

THE UNKNOWN: PILOT

Written by

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INT. 1970S SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT

WHUNK

FRANCIS OLDMAN, white, 60s reels back, holding the side of his head.

OLDMAN
Ahaaaahhww...

He fumbles to steady himself on the nearest upholstered chair. We're in a tidy house, in the decor of the time, maybe even a bit late-60s. It's fairly small, this man lives alone.

OLDMAN (CONT'D)
What are you-

The pointy end of a pool cue swings in from the left and smacks him across the forehead.

OLDMAN (CONT'D)
Euhhhwww

Oldman is shoved backwards a few steps by the blow, into the connected kitchenette. Where the pool cue connected we see a gash, it looks pretty damn bad.

OLDMAN (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Christ they're quick.

We hear a voice, the one attached to the pool cue. A young white woman, CONNIE GRUNES, early 20s. She looks scared more than anything.

CONNIE
Fuck are you here?

The man holds his right hand to his forehead wound to staunch the bleeding. It doesn't staunch.

OLDMAN
I- this is my house?

He steps back, propping himself up on the kitchen counter with his left hand.

CONNIE
You're early.

OLDMAN
Tell that to my boss, he's the one who fired-

He lowers his right hand to the counter, shifting his weight to compensate. Slick with blood, his hand slips, shoving him off-balance.

OLDMAN (CONT'D)

Oh-

His bald, pale head smacks into the tile counter with the *CRACK* of a break shot. Now a heap in the right-angle of the kitchenette, he gurgles quietly.

CONNIE

Oh-

Fuck. Blood oozes out of the fractured skull like a stepped-on PB&J. Connie drops the pool cue and does the classic horror movie Backwards Ass-Scramble (also: my favorite breakfast at Denny's) towards the dinner table, grabbing a leg.

She stares at the man on the linoleum floor. He gurgles a bit more, apparently not quite dead. For a short, terrifying moment, he looks her dead in the eye.

She could have sworn she saw a smile.

OLDMAN

(gurgling)

Gurg.

(dying)

Ahhh...

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

A quick *RAP* on the door, which opens to a black man, BEN PARKS, mid-30s, cheap polyester suit. He smiles.

BEN

Hey, hi! Ben Parks, glad to meet ya, your wife here?

A middle-aged DUMPY-looking man stands opposite him, looking kinda confused. Ben slowly pushes past him into the living room.

DUMPY

She- uh

BEN

Oh, I know, that's what I'm here to talk about.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

See I've got some bad news about
your wife, she- well you might want
to sit down.

He deftly guides the man to the couch and sits him down, as if corralling a small child. Ben, however, remains standing and moves to the opposite side of the coffee table.

DUMPY

What ar-

Ben sets down a folder on the coffee table. He pulls out a picture, it's of a woman, about the same age as the man, outside in the rain.

BEN

I've got some pictures of your wife-

He pulls splay out some more pictures, this time of the dumpy-looking man and another woman, in various stages of coitus.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ditching your ass because you're a
cheat.

DUMPY

W-what?

BEN

She wanted me to tell you.

The man lunges across the coffee table, Ben quickly steps to the side. The pictures flutter through the air.

BEN (CONT'D)

And now I understand why.

Ben backpedals out the door, slamming it loudly. We hear the opening keyboard to *Emerson, Lake & Palmer's Tarkus*.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING

Parks drives his pristine 1963 Chevrolet Corvair through a series of CONVENIENT ESTABLISHING SHOTS. We're in SAN FRAN-fuckin-CISCO baby, and the year is 1974! We got

THE TRANS-AM PYRAMID

We got

THE GOD-DAMN GATE BRIDGE

Do we got

THOSE HOUSES FROM THE INTRO TO FULL HOUSE?

You bet your ass we do!

After kindly giving our viewers a tour of the city, Ben pulls up in front of *Ramirez's Diner*, next to a pea-green station wagon.

INT. RAMIREZ' DINER - MORNING

Inside, we see he's immediately recognized by the wait-staff. He's the kinda fella who could say "the usual," but they know him well enough that he doesn't need to.

He seats himself at a table. A white man, EDDIE FINSTER, 20s, dressed in a short-sleeve button-up and tie is arguing with the owner of the diner over a dead rat.

Ben eats his breakfast, trying his best to tune out the argument. Ooh, bit of a childhood flashback there.

EDDIE

-ever seen anything more disgusting.

OWNER

It's just one-

EDDIE

One dead rat? You know what that means? At least, a hundred more alive ones. It's math. That's how math works.

OWNER

You're a prick.

EDDIE

And you're a slob.

Now Ben's known the owner for quite some time, and he doesn't take too kindly to folks badmouthing his friends. He zeroes in on the young guy: ahhh, health inspector. That's about right.

He turns and scans the cars outside- boom. That green station-wagon, it belongs to the city. And one of the windows is cracked open, because it is HOT TODAY.

He leaves a generous tip, grabs his soda and walks out to the car. Smoothly, he dumps what's left of his soda in the driver's side window.

CUT TO:

INT. BENJAMIN PARKS INVESTIGATIVE SERVICES - MORNING

We see the name on the legally mandated frosted glass door:

"SECIVRES EVITAGITSEVNI SKRAP NIMAJNEB"

Oh, right, we're inside.

Ben sweeps the scattered papers to the side of his desk as he flops down in his upholstered chair.

He removes *Chariots of the Gods* from a drawer, puts his feet up on his desk, pauses, takes his shoes off, puts feet up on his desk, and idly flips through the book.

But it's never so easy for Ben.

KNOCK-fuckin'-KNOCK

He slips an old receipt between the pages and sits up.

BEN

Unlocked.

In walk a middle aged white couple, AGATHA and TERRENCE GRUNES.

BEN (CONT'D)

Usually I work one spouse at a time.

A beat.

TERRENCE

You're Ben Parks?

The two share a glance, apparently shocked by his blackness. The woman elbows her husband in the side. They enter.

AGATHA

We're Grunes, Agatha and Terrence.
Officer Chavez sent us.

Terrence takes a seat. Agatha doesn't. She's holding a folder of papers. Mm. One of those.

BEN

How long's your daughter been missing?

AGATHA

How'd you-?

BEN

If it's not a spouse, it's a kid. And when boys run off on their own, they call it "finding work."

AGATHA

Our Connie- Constance. She's been gone three years now, she ran away when she was eighteen and-

What

BEN

Three years?

AGATHA

We've tried the police, other PIs, and they've been no help.

BEN

I, uh, I really don't go in for these kinda cases. Three years-sorry, but either she doesn't want to be found, or there's nothing left of her *to* be found.

TERRENCE

Constance is dead.

BEN

Buh-?

AGATHA

(overriding her husband)

To us, he means. Soon as she walked out the door.

TERRENCE

Saw her die. Same as with the Kennedys.

BEN

On the television?

TERRENCE

You ever had a tooth filling?

BEN

Uh, no, I floss regular.

TERRENCE

You can pick up the radio, through a tooth filling. Hear what they're saying.

BEN

Right.

TERRENCE

I got a plate in my head, see.

Parks waits expectantly for further explanation. It doesn't come.

BEN

I'm not sure I understand what you're asking for here. If she's dead- uh, to you, at least, why do you want me to find her?

AGATHA

We think- well, with all the- it's dangerous to be a young whi-, a young woman in around here these days. You know, with the whole Hearst situation and all.

BEN

You think she might be-?

AGATHA

Who knows? She was always- well, we didn't see eye-to-eye on- those- uh.

Agatha is visibly uncomfortable speaking about this in front of a black man. Ben narrows his eyes at this.

AGATHA (CONT'D)

We don't want her caught up in something that- that might reflect on the family.

BEN

Or with someone, huh?

(a beat, then a hint of a mischievous smile)

Now, I need you to understand a few key things here; even if I can track her down, I can't legally compel her to come back to you.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

She's an adult, she can do what she wants. Get that?

AGATHA

Yes.

BEN

And you're still willing to pay for that service?

AGATHA

Yes.

BEN

How much?

Agatha places a stuffed envelope on the desk. Ben opens it, raises his eyebrows slightly.

BEN (CONT'D)

I- uh. Okay, well. Do you have anything to work off of?

Agatha places her folder on the desk. She's definitely done this before.

AGATHA

Everything in there should be sufficient.

Ben looks down at the overstuffed folder, and looks back at Agatha. Her steely-eyed gaze betrays almost nothing. He glances at Terrence. We now see that he's been silently crying, tears streaming down his cheeks as he sits in the chair opposite Ben.

BEN

I- alright. Okay. But no promises, right? I'll get looking.

He stands to lead them out. After they exit, he looks down and sighs, realizing he conducted this entire business transaction in brightly colored argyle socks.

He returns to his desk and opens the folder. Paperclipped to the inside, we see a photo of a young girl, looking happy.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. 1970S SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT

That same girl, a bit older, significantly less happy, sits at the base of the dinner table for a few moments. She grabs the pool cue and takes a few tentative steps forward.

She pokes the body with the proverbial stick. It doesn't react. She uses the pool cue to shift the body, revealing a bloody mess on the right side of the man's head. Fuck. Fuck.

CONNIE

Fuck.

Connie looks like she wants to cry, but for some reason can't. She stands straight and looks at the body, contorting her face, trying to force tears.

Failing that, her face lands on vague contempt. She looks at the blood on the corner of the counter with accusatory eyes.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Murderer.

She runs to a window, hoping to find curtains.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Damn!

Venetian blinds. All of the windows have venetian blinds. Who does that? How are you supposed to wrap a body if you don't have curtains?

She checks around for rugs, none of those either. She lifts up the edge of a welcome mat with her foot, peering down at it.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Mm. No.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

She enters the quiet bedroom: jackpot.

INT. 1970S SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Connie drags a large, fluffy comforter down the stairs of the house. She wraps the dead fella in it. She suddenly remembers something.

Returning, with pockets visibly filled with money, she drags the body into the garage, where we see a standard 70s sedan.

The trunk is unlocked, she dumps the human burrito in there, then sits in the driver's seat.

Wait.

She lugs it back out of the trunk, and unrolls. She searches his pockets. Wallet: money! City ID: FRANCIS OLDMAN, WATER AND POWER.

She frowns at that. A city official is bad news.

Aaaaand... aaaand... come on... keys! There we go.

She slams the trunk, Oldman wrapped up inside, and turns the key.

Vroom.

CUT TO:

INT. RAMIREZ' DINER - MORNING

The owner and Eddie are still arguing.

OWNER

So just like this? Three years with no complaints and now you write me up without a second chance?

EDDIE

Just going by the book here.

OWNER

Okay, okay.

He takes a step back.

OWNER (CONT'D)

It would be a shame if you left hungry, though, wouldn't it?

EDDIE

...why would I want to eat here after finding that?

He points at something: we finally see it, the dead rat. It's pretty large and gross, honestly he's pretty understandably upset at finding it.

The Owner sighs and waves him off, muttering.

EXT. RAMIREZ' DINER - MORNING

Eddie loosens his tie and wipes the sweat from his forehead.
It is HOT TODAY.

INT. CAR - MORNING

He sits in the driver's seat of his pea-green car. His face twitches in annoyance, and he looks down at his pants.

EDDIE
Ya gotta be-

He looks up and his eyes catch another pair staring at him in the rearview mirror.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
FUAH!

A quick rap of knuckles on the window. Eddie turns around to see a woman, CARLA, about Eddie's age, wave. He takes a moment to calm himself down, and exits the car.

EXT. RAMIREZ' DINER - MORNING

EDDIE
Carla! What are you doing here?

CARLA
Eddie, I thought I recognized you!
How's things?

EDDIE
Oh, you know. Making the rounds.

CARLA
How are those rounds?

EDDIE
They're, well, they're- ya know.
Round.

CARLA
Right.

EDDIE
Yeah.

CARLA
Saw you coming out of Ramirez',
what's the report?

Eddie gives her a little head shake. Carla nods in understanding.

CARLA (CONT'D)
 Guess I'll head somewhere else for
 lunch, then.

Eddie nods. They stand there for a moment. They haven't seen each other for a while, and they both grapple with the realization that they don't care.

EDDIE
 Well.

CARLA
 Well.

EDDIE
 Good to see you, then. Gotta get
 back on the clock.

They give a half-hearted hug, and Eddie returns to his car.

INT. CAR - MORNING

We see him look in on the seat, which is now all wet. He sighs, grabs a towel from the backseat, and places it over the driver's. He sits down and adjusts the mirror, having knocked it out of alignment in his surprise earlier.

Eddie checks his watch: he's ahead of schedule. He pulls out a packed sandwich... nah. Instead, he looks at a handwritten list of restaurants in a notebook. Each of them has an "A" circled next to it.

His finger lands on *Italics*.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOMELESS COMMUNITY - DAY

Ben winds his way through the overstuffed shopping carts of this desperate area. He approaches a sitting circle, one of which, VICENTE GUILLARDO, chicano, 40s, is telling a story.

VICENTE
 -this big. And I ain't talking no
 bass. Anyways, I started to- Ben?

BEN
 I don't mean to interrupt.

VICENTE

Oh, no, it's not a- not to your tastes.

Ben smirks at this.

VICENTE (CONT'D)

Why, O Benjamin, patron saint of Parklands, do you visit poor Vicente on this very hot day?

BEN

I got someone needs finding.

VICENTE

Don't you ever just come to talk?

BEN

I literally did that last week.

VICENTE

Right. Well, who is it then?

BEN

Girl by the name of Constance Grunes. Connie. Young, pretty. You'd have noticed her.

VICENTE

Got a picture?

BEN

Only one, so-

VICENTE

Don't worry, I'll give it back.

Ben hands it over.

VICENTE (CONT'D)

Hm. No one here looks like that recently. When would she have passed through here?

BEN

Any time in the last three years.

VICENTE

Well, I ain't claimin' to have perfect memory, but she didn't come through here. I thought you didn't take missing persons'.

BEN

Pay was big enough for a single day of work.

VICENTE

That confident?

BEN

Girl ran away from her racist parents, most likely to be with someone they didn't approve of. I don't blame her. After this much time, she's long gone. Figure I'd do my due diligence and cash in, no way anyone's gonna find her.

VICENTE

You're a real asshole, you know that?

BEN

It varies, I feel vaguely justified on this one.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

Back to Connie. We're really capitalizing on the landmarks here. Connie crosses the bridge in her freshly stolen car.

EXT. REDWOODS - NIGHT

The headlights bounce in the distance as Connie drives off-road, deep into the woods. The car slows to a stop.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Connie pulls the brake and checks all around her. No one. Of course. Who would be out in the middle of the woods in the middle of the night?

The engine whirrs to a stop, and she pulls herself out into

EXT. REDWOODS - NIGHT

Constantly checking over her shoulder, Connie hefts the amateur mummy out of the trunk, accidentally dropping it in the dirt.

CONNIE

Shit.

She leans down (lifting with her back, bad form) and picks up the body again, sighing at the inconvenience.

Wait! Was that something in the distance?

She waits a few seconds.

Guess it was nothing. She keeps moving, keeps moving through the trees. She hauls the body over a log, and stops to look around.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Aw.

She thinks the car is that way? She really should have left the headlights on.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Goddammit.

She sets the body down and sits on the log. She stares at the corpse-blanket.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

You're really more trouble than
you're worth, you know that?

WAIT SHIT. That was definitely a voice in the distance. She ducks behind the log. What? Why? Who? She sees in the mist, the lights, vaguely.

Could they already know she's here? How? But why else?

Determined, she creeps towards the lights, climbing a small hill to see

FUCK YOU CUT TO:

INT. ITALICS RESTAURANT - DAY

Eddie enters a pretty nice-looking restaurant. Not expensive, but nice. Noticeably, he's wearing a different pair of pants.

COUNTERMAN

Thought you only did houses?

EDDIE

What?

COUNTERMAN

You Mormons, thought you only did houses, not restaurants. Tryin' to convert my meat?

Eddie waves him off, finding his seat.

EDDIE

Funny man, funny man.

He scans a laminated menu. Everything here is spick and span, clean as a whistle, so clean you could eat off it. Which is good, 'cause Eddie will.

However, he does notice a little smudge on the table. He zeroes in on it a little bit. Using a napkin, he wipes the smudge away.

He then crosses the entire restaurant, fairly slowly, to toss the napkin in the trashcan. It's a bit of an ordeal. The Counterman rolls his eyes at the display.

Eddie returns to his booth and orders the Number Five.

While he's waiting for his order, we hear another group talking kinda loud about nothing in particular. Eddie's not too pleased by this, but it's whatever, really.

He sits, waiting for his burger.

The other group stands to leave the restaurant, but one of them suddenly stops. He stands there for a few seconds, wobbling. Eddie looks at him quizzically.

The guy's sweating a lot. Not that it isn't HOT TODAY, but he's definitely sweating more than he should. He leans forward, puts his hands on his knees, and just straight up vomps onto the floor.

Eddie flinches instinctively at this.

This isn't just normal vom, oh no. It's a weird, oily vom. Real gross. And our resident vommer does this juust too long to be normal.

VOMMER

(vomming)

Vom.

Then he straightens himself out, wipes his mouth with his sleeve, and collapses into the oily puddle with a little splash.

Eddie watches on with horror. A burger slides onto the table in front of him.

WAITER
Your burger, sir.

CUT TO:

EXT. 1970S SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

OFFICER CHAVEZ, chicano, 30s, stands inside police tape circumscribing a 1970S SUBURBAN HOUSE. We see Ben's Corvair pull up outside the tape. He climbs out of the driver seat.

Chavez ducks under the tape.

BEN
How's the leg?

CHAVEZ
Think I'm starting to get some feeling back.

A quick laugh from Ben. Chavez lifts a pant leg to reveal a prosthesis, likely a souvenir from in-country. Ben points wordlessly at the police tape and raises his eyebrows.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
So, you know I owe you from the whole Schlinger situation last year.

BEN
Yeah, you do owe me.

CHAVEZ
Yeah, I know I owe you, that's what I just-... fuck it. Anyways, so you was asking around about that girl, yeah?

BEN
Grunes?

CHAVEZ
Yeah. Well, this morning we got called in, some kinda city hall guy didn't show up for work. Power and Water or something.

BEN
What's that got to do with-

CHAVEZ

Lemme finish, okay? I was collating. So anyways, we canvas the street, neighbors say they saw a young girl hanging around earlier that day. Girl they didn't recognize.

BEN

So you're saying-

CHAVEZ

Would ya just shut up for a second? I gotta- just shhh. Anyways, so I'm saying, by their description this girl looks like the spitting image of who you're looking for. Loitering.

Ben stays silent for a moment, checking to make sure this isn't one of the overly long pauses that lie between this policeman's sentences.

BEN

Hell of a loitering unit you got out here.

CHAVEZ

Yeah, well she may'a loitered someone to death with a pool cue.

BEN

Murder?

CHAVEZ

Maybe. Blood looks like she cracked his head open like an eight-ball, no body though.

BEN

You don't crack open eight-balls.

CHAVEZ

It's- it's a metaphor.
(under his breath)
Idiot.

BEN

Uh-huh.

CHAVEZ

So we're even then.

Ben is silent, in thought.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)

We're even.

BEN

Mm. This was supposed to be a catch-and-release. Looks like it's turned into a catch-and-make-confront-multiple-violent-crimes-in-the-court-of-law.

He pauses.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hey, d'ya think I could-?

He motions vaguely towards the crime scene.

CHAVEZ

Okay, but be quick. And you owe *me* now.

CUT TO:

EXT. REDWOODS - NIGHT

Connie, night time. She peers over the hill, gazing into the misty darkness. She sees flashlights moving through the forest, hears indistinct, undecipherable voices.

She glances nervously back at the wrapped up body lying on the ground. Shiiiiit. She crouch-walks over and stares at it for a few seconds, contemplating what she should do.

A twig cracks.

LIGHTS

SHINING IN HER FACE

Lots of 'em, all pointed at her. Not a great sign, really. Her vision adjusts slowly. Standing in front of her is a Terrence in middle-ages attire.

He doesn't say anything, but he does point a rather modern-looking gun at her. A second man, dressed similarly, walks slowly toward the humano asada burrito.

Connie lunges for it, but the man kicks her away, putting his hand on a gun holstered at his hip. We now see that more and more people gather around Connie, dressed in clothes that went out of style with feudalism.

The second man pushes the roll along with his feet, slowly unraveling the comforter to see what's inside. The body of Oldman rolls out, curled up into a rather uncomfortable-looking position. The man crouches next to the body, placing his head on Francis' chest. He waits for a few seconds.

He smiles. Connie is shocked, could he still be alive? But she poked him with a stick! That's the medically required check! The two men heft Francis over their shoulders. One points his firearm at Connie, motioning her to get up. She does.

The group moves through the forest silently as one, picking their way through the redwood trees. After a few minutes of silence

CONNIE

Where are we going?

The first man looks at her, but just makes a motion with his gun. They walk a bit longer.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Is- is he still alive?

FIRST MAN

Could say that.

But no more than that. They crest a hill to a

EXT. SMALL LAKE - NIGHT

Built up at one of the edges of the lake is a wooden stake, surrounded by kindling.

CONNIE

Oh God.

It looks like she stumbled into *The Wicker Man*. No, not the one with Nic Cage. A woman, DIANE BLACKWOOD, late 30s, short hair, dressed in plain middle-ages attire stands in front of the stake, her eyes closed.

As the group congregates around her, she opens her eyes. The first man approaches Diane with Oldman's body. He nods at it, Diane nods back. He then points at Connie. Diane nods to that as well.

They drag Oldman to the base of the stake.

OLDMAN

(quietly)

Moan.

Diane pulls out a pair of scissors and cuts his hair. Connie sees this, and looks around frantically. There are far too many well-armed people to make any sort of break for it.

Snip snip snip the hair comes off, leaving Francis as bald as the day he was born. Fitting, as this'll be the day he dies. They hoist him up to the stake, tying him to the large piece of wood. The rest of the congregation array themselves around the side of the lake.

Diane stands still and silent, above it all, watching it go down. She looks at Connie and smiles warmly, Connie instinctively returns it. Huh. Weird. As the congregation evenly space themselves along the edge of the lake, they kneel and turn their heads away from the stake.

Diane looks directly at it. The two men from earlier grab Connie by the shoulders. Diane once again looks at Connie and smiles, then pulls a zippo lighter out of her pocket and steps toward the firewood. She holds it at the lowest piece until it takes.

Once it does, it is insatiable. The flames lick higher and higher, toward Francis, who is now moving. The movements get jerkier and jerkier, and a low groan emits from his mouth. Connie tries to look away, but the two men grab her and forcefully point her toward it. She closes her eyes... but after a few moments, she feels compelled to open them.

She watches as Francis sweats, the groan growing louder and louder. Pain is visible on his face, twitching in spasms from the brain damage visited upon him by the kitchen counter. He screams, Diane closes her eyes. Tears well in Connie's as she watches this man painfully burn to death.

Suddenly, Diane's eyes are wide open, too wide. They become speckled with the stars of the night sky, flicking back and forth frantically, she's seeing something. Her mouth moves, as if she is mouthing along to a song only she can hear.

Connie can't take it anymore, she bites the hand of one of the men holding her, falls to the ground, and grabs for his holstered gun. Successful, she turns toward the screaming Francis and fires.

BANG

Miss

BANG

Miss

BANG BANG

The bullets thud into his chest, giving the scream an airy, breathy quality it did not have before. After a moment, he is silent. Connie watches him breathe what MUST BE his last breaths. He slumps forward and the fire burns higher.

Diane turns toward her, framed by the flames. A *SMACK* to the back of her head sends Connie reeling, and soon she finds herself again constrained, minus a gun. Diane walks slowly toward her, intercut with the bald Oldman burning up.

DIANE
Mm. Good enough.

She steps even closer, offering her right hand.

DIANE (CONT'D)
Welcome!

CUT TO:

INT. ITALICS RESTAURANT - DAY

Eddie stares alternately at his burger and the Terrence now lying front-down in a pool of oily vomit. He pushes his plate forward an inch, the universal sign of "no more for me, thanks."

The man stands up, looking none-too-great. The front of his shirt is, however, quite grody. Not eager to approach, Eddie calls out from his seat.

EDDIE
Sir, you okay?

There's no response.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Sir?

VOMMER
What? Oh... uh, I feel better, I suppose.

EDDIE
Better than when you were vomiting for five minutes straight, or than when you were lying on the ground just now?

VOMMER
Both.

EDDIE

Good.

Eddie takes a moment, peering at the vomit. He moves closer, making sure not to get any on the wing-tipped tips of his wing-tips. Now Eddie's seen a lot of vom in his time, and this vom? This vom wasn't just any other vom. It was some high-class, spooky-ass vom.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Out of curiosity, what did you order?

VOMMER

The number five.

Eddie gives his burger the side-eye. He quickly exits and re-enters, his "Registered Sanitarian" badge reinstated. Eddie approaches the owner of *Italics*, who's not particularly happy to see the badge.

EDDIE

I'm gonna have to take a look.

The owner wordlessly shakes his head, but lets Eddie through.

INT. BACK OF RESTAURANT - DAY

Eddie takes his time, meticulously checking every part of the kitchen. Most of it checks out pretty well, it's just as clean as the last time he was here. He checks a number of drawers, then stoops to look under a counter.

Ah. There it is.

Beneath the counter is a dark, oily mold of some sort. Eddie recoils, looking like he's about to hurl.

CUT TO:

INT. 1970S SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Ben looks at the smeared bloody handprint on the kitchen counter, then the pool of blood on the ground. He looks at the pool cue.

He takes a few steps back, his foot slides a bit on a few crumpled bills left on the ground.

BEN

(to himself)

Why a pool cue? And that-...

He sighs.

BEN (CONT'D)

This was an accident. Maybe. So she freaked and stole his car to get rid of it. But where...

We see a painting hung on the wall, the redwood forests.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. REDWOODS - AFTERNOON

Ben his car outside a Park Ranger's station in the forest. He approaches the building and is met at the door by a PARK RANGER.

BEN

Hi, hey, Ben, legal investigator. Wondering if you saw or heard anything strange around here last night.

PARK RANGER

Last night?

BEN

Yeah.

PARK RANGER

I don't remember the last night I *didn't* see something strange around here.

BEN

Ah. Good.

PARK RANGER

Best you don't go investigating.

BEN

...is that a threat?

PARK RANGER

Oh, me? No, I'm not- no. I'm just trying to survive out here, I don't- it's just a- people, well, we've had a lot of folks go missing around here lately.

BEN

In the woods?

PARK RANGER

Yeah they, they say don't go hiking alone but- well, I saw a few of the people gone missing. They weren't alone. But there's bears and- It's just not safe to explore around here right now. I'd drop it.

BEN

Well I'm not getting paid to drop it.

PARK RANGER

Yeah. Yeah okay. I heard, a voice last night, out that-a-way last night. Some smoke.

He points.

BEN

Smoke? Aren't *you* supposed to prevent forest fires?

The Ranger is silent.

BEN (CONT'D)

Huh. Guess Smoky was right.

Ben heads that-a-way, into the woods.

PARK RANGER

Just- just be careful, is all.

Ben soon finds tire-tracks, and follows them to Francis' car, still there, abandoned in the trees. He checks the trunk no body. Hmm. He treks away from the car, roughly approximating Connie's journey.

He finds evidence of a large group moving through the woods. Footprints all around.

BEN

Who the hell are *these* guys?

He follows the path of trampled leaves, sticks, and dirt, cresting the final hill. He sees it: Oldman, horrifically burned at the stake, at the edge of the lake.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL LAKE - NIGHT

Connie looking at the exact same thing. Diane still stands in front of her, hand stuck out. Diane nods at the two fellas constraining Connie, and they let go, dropping her to her knees.

DIANE

Really convenient of you to stop by.

Connie doesn't reply.

DIANE (CONT'D)

I understand. You're lost, confused, aren't you? So were we all... so was I, really.

Connie again does not reply. Diane pauses, considers another tack.

DIANE (CONT'D)

This man you killed, you didn't mean to, did you? At first, I mean. Before you shot him.

Connie weakly moans something that sounds like a negative.

DIANE (CONT'D)

But then, at the end, when you grabbed the gun and put him out of his misery... that was intention! That was purpose! You knew what you needed to do, and you did it! None of that was an accident. Your life, so often ruled by chance and the whims of fate... you're not in control. And that frightens you, doesn't it?

Connie looks up at her, indecisive.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Oh don't worry, it frightens all of us. Lacking control, well, no one digs that. But having control, taking control... that's where it's at. And you know what the difference between the two is?

Connie mumbles something indistinct.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Confidence! Confidence is the difference! It's just a state of mind! And when you grabbed that gun and put old Oldman out of his misery, why you were more confident than I'd ever seen you before!

CONNIE

(weakly)
Before?

DIANE

And that's what I want to see from you. That verve, that "I-will-do-what-I-must." Because that's how you regain control of your life. That's how we all regained control of our lives. That, and God.

Connie looks confused.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Oh. I could explain, but why do that when I could just show you? Come here, come here. Come on, now, don't be shy. It's exciting! It's okay to be excited!

Connie weakly follows Diane, they approach the stake, which is still burning.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Here, here... look into the fire. Exquisite, isn't it? Anyways, that's not important, just wanted you to get a good look at it. Now, this way please!

Connie follows once again as Diane leads her around the fire.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Look into the lake. What do you see?

Connie looks into the lake. At first, she just sees the stars, reflected clearly in the water. But then, the stars begin to widen, accompanied by the reflection of Francis' screams. They widen further and further, revealing themselves to be not stars but holes in the sky. The widening holes combine into one giant puncture. Through the hole, we see a blank emptiness. Nothing, complete nothing. But then... it appears. A shape. It's blurry, undefined, constantly shifting.

For a second, it resembles a person, but bulbous and malformed, cancerous, clawing its way up through the abyss. But then it's gone.

The reflection of Francis' screams are swallowed whole by the *thing*. As soon as it appeared, the holes close and the lake is whole again. There is a moment of shocked silence. Diane sidles up behind Connie.

DIANE (CONT'D)
Pretty cool, huh?

CUT TO:

INT. EDDIE'S CUBICLE - AFTERNOON

Eddie sits in his cramped cubicle, sadly marking *Italics* off of his notebook. He turns back a page, and we see another full page of restaurants written in pencil with "A" ratings, crossed off. He looks at this for a bit, then pulls a large paper map out of his desk drawer. He spreads it out on his desk, and consults his notebook. For he circles each of the crossed out restaurants on his map.

We close in on his face as he does it, and realization dawns.

CUT TO:

INT. DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Eddie stands outside the door, map tucked under his arm. The DIRECTOR sees this too, but quickly looks down as if he totally didn't just see Eddie out there no he was looking at this paperwork the whole time. Eddie knocks on the glass. The Director looks up as if this was news to him, shuffles the paperwork to the side, and waves Eddie in.

DIRECTOR
See you've got a map today, Eddie.

EDDIE
I do have a map. And if you could-

Eddie moves the Director's coffee mug from the desk to the ground, then unrolls the map on the desk.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
What do you see?

DIRECTOR
The fine City of San Francisco.

Eddie is nonplussed.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

You've got the circles again,
Eddie.

EDDIE

Yes, I've got the circles again.
Because I just had the unpleasant
experience of trying to eat while
someone yakked an oil spill. And,
wouldn't you know it, another one
of my favorite restaurants has a
serious health issue.

DIRECTOR

Well, write them up for it.

EDDIE

I did. But it doesn't make sense.
All of these places, before the
last few months, were perfect.
Spotless. The only places I'd eat.
But now? Suddenly, now they're all
coming down with serious health
issues? That doesn't make sense.

DIRECTOR

Maybe they got overconfident.
Figured that if they had your seal
of approval they wouldn't have to
work so hard.

EDDIE

If anything, wouldn't they want to
work harder to know that I wasn't
going to turn around and slap them
with a demerit?

DIRECTOR

I don't know, Eddie. Your
relationship with the restaurateurs
of this town is a lurid and
tumultuous one, and the less I know
about it, the better I feel.

EDDIE

So I figured I'd keep track of it,
see if there was something strange
to it all. And would you look at
that, there is.

He pulls out a pen, and connects the dots in lines, all
radiating from a center.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

It's exact. They're all coming from right there.

DIRECTOR

That new place opened up a bit ago?

EDDIE

The timing matches up exactly, three months ago this place opens, three months ago other restaurants start having trouble.

DIRECTOR

This seems like a correlation-causation-type misunderstanding.

EDDIE

It may be. But it wouldn't hurt to check it out.

DIRECTOR

We already did an inspection, it's clean.

EDDIE

Yeah, but *I* didn't. And I'm considerably more thorough.

The Director thinks on this for a few moments.

DIRECTOR

Okay. Fine. If it gets you offa my back.

EDDIE

Thanks, you won't regret this. I'll be leaving now.

DIRECTOR

It's already paying off.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL LAKE - AFTERNOON

Ben approaches the stake, cringing at the burned corpse. Not a pleasant way to go. His foot jangles something, he looks down. Huh, four shell casings.

He looks at the footprints spread out along the side of the lake. He slowly moves toward the edge of the water, looking into the lake.

Connie looks back. Through the lake he sees into last night. Connie stands at the edge, frantic, scared, dirty. A woman stands behind her, but she's out of focus. The stars shine brightly in the night above them. We see the woman sidle up behind Connie. She says something that Ben cannot hear.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL LAKE - NIGHT

Connie turns to see Diane behind her.

CONNIE

What- what was that?

DIANE

Oh, you know. Just God. No big deal, really?

CONNIE

(whispering)

I did see that. Didn't I?

DIANE

You most certainly did.

CONNIE

But that means-

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL LAKE - AFTERNOON

Ben sees the back of Connie, speaking to the woman. The woman extends her hand. After a few seconds of hesitation, Connie takes it. The other woman leads Connie away, out of clear view. Instinctively, Ben reaches out for her, disturbing the water. The ripples from his hand spread through the lake.

Other ripples form, multiplying, colliding into each other in a feedback loop, amplifying themselves, turning the once-placid surface of the lake into a roiling mass of water.

A low, scraping sound grows louder and louder, it seems to be emanating from the lake. Ben recoils, taking a few steps back from the water's edge. A figure emerges from the water, slowly. It is dripping, a figure of water, vaguely human. It vibrates with the ripples of the lake. It steps haltingly onto the shore, the reflection of Oldman's scream stuttering out of it.

Ben fuckin' books it. He sprints outta there faster than whoever the most famous Olympic sprinter of the early seventies was. He bounds over a log, jumps through bushes, and sprints the straightaways.

EXT. REDWOODS - AFTERNOON

He passes Oldman's car, and follows his tracks back to his own. He slams the door closed, pops it into gear and flies down the road.

CUT TO:

EXT. REDWOODS - NIGHT

The water figure walks slowly through the woods. It finds Francis' car, crawls into the driver's seat, and collapses, splashing everywhere.

CUT TO:

INT. COZY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ben parks his car outside the first establishment he sees before rushing in. He approaches the counter, looking scared shitless. He wipes the sweat from his brow. A man stands behind the counter, older.

BEN
Whiskey. Quick.

Ben looks around. There's not too many people here, just a few sitting alone at tables and in booths. A small group is playing pool at a centrally placed table.

Wait, is that-?

We see Eddie, still dressed in his workday best, entering the establishment. He slowly makes his way to the counter alongside Ben. The two give each other a quick nod.

EDDIE
Could I speak to the owner?

The man on the other side of the counter squints his eyes. Eddie points to his badge. The man walks into the back, out of sight. A few moments later, a woman comes out. Diane Blackwood. She smiles at them both.

CRACK

And the pool balls crash.

THE END