

THE LONG RUN

By Stephen Belber

8-15-07

MUSIC--CREDITS ROLL:

EXT. PARKNG LOT - DAY

RICK DAYNE, white, 50's, parks and gets out of his '94 Buick carrying a travel mug, a brown bag lunch and three different newspapers. He wears jeans and a corduroy blazer and his expression is a mix of cynicism and fatigue. He's not without passion but you gotta dig deep. He walks toward a building whose entrance sign reads: *DELAWARE STATE JOURNAL*.

INT. NEWS ROOM - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick walks through the bustling news floor nodding hello to the occasional colleague. In the back corner is a dangling cardboard sign: THE BOYS OF OP-ED. The cubicles here are a little nicer. Rick taps awake his computer as MATT BARNES, another op-ed writer, pokes his head around the partition.

MATT BARNES

Didn't think you were comin' in this morning.

RICK

Forgot my research.

MATT BARNES

On what?

RICK

The prison reform thing. My annual rage against the machine.

MATT BARNES

Sean gonna run that this year?

RICK

He runs it every year. It's his concession to me for taking my job.

MATT BARNES

Big heart, small dick.

RICK

Yeah, well, he knows my last name so he figures it's good luck.

MATT BARNES

That-a-way to think about it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rick glances through a folder of printed-out articles.

MATT BARNES (cont'd)
Is this the inmate-website guy?

RICK
Yeah.

MATT BARNES
He write well?

RICK
(off the articles)
...He's all right.

SEAN (O.S.)
What's up, fellas'?

Rick turns to see SEAN, 30's, the op-ed page editor who's immensely sure of himself but tends to give Rick the deserved respect of an elder.

RICK
What's up, Sean?

SEAN
You headed out to Smyrna?

RICK
Yeah.

SEAN
Good stuff. I love how you track these guys down. Old school, man, *old school*.

RICK
That's me.

SEAN
You hear Schwarzenegger's talking about a major state prison overhaul?

RICK
No, I didn't--

SEAN
AP had it last night. The guy's got vision.

RICK
He also fondles women.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SEAN

Hey, there but for the grace of God, you know what I'm saying?

MATT BARNES

No, Sean, we don't.

SEAN

(leaving)

Call me later, Rick, I want you to do a piece on the Soil Conference next week.

INT. LOBBY - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick exits the elevator and heads for the door, throwing a glance to a glass-encased, black and white photo portrait of a distinguished man in his 60's. We glimpse the attached nametag: *MELVIN DAYNE, PUBLISHER, 1941-1966.*

As Rick passes the front desk, he nods in greeting to the SECURITY GUARD, who smiles back.

SECURITY GUARD

Have a good one, Mr. Dayne.

EXT. VISITOR'S ENTRANCE - DELAWARE CORRECTIONAL CENTER - DAY

Rick's Buick pulls into the mostly empty lot. He gets out, surveying the low-lying, sprawling facility, its two guard towers, its six miles of surrounding razor wire.

INT. SECURITY CHECKPOINT THREE - CORRECTIONAL CENTER - DAY

Rick being patted down by two bored CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS.

RICK

You woulda thought they'd find anything bad the *first* two checkpoints.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER #1

It's death row, man; if you were a killer you'd take away our fun.

Rick looks at the guy, expressionless.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER #2

'Sides, if you're goin' to see McBain, you're the one who should be worried; dude'll *outsmart* you to death.

RICK

Yeah, but is he nice?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER #1

He actually kinda is.

INT. PRISON VISITING ROOM - DAY

Rick sits opposite DARIUS MCBAIN, black, mid-30's, two-inch afro, orange prison garb. He's earnest, confident and intense, able to swing from street vernacular to "white talk" without seeming false. The kind of guy you can't take your eyes off.

DARIUS

I was out walking, I was high, I heard a gunshot, distinct as hell, about a block away. So I ran in that direction.

RICK

Why?

DARIUS

'Cause I was 17.

(pause)

I turned the corner, saw the body. And I'm thinking I knew Ronny did it, that it musta been a deal gone wrong because it's his block and his time of night. I pick up the gun--

RICK

Why would he have dropped it?

DARIUS

'Cause he panicked.

RICK

Ronny the kind of guy to panic?

DARIUS

Yep.

RICK

...Then what?

DARIUS

I ditch the gun, turn the corner, run smack into a patrol car responding to shots fired.

RICK

Shots?

DARIUS

Shot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

...Next thing you know you're in jail.

DARIUS

No. Next thing I know I'm staring out the window of the cruiser wondering if I should say the name Ronny.

RICK

You should've.

DARIUS

I should've. But I thought--You don't ID your friends, that I didn't have motive, the weapon was gone, I was a juvie, with respectable folks...I thought there was no way I'd go down for it.

RICK

So why'd you confess?

DARIUS

Because they got to me. Eight guys in rotation for 36 hours, no sleep, high on soda sugar, no food, no lawyer--I was 17.

ANGLE on a bored CO in the corner of the room.

RICK

And at the trial?

DARIUS

I retracted but my lawyer didn't want me on the stand; the jury was eight white with four black who *thought* they were white, I had no alibi. A *white judge's* kid got shot. They were on a warpath.

RICK

I'd have been, too.

DARIUS

Listen, at the range at which that kid was shot there would've been spatter on my clothes and powder residue on my hands--neither of which were.

RICK

What about the hairs?

DARIUS

Two negro hairs that were *consistent* with mine but never tested for DNA.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS (cont'd)
(pause; quiet)
I went to church two days before the murder, was president of my class, a 3.7 GPA... I'm not a murderer and I don't deserve to die.

Rick sits back, a light smirk on his face.

DARIUS (cont'd)
(lightening up)
But you were asking me about prison reform.

RICK
That's true.

DARIUS
Not a lot of people browse prison websites.

RICK
I do an article every year--

DARIUS
I know.

RICK
I thought yours would be a fresh perspective.

DARIUS
It ain't gonna change things anyway.

RICK
Probably not.

DARIUS
(Darius considers him)
You read my idea about having welfare moms teaching inmates how to read?

RICK
...Yeah, I did.

DARIUS
You like it?

RICK
It's a little far-fetched.

DARIUS
Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICK

Because I would bet that half of the
welfare moms are also illiterate.

DARIUS

It'd say it's 50-50, meaning you match up
whoever *can* read with whoever *can't*.
Either way, Moms get their 5.50 an hour,
prisoners get their 50 cents.

RICK

And everyone else learns how to read?

DARIUS

That's right. So instead of people
hating welfare queens, they *respect* 'em
for gettin' a job educating a thug.

RICK

I'll rush to the state house and run it
up the flagpole.

DARIUS

You think it's a joke, man, but every
time an uneducated inmate gets outta
here, guess where they're headed?

RICK

Arby's?

DARIUS

Your fucking house.

Rick looks at him, half-smiling; Darius returns it.

INT. RICK'S BUICK - DAY

Rick drives through rural Delaware, a bemused smile still on
his face as he listens to country music.

INT. RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick sits on a kitchen counter sipping Merlot, talking with
his girlfriend, KATYA--late 30's, hip--who's nibbling Weight
Watchers and keeping an eye on the late-night news. If Rick
is old school media, she's very new.

KATYA

Nice guy?

RICK

He actually is.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA

Why, 'cause he says he's not guilty?

RICK

More because he's smart.

KATYA

Smart doesn't mean nice, Rick.

RICK

What does it mean?

KATYA

It means able to make guilt seem like innocence.

RICK

The guy's scheduled to die in six months and he's in there posting articles about prison reform.

KATYA

Was he good-looking?

RICK

What's the difference?

KATYA

I take that as a yes.

RICK

Why does that--?

KATYA

It doesn't, it just means your leftist, ex-hippie guilt has got the best of you again.

RICK

Wow.

KATYA

My *point* is that prisons are *full* of cute killers with GED's. Our job as journalists is to see past that.

Rick looks at her with a smile and shakes his head.

RICK

For someone claiming to be liberal, you exude a lot of antipathy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATYA

(with a smile)

That actually comes from *living* with a liberal, as opposed to being one.

RICK

So you're saying I'm more liberal than you?

KATYA

You're like a poster boy for the Sixties. Which doesn't mean I don't love you.

RICK

It just means you're not ready to marry me.

She gives him a loving smile...

KATYA

Yet.

RICK

Yet.

KATYA

(keeping it light)

Let's put it this way, there's a difference between media-savvy liberal activism suitable to the 21st century, and passively *wishing* it were still 1969.

RICK

Well maybe that's why this guy interests me. He's my way back in.

KATYA

(sweet; genuine)

Good.

RICK

Good.

INT. SECURITY CHECKPOINT THREE - CORRECTIONAL CENTER - DAY

Rick getting patted down again by the same two guards.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER #1

Back for more with Malcolm X?

RICK

Someone's got to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER #2

He tell you about his prison health care idea?

RICK

No.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER #2

Ask him; it's actually kinda cool.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

Rick and Darius stand in a sliver of sunlight in a tiny yard with high walls, a prison tower looming above; a burly CO stands by the door.

RICK

I'm surprised they let us out here.

DARIUS

Half-hour a day for good behavior. If you're extra good they let you go in two's. Not bad for guys who wanna kill me.

RICK

...I wanted to ask about your DNA test.

DARIUS

Huge backlog. Mine's not due up until 2008.

RICK

And yet your execution date--?

DARIUS

August '07.

RICK

Is your lawyer working on that?

DARIUS

Theoretically.

RICK

(Rick nods, writing on a pad)
I'm also supposed to ask you about your prison health care plan.

DARIUS

(a prideful smile...)
Robbie tell you about that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Yeah.

DARIUS

Well I haven't posted it yet 'cause it's not perfected, but basically we got a whole generation of 3-strike prisoners about to turn geriatric and if we don't figure something out it'll fuck every state budget in the country.

RICK

So what's your idea?

DARIUS

A 40 cent per gallon tax hike on gas for cars that cost more than 40-thousand dollars.

RICK

That's your plan?

DARIUS

Yeah. "40 at 40." Works out to roughly a billion a year, which'll fund a prison health care system based on the Canadian one, to be used as a *test* program for how a national *kids* plan could work, in which case you expand it to 70 at 20.

(pause)

I got the details laid out on my computer.

Rick smiles, unimpressed, or at least not showing it.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - DAY

Darius stands, now shackled and about to be ushered back to his cell. Another guard waits to escort Rick out.

DARIUS

By the way, I liked the article.

RICK

Oh. Thanks. Wasn't sure you'd read it.

DARIUS

I read everything, Rick.

RICK

Right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

You got all my major points in, but you took out the curse words.

RICK

Yeah, well--

DARIUS

I liked it. Made me think there's a way to communicate in this country after all. Beneath all the bullshit. That there are people out there, walking around, trying to understand each other.

Rick nods, unsure what to say, but sort of flattered. Darius leans in and lowers his voice.

DARIUS (cont'd)

And if you ever wanna write another one, I think you should. About my case.

(simple; inescapably honest)

Because I didn't shoot that kid. I swear to God above, Rick: I did not shoot him.

They watch each other...before the guard guides Darius away.

EXT. FRONT STEPS - STATE COURTHOUSE - DAY

Rick climbs the grand steps to the columned stone building, waving hi to a man in a 3-piece suit going the opposite way.

INT. ARCHIVES - COURTHOUSE BASEMENT - DAY

Rick stands at the florescent-lit counter as a 60-something female CLERK hands him a large cardboard container.

CLERK

McBain under M.

RICK

Really? What a great system.

CLERK

You've been a wise-ass since the day I met you.

RICK

Which was 114 years ago.

CLERK

Speak for yourself, Dayne, I'm a spring goddam chicken.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Good, while you're springing around would you look up on little your computer whether there's a *Ronald Jackson* in our country's wonderful prison system.

CLERK

Why?

RICK

Because I have a crush on him.

She blows a kiss and works the computer as Rick pulls a file and opens it to a mug shot: Darius glaring at us from 17 years ago, wide-eyed and scared. He moves onto a document...

RICK (cont'd)

Did you know that inaccurate hair comparison is a factor in one-third of DNA-overtuned convictions?

CLERK

You ask me, they're *all* drunks.

RICK

I do love you, Delores.

CLERK

(off computer)

Ronald Jackson: Maryland. 25-to-life for rape/murder.

RICK

(looking up)

Does that mean his blood's in the system?

Off Delores, nodding--

INT. RICK'S BUICK - DAY

Rick drives, talking into his cell, his cynicism on hold.

RICK

Hi, Sean, it's Rick...Good, so look, if it's all right with you I'm gonna skip the soil conference and do another piece on Darius McBain....'Cause I wanna try and get them to reopen the case.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rick, Katya and ROY and JANE FIELD, an interracial couple, dine together at a high-end Wilmington bistro.

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CONTINUED:

JANE

So Rick, I read your article on the death row guy this morning.

KATYA

I think it's the first time he's written on the same subject twice.

RICK

Not it's not--

KATYA

(to Jane)

But it was good, no?

JANE

It was very good.

ROY

I agree, I saw it, too--

JANE

It's funny, my firm's been approached several times by non-profits about the backlog of DNA testing.

ROY

It's a serious problem--

RICK

There's over 400 cases waiting for re-test, and only one in-state lab.

JANE

Are the right people reading your stuff?

RICK

Actually--yeah. The state's attorney called me two hours ago. He's jumping Darius's case to the front of the pile.

KATYA

What?

ROY

He *called* you?

RICK

Yeah, he wants me to write about him so that *he* doesn't look like a prick.

Pause; Jane and Katya digging Rick's sexy integrity. Jane raises her glass; the others follow.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Rick, bored, registers at a table with a perky VOLUNTEER.

RICK

Hi, Rick Dayne with the Delaware State Journal, checking in for the conference.

VOLUNTEER

We're *honored*, Mr. Dayne, and we *do* hope you'll enjoy our DelTech Initiatives discussion. It's already started, so--

He makes the "hush" sign as Rick, dreading it, heads inside.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME

A room full of mostly-empty chairs at the front of which sit two balding men, some graphs and a Delaware state flag. As Rick sits in the back, his phone vibrates. He checks the ID--

RICK

Hey, Sean.

--as he listens, his face goes from bored to bright.

INT. SEAN'S OFFICE - STATE JOURNAL - DAY

Sean, elated, sits at his desk, Rick standing before him.

SEAN

So the test comes back positive, meaning Ronny Jackson's bloodwork matches the hairs found on the victim's clothes--

RICK

Which they still have--

SEAN

Which *of course* they still have, this is *Delaware*, Rick, we don't lose evidence--

RICK

Where's Texas when you need it?--

SEAN

But get this part: They call the prison in Maryland where he is and tell him "They just found your hair on a 1990 murder victim's clothes," and *two hours later* the guy asks to see the warden and confesses to the whole fucking thing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Really?

SEAN

I kid you not, it's phenomenal.

RICK

So what happens--?

SEAN

It's on the governor's desk with a request for McBain's immediate release, which they think could happen. It seems the gov's been reading your articles.

Rick takes this in, trying to conceal his pride.

SEAN (cont'd)

You're a dragon-slayer, Rick, I'm putting you up for the fucking Pulitzer.

RICK

Keep it in your pants, Sean--

SEAN

And no longer can I give you shit for dating younger women. You're a *beast*.

CUT TO---SERIES OF SHOTS:

Darius, in jeans and a sweatshirt, being handed a small gym bag by a prison official.

The prison warden solemnly shaking Darius's hand.

Rick in the prison parking lot, waiting.

Darius being escorted by two CO's down a long, generic hall.

Rick, a barely perceptible smile as he watches the prison gate swing open and Darius, gym bag in hand, walk toward him.

A small gang of photographers click away as Rick and Darius shake hands.

INT. RICK'S BUICK - DAY

Rick drives, Darius next to him, taking it all in.

RICK

So I found a group that's gonna help get you an apartment. They're pretty good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS
(humbled)
Thank you.

RICK
I'll take you over there now?

DARIUS
Sure.

RICK
And obviously, I'm here for you, in terms
of helping you get back on your feet.

DARIUS
I appreciate it.

RICK
I was thinking we should have dinner this
week, go over options, maybe I can steer
you toward a job.
(Darius nods)
I assume you have ideas about that?

DARIUS
Not really.

RICK
Well, we'll come up with something.

Rick drives in silence a moment, then takes an envelope from
his breast pocket and offers it to Darius.

RICK (cont'd)
A little get-back-on-your-feet money.
Just to, you know...

DARIUS
Get back on my feet?

RICK
Yeah. Until you win your lawsuit.

DARIUS
You don't have to do that--

RICK
This has been good for me, too, so...

Darius smiles, accepts the money. Honest:

DARIUS
Thank you, Rick. Serious.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Rick nods; drives.

RICK
I assume you have people you wanna see?

DARIUS
Yeah. ...Might try and see my wife.

Rick looks at him; this is new info.

DARIUS (cont'd)
She was my girl when everything happened,
then we married before the trial, but...
After a while she stopped comin' around.

RICK
...Well, maybe she's read the paper and
is waiting for you with flowers.

DARIUS
I wouldn't bet the bank.

They drive.

DARIUS (cont'd)
You're not married?

RICK
Divorced. But I live with someone.

DARIUS
Kids?

RICK
Never got around to it.

SOUND OF A DOORBELL--

INT. FRONT HALL - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MILES DAVIS slides from a speaker as Katya, dressed fashionably, answers the front door. Darius is there in slacks and a sweater, as is OPAL OWENS, black, mid-30's, a woman who knows her mind well and isn't afraid to speak it.

KATYA
Hi--you must be Darius--

DARIUS
That's right--

KATYA
So nice to meet you--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS
Thank you. This is my wife, Opal.

KATYA
Hi, Opal.

OPAL
Hi.

As Rick approaches from the kitchen.

RICK
Hey, Darius.

DARIUS
Hi, Rick. This is Opal.

RICK
(extending his hand)
Great to meet you.

OPAL
(barely shaking his hand)
You too.

Katya shuts the door and the four of them stand in awkward silence for a moment. And then:

RICK
C'mon in!--I'll get you a drink.

INT. LIVING ROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - LATER

Opal, Darius and Rick sit as Katya, offering around a plate of hors d'oeuvres, talks excitedly.

KATYA
I think it's a no-brainer: Get a book deal. Memoir, creative non-fiction, people eat that stuff up--

DARIUS
I dunno--

KATYA
You don't wanna write a book?

DARIUS
About what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA

Your experience getting massively *screwed* by the powers-that-be. It'll be the story of our entire justice system.

RICK

She's got a point. With the way you write, we'd see it from the inside like never before.

KATYA

I read your letter-to-the-editor in response to Rick's article; you're *good*.

DARIUS

Thanks. It's the Irish in me.

KATYA

Hah! Here, spanakopita?

DARIUS

Sure--

KATYA

They're frozen, I mean not anymore 'cause I nuked 'em, but they'll hold you over 'til dinner.

She smilingly offers one to Opal, who declines. Beat.

KATYA (cont'd)

So, what do you think, Opal?

OPAL

About what?

KATYA

About what Darius should do.

OPAL

I dunno.

RICK

You think he should write a book?

OPAL

If he wants.

KATYA

...What do you do, Opal?

OPAL

Nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATYA
You're unemployed?

OPAL
Nope.

KATYA
So you don't *like* your job?

OPAL
I don't *have* a job.

DARIUS
Why're you giving them a hard time?

OPAL
I'm not.

DARIUS
(to others)
She works off the books, babysits--

OPAL
Deals drugs--

DARIUS
No you don't--

OPAL
How do you know?

DARIUS
Because you *don't* deal drugs--

OPAL
Yes I do--

DARIUS
What kind?

OPAL
I dunno.

DARIUS
(to others)
She doesn't deal drugs.

KATYA
It's fine with me if she does--

DARIUS
You *don't* deal drugs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OPAL
Whatever you say, Darius.

KATYA
...So you don't deal drugs?

OPAL
I guess not.

Silence a moment.

DARIUS
Lemme explain: Opal married me 'cause she was honoring our past, but nobody expected her to stay home and sew socks. For me, it was just being able to say I *had* a wife. Most inmates don't get that, and guys on death row--?
(shaking his head)
She's a remarkable woman.

OPAL
I have a boyfriend.

DARIUS
She likes to say that.

OPAL
It's true.

DARIUS
It's true but it's not *good*, Opal, 'cause Jackie told me what he does and that shit's no good, I'm telling you.
(pause; to others)
I love this woman. She makes me a better man.
(she essentially ignores him.
To the others:)
She don't love me back yet, but she will.

Off Opal, expressionless. Darius turns to them:

DARIUS (cont'd)
How long *you* two been together?

RICK
Three years.

KATYA
Three and a half, actually.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Rick looks at her, surprised at her accuracy. She smiles back genuinely. Darius and Opal watch; it's a nice moment.

INT. DINING ROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - LATER

Rick, Katya, Opal and Darius sit around a candlelit table. Rick is boring the shit out of Opal and Katya.

RICK

The thing about Delaware offshore wind-energy potential is that it's *doable*.

KATYA

Anyone want more fish?

DARIUS

That'd be great--

RICK

Because the fact is, the best available wind resources just *happen* to be in the mid-continental plains of each of the major continents, *i.e.* 20 miles off the Delaware shoreline!

DARIUS

I hear you--

RICK

Right?! So *my* question is: Why aren't we doing it?

KATYA

Are we *sure* this is interesting?

RICK

Yes--Darius wrote an essay about prisons using alternative fuel sources.

KATYA

Well then maybe Opal and I can just get drunk--

DARIUS

See, the *problem* is aesthetics. Americans have this relationship with their oceans that's hard to violate.

RICK

It's *emotional*--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

Profoundly fucking emotional, but it's messing us up 'cause we're *also* talking wave energy, *tidal* energy, *aquaculture*--

RICK

So what do we do?

DARIUS

You gotta come up with a campaign to convince people that a buncha' wind turbines sitting out at sea is actually a work of art. Which they are--

RICK

I agree--

DARIUS

America has *zero* offshore farms and Europe's got hundreds of 'em, and everyone knows that the French are more fashion-conscious than we are. It's just a matter of re-shaping *perception*.

The others are just looking at Darius.

KATYA

How'd you come up with that?

DARIUS

Books.

KATYA

(serving fish)

You should come on my show. You're like a walking human-interest story.

OPAL

He's like a guy who can talk out of his ass and make his lips move.

DARIUS

(pause; simple)

You don't think I tell the truth?

OPAL

When the fuck've you ever seen a fucking windmill?

DARIUS

Never, like I just said, 'cept in a book.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OPAL

So that's what I call talkin' out your
ass.

DARIUS

You don't think books are real?

OPAL

Not enough for you to talk like that.

DARIUS

I gotta go sit in a field in Minnesota to
have an opinion about turbines?

OPAL

Hmm hmm.

DARIUS

Do I gotta have seen Jesus to believe in
God?

OPAL

If you're gonna preach about Him then all
I can say is I hope you've *seen* Him or
spoke with Him or at least motherfucking
heard Him on the street.

DARIUS

All right then, Opal. That's your
opinion, and I won't get in its way.

OPAL

Good.

DARIUS

(pause; to others)
Now you see why I love this girl?

INT. TV STUDIO - "THIS WEEK IN DELAWARE" - DAY

The set for an informal Sunday morning TV talk show--a coffee
table and two chairs, one of which is occupied by Darius, in
a tie and jacket, and the other by Katya. As cast and crew
prepare, Katya leans over to Darius so that only he can hear.

KATYA

You doing OK?

DARIUS

I guess.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA

You are, you're doing great, now in this segment just let go and have fun.

CREW MEMBER

And we're on in 5-4-3-

C.U. on Darius, a slight deer-in-the-headlights look as he takes in the camera, the studio, the crew--

CREW MEMBER (cont'd)

2--and go!

KATYA

(polished, into the camera)

We've been talking to recently-exonerated prison inmate Darius McBain about the corrections system in this country--

(to him)

--but I'd like to switch now and ask you a little about how you *landed* in the middle of that system to begin with.

Darius takes a moment to gather himself before responding.

DARIUS

Well, I, ah, grew up in Wilmington, on Rosemont Avenue. Went to Howard High. I was an only child. My dad was a postal administrator, my mom ran a little greeting card service out of our house.

KATYA

Your mother made *greeting* cards?

DARIUS

That's right.

KATYA

So you're talking about a pretty solid family?

DARIUS

We had a nice car but no savings.

KATYA

So then what happened?--to put you near the crime that night?

DARIUS

I screwed up. In with the wrong crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATYA

Do you regret it?

DARIUS

Of course. I mean, the confession was coerced, but *I* shouldn't have been anywhere near that interrogation room that night.

KATYA

Because--?

DARIUS

Because kids know very early on how the world works, and it's our job to make sure we navigate it well.

ANGLE on Rick, watching Darius's image on a monitor behind the cameras, enjoying the show.

KATYA

How *does* the world work, in your opinion?

DARIUS

...Meaning--?

KATYA

For example--does our country's *welfare system* work?

Darius looks at her blankly for a moment, then glances at a cameraman in mid-yawn. Pause. And then:

DARIUS

I'm not a big fan.

KATYA

And why is that?

DARIUS

Because it's more helpful to whites than it is to blacks.

(her eyebrows lift, waiting)

That kind of guilt-driven urge--as profoundly as it might be *felt*--takes away our power.

KATYA

How?

DARIUS

By killing our desire to live.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KATYA

Yes, but *how*?

DARIUS

(again a pause...before
deciding to let it rip)

Think about your average female welfare recipient: She gets free housing, food stamps, healthcare, daycare--no wonder she doesn't get married, she's better off single. Her energy goes into *finagling* instead of making a better life.

ANGLE on Rick, his smile fading quick--

KATYA

And that's the *state's* fault?

DARIUS

No, but it's the state that *engenders* it.

KATYA

Does this mean you're also against affirmative action?

DARIUS

Partially--

KATYA

You don't think the effects of slavery still resonate?

DARIUS

Yes, but they don't beat out ignorance, lack of self-confidence and poor reality-assessment.

KATYA

(pause; a smile)

So what's your solution, Mr. McBain? You can't complain if you don't have answers.

DARIUS

I think it starts with a *question*: How do we re-imagine the intervention? Because it's more than just some white kid losing his assembly line job to a black kid.

ANGLE on the CAMERAMAN smiling--

DARIUS (cont'd)

Money and energy need to be redirected to where the problem *starts*;

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DARIUS (cont'd)
we need toilet paper and pencils in *grade*
school a lot more than we need some high-
yella black jerk in *law* school.

ANGLE on Rick turning away with a wince--

DARIUS (cont'd)
I say legislate SAT prep courses in the
ghetto; mandate a corporate matching
donation to a *rec center* for every
campaign contribution in this country;

ANGLE on Darius in the monitor, hitting stride--

DARIUS (cont'd)
Require tobacco companies to replace all
those nigger-aimed cigarette ads with
billboards of Zora Neale Hurston quotes.
Put the money where the mouth is--*that's*
my answer.

Darius stops, then nods humbly at the camera...as Katya
regards him with a mischievous smile...before turning to us:

KATYA
I've been talking to Delaware native
Darius McBain. I'm Katya Braunne, join
us again next week for, *This Week in*
Delaware.

ANGLE on the camera's RED LIGHT going out, as Katya, Rick and
the entire crew just stare at Darius, as if to say, "This guy
is good." After a moment Katya breaks it, un-miking herself:

KATYA (cont'd)
Well done.

DARIUS
Thanks--

KATYA
We'll beep out the nigger reference.

DARIUS
Sorry--

KATYA
Not a problem, I like your style.

DARIUS
I don't have a style--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

KATYA

Sure you do: "Sympathetic meets provocative." It's unique.

A Crew Member approaches, hand extended--

CREW MEMBER

That was awesome, man.

DARIUS

Thanks.

CREW MEMBER

(to Katya)

I think he's the first guest we've had who wasn't full of shit.

Rick approaches--

RICK

You're *against* affirmative action?

DARIUS

I guess so.

RICK

What the fuck?

KATYA

What--you're gonna put him back in jail?

RICK

No, I just...I mean I'm all for... *restructuring* things, but--

KATYA

Don't worry, dear, the future can include you, too.

(she pats his head. Then:)

I think this'll edit up well.

She leaves; they watch her go. The CAMERAMAN walks by--

CAMERAMAN

You're good, dude.

Darius nods thanks; Rick watches him. Beat.

RICK

So, ah, you wanna grab a drink?

DARIUS

If you're not too mad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

RICK

What can I say?--you spoke your mind.

EXT. PARKING LOT - TV STUDIO - DAY

Darius and Rick walk toward Rick's car; Rick fiddles with his new Blackberry.

RICK

My editor gave me this thing, it's frickin' amazing.

DARIUS

Why's he giving you gifts?

RICK

For saving your life.

Darius smiles, still walking.

DARIUS

It's true. You're the man.

RICK

I'm assuming that's a loaded term.

(off the Blackberry)

Look at this: *The Lay Catholic Society of Delaware* wants you to speak at their annual conference.

DARIUS

Oh yeah?--

RICK

Seems they loved your op-ed piece and want you to expound on, quote, the way we treat our own. ...And they pay.

DARIUS

I should do it for free.

RICK

You owe me three-grand, take the cash.

Darius grins--

JIM CRAGEN (O.S.)

Excuse me.

They turn to see JIM CRAGEN, white, 60's, quiet, strong-willed. He has gotten quite close without their noticing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Yes?

JIM CRAGEN

You're Darius McBain.

DARIUS

That's right.

JIM CRAGEN

...How does it feel?

DARIUS

...How does *what* feel?

JIM CRAGEN

Your freedom.

DARIUS

It's good.

JIM CRAGEN

You're happy?

DARIUS

I am. Do we know each other?

JIM CRAGEN

I'm glad you're happy.

DARIUS

Thank you.

Jim just stares at Darius; an eeriness.

DARIUS (cont'd)

Have we--?

JIM CRAGEN

I just wanted to look at you.

DARIUS

(trying to stay polite)

Why?

JIM CRAGEN

I wanted to see what you look like. Up close.

(pause)

You don't know me, do you?

DARIUS

I'm sorry, I don't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM CRAGEN

My name is Jim. I followed your case.
Since the start.

(pause)

Jim Cragen.

Darius regards him, now getting it.

DARIUS

That's right.

RICK

Mr. Cragen, I'm not sure this is--

JIM CRAGEN

Don't worry. I'm not here to do
anything. I'm not here to yell. I just
wanted to look.

DARIUS

(gentle)

I received a legal pardon, sir. Another
man admitted to the crime.

JIM CRAGEN

You think I'm here to hurt you?

DARIUS

No--

JIM CRAGEN

To kill you? You think that's how my
mind works?

DARIUS

I really don't know how it works, I just
don't want any trouble.

JIM CRAGEN

You don't want trouble?

DARIUS

No.

JIM CRAGEN

You want a hug?

DARIUS

...I'm not sure what--

JIM CRAGEN

Should I hug you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DARIUS
Why would you?

JIM CRAGEN
Make you feel better. Make us both feel
better.

DARIUS
...O-K.

Beat. Jim takes two or three small steps toward Darius,
until he is really quite close. But then stops. Pause.

JIM CRAGEN
Maybe I'll just stand here.
(pause)
Does that make us all feel better?

A deafening silence....and then Darius speaks softly.

DARIUS
I did not kill your son, sir.

JIM CRAGEN
Of course you did.

DARIUS
No--

JIM CRAGEN
Everything about you did. Everything
about you ripped out his heart. But I'm
not mad. I'm not even sad. I just
wanted to look at you.

Pause. Darius slowly, gently tries to reach out to him--

JIM CRAGEN (cont'd)
Don't touch me!

DARIUS
OK--

JIM CRAGEN
Don't ever....touch me.

Darius remains still; Rick watches, stunned. After a
moment, Jim turns to go, speaking quietly:

JIM CRAGEN (cont'd)
I hope you die.

He begins to walk away.....and then:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DARIUS
I knew Patrick.

Jim stops but doesn't turn around.

DARIUS (cont'd)
From earlier that year. He'd been coming
around for several months. So I knew him.
(pause; very gentle)
He was a good kid, sir. I remember his
face. Lit up like a lamp when he smiled.
...He was a very sweet kid.

Jim remains with his back to them....and after a moment he
continues walking away. Silence...

RICK
You all right?

DARIUS
(quiet)
Yeah.

--as they watch Jim get into his car and drive off.

INT. NEWS ROOM - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick sits at his cubicle working the Blackberry like it was
Play Station. Sean sticks his head around the corner.

SEAN
Can we talk for a sec'?

EXT. MAIN AVENUE - WILMINGTON - DAY

Sean and Rick stroll down the avenue, each sipping coffee
from paper cups. Sean eats a scone.

SEAN
You know I have enormous respect for not
only who your grandfather was, but for
what you've done here, especially
recently.

RICK
Thanks--

SEAN
But here's the thing: You're blurring
the lines.

RICK
Which lines?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SEAN

The ones delineating objectivity. Four articles on one guy is two too many; arranging his talk show appearances--not good, and lending him money, particularly the four-figure kind, is a definite "journalistic-integrity" no-no, Rick, and I know you know this--

RICK

Who said I lent him money?

SEAN

Did you?

RICK

Yes.

SEAN

Then it doesn't matter who, the *point* is it has to stop or else the paper, the one your *grandfather used to run*, gets accused of having a major fucking agenda.

RICK

I write for op-ed--

SEAN

Doesn't matter, we still come off as liberal softies who *only* champion underdogs.

RICK

They tend to *need* championing.

SEAN

Yes, but not *unconditional love*. Let the non-profits do that. *Our* job is impartial truth-telling.

RICK

Oh c'mon--we're fucking owned by *Gannett*! We're the *poster-boy* for corporate bias!

SEAN

Is that what your granddad would say?

RICK

He died a year after they *sold* to Gannett, Sean, and *with* him went any pretense of objective fucking journalism--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SEAN
That's not true--

RICK
Of course it is and even if it *weren't* it
wouldn't matter because no one *reads*
papers anymore anyway!

Sean stops, looks at him, a weary smile.

SEAN
What do you want me to say, Rick? It's
still inappropriate.

Beat. Then Rick just turns and walks away.

EXT. PLAZA - 40-STORY GLASS-ENCASED OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Darius and Rick stand gazing up at this enormous building
that shimmers in the morning light of downtown Wilmington.

DARIUS
I've actually never been in one of these.

RICK
...They have nice couches.

And with that they head inside.

INT. CORPORATE LAW OFFICE - DAY

Rick and Darius sit on a plush leather couch opposite DONALD
SMATHERS, white, 60's, a quick-talking corporate lawyer with
the jovial air of someone who always gets what he wants.

SMATHERS
I caught your Lay Catholics speech, and
then the prosecutors thing last week
where I think you lit the place on fire.

DARIUS
Thank you--

SMATHERS
You've a got a great way with words, it's
what we're short on these days.

RICK
(to Darius)
Don's a lawyer.

SMATHERS
Otherwise known as a bullshitter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

A bullshitter in pursuit of truth.

SMATHERS

Artful bullshit--as we call it at the club. I also saw you on the show, Darius, the Sunday show--

RICK

This Week In Delaware--

SMATHERS

You were fantastic--

DARIUS

Thank you--

SMATHERS

Then I went back and read your articles, your *rants*, not rants, well yes--rants, but *good* rants, meaningful rants.

DARIUS

I just try and tell the truth.

SMATHERS

Well I think that's why we're here.

(genuine)

Did Rick *tell* you why we're here?

DARIUS

No--

SMATHERS

I asked him not to.

(pause; no more bullshit)

I want to plant a seed in your head, Darius. Did Rick tell you what I do?

DARIUS

You're a lawyer.

SMATHERS

I run the State Democratic Committee, Darius. And I want to know if you'd consider running for state senator.

Pause; Darius looks to Rick, who suppresses a smile. Smathers offers Darius a bowl.

SMATHERS (cont'd)

Nut?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS
Are you fucking with me?

SMATHERS
I'm far from fucking. Have a nut.

DARIUS
(to Rick)
Does he know who I am?

SMATHERS
Of course I do--

DARIUS
Oh, so that's part of the--

SMATHERS
Part of the what?--part of the reason I'd
want you to run?

DARIUS
Yeah--

SMATHERS
Yes, yeah, it's part of the reason--

DARIUS
Why?

SMATHERS
Because it qualifies you to speak to a
portion of this state's residents for
whom life is not a cakewalk. Your life
hasn't been a cakewalk, Darius, and yet
you never gave up. You're not--
(to Rick)
How do I say this?--

RICK
He's a gifted public speaker--

SMATHERS
You're an *inherently* gifted speaker, your
opinions happen to coincide with and
actually *elucidate* a growing trend within
the state democratic apparatus in which
we're seeking to own our own identity in
juxtaposition to the radical left and the
centrist right. Am I--do I need to say
this or am I right to assume you know it?

DARIUS
I don't think I know it--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SMATHERS

Your *instincts* are dead-on.

(lowering voice)

You call it like you see it, Darius.
It's what we need.

RICK

...Can you tell him a little about what
he'd have to do, Don?

SMATHERS

He has to think about it. If he says
yes, I start the process to get him on
the ballot, we crash course the local
issues and put him on a speaking tour
until he's someone people care about.
Wilmington West has a black republican
who we can unseat *if* we come up with
something unique. And pardon the
bluntness, but you're that something.

DARIUS

...It's a lot to throw at someone.

SMATHERS

It is. And I don't want an answer now.
But you've got something special, Darius.
It's the kinda thing that changes things.

Off Darius--

EXT. DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON PARK - DAY

Rick and Darius walk among a corporate crowd catching its 45
minutes of sun before returning to nearby office towers.

DARIUS

So you knew he was gonna say all that?

RICK

He'd outlined the idea but I wanted you
to hear it direct.

DARIUS

You don't think it sounds a little
insane? A guy with my background?

RICK

(stopping to look at him)

I can think of a lot *more* insane stuff
that's gone down in politics, this year
alone. So--no. I think Don is right: I
think you should just think about it.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DUSK

Darius, dressed nicely and carrying flowers, walks up the front path a of a rundown, 3-story red brick building. He rings a buzzer and looks around at the trash-strewn "yard," the desultory street activity, the depressing urban squalor. The exterior door opens and we see Opal, wearing nice clothes but only semi-happy to see him. He offers the flowers.

DARIUS

Hey there.

OPAL

Hey.

DARIUS

You still up for some dinner?

OPAL

(a glance around)

...OK.

EXT. COMMERCIAL STRIP - WILMINGTON - DUSK

Opal and Darius walk; he still holds the flowers...

DARIUS

It's too bad they don't have a Red
Lobster around here.

(she *maybe* smiles)

You remember that time we were kids and
ate so much food there I thought we were
gonna pass out? Deep fried shrimp, deep
fried flounder, deep fried *squid*...

OPAL

...Deep fried mushrooms--

DARIUS

Deep fried mushrooms, deep fried, like,
butter biscuits--

He's gotten a small laugh out of her--

DARIUS (cont'd)

Deep fried *Pepsi*...

They walk...

DARIUS (cont'd)

And that time I borrowed my uncle's car
and we went down to Ocean City?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS (cont'd)

We went on those rides and you threw up
on that brand new shirt I had?

(she smiles)

What the hell were you thinking, girl?

OPAL

I didn't mean to--

DARIUS

That was my brand new Ralph Lauren!--

OPAL

It's 'cause you made me eat all those
apples--

DARIUS

I *made* you eat them?!--

OPAL

I didn't want 'em--

DARIUS

I *made* you eat 'em?--*NOW* You're drunk,
Opal, now you're just talkin' drunk--

OPAL

I had like seven caramel apples, Darius--

DARIUS

I *know* you had seven caramel apples, I'm
not disagreeing on that, I'm just saying
there ain't no way you can blame *me* for
you eating 'em!--You were like--"Oooo--
caramel apples, Hmmm--my favorite"--
gobble gobble gobble--

OPAL

That's not true, D--

DARIUS

Hell yeah it's true, girl, you ate them
apples quicker than a squirrel eats nuts,
I swear to god! You were like--"HMMM--
Gimme some apples, gimme some apples!"...

They laugh and walk, the ice slightly broken...Darius points
to a restaurant.

DARIUS (cont'd)

Let's try in there.

INT. LIVING ROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick drinks a can of beer and watches a grainy tape on his old school VCR. The image on the screen is of Rick's grandfather, JAMES DAYNE, 70's, bow tie intact, giving an interview to a host on a 1970's Dick Cavatt-like show.

JAMES DAYNE

Needless to say, when Kennedy was president, and even going back to FDR, the press would turn a blind eye to their "extracurricular" activities due to the notion that there was a *higher truth* for which they were working.

KATYA (O.S.)

What is this?

Rick turns to see Katya standing in the doorway.

RICK

My grandfather on a talk show in 1977.

KATYA

He looks cute.

RICK

A month before he died.

KATYA

I hope *I* have that much hair when I go.

RICK

It's like he's predicting the death of journalistic integrity.

KATYA

Rick, you're a journalist who just freed a wrongly-accused man.

RICK

(re: the TV)

I know, but *he's* talking about a higher truth, and today's reality is that the media no longer *cares* about that. Our job is to sell papers, and the only *truth* is that pussy sells more than policy.

KATYA

Oh my god, you're like a redneck.

RICK

I'm serious--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA
Canned beer, VHS tapes, "pussy" talk.

He smiles, looks at her...

KATYA (cont'd)
I'm starting dinner.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Darius and Opal sit at a table; the place is a tad upscale.

DARIUS
It's nice here.

OPAL
It's all right.

He smiles; they eat.

DARIUS
So you still seeing that guy?

OPAL
Which guy?

DARIUS
How many are there?

OPAL
It's none of your business.

DARIUS
(a grin)
I know that ain't true.

OPAL
How?

DARIUS
Because I have contacts, I know things--

OPAL
Is that right?

DARIUS
You're damn right it's right--

OPAL
So whattayou know?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

I know you like to *tell* me you're dating but that reality is you're not, 'cause you still like *me*.

OPAL

And you *know* that?

DARIUS

Yeah, because I know *you*, Opal Owens--

OPAL

No you don't--

DARIUS

Yes I do--and I know that inside of you there's a special spot still on ice for me. Chilled and waiting.

OPAL

You got three square a day for 16 years while I was out here trying to get by. I got all kinds of shit on ice, Darius, but most of it you don't wanna see.

DARIUS

(honest)

I wanna see it all.

Off Opal, not really buying it--

INT. LIVING ROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick and Katya eat pasta in their preferred "dining area," the "paused" image of James Dayne remains frozen on the TV.

KATYA

I'm having trouble eating with the image of your grandfather staring at me.

RICK

I thought you said he was cute.

KATYA

He is, but he's making me question my journalistic integrity. Plus he looks like he wants a bite of my linguine.

Rick chews, not answering...

RICK

If you were Darius, would you run?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA

First off, I'm so far from being Darius it's an absurd question; second, if I were him I'd be too amused by the offer to make up my mind.

RICK

Why?

KATYA

Because state democrats are so desperate for someone who's not half dead that they're willing to basically *anoint* a guy who's been in jail for 16 years. I mean--

RICK

I would say he spent those years well--

KATYA

Yes, but doesn't it say something that all it takes to excite people these days is an articulate ex-con?

RICK

I agree. We want a higher truth.

KATYA

No--you want that. The rest of the world wants a good sound bite.

RICK

(pause; a small grin)
I thought that's what you liked about me.

KATYA

Your desire for a higher truth?

RICK

Yeah.

KATYA

It is, I just haven't seen it in action for awhile. So I have to get used to it again.

They regard each other; their own little form of foreplay.

EXT. DESERTED STREET - RUNDOWN NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Opal and Darius walk home from the restaurant. Darius points to a clump of tall apartment buildings (i.e. the projects).

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

It's looking like they might find me an apartment in there by next week.

She looks but doesn't answer; they walk...

OPAL

Same reason you like having *me* around.

DARIUS

What is?

OPAL

You wanna keep it real.

DARIUS

Keep *what* real?

OPAL

Your image; in case you decide to do the politics. That way you have your true black girl by your side.

DARIUS

What?--Why would I want--

OPAL

So that everybody thinks Darius McBain didn't turn into an Uncle Tom.

DARIUS

That doesn't make any sense--

OPAL

Of course it does--you think that if you end up running for office it's gonna be more "authentic" to be living in the projects and dating a black woman.

DARIUS

According to who?--

OPAL

According to what you think they think--

DARIUS

What *I* think they think is that it's a lot easier to vote for a black man who's with a *white* woman than for a black man who's with a *black* woman.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OPAL

Well I don't think that's true anymore
and I don't think that's what you think--

DARIUS

Well it *is*.

(pause)

Besides, we're already *married*, Opal, so
I ain't got no *choice* but to be with you.

He tries to tickle her, she sort of lets him. Beat.

OPAL

Well then maybe it's something else.

DARIUS

Maybe *what* is?

OPAL

The reason you wanna be with me.

DARIUS

...Like what?

OPAL

I dunno.

DARIUS

Yeah you do, you said that for a reason.
(she's not looking at him)
Opal. Tell me what you're talking about.

OPAL

I'm just saying it could be another
reason why you want me by your side.

DARIUS

Having to do with what?

OPAL

With other stuff.

DARIUS

Like what?

OPAL

Like stuff you think I might know that
you don't want me to talk about.

DARIUS

...Like what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OPAL

Like stuff I don't feel like talking
about right now. Even though we're
standing right here.

She avoids his gaze, looking at the empty street before them.

DARIUS

...If you're talking about what I *think*
you're talking about, then we should talk
about it.

OPAL

We are.

He looks where she's looking; silence...and then:

DARIUS

The reason I want you back is because you
make me remember what my life was like
the last time I *had* a life. You make me
start breathing again.

(pause; gentle)

Opal?

OPAL

Yeah?

DARIUS

Are you listening?

Pause; she looks at him.....

OPAL

Yeah.

INT. BEDROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Katya in pajamas as Rick gets undressed, looking at her with
that special look.

KATYA

I have to get up at six.

RICK

Why?

KATYA

To seek a higher truth.

(he looks at her)

Pilates.

SOUND OF DOORBELL. Rick glances at the clock: "11:20 P.M."

INT. FRONT HALL - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - SAME

Rick opens the door to Darius.

DARIUS

Hey.

RICK

Hey.

DARIUS

Can I come in?

INT. LIVING ROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - SAME

Darius sits on a couch; Rick stands.

DARIUS

So I'm leaning towards doing it. I know it's a long shot, but I can't get the idea out of my head.

RICK

I think you'd do a great job.

DARIUS

But I'd want you to run my campaign.

(pause)

You're the reason I'm free. And I can't do it alone.

Rick doesn't react at first...and then a slow grin.

RICK

I already have a job.

DARIUS

Quit.

(no reaction)

C'mon, Rick, it wouldn't be the first time a journalist switched sides.

RICK

It's nice of you to ask--

DARIUS

You don't even *like* your job.

RICK

(a smile)

I'll give it some thought.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

Will you?

RICK

Yeah.

Darius nods....then stands.

DARIUS

But there's something we should talk about. A big thing. And you're about the only person I can talk to about it.

RICK

...All right.

DARIUS

I was there the night Patrick Cragen got shot.

RICK

...What do you mean you were there?

DARIUS

I was present.

RICK

At the murder?

DARIUS

Yeah. I wasn't a block away. I was with Ronny. Standing next to him.

RICK

Wait a minute--you were *there*?

DARIUS

None of us had any idea it was gonna happen. It was a misunderstanding, and Ronny pulled his gun and shot the kid.

RICK

...Wait, so how did you get the gun?

DARIUS

Ronny handed it to me and told me to throw it in a dumpster.

RICK

And when the cops picked you up?--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS

Same as I told you. They had me pegged for it the whole time and I didn't have the guts to give 'em Ronny's name.

RICK

What about at the trial--?

DARIUS

That's when I said I was a block away.

RICK

Why didn't you just say the truth?

DARIUS

Because the way they explained accomplice liability to me was that if you're there partaking in a crime you're still guilty.

RICK

But was it a crime or just a fight between Ronny and Cragen?

DARIUS

I don't know *what* the fuck it was. Who was ripping off who, or if there was old shit between them or if Ronny just lost his cool. And I haven't talked to him since that night so I *still* don't know.

RICK

...Jesus, Darius.

DARIUS

I know--

RICK

I mean, what the fuck?

DARIUS

(pause)

If I had told you, you wouldn't have written the articles.

RICK

Well you're fucking right!

DARIUS

(quiet)

I didn't shoot anybody. I happened to be standing next to a man when he shot another man, and when the police hit me for the crime I didn't rat out Ronny.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DARIUS (cont'd)

That's all it all is. 17 years old and I'm trying to find my way through shit I have no idea where it leads.

Rick just looks at him...then turns away. Beat.

DARIUS (cont'd)

I put in 16 years for a murder I didn't commit. I think I'm paid up.

RICK

...So what am I supposed to say?

DARIUS

I don't know.

RICK

And you're still thinking about running?

DARIUS

Yeah.

RICK

That's insane.

DARIUS

Why?

RICK

Because you were part of a *murder*.

DARIUS

(honest)

I did the time, Rick. And the system did its job. I'm a better human being.

Rick just looks at him, a mix of incredulity, shock and maybe even awe at Darius's ability to not only make this argument, but to make it sound good.

DARIUS (cont'd)

So will you let me know what you're thinking? Because like I said, I can't do it alone.

RICK

(a smile at the audacity)

...Sure.

EXT. WILMINGTON STREET - DAY

MUSIC FADES IN as Rick ambles along a busy avenue, deep in thought, a slightly world-wary smile on his face.

INT. NEWS ROOM - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick walks through the newsroom, taking in the activity all around him. His colleague Matt Barnes approaches--

MATT BARNES

You see the thing about the boy scout scandal in Dagsboro?

RICK

Missed it.

MATT BARNES

13-year-olds posing on-line with only scout cookies taped over their genitals.

Off Rick, expressionless--

INT. LOBBY - LINCOLN HOUSES - DAY

Darius and three BLACK TEENAGERS attempt to jam a large sofa into a small, rickety-looking elevator in this dimly-lighted lobby. Darius's age and maturity are juxtaposed to these kids' doo-rags and oversized football jerseys, and yet he relates to them as if he were their peer, giving instructions and bursting into laughter when they all almost drop it.

INT. PRESS GALLERY - STATE SENATE - DOVER - DAY

Rick sits in the near-empty press gallery of the state senate chamber, his feet resting on the seat in front of him as he observes the senate in session. His POV on this group of predominantly old, white, male STATE SENATORS droning on--

STATE SENATOR

(monotone)

--the need to reform these state campaign finance laws is dire, urgent and most of all a necessity if we are to call ourselves a democratic democracy.

C.U. on Rick, his mind working hard behind tired eyes.

INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - LINCOLN HOUSES - DAY

Darius and the teenagers stuff the couch through the front door and put it down. Darius takes in his new pad--cinder block walls, cheap carpet, a view on the next tower over and the shitty courtyard in between. One of the kids looks out--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEENAGER #1
 (to Teenager #2)
 Yo nigger, he got the top floor, he can
 see the river!

TEENAGER #2
 You can't see shit from down on 3.

DARIUS
 (re: #1's Vick jersey)
 Hey 7, what's your name again?

TEENAGER #1
 Andre.

DARIUS
 Andre, do me a favor and call your
 brother a brother instead of a nigger.

TEENAGER #1
 But my brother *is* a nigger.

DARIUS
 Well in here let's make him a brother.

EXT. DEN - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick and Katya sit at twin desks; she types away furiously,
 while Rick stares at his screen, completely uninspired.

KATYA
 How's it coming?

RICK
 (standing)
 I think I'm gonna get some air.

EXT. COURTYARD - LINCOLN HOUSES - NIGHT

MUSIC FADES--as Darius stands out front of the projects with
 his posse of YOUNG BLACK MEN, shooting the shit and laughing.
 His manner is easy and fun as he acts out a story for them--

DARIUS
 --and so this neo-Nazi-lookin'
 motherfucker comes up to me in the prison
 yard and says, "I hear you're the man to
 talk to about self-education." And I go,
 "Well what is it you wanna learn?" And
 he says "I wanna get a sex-change"--I kid
 you not, and so I ask why and he's goes
 "Cause I hear the Parole Board likes it"!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laughter as Darius suddenly sees Rick, who's been listening.

DARIUS (cont'd)
Oh shit, it's Mr. Rick Dayne.

RICK
How're you doing, Darius?

DARIUS
Getting to know my new neighbors. You all, this is the man who helped get me released.

The guys greet Rick with the proper respect, a friend of their new friend, handshakes, nods....

DARIUS (cont'd)
So what brings you around?

RICK
I've been thinking about what you said.

Off Darius, knowing what this means, breaking into a smile...

--as MUSIC KICKS UP and we see the following SERIES OF SHOTS:

A sparsely attended press conference; Darius at a podium announcing his candidacy as two lonely photographers capture the moment. Rick stands nearby, arms crossed, taking it in.

Darius outside a Wilmington shopping mall looking for people to shake hands with. There aren't many. Rick watches.

Darius, in a public park, holding a tray-full of coffee to-go cups, approaching a homeless encampment with a broad smile.

Rick and Darius in Rick's Buick, both staring bleakly straight ahead as Rick drives.

Darius energetically engaging with a group of soccer moms in a church basement. Behind him a chalkboard reads "SAFER URBAN STREETS." The moms are *loving* him. Rick stands at the back, loving the moms who love him.

Darius on the steps of a welfare center handing out flyers to single, mostly-black moms coming in for their checks. Some accept it with a smile, others really couldn't give a fart.

Darius and Rick outside a factory as its workers exit. Darius's hand is out but there are few takers.

Darius speaking casually with a small, mixed race crowd outside a busy lunch spot in downtown Wilmington.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Darius at the homeless encampment, night, sitting with the homeless, next to a sign that reads SAFER SHELTERS NOW!!

DNC lawyer Don Smathers watching Darius speak at a podium beneath a banner reading *EVANGELICAL DELAWARIANS FOR PEACE*.

Rick and Darius jogging along a busy Wilmington boulevard, both wearing *MCBAIN FOR STATE SENATE* shirts. Cars honk their support until a BLACK MAN leans out a window and shouts:

YOUNG BLACK MAN
YO' DARIUS, YOU'RE A WHITE GAY HONKEY!!

But Darius doesn't miss a beat--

DARIUS
I'll see you on election day, my brother!

MUSIC FADES as we transition into--

INT. REC CENTER - DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON - DAY

Darius and Rick mid-tour with the center's MANAGER, examining computers where black and Latino youths work the keyboards. A two-man DIGITAL CAMERA CREW records Darius "in action."

REC CENTER MANAGER
Over here is Computer Row, where the kids can work on their homework, play games, do email or what have you--

DARIUS
Only three computers?

REC CENTER MANAGER
Well as you know, they're expensive.

DARIUS
I know, but you should do what they do down in Houston.

REC CENTER MANAGER
What do they do down--?

DARIUS
They got a system to collect people's *old* computers and send 'em straight over to the state pen, where the *inmates* have been trained to refurbish and upgrade;

C.U. on Darius, grainy and blurred, through the viewfinder--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS (cont'd)

Then they send 'em *back* to the center
where suddenly all these fatherless boys
have free *email* with their long-lost
dads, half of whom are the motherfuckers
who just *fixed* the goddam things!

The kids look up from their screens with broad grins, as Rick looks at the cameras, grimacing, and the speechless center manager tries to nod agreeably.

INT. RICK'S BUICK - DAY

Rick drives, Darius in the passenger seat. After a moment:

RICK

So we should have a talk about the notion
of comportment.

DARIUS

(staring at him blankly)
"Comportment"?

RICK

Yeah.

DARIUS

As in, "Don't act too black"?

RICK

That's not what I said.

DARIUS

No?

RICK

(he drives)
It's a matter of acting...*senatorial*.
(no answer)
Especially when we're trying to put
together ad footage.

DARIUS

All I said was two bad words.

RICK

It's not just the language, it's the
overall presentation. Believe me, no
one's asking you to act white, it's just
a matter of what people expect from their
politicians.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS
What they expect *is* white.

RICK
No, what they expect is *composure*.

Darius smiles a little to himself, looking out the window.

RICK (cont'd)
...All that to say that CNN called today.
(Darius now looks at him)
It's not a full story but they do wanna
do what they call a "45-second feature."

DARIUS
45 seconds about--?

RICK
You being the first-ever politically-
viable ex-death row candidate.

Darius grins, and Rick allows himself one as well. Beat:

DARIUS
You wanna go meet my mom?

INT. MCDONALD NURSING HOME - DAY

Darius and Rick walk down the florescent-lit corridor of an elderly care facility where all the patients *and* staff are black; which makes Rick stick out like a Q-tip. This is not a luxury residence, but it's got its share of warmth.

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - NURSING HOME - DAY

Rick stands, Darius sits at the bedside of JUDY MCBAIN, 70's. Diabetes has debilitated her body, but not her sweetness.

JUDY
When Darius was two he used to tell me he
was gonna grow up and run a company that
sold tractors to African farmers.

RICK
When he was *two*?

JUDY
Still wearing diapers.

DARIUS
That's not true, Ma'.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUDY
Of course it is!

DARIUS
(to Rick)
She says she's not senile but you can see
it coming.

JUDY
Don't talk like that about your mother.

DARIUS
(still to Rick)
See?--Now she's liable to beat me.

They laugh as Darius gives her a kiss.

RICK
It's been quite a year for Darius.

JUDY
Yes it has.

RICK
You must be proud.

JUDY
He was on Channel 3 last week and I made
everyone crowd in here to watch.

DARIUS
I didn't like that piece.

JUDY
It was fine but your hair was fussed up.

DARIUS
"Fussed"?--what are we in 1952?

JUDY
I just wish your father could see.

DARIUS
...Me too.

RICK
(pause)
Is there any advice you have for Darius?

Judy's smile recedes as she regards her son intently...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JUDY

I would say to him...be yourself and speak the truth. People out there *want* the truth, and they want someone strong enough to say it.

(very soft, straight to him)

So that's what you should do, my son.
Just speak the truth.

Off Darius, deeply moved.

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Darius McBain may not have the most conventional political resume--

CUT TO QUICK-CUT TV FOOTAGE: Darius shaking hands with an adoring black family on a stoop in a poor part of Wilmington--

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (cont'd)

--but he *does* have innate political appeal.

ANGLE on Darius kissing a lily-white baby--

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (cont'd)

Charismatic, charming, versed in the issues and easy on the eye--

Darius gets out of Rick's car with a smile for the camera--

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (cont'd)

He's that rare breed of public figure who seems to connect with everyone he meets.

Darius speaks earnestly to a group of farmers--

CNN ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (cont'd)

And while a state senator from Delaware may not rule the world, if McBain can win next month's primary, it *could* be the first step on a very exciting journey.

CAMERA ZOOMS on Darius, alone on an urban street, staring into the distance--

CNN ANNOUNCER (cont'd)

For CNN news, this is Josh Krasnow.

INT. MCBAIN CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Darius and Rick in their small, storefront headquarters: a couple *McBAIN FOR STATE SENATE* posters and a lonely-looking VOLUNTEER working a laptop at a desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Darius sits with his legs on a desk, trying to stay awake as he peruses last year's state budget. Rick practically shouts into his cell.

RICK

I don't think you understand, in the last week people have started *pushing* each other out of the way to shake his hand. He's a rock star here.

(cupping the phone, to Darius)

Newsweek.

(back into the phone)

I had five people tell me *today* they're gonna vote for the first time in years because of Darius--which is *why* you should do this story.

(with a wink to Darius)

He makes people wanna get involved.

The street door opens and Opal enters. Rick gives a wave as Darius looks up and smiles.

DARIUS

Hey, sweetness.

OPAL

(taking it all in)

Hey.

Darius gives her a kiss, although she remains uncomfortable. Darius, knowing this, signals to Rick that they're gonna go for coffee. Rick motions back for a black with two sugars.

Rick's POV as they leave: Darius putting his arm around her and making her laugh. Rick watches while still on the phone.

EXT. AVENUE - WILMINGTON - NIGHT

Darius and Opal hold hands as they walk toward an all-night deli. Darius is simple and gentle with her.

DARIUS

How're you doing?

OPAL

I'm good.

DARIUS

You get all those chores done?

OPAL

Yep.

They walk in silence.....

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OPAL (cont'd)
 You know, most people who get outta jail
 try to buy a car, not run for office.

DARIUS
 (he looks at her)
 What're you saying?

OPAL
 I'm saying buy a fucking car, D. Why
 can't you just be happy with that?

DARIUS
 Why're you bringing this up?

OPAL
 Because I wish you weren't running.

He stops...

DARIUS
 Why?

OPAL
 'Cause that's what I wish.

DARIUS
 I know, but *why*?

OPAL
 'Cause if I'm gonna be with you, I don't
 wanna be in that whole world.

DARIUS
Which whole world.

OPAL
 The whole world of whatever that world
 is. I don't wanna be in it and I don't
 want you to try and *make* me. And if you
 love me, you'd respect that.

DARIUS
 This makes no sense--

OPAL
 It doesn't have to.

DARIUS
 Listen to me. Opal: I got no desire to
 drag you somewhere you don't wanna be, or
 make you into something you're not--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OPAL

Good--

DARIUS

But this is important to me.

OPAL

Why?

DARIUS

Because I'm good at it. And I like it.
And it can change things.

OPAL

No it can't.

DARIUS

Oh c'mon, you don't think I'm talking
about stuff that matters?

OPAL

I think you can talk 'til you're blue but
it ain't gonna *change* things.

DARIUS

Well that doesn't mean you can't love me.
(looking at her)
It doesn't mean we can't have a family--

OPAL

Oh please--

DARIUS

I'm serious, as soon as you let me take
you home I want us to start trying to
make a family.

(no answer)

I know you *want* kids.

OPAL

How?

DARIUS

'Cause my sources told me--

OPAL

Bullshit--

DARIUS

And *you* told me--

OPAL

When?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DARIUS

When we were 17, you said you wanted to
move outta the towers, have 10 kids and
live like the Queen of Sheba of Delaware.

She takes this in, maybe with a reluctant smile. He places
his hands on her cheeks and speaks softly.

DARIUS (cont'd)

I'm gonna take care of you. It doesn't
matter if I'm a plumber or a president.
'Cause I adore you. *That's* my job: I
adore Opal.

She returns his look, as if trying to decipher. Pause.

DARIUS (cont'd)

And you don't have to adore me back right
now. ...But maybe I can get a kiss?

Beat; she looks at him.....and finally, they kiss....

INT. BEDROOM - RICK AND KATYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A TV commercial drones as Rick and Katya kiss in bed. But
after a moment Rick pulls back, distracted.

RICK

The thing is, regardless of what happens,
I don't wanna go back to the paper.

KATYA

Great, be a house-husband.

RICK

We're not married.

KATYA

Fine--then just have dinner ready.

He nods and she begins kissing again...and then:

RICK

Does this mean you like me again?

KATYA

(still kissing)
I never stopped liking you, I just wanted
you to....

RICK

Get my mojo working again?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA

(she looks at him, a smile)
Yeah, something like that.

RICK

Gotcha.

They continue kissing, increasingly passionate.....until
after several moments, the local news begins--

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Good evening and welcome to Channel 3
News at 11. In an exclusive report being
prepared for tomorrow, Channel 3 has
learned that the IRS is investigating,
quote, "severe inconsistencies" in the
tax filings of democratic frontrunner for
U.S. Senate, Jon Lapham.

Katya and Rick have stopped and are looking up to see file
footage of a 40-something white man at a book signing--

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (cont'd)

Lapham, who is expected to win next
month's primary and challenge Republican
incumbent Gerry Phillips for his seat in
Washington, declined to comment tonight.

RICK

Where the hell did *that* come from?

KATYA

He's screwed.

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Analyst Joe Rickshaw told Channel 3 that
if Lapham *is* forced to give up his senate
quest this late in the campaign,
democrats would effectively be forced to
concede.

TV SHOT on JOE RICKSHAW, professorial--

JOE RICKSHAW

The other contenders are a cosmetics
industry millionaire and a state
treasurer with a shady past. The DNC's
only hope to unseat Phillips would be to
hand-pick a radical alternative and pray.

Katya is looking at Rick with a wry smile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATYA

Talk about getting your mojo...

But Rick doesn't answer...his mind too busy working overtime.

INT. PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - THE WILMINGTON HILTON - DAY

Rick, Darius, Don Smathers and four WHITE MEN IN SUITS sit on big couches and chairs around a large coffee table full of orange juice, danish and meaty sides of bacon. More than a meeting, this is a *gathering of force*. FRED TOWERS, 50's, white, congenial but fierce, speaks to Darius.

FRED TOWERS

Let me put it this way: The Democratic National Committee doesn't fuck around. We wouldn't be here if we didn't think you had a shot. And I'm not just talking about the primary.

WHITE MAN IN SUIT

The primary is a shoe-in--

FRED TOWERS

Primary's a no-brainer--

WHITE MAN IN SUIT

You'll win the fucking primary--

FRED TOWERS

In-state polling suggests that with you as the nominee we might cajole Phillips into a false complacency and then blindside the shit out of him.

Darius looks at them, amused.

FRED TOWERS (cont'd)

This must sound strange.
(no argument)
Gerry Phillips is beatable.

DARIUS

No he's not.

FRED TOWERS

And *that's* the reason he is, because everyone thinks he's not.

DARIUS

I think you all just want more black voters on the rolls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The men laugh uncomfortably. Fred turns to Smathers.

FRED TOWERS

Is this what you meant by not to be messed with?

(Smathers smiles; Fred zeroes in on Darius)

You can think that if you want and maybe it's half-true, but it doesn't negate the fact that politics in America is changing faster than any of us here can keep up with. Guys like you are the future, Darius: Smart, no-bullshit, embodying a new American feel. You are that, and it goes way beyond color.

DARIUS

You think?

FRED TOWERS

I do.

DARIUS

As opposed to a good P.R. push for a seat you're gonna lose anyway?

(Fred meets his stare)

A little DNC reverse minstrel show? The "eloquent" black man reciting party line to a whole new block of voters--but maybe without all that "black vernacular"?

FRED TOWERS

Untrue, my friend--

DARIUS

(a grin)

A telegenic nigger with a vocab?

Fred regards him, actually loving Darius's nerve.

FRED TOWERS

It's provocative but false.

DARIUS

OK. So then I get to say what I want, the way I wanna say it?

FRED TOWERS

(pause; a grin)

We'll send the occasional memo but you're not obliged to read it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

They watch each other carefully, both with small smiles.
Darius turns to Rick for his opinion.

DARIUS

You're my witness on that?

RICK

I think what actually matters is that
they secure funding.

FRED TOWERS

We have 5 million already slated, plus
we'll put him on the soybean circuit.

(to Darius)

Ever been to an agribusiness cocktail
party? Biofuel-in-a-blanket, shots of
ethanol...

(to Rick)

This state's got soybean coming out the
ass. All he has to do is shake a couple
lobbyists' hands and the cash flows.

DARIUS

With what strings attached?

FRED TOWERS

None. Ford and GM just wanna be able to
say they're pro-environment. And you get
green; in both senses of the word.

The men await Rick's opinion. He finally turns to Darius:

RICK

If you have the machine behind you, then
I'd say forget about race, forget about
political B.S., and just ask yourself:
Do I have a message people need to hear?
Because Fred's right, you can take the
primary fairly easily, meaning you *will*
be heard. The question is: Do you have
something to *say*?

All the white men look at Darius--

As MUSIC BEGINS--

Darius looks *back* at all the white men--

As MUSIC KICKS IN LOUD--

Rick *watches* Darius looking at the white men...and smiles:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Now entering the game, democratic senate
primary winner and future U.S. Senator--

C.U. on Darius's eyes:

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (cont'd)
DAAARRIIUSS MC--BAAAIINNNN!!!!

SOUND OF CROWD CHEERING WILDLY--

CARD: "6 MONTHS LATER"

INT. BASKETBALL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Darius, in shorts and a tank top reading, "New Castle Cerebral Palsy Fund"--checks into a charity basketball game in a packed high school gym. The crowd is ecstatic and Darius works it--smiling, waving, finger-pointing.

INT. BASKETBALL GYMNASIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Darius is all game now--racing down the court, passing left, cutting right, getting it back, checking his three-point status and firing from afar. He sinks it--

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
MCBAAAIINN FOR THREE!!!

But Darius isn't done, hustling back on defense and forcing the other team into a turnover--the CROWD GOING NUTS.

CAMERA FINDS various crowd members in the stands:

A young mother holding her baby above her head, the baby's oversized t-shirt with a picture of a grinning Darius.

Rick on the sidelines doing a stand-up interview with a camera crew.

Two smiling lesbians with a sign: **MARRY US, DARIUS!**

Katya with Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon--stoic in the first row.

Opal and a friend drinking soda and laughing.

White college kids with beer chanting: *DARE-E-US! DARE-E-US!*

RETURN TO Darius sinking another three-pointer--

--the crowd erupts, forcing Rick to shout into the mike:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

As you can see, people respond to Darius,
and it's an across-the-board demographic!

Darius backpedals downcourt, blowing a kiss to the baby--

As the interviewer presses Rick:

INTERVIEWER

But what about *you*? Not so long ago you
were a respected journalist from a
prestigious newspaper family, and yet
you've put all that on the line for the
sake of a long-shot candidate.

RICK

First off, Darius has a *real* shot of
beating Gerry Phillips, and secondly, you
should quit *your* job.

--as Darius dribbles downcourt--

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Why is that?

RICK (O.S.)

Because the aim of so-called journalism
these days is hit-and-run, no-attention-
span *schlock*; it's insulting.

HAND-HELD CLOSE-UP on Rick, right into the camera:

RICK (cont'd)

So when someone like McBain comes along,
who *unfailingly* speaks truth to power and
provides answers, we should *all* quit our
jobs and get on the goddam train.

As Darius drives past two defenders and lays it in.

INT. DARIUS'S APARTMENT - LINCOLN HOUSES - NIGHT

Darius's oasis in the projects: It's still the "towers" but
it *is* the top floor, with views of downtown Wilmington
sparkling in the crisp night air, and he's furnished the
place with upscale, funky furniture and bachelor pad
accoutrements, including barbells, framed prints and a flat
screen TV. Darius, in a post-game sweatsuit, sips Gatorade
and has fun with Rick and three CAMPAIGN AIDES, (22, 35, 50;
white, black, white), mid-mock-debate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAMPAIGN AIDE #3

Mr. McBain, do you have plans for the protection of Delaware's coastline?

DARIUS

Well, Jimminy--

RICK

His name's not Jimminy--

DARIUS

I'm fucking with him--

RICK

Well don't--

DARIUS

Well, *Jimmy*, as you know, we have 24.5 miles of coastline in this state, and I love every inch of it--

RICK

No you don't--

DARIUS

You're right, I hate the fucking beach--

RICK

Can we just be serious?--

DARIUS

(game-face)

If elected, I'll immediately request congressional funding for The U of D's Coastal Ocean Program in support of their research on *Pfiesteria Piscicida*--

CAMPAIGN AIDE #2

Which is what?

DARIUS

Pfiesteria Piscicida is a toxic dinoflagellate--

RICK

Which is what?

DARIUS

Fuck if I know--

The staff guys crack up--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICK

So we need to get on that--

DARIUS

The point is it's associated with fish lesions and deaths in coastal waters from here down to North Carolina--

RICK

So why is it important?

DARIUS

(honest)

It's important because nobody, starting with me, wants to be eating some halibut and suddenly bite into a big, brown, puss-emitting Pfiesteria lesion. It's an issue that matters.

Rick nods approvingly. An aide turns to Rick--

CAMPAIGN AIDE #1

He's not gonna wear those sweats in public, is he?

CAMPAIGN AIDE #3

Mr. McBain, the question of your inexperience has repeatedly come up, can you address that?

DARIUS

Ted Kennedy was 30 when he was elected to the Senate, Henry Clay was 29.

RICK

Is there a finish to that?

DARIUS

Yeah--and Ted Kennedy's a drunk.

The others laugh but Rick's not in the mood--

RICK

You have to be able to *close* the topic.

DARIUS

I'm forty points behind this dude, I don't need to close shit. And gimme a break, I just hit 7 3-pointers.

CAMPAIGN AIDE #2

That was awesome.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DARIUS
16 years worth of prison yard jump shots.

CAMPAIGN AIDE #1
Did you guys see Susan Sarandon's tits?

CAMPAIGN AIDE #2
Fucking humongous.

SOUND OF BUZZER. Darius goes to the wall-intercom.

DARIUS
Hello?

OPAL (O.S.)
It's me.

DARIUS
Hey baby, come on up.

He buzzes her in, then turns to Rick:

DARIUS (cont'd)
Can we talk for a sec'?

Rick and Darius head to the kitchen area. Darius turns, lowering his voice.

DARIUS (cont'd)
I wanted to let you know that I asked
Opal to reconfirm our marriage vows.

RICK
...You serious?

DARIUS
Yeah.

RICK
What'd she say?

DARIUS
She said yeah.

RICK
(genuine)
Congratulations.

DARIUS
Thank you--

RICK
That's great--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DARIUS
Yeah, I'm happy.

RICK
I mean, the DNC guys might throw a fit.

DARIUS
You think?

RICK
Only 'cause she can be a little rough
around the edges; but fuck it, you love
her.

DARIUS
I do. She just needed a little
persuading to love me back.
(pause)
The thing is, she's convinced we're gonna
lose.

RICK
Why?

DARIUS
Because we *are*, I mean let's be real--

RICK
Then why the hell are we here?--

DARIUS
Fine, we'll "win," but *she* thinks we
we're gonna lose and I'm asking you not
to disillusion her of that.

RICK
Why?

DARIUS
'Cause it makes her uncomfortable. She
doesn't want all that, so just help me
out and don't talk about us "moving to
D.C." or whatever.

RICK
...Fine.

A KNOCK on the door.

DARIUS
Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Darius opens the door to Opal. They kiss, and Opal enters. She looks good, dressed well and much more at ease than we've seen her, placing down her purse and nodding to the staff guys, who are talking about the Wilmington nightlife.

OPAL

Hey, guys.

GUYS

Hey, Opal.

RICK

How're you doin', Opal?

OPAL

I'm good.

DARIUS

Show him your nails.

(to Rick)

She got her nails done today.

OPAL

("no big deal")

I get my nails done a lot.

DARIUS

Yeah, but not at that other place.

(to Rick)

I got her a pedicure/manicure gift package at this place uptown.

RICK

(nodding)

So I hear you two are gonna "rededicate your love."

OPAL

(a small smile)

Yeah.

RICK

Congratulations.

OPAL

Thank you.

DARIUS

We're goin' all out this time. No more prison room party, I'm gonna rent one of them spinning rooftop restaurants, shrimp on ice, champagne in glass slippers--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

OPAL
I don't like shrimp--

DARIUS
There ain't gonna be no shrimp for miles
around that spinning restaurant, Rick!--

RICK
Gotcha--

DARIUS
NO SHRIMP AT MY WEDDING PARTY!

RICK
Fuck the shrimp!

DARIUS
Fuck the shrimp!--
(to Rick--)
What, now you like to fuck shrimp?

RICK
No--

DARIUS
(his arm around Opal)
And then we're gonna get a little place
in the midwest, settle down, open a
hardware store--
(she's looking at him)
...or maybe a sandwich shop.

OPAL
(with a smile)
You believe this shit, Rick?

RICK
No.

OPAL
Why?--you think he's gonna win?

RICK
(a quick glance at Darius...)
I *wish* he were gonna, but...

OPAL
But I don't see Darius making corned beef
sandwiches out in Kansas, neither.

RICK
No, I don't see that either.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

The three of them share a laugh, even if Darius's is a touch too loud... He gives Opal a kiss.

DARIUS

All I know is I got my sweetheart back.

Off Rick, studying Opal's reaction...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick sits with his former colleagues, Sean, Matt Barnes and other editorial and op-ed writers. He's on a soapbox--

RICK

You have a chance to endorse not only the right man for this *state*, but the kind of candidate who's gonna change the way we do politics in this *country*.

SEAN

But give examples of what he *stands* for.

RICK

You want examples?--Look at who's endorsed him in the last three days: Pat Buchanan, Edgar Bronfman and Sean fucking Penn! A fascist, a liberal Jew and a movie star--three people who wouldn't be able to agree on a *breakfast cereal*!

MATT BARNES

Meaning--?

RICK

Meaning what he "stands for" is total ideological *independence*.

The staff is loving Rick's newfound passion.

SEAN

You're jacked up, Rick--

RICK

I'm totally jacked--

MATT BARNES

For the first time since Eugene McCarthy.

RICK

You wanna know why Darius is 20 times better than McCarthy?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK (cont'd)

It's 'cause he's not nostalgic for "liberalism." Every issue for him is free of baggage or taboo, which is what voters *thirst* for: Someone with an *untainted* belief system.

SEAN

(deadpan)

So you like the guy?

RICK

I like the guy.

SEAN

And what if he loses?

RICK

I'll come back here and write for sports.

INT. CHICKEN PROCESSING PLANT - SOUTHERN DELAWARE - DAY

Several camera crews follow Darius as he, Rick and 6 or 7 staff members are given a tour of a large industrial plant; a dozen or so mostly-Latino workers follow behind. The PLANT DIRECTOR is loving his moment in the sun.

PLANT DIRECTOR

We can now run 105 birds a minute on these two evisceration lines. That's up from 70 a minute 25 years ago.

CAMERA CREW ANGLE on Darius trying to smile as he watches a worker use a gun to pump plastic thermometers into vacuum-packed whole birds.

PLANT DIRECTOR (cont'd)

Unlike most companies, our wages start at 9.70 an hour, going up to 10.20 for a line leader. We do 401 K's and offer 10-dollar doctor visits to all employees.

Darius shakes hands with the thermometer guy, then turns to get a pump of HAND LOTION from an aide. He then sees a group of 8 men wearing chain-mail aprons and wielding large knives on a batch of roasting chickens. The director explains:

PLANT DIRECTOR (cont'd)

Over here they're removing breasts.

As Darius watches, Rick leans and whispers in his ear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

We have a situation outside.

(Darius looks at him)

Gerry Phillips just showed up.

EXT. CHICKEN PROCESSING PLANT - DAY

Darius and his entourage exit the plant, where GERRY PHILLIPS, the republican incumbent--white, 60's, old-school "sophistication"--is speaking to gathered reporters.

GERRY PHILLIPS

This isn't the first time Russia has threatened to stop importing Delaware poultry; it happened in '96 and I'll say the same thing I said then: We will not be intimidated or threatened into making concessions we don't want to make.

(waving off questions)

Granted they're our country's largest foreign poultry market, but pride is pride, especially *poultry* pride.

(seeing Darius)

I see I'm not alone today.

The media is loving this mini-confrontation, and we watch through their handheld cameras as Darius approaches.

GERRY PHILLIPS (cont'd)

Nice to formally meet you, Mr. McBain.

DARIUS

Call me Darius.

GERRY PHILLIPS

You bet.

They shake, smiling for the cameras.

REPORTER

Mr. McBain, do you have any response to the Russian threat?

In a rare moment of what-the-fuck vulnerability, Darius glances at Rick. He's in way over his head and he knows it. He takes a moment....then eyeballs the CAMERAS:

DARIUS

Sussex County is the top broiler-producing county in the nation, so I don't need to state that poultry around here is *powerful*. And as I've just seen, Delaware producers do a darn good job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE on the LATINO WORKERS, listening intently--

DARIUS (cont'd)
 But the fact is, Russia is right to
 demand that we reassess our techniques.
 Because we *can* do better.

ANGLE on Rick suppressing a smile--

DARIUS (cont'd)
 We can rotate shifts so workers avoid
 muscle strain, reduce workplace accidents
 and compost more farm waste to make our
 fertilizer *organic*.
 (flashing the charm)
 Because personally, I don't want a little
 Russian kid eating a chicken wing that *I*
 wouldn't delight in eating myself.

Pause--and then the Latino workers break into LOUD APPLAUSE.

DARIUS (cont'd)
 Nice to meet you, Gerry; I was just
 heading out, but my debate offer stands.
 Hope to see you there.

Darius smiles and heads for the parking lot as Rick watches,
 wondering if that was real... He catches up to Darius and
 they talk in hushed voices. Darius sheds his cockiness.

DARIUS (cont'd)
 Was that too much?

RICK
 Maybe.

DARIUS
 Is he gonna debate me?

RICK
 He might *have* to after that.

Darius stops and turns to Rick, honest.

DARIUS
 I'm in a little over my head.

RICK
 I know. But you're good. You're built
 for this. So just keep being honest.

They watch each other...as MUSIC FADES UP--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SERIES OF SHOTS:

--Darius at a crowded, ritzy cocktail party, smiling broadly as he jokes with a group of Jack Daniel-swilling lobbyists.

--CAMPAIGN COMMERCIAL MUSIC, with shots of Darius sinking a 3-pointer; mid-riff at the chicken plant; swaying with the choir at a Baptist church; speaking to high school kids.

--In a yarmulke, speaking to a crowded synagogue:

DARIUS

--and of course, *Tikkun Olam*, the 16th century term that reflects the divine values of tzedek, hesed and *shalom*--

--Opal watching Darius charm the hell out of a women's rally:

DARIUS (cont'd)

The choice is *yours* and it'll be my job to *protect* that choice!

--Darius nodding, listening intently to the Jack Daniels-swilling lobbyists, one of who turns to Rick, hushed:

LOBBYIST

We can work with this guy.

--Rick and Darius jogging, their banner-draped campaign minivan following behind, as passersby's honk their support.

--TV COMMERCIAL showing Darius speaking to a crowd:

GRAVE VOICE (O.S.)

McBain says he'll be tough on crime.

FLASH on Darius's teenage mug shot--EERIE MUSIC:

GRAVE VOICE (O.S.) (cont'd)

Somehow we have trouble believing that.

FLASH on Phillips' beaming face:

GRAVE VOICE (cont'd)

Vote Gerry Phillips, for U.S. Senate.

--TV monitor ANGLES on Darius appearing on Larry King... Charlie Rose...*Oprah*.

--Darius and Rick, both in black tie, being escorted through a SERIES OF winding basement corridors...waiters nod hello.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

--Georgetown cocktail party; Darius and Rick mingle with D.C. elite: Vernon Jordan, Bob Woodward, Al and Tipper...

--Opal forcing a smile as Rick introduces her to a smarmy-looking politico.

--Rick and Darius in black tie--backstage corridor; Rick hits Darius with a shot of *Breath Blast*.

--Phillips being interviewed, the Capitol as his backdrop.

--A local TV news anchor speaking to the camera--

TV NEWS ANCHOR

--with Gerry Phillips' once-imposing lead now down to only 11 percentage points...

--Fred Towers ranting at Rick, who listens stoically; CAMERA REVEALS the object of the rant: Opal, who stands watching Darius speak at a rally. After a moment she turns and sees them talking...and she knows it's about her.

P.A. ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Your next senator from the great state of Delaware, *DARIUS MCBAIN!!!*

--Rick and Darius in black tie backstage. Rick nods; Darius breathes deep and steps forward. CAMERA REVEALS to where: A ballroom packed with \$500-a-plate campaign contributors.

C.U. of Darius taking in the crowd--and turning on the charm.

END SEQUENCE, MUSIC FADES...**Silence a moment**...as we land at:

INT. TV STUDIO - DEBATE SET - NIGHT

Darius and Phillips sit on two stools, triangulated by a moderator's table manned by JIM DINGLE, 40's, white.

GERRY PHILLIPS

As we all know, racial profiling is a big problem here, particularly along the I-95 corridor, and I've already drawn up legislation that would strictly forbid the practice by state troopers and local police across the nation.

ANGLE on the studio audience listening closely--

GERRY PHILLIPS (cont'd)

It is simply un-American to stop people because of the way they look, and I *will* not stand for it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM DINGLE

Mr. McBain?

DARIUS

If a trooper learns that black drug dealers driving Lincolns are running heroin from New York to D.C. on 95, and my troopers spot a black man in a Lincoln, I say stop the man.

GERRY PHILLIPS

That's fascistic.

DARIUS

There are Black men in this country who deal drugs, Gerry, if you wanna stop the drugs, you need to stop some Black men.

GERRY PHILLIPS

I'm beginning to understand Mr. McBain's strategy here: He's gonna do all he can to appeal to voters' fears, but were he to win he'd vote far left down the line.

DARIUS

My strategy is to find solutions that actually *solve*, even if it means crossing the partisan line.

FLASH on Rick nervously watching from the wings.

JIM DINGLE

Mr. McBain, your limited foreign policy experience is a concern to many voters, so I'd like to ask how you would vote when it comes to overseas intervention.

DARIUS

Let's be honest, the world's a messed up place, and we can't be everywhere;

FLASH on INMATES at Delaware State Prison, watching on TV--

DARIUS (cont'd)

--but when it comes to how we *should* act, I think Americans need to ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be a part of the human race?" Apart from all other identity--what is it to be *human*?

FLASH on a 20-something audience member with a McBain button.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS (cont'd)

Now that may sound a little romantic, but if it feels *inhumane* to sit back and watch people die in *one* country, while millions are spent chasing oil somewhere *else*, then shouldn't that be a clue for us to intervene?

FLASH on DNC official Fred Towers, listening gravely.

JIM DINGLE

Senator Phillips?

GERRY PHILLIPS

Self-interest *has* to be factored into our decision-making, Jim, otherwise we'd have troops in every country in the world.

DARIUS

But even on a limited basis, shouldn't we choose based on empathy? Aren't *humanist principles* what this country is founded on?

GERRY PHILLIPS

I beg to disagree--

DARIUS

Well even if it's not, that's how *I* would vote. I'll vote how I'm human. Because for me, politics *does* go that deep.

Flash on Katya, in the audience, moved. CAMERA finds Opal, next to her, bored.

JIM DINGLE

Senator Phillips, you recently stated that you were changing your stance on the death penalty, could you elaborate?

GERRY PHILLIPS

("courageous")

I simply don't feel we've come up with a method for properly administering this punishment. Until we do, we should *rehabilitate* our criminals, which our prisons are fully capable of doing.

JIM DINGLE

Mr. McBain?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DARIUS

I'm *for* the death penalty, Jim, and I'll tell you why. Because for many the alternative is life without parole, which in most prisons is a sentence worse than death.

GERRY PHILLIPS

This is a P.R. stunt.

DARIUS

Life terms take away hope, and a man without hope might as well be dead.

JIM DINGLE

But you yourself were wrongly accused--

DARIUS

That's why we have to foolproof the system, but once we do, let's address the *roots* of the problem.

FLASH on Darius supporters, confused--

DARIUS (cont'd)

Let the serial killers die and *instead* fix the neighborhoods where most criminals *come* from--

GERRY PHILLIPS

You're switching the subject--

DARIUS

I'm talking about death--

GERRY PHILLIPS

And I'm discussing how we treat *people*.

DARIUS

Fine, then tell me, if I hadn't been exonerated would you have lifted a *pinkie* to "treat me nicely"? Or would you have watched me die so you could say you're tough on crime? Gerry?

Phillips eyes him carefully.

GERRY PHILLIPS

Well let's talk about that for a second.

DARIUS

Fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JIM DINGLE

I'm not sure this is--

GERRY PHILLIPS

It's OK--this is a discussion, remember, not a debate. As per the rules.

(back to Darius)

You were accused of killing a man, is that correct?

(Darius nods)

And then your conviction was overturned due to a suddenly divulged confession?

DARIUS

That's right--

GERRY PHILLIPS

--in which Ronald Jackson stated that *he* was the actual shooter.

DARIUS

Correct.

GERRY PHILLIPS

(point blank)

Where were you at the moment that Mr. Jackson shot his victim?

JIM DINGLE

Is this *relevant* to today's discussion?

GERRY PHILLIPS

I would say it most definitely is.

DARIUS

I was in the vicinity of the shooting. There's no question that during this period in my life I was in with the wrong crowd. So yes, I was in the vicinity.

GERRY PHILLIPS

Were you present *at* the shooting?

ANGLE on the murmuring audience--

DARIUS

...Yes. I was.

JIM DINGLE

Mr. McBain, just to clarify, up to now you've said that you were a block away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ANGLE on Rick, in the wings, motioning the "cut" sign...
Phillips and Dingle see this, but Darius ignores.

DARIUS

I'm not sure where you got this, Senator,
but it's true that I witnessed Ronald
Jackson shoot Patrick Cragen.

FLASH on Katya and Opal, both now transfixed--

DARIUS (cont'd)

And because of accomplice liability laws,
I lied and said I was a block away. I
should've known better than to be there,
and I paid 16 years for that mistake.

GERRY PHILLIPS

Let's not gloss over the facts: You were
part of a drug deal gone bad in which
your partner shot a man in cold blood.

FLASH on Rick watching, tight-lipped--

GERRY PHILLIPS (cont'd)

You were standing *next* to him, and
instead of calling the police you *ran*;
then you confessed, then *retracted* that
and fed them *another* lie, and now that
the laws protect you--you ask for pity
because you "didn't know better"?

FLASH on frantic rumblings among the McBain supporters--

GERRY PHILLIPS (cont'd)

Well you know what?--I don't buy it. You
watched as another human being was
brutally killed. You watched, and you
did nothing. YOU. DID. NOTHING.

(pause--grave)

And that's not who the people of Delaware
want representing them.

Silence--a stunned audience, moderator, DNC officials...

DARIUS

(silence, and then:)

I don't have a perfect past--

GERRY PHILLIPS

Here he goes again with the sob story--

DARIUS

But I'm better for what happened to me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

GERRY PHILLIPS

Why, because you hung out in the prison library?

DARIUS

Because prison taught me things no book could ever touch.

GERRY PHILLIPS

Tell that to Patrick Cragen.

JIM DINGLE

(beat)

Are you protected by double jeopardy laws, Mr. McBain?

DARIUS

I have no idea--

GERRY PHILLIPS

No, but he'd be out for time served, which I'm sure he's quite aware of.

(to Darius, direct)

You're a liar, sir. You're lying right now. You rely on a false past to play on people's sympathies.

DARIUS

Why would people have sympathy--?

GERRY PHILLIPS

Because you make them feel sorry for you.

DARIUS

How?

GERRY PHILLIPS

By acting as the "poor, wrongly accused kid from the inner city." But it's a lie. And it's immoral. And it's illegal. Which means that *everything* you do should be followed by a question mark.

Intense silence, as we see shots of Opal, Katya, Rick, Darius's tearful supporters and Phillips' smirking aides....

DARIUS

(quiet, humbled)

You're right. I did nothing. I froze... and did nothing.

During the following, we see FLASHBACK SHOTS--beginning with Darius doing push-ups in his prison cell:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

DARIUS (O.S.)(cont'd)
Two years to the date of that murder, I
woke up and made a vow to myself:

Darius teaching a class to other inmates--

DARIUS (cont'd)
That I would spend the rest of my life
working to ensure that people who have
made mistakes like I did, will not be
doomed to repeat them.

Darius, alone, late-night, studying in his cell--

DARIUS (cont'd)
I have kept that vow and I'll add to it
right now, that if elected--

Darius, age 17, that night, standing next to Patrick--

DARIUS (cont'd)
I will dedicate every ounce of my energy
toward making a world where the look I
saw in Patrick's eyes that night--

C.U. on the young Darius, intently watching Patrick--

DARIUS (cont'd)
--the look of horror and fear--*no longer*
exists. Every ounce of my energy, Gerry.

RETURN to present, the debate, C.U. on Darius, *true*:

DARIUS (cont'd)
That's where I'll be coming from if
elected. So until next week, you can
call me what you want, but that's my
pledge---to Patrick's family, to the
people of Delaware, to this nation.

Phillips is looking at Darius, unsure how to react. Rick
allows himself the glimmer of a smile; Katya is near
tears...but Opal just looks down...and shakes her head.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - TV STUDIO - NIGHT

A celebration as Darius, beer in hand, takes off make-up,
surrounded by staff guys on cell phones and photographers
seeking to capture a "behind-the-scenes" moment. Opal
lingers to the side...watching Katya fawn over Darius.

KATYA
Impressive; really, *really* impressive--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

Thanks--

KATYA

No, I'm serious--

(to Opal)

Wouldn't you say?

OPAL

Among other things.

Katya laughs but Darius doesn't. Rick enters, pumped

RICK

Quick-Poll shows we closed to 5 and still going up. You did good.

DARIUS

Thanks, man.

RICK

I gotta get back up and spin--

(to Katya)

We're still doing dinner?

KATYA

Sure.

RICK

You guys coming?

Darius looks to Opal, who stares him down--and then leaves.

DARIUS

Let us talk it over.

RICK

Gotcha. Good, all good, this is good--

DARIUS

Good.

RICK

Good--Right, Bye.

INT. UPSCALE BAR - COUNTER - NIGHT

Rick and Katya sipping martinis.

KATYA

I mean it's amazing: Phillips blindsides him and he doesn't bat an eye.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATYA (cont'd)

Yes he was at the crime scene but it *doesn't* make him unqualified; if anything, *all* senators should know what it's like on America's streets.

RICK

You're right.

KATYA

And then to defend himself like that, on TV, *in* the moment, it's really, you know--

RICK

It's heavy--

KATYA

It's totally fucking heavy.

Silence as they sip....

RICK

I should tell you, by the way, in terms of what happened tonight...it wasn't *completely* in the moment.

KATYA

What wasn't?

RICK

The blindside.

KATYA

...What do you mean?

RICK

It just means...we knew it was coming.

KATYA

The blindside?

RICK

Yeah. I mean, it was *gonna* come up sooner or later, from some reporter or from Ronny reading about Darius, so...

KATYA

So *what*?

RICK

So we leaked it to the Phillips' staff.

KATYA

...You *what*?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RICK
We leaked it.

KATYA
The fact that Darius was there?

RICK
Yeah.

KATYA
So his whole response was--?

RICK
Scripted. This shouldn't piss you off.

Katya stares at him, speechless.

RICK (cont'd)
It doesn't make it less genuine, it just means we eliminated Phillips' opportunity to *actually* ambush us.

KATYA
Excuse me, but if you were still at the paper and this happened, you'd collect-call heaven to *cry* to your grandfather.

RICK
But I wouldn't be *surprised*.
(she just looks at him)
He didn't lie about the *facts*, all he did was control their release. It's what politicians do to ensure their message.

KATYA
And what's his message--that he's pro-death penalty?

RICK
It's what he believes.

KATYA
Do *you*?

RICK
I'm not sure--

KATYA
You fucking *hate* the death penalty!

RICK
Well *I'm* not running for senator--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KATYA

And I bet you *he* hates it too but he said that so he could hijack the issue.

RICK

And that would piss you off?

KATYA

Yeah--

RICK

Because it didn't seem to until just now.

KATYA

Yeah, when I discovered that he's more of a typical politician than I thought!

RICK

It's called political *bullshit*, Katya, and it's a necessary evil that wasn't exactly invented yesterday--

KATYA

I don't mind the bullshit, what's pathetic is *you* wanting to be in the club so bad you're willing to back opinions you *don't even fucking hold!*

(she stands to go)

Even though you supposedly quit your job out of "conviction."

RICK

Katya--

KATYA

(pissed, leaving--)

It's like you turned from Abbey Hoffman to Karl Rove in 6 fucking months!

INT. MCBAIN CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Rick works his laptop, late-night; a few other staffers sit around preparing flyers for morning distribution, CNN droning on a corner TV. After a moment, Opal enters. Rick looks up, neither speak for a moment...and then:

RICK

Hey, Opal.

OPAL

Hi.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK
You looking for Darius?

OPAL
Nope.
(he waits)
I wanted to talk to you.

EXT. COMMERCIAL STRIP - WILMINGTON - NIGHT

Darius and Opal walk... Rick breaks the silence.

RICK
So what's going on?

OPAL
...What I gotta say is gonna fuck you up.

RICK
...OK.

OPAL
He shot that kid.

RICK
(stops)
What?

OPAL
Darius shot that kid. That night. The
judge's kid.

RICK
Darius shot him?

OPAL
Yeah.

RICK
The kid that Ronny Jackson shot?
(she nods)
...Why're you saying this, Opal?

OPAL
'Cause I saw it.

Rick just stands there, at an utter loss.

RICK
Let's backtrack: You were there the
night Patrick Cragen was shot?
(she nods)
Does Darius *know* that?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK (cont'd)
 (she shakes her head)
 Why not?

OPAL
 'Cause I was at the other end of the
 block but they didn't see me.
 (she looks him in the eye)
 I'll show you if you want.

EXT. RUNDOWN STREET - WILMINGTON - NIGHT

Rick and Opal at the same spot we earlier saw Opal and Darius. It's not a pretty neighborhood.

RICK
 So who was here?

OPAL
 (gesturing to the curbside)
 Ronny and Darius and the kid. Over here.
 They got in an argument and started
 pushing, Ronny took his gun out, or it
 fell out, and Darius picked it up and
 shot the kid; like this.

She demonstrates an angle and shooting motion.

RICK
 ...Did he *take* it out or did it *fall* out?

OPAL
 I'm not sure.

RICK
 It's important.

OPAL
 It fell out.

RICK
 And Darius picked it up?

OPAL
 And shot him.

RICK
 How come there was no powder residue on
 Darius's hands?

OPAL
 He musta' been wearing gloves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

...And you saw all this from over there?
(she nods)
And never *told* Darius?

OPAL

I thought he'd tell me when he was ready.
But he's not gonna. You saw him on TV
tonight; everything he says is bullshit.

RICK

Why?

OPAL

Because it's one thing to not tell the
truth; it's another to outright *lie* in
front of the whole fucking world.

RICK

I'm having a little trouble here, Opal.

OPAL

You think I'm just trying to mess him up?

RICK

No--

OPAL

You think he's a "good man"? 'Cause he's
not. That's what I'm saying. Him
shooting that kid and lying about it *is*
the man. *That's* who he is.

RICK

...Why would Ronny take the blame 16
years later?

OPAL

Maybe 'cause he's in for life anyway and
ain't coming out. Maybe he thinks he
owes D.

RICK

Why would *you* stay with a guy if you knew
he was a murderer?

OPAL

I *didn't* stay with him.

RICK

Why did you *marry* him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OPAL
'Cause I loved him.

RICK
Even though you knew what you knew?

OPAL
He was on death row.

RICK
So then why didn't you tell anybody once
he got out?

OPAL
Because I thought maybe he already paid
his price. That he was a new man and
that it might be OK.
(pause)
But he's *not* a new man. And it's *not* OK.

Silence on the street; Rick looks up the block...

OPAL (cont'd)
You think I ain't telling the truth?

RICK
I don't know, Opal.

OPAL
That's right. Which is what I'm saying
about Darius. You don't ever get to *know*.

INT. MCBAIN CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Rick, very late, completely alone, surrounded by walls
plastered with *McBAIN FOR SENATE* signs. He's perhaps drunk,
but also just freaked. He stares down a life-sized poster of
Darius.

Breaking out of it, flips open his phone and speed dials...

RICK
Hey, Katya, it's me. Just wanted to, I
dunno, apologize; I think. I, ah...I
dunno. Call me if you get this?

He shuts off, lost in thought...then makes his way to a
couch, clears off the hundreds of campaign pamphlets, and
lies down to sleep.

INT. LOBBY - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick, wearing the same clothes as last night, enters. The security guard looks up with a smile--

SECURITY GUARD
Hey, Mr. Dayne, how you doin'?

RICK
I'm all right, Bill. How are you?

SECURITY GUARD
I'm good. Your guy's sure doin' well.

RICK
Yeah.

SECURITY GUARD
Paper says it's almost neck and neck.

RICK
Yeah, he's hit a good patch.

SECURITY GUARD
Must feel good.

RICK
To be him?

SECURITY GUARD
To be *you*. You picked a winner.

Rick forces a smile, sneaking a sideways glance at the portrait of his grandfather....

RICK
Good to see you again, Bill.

INT. NEWS ROOM - STATE JOURNAL OFFICES - DAY

Rick tries to keep a low profile as he makes his way through the newsroom, various ex-colleagues giving him waves or nods hello. He arrives at his old cubicle, unlocks a file cabinet and starts to look through it. After a moment, Matt Barnes pokes his head around.

MATT BARNES
What's up, big guy?

RICK
Hey, Matt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT BARNES

I thought you were gonna clear that shit outta here.

RICK

I will when I know I'm not coming back.

MATT BARNES

I heard you weren't coming back even if he loses.

RICK

...I'm not so sure.

MATT BARNES

Why's that?

Rick doesn't really want to have this conversation, but the question makes him stop with the files and look up.

RICK

I guess there's still a journalist in me somewhere.

MATT BARNES

I like to say that too, but I usually mean investigative, and I'm usually talking about my cock.

Rick looks at him, reluctantly finding this kinda funny.

RICK

That's good, Matt.

MATT BARNES

Thank you.

Rick goes back to the file cabinet.

MATT BARNES (cont'd)

So what're you looking for?

RICK

(not looking up)

The name of a forensics guy from an old case.

INT. TV DEN - LORENZO HOUSE - DAY

The dusty, book-lined den of ABE LORENZO, 81, white, a retired forensics expert who sits on a recliner, feeble but possessed of a clear mind. Rick sits on a small sofa, as a soap opera plays on a muted TV.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Darius's lawyer was inept from Day One, but after the trial he *did* complain that the prosecution kept misusing the word "match." Is that--?

ABE LORENZO

It's *absolutely* true. And I remember because I'd made a *point* of repeatedly saying *under oath* that the hairs on the victim were "consistent" with McBain's, but the DA kept saying they *matched!*-- seven times he said this in his closing argument alone! McBain's lawyer shoulda called for a mistrial right there and then!

RICK

So just to be clear, none of Darius's hair or skin fiber was ever found on the victim's coat.

ABE LORENZO

None whatsoever.

RICK

And we now know that the hairs that were found belonged to Ronald Jackson.

ABE LORENZO

DNA doesn't lie.

RICK

So you still believe Darius is innocent?

ABE LORENZO

I do.

(Rick absorbs, content)

But who the hell am *I?*--because all *that* means is that Jackson was in close proximity to the victim that night. It in no way proves that McBain *wasn't*.

INT. BASKETBALL ARENA - UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE - DAY

Darius stands at an elevated podium at one end of the court, JFK-like charisma dripping off him. He soaks up the frenzied applause of an *enormous* crowd of mostly college kids who are going nuts for him, a prolonged chant of *DAR-I-US!! DAR-I-US!!* He tries to settle them down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE on Rick, anonymous at the far end of the arena, high in the stands, taking it all in. Darius finally calms the crowd and continues his speech.

DARIUS

Thank you, thank you very much. As I was saying--

(the cheering again erupts--)

...as I was saying, if we can allow ourselves to re-*imagine* government, then we will literally be re-*imagining* our *world*.

Rick spots someone down on the court, also watching. Rick's POV on Katya, standing alone to the side of the crowd, listening dubiously.

Rick makes his way toward her as Darius continues.

DARIUS (cont'd)

My spiritual and possibly biological forefather, *Thomas Jefferson*--

The crowd goes nuts and a smiling Darius waits for them to settle...

DARIUS (cont'd)

Thomas Jefferson struggled to keep the federal government out of his little red hair--

Rick makes his way through the crowd toward Katya--

DARIUS (cont'd)

--and I think we can learn from that. For there are times when government can help, but there are also times when it *hurts*.

Rick taps Katya on the shoulder. She turns and, upon seeing him, gives the slightest of smiles. Darius's speech now fades into the B.G. as we pick up their conversation.

RICK

Hey.

KATYA

...Hey.

RICK

What brings you to our little Nazi Youth pep rally?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATYA

(a small smile)

I'm dedicating my pre-election special to the candidates' moral fiber.

RICK

I hadn't realized.

KATYA

It's a recent decision.

He looks at her, knowing full well what this means. He looks at the surrounding crowd.

RICK

You're not gonna find a lotta moral complexity *here*.

KATYA

No, but it's a good gauge as to how full of shit someone is. College kids tend to have excellent bullshit radar.

RICK

Not when they're blinded by ideals.

KATYA

Speak for yourself, Joan Baez.

RICK

(a smile, and then:)

You sure you're not just pissed because you were starting to fall for him?

She looks at him, not finding this funny. They listen to Darius.

DARIUS

Because it's also up to *you*, to ask yourselves, "Where do *I* come in? How can *I* engage with and contribute to the world around me?"

The mostly-white crowd is now engaging in Arsenio-type dog whoops. Rick speaks without looking at her.

RICK

Sometimes it's just a matter of how *much* bullshit we're willing to put up with.

No response.....

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICK (cont'd)
I understand why you felt betrayed. I
can empathize. And I'm sorry.

Still no answer, but she has heard. Beat.

RICK (cont'd)
When are you taping the election special?

KATYA
Sunday night.

RICK
Airing Monday?

KATYA
Yeah.

RICK
Election eve.

KATYA
Just in the nick of time.

Rick looks at his watch, looks at Darius...Beat.

RICK
That gives me a day and a half.

KATYA
To do what?

RICK
(not looking at her)
Give you the biggest story of your life.

She looks at him but he remains poker-faced, watching Darius
enthral the crowd.

KATYA
What do you mean?

RICK
I might have something. Concerning my
candidate.
(she waits for more)
That could change everything.

KATYA
Turning back into a journalist, are we?
(he smiles)
...Trying to restore the family name?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RICK
 Something like that.
 (he turns to go)
 Keep your cell phone on.

--as he strolls away.

KATYA
 Where are you going?

RICK
 Maryland.

EXT. MARYLAND HOUSE OF CORRECCTION - DAY

Long shot of yet another prison, sprawling and immense, frightening by way of its blandness. Rick's car pulls into the visitors' lot.

INT. VISITORS' ROOM - MARYLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION - DAY

Rick sits at a cafeteria-style table opposite RONNY JACKSON, 40's, black, a bit of a thug but by no means dumb.

RICK
 So I assume you know what's happened with Darius since he was released last year.

RONNY
 Got his picture on my wall; my boy's doing well.

RICK
 It's quite something.

RONNY
 The kid was always good; even back then, Darius knew how to talk.

Rick nods, silence a moment.

RICK
 Do you know why I'm here, Ronny?

RONNY
 I have my suspicions.

RICK
 I want to talk about the night Patrick Cragen was shot.

RONNY
 Hmm hmm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

I wanna know who pulled the trigger.

Ronny just looks at him, not answering.

RICK (cont'd)

Meaning I'd like you to tell me.

RONNY

I pulled the trigger.

(Rick waits for more)

I fucking confessed to the thing, man,
you think I'd make that shit up?

RICK

Why did it take so long to confess?

RONNY

You ever confessed to murder?

RICK

(beat)

Listen, I realize that you essentially
got 12 free years because Darius didn't
say your name. So I'd understand if you
had an urge to somehow return that favor,
I get that--

RONNY

You *get* that?

RICK

...I *understand* it. But right now,
because Darius has become a public
figure, I need you to throw that notion
aside. This isn't about one-on-one
loyalty, it's about someone trying to be
a representative of the people, meaning
the people have to know *exactly* who it is
that's seeking to do that on their
behalf.

RONNY

Why?

RICK

Because it's their right.

Ronny just sort of smiles, this argument isn't exactly
bringing tears to his eyes. Beat...and then:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RONNY

I shot Patrick Cragen. Just like I shot the other person I'm in here for. I ain't proud of it, I wish I hadn't, but I did.

RICK

...And what about Darius?

RONNY

Darius was there, standing next to me, but that's all he did. He wasn't the kinda kid to do that. He was too smart.

(pause; honest)

I swear to God, on forty bibles and my mother's grave, he didn't do it. He's not that guy.

Off Rick--

INT. RICK'S BUICK - NIGHT

Rick drives through beautiful southern Delaware farmland, listening to a radio ad.

RADIO VOICE (O.S.)

As an innocent bystander, Darius McBain spent 16 years studying our justice system firsthand. Though wrongly-convicted, he patiently waited out an appeals process, was a model prisoner, a prolific writer and a diligent leader in his community. Darius McBain doesn't politicize the issues, he *knows* them. Gerry Phillips says McBain would be soft of crime. *But what in the world does Phillips know?*

Rick keeps driving, expressionless.

RADIO VOICE (O.S.) (cont'd)

Vote this Tuesday for Darius McBain, for U.S. Senate.

(Rick's mouth tightens a little)

This ad paid for and approved by the Fund To Elect Darius McBain.

Rick is forced to crack an ironic smile. As it fades, an idea comes to him...and he quickly looks at his watch.

INT. DINING ROOM - MCDONALD NURSING HOME - DAY

Rick sits at a corner table with Darius's mom, Judy McBain.

JUDY
Where *is* he today?

RICK
Speaking to a labor union.
(pause)
He doesn't know I'm here.

JUDY
...Uh oh.

RICK
Why do you say that?

JUDY
Doesn't that usually mean trouble?

RICK
It's not trouble, I just...I'm sort of at
a loss.

JUDY
About what?

RICK
About whether your son tells the truth.

Silence as a slow, small smile comes to her lips.

JUDY
You don't think Darius tells the truth?

RICK
I'm not sure that it's a hundred per cent
down the line.

JUDY
Is this about something in particular?

RICK
Yes.

JUDY
(pause)
I don't really know Darius that well
anymore. 16 years is a long time.

RICK
Of course.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUDY

But I can tell you that growing up, he had a way of getting at truth, that was particular to him.

RICK

How so?

JUDY

He wasn't against cutting a corner if he thought that what he was getting to was more important.

RICK

Meaning a little lie is OK...?

JUDY

So long as you're doing it to accomplish a big truth.

RICK

Do you think he's still like that?

JUDY

I have no idea, Mr. Dayne.

(pause)

But I do love my son. And I have faith in his heart.

EXT. COURTYARD - LINCOLN HOUSES - NIGHT

Rick, conspicuous with his white skin and corduroy blazer, approaches the entrance to the project tower where Darius lives. A couple young men loitering out front give him the once-over.

INT. CORRIDOR - LINCOLN HOUSES - NIGHT

Rick exits the elevator and heads toward Darius's door. As he does, we see DAMON, a bodyguard, black, 30's, posted out front.

RICK

Hey, Damon.

DAMON

Hey, Rick. He know you're coming?

RICK

No.

Damon KNOCKS on Darius's door as Rick gathers himself. After a moment Darius opens the door. He gives Rick a look...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

Well, well. Didn't know if I was gonna see you again.

RICK

I've been running around a lot.

(Darius just nods)

Can I come in?

INT. DARIUS'S APARTMENT - LINCOLN HOUSES - NIGHT

Rick stands at the window looking out. Darius holds two cans of beer, offering one to Rick.

RICK

No thanks.

Darius puts the other beer back in the fridge. He opens his own. Silence.

DARIUS

So you gonna tell me where you been all day?

RICK

...How's Opal, Darius?

DARIUS

...She's all right.

RICK

Yeah?

DARIUS

No. Actually.

(pause)

She said she wants to take a break.

RICK

She say why?

DARIUS

Well...I told her about Fred Towers wanting us not to announce the wedding ceremony until after the election.

RICK

You *told* her that?

DARIUS

I wanted to be up front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Did you say that it's because the DNC doesn't want people reminded that their next senator's married to, quote, a welfare queen?

DARIUS

I didn't use those exact words. But she got the point.

RICK

I see.

DARIUS

Look, she's gotta understand that there's always gonna political games going on, but that if we stick it out it'll be worth it; 'cause we're in it for the right reasons.

Rick just nods, again looking out the window.

DARIUS (cont'd)

You should tell me what's going on, Rick.

RICK

...I need to ask you more about what happened the night Patrick Cragen died.

DARIUS

...Why?

RICK

Because I was told something that I don't think I believe; but I wanna make sure.

(pause)

It's about who pulled the trigger.

DARIUS

We've already been through this--

RICK

I wanna go through it again.

DARIUS

Ronny pulled the trigger, I was standing next to him; it took all three of us by surprise.

RICK

Were there any witnesses?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS

No. Not that I know of.

RICK

(beat--direct)

Opal told me she saw you shoot Patrick that night. That she was walking down the block looking for you and that she saw you pick up Ronny's gun and shoot Cragen as the two of them were fighting.

Beat; Darius slowly takes a sip of his beer.

RICK (cont'd)

I also spoke to Ronny earlier, who swore to me that *he* was the one who shot him. So here's my dilemma: I don't know what to believe. I want very badly to believe *you*, so bad I can't even tell you; but I also don't think that the people of Delaware should elect as their senator a murderer. And as a journalist, or former journalist, or whatever I am, I know this information needs to come out.

(pause)

Otherwise you're gonna win on Tuesday and I'm not gonna know who you are.

DARIUS

(beat)

Is it *you* who needs to know or is it the voters?

RICK

Depends on the answer. If you didn't do it, it's just me and we discredit the shit out of Opal if she tries to go public; but if you're guilty, it's the voters.

(Darius remains silent)

You're one percentage point back, Darius. I need you to talk to me. I need you to tell me something.

DARIUS

I didn't shoot Patrick Cragen.

RICK

That's it?

DARIUS

That's it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICK

Can you tell me why Opal's saying you did?

DARIUS

'Cause she thinks I'm bullshit. That I'm embracing a system she despises and so she wants to pull me down.

RICK

Why?

DARIUS

To keep her company in *hating* the world instead of doing something to fix it. It's *fear*.

RICK

Of what?

DARIUS

Of black people succeeding. When one of us does well, it freaks the others out. We're not *used* to it.

(Rick just waits for more)

She's *lying*, Rick. If it was true she would've confronted me directly, but instead she comes to you. She sees our numbers coming up, she's scared of how her life might change so she tells a lie to tear it all down.

RICK

You gotta give me more--

DARIUS

Why?--

RICK

Because you're not convincing me--

DARIUS

(intense)

I don't *have* to!--Don't be a fucking hypocrite! Vote for me or don't, but don't read into something that's got nothing to do with what I'm saying!

RICK

How can I trust what you're saying if I can't even know what you did?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RICK (cont'd)

Because I'm sorry but there is a *huge* difference between you being next to him and you pulling the trigger!

DARIUS

Is there? In the long run?

RICK

OK--you and I need to rethink things--

DARIUS

Tell me the difference--

RICK

Because next to him means you're a kid in the wrong place at the wrong time, and pulling the trigger means you *sorely* lack judgment in making decisions that affect the lives of others--

DARIUS

What matters is *forward* thinking, not back--

RICK

No, Darius, it matters--if you shot him-- it *matters*.

Silence, a stand-off, neither giving in... After a long moment, Darius speaks quietly but firmly.

DARIUS

I speak what I believe every single time I talk. I look, and I describe how I think the world might get better. Period.

(pause)

So whatever you're going through right now, be it your self-image, or your grandfather's image, or whatever, I can't help. Because whatever it is you wanna "know" about me, *isn't* knowable.

(pause; quiet)

I mean, even if I *did* do it, Rick...

(he watches Rick closely,
giving nothing away)

--which I didn't; but even if I had, it *still* wouldn't make you know me. Because that kind of knowing doesn't exist. You don't get to know what a person *thinks* about when they go to bed at night; all you get to know is how they *act* when they wake up.

(finally stepping away)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

DARIUS (cont'd)

So you wanna trust me?--Then trust what you see. Not what you hear from a sad, embittered woman.

Off Rick---not convinced.

INT. MCBAIN CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The office is in full swing, 25-30 staff and volunteers getting the vote out via phone and internet. JAMES BROWN plays from a boom-box, lending a hyped-up quality to the last minute activity. A TV plays CNN in the corner.

CNN ANNOUNCER

With less than 72 hours left, the senate race in Delaware could still offer a big upset, as come-from-behind candidate Darius McBain continues to cut the lead of incumbent Gerry Phillips.

CAMERA FINDS Rick in a corner, quietly wrapping up a call.

RICK

Thank you, sir. Yes. I'll talk to him and call you back....Thank You, sir.

Rick hangs up, thinks for a moment, then looks up and speaks to an AIDE.

RICK (cont'd)

Is he still asleep?

AIDE #1

He said wake him at 3.

RICK

(off his watch)
I'll be a little early.

INT. SIDE OFFICE - MCBAIN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Darius sprawled on a couch; Rick half-knocks and lets himself in.

RICK

Hey Darius?

DARIUS

(eyes heavy)
Yeah?

RICK

I need to talk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Darius looks at his watch, doesn't say anything but slowly sits up. Rick waits for him...and then:

RICK (cont'd)

I want you to talk to Patrick Cragen's father.

(pause as Darius absorbs)

I've been thinking about this non-stop and I don't know what the fuck else to do, so...so that's my idea: Talk to him and tell him something he can believe in.

(pause)

And I don't know if that means belief about what happened; or if it means asking forgiveness; or if it's just something about how he should get through his day each day. I don't know. But I want you to tell him something truthful. And only *you* knows what that means.

Darius, more awake now, looks at Rick.

DARIUS

And you think that's gonna achieve something?

RICK

Yeah. Because if you make a believer out of *him*, then maybe it's good enough for me.

(beat)

I told him you have something to say, but if you don't wanna...

DARIUS

And if I don't wanna, then what?

RICK

...I haven't decided.

Darius gives a resigned chuckle at Rick's dilemma. Then:

DARIUS

I'll do it.

EXT. HUNTINGTON PARK - SUBURBAN WILMINGTON - DUSK

Rick and Darius stand shivering a bit in this mostly-deserted park on a late-autumn Sunday at dusk. The occasional jogger passes, or a mother pushing a stroller home from the playground, but for the most part it's empty, and the waning light prevents people from recognizing Darius. Neither man talks....until Rick sees someone in the distance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICK

Here he comes.

Darius turns to see Jim Cragen slowly walking toward them. They go to meet him...

RICK (cont'd)

Hi, Mr. Cragen. Thanks for meeting us.

He nods his hello; he looks at Darius.

DARIUS

Hello, Sir.

JIM GRAGEN

Hi.

Beat.

RICK

So I'm gonna let you two talk. I'll wait here.

Darius somewhat awkwardly gestures, and he and Cragen begin walking along a path. Rick watches them. After a moment, he glances at his watch, then takes out his cell phone and speed dials...

RICK (cont'd)

Hey, it's me.

CUT TO Katya on her cell in the PRODUCTION ROOM of the TV studio where they tape her show. CROSS-CUT as needed.

KATYA

I didn't know we were still talking.

RICK

We are, we're just not sleeping together.

KATYA

I see.

RICK

Maybe when this is over I'll come back off the couch; so to speak.

KATYA

May-be.

RICK

In the meantime: When are you taping tonight?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATYA
(off her watch)
In two hours.

As they speak, Rick keeps a steady eye on Cragen and Darius.

KATYA (cont'd)
Why, you have something for me?

RICK
I'm not sure.

KATYA
Well you better hurry up.

RICK
Something tells me you'll take what you
get. Seeing as there's not much else
that'll put a dent in Darius.

KATYA
...I can still try to tarnish the image.

RICK
No doubt.

Rick watches as Darius and Jim now stop walking and face each other, standing close, talking.

KATYA
Of course, if this is just an attempt by
you and Machiavelli to plant more
information for your own benefit, then
I'm not interested.

RICK
No, this would be all me.

KATYA
Where is he now?

RICK
He's here.

KATYA
And where is here?

RICK
At a park.

KATYA
Doing what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RICK

Trying to figure out what's right.

KATYA

I don't have time for this, Rick. Call me back if you're serious, but do it quick.

She clicks off. Rick folds his phone, still watching Darius and Jim. After a long moment they turn and start to walk solemnly back toward him, darkness now descending rapidly. Rick goes to meet them....knowing it's decision time.

As they come closer, we glimpse Cragen's face, close enough to see that he may (or may not) have been crying. He speaks quietly to Rick.

JIM GRAGEN

Thank you.

RICK

Sure.

Rick studies Cragen's face for a sign of what's happened. He looks to Darius as well, but both men are attempting to cover any emotions.

RICK (cont'd)

Is everything OK, sir?

JIM GRAGEN

Yes.

(a small nod)

I should go.

Cragen turns to Darius. Quiet:

JIM GRAGEN (cont'd)

I'm glad we spoke.

DARIUS

So am I.

JIM GRAGEN

(very quiet)

...OK then.

Beat. Then, slowly, Jim gives Darius a hug; it is simple, still and quiet... Rick watches, awed, but not sure what by. After a long moment they come apart. Jim turns, shakes Rick's hand, nods, and leaves...without saying another word.

Darius and Rick stand in silence, watching him go... Finally:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RICK
How did that go?

DARIUS
...It was good.

RICK
(pause)
You still feel OK about going forward
with this?

DARIUS
Do *you*?

RICK
(pause...and then:)
Yeah.
(pause)
Do you?

DARIUS
Yeah.

RICK
...OK then.

They regard each other once more...and then Darius walks toward the car. Rick lets him go, watching...then takes out his cell phone, opens it and speed dials.

RICK (cont'd)
Hey, it's me. So I was wrong. I don't
have anything.
(he listens)
Yeah, well...OK then.
(pause)
I'm sorry.
(he listens...)
Goodbye.

He shuts off, knowing he's just ended a relationship. Beat. After a moment he looks up and watches as Darius makes his solitary way toward the car at the edge of the park. After another moment, two ladies taking a "power walk" recognize Darius and go to him. Rick watches as Darius takes out a pen and signs their sweat-suits. They are blushing, enthralled by their encounter.

Rick pockets his phone, smiles a little to himself...and starts to walk over.

THE END