

PARANOIA

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING -- DAY

Angry PROTESTERS crowd the front steps, sidewalk, and street. They wave signs stating "Cut County Spending," and "Lower Property Taxes Now."

A CAMERA CREW has COMMISSIONER BENNETT, (30's), lifetime bureaucrat, cornered. A REPORTER holds a microphone in front of the commissioner's face.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT

The commissioners are determined not to increase taxes. We have a very viable plan.

INT. COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - HALLWAY -- DAY

The hallway is empty. On one side of the hallway is a glass wall with glass doors. A conference room is visible through the glass.

Posted on the door is a "notice of executive session."

CONFERENCE ROOM

This is a large room, meant for sessions where the public and press are invited.

There is a conference table for the commissioners, chairs for spectators, and a press table.

At the conference table sits LYLE BENNETT, (30's), Commissioner Bennett's brother. Impeccably groomed, very nice suit, and all-business. A WORRIED COMMISSIONER sits next to Lyle.

An ANGRY COMMISSIONER stands by the window looking down at the protesters.

LYLE

I'll cut the department's spending by half within six months.

Commissioner Bennett enters.

WORRIED COMMISSIONER

Can you do it without any backlash?

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
Backlash is always over taxes or
bad roads.

ANGRY COMMISSIONER
I don't see any signs demanding
better schools or safer streets.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
We don't have many options.

WORRIED COMMISSIONER
I agree. Go for it.

The others nod in agreement.

The angry commissioner continues to glare at the protesters
on the ground below.

ANGRY COMMISSIONER
Leave property taxes the same, cut
costs, and get these fucking people
off our backs.

INT. COMMISSIONER BENNETT'S CAR -- DAY

The car is county-owned. White. No frills. The protesters
are visible through the window.

Lyle fiddles with a small box while Commissioner Bennett
drives.

LYLE
Nothing brings out citizens' ire
like taxes.

This is not a pleasant subject for Commissioner Bennett.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
Assholes.

Lyle grins, nodding. He examines the box.

LYLE
What's the gift?

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
Commissioners are giving the
traditional watch. Mac's employees
are giving their own gift.

Commissioner Bennett is torn between amazement and anger.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT (CONT'D)
Get this. A boat trip to meet long-
lost relatives.

LYLE
We pay them too much. On the subject
of pay, what's the procedure for
getting an advance?

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
There isn't one.

LYLE
He gets a cruise and I have to wait
two weeks for a check.

Lyle puts the box on the dashboard.

LYLE (CONT'D)
How do I get the insurance moved
up?

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
Three months. You can make it three
months.

LYLE
Alice is due in two.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
I'll see what I can do.

INT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING - CAFETERIA -- DAY

A retirement party for a much-loved director. Pot-luck
contributions are on the buffet table. EMPLOYEES decorate
the room.

RUPERT, (30's), pleasant and easy-going, removes balloons
from a package, inflates them, and puts them in a box.

DEIDRE, (60's), sweet and grandmotherly, hands the inflated
balloons to ROGER, (60's). Roger stands on the ladder quickly
taping the balloons to the wall as he nervously watches the
door.

ROGER
Where's Carmen? She's going to
miss Mac's retirement.

EXT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING -- DAY

EMPLOYEES watch PUFFY, a small, dirty, dog cowering under a bush.

GEORGE, (30's), a slimy little man, stands in front.

CARMEN, (40), attractive, but hiding it with professionalism, rushes up and gets on her knees in front of the bush.

GEORGE

I called nine-one-one.

CARMEN

For this?

INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- DAY

Carmen pulls sweaters, books, and games out of a large box. She digs through a litter bag and finds a half-eaten burger. She peels the sticky bread and dried condiments off the meat.

EXT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING -- DAY

Carmen waves the meat under the hungry dog's nose and coaxes him into the box.

The employees applaud. George looks on in disgust.

Carmen carries the box to the door as police cruisers, ambulances, and fire trucks storm into the parking lot.

CARMEN

(to George)

I'll let you explain the emergency.

GEORGE

It could have rabies.

INT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING - CAFETERIA -- DAY

The employees continue decorating.

Carmen enters carrying a large tray of baked goodies and places them on the table.

Roger relaxes when he sees her.

ROGER

Finally.

Carmen removes a large plastic cruise ship from under the table.

Deidre hands Roger the last of the balloons. Rupert crumples up the empty package.

RUPERT

Last balloon. Where did you hide the extras?

Carmen signs the ship and hands it to Roger to sign.

CARMEN

Men's bathroom. Cabinet with the toilet paper.

These are happy employees with a sense of humor.

DEIDRE

They'll never look there.

Roger signs the ship and hands it to Rupert.

RUPERT

There's a cabinet with toilet paper?

Rupert signs the ship.

Roger climbs down the ladder.

ROGER

I'll get the balloons.

BATHROOM

George washes and dries his hands as Lyle enters.

GEORGE

Are you Lyle?

LYLE

Yes.

They shake.

GEORGE

Julius has said good things about you. I'd like your advice on a situation, when you have time.

LYLE

Sure thing.

Roger enters and gets the party supplies.

ROGER

Lyle?

Roger extends his hand. They shake.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I'm Roger.

JULIUS, (30's), enters. Greets Lyle pleasantly.

JULIUS

It's going to be great working with you, again.

LYLE

Likewise.

JULIUS

You've met Roger, my boss?

LYLE

Yes, we've met.

Roger nods. There's something uncomfortable about the whole exchange. Roger grabs the party supplies and exits.

CAFETERIA

Rupert meticulously places plastic silverware on the buffet table while Deidre puts out plates.

DEIDRE

I'm going to cry.

RUPERT

You can cry after you meet the new boss.

MAC, (60's), kind and professional enters with Commissioner Bennett behind him. They head for the podium.

Carmen approaches Lyle. They shake hands.

CARMEN

I'm Carmen, Director of Work Services. We have a dinner meeting planned for this evening, if it meets with your plans. It's at Dolches. One of us would be happy to give --

Lyle is impatient.

LYLE
-- I'll meet you there.

Carmen slips back into the group.

DEIDRE
S.O.B.

CARMEN
Bad timing. I should have grabbed
him after the reception.

At the podium, Commissioner Bennett gives Mac the box and mechanically shakes his hand. The room is quiet.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
Mac, thank you for your dedication
to the County.

Mac is sincere.

MAC
Thank you. I'll miss this group.
You are the most dedicated, hardest
working people I have ever known.

LATER

Commissioner Bennett is at the podium.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
It gives me great pleasure to
introduce Mac's replacement.

Some employees whisper comments to each other, like children in a classroom, after each of Commissioner Bennett's introductory remarks.

Roger leans over to Deidre.

ROGER
Replacement my ass.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
I've known Lyle for many years.

George whispers to Rupert.

GEORGE
They're brothers.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
The commission chose him for his
vast array of experience.

Rupert whispers to George.

RUPERT
You get lots of experience when you
only stay on a job six months.

COMMISSIONER BENNETT
Please welcome Lyle Bennett.

Half-hearted applause.

LATER

The employees help themselves to the buffet.

SUZY, a nursing student, young, cute, bubbly, unwraps a plate
of brownies. She stands next to Lyle.

SUZY
I'm Suzy. I'm doing a nursing
practicum with Deidre.

Lyle extends his hand to shake it.

Suzy puts her hand on Lyle and gazes into his eyes,
flirtatiously.

SUZY (CONT'D)
This is a great place. I'd like to
find a permanent position here.

George and Rupert glance over at Lyle and Suzy.

RUPERT
Nobody sees this?

George turns away.

GEORGE
Not me.

INT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING - LYLE'S OFFICE -- DAY
Nice office. Not plush, but decent. Upper level management
in a government agency.
Lyle pitches Mac's things into a box. Nameplate, coffee
cup, and pictures from the credenza.

The pictures are of Mac's family but also family pictures of employees, Carmen, Deidre and others.

Mac enters and retrieves his coffee cup.

MAC
Didn't waste any time.

LYLE
I thought you took everything you wanted.

Mac examines an employee picture.

MAC
You don't want the pictures?

LYLE
This is an office not a living room.

JOYCE, forties, enters with a stack of folders and papers. She places them on Lyle's desk as she states what they are.

JOYCE
Personnel files, organization charts,
and salary levels you wanted.

CARMEN'S OFFICE

Nice, but smaller than Lyle's.

Puffy sits by Carmen's desk watching her as she rummages through a drawer. She finds a pop-top-can of beef stew and dumps it onto a piece of paper. Puffy gobbles it.

Joyce enters. Puffy runs under the desk.

JOYCE (CONT'D)
New patient?

CARMEN
Cute.

JOYCE
I need your help.

HALLWAY

Carmen and Joyce walk rapidly down the hall.

JOYCE (CONT'D)
I couldn't find George or anyone
from George's department.

They reach the men's room. Loud GROANS.

MEN'S ROOM

An elderly man is on the floor in a stall next to his
wheelchair. Carmen thumps the emergency button by the stool.

JOYCE (CONT'D)
No one answered it.

Carmen and Joyce lift the man back into his chair.

HALLWAY/LYLE'S OFFICE

George, Julius, and Lyle laugh at an unheard joke. Carmen
glances into the office as she walks by.

LYLE
Can I help you?

CARMEN
I was looking for George.

George acknowledges her with a wave.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
Stop by my office when you're done.

George salutes.

GEORGE
Yes, ma'am.

CARMEN'S OFFICE

The clock shows three-thirty. Carmen works at her desk.
Puffy is under the desk.

George enters.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
How can I help you?

CARMEN
We were scheduled to go over your
appraisal at three.

GEORGE
I thought it was four.

CARMEN
No, it was three.

She pulls an appraisal from an inter-office envelope.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
The call-buttons in the restrooms
have been disconnected. Do you
know anything about that?

GEORGE
They were being pushed too often
and I just don't have the staff for
it.

George continues to stand by the door.

CARMEN
Have a seat.

George reluctantly sits.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
You're got four open positions.

GEORGE
I'm trying to save money.

CARMEN
I appreciate your effort, but
jeopardizing safety isn't the way
to do it.

Carmen puts a copy of the appraisal in front of George. He studies it and grimaces.

INT. CARMEN'S HOME - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

The kitchen is clean and neat, but suffers from disrepair. There is a beautiful birthday cake on the counter, covered with a glass dome.

Carmen's children, JAROD, (14), and HOLLY, (13), sand a large wooden flower box. There are pots of flowers next to the box.

BEN, (30's), Carmen's brother, rubs his hands over the box. He's intelligent and classy.

BEN
You kids did a good job.

They beam at the complement.

JAROD
You're my favorite uncle.

BEN
I'm your only uncle.

GARAGE

The Garage door RUMBLES open.

KITCHEN

JAROD
They're here.

Holly, Jarod, and Ben quickly load the flower pots into the box.

HOLLY
I hope she likes it.

JAROD
She said she loved Deidre's.

BEN
She'll love it.

Holly and Jarod struggle with the heavy box moving it out of the kitchen.

LATER

Carmen enters with Deidre. Following is TINA, (30's), attractive, well-dressed, and pregnant. She is Ben's wife and Deidre's daughter.

Ben kisses Tina.

BEN
Happy birthday sweetie.

Ben kisses and taps on Tina's belly.

BEN (CONT'D)
Hey, baby.

TINA

Amazing how a pregnant wife can
lower I.Q. and maturity.

Ben smiles at Tina. He hugs Carmen and Deidre.

Carmen puts a bag of fast food on the table, notices the
sawdust, and puts the bag on the counter.

Jarod and Holly enter. "Secret" written all over their faces.

Carmen washes off the table.

CARMEN

What's this dust?

JAROD

You know. The thing.

HOLLY

The basement thing.

CARMEN

Oh, the basement thing.

Playing along.

TINA

Do you have something weird in the
basement I could do an expose on?

JAROD

You'll see.

HOLLY

Ms. Deidre. Did you bring the
magazines for my science report?

Deidre gives Holly her house key.

DEIDRE

They're on the kitchen table. I'll
pick up the key when we get back.

CARMEN

Don't touch the cake, but if you
can't resist, there are cupcakes in
the fridge.

Ben examines the cake.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
That goes for you too, Ben.

Ben gets a cupcake from the fridge.

Carmen and the kids hug and kiss. Love you's all around.

CARMEN (CONT'D)
Love you.

HOLLY
Love you. Have fun.

JAROD
Love you.
(to Holly)
It's work. She's not supposed to
have fun.

CARMEN
Ben, there's a box in the garage.
Could you help the kids wash it,
feed it, and walk it?

Jarod and Holly look at each other, excited.

INT. DOLCHES RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

A nice, but casual, restaurant.

Seated are Lyle, Carmen, Deidre, Joyce, Rupert, and Roger.

A WAITRESS hands out menus.

CARMEN
Why don't we introduce ourselves --

Lyle buries his nose in the menu as he interrupts.

LYLE
-- Hope you don't plan on counting
this as work.

JOYCE
We are working.

LYLE
My people work over 40 hours on a
regular basis.

DEIDRE

We work hard hours. By the time we go home, we're exhausted.

LYLE

Expect to be more exhausted. If you can't handle the pace, you need to get in shape or find a less grueling job.

Carmen still doesn't get it and continues to try to be friendly.

CARMEN

I jog three miles a day.

She's targeted.

LYLE

Carmen, I've read your file. With your education, why would you want a job like this?

CARMEN

I like my job.

LYLE

Nobody gives up law and medicine to do this.

The others are surprised.

JOYCE

Law and medicine?

LYLE

A special program of law school and medical school, which she gave up, even though she was tops in both classes. What's wrong with you?

Carmen is taken aback by Lyle's question.

Rupert examines the tense faces.

RUPERT

That would be rough. You come upon an accident and you don't know if you should treat the person or sue.

There's too much tension for a joke.

CARMEN

I had to quit school when I got divorced. I like this job. . . And, that information's not in my file.

Lyle moves on.

LYLE

Joyce. Running into the burning house of a family you didn't even know. Stupid wasn't it?

DEIDRE

She saved four children.

JOYCE

The city gave me a medal.

Lyle studies Roger and Deidre.

LYLE

The retirement benefits must be good.

The group doesn't know how to respond. Confused. They look at each other. Are they being insulted? The silence is tense.

Carmen hands Lyle several papers, attempting to change the subject.

CARMEN

We've put together an orientation, with tours, to help you get to know us and the agency better.

Lyle flips through the pages. He writes.

LYLE

I'm adding Julius to these tours.

Rupert waves over the waitress.

RUPERT

(to the waitress)
We'd like to order.

Joyce whispers to Rupert.

JOYCE

Think he'd get the hint if we ordered
arsenic and the check?

INT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING - ENTRANCE -- DAY

A few seats, small reception desk. Windows all around the
entrance.

Lyle, Roger, Carmen, Deidre, and Julius wait for the van.

Joyce gives the RECEPTIONIST a handful of stamped and
addressed invitations.

JOYCE

Would you stick these in today's
mail?

RECEPTIONIST

Looks like someone's having a party.

JOYCE

My son's twenty-first.

Rupert arrives with the van, visible through the windows.
Government white, no frills, institutional, fifteen passenger.

INT. KRAMER-COSS COMPANY - LOBBY -- DAY

Carmen, Lyle, Rupert, and the others sign in and put on
visitor badges.

CAFETERIA

Carmen and Lyle watch JOE, (50's), a mentally disabled man
wearing janitor's coveralls, clean the tables. A SUPERVISOR,
carrying a clipboard, points out a spot Joe missed. Joe
complies by vigorously rubbing the table, then overturning
it.

JOE

Goddamn it. Goddamn it.

The supervisor comforts Joe and helps him lift the table.

Joe overturns the table, again.

JOE (CONT'D)

Goddamn it. Goddamn it.

CARMEN

We'll take Joe back with us.

LYLE

Let the company handle it.

PRODUCTION AREA

Carmen, Lyle, Julius, and Joyce examine a product which WORKERS assemble.

CARMEN

The company pays us a flat rate and we pay our patients.

LYLE

Our patients can volunteer and the company can choose and hire who they want.

CARMEN

Having people work for free won't meet labor regulations.

LYLE

The company can do it's own homework. Julius?

JULIUS

Excellent idea.

Carmen and Joyce look at each other. They can't believe what they are hearing.

INT. VAN -- DAY

Rupert drives. Lyle sits next to him. Carmen, Joyce, and Joe sit behind Lyle and Rupert. The others are in the last rows.

Joe eats an apple. He has difficulty chewing, making noises as he eats. He sits behind Lyle. Lyle keeps an eye on Joe, uncomfortable.

CARMEN

Isn't Joe on a bland diet?

RUPERT

He packs his own lunch.

LYLE

Is he dangerous?

JOYCE

About as dangerous as you --

Carmen is shocked by Joyce's comment and tries to cover by quickly interrupting.

CARMEN

-- No, he's not dangerous.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- DAY

The building is rundown. Not in the best neighborhood.

Joe rushes inside.

Lyle and Rupert examine the depressing exterior.

LYLE

How much do these cost?

RUPERT

They're the cheapest in the county.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY -- DAY

The inside is worse than outside. Graffiti has been painted over. Carpeting is old and soiled. Some lights are burnt out or broken.

Lyle, Rupert, Joyce, Carmen, and Julius survey the dismal surroundings.

A MAN urinates in the corner.

RUPERT

Bertram! Stop that.

LYLE

We're not helping him much.

RUPERT

He's not a patient.

JOYCE

He's normal. Like --

Carmen grabs Joyce's arm, leading her down the hall, preventing Joyce from making another inappropriate comment.

CARMEN

-- the apartments are this way --

Catching Carmen's eye.

JOYCE

-- like us.

Doesn't matter. Lyle has his own agenda.

LYLE

What happens if they can't afford these?

RUPERT

Some get government subsidy and we cover the remainder.

LYLE

If they can't afford to pay they shouldn't live here. Julius, I want to know how much each patient contributes.

APARTMENT 200

Everything in this apartment is picture perfect.

The occupants, MISSY, (30's), and JEAN, (30's), both mentally disabled, hang freshly washed curtains.

The group crowds into the apartment. Rupert stands next to Lyle.

Lyle interrogates.

LYLE

How long have you ladies lived here?

JEAN

Four years. We like it here.

LYLE

Do you work?

JEAN

I do.

MISSY

I have lots of medical problems.

LYLE

You have nice furniture.

MISSY

Mom and dad give us lots of stuff.

RUPERT
(to Lyle)
Missy's dad is Judge Brundel.

A change in Lyle's attitude.

MISSY
We have a nice dinner for tonight.

LYLE
I'm looking forward to it.

INT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING - ENTRANCE -- DAY

Rain pelts the windows.

Carmen has her purse and coat and heads for the door. Lyle stops her.

LYLE
It's only four.

CARMEN
My hours are seven-thirty to four.
Joyce and I open and Roger and Deidre lock up.

LYLE
Not anymore. You stay until five.

CARMEN'S OFFICE

Carmen uses the phone.

INT. CARMEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Quiet, and empty, except for the rain pounding the windows.

KITCHEN

The phone RINGS. And RINGS. And RINGS.

BEDROOM

A clean, content Puffy sleeps on the bed.

INT. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING - CARMEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Carmen hangs up the phone just as Lyle enters.

LYLE
What's your problem with George?

CARMEN

I don't have a problem with George.

LYLE

You gave him a bad review.

CARMEN

I have a problem with his work.

LYLE

Julius says George is an excellent employee.

CARMEN

Julius doesn't supervise him.

LYLE

I've known Julius for many years and I trust his judgment.

Lyle exits.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOME -- NIGHT

Rain and Lightening.

Holly and Jarod sit, looking wet and abandoned, on the front steps.

Carmen pulls in the driveway. The garage door opens.

Holly and Jarod run into the garage.

INT. CARMEN'S HOME - GARAGE -- NIGHT

Carmen rushes out of her car, upset to see her children shivering and looking like drowned rats.

Holly and Jarod wring the water out of their clothes.

CARMEN

Why were you outside?

HOLLY

We couldn't find our key. You're always home.

JAROD

Where were you?

Carmen gently wipes her children's wet faces. Guilty. Concerned.

CARMEN
My hours changed.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- NIGHT

Major thunderstorm.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - APARTMENT 200 -- NIGHT

JUDGE BRUNDEL, fifties, Lyle, and Rupert are at the table.

Missy and Jean clear the dirty dishes.

JUDGE BRUNDEL
I understand change is in the works.

LYLE
Some change, yes.

JUDGE BRUNDEL
Missy has done very well here. I
want to make sure her progress, and
of course the progress of others
like her, isn't jeopardized.

LYLE
As long as I have a job here, Missy
will have a place to live.

JUDGE BRUNDEL
That's what I want to hear.

INT. CARMEN'S HOME - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Carmen, Jarod, and Holly, clear the table and load the
dishwasher. Jarod and Holly have dried off and changed.

Rain beats against the window.

JAROD
How's the new boss?

CARMEN
Seems okay.

HOLLY
Seems okay, like Mac?

CARMEN
No, he's different from Mac.

A pan of water in the sink receives a drop of rain from the ceiling, then another, and another.

Several stained circles on the ceiling fill with water, slowly, then more rapidly, release the drops.

Carmen surveys the wet ceiling.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Damn.

INT. LYLE'S HOME - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Lyle's wife ALICE, (30's), pregnant, clears the table.

CHILD #1, (4), in a high chair, has tubes in its nose and an oxygen tank. CHILD #2, (6), finishes eating.

Lyle enters. Rain coat dripping onto the floor.

The kids fuss.

ALICE

How was the meeting?

Lyle gets a glass.

LYLE

It was a meal not a meeting.

He examines the glass. Is it spotless? Polishes a spot with a paper towel.

Lyle watches as Alice scrapes and rinses the dishes before putting them in the dishwasher.

LYLE (CONT'D)

Scrub harder than that, and use more soap.

Alice slams the dishes, unwashed, into the dishwasher.

Lyle takes a bottle of vodka out of the freezer, fills the glass, and leaves.

Alice grabs a handful of paper towels and scoots around on the floor wiping up the drips from Lyle's coat.

INT. CARMEN'S HOME - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Carmen watches the drip, drip, drip.

The phone RINGS.

Jarod answers.

JAROD
(to Carmen)
It's the Rice Man. He's on
television.

INT. TELEVISION STATION -- NIGHT

Tina is at the anchor station. Next to her is a CO-ANCHOR.

TINA
In local news, Attorney Ben Pearson
won a class action employment lawsuit
against the Fixon Corporation.

INT. CARMEN'S HOME - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

ON TELEVISION MONITOR:

EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE -- DAY

Ben stands on the steps, pleased with himself. The camera crew and Reporter are on the steps. The reporter questions him.

BEN
The evidence was overwhelming.

REPORTER
Do you expect an appeal?

BEN
Not if they've learned anything
from this.

LIVING ROOM

Carmen holds a cordless phone in one hand and a bucket in the other catching a stream from the ceiling.

She's happy for her brother, but jealous, too.

CARMEN
(on phone)
Congratulations. I'm glad one of
us is successful.