

DEN OF THIEVES

Written by

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One-Hour Pilot

"Initiation"

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SHOWTIME
GROUNDWELL PRODUCTIONS

FADE IN:

INT. ROBERTS KROLL BUILDING - EARLY MORNING

We slowly TRACK across an empty bond trading floor of a major investment bank: rows of Quotron terminals, bulky black phones, swivel chairs...

ON SCREEN appears: "NEW YORK CITY - APRIL, 1982 - 5:00 A.M."

At the rear of the floor, in a large adjoining office behind a glass wall, MARSHALL MAREN, early 40s, dressed in a crisp dark suit, walks around a ten-foot-long X-shaped desk, placing a sheet of paper in front of each unoccupied place. He is careful to make sure that the edge of each sheet aligns perfectly with the edge of the desk.

MAREN

I don't need much sleep. I like to get here before my team and leave a sheet of directives on each man's desk. That way there aren't any misunderstandings. Of course, sometimes there are unpleasant surprises that need to be dealt with.

(beat)

Do you know the body's natural pressure points, Nick?

NICK SLOAN, 32, also in a dark suit (though a less expensive one), sits on a chair facing the desk. Maren's gaze on Nick is intense, proprietary, a permanent test of some kind.

NICK

No.

MAREN

A pressure point is a nerve bundle that can produce significant pain when manipulated in a specific manner. Easy enough to find but difficult to master. My jujitsu sensei knows every one. I only know a hundred and twelve.

NICK

That sounds like a lot.

MAREN

It's just the beginning.

Maren steps to the bank of windows behind him and stares out: the day's first light is breaking over Wall Street and the bottom of Manhattan.

MAREN (CONT'D)

The city's beautiful when you can't see another soul.

(beat)

I've been hearing some interesting things about you.

Maren turns around to face Nick.

MAREN (CONT'D)

That you, let's say, have a strong sense of professional obligation. An old-school conscience.

NICK

Saying it like that, it sounds almost...

MAREN

Exactly why I looked into your story a little more closely.

NICK

How do you mean?

MAREN

You were in boarding school when your father went bankrupt and dropped dead of a heart attack.

Nick looks carefully at Maren: this information is not generally available.

NICK

That's true.

MAREN

He'd lost his contractor's license. Sad, but interesting. Were the allegations of fraud against him true?

NICK

I have no idea.

MAREN

You sound a little tense, Nick. Are my questions starting to piss you off?

NICK

I never get pissed off on a first date, Mr. Maren. I'd just like to know what I'm doing here. I get a call out of the blue to come to your office at five in the morning. I'm flattered, of course, given who you are. But I guess I'm also still kind of missing the point.

Maren smiles.

MAREN

You know, I think this might just work out.

NICK

What's going to work out? Look, Mr. Maren--

MAREN

Marshall.

NICK

Okay -- Marshall. It's been a pleasure. But it's time for me to go to work now.

Nick stands up.

MAREN

There are two things I'm looking for in a member of my team, Nick.

NICK

(thrown)

Sorry -- it's so early my hearing's a little funky. I thought you just said "a member of my team".

MAREN

First, a sense of family. No sense of family, no fucking loyalty. Wouldn't you agree? You still pay your mother's mortgage every month, and sometimes your brother's debts. I like that. The second thing I need to see is a profound, animal hunger to make more money than has ever been made on this planet. A hunger so primal it's got a conscience of its own. I think you know what I'm talking about.

(MORE)

MAREN (CONT'D)

Because in my experience, nothing gives you a greater appetite than getting fucked over by life at a young age. You never forget the feeling of having the rug pulled out from under your feet just when you were going for the gold ring. So what do you say, Nick? Are you hungry enough to come eat at my table?

Nick stands staring at Maren as if he's just run smack into a human forcefield.

INT. TAXI - TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA - DAY

Nick, wearing a dark suit, sits in the back of a Terre Haute taxi (a 1980 Plymouth Gran Fury), staring out at the

EXT. TERRE HAUTE - CONTINUOUS

Small-city Midwestern streets.

The taxi pulls through the gates of an industrial compound -- several buildings and warehouses with long-haul trucks pulled up to loading docks. A sign reads "CARTHAGE PAPER INC."

INT. CARTHAGE PAPER - DAY

The offices of this successful corporation are understated. Outside the CEO's office a SECRETARY smiles at Nick.

SECRETARY

He's waiting for you.

MORRIS CARTHAGE, 60, sharp-eyed and Midwestern to the core, greets Nick with a fond handshake. The feeling between them almost familial.

MORRIS

You here to gloat? You did a nifty job on that re-financing deal. I ought to buy you a drink.

Nick smiles.

NICK

Too bad you don't drink.

MORRIS

Might just be time to start.

Morris goes to the sideboard and pours two glasses of water from a carafe, hands one to Nick.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

The damn recession's knocked everybody around.

NICK

I know. But the re-fi should cover you till things pick up.

MORRIS

Here's to that.

They clink glasses.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

So you gonna tell me why you're really here? You could've just picked up the phone. I know Terre Haute isn't Miami Beach.

NICK

I'm changing jobs, Morris.

MORRIS

Don't tell me Kidder Peabody's not paying you well.

NICK

An opportunity's come up, totally out of the blue. Something I can't turn down.

MORRIS

Where're you moving to?

NICK

Roberts Kroll.

Morris looks at him, surprised.

MORRIS

Marshall Maren's firm? What's the Junk Bond King want with you?

NICK

Some new blood on the M and A side, I guess.

MORRIS

What was wrong with the old blood?

NICK

I just want you to know I'll always be grateful for the chance you gave me when we took Carthage public.

MORRIS

This is starting to sound like a kiss-off speech. What's going on, Nick?

NICK

You're a longtime Kidder client, Morris. I didn't want to assume anything.

Morris looks at him.

MORRIS

If I'd thought you were just another suit with a fancy B-school degree, I never would've trusted you with my business in the first place.

(beat)

Go on and send me the papers for the account transfer.

They shake hands meaningfully.

NICK

Thanks for your loyalty.

MORRIS

No need for that. You've earned it. How well do you know Maren, anyway?

INT. FOUR SEASONS GRILL ROOM - DAY

Mies van der Rohe's metal curtains shimmer over floor-to-ceiling windows. The room's in full power-lunch mode: a shark tank of money, competition, million-dollar secrets.

The MAITRE D' shows two well-known FINANCIERS to a central table. Heads turn subtly, conversations lower.

At a nearby table Maren and Nick are having lunch. With the faintest motion of his hand, Maren brings the waiter right over.

MAREN

This bottle of Perrier is flat.

WAITER
Sorry, Mr. Maren.

The waiter whisks the bottle away.

With the same coiled stillness about his movements, Maren places a leather watch box on the table in front of Nick.

MAREN
Open it.

Nick opens the box: it's a gold PATEK PHILLIPE NAUTILUS.

MAREN (CONT'D)
Put it on.

NICK
(joking)
What am I, your mistress? My wife's gonna be jealous.

MAREN
Consider it an official welcome to Roberts Kroll.

Self-conscious and excited, Nick unbuckles his Timex and straps on the Patek Phillipe.

MAREN (CONT'D)
Fifteen hundred individual steps went into making that, all done by hand.

NICK
It's a beautiful watch.

MAREN
You want to be the best? The most expensive? Fifteen hundred steps. Two thousand hours of intricate labor. All in a closed room, where no one can see what you're doing.

The waiter returns with a fresh bottle of Perrier.

MAREN (CONT'D)
(to waiter)
Mr. Steinberg will be covering my bill today. Give him my best wishes.

He indicates a short, brutish man talking aggressively with his hands at a table across the room.

As the waiter leaves, VICTOR STEINBERG, 42, notices Maren observing him and raises a hand in greeting. Maren nods once, offers a faint, knowing smile.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Am I interrupting?

Standing beside the table is IRWIN KILLMAN, 40, dry and reptilian, looking like the polished financial predator he is (and, as always, wearing a three-piece black suit).

MAREN

Nick Sloan, Irwin Killman. The best-informed arb in town.

KILLMAN

I believe Marshall means the richest. Patek Phillipe? You shouldn't have.

MAREN

I gave Irwin a watch after a deal once. He sold it the next day.

KILLMAN

(shrugs)

It was a good day for gold.

He places a business card beside Nick's old watch.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

I always make it a point to get to know Marshall's new hires. Sheila and I are having a dinner party for a few friends Thursday night. Why don't you and your wife come out to Bedford and join us?

Nick glances at Maren.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

Marshall hasn't gone to a social event since junior high. He'll be working.

NICK

Okay...thanks. We'll come.

KILLMAN

Good.

Killman gestures toward Victor Steinberg, who again is jabbing his hands at his lunch partner as he talks.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

Looks like Steinberg's getting ready to grab something big and fuck it. Could this be a Marshall Maren operation?

Maren's expression is inscrutable.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

Ah, yes: a gentleman never tells.
(to Nick)
Thursday, 7:30.

Killman walks away.

Maren folds his napkin. He is dead serious.

MAREN

I'm the only one you need to listen to.

EXT. 300 CENTRAL PARK WEST - EVENING

The twin-towered El Dorado apartment building. Out front, two tired MOVERS close up the rear of a truck and drive away. A moment later, a taxi pulls up. A DOORMAN comes out and opens the door for Nick.

DOORMAN

Welcome, Mr. Sloan.

It takes Nick a moment to realize that he's Mr. Sloan. He smiles.

INT. 300 CENTRAL PARK WEST - CONTINUOUS

Nick walks through the gorgeous lobby like a kid in a candy shop.

INT. SLOAN APARTMENT - EVENING

Nick enters a large, beautiful pre-war apartment freshly furnished by an interior designer: they've just moved in. He spots his lovely wife, KATE, 32, standing by the living room windows that overlook Central Park.

Before Kate can say anything, Nick tosses his briefcase, strides over to her with a huge smile, and PICKS HER UP in his arms.

NICK
Can you believe we actually live
here?!

KATE
Yes.
(laughing)
No!

Nick tickles her and she lets out a SQUEAL of delight.

KATE (CONT'D)
Okay, okay! Yes!

They kiss, long and deep. Then they stand looking out the window at CENTRAL PARK in the twilight. This is it: the view they've always dreamed of.

NICK
Scratch that. This is
unbelievable.

KATE
The movers unpacked all our clothes
in the bedroom closet -- and it's
still half empty.

A small, sexy smile from Nick.

NICK
Let's spend the night in there.

They kiss again -- just as AVA, 4, runs out of the back of the apartment.

AVA
Daddy, you're home!

Nick sweeps her up in his arms.

NICK
Hey, muffin. How was your day?

AVA
Good. Wanna see my new room?

NICK
I'd love to.

The three of them take a giddy tour of the apartment, room by room, Ava leading the way.

In the smallest bedroom, JOSH, 2, lies asleep in his toddler bed.

Ava's room is a fairy princess' castle. Nick reaches down and takes his daughter's hands, she hops on top of his feet, and they begin to dance around the room.

INT. NICK'S HOME OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

The latest bulky high-tech equipment, circa 1982: IBM computer, fax machine, telephone. Folders and unfiled papers, company prospectuses and 10-k reports.

Kate, in a bathrobe, walks in.

Nick holds out his wrist so she can admire his new watch.

KATE

Wow, that's some party favor. So lunch was good?

NICK

Seemed like it.

KATE

Details?

NICK

Aside from his super-intense gaze and his general aura of Vulcan mind-control? No.

KATE

Come on, you have to give me something to chew over.

NICK

Okay...Maren sent the lunch bill over to Victor Steinberg.

KATE

Nice. That's what I do when I go out to eat -- send the check to the nearest corporate raider. So Maren and Steinberg are pals?

NICK

According to Irwin Killman, Maren doesn't have pals.

KATE

The arb? Was he there, too? I've heard he looks like a funeral director.

NICK
More like a very rich serial
killer. You'll get to meet him
Thursday night. Small dinner party
at his home in Bedford.

Kate raises an eyebrow, impressed.

KATE
You don't waste any time, do you?

NICK
(smiles)
Foreplay's for slow-pokes.

Kate picks a PROSPECTUS (for "Braniff Airlines") off Nick's desk, starts looking through it, and immediately gets absorbed. Nick watches her; her seriousness and interest in all things financial is palpable.

KATE
(glances up)
What?

NICK
Nothing.

KATE
(re the prospectus)
I can see why they just filed for
Chapter 11. They should've hedged
their exposure to oil.

NICK
They're not the only ones.

KATE
That makes, what, ten airlines
belly-up in the last six months?

NICK
Braniff might come back.

KATE
Not with these numbers. And
Reagan's deregulation push is going
to kill off a bunch more. We're
going to see massive consolidation
in the next few years.

A pause. Nick is looking at her with respect; she's good at this -- maybe even better than him.

NICK
When Josh starts nursery school...

Kate ends the subject with a shake of her head.

NICK (CONT'D)
Come on, Kate. It's obvious you miss it.

KATE
I made a choice to have a family,
and I don't regret it for a second.
(beat, faint ironic smile)
Now if I can just find the off
switch in my brain.

Nick steps forward and kisses her.

NICK
You're a wonderful mother, brain or
no brain.

KATE
Thank you.

EXT. WALL STREET - EARLY MORNING

Nick comes up out of the subway station...

Enters the Roberts Kroll building.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Nick stands in his still-new office watching the day's first light spread over lower Manhattan. A feeling of possibility and promise.

His phone RINGS. He stares at it. There's only one person he knows who'd be awake at this hour -- his brother. Nick picks up, his face a picture of familial ambivalence.

ANDY (O.S.)
Tell me the truth: Do you think
Heaven looks like Danceteria?

INT. TRIBECA LOFT - SAME TIME

ANDY SLOAN, 29, lithe and somewhat unhealthily handsome, phone tucked between neck and shoulder, stands in the messy, open kitchen of an old Tribeca loft (before they were cool and expensive), fixing himself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Behind him, the front door stands open; Andy's just come home after another all-nighter of disco balls and too much coke. As always, his default communication mode with his brother is ambivalent irony streaked with genuine feeling.

NICK (O.S.)

Sorry to be the one to break it to you, but I think Heaven looks more like Goldman Sachs.

Andy almost smiles.

ANDY

You're a truly disturbed human being -- you know that, right?

NICK (O.S.)

Sometimes I do know that.

ANDY

How's the new office?

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Nick looks around his office.

NICK

Bigger than the old office.

ANDY (O.S.)

I knew it! Size *does* matter.

NICK

(lying)

Andy, I've got a meeting in a few minutes.

ANDY (O.S.)

Right.

(intoning)

My brother Nick, The Busy Man.

Nick sighs; their conversations always have a way of ending like this.

NICK
You called me, remember? Something
you need?

ANDY (O.S.)
Like what?

NICK
I don't know...Money?

ANDY (O.S.)
The magazine pays me plenty.

NICK
I know it does. And you spend
plenty.

ANDY (O.S.)
And you don't? Never mind. I
called because...

INT. TRIBECA LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Andy sniffs, takes a ravenous bite, chews into the phone.

ANDY
(not going to say it)
Fuck if I can remember.

NICK (O.S.)
I'll put a check for a K in today's
mail. Will that cover whatever it
is?

Andy stands silent, grateful and resentful.

NICK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Why don't you come up to the new
place for dinner this weekend? The
kids would love to see you.

ANDY
Yesterday I put these two naked
girls on a trained camel for a
cover shoot -- kind of Eric Fischl
meets "Wild Kingdom". Except the
camel wasn't so trained and one of
the models fell off and sprained
her ankle. Lucky she was too coked
up to notice and we got a great
shot. After we sue the camel
trainer we might even come out
ahead.

NICK (O.S.)

Andy...

Andy starts to sing lightly:

ANDY

"We're off to see the Wizard, the
wonderful Wizard of Oz..."

He hangs up.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Nick stands listening to the dial tone.

INT. BOND FLOOR - LATE MORNING

Nick walks across the chaos of the trading floor, fanatical BOND TRADERS at their stations SHOUTING prices and orders into phones. Approaching Maren's glass-walled office, Nick observes:

Maren sitting in the center of the X-shaped desk, holding a phone to each ear, surrounded by members of his TEAM. He hangs up one phone, then the other. He sees Nick and stands up.

INT. SMALL OFFICE - A MINUTE LATER

Maren leads Nick into a side office and closes the door.

MAREN

How's your pal Morris Carthage?

Nick didn't see this coming. He just looks at Maren.

MAREN (CONT'D)

I know you went to see him last
week.

NICK

That was a personal trip.

MAREN

Personal?

Maren shakes his head sadly: when will Nick learn?

NICK

Morris gave me my first real break in banking. I wanted to tell him about the new job in person.

MAREN

And you were successful -- congratulations. Carthage is now a Roberts Kroll client. So now we can get down to the deal.

NICK

What deal?

MAREN

Tomorrow I'm faxing a letter to Carthage Paper's board informing them I've already raised a hundred and fifty million on behalf of Victor Steinberg.

Nick is stunned.

NICK

What the hell does Steinberg want with Carthage Paper?

MAREN

What does Victor want with anything? He wants to buy the fuck out of it.

NICK

That makes no sense. It's just a another paper company.

MAREN

Sitting on a pile of under-utilized assets and bullshit waste. The corrugated products unit is failing. High-end stationary's stagnant. The timber investment's a bad joke. Victor will maximize shareholder value by divesting all the garbage in a day. Consider it a public service -- freeing our public corporations from the tyranny of self-interested, mediocre managers wherever they may be hiding.

NICK

Morris is a good CEO, Marshall.

MAREN

You mean a good *man*? Is that what you mean? A good *person*, kind to kids, pets, and old folks? Don't make me fucking weep, Nick. And don't ever insult my intelligence. It's not called the Old World for nothing. We're making the new one.

Maren opens the door.

MAREN (CONT'D)

It's gonna be good. Don't do anything till you hear from me.

INT. BOND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Maren and Nick re-emerge onto the trading floor -- but now into a strange QUIET: nobody screaming into phones or shouting orders.

Maren stops, looks around.

MAREN

What the hell...?

Nick notices fear on everyone's face, even the toughest of the traders: all eyes are on Maren.

KAREN, Maren's secretary, nervously approaches.

KAREN

The phones are dead again.

MAREN

What?

Maren grabs a receiver and presses it to his ear. The look on his face is chilling.

MAREN (CONT'D)

Get me Chuck Brown's direct number.

KAREN

Charles Brown, the CEO of AT&T?

MAREN

Now.

Maren waits in silence, Nick beside him -- the entire trading floor frozen -- until Karen brings him a slip of paper with the number written on it.

EXT. ROBERTS KROLL BUILDING - TWO MINUTES LATER

His face taut with focused rage, Maren exits the building and crosses to the other side of the street.

INT. MAREN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Nick stands pressed up against the big window, eyes fixed on THE SIDEWALK DOWN BELOW.

From NICK'S POV, we see a TINY FIGURE (MAREN) step into a PAY PHONE on the corner.

EXT. STREET CORNER - PAY PHONE - CONTINUOUS

Maren drops in a coin, dials the number on the paper.

MAREN

Marshall Maren here. I want Chuck Brown.

While he waits for the transfer, Maren stares at a HOT DOG VENDOR taking a dollar from a BANKER for a hot dog heaped with onions...

MAREN (CONT'D)

Chuck, Marshall Maren. Now listen to me carefully. If the phones on my trading floor aren't back running in two minutes, I'm going to short your fucking company back to the fucking stone age.

INT. CHUCK BROWN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Seated behind his \$20,000 desk in his CEO's suite at AT&T Headquarters, CHUCK BROWN's face is gray with fear.

CHUCK BROWN

Right away, Marshall.

INT. ROBERTS KROLL BOND FLOOR - MINUTES LATER

CACOPHONY AND CHAOS as all of a sudden the phone lines go back on in a shouting, human frenzy of buying and selling.

Nick stares at the scene in AWE: at this moment, it seems as if Maren literally has the power to make the world stop and start with one call.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Nick sits behind his desk. There's work to be done, but he can't focus. Maren has infiltrated his head.

After a few moments, he picks up the phone receiver, puts it to his ear.

Yep: a DIAL TONE.

He sets the receiver back down.

INT. BOND FLOOR - LATER

Maren strides through the noise holding a sheet of paper. He comes to an office at the rear of the floor and enters without knocking. He closes the door.

INT. REAR OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Seated at a desk, bent over piles of ledger books and print-outs, is Maren's older brother JOEL, 45, brusque, balding, and obsessive -- Maren's backroom fixer.

Maren drops the paper on the desk.

MAREN

I want someone useful to see this
and get a hard-on.

Joel silently reads Maren's fax to Carthage. He almost smiles.

JOEL

When?

MAREN

Tomorrow.

Maren leaves, closing the door behind him. Joel picks up the phone and dials.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Kidder Peabody.

JOEL

Get me Larry Milstein.

INT. EL DORADO - NIGHT

Nick walks through the lobby. He no longer looks like a kid in a candy shop.

INT. SLOAN APARTMENT - LATER

Nick and Kate sit at the kitchen table with a bottle of wine. They've been talking about Maren.

KATE

Is he wrong?

NICK

What do you mean?

KATE

Is Carthage badly managed?

NICK

No. Look, the recession--

KATE

(gently mocking)

Has been bad for everybody?

NICK

Morris got twitchy the last couple of years. He wanted to grow the business, but he was looking in the wrong areas. With the re-fi now, he should be able to turn it around.

KATE

So what about the offer?

NICK

He might go for it -- if it's a legit offer, and not just a gun to his head. But I know Morris and he won't give up running the company. Not for any price.

(beat)

Fuck. What am I doing in the middle of this mess?

Kate puts her hand over his on the table.

KATE

You're doing your job. And it's a good job. We're lucky you have it.

Antsy, Nick gets up, opens the fridge and stares inside. Closes it without taking anything.

NICK

I could go back to Kidder.

KATE

They'd punish you for bailing on them. Probably cut your bonus in half.

(beat)

The mortgage on this place is a million-one at 16 and a quarter.

NICK

(frustrated)

What do you want me to do, Kate?

At a loss, Kate shakes her head. Nick starts to leave the kitchen. Kate's words stop him.

KATE

We said it when you took the job, Nick. Maren's a whole different level. It's the kind of opportunity we used to dream about when we were analysts waiting by the Xerox machine.

Nick remembers. He walks out of the kitchen.

INT. LAZARD FRERES OFFICES - LATE NIGHT

On the wall behind the empty reception desk, in large elegant lettering: "LAZARD FRERES & CO."

We TRACK along the floor, past rows of unoccupied cubicles. This time of night, there's no one in the office, except...

We hear RUSTLING AND WHISPERING noises coming from a glass-walled rear office...

We enter the office and find Lazard secretary LINDA BENINATI, 30s, nervously searching through files on a desk, while Kidder banker LARRY MILSTEIN, 30s, in an ill-fitting suit, looks on impatiently.

MILSTEIN

I thought you said you knew where you'd put it.

LINDA

I did. Someone must've buried it with other stuff.

MILSTEIN

Well, find it, goddamnit. The clock's ticking.

LINDA

Lower your voice. I'm riskin' my means of production here.

MILSTEIN

Your what?

LINDA

I don't understand why they sent it to me anyway. If it was meant for you, they shoulda just sent it to you and left me out of it.

MILSTEIN

What're you, brain-dead? This way, things go right, you get to profit from my beneficial attitude. Consider yourself lucky to know me.

Suddenly, on the other end of the floor a DOOR OPENS and a JANITOR appears with a rolling cart of mops. Milstein and Linda are visible through the glass wall of the office. Linda almost has a heart attack.

LINDA

(whispering)
Oh Christ...Larry!

MILSTEIN

What the fuck are you making such a racket for?

Milstein sees the Janitor then. Calmly, he smiles and gives a little wave.

MILSTEIN (CONT'D)

(low, to Linda)
Wave at him, goddamnit. Look natural.

Linda gives a terrified wave.

The janitor's wearing HEADPHONES plugged into a boombox and has zero intention of getting involved with anybody, no matter what they might be doing. He nods absently at Linda and Milstein.

MILSTEIN (CONT'D)
 (low, to Linda)
 Nod and smile.

Linda nods and smiles, and so does Milstein. The Janitor wheels his cart around a corner and out of sight. Linda almost collapses from relief.

MILSTEIN (CONT'D)
 Keep looking.

Linda goes back to searching the files. She opens one, scans the paper inside, hands it to Milstein.

It's the FAX from Joel Maren. Milstein quickly reads it -- and breaks into a grin.

LINDA
 Told you. I hope you're happy.

MILSTEIN
 (ebullient)
 Happy? Who woulda thunk? Carthage
 po-dunk Paper!

LINDA
 Can we get going now?

MILSTEIN
 The only place I'm going, baby, is
 the motherfucking Bahamas.

INT. HEALTH & RACQUET CLUB - SQUASH COURT - EARLY MORNING

Dressed in whites, Nick enters a glass-backed squash court, where NED DOYLE, 45, is hitting forehands to himself with a wooden racquet. Ned turns and regards Nick with skeptical affection. Wearing worn shorts and a "NORTHFIELD" T-shirt, Ned looks like the boarding school squash coach he once was, now in paunchy middle age.

He tosses Nick the ball.

NED
 Youth before beauty.

NICK
 Hey, it's your funeral.

Nick slams a hard serve off the front wall, and the game begins.

INT. SQUASH COURT - LATER

The middle of a hard-fought point, a couple of games later: Nick wrecked and furious; Ned crafty and still composed. Ned drop-shots Nick, then lobs him to the back corner. Exhausted, Nick scrambles after it and takes a wild, ferocious swing. His racquet SMASHES into the wall and snaps in half.

A long moment, chest heaving and frustration at full boil: then Nick picks up the PIECES, carries them out of the court.

INT. SAUNA - LATER

Nick and Ned wear tiny towels. They're alone, dripping sweat.

NICK

You ever miss coaching squash?

NED

Know what I miss? The kids. I loved the kids.

NICK

Even the screwed-up ones like me?

NED

'Specially the screwed-up one like you. All the trouble you caused -- just trying to keep you from gettin' busted and kicked out of school -- it kept me young. I mean it. Almost made me feel like I actually knew something about life. Selling foreclosed real estate for a five percent commission? Not so much.

NICK

Look, Ned, it's just a job, right? Gotta pay the mortgage. We're all doin' it, one way or another.

Nick's saying this for Ned's sake, but also for his own.

NED

(not buying it)

Yeah.

Nick doesn't really buy it, either. Starting to brood, he gets up, dumps more water over the heating stones. A HISS, and a cloud of STEAM envelops him.

EXT. EPISCOPAL DAY SCHOOL - DAY

Kate waits with other stay-at-home MOMS outside the tony Upper East Side preschool. She stands a bit apart, uncomfortable, overhearing snippets of their GOSSIP about bedtimes and piano lessons.

Then a wave of KIDS emerge from the school, and groups of moms and kids start heading off together.

Finally, Ava appears, and Kate hugs her.

INT. PASTRAMI 'N THINGS - DAY

A shabby deli in Midtown. Milstein waits at a table, fidgeting with a cup of coffee and a danish. Despite his banker's suit, he looks right at home in this place.

Killman enters, sits down across from Milstein. Milstein offers his plate.

MILSTEIN

Danish?

Killman looks disgusted.

KILLMAN

I don't eat that crap. What do you have for me?

Milstein glances around, removes a document from his briefcase and slides it face down across the table. Killman turns the paper over, reads.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

Where'd you get this?

Milstein, smug, takes a big bite of danish.

MILSTEIN

That's private information.

KILLMAN

Fuck you, Milstein. What's Carthage now?

MILSTEIN

Twenty-seven four-four, thirty minutes ago.

KILLMAN

Yesterday's close?

MILSTEIN

Twenty-seven three-eight. This is so fucking fresh it hasn't happened yet.

KILLMAN

How sure are you?

MILSTEIN

Like the letter says: "highly confident." I started buying this morning.

KILLMAN

And Maren probably started last week.

MILSTEIN

Fuck him. He'll let the rest of us bid the stock up, then he makes a killing either side.

KILLMAN

What do you care? As long as there's enough to go around.

Killman folds the paper and slips it into his inside pocket.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

You worked with Nick Sloan at Kidder, right?

MILSTEIN

Can you fucking believe Maren poached that guy instead of me? We're both senior VPs. I'm even a year ahead of him.

Killman's pitiless expression says he can believe it, easy.

KILLMAN

What's Sloan's...mindset?

MILSTEIN

Thinks he's better than me. But he isn't.

KILLMAN

(getting impatient)
Aside from that.

MILSTEIN

He's a, whatever, a toe-liner.

KILLMAN

A what?

MILSTEIN

You know, always starts the race with his toes behind the line. One of those guys who thinks he's too smart to need a leg up like the rest of us.

KILLMAN

Then why'd Maren want him?

MILSTEIN

The fuck if I know.

Killman's had enough of Milstein for now; he stands up, then decides to throw the guy a bone.

KILLMAN

By the way, I hear Bendix is sniffing up Martin Marietta's ass.

MILSTEIN

(mollified)

Thanks for the tip, Irwin.

KILLMAN

Fucking change your diet, Larry. Go to the gym. And don't forget to leave an actual tip this time.

Killman walks out. Milstein pulls an enormous WAD OF CASH out of his pocket, peels off a single, and flutters it onto the table. It lands on what's left of the danish.

INT. SERENDIPITY CAFE - DAY

Kate sits at a table with her daughter, watching Ava eat frozen hot chocolate with a long spoon. After a while, out of the blue:

AVA

Are we rich, Mommy?

Kate stares at her. Where did this come from?

KATE

No.

AVA

So we're poor.

KATE
No, sweetie. We're not poor.

AVA
Then what's rich?

At a nearby table, Kate notices a diamond-encrusted MOM sitting with her young BALLERINA of a daughter.

KATE
Rich is...a way of thinking.

AVA
What kind of thinking?

KATE
Sort of like...I don't know -- freedom, I guess.

AVA
(getting frustrated)
I don't understand.

KATE
You know how sometimes you hate it when I tell you what you have to do?

AVA
Yeah.

KATE
Well, imagine if one day I stopped doing that. If I couldn't tell you what to do anymore. If no one could. If you could always do exactly what you wanted. Being rich is probably a little like that.

Ava has stopped eating her dessert. Kate watches her, unhappy with the definition she's just given, but unable to think of a truer one.

EXT. KILLMAN ESTATE - BEDFORD, NY - NIGHT

A black BMW pulls up to a security gate in front of a massive estate. A plain-clothes GUARD steps out of his booth and approaches the car.

INT. BMW - CONTINUOUS

Nick and Kate are dressed for a dinner party. Nick powers down the window. The guard has a clipboard.

GUARD
Name?

NICK
Is this the Killmans'?

GUARD
Name?

NICK
Sloan.

The guard finds the name on the clipboard, checks it off. He returns to the booth and the gate opens. Nick drives in. Through the BMW's windshield we see:

THE LONG, TORCH-LIT DRIVEWAY.

At the end of which, the house resembles an airplane hanger. Stepping from a group of uniformed MEN out front, a PARKER indicates they should stop. Nick and Kate get out and start walking into the building.

PARKER
Excuse me! That's the garage.

Nick and Kate stare at the huge building. The *garage*?

PARKER (CONT'D)
Mr. Killman's rare car museum.

NICK
Right.

PARKER
This way, please.

They pass another enormous structure with a bubble roof. Off Nick and Kate's look:

PARKER (CONT'D)
Tennis courts.

KATE
Right.

Another building.

NICK
Let me guess: pro nerfball court?

PARKER
(not amused)
Thoroughbred stable.

Now the MAIN HOUSE rises up, like Versailles. A pink Rolls is parked out front. Nick and Kate are blown away by the vast extravagance of it all.

NICK & KATE
Right.

INT. KILLMAN MANSION - A MINUTE LATER

The front door opens and Nick and Kate are stunned to find themselves facing a sea of PARTY GUESTS decked out in the most expensive jewels and clothes.

KATE
(low)
I thought you said it was a small dinner.

NICK
(low)
It's conceivable I misread the situation.

Killman appears, strides over and shakes Nick's hand.

NICK (CONT'D)
Big crowd.

KILLMAN
This? No, no. Just a few friends.
And you must be Mrs. Sloan.

KATE
Kate.

KILLMAN
Means gorgeous in Italian.

Killman kisses her hand.

NICK
Actually, she's Irish.

KILLMAN
I own property in Ireland.

KATE
Oh? Where?

Killman thinks...

KILLMAN
Can't remember...but it's a great
tax shelter. Come in. Meet some
people. Marv!

A bullish man (MARV, 45) with a wide collar and no tie is
passing by with an empty martini glass. Killman hauls him
over with a firm hand.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)
Marv and Maren did an LBO a couple
years ago.

MARV
Circle Corp. My holding company.

NICK
How many companies do you own now?

Marv counts to himself.

MARV
Fourteen.

KILLMAN
Nick here's just started working
for Marshall.

MARV
Love that fucking guy. Owe him
everything. Named my yacht after
him.
(reverently)
"Double M."

KILLMAN
Hell of a boat.

MARV
French.

KILLMAN
The best.

MARV
(holds up his empty glass)
Gotta go.

Marv heads off.

KILLMAN

You two appreciate rare cars?
You'll want to see my collection.
One of the biggest. Follow me,
there's a short cut to the garage.

A uniformed WAITER passes with a tray of drinks and Killman grabs flutes of Champagne for his new guests. He marches them through the crowd and down a long hallway hung with paintings.

Kate notices a small, brightly colored PAINTING. Stops and stares at it.

KATE

This is a beautiful Matisse.

Killman's already a few paces down the hallway, impatient to get on with his tour.

KILLMAN

That? No, my wife bought that.
She needs my OK for anything over
six figures.

KATE

It's definitely a Matisse, Mr.
Killman. Late period.

KILLMAN

I don't see a signature.

KATE

They don't all have signatures on
the front.

Nick's enjoying this little stand-off.

NICK

(to Killman)
Art history major, before she went
into banking.

Killman is annoyed at being challenged -- by a woman, no less. He strides over and takes the painting down from the wall. There on the back is the DEALER'S VERIFICATION PLACQUE. It's a Matisse, all right.

KILLMAN

I prefer contemporary art.

He hands the painting dismissively to Nick, then continues down the hallway.

Nick holds the painting a moment longer than necessary -- he's never handled a Matisse before, and is reluctant to let it go -- then re-hangs it on the wall.

EXT. MERRITT PARKWAY - WESTCHESTER - SAME TIME

A black CHAUFFEUR-driven Mercedes speeds down the near-empty road. In the backseat, a reading light glows murkily through the tinted glass.

INT. MERCEDES - CONTINUOUS

Maren sits reading a stack of financial documents. So focused it's as if he's in a trance. His briefcase rests on the seat next to him, overflowing with more files.

The car hits a BUMP and he looks up blinking, stares into the BRIGHT LIGHT...

INT. COMMUTER BUS - BEFORE DAYBREAK (1972)

BRIGHT LIGHT...

We PULL BACK to Maren (10 years younger) wearing a MINER'S HEADLAMP over a fur-lined aviation cap (with earflaps) and reading a 10k report, a pile of papers on the seat next to him. A mono-maniacal nerd, commuting to work in the frigid pitch-black hours of early morning, that same intense focus in his eyes.

After a while, a HAND taps him on the shoulder. Plucked out of the depths of his brain, Maren glances over...

Sitting across the aisle from him is a GUY, 30s, dressed like a construction worker.

GUY

My dad was a miner.

Maren has no idea what the guy's talking about.

MAREN

Excuse me?

The guy gestures at Maren's headlamp.

GUY

Western P-A. Wore a headlamp like that underground. Where'd you get yours?

MAREN

Um...I, uh...found a catalogue.
Bought a couple dozen.

The guy just looks at Maren, not sure if he's being made fun of or not. The silence makes Maren uncomfortable; he wants to go back to his reading.

Finally, just to get the guy off his back:

MAREN (CONT'D)

Would you like one?

GUY

What, a headlamp?

MAREN

I got an extra in my bag.

GUY

You got an extra headlamp?

MAREN

In case, you know, the light on the first one dies.

Maren digs into a gym bag at his feet, pulls out a SECOND HEADLAMP, and hands it to the guy.

MAREN (CONT'D)

You can keep it.

Maren immediately returns to his reading.

GUY

Thanks, buddy.

After a moment, the guy fits the headlamp over his head and switches it on.

We PULL BACK to show the TWO HEADLAMP BEAMS shining side by side through the dark bus.

INT. MERCEDES - NIGHT

Maren looks away from the light, goes back to reading.

INT. KILLMAN MANSION - LIBRARY - SAME TIME

Killman's brought Nick in for a little one-on-one. PARTY NOISE is audible through the half-open door.

The wood-paneled room is gussied up to resemble that of an English lord.

KILLMAN

You should think about joining the Harvard Club, Nick. I could put you up for membership. You'd be a shoe-in. Be a good place for us to meet.

Nick, standing by a bookshelf filled with color-coordinated leather-bound volumes, picks one off the shelf.

NICK

I didn't know you went to Harvard.

Killman fixes him with his Siberian Husky stare.

KILLMAN

I didn't.

Nick realizes that the book in his hands is a FAKE -- wood-and-cardboard covered with colored leather. All the books are fakes. He puts the fake book back on the shelf.

He looks up and finds Killman studying him in a clinical, not quite friendly way.

KILLMAN (CONT'D)

So there was this Bear Stearns banker. Kavanaugh. This was a couple years ago. And Kavanaugh gets it into his head that he's going to fuck Marshall Maren up the ass. Marshall and his hand-picked front man -- not Steinberg, but just like him -- have sized up Lyman Oil and are going in for the kill. That's when Kavanaugh comes forward with a white knight, ready to pay top price. Just for the sport of it, you understand. Overnight, the stock goes through the fucking roof. Maren has to pull out -- like some pimply teenager who can't afford to knock up the boss's daughter. You can imagine how Marshall felt about that. Like me, he hates to lose. Have you read my book on the history of arbitrage, Nick?

Nick didn't know there was such a book.

NICK

Not yet.

KILLMAN

Got some excellent reviews. Here's
a signed copy for you.

Killman strides across the room and hands Nick a copy of his
book "Arbitrage".

NICK

Thanks.

Standing close to Nick now, his gaze cold and steady, Killman
completes the moral of his story.

KILLMAN

Six months after fucking Marshall's
deal with Lyman, Kavanaugh gets
terminated by the mother Bear.
Another six months and he's filing
for chapter seven. Has to sell his
houses and cars. His hot young
wife leaves him for a Peruvian polo
player with a humongous cock. The
following winter, Kavanaugh blows
out his brains with a Charles
Boswell 12-bore shotgun -- a
collector's item. It was Yom
Kippur, the Day of Atonement. And
the guy wasn't even Jewish.

The story over, Killman stares at Nick a few extra moments.

NICK

Well...Thanks again for the book.

Killman smiles.

KILLMAN

We'll talk again soon.

Nick walks out of the room.

INT. BMW - LATER

Kate drives, Nick sits beside her in the passenger seat.
Seeing all that wealth has infected them both like a virus.

INT. MAREN HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Maren stands alone in his huge kitchen consuming a cold chicken leg and a glass of milk while reading a prospectus.

His suburban-mom-looking wife, JODY, 36, walks in and kisses him on the cheek.

JODY

When did you get home?

Jotting figures in the margins of the prospectus, Maren merely grunts. Jody doesn't take offense -- this is the man she's been with since high school.

JODY (CONT'D)

The boys are probably still awake.

Maren nods -- he really does intend to go and kiss them goodnight. But then his eyes drift back to the prospectus...

JODY (CONT'D)

Marshall.

Maren looks up, remembers, and leaves the room -- but takes the prospectus with him.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Maren stands a bit awkwardly in the doorway, silhouetted against the light outside; he's a shadow. His sons, EVAN, 8, and NOAH, 6, are in their twin beds.

MAREN

You guys doing okay?

NOAH

Hi, Dad.

MAREN

Hi...So. How was the day?

EVAN

Good...I guess.

MAREN

Good. Well, goodnight.

EVAN

Night, Dad.

Maren stands there.

INT. MAREN HOUSE - OFFICE - A MINUTE LATER

Reading the prospectus, Maren enters his home office (a separate wing) and sits down at the Quotron terminal on his desk. He types in "CTHG" and watches the STOCK PRICE for Carthage Furniture come up on the screen: 30.72. He almost smiles. Things are shaping up just as he expected.

INT. SLOAN APARTMENT - NICK'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Nick pulls the pieces of the squash racquet he broke playing with Ned out of his briefcase (he's been carrying them around all day) and tosses them on the floor of the closet in his office. They land on top of PIECES OF OTHER BROKEN RACQUETS.

As he's doing this, the phone RINGS. Nick picks up.

MAREN (O.S.)

What did you think of Killman's house?

NICK

My wife liked his Matisse.

MAREN (O.S.)

Which one?

NICK

There's more than one? The small one in the hallway.

MAREN (O.S.)

Your wife has excellent taste. So tell me, Nick. Are you with me? Or not with me?

A long pause.

MAREN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Come and see me in the morning.

Maren hangs up. Nick looks down at his desk. The prospectus on top of the pile is for Carthage Paper. It's as if Maren somehow put it there.

MAREN (O.S., PRELAP) (CONT'D)

My brother Joel. What I know, he knows.

INT. ROBERTS KROLL BOND FLOOR - EARLY MORNING

Nick is meeting with Maren in Joel's side office. Joel, working his Quotron terminal at his desk, doesn't even look up.

MAREN

This deal doesn't need to be hostile. Unfortunately, your friend's resisting.

NICK

He wants to run the company he built.

MAREN

We're amenable to that.

This change in tack catches Nick by surprise.

NICK

That's not how you were talking before.

MAREN

I've changed Victor's mind. In this case, we feel continuity of leadership would be in everyone's best interest.

NICK

What about the "public service"?

MAREN

If you want to serve the greater good, Nick, sometimes you need to be flexible.

Nick stares at Maren; it's not clear -- even to himself -- what he believes, exactly. We watch the multiple pressures work internally on Nick. And then we watch him force himself subtly across the invisible moral line.

NICK

What are you asking me to do?

MAREN

Tell your client that our intentions are long-term. We're not fire salesmen. We believe in his proven leadership and the direction he wants to take the company.

(MORE)

MAREN (CONT'D)

But if this deal is going to happen on beneficial terms for him and his family -- very beneficial terms -- it has to happen now.

NICK

And if he says no?

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - MORNING

Beyond the bank of windows the sun is still rising over lower Manhattan. It's beautiful and ugly at the same time, and Nick can't take his eyes off it -- a relief from his own doubts about what he's about to do. Finally, he picks up the phone...

INT. CARTHAGE HOME - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

A 60-year-old WOMAN (PEGGY CARTHAGE, Morris's wife) in unfashionable clothes stands by a table covered with breakfast dishes for two. She is watching Morris, where he stands at the counter with the phone pressed to his ear.

MORRIS

(into phone)

This doesn't feel right on the phone.

Morris glances back, sees Peggy. Their eyes meet. They've been married 40 years.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Tell you what. Clear your schedule this evening. I'll catch a noon flight, you can meet me at the Waldorf at seven. We'll talk it through over dinner like we always do.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Nick sets down the receiver.

Out the window, above the skyscrapers, a jet plane is flying across the sun, too bright to look at.

INT. P.J. CLARKE'S SALOON - EVENING

We TRACK through the front plate-glass window with the famous name painted on it, into the heart of the nightly CROWD, boisterous on bar stools and at tables in the dining room -- high-lives and low-lives, power suits and blue jeans, matrons and models, white-aproned waiters -- to a table where Nick and Morris sit over half-eaten steaks. Or at least Morris' is half eaten; Nick has barely touched his.

MORRIS

I remember nineteen forty-one. I brought Peggy here. Our first time in New York City. I was nineteen and about to be sent overseas. I had no damn clue what was coming my way. None of us did. And I brought my girl to dinner at P.J. Clarke's in New York City. And now here I am 60, and she's still my girl, and I'm in P.J. Clarke's again.

Morris, in a ruminative mood, shakes his head to himself.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Funny...

He takes a sip of water. Nick matches him with red wine, and immediately refills his own glass from the wine bottle on the table, now almost empty.

NICK

Did you know you loved her when you met her?

MORRIS

Peggy? Oh, yeah. Some things you just know. Not two colors mixed together -- just one. Bright and clear.

The look on Nick's face is a kind of envy -- for that brightness and clarity that he has never exactly felt himself.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Anyway, that's enough memory lane for one night.

Morris glances at his watch -- a Timex like the one Nick used to wear.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
 Almost my bedtime.

Across the room, a WOMAN slots a quarter into the jukebox: SINATRA starts singing "How Could You Do a Thing Like That to Me?"

Nick drinks some more wine.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
 I'll put it to you straight, Nick. I'm not sure exactly what's going on here, and that unsettles me. Your man Maren and that fella Steinberg, they came out of the gate swinging for my head -- but now we're all supposed to be buddies. Partners. And I'm not saying we can't be -- the terms are good -- but I need some personal reassurance here that intentions are what they're said to be. That these are men I can do business with for the health and future of my company and my people.

Nick has been looking not at Morris but down at the table. Now he looks up. Takes a breath to calm himself.

NICK
 I think you can do business with Maren.

Morris holds Nick's gaze like a powerful magnet. Nick tries to escape it, but can't.

MORRIS
 Are you giving me your word that you can protect me?

NICK
 You have my word.

MORRIS
 Then that's good enough for me.

Nick drinks more wine. The Sinatra song ends, briefly dissolving into the grooved-scratch sound of the end of the record.

INT. TRIBECA LOFT - NIGHT

Nick sits on his brother's landing with his back against the loft door. He's been there a while.

Finally, down the long flight of grubby stairs, the sound of a DOOR SLAMMING, then giddy MALE VOICES and CLIMBING FEET. Slowly, Nick stands up.

Andy and his Haitian boyfriend WEBSTER, early 20s, dressed in 1982 clubwear, emerge at the top of the landing. They're both pretty wired on coke.

Seeing Nick, Andy's smile fades. An awkward pause.

ANDY

This is Webster. My big brother
Nick.

Webster ironically looks over Nick's expensive banker's suit, now a little rumpled.

WEBSTER

(Haitian accent)
Hello, big brother.

He forms his hands into a camera and points it at Nick.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Click.

Webster opens the loft door with his own key and walks inside, leaving the brothers on the landing.

NICK

I guess I should've called first.

ANDY

Usually a good idea.

Andy looks at Nick more closely.

ANDY (CONT'D)

You look like shit. You okay?

NICK

I don't know.

Another long look, and Andy produces a small square paper PACKET out of his pants pocket.

ANDY

Not really your thing, but there's
a little left.

INT. LOFT - A LITTLE LATER

MUSIC blares from the stereo (an LP playing on a Technics turntable): the Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of These)".

Andy and Webster lounge together on a loveseat...

While on his knees over the coffee table Nick snorts up the last of the coke...

And Annie Lennox sings: *Some of them want to use you/ Some of them want to get used by you/ Some of them want to abuse you/ Some of them want to be abused...*

As Andy watches his brother doing drugs, a guilty unease creeps into his face: this isn't who Nick really is, or in fact who Andy wants him to be.

Nick is forming another line with the edge of a PLAYING CARD (A JOKER), when Andy puts a hand on his brother's back. Nick pauses, looks back at him.

ANDY
(compassionate)
Time for you to go home.

INT. SLOAN APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Nick sits slumped and disheveled in the darkness. He's holding an old family PHOTOGRAPH, faintly lit by moonlight coming in through the parkside window: himself, his kid brother Andy, his mom and his dad standing in front of a suburban house long ago. They are all smiling except his mom.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Kate comes awake in bed, sees that Nick's not there and the sheets on his side are untouched. She sits up and switches on the light.

INT. JOSH'S BEDROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Kate stands beside the toddler bed, in the night-light-illuminated darkness, staring with love and concern at Nick asleep in his clothes with his body curled needfully around the tiny figure of Josh.

EXT. ROBERTS KROLL BUILDING - MORNING

Several chauffer-driven luxury cars idle out front. A yellow cab pulls up...

Morris Carthage gets out. Stares up at the towering skyscraper. Enters the building.

INT. ROBERTS KROLL - NICK'S OFFICE - MORNING

A haggard Nick stands at the window in his shirtsleeves.

Far down on the streets below, PEOPLE the size of ants scurry here and there. It hardly looks real.

He flinches when his phone BUZZES.

KAREN (O.S.)
They're waiting for you.

Nick pulls on his suit jacket. Like a man strapping on a parachute, about to jump out of a plane.

INT. BOND FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Marshall Maren, Joel Maren, Victor Steinberg and Morris Carthage are already seated when Nick enters.

Nick takes a seat. Morris gives him a warm nod of greeting. Nick forces himself to look Morris in the eye, finally succeeds.

MAREN
Now that everyone's here, I know that we'd all like to thank Morris for coming to New York so we can finalize our deal in person.

MORRIS
I appreciate that, Maren. Face-to-face is the only way I know how to do business.

Maren nods at Joel, who passes a folder to each man around the table, along with a pen. Inside each folder is a CONTRACT.

Morris begins to scan the document. Nick believes he knows what's in the contract, and doesn't bother reading it again. He glances from Morris to Maren. Maren's gaze on Nick is steady, almost a challenge. Nick looks away.

Suddenly, Morris' expression changes.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
What the hell is this about a
severance package?

Nick is blindsided by this news -- this isn't what Maren told him. He grabs the contract and starts quickly reading through it.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
There's no severance. This is my
company. I run it.

MAREN
I think you'll find the terms more
than generous.

MORRIS
There are no terms -- because
there's not gonna be any severance.

Nick reads the part in the contract that stipulates Morris' ouster from the company. He is outraged and horrified, but all he does is glare down the table at Maren. Who looks calmly back at him as he says to Morris:

MAREN
I'm afraid that's not what the
contract says.

MORRIS
I'm not signing this.

MAREN
(knows better)
Really?

Morris angrily gathers his papers. Looks hard across the table at Nick.

MORRIS
These the people you working for?
The promises you make?

Morris stands up, turns to Maren.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
You listen here. I don't give a
damn what you and your lackeys
think you're doing. Saving the
world by stuffing your pockets.
Ruining what's best about this
country.

(MORE)

MORRIS (CONT'D)

You don't own me, and you never will. You don't even know what we are or what we do. You don't care. You're no better than a human junkyard, taking something that other people spent years, decades, making, and just stripping it down for the parts. Well, I'm not buying what you're selling -- not now, and not ever.

MAREN

(cool as a sniper)
Sit down, old man.

Morris stares at him as if he's been slapped.

MAREN (CONT'D)

You heard me. As of yesterday's close, Victor Steinberg's subsidiary, along with limited partnerships owned by my brother and me, became majority shareholders in Carthage Paper. That's right: we already own you. Which means you're already out of a job. So the only relevant question here is not what you happen to think, in your calcified way, is best for the United States of America, but whether you're even going to be able to afford your retirement by the time we're through with you. Sign this and you will. Don't, and you won't. So sit down.

MORRIS

You can go to hell. All of you.

He grabs his briefcase and stalks toward the door.

It's Nick who stops him cold.

NICK

(defeated)
Sign it, Morris.

Morris turns around.

NICK (CONT'D)

He's got you.

Morris stands there, staring at Nick. Nick looks back at him, taking his punishment, devastated to have lost Morris' respect.

NICK (CONT'D)
You don't have a choice. Protect
the money for your family.

MORRIS
I trusted you like a son.

Nick wants desperately to tell him that he didn't know, that Maren betrayed him, too -- but a glance at Maren tells him the rules of the game, and he shuts his mouth.

Morris takes a couple of heavy steps back toward his seat at the table.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
I just feel so...tired.

Gut-shot, Morris sinks onto his chair. He picks up a pen.

Nick can't watch.

Nothing but the sound of the PEN against paper (Morris signing the contracts), until:

STEINBERG
Let's get this show on the road,
shall we? I gotta catch a plane to
fucking Indiana.

INT. BOND FLOOR ELEVATOR BANK - MINUTES LATER

Nick hurries into a corridor...

He spots Morris about to step into the elevator, and rushes toward him...

Hearing footsteps, Morris turns. His look stops Nick in his tracks: it's as if Morris has never seen him before.

Then Morris steps into the elevator, and the door closes after him.

INT. BOND FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Maren sits alone at the head of the long table, savoring his triumph.

Nick bursts in.

NICK
You fucking asshole!

Maren is unsurprised, almost bored, by Nick's outburst.

NICK (CONT'D)
You lied to him!

MAREN
Who lied, Nick?

NICK
You had a deal. You promised him
he'd run it.

MAREN
Who made the promises, Nick?

NICK
You fucking used me.

MAREN
And you used Morris.

Nick stands staring at him: it's true, and he knows it.

Maren stands up: this meeting is over.

MAREN (CONT'D)
I found your pressure points, Nick.

He walks out, leaving Nick alone in the room.

INT. HEALTH & RACQUET CLUB - SQUASH COURT - LATER

Nick and Ned are in the middle of a long brutal point. Both men are sweating and breathing heavily. A couple of times Nick bumps Ned a little too hard on his way to the ball.

Finally, Ned drives a shot into the back corner. Nick barely digs it out, sending a floater off the front wall; Ned slams home the match winner.

Nick, chest heaving, stands watching the ball roll to the front of the court. Then he goes crazy. He steps to the wall and SLAMS his racquet over and over until it's strewn in pieces all over the court.

NICK
FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! STUPID
MOTHERFUCKING COCKSUCKING FUCKING
MOTHERFUCK!!
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)
 (beat, soft)
 Fuck.

At the end, his voice fades to a beseeching whisper. Now he's holding just a SHARD of racquet. He stares at it in his hand, looking as if he could cry.

Ned walks over to him. Puts his hand on Nick's shoulder. Stands with him. Just stands there.

INT. SAUNA - LATER

Nick and Ned sit in the high heat. Nick's face gleams sickly with sweat; he looks woozy and desperate.

NED
 I never told you why I left
 Northfield after you graduated.
 (beat)
 I had some debts. Kath didn't
 know. One night, I'd been
 drinking, I broke into the science
 building and stole some new
 computers. Like some punk. I was
 gonna sell 'em, make a little
 profit. Well, that didn't work out
 too well.
 (beat)
 The school was pretty good about
 it. I paid 'em back, and they gave
 me an honorable discharge, so to
 speak.

Nick is thrown by this news; he sits trying to make sense of it.

NICK
 Why tell me all this now?

Ned stares at him, his gaze telling Nick more than he will say aloud.

NED
 I was afraid if you thought I was a
 thief and a liar, you wouldn't want
 to know me anymore.

Nick is silent. Slowly, his head sinks back against the wall, as if he can barely hold it up.

NED (CONT'D)
 You okay?

NICK
 (mumbled)
 Don't think so...

We're IN NICK'S HEAD now: Ned and the cramped space around them are BLURRED and too bright and beginning to RISE UP and--

NED
 (muted)
 Nick!

EXT. SOMEWHERE - DAY (1960)

A 1958 Chevy PICK-UP TRUCK with "Sloan Contracting" stenciled on the front door drives down a bucolic two-lane country road, George Jones' "Money to Burn" playing on the radio and spilling out through the open windows. The truck's dirty and well-used, and the bed's full of building materials. We PUSH IN through the passenger window and find:

INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

10-year-old NICK sitting next to his DAD. Sunlight's pouring in through the windshield and the two of them look happy. They're not speaking, just riding together contentedly, listening to the radio, back before everything went wrong.

And now Nick's Dad starts SINGING ALONG with George Jones:

NICK'S DAD
 (singing)
 It's money in my pocket but
 heartaches in my heart,
 And how many times have you heard
 it said,
 A fool and his money will part.

Nick's Dad reaches out and puts his hand on Nick's leg, gives it a little happy shake. His son stares up at him lovingly...

NICK'S DAD (CONT'D)
 (singing)
 I thought money it was everything
 and was all I'd ever need,
 Oh, but a man without a woman's
 love is like a garden without seed;
 Oh, but a man without a woman's
 love is like a garden without seed.
 (beat)
 Yes, money in my pockets and
 memories on my mind,
 (MORE)

NICK'S DAD (CONT'D)
 Memories of an old love, the one I
 left behind...

Nick looks from his Dad up through the windshield, directly into the SUNLIGHT streaming down, until the PICTURE BRIGHTENS AND WHITES OUT.

INT. HEALTH & RACQUET CLUB - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Nick opens his eyes. He's lying on his back on a narrow wooden bench. He blinks groggily, slowly sits up.

MAREN
 You passed out.

MAREN, in his crisp dark suit, is sitting on a stool not more than a foot away from Nick.

MAREN (CONT'D)
 Must've been the pressure.

NED
 He used to pass out sometimes after
 close matches.

NICK
 (confused)
 Ned...?

Ned is standing rather stiffly against a row of lockers, behind Maren. He doesn't come forward; he seems a little intimidated by Maren, like a lower pack dog in the presence of the alpha male.

NED
 I'm here, Nick.

NICK
 (to Maren)
 Marshall...what're you...?

MAREN
 Your friend here called your
 secretary asking for the name of
 your doctor.

NED
 Sorry, Nick -- I didn't have your
 new home number.

MAREN
 (to Ned)
 You did the right thing.
 (MORE)

MAREN (CONT'D)
(to Nick)
Your secretary's a smart girl. Her
first call was to me.

Maren leans forward and bores in on Nick, something hard entering his gaze.

MAREN (CONT'D)
Should I call your wife to come and
get you, Nick? Is that what you
need me to do? Because I can
certainly do that.

Nick raises his eyes to meet Maren's. And he gets it, the challenge that's being thrown down: pass or fail, right now.

NICK
No.

MAREN
Are you sure?

NICK
I'm sure.

MAREN
Okay, then. This little episode
will stay just between us.

Now that he's got what he wants, Maren's face softens.

MAREN (CONT'D)
This is a tough business, Nick.
You know that now. Most people
have no idea what we do to make
things right. The moment I heard
you went down to Indiana to see
that old guy and hold his hand, I
knew Carthage was going to be your
initiation.

Maren pats Nick on the chest, just where his heart would be.

MAREN (CONT'D)
You have to go straight at the soft
spots, till they're not soft
anymore.

Maren rises and walks out of the room.

Nick and Ned remain where they are, each in his own thoughts, staring at the floor as:

Gang of Four's anarchic "To Hell with Poverty" (1981) explodes on the soundtrack -- and continues to play over the next scene.

EXT. NASSAU, BAHAMAS - AIRPORT - DAY

The sound of SHUTTING-DOWN JET ENGINES. Brilliant blue sky, blazing sun. The passenger jet hatchway opens and Larry Milstein, dressed in Hawaiian shirt and carrying an aluminum briefcase, is first off the plane.

Only in the Bahamas, carrying a briefcase full of cash, would Milstein be considered a VIP. And he's loving every minute of it.

At the bottom of the gangway, he's met by a SWISS BANK OFFICIAL.

BANK OFFICIAL

Mr. Diamond?

Milstein smiles broadly and shakes the man's hand.

EXT. 300 CENTRAL PARK WEST - EARLY EVENING

Maren's black Mercedes pulls up to the curb. Maren himself gets out of the back, carrying a PACKAGE (about two feet square) wrapped in plain brown paper.

INT. SLOAN APARTMENT - LATER THAT EVENING

Nick lets himself into the apartment, steps into the foyer...

Suddenly a GOLDEN LASSO drops over his head.

AVA

Got you!

Nick is deeply unsettled. Then he sees that it's only his five-year-old daughter in a WONDER WOMAN COSTUME.

NICK

...Muffin.

AVA

Have you lied to anyone, Daddy?

NICK

(taken aback)
What?

AVA
Cause if you did, Wonder Woman's
golden lasso will make you tell the
truth!

Nick tries to steady himself.

NICK
No, Muffin. Daddy never...he
never...

AVA
Then I'll set you free!

She pulls the lasso off Nick. Sets him free.

In his visceral relief, Nick looks up, sees:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

KATE standing by the windows, observing the scene with a very
faint smile.

KATE
Your boss was here.
(beat)
He brought me a present.

Ava begins trying to jump rope with her golden lasso of
truth. Nick and Kate stand looking at each other across the
large room.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is lit by candles. On the bed Nick and Kate make
love. She climaxes, then he does. He rolls off.

They both lie propped in bed staring at the wall in
wonderment, as if watching the sun rise.

Slowly, together, SMILES grow on their faces until they're
both grinning like kids.

CLOSE ON THE WALL:

It's the MATISSE from Killman's house.

FADE OUT.

THE END