

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 DUPLENTICY. 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 Good Friday murder through my eyes I gotta start here. Nine months ago. When this asshole Deacon said something way out of line and I did this.

With lightning 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 DELANCY

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

JUD

No. I don't believe that. Father. 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)

I just want to be 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 -

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Alright, alright. Listen. Deacon Clark's famously a dick, nobody's actually that upset you clocked him. In fact, kind of the opposite. But we need to do something about it.

(beat)

We're sending you to a small parish. In Chimney Rock. It's just one priest there now.

JUD

Assistant pastor?

Langstrom raises his hands, a pained expression.

BISHOP LANGSTROM
Well. Curb your enthusiasm.

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
you and me I think he's a few beads
shy of a full rosary and a real son
of a bitch. But what's undeniable is
his flock is shrinking, even
calcifying. It could use 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
Hey hey, 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.)
So 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. Jud
Duplenticy. From Albany.

WICKS

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

WICKS

It'll be fine Martha.

MARTHA

Father Jud. You are welcome here.

JUD

Thank you. Martha. I was just saying
to 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, huh?
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?

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Jud settles onto a stone bench with Wicks.

WICKS

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, that is a
good looking car. The coup. I have
envied the power of great men. 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, in what
did I say six weeks? So let's say
thirty times masturbated.

(MORE)

WICKS (cont'd)

This week in my bed in the morning
once, once in the shower, standing
up, which was 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 I hadn't
prepared so I had to finish into a
copy of Catholic Chronicle magazine,
just what was on the end table. Which
is probably its own kind of sin,
maybe not, but not good.

Jud nods, straining to keep his gaze even.

JUD (V.O.)

*At the time I thought this was just
weird, but looking back now I know.
This was Wicks's first punch.*

Jud murmurs "One Hail Mary, One Glory Be" then the prayer of
absolution.

WICKS

Thank you Father.

Wicks puts his hand out to shake.

JUD (V.O.)

It wouldn't be his last.

WICKS

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.

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 to me once if I can stave off that demon you can and every day it is a struggle, but I have. Credit him and my sweet Martha.

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

JUD
Your sweet Martha?

SAMSON
I'd do anything for her. My angel on earth.

JUD (V.O.)
*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, feeds Wicks.*

INT. CHURCH - DAY

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

JUD (V.O.)
*plays the organ. 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
So this is the crypt?

SAMSON
Yup. Damn shame. Have to put up a
security camera.

JUD
Is there an entrance?

Samson indicates a faint rectangle outline on the front.

SAMSON
There is. This right here. It's a
"Lazarus door" - Takes construction
equipment to open from the outside,
but cantilevered as such that one
push will send it tumbling to the
ground from inside.

JUD
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.

(re: the graffiti)

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

Samson and Jud exchange looks.

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 borrow some of 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

Yes the harlot whore. 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, she loved her revealing clothes and her fancy brands.

JUD

Fancy brands. Oof, yeah.

MARTHA

As a teenager she slutted around bars, was soon pregnant by a drifter.

EXT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON - FLASHBACK

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

Behind them, GRACE (25) smokes and glares.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTHA

Prentice had a vast family fortune in the bank. To protect his grandson, Wicks, he promised: if Grace stayed under his roof, the fortune would be willed to her. So the whore waited for her father to die. 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.

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 said, and do you know what
he said? Yes, you are heir to every
single penny Prentice had. And in his
accounts... not one hot dime.

JUD

What'd he do with the fortune?

MARTHA

Gave it to the poor say some, threw
it in the ocean say others. No one
knows. It was gone. That holy man's
final act of grace was to keep the
corrupting evil out of wicked hands.
All that 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 said. But I knew.
 Look not for Eve's apple. Your
 inheritance is now Christ.
 (beat)
 That night, she had her revenge.

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 said, sister Grace, God your father
 will 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.

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. 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.)
*The darkness of that story was the
 bedrock of this place. You could feel
 it.*

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

JUD (V.O.) (cont'd)
*So what would draw someone to make
 this their spiritual home?*

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.)

The core group of regulars all had their reasons. And these will be our suspects. So I should introduce them.

JUD (V.O.)

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 dad was Wick's attorney, and drinking buddy. The boys.

JUD

And so you became a lawyer so you could take over his family practice?

VERA

I became a lawyer because I wanted to do great things in the world. But this place is my dad's legacy, he wanted me to keep it going after 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.)

When Vera was young, just out of law school, her dad came home with ten year old Cy out of the blue, told Vera she was going to raise him, no questions asked. The whole town knew he was obviously her illegitimate brother, but Vera accepted it. She did it.

VERA

I've given up a lot to be loyal. To my dad. To Cy. To Wicks. I think that when my dad is looking down on me from heaven, I think he is very pleased with me. So I guess that's nice.

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, DEI, 5G, everything. All of it I did - nobody, just, nothing. People are just numb these days. I don't know why.

JUD

Maybe we need to get back to
fundamentals, basic building blocks
of how to genuinely inspire people.

CY

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

JUD

Well no.

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 was spinning out. He wasn't successful enough, rich enough, good enough for her. He would do anything to get her back.

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.)

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 and come here and -

JUD (V.O.)

His book sales and popular standing have been in slow decline ever since. But he spent the last year writing a massive book about Wicks.

Lee slams a printed manuscript on the desk.

LEE

His teachings. My reflections. Essays and recollections of an acolyte at the feet of a prophet.

JUD (V.O.)

"The Holy Man And The Troubadour" I found it a tough read. But he pinned all of his hopes on it.

LEE

This is my last chance ticket out of Substack hell. I can't take it anymore. My readers these days. I mean they are survivalist freaks. They all look like John Goodman in The Big Lebowski.

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. Cy. Got his little influencer fangs in the Monsignor lately. We don't like him. We're all like Wicks be careful. You gotta 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

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

This feels different though, faith in
God to heal me, this is different. I
feel hopeful now, like a miracle
could happen. That's how Monsignor
Wicks makes me feel.

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, huh?

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

WICKS

My warriors!

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 be 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. 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.

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

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

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

Another mass: a 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.*

Samson loudly listens to baseball on his radio earpiece -
Martha SWATS him, he takes it out.

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. 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. 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 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
Sure, of course, I'll tell him, I
just wanted us to connect and uh

LEE

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

Jud stares at Lee.

DOCTOR NAT

Why wouldn't you tell him?

SIMONE

This feels kinda weird.

JUD

Guys. This is a prayer meeting, it's
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

Only 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. Can I see that?

VERA

I'm gonna go. Cyrus?

CY

Yup.

SIMONE

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

The flock files out. Doctor Nat comforts Jud:

DOCTOR NAT

Nice try guy.

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 so sorry your little coup failed
this afternoon, Father.

JUD

My coup Martha? Really?

MARTHA

If we want to pray or need to confess something we can do it with Monsignor Wicks.

JUD

Can you? Cause you all seem scared to death of the guy. Could you walk into that church of 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

Well 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)

And then 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.

JUD

Five our fathers. Five hail Marys.

WICKS

Well we're at nine months now, Jud.
How are you enjoying it here?
Breaking down some walls?

Motions "you do me now."

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 the past 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 living his 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 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."

(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)

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)

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 in the possibility of miracles through Christ.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

JUD

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

WICKS

God help me. Anything else?

JUD

Yeah why not. Cy Draven. 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

There's G-O-D in DOGE

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

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 a dangerous way.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Back to the garden.

JUD

When was the last time a new person lasted more than one Sunday? Words gotten out - every week now it's just this hardened cyst of regulars, and it seems like you're intentionally keeping them 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. Yes. 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'm going to come at you again so you're protecting yourself.

(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. Are 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.

JUD (V.O.)

Christ you didn't give up on me, I'm not giving up on this church.

EXT. RECTORY - NIGHT

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

JUD (V.O.)

But he was one step ahead of me.

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 - you're a devil wolf - 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 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
Hey! 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.*

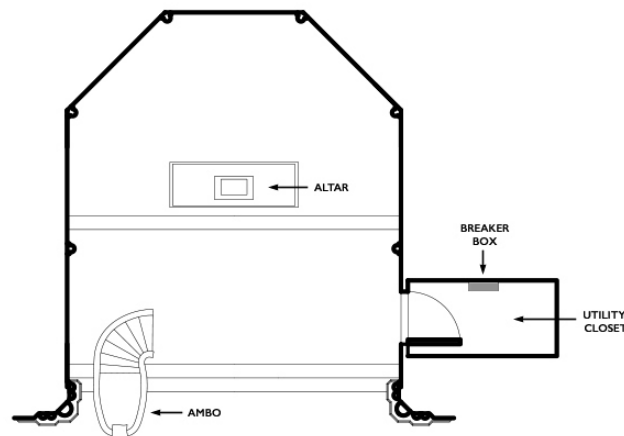
Wicks finishes, dripping sweat from the exertion.

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 wood of the Cross, on
which hung the salvation of the world

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

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 (cont'd)

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.

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
Wait. Don't touch it - Don't touch anything -

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

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! The Devil!

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.

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 take that man! He shall rise again in the glory of the lord!

The Chief of Police GERALDINE SCOTT gets out of the lead car. She's brusque in her 40s.

JUD (V.O.)

This was an insane event for a tiny town. And poor Geraldine the local chief was thrown in headlong.

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

You were the only one on stage with the Monsignor at the time of his killing. And you had prior possession of the wolf head figurine attached to the murder weapon. You were the only one in that church who hated his guts.

JUD

I don't hate any guts.

GERALDINE

But it's literally impossible for anyone to have done this, so I don't know what this is. Alright, Father, why don't you get some rest. But I should warn you before you walk out of here. The town is talking. Cy Draven put this up on his YouTube this morning.

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
It's been reposted. Quite a bit.

INT. POLICE STATION HALL - EVENING

Jud walks in a trance down the hall.

Notices on the ground: ROSARY BEADS. He picks them up, and
through a window sees Simone, talking tearfully to a DEPUTY.
The Deputy shuts the blinds.

Jud pulls out his phone.

JUD (V.O.)
I turned on my phone for two minutes.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - NIGHT

Jud wanders through the woods.

JUD (V.O.)
*That was a mistake. A flood of
messages to the killer priest. But I
wasn't thinking about getting
arrested or defrocked. I was thinking
Wicks had won. Cause 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
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.

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

BLANC (cont'd)
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. Proud heretic, I
kneel at the altar of the rational.

JUD

Uh huh. You weren't raised in a faith?

BLANC

My mother is, was, very religious.

JUD

Were you close with her?

BLANC

No. When I was a boy. 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 perfidious bubble of belief and get to a truth I can swallow without choking.

(beat)

The rafter details are very fine 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.

(beat)

You're right, it's storytelling. This church, it's not 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 we can't express any other way. Except storytelling.

Blanc regards this young man.

BLANC

Touché, padre.

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

BLANC (cont'd)

Son...

JUD

I'm 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.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)

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.

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

Would you allow me to 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. Geraldine has graciously allowed me access. 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

Blanc - I'm trusting your process but I agree with him.

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, just an empty vessel, not the mythologized monster in your mind but merely flesh and blood, dead from a knife wound we can analyze.

Blanc starts poking the body, which jiggles like jello.

GERALDINE

Please stop doing that.

BLANC

Tammy would you mind flipping the meat?

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.

Jud scrambles out the door, hyperventilating.

EXT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY

Jud slams into the opposite wall and sinks to the ground, gasping for breath.

Blanc comes into the hall and kneels next to Jud.

BLANC

Hey -

JUD

No no no no I don't belong here. I don't know why you brought me here -

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

Geraldine comes into the hall.

GERALDINE

Father I need to know you understand the situation. We are not all buddies running around trying to solving a case. You are still a suspect. The point is - you do not need to be here 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 do it 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?

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

NIKOLAI

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.

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

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... where?

JUD

In the church. I threw it at the church, it broke a window, I don't know why

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
Do you see that?

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
Hey. I was just, having a little
lunch.

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.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Tell 'em, Nat.

Nat walks out.

NAT

Son of bitch! Killer priest!

Jud's anger rises, his focus returns.

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.

EXT. PICNIC TABLE - DAY

GERALDINE

First off, I owe Detective Elliott a fruit basket for giving me your number.

BLANC

I am just glad to be of service. Geraldine you had the foresight to see this goes way beyond normal police work. This is something even I have not experienced...a textbook example of a perfectly impossible crime.

(MORE)

BLANC (cont'd)
 The stuff of detective fiction, it
 should not exist in our real world.
 And yet here it is, the holy grail.

GERALDINE
 Love the passion, I just need to feel
 confident that you know this case is
 solvable.

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
 Great. How do we get there?

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 golden age detective novel,
 and a veritable primer on the locked
 door mystery, the impossible crime.

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)
 "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 is 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. Possibility number
one: Wicks was stabbed with the knife
before entering the closet.

(beat)

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, and the witnesses in
the nave, but would have certainly
been witnessed 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. Possibility two: nixed. Progress!

GERALDINE

How many more possibilities are there?

BLANC

Not many. Three! He was killed 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.

(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)
So the knife must have somehow come
through 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 else was found
on the floor of this space, yes?

GERALDINE
Just the red thread.

BLANC
The red thread?

Geraldine shows Blanc photos of the red thread.

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

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! To walk this holy place like some crime scene, some tawdry police show, talking of robots, it's not right father. It isn't right.

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
have 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 so
be it. 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
I would not, Martha doesn't approve.

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 happened at 3:47pm. And 90 seconds before that...

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 glitch, but to answer your question yes, it's consistent with a strong burst of RF interference that you might get from a souped up remote control.

GERALDINE

DAMN!

JUD

This is it right? This triggered the knife robot, this has got to be it - 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)

Oh. 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 before us now.

JUD

We do?

BLANC

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

JUD

So give us the answer!

Blanc looks genuinely stunned. Almost shell shocked.

BLANC

I can't.

JUD

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

BLANC

I know. And yet with all the pieces on the table, this crime still truly appears impossible.

JUD

You told me you could solve this, that's what you do, I put my faith in you! Oh god.

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

BLANC
You haven't slept in 36 hours. I
think it's bedtime.

GERALDINE
Yeah it's been a helluva day. Good
night Father Jud.

BLANC
I'll drive you back.

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. I
think there's something in your head
that I need to solve this case, and
if I can't shake it loose then I'm
sorry, I'll have to go in there and
get it.

JUD
Ok you're freaking me out now.

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?

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
Monsign-ya jalapen-ya 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 like. Keep it
interesting, keep it moving, but
spare no detail.

JUD
Blanc I'm not a writer.

BLANC
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 (O.S.)
"Joined the others outside." So you
stayed inside. 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,

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 (O.S.)
he "fortified" himself, yes - clever
wording there - but everyone must
have known.

Lee passes Jud, nods back to Wicks.

LEE
Spirit really moved him today, right?

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 (O.S.)
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.)

Wicks had been stabbed. I don't know how or by who, but I knew he had been stabbed. So this had nothing to do with it. It was 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

Bull shit. 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. It's not here.

Blanc appears in the doorway.

JUD (cont'd)

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

BLANC

No you did not 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

Now you see the enemy we're up against. You have listened to this flock's stories with empathy and grace, we're done with that now. We've wasted enough time. 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 left 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.

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

MARTHA

Gentlemen. May I have a moment?

WICK (O.S.)

Judas in many forms. Always the true
threat comes from within. Remember my
words.

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

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAY

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.

Blanc stands discreetly at the tomb. Observing.

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.

Jud stands with Blanc, deep in thought.

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

Hands a clipboard to Jud, who squints and signs.

JAMES

Sorry for your loss, Father.

(beat)

Here sign on the bottom. Listen
between you and me, I don't care what
the internet says, I think there's a
chance you didn't do it.

Jud snatches his copy of the receipt from James.

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM

Jud BURSTS into the room, Blanc in after him.

JUD

Alright everyone, listen up!

LEE

Well would you look who it is, Judas
Jud.

MARTHA

Father you are not welcome here.

JUD

Alright STOP. Here's what's going to
happen.

(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)

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. That was very good. And we're going to start with what happened that night, right here, in this very room.

DOCTOR NAT

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

JUD

No - and that, that was,
(to Blanc)
the boxing thing

LEE

And now he's covering his ass by attacking us. He's a PINO.

JUD

A "PINO?"

LEE

Priest in name only.

JUD

Oh gawd.

LEE

Helping Benoit Blanc crack the mystery of the eeeeeevil Church. Then some 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.
(MORE)

SIMONE (cont'd)
 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.

BLANC
 Well actually 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. What was that meeting
 actually about?

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...

INT. RECTORY - MAIN ROOM

BLANC
 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 talked about that night has nothing to do with Wicks's killing, but it does have to do with things that, if made public, will ruin people in this room.

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'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.

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)

And I've been thinking about what her life must have been like. Trapped in a house with a father and a son. Closing rank and shaming her. And teaching us all to shame her. 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 details for 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...
"...affirmation that I Jefferson Wicks am the biological father of Cyrus Draven."

VERA

No shame for you, right? Who was the mother? Does it even matter? No. She came back and dropped this poor kid in your lap, and then she went and had a life. My faithful father came to the rescue, once again the boys club closed ranks. And there I was, the loyal little idiot. Trapped. I obeyed and honored and raised your son while you sat on your pulpit, shameless, you hypocritical son of bitch.

Dumbstruck reactions.

DOCTOR NAT

...Cy? Did you know?

CY

Not till Vera told me this morning.

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 cut the shit. You're all standing by your man. I just wanted to see you all eat his shit up with a spoon and come back for seconds.

LEE

That's so condescending, Vera. You don't know what we're feeling. I think as Christians we're all very shaken up by what you just said.

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

LEE (cont'd)

But... we are fighting an existential war here, 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 be his warrior.

(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.

DOCTOR NAT
Thank you.

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 Wicks, 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 trust or hire 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

Vera. You are your father's nightmare. He would be so ashamed.

WICKS (cont'd)

Simone. I cannot heal a faithless woman. I cannot help you.

SIMONE

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

WICKS

I promised you nothing.

SIMONE

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

WICKS

You cannot buy God's healing. You will never be healed, you will die in pain in the prison of that 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 you all.

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 glory be, that cleared the room.

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. Tell me 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. He unburdened himself.

WICKS

I hate this place. I 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. Just this week.

VERA

No. No, that money is gone, nobody knows where Prentice put it but it's 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, are you kidding me! Give me four years and you could be president.

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

CY (cont'd)

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. If they
associate themselves with us, show up
on cable news, even want a place in
this thing. We need to burn them off
like leeches.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE

JUD
That's why he torched them all...
your petty vindictiveness. 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, fifty years ago what was the safest way for Prentice to hide eighty million dollars?

VERA
(realizing)
A Swiss bank account...

BLANC
All you need to do is find that 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.

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, as if Eve's Apple is the fortune. But a Swiss account we're looking for nineteen numbers, so it doesn't work but - Vera, did he ever tell you anything?

VERA
Even if he did, I would go 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 and get 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 "L'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 might be sewn in
the lining, etched in the metal...

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 figurine, examines it more closely.

BLANC (cont'd)
This is hollow.

JUD
Yes, do it.

Blanc smashes it on the desk and looks inside.

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, but if Eve's Apple is the fortune and it's not a pile of cash in a Swiss account somewhere. What is it.

BLANC
What?

Jud squints at the receipt.

JUD
They must have misprinted the date on this... it says the crypt opening thing was ordered last Wednesday.
(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)
 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, he takes the orders but I
process the orders

JUD
Right, and the reason I'm calling

LOUISE
And I've been to that church of
yours, but I don't think you were
there

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

LOUISE
Oh congratulations. It was Father
whats-it, Older guy, Wicks?

JUD
Monsignor.

LOUISE
Ok, it was Father Monsignor preaching
when I went and let me know you, that
is not a nice man, but I am sorry
that he died, I'm sorry for all
y'all's 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 need to know who placed
the order

LOUISE
James takes the orders, he's left for
the day

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

If you could call James now, I would appreciate it so much, thank you Louise

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 affecting her and made her say some terrible things. And I said bad things back. And now I'm afraid that's going to be the last thing we say to each other. Father I'm feeling pretty 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. Call you tell me 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. 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 came to close up.

Jud stands and wipes the tears away from his eyes.

JUD

I'll get the church. You take care of the rectory.

He leaves, Blanc storms out after him.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - LATE DAY

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

JUD

Don't follow me Blanc. I'm done.

BLANC

Why exactly?

JUD

I've had a road to Damascus thing. Paul had a holy revelation on the road to Damascus.

BLANC

Yes I know he was struck blind and all that hogwash, probably a case of pink eye - but he was not on the verge of solving a murder when it happened. I mean what do you think we're doing here.

Jud stops.

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 you a place to hide, and a clear method to give you a sense of absolution.

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

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. God 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

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
in life 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 have to understand all this
but Blanc just 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, help me understand.

JUD

We're here to serve the world, not
beat it. 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 his
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 is the treasure. Eve's
apple restored to the tree. What did
that mean?

JUD

Blanc 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's great actually. 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 rewatched 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

And you knew, you knew all along and you toyed with that poor kid like a cat with a mouse.

BLANC

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

GERALDINE

No.

BLANC

Just one more -

GERALDINE

I've found my killer and I'm bringing him in. 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.

BLANC (O.S.)
Who's there?

INT. FOREST GROVE

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

BLANC

Wait!

GERALDINE (O.S.)

Blanc!

BLANC

Here.

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

GERALDINE

Oh shit. who's that?

BLANC

The groundskeeper, Samson.

GERALDINE

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?

BLANC

Scooby-Dooby-Doo.

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.

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD

Blanc and Geraldine come out, Blanc tries to calm Martha but
she's shouting in near hysterical tongues of joy.

MARTHA

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, news is
going to spread quick and I don't
want more looky-loos.

DEPUTY

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.

MARTHA

Hallelujah praise God, he has raised
up his servant from the dead.

GERALDINE

Hey will you do me a favor? Tape off
this entire area, down to the grove.
It's a homicide scene. The
groundskeeper is dead.

Martha hears this and falls silent, afraid. Her eyes go to the dark grove entrance, cops taping it off.

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.

Geraldine in the entrance of the grove

GERALDINE

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 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 you doing?

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. 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

Yes? Slow down Martha, what?

(beat)

What?

INT. SIMONE'S LIVING ROOM

Simone on the phone.

LEE

It's a miracle

SIMONE

Bullshit.

LEE

No it happened, Martha says the tomb is empty, 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 did. 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, Donnie the technician working the playback.

DONNIE
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.

DONNIE
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 Deputy comes in, hands a piece of paper to Geraldine.

DEPUTY
Prints from the gardening tool - We
didn't run a full database check,
just the suspects you questioned,
but... it's Father Jud.

Geraldine glances at it. Then shows it to Blanc angrily.

GERALDINE
Where is he.

BLANC
I sincerely wish I knew.

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.

JUD
I'm turning myself in.

BLANC
No you're not.

Blanc starts the car and "Skimbleshanks the Railway Cat" comes on, he turns it off quickly.

JUD
I did it, I killed Samson. I'm guilty
I have to confess let me out.

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,
I only hope 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?

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. More 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. What's left of 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 (cont'd)
(into phone)
Geraldine, Blanc. You're going to want to come to Doctor Nat's house. There's a body or two. It's all here. Yes. 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 killed Samson. I have to do this and I have to do it of my own free will or it won't mean anything.

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.

He breaks the tape barrier and walks up the road to the church. Spellbound, the flock follows him.

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'd like to 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 -

"The Phantom of the Opera" 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, 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 clanky 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

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 photograph.

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 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 in the closet?

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
Wait - Don't touch it

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.

(MORE)

JUD (cont'd)

Why do all of this insane elaborate stuff, the theatricality the impossible crime, why?

BLANC

Indeed.

GERALDINE

And if Doctor Nat killed Wicks, who killed Nat?

BLANC

Well now we get to it. Not some fiddly locked door mystery with devices and clues, but a larger scheme. 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 himself. 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.

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 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?

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.

JUD

Blanc, if you know what really happened, you should tell everyone.

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 give 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 another 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 suppose they will.

INT. CHURCH

GERALDINE

What the hell was that?

Blanc in a delicate state, still suspended in revelation.

BLANC

Road to Damascus, the scales fell
from my eyes.

GERALDINE

So what, facts schmacts now, you
believe in God and all of this
mishegas is real?

BLANC

God? Oh no, God is a fiction. No my
revelation came from Father Jud. His
example to have grace. Grace for my
enemy.

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 the broken. Grace for those
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.

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 born to do. Be her
 priest. Take her confession.

Blanc guides Jud to Martha. Jud takes her hands.

MARTHA
 Bless me Father for I have sinned. It
 is a week since my last confession. I
 told myself it started with pure
 intent. But the truth is it started
 with a lie.

BLANC
 Prentice.

MARTHA
 Prentice.

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.

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. My
 entire cursed fortune. All the sin in
 the world. All that Eve hungers for.
 But I have trapped it. It shall never
 again be plucked by evil 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.)
He took the jewel to his grave. I
swore I would protect this great
secret. But Grace discovered he'd
bought the diamond.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
I don't know how.

BLANC
She knew her fancy brands.

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 made
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 plastic Jesus.
No. Something facet-cut worth a
fortune. A jewel.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA

But she didn't know where he hid it.

JUD

So that night 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 terrible burden. Until.

JUD

Until I challenged 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.)

With defiant pride.

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.

MARTHA

I could accept that he had strayed.

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 something much
bigger. He was embracing that
terrible boy. 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
steal the diamond. For his own greed
and lust 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 had warned me about. I had
failed him.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
All my life I was not the bad one, I
was the good one, the faithful one,
serving and protecting the church. If
I failed at that, what is my life?

JUD
I understand.

MARTHA
My sole purpose, and I failed.

BLANC
Unless.

MARTHA
Unless.

INT. RECTORY - MARTHA'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Martha's eyes shift. Having a revelation.

MARTHA (O.S.)
Unless I could steal the jewel first,
and get rid of it forever.
(MORE)

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
And with the same stroke, raise Wicks
up as a miraculous risen saint, not a
fallible man but a symbol that would
save my 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
So I formed my plan. Wicks's death
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 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.)
It all went according to plan.

INT. CHURCH

Martha's demeanor changes. Emotion creeping in.

MARTHA
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 made 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. 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 will be ok,
you will rise again, it will be ok. I
promise.

MARTHA (O.S.)
He didn't understand why we were
doing it.

SAMSON
(whispers)
Anything for you. My angel.

Doctor Nat enters, gently pries Martha away.

MARTHA (O.S.)
But he trusted me because he loved
me.

With a final look at Samson (giving a thumbs-up) he replaces the lid, calling for the other men.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA
Oh 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 to his faithful
groundskeeper before ascending back
to heaven. A miracle. 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.

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. DOCTOR NAT'S BASEMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Martha descends into the basement followed by Nat.

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.)
Then he told me the fairy tale about
how everything had gone according to
plan. It was only then that that I
told him I had been to the crypt. And
I 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
We can't let him 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.
(MORE)

MARTHA (O.S.) (cont'd)
Christ himself could resist
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. No
remedy once ingested. Painless. A
little numbness in the lips, then in
ten minutes, time for a final prayer.
Then he begged me to understand why
he was doing all of this. That the
money would lure back his harpy wife,
blah blah blah. I told him, I
understood.

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.)

These things I did with hatred in my heart. Vengeance is mine says the Lord. And that is the story the crime scene will tell the world. But inside my heart I know.

INT. CHURCH

MARTHA

Vengeance is mine.

(beat)

These sins I confess to you Father. 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's happening?

BLANC

I knew when I saw her lips.

FLASH TO - Earlier, Blanc on the stage sees Martha touching her ashen lips, realizes...

BLANC (cont'd)

It was already too late.

and we're **BACK TO THE SCENE:**

BLANC (cont'd)
She's taken the pentobarbital.

GERALDINE
Get an ambulance here, fast. Now!
Dammit - there might be a poison kit
in the prowler -

Geraldine runs out, cops with her. Blanc stays knowing it's too late. Jud looks back to Martha fading away in his arms.

MARTHA
Forgive me Father 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 Grace.
(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 of 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: **ONE YEAR 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, control 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 search the church and rectory thoroughly, they've found nothing. Also Mr. Blanc was there when Martha passed and denies anything untoward.

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 your shitty 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 punk bitch. His video with you is still trending.

BLANC

Yes, "Benoit Blanc Pwned" - "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 keep flooding our Facebook, it's a outhouse fire. Such a time to be alive.

(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.

BISHOP LANGSTROM

Good luck kid.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Blanc and Jud amble up. Neither sure what to say.

BLANC

I'm gonna go.

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 coming up. If you want to stick around.

BLANC

That's so nice of you. There is nothing I would rather not do.

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.