THE ADVOCATES

BY BRUNO HELLER

19/1/13

EXT. PAUL REVERE HIGH SCHOOL. LONG ISLAND. N.Y. - DAY

ESTABLISHING.

The sky is dark and cloudy, a storm on the way.

A clean, crisp, modernist suburban campus. The lunch bell rings and STUDENTS head for the cafeteria; a raucous sea of teenage hormones. Bold fashion choices, Guns'n'Roses, and A CHIRON tells us it is..

THE DAY AFTER VALENTINE'S DAY - 1997 - SIXTEEN YEARS AGO

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Sitting at the punks and stoner's table, a skinny, long haired, ferally handsome kid in flannel and black leather and ragged jeans - HENRY BIRD, 16 - gazes with intense feeling at...

SHANNON CARTER, 16, preppy, smart, beautiful; sitting at the popular kid's table. Everyone at the table except Shannon is abuzz with the joy of being cute and popular, laughing over the raunchy message in one of the girls' valentine's card. But Shannon is alone with her thoughts, worried about something...

She senses someone watching her and looks up, but Henry immediately looks away, and she doesn't catch him.

INT. HALLWAY OF LOCKERS. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Shannon at her cluttered locker. Alone for a moment, she's even deeper in anxious thought.

Henry sees her from down the hallway. There's nobody else around. This is his chance. He pulls a WHITE ENVELOPE from his pocket, with the name Shannon written on it. But he hesitates for a fatal second when he sees the anxiety on her face. What the hell, do it. But right then, a handsome FOOTBALL JOCK comes the other way and approaches Shannon.

JOCK
Yo Shannon. 'Sup.

SHANNON
(big covering smile)
Hi Wes.

We go with Henry as he turns and walks away disappointed

INT. LIVING ROOM. HENRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The small and modest home of a poor but happy family. Henry sits on a chair at the dining table, pretending to do homework, but gazing at the white envelope in his hand. His MOTHER (weary waitress, 42) - still in her work clothes - and little sister ROSE (a tomboy in basketball shorts and a Knicks cap, 10) are watching Touched By an Angel on TV. Henry makes a decision.

He gets up, puts the envelope in his back pocket and grabs his battered skateboard.

HENRY
Going out.

MOM
K. Bye Henry. Don't be late.

Henry exits.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest pink bungalow on a street of modest bungalows. Henry skateboards away.

EXT. CARTER HOUSE. UPSCALE RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A big old house glowing cosily in the twilight behind a luxuriant front yard and an imposing gate. A FAMILY gathers for dinner in the downstairs dining room...

INT. DINING ROOM. CARTER HOUSE - NIGHT

The decor is New England Traditional, just a little stiff.

Shannon Carter sits with mom and dad for dinner. Soup, salad and roast beef on a nicely laid table. Mom is elegant, neurotic, quiet ALICIA CARTER (40s). Dad is GREG CARTER (50s) Alpha lawyer, self-assured, powerful.

GREG CARTER
(end of a funny story)
...And the Judge looked at me and said, very gravely -'But Counsellor, how could you possibly know that?'.

Shannon and Alicia laugh vigorously. IRENA (60s) the Latvian housekeeper enters with a bottle of wine.

ALICIA CARTER
Thank you Irena.

GREG CARTER
(pouring)
Just what the doctor ordered. Did you get any valentines yesterday Irena?

IRENA
No mister Greg.

ALICIA CARTER
Well, we love you.

Irena smiles, exits.

GREG CARTER
You Shannon? How many?

SHANNON
I didn't count.

GREG CARTER
(jovial, proud)
Alot then huh? Anyone I should be worried about?

SHANNON
No, sadly. They're all sooo juvenile.

Greg tastes his soup, grimaces.

ALICIA CARTER
What's wrong darling? You don't like the soup?

GREG CARTER
Tastes funny.

ALICIA CARTER
Mine tastes fine.

SHANNON
Mine too. Delicious.

Greg tries Alicia's and Shannon's soup.

GREG CARTER
Yes. That's odd isn't it? Irena!

ALICIA CARTER
(very gently)
Greg, it’s no problem, let’s switch.

GREG CARTER
No problem. Just curious.

Irena enters.

GREG CARTER (CONT’D)
Irena, did you put something in my soup that you didn’t put in theirs?

IRENA
(puzzled)
No Mister Greg.

GREG CARTER
Really? Nothing?

ALICIA CARTER
Greg...

A strange look comes over his face. We can see his mind churning. He SLAMS HIS HAND on the table.

GREG CARTER
You’re lying!

The women all

ALICIA CARTER
Greg, please...

GREG CARTER
She’s lying. She’s trying to poison me.

ALICIA CARTER
No no no, she’s not. Truly.

Irena just stares at the floor, terrified.

SHANNON
Dad, you’re being scary.

ALICIA CARTER
Greg, please, you need to take your medication...

Greg does a slow burn. A wild look in his eye, he turns to his wife and daughter.

GREG CARTER
(quietly)
You're in this with her, both of you. You're all trying to kill me.

ALICIA CARTER
No Greg, please---

GREG CARTER
--How could you betray me like this? What have I ever done but love you?

He stands abruptly and strides to the windows.

EXT. CARTER HOUSE - NIGHT

From the street, we see Mister Carter angrily close the dining room curtains. A beat later, HENRY BIRD glides gracefully into frame and comes to a halt on his skateboard.

He takes the white envelope from his pocket and hesitates at the gate for a while, summoning nerve, then opens it and heads on up the path to the front door. He's about three quarters of the way to the door when a dining room curtain opens a little and a stab of light flashes across him. He stands very still.

HENRY'S POV - An old woman, covered in blood- Irena - is hiding behind the window curtains, desperately trying to open the security bolt on the window while making no noise. She gets the bolt off, and opens the window a couple of inches when A HAND REACHES THROUGH THE CURTAINS and snatches her abruptly out of Henry's sight.

Henry's about to turn and run away to raise the alarm, but he's stopped by the envelope in his hand. Shannon. Shannon's in there. He puts the card in his back pocket, takes several deep breaths and goes to the unlocked window, pushes it open and crawls quietly inside, skateboard in hand.

INT. DINING ROOM. CARTER HOUSE

Henry peers through the curtain. Dinner untouched. Nobody in the room. Silence. Henry tiptoes across the room to the door.

INT. HALLWAY. CARTER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Henry peeps round the dining room door. IRENA LIES DEAD -her throat cut - in the middle of the hall. Alicia Carter is halfway up the stairs, killed the same way.

Henry recoils in horror and accidentally kicks the dining room door. CLUNK. The sudden noise seems very loud in the silence.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/BEDROOMS. CARTER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Greg Carter stands very still, bloody carving knife in hand, trying to guess the source of the noise. His eyes are wild, his face spattered with blood. A madman.

GREG CARTER
Where are you Shannon?

Just along the same hallway, Shannon crouches behind a big straw laundry hamper, trembling. Her father is between her and the stairs. But he creeps quietly into the first bedroom off the hallway...

GREG CARTER (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I got mad. Let's talk.

Shannon peeks over the hamper. Seeing he's gone into the bedroom, she makes a dash for the stairs. She makes it to the top of the stairs before her father catches her. She wrenches free, but escape via the stairs is cut off, and she retreats to...

HER BEDROOM

Shannon heads for the windows, but her Father's close behind. He grabs her by the hair and throws her down on the bed, scattering the twenty or so VALENTINE CARDS that were strewn on the quilt.

He raises the knife. Shannon SCREAMS IN TERROR, sure she's about to die. But Henry Bird comes charging into the room brandishing his skateboard and roaring like a Celtic warrior. He gives Carter a glancing blow to the head, stunning but not KOing him. When Henry goes in for a second try, Carter slashes him with the knife.

A SWIFT BUT FEROCIOUS FIGHT. In the end, by sheer luck, it's Henry who stands up holding the knife, Carter dead at his feet.

Shannon is crouched in a corner in a weirdly calm state of shock. Their eyes meet. She looks puzzled - what are you doing here? THEN SHE FAINTS. Feeling weak himself, Henry sits down. In the distance - wailing POLICE SIRENS, coming closer. Then thunder. **Henry's bloodstained Valentine envelope** lies on the floor, inconspicuous amid the other cards and the debris of the deadly fight.

INT. WINDOWLESS HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Henry lies on a gurney, heavily bandaged and hooked to a drip. Two NYPD HOMICIDE DETECTIVES, (male, hard faced, 40s) looking at him sadly. Rain drums on the window.

HENRY
And then I heard police sirens and I think I fainted.

DETECTIVE #1
That's an amazing story. You're a hero.

DETECTIVE #2
Now tell us the truth.

HENRY
I just did.

DETECTIVE #2
Henry, look how it looks. What's the chances this big time lawyer goes berserk for no reason?

DETECTIVE #1
For no reason. On the very same night that you, the class misfit, come creeping through the window. What's the chances?

DETECTIVE #2
You got a thing for Shannon, right? You're in love. It hurts doesn't it? Makes you crazy.

HENRY
(guiltily)
No. I was just passing.

DETECTIVE #2
Henry, we have your prints on the murder weapon. We know you did it. We just want you to be honest with us. You'll feel better.

HENRY
No. Ask Shannon what happened! She'll tell you. Ask Shannon!

DETECTIVE #1
Yeah. We did.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A much nicer room. Shannon lies in bed, lightly bandaged. The same two Detectives by her bedside, and a FEMALE DOCTOR. Shannon's frowning, upset.

SHANNON
...I, I don't know. I remember waking up in the morning and then I don't remember anything. What happened? Why can't I remember? Where's Mom and Dad?

A SOLEMN MALE VOICE PRELAPS...

JUDGE O.S
Henry Bird...

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

MOS - The two Detectives, aided by two HOSPITAL ORDERLIES, push Henry Bird out of the room on the gurney. Both his wrists are cuffed to the gurney, but it still takes all four men to hold the terrified boy down. Henry's MOM and sister ROSE are waiting to see him, and react in dismay and confusion as he is taken away...

JUDGE O.S
You have been tried as an adult and found guilty of three brutal and senseless murders.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The grim old JUDGE speaks to Henry and a packed courtroom.

JUDGE
I must also sentence you as an adult. Your heinous crimes demand it. On each count, this court sentences you to life in prison without the possibility of parole...

INT. CELL BLOCK. NEW YORK STATE PRISON - DAY

A steel door opens onto a noisy barn filled with about TWO HUNDRED VIOLENT CRIMINALS on their rec hour. They all turn to the door as if food had arrived. Henry is pushed inside by a guard.

JUDGE
..The sentences to be served consecutively. May God redeem your wicked soul.

CUT TO BLACK

EXT/INT. KINGS COUNTY STATE COURTHOUSE. NYC - DAY

Well dressed people coming and going under the BRONZE STATUE OF BLIND JUSTICE...

A CHIRON tells us it is

2013

We pick up and follow ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY SHANNON CARTER - 31, passionate, persuasive, driven - as she strides into the courthouse, radiating warmth and energy and a take no prisoners/suffer no fools attitude. As she walks and talks (fast), she's engaged in mimetic conversation with passing LAWYERS and COPS, who all know and like her, or fear her. By the way, she's dressed sharp as a tack and looks like a million dollars.

SHANNON
(to a Guard)
Hey Cindi, happy birthday.
(to bluetooth)
No Hank, the answer is no. Your client gives scumbags a bad name.
(click. Different caller)
Hey, got you at last...

DISTRICT ATTORNEY RAFAEL 'RAFFA' CORTEZ joins her, a fast talker and walker also. Mid 40s sharply handsome, vain, arrogant, sharply dressed, sharply focussed student of Machiavelli and Bill Clinton. He's very fond of Shannon, and in the distant past they almost connected, but Shannon balked. We'll have an inkling of this history by the end of the episode.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
(to bluetooth)
Call you back.
(to Cortez)
Good morning Mister District Attorney. I sweet-talked Gilligan like you said. No dice. But I got Judge Ivey to delay the Friston docket.

CORTEZ
Tell Gilligan I will make him fry and eat his own liver on the courthouse steps. Good news. I got you a spot on Hello Long Island. Soft human interest. Kings County's winningest ADA, running on the beach with her dog, that kind of thing.

SHANNON
I don't have a dog.

CORTEZ
Your cat then, whatever. They're going to want to talk about the tragedy.

SHANNON
Nope. No way.

CORTEZ
(he knew she'd say that)
Shannon, when you eventually step up and run for my office, people will want to hear your story. It's made you what you are. It's election dynamite. And you're going to say 'nope'?

SHANNON
I'll say I have incarcerated four hundred and fifty violent criminals and my personal history has no bearing on my service to the people of Kings County.

CORTEZ
Thus locking up the all important cold bitch vote. You have passion and heart Shannon, you need to let the people see that.

SHANNON
Raffa, I can't talk about the tragedy because I don't remember it. None of it. Nothing. And here's the thing. I don't want to remember.

CORTEZ
Maybe confronting that fear and trying to remember would be therapeutic---

But Shannon is exiting into a COURTROOM

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Shannon approaches the impatient JUDGE, a PROSECUTOR'S CLERK, TWO DEFENSE LAWYERS and a PRISONER, 30s, a tall creepy brute. The room is otherwise nearly empty.

The LAWYERS exchange a discreet look of dismay on seeing Shannon walk in. The Clerk hands Shannon a file, which she scans as she speaks

SHANNON
Sorry for delaying you Judge. I'm subbing for ADA Dembele, who has a life.

JUDGE
No problem Miz Carter. Let's cut along swiftly Mister Hess. Bail. Why?

DEFENSE LAWYER
Your honor my client mister Kluj is a pillar of his local community. A family man, with three children, and a lovely home. He has no passport, no overseas assets. And on the other side? Flimsy charges concocted from hearsay and distortion. Mister Kluj deserves to be released on his own recognizance. If anything, a nominal bail should suffice.

JUDGE
Miss Carter?

SHANNON
Mister Kluj is charged with extortion and public indecency only because more serious charges of murder and rape will not stick. They won't stick because Mister Kluj is not just a psychopath, but a clever psychopath.

DEFENSE LAWYER
As usual from ADA Carter, showboating and wild assertions.

SHANNON
A psychopath. You may as well release a hungry tiger onto the streets of New York. If you do grant bail, it'll be my civic duty to alert the public, via the media, that this animal is on the loose.

The Judge is angry, but aware Shannon will do what she says.

JUDGE
I will not be threatened Miz Carter. There'll be none of your showboating in my courtroom.
(beat)
Mister Kluj, bail is granted...

Kluj and his lawyers grin..

JUDGE (CONT'D)
..In the sum of one million dollars.

Their faces fall.

DEFENSE LAWYER
But your honor, my client doesn't have that kind of money...

JUDGE
Not my problem. This hearing is closed.

He bangs his gavel. He did exactly what Shannon wanted him to do. She's up and out of there fast, but allows herself the pleasure of meeting Kluj's eye and giving him a haughty look of triumph.

Kluj snarls in anger and throws himself at Shannon. She stumbles backward and hits her head on the wooden railing behind her table. She's out like a light.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Shannon lies in bed asleep, moaning softly.

FLASHBACK

INT. CARTER DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Shannon's POV: IN ABRUPT FLASHES -

Her father closing the dining room curtains and returning to the table, picking up the carving knife. The wild look in his eyes.

Running up the stairs in terror, looking back and seeing her father grab her mother.

Henry running in and attacking her father.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

2013 Shannon wakes abruptly, her eyes wide. She sits up.

SHANNON
Oh my God.

EXT. HOPSITAL - DAY

A busy urban setting. Terribly upset, Shannon dashes out into the street, bandaged head and all, her clothes thrown on, shoes in hand. She hails a taxi.

EXT. KINGS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Shannon runs up the stairs in disarray, straight from the hospital, holding her shoes. People stop and stare. The guard at the gate looks concerned...

GUARD
Shannon?

But she blows by him...

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Shannon busts through the big oak door that says District Attorney. Cortez is at his desk on the phone...

CORTEZ
If that's what you want Ed. But when you get what you want you'll wish you didn't have it. Like a pet monkey. Later.

He hangs up, taking in Shannon's state.

CORTEZ (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

She has to catch her breath.

SHANNON
I remember. I remember what happened!

CORTEZ
Remember what?

SHANNON
It was my Dad. He went mad. He killed my mom and Irena. Henry Bird is innocent. He saved my life.

Cortez presses an intercom button.

CORTEZ
Inez, hold my calls.

A MOMENT LATER

Side by side on the office sofa. Cortez holding Shannon's hand.

SHANNON
He's been in prison for sixteen years!

CORTEZ
Shannon, you've had a concussion. This could just be a crazy dream.

SHANNON
No. It's real. I remember the whole thing. We have to get Henry Bird out of prison.

CORTEZ
Think a moment. There's no rush. Think what will happen to your career.

SHANNON
What? I don't care about that. He's---

CORTEZ
--Listen to me. This will play in the media as a terrible miscarriage of justice. Your reputation will be shot. Never mind standing for DA, you won't be able to work in a courtroom again. Because you had a dream.

That shakes her, but she's knows what's right.

SHANNON
We have to get him out of prison.
Now.

INT. CELLBLOCK. NEW YORK STATE PRISON - DAY

A TOM HANKS type of GUARD makes his way along the terrace of the noisy hellish block, past massive TATTOOED VILLAINS and dead eyed PSYCHOS, to an open cell door.

INT. HENRY'S CELL - CONTINUOUS

The tiny one bunk cell is stacked with hundreds of text books and note pads and beautiful drawings of flowers and animals, and little mechanical models made out of matchsticks and bottle caps and the like. Several University degree diplomas are framed on the wall.

It's like the cell of a mediaeval alchemist or a scholar. Only the man sitting at the little desk reading a neuroscience text book doesn't look like a scholar.

HENRY BIRD 31, is stripped to the waist in the steamy heat, displaying the lithe physique of an athlete, crisscrossed with a latticework of old scars. A brooding enigmatic presence.

The Guard leans in the doorway, savoring his moment.

GUARD
Yo, Bird. You'll never guess what.

Henry glances up. Sad but peaceful eyes that have seen terrible things in a face that stops you from asking about the terrible things.

HENRY
Then I guess I won't try.

He returns to his book. But something about the Guard's expression makes him look up again.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. CATSKILL MOUNTAINS - DAY

A GREYHOUND BUS speeds down the highway, destination New York. Henry Bird is at a window seat, hypnotised by the gorgeous misty green landscape.

CHIRON - THREE MONTHS LATER

EXT. RURAL BUS STOP - DAY

A rest stop in the rain. Passengers huddling for shelter and cigarettes. Henry stands in the rain, letting it fall on his face.

EXT. BUS STATION. KINGS COUNTY - DAY

A milling urban concourse. Typical Long Island urban sprawl. Henry carries a massive duffel bag over his shoulder as he exits the bus station. He's disoriented by the noise and crowds, but finds his bearings and sets off.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - DAY

CABLE (9, a budding hoodlum in black skull t-shirt) is sitting on the doorstep of Henry's old house, nodding to earphones, when he sees Henry coming down the street.

He jumps up and yells inside.

CABLE
He's here!

ROSE BIRD comes hustling out of the house a moment later and meets Henry at the gate. Rose is 25, a tattooed and pierced supermarket cashier working her way slowly through college. She grew up tough and rebellious, the kid sister of a notorious killer. She never doubted his innocence for a second.

HENRY
Hi sis.

Henry and Rose hug wordlessly and very intensely for a long moment, Cable sitting on the doorstep, pretending to be grossed out. Then they head inside, Henry hefting the duffel.

HENRY (CONT'D)
You repainted.

ROSE
The week after mom died. No more goddamn pink.

Henry tousles Cable's hair as they enter.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Henry Rose and Cable enter. Henry puts down the duffel.

Cable lays down on the couch, watching Henry warily. Henry gazes round his childhood home, redecorated now with Rose's rock chick sensibility; but still the same old place.

ROSE
She'd be so happy.

Henry nods somberly, unable to talk about his mother.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I'll put the kettle on.

She exits to the kitchen. Henry sits down at the table. Last time he sat here he was wondering whether to go to Shannon's house to deliver the valentine card. THE DOOR BELL RINGS.

Henry is pleased with the novelty of being able to get up and open his own door.

On the other side of the door is a TV NEWS REPORTER and a CAMERA CREW. A powerful light is switched on, momentarily blinding Henry...

REPORTER
Mister Bird! Welcome home! Sandra Kwan, WKLI, Good Morning Long Island ...

EXT. LONG ISLAND SPRAWL - MORNING

Greater Metro New York from the air as the sun rises.

REPORTER O.S
How does it feel to be home after sixteen years in prison?

HENRY O.S
Good.

We glide down toward a tall modern apartment block...

INT. SHANNON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

We move through a faceless condo, still pretty much as it was when Shannon moved in with enough furniture to eat sleep and watch TV. There's a framed photo of smiling Mom, Dad, and Shannon at age thirteen on the wall. A big closet full of sharp business suits, and a great view of the Long Island Sound.

REPORTER O.S
I bet. I bet. What are you going to do now that you're free? Got any plans?

We find Shannon in bed, but unrested, transfixed by a TV on a table at the foot of the bed.

HENRY ON TV
I don't how know yet. Maybe try to help other victims of injustice.

REPORTER ON TV
What did you have to say to Shannon Carter, whose fresh testimony made all this happen?

A cloud crosses Henry's face.

HENRY ON TV
We haven't spoken.

REPORTER ON TV
Really? Don't you want---

Shannon switches off the TV and throws away the remote.

INT. BATHROOM. SHANNON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Semi-dressed, Shannon brushes her teeth, combs her hair, makes herself vaguely presentable. Bleary eyed with lack of sleep, this is not the sharp Shannon of old.

EXT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE - MORNING

It's still very early. We ESTABLISH a converted bank building on a corner. The sign over the door says **VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE** in four languages.

Shannon approaches, venti red eye in hand. She unlocks the front doors. First in.

INT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE -CONTINUOUS

The bank has been changed into a big airy open plan office painted in bright colors. This is the warm and human side of the justice system.

Soothing and inspirational art on the walls. Several comfortable seating nooks for one-on-one conversations, as well as more normal office furniture, desks and chairs, and a few ancient computers. There's a corner set up with soft toys, games, and coloring books.

Shannon sits down at her desk, takes a deep breath and opens a file.

Bing! The doorbell makes her jump like a cat.

MARJORIE KAPLAN - (50s, prim but perceptive and tough as nails in a floral smock and comfy shoes) enters with a cheery smile.

MARJORIE
Morning sugar.

SHANNON
(cheery smile)
Hi Marjorie. How ya doing?

Coming to Shannon’s desk, Marjorie eyes Shannon with a gimlet eye.

MARJORIE
First in again. Still not sleeping huh?

SHANNON
No. Yes. I sleep. Often.

Marjorie nods sympathetically.

MARJORIE
While we have a quiet moment...

Marjorie sits down facing Shannon, who looks wary.

MARJORIE (CONT’D)
Do you like being a Victim’s Advocate, Shannon?

SHANNON
Yes. I do. Why? Have I not been doing okay?

MARJORIE
It's been three months since the DA sent you here. Against my very strong objections. I didn't need a broke down lawyer moping around on my watch. But you changed my mind. You're super capable and smart, you're honest and caring, you're a good listener, and one day you're going to be a great Victim Advocate.

SHANNON
One day?

MARJORIE
The people we counsel and support are often enduring the absolute worst moment of their lives. Sometimes we're their last hope for justice and safety. And the whole time we have to be strong and calm and resourceful and patient. It's good work we do. It's a calling. But it's not penance. You work all the time, you don't eat, you don't sleep, you're never happy. You don't have fun.

SHANNON
I do all those things. Occasionally. You've seen me have fun and be happy.

MARJORIE
I've seen you pretend to have fun and be happy. What I think? You're punishing yourself for something that wasn't your fault. The fault lies with shoddy police work and bad lawyers.

SHANNON
You think Henry Bird thinks it wasn't my fault?

MARJORIE
I don't know. He came out yesterday huh? That's why you're wearing yesterday's blouse. Why don't you talk to him and find out?

SHANNON
I wrote a letter of apology. I don't need to talk to him to know he must hate me.

MARJORIE
Maybe he's grateful you remembered.

SHANNON
After sixteen years? No. He hates me.

MARJORIE
Are you talking to anyone? A therapist?

SHANNON
Right, some med school drop out watching me cry twice a week. No thank you. I'm fine. I will be fine. I'm adjusting.

BING!

A shambling MIDDLE AGED MAN IN TEARS enters the front door, and looks around tentatively.

MARJORIE
Morning has broken. Okay sweety. I'm here if you need me.

She heads for the man in tears...

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Good morning sir. How can we help you?

We stay on Shannon, shaking off the conversation with a sip of coffee. She grimaces. BING. The doorbell rings. Then again. Shannon stands and puts on a smile as someone approaches her desk...

STOP MOTION - the office bustles along.

A FEW HOURS LATER

In a brief moment of calm, Shannon is still sitting at her desk, lost in unhappy thought.

GABRIELLA O.S
Ma'am?

Shannon comes back from her reverie. A fragile but attractive, well dressed woman in her early 40s, a faint foreign accent - GABRIELLA YANNICK - is standing on the far side of the desk.

GABRIELLA
Hello.

Shannon rises to shake Gabriella's hand.

SHANNON
Hi. Sit down. I'm Shannon, Shannon Carter. How can I help you?

Shannon comes around the desk and sits them both down on comfortable chairs.

GABRIELLA
I hope you can help me. My name is Gabriella Yannick. People call me Gabby. For a long time I lived with a man named Ennis Relf. He began hitting me quite early on in our relationship. But I loved him, so... This last year it got much worse. He's had business worries I think, and he was very angry and using drugs, and six months ago he beat me unconscious, broke my nose.

SHANNON
I'm very sorry.

GABRIELLA
The nurses at the hospital called the police. I didn't want them to. I was so ashamed. But the detectives were very kind and they persuaded me I should leave Ennis and press charges.

SHANNON
Good.

GABRIELLA
No. Ennis was very angry. He said I was crazy. He said that I deliberately injured myself and then attacked him. He tried to have me committed to a mental hospital. And he nearly succeeded. Sometimes I wish he had. I get so anxious.

Shannon takes Gabriella's hand. Her own worries forgotten.

SHANNON
Has he been tried for the assault?

GABRIELLA
Last month. There was a mistrial. The jury was told Ennis had a previous conviction for fraud. The lawyers explained it to me, but I still don't understand why they had to stop the trial.

SHANNON
Prejudicial evidence. It happens. Are they retrying him?

GABRIELLA
They say maybe in the fall. I thought it was going to be over but it goes on and on and I'm so scared.

SHANNON
Has he made threats?

GABRIELLA
No, we haven't spoken since he was charged. No contact.

SHANNON
Perhaps he's learned his lesson.

GABRIELLA
No. When he doesn't speak, that's when I know he's really angry. There is a whatyoucall a restraining order, but the police say they can't do anything unless he does something.

SHANNON
Do you have friends or family to give you support? Are you in a safe place?

Gabriella indicates a whole other hazzerai.

GABRIELLA
My family is far away. I can't go back. But one of my cousins is a property investor, owns a place here on Long Island.
(MORE)

GABRIELLA (CONT'D)
Ennis doesn't know where it is. I feel safe there.

SHANNON
I'm sorry for your troubles. How can I help you Gabriella?

GABRIELLA
He has my cat, Yolanda. She's at the house with him. I want her back, but I'm scared to go ask him.

SHANNON
I see. That's tough. You know, the simple solution would be to get another cat.

GABRIELLA
I guess you don't have a cat. She's my baby. I know that sounds silly, but she is. I miss her so much.

SHANNON
Give me Mister Relf's address. I'll see what I can do.

EXT. RELF HOUSE - DAY

A walled McMansion in Queens someplace. There's a tattooed SECURITY GUY(hard Russian, black tracksuit, gold jewelry, 40s) at the iron gate looking with some bemusement at an amped up Shannon.

SHANNON
Tell Mister Relf that Shannon Carter is here to see him. I'm a victim advocate.

INT. RELF HOUSE - DAY

A sumptuous open plan home decorated in appalling taste - suburban Scarface. ENNIS RELF (late 40s, swarthy, commanding, muscular, a player in loud casual wear) ushers Shannon solicitously into a sunken living room, offers a seat. There's A BIG FLUFFY WHITE CAT sleeping on the arm of the sofa.

ENNIS RELF
Welcome welcome. Victim Advocate eh?

SHANNON
Yes I am, I'm here to---

ENNIS RELF
---That's fine work you do. Kudos. You want a soda, cocktail?

SHANNON
--No no thank you.

ENNIS RELF
So I'm guessing this is about Gabby.

SHANNON
That's right. She wants her cat.

ENNIS RELF
She wants her cat.

SHANNON
(off cat)
Yolanda. This is her uh?

He laughs, sighs.

ENNIS RELF
Not going to happen.

SHANNON
Why not?

ENNIS RELF
You know she's crazy, don't you? Mentally ill.

SHANNON
No sir, I don't know that.

ENNIS RELF
A lost soul. I tried to help her, but there's some people you just can't help. Where's she at anyhow?.

SHANNON
I can't tell you that, and I don't want to argue about your dispute with Miss Yannick. Please do the right thing sir. She just wants her cat.

ENNIS RELF
She can't have it.

SHANNON
It is her cat isn't it?

ENNIS RELF
Yeah it's her cat, the cat is not the point. The point is I'm the injured party here, and she's saying I'm the bad guy. That's not right. The loony bitch attacked me with scissors. I've got pictures of my injuries.

SHANNON
Sir--

He jumps up.

ENNIS RELF
--I'll get them. You'll see what a crazy she is.

He exits the room. Shannon looks at him go, seething with anger. She looks at the cat, looks back at the door through which Relf has disappeared. Fuck it.

EXT. RELF HOUSE - DAY

Shannon hastens out of the front door and strides swiftly but as casually as possible down the driveway to the iron gate. She has the squirming white cat tucked under her coat.

SHANNON
Shush kitty. Quiet. It's alright.

The Guard opens the gate and Shannon hurries through. The Guard sees the cat, but he's not on cat duty, and lets her go by without comment.

INT. RELF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Relf returns with a thin stack of photos of his 'injuries'. Looks puzzled to find the room empty.

EXT. SHANNON'S CAR. RELF HOUSE - DAY

Shannon jumps in her car, slams the door and lets the frantic cat free. It ricochets yowling around the car as Shannon drives off as quick as she can. Shannon grins.

INT. KITCHEN. GABRIELLA'S COUSIN'S HOUSE - DAY

A neat and tidy little kitchen, feminine decor. Gabriella cuddles with Yolanda, very happy.

GABRIELLA
My baby. Thank you so much. You're a good woman.

As Gabriella baby talks with Yolanda, we're tight on Shannon wondering whether she is a good woman.

EXT. CARTER HOUSE - DAY

Shannon sits in her car outside her childhood home, just looking at it and thinking. There's a new family lives there now, and a COUPLE OF KIDS go running up to the front door, laughing. A smiling DAD lets them in. Shannon cries quietly.

INT. SHANNON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Four AM. Shannon's in bed, staring at the ceiling.

EXT. BACKYARD. HENRY'S HOUSE - DAY

MORNING. Henry's sitting on a kitchen chair, reading a driving manual from the DMV. Another chair serves as the car. A newspaper on the chair is folded open at the Help Wanted page.

INT. KITCHEN/FRONT DOOR. HENRY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rose making brownies. The doorbell rings. Rose opens the door.

Shannon Carter is at the door, terrified but covering well. Rose is amazed, but doesn't like to show her feelings.

SHANNON
Hi. I'm Shannon Carter. Can I speak to Henry?

ROSE
I'll ask him.

She shuts the door...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. BACKYARD. HENRY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rose comes hurrying out to Henry.

ROSE
(urgent whisper)
She's here. Shannon Carter is here!

Henry looks alarmed.

HENRY
Shannon Carter?

ROSE
Yes. She wants to talk to you.

HENRY
Here? Now?

ROSE
No, in Cancun, next week.
Put your shirt on. I'll send her
out.

HENRY
No! I mean, no.

ROSE
No? Too soon? No problem. I'll
send her away.

She turns to go...

HENRY
No, wait.
(beat)
Why not? I'll see her.

ROSE
Oh-kay. You sure for sure?

HENRY
Uh huh.

She exits. He takes a beat, apprehensive, then starts looking for his shirt.

EXT/INT. FRONT DOOR. HENRY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shannon taking deep breaths at the closed front door.

SHANNON
(muttering)
You're fine. You're fine.

The door opens abruptly wide, Rose gives her a big fake fuck you smile.

ROSE
Come on in, Shannon.

SHANNON
Thank you.

We follow them through the house.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
You must be Rose.

ROSE
I must be. You want some tap water?

SHANNON
No thank you.

EXT. BACKYARD. HENRY'S HOUSE - DAY

Henry has just gotten his shirt on and is looking for a natural way to stand when Rose and Shannon appear.

ROSE
There he is. I'll be in the kitchen pretending not to listen.

Rose goes back inside. Henry and Shannon meet each other's eyes. Both wearing masks to hide their fear.

SHANNON
Hi.

Henry is struck dumb for a second. She's beautiful. His heart is instantly sixteen years old again, back in love. His mind is ashamed of his heart's weakness, and puts a look of cool reserve on his face.

HENRY
Hey.

They sit down awkwardly on the kitchen chairs. A beat as Shannon composes herself...

SHANNON
Words are not enough, I know. But I have to say this anyhow.
(MORE)

SHANNON (CONT'D)
I want to thank you for saving my life. And I want to apologize for, for ruining your life. I know you must hate me, and I know I can't make up for what happened, but whatever I can do for you, ever, I will do.

Long beat. She stares at the ground, a single tear slowly rolling down her cheek. He stares at her darkly, in terrible confusion. He wants to take her in his arms and kiss her, and he wants to never see her again, and he wants to wring her neck, all at the same time. Like Heathcliffe or Mister Rochester, he's too proud and too damaged to reveal himself.

HENRY
I don't hate you. Stuff happens. Forget it.

Shannon is perplexed. Redemption and forgiveness aren't that easy. Can he mean what he says?

SHANNON
Forget it? I owe you my life. If you hadn't been passing by...

HENRY
Dumb luck.

SHANNON
If you hadn't been so brave...

HENRY
Stupidity.

SHANNON
Well, I won't forget. Not twice.

She smiles at him and touches his hand and it makes him feel weak and stupid, which are feelings he hates. He has to push her away.

HENRY
Can I ask you a question?

SHANNON
Anything.

HENRY
Did you really just remember what happened now this year? Or did you know all along?

SHANNON
(uncomprehending)
What?

HENRY
About ten years in, I kind of lost hope you'd remember. I got to thinking maybe you knew all along and kept quiet. To protect your father, and your family.

SHANNON
(aghast)
And then what? Sixteen years later, I get a conscience?

He just looks at her. He wants to know. She had never conceived of the notion, and it horrifies her. Her mask of calm cracks completely. She jumps up, paces the yard.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
Oh my God. Why would you not think that? No. No. God, no. I didn't know. I would never..., If I'd had the slightest idea... No. You have to believe me.

Henry's taken aback by her emotional response.

HENRY
Okay. I believe you.

SHANNON
(very upset)
But how can you know for sure? You can't. I'd lie, of course. Oh I can't bear it. I'm so sorry...

Rather than bust into tears and collapse right there, Shannon opts to dash away through the kitchen door, leaving Henry completely unable to move or think. After a beat, Rose appears in the doorway, toking on a joint.

ROSE
So you still got a smooth way with the ladies.

Off Henry, anguished.

EXT. SHANNON'S CAR/STREET OUTSIDE HENRY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shannon hurries to her car, gets in, and drives away as fast as she can.

Henry comes running out of his house to catch her, but he's too late. Pale and dizzy and only just holding her shit together, Shannon doesn't look in the rear view mirror or she'd see him standing in the road.

INT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE - DAY

The office is buzzing with VAs and CLIENTS. A COUPLE OF SMALL KIDS play noisily in the corner. Over in one of the nooks, MARJORIE consoles a silently weeping WOMAN. On the far side of the room, another VA named DOUGAL (a skinny long haired vegan Buddhist, 30s) teaches calm breathing exercises to a group of young teenage GANG-BANGERS. An elderly SECURITY GUARD dozes by the door. Shannon enters still shell-shocked from talking to Henry, but trying to cover it.

SHANNON
Hey all.

She sits down at her desk. There's three or four post it notes on her keyboard. It takes a moment for Shannon to register that one of the notes says **'Call Gabriella Yannick - urgent.'**

Shannon sighs, crap. Dials a number she gets from her computer screen. Marjorie comes over.

MARJORIE
Hi Shannon. Are you okay? Not like you to be so late.

SHANNON
(trying for casual)
Yes, sorry. Life.
(to phone)
Gabriella? Hi. Good morning. This is Shannon Carter, your advocate? I have a message that you called me? Are you okay?

INTERCUT WITH

INT. KITCHEN. GABRIELLA'S COUSIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Gabriella Yannick talking on a wallmounted phone, looking very worried.

GABRIELLA
Yes, I'm okay. But I'm scared.

SHANNON
Has your husband contacted you?

GABRIELLA
I got a phone call, and when I answered there was no-one there, just breathing. I called the police but they said it was probably a wrong number. But I think he knows where I am.

Shannon is both concerned for Gabriella and can also see that still hovering Marjorie is going to go into a full on interrogation, so Shannon's only to happy to get out of the office, without asking too many questions.

SHANNON
Are you still at your cousin's house?

GABRIELLA
Yes.

SHANNON
Give me that address again. I'll come over and we'll talk over what can be done.

GABRIELLA
Twenty seven fifty Lonsdale Avenue.

Shannon writes the address down on a desk-pad.

SHANNON
Twenty seven fifty Lonsdale. I'll be there in a half hour or so. Depending on traffic.

GABRIELLA
Thank you.

Gabriella hangs up the phone, and just then **BOOOM** - ENNIS RELF kicks in and shatters the frosted glass kitchen door, and steps inside. Gabriella screams.

WE LEAVE Gabriella and Ennis at that crisis point, and stay with Shannon; who gives Marjorie a long suffering smile and a shrug as she stands and grabs her bag to head out.

SHANNON
(off phone)
This is why we get paid the big bucks. Panic attack, sounds like.

MARJORIE
I'm worried about you. You look like you've seen a ghost. What's happened?

SHANNON
You and your worrying. I'm never better. Well, slight exaggeration, but I'm okay. Pretty good. Got to run.

This as she heads for the front door...

MARJORIE
Shannon...

But Shannon just waves and she's out the door, leaving Marjorie very concerned. She goes slowly back to her own desk, her mind on Shannon.

EXT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Shannon turns left out of the door and walks round the corner just as Henry approaches from the other direction. He enters the Victim Advocate office a few seconds after Shannon's exit.

INT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Henry enters, looks around for Shannon in the unfamiliar space. Marjorie doesn't notice him until he approaches her desk...

HENRY
I'm looking for Shannon Carter.

Marjorie does a take. Knows who it is immediately.

MARJORIE
(formal, guarded)
I'm sorry, she's not here at present. Can I be of any assistance?

HENRY
It's personal. Will she be back today?

MARJORIE
Are you Henry Bird?

HENRY
Yes I am.

Marjorie gives a quick look to the dozing security guard.

MARJORIE
Well okay then, Mister Bird, nice to meet you. I'm Marjorie Kaplan What do you want with Shannon, if you don't mind me asking?

HENRY
I need to say something to her.

MARJORIE
Hmm hmm. And would that be something she'd want to hear?

HENRY
Ma'am...

MARJORIE
Marjorie.

HENRY
Marjorie. The last thing I want to do is hurt Shannon. I just need to talk with her as soon as I can. Put some things straight.

Marjorie sees and feels his honesty and basic goodness, and she's worried for Shannon anyhow.

MARJORIE
I can call her and tell her that you're here and you want to speak with her.

HENRY
Okay, thank you.

MARJORIE
But if she doesn't want to speak with you, that's going to be okay also, right?

HENRY
Right.

INT. SHANNON'S CAR ON THE ROAD. KINGS COUNTY - DAY

Shannon driving badly as usual. Her phone beeps. She glances at it, and seeing Marjorie's name, doesn't answer.

Instead she cranks up ADELE on the car stereo and sings along as best she can.

INT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Marjorie puts down her phone, worried.

MARJORIE
Not answering.

HENRY
You look worried.

Marjorie looks at Henry. She is worried.

EXT. GABRIELLA'S SISTER'S HOUSE - DAY

A nicely kept small semi-detached house on a quiet street. Shannon walks up to the front door, rings the doorbell. No reply. She frowns. The door is slightly ajar. She pushes it open.

SHANNON
Gabriella?

No reply. Shannon creeps inside.

INT. GABRIELLA'S COUSIN'S HOUSE - DAY

We move with Shannon as she creeps quietly down the hallway to the kitchen. We don't see what she sees in the kitchen, but we see her REACT WITH HORROR.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE GABRIELLA'S COUSIN'S HOUSE - DAY

At the curb, Marjorie and Henry climb out of Marjorie's Prius. Marjorie leads the way to the house...

MARJORIE
Now, if she's here, you let me do the talking at first, see if she's willing...

HENRY
Okay.

INT. GABRIELLA'S COUSIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Marjorie and Henry come through the front door warily.

MARJORIE
Hello?

SHANNON O.S
In here.

Marjorie and Henry follow her voice to the kitchen...

SHANNON sits on a chair, cradling the DEAD WHITE CAT in her arms. She registers puzzlement at Henry's presence, but she's too upset to talk.

EXT. GABRIELLA'S SISTER'S HOUSE - DAY

HALF AN HOUR LATER.

Two POLICE PATROL CARS and a grey Crown Vic parked haphazardly outside. A lounging COP.

INT. KITCHEN. GABRIELLA'S COUSIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Two Serious Crime Unit DETECTIVES, BROWN and MURPHY(beefy moustached men in suits, 40ish) look around the room blankfaced. Shannon is pacing, agitated. Marjorie and Henry are sat at the kitchen table. The dead cat is in the sink. Henry watches the two cops like a mongoose watching snakes. Natural enemies.

SHANNON
...The man's name is Ennis Relf.
R. E. L. F.

DETECTIVE BROWN
Yeah, we got that information.

SHANNON
So go find him, arrest him.

DETECTIVE MURPHY
Whoa Shannon, slow up. You know we're always happy to help you guys at the VA office, but you said yourself, no threats were made. We have a broken door and a dead cat and a woman that's been missing for less than three hours.

SHANNON
(trying to remain calm)
Ennis Relf did this. She had a restraining order against him. And I stole her cat back. That's why he killed the cat and abducted her. It's obvious!

DETECTIVE BROWN
(calmly)
Yeah, you said. Foul play could be a factor here, but we don't know that yet.

DETECTIVE MURPHY
She might have gone for a long walk because she's sad the cat died.
(to Henry)
Do we have a problem?

HENRY
I don't know. Do you?

DETECTIVE BROWN
No, you and me. You've been staring at me like we got a problem.

HENRY
No, I'm just interested. I didn't mean to make you self-conscious.

The cop eyeballs Henry hard. Henry just gazes back amiably.

DETECTIVE BROWN
I know who you are.
(turning to Shannon)
Shannon, no disrespect, but what gives? Why's he here?

Shannon waves this away...

SHANNON
Please, that's irrelevant. This woman was abducted. Do something.

The Detectives exchange a glance. She's not stable. Detective Brown holds up his hands.

DETECTIVE BROWN
Nobody's saying we won't do our job. We'll go talk to the boyfriend. If there's been any shenanigans, we'll know.

SHANNON
I'll meet you there.

DETECTIVE MURPHY
That's not necessary.

SHANNON
I'll meet you there.

The two Detectives' long suffering sighs are almost audible. They eye Henry as they exit. Shannon looks at Henry distractedly...

SHANNON (CONT'D)
What <u>are</u> you doing here?

MARJORIE
That was me. I was worried about you and um, well...

She looks to Henry to pick it up...

HENRY
I wanted to talk to you.

Shannon's clearly in no frame of mind for this...

HENRY (CONT'D)
But it can wait.

SHANNON
Okay.

She follows the Detectives out. Marjorie watches Henry watch her go. Their eyes meet. She sees his genuine concern for Shannon, which mirrors her own.

MARJORIE
We'll follow. Make sure she's okay.

Henry nods, grateful.

INT. ENNIS RELF'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The two Detectives are seated opposite Ennis Relf, who's all innocent sadness and puzzlement.

RELF
No, I haven't had any contact with Gabby since we were in court.

DETECTIVE BROWN
Where she accused you of assault.

RELF
Mistrial. But I would have been proven innocent. Gabby is a very sad, very sick woman. Mental problems. Self harming they call it. Paranoid delusions.

SHANNON
She's completely sane.

DETECTIVE MURPHY
(don't speak)
Hey.

RELF
Lady, I wish that was true. I tried to help her. For some people, there is no help.

SHANNON
You beat her. She has a restraining order against you.

RELF
And I have one against her. Why d'you think I have security outside? I'm afraid she'll try to kill me.

SHANNON
He has a goon outside because he's a thug. He abducted Gabriella Yannick.

DETECTIVE BROWN
Shannon, we had a deal...

RELF
Lookit guys, I know you got a tough job to do. You want, you're welcome to look around, reassure yourselves. But this woman comes to my house, talks crazy, and steals a cat. I'm guessing she's a little unstable, and I feel bad for her, but really, gimme a break, you're going to go by what she says?

The Detectives exchange a glance.

EXT. RELF HOUSE - DAY

Henry and Marjorie are waiting outside by her Prius.

The two Detectives exit the gates dogged by Shannon, going past the tattooed Russian Guard, heading for their Crown Vic.

SHANNON
He's lying!

DETECTIVE #3
So you keep saying. But let's be reasonable. We got nothing to hold him on.

DETECTIVE #4
Don't worry, if there's any developments, we'll be right on it.

Anxious to depart, they get in the Crown Vic and drive away. Shannon doesn't notice Marjorie and Henry approaching until Marjorie takes her arm.

MARJORIE
No luck?

Shannon shakes her head forlornly.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Let's go back to the office, talk this through.

SHANNON
Talk? Gabriella might be dead already and it's my fault!

MARJORIE
No honey, it's not your fault. Come on.

She starts guiding Shannon toward the cars.

HENRY
Wait a moment.

Henry walks back to the gate, approaches the guard.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Hi.

The Guard looks at him sullenly, and grunts. **The following exchange takes place in Russian with subtitles.**

HENRY (CONT'D)
I see by your ink that you are an honorable thief.

The Guard straightens up, glowers.

GUARD
Who are you to ask?

HENRY
A humble prisoner, making his way like you.

GUARD
(relenting)
You speak good Russian for an American.

HENRY
I learned from the best.
(reciting from memory)
I loved you and this love by chance inside my soul has never fully vanished.

GUARD
(smiling broadly)
Ah, Pushkin.
(declaiming)
I loved you speechlessly and wildly, by modesty and jealousy was stressed,

GUARD AND HENRY IN UNISON
...I loved you so sincerely and so mildly, as God permit, may you love someone else.

The two men smile at each other.

HENRY
How does a man of honor like you come to be working for this sad creature?

GUARD
(rueful)
Eh. You got to eat.

ON SHANNON and MARJORIE watching the men. They can hear them talking Russian. They exchange a puzzled look.

MARJORIE
Interesting man.

SHANNON
Why is he here?

MARJORIE
He wanted to talk to you.
You wouldn't talk to me.

Henry shakes hands with the Guard and returns to the women...

HENRY
He hasn't seen the wife, but he says Relf never brings any of his dirt home with him. There's a warehouse in Smithville he uses for that kind of business. Ten ninety Atlantic.

Beat. Shannon is bemused. Her opinion of Henry starts to shift again. He does mean well after all.

SHANNON
Thank you.

She heads for her car.

MARJORIE
Wait. You're in no state to drive.

Shannon starts to protest, then realizes Marjorie's right.

INT/EXT. MARJORIE'S PRIUS IN MOTION - DAY

Marjorie at the wheel, Shannon alongside, Henry in back. Tense silence.

MARJORIE
You speak Russian huh?

HENRY
A little.

MARJORIE
Why Russian?

Shannon is intrigued despite herself.

HENRY
I figured I might as well learn all the European languages.

MARJORIE
Wow. That’s alot of languages.

HENRY
I had alot of time.

OFF Shannon, flinching.

EXT. RELF’S WAREHOUSE - DAY

An industrial district. Very little traffic. Shannon, Henry and Marjorie are looking at a run of the mill unmarked warehouse surrounded by a high chain link fence. The electrically operated gates are firmly shut. Nobody’s around.

MARJORIE
Nothing.

SHANNON
Gabriella could be in there.

MARJORIE
She could be, but it doesn’t look like it.

SHANNON
We have to find out.

MARJORIE
How?

HENRY
Wait a moment.

Henry scales the chain link fence like it was nothing, dropping down gracefully inside the warehouse compound. Shannon and Marjorie are taken aback.

MARJORIE
Hey! You can’t. Don’t do that...

Henry just grins and heads for a loading bay.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
(not wanting to shout)
Hey!

Shannon puts a hand on Marjorie, saying 'No, let him...'

Henry vanishes into the cavernous darkness of a freight loading bay.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Shannon, this is totally illegal. We're VAs, not cops. We're crossing the line.

SHANNON
I don't care. I was supposed to protect Gabriella Yannick. I didn't.

MARJORIE
Honey, you don't know that she's in trouble. And even if she is, it's not your fault.

SHANNON
It's all my fault.

The GATES grind into life and start rolling back on their tracks.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
Wait here.

Shannon heads for the warehouse, leaving Marjorie agitated and alone.

MARJORIE
Shannon...

But Shannon has followed Henry's path into the warehouse...

INT. RELF'S WAREHOUSE - DAY

Shannon feels around in the dark.

SHANNON
Henry?

Racks of fluorescent ceiling lights flicker on, illuminating the whole warehouse and revealing Henry at a bank of light switches.

They are in a high ceilinged room about the size of a tennis court. The open floor is littered haphazardly with shipping crates, a Mercedes, a sofa, tables and chairs set out for a poker game. One long wall is lined with six head high secure storage lockers with padlocked metal doors.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
Gabriella? Hello? It's Shannon Carter. Are you here?

Not a sound. Henry moves quietly around the room, points out tire marks on the floor, a patch of damp by a roll up entry gate.

HENRY
Someone drove in here recently.

Sniffs the air...

HENRY (CONT'D)
Smoked some meth, had a few beers.

Henry points out a small stain on the floor near the sofa.

HENRY (CONT'D)
That's blood.

SHANNON
Oh my God.

HENRY
Not enough to hurt anyone.

He focuses on the lockers, looking at each padlock.

They're all lying flat, except one, which is wedged a little sideways. Henry rattles the locker door and the padlock swings flat against the door like the other padlocks. Ah ha. Used recently.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Do you have a hairpin?

Shannon is transfixed - she instantly upends her bag on the floor, rummages in the pile of stuff, and comes up with a hairpin.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Thank you.

He works on the padlock with her pin. And very swiftly the lock clicks open. Shannon is wide eyed.

Henry takes off the lock, opens the locker door...

Inside the otherwise empty locker, GABRIELLA YANNICK is lying tied up, gagged and unconscious on a grimy mattress.

Shannon and Henry kneel beside her and work together to undo the gag and the nylon ropes that bind her.

Henry pulls Gabriella out of the locker on the mattress, picks her up and lays her on the sofa.

HENRY (CONT'D)
She could use water.

Shannon looks for water. Henry listens to Gabriella's breathing, checks her eyes.

HENRY (CONT'D)
She's okay I think.

Shannon gives him a plastic bottle of water. He splashes some in Gabriella's face, pats her cheek gently.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Talk to her.

SHANNON
(takes her hand)
Gabby, you're safe. It's me, Shannon. You're going to be okay. Gabby...

Gabriella starts to come round, opens her eyes, immediately fearful...

SHANNON (CONT'D)
It's okay. You're safe.

EXT. RELF'S WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Marjorie paces anxiously next to her Prius. A BLACK ESCALADE comes down the street and stops briefly at the open gates of the warehouse, as if it's driver - unseen behind tinted glass - was thinking WTF?

Horrified, Marjorie jumps into the Prius.

The Escalade pulls into the warehouse compound.

In the Prius, Marjorie beeps her car horn urgently.

INT. RELF'S WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shannon and Henry are helping Gabriella to her feet, frozen by the urgent SOUND of Marjorie's car-horn.

Right then, a MOTORIZED ROLL UP-GATE LURCHES OPEN and the three of them are standing in plain view as the Escalade drives right into the warehouse and screeches to a halt.

Relf jumps out of the passenger side door. A very large driver/bodyguard name of IVAN (30s, a capable thug; leather jacket, badass scowl) gets out of the driver's side holding A BIG HANDGUN. Relf is scared and angry and confused by this unexpected scenario, but tries to affect chilly calm.

RELF
Hey, hi guys. Hi Gabby. What's going on?

Gabriella is rigid with fear. Shannon holds her close.

SHANNON
We already called the police. They'll be here any minute.

RELF
There's no signal here.
(to Ivan)
Ivan, put your gun on this monkey.

Ivan steps up and points his gun at Henry, close enough so he can't miss.

EXT. RELF WAREHOUSE -CONTINUOUS

Marjorie on her cellphone.

MARJORIE
Hello, hello, I need help!

A burst of static and garbled speech from the phone.

The Electric gate start closing.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Hello, can you hear me?

INT. RELF'S WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Relf has just thrown the switch to close the gates and now he approaches the women, smiling. Shannon stands in front of Gabriella...

SHANNON
(placatory)
--Listen, the whole cat thing was my fault...

RELF
The cat? I don't care about the freaking cat...

Relf punches Shannon in the face and grabs Gabriella by the arm as Shannon falls.

RELF (CONT'D)
I was never going to let you just walk away. When will you learn Gabby? When will you learn?

Henry has watched this poker faced. Now he looks at Ivan and his gun.

HENRY
(in Russian)
Brother, listen, there's no good reason for anyone to get hurt.

IVAN
(a sneer)
Que?

HENRY
Ah, claro. Lo siento. Su nombre confudadame.

With that, Henry **grabs the gun and elbows Ivan in the face.** The much bigger man is stunned, but doesn't go down, and keeps hold of the gun. He and Henry wrestle for it's possession. Shots ring out, whining into the roof. Henry gets hit hard, but hangs in there. The gun goes skittering away across the floor. Henry subdues Ivan with a vicious headbutt; but he's immediately hit in the head himself by Relf, wielding a bottle. Henry goes down and Relf starts kicking him as hard as he can. Henry grabs Relf's leg, brings him down to the ground and - lost in a fighting madness - proceeds to beat the living shit out of him.

Relf is out cold, helpless; and Shannon, still groggy herself, has to physically stop Henry, holding his arm. He looks at her wild eyed.

SHANNON
Henry. That's enough. You'll kill him.

Her face brings him back from madness.

HENRY
Yes. Thank you.

SHANNON
No, thank you.

She touches his face.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
You okay?

He nods. Battered and bleeding, Henry stands up and walks unsteadily out of the open gate, to get away from the reek of violence.

Once out in the open air, he falls to his knees.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. KINGS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Ennis Relf (bruised and stitched, hobbling)is perp walked into court past a gauntlet of press cameras.

INT. COURTHOUSE LOBBY - DAY

DA Cortez, very happily holding forth at a PRESS CONFERENCE. Shannon and Marjorie stand at the back of the dais, next to the union and state flags. A medium size crowd of NEWS CREWS and JOURNOS in attendance.

CORTEZ
Absolutely Brad, we're extremely proud of our heroes Shannon and Marjorie and we're very grateful to Henry Bird for his timely assistance. What a great story uh? Inspiring.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - DAY

MOS. Henry and Cable practicing skateboard tricks on the sidewalk. Henry's banged up but okay, laughing with his nephew...

CORTEZ O.S
Henry's still recuperating otherwise I'm sure he'd love to be here to take a bow...

INT. COURTHOUSE LOBBY - DAY

Cortez at the mikes...

CORTEZ
Get well soon Henry... You know guys, I'm so happy to talk with you today because I get to shine a light on our wonderful victim advocates and the vital difficult unsung work they do. Not just today, but every day, they are out there quietly saving lives and righting wrongs.
(MORE)

CORTEZ (CONT'D)
They are a perfect example of the tough but caring and proactive justice I am committed to providing for the citizens of Kings County. With fresh ideas and love and energy, we can move mountains, people.

INT. DA'S OFFICE - DAY

Behind closed doors, DA Cortez admonishes Shannon.

CORTEZ
What were you thinking? I should suspend you indefinitely. You're a Victim Advocate, not Wonderwoman.

Shannon has a new lease of life, a sense of purpose.

SHANNON
You can't suspend me right after commending me. I'm a hero. You said so.

CORTEZ
I had to do that. If I don't spin hard that way, the headline is 'D.A.'s Loose Cannon and Ex-Con Unleash Vigilante Havoc'.

SHANNON
But you did spin that way. And the headlines are good. You have a PR windfall on your hands.

CORTEZ
Yes I do. But what if you were dead or crippled? Then I'd be standing here with a turd in my hand.

SHANNON
I've been thinking about everything that's happened, and about the future, and what you said out there really struck home. About proactive justice and fresh ideas and moving mountains?

CORTEZ
(immediately wary)
That was press call improv.

SHANNON
Yes, but you were absolutely right. You spoke the truth and you sounded strong and eloquent and I think we as Victim Advocates can do much more to realize your vision. We can build a new kind of Victim's Advocacy. Proactive, caring. All we need are a few more resources and a little more operational leeway.

Cortez laughs at her unashamed manipulation.

CORTEZ
Welcome back Shannon Carter. I'm going to let you start busting crime? And pay you to do it? We have cops and lawyers who do that already.

SHANNON
Cops and lawyers speak for the law, we speak for the victims. Just let us be true victim's advocates. Let us give victims the help they need, the best way we know how. Give us some freedom to act, and a couple of good cops that will listen when we call. And first dibs on a smart young ADA. And some money. We could move mountains.

CORTEZ
Stop using my words against me. Who is we? Marjorie Kaplan's on board with this idea?

SHANNON
She will be.

Beat.

CORTEZ
If I was foolhardy enough to back this fantasia of yours, you got to promise to come to me when you screw up.

SHANNON
(elated)
You'll back me?

CORTEZ
How can I refuse? You have the light back in your eyes.

Shannon hugs him. Raffa can't help breathing in the smell of her hair. We can see he doesn't want to let go.

SHANNON
Thank you Raffa. I promise to come to you when I screw up.

When they break...

CORTEZ
(faux casual)
What about Henry Bird?

SHANNON
What about him?

CORTEZ
Is he part of this? If he is, you'll have to formalise his situation. We can't have your boyfriend dishing out freelance beat downs.

SHANNON
He's not my boyfriend.

CORTEZ
Glad to hear it. What is he?

SHANNON
I don't know exactly. He's very, capable. He'd be a useful part of the team. But we have issues to resolve.

CORTEZ
No doubt. I'll trust your judgment on that. But listen...

SHANNON
If I screw up, I'll come to you.

EXT. KINGS COUNTY PARK - DAY

A sunny green day. Henry sits on the grass, sketching ducks and geese on a pond.

Shannon appears at the park gates and looks around for him. He watches her come all the way over to him. Has to stop looking at her once she gets close.

SHANNON
Hi.

HENRY
Hi.

SHANNON
Rose said you'd be here.

He gestures 'here I am'. She sits down on the grass, a judicious distance from him. A beat. He keeps sketching.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
Can I see?

Henry hands her the sketchbook.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
You're good.

HENRY
Thanks.

SHANNON
Right. You had alot of time.
Sorry.

HENRY
You should stop saying that.

They look at each other properly.

SHANNON
(trying for casual)
We never had that talk you wanted to have. What were you going to tell me?

Henry takes a beat to think of what to say.

HENRY
I was going to apologize for saying what I said. About you knowing I was innocent all along. As soon as I met you I knew that wasn't true. I was just feeling grumpy that day I guess. I have no hard feelings toward you. I'm just happy to be free. And I'm grateful to you for that.

Beat.

SHANNON
Don't be grateful. It's the truth, I didn't remember. But I didn't try to remember. I was scared. I didn't want to remember and I didn't try. That's why you were in prison all that time. Because I was scared.

Long beat.

HENRY
I understand. Like I said before, forget about it.

SHANNON
(laughs ironically)
Right.

HENRY
Seriously.

SHANNON
I don't believe anyone can forgive and forget so easily.

HENRY
Believe it.

Shannon touches his hand. Henry's on the edge of summoning the nerve to speak.

SHANNON
You're a good man, Henry Bird. Would you like a job?

The romantic spell over Henry is broken.

HENRY
A job? Sure. Where?

SHANNON
At the Victim Advocate office. With me.

Henry's torn.

HENRY
Oh. I see. No. Thanks. But I don't think so.

SHANNON
Why not? I thought we worked really well together. Didn't you? And you want to work against injustice. You said so on the TV.

HENRY
I do want to do that. But I don't like hurting people. I dislike it only slightly less than I dislike being hurt myself.

SHANNON
We don't hurt people, we help people.

Henry shuts it down.

HENRY
Look, I forgive and forget and what's done is done, hundred percent. But working together? No. It's too soon, too close.

She's cast down and embarrassed by the rejection.

SHANNON
Right. Maybe you're right. I just thought... Anyhow, think about it...

HENRY
Yeah, no. I mean... Okay.

Shannon gets up and exits with Kirsten Wiigish awkwardness.

SHANNON
Bye then.

HENRY
Goodbye.

Off Shannon, very disappointed.

INT. VICTIM ADVOCATE OFFICE - DAY

Shannon sits by her desk in a funk, Marjorie commiserating with her.

MARJORIE
While you're sitting there staring at the floor, you want to tell me about this crazy scheme you got planned?

Shannon ignores the subject, distracted.

SHANNON
He says he forgives me, he says he's grateful to me even, but he doesn't want to work with me? Can't be around me? What does that mean?

MARJORIE
What do you think it means?

SHANNON
I think he's a good man who deep down still hates me and he can't stand to look at me and he wants me out of his life. Which is fair enough.

MARJORIE
Did you ever consider other alternatives?

SHANNON
He wants to lure me into an abandoned house and kill me?

MARJORIE
The night he saved your life, what was the date?

SHANNON
The fifteenth of February.

MARJORIE
Right. The fifteenth of February.

SHANNON
Yes?

MARJORIE
The day after Valentine's day.

Shannon finally gets her drift.

SHANNON
Oh please.

MARJORIE
Didn't you ever wonder why he was there? Why he happened to be outside <u>your</u> house that night?

SHANNON
Actually, yes, we talked about that. He said... He said, he said it was dumb luck.

MARJORIE
Uh huh.

Off Shannon - Could it be?

INT. CRIMINAL RECORDS STORAGE UNIT - DAY

A dusty basement. Endless shelves of cardboard filing boxes. Shannon and a limping FILES CLERK make their way down a long aisle of boxes.

FILES CLERK
Here you go. People Versus Bird is those five boxes.

AN HOUR LATER

Shannon is going through the boxes, laying out the files on a big metal table.

INSERT - Photos of the family in happier times, crime scene photos, autopsy reports.

Shannon opens a file and finds a thick sheaf of valentine cards and envelopes, the cards that were scattered across the floor of her bedroom that night sixteen years ago. She looks through the faded cards.

She finds the big white envelope that Henry came to deliver, her name on the front.

It stands out because it has bloodstains on it and it's the only envelope that hasn't been opened.

With fumbling fingers, she opens the envelope, takes out the card.

The cover depicts the usual red hearts and flowers.

Inside, a **handwritten message.**

HENRY AT SIXTEEN V.O.
Dear Shannon, just so you're not wondering, this is from Henry Bird, from school. You don't know me very well, but I feel like I know you because I have been watching you ever since you transferred from Saint Ignatius. That sounds kind of creepy and I am sorry. I just want you to know that I think you are a very good person and also extremely beautiful. I love you very much and I always will. Yours sincerely, Henry Bird. PS Sorry this is late, and please don't feel you have to reply. I just wanted you to know, in case you ever need someone who will do anything for you.

Off Shannon, emotions roiling and surging. Affection, gratitude, pity, guilt; and a very small hint of calculation.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - DAY

Shannon walks up to Henry's front door, with the valentine card in her hand. She hesitates at the door, looking at the card. She decides to put the card in her bag before ringing the doorbell. She's not going to play this 'cards up'.

Henry answers the door, surprised to see her.

HENRY
Hi.

SHANNON
I can't take no for an answer. I need you.

Off Henry, lost for an immediate reply....

END