

WAKE UP DEAD MAN

a Benoit Blanc Mystery by

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A FIREPLACE CRACKLING IN A LARGE STONE HEARTH.

BENOIT BLANC settles in a comfortable chair, the room dark behind him. A legal pad filled with hand-written scrawl on his lap.

We hear the first line as we see it:

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hard to know where to start.

EXT. BREEZEWAY - LARGE URBAN CHURCH - DAY

Our man, JUD DUPLÉNTICY. A priest.

A neck tattoo peeks over his clerical collar. 30s, taut and strong, has taken a few punches in his life. Currently losing patience listening to a DEACON spout vitriol we don't hear.

JUD (V.O.)
I guess to tell the story of the murder through my eyes I gotta start here. Six months ago. When this asshole Deacon said something way out of line and I did this.

With lightening speed Jud COLD COCKS the Deacon, who falls like a sack of flour. Jud immediately looks horror-stricken.

JUD
Shit.

INT. MEETING ROOM - LARGE URBAN CHURCH - DAY

Jud sits in front of two senior PRIESTS and BISHOP LANGSTROM, a disciplinary meeting.

FATHER DELANCY
So you're a fighter then?

JUD
No Father, absolutely not.

FATHER FRANK
We have a Deacon who'd say otherwise, if his jaw wasn't broken.

JUD
In my previous life yes I was a boxer, I lived on the streets and did some other things.

FATHER FRANK

A violent history, and of course this incident when you were seventeen -

BISHOP LANGSTROM

For which I sponsored his dispensation from Rome personally.

FATHER FRANK

Still. It seems relevant.

FATHER DELANCY

We need fighters today, but to fight the world, not ourselves. A priest is a shepherd, and the world is a wolf.

JUD

No. No never. I don't believe that. Your Excellency. Respectfully.

Raised eyebrows. Jud wonders if he's fucked up.

JUD (cont'd)

Start fighting wolves before you know it everyone you don't understand is a wolf. And I still got that fighting instinct and I gave in to it today, but Christ came to heal the world not fight it, I believe that. This not this ya know?

(arms out vs fists up)

All I want to be is a good priest, show broken people like me the forgiveness and love of Christ, the world needs that so bad. You give me one more shot I promise I'll do that.

He covers his bruised fist. The Bishops exchange a look.

EXT. GARDEN - LARGE URBAN CHURCH - DAY

Jud nervously awaiting the verdict. Langstrom enters, smiling reassuringly. A mentor to Jud.

JUD

Your Excellency you stuck your neck out for me so many times, I let you down and whatever the disciplinary council decides I understand -

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Alright, alright. Look. Deacon Clark's famously a dick, nobody's actually that upset you clocked him. But we need to do something with you.

(beat)

We're sending you to a small parish. In Chimney Rock, tiny town, hour north of Utica. It's just one priest there now.

JUD (V.O.)

We don't use the word 'promotion' but this was the kind of assignment I didn't expect to get for years.

JUD

Assistant pastor?

Langstrom raises his hands, a pained expression.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Well.

JUD

What?

BISHOP LANGSTROM

You're going to Our Lady of Perpetual Fortitude, led by Monsignor Jefferson Wicks. Have you heard of Jefferson Wicks?

(no)

Okay. Look. Wicks has his supporters here. I am not one of them. Between us I think he's a real son of a bitch. But what's undeniable is his flock is shrinking, calcifying. I would use the word metastasizing. It needs some of what you said in there. You understand?

JUD

Not at all but yes. Yes yes yes - spirit's got me, yes, lemme at 'em.

Jud dances joyfully like a boxer. Langstrom smiles weakly.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Alright, this not this.

(arms out vs fists up)

Good luck, kid.

EXT. TOWN OF CHIMNEY ROCK - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A small town surrounded by lush woods.

JUD (V.O.)
That's how I came to Chimney Rock.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Jud approaches the stone facade of Our Lady of Perpetual Fortitude, like a medieval fairy-tale castle.

JUD (V.O.)
*Daniel in the lions den, David facing
 off Goliath. Young dumb and full of
 Christ, ready for anything.*

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jud enters, taking in the mystic aura of the place.

On the stone wall behind the altar, a faded shape where a crucifix once hung. Huh.

Then: up the aisle comes JEFFERSON WICKS, in his 60s but strong and broad shouldered, with piercing eyes. You do not want to fuck with this priest.

JUD
 Father Jefferson. Hello. I'm Jud
 Duplenticy. From Albany.

WICKS
 The Lord be with you, Jud Duplenticy
 from Albany. You're here to take my
 church away from me?

JUD
 Ha. No.

WICKS
 (smiles)
 Good. Ok. Call me Monsignor Wicks. I
 see you've met Martha.

JUD
 Martha? No -

Startlingly close behind him a woman **MELTS** out of the shadows. Jud does a full scaredy-cat jump.

JUD (cont'd)
 JEEEEzus ah.

MARTHA DELACROIX, sixties, dressed in starched black.
 Ghostly skin and hawk eyes. A severe air of authority. All
 withers under the moral judgment of her gaze.

MARTHA
 Monsignor, I got up early and gave
 the silver a polish, it was looking
 blotchy.

WICKS
 That's fine Martha.

MARTHA
 Father Jud. You are welcome here.

JUD
 Thank you. Martha. I was just telling
 Father Wicks -

MARTHA
 Monsignor Wicks.

And having sharply corrected, she floats away.

JUD
 Monsignor, sorry. Right. And sorry.
 About saying "Jesus."
 (beat, then trying to
 lighten things)
 Whew! Well this is going great I
 think?

Wicks gives him nothing.

WICKS
 Bishop Langstrom sent you, right?
 Langstrom. Know him well. He hand-
 picked you, sent you here, that says
 something to me. Tells me a lot.

JUD
 Well yeah I know you're used to
 flying solo but I'm here to serve.

A long beat, Wicks sizing him up.

WICKS
 Take my confession?

Jud lights up.

JUD
Yeah! Yeah of course.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Jud settles onto a stone bench with Wicks.

WICKS
It's a twenty minute drive to the next parish, I don't get out there much, so you know

JUD
Yeah great, great.

WICKS
Alright. Bless me father for I have sinned it's been six weeks since my last confession. I have envied the material wealth of others. I saw a luxury car commercial Sam had on his tv. Lexus. I thought mm, nice looking car. The coup. I have envied the power of great men. Envied their influence. Just generally. Envied my grandfather's power as a priest. Wanted that. Always did. Hm. I have masturbated. Four... four times this week, generally four or five, what did I say six weeks? So let's say thirty times masturbated. This week in my bed in the morning once, once in the shower, standing up, which is convenient, use the bath gel. Uh, once in the middle of the night after a dream about...

JUD
It's alright

WICKS
about one of those Japanese cat cafes

JUD
Ok

WICKS
I read an article, but the cats were girls, and you know so - and it was the middle of the night I hadn't prepared so I had to finish into a copy of Catholic Chronicle, just what I had on the end table.

(MORE)

WICKS (cont'd)
Which is probably its own kind of
sin, maybe not, but not good. Aaaand
then... once at my desk, at the
computer.

JUD
Well, finding healthy outlets for -

WICKS
To foot-based pornography.

Jud nods, straining to keep his gaze even. Murmurs "One Hail
Mary, One Glory Be" then the prayer of absolution.

JUD (V.O.)
*At the time I thought this was just
weird, but looking back now I know.
This was Wicks's first punch. It
wouldn't be his last.*

WICKS
Would love to do this a few times a
week. Thank you Father. And welcome.
(pointed)
To my church.

INT. RECTORY - JUD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Simple. Jud puts his duffel on the bed. On the nightstand: a
copy of CATHOLIC CHRONICLE. He winces.

Out the window Martha strides across the misty green, back
to the church.

JUD (V.O.)
*Over the next few weeks I settled in
at Our Lady of Perpetual Fortitude.*

Martha passes SAMSON, a weathered, brawny groundskeeper in
his late 60s. Warm and gentle, and strong as an ox. He cuts
weeds with a short handled sickle.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*The only other full time employee was
the groundskeeper Samson, Sam.*

Samson pats Martha's behind as she walks away. Jud squints.

EXT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE - DAY

A glorified tool shed. Jud sits with Samson drinking soda.
An old tube TV with rabbit ears is tuned to a baseball game.

JUD (V.O.)
Also used to drink.

SAMSON
It's Monsignor Wicks who gives me the strength every day to not go back to the bottle, he used to drink too, he said if I can stave off that demon you can and every day it's a battle, but I have. Credit him and my sweet Martha, that angel on earth.

Samson's eyes grow misty. Jud narrows his eyes suggestively - you two?

JUD
Your sweet Martha?

SAMSON
She turned this broken shell into a man and I'd do anything for her. My angel on earth.

Yup.

JUD
Okay.

Martha startles them both at the door.

MARTHA
Samson will you see to the rectory gate when you get a chance.

SAMSON
As you wish.

Does Martha blush? She hefts up an unexpectedly large bundle of firewood and leaves.

JUD (V.O.)
Really though, as far as the church goes, Martha does it all.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

Martha picks at an old laptop as Jud reads mail.

JUD (V.O.)
She keeps the books, manages donations. Files everything.

She hands Jud an invoice, points to the file cabinets.

MARTHA
File that.

INT. CHURCH - SACRISTY - DAY

Martha helps Wicks on with his vestments.

JUD (V.O.)
*She launders the vestments, stocks
the supplies,*

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Mass. Wicks at the altar, Martha playing the organ.

JUD (V.O.)
*plays the organ, feeds Wicks. She
goes "home" every night but I don't
know where she lives. I've never seen
her eat. She knew where the bodies
were buried.*

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

Jud admires a monolithic above-ground CRYPT. White as bone.

Vandals have spray-painted crudely drawn dicks all over it.
Samson white-washes over them.

JUD
Impressive. Wow. Is there an
entrance?

Samson indicates a faint rectangle outline on the front.

SAMSON
It's a "Lazarus door" - popular back
when folk feared grave robbers and
being buried alive. Takes
construction equipment to open from
the outside, but cantilevered such
that one push will send it tumbling
from within.

JUD
Creepy. Who's in there then?

Martha steps around the corner, startling Jud.

MARTHA

Prentice. Wicks's grandfather. The founder of this church, was like a father to me, the purest saint of a man ever to wear the cloth.

(re: the graffiti)

Makes me sick, these kids painting rocket ships all over his sacred resting place.

Samson and Jud exchange looks.

SAMSON

I've been meaning to install a security camera anyway.

JUD

I'll do it. I'm handy.

MARTHA

Samson is plenty handy.

Samson raises his eyebrows and she blushes.

MARTHA (cont'd)

But I suppose you could make yourself useful.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Jud on a step ladder, measuring the faded spot on the wall where a crucifix once hung. Wicks enters eating an apple.

WICKS

What are you doing.

JUD

Well I do a little wood working, I thought I could use Sam's tools, maybe make a proper -

WICKS

We leave that. A reminder. The shameful sin of the harlot whore.

Jud stares blankly.

WICKS (cont'd)

Take my confession?

Jud winces.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

Jud helps Martha stuff envelopes with BOOK CLUB READING
LISTs. Addressed to everyone in the flock.

MARTHA

The harlot whore. Yes. That was
Wicks's mother.

JUD

Ok... so what's the deal with that?

MARTHA

She was a harlot. And a whore.

JUD

...ok.

MARTHA

When Prentice entered the priesthood
and founded this church, he was
widowed with a daughter. Grace was
her name. Always a bad seed, loved
her revealing clothes and fancy
brands.

JUD

Fancy brands. Oof, yeah.

MARTHA

As a teenager she slutted around in
bars, and was soon pregnant from some
drifter who left town.

EXT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON - FLASHBACK

PRENTICE (70s) erects a birdhouse with BABY WICKS (3).

Behind them, GRACE (25) smokes and glares.

MARTHA

Prentice, saint that he was, kept her
under his roof and helped her raise
the child Wicks. Grace was an angry,
spiteful woman. She did not hide her
contempt for the church, for Prentice
himself. Why did she stay?

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTHA

Because Prentice had a vast family fortune in the bank. To protect the boy he promised: if she stayed under his roof, the fortune would be willed to her. So the whore waited for the saint to die, so she could get her greedy hands on the treasure. It weighed on him heavily.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Empty pews. Prentice sits at the organ with 8 YEAR OLD MARTHA, his brow knit with concern.

Through a window they see: GRACE reads a magazine while YOUNG WICKS plays.

PRENTICE

Martha, remember this: wealth and the power that comes with it is Eve's apple, temptation that leads to the fall. We must protect our loved ones from its corrupting influence at all costs.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Jud and Martha sit in front of a fire.

MARTHA

His day came at last. I was there. I saw it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

8 YEAR OLD MARTHA's eye peers through an ajar church door.

She sees: Prentice slumps against the altar.

MARTHA (O.S.)

I saw Prentice take his final communion and die on the holy altar, at peace.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Martha leans in, her eyes dancing in the firelight.

MARTHA

The harlot whore went straight to Prentice's attorney. "Give me my money" she told him, and do you know what he said? Yes, she was heir to every penny Prentice had. And in his accounts... was not one hot dime.

JUD

What'd he do with the fortune?

MARTHA

Gave it to the poor say some, threw it in the sea say others. No one knows. But it was gone. This holy man's final act of grace was to keep the corrupting evil out of wicked hands. All he left her was this.

Martha grins with relish.

Shows Jud a dusty metal DISPLAY BOX with a domed glass top. A tiny bronze plaque on the front reads "L'Eveil Appel"



Under the domed glass: An ICON CARD of JESUS.

MARTHA (cont'd)

What is this she shrieked. But I knew. Look not for Eve's apple. Your inheritance is now Christ.

(beat)

That night, she had her vengeance.

INT. CHURCH - SUNSET - FLASHBACK

GRACE throws open the church doors. Soaked, blazing in fury.

Rain pours outside, the sun BLOOD RED through ebon clouds.

MARTHA (O.S.)
In a demonic rage she defiled this
holy place.

Grace TEARS the church apart. Bibles, statues, paintings,
everything - she breaks, tears, destroys it in a rage.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
Blasphemy. Desecration. Evil
incarnate.

The final act: The ornate wooden CRUCIFIX behind the altar.

Grace takes it down. SMASHES IT to pieces.

Then STOPS.

Standing in the aisle is Young Martha. Music book in hand.

Grace breaks. Sobbing. Splinters of the crucifix still
clutched in her hands.

Young Martha comes close, and speaks into her ear.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
I told her, sister Grace, God your
father can forgive you in his love.

A beat of stillness.

Then Grace LUNGES at Young Martha, hands around her throat
VIOLENTLY THROTTLING, HITS her HARD in the face again and
again, beating her to the ground.

MEN RUNNING into the church - GRABBING Grace, wrenching her
off the sobbing child who has a gash across her cheek.

Grace breaks free and RUNS hysterical out of the church.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

In the rain Grace screams at the foot of the CRYPT.

MARTHA
She died throwing herself against
Prentice's tomb, cursing his name. A
brain aneurysm they said.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

MARTHA

Struck down I say. By God in His
mercy.

Martha's scar gleams in the firelight.

JUD

Holy shit.
(sharp look)
Sorry.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The faded outline of the cross on the wall.

JUD (V.O.)

*So that set the tone. And as months
passed, I realized the darkness of
that story, it was in the bedrock of
this place.*

Wicks performs Mass for maybe 30 people. Jud at the altar.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)

*I understood now what Langstrom had
meant, this place needed a fresh shot
of love. So I got to work. There was
a core group of regulars.*

In the pews - VERA DRAVEN, smartly put together in her mid 40s. She carries a deep resigned tiredness, like a sharp tool that has been blunted.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)

*Vera Draven. Local attorney. She was
loyal and devoted.*

EXT. VERA DRAVEN'S HOME

The home that is also Vera's family legal office. Signage out front: "DRAVEN & DRAVEN LEGAL". Vera unloads groceries from her SUV.

INT. VERA DRAVEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Vera drinks tea with Father Jud. A framed photo of her DAD and FORTY YEAR OLD WICKS hangs behind her.

VERA

My father supported the church,
supported Wicks. He was his attorney,
and his drinking buddy. The boys.
Quite a pair.

JUD

And you became a lawyer so you could
take over his family practice? That's
so nice.

VERA

I became a lawyer to do great things
in the world. But this place was my
dad's legacy, he wanted me to keep it
going when he passed. So. Here I am.

Enter CY DRAVEN, 30 and clean cut, watching a video on his
phone and barely acknowledging Jud. Vera reminds him to pick
up dinner and he "yeah yeahs" her, heading out to the deck.

JUD (V.O.)

*Her adopted son Cy had just moved
back home after trying and failing to
get a foothold in politics.*

JUD

Is it nice having him back?

Vera smiles tightly. Cy out on the deck behind her.

JUD (O.S.)

*Vera's dad came home with ten year
old Cy out of the blue, told Vera she
was going to raise him, no questions
asked. She was young, just out of law
school. But she did it. The whole
town knew he was obviously her
illegitimate brother, her dad's love
child, but Vera accepted it. That's
Christ-like stuff right there.*

VERA

My dad valued loyalty. So I've always
valued that too, I've given up a lot
to be loyal. To my dad. To Cy. To
Wicks. I think if dad looked at my
life now, he'd be pleased.

Vera is obviously not pleased with it herself.

EXT. VERA DRAVEN'S HOME - DECK - DAY

Jud and Cy on the deck, while Vera works inside. Cy has a combination of shark-like focus and dull eyed sincerity. The effect is chilling.

CY

I came this close. I was the GOP golden boy, the great hope, I've got connections and ins and outs I was on the cusp but I just couldn't engage voters. I didn't have that cult of personality thing I guess.

JUD

It's hard, connecting with people in a genuine way.

CY

I know. And I tried everything, believe me - I hammered the race thing, I hammered the gender thing, the trans thing, the border thing, the homeless thing, the war thing, the election thing, the abortion thing, the climate thing, the thing about induction stoves, Israel, library books, vaccines, pronouns, AK 47s, socialism, BLM, CRT, the CDC, 5G everything, all of it I did - nobody, just, nothing. People are just numb these days. I don't know why. It's sad. I'm just regrouping though, gonna figure it out. Show all those beltway bastards.

JUD

Well maybe if you get back to fundamentals, basic building blocks of how to genuinely inspire people.

CY

Right, the basics. Like show them something they hate then make them afraid it's going to take away something they love?

JUD

Well no. I meant like inspiring their hearts. What inspires you? Your faith, right? Maybe start there?

Cy considers this, and seems genuinely inspired.

CY
Yeah... faith. I can use that. Yeah.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Behind Cy - DOCTOR NAT SHARP, an unassuming man around 40.
He sits next his vivacious wife DARLA.

JUD (V.O.)
*Nat Sharp, the town's local doctor.
His life revolved around his wife,
Darla. She was his everything.*

INT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA - DAY

The local pizza joint, festooned with kitschy devils.

Jud at the bar with Doctor Nat, who pounds straight whiskey
and twists his bolt-shaped wedding ring. His soft manner
curdles with simmering rage.

DOCTOR NAT
Darla left me last week, took the
kids, moved to Tucson with a guy she
met on a Phish message board.

JUD
Phish the band?

DOCTOR NAT
I had no idea.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Nat in the same seat but now alone and miserable.

JUD (V.O.)
*Doctor Nat wasn't just grieving a
loss, he was a man cut adrift. It was
a very vulnerable time, a crossroads
between building a new life in
Christ's love or in someplace not so
good.*

Doctor Nat takes an angry but discrete pull from a flask.

Across the aisle: LEE ROSS, rugged late 40s in flannel.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*The closest thing we have to a local
celebrity, the sci-fi writer Lee
Ross.*

CUT TO: A book cover, "THE CRESCENT LIMBO by LEE ROSS - over
1 million copies in print"

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*You probably know at least some of
his books. The Crescent Limbo series,
Icepick of Time, The Crystalline
Juncture.*

INT. LEE ROSS'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Medieval weapons and hunting trophies on the wall. Lee
shows off a broadsword to Jud, wagging it between his legs
like a dick. Big dog energy, edged with a brainy meanness.

JUD (V.O.)
*He collected medieval weapons and
dirty jokes.*

LEE
So then the guy says "I screwed your
dog, I took a shit in your purse, I'm
outta here." Ha. Ahh. But. Nobody has
a sense of humor anymore, that's the
problem.

JUD (V.O.)
*Fun to be around, just a born
storyteller.*

Lee shows off a painted FIGURINE of a sci-fi figure.

LEE
Then Guillermo's like "cabrón,
where's the dick?"

JUD
So Guillermo Del Toro's making a
movie of Crescent Limbo? I read that.

LEE
We're down the road with him but...
his schedule, and plus I dunno if
he's right for it. You know, he's
Mexican, there's a cultural divide
there.

JUD

Ten years ago Lee moved here from New York, connected with Wicks and the church, and as he puts it:

LEE

Unplugged my brain from the liberal hive mind. I highly recommend it.

JUD (V.O.)

His book sales and popular standing have been in slow decline ever since.

Close ups of a series of titles - "THE GROUPTHINK INVADERS" - "WOKEN INTO OBLIVION" - "THE WALL HUMANITY BUILT" - "VIRUS OF DECEIT"

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The congregation mills post-mass. Cy is taking a selfie video with Wicks. Lee leans in to Jud, scowls.

LEE

This little shit-wick. Got his little influencer fangs in the Monsignor lately huh.

JUD

Yeah. I guess I told him to - well maybe, yeah.

LEE

We don't like him. We all keep warning Wicks shake him off, he's bad news. Opportunistic poetaster.

Jud shifts his attention to SIMONE VIVANE, stunning in her late 20s, in a wheelchair.

JUD (V.O.)

Simone was new to town and new to the church. She had been a world class cellist, forced to retire five years ago for health reasons.

Quick shot of SIMONE playing cello passionately.

INT. SIMONE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Simone looking at her hand, cramped and twisted like a broken spider. She sits having coffee with Jud.

JUD (V.O.)

Chronic pain. Some mysterious nerve thing that doctors cannot diagnose.

SIMONE

But that didn't stop them taking my money, giving me hope. Tests and experimental surgeries and "let's maybe try this" treatments. I believed they could heal me. Suckered. Dipshit moi. To take someone's faith and exploit it for money. It's the ultimate evil, don't you think it is?

JUD

Yeah it's bad. But I understand wanting to believe.

SIMONE

Do you? I think you do. My friends in the city have all pulled away from me. She's gone crazy Christian. I dunno. The person they know it's the room up here

(her head)

where I'm funny and can flirt and quip and dinner-party it, they know that me. But I have a basement, down here, and it's the size of Yankee Stadium and it's filled with pain, and all it wants is someone stronger than me who can take the pain away. And I know myself enough to know it's always gonna be steering the ship. This is different though, faith in God to heal me, this feels different. I feel hopeful now, like a miracle could happen. I feel protected, safe. That's how Monsignor Wicks makes me feel.

Jud smiles.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Wicks greets Simone warmly. Jud watches, not smiling at all.

Lee punches Jud on the arm and nods back to Wicks.

LEE

Spirit really moved him today, right?

MARTHA

Mr. Ross, thank you for hosting the book club this weekend.

LEE

You bet Martha, going to be a fun one.

Wicks approaches boisterously, his arm around Nat's shoulders, Simone behind him.

Cy is cut off from this little group by Nat and Lee, who give him the cold shoulder. Cy glares, resentful.

WICKS

My warriors! My army. What a day, yes? Feels like we could take on the whole world, a day like this. All of us against the world!

He slaps Lee on the back. Jud watches the comradery Wicks generates. His gaze darkens.

JUD (O.S.)

Wicks kept this core group tight, the seductive power of his charisma was undeniable. But his method...

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Monsignor Wicks delivering a fiery homily.

JUD (V.O.)

Every week he would pick someone out, a newcomer usually.

In the pews, a SINGLE MOTHER with a toddler.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)

And he would attack.

WICKS

- the world wants us all to feel ok, any of your choices, make your choices, they're your choices, don't feel bad, have that affair, tell that lie, have that child out of wedlock, satisfy your selfish heart. Selfish. Yes. Depriving that child of a family, of a father. An assault on our castle, the institution of manhood.

(MORE)

WICKS (cont'd)

My own mother made that selfish choice with me and I curse her selfish heart for it every day of my life, putting her needs and wants before the family God intended, I am enough, ME, selfish harlot heart, you are not! Might as well beat that child. Yes. Might as well starve that child. Defy the family that the Lord intended and watch your child burn beneath that burden -

JUD (V.O.)

This is not the true church, you ask even the most hardcore of those in the pews, they'll say no of course this is not what they believe, it's Wicks being Wicks, pushing it too far. And what he's pushing for, every time, is a walkout.

The single mother, shaken and upset, gathers her toddler and walks out. All eyes watch her go.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)

Why does he do this? Because when that person walks out everyone watches, and even if in the light of day it's indefensible, deep down in the dark, it scratches an itch.

Nat clocks the single mom exiting. His face barely changes.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)

And by staying put in that pew, a side is taken. Wicks's side.

Another mass: an ASIAN WOMAN in a N-95 mask walks out in tears. Lee clocks her going, and doesn't react.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)

Testing tolerances, tapping deep poisoned wells, hardening, binding with complicity.

A clean-cut GAY COUPLE storm out. Martha watches, impassive.

Jud taking all this in, troubled.

JUD (O.S.)

So I tried to offer a counterbalance.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Jud sits with the flock - Martha, Lee, Nat, Simone, Cy, and Vera.

JUD

Welcome to our first Father Jud prayer group, thank you all for being here. I know I'm "the new guy" but I've found the value of new people coming into my life is they can see walls that maybe sprouted up in my heart that I'm not even aware of. And this is all about breaking down walls between us and Christ, us and each other, us and the world.

(beat)

When I was seventeen I was a boxer. I killed a man in the ring. I built up so many walls of anger, addiction, violence, so no one could touch this guilty wound I had. It was only when I felt safe enough to put my dukes down, open my arms, confess my deepest sin, that was the day that Christ saved my life. He didn't transform me, he sustains me, every day it's daily bread right? I'll tell ya if I didn't have his love and purpose in my life of serving him, serving all of you as a priest, I'd fall back to my old ways like that, I don't know how I'd live. I think that's what the church should be, that's what I want this church to be for me and all of you.

MARTHA

So... Monsignor Wicks is not coming?

JUD

No, but... no. So I thought we could just talk and start sharing and -

CY

But he knows that we're doing these, right?

JUD

He knows - sure, of course, I'll tell him, I just wanted us to connect and uh, walls you know

LEE

You'lll tell him? Contraction of the
simple future tense meaning you
haven't yet?

Jud stares at Lee.

DOCTOR NAT

Why haven't you told him?

SIMONE

This feels kinda weird.

JUD

Guys. This is a prayer meeting, not a
secret anything.

SIMONE

It's a secret prayer meeting.

JUD

No

CY

That's literally what it is.

MARTHA

I just texted the Monsignor.

JUD

Great! So it isn't a secret anymore.
Now if we can get back to breaking
down those walls through Christ's
love

DING!

MARTHA

He says "What the holy heck."

DOCTOR NAT

Aw geez.

VERA

Sorry Father, I came because I
thought this was an official church
function?

MARTHA

But he didn't use the word "heck"

JUD
Thank you Martha, this is a church
function Vera it's at church with me
it's official.

MARTHA
Or "holy"

LEE
Ha. Lemme see.

VERA
I'm gonna go. Cy?

CY
Yup.

SIMONE
Yeah sorry Father, I don't want to
piss him off.

MARTHA
I think we all should go.

The flock files out. Doctor Nat comforts Jud:

DOCTOR NAT
Nice try Father.

JUD
Thanks Doc.

Cy stops shooting with his phone on his way out.

CY
I'll probably post it tomorrow, can I
tag you?

JUD
I'd prefer you didn't.

CY
I probably will anyway.

JUD
I know.

Jud puts his head in his hands. Martha lingers, angry.

Like talons against stone:

MARTHA
I'm sorry your little coup failed
tonight, Father.

JUD
My coup Martha? Really?

MARTHA
Anything we need to pray about or
confess we can do to Monsignor Wicks.

JUD
Can you? Cause you all seem scared to
death of the guy. Could you walk into
that church by your own free will and
confess your deepest sin to Wicks,
Martha? Without fear? Cause if not,
this whole place is a whitewashed
tomb.

MARTHA
(defiant)
Yes I could.

JUD
Good.

She stares hard back at him, then leaves.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Empty, before services. Jud arranging things on the altar.

Martha steps out of the CONFESSIONAL. Gives Jud a "so there"
look and walks haughtily off.

A moment later MONSIGNOR WICKS stumbles out of the
confessional, shell shocked. Steadies himself against a pew.
Raises his eyebrows and whistles, staggers off.

JUD (V.O.)
*Holy Week, the week of special
services leading up to Easter.*

CUT TO: Holy Week on a calendar, with the days marked: Palm
Sunday, Spy Wednesday, Good Friday, Black Saturday, Easter.
We move in on Palm Sunday.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*It was on Palm Sunday that I finally
broke.*

WICKS (PRE-LAP)
So twice in the shower this week,
doing that thing I told you about
where I hold my hand upside down,

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Jud sits with Wicks in their confession spot.

WICKS

And then at the computer with the Korean cartoon pornography, with the tentacles I described last time, and then...

(thinking)

no that's it. That's it.

JUD

Five our fathers. Five hail Marys.

WICKS

It's been so cleansing, doing this twice a week, thank you. Well we're at nine months now, Jud. How are you enjoying it here? Breaking down some walls?

JUD

Can we just -

Motions "you do me now."

WICKS

Yes.

JUD

Bless me father for I have sinned, it's been a week since my last confession.

(beat)

I betrayed a fellow priest's privacy. I know that Martha keeps your medical bills filed in the office, so I went through them. And learned you had a radical prostatectomy five years ago, making you physically incapable of an erection.

Wicks holds him with a sly half smile.

JUD (cont'd)

I can handle whatever this is. But for nine months I've seen the way you tend this flock, and I don't like it.

WICKS

You don't like it.

JUD

No Monsignor I don't.

(beat)

Nat Sharp. Man needs to forgive and start building a life, Christ's love should be the launching pad for that, and instead he's every day just getting more and more angry and bitter against his ex-wife, against women, it's bad. And Lee, he's an author - a storyteller, and it's like his superpower has been turned against him, the only story he tells is "the world is out to get me." He was brilliant funny and smart and respected and now he's just spinning out and angry all the time, paranoid, did you know he's literally built a moat around his house?

WICKS

Really?

EXT. LEE ROSS'S HOUSE - DAY

Two full suits of armor flank the front door. Lee fills a shallow trench circling his house with a garden hose.

JUD (O.S.)

I mean it's mostly symbolic but yeah.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

JUD

Simone. I'm sorry Monsignor but I'm afraid you're taking advantage of her.

(Wicks reacts)

No not that way - I've seen the donation numbers I know how much she's giving now, the past few months she's basically supporting this place.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - FLASHBACK - DAY

Jud sees Simone sitting with Wicks, praying earnestly with her rosary beads.

JUD (O.S.)
 And yes I believe true, pure faith in
 the possibility of miracles through
 Christ can have a healing effect.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

JUD
 But what you're giving her is not
 that. It's transactional. Through
 you. And God help you, you make her
 feel betrayed again.

WICKS
 God help me. Anything else?

JUD
 Yeah why not. Cy Draven. You two are
 close, good. He's building a new
 political identity, ok. His faith is
 part of that, fine. But doesn't this
 new YouTube stuff he's doing worry
 you?

INT. RECTORY - JUD'S OFFICE - DAY

On a LAPTOP SCREEN, Cy's YouTube channel:

ARMORY OF GOD - weekly wisdom from Monsignor Wicks

Jud looks encouraged and clicks on it. He frowns.

The episodes: Non-Binary Non-Godly

Locked and Loaded for the Lord

Racism Doesn't Exist in God's Kingdom (America)

JUD (O.S.)
 Every week now he takes clips from
 what you say in mass and plugs them
 into his political rants, he's co-
 opting and honestly I think
 misrepresenting the church in
 dangerous ways.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Back to the garden.

JUD

God forbid anyone ever starts watching them.

(beat)

When was the last time a new person lasted more than one Sunday? Word has gotten out - every week now it's just this hardened cyst of regulars, and it seems like you intentionally keep them all angry and afraid. Is that how Christ led his flock? Is that what we're supposed to do?

Wicks nods. A silent beat.

Then he PUNCHES JUD HARD in the stomach. Jud curls onto the ground.

WICKS

Right now. You're angry. You should be. It'd be dangerous if you weren't, I'd see you're helpless and I'd do it again and again. I'm the world, you're the church. Stay down -

He kicks at Jud's stomach but Jud blocks it and scrambles to his feet in a defensive posture.

WICKS (cont'd)

Good. Right. Anger lets us fight back. Take back the ground we lost. And we have lost so much ground. And now you're afraid - look at those bare knuckle instincts coming back, good, you're afraid I'll come at you again so you're protecting yourself. You're alright now, ok.

(sits)

Because the world wants to destroy us. Your version of love and forgiveness is a sop, it's going along to get along with modernity, not wanting to offend this garbage world, and meanwhile they destroy us. The feminists, the Marxists, the whores. Bit by bit they do. I carry my burden, I hold the line. And you? You simpering child from Albany. You going to get angry and fight?

JUD

You're poisoning this church. I'll do whatever it takes to save it, to cut you out like a cancer.

Wicks pats him on the shoulder as he walks away.

WICKS

Five our fathers. Five hail Marys.

Jud spits blood. Looks up and sees Wicks greeting Cy, who grins knowingly at Jud.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Wicks gives his Palm Sunday homily. Jud sits, still shaken from their encounter.

JUD (V.O.)

*Christ you didn't give up on me, I'm
not giving up on this church. There
must be a way to pull the flock back
from Wicks.*

The flock in the pews. Samson loudly listens to baseball on his radio earpiece - Martha SWATS him, he takes it out.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Jud, alone, locks up the church.

JUD (O.S.)

But he was one step ahead of me.

EXT. RECTORY - NIGHT

Jud approaches the Rectory. Half dozen cars are parked in front. Jud slows, listening to shouting from within.

WICKS (INSIDE)

Father Jud's prayer meeting? Ha! I have kept this church, I have fortified it with the truth of God and now, the betrayal! To find my authority and faith and life itself challenged! And from inside my own sanctuary!

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Jud angrily PUSHES OPEN the door.

The entire FLOCK (minus Sam) sits around the main room, with Wicks holding court.

Every head turns to Jud. Every face a mask of anger.

WICKS

GET OUT.

Wicks HURLS a book at Jud, who falls back outside and slams the door behind him.

INT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA - NIGHT

Still in shock, Jud drinks at the bar.

JUD (V.O.)

Wicks's final move. Open war against me. I got pretty toasty.

Jud spots a LAMP on the bar with a wolf-like DEVIL HEAD ornament on top.

He grabs it, and it accidentally snaps off in his hand.

JUD

The world's a wolf! Devil wolf - that's what he is - oh. Nikolai, I broke, I'm sorry. It broke.

The kindly owner of the place, NIKOLAI, very New York, comes and gently guides Jud out.

NIKOLAI

Father it's ok, it's alright. They're junk lamps. You ok to drive?

EXT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA - NIGHT

Jud shakily gets on his bicycle.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - NIGHT

Jud stops on his bicycle. The CHURCH glows in the moonlight.

He realizes he still holds the DEVIL HEAD ornament.

JUD (V.O.)

I had hatred and rage in my heart that I had never felt before. Or maybe felt once.

Jud HURLS the devil head towards the church.

A CRASH and tinkle of glass.

In the woods, a lantern turns on - SAMSON in a cloaked rain hood, doing his rounds.

SAMSON
Who's there?

Jud BOLTS like a little kid.

THE HOLY WEEK CALENDAR: Zero in on Good Friday.

JUD (V.O.)
*And that brings us to Good Friday.
Here we go.*

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Clouds on the horizon.

JUD (V.O.)
It was a 3pm service.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

JUD (V.O.)
Just the regulars.

They're all there in the pews: Vera, Martha, Simone, Lee, Doctor Nat, Samson, and Cy filming with his phone.

Wicks delivers his homily. A fiery one. We don't hear it.

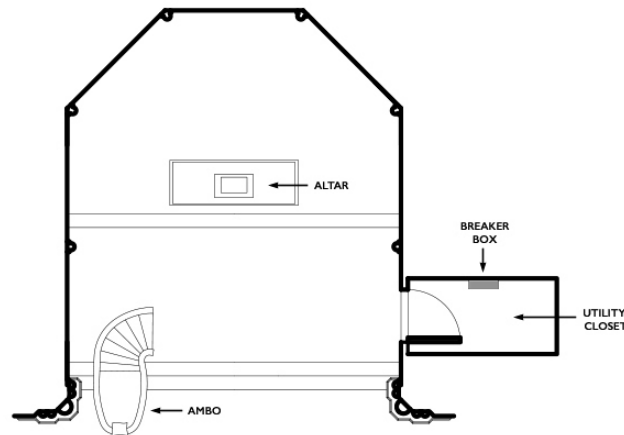
JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*There was a strange tension in the
air. I can't recall the homily but it
felt different. The anger felt less
calculated. More unhinged.*

Wicks finishes, dripping sweat from the exertion.

He walks silently past Jud.

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*As always, after the homily Wicks was
spent, emotionally and physically,
and needed some time to recover. He
would always duck into this small
storage closet just to the side of
the sanctuary so he'd be out of
sight, he'd fortify himself, and I
would continue the service, until he
felt strong enough to rejoin and take
over.*

The closet is small, concrete and totally empty except for a closed steel breaker box. Wicks steps into the closet, and out of sight.



Jud pulls a standing wooden cross to center stage.

JUD
Behold the cross, on which hung the
savior of the world

A heavy THUD-CLANK is heard. Jud stops. Looks at the storage closet, its door wide open.

JUD (V.O.)
That's when it happened.

Everyone in the pews looks confused - what happened?

Jud's POV: Wicks lies face down on the bare concrete floor of the closet, his head towards the door. He does not move.

JUD
Monsignor?

Jud approaches him, enters the closet.

DOCTOR NAT
What's wrong?

MARTHA
Jefferson?

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE

Jud kneels next to the still form of Wicks.

Through the open door we see Nat and then the rest of the flock come onto the sanctuary, peering in.

Jud touches him gingerly on the back, trying to stir him.

JUD
Monsignor?

Then he feels something and stops.

Jud raises his hand from Wicks's back.

It is wet with bright red BLOOD.

Everyone is too stunned to react.

DOCTOR NAT
Jud.

Then Jud sees it - something red and solid about the size of a billiards ball, resting on Wicks's lower back.

JUD
There's - there's something on his back.

DOCTOR NAT
Don't touch anything - let me see -

Jud stands and backs out of the closet. Nat takes his place, leaning down to look.

DOCTOR NAT (cont'd)
What...

And now we see what is on Wick's back.

The wolf DEVIL HEAD.

The same one Jud took from the bar, but now painted bright red, almost blending in with the vestments.

A PIERCING SCREAM breaks the silence.

All eyes go to Martha, who is pointing and shrieking, stumbling backwards, sending the cross crashing to the ground. Samson grasps her, trying to calm her down.

MARTHA
Struck down! Down by Satan! Satan has struck him down!

DOCTOR NAT
Oh oh.

Attention back to Nat, who is using his handkerchief to lift the wolf head off the body.

But it doesn't come off. It's stuck hard.

Nat pulls with a little more pressure... and a glimpse of steely blade is revealed coming from the bottom of the figurine, piercing Wicks's back.

Blood begins to pool from the body. Doctor Nat steps back, phone already in hand.

DOCTOR NAT (cont'd)
 Someone call the police.
 (into his phone)
 John it's Doctor Nat, I'm at Our Lady
 of Perpetual Fortitude, we have a
 stabbing, a - send an ambulance
 immediately.
 (shouts)
 Someone call the police! Now!

Jud's face, still shocked and dazed, the tears and horror and Martha's screaming swirling around him.

CUT TO:

INT. JUD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Jud at his small desk. Pen in his hand, legal pad in front of him. He has just paused writing.

He looks up, stares into space. Thinking. Troubled.

Then begins writing again.

JUD (V.O.)
*The ambulance took just five minutes
 to arrive. Wicks was pronounced dead
 on the scene.*

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Dark stormy skies. Wicks is carried on a stretcher to the ambulance, everyone but Jud gathered in shock.

JUD (V.O.)
*When I joined the others outside the
 police were just arriving.*

Jud emerges from the church just as cop cars pull up.

Martha in Samson's grasp, wailing and shrieking.

MARTHA

The devil will not have this man! He shall rise again in the glory of the lord! He will rise!

The Chief of Police GERALDINE SCOTT gets out of the lead car. She's brusque in her 50s.

GERALDINE

Christ.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - EVENING

Jud, top-lit, his face a mask. Geraldine across the table exhausted and explaining something to him.

JUD (V.O.)

Hours of questioning, all through the day Saturday. Until finally:

GERALDINE

Father I'm going to be honest with you. You were the only one on the stage with Wicks at the time of the killing. You've admitted to having prior possession of the murder weapon, the devil head thingy. And you were the only one in that church who hated his guts.

JUD

I didn't hate any guts.

GERALDINE

Cy Draven put this up on his YouTube this morning, it's blowing up. As the kids say.

Geraldine shows him a YouTube video on her phone - Cy was **FILMING** Jud and Wicks's confession in the garden. Titled "WICKS'S WOKE MURDERER"

JUD (ON VIDEO)

You're poisoning this church. I'll do whatever it takes to save it, to cut you out like a cancer.

Jud is shell shocked.

GERALDINE

And so. If it weren't for the stubborn fact that it appears impossible, I'd say you killed him. So would half this town, now. And yet. I dunno. It's a goddamn miracle.

INT. POLICE STATION HALL - EVENING

Jud walks in a trance down the hall.

Notices on the ground: ROSARY BEADS. He picks them up, and inside a doorway sees Simone, talking tearfully to a cop. Jud holds them out to her, she does not take them. The cop closes the door.

Jud's phone rings - "BISHOP LANGSTROM - ALBANY"

EXT. POLICE STATION - EVENING

Jud stumbles out of the station, on a FaceTime with Langstrom.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

How you doing, kid?

(nothing)

Come on back. Take a day, Wicks requested a private burial without a funeral mass which is insane but we're just letting it happen, so stay for that then come back to Albany.

JUD

I'd rather stay here, this church is going to need -

BISHOP LANGSTROM

We're recalling you. Back. The council saw that video the kid posted and, what you said, yeah. There's not a lot I can do. There'll be a review.

JUD

What's going to happen?

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Son, not everyone needs to be a priest.

JUD

Yeah but I do.

Jud hangs up. Absolutely gutted.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - NIGHT

Jud wanders through the woods. Falls to his knees.

JUD (V.O.)
I didn't even try to sleep. Wicks had truly beat me. The council was right: how could I wear this cloth, when in the part of my soul that cannot lie to Christ, or myself, or you... I was happy the old man was dead.

The sun breaks over the Church. Jud's eyes rimmed fiery red, his hands clasped in front of his face - the morning light reveals a trace of bloodstain on his hand.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Jud falls to the ground in front of the the empty space on the wall where the cross should be.

JUD (V.O.)
Jesus. Help me. Show me the way out of this. Please.

A beat of silence. Then a singsong voice with a distinct southern lilt rings out from the back of the church:

BLANC (O.S.)
 Hellooooooooooooo?

Jud turns. Benoit Blanc steps gingerly across the threshold.

BLANC
 I'm sorry. Are you... open?

Jud stands, wiping his eyes.

JUD
 Always.

BLANC
 Are you alright?

JUD
 Yeah. Uh huh. I'm sorry, come in. There's no uh, Easter Mass, I'm sorry. But you're welcome here. Come in.

Jud comes to greet him, trying to pull himself together.

BLANC
Thank you. I don't want to take you
away from priestly duties.

JUD
No. This is it, man.

BLANC
Ok.

JUD
Yeah.

A long beat of silence, as Blanc takes in the space.

BLANC
Well this is really something.

Jud tries to be engaged, but is bleary.

JUD
Right? It's hard to be in here and
not feel His presence.

BLANC
Whose?
(Jud blinks)
Oh yes. Yes. Of course.

JUD
You're not a Catholic.

BLANC
Very much not, no.

JUD
Baptist? I'm guessing?

BLANC
Oh goodness no. Proud heretic, I
kneel at the altar of the rational.

JUD
Uh huh. So this is enemy turf. You
weren't raised in a faith?

BLANC
My mother is, was, very religious.

JUD
Were you close with her?

BLANC

No. As a child, I was. But uh.

JUD

Complicated. Family.

BLANC

Complicated. Yes.

JUD

So how's all this make you feel?

BLANC

How does it make me feel.

(beat)

Truthfully?

JUD

Sure.

BLANC

Well the architecture interests me. I feel the grandeur. The mystery, the intended emotional effect. And it's like someone is shouting a story at me that I do not believe, that's built on the empty promise of a child's fairy tale, filled with malevolence, misogyny and homophobia and that's justified untold violence and cruelty while hiding its own shameful acts. So like an ornery mule kicking back I want to pick it apart, pop its insidious bubble of lies and get to a truth I can swallow without choking.

(beat)

The rafter details are nice though. You want to kick me out go ahead.

JUD

You're being honest, it's good.

BLANC

Telling the truth can be a bitter herb. I suspect you can't always be honest with your parishioners.

JUD

You can always be honest by not saying the un-honest part.

(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)

(beat)

You're right, it's storytelling. This church, it isn't medieval, we're in New York. It's neo-Gothic, nineteenth century. Has more in common with Disneyland than Notre Dame. And the rites and rituals, the costumes, all of it. Storytelling. You're right. I guess the question is, do these stories convince us of a lie, or do they resonate with something inside us that's profoundly true. That maybe we can't express any other way. Than storytelling.

Blanc regards this young man.

BLANC

Touche, padre.

Jud smiles. Then laughs, suddenly realizes he's crying.

BLANC (cont'd)

Son...

JUD

No. Yeah sorry. It just - I just felt like a priest again - and now I'm gonna lose that, and without that purpose I'm frightened, I don't know how I'm going to live...

The Chief of Police Geraldine bursts into the church.

GERALDINE

Blanc! Oh - you found him. Is he -

Blanc motions to her - 5 minutes. She nods and goes. Blanc turns back to Jud, who is suddenly alert and suspicious.

JUD

Who are you.

BLANC

I'm sorry, I should have led with this. My name is Benoit Blanc. I'm a detective, and I've taken an interest in the murder of Jefferson Wicks.

JUD

(oh god)

A detective. So you're with the police.

BLANC

No. I work in a private capacity.
Geraldine has graciously allowed me
access for the day.

JUD

She thinks I did it.

BLANC

She's fairly convinced yes.

JUD

Everyone thinks I did it. I didn't do
it. But in my heart maybe I did, and
the way it happened was some kind of
miracle, I don't know... I'm lost I
don't know.

BLANC

Will you let me help you.

JUD

What?

BLANC

Your lips are cracked with
dehydration, you haven't slept all
night. You've spent it out of doors,
from the state of your pant-legs on
your knees in prayer. What I see is
not a guilty man in torment, but an
innocent man tormented by guilt. Let
me help you.

JUD

How?

BLANC

This was dressed as a miracle, but
it's just a murder. I solve murders.

JUD

Wait wait - were you - that thing at
Kentucky Derby? With the murder and
they caught the guy with the photo-
finish camera? So you're - okay, you
were on The View, what are you doing
here?

BLANC

I need to come up to speed rapidly on
the events of that Good Friday
service, and the goings on at Our
Lady of Perpetual Fortitude.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)
If you can spare the day and
accompany me on my investigation,
view the body, trace the murder
weapon, inspect the crime scene, you
are in a unique position to assist
me.

JUD
The body?

INT. HOSPITAL MORGUE - DAY

The body. Naked and laid out on its back on a gurney. Jud
stands pale white and in shock, Blanc flits back and forth
over the corpse. Geraldine stands at a remove.

JUD
Yeah I've changed my mind I don't
think I should be here -

GERALDINE
Exactly - Blanc if it weren't you I
wouldn't be allowing this, it's
insane that he's here.

Blanc pulls him closer to the corpse. TAMMY THE MORGUE
ATTENDANT stands nearby, munching on a granola bar.

BLANC
No no. I want you to have a clear
clinical picture of how this
happened. To see Wicks now just a
corpse,

Blanc starts poking the body, which jiggles like jello.

BLANC (cont'd)
look there, not the mythologized
monster in your mind but flesh and
blood, dead from a knife wound we can
analyze.

GERALDINE
Please stop doing that.

BLANC
So look here, the entry point.
Consistent with the width of the
murder weapon. If you would please -

TAMMY
Pancake him? Yup.

The attendant holds the granola bar in her mouth and FLIPS the body over onto its stomach with a SLAP. Jud winces.

A small slit in the skin on the lower left back, just under the shoulder blade. Jud edges forward, ghostly white.

BLANC

You see there? Clean, went straight in, no wiggling around or signs of struggle. Stabbed through his robes.

JUD

Vestments.

BLANC

Vestments! There, see - your presence is invaluable already.

CUT TO: an X-ray of Wicks's torso. A long slender knife blade (with the devil head attached) pierces from his back upwards into his heart.

BLANC (cont'd)

One single thrust, in and up. The blade tore open the right ventricle of the heart.

JUD

Why didn't he scream?

BLANC

Well. The blade was sharp, slender and thin, so the initial sensation would have been overwhelmed by the impact. It might have felt like getting tapped hard on the back.

Blanc taps Jud on the back to demonstrate and Jud does another FULL SCAREDY-CAT reaction.

BLANC (cont'd)

Sorry. Sorry that was me. Just demonstrating the -

GERALDINE

Jeez Louise.

JUD

I might just wait outside.

GERALDINE

That's a great idea, please do. Okay? Okay.

Jud turns to exit when SLAP! The ATTENDANT flips Wicks onto his back. Jud slows to a stop next to Wicks's body. Drawn to it, hypnotized by his face.

GERALDINE (cont'd)

That's a pretty precise target to hit, right? Stabbing from the back to hit the heart?

BLANC

No, they knew what they were aiming for, but there's a little leeway, nicking any of the major veins or arteries would have the same effect.

Jud can't take his eyes off Wicks's cold waxy face.

BLANC (cont'd)

What I wonder is, could he have been ambulatory, could he still have been on his feet, even walked between the stabbing and losing consciousness?

GERALDINE

I'll call Beth, the medical examiner, get an opinion.

Wicks's eyes SNAP OPEN and he SITS STRAIGHT UP, his cold dead hand punching forward and clasping Jud's throat -

Blanc SNAPS his fingers in front of Jud's face.

Jud's eyes flutter open - he's on his back, he fainted. Wicks is still very much dead.

JUD

Oh god.

BLANC

Easy, easy there -

JUD

I gotta get out of here

BLANC

Here there now

Jud scrambles out the door, hyperventilating.

EXT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY

Jud slams into the opposite wall and sinks to the ground, gasping for breath. As the swinging doors to the morgue open and close he sees Geraldine yelling at Blanc

GERALDINE	BLANC
I'm pulling the plug on this, he's my prime suspect and I see what you're doing playing Columbo with him hoping he'll slip up, it's cruel and legally very very shady.	No - No yes just let me talk to him - one second please.

Blanc comes into the hall and kneels next to Jud.

BLANC (cont'd)
Hey -

JUD
No no no no this is not where I belong I can't help you I don't know why you brought me here but I just need to leave

BLANC
Hey hey hey hey HEY. You want absolution? You want to ever be a priest again? Then you need to go through this with me. I mean what's the point of letting yourself be crucified for something if you're innocent?

JUD
Blanc. C'mon.

BLANC
The real killer is out there. Let's find them, nail them - sorry - catch them, and get your life back. Yes?

Geraldine comes into the hall.

BLANC (cont'd)
He's alright.

GERALDINE
Oh is he? Father I need to know you understand the situation. We are not all buddies solving a case, I'm a cop who suspects you strongly.
(MORE)

GERALDINE (cont'd)
Anything you do or say in front of
me - you don't have to be here. Not
without a lawyer. Do you understand
that?

This prods Jud and he kicks back:

JUD
I didn't do this. If I can help find
who did, I'm in, I'm fine yeah let's
yeah.

BLANC
Body. Now murder weapon. And then
crime scene. Stick with me.

INT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA - DAY

The MURDER WEAPON is placed on the bar. The long thin blade,
with the wolfish devil head for a hilt.

The bar owner Nikolai is there. Geraldine and Jud too.

NIKOLAI
Tell you something, I don't even like
the Devil. Il Diavolo, sounds classy,
Italian, fine. Then my wife buys a
devil sign, then she buy devil lamps,
people start "oh give him a devil
thing for the bar he loves it" and
hey-o devil devil devil, bang. I
dunno.

Blanc picks it up, inspects it, holds it next to the lamp.

BLANC
That's it though, for sure, right?

JUD
Yeah.

NIKOLAI
Yeah here - this'll show ya.

Nikolai takes a framed photo from the wall of him posing
behind the bar. There's the lamp alright.

NIKOLAI (cont'd)
It wasn't red though, it's red now.
That's paint, I hope.

GERALDINE

Yeah freshly painted. They filled it with some kind of plaster and stuck the blade in that way.

BLANC

Explains the weight.

GERALDINE

(to Jud)

And you took it... just because.

Jud falters. A CUSTOMER at a booth is watching the incriminating Cy video (loudly) and stealing glances.

JUD

Yeah, I don't know why.

NIKOLAI shouts at the customer with the phone.

NIKOLAI

Hey! Ixnay, Eddie c'mon. Not cool.

Jud is thrown, Blanc guides him back.

BLANC

The devil head thing. It ended up...

JUD

In the church. I threw it at the church, it broke a window, I forgot I did it the next day, it was stupid I was very drunk.

BLANC

I don't suppose anyone admits to finding it?

GERALDINE

Shocker: no.

JUD

No, I threw it Sunday night,

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Martha exiting the church looks down and notices broken glass on the ground.

JUD (O.S.)

and after the Chrism Mass on Monday, Martha told me she found a small broken window.

MARTHA
 (mutters)
 Kids.

INT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA

JUD
 But nothing else.

BLANC
 Hm.

Blanc is doing something strange - he's holding up the photo of the bar from the exact same spot the photo was taken, and flipping it away and then back. The effect is like a "what's the difference between these pictures" game.

JUD
 Hm?

BLANC
 You see it, yes?

In the photo, a slightly younger DOCTOR NAT is sitting at the bar alone, his leather DOCTOR'S BAG on the ground by his stool. In the real-life bar, no doctor... but the BAG is there, in just about the same place.

Jud goes and inspects the bag. Realizes a wet cocktail napkin is on the bar.

JUD
 Yeah.
 (calls)
 Dr. Nat?

REVEAL: Sitting in a booth, Doctor Nat with a whiskey. Caught, he slides out and unsteadily approaches the bar.

DOCTOR NAT
 Yes. I was just, having a little lunch. Father. Officier-ers.

BLANC
 Dr. Nat I'm Benoit Blanc

DOCTOR NAT
 Great. Good.

Nat signals to Nikolai for the check. Twists his wedding ring nervously.

JUD

Nat, I can come by later. If you need to talk.

DOCTOR NAT

No I don't think I'd prefer that. I'd prefer not that.

(the knife)

Is that what you did it with? Cut him out like a cancer? You son of a bitch. Congratulations.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Tell 'em, Nat.

Nat walks out. Nikolai enters with Nat's check. He sighs.

JUD

I'll get it, Nik.

NIKOLAI

(discreet)

It's a big tab Father. For month.

JUD

It's fine

(looks)

Whoa. Uh I -

(concerned)

How often is he in here?

NIKOLAI

Often often.

Blanc plucks the bill out of Jud's hand.

BLANC

I'll get it. Consider this my contribution to the

(reads it)

WHOA. Wow. No it's ok. It's fine.

A customer brushes past them, exiting.

HECKLING CUSTOMER

Murderer.

NIKOLAI

Hey! He's a good priest, you watch your mouth with that. Father, sorry.

Jud's anger rises, his focus returns. To Blanc:

JUD

Ok. What's next?

Blanc drops his card, then examines the blade with his reading glasses.

BLANC

We know the origin of half the murder weapon, I'm going to get greedy now: This is an antique blade that's been recently sharpened. Where in town could one find an antique, possibly medieval knife?

Jud and Geraldine look at each other.

EXT. LEE ROSS'S HOUSE - DAY

With the "moat," the suits of armor flanking the front door. Our three approach, and Blanc hops over the moat.

BLANC

I have a feeling this is a bingo.

INT. LEE ROSS'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

ON LEE'S LAPTOP: Cy's Youtube page. Jud glares at it, then shuts the laptop.

Lee is absorbed in inspecting the murder weapon with a large loupe as Blanc and Geraldine look on.

LEE

Mm hm. Mm hm. Mm. Fifteenth century. It's a blade from a ballock dagger.

BLANC

Where would one obtain a hefty ballock dagger such as this? Ebay?

Lee's manner is dark, something weighing on him.

LEE

No. eBay pfft. No this is real deal stuff, either a respected auction house or an inside track with dealers. The real. Deal.

(beat)

I've been expecting this.

BLANC

You have.

LEE

Yeah. I guess it's time to bring you guys in.

Lee sets a heavy MANUSCRIPT on his desk with grave import.

LEE (cont'd)

I have sweat blood into these pages for the past year. This is my last chance ticket out of Substack hell - I can't take it anymore, my readers these days - survivalist freaks, they all look like John Goodman in The Big Lebowski I swear to god. But this'll get me back on the bestseller shelves.

(beat)

And it's also... the reason Jefferson Wicks was killed.

They all lean in to read the title page.

BLANC

"The Holy Man And The Troubadour: A Battle Song For America's Soul." What is this? It's about Wicks?

LEE

His teachings. My reflections. Essays and recollections of an acolyte at the feet of a prophet. Both under siege from a world that wants to silence them. They got to the saint first. Isn't that always the way.

JUD

Who got to him?

LEE

Who. Right. Who had the power to obtain this weapon and silence Wicks forever with it? Who has destroyed my writing career with the venom of a literally vampiric cultural cabal of intellectual elites?

GERALDINE

Oh god this is gonna be the Jews

LEE

Who got my TV deal cancelled when I even came close to exposing their conspiracy.

GERALDINE

Yup, okay

LEE

(the manuscript)

These are plans of war, a field guide for taking our country back to its roots - who wants to stop that and has the power to source a medieval weapon to strike the symbolic blow?

JUD

Alright, um

LEE

I'm just asking the questions.

GERALDINE

Rhymes with "the shoes" though right?

Blanc, who has been half listening as he idly looks at books on Lee's desk, now cuts straight to the point.

BLANC

Mr. Ross, I have reason to suspect this weapon was stolen from a local source, for expediency and to avoid a purchasing paper trail. But if this is the extent of your weapons collection, I can see we're wasting your time.

Lee stares back hard at him. Then walks to a bookshelf, pulls a beer tap handle, and a secret door opens. He leads them through it into

INT. LEE ROSS'S WEAPONS WORKSHOP

Workbenches, shop vacs, armor and weapons everywhere.

Lee opens a drawer with literally dozens of blades similar to the one in the murder weapon.

LEE

These are weapons of war, I keep this room locked down.

BLANC

So it's impossible anybody could have accessed one of these blades.

LEE

Impossible.

JUD
Anyone but you.

This just comes out. Lee stares daggers at him.

LEE
Judas.

GERALDINE
He's right though, and a splashy murder case and a martyred saint won't exactly hurt your book sales, right Lee?

LEE
How dare you.

GERALDINE
I'm just asking the questions.

Suddenly Lee's anger goes slack, as he realizes something.

LEE
Shit. Wait.

EXT. LEE ROSS'S HOUSE - DAY

Lee at one of the suits of armor. He pulls the DAGGER from the sheath on its belt. The blade is identical to the murder weapon.

All eyes go to the other suit of armor. Geraldine pulls its dagger - and the handle comes off. No blade. Ah ha.

BLANC
Do you have any security system outside the house?

LEE
I mean...

Lee motions to the moat.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Jud and Blanc exit his rental car. In the background Geraldine parks her prowler. Jud looks dazed.

He sees in the forest: SAMSON in his cottage, the garage door open. Assembling a pine coffin.

Samson catches his gaze, then closes the garage door. When he hits the remote, the baseball game on his tv fuzzes.

BLANC

How are you holding up?

JUD

I dunno, a little punch drunk. And I haven't slept in thirty six hours. But I'm starting to click with this process, it feels good, and you're doing your thing? You're figuring it out?

BLANC

I am. Last step: the crime scene. Stick with me.

JUD

The crime scene, right.

Meaning the church. Geraldine joins, hanging up her phone.

GERALDINE

That was Bishop Langstrom. He wants you back ASAP for your Priest trial or whatever but I don't want you leaving town yet. Blanc we gotta talk.

CUT TO: They all sit at a picnic table.

GERALDINE (cont'd)

So believe me I'm happy you're here. I'm too understaffed and too Jewish for all of this priest mishegoss. No offense Father. But. When you showed up I made a false assumption. I assumed the church hired you.

JUD

The church hired you?

GERALDINE

I just learned no.

BLANC

No. Nobody hired me. A friend on the force in the city emailed me the file yesterday. I was on the next train to Chimney Rock.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)

(beat)

Consider. A man gives a ten minute sermon, demonstrates his physical and mental facilities in front of an audience of witnesses. He then, in plain sight of everyone, walks alone into a sealed concrete box. Nobody else is inside this box, the only exit is visible to the witnesses at all times. And thirty seconds later, that man is lying dead, still alone in the box, with a knife strategically embedded in his back.

(beat)

Give me a one word reaction to that scenario.

GERALDINE
Fakakta.

JUD
Impossible.

BLANC

Impossible. An almost comically clear textbook example of an impossible crime. This does not happen in the real world. In detective fiction, yes. The impossible crime and the locked door mystery, detective fiction is rife with them. But in the real world, if you premeditate an elaborate murder, you make it look like suicide. Or an accident. Or frame another likely suspect. The one thing you do not do is hang an ornate sign above the body that says "I AM A MURDER, PLEASE SOLVE ME." A classic impossible crime in our real world. It thumbs its nose at reason, it desecrates the bedrock of my soul.

GERALDINE

Jeez.

BLANC

This is akin to a centaur showing up in a mall, a seraph suddenly in 7-11, buying a Yoo-Hoo. Its own sort of miracle. For a man of reason this is, if you'll pardon me Father, the holy grail, and my rational heart will not rest until I've popped its mythic bubble. So you see. I must find that angel with a Yoo-Hoo. And take it down.

JUD

So you've made a pilgrimage?

BLANC

(distaste)

Well.

GERALDINE

But we're gonna solve this, right?

BLANC

I'm incapable of not solving a crime.
That moment of checkmate, when I take
the stage and unravel my opponent's
web... well you'll see. It's fun.

GERALDINE

Look forward to it. Where do we
start?

BLANC

The source.

Blanc pulls a paperback from his pocket, tosses it to her.

BLANC (cont'd)

John Dickson Carr's "The Hollow
Man" - a gold age detective novel,
and a veritable primer on the locked
door mystery, the impossible crime.

Geraldine flips it open - "EX LIBRIS - LEE ROSS"

GERALDINE

Is this Lee's?

BLANC

I stole it. Arrest me.

GERALDINE

Lee who has a storyteller's brain and
I guess has been studying the source
material, this is significant right?

BLANC

Hence my purloining.

JUD

Hold up.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

Jud hands a copy of the BOOK CLUB READING LIST to Blanc. At the top of the list of titles... THE HOLLOW MAN.

BLANC

Father Jud, once again earning your keep.

He murmurs as he runs down the list of titles...

BLANC (cont'd)

Wait a minute "Whose Body" - "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" - "Roger Ackroyd" - "Murder at the Vicarage?!" My god, this is practically a syllabus for how to commit this crime! And the whole flock was in this group? Who chose these books?

JUD

Oprah.

For half a second Blanc's brain breaks.

BLANC

Oprah?

JUD

Martha pulls a themed list from Oprah's site.

BLANC

It confirms my theory: the killer certainly imitated the traditional methods of a locked door mystery story. Which makes things simple. Book club time, c'mon kids.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Martha's eye, peeking in the ajar church door.

Her POV: Blanc holds court on the sanctuary, Jud and Geraldine listening attentively.

BLANC

In "The Hollow Man" the detective Gideon Fell gives a run-down of all the possible methods for a locked door killing. So, let's line em up and knock em down.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)
Possibility number one: Wicks was
stabbed with the knife before
entering the closet.

(beat)
This presumes he could walk a few
steps after being stabbed, which is
possible. Father Jud please take your
place, right where you were.

Jud sits on the side, Blanc stands in the Ambo.

BLANC (cont'd)
Wicks completes his sermon. Any
device behind him capable of
propelling a heavy unbalanced dagger
into his back would have been hidden
from the camera's view, and the
witnesses in the nave, but would have
certainly been observed by Father
Jud.

Blanc looks expectantly at Jud.

JUD
No I did not see a knife-shooting
robot behind him.

BLANC
No. Possibility one: nixed.
(beat)
Possibility two: he was killed while
inside the closet, by someone or
something outside the closet.

JUD
Like something shot the knife into
the closet from out here? No that's
nuts.

BLANC
Nuts and impossible on several
fronts. The only entrance is the
door. Clearly visible to all,
including Cy's camera. Possibility
two: nixed. Progress!

GERALDINE
How many more possibilities are
there?

BLANC
Not many. Three! Wicks was stabbed
while inside the closet by a device
that was also inside the closet.

INT. UTILITY CLOSET

Blanc enters, taking in the very bare simple space.

GERALDINE

So like, something planted
beforehand? Triggered with a remote?

BLANC

These walls are thick but a very
strong RF signal could blast through
them. So where do you hide a remote
controlled knife propelling device in
an empty box? Hm?

Jud steps forward, intensely engaged.

JUD

Wicks fell on his stomach, I remember
that clangy thud, and his head was
towards the door, so he was standing
at the back facing out. So the knife
must have somehow come from the back
wall.

Blanc runs his hands over the back wall, tapping gently.

BLANC

A clangy thud. Very good. However...
Rock of Gibraltar.

JUD

What about... what about a false
wall? That was removed later?

Blanc is truly impressed.

BLANC

Go to town Father Brown.

GERALDINE

My boys would have noticed a fake
wall.

He flips open the breaker panel. It's just an inch deep.
Tries the breakers, the lights go on and off in the church.

BLANC

Yes, and removing it after would be
no small task. Nothing was found on
the floor of this space, yes? Nothing
at all?

GERALDINE
Just the red thread.

BLANC
The red thread?

GERALDINE
Yeah it was in the report - or it
should have been.

BLANC
It certainly was not.

GERALDINE
Well, two strands of thick red thread
about three inches long. There. Found
next to the body, by his hips.

Geraldine shows Blanc photos of the red thread.

BLANC
Hm hm hm.

JUD
So what's possibility four?

Blanc looks at him strangely.

Then raises a finger, listening. You hear that?

In the gloomy darkness down the aisle, crumpled on the
ground, Martha lies weeping.

JUD (cont'd)
Martha...

He goes to her, Blanc and Geraldine approaching gingerly.

MARTHA
Throw them out! Like Christ with the
money changers, father throw them
out! To walk this holy place like
some crime scene, some tawdry police
show, talking of robots, you aught
not father. It isn't right.

BLANC
Martha, is it? My name is Benoit
Blanc, it's a pleasure to -

But Martha lunges at them accusingly, pointing.

MARTHA

You search in vain, you are blind to
the mystery of faith. Treading on the
sacred, mocking a holy martyrdom how
dare you, how dare you!

Jud leads Martha out of the church.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Jud gently leads Martha out into the sunshine.

JUD

Martha. You should go home and rest.
Can I do anything for you?

MARTHA

Leave. No one wants you here anymore.
You always hated the Monsignor and
had nothing but contempt for us.

JUD

That's not true...

MARTHA

Murder in your heart.

JUD

No...

MARTHA

Blood on your hands! Like the harlot
whore your original sin has stained
this place.

Jud struggles for words. Starts to break.

MARTHA (cont'd)

False priest.

Jud SLAPS away her pointing accusing finger.

Martha is stunned. Jud's face is filled with rage but he
spits all this out like a machine gun:

JUD

I'm sorry. But yes if finding the
facts with that detective puts me
against you and this flock, then I
dunno, watch your butts I guess.
Sorry.

and stalks off.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE

Jud barrels in, straight to Samson's speed bag.

JUD
Can I use your bag.

Jud's already punching fast and furious. Samson, who was watching a baseball game on his tv, sits up in his cot.

SAMSON
Sure go ahead.
(beat)
Are you ok?

Jud rolls punches, focused and alive.

JUD (V.O.)
*A fog was clearing. This was a
puzzle. It was solvable. The body.
The weapon. The crime scene. Robot
knife guns and angles of view and
stone walls and remote controls...
remote controls...*

Jud's punching stops. His eyes goes from the church, visible outside the garage door, to the baseball game on the tv.

JUD
You didn't listen to the game during
Friday's service. On your radio.

SAMSON
Would not, Martha frowns upon it.

JUD (V.O.)
*Remote controls with RF signals...
strong enough to get through stone
walls.*

Jud taps the old top-loading VCR next to the TV.

JUD
So you taped it.

SAMSON
Yup.

INT. POLICE MEDIA ROOM - DAY

GRAINY VIDEO FOOTAGE: A batter HITS A HOME RUN.

Blanc, Geraldine and Jud gather around a computer, where DONNIE the video technician plays the digitized footage.

A VHS player is hooked up to the computer.

DONNIE

Ok. I've overlaid a time-stamp, taking into account the broadcast delay. Dr. Sharp's call to the hospital was made at 3:47pm. And a minute and a half before that, at 3:45pm...

On the screen, when the time-stamp hits 3:45:34, a brief shimmering pulse of static overtakes the screen.

DONNIE (cont'd)

There are several things that could have caused that, but to answer your question yes, it's consistent with a strong pulse of RF interference.

GERALDINE

Father Jud boy detective DAMN!

JUD

Yes. YES. This is it right? This triggered the knife robot, this has got to be it - god this feels good - you can solve it now?

Blanc is not excited or surprised. To the technician:

BLANC

Did you sync it up with Cy's footage?

DONNIE

I did. We've got a time stamp on the iPhone video, very precise.

BLANC

Ok, show us.

GERALDINE

Show us what?

Donnie the technician plays two video streams - the baseball game with its time stamp and Cy's iPhone footage with the time stamp in sync.

Jud is on stage with the cross. His attention is drawn to the clangy thud in the closet. He goes towards it, staring inside, and just then the baseball game fuzzes.

GERALDINE (cont'd)

(deflated)

So when the RF burst happened, he was already on the ground with a knife in his back. And Father Jud's staring right at him. So. How's that work.

BLANC

For the knife robot? It doesn't.

JUD

So this was nothing?

BLANC

No no. It's very much something. We have all the pieces laid out now.

JUD

We do?

BLANC

Yes. Consider: the origin of the devil head. Red thread. A clangy clunk. The timing of the RF signal. It all lines up.

JUD

So give us the answer!

Blanc looks genuinely stunned. Almost shell shocked.

BLANC

I can't. I'm sorry, I can't.

JUD

You said with all the pieces you'd have an answer!

BLANC

I know. I can't explain it. With all the pieces on the table, this crime still truly appears impossible. I don't understand.

JUD

But impossible is a miracle, it can't be impossible, you said you can solve it, that's what you do, the Kentucky Derby, I put my faith in you! Oh god.

Jud sinks into a chair like a child spent from a tantrum.

BLANC

I think you should get some sleep.

GERALDINE

Yeah that's a good idea, it's been a helluva day. Father. Some sleep.

BLANC

I'll drive you back.

Geraldine holds up the copy of THE HOLLOW MAN.

GERALDINE

You want this?

BLANC

I've read it.

They leave. Geraldine flips the book open with a smirk.

EXT. RECTORY - EVENING

Blanc's rental car pulls up and stops.

INT. BLANC'S RENTAL CAR

Blanc sits for a thoughtful beat, staring at Jud.

BLANC

You're right. It can't be impossible. There must be a piece missing. And I think I know where to find it.

JUD

Where?

BLANC

I've tried to focus your mind on facts, but you cannot let go of the stage scenery of faith, this murky mythological mire. There's something hidden in there, in your head that I need to solve this crime, and if I can't shake it loose then I'm sorry, I'll have to go in and get it.

JUD

Ok you're freaking me out now.

BLANC

Would you do something for me?

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

They sweep in, Blanc with the energy of a man with a plan.

JUD
I don't understand, I don't get how
this will help?

BLANC
It will.

INT. JUD'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Jud sits at his little desk, Blanc excitedly hands him a legal pad and pen.

JUD
You want me to write the story

BLANC
The story of the Reverend Wicks's
murder -

JUD
Monsignor. Wicks.

BLANC
Papal Grand Poobah I don't care - I
need to see his murder and the events
leading up to it through your eyes.

JUD
Starting... where?

BLANC
Wherever you think. Try to keep it
interesting, keep it moving, but
spare no detail.

JUD
Blanc I'm not a writer.

BLANC
I'm not expecting you to win a
Pulitzer, just do your best. Be
honest. And take your time. I'll be
quite comfortable.

Blanc retires to the main room. Jud watches him through the ajar door as he starts building a fire in the hearth.

Hesitantly, Jud sighs and puts pen to paper, writing "*Hard to know where to start.*"

JUD (V.O.)
*And so I've spent the past hour doing
exactly that. And now I'll put down
this pen and hand it to you,*

INT. MAIN ROOM - HOURS LATER

The fire burned low. Jud dozes on the couch.

Blanc silently reads the final words as we hear them:

JUD (V.O.)
*and I guess wait while you read my
story of the murder of Monsignor
Jefferson Wicks.*

Blanc lowers the pad. Face heavy, his eyes distant. He watches the fire. A log settles into ash.

He stands, turns to face Jud.

Jud sits up, bleary. A beat.

BLANC
Why did you do it.

A long, terrible beat.

JUD
The better question is why did I
think I could lie to you, and get
away with it.

BLANC
You didn't lie. I knew you wouldn't.
You just didn't say the dishonest
part out loud. *"When I joined the
others outside the police were just
arriving."*

Blanc points to Jud's words on the legal pad.

EXT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks's body on the stretcher, everyone gathered watching, police pulling up. Jud exits the church.

BLANC (V.O.)
"Joined the others outside." So you
stayed inside.
(MORE)

BLANC (V.O.) (cont'd)
So you were the only person with
unobserved access to the utility
closet after the murder but before
the police searched it.

Geraldine pushes past Jud, into the church. He looks guilty.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

The firelight glancing hard on Blanc's face.

BLANC
Why. Why protect him?

JUD
I didn't do it to protect Wicks. I
did it to spare the people who
believed in him just a little
disillusionment.

BLANC
But surely everyone knew.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Lee embracing Wicks after a ceremony.

BLANC (O.S.)
It would have been on his breath,
after every mass,

Lee passes Jud, nods back to Wicks.

LEE
Spirit really moved him today, right?

INT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jud performs communion, glances into the utility closet.

Wicks in the closet pulls a FLASK from the shallow breaker
box, and takes a DEEP PULL.

BLANC
he "fortified" himself, yes - clever
wording there - but everyone must
have known.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

JUD

No. Not everyone. Sam, the one good person in this whole place, getting sober saved his life.

INT. UTILITY CLOSET - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks dead on the ground, Jud beside him.

His eyes land on THE FLASK, gleaming on the floor.

JUD

And I knew there would be police and press, why have this be part of the story,

On his way out he PUSHES THE FLASK behind the door and out of sight.

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

As everyone follows the stretcher, Cy with his camera, Jud lingering behind, looking back at the sanctuary...

JUD (O.S.)

it was just an impulse.

INT. UTILITY CLOSET - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Jud reaches in, the blood still fresh. He GRABS the flask from the floor, pockets it.

JUD (O.S.)

A little storytelling to protect my flock.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Blanc's eyes flare. With alarming intensity:

BLANC

Yes you're a good priest at heart blah blah blah and in protecting their bubble of belief you have shielded a killer. Where is that flask?

INT. RECTORY - JUD'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jud enters, goes to his end table, opens the drawer - and stops. Digs around.

JUD

Shit.

He rifles with more urgency. Blanc appears in the doorway.

BLANC

I can't imagine you keep this place under lock and key.

JUD

I don't think the front door even has a lock. Shit. It's not here.

Jud looks under the table, the bed - nothing.

JUD (cont'd)

Blanc I'm sorry, he was stabbed so I didn't think -

BLANC

No you didn't think. But we're into the woods now, so you'd better start.

JUD

Someone broke into my room, it's just hitting me, this is, it's devious, like calculated - against me...

BLANC

Yes. You see what's at stake.

JUD

They're trying to ruin me...

BLANC

You see the enemy we're up against.

JUD

I never let myself reckon with the reality of it but one of them really did it. Killed Monsignor Wicks.

BLANC

And I fear is capable of much more. You have listened to this flock's stories with empathy and grace, we're done with that now. We've wasted enough time.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)
 Tomorrow we will use the gathering at
 the burial to question them all
 together. We must discover what
 happened that night. And what this
 flock of wicked wolves is hiding.

A snore. Jud is out like a light, slumped over on his bed.

Blanc slips the iPad out from under the legal pad. It's cued
 to to the video from the murder, Wick poised at the ambo in
 his scarlet Good Friday vestments. Blanc presses play.

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks regards the flock, apparently unaware that when he
 finishes this final homily, one of them will put a knife in
 his back.

WICKS
 Betrayed. Beaten. Mocked. Pierced.
 Murdered.

Intercut this with:

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

A mini FORKLIFT pries the stone slab away from the entrance
 to the CRYPT, leaving a gaping black entrance.

Simone, Lee, Martha, and Doctor Nat watch this, along with
 maybe a dozen people from town.

WICKS (O.S.)
 And put in a hole to rot, to be
 forgotten. As with our Savior, so
 with the Church. Our Church is
 assailed by wicked modernity. By the
 enemies of God. The harlot whores,
 the vermin who would oppress and
 silence and bar us from our rightful
 place as the rulers of a Christian
 nation of faith.

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

WICKS
 And even as I stand before you a
 warrior in Christ in the armor of God
 ready to fight the world to my last
 breath - YOU SHALL NOT PASS -

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE - DAY

A SIMPLE PINE COFFIN on a table. The unsealed lid is removed, revealing the corpse of MONSIGNOR WICKS.

WICKS (O.S.)
as our Lord was, I am betrayed by
Judas. Judas in many forms.
Always the true threat comes from
within. Remember my words.

In the small cottage are Doctor Nat, Lee, Samson and Jud.
Behind them, MARTHA enters, tearful.

MARTHA
Gentlemen. May I have a moment?

Samson leads her to the body and she weeps over it. The
other men all step outside.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

Blanc stands discreetly at the tomb. Observing.

Simone in her wheelchair, smoking.

WICKS (O.S.)
On this Good Friday, remember what's
to come. Remember, all of you.

Vera arrives late, very put together, her face unreadable.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE

Jud peeks into the ajar door. Sees Martha weeping over the
open coffin.

MARTHA
You will rise again, it'll all be ok,
you will rise again, you will rise.

WICKS (O.S.)
The hour approaches. The hour I have
warned you about.

Doctor Nat edges past Jud and enters. He gently pries Martha
away and with a final look into the coffin replaces the lid,
calling for the other men.

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

WICKS

Remember what I have promised you all
come Easter Sunday - for I will make
good on that promise. Yes I will.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

Jud, Doctor Nat, Lee and a few others from the town carry
the coffin past the assembled and into the crypt.

WICKS (O.S.)

For behold though he is struck down
the righteous Son of God will rise
again! Eve's apple restored to the
tree and the wealth of his kingdom
and his rising reign,

INT. CRYPT

The crypt is tiny, with a shelf on the left and a shelf on
the right. An aged pine box identical to Wicks's sits on the
left shelf.

The men slide Wicks's coffin onto the right shelf.

WICKS (O.S.)

and as you gnash your teeth in the
darkness you unfaithful devils, as
you lie cold and forgotten and alone
he will rise again!

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK - DAY

WICKS

To reclaim what is his and strike
down the wicked and raise his true
Son to the throne of this nation yes
he will rise yes he will rise yes
tremble in fear for he will rise
again in glory and vengeance and
power!

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

The forklift REPLACES the stone slab, sealing the crypt.

Doctor Nat turns with a "well that's it" gesture.

Everyone mills. Jud stands with Blanc, deep in thought.

MARTHA

Father Jud.

Martha suddenly at his arm. Jud jumps, startled. He immediately bristles, ready for a fight.

JUD

Yes Martha.

MARTHA

I've arranged coffee and cookies as a reception in the rectory, just for the closest members of the congregation.

JUD

Oh. Well that's, that's very nice, thank you -

MARTHA

So if you could make yourself scarce for a few hours, we'd appreciate it.

She walks off. Jud glowers.

EXT. RECTORY - DAY

Jud and Blanc linger in the front driveway.

JUD

Sons-a-bitches. Should we just bust in?

BLANC

Let's not go off half cocked. Give it a minute, form our strategy.

MAN (O.S.)

Hey!

A man in work coveralls with the name-tag "JAMES" approaches from a truck hauling the mini-forklift.

JAMES

You look like you work here.

Hands a clipboard to Jud, who squints and signs.

JAMES (cont'd)

Sorry for your loss, Father.

(MORE)

JAMES (cont'd)

(beat)

But glad this worked out. Hey wait a minute - aren't you the priest who killed that priest?

Jud snatches his copy of the receipt from James and launches towards the front door.

JAMES (cont'd)

Hey could I get a picture Father? For my kids.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM

Jud BURSTS into the room, Blanc in after him.

JUD

Alright everyone, listen up!

LEE

Well look who's here, Judas Jud.

MARTHA

Father you are not welcome here.

JUD

Alright STOP. Here's what's going to happen. Benoit freakin Blanc and I are going to ask you all questions and you're going to answer them, and we're going to get to the bottom of who killed Monsignor Wicks and why. And then. That's it. Ok. Ok? So.

BLANC

Thank you Father. And we're going to start with what happened that night, right here, in this very room.

DOCTOR NAT

You mean that night where Jud admitted to all of us that he's killed a man?

JUD

No - and that, that was,

(to Blanc)

the boxing thing

(then)

I was trying to break walls and Jesus and alright. No.

LEE

And now you're covering your ass by turning against us. A PINO helping Benoit Blanc crack the mystery of the eeeeeevil Church.

JUD

A "PINO?"

LEE

Priest in name only.

JUD

Oh gawd.

LEE

Then some hacky libtard will do a podcast and before you know it the idiot versions of all of us will be on Netflix.

VERA

The idiot versions. God forbid.

Simone stands to get a lighter. Martha SCREAMS.

MARTHA

It's a miracle!

SIMONE

I can walk Martha it just hurts. And I say good, expose it all. Wicks was a con man, miracles and supernatural power of God bullshit. I really believed. I still want to believe, how sick is that. My goddamn volcano.

LEE

What?

SIMONE

I will happily be played by Jenna Ortega if it saves another idiot like me being suckered.

DOCTOR NAT

Don't flatter yourself.

SIMONE

Shut your dusty dick-hole, Nat.

DOCTOR NAT

That doesn't mean anything.

SIMONE
 (eyebrow wag)
 Oh yeah it does.

DOCTOR NAT
 What?! My dick-hole is dusty, that's,
 what does that even imply?

SIMONE
 You know.

DOCTOR NAT
 That it's small?

LEE
 Nat.

DOCTOR NAT
 Oh good one ha ha real logical why
 would that make it dusty?

SIMONE
 (winks)
 Dusty.

DOCTOR NAT
 WHY?

Simone wags her eyebrows. He LUNGES AT HER - a collective
 "WHOA" from the group and he is restrained.

Pandemonium erupts. Broken by a PIERCING BLAST OF NOISE.

Blanc holds an air horn he's picked up from a shelf.

BLANC
 Sorry - my god, I thought that was
 going to be a toot toot situation and
 that was - wow. Yes so. I was
 inquiring not about Jud's prayer
 group, but about the shadowy meeting
 with Wicks that took place in this
 room on Palm Sunday. Father Jud, at
 the time you thought you were
 shielding these poor souls from
 Wicks, and you assumed he was turning
 them against you. But now I think
 you're seeing this flock in a new
 light. Remember that night, now, and
 tell me what you see.

Jud seems confused, but goes back in his memory...

INT./EXT. RECTORY - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Jud opens the door and walks into the great room.

All the angry faces...

JUD (O.S.)
I remember... you were all filled
with hatred and rage,

But they are looking at Wicks. Their rage directed at Wicks.

JUD (O.S.) (cont'd)
but not at me. At him. At Wicks.

Wicks throws a book at Jud

WICKS
GET OUT!

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM

Jud's eyes open.

JUD
Blanc you're right. It wasn't about
me. All of you looked ready to kill
him. Why?

BLANC
Yes. Why? Who wants to go first?

Silence all around. Then:

CY
I'll tell you.

Everyone turns - Cy Draven, with a wild look in his eye. He
heads straight for Martha's office.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE

Cy roughly rifles through the file cabinets.

Blanc and Jud enter, the rest of the flock just outside the
door.

MARTHA
You tell him nothing!

LEE
Keep your mouth shut you
little shit weasel, this
isn't your decision.

JUD

Cy. Tell us what happened.

Doctor Nat, physically exhausted and emotionally vulnerable, makes an honest plea:

DOCTOR NAT

Father Jud. I promise that what we discussed in that room has nothing to do with Wicks's killing, but it does have things that, if made public, will humiliate and maybe ruin people in this room. Please. I ask you for trust, for mercy and for grace. Leave it alone.

Jud suspended between anger and empathy.

Then Cy holds up his phone.

CY

I recorded the whole thing. Just hit play.

The briefest "what's everyone gonna do" moment, then Nat LUNGES towards the door.

Jud SLAMS it and locks it, shutting the flock out. Blanc grabs the phone.

JUD

Play it!

Blanc presses PLAY on the phone. HARD CUT TO:

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Seated are Doctor Nat, Lee, Martha, Vera, Simone and Cy, with his phone in his lap.

Monsignor Wicks sweeps in, impatient.

WICKS

Alright. Very dramatic, Vera. You've got your audience. What's this about.

Vera is obviously nervous. She holds a piece of paper.

VERA

I thought everyone should hear this, together.

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)
Because I know how news travels in
this group, and I want you all to get
the truth, straight from the source.

WICKS
The truth. Well. Bestow it upon us.

VERA
I've been thinking about your mom.

Wicks stiffens.

VERA (cont'd)
I never knew her. But growing up in
this church I knew the story of the
harlot whore. And I've been thinking
about what her life must have been
like. Trapped in a house with a
father and a son who closed ranks and
shamed her. And taught us all to
shame her, even in death. That poor
girl.

Wicks does not react. Vera brandishes the paper.

VERA (cont'd)
Yesterday I got a call from a family
law colleague in Brooklyn. He wanted
to double check a contact detail
about Monsignor Jefferson Wicks, my
client. Because my client had filed
an AOP with him. In Brooklyn. So I
wouldn't know.

LEE
What's an AOP?

She hands the paper to him.

LEE (cont'd)
Acknowledgement of parentage... oh
wow.

VERA
No shame for you. Who was the mother?
Does it matter? No. She came back and
dumped this poor kid in your lap,
went and had her life. My faithful
dad came to the rescue, once again
the boys club closed ranks.

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)

And there I was, the loyal little idiot. I obeyed and honored and raised your son for twenty years so you could sit on your pulpit, shameless, you hypocritical son of bitch.

Dumbstruck reactions.

DOCTOR NAT

...Cy?

LEE

"...affirmation that I Jefferson Wicks am the biological father of Cy Draven."

DOCTOR NAT

Did you know?

CY

Not till Vera told me this morning. But also I think I always knew.

Wicks puts his hand on Cy's shoulder. Cy grasps it.

WICKS

Yes. Cy is my son. From a loose woman of no importance who I knew for one night and haven't seen in thirty years. Vera's father and I kept this secret. But no longer. He is my heir, my son, and now the world is going to know it.

(Looks around)

So. Rats. Flee the sinking ship.

Lee is doing math in his head. Doctor Nat instinctively goes to take a drink before realizing he has nothing in his hand.

Simone and Martha look truly shaken.

VERA

Oh skip the farce. You're all sticking by your man. I just wanted to see you all eat his shit up with a spoon and ask for seconds.

LEE

That's so condescending, Vera. You don't know what we're feeling. I think as Christians we're all very affected by this.

Wicks eyes him. Lee stands up in front of a picture of Christ on the cross.

LEE (cont'd)

But... we are engaged in an existential war, where the ends justify the means. The Church doesn't need some pussy who's just gonna lie down and take it, we need a warrior. And I do believe God has chosen Monsignor Wicks.

(to Wicks)

You and your son have my sword.

Vera rolls her eyes. Wicks looks around - anyone else?

DOCTOR NAT

We don't know this woman, what her deal was. Monsignor you can, if you want to tell us, or not, but we don't know, how she, you know, we may never know, what is truth, even, with various, sources, does it exist, does anything exist? So.

CY

Well said, Doc.

SIMONE

(to Wicks)

You promised if I stuck with you, you can heal me. If that's true, I don't need you to be a saint.

Wicks looks at Martha. Martha is silent.

LEE

We're with you Monsignor, and literally nothing you do or say will change that.

Cy looks at Wicks, gives him a "you know what to do" look. Wicks nods in affirmation, takes a breath and begins:

WICKS

I will give my final service a week from today on Easter Sunday. And then I will close the doors of this sad little church for good. But not before I have destroyed each and every one of you.

LEE

Wait what?

WICKS

Your drinking, Nat. You are a dangerous man. Going to work drunk, treating patients, children while drunk, this community should know. The medical board should know. No one must ever hire or trust you again.

Nat looks like he's been punched in the stomach.

WICKS (cont'd)

And Lee, this "Troubadour" book you've been writing. Its bootlicking idiocy is an affront to my ministry. It's my duty to warn not just the public but my friends in the publishing world. It must be buried. You must be buried. Exposed you as the irrelevant clown that you are.

LEE

What the hell is this - what is even happening right now?

WICKS

Simone. I cannot heal a woman without faith. I cannot help you.

SIMONE

But... you said you could cast it out... you promised me

WICKS

I promised you nothing.

SIMONE

But I've given you, my savings, all of it -

WICKS

You cannot buy God's healing. Faithless harlot. You will never be healed, you will die in pain in the prison of this chair.

SIMONE

Why are you doing this? I don't understand - why?

Wicks looks at Martha, who is unreadable.

DOCTOR NAT
I am so confused right now

LEE
Wicks is this a joke - is
this payback for the Father
Jud prayer meeting thing
cause that was an ambush

WICKS
Father Jud's prayer meeting? Ha! I
have kept this church, I have
fortified it with the truth of God
and now, the betrayal! To find my
authority and faith and life itself
challenged! And from inside my own
sanctuary!

Jud opens the door and Wicks THROWS a book at him.

WICKS (cont'd)
GET OUT!

Jud does.

WICKS (cont'd)
Weak. All of you. You can't follow my
path. Yes we are at war. And I cast
you out of my fortress.

SIMONE
You son of a bitch.

WICKS
On Easter Sunday when the pews fill
with townspeople I will lay bare the
sins of this flock, cut you loose and
shake the dust of this place off my
sandals. And to hell with all of you.

He stomps upstairs, the flock stunned. HARD CUT back to:

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

Blanc hands the phone back to Cy as Jud swings the door open
revealing an empty room, only Vera staring into space.

BLANC
Well that cleared the house.

JUD
Cy. Why did he do that?

Cy has completed his searching, and has not found what he
was looking for. He collapses in a chair, deep in thought.

JUD (cont'd)

Cy. CY.

Jud slaps him. Cy snaps out of it, stunned.

CY

You just slapped -

Jud does it again.

CY (cont'd)

Can priests do that?

JUD

Yes it's a new thing the Pope just okayed it. So tell me before I get slappin again what was happening? Why did he torch them all? Why would he do that?

CY

Because I told him to.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks embraces Cy in the empty church.

CY (O.S.)

When Vera told me the truth I went and found him. And he embraced me as a son. For the first time in my life. Do you know how that felt? He unburdened himself.

WICKS

I hate this place. Hate this sad flock of losers. I want to get out. And now finally I can.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

CY

He told me... his grandfather's family fortune. Lost all these years. He had found it.

VERA

No. No, it's gone, nobody knows what Prentice did with it but it was gone without a trace.

CY

He told me he found it. He was going to shutter this dump and retire in filthy wealth. And I told him... are you nuts?

INT. CHURCH - FLASHBACK

CY

Retire?! Do you know the power of what you do on that stage?

WICKS

I've shrunk the flock...

CY

No you've radicalized them. That is power. In a small town there are only so many witches to burn and zealots to activate, your flame lacks fuel. But... on the internet? Wildfire. With this money and your cult of personality and me as your Steve Bannon, are you kidding me! The sky is the limit. You could be a religious icon, a media mogul, a king maker, a king - give me four years and you could be president.

WICKS

Oh come on.

Cy gives him a "do you seriously think you couldn't?" look. And Wicks realizes, of course he fucking could.

CY

Together we can build a real empire, as father and son.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

JUD

Like... in Star Wars?

CY

Yeah exactly, like the rebels.

JUD

No

CY

His ministry and my political instincts, fueled by enough money, can you imagine what we could do in Christ's name?

Jud processes this, mortified.

JUD

Yeah I think I can.

CY

But first, I told him - and this was a little personal I'll admit - first we need to burn this flock.

INT. CHURCH - FLASHBACK

CY

They're a liability. Doctor Nat is a gin-soaked malpractice suit waiting to happen, Lee's damaged PR goods, Simone's nuts, she's volatile. If they associate themselves with us, show up on cable news, even want a place in this thing, no.

WICKS

They'll jump ship when they learn about my indiscretions...

CY

Come on, you know they won't. We need to burn them off like leeches.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE

JUD

That's why he torched them all... your petty vindictiveness.

VERA

Like father like son.

JUD

One of them might have killed him for it, you know that right?

BLANC

Getting back to this vast fortune... so it's yours now?

CY
Technically yes.

JUD
Technically.

BLANC
(realizes)
He didn't tell you where it was.

CY
No. His accounts are empty, there's nothing. So where is it? Then I realized, thirty years ago what was the safest way for Prentice to hide eighty million dollars?

VERA
(realizing)
A Swiss account...

BLANC
And that's why he filed an AOP... he made you sole heir so you'd have access.

(pointed)
If he died you'd be the only one with access. All you need to find is the account number. No luck there?

Blanc motions to the file cabinet he was searching.

CY
It has to be written down somewhere. Martha files EVERYTHING and it isn't here. Is there anything in all these years he said to you or wrote down, it might have been a code or I don't know, here I thought -

Cy unfolds a crumpled piece of paper. Scrawled attempts at decoding, all centered around the words "EVE'S APPLE"

CY (cont'd)
I thought it might be a code because he kept saying it, Eve's Apple will be restored to the tree, that was a thing, I think going way back but he kept saying it. But a Swiss account we're looking for nineteen numbers, so it doesn't work but - Vera, did he ever tell you anything?

VERA

If he had, I would take it to my grave before giving it to you.

CY

Yeah. You'd have done anything to keep the prodigal son from getting the fortune. It burns you up. You bitter hag.

VERA

That money is one psalm in the bible of my bitterness. You fucking child. Come by and pick up your shit. It'll be on the street.

She walks off. Cy looks back at Blanc and Jud, desperate.

CY

You, you're a detective I'll pay you I don't care this is very important, my inheritance and future political career depends on it - can you think of anything related to Eve's Apple that might contain that number?

Right behind Cy's head is the DISPLAY BOX with the "L'Eveil Appel" plaque. Blanc and Jud exchange a look, then go tight-lipped, shaking their heads.

EXT. RECTORY - DAY

Cy trots to his car, calling back to Jud in the doorway.

CY

But if you think of anything you'll call me?

JUD

Oh yeah you bet.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE

The "Eveil Appel" display box on the shelf.

Blanc and Jud exchange a look.

Then Blanc takes it and roughly gets to work.

BLANC

Look everywhere, it could be etched in the metal or sewn in the lining...

They pull it apart, removing the card-sized icon of Jesus from the octagonal indentation in the velvet. Blanc feels the shape of the indentation.

Blanc spots this symbol on the metal underside:



A MINUTE LATER the entire thing is disassembled on the desk. Blanc picks up the Jesus icon, examines it more closely.

BLANC (cont'd)
This is layered card stock... the
ends will justify the means here I
think

JUD
Yes, do it.

Blanc TEARS the card apart, separating the layers, searching... but the layers beneath are all blank.

There is nothing. A disappointed beat.

Jud sighs, then fishes the receipt from the forklift guy out of his pocket.

JUD (cont'd)
Remind me to file this.

BLANC
File that.

Opens a filing cabinet and robotically flips through the dates to file it. High on the hunt.

Blanc looks at the remains of the display box.

BLANC (cont'd)
It doesn't make sense.

JUD
I know, an eighty million dollar
fortune that's gotta be what this is
all about but why if Cy's the only
one who can access the account how
does it motivate - huh. This doesn't
make sense.

BLANC

What?

Jud squints at the receipt.

JUD

They must have misprinted the date on this... it says the forklift was ordered last Wednesday. But that can't be right. Who would pre-order burial equipment for a man who isn't dead?

A stone silent beat. Then Blanc springs like a snake, snatches the paper from Jud.

BLANC

Someone who knew with great confidence when his day and hour would come.

Jud has his phone out, dialing. Blanc points out a number at the top of the form. Fire in his eyes.

BLANC (cont'd)

It's computer dated, it's not a misprint. This is it. Whoever called in the order, that's the key.

JUD

Yes yes yes yes yes hello?

INT. STEEL WHEELS CONSTRUCTION COMPANY - DAY

A cramped office. A woman named LOUISE in her 50s answers a bulky phone.

LOUISE

Steel Wheels construction, this is Louise, how may I -

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE

Intercut with Jud on the phone, Blanc hovering nearby, buzzing with anticipation.

JUD

Yes hello Louise yes it's Father Jud from Perpetual Fortitude hello

LOUISE

Oh, hello.

JUD

Hi. Louise, uh, we had a piece of your construction equipment here today, a forklift to open a uh crypt

LOUISE

I know, not too often we get crypt opening orders.

JUD

great, so I need to know

LOUISE

I processed the order, I do all the processing

JUD

Yes and what I need to know is

LOUISE

I run this place with my brother James but he's around less and less these days

JUD

Right, and the reason I'm calling

LOUISE

And I've been to your church before, I don't think you were there

JUD

No I'm new, relatively new here. Louise I'm

LOUISE

It was Father whats-it, Older guy, Wicks?

JUD

Monsignor.

LOUISE

Ok, it was Father Monsignor preaching when I went and he was not very nice, but still I'm sorry that he died, I'm sorry for yours all loss over there

Blanc rolls his eyes and frantically spins his hand - GET THIS MOVING.

JUD

Yes terrible tragedy for everyone
Louise I have can I interrupt I have
a question, the order for the
forklift I guess it was placed last
week,

LOUISE

That sounds about right. James takes
the orders

JUD

Ok but can you tell me, I need to
know who called in the order, if you
know the name of who actually called
from the church and placed the order
for the forklift last Tuesday.

LOUISE

Oh. Well. James takes the orders.
Like I said.

JUD

Is James there?

LOUISE

He's gone home for the day. He's
around less and less these days. I'm
here mostly alone. Like I said.

JUD

Can you, uh um ok can hm. Can you
give me James's number? I need to
find out who placed the order.

LOUISE

No, I don't think that I can do that.
But what I can do

JUD

It's very important

LOUISE

Excuse me. What I can do, as I was
saying, is give him a call and get
that information for you Father, and
then I can give you a ring back.

JUD

Ok. Alright yes, but if you can reach
him today, even this evening, it's
very urgent. Can I give you my cell
number?

LOUISE

I think I have it here on the caller ID, it ends in 2....3.....8

JUD

2384 that's it, ok if you can call him now I would appreciate it so much.

LOUISE

Ok I will. Father Jud you said?

JUD

Father Jud. Right now, thank you Louise.

LOUISE

Father Jud, would you mind if I asked you something?

JUD

I - yes, it's though - yes, if you can make it quick - this is a priority right now but yes - go - now - what?

Jud and Blanc are DYING. But Louise's tone has changed, her voice has suddenly gotten much smaller.

LOUISE

Father Jud, would you.

(beat)

Oh god.

Jud senses something is wrong. Louise is choked up.

JUD

Louise?

Blanc can't hear the conversation and he's giving a "what the fuck is happening" look.

LOUISE

Will you pray for me?

This stops Jud in his tracks.

JUD

Yeah. Of course. What... can I ask what for?

LOUISE

It's. My mother.

Silence. Louise is crying. All Jud's urgency has vanished.

JUD
Is she sick?

LOUISE
Mm hm. She's in hospice.

JUD
I'm so sorry Louise.

LOUISE
She won't talk to me. We fought last time we talked, the tumor in her brain, it's effected her and made her say some terrible things. And I said bad things back. And now that might be the last thing we said to each other. And my brother is angry. He's right and I hate myself. I feel so alone.

Jud's gaze lands on the torn icon picture of Jesus. Blanc senses something is wrong but signals "what is happening?"

JUD
Louise I'm sorry. You're not alone. I'm right here. I'm here. What's your mother's name?

We don't hear Louise's side of the call now. Jud drifts out of the office, closing the door on Blanc behind him.

Blanc stands in Martha's office, stunned and confused. But knows better than to interrupt. He waits.

SOME TIME LATER. The storm has risen. Wind whistles. Blanc leans on the desk. He breathes, checking his watch. Then gently opens the door.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Jud sits in a chair, still on the phone, talking gently.

JUD
We pray that Barbara will feel her daughter's love, and that it will comfort her in this time. And Lord I pray for Louise. Be with her and give her wisdom and guidance. And Lord hold her in your healing arms and let her know she is loved and she is not alone.

(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)

This we pray through Christ our Lord,
amen. Ok Louise. You have my number,
any time day or night, I'm here for
you. This church is here for you.
Bless you. Ok. Ok.

Jud hangs up. A long beat of silence. The wind rattles.

Martha walks in the front door, stops.

MARTHA

Oh. The storm. I was going to close
up the church.

Jud stands and wipes the tears away from his eyes.

JUD

I'll do it. You check the rectory
windows.

He leaves, Blanc storms out after him.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - LATE DAY

Jud walks through the greenery blustering darkly, Blanc a
step behind him.

BLANC

What just happened?

Jud stops. Deep in the woods behind them, the dark figure of
SAMSON in his hooded rain slicker wanders the woods with his
lamp raised, an eerie figure.

JUD

I've had a road to Damascus thing.

BLANC

Road to Damascus, ok.

JUD

Paul's conversion to Christianity
happened on the road to Damascus.

BLANC

I know yes he was struck blind until
scales fell from his eyes and he
could finally see, probably a case of
pink eye -

JUD

Why do you think I became a priest?
No bullshit, why do you really think.

Blanc takes a breath. Looks at him with compassion but speaks the truth:

BLANC

You felt guilt for taking a life. The Church offered a place to hide from that, and a clear method to give you a sense of absolution.

JUD

The guy I killed in the ring. I hated him. I remember I knew he was in trouble, and I kept going until I felt him break. It wasn't an accident. I killed him with hate in my heart. There's no hiding from that and there's no solving it. Christ didn't hide me or fix me. He loves me when I'm guilty. That's what I should be doing for these people. Not this whodunnit game.

Jud keeps walking.

EXT. CHURCH - DUSK

The wind is really kicking up. Jud closes the wooden shutters over the welcome sign marquee.

BLANC

A game? Excuse me - look at me when I'm talking to you - we're looking for a murderer, this is not a game.

JUD

It is a game, solving it, winning it, getting your big checkmate moment. And by using me in it you're setting me against my real and only purpose which is not to fight the wicked and bring them to justice but to serve them and bring them to Christ. Otherwise I'm just as bad as Wicks, making it about me not Jesus. You don't need to understand all this but Blanc just please please please please please please let me be.

Jud heads to the church entrance. It starts to rain.

INT. CHURCH - DUSK

BLANC

Can you say that again -

JUD

No.

Jud crosses himself, storms down the aisle. Blanc follows.

BLANC

About you, not Jesus. Like Wicks, you said. Father. I think this is important, please help me understand.

JUD

We're here to serve the world, not beat it. That's it. Even if it means we take a beating and never hit back, that's what we're here for. That's what Christ did.

BLANC

So

JUD

So when Wicks talked about fighting the world for Christ he wasn't talking about Christ. He was talking about his own ego and power. He was never talking about Christ.

INT. SACRISTY - DUSK

The small room where Wicks prepared for mass. Jud checks the windows are secure. Blanc enters, thinking.

BLANC

Yes. Over and over, he talked about Christ rising in power, getting revenge on the unfaithful...

Jud turns the light out and exits.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Jud turns out the lights, Blanc behind him the whole time.

BLANC

Eve's apple restored to the tree. What did that mean?

JUD
I don't know, I don't care.

Blanc deep in worried thought. Distant police sirens.

EXT. CHURCH ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The distant lights of Geraldine's police prowler approaches, two other police cars following. As they step out Blanc's face tightens in concern, though Jud doesn't notice.

BLANC
That'll be Geraldine coming for her
update on the case.
(beat)
Father you're right. This is my game,
not yours. Why don't you head back to
the rectory, I'll handle her.

JUD
Thank you. Make sure the door's shut
when you leave?
(beat)
I hope you catch your killer, Blanc.

BLANC
I will.

Blanc watches Jud duck into the woods, his expression grave.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Blanc wanders back into the church. Geraldine bursts in, her deputies in tow. On the warpath.

GERALDINE
Father Jud! Father Jud!

BLANC
He's not here.

GERALDINE
(to the deputies)
Search those back rooms. The closet
thing too.

Geraldine turns on Blanc. Sharply holds up THE HOLLOW MAN.

BLANC
It's good, right?

GERALDINE

It is actually really good.
Especially the part where Gideon Fell
walks through the possible solutions
for a locked door crime. You covered
three of them. Then you stopped. And
now, having read the fourth, I know
why.

(beat)

I checked the video and realized
something. From the moment Jud enters
the closet...

THE FOOTAGE OF THE CRIME: Jud goes into the closet. Doctor
Nat walks up onto the sanctuary stage to see what's
happening, followed by Lee and Martha.

GERALDINE (cont'd)

...until the first of the flock has a
line of sight into the closet, is
nine seconds.

(beat)

Nine seconds. Alone and unseen.

INT. UTILITY CLOSET - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Jud enters, drawing the devil head knife from the folds of
his vestments. Kneels, PLUNGING THE KNIFE swiftly into
Wicks's back. Nat appears through the doorway.

GERALDINE (O.S.)

Plenty of time to do the deed with
the concealed knife.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Blanc is stony-faced.

GERALDINE

That's how it was done, right? No
games, no bullshit - that's how it
was done?

BLANC

Yes.

GERALDINE

So you know and you've been toying
with that poor kid like a cat with a
mouse, why?

BLANC

I don't know the whole picture. Not yet. Give me a little more time.

GERALDINE

No.

BLANC

Just one more -

GERALDINE

No, game's over. I've found my killer and I'm arresting him. Where is he?

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - NIGHT

Jud walks through the darkening woods, rain falling.

Far ahead, the vague white form of the crypt.

Beyond it, the figure of Samson wandering hooded like a ghost, his lamp raised.

The wind settles. The rain patters. An eerie still moment.

Then, a noise.

A hard knock.

Oddly resonant through the muffled forest.

Jud stops.

In the distance the shape of Samson stops. He heard it too.

Jud takes a tentative step forward when

Knock.

He stops.

Scrape. Knock.

The heavens open a little bit and the rain picks up.

KNOCK. Heavier.

KNOCK.

Rain. Jud frozen to the spot. Heart pounding in his ears.

Through the dark woods he sees very clearly this happen with a solidity that freezes time:

The STONE SLAB of the crypt's door FALLS FORWARD.

CRASHES into the dirt.

The motion-sensing camera on Samson's shack CLICKS on and light floods the bone white crypt whose opening gapes, a black maw.

The hooded figure of Samson raises his lamp, frozen in fear.

Jud cannot move. Everything around him takes in a breath.

From the dark opening, lumbering and dark as the grave, the hulking black shape of MONSIGNOR WICKS emerges.

And staggers towards the beacon light of Samson's lamp.

JUD RUNS.

TOWARDS the crypt. Towards the impossible threat closing in on the hooded form of Samson who in fear or stupidity still holds the lamp high.

The mud slips beneath Jud's shoes and the rain blinds him, shaky running vision he sees the space between the two forms close and he's not even close to reaching them when the HULKING FORM of the dead man TACKLES hooded Samson backwards and the lamp vanishes with them into a GROVE OF BLACK BRUSH.

Jud runs full out now past the open crypt towards the dark grove and now he's there and does not even slow running into it without thinking -

The muddy blackened FIST that lands square between his eyes cuts the world out like a broken filmstrip.

INT. FOREST GROVE - NIGHT

A thicket like a cave.

Everything moves slowly. Jud is on his feet.

And looming up above Jud, bloodied and pale as the grave, is MONSIGNOR WICKS.

JUD has a KNIFE in his hand somehow and LUNGES AT HIM, the air thick, everything slow and getting slower, strobing and fading like dying light.

Jud completely given over to rage and fear. Kill this monster.

Wicks unafraid as Jud's blow descends towards his chest.

The last thing Jud sees is Wicks's thin triumphant grin.

JUD'S EYES OPEN.

The world is moving normally again. Rain still falling.

Light from flashlights through the trees. Shouts and calls from voices of authority. "OVER HERE!"

Jud raises his head and takes in the terrible scene.

He lies on his stomach, nose bleeding, arm extended out.

Jud's hand gripped white-knuckled around the handle of Samson's SICKLE.

The sickle blade buried in a DEAD MAN's chest.

It's SAMSON. In his hooded cloak. Blood spreading from the sickle blade in his chest. Eyes staring dead and gone.

The exact moment Jud takes in the horror of this, a FLASHLIGHT BEAM hits him. A DARK FIGURE standing at the entrance to the grove, holding the flashlight.

Jud lets go of the sickle and recoils from the body.

The dark figure takes a step forward and like a frightened animal Jud RUNS, vanishing into the woods.

INT. DARK WOODS - NIGHT

Jud sprinting blind through the dark woods, terrified and possessed by one animal thought: FLIGHT.

INT. FOREST GROVE

Benoit Blanc steps into the light. His face a mask but the clockwork behind his eyes throwing off sparks.

GERALDINE (O.S.)

Blanc!

BLANC

Down here.

She skids into the grove with a few COPS in tow.

GERALDINE

Oh god. What the hell happened?

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Blanc approaches the CRYPT, exchanges a look with Geraldine.
The slab lies in the mud, the dark entrance agape.

INT. CRYPT

They enter, Geraldine with a portable LANTERN that lights up the small crypt.

On Wicks's pedestal, the remnants of his coffin. Empty and half shattered.

GERALDINE

Wicks was one hundred percent
medically dead dead. We know this but
I'm just saying it. Right?

Blanc gently opens the other identical pine coffin. Inside, the bare skeletal remains of PRENTICE, undisturbed.

BLANC

Right.

GERALDINE

So can we just say out loud also that
a man can't rise from the dead, and
there is obviously some Scooby-Doo
shit going on here?

MARTHA (O.S.)

PRAISE TO GOD! PRAISE AND GLORY TO
THE ALMIGHTY!

Outside the crypt Martha kneels in the rain, her face a mask of near orgasmic ecstasy.

GERALDINE

Oy, this one.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD

Blanc and Geraldine come out, Blanc tries to calm Martha but she's shouting in near hysterical tongues of joy.

MARTHA

He has raised his servant from the
grave! The world will see his works
and praise his name and hold him high
glory be to God! Glory glory in the
highest! He is risen!

Geraldine shouts orders to her police.

GERALDINE

Set a perimeter at the road, word's going to spread quick and I don't want more looky-loos.

COP

That motion detector light there, it's also a camera, but it's not hooked up to anything.

GERALDINE

Camera huh? Well maybe it records to a chip inside or something, get it to the media lab. And let's tape off this whole area, and down in that grove there, it's a homicide scene, the groundskeeper, get the boys from the morgue down here.

Martha hears this and falls silent, afraid. Her eyes go to the dark grove entrance, cops taping it off.

She lunges out of Blanc's arms and BOLTS for the grove.

BLANC

No - Martha no -

INT. FOREST GROVE

Martha dashes into the grove and sees SAMSON'S BODY.

Horror. Shock. She falls over him, holding his face.

MARTHA

No... no no no NO! No no no no no...

Blanc tries to pry her away. She clings to Samson, whispering to him like a lover:

MARTHA (cont'd)

It's ok my love it's all ok because he has risen, he will avenge you, you will be avenged I promise my love!

Geraldine in the entrance of the grove

GERALDINE

Get her out! Can we get some help here - get her out of here!

Martha screams into the dark forest as Blanc pulls her away.

MARTHA

Flee into the dark you murderer but
he has returned and he brings
judgment to you! He will bring
vengeance! He brings death!

EXT. DARK WOODS - NIGHT

Jud hits a tree and stops, heaving for breath.

He slows his breathing. Where is he. What is he doing.

BUZZ and a SILLY RING TONE.

Jud jumps, terrified. Pulls his phone out of his pocket like
it's a relic from an alien world. Answers, stunned.

JUD

This is Father Jud.

LOUISE (ON PHONE)

Father Jud, it's Louise. How are you?

JUD

Uh. Hi Louise.

LOUISE (ON PHONE)

I hope it's not too late, but you
said it was urgent, so I just wanted
to tell you I spoke to James and the
order for the forklift was actually
placed... by Monsignor Wicks.

JUD

Uh huh.

LOUISE (ON PHONE)

He spoke to James directly about it.
So I hope that clears things up. God
bless you again Father, you have a
good night ok?

JUD

I will you too Louise.

He hangs up. A few big breaths. Then he turns and comes FACE
TO FACE with the cadaverous grin of WICKS.

Jud falls back - but there is nothing there, just a gnarled
tree. The forest looms around him.

He closes his eyes and silently prays.

EXT. TOWN OF CHIMNEY ROCK - NIGHT

The storm is starting to abate.

EXT. LEE ROSS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

His moat overflowing, LEE tries to lift one of the suits of armor, fallen in the wind. His phone rings. Annoyed:

LEE
Yeah? What no slow down Martha, what?
(beat)
What?

INT. SIMONE'S LIVING ROOM

Simone on the phone.

SIMONE
Bullshit.

LEE
A miracle no it happened, he said
he'd do it and it happened, Martha
says the tomb is empty the police are
there it happened but I won't believe
it till I see it, I'm calling
everyone and I'm on my way now -

She's already hanging up, grabbing her keys.

INT. VERA DRAVEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Vera sits smoking and thinking. Her cell phone face down.

CY bursts in, pulling on a jacket and out of breath.

CY
Did you - what are you doing you
don't smoke

VERA
I smoked for fifteen years.

CY
Did Lee call you? Did he tell you?

VERA
Yes.

CY

Ok - I'm gonna go witness a miracle,
you enjoy your cigarette indoors.

He's already gone. Vera doesn't move. Deep in thought.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Doctor Nat's CELL PHONE on an end table buzzes and rings.

Then stops. Silence.

Then: a THUDDING BANG at the front door. Angry, insistent.

Nat appears from the hallway, coming up from a basement.
More knocks. He takes a breath, steeling himself.

Then OPENS THE DOOR. Smiles through fear at whatever's on
the other side.

DOCTOR NAT

Praise be. It is accomplished.

The PHONE begins to BUZZ AGAIN

INT. POLICE STATION HALL - NIGHT

Blanc trying in vain to call Dr. Nat. Hangs up, worried.

Geraldine blows past him.

GERALDINE

He's got it.

INT. POLICE MEDIA ROOM

Blanc steps in. Geraldine is already hunched over the
monitor, the technician working the playback.

TECHNICIAN

It's not great quality, but... what
am I looking at here?

He plays the clip. Black and white and grainy, it clearly
shows the crypt. The form of Samson with his lamp. The crypt
slab falling open, the dark shape of Wicks lumbering out,
embracing Samson and vanishing with him back into the grove.

The clip ends.

GERALDINE

Ok. Ok.

TECHNICIAN

It records when there's motion. This clip is four seconds later.

He plays the next clip - JUD sprinting into the dark grove. Geraldine stiffens. Stares daggers at Blanc.

GERALDINE

Ok.

A COP comes in, hands a piece of paper to Geraldine.

COP

Prints from the gardening tool - I didn't run a full database check, just the suspects you questioned, but... bingo.

Geraldine glances at it. Then shows it to Blanc angrily.

GERALDINE

Where is he.

BLANC

I sincerely wish I knew.

INT. POLICE STATION HALL

Geraldine barrels out, barking orders - Blanc at her elbow.

GERALDINE

Get everyone who's got a car out there on the streets, and we're gonna sweep the woods adjacent to the church.

BLANC

I think I know what happened tonight and if I'm right there is great danger and very little time - this is not a by the book murder it would behoove you to take a moment and think about what we just saw -

GERALDINE

Call Shapiro and Marks, ask what they can spare, we need manpower.

GERALDINE (cont'd)

I don't know what I just saw but I've got a double killer on the streets and we're bringing him in.

(MORE)

GERALDINE (cont'd)
He contacts you, you will tell me
immediately or face the consequences
of the law.
(to the cops)
Alright let's move - find me that
priest!

She's off.

INT. POLICE STATION LOBBY - NIGHT

Blanc walks purposefully towards the exit, deeply worried.

Then he stops, shocked.

Walking through the automatic front doors, bloody faced and muddy, is a shell shocked FATHER JUD. In the bustle of the night nobody has noticed him yet.

Without a word Blanc keeps walking, spins Jud around and leads him back outside by the arm.

INT. BLANC'S RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

The police parking lot. Blanc shoves JUD into the back seat.

BLANC
Down. Stay down.

JUD
I'm turning myself in.

BLANC
No you're not.

Blanc starts the car and drives.

JUD
I did it, I killed him. I'm guilty I
have to confess turn this car around

BLANC
Listen to me. You're going to tell me
exactly what happened but first how
do I get to Doctor Nat's house?

JUD
Dr. Nat -

BLANC

Yes - quickly. I regret my stalling,
my own vanity, it may cost another
life - I only pray that we're not too
late.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - NIGHT

A few prowlers and several cops block the church road.

Lee shouting at the COPS, Cy shooting it all with his phone
rig. Martha on the ground praying.

LEE

I respect the work you do, I
respect the badge, believe
me but you've gotta let us
up there, this is our
church, and I'm not saying
I'll resort to violence but
you know this is our
church -

CY

We have a right to go up
there! Are you even real
cops? This stinks of psy-
ops. Show us your badges. I
want to see the numbers.

Simone rolls up in her chair, overcome with emotion.

SIMONE

Is it real? This isn't real right? It
can't be

LEE

They won't let us up

SIMONE

I need to see. Please. I
need to see.

EXT. NAT SHARP'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Blanc and Jud run up to the front door, then stop.

It is ajar. A large smudge of dirt on the door frame.

Blanc gingerly pushes it open.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Still and silent. A lamp overturned casts eerie light.

Blanc and Jud enter, tentative.

JUD

Doctor Nat?

Signs of struggle are evident - a framed picture on the floor, more dirt streaks along the walls.

The basement door, ajar. Another blotch of dirt on its jamb.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Wooden stairs lead down into inky darkness.

Blanc and Jud slowly descend to the bottom of the stairs. The darkness swarms around them, a threatening presence.

JUD
What's that smell?

BLANC
(grim)
Wait here.

Blanc feels his way along the wall.

Jud stays at the staircase. Blanc vanishes into the gloom.

JUD
Blanc?

SNAP. Blanc flips the light switch.

The first thing they see is a washer/dryer. A small table with two folding chairs. A coffee cup on the table.

JUD (cont'd)
Oh god.

Jud has seen the next thing.

A steel BATH TUB. Filled with greenish viscous liquid, foul and steaming.

Next to it, a large empty plastic TANK with a rubber hose feeding into the tub.

A CORPSE. On its knees beside the tub. Leaned over the edge with its arms submerged up to the biceps in green liquid.

The kneeling corpse is MONSIGNOR WICKS.

Blanc touches his neck.

JUD (cont'd)
Wicks. Is he...

BLANC
For what it's worth these days.

Blanc's attention goes to the liquid. He looks back at Jud.

BLANC (cont'd)
This might be unpleasant.

Blanc turns a valve, and the liquid begins to drain out of the tub and into a second tank.

It reveals more of Wicks's arms - the flesh and muscle has been cleanly eaten away, leaving skeletal bones.

Jud is horrified but can't look away.

The liquid level drops... revealing the skeletal remains of A MAN lying in the bottom of the tub. Wicks's bony hands vaguely around this second man's neck.

The final inches of liquid drain away, and the man's bony fingers clack onto the steel tub's bottom... wearing the doctor's BOLT SHAPED WEDDING RING.

JUD
...Doctor Nat?

BLANC
In the flesh. And now it all makes sense.

JUD
Does it?

Blanc looks at the coffee cup on the table. Spots an identical cup in the sink.

The Doctor's leather bag on the floor by the sink. He opens it and digs through, finds an empty vial - PENTOBARBITAL. He makes a call on his phone.

BLANC
(into phone)
Geraldine, Blanc. You're going to want to come to Doctor Nat's house. With the whole gang. Yes. It's all here. It's finished.

Blanc looks back - and Jud is gone.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Blanc comes up from the basement - Jud is at the front door.

JUD

I have to do this and I have to do it
of my own free will or it won't mean
anything. Don't stop me.

BLANC

With that left hook, I wouldn't dare.

Jud walks out into the night. Blanc lets him go, worried.

EXT. FOREST - PRE-DAWN

Jud walks clear and steady. Light starting to glow on the horizon through the trees.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAWN

Lee, Simone, and Martha gathered at the police barrier, huddled in prayer. Cy filming it.

They all turn as Jud approaches, speaks gently to a COP.

JUD

Would you call Geraldine please. Tell
her Father Jud has come back to his
church, and he's ready to confess.
(to the flock)
Follow me.

He breaks the tape barrier and walks up the road to the church. Spellbound, the flock follows him.

They come to the open crypt. They stand stunned.

LEE

My God... it's real.

Simone looks to Jud, what does this mean? But he has no answer for her. He continues up towards the church.

INT. CHURCH - DAWN

Jud enters with the morning sun. Kneels, and silently prays.

The rest of the flock not sure what is happening.

Sirens. Geraldine enters with police, takes in this weird silent scene. As she speaks he stands slowly, faces her.

GERALDINE

Father Jud. I'm here to arrest you for the murder of Monsignor Jefferson Wicks and Samson Holt. And you are a person of interest in the death of Doctor Nathaniel Sharp.

The flock reacts. Vera silently enters the church.

LEE

Nat is dead?

GERALDINE

Murdered in his home. We've also recovered Wicks's body. It's over. Anything you say can be used against you in a court of law, but if you're gonna confess to anything, this seems like a great place to do it.

The flock looks to Jud, stunned. Martha teary eyed.

JUD

Yes. Years ago I murdered a man in a boxing ring, killed him with hate in my heart. Last night that same sin rose in me, and in a moment of fear and rage I -

A holy chord of music BLASTS through the church, obscuring Jud's next words.

Blanc, out of breath at the organ. He trots up to the stage.

BLANC

Sorry. That was dramatic, but I needed you to stop talking, and I didn't - sorry. Father, sit down please.

JUD

Blanc, I've had enough of this -

BLANC

If you'd sit down and listen

A din rises of the flock shouting at Blanc, shut up/get out.

GERALDINE

Back off Benoit, this is all over, it's finished

BLANC

You shall not silence the voice of the LORD as he speaks through his servant, but SIT now and behold the wickedness and shame of the guilty laid bare before you you all!

Blanc's ecclesiastical authority echoes through the church.

Everyone sits without thinking. Geraldine included.

Blanc gives Jud a "wow that worked" look, then launches forward.

BLANC (cont'd)

Let's begin with Wicks's murder, right here, on Good Friday. The impossible crime. And Geraldine you were correct in your deduction. When Monsignor Wicks collapsed in that closet space, he was not dead, he was not even stabbed. Not yet.

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks enters the closet, exhausted. He takes the FLASK from the breaker box and drinks.

BLANC (O.S.)

The flask he kept stashed in the breaker box was spiked with a powerful tranquilizer. He drank from it, fortified himself, and in minutes fell to the floor, unconscious. The clangy clunk.

Wicks falls, THUD. The flask CLANGS to the concrete floor.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC

Leaving him defenseless, and giving the killer their chance to enter the closet and deliver the deadly blow.

GERALDINE

Yes - I said this already, Father Jud

BLANC

No.

JUD

No - the knife was in his back when I found him. So, how? When? It's impossible, I saw -

BLANC

What did you see?

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Jud sees: the devil on Wicks's back, blood on Jud's hands.

BLANC (O.S.)

The red devil head. Blood you assumed was Wicks's.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC

I showed you the answer to this, did you see it? Il Diavolo, the pizza bar. The photo.

INT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA - FLASHBACK

Blanc compares the photo of the bar with the bar in real life, flipping it away and back for Jud.

BLANC (O.S.)

You thought you saw...

Jud notes the doctor's bag and goes to it

BLANC (O.S.) (cont'd)

But that wasn't it. No. There was a second identical lamp. A second identical devil head. And it was also missing.

Indeed, in the picture there are TWO lamps with devil heads on either end of the bar. And in the present day bar BOTH DEVIL HEADS are both missing.

INT. CHURCH

JUD

Two devils...

BLANC

Yes. Why two? And why painted red...

INT. IL DIAVOLO PIZZA - FLASHBACK

NIKOLAI
It wasn't red though, it's red now.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC
the same red as the Good Friday
vestments? The same red as the
mysterious thread found at the scene?

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks walks from the ambo to the closet, and this time we
see what was always there: the RED DEVIL HEAD sewn to the
back of his red vestments, perfectly blended red on red.

BLANC (O.S.)
Because the second devil head was
there the whole time. Sewn to the
back of his vestments.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC
Hollow. Light. And filled with a
small squib of blood.

INT. CHURCH - FLASHBACK

Jud lugging the cross up on the sanctuary.

BLANC (O.S.)
Triggered by an RF remote.

In the darkness of the pews, DOCTOR NAT holds a small simple
REMOTE in his hand.

BLANC (O.S.) (cont'd)
Set off at the exact right moment.

THUD CLANK. Jud looks. Nat presses the remote button.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Samson's tv, the VCR running beside it, briefly HAZES with
RF interference.

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE - FLASHBACK

Red liquid soaks the vestments from the red DEVIL HEAD on Wick's back. Jud touches it, raises his hand to show the flock out on the sanctuary. Doctor Nat in front.

BLANC (O.S.)

A doctor, a voice of authority, who
can wait for the discovery he needs
and then take charge...

JUD

There's - there's something on his
back.

DOCTOR NAT

Don't touch it - let me see -

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE - FLASHBACK

Doctor Nat kneeling next to the body, handkerchief in hand.

BLANC (O.S.)

A moment of distraction presents
itself...

Outside Martha screams, all eyes go to her.

BLANC (O.S.) (cont'd)

and the deed is quickly done.

In one fluid movement Nat pulls the KNIFE out of his jacket
sleeve, holding its devil head hilt by the handkerchief.

His left hand TEARS AWAY the devil sewn to Wicks's
vestments. His right PLUNGES the knife into Wicks's back.

DOCTOR NAT

Oh oh.

All look - his handkerchief hand still on the devil hilt.

BLANC (O.S.)

His final task - to remove the
incriminating flask. But where was
it? It was gone!

Doctor Nat's eyes dart around the closet - the flask is
nowhere to be found.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC

The one hiccup in his plan, the
result of a moment of foolish grace,
by Father Jud.

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE - FLASHBACK

Father Jud still kneeling over the body spots the glinting
flask on the ground, between the ajar door and the wall.

BLANC (O.S.)

Who concealed the flask to hide
Wicks's drinking. And returned later
to retrieve it.

On his way out Jud subtly pushes the door fully open,
against the wall, concealing the flask.

INT. CHURCH

LEE

My god. Nat...

JUD

Why?

VERA

Wicks was going to scorch the earth,
he was going to ruin him.

JUD

(to Blanc)

No, the bigger why. The why that
brought you here. Why do all of this
insane elaborate stuff, the
theatricality the impossible crime
the angel with a yoo-hoo, why?

BLANC

Indeed.

GERALDINE

And if Doctor Nat killed Wicks, who
killed Nat?

BLANC

Well. And now we come to it. Not some
fiddly locked door mystery with
devices and clues, but a larger
scheme.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)

One whose roots run to the bedrock of this church, and one which draws me, an unbeliever in every sense of the word, into the realm of belief. To understand this case I had to look at the myth that was being constructed, not to solve whether it was real, but to feel in my soul the essence of that which it strove to convey.

(beat)

A holy priest. Struck down by no man, but by the hand of Satan. Laid to rest in the sealed tomb of his father, but then risen. By the will of God, risen as something new, no longer a fallible man but a symbol of the Lord's power over death, his justice for the holy, his vengeance for the wicked.

(beat)

Doctor Nat was found murdered by Monsignor Wicks himself.

CY

He was?

GERALDINE

Well he - they were positioned to look like that but -

BLANC

The slayer slain by the risen saint, a final act of holy justice. And vengeance. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.

GERALDINE

Okay. Now. What really happened?

BLANC

Yes. It's time to break the tawdry facade of miracles and resurrections and reveal what really happened. It is time for Benoit Blanc's final checkmate over the mystery of faith.

Blanc savors this moment, looks at the flock, all leaning forward, expectant. Lee intense, Simone searching.

Martha touches her ashen lips.

Blanc freezes. Then... light breaks through the stained glass window. Engulfing Blanc in a god-ray.

He looks towards the light. Something very big dawning.
Everyone glances at each other - what is going on?

JUD
Blanc... are you ok?

Blanc sinks as if in slow motion into a chair. Still
suspended in a moment of revelation. Barely audible:

BLANC
Damascus.

JUD
Damascus? Like you're having a road
to Damascus thing?

BLANC
Yes. Yes.
(then)
Shit.

GERALDINE
Blanc.

A long, long moment of silence.

BLANC
I cannot solve this case.

GERALDINE
What?

JUD
Blanc, if you know what really
happened, you should tell us.

Cy steps forward filming with his phone.

CY
Are you saying that your conclusion,
Benoit Blanc, is that Monsignor Wicks
rose from the dead? That it was a
miracle?

Simone leans forward. Blanc swallows hard. But:

BLANC
I'm saying... I cannot solve this
case.

CY
That works - thank you!

Cy cuts and EXITS, absolutely thrilled. Martha has already left. Vera goes too. Simone rolls forward.

SIMONE

Is this you sparing our faith or
being respectful or something?
Because we deserve the truth.

BLANC

It is not.

SIMONE

I need the truth. Can't you just tell
us the answer? Isn't that what all
this is for?

Blanc looks at Simone's tearful face, but doesn't reply.

LEE

And would you consider blurbing my
book?

BLANC

No.

GERALDINE

Alright, show's over everyone. Out.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Lee exits, on the phone with his agent.

LEE (INTO PHONE)

I add a chapter and we're ready to
publish, trust me Alan call Random
House this is gonna be huge!

Simone rolls out, in a tempest of thought and emotion. Light
breaking through the storm clouds behind her.

A few mobile news vans have joined the cop cars. Cy is
already being interviewed.

CY

A miracle confirmed by none other
than Benoit Blanc himself!

Vera smokes, processing all of this. Martha ashen.

VERA

What a mess. I guess they'll arrest
Father Jud now.

MARTHA

Yes. I expect so.

INT. CHURCH

GERALDINE

So what the hell was that?

Blanc in a delicate state, still suspended in revelation.

BLANC

Road to Damascus moment, the scales
fell from my eyes.

GERALDINE

So what, facts schmacts now, you
believe in God and all of this
schmegegge is real?

BLANC

God? Oh no, God is a fiction. No my
revelation was from Father Jud. His
example, to value something above the
walls, the battle lines and chess
boards of black and white I've put
all my pennies on beating, all my
life.

Blanc's eyes fixed on the main door of the church. Not
surprised at all when it cracks open, and someone enters.

BLANC (cont'd)

Grace. For my enemy. For the broken
who deserve it the least and need it
the most. For the guilty.

MARTHA. She stops before Blanc. Tears in her eyes.

MARTHA

Mr. Blanc. You know the truth. All of
it.

BLANC

I do.

MARTHA

And you made yourself the fool just
now

BLANC

So that you could do this. Of your
own free will. Yes. And now you'd
better do it quickly.

MARTHA
(breathes)
Thank you.
(to Jud)
Father Jud...

Martha sinks to her knees. Jud is freaked out. To Blanc:

JUD
What do I do?

BLANC
What you were always meant to do. Be
her priest. Take her confession.

Blanc guides Jud to Martha. Jud takes her hands.

MARTHA
I could not let you carry the blame
for my unforgivable acts, Father. I
told myself it started with pure
intent. But the truth is it started
with a lie. A secret I've kept since
I was a little girl.

BLANC
Prentice.

MARTHA
Prentice. He told me I was the good
girl he wished he had as a daughter.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martha spying on Prentice, alone in the empty church.

MARTHA (O.S.)
I saw him taking his final communion.

Prentice sees her. Smiles. Beckons. Young Martha joins him
at the altar.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
He told me he knew his hour had come.
But don't be afraid.

Prentice lifts a faceted DIAMOND the size of a peach pit, a
slight rose hue in its dazzling sparkle.

PRENTICE
This is Eve's Apple, Martha. All the
sin in the world, the temptations.
All that Eve hungers for.
(MORE)

PRENTICE (cont'd)
 But I have trapped it, right here. It
 shall never again be plucked by
 wicked hands.

Young Martha mesmerized by the sparkling diamond. He weakly
 raises the jewel like a communion wafer.

PRENTICE (cont'd)
 The body of Christ.

Takes it into his mouth, painfully swallows. Young Martha
 looking on with awe and reverence.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martha surrounded by mourners. Prentice's pine coffin
 is carried into the CRYPT.

MARTHA (O.S.)
 I swore to myself I would be a good
 girl, I would protect this great
 victory over sin, the secret of Eve's
 Apple.

INT. CHURCH

JUD
 L'Eveil Appel...

BLANC
 The "Awakening Call." Sold at auction
 to a secret buyer sixty years ago.
 For eighty million dollars. In
 today's market, it may be priceless.

MARTHA
 I didn't tell a soul. But Grace
 discovered he'd bought the diamond. I
 don't know how.

BLANC
 She knew her fancy brands. When she
 saw that box Prentice left her, she
 would have figured it out. Like I
 did.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Blanc tearing apart the display box, looking at that
 peculiar stamp on the bottom (the emblem of Faberge.)

BLANC (O.S.)
What would come in a custom Faberge
box, itself worth maybe twenty
thousand dollars?

INT. RECTORY - GREAT ROOM - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Grace's fingers trace the indentation in the velvet, just as
Blanc's did - the octagonal shape, perfect for a large
jewel. Her eyes blaze.

BLANC (O.S.)
Not a trinket. Or a paper icon. No.
Something facet-cut that cost a
fortune. A jewel.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
But she didn't know where he hid it.
He didn't trust her like he trusted
me.

JUD
So that night so she wasn't
desecrating the church in anger...

BLANC
No.

INT. CHURCH - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Grace tearing the place apart.

BLANC (O.S.)
She was looking for the hidden jewel.
Her dark life of desperation, a
prisoner of shame and judgment, it
was her one way out.

Grace stops - YOUNG MARTHA stands in the aisle, watching.

INT. CHURCH

JUD
That poor girl.
(then)
Martha what did you say to her?

INT. CHURCH - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Young Martha whispering into Grace's ear:

YOUNG MARTHA
I know where he hid it. And you'll
never find it. You harlot whore.

Grace looks at this kid, unbelieving. Then LUNGES at her, throttling her, as Young Martha LAUGHS at her.

GRACE
Where is it! You little shit tell me!
Tell me!

Grace STRIKES Young Martha.

INT. CHURCH

Jud is dumbstruck.

MARTHA
I kept the secret of Eve's Apple
locked in my heart for sixty years.
My most secret sin. Until.

JUD
Until I told you to confess it.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jud at the altar - Martha comes out of the confessional, haughty. A moment later Wicks emerges, shell-shocked.

MARTHA (O.S.)
My pride. I needed to prove I could
trust him, to you and to myself. it
was my first mistake.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
(to Jud)
I confessed to the wrong Priest.

BLANC
Time is of the essence now. Last
Sunday in the rectory. Vera
confronted Wicks and you learned
about Cy. The same sin you cursed
that poor woman to hell for.

MARTHA

It was a shock. But sins of the flesh - he's a man, a man is allowed a lapse. Wicks was not his grandfather, I could accept that he had faltered.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

As Wicks rails against the flock, Martha's face is solemn, knit with thought.

MARTHA (O.S.)

But as he spoke, something became clear. This was not the admission of a sexual dalliance. He was embracing that silly boy. Destroying my church. This was something much bigger. That's when I suspected.

BLANC (O.S.)

So you called the construction company.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Martha on the phone, her face grave.

MARTHA

Thank you James.

She hangs up.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Then I was certain. He had ordered the equipment to open the crypt, to get the diamond. For his own greed and thirst for power.

Martha's eyes on the Eve's Apple display box on the shelf.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)

The corrupting sin of Eve's Apple would be unearthed. This church would fall because of it. Everything Prentice warned me about. I had failed him.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA

Father please understand. My whole life I was not the bad one but the good one, the faithful one, who served and protected the church. If I failed at that, what is my life?

JUD

I understand.

MARTHA

Yes. Yes I think you do. My one purpose, and I had failed.

BLANC

Unless.

MARTHA

Unless.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Martha's eyes shift. Having a revelation.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Unless there was a way to steal the jewel first, and get rid of it forever. And with the same stroke, raise Wicks up as a miraculous risen saint, not a fallible man but a symbol that would save this church. All it would take is a miracle...

Next to the Eve's Apple box... on the shelf... Martha's paperback copy of "THE HOLLOW MAN."

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA

And what is a miracle, Father?

JUD

A story. About the impossible.

MARTHA

So I formed my plan. Wicks must not suffer. No, no pain. It could not be a suicide or a tawdry accident. His death itself must be a holy mystery, unsolvable and divine.

BLANC
But you couldn't do it alone.

MARTHA
(rueful)
No.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Martha sits with Doctor Nat, pitching the plan. He drinks.

MARTHA (O.S.)
A weak man, I thought. Desperate.
Someone who would fall in line to
save the church and stay in line to
cover his own shame.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC
And who had access to medical grade
tranquilizers.

MARTHA
Yes and that.

INT. CHURCH - CLOSET SPACE - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Martha plants the spiked flask in the breaker box.

INT. CHURCH - SACRISTY - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Martha helps Wicks into his red vestments, the RED DEVIL
HEAD sewn on.

MARTHA (O.S.)
And when the moment came,

INT. CHURCH - GOOD FRIDAY - FLASHBACK

Doctor Nat in the closet kneeling over the body.

Martha SCREAMS, all eyes go to her. Pandemonium.

MARTHA (O.S.)
The distraction. It all worked.
Even the missing flask, when I
realized Father Jud had taken it,

INT. RECTORY - JUD'S ROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Martha looks through Jud's drawers and finds the flask.

MARTHA (O.S.)

It was easy as pie to find. It all
went according to plan.

INT. CHURCH

Martha's demeanor changes. Emotion creeping in.

MARTHA

I knew it was a terrible thing I had
done. But I believed in what it would
accomplish...

BLANC

The ends would justify the means.

MARTHA

Like winning a game. Oh God. My
vanity. So wicked.

Martha is losing it, descending into weeping, but Jud brings
her back.

JUD

Martha. I understand. I promise I do.
Keep going, I'm here.

MARTHA

I didn't reckon the cost. Forgive me
Father. Forgive me Samson. Strong
Samson. Faithful Samson.

BLANC

Samson who built the coffins.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Wicks in the coffin, Samson and Martha alone in the room.

Samson EASILY REMOVES coffin's side plank, rolls Wicks out.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA

He was handy.

INT. GROUNDSKEEPER'S COTTAGE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Monsignor Wicks's body hidden beneath Samson's work bench.

Martha leaning over Samson in the coffin, holding his hands and comforting him tearfully.

MARTHA

You will rise again, it'll all be ok,
you will rise again, you will rise.

MARTHA (O.S.)

He didn't understand why we were
doing it, but he trusted me.

SAMSON

(whispers)

Anything for you. My angel.

Doctor Nat enters, gently pries Martha away.

With a final look at Samson (giving a thumbs-up) he replaces the lid, calling for the other men.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA

Because he loved me. Oh my lord. How
did it go so wrong?

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Rain falls. The form of SAMSON in his hooded rain slicker emerges from the forest - and we see now that it is actually DOCTOR NAT wearing Samson's outfit.

Beneath his rain slicker he hits "SEND" on a text.

MARTHA (O.S.)

It was supposed to be so simple. The
doctor gives the signal.

INT. CRYPT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Pitch black. The DING of a cell phone notification.

Light from a cell phone flashlight emerges as Samson throws off the lid of the coffin - BANG.

He breaks the wood apart climbing out of it, BANG BANG.

MARTHA (O.S.)
Samson retrieves the jewel.

Opens Prentice's coffin. Nestled in the dust of Prentice's abdominal cavity... the GLEAMING JEWEL that is Eve's Apple. Samson takes it.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
The Lazarus door serves its purpose.

Samson puts his hand on the stone slab of a door, and with the SLIGHTEST PUSH it groans forward...

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The SLAB of stone FALLS AWAY from the crypt door.

The motion-detecting light/camera SWITCHES ON.

Doctor Nat raises his lamp and waves it. Samson staggers towards him. Embraces him, they step back into the grove.

MARTHA (O.S.)
All caught on camera as we planned.
Doctor Nat would drive off with
Wicks's body in his truck, dispose of
it with that nasty gook in his
cellar. The next day Samson would
tell the tale of the risen saint, and
the word of blessing he gave his
faithful groundskeeper before
ascending back to heaven. It would
have been perfect.

FATHER JUD sprinting from the distance.

INT. CHURCH

JUD
I wasn't supposed to be there.

MARTHA
You most certainly were not.

BLANC
Did you know what had happened when
you found Samson's body?

MARTHA
I had an idea.

INT. FOREST GROVE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Martha on the body of SAMSON, screaming into the woods.

MARTHA
He will bring vengeance!

INT. CHURCH

Martha even now clenched with rage.

MARTHA
But I had to be sure.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Nat OPENS THE DOOR to reveal MARTHA. He nervously smiles.

DOCTOR NAT
Praise be. It is accomplished.

INT. CHURCH

BLANC
Surely you knew the danger?

MARTHA
Yes but I had an advantage.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S BASEMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Martha descends into the basement followed by Nat.

MARTHA (O.S.)
He didn't know that I knew Samson was
dead.

Wicks's body on the floor next to the rigged steel tub. Nat
hands Martha EVE'S APPLE. She's mesmerized by it.

She fumbles and DROPS IT. Nat instinctively rushes to pick
it up, as she turns away.

MINUTES LATER - they sit at the little table with folding
chairs, Nat serves coffee into the two cups and they drink.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
He poured coffee - a long night yes a
long night - we drank and he told me
the fairy tale about how it all went
according to plan. It was only then
that that I told him I had been to
the church. And knew he was lying.

Nat looks scared. Then he steels himself and smirks.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
And then he told me the truth.

INT. FOREST GROVE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jud BARRELS towards the grove. Samson and Doctor Nat see him coming, look at each other - what do we do?

DOCTOR NAT
He can't see us!

When Jud flies into the grove Samson CLOCKS HIM, out like a light. Nat's shocked but Samson shrugs, what was I gonna do? Leans down to check on Jud.

Nat looks down at EVE'S APPLE, sparkling in his hand.

MARTHA (O.S.)
My second mistake. Underestimating
the temptation of Eve's Apple. Our
agreed on mission was to destroy it,
to throw it in the sea, but... all
this power will I give thee. Christ
himself could deny temptation, but
this desperate little man. All that
stood in his way were Samson and I.
And now here was an opportunity.

Nat looks at Samson bent over Jud. SICKLE on his belt.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
To remove his obstacles, frame a
young priest with a violent past. And
keep the jewel. He took it.

INT. FOREST GROVE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Samson turns and Nat PLUNGES the SICKLE into his chest. Samson looks at him, not understanding. Then falls.

MARTHA (O.S.)
Then all that remained in his way...
was me.

INT. DOCTOR NAT'S BASEMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Martha and Doctor Nat facing each other like chess opponents. Nat speaks to her.

MARTHA (O.S.)
He had poisoned my coffee with a
lethal dose of pentobarbital, he told
me. No remedy once it's ingested.
Painless, he promised. A little
numbness in the lips, then in ten
minutes or so, time for a final
prayer Martha I'll hold your hand,
it'll be just like going to sleep.
Then he begged me to understand why
he did all this. His harpy wife, his
desperate position, blah blah. I
understood, I told him.

FLASH TO: Earlier when Martha held the JEWEL, gazed at it.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
I understood why he did it.

She DROPS IT and while Nat scrambles to pick it up, she
turns and SWITCHES the coffee cups.

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
I had understood it all.

BACK TO THE SCENE - Nat squints at her, touches his lips,
which have turned ashen.

INT. NAT SHARP'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Doctor Nat STAGGERS up into the hall, dying. Breaking
pictures, upsetting lamps. Streaking dirt. Gets to the front
door and collapses, dead.

Martha emerges from the basement door. Satisfied.

QUICK SHOTS: NAT's body dragged away, then laid in the empty
tub. Wicks being leaned over him, his hands placed around
Nat's neck. Martha turning the valve on the acid tank.

MARTHA (O.S.)
This I did with hatred in my heart.
This I confess to, Father.
(MORE)

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
Vengeance is mine says the Lord. And
that is the story the crime scene
will tell the world. But inside I
know.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
Vengeance is mine.
(beat)
These things I confess to you Father,
I have caused so much pain, for this
church, for you. I have lied. I have
killed. And now I've topped it all
off with a real doozy.

Martha clutches her chest. Her breathing ragged.

BLANC
Father. Quickly.

JUD
What? What's happening?

BLANC
Her lips. I knew when I saw them,

FLASH TO - Earlier, Blanc on the stage sees Martha touching
her ashen lips, realizes...

BLANC (cont'd)
Shit.

and we're **BACK TO THE SCENE:**

BLANC (cont'd)
that she'd taken the pentobarbital.

GERALDINE
Get an ambulance here, fast. Now!
Dammit - is there a poison kit in the
prowler - check, now!

Geraldine runs out, cops with her. Blanc stays knowing it's
too late. Jud looks back to Martha fading away in his arms.

MARTHA
I'm sorry Father, forgive me for all
you've endured... forgive me Lord for
Wicks and Nat... Samson, my sweet
Samson...

JUD
And Grace. Martha. Grace.

Martha's face tightens in anger. Her fist clenches.

JUD (cont'd)
You're safe here. Now let it go. Let
the hatred go.

MARTHA
Grace... yes I see now... that poor
girl.. forgive me.
(beat)
Father...

Jud leans in close to hear Martha's final whispered words.

MARTHA (cont'd)
You're really good at this.

He almost laughs. Then through tears he gives the
absolution, as Martha's gaze goes distant.

JUD
God, the Father of mercies, through
the death and resurrection of his son
has reconciled the world to himself
and poured out the Holy Spirit for
the forgiveness of sins; through the
ministry of the church may God grant
you pardon and peace, and I absolve
you from your sins in the name of the
Father, and of the Son, and of the
Holy Spirit.

Martha dies. Her fist unclenches.

The glittering pink EVE'S APPLE clinks to the floor.

JUD (cont'd)
Oh shit.

Jud looks at it. Blanc looks at it. They are alone,
Geraldine is off calling the ambulance, she didn't see this.

Blanc holds up his hands, "above my pay grade."

Jud looks back at the diamond, glittering and gleaming on
the stone floor.

JUD (O.S.)
The jewel was never found.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

A rich CELLO SOLO begins. Dappled sun. Title: **9 MONTHS LATER**

JUD (O.S.)
*The church closed for awhile. The
 flock, what was left of them,
 scattered.*

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE - DAY

LEE at a book signing - "RISEN: THE LIVING MIRACLE OF
 MONSIGNOR JEFFERSON WICKS."

JUD (O.S.)
*Some got what they wanted, only to
 discover the one thing every holy man
 knows: God has a sense of humor.*

The line is filled with dudes who look like John Goodman in
 The Big Lebowski. Lee simmers.

EXT. VERA DRAVEN'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Moving van out front, "FOR SALE" sign on the lawn.

JUD (O.S.)
*Some got a fresh start. Maybe to find
 a path that's theirs. I hope so.*

Vera is happier than we've ever seen her.

INT. SIMONE'S CITY APARTMENT - DAY

Simone, in her chair with braces on her arms, plays cello.
 Her face is pained but the music is beautiful, and her eyes
 glow with the act of creation.

JUD (O.S.)
*And some got their miracle. Not being
 cured or fixed, but finding the
 sustaining power to wake up every day
 and do what you're here to do, in
 spite of the pain. Daily bread.*

We push in - and see the CROSS pendant around her neck. She
 finishes with a flourish.

INT. RECTORY - GREAT ROOM - DAY

Jud in a chair, sincere and warm.

JUD

That's what I pray for with you. That
you find what you're looking for.

Cy sitting opposite him. He LUNGES at Jud and is restrained
by his ATTORNEY.

CY

WHERE IS IT! You know - goddammit I
know you both know this is your last
chance or we're gonna drag your asses
into court!

Blanc sits next to Jud, BISHOP LANGSTROM next to them.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Mister Wicks, please restrain
yourself. We hoped this mediation
would resolve this matter.

CY

She gave it to them and they're
hiding it, I know!

BISHOP LANGSTROM

We have allowed your representatives
to thoroughly search the church and
the rectory, they've found nothing.
Also Mr. Blanc was there when Martha
passed and denies any -

CY

You lying piece of detective shit!
(to Jud)
It's mine, I'm never gonna stop till
I get it. Not till the day I die. You
think you'll outlast me, padre?

JUD

Probably not. But the Church will.

A beat, then Cy LUNGES at him again.

EXT. RECTORY - DAY

Jud exits with Blanc and Langstrom. Cy gets in Jud's face.

CY

Any hint that you've sold it. Any big charity donations. You fix the roof, you upgrade the communion wine, I'll watch, I'll audit, I'll find out.

JUD

I hope you come back to the Church some day, Cy. Your real inheritance is in Christ.

Cy sneers and walks off.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Little shit. His video with Blanc is still trending.

BLANC

Yes, I'm not thrilled that the first search result for my name is now "Benoit Blanc Pwned" - pawned? "Owned" with a "p" whatever that means.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

We keep pushing the facts out there. Martha, what really happened, but it doesn't seem to matter. Wicks truthers are flooding our Facebook, it's a dumpster fire.

(to Jud)

You're gonna be popular when you open, maybe not in a good way. You ready to take that on?

Jud opens his arms wide.

JUD

Let 'em come.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Blanc and Jud amble up. Neither sure what to say.

BLANC

Well.

Blanc holds out his hand for a shake. Jud takes it and embraces him, catching Blanc off guard. But Blanc returns the hug. Then as he breaks off to leave:

JUD

My first mass is in a few hours. If
you want to stick around.

BLANC

Don't press your luck, son.

Blanc walks off, leaving Jud in front of his church. Its new
name on the welcome sign: "Our Lady of Perpetual Grace.
FATHER JUD DUPLENTICY"

QUICK SHOTS: Jud pulls a large LIMB from a tree and carves
it with Samson's woodworking tools.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The blank spot on the wall with the empty shape of the
cross. Jud mounts the NEW HANDMADE CRUCIFIX.

A YOUNG COUPLE enters the church, tentative. Father Jud
smiles and walks to greet them.

JUD

Welcome.

We stay with the crucifix. Light breaks through the window,
a slash of sun illuminating the carved figure of Christ.

Inset deep in the figure's chest, almost invisible except
for a small crack, a pink bit of jewel.

It catches the sunlight and sparkles.