

Vigilant

Written By
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START OF ACT #1

EXT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Three cars litter the parking lot. Along the roadside, election signs for multiple candidates stab into the grass.

INT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE

RAY is checking people out at the register. KELLY, an 18-year old part-timer, sweeps the floors. MRS. GARTNER pays for her cigarettes, and RAY smiles as he returns her change.

RAY

You almost done, Kelly?

KELLY

Probably.

RAY grunts.

RAY

Just leave it.

KELLY

All right.

KELLY props the broom against the freezer doors and enters the back to get his jacket. The broom handle skates across the doors and hits the ground with a clack. RAY locks the register and goes to pick up the broom, bending slowly and wincing as he does. KELLY pops back out of the back room.

KELLY

See ya, Ray!

RAY

Hey, pay attention going home. The last thing I need is to hear you got jumped.

KELLY

Uh-uh. Sure thing, Ray.

The door chimes as KELLY leaves. RAY starts sweeping. Half a minute later, the door chimes again. RAY calls to them without looking up.

RAY

We're closing soon.

The lights in the room go out, and a rattling comes from over the counter. RAY looks up. Two THIEVES, wearing hooded

jackets, poorly trying to conceal their faces, are trying to break open the register. THIEF 1 looks over at RAY with a gun drawn. He approaches RAY.

THIEF 1
Best keep quiet, old man.

THIEF 1 pushes RAY against the freezer doors, and RAY tosses the broom to his right. RAY keeps his hands up. THIEF 2 continues to rustle with the register.

THIEF 1
Hurry up, man.

THIEF 2
Just watch him.

THIEF 1
Nothing to worry about. Fat old
turd isn't doing nothing.

THIEF 1 smiles as he slowly rotates his gun hand until the gun sits sideways. RAY continues to stare at him, stone faced. More thrashing comes from the register. THIEF 1 looks back at his partner.

THIEF 1
Stop fucking around, man!

THIEF 2
You wanna come do this?

THIEF 1
Yeah, maybe I do!

RAY lunges at the thief while he's distracted. They fall to the floor. RAY uses his weight to pin him down. RAY throws a few meaty hits at the thief's face.

THIEF 2
Hey!

THIEF 2 runs towards the fight as RAY attempts to slam the gun out of THIEF 1's hand. The gun goes off, and a bullet flies by THIEF 2, missing him. He ducks behind the end cap at the end of the aisle.

The bullet hits a freezer door and shatters it. A few plastic milk bottles inside burst from impact.

RAY continues to hit THIEF 1, but instead of punching with his knuckles, he comes down with the bottom of his fist like a judge's gavel. THIEF 1's head bounces against the floor

until he's unconscious.

RAY takes a second to catch his breath just THIEF 2 barrels down the aisle and tackles RAY. They skate across the floor into another shelf.

Boxes of snack foods, cookies, and instant mashed potatoes fall from the shelves on top of them. They scramble and slap on another. THIEF 2 holds RAY down and get a couple of punches in.

RAY kicks THIEF 2 in the shin, pushing his leg out from under him. THIEF 2 falls a few inches, hits his forehead on one of the metal shelves, and then falls to the floor, clutching his head.

RAY crawls across the floor towards the gun. THIEF 2 shakes himself from his daze and gets up to run past RAY. RAY grasps the broom as he shuffles across the ground. As THIEF 2 hurries past him, he sticks the broomstick in front of THIEF 2's feet, and he crashes to the ground, passed out.

RAY uses the broom to prop himself back up and limps over to the counter. As he passes the gun, he pauses and bends to pick it up, stretching his arm out fully to keep it as far away from him as possible.

RAY reaches the counter, resting the gun there, and picks up the phone.

EXT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - LATER

A POLICE OFFICER speaks to RAY, getting information about the robbery.

POLICE OFFICER

Thank you for all the information.
You'll be called on to give
testimony in court.

RAY

(Mumbling)

Thanks.

RAY walks towards his car. He's intercepted by a REPORTER'S ASSISTANT.

ASSISTANT

Excuse me, uh... Mr. Pierce? Could
Channel 16 have a quick interview
with you?

RAY
 (Continuing to walk)
 No.

ASSISTANT
 (Following after RAY)
 Uh... Mr. Pierce, we'd like to get
 your point of view.

RAY
 (Still walking)
 No.

ASSISTANT
 Don't you want people to see what a
 hero you are?

RAY stops and turns back to the ASSISTANT.

RAY
 Fine.

EXT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

RAY follows the ASSISTANT to the coral of cameras and news vans, all from different stations. Reporters practice their reports as cameramen test their equipment. The ASSISTANT pulls RAY in front of one of the REPORTERS. She doesn't look up from the paper she's memorizing.

REPORTER
 Hello... Ray?

RAY
 Yeah, that's m-

REPORTER
 (Still reading her paper)
 "Ray"? "Mr. Pierce"? "Raymond"?
 "Raymond Pierce"?

RAY
 "Ray" is fine.

REPORTER
 How's about we go with "Raymond"?
 More masculine.

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)
 Live in ten.

The ASSISTANT grabs RAY'S arm and pulls him back a step.

ASSITANT

Stand here.

The REPORTER straightens her posture and faces the camera.

REPORTER

Tonight, Raymond Pierce, a local convenience store owner, defended his store against an attempted robbery at the hands of two young men, one of whom was armed with a gun. Mr. Pierce, how did you manage to stop the robbers?

RAY

Wasn't hard to outsmart two punks who didn't know how to unlock a cash register.

REPORTER

You seem very confident. Were you worried at all about being hurt?

RAY

I'm more concerned about having to replace my freezer door.

REPORTER

So no concern at all?

RAY

No.

REPORTER

Have you seen this dealt with this kind of criminal activity before?

RAY

(Pausing)

Yes.

REPORTER

Do you feel safe?

RAY

No, I don't feel safe when someone thinks that they can just walk into my place and do whatever they want. I don't feel safe when I have to wait on someone like the police to come rescue me instead of protecting me.

REPORTER
Okay. Th-thank you, Mr. Pierce.

CUT TO:

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

RAY'S wife, HARLOW, sits on the couch that separates the small living room from the open kitchen, watching the news and snacking on baby carrots.

REPORTER
(On television)
Back to you, Roger.

The front door opens and RAY walks in. He locks the door behind him and rustles the knob to confirm it's locked. He strides down the hall into the living room.

HARLOW
(Not looking up from the television)
I just saw you on the news. You had me worried.

HARLOW picks out another carrot and chomps on it with her molars.

RAY stops next to the couch and looks at the television.

RAY
They said it was going to be live.

RAY tosses his keys onto the kitchen table.

RAY
I don't know how long the store's going to be closed, so we'll need to watch our money.

HARLOW
I don't live like a queen.

RAY walks off into the bedroom.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

RAY walks into the cool, dark bedroom and doesn't bother to flip on the lights. He sits on the foot of the bed and pulls off his over shirt. He plucks off his shoes and socks and strips off his pants.

RAY sits in the darkness and listens to his breathing. It

becomes faster and faster until he's panting. He rubs his arms and rocks back and forth, trying to find comfort in the silence.

EXT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - THE NEXT DAY

RAY pulls his old station wagon into the store's parking lot. He walks up to the front door. Police tape hangs on the glass. RAY rips the tape off, unlocks the door, and goes inside.

INT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

Spoiled milk pools on the floor from the freezer. RAY recoils at the scent. He goes to the back room to grab a mop. When he comes back, KELLY is standing silently in the doorway.

KELLY
What happened?

RAY hands KELLY the mop and walks to the counter.

RAY
Spilled some milk.

KELLY walks around the puddle and picks at the hole in the glass door.

KELLY
Holy shit, did someone shoot at you, Ray?

RAY
You don't watch the news, do you?

KELLY
Naw, I went straight to bed after work.

RAY
(Sarcastically)
Right.

KELLY starts mopping.

RAY
Once you're done with that, pull out all the drinks from that freezer and put them in the back one. Then go home. I don't need you the next couple of days, not until the police are done investigating.

KELLY
Police? Tell me what happened, Ray.

RAY
Ask your parents.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Several people are brought to the stand to describe the events of the robbery at RAY'S store.

POLICE OFFICER
At 1:22 a.m., we received a call from Mr. Pierce-

THIEF 2
I tried to convince him that it was wrong to-

THIEF 1
We needed money, man-

RAY
I know what it means to be down on your luck, desperate, jealous. You see what other people have and you want it for yourself, but it isn't yours. And as hard as you may fight to take it from me, I will fight twice as hard to keep it. I struggled for it; you did not.

PROSECUTOR
Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - LATER

RAY is walking back to his car. MORGAN BARRENS trails after him.

MORGAN
Mr. Pierce?

RAY slows his walk and turns back to look at her.

RAY
Yeah?

MORGAN
Sorry to bother you. My name's Morgan Barrens.

MORGAN extends a hand. RAY shakes it.

MORGAN

I'm Councilman Wright's aide. Your councilman. Mr. Wright's office wanted to extend their condolences about the robbery, but we're glad that you're okay.

RAY

Okay.

MORGAN

To that point, I suspect you'll be back here to see you assailants' verdict. Mr. Wright will be there as well, speaking out against crime and it's negative affect on our community. Would you be willing to speak along side us?

RAY

I'm good.

MORGAN

Are you sure, Mr. Pierce? I think a small statement will go a long way in making people feel safe.

RAY

No, I'm good.

MORGAN

Mr. Pierce, I'll be frank in saying that coming out and speaking with the councilman will help us as we head into another election, and it would earn you some friends in and around city council. I'm sure a hardworking businessman like yourself could use any help you could get.

RAY

Still good.

MORGAN

All right. If you change your mind, you can let us know.

MORGAN hands RAY one of her business cards.

MORGAN

We'll see you at the courthouse.

INT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

RAY flips over the store's sign from open to closed. The shot-out freezer door has been removed, its contents emptied, and its light shut off.

KELLY strides back into the store.

RAY

You're twenty minutes late.

KELLY

(Holding the door open)

Oh, hey, sorry, Ray. I had to pick something up.

KELLY'S father, GERALD, walks in, carrying a new glass door.

GERALD

Why hello there, Ray!

RAY

(Grumbling)

Hey.

KELLY

We got you a new door!

GERALD props it up against the other doors and leans upon them to take a break. RAY walks up to inspect it.

GERALD

We asked around the neighborhood to get people to pitch in. Everyone needs taken care of every once in a while, don't you think?

RAY clenches his fist.

KELLY

Want us to go ahead and put it up?

RAY

No.

KELLY

No?

RAY

No. Thank you, no. No. No, thank

(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

you.

KELLY

You sure?

RAY

I'll take care of it later.

GERALD

All right... Well, if you're sure,
I'll get going then.

KELLY

See ya, Dad.

RAY circles back to the counter as GERALD leaves.

RAY

Kelly...

KELLY

Yeah?

RAY

Thanks.

KELLY

Yeah... Yeah, no problem.

INT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - LATER

RAY, once again, stands at the register. He glances over at the uninstalled glass door.

JEFF, a semi-regular customer, approaches the counter with a unpurchased soda.

RAY

Anything else, Jeff?

JEFF

Yeah, what did you think about what
you said the other night?

RAY

What?

JEFF

You have a problem with the police?
Don't think we do our jobs well
enough? I've been a cop for twenty
years. My kid? Just out of the
academy. We don't put our lives on

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

the line and then have you say we do a shit job.

RAY

Maybe if everyone did as good of a job as you and you're son, then I wouldn't have to worry.

The cash register chimes.

RAY

That'll be two fifty.

JEFF pulls three dollars out of his wallet and skips them across the counter.

RAY stacks them together and then pulls them apart to count them, slowly, one by one. He tosses them into the register box and pulls out two quarters.

RAY

Fifty cents is your change.

RAY scrapes the change across the counter.

JEFF tosses them into the hospital donation jar and stomps out.

MRS. GARTNER walks up to the counter, watching JEFF as she walks out.

MRS. GARTNER

Don't worry about him, dear. He'll calm down.

RAY

Mm-hm. What are we having today, Mrs. Gartner? Mentholated?

MRS. GARTNER

Just some regular reds today, dear.

RAY

You got it.

RAY turns around to grab a pack of cigarettes.

MRS. GARTNER

How have you been, Ray?

RAY

Be a lot better if people stopped asking me.

MRS. GARTNER
People just care about you, dear.

RAY
Everyone wants something from me.
Why? All I did was teach two punk
kids a lesson.

RAY places the pack on the counter. MRS. GARTNER rests her hand on top of his.

MRS. GARTNER
Exactly. People are standing up for
you for standing up for yourself.
Y'know, when I was younger, I got
myself in with some bad people.
Sometimes for fun. Sometimes...
without a choice...

MRS. GARTNER becomes despondent for a moment.

MRS. GARTNER
I only wish for people to stand up
for themselves more. So thank you
for standing up.

MRS. GARTNER gives exact change and leaves.

EXT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - LATER

RAY is heading to his car. Once there, he pulls out his flip phone. He scrolls through tens of messages from people extending their support and wishing him well.

RAY pulls out the business card and dials the number. The phone rings six times before someone picks up.

MORGAN (V.O.)
(Quiet and still waking
up)
H-hello?...

RAY
Hello, uh, Morgan? This is Ray
Pierce. We talked before?

MORGAN (V.O.)
Oh... Oh! Mr. Pierce! Uh, how are
you doing?

RAY
I'll be at your press meeting.

MORGAN (V.O.)

Oh, great! We'll see you at the courthouse, then?

RAY

Sure.

RAY hangs up.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

RAY sits in the audience of the courtroom.

JUDGE

On the charges of second degree robbery and assault, the defendants are fined five thousand dollars each and sentenced to one year imprisonment with the possibility of parole.

The JUDGE hammers his gavel, and there is some murmuring in the courtroom as people shuffle around. The THIEVES sit at the defendants' table. THIEF 2 slumps in his seat, while THIEF 1 smiles and nudges him. RAY leaves.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

RAY walks down the courthouse stairs. MORGAN and SPENCER WRIGHT are prepping for the press. No one else has left the court room yet.

MORGAN

Mr. Pierce, hello! What was the verdict?

RAY

They got away.

MORGAN

What?

RAY

They won.

MORGAN

What do you mea-

WRIGHT

Mis-ter Pierce!

WRIGHT waltzes up to RAY to give him a firm handshake.

WRIGHT
It's a pleasure to finally meet
you. I'm Spencer. Morgan, what's
the verdict?

MORGAN checks her smartphone.

MORGAN
Five thousand in fines and one year
with parole for both felons.

WRIGHT
Five thousand each! Mr. Pierce, I
believe you're going to walk away
from this episode net positive.

RAY remains silent.

WRIGHT
C'mon, let's tell the public the
good news.

WRIGHT marches back towards the press podium. RAY steps
forward.

MORGAN
Mr. Pierce, are you all right?

RAY
M'fine.

RAY walks up and stands behind WRIGHT.

WRIGHT
(Speaking into
microphones)
My friend, Ray Pierce, suffered at
the hands of two confused young
men. Fortunately, they have the
opportunity to learn from their
mistake without it taking their
entire lives. We have our criminal
justice system to thank for taking
care of Ray and these men. But
let's have Ray speak for himself.

RAY walks to the microphone. He stands there silently for
several seconds.

WRIGHT
Ray, what's your opinion on the
verdict?

RAY

No one needs to take care of me.

The crowd and WRIGHT remain silent. RAY points back at the courthouse.

RAY

Those boys- those men- those criminals held a gun to my head in order to rob me blind. No one showed up. No one took care of me. I took care of myself.

WRIGHT

(Interjecting)

I think what Mr. Pierce means to say is-

RAY

And in one year, who's to say these men won't be trying to do the same thing?

WRIGHT

Mr. Pierce, we all know you've been through an ordeal, but that does not mean that your perpetrators don't deserve a chance at redemption.

RAY

Where are they going to find redemption in jail?

WRIGHT

I think if you can just trust the system to work-

RAY

The system? The system failed me, and it will continue to fail when those two come out unchanged.

WRIGHT

Mr. Pierce, I appreciate your passion for this subject, but I need you to trust me as your councilman that I have everyone's best interests in mind.

RAY

No, you don't. I have lived in this

(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

town for 52 years. I have its best interests in mind.

WRIGHT

Well, when you run for councilman, Mr. Pierce, we'll see what changes you'll bring.

RAY

All right. You will.

RAY walks away from the podium, past a silent MORGAN and through a crowd of swarming REPORTERS.

END OF ACT #1

START OF ACT #2

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - MORNING

RAY and HARLOW eat breakfast at the kitchen table. Lawn signs saying "Pierce for City Council" lay stacked against the wall.

HARLOW

How much longer are those signs going to keep sitting there?

RAY

Until I find enough supporters. Why not give a few out? Give one to your mother.

HARLOW

You know my mother doesn't concern herself with politics. Or you.

RAY scrapes at his bowl of oatmeal.

HARLOW

You shouldn't be doing this, Ray. What do you know about what these people do?

RAY

Enough to know that they're doing it wrong.

HARLOW

You're the one that said we need to count our pennies. How do you expect to pay for more than signs?

SOMEONE knocks at the door.

RAY
(Getting up from the
table)
By people giving me doors.

HARLOW
What?

RAY walks to the door.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

RAY peers through one of the sidelights. His face becomes expressionless as he opens the door a fourth of the way.

EXT. RAY'S HOUSE - DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

Outside, WRIGHT and MORGAN stand on his doorstep.

WRIGHT
Good morning, Ray.

MORGAN
Hello, Mr. Pierce.

RAY
Can I help you?

WRIGHT and MORGAN glance at one another.

WRIGHT
Uh... Yes, Ray. I just wanted to apologize about the miscommunication at the court house the other day.

RAY
Yeah?

WRIGHT
We want the same things for our community. Safety. Peace. We've just seen different aspects of the issues, causing that schism between us. I apologize for not being understanding.

RAY
It's fine.

WRIGHT

Well, I'm glad you're willing to accept my apology. You're obviously very passionate about this. I'd still like to have you as an advisor of sorts. It'd certainly beat trying the learning all about the election ground game by yourself. It's not for the faint of heart. Trust me.

RAY

No, I think I'll stick with it.

WRIGHT

Ray, I admire your enthusiasm, but believe me when I say that campaigns do not help one's financial standing. You've got a business to run and family to support, I'm sure. How do you expect to-

HARLOW

Who you talking to, Ray?

HARLOW pulls the door fully open.

WRIGHT

Ah, Mrs. Pierce, I presume?

HARLOW

Harlow.

WRIGHT

Harlow, a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

WRIGHT extends a hand. HARLOW drops her hand into his.

WRIGHT

Being Ray's better half, what do you think about him running for the council position?

HARLOW

I think it's foolish.

WRIGHT

That may be a bit harsh, but I agree that he probably shouldn't continue to run.

HARLOW shrugs as she leans against the door.

HARLOW
Foolish men do foolish things. Like
practice politics.

WRIGHT gives a limp smile.

WRIGHT
Well, Ray, that sounds like an
endorsement. If you must run, I
hope we can learn something from
one another on the campaign trail.
Mrs. Pierce.

WRIGHT turns to go. MORGAN does the same. RAY closes the door behind them.

EXT. RAY'S FRONT LAWN - CONTINUOUS

WRIGHT and MORGAN walk towards their car.

WRIGHT
Morgan, I want you to do some
research on Raymond. See how much
we can learn about him.

MORGAN
You think that's necessary?

WRIGHT
Never hurts to know as much as you
can about your opponent.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

HARLOW walks towards the kitchen as RAY pauses behind the closed door.

HARLOW
Does that man always talk so much?

RAY
Yeah.

RAY follows HARLOW through the living room and back into the kitchen.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

HARLOW
You'd better get to work if you
want to beat him, Mr. Mayor.

RAY
Councilman.

HARLOW
Whatever.

RAY goes to the counter and picks up the home phone. He calls the store.

MARSHA (V.O.)
Yello?

RAY
Marsha? It's Ray.

MARSHA (V.O.)
Hey, Ray.

KELLY
Kelly's scheduled today, right?

MARSHA (V.O.)
Yeah.

RAY
Put him on the phone.

MARSHA (V.O.)
M'kay.

The line is silent for a moment.

KELLY (V.O.)
Yo.

RAY
Kelly, how many people did you talk to about that door?

KELLY (V.O.)
Like probably... Twenty or so? Why?

INT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

The store is filled with about a dozen and half people. They cram the small aisles talking to one another. RAY and KELLY stand at the counter.

KELLY
Yep, this is definitely a fire hazard.

RAY stands on the tips of his toes, trying to get a view of everyone in the crowd.

RAY
Get me a chair.

KELLY walks off to the back room and carries a chair back with him. RAY takes it from him and places it against the counter. He places a foot on top of the seat and tries to push himself on to it, but his joints won't let him.

KELLY offers up a hand. RAY glares at it, but begrudgingly takes it for support. He stands atop the chair and tries to get the crowd's attention.

RAY
Excuse me. Excuse me!

The crowd's murmuring subsides, and everyone turns their gaze towards RAY. There are many familiar faces in the crowd: GERALD, MRS. GARTNER, and even JEFF for some strange reason.

RAY
Uh... Thank you for coming, and
uh... Thanks, some of you, for the
door.

RAY motions to the glass door that still hasn't been installed.

RAY
Unlike Kelly, I guess some of you
watch the news.

Some awkward laughs emanate from the audience.

RAY
So you probably saw me talk at the
courthouse the other day.

JEFF
I saw you make an ass out of
yourself.

The neighbors all look at JEFF. RAY steps down from his chair.

RAY
Got something more to say, Jeff?

JEFF
Why you gotta make this all about
you, huh? First you insult my job,
then you insult the Goddamn legal
system, and you insult this

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

councilman who did nothing but try to help you. You got robbed, but you're all right. This whole crusade is fucking stupid.

RAY

You wouldn't be saying that if it was you or your family that got held at gunpoint, Jeff. Or if someone who did you wrong got put away only for a year.

JEFF

Have you been to prison, Ray?

RAY stays silent.

JEFF

You have no fucking idea what it's going to be like for those guys in there. You don't know what a year will do to them.

RAY

The only reason those two got put in jail is because of me! Not you. Not anyone else. Me! If I hadn't stopped them, then they would have gotten away with it. Everyone claims to be taking care of me and my family, but I'm the only one that takes care of me.

RAY looks around at his neighbors. All of them stay silent.

RAY

Nobody should have to listen to somebody say they're taking care of you and still be afraid of walking out of their house. Do you all always feel safe?

The room is still silent.

RAY

Well do you?

GERALD

Not after hearing what happened to you, Ray.

MAN 1

Yeah, it kinda freaked me out.

WOMAN 1

I can't believe it happened so close to our house.

RAY

Then help me, not to take of you, but for you guys to take care of yourselves.

JEFF

This is bullshit. No one's going to support your single-platform campaign.

GERALD

Jeff, I think you should go.

JEFF looks around at all his neighbors watching him. He creeps towards the door and speeds up as he gets closer until he's out of the building.

RAY

Well, like I said, thanks. But you need to spread the word because I don't think I'll win this thing with an amount of people that will fit in my store.

INT. WRIGHT'S OFFICE - DAY

The small, cramped office is filled with piles of paperwork. WRIGHT looks at a graph on a local paper's website on his desktop computer. A half-eaten sandwich sits on the desk. MORGAN walks into the office and plops a stack of papers on the already crowded desk.

MORGAN

Here's the information about that police armament bill that's coming up at the end of the month.

WRIGHT

Have you seen these polls?

MORGAN

Yeah, it looks like Heathridge is bound for incumbency.

WRIGHT

I'm not talking about the mayoral ballot. I'm talking about Pierce.

MORGAN
Isn't he in last place?

WRIGHT
Yeah, but look how quickly he got these supporters. If he can get a hundred so quickly, then he can get a thousand. Or ten thousand. At this point, it's just a popularity contest.

MORGAN
Don't let Heathridge know you said that.

WRIGHT
We need to let people know that this guy has no business doing what we do. What did you find?

MORGAN
Nothing.

WRIGHT
Nothing?

MORGAN
Not a thing.

WRIGHT
There's gotta be something we can work with.

MORGAN starts walking out of WRIGHT'S office.

MORGAN
I say we leave him alone. He'll fizzle out. He's not worth our time.

WRIGHT
Morgan.

MORGAN stops. WRIGHT gets up from his desk. He circles around it and sits on the edge closest to MORGAN, crossing his arms.

WRIGHT
How important is this job to you?

MORGAN
Excuse me?

WRIGHT

It's just- I'm not convinced you're taking this situation seriously.

MORGAN

The guy owns a Goddamn A.M./P.M., Spencer. What are you so afraid of? Do you think he's right?

WRIGHT

No! I think he's ignorant, and I think he's reckless. But people are listening to him because he has a story.

MORGAN

I think you're blowing this way out of proportion, and there are more important things to worry about, like that small forest you're collecting in your office.

MORGAN turns to leave.

WRIGHT

Morgan, what did you find?

MORGAN

I didn't find anything, Spencer. I told you.

WRIGHT

You never don't find anything. You're too good. Too thorough for that. What did you find?

MORGAN stays silent.

WRIGHT

I guess you *don't* value this job.

MORGAN gives a dead laugh.

MORGAN

All right, you know what?

MORGAN fishes through her jacket pocket and pulls out a USB drive. She chucks it at WRIGHT, who flinches as it bounces off his chest and lands in his cupped hands.

MORGAN

You deal with this nonsense, then. I have real work to do.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The TV is playing an advertisement about RAY. HARLOW sits on the couch while RAY watches standing up.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Raymond Pierce says he cares about
our community and wants to stop
crime.

A very old mugshot of a teenage RAY appears on the TV.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
But back in 1979, Raymond Pierce
was arrested for assaulting a man
on his way home from work, spending
ninety days in prison.

HARLOW
Look how young you are, Ray.

RAY grumbles as he walks away.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Does Raymond Pierce really have our
best interests at heart?

INT. WRIGHT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

WRIGHT and MORGAN watch the commercial as it airs.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Paid for by supporters of Spencer
Wright.

WRIGHT
Good job finding the criminal
record, Morgan. This is great.

MORGAN walks out of WRIGHT'S office.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - EVENING

RAY and KELLY stand behind stage right, concealed from the audience.

RAY
Thanks for coming. Where's your
father?

KELLY
He, uh... Said he couldn't make it
tonight, but he wanted to wish you
(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

good luck!

RAY

Hm.

The MODERATOR walks up to RAY.

MODERATOR

Are you ready?

RAY

Sure.

MODERATOR

All right, then let's get started.

The MODERATOR walks onto the stage. There are two standing microphones, one in the center and one stage left. The MODERATOR stands at the one on stage left.

MODERATOR

I want to thank everyone for coming to this town hall meeting tonight. Let's please welcome Councilman Candidate Ray Pierce.

KELLY pats RAY on the back as RAY walks onto the stage.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - FRONTSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

RAY walks onto the stage. The audience gives a middling applause. RAY approaches the center microphone and nods his thanks to the MODERATOR.

MODERATOR

Please line up at the mic to ask your questions.

People start to get up from their seats to go to the microphone in the center aisle. The first is a YOUNG WOMAN who looks to be in her early thirties.

YOUNG WOMAN

Hello, Mr. Pierce.

RAY

Hey.

YOUNG WOMAN

You've spoken a lot on the topics of crime and violence, but I wanted to know your opinions on other issues.

RAY

Okay.

YOUNG WOMAN

What would you do to help this communities education system? I know there are a lot of parents who worry about sending their kids to certain schools. I don't want to name any names, but what would you do to improve the schools across the board?

RAY

Well, uh... Obviously, education is very important, and, uh... I think children should have a good education, even though I don't have any kids myself, heh...

RAY pauses. The room is deathly silent.

RAY

But I do have a few employees that are still in high school. One of them, Kelly, is always complaining about how much homework he has, so if I were to do anything, I'd say... Less homework?

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

KELLY conceals his face with a hand and shakes his head.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - FRONTSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

MODERATOR

Okay, um... Thank you for your question, ma'am.

YOUNG WOMAN

Yeah...

MODERATOR

Next question, please.

The YOUNG WOMAN shuffles to her seat. A MIDDLE-AGED MAN, next in line, approaches the microphone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Hey, Pierce. What do you have to

(MORE)

MIDDLE-AGED MAN (CONT'D)

say about these ads about your assault?

MODERATOR

Please, sir, let's keep the questions on the topic of Mr. Pierce's political platform.

RAY

No, it's all right. I'll answer the question.

You want to know what happened? I was young, and I was stupid. I asked a guy for some money, and then I jumped him when he didn't give it to me.

I spent ninety days in jail, and it was probably the best lesson I'd learned. But I saw people in there that I knew shouldn't come out, and I left with more than enough scars.

You think I'm a hypocrite for having a record? I can tell the good from the bad, and there are those that deserve second chances, and those who don't.

MODERATOR

All right, uh... Thank you, Mr. Pierce. Next question, please.

A YOUNG MAN in his twenties approaches the microphone.

YOUNG MAN

Hi, Mr. Pierce.

RAY

Hey.

YOUNG MAN

What's your opinion on this police armament bill that's going to be on the floor of the city council soon?

RAY

Anything that let's the police do their job better is a good thing. I'm in full support of it.

YOUNG MAN

But you do realize that this can give the police force access to more powerful weapons, like assault rifles, or even a tank?

RAY

Whatever makes our city safer.

There's a collective murmuring amongst the crowd.

MODERATOR

Next question.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

RAY watches a news report on TV.

NEWS ANCHOR

Raymond Pierce, local convenience store owner and city councilman candidate, has received criticism for focusing too much on the anti-crime aspect of his platform. His favorability in the polls has taken a steep dive.

RAY turns off the TV with the remote and then hurls it across the room. A knock is heard at the front door. RAY gets up.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

RAY goes up to the front door and opens it.

EXT. RAY'S HOUSE - DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

MORGAN stands on the front porch. RAY slams the door shut.

MORGAN

Ray!

C'mon, Ray! I just want to talk to you!

The door remains closed.

MORGAN

Ray, please.

Still nothing.

MORGAN
I quit my job.

After a moment, RAY opens the door.

RAY
Why?

MORGAN
What?

RAY
Why'd you do that?

MORGAN
I didn't like what he was doing to
you. Or to me.

RAY
Well, glad you got that figured
out.

RAY starts closing the door.

MORGAN
Are you sure you don't need some
help with this campaign of yours?

RAY
Not from you.

MORGAN
Ray, I have been more than amicable
towards you.

RAY
Were those ads "amicable"?

MORGAN
I'm sorry for my involvement with
that, but it wasn't till afterwards
I saw how overboard Wright was
going.

RAY
I'm not interested in making you
feel better.

MORGAN
Are you interested in winning?
Cause I don't think your cavalcade
of volunteers is going to fix your
campaign.

RAY sighs. He opens the door fully.

RAY
Come in.

MORGAN
Thank you.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

MORGAN and RAY sit at the kitchen table. MORGAN has her MacBook and a legal pad out. She starts typing away on the keyboard.

MORGAN
What's the wifi password here?

RAY
The what?

MORGAN curls her fingers away from the keyboard.

MORGAN
Nevermind. Let's focus on the most important thing: fixing your public persona.

RAY
My what?

MORGAN
Your image. You're walking around like a inquisitor trying to lock anyone up that looks suspicious.

RAY
No I don't. I just want the best for people.

MORGAN
Ray, everyone has a different interpretation of "the best," and right now, your best is being interpreted as militarizing the police and arresting everyone.

MORGAN writes some notes on her legal pad.

MORGAN
We might be able to work with the military slant if you can your audience. Why not try running as a Republican?

RAY

No.

MORGAN

Ray, the NRA is a huge contingency in the GOP. That could gain your some favor, and you're not earning any popularity with liberals anyway.

RAY

No. Stop asking.

MORGAN

All right, we'll table that discussion for now. We also need to launch a bigger countercampaign against Spencer so his attack ads aren't the only thing that's out there for people to consume. How much money do you have to work with?

RAY

Well, that ten thousand from the case should be coming in soon.

MORGAN

That should be a good place to start for creating some campaign ads for yourself. Then we'll have to worry about buying spots on primetime. What else do you have?

RAY

That's it.

MORGAN

That's it?

RAY

Yeah.

MORGAN

What have you been using till now?

RAY

Kelly. And some savings to print shirts and signs.

MORGAN

Ray, you're going to need more

(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)

funds than that. Even for something as seemingly small as a city council position. You're going to have to find a way to get some cash in. Fast.

RAY

I'll see what I can do.

MORGAN

I hope so. Another thing, you've made some inflammatory comments about the prison system as well as those men you helped put away. I think we need to step away from that, especially since you've been in prison yourself.

RAY

Fine.

MORGAN

I have an idea for how we can do that.

INT. PRISON - CHECK IN - DAY

RAY passes his wallet and keys to SECURITY GUARD 1, who drops them in a bucket and rolls them through the X-Ray machine. SECURITY GUARD 2 stands on the other side of the metal detector.

SECURITY GUARD 2

Alright, come through.

RAY walks through the metal detector and collects his items from the bucket.

INT. PRISON - VISITATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RAY sits at one of the stools. THIEF 2 walks in from the other side of the glass and sits across from RAY. They both pick up the phones. They stay silent for a moment.

RAY

Hey.

THIEF 2

What you doing here?

RAY

Just wanted to see how you were doing.

THIEF 2

Really?

RAY

Yeah, I guess. I did knock you out cold. Least I could do.

THIEF 2

Look, man. I'm real sorry for what happened. I shouldn't have listened to the other guy. Now I'm stuck here for a year.

RAY

Look, I've been there. You seem like a good kid. How old are you?

THIEF 2

Twenty.

RAY

This thing is going to follow you for a while, but you just gotta keep your head down and soon you'll be out and eventually it'll wash away.

THIEF 2

Alright, alright. Yo, thanks, man.

RAY

Yeah.

THIEF 2 gets up and leaves the visitation room.

Half a minute passes, and THIEF 1 comes into the room. His hands are cuffed, unlike THIEF 2. He sits down across from RAY. RAY is still holding the phone. THIEF 1 just sits there and stares at him. Eventually, he picks up the phone.

THIEF 2

The fuck you want?

RAY

Just checking in.

THIEF 2

Yeah, that's not what I heard. I don't get to do much, but I do get to watch some TV. Looks like we did all right by you, getting you to run for mayor and shit.

RAY
Councilman.

THIEF 2
The fuck ever. So when do I get my
pardon?

RAY
Why would anyone pardon you?

THIEF 2
Cause I'm your fucking campaign
runner, man. Ain't for me, you'd
still be fucking sweeping floors in
that shitty shop.

RAY
Still doing that.

THIEF 2
But you's hobnobbin' and shit now.
Gets to see the glam life.

RAY
It's not all that.

THIEF 2
Yeah, I guess not, not if you have
to come talk to a lowlife like me.

RAY
You wouldn't be a lowlife if you
didn't do the things you do.

THIEF 2
Man, I do what I gots to do to
survive. Just like you. Just like
how you said the day we fucking got
put in this place. You's done the
same as us.

RAY
I regret doing that.

THIEF 2
But you don't regret yourself now,
using us as your Goddamn puppets.
Do you even know my name?

RAY
No.

THIEF 2

It's Sean go-fuck-yourself Barrett.

RAY

All right, Sean Barrett. Go fuck yourself.

RAY hangs up the phone and leaves.

INT. PRISON - CHECK IN - CONTINUOUS

RAY walks back through security into the waiting area. MORGAN is sitting down waiting for him. She starts to get up as RAY walks towards her.

MORGAN

How'd it go?

RAY walks past her and heads outside. MORGAN follows after him.

INT. MORGAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

MORGAN is driving as RAY stares outside the passenger window.

MORGAN

Well, regardless of how those two responded to you, I think it really helped us that you showed people you were willing to talk to them. Don't you think?

RAY stays silent as he watches trees roll by.

MORGAN

Now that we've got that out of the way, we'll have to think about how to combat Spencer's campaign. We can start by...

MORGAN'S voice fades off as RAY stops listening.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - LATER

MORGAN and RAY enter through RAY'S front door.

MORGAN

...and like I said before, we have to think about funds if we want to counterattack Spencer. What's your current campaign balance look like?

RAY

Zero.

MORGAN

What, really? Then how have you been funding this thing so far?

RAY

Favors.

MORGAN

Well, the things we need, can't be purchased with favors. Well, they can, but not until you get into office. We need some capital.

At the end of hall, HARLOW stands, watching the both of them.

HARLOW

What the hell is she doing here?

MORGAN

Oh, uh, hello, Mrs. Pierce. How are you?

HARLOW

Hi. Good. How you? Ray?

RAY

She's helping us out with the campaign.

HARLOW

The hell she is. No one says those things about my husband and then tries to make up for it. Get out of my house.

HARLOW marches towards MORGAN.

RAY

I thought you liked the way I looked in those ads?

HARLOW points towards the door.

HARLOW

Out. Now.

RAY

Harlow.

MORGAN

It's alright, Ray. I'll go.

MORGAN opens the door.

MORGAN

I'll talk to you soon, Ray.

RAY

Yeah.

HARLOW

No, you won't.

MORGAN

Mrs. Pierce, it was nice seeing you again.

MORGAN closes the door behind herself. HARLOW marches back towards the living room. RAY follows after.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RAY

What the hell is a matter with you?

HARLOW

I'm sick of this nonsense, Ray. This whole thing is filling people with hate, and where has it got you?

RAY

We've got supporters.

HARLOW

Yeah, how many? Five?

RAY

Morgan was trying to help before you kicked her out. She has plenty of ideas-

HARLOW

We can't afford any of her ideas, Ray. I'm helping run the store when you're too busy playing politician, and all this nonsense isn't helping business. I've heard that people don't want to deal with us cause of what you've gone around saying.

RAY
It'll be easier once I've won.

HARLOW
No it won't, Ray. You're not going to be paid much of anything as a councilman. Why don't you just give this up?

RAY
(Shouting)
Because it's what I want!

HARLOW and RAY stay silent for a moment.

RAY
I want this. I think I can do this.

HARLOW
You're being foolish, Ray.

RAY
Am I? Why is Morgan helping, if I'm foolish?

HARLOW
I don't know, Ray. I guess she's foolish too.

RAY
Or maybe she thinks I can do it.

HARLOW
I guess she thinks you can do something, but you still gotta be able to afford it. And you can leave me out of that.

HARLOW walks into the bedroom and leaves RAY to himself.

INT. RAY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

RAY is tending to the store by himself. He stands behind the counter and stares at the donation jar in front of him. It has a piece of paper taped to it that says "RAY for Councilman." Inside are a few crumpled bills and some loose change.

ALLEN, the franchisor broker, walks into the store. He's wearing a plaid shirt tucked into some jeans with a suit jacket overtop. He's carrying a soft leather briefcase.

ALLEN

Ray!

ALLEN extends a hand across the counter to RAY. RAY shakes it.

RAY

Allen.

ALLEN

Been a while. We heard about the robbery. Glad you're okay. How've things been since then?

RAY

Quiet.

ALLEN

That's good, that's good. Means nothing's going wrong.

ALLEN glances down at the donation jar.

ALLEN

How's the campaigning?

RAY

Fine.

ALLEN reaches into his pocket and digs out his wallet.

ALLEN

Mister Raymond Pierce, the district councilman.

ALLEN drops three dollars into the jar.

ALLEN

Moving onto bigger things! You ready to get started on the paperwork?

RAY

Yeah.

RAY rounds the counter, switches the door sign from open to closed, and locks the door.

ALLEN

When I got your call, I wasn't sure how long it was going to take to find a buyer, but there were some eager people for this location. I

(MORE)

ALLEN (CONT'D)

got you a great deal, and I expect that it'll be accepted by the franchisors promptly.

RAY

Good. We can go over it in the back.

ALLEN

Sounds good to me.

RAY leads ALLEN to the back room and shuts it behind him.

END OF ACT #2

START OF ACT #3

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

RAY, MORGAN, HARLOW, and RAY'S volunteers, which include KELLY and MRS. GARTNER, watch the new TV ad for RAY'S campaign.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Raymond Pierce is a local businessman, so he understands the needs of other local businesses.

The TV cuts to a shot of RAY sitting on park bench. He glances at the camera a couple of times and shuffles in his seat.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Raymond Pierce has been a part of this community for over fifty years, so we know he's here to stay.

The campaign logo fades onto the screen.

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Raymond Pierce for Councilman.

MORGAN clicks the TV off with the remote.

MORGAN

That was great. We really nailed it. I still think we should have gone after Spencer in the ad.

HARLOW gets up from the couch.

HARLOW
For once, we agree on something.

RAY
No.

MORGAN
Glad we see eye to eye on this,
Mrs. Pierce. Thank you for
welcoming me back into your home.

HARLOW
I didn't.

HARLOW walks into the bedroom and slams the door behind her.
All the other guests remain silent for a moment.

KELLY
Well, thanks for having us too,
Ray.

MRS. GARTNER
Yes, thank you, Ray.

RAY smiles at MRS. GARTNER.

RAY
Yeah, no problem.

KELLY lays across RAY'S couch.

KELLY
Nice to not meet at the store for
once.

RAY avoids KELLY'S eyes for a moment.

MORGAN
Alright, thank you all for coming.
It's good to know we're still all
in this fight together.

MORGAN'S phone rings, and she answers it as she walks away
from the group.

MORGAN (O.S.)
Hello, this is Morgan. We got it?
Great. What's the earliest date we
can do the taping?

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The volunteers trickle out of the house, and RAY follows

behind them. KELLY stops and turns around.

KELLY

I guess it's good to have an
insider on our side, huh?

RAY

Guess so.

KELLY

See ya later, Ray.

RAY

Goodbye, Kelly.

RAY closes the door and walks back into the living room.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MORGAN hangs up her phone as RAY walks in.

MORGAN

Good news. I got Channel 16 to do a
sit down conversation between you
and Spencer.

RAY

What? How?

MORGAN

Because you need to approach
Spencer head on to show that you're
still in this thing, and the only
reason he's agreeing to do this is
because he thinks you've already
lost.

RAY

Great.

MORGAN

Which you haven't, but we gotta be
prepared. Spencer knows how to talk
in front of a crowd. He knows about
the issues. You don't.

RAY

I know this town better than him.

MORGAN

That may be what we went for in the
campaign ads, but the truth is you
only understand one side of this

(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)

town. Spencer knows another, and you're not going to win if you don't come up to his level.

RAY

Do you always help people by talking down to them?

MORGAN

I'm just letting you know what you're up against. You've invested some money in this, and you're about to invest a lot more. You need to know what you're facing before you spend anymore of my time or yours.

RAY

I'm not going anywhere.

MORGAN

Good.

MORGAN reaches into her bag and pulls out a giant paperbound report. She hands it to RAY. The hundreds of pages flex and flop in MORGAN'S hand before RAY takes it.

MORGAN

This is a short list of all pertinent city ordinances and proposed bills that are likely to be brought up during the rest of the campaign or your talk with Spencer. It also has a list of important people to know. Know them.

MORGAN readjusts her bag onto her shoulder.

MORGAN

I'll be back later to go over that info. I need to do some more research before your date with Spencer. Have fun studying.

MORGAN sees herself out. RAY sighs, leans on the back of the couch, and flips through the pages of the report.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

RAY sits at the kitchen table while MORGAN paces back and forth in front of him.

MORGAN
Alright, who...

MORGAN slams her hands on top of the table.

MORGAN
Is the superintendent of the school
board?

RAY starts to thumb through the report in front of him.

RAY
Uh...

MORGAN
Ray, are you serious? Did you even
look at the report?

RAY
Yeah, I glanced at it.

MORGAN rubs the bridge of her nose.

MORGAN
Benworth. Diana Benworth. Remember
it. She's important. She's made a
lot of smart choices for the school
district.

RAY
Okay.

MORGAN
Ray, I'm serious. We need to
rectify your gratuitous homework
proposal from a few weeks ago.

RAY
I don't want to talk about it.

MORGAN
Well, Spencer is going to. It's the
perfect example for him to show how
you don't know what you're doing,
so you need to prove him wrong.
Speaking of which, I brought you
yet another gift that you likely
won't use.

MORGAN pulls out a manila envelope filled with papers.

MORGAN
This is everything I know about
(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Spencer. Every vote he's cast,
every decision he's made, and the
reasoning behind it. This is
powerful information.

MORGAN plops it on the table.

RAY

I don't want it.

MORGAN

I figured you wouldn't, but you
need to consider it. Spencer's not
going to pull any punches, and
neither should you. Just consider
it.

INT. NEWS STATION - OFF SET - DAY

MORGAN and RAY wait for the recording to begin. The
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT, HARRISON, comes up to them.

HARRISON

Mr. Pierce, Mrs. Barrens, it's a
pleasure to meet both of you. My
name's Harrison.

MORGAN

Hello, Harrison.

RAY

Hey.

HARRISON

We're still waiting on Mr. Wright.
I'm sure he'll be here in a few
minutes.

MORGAN

Spencer always liked to arrive
right on the scheduled minute. Ray,
I'm going to run to the bathroom
real quick. I'll be right back.

Both MORGAN and HARRISON leave RAY to himself. RAY pokes
around the studio, looking at all of the equipment.

WRIGHT

Raymond!

RAY jumps a little at WRIGHT'S voice. RAY spins around to
the sight of WRIGHT extending a hand. RAY takes it.

WRIGHT
How're you doing? How's the
campaign?

RAY
It's going fine.

WRIGHT
That's great to hear. I'm glad you
scheduled this little chat for us.
People will finally get to see
where we stand on these issues. How
were you able to set this up,
anyway?

MORGAN walks over to the pair.

MORGAN
I helped him.

WRIGHT
Morgan!

MORGAN
Spencer.

WRIGHT
Are you working for the station
now?

MORGAN
I'm working for Ray.

WRIGHT
Well, that's good to hea- wait,
what?

MORGAN
I figured I could still help out
with the campaign, just not yours.

WRIGHT
It looks like you lucked out, Ray.

RAY
Looks like.

HARRISON walks up to the group.

HARRISON
Gentlemen? We'll start recording in
ten.

HARRISON walks away.

MORGAN
Looks like you better get ready,
Spencer.

WRIGHT appears shocked at the way MORGAN is speaking to him.

WRIGHT
I guess so. I look forward to our
conversation, Ray.

RAY nods. WRIGHT walks away.

RAY puts his hands in his pockets. MORGAN slides the manila folder from before under his arm. RAY reflexively holds it in place, but he looks down to see what it is. He then gives MORGAN a stern, disapproving look.

MORGAN
Take it. Just in case.

RAY
No.

MORGAN
Ray, just take it! I know him. You
don't.

HARRISON
Mr. Pierce? We'd like for you sit
down now.

MORGAN pushes RAY forward. RAY stumbles for a few steps, glares at MORGAN, and then walks onto the set with the folder.

INT. NEWS STATION - ON SET - CONTINUOUS

WRIGHT and RAY sit across from one another at a circular table. MARCIA ADAMS, the INTERVIEWER, sits between them. Both WRIGHT and MARCIA look at notes that they have compiled. RAY looks at the closed folder in front of him on the table. HARRISON stands off set behind the cameras.

HARRISON
Okay, we'll be starting in five...

HARRISON puts up five fingers. He lowers a finger every seconds. After the last finger goes down, MARCIA starts talking.

MARCIA

Hello. I'm Marcia Adams. Today we'll be speaking with the two council person candidates for the third district: Spencer Wright and Raymond Pierce. Thank you joining me, gentlemen.

WRIGHT

Thank you for having us.

RAY

Yeah.

MARCIA

First, I want to talk about what makes you both want to run for this position. Councilman Wright, let's start with you. As the incumbent, what makes you want pursue this office again?

WRIGHT

Marcia, thank you for asking. I want to continue my role in this office because I believe I am making a significant change to this district. I'm a resident here too, so I see everyday the change that I effect, whether it's more funds going towards our parks or a string of new bus stops added around our neighborhoods.

MARCIA

Thank you, Councilman. Mr. Pierce, same question.

RAY

Well, I, uh... Ahem, I'm also a guy in this community, and I own a business. So I care about the safety of my neighborhood-

WRIGHT

Mr. Pierce, if you care so much, then why do you support this bill for increased police armaments?

RAY

Well, I-

MARCIA
Councilman, please. Allow Mr.
Pierce to speak.

WRIGHT
I'm sorry, Marcia. I just needed to
let my opinion known on this
matter.

RAY
I think that increasing the police
force would be helpful because-

WRIGHT
You do seem to be very focused on
just increasing our police presence
and nothing else, Mr. Pierce.

MARCIA
Councilman, please.

WRIGHT
I just wanted to let Mr. Pierce
know that the city council oversees
more than just the police force,
Marcia. Take, for instance, Mr.
Pierce's education policy, which is
simply reducing students' homework
burden.

RAY looks at the manila folder as WRIGHT continues his tirade. He opens it up to the first page, which has a sticky note attached to it. The note reads "Hit him hard." RAY peels off the sticky note. Underneath, there are city filings, interviews with WRIGHT, and other copied laws. Sections of the pages are highlighted, with MORGAN having scribbled notes on the side.

RAY
Since you want to talk about
education, Spencer.

RAY pulls out a page from the folder.

RAY
Let's talk about what you've done.
One year ago, you chose to take
part of the, uh... \$150 million for
the public schools and instead use
it for renovations for the
courthouse.

WRIGHT
That sounds familiar.

RAY
You did, I have the paper right here.

RAY waves the paper at WRIGHT.

RAY
But it looks like two years before that, the courthouse already had renovations on it. Did you make these new renovations to...

RAY rereads MORGAN'S note.

RAY
"improve your standing with the district judiciary"?

WRIGHT
Marcia, weren't you saying something about us talking out of turn? I would like Mr. Pierce to have an opportunity to save himself from making more slanderous statements.

MARCIA
If it's anyone's turn to speak, Councilman. It's Mr. Pierce's. Mr. Pierce, please continue.

RAY
Thanks, Marcia. Since we were talking about education, I can tell you my actual ideas for improving it, which include...

INT. NEWS STATION - OFF SET - CONTINUOUS

MORGAN watches the shoot through a monitor. She nods as RAY regurgitates their practiced platform.

EXT. RAY'S FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

MORGAN walks up to the door and knocks. After a moment, the door opens, and RAY and HARLOW are on the other side. HARLOW is wearing a blouse and dark pants. RAY is wearing a collared plaid shirt, with a "Ray for Councilman" t-shirt overtop of it.

MORGAN
I thought I told you to wear
something nice.

RAY
I am.

HARLOW
He is.

MORGAN
Alright, alright. He is. He is.

MORGAN, RAY, and HARLOW walk over to RAY'S car.

INT. RAY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

RAY and HARLOW sit in the front, with RAY driving. MORGAN sits in the second row behind RAY. RAY starts the car and pulls out of the driveway.

MORGAN
Again, great job during the talk
with Spencer, Ray. That really
knocked him down a peg or two.

HARLOW
I thought you said you weren't
going to attack him, Ray?

MORGAN
Spencer was the one who started it,
Mrs. Pierce.

RAY
I did what I had to. I wasn't
having him walk all over me.

MORGAN
There won't be any more focusing on
Spencer, Mrs. Pierce. We have to
win with votes not words.

INT. HOTEL - BALL ROOM - LATER

MORGAN, RAY, and HARLOW enter into the ballroom. It's been set up with cloth-covered tables and a sizable food spread on the side. The room is filled with dozens of people mingling with one another. There's a temporary stage built against one wall.

MORGAN
Welcome to your first campaign
(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)
dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Pierce.

RAY
Morgan, who paid for all of this?

MORGAN
The campaign did.

RAY'S becomes expressionless for a moment, and he blinks several times.

MORGAN
All of these people are business owners within the district, and they're potential donors. We'll recoup our losses. I'm sure you know more than a couple of them. Mingle. I need to go check on something.

MORGAN walks off. RAY and HARLOW approach the food table.

HARLOW
We shoulda brought some Tupperware.

ALLEN
Ray!

ALLEN comes up to RAY and shakes his hand.

ALLEN
Thanks for inviting me to this. Great networking opportunity! Lotta local money here.

ALLEN grabs a cheese cube, puts it on a Ritz, and chomps on it while he talks.

ALLEN
Looks like everything's going well for ya.

RAY
Yeah, I think so. Uh, how's the store?

ALLEN
(Chewing)
No idea. Haven't heard from the owner since he got the keys, so I guess all's good.

Some feedback is heard on the speaker system as MORGAN taps

on a microphone with her finger.

MORGAN
Attention, everyone.

All of the guests turn to look at MORGAN.

MORGAN
I'd like to thank everyone for coming tonight. As you know, our own Raymond Pierce is a business owner like yourselves, and he'd have your best interests at heart as your councilman. Ray?

RAY glances back and forth as heads turn towards him and wait. He creeps towards the stage. MORGAN steps down as RAY comes up to the microphone.

RAY
Uh... Hello.

The guests wait for him to continue.

RAY
Like Morgan said, I'm a business owner too. I run the convenience store a mile down the road here.

RAY'S gaze passes over ALLEN, who has a look of consternation on his face.

RAY
And I've had more than my fair share of troubles from the city: construction driving away business, power outages that last too long, whatever. Sometimes the city wants to help whenever it's convenient to them. And that's not something I want to do.

RAY stops and watches the crowd watch him.

RAY
So, anyway... Enjoy your night, and enjoy the food. I will.

The crowd laughs and applaud as RAY descends from the stage. MORGAN runs back up the the microphone.

MORGAN
Thank you! Please help yourselves!

RAY walks back to HARLOW, shaking hands as he goes.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

RAY lounges on his sofa, reading the paper. There's a small article covering the campaign dinner, and he smiles. There's a knock on the door. RAY gets up to answer it.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

RAY opens it. KELLY is on the other side.

RAY

Oh. Hey, Kelly.

KELLY

Hey, Ray. I've been trying to get a hold of you.

RAY

I'm sorry, Kelly. I gave my cell over to Morgan. I've been getting a lot of campaign calls.

KELLY

Uh-huh. So when were you gonna lets us all know that you didn't own the place anymore?

RAY

Kelly, I needed money for the campaign. Is the new owner giving you trouble? I could go down and talk to him.

KELLY

No, Ray. That's not what's bothering me. I don't think you should have done that, y'know? What if you lose?

RAY

I won't.

MORGAN, in her car, drives up the curb in front of the house.

RAY

I have to go to a meeting, Kelly. I'll talk to you later.

RAY walks past KELLY, closing the door behind him. He gets into MORGAN'S car, and they drive off.

INT. MORGAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

RAY
Where we going?

MORGAN
To help you get more constituents.

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - PARKING LOT - LATER

RAY gazes outside the car window as MORGAN parks.

RAY
What're we doing here?

MORGAN
I told you, we're getting you more supporters.

MORGAN pops her side of the door and gets out.

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - SKEET FIELD

MORGAN and RAY walk along the perimeter of one of the skeet fields. The other fields are occupied by people shooting clay pigeons being flung through the air.

Two MEN approach MORGAN and RAY on the empty field. One of them is carrying a rifle.

MORGAN
Ray, this is Dan Moorenson. He's an officer for the local chapter of the National Rifle Association.

DAN
Hey.

DAN extends an arm. RAY silently takes it.

DAN
This here is another member of our chapter, Jeremy. Jeremy Walters.

JEREMY
Heya.

RAY silently shakes his hand as well.

DAN
We're glad to hear about your support for the police armament bill.

RAY

Yeah.

MORGAN

Yes, Ray's in full support of it. In fact, he's going to be at the public hearing of the bill giving his support before it goes to committee.

DAN

That's great to hear. We'd be glad to help.

DAN grabs the rifle from JEREMY.

DAN

You ever shoot skeet, Ray?

RAY

No.

DAN

Oh, then you're in for a treat.

Everyone walks over to the left side of the field. DAN hands the gun over to RAY.

DAN

Jeremy can run you through it. He needs to brush up on his weapons handling for the chapter.

JEREMY

Sure, Dan.

JEREMY steps forward next to RAY as DAN steps back to talk to MORGAN. JEREMY repositions RAY'S stance and his hands on the gun.

DAN

I'm glad you and Ray were so willing to talk. We figured Spencer wasn't going to budge on this issue.

MORGAN

He wasn't.

JEREMY

Alright, now, when it comes out, be sure to lead the shot.

A clay pidgeon flies out from one of the buildings. RAY follows it across the sky. He pulls the trigger, and the gun goes off. But he misses the disk.

JEREMY

Aw! That's alright. That's alright.
We'll try it again.

DAN

We're not such big fans of some of
Ray's other positions, but those
aren't really our areas of
expertise.

MORGAN

Ray is always willing to reassess
his position if matters change.

RAY glances back at MORGAN and DAN. He looks back at the field in time to see another clay pigeon fly across the sky. He shoots. He misses.

JEREMY

Closer. We're getting closer.

DAN

If that's the case, then you can
expect to have our support.

MORGAN

That's great to hear. Ray's office
and the NRA can be great allies.

Another pigeon flies. RAY shoots again and misses.

JEREMY

Daw!

DAN

There's also the case of the
proposes restrictions on commercial
gun sales in town. Have you given
that any thought?

MORGAN

With the NRA's support, we can take
a look at freeing those
restrictions.

RAY turns his head towards MORGAN.

RAY

Morgan!

RAY lets the gun slide so it's parallel to the ground. He reflexively pulls the trigger. The gun goes off, and the shot pings the metal center stake between the high house and the low house.

JEREMY

Nice shot.

RAY turns around and shoves the rifle into JEREMY'S hands. RAY starts walking off the field past MORGAN.

RAY

We're going.

MORGAN glances back and forth between RAY and the NRA MEMBERS.

MORGAN

Oh, um, I-I guess we'll be going now. We'll keep in touch.

MORGAN speed walks to catch up with RAY.

INT. MORGAN'S CAR - LATER

MORGAN is driving RAY back from the shooting range.

MORGAN

What the hell is wrong with you?

RAY ignores her and looks out the window.

MORGAN

You can't just snub people like that, Ray. We may need them later.

RAY

You can't sell me off like some cut of meat.

MORGAN

Political power is built on favors. You've used them since you started.

RAY

Favors out of kindness, not favors when I'm told how to vote or how to think.

MORGAN

These are kind favors. We're kindly agreeing to their proposal, and they're kindly donating to our

(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)

campaign.

MORGAN pulls up to a red light. While the car is stopped, RAY unbuckles himself.

MORGAN

Ray?

RAY steps out of the car. He starts walking down the sidewalk.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

The light turns green, and MORGAN rolls the car forward to keep pace with RAY.

MORGAN

Ray. Ray!

RAY ignores her and keeps walking.

MORGAN

Ray, get back in the car.

RAY continues to walk.

MORGAN

Alright, Ray, walk home if you want, but be at city hall for that hearing.

MORGAN drives off.

INT. RAY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

RAY walks into the living room. HARLOW is watching TV.

HARLOW

How was playing politician?

RAY

I don't want to hear it.

HARLOW

What's the matter? Didn't get as many rich supporters today as before?

RAY plops on the leather lounge chair next to the couch.

RAY

Morgan just wants the same thing that Wright wants.

HARLOW

What?

RAY

They're just using me for their own good.

HARLOW

Well, what did you expect?

RAY

Power.

HARLOW

You think you'd get power for doing all this? You have to answer to too many masters. You have to answer to Morgan, to your supporters, even to Wright. You're no more powerful than when you ran a convenience store.

HARLOW stands up.

HARLOW

At least then you were happy.

HARLOW sits on the arm of the lounge chair.

HARLOW

At least, I think you were happy.

RAY

Maybe.

HARLOW

Then give up this foolishness, Ray. You've got nothing else to prove.

INT. CITY HALL - MEETING ROOM - DAY

All of the COUNCILPEOPLE and the MAYOR are collected at tables at the front of the room. There is a small audience in attendance. MORGAN and RAY are a part of it. WRIGHT is speaking into a microphone at his seat.

WRIGHT

...and that is why we should not support this police armament bill.

COUNCILWOMAN #1

Thank you, Councilman Wright.

WRIGHT sits back from his chair.

COUNCILWOMAN #1

City council will now hear public testimony for the bill. The first testimony will be given by Mr. Raymond Pierce.

RAY gets up from his seat next to MORGAN and approaches the empty seat with the microphone at the circle of tables.

COUNCILWOMAN #1

Mr. Pierce, what is your statement on the police armament bill?

RAY

Well, uh, as you may know, I was attacked, at gun point, at my store. I believe that if the police had more equipment and there were more of them, then I wouldn't have had to defend myself.

RAY passes over all of the COUNCIL PEOPLE and the MAYOR. All of them are watching him, except for WRIGHT.

RAY

But I think I'm wrong.

WRIGHT looks up.

RAY

I think that more guns or police cars or anything else is gonna stop people from having what I had. I think it's better if we try to solve the problem of crime a different way.

COUNCILWOMAN #1

Thank you, Mr. Pierce.

RAY scoots his chair back and gets up. He walks down the aisle towards the door, ignoring MORGAN'S stare. The COUNCILWOMAN can be heard in the background.

COUNCILWOMAN #1

Next we'll hear from Mrs. Heather Atley.

RAY walks out the door.

INT. ANTHONY'S CONVENIENCE STORE - EVENING

RAY is sweeping between the aisles. ANTHONY, RAY'S boss, is standing at the counter.

ANTHONY

Hey, Ray.

RAY stops and looks at ANTHONY.

RAY

Yeah, boss?

ANTHONY

You've swept that floor at least five times today. Go ahead and head out.

RAY

Alright.

RAY puts the broom in the back room and comes back out.

ANTHONY

Have a good night, Ray.

RAY

Yeah, you do the same.

RAY walks outside to his car.

INT. RAY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

RAY sits in his car and starts it up. The radio comes on.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

And for the third district,
incumbent Councilman Wright will
retain office for another term.

RAY smiles and drives home.

END OF FILM