UTOPIA

written by
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TEASER

EXT. TREE-LINED COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A picturesque country road, the trees dropping fall colors. A WHITE SEDAN, a rental, BREAKS FRAME.

WOMAN (V.O.)
America was founded on the belief that through hard work, courage and determination, one could achieve prosperity.

The sedan rounds a curve, passing a SIGN that reads: Now entering Macon Heights. Have a nice day!

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - DAY

The sedan cruises down the main street of Macon Heights, USA. This is the small town that exists in the minds of all Americans, whether we’ve been there or not. Main Street is warm and inviting and the storefronts are similar, but not identical.

It’s small enough that people know their neighbors, but large enough that it’s possible to meet new people.

WOMAN (V.O.)
We were promised financial security and constitutional freedom in America. The American dream.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - DAY

The car pulls up to a parking spot, and parks in front of the MACON HEIGHTS SENTINEL building.

WOMAN (V.O.)
But ever since we were so viciously attacked, that way of life has been threatened. Now, Americans aren't so certain that they'll achieve that dream.

Out of the car steps

JASON TAVERNER

Early 20s, one of those rakishly handsome guys who’s only going to get more interesting as he gets older. He’s dressed nicely, like he’s going for a job interview. Which he is.

CUT TO:
INT. SENTINEL - SUE’S OFFICE

A plush, gorgeously minimalist office. SUE FROST (30s), the Sentinel’s editor, stands up. She and Jason shake hands. He seems stunned by his good fortune.

WOMAN (V.O.)
But what if it were handed to you?
What if you were given, on your merits, your ideal job?

CUT TO:

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MAPLE STREET - DAY

Jason’s standing on the porch of a perfect little HOUSE, shaking hands with a REAL ESTATE AGENT in a maroon jacket.

WOMAN (V.O.)
What if you were able to buy the house you've always dreamed of?

The real estate agent hands Jason the keys to his new house.

CUT TO:

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - DAY

Jason, now a Macon Heights resident, is walking down the street. He stops to pet a dog, smiles at a WOMAN and her SMALL CHILD.

WOMAN (V.O.)
What if you lived in the perfect American town? What if you achieved the American dream?

CUT TO:

INT. JASON’S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Jason’s sitting on the sofa, his feet up. He turns - there’s a knock at the door. He goes to the door, opens it. There, on the stoop is a WELCOME BASKET. He brings it inside.

WELCOME BASKET

A CARD that welcomes him to the neighborhood... a BOX OF COOKIES from the local bakery... COUPONS for the restaurants... a COFFEE CARD to the coffee place... a copy of MACON HEIGHTS WEEKLY, the local magazine... and an ENVELOPE.

Jason takes out the envelope, opens it. Inside, a white CARD.

CLOSE ON CARD
Which reads, in BOLD BLOCK LETTERING, “Get out while you have the chance.”

JASON

Staring at the card, stopped for a moment... is this a joke, or is it real? He looks out the window.

JASON’S POV – HIS NEIGHBORHOOD

KIDS ride Razor scooters in the street... a NEIGHBOR trims his hedge... a WOMAN comes home with groceries. Totally normal.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Would you question it? Or would you just accept your good fortune and turn a blind eye to the possibility that your American dream come true is actually your nightmare?

JASON

Looks down at the card in his hand. He hesitates, then drops it onto the counter. He turns and opens the door, going outside, ready to enjoy a perfect afternoon in the perfect town.

END OF TEASER
ACT ONE

INT. JASON’S HOUSE - MORNING

On Jason, sound asleep. Peaceful. The sun gently bathes his face. He yawns, stretches, opens his eyes. For a moment, he doesn’t know where he is. Then he remembers. He smiles and gets out of bed.

Jason goes into the living room, which is furnished, as is the rest of the house, in a tasteful yet funky bachelor pad style. Jason picks up his CEL PHONE. He dials, waits.

    JASON
    (into phone)
    Hi, I need to leave a message. For Dorothy... Right. Sorry. D.O.T. The number is twelve, four, eight, three. Tell her I have news. And... that this is really stupid. And paranoid.

He hangs up, shakes his head. He goes into the kitchen and SEES the CARD from the welcome basket. He picks it up.

EXT. MAPLE STREET - MORNING

Jason opens his front door. The Sentinel’s on the stoop. He bends down to pick up the paper.

    ROSEMARY (O.S.)
    Hi, number six.

Jason jumps. Standing at the porch railing about ten inches away is ROSEMARY MALPARTO (14, budding smartass).

    JASON
    Gah!! You scared the crap out of me!

    ROSEMARY
    That’s me, silent but deadly.

    JASON
    Why did you call me number six?

    ROSEMARY
    Your address. Number six Maple Street. (beat)
    I’m number two.

    JASON
    Who is number one?

    ROSEMARY
    The Andersons. (beat)
    I AM NOT A NUMBER! I AM A FREE MAN!
JASON
Nice to know someone else in town knows the classics.

ROSEMARY
You just moved in, right?

JASON
Yesterday. I’m Jason.

ROSEMARY
Rosemary. I moved in a few months ago with my stupid mom and her husband. The husband’s president of the neighborhood watch. Lame.
(beat)
My dad died.

JASON
I’m sorry.

ROSEMARY
No big deal. It’s just information.
(beat)
Did you get a big old welcome basket? The husband likes to do crap like that.

JASON
As a matter of fact, I did. This was in it.

Jason shows her the card from the basket.

ROSEMARY
Wow. The husband has a weird sense of humor.
(beat)
So what’s your deal here?

JASON
I just got a job, with the paper. I’m a reporter.

ROSEMARY
What are you going to report on? The garbage strike?

JASON
There’s a garbage strike?

ROSEMARY
JASON
You know, there’s something to be said for a nice, quiet little town.

ROSEMARY
Live here for awhile and get back to me.

JASON
Now why don’t I think the husband put that note in my welcome basket?

Rosemary grins.

VICTOR (O.S.)
Rosemary! You’re going to be late!

Rosemary rolls her eyes.

ROSEMARY
The husband.
(beat)
Gotta go.

JASON
Nice meeting you.

ROSEMARY
Likewise. See you around, number six.

Rosemary’s gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. SENTINEL - MORNING

Jason stands on the sidewalk, getting ready to go in for his first day. He clutches his new briefcase, takes a deep breath, and opens the door...

INT. SENTINEL - MORNING

...into CHAOS. EMPLOYEES rush from one end of the building to the next. People shout on the phone. Jason tries to get out of someone’s way.

LEO (O.S.)
Look out!

Jason turns and just avoids being run into by a WOMAN and her cup of COFFEE. LEO BULEBO (40s, energetic Clark Kent type) stands with editor SUE FROST (30s).

SUE
Close call.
JASON
I hope I’m not late --

SUE
You’re right on time. Jason Taverner, Leo Bulero.

LEO
Good to know you. We’re gonna be shacking up for your first story.

SUE
Take it easy with him, Leo. Don’t ruin another one.

LEO
Yeah, yeah. Come on, kid, time’s a wasting.

Leo hustles a bewildered Jason out the front door.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MORNING

Jason hurries to keep up with Leo.

LEO
First newspaper job?

JASON
If you count the college paper --

LEO
Won the student Pulitzer, right?

JASON
The opposite. My story was kind of scandalous.

LEO
The administration freak about the cafeteria expose?

JASON
We had a... well, I guess you could call him a mad scientist. He was doing experiments, with drugs. People wanted to cover it up. The administration, the CDC...

LEO
They publish it?

JASON
They butchered it. A story on wheat farming won instead.
LEO
It’s always the fluff pieces. Guy probably writes for Time now.

JASON
Entertainment Weekly.

(beat)
But at least I found out the truth. About the scientist.

LEO
Truth ain’t all it’s cracked up to be. Sometimes you gotta know when not to cross the line.

Jason looks at Leo for a long moment. A light dawns.

JASON
Leo Bulero... you worked for the Times, didn’t you? The shady source article --

LEO
Invented him out of whole cloth was how the editor put it. I knew the story was true but I couldn’t prove it. I paid for it. Sue took a chance on me. I owe her big.

(beat)
You’re lucky, to get this shot when you’re just starting out. Maybe you can avoid the mistakes I’ve made.

They move off of Main Street.

LEO (CONT'D)
The residential areas of Macon Heights are all within walking distance of the business district. You don’t need a car here unless you want one.

They pass a CHURCH. The board in front of the church reads, “Million bright ambassadors of morning.”

JASON
What does that mean?

LEO
Gibberish. Pastor Bob likes to make fun of those inspirational sayings. He’s a little... strange.

JASON
TV small towns are notoriously quirky. “Picket Fences,” “Northern Exposure,” “Gilmore Girls...”
LEO
I don’t own a television.

JASON
At all?

LEO
I’m not of the TV generation.

JASON
Actually, I think you are.

LEO
I remember LPs, eight-tracks --

JASON
You’re not that old, Leo.

LEO
I will admit to remembering the early days of MTV.

JASON
So all I can use on you are Dire Straits references?

LEO
Duran Duran references work, too.

As they turn a corner, Jason begins to notice a series of colorful POSTERS on fences, walls, doors. They advertise an upcoming FILM FESTIVAL -- The Macon Heights Noir Festival.

JASON
Macon Heights has a noir festival?

LEO
Yep. One thing the town council’s always on about is civic pride. So they got the idea years ago to do stuff to get us excited about Macon Heights. We do these festivals, four times a year. They appoint an M.C., master of ceremonies, for each festival.

(beat)
You’ve got a feel for this town already. We’re gonna go talk to the festival M.C.

JASON
That’s our story?

LEO
People in this town like to know their neighbors.

(MORE)
LEO (CONT'D)
Good thing is, they like to yap about themselves so it’s easy to get quotes for your articles.

Leo’s cell phone rings and he answers it. Jason wanders off, giving Leo privacy. Ahead, he SEES a PARK. A TELEPHONE POLE has several festival posters wrapped around it. Jason looks at a flyer for a lost Papillon. It’s a cute little dog. He accidentally pulls the flyer off, revealing another FESTIVAL POSTER underneath it.

JASON
Dammit...

He tries to use an old staple to re-fasten the lost dog flyer. But he freezes when he sees the festival poster. Because this one’s different... rather than announcing the upcoming film festival, this poster -- which is designed exactly the same way as the festival posters -- has a QUOTE on it: “War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.” If you aren’t looking directly at it, you wouldn’t necessarily notice. Jason blinks.

LEO (O.S.)
Sorry ‘bout that. Let’s go meet Tom.

Jason turns. He starts to say something about the posters, but Leo’s already walking. Jason hesitates, then follows him through the park.

They arrive at a darling storefront which reads “Festival Headquarters.” There are more of the festival posters, but none with the strange quote. They enter.

INT. FESTIVAL H.Q. - DAY

The place is packed full of posters, t-shirts, mugs, all kinds of stuff that’s going to be sold. CLARA, an energetic young woman in a festival shirt, is nodding as THOMAS ASHBLESS (30s, distinguished writerly type) talks.

ASHBLESS
Last time Dean did the signs, he spelled everything wrong. Nothing gets spelled wrong on my watch.

CLARA
Gotcha, boss.

LEO
Hey, Tom.

Ashbless grins.
ASHBLESS
Hey, Leo! We’re coming right along here.

LEO
Swell. Look, I want to introduce you to the new guy. Jason Taverner, this is Tom Ashbless, the film festival emcee and professional book writer.

ASHBLESS
Good to know you, Jason.

JASON
Nice to be known.

LEO
We’re gearing up for festival coverage at the paper. I thought you could indoctrinate young Jason here.

ASHBLESS
Glad to!

JASON
You’re letting me do the story?

LEO
I think you can handle it. You’ll learn something about the town, too. (beat) Just get whatever interests you and we’ll work on it tomorrow.

Jason’s clearly excited to be left on his own.

JASON
Okay. Great.

Leo leaves. Ashbless turns to Jason.

ASHBLESS
I think we should start at the beginning. (beat) The first Macon Heights festival took place in 1958. It was the mayor’s idea. Ed Fletcher was a free-thinker for 1958. You going to write any of this down?

Off Jason, realizing what he’s gotten himself into...

CUT TO:
INT. FESTIVAL H.Q. - LATER

Ashbless is sitting now, perched on a stool, still as energetic as before. Jason, his eyes a little glazed over, is scribbling in a notebook.

ASHBLESS
-- and then came 1987. THAT was a revolutionary year! The town council decided --

Ashbless’s phone rings. He picks it up.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hel-lo! Oh, dammit. What time is it?

Ashbless looks outside. It’s getting dark.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)
Ten minutes, okay?

He hangs up, looks sheepishly at Jason.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)
I got carried away.

JASON
That’s okay. It was interesting.

ASHBLESS
Even I know it isn’t, but thanks for being polite. Hey, I’m meeting Leo and some friends for dinner. Want to come?

JASON
Yeah, if it’s okay...

ASHBLESS
It’s always okay in Macon Heights.

EXT. FESTIVAL H.Q.

Ashbless and Jason walk down the street.

JASON
So what kind of books do you write?

Ashbless shrugs.

ASHBLESS
Someone kills a guy. Another guy solves it. It’s not Tolstoy.
JASON
I like mysteries.

They cut through the park. Even though it’s getting dark, the park is serene. Up ahead is the telephone pole with the strange poster.

Jason stops, perplexed. All the POSTERS are festival posters. None of them has the strange quote. Jason frowns.

JASON (CONT'D)
There was another poster here... it had an Orwell quote on it.
(beat)
"War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." But it isn’t here anymore.

Jason pulls at a few of the posters, trying to find it.

ASHBLESS
Don’t bother. They come down as quickly as they go up.

JASON
What are you talking about?

Ashbless looks around, almost furtive. Satisfied nobody’s paying any attention to them...

ASHBLESS
Ever since the first festival, there have been these... anomalies. Posters that look exactly like festival posters, only they have quotes on them. Idealism is the noble toga that political gentlemen drape over their will to power. Before that, we had Paranoia is when you know all the facts. That kind of thing.

JASON
What do they mean?

ASHBLESS
No idea. There aren’t very many. And not everyone knows about ‘em. There’s a hardy group of us, we try and collect ‘em when we see ‘em. I barely snagged one before it was taken down.

JASON
Who takes them down?
ASHBLESS
Nobody knows who puts them up or who takes them down. It’s a total mystery. Some people think there’s a message, others think it’s just a prank.

JASON
There was this thing in Arizona... the May Day Mystery.

ASHBLESS
Right! The coded message that shows up every May Day in the college paper. I personally do not think it’s a joke.

JASON
What about these posters?

ASHBLESS
I have yet to formulate an opinion.

He gives Jason a long, measured look... weighing something in his mind.

ASHBLESS (cont’d) (CONT’D)
I’ve got an almost complete collection at home. You interested in getting into the game?

JASON
It is kind of up my alley...

ASHBLESS
Then you’re coming over tomorrow. End of story.
(beat)
And here we are. Best Mexican food in town.

They enter the Capitan Restaurant.

INT. CAPITAN RESTAURANT - EVENING

Sitting at a table consuming a gigantic margarita is Leo, with two pretty GIRLS. He waves. Jason and Ashbless sit.

ASHBLESS
Hola!

LEO
Hey, guys.
(to Jason)
How’s the story coming?
JASON
Tom’s a font of information.

LEO
Yeah... sorry about that.

ASHBLESS
He meant a good font, Leo.

One of the girls, SHELLEY LATHAM (20s, blonde and captivating) smiles at Jason.

SHELLEY
Hey Tom, introduce us.

Jason glances at her, and then he looks at her. He can’t take his eyes off of her.

ASHBLESS
Jason Taverner, Linda Fox and Shelley Latham. Our resident library geniuses.

Jason half-glances at LINDA FOX (20s, dark and sultry), but then his gaze slides back to Shelley. Before he can stop himself..

JASON
You’re librarians?

Linda bristles.

LINDA
I suppose we’re all supposed to be spinsters, right?

SHELLEY
Like in “It’s A Wonderful Life,” when Jimmy Stewart sees what would happen to Donna Reed if he didn’t exist. She’s all matronly and pinched and has to wear glasses, which she doesn’t have to wear when she’s had four children.

JASON
That’s my favorite movie!

SHELLEY
Mine too, even though it made me deathly afraid of not being married.

They keep looking at each other. Ashbless nudges Jason.

ASHBLESS
She’s not, by the way.
JASON
Not what?

ASHBLESS
Not married.

LEO
For God’s sake, Tom.

LINDA
Honestly.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - LATER

Jason and his new friends are strolling down Main Street. Jason and Shelley are walking together, very aware of each other. Shelley’s telling Jason about her life.

SHELLEY
...we were together about two years. I thought I loved him, but... I was just afraid of him.

JASON
So what happened?

SHELLEY
Well, I was going to break up with him. I had the speech all planned. And then I get a call from him. He’s totally been arrested and, I kid you not, sent to Gitmo.

JASON
Guantanamo Bay? Seriously?

SHELLEY
I pretended I didn’t know who he was. Is that awful?

JASON
Depends on why he was arrested.

SHELLEY
I never found out. I was just frantic to get away, and there was an opening here, so I grabbed it. I haven’t heard from him since. It felt good... to stop running.

JASON
I know exactly what you mean.

SHELLEY
You do?
JASON

Yeah.

The POSTERS almost completely cover a brick wall. Jason peers at them, peels one back from the wall.

LEO

What are you doing?

JASON

Looking for the Orwell poster.

LEO

The Orwell...?

(beat)

Tom, you did NOT suck Jason into your paranoid little world.

ASHBLESS

I didn’t do anything. He saw one on his own. And it’s not paranoia. I’ve got evidence.

LINDA

(to Jason)

Ask Tom about the other evidence he has. The Bermuda Triangle, the Holy Grail... he’s got theories on every ounce of esoterica.

ASHBLESS

Well, those are easy.

(beat)

It’s Nazis.

JASON

What?

LEO

That’s his answer for everything.

ASHBLESS

Not my fault they had their hands in so many pies.

JASON

Look, I saw one. With my own two eyes. It said War in peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.

ASHBLESS

Mr. George Orwell. Interesting choice, don’t you think?

LEO

Not really.
LINDA
Not interested.

ASHBLESS
Ah, come on. Leo, you’re a journalist. You don’t even have an opinion? Don’t you think there are people who believe that ignorance is strength, and war is peace?

LEO
Well... yeah. Dictators, fascists, people who want to control others.

ASHBLESS
What about the people they control? Do they believe it?

JASON
If they know they’re being controlled, then no.

ASHBLESS
Do you believe it?

JASON
Of course not.

ASHBLESS
Then aren’t you being controlled?

JASON
No.

ASHBLESS
How can you know that?

JASON
Huh. I guess I can’t.
(beat)
How do you think they’d do it? Control people.

ASHBLESS
If you control information, you control how people believe.

LEO
Here we go... big lecture on the evils of a free press.

JASON
But in order to control information, you have to create it.
SHELLEY
(suddenly)
You use information to create a new reality. You manufacture it right to the population. It becomes their reality, and they’ll do anything they can to protect it.
(beat)
Information is power.

It’s said with such knowing conviction that everybody stares at Shelley.

ASHBLESS
It’s certainly something to think about --

PETE (O.S.)
What’s something to think about?

PETE DOWLAND
(20s, dark and serious), wearing a dark blue jacket with an EMBLEM on it, is standing there.

LINDA
Hey, Pete.

ASHBLESS
(to Jason)
Boyfriend.

Pete glances at Jason, sticks out a hand.

PETE
Pete Dowland, Runciter Security.
Good to know you.

JASON
Jason Taverner.

PETE
(to Linda)
I got my shift changed for Friday. Can we do Saturday?

LINDA
Sure.

Pete’s radio buzzes.

PETE
Gotta rabbit.

Pete kisses Linda and moves off.
JASON
What’s Runciter Security?

LEO
They’re the law in Macon Heights.
(beat)
Macon Heights is a private community.

JASON
I got that from my research. It was kind of a selling point. But it didn’t say anything about police. I guess I just never thought about it.

SHELLEY
We’re safer here than we would be in a city. Here, people care. They keep us safe. Really safe. You can walk around here, no problem.

Jason smiles at her, suddenly totally in love with her.

JASON
Even though it’s really safe, can I walk you home?

Shelley grins at him. Leo rolls his eyes.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS STREET - LATER

Jason’s walking Shelley home. They’re both quiet. Jason looks at her. Shelley looks young and innocent and vulnerable. On impulse, he takes her hand. She smiles at him. They hear the distant sound of someone hammering.

JASON
What on Earth...?

They get closer and see WORKMEN repairing a roof.

JASON (CONT'D)
Weird time to do repair work.

SHELLEY
Oh, they only do repairs at night here. So everything’s magically repaired by the morning.

JASON
Is that some kind of town ordinance or something?

SHELLEY
Yes, it is.
(beat)
I’m just up here.
They turn up a walk to a lovely little house. Jason walks her to the door. Shelley turns to look at him.

**SHELLEY (CONT'D)**
I had an unexpectedly good time tonight.

**JASON**
I’m not sure how to take that.

**SHELLEY**
Well... I didn’t expect to meet you. But I did. And... I think you’re perfect.

**JASON**
I think you’re perfect, too.

Jason leans down and kisses her, a nice chaste kiss... with potential. They break apart, breathless.

**SHELLEY**
Well. Goodnight.

**JASON**
Hey, would you -- can I cook dinner for you? Tomorrow?

**SHELLEY**
That would be... yes. Absolutely.

**JASON**
Tomorrow, then.

Shelley goes inside, closes the door.

**INT. SHELLEY’S HOUSE**

Shelley turns on a light and goes into the living room, towards a COMPUTER that’s on a cute little desk.

**POOLE (O.S.)**
Did he ask you on a date?

Shelley spins, startled. Sitting in an armchair, in the dark, is GARSON POOLE (early 40s, imposing, with a cruel streak). But Shelley’s not scared.

**SHELLEY**
You could just call, you know.

Poole gives her a long, probing look, then smiles.

**POOLE**
You really like him. Don’t you?
SHELLEY
Of course not.

POOLE
Shelley, Shelley, Shelley...

Poole stands, walks over to her. Poole brushes a strand of hair out of her eyes. She flinches.

POOLE (CONT'D)
Just do your job. Don’t get too attached.

He smiles, then leaves, shutting the door behind him. Shelley sinks into a chair, turns to the computer. The screensaver is an adorable slide show of adorable kittens. Shelley sits, moves the mouse. She goes to her E-MAIL PROGRAM, types in a series of PASSWORDS. She downloads a FILE, opens it: It’s a DOSSIER, with a photo -- JASON’S PHOTO. Shelley gets to work reading about Jason...

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

INT. JASON’S HOUSE – MORNING

Jason’s in his kitchen, standing in front of the refrigerator. There is nothing inside. Not even an egg. He closes the door, thinks for a minute.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS – MAIN STREET – LATER

Jason’s walking down Main Street. The street is filled with residents shopping, eating, hanging out. A good number of people are literally dressed in their Sunday best. Jason’sCEL rings. He answers it.

JASON
(into phone)
Go for Jason.

Jason sighs.

JASON (CONT’D)
I already gave you the number. Twelve. Four. Eight. Three.
(beat)
Can’t you just tell her -- no, I understand. Just... I need to talk to her, okay?

Jason hangs up, frustrated. He stops when he sees Happy’s, the local diner. The place is packed. He opens the door.

INT. HAPPY’S

Jason enters. This is a familiar, comfortable diner. The WAITER, a harried-looking kid with blue streaks in his hair, spots Jason.

WAITER
Table for...?

JASON
One.

WAITER
One?

Jason nods, then notices that everyone in here is also dressed in church clothes. EVERYONE. Except for him.

WAITER (CONT’D)
You’ll have to wait.

Jason sees Linda Fox and Pete Dowland, sitting with a striking older WOMAN, VALERIE DOWLAND (late 40s, gorgeous but motherly) at a corner table. These three are whispering, secretive. Linda spots Jason. He waves, and she finally waves, too.
WAITER (CONT'D)
You know them?

JASON
Sort of.

WAITER
Hey Linda, can this guy sit with you? He came by himself.

Linda hesitates but Valerie nods. Jason awkwardly joins them at their table. He’s immediately put at ease by Valerie.

VALERIE
You must be the new reporter. Jason, right? Pete told me about you. I’m Valerie. Pete’s mom. Good to know you.

JASON
Same here. Thanks for letting me barge in.
(beat)
Sorry I just showed up in jeans. I didn’t know.

VALERIE
What nice manners! Your mother must be proud of you.

JASON
Intermittently.

VALERIE
This is the traditional after church place. There’s no dress code. We’re not freaks.
(beat)
Do you go to church?

JASON
Not really.

VALERIE
You’ll have to try our church. Pastor Bob is a riot.

JASON
I will. Thanks.

VALERIE
So what are you up to today, Jason?

JASON
Well --
VALERIE
Because if you’re not busy, or if you’d like something fun to do, I own a craft store and we’re doing a decoupage class today.

JASON
I’m... not sure I know what that is.

VALERIE
You don’t craft?

PETE
Mom, he’s a guy. Obviously not.

JASON
Actually, I’m going to Tom Ashbless’s after breakfast.

VALERIE
Tom Ashbless?

JASON
He’s really interested in the posters, so I --

VALERIE
The posters? You mean Tom and his conspiracy theorists?

JASON
I suppose. I saw one yesterday. A poster.

LINDA
It’s just a joke.

VALERIE
Only Tom and his friends think otherwise, Jason. Really. Don’t become associated with someone like Tom Ashbless.

JASON
He’s not a crackpot. Leo, Shelley and Linda are friends with him.

Valerie gives Linda a long, measured look. Linda looks back coolly, with no reaction. Jason begins to feel uneasy. Valerie turns back to Jason, suddenly all smiles again.

VALERIE
I’m not saying you should be unfriendly, but... this is a small town, and you have to be careful who you align yourself with.

(MORE)
VALERIE (CONT'D)

(beat)
But enough small-town politics.
Tell me about yourself, Jason. Where
are you from?

Off an uncertain Jason, we

CUT TO:

EXT. ASHBLESS’S HOUSE

The house is completely overgrown, at odds with its neighbors.
As Jason raises a hand to knock, Ashbless opens the door.

ASHBLESS
Glad you could make it, Jason! Come
on in. I’ll show you what I’ve got
so far.

INT. ASHBLESS’S HOUSE

They enter Ashbless’s house and Jason stops. The walls are
COVERED with the posters. BOOKS obscure every surface.
Ashbless takes a pile of books off of a TABLE.

ASHBLESS
Sorry. Research.

Ashbless opens an artist’s portfolio and takes out a
collection of POSTERS, which he lays on the table.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)
I’m the only person in town with
this complete a collection. I got
microscopes, infra-red, UV, the works.
Examine ‘em to your heart’s content.

JASON
Thanks. I will.

Jason sits down and Ashbless leaves. Jason looks at the first
poster, which is the latest one. The artwork is intricate
and colorful, almost like the Fillmore posters of the 60s.
Jason handles the posters carefully. The second one is also
intricate and colorful, clearly done by the same artist. The
phrase here is We have colluded in our own doom. It’s
chilling, especially the way the tendrils of the art entwine
through the letters... Almost as if it’s on purpose.

Jason turns on a powerful desk LAMP and pulls it closer,
already engrossed.

TIME CUT TO:
INT. ASHBLESS’S HOUSE – A PATCH OF GREEN

Under a microscope. The green is hit with a UV light, turning it black.

ASHBLESS (O.S.)

Hey, Jason...

We PULL BACK TO SEE Jason, hunched over a poster. He looks up, startled. Ashbless is standing there, holding his jacket.

ASHBLESS (CONT'D)

You want to grab some dinner?

JASON

What time is it?

ASHBLESS

Seven.

JASON

Shelley’s coming over for dinner at eight. Oh God. I have to cook a chicken!

Jason stands. Ashbless collects the posters, puts them back into the portfolio.

ASHBLESS

Take these with you, to study.

JASON

Are you sure?

ASHBLESS

Absolutely.

INT. JASON’S HOUSE – KITCHEN

Jason opens the oven door, checks a baking CHICKEN, then close the door. CAMERA FOLLOWS him through the house to the living room. He’s spread out Ashbless’s posters on the coffee table. He sits, looking at the row of posters.

JASON’S POV – THE POSTERS

The design of each poster is similar... strikingly similar. The posters are crowded with designs, the words only standing out because they’re brightly colored; so brightly colored that your eye is drawn away from the background.

Jason leans forward, frowning... noticing something.

JASON’S POV – ONE POSTER

The CAMERA MOVES IN on one poster now, racking past the bold phrases into the background where, almost unseen, is a dense
collection of darkly colored DOTS that doesn’t really seem to fit with the rest of the design.

The CAMERA MOVES from one poster to the next, racking into each background until a COLLECTION OF DOTS is revealed.

Jason is perplexed, puzzled. He sits, gazes at one poster. Then... his expression changes.

JASON’S POV - THE POSTER

As he looks at it, the collection of DOTS changes, morphs... revealing a DRAWING -- a DIAMOND, with a STRAIGHT LINE attached to its bottom -- that floats above the background.

Jason stares at it. Gets it.

       JASON
It’s a stereogram.

He grabs a piece of paper and a pen, quickly sketching the symbol. Then he stares at the next poster.

JASON’S POV - POSTER

This collection of DOTS morphs, revealing a CIRCLE with two ARROWS coming out of it.

Jason draws it. The doorbell RINGS. Startled, he gets up, goes to the door. Shelley stands on the doorstep, looking lovely.

       SHELLEY
Hi! Am I early?

       JASON
Right on time. Come on in.

There’s a slightly awkward kiss as Shelley enters the house.

       SHELLEY
Hey, this is nice.

The oven DINGS. Shelley looks surprised.

       SHELLEY (CONT'D)
You actually cooked?

       JASON
I told you I would. I made chicken.

       SHELLEY
I didn’t think you’d go through with it. Well, the least I can do is set the table.
(beat)
Silverware?
JASON
I knew I forgot something.

CUT TO:

INT. JASON’S HOUSE - LATER

Jason and Shelley are sitting at the empty kitchen table, eating chicken with their fingers and drinking wine out of the bottle.

JASON
I’m really sorry about this. I never had to buy my own dishes before, so...

SHELLEY
No, this is nice. Messy, but nice.

JASON
You want to go out in the living room?

SHELLEY
Sure.

Shelley grabs the wine bottle, grins, and goes into the

INT. LIVING ROOM

Where she sits on the sofa. Next to the sofa, on a side table, is a PHOTO ALBUM. Shelley picks it up as Jason comes into the living room.

SHELLEY
Okay if I look?

JASON
Sure.

He sits beside her as she opens the photo album.

PHOTO ALBUM - AS SHELLEY TURNS THE PAGES

JASON as a baby... Jason’s MOM holding him and smiling into the camera... Jason as a toddler, at Christmas, opening his presents... all very normal pictures, until we SEE Jason at about six, standing proudly besides a large BLACK BOX that has gears and levers on it.

Shelley looks at it, perplexed.

SHELLEY
What the hell is that?

JASON
It’s an Enigma machine.
SHELLEY
A what?

JASON
Enigma machine? It’s what the Germans used during World War II to encode their messages.

SHELLEY
Okay...

JASON
I was home-schooled, by my mom. She taught me was how to break Enigma and Lorenz ciphers.

SHELLEY
That’s... unique.
(beat)
What about your dad? Did he approve?

JASON
I never knew my dad.

SHELLEY
Why not?

JASON
(uncomfortable)
I just didn’t.

Shelley closes the photo album and goes to set it down on the coffee table. She stops when she sees the POSTERS. She looks shocked.

SHELLEY
Where did you get those?

JASON
Oh. Tom Ashbless lent them to me.
(beat)
Speaking of codes, there’s a code on those posters.

SHELLEY
Really.

JASON
It’s a stereogram. A --

SHELLEY
Magic eye picture.
(thoughtfully)
You’ve heard of the Rosenbergs, right? Julius and Ethel?
JASON
Sure. They’re the only spies in this country who’ve ever been executed.

SHELLEY
You know why?

JASON
Because they sold atomic secrets to the Russians.

SHELLEY
Because they didn’t make a deal. If they’d made a deal, they wouldn’t have died.

Now Shelley looks at Jason.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)
If you make a deal, you’ll be safe.

Shelley isn’t dreamy and adorable anymore. Now, she’s serious. Jason’s romantic evening has collapsed.

JASON
A deal for what? Shelley --

Shelley touches Jason’s face, smiles at him... almost sadly.

SHELLEY
Jason, I like you. I really do.

JASON
Well, I like you, too.

She stands up.

SHELLEY
So I have to go.

JASON
What? But we just had dinner. I thought we could --

Shelley starts towards the door, Jason on her heels.

SHELLEY
I’m sorry. But there’s something I need to do.

She opens the door, then turns towards him.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)
Would you come over tomorrow morning? For breakfast?
JASON
Will you tell me what’s going on?

Shelley locks eyes with him, then nods.

SHELLEY
I will.

She leans in and kisses him. It’s a pretty good kiss that leaves both of them breathless. She smiles at him.

SHELLEY (CONT'D)
Dinner was wonderful. I’ll see you tomorrow.

Jason watches Shelley leave. He closes the door, lost in thought.

EXT. JASON’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Shelley pulls out her cellphone as she walks. She punches in a number.

SHELLEY
(into phone)
Elias, it’s Shelley. Pick up.

(beat)
Okay. Look... this guy, Jason, I think he’s another one, but he doesn’t know it yet. What’s going on? I need to talk to you about this. Meet me at my house.

She hangs up and walks down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHELLEY’S HOUSE - MORNING

Jason goes up the walk... then stops. SHELLEY’S FRONT DOOR stands open. Jason stares at it for a moment, then he runs up the walk and into the house.

INT. SHELLEY’S HOUSE

The place has been completely TRASHED. Jason, heart in his throat, makes his way through the mess.

JASON
Shelley?

Wary, Jason comes into the LIVING ROOM, which is in complete disarray.

JASON (CONT'D)
Shell --
And there, on the floor, dead eyes staring sightlessly, is SHELLEY. She’s covered in blood. Jason stares, not processing what he’s seeing. He drops to his knees, as we GO TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO
ACT THREE

INT. SHELLEY’S HOUSE - LATER

A shell-shocked Jason sits at the kitchen table, trying to avert his gaze from the destruction. Runciter Security MEN, in their capable blue coats, process the scene.

POOLE (O.S.)
Jason Taverner? You found the body?

Jason looks up to see GARSON POOLE, who we recognize as the man who’d menaced Shelley. He’s wearing a blue jacket.

JASON
Yes. I...

POOLE
I’m Garson Poole, head of Runciter Security.
(beat)
I understand you and Shelley were together last night?

JASON
We met Saturday. I just moved here.
(beat)
I bought a house. And I think I’m late for work.

Jason’s obviously in shock. Poole levels a gaze at him.

POOLE
Tell me what happened, Jason.

JASON
I cooked dinner last night. She... left. Around nine. She wanted me to come over for breakfast, so I did. And then I... found her.

POOLE
When you saw her... did she seem all right? Did she seem like she was afraid of anyone? Worried?

Jason shakes his head.

POOLE (CONT’D)
Did you touch anything when you came in here?

JASON
I don’t know. I might have. I wasn’t thinking --

Poole pulls a BIOMETRIC SCANNER out, sets it on the table.
POOLE
I’ll take fingerprints so we can exclude you if we find any.

Pete Dowland enters, officious in his blue jacket.

PETE
We got a witness. Neighbor saw someone hanging around.

POOLE
Bring him in. Get a sketch and a detailed description.

Pete nods, then leaves. Poole looks at Jason.

POOLE (CONT'D)
My best guess -- home invasion. Guy gets pissed off that there’s nothing to steal and goes ape. She surprises him, he kills her.

JASON
Then why did you want to know if she was afraid?

POOLE
You said she wasn’t. I revised my theory.

JASON
Your witness says someone was hanging around. Home invaders are generally more impulsive. He wouldn’t have cased the place.

POOLE
He would wait to see if anyone was home.

JASON
But he’s just standing there. He’d be more proactive than that. And why didn’t anyone hear anything?

POOLE
I know you’re a reporter, Jason, but you’re not conducting an interview. I am.

Poole stands.

POOLE (CONT'D)
I’ll let you know if I have anything further.
JASON
But --

POOLE
Good to know you, Jason.

Poole turns away. Jason stands there a moment, then leaves.

INT. SENTINEL - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

Sue and Leo and the STAFF (curmudgeonly HERB ASHER, nerdy ED FLETCHER, sports guy CHUCK RITTERSDORF, thin and excitable A.J. SPECTOWSKY and former pageant queen NIKKI THIBODEAUX) are watching Garson Poole on the TV MONITOR. Poole’s giving a press conference and everyone’s riveted. Jason enters, stands at the back.

ON MONITOR - GARSON POOLE

Is sitting in what looks like the biggest, plushest office ever. He sits, casual, hands folded, the perfect commander in chief.

POOLE
-- the murder. We’re doing everything we can to find the person responsible. If anybody has any information about this man --

Poole’s face is replaced by a SKETCH -- a thin, dark MAN. It’s a strikingly detailed sketch and looks computer rendered. Poole comes back on screen.

POOLE (CONT'D)
Please contact us. Because we have a criminal at large, we will be enforcing a level two curfew tonight. We --

A MAN in a blue coat leans in, whispers to Poole. Poole nods, then looks back at the camera.

POOLE (CONT'D)
Citizens of Macon Heights. We have identified the man responsible for this crime. His name is Elias Tate.

The SKETCH appears on the screen again, next to a strikingly identical BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH.

POOLE (CONT'D)
If you have any information about this man, or his acquaintances, get in touch with us ASAP.

Poole’s back. He smiles, a fatherly “I will protect you” smile.
With your help, we’ll catch this man.

Sue turns off the TV and turns, surprised to see Jason standing at the back of the room. She gives Jason a “You okay?” look, and he nods.

SUE
This story is our new priority. Leo, you and Jason get down to Runciter. Talk to Poole. Get whatever you can on this Tate guy.

Leo nods, gets up. He and Jason leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUNCITER SECURITY - DAY

It’s sleek, efficient, state-of-the-art, and it means business. Outside is a bronze STATUE of a man.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - DAY

It’s like the Pentagon, only sleeker and more efficient. It’s also dead quiet; BLUE-COATED SECURITY MEN and WOMEN glide through the building in crepe-soled shoes. At the entrance is an imposing DESK, at which sits a beefy GUARD.

SECURITY CAMERAS click and whirr as they record every square inch of the polished building.

Jason and Leo enter. Jason’s a little awed. He SEES a BANK of SECURITY MONITORS -- digital and in color. The monitors cover every floor, every office, and every bathroom in the building.

Jason and Leo go to the ELEVATOR. Another GUARD ushers them on and presses his THUMB against a BIOMETRIC SCANNER. He punches Floor 4. The doors glide closed.

Jason looks up to see the SECURITY CAMERA, which is focused on him. He shifts, nervous. The elevator dings softly. The doors glide open.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - TOP FLOOR

Jason and Leo exit into a plush LOBBY. Several local TV REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN crowd into the lobby, all wanting a piece of Poole. His assistant, DIANE, is trying in vain to keep them calm.

DIANE
Come on, you vultures --

Diane spots Leo and Jason. Her eyes widen.
Leo dashes past her, Jason on his heels. Leo grins at Jason, pushes open the door to reveal

GARSON POOLE

Standing, arms clasped behind him.

The office wood-paneled, like a stark study rather than an office. There are security cameras in here, too, and one wall is entirely composed of a BANK OF SECURITY MONITORS, which seem to be trained on various parts of Macon Heights. But as he turns, the pictures on the monitors change -- now they mirror the monitors from the lobby.

POOLE
How’d you get past Diane?

LEO
Wind sprints.

POOLE
I gather you’re here about Tate.

LEO
Yes, Sir.

JASON
How did you identify him?

POOLE
We thought we’d have something from casts of footprints in the begonia bed but then we got our big break. He was smoking and dropped several butts. DNA.

JASON
How did you get a PCR done so quickly?

POOLE
Glen Runciter, rest his soul, was a genius. He believed that technology could mimic human nature enough that it could aid us in solving crimes. That extends to forensics.

JASON
So you use a computer to solve crimes here?

POOLE
I won’t bore you with the technical details, but our Turing program can
POOLE (CONT'D)
extrapolate motive, examine alibi,
define the personality of the
killer... all of these elements work
together to help us identify suspects
and solve crimes.
(beat)
Guys, look... I’m sorry to rush you
out of here, but I’ve got a lot of
work to do.

LEO
Thanks, Mr. Poole. We really
appreciate it.

Poole watches, enigmatic, as Jason and Leo leave the office.

EXT. RUNCITER SECURITY - DAY

Jason looks at Leo.

JASON
Do you think Poole can find this
Elias Tate?

LEO
Poole always finds them.
(beat)
So here’s what we’re gonna do. You
go to the library, dig up what you
can on this Tate guy. I’m going back
to the office to get a head start on
this story.

JASON
Don’t we have better resources at
the Sentinel?

LEO
You haven’t seen the library yet.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS LIBRARY - DAY

This is the library version of the House of Usher -- it’s
big, solid, grand. A brick building, requisite vines creeping
perfectly up the front. A town this size has no business
having such a gigantic library.

Jason stands on the steps, awed.

ROSEMARY (O.S.)
Hey, Number Six.

Jason turns to see Rosemary clomping up the steps.

JASON
Number Two.
(MORE)
JASON (CONT'D)

(beat)
Shouldn’t you be in school?

ROSEMARY
It’s progressive so it’s flexible. I work here in the afternoons. IPod money.

Rosemary pushes open the double glass doors and Jason enters the library.

INT. MACON HEIGHTS LIBRARY

The SHELVES are floor to ceiling and every shelf is crammed with books. The DESK is more like a situation room, where dark-suited LIBRARIANS help CUSTOMERS, shelve books, type on the computer. It all seems very efficient.

Rosemary leads Jason to the desk. Linda Fox, working the computer, looks up. She looks different today, in her dark suit. Very serious and smart and capable.

LINDA
(to Rosemary)
Shelving, doll. Juvenile fiction.

ROSEMARY
Yuck.

Rosemary moves off.

LINDA
I saw the news conference. Looks like Poole’s found his man.

JASON
I’m sorry about Shelley...


LINDA
Thanks. What can I do for you?

JASON
I need to find anything I can on Elias Tate. For the paper.

LINDA
Follow me back to Reference.

Jason follows Linda through the library.

JASON
This is the most impressive library I’ve ever seen.
LINDA
The entire history of the town is contained in this library. The founder, Alexander Macon, wanted to make sure the town would be remembered. There isn’t a year, a month, a day that hasn’t been recorded.

Linda leads Jason to

THE REFERENCE ROOM

Which is an open area, softly lit. Wooden CARELS, all stocked with computers, are in the center of the stacks.

LINDA (CONT'D)
All the back issues of the Sentinel are accessible on any terminal... any book pertaining to the history of Macon Heights... school yearbooks... if Elias Tate is in this town, he’s in this room. Figuratively, of course.

(beat)
We take information very seriously.

JASON
Information is power. Shelley was right.

LINDA
Yeah, about that... Shelley gets -- got -- kind of weird about things. She didn’t have the easiest life before she came here. And even though she found a home here, she was still afraid. Not of anyone specifically, but... of being hurt.

(beat)
God, it’s weird talking about her that way.

JASON
I know.

LINDA
Let me know if you need anything.

JASON
I will. Thanks.

Linda leaves. Jason looks around and gets to work. He boots up a computer and starts looking at Sentinel back issues.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE
Jason doing research. He flips through back issues of the paper on the computer... stacks BOOKS on the desk... goes through YEARBOOKS...

It gets later and later. Finally, Jason closes his last yearbook and sits, perplexed.

JASON (CONT'D)

Who is this guy?

Jason walks through the library, towards the desk. But when he turns a corner, he discovers that he's found the RESTROOMS.

He frowns, confused. He turns back, walks down the stacks. He hears something shuffling in the next aisle.

He hurries around the corner and hears THUMP as a book is dropped. Jason jumps, spins and sees that a BOOK has fallen to the floor. He bends down and picks it up, hunts for the right place.

He finds a hole in the shelf and as he's putting the book back.

A FACE

Stares through the empty spot at him.

Jason jumps back, still holding the book. He looks back. The face is gone. Jason stands, heart pumping, not really knowing why he's so unnerved.

And then he gets it.

JASON (CONT'D)

Tate.

Jason SEES a SHADOW duck around the end of the stack. He sprints forward then stops, looking around the corner.

JASON'S POV - THE AISLE

Is empty.

Jason darts from one stack to the other. Each aisle is empty. He hears another THUMP and is suddenly face-to-face with

ELIAS TATE

His wide, haunted eyes are boring into Jason's.

Tate lifts a bony finger to his lips. Shushing Jason. Jason, heart in his throat, stares at Tate.

TATE

I didn’t do it. I didn’t kill her.
Jason just keeps backing away from Tate and Tate follows him.

JASON
A witness saw you.

TATE
There’s always a witness in Macon Heights.
(beat)
Look, I don’t have too much time. Shelley tried to warn you. Okay?

JASON
Warn me about what?

TATE
You found something, right? The hobo signs.

JASON
What are you talking about?

TATE
Christ on a pony, son! You gotta get out of here before it’s too late.

JASON
Get out of where?

TATE
It’s too late for me. But you... maybe you could make it. Poole’s gonna get me, sooner than later.
(beat)
I showed you where to look. Now you look there. Got it?

JASON
I --

Tate gets intense again, focused, furious.

TATE
You look there. Shelley said you were another one. Like Ashbless, and the girl. So you --

Tate suddenly stops, sways, like he’s dizzy. Staring at something. Jason turns. Standing at the end of the aisle is Rosemary... like she beamed in. She looks from Jason to Tate, her eyes wide. Then she turns and runs.

Jason turns back to see Tate, no longer frozen in his tracks, disappear around the corner.
JASON

Dammit!

Jason takes off after him, winding through the stacks, but Tate seems to have disappeared. Jason stops, winded. He looks up to see Linda staring at him, incredulous.

LINDA

Do I really have to tell you not to run in a library?

EXT. SENTINEL - LATER

Jason’s on his cel, pulling open the door.

JASON

(into phone)

Look, can we just cut through the twelve layers of security here? I just want to talk to my -- I need to talk to her.

INT. SENTINEL - CONTINUOUS

Jason’s in the building, going towards his office.

JASON

(into phone)

If you could rush this --

He frowns, looks at the phone. NO SIGNAL. Leo comes around the corner, sees Jason.

LEO

There you are. Linda called, said you looked weird when you left. Did you find anything on Tate?

JASON

Not any information.

LEO

But you found something?

Leo looks hopeful, and completely guileless. Jason trusts him... and he has to tell somebody.

JASON

At the library... I saw Tate. He approached me. Accosted me.

Leo’s stunned.

LEO

Jesus. Are you okay?

Jason nods.
LEO (CONT'D)
So what happened? What did he want?

JASON
He took off. I chased him... but I lost him.
(beat)
He wanted to show me something that would clear him.

LEO
But you didn’t... believe him.

JASON
He said he wasn’t even there. The sketch of him that Poole had? It looked exactly like Tate. How could the witness see him out the window at night, skulking in the bushes, and give a description that accurate? If Tate’s being set up --

LEO
Jesus. You’re a crime-solver, aren’t you?
(beat)
Look, Poole’s a methodical guy. If he says the guy did it, the guy did it.

JASON
But--

LEO
What this town, and this newspaper, have given me... they could give to you. If you don’t mess that up.

JASON
But things are different now. Tate sought me out.

LEO
The reporter cannot become a part of the story. What you’re proposing here... we do not do investigative reportage of this nature. Your obligation is to file the story, Jason. Leave the police work to Poole.

Sue catches up with them, excited.

SUE
They caught him. They caught Tate.
LEO
(to Jason)
See? Poole doing his job. You stay here until we get back.

Leo and Sue leave. Jason stands there, frustrated.

INT. SENTINEL - JASON’S OFFICE - EVENING

Jason’s on his computer. He reaches for a cup of coffee and accidentally knocks a BOOK off his desk -- it’s the book that had fallen on the floor in the library. He forgot he had it.

JASON
I’ve stolen a book from the library.
I’m going to library jail.

He glances at the cover. It’s a book about Glen Runciter. written by “Anonymous.” Jason flips through it. In the center of the book are PHOTOGRAPHS from the 60s. Photos of a young Glen Runciter unveiling his statue in front of the brand-new security building. Runciter with a group of FRIENDS.

Runciter with ELIAS TATE.

Glen Runciter, in his early 20s, is standing with his arm slung around the shoulder of a man who is unmistakably Elias Tate, looking exactly as he looks now. The caption reads, “Runciter and a co-worker.” The date: 1965.

LEO (O.S.)
You still here?

Startled, Jason looks up. Leo stands in the doorway. Jason covers up what he’s doing.

JASON
Did you talk to Tate?

LEO
No. To Poole. They caught him, he confessed, end of story.

Jason nods, not believing a word.

LEO (CONT'D)
Well. You should go home. We’ll work on this tomorrow, right?

JASON
Right.

Leo leaves. Jason waits a moment, then stands up, grabbing his jacket and the book.
INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - LATER

Jason enters. He’s carrying the book. The guard looks up.

JASON
Jason Taverner, from the Sentinel. I need to see Poole.

INT. RUNCITER SECURITY - HALLWAY

Jason’s talking to Poole.

POOLE
He confessed, Jason.

JASON
That doesn’t mean he did it.

POOLE
He confessed. Beyond, that, every single bit of evidence points to him.

JASON
Why wouldn’t you let Leo and Sue talk to Tate?

POOLE
Simple. They didn’t ask.

JASON
I want to talk to him.

POOLE
Fine. I’ll take you back.

Surprised it’s that easy, Jason follows Poole down a long, plush hallway. Poole stops, presses his thumb on the scanner. DOUBLE DOORS hiss open. Jason follows Poole into

A CELL BLOCK

That is different from any other cell block. It looks like a hospital corridor and the cells are glassed in, not barred.

PRISONERS glance up as Poole leads Jason down the row. One PRISONER, an elderly MAN, is lying on his bed, staring vacantly into space. When he sees Jason and Poole, he raises his head and begins screaming. Poole ignores him.

POOLE (CONT'D)
Here we are.

Poole stops and for the first time, we see him disconcerted. He slaps a BUTTON on the wall, next to an INTERCOM.
POOLE (CONT'D)
Poole in 6A. Send a medic. Now.

Jason comes around to see

ELIAS TATE

Hanging by a bedsheet rope from his cell. His sightless eyes
stare at Jason. Poole uses his security card, opens the door.
It sniks opens. Jason steps inside, staring at Tate. His eye
travels to the WALL, where

A SYMBOL

Like the ones Jason found on the posters. The reverse of the
line-and-diamond -- a DIAMOND with a STRAIGHT LINE attached,
only this line is attached at the top of the diamond -- is
hastily carved into the wall.

END OF ACT THREE
ACT FOUR

INT. JASON’S OFFICE - A COMPUTER SCREEN

A home-made web page. The title at the top reads “Hobo Signs.” Covering the page are many of the symbols Jason had found on the posters, and their meanings.

THE REVERSE LINE-AND-DIAMOND

From Tate’s cell. It reads “here we have to take revenge.”

THE LINE-AND-DIAMOND SYMBOL

From one of the posters: “be ready to defend yourself.”

A CIRCLE, WITH TWO ARROWS COMING OUT OF IT

Reads “get out fast.”

JASON

Grabs the photos from the posters and jumps up.

EXT. ASHBLESS’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jason knocks. After a moment, Tom Ashbless opens the door. Jason, excited, launches into his discovery.

JASON

I found it, Tom. The code. On the posters. They’re hobo signs.

Jason shows him the symbols.

JASON (CONT'D)

Gypsies used them as warning signs, and I think someone’s using them to communicate. But there’s more to it. Shelley was at my house and saw your posters, then she got really weird and left.

(beat)

I think she was killed because of something she knew. And Tate was set up for her murder.

He shows the startled Ashbless the photo of Tate.

JASON (CONT'D)

This is a picture of Elias Tate, taken in the sixties.

(beat)

When I saw him, he looked exactly the same. I --
ASHBLESS
Hang on a minute.

JASON
I just needed to tell someone --

ASHBLESS
And you chose me because...

JASON
Because of the posters. I thought... you’d be intrigued.

Ashbless shakes his head, totally at sea.

ASHBLESS
I’m sorry, but... have we met?

Jason stares at him.

JASON
What?

ASHBLESS
I really don’t have the slightest idea who you are --

JASON
Jason. Jason Taverner.

ASHBLESS
Well, I don’t know what you’re talking about, Mr. Taverner. I’m going to close the door now.

Jason can see that Ashbless is a little frightened of him.

JASON
Tom, I --

ASHBLESS
Good to know you.

Ashbless firmly closes the door in Jason’s face.

INT. JASON’S OFFICE – EVENING

Jason’s back in his office. He picks up the Runciter book, flips it open. He tosses it to the ground, frustrated and angry. The book splays, face-first, on the carpet. He bends down to pick it up, but freezes.

CLOSE ON BOOK – THE PUBLISHER

Is Ubik Publishing, but the logo underneath is a BOX with two circles and an X.
Jason turns to the WEBPAGE with the hobo signs. He scrolls down until he finds what he’s looking for

A BOX, WITH TWO CIRCLES AND AN X

Which reads “all the doors.” Jason holds up the Runciter book. The SYMBOLS are EXACTLY THE SAME. He picks up the phone.

JASON
( into phone)
Hi, information for New York City...
Ubik Publishing.

Jason puts the phone on speaker and waits as it rings. Then a RECORDING comes on. It’s a woman’s voice.

RECORDING
(on speaker)
You have reached the Ubik Corporation.
Please listen carefully, as our menu
has changed. For Billing, press one.
For the Ubik Group, press two. For
Ubik Publishing, press three --

Jason presses three.

RECORDING (contíd) (CONT'D)
(on speaker)
You have reached Ubik Publishing.
Please listen carefully, as our menu
has changed. For Editorial, press
one --

Jason presses one.

RECORDING (CONT'D)
(on phone)
For Fiction, press one. For Non-
fiction, press two --

Jason presses two.

RECORDING (CONT'D)
(on speaker)
Your hold time is about three minutes.

A scratchy version of “Love Is Blue” emanates from the speaker as Jason waits.

WOMAN
(on speaker)
Editorial. How may I direct your call?

JASON
Hi. I’m trying to find some information --
“Love Is Blue.” Then --

RECORDING
(on speaker)
You have reached Ubik Publishing. Please listen carefully, as our menu has changed.

JASON
The hell?

RECORDING
(on speaker)
For Editorial, press one.

Jason presses one, then two.

RECORDING (CONT'D)
(on speaker)
Your hold time is about three minutes.

“Love Is Blue.” Then --

WOMAN
(on speaker)
Editorial. How may I direct your call?

JASON
Hi, I just called and you transferred me back to the menu.

WOMAN
(on speaker)
So sorry, sir. How may I direct your call?

JASON
I need to get some information about a book that was published.

WOMAN
(on speaker)
What's the name of the book?

JASON
“Runciter, The Man.” I need to find out who the author --

WOMAN
(on speaker)
Please hold.
“Love Is Blue.”

WOMAN (cont'd) (CONT'D)
(on speaker)
The rights for that book now belong to our subsidiary, Ubik Press. Please hold.

“Love Is Blue.”

RECORDING
(on speaker)
Welcome to Ubik Press. If you know the extension of the party you’re trying to reach, enter it now.

Jason sits there, frozen. He waits. Nothing. He presses a button. There’s a DIAL TONE. It hung up on him.

JASON
Dammit!

He dials again.

DIFFERENT RECORDING
(on speaker)
The number you are trying to reach is no longer in service --

Jason slams the phone down and gets up.

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

A medium-sized airport. Jason’s rental car pulls into the lot. Parks. Jason gets out. He’s on his cel, frustrated.

JASON
(into phone)
Look, I don’t care if you have to put it in code. Just tell her I have to go to New York for a few days. Can you at least do that?

Jason enters the terminal.

INT. AIRPORT

Jason gets to the counter.

CLERK
We’ve got a non-stop flight to New York in two hours.

JASON
That’s perfect.
CLERK
Driver’s license?

Jason hands it over. The clerk works at the computer. She frowns, looks at his driver’s license, then types again. She waits. Then she slides a glance towards Jason.

CLERK (CONT'D)
It’ll be just a moment, Sir.

Jason nods. The clerk leaves the desk. As Jason watches, she talks to a MAN in a DARK SUIT - obviously some kind of a security guy. She talks. The man comes over to Jason.

SECURITY MAN
Sir, do you possess a United States passport?

Jason’s startled. Nods.

SECURITY MAN (CONT'D)
Do you have it with you?

JASON
Well, yeah.

Jason digs through his backpack and finds his passport. He hands it over. The man examines it.

JASON (CONT'D)
I’m just going to New York, though.

SECURITY MAN
Please come with me, Sir.

JASON
Why? What’s wrong?

SECURITY MAN
I just need you to come with me.

Jason starts to protest again but out of the corner of his eye, he sees several SECURITY MEN inching towards him.

JASON
Okay, okay. Geez.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Jason’s in a bare room that contains only a table and a chair. He’s been here for awhile. The door opens. A different MAN enters -- the SUPERIOR.

JASON
I’ve been here for hours --

The man slams Jason’s passport down on the table.
SUPERIOR
How far did you think this would get you?

JASON
It got me to France once --

SUPERIOR
It’s not a very good fake.

JASON
It’s not a fake. It’s my passport.

SUPERIOR
And is this your driver’s license?

He slaps that down, too.

JASON
Yeah. What’s going on?

The man unfolds a piece of PAPER and lays it on the table.

Jason looks at it -- it’s a rough photo of Jason but underneath it is a different NAME -- JAMES BRISKIN.

JASON (CONT'D)
That’s not me!

SUPERIOR
It’s obviously you.

JASON
But I’m not James Briskin. I’m Jason Taverner. There’s some kind of a mix-up here.
(beat)
I can call people who will vouch for me.

SUPERIOR
We know this maneuver. You have agents planted --

The door opens and another security man motions to the superior. He turns back to Jason and levels a gaze at him.

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)
You’re in a lot of trouble.

He leaves. Jason sits there, in total disbelief. The door opens again. The superior enters. He glares at Jason.

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)
If you ever try and enter my airport again, I’ll do more than just sit

(MORE)
SUPERIOR (CONT'D)
you in a room for a few hours. Is that clear?

Jason’s bewildered.

SUPERIOR (CONT'D)
Clear?!?

JASON
Yes. Yes. It’s clear.

The man jerks his head.

SUPERIOR
Out.

Jason walks out to find Garson Poole in the hallway.

POOLE
Let’s go, Son.

Poole puts a hand on Jason’s shoulder and guides him past the security men and out of the airport.

EXT. AIRPORT

They walk in silence for a moment.

POOLE
I pulled a lot of strings to get you out of there.

JASON
But I didn’t do anything!

POOLE
Does it really matter?

JASON
Where are you taking me?

POOLE
Macon Heights. Where you belong.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS - MORNING

Another beautiful day in paradise. Birds are singing, a guy mows his lawn, kids are playing.

INT. JASON’S HOUSE

Jason wakes up, rolls over, groggy. He hears his coffeemaker DING. He goes into the kitchen and pours a cup of coffee. He looks around his house. It’s peaceful. Orderly. He goes to the front door and opens it. The paper’s on the stoop.
Rosemary, helping her mom with the gardening, waves. Jason waves back, opens the paper. There, above the fold, is the story about Shelley’s murder, Tate’s arrest and suicide... and the byline says Leo Bulero and Jason Taverner. Jason reads it, perplexed.

INT. LEO’S OFFICE - MORNING

Leo looks up as Jason knocks.

LEO
Hey, kid. You see the story?

JASON
Yes, I did, but... where did all that information on Tate come from? I looked through the entire library and couldn’t find a thing.

Leo rummages through the mess on his desk and tosses Jason a thick MANILA ENVELOPE.

LEO
You just had to know where to look.

Jason doesn’t seem convinced.

LEO (CONT'D)
Was the story okay? I had to change some of your stuff, you know, to make it mesh.

JASON
No, Leo, it’s okay. It’s fine. I’m... glad to see my name in print.

LEO
I know you were stressed about this, and that’s too bad. But you did a good job. I told Sue that. And I hope you know, Jason... if you ever need anyone to talk to, I’m here.

JASON
Well. Thanks. I appreciate that.

Jason holds up the envelope.

JASON (CONT'D)
Okay if I keep this?

LEO
Sure.
EXT. SENTINEL - DAY

Jason sits down on a bench, takes out a pen. On the envelope, he writes "D.O.T., PO Box 4532, 93618." He pulls STAMPS out of his pocket, puts them on the envelope, then gets up and drops the envelope into a MAILBOX.

EXT. MACON HEIGHTS COMMUNITY PARK - LATER

A really nice park. Kids, playing, the whole nine yards. Jason sits on a bench, just watching.

POOLE (O.S.)
I liked your story.

Garson Poole sits down next to Jason.

JASON
There’s a more intriguing version out there.

POOLE
Ah. You’re still interested in Elias Tate.

JASON
Just satisfying my curiosity.

POOLE
And you’re willing to sacrifice everything for that? A good job, a nice house, a life in this town?

JASON
How am I sacrificing anything by looking into a story?

POOLE
There are powerful people who may not look at it that way.

Jason stares at Poole, realizes:

JASON
People like you.

POOLE
There are things about this town that you don’t understand. Things you’ll never understand.

JASON
Things you don’t want anyone to know. You set Tate up, didn’t you?
Based on your story, Tate’s background is explained.

POOLE

Nobody’s going to believe that.

JASON

Are you kidding? Everybody believes it.

POOLE

Because you made it all up and planted information for Leo to find. Why? What did Tate know? (beat)

And what about Shelley?

JASON

HEY. I liked that girl. You think you knew her, but you didn’t. (beat)

I won’t allow you to cause trouble in my town.

POOLE

What do you want from me?

JASON

Did you also regret making sure I got stopped at the airport?

Poole smiles, noncommittal.

POOLE

I’m giving you an opportunity to become a productive member of the community. If you’d prefer to test me, Jason, you’ll regret it.

Poole stands.

POOLE (CONT'D)

I’ve told you what you need to do to live a good life in Macon Heights. I will protect this town at all costs. From anything or anyone I deem a threat. Don’t become a threat, Jason. Do we have a deal here?

Jason stares at Poole as he echoes what Shelley said to him.
JASON

A deal.

POOLE

Good.

Poole holds out his hand. Jason hesitates, then stands.

He shakes Poole’s hand and doesn’t look at him as he walks off, through the park, where kids play innocently, a COUPLE laughs together as they eat ice cream, and a MAN jogs with his dog. Poole watches Jason go.

VALERIE (O.S.)

You catch more flies with honey.

Poole turns. Valerie Dowland joins Poole.

POOLE

He can be controlled, Val. He just doesn’t know it yet.

VALERIE

When are we going to tell him?

POOLE

When it suits us. Not before.

Valerie surreptitiously brushes Poole’s hand, and we

CUT TO:

INT. JASON’S HOUSE

Jason, still numb, enters. He drops his keys on the counter and then he goes into the living room where he can finally collapse onto the sofa. He buries his head in his hands, drained. He hears something SCRATCHING at the back door. He goes to the door, opens it.

There, on the stoop, is a PACKAGE. Jason opens it. Inside is an unmarked VIDEOTAPE, and a white sheet of paper. On the paper, the “all the doors” symbol.

Jason puts the videotape into the VCR, hits “play.” The tape flutters, grainy. A BLACK AND WHITE IMAGE appears -- it’s a YOUNG WOMAN in her 20s, dressed in a nice dark SUIT from the fifties. She’s standing in front of a huge MAP OF AMERICA. And when she speaks, we recognize her voice -- she’s the voice-over from the teaser. The tape is in the middle:

WOMAN

Would you question it? Or would you just accept your good fortune and turn a blind eye to the possibility that your American dream come true is actually your prison?
She folds her hands, staring directly into the camera.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
As everybody knows, the key is not in getting the American dream. It's in holding onto it. That is the central point of our presentation. In order to control the minds of people, you must control their perceptions, get them to see the world as you do.

JASON
What the hell is this?

WOMAN
We will create a reality that you can manipulate, a people who will participate in the creation of that reality. They will feed it to their own children, and they will fight to protect it. Now... in order to proceed --

The VCR makes a squealing noise. The tape BREAKS.

JASON
No...

He jumps as his CELPHONE rings. He ignores it as he tries to get the videotape out of the VCR, but it’s stuck, broken. He finally grabs his cel.

JASON (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Jason.
(beat; incredulous)
Mom?? What are you doing calling me? It’s not safe --

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - A WOMAN

In her mid-forties, clutching a telephone. This is Jason’s MOTHER, DOROTHY.

DOROTHY
Jason, I just got your message --

JASON
Mom, you have to hang up.

DOROTHY
It’s okay. I’m covered.
JASON
No, you’re not. You’re not covered.
Look, I’m in some kind of trouble.
I’m in this town, and I think they’re trying to keep me here.

Dorothy frowns.

DOROTHY
Jace, where are you?

JASON
Macon Heights. But don’t worry, because I’m going to figure out what’s going on. I’ll get to the bottom of this --

Dorothy closes her eyes, sick.

DOROTHY
Oh, God, Jason...

JASON
Mom, what is it?

DOROTHY
I never told you. All these years... of trying to keep you safe. All the running...
(beat)
That’s where we were running from, Jason. We were running from Macon Heights.

Jason sits, stunned, frozen, in his perfect house... in his prison.

The CAMERA PULLS UP and out of Jason’s house, flying over other backyards as people go about their lives in the perfect town of Macon Heights.

FADE TO BLACK.