GOTHICA

By

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PILOT
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ACT ONE

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

AERIAL SHOT: We soar over a GLITTERING METROPOLIS AT NIGHT. Towers of steel and glass. Streets bustling with people and cars. Museums, a sports arena, a striking modern concert hall set amid grand old brownstones. This is a city both ancient and modern, of founding families and just-arrived immigrants. There's something heightened about this place, a mystery and a romance that we feel as much as see.

GRACE (V.O.)
They founded the city two hundred years ago. Like the titans of old -- the Astors, the Vanderbilts -- each of the founding families was the master of its own realm. Though they were rivals, they made a pact to rule the city together. But now that pact is broken, and one house threatens the rest...

We swoop past a GLEAMING BLACK TOWER, the tallest in the city. At the top of the tower, a corporate logo in glowing white letters: "DRAX."

GRACE (V.O.)
A battle between good and evil is being fought -- in the corridors of power, in the bedrooms of the most exclusive homes in the city...

Now another tower looms: a beautiful 1930's ART DECO BUILDING. We swoop in toward the panoramic windows on the top floor.

GRACE
... and in the hearts of a few men and women who fate, or destiny, has chosen to fight it.

We PUSH THROUGH the windows, into a SPECTACULAR PENTHOUSE with vaulted ceilings and stunning views, filled with striking art and arcana. The door FLIES OPEN and a MAN and WOMAN burst in. The Man clutches his coat to his chest, bleeding.

WOMAN
I'm calling 911!

MAN
No! Do not call!

The Woman tries to look at his wound. The Man pulls away, leaves the Woman holding only a BLOODY SCARF.

The Woman pursues the Man through a shaft of moonlight, giving us our first good look at:

GRACE (28) is beautiful but with an edge, in looks, style, personality. The elegant strapless gown she's wearing shows off a striking abstract tattoo on her left shoulder blade -- both sides of her personality on display.

Her companion, call him the HANDSOME MAN (32), is even more beautiful than Grace is. In another setting, we'd find him effortlessly, devastatingly sexy. Now he grimaces in pain, as he staggers to a BATHROOM DOOR --

GRACE
Wait!

Grace catches sight of a nasty gash through the Handsome Man's shirt, then the DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

GRACE (CONT'D)
(bangs the door)
Dammit!

INSIDE THE BATHROOM -- The Handsome Man rips open his tuxedo jacket, his bloody shirt. In the mirror, a GASH across his chest.

OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM -- Grace paces, looks up at a large PAINTING on the wall: the HANDSOME MAN, rendered in stark browns and grays. A powerful and mysterious portrait that sucks her, and us, in...

A BANGING at the FRONT DOOR startles Grace. A MAN'S VOICE shouts through the door:

MAN BEHIND DOOR (O.S.)
Grace, it's me! Open up!

Grace looks from the front door to the bathroom door, agonizing over what to do.

MAN BEHIND DOOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Grace, he's dangerous! <u>Don't trust him</u>!

The bathroom door opens and the Handsome Man emerges, his coat pulled over his chest. He hears the BANGING at the front door, the SHOUTS of the man outside. He knows that voice.

HANDSOME MAN
You called <u>that</u> bastard?

GRACE
You need a doctor!

The Handsome Man heads for a bedroom.

HANDSOME MAN
Take your boyfriend and go. I'm fine.

But Grace won't be denied, rips open his coat, TO REVEAL:

THE HANDSOME MAN'S CHEST, naked and well-muscled and unmarred by so much as a scratch. Grace gasps, in shock. The BANGING on the front door continues.

GRACE (V.O.)
The man trying to bust the door down, I've known and loved for my entire life...

Grace stares with wonder, raises her hand to touch the Handsome Man's chest where a wound, at least a scar, should be. She strokes his chest, looks up to meet his gaze -- a moment electric with mystery and sensuality.

GRACE (V.O.)
This man I've only known for 24 hours, yet somehow it feels like a lifetime...

WHAM! Grace gasps as the door FLIES OPEN and a MAN (32) bursts in. He's good-looking, with intense, intelligent eyes.

GRACE (V.O.)
The man in the doorway is Victor Frankenstein...

Grace looks from Victor to the Handsome Man, slowly takes her hand from his chest.

GRACE (V.O.)
... and this is Dorian Gray.

Dorian and Victor stare daggers at each other as Grace stands between them -- a triangle whose mysteries we must wait to unravel, as we SMASH TO BLACK, THEN FADE UP:

GOTHICA

PRELAP AUDIO: The ROAR of a JET ENGINE.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (V.O.)
We're beginning our final descent, please return all seats and tray tables to their upright position...

INT. JETLINER (FLYING) - NIGHT

Grace jostles awake, in a Bowie t-shirt and jeans. Black-and-white photos are scattered on her tray table, street scenes at once journalistic and highly artistic. She flips up her window shade, looks out on the GLITTERING SKYLINE below.

TITLE UP: "THREE WEEKS EARLIER"

Grace feels a wave of unease as the city draws near. She pours the last bit of her Absolut mini-bottle, and DOWNS IT.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - NIGHT

Grace's brother CHRIS (32, smile of a younger man, eyes of an older one) is built like the linebacker he was in college. He stands with the LIMO DRIVERS, holding a placard: "Pulitzer Prize Winner." Grace sees him, smiles and hugs him tight.

CHRIS
Welcome home.

Grace's smile ever-so-slightly dims at that. As they walk:

CHRIS (CONT'D)
So, let's see this trophy.

GRACE
It's more of a plaque actually.

CHRIS
Seriously? They don't even go trophy? Well, screw them, we're celebrating anyway.

GRACE
Is this where you get me drunk and try to talk me into coming back?

CHRIS
Me? I would never.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NEWSPAPER BUILDING - NIGHT

THE GUARDIAN BUILDING is a four-story 1940's brown brick building. Grace and Chris stand at the waist-high roof ledge, drinking beers. Grace takes a bite of a greasy sandwich and a smile of pure bliss crosses her lips.

CHRIS
Won't get <u>that</u> in New York.

GRACE
<u>Bastard</u>.

CHRIS
Remember playing up here as kids? Mom and Dad would be trying to get the paper out, tell us to quit stomping around... I could never leave this building. I always felt like this was home.

GRACE
(a sharp look)
I'm here for three days. Can we please not do this?

CHRIS
Ten years, Grace. I know he broke your heart, but --

GRACE
This isn't about Victor.

CHRIS
Are you gonna see him?

GRACE
Didn't I just say, it's --

CHRIS
Not about Victor, got it. Are you?

GRACE
(still angry, hurt)
I've got nothing to say to him.

CHRIS
I just want to know in case I should get out of town, maybe find a bomb shelter to hide in.

Grace smiles, takes a sip of beer and looks out on the city. Across town, the dark tower we saw in the prologue, with its logo in glowing white: "DRAX."

GRACE
(anxious to change the subject)
So, Drax is still up there, huh? Pulling a Howard Hughes?

CHRIS
I would've torched this place before we sold it to Clayton Drax. All his "philanthropy" and good works... I'm telling you, he's not who people think he is.
(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)
You know how brutal it's been for newspapers. Thank god Fiona Hunter's group swooped in and made us a better offer.

GRACE
But you'll still be running the day-to-day?

CHRIS
(nods)
The *Guardian* will still be our family's vision. That'll never change.

Grace eyes her brother, and smiles.

GRACE
They would have been proud of you.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF GUARDIAN BUILDING - NIGHT

Grace is at the wheel of Chris's black Audi. Chris stands at her window.

GRACE
You sure you trust a New Yorker driving your car?

CHRIS
I've got a column to write, I'll prob'ly crash in my office. Plus I have to meet someone later.

GRACE
I know that look. Who is she?

CHRIS
(deflecting smile)
Who says it's a date? I'll see you here at ten to sign the contracts. Fiona wants to buy us lunch after to celebrate.
(starts to walk off)
Hey, make sure you read my column tomorrow.

GRACE
What's it about?

Chris flashes a cryptic smile and heads inside. Grace watches him go up the steps and into the building, beneath a motto etched in stone: "Quaerere Veritatem - <u>TO SEEK THE TRUTH</u>."

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING

Through a camera lens, we see:

CLICK-WHIR!- An OLD MAN and a PUNK GIRL play chess in a park.

CLICK-WHIR!- A POSH WOMAN walks past a trendy boutique, looks just like the mannequins in the window.

CLICK-WHIR!- A BEAT COP rousts a HOMELESS GUY.

Grace moves through the city, great instincts and an uncanny eye. She's in the zone.

IN FRONT OF THE GUARDIAN BUILDING -- Grace pulls a paper out of a dispenser. On the front page, left-hand side: "The City Column will not appear today." Off Grace, curious --

INT. GUARDIAN OFFICES - CITY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Grace arrives at the front desk, looks up from her paper to see the RECEPTIONIST (22, piercings) has been crying. Grace looks past the desks where several REPORTERS have abandoned their work to talk quietly. There, in a glass-walled office, a WOMAN talks to a MAN as two POLICE OFFICERS look on. Grace feels a wave of unease, heads for:

INT. CHRIS'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Managing Editor MINA MURREE (28, Indian descent, eclectic clothes) is Grace's old friend from college. Mina wipes away a tear as Grace pushes past the cops.

GRACE
Mina, where's Chris?

MINA
Oh my god. Grace.

GRACE
(turns to the Police)
What's going on?

JOHN HARKER (32, African American, handsome) steps forward with a sympathetic look that sends a chill up Grace's spine.

JOHN HARKER
I'm Detective Harker. I'm afraid
I've got some bad news.

OUTSIDE THE OFFICE -- Through the glass walls we can see but can't hear the news being delivered. Grace cries, SCREAMS, pulls away from Harker, crumples to her knees as Mina comes to comfort her. REVERSE ANGLE ON:

The STAFF OF THE GUARDIAN, a mix of savvy vets and hipsters just out of journalism school, united in their heartbreak.

INT. CHRIS'S OFFICE - LATER

Grace is devastated. She sits on the couch next to Mina as Harker brings her a glass of water.

HARKER
Did Chris have any enemies?

GRACE
This is the *Guardian.*

HARKER
Meaning?

MINA
We piss off powerful people on a daily basis.

GRACE
How was he killed?
(Harker is reluctant)
How?

HARKER
His throat was cut. Small incision, almost surgical. We'll know more once the labs come back. There were some odd things about the scene.

GRACE
(a wave of dread)
No blood...

Harker doesn't respond, but the surprise on his face is answer enough. Grace looks past him, into space, or the past.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh my god, it's happening again.

MINA
What is?

GRACE
He bled out, but there was no blood on the scene...

Mina looks startled. This means something.

HARKER
How did you know that?

CLOSE ON GRACE, her heartbreak mixed with awe at the mystery opening up before her like a chasm.

GRACE
Check your cold case files. Ten years ago, a couple was killed the same way... Abraham and Eliza Van Helsing... My parents.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - DAY

CLOSE ON this morning's *Guardian*, "Drax To Fund Scholarships for City's Poor," then PAN UP TO REVEAL:

TESSA (24), sultry in a see-through negligee, pads around the spectacular penthouse we saw in the prologue.

TESSA
(calls out)
Don't you have a TV in this place?

DORIAN appears out of nowhere, pins her to the wall. His eyes flash hungrily. His smile is like a switchblade.

DORIAN
Do I seem like the kind of guy who spends his nights watching TV?

Dorian arches Tessa's body back, kisses her neck.

TESSA
No, come on, I've got to get to work. I need to check the traffic. Please, my boss is a bitch...
(she bites her lip)
Why do you do this to me?

Tessa is his if he wants her -- and where's the fun in that?

DORIAN
(lets her go)
Coffee?

TESSA
Wha -- ? That is not nice!

DORIAN
I'm not nice. TV's in the cabinet.

Tessa smiles as he heads for the kitchen. She finds the T.V. and flicks it on. ON SCREEN: A news story about:

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)
-- the scion of one of the city's founding families has been murdered.

TESSA
Dorian!

Dorian runs back into the room. ON SCREEN: A photo of Chris.

NEWS REPORTER (ON TV)
Chris Van Helsing was the editor and publisher of the *Guardian,* a crusader against the very circles from which his family came. The murder of his parents ten years ago remains one of the city's most notorious unsolved killings.

TESSA
Oh my god, he was here last night...

Dorian seethes, grabs a GLASS SCULPTURE and THROWS IT AGAINST THE WALL, SHATTERING IT, the crash echoing into:

EXT. STREETS WINDING THROUGH HILLS - DAY

Grace drives Chris's Audi up a winding road past huge estates, an occasional shimmer of sunlight on the bay.

TITLE UP: "TWO WEEKS LATER"

Grace pulls through an iron gate, past the name carved on the ivy-covered brickwork: "USHER."

EXT. USHER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Gargoyles peer down on Grace as she gets out of the car, peers up at the most historic home in the city: USHER HOUSE is a massive and imposing gothic mansion with seven gables.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
I swear, the girl doesn't age.

Grace turns, sees RODERICK USHER (32, well-tanned, sharply dressed), approaching with a jovial smile. It's been a while.

GRACE
(smiles)
Hello, Erick.

RODERICK
I'm back to Roderick now.
(a little context-)
I came out in law school.

GRACE
Congratulations. And on getting elected, too. D.A., I heard.

RODERICK
Can you believe it? Me, a public servant?

GRACE
I can't believe you got into law school.

RODERICK
God, I miss you. Sorry about Chris.

GRACE
Thanks. And your niece. So terribly sad.

RODERICK
(nods thanks)
Six months ago today...

Grace follows Roderick's gaze past the manicured hedges to a PLOT OF GROUND surrounded by a wrought-iron fence. A MAN and a WOMAN are just visible sitting beneath a tree.

GRACE
Chris didn't tell me many details.

RODERICK
Anna had a rare blood disorder. Those last few weeks, Victor stayed up day and night, trying to find a cure. The vaccine he developed will prob'ly go down as the biggest achievement of his career, and save thousands of lives... but not Anna's. He was two days too late.

CUT TO:

THE FAMILY PLOT -- As we GLIDE PAST the graves, some centuries old: Randolph Usher, Jezebel Usher, Cornelius Usher...

Finally we arrive at a man and a woman, sitting on a bench. We've met VICTOR before, in the prologue. His wife MADELINE (32) is an ethereal beauty, staring at something O.S.

VICTOR
We brought your favorite flowers...

Dahlias. Victor puts his arm around his heartbroken wife, as we REVERSE ANGLE ON: a CHILD'S HEADSTONE, and the name inscribed on it:

"ANNA USHER FRANKENSTEIN, 2006 - 2013"

BACK TO GRACE, watching from afar as Victor and Madeline start heading this way. (They don't see Grace yet.)

GRACE
I tried calling when I heard about Anna. Victor never called me back.

RODERICK
But he knows you're coming today.
(Grace shakes her head no)
So you haven't spoken to him since you broke up? Damn, Grace, if I'd known it was gonna be an ambush, I would have made popcorn, invited some friends over.

GRACE
I'll text you next time.

Grace fixes her stare on Victor as he and Madeline come up from the lawn, onto the driveway. Victor looks up, and --

VICTOR
Grace?!

Victor stares in shock. Madeline's eyes narrow angrily.

GRACE
Hello, Victor.

Victor starts to come in for a hug, but whether it's the look on Grace's face, or Madeline's, he decides against it.

VICTOR
Grace, I think you know Madeline --

MADELINE
Actually, I was at boarding school when all of you were at Crandall together.
(cool smile)
Welcome to Usher House.

GRACE
Thanks. You have a beautiful home.

MADELINE
It's been in my family for two hundred years. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else.
(beat)
Victor loves it, too.

A measuring stare between two formidable women. Grace smiles.

GRACE
Could I borrow him for a minute? I promise, I'll give him right back.

Madeline smiles tightly: *Of course.*

INT. USHER HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

A house of great history, and mystery, USHER HOUSE is big and atmospheric, with hallways shooting off in all directions. Victor leads Grace through a set of French doors, onto:

EXT. USHER HOUSE - VERANDA - CONTINUOUS

A great vantage point to take in the expansive grounds. A hundred yards away, the shell of a decrepit old greenhouse.

VICTOR
It's good to see you --

Fuck the niceties, Grace gets right in Victor's face.

GRACE
He was your best friend. How the <u>hell</u> could you not come to my brother's funeral?!

VICTOR
Grace, I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd want me there. I was trying to be sensitive to your feelings.

GRACE
<u>Now</u> you're sorry? <u>Now</u> you want to be sensitive to my feelings? How about ten years ago?

VICTOR
Look, I wanted to see you after your parents died, but --

GRACE
What? You'd already ditched me and you didn't want to make your father mad?

A fire in Victor's eyes now. He's done playing defense.

VICTOR
Grace, your father <u>destroyed</u> my family! It took us years to restore our reputation.

GRACE
It took <u>you</u> to restore it. Your father got what he deserved.

VICTOR
Everything your father wrote was a lie. My dad <u>built</u> that hospital --

GRACE
And then he robbed it blind.

VICTOR
(bitter smile)
Grace the crusader. You want my advice? Don't sell the paper. You deserve each other.

GRACE
(shakes her head)
I'm signing the contracts Friday, then I'm going back to New York.

VICTOR
So, why the hell did you come here?

GRACE
(beat)
I guess I came to say goodbye.

A raw, emotionally charged moment. They each know they will never see each other again. Grace starts to walk out, looks back for a beat.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about your daughter. I know what it's like to lose someone you love so much...

Their eyes meet and for a moment we see a glimpse of the deep love that once was theirs. Then Grace walks out.

EXT. USHER HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Grace heads to her car when a Jaguar pulls into the drive, and a man gets out: ALPHONSE FRANKENSTEIN (60 but looks 50, with a palpable power). Victor's father. Grace gives a cool nod.

GRACE
Alphonse.

ALPHONSE
Grace. My condolences for your brother, though why Victor stayed friends with him is beyond me.
(MORE)

ALPHONSE (CONT'D)
But then I never understood what my son saw in any of the Van Helsings.

GRACE
You never thought I was good enough for your son.

ALPHONSE
Don't make me out to be an elitist, Grace. I just never liked you.

GRACE
(shakes her head)
Six years in jail for fraud and embezzlement and you couldn't come up with a better line than that?

Alphonse glares at Grace as she gets in the car and peels out of the drive. He starts to head into the house when he looks over and happens to notice Victor, a hundred feet away, headed out toward the OLD GREENHOUSE...

INT. ABANDONED GREENHOUSE - DAY

Practically a ruin, with many glass panels cracked or missing. Victor walks past rows of dead plants, until he reaches a TARP on the floor. Victor throws aside the tarp, reveals a WOODEN HATCH underneath. Victor lifts the hatch, TO REVEAL:

CRUMBLING STONE STAIRS descend into the darkness. Victor goes down the stairs until he is SWALLOWED BY SHADOW...

A DARK PASSAGEWAY, deep beneath Usher House, dead-ends at a RUSTED IRON DOOR. A crowbar sits against the wall. Victor takes the crowbar and PRIES OPEN THE DOOR, TO REVEAL:

INT. ANCIENT CELLAR

A MEDICAL WORKSPACE has been set up in this cavernous room: laptops on tables, a makeshift operating theater...

... and a STAINLESS STEEL TANK, lying horizontally on a table. The tank is the size of a CHILD'S COFFIN. A STUFFED BEAR, a STORYBOOK and other CHILDHOOD MEMENTOS sit next to the tank.

Victor lays a single DAHLIA atop the tank, touches his hand to the cold, lifeless metal.

VICTOR
(whispers)
Soon.

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. GUARDIAN OFFICES - CHRIS'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Grace and Mina are clearing Chris's office. Grace is telling Mina about her visit to Usher House.

GRACE
Alphonse never wanted Victor and me to get married. I had the old-family pedigree but not the old-family money. Madeline has both.

MINA
Had both. They live off the money that Victor made when they took the biotech company public.
(off Grace's surprise)
Chris didn't tell you? All the Ushers' money was tied up in real estate. When the market crashed, Drax swooped in and bought them out.

GRACE
Wait, you mean -- ?

MINA
Usher House may still be standing, but the House of Usher?

Mina makes the throat-slash gesture. Then:

MINA (CONT'D)
So, why'd you go see Victor?

GRACE
To give him hell for not going to Chris's funeral.

MINA
They don't have phones at Usher House? If you ask me, you're still in love with him.

GRACE
That's ridiculous. I got over Victor a long time ago.

MINA
Says the girl who hasn't held onto a boyfriend longer than six weeks since you broke up.

A fact Grace would prefer not to dwell on. As Mina moves over to Chris's desk:

MINA (CONT'D)
It's hard to believe Chris won't be sitting in this chair.

GRACE
I'm sure Fiona will bring in someone great.

Just then, Grace notices a LAPTOP on the desk, with a yellow evidence sticker affixed to it.

GRACE (CONT'D)
The police brought Chris's laptop back?

MINA
Yeah, Harker wants you to call him.

Grace boots up the laptop.

GRACE
Chris told me he was working on a column. I thought maybe we could publish it, as a kind of epitaph.
(beat; typing)
Here we go, this looks like it.
(then)
Damn. Looks like he only wrote a few lines...

We can only see the column's title: "HOUSE OF LIES." Grace looks stunned as she reads.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh my god.

Grace heads almost unconsciously to the window. Mina comes around the laptop, and reads:

MINA
"For my sister and me, March 12th, 2003, was the night that everything changed. That was the night a man named Vlad Drakul murdered our parents, and the only reason his name means nothing to you is because that's the night this monster stopped our parents from revealing the name by which he's become known, even beloved, by the people of this city..."

Mina looks up at Grace, in shock.

GRACE
Clayton Drax.

Grace stares out the window. Across the city, the setting sun has begun to slip behind the DARK TOWER.

HARKER (PRELAP)
You really think the most prominent businessman in the city is a killer?

INT. GUARDIAN OFFICES - CHRIS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Harker and his partner, DAWES (50), talk to Grace and Mina.

GRACE
Chris obviously did. Maybe if you started sharing information, I wouldn't have to jump to conclusions.

HARKER
Fine. We know that after he left you, Chris came up here and started that column. Later on, he left. We're not sure where he went at first, but an hour later he showed up at Dorian Gray's apartment.

GRACE
Dorian Gray... Why?

HARKER
According to Gray, to talk business. Chris stayed for ten minutes then left. Gray had a female companion who corroborated his story.

DAWES
(god, she was hot)
Some companion.

Harker shuts up Dawes with a look.

HARKER
After he left Gray's, your brother was crossing through Fort Defiance Park, we believe on his way back here. He never made it. Now, I want to be clear about this.
(MORE)

HARKER (CONT'D)
We looked into this Drax thing, and we have no reason, none, to believe he was involved in either Chris's murder or your parents'.

GRACE
Why do you have no reason?

Grace has a look in her eye. A born interrogator.

HARKER
For starters? Drax hasn't left the top of that tower in twelve years, well before your parents got killed. And why would he kill Chris?

GRACE
Because Chris attacked him in print on a regular basis.

HARKER
Yes, he did. Over the years, he also attacked Alphonse Frankenstein, Dorian Gray, and the Ushers. Maybe one of them killed your brother.

MINA
Maybe one of them did.

HARKER
My point is, the *Guardian* has never had a problem making enemies.

GRACE
What about this "Drakul?"

HARKER
You mean Clayton Drax's "real name?" We looked into that, too. Dawes, want to show her what we found?

Dawes opens a manila envelope, hands Grace a print-out.

CLOSE ON the PRINT-OUT, a treatise pulled off the internet. There's a photo of an old etching: a fierce MEDIEVAL WARLORD stares at, almost through us. Darkly handsome, with a THIN SCAR running down from one eye...

HARKER (CONT'D)
Say hello to Vlad Drakul. Unless Clayton Drax is actually a Romanian warlord who died in 1476, I'm pretty sure there's no connection.

Off Grace, turning to Mina in disbelief --

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Grace and Mina talk next to their cars, parked at the curb.

MINA
Look, I didn't say anything because he was gone. I don't know, maybe it was the stress of running the paper, but Chris was becoming obsessed with Clayton Drax.

GRACE
What do you mean?

MINA
He got it in his head that Drax wasn't the shut-in that everyone makes him out to be. There were some strange murders in the Third Ward last year. Chris was convinced that Drax was involved.

GRACE
(beat)
I don't know what hurts more, that Chris might have been crazy, or that he didn't feel like he could confide in me. That he had to tell me in a column.

MINA
He prob'ly thought you'd never believe him.

Grace thinks for a moment, heads for her car.

MINA (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

GRACE
To talk to the last man to see Chris alive. Dorian Gray.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GRAY BUILDING - NIGHT

Grace looks up at a shining art deco tower, still the most exclusive and romantic address in the city. Grace heads into the building, beneath a MOON ringed by a halo of silver clouds. Off that moon, we

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. USHER HOUSE - NIGHT

CRANE DOWN from the MOON, TO REVEAL: Victor makes his way from Usher House, across the lawn toward the old greenhouse. Alphonse stands hidden behind a column, watching him.

INT. ANCIENT CELLAR - NIGHT (MOMENTS LATER)

Victor goes from the cryogenic tank to his workspace, checks some figures on his laptop.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Anna's in there, isn't she?

Victor looks up, sees Alphonse staring from the doorway with a mix of sadness and horror.

ALPHONSE
Son... she's dead.

Victor's response is a dagger through Alphonse's heart:

VICTOR
For now.

ALPHONSE
Does Madeline know?
(Victor shakes his head no)
Victor, what are you doing?

VICTOR
What any parent would do. What you would do if your child died and you had the power to bring her back.

Alphonse is stunned. Victor nods.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I'm close.

INT. GRAY BUILDING/PENTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Grace steps out of the elevator, knocks on the door marked "PH." No answer. She tries the knob. It turns in her hand. Grace slowly pushes the door open...

GRACE
Hello? Anybody home?

Grace steps into a spectacular apartment that she doesn't recognize, but we do, from the opening scene. She goes past the industrial kitchen, peeks around a column and GASPS with surprise, TO REVEAL:

EVELYN (24), a stunning redhead whose nakedness is obscured only by a sofa and the unintentionally well-located magnum of champagne she's carrying.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. It was unlocked.

EVELYN
He always says the more the merrier. Grab a glass and come on in.

Evelyn goes into a bedroom, leaves Grace wondering what to do with that. We hear VOICES inside the bedroom. Grace decides it's time to leave, when:

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(calls out)
I'll be right out.

Grace moves deeper into the apartment, stops at the sight of DORIAN'S PORTRAIT on the wall. The mysterious image we saw in the prologue. Grace can't take her eyes away.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Want to buy it?

Grace whirls around, to see:

DORIAN, looking even sexier than the last time we saw him, wearing jeans but no shirt to cover his well-muscled chest.

DORIAN
I sat for it years ago. I'd like to sell it but I can't quite bring myself to part with it. Kind of a love-hate thing.
(offers his hand)
Dorian Gray.

GRACE
Grace Van Helsing.

DORIAN
(surprised, then-)
I'm sorry about your brother.

GRACE
Thanks.
(peering at him)
I'm trying to decide if we've met.

DORIAN
I don't think so. I spent my teens trekking across Asia. My father's idea of a proper education.

GRACE
(nods)
I met your dad when I was in high school. My father introduced us. Can I say, you look exactly like him.

Dorian turns to the bar with a thin smile.

DORIAN
I get that a lot. Drink? I've got an amazing Royal Anejo.

GRACE
No thanks.
(off a painting)
That's a great Savinio.

DORIAN
You know your neo-classicists.

GRACE
(off the walls)
Guston. De Chirico. Blum. Fuseli.

Dorian places two snifters down on the bar.

DORIAN
Now you're showing off.

GRACE
(deadpans)
This from the guy not wearing a shirt.
(slides the drink away)
And I said "no thanks" to the tequila.

Dorian smiles. Each has the other sized up now.

DORIAN
Grace, you just did something no woman has ever managed to do...

Dorian grabs a black t-shirt off the back of a bar chair.

DORIAN (CONT'D)
... make a modest man out of me.

GRACE
I doubt it.
(beat)
My brother came to see you the night he died. I'd like to know why.

Dorian drinks his tequila down.

DORIAN
(sighs)
And I was just starting to have fun... Fine. He came to ask me for twenty million dollars. He was looking for an investor.

GRACE
For the paper? That doesn't make sense. We have an investor. I'm signing the papers Friday.
(beat)
What did you tell him?

DORIAN
I told him no.

GRACE
(realizes)
You're not telling me something.

DORIAN
You're right. What I actually said was: "Screw you, prick. You bash me in the paper, say a once-great family has fallen into a hedonistic haze of moral decay, then you have the balls to come in here and ask me for money?" I'm paraphrasing. Sure I can't pour you one?

GRACE
(hard stare)
I guess the truth hurts.

DORIAN
Not really. I happen to like my hedonistic haze of moral decay. It makes me feel snuggly.

Just then the bedroom door opens and Tessa, the brunette from earlier, stands there half-naked.

TESSA
Come back to bed...

Grace does a double-take: Wasn't she a redhead a minute ago? Then Evelyn, the redhead, snakes up behind Tessa.

EVELYN
Yeah, we're lonely.

Grace turns to Dorian with a look. Dorian smiles.

DORIAN
(raises his glass)
Viva la haze, Grace. Viva la haze.

Grace nods, grabs her coat. Dorian walks her to the door, opens it for her. Grace stops in the doorway.

GRACE
My dad used to tell me what a great man your father was. Clearly you're nothing like him.

Grace exits, her words lingering in Dorian's mind.

DORIAN
(under his breath)
Not anymore...

Dorian goes into the bedroom. We hear the women laugh as he closes the door, and we PAN OVER TO:

DORIAN'S PORTRAIT, and we TRACK IN, zeroing in on the black well of Dorian's eye, until finally we're SWALLOWED BY THE DARKNESS, only to emerge on the "reverse" of Dorian's portrait...

And now we're TRACKING BACK OUT, but instead of Dorian's beautiful face, we reveal a DYING AND DECREPIT OLD MAN -- unmistakably Dorian, but with yellowed eyes, spidery veins, and hands gnarled like talons. Only when this chilling and mysterious image has filled the screen, do we

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. CHRIS'S TOWNHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Grace wakes up on the couch. She sits up, stares at the empty townhouse.

IN THE BATHROOM -- Grace stares at her face in the mirror. She opens the medicine cabinet, throws away the shaving gel, the razor blades. She pulls an item out of the cabinet, a small bottle of expensive PERFUME. Grace stares at the perfume, remembering her last conversation with Chris...

PRELAP AUDIO: A KNOCK on the front door.

MOMENTS LATER -- Grace opens the door and Mina brushes past her, carrying stacks of documents.

MINA
Fiona's office sent these over for you to take a look at before the closing tomorrow. The lawyers have all signed off. She's been trying to reach you --

Grace is holding the bottle of perfume.

GRACE
Do you have any idea who Chris might have been seeing?

MINA
(shakes her head no)
He didn't share that kind of stuff with me.

GRACE
(tinge of regret)
Me, neither.

MINA
I can think of one person he would have told. His best friend.

GRACE
(w/ trepidation)
Victor.

EXT. MERCY HOSPITAL/GENESIS CORP. CAMPUS - DAY

Occupying half a city block are two buildings that embody the city's melding of old and new: a beautiful brick Prohibition-era HOSPITAL, connected via a well-tended greenspace to a gleaming, steel-and-glass BIOTECH RESEARCH BUILDING.

INT. HOSPITAL - SURGICAL WING - DAY

Grace sits in the waiting area, notices a couple of PARENTS (30's) nearby. The father paces furiously. The mother sits in a state of almost catatonic fear.

Just then, behind Grace, Victor emerges from a corridor, wearing scrubs. Because Grace is seated against the wall, Victor has walked right past her without seeing her. His back is to Grace, as the scene unfolds...

The Parents are terrified as they hurry to Victor, not sure if he brings news of joy or doom. An excruciating beat, then:

VICTOR
(smiles)
She's going to be fine.

The Parents burst into tears, and for a moment, Grace is moved, too, by the brilliance and compassion of the man whose face she can't see. The Parents hug Victor, thank him incoherently, then run off to notify their relatives.

Grace smiles, is about to alert Victor to her presence when she sees his shoulders sag almost imperceptibly. He just delivered the happy news he never got to hear himself. Grace's heart breaks for him.

GRACE
Victor.

Victor turns around, surprised to see Grace standing there. Grace smiles. Victor smiles.

VICTOR
I'm so glad to see you.

EXT. MEDICAL CAMPUS - DAY

Grace and Victor walk through the greenspace that separates the hospital from the biotech building.

GRACE
I think Chris was seeing someone, but he wouldn't tell me who. Did he say anything to you?

VICTOR
(shakes his head)
Nothing.
(clocks her disappointment)
Any news from the police?

Grace shakes her head. She takes in the surroundings.

GRACE
This is amazing, Victor.

VICTOR
It was always my dream, a combined research-and-care facility. I just hope I can hang onto it.
(off Grace's look)
I just found out that Clayton Drax has been contacting our shareholders. We're expecting a takeover bid any day now.

GRACE
(beat; her mind working)
Why is he doing this?

VICTOR
The hospital barely breaks even. Drax must want something we're doing at biotech.

GRACE
First the Ushers, then he tried to buy us, now you. Who's next?

VICTOR
Maybe the Grays, although it's just Dorian now. I wouldn't be shocked if that bastard's in with Drax.

GRACE
Bastard is right. I met him.
(off Victor's anxious look)
Chris spoke to him the night he died. I wanted to know why.

VICTOR
I would stay away from Dorian Gray. He's dangerous.

MOMENTS LATER -- Grace and Victor sit beside a fountain. Victor stares into the rippling water.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
That little girl today... I've prob'ly done fifty heart transplants. Out with the old, in with the new. And for whatever reason, today, I thought -- If only we could do that. Just pull out the old one, all those scars and heartbreaks...

GRACE
And start all over.

They share a look, understanding each other's heartbreaks, regretting the ones they caused each other.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I had another reason for coming. I didn't want things to end the way they did.

VICTOR
I deserved it. Leaving you the way I did was wrong.

GRACE
It hurt a lot. But I got over it.

VICTOR
I didn't.
(Their eyes meet)
Letting you go was the worst mistake of my life. I've regretted it ever since.

Victor leans in suddenly, and kisses Grace on the lips.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(pulls away)
I'm sorry.

GRACE
I'm not.

Beat. We can feel a deep, long dormant passion stirring.

VICTOR
Don't go back to New York.
(Grace laughs)
I'm serious. You're a photographer, you can live anywhere. You could stay and take over the paper.

GRACE
Now I know you're kidding.

VICTOR
I know Chris had a lot of faith in this Fiona Hunter woman, but the *Guardian*'s in your blood.

GRACE
I thought you hated the paper. I thought it destroyed your father.

VICTOR
I love my father. But the city needs its voice, and the *Guardian* has always been that.

GRACE
(wistful smile)
I don't think me staying would be good for either of us. Or your marriage.

Victor nods, resigned that Grace will be leaving his life for a second time.

VICTOR
When do you fly out?

GRACE
Saturday night. Redeye.

VICTOR
We're hosting an event for the new children's wing that night. You could swing by on your way to the airport... I'd love to see you one last time.

Grace thinks about it, smiles and nods. Suddenly, her PHONE RINGS, breaking the moment. Grace answers.

GRACE
Hello?
(listens, then-)
I'll be right there.

Grace hangs up, looks jolted as she turns to Victor.

GRACE (CONT'D)
They just arrested someone for Chris's murder.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - CORRIDOR

Grace and Victor walk with Detective Harker.

HARKER
He won't talk to us. We know he's been living in Fort Defiance Park, where we found Chris. When we picked him up, he had Chris's wallet on him, as well as a knife. Other than that, we don't know much. Not even his name.

INT. POLICE STATION - OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Victor and Grace follow Harker into a room that looks into an adjoining interrogation room through a large one-way glass. There, a GAUNT MAN (35) sits alone at a table, in an orange jumpsuit. His face is grimy, his cheeks sunken, his beard flecked with premature gray. A walking cane leans against the table. A ghost of a man.

Victor takes one look at the man, and his jaw drops.

VICTOR
Oh my god... Jekyll.

Off Grace and Harker, staring with surprise --

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Victor stares through the glass at the wretched prisoner.

VICTOR
Henry Jekyll is -- was -- one of the most brilliant men I've ever known. He was our lead scientist at the biotech company. He was also my friend.

Grace and Harker listen, rapt. Dawes has joined them, too.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Without my knowledge, he started testing an experimental drug on some patients in the psych ward. A nurse tipped off Chris, and the *Guardian* ran a front page exposé. I fired Henry, and it was a downward spiral from there... But he always blamed Chris for what he lost.

Harker and Dawes trade a glance. *Motive.*

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Can I talk to him?

HARKER
(Why not?)
He won't talk to us.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jekyll stares vacantly at the table, looks up as Victor enters with Harker. A spark of recognition in Jekyll's eyes, and compassion in Victor's. These men were close.

VICTOR
You don't look well, Henry.

HENRY JEKYLL
Lymphatic cancer. I'm a dead man.

VICTOR
I'm sorry to hear that.
(beat)
Henry... did you do it?

HENRY JEKYLL
I don't remember, but I wouldn't be surprised.
(beat)
I'm not myself lately.

INT. POLICE STATION - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Roderick Usher, in his capacity as D.A., huddles with Harker and Dawes. Grace and Victor listen in.

RODERICK
So, he had Chris's wallet, he had motive, and he lived in the park. Any blood on the knife?

HARKER
(shakes his head no)
Clean, but he could have wiped it.

RODERICK
(considers it, then-)
Let's charge him.

Harker and Dawes walk off. Roderick comes over to Grace.

RODERICK (CONT'D)
I know it can't replace Chris, but I hope this gives you some closure.

Grace nods thanks. Roderick walks off. Victor gives her a supportive look.

GRACE
I hear what Roderick's saying, and Jekyll definitely had motive... but does he look like he's in any shape to kill somebody?

VICTOR
(beat)
Looks can be deceiving.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GUARDIAN OFFICES - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Grace steps out of the elevator, looks out on the newsroom. Just a few REPORTERS working at this late hour.

INT. CHRIS'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Grace sees a BLINKING RED LIGHT on the phone, hits speaker, then voicemail. We hear a BEEP, and in a friendly, British-accented FEMALE VOICE:

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON SPEAKER)
Grace, it's Fiona Hunter. I'm looking forward to putting a face to the voice at the closing tomorrow...

Grace sits on the edge of the desk, picks up a PAPERWEIGHT.

FIONA (O.S., ON SPEAKER)
I know the paper is near and dear to you, as it was to Chris. Please have every confidence that you're leaving the *Guardian* in great hands. See you tomorrow.

Grace looks at the paperweight, a bronze cube that bears an inscription: "Quaerere Veritatem - To Seek The Truth."

Grace stares at the newspaper's motto... then drops the paperweight into a box packed with other items. Another item catches her eye. Grace pulls out:

An OLD FRAMED PHOTO, captioned: "FOUNDING FAMILIES, c. 1923." Five men stand in front of the Guardian Building, smiling confidently into a future that they own. Their names have been etched onto the negative, as photographers used to do:

Cornelius Usher. Samuel Van Helsing. Heinrich Frankenstein.

The last two names and faces are curious. SEBASTIAN DRAX must have turned his head at the instant the photo was taken. His face is a BLUR...

As for J. WENTWORTH GRAY, in his straw boater hat and double-breasted suit, he looks remarkably, almost stunningly similar to Dorian. Grace marvels at the likeness, as we

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. USHER HOUSE - ABANDONED GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

Victor descends the stone stairs, down the passageway to the iron door. Just outside, Alphonse is waiting for him.

ALPHONSE
Show me everything.

INT. THE GUARDIAN OFFICES - CHRIS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Grace packs up the last shelf. She opens a cabinet, pulls out a GIFTWRAPPED PRESENT. It has the heft of a book.

Grace unwraps the item, TO REVEAL: *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* a beautiful first edition. Grace opens the cover, sees an inscription written by hand. We can't see what Grace sees, but she looks up, in shock.

INT. USHER HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

MADELINE'S ETHEREAL BLUE EYES pop open. She looks over, sees Victor sleeping next to her. She smiles hungrily, slides her naked body up against his --

Madeline hears something, faint but unmistakable: a HEARTBEAT. Victor lies there asleep. He doesn't hear it. Madeline gets up and pads around the room, trying to find its origin.

The heartbeat gets louder and louder. Madeline panics, realizes it's coming from beneath the FLOORBOARDS. She crouches down, peers through a tiny gap in the boards. Down there in the dark, lit only by a sliver of light -- an EYE POPS OPEN.

Madeline SCREAMS, bolts awake. The pillow next to her is undisturbed. Through the window she sees the first rays of sun breaking over the grounds of Usher House. Where is her husband?

ALPHONSE (PRELAP)
You're taking a huge risk...

INT. CELLAR BENEATH THE GREENHOUSE - DAWN

Alphonse sits at a worktable, surrounded by laptops and sheafs of paper filled with calculations. Victor has spent all night walking him through the science. Alphonse pushes the papers away.

ALPHONSE
I can't deny the brilliance of what you've done here. But even if you succeed... How can you be sure it's the Anna you loved who will come back?

VICTOR
I can't. That's why I've got to test it first.

Alphonse feels a chill as Victor leads us through a narrow passageway into an ADJOINING ROOM, TO REVEAL:

A LARGE GLASS TANK, 12-feet high and filled with a viscous liquid. The tank is lit from within but the glass is fogged by condensation. The fog keeps us from making out any details of what's inside, but the silhouette is unmistakable:

A DEAD MAN floats silently, eerily in the glass tank, connected to hoses that resemble black tendrils.

ALPHONSE
My god.

Victor looks at the Dead Man and smiles, as we

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. CELLAR BENEATH THE GREENHOUSE - DAY

Alphonse stares in awe at the lifeless shape in the tank.

ALPHONSE
Who was he?

VICTOR
Does it matter? This is the only way. I have to be sure it'll work before I try it on Anna.
(off the Dead Man)
The only piece I haven't been able to crack is the protein re-sequencing. But as soon as I do...

ALPHONSE
Son, I beg you to reconsider. This is against the laws of nature.

VICTOR
So's penicillin. So's chemotherapy. So's the goddamn vaccine I invented, two days too late.

ALPHONSE
There's a higher law. God's law.

VICTOR
(explodes w/ rage)
God?! You come in here and talk to me about GOD?!
(points to Anna's tank)
There's what your God, did! He killed my little girl! And I'm going to bring her back.

Victor trembles with anger and heartbreak. Alphonse, too, is devastated.

ALPHONSE
(shakes his head)
When I came in here, I was afraid you'd lost your mind... But it's your soul that's lost.

Alphonse exits, leaves Victor standing there.

EXT. USHER HOUSE - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Madeline supervises WORKERS unloading tents and chairs from a truck. She hears a CAR DOOR, sees Alphonse driving off...

And a black Audi coming up the drive. Madeline's eyes narrow. She makes a beeline for Grace, getting out of her car.

MADELINE
I see what you're doing. You think you can just walk back into his life. Well, he's my husband --

GRACE
Happy Birthday.

Grace hands Madeline *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Madeline looks puzzled, takes the book and opens it. With dawning heartbreak, she reads:

MADELINE
"Madeline... Every moment we're apart feels like a hundred years... Happy Birthday, Chris.""

GRACE
No wonder he didn't tell Victor who he was seeing.

MADELINE
Please, don't tell Victor.

GRACE
You were the woman Chris saw the night he died.

MADELINE
But not the last one, I'm afraid.

Off Grace, intrigued by this remark --

INT. USHER HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Madeline's hand shakes as she brings the wine to her lips.

MADELINE
I left Chris at midnight, and came back here. I woke up after two. I had a terrible feeling something was wrong. I jumped in my car --

GRACE
Where was Victor?

MADELINE
You'll have to ask him where he goes at two in the morning.

Grace is surprised, files that one away. Madeline is haunted by the memory of what came next.

MADELINE (CONT'D)
When I got to the park, Chris was lying beneath a tree, and the way he looked... like some fragile leaf that had fallen. He said two words. "She lied." Then he died.

GRACE
How'd you know he was in the park?

MADELINE
(beat)
I must have dreamt it.

A cryptic remark, made all the more mysterious as Grace realizes that Madeline is serious.

MADELINE (CONT'D)
I took one of the park's emergency phones off the hook, and I left. I couldn't be there when the police arrived. I couldn't let Victor find out --

GRACE
"She lied?"

MADELINE
I loved your brother, Grace. I like to think he gave his heart to me. But his soul he entrusted to another.

GRACE
His soul...?
(horrible realization-)
The *Guardian*... Fiona.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. 40TH FLOOR OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

PING! Grace steps out of the elevator into a modern lobby with commanding views of the city. ZOE (24, a gorgeous blonde in a short dress) is there to meet her.

ZOE
I'm Zoe, one of Ms. Hunter's assistants. Please follow me.

Grace looks determined, braces herself as Zoe leads her through a set of glass double-doors, into:

INT. FIONA HUNTER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A stark modern office, everything in white. A white, high-backed chair swivels around, TO REVEAL:

FIONA HUNTER (35), a striking beauty in a blood-red Chanel suit. It's something in her eyes, or maybe her posture as she smiles and comes around her desk. The woman emanates power.

FIONA
Grace, it's wonderful to finally meet in person. I'm sorry I couldn't be at Chris's funeral. I got called to London. He was a special man.

GRACE
Thanks. The flowers you sent were beautiful.

FIONA
Can I offer you anything? Before the celebratory champagne, that is?

GRACE
I'm fine, thanks.

Fiona gestures Grace to a glasstop conference table where neat stacks of paper -- CONTRACTS -- are lined up. Grace and Fiona sit on opposite sides of the table. Fiona smiles.

FIONA
Should we start signing?

GRACE
I have one question.
(Fiona nods)
My brother mentioned that even though your group is buying the paper, day-to-day control of the *Guardian* would stay in my family. I didn't see that in the contracts.

FIONA
(sympathetic smile)
Well, it's true, we had an understanding that Chris would remain in the editor's chair. But of course that's impossible now. Such a loss.

GRACE
Thanks, but I'm going to need that provision put back in.
(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)
(off Fiona's look)
I've decided to stay on as editor.

Long beat. Fiona measures Grace, smiles.

FIONA
Where's this coming from, Grace?

GRACE
These past few days, I realized something. To the city, the *Guardian* is a newspaper. To you, it's an investment. But to me, it's family.

FIONA
And yet you've never run a newspaper before.

GRACE
I'm a Van Helsing. I was born in one. And there's no one who can run the *Guardian* better than I can.

FIONA
With all due respect, my investors might disagree.

GRACE
I'd love a chance to persuade them, or should I say him. I know he never leaves that tower, so I'm happy to go there.

For a moment, you can hear a pin drop.

FIONA
(friendly)
You seem to have a theory, Grace. Let's hear it.

GRACE
Your boss realized that my brother would never sell him the *Guardian.* So he had you form a holding company to buy it for him. But somehow, the night before the deal closed, Chris found out who you really work for. Why else would he have gone to Dorian Gray, frantic to find a new investor? Why else would his last words have been, "She lied?"

FIONA
I don't need to dignify that with a response.

GRACE
(starts to get up)
And I don't need to sell you my newspaper.

FIONA
No, you don't. You can go bankrupt.

Grace hesitates. Fiona eases, smiles. *I'm your friend here.*

FIONA (CONT'D)
The first thing you should know is that neither I nor Mr. Drax had anything to do with Chris's death.

GRACE
You're not denying my theory.

FIONA
Mr. Drax owning the *Guardian* is not only in the best interests of the paper. It's in the best interests of the city.

Grace stares at Fiona, suddenly suspects:

GRACE
This isn't about the paper... Let's face it, other than the website, the company's struggling. So why is the *Guardian* so important to you? What are you <u>really</u> after?

Fiona's only answer is a faint but impenetrable smile.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Your boss stands for everything my family ever fought against. I'll see the *Guardian* burn before I sell it to Clayton Drax.

FIONA
That <u>is</u> another option.

A long, measuring stare between these two forceful women. Grace smiles: *Bring it on.* Then she turns and walks out.

IN THE RECEPTION AREA -- Grace heads for the elevator, glances to her left -- and is startled by what she sees.

Zoe, Fiona's assistant, is sitting at the reception desk, talking to two young women...

TESSA and EVELYN, from Dorian's apartment. As one, the three gorgeous young women look at Grace, eye her coolly...

The three assistants head into Fiona's office. As Grace steps into the elevator, the last thing she sees are Fiona's assistants, REDHEAD, BRUNETTE and BLONDE, coming around behind Fiona's chair. Zoe puts her hand on Fiona's shoulder. Fiona takes two of Zoe's fingers in her hand.

Fiona meets Grace's gaze and smiles, as the elevator doors SLIDE SHUT, and we

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. USHER HOUSE - LAWN - SUNSET

Elegantly-dressed GUESTS climb out of their expensive cars, hand off their keys to VALETS. On the lawn, ice sculptures and white-linen tables are arrayed around a dance floor while partygoers sip champagne under a big, white tent. A charity event for which no expense has been spared.

IN THE DRIVEWAY -- Grace hands her keys to the valet. She looks stunning in a dress that shows off her sexy body and the tattoo on her shoulder blade. Elegance with an edge.

Grace hurries through the crowd, looking for Victor. Victor sees Grace and his face lights up -- stinging Madeline, who is standing with Roderick, across the tent.

VICTOR
I'm glad you came.

GRACE
Fiona Hunter works for Drax. The whole thing was a plot to give him control of the *Guardian*.

VICTOR
(surprised, then-)
Sonofabitch.

GRACE
You were right, Victor. I didn't realize it 'til they tried to steal it from me, but that paper's in my blood. It's who I am.

VICTOR
(smiles)
Then you'll stay?

GRACE
Not if I can't keep our doors open. Victor, I have nowhere else to turn... I need twenty million dollars to keep the paper going until I can find a new investor.

VICTOR
(anguished beat)
Grace, you know I'd do <u>anything</u> for you... It's just that I've sunk most of my fortune into a research project. Madeline doesn't even know.

GRACE
(resigned smile)
It's okay, Victor. I know you'd do it if you could.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Now there's a phrase no man wants to hear...

Grace and Victor turns to see Dorian walking up.

DORIAN
It's okay, Victor. They make pills for that. You're a doctor. You can probably get them for free.

Victor glares at Dorian, a mutual hatred that goes back ages.

VICTOR
Dorian... I didn't figure you for the charity benefit type.

DORIAN
I'm not. I just came for the booze.

Victor starts coming at Dorian...

VICTOR
You really want to do this again.

Dorian smiles, clenches his fist...

DORIAN
Now that was a Christmas party.

Grace gets between them (and had better get used to it).

Dorian smiles, plunks his glass on the tray of a passing SERVER. He looks at Grace, nods toward the dance floor.

DORIAN (CONT'D)
Shall we?

Grace, anxious to light into him for her own reasons, takes Dorian's arm. Victor can only look on jealously as Grace and Dorian begin to dance. There's a heat between Grace and Dorian -- it's physical.

GRACE
You're a bastard.

DORIAN
You're the first woman to make that observation since lunch.

GRACE
I knew you were selfish, but to get in bed with Drax.

DORIAN
That's a little kinky, even for me. When will you get it through that pretty head of yours? I'm not on anyone's side but mine.

GRACE
Is that why you're screwing Fiona Hunter's assistants?
(Dorian stops dancing)
Why not go for the hat trick? Are blondes not your thing?

But the look of surprise if not alarm on Dorian's face makes Grace suddenly realize:

GRACE (CONT'D)
You didn't know.

DORIAN
(his mind racing)
What's Drax up to...?

GRACE
(pointed)
Nobody knows. But it looks like you might be next on his list.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Mind if I cut in?

Grace and Dorian turn around, startled to see:

FIONA, gorgeous in a plunging black dress, eyes alight at the shock on their faces. Grace steps back, away from Dorian --

But to our surprise, it's Grace who Fiona starts dancing with. Dorian is left stranded, as Fiona leads Grace across the floor, drawing curious looks from the other dancers.

FIONA
So that's Dorian Gray. Well done, Grace. He looks good enough to eat.
(then)
You gave me a lot to think about today. I see how much the paper means to you now. It's all that's left of your family, and I respect family. So does Mr. Drax.
(MORE)

FIONA (CONT'D)
He'd love nothing better than to buy the *Guardian* -- and put you in charge.

GRACE
(shakes her head)
To be his mouthpiece? Forget it.

FIONA
You'll have total independence and control. You have my word.

Grace is skeptical.

FIONA (CONT'D)
This is the only way for the *Guardian* to survive. Has Victor stepped up with the money? Has Dorian Gray?
(beat)
Don't trust them, Grace. They're not your family.

GRACE
Neither are you. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get started on tomorrow's column. It may be the last one to ever run, but at least it'll be a Van Helsing who wrote it.

FIONA
And what is it that you're going to write?

GRACE
(smiles)
I guess you'll just have to buy a paper.

FIONA
You should know, Grace, Mr. Drax takes attacks on his character very personally.

GRACE
What's he gonna do? Sue me? Shut us down? I'm your worst nightmare, Fiona. I've got nothing to lose.

Grace walks off. Fiona watches her go, looks across the party to see Dorian following Grace with his eyes.

IN THE DRIVEWAY -- Grace goes to the front of the long VALET LINE.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Could I just get my key?

JUST OUTSIDE THE TENT -- Dorian watches Grace making her way toward the front gate and off the property.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
She reminds me of her mother...

Dorian turns, sees Alphonse watching Grace.

DORIAN
I see her father, too. You look good, Alphonse. Have a little work done?

ALPHONSE
(knowing smile)
Just trying to keep up with you.
(then, off Grace)
The *Guardian* closing is bad for the city, but good for her.

DORIAN
(shakes his head)
Drax is the only one who wins.

ALPHONSE
You think Drax went after the *Guardian* to make Grace leave town?
(shakes his head)
He did it to keep her here.

DORIAN
What do you mean?

ALPHONSE
If anyone else had bought the paper, would Grace have even <u>thought</u> about staying? Drax <u>wanted</u> her to know it was Fiona who deceived her brother. He's made the *Guardian* her cause.

DORIAN
Why would he do that?

ALPHONSE
I'm not sure. I've always hated the Van Helsings... But I hope for her sake she gets on that plane.

Off Dorian, scared to realize that Alphonse may be right --

INT. USHER HOUSE - BAR - NIGHT

The normally gregarious Roderick seems anxious as he pours himself a drink, even more so when Fiona walks in.

RODERICK
We shouldn't be seen together.

FIONA
Can't the D.A. talk to one of his constituents?
(beat)
I heard you charged Henry Jekyll with murder today.

RODERICK
(low, begrudging)
Just like you asked.

FIONA
Make the charges stick. Then you'll have done what we asked.

ERICK
And an innocent man will be sentenced to death.

FIONA
Jekyll's already got a death sentence... And who among us is "innocent?" Right, counselor?

Fiona smiles knowingly, and walks out. Erick slams his drink. PRELAP AUDIO: A RUMBLE OF THUNDER...

EXT. EXCLUSIVE NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A light rain is falling as Grace walks away from Usher House, now just lights in the distance. Massive homes loom in the darkness as she looks for her car among the many lining the road. We hear FOOTSTEPS. Dorian comes running after her.

DORIAN
I'll walk you to your car.

GRACE
I think I'm safe in this neighborhood.

DORIAN
You'd be surprised.

More THUNDER, and a sudden DOWNPOUR. Dorian grabs her hand.

DORIAN (CONT'D)
Up here!

We CRANE UP as Grace and Dorian run through a gate. Through FLASHES OF LIGHTNING we glimpse an old, half-gutted SPANISH MANSION. A bulldozer sits in a yard turning quickly to mud.

Grace and Dorian reach the shelter of a porch, their clothes clinging tightly to their bodies. Their eyes meet, and for a moment Grace feels the raw sexual power of this man...

Suddenly, a FLASH OF LIGHTNING throws a SHADOW: someone or something crawling down the side of the house. It's gone in a heartbeat. Grace tenses, now must wait for the next flash of lightning... NOTHING THERE. Grace exhales, relieved, then:

DORIAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Grace, run!

In the time it takes Grace to turn around, Dorian has been sent flying and a MAN IN A BLACK HOOD is bearing down on her. Grace can't get a scream out before Black Hood BACKHANDS her. Grace lands hard in the mud.

With Grace out of the way, Black Hood turns on his target: Dorian. Dorian knows how to fight, but Black Hood is freakishly strong and fast. Around Black Hood's neck: an ancient GOTHIC CRUCIFIX on a chain. He pulls on the bottom of the cross, which detaches into a small, sharp KNIFE...

Black Hood SLASHES Dorian across the chest. Dorian SCREAMS, falls. Black Hood comes at Dorian, has an easy killstroke... but doesn't take it. Black Hood HESITATES, never sees Grace, or the CROWBAR --

Grace SMASHES the bar across Black Hood's face, the kind of blow that puts you in the ICU or the grave. Black Hood goes down. Grace drops the crowbar, grabs Dorian's hand and they run out into the street. Three seconds go by, then Black Hood vaults to his feet, takes off his hood, TO REVEAL:

TESSA, licking the crimson off her lips. She's about to go after them when she hears a SHOUT. Dorian and Grace have come across two COUPLES walking to their cars. Tessa glares, runs off into the shadows.

ON THE STREET -- Grace and Dorian run past shocked revelers.

Dorian collapses into the passenger's seat of his 1959 gullwing Mercedes roadster. Grace jumps behind the wheel.

DORIAN (CONT'D)
Take me home.

GRACE
You need to get to a hospital!

DORIAN
Dammit, take me home!
(meets her gaze)
Please.

EXT. THE GRAY BUILDING - NIGHT

The rain has slowed as Dorian staggers from the car toward the building. Grace lags, dials a number on her phone.

GRACE
Victor... I need you.

Off a FLASH OF LIGHTNING, we

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DORIAN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

WHAM! The front door FLIES OPEN and Victor bursts in. Grace gasps with surprise, pulls her hand from Dorian's naked chest. We're back where we left off in the prologue.

Victor stares jealously at Dorian and Grace.

VICTOR
What happened?

Grace and Dorian trade a guilty look.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Who's hurt?!

DORIAN
We were attacked. Grace called you because she thought I was hurt. But it wasn't my blood. It must've been the attacker's.

Victor clocks the BLOODY SCARF on the floor, Dorian's bloody shirt...

VICTOR
(suspicious)
That's an awful lot of blood.

GRACE
It all happened so fast --

VICTOR
Grace, whatever is going on, I need you to tell me, right now.

Grace stares at Victor, but remains silent. Victor seems as if he's about to explode, then eases slightly.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Come on, I'll give you a ride.

But as Victor turns for the door --

GRACE
I'm staying.

The words hit Victor like a bomb. He smiles thinly.

VICTOR
(beat)
I guess I had this coming.

Grace goes after him, stops him near the door.

GRACE
Victor... Thank you.

Grace kisses him on the cheek. Victor's only response:

VICTOR
Good night, Grace.

As Grace goes back to Dorian, Victor glances down, sees DORIAN'S BLOODY SCARF lying on the floor. Victor thinks for a beat about what he's seen and what he hasn't been told. Victor takes the scarf.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -- Dorian shakes his head at Grace.

DORIAN
You should have gone with him.

Grace opens Dorian's shirt, looks at his chest, then at him.

GRACE
How...?

Dorian smiles, weary and knowing. The smile of a man who's known a thousand heartbreaks.

DORIAN
We live in an age of science. We charted the elements and the human genome. We found the "God Particle." All the great mysteries have been solved one by one. And yet... just at the edge of our vision... We still see faces in the shadows...

A FLICKER OF LIGHTNING casts shadows both beautiful and terrible across Dorian's face.

DORIAN (CONT'D)
We're still scared of the dark.

Grace feels the hairs on the back of her neck prick up. A LOW RUMBLE OF THUNDER, the storm moving off now.

DORIAN (CONT'D)
Your brother tried to tell me this city brings out the best and the worst in us. I'll tell you what I told him. The angels have all left town, Grace. Only the monsters are left.
(beat)
Get on that plane.

CLOSE ON GRACE. Quite literally, the choice of a lifetime.

GRACE (V.O.)
They called them the Five Families. Gray. Usher. Frankenstein. Drax... And Van Helsing.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. THE GUARDIAN BUILDING - NIGHT

A JETLINER ROARS overhead, then PAN DOWN TO REVEAL: a single office lit in the fourth floor of the newspaper office.

INT. GUARDIAN - CHRIS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Grace writes tomorrow's column, which we hear in V.O.

GRACE (V.O.)
They built a city where the American dream came true like it did nowhere else...

EXT./INT. POLICE PRECINCT - DAY

Harker walks up the steps toward the station, startled to see his partner, Dawes, being wheeled out on a gurney.

GRACE (V.O.)
But something has happened to the city they built...

INSIDE THE STATION -- Harker runs in, sees three COPS being stitched up by PARAMEDICS. There's glass on the floor, a broken chair. Harker turns to a shell-shocked SERGEANT, who can't believe what he's just seen.

SERGEANT
Jekyll escaped.

Harker's jaw drops. *Henry Jekyll did <u>this</u>?*

INT. DORIAN'S APARTMENT - PREVIOUS NIGHT

REDUX Grace and Dorian, standing where we left them.

GRACE (V.O.)
Tonight we are a city in shadow.

DORIAN
Get on that plane.

GRACE
(beat; determined)
I've made my choice, Dorian. Now you make yours.

Grace turns and head for the door. HOLD ON DORIAN.

GRACE (V.O.)
A few hours ago, the paper you're reading was about to go dark. But as long as the hopes of our city's founders live on...

Dorian looks at his PORTRAIT, his ever-present savior and tormentor, as we CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER -- Grace and Dorian stand facing each other, with the city, through the window, as their backdrop. Dorian holds up a CHECK with two fingers.

GRACE (V.O.)
... so will the *Guardian*.

DORIAN
(re: the check)
When I think of the fun that could be had with all those zeros...

Their faces are close. Grace smiles, and snatches the check.

GRACE
Good night... partner.

Grace turns and heads for the door. Dorian smiles, and we think to ourselves: *This should be fun.*

GRACE (V.O.)
Our mission remains the same...

INT. USHER HOUSE - ANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Madeline stands in ANNA'S BEDROOM, staring at the floor, the fear rising in her face. There, beneath the floorboards, we hear a HEART BEATING... and this is no dream.

GRACE (V.O.)
To seek out the truth, no matter where it lies...

INT. FIONA'S APARTMENT - PREVIOUS NIGHT

Fiona and Tessa face each other in a cavernous modern space.

GRACE (V.O.)
... no matter what dark places it takes us.

FIONA
You hesitated.
(Tessa nods)
You love him.

Tessa nods again, ashamed and a little scared.

TESSA
Are you going to tell Mr. Drax?

Fiona takes Tessa's chin, smiles.

FIONA
It'll be our little secret.

As Fiona leans in toward Tessa...

We start a 360°, the CAMERA CIRCLING AROUND THEM as Fiona kisses Tessa on the lips, moves to her neck. We're CLOSE ON TESSA'S FACE as her lips part with pleasure, then her eyes go wide as <u>FIONA'S BITE SINKS DEEP</u>.

And when we've come all the way around, and Fiona looks up:

SHE'S <u>NOT</u> FIONA, but a DARKLY HANDSOME MAN with a piercing gaze and a THIN SCAR we've seen once before...

The gentleman's name is Vlad Drakul. Or, if you prefer:

<u>CLAYTON DRAX</u>.

INT. CELLAR BENEATH USHER HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON Dorian's BLOODY SCARF, sitting next to a pair of scissors on Victor's work table, then PAN OVER TO REVEAL:

Victor stares into a microscope, a tiny patch of DORIAN'S BLOODY SCARF on the glass plate. Victor looks up, in shock... then he smiles. *He's found the missing piece.*

Victor goes to the GLASS TANK, the dead man's face obscured by a fog by condensation. Victor wipes away a swath of condensation, TO REVEAL:

GRACE'S BROTHER'S FACE. Chris's muscular, once-powerful body floats lifelessly in the tank.

VICTOR
(whispers)
I'm sorry...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE GUARDIAN - MORNING

Grace steps out of Chris's office -- her office now -- to find Mina and the STAFF OF THE GUARDIAN assembled. They applaud their new leader. Grace nods, smiles. She's home.

INT. FIONA'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON TODAY'S PAPER. The headline: "HOUSE OF LIES - Clayton Drax's Dirty Dealings." Fiona stares at the headline, seething.

EVELYN (O.S.)
Where's Tessa?

Fiona looks up, smiles at Evelyn and Zoe.

FIONA
I had to let Tessa go. Time to start looking for a replacement...

Fiona glances at the society page. Last night's fundraiser in words and pictures, but Fiona's eye falls on one face: MADELINE USHER. Fiona smiles, as we

CUT TO:

INT. GUARDIAN - GRACE'S OFFICE - PREVIOUS NIGHT

Grace types the last few words of her column.

GRACE (V.O.)
This city isn't just where we were born. It's in our blood. And like our parents, and our parents' parents, it's where we'll find our destiny. This is where the ancient struggle between good and evil will play out. This is my city...

EXT. THE GUARDIAN BUILDING - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Grace stands on the roof, looking out on the glittering city.

GRACE (V.O.)
This is Gothica.

In the distance, the DARK TOWER looms, ominous and expectant. As we slowly, very slowly...

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT