

THE QUESTION

Written by

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The Question, Episode One: "Hub City's Hero"

TEASER

EXT. HUB CITY

Jagged skyscrapers carve a gray sky, mirrored in the murky waters of a lifeless bay. No construction, only decay.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Hub City is f-floating f-filth.

DOWN

Through the city's crumbling walls, the streets lined with rotten sacks of trash, abandoned husks of burnt-out cars.

Sidewalks empty. Storefronts boarded up. Fog.

INTO

EXT. ALLEY - DOWNTOWN HUB CITY - NIGHT

FOLLOW

A long line of unfortunate humans as it stretches around the corner and into an alley, ending beneath a glowing green sign: DRUGS.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Dirt and d-disease...

In this line of people waiting for a fix, we find STUTTERING SAM: an old Irish wolfhound with sallow cheeks and withering hair. He takes a swig from the bottle between his legs.

STUTTERING SAM  
...drunks and p-punks. All p-piled  
one on top of th'other like a t-  
trash sandwich.

Beside him is VIC SAGE, our hero. He's utterly unremarkable: could be your uncle, your mechanic, the guy in the elevator next to you. His unremarkability is his singular superpower.

At the moment he's got crap all over his face and he's dressed in rags.

VIC  
Careful, bub. I was born here.

His voice is warm, low and inviting. He may not be much to look at, but he's something else to listen to.

Vic looks down the line of people toward the neon DRUGS sign.

Beneath it, two BOUNCERS with tattoos and shaved heads stand on either side of a lit doorway.

The door opens and a third man appears. He is lanky and tough, all in black with spiked implants running in three rows down his shaved skull. We'll call him SPIKE.

STUTTERING SAM

Hey. Y'know how you can tell a fella's from Hub City? He asks you for b-bus fare.

Spike makes a gesture and the next JUNKIE on line steps forward.

The bouncers stop and frisk him roughly.

VIC

You ever think about getting clean?

STUTTERING SAM

Why would I d-do that?

He turns toward Vic. His dull glassy eyes swim listlessly in his skull.

Vic looks past him, toward the clinic.

UNDER THE DRUGS SIGN

Spike opens a heavy metal cash box. Looks up at the Junkie.

SPIKE

Thirty bucks? That all you got?

JUNKIE

It's all I could get man, come on.

SPIKE

I don't wipe my ass for thirty bucks!

JUNKIE

My social security comes in tomorrow, I just need a little--

SPIKE

You want me to loan you money? Is that what you're saying? (AD LIB)

The bouncers hold the Junkie as Spike berates him. The Junkie looks sad and helpless.

BACK TO

Vic and Sam.

VIC  
How long does this usually take?

STUTTERING SAM  
D-depends. Sometimes all night.

VIC  
I don't have all night.

Vic leaps to his feet. He's athletic, tall. From the tattered pocket of his jacket he produces a small camera, which he holds up as he approaches Spike.

STREAMING VIDEO

From Vic's camera POV.

BOUNCER #1  
Hey! Back of the line.

VIC (V.O.)  
Vic Sage, citizen journalist.  
Broadcasting live to the Internet.  
Why are you holding this man?

The bouncers look to Spike for direction.

Camera moves close on the disheveled face of the Junkie.

VIC (V.O.)  
Sir? Are these men harassing you?  
It's okay, you can tell me.

The Junkie looks over at Spike as well.

Camera pans to Spike. His hand covers the lens.

BACK TO VIC

VIC  
Please let go of my camera. That's  
private property.

Spike is calm, even-tempered. Rapid dialog OVERLAPS.

SPIKE  
You need to wait your turn in line.

VIC  
Is this the Eastside Clinic,  
operating under city license number  
three four six a dash thirty two?

BOUNCER #1  
Man get back in the friggin line-

SPIKE  
This is the Eastside Clinic.

VIC  
And are you Doctor Malcolm Warner?

SPIKE  
The doctor's not here right now.

VIC  
According to Hub City ordinance  
sixty-three dash two--

SPIKE  
Turn the camera off.

VIC  
"Medical clinics dispensing  
narcotics as described under title  
three, section four of the Federal  
Drug Enforcement Act of the United  
States--"

SPIKE  
We're done here.

A slight nod from Spike is all it takes. Bouncer #1 tosses the Junkie aside and reaches for Vic's camera.

But Vic ducks and tucks the camera into his pocket deftly.

Vic's movements are graceful, dance-like. He sweeps Bouncer #1's feet and drops him to the ground.

But as he pops up Bouncer #2 flanks him and lands a body blow, followed by a hard left hook.

Vic falls backward onto Bouncer #1, who easily rolls him to his back and starts walloping him.

After several blows:

SPIKE (CONT'D)

Enough.

He looks down the line of waiting druggies.

SPIKE (CONT'D)

From now on, we got a fifty dollar  
minimum. And the next one-a you  
lowlife addicts asks me for a loan--

He kicks Vic in the face.

Gestures to the bouncers. They each take one of the men

AROUND THE CORNER

Where they deposit Vic and the Junkie on the curb. The  
Junkie's body starts to quiver-- withdrawal.

JUNKIE

Come on, I don't know this guy!

The bouncers turn their backs on them.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Please! I'm coming down man I need  
a little fix, I'll do anything!!

Vic-- bleeding from several places on his face-- rises to his  
feet with help from a nearby building.

Vic checks his pocket: the camera is undamaged.

He starts to limp away. The Junkie follows him.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Why'd you do that? Huh?

Junkie shoves him angrily.

Vic fishes in his pocket.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

You wanna screw up the only good  
thing left in Hub City? You tryin'  
ta be a hero or something?

Junkie comes at him again.

Vic produces a twenty dollar bill.

VIC

I'm no hero

He hands the Junkie the money and we rise

UP

Like smoke from the cigarette Vic lights as he walks away.

He limps down the empty street, holding onto the building.

The Junkie turns and goes back toward the clinic.

A distant siren wails.

CREDITS/EPISODE TITLE.

ACT ONE

SERIES OF SHOTS

Riffy, upbeat rock. Heavy on rhythm guitar and snare drum as:

CLOSE

A pair of lips applying lipstick in a makeup mirror.

Long blonde hair brushed by hands with black fingernails.

A skinny, awkward teenage body dancing to the music. Hair swirling around a body clad in hot pants and a hot pink top.

Closed eyes, pink eyeliner etched with care.

Opening a set of false eyelashes.

As the eyelash is being applied, it slips from the fingers and lands in the sink.

WIDE

At the edge of the frame, the bedroom of a pre-teen boy: all movie posters and cars. In the center, the bathroom of a teenage girl: all creams and pink makeup.

LOLA framed in the bathroom. Lola is, genetically, a teenage boy. So Lola's voice squeaks on

LOLA

Crap.

Music out, but the shot lingers.

LATER

Lola listens to the same song on an iPhone.

Seated on the edge of the bed, Lola's toes separated by cotton. Black fingernails wield a hot pink toenail brush with care, but not expertise.

Lola glances up and catches sight of the mirror. We clearly see the boy beneath the wig now-- vulnerable and determined.

POV

Lola's feet in heels.

Walking down the hallway... uncertain... gaining confidence.



INT. MAYOR'S RESIDENCE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Hub City's incumbent Mayor, John RICHARDSON, sits with his wife JOCELYN at the dining table.

RICHARDSON  
It's not looking good. We're down  
twenty points this morning. I'll  
get a bump with the Governor's  
endorsement but we're getting  
killed by the white collar workers--

Lola clomps halfway down the stairs behind him.

His wife sees Lola first.

JOCELYN  
Jeffrey!

Richardson turns around.

RICHARDSON  
Oh. My.

Lola stands on the staircase: long blonde wig, heels, hot  
pink shorts and a lopsided pair of sock-filled breasts.

But when Lola speaks, it is with uncanny certainty.

LOLA  
It's Lola now.

The family regard one another in silence.

EXT. NEWS STATION

A tree-lined street in the burbs. Downtown Hub City behind.

IN

On an unremarkable building, through a window into an office  
last updated in the 1970s--

INT. NEWS STATION - JOE DUKE'S OFFICE

--where JOE DUKE, surly station manager for WHBC News,  
watches the footage that Vic shot.

VIC (ON RECORDING)  
Are you Doctor Malcolm Warner?

SPIKE (ON RECORDING)  
The doctor's not here right now.

VIC (ON RECORDING)  
According to Hub City ordinance--  
(etc)

Vic stops playback. He's not bad-looking, without the crap.

JOE  
That's it? What happens next.

MYRA  
He gets his ass kicked.

MYRA Connelly-- beat reporter for the station, hard as nails with a melancholy edge as if always on the verge of tears-- stands in Joe's doorway.

Joe looks at Vic: two black eyes and a fat lip confirm it.

JOE  
So what's the story? Citizen drug bust, epic fail?

MYRA  
Try legalized drugdealing. This is a pill mill- they give out opium to anyone with twenty bucks.

VIC  
Price has gone up recently.

JOE  
It's a goddamn tragedy, I'll give ya that. But unfortunately there's nothing illegal going on.

VIC  
What about the tape?

JOE  
What about it?

VIC  
He admits to breaking the law. There's supposed to be a doctor onsite.

JOE  
Oh, my goodness! Let me get Chief O'Toole on the line right away.  
"Hello, Chief?  
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

We got a guy here *on tape* admitting to not being a doctor."

MYRA

These clinics have been popping up all over the city. They exploit the economically disadvantaged and ruin lives. They ruin families!

JOE

I'm sorry, Myra, but this is not a story. What's my headline? Huh? Local business owner admits to violating obscure civil ordinance? Click here to see the unbelievable footage!

MYRA

I'm thinking an exposé of the whole industry. The doctors, the clinics. We could run it as a series.

JOE

A series! This is Hub City. We got so much crime and corruption on our streets we make Gotham look like goddamn Disneyland.

VIC

Somebody ought to put a stop to it.

JOE

Listen wise-ass. I been in this business a long time, I know what you need to run a story. You need documents, a paper trail. You got anything like that?

Vic sets a folder on his desk.

VIC

I ran a report on how many of these clinics have Doctor Malcolm Warner on their payroll.

JOE

And?

VIC

There are over a dozen of them.

MYRA

All located in poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

JOE

So what? He over-commits himself.

VIC

Or he doesn't exist. I checked every medical school in the country. No one has heard of him.

JOE

This is all based on a tip from your little website, isn't it.

VIC

Why does that make a difference.

JOE

I like to know who my sources are.

VIC

Maybe that's why your news station is failing.

The men stare each other down.

JOE

Myra, you're a good reporter. I trust your instincts. You want to put five minutes together on the drug story, fine. But I am not running footage of your boyfriend gettin his ass beat. It's embarrassing.

Myra and Vic exchange awkward looks.

MYRA

Thanks.

Joe glances past them to his office door: a dismissal.

INT. NEWS STATION - OUTSIDE JOE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

There are a few cubicles populated with fact-checkers, interns and the like. The doors to the STUDIO and Myra's DRESSING ROOM are down the hall.

Myra exits Joe's office and starts walking toward them briskly.

VIC

Hey, thanks for standing up for me back there.

MYRA  
He's not wrong.

VIC  
About what?

MYRA  
You're basing all this on some  
anonymous tip-

VIC  
And?

MYRA  
What if it's a set up? What if  
you're putting yourself in danger?

VIC  
Fighting for what's right means  
taking a few hits along the way.

Myra rolls her eyes.

MYRA  
I've gotta get ready for broadcast.

She pushes open the door to

INT. NEWS STATION - DRESSING ROOM

A large mirror on one side. She starts applying makeup.

Vic enters.

VIC  
Is that what you tell people, by  
the way? That I'm your boyfriend?

MYRA  
You're not my boyfriend.

VIC  
I know. You keep reminding me.

Myra smiles at him flirtatiously.

MYRA  
Hey. Want to come over to my place  
tonight, put a movie on and not  
watch it together?

VIC  
I can't.

MYRA

Oh. Okay.

VIC

Sorry. I haven't been sleeping.

MYRA

Hey, no problem. I have the place to myself tonight, is all. But. You have plans.

VIC

Not plans. I'm tired.

MYRA

It's fine. We said this is casual.

He nods. He tries to kiss her but she pulls away.

MYRA (CONT'D)

Lipstick. Sorry.

Vic exits but we stay with her.

IN THE MIRROR

She looks at the door. Maybe she hoped he'd stay.

Maybe she's glad he didn't. Her melancholy edge.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Vic's car -- an 87 Mustang with a rusted belly -- pulls up in front of a modest, single-floor home with an attached garage on a sleepy suburban street.

ON THE PORCH

Before Vic can knock, the door swings open.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

Vic looks around a small living room cluttered with books, stacks of papers and various half-assembled gadgets. Alex Grey paintings and Pink Floyd album art on the walls.

Vic enters cautiously.

VIC

Hello? Professor Rodor? Tot?

TOT enters from the kitchen. He wears a Grateful Dead shirt and his long silver hair pulled back in a ponytail.

He has the narrow-band nerdiness of an engineer and the lilting speech of a California beach bum.

TOT

Hey Vic.

VIC

The door just opened.

TOT

Yeah it's a new system.

He shows Vic his homemade handiwork.

TOT (CONT'D)

I hooked this pneumatic arm up to a camera and attached it to a database of my friends' faces, so anytime someone I know comes over they can just, like, walk right in.

VIC

Is that a large database?

TOT

Not really. It's good to see you, man! Can I get you anything? Edible? Hash oil?

VIC

What do you know about an accounting firm called Turner-Daniels?

Tot clears a space to sit as he speaks, taking a couple piles of junk from one seat and stacking it higher on another.

TOT

They handle a lot of corporate clients, I know that. Landed a big contract last year with the city to help them sort out their financial problems. Lotta good that's done. Mayor Richardson was close with the woman for a while-- Daniels. Melanie Daniels. Very well-educated woman, pee aitch dee in economics from Stanford or something. What's all this about, Vic? Tired of using H and R block for your taxes?

VIC  
I got an anonymous tip on my  
website a few days ago.

FLASHBACK: BLACK AND WHITE FOOTAGE

CLOSE-UP Vic's website: QuestionEverything.com

Click on a link titled ANONYMOUS TIP. A form window pops up.

Typing text similar to Vic's voice-over.

VIC (V.O.)  
The tipster said to check out these  
after-hours drug clinics registered  
to **Turner-Daniels**. Said what I  
found would be the **tip of the**  
**iceberg**. That I should **follow the**  
**money** to get to the truth.

BACK TO

Tot, taking a hit on a vape pen.

TOT  
And?

VIC  
I have to get into the Turner-  
Daniels office.

It takes a moment before Tot understands. Then--

TOT  
Oh I see.

VIC  
These clinics are a scourge on our  
city, Tot. They ruin lives and  
families.

TOT  
I invented pseudoderm to heal  
wounds! Not to help you break the  
law.

VIC  
I'm not gonna break the law! Okay,  
I'm gonna break the law. But it's  
for a good cause.



TOT

That's exactly what all evil people  
throughout history have said.  
Consequentialist ethics is what  
gave us Hitler, Mussolini. Google.

VIC

This is different.

TOT

Why?

VIC

Because. I'm a good guy.

TOT

Are you sure?

VIC

No.

TOT

Good. I never trust a person who  
deals in moral absolutes.

Tot throws a roll of PSEUDODERM to Vic. It looks like flesh-colored tape.

TOT (CONT'D)

I changed the formula. Should make  
it easier to breathe. Spray this on  
to activate it.

He hands him a breath-freshener size spray bottle.

VIC

Thanks.

TOT

Are you sure you know what you're  
doing?

VIC

Of course.

He doesn't sound exactly sure. Tot's tone becomes serious.

TOT

Victor. I had a dream last night  
that a friend of mine was drowning.  
Trapped underwater in a sinking  
car. I hope it wasn't about you.

VIC  
Is that your version of "good  
luck?"

TOT  
It's my version of "be careful."

Vic isn't sure what to say. He gestures with the pseudoderm.

VIC  
See you soon.

ACT OUT

ACT TWO

EXT. MAYOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

A sprawling Queen Anne Victorian, complete with turret. Surrounded by a lush green lawn and manicured gardens.

PUSH IN

INT. MAYOR'S RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Well-appointed with the requisite antiques from bygone eras and framed paintings of Hub City during the boom times. But the furnishings, like the city, are starting to look worn.

Lola sits in a high-backed chair which has the effect of making Lola look even smaller than Lola wishes to be.

Lola wears a pink wig and a dress.

Standing not far off, surveying Lola like a pothole to be repaired, is Richardson's campaign manager Ira TERKELSEN.

Terkelsen is as cold and pragmatic as a gravedigger.

TERKELSEN

So what am I looking at here.  
Transexual? Gay?

LOLA

I'm not gay.

RICHARDSON

The correct term is actually transgender, Ira. We're all learning a lot from Lola. Such as Lola prefers that we avoid using gendered pronouns when addressing Lola.

TERKELSEN

Lola. So you're a girl now?

LOLA

I don't see gender as a binary construct.

TERKELSEN

Uh-huh. Have you told anyone else?

RICHARDSON

Only the family knows so far.  
Jocelyn's still sleeping. The thing  
is, Ira, we had a long night  
talking through all the options and-

Terkelsen silences him with a gesture.

He approaches Lola and kneels awkwardly beside her.

TERKELSEN

Sometimes, you know, something  
happens to us that we don't like.  
Someone says something about us,  
maybe. About the way we look? And  
in those times it can be good to  
talk about how that made you feel.  
Is that something you'd like? To  
talk to someone about how you're  
feeling?

LOLA

I don't need a therapist. I feel  
fine.

RICHARDSON

The thing is, Ira. My son has never  
reacted well to doctors--

LOLA

I am NOT your son! I'm Lola.

RICHARDSON

Sorry, Lola.

TERKELSEN

Your father's in the middle of a  
very difficult campaign right now.  
And having you parading around like  
this is going to make it very  
difficult for us to keep the media  
on message. Do you understand what  
being on message means?

LOLA

I don't care about your campaign.  
This has nothing to do with your  
stupid campaign!

RICHARDSON

I understand this is hard for Lola  
to talk about.

(MORE)

RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

But at some point the public is going to find out about this and Ira here is going to help keep them out of Lola's private business. Isn't that right, Ira?

TERKELSEN

I'm not a miracle worker, John.

RICHARDSON

And what is that supposed to mean.

TERKELSEN

It means this-- I've never seen anything like it. In my thirty years, I don't know... I'm not sure what, how to even begin with this.

RICHARDSON

I know it's a lot. But I think if the people just have a chance to hear from Lola, in Lola's own words--

TERKELSEN

I'm not putting that on TV.

Lola begins to cry.

RICHARDSON

For Christ's sake, Ira!

TERKELSEN

You put that on TV, that's your campaign. The whole thing is that. Forget immigration reform, forget better health care for the elderly, forget tough on crime, it's that. It's the Lola show. Is that what you want?

Richardson takes Terkelsen aside.

RICHARDSON

I want to win this goddamn race, that's what I want. You're the political genius, you tell me: what do we do?

Ira glances back at Lola. He escorts Richardson out.

Lola looks around the empty room.

Feeling smaller than ever.

EXT. HUB CITY - NIGHT

The unfamiliar skyline. The murky curve of water at its feet.

STUTTERING SAM (V.O.)  
Here's one f-f-for ya: whatta ya  
call a Hub City police officer? *Off-*  
*duty.*

DOWN

Through crisscrossed power wires, laundry strung between buildings, rusted fire escapes whose floors were pried loose and sold at scrapyards long ago...

EXT. STREET - DOWNTOWN HUB CITY - NIGHT

A cluster of people warm their hands at a trash fire.

We recognize Sam's face in the flickering light.

STUTTERING SAM  
And whattaya call an on-duty Hub  
City p-policeman? *Deceased.*

He chuckles and knocks back a bottle.

MOVING

Past them, down the empty street.

Vic's Mustang pulls to a stop.

The lights go off.

IN

Through the rear window, which reflects the flames--

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Vic watches the urban campfire in the rearview.

Looks down the street at a small sign: Turner-Daniels.

Overhead florescents bathe the gleaming tiled lobby with an eerie daylight.

Vic turns his attention to a long roll of tape in his lap.

He pulls a section out, presses one end against his neck.

Draws the tape around his neck, twisting the roll as he goes around, inching upward like a boxer taping hands.

EXT. STREET

Sam's wheezing laugh.

STUTTERING SAM  
Ya know why Hub City p-prostitutes  
never swallow? Tracheotomy.

No one acknowledges him.

STUTTERING SAM (CONT'D)  
You b-bums don't appreciate comedy.

He finishes his bottle. Stumbles down the street humming.

INT. CAR

He continues to wrap. Covering his eyes now.

VIC POV through the tape. Like wire mesh.

Across the street, the Turner-Daniels lobby is closer than before.

PUSH IN

EXT. STREET

Sam leans against Vic's car. Seems about to throw up.

INT. CAR

He's wrapped almost his entire face now. He looks something like the Invisible Man, only the pseudoderm is flesh-colored.

VIC POV across the street at the Turner-Daniels lobby.

It's closer than before.

PUSH IN

Vic pops open the glove box and takes out a small spray bottle, the size of breath spray or mace.

He turns it toward his face and sprays.

When the spray hits the pseudoderm, the edges of the tape surface begin to ripple and melt into one another.

It appears almost alive, the way it moves and slides over his face until the surface is entirely smooth.

VIC POV across the street.

It's even closer.

PUSH IN and suddenly

STUTTERING SAM  
Help! S-somebody!

EXT. STREET

Sam pressed against a building. The Junkie from the teaser holds a knife at his throat.

JUNKIE  
Gimme your friggin money old man!

Vic gets out of his car.

VIC  
Hey. Hey! What are you doing?

He runs over to them.

He quickly disarms the Junkie, forcing him to drop his knife.

But the Junkie grabs Sam's bottle out of his hand.

Smashes it against the building, whirls on Vic with it.

Vic ducks and sweeps his leg.

CELL PHONE FOOTAGE

Someone inside the building records the fight.

Vic manages to get on top of the Junkie.

VIC  
(to Sam)  
Are you hurt? Are you all right?

STUTTERING SAM  
B-broke my bottle. Motherf-

He's about to attack the Junkie when Vic stops him.



VIC

Let's all walk away from this right  
now and pretend it never happened.

For the first time, his blank face is illuminated by the  
street lamp. Eerie to look at.

Sam stumbles away. The Junkie is transfixed.

JUNKIE

Wh-wh-what the hell are you?

VIC

That's a good question. Why don't  
you stick around and find out?

Vic leans in close to the Junkie, who pees his pants a little  
then turns and runs off down the street.

EXT. ALLEY

Vic enters an alley around the side of the Turner-Daniels  
office.

Flips down the lid of a dumpster and pulls himself up on it.

With that same dancer-like agility he leaps for a fire escape  
ladder dangling nearby and easily hooks it, climbing up.

Crouched in the shadows of the second floor fire escape, he  
turns his attention to the window beside him.

He slips the Junkie's knife out of his pocket.

CLOSE as he slides the edge under the edge of the window.

After worrying it back and forth a bit, the metal latch  
inside pops open.

He slides the window up and slips inside quietly.

BROADCAST FOOTAGE - WHBC MORNING NEWS

The news desk. Anchor QUINN CALLAHAN grins through a painted  
smile as she reads from the teleprompter.

QUINN

Metropolis has Superman, Batman has  
Gotham, and now Hub City has...  
Blankman?

INSERT

A still from Vic stopping the mugger. His blank face.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Cell phone footage shot early this morning is spreading like wildfire through social media. The footage appears to show a man with no facial features stopping a would-be mugger with some athletic moves.

CELL PHONE VIDEO rolls.

QUINN (V.O.)

The incident occurred about two fifteen this morning in the seven hundred block of East Fifth street. No other information is known about the man at this time, but some are already calling him a hero. More on this as it develops. Now here's Don Visser with traffic.

EXT. HUB CITY - CHINATOWN - DAY

The seedy part of a seedy city. Drug-users lounge in doorways. Prostitutes linger on street corners.

Some restaurants are indicated by hand-written signs. Others have skeletal awnings, the fabric worn away entirely.

DRIVING

Following Vic's car. Broken glass on the sidewalk. A burned-out storefront. A police cruiser with a cop inside, his head laid back against the headrest and his eyes closed.

Vic pulls up behind the cop.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING

Vic gets out of his car and takes the steps leading up to his apartment building.

As he passes the cruiser, a WOMAN lifts her head from the cop's lap. Vic shakes his head.

CLOSE

On the heavy steel outside door, already open.

Vic's eyes narrow. This can't be good.

CONTINUOUS

Vic pushes open the door. No light in the hallway.

A dog BARKS ominously, relentlessly.

He holds up his smartphone screen to light his way down the hall to his apartment door.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - OUTSIDE VIC'S APARTMENT

His door hangs from one set of hinges like a guilty man.

The deadbolts hammered out of the wooden frame. A sledgehammer on the ground.

Vic pushes the battered door open and goes

INSIDE THE APARTMENT

The small living room is trashed. Papers everywhere.

Daylight filters in from a large broken window.

Vic peeks around the corner to his bachelor's bedroom-- a single mattress resting on the ground.

Its bedclothes shredded with a knife.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Mister Sage.

ACT OUT

ACT THREE

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - VIC'S APARTMENT

As before. Vic pushes open the door to his bedroom.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Mister Sage.

Vic whirls around to find his neighbor, GRIMLEY. Grimley is lanky, with a bulbous beerbelly that tests the limits of his greasy white tanktop. He snacks on a bag of chips.

VIC  
Grimley.

GRIMLEY  
I asked around for ya. Nobody saw a thing.

VIC  
No surprise.

GRIMLEY  
Coulda been teenagers, ya know.  
Teens love messin with people for no reason.

VIC  
Uh-huh.

Vic starts collecting papers from the living room, as Grimley follows him around popping chips.

GRIMLEY  
I hadda teenager myself, once. Girl though. Different kinda problems.

VIC  
Uh-huh.

GRIMLEY  
She used to give me what-for, all right. Real firecrackah. Real handful too, I'll tell you what. Course she's dead now.

VIC  
Dead?

GRIMLEY

Terrible tragedy. Slipped an fell  
in the subway. Next thing ya know  
they're hosin her off the tracks.  
Terrible tragedy. But at least she  
went quick. Ya know?

ON VIC, disturbed by both the story and its casual telling.

He pauses to take in the fullness of Grimley's oddity: a chip-  
popping stork with dirty hands and underarm hair.

VIC

So nobody saw anything.

GRIMLEY

Nothin. Musta happened this  
morning. I was out with my sister.

Vic looks past him to the broken window.

VIC

Mmmhmm. And that window?

GRIMLEY

Prolly how they got in.

Vic goes to the window and looks down.

The alley beside the building. A cinder block and some trash.

VIC

Yeah.

GRIMLEY

Listen if you need a guy to clean  
this place up, my cousin works in  
construction--

VIC

That's all right. I won't be  
staying here for a while.

GRIMLEY

Where you gonna go?

VIC

I have some family in Hubbard  
Hills. If anyone remembers  
anything, call me at this number.

He scrawls a number down and hands it to Grimley, wrapped in  
a fifty dollar bill.

Grimley eyes the amount before affirming.

GRIMLEY  
You got it, Mister Sage.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Vic emerges. The police cruiser is gone, and in its wake is a parking ticket fluttering on his windshield.

VIC  
Aw, come on!

He sees now that the cruiser was parked beside a hydrant.

Vic pulls the ticket off his windshield.

INT. NEWS STATION - DRESSING ROOM

Myra puts on makeup. Her phone rings. She puts it on speaker as she continues to get ready.

MYRA  
You're up early.

VIC (ON PHONE)  
You were right.

Myra's obviously not used to hearing those words from him.

MYRA  
About what?

INT. CAR

Vic sits in his car, not driving.

VIC  
It was a setup. They came by my apartment. Goddamn landlord let them in.

FLASHBACK - BLACK AND WHITE/OVEREXPOSED

A shadowy FIGURE handing Grimley money.

At first we might think it's a shot of Vic from earlier, but the amount is much higher.

Grimley unlocks the door.

## DRESSING ROOM

MYRA

I thought you were home last night.

VIC (ON PHONE)

Couldn't sleep.

Myra reacts.

VIC'S CAR/INTERCUT.

VIC (CONT'D)

They were looking for something.

FLASHBACK - BLACK AND WHITE/OVEREXPOSED

QUICK CUT: flipping through papers.

QUICK CUT: lifting up the bachelor mattress.

QUICK CUT: going through clothes in a closet.

VIC (V.O.)

And when they couldn't find it,  
they decided to send a message.

The figure slashes at the bed with a knife.

Scatters papers around the living room.

MYRA (V.O.)

How do you know the landlord let  
them in?

VIC (V.O.)

He gave me his alibi before I even  
asked for it.

CLOSE on Grimley's lips as he says "my sister."

VIC (V.O.)

He tried to make it look like a  
break-in. But he's an amateur.Grimley tosses a cinder block through the window, shattering  
the glass. Watches it fall to the ground and land where we  
saw it earlier, by the dumpsters.

VIC (V.O.)

Even busted out the door so he  
could get more work for his  
"cousin."

CLOSE on Grimley taking the sledgehammer to the door. The worn rubber handle leaves marks on his hands.

CLOSE on Grimley's hand reaching into the bag of chips-- black marks all over it.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. NEWS STATION - DRESSING ROOM

Myra looks concerned-- not just by the story, but by the telling. Vic sounds distant.

MYRA

Vic are you in danger?

VIC

I'm gonna lie low for a while.  
Disappear. But everything's fine.

MYRA

Wait a minute, don't hang up--

She picks up the phone to talk to him, but he is gone.

She looks in the mirror. That edge.

INT. CAR

Vic cradles the phone in his hand. Sighs. Looks out the window at a neon BAR sign across the street.

He gets out of his car and looks around at the suspicious eyes of prostitutes and lounging drugdealers.

He's scanning them, looking for an anomaly-- someone hired to watch his building after the invasion.

But it could be any of these people.

So he shouts to them all.

VIC

I'm not scared! If that's what you  
were going for, it didn't work!

Scanning the street again. No one reacts. People yell crazy shit all the time around these parts.

There's that BAR sign again, glowing.



INT. BAR - DAY

A basement spot, long and narrow.

Vic stands in the doorway surveying the scene.

One drunk asleep at the bar. A homeless-looking guy in a booth stacks coins in columns on the table. His pile of clothes and blankets to one side.

The BARTENDER-- suspicious of everyone at this hour. Looks like he's spent time living on the streets, too.

Vic sits at the bar, one seat away from the sleeping drunk.

Bartender watches him, makes no move to serve him.

VIC  
Got a bathroom?

BARTENDER  
In the back. Customers only.

Vic puts a bill on the table.

VIC  
Whiskey. Double. No ice. Keep em  
comin.

Bartender pours the drink. Vic downs it.

VIC (CONT'D)  
Hit me again.

Bartender fills him up.

Two CONSTRUCTION WORKERS enter, laughing. Vic eyes them, whispers to the bartender.

VIC (CONT'D)  
You know these guys?

BARTENDER  
I don't know you.

Vic drinks, motions for a third. Bartender obliges.

He takes the bill and turns to the newcomers, who sit a few seats from Vic.

WORKER #1  
We got yellow tickets for the day.

WORKER #2  
Which means we're celebrating!

WORKER #1  
Gettin paid to drink!

The two men laugh together.

Vic's eyes narrow as he watches them.

WORKER #2  
What should we have? You want a beer?

WORKER #1  
Nah, man. We celebratin! Let's get some tequila! (AD LIB)

As the two men continue talking and laughing, Vic shifts his attention to the television above the bar-- where Myra's news broadcast is playing.

BROADCAST FOOTAGE - WHBC NEWS

Myra addresses the camera.

MYRA  
Good morning, Hub City. I'm Myra Connelly and here are the stories we're tracking today. With the election still months away, the campaign between City Councilman Wesley Fermin and Mayor Richardson is already heating up.

INT. BAR

The men down the bar toast. Vic stares at them icily.

MYRA (O.S.)  
Last night at an open forum on housing development, Fermin accused the Mayor of, quote "neglecting his duties" and suggested he should face criminal charges. Let's watch.

BROADCAST FOOTAGE - WHBC NEWS

A small event in a crowded book store. Fermin addresses the gathering with a handheld wired microphone. He wears a work shirt and casual slacks, very "man of the people."

FERMIN

The homelessness. The crime. And the corruption at the highest levels... Mayor Richardson has presided over the single worst decade in the history of Hub City. And we've had some bad decades!

The crowd laughs.

FERMIN (CONT'D)

I think we need to get serious about this. We have to hold these officials accountable when they use public funds for private gain. Four thousand dollars on a new desk? Come on! That's criminal behavior.

INT. BAR

Vic sucks down his drink.

VIC

That's not news. It's playground gossip.

He throws another bill on the bar.

VIC (CONT'D)

Hey bud, where'd you say that bathroom is?

The bartender points.

Vic eyes the construction workers again.

FOLLOW

Vic to the back of the bar, into the bathroom.

As soon as the door is locked, Vic moves quickly.

He balls up his jacket around his fist.

Balancing on one foot, he punches through a small glass window while kicking down on the toilet flush.

INT. BAR

The sound of the toilet flushing. The TV report continues.

The two construction workers fall silent. They both turn to where Vic was sitting, as the bartender drops a fresh drink.

INT. BATHROOM

Vic shimmies out the window.

EXT. STREET

Vic runs around the front of the bar and gets in his car.

EXT. BAR

The two workers emerge just in time to watch Vic peel out.

INT. CAR - DRIVING

Vic glances in his rearview, watches them scrambling to get into an unmarked sedan and give chase.

He smiles: he lost them.

INT. NEWS STATION - STUDIO

Myra's voice is the only sound in the utterly silent room.

She sits at the desk beside Quinn Callahan.

MYRA

And these clinics are popping up  
all over the city. It's an  
epidemic.

Joe Duke enters the broadcast area, with a STRANGER.

Myra watches them as Quinn wraps up the broadcast.

QUINN

It's awful. Just awful. Thanks  
Myra. And finally, an update on  
that Blankman video we showed you  
earlier... it's now been shared  
over four hundred thousand times  
and the hashtag "Hub City Hero" is  
a trending topic on Twitter. From  
all of us here at WHBC News, thank  
you and have a pleasant day.

She remains frozen for a moment.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)  
We're clear. Good show everyone.

The sound engineer helps her out of her microphone.

Joe Duke approaches the desk.

JOE  
Great job as always, Myra.

MYRA  
Thanks.

JOE  
There's someone I'd like you to  
meet.

On cue, the stranger approaches with his hand out.

She extends her hand.

MYRA  
Myra Connelly.

STRANGER  
Doctor Malcolm Warner, pleased to  
meet you.

ON

Myra's face. She does not look happy.

Nobody does.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. IRISH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

GLIDING over rolling hills. Swooning, dream-like.

Sound of a woman laughing. An Irish band playing.

ACCELERATING toward the end of a cliff, then off and--

INT. POLICE STATION - O'TOOLE'S OFFICE

Police Chief Izzy O'TOOLE awakes in a large, comfortable office with his feet up on the desk.

His hair is salt-and-pepper, his jaw is leading man.

He wears two-toned wingtips.

In the doorway, his ASSISTANT repeats:

ASSISTANT

Ira Terkelsen on the line for you.

He moves slowly and deliberately; a man whose caution has served him more than bravery. Picks up his desk phone.

O'TOOLE

Ira! What an unpleasant surprise.

How's the opposition party.

PUSH TOWARD the window as he listens.

O'TOOLE (CONT'D)

Uh-huh. Yes. I understand.

EXT. NEWS STATION - DAY

Establishing. A knocking sound carries us

INT. NEWS STATION - JOE DUKE'S OFFICE

Myra stands in the entryway. Joe motions for her to enter.

JOE (ON PHONE)

Well we certainly appreciate you coming in, Doc. Uh-huh.

She slumps in her chair like a kid in the principal's office.

JOE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)  
You're a very understanding man.  
We'll have the retraction on the  
evening news, I guarantee it. Our  
apologies again for-- thank you.

He hangs up.

MYRA  
I take it that was Doctor Warner?

JOE  
His lawyer. And we're damn lucky  
he's not suing us for defamation!

MYRA  
I don't know what happened, Joe. I  
vetted the sources. Triple-checked  
his work. I don't know why--

JOE  
I'll tell you why! Because Vic  
don't give a crap about anyone but  
himself. Let me ask you something,  
Myra. You're smart, capable. You  
got a career that's goin places.  
Why stick your neck out for a guy  
like this? Why hitch your wagon to  
his horse?

MYRA  
He's an honest man. And he has  
probably the strongest moral  
compass of anyone I've ever met.

JOE  
You sure about that?

She's not.

MYRA  
I'll have the retraction on your  
desk within the hour. Are we done?

JOE  
Don't worry about the retraction,  
I'll have an intern cover it. I  
need you down at City Hall. The  
Mayor's doing a surprise briefing.

Joe glances at the door, his customary dismissal.

She exits.

Joe pulls up a file on his laptop: the footage of a masked Vic stopping the mugger.

Then he pulls up a second file: the footage Vic shot at the drug clinic.

He plays them side by side.

In both pieces, Vic ducks and sweeps the feet. It's pretty easy to see they're the same person.

JOE (CONT'D)

Hmm.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Establishing.

INT. CITY HALL - PRESS BRIEFING ROOM

Bright lights, dull colors. A podium with a dozen seats for the print journalists and beat reporters, maybe half of them occupied.

Along the back wall, a warren of local TV news cameras and the talent to go with them.

Myra adjusts her makeup.

IN THE MIRROR of her compact she sees the side door open.

Vic shouts at the guard who prevents him from entering.

VIC

You can't keep me out, I have valid credentials! Do you not understand the first amendment?

The guard pushes him out and closes the door.

She snaps the compact shut.

DIRECTOR (IN EARPIECE)

Myra we're on you in sixty seconds.

Myra takes her position in front of the camera.

BROADCAST FOOTAGE - WHBC NEWS

MYRA

This is Myra Connelly, live from--



STREAMING VIDEO - VIC'S WEBSITE

Vic broadcasts live from a smartphone.

VIC

-outside City Hall, where yours truly has just been denied entry despite having valid credentials. This is yet another example of a system based on corruption and--

BROADCAST FOOTAGE - WHBC NEWS

MYRA

--we don't know exactly what the Mayor is expected to say, but the Chief of Police is here which means he may be tendering his resignation. The Mayor's been under fire recently for his record on crime, with challenger Wesley Fermin going so far as to suggest--

STREAMING VIDEO - VIC'S WEBSITE

VIC

--criminal activities, legalized drug sales, breaking and entering, and intimidation tactics against me personally. But I happen to know where the private exit is to the briefing room so let's--

BROADCAST FOOTAGE - WHBC NEWS

Behind Myra, a pair of doors open and Terkelsen enters followed by Richardson and a handful of AIDES with copies of the Mayor's statement ready to hand out to the press.

MYRA

--go there now.

The Mayor takes the podium. An air of quiet anticipation.

POV RICHARDSON

Staring out at the unblinking eyes of a half-dozen cameras.

The paper statement in his hands.

RICHARDSON

At approximately six forty-five this morning I entered my son Jeffrey's room and found his bed empty.

Cameras begin clicking and flashing with rising intensity.

RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

I attempted to contact him through friends, family, and his personal cell phone but have been unable to reach him. About nine thirty this morning I contacted the Chief of Police, Izzy O'Toole, who dispatched a team of detectives to my residence. When the detectives arrived they found evidence which appears to indicate... that my son has been kidnapped.

A murmur spreads across the room. Camera flashes are like machine gun fire now. The Mayor struggles to continue.

RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

Effective immediately, I am suspending my campaign for Mayor and taking a temporary leave of absence from my elected office. Taking my place will be Deputy Mayor Chandler Beaumont. Going forward Chief O'Toole will provide updates on the investigation as necessary and appropriate, but I ask that you please respect the privacy of my family during this difficult time. Thank you.

Every journalist is instantly on their feet shouting questions. Cameras jockey for position.

Mayoral aides press the crowd with their one-sheets.

O'Toole removes his captain's hat and sets it on the podium.

He points at one of the news reporters.

O'TOOLE

Yes?

INT. CITY HALL - PRIVATE EXIT

The Mayor and Terkelsen emerge from the briefing room, only to be ambushed by Vic and his live video feed.

VIC

Mayor Richardson, can you tell me what work the Turner-Daniels firm performed for your administration?

Richardson reacts, but it's ambiguous.

Terkelsen steps in front of Vic's camera.

TERKELSEN

Okay, okay, that's enough.

VIC

Can you explain the nature of your relationship to Misses Daniels?

But they are gone.

STREAMING VIDEO - VIC'S WEBSITE

Vic turns the camera on himself.

VIC

Did you see his face? Did you see that reaction? Post your thoughts in the comment section below!

INT. NEWS STATION - JOE DUKE'S OFFICE

Joe watches Vic's feed on his laptop screen.

He picks up a phone and dials.

JOE (TO PHONE)

He's at City Hall.

He hangs up. Closes the laptop.

ACT OUT

ACT FIVE

EXT. CITY HALL - NIGHT

Myra helps her cameraman load equipment into the news van.

Vic appears around the side.

VIC

Hey.

MYRA

Nice stunt you pulled in the briefing room. I thought you were trying to keep a low profile.

VIC

They know we're close, so they're trying to misdirect us. I can't let them get away with it. Did you see the footage? Richardson's reaction when I asked him about Turner-Daniels? I've gotta show you this.

He fiddles with his phone.

She loads the last piece of equipment in the van.

MYRA

Doctor Warner came by the station today.

VIC

Jesus. We must really be onto something! To hire an actor, fake his medical records--

MYRA

Doctor Warner is German. He went to school in Germany. That's why we couldn't find anything on him. And we're damn lucky he's not suing us for defamation.

VIC

Here.

He hands her a USB key.

MYRA

What's this?

VIC

Accounting records from Turner-Daniels. Very interesting reading. Go over it tonight and we'll compare notes tomorrow.

MYRA

In case you haven't noticed, I have an actual job covering the actual news.

VIC

Actual news??

MYRA

Yeah, actual news. Not anonymous tips on a website. And if Mayor Richardson gave you a strange look, maybe it's because his kid is missing. Did you ever think of that? No, you didn't. Of course you didn't.

VIC

Don't do that. Don't make this about me and kids.

MYRA

You know Joe's right? The only person you care about is yourself.

VIC

I fight for what's right. Every day. That's integrity.

MYRA

That's your definition of integrity.

VIC

Isn't it everybody's?

MYRA

Be honest. You live and die by the scoop. But our job isn't to make the news, Vic. It's to report it.

VIC

So you want me to sit behind the desk and read my script like a good boy, is that it?

MYRA

No! I want you to not be such an asshole to everyone. And especially to me.

She walks off toward her car. The van pulls out of the lot.

VIC

Myra!

He follows her across the parking lot.

VIC (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go back to my place.  
I have a hotel room in East County--

MYRA

I'm going home, Vic.

VIC

Is this about the other night? When you invited me over and I said I had something else to do?

MYRA

You didn't say you had something else to do. You said you were tired. Where were you that night? Huh?

She looks at him, searching for something.

His features are heavily shadowed.

VIC

I was with Professor Rodor.

MYRA

Okay.

VIC

I'm sorry I haven't been around. I just have a lot going on right now.

MYRA

I know. So do I.

VIC

And you're the one that said you wanted to keep it casual.

MYRA

I know.

VIC

So.

MYRA

So it was casual. And now it's over.

VIC

Wait, what?

MYRA

Good night Vic.

VIC

No wait a minute. Let's talk about this!

MYRA

There's nothing to say. Some things are just over. That's how it works.

VIC

Myra! Hang on, can't we at least get a drink? Myra? Myra!

But she's already in the car, and the car drives away.

Vic stands alone. Fog settling in. Twilight.

A black SUV pulls into the lot.

Vic lights a cigarette.

Sound of car doors.

Suddenly, from the shadows behind him, a FIGURE attacks.

WIDE

The parking lot outside City Hall.

Vic held by one figure as two others converge from the SUV.

EXT. PIER - NIGHT

A thick mist hovers over the water. Light refracting through suspended water molecules lends a mythical appearance.

A pair of headlights swings onto the pier.

CLOSE on the black SUV. It stops and idles. Back door opens.

A figure emerges. We recognize him from the row of spikes running along his shaved head: it's Spike from the clinic.

He reaches in and pulls out Vic-- beaten and limp.

In the dim light we see Vic's face covered in blood.

CLOSE on his face. One eye fluttering.

SPIKE  
He's coming to.

VIC  
F-f-f-

Vic sputters blood.

A voice from inside the car.

VOICE  
He's choking on his blood. He'll be  
dead soon.

POV VIC

Everything a blur-- Spike an indistinct figure in the mist.

Another door opens.

The sound of shoes on wood.

The shoes come into the light: a pair of two-toned wingtips.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Set him down.

Spike lays him out along the pier.

Vic stares at the shoes.

LOOKING DOWN

On Vic. Badly beaten.

Sound of a phone vibrating.

POV VIC

He turns to look up.

The blurry figure points a pistol down.

VOICE (CONT'D)  
It's for you.



WIDE

Three shots fired, flashing and reverberating: one, two, a beat, and three.

The figures return to the car.

Sound of a car driving away.

Vic's body lies motionless on the pier.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Myra sits at her desk, looking through the Turner-Daniels records on her computer.

She holds her phone to her ear, listening to it ring.

A tear runs down her cheek.

CHESSIE (O.S.)

Mom?

She wipes the tear away and turns toward her daughter, CHESSIE, a slightly overweight teenager.

CHESSIE (CONT'D)

Can you help me with my homework?

MYRA

Sure sweetie. I'll be right in.

VIC (VOICEMAIL MESSAGE)

This is Vic Sage, citizen  
journalist. You can submit  
anonymous tips on my website at--

She hangs up. Wipes the tear away.

EXT. STREET - DOWNTOWN HUB CITY - NIGHT

Stuttering Sam walks along the street singing to himself.

(Song lyrics by The Monkees)

STUTTERING SAM

"It was easy then to t-t-tell...  
right from wrong,  
Easy then to tell... weak f-from  
strong  
When a man should stand and f-f-  
fight... or just go along..."

A splash from the street as a black SUV cruises by.

In the back, a face pressed against the window.

It is Lola. Lola looks scared.

EXT. PIER - NIGHT

Under the pier. Dark water lapping against the supports.

A loud, sudden splash as we cut to black and roll credits.

END