

"BACKDRAFT"

Screenplay by

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SHOOTING DRAFT

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - STORAGE ROOM - 20 YRS. EARLIER

Darkness. Then the GLINT of a flashlight. Its beam rocks crazily to and fro across the inside of a small storage room as we hear two children arguing.

OLDER KID

You're doing it wrong.

YOUNGER KID

Shut up.

OLDER KID

You're doing it wrong.

It's hard, but we get a sense of the room in the whipping beam of light. Huge, dark coats lined up like sides of beef on steel batons. Bent, stained helmets hung like African masks.

Beneath them BRIAN, 7, and STEPHEN, 12, are trying to struggle into a pair of the ludicrously massive coats over their pajamas.

STEPHEN

It doesn't go like that.

BRIAN

Who asked you?

STEPHEN

If you do it like that it'll open in the fire. Then you'll get burned and DIE.

The door suddenly opens, morning sunlight roaring in. It's a

fire station storage room full of fire gear. A fireman stands in the doorway, tall, athletic, their father; DENNIS McCAFFREY.

DENNIS
Who's going to die?

STEPHEN
Brian. He's not doing it right, dad.
He never does it right.

DENNIS
(gestures for them to
come out)
Well, let's have a look.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - DAY

The two boys tromp out of the closet. The rubber turn-out boots are as high as their thighs. The ends of the coats drag on the floor. They salute, Brian's arm just an empty sleeve. Dennis kneels down and re-fastens Brian's coat.

DENNIS
Your brother's right. If you don't
fasten these correctly they could
open and you'd get burned.

STEPHEN
And DIE!

BRIAN
You wouldn't let me die, would you,
Dad?

DENNIS
McCaffreys are smarter than fire,
Brian.
(playfully slaps their
shoulders)
How 'bout lunch, huh?

STEPHEN
Fireman shit?

DENNIS

Hey, what's with the mouth? Where'd you grow up, a barn?

STEPHEN
Firehouse.

DENNIS
Cute.

– The station suddenly fills with the BELLOW of an ALARM KLAXON.

DENNIS
(sighs)
Never fails...

A young fireman, ADCOX, appears with the dispatch card.

DENNIS
Big deal?

AXE
Medium deal.

DENNIS
Want to come along, Brian? Watch the old man earn his keep?

STEPHEN
(pissed)
Dad!

DENNIS
You've come along a dozen times, Stephen, give your brother a chance. We'll be back in a few minutes.
(to Brian)
How 'bout it, sport?

BRIAN
Sure!

Dennis scoops Brian up and loads him into the fire engine cab. The other three firemen climb aboard and take their places.

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - DAY

There's a cough of diesel, a crunch of gears, and the engine is pulling out of the station.

DENNIS

Hit the button, Brian.

Brian stamps his foot on the siren button. The red light snaps on, the siren growls and blares, and they're off down the street. Brian turns around in his seat and, at the last instant before the corner, makes eye contact with his older brother.

They stick their tongues out.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY - 20 YRS. EARLIER

The engine howls its way through the city. Brian, sandwiched between his father and Adcox, looks out in wonderment at intersections zipping past like picket fences, at people on sidewalks holding hands over their ears, at the red emergency lights bouncing crazily off shop windows.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY - 20 YRS. EARLIER

Lazy smoke curls out the second story of a commercial block. Medium deal. The engine pulls up and the firemen are jumping off like ship rats. Dennis opens his door, hops down, and pauses just long enough to point a serious finger at his son.

DENNIS

Stay near the truck.

(winks)

And keep an eye out for us, huh?

We're short handed today.

Brian nods vigorously, taking the command seriously. Dennis smiles and is off, dragging a hoseline with his crew toward a doorway they disappear into. Brian climbs down from the cab.

ENGINEER

Don't stray too far, little man.

Brian smiles to the pumper operator. He just wants a better look. And he gets it: Smoke turned evil and dark now, taking on purpose.

EXT. BUILDING - DAY - 20 YRS. EARLIER

There's a level of apartments above the storefronts. As Brian watches, a window opens and out steps his father and Adcox onto a small fire escape. Their attention's on the next window over, out of reach, wrapped in leaky smoke.

Suddenly Dennis climbs up onto the fire escape railing, armed with only an axe, and JUMPS across to the next metal balcony. A ballsy, dangerous move. He kicks in the window, breaks out the frame with his axe, and dives in.

A beat later he reemerges on the balcony with a terrified, smudged little girl. He hands the little girl over the railing to a fireman now coming up the more traditional way – a ladder.

Dennis's face lifts and grins at Brian; dirty, bigger than life, invincible. He winks a wink only possible between fathers and sons and he's gone again, back into the swirling darkness. As Brian stands there, full of love, full of pride, he sees a piece of awning along the roofline crack; releasing a sickly yellow tongue of flame that slinks over the roof. The flame seems to pause, to stare at Brian a beat. Shhh, don't tell anyone. Brian is transfixed, his little head staring up in astonishment.

Nobody else has noticed it.

Brian can see his father and Adcox through the window; probing, looking for the flame lurking just above. Brian starts to call out in a small, hesitant voice,

BRIAN
Dad...

He tries to call louder... But suddenly everything is happening very fast in slow motion:

– Brian can see Adcox testing the ceiling with a pike pole as Brian steps forward, under the power of a flame that beckons him as –

Dennis suddenly THROWS his body against Adcox, knocking him clear just as a flame EXPLODES DOWNWARD from the ceiling fully against him as – All the building's windows BLOW OUT and it's like the sky's erupted for Brian, a burning hailstorm that falls and pelts the ground around him. Plaster, wood, and something metal that cracks against the pavement and spins slowly.

A fire helmet.

And Adcox is coming out the door now, blackened and torn, hopeless tears streaming down his face.

AXE

Get us some backup! We need some goddamn backup!

And, spotting Brian, he runs towards him. And the helmet spins and spins and Adcox keeps running, and the sky is raining fire, and the flame on the roof has risen up now to its full, horrifying size and it's laughing now, laughing at the little boy as the helmet finally stops spinning, and we read the printing on the neck guard.

MCCAFFREY

And Adcox is sobbing and has his arms around the boy, protecting him from the fire, the world, but it's like Brian doesn't see him. He pulls away from Adcox, walks up to his father's helmet, And puts it on.

The scene EXPLODES with a flash as a photographer captures the instant.

INT. SEEDY APARTMENT - DAY

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. BRIAN'S CAR - DAY

Hold on the freeze-frame. Let it become an aged cover of LIFE. The magazine jiggles and rocks and we see now it's sitting atop a box of knick-knacks jostling in the back seat of an aging BMW. There's plenty of other boxes here, a live on the move, and in the driver's seat, BRIAN McCaffrey, now

27. There's piles of empty burger wrappers, Coke cans, and Florida knick-knacks on the dash board; a little blow-up palm tree, a cheesy hula girl emblazoned with "McCaffrey High-End Stereo Sales".

EXT. HIGHWAY - MONTAGE - DAY

Brian and his battered BMW shoot past prairie, cow country, nervous suburbs and finally a sign: WELCOME TO CHICAGO.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Wind tugging at his bangs, Brian stares down at the graves of Dennis and Mary Elizabeth McCaffrey.

INT. CHICAGO GAS STATION RESTROOM - DAY

In a crusty sink he combs his hair, knots a tie around his neck.

EXT. CHICAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING ACADEMY - DAY

Brian walks through its sculpted columns, straightening his tie. He comes to a door, FIRE ACADEMY CHIEF. He takes a deep breath, steadies his gaze, and enters.

INT. FIRE ACADEMY CHIEF'S OFFICE - DAY

The ACADEMY CHIEF sits at his desk going over a file. Out the window can be heard a FIRE TRAINING CLASS in action.

CHIEF FITZGERALD
Is this a joke?

Brian's sitting in the seat opposite.

BRIAN
If it was a joke, sir, you'd be laughing.

CHIEF FITZGERALD
You walked out on this academy six years ago. One week to graduation. You think we forgot that? You think I did?

BRIAN

I want another shot, Sir.

CHIEF FITZGERALD

(beat)

Look, everybody remembers your old man. Being his son, all you had to do was breathe to graduate here. Dead Hero Father Rule. But you blew us off. Why should I take you back?

BRIAN

If you remember, sir, my test scores were in the top –

CHIEF FITZGERALD

– I don't give a damn what your test scores were, maybe you could have been a good firemen, but you had your shot.

BRIAN

I need another one, sir.

CHIEF FITZGERALD

Sorry, but it's out of my hands. Try again next year.

BRIAN

No, it isn't out of your hands or you wouldn't even have met me. If I push you have to let me back in. Dead Hero Father Rule. Sir.

CHIEF FITZGERALD

(simmers)

Even if you graduate this academy, you've still got nine months of probation. That's hard duty, son. If you don't really love this job, it'll kill you.

BRIAN

(rises)

See you Monday. Sir.

As we hear the BLOW OF A WHISTLE

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO FIRE DEPT. TRAINING ACADEMY - GRADUATION DAY

And everybody lined up at attention in dress blues.

CHIEF FITZGERALD

(at podium)

Though the world changes every day,
some things are truly forever:
Courage, devotion, and honor in what
we do. This class is a special one,
for we dedicate it to the three
firefighters that have fallen this
year: Donald Knowlton, Richard Walter
and Michael Petzold...

(silent beat)

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with
pleasure that I certify that Candidate
Class number 322, having successfully
completed all academy requirements,
are hereby graduated to the Chicago
Fire Department.

Candidates and their relatives CHEER and leap to their feet.
Something struggles inside of Brian. He doesn't stand at
first. Another Candidate, TIM, 20, looks at him strangely.
So does the Academy Chief, his eyes finding Brian's. And
Brian's standing slowly now, joining them...

EXT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

An expensive one. We hear a window BREAK.

INT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Through the dimness a file cabinet. An AXE SUDDENLY SLAMS
into it, RIPPING it apart. Files crash to the floor. And a
picture. 1970. Four young guys marlin fishing. Time of their
lives.

INT. BROWNSTONE BEDROOM - NIGHT

And a GREY PUTTY being SLAPPED along the edges of a door.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

A split-level firemen's dive; complete with mounted axes and personalized T-shirts from various engine companies proudly declaring "LADDER CO. 6 – AXE FIRST, HOSE LATER" and "CHICAGO FD, 150 YEARS OF TRADITION UNIMPEDED BY PROGRESS".

Tonight the place is firmly in the hands of an army of recently graduated candidates. A few on the back patio have hooked up a charged hoseline and are taking potshots at balloon targets, each other, the neighbor's cat. Brian and Tim, still in their uniforms, enter from the street. Survey the scene.

BRIAN

Completely out of control.

TIM

What the hell are we waiting for?

As they shoulder their way inside, another CANDIDATE appears holding proudly a fistful of sealed envelopes.

CANDIDATE

Hot off the presses, guys. Station assignments.

Tim and everyone else but Brian eagerly tear into them. Brian nonchalantly shoulders up to the bar.

BRIAN

A beer, Willy!

The barkeep turns and smiles.

WILLY

Well, if it isn't the littlest McCaffrey.

(to candidates with hose)

Hey! You break anything with that you buy it!

(to Brian)

Sorry, there must be something wrong with my eyes. I keep thinking that's

a fire department uniform.

BRIAN

It's in my blood, Willy.

The candidates are ripping open their assignments, exclaiming to each other: "All right! Engine 117! That's a slum! They get cookers every day!". "Oh no, Engine 10, that's a nice neighborhood"...

Willy turns to the bulletin board behind him and unpins a stack of business cards.

WILLY

Really. Well, let's have a look at what else was "in your blood". I always look forward to getting these, they make such a nice collage for the bar... "Assistant Director, Sales, Aspen Snowmobile Tours..."

BRIAN

Didn't offer the kinda growth and challenge I need.

WILLY

Uh huh. And "Pioneer's Pride, Mobile Log Cabins". That was in your blood about six months wasn't it?

BRIAN

Management were pin heads.

WILLY

"Laguna Jamming, Custom Surfboards"?

BRIAN

Coffee sucked.

WILLY

And just this year, "Brian's Sound Spectrum". Your own company even. Big step.

BRIAN

I was ahead of my time.

WILLY

You know, I've got a perfect little spot here for "Brian McCaffrey, Fireman"...

Tim holds an envelope marked McCAFFREY out to Brian.

TIM

Aren't you even curious?

BRIAN

Engine 115, right?

TIM

(opens it, surprised)

How'd you know? These are supposed to be sealed.

BRIAN

Lucky guess.

(winks)

And a case of scotch to a captain in station assignments.

TIM

You crooked son of a bitch. Why 115?

BRIAN

Lots of fires. They promote faster there. Take a look at the last Lt.'s list, half the guys on it came from that battalion. Gotta think about your future, Timmy. 115's the station.

TIM

Ah man, if you're gonna bribe your way into a station, why not 17 with me and your brother?

On Brian's reaction

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A Porsche knifes through darkened streets. The DRIVER, 50, is dressed for success. Pulling up to the brownstone we saw earlier, he gets out and rubs his eyes. Another day in the salt mines.

Climbing the short stairs, he sticks his key into the lock and opens the door. It is the last thing he will ever do.

A THUNDERING EXPLOSION ENGULFS the stoop.

INT. PUB - NIGHT

The place is packed now with girls flirting with the candidates, putting their helmets on, etc. The horseplay around the bar suddenly stops at the sweet sound of a SIREN.

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Everyone steps outside, cocks an ear. And here it comes, the real thing, SCREECHING past in a full-tilt rush. Shouts and raised toasts.

TIM

Hey, that's my cousin's company!
C'mon! Let's go!

As Brian turns, he suddenly confronted by an elderly LITHUANIAN WOMAN.

BRIAN

(surprised)
Mrs. Viatkus...

She grabs his cheeks and rattles off in Lithuanian. Brian can only smile. Then two attractive jean-clad legs step up. JENNIFER.

JENNIFER

Brian.

BRIAN

(surprised)
Jennifer.

JENNIFER

You're back.

BRIAN
You look great.

JENNIFER
Thanks for calling.

BRIAN
Uh... I've been sorta keeping a low profile... the academy... I graduated today.

JENNIFER
Huh.

BRIAN
So... I see you're still in the neighborhood.

JENNIFER
Not quite. Just visiting. I live in Lincoln Park now.

BRIAN
Yeah? What have you been up to?

JENNIFER
I work for city hall.

BRIAN
Really? No kidding.

JENNIFER
What, you think I just dried up and blew away when you left? The world does turn once in awhile Brian, even without your permission.

Just then, Tim OPENS UP the hoseline, DRENCHING Brian.

TIM
Don't want you overheating, Brian!

Brian ducks the stream and PULLS a length of hose near his feet, FLIPPING Tim. Brian JUMPS him, shuts off the hose and pins him to the pavement.

TIM
Okay okay! Uncle!

Brian walks back toward Jennifer

JENNIFER
You've certainly matured.

She turns to leave.

BRIAN
Well, if nothing else, it's nice to
know we can still be friends.

JENNIFER
I don't want to be your friend, Brian.

Another in a series of fire engines HOWL past. Tim grabs
Brian by the shoulder.

TIM
Let's go, man!

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Brian and Tim jump into Brian's car. They shoot blindly down
the street looking for the fire engine, running down red
lights or anything else that gets in their way. Brian suddenly
hits the brakes, SCREECHING to a stop. They roll down their
windows. Far off can be heard the wind-up of a siren.

TIM
(points)
That way.

EXT. STREETS - FIRE ENGINE - NIGHT

SCREECH. They fly around a corner, down a block, and there
it is, lights flashing up ahead. Brian GUNS it, roars up
alongside the fire engine. Tim leans out the window, shakes
a bottle of beer, and lets loose a foamy eruption in the
truck driver's face.

DRIVER
Tim! You crazy motherfucker!

But he's laughing.

TIM
What'cha got?

DRIVER
Box alarm. Walton Ave.

TIM
We'll meet ya.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - WALTON AVENUE - NIGHT

As Brian and Tim pull up two engine companies are already dragging lines toward the rolling brownstone we saw explode earlier. Tim cheers the firemen on like a drive-in movie.

Brian watches the fire with uneasy fascination. Embers whipping into the night, drifting to the ground around him.

One of the engine companies is entering the doorway now. He watches as they willingly crawl into a place any sane person would run for their life from. Jesus Christ. FLASH – Brian turns at the blinding snap of a camera. Several locals are gathered around a parked car, some taking pictures. Brian notices that right away. It takes a beat longer to notice the CHARRED CORPSE stuffed head-first through the windshield. It's the Porsche driver, his legs sticking out at crazy angles. A dog barks furiously at it.

TIM
(also looking at body)
Man. Something sure put a crimp in his evening.

BRIAN
Backdraft.

The brownstone fire quickly transforms itself into noisy clouds of dirty white steam. And one of the firemen is coming back out now, walking toward Brian.

When he's just a few yards away he pulls off his air mask and helmet and we shudder with Brian, because the man is a dead ringer for HIS FATHER.

STEPHEN

Well, look what we have here. Nice costume. Rent it?

BRIAN

I want to thank you for coming to my graduation, Stephen. It was a great inspiration to me.

STEPHEN

So you're going to fight fires now, huh?

He pats Brian's cheeks, leaving behind large charcoal smears.

STEPHEN

(re smears)

Doesn't work on you.

(turns to leave)

See ya around, little brother.

BRIAN

Not likely.

STEPHEN

(turns)

Well, see you're wrong already. Had a talk with Chief Fitzgerald, and we decided in the interest of brotherly love, that maybe you shouldn't be way over on the other side of town. So starting tomorrow, your assigned to company 17. My company.

(Brian's color drops a hue)

One case of scotch, you're getting cheap in your old age, Brian...

And Stephen turns for his own men, Tim staring at Brian as clouds of smoke drift past like ghosts.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - ACROSS THE STREET - NIGHT

A flame LEAPS up into the foreground. Touches a cigarette. The cigarette glows, lingers, then lowers slowly from the

mouth of RIMGALE, fifty-five years old and six and a half feet of solid granite. Wearing a windbreaker and grey slacks tucked into fire department rubber boots, he takes another slow drag. Looks at the body stuffed into the windshield. It's twenty yards away from the brownstone. Stephen looks up as Rimgale drops the cigarette, crushes it with his boot, and crosses the street to the building.

INT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Charred walls hiss and snap in the steamy darkness. Rimgale is there, gloomy in the beam of his flashlight. He crouches down, plays his flashlight along the ruined baseboard.

SHADOW

If you stare any longer Stevie, I'll start charging you admission.

Stephen is leaning in the doorway, watching him.

STEPHEN

Got a cause?

SHADOW

Are the glory boys actually showing interest in Investigation's work? I may have a stroke.

STEPHEN

The glory boys just want to finish their report so they can go home.

Rimgale's flashlight finds a wall socket that he pries loose and holds up to the light. He lowers it, takes in the walls, the room.

SHADOW

They're gonna have to wait a few days on this one.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Tim's talking to his cousin. Brian hangs back, watches the body-bag people load the Porsche driver into a meat wagon. There's a still an audience for this, still stray dogs circling and barking. Brian walks up, looks inside the car,

and sees on a seat the ragged remains of a FINGER.

BRIAN
(to coroner crew)
Hey, you forgot... this.

They're already climbing into the wagon. The driver smiles creepily.

CORONER DRIVER
We always leave something for the dogs.

Brian looks across the fireground, sees his brother walking back to the fire engine. They share a brief, edgy glance.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

A modest one. South-side Irish old fashioned. Brian walks up. There's a little kid, about five, playing with a toy fire truck on the drive.

BRIAN
Hey, Sean. What's goin' on, man?

The kid stares at him without a glimmer of recognition.

BRIAN
It's Uncle Brian. Y'know.

He makes his hand into a talking puppet.

BRIAN
(bandito accent)
"Spinach? We don't need no stinking spinach". Remember?

The kid drops his toy truck and flees inside.

KID
Mom! Mom!

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE

Brian follows, sticks his head in the door.

BRIAN
Hellooo...

A warm looking woman, 30's, HELEN, comes around the corner.

HELEN
Brian?

BRIAN
Hi, Helen. Man, you look great.

HELEN
You look like... Brian.

She gives him a tentative hug.

HELEN
'Bout written you off. How long have you been in town?

BRIAN
Four months.

HELEN
Four months?

BRIAN
I know, I know, Should'a called.
I've been really busy. I joined the fire department.

Helen's expression suddenly saddens.

HELEN
Oh Brian...
(beat)
You guys... you really know how to put each other through it, don't you?

The little kid is peeking fearfully from the kitchen doorway.

BRIAN
That's Sean? Jeez, he's a giant.

HELEN

Yeah, you'd be surprised what three years can do to a kid.

BRIAN

Sean, come on out, man. What, you forget your favorite uncle?

HELEN

Stephen told him you were killed in a hot tub accident.

SEAN

(intense)

Dad was kidding, Mom.

And the kid runs unexpectedly away, angry.

BRIAN

Well that's two things to strangle Stephen for. Where is he, anyway?

HELEN

(beat)

Stephen's not staying here now, Brian. He moved out last April.

An embarrassed sting.

BRIAN

Oh, man, I'm sorry.

HELEN

You guys ought to try picking up a phone once in awhile.

EXT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - MARINA - DAY

A small one on the river. Several boats bob peacefully. Except one. Raised high in dry-dock, it's an ancient fishing trawler. Bachman-Turner-Overdrive drifts up from the galley on badly fuzzed speakers as Brian climbs the ladder.

BRIAN

Hey.

Stripped to the waist, Stephen's bent-over cleaning out the

guts of the inboard motor. He looks confused to see Brian.

BRIAN
I talked to Helen...

Wrong thing to say. Stephen turns back to his work.

BRIAN
...Man, I thought dad's boat was
finally retired to the family
graveyard. Don't you worry about
falling out of this thing?

Stephen straightens up, his forearms smudged with grease. Brian admires the unwashed cereal bowls and peeling deck paint.

BRIAN
I like what you've done with the
place.

STEPHEN
It's comin' along... want a beer?

Stephen tosses him a beer from the fridge. As Brian pops it, he sees the small pile of city-issue gallon size cans in the corner. Armorall, solvent, extinguisher foam.

BRIAN
Been ripping off fire stations?

STEPHEN
It's old stuff Adcox gave me that
the department was going to throw
out anyway. Still good enough though
for this tub.

Brian winces at the music coming out of shot speakers.

BRIAN
Bachman Turner Overdrive?
(looks through music
rack)
...Buffalo Springfield? ... Stephen
Bishop? Oh man...

Brian lifts one of the tapes – an 8-track – and holds it carefully in his palm as if it were a rare and fragile relic.

BRIAN

My God, an actual operating 8-track.

STEPHEN

What, you've never seen one before?

BRIAN

In the Field Museum once.

STEPHEN

It works.

BRIAN

It worked when you were in sixth grade.

INT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - DAY

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - DAY

Brian opens the trunk of his old BMW. It's full of stereo boxes marked BRIAN'S "SOUND SPECTRUM".

INT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - CABIN - DAY

Brian's gutted the speakers and is re-wiring them.

STEPHEN

People actually used to pay you for this?

BRIAN

Millions, Stephen – And sexual favors.

STEPHEN

Sheep don't count.

BRIAN

Yeah? What about Laura –

STEPHEN

That was never proved.

Brian moves over to another speaker.

STEPHEN

Why'd you come here, Brian?

BRIAN

I wanted to know why you messed with my station assignment. I mean, is this really gonna have to one of those big brother – little brother "you broke my GI Joe and I'm still pissed" games?

STEPHEN

(sighs)

What is it with you, man, huh? How do you manage to keep coming up with new and amazing ways to screw up? That scotch bullshit? Am I really supposed to believe you came crawling back home because you suddenly felt heart strings moan for the family biz? You were bankrupt, man.

BRIAN

Hey! You don't know me –

STEPHEN

I know you cold, Brian. The scary thing is, you probably could have faked it for awhile. But you see, in this job there's no place to hide. Isn't like selling log cabins. You have a bad day here – someone dies. And that's not fucking good enough. Want another beer?

BRIAN

So that's it? Big bad brother's gonna ride my ass till I cough blood?

STEPHEN

Big bad brother is going to treat

you like any other probie – that I don't think is going to make it.

Brian staples the last of the audio cord in place and switches on the tape player. The cabin fills with sharp, crystal clear – Stephen Bishop.

BRIAN

There's only so much technology can do.

(picks up his tool box)

Thanks for the beer.

STEPHEN

Thanks for the speakers.

EXT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - DAY

Brian climbs down off the boat. Looks up at Stephen.

BRIAN

Y'know, I told myself a million times I didn't want to be a fireman. I said bullshit to that line about tradition and family legacy. I know I split, and I know how you felt...

STEPHEN

Yeah, you know. You know what it felt like.

BRIAN

I gotta do this, Stephen. I gotta know.

STEPHEN

I think you're gonna find out, Brian. Don't be late tomorrow.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A simple one-room walk-up. A stereo blares Chicago blues as Brian buttons up his uniform in the mirror. He steps back, looks at himself, – and oh man what the hell am I doing...

EXT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - STREET - MORNING

Brian climbs into his car, turns the key – nothing. He gets out, looks under the hood, then SLAMS it down in frustration.

INT. ELEVATED TRAIN - MORNING

A pissed-off Chicago, hauling itself off to work in the morning snap, passes by Brian's window. Tough Midwestern brick. Tough Midwesterners. Heads-down in their 150 year war with a wind committed to pushing the whole damn thing into Lake Michigan.

EXT. EL STATION - MORNING

The train clacking away above him, Brian walks down the sidewalk carrying his fire equipment. He turns a corner and comes on.

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - MORNING

Brian stands there. It's his dad's station. Turn of the century abused. Sooty with stone gargoyles and a pair of faded red doors that suddenly CRANK OPEN as Brian comes up the drive. Fire engine 17 and ladder truck 46, lights flashing, pull out onto the apron.

The fireman sticking his head out of the passenger window is Stephen. One look at the silver trumpet on his collar and we know this isn't Fireman McCaffrey but Fire LT. McCaffrey.

STEPHEN

You're too late, probie.

Tim, in ladder truck 46, waves a small bye-bye as both rigs begin heading down the street.

BRIAN

(chasing)

Goddamn it, Stephen...

Brian bolts full-out for the engine. At the last instant before he falls on his face a fireman reaches out and drags him aboard.

INT./EXT. FIRE ENGINE 17 - DAY

It's Adcox, the fireman from the first scene, now a veteran.

AXE

Why baby McCaffrey, how ya doin'?

The Pumper driver, SCHMIDT, pops in a howling ROCK TUNE as they zoom off.

SCHMIDT

(re Brian to Adcox)

You know this rug rat?

AXE

Know him? I practically raised him.

(Jewish mom)

And he never calls, he never writes...

Brian shouts over the noise to GRINDLE, 35, one more seat down.

BRIAN

I'm Brian.

GRINDLE

I'm sorry.

Grindle sticks his nose out the window, sniffs, then begins buckling up his coat.

GRINDLE

Boys, I do believe we have a barbecue...

As Brian and Adcox fasten up their own equipment –

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

Smoke pours with confused indecision from every window of a five story factory as the pumper and ladder company pull up.

GRINDLE

(staring at confusing
smoke)

I hate it when we gotta fucking go
look for it.

STEPHEN
(to Schmidt)
Call in another alarm. We're gonna
need some back-up.

Everyone begins strapping on air tanks and masks. Adcox drags the rig's suction line to the hydrant. A beautiful illegally parked Mercedes is blocking the way.

AXE
(to Stephen)
Oh these moments do try me...

STEPHEN
(admiring car)
Be gentle.

Whistling to himself, Adcox SMASHES the brass coupling through the passenger window, runs the line through and SMASHES it out the other window before connecting up to the hydrant.

Stephen and Grindle pull hose off the bed and move out. Brian's so jacked up he can't get his air tank on right. Schmidt calmly helps him into his gear.

SCHMIDT
It's only rock 'n roll, kid.

Stephen, Adcox and Grindle are crouched at the door, ready to go. Brian takes a hose roll and runs to catch up when he's cut-off by dazed Latin workers shouting incoherently at him in SPANISH.

STEPHEN
Hey, probie! How 'bout it, huh?

Brian pushes past the workers and takes his position on the hose line. Stephen reaches over and re-adjusts Brian's air tank strap.

STEPHEN
You're doing it wrong.

Stephen eases the door open. Thick smoke rolls sickly out over their heads.

STEPHEN
(to Brian)
Stay beside me.

And in they go...

INT. BURNING FACTORY - DAY

Inside the smoke is like liquid lead. Going by feel, they hump the hose up one staircase after another, crawling on their hands and knees toward a dull red glow. Turning a corner, they enter

INT. BURNING FACTORY - A VAST ROOM - DAY

Totally ablaze. Brian looks up in wonder at the buffeting waves of flame in the ceiling, at the SCREECHING timbers crumbling to the white-hot floor. At the walls HOWLING in bestial agony. It is the most horrifying, and wonderful thing he has ever seen.

AXE
Wash it to the windows?

STEPHEN
No, we'll hit the son of a bitch head on.

AXE
It's gonna flash, Stevie. We gotta get behind it.

STEPHEN
Nah, listen to it. It's a pussy. It'll just steam on us. It won't flash. Go high in the ceiling.

Adcox and Grindle shrug and pull their helmets down tight, expecting the worst. Adcox opens up the nozzle, turning loose a high pressure BLAST OF WATER into the ceiling. The fire SCREAMS in manic anger and HEAVES a cloud of HOWLING steam that WHIRLS back and BAKES them like lobsters. Brian gasps for air as swirling ash batters his facemask. A window somewhere EXPLODES. Somebody shouts. Christ, you can't see anything. Stephen HOOPS in victory.

STEPHEN

(to fire)

I knew you were a pussy! C'mon! Steam us!

(to firemen)

Let's go!

The chase is on! Going for the throat while the fire's confused and defensive, the firemen SCRAMBLE through the boiling cloud. They hit it in the ceiling, in the walls, forcing it back and back. It HOWLS and CLAWS in anger, furiously throwing cinders and broken timbers in their faces. The walls ECHO with its SCREAMS as it retreats to a corner.

STEPHEN

Ya love it, probie?

BRIAN

I'm in heaven, Lt.

STEPHEN

Hook us up to a stand-pipe.

Brian runs back to the wall to hook up his hose roll to the building water system. He goes to unscrew the cap with his hydrant wrench but it keeps slipping off the nut.

STEPHEN

Jesus, how 'bout man, huh? We're gonna loose this!

Brian finally gets it hooked up and runs back.

EXT. FACTORY - OTHER SIDE - DAY

Tim and three guys from his ladder company, come up an extended aerial ladder, CRASH through a window and

INT. FACTORY - DAY

begin HACKING their way toward Brian's company as – BOOM! It's a sudden, shattering vibration that shakes the building to its foundations. Then, a sucking sound: RUSH-RUSH-RUSH... Stephen speaks calmly into his radio handset.

STEPHEN
Hey Otis, is it...?

SCHMIDT
(into radio)
Yeah.

STEPHEN
Goddamn it, where's our backup?
Where's the second-in companies?

SCHMIDT'S VOICE
Sorry, man. John Wayne time.

STEPHEN
(to firemen)
Dig in!

The firemen hesitate. PENGELLY, the Truck Company Lt., looks at Stephen with concern.

STEPHEN
Dig in, goddamn it!

The crews immediately gather in the center of the floor. They turn over tables, chairs, anything to form a barrier. A circling of the wagons. – BOOM! rush-rush-rush – BOOM! Each louder than the last. Stephen and Brian are ducked behind an overturned desk. Adcox and Krizminski clutch hoselines like frontiersmen's Winchesters.

STEPHEN
You're gonna love this.

– rush-rush-rush – CRAAAASH!! On an instant the world comes apart as all four walls of factory windows EXPLODE in a hail of glass. A wave of HOWLING FLAME POURS IN after it, SHRIEKING and HISSING.

At the same moment, part of the floor beside a heavy sewing machine GIVES WAY and a ladderman, SANTOS, FALLS THROUGH, grabbing the edges at the last minute as flames BELLOW UP from underneath. He SCREAMS as his grip loosens.

Grindle leaps to the ladderman's side, grabbing his arms and coat. Brian hesitates just an instant and Stephen SHOVES him

out of the way to back up Grindle.

SANTOS
Help... Oh God...

Adcox's taken the hoseline and is opening fire. Water and flame crash and snarl across the floor in a blood curdling ROAR. It's a thrashing, murderous standoff.

Stephen and Grindle have got Santos but the angle's bad. Blow it now and all three could take a header. Santos is panicking, losing his grip. Grindle bores his eyes into the man's with the calm and conviction of Moses.

GRINDLE
You go, we go.

They may all die, but they won't leave him. He calms a little, hangs on till they PULL him out of harm's way. Adcox continues with the hose as suddenly, everyone HITS the deck as the fire EXPLODES over them, BURSTING their coats into flame. Tim's company opens up their line, WASHING everybody down before CHARGING after the fire. A ladderman, NIGHTENGALE, steps on Brian's back.

BRIAN
Hey!

NIGHTENGALE
Sorry man, I thought you were dead.

Brian, stunned, sits up, his coat and helmet smoking. Stephen seems totally unaffected and is already on his feet and over the top of the barricade, the others backing him as he mercilessly drives the fire back, trapping it finally into a corner. The fire hisses, spits, shakes the walls with its furious anger. But it's all bluster now, the fire's dying.

PENGELLY
(ladder co. captain)
Stephen! BC's on the radio. Says they think a civilian got left behind downstairs.

STEPHEN
Adcox! Take Tim and do a search.

Adcox leads Tim downstairs. Brian looks shaken up. Stephen helps him roughly to his feet.

STEPHEN
Don't you fold on me now, man.

Brian burns at that and shakes his brother's arm off.

STEPHEN
Clear the hose for me.

Brian's walking over to clear the hoseline when he hears it. small voice. Faint. "Help me..."

BRIAN
Hey, I think it's coming from a different staircase.

Nobody hears. – Brian takes off down the other steps on his own.

INT. BURNING FACTORY - DOWNSTAIRS

It's only the fire's ghost here, lazy and slow.

Off the corridor are rooms full of commercial sewing machines. Brian enters one and drops to his knees.

Looks under a table, flashes his light behind a work stand. Nothing. He turns to backtrack his way out when A TONGUE OF FLAME suddenly LEAPS up through the floor in front of him, cutting off the door. Brian lands on his ass as it hisses and giggles and dances unreally in front of him.

I never forget a face, kid. – That fire from childhood. He could maybe force his way through but Jesus, the way it looks at him –

– Brian ROLLS away from it. Looks for another doorway – And ends up in thick smoke. He drops to a crawl, stays on his belly where the air's clear. When he sees it. Behind some furniture. Something flesh-colored. Shit. It's a body. He crawls up closer. It's a woman. Adrenalin pounding the top of his skull off, he grabs her and stumbles back down the hall, makes a turn –

BRIAN
I got one!

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

– And now he's bursting from the building onto a short fire escape, shouting at the top of his lungs.

BRIAN
I got somebody! I got somebody!

A sea of media flashbulbs ERUPTS in his face. The press have arrived in force, crowding the street. Brian pushes through them to a clear spot on the far side of the engine. Two fire paramedics rush over as he lowers the figure.

BRIAN
Is she... Is she alive?

The paramedics suddenly stop their efforts. Turn to Brian.

PARAMEDIC
I'm afraid you're a little too late with this one.

They step aside. Brian looks down. The woman looks strange. Mostly because she's a heavy store DRESSING DUMMY. The paramedics burst into laughter. Brian, looking pale and shaken, turns and walks away. He passes Grindle and Tim, sitting on the pumper's tailboard helping the REAL woman that was found inside.

GRINDLE
Sorry to hear about the mannequin. I heard you two were close.

Photographers have appeared and are flashing the woman. Dizzy, Brian wanders off, tries to help out with the choking clog of singed factory employees before finally turning quickly into

EXT. FACTORY ALLEY - ACROSS THE STREET - DAY

Where he barfs his guts out in private. Doubled-over, one arm on the brick wall for support, we see the raw terror.

The demons rushing out of him.

BRIAN

Shit...

Someone else does too. Jennifer. Dressed now in a long expensive coat, she's standing at the end of the alley with a clipboard. Brian, ashes smeared across an ashen face, spittle on his chin, doesn't notice her.

STEPHEN

(appearing beside him)

You all right?

Stephen isn't pale. He's flushed and buoyant. All this hasn't taken anything from him. It's made his day.

BRIAN

Yeah. Fine. I'm a little busy right now.

Stephen leans against the wall. Folds his arms.

STEPHEN

Y'know, you got an awful short memory for direct orders. I told you to stay beside me.

BRIAN

– C'mon, Stephen.

STEPHEN

– You split the team, man. And what was that crap with the standpipe? You'd think you and a hose were never introduced before.

Stephen turns to leave. Brian yells after him.

BRIAN

Goddamn it Stephen!

STEPHEN

– I told you to stay next to me!

BRIAN

– I was doin' it! I was up there
fucking doin' it. You don't know,
man, you don't know what I did!

STEPHEN

What you did was drop the ball,
Probie. Get that right.

PENGELLY

(from end of alley)

Hey! Stevie! They're callin' for ya.

Stephen turns to walk away. Pauses.

STEPHEN

Bet 30,000 dollars a year and twenty
two days a month off sounded pretty
good twelve weeks ago, huh?

As Stephen leaves, we see that Jennifer's been standing at
the end of the alley, listening to them. She's turns and
walks as Brian looks up. We register his surprise. He watches
her head toward a dynamic-looking guy in his 40s, ALDERMAN
SWAYZAK, surrounded by reporters.

EXT. BURNED BUILDING - FRONT - DAY

SWAYZAK

(to reporters)

Roger, Paul... How's it going, guys?

REPORTER

Another fire in this district. Getting
to be Cinder Alley up here.

JENNIFER

(walking up)

You used that last week.

She hands Swayzak a clipboard.

AXE

(yelling down from
window)

(to Brian)

Hey! Probie! We're still workin'

here, man.

INT. BURNED BUILDING

Brian and the rest of the company rip open the walls and beat the last weak flames in a final flurry of dingy sparks.

The moment the smoke clears just a fraction, cigarettes appear in everyone's mouth. Was it good for you? The talk is easy and obscene, the intense camaraderie of shared danger. Ash clods are thrown playfully back and forth in the afterglow of having taken on the worst there is and walking away one more time.

GRINDLE

(to Adcox)

Stephen man, what's going through that guy's head? Takin' it on in the first room... this shit's happening too often. It could've flashed. Should've flashed.

AXE

But it didn't. Guy knows.

GRINDLE

Guy's lucky.

Adcox sees Brian. Smiles.

AXE

Hey, baby McCaffrey. First one's the clincher. You did okay.

BRIAN

My Lt. might have something to say about that.

AXE

Ah, everybody screws up some, Brian. You're working for the toughest Lt. on the job. Saw him once pick up a probie he thought was moving too slow and throw him into a burning building. It's just bad luck you're family.

BRIAN
(beat)
John, when you're in there... in the
fire... do you ever see...

STEPHEN
(from across room,
interrupting)
C'mon ladies, let's roll some hose...

BRIAN
(to Adcox)
– Never mind.

Brian turns and sees out the window Jennifer and Swayzak standing near Rimgale's red fire dept. sedan.

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

Rimgale walks up to his sedan.

SHADOW
Alderman Swayzak.

SWAYZAK
Investigator Rimgale.

SHADOW
I need to get in the trunk.

Swayzak's leaning on it. We sense the dislike between them. Swayzak steps aside. Rimgale pops the trunk.

SHADOW
Awful expensive shoes to be wearing
at a fireground, Alderman. But then
I guess you haven't been to too many
fires.

JENNIFER
I wanted to talk to you about Alan
Seagrave's death. We still haven't
gotten a fire report from your office.

SHADOW

You'll have an answer as soon as I do.

SWAYZAK

People are asking how a prominent taxpayer got stuffed through the windshield of his own car. They're asking me.

JENNIFER

–The point is, Investigator, you haven't even told us yet if the fire was accidental. We're starting to get the feeling your office is dragging out this case to embarrass the Alderman because of his fire dept. reorganization program –

SHADOW

– You mean his firehouse closing program, – Don't you?

JENNIFER

We'd just be very disappointed if it turned out your office was playing politics.

SWAYZAK

– Because I'm not. I care about this city, and I care about this department –

Rimgale cuts him off with the shutting of his trunk lid.

SHADOW

(calm of a monk)

Alderman, I have a remarkably uncomplicated job. To decide if a fire's arson, and if so catch the pain in the ass doing it. But to be honest, if my methodical investigative methods just happen to muck up the campaign of certain mayor wanna-bees, well, I guess I can't say I sleep any less peacefully.

And he walks back to the burned building.

SWAYZAK

I wish I could just fire the son of a bitch.

STEPHEN

Hey! Swayzak!

Stephen's leaning out of an upstairs window. As the TV cameras turn, he drops down onto a fire engine hose bed and pops right into Swayzak's face with a murderous grin.

STEPHEN

We almost lost a whole company up there, Swayzee buddy. Isn't any back-up since you closed '33. And we really appreciate it, the guys and me. Honest. I know you've got my vote for mayor.

Grindle and Santos start walking for Stephen. Brian's there, following after them.

SWAYZAK

Look Lt., I'm on your side. If there's a problem, please, work with our task force to fix it.

STEPHEN

Oh yeah, your famous task force... three guys have already died this year because of the cuts made by your "task force"...

GRINDLE

Stevie, c'mon man...

Stephen silences Grindle with an outstretched hand. Swayzak leans close, out of earshot of the cameras.

SWAYZAK

You see that funny glow that's starting to blink in the corner of your eye, Lt? That's your career dissipation light – and it just

went into overtime.

STEPHEN

If anybody's light's gonna blink,
it's yours.

Swayzak holds his ground. It's a tense, out of control moment between them. Rimgale turns from his work, watches Stephen with concern. Adcox suddenly inserts himself face-to-face with Swayzak and we see the raw hatred.

AXE

You're in firemanland now, Swayzak.
Do yourself a favor and just walk
away.

Swayzak holds Adcox's gaze, then turns for his car. Brian watches Jennifer climb in beside her boss.

BRIAN

This is your city job?

Jennifer shrugs as they pull away.

INT/EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - LATE DAY

Brian jumps down from the rig as it backs up the driveway. Across the street a middle-aged woman flashes them from the balcony of her apartment.

AXE

That's Franny. She likes firemen.

STEPHEN

Tim, fill out the alarm card.

(to Brian)

Clean the pipe poles, wipe down the
ladders and hang some hose.

Adcox watches Brian and Tim exchange looks. Tim shrugs. Brian sighs and pulls out the pike poles, starts across the floor before freezing suddenly at a murderous GROWL. Brian turns and sees a DOG. Sort of. It has the rib cage of a wild beast, fangs, long greasy hair. It blocks his way, SNARLING with hate.

GRINDLE
That's The Thing. You can't stay
unless he likes you.

Slobber drools out of its mouth as it GROWLS.

BRIAN
Have you guys got something against
dalmatians?

Brian wipes some of the crusted grime from his face, looks
back and forth between Franny and The Thing, and sighs.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - BUNKROOM

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - LOCKER ROOM

Brian enters, strips down his battered uniform, and opens
his locker. The mannequin from the fire SPRINGS OUT, legs
spread. A sign taped to its mouth says: "TAKE ME BRIAN, YOU'RE
MY SUPERMAN!"

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - WASHROOM

Brian and the others scrub the morning's fire off their bodies
in the station shower. Tim keeps filling his mouth full of
water and launching it upward in a stream.

BRIAN
Do you have to do that?

TIM
(pumped)
Could you believe that fire? Man!
First day! There I was, Adcox and
me, pullin' that lady right out of
the fire's fuckin' throat! I love it
here – No surround and drown for
this company. Fighting 17th! Goddamn
Stephen's amazing. You see how he
took that fire by the balls? I'm
gonna be that good some day, you
watch.

Brian compares himself to the praise heaped on Stephen.

TIM

Y'know what Stephen said to me, right when all the shit was coming hard? "You never know till the moment the fire stares you down if you're just gonna do this job or be great at it".

BRIAN

Ah man, is he usin' that line now on you? What, you think he made that little gem up? Jesus Christ, I used to have to listen to my old man use that every morning.

Brian shuts off his shower and walks out.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - BUNKROOM

Stephen sits alone at his bunk, slowly stretching a strained and ruined back. He blows out a long, tired breath, and begins working ointment into an anciently scarred and battered knee.

On the wall is a small glass case full of station memorabilia through the years. There's a two battered fire helmets there, set reverently on velvet. Beside it is a photograph of his father. Grinning. Top of the world. He's wearing a T-shirt proudly stenciled FIGHTING 17th.

Father and son exchange a long, awkward greeting.

In the doorway, Brian stands watching his brother, who not even 40, suddenly seems an old and broken man.

The ALARM KLAXON suddenly sounds. Brian, just in a towel and Tim, in boxers covered with little dinosaurs, dash for the fire pole.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - APPARATUS FLOOR

Tim and Brian slide down and bounce off the floor.

GRINDLE

– C'mon! C'mon! Go! Go!

Brian and Tim rush for their equipment. Grindle grabs their arms.

GRINDLE
No! C'mon! This way!

He hustles them across the apparatus floor, through a doorway, and into the kitchen.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - KITCHEN/DINING AREA

The makings of a meal are laid out on the counter. Brian and Tim come to a screeching halt. The rest of the station is sitting calmly at the kitchen table, watching.

BRIAN
What's going on?

PENGELLY
Dinner, Probies. Get started.

CUT TO:

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - KITCHEN

Tim and Brian, still in their boxers, set down plates of food.

STEPHEN
Better be good.

SANTOS
Or we feed you to The Thing.

Everybody digs in. The table is a craze of half a dozen different conversations. On the TV mounted above on the wall are news shots of Seagrave's body sticking out of the windshield.

Adcox stands and tinks his glass with a spoon for silence.

AXE
Gentlemen, please... As 17's official
toastmaster –

SANTOS
And bullshitter.

AXE
Thank you, Santos. Did I happen to mention that you were cut out of my will?

(company laughs)
I think it appropriate that we recognize the two asswipes – I mean probationary firemen – among us who today were baptized officially into the world of Old Man Fire. First to Tim, who despite being handicapped at birth with a rather dull expression and a really hideous pair of ears, not only took on the beast but pulled from its clutches – assisted by a more famous and brilliant firefighter – me – a kicking and screaming civilian that will probably end up suing us for breaking her fingernail.

(laughs)
And to Brian, who's own contribution was both more beautiful and less likely to sue.

Adcox puts his arm affectionately around the mannequin, seated with honor at the head of the table. Right beside The Thing.

AXE
Y'know, when I heard that both McCaffrey brothers were going to be assigned together here, well, my heart was filled with... a sudden desire to transfer.
(laughs)
So raise a glass, lads. To funny-looking Tim, and the McCaffrey brothers, who despite years of getting on each other's nerves have managed with great effort... to still be pissed off at each other. Gentlemen!

COMPANY
(together, a toast)

Fuck you!

The klaxon suddenly rings. Two bells. The ladder guys groan and get up.

STEPHEN

Bye, boys.

SCHMIDT

(winks)

We'll keep it warm for you.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - BUNKROOM

Dawn lightens the room as Brian slowly opens his eyes and sees in extreme, fish-eyes close-up: THE THING GROWLING at him. Brian turns the other direction and sees Stephen, fully dressed, standing over his bunk.

STEPHEN

Clean the toilets.

INT. APPARATUS FLOOR

Bleary-eyed, the nine firemen line up raggedly in front of their rigs, dressed like shit but for peaked uniform caps they wear only at this moment. Stephen stands before them, does a quick glance up and down the line.

STEPHEN

Okay, company dismissed. – See ya guys tonight at Fitzgerald's retirement party.

They shuffle for the door. As Brian passes,

STEPHEN

You want a ride?

EXT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

Stephen pulls up. Brian opens the door.

BRIAN

Thanks.

STEPHEN

Brian –
(a beat that hangs
there)
– See ya tonight.

INT. RESTAURANT - RETIREMENT PARTY - NIGHT

That's been cleared out for a huge PARTY in full swing. An Irish folk band cuts loose a merciless bagpipe beat. City brass—including Alderman Swayzak – a few reporters, firemen and their families all mix together for this is a RETIREMENT PARTY for the Captain Fitzgerald. Brian enters, seeks out a beer at the bar. Stephen's there, swaying with what is clearly not his first drink of the evening.

STEPHEN

Hey.

BRIAN

Hey.

CHEERS as a one joke gift after another is laid on the Chief. Stephen sees his ex-wife, Helen, dancing with another man. He turns away.

STEPHEN

I gotta change the view...

Santos and Grindle walk up.

GRINDLE

Heard you didn't make the list for
captain, man. I'm sorry...

Stephen just shrugs.

Brian sees Jennifer across the room. She looks great. Refined as she expertly works the room, schmoozing and hugging and calling various politicians by their first name.

As she speaks to one, a waiter offers a drink. As she accepts, a bottle appears over her shoulder and splashes it with red syrup.

BRIAN
(holding bottle,
interrupting)
With grenadine, right?

JENNIFER
When I was twenty.

BRIAN
Oooh, very sophisticated. Having
fun?

Her attention broken, the politico has slipped away. Annoyed, Jennifer leads Brian aside and speaks low, but angrily at him.

JENNIFER
Look, I'm not the same girl who had
nothing better to do than wrap her
legs around you on a Saturday night.
This isn't about fun. I'm working
here.

BRIAN
Carrying Swayzak's notebook?

JENNIFER
Let me tell you something. Martin
Swayzak is going to be this town's
next mayor.

BRIAN
Yeah. Swayzak. Humanity's last hope.
How can you work for that guy?

JENNIFER
Why do you think Marty came here
tonight? Because he cares about your
department. You don't know how hard
he works. You don't know about his
programs helping West Side –

BRIAN
– All I know is that his programs
are getting firemen hurt.

JENNIFER

Bullshit. Marty's plan is only about efficiency. I've got two cousins on the job, you think I'd work for him if I didn't believe in it?

Jennifer instantly cuts off as a well-dressed COUPLE passes and switches stunningly into schmmoze-mode.

JENNIFER

(to man)

– Tom, how nice to see you. I know Marty'll be very happy you came. Thanks so much for the donation.

(to woman)

Marie... how's little Kevin? Really? Seen the polls? This is the year...

They move away. Jennifer turns to Brian and switches just as fast back to their argument.

JENNIFER

– The thing that really makes me angry is the way your union has –

Brian can't help it. He cracks up.

BRIAN

What was that? Oh man, you have picked up a few moves since John Paul II Boulevard.

JENNIFER

Yeah, well I like to think I'm just a little past hanging out on JP II watching the Irish pick fights and Litwalks barf in the planters.

BRIAN

I seem to remember some pretty good nights on JP II.

Brian turns and walks away.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Adcox is talking with another knot of firemen. He's brought a date, SALLY, a hot little number that has a habit of standing on her tip-toes when she talks.

SALLY

(looking at Swayzak
across room)

Yuck, what a scumbag.

AXE

(to Santos)

Fuckin' city transferred Sally three months ago out of parking violations into Swayzak's office. Now I gotta pay my own goddamn tickets and she's stuck with an asshole.

SANTOS

Pay more?

SALLY

(shrugs)

No, but there's more exercise – being chased around a desk.

There's a commotion at the other end of the bar. A group of firemen have gathered around a weekly magazine.

GRINDLE

Aw, I don't believe this shit.

SCHMIDT

Somebody get a shovel! You seen this, Stephen?

As they hold it up to Stephen we see a photo spread titled DARING FIRE RESCUE.

The first photo shows Brian rushing out of the burning building with seemingly a woman in his arms. The second photo shows the backs of Adcox and Tim's helmets as they administered aid to the real woman they saved. The implication is it's the same woman.

BRIAN

What?

TIM

(reads)

"Probationary Fireman Brian McCaffrey, on his very first fire, showed the kind of bravery and courage of a veteran firefighter when he risked life and limb to double-check a burning floor alone, emerging victoriously with Anna Rodriguez, a seamstress for the North Shore Clothing Company... McCaffrey first gained prominence as the subject of a 1972 Pulitzer Prize winning photograph taken at the scene of his father's death..."

The old photo is there too. Brian and his dad's helmet.

GRINDLE

Whadda we gonna do about this?

Stephen glances over the headlines.

STEPHEN

Y'know, I think it's a union bylaw that if a guy gets in the paper – especially if it's bullshit – he owes the company a drink. In fact...

(motions to waiter)

...I'll have a double. On the hero.

The other firemen jump in with drink orders. Dozens of them.

BRIAN

(confused)

What's going on?

Tim shows him the magazine. Brian reads with horror as Alderman Swayzak appears beside him.

SWAYZAK

Brian McCaffrey, right?

JENNIFER

Brian, this is my boss, Alderman
Swayzak.

(to Swayzak)

Brian's a big fan of yours.

BRIAN

Yeah. Big fan.

SWAYZAK

And I'm a huge fan of what you did
to save that woman, Brian.

BRIAN

Uh, I think there's been a mistake.
I didn't save that woman.

SWAYZAK

No need to be modest, Brian.

BRIAN

No, you don't understand, I saved a
mannequin.

SWAYZAK

– That really was incredibly work
you did. You and your brother,
fighting fires together, helluva
image, isn't it? You must feel lucky
to be assigned under his command.

BRIAN

Every little boy's fantasy.

SWAYZAK

Brian, let me come to the point. I'd
like to offer you a job.

BRIAN

I have a job.

SWAYZAK

This one's still with the fire
department. One of our best
investigators, Don Rimgale, is working
on a very difficult, visible case
right now. We think he could use

another pair of hands and you're exactly the kind of guy I want representing us: An authentic hero from a traditional firefighting clan.

BRIAN

Yeah, we got all kinds of traditions – like dying young.

SWAYZAK

Not every job in the fire department comes with a tombstone, Brian. This could be a great opportunity to move... beyond a fire engine.

Brian looks at Jennifer, then smiles at Swayzak.

BRIAN

Thanks anyway, Mr. Swayzak, but fire engines sorta run in my family. Politics don't.

– A man suddenly steps between them to pump Swayzak's hand. Brian shakes his head and walks away. Swayzak shoots a concerned glance at Jennifer. She catches up with him at the buffet table.

JENNIFER

Boy, took you all of thirty seconds to blow that.

BRIAN

C'mon Jennifer, he's just another North-Side jag-off with a mouth.

JENNIFER

Brian, do you always have to be so stupid? Think about your future for once.

BRIAN

So now you suddenly care about my future?

JENNIFER

Look, I didn't mean to take a piece

out of you back there, I just thought you'd call when you came back. You didn't and...

(beat)

Don't blow it just because of this garbage between us.

BRIAN

Hey, sorry if I made you look bad in front of your boss. But I'm not gonna be a poster boy for him, I'm trying to do something here. There's five hundred smoke eaters in this room that do that stuff for real every day. Tell Swayzak to talk to one of them.

Across the room, Stephen's at the buffet, watching Helen dance with her fireman date, the drinks hammering him hard.

PENGELLY

Aw man, how can she dance with that guy?

SCHMIDT

I hate that guy. He's a dispatcher. I hate his voice.

STEPHEN

Whatever...

PENGELLY

I mean, I know women have gotta bang somebody, but why that son of a bitch?

Stephen gives Pengelly an icy, sideways look.

SCHMIDT

Hey Stevie, he's an asshole...

Stephen smiles and pushes off the bar – right for Helen as she dances.

STEPHEN

Uh, Helen, I wanted to talk to you a second about Sean...

HELEN

Stephen, I'm kinda busy here, can we talk about this later?

DATE

How ya doin', Stephen?

STEPHEN

Jackson.

Jackson steers her away but Stephen isn't done yet. He dogs them.

STEPHEN

(to Helen)

What's wrong with right now? He's your son for christ's sake. He's –

JACKSON

Hey, Stephen, what about that dumb ass brother of yours, huh?

STEPHEN

...Yeah?

JACKSON

Savin' a mannequin... How fuckin' stupid can a guy get?

Stephen suddenly PUNCHES Jackson.

STEPHEN

You can't talk about my brother like that...

HELEN

(sighs)

Here we go...

And Stephen PLOWS into Jackson. Another fireman JUMPS to Jackson's aid. And Brian's there, defending his brother, PUNCHING OUT a fireman. The crowd finally pulls the two apart.

JACKSON

You're crazy, man!

STEPHEN
Leave me alone!

AXE
Goddamn it, Stephen, lay off!
(Stephen calms a little)
You stupid dumbshit, you never know
when to fucking quit, do you? You
ever wonder why your career's in the
fucking toilet? Why you're gonna be
stuck a Lt. for life?

STEPHEN
No.
(beat)
I need a drink.

Stephen takes a step for the bar – then suddenly turns and
JUMPS Jackson again. Brian pulls him off and drags him for
the door.

BRIAN
You don't need a drink, man. You
need to get outta here...

As Jennifer watches Brian lead Stephen out the door.

JENNIFER
(to Swayzak)
Ah those McCaffreys... just hate
leaving a party with anyone left
standing...

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Brian leads Stephen toward his car.

STEPHEN
I'm okay... leave me alone...

Stephen pushes Brian away and promptly stumbles to the
sidewalk.

BRIAN
So you got a 'roid going with Jackson

or what?

STEPHEN

Nah, he's nothin'. It's just sometimes... sometimes you just gotta punch somebody out, y'know?

Brian stands there and folds his arms.

STEPHEN

I don't think I can get up.

Brian lends an arm.

STEPHEN

Look, Brian, a photographer. Maybe I can get on the cover of LIFE magazine, too.

BRIAN

C'mon, let's crawl home.

EXT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - NIGHT

Stephen throws an arm over Brian's shoulder as he leads him up onto the boat.

STEPHEN

...Adcox, those guys...they don't get it... it isn't the goddamn promotion... or dad... I'm not my old man, y'know? No fire's gonna get me... I don't give a shit about being a captain... it's just... it's just they don't trust me anymore...

(blows out painful
breath)

...they don't trust me anymore...

INT. STEPHEN'S BOAT

Brian flops his brother on the bed. Unties his shoes.

STEPHEN

If you'd get out of my fuckin' way.
I could take my own goddamn shoes

off...

He clearly can't. Brian slips them off.

STEPHEN

You're such a pain in the ass...
You've always been a pain in the
ass...

There's just a grim wall lamp above Stephen's face.

STEPHEN

Jesus, it's too damn bright in here...
Like a goddamn spotlight... I'm goin'
blind...

BRIAN

(touching light)
This?

STEPHEN

Yeah... too bright...

Brian turns off the dim light. Stephen's breathing deepens.

STEPHEN

They don't know... they don't know
what I hear in there...

Brian tucks the blanket around him.

STEPHEN

...This boat could be okay, huh?...
Take it out weekends... Sean 'n me...

Stephen's voice drifts off into sleep. Brian watches a moment,
the rare look of peace on his brother's face, then leaves.

EXT. FIRE ACADEMY - NIGHT

Dark and still. Brian, carrying a roll of hose, scales the
chain link.

EXT. FIRE ACADEMY - EXERCISE GROUND - NIGHT

Is a practice stand-pipe. Brian counts down to himself, then

rushes the stand-pipe, spinning off the cap with a hydrant wrench and attaching the hose coupling. He does it again, over and over.

EXT. FIRE ACADEMY - DAWN

The sky's gone pink and blue as Brian climbs back over the fence. Adcox, coming out of a donut shop across the street, sees him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET - CHICKEN ACCIDENT - DAY

A truck has JACKKNIFED across the avenue and SPILLED its contents – several THOUSAND baby chicks. They're scurrying everywhere as Brian's company tries to round them up. It's hopeless as the exhausted firemen stuff handfuls of the cheeping cargo into their turn-out coats. There's ghetto kids all around, grabbing at the chicks, grabbing at the fire engine.

STEPHEN
(at kids)
Hey! Knock it off!

Brian stops a beat. Rubs his eyes.

AXE
(smiles)
Maybe you should have gotten more sleep last night.

Brian looks at him. Does he mean what he thinks he means? Tim is coming out of a small store across the street. He hands a small bag of groceries to Adcox.

TIM
This everything you wanted?

Everyone grows suddenly silent.

EXT. WIDOW'S HOUSE - DAY

A fireman's without even saying so, "Petzold" on the mailbox, Engine 17 parked out front. Brian's alone outside, cleaning

the diesel fuel off his arms. Watching a small kid playing with a toy fire truck in the drive.

INT. WIDOW'S HOUSE

Tim and Brian are loading the groceries into the fridge. Stephen and Grindle are fixing a loose cabinet door as Adcox sits caulking a faucet fitting at the kitchen table with a young WOMAN.

WOMAN
(to Stephen)
Can I help you guys at all?

STEPHEN
Nah, we just about got it.

WOMAN
(noticing Adcox's
shirt)
Sally must be finally ironing your shirts.

AXE
It's just new. Couple'a shifts and it'll be as thrashed as the rest.

The sight of uniform is too much for her. Her eyes cloud.

WOMAN
I'm sorry...

Adcox reaches out and lets her weep on his shoulder.

AXE
It's okay...

WOMAN
I miss him... I just miss him,
y'know?...

EXT. WIDOW'S HOUSE - DAY

Adcox stands out at the fire engine smoking a cigarette, lost in himself, watching the little boy play with his toy fire truck. Stephen's followed him out.

AXE

This job... This fuckin' job
sometimes... To buy it trying to go
the extra yard, man, that's one thing,
but to buy it just because there
wasn't any back-up... it's bullshit...

Stephen leans down close.

STEPHEN

Yeah, it's bullshit. So what? Fuck
Swayzak. Fuck 'em all. We don't go
into fires for them. You know that.
Christ, you taught me that.

A beat of understanding between them. Stephen looks back at
the house.

STEPHEN

You know Knowlton pretty well?

AXE

Yeah...

STEPHEN

(beat)

Kind of an asshole, wasn't he?

Adcox can't help but smile.

AXE

Biggest in two battalions.

STEPHEN

(beat, smiles)

We're gonna be okay, man...

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - DAY

As Brian and Tim scrub down the fire engine, the rest of the
company lies sprawled in

THE STATION REC ROOM

Watching a weepy soap. Schmidt walks through and is snared

by the TV's glow. He hesitates. Shares the moment.

SCHMIDT

Is she going to get the divorce?

SANTOS

(sighs with honest
concern)

Hell if I know, man.

A ladderman, WASHINGTON, walks in with a memo.

WASHINGTON

Hey, Pengelly, you made the captain's
list!

Everybody clasps Pengelly on the shoulder. "Way to go". "All right, man". Brian turns and sees Stephen out on the apparatus floor, watching. Watches. Pengelly's younger than him.

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - TRAINING BUILDING/HOSE TOWER - DAY

An expanse of concrete lying out back of the station. Built in one corner is the concrete shell of a five story training building, just wide enough for a stairway and room on each level. Twenty yards away, Brian, Tim and Adcox stand ready beside a pile of coiled hose rolls.

STEPHEN

(looking at watch)

Alright... Go!

Tim picks up a roll of hose, 50 pounds, throws it over his shoulder and runs with Adcox to the foot of the building. There's a fixed standpipe that Adcox ties into as Tim drags the other end inside and up a flight of stairs.

STEPHEN

Go!

Brian lifts another hose roll under his arm and runs for the building.

STEPHEN

That isn't a football, probie. Get
it on your shoulder.

Brian runs up two flights to meet Tim and connect his end. Tim heads down for another roll as Brian drags his up another two flights. It's a bitch.

Sweating, he barrels back down the stairs, passing Tim coming up with another roll.

BRIAN
Having fun, fireman?

Tim flips him off. Brian laughs and sprints for another roll.

STEPHEN
You're not breaking any records,
Brian.

Brian holds it under his arm and takes off. Stephen grabs a roll himself, hoists it to his shoulder and runs alongside.

STEPHEN
Your shoulder. Like this!

Brian lifts it to his shoulder.

STEPHEN
Come on! Pick it up!

They come to the doorway. Instead of stopping, Stephen follows Brian in and runs alongside up the stairs. Without a word spoken it's become a race between them.

Brian's face explodes in sweat. His heart pounds as they go up flight after flight. The hose rolls weigh a 100 pounds. A thousand. Neck 'n neck all the way; grunting, their throats burning, only one flight from the roof Stephen STUMBLES and SCRAPES his leg. Brian pauses. Stephen's already back on his feet.

STEPHEN
Run, damn you!

Brian does, Stephen already gaining on him – getting ready to pass him – when they burst gasping out onto the roof, Brian the "winner" by a nose. Stephen drops his hose roll, sticks his face into Brian's, – And laughs. Unsure, Brian

starts to join in. Stephen stops suddenly.

STEPHEN
Roll the hose.

BRIAN
What, are you kidding? By myself?

Adcox and Tim, down below, have already disappeared back into the station.

STEPHEN
You heard me.

We see now what Stephen apparently doesn't. He was scraped badly, his pant leg torn and leaking dark circles of blood.

BRIAN
What, is it the stairs? Christ, I'll let you win next time.

STEPHEN
(in Brian's face)
You got a problem with drilling, probie?

BRIAN
No, Lt., I don't have a problem with drilling. But let's just have one drill. Not one for the company and one for me.

STEPHEN
Roll the hose.

Stephen turns and walks away. Brian stands there watching him in blind fury, finally exploding.

BRIAN
Goddamn you Stephen, I'm not gonna quit. You hear me!

An awkward beat between them that's interrupted suddenly by the station alarm klaxon. Stephen smiles.

STEPHEN

Well, thank God for fires...

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - HOSE TOWER - BELOW - DAY

Sequence omitted from original script.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SHORE MANSION - NIGHT

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. LAKE SHORE MANSION - NIGHT

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. LAKE SHORE MANSION - FRONT DOOR

Sequence omitted from original script.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENEMENT BUILDING - DAY

Smoke and confusion. A MOTHER is screaming hysterically at Stephen as he jumps down from the engine.

MOTHER
(grabbing his coat)
My baby! My baby's still up there!

BATTALION CHIEF
Hang on a sec, Stevie, we got a
hoseline coming.

Stephen doesn't even pause and enters the building. Brian hesitates a beat, then follows.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - DAY

Where they bomb up a staircase just as a WALL OF FIRE LASHES DOWN, KNOCKING them on their ass. Stephen jumps to his feet with an axe as Brian struggles to get up.

STEPHEN
Don't take that kind of shit from

it! Don't let it know you're scared!
Come on!

Stephen, with just his axe, CHASES up the stairs at the fire, HAMMERING at the flaming boards. The fire retreats into another room, SLAMMING the door shut behind it.

Brian struggles up the stairs. The two of them slide up on either side of the closed door, Stephen cradling his axe like a SWAT team shotgun. The door breathes in and out and something animal scratches and snarls on the other side.

Brian can feel the panic rising in his throat. That thing behind the door, that slobbering, evil thing. It wants out. It wants... him.

STEPHEN
Ready?

BRIAN
Christ, Stephen, let's wait for the
hose team...

STEPHEN
Listen to it, Brian... Jump when I
say... It won't get us.

Stephen HAMMERS the lock with his axe and KICKS the door open. A WALL OF FLAME ROARS out past their cheeks, then BACKWASHES in.

STEPHEN
Now!

Stephen picks up the door, and using it as a shield CHARGES into the flames. Brian tries to follow but the fire WELLS UP, cutting him off. He hesitates. It's that goddamn flame again, leering at him. Daring him. It BUCKS suddenly, DROPPING Brian to his knee. He GROANS in pain.

– And now Adcox and Grindle are coming up the stairs with a hoseline WASHING DOWN the room. Clouds of furious steam bellow out and across the ceiling. Nobody could be alive in there.

Except Stephen. His entire outfit smoldering, he emerges from the clouds like a fucking god, carrying in one arm a

gasping child.

EXT. TENEMENT BUILDING - AFTERMATH - DAY

Most of the firemen have gathered together for post-fire coffee and stories. Brian sits off alone on the fire engine bumper, apart from them. Santos walks up.

SANTOS

They think she's gonna live...

Stephen walks up. Sits down beside him.

STEPHEN

You okay?

BRIAN

I waited... I would have fucking waited...

STEPHEN

That's not what it's about, Brian. The point is there was a kid in there. And what if there'd been two? I went in because that's what I do. It's my way. It's dad's way. It isn't everybody's way.

BRIAN

Dad's way? Where did he tell you that? In a fucking seance?

STEPHEN

You said you wanted to know something, Brian. What did you learn today?

(Brian doesn't answer)

What do you say, Brian, huh? Time to move on?

Brian lingers only a moment before standing.

BRIAN

You're right, Stephen... You win... You're the best, man...

Brian hands Stephen his helmet and walks away.

INT. SWAYZAK'S OFFICE - DAY

There's only six like it in city hall, and this one has a view.

SECRETARY'S VOICE

(on intercom)

Brian McCaffrey on line two for Jennifer.

JENNIFER

I'll take it in my office.

SWAYZAK

(turns to her and smiles)

Go get him.

INT. CORRIDOR/CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Jennifer comes out of Swayzak's office and walks down to her own.

INT. JENNIFER'S OFFICE/INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

– It's a tiny, bleak little rat hole. She picks up the receiver...

JENNIFER

Brian?

We see Brian in his apartment.

BRIAN

I've been thinking about what you said the other night... If the offer's still on the table, I'd like to talk about it.

JENNIFER

(beat)

...Okay. I'll arrange things with your assignment captain.

(beat)

Marty's a good man, Brian.

BRIAN

Yeah...

Brian hangs up. He stares at it a moment, then SLAMS it against the wall.

Jennifer stares at the phone with something almost like sadness.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Stephen drives past the burned-out brownstone that fried Alan Seagrave. He parks in the alley behind, walks up the building, and PULLS OFF a plywood sheet covering a blown-out window.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Stephen walks through the creepy, brutalized silence. Back to where Rimgale had focused his investigation that night. He searches the floor, the wall, looking for something...

EXT. ARSON HQ/FIREHOUSE - DAY

A crumbling one in Chinatown. Brian checks the address on his slip of paper. He stands there a beat, hating himself.

INT. FIRE STATION/ARSON HQ

It's a regular station but for the rear that has been converted into arson squad offices. As Brian approaches the office door he can see Rimgale sitting at his desk. Standing nervously beside it is a fresh-faced, uniformed PROBIE.

SHADOW

(to probie)

...So stop me if I get this wrong...

The fire's almost out... You're upstairs on the unburned floor checking for heat. You've been told by your Battalion Chief, your Captain, by me, not to do anything up there until ordered. But now the itch

starts, and all of a sudden comes the Glory Boy Flash: Hey, I'm a hero. Heroes don't just stand around. So on your own you decided to punch out a window for ventilation. Was that before or after you noticed you were standing in a lake of gasoline?

The kid is dying a thousand deaths of humiliation.

SHADOW

You could've crispered half your company with that little stunt, but more importantly you wrecked the physical evidence I use to prove it's arson. You've made my day longer, Probie. Go home and think about that.

The kid shuffles off hang-dog. Rimgale's angry gaze falls on Brian.

BRIAN

Uh, I'm Brian McCaffrey. Your new assistant.

SHADOW

Your Dennis' kid.
(beat)
I work alone.

And Rimgale walks into his office, leaving Brian marooned in the doorway. Stepping behind a small partition, Rimgale changes his shirt. Brian can just glimpse from where he stands a horrible burn that has consumed most of Rimgale's stomach. Rimgale catches the look.

SHADOW

Are you still here?

BRIAN

Get used to me, Inspector. I'm not going anywhere.

SHADOW

Then go find a corner. I don't want you in my way.

BRIAN

I think we should get something straight here. I was assigned to this office by the city.

SHADOW

Look, I knew your father, he had a helluva reputation on this job. But that don't mean you get any slack. Swayzak sends you down here, okay, I gotta eat you, that's the rules and I got nothing to say about that. But Swayzak or no, you live with me. Step out of line, and I don't care who knows you, I'll swing the hammer.

(beat)

You think you're the first?

Rimgale glances at his watch, puts on his coat, and picks up a small paper bag.

BRIAN

Where are you going?

SHADOW

Pest control.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX SECURITY PRISON - DAY

And the face of RONALD, an unremarkable man in his 40s. Unremarkable but for laser eyes and two heavily bandaged hands. Go wide and find him sitting in an institutional chair – handcuffed, actually – in an institutional hall. A uniformed guard stands nearby as Brian and Rimgale come down the corridor. Ronald smiles upon seeing Rimgale.

RONALD

Shadow.

SHADOW

How ya doin', Ronald. Staying comfortable?

RONALD
Didn't think you'd make it.

SHADOW
Wouldn't miss this for the world,
pal.

RONALD
(looking at Brian)
Who's this?

SHADOW
He works for me.

RONALD
Is he a fireman?
(smiles)
I like firemen.

SHADOW
You like everybody, Ronald.

Ronald's eyes pick up Brian's name on his prison ID badge.

RONALD
Brian McCaffrey...
(eyes light up happily)
Oh this is really a treat. Brian
McCaffrey. Lost a dad to the animal,
huh?

BRIAN
(heating up)
Hey, do I know you?

SHADOW
You don't know him.

RONALD
I know you.

BRIAN
(to Ronald)
What the hell are you talking about
my –

Rimgale silences Brian with a threatening hand.

SHADOW
Knock it off. Now.

RONALD
Tell him about me, Shadow?

SHADOW
Ronald here likes telephones. Used to tape wooden matches to the bell striker and wrap it in cotton. Came up with a whole little thing there, didn't you Ronald? When you got bored, what did you do? You just started making calls... mostly day care centers and retirement homes, wasn't it?

RONALD
Did he tell you how we finally met?

SHADOW
Nobody cares, Ronald.

RONALD
Oh, but it's a good story, Shadow. You're depriving our famous young friend here...

VOICE IN CORRIDOR
Okay... Ronald Bowland...

The cop helps Ronald to his feet and all four are marching down the hall.

RONALD
It was on State Street, right?... Just your basic warehouse torch for the owner. Cakewalk. But the animal... turned on me... 'Ol Shadow here, he shows up – whole place is going like hell – my hair, my hands... could've just let the animal take me – but Shadow, he's a good camper, so he tries to pull 'ol Ronald out.

Guess he didn't notice the tub of phosphorous next to me...

(smiles)

Notice you're still a little shy about rolling your sleeves up, Shadow. Show him your stomach yet?

INT. PRISON - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Ronald in the hot seat before a parole board, Rimgale and Brian on the sidelines.

MAN

...All right, the parole board has received Mr. Bowland's fitness report, his ID-44, endorsement from his section warden... Dr. Norris?

WOMAN PSYCHIATRIST

As supervising psychiatrist I would describe Mr. Bowland's progress as remarkable. Taking into account his disability and the six years already served, I recommend parole.

MAN

Mr. Bowland, do you regret your crimes?

RONALD

Yes. I understand now the pain I caused.

MAN

If released, will you commit these crimes again?

RONALD

I won't.

MAN

Do you consider yourself ready for society?

RONALD

Yes.

The parole board shuffles their papers. It's a done deal.
Rimgale suddenly stands and approaches Ronald.

SHADOW
Sure Ronald? You're ready alright.

RONALD
Absolutely.

MAN
(surprised)
Excuse me, Mr. Rimgale.

SHADOW
Excuse me.
(to Ronald)
What do you do with little girls?

A tortured look comes over Ronald's face. He's holding back.
From the paper bag, Rimgale suddenly tosses a burned baby doll in his lap.

SHADOW
What do you do with them, Ronald?
Huh?

Rimgale then lights a cigarette lighter in Ronald's face.

RONALD
(smiles)
– Burn them.

SHADOW
And old ladies?

RONALD
– Burn them.

SHADOW
And the world – the whole world.

RONALD
(smiles)
– Burn it all.

The parole board stares, stunned. Rimgale stands.

SHADOW

See ya next year, Ronald. Gotta go.

EXT. THEATRE BUILDING - DAY

A pre-war theatre closed with a sign: UNDER RENOVATION – OPENING XMAS 1991. DAVID BENTON, mid-forties, climbs out of his car and walks to the entrance with some rolled-up blueprints.

INT. THEATRE BUILDING - DAY

Benton walks through the vast theatre and up to a beautiful Art Nouveau office door: DAVID BENTON, PRIVATE. He goes to insert his key. Drops it. As he reaches down, we see a tiny wisp of smoke SUCK back under the door. Benton sniffs, as if he smells something, then shrugs and inserts his key. It'd have been a good story if he'd lived longer.

The moment he pushes the door open It EXPLODES OUTWARD in a ROARING FIREBALL.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THEATRE BUILDING - SUNDOWN

Later and engine companies have already knocked down the building fire as Brian climbs out of Rimgale's red sedan.

SHADOW

(opens trunk)

Hey kid, c'mere – At least make yourself useful.

He starts handing Brian handfuls of equipment cases. Loaded down, Brian follows Rimgale into the building.

INT. THEATRE BUILDING

Fire crews are at work in here, including Engine 17 at the other end of the theatre. Brian's surprised to see them, his eyes locking briefly with Stephen's. An ENGINE COMPANY LT. walks up to Rimgale.

ENGINE LT

We were lucky with this one. Could've taken out the whole complex, but the explosion blew out most of the flame. Good for us.

(looks to body)

– Not so good for him.

"Him" is our previous owner, David Benton, just his hands and a leg showing from under the collapsed door. Rimgale crouches beside it.

SHADOW

Turn this over.

Brian does. The corpse's keys are still in the lock. So's Benton. Blown with such force he seems fused with the door. On the door's edge Rimgale notices a small patch of melted, sticky goo. With his penknife he scrapes a sample and seals it in a glass vial, stands, and walks into the office.

INT. THEATRE OFFICE

BRIAN

What do you want me to do with –

Rimgale, now inside, silences him with an outstretched arm.

SHADOW

– Shhh.

BRIAN

(after a beat)

What are you listening to?

Rimgale doesn't answer. His eyes drift over the scorched walls as he speaks softly to them.

SHADOW

You sneaky little son of a bitch...
Hide and seek... Come on, tell me
what I want to know...

He scratches at some soot. Smiles and lifts a small hand recorder.

SHADOW

(business-like into
recorder)

Heavy smoke stains observed in entry
room. Demarkation line high. Fire
never got hot enough here to cook
soot off. It started somewhere else...

(walks down hall)

Less soot here. More heat.

(they enter back room)

And very little soot here.

(to Brian)

Get that couch out of the way.

Brian pulls it aside. The lower third of the wall is
completely untouched by soot.

SHADOW

(to himself)

So you were happy here. Warm and
cozy and in no hurry...

(into recorder)

Soot high, clean unburned wall low,
indicates slow burn in thermal
balance.

(to Brian)

Find me some glass.

BRIAN

Glass?

SHADOW

Do we have a language barrier here?

Glass.

There's some on the sill of a blown window. Brian hands a
shard to Rimgale, who turns it over in his palm.

SHADOW

(into recorder)

Glass found in ignition room is in
small, thin pieces, indicating
explosion. Lack of discoloration
indicates a long, slow burn. Explosion
must of come after a slow burn.

(shuts recorder off)

You little tease... What were you up to you little bastard, huh? What made you that mad?

(then, an idea)

Or scared.

(switches on recorder)

It started in this room. Took its time, hung out... but the air ran out. It couldn't breathe. So it was snuffed. But it wasn't dead... still all that trapped heat, lying low, waiting for some sucker to open the door and give it that one gulp of air...

BRIAN

– Another backdraft.

Rimgale turns to the wall, a section where the plaster is severely damaged. He probes with a penknife.

SHADOW

Finish coat burned away... Severe spawling of rough coat...

Rimgale follows the damaged wall down – down – to a melted wall socket.

SHADOW

That's our ignition point. Dig it out. Carefully.

Brian chops it out from the wall. Rimgale crouches down, peels back the melted faceplate and examines the wires. The copper tip is severely melted. Rimgale sniffs the plug.

SHADOW

(into recorder)

Temperature in this room was about 2000 degrees, but copper wire in outlet is melted, which requires 5000 degrees. An accidental short in the plug could of created a spark of 7000 degrees, hot enough to melt the wire and start a fire.

BRIAN
No it couldn't.

Rimgale shuts off the recorder. Stares down Brian.

BRIAN
I mean you'd be right – with normal wire. But that's gauge ten in that plug – industrial stuff. Who knows why they put it in here – but it won't melt at less than 12,000 degrees. And no natural spark short of lightning gets that hot.
(Rimgale just stares)
In another life I was in high-end electronics.

Rimgale opens a plastic bag and puts the plug inside.

SHADOW
(into recorder)
Have outlet analyzed for any traces of flammable accelerants.

Rimgale stands and walks out.

BRIAN
Don't mention it.

INT. THEATRE BUILDING - NIGHT

Brian follows Rimgale down from the office into the vast theatre. Walls hiss and spit. Brian's surprised to see his former engine mates there, tromping and crunching their way through broken glass, their flashlights like dancing fireflies. Tim passes by.

BRIAN
Hey, Tim.

Everybody turns at the voice and the air suddenly chills.

TIM
(distant)
Brian.

SHADOW
(to Brian)
Check the wall for burn patterns.

And Rimgale's off to another room. Brian turns and looks at the wall. It's endless.

BRIAN
(to Tim)
So, you surviving without me?

TIM
There's no replacement 'cause of your boss' cuts, if that's what you mean. If someone else goes out on an injury we're really screwed.

BRIAN
Swayzak's not my boss.

Silence. Brian looks over the wall. A dirty puddle separates him from it.

GRINDLE
(to Brian)
Ooooh, like the tie. Love the tie.

BRIAN
Grindle, scrape down that wall for me, huh? I would myself, but the tie 'n all, y'know...

Grindle stares at him a beat, then wordlessly steps into the muck and pulls free a section of wall, dropping it on the ground in front of Brian. Santos and Grindle look at each other.

SANTOS
Uh, Brian, if you're lookin' for smoke patterns, there's some good ones over here.

BRIAN
Yeah? Where?

GRINDLE

(as Brian walks over)
Little to the right... further...
further... Right behind there. Hey,
could you hand me that pike pole?

There's a pike pole leaning against the wall. Brian pulls it
aside. SPLASH – The pole had been supporting a small, sagging
piece of ceiling that instantly collapses, dumping twenty
gallons of murky, putrid black water all over Brian's civvys.
Nobody laughs.

GRINDLE
Sorry, maybe that wasn't it after
all.

Stephen appears around the corner. Sees what's happened.

STEPHEN
That's just about enough, guys, okay?

SCHMIDT
See ya around, Brian.

They leave. Brian stands there, humiliated.

AXE
(to Brian)
What the hell's the matter with you,
huh? You're steppin' in the shit
again. You could've done it. You
don't want this.
(the suit 'n tie)
Wake up, kid.

Brian burns with shame and anger as Adcox walks away. Stephen
hands Brian a towel.

STEPHEN
Here. Dry yourself off.

Brian snatches it from him. Glares at his brother.

STEPHEN
Look, you are sorta making yourself
fair game.

BRIAN
Thanks for the insight.

STEPHEN
Brian, look –

BRIAN
Just leave me alone, okay?

Brian walks away. Stephen calls after him.

STEPHEN
Hey, Bri... Rimgale's okay. I don't
get half the shit he's talking about,
but then everybody says the same
thing about me. Who the hell knows?

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Helen, Stephen's ex-wife, is sitting at her kitchen when she
looks up suddenly at a strange sound coming from the roof.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - ROOF - DAY

On the short, sloping roof, Stephen stands hammering a shingle
back into place. Helen sticks her head out the dormer window.

HELEN
Stephen, what are you doing here?

STEPHEN
Fixing my roof.

HELEN
It's not your roof anymore.

He stops and tosses the hammer aside. Looks at his watch.

STEPHEN
Where's Sean?

HELEN
He's got piano lessons.

STEPHEN
Oh yeah? How's he doing?

HELEN

He's going to be a fireman.

STEPHEN

Give up, babe. You can't fight it.
Believe me, my mom tried...

HELEN

(beat)

Stephen, you gotta stop just showing
up on the roof like this.

STEPHEN

I just wanted to, I don't know, not
exactly apologize for the other night –
especially since I don't remember
much of it –

HELEN

– You remember.

STEPHEN

Yeah... I just thought I should say,
I don't know, something.

HELEN

The great communicator.

STEPHEN

Sorry I hit Jackson.

HELEN

He deserved it. He was born deserving
it.

STEPHEN

He treats you okay?

HELEN

Okay.

STEPHEN

I treated you better.

HELEN

You treated me like shit.

But she smiles.

HELEN

You want some coffee?

STEPHEN

Coffee? Nah, I gotta go.

HELEN

What's wrong, Stephen?

(looks at her)

C'mon, you only beat up the roof
when something's on your mind.

(beat)

How's Brian doing?

STEPHEN

He's out.

HELEN

I know he's out, but how's he doing?

STEPHEN

Y'know, I treated him better than
any other probie I ever had. He
probably hates my guts, but I did
the best thing for him. I made him
finally look in the mirror.

HELEN

Ah Stephen, that's what this is really
about, isn't it? You always have to
be right.

STEPHEN

Hey, I'm the first one to admit when
I'm wrong.

HELEN

Yeah? When was the last time?

STEPHEN

In a fire? Never.

(beat)

Look, I'm his brother. I care about him, y'know? He was going to get himself killed. Maybe not today, maybe not in a year, but it would've happened. And I couldn't – I just couldn't...

HELEN

You can't keep being his father...

Stephen sighs deeply.

STEPHEN

You know what I realized today? I can't remember my dad's face anymore. There's pictures of him staring at me everywhere I go, but the guy behind them... he's gone...

He sighs and hops down from the roof to the driveway.

STEPHEN

I'll see ya around, Helen.

She watches him as he walks lonely up the street.

INT. CITY MORGUE - DAY

A Lab Tech, RICCO, leads Brian and Rimgale through the autopsy area till they come on two corpses lying side by side covered in plastic.

RICCO

Okay, Alan Seagrave and Donald Cosgrove...

If you say so. Brian's stomach does a half-gainer as he's confronted by two hideously charred bodies.

RICCO

...Both deaths due to close encounters with stationary objects; office door for Mr. Cosgrove, '89 Porsche for Mr. Seagrave. No non-relevant traumas. No significant blood toxicology. Attitude of both trajectories

consistent with explosions.

Brian is discreetly avoiding his gaze, whistling quietly to himself as he looks over specimen jars on a shelf.

RICCO

They ran the residue you scraped from both crispers' front doors. It's a combination of plumber's putty and rayophene gum. Burns almost completely away when you light it.

SHADOW

Putty? On both doors?

RICCO

There's something else kinda interesting...

Ricco lifts Benton's charred shoulder. Underneath we see some of his clothes that have melted and co-mingled with his flesh.

RICCO

See this?

A credit card has been fried right into Cosgrove's skin about where his back pocket should have been.

RICCO

Guess he didn't leave home without it.

Ricco erupts in a honking laugh, then switches instantly back to a business tone.

RICCO

Anyway, down here, take a look...

SHADOW

McCaffrey, hold this for us.

BRIAN

Uh, I don't think that's in my contract...

SHADOW

I just re-wrote your contract.
C'mere...

With supreme reluctance Brian pulls the crisper's head and shoulder away from the table.

RICCO

Jesus Christ, he isn't gonna try to sell you insurance, lift him.

Brian gathers the torso up and hoists him higher.

RICCO

(to Rimgale)

See that patch of shirt? We wondered about the discoloration so he ran a spectro. On a lucky shot we picked up some traces of Trychticholorate. Nobody around here had ever heard of it.

SHADOW

Trychticholorate? Alright, it's an absorption catalyst in toxic waste accidents. It's pretty rare, they stopped making it a couple'a years ago.

RICCO

Probably got in Cosgrove's clothes in a gas state from the fire.

SHADOW

What the hell was it doing in the fire?

RICCO

That's your job.

At that instant, Cosgrove's eyes OPEN and his body SIGHS. Brian DROPS the body in shock and backs away, stunned.

SHADOW

I asked you to hold him, not feel him up...

INT. RINGALE'S CAR - DAY

Rimgale's FD sedan. Brian is still wringing imaginary guts off his hands. Rimgale tosses an open fire chem book in his lap.

SHADOW

Read.

BRIAN

"Trychtichlorate is a binary structured –"

SHADOW

– Go to the bottom. Under heat properties.

BRIAN

"During heat episodes of 2000 Kelvin or higher, Trych breaks down and dissipates. Will consume magnesium".

SHADOW

Ever burned magnesium? It's so hot it takes water molecules and BAMM!

Rimgale CLAPS his hands next to Brian's head, STARTLING him.

SHADOW

Son of a bitch tears 'em apart just to eat the oxygen. Wouldn't take much at all to melt ten gauge wire. Problem's burnt magnesium leaves a powder trace – unless you could find something that would eat its residue.

BRIAN

Trychtichlorate. Then Swayzak can announce Seagrave was a murder.

Rimgale looks at Brian. He's getting tired of this.

SHADOW

Look, it isn't proof, okay? Someone

may have put the chemical in the outlet, but we found it as a vapor in Cosgrove's clothes.

BRIAN

And the putty around the door?

SHADOW

Even if it was used to seal the air off, that doesn't explain why someone would go to the trouble of a backdraft. A gun's a helluva lot easier

BRIAN

But the right guess on this is arson.

SHADOW

I don't guess.

BRIAN

Some people say you don't do much of anything when it comes to this case.

SHADOW

I don't work for them, either.

INT. ARSON HQ - DAY

Brian's sitting at a desk. He's finishing up a huge paper clip Tyrannosaurus. The phone RINGS.

BRIAN

Arson.

JENNIFER

Straightest answer your department's given me all week.

We see Jennifer's calling from her office, she's busy signing papers brought to her and okaying campaign posters as she talks.

BRIAN

Hey.

JENNIFER
How's it going?

BRIAN
Boss and I are up to about three
words an hour.

JENNIFER
(to secretary)
Green committed to a thousand.
(to Brian)
There's another fund-raising party
tonight. Marty'd really like you to
come.

BRIAN
I don't know, I'm kinda swamped here.

He tosses a paper airplane.

JENNIFER
I could use a date.

BRIAN
Yeah? Well, maybe I can fit it in...

RIMGALE'S VOICE
McCaffrey! Come here!

BRIAN
(into phone)
Call ya back.

Brian hangs up quickly and walks back into

INT. ARSON HQ - ANOTHER ROOM - DAY

Rimgale's there, crouched excitedly beside a trash can that's
lid's been sealed closed. He tamps a piece of putty on the
rim and backs away.

SHADOW
Take the top off. Go ahead. Take it
off.

Brian walks over and RIPS OFF the lid. – Instantly a tongue

of flame SHOOTs straight up past his head and BLOWs out.

BRIAN

Jesus!

Rimgale's grinning like a little kid.

SHADOW

That's it! Oh, that son of a bitch, he's different, goddamn it! You see what this tells us, huh? Our killer doesn't love fire!

BRIAN

What?

SHADOW

(pulls out file)

I got it after we talked to Ronald. Torches. Want to fry the whole goddamn world. But the fires that killed those guys never really burned up much. – The burns were all lit in outlets surrounded by double firebreaks in the walls. And he made his burns backdrafts.

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BRIAN

But he killed these guys.

SHADOW

But he could have killed everybody there. The firebreaks kept it from spreading in the wall. The backdraft blew out the flame. That's it. That's the reason.

BRIAN

What reason?

SHADOW

Why backdrafts. Whoever fried Seagrave and Cosgrove went to a helluva lot of trouble to make sure they died by fire, but also made sure the fire

blew itself out.

BRIAN

That's why the sealant on the doors...
So what have we got, a torch with a
conscience?

SHADOW

No, we have a stone killer trying to
make a point.

BRIAN

Are you going public with this?

SHADOW

No. Do that and I guarantee you'll
scare him off. I don't want him
running away.

EXT. PARTY BOAT - NIGHT

A Latin band cuts loose as beautiful people mill about against
a beautiful Chicago skyline. An AIR HORN blows, and suddenly
the skyline is MOVING. We're on a huge, private party boat.

EXT. PARTY BOAT - NIGHT

Brian's leaning on the boat railing watching the passing
parade of rich and beautiful. Across the sea of champagne
and brie, he spots Jennifer talking with her boss, Swayzak.
He has his hand on her back.

Jennifer spots Brian. She smile, detaches herself and walks
over.

JENNIFER

Hi.

BRIAN

(eyes on Swayzak)

Hey...

(beat)

So are you dating your boss or what?

JENNIFER

If you weren't at least the 300th

person to ask me that, I'd probably
be pissed.

(beat, sighs)

Boy, you sure know it's a man's world
sometimes...

BRIAN

Sorry.

(beat)

Are you dating anyone?

JENNIFER

You think that's really any of your
business?

BRIAN

Well, you did invite me here.

JENNIFER

Marty did.

(beat, smiles)

But I wanted you to come to.

Swayzak suddenly appears with his entourage.

SWAYZAK

Mr. McCaffrey...

BRIAN

Nice boat.

SWAYZAK

It isn't mine.

(to photographer)

Let's get a picture.

Swayzak swings around and puts his arm cheesily around Brian's
shoulder. Another staffer slaps a SWAYZAK FOR MAYOR sticker
to Brian's lapel. Jennifer rolls her eyes to Brian. I'm
sorry... Snap.

SWAYZAK

(seeing someone else)

Larry!

(sotto to Jennifer)

What does he do again?

Swayzak leads her off in pursuit. Left alone, Brian turns to the railing, stares off at the passing city. You can hear the wind-up of a siren.

And there it is now, an engine company zooming along Wacker Drive. Something digs and kicks inside of Brian as he watches it disappear.

JENNIFER
How's the job going?

She's appeared again beside him.

BRIAN
Okay.

JENNIFER
Boy, Rimgale's as slow as a snail, isn't he?

BRIAN
No, he's more of a dinosaur. Guy's not a dummy, though. He's juggling alot of balls on this one.

JENNIFER
Yeah, but it doesn't take Albert Einstein just to figure out if these guys were killed by accidents or not.

BRIAN
Jesus, give him a break. There isn't enough proof yet to go public. Sure, we found some chemical shit we think somebody dumped in the plugs to torch 'em, and we've maybe figured out why backdrafts, but you can't rush this stuff. Not 'till it's locked.

JENNIFER
But Rimgale's probably going to come around to arson.

BRIAN

In a dinosaur kinda way, yeah.

BAMM!

Both of them look up sharply. A woman drunk out of her mind has tipped over in her chair. She laughs, her fellow tablemates laugh, everybody laughs. Jennifer takes Brian by the arm in the opposite direction and smiles.

JENNIFER

Save me.

EXT. PARTY BOAT - NIGHT

The band's completely cut loose now. A wild percussion rhythm that has everyone on their feet dancing like madmen. Brian and Jennifer stomp and sweat and shake and giggle through hair crazily askew. The lakeshore is twinkling and wonderful as it slips past. The drums beat faster and harder and the only thing that isn't moving now is their eyes – eyes locked on each other.

EXT. ARSON HQ - NIGHT

Sweaty, flushed with the evening and a few drinks, Brian and Jennifer pull up in her car.

BRIAN

Thanks for the invite.

JENNIFER

Got anything to drink in there?

BRIAN

Oh, there might be something stashed away for emergencies.

INT. ARSON HQ/FIRE STATION

The regular engine company's gone to bed and the arson squad's packed in for the night, leaving the apparatus floor quiet and dim as Brian and Jennifer enter.

Brian leads her back past the engine and arson sedan to the rear where Rimgale has his offices. As they walk Jennifer's eyes drift up to the old sculpted parapets, the press-tin

ceiling.

BRIAN

This is one of the oldest fire stations in the city. Lotta tradition locked up in here. What do you think?

JENNIFER

Homey.

BRIAN

See that trap door up there? That used to lead to the hay loft when they had horse-drawn engines. It was pretty different then... but kinda the same, y'know?

JENNIFER

Do you miss it?
(he doesn't answer)
You seem like you do.

BRIAN

When I came back, I knew more than anything else that I wanted to be a fireman.

JENNIFER

Then why did you quit?

BRIAN

I wanted to be a good one.

INT. ARSON HQ - BACK OFFICES

They walk into the back arson offices. Brian pokes through a few drawers, one or two shelves. Finally he lifts a squat, specialized fire extinguisher. The bottom has been hollowed out, leaving room for a fifth of bourbon.

BRIAN

Old firehouse trick.

He pours her a glass. Jennifer takes a generous sip of her's, turns, brushes past him and breathes,

JENNIFER

So show me your fire truck.

INT. ARSON HQ - APPARATUS FLOOR

Brian escorts Jennifer along the side of the behemoth.

BRIAN

Well, our specimen here is your basic standard issue piece of primary suppression equipment. This area is the pumping panel, which controls the rate of liquid insertion into the hose.

JENNIFER

Uh huh.

Brian lifts a narrow, tapered straight-bore nozzle.

BRIAN

This is a six inch playpipe, cast bronze to keep it firm during hard flows.

(picks up another item)

This is our pipe extender, used in forward lays...

(moves on)

This is our hard suction line... Our adjustable insertion nozzle...

(comes around back of trunk)

...And this is the hose bed.

Beat. The air cracks between them. And is brushed aside. In an instant they're all over each other. Tangled lips and gulping breaths. Jennifer abruptly breaks it off

– And looks mischievously up at the hose bed, with its long curling rolls of soft cotton.

Brian doesn't remember this precise scenario being discussed at the academy, but he improvises admirably, popping up onto the hose bed and offering a gentlemanly hand to Jennifer. As they tumble into the soft folds

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH-RISE - NIGHT

Engine 17 roars up, lights flashing, to a high-rise. As the crew jumps down Tim trips and falls flat on his face.

GRINDLE

Jesus Tim, if you're going to kill yourself at least wait till the fire, it's better P.R.

INT. ARSON HQ - HOSE BED - NIGHT

Jennifer unbuttons Brian's shirt.

JENNIFER

Tell me about the playpipe again...

She pulls the shirt off his shoulder as we

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH-RISE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Engine 17 walking up to a frazzled security guard in the lobby.

STEPHEN

Where is it?

SECURITY GUARD

Don't know. There's alarms going off on three different floors.

STEPHEN

Wonderful.

They climb into the elevator.

INT. HIGH RISE - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

It's cramped on the way up with the bulky coats, helmets, hose rolls, and the tangible nervousness that always goes with this kind of fire. The elevator Musak plays 101 Strings

version of "Tie A Yellow Ribbon 'Round The Old Oak Tree".

TIM

How do we know if the floor's going to be on fire?

STEPHEN

If the doors open and it's hot, don't get out.

INT. ARSON HQ - HOSE BED

Brian pulls off Jennifer's stockings. As she kicks it away...

INT. HIGH-RISE - UPPER FLOOR - NIGHT

The elevator stops. DING. The door opens. No howling blaze, not even any noise, but enough hanging smoke that you can't see your hand in front of your face.

They fan out gingerly onto the floor, looking for the fire. Hide and seek in a white fog bank. Everybody stops and listens. Slowly, carefully, they feel their way through the haze.

STEPHEN

It's here.

On cue something snakes past behind the walls, whispers and whines and shivers up and over them and then is silent. Grindle attaches a hoseline to the building standpipe.

GRINDLE

These high-rise gigs give me the creeps.

AXE

Let's wait for a back-up, Stephen. We're early on this one, it hasn't even broke out yet. We're one short as it is with Brian gone.

But Stephen's on the hunt now. Obsessed.

STEPHEN

Want to learn something?

TIM
Yes sir!

Stephen and Tim take the lead, their axes gripped like shotguns. Grindle backs them up with a charged hoseline.

STEPHEN
Adcox, go with Pengelly and check the other side.

AXE
It isn't safe, man. Don't go splittin' us up. Not with this one.

STEPHEN
– What the hell's the matter with you? You always check the other side. I haven't got time for bullshit right now, okay? We got a job here.

AXE
Let me take the lead, Stephen...

STEPHEN
Goddamn it Adcox! Just do your fucking job!

Adcox folds. With a stricken look on his face he takes his crew down the other way. Stephen and Tim slowly feel their way.

CRACK

Everybody SPINS around in terror. Nothing. Something inhuman giggles down ahead of them. Stephen smiles.

STEPHEN
(like a mantra)
Oh, you're so very sly, but so am I...
(to Tim)
...Listen to it... you can tell when a wall cracks which way it's gonna jump... you can hear the doors breathe if they're hot...

Tim looks confused. He doesn't get it.

They come to a side door. Stephen runs his hand down the jam, feels for heat. Then he steps back, takes a deep breath, and CRASHES the door down with one AXE BLOW. Quiet inside.

INT. ARSON HQ - HOSE BED - NIGHT

Brian and Jennifer are into the rhythm now, breathing deeply. On the wall above them are framed photos of dead firemen. Watching.

INT. HIGH-RISE - SECOND DOORWAY - NIGHT

Stephen concentrates on the sound of the fire above him, – then abruptly turns and CRASHES down another door.

INT. ARSON HQ - ALARM KLAXON GOES OFF - NIGHT

Brian and Jennifer lie in a tight embrace, enjoying the moment, the lull, as suddenly the lights SNAP ON and an alarm klaxon BELLOWS. Firemen are coming down the pole now.

JENNIFER

What's going on?

They frantically climb into their clothes. The firemen haven't noticed them as they climb aboard. They've STARTED THE ENGINE.

JENNIFER

What are they doing?

EXT. ARSON HQ - STREETS - NIGHT

And before either of them realizes it, they're suddenly pulling out into the street and WAILING off down the block. The wind's wild in their hair, the siren deafening, the flashing red lights blinding staccato, And Jennifer loves it. She kisses Brian fiercely, he lets out a war whoop lost in the blast of air, and together they hold each other as the night screams past and...

EXT. HIGH-RISE - NIGHT

Engine 17 pulls up into the parking lot of the high-rise

fire. Firemen leap out of the cab and rush around behind to pull off lengths of hose from the bed. As the folds curl away the fireman is stunned to see a woman's stocking come out with it.

With equal shock he looks up and watches as a disheveled and grinning Brian and Jennifer climb calmly down out of the bed.

BRIAN
Excuse us.

INT. HIGH-RISE - TIM'S DOOR - NIGHT

Stephen and Tim creep along the hall.

STEPHEN
(to Tim)
Lotta smoke, but it isn't rolling...
that means it's hiding... staying
sleepy... one of these doors...

Tim's come to one.

STEPHEN
(to himself)
Easy... no hurry... you're not going
anywhere...

Stephen BANGS down another door. Sticks his head in to check. A little woodpecker toy dips up and down in a glass of water.

Tim readies his axe before his door, gathers his courage as Stephen comes out of the room he was checking. Sees Tim lifting his axe.

STEPHEN
Did you check the door for heat,
Tim?

Tim doesn't hear. The axe is already up.

STEPHEN
Tim?

Tim's committed now, coming hard at the door. And Stephen

sees it for just an instant – Small tendrils of smoke edging lazily around the door – then being sucked back in.

STEPHEN

Tim!

He rushes for Tim as Tim's axe SMACKS the door and a whine behind it builds and roars and howls and Tim's all follow-through now, hitting the door with his shoulder as

The door EXPLODES OUTWARD, HURLING TIM against the opposite wall and for an instant he's okay but he freezes in terror as A SHRIEKING TONGUE OF FLAME SHOOTS OUT THE DOORWAY and Grindle shouts in horror and opens his hose line as the flames wrap Tim like a jealous lover as Adcox hears it and screams,

AXE

Oh God! Oh God no!

And Tim's screaming now too, because his helmet, his mask, his face, it's all melting and Grindle dives suicidally at the monster, BLASTING it with his hose as Stephen ignores the flames and puts his arms around Tim as Grindle DOUSES them both, killing the flames.

The monster rolls wounded back into the room, into the air shafts as Tim whimpers incoherently, sliding down the wall as Stephen tries to help but oh God you can't tell what's face and what's mask and helmet anymore.

Grindle looks back where the fire came from. There's a corpse in there, burned and lying between two doors.

Adcox rushes to Tim's side sobbing and it's the end, the end of the goddamn world...

EXT. HIGH-RISE - NIGHT

Brian and Jennifer are having the time of their lives, when suddenly a group of firemen pass by rushing someone on a stretcher to an ambulance and Brian sees – sweet Jesus – it's Tim. Jennifer turns away in horror. They load Tim into the van as Adcox and Grindle jump in to ride along. To hold his hand.

Stephen watches the ambulance disappear out into the street.

Frustration and fury tear at him as he takes off his coat and slams it to the ground. He kicks it, kicks it till his strength's gone. He turns, his wounded eyes finding Brian.

INT. HIGH-RISE - NIGHT

Rimgale walks down the smokey corridor. The charred civilian is there, sitting in the short stretch of hall between two blown doors. Through the haze Rimgale sees Stephen crouched in the interior room, picking at the debris. Lost in himself.

STEPHEN

Hey, Stevie.

Stephen stands and looks around the room, seemingly unaware of Rimgale. He walks wordlessly straight out past him, his eyes streaming with tears.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Brian shoulders his way through the emergency room. He passes a small alcove full of vending machines. Adcox is there, sipping a paper cup, leaning against the machine in deep anguish.

BRIAN

Is he...

AXE

He's alive.

INT. HOSPITAL ICU - NIGHT

Further down the hall is ICU. Grindle and Santos are there, sitting outside the room, raw and weary. Grindle nods to Brian. Everyone's still stained and smudged from the fire.

Everyone but Brian.

Brian looks through a door window into the room. There, surrounded by doctors and physicians, lies Tim. He's been cut out of his uniform. Gauze bandages everywhere. As a pair of forceps peel some away Brian glimpses what used to be a face, now only reds and browns and leaky whites. He turns away.

BRIAN
Do they think he'll pull through?

GRINDLE
They're not saying.

BRIAN
I should have been there.

NIGHTENGALE
None of us should have been there,
Brian.

Voices rise down the hall. Turn to shouts. It's Adcox and Stephen, tearing heartbreakingly into one another. Brian can't make out the words but it's ugly, emotional. Abruptly it ends and Stephen emerges from the alcove, walking toward them upset.

BRIAN
You had to do it, didn't you?

Stephen's got other things on his mind.

STEPHEN
...Not now, Brian.

BRIAN
Had to take on another fire bare-handed, huh? Had to be fucking myth man in there instead of looking out for your probie. Is that what happened? Is it, Stephen?

STEPHEN
I had that fire. He didn't listen!

BRIAN
He didn't listen? He was a fucking candidate! He was your responsibility. He shouldn't have been there in the first place, Stephen.
(beat)
You burned him.

STEPHEN

Fuck you.

Brian grabs his arm.

Stephen SNAPS and roughly PUSHES Brian, knocking him against the wall. Brian comes off it in a flash and is all over Stephen. They go down and it's all thrashing and shouting now. A horrible, endless draw. Grindle and Santos are in it, pulling them apart, holding them up against opposite walls.

Both brothers glare at one another, tears filling their eyes. Brian shakes Grindle off and walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARSON HQ - BRIAN'S DESK - MORNING

Brian sits staring blankly. A newspaper drops in front of him. FIRE DEPT. SAYS IT'S MURDER. Rimgale stands above him.

SHADOW

Goes on about how the break was made through the discovery of "chemical traces" and a "behavioral link". Oh, and Swayzak's quoted saying the chief investigator is closing in on the torch and expects an arrest "any time".

Brian's eyes wince closed.

SHADOW

Get your stuff and get out.

INT. JENNIFER'S OFFICE - DAY

She's pouring some coffee as Brian bursts in.

JENNIFER

(surprised)

Brian. What's wrong?

BRIAN

You told Swayzak about our arson lead. It's all over the fucking news.

JENNIFER

I didn't know it was a secret. There aren't supposed to be secrets between the city and its investigators –

BRIAN

– Bullshit! You knew what I told you wasn't ready for the papers –

JENNIFER

Will you please keep your voice down, there's people –

BRIAN

– You could have scared the son of a bitch off. We may never bust him now. All for a couple's political points.

JENNIFER

I was doing my job.

BRIAN

(grabs her arm)

Yeah? And just how much of all this has been "doing your job"?

JENNIFER

(shakes it off)

Let me ask you something, do you really think Marty had you assigned to arson because of your firefighting skills? Who the hell are you kidding? I was there, remember? I saw you and your brother –

BRIAN

Leave Stephen out of this –

JENNIFER

Oh yeah, he's the real fireman.

(beat)

Who are you? Just another probie working for Swayzak –

BRIAN

– I work for the city.

JENNIFER

You knew what we were asking you to do. Don't suddenly pull out a conscience now. The fit isn't right.

Swayzak appears in the doorway. He looks haggard, as if he hasn't slept. There's something haunted in his eyes.

SWAYZAK

Mr. McCaffrey... Keeping busy?

BRIAN

Yeah. In fact, I just dropped off a letter to the Times explaining how yesterday's arson announcement was a fabrication by your office. They loved it. And you know what? You were right, my family background in firefighting gave it weight.

JENNIFER

Oh Brian...

Brian shoulders his way past Swayzak and walks out.

INT. HOSPITAL - TIM'S ROOM - NIGHT

Brian walks up to Tim's room. Stephen's sitting there, ragged looking. Inside the young probie lies wrapped in tubes and gauze and years of wasted promise. An EKG beeps, a respirator hisses, and Brian gulps down something heavy in his throat.

STEPHEN

He's gonna live. Maybe not much else, but he's gonna live...

Stephen walks away.

EXT. ARSON HQ - MORNING

As Rimgale gets out of his car a limousine pulls up. Swayzak opens the rear door from inside.

SWAYZAK

Inspector.

SHADOW
Alderman.

INT. SWAYZAK SEDAN - DAY

Cruising through traffic. Swayzak is disheveled, unshaven, fidgety. A man who hasn't slept and had a few drinks before the one he's pouring now. He offers one to Rimgale.

SHADOW
I usually have breakfast first.

Swayzak apparently doesn't.

SWAYZAK
When are you going to catch the prick
that's doing this, Don?

SHADOW
"Don?"

SWAYZAK
Don't you have any leads at all?

SHADOW
No Marty, I don't.

For the first time, Rimgale sees real fear on Swayzak's face.

SHADOW
We still haven't found a connection
between the victims.

SWAYZAK
Jesus, open your eyes! Seagrave,
Cosgrove, and now Holcomb – fried
in a goddamn high-rise!

SHADOW
Holcomb? I didn't know the name of
that victim had even been released
yet.

The sedan stops back at arson HQ. They'd gone around the

block.

EXT. ARSON HQ - SWAYZAK SEDAN - DAY

Rimgale opens the door, climbs out, lingers.

SHADOW

Is there a connection between them,
Alderman?

SWAYZAK

Just catch the son of a bitch.

The door shuts and Swayzak roars away.

INT. ARSON HQ - BACK OFFICES - DAY

Rimgale walks back into his offices. He's surprised to see
Brian there working at his desk.

SHADOW

What the hell are you doing here?

BRIAN

I'm finished with Swayzak. I'll do
whatever you want me to do. I just
want to help catch the guy that burned
Tim. You gotta give me another shot.

Rimgale stares at Brian, appraises him.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH-RISE

A CLOSE UP of Rimgale POPPING the molding around the door
frame of Holcomb's burned office. Underneath can be seen
traces of the same white residue from the other fires.

SHADOW

I thought 'ol Marty was acting a
little strange... And he's right.

Rimgale rubs the white powder between his fingers.

BRIAN

Backdraft?

Rimgale stands at the spot in the short hall where the body
lied between two doors.

SHADOW

The backdraft was set somewhere in
there. It fried Holcomb when he opened
the inner door. But the outer door
held... and waited for Tim...

Brian steps into the inner office.

SHADOW

So find me the fire.

Brian begins searching, probing. He finally stands. Defeated.

SHADOW

You're thinking too much of the
building and not enough of the ghost.

Brian's eyes don't understand. From Rimgale's coat comes a
plastic flask. He pours out of it a liquid onto the floor
and lights a match.

SHADOW

In a word, Brian, what is this job
all about?

BRIAN

Fire.

Rimgale drops the match.

WUMP. A small flame explodes to life.

SHADOW

It's a living thing, Brian. It
breathes, it eats, and it hates.

The fire's climbing a wall, chewing a corner.

SHADOW

The only way to beat it is to think
like it. To know that this flame

will spread this way across the floor
not because of the physics of
flammable liquids or heat convection,
but because it wants to.

FWUMP. It darts west. Licks the ceiling. The fire purrs and
hisses. Stretches luxuriously and attacks savagely.

SHADOW

Some guys on this job, fire owns
them. It makes them fight on its
level. But the only way to truly
kill it is to love it a little, just
like Ronald.

Brian stares at the flame. A goblin reaching out for him... –
Woosh! Rimgale hits it with a fire extinguisher. In an instant
the goblin is gone, the genie in the bottle.

VOICE

What the hell are you guys doin'?

A young woman's entered.

SHADOW

We're the fire department, lady.

WOMAN

Well color me stupid, I always thought
the fire dept. put out fires.

SHADOW

(to woman)

You work here?

WOMAN

Till yesterday. What do you think
the odds are that a non-refundable
ticket to Paris survived this?

BRIAN

Somewhere between zero and no way.

WOMAN

Shit. What a mess.

SHADOW

You seem real broken up about Mr. Holcomb.

WOMAN

Jeff Holcomb? The Darth Vader of tax accountants? He was a sleezeball. Hopefully a sleezeball that carried some insurance.

BRIAN

Go talk to the building owner.

WOMAN

He was the building owner.

BRIAN

Our book lists the owner as Dekom Trust.

She looks at him like he's the dumbest human she's met all week.

WOMAN

Don't investigators come in adult size?

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - OUTSIDE STEPHEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - STEPHEN'S STATION OFFICE - DAY

Stephen's lying sprawled on his bunk, his hands pressed over his eyes. There's a voice outside the door.

GRINDLE

Stevie? Rimgale's here to see you.

STEPHEN

I'm busy.

GRINDLE

He just wants to –

STEPHEN

– I'm busy goddamn it, okay?

A beat, then Rimgale himself enters.

STEPHEN

What, they don't knock on your planet?

Rimgale takes in Stephen's room, the half empty bourbon bottle. Without a word, Rimgale walks over and pours it out. He sits down beside Stephen.

SHADOW

I still haven't gotten your fire report, Stevie. On Tim.

A wave of pain rolls through Stephen.

STEPHEN

I'm working on it.

SHADOW

I deal with this stuff every day.
But a fireman... you never get used to it.

(beat)

What happened up there? He was a candidate. Did he pay attention? Was he listening?

STEPHEN

...He wasn't listening to the right thing...

SHADOW

What do you listen to, Stephen?

STEPHEN

You don't know... nobody knows...

SHADOW

I might.

Stephen's eyes meet Rimgale's and hold.

STEPHEN

It knows us. This one knows us.

SHADOW
(beat)
I need that report, Lt.

Stephen takes Rimgale's notebook out of his lap, rips out a page, and writes angrily in huge block letters.

STEPHEN
~~Tim-went-to-the-fire-and-now-he-~~
~~doesn't-have-a-face.~~

Stephen throws the sheet at Rimgale, stands, and walks out.

INT. HALL OF RECORDS

An Escher drawing of a place, endlessly vast racks spun around an open central core. High up, lost among its rows, Brian is going through rack after rack of dog-eared record books as Rimgale enters down below.

BRIAN
(trying to hold it
together in his mind)
Hey boss, Dekom Trust is owned by
Pan Illinois... which is majority
controlled by Lakeside Dynamics...
which is a division of Windy City
Ventures... who's partners are...
(beat)
Alan Seagrave, Donald Cosgrove, and
Jeffrey Holcomb.

SHADOW
Son of a bitch. They knew each other.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF RECORDS

More books. Files. Acres of paper.

BRIAN
So Seagrave and Holcomb were
accountants...

SHADOW

And Cosgrove. Coppers figured he laundered money for the mob before getting into real estate. They weren't very high on Seagrave, either.

BRIAN

Nice bunch of guys.

SHADOW

Who all ended up wearing candles for faces...

(beat)

Swayzak's up to his ass in this somehow. Guy can barely hold a drink in his hand, he's so scared.

A beat, then he looks directly at Brian.

SHADOW

We need to get a look at his files.

EXT. ROOFTOP RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. LAKESHORE - DUSK

With glowing skyscrapers leaping up in the background, it's an unexpectedly quiet, serene place along the lake. Jennifer sits alone at a bench, watching an ancient fisherman look for dinner, as Brian walks up.

JENNIFER

Hi.

BRIAN

Hi.

JENNIFER

We still talking?

(beat)

Look, I'm sorry about the other day –

BRIAN

Swayzak knows something about the

guys that were murdered. I want to know why he keeps that hidden.

JENNIFER

I don't know anything about it.

BRIAN

You could check. It'd be in his files.

JENNIFER

(beat)

Do you know what you're asking me to do?

BRIAN

Yes.

JENNIFER

Y'know, four years ago I was working in a bakery. Two years ago I was bringing Marty coffee and he didn't even know my name. I run that office now. Marty believed in me and I believe in him. You want me to just throw that away?

BRIAN

Your boss is lying, Jennifer.

And it hangs between them, two people lonely on the edge of the lake.

INT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. HELEN'S GARAGE - NIGHT

At a workbench, under a single lamp, Stephen stands amongst a confusion of tools, wire, And a wall socket.

With a pair of pliers, he tugs at something within the socket, puts the face-plate back on and screws it down. He stares at it, and we feel the sudden wave of hopelessness cascading through him.

He sets the socket back down – and SCATTERS everything aside in a single, furious move.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. HELEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stephen sits quietly against Helen's back door, lost in himself. A light comes on. Helen opens the back door.

HELEN
Stephen?

She sits down beside him.

STEPHEN
I'm sorry... I... couldn't sleep...

HELEN
What's wrong?

STEPHEN
I...
(beat)
It used to be, when I was a kid,
what meant most to me about this job
was there were no ifs. Life and death,
right and wrong. When someone called
the fire department, we came... Those
guys don't know how much I love
them... You don't leave people
hanging... cause that's what it's
all about. It's loyalty. It's 'till
death do us part. Isn't that what
you heard?... It's you go, we go...
Cause without that, it's the end of
families, it's the end of the fire
department... and when the fire
department stops coming... that's
the end of the fucking world...

(beat)
I'm sorry I came, Helen, it's just...
it's just there's nobody I can talk
to...

(beat)
I miss you.

The moment lingers, grows heavy and grey.

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stephen and Helen in bed, holding each other...

INT. HELEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Morning, and Stephen dressed, making eggs for three. Sean's there, lending a hand, beaming as Stephen tries to show him how to flip an egg. Helen enters in her robe. He kisses her.

STEPHEN
Cook and I are almost finished here.
Have a seat.

HELEN
Stephen... I... can I talk to you a
second...

Stephen musses his son's hair and follows her out into the hall.

STEPHEN
Look, I'm sorry I –

HELEN
– No, that's okay. It's just Sean...

STEPHEN
– He's gettin' good on those eggs.
And y'know, he told me he actually
likes the piano.

HELEN
I don't want to confuse him, Stephen.

The blow's so long and hard and deep you don't even see it.

HELEN
It's... It's just things have
changed... you're the same, Stephen,
but things are different now... you've

got a son... you're the best at what
you do Stephen, you always were, but
you scare me now...

Just then, Sean sticks his head into it.

STEPHEN

(to Sean)

Hey... Sean-man, your dad blew it. I
forgot I had to work this morning...

SEAN

Aw dad, c'mon...

STEPHEN

Next time, huh? We'll do it up big.
Promise.

Helen's turned away.

SEAN

Okay.

(then sotto)

Mom's crying, dad.

INT. SWAYZAK'S OFFICE - CITY HALL - MORNING

Jennifer enters Swayzak's inner office. His chair's turned
away toward the window.

JENNIFER

(holding print-out)

Latest polls came in, Marty.

(he doesn't answer)

Marty?

Finally the chair turns, revealing a haunted man. Polls are
far from his mind.

JENNIFER

Jesus Christ, Marty, what's going
on?

SWAYZAK

Leave me alone.

She sees a fire department file on the murders open on his desk.

JENNIFER

We've come a long way together, Marty.
I've staked my whole career on you.
And now you're sneaking around this
office, leaking things to the papers
behind my back...

(beat)

Is there something you're not telling
me about these deaths?

Swayzak's eyes are dead metal.

SWAYZAK

No.

And he turns his chair around again. Jennifer stands there a
beat. – Then turns to the filing cabinets.

EXT. BRIAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Brian drives up and parks. He's half way to the staircase
when he sees someone sitting in the dark in a car.

BRIAN

Jennifer?

She hands him a manila envelope.

BRIAN

What is –

JENNIFER

Just take it.

Silence.

BRIAN

I'm sorry.

JENNIFER

That's a dumb thing to say.

BRIAN

You're right.

She starts her car.

JENNIFER
Goodbye, Brian.

INT. FIRE DEPARTMENT REPAIR DEPOT

A cavernous hall full of dozens of fire trucks loaded on jacks. Rimgale's sedan's there, the repairman shaking his head in amazement at the undercarriage.

REPAIRMAN
What the hell do you do with this thing?

Rimgale's looking through the report Brian's handed him.

SHADOW
This is the copy of Swayzak's manning report that was released. Everybody on this job knows it's bullshit but we could never argue with the numbers. They're all airtight.

BRIAN
Yeah? Airtight?

He dumps three more reports on Rimgale.

BRIAN
I've got three different drafts of the same report – with different numbers that're all over the place. Looks like they were just making it up as they went along.

SHADOW
Did a little check on the consulting firm that wrote the report. They did exactly one job – Swayzak's manpower study. It's not even really a company. No employees, no directors, just a PO Box.

BRIAN

Then who wrote the report?

SHADOW

It had to be someone who knows numbers. Some kind of fancy accountant. But what's the connection?

Brian hands him something else. A photograph. Swayzak and the other three, posing on a fishing boat, 1970. Time of their lives.

SHADOW

I think it's time Mr. Swayzak and us had a little heart to heart talk.

EXT. SWAYZAK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The red arson sedan pulls up to wealthy home. Rimgale and Brian walk up and knock on the door – it creaks open ajar. They push the door open slowly.

INT. SWAYZAK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's dark as they enter.

SHADOW

Hello? Swayzak?

Brian and Rimgale split up down different halls. It's the HISS Brian hears first. Then the FLASH of an electrical socket FLARING ice-cold cobalt blue. Suddenly the room's dimensions are there in frantic, strobing shadows. Chairs, a couch –

– And a figure that JUMPS Brian. the light from the burning plug is a fierce strobe as the figure, a confused shadow, crashes Brian to the floor. They STRUGGLE.

The figure GRABS Brian's throat. Brian PUSHES him back

– Against the burning wall plug. The figure SHRIEKS in pain, gets his hand on a crowbar and SLAMS Brian – who crumples, dazed. The figure stands – just as Rimgale TACKLES him. The figure CRASHES across a gas space heater, SNAPPING the connection off. The figure SLAMS Rimgale HARD with the crowbar, squirms free, and stumbles out the door.

Hisssss... Rimgale climbs to his feet as fire eats at the wall. A baby backdraft wagging its tail. He goes to a dazed Brian's side, lifting him by his armpits and

EXT. SWAYZAK HOUSE - NIGHT

helping him outside. Hisssss... The ruptured space heater pumps gas furiously. Rimgale sees that. He also sees a bedroom door ajar on the far side of the house. And through the door a couch. And on the couch, A body. Hisssss...

INT. SWAYZAK HOUSE - NIGHT

Rimgale rushes back inside. It's Swayzak, unconscious.

EXT. SWAYZAK HOUSE - NIGHT

Rimgale drags him out on the stoop beside Brian just as the gas WHUMPS and the doors and windows EXPLODE in a HOWLING FIREBALL, the shrapnel BLOWING Rimgale off his feet. Brian slowly shakes his head clear. He looks around, tries to orient himself.

SHADOW

Uh... I sorta got a problem here...

Brian climbs up to his feet and walks over to where Rimgale lies at a weird angle, a piece of wrought iron fence punched through his shoulder.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Rimgale lies in an emergency room bed.

SHADOW

Well Brian, I guess you can say it's arson now...

BRIAN

How ya feeling?

Rimgale grunts.

BRIAN

Did you pull me out?

SHADOW

Yeah.

BRIAN

Did I say thanks?

SHADOW

No.

BRIAN

Just wondering.

SHADOW

I hate hospitals. You're so... so
goddamn useless...

Rimgale suddenly kicks the bed frame in anger. He kicks it over and over with frustration till something finally SNAPS off. Brian waits, let's him vent his frustration.

BRIAN

So what do you want me to do?

SHADOW

I've been lying here hours... just
thinking... We're close...

(beat)

We're not looking in the right place,
Brian. This one knows us and we're
not looking in the right place...

INT. PRISON INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Brian's sitting alone in a chair. Finally the opposite door opens and in enters Ronald.

RONALD

Well, Mr. Life magazine. Come all
this way just to say hi?

Brian hands him a stack of murder files.

BRIAN

I'm close... but I can't get who it
is...

RONALD
So you came to me...
(smiles)
Well, this is going to be an
interesting afternoon after all...

As Ronald starts to read the files

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER - DAY

Brian still sitting there. Watching Ronald devour the statistics. The photos of charred bodies. Ronald finishes, leans back.

RONALD
Okay, here's the deal. I'll tell you
a story, you tell me one. Fair?

BRIAN
Who's doing this?

RONALD
Your first question should be who
isn't. It isn't a spark, Brian. Not
enough damage. And an insurance pro?
Where's the profit margin?

BRIAN
Then who –

RONALD
– No no, your turn. Tell me a story.

BRIAN
I don't have a story.

RONALD
Sure you do.

Ronald drops on the table a dog-eared copy of that 1972 LIFE magazine with Brian on the cover.

RONALD

Famous story even. Straight burn.
Just an engine and truck first on
scene. What did you feel, Brian,
when you first got there?

BRIAN

What?

RONALD

You gotta tell a story too, Brian.
It's fair. C'mon, don't think too
hard –

BRIAN

I... I thought it was great. I loved
it. It was nothing to these guys...
medium deal.

RONALD

Right. Light smoke, low roll. Couple'a
civilians hollering – medium deal.
So young fireman Adcox and Captain
McCaffrey, they head up stairs, get
out on the fire escape – McCaffrey
does the ballsy jump across... what
were you feeling, Brian?

(Brian doesn't answer)

C'mon, you promised. Be honest.

(Brian just stares)

Okay... Guard!

BRIAN

– I wanted to be him. Right then I
wanted to be him more than anything...

RONALD

(smiles)

Very good, Brian. – About your report
here. The way to a torch's heart is
through his tools. That's how you
know him. It's the way he talks to
the fire. And to you if you listen.

BRIAN

The outlets.

RONALD

That's a probie answer. You're smarter than that, Brian.

BRIAN

Trychticholorate.

RONALD

Good. – So our two heroes, Adcox and McCaffrey, they go back inside. Only there's another fire in there nobody sees. And it took your dad, didn't it Brian? Did you see him burn?

In a flash, Brian suddenly reaches across and grabs Ronald by the collar.

BRIAN

Who the fuck is doing this?

RONALD

After it took your dad... the fire... did it look at you Brian? Did it talk to you?...

And Ronald sees something in Brian's eyes. He smiles.

RONALD

You see, our world's aren't so different...

Brian releases Ronald.

BRIAN

(quiet)

Who's doing this?

The arsonist smiles a creepy, horrible grin.

RONALD

Think, Brian. Who doesn't love fire, but knows it better than anyone else? Who's around trychticholorate 24 hours a day?

A cold shock rolls through Brian as he slumps back in his chair.

BRIAN
Oh Jesus Christ...

RONALD
Not such a far walk after all, is it, Brian?

EXT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - MARINA - NIGHT

Brian climbs up onto Stephen's boat. Nobody home. He opens the cabin door, goes inside and hits the lights.

INT. STEPHEN'S BOAT - NIGHT

There's cereal bowls in the sink, beer bottles on the table, And a stack of fire department supplies in the corner.

His whole body aching with reluctance, Brian begins looking through them. Solvents, Armorall, a small specialty can of fire dept. chemicals. There's a label of ingredients on it. Way down at the bottom, Is trychticholorate. Nausea wracks its way through Brian.

BRIAN
Oh goddamn it Stephen...

Footsteps. Brian spins around in stone shock as Stephen comes into the cabin.

STEPHEN
Hey, what are you doing here?

BRIAN
Just... Just wanted to say hello...

STEPHEN
So hello.

Brian backs away from the chemicals.

STEPHEN
Well, long as you're here you can help clean up a little. I've got a

guy coming to look at this in a few minutes.

BRIAN

You're selling dad's boat?

STEPHEN

Yeah, it's just another memory in my life right now. And I got way too many of them...

BRIAN

I really should get back. There's... there's something I'm supposed to do.

STEPHEN

Yeah? What have you got to do?

(beat)

Look at you. Look at your face. All the things you must be thinking. Man, you must really hate my guts. Well, you know what? It's okay.

BRIAN

Look, Stephen, maybe we can talk about this some other –

STEPHEN

– Okay, so you don't like me. You don't like everything I've done. What, because I wasn't such a genius the way I raised you? Jesus Christ, dad was gone, what was I supposed to do? You tell me, what the fuck was I supposed to do?!

He KICKS the bulkhead wall.

BRIAN

It's okay, Stephen, I –

STEPHEN

– I tried, y'know? Helen's right. I don't have all the answers, but goddamn it, I've got some.

(beat)
Look, you're gonna do what you have to, and maybe I shouldn't have gotten in the way. I'm your brother, not your father. Go on. You gotta go somewhere? Go...

Brian turns to leave. Pauses.

BRIAN
I saw it.

STEPHEN
Saw what?

BRIAN
When dad died, I saw another fire...

STEPHEN
Everybody did.

BRIAN
I saw it before it got them. I tried to yell, but... He asked me to look out for him. And I didn't do it. I let him die.

STEPHEN
(stunned)
...Jesus, you been carrying that around for twenty years? For christ's sake, you were seven years old! You think he could have heard you in there?

BRIAN
I hate him so much sometimes, Stephen. You don't know how hard it was for me to put that uniform on...

STEPHEN
Maybe I do.
(sighs)
...What a fuckin' mess, huh?
(beat)
People can change Brian.

BRIAN

Sometimes right when you're looking at them.

Brian sees the chemicals in the corner again and something freezes up inside. Stephen catches the look and there's horrible silence between them.

BRIAN

Oh God, Stephen, what's going on with you?

STEPHEN

I don't know, Brian... I don't know...

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - NIGHT

Brian stands before the fire station. His brother's and his.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - UPSTAIRS LOCKER ROOM

Brian PRIES the lock off Stephen's locker. Starts looking through it. Adcox comes out of the shower with a towel on, starts shaving in a mirror. He doesn't notice Brian. Adcox turns to head for his own locker and the towel slips a little. And Brian's universe caves in.

An icy claw tears out his stomach. Gulping breaths, he forces himself to look at Adcox's back.

On it is a small, rectangular burn. It's fresh and it's the size of a wall socket. At that moment Adcox turns. The two of them stare at one another just a beat, then Adcox walks past him. Just then the alarm bells RING. Brian hesitates a beat, confused, then turns and runs down to

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - APPARATUS FLOOR

Where firemen are scurrying around, suiting up. Brian looks frantically for Stephen, sees him out back.

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - BACK OF STATION - SUNDOWN

BRIAN

(breathless)

– Stephen, wait a minute. I gotta talk to you. It's Adcox, he's –

STEPHEN

– What are you doing here?

BRIAN

I saw Adcox's back! I saw the burn!
I put it there! Jesus Christ, Stephen,
he's been killing people!

STEPHEN

I know.

BRIAN

How do you know?

STEPHEN

I knew when you came looking for the chemicals. Looking for me.

BRIAN

– What were they doing there?

STEPHEN

They were for the fucking boat, Brian.

Grindles sticks his head out the back door.

GRINDLE

We gotta roll, Stevie...

STEPHEN

I'll be there.

GRINDLE

They're waitin' man.

STEPHEN

I'll be there, goddamn it!

Grindle goes back in.

STEPHEN

(to Brian)

Anything else?

BRIAN

What are we going to do about this?

STEPHEN

I'll handle it.

BRIAN

We gotta go to Rimgale, Stephen.

STEPHEN

I'm his Lt. He's my responsibility.

I'll handle it. Me.

Stephen turns and walks toward the station.

Brian's eyes go to a window just above it. There, watching him, watching the whole exchange between brothers, is Adcox.

Adcox stares at Brian a beat, then finally disappears as Brian hears the cough of diesel engines.

BRIAN

Oh, Christ. Stephen...

He starts running for the station.

INT/EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - NIGHT

– It's too late. Adcox climbs aboard just as the engine company pulls out and whistles down the street.

The ladder company is just easing onto the drive. Brian hesitates only an instant, then runs to the equipment racks, PULLS off the hooks his helmet, coat, boots – and jumps onto the truck as it takes off in pursuit.

INT/EXT. ENGINE COMPANY 17 - NIGHT

As it howls down the avenue, Stephen turns around and stares at Adcox sitting behind. The glimmer of an understanding...

INT/EXT. TRUCK COMPANY 46 - NIGHT

The laddermen look confused seeing Brian sitting among them.

A CAR Suddenly CUTS the truck company off. The driver SLAMS the brakes, PUSHING the truck company into a HORRIBLE SKID. The back fishtails, the wheels JUMP the curb, BASH a mailbox, and then the whole rig ROLLS onto its side and DRAGS to a stop.

It's tangled confusion in the rear cab. Firemen, unhurt, piled atop one another. Brian slides his way out from under them and looks down the street where plumes of smoke rise six blocks away.

He starts running.

EXT. WAREHOUSE FIRE - NIGHT

Flames and smoke curl from a huge industrial warehouse along the river as Brian, panting, runs up. He searches frantically through the maze of arriving engine companies, looking for number 17. There it is but nobody's home. Brian stops a passing captain.

BRIAN

Where are they? Where's 17?

CAPTAIN

On the roof.

Brian looks up at the smoke and whirling firestorm four stories above him, feels the bile of fear in his throat, the desperation, – And begins strapping on an air tank.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Brian, now fully suited up, climbs the endless rungs of an extended aerial ladder.

EXT. WAREHOUSE ROOF - NIGHT

Tongues of flame ROCKET skyward through ragged holes. Black clouds drift murderously, roofing tars bubble and hiss as the roof itself GROANS like a comatose dinosaur, reminding you the whole thing could go any minute – and you with it.

Trudging alone across this alien, spongy surface, Brian looks for his company. It's almost impossible to tell anyone apart, faces hidden behind helmets and masks.

Suddenly a cloud of smoke clears and there's two firemen near the edge, "17" on their helmets.

BRIAN
Stephen –

The helmets look up. Stephen and Adcox. Facing each other. Adcox cradles an axe.

STEPHEN
Brian?

Brian starts to move beside Stephen but Adcox turns, tightens his grip on the axe, and now all the cards are on the table. A hissing black cloud drifts through. They're the only three people on earth.

Adcox's eyes are clouded with tears.

AXE
Aw man, Stephen, listen to me...

STEPHEN
– What the fuck were you thinking, huh? Burning people? You're a fireman.

AXE
They were killing firemen, man. When Sally showed me what was in Swayzak's files... They were my friends, I had to do it. I had to do it for the department.

BRIAN
Did you do it for Tim?

AXE
(pain, to Stephen)
That was an accident! Jesus Christ, why did you have to go in there so fucking early? Why didn't you listen to me!

Brian and Stephen are backed up against the roof edge – sixty feet up. Far below a fireboat has begun pumping a

massive stream at the side of the building.

AXE

You gotta let me finish –

BRIAN

Just come down, John. Just –

AXE

– Shut up! Your dad would fucking puke if he saw how you've shit on his department!

STEPHEN

– Knock it off!

AXE

(to Stephen)

– You can't let him turn you against your friends, man –

BRIAN

– He killed people –

AXE

– You know what Swayzak would do to the department if this got out? –

BRIAN

– Stephen, this is bullshit –

AXE

– What he would do to your dad's department? You gotta let me finish it –

And there's a horrible glimmer of confusion on Stephen's face.

BRIAN

You're his Lt., Stephen...

(beat)

Are you gonna handle it? Are you Stephen?

STEPHEN

Shut up!

AXE

...What do you want me to do, Stephen?
Talk to me. What am I supposed to
do?

STEPHEN

(beat)

There's a fire. We've got a job here.
Let's get on with it.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - ACROSS THE ROOF - NIGHT

The rest of the crews are totally oblivious to what's
happening through the smoke on the other side. Grindle and
Santos feel the roof go suddenly spongy beneath them.

GRINDLE

Shit... It's going! Clear the roof!
Now!

Everybody drops their equipment and runs for the edges as

EXT. WAREHOUSE ROOF - BRIAN ET. AL - NIGHT

Brian, Stephen and Adcox react as the roof HOWLS and GROANS
and huge SPLITS begin racing along it. And then it goes.

The center section DROPS, and in rolling waves of SCREECHING
steel, the hole spreads outward; DEVOURING.

Adcox shoves them aside and runs for his life as the hole
races for them, SWALLOWING roof.

STEPHEN

Jesus Christ Brian, run! Run goddamn
it!

And Brian balls-out dashes for the edge. Stephen's made one
corner, Brian desperately heads for another. At the last
instant – as the HOWLING FLAME BELLOWS UP to his ankles –
Brian LEAPS OFF the roof –

EXT. WAREHOUSE - FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

– And falls half a story before CRASHING onto an exterior fire escape. Flames have cut off the fire escape two floors below, so Brian climbs down as far as possible, crawls onto a ledge, KICKS out a window, steps through,

And falls.

INT. WAREHOUSE - ELEVATOR SHAFT - NIGHT

Blackness and emptiness, two stories of it, before he CRASHES into a pool of water at the bottom. He's in a freight elevator shaft, thrashing madly, drowning. Great SHEETS of WATER are POURING through an upper doorway and CASCADING down like monsoon rain.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - FIREBOAT

We see it's coming from the fireboat's rushing stream.

INT. WAREHOUSE - ELEVATOR SHAFT

The weight of his equipment is pulling Brian underwater. Struggling against the insane swirls and the sheets of water still POURING DOWN, Brian unhooks his air tank. He leans back, tries to float on the rising column of water. – His coat catches on something – YANKS him underwater. He struggles feverishly – finally tears the coat off.

The building GROANS in earnest. Flaming chunks of plaster CRASH down around Brian, forcing him to duck underwater. The place is coming apart.

Ten feet above, one of the falling chunks SMACKS a gas main, SPLITTING then IGNITING it. A white-hot JET OF FLAME SHOOTS from one side of the shaft to the other.

Brian's floating okay, he's floating right up into the flames.

Brian tries to flatten himself out, to keep everything but his nose below water, but he's still moving up – the heat becoming so intense his face flares and he's ducking under water now, trying to stay alive, trying to decide whether to drown or burn –

– When there's a CRASH. And suddenly another door on the shaft is tearing open. There's a glint of an axe. A

flashlight.

It's Stephen.

Brian has about two seconds left. In that time Stephen sees the shut-off for the gas line mounted on the wall opposite. It's unreachable, a good twelve feet across a horizontal curtain of flame. Before we can even assimilate that, Stephen's already jumped. A crazy leap over the fire. He SMACKS the opposite wall, HITS the shut-off, and FALLS CRASHING into the pool beside Brian.

STEPHEN

You crazy son of a bitch, why couldn't you stay behind a desk where you belong?

BRIAN

"You never know till the fire stares you down if you're gonna be –"

STEPHEN

Oh shut up, huh?
(grimaces)
I think I broke my goddamn arm...

Brian helps him stay above water. The level continues to rise, bringing them finally even with an open doorway they scramble through.

INT. WAREHOUSE - STAIRWAY - NIGHT

It leads to a stairwell that's become a RAGING TORRENT of water spilling down it. No way. They push through to the next doorway and out onto

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The place is full of hundreds of chemical drums. The fire has cracked its way into the room as WUMP – drums begin EXPLODING, SHOOTING UPWARD Roman candle fountains of glittering FLAME. Brian helps Stephen as they snake their way past sweating drums – pressure valves hissing madly with desperation. They duck low, round a corner,

INT. WAREHOUSE - CATWALK - NIGHT

– And walk right into an axe handle that SMACKS Brian's throat KNOCKING him gasping flat on his back. It's Adcox.

Stephen JUMPS Adcox and TACKLES him on the edge of a metal platform that extends out from the raised flooring.

STEPHEN

You stupid son of a bitch! What the fuck are you doing!

AXE

Stevie... I...

Adcox struggles against him, heaving and sobbing.

STEPHEN

Let it go! Goddamn it let it go!

And Adcox releases the axe.

AXE

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry...

Brian's on his feet now, coming toward them, when a chemical drum below EXPLODES, the shock wave BUCKLING the platform and DROPPING it several feet before it HOLDS. Brian, cut-off, is HIT with a wall of debris.

Adcox and Stephen are FLUNG across the platform and THROUGH the shattered railing. Stephen grabs a piece of broken, dangling strut and hangs on with one hand.

In his other hand is Adcox. Hanging below him, his grip loosening.

BRIAN

Stephen!

Brian's struggling to get out from under the debris. The railing Stephen's hanging onto is slick, his hand SLIPPING along it. But he won't let go of Adcox. His eyes bore into his best friend's with absolute conviction.

STEPHEN

You go, we go.

The towering shots of FLAME from below have begun to IGNITE Adcox's pant leg. He's starting to burn. But Stephen won't let go. Won't let go even as the flames crawl up Adcox's back. And Stephen's hand is slipping and slipping and then it isn't slipping anymore because it's come off.

BRIAN
NO!

Adcox and Stephen FALL. There's a narrow catwalk half-way down. Stephen HITS with a sickening CRUNCH.

Adcox falls past it, down into the flames.

There's an exposed I-beam running from the ruined platform out over the catwalk. Brian climbs up onto it, balances across over the fire below and jumps down to the catwalk where his brother lies, battered but still alive.

BRIAN
You're gonna be all right, man.

INT. WAREHOUSE - FLOOR - NIGHT

Brian looks down and across the factory floor. There, coming through the doorway, is Pengelly and Nightengale with a hoseline.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

BRIAN
Hey! Over here!

They start for him when another drum EXPLODES, FLATTENING them and launching their hoseline into a crazy, thrashing arc. The flame has cut them off from the hose. Stephen sees what Brian's thinking.

STEPHEN
Wait for another hose team...

But Brian's already moving for the catwalk ladder.

STEPHEN
Wait for the goddamn hose team!

Brian puts his feet on the outside rungs of the ladder and SLIDES down to the factory floor. He's heading for the hoseline when WHAM! – The fire cuts him off. Not just any fire. That same one from so many years ago.

Don't fuck with me, kid. I'm not in the mood.

Nightengale's lost his helmet and it's lying near the flames spinning slowly upside down – just like his father's. Brian stands there, paralyzed, as the fire laughs at him. Same old little kid with his finger up his ass. Then something different comes into Brian's eyes.

BRIAN

No... No more.

There's a pathetic little wall extinguisher mounted on the pole. Brian lifts it, approaches the fire. You can practically hear the flames laugh at him. Brian suddenly turns and SLAMS the neck of the extinguisher against the pole, BREAKING it off before HEAVING the cannister HISSING into the flames where it EXPLODES – a cloud of extinguisher powder that STUNS the flames just long enough for Brian to dash through and TACKLE the hose.

The fire shakes off the powder, rises up to kill – Just as Brian spins and HITS it with the STREAM.

– And it's like a howling train wreck as the two grapple with each other – Pengelly and Nightengale have an opening, and they're dashing for the catwalk ladder up to Stephen because the fire doesn't care – it only has eyes for Brian now –

– And Stephen sees Brian tackle the monster, and his eyes fill with tears –

– And the fire's pushing Brian – pushing him with the fury of a frightened street bully – but Brian won't give – and now the fire's back's broken – it's whimpering, dying.

And Pengelly and Nightengale have climbed up to Stephen now, pulling him away.

STEPHEN

That's my brother! That's my brother
goddamn it!

And the fire's just a little gremlin now, sighing sadly as
Brian steps up with the hoseline.

BRIAN
Another time, friend.

And whoosh, it's gone.

EXT. BURNED BUILDING - NIGHT

Brian rushes up as paramedics load his brother into an
ambulance.

STEPHEN
(smiles, weak)
You are such a pain in the ass...

As Brian jumps in with him

CUT TO:

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Paramedics swarm over Stephen as the ambulance screams through
the night. Brian's right there, holding his hand.

STEPHEN
Don't tell them about Adcox... Don't
let 'em...

BRIAN
I'm sorry... I'm sorry I thought...
I won't.

His brother squeezes Brian's hand, his eyes never leaving
him.

PARAMEDIC
(reading EKG)
Oh shit, give him some lidocaine,
now. Now.

STEPHEN

(beat)
Who's your brother?

Stephen's EKG's begun to falter. The other paramedic fires off an injection into his IV.

PARAMEDIC
His pressure's fading – push some
adrenalin.

The EKG's become erratic. Stephen's eyes never leave Brian's.

BRIAN
Oh man, don't you die... Don't you
die...

PARAMEDIC #2
He's going south... He's gonna box
damn it...

They put an ambo bag over Stephen's face. The eyes never leave Brian's.

BRIAN
Goddamn it don't you die now... Not
now!

They're breathing for him now. The EKG begins shrieking.

PARAMEDIC
V-fib!

The paramedics begin scrambling to load the defibrillator pads on Stephen's chest. But the fireman's eyes never waver from Brian. They look into his with complete conviction, complete acceptance, And then they don't.

FADE TO BLACK:

Then, FADE UP TO:

EXT. MICHIGAN AVE - DAWN

A silent, quiet street absolutely empty of traffic. Then over the crest of Chicago's mightiest thoroughfare, creeps slowly a fire engine. It's emergency lights are on but not

the siren. This engine isn't in a hurry today.

Behind comes another fire engine. And another. Ten, twenty, all of them creeping slowly along. And behind the engines now walk firemen in their dress blues. Hundreds of them. Walking silently in step behind

TWO COFFINS

Loaded in the rear of Engine 17. Santos drives as Grindle, Brian, and the men of ladder company 46, walk behind. The silent procession passes under extended aerial ladders crossed like dress swords. Average people stop, take their hats off.

EXT. LAKE SHORE DRIVE - THE SILENT PROCESSION

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Two coffins, lying side by side, draped in the blue and white of the Chicago flag. A single fire helmet rests atop each casket.

Brian stands at attention beside Helen. He holds the hand of Stephen's son Sean, his eyes clouded with tears as a fire dept. honor guard plays Taps. Jennifer's there, too far away to touch.

Rimgale, still wearing a head bandage, stands stiffly beside a brass bell and speaks with a voice raw and weary.

SHADOW

In the Chicago Fire Department the alarm code 3-3-5 signifies that the company has returned home to quarters. We will now ring out that code to welcome home John Adcox and Stephen McCaffrey...

With a small hammer Rimgale rings out 3-3-5 on the bell.

The honor guard folds the flag covering Stephen's casket and hands it to Helen, who holds it to her breast as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A sea of blue uniforms drifting across green as the funeral breaks up. Brian hugs Helen and Sean. Lets them go.

EXT. CEMETERY EDGE - DAY

Rimgale's there, resting against his dept. sedan as Brian walks by, pauses, and leans on it beside him. A beat.

SHADOW

Your brother was a good man.

BRIAN

Yeah.

SHADOW

Another couple of good men get burned up for their city? Is that how it's going to read?

(Brian doesn't answer)

You're the only one that knows.

BRIAN

Like it never happened...

Rimgale turns to walk back to his sedan. He pauses. Looks back to Brian.

SHADOW

Want to help me with something?

INT. OFFICE - DAY

An elevator opens as Brian and Rimgale walk quickly out, down a hall, and BURST into Swayzak's office.

INT. SWAYZAK'S OFFICE - DAY

The Alderman's there, giving a press conference from his desk.

SHADOW

Mr. Swayzak! How ya doin'?

SWAYZAK
(confused)
Investigator...

Rimgale sits on Swayzak's desk.

SWAYZAK
I'm a little busy right now –

SHADOW
This'll only take a minute. There's
two cops outside that want to ask
you about this –

Rimgale drops the manning report on Swayzak's desk.

SHADOW
This is just a guess of course, but
I think they're gonna want to know
why you secretly paid Donald Cosgrove,
Jeffrey Holcomb and Alan Seagrave to
create a phony manpower study.
(to cameras)
You guys'll wait, right?

The room explodes with questions. Through the din Brian leans
over the desk very close to Swayzak.

BRIAN
See that glow flashing in the corner
of your eye? That's your career
dissipation light. And it just went
into high gear.

Brian turns and pushes his way out. At the door he pauses
and looks back at Rimgale. The investigator nods and smiles
just a little...

INT. SWAYZAK'S OFFICE CORRIDOR

As Brian walks down it, Rimgale appears and calls to him.

SHADOW
– Brian.

Brian hesitates.

SHADOW

Don't keep looking over your shoulder
for the ghost. It's gone now.

And there's just a beat between the investigator and his
probie before Brian nods and walks away.

EXT. SWAYZAK OFFICE CORRIDOR

Brian walks down the hall. He passes Jennifer's small office.
She's in there, surrounded by packing boxes.

BRIAN

I think your boss is going to need
some spin control.

JENNIFER

I quit two days ago, Brian.

BRIAN

(beat)
What'll you do?

JENNIFER

I don't have the slightest idea...

BRIAN

I'll see ya around, huh?

JENNIFER

It's a small town.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FIRE STATION 17 - CITY

And morning breaking across the avenues and up against the
tired brick of firehouse 17.

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - LOCKER ROOM

Brian sits staring into his locker, lost in thought, his
equipment stacked up on the bench beside him. THE ALARM KLAXON
SOUNDS

INT. FIRE STATION 17 - APPARATUS FLOOR

And firemen scurrying to their equipment on the apparatus floor. They're climbing aboard their rigs now and the pumper's diesel is coughing to life.

At the last moment, as it begins to pull out, Brian comes sliding down the pole in his turn-out gear, bounces off the floor, and climbs aboard as the engine WHISTLES away.

INT. ENGINE 17 - CAB

There's a new fireman beside him on the bench. He can't get his coat buckled right. Brian leans over does it for him.

BRIAN

You're doing it wrong.

EXT. FIRE ENGINE 17 - STREET - DAY

And the fire engine slips away from us, down the avenue, into the city as we

FADE TO BLACK

THE END