

BRIARPATCH

101

"Breadknife Weather"

by

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Based on the novel by Ross Thomas

EXT. TEXAS. DAY.

A hot morning, getting hotter. In front of a cloudless sky, a billboard shimmers in the heat: MO FIXENS' BBQ. A cartoonish drawing of a pig, basting itself in barbecue sauce leers. Block script spells out the motto: GET IT WHILE IT'S HOT! Next to the text is a digital thermometer. It reads 88F. A beat. Then: 89F.

We pan down to the balcony of a modest split level home. A CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN stares up at the billboard. Sighs. With effort, a smile settles on her face. Then she locks the door behind her.

We follow as she: walks down the exposed staircase to the first floor. She BANGS on the door.

HAROLD (O.S.)

Hold on. I ain't wearing any pants!

The door opens, revealing HAROLD SNOW: Late '20s, greasy, very much not wearing pants.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Morning.

CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN

(bemused)

Harold.

HAROLD

Yeah?

CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN

You're still not wearing any pants.

He looks down.

HAROLD

No. Don't suppose I am.

A voice from behind him in the messy apartment.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Who the hell is it?

HAROLD

(yelling behind him)

It's the landlady, Cindy!

CINDY (O.S.)

What the hell does she want?

HAROLD
(yelling)

What the hell you think she wants?

CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN
What *do* you think I want, Harold?

Harold sighs. Spits into a coffee cup.

HAROLD
I could say conversation. Or a blessed moment in the air con that you so generously provide. A three-egg omelette. But I suppose what you want is the rent.

CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN
You suppose right.

Harold scratches his cheek.

HAROLD
And I intend to get it to you. It's just that work is a little light just now.
(he adjusts himself)
You sure you don't want the omelette?

CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN
The rent, Harold. I want the rent. And I'm going to get it today. Or you're going to find another place to hang your pants.

HAROLD
Listen --

CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN
Today. I'll be back at 5pm.

HAROLD
Gotta round up the usual suspects, huh?

She smiles then turns and walks to the curb where a police cruiser is parked. She unlocks the door and catches a glimpse of herself reflected in the window. She lifts her hair up, then lets it fall -- dissatisfied. Then she gets in the car, turns the ignition. It doesn't catch. She flips the key again, and --

BOOM!!!

A hot flash of orange white flame as the police cruiser EXPLODES in a fireball setting off car alarms up and down the block. Through the smoke, we see the CURLY-HAIRED YOUNG WOMAN, torn apart and bloody, hanging halfway out of where the door once was. She blinks once in pain. Twice in fear. She dies.

Harold, still pants-less, joins a frantic crowd of suburban onlookers.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
 Jesus, stay back! The gas tank
 could go.

CINDY, Harold's girlfriend, runs up behind him.

CINDY
 What the hell happened?

HAROLD
 It appears someone just blew up the
 landlady.

We pull back to take in the scene. The thermometer on the BBQ billboard clicks up again: 90F.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: **BRIARPATCH**

INT. VIRGINIA APARTMENT. MORNING.

A modern Beltway condo with all the furnishings, organized to a millimeter of its life. From above we see a Queen size bed. A WOMAN is asleep in her underwear, curled into "little spoon" position. The indentation behind her suggests there was a big spoon at some point in the night. But not now.

This is ALLEGRA DILL: Newly 38, lean & angular; eyes like year-old ice.

A cellphone BUZZES. Allegra moves to shake off the embrace of someone who isn't there. Her hand slides under the pillow and retrieves her phone.

ALLEGRA
 Yes?

She listens. Sits up urgently.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 Let me stop you: Hurt or dead?

The answer comes. Her shoulders sag. A noise emerges from her mouth, halfway between a gasp and a yelp. She regains control. Continues.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 Today was her birthday, you know.
 Mine too. Ten years apart.
 (Pause)
 Her 28th birthday.

She listens.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 Yes, that's kind of you. I'll go to
 the airport now.

Listens.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 That's fine is -- Is the Hawkins
 Hotel still standing?

CUT TO:

INT. UBER. LATER.

Allegra, leather shoulder bag by her side, rides in a car service past the Capitol building. She stares out from behind Ray-Bans. Impassive. Then she removes her phone, dials.

ALLEGRA
 Hi, Betty Mae. Thank you. Yes. 38.

(listens)

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 About that: I won't be in tomorrow
 either. I may need the whole week.
 My sister died.

(listens)

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
 No. A car bomb.
 (pause)
 Hello?

(listens)

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

That's OK. Fine. I'm heading to National now. Can you tell him I'll be reachable by cell or -- OK, sure.

(pause)

Hello, Senator. Yes. I appreciate that. I will. This morning. I'm going there now to find out.

(listens)

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

You know where.

(beat)

Texas. The hot part.

EXT. TEXAS AIRPORT. LATER.

Allegra steps out of the air-conditioned terminal into the muggy meat of the day. Beads of sweat immediately pop on her forehead. A sign behind her reads:

WELCOME TO SAN BONIFACIO: THE GATEWAY CITY

She pulls a pack of cigarettes from her shoulder bag. Puts one in her mouth. Pantomimes lighting it, inhaling. She closes her eyes. Exhales, long and slow.

REDCAP

You gonna light that?

ALLEGRA

Nope.

The Redcap gives her an inquisitive look. She hands him the cigarette. Then steps into a waiting cab.

INT. CAB. A BIT LATER.

CABBIE

First time in Saint Disgrace?

ALLEGRA

I was born here.

He glances back in the rearview, skeptical.

CABBIE

Really? You don't have the look.

ALLEGRA

Give me a few hours.

The cab turns off the highway and heads toward the downtown. Stately facades of buildings, brick and stone, but decaying ever so perceptibly. It's worthy of a museum. Or a mausoleum.

As they approach a large intersection, Allegra clocks a hubbub ahead. Police cruisers parked sideways, blocking off a lane. A large gathering of onlookers. A few shouts.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

What's this?

CABBIE

Oh, there was a break-in at the zoo a week or so back.

ALLEGRA

A break-in?

CABBIE

More like a break-out. Someone blew the locks on the cages. Been making a mess of things ever since. It's --

He's interrupted by a fusillade of GUNSHOTS. Allegra tenses in the backseat. The cabbie doesn't flinch.

CABBIE (CONT'D)

Anyway, they've mostly got a handle on it now.

The cab cruises past the scene. Through the window, Allegra sees a half-dozen police, guns drawn, standing around a DEAD KANGAROO. Animal blood pools. People stare. The cab drives.

EXT. HAWKINS HOTEL. EVENING.

The cab drives away, leaving Allegra looking up at the Gothic facade of the HAWKINS HOTEL. It used to be the only hotel in town. Now it's crowded on either side by leering, gauche new construction. She pats her pockets for the cigarettes she won't smoke. Picks up her bag and enters.

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL LOBBY. CONTINUOUS.

An ornate lobby, looking like a seldom-visited, out of the way chapel. A perfect place to have an assignation. Plush chairs, red carpet, and low chatter. A sudden rush of air conditioning causes Allegra's skin to break out in goosebumps. She shivers.

CLERK

Can I help you, ma'am.

ALLEGRA

Yes, I have a reservation. Dill.
Allegra Dill.

CLERK

Certainly, ma'am. Made this
morning. May I ask how long you'll
be staying with us?

ALLEGRA

I'm not certain. A week, maybe.

CLERK

That's fine, fine.
(he hands her a large, gold key)
Room 981. I apologize there's no
one to help you with your bag. Cody
called in sick again. Rosa too.

ALLEGRA

I'll manage.

As she turns she comes to face to face with a tall, slender
black man. Sport coat, dad jeans, high top Reeboks. This is
A.D. SINGE (34). He is overly excited to see her.

SINGE

You're Pick Dill!

ALLEGRA

Not since high school.

SINGE

But that's what they used to call
you: Pickle Dill. Where were you?
Horace Mann out on 22nd and Monroe?

ALLEGRA

I was.

SINGE

That's where it started and where
it ended too. What was it, fourth
grade? Fifth? When you took down
three of the worst bullies this
state ever managed to cough up.

ALLEGRA

My finest hour.

SINGE

After that, they called you Pick instead of Pickle. They stopped for good once you got to Austin for college. But your sister, she always called you that. Pick.

Allegra's face tightens.

ALLEGRA

She did.

SINGE

I'm A.D. Singe -- like "scorch."
I'm -- was, dammit -- a friend of Felicity's. I'm also her attorney.

Allegra holds out a hand. They shake slowly.

ALLEGRA

I didn't know Felicity had an attorney.

SINGE

Yep. Me. And since I provided counsel to her I thought the least I could do was be here for you, see if there's anything that you need.

ALLEGRA

I can think of one thing. A drink.

Singe smiles. Cocks his head towards the bar off the lobby.

SINGE

The Slush Pit do?

ALLEGRA

Fine.

INT. THE SLUSH PIT. CONTINUOUS

A dark, discreet watering hole. A U-Shaped bar in the center of the room, surrounded by red leather banquettes, the kind you could disappear into if you wanted. And most people drinking at The Slush Pit do. Singe and Allegra slide into one, giving a cursory nod at two drunk men sitting on stools. Neither pays them any mind.

A waitress approaches.

WAITRESS

Hey, A.D. What'll it be.

SINGE

I'll take a brandy alexander -- and whatever the lady is having.

ALLEGRA

A gin, please. Ice.

WAITRESS

The fruity kind or the dry?

ALLEGRA

The dry.

Satisfied, the waitress walks away.

SINGE

I'm terribly, terribly sorry about your sister.

He begins to tear up, rubs his eyes embarrassed. Allegra looks away.

ALLEGRA

Thank you.

Formalities done, they sit silently until the drinks arrive.

SINGE

I'd toast but it's not a day for that.

ALLEGRA

Actually, it's my birthday.

He raises an eyebrow. Then, his glass. They drink.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

Did you know Felicity long?

SINGE

A few years now. I was at the law school when she was undergrad.

Allegra's turn to raise an eyebrow.

SINGE (CONT'D)

It wasn't like that. Well, I wished that it was. I'd be lying if I said otherwise. But it wasn't. We were friends. Good friends, eventually. First she was just my French tutor. (off Allegra's look) I thought it would be useful.

ALLEGRA

In Texas?

SINGE

Somewhere. Anyway, we stayed close. She'd quiz me on the *imparfait* and would kick me some cases after she joined the force. Cops getting divorced, mostly. I helped her buy that duplex. I...drew up her will.

ALLEGRA

When?

SINGE

When she transferred to homicide. 16 -- no, 17 months ago.

ALLEGRA

She ever talk about her work?

SINGE

Sometimes.

ALLEGRA

Was she working on anything that might've caused someone to put a bomb in her trunk?

SINGE

It was under the seat, actually.

Allegra doesn't reply.

SINGE (CONT'D)

No. Not that she ever told me about. There is something you ought to know, though.

ALLEGRA

What?

SINGE

She worked for a man named Strucker.

ALLEGRA

The chief of detectives. He called me this morning.

*

SINGE

Two hours after she died he rang me up and the first thing he wanted to know, even before he told me she was gone, was whether I was the executor of her estate.

*
*

ALLEGRA

OK.

SINGE

I said, yes, sir, and then he told me she'd died. And before I could say how or why or even oh my god no, he asked me to meet him at Felicity's bank.

ALLEGRA

Safety deposit box?

SINGE

(nodding)

I was there when they opened it. They brought it all out of the box, one thing at a time. Like dinosaur bones at a -- what do you call it--

ALLEGRA

An excavation.

SINGE

Right. Her will. Some photos of your parents. Her passport. Then an insurance policy. First I'd heard of it. Only three weeks old. A term policy naming you as sole beneficiary.

Allegra takes out a cigarette.

SINGE (CONT'D)

I don't think you can smoke in here anymore.

ALLEGRA

I don't plan to.

She puts the cigarette in her mouth, closes her eyes. Inhales. Takes it out again.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

OK. How much?

SINGE

One point seven million.

He holds Allegra's gaze to see her reaction. There is none, only a subtle creep of ice across her eyes.

ALLEGRA

One point seven million dollars.

Singe nods.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

Let's get another drink.

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL. LATER.

The elevator dings on the ninth floor and Allegra, a little buzzed, walks out into a dark hallway. An exit sign flickers at the end of a hall and then fizzles out.

She walks along the thin carpet to room 981. As she fiddles with the key she looks down. On the floor, next to the adjoining room, is a room service tray, full of food. An enormous steak, bloody and rare, sits untouched. Potatoes, spinach, a side salad, a soda bottle, and a pitcher of coffee. Allegra clocks it, wonders why. Then enters her room, the door closes behind her with a reassuring THUNK.

INT. ROOM 981. MORNING.

Bright light pours into a modest, old-fashioned hotel room. Everything is tidy; Allegra is an unpacker. She is just buttoning her last button when there's a knock at the door.

She opens it to reveal:

Two TALL MEN, both in bland, dark suits. The older and wider of two is CALVIN STRUCKER (55), the younger, dark and handsome in the slightly phony way of soap opera stars, is GENE COLDER (35).

ALLEGRA

Officers. Please come in.

COLDER

What gave it away? The posture?

ALLEGRA

The suits.

They nod.

STRUCKER

I'm Calvin Strucker, Ms. Dill,
chief of detectives in the SBPD. We
spoke on the phone. Let me again
say how truly sorry I am.

Allegra accepts his hand and nods.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

This is Captain Gene Colder.
Homicide.

ALLEGRA

Investigating or mourning?

COLDER

Both, I'm afraid.

ALLEGRA

Would either of you like some truly
appalling coffee?

STRUCKER

I've never been able to refuse a
pitch like that.

Allegra pours Strucker a coffee from the mini machine. She
waits until he has a scalding sip before asking:

ALLEGRA

So. Who did it?

STRUCKER

We don't know yet.

ALLEGRA

Why did they do it?

STRUCKER

We don't know that either.

He sighs the sigh of a much older, frailer man.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

We're here for two reasons. One is
to try and answer your questions.
The other is to offer the official
condolences of the department.

COLDER

Your sister was . . . She was an
exceptional person.

ALLEGRA

How much did she make a year?

Strucker grimaces as if the question were distasteful.

COLDER

Fifty-five fifty.

ALLEGRA

And the annual premium on a one point seven million dollar life insurance policy for a 26 year old woman in good health is how much?

The grimace becomes a frown.

STRUCKER

You heard about that, huh?

ALLEGRA

I heard about it.

COLDER

The lawyer?

She nods. Strucker puts down his coffee.

STRUCKER

If we're having this conversation, I'm gonna need a better cup of coffee.

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL LOBBY. CONTINUOUS.

The three fix new cups of coffee from a shiny, silver urn.

STRUCKER

According to the Arbuckle Confederated people, the annual life insurance premium for a non-smoker like Felicity was \$960. And she paid it off as a lump sum on the 14th of last month.

ALLEGRA

It's not a smart investment for a young person with no dependents. No surrender value. Can't borrow against it. Of course, if she knew she was going to die, she might have wanted to leave something to her family. Which is me.

COLDER

She said you were some kind of investigator yourself. You a Fed?

ALLEGRA

No. I work for a senate sub-committee.

COLDER

What does that mean?

ALLEGRA

Whatever they want it to.

A stare. Feeling each other out. It breaks.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

You don't think it was suicide?

COLDER

It wasn't suicide.

ALLEGRA

I don't think so either. Because there's also the matter of her duplex.

STRUCKER

Out on 32nd. Been there?

ALLEGRA

Not yet. When she told me she was in the market, I thought she was thinking of one of the old Spanish bungalows on Paseo Gracia. You can get those for, what, 100 grand? More?

STRUCKER

They're getting scarce, but sure. Around that.

ALLEGRA

I offered her some help with a down payment. She laughed. Said she was going to get creative.

COLDER

That's her.

ALLEGRA

So then I find out what that means: A fine old duplex with a pricetag just north of \$850,000.

(MORE)

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

If her salary was what you say it was, she could just do it, maybe. A generous mortgage from Allied. Supermarket coupons. Red beans and rice from Lupe's. Thrift store clothes and a library card. But that generous mortgage came with a balloon payment.

STRUCKER

Due when?

ALLEGRA

Next month. \$121,000.

Strucker whistles.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

How much did my sister have in her checking account?

COLDER

\$332.

ALLEGRA

So. Do you want to ask it or should I?

Colder nods. His eyes flash challenge: You do it.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

When did my sister go bad?

COLDER

She didn't.

STRUCKER

Gene --

COLDER

She was good police. Natural. We jumped her to second grade over three older detectives, guys straight out of central casting. She worked leads, she was patient. She would have made sergeant in two years, easy.

ALLEGRA

You talk like you knew her.

COLDER

Better than you.

Allegra's eyes flash.

STRUCKER

Miss Dill, I apologize if tempers are running a little hot. Felicity was your family -- we feel the same way. And the thing with homicides, well, most of them are damned simple. A guy will call you up and say, "I need you to get over here on account of I just killed my girlfriend with this hockey stick." And when you get there, he's sitting there on the edge of the bed, the stick still in his hands, crying tears on top of blood. But every so often you get a tricky one. Like this right here.

ALLEGRA

Yes. All right.

STRUCKER

I told you over the phone that we were going to bury your sister on Saturday. That's in three days time. Before that, we're going to find out what the hell went wrong.

ALLEGRA

Fine. I want to see the duplex.

COLDER

Impossible. There's procedure.

STRUCKER

What Gene's saying is it just might take some time. You see, we've got our best forensics boys tramping through there just now.

ALLEGRA

I need to see where my sister lived.

STRUCKER

And I appreciate that. Look, there's a cop thing happening for her tomorrow morning. A wake, kind of. Over at Jolly's. I hope you'll join us. We can talk more then.

Strucker puts down his coffee. Stands.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

But you have my number if you need anything. And I mean anything.

He turns to go. Colder holds a beat.

COLDER

Your sister and I -- well, when my divorce comes through, we were going to be married. She never told you, did she?

ALLEGRA

No. She never did.

EXT. PECOS PARK. AFTERNOON.

Allegra sits on a park bench underneath a brilliant, hot sun. She drinks a grapefruit Jarritos soda and is polishing off a tamale. A large green park extends before her. Her eyes watch two large, PINK FLAMINGOS sunning themselves in center frame.

A tall, graying AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN, flouting the heat in a double-breasted suit suddenly appears. This is CYRUS HARE.

CYRUS

Miss Dill.

ALLEGRA

Cyrus.

CYRUS

The senator would like to meet.

ALLEGRA

I'm on personal leave. Bereavement.

CYRUS

The senator knows. And extends his condolences.

ALLEGRA

If he extends them any further he might strain something.

CYRUS

I will be coordinating his arrival later today. We'll be in touch.

ALLEGRA

He could call me.

CYRUS

This isn't the sort of thing one
discusses on telephones.

ALLEGRA

It never is. How about a hint? *

CYRUS

Your loss, while tragic, *
presents...an opportunity. *

ALLEGRA

Here it comes. *

CYRUS

While in town, you could depose *
Spivey. You know him well, I *
believe. *

ALLEGRA

I do. *

CYRUS

It would save us a subpoena. And *
all of -- *

He gestures. *

CYRUS (CONT'D)

This could be expensed. *

ALLEGRA

Fine. *

CYRUS

You'll do it? *

ALLEGRA

I'll talk to the Senator about it. *

She dabs at her mouth with a napkin. Folds up the tin foil.

CYRUS

The tamale. Was it good?

ALLEGRA

The best.

CYRUS

Where did you get it?

ALLEGRA

Lupe's.

A beat.

CYRUS
Spell it?

ALLEGRA
L-U-P-E-S.

Cyrus jots it down in a reporter's notebook.

CYRUS
Apostrophe?

ALLEGRA
Of course.

He nods.

CYRUS
We'll be in touch.

He vanishes as efficiently as he appeared. Allegra sighs and begins her cigarette not-smoking ritual, her eyes drawn to the flamingos when she suddenly NOTICES:

A large ALLIGATOR, waddling incongruously across the grass towards the birds!

Her eyes widen as the gator opens its jaws and SNAPS THEM DOWN on one of the flamingo's legs. The bird SQUAWKS and flaps its useless wings, crumping to the ground.

An AIR HORN blares as a dozen ANIMAL CONTROL and COPS converge on the scene, nets held high, guns drawn.

"Come Little Donkey" by The Weavers plays, blanketing all sound, as Allegra watches a farce unfold before her.

Animal control officers desperately trying to restrain the gator and extricate the flamingo's leg while --

-- the other flamingo, in fear and rage, charges at the cops who threaten to shoot --

-- Animal Control wave their arms, trying to block the guns --

--the gator, tired of the bird, clamps its legs down on one of his would-be saviors instead -- the guns go off!

It's a folk music bloodbath.

Allegra blinks, rises. And hurriedly walks away.

EXT. PRESS CLUB. EVENING.

A stately, three-story Victorian painted an appalling shade of lime green and already peeling. Allegra emerges from a taxi and makes her way up the stairs to the locked door. Above the door, engraved in bronze, is the club motto:

I USED TO BE A NEWSPAPERMAN MYSELF

She presses the bell, a loud voice barks from the intercom:

VOICE (O.S.)

What?

ALLEGRA

Allegra Dill.

VOICE (O.S.)

Jesus.

A buzzer sounds unlocking the door.

INT. PRESS CLUB. CONTINUOUS.

Allegra walks through a small foyer into a cool, claustrophobic lounge area. No one smokes but the cigar fumes linger. Slats of light pour in through a poorly shaded bay window. To the left is a large bar room. She heads that way.

There, behind an old, varnished wood bar, is IGNACIO "NACHO" LEVANTES: 60s, mustache, dark eyes that have seen a lot and could withstand a lot more. The owner and proprietor. He doesn't move until Allegra sits. Only watches.

NACHO

Well. You're back.

ALLEGRA

I'm back.

NACHO

I heard about your sister.

(pause)

I'm sorry.

ALLEGRA

Thanks.

NACHO

Hell of a thing. I remember when you used to bring her 'round the old place when she was yay-tall. What was she, 8 years younger?

ALLEGRA

Ten.

NACHO

You were responsible for her,
right? After the accident?

Allegra nods.

ALLEGRA

We got along. We were friends.

NACHO

But you never came back.

ALLEGRA

Is that a question?

NACHO

No.
(beat)
Drink?

ALLEGRA

Tecate. Lime if you've got it.

NACHO

I keep 'em for the gringos.

He twists the cap off of a red bottle, sets it down.

NACHO (CONT'D)

It's on the house. But you still
owe \$81.78 from your tab which you
sort of forgot to square when you
took off for, where was it?

ALLEGRA

Washington.

She reaches into her wallet, removes a \$100 bill.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

Keep the change.

Nacho nods.

NACHO

For that, you get a second lime.

She takes a long pull of the beer.

ALLEGRA

How you been?

NACHO
Same old shit.

ALLEGRA
Looks pretty nice, actually.

NACHO
Sure, if you like dry rot.

ALLEGRA
Steaks still good?

NACHO
I ate one yesterday. I ain't dead yet.

He wipes down a section of the bar.

NACHO (CONT'D)
So who did it?

ALLEGRA
They don't know.

NACHO
Who's working it?

ALLEGRA
A guy called Strucker.

NACHO
Him I know. Smart. Not college-smart. Cop smart. 25 years on the job. Married well. Lives good. Fixing to retire soon.

ALLEGRA
And Gene Colder?

NACHO
Oh sure. Him.

ALLEGRA
Him.

NACHO
Shipped in from somewhere north and east a couple of years ago. Big Chief Raytek's grooming him for Strucker's job, I'd expect. He's a comer. But not exactly noisy about it.

ALLEGRA
Who's on the police beat for the
Trib these days?

NACHO
Who else? Freddie Laffter.

Allegra guffaws -- the first laugh since we've known her.

ALLEGRA
No. Jesus. Doesn't anything change
around here?

Nacho considers the question seriously.

NACHO
Not a hell of a lot.

ALLEGRA
He still come in for dinner every
night?

NACHO
Eight on the dot. You planning on
asking him about Colder?

ALLEGRA
I just might.

NACHO
It'll cost.

ALLEGRA
I know it.
(gesturing to the Tecate)
How about another?

He snatches the bottle away.

NACHO
Listen, Pick, word of advice: If
you're treating Freddie Laffter,
you're gonna want to pace yourself.

INT. PRESS CLUB DINING ROOM. LATER.

Close in on an old man's mouth as he BELCHES with
satisfaction. We zoom out to take in FREDDIE LAFFTER: Past 70
but looks 80. Red faced and disheveled police reporter-for-
life. He's the boss from *Blondie* with a Lipitor scrip.

Freddie pushes himself back slightly from the dinner table, a picked clean T-bone in front of him. (The salad is untouched.) His pants are already unbuttoned.

LAFFTER

You wanna talk about your sister.

Allegra dabs at her mouth with a napkin. She ate her salad.

ALLEGRA

I do.

LAFFTER

You see this?

Laffter tosses a copy of yesterday's Trib on the table. Headline in 80 point type:

**CAR BOMB
KILLS
CITY DETECTIVE**

ALLEGRA

I did. A bit flowery, don't you think?

Laffter snorts, motions for a waiter.

LAFFTER

Lalo, goddammit, treat us like gentlemen and get us some cognac.

LALO appears, an wry smirk on his face. This is Nacho's son, handsome, laconic, and very, very used to it.

LALO

You want the good stuff or do you want me to pour corked Cab into a snifter again, make you feel classy, old man?

ALLEGRA

Bring him the good stuff.

LALO

Your funeral, Miss Dill. Or more likely his. You let me know if you need anything else, OK?

She nods. He leaves.

LAFFTER

How come he treats you like a white man?

Allegra demurs. Laffter lights a cigarette.

LAFFTER (CONT'D)
They still let me smoke in here.
Mainly because they're hoping I'll
croak faster. You want?

ALLEGRA
No thanks.

He exhales, happily.

LAFFTER
You know how long I've been doing
this?

ALLEGRA
A thousand years?

LAFFTER
Fifty. Fifty! Half a goddamn
century. I was 22 when old man
Hartshorne hired me. \$22.50 a week
and I got Tuesdays off. Who the
hell wants Tuesdays?

Lalo places two snifters of cognac on the table. Laffter
drains his in one go. Allegra offers him hers.

LAFFTER (CONT'D)
Jesus, if there's one thing I can't
stand, it's a controlled drinker.
(he raises the snifter)
To our most enduring myth: The
bibulous newspaperman.

He drains the second.

ALLEGRA
Tell me about Captain Colder.

LAFFTER
Your almost brother-in-law?

ALLEGRA
You know about that then.

LAFFTER
They weren't exactly trying to hide
it.
(Off her look)
But she didn't tell you, did she?

ALLEGRA

No.

LAFFTER

Huh. Must have had her reasons.

ALLEGRA

Such as?

LAFFTER

Ask Captain Colder.

ALLEGRA

I did. He says he thought she'd told me.

LAFFTER

Called her a liar, did he? Not very nice. But who pays for nice nowadays?

ALLEGRA

He says she was a pretty good cop.

LAFFTER

(shrugging)
She was ok. Moved up pretty quick.

ALLEGRA

Who do you think killed her?

LAFFTER

The generic who, you mean? Someone with money.

ALLEGRA

Why?

LAFFTER

The bomb. It was done by a pro. C4 plastic, mercury fulminator. Very classy. That probably means out-of-state talent and that means money.

ALLEGRA

OK. That's who. What about why?

LAFFTER

A guess?

ALLEGRA

Sure.

LAFFTER

She found out something that could
stop whoever hired the bomber from
being rich anymore.

Laffter lights a new cigarette off the bones of an old one.
Clocks Allegra watching him.

LAFFTER (CONT'D)

You lied to me, by the way.
(off her questioning look)
You do want one.

He exhales a long stream of smoke towards her face.

LAFFTER (CONT'D)

I know about the duplex. Decided
not to run it. For now.

ALLEGRA

You think she was on the take?

LAFFTER

I don't know. Do you?

ALLEGRA

I wish I did.

LAFFTER

Who was the richest man in town the
last time you were here?

ALLEGRA

Probably Old Lady Bains.

LAFFTER

Ha! Carol. Yeah. You know she
burned with the sugar factory?

ALLEGRA

I'd heard.

LAFFTER

An entire goddamn city block,
turned to caramel. Nah. You know
who I'm talking about, right?

ALLEGRA

I do.

Laffter's eyes narrow. He's a clown, not a fool.

LAFFTER

You gonna see him?

ALLEGRA
I don't suppose I can avoid it much longer.

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL. LATER.

Allegra approaches her room. As she keys the lock, she looks down. The steak dinner is still sitting there, untouched and starting to turn.

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL LOBBY. CONTINUOUS.

Allegra approaches the clerk.

ALLEGRA
Is it possible to send someone up to the ninth floor? There's a tray of food that's been checked-in as long as I have.

CLERK
Oh, jeez. I'm so sorry, Miss...

ALLEGRA
Dill.

CLERK
Doll?

ALLEGRA
Dill.

CLERK
I do apologize Miss. We're a little short-staffed right now due to the...situation.

ALLEGRA
Situation.

CLERK
The animals. From the zoo? Cody was mauled by a tiger, I'm afraid, and--

ALLEGRA
Tiger?

CLERK
Yes, ma'am.

ALLEGRA
They haven't caught the tiger?

CLERK

No, miss. But, you know, fingers
crossed!

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL. NINTH FLOOR.

Allegra tries again. But again her eyes are drawn to the decomposing meat. A sound -- a rustle? Her eyes turn towards the dark hallway where the EXIT sign flickers. Slowly, she kneels and picks up the bottle from the dinner tray. It's a bright orange Sunkist Soda.

She waits. Breathes.

Then tumbles the lock. CLUNK. And opens the door.

INT. ROOM 981. CONTINUOUS.

Allegra flips on the light. There's a MAN standing right in front of her. She screams:

ALLEGRA

Ahhhh!

And: THUNK. She HITS him across the head with the soda bottle. Orange sprays everywhere. He collapses to one knee.

MAN

Mother-FUCKER!

Allegra looks down. Her breathing slows in recognition.

ALLEGRA

Senator?

INT. ROOM 981. MOMENTS LATER.

38 year-old Senator JOSEPH "JO-JO" RAMIREZ, aka "The Child Senator," sits on the edge of the bed holding a washcloth filled with ice against his temple. He's known for being polished, bright-eyed, empathetic -- though he's none of those things just now. The future of the Democratic party in Texas. The husband of somebody else.

Allegra paces.

ALLEGRA

In the DARK?

SENATOR

Cyrus told you I was coming.

ALLEGRA

That's not the same thing and you know it.

(beat)

Where does she think you are tonight?

SENATOR

San Antonio. Fundraiser.

ALLEGRA

Dinner?

SENATOR

Yup.

ALLEGRA

How's the soup?

SENATOR

Never eat the soup.

He smiles. Looks at the washcloth -- no blood.

ALLEGRA

You gonna survive?

SENATOR

Looks like it.

(beat)

How you doing?

ALLEGRA

Swell.

SENATOR

Allegra.

ALLEGRA

You're not here to ask me about my feelings so don't pretend that you are.

He sighs.

SENATOR

I take it Cyrus already made the ask. Allegra, I feel sick about having you do this.

*
*
*

ALLEGRA

Don't bite your lip. That shit works on soccer moms. Not me.

*
*
*

SENATOR
(cutting the shit)
OK. Have you seen him?

*
*
*

ALLEGRA
I've been a little busy.

SENATOR
Have you had any contact at all?

ALLEGRA
Someone blew up my sister, Senator.
Someone with money.

SENATOR
You think Spivey?

ALLEGRA
I don't think anything. He was my
friend.

SENATOR
And then he wasn't.

She glares at him: Don't go there.

He sighs, moves toward the minibar.

SENATOR (CONT'D)
Can I take a drink?

ALLEGRA
We're out of soda.

SENATOR
Cute.

She picks up an attaché case on the bed. It's filled with
file folders. We catch glimpses of labels: **SPIVEY, JOHN JACOB**
(?), DEPOSITION: BRATTLE, CLYDE 05/19/13; ZETAS DE LA SONORA.

ALLEGRA
These for me? You shouldn't have.

SENATOR
When you see Spivey, I need you to
wear a wire.

ALLEGRA
I won't do it.

SENATOR
Will you wear anything?

She SLAPS HIM full across the face.

A beat.

Then: He SLAPS HER.

Her eyes ice over. And she calmly DECKS HIM, knocking him back onto the bed.

SENATOR (CONT'D)
Goddammit, Allegra. Open hand --
open hand!

She is calmly, methodically unbuttoning her blouse.

ALLEGRA
I'm going to get the bottle now.

His eyes widen with kink and delight. He nods.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM 981. MORNING.

Big spoon/little spoon. Only this time little spoon wakes up first. Allegra slides out from the Senator's arms and walks, nude, to the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

A steamy bathroom, post-shower. Allegra stares at herself in the mirror. There's a bruise forming where the Senator slapped her. She hasn't cried yet. Will she today?

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM 981. MOMENTS LATER.

She zips herself into a black dress. The Senator stirs.

ALLEGRA
I'm going to go watch a bunch of
assholes drink themselves sick in
memory of my baby sister. Don't
order room service.

EXT. JOLLY'S TAVERN. DAY.

A corner bar with wide, street-facing windows on both sides of the door. Police cruisers are parked all around. From the sounds inside, it appears the party got started early.

As Allegra approaches, she almost collides with Singe. *

SINGE *

Pick, hi! *

He notices the bruise on her face. *

SINGE (CONT'D) *

Wait, are you -- *

He reaches out a hand. She turns to ice. Shakes her head. No touching.

ALLEGRA *

What are you doing here? *

SINGE

Sorry. I just figured maybe you could use some --

ALLEGRA

Representation?

SINGE

Company.

Allegra smiles. Singe chuckles.

ALLEGRA *

It's kind of you. If I'd wanted to watch powerful men vomiting on each other I could have stayed in DC.

SINGE

How long's it been exactly?

ALLEGRA

12 years.

SINGE

Bet you didn't miss this heat.

ALLEGRA

It's hot all over.

SINGE

Not like here.
(he mops at his brow)
Breadknife weather.

ALLEGRA

Come again?

SINGE

Breadknife weather. What Felicity used to call it. As soon as it hit triple digits she knew she'd be busy.

ALLEGRA

Why's that?

SINGE

People around here? Shit. When you crank the burner this high, they don't even bother reaching for the pointy stuff before they start stabbing each other.

*

INT. JOLLY'S TAVERN. LATER.

The wake continues. There's a large portrait of Felicity framed in flowers. She's in her beat cop blues, impossibly young. Smiling like it's homecoming.

Allegra sits at a table while Singe goes to the bar.

TIME SPEEDS UP. We stay on Allegra, nursing a slow beer. "Hate the Police" by The Dicks plays. She's quiet. Watchful. Getting the lay of the land. Around her, cops drain pints, throw their arms around each other, stagger, sing, and get sick. Sometimes Singe is next to her talking. Other times she's alone. She clocks STRUCKER making the rounds, listening, consoling. The good cop. She eyes COLDER alone, fuming. Furious. Strucker reaches Colder and the latter bristles. Something between them then --

*

*

The song ENDS and time resumes and Allegra sees both men turn towards the window in shock.

She turns and we see what she does through the large, street-facing windows: **A GIANT BLACK PORSCHE SUV** pulls up to the curb. **FOUR HEAVILY ARMED MEXICAN GUARDS EMERGE** and case the street. The cops, realizing what is happening, slowly stop weeping/punching/vomiting and stare, slackjawed.

The guards open the back door of the SUV and out into the sunlight steps **JAKE SPIVEY (38)**. He's not fat, exactly. He's wide, in a rumpled seersucker suit with a black rose in his lapel. His entrance sucks up all the oxygen in the bar.

Jake's bulk cuts through the cops like a switchblade through butter. He approaches Allegra. His mouth stays serious but his eyes dance.

JAKE

Pick.

ALLEGRA

Jake.

JAKE

I'm damned sorry.

She nods, a flush spreading across her cheeks.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Let's catch up, huh? Maybe come by for lunch?

ALLEGRA

OK.

JAKE

Well, great. You remember the Bains Mansion, right? How's lpm?

*
*

She nods.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Be seeing you.
(he winks, turns, then turns back)
You look good, Pick. Older. But who the hell doesn't.

She doesn't flinch. Jake removes his wallet, turns to the bar and drops a \$100 bill on it. Then two more. A theatrical pause, then he DROPS IN HIS ENTIRE MONEY CLIP.

*
*

JAKE (CONT'D)

Officers. Enjoy your . . . Well, enjoy yourselves.

The door closes and the cops explode in crosstalk. Colder, apoplectic, is at Allegra's side.

COLDER

Do you know who the fuck that was?

SINGE

Sure she does. Since high school, right?

ALLEGRA

Before that even. Elementary. Jake and I took turns being the poorest kid in the class.

COLDER

(snorts)
Things change.

EXT. BAINS MANSION. LATER. *

Down a private cul-de-sac is a high, hedge wall with a wooden door cut into it. Allegra approaches and rings a discrete buzzer. She smiles for the tiny camera, though it never reaches her eyes.

<BUZZ>

She pushes through the gate, revealing a soaring, pearl-white plantation style mansion surrounded by ample, landscaped grounds. There's a rustling in one of the Magnolia trees and Allegra turns to see TWO GIRAFFES lazily feeding. She stares.

EXT. BAINS MANSION. MOMENT LATER.

The porch. The ARMED GUARDS from earlier stand sentry.

Allegra clocks a pair of scuffed BOOTS hanging from the portico. This time her smile seems almost genuine. Then she pushes another buzzer. The door is opened by a beautiful, Asian woman.

ALLEGRA

I'm here to see Jake.

The woman nods, escorts Allegra past the guards and through a building that feels less like a home and more like an antebellum museum. Ferns, mahogany, & wicker. The chairs are rattan from a sinking ship. Every detail is considered -- a weaver's wheel nailed to the wall, a fainting couch upholstered like Versailles -- nothing has been used.

They reach a large wooden door. The woman KNOCKS once then pushes it open to reveal:

Jake Spivey, in his glory. Dressed in pastels & shorts, he looms enormously over an oversized wooden desk. Behind him, floor-to-ceiling windows look out over ample green grounds.

JAKE

Pick. So glad you came.

The woman exits.

ALLEGRA

Does she talk?

JAKE

Daffy? Sure, she's a chatterbox. All depends on the topic. Come on, sit, will ya? You got me feeling nervous as hell.

She sits.

JAKE (CONT'D)

How you doing? Hell of a thing. I didn't see Felicity all that much -- not the biggest fan of cops, as a general rule. But she seemed like a good one. Clocked her a couple of times in her cruiser. Looked the part too, you know what I'm saying? She was small, smaller than you, hell, but you could tell she could handle herself.

(beat)

You want something? Soda pop? A beer? I've even got some coke if you like that sort of thing.

Allegra doesn't flinch.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Well, shit, Pick, do you talk?

She smiles.

ALLEGRA

All depends on the topic.

(beat)

I'll take a beer.

JAKE

Well OK.

He ducks below his desk to a small dorm fridge, pulls out two cans of Lone Star. Cracks them, hands one over. They drink.

ALLEGRA

First beer I ever had was probably sixty feet away. Over that back hedge. You gave me that one, too.

JAKE

Shit, you remember that?

ALLEGRA

You said you'd own this place
someday.

*

JAKE

And I do.

ALLEGRA

Hang your boots on the porch.

*

*

JAKE

And I did.

*

*

ALLEGRA

Yeah. You said a lot of things.
(beat)
The giraffes. From the zoo?

*

JAKE

Aw, no. Those are mine. You know
how I feel about tall ladies.

They drink beer in silence.

JAKE (CONT'D)

How long before Felicity did you
know you'd have to come back here?

ALLEGRA

About six months.

JAKE

And how long were you planning on
putting it off?

She shrugs.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Did you tell that kid senator of
yours about us knowing each other
or did he figure it out for
himself?

ALLEGRA

Does it matter?

JAKE

I don't suppose it does. Goddamn if
this ain't just like you, Pick:
mixing business with sorrow. So
what are you really here to do? Put
me in handcuffs?

ALLEGRA

No.

JAKE

You still like that stuff, though, right? Handcuffs?

Allegra flushes.

JAKE (CONT'D)

OK. How does it work, exactly? A deposition.

ALLEGRA

I ask you questions, you answer truthfully "to the best of your ability."

JAKE

Shit, Pick, that's never been one of my better abilities.

ALLEGRA

They found Clyde Brattle, Jake.

The light dims from Jake's eyes.

JAKE

Bullshit.

ALLEGRA

Truth.

JAKE

Where was he? Cape Town? Old San Juan? One of the Tripolis? More folks have seen Clyde Brattle since Fallujah than Elvis, Tupac, and Jesus combined. And he's deader than all three of 'em.

ALLEGRA

Mexico City.

Jake's lip twitches.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

That means he extraditable. And the Senator only needs one of you.

As that sinks in, she reaches into her shoulder bag and removes some files.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
You mind if I record this? Or
should we just use yours?

JAKE
My what?

ALLEGRA
The recorder you've got set up in
here. How long's it been going?

Jake smiles.

JAKE
From the second you walked into the
room.

They stare.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Goddamn. Is it bad that this is
turning me on a little bit? That's
truthful.

Allegra doesn't flinch.

JAKE (CONT'D)
We can use my tape. I'll have Daffy
type it up after lunch.

ALLEGRA
OK. Here we go. This is the sworn
testimony of John Jacob Spivey,
taken on August something or other
right here in his goddamn obscene
mansion.

Jake nods, playfully.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
You are John Jacob Spivey.

JAKE
Always have been.

ALLEGRA
State your age.

JAKE
38, same as you. Happy birthday, by
the way.

*
*

ALLEGRA
You are an American citizen?

JAKE

I am.

ALLEGRA

Occupation?

JAKE

I'm retired.

ALLEGRA

Prior to that?

JAKE

I was engaged in the purchase and sale of defensive weaponry.

ALLEGRA

For how long?

JAKE

Oh, five or six years.

ALLEGRA

Before that?

JAKE

I was a contract employee of a government agency.

ALLEGRA

Which agency?

JAKE

One of the ones that you're not supposed to talk about on the record.

ALLEGRA

Where were you hired?

JAKE

Well, I guess if you rewind the tape far enough I was hired in the ROTC back at UT-San Pecos. But I guess I got the real heavy thumb when I was deployed.

ALLEGRA

In Iraq.

JAKE

In and around there, sure.

ALLEGRA

Can you disclose the nature of your duties while in government service.

JAKE

Shit, no.

ALLEGRA

Due to oaths of service sworn to or fears of self-incrimination?

Jake smiles like a cat with a mousetail stuck in its teeth.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

When did you first meet Clyde Tomerlin Brattle?

JAKE

Oh, probably 2003, or around there.

ALLEGRA

And what was the nature of your relationship?

JAKE

He was my boss.

ALLEGRA

And what was the nature of your work together?

JAKE

You know those tall, extra faucets American ladies love to have? The ones they use to fill their big old copper pots with filtered water to cook the gluten-free rice pasta they ain't never gonna eat anyway? Well it turns out hardly anybody in the middle east has one of those suckers. Old Clyde and I thought that was a shame so we'd go around to all the little hovels in Mosul and Tikrit and, kinda, do some light plumbing work in a humanitarian sort of way. Aquatic Outreach we called it. Real successful, though of course the lamestream media only reports on the bad news from over there.

ALLEGRA

Cut the shit.

JAKE

You're the one peddling it. You think I give a fuck about oaths or secrecy or any of that? I was 31 when I quit and an old man. I mean up here.

(he taps his head)

I'm 102 up here, Pick. I've seen some shit. I was in even more of it. They paid me ten thousand bucks a week to do stuff I wouldn't do now and other stuff I won't even let myself remember. When's the last time we saw each other? Ten years ago? Twelve?

ALLEGRA

Yes.

JAKE

Right, well, you've got your own road to hoe, I'm sure, but I bet you got to be 26, 27, 29. Not me. I pledged allegiance at 23 and got Shanghaied out at 31 going on a hundred and fucking two.

ALLEGRA

Poor, war criminal Jake.

JAKE

Fuck you, Pick.

ALLEGRA

Fuck you, you think I got to be young and carefree. You remember what happened "ten, twelve" years ago?

They stare. He breaks it.

JAKE

You want another beer?

ALLEGRA

Sure.

They drink.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

Can you testify to how much money Clyde Brattle had under his control when he went missing in Fallujah?

*
*

JAKE
You mean got blown to fucking
hummus in Fallujah?

She shrugs.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Enough to make your boss and a
couple other governments awful mad.

ALLEGRA
And you've had no contact with
Clyde Brattle since?

JAKE
What's the ask, Pick.

She doesn't blink.

JAKE (CONT'D)
You offering immunity?

Allegra nods slowly.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Put it in writing?

She shakes her head no. He sits back, exhales.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna need a few days. You
sticking around?

ALLEGRA
Until I find out what happened to
Felicity, sure.

Jake rolls his eyes.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)
She's dead, Jake. Someone killed
her.

JAKE
Shit there's always a dead girl,
Pick. Don't you go to the movies?
Watch the news? The trick is
keeping yourself out of the
equation.

ALLEGRA
What's that supposed to mean?

JAKE

Well, number one, don't be the dead girl. And second, don't be the hopeless fucker trying to figure out who killed her.

ALLEGRA

And what about the one who did the killing?

JAKE

Oh, no one gives two shits about him, Pick.

ALLEGRA

And why's that?

JAKE

'Cause, in my experience? He always gets away with it.

EXT. DUPLEX. EVENING.

Allegra stands outside Felicity's duplex, not far from where her sister died. She's holding a cigarette, not smoking it. Staring at the evidence of the murder. Cicadas scream a symphony from the underbrush.

The car has been removed but the ground is still stained with blood and burnt tar. Police tape everywhere. Allegra glances up at the Mo' Fixens BBQ billboard. It reads 100F.

STRUCKER (O.S.)

I'm old enough to remember when we used to have seasons round here. Now we just have broiler settings.

Strucker approaches. He's sweaty, still a little loaded.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

Was on my way home from the wake when I got a call someone was disturbing an active crime scene. I'm disappointed, Miss Dill. If you wanted a look-see all you had to do was ask.

He fishes some keys from his pocket. Lets them dangle.

ALLEGRA

I thought it was against procedure?

Strucker chuckles.

STRUCKER

You really have been gone a long time.

He lifts the police tape. Gestures.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

After you.

They enter the lawn and begin to climb the exterior stairs. Light spills from the downstairs unit, the sound of a TV.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

You know, my old desk sergeant used to say that being a cop in Saint Disgrace was like being a salad on the menu at a burger joint: You're just there to make people feel like they had a choice.

Strucker keys the lock and the door swings inward. The musty air hits them like sealing wax. Strucker flips on a light, walks in and fires up the A/C.

INT. FELICITY'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

ALLEGRA

Felicity seemed to think it was more than that.

STRUCKER

I'm proud to say that she did.

He lowers his voice.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

There are people here -- powerful people -- who are heavily invested in making sure whatever shit flows across the border runs right down Main Street. Felicity, god save her... she truly believed she could clean it all up.

ALLEGRA

And what about you? Another noble janitor?

STRUCKER

I'm a cop, Miss Dill. When I see something wrong, I try to put it right.

He moves to exit.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)
Take as long as you like.

He exits, closing the door partially behind him.

Allegra takes in her surroundings. It's an apartment, nothing more. Some mail-order prints on the wall, mismatched furniture without care or consideration. Everything is oriented towards a gleaming flatscreen TV.

Allegra runs her fingers over the furniture, looking for a tactile trace of her sister. She moves into the kitchen and opens the fridge: A jar of mustard, a half-eaten loaf of wheat bread, three bottles of hot sauce. A bag of gourmet coffee beans, mostly empty. In the back are two bottles of Perrier. Allegra removes one, cracks it, drinks. Her eyes fall on a neatly arranged spice rack. She scans it.

INT. FELICITY'S BATHROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Inside-the-medicine-cabinet POV. The door swings out as Allegra investigates. Tampax, Advil, make-up remover. She closes the door.

INT. FELICITY'S BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS.

A neatly-made double bed. On the side table, a framed photo of the two sisters on a beach: The summer before Allegra left for college. Felicity pulls a goofy face, Allegra buries her head in her little sister's small shoulder.

But as her eyes fall on a stack of celebrity magazines, she hardens.

Opens the closet: Three pantsuits neatly hung. Shoes lined up like soldiers. She SLAMS the closet door and we

CUT TO:

INT. FELICITY'S SECOND BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Here's where the decor ran out. A folding card table. A folding chair. A metal file cabinet. Allegra opens it: empty.

She moves to the window and peers out in the backyard, seeing:

HAROLD SNOW, the downstairs tenant. He's still not wearing pants.

In his ratty briefs and too-small t-shirt ("Free Mustache Rides") he is moving strangely, almost gracefully. He's practicing an elaborate nunchaku routine, the bars spinning in front of him.

He pauses. Wipes his sweaty brow with his tshirt, exposing his sagging belly. He looks up. Sees Allegra. A leering smile opens up on his face. He turns his body towards her. Waves.

She pulls back from the window.

EXT. DUPLEX. CONTINUOUS.

Allegra slams down the stairs, hunting for Strucker. She doesn't see him. Then: Laughter?

She approaches the ground floor unit. The screen door is propped open, light spilling out. A male voice, then female laughter. The sound of a jai alai game on the TV.

Allegra stands in the doorway, sees Strucker sitting with Cindy, both drinking beers, low talking, and laughing. Cindy falls silent when she sees Allegra. Strucker turns.

INT. HAROLD'S APARTMENT. CONTINUOUS.

STRUCKER

Thought you'd be longer.

ALLEGRA

Where did my sister live?

STRUCKER

(standing up)
I don't get it.

ALLEGRA

I'll ask again: Where did my sister live?

STRUCKER

Right upstairs, Miss Dill. I can show you the deed. It's probably yours now by rights anyway.

ALLEGRA

No. This is where she camped out. A night or two a week, tops. Had a cup of coffee. Maybe some sex. But no one lived in that apartment. Certainly not Felicity.

Strucker walks toward her. The vibe is different now. He is drunk. And large.

STRUCKER

Let's have this conversation
outside.

EXT. DUPLEX. CONTINUOUS.

Strucker walks Allegra backward onto the lawn, lights a cigarette.

ALLEGRA

Give me one of those.

He does, watching as she lights it, inhales long and deep.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

Tarragon, goddammit.

STRUCKER

What now?

ALLEGRA

Tarragon. It's an herb. Tastes like
mint french-kissing liquorice.
Felicity loved it, dumped in just
about everything. Chicken. Fish.
White chili. There's not a trace of
it in that apartment, same as there
aren't any books -- which, by the
way, is what my sister liked to
read, two at a time, not magazines.

Strucker looks at her, impassively.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

Felicity wasn't neat, Chief. She
didn't hang mail-order
Impressionist prints on her wall
like a fucking depressed secretary,
she didn't press and fold her
bikini briefs. She made piles,
nests.

STRUCKER

Miss Dill I really need you to calm
down.

Allegra sucks the cigarette to the filter. Paces.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

When was the last time you saw your sister?

ALLEGRA

Three years ago. She came to DC to...be with me for a few days.

STRUCKER

And the last time you were here?

ALLEGRA

Nine years before that.

STRUCKER

It doesn't sound like you were particularly close.

Allegra seethes. As Strucker speaks, he walks towards her calmly, as one would approach an animal in the wild.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

I say that because police work has a funny way of changing people. Makes them less sloppy in all areas of life. Civilians and civil rights activists seem to think the gun and the badge give us an inflated sense of control but, in my experience, all they do is remind you how impossible control really is.

He's close now. She can smell his breath.

ALLEGRA

Tell me where my sister lived or so help me god I will burn this city to the ground.

A beat. He steps back. Relents. Chuckles, even. *

STRUCKER

I believe you would, too. OK, Miss Dill. Maybe your sister didn't live at this address. At least not full time.

ALLEGRA

Why?

STRUCKER

Perhaps she didn't think it was safe. *

ALLEGRA

Why? What did she have to be afraid of?

STRUCKER

Everything! If you're smart in this life, you're afraid of everything! I tried to teach Felicity that.

His eyes wander to the stained sidewalk. A beat.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

Mercy, it's hot.

He clocks the MO FIXENS sign as he wipes his brow. 101F.

ALLEGRA

(quietly)
Who killed my sister.

Strucker exhales. Makes a decision.

STRUCKER

Why don't you and I go for a ride.

ALLEGRA

(off-guard)
What?

STRUCKER

I'm parked right up the street. You want answers, I'll do my best to give them. But not here.

Allegra is frozen.

STRUCKER (CONT'D)

I was a friend to your sister. I can be your friend too. Get in the car.

He reaches his cruiser, opens the door and stands, waiting. She hesitates. Then starts to go to him.

SINGE (O.C.)

Pick! Allegra!

She turns, sees Singe jogging up. He looks flustered.

SINGE (CONT'D)

(nervous, fast)
Where you headed on a cool night like this?

(MORE)

SINGE (CONT'D)

You ought to be in some air conditioning, maybe a meat locker if you're lucky.

STRUCKER

Why don't you two catch up another night, Mr. Singe. Miss Dill and I have some business.

Allegra turns from one man to the other. Strucker waves her over. Singe's eyes scream "don't go."

ALLEGRA

Meet me at the Slush Pit in an hour? This won't take long.

SINGE

I think --
(he switches to truly awful French)
Je pense que nous devrions obtenir cette boisson maintenant.

ALLEGRA

What?

SINGE

Je pense que -- le boisson ... maintenant.

STRUCKER

You feeling ok, son?

SINGE

Maintenant.

Allegra makes a choice.

ALLEGRA

Chief, it'll keep until tomorrow.

STRUCKER

Miss Dill. Come on now.

ALLEGRA

I'll . . . come by the station in the morning.

Singe's eyes say "thank you."

STRUCKER

(annoyed)
Suit yourself.

SINGE

I'm just parked over here.

He turns, walks towards his car.

Strucker slams the cruiser door. Keys the ignition and --

KA-FUCKING-BOOM!

The police cruiser explodes in a towering fireball.

The concussive force lifts Allegra UP off her feet, throwing her back onto the pavement.

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM. LATER.

A ringing in our ears. Allegra sits on the edge of a hospital bed, barely wrapped in a paper gown. Her face is smudged with soot and smeared with dried blood from numerous tiny cuts. Some blood is also dried on her ears.

Around her are Singe (concerned), Gene Colder (furious, questioning), and Freddie Laffter (leering, taking notes). All of their mouths are moving, but we hear none of it. Just the dull ringing as Allegra looks from one face to another.

The curtain is pulled back and a young nurse, SOFIA, enters.

This part, we hear:

SOFIA

I need every man in this room to get the fuck out. Now.

The men fall silent.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

This woman is in shock. She needs stitches. She needs rest. And she needs some fucking quiet.

Colder starts to protest but falls silent at Sofia's look. The men file out.

ALLEGRA

(whisper)
Thank you.

Sofia pulls up a stool and sets to stitching up a cut on Allegra's arm.

SOFIA

Don't mention it. They don't belong
in here.

She looks up from her work.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Had a day, huh?

ALLEGRA

You could say that.

SOFIA

I'll try and make this as quick and
painless as possible. How are you
with needles?

ALLEGRA

I'm OK.

Sofia begins, Allegra flinches.

SOFIA

Oh, sweetie, I'm sorry. I'll try
and be more gentle.

The words hit Allegra. And all of a sudden, the tears come. Everything that's been buried -- for Felicity, for everything that came before -- unearths itself in a great, hacking stream of sobs. Allegra doesn't weep. She *cries* in the un-selfconscious way of a child.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Oh, I -- OK. There, there. I've got
you. You're OK. You're OK.

But she's not OK. And she keeps crying.

INT. HAWKINS HOTEL. NINTH FLOOR. LATER.

Ding! The elevator opens and Allegra emerges, bandaged, bruised, eyes still red. She walks slowly down the half-dark hall, ready for sleep. At her door she pauses, looks down.

The steak is still there, untouched. Only now it has gone completely rancid. Maggots fester across its surface. Decomposition. Decay. Disgust.

There's a rustling noise down the end of the hall. Allegra turns toward it. Pulls herself together, stands tall. She's exhausted but not beaten. She faces the flickering exit sign.

ALLEGRA

What?

Nothing.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

WHAT?

Nothing.

ALLEGRA (CONT'D)

I thought so.

She puts the key in the lock. It CLUNKS open. She enters the room, but we don't go with her. The door closes and we turn back, down the dark hall. A rustle and some movement in the darkness. Beneath the exit sign, a figure appears, low and lumbering.

IT'S A FUCKING BENGAL TIGER.

The tiger walks slowly, almost lazily down the hall, its pads falling silently on the carpet.

When it reaches Allegra's door it sits, the very picture of a domesticated animal, and happily sinks its teeth into the rotten room service meal. It gnaws. It almost purrs. And we --

CUT TO BLACK.