing around the thing?

JAMES

(annoyed)

Yes, Reginald, I'm going to do a perimeter patrol around the site.

A few yards away, a group of very obvious FBI AGENTS cross the plaza, holding sub sandwiches and Cokes and casually talking amongst themselves. James sees them, and shuffles as fast and casually into the vector of the FBI Agents' path. He intercepts them.

JAMES (cont'd)

Hey, guys. Hot as hell, huh?

FBI AGENT

Yeah.

JAMES

(re: sandwich)

I had one of those just yesterday.
They're great. Not local, but, you
know, good.

The agent in front, AGENT BEDFORD, sucks a tooth and sighs, regarding James.

AGENT BEDFORD

Everything okay?

James gives a surveying look around the plaza.

JAMES

Yeah. Yeah. I've been doing
perimeters about every ten to
seventeen minutes. Enough, but not
so regular so you could time it,
you know, and know where I'll be.
There's two others over there, but
they don't have any law enforcem --

AGENT BEDFORD

-- Do you need anything from us?

JAMES

Huh?

AGENT BEDFORD

We're on our break.

He wiggles his earpiece which is over his shoulder and not in his ear. They start to move past him.

JAMES

If you guys need any water, ever, I
got a cooler over there in the CT&T
tower.

James watches them walk away, in a little awe.

EXT. EXPO PARK PLAZA - CT&T TOWER - LATER

James leans back on the ad-plastered tower, lost in thought while watching the crowd.

James looks to his left -- Agent Bedford sits at a nearby concession counter having coffee, on break again, drumming his fingers absently. He doesn't look James' way. James pushes off the plywood and starts walking.

JAMES'S POV AS HE WALKS

The plaza seems a little more lurid tonight: shadows darker, faces more garish, the few pools of light more harsh... Teens lurking and smoking in packs... The sweaty band is lit up with cheap colored stage lights... More NASCAR guys, saluting the stage with watery beer cups and unnecessary screaming. OVER THERE --

A BENCH,

Far away, in the middle of the humid clots of people, a few feet from another sign-covered plywood media tower. There are a four or five DIRTBAGS, partying loudly, passing what must be a joint, whipping each other with their sweat-soaked t-shirts. They have a collective trouble in their eyes.

James clocks them, and heads in their direction. As he makes his way, the Dirtbags become obscured by the crowds for a few seconds at a time. When James finally arrives, they are gone.

He looks around: nothing. James looks up at the stage, then around him again. Then down.

A DARK LUMP

On the ground, through the slats of the bench. GO LOWER. It's a GREEN BACKPACK.

James is crouching, reaching for it -- but stops mid-motion before it gets to the bag. He slowly retrieves his hand. A WOMAN in hiker gear starts to sit on the bench.

JAMES

Excuse me, Ma'am. Is this your bag?

WOMAN

No.

JAMES

Thank you, Ma'am. I'm sorry, would you mind not sitting on this bench right now? Okay?

She nods and moves on.

JAMES (cont'd)

(after her)

Thank you.

(to bystanders)

Excuse me? Is this your bag? Ma'am, is this your backpack? Sir? Is this your backpack?

He looks around again. It's really nobody's. James looks back at the bag, takes a breath. He strains to see above the thick crowd that surrounds him. He gets his WALKIE TALKIE off of his belt.

JAMES (cont'd)

(into the walkie)

This is Ballard for Rollins, over.

(beat)

Ballard for Rollins, over.

(beat, then)

HEY. Reginald. Or Terry. HELLO.

The walkie crackles back.

TERRY (O.S.)

Who is this?

JAMES

It's James, Terry. Go outside the kiosk, over.

TERRY (O.S.)

Why?

JAMES

Just do it, over.

TERRY (O.S.)

Ooh, tough-guy on the radio. Fine... Okay. What. OVER.

A MAN starts to sit on the bench...

JAMES

Do you see an FBI-looking guy over
at the Starbuck's Expo Coffee
Center, over?

(to the Man at the bench)

Not now, sir. Please.

(back to the radio)

Late thirties. Blond. Kinda bald.
Thin. About five-foot-nine. Tie.
Short sleeves, over.

TERRY (O.S.)

Yeah. He's right there.

JAMES

Tell him to meet me at the third
bench in the center of the zone
behind the #4 light and sound
tower, right now, over.

TERRY (O.S.)

He looks like he's on a break. The
ear thing's out of his ear.

JAMES

Do it right now. And you and
Reginald stand by, over.

TERRY (O.S.)

A'ight.

Radio goes quiet. He looks around again, scanning the crowd.

INT. RALEIGH 911 CENTER - SAME

ANGELA CHARLES, a 911 operator, at her computer, answering
and routing calls. A half-finished word jumble sits in front
of her. She is bored and unfazable.

ANGELA

Raleigh 911 emergency.

MALE VOICE

(filtered)

There's a bomb in Exposition Park.
You have thirty minutes.

ANGELA

Excuse me, sir, could you repeat
what you just said?

MALE VOICE
(filtered)
Yes, I can: There's a bomb in
Exposition Park. You have thirty
minutes.

Click goes the hang-up. Angela sits there a moment.

ANGELA
Shit.

She is about to start typing but stops and turns over her
shoulder to another operator in another carrel.

ANGELA (cont'd)
What's the address for Exposition
Park?

OTHER OPERATOR
I dunno.

ANGELA
I can't enter nothing in without an
address.
(sighs)
Shit.

Angela hits the console.

RALEIGH POLICE DISPATCH
Raleigh PD Dispatch, go ahead 911.

ANGELA
RPD I have an explosive device
reported in Exposition Park.

RALEIGH POLICE DISPATCH
What's the address on that?

ANGELA
I don't know.

RALEIGH POLICE DISPATCH
I need an address to call this out.

ANGELA
I know. Me too. That's why I'm
calling you on the phone instead of
just entering it in my system.

RALEIGH POLICE DISPATCH
Yeah. I see what you're saying.

CUT TO:

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA - SAME

James and Bedford stand there, arms crossed, looking at the backpack under the bench.

AGENT BEDFORD
Okay... You asked around...
nothing. Who do you report to?

JAMES
My superior Mr. Ames. I can't reach
him on the radio. But I saw you
over there before, and I thought
you'd be more, you know, qualified
for this.

AGENT BEDFORD
Yeah. Well.

Bedford absently puts his earpiece back in.

JAMES
Shouldn't we maybe clear the area?

Bedford looks around, then back at James.

AGENT BEDFORD
Yeah. I guess so. In a way that's
no big deal. Don't scare people.
You got that?

JAMES
Yessir.

AGENT BEDFORD
No heroics, no hysterics.

JAMES
Copy that.

James begins toward a group of bystanders.

BEDFORD
(into his mouthpiece,
annoyed)
This's Bedford.
(MORE)

BEDFORD (cont'd)
Send two tactical teams to me at #4
light and sound tower. No alert,
just get 'em over here to help me
with some possible crowd control.

Bedford crouches to the bag.

TIGHT ON THE BACKPACK

As Bedford's hand lifts the flap: PIPE. WIRE.

He involuntarily reels backward a few steps. James notices.
Bedford's eyes grope the space around him, finding James
staring back. Wordlessly, James understands --

CUT TO:

INT. RALEIGH 911 CENTER / RALEIGH POLICE DEPARTMENT DISPATCH -
SPLIT-SCREEN

Angela Charles is now joined by a SUPERVISOR, who hovers over
her, listening in on the call. Her counterpart at the Raleigh
PD Dispatch, TAMATHA ALLEN, is joined by CAPTAIN WARREN. He
is flipping through a well-worn laminated map book.

CAPTAIN WARREN
Expo Park's pretty big. He could be
talking about anywhere...

TAMATHA
Could we just... call it out for
the whole park?

CAPTAIN WARREN
A call like that will just make
everybody... not focussed. It'll do
more harm than good. Lemme see
here.

Everyone hangs there, waiting for Captain Warren, who still
looks at the map --

CUT TO

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA

EXTREME CLOSE ON THE BACKPACK,

It's zipper slightly open, letting in just enough light for
us to see PIPES and WIRES. Behind it we can see James and
Agent Bedford are clearing the area, REALLY FAST.

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AGENT BEDFORD
(into his walkie)
I'm doing it. I'm doing it. I need
more guys... Yes, ATF! I told you
ATF!

Six SWAT TEAM MEMBERS jog over.

BEDFORD
(to SWAT)
You seen the ATF guys?

JAMES
(to some bystanders)
People. Let's just keep moving this
way. Thanks much.

VOICE (O.S.)
Suck it!

James looks nervous, but clings to his purpose and summons everything he can to present himself as calm.

JAMES
Seriously, gentlemen. We need to
clear the area for a few minutes.

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)
Lick my fuckin' dick, dickhead!

Agent Bedford looks like he's about to burst into tears or screams, but barely holds on, fighting the quiver in his voice.

AGENT BEDFORD
Move on, son.

The SWAT TEAM goes into action, taken people by the elbows and moving them fast out of the way.

Bedford looks over his shoulder at the backpack.

AGENT BEDFORD (cont'd)
(to himself)
Oh fuck. Oh God fuck.

James seems to be getting a little more calm every moment, and Bedford seems to be heading in the opposite emotional direction. James takes in the area.

JAMES
(to Bedford)
Sir, I'm going to sweep right and
get the flow of bystanders to --

AGENT BEDFORD
Jesus Christ! Where are those
fucking ATF guys?!

James looks up --

THE MEDIA TOWER

Two stories up, a cluster of TV CAMERA LENSES can be seen,
poking out toward the stage.

James looks around, then at the bag nearby, then at the dark
doorway into the tower, just behind the bench. He heads
toward it --

AGENT BEDFORD (cont'd)
HEY --

James disappears into

INT. MEDIA TOWER

Scaffold stairs and cables snaking upward into cramped, hot
darkness. He hustles up the stairs to the second floor and
reaches a platform, where THREE CAMERAMEN idly operate
cameras pointing outward.

JAMES
Out. Everybody out. Now --

CUT TO:

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA - OUTSIDE THE TOWER

Two of the Cameramen emerge and head off. The third crosses
the threshold, being pushed by James.

JAMES
(to Cameramen)
Over there. Go.

Two ATF AGENTS walk up from behind Bedford.

AGENT BEDFORD
Where the have you been?!

ATF AGENT #1

Chill. You called like four minutes ago. We were on the other side of the park. Where's the bag?

James and Bedford point to the bench, the area now clear of people. The ATF Agents start toward the bench when

SOME FUCKING DUDE IN CUTOFFS,

Completely wasted, weaves his way to the bench and lays down on it, relaxing his weary drunken bones.

DUDE

Ah... yeah.

James runs past the ATF Agents and grabs the Dude in a totally pro crowd-control headlock and hustles him back to the perimeter.

JAMES

Clear!

The ATF Agents approach the bag low and fast.

UNDER THE BENCH

The backpack. Four tentative feet approach. A pair of legs bend down until ATF Agent #1's face is level with the small zipper opening. He points a small Mag-Lite into the hole.

ATF AGENT #1

Okay. It's a device.

ATF AGENT #2

For real?

ATF AGENT #1

Let's go.

He stands again out of frame and their feet go RUNNING AWAY.

ATF AGENTS #1 & #2 (O.S.)

GO GO GO GO! MOVE IT! GO GO GO GO
GO!!

THE BACKPACK...

CUT TO:

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INT. RALEIGH 911 CENTER / RALEIGH POLICE DEPARTMENT DISPATCH

Captain Warren thinks. He looks at Tamatha, who looks really scared. He thinks some more.

CAPTAIN WARREN

Well. I think we better just call
it out for the whole park. Shit.

Tamatha looks up to him, then turns to the console --

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. UNDER THE BENCH - THE BACKPACK

...just for the moment before its shape CEASES TO EXIST,
REPLACED BY HEAT AND LIGHT. LIKE THUNDER AFTER LIGHTNING, ITS
FLASH-OBLITERATION IS INSTANTLY FOLLOWED BY A SHATTERING
BOOM.

THE PARK, FROM ABOVE

LIGHTS UP. PEOPLE MOVE SHORT FAST DISTANCES AS IF FLICKED BY
A GIANT FINGER -- THEIR HAIR, LIMBS, SHOES AND FOLDS OF
CLOTHES WAY AHEAD OF THEM --

JAMES

TRAVELS SIDEWAYS, A COUPLE OF FEET OFF OF THE GROUND, INTO A
TRASH CAN THAT HAS STOPPED AT THE TOWER, CRUMPLING INTO IT.

THE ATF AGENTS SAIL THROUGH THE AIR.

AGENT BEDFORD GRIMACES FROM BEHIND THE TOWER AT THE FORCE AND
LIGHT COMING FROM THE OTHER SIDE.

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA

The crowds look toward the source of the explosion. The music
stops, and some think pyrotechnics --

NEARBY NASCAR DADS AND DIRTBAGS

WOOHOOOO!!!!

The distant figures of the band look toward the explosion.
Then they run. A wave of dread spreads through the crowd in
one long second, then converts to panic -- the CROWD BEGINS
TO STAMPEDE AWAY FROM THE EXPLOSION, first silently, then
screaming.

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EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA

James lies crumpled and still. HIS RADIO CRACKLES:

DISPATCHER TAMATHA (O.S.)
(filtered)
Attention all security personnel in
the Exposition Park area... Be
advised of a threat of a possible
explosive device somewhere in the
park area...

James opens his eyes, dazed. He pulls himself to a sitting position.

JAMES' POV - THE PARK

Total panic. People running, screaming. The wave of mayhem is flowing away from the site... People running flat out, some right over others who are trying to get up, or not moving at all.

A rivulet of blood runs down James's forehead from within his scalp and into his eye. He absently brushes it aside, and gets to his feet.

JAMES
Oh God.

DISPATCHER TAMATHA (O.S.)
(filtered, from James's
walkie)
....Investigate area and approach
unattended bags with extreme
caution. Report any findings on
channel two.

He slowly gets to his feet and stands there, chaos swirling around him. Blood everywhere, people grabbing at their own twisted limbs and pieces of jagged metal protruding from their skin.

JAMES
Oh God.

He sees Agent Bedford, poking his head out from behind his cover. James goes toward him, limping a little.

JAMES (cont'd)
Sir? Sir? Are you okay?

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Bedford looks up at him, stunned.

AGENT BEDFORD

What?

James looks him over. He's okay. There's a particularly bad SCREAM from behind James, and he blearily turns and goes toward it. Bedford watches him go.

THE SWAT TEAM LEADER,

lying on his stomach, chin on his hands. He might look like he was casually resting, were it not for the surroundings and the two large pieces of SHRAPNEL protruding from his back and thighs. James kneels next to him.

SWAT LEADER

What is it? What is it?

JAMES

It's just a little metal. I think it's only surface stuff.

(into radio)

This is Ballard from the media tower, and we've got about... one hundred or so people down... Uh, including officers.

He takes a bottle of water nearby and pours it over the SWAT Leader's wounds.

JAMES (cont'd)

Send... just send everything you got.

SWAT LEADER

I'll be fine. Go help somebody else.

James stands, the blood coming down his face from his hairline again. He looks around, trying to orient himself... Carnage and chaos. Screaming, moaning, smoke. Bodies everywhere, writhing. The camera tower leans over at an unnatural angle, metal groaning, then falls to the ground--

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - WASHINGTON, D.C.

Darkness. RING goes a phone. A LIGHT turns on at the end of the first ring, and LARRY KOHL, DIRECTOR OF THE FBI, sits on the edge of his bed. Behind him is a cross on the wall and a sleeping wife.

KOHL

Yeah?

He listens.

KOHL (cont'd)

Who did it?

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA

The plaza is still littered with people, some sitting up now, some laid out, some running away and some moving to help people. Far in the distance, sirens can be heard, and tons of cops and ambulances are on the scene.

James kneels beside a WOMAN who is crumpled face down on the pavement. He turns her over gently -- She's very dead. He turns from her to an ELDERLY MAN, moaning softly, holding the side of his bleeding head.

JAMES

Sir, how you doing?

INT. RESEARCH ROOM - RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES NEWSPAPER

TIM GROLLER, a bitter journeyman reporter in his mid-'40s, sits at a desk, writing.

ROLAND

Somebody bombed the park.

Groller turns around to see ANN ROLAND, a younger colleague. She dashes out. He runs after her --

EXT. EXPOSITION PARK PLAZA

SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE JERRY ALVIN, '40s, the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Raleigh office, leans over Agent Bedford, who sits on a bench drinking a bottle of water. Flashing lights and lots of people running everywhere. Others seem to sleepwalk.

JERRY

So you're the one who found it?

AGENT BEDFORD

I was on the scene.

JERRY

Good work, man. Good fucking work.

An AMERICAN NEW CHANNEL PRODUCER and CAMERAMAN approach.
Jerry holds out a hand toward him.

JERRY (cont'd)

Not now. Give him a few minutes.

ANC PRODUCER

Where's the guy who found the bomb?

(looks over toward James)

That's the guy.

They keep moving.

JERRY

(to Bedford)

I thought you found the bomb.

Bedford looks after the ANC people, sees them reaching James,
who turns in surprise.

AGENT BEDFORD

I was there. After.

Jerry turns toward Ballard, who is talking to a pair of
POLICE OFFICERS and holding a wet towel to his head.

AGENT BEDFORD (cont'd)

He actually, you know, found the
bomb. That guy, that security
guard. He found me, though, and I
called it in. He didn't actually
call it in, you know what I'm
saying? I did.

JERRY

Yeah.

Two AGENTS approach. They are SPECIAL AGENT DWIGHT WILLIGER,
'30s, a solid FBI soldier, and his partner SPECIAL AGENT
SCOTT ROOK, late '20s, something of a fast-track careerist.
Williger holds out a cell phone to Jerry.

DWIGHT
(whispers)
Sir, it's the Director.

Jerry takes the phone.

INT. BACK SEAT OF A TOWN CAR IN WASHINGTON, D.C. - INTERCUT
Kohl sits in the back seat.

KOHL
Jerry, whoever this agent is that
found the bomb, do not let him
speak to the press. Tell him he's
going to get a serious commendation
and medal, though.

JERRY
It wasn't one of our agents, sir.
It was a security guard.

Bedford's face falls.

KOHL
That was not the initial report I
received. I was told it was Clay
Bedford.

JERRY
I've debriefed Bedford and he
didn't discover the device. A
security guard found the device and
he got a hold of Bedford.

KOHL
Shit. Okay.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - NIGHT

Joelle sleeps in her bed, with a couple of stuffed animals.
The phone rings. She reaches for it.

JOELLE
Hello?

She sits bolt upright in terror.

JOELLE (cont'd)
No. No.

She drops the phone, drops to her knees in front of the TV and turns it on. A live broadcast from Expo Park...

JOELLE (cont'd)
Oh my God, James --

The coverage flashes on the shot of JAMES helping the old man, then cuts to James squinting at the camera. Joelle turns up the volume.

T.V. REPORTER PATSY DEE
...who apparently found the
explosive device and notified the
FBI, then set to clearing the area.
Back to you, Craig.

T.V. ANCHOR CRAIG LANSING
In this dark hour, a story of
courage and kindness.

FREEZE-FRAME GRAPHIC OF JAMES

T.V. ANCHOR CRAIG LANSING (cont'd)
Thank you, Patsy. We still do not
have all the details of --

Joelle stays there, frozen.

JOELLE
Oh James. Oh my good good boy.

INT. RALEIGH FBI COMMAND CENTER - NIGHT

Jerry sits at a table with James and Rook and Dwight.

JERRY
Let's just go back to the beginning
again. You were where on this map
when you saw the bag?

JAMES
Whew. Okay.

ROOK
I'm sorry, man. It may seem like
going over and over it is pointless
but we always do this, even with
each other.

DWIGHT

Yup. New stuff comes up, and it's important to do it before you go to sleep while it's all fresh.

JAMES

I'm with you 100%. Okay. From the top...

DWIGHT

Man. I gotta say, I don't know if I would have done it down the line like that. Really. You should sign up for the Bureau.

James takes that in.

ROOK

Fucking A. Take Bedford's spot, right?

JAMES

No, no. Agent Bedford was... Great. He called it in.

ROOK

Aw bullshit. We know Bed-Head.

JERRY

(to James)

You want a Coke or anything?

JAMES.

I'd love a Coke.

James reaches into his pocket for change, but Jerry is out the door.

INT. COMMAND CENTER KITCHENETTE - NIGHT

Jerry talks into his cell while he fishes out two Cokes.

JERRY

He did it totally by the book.
Exemplary reaction.

INT. KOHL'S OFFICE, FBI HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON D.C. -
INTERCUT

Kohl sits at his desk, on the phone, and sighs.

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KOHL

Who do you think did this, Jerry?
The President wants to say
something when the sun comes up.

Jerry starts back toward the conference room.

JERRY

Well. Everybody's taking in
everything right now to get some
leads, and then --

KOHL

(stressed, sarcastic)
Oh. Great. I'll pass that along to
him. Good stuff, Jerry.

(then)

Shit. And it wasn't even one of our
guys who found the bomb. You know
that's the first thing the
President heard. Was that it was
FBI who found it, and he said "good
job" to me, for pretty much the
first time ever. Fuck. Goodbye.

Click. Jerry reaches the door to the conference room, and
looks in the window on James.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Joelle sits watching television. She hears something, runs to
the door, throws it open to find James coming up the steps.
She begins sobbing. He comes in and hugs her.

JAMES

It's okay, Mom. I'm fine. Don't
cry.

JOELLE

I'm just so happy.

James releases her and looks at her.

JOELLE (cont'd)

You still think there's something
wrong with you?

He smiles.

JAMES

I didn't really think there was something wrong with me.

JOELLE

(teasing, happy)

Yes you did. Yes you did.

She grabs him and rubs his hair.

JAMES

Quit.

He looks over at the television, where BILLY GRAHAM is speaking, but on MUTE. James bows his head.

JAMES (cont'd)

I gotta say a prayer. I gotta say a prayer for all those people.

JOELLE

You were the answer to their prayers, James! You!

CUT TO:

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON D.C. - CONFERENCE ROOM

Director Kohl and twelve AGENTS and ANALYSTS surround the table. It's full of coffee, computers, paperwork and phones -- a hastily made war room. Sleeves are rolled up, people come in and out of the room delivering and taking paperwork. MARTA DAVIDSON, an analyst, speaks to Kohl.

DAVIDSON

It's not Jerry Alvin's fault. They're trained to build a case empirically. That's how you get a conviction.

He gets to his feet, paces.

KOHL

Look at this.

He holds up an EMAIL PRINTOUT.

KOHL (cont'd)

I got the Director of Homeland all over me, ready to come in that door and take this over.

(MORE)

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KOHL (cont'd)

He's already suggesting we bring in CIA. And don't anybody tell me they won't operate domestic, because they fucking will. They'll take this away from us gleefully.

Special Agent RICK ORTIZ leans in.

ORTIZ

Well what about Division 5? National Security Division? They work under Homeland but they're still FBI. So they're ours. We'd still be driving. And it'd make the Homeland happy.

DAVIDSON

I don't think Division 5's act would play very well Stateside. The way they get results doesn't exactly involve dealing with the US Constitution, if you know what I mean.

ORTIZ

Yeah, Marta, but we could keep them in line. We'd be running it. This is how we keep Homeland and CIA out of it.

Kohl thinks. Marta looks to him, hoping for eye contact.

DAVIDSON

I don't know...

KOHL

Here's what I want to do. Get somebody from Division 5 who's stateside at the moment. Somebody who's active overseas in getting cases like this done fast, somebody Homeland likes, and send him down there. Like now, before Homeland comes at me with this CIA thing again.

Davidson rubs her eyes, lost.

ORTIZ

Just one agent?

KOHL

Just one agent.

INT. EMBASSY SUITES HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

A LONG TALL GORGEOUS YOUNG REDHEAD sits at the foot of the bed, illuminated by the television, smoking a cigarette, her face a combination of post-coital glow and boredom.

She is half-dressed in what's left of some kind of FUTURISTIC SUPERHERO COSTUME that's been pulled off here and pulled to the side there, in a hurry. She stares at the TV as it blurts out coverage of the Exposition Park chaos.

Next to her a bearish but fit man in his late 30's begins to wake up. He's FBI SPECIAL AGENT LONNIE DAVIS. His bleary 1000-yard stare adjusts to the carnage on the TV.

LONNIE

(re: TV)

Jesus. Where's that?

WOMAN

Somebody bombed the World Expo last night.

LONNIE

Wait. You mean... Wait. Here?

WOMAN

'Course here, silly. You can't have more than one World Expo at a time.

He sits bolt upright, adrenaline blasting away sleep.

WOMAN (cont'd)

(points toward his pants
on a chair)

Oh, your thing went off a little while ago.

He pulls himself from the bed and walks naked to his clothes, looks at the pager on his belt, and starts dressing while moving toward the door.

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Kohl and his DC team, around the conference table.

KOHL

How well do you know Raleigh?

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INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - INTERCUT

Lonnie on the cell phone, still groggy, shirt undone.

LONNIE

I don't, really. I'm here to sign some papers for my father's estate. I'm due back over there in 48 hours.

KOHL

You're temporarily reassigned. We want you to come in on this Expo thing immediately.

LONNIE

Um. Okay. Why?

KOHL

The SAC down there, Jerry Alvin, I think he's in over his head. We need to solve this thing. Like, now. I think you're kind of background, somebody like you, somebody from Division 5 could be a big help. Procedurally.

LONNIE

Is Homeland talking about bringing in CIA?

Kohl looks around the room, then gestures at the speaker-phone as if to say, "see?"

KOHL

Well, as a matter of fact, there has been some noise about that very idea. And while I'm all for interagency synergy, the FBI runs domestic, and this is domestic. And you're FBI, but, you know --

LONNIE

There's crossover in my experience--

KOHL

-- Exactly, crossover, and I think with you involved we can keep this what it should be, which is a domestic security situation.

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LONNIE
I understand completely.

KOHL
I'm picking up on that. And it's appreciated. So just get over there, see where they're at, and call me back.

Lonnie hangs up and walks back into the room.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Lonnie reenters.

WOMAN
My real name is Ashley. Vortex is just my convention character name. I was thinking about you coming back in and not knowing what to call me.

He starts dressing fully, getting his things together, including his gun and badge/ID.

WOMAN (cont'd)
Are you gonna be here for the rest of the convention?

LONNIE
I'm not here for the convention. And I'm probably going to get a little busy now, because of the...
(gestures toward the TV,
wiggles his gun and ID)

WOMAN
Oh.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MINUTES LATER

The elevator doors open. Lonnie exits and hustles down the long hall toward the front doors.

The hall and lobby are choked with PEOPLE IN FUTURISTIC, SCI-FI, GOTHIC, FANTASY, AND COMIC BOOK CHARACTER COSTUMES, and people in street clothes milling amongst them.

Everyone has "FANTACON" laminates on. He pushes through and out into the sun.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING

Sunlight leaks in. James' eyes open. He looks around, disoriented, then winces in pain and touches his head. Then he smiles. He sits up and looks in the mirror, and sees a new man staring back at him. There's a knock on the door.

JOELLE (O.S.)

James?

He runs his fingers through his hair.

JAMES

Yes, ma'am?

The door cracks and Joelle pokes her head in. She looks anxious.

JAMES (cont'd)

What's wrong?

JOELLE

There's... there's some people at the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM

James pads in from his bedroom, finishing buttoning his shirt. He walks to the door, pulls it open and is peppered by FLASHES and video lights. He holds up a hand to visor the light.

JAMES'S POV

A few REPORTERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, and VIDEOGRAPHERS stand at his front door.

REPORTER #1

James Ballard?

JAMES

Yeah?

They break out in APPLAUSE. James smiles sheepishly.

REPORTER #1
How's it feel to be a hero?

JAMES
What?

REPORTER #2
Were you frightened last night?

REPORTER #3
James, are you okay?

JAMES
I'm fine. I'm fine. Uh...

He looks behind him at Joelle, who is kind of cowering.

JAMES (cont'd)
I'm not really... the ATF guys, now
those guys are the heroes.

REPORTER #1
Do you think you're going to shake
the President's hand?

JAMES
(smiles)
I haven't heard anything about
that.

They laugh. He smiles, his eyes adjust, he relaxes a little.

REPORTER #3
James --

James looks back at Joelle again.

JAMES
(to reporters)
Hold on a second.

He shuts the door and turns to Joelle.

JAMES (cont'd)
You okay?

JOELLE
Do they all have to crowd around
like that?

JAMES

They're okay, Mom. They're just doing their job.

JOELLE

I think somebody should ask somebody before they just take your picture.

JAMES

I'll answer a couple more questions and then tell 'em I'm done for the day. We gotta go to work, right?

She smiles tentatively, and James goes back to the door...

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - MORNING

DEAN LOWITZ, James's old boss from the community college, sits in his breakfast nook, eating yogurt and watching ANC graphic-spattered coverage of the bombing. A cat nuzzles him, he pushes it away.

ANC ANCHOR

...people in this area, there were over two hundred, and if the bomb had not been detected by Mr. Ballard the human cost of this cowardly attack would have been exponentially higher...

Lowitz listens, a cloud passing over his face. He puts down the yogurt. On the television is a quick FREEZE-FRAME of James.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER, RALEIGH - DAY

Jerry hangs up the phone, the office swirling around him. Rook and Dwight approach. Jerry's far off, not listening.

DWIGHT

Jerry?

JERRY

There's an Agent Lonnie Davis coming in. Division 5. I guess he was in town anyway, and Kohl asked him to give us a hand.

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JERRY (cont'd)
Just let him in, make some room for
him. He's on his way.

Jerry walks off.

ROOK
Whoa. Division 5. Those guys are
fucking ninjas.

DWIGHT
They're strictly overseas
operators.

ROOK
I know. Afghanistan. Iraq. Jordan.
Fucking cool.

DWIGHT
They're counterintel. They don't
even do domestic investigations.
Seems kind of stupid to bring him
in.

ROOK
They keep telling us to think world-
wide, man. Makes sense to me.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - DAY

James sits on the couch, on the phone. Joelle enters, dressed
for work and holding a thermal cup.

JAMES
Well, there's not much to tell,
ma'am. I was just doing my job like
-- Yes ma'am. Well, thanks... Uh. I
don't know about that, ma'am.

Joelle looks through the blinds, then turns to James and
mouths "who is that?" James looks up at her and smiles wide.
As he talks on the phone, he holds Joelle's eyes.

JAMES (cont'd)
Well... I'll do it if my Mom can
come along. She watches your show
every morning. That's right.

Joelle's jaw starts to slack with as it dawns on her --

JAMES (cont'd)
She even Tivo's it. Yes ma'am.
Okay. Okay. Good deal. Nice talking
with you. Bye.

He clicks the phone off and puts it on the counter, grinning
up at Joelle.

JOELLE
NO.

JAMES
Yes.

JOELLE
It was not.

JAMES
Callie Cannon. She wants me to be
on "Morning In America" tomorrow.

Joelle's about to lose it --

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER - RALEIGH

Jerry and Lonnie walk through the big room full of desks.
Lonnie is sipping from a large to-go coffee cup.

JERRY
So right now it's just running
through the threats, cross-
referencing them with the database,
and fielding tip calls.

LONNIE
Great. And I called in some intel
from some guys I know at Homeland.
Should be on my email by now.

JERRY
Oh. Okay. Great.

LONNIE
Hey Jerry. I just want to tell you
that I'm here to help. That's it.
You just --

JERRY
No, no. Hey, we need all the help
we can get. Glad you're here.

They arrive at a big table full of files being sifted through by various AGENTS, including Rook and Dwight. Lonnie looks out over the field of paper.

LONNIE

You mind if I...?

JERRY

No. Dive in. I'll be in my office.

Jerry walks off. Lonnie nods to the other agents, who by now know who he is. There's fear mixed with reverence. He puts his cup down, and reaches for a file.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES

Groller types away into a computer. Anne Roland sits at the next desk, wearing headphones and watching ANC coverage on a tiny TV.

ROLAND

Tim.

She pulls out her headphones and the TV SOUND comes on:

ANC ANCHOR

We know little at this time about the mosque on Durham's Chapel Hill Drive, but sources say that several members have recently immigrated on student visas from Indonesia...

GROLLER

Islamic guys here from *Indonesia*?
Fuck! Fucking ANC. Goddammit.

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER, RALEIGH - CONFERENCE ROOM

Several agents are gathered around the table, including Rook, Dwight and Jerry. Behind them is a large grease board, diagraming areas of investigation. There is a SPEAKER PHONE in the middle of the table.

KOHL

(on speaker, filtered)
Who in the fuck told ANC we're on a lead about a *mosque*? Jerry?

JERRY

We haven't talked to any press and
we're not working a lead about --

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON D.C., CONFERENCE ROOM -
INTERCUT

Kohl leans over the speaker phone like he's going to squash
it. Ortiz, Davidson, and others surround him.

KOHL

Because that's some very incendiary
stuff with the Muslim community, if
there is one down there --

He freezes with a moment of dawning dread. He is headed
toward a full lather.

KOHL (cont'd)

Oh. Oh *great*. Somebody find out if
Homeland is running something on
this mosque thing behind our backs.
And even if they're *not*, now we
have to say that *no*, we do *not* have
suspects, which is worse than never
having *said* we had a suspect in the
first place.

JERRY

We never did say that.

KOHL

Well ANC *said* we did! Same
difference. Look. People are
actually talking about shutting
down the Expo down there. This
is... there's a lack of confidence
right now. People have to feel like
we've got these things handled.

Lonnie, sheaf of papers in hand, silently slips into the room
behind Jerry.

KOHL (cont'd)

This isn't some *murder* that we...
procedure, obviously, is
everything. I'm not saying it isn't
but we gotta come harder and faster
than this. Jesus...

Kohl rubs his head.

KOHL (cont'd)
Maybe I better come down there.

Everybody in the Raleigh office goes white. Jerry is about to say something when he feels someone behind him. He turns and sees Lonnie, holding up a stiff but reassuring hand. Lonnie leans toward the speaker phone and rolls the last of his hangover out of his neck.

LONNIE
Sir, Lonnie here, if I can just chime in for a second.

KOHL
Go ahead, Lonnie.

LONNIE
I think we need your firepower in DC, right now.

The room relaxes a bit.

LONNIE (cont'd)
And I hope you don't mind, but I took the liberty of speaking to some people I deal with at Homeland.

KOHL
Oh you did. Why.

LONNIE
To let them know that this looks like something the FBI can deal with, on our own.

KOHL
Really?

LONNIE
Yes sir.

KOHL
Wow. That's great.

DAVIDSON
Hold up. I'm sorry. What does it look like to you?

LONNIE

Not sure yet. I think the important thing right now is that Homeland concurred.

KOHL

You mean, the top of Homeland?

LONNIE

What top of Homeland?

Everybody on both sides of the call crack up. Shoulders loosen a little.

KOHL

Tell me about it. Oh boy.

LONNIE

Look, they're at ease for now. So if we want to keep our hands on the wheel we should get down to the real work of finding a suspect. Right now.

KOHL

I concur. Thank you Lonnie. This is great.

LONNIE

Not at all. I may be Division 5, but I'm still FBI. If it's okay with you guys, I'd like to keep working in this.

DAVIDSON

Do you feel qualified for working Stateside?

LONNIE

Well. Now I do, yeah. PATRIOT's cleared a lot of hurdles out of your way over here. You can run this down pretty much the same way I've been doing it for a couple of years in overseas.

In DC, Davidson shoots Ortiz a look. He shrugs.

In Raleigh, Dwight shoots Jerry a look. He shrugs.

LONNIE (cont'd)
And I've had enough of babaganoosh
in a Pakistan basement, trying to
get mutes to sing soprano.

He laughs. No one else really does.

LONNIE (cont'd)
Just kidding.
(...not.)
Listen, if my skill-set is needed
in the US of A now, I'm happy to be
back.

KOHL
Make yourself comfortable, Lonnie.
Keep us posted.

LONNIE
Great. I'm gonna get back to it.

Lonnie walks out, giving Jerry a pat on the shoulder as he
exits.

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER - MAIN ROOM

Lonnie is packing up his laptop. Rook appears behind him.

ROOK
Sir, I just wanted to say that if
you need --

LONNIE
Can you box these recent phone tips
and local intel and help me get it
out to me car? I'm going back to my
hotel.

Off of Rook's reaction.

LONNIE (cont'd)
They got wi-fi. I'll be in touch.

Lonnie heads for the door.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - SUNSET

James stands in front of the stairs, talking to Tim Groller
and Ann Roland. They are the only reporters left.

JAMES

The place is kind of a mess right now. Not a mess, just...

GROLLER

It would let us give the readers some atmosphere.

Groller peers in past James, then scribbles.

ROLAND

Come on, James. You saw the piece we did on you. People just want to know more.

JAMES

My mom's kind of busy. Besides, I gotta get ready for work.

ROLAND

Where are you working tonight?

GROLLER

Yeah, the park's closed.

James thinks.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lonnie comes through the front door into the throng of sci-fi and fantasy fans, partying and traveling between banquet rooms. Up ahead he sees VORTEX in full costume, getting her picture taken with two NERDY HOBBITS. Their eyes meet --

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - NIGHT

James sits on the couch, in uniform. Joelle talks to him from the kitchen.

JOELLE

You need the rest, James.

JAMES

No I don't.

JOELLE

You have to be fresh for Callie Cannon at five a.m.

JAMES

Just gonna say the same damn thing.
Which is pretty much nothing.

JOELLE

What if Jim Fort wants to come to
Raleigh to interview you? He's my
favorite. What if you meet Jim
Fort?

JAMES

That'd be great.

She hears the low note in his voice. She looks over the
galley counter.

JOELLE

You want some Haagen-Daz?

JAMES

No, ma'am. I'm gonna go get changed
outta this.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - NIGHT

James sits in uniform on the edge of the bed, looking at

JAMES'S POV

Of the newspaper, folded to display a photo of the WOMAN he
found dead at the Expo. He stares into her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lonnie and Vortex, post-coital. He's wrapped in a sheet,
sitting up in bed with a flurry of papers, his laptop, and a
glass of Scotch. Vortex is nude, flipping through a few well-
done FANTASY GRAPHIC NOVELS open on the bed. The TV is on in
the BG. She holds up a comic.

VORTEX

See? This is Vortex.

He looks up for a second, then back to his paperwork.

LONNIE

Yeah. Huh. She actually looks a lot
like you.

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VORTEX

I know and that's not even why I do
Vortex at the conventions.

He takes a sip of scotch. Punches a few keys.

LONNIE

Is that right.

VORTEX

Look at how cool she is. I mean,
Forynth is mesmeric, right, and
she's got the best clothes of any
character, for sure. But Vortex
knows the truth in any situation.

LONNIE

She knows the truth about
everything, huh.

Big slug of scotch. Yawn.

VORTEX

No, just what she encounters -- I
mean, if she knew the truth about
everything she'd just be God, and
that'd be wicked boring. But no one
can lie to Vortex, ever. It's
impossible. I mean, how amazing
would that be. I feel like the
truth is really important.

He looks up at her, and shuts his laptop and starts shoving
the papers off of the bed and into a chaotic pile the floor.

LONNIE

I've been in some places where
everybody knows the truth, or *their*
truth, anyway, and it's
surprisingly unimportant in the
middle of chaos.

VORTEX

Huh. Sounds like maybe you should
check out "The Renegor Chronicles."

He lays back and closes his eyes.

INT. CT&T MEDIA CENTER - TELEVISION STUDIO - MORNING

James is in a chair, under the lights. A crew is fussing over him; a dab of powder, a mic wire rearranged, a light tweaked. He looks a little nervous in a new CT&T golf shirt. Outside the arc of stage light he can see Joelle. He gives her a thumbs up.

CALLIE CANNON herself approaches with a wide smile and an outstretched hand.

CALLIE CANNON
James Ballard! My hero!

JAMES
Hello, Ms. Cannon.

CALLIE CANNON
Call me Callie.

Joelle is about to swoon.

JAMES
That's my mom over there, Joelle.
Mom, this is Callie Cannon.

CALLIE CANNON
Hello, there.

JOELLE
Oh my God.

CALLIE CANNON
You must be so proud.

Joelle can't respond.

CALLIE CANNON (cont'd)
Well. They look ready for us. We'll
just jump right in. Are you all set
James?

JAMES
(smiles)
No.

CALLIE CANNON
Just leave it to me.

INT. HOTEL COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Lonnie, a little hung over, drinks coffee and wolfs down a plate of eggs and sausage. The TV prattles on in the corner. He looks at the PLACARD in front of him on the counter that asks "WHAT'S BETTER THAN A REAL AMERICAN BREAKFAST?"

LONNIE
(to the placard)
Nothing. That's what.

He looks up at the TV and sees

JAMES BALLARD'S FACE, full screen.

Lonnie watches, gaining interest.

JAMES
-- should really focus on is the
people hurt and killed in this. I
was just doing my job, that's all.

CALLIE CANNON
But from what I understand, if you
hadn't discovered the device and
cleared the area there would have
been possibly hundreds of deaths
and many more injuries.

JAMES
Well, I can't speculate on that, I
don't know --

CALLIE CANNON
--You don't have to speculate on
it, it's pretty established as a
fact --

JAMES
-- but I should say that I just
helped the authorities on the scene
do what they did so well. Those ATF
guys, you wanna talk to heroes,
those guys are some heroes.

CALLIE CANNON
(admiringly)
And you were just doing your job.

JAMES
Yes, ma'am.

Lonnie leans back on his stool...

CUT TO:

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

Kohl, Davidson, Ortiz and others sit around their table, staring at their SPEAKER PHONE.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

Jerry, Dwight, Rook and a couple of others are sitting around the table, also looking at the SPEAKER PHONE. The door swings open and Lonnie enters.

LONNIE

Sorry to keep you guys waiting. We got D.C.?

KOHL

We're all here, Lonnie. You got anything?

LONNIE

Maybe. It might be nothing, but it's the first thing that doesn't really make sense to me. Or does.

He approaches the grease board, a small stack of papers in his hand. He gently wipes away some of Jerry's diagram to make some room.

LONNIE (cont'd)

I've been playing around with a kind of "Hero Bomber" profile in my mind.

KOHL

"Hero Bomber." I don't know that profile.

Kohl looks around his table of agents, who all shrug.

Lonnie writes the words "HERO BOMBER" on the grease board.

LONNIE

A guy who's unhappy with his life, who always knew that he could gain the love and admiration of those around him, if he was just in a situation that required him to be the hero that he knows he is. Deep inside. Maybe he's chosen a career that would put him closer to that situation, such as...

Lonnie writes "LAW ENFORCEMENT" on the board.

LONNIE (cont'd)

Law enforcement. But his moment just doesn't come. He gets tired of waiting, and finally creates the moment himself.

He turns to the room to watch his idea sink in.

LONNIE (cont'd)

The only thing missing for this guy is the world seeing him the way he'd like to see himself.

He turns back to the grease board and writes the words "JAMES Ballard," and starts going through his papers.

JERRY

James Ballard?

KOHL

The security guy?

LONNIE

Former cop. Sort of. Lotta trouble finding a job as a cop. Kind of marginalized. Overweight. A lot of gun licenses. He lives with his mom.

KOHL

This is the guy that the whole world thinks is the hero here, Lonnie.

LONNIE

Exactly.

Lonnie shuffles through his sheaf.

LONNIE (cont'd)

The guy can't even keep a dipshit campus security job and yet, in a major situation swarming with trained law enforcement, this fat security guard who lives with his mommy not only IDs the device, he calls it in. He not only IDs it and calls it in, he is instrumental, if not the primary actor, in a textbook evacuation that saved maybe hundreds of lives.

Everybody listens.

LONNIE (cont'd)

This makes no sense to me.

KOHL

He outperformed everyone there.
This guy.

JERRY

We're running a check on Ballard,
just like everyone at the scene.

LONNIE

I'm not the only one that thinks
this is odd. When I was going
through the call logs this morning
I found one from...

He shuffle his sheaf again.

LONNIE (cont'd)

... From a Michael Lowitz, Dean of
Foley Community College, Ballard's
last employer. He saw Ballard on
ANC, and felt he had to call us. He
fired Ballard a few months ago for
overzealous policing on campus. And
off campus. Lowitz found Ballard to
be "erratic." "Too excitable, "gung-
ho."

JERRY

But... that's not --

LONNIE

-- this campus is 100 miles away.
Let me take a couple of men up to
talk to this Lowitz guy and anybody
else we can find up there. Friends,
girlfriends, students.

KOHL

But keep it low-key.

LONNIE

Sure.

ROOK

I'll go. Me and Dwight'll go.

LONNIE

Fine with me if it's fine with
Jerry.

INT. UNMARKED FBI CAR - MORNING

Dwight drives, Lonnie rides shotgun, Rook is in the back. The
scenery is getting pretty rural. Rook inches forward
tentatively.

ROOK

So... you guys get to wear whatever
you want over in Division 5? No
suits if you don't want?

LONNIE

No. We wear suits. I was on leave
when they called me in. So.

ROOK

Oh. I was gonna say, that'd be
pretty cool. Division 5 seems
pretty cool.

Lonnie opens the evening edition of the Raleigh Banner-Times
on his lap and turns up the radio. Rook recedes into the back
seat.

LONNIE'S POV OF FRONT PAGE STORY: "ALERT GUARD SAVES LIVES"

... with the byline of Tim Groller and Anne Roland.

INT. FOLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE - DEAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Lowitz sits behind his desk, facing Lonnie, Dwight and Rook.

DEAN LOWITZ

Maybe erratic is the wrong word.
More overzealous. That's the word.
Speed traps off of campus property.
Drug investigations. Always talking
about national security. No offense
to you guys, of course, but jeez.
The paperwork, I mean the amount of
paperwork that this guy
generated...

(points to a huge stack on
a table)

This is a small campus. It's not
like fighting criminals.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE DORM, REC ROOM - DAY

Rook and Dwight sit at a table and talk to a group of three
or four STUDENTS. The students are excited, into it.

STUDENT

He was a dick, bro.

STUDENT #2

He thought he was a cop. And he
would tell your parents if he
caught you with hard drugs.

STUDENT

What the fuck is that all about?

Lonnie shows them a photo.

DWIGHT

Did you ever see him with a
backpack like this one?

STUDENT #2

Yeah.

LONNIE

You sure?

STUDENT #2

Well, he had all kinds of army
shit. Boots. Knife. Jacket.

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STUDENT #2 (cont'd)
He probably totally had a backpack
like that.

STUDENT #3
And he was FAT.

STUDENT #2
And he hung out with that other
queer fat guy. From the computer
lab.

STUDENT #3
Yeah. Those guys were weird.

INT. GAMMANET COMPUTER COMPANY - BREAK ROOM

CRAIG TAWNY, 25, heavy, sits across from Dwight and Rook.
Lonnie stands unsettlingly far behind them, as if guarding
the door.

CRAIG
We just hung out, that's all. We
were friends.

ROOK
What do you mean when you say
"friends," Craig?

CRAIG
Uh, what do you think I mean?

LONNIE
Are you a homosexual?

CRAIG
What?

ROOK
Are you gay?

CRAIG
Uh, hell no. I'm a Christian. I'm
engaged. To a woman, sir.

ROOK
I'm not saying there's anything
wrong with you being gay, or James
being gay.

CRAIG

Well, sir, I am saying there is something very wrong with being gay and I'm not gay. And neither is James, as far as I know.

LONNIE

I'm sorry if these questions are making you nervous.

CRAIG

They're not making me nervous.

DWIGHT

What if he thought that nobody would get hurt? If he thought he was going to save everybody?

CRAIG

No.

ROOK

You don't look like you're so sure of that.

Craig just stares at him. Then shrugs.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

James' ex-girlfriend MARCY, behind the desk, who lives on the border of pretty and plain. She feels someone behind her, and turns to find Lonnie standing there, kind of close. He smiles.

LONNIE

Hi. Marcy Crouse?

INT. HOSPITAL BREAK ROOM - DAY

Marcy sits across the table from Lonnie, who types into his laptop while talking to her. Rook and Dwight stand by the door.

MARCY

Just... because. We don't really talk anymore.

LONNIE

Break-up kinda rough?

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MARCY

Not rough, just... You know.

LONNIE

I do, actually. I just went through one myself. Just kind of finding my feet again, you know? So was he threatening? Is it something like that?

MARCY

James? No way.

LONNIE

So why can't you just give him a call for us? See how he's doing?

MARCY

I'm sorry. I just don't want to do that.

Lonnie smiles agreeably, looks up from his screen.

LONNIE

Hey, was James aware of your debt problem?

MARCY

Huh?

Lonnie nods at his screen.

LONNIE

You've got a bankruptcy two years ago.

MARCY

My college loans were...

LONNIE

As far as spending... wow, you don't seem to have slowed down at all. Look at this.

Marcy gets nervous.

LONNIE (cont'd)

ATM machine at... the Cherokee Harrah's Casino... One, two... three, four. Four times last month. Hey, do they let you make *deposits* at Casino ATM's?

(MORE)

LONNIE (cont'd)
(laughs)
Wouldn't that be funny if
somebody... Eh. Anyway.

MARCY
How do you know this stuff? Isn't
that --

LONNIE
Private? No. This is a terrorism
case. Brian Tooley. You sure call
him a lot.

MARCY
Brian's just a friend --

LONNIE
-- Didn't ask you that.

Lonnie adjusts his laptop.

LONNIE (cont'd)
Where did that Wi-Fi signal go? It
was fine just a sec -- ah. Here we
go. I'm back --

He looks at the screen.

MARCY
Well you --

LONNIE
Hey Marcy, if I can get a fucking
word in edgewise, it'd be great.
Now I can keep punching things into
the system about you and getting
more back, all day until I find
something --

MARCY
Why?

Marcy's eyes begin to well up, and she looks to Dwight and
Rook, who don't look back.

LONNIE
-- Hey. Don't do that. No crying.
Stop it. I can keep looking, and
call Brian --

MARCY
-- But why?

LONNIE

-- Call your boss, your folks, or you can start helping your country right now and we can be done with this. That option's got my vote. Hey. Don't look at the floor. Answer's not down there. So how should you and I proceed?

CUT TO:

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - DAY

James is still in the CT&T shirt, and is all smiles. He is on the phone. Joelle keeps rewinding the TIVO and playing choice bits of the interview.

JAMES

You see the news?

INT. MASON'S OFFICE - INTERCUT

Mason holds the phone to his ear while still looking at his paperwork.

MASON

I don't watch the news. May told me. So what's up.

JAMES

Oh, everything. You know. Just... all this stuff. I just was over doing a television interview with Callie Cannon and the producer of the show asked me if I had a lawyer and was I gonna do a book deal. And so I thought I should give you a call.

MASON

Well, that's not really my area, James. Buying a house and you need somebody to look over your closing, you call me. Besides, I think it's a bit premature.

JAMES

Yeah, well. If it comes up I'll call you. You are my lawyer.

(MORE)

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JAMES (cont'd)

And I'll get that circular saw over soon as I can.

MASON

Thank you. And James? I'm real happy for you. You're a good man and you did the right thing at the right time. Doesn't surprise me. Good for you.

Hearing this from Mason makes James look more happy and content than hearing it from anywhere else.

MASON (cont'd)

Gotta fly.

JAMES

Talk to you later, Mason.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER - CONFERENCE ROOM

Jerry looks like he's been up all night, coffee cups everywhere and sleeves rolled up. Rook and Dwight are also at the table, and they are on a conference call with Director Kohl.

KOHL

And the voiceprints on the 911 tape?

JERRY

Negative. It doesn't match Ballard.

KOHL

What do you think, Lonnie? Are you guys reviewing video of the park or are we doing that up here?

JERRY

Agent Davis is not present, Sir.

KOHL

Where is he?

JERRY

I don't know. Did you read the memo I emailed about you about Daniel Langtree, Sir?

KOHL

What?

JERRY

Daniel Langtree. Fugitive. Bombed
two --

KOHL

(didn't)

The Missouri Militia guy.

JERRY

Tennessee.

KOHL

Yes. Yes, I read that. Don't waste
too much time on that. Tell Lonnie
to call me.

CLICK. Jerry rubs his face. He looks up at Rook and Dwight,
who play with their pencils, avoiding eye contact.

ROOK

The faster we eliminate Ballard,
the sooner we can --

JERRY

Shut up, Damon.

Jerry slowly rises to his feet, and heads out the door.

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES

Anne Roland, watching ANC on her tiny TV. Her phone RINGS.

ROLAND

Anne Roland.

She listens, leaning forward and grabbing a pencil. Now she's
listening hard. She looks across the room at Groller's back.
As if feeling her gaze, he turns around. She motions him over
to her.

ROLAND (cont'd)

Well. Sure. Now's fine. Yeah, I
know it. See you in ten minutes.

She hangs up the phone and turns to Groller, open-mouthed.

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

Marta Davidson leans into Kohl's office door. He looks up from his desk.

DAVIDSON

Behavioral said that there is no
"Hero Bomber" profile.

KOHL

What about the cop at the '84
Olympics in LA? Fake bomb, same
thing.

DAVIDSON

That's just one case. And his
device wasn't lethal. That's the
key difference --

KOHL

I see the distinction but that only
makes Ballard worse. Or maybe
there's going to be a Hero Bomber
profile when this is done. Who
knows?

He goes back to his reading. Davidson exits.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - DAY

James sits on the edge of his bed, staring into space. The
smile is gone. He holds in his hand a ripped, jagged piece of
pipe. He looks tired, drawn. From elsewhere in the house, the
phone rings and rings, almost breaking his reverie.

JAMES

(to himself, re:the phone)
We gotta unplug that.

After a beat, Joelle appears in the doorway, smiling and
cheery.

JOELLE

What is it?

JAMES

There's people dead. And lying in
the hospital right now. They were
everywhere.

JOELLE

You're right, sweetie. You're so right. And I've been just... I've been happy for you and proud of you. And maybe that is a little insensitive.

JAMES

It's just my thing. I'll be alright.

JOELLE

James. Marcy is on the telephone.

He looks up at her. He stands and goes through the door.

INT. "RALEIGH UNDERGROUND" SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Annie Roland and Tim Groller sit at table in the food court, FACING CAMERA. We do not see who they are talking to. Groller is examining a laminated ID. He goes to mess with it --

VOICE

Huh uh. Leave the piece of black tape over my name.

GROLLER

Look, I gotta --

VOICE

It's my picture, and your judgement of the ID's validity won't change if you can read my name. You want this or not.

Groller hands it back to

REVERSE - LONNIE

Who takes the ID, rolls his eyes, peels the tape off, and pockets it.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - NIGHT

James is scrambling through the closet, pulling out shirts and checking their cleanliness. Joelle watches from the doorway, smiling.

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JOELLE

And she's just in town for the night?

JAMES

A convention. She saw me on TV. I just wish I was having dinner with her in a month. Not tonight.

JOELLE

I think it's like a gift to you that you get to have dinner with Marcy to crown a day like today.

JAMES

Yeah, but in a month... eh. Forget it.

JOELLE

What.

JAMES

No. It's gross to even think it at a time like this.

JOELLE

That in a month you'll probably be done picking out whatever law enforcement job you want in the sweet world?

He checks himself in the mirror.

JAMES

Yeah. Yeah.

(smile breaking)

Can you believe that? You know what? I feel really bad about what happened at the park, but part of it's feeling bad for how good I feel. You know? And I don't know if I can keep that up, the feeling bad part. Because I feel really really good!

He grabs her and hugs her, and she squeals --

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - NIGHT

James comes out the front door, looking put-together in khakis and a CT&T golf shirt.

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There are a couple of people milling around, mostly neighbors out on their stoops. They APPLAUD. Gary the neighbor jogs over and walks James to the car.

GARY

Heydy hey, James!

JAMES

Hey, Gary.

GARY

Man, we are fuckin' proud of you, buddy. Proud to have you in the complex.

JAMES

Aw, well that's nice, Gar. Thanks.

GARY

You need anything at all, you holler at me, got that? I'm over --

JAMES

-- Right by the pool.

GARY

I'm always right by the pool.

JAMES

Got it.

James reaches his truck and gets in, then waves and pulls away. Another round of APPLAUSE sees him off.

INT. APPLEBEE'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

James and Marcy eat dinner.

MARCY

I mean, it's just unbelievable. It's like your whole life was like in preparation for that moment.

James puts his silverware down.

JAMES

Exactly. You just -- that's it exactly. Even the hardships, even things that have tried my soul, you know?

MARCY

I mean, what if you'd stayed in Breeston? What would have happened to those people you saved?

JAMES

(smiles)

If you hadn't broke up with me I'd still be up in Breeston. See? There's plenty of credit to go around.

MARCY

Funny funny, James.

He re-attacks his steak.

JAMES

It's true.

Marcy watches him, her smile fading as she remembers why she's here. She takes a big sip of wine.

MARCY

So. Who do you think did it?

JAMES

Heck if I know. They'll catch him, though. And I hope he gets the death penalty. I really do.

MARCY

How did you know it was a bomb? Have you ever seen a bomb before?

JAMES

Nope. Well, I had a little training on it, but to be honest it just looked like a bomb. Pipes. Wires. Clock. Like it was straight from the Acme Company to Wiley Coyote. Know what I mean?

INT. NEWSROOM FLOOR - RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES - NIGHT

Annie Roland and Tim Groller stand with STEVE BURLING, their editor. Groller is livid.

GROLLER

-- No, no, I'm not going to fucking calm down.

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GROLLER (cont'd)

I shouldn't calm down when I've got the story of my career served to me on a platter and you won't run it.

BURLING

I mean, if the guy would let us print his name --

GROLLER

-- Are you -- have you ever --
FUCK. He's an official in the FBI!
That's the *point*. He's not going to name himself, Steve! That's why we have a story! That's the whole fucking *thing* here!

He walks off. Anne and Steve watch him go.

BURLING

That hothead business is getting a little old.

(then)

You guys go write it up. Let me see it.

Anne takes off.

BURLING (cont'd)

Hurry up, though.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAWN

Lonnie sits on the edge of the bed, ALREADY DRESSED. Vortex lies asleep behind him. He stares at the phone, willing it to ring. It RINGS.

LONNIE

Yeah?

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON D.C. - 4 A.M.

Kohl, Rick Ortiz and Marta Davidson cluster around the speaker phone.

KOHL

They're running it front page this morning. In an hour this Ballard thing is going to be blown. I want to know who leaked this, and what do we do now?

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER, RALEIGH - INTERCUT

Lonnie, Rook, Dwight and Jerry cluster around theirs.

LONNIE

We see what happens.

KOHL

You sound awfully fucking mellow about this.

LONNIE

This press thing could be really helpful. He's going to crumble under it. Just watch Ballard. See what he does.

KOHL

I know what he's going to do. He's gonna get lawyered up and douche his house out. That's what I'd do. We've got nothing on this guy. We should drop this. Deny it.

LONNIE

If everybody thinks we've got our guy then everybody's calm and everybody leaves us alone. Then the stupid Expo enters the ghost-town phase and the press moves on.

KOHL

This is just... fucked.

LONNIE

If we stay the course for two more days, it's over, no matter what happens. Okay?

Long silence.

JERRY

How should we respond to questions about the suspect?

DAVIDSON

Whoa. First of all, nobody refers to Ballard as a suspect, at any time. Not yet. At this time James Ballard is a person of interest. Nothing more.

KOHL
 (to the speaker phone)
 Find out who the fuck leaked this.

Kohl hangs up. Lonnie looks out the open door and notices the conference room across the hall, where a small CAMERA CREW can be seen, setting up. Their camera is pointing at him. He jumps out of his chair and goes to the door.

LONNIE
 (to the CAMERAMAN)
 Turn that thing off.

From across the hall --

CAMERAMAN
 It's not on. I was just --

Lonnie's on his feet and headed at the Cameraman.

LONNIE
 Gimme the tape. Take it out.

The Cameraman hits "eject." He warily hands it across the hallway to Lonnie.

LONNIE (cont'd)
 (to Jerry, re:camera crew)
 -- What's that?

JERRY
 They're in from DC. Doing a
 training video on first responders.
 It's been scheduled for months.

Lonnie stands and walks to the doorway to get a closer look. He says nothing for a moment, then shuts the door and turns to the others, something new in his mind.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Dwight and Rook come up the sidewalk to the house. Rook deftly kicks the newspaper off of the pavement and into the bushes without missing a step, then RINGS the bell. After a moment the blinds split, then the door cracks. James squints in the sunlight, in a T shirt and sweats.

JAMES
 Hey, y'all.

DWIGHT
What's up, buddy?

INT. FBI FORD SEDAN

Rook drives, James rides shotgun, and Dwight's in the back.

JAMES
Man. I don't know what I'm going to
say, really.

ROOK
This training film needs real first
responders in it. When they asked
us who they should interview, what
did we all say at the same time,
Dwight?

DWIGHT
James Ballard.

ROOK
Fuckin' A.

James is swollen with happiness and pride, but trying to
maintain a professional demeanor.

JAMES
Well. Whatever you guys need.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

James sits at the table, a CAMERA CREW MEMBER clipping a
lapel mic to his shirt. Another fusses with a barn door on a
small light above James.

JAMES
Too bad I don't still have my make-
up on from Callie Cannon.

Rook and Dwight chuckle. Lonnie enters the room.

ROOK
James, this is Special Agent Lonnie
Davis. He's doing the on-camera
interviews.

Lonnie reaches across the table and shakes hands.

LONNIE

Hello, Mr. Ballard. This is a real honor.

JAMES

Oh. Hey. The honor's mine.

Lonnie's cell phone rings. He turns it off.

LONNIE

You've had quite a couple of days, huh?

JAMES

Yes sir, to put it mildly.

LONNIE

You doing alright, though?

The door opens, and a female ASSISTANT appears.

ASSISTANT

Agent Davis? You have a phone call.

LONNIE

Take a message.

ASSISTANT

It's a *Larry* on the phone.

LONNIE

(to James)

I'm so sorry. I'll be right back.

INT. THE OTHER CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Lonnie huddles over the phone.

INT. LARRY KOHL'S KITCHEN, GEORGTOWN VA - INTERCUT

Kohl paces.

KOHL

Read him his rights.

LONNIE

It'll change the whole tone of this.

KOHL

Yeah, that's the idea, to change it to a *legal* tone. An *admissable* tone.

LONNIE

If he's the guy and we get him, it's not going to be a problem. Ask Homeland.

KOHL

Stop the interview.

LONNIE

This is our last chance to talk to this guy lawyer-free. Last chance.

KOHL

Read him his motherfucking rights! That's it!

Kohl hangs up the phone.

KOHL (cont'd)

Jesus!

Lonnie slowly replaces the receiver, and takes a deep breath.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Lonnie comes back in.

ROOK

We were just talking shop.

LONNIE

You nervous?

JAMES

Ah, no. No. I mean, I don't know what to say, really. But.

LONNIE

Yeah, I understand. Well let's loosen up with a reversal.

JAMES

Okay. What's that.

LONNIE

We do it all the time when we're going over cases, to get our thought processes going.

JAMES

'Kay.

LONNIE

So. Reversal. Let's see. Okay. Here's one. You be the suspect, and I'll be the interrogator. You'll see where I'm going with this. We all do this. Switch around the roles. You'd be surprised at the stuff we come up with when we do it.

(to the Cameraman)

Let's put in a fresh tape so we don't have to change later.

The cameraman closes the tape compartment, with the fresh tape ready to roll, with a snap. James notices.

LONNIE (cont'd)

Here we go. Okay. So you're there, I'm here. First things first.

JAMES

Okay.

Lonnie assumes a slightly different demeanor, as if "acting."

LONNIE

James Bell, You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law.

(breaking "character")

Darn. What's the rest of it. Ah. Right.

("acting" again)

You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford one, one will be appointed to you by the court. Do you understand these rights as I have stated them?

James takes it all in: the agents, the camera, the crew. Dwight looks at the floor. James's world begins to cave in.

JAMES

Yes, I do. I think I do understand.
I think I want to talk to my
lawyer.

LONNIE

Yeah. You know what? Let's go the
other way with this one. Like you
don't want to talk to a lawyer.

JAMES

I want to talk to my lawyer.

The air is quietly exiting the room. Lonnie feigns confusion.

LONNIE

Wait, you mean you, James Ballard,
want to talk to your lawyer?

JAMES

If it's you, Agent Davis,
Mirandizing me, James Ballard, and
asking me questions, then yeah, I
wanna call my lawyer.

LONNIE

(feigning confusion)

Whoa. Hold on. What's going on
here, James?

JAMES

You tell me.

LONNIE

Well I don't know but you're the
hero, right?

JAMES

I've never said that.

LONNIE

I... I don't get this. We're here,
we're doing this training film for
first responders, and you wanna...
I don't get it.

JAMES

I think I'm done with the training
film for the day.

LONNIE

Fuck it. Let's just do it without
me reading you your Mirandas.
That's fine with me.

JAMES

You already did read me my
Mirandas. You got it on tape right
there.

LONNIE

Tell you what. Why don't you think
on it for a minute. We'll give you
a little room. Come on, you guys.

They file out after him. James sits there, staring at his
hands. After a moment, he reaches over and picks up the
phone. He dials.

EXT. LINSON AVENUE - MORNING

A HUGE JUMBOTRON on the side of a building.

JUMBOTRON: A THIRTY-FOOT TALL PICTURE OF JAMES, under which
the chairon reads: "GUARD SUSPECTED IN BOMBING - BALLARD FITS
'HERO' BOMBER PROFILE"

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Mason and May, Starbuck's in hand, stopped in their tracks.

MASON

Oh shit.

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER - HALLWAY

Lonnie, Dwight, and Rook stand there in a huddle.

LONNIE

It would have been nice but we
don't need it.

DWIGHT

It would have been inadmissable, is
what it would have been.

LONNIE

If we get him in there, it won't
really matter. I've been through
this before.

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DWIGHT

Really? I haven't. Where have you been through this before? Some back room in Beirut or something? Hey, with all due fucking respect. We're used to having to deal with the US Constitution around here. It's sort of a *tradition*. Quaint, maybe, but people take it really seriously. And when you get caught fucking with it, you get FUCKED.

LONNIE

Is that the problem here? Well who gets fucked when you don't use the tools your government has handed you to protect your country? Your country gets fucked, that's who. So if you'd like that to happen here, AGAIN, then just keep your sphincter clinched around your pension and benefits and go home sick with the same pussy flu that Jerry got, and let Rook and I get this done.

Dwight looks to Rook.

ROOK

I think we gotta do this, bro.

James appears behind them.

JAMES

I didn't do anything wrong.

They all start, then turn and just stare at him.

JAMES (cont'd)

I have nothing to hide. You want to ask me questions, you want to tape it, Mirandize me, fine with me.

They all just stand there.

JAMES (cont'd)

I'm law enforcement too, you know. I want whoever did this to be caught, and the sooner you eliminate me the sooner you can apply yourselves to finding the guy.

James turns and goes back into the conference room.

LONNIE
(to Dwight, cold)
Why don't you wait out here?

Lonnie and Rook disappear into the room and shut the door behind him. Dwight takes a deep breath.

INT. MASON'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Mason and May stand over the ANSWERING MACHINE, listening.

JAMES
(filtered)
...So, uh, I came down here with them to make this training film? But... I don't know. They want to Mirandize me. But they say it's part of the film. Anyway. I guess you're not around. Give me a call.

MASON
Give you a call where, you dumbass?

MAY
Try star-69.

MASON
Never works.

Mason punches star-69, hard. He reacts to the answer.

MASON (cont'd)
This is Mason Asheton, attorney for James Ballard. Get him on the phone.

He sits down and grabs a pencil, then listens.

MASON (cont'd)
Bullshit. BULLSHIT. He just called me from there. Oh you bet I'll hold.

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER - HALLWAY

Dwight, still leaning against the wall. From down the corridor there's a female VOICE.

VOICE

Hey, Dwight? You got the Ballard
guy in room 7?

DWIGHT

Yeah.

VOICE

His lawyer's on the phone. Line 9.

DWIGHT

Tell him Ballard's not here.

VOICE

He knows he his.

DWIGHT

Fuck.

He pushes up off the wall, goes through the doorway into

INT. FBI COMMAND CENTER CONFERENCE ROOM

Lonnie, Rook, James, and Dwight, who stands in the doorway.

LONNIE

James, why do you have a lawyer?

JAMES

I have a friend. He's a lawyer.

LONNIE

Do you feel like you have to talk
to him?

JAMES

Do you feel like I shouldn't talk
to him?

DWIGHT

He's on line 9.

James reaches to the phone, punches number 9. Then he looks
at Lonnie, and hits the button marked "Speaker."

JAMES

Mason? You're on speaker.

MASON

Have you been charged with
anything?

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JAMES

No.

MASON

Good. Now get the fuck out of there. RIGHT NOW. Stand up, walk toward the door, walk through it, talk to no one there anymore, and I will meet you in front of the building. You got all that?

JAMES

Yessir. But I don't have anything to hide. I want you to know --

MASON

-- STAND UP. WALK OUT. DO NOT TALK TO ANOTHER COCKSUCKER THERE. MEET ME IN FRONT. We clear?

JAMES

Yessir.

MASON

And whoever else is in earshot of me right now, my name is Mason Asheton and you are FUCKED.

Click. James pushes back from the table, and stands. They all look up at him, the game over. He holds up his hands, and walks out the door. The agents exchange glances.

James's head pops back in the doorway.

JAMES

Is it a left at the end of the hall or a right?

ROOK

Left. And straight through to the front door.

JAMES

Thanks.

EXT. FBI COMMAND CENTER, RALEIGH

Mason's car screeches to a halt in front of the double doors. James emerges from the building and gets in Mason's car. He takes off again.

INT. MASON'S CAR

Mason and James.

MASON

I gotta get you home. We gotta see
if your mom's okay.

JAMES

Why? What happened to her?

Mason looks at James. James just stares back. Mason pulls the
paper from the back seat and tosses it on James's lap.

PAPER: "HERO" GUARD NOW NUMBER ONE SUSPECT

MASON

This happened to her. And you. Look
at that. It's a picture of your
fucking front door. Your house.

JAMES'S POV - NEWSPAPER

His eyes scan down the columns crazily, taking in the words.

JAMES

... It says I sought out interviews
and press.

MASON

Well you did go on Callie goddamn-
Cannon.

JAMES

It's my mom's favorite show. Look
at this. They're talking about how
I got fired at Foley College.

MASON

Yeah, they got that fitting right
into a "Hero Bomber" profile. Your
white, you're a wannabe police, you
got fired, and you live with your
mom.

JAMES

I didn't -- look at this. I -- It's
only temporary. Living with my mom.

Mason shakes his head and accelerates.

JAMES (cont'd)
I hope Marcy doesn't see th--

They both react as Mason slams on the brakes just short of James' complex. Traffic is clogged suddenly and intensely.

MASON'S AND JAMES' POV - MOBILE SATELLITE ANTENNAE RISING HEAVENWARD FROM VANS BEARING STATION LOGOS. REPORTERS, NEWS TEAMS, BYSTANDERS, RESIDENTS -- ALL PILING UP AND MOVING TOWARD JAMES'S HOUSE.

JAMES (cont'd)
Mom.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

CLOSE-UP: TELEPHONE RECEIVER

Off the hook, lying on the floor. PULL BACK to find

JOELLE

-- terrified, sitting on the sofa looking at the door, which shakes from BANGING. INDUSTRIALLY BRIGHT LIGHTS blast through the blinds and drapes, strobing through the room. LOUD VOICES virtually surround the house, creepy, horror-movie-like. She clutches today's edition of THE RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES.

EXT. FBI PARKING LOT - DAY

About twenty AGENTS from the FBI and the ATF stand by their vehicles, waiting. Lonnie nods to them, and keeps walking to his car. They all fall out, get in their cars, start their engines and fall in behind Lonnie.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

James and Mason stand facing James's door, across the parking lot. Between them is a sea of CAMERA CREWS and REPORTERS, about 200 people.

VOICE (O.S.)
HEY.

FLASHING, SNAPPING NOISE OF A CAMERA SHUTTER.

The crowd turns, as if an unseen signal has reached them all, and they descend upon James.

MASON
(to himself)
Holy shit.

Mason throws his windbreaker over James, wraps his arm around his shoulder and starts barrelling toward James's house. Reporters and photographers collapse upon them, and Mason and James have to lean into them to push through.

REPORTERS
JAMES. JAMES. WHY DID YOU DO IT?
WHY DID YOU DO IT?

PHOTOGRAPHERS
LOOK AT ME. LOOK UP.

REPORTERS
WHY DID YOU BOMB THE EXPO.

MASON
(to one of the reporters)
HEY --

PHOTOGRAPHERS
LOOK UP. LOOK UP. HEY YOU FAT FUCK.
LOOK AT ME. COME ON. YOU'RE A
FUCKING MURDERER. LOOK AT ME. LOOK
UP.

REPORTERS
DON'T YOU WANT TO TELL US YOUR SIDE
OF IT? TELL US YOUR SIDE OF IT.
TELL US. WHY DID YOU BOMB THE EXPO.

PHOTOGRAPHERS
HEY YOU FAT FUCK. LOOK UP.

Mason pushes his way through the throng, throwing shoulders. MICROPHONES push in his face.

REPORTER #2
WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOU?

MASON
I'm Mason Asheton. I am James
Ballard's attorney.

REPORTERS

Mason! Mason! Is Ballard GOING TO
GET ARRESTED? WHY DID HE DO IT?

Mason can't help but stop and blow his stack.

MASON

What proof are you people working
with? What evidence? What in the
fuck do you know about anything,
you vultures?

A few Reporters LAUGH. Mason keeps moving.

JAMES

Under the tent of the windbreaker, breathing heavily, moving,
jerking blindly through the mass... His face hardens. He
throws the windbreaker off. CLACK CLACK FLASH FLASH go the
cameras, NEVER PAUSING.

For a second, James sees GROLLER AND ROLAND through a slit in
the windbreaker: they stare back stone-faced.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

James and Mason shut the door behind them. Joelle's head is
in her hands. The reporters and crews and spectators are
going insane outside.

JAMES

Mom, I'm so sorry.

She looks up, terrified.

JOELLE

Sorry? Sorry for what?

JAMES

Sorry that this is happening.

MASON

James. I'm going to ask you this
once, just one time...

JAMES

I didn't do it, Mason.

MASON

You didn't do it.

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JAMES

No, sir.

MASON

Is there anything I do not know about that you want to tell me.

JAMES

Ask me. I don't think so.

MASON

You know who did do this?

JAMES

If I did I'd be doing whatever I could to get them in prison.

MASON

I'm going to ask you one more time--

JAMES

(getting angry)

Hey, Mason. You already asked me one more time. You don't believe me, then you can go. But stop asking me one more time.

JOELLE

Yeah, Mason.

Mason claps his hands together and puts the tips of his fingers to his lips.

MASON

Okay. I'm sorry.

JAMES

That's okay.

There's BANGING at the door. They all jump.

MASON

You open this door for no one. No matter what they tell you.

JAMES

What if it's the FBI?

MASON

Especially if it's the FBI. Unless they have a warrant.

(MORE)

MASON (cont'd)
Then do what they say but do not
say a word to them.

THE TELEVISION

On the TV, she can see their front door, and the FBI coming
up the stairs. She recoils from the TV set.

JOELLE
Here they come.

James turns and disappears into his room.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM

James opens the closet door, drops to his knees and
frantically spins the wheel on the gun safe --

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

James comes back into the living room and joins Joelle and
Mason, who stare at the door --

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

JOELLE
Don't open the door!

MASON
Open it.

James opens the door. Lonnie and Rook stand there, in FBI
windbreakers and hats. Lonnie holds up a WARRANT.

MASON (cont'd)
Give me that.

LONNIE
You must be Mason.

Lonnie hands him the warrant, and he flips through it. Lonnie
walks past James and Mason and into the house.

LONNIE (cont'd)
(to James)
Last chance, James. Anything you
want to tell me about before we
begin? Anything around here from
the Acme Company?

MASON

What the hell's that mean?

LONNIE

I think that's what you said to Marcy. The recording was a little fuzzy at that point. I think she was adjusting her blouse or her bra strap or something and it rubbed the mic.

James and Mason look to each other, dawning. Lonnie almost smiles.

MASON

You think wiring his ex-girlfriend is going to be admissable.

LONNIE

Yes. No. Maybe.

Joelle looks at Lonnie with terror and loathing, and can take no more. She goes toward her bedroom.

LONNIE (cont'd)

Ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to step back from that door.

JOELLE

Mason! Do something!

JAMES

Mom, come in here for a minute.

James guides her into the kitchen, and shuts the shutters above the counter, giving them some privacy.

JAMES (cont'd)

Mason can't do anything about this and neither can we.

JOELLE

Why are you so calm?

JAMES

I want you to go across to Gary's house --

JOELLE

-- Why would she do that? Why would Marcy do that for them?

JAMES

Don't be mad at her. It's not her.
It's them.

JOELLE

Would you do that to her?

JAMES

Now you go across to Gary's and
wait there. This should only take
an hour or so. I'll come and get
you.

LONNIE (O.S.)

James. Let's go. Now.

JAMES

Come on, Mom.

He guides her back out of the kitchen to find SEVEN FBI AGENTS, including Rook and Dwight, in the living room. They are opening TACKLE BOXES and donning RUBBER GLOVES. James takes Joelle to the door. They collect themselves, then James opens the door --

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE

EXPLOSION OF NOISE AND LIGHT -- cameras, reporters, bystanders yelling and flashing. James and Joelle step out of the door, vainly shielding their eyes. James' eyes search the distance, Joelle hides behind him.

JAMES' POV - ACROSS THE PARKING LOT

Gary stands on his porch, arms crossed, watching the spectacle. James catches his eye, but Gary looks at his feet and goes inside.

James guides Joelle down the stairs. She's melting down under the crush of reporters.

REPORTERS

MRS. BALLARD! MRS. BALLARD! DID YOU
KNOW HE WAS GOING TO DO IT? DID HE
DO IT? WHY DID JAMES DO IT?

James wraps his arm around her shoulder and moves forcefully through the pack.

INT./EXT. GARY'S HOUSE

Gary opens the door to find James and Joelle, hounded from behind. He hangs back in the shadow, his face blank.

GARY

Yeah?

JAMES

Can she stay here for a little while?

Gary looks uncomfortable. The Reporters and Photographers catch up, crushing behind James and Joelle.

JOELLE

GARY!

GARY

Fine, Jesus, just... get in here.

He shuts the door behind her, and James turns back to traverse the pack again...

INT. JAMES'S ROOM

On the bed are an array of HANDGUNS, a RIFLE and a police-style SHOTGUN. Lonnie looks them over, Mason watching.

LONNIE

Goodness me.

AGENT

That's where I found them.

MASON

Shit.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - FIVE MINUTES LATER

James sits on a stool in the living room. Rook, Lonnie, and Mason watch another AGENT hovering above James, wearing rubber gloves and going through his hair with tweezers. The Agent secures a small tuft and PULLS IT OUT --

JAMES

OUCH.

AGENT
Sorry 'bout that.

The Agent places the tuft into a Ziploc bag.

LONNIE
I'm going to have to ask you to
step outside now, James.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE

James emerges from the house. CAMERAS EXPLODE AND CLATTER, REPORTERS SHOUT. He sits down on the steps. More AGENTS of different branches, in color-coded T-shirts, continue past James and into the house.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - EVENING

The same lay-out as the Ballards', not as neatly kept. Joelle sits in front of the TV, which is broadcasting live from in front of her house. The agents come out with container after container of their stuff, walking past James who sits helplessly on the stairs. Gary watches her, uncomfortable.

GARY
Well. I hope he didn't do it.

Joelle keeps watching the nightmare TV, doesn't respond.

GARY (cont'd)
I'm just saying. You know. That I
just hope he didn't do it.

T.V. ANCHOR
Live from the James Ballard House,
where the search continues after
four hours. We don't have any new
information, but it would appear
that the FBI have got their man,
and we are expecting an arrest at
any minute.

GARY
I just really wouldn't want the
neighborhood being known for --

JOELLE
Shut your mouth! Shut your mouth!

Gary recedes into another room.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE

James sits on the steps. Each time he adjusts his body, the photographers' FLASHES blast. Local POLICEMEN are keeping the crowd of press and bystanders behind a thin yellow rope, about twenty feet away. Mason comes out the door, and sits with him. CLACK CLACK go some shutters. James looks quietly terrified.

MASON

There's nothing we can do now. We can't go in there. Let me get you out of here.

JAMES

I want to see what they take out and I want to get back in there before my mom comes back.

MASON

(re: media)

You sit out here like this, you're just giving them what they want.

James looks up at him.

JAMES

That's okay.

(re: crowd)

I don't care about them. I didn't do anything wrong.

Behind them, the door opens. Agents begin to emerge, carrying CONTAINERS and tackle boxes past James and Mason, toward the FBI and ATF vans. Lonnie, Dwight and Rook come out the door, and James gets to his feet. FLASHES GO CRAZY. Lonnie holds a folder up to the side of his face to shield himself from the flashes and cameras.

LONNIE

James?

James looks into Lonnie's eyes.

JAMES

Am I under arrest?

LONNIE

No. Why, should you be?

James says nothing. CAMERAS START FLASHING again.

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LONNIE (cont'd)

I was just going to tell you that we accidentally broke your remote control.

DWIGHT

It's noted in the report.

MASON

When can he go back in?

LONNIE

He could have come back in an hour ago. No one came out and told you?

JAMES

No.

LONNIE

Sheesh. Sorry.

(then)

We're taking your truck. Can I have the keys, please?

James hands them over. Lonnie walks down the stairs, followed by Rook and Dwight.

MASON

(to James)

Go inside and stay there. I'm going back to the office to go over these warrants.

James ducks in, and Mason heads off.

Groller, in the crowd of reporters, meets eyes with Lonnie, who looks away. Groller tries to follow him discreetly, but Lonnie strips his windbreaker, puts on a pair of sunglasses, and effortlessly dissolves into the crowd. The reporters rush Rook, who affects an air of gravity.

REPORTERS

SIR? AGENT, SIR? PLEASE TELL US YOUR NAME. ARE YOU ARRESTING THE SUSPECT? WHEN ARE YOU ARRESTING THE SUSPECT?

ROOK

I'm Special Agent Rook of the FBI. I'm sorry, but we cannot comment on this investigation at this time. Excuse me.

REPORTERS
WHEN DID YOU MAKE JAMES BALLARD A
SUSPECT?

ROOK
James Ballard is not a suspect at
this time. He is a person of
interest. Thank you. Goodbye.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - EVENING

James takes in the house: it's methodically thrashed.
Everything has been removed from all shelves, drawers, and
cabinets and placed in piles on the floor. All furniture is a
few inches off kilter. He sets to work, cleaning up as fast
as he can. Joelle rushes in, shuts the door behind her,
muting the CALLS from outside. She looks around.

JOELLE
Oh my God...

JAMES
I'll clean it up, Mom.

James sees her going toward the kitchen door --

JAMES (cont'd)
Wait! I didn't get a chance to--

INT. KITCHEN

She comes through the door: Chaos, piles. All containers are
gone, their contents emptied into ZIPLOC BAGS lying on the
counter. Joelle begins to break down. James enters, and puts
his hands on her shoulders.

JOELLE
My Tupperware! All my Tupperware's
gone!

JAMES
Let's deal with the kitchen
tomorrow.

She holds up two Ziplocs from the many, one full of flour and
another of pickles.

JOELLE
Look at this!

JAMES
Mom, come on.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

As they enter, she points at the muted TV, where Callie Cannon's head and shoulders appear next to a FRAME of their house.

JOELLE
Callie. Thank God.

She sits down with James, and turns up the sound.

CALLIE CANNON
...I'm sure they have enough for an arrest at this point, Jim, but they really have to make sure they have enough to convict.

ANCHOR
Callie, I'm sure a lot of our viewers would like to know how you feel right now. Having sat with this man yourself.

CALLIE CANNON
Jim, I feel... Honestly, Jim? A little betrayed. And frightened. Retroactively.

James shuts off the TV. Joelle can't hold it anymore and starts crying.

JOELLE
No!

JAMES
Mom --

She gets up and goes to her room. James breaks down too.

INT. MASON'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Mason in pajamas, reading the paper. He turns a page:

"TERROR FROM WITHIN RETURNS TO RALEIGH, BY GREG NICHOLSON."

Mason leans in, his face getting Mason-red...

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

James at the kitchen table, just sitting there, staring at the RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES, frozen in his hands. He hears his mother in the next room, and quickly shoves the paper in the garbage.

INT. RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Mason sits at the table, fuming. Across from him is a heavy-set middle-aged man, GREG NICHOLSON, Steve Burling, the editor, and the paper's CORPORATE ATTORNEY.

MASON

Retraction. Now.

ATTORNEY

Mr. Asheton, Mr. Nicholson here has every right to express his opinion in the Op-Ed--

MASON

(holding up the paper to
Nicholson)

LOOK AT THIS. YOU WROTE THIS.

(reads)

"This is not the first time that federal agents have come to our city, to deal with a man who lived in the fringes with his mother, another man who was drawn to the sirens and lights of police work. Like Michael Mathers before him, this man becomes a dark light cast over our fair city. This time, his name is James Ballard."

Mason looks up. No one says anything.

MASON (cont'd)

Your Mr. Nicholson compares my client to Michael Mathers. Michael Mathers is a convicted fucking child murderer.

(to Nicholson)

You wanna stand by that?

ATTORNEY

Falls under protection as opinion.

MASON

Tell you what. I'm going to *sue* that opinion, in the form of *you*, Mr. Nicholson. I'm going to sue this paper, and NBC and Jim Fort, and the FBI, and anybody else who slanders my client. That's my *opinion* --

ATTORNEY

-- I think this meeting is over --

Mason stands.

MASON

-- But if I were you guys I'd just keep doing what you're doing. I'd throw every piece of shit you got at this, and help the Feds railroad James because if they *don't* get a conviction, you people are done.

Mason leaves. Everybody looks a little worried.

ATTORNEY

I think we're fine.

(to Burling)

Have Roland and Groller heard from their source again yet?

Burling shakes his head.

EXT. RALEIGH BANNER-TIMES BUILDING - DAY

Mason comes out the front door to find May, his assistant, waiting. She doesn't look happy.

MASON

What? What happened?

She hands him a sheaf of legal papers.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

James stands in front of two overflowing garbage bags, reacting to their fetid smell. He goes the window, and pulls the curtain just a bit to see

JAMES' POV

Of the MOB outside, dotted with lenses pointing back at him, then the DUMPSTERS, way in the background behind them.

He hefts the garbage bags, girds himself, and opens the door--

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE

James tries to keep it together as he heads for the Dumpsters but the mob closes in...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

HEY. HEY. JAMES. HEY.

REPORTERS

JAMES!

James stops and starts to back up, overtaken by them.

REPORTER #2

(re: garbage)

Let me get that for you.

REPORTER #3

No, I'll get it --

He steps back pulling his garbage away from them --

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - LATER

James sits there, staring at the stinking bags of garbage. There's a knock at the door. James looks through the peephole, and opens it. Mason enters, and shuts the door behind him. He holds the sheaf of papers from May. James goes back to straightening the kitchen.

MASON

We got a lawsuit.

JAMES

I don't know if I feel like suing anybody yet, Mason.

MASON

You are being sued, James. By a group of the victims of the bombing.

JAMES

They're... wait. They're suing me?

Mason nods.

JAMES (cont'd)
What am I supposed to do?

MASON
We'll just respond to it and --

JAMES
What am I supposed to do about *everything*? I always knew what to do, even when things were bad, I always go, "well, you just gotta pick yourself and go back in and try -- "

MASON
-- I know. That's how you are, and--

JAMES
-- or "time to try something else"
or -- I can't leave my house--

MASON
-- I know --

JAMES
-- No you don't. I can't even try now. There's nothing to try at. I won't get a job, any job. I can't live anywhere. Think about that one for a second --

MASON
-- When we win this thing --

JAMES
-- look at my mom's house! And -- Win what? WHAT is the contest or the case or the game or whatever? You don't even know.

MASON
Well pardon me if I keep trying.

JAMES
Pardon me if I go back to my room. Their microphones can't hear anything in there.

James disappears into his room and shuts the door. After a beat, Mason goes to the door, opens it, and steps in...

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Joelle walks through the women's sportswear section with a hat and dark sunglasses, carrying a few items.

Above the athletic section there are TVs that bear live "World Expo Coverage," which means James Ballard coverage. She takes a left away from it.

In a mirror she catches something, stops and turns around -- two obvious FBI AGENTS, twenty feet behind her, stop and halfheartedly examine clothes.

Joelle sets down her items and walks fast for the door. The two Agents follow. Joelle panics and almost breaks into a run for the door. A SECURITY GUARD eyes her and moves toward the door as well, but seeing that she has no items stops short of grabbing her. She lets out a small SHRIEK and pushes through to the outside.

INT. HOTEL COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Lonnie finishes off the last of a Ribeye and eggs, careful not to chew into the telephone.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS - KOHL'S OFFICE - DAY

KOHL

Anything back from the labs?

LONNIE

Negative.

KOHL

Nothing yet?

LONNIE

No. All the tests on samples from the house were negative. It's clean.

KOHL

You've got to be kidding me.

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LONNIE

I had his truck flown up to Quantico, though. That'll burn another day or two.

KOHL

I got a message to call Jerry. Do you know what that's about?

LONNIE

Mmmn. No. He was sick. Now he's back. Don't know what he's working on. So.

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

U.S. ATTORNEY DONALD WILEY, late 30's, sits behind his desk. Across from him is Mason, who looks very tired.

MASON

I've talked it over with James.

WILEY

Great. And?

MASON

We're going to sue you. And the FBI. Sue everybody. Get as much sunlight on this whole stink-pile as we can through the civil courts.

WILEY

Is that right? Sue for how much? I'm just curious.

MASON

Against my advice, James seeks zero dollars. He wants a letter from the FBI clearing him of all suspicion in the case, signed by FBI Director Kohl himself. That's it. It doesn't die until he gets it.

WILEY

I thought you had something quite different in mind. Like a plea.

MASON

I'm gonna let an innocent man take a plea? I don't think so.

WILEY

Well we'll see, I guess, if he's innocent.

MASON

You mean we'll see if he's guilty. He's innocent right now. Right now all we know is that James Ballard is a hero, and before we go planning his hanging somebody should be planning which street the city's going to name after him.

DONALD

All due respect, Mr. Asheton, but have you considered bringing on an experienced defense attorney?

MASON

I have indeed. But the guy would need something to defend James against, other than FBI harassment and grossly negligent journalism. You can help me with that if you'd just march down to Stratford Highway and throw the poor fucker in jail.

Wiley says nothing.

MASON (cont'd)

I'm just asking because I'm in kind of a bind here. James could use some rights. Just the usual ones, nothing fancy. Innocent-until-proven-guilty, stuff like that. In his current status as... what's it called?

WILEY

He's a person of interest.

MASON

Right. If you would be so kind as to arrest him and charge him with some crime, any crime, then he can be a suspect, with all a suspect's Constitutional rights, and then somebody can defend him against the charges. You all think he did it? Put him in jail.

Wiley takes a moment.

DONALD

If they find anything, maybe he won't go to jail.

MASON

What do you mean.

DONALD

Well. It's a terror case. He might go someplace else. If you care about him, I'd think about talking to him about a plea. I can try to help you reduce it to something that keeps his case in the regular judicial system.

Mason looks thrown, lost, for the first time. He stands and goes for the door. He turns.

MASON

I know about you. I know you're a good man. I know you know this is fucked.

No reaction from Wiley. Mason leaves.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - NIGHT

The drapes are taped to the walls, but some MEDIA LIGHTS still leak in. Joelle and James sit across a table from each other. Nerves are short.

JOELLE

Where the heck is he?

He reaches for a Ziploc of pickles and puts it down in front of her. She pushes it away.

JAMES

We're lucky Mason's willing to go out there and get us pizza.

JOELLE

Oh is that what we are? Lucky to be stuck in our house for days with Mason's getting us pizza?

James stalks off to the living room, turns on the TV. Stallone's "Cobra" is on. A BOMB blows up on the TV. Joelle rushes in.

JOELLE (cont'd)
What the hell are you doing?

JAMES
(annoyed)
What?

JOELLE
There's a...
(points at the TV)
You're watching something like that
with explosions and they're --

She indicates "listening," and goes into her room. He sighs, and changes the channel. On "THE NIGHT SHOW," a comedian HOST is doing his opening monologue in front of the velvet curtains.

HOST
And *what is up* with the guy down at
the Expo in Raleigh? The security
guard bomber? I've been staying
away from the post office for a few
years, and now I have to avoid rent-
a-cops? What's up with *that*?
(gets the laugh)
I've heard that if they don't meet
his demand of a year's free Dunkin'
Donuts, he *will* bomb again.

AUDIENCE LAUGHTER.

HOST (cont'd)
Hey. And in New York City. What the
heck is *up* with --

James shuts off the TV. He goes to the window and peels back an inch of curtain.

JAMES'S POV

Of the parking lot. A few REPORTERS are holding the night vigil. On the roof across the lot, AGENTS can be seen. Two of them man a TELESCOPIC MICROPHONE in a LARGE DISH, pointed straight at James. He lets the curtain fall again.

INT. JAMES'S ROOM - NIGHT

James stands at his closet door, looking at his uniform hanging there. He takes a wastebasket, and begins filling it with every law-enforcement-related object in the room he can find, starting with the uniforms. He turns to see Joelle in the doorway behind him.

JAMES
Get out. GET OUT.

He kicks the door shut --

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Burling, the Attorney, Groller and Roland sit at the table. Big tension.

BURLING
(to Groller)
We need more from your source.
Right now, Tim. This story is
starting to stink.

GROLLER
He hasn't called.

BURLING
Well everybody else has. Because
nobody else has heard a peep from
any government sources about any
evidence at all on Ballard, except
you two. So should we just run
yesterday's story again? Move some
'graphs around?

ATTORNEY
We haven't printed anything that's
technically libel.

BURLING
(to Groller and Roland)
You hear that? Good news! What you
have been reporting is not
technically libel! This is great!

Burling goes for the door.

BURLING (cont'd)

You know what I think, you guys? I think you got played. And if you did, you know what I'm going to have to do?

GROLLER

I know, I know, you'll fire us.

BURLING

Nope. You'll wish I just fired you. I'll do a *story* on you.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Lonnie, naked, sleeps as far to the other side of the bed as he can be from Vortex, also naked. There's a KNOCK on the door. He wakes, pulls a sheet around himself and opens the door to find

FBI DIRECTOR KOHL,

Standing in the doorway. He looks shell-shocked, hollow. He passes Lonnie and sits down, noticing the sleeping Vortex. She wakes up.

LONNIE

(to Vortex)

Why don't you go to your room?

VORTEX

'Kay.

She wraps a sheet around herself, takes her purse and leaves.

LONNIE

I didn't know you were coming down.

Lonnie sits in the bed across from Kohl.

LONNIE (cont'd)

So. How's it going?

KOHL

Not that well, Lonnie. There's new intel that Daniel Langtree was in town during the incident.

LONNIE

Who's that.

KOHL

He's a bomber. Tennessee Militia. He probably did it. The voiceprints are looking good and he actually fits an actual profile. Jerry mention it to you?

LONNIE

Don't remember.

KOHL

He mentioned it to me. I guess I didn't remember, either.

LONNIE

So we'll get on it.

KOHL

You? No, see this is probably going to turn into a real investigation now. What you bring to the table will not be required, I don't think.

(then)

It was you. You leaked it, didn't you?

LONNIE

I got what you wanted. That's what I do.

KOHL

I'd love to ruin you. I really would. But it'd play all wrong. So I'm reassigning you. You're going back overseas. Whatever the worst assignment I can find.

LONNIE

Okay.

Kohl goes to the door and opens it.

KOHL

Yeah, I thought you'd be okay with that.

LONNIE

Of course I'm okay with it, Sir. It's my job. You'd like a matter settled, and fast, so you call me.

(MORE)

LONNIE (cont'd)
I get you what you want, you get to
come in at the end and be outraged
with how I did it. You punish me.
You feel better. It's fine.
Everybody's done their job.

Kohl regards him from the doorway.

KOHL
Do you care about *anything*, Lonnie?

Lonnie stifles a laugh.

LONNIE
Of course. I care about whatever
you do.

Kohl leaves.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE - MORNING

James and Joelle sit facing Mason. He holds out an envelope
to James.

MASON
This came to my office yesterday.

JAMES
Is it my letter from the FBI?

MASON
No. It's from Marcy.

James looks at it in Mason's hand.

JAMES
That's okay.

Mason still holds it out.

JAMES (cont'd)
No thanks. Just. No thanks.

Mason puts the envelope in his briefcase.

MASON
Alright. So. The Callie Cannon's
network wants to settle for the
comment.

JAMES
Okay.

MASON

"Okay?!" James, this is great!

JOELLE

How come?

MASON

They're cracking. There's no case, they know it. Shit, NBC might even know more than me about it.

JOELLE

James, you hear that?

JAMES

Where's my letter from the FBI?

MASON

Don't you want to know how much the network wants to settle for?

JAMES

Not really. I mean, if you want to tell me.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Two black Suburbans pull quietly into the lot, lights off. Rook, Dwight, and seven AGENTS pour quietly and quickly out of the vehicles, and begin pulling boxes from them. Among them is Bedford, the agent that James alerted at the Expo.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - NIGHT

James opens the door to find Dwight and Bedford.

JAMES

Do you mind if I get a jacket?

DWIGHT

We're not here to arrest you.

The other Agents begin filing through the doorway, setting down the boxes. Bedford, all his earlier bravado gone, holds out a clipboard to James. He has trouble meeting James' eyes.

BEDFORD

(to James, with clipboard)

This is a receipt for your property. Sign here, please..

James ignores the request and begins opening boxes. Dwight looks back through the doorway -- the few straggling Press People have noticed the action and are getting out of their vans.

BEDFORD (cont'd)
All the kitchen stuff is in those
two, your weapons are in the blue
box there.

James stands up, and faces Bedford. He takes the clipboard, signs, and roughly returns it to Bedford. Bedford begins to back out of the door, James matching him pace for pace.

BEDFORD (cont'd)
You'll receive compensation for the
carpet and your truck in six to
eight --

James slams the door shut in Bedford's face. James stands alone, facing the door. After a beat, we hear a door CREAK behind James.

JAMES
They're gone.

Joelle tentatively emerges from her bedroom. She looks around, then goes to the boxes. James points at one.

JAMES (cont'd)
Kitchen.

She opens it, and pulls out a piece of Tupperware. There's an inventory code scribbled on it, in permanent marker. She places it on the counter, reaches for another -- the same.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Mason absently stirs a black coffee, looking up at the TV behind the counter:

ON TV, MUTED

CALLIE CANNON reports live from Cape Canaveral with two smiling ASTRONAUTS, the Shuttle on the launch pad behind them.

Mason looks up as U.S. Attorney Donald Wiley walks in the door. He sees Mason and sits across from him. Wiley slides an ENVELOPE across the table. Mason opens it and reads the single page inside.

WILEY

So. You can drop your suit now. You win.

Mason looks up from the letter.

WILEY (cont'd)

You know how often the government issues a letter like that?

MASON

Whenever they should?

WILEY

Never. You should be proud.

MASON

Wish I could say the same to you.

WILEY

Well, it's over. It's all been pretty unfortunate, but it's over.

Mason shakes his head, puts the page back in the envelope and leaves.

INT. BALLARD HOUSE

Mason sits across from Joelle and James, who holds the letter in his hand.

MASON

You know how often the government give up a letter like that? Never. That's when. This is history.

JOELLE

You think the papers'll print this?

MASON

You bet they will.

JAMES

What page?

James breaks his reverie and looks up to Mason.

JAMES (cont'd)

I was guilty on the front page. Page one. I think I was back on B2 today, in the Metro section.

(MORE)

JAMES (cont'd)
Where do you think I'll be
innocent? B5? B20?

MASON
We're gonna get those bastards,
James. Every last one of them. I'm
going to sue every person who so
much as put you and the word "bomb"
in the same sentence. Then it's
going to be over.

JAMES
Nobody's gonna care.

James just stares at him, then gets up to go to his room.

JAMES (cont'd)
I'm going to be the guy who might
have done it. Forever. Nothing's
going to change that. Not even that
letter.

He starts toward his room.

JAMES (cont'd)
(over his shoulder)
But thanks.

INT. NORTH CAROLINA STATE CAPITOL - DAY

On the legislature floor, the mundane process of passing laws and declarations. There are just a few spectators, including a junior high school civics class, and Joelle. She is dressed well, holds her purse in her lap and listens as an emotionless clerk drawls out:

CLERK
Motion number 6745-B. The Great
State of North Carolina hereby
declares James Sanderson Ballard an
official State Hero for his
courageous actions of June 4th,
2004, in saving countless lives
during the bombing of the Raleigh
World's Fair Exposition. Mr.
Ballard showed a rare combination
of vigilance and bravery in acting
on the behalf of his fellow man.
Motion number 6746-B451.
(MORE)

CLERK (cont'd)
The Great State of North Carolina
hereby declares the date of March
6th to be North Carolina
Immunization Day, in accordance
with...

Joelle stands, and leaves.

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE - DAY

James is on his knees, putting a new coat of paint on the
well-trampled front stairs. From behind him he hears

VOICE
You James Ballard?

James looks up to see a SHERIFF in his late '60s.

JAMES
Yes.

SHERIFF TAYLOR
Alfred Taylor, Sheriff of Redlake
County. North of here, almost to --

JAMES
I know where it is.

SHERIFF TAYLOR
Great. You wanna come work up there?

James pauses painting.

SHERIFF TAYLOR (cont'd)
I just got a budget increase for a
new deputy. Turns out I got a
couple Homeland Security targets in
my area.

James looks around. Nobody, no cameras.

SHERIFF TAYLOR (cont'd)
I tried to call but that was a no-
go, and I was down here visiting my
daughter at school so I thought I'd
come by personally. Sorry to barge
in.

Off of James's implacable face we

CUT TO:

EXT. KYRGYZSTAN STREET CURB- DAY

A LAUNDRY VAN, surrounded by pedestrian traffic.

INT. LAUNDRY VAN

Surveillance gear surrounds Lonnie, sitting in a chair with a pair of headphones on. On the table in front of him is a .45 automatic and a Coke. He reads a "VORTEX" COMIC BOOK.

INT. DENNY'S - DAY

James sits at the counter, a "Sports Illustrated" next to his plate. He looks a little thinner. Outside the windows, the scenery is rural. Behind the counter stands the MANAGER, talking to him.

MANAGER

But if she goes to night school I
work all day, then when are we
supposed to hang out?

JAMES

Shouldn't take long for her to
finish if she's already got --

VOICE (O.S.)

-- NO! NO! HELP!

James and the Manager turn to see a YOUNG COUPLE at a table in the back, with a lifeless ONE-YEAR-OLD GIRL in their arms.

James moves fast across the room to them, slaloming between the tables.

The FATHER is trying to Heimlich the child.

JAMES

SIR. STOP.

YOUNG MOTHER

SHE'S CHOKING! SHE'S CHOKING!

JAMES

I know!

James takes the child from the father and turns her face down and straddling his arm.

YOUNG FATHER

Please --

James finds his calm. He feels inside her mouth, then hits the infant on the back -- nothing --

YOUNG MOTHER

OH GOD.

-- AGAIN. Nothing.

YOUNG MOTHER (cont'd)

OH GOD, NO.

He looks down her throat, concentrating...

JAMES

Okay.

He HITS AGAIN -- and out POPS a piece of food, hitting the floor. The girl COUGHS and WRETCHES, then begins to WAIL. Her mother rushes to her and takes her.

YOUNG MOTHER

Oh my baby, baby. It's okay. It's okay. Everything's going to be okay.

James takes a step back, and watches the parents embrace their child. His face relaxes, grows younger.

YOUNG FATHER

(to James)

Thank you. Thank you!

YOUNG MOTHER

(to the girl)

It's okay. It's okay.

James catches his breath, and he begins to smile...

THE END.