

PRESS PASS

"Pilot"

by

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ACT ONE

INT. CITY GAZETTE - NEWSROOM - AFTERNOON

Reporters clack away on keyboards. Researchers scribble notes and scurry from desk to desk. There's a sense of importance to everything: news is happening.

Finally we land on a closed office door with a plaque outside: "WRITE REDDING -- with CHARLIE REDDING."

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CHARLIE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

CHARLIE REDDING (late 30s, a people person) leans back in his chair doing a crossword. His desk is lined with trays labeled GROW A BACKBONE, STOP BEING A JERK, and LEAVE THE LOSER. Each overflows with letters. On his monitor, an already-written email reads: "Tomorrow's advice column!"

An alarm clock on the desk flips from 4:59 to 5:00 and buzzes. Like a practiced routine, he shuts it off, hits send on the email, flips off the light, and leaves the office, carefully closing the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - ALLEY - SAME - INTERCUT

A door slams open into a dumpster as RONALD THOMPSON (late 30s) barrels out of a building. He pauses, looks both ways, and races toward the...

STREET

He keeps glancing back as he races into the road. SCREECH! A taxi almost hits him. The DRIVER lays on the horn.

DRIVER

Watch it, buddy!

But Ron doesn't hear. He's spotted the man in sunglasses who follows him from the alley, unhurried but completely focused. Clean cut, robotic -- a MAN IN BLACK. Ron darts across the street causing a--

INT. GROCERY STORE - SAME

--CRASH! Charlie's cart collides with another CUSTOMER.

CHARLIE

Sorry.

Charlie's eyes are glued to his grocery list.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - SAME

Ron runs through the lobby to the elevators. He taps the button repeatedly. The CONCIERGE approaches.

CONCIERGE
Morning, Mr. Thompson. Is there something we can help you with?

Ron sees the Man In Black enter the lobby. He pushes past the Concierge and dashes into the stairwell, feet pounding and--

EXT. REDDINGS' HOME - SAME

--slowing as we find Charlie shuffling up his porch steps, reading mail, holding groceries. He enters into the...

LIVING ROOM

AARON (14, parents are heartless drones out to ruin his life) sullenly surfs through TV channels.

CHARLIE
(still reading)
How was school today, Aaron?

AARON
(annoyed)
Great. I have homework to do.

He turns off the TV and slinks into his room.

CHARLIE
Keep up the good work!

Charlie keeps reading.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - HALLWAY - SAME

Ron flies down the hallway to room 416. He slides his card in the key-slot and... the RED LIGHT flashes.

RON
Oh, no, no, no, come on.

The elevator DINGS. Shit! Ron jams the card in again-- GREEN! The door opens. Ron glimpses the Man In Black enter the hallway as he slams the door closed and--

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - KITCHEN - SAME

--the kitchen door swings open. Charlie enters, still reading the mail. LAUREL (late 30s, plans every second of her day) stands over the stove, stirring.

CHARLIE

Hey.

LAUREL

Hey.

He sets the grocery bag down on the counter.

CHARLIE

Eggs you wanted. Beef stew tonight?

LAUREL

Of course. It's Wednesday.

Charlie nods and leaves, still reading.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - ROOM 416 - SAME

Ron puts something in a LOCK BOX. Closes it. Where to stash it? Desk? Bed? Too easy. Then it hits him. He grabs duct tape from his suitcase, opens the window, then reaches down under the sill, and tapes the box to the outside of the building. He grabs the window and--

INT. REDDING'S HOME - DINING ROOM - SAME

--Charlie slams the window shut.

CHARLIE

(shivering)

That's better.

He joins his wife and son at the table. They eat. In silence.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - ROOM 416 - SAME

Ron stands in front of the bathroom mirror, still shaky. He leans down to splash his face with water and--

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - BATHROOM - SAME

--Charlie's dripping face raises into frame. He stares at his reflection and his eyes widen: a grey hair on his chest. This is clearly a new and not very welcome development.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - ROOM 416 - SAME

Ron exits the bathroom to find the Man In Black in the desk chair. Ron looks at the door -- no sign of forced entry.

RON
You have a key?

MAN IN BLACK
We have all the keys, Mr. Thompson.

Ron smirks, then explodes toward the door. He makes it three steps before the Man In Black knocks him down, ties him to the desk chair, then calmly sits on the edge of the bed.

MAN IN BLACK (CONT'D)
Give it to me.

RON
Give you what?

The Man unveils a wicked-looking TASER. It CRACKLES with electricity. He presses it to Ron's chest and--

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - BATHROOM

CHARLIE
YEEEEAAH!

Charlie holds up the plucked grey hair in a pair of tweezers.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Charlie Redding. Making the world a better place.

He rubs his chest, then heads into the...

BEDROOM

He climbs into bed, rolls over to Laurel. But she's asleep, mouth slack and eyes closed. He sighs, turns off the light.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - ROOM 416 - SAME - END INTERCUT

Ron's face is a grotesque mirror of Laurel's, clearly dead. We pull back to reveal that he's lying naked in the blood-soaked tub, his right wrist slashed open. We continue through the hotel room and catch the Man in Black slip out the door.

CUT TO:

AN ALARM BLARING

A hand fumbles to turn it off and finally does. We're back in Charlie and Laurel's bedroom, and they're in the same position we left them, in the same matching pajamas.

CHYRON: TWO MONTHS LATER

Without a word, they get up and leave in opposite directions.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Laurel makes eggs at the stove. Aaron pokes at his bacon.

AARON
This isn't fair.

LAUREL
No, it's life.

Charlie enters with the paper.

CHARLIE
What's life?

AARON
Being forced to give up the things
you love, apparently.

CHARLIE
This about Inverted Cosine again?

AARON
The band's called Inverse
Cotangent, Dad. What you said
doesn't make sense.

CHARLIE
Aaron, look, this band you and your
buddies started was fine over
winter break, but with school--

AARON
We're auditioning for the Band Bash
Contest this week. Come on!

LAUREL
We just don't want you to waste
your time on this.

AARON
You think we suck.

CHARLIE

We think it will take away too much of your studying time.

AARON

But it won't! Besides, I have straight As.

LAUREL

And we want to keep it that way. This is about responsibility. Growing up and being an adult.

CHARLIE

What she said.

AARON

Whatever.

LAUREL

Enough. Both of you need to go now or you'll be late.

CHARLIE

Pizza night tonight?

LAUREL

It's Monday, isn't it?

She barely notices as he gives her a quick peck and leaves.

AARON

(angsty)

Pizza. At least there's something good about this day.

He exits. Laurel frowns as she watches them leave.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CHARLIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie mechanically sorts through a huge sack of mail. He pulls out a letter, scans it, then flips it into the desk tray labeled GROW A BACKBONE. He pulls out another letter, repeats the process. A third. He pauses on it.

CHARLIE

"Dear Mr. Redding... hate my job... want to do something meaningful..."

Charlie rolls over to his computer and types.

INSERT COMPUTER SCREEN

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Dear JADED, If you're truly unhappy in your career and want a change -- follow Nike's advice and Just Do It (I get money for that, right Nike?). Seriously, though, life's short. If there's even a chance to spend it doing something you love, why wouldn't you go for it? You don't want to be stuck in a job that doesn't excite you for the rest of your life, doing the same boring thing day in and day out. My advice -- take a leap of faith, or be willing to live with regret.

Charlie looks at his trays of letters and frowns.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S OFFICE - DAY

BARRY JENKINS (50s, the cranky editor-in-chief) reads a story at his desk. Charlie knocks on his open door.

CHARLIE

Got a sec, Chief?

Without looking, Jenkins motions for Charlie to sit. He does.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I realized today that people are always asking me the same things, and I'm giving the same answers.

JENKINS

Uh-huh...

CHARLIE

So I was thinking we switch it up. Do a piece about why people keep needing the same advice. What's behind it. I could research--

JENKINS

(finally looking up)
You want to make changes to our most popular column?

CHARLIE

I just thought maybe people would benefit more from--

JENKINS

Redding, the audience likes what it likes. Stick with what works.

Charlie, about to protest, thinks better of it and exits, disappointed.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - NEWSROOM - DAY

As Charlie shuffles back to his office, he almost collides with STUART (20s, paranoid, rail-thin researcher), who carries a huge sack of mail and munches on a chocolate bar.

STUART

Whoa, there. More gifts for you, Mr. Famous Columnist.

Charlie gives him an exhausted, disgusted look.

CHARLIE

You want to write tomorrow's column? I can't read that many more "Should I stay with my fiance" letters without shooting myself.

STUART

Sorry, man, these are all you. I have a very important project to attend to.

CHARLIE

(amused)
Another conspiracy to prove?

STUART

Mock if you will, but I hear things.

Charlie smiles as Stuart leaves, then reluctantly drags the bag of letters into his...

OFFICE

He spills them on the floor and groans. Of course. Then one catches his eye: a shiny, blood-red envelope with a wax seal.

CHARLIE

Someone must think their question is important...

He smiles, but as he opens it and reads, his face pales.

INSERT LETTER

CHARLIE (V.O.)
 "...People say my friend Ron
 Thompson committed suicide, but
 it's not true. How do I get them to
 listen? Signed, Concerned Reader."

Charlie's eyes go wide.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 It can't be...

He goes to his computer and googles "Ron Thompson + suicide."
 Several Metro Press stories by Ron Thompson pop up. Finally
 we see a link that mentions his death.

As Charlie reads, we see particular phrases: "investigative
 reporter found dead in hotel bathtub," "police say he slit
 his wrist," "will be missed."

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Jesus.

Charlie leans back in his chair, his world rocked.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - KITCHENETTE - DAY

Charlie sits and studies the letter. Stuart enters.

STUART
 That must be the most interesting
 advice letter ever.

Charlie hands it to him.

STUART (CONT'D)
 (reading)
 Holy crap. This is the most
 interesting advice letter ever.
 Conspiracy central. No return
 address... Who's Ron Thompson?

CHARLIE
 Metro Press reporter. We wrote
 together on Yale's paper.
 (smiling)
 Wanted to be Woodward and Bernstein
 part deux.

STUART

Advice man was out there investigating stuff, really? I can't picture it.

CHARLIE

We were the dynamic duo. No lock too strong or university administrator too powerful.

STUART

Why didn't you guys partner up?

CHARLIE

(shrugs)

We had a falling out. Different priorities. He never wanted to leave our college lifestyle.

STUART

Charlie Redding, a party animal?

CHARLIE

For a brief time. It's probably been a decade or more since I last talked to him.

STUART

Sucks. Alright. So, then, Woodward or Bernstein, what's the whole suicide business about?

Charlie smiles, clearly reveling in the investigation.

CHARLIE

Supposedly he slit his right wrist.

STUART

Always a classic.

CHARLIE

But Ron couldn't even cut a steak with his left hand. He hurt it in a college rugby game.

STUART

You'd only need one quick slash.

CHARLIE

But that's the thing. They said he used a butterknife from the kitchenette in his room. He'd really have to work for it.

STUART

So it's an actual, real cover-up?
Like when the Nazis used Vril to
make flying saucers. You need help?

CHARLIE

Uh, thanks, but after lunch, I'm
turning it over to the crime desk.

STUART

What? Why?

CHARLIE

Come on, Stu. I'm just an advice
columnist.

STUART

That's crap, man. I guess I'm
(air quotes)
"just a researcher," but that
doesn't stop me from trying to
uncover the government's plots to
keep us down. If you believe enough
in something, you need to stand up
and fight for it.

CHARLIE

Right. And how many conspiracies
have you uncovered?

STUART

Dude. Harsh.

CHARLIE

Look, I appreciate the sentiment,
but I left that world behind a long
time ago.

STUART

Suit yourself.
(pointing)
You gonna eat that cupcake?

But Charlie's already absorbed in the letter again, which
Stuart takes as permission. He scarfs the cupcake down.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CRIME DESK - DAY

Charlie approaches Sr. Investigative Reporter RIKA CORCILLO
(40s), who types away in her cubicle.

CHARLIE
 Hey, Rika. Got a second? I thought
 this letter might interest you.

RIKA
 You're bringing me a lead? It's not
 even Christmas.

He hands her the letter, and she reads.

RIKA (CONT'D)
 "How do I get people to listen?"
 Someone just sent this to you?

CHARLIE
 (nodding)
 And I already did some poking
 around. Here are my notes. They
 said he slit his wrist, but--

RIKA
 (friendly)
 Okay, you don't need to convince
 me. Look, I'm not sure if there's
 anything to find here, but I'll
 make a few calls today, alright?

CHARLIE
 You're the best, Rika.

RIKA
 I know.

Charlie nods and walks away smiling.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CHARLIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie plays computer solitaire at his desk. He checks the
 clock: 4:55. His office phone: 0 MESSAGES. He drums his
 fingers, then gets up and leaves.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CRIME DESK - DAY

Charlie approaches Rika. She notices but doesn't look up.

CHARLIE
 Hey. Don't mean to be a pest, but
 did you find anything on Ron?

RIKA
 No.

CHARLIE
Nothing at all? I can help with
leads if you need--

RIKA
Look, Charlie, it's done.

She heads over to the big filing cabinet across the room,
grabbing a folder. Charlie follows.

CHARLIE
What are you talking about?

RIKA
I'm not looking into this, Charlie.
And you need to back off too.

CHARLIE
Is this a joke?

But Rika walks away, leaving him standing there confused.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - EVENING

Charlie sits at his desk and rereads the mysterious letter.

LAUREL (O.S.)
Dinner's ready!

He stands, then sits back down and quickly composes an email
to the editor-in-chief before he can talk himself out of it.
Subject line: Ron Thompson. He hits send and looks satisfied.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CHARLIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie types. Stuart plops down on his couch.

STUART
Dude, I have to tell you about
Rika.

Charlie's desk phone beeps.

JENKINS
Redding, need you in my office.

CHARLIE
Sure thing, Chief.
(to Stuart)
I emailed him yesterday asking if I
could write that story about Ron.

STUART
Yeah, you might want to rethink--

CHARLIE
Wish me luck.

Charlie exits as Stuart sinks down into his couch.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie sits across from Jenkins, eyes wide.

CHARLIE
I'm what?

JENKINS
Fired. Sorry, Redding, I don't have
any say. This comes from corporate.

Off Charlie's shell-shocked look...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charlie sits across from Laurel. Both look very solemn.

LAUREL

It just doesn't make any sense.

CHARLIE

Tell me about it.

LAUREL

Your column was so popular...
(beat, recovering)
Which just means it'll be easy for
you to get a new one.

CHARLIE

Yeah... But I'm not sure I want to.

LAUREL

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

Maybe getting fired is an
opportunity.

LAUREL

Okay. An opportunity for what?

CHARLIE

I'm going to try to get a position
as an investigative reporter.

LAUREL

Is this about Ron?

CHARLIE

No. It's always been my dream.

LAUREL

No, I know, but... You haven't done
work like that since college. Who's
going to hire you?

Charlie looks hurt, and Laurel softens.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

I just mean that we have to be
responsible. We'll be fine for a
few weeks, but we can't afford to
stop contributing to Aaron's
college fund for too long.

Charlie is silent. She's right.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
Just keep an open mind.

He nods, and she walks off, leaving him dejected.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

The doorbell rings. Charlie, disheveled in a robe, answers the door to find Stuart on the porch carrying a mail sack.

STUART
I come bearing gifts.

CHARLIE
I really hope you didn't bring me advice letters.

STUART
Fan mail. Readers were mega upset your column was ending. But that's not the real reason I'm here.

Charlie can't help but grin. He takes the sack and motions for Stuart to enter, then closes the door behind him.

CHARLIE
What's up, Deep Throat?

STUART
I think you were fired for not backing off the story about Ron.

CHARLIE
Doesn't that seem a little far-fetched?

STUART
I overheard Rika talking to her husband on her cell, freaked out before you got fired.

CHARLIE
Why?

STUART
Because corporate threatened her job when she started asking about Ron Thompson. In fact, she thought they were going to fire her.

CHARLIE
But she backed off.

STUART
And you didn't. You emailed
Jenkins. What are you gonna do?

Off Charlie's determined look.

INT. METRO PRESS - NEWS EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie sits across from the METRO EDITOR.

METRO EDITOR
Mr. Redding, we all miss Ron's...
dedication, but the police--

CHARLIE
Are wrong. I mean, you knew Ron. He
wasn't the suicide type.

The Editor purses his lips.

METRO EDITOR
To be honest with you, I barely
ever saw him. He was always on a
story. As far as I could tell, Ron
lived, ate, and breathed his work.

CHARLIE
(scoffs)
Ron? He was always Mr. Social.

The Editor shrugs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Well, do you know what he was
working on before he died?

METRO EDITOR
Last time we spoke, he told me he
had a little more research to do
before he'd pitch the piece.

CHARLIE
No notes? Personal effects?

METRO EDITOR
Everything went home with his wife.

CHARLIE
Wife?

Off Charlie's surprised look.

INT. THOMPSON RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Charlie watches Tommy (3) run around the room with his arms outstretched, pretending to be an airplane. Ron's wife KATE (late 20s, stoic facade) enters and hands a box to Charlie.

KATE

I don't know what you'll find in there. Ron never talked about work.

CHARLIE

It must be hard, losing him so suddenly like this.

KATE

I just wish Tommy had a chance to get to know him better. He worshipped his daddy, and I thought someday...

She trails off, watching Tommy sadly.

CHARLIE

My family, we're just across town, so if there's any way we can help...

KATE

(pulls herself together)
Thanks, but we know how to manage.

Charlie nods, then stands to leave.

CHARLIE

Well, again, my condolences. And thank you for the box.

KATE

(shrugs)
I was going to throw it out anyway.

Charlie frowns, puzzled, then exits.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Charlie enters carrying the box of Ron's stuff. Laurel immediately bombards him.

LAUREL

You'll never guess who just called!

CHARLIE

Who?

LAUREL

Southside Daily! They read your final column and said they were thrilled you were up for grabs.

CHARLIE

Really? They called me? They do great, hard-hitting stories.

LAUREL

They said they'd been thinking about adding an advice column, so when your name came up, it was like kismet.

CHARLIE

Oh. Another advice column.

LAUREL

I know, I know. But they're chomping at the bit for you.

CHARLIE

It'll be like I never lost my job.

LAUREL

They asked to see you today in two hours.

CHARLIE

Right, sure.

LAUREL

(re: the box)
Is that stuff from your old office?

CHARLIE

Uh... yeah. Just dropped by to pick it all up.

LAUREL

(sympathetic)
Must be hard going back.

With that, she heads into the kitchen. Charlie frowns.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - DAY

Charlie goes through the box. Post-its with incomprehensible notes. A Regency Hotel keycard with 416 taped on it.

Notebooks. A business card: METRO POLICE DEPARTMENT - Detective Madeline Chow. There's a phone number and a scribbled note on the back: SOURCE.

He turns his attention to Ron's notebooks. Letters are written in the upper right corner of several pages in a bright orange ink that stands out from the rest of the text: F.D., J.T., B.L., M.Z., etc.

CHARLIE

Always did love your codes...

Laurel enters with two buttoned-up shirts.

LAUREL

Interview's soon! Which one were you thinking?

Charlie forces a smile as he pockets the keycard and Chow's business card.

INT. SOUTHSIDE DAILY - EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie, wearing one of those buttoned-up shirts, sits across from JOAN MORGAN (50s, no nonsense).

MORGAN

I'm glad you could make it on such short notice. We love your writing.

CHARLIE

You're very kind.

MORGAN

We haven't had an advice columnist for a while, so we thought your first column could sort of explain what you do, what kind of questions people can ask and so on.

Charlie takes a deep breath, then:

CHARLIE

Actually, I'm not interested in the advice column job. I'm looking for a position as an investigative reporter.

MORGAN

(flustered)

I'm sorry, I don't... Have you even done any investigative reporting?

CHARLIE

Sure. My ex-partner and I won the National Honor Award for our work in uncovering an ID theft ring.

Morgan looks at him quizzically.

MORGAN

National Honor Award? For the best reporter of the year... in college?

CHARLIE

(faltering)
Maybe? Yes. But at Yale.

MORGAN

So you have zero professional experience as an investigative reporter.

CHARLIE

You already know I can write. Just give me a chance, and I'll show you that I have what it takes.

MORGAN

I'm sorry, I can't do that.

Charlie deflates, lowering his head. Then he sees the keycard poking out of his pocket and squares his jaw.

CHARLIE

(brusque)
Thank you for your time.

He stands and exits.

INT. REGENCY HOTEL - ROOM 416 - DAY

A MAID opens the door and Charlie enters, all charm.

CHARLIE

Thank you so, so much. I just couldn't get that keycard to work.

MAID

Happens all the time. And thank you for the advice.

CHARLIE

Just promise me you'll take it. A man who ignores you isn't worth keeping around.

She smiles and leaves. Charlie scans the room.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
If I were Ron...

He looks in the same places Ron considered earlier. Nothing. He pauses, looks out the window, then considers the window itself and smiles.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
No way...

Charlie opens it and feels around outside. Jackpot! He pulls in the LOCK BOX Ron stowed out there... interesting.

INT. METRO POLICE DEPARTMENT - BULLPEN - DAY

DET. MADELINE CHOW (late 20s, Asian, tough, blunt) reads a file at her desk. More cops sit at desks nearby. The RECEPTIONIST approaches Chow as DET. SEAN JACOBS (30s, knows he's the shit) exits the break room.

RECEPTIONIST
A man named Charlie Redding asked to see you. About Ron Thompson.

JACOBS
(laughs)
That reporter's coming back from the grave to haunt your career.

LT. BOB HAWKINS (40s, gruff) leans out of his office.

HAWKINS
Thought I told you to drop the Thompson crap, Chow.

Chow nods at him as she jots down a note, then gets up.

INT. METRO POLICE DEPARTMENT - FRONT DESK - DAY

Chow approaches Charlie, cutting him off before he can speak.

CHOW
What do you want?

CHARLIE
Detective Chow, I presume? Charlie Redding. I'm a friend of Ron's.

CHOW
His case is closed.

CHARLIE

That's what I want to talk about. I don't think it was a suicide. I found a code in his notes, and he hid this in his hotel room.

He takes the lock box from his pocket. Chow's eyes widen briefly, then narrow.

CHOW

I truly am sorry for your loss, but you have to go.

She marches him to the door while the Receptionist watches. At the last moment, inexplicably, she shakes his hand.

CHOW (CONT'D)

Nice to meet you.

She practically shoves him out the door and goes back inside.

EXT. METRO POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Charlie looks down and opens his hand, revealing a note from Chow: "Windy City Cafe. One hour."

INT. WINDY CITY CAFE - DAY

Charlie sits across from Chow at a booth.

CHOW

Sorry. My lieutenant made it clear: no more work on Ron's death or he'd bust me down to traffic cop.

CHARLIE

So you don't think it was a suicide either?

CHOW

(beat)

Ron never mentioned a Charlie.

CHARLIE

I'm not surprised. We were college roommates but hadn't spoken in years. Why are you so invested? Sounds like this could hurt your career.

CHOW

Ron's the reason I have one. No one thought I was worth listening to when I was undercover in vice, but he did. We shared leads and info. Eventually I made detective.

(points to the box)

You found that at the Regency? Where? Cops got nothing.

CHARLIE

Taped underneath the outside of the windowsill.

CHOW

How in the world did you know to look there?

CHARLIE

Rooming with someone in college gives you a certain insight into their personality.

(off her look)

It's where he hid his weed in the dorm.

Charlie laughs. Chow doesn't crack a grin.

CHOW

You wanna know why Ron was killed?

Charlie's eyes go wide. He nods.

EXT. SKID ROW - DAY

Chow and Charlie approach a burnt out warehouse.

CHARLIE

Really? Over a warehouse fire?

CHOW

(shrugs)

We were right in the middle of this case, and a few hours before he died, Ron called to tell me he'd stumbled onto something big.

CHARLIE

What was it?

CHOW

Didn't say.

A homeless man, FRED (30s), rests on the stoop out front. Charlie walks past him until he notices Chow stop.

CHOW (CONT'D)

Charlie, meet Fred. He's the man who set Ron on this case.

CHARLIE

Hi, Fred. How'd you know Ron?

FRED

He's a good man. Lets me stay with him sometimes.

CHOW

Just tell Charlie what happened.

FRED

Here's the thing. I'm not lying. I'm just not.

CHARLIE

I believe you.

Fred nods and collects his thoughts.

FRED

Caroline and I, we were staying in this warehouse. I was coming home and a man ran away with a gas can. He left my wife... ashes...

He trembles, then pulls himself together and rushes to the corner of the building. Chow and Charlie follow.

FRED (CONT'D)

He was here.
(pointing)
Running that way.

CHARLIE

What did he look like?

FRED

(duh)
A dude running away with a gas can.

CHARLIE

Well, that narrows it down.

FRED

It was dark. Plus I was pretty drunk. But he came out of here.

Fred bolts inside. They follow.

INT. BURNED OUT WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Chow and Charlie carefully make their way through the ruins to Fred. He stands in the corner, immobile.

CHARLIE

Did you see the man there?

Fred doesn't respond.

CHOW

What are we looking at here, Fred?
We need facts.

Fred looks up, tears streaming. He opens his mouth to speak, but Charlie stops him and puts his hand on his shoulder.

They take a silent moment to look at the spot where Caroline died.

FRED

Will you find her killer?

Charlie takes one look at Fred's pleading eyes and nods.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie bursts through the front door, energized. Aaron is leaving his room with his guitar.

CHARLIE

Aaron, where's your mom?

AARON

Kitchen. Dad, listen--

Laurel enters from the kitchen wearing a dirty apron.

LAUREL

Aaron, you said you'd help with--

Charlie races over and takes her hands.

CHARLIE

Laurel, you won't believe what happened to me today.

LAUREL

Did you get it? You got it.

CHARLIE

Get what?

AARON

Guys, I need to tell you something.

LAUREL

(to Charlie)

Stop kidding around. The job!

Aaron, tired of this, shakes his head and leaves.

CHARLIE

Oh. Uh, actually I didn't get it.

LAUREL

But they seemed to want you so bad.

Charlie takes a deep breath.

CHARLIE

Well, they had an investigative reporter slot open, so--

LAUREL

You refused the advice columnist job? Charlie!

CHARLIE

No. Not Charlie. I told you, this is important to me.

LAUREL

And this family isn't? This was a good, solid job. If investigating's really that important to you, why can't you just do it on the side? Compromise.

CHARLIE

My entire professional life has been a compromise. I'm tired of feeling like I'm half-assing everything.

LAUREL

(bitter)

Yeah. I'm tired of that too.

Aaron clears his throat from the hallway, and they immediately turn toward him, embarrassed.

AARON

I considered your "be a responsible adult" lecture, but ultimately decided to stay in the band. We'll be practicing in the garage.

He turns and heads into the garage.

LAUREL

He really is your son.

CHARLIE

I'll talk to him.

She goes to the bedroom and closes the door. Charlie frowns.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - GARAGE - DAY

Aaron plays lead guitar and sings, with the rest of the GROUP behind him. It's very '80s. They're all 14, all nerdy, and actually kind of good. They finish, and Charlie claps.

CHARLIE

You guys are great. Would you mind stepping outside so Aaron and I--

AARON

Whatever you say to me, you can say to the band.

CHARLIE
 (sighs)
 Aaron has to quit.

There's an uproar from the Group.

AARON
 But I love playing. You can't just
 make me give it up. My grades won't
 change, I promise.

CHARLIE
 Your mother and I--

AARON
 Please.

Charlie turns away, clearly connecting with his son's plight.

CHARLIE
 I'll talk to your mom, but... you
 guys can't practice here. Not
 tonight, anyway.

AARON
 (to the group)
 Seth is closest. Thanks dad!

They rush around to pack up their equipment.

CHARLIE
 (to himself)
 I am in so much trouble.

He heads inside.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - NIGHT

Charlie enters to find Ron's papers scattered. His eyes widen in alarm. Was somebody here? A breeze blows more papers around, and he notices the open window. He locks it and scans the yard. No one. He shakes it off, but closes the curtains.

He pulls out Chow's note and compares it with the red envelope letter. The handwriting isn't even close. One suspect down, a few billion to go.

He grabs Ron's notebook and pages through it. One name is circled: "?John Orr?" Charlie googles him, and information about the famous California fireman/arsonist fills the screen. He whistles, then picks up his phone and dials.

CHARLIE

Chow? I think I have a lead. I just need one thing first.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - DAY

Laurel works at the computer, getting into what she's doing.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry about last night. I really appreciate this.

LAUREL

Well, you took a bullet by telling Aaron he's quitting that band.

CHARLIE

Yeah, about that--

LAUREL

And I probably overreacted. This is just a big life decision. I want us to really give it some thought.

CHARLIE

Right now I'm not thinking past this story. It's something I need to do.

LAUREL

I know. Just... be safe?

CHARLIE

Chow will be nearby just in case.
(re: her design)
It looks fabulous, by the way.

LAUREL

I'm surprised I even remember this design stuff. It's been ages.

A thick piece of paper comes out of the printer. Charlie holds it up proudly. A press pass for "Charlie Redding, Investigative Reporter." He smiles: perfect.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

(frowning)

Hold on, I want to change the weight of that font. It's a few picas off. It'll bug me.

Laurel dives back into her work. Charlie watches and grins.

INT. FIRE DEPARTMENT - DINING AREA - DAY

Charlie and the FIRE CHIEF stand in front of many firemen, including ADAM DAROFF and TOM JUSINO.

FIRE CHIEF

This here's Charlie Redding. He's writing a story on how heroic all you animals are, so treat him nice.

CHARLIE

Sure you don't need to see my press pass?

(holds it up)

Freelance investigative reporter.

FIRE CHIEF

This close to city budgeting time we need all the good press we can get. Just stay out of the way and make us look good.

He leaves. Charlie is uncomfortable as the firemen stare.

JUSINO

We're playing poker.

DAROFF

For Twinkies.

Jusino tosses Twinkies at him and walks off. Charlie follows.

INT. FIRE DEPARTMENT - DINING AREA - LATER

Charlie sits at the table with the firefighters, playing cards. His pile of Twinkies is the largest.

JUSINO

(sighs)

Fold.

DAROFF

Are you the Charlie Redding? You wrote that advice column?

Charlie nods and makes his bet. Others do the same.

DAROFF (CONT'D)

Cool. My mom said you told her to stop nagging me. So thanks.

CHARLIE

No problem. Glad I could help.

JUSINO
 You ask me, advice columns are just
 a waste of space in a newspaper.

CHARLIE
 Actually, I kind of agree with you.

JUSINO
 (annoyed)
 Call.

They all show their hands. Charlie wins.

DAROFF
 Man, you are good at this game.

CHARLIE
 Just lucky tonight, I guess.

JUSINO
 More likely we have a few suck-ups
 trying to get on your good side.

The men take offense. Jusino ignores them.

JUSINO (CONT'D)
 You'd be surprised what people will
 do for attention. Like my girl.
 She's always jumping up on bars,
 dancing around like a crazy person.
 What's that about, Advice Guy?

CHARLIE
 Well, if someone wrote in about
 that, I might suggest that the
 girlfriend is looking for attention
 from others that she's not getting
 from her boyfriend. But I don't
 really know your particular case.

The rest of the firemen stifle laughter. Charlie looks
 uncomfortable as Jusino just stares at him.

JUSINO
 No. You don't.

He turns to his cards, talk over.

The fire bell rings, and the men spring into action. Charlie
 struggles to keep up.

EXT. BURNING HOUSING PROJECT - DAY

A housing project is ablaze. Most of the men work the hose, but Jusino and the Chief enter the building.

Charlie sneaks over to peek through the door and sees Jusino grab something and stash it under his coat.

FIRE CHIEF (O.S.)

Tom, what the hell was that?

The Chief heads over to Jusino.

JUSINO

What was what?

FIRE CHIEF

Sorry... I guess it must have been the smoke playing tricks on me.

They continue deeper into the building. Charlie pulls out his phone and dials.

CHARLIE

Chow, I just watched a firefighter steal something from a fire. Do you think--?

CHOW (V.O.)

We have our arsonist.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. FIRE STATION/INT. CHOW'S CAR - DAY

Charlie and Chow sit in her car and watch the station as the day shift leaves. Jusino is one of the last hanging around. He walks away from the station and down the road to his car.

CHARLIE

Just let me talk to him, okay? He knows me, and maybe there's an explanation, so--

Chow's out of the car before he can finish. Charlie follows.

CHOW

Thomas Jusino?

JUSINO

Yeah?

He turns, and she flashes her badge quickly.

CHOW

I have reason to believe you have stolen property in your possession.

JUSINO

What?

Jusino notices Charlie jogging up behind Chow.

JUSINO (CONT'D)

This your doing, Writer?

He opens his mouth to speak, but Chow beats him to it.

CHOW

He saw you take something from the fire today and then lie to your chief about it. Covering up arson is a felony, you know.

JUSINO

Arson? You joking? Here. Take it back to the family yourself.

He pulls a wedding album from his bag and tosses it to them. They're both taken aback.

CHARLIE

That's what you took? Why?

JUSINO

(shrugs)

Everything else can be replaced,
but that... It gets to me.

CHOW

So you stole it?

JUSINO

I saved it. Scheduled a time to
meet up with the family tomorrow.

Chow shakes her head and turns away.

CHOW

We're wasting time, Charlie.

JUSINO

I take it you're not really writing
some fluff story about us?

CHARLIE

We have reason to believe that
warehouse fire on Fifth and
Washington was arson.

JUSINO

(scoffs)

Look, I've thought that about a few
fires over the past year, but it's
crazy. The arson cops didn't find
anything.

CHOW

A few fires? And this house handled
them all? What do you know?

JUSINO

First you accuse me, and now you
want me to go after my friends?

CHARLIE

We're not accusing anyone of
anything. But there's more than
just mementos that get burned in
these fires. We're trying to help a
man who lost his wife.

Off Jusino, considering.

INT. WINDY CITY CAFE - AFTERNOON

Jusino, Charlie, and Chow pore over printed firefighter logs.

CHOW

So there are six suspicious fires
over the last twelve months.

JUSINO

Just telling you what I saw.

CHARLIE

Then these logs don't make sense.

JUSINO

Sure they do. They show that no one
fireman was at more than half of
the fires. But it throws your whole
theory out of whack, so you don't
want to see it.

CHOW

(bristling)

We want to see the truth.

JUSINO

You want to see that one of my
buddies did this.

CHARLIE

That's not it at all--

CHOW

Yes. Firemen are good suspects.
They know what they're doing and
have plenty of opportunity.

Without another word, Jusino stands and walks out.

CHARLIE

(to Chow)

Brilliant bit of diplomacy.

CHOW

(genuine)

What?

Charlie sighs.

CHOW (CONT'D)

If only I could look at those
police records without having the
lieutenant up my ass.

Charlie thinks, then picks up his phone and dials.

CHARLIE
Deep Throat. Can I beg a favor?

Chow furrows her brow.

EXT. CITY GAZETTE - DELIVERY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Chow and Charlie wait in the cold.

CHOW
This amazing researcher friend
doesn't know how to tell time?

CHARLIE
Promptness isn't his specialty, but
believe me, if the information is
out there, he'll have it.

The back door opens, and a disheveled Stuart pops out.

STUART
Sorry, man. Overslept.
(noticing Chow)
Hey there.

She gives a curt nod.

CHARLIE
Stuart, meet Detective Madeline
Chow. And vice versa.

STUART
(pouring on charm)
Should I call you Madeline?

CHOW
Chow's fine.

CHARLIE
We really appreciate your help.
It's for a good cause. A man lost
his wife.

STUART
That's terrible. And you brought
those Twinkies you mentioned?

Charlie holds up a large paper bag. His poker winnings.

STUART (CONT'D)
Nice. Come on.

Chow shoots Charlie a skeptical look as they enter.

INT. CITY GAZETTE - CONTINUOUS

They walk through the press room.

CHOW
You really keep everything?

STUART
Oh yeah. I could write three more stories just with the stuff they don't include from the notes.

CHOW
Must be hard to keep it organized.

They enter the...

ARCHIVE ROOM

Boxes and notes fill up an entire wall. It's a mess.

STUART
Yeah, I've been meaning to get around to that.

Off Chow's mounting horror...

INT. CITY GAZETTE - ARCHIVE ROOM - LATER

Charlie, Chow, and Stuart have made a huge dent in the boxes. Stuart sighs and shoves a Twinkie into his mouth.

STUART
(muffled)
Dude, there's no connection between the fires.

CHOW
How would we know? This is so disorganized that we've only been able to find a few records that even pertain to the case.

STUART
My job is researching, not redecorating. I need another break.

Stuart leaves, tossing the documents he was reading down in front of Charlie's face. Charlie's eyes go wide.

CHARLIE
Wait! I've seen that name before.

He rummages through the pile and plucks out another sheet.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Here! These two fires have the same insurance adjuster, Paul Braden.

CHOW

That's pretty thin.

Charlie digs up a few more papers.

CHARLIE

These too! I think we've found it!
(off Chow's look)
I know it's not much, but it's something.

CHOW

(shrugs)
Well, following the money's always a smart play.

Stuart returns and claps Charlie on the back.

STUART

Hey, that's great, you found something. Now get out so I can sleep before work tomorrow.

Chow and Charlie leave. Stuart puts on his jacket and follows them, then checks his phone: 6:30 am. He shrugs, removes his jacket, and curls up on the floor amongst the papers.

EXT. CITY GAZETTE - MORNING

Charlie and Chow exit out the back.

CHARLIE

So, what do we do now? Charge into Braden's office?

CHOW

We do nothing. I try to convince the lieutenant there's enough evidence for a wiretap on Braden.

CHARLIE

Lottery odds?

CHOW

If he's having a good day.

Charlie grins.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Laurel sits on the couch using Charlie's laptop to work on a design. The front door opens, and Charlie enters, exhausted.

LAUREL

You're late. By half a day. Thanks for the call, by the way.

CHARLIE

I am so sorry. I guess I got too wrapped up in this story. Chow and I were researching all night--

LAUREL

At the paper with Stuart. I know.

CHARLIE

Oh. How--?

LAUREL

Because after panicking and calling the cops, I found your contact list and started dialing numbers.

(pointed)

In short -- I called him.

CHARLIE

(chagrined)

Sorry. It won't always be this way, I promise. Believe me.

LAUREL

Of course. Why wouldn't I? It's not like you lied to me about our son.

CHARLIE

Ouch. I'm really not a good husband this week, am I?

AARON (O.S.)

You don't have to fight about me, the band broke up.

They turn to see Aaron.

CHARLIE

What?

LAUREL

Why?

AARON

Um, because we suck. Band Bash guy didn't even let us finish our song. Should've listened to mom.

LAUREL

Aaron, I don't think you--

AARON

So you got your wish, okay? Plenty of study time for me.

CHARLIE

That's it, then?

Aaron shrugs.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Aaron, earlier this week an editor refused to hire me. Said I couldn't be an investigative reporter. But now I'm about to crack open a big arson conspiracy. Only you know whether it's time to throw in the towel, or to stand up and fight.

He heads to his office, leaving Laurel and Aaron surprised.

INT. WINDY CITY CAFE - DAY

Charlie frowns as Chow enters and shakes her head.

CHARLIE

No jackpot for us?

CHOW

No, but I might be joining you on unemployment soon. We need Braden's records.

CHARLIE

Doesn't that require a warrant?

CHOW

A cop needs a warrant.

Charlie frowns, not getting it. Chow speaks slowly.

CHOW (CONT'D)

But if a civilian somehow obtained the records and submitted them as evidence to the police...

Charlie smiles big.

INT. BRADEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

It's dark and empty. A flashlight shines on the glass front door and two masked figures approach.

STUART

You can really do this?

One of the figures drops to his knees and uses a bobby pin to fiddle with the door lock. Within seconds, it's open.

STUART (CONT'D)

Guess that's a yes.

CHARLIE

(smiles)

No lock too strong.

They enter the office. Stuart goes straight for the computer while Charlie looks around.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Remember, in and out. Just take anything that looks important.

Stuart gives him a thumbs up. The password protection pops up on the monitor and he scans the desk. There's a framed photo of two young girls with names written on the bottom: "Kacey" and "Alex." He tries the names in that order. "Alex" works.

STUART

Somebody has a favorite.

He plugs his thumb drive into the computer and begins downloading everything. He frowns.

STUART (CONT'D)

That's weird.

CHARLIE

What?

Flashlights appear in the doorway. Charlie races over to check it out and sees two Uniformed Cops heading their way.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Police. Find another way out.

Stuart grabs the drive, and they duck into different rooms of the office.

STUART (O.S.)

Window.

Charlie reappears and follows Stuart's voice into the...

BATHROOM

They stare up at a tiny window above the stalls. Charlie looks at Stuart: seriously? Stuart shrugs. Back in the...

MAIN OFFICE

the Cops enter. They shine light into the bathroom, but Charlie and Stuart are gone. The cops point at the open window and race out.

We move up toward the window, then swivel down to REVEAL Charlie and Stuart perched precariously on the same toilet. They wait for a silent beat, then race out after the cops.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Charlie drives as they try to calm down.

CHARLIE

So, what did we get?

STUART

Nothing. Just system files. That computer was wiped clean.

Pissed, Charlie slams his hands against the wheel.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie enters and collapses onto the couch, head in hands. Silently, two MEN IN BLACK detach from the wall behind him. One grabs Charlie's wrists and pulls them behind his back.

CHARLIE

Hey! What is this? Where's my family?

While the first man holds Charlie's arms, the second pulls out a taser.

MAN IN BLACK 2

You should have taken the warning when you were fired.

Oh, crap. As the sparking taser closes in...

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Right where we left off. The Men In Black menace Charlie. Then headlights flash through the window as someone pulls into the drive, and the Men race off.

Oblivious to what just happened, Laurel and Aaron enter to find Charlie scared shitless.

LAUREL
Charlie? What's wrong?

But he just sits there rubbing his wrists.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Laurel and Charlie sit on the couch, upset, while Officer Jacobs writes the report. He finishes, and they wait in silence for a beat.

LAUREL
Well? What are you going to do?

JACOBS
(shrugging)
To be honest, ma'am, the whole thing just sounds a little nuts. A taser? "You were warned"?

LAUREL
(defensive)
It's what happened.

JACOBS
You said you didn't see it.

LAUREL
Well--

JACOBS
(standing to leave)
Look, we'll put a car on the house for tonight just in case.

LAUREL
Shouldn't Charlie see a sketch artist or something?

JACOBS
I think I've got enough here.

He pats the notebook as he exits their house. Laurel glares.

LAUREL
What a-- It could have been Aaron!

CHARLIE
You're right. I'm stopping the investigation immediately.

LAUREL
The hell you are.

Charlie looks at her quizzically.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
These people are willing to kill over this. You think they'll back off because you do? Or that guy's going to stop them?

CHARLIE
And I am? All this researching and sneaking around and I still don't have any real evidence. I can't.

He hangs his head, defeated.

LAUREL
Come with me.

She leads Charlie out of the room.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OUTSIDE GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

They hear Aaron's guitar from the hallway, but Laurel pushes the door open. He's totally focused as he plays. When he mangles a note, he stops and plays the part again until he gets it right. Laurel closes the door.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charlie and Laurel enter. Charlie can't hide his confusion.

LAUREL
He said -- and I quote -- "It's like Dad says. I have to stand up and fight." He convinced his friends to keep the band together. There's another contest next month. Something about explosions?

CHARLIE
And you're okay with this?

Laurel takes him by the shoulders.

LAUREL

You can do this. And you have to,
because no one else is even trying.

Charlie gives her a big kiss, and newly energized, he exits.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - NIGHT

Charlie pulls out the lock box and drums his fingers against the combination.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - CLOSET - NIGHT

He opens the door and turns on the chain light, then reaches up to grab a box full of books and old newspapers. He turns off the light and shuts the door again.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - NIGHT

Old college facebook, a stack of yellowing Yale Daily News editions, and old Yale contact lists sit on the coffee table.

Next to the Contact List is a notebook with several entries:

~~Ron's birthday 11/14~~
~~Ron's school phone? 4472~~
Parents' address 3117 Mockingbird

Charlie holds the lockbox and dials in a final number: 3117. It doesn't open.

Frustrated, he flops onto the couch and picks up one of the facebook. He flips to Ron's picture and reads the entry: "Have a crappy summer -- Woodward."

He smiles, then bolts upright and grabs his laptop. He googles "Bob Woodward + birthdate" and finds the answer: "March 26, 1943." He tries a new set of numbers on the lockbox: 0326. The box pops open! He peers in to find a key with "1472" taped on it. What could it be to?

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - DAY

Charlie's parked in an alley. Chow climbs in the car.

CHOW

I can't believe all Braden's files
were just gone.

CHARLIE

Yeah. I wasn't hurt in the attack,
by the way.

CHOW
 (ignoring him)
 I'm not sure what our options are
 at this point.

CHARLIE
 Braden had to have inside help.
 Someone warned him to wipe his
 files.

CHOW
 How do you plan on proving that? I
 can't just go after him. Remember
 the law, that thing I uphold?

CHARLIE
 Stuart and I can handle him.

CHOW
 (disbelieving)
 Really?

CHARLIE
 Relax. I'm just going to give him
 some advice.

Chow rolls her eyes.

EXT. PAUL BRADEN'S MCMANSION - DAY

Braden, still wearing a robe, glances out his window as he
 walks past and does a double take. He storms outside.

BRADEN
 Excuse me, just what do you think
 you're doing?

Reveal Charlie and Stuart leaning against Braden's immaculate
 Mercedes Benz CL-600. Stuart is relishing being a badass.

CHARLIE
 This is one hot car.

STUART
 On fire, one might say.

BRADEN
 You've got about one minute to
 leave or I get security up here.

CHARLIE
 (pointing)
 That security?

He waves down at the Gate Guard, and the Guard waves back.
Braden bristles.

STUART

We know what you and your partner
are up to.

BRADEN

(stiffening)

I don't know what you mean.

CHARLIE

Miraculous turnaround on your
business. From near-bankruptcy to
flourishing in a year. All those
fires happening so quickly really
helped the bottom line.

BRADEN

How dare you come to my house and
accuse me? You have no proof--

STUART

Because you erased the files,
right? Do you know how hard it is
to truly delete files unless you
destroy your hard drive?

Braden shifts nervously.

CHARLIE

Scared me too. Apparently a good
tech guy can recover anything.

STUART

And ours is the best.

CHARLIE

You flew under the radar for a
while, but a woman was killed in
the last fire. That can't be
overlooked. Turn yourself in. Avoid
the nasty scene of being taken from
your fancy house in handcuffs.

BRADEN

We'll see who's in handcuffs.
You're trespassing.

Braden stomps back into the house. Charlie and Stuart quickly
head towards the gate.

STUART

Dude, that was awesome. Think it'll work?

CHARLIE

He's scared. Which means he'll be calling his partner, not the cops.

The Guard looks up as they pass by.

GUARD

Got what you need for your story?

CHARLIE

(nodding)

Thanks for your help, Benny.

GUARD

Anything for Charlie Redding. I told you, you saved my marriage.

He points to a framed advice column on his wall with Charlie's picture on it.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR - DAY

Stuart dozes, but Charlie and Chow notice Braden on the move. They duck as he goes by, then follow him.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

They trail Braden's car downtown. He stops by a Lamborghini in a dark alleyway. The door of the Lamborghini opens, and out steps... Officer Jacobs!

CHOW

He's not paying for that on our salary.

Off Charlie's angry look.

INT. WINDY CITY CAFE - DAY

Charlie slams the table, startling Chow.

CHARLIE

One of them killed Ron. We need to take them down.

CHOW

All we have is people acting suspicious.

(MORE)

CHOW (CONT'D)

Move in now, Braden will make this a political nightmare. We need to catch them in the act.

CHARLIE

How diplomatic of you.

CHOW

You must be rubbing off on me.

CHARLIE

So then how do we catch them if they know we're onto them?

CHOW

(smiles)

I follow the chain of command.

Charlie looks at her, confused.

INT. METRO POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Chow and Hawkins yell in his office while the entire department listens uncomfortably through his open door.

CHOW

Just hear me out. This is huge.

HAWKINS

I told you to lay off the fires.

CHOW

But we know who really did it now. He was hiding behind a sob story the whole time. You just need to see the file, and--

HAWKINS

I've had enough. You're demoted.

CHOW

Lieutenant--

HAWKINS

Out!

Chow stomps out, slams a file on her desk, and exits. A beat, then Jacobs sidles over to peek at it.

INSERT FILE

It's a photo of Fred and an address for the warehouse he's squatting in. Jacobs smiles.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Jacobs enters the dark warehouse with a gas can in his gloved hands. He plants evidence in Fred's area: lighters, matches, newspaper clippings about the fire. Then he stands, turns... and nearly bumps into Charlie and Chow. She levels her gun at him and glares.

CHARLIE

We knew you couldn't pass up an opportunity to set someone else up.

JACOBS

(to Chow)

Wow. You really are a crappy cop. This is against so many regulations it's ridiculous. Working with this hack advice columnist?

CHARLIE

Former advice columnist, actually.

CHOW

And this crappy cop just nailed your ass.

JACOBS

(scoffs)

You really think the lieutenant will believe you and your sidekick over a prominent local businessman and a decorated cop?

HAWKINS (O.S.)

I think he might be so inclined.

Hawkins steps out of the shadows flanked by two Officers. Jacobs' face falls.

HAWKINS (CONT'D)

I didn't believe her. Had to see it for myself.

(to Officers)

Take him in.

The Officers handcuff Jacobs.

HAWKINS (CONT'D)

(into walkie-talkie)

It's a go. Arrest Braden.

CHOW
(smiling big)
Thanks for the vote of confidence,
lieutenant.

HAWKINS
What are you smiling at? Jacobs
wasn't wrong. You know how many
regulations you violated? You were
right this time, but disobey my
orders again and you'll wish I just
demoted you to traffic cop.

She nods, cowed, but can't quite stop smiling as he leaves.

Charlie celebrates as the Officers drag Jacobs past.

CHARLIE
Think about what you did to Ron
while you're rotting in a cell.

JACOBS
I had nothing to do with that.

CHARLIE
Like hell.

JACOBS
I'm just a cog. He was into things
way above my pay grade.

CHARLIE
What does that mean?

Jacobs just smiles. He's not talking. Charlie's furious, but
Chow holds him back as the Officers drag Jacobs off.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. WINDY CITY CAFE - DAY

Chow and Charlie sip coffee. Charlie is frustrated.

CHARLIE

So what if Braden and Jacobs have airtight alibis? Clearly they didn't kill Ron themselves. They hired a professional.

CHOW

My thoughts exactly. But so far we haven't been able to trace any large sums of money from either of their accounts going anywhere suspicious. Just Braden making payments to Jacobs.

CHARLIE

But they must have had some connection.

He goes silent, lost in thought.

CHOW

We did good here. Braden and Jacobs are going away for a long time.

CHARLIE

(half-hearted)
Yeah.

Chow frowns and stands.

CHOW

Let me show you something.

Charlie narrows his eyes, curious.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER - DAY

Chow leads Charlie through the crowd, waving at a Worker as she heads into the...

KITCHEN

Fred cooks at a stove, full of energy and -- more importantly -- completely sober. He sees them and lights up.

FRED

My two favorite people! Billy, can you take over for me?

Billy does, and Fred leads them into a pantry for privacy. He takes Charlie's hand in his.

FRED (CONT'D)

Miss Madeline told me how you helped her. I can't tell you how much it means to me that Caroline's killers are gonna be punished for what they did. Everyone ignores us, but you didn't.

CHARLIE

(moved)

Glad I could help.

FRED

Know what's even better? We're doubling the size of this place, and it's gonna be renamed in Caroline's honor!

CHOW

How?

Fred pulls out a BLOOD-RED ENVELOPE. Charlie's eyes go wide.

FRED

Damndest thing. I haven't gotten a letter in years -- pretty hard with no address -- but yesterday morning, this was just sitting on my blanket with my name on it.

CHARLIE

Could I see that?

Fred hands it over. It even has a wax seal on the back.

FRED

It says an anonymous donation was made to this homeless shelter in Caroline's name so...

(starting to tear)

...so the world won't forget her.

CHOW

That's amazing, Fred.

Charlie looks up from the letter, a fire in his eyes.

CHARLIE

You mind if I keep this?

Fred nods: keep it. Chow eyes Charlie curiously.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - OFFICE - DAY

Charlie types at his computer, finishing his story on the fires. It's called: "Not Forgotten." He leans back and takes a deep breath, looks over at Ron's personal effects.

CHARLIE

Your last story, Ron. Hopefully my first.

He turns back to the computer and hits PRINT.

INT. SOUTHSIDE DAILY - EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Morgan is about to take a large bite out of her sandwich when Charlie opens his door and strides in.

MORGAN

Mr. Redding?

Charlie tosses his completed story onto Morgan's desk.

CHARLIE

There's my experience.

He turns and walks out. Morgan looks down, intrigued, and begins to read.

EXT. SOUTHSIDE DAILY - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie unlocks his car and is about to climb in.

MORGAN (O.S.)

Mr. Redding!

Charlie turns to see Morgan huffing as she races over.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

This is all true?

CHARLIE

Arrests were just made.

MORGAN

8am Monday. Come with a new lead.

Charlie nods, and Morgan walks off. Charlie can't contain his excitement as he climbs into his car and dials on his phone.

LAUREL (V.O.)

Hello?

CHARLIE
 Guess who's Southside Daily's
 newest investigative reporter?

It's hard to tell which of them screams and laughs louder.

INT. WINDY CITY CAFE - AFTERNOON

Chow reads a report, sipping coffee. Two red envelopes are tossed in front of her, and she looks up to see Charlie.

CHOW
 Fred got another envelope?

CHARLIE
 (shaking his head)
 One of them is mine. It's why I
 started looking into Ron.

Chow picks up the letters and reads. She whistles.

CHOW
 What the hell was Ron into?

CHARLIE
 No idea. And I found this.
 (reveals the key)
 But I don't know what it's to.

Chow takes the key and examines it.

CHOW
 Ron mentioned a storage unit once
 on East and Main.

They meet each others' eyes, excited.

INT. STORAGE UNIT - AFTERNOON

The garage door of the unit roars upward, revealing Charlie and Chow at the entrance. Their jaws drop at what they see.

CHARLIE
 Dear god, Woodward.

Tables are piled high with books, notebooks, newspapers, and full manila folders. The walls are lined with corkboards covered in maps, newspaper clippings, and photos. Charlie sees a photo of the warehouse Caroline died in on one of the boards and approaches. Photos of the other burned buildings surround it, along with the names of the different owners who bought them. But lines of string pinned to the board show--

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

The building owners, they're shell companies for the same corporation. When Jacobs said it was above his pay grade... The fires are just the tip of the iceberg.

As he speaks, he traces the string: the six owners link to three larger companies, subsidiaries of ASCENDANT CORP. A single string from Ascendant connects to Metro Press.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Ron's paper...?

CHOW (O.S.)

(scared)

Charlie. You should see this.

She studies clippings on the other side of the room. As Charlie approaches, he sees pictures and names -- Francis Daly, Jermaine Thurber, Beth Lutz.

CHARLIE

Obituaries?

(lightbulb)

Wait. These names. The initials match Ron's code.

He shows her the bright orange initials in Ron's notebook.

CHOW

It's even weirder. They're all journalists who died in the last decade. And they all committed suicide in the exact way Ron did.

Charlie and Chow stare at each other, terrified. What the hell did they just stumble onto?

INT. THOMPSON RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlie sits across from Ron's wife again.

CHARLIE

It's looking like Ron was into something big. I was wondering if you knew anything about it, or if maybe there were more notes here?

KATE

Sorry. There's nothing.

CHARLIE

Even the smallest thing might help.
I'm just trying to find who killed
him and destroyed your family.

Kate's calm facade breaks.

KATE

Ron is what destroyed us. Always
away on some damn story or another.

Charlie is taken aback.

KATE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I didn't mean to-- We were
in the middle of a divorce. He
moved out about eight months ago.
Anything he had, he took with him.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I had no idea.

KATE

You know, I see him in you. That
same passion. Don't let it consume
you. Move on. I am.

Off Charlie, totally at a loss.

INT. REDDINGS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Charlie enters yawning. A laptop sits on the coffee table,
and Charlie notices a half-finished graphic design file:
"BandSPLOSION! Presents The Next Great Band." Spotlights
illuminate the title and silhouette a group of teen boys
onstage, playing for an adoring crowd. It's gorgeous. He sets
it down as Laurel enters with the paper and the mail.

LAUREL

Aaron, get in here!

Charlie looks up: What's the fuss? Aaron enters, and--

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Dad's story is on the front page!

She holds up The Southside Daily for them. There's a big
picture of Braden covering his face as cops lead him away.

AARON

(mildly impressed)
Cool, Dad. Good job.

Laurel swats him with the paper.

LAUREL

Good job? This is fantastic. We're going to Nat's for family breakfast to celebrate.

AARON

Now? I have to shower.

He races off.

LAUREL

You better hurry! The breakfast special ends at 10:30!

CHARLIE

Maybe we don't have to be so frugal now that we both have jobs.

He smiles, nodding to her design on the screen.

LAUREL

(waving him off)

That? I practically had to beg the event promoters to let me design it.

CHARLIE

Trust me. You won't be begging anybody after they see this.

She blushes, and he leans in and gives her a kiss.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Congratulations. I'm really happy for you.

LAUREL

For both of us. I have to say, though, I'm glad you're done with Ron's case.

CHARLIE

(hesitates)

Yeah...

LAUREL

There were just things about it... Well, it scared me.

Charlie stands and hugs her tightly, eyeing Ron's box of notes in the office.

LAUREL (CONT'D)
We better go get ready too.

CHARLIE
I'll be right in.

She leaves, and Charlie notices a NEW BLOOD-RED ENVELOPE sitting in the mail Laurel brought in.

LAUREL (O.S.)
What's taking you so long?

CHARLIE
Nothing. I'll be right there.

He hesitates, then tears open the envelope and begins to read, his eyes wide with excitement.

END OF EPISODE