

Documentia

by  
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EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Oppressive rain.

KARL BANSWICK sits behind the wheel of a slow-moving '74 Mercedes. He is forty-two, unshaven with dirty hair. He wears a sports-coat torn at the shoulder. He smokes a cigarette like it's a part of him.

The car crawls down a narrow city residential street. The rear window is smashed and rain drips in.

KARL'S POV:

The porch of a particular townhouse, as he passes. Two men in overcoats and hats, waiting for someone.

INSERT:

Flashes: Two hands touching -- a man's and a woman's. The man loses his grip and the female hand falls away. Face of a woman, features blurred. The tearing open of a red envelope.

Karl drifts to a stop. The men on the porch notice Karl's Mercedes. One of them points his way.

CU:

A white envelope, torn open at the side, rests on the seat next to Karl.

A third man in a black suit exits the townhouse at one of the other men's signal.

CU:

Karl, through the wet window of the Mercedes. He looks exhausted, about to crumble...

TITLE CARD: "FIRST DOCUMENT"

INT. OFFICE (LOBBY) - DAY

A plush city high-rise.

The office is done in late-70s best. Fashions and decor reflect the times. There is a pretty BLONDE RECEPTIONIST looking bored.

INT. OFFICE (RABASSA'S) - DAY

Karl is seated opposite MR. RABASSA, 50s.

Karl holds a red envelope in his lap and smokes a cigarette.

RABASSA  
Open it, Karl.

KARL  
You said this was from the judge?

RABASSA  
I've never been handed anything so  
mysterious. Not during session.

KARL  
What's inside?

Rabassa shrugs, but it's clear the lawyer is curious.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Will it be rescheduled?

RABASSA  
Yes. But for now... technically...  
you are *still* married. She fails  
to appear, thus --  
(pause)  
Karl. Open it.

Karl looks to the envelope. He stands.

KARL  
Maybe later.

RABASSA  
Don't leave me in suspense.

KARL  
I'll call if it's something related  
to the divorce.

RABASSA  
You're happy about this. Aren't  
you? Her not showing for the final  
hearing.

KARL  
I'll call you.

Karl exits.

INT. OFFICE (LOBBY) - DAY

Karl passes the Blonde Receptionist. She gives him a cold  
look and glances at the envelope, perhaps recognizing  
something?

INT. OFFICE (ELEVATOR) - DAY

Karl descends. The elevator stops. A JAPANESE MAN, immaculately dressed, gets on with him. Awkward moment. Soon Karl exits.

EXT. HIGH-RISE - DAY

Karl, in the street. He watches the Japanese Man go off down the street. Karl dashes out his cigarette then tears open the envelope.

CU:

The contents -- two pages. One says WELCOME KARL BANSWICK in typed bold letters. The second is a notice from the city library, a book on hold.

Karl checks his watch.

INT. CITY LIBRARY (FRONT DESK) - DAY

Karl approaches a desk marked Information, where an OLD VOLUNTEER works. He holds up the notice.

KARL

I didn't order this book.

OLD VOLUNTEER

(reading)

Karl Banswick. That's you, right?  
"Maps, The Seven Secrets To  
Cartography."

The Old Volunteer searches a bin under his desk.

KARL

(on deaf ears)

It's a mistake.

The volunteer slaps a book on the counter -- an older book, from the 1940s, in good condition, the jacket style of the times.

KARL (CONT'D)

It was meant for someone else.

OLD VOLUNTEER

What book did you order then?

KARL

I didn't order *any* book.

OLD VOLUNTEER  
(confused)  
Do you want me to put it back?

Karl turns. There is a growing line behind him. He steps away, awkward and out-of-place.

INT. CITY LIBRARY (STACKS) - DAY

Karl checks his watch. He roams an aisle of the library.

CU:  
The books he's passing. Titles on DIVORCE. Self-help.  
A woman enters the aisle and Karl quickly slinks away.

INT. CITY LIBRARY (FRONT DESK) - DAY

Karl approaches the Old Volunteer. The line has dissipated.

KARL  
That book might be for me after  
all.

OLD VOLUNTEER  
(smiling)  
Your wife reserved it, didn't she?  
She forgot to tell you.

Karl, lying, nods.

INT. DELI - DAY

Karl eats lunch and reads the book. After the turn of a page, he shakes his head, not impressed, and shuts the book.

He looks to the back cover. There is the picture of a young author with slicked hair and glasses. Underneath the picture it says, "Henry Dodge, 1947."

INT. CAR GARAGE - DAY

Karl starts up a '75 Ford Granada, tossing the Henry Dodge book aside.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Karl drives distracted. At a point, he smiles.

EXT. FLOWER SELLER - DAY

Karl, Granada parked nearby, buys flowers from a street stall.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

The Granada pulls into a low-rent used car lot with less than twenty cars in the lot. The pavement is cracked and the property cheap. There is a single showroom / office building on the property. A wide sign proclaims, BANSWICK MOTORS.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Two salesmen -- DARNELL, 30s, black, and FRANK, 50s, white -- wear pastel ties and pace the floor, bored.

Behind the counter that leads to the rear offices stands ARTURO, early 40s Hispanic.

There are 2 cars in the showroom -- the black Mercedes from the opening scene (rear window intact), and a white Buick.

Karl enters, flowers in hand, and the employees snap-to.

ARTURO

Did you bring back the Granada, Mr. Banswick?

KARL

Why? Someone wanna buy it?

ARTURO

No...

Karl lays the flowers on the counter-top.

KARL

Any customers today?

ARTURO

You have a visitor.

Karl picks up the flowers.

KARL

Is it her?

ARTURO

(gently)  
Not your wife.

Karl is visibly disappointed. He lays the flowers back down.

ARTURO (CONT'D)  
Is it over?

KARL  
She didn't show. I thought she  
might come here.

ARTURO  
I don't like you like this. I  
remember you, with your father--

Karl grips his arm in mild pain. Arturo narrows his gaze.

KARL  
I'm okay.

Karl takes out a cigarette and lights it.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Who's my guest?

ARTURO  
It's a big fat man. I think he is  
with the police.

KARL  
What makes you think that?

ARTURO  
He's wearing a gun.

KARL  
He might be a robber.

ARTURO  
Only police have guns here -- in  
the arm. Thieves have it in the  
belt.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - DAY

Karl enters his tiny office to find a very large man in a suit seated in the chair opposite his small desk. This is BRODY EASTER.

KARL  
Police?

EASTER  
Detective. Are you Karl Banswick?

KARL  
Can I see your badge?

EASTER  
I don't have a badge. But I have a card.

Easter hands over a card.

KARL  
(reading)  
Detective Brody Easter. Sounds made up.

Easter smiles and takes out a note-pad.

EASTER  
You're forty-one, correct?

KARL  
Forty-two, just had a birthday. Do you want to see my driver's license? How about my license plate number? Need that? 'Cos if you do, I don't have one. I don't own a car.

EASTER  
What kind of a man runs a car lot and doesn't own a car?

KARL  
My wife got the car in the separation.

EASTER  
Do you hold the papers on the lot? Or are you just the manager?

KARL  
I inherited the dealership from my father. He died. I'm just trying to break even so I can sell it.

EASTER  
Cause of death?

KARL  
A heart attack. The Banswicks have a history of it. I've already had one bypass. Wanna see my zipper?

Easter shakes this off, the writes in his note-pad.

KARL (CONT'D)

I've given you a whole bunch of freebies, Detective. Not that it matters, but I want you to see that I'm not hiding anything. Now tell me... why is there a detective in my office?

EASTER

I'm here about your wife, Mr. Banswick. Do you know where she might be?

KARL

She missed an appointment today at the courthouse.

EASTER

She hasn't telephoned?

KARL

No, but we're getting divorced. I doubt I'm her first choice in an emergency. Probably has a lover somewhere.

EASTER

Do you really believe that?

KARL

Have you checked our house?

EASTER

*Our* house?

KARL

(snapping)

Yeah, my name's on the title, too, you know. She wasn't at the courthouse today so everything's still mine as much as hers.

EASTER

Is that where you slept?

KARL

No. I sleep at my father's old place. An apartment.

Brody writes.

KARL (CONT'D)

Hold on a sec. Do you mean to tell me she's missing?

EASTER  
 Yes, Mr. Banswick. Your wife is  
 missing.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Karl watches Easter through the showroom window as the man  
 leaves the dealership lot.

Arturo approaches.

KARL  
 I don't think he's very good at his  
 job, Arturo. I wonder if he's even  
 a real policeman.

ARTURO  
 Is something wrong, Mr. Banswick?

KARL  
 It's my wife. She's missing. And  
 that detective thinks he can find  
 her.

FADE TO

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Karl sorts the dealership mail.

He finds a red envelope tossed aside from the stack.

He holds it up.

KARL  
 (calling)  
 Arturo! Where'd this come from?

Arturo, polishing the showroom's Mercedes, stands upright.

ARTURO  
 Dolores.

TITLE CARD: "SECOND DOCUMENT"

INT. THE COFFEE POT - DAY

Karl enters a donut shop called "The Coffee Pot" -- a  
 desperate-looking dive across the street from Banswick Motors  
 that's directly opposite Banswick Motors.

DOLORES, 40s, woman, no make-up, wearing a smock, pours coffee for a customer at the counter.

DOLORES  
(to Karl)  
Watch your head.

Karl bumps into black and orange paper lanterns hanging above the door. He notices they are strung all around the perimeter of the shop.

DOLORES (CONT'D)  
Gotta raise those up. My sis and I made those over the weekend. For Halloween. Sis didn't warn me the paper would be so expensive. She's gotta get everything top of the line. Do you like?

Karl sits, puts the red envelope on the counter between them.

KARL  
Did you drop this off?

DOLORES  
Yes, Karl.

KARL  
What's inside?

DOLORES  
Open it.

KARL  
Is it from you?

DOLORES  
No. A customer gave that to me.

KARL  
What's his name?

DOLORES  
Just a fella, comes in. I don't know his name. Curly the newspaper guy gave it to him, and he gave it to me to give to you.

KARL  
Why didn't Curly just bring it over himself?

Dolores shrugs. She notices his mood.

DOLORES  
Are you okay?

KARL  
They tell me my wife's missing.

DOLORES  
Oh, God, Karl. Since when?

KARL  
A few days. The police came to see me.

DOLORES  
Are they gonna help?

KARL  
Maybe.

DOLORES  
Oh, Karl. She didn't call or anything?

KARL  
Why would she call *me*?

DOLORES  
You're cranky, Karl, but we like you. We don't like you depressed.

KARL  
I'm not depressed...

DOLORES  
Sure. You just haven't smiled in eleven months.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTERS - DAY

Karl crosses back to the dealership. En route, he opens the second red envelope.

CU:

A single page reading, OUR INTERESTS ARE YOURS, and a sales receipt.

EXT. CITY STREET - DUSK

Karl drives in a gray '68 Volkswagen.

INT. JOGGER'S DEN - DUSK

Karl enters a sports store called "Jogger's Den." In his hand is the receipt. He goes to the counter where an athletic-looking SALESWOMAN with feathered hair stands ready.

KARL

Do you sell anything for \$24.95?

Karl hands her the receipt.

KARL (CONT'D)

I have this receipt. But I can't for the life of me remember what my wife purchased. I have to note it as a business expense.

SALESPERSON

This is from just yesterday.

KARL

I know. What do you have for \$22.95?

SALESPERSON

I think just these.

She gestures to a display on the counter. Wrist-watches. There is only one left.

KARL

A watch?

She hands one to Karl.

SALESPERSON

You can drop it, stomp on it, get it wet, it still works. Tough stuff. Really good for joggers who like foul weather. You know it rains more than it's sunny in this city.

KARL

Believe me, I know.

(pause)

Let me buy one.

Karl puts down the watch and pulls out his wallet.

SALESPERSON

(suspicious)

Don't you already have one?

(MORE)

SALESPERSON (CONT'D)  
Doesn't matter to me if you want a  
matching pair with your wife.

Karl doesn't answer, puts down his money.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - NIGHT

Karl enters the dealership. There are a few evening  
customers being helped by Darnell and Frank.

Karl passes Arturo in the rear office.

ARTURO  
Any word about your wife?

Karl gives a quick shake of his head and scurries into his  
office.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - NIGHT

Karl on the telephone.

KARL  
(into phone)  
I think someone's giving me clues.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - NIGHT

Brody Easter stares down at the torn open red envelopes, the  
watch, the book.

EASTER  
Tomorrow we'll question Curly, that  
newspaper seller you mentioned.  
There's obviously some sort of  
transfer going on, but the train  
has to start somewhere, right?

KARL  
We open at nine, but I'm usually  
here an hour before to do the  
paperwork. Curly always beats me.  
I'm actually not here much during  
the day. I leave the selling to  
the salesmen.

EASTER  
Oh, what's your line, then?

KARL

I'm educated in business, but this is the only one I've ever tried to run.

EASTER

You mean to tell me you're a forty-two-year-old businessman who's never owned a business?

KARL

I dabbled in this and that. And I managed my wife's affairs. She's a-

EASTER

I know what she is. I've been to the mayor's office.

Easter thumbs Henry Dodge's book.

EASTER (CONT'D)

Know anything about maps?

KARL

Not really. But that book doesn't seem to really be about maps. It's more about the influence map-makers have on politics.

EASTER

(dismissive)

They're just harmless pieces of paper, aren't they? Nothing very scary here. Letters, papers, ink. It's not like you open one and it explodes in your face.

KARL

Scariest things I ever got in my life came in the mail. Tax notices, separation papers, death certificates.

EASTER

Let me see that watch.

Easter inspects the watch, then drops it to the table.

KARL

Aren't you going to... well, dust these documents for prints?

EASTER

You got a file cabinet?

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS (REAR OFFICE) - NIGHT

Karl, with Easter, flags down Arturo.

KARL  
Arturo, give me your keys.

ARTURO  
Am I being fired?

KARL  
*God no.* Give me the keys, Arturo,  
and don't ask any more questions.

Arturo hands over the keys and moves back onto the floor.

Karl locks the booty in the lower drawer of the single file cabinet as Easter watches.

EASTER  
Do you trust your men?

KARL  
They've worked here a long time.

EASTER  
Even the Mexican?

KARL  
Arturo is Argentinian.

Easter leaves.

Karl notices the flowers he bought earlier in the day, wilting on the counter. He walks to them and throws them in the trash.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Karl drives a '72 Impala home to his apartment.

INT. KARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's lonely, and small, the apartment of an old man.

Montage:

- Karl, watching a show on a black & white television
- Karl drinking
- Karl brushing his teeth

- Karl sleeping

FADE TO

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Morning, Karl is unlocking the dealership. He looks across the street and sees CURLY, 60s, wearing a ball-cap and hocking papers in the middle of the busy rush hour intersection.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY

Karl signals for Curly, who hops to the corner and draws out a daily paper.

CURLY  
Mornin', Mr. B.

KARL  
Did a man come and talk to you this morning? A fat guy?

CURLY  
No, nobody come talk to me.

Karl is surprised. He fumbles for change and buys the paper.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - DAY

Karl finds Easter's card. He phones.

MESSAGE  
"You have reached a non-working telephone number. Please check the number and try again."

He re-dials.

MESSAGE (CONT'D)  
"You have reached a non-working telephone number. Please check the number and try again."

He hangs up, thinks.

Calls another number.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

A uniformed officer speaks to Karl.

POLICE OPERATOR

You musta been lied to. If he shows up again, call us. We'll arrest him for impersonatin' a detective.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - DAY

Karl hangs up. His eyes burn into the business card.

KARL

(to himself)

No *badge*.

He crumples the card.

KARL (CONT'D)

Sonofabitch.

INT. OFFICE (RABASSA'S) - DAY

Mr. Rabassa, on the phone.

RABASSA

(into phone)

Legal advice so early in the morning, Karl?

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - DAY

Karl on phone.

KARL

(into phone)

Have you heard from my wife?

RABASSA

(over phone)

No. And neither has her lawyer. I phoned him late yesterday.

KARL

I'm beginning to think something's happened. That she's been kidnapped or something. What are the steps for that?

INT. OFFICE (RABASSA'S) - DAY

Mr. Rabassa on phone.

RABASSA  
(into phone)  
I suppose we should start by  
contacting the police. Have you  
been to the house?

KARL  
No, but I plan on going there as  
soon as I can...

FADE TO

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Karl drives the Impala.

RABASSA  
(V.O., over phone)  
If she's missing, Karl, think about  
how that might look. Final stages  
of a deee-voorce. Get a neighbor to  
let you in. Or, better yet, have  
the neighbor look around on your  
behalf. Call me back, Karl.  
Promise?

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Karl stands on the porch of the townhouse, the same one from  
the opening scene.

He peers in windows. He goes to the driveway and inspects a  
car, sitting stagnant.

Karl stands back from the house and thinks.

He drives off.

INT. POLICE STATION (LOBBY) - DAY

Karl stands before a DESK OFFICER.

KARL  
I'd like to report a missing  
person.

INT. POLICE STATION (INTERROGATION) - DAY

The Desk Officer escorts Karl to a small room.

DESK OFFICER  
Someone will be with you in a few  
minutes.

Karl waits in a chair. He lights a smoke.

The door opens. It is a young UNIFORMED POLICEMAN.

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN  
Karl Banswick?

Karl rises from his chair.

KARL  
Yes, that's me.

UNIFORMED POLICEMAN  
Here ya go.

The Uniformed Policeman drops a red envelope into Karl's hand, then he exits.

TITLE CARD: "THIRD DOCUMENT"

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Karl leaves the police station, breathless, holding the torn envelope.

EXT. DERRY PARK - DAY

The sun shines on a small, old-fashioned park. Kids, Moms, grass, trees, a circular park drive, and a Carousel.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:  
Karl, looking at the carousel. In his hand, he holds a carousel ticket.

He takes a long look at the faces around him, sighs, and takes a step forward.

SUDDENLY! A woman races at him--

This is AVA MOON, 30s, beautiful, well-dressed.

AVA  
Oh my God, oh God, what, what-

Karl stumbles back. Ava clutches at him.

AVA (CONT'D)  
That envelope, the envelope!

He surrenders it. She reads the page aloud.

AVA (CONT'D)  
(reading)  
"LEAVE NOW IF YOU WANT TO SEE HER."  
What else was in the envelope?

KARL  
A coupon, for the carousel.

AVA  
(accusingly)  
Where did you get this?

KARL  
A policeman gave it me.

AVA  
Have you got any others?

KARL  
Not with me.

AVA  
But you've been *given* others.

KARL  
Two.

Ava is in obvious emotional pain. She squeezes the envelope into a tight ball.

AVA  
What's your name!

KARL  
Karl.

AVA  
Who's missing?

KARL  
Who the hell are you?

AVA  
My son. Noah. He's missing.

Pause.

KARL  
My wife is missing.

Ava reaches into her coat and pulls out her own red envelope. She hands it to him.

CU:  
The contents. Typed page: DON'T STOP, plus an article on depression.

AVA  
I haven't been myself lately. But do you *blame* me? My son's been missing for five days! I can't eat, I can't drink, I can't sleep-

Ava turns towards the park, the children playing.

AVA (CONT'D)  
I've been here every afternoon hoping he'll be here.

KARL  
I'm waiting for my wife. You saw my note. It said she would be here.

AVA  
"LEAVE NOW IF YOU WANT TO SEE HER."  
(pause)  
Maybe they meant me.

Karl looks off in the distance, considers, becomes resigned.

KARL  
Yes. They did.

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Karl and Ava sit on a sofa in Ava's condominium, a luxury high-rise well decorated and as perfectly put together as Ava herself. She is showing Karl her red envelopes, the contents, and pictures of her son, NOAH.

AVA  
(indicating)  
A student application.

KARL  
For where?

AVA  
City University. Blank. The  
program on Human Geography.

KARL  
What's that?

AVA  
The study of human patterns,  
history, and behavior.

KARL  
Oh.

AVA  
I looked it up.

KARL  
Oh.

AVA  
(indicating)  
Magazine article. Some Dutch  
sculptor on display at the art  
museum.

KARL  
Have you gone to see the show?

AVA  
There was the statue of a little  
boy. He looked like Noah.

KARL  
(indicating the last)  
And a brochure?

He picks up the last document -- a fashion brochure.

AVA  
It came with this note.

She hands him a typed page: DRESS FOR SUCCESS.

AVA (CONT'D)  
And the others came with these top  
pages. "WELCOME AVA MOON" and  
"ENJOY THE ARTS."

KARL  
At least we both got a welcome to  
the party. My first note was a  
welcome. Did you go to the  
university?

AVA  
No. Should I have?

KARL  
I don't know. That Easter guy was an imposter, sent to mislead me. Delay me. Then, the moment I'm about to report my wife missing, I get a message that makes me race out of the police station.

AVA  
Why not turn everything over now?

KARL  
Why haven't *you*?

AVA  
I don't know. I feel like... like if I told... something bad might happen.

KARL  
I did a trace on my last envelope...

INSERT: As Karl describes.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(V.O.)  
The envelope had come from Curly, the corner news-seller. He got it from Mr. Peterson, a guy who bought a car from me. He got it from a neighbor. The neighbor had gotten the envelope from her lawn service. The lawn service had gotten the envelope from another customer. That customer had gotten the envelope from his brother. His brother had gotten it from a man at the bank. The man at the bank from a co-worker. The co-worker had from a Brink's driver. And the driver... no one could remember his name. All this happened in less than twenty-four hours.

AVA  
A hand-off.

KARL  
Apparently so.

Karl picks up a picture of Noah. He is a happy boy with his mother.

KARL (CONT'D)  
I should get back to work.

AVA  
Take me with you.

KARL  
Look, I'll give you my telephone number, though, if anything turns up you can just-

AVA  
They *meant* for us to meet. We should stay together.

Karl stands. His face shows paranoia. He looks around at her perfect apartment. Toys scattered on the floor, more pictures, Ava's face.

KARL  
I'm slow to trust people these days. You're a complete stranger. Do you understand? For all I know, there isn't even a Noah Moon.

Ava's face crumbles. She starts to cry.

Karl, regretful, finds his way to the door.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Karl parks his car. He gives Darnell, wandering the lot, an impatient nod.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Karl enters. Arturo is there.

ARTURO  
Good afternoon, Mr. Banswick.

KARL  
Where's Frank?

ARTURO  
On break.

Karl moves into his office...

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - DAY

...Karl enters, shuts the door, and grips his arm. He's feeling pain. He quickly lights a cigarette.

Then he sees.

A red envelope on his desk.

The phone rings. He jumps.

KARL  
(into phone)  
Hello.

RABASSA  
(over phone)  
Karl! Where the hell have you been, Karl? I thought you were going to telephone me this morning.

KARL  
(into phone)  
I got busy.

RABASSA  
(over phone)  
Your wife. What's happening? Was she at the house?

Karl picks up the latest red envelope.

KARL  
(distant, into phone)  
My wife? She's fine. Yes, not missing. She was down with a cold. What's that? Yeah, don't do that. No, don't call her lawyer. She'll be in touch with him soon, I'm sure. Let me know if anything comes up on the reschedule. Call you soon.

He hangs up.

CU:  
The envelope.

TITLE CARD: "FOURTH DOCUMENT"

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Karl emerges from his office. He hears the ding of the showroom door bell. He approaches the counter between the office and the showroom floor. It's Frank, coffee in hand.

Karl sighs and looks to the envelope. He stuffs it in his jacket.

There is another rattle of the bell.

He looks up. Ava Moon stands in the doorway.

Karl comes around the counter, intercepts Arturo from speaking with her, and moves in close, his back to his employees, aware of their eyes.

AVA

(softly)

I followed you. I... I took a taxi after you left. I had him circle the park. I saw you get into your car.

KARL

What for?

AVA

You have to *help* me.

KARL

I've got my own troubles. Where's your husband?

AVA

We're divorced. He lives in Spain.

Karl hedges.

AVA (CONT'D)

Please. If we work together, maybe we can find both *your* wife and *my* son.

KARL

We're getting a divorce. It's almost final. She's probably wouldn't want to see me anyway. And I shouldn't be seen with you.

AVA  
 But something's going on, isn't it?  
 We should go to the police, tell  
 them that you've been getting  
 these, too, and-

Karl catches Arturo staring.

KARL  
 (even softer)  
 Across the street. The donut shop.  
 We'll talk there.

Karl indicates that she should wait. He goes to Arturo,  
 flashes him the red envelope.

KARL (CONT'D)  
 (to Arturo)  
 Where did this come from?

ARTURO  
 That fat man from yesterday dropped  
 it off.

KARL  
 What?

ARTURO  
 Yes. I think he's at Dolores's.

Karl turns, goes to the showroom window.

POV:  
 Brody Easter sits in The Coffee Pot's front window, eating a  
 donut.

KARL  
 (to himself)  
 Sonofabitch. He came back.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Karl races out of the showroom, past Ava, who stands dumb.

Envelope in hand, he nearly gets clipped crossing against the  
 traffic.

Easter spots Karl, darts from his position. He runs out of  
 the donut shop into an adjoining alley.

Karl's on him, chasing through the alley.

Karl fumbles the envelope, drops it, but keeps going.

He feels his chest -- he's in pain.

At the break of the alley, he's lost Easter in the rear of the donut shop.

A station wagon SCREAMS down the alley. Easter at the wheel.

Karl tries to get in front of the getaway vehicle.

KARL  
Wait! Wait!

The wagon steams past Karl, splattering Karl in rainwater.

Karl grips his chest.

He's in severe pain. He crumbles, blurs.

His wristwatch smashes on impact with the concrete.

Arturo is at his side in seconds. Frank, still with coffee cup, holds at the mouth of the alley. Ava stands distant, observing.

ARTURO  
Mr. Banswick! Mr. Banswick! Are  
you okay?

Karl can't speak.

ARTURO (CONT'D)  
(calling to Frank)  
Get an ambulance!

Frank runs off.

Ava comes closer.

ARTURO (CONT'D)  
We're going to get you help, Mr.  
Banswick. Just stay still.

Karl catches his breath, nods. When Ava is in earshot, he finally speaks.

KARL  
(weakly)  
My heart. I'll be all right.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Karl is in a hospital bed, hooked to monitors. He looks significantly better. Arturo is by his side.

KARL

...he's not a policeman. He's a fake.

ARTURO

A fake? Your wife -- is she missing or not?

KARL

No, she's fine, Arturo.

ARTURO

(secretive)

That woman is waiting in the lobby.

KARL

Her name's Ava. I met her through a friend.

(pause)

Don't you worry about her.

Arturo debate his approach, then speaks.

ARTURO

Mr. Banswick, fifteen years I worked at Banswick Motors. Your father sponsored my Green Card. I owe you everything. If you're in some sort of trouble... I can help.

Karl doesn't answer, just pats Arturo's knee.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Karl walks on his own power -- Arturo and Ava flanking him. Arturo goes to help, but Karl brushes him away.

ARTURO

I'll drive you home.

KARL

That's okay. You're in the opposite direction.

(to Ava)

You're my way. Want to share a taxi?

Arturo doesn't like this, his face shows it, but he acquiesces.

ARTURO

Don't worry about the dealership. I'll be there. You rest.

Arturo leaves.

Karl signals a taxi.

INT. TAXI (MOVING) - NIGHT

Karl and Ava, riding.

KARL  
(to driver)  
Banswick Motors. 8th and Jarvis.

AVA  
We're going back to the dealership?

KARL  
I dropped something.

EXT. THE COFFEE POT - NIGHT

Karl and Ava comb the alley.

AVA  
Will you be all right now?

KARL  
They prescribed me to take  
nitroglycerin.

AVA  
Won't that make you explode?

KARL  
Don't worry. It's not that kind of  
nitro. It's a pill I take when  
things get bad with the ol' heart.  
After this, we'll hit a drugstore  
and I'll get my prescription  
filled.

Karl finds the unopened red envelope in the muck of the alley.

Karl returns to the lamp-light at the end of the alley. As Ava watches, he SLOWLY tears open the edge.

CU:  
Typed page: YOU ARE LUCKY.

Underneath, a small document.

AVA  
What is it?

Karl begins to laugh.

KARL  
A prescription. For nitroglycerin  
tablets.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (REAR OFFICE) - NIGHT

Karl clears out the locked drawer of red envelopes, their documents, and associated booty -- the Henry Dodge book, the sports watch.

KARL  
Did you go to the police?

Karl discards his broken wrist-watch and replaces it with the sports-watch from Jogger's Den.

AVA  
What kind of mother do you think I  
am? Noah went to play in the park  
and didn't come back. I told the  
police everything and they had  
horses combing the streets by  
nightfall. I've spend the last  
five days putting fliers on  
telephone poles, trying to get the  
newspapers to call me back.

KARL  
They stopped me from telling  
anyone, but didn't stop you.  
Weird.

AVA  
I'm curious why you always say  
"they."

Karl packs all the remaining evidence into a small cardboard box.

KARL  
It just seems like they'd need  
several people to carry all this  
off. These criminals are either  
great guessers or have access to a  
time machine. They knew I might  
need this wristwatch.

Karl flashes the watch.

AVA  
Your fingerprints are all over  
that.

KARL  
True. And the envelopes. If these  
guys are so smart, I doubt they did  
any stuffing without a good pair of  
gloves.

Ava notices Henry Dodge's book.

AVA  
Is that the book you told me about?

He hands it over; she flips.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Any good?

KARL  
Let's just say I'm not its  
audience. Ready? Off to the  
police. No distractions this time.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Karl and Ava in a '65 Pontiac.

AVA  
Your prescription...

POV:  
An all-night drugstore.

Karl pulls the car over.

KARL  
Wait in the car. Don't go  
anywhere. I'll need you at the  
police. You're my proof that I'm  
not making all this up.

INT. DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

Karl enters, debates which one, then hands one of the two  
prescriptions to a blonde haired female PHARMACIST.

FADE TO

Karl roams the aisles, waiting for his name to be called.

PHARMACIST  
Mr. Banswick!

Karl approaches the counter. She hands him the bag.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)  
(sudden)  
Oh! Banswick. I thought that name  
sounded familiar.

She pulls a red envelope from behind the register.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)  
Someone dropped this off for you.

Karl stares hard at the envelope.

PHARMACIST (CONT'D)  
I didn't open it.

Karl slowly takes it.

KARL  
(quietly)  
Thank you.

He walks towards the door, his emotion building.

FOLLOW TO

EXT. DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

The Pontiac's door has been left open.

Ava has left.

Karl closes the door and tosses his prescription and envelope  
onto the passenger seat.

He gets in the car.

KARL  
(furious)  
SON OF A BITCH!

He peels out.

TITLE CARD: "FIFTH DOCUMENT"

INT. KARL'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Karl lies awake on the couch, smoking, exhausted.

FLASHBACK: Karl, his wife, kissing.

The red envelope sits on the end of his coffee table. He has not opened it.

EXT. CITY MUSEUM - DAY

Karl stands at the steps of the city museum. A banner advertises the Dutch sculpture exhibit, the one from Ava's clue.

INT. CITY MUSEUM - DAY

Karl enters the museum, wanders the exhibits, finds the Dutch sculpture exhibit.

Soon, he finds the statue of the boy -- the one that resembles Noah Moon.

FLASHBACK: Karl looking at the photograph of Noah in Ava's apartment.

There is indeed a resemblance.

The crowd clears in the exhibit room. It's a lull.

Karl, suddenly inspired, reaches forward and tosses the latest red envelope, unopened, under the foot of the sculpture.

KARL  
(to himself)  
I won't even read the damn thing.

Satisfied, he exits.

He comes back, checks one more time, debates, then leaves again for good.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Karl parks the Pontiac on the dealership lot.

Darnell holds down the fort, standing just at the door. He is visibly surprised to see Karl, and stumbles over his words.

DARNELL  
Hey, uh, Karl-

Karl brushes past and into the showroom.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Frank tries to cut Karl off at the rear offices.

FRANK

Karl...

KARL

Not now, Frank.

FRANK

I should warn you.

KARL

Later, Frank. Kinda busy.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (KARL'S OFFICE) - DAY

Karl opens his office door to find a UNIFORMED COP, a DETECTIVE, and ARTURO in his office.

ARTURO

Mr. Banswick, these men... they just barged in and started waiting for you, I-

UNIFORMED COP

Are you Karl Banswick?

Karl nods. The cop boxes him in.

DETECTIVE

Mr. Banswick, we need some of your time this afternoon. We have some questions we'd like to ask you at the precinct.

KARL

I don't suppose I could say that I'm busy.

DETECTIVE

We're just being polite.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (REAR OFFICE) - DAY

Karl is marched out.

KARL

(to Arturo)

Call my lawyer.

(MORE)

KARL (CONT'D)

Rabassa is his name. His number is  
in my desk drawer.

ARTURO

Of course. I will. And I swear --  
we didn't telephone them or  
anything. They just showed up.  
You told me your wife was not  
missing, but they say she is.  
What's going on?

KARL

I know, Arturo, it's okay. I just  
didn't want you to worry about it.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Everyone watches Karl as he's pushed into a squad car.

Dolores is also there in the lot.

DOLORES

(to police)

He's innocent, I told you that, you  
idiots!

Karl cringes. He sees the faces staring at him.

INT. SQUAD CAR - DAY

Karl, in transit.

CU:

Karl's face -- barely hidden panic.

INT. PRECINCT - DAY

Karl sits at a desk in front of the detective.

KARL

I want a phone call.

DETECTIVE

Your lawyer's on the way, Mr.  
Banswick.

KARL

No. I want to call someone else.

DETECTIVE

All right...

The detective turns the phone around for Karl to dial.

KARL  
In private.

The detective stands, walks to the coffee machine.

Karl dials.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
Please be listed...

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DAY

In a seemingly empty apartment, the phone rings.

INT. PRECINCT - DAY

Karl, waiting. Someone picks up the phone on the other end.  
It's Ava.

AVA  
(over phone)  
Hello?

KARL  
(urgent)  
Ava, it's Karl.

AVA  
(over phone)  
Karl! Look, I've got some news-

KARL  
I've been arrested.

AVA  
(over phone)  
Arrested!

KARL  
Yes, I need you to do me a favor.  
I don't know who you are, Ava. I  
don't know if you're real or you're  
with them. But you've got to help  
me. Do this for me... and I'll do  
whatever you want.

INT. PRECINCT - DAY

Karl sits in a holding room. He checks his sports-watch.  
5:45 PM. A JAILER enters.

JAILER  
Banswick. Yer okay to go.

KARL  
Just like that?

EXT. PRECINCT - EVENING

Ava waits in a parked taxi cab outside the precinct. It is starting to rain.

Karl exits the building, sees her, lights a cigarette, then gets in the taxi.

EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

The taxi, moving.

KARL  
He must have worked like hell to spring me. I know he's mostly divorce, but he's got skills. I can see that now. I've got a great lawyer.

AVA  
No you don't. Your lawyer left an hour ago to have dinner with some political friends.

KARL  
*What?*

AVA  
The police told me that. Don't be thanking any lawyers; you should be thanking me and that precious little envelope.

Ava hands him a page and a torn open red envelope.

CU:  
The page, reading: GIVE THIS TO THE POLICE.

Karl turns the page over.

KARL  
Where's the document?

AVA  
(sarcastic)  
Um, I gave it to the police.

KARL  
Well? What was inside it?

AVA  
Just a sheet filled with numbers.  
Didn't mean anything.

KARL  
(not believing)  
This is the envelope I left at the  
museum? Under that boy's foot?

AVA  
Yep.

KARL  
Well, it must have meant *something*.

AVA  
Not to me.

The taxi takes a hard turn.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Do you want to know what happened  
to me the other night?

KARL  
You left me.

AVA  
I didn't mean to.

KARL  
Is that the truth?

AVA  
(biting)  
I just got you out of jail. Now  
you have to *help* me. Remember? I  
was surprised that you phoned. I  
thought for sure *you* were abandoned  
*me*.

EXT. DRUGSTORE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, THE NIGHT BEFORE)

Ava sits in the Pontiac, awaiting Karl's return.

A BLACK MAN, 50s, with a ghetto blaster radio, turns the corner. He heads for the Pontiac, bends to talk to Ava through the cracked passenger window.

BLACK MAN

Ava Moon?

She nods.

He drops a red envelope through the window and starts to walk away.

She quickly jumps out the car, envelope in hand, following the BLACK MAN.

AVA

Wait!

He picks up speed.

FOLLOW TO

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Ava struggles to be heard over the ghetto blaster.

AVA

Please, wait!

At last, she catches him, well out of sight of the Pontiac. He turns.

BLACK MAN

What tha hell you WANT!

They speak, but the conversation cannot be heard. At last, she falls into his arms, weeping.

EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

The taxi, moving, continued.

KARL

So what did the envelope say?

AVA

"YOU MISSED ONE."

KARL  
What was attached?

AVA  
Nothing.

KARL  
I don't have many people in my life. Just those three guys at the dealership. I got that page of numbers last night. If I hadn't dragged my feet, I could have given it to the cops the second they set foot on my lot. Instead, I got a taste of what jail is like. And I'm not anxious to return. So until I figure out what the hell's going on, I'm keeping all options open. Including my options with you.

The taxi hits a hard bump. Karl refocuses on the road.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Where are we going?

The taxi zooms past a sign: CITY UNIVERSITY.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(understanding)  
The Human Geography application.

AVA  
"YOU MISSED ONE."

KARL  
They're catching you up.

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - EVENING

The taxi departs. Karl and Ava are outside the Geography department's building, a traditional city college with Ivy League pretensions.

KARL  
Place is deserted.

AVA  
It's dinner time.

KARL  
We should come back tomorrow.

AVA  
No. I want to go in.

INT. GEOGRAPHY BUILDING - EVENING

Karl and Ava proceed down a long corridor, offices and classrooms on both sides.

AVA  
Oh my God!

Taped to an office window, a red envelope.

They both race for it-

TITLE CARD: "SIXTH DOCUMENT"

INT. GEOGRAPHY BUILDING - EVENING

Ava's won the struggle; she tears open the envelope, see the contents. Disappointed, she hands it over to Karl.

AVA  
It's for you.

CU:  
A flier for a strip club.

KARL  
(reading the typed page)  
"IF A MAN, BE A MAN." No thanks.  
I'm married.

Karl looks up. Ava has fixed her gaze to a posted sign on the wall next to the office.

CU:  
The sign: DR. HENRY DODGE - OFFICE HOURS 2-4 PM T W

AVA  
(stunned)  
He *teaches* here. The man who wrote  
that book.

Karl walks over to her position, reads the sign.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Do you think he knows where they've  
taken Noah?

KARL  
Maybe. Or, do you think it's Henry  
Dodge who's been leading us around?

AVA  
How old is he by now?

KARL  
(thinking)  
We should... we should come back...  
when he's here.

INT. GEOGRAPHY BUILDING - EVENING

Karl and Ava move towards the building exit.  
On the floor by the door, another red envelope.

KARL  
(humdrum)  
You should get that. It's probably  
for you.

Ava picks it up.

AVA  
(noticing)  
It's already been opened.

She takes out the typed page within. There is no document.

AVA (CONT'D)  
(reading)  
"WELCOME LAZLO MUNDT."

KARL  
(confused)  
Who's Lazlo Mundt?

Sound: A LOUD GUNSHOT.

Passing the glass of the exit door window, an ASIAN MAN in a  
suit. It is raining harder now, and it's difficult to make  
out much more.

Ava and Karl duck down.

BOOM! Another gunshot.

The man in the suit moves clear.

A third shot is heard, farther off.

Karl goes to the door's window; Ava catches his arm.

AVA  
Get down, you idiot!

KARL  
I can't see.

Another shot, far-off.

Karl opens the exit door and, crouching, sneaks out of the building and into the surrounding bushes. Ava follows.

POV:

An ASIAN MAN, twenty yards off, near the campus drive. He is shooting at a JAPANESE MAN, also in a suit, who returns fire with a pistol.

Karl recognizes the Japanese Man as the man from the elevator at Rabassa's office.

INSERT: Elevator scene, Karl shyly hiding his first red envelope.

KARL (CONT'D)  
I know that guy.

Two more shots, misses.

Karl moves forward, in cover, closer to the action. Ava sticks to him in the mist and rain.

KARL (CONT'D)  
That man was at my lawyer's office.

The two dueling men get off glorious shots, simultaneously hitting vital organs. They both fall dead.

Karl now notices: there is a third man, young, in a trenchcoat, watching the shootout from the sidelines.

Karl points out the man to Ava.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Lazlo Mundt. I bet a million dollars.

Just then, LAZLO MUNDT eyes lock with Karl's and Ava's.

He takes off.

AVA  
Can you run?

Karl shakes his head, points to his chest, his weak heart.  
She pursues the boy on foot as Karl huffs behind slowly.

EXT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - EVENING

Lazlo runs into the university library. Ava follows.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - EVENING

Karl enters, huffing and puffing, wet from the rain.

He searches the stacks.

KARL'S POV:

Two people, tucked in the corner, whispering intently. It's  
Ava, standing over Lazlo.

The young man is in his twenties, speaks lightning-speed as  
he explains himself to Ava, and seems like a patient off his  
medication.

LAZLO

(hurried)

I didn't give them those letters.  
No, they just found them and then,  
and then, well, they had guns,  
fucking guns. Did you see? They  
just started shooting, BAM BAM!

Karl pushes into the boy.

LAZLO (CONT'D)

Let me go!

AVA

Karl!

LAZLO

I'm an idiot. A goddamn dimwit  
without sense of anything. Oh  
sure, sure, I go to a good school,  
but I'm an idiot. I don't like  
letters. I don't like stamps. My  
father -- he's an ambassador.  
Australia! You run after me and I  
run away; it's a survival instinct.  
I didn't get to be twenty-three  
with only lucky breaks, you know?  
I had to cut a few corners, make  
some wise choices.

(MORE)

LAZLO (CONT'D)  
Wise, wise, wise. All of 'em. All  
of 'em wise.

AVA  
(hushing)  
Shut up!  
(gentler)  
Please.

KARL  
Who were those two men?

LAZLO  
The Chen brothers.

AVA  
The ones in the papers all time?  
The mob guy? You said they each  
got a letter...

LAZLO  
Just now. We were coming across  
the city to find my brother --  
Fenton. He goes to school here.

AVA  
Who were the Chen Brothers looking  
for?

LAZLO  
Sis -- sis -- sister.

Lazlo hands them a document.

LAZLO (CONT'D)  
My first. First one I got. They  
had bunches. My brother's class  
schedule.

Karl reads.

KARL  
(to Ava, as he scans the  
schedule)  
Dodge is one of his brother's  
teachers.

Ava takes hold of Lazlo.

AVA  
You're staying with us, like we're  
chained together. You hear me?

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - NIGHT

The police have arrived to sort out the Chen Brothers shoot-out. Karl, Ava, and Lazlo sneak off campus.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The three eat at a cheap dive.

LAZLO

(fast)

Waiter! I snapped my fingers, but he didn't hear me. A sheep. A sheep. They're everywhere on these campuses. I'm from across town at City College. Good school. No -- GREAT school. Didn't have the grades for Fenton's place. But Fenton's got a few -- wheeeee! -- mental problems. Missing since Monday. Least I can't find him. Should I get more coffee?

AVA | KARL

(together)

No!

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

On the curb, Karl tries to signal for a taxi.

AVA

What do we do now?

KARL

I'm heading back to my apartment. I smell like a jail cell and I want to go to bed.

AVA

What are we supposed to do?

KARL

Do what you like. Go home and sleep.

(to Lazlo)

You got a place to sleep, don't you?

LAZLO

Yeah, yeah, sure, sure.

A taxi responds to Karl's signal, pulling over.

KARL

Then I'll see you tomorrow at  
Dodge's doorstep.

Ava grabs Karl's arm.

AVA

We have to stick together. You  
promised. Someone *wanted* the three  
of us to meet, don't you see?  
There might be a dozen more people  
in this city with these envelopes.  
All I know is every one leads me  
closer to Noah. Please!

KARL

I just saw two people shoot each  
other to death!

AVA

Don't *leave* us, Karl.

Karl gets into the rear of the taxi.

AVA (CONT'D)

I got you out of *jail*! I waited  
for you at the *hospital*. The  
police have known about my son for  
six days now and they don't even  
call me. You're not leaving, Karl.

Karl reaches into his pocket for his cigarettes. He finds  
the pack, along with the document advertising the strip club.

Ava sees an opening.

AVA (CONT'D)

Remember the last time you threw  
away a clue! You ended up in jail.  
Maybe this time there's no magical  
sheet of numbers to get you out. I  
think by now they've taught us to  
not ignore ANYTHING!

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The taxi, moving. Karl alone.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Ava. Lazlo.

CROSSFADE TO

INT. KARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Karl brushes his teeth, gets ready.

Behind him, in the steam from the sink, a woman his age, pretty, in a towel. This is LANA BANSWICK, his wife.

KARL

I don't suppose you want to tell me  
where you are?

She smiles.

KARL (CONT'D)

Then get out of my head.

Karl exits the bathroom.

Lazlo is loudly watching T.V. Cartoons.

Ava sits with him, motherly.

Karl signals and Ava follows him into the kitchen.

KARL (CONT'D)

(low)

Do you think he's acting?

AVA

(low)

No.

KARL

He could be another Brody Easter.  
You don't really believe all that  
garbage about his father being an  
ambassador?

AVA

Okay, I'm not sure about the  
ambassador part. If it weren't for  
the red envelope, I wouldn't even  
really think he had a brother.

KARL

He's lying.

AVA

No. His brother sounds bit more like one of Noah's imaginary friends. Slightly idealized. But I believe him. For now, he's better with us. Even if he's a faker, he's some kind of connection, right? It's because of *him* we know the time Henry Dodge's class starts.

KARL

We knew his office hours.

AVA

Yes, but he didn't have hours on Thursday or Friday, did he? We would have had to crash the university records department or wait until next week to see the man. It's a trail. It will lead me to my Noah. I know it.

She starts to leave the kitchen.

KARL

We're not an army, Ava.

Ava doesn't argue it, she talks over him.

AVA

It's almost eleven o'clock.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Karl, Ava, and Lazlo slink down a wet alley. A taxi pulls off in the distance. There is no sign for the strip club, but pounding music can be heard through the walls.

They stop at the dimly lit entrance, where a BOUNCER stands.

BOUNCER

Twenty.

Karl hands over a wad of cash. The bouncer hands back a \$20, nods to Ava.

BOUNCER (CONT'D)

No women.

AVA

What?!

BOUNCER  
(smiling)  
Not unless you're naked.

KARL  
(aside, to Ava)  
What do you want to do?

AVA  
I'm not stripping!

BOUNCER  
I'll watch yer wife for ya, buddy.

KARL  
She's not my wife.

The bouncer winks, nods.

AVA  
I'll be okay. Stay on the trail.  
I'll just wait 'til you come out.

Karl nods, he tugs Lazlo.

BOUNCER  
No, really. She'll be fine. I'm  
an off-duty cop.

KARL  
Uh-huh.

Karl and Lazlo enter the warehouse.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The warehouse is a pinwheel, with nude dancers in the center and semi-private booths surrounding the show. The music is LOUD, the air smoky, and the atmosphere seedy. There are about 30 other males gathered, being served drinks by topless waitresses.

Lazlo beams.

LAZLO  
Holy shit, enjoy the show, enjoy  
the show, enjoy the show.

Rubbing his hands together, the boy takes off for an empty table on the pinwheel. He laughs and points, a kid in a candy shop.

KARL  
(to himself)  
Son of an ambassador, my ass...

Karl finds a table at the opposite side of the pinwheel from Lazlo. He watches a dancer, feigning interest. He obviously doesn't want to be there.

A topless WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS  
(shouting over music)  
Can I get you a drink?

She looks down at the table, where there is a brand new red envelope, innocently resting.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)  
(pointing, shouting)  
Where did you get that?

Karl looks to the envelope.

KARL  
(shouting)  
You didn't put it there?

WAITRESS  
(shouting)  
No. But I get one of those every few days.

Karl stands.

KARL  
(shouting)  
You do!

WAITRESS  
(shouting)  
15 or so by now.

KARL  
(shouting)  
What do they say?

WAITRESS  
(shouting)  
I only opened one, it didn't make any sense.

Karl picks up the envelope.

KARL  
 (shouting)  
 Look. There's a lot to tell you  
 about these. Can you come outside?

The Waitress looks doubtfully at him, as if she's seen this line before.

Karl signals for Lazlo, holding up the envelope. The kid sees and, frowning, bumps a stripper off his lap, starts to come around.

KARL (CONT'D)  
 (to waitress)  
 I'll be outside!

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Karl and Lazlo emerge. The bouncer is sweet-talking Ava.

AVA  
 (to Karl)  
 He's going to check on Noah's case!

BOUNCER  
 Sure, doll.

Ava waves a piece of paper, the bouncer's telephone number.

AVA  
 (to bouncer)  
 I'll call you tomorrow.

The three exit the alley.

LAZLO  
 Crazy world, crazy world, nutty,  
 spectacular. Those girls, wow. I  
 want to go back some time with my  
 brother. He'd love it. Love it.  
 Crazy love it.

Ava sees the red envelope

AVA  
 (to Karl)  
 Another one! What's in it?

KARL  
 I haven't looked yet.

The waitress is coming out of the club, following. She's put on a tight top, no bra. Ava sees her.

WAITRESS  
Hey, wait up!

AVA  
(disapprovingly to Karl)  
Found more than that envelope  
inside, did you?

KARL  
She was my server.

AVA  
Is that code?

The waitress it at their side now.

WAITRESS  
His name's Jeff. He's my ex-  
boyfriend. We kept in touch. Then  
he stopped calling... I'm Jodi.

JODI the Waitress puts out her hand.

TITLE CARD: "SEVENTH DOCUMENT"

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Jodi leads them towards her car, parked under the bridge.

A red envelope is under the wiper of her Nova.

JODI  
Hey, another one.

She takes the envelope from under the wiper, tosses it on the  
cluttered floor of her car.

Ava gets in the front seat, finds 2 more discarded and  
unopened red envelopes.

AVA  
These are important! Don't you  
want to *find* everyone? Only  
someone as young and stupid as you  
could ignore these.

KARL  
Easy now. You ignored the first  
one, Ava.

AVA  
Yes, but I didn't ignore THREE!

JODI  
That's only some. The other  
fourteen are back at my apartment.  
Oh, and I threw one away by  
mistake.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Jodi's car, in motion.

Karl and Lazlo in the back; Jodi driving, Ava beside. They  
move over the bridge back towards the city.

Karl, with trepidation, opens the red envelope he received at  
the strip club.

AVA  
What is it?

KARL  
(resigned)  
A missing person's report. On my  
wife.

He hands the page up to her.

AVA  
(reading)  
Lana. That's a pretty name.

KARL  
She works for the Mayor. City  
beautification.

JODI  
(with a nod)  
Open mine.

Ava opens the first two from the floor.

AVA  
Expired coupons.

JODI  
Yeah, I think most all of them are  
that. All but the first couple.  
Weird, huh?

She opens the last one found on the windshield. When she  
reads, she exclaims with glee.

AVA  
 Ah ha! "MOTHER'S ADVICE: LOOK BOTH  
 WAYS." A mother, that's me. This  
 one is mine.

JODI  
 Hey, I could have a kid somewhere.  
 (beat)  
 But I don't.

KARL  
 (to Ava, concerned)  
 What is it?

CU:  
 The document.

AVA  
 A car advertisement.

The four all draw inward for a long moment, frustrated and  
 sad.

INT. KARL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Karl is laying out throw-pillows and blankets for his three  
 guests.

JODI  
 This is your plan? Sleep on the  
 goddamn floor until that Dodge  
 guy's class starts?

KARL  
 You got it.

JODI  
 Well, it's simple anyway.

AVA  
 Thank you for staying.

Karl turns off the light.

KARL  
 Good night.

Karl goes to the kitchen, cracks a beer, and nearly falls  
 asleep standing up.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Sunrise. Jodi's Nova pulls in. The four get out.

JODI  
Why are we stopping here?

KARL  
You made us drive to your place to get all your envelopes, so now its an errand for me. I own the lot. We can get another car.

JODI  
What's wrong with mine?

Karl doesn't answer. He goes to put his key in the lock. He notices the dealership rear offices have their lights on.

AVA  
What is it?

KARL  
The door's unlocked.

He pushes it, and it comes open a little.

Slowly, the four enter the showroom.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Karl approaches the counter.

Suddenly -- Arturo pops up from behind. They both startle.

ARTURO  
Mr. Banswick! You're out of jail!

KARL  
What are you doing here so early?

Arturo gestures behind him.

ARTURO  
They took the file cabinet. Yesterday. I came in to get the paperwork ready.

Arturo notices the other three -- two of them he's never seen before. A look comes into his eyes.

KARL  
Don't worry, Arturo. They're with me.

AVA  
(to Karl)  
Why would they take your files?

KARL  
They still suspect me. Or they sent the order to confiscate them before I was released from jail and didn't have time to change it.

Arturo takes Karl aside.

ARTURO  
(urgently)  
Mr. Banswick, what is going on?

KARL  
Look, I can't tell you anything today, Arturo. Maybe tomorrow.

ARTURO  
Is... can I... please, is there anything I can do for you?

KARL'S POV:  
Lazlo. He's reading the daily newspaper and, in his face, he looks seems, for once, completely normal.

KARL  
Yes. Find out the name of the ambassador to Australia.

Lazlo drops the paper, done.

CU:  
Headline: TWO GANGSTERS DEAD IN CAMPUS GUNFIGHT

INT. GEOGRAPHY BUILDING - DAY

The four head for Henry Dodge's classroom. Jodi carries a small grocery sack.

A man's voice -- low and powerful -- can be heard O.S. lecturing a class.

Karl puts his head around the corner and looks in the open door.

A student notices him.

STUDENT  
 (to O.S. Professor)  
 Um, Dr. Dodge.

Suddenly, he's there, at the door -- DOCTOR HENRY DODGE, the man from the library book. Karl is stunned. He's older, grayer, but most certainly him.

DODGE  
 May I help you?

Dodge cranes his neck, sees the others. He knows. He nods.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Dodge has dismissed the class. Only the five of them sit in a massive university classroom.

DODGE  
 Tell me who's missing.

AVA  
 My son.

KARL  
 My wife.

LAZLO  
 My brother.

JODI  
 My ex-boyfriend.

DODGE  
 For me, it was my sister. Everyone assumed she had drowned, but then I started to get documents. I read them, but didn't understand the connection. I thought it was a prank. But around the third or fourth envelope, I was on my way. And I found other people, too. Like you have. You're actually the third group to visit me in five years.

AVA  
 Did you tell the police about the envelopes?

DODGE  
 I told everyone. It was a waste of time.

(MORE)

DODGE (CONT'D)

I even went to the newspapers, detailed my whole story to a man I thought worked for the Daily. A few days later, I phoned to follow up. That reporter had been a phantom.

KARL

I had one of those.

Karl starts to light a cigarette.

DODGE

There's no smoking in here.

Karl puts down the cigarette.

DODGE (CONT'D)

You know it gets harder from here, don't you? So far, I bet you've just been chasing a few clues. You've been given a few... helpful objects. Somewhere between five and ten envelopes is my guess.

Jodi pulls open her grocery sack, takes out a couple of her envelopes.

JODI

I've had more. Can you help me understand them?

DODGE

I cannot help you with your envelopes. Nor can I help you search. Have any of you gotten any *black* envelopes?

(pause)

Hmm, yes, it might be too soon. Two in our group eventually received black envelopes. One was a woman in her late sixties. She was looking for a high school sweetheart.

AVA

What's different about black envelopes?

DODGE

This particular one -- for that old woman -- required that she swim. She drowned, like my sister.

(MORE)

DODGE (CONT'D)

The black envelopes... they can kill you.

Lazlo's face blanches.

LAZLO

John Chen and Wayne Chen. Their last envelopes were black, they were. Black as black. It's true.

DODGE

The shootings last night?

KARL

Did you get a black envelope?

DODGE

I did.

AVA

Well you survived.

DODGE

I didn't open it. I turned back. And I stopped searching for my sister.

KARL

You have to help us.

DODGE

As I said, I can't. I had my own experience. It was quite different, I'm sure, from what you're going through. And mine was five years ago. I left my group and they went on. If you want an ally, better to find someone who got further. Maybe someone who lived past a black envelope.

(pause)

Good luck to each and every one of you.

Dodge starts to exit the classroom.

AVA

Dr. Dodge!

He stops.

AVA (CONT'D)

Do you think that your sister is alive somewhere?

DODGE  
 (head shaking)  
 Not anymore.  
 (pause)  
 I should have kept going. I should  
 have opened that black envelope.  
 It's one of the great regrets of my  
 life.  
 (pause)  
 Good luck.

He exits.

Jodi suddenly, furiously, begins ripping into her red envelopes, opening every last one of them.

CU:  
 Coupons. Expired. All of them.

JODI  
 (breaking into tears)  
 He's dead! He's dead! I waited  
 too long.

Ava tries to console her. Lazlo is frozen.

Karl drifts to the door and looks out.

The Student stands there.

STUDENT  
 I wasn't listening.

She hands Karl a red envelope and runs off.

TITLE CARD: "EIGHTH DOCUMENT"

EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Karl and the others stare at a FACULTY PARKING ONLY sign and the empty spot in the street.

KARL  
 SON OF A BITCH! They towed my  
 goddamn car.

LAZLO  
 (noticing something)  
 Hey! Look!

Lazlo retrieves a red envelope from a spot in the bushes. He opens it.

LAZLO (CONT'D)

Whiskey!

It's an advertisement for whiskey. He reads the cover page.

LAZLO (CONT'D)

"MAKERS MAKE DUE." Fenton's favorite drink.

KARL

They're toying with you, Lazlo, like they did with all of us in the beginning.

AVA

Leave him alone! What are we going to do about *the car*?

KARL

I can't deal with it now. I'll get someone from the dealership to pick it up. I'm going back to my apartment and sleep.

AVA

Sleep!

KARL

I'm useless right now. I'll just do something stupid.

AVA

We can't waste a moment! Your wife... Noah... we've-

KARL

They've got it planned out! Don't they? Every second, every move. They sent us all to Dodge; they're keeping us from the police, the press, from anyone but our little group. I've been getting these messages for four days. How long before we all snap and start shooting at each other like the Chen brothers? I'm sleeping.

Karl takes out the bottle of nitroglycerin tablets, shakes them in Ava's face.

KARL (CONT'D)

Consider it a rest for my health!

JODI  
We should stick together.

KARL  
There's no point, is there?

AVA  
Karl, they *wanted* us to find each other.

KARL  
Why? We can't help each other!  
Maybe it's just bad luck.

AVA  
Fuck you.

Karl's face shows a glimmer of regret. Then he leaves them.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Karl, alone, in a taxi.

EXT. KARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Karl mounts the creaking rear stairs of his apartment.

INT. KARL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Karl, on the phone.

ARTURO  
(over phone)  
Your friends came back in a taxi.  
They picked up that Vega.

KARL  
Thanks, Arturo. And thanks in  
advance for retrieving my car.

FADE TO

Karl, asleep on his sofa. He thinks he sees his wife, LANA, on the chair in front of him.

LANA  
(through effect)  
You've been chasing envelopes all over the city hoping they'd lead you back to me? Well, that's silly. We're getting divorced.  
(MORE)

LANA (CONT'D)

Remember? You really needn't have  
bothered. I'm safe and sound.  
Always have been, always will be.

Karl sits up, awake.

FADE TO

Karl on his rear porch, unopened red envelope in hand.

He finishes his cigarette, tosses it off the stairs, and his  
eyes drill into the envelope.

He's frightened. He opens it anyway.

CU:

The typed page: DANGER. The document: a City Building  
Inspection notice.

Before he's had a time to digest --

The very stairs he's standing on begin to break, to collapse  
away from under his feet.

Karl throws his arm out --

He's just in time to grip the single support banister before  
his footing gives way.

The torn red envelope flutters to the ground.

Karl, with great effort, pulls himself inside the opening to  
his apartment. He huffs and puffs, looks down --

The rear stairs is now just a pile of wood two stories below.

Karl ratchets in pain -- his heart. He stumbles through his  
kitchen, finds the bottle of nitro tablets, pops one under  
his tongue, waits for the medicine to hit.

Slowly, the pain fades.

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Ava opens the door of her apartment, answering a knock.

There's Karl, sheepish.

KARL

I'm sorry.

Ava face faintly shows gladness.

AVA  
Jodi's sleeping. Lazlo's playing  
with Noah's trains. Can't get him  
away from them. I was watching  
television. I can't sleep.

(pause)  
You got another envelope, didn't  
you?

KARL  
A doozy. Let me in.

AVA  
You abandoned us.

KARL  
It won't happen again.

She hugs him, he hugs her back.

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

In the kitchen, Ava fixes Karl coffee.

AVA  
I got one, too.

She hands a red envelope to Karl. He reads.

KARL  
"BANK ON THIS."

AVA  
And a withdrawal slip from my bank.  
It's filled out for \$10,000.

KARL  
(not quite believing)  
Hmmm. I don't think it's going to  
be that simple. Extortion.

AVA  
Why not?

KARL  
Those stairs gave way the second I  
was on them. The second I had  
opened the envelope. The watch, my  
prescription-

AVA

Stop right there. Karl. This isn't magic. These are bad people who have taken my son.

KARL

They have to be God or something to know all this. It's scaring me.

AVA

For Christ's sake, Karl, they drowned an old woman. Dodge said so. And poor Jodi! At least Lazlo is mildly *oblivious* to what's going on. But Jodi, she knows something is very, very wrong.

(in a whisper)

Karl... I think her ex-boyfriend is dead.

Jodi appears in the doorway. She's been listening.

JODI

(loud)

He's not dead! He's not dead!  
He's not!

Ava starts to crumble, embarrassed, sad.

JODI (CONT'D)

How dare you say he's dead! Maybe your kid's dead? Maybe someone's fucking killed him! Maybe Lazlo's brother's had his throat slit, maybe Karl's wife has been stabbed in the fucking FACE!

Lazlo appears, seeing the argument. He covers his ears.

Karl holds Jodi back.

LAZLO

Stop it! Stop it!

Ava races into her bedroom. Jodi slams the door to the bathroom, locking herself in.

A moment of silence.

Slowly, Karl guides Lazlo back to the living room.

KARL  
Show me your trains, kid.

FADE TO

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Morning. Karl, smoking in the kitchen.

Ava comes out of her room. She sees Lazlo asleep on the sofa. She goes to the kitchen.

AVA  
We had better leave. The bank's  
only open until noon.

KARL  
Do you have ten-thousand dollars?

AVA  
Yes. Where's Jodi?

KARL  
Gone. When I woke up.

INT. BANK - DAY

Ava withdraws her money. Lazlo and Karl wait.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

They arrive at the lot. Dolores is staring at the window sticker of a Ford, none-too-convincingly.

KARL  
(rushed)  
Hey, Dolores.

DOLORES  
Karl, where have you been? That  
man, that man you chased- He hasn't  
been back. I've been lookin'.

KARL  
Okay, thanks.

He dusts her, uninterested.

On the way into the showroom, Karl mumbles to Ava.

KARL (CONT'D)  
She should be making paper lanterns  
with her sister instead of tailing  
me.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

Inside, Arturo's face lights up.

ARTURO  
Mr. Banswick!

KARL  
I need another car, Arturo.

ARTURO  
Oh, no, Mr. Banswick, no. I just  
got the other one back from the  
pound. It's all muddy.

KARL  
Sorry, can't be helped. I need  
some wheels. Tell ya what, I'll  
take the lemon.

He gestures to an orange Oldsmobile outside, the least  
attractive car on the lot.

EXT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Karl has keys to the Oldsmobile in hand and leads Ava and  
Lazlo to the car. Arturo tries to keep up.

KARL  
See ya, Arturo.

ARTURO  
Mr. Banswick! Wait. I found your  
answer.

KARL  
What answer?

Arturo comes close, whispers.

ARTURO  
The name of that ambassador. Here.  
I wrote it down.

He hands Karl a slip of paper. Karl reads.

KARL  
Thanks, Arturo.

Karl gets behind the driver seat, Ava beside, Lazlo in back.  
He drops the slip of paper into Ava's lap.

CU:  
The message: PETER MUNDT.

Ava nods to Karl, then smiles at Lazlo, who is oblivious.  
They peel out.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

The Oldsmobile, moving.

AVA  
You're in such a rush!

KARL  
I get antsy in that place.

AVA  
I think all your guys seem pretty  
nice. And you really don't work  
very many hours.

KARL  
Banswick Motors was my father's  
business. Not mine.

AVA  
What is your business, then?

KARL  
To survive.

Karl jerks the wheel around a curve. The Oldsmobile makes an  
awful sound. This car could use a tune up.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

The Oldsmobile pulls onto Lana Banswick's street. The  
townhouse is as it was days earlier, quiet, with a car out  
front.

Karl parks.

AVA  
You wife's house?

KARL  
I need something.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Karl smashes the window slat next to the front door with his foot. Lazlo laughs.

LAZLO  
Breaking and entering! Breaking  
and entering!

KARL  
It's my house, too.

AVA  
Then use a key.

KARL  
She changed the locks.

AVA  
Maybe that's for a reason.

INT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Two stories, well-decorated.

LAZLO  
(beaming)  
Oh, man! That's a beautiful house.  
I like it. Yes I do. That's a  
*real* house. Don't see many of  
those. Is it haunted?

KARL  
In a way.

AVA  
(motherly)  
No, Lazlo, it's not.

Karl bounds up the stairs. Ava follows. Lazlo stays on the ground floor.

Ava arrives in the bedroom to find Karl searching the closet.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Are you sure she hasn't been home?

KARL  
The plants are dying.

AVA

Oh.  
(pause)  
Did you have children?

KARL

Every coupla years the idea came up. Then we sorta ran out of time.

He takes out a shoebox, dumps it. Karl dusts away tissues to reveal -- a revolver and a box of bullets.

AVA

(frightened)  
We don't need that.

KARL

That collapse of my staircase coulda killed me. But it wasn't a black envelope. It was a normal red one. What do you make of that?

AVA

It means there's worse ahead.

KARL

Exactly.

There is a small ruckus and a laugh downstairs from Lazlo. Karl gestures the boy's direction.

KARL (CONT'D)

I want to go see Lazlo's father. I'd go to the Mayor, but I never did trust that slimy son of a bitch. This ambassador's got no ties to the local police or any of these red envelopes. There has to be *someone* out of their reach.

AVA

Karl. Think. Those sending the red envelopes have to already know Lazlo's father is in the government.

KARL

Maybe. But the kid is so unpredictable there would be *no way* our manipulators can second guess that kid.

Karl loads the gun with six shots, then tucks it in his belt. Then he takes Ava's purse and drops the bullets on top of the \$10,000.

AVA  
(joking)  
Oh, *this* looks good.

They move into the hallway. Ava stops at a gallery of pictures hanging on one wall.

She sees a picture of Karl and Lana.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Is that her?

KARL  
Yes.

AVA  
She's pretty. You both look very happy.

KARL  
That's the day I had my first heart attack. Things were different before that moment.

Karl starts to walk away, but Ava stops him.

AVA  
Karl, why do you want to find her?  
(pause)  
I want to find Noah because I love him. I can't imagine living without him.

KARL  
Maybe they don't want to be found.

AVA  
Why would you *say* that?

KARL  
(considering)  
As long as I'm married, she's my wife. I can't have her gone without knowing what happened to her. To us.

AVA  
Are you trying to redeem yourself?

KARL  
No. I'm trying to redeem *her*.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

The Olds -- Karl driving, Ava beside, Lazlo in rear.

Karl sees Lazlo smiling in the rear view.

KARL  
Why ya smilin' there, Mundt?

LAZLO  
(smiling)  
I'm not smilin'.

KARL  
Listen, kid, do you know where your father is? Because I think we need to call him. He's not in Australia, is he?

Lazlo's smile fades.

LAZLO  
No, he's in the city.

KARL  
Where?

LAZLO  
He's at the Cafton Hotel.

KARL  
The Cafton? On Broadway?

LAZLO  
There's a big thing happening tonight. Lots of people, lots of people. Big, important people. Dinner and talk talk talk. Politicians and everything, everything. I used to have his schedule memorized. I put it in this noggin and then I knew where he was, just like that. Like a snap. Your car's on fire.

Karl, at first, doesn't know how to react to this. He takes his distracted gaze from the rear view and sees --

Steam pouring out of the Olds' hood.

KARL

Shit!

Karl pulls the car over. The three get out. Karl goes to the hood, but just then the steam turns to black smoke.

LAZLO

Look!

The interior cabin of the Olds has caught fire.

KARL

Shit!

He pulls the others away from the burning vehicle. It doesn't take long -- soon the fire's buckling the hood, melting the dash.

AVA

My purse!

BANGS! from inside the cab.

KARL

(explaining)

The bullets.

AVA

My \$10,000!

She goes forward, but Karl catches her.

KARL

No!

They take cover behind a bus stop. A crowd gathers, watching the car burn...

FADE TO

Later, the fire is out.

There's a fire truck. Karl is talking to a fireman.

FIREMAN

Dealer plates, huh?

KARL

Bum car. Giving me trouble all morning.

FIREMAN

Is it possible your car got  
tampered with? No one out to get  
you, is there?

Karl looks paranoid, but answers opposite.

KARL

No. No one.

FADE TO

Karl, with Ava, as they tow the wreck away.

KARL (CONT'D)

Arturo's gonna kill me.

(pause, to Ava)

Sorry about your money.

(pause)

You think this is the kind of thing  
that would come with a black  
envelope.

AVA

Maybe they didn't know about it.  
Maybe it was just car trouble.

KARL

Then it's a good sign. They can't  
predict everything.

Karl taps his belt, where the gun is.

A YOUNG BOY approaches Karl on the curb.

YOUNG BOY

Mister...

He holds out a red envelope to Karl.

TITLE CARD: "NINTH DOCUMENT"

INT. CITY STREET - DAY

CU:

The document. A ticket to a puppet show.

Karl shows it to Ava.

KARL

A puppet show. Tomorrow.

A taxi, moving. Karl, Ava, Lazlo.

KARL (CONT'D)  
I was thinking about what Dodge  
said. Things *have* gotten harder.  
For me, but not for you, Ava.

AVA  
I just lost \$10,000. I consider  
that pretty hard.

TAXI DRIVER  
Did someone say Ava?

They look at the TAXI DRIVER.

AVA  
(gulps)  
Me.

He hands her a red envelope.

TAXI DRIVER  
Fella in my cab gave me this and  
said I should give it to a  
passenger named Ava.

She opens it.

CU:  
The document. Another ticket to the puppet show.

AVA  
How did they know I would be in  
this cab?

Karl looks at the ticket.

KARL  
Apparently, they want us to go  
together.

LAZLO  
I like puppets.

KARL  
Don't worry, kid. You'll probably  
get one next.

The taxi stops. The three get out. No one moves to pay the  
driver.

AVA  
I'm broke. I lost my purse,  
remember?

KARL  
I thought you said you had a lot  
more money than that ten grand.

AVA  
Not on me. I'll have to go to the  
bank on Monday when it opens. I  
have a charge card upstairs in my  
apartment, but I'm at my limit.

KARL  
I've only got a few bucks myself.  
I can't pay him.

LAZLO  
(gleefully)  
I got it.

Lazlo hands the driver a twenty. The taxi peels off.

KARL  
(to Lazlo)  
You just tipped that guy a  
goldmine. We coulda used that  
money. We have no idea what's  
ahead for us.

They start walking.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(to Ava)  
How much money *do* you have?

AVA  
In the bank? Well, now I have a  
little over thirty-eight thousand.  
I had forty-eight at the start of  
the day. I feel like I came back  
unlucky from a casino.

KARL  
Forty-eight's a pretty good  
position to be in, if you ask me.  
I've got less than two. That  
lawyer Rabassa's bleeding me dry.  
How much you got, Lazlo?

LAZLO  
I got lots, lots. I've got as much  
as I need.

(MORE)

LAZLO (CONT'D)

I've never, never, ever been short of money. I just have to ask and I get it, like that, like that. From my dad.

KARL

Well. Let's hope we don't have to ask.

They stop.

They are in front of the Cafton Hotel.

INT. CAFTON HOTEL (LOBBY)- EVENING

The three enter the fray of well-dressed PARTYGOERS lining up before entering the ballroom.

KARL

(to Lazlo)

Remember to point out your father.

They now see the front of the line, the reason for the slowness. A security checkpoint.

Karl sees people handing over tickets to a SECURITY MAN while a SECOND MAN checks a list.

KARL (CONT'D)

(low)

Sonofabitch.

(to Lazlo)

You never said this was a private dinner. Did you? How are we supposed to get in?

Lazlo reaches into his jacket.

LAZLO

I think we can use these.

He shows them three fancy party invitations.

Ava and Karl are shocked.

AVA

Where did you get these?

LAZLO

The house. Today.

KARL

My house?

LAZLO

Ya, red envelope in your icebox.  
It said, "DINNER WITH FRIENDS" and  
had three, three, three of these.  
Pretty great, huh?

Karl exchanges a look with Ava.

KARL

They know everything before we do  
it. How is that *possible*? They  
knew I'd go to my old house, they  
knew I'd try to contact the  
ambassador, and, even more bizarre,  
they knew that Lazlo would look in  
the goddamn *freezer*.

LAZLO

It was cold.

AVA

What do you want to do, Karl?  
Leave?

KARL

(low)  
They'll search us.

POV:

Partygoers are being searched before entrance.

KARL (CONT'D)

They'll find the gun.

Ava turns the ticket over. The words PRESS -- ALL ACCESS are  
stamped on the back.

KARL (CONT'D)

They even know about the gun.

AVA

Do you want to go inside? Or just  
walk away?

KARL

I don't know anymore.

AVA

The path leads to Noah. We should  
stay on the path.

KARL

But it's *foolhardy*.

AVA

I don't care. It leads to Noah.

Karl, finally, nods agreement.

They move forward, past the line. They show their tickets to the Security Man, he refers them to the Second Man. Their names are checked on the list. They are admitted without a search.

INT. CAFTON HOTEL (BALLROOM)- EVENING

Politicians and their wives are being seated for dinner at wide, round tables. A SPEAKER is ready behind a podium, checking his papers for his speech.

Ava examines Lazlo's face. For the first time, he doesn't seem excited about seeing his father. He seems scared.

LAZLO

(solemnly)

There he is.

The three have been noticed by a gray-haired man in tuxedo. The man dashes out his cigarette and excuses himself from the business-like crowd that surround him. He crosses to where the three of them are holding. This is AMBASSADOR PETER MUNDT.

LAZLO (CONT'D)

Dad, these are my friends.

KARL

Mr. Ambassador, we have to speak with you. It's very important.

MUNDT

Are you in trouble?

AVA

Yes.

He nods, sympathetic, and leads them outside the ballroom.

INT. CAFTON HOTEL (CORRIDOR) - EVENING

Away from the crowd, Mundt stops in a smoking foyer.

MUNDT

Lazlo -- why don't you wait over there?

He gestures far off down the corridor, near to the men's room. Like a good puppy, Lazlo obeys and moves out of earshot.

AVA

You didn't need to send him away.

MUNDT

Yes, I'm afraid it's necessary.

AVA

Do you know why we're here?

MUNDT

I'm afraid I do. It happens from time to time. I'm getting used to it. Though it's never well-timed or very pleasant.

AVA

You know your son Fenton is missing?

MUNDT

He'll turn up. Fenton goes missing once or twice a year.

KARL

Lazlo's looking for him.

MUNDT

(smiling)

Did he check the *gutters*?

Mundt offers Karl a cigarette. Surprisingly, Karl declines.

MUNDT (CONT'D)

I've seen two types in my son's company. There are those that want to take care of him, and those that want to take *advantage* of him. I couldn't say if you're the former or the latter, but if you're either, I should say it's no good. Lazlo and his brother are hopeless because they cannot improve their station, and because he's not even useful to parasites. I blame their mother. It was a bad choice on my part. I was young, in a foreign land, and had just started to be interested in advancement. And she wasn't *all* rotten. She had some connections in the capitol.

(MORE)

MUNDT (CONT'D)

However, like the two children we've brought into this world, she, too, was broken. And now I'm left with two hopeless sons. Fenton... well... Have you met Fenton?

AVA

Didn't you hear us? Fenton's missing.

MUNDT

Now Lazlo's a different matter. He's no more intelligent than a houseplant. And let's just say he draws attention. I've encouraged him to leave the city. He's well-funded and can certainly go anywhere he wants, do anything he wants. But *no*. He hounds me. And occasionally, he shows up where I happen to be. I'm in the newspapers too much. And he's got an uncanny ability to track me down. And... sometimes... Lazlo shows up with friends.

KARL

We're not taking advantage of Lazlo. We're not trying to save him! Look, you're a man who has connections-

MUNDT

(louder)

It sounds to me like you want a political favor. I didn't get my appointments for my ability to ignore *signs*.

AVA

But you're ignoring them *now*! There are these envelopes and, and every few days we get them, and your son, and my son, and Karl's wife, and there was a shooting - the Chen brothers, and car fire, and-

Mundt stands, stamps out his cigarette.

MUNDT

Now I want you to be gone from this hotel.

(MORE)

MUNDT (CONT'D)

If you stay longer than five minutes I'll have you arrested.

He returns down the corridor in the direction of the ballroom.

Karl rushes after him and grabs his arm.

KARL

You have to help us!

MUNDT

Let go of my arm! Let go! You extortionist! You naïve dolt! Do you know how many times Lazlo has tried to slit his wrists? It's his mother's fault and he knows it. Thank God they're not in arm's reach because those depths -- those depths are not pleasant. If you claim to be Lazlo's friends you'll do what's best for him and keep him away from his parents. It's what everybody wants!

He storms off.

Karl and Ava stand stunned.

They look to far-off Lazlo. The boy has heard the last bit.

EXT. CAFTON HOTEL - NIGHT

The three, disillusioned, drift outside the hotel.

AVA

Why didn't you *shoot* him?

KARL

What's the point?

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lazlo sleeps in a chair. Ava and Karl distractedly watch television. Karl is drinking gulps from a bottle of wine.

KARL

I need to sleep.

AVA

Take my bed. I'm not tired.

Karl stands and moves to the hall. He turns.

KARL  
Sorry about your money.

AVA  
I wish it *had* been a ransom. It doesn't matter nearly as much as another day without Noah.

KARL  
I don't know where my wife is, I don't know who the hell is passing us all these envelopes, but I do know it feels good to not do this alone.

AVA  
Yes. It's better this way.

Their eyes lock. Karl breaks it. He retires to bed.

INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Karl is asleep. A body moves into bed with him, snuggling. Quickly, the snuggling turns to kisses and fondling. It's Ava. Karl remains still.

KARL  
(whispering)  
Don't.

AVA  
I want to.

KARL  
Don't. I'm married.

She tries a few more touches, then falls away.

FADE TO

INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ava awakens. She hears Karl in the bathroom. He pokes his head out.

KARL  
(through brushing)  
I stole a spare toothbrush.

He smiles. They pass a look -- it is going to be all right between them.

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Karl eats a quick breakfast. Ava watches Lazlo, still asleep on the living room floor.

KARL  
What time's that damn puppet show?

AVA  
Noon.  
(pause)  
I don't want to leave him.

KARL  
We'll only be two hours, tops, and he doesn't have a ticket. We'd have to leave him outside the theater. He's safer here.

She nods, heads for Lazlo, wakes him.

INT. THEATRE - DAY

A run-down vaudeville house, two floors, on a rainy day.

A sign: PUPPETS with an arrow pointing to the basement.

Karl and Ava head down the long staircase, coming on a long corridor leading to a dank performance space.

INT. PERFORMANCE SPACE - DAY

The lamps dim and the curtain draws open on squeaky cranks.

No puppets. Instead, men and women. Mimes, acrobats.

No strings on the "puppets," instead the arms of the actors are raised, as if manipulated by invisible rods. The interactions of the "puppets" are generic human activities -- shopping, eating dinner, watching television. There is no conversation throughout the play, only the harsh sounds of the actors' boots as they cross the stage, conduct their ritual business.

Karl turns to Ava, two of just six patrons.

KARL  
 (low)  
 What is this?

A BUSINESSMAN seated nearby looks up at Karl, then back again.

Karl and Ava watch as the scene from the night before -- the two in bed, the man refusing the woman -- is acted out in front of them.

KARL (CONT'D)  
 (louder)  
 What the fuck is this?

AVA  
 It's us...

Karl bolts from his chair. Ava follows into the corridor.

INT. THEATER (DOWNSTAIRS CORRIDOR) - DAY

Ava catches Karl at the stairs.

AVA  
 Maybe there's an important clue at  
 the end of the show, maybe-

The two see the Businessman has followed them.

BUSINESSMAN  
 You're here about the red  
 envelopes, aren't you?  
 (pause)  
 Puppet shows. Usually good luck  
 for me. A lot of people get  
 directed to one of those  
 eventually.

KARL  
 Who the hell are you?

BUSINESSMAN  
 Easy. I'm here to help.

AVA  
 Help how?

BUSINESSMAN  
 By telling you *everything*.

Karl takes a step off the stairs, approaching the man, Ava behind.

BUSINESSMAN (CONT'D)  
I've been through it. I've been  
all the way to the end.

AVA  
Do you know where my son is? Do  
you? You have to tell me? Please,  
please. Tell me.

BUSINESSMAN  
Hey, hey -- don't rush me.

KARL  
He's lying.

AVA  
No, he's not.

BUSINESSMAN  
Made it past the black envelope,  
even. Bet you don't know anyone  
who's done that. I'm the greatest  
shortcut in the world. They're  
Gods, you know. You'll never beat  
'em. Not them. But I can get you  
around their bullshit. You just...  
go to the source.

KARL  
There's a catch. Isn't there?

BUSINESSMAN  
Fifty thousand dollars.

AVA  
Fifty thousand-

BUSINESSMAN  
And, you're getting a bargain,  
because I'll tell you both  
together. That's only twenty five  
thousand each.

INSERT: The burning Oldsmobile, the \$10,000.

KARL  
(adding it up)  
We're short. Between you and me,  
Ava, we're short.

AVA  
By exactly \$10,000.  
(pause, thinking)  
Wait, what about Banswick Motors?

KARL  
Someone would have to buy a few cars.

AVA  
What about your business account?

KARL  
The account's frozen... my divorce. The courts only allow me enough for day-to-day operations.

AVA  
What about those men -- Arturo and the two salesmen?

KARL  
They're in the same boat as me, maybe worse. They have families, too.

Karl rushes to the Businessman.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Do you want a car? Forty thousand and a car?

BUSINESSMAN  
(dismissive)  
I've got too many cars already. And they're all very nice.

Karl snaps. He races at the Businessman and pins him to the wall.

AVA  
(pleading)  
Just take forty thousand! It's all we have. Just take it. Please.

BUSINESSMAN  
(straightening)  
Fifty is the price.

Karl takes out the gun and puts it to the man's head.

KARL  
You greedy FUCK!

BUSINESSMAN  
You're not the first to try that...

KARL  
Well I'll be the last.

Ava pulls on Karl's arm.

AVA  
No, Karl. Don't.

KARL  
Tell us!

BUSINESSMAN  
Business has gone down. I don't  
get as many hits as I used to. The  
price is the price.

Karl throws the man against the corridor wall, angry.

KARL  
They're onto you, you know that?

BUSINESSMAN  
Not entirely.

Karl grabs Ava's hand and starts to drag her up the  
staircase. She resists, but he's stronger.

The Businessman shouts up at them.

BUSINESSMAN (CONT'D)  
You're missing a great opportunity  
here. Fine! Go on your hunt! See  
where it leads you. Good luck if  
you find a black fucking envelope.  
I hope you get KILLED!

Karl and Ava hear his voice fade at the turn of the stairs.

AVA  
Karl, maybe we... maybe we can...  
maybe we should...

KARL  
He's lying, Ava. He's lying. He  
doesn't know any more than we do.  
He would have never made it through  
a black envelope.

At the top landing, there stands an USHER. In her hand, is a  
red envelope.

USHER  
(upbeat)  
Here you go, sir! The theater  
manager told me I should wait here  
and give this envelope to the first  
man up those stairs.

TITLE CARD: "TENTH DOCUMENT"

INT. AVA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Karl and Ava enter. Lazlo is no longer in the living room. They search the house, thinking him gone.

INT. AVA'S BEDROOM - DAY

They find him in Ava's room, face down in a pillow.

Beside the boy on the bed -- a black envelope.

Ava sees it first.

AVA

Oh, no. No, no, no.

She kneels beside the bed, afraid to touch it.

Karl wakes Lazlo.

KARL

Lazlo. Come on, wake up.

LAZLO

It was under the door.

AVA

Who is it for?

LAZLO

I don't know.

KARL

I just got a red envelope, so I doubt it's me.

LAZLO

You did? What was in it?

KARL

A gift certificate to a restaurant. The note said, "THE LAST SUPPER."

AVA

(to the envelope)  
We should open it.

They stare down the envelope. At last, Lazlo opens it.

LAZLO  
It's an address.

Karl takes the single page -- no document accompanies it.

KARL  
I know this street. It's near the  
hospital where I had my surgery.

AVA  
Do you know who lives there?

KARL  
No.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS - DAY

Karl enters through rain. He takes a set of keys from the rack. Arturo watches him, but doesn't ask.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Karl, Lazlo, and Ava eat in silence.

At the end of the meal, Karl pays with his gift certificate.

EXT. SEMINARY STREET - DAY

It is now raining hard. Karl pulls down Seminary Street until he finds the address. He parks.

Karl looks to the others.

KARL  
(calming)  
It's just an address.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Karl and Ava hold umbrellas, Lazlo trails behind. The boy is distant, nervous. Karl stands in front of the call box, searches the names on the buzzers.

KARL  
I don't recognize anyone.

Ava reaches out to buzz a particular apartment.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Wait!

AVA  
But this is the one.

KARL  
I'm not walking into a trap. I'm  
not ringing the buzzer until we've  
all taken a look.

Karl steps back, surveys the ground floor of the building.

KARL (CONT'D)  
I bet it's this one.

He points to the apartment to the left of the door. The  
lights are on and the curtains drawn.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Yeah. One. South. This is the  
only one south on the ground floor.

Karl steps off the porch and into the grass, allowing his  
umbrella to drop. He finds a crack in the curtain and peers  
inside.

KARL'S POV:  
Inside the bare apartment, there is a WOMAN talking to  
herself. She is in her late 50s, with wild hair, wearing  
pajamas.

Karl steps away.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Some woman. I don't know her.

AVA  
Maybe I will.

Ava does as Karl had. Same result.

AVA (CONT'D)  
I don't know her either. She looks  
kinda funny.

At this comment, the both turn to Lazlo, who stands behind,  
petrified.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Lazlo. You have to look. You have  
to tell us if you recognize her.

The boy doesn't move.

KARL  
Come on, Lazlo.

AVA  
Don't *push* him.

Long hold. The boy finally moves forward, to the window.

His eye's against the glass. He watches a moment, and then he starts to melt.

LAZLO  
No, no, no-

KARL  
Who is she, Lazlo?

Lazlo spins from the window, crying and scratching.

LAZLO  
No, no, no, no, no...

AVA  
*Please* Lazlo. We can help you.

LAZLO  
It's her, it's her, it's her!

They follow Lazlo onto the lawn, in the rain, arms out.

LAZLO (CONT'D)  
It's my mom. Oh, Jesus.

The boy bolts, top speed, as far away from his mother as possible.

AVA  
Come back!

They pursue Lazlo. A high fence blocks the end of the street. On the other side, the lighted campus of a white hospital.

Lazlo scales the fence, leaving them at the bottom.

Ava starts to climb, too. Karl stops her.

AVA (CONT'D)  
Help me over.

KARL  
The car. We'll drive around.  
Catch him on the other side.

EXT. HOSPITAL CAMPUS - NIGHT

Karl and Ava, in pursuit in the car.

KARL  
There he is!

They spot Lazlo -- just a shadow in the downpour, as he cuts across the road in front of them, into a line of trees.

They zoom past the hospital.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Which way did he go?

AVA  
Left, left-

Karl turns the wheel RIGHT.

AVA (CONT'D)  
No LEFT!

At the turn of a corner --

CRASH!

They've collided directly into the front hood of another car.

Glass pours down on them --

BLACKOUT

FADE IN ON

Karl is slumped behind the wheel. His forehead is bleeding.

He is able to get out. When he does, the gun falls from his belt. He scrambles to pick it up then hides it in the grass.

Ava is across the hood, dazed.

There is a DOCTOR in a lab coat screaming at them, looking at his destroyed car.

DOCTOR  
Wrong side of the road, JACKASS!

Karl comes around to Ava.

KARL  
Are you hurt?

AVA  
I'm okay. You're bleeding.

Karl wipes his forehead.

AVA (CONT'D)  
How's your heart?

KARL  
Dodged that one.

The doctor's rants continue. Karl drops the gun and kicks it out of sight.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(to Ava)  
Where's the kid?

Ava scans the dark trees.

AVA  
(distraught)  
I don't know. I've lost everybody...

DOCTOR  
My fucking car! My goddamn fucking car! I'm calling THE POLICE!

FADE TO

Later, crews on the scene, Karl getting patched up. As they pull away, Karl retrieves the gun.

FADE TO

EXT. BUS STOP - NIGHT

Ava and Karl wait alone at an intersection off the tree-lined hospital campus. It continues to rain. They look destroyed.

KARL  
I want things to go back. I want to find my wife, but I want the divorce to be over. It's wrecked me. As much as I've wrecked all those cars. I don't want to play games anymore -- not with her, not with any envelopes.

AVA  
Did you ever fight for her?

KARL  
 No. I just gave up.  
 (noticing)  
 Here's the bus.

The city bus approaches.

As it slows, Karl notices --

Brody Easter sits by one of the bus windows, not noticing them -- a mere passenger.

Karl takes out the revolver from his belt --

AVA  
 Karl?

Karl raises the gun, just as the bus slows.

He fires -- smashing the window around Brody Easter. The shot is loud, the bus zooms from the curb. Ava and Karl jump back.

AVA (CONT'D)  
 Karl!

KARL  
 It's him!

The bus driver sees the gun, he accelerates, trying to gain distance.

Karl runs after the bus, gun pointed.

In the rear, he sees the faces of children and their mother, staring at him. The mother forces the children down, under the seats, out of the window and away from Karl's aim.

CU:  
 Karl's face -- remorse, anger, despair.

The bus is out of range.

AVA  
 Karl, what was THAT for?

KARL  
 Brody Easter. I saw him on the bus.

AVA  
 Well you shouldn't SHOOT at him!  
 You could have KILLED someone!

KARL

I... I...

AVA

Come on, let's get out of here.

Ava rushes Karl from the scene.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Karl and Ava enter a room. Ava falls onto the bed. It's a fleabag.

AVA

Far cry from the Cafton.

KARL

It will have to do until tomorrow when the bank opens, and you can get more money.

AVA

It's bad when you can't afford a cab across town, and your friend has eliminated the buses and subways.

KARL

How many times do you want me to apologize?

They grow quiet. Karl takes off his coat. He places the gun on the table. At last, he stares at the one bed.

KARL (CONT'D)

I'll sleep in the chair.

AVA

Don't be ridiculous.

Slowly, he sits, then lays.

FADE TO

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Karl awakes alone. The clock reads 10:17.

He splashes his face with water.

He stares at the gun.

Deciding, he goes to the window, opens it.

POV:

The alley below. A dumpster.

Karl centers then drops the gun. It falls five stories into the dumpster with a clang.

Karl seems suddenly regretful, then relieved.

Ava enters.

KARL

Did you get the money?

AVA

\$2000, to tide us over. You were still sleeping. I phoned the police from the lobby pay phone. The detective on Noah's case says they have nothing.

KARL

It's up to us, then.

AVA

Do we wait for more envelopes?

KARL

I'll cab it to the dealership. If I don't show my face, explain about the car, Arturo might start talking bad about me to the police. Maybe that page of numbers that got me off the hook was a limited time offer, too.

(pause)

You should go home.

AVA

Do you think Lazlo will come back there?

KARL

Phone me at the dealership if the kid shows up. Or if you get another envelope -- red or black.

Karl puts on his coat. Ava suddenly thrusts into his arms.

AVA

We shouldn't separate.

KARL  
I'll get another car and meet you  
at your place. Only an hour.

INT. BANSWICK MOTORS (SHOWROOM) - DAY

It is a cloudy day, but the rain has stopped. Karl enters to find Arturo, Frank, and Darnell, as expected.

ARTURO  
(realizing)  
Oh, Mr. Banswick, no-

KARL  
I got some bad news about the  
Buick, Arturo.

ARTURO  
We're not going to have any cars  
left!

Karl goes to the mail stack, begins rifling.

ARTURO (CONT'D)  
I placed an advertisement in  
today's newspaper. For the  
dealership.

KARL  
An ad? Good thinkin'.

ARTURO  
And the police returned the file  
cabinet.

Karl turns. It's there. He goes towards it.

ARTURO (CONT'D)  
It's still locked, Mr. Banswick, so  
you'll need your key.

He pulls on a drawer and it comes open easily -- not locked.

He turns to Arturo with a look, and then pulls the drawer fully open. He reaches inside.

Hundreds of red envelopes.

KARL  
What is this?

Frank freezes, mid-bite of his lunch. Darnell stands dumb with his coffee.

ARTURO

Mr. Banswick, I swear, that was locked.

Karl keeps digging through the envelopes. He tries the second drawer and finds more of the same.

KARL

What the fuck is going on!

Third drawer -- the same -- filled to the brim with red envelopes.

Karl tears a few open. Empty.

KARL (CONT'D)

Is this some kind of JOKE!

ARTURO

I don't know, boss - Mr. Banswick, please!

Karl hauls a drawer from its track and throws it over the rear office counter. There is a huge sound and red envelopes scatter all over the floor.

KARL

You're all INVOLVED, aren't you!  
You're all involved and you're trying to kill me!

Karl pulls free another drawer and tosses it randomly.

SMASH! The drawer crashes through the rear window of the showroom's Mercedes. The sound is tremendous, as well as the impact on his employees.

The front door bell jingles. An OLDER MAN enters, carrying a newspaper clipping.

Karl storms to him.

KARL (CONT'D)

Who are you, what do you want!

The older man holds out the clipping.

OLDER MAN

My name's Roger. My daughter-

Karl shoves the Older Man.

KARL  
Get out! Get out and don't come  
back!

OLDER MAN  
But someone mailed this ad to me.

KARL  
I DON'T CARE! GET OUT OF HERE!

He shoves the Older Man out the door. In the dealership lot,  
the Older Man stands confused, then walks away...

Karl now refocuses on the faces of his employees. They are  
horrified.

Long beat.

Karl comes to his senses, controls his anger.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(stunned)  
I'm sorry...

Karl collapses.

Arturo races to his side.

ARTURO  
(to the others)  
An ambulance! Phone for an  
ambulance.

KARL  
(in pain)  
No! My pills, in my pocket.

Arturo finds the pills in Karl's jacket, opens them, pops a  
pill under Karl's tongue. They wait for it to take effect.

Karl gestures for another. Arturo complies.

Hold.

Karl's body relaxes.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(breathing)  
I feel better.

Arturo sits him upright.

KARL (CONT'D)

(weakly)

My wife is missing. I've been receiving these red envelopes. I think they're leading me to her.

(pause)

Or maybe they're leading me farther away.

FADE TO

Karl locks the dealership door, watching Frank and Darnell leave the lot. He turns to Arturo, who is helping sweep up the broken glass. Karl starts to help gather strewn envelopes.

ARTURO

I'll get it, Mr. Banswick. You rest.

Karl leans against the rear office counter.

Arturo picks up an envelope, gets a look.

KARL

What is it, Arturo?

ARTURO

I was just thinking... These are very unusual envelopes.

KARL

Yes. I thought that myself when I got the first one.

ARTURO

And the color. Red like I never seen. Maybe it's obvious to you. You've already done it. But why don't you try to find out who makes these envelopes? Maybe then you can find out who bought so many of them.

Karl's face -- contemplation turns to elation. He steps to Arturo and kisses him on both cheeks.

KARL

Holy *shit*! You're a genius!

(snapping fingers)

I'll be right back!

INT. THE COFFEE POT - DAY

Karl bursts into The Coffee Pot, where Dolores cleans the counter.

DOLORES

Karl!

Karl grabs one of the paper Halloween lanterns off the ceiling.

KARL

Where do you buy this paper?

DOLORES

Karl, are you okay? I've been worried sick.

KARL

Please, Dolores, please -- just tell me where you bought this paper. You said it was expensive. What's the name of the paper shop?

INT. PAPER SHOP - DAY

Karl speaks with a SHOP OWNER. The Shop Owner goes back into storage and comes out with an envelope box. He opens it up. There are only a dozen red envelopes inside. Karl inspects. It's the same red envelope. The owner points to the label:

CU:

"MANUFACTURED BY DOCUMENTICON" followed by the word "discontinued."

KARL

(V.O., over phone connection)

It's the paper, Ava. It's the goddamn *paper*. Some mill upstate. A town called "Forest Hill."

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EVENING

Karl drives the Mercedes with the busted window.

Beside him, Ava, excited.

Ahead, a sign: Forest Hill.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREET - EVENING

Karl pulls up to a diner. There's a man in logger clothes standing outside.

KARL

Do you know where there's a mill run by Documenticon?

LOGGER

Fuck Documenticon. They haven't hired from this town in a long time.

KARL

Where's the mill?

LOGGER

The peninsula.

EXT. PENINSULA BRIDGE - DUSK

Karl and Ava find the cross-bridge.

There's a sign: BRIDGE OUT.

INT. CAR - DUSK

Ava and Karl, stumped.

AVA

It doesn't make any sense. How do they get all that paper off the island with the only bridge out?

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Karl and Ava check into a small, log-cabin style motel with sign "Forest Hill Travel Lodge." The KEEPER is offering an explanation.

KEEPER

They haven't so much as made a ream a paper in a decade. Somebody bought the mill in 1971, but I don't think they've been doin' much to rescue 'er. Just... hangin' onto the trees. Good idea to wait until morning and hire a boat.

The Keeper turns her back. Ava shows Karl the guestbook.

AVA  
 (whispering)  
 Look, Karl.

The guestbook is full.

KARL  
 (whispering)  
 Lots of people for a small town.

The Keeper turns with their keys. Karl takes them and steps from the counter. Ava, not seen by the others, turns another page in the guest book.

There, tucked in the book -- a black envelope.

She shutters. Her hands shake. She reaches for it and accidentally knocks it to the floor. Reaching over, she quickly retrieves it and hides it under her coat.

KEEPER  
 (pleasant)  
 Welcome to Forest Hill!

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Ava stops Karl under a tree and shows him the black envelope. Ava is very emotional.

AVA  
 Oh, God, Karl, oh, God.

KARL  
 It could be for me.

AVA  
 It's not, it's not. It's for me.  
 I found it. Lazlo found his.

KARL  
 It doesn't matter! This is just a piece of goddamn paper. We can get through this.

AVA  
 No, no. No, we can't. Remember poor Lazlo? Lazlo could have jumped in the river; he could have stepped in front of a bus.

KARL  
 Open it. We're scared because we don't know what it says.

Slowly, she opens it.

It is a simple hand drawing. Two vertical black ink bars separated by mere inches on bare white paper.

In the center between the two bars is a number and an abbreviation: 4 FT.

KARL (CONT'D)

Four feet. See? That doesn't sound so bad.

AVA

Neither did a random address.

KARL

(determined)

All right. You want to *do* something about it? Let's steal one of those boats at the wharf and get to the other side of the peninsula. I'm not wrong, Ava -- something is *inside* that Documenticon mill. I don't think it's as closed as everyone thinks.

EXT. WHARF - NIGHT

Karl returns with Ava in the Mercedes to the bridge.

Leaving the car, they jump the fence to the wharf and approach the dozen neglected boats tied to the posts.

Karl checks a boat.

AVA

Do you know anything about boats?

KARL

Not much. I'm hoping to find one that drives like a car. This one's out of gas.

He moves to the next boat.

KARL (CONT'D)

Too complicated.

He moves to the next boat, stops.

On the wheel, a red envelope.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Fuck. They know everything.

He boards the boat.

TITLE CARD: "ELEVENTH DOCUMENT"

EXT. THE WATER - NIGHT

Karl drives the boat. Ava sits in the rear. She holds the document, the torn open red envelope. Boat instructions.

AVA  
How deep is the water?

KARL  
(knowing)  
You can't drown in four feet of water.

AVA  
Yes, you can.

KARL  
You won't.

The boat gains speed. The peninsula, covered in a tall dense forest of perfect trees, appears as an eerie monster on their starboard side.

AVA  
(buried by the engine)  
We really love them, don't we?

KARL  
What's that?

AVA  
We really love them. To do all this. I love Noah. I love him and I want him back. I'll do anything. I'll do it all. Whatever they want. If this is a test, I've passed. I just want my son.  
(pause)  
Do you love her that much, Karl?

KARL  
I've always loved her.

Up ahead, on a landing point, there is a lamp-post. The light flashes.

AVA  
They're signaling us.

KARL  
It's probably just a short.

AVA  
No. It's them.

EXT. SHORE - NIGHT

Karl ties the boat to the landing and helps Ava out of the boat. Ahead lies a path to an incline.

AVA  
It's too dark.

Karl returns the boat, digs. He finds a tool box with flashlight.

AVA (CONT'D)  
The batteries might be dead.

Karl switches the beam on, strong.

AVA (CONT'D)  
They think of everything, don't they?

KARL  
Well this time it helps. Come on.

They begin the hike through the forest.

EXT. PLATFORM - NIGHT

They come to a platform, the last wide set of boards before the start of a gangway, which leads up the side of the intimidating hill.

KARL  
Maybe we shouldn't attempt this at night...

AVA  
Look!

Ava points beyond the trees to the top of the hill. It's some sort of building with lights on.

AVA (CONT'D)  
That's where my son is -- up there.  
Locked in a tower.

KARL  
It's not a castle, Ava. It's not a  
prison.

AVA  
What is it then?

Karl takes her hand and pulls her up, beginning the dangerous  
trek.

KARL  
It's a paper mill...

FADE TO

EXT. GANGWAY - NIGHT

The journey is hard, and long. The night passes as they wind  
their way up a seemingly endless gangway.

Ava drops Karl's hand.

KARL  
Keep holding my hand...

AVA  
We should rest. Your heart.

KARL  
(with a snap)  
I'm fine.

AVA  
(forceful)  
Karl. We should *rest*.

He nods. They take a moment.

FADE TO

Later: the two, continuing up.

Finally, they come to it.

A broken part of the gangway -- a gap.

CU:  
Ava and Karl.

AVA (CONT'D)  
How wide?

KARL  
(frustrated and now  
understanding)  
Four feet.

Ava starts to cry. Karl takes her firmly.

KARL (CONT'D)  
We have to jump it.

AVA  
No, Karl, no -- that's my black  
envelope. We have to go back.

KARL  
No. It won't *work*, Ava, you know  
*that!* If it's not this document it  
would be another. We've been at  
this so many days now with so  
little sleep that we've forgotten  
that there's an end. There is.  
We've forgotten that the road  
exists! This is a path. Say it.

AVA  
There's a path. But what about  
when you get your black envelope?  
You could have fifty more envelopes  
ahead of you before you find your  
wife, Karl!

KARL  
Look -- the way is ending. You can  
see the boards stop just a hundred  
feet ahead of us! That's a  
clearing. That's the mill. Maybe  
I don't ever get a black envelope.  
Maybe I missed one.

AVA  
Not possible.

KARL  
They're not perfect. They don't  
know you can't make this jump. I'm  
the one that's overweight with a  
bad heart. I'm the one who smokes  
four packs a day. You're perfect  
for this. They've underestimated  
you, Ava Moon.  
(MORE)

KARL (CONT'D)

You're going to make this jump and  
we're going to find the end.

(pause)

Stand back.

Karl readies himself, hands Ava the flashlight.

Then, he runs toward the gap --

JUMPS!

Tumbles onto the opposite gangway, collapses.

AVA

Are you okay?

He gets up slowly, sore.

KARL

Toss me that.

Ava tosses Karl the light.

Karl aims it at the gap.

KARL (CONT'D)

Now you.

AVA

(frightened)

I can't.

KARL

Fuck the fucking black envelope!  
Now, back up, get some speed, keep  
your eyes on the end of the fucking  
boards.

Ava, at last, complies. As Karl had done, she backs up,  
starts to run, gets some speed --

JUMPS!

Bang, she lands on the very edge, and falls.

Karl rushes forward and grabs her hand, just in time.

She tumbles, pulling him onto his stomach, barely holding her  
one hand as she swings over the precipice.

Their eyes meet.

She falls.

Hundreds of yards below, she vanishes into the trees.

KARL (CONT'D)

Ava!

(pause)

Ava!

He continues calling her name into the blackness.

FADE TO

Some time later. Karl finally gets up, grips his flashlight, and, angry and determined, heads for the mill...

INT. STAIR TOWER - NIGHT

Karl enters what looks like a lighthouse, and proves to be a tower of stairs leading up the last stretch, to the mill.

On the first stair -- a black envelope.

TITLE CARD: "LAST DOCUMENT"

INT. STAIR TOWER - NIGHT

Karl reads the black message.

A number: 458.

KARL

(to himself)

Four hundred and fifty eight...

(he looks ahead)

...stairs.

He crumples the page, tosses it, shines his light, and starts up.

KARL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

One...

He counts steps.

FADES between, showing the passage of time, his fatigue, his heart.

KARL (CONT'D)

Sixteen... twenty-seven... fifty-one...

He's running out of breath.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Ninety six...  
(shouting up stairs)  
YOU WON'T GET ME LIKE THIS!

He counts steps

Time passes...

KARL (CONT'D)  
Two-hundred six... two-hundred  
seven...

He rests, catches his breath, waits.

Time passes...

He continues up to the next landing.

KARL (CONT'D)  
Three-hundred fifty-five... three-  
hundred fifty six...

KARL'S POV:

Stairs, stairs, stairs, dizziness, blur.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the bottle of nitroglycerin pills. Five pills left. He takes one, grips his arm, waits for the pain to pass, then continues up, up, up.

INSERT: Flashbacks, prior events -- Lana's face; Ava's face; crashed cars, the dealership, his father, Lazlo...

Karl, exhausted, reaches yet another landing. He's wrecked.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(screaming)  
FUCK ALL OF YOU!

He reaches for his nitro. He fumbles with the bottle, bobbles it. It hits floor and two pills disappear under the stair boards.

Karl nabs the last two.

He struggles up one more landing.

He collapses. Just in time, he puts the last two pills under his tongue in quick succession and steels himself against a wave of pain.

Is he dead? Time passes. He does not move.

At last, Karl flops over on his side. He looks up. Sees a light.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(weak)  
Who's there?

He stands. It's not a staircase on this landing -- but instead a short ladder.

He puts a hand on the rungs, moves upward.

KARL (CONT'D)  
(smiling)  
Four-hundred fifty-eight.

INT. DOCUMENTICON MILL - DAWN

Karl has emerged triumphantly on the abandoned floor of the Documenticon mill.

The mill, in years past, had been a working business. But no longer. The machinery is rusted. Cobwebs hang between gears. A bare utility light swings from a hook as if recently touched by a hand.

KARL  
Hello!  
(pause)  
I'm here!  
(pause)  
Karl Banswick!

He sees something on a timber beltway, below a large circular cutting saw.

A white envelope.

He crosses the floor of the mill to it and snatches it up, then opens it.

CU:  
A single page reading, GO HOME.

Karl begins to weep.

He pushes his way out the front door of the mill.

EXT. DOCUMENTICON MILL - DAWN

Karl stands on the top of the hill. The mill's exterior looks like a ghost town -- rusty equipment, half-cut trees, a place caught in time.

In the misty morning fog, he can see his car parked on the wharf below.

Karl crosses the bridge off the peninsula. It is no longer "out."

EXT. HIGHWAY - MORNING

Karl drives back to the city. He looks to his passenger seat -- Ava's seat. Empty.

EXT. KARL'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Karl stands ready to unlock his door. He stops short.

He takes out the white note: GO HOME.

KARL  
(to himself)  
I'm in the wrong place...

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Oppressive rain.

KARL BANSWICK sits behind the wheel of a '74 Mercedes. He is forty-two, unshaven with dirty hair. He wears a sports-coat torn at the shoulder. He is smoking a cigarette.

The car moves at a crawl down a narrow city residential street. The rear window is smashed and rain drips in.

KARL'S POV:

The porch of the townhouse, as he passes. Two men in overcoats and hats, waiting for someone.

INSERT:

Flashes: Two hands holding, a man's and a woman's. The man loses his grip and the female hand falls away. Face of a woman, features blurred. The tearing open of a red envelope.

Karl drifts to a stop. The men on the porch notice Karl's Mercedes. One of them points his way.

CU:

A white envelope, torn open at the side, rests on the seat next to Karl.

A third man in a black suit exits the townhouse at one of the other men's signal.

CU:

Karl, through the wet window of the Mercedes. He looks exhausted, about to crumble...

FADE TO BLACK

INT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Karl wanders his own house like a ghost. He is alone.

There is a knock at the door.

He answers to find Henry Dodge standing at his doorstep.

INT. TOWNHOUSE (KITCHEN) - DAY

Karl and Dodge.

DODGE

I saw the notice in the newspaper.  
My condolences.

KARL

(morose)  
And the one on Ava Moon's son?

DODGE

(gently)  
Yes.

KARL

You knew that would be the end of  
it.

DODGE

I did. Although I didn't know how.  
You wife -- a fall into the city's  
drainage pipe while planning for  
beautification. A boy struck by a  
car and hidden in a garage.  
Terrible. Terrible.

(pause)

I lied to you, Karl. I did make it  
through my black envelope. I had  
to jump from an small airplane onto  
the peninsula.

(MORE)

DODGE (CONT'D)

And I'm a man afraid of heights. It was the only option they left for me. An old man and his parachute.

KARL

Why didn't you tell us we'd find nothing?

DODGE

I lied about something else, Karl, to you and your friends. You weren't the third group in five years to show up and ask me questions. You were the twenty-second. Some just had a few people. Others as high as fifteen. I told the truth to the first few groups and never knew the results. Then I took to lying. And following.

(pause)

If you had found out that your wife died in an accident, without the documents, what would that mean -- years from now, days from now -- what would that mean?

Karl thinks.

KARL

It would have meant that she never knew. But... who cares that I have proof of how I felt about Lana?

DODGE

I don't know.

KARL

Still? After five years?

DODGE

Everything that happened to me, everything that happened to you. Men *couldn't* have done it.

(pause)

Do you still have your white envelope?

KARL

I threw it away.

DODGE  
(knowing)  
No you didn't.

Karl gets up, finds it, hands it over.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Dodge departing, umbrella raised.

DODGE  
You have done a great thing. You made it into the mill. Do you know how few people do that? I know. I've followed dozens. Men, women, every stripe, every profession. They all turned from it; they all gave up. And yes, a few become statistics in the newspaper. But you made it through. I never thought I'd find another person that made it all the way through!

Dodge hands Karl an opened white envelope.

DODGE (CONT'D)  
Read it. That's mine.

Karl takes out the page, reads.

DODGE (CONT'D)  
Mine just took a little longer to come true.

Dodge leaves in the rain. Karl again looks to Dodge's page.

LONG CU:  
The page -- the words, FIND HIM.

Karl takes a few steps forward, into the downpour. He's soon soaked. He turns and looks back to the townhouse -- his home.

KARL  
She knows. She knows.

He goes inside.

FADE TO BLACK  
/CREDITS