

DEADLINE

an original screenplay by  
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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT, FRIDAY

1

A state-of-the-art entertainment system sits against one wall. The VCR plays a snuff film. The big screen TV is filled with the image of a partially dismembered man, writhing in agony, soft moans emanating with his dying breaths.

A highback leather recliner faces the TV. We see the back of a MAN's head, resting as he watches. As the surround-sound moans become more desperate, we realize that they are not only coming from the snuff film but from the man as well.

A video cassette sits at his feet, the tape spooling wildly out. It is wrapped many times around his hands and feet, binding them together. The man's face is bruised and battered, his mouth oozing blood with each cough. Dark stains cover his clothes and the chair.

INT. KITCHEN

2

The black-gloved hand of an INTRUDER pulls a drawer completely from its track, dumping its contents onto the counter. The hand rummages through the various utensils, grabbing a large carving knife. Reconsidering, the hand puts down the knife and takes up a nearby melon baller.

INT. LIVING ROOM

3

The tortured Man is slumped in his chair, his eyes swollen nearly shut. The Intruder enters the room and the Man catches a glimpse of the kitchen gadget. His eyes open more than seems possible, fearing what lies ahead.

The Intruder takes advantage of the clear path, plunging the melon baller toward the Man's glassy eyes.

INT. KITCHEN, TAVERN ON THE GREEN - AFTERNOON, SATURDAY

4

A white gloved hand scoops a ball from a cantaloupe. Nearby is a tray of crystal cups filled with fruit. The hand drops the melon ball into a cup. Another hand is garnishing the fruit cups with fresh mint sprigs.

The second hand belongs to a WAITER, who lifts the tray up to carry it into the main dining room.

INT. DINING ROOM

5

Black ties and gowns abound at a gala luncheon benefit for VINCENT HARRIS, the Republican mayoral candidate who sits at a dais. WILLIAM LAWLOR, an elderly former mayor, speaks at an adjacent podium.

The Waiter places the fruit cups on a tray stand toward the back of the room.

As he serves a nearby table, RYAN JEANETTE, a reporter with the New York Chronicle, swipes a few chunks of fruit. He plops them into his mouth and repositions the mint leaf to cover his tracks.

He slips back to a group of MEDIA PERSONNEL sitting in folding chairs with notepads, microcassettes, cameras, etc. JAKE McKENNA, reporter for the Times, sees Ryan munching.

JAKE

Bastard.

RYAN

(mouth still full)  
Hey, what's the crime?

JAKE

At \$500 a plate, I'd say grand larceny.

Ryan swallows loudly.

RYAN

No evidence.

A TV CAMERAMAN in the media crowd leans over to them.

TV CAMERAMAN

Got it all on tape, Jeanette.

Ryan smiles then diverts his attention to the podium.

LAWLOR

So without any further adieu, I'd like to introduce you to the man who will restore fiscal responsibility to New York City, your next mayor, Vincent Harris.

The crowd applauds. Harris greets Lawlor as he takes the podium.

RYAN

Wishful thinking.

JAKE

Maintain your objectivity, Mr. Journalist.

The applause wanes and a smiling Harris speaks.

HARRIS

Thanks, Bill, and thank you all for coming here today.  
(more)

HARRIS (Cont.)

Your presence is a real testament to New Yorkers standing for real change. A change back to the way things were under Bill Lawlor's administration. Taxes were down, the economy was up, and nobody sacrificed quality of life to the cost of living.

Harris continues as the reporters take notes and pictures. Ryan sniffs the air a few times.

RYAN

Hey, what's that smell?

Jake sniffs curiously.

JAKE

What?

RYAN

Smells like Reaganomics.

JAKE

Remind me not to sit next to you anymore.

HARRIS

And when we do, we'll bring New York back to its glory days.

RYAN

And George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley will reunite as "Wham!"

EXT. TAVERN ON THE GREEN - LATER

6

Tuxedos and ballgowns flood into a balmy October afternoon in Central Park. Ryan and Jake make their way through the crowd.

JAKE

Christ, it's beautiful out here.

RYAN

Sit inside all day, eating fancy food and wearing formal clothes. And they have the nerve to talk about frivolous spending. Shoulda spent today with hot dogs and Roller blades.

JAKE

Four more weeks of this bullshit.

RYAN

You wanna grab a beer?

JAKE

Early deadline. I gotta catch a power nap.

RYAN

I just did.

INT. NEWSROOM, NEW YORK CHRONICLE - LATE AFTERNOON

7

Ryan, coffee and notepad in hand, walks into the Chronicle newsroom, which looks more like a warehouse than an office. In the cavernous space, desks form a maze through which Ryan winds his way to his editor, DOUG KURTZMANN.

RYAN

Another yawner.

KURTZMANN

No mud?

RYAN

Actually, more polite than usual, but still the same old crap.

KURTZMANN

Just give me six inches for the Metro section.

Ryan pats his inner thigh.

RYAN

Oh, I've got more than six for you, baby.

KURTZMANN

Get.

Ryan smiles and heads off to his desk, sipping coffee on the way. His desk is adjacent to that of HALEY BROOKS, Metro reporter. She is on the phone, typing at her terminal as she listens.

RYAN

Honey, I'm home. Anyone call while I was out?

Haley holds her hand up, indicating he should hang on. She speaks into the phone.

HALEY

So are you saying there's virtually no difference at all?

MAN'S VOICE O.S.

Basically, yes.

HALEY

Do you have the actual statistics in front of you?

MAN'S VOICE O.S.

No, but I just looked them up for you earlier today. They're about the same.

HALEY

Could you do me a favor and get them? I need the exact number.

MAN'S VOICE O.S.

Alright.

INT. POLICE STATION

8

A detective, PAUL MAAZEL, sits at his desk shuffling through some paperwork while on the phone with Haley. He finds a manilla folder complete with coffee stains, opens it.

PAUL

Here we go. Six percent.

HALEY O.S.

Well, then, that's something, isn't it?

PAUL

Not much.

INT. NEWSROOM

9

Haley takes down the information at her computer.

PAUL O.S.

But it's something.

HALEY

Well, thanks anyway, Paul.

PAUL O.S.

No prob. If there's anything else you need, give me a call.

HALEY

Thanks. Bye-bye.

PAUL O.S.

Okay.

She hangs up frustrated and pounds on the keys to her terminal.

RYAN

Hello?

HALEY

Hey, Ryan.

RYAN

You don't sound to happy.

HALEY

I'm trying to do this piece on neighborhood crime watches. I needed hardcore stats to show that neighborhoods with crime watches have a significantly lower crime rate than those which don't.

RYAN

And?

HALEY

The stats don't hold up.

RYAN

Then make some up.

Haley shoots Ryan a look.

RYAN (Cont.)

Kidding. But here you are, making a story from pure scratch. And you can't hold it against your friend McGruff if the facts don't fit. You just have a different story than you thought.

HALEY

So I should just write an article about the ineffectiveness of local volunteers in their effort to make their neighborhoods and this city a better place?

RYAN

Sure, why not?

HALEY

It doesn't seem like a very responsible statement for a journalist to make.

RYAN

It is if it's the truth.

HALEY

It's not what I wanted to say.

RYAN

Leave want for the Op Ed page.

Haley closes the file on her computer.

HALEY

Thanks. So how was the fundraiser?

RYAN

Six inches.

HALEY

That good?

RYAN

I've asked Kurtzmann for a transfer to Obits. I'd get a lot more space.

HALEY

You should come back to crime.

RYAN

Politics is the same. Crooks, rapists and prostitutes.

Haley's phone gives a double ring.

HALEY

Newsroom, Brooks.

PHONE VOICE O.S.

This is Haley Brooks?

HALEY

Yes, can I help you?

PHONE VOICE O.S.

I've got a story I think you might be interested in.

HALEY

And you are?

PHONE VOICE O.S.

If you could come to 252 Thompson, Apartment 3D, tonight at around-

HALEY

I'm sorry, who am I talking to?

PHONE VOICE O.S.

Most reporters would kill for this story.



HALEY

I'm sorry, we get a lot of calls  
here, sir, maybe you'd like to come  
in here to talk about-

PHONE VOICE O.S.

The truth will come to light.

The person on the other line hangs up.

HALEY

Where were we?

RYAN

Rapists and stuff.

HALEY

Right.

INT. HALEY'S APARTMENT - THAT EVENING

10

Like most NYC apartments, this studio is extremely small and extremely over-priced. In the corner is a desk on top of which sits a computer and phone. A single door leads to the only other room, the bathroom.

At a table, Haley eats take-out Japanese out of the cartons. A second place setting is beside hers. In the bathroom, the sink is on full blast.

MAN'S VOICE O.S.

How much are you paying for this  
place?

HALEY

\$750 a month.

MAN'S VOICE O.S.

\$750!?

HALEY

Mm-hmm. What, is that a lot?

MAN'S VOICE O.S.

Hang on, I can't hear you.

The bathroom door opens and out steps Paul Maazel. He heads over to the table.

PAUL

Your sink is fantastic.

HALEY

My sink.

PAUL

I pay \$935 a month. My place, the hot water takes a minute to get going, never really gets hot, and the water pressure is terrible. Yours, hoo.

HALEY

Mine used to be like that. I tinkered with it.

PAUL

You tinkered?

HALEY

Want something done, you gotta do it yourself.

PAUL

Where did you learn to tinker?

HALEY

Keep a secret?

PAUL

Try me.

HALEY

The only job I could get out of college was working for a home fix-it publication.

Paul gets a gleam in his eye.

PAUL

Really. What other tools are you good with?

HALEY

I'm killer with a table saw.

PAUL

Mm-hmm. Pass the tempura.

She does and he dumps several pieces on his plate.

You can kill that sushi.

HALEY

I was planning to.

Paul's beeper goes off. He harshly swallows a bite of tempura.

PAUL

Shit.

Paul wipes his mouth with a napkin as he rises from the table. He checks his beeper as he crosses the room to pick up the phone.

HALEY

I'll make it worth your while if you ignore it.

Paul hangs up, then after a moment of hesitation he reluctantly picks it up again and dials.

PAUL

Shit.

Haley, a bit perturbed, remains seated, polishing off the sushi.

(into phone)

This is Maazel, what's up?...  
Okay... Hang on.

He snatches a pen and pad off the desk and writes.

Okay... 252 Thompson, apartment-

HALEY

3D.

Paul stares at her.

PAUL

Yeah, I'm there.

He hangs up.

(to Haley)

What do you know?

Haley grabs one last piece of sushi and scrambles for her jacket and notepad.

HALEY

Nothing, except that I have to call my editor. Split a cab?

She picks up the phone and dials.

EXT. WALKUP APARTMENT BUILDING, 252 THOMPSON ST. - NIGHT

11

Several police cars, lights spinning, are parked outside the apartment building. A small crowd forms. A policeman GUARD stands at the entrance, keeping people out.

A taxi pulls up to the building. Paul emerges from the cab and gets out his badge. As he approaches the guard, Haley comes out behind him and the cab pulls away.

She gets out a notepad and pen.

Paul flashes his badge and the guard lets him by. Haley shows the guard a press card.

HALEY  
Chronicle. I want to talk to the  
neighbors.

The guard nods her in.

INT. HALLWAY

12

As Paul and Haley emerge from the stairway onto the third floor, they see a group of UNIFORMED OFFICERS and plain clothes DETECTIVES gathered outside apartment 3D. Its door has police crime scene tape across it. Paul heads there as Haley picks a different door.

INT. APARTMENT

13

Paul ducks under the tape and enters the apartment. Several officers scour the room looking for possible clues. A few officers dust for prints, while others put an occasional item in a plastic bag. All wear surgical gloves.

As Paul gets deeper into the apartment, the crowd of officers becomes more dense. He parts the crowd with his arms and finds himself standing before a CORPSE.

INT. LIVINGROOM

14

The victim, a Caucasian male in his mid-30s, is slumped over in the leather chair, still bound with video tape. His entire shirt and lap are blood-soaked.

Paul approaches the corpse and Detective SPENCER McKAY sidles up to him. Spence lifts the victim's head up to face Paul, revealing two hollowed out eye sockets and a torn-out throat.

PAUL  
Jeeeesus!

SPENCE  
Ain't he pretty?

PAUL  
Definitely worth leaving dinner for.

SPENCE  
Dirk Denver. 37, white male,  
filmmaker.

Spence lets go and the head flops forward.

PAUL

Yeah?

SPENCE

You haven't seen his films, though.  
At least, if you have, I don't know  
you as well as I thought. Heard of  
"Images of Death"?

PAUL

No, but I've seen plenty of them.

SPENCE

Real dark, cult shit. Snuff films.

Spence hands Paul a few videotapes. They include titles such  
as "Doom with a View," "Look Who's Stalking," and "Scenes from  
a Maul."

SPENCE (Cont.)

Denver would film actual death  
scenes. People, animals, you name  
it. Caused one hell of a ruckus when  
he filmed a live abortion.

PAUL

So it's safe to say he probably had  
some enemies.

SPENCE

Half the fucking country.

PAUL

Well, that'll make our job a whole  
lot easier.

INT. HALLWAY

15

Haley knocks on the door of apartment 3F. The 3F TENANT  
cracks the door open and peeks her eyes out behind the chain.  
Haley is quickly blown off.

INT. APARTMENT

16

Paul stands over the body, which has been unbound. He talks  
to a man clad in a blue windbreaker with yellow writing on the  
back which reads "NYC CORONER."

PAUL

What are we looking at for estimated  
time?

CORONER

Somewhere between 11:00 and 1:00 last  
night.

PAUL  
Cause of death?

CORONER  
Are you serious?

PAUL  
Well, obviously someone gouged his  
fucking eyes out. What else?

CORONER  
You'll have to wait for the autopsy  
results.

A DETECTIVE approaches Paul.

DETECTIVE  
We've got a weapon. No prints.

The detective holds up a plastic bag which contains a bloodied  
melon-baller.

PAUL  
Simply disgusting.

DETECTIVE  
What do you want me to do with it?

PAUL  
Send it to ballistics. Have them  
figure out if it's Farberware or  
Williams Sonoma.

DETECTIVE  
Really?

PAUL  
Just send it to evidence.

SPENCE O.S.  
Paul, come in here.

INT. BEDROOM

17

Paul walks in to see Spence intently looking at something on a  
shelf full of videotapes.

SPENCE  
Twenty bucks says you've never before  
seen what you're about to see.

Paul walks over to Spence. On the shelf, among other things,  
is a set of "Images of Death" tapes. The last one lies flat,  
the flap of the box open. Sitting on the spools of the tape  
are a pair of eyeballs.

SPENCE (Cont.)

I guess Mr. B. DeMille didn't see it coming.

INT. APARTMENT

18

Haley sits on a chair talking to SEAN and MARTHA CASEY, a late 30s couple and the residents of apartment 3E.

MARTHA

Because of what he did for a living, we pretty much avoided contact. But I can't say he was a bad neighbor.

SEAN

Never had any loud parties or anything crazy. Lots of women, but that's about it.

HALEY

Did you ever hear him fighting with anyone?

SEAN

No.

HALEY

When was the last time you saw Mr. Denver?

SEAN

I saw him yesterday afternoon getting out of a cab in front of the building.

HALEY

Was he with anybody?

SEAN

No. Alone.

INT. HALEY'S APARTMENT - 8:30 PM

19

Haley sits in front of her PC, putting the finishing touches on her story. She dials the phone, cradles the receiver between her ear and shoulder, continues to type.

HALEY

... Doug, hey, it's Haley. I got 12 inches for you, on its way as soon as I hang up, okay?

INT. CHRONICLE NEWSROOM

20

Doug Kurtzmann is on the phone.

KURTZMANN

So much for the neighborhood crime  
watch. Thanks.

INT. HALEY'S APARTMENT

21

Haley has her communications software up.

HALEY

No problem. See you tomorrow.

She hangs up the phone, types a few keys. The computer begins its white noise tones as it sends the story through the fax modem.

INT. NEWSROOM - MORNING, SUNDAY

22

Ryan Jeanette enters the room, coffee in hand. Under one arm is a rolled-up copy of the morning edition. He strolls over to his desk and slaps the paper down in front of Haley.

RYAN

Twelve inches. Impressive, Brooks.

HALEY

Ryan, do you have column envy again?

RYAN

No, no. I'm getting plenty of  
action.

HALEY

Glad to hear it.

RYAN

Fontana and Harris won't shut up.

At a nearby desk, JUDITH EGAN, a frumpy mid-50s reporter, looks up from reading several newspapers.

JUDITH

It's their job.

RYAN

Thank the Lord, right?

JUDITH

Very steady job we've got.  
Election's like sales at  
Christmastime. Same bullshit on the  
shelves every day, every month,  
people just pay a bit more attention  
because they think it's different.  
Never is.

Haley's phone double-rings. She picks it up.



HALEY  
 Anything for a buck.  
 (into phone)  
 Newsroom, Brooks.

PHONE VOICE O.S.  
 It's amazing, the things you can do  
 with an ordinary kitchen utensil  
 these days.

HALEY  
 Excuse me.

PHONE VOICE O.S.  
 A simple melon baller can, say,  
 extract an eye - or two - in a matter  
 of seconds.

She immediately begins typing their conversation, double-  
 timing to catch up on what has already been said.

HALEY  
 I had a feeling you'd call.

KILLER O.S.  
 I would chalk that up to the obvious  
 rather than trying to credit it to  
 journalistic intuition.

HALEY  
 If I'd have shown up last night would  
 you have done that to me, too?

KILLER O.S.  
 Oh, no. I wouldn't have been there.

HALEY  
 Who am I talking to?

KILLER O.S.  
 Don't insult me.

HALEY  
 What do you want?

KILLER O.S.  
 Same thing as everyone else. Self-  
 actualization.

HALEY  
 What?

KILLER O.S.

Instead of studying your inverted pyramid, Ms. Brooks, you might learn more about people with Maslow's hierarchy. Self-actualization, the pinnacle of individual achievement. When one has decided what one is all about and then takes action to demonstrate it.

HALEY

By becoming a murderer?

KILLER O.S.

Let us do evil that good may come.

HALEY

And what kind of good do you believe will come from killing?

KILLER O.S.

In good time I will tell you.

HALEY

Why me?

KILLER O.S.

I'm a fan.

HALEY

Guess I should be flattered. But I'm not even an investigative reporter.

KILLER O.S.

I much prefer the topics you write about.

HALEY

Charity balls and science fairs? You strike me as more of the random violence kind of guy.

KILLER O.S.

I assure you, there is nothing random about what you will find at 79th and Amsterdam. 2A.

The Killer hangs up.

HALEY

Hello?

Haley hits a key on her keyboard and dashes up from her seat.

RYAN

Who was that?

Haley hustles through the newsroom, stopping at a printer. She rips off the most recently printed sheets and heads to Doug Kurtzmann.

HALEY

Can I talk to you in Weber's office?

KURTZMANN

What's up?

HALEY

Can I talk to you?

KURTZMANN

Sure.

He gets up and they head across the room in silence.

INT. NORA WEBER'S OFFICE

23

The executive editor's office has a small conference table in one half of the room, a solid oak desk in the other. Haley and Kurtzmann sit in upholstered chairs before the desk, a larger chair empty behind it.

On the desk, the phone is set on speaker. NORA WEBER, executive editor, converses with Haley and Kurtzmann.

KURTZMANN

We've got to notify the police. We have no choice.

WEBER O.S.

But we can work things out on our terms. We'll only tell them what we know if our reporter is given exclusive access to the crime scene.

KURTZMANN

What if they don't buy it?

INT. NORA WEBER'S KITCHEN

24

Nora Weber stands, phone in hand. Through a window she keeps an eye on her FAMILY, which is having a barbeque on the porch.

WEBER

Then they can wait until they smell the rotting corpse. We're the only ones who know there's another victim and where the body lies.

HALEY O.S.

You mean I'm the only one who knows.

INT. WEBER'S OFFICE

25

Kurtzmann shoots Haley a look.

KURTZMANN

What do you mean by that?

HALEY

Just that I think I know what's coming.

WEBER O.S.

She knows we're going to pull her.

KURTZMANN

Of course we are. She's a neighborhood reporter.

HALEY

Doug, this guy picked me. Why I don't know, but you pull me, he might get a bit pissed. And I don't think you want to piss off a guy like this.

KURTZMANN

The guy's a killer. I'm not worried about pissing him off.

WEBER O.S.

Doug-

HALEY

I can take this story.

KURTZMANN

Forget can.

INT. WEBER'S KITCHEN

26

Nora's husband motions to her through the window. She smiles, gesturing to him as she continues to talk.

KURTZMANN O.S.

Since when are you into homicide?

HALEY O.S.

It's not everyday a reporter finds herself in a situation like this.

WEBER

Haley, you're absolutely right. This is a very unique situation. And it could be a boon or a disaster, both for the paper and whoever covers it.

HALEY O.S.

I'm not some cub reporter fresh off  
a college internship.

KURTZMANN O.S.

You're not an investigative reporter  
either.

HALEY

I can do it.

WEBER

Doug, call Ed in, and call the police  
before he sets foot anywhere near  
that body.

INT. WEBER'S OFFICE

27

Haley sits calmly, resigned.

WEBER O.S. (Cont.)

I'm sorry, Haley.

HALEY

Thanks.

WEBER O.S.

See you tomorrow.

KURTZMANN

Okay.

Weber hangs up. Kurtzmann stands.

KURTZMANN

What's the address?

HALEY

79th and Amsterdam.

Kurtzmann pauses, waiting for Haley to stand. She does.

KURTZMANN

Hey, at least you get to enjoy your  
weekend.

HALEY

Thanks.

EXT. 79TH AND AMSTERDAM, NYC - NOON

28

A couple of patrol cars are parked curbside at a semi-run down  
apartment building. Aesthetically this place leaves a lot to  
be desired, but at least the neighborhood is fairly safe.

Paul and Spence enter the building with a few UNIFORMED OFFICERS and ED MYERS, a Chronicle reporter who is codgery even in his early 40s. Paul quickly scans the mailboxes in the entranceway and sees the name Robin Enright next to 2A. They bound up the stairs.

INT. HALLWAY

29

Paul begins rapping on the door. Spence and Ed stand behind him, Spence with his gun drawn covering Paul.

PAUL

Ms. Enright, open up. NYPD.

SPENCE

How do you know it's a Ms.?

PAUL

Robin.

SPENCE

And?

PAUL

How many guys you know named-

SPENCE

Oh, I don't know. Batman and...

PAUL

Twenty bucks.

SPENCE

You're on.

PAUL

Ms. Enright. Open up or we're coming in!

Paul steps aside and nods at Spence who steps forward and kicks the door in.

INT. APARTMENT

30

The group makes its way through the apartment, which is gaudily decorated. In the kitchen they find a CORPSE, thin with long hair, face down to the floor in a pool of blood.

PAUL

Twenty bucks.

Spence lifts the face up. It is bloody and bearded, and lacking its throat.

SPENCE  
Twenty bucks indeed.  
(to Uniforms)  
Chalk it.

The two officers leave the kitchen.

ED  
Detective Maazel, making assumptions.  
Shame on you.

Paul glares at Ed as he hands Spence a 20.

PAUL  
He's still got his eyes. I'm gonna  
look for a weapon.

Spence bends down to the corpse, pulls its hair back.

SPENCE  
Myers, you're gonna have to leave.

ED  
Yeah, yeah.

The corpse's ears have been sliced off, leaving two small  
holes. Jagged slivers of flesh hanging from the skull imply a  
rough cut.

SPENCE  
Hey, Paul. These murders are really  
senseless.

PAUL  
What?

SPENCE  
No eyes, no ears.

PAUL  
Cute. Ed, you want to use that?  
Senseless murders?

ED  
I'll hold off for "speak no evil."

The connection dawns on Paul.

PAUL  
Oh, shit.

ED  
(conceited)  
Ah hah!