INFLUENCE

Written by

Kyle Killen

TEASER

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

ROSS, early 40's, handsome, sleeps across a largely torn apart bed next to STACY, 30's, beautiful. A phone BUZZES repeatedly.

ROSS
If you get calls at this hour, I don't think this is going to work.

STACY
It's yours. And this is like the fifth time.

A beat and then Ross bolts up in bed.

ROSS
Hand it to me, hand it to me.
(as he grabs for it)
Don't say anything.

STACY
You said you were divorced.

ROSS
I am. I'm afraid it might be my parole officer.

STACY
Parole officer?

He gestures to silence her and then -

ROSS
(casual)
Hello?

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE - INTERCUT

CLARK, late 30's, manic, pushes a heavy, modern looking couch through the office. He talks fast, like the words need out.

CLARK
Where the hell are you? We were supposed to meet an hour ago. We-

As Clark goes on Ross looks at Stacy, relieved.

ROSS
It's just my brother.

She moves warily into the bathroom, not nearly as relieved. As Clark GRINDS the couch across the floor-

CLARK
This is important and obviously difficult for me, Ross, and I mapped out a whole new strategy and you promised that before we went in-

CONTINUED:

ROSS
Clark. Clark. What is that noise?

CLARK
It's the furniture. The furniture has been arranged very confrontationally, okay? I don't know how I didn't pick up on it before. That's on me. But, it's absolutely costing us business. All these tables-

ROSS
You're at the office?

CLARK
Yes.

ROSS
You slept there?

CLARK
Oh no. I haven't slept.

ROSS
Clark-

CLARK
I know! I'm on top of it. I did a full self assessment and in addition to the furniture issues, I've realized we're a person short. We need another person. I need another person. I've hired another person. And we should talk before-

ROSS
Clark, you do realize we can't pay the people we already have, right?

Stacy peeks tentatively out of the bathroom.

STACY
Exactly what sort of parole are we talking about?

ROSS
Strictly white collar. Seriously, you can come out. I was barely even in prison.

STACY
Prison.

She goes back into the bathroom and closes the door.

ROSS
(to Clark)
Look, I'm on my way. Stop moving things, okay?

CLARK
Yes. Fine. Wait. Ross?

CONTINUED: (2)

ROSS
Yeah.

CLARK
I'm gonna keep moving the furniture. I don't know why I said I'd stop.

ROSS
I'll be there in ten minutes.

Ross hangs up, starts to dress.

STACY (O.S.)
(from the bathroom)
You said you were an architect.

ROSS
Technically, you said you were an architect first.

STACY
(stepping out)
That's because I AM an architect.

ROSS
Right. And then I said I was an architect because when people discover they suddenly have something in common they immediately feel more at ease and less like strangers. It's part of this process called 'mirroring'?

STACY
'Process'?

ROSS
Like a way to make people feel more comfortable and... connected.

STACY
By lying?

ROSS
'Mirroring'.

STACY
I missed the difference.

ROSS
Well, it's a... science thing.

STACY
Did you really go to NYU?

ROSS
I... no. I mean I went to college. Just not that one.

STACY
Is Hud really your favorite movie?

CONTINUED: (3)

ROSS
I haven't actually seen it, but I youtubed the fifty eggs scene while you were in the bathroom last night and just based on that, yeah, I think it's safe to put it near the top of the list.

STACY
Your secret love of Taylor Swift music?

Ross just CRINGES and shakes his head as he finishes dressing, moves toward the door.

STACY
My God, are you really even divorced?

ROSS
Yes. Very yes. I am SUPER divorced. Honestly, it still feels good just to say it out loud.

STACY
Did you just use the word 'honestly'?

ROSS
Look, I know it sounds a little strange, but it's a technique -

STACY
Oh, well if it's a technique-

ROSS
- we use in this new business I started with my brother who's like a genius with psychology and honestly-

STACY
You did it again.

ROSS
- it's all very new to me and I just didn't realize it would be this... effective. I swear I wasn't aiming any higher than getting your number. YOU asked ME to come home with you, remember?

She does remember. They stop in the doorway. One more chance.

STACY
Is your name really Royce?

ROSS
(cringing)
It's Ross.

Her expression goes flat. Off the door SLAMMING in his face-

INT. CAR - MORNING

Ross and Clark whip into a parking space.

CONTINUED:

CLARK
We lead with our weaknesses.

ROSS
This is your new strategy? You understand that this is the last investor willing to talk to us? That Latrell worked this guy's assistant for a month to get us this meeting?

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

As they get out of the car-

CLARK
I understand those things so well I was actually at the office at the agreed upon time.

ROSS
In a way my absence is directly attributable to you.

CLARK
I never remotely suggested you use the research to pick up women.

ROSS
You should have.
(dawning)
God, maybe that's what we should be selling.

As Clark walks and talks FAST Ross struggles to keep up.

CLARK
The studies show you're judged to be more likable if you begin by admitting to your faults rather than waiting. In fact, it actually makes you more likable than someone with no faults at all. We'd be better off making up things to admit to than appearing to be perfect.

ROSS
I highly doubt we have to worry about appearing perfect.
(grabs, stops Clark)
Are we racing?

CLARK
I'm excited.

ROSS
Is there an excitement level just below jogging into the meeting?

CLARK
I'm not jogging. This is jogging.

Before he can begin actually jogging, Ross grabs him.

CONTINUED:

ROSS
Why aren't you sleeping at home?

CLARK
Well, I wasn't sleeping, so it didn't make sense to-

ROSS
You know what I mean.

CLARK
There's still a lot of Beth's stuff there, and I can't get rid of it because I'm not ready to get rid of it but I can't be around it-

ROSS
Clark, you've got to stop this. She was just some girl. You've had other-

CLARK
No. No, not like this, not like-
(quick beat)
You're killing my mojo here, Ross. This is killing it. So let's do this later because right now I'm ready to shake the money tree. I'm ready to dominate. Can we go dominate? Let's go dominate.

Clark heads in. Ross stands, concerned.

ROSS
Is there a level just below dominate?

INT. HIGH RISE - WINDOW OFFICE

Clark and Ross sit across from TED SANDERS, late 50's, balding, short, busy. Ross leads. Clark vibrates.

ROSS
In 2008 a group of psychologists decided to see if instead of just observing people in the lab, they could use what they'd learned to actually manipulate them in the real world. Specifically, they decided to see if they could influence an election. So, the night before, in a few districts, they called voters from one party and instead of just asking IF they were going to vote, they asked WHEN, and then they asked what the person thought they'd be doing just before they went to vote, a little psychological trick that their research showed would cause the voter to create an unconscious trigger in the following day that would remind them, oh yeah, this is when I'm supposed to go vote. The results - were stunning.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

ROSS (CONT'D)
Turnout from these specially scripted calls blew away traditional get out the vote calls, and just like that, it became very clear that in the right hands, these little observations about human nature that had just been lying around in academic journals could be turned into very powerful tools capable of doing nothing short of helping decide who became the next leader of the free world.

Clark suddenly stands as if he can't take sitting anymore, starts to move impatiently around the room like a boxer.

ROSS
And that got us thinking, what if instead of just trying to manipulate critical elections, you could use this vast body of knowledge to help people manipulate the most important moments in their lives. What if--

Clark can't take it. His words are unleashed in a torrent of pressured speech as he wanders the room fondling Ted's things.

CLARK
What if, Ted, what if we started the way we agreed we were going to start, which was by saying that I'm severely bipolar and my academic career recently imploded when the university became aware I was having an affair with a 22 year old undergraduate student. Also, Ross just finished a two year stint in a minimum security prison for fraud, so there's that. The point is we're not hiding anything, even though not leading with it, like we agreed to, makes it seem like we are, we're not, because we don't need to hide anything because this is an incredible opportunity. Sway the vote for the leader of the free world? Yeah, we can do that. That was my research. But maybe you don't want to get elected president. Maybe you just need help getting the job you always wanted? Or maybe you need to make sure your company is chosen for a billion dollar contract? Or that your daughter doesn't marry the dirtbag freeloading musician she's threatening to elope with. You want to play what if? What if, instead of leaving the big moments to fate, we could manipulate them with 60 years worth of research into human behavior, stacking the deck in your favor, so that when it really, really mattered, you always came out on top?

TED
You're offering me an alternative to fate? Sure, I'll take two.

CONTINUED: (2)

Clark SLAPS the desk, excited.

CLARK
There you go! Now we're cooking!

ROSS
(trying to be calming)
Clark is a world renowned expert in the fields of human behavior, psychology, and motivation, and drawing from the most cutting edge psychological research he's able to tailor a plan to influence any situation so that at that critical, life altering moment-

Clark jumps in, unable to contain himself.

CLARK
Ted, you lost some kind of shareholder revolt you were trying to lead last year, right? We could have won that for you.

TED
You could have constructed a better argument for replacing the board?

CLARK
No, I could have replaced the board without knowing anything about your argument. I saw clips of your presentation. Series A dividends? Hell, I don't know if that was a good argument. But I know you're short. And bald. And you sound a little effeminate. And pointy shoes make you look like an elf. I know you lost when you stood up on the far left side of the conference room. No one important is ever wearing pointy shoes on the far left side of a room, Ted. Ever.

TED
So you'd have changed my shoes and the seating chart and I'd have won.

CLARK
I'd have primed your audience, Ted. Just like you did. Except you had them primed to ignore you.
(very worked up)
Don't you get it Ted? This is how people work. We don't listen to each other. No one's listening to you. No one's listening to me. We don't hear! We react to a million little things we aren't even aware of. The brain's all jedi mind tricks and back doors and secret passageways and if you know about them- Watch this. Watch. Okay-

ROSS
Clark-

CONTINUED: (3)

Clark suddenly GRINDS Ted's desk sideways, KNOCKING things off before Ross leaps up to stop him.

ROSS
Stop.

CLARK
Ross, we can assert his power with just his feet! I'll show you. Go find me a female. Any female. Watch this.

He grabs at Ted's shoes while backing the desk up further.

ROSS
Clark! Stop!

Suddenly Ted's shoes comes off, sending Clark into the desk which goes over with a CRASH. Everyone stares. Long beat.

TED
Exactly how many fates would you say you two have altered so far?

ROSS
Well, we've only been up and running for a couple of months but we've managed to optimize several press releases and-

TED
Press releases.

ROSS
We're just beginning to educate people to the possibilities of what we can do and with an infusion of cash from you-

TED
Uh-huh. Look, I'll buy that there's some science to manipulating people-

CLARK
You'll buy it? It's not something you buy. It's not optional. The science is bulletproof. The science is science.

TED
Then maybe the science isn't the reason you're not getting any business.

CLARK
What's that mean?
(to Ross)
What does he mean?

TED
What I mean is, maybe when someone's life altering moment arrives, a felon and someone too mentally unstable for academics aren't the people you want pulling strings on your behalf.

CONTINUED: (4)

CLARK
I wasn't fired for being mentally unstable. I was fired for sleeping with an undergraduate.

TED
My mistake. Let me just get out my checkbook.

ROSS
Ted-

TED
Look, he's got a stunning resume when it comes to research, publications, experiments, but this is real life. And in the real life, the guy you needed money from is going to have to call a cleaning crew when you finish your pitch. Forgive me, but I think I'll wait for the next bus into this brave new world.

OFF Ross and Clark-

END OF TEASER

ACT I

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE

Ross and Clark step off the elevators, arguing. As they walk-

ROSS
I'm not saying all the time. I'm saying occasionally. For important events. Like meetings with people who could help us pay for things like electricity and all the furniture you enjoy pushing around.

CLARK
Look, I had a strategy and you-

ROSS
Don't change the subject.

CLARK
I can't take the drugs, Ross! Because you know what it's like? It's like when you go for a jog with headphones on and great music playing and it's like life has a soundtrack and then you take the headphones off and suddenly it's just dull and flat. The drugs stop the music, and the music is where the ideas come from.

ROSS
I can think of several ideas we could have done without in that meeting.

They reach offices next to each other. MILES, mid 20's, geeky handsome, and LATRELL, late 20's, serious, step over.

CLARK
Okay, yes, there's some bad with the good, but my condition correlates highly with creativity and some of the greatest minds in history have-

ROSS
We're not talking about history. We're talking about right now. This exact moment in time where we just wasted our best chance to-

LATRELL
We didn't get it?

As Clark walks into his office with Miles in tow-

CLARK
No, Latrell. I blew it. Is that what you wanted to hear, Ross?

ROSS
All I suggested was-

Latrell grabs Ross before he can follow Clark into his office.

CONTINUED:

LATRELL
Hey. This is serious.

ROSS
Does it seem like I'm taking it lightly?

LATRELL
I called every contact I had left and practically offered to mow their lawn to get you in there. Ted was our lifeboat.

ROSS
Then we'll just swim until we find another Ted. We have other-

LATRELL
We have nothing. The landlord is ready to lock us out. I've talked to every bank and investor with a phone. There are no other Teds coming. We needed this Ted.

INT. CLARK'S OFFICE - INTERCUT

Clark paces as Miles watches.

CLARK
You were a very promising graduate student Miles. You shouldn't have followed me here.

MILES
I don't understand. The strategy didn't establish trust?

CLARK
We didn't lead with it. And when I did come in it all came out wrong and-

MILES
Did you talk about a dominance display or seeding behaviors?

CLARK
I talked about a lot of things. I remember trying to take off his shoes.

MILES
Why would you-

CLARK
I was making a point about physical asynchronicity and power positions. I was going to demonstrate how putting his feet between himself and a female-

MILES
The Miller-Barre studies.

CONTINUED:

CLARK
Miller-Barre! Exactly! Except I didn't say Miller-Barre, I ripped off his shoe and flipped over his desk. Where's Claire?

BACK ON LATRELL AND ROSS

LATRELL
You said you could control him.

ROSS
He's just in an up phase right now.

LATRELL
And when will he come down?

ROSS
We don't want down.

LATRELL
What do we want?

ROSS
Something in the middle. It's not an exact science. Look, try to remember, I'm the one who found you. I saw you had talent when everyone else saw a kid with a record, bad grades, and no degree, and I gave you a shot.

LATRELL
You set me up selling illegal investments out of a boiler room and you left in handcuffs! I'm not interested in another shot like that.
(beat)
Where were you last night?

ROSS
You're checking my place now?

LATRELL
I was guessing. Apparently I was right. You haven't changed at all.

Latrell walks away.

ROSS
(calling after Latrell)
One thing has nothing to do with the other!

CLARK
(sticking his head out)
You <u>were</u> late.

ROSS
Yes, that cost us a chance to really hone your new 'we're criminals please hire us plan'.

CONTINUED: (2)

CLARK
The studies are clear Ross-

Suddenly MEGAN, early 20's, knockout, steps over.

MEGAN
Morning.

Megan stops everyone cold. Miles seems most excited.

MILES
Megan. I thought you weren't coming in until Thursday.

Her eyes flick towards Ross, but only Clark seems to note it.

MEGAN
Right. I was just between auditions and thought maybe I'd stop by. Try to learn a little more about the... science, or whatever, behind what you need me to do.

MILES
(confident)
You wanted to see me.

MEGAN
I'm sorry?

CLARK
(to Miles)
I know what you're trying, but that's not how you do it.

MILES
Really. It was declarative and I looked right at her eyes when-

Suddenly Latrell steps back over. Quickly, shocked-

LATRELL
There's... a woman here who says she wants to hire us.

Surprised, they all look at each other for a beat. Then-

CLARK
What are we waiting for? Let's go dominate.

Clark moves toward the lobby with renewed vigor.

ROSS
Dominate was bad, remember? Let's try conversing. Let's-

Suddenly Clark stops short, looks around.

ROSS
What?

CONTINUED: (3)

CLARK
Help me push this chair over to that plant.

INT. MEETING ROOM

Clark and Ross sit in chairs at opposite RIGHT ANGLES from SOPHIE, 40's, and her son TYLER, 10. The effect is that she has to look back and forth between the brothers.

SOPHIE
I don't even know if this is what you do. One of Tyler's doctors suggested maybe you could help. Dr. Allen? He said you used to be faculty at the same medical school.

CLARK
Yes. I was let go for throwing my lunch at a class full of first years.

SOPHIE
He mentioned that.

CLARK
I was also recently let go from another institution for having an affair with an undergraduate. In my own defense I was deeply in love with her and felt like she understood and accepted me exactly as I am.

SOPHIE
O-kay.

Clark shoots a leading glance at Ross. He SIGHS.

ROSS
I've been convicted of securities fraud and spent two years in a minimum security prison. Would you like to hear about the time I accidentally drove off without paying for gas when I was 17?

SOPHIE
Why are you telling me these things?

ROSS
That's <u>such</u> a good question.

CLARK
Because we want you to know we've made mistakes, but we've learned from them, and this is our chance to apply those lessons, and the expertise I've gained through a lifetime of studying human behavior, study that's frankly been at least partly an effort to understand the difficulties I have controlling my own, and use that accumulated knowledge and experience to help people like yourself.

CONTINUED:

ROSS
Where was that answer an hour ago?

CLARK
At the beginning of the meeting if you'd stuck with the plan.
(to Sophie)
I'm sorry, continue.

SOPHIE
Well, Tyler has a heart condition. It makes him very weak and requires invasive surgery to repair his valves almost every year.

TYLER
(smiles weakly)
One more surgery and I'll have had as many broken ribs as Evel Knievel.

Clark cringes sympathetically at this thought.

SOPHIE
The doctors have offered a new permanent treatment that uses stem cells to help regrow the valves. But the insurance company is saying it's experimental and they won't pay for it. We've already been bankrupted by Tyler's bills, so without the insurance we can't possibly afford the procedure and Tyler will just keep suffering through the surgeries.

Ross appears to have heard only one word and his face falls.

ROSS
Bankrupted?

Sophie nods. Ross is done, but Clark's pacing, intrigued.

CLARK
Who have you been talking to?

SOPHIE
Well, we've worked our way up. I have a meeting scheduled with the head of the claims department tomorrow.

CLARK
And he could approve the surgery?

SOPHIE
Yes.

CLARK
That's very good. What's he like? How educated is he? Is he aggressive? Do you have any pictures of his hands?

CONTINUED: (2)

SOPHIE
No... we've only talked a few times. His name is Charles Murray. I don't know much else.

CLARK
That's okay. We'll pull together a full background and figure out-

ROSS
When exactly did you declare bankruptcy?

He emphasizes it for Clark, who seems oblivious.

SOPHIE
About six weeks ago. I'm sorry, I guess I don't fully understand what it is you do.

CLARK
What we do is research and deploy a psychological strategy to make sure the people who've been telling you no decide to say yes. Simply put, we change their minds without them knowing we did it.

TYLER
Like jedi mind tricks.

CLARK
Exactly like jedi mind tricks! I just said that to someone this morning. Ross, didn't I say that?

ROSS
Yes. It went over really well.

CLARK
See, in your case we've just got to change one man's mind, that's called a single point of influence, and there's a number of strategies that might work. You said you're meeting tomorrow-

ROSS
You know what? Before we get too far, let us jump into a meeting. We'll get your contact information and get back to you as soon as possible.

INT. MEETING ROOM - LATER

Clark walks around as Miles, Latrell, Ross and Megan watch.

CLARK
This one's very intriguing.

ROSS
It isn't a one.

CONTINUED:

CLARK
Really? Tell the kid staring at twenty more heart surgeries this isn't a one.

ROSS
Pretty sure his phone's been cut off since they have no money.

MILES
Did you move the chairs in here?

CLARK
Yes.

MILES
I don't know this one.

CLARK
Keeping the chairs at 90 degrees avoids people directly facing each other which minimizes confrontation and makes them more likely to remember what's said.

Miles nods, interesting.

ROSS
MetroHealth has sued their own policy holders to avoid paying for conventional treatment. You've got a better chance of getting a unicorn to perform an experimental surgery than of getting them to then to pay for it.

CLARK
We're not talking about MetroHealth, we're talking about one guy, Charles Murray, and that opens up several very strong strategies-

MILES
Mirroring. Triangulated confidence structuring. Request reversal-

ROSS
It doesn't matter. They're bankrupt. There's ZERO upside.

LATRELL
Maybe the fact that it's impossible is the upside. Look, we can't nail down business or investment because no one seems to believe we can do what we say we can do. So maybe we pro bono this, get a head on the wall, and you and I have something to point to when we're trying to close people who can pay.

CLARK
Wait, are you on our side?

LATRELL
I guess I am.

CONTINUED: (2)

CLARK
Oh. I just assumed you'd be against us. You should really be sitting over here then. And Megan, why don't you sit opposite Ross?

MEGAN
Why?

CLARK
Because looking at someone they're attracted to largely destroys people's ability to form a cogent argument.

She blushes and then as everyone starts to shuffle seats-

ROSS
Stop! Just... sit down.
(to Clark)
You really think you can do this?

CLARK
I've always wanted to see if these effects could be isolated outside of a laboratory enviro-
(off Ross's look)
Yes.

ROSS
You understand that if this blows up then we're completely-

Ross stops like he's just seen an ax murderer in the office.

ROSS
What in the <u>hell</u> is she doing here?

Heads turn and find CLAIRE, 40's, attractive. She waves.

MEGAN
Who is she?

ROSS
My ex-wife.

CLARK
Our new office manager.

The two brothers stare at one another.

CLARK
I told you I needed one more person.

Claire sticks her head in. Clark crosses to hug her.

CLAIRE
Sorry I'm late. Where should I sit?

Clark looks at the room. He's intrigued.

CLARK
Yes. Where <u>should</u> you sit?

<u>END OF ACT I</u>

ACT II

INT. ROSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Ross is fuming. Clark seems oddly composed.

CLARK
Claire calms me down, Ross. She's like my magic feather.

ROSS
Well you may have noticed she has the exact opposite effect on me! Besides, I'm your magic feather.

CLARK
Traditionally, yes. But we're starting a business together which turns out to be full of negative triggers like deadlines and stress and talk about money, and now you're wrapped up in those. I haven't slept in four days. Obviously you don't work anymore.

ROSS
(hurt)
I see.
(beat)
But she's not the answer. Even if you were close when we were married-

CLARK
When you went to prison I was trying to deliver a grant proposal and I hadn't slept for almost two weeks, and I began to believe I needed to go on a cross country mission for God. And I called her. And she came. And the minute I saw her I started to come down. If she just sat in the room with me I could focus. If she laid in the bed with me I could actually sleep. If-

ROSS
You slept together?!

CLARK
We slept in a bed together, yes. After I'd been awake for two weeks!

ROSS
You don't do that. You don't call my ex wife to tuck you in. We ALL got divorced! That's how it works.

CLARK
Were you available? I didn't know they let you out for 'brother's grant proposal has turned into interstate holy mission'. If it weren't for her I'd have ended up in Iowa mowing down satanic corn in a rental car!

CONTINUED:

ROSS
Look, I know it's stressful right now-

CLARK
It's not just work. All my journal entries indicate the fact that I let Beth get away is still causing-

ROSS
Clark, you have to stop with this... Beth was absolutely not 'the one'.

CLARK
She accepted me, Ross. Right from go. All the tricks and gags and ways to hide what I am, I didn't have to do that. She just loved me 'as is'. That doesn't happen.

ROSS
In a few weeks-

CLARK
I'm leaving her ten to fifteen messages a day, Ross. I'm sending 20,000 word emails! The amount I've spent on flowers alone-

ROSS
Clark, you <u>can not</u> be-

CLARK
That's why I need Claire! Why WE need Claire. She'll keep me from going to the place I was in during the pitch! Help me sleep and stop moving furniture. Get control before I'm charged with stalking a former student!

ROSS
She turned me in, Clark! I spent two years in prison because my own wife-

CLAIRE
(in doorway)
You spent two years in prison because you were a fraud.
(to Clark)
I told you he'd be like this.

ROSS
Then why the hell did you come?

CLAIRE
Because Clark asked for my help! And if he's working with you God knows he needs it.

ROSS
So when he asks you come running. When I ask you run away?

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE
He’s not asking me to break the law!

ROSS
All I asked for was a little time to-
(to Clark)
Forget it. I can’t. There’s no way.

CLARK
Ross, I told you I’m not cut out for the real world. I told you I should be looking for another teaching job. But you wanted me to try, and if you want me to stay, then I need her. By which I mean, I won’t do it without her.

Ross stares, sees Clark’s dead serious. Claire just smiles.

CLARK
Why don’t you take the rest of the day-

ROSS
I don’t want to take the rest of the day. I want to help figure out-

CLARK
I’ll get more done without you. Please, just let Claire sit with Miles and I. We’ll figure it out.

That stings. Clark pats his shoulder, turns, smiles at Claire.

CLARK
You want to meet the gang? You’re going to love them. Megan, she’s an actress we use, or would use if we ever did anything, she was in an infomercial once. Did you ever see the one for that thing that was like an oven mitt for the shower?

OFF Ross, stunned at how quickly he’s been sidelined.

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

There’s a whiteboard full of ideas and cross outs. A table littered with junk food wrappers and drinks. Clark and Miles look spent. Claire sleeps curled up on the couch.

MILES
I really feel like a request reversal is the best way to-

CLARK
It’s a first order effect and we can’t teach a nervous mother to do it in-
(checking watch, alarmed)
- four hours! My God. Four hours!

Clark starts to stress, pace. He recognizes this, walks over the couch, more or less sits on Claire. She wakes with a jolt.

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE
What... what's happening?

CLARK
Nothing, sorry, I was getting a little... Is this okay? You can go back to sleep.

CLAIRE
It's okay. This is fine.

He relaxes some, though his leg continues to bounce rapidly.

CLARK
We just need a way to prime his response.
(light bulb)
What if instead of focusing on getting him to help Sophie and Tyler specifically we focused on making him believe he's the kind of person who always helps people in need?

MILES
You want to suddenly turn him into a kind and generous guy?

CLARK
Yes.

MILES
In four hours.

CLARK
Yes.

MILES
How?

CLARK
Adrenalized implantation.

MILES
(impressed)
That's... Has that ever been tried under these kind of-

CLARK
No.

MILES
We'd need a scenario that-

CLARK
Right.

MILES
And implantation, we'd need someone to-

CLARK
Exactly.

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE
Wait. Will someone finish a sentence? What are we talking about?

CLARK
Adrenalized implantation. It's- okay, we've known for a long time that incidents that occur when you significantly raise adrenaline levels become highly memorable, almost like they're seared into your brain. Think of a car crash, or a soldier in a firefight. And we know from talking to people who've been in these highly adrenalized circumstances, that what you do, your actions under fire, you start see those as character defining, almost like you get a glimpse of your true self. So the question became, if we created the circumstances that elevated your adrenaline levels, if we guided your reaction and your thoughts, could we essentially <u>implant</u> thoughts that you would begin to see as part of your deepest character?

MILES
It's almost like when you raise someone's adrenaline levels you turn their brain into wet cement, and you can write anything you want about them before it dries and they'll believe it's a deep personal truth. When I was Clark's graduate assistant I drew up a proposal to show how it could be used to get a candidate to pull out of the race for student body president.

CLARK
Which I denied because it would have been highly unethical.

MILES
My point is it would have worked.

CLARK
The question isn't always 'can you' do something, Miles, sometimes it's 'should you'. I seem to remember you getting expelled for getting that one wrong.

CLAIRE
But you think this would work on our guy?

CLARK
IF we could spike his adrenaline levels and implant the idea that he's the kind of person we need him to be, the kind of person who would be willing to help a family in desperate need, then yes, the research suggests that's exactly how he'll behave.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLARK (CONT'D)
(beat, to Miles)
You said he rides the bus to work?

MILES
Yes.

CLARK
Ok. Ok. So we put Megan in a distress scenario and then she does the implantation. And for a heavy we get-

MILES
Latrell?

CLARK
Latrell.

MILES
Would he do it?

CLAIRE
Do what?

Off Miles and Clark -

INT. RENTAL VAN - MORNING

Clark, Claire, Miles and Megan, who's dressed simply but looks striking, surround Latrell, who's dressed like a scary vagrant. As Clark hands Latrell a mic and earpiece-

LATRELL
You want me to fight him?

MILES
Just a little.

CLARK
(to Miles)
No.
(to Latrell)
No. I want you to provoke an adrenalized response.

LATRELL
That sounds like a fight.

MEGAN
I thought you meant fight too.

CLARK
No fight! Okay! I told you, just be threatening until he -

Suddenly the van door slides open revealing Ross, not happy.

ROSS
What the hell? Our first job and you're going to do it without me?

CONTINUED:

CLARK
I sent you a text. There wasn't time for anything else. We spent all night working out a plan and barely had a chance to-

ROSS
What plan?

LATRELL
They want me to get in a fight with Charles Murray.

ROSS
What?

CLARK
Latrell-

ROSS
Beat him into giving the kid an operation? That's your plan? That doesn't sound like psychological manipulation, it sounds like you spent all night watching Goodfellas.

CLAIRE
There's not going to be a fight. Latrell's just going to upset the guy until he wants to fight so Megan can redefine his character. It's called adrelanized implantation.

Clark's impressed. Ross is jealous that he's not in the know.

LATRELL
If you're all so excited about it, why can't one of you do it?

MILES
Because you're black.

LATRELL
Oh, there's no white homeless people?!

CLARK
He just means the racial differences between you and Murray will get the most adrenalized out group response. But the anger's good. Use that.

MEGAN
(looking up the street)
I think that's him.

Heads turn to see CHARLES MURRAY, late 30's, meek, balding, bad tie, coming down far end of the block.

ROSS
Him? He's supposed to want to fight Latrell? That guy's never been in a fight in his life.

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE
Tell him about his hands.

ROSS
What about his hands? And why are you acting like you know everything?

CLAIRE
Because I was actually there when we put the plan together.

ROSS
He asked me to go home.

CLAIRE
Exactly. And he asked me to stay.

MILES
His ring finger is much longer than his index.

ROSS
What's that have to do with anything?

CLARK
There was a road rage study that determined the most reliable predictor of who would fly off the handle wasn't body type or appearance, but surprisingly, high testosterone exposure levels suggested by index to ring finger proportions.

MILES
This guys' fingers indicate he's not only provokable, he might actually go into some kind of blind rage. We're filming this, right?

LATRELL
This is not what I signed up for.

Latrell starts to take off the clothes. Megan reaches out.

MEGAN
You'll be fine. I always get nervous before auditions. But once you open your mouth it will go away.

LATRELL
I'm not an actor! I do business development.

MEGAN
But I'll be with you. Just focus on me. Okay?

Latrell seems bolstered, maybe a bit infatuated.

CLARK
Yes! Megan, that's exactly the sort of reassurance display we're looking for.

CONTINUED: (3)

MEGAN
But I really meant it.

CLARK
Doesn't matter. Do the implantation just like that. Alright. We ready?

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

Charles waits for the bus. Megan sits on the other end of the bench. They smile briefly at one another.

EXT. STREET - INTERCUT

Latrell, nervous, makes his way toward the bus stop. He hesitates. He speaks into a mic we can't see.

LATRELL
Guys, seriously, I don't think I can-

EXT. CORNER - INTERCUT

Clark, Claire, and Ross watch from the end of the block.

CLARK
(into walkie)
Stop whining and just do it!
(to Claire and Ross)
Sudden negative reinforcement can help alleviate reluctance and-

ROSS
I'm familiar with 'yelling at someone'. You don't really have to explain it.

CLAIRE
I wouldn't have thought one of your ponzi scheme jockeys would have so much trouble playing a bad guy.

ROSS
Latrell's not like that. He was only good because he never knew the investments we were selling weren't real.

CLAIRE
Ah. So you lied to him too. We should start a support group.

As Clark watches, Ross pulls Claire a couple steps away.

ROSS
Is that why you're here? To keep raking me over the coals?

CLAIRE
Nice to see you still assume everything revolves around you.

CONTINUED:

ROSS
Then what it is? You want more money? The lawyers took everything that-

CLAIRE
I never cared about money. That was you.

ROSS
Look, let's just be honest. This isn't going to work. Stop filling his head with this crap about needing you and let's just leave each other alone.

CLAIRE
He does need me. If you want to be left alone, maybe you should go.

ROSS
Me? This whole thing was my idea.

CLAIRE
Exactly. Your ideas tend to end in depositions.

ROSS
I had that under control. I was making it legitimate when my wife turned me in-

CLAIRE
I didn't turn you in. You told me our whole life was a lie two days before a man with a badge started asking me questions. What was I supposed to say?

ROSS
Nothing!

ON LATRELL who's made it to the bus stop, but just stands in front of Megan, frozen. She looks at him, eyes pleading.

LATRELL
(weakly)
Hey. You're uh... you...

But he just trails off. As Megan stares up at him-

ON CLARK-

CLARK
(into walkie)
Come on Latrell. Come on.

EXT. FAR CORNER - INTERCUT

Miles sees THE BUS coming down the block.

MILES
(into walkie)
Guys. Bus incoming. Time to go.

CONTINUED:

LATRELL GLANCES up, sees the bus. Still he can't do it.

BACK ON CLAIRE AND ROSS who continue fighting, oblivious.

CLAIRE
You know what the most insulting part was? Not that they hauled me in for questioning a hundred times. But that they just couldn't believe I didn't know the whole time. That someone could really lie to their wife about almost <u>every</u> aspect of their life together. They didn't think that was possible. I told them obviously they hadn't spent enough time with you.

ROSS
I was trying to protect you. I didn't-

Suddenly CLARK STARTS to come unglued.

CLARK
Will you two stop it! We're right in the middle of a delicate- and Latrell won't - and the bus is-

Clark suddenly turns around and starts to KICK the van. Over and over. Hard.

CLARK
(into walkie)
Latrell! DO IT! NOW! What is wrong with you! Why won't you- NOW! Latrell! Now! Now! Now! Now!

Suddenly Claire hugs him, pinning his arms to his side. She puts her lips right next to his ear. It's almost intimate.

CLAIRE
(whispering)
Hey. It's okay. It's okay. Relax.

Ross watches, surprised, somewhat jealous, that this actually seems to bring Clark down.

MEGAN LOOKS UP, sees the bus is almost there. She locks eyes with Latrell. She gives him a tiny smile and confident nod. Latrell absorbs that and then suddenly...

LATRELL
HEY!

Both Megan and Charles jump at the sound of Latrell's voice.

ON CLARK as he looks up, buoyed by the sound of Latrell through the walkie, actually doing it.

BACK ON LATRELL-

LATRELL
You're on my bench! That's my bench!

CONTINUED: (2)

MEGAN
I'm sorry, I -

She starts to get up, but Latrell pushes her back down. That causes Charles to speak up, although meekly.

CHARLES
Hey, there's no need to-

Latrell suddenly wheels on him.

LATRELL
What! What did you say!

Charles freezes, intimidated. Latrell waits, unsure.

CLARK, CLAIRE, and ROSS are watching.

CLARK
(calmed, into walkie)
Don't let up, Latrell. He'll snap. I promise. Just keep going.

AS THE BUS BEARS DOWN, Latrell decides to go for it. He steps closer to Charles.

LATRELL
You have a problem?! Huh?!

CHARLES
No. I was just saying that-

Latrell SHOVES Charles. And with that... Charles snaps. He SHOVES Latrell back and comes after him like a rabid dog.

CHARLES
DON'T TOUCH ME! YOU HEAR ME! I WILL-

SLOW MOTION for a beat as Charles screams, veins popping, spittle flying. Latrell doing the same as he backs away.

RESUME as the bus stops-

CHARLES
GET OUT OF HERE! GO! NOW!

Latrell turns, moves down the block. The BUS DRIVER sticks his head out of the bus.

BUS DRIVER
Everything okay?

As Charles turns back toward the bus, shaking with adrenaline, Megan looks at him admiringly.

MEGAN
Yeah. We're fine now.

As they step toward the bus, she puts a hand on Charles' arm.

MEGAN
Thank you.

CONTINUED: (3)

Charles looks at her, nods.

INT. VAN

Miles drives, Claire in the passenger seat, Clark, Latrell, and Ross watching intently as they follow the bus.

CLARK
(to Ross)
See, at the moment he's completely suggestible. Everything she puts in his head now will crystallize into the new way he sees himself once the adrenaline fades.

INT. BUS - INTERCUT

Megan sits next to Charles.

MEGAN
I just... You don't meet a lot of people who are willing to stick their neck out like that. To help someone they don't even know just because it's like... the right thing.

CHARLES
It really wasn't that big a deal. I just-

MEGAN
It was Charles. If you hadn't been there, if you hadn't been... the kind of person you are... I'm just lucky you're one of the good ones.

She smiles warmly. The bus stops as this washes over him -

INT. VAN

They watch as Megan and Charles get off. She scribbles on a piece of paper and hands it to him.

LATRELL
What's she doing?

MILES
Giving him her number. Or a number anyway. It'll keep him thinking about her and by extension the type of person she believes him to be when he sits down with Sophie and Tyler.

They watch as Megan gives Charles a little kiss on the cheek as they part and he heads toward the MetroHealth building.

ROSS
And all that's really going to make him say yes?

INT. METROHEALTH INSURANCE - LOBBY - INTERCUT

Charles gets off the elevator grinning as he looks at Megan's number on a scrap of paper.

CLARK (V.O.)
No. But It's going to make him believe that when someone's really in need, he's the kind of person who says yes.

Sophie and Tyler look up from their chairs, lock eyes with Charles. A beat, then he offers them a smile, motions them toward his office. As they rise-

CLARK (V.O.)
We can't force him to say one thing or another. It's not mind control.

INT. VAN - RESUME

Clark looks at Ross.

CLARK
But we can make him believe he's a different, better person, and we can hope that leads to a different, better answer.

Suddenly the van door opens, revealing Megan.

MEGAN
How'd we do?

Everyone looks Clark.

CLARK
I'd say if we get a call in the next three hours we have a... 40% chance?

MILES
No offense, but shouldn't you overestimate. I assume you've read the papers arguing that even expressing false confidence can positively shape outcomes?

CLARK
The lead confederate in a highly experimental procedure we developed and deployed in six hours was our untrained head of business development dressed a homeless person. I was overestimating, Miles. By a lot.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE

Sophie, Tyler, Miles, and Latrell sit, waiting. Clark paces. He starts to move an armchair. Ross guides him to sit.

CLARK
It's been too long. The effect can fade. If you miss the window-

ROSS
Stop. You said yourself that it would take some time, that he'd need to create a narrative to feel like he came to the decision on his own.

CLARK
But that wouldn't take-

ROSS
Clark- you did a good job.

A beat as Clark takes those words to heart. He nods. From the other part of the room a phone RINGS.

MILES
It's him.

Clark and Ross move quickly to Sophie who's now on the phone.

SOPHIE
Yes. Yes. I understand. Right. Oh. Okay. Yes. I appreciate it.

When she hangs up she has tears in her eyes. Everyone is afraid to ask. She stands, unable to speak, and hugs Clark.

SOPHIE
(through tears)
Thank you.

CLARK
Yes! Okay! For a second there I was worried that maybe we failed to sufficiently raise the level of his-

Sophie turns away, not listening, and hugs Tyler.

CLARK
Oh, right.

Clark turns, high fives Ross and other members of the team. When he gets to Claire, they hug. Ross stares, troubled.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Clark is on a small karaoke stage passionately belting out "I Want To Know What Love Is". Megan and Claire are at one end of a long table while Ross, Miles, and Latrell are deep in excited, drunken conversation at the other.

CONTINUED:

ROSS
I'm talking about the people with deep pockets. Politicians trying to get elected.

MILES
Politicians trying to avoid jail.

ROSS
Billionaire trying to take over a company.

MILES
Or effect the stock price. There's almost nothing you can't manipulate. You could start a war if you wanted.

LATRELL
Why the hell would you want to start a war?

MILES
Stop a war then. You could do either.

ROSS
The point is, once the word gets out about what we can do, there's going to be millions just there for the taking.

LATRELL
Hey, let's not forget we just gave that kid a whole new life. That's pretty great. And there's a lot more people like that, regular, innocent people getting screwed who could use our help. Instead of just chasing the highest bidder wouldn't it be cool to actually fix some things?

Ross and Miles look at each other.

ROSS
Work for free? Not really.

MILES
I was more drawn to the millions part.

ON MEGAN AND CLAIRE as Claire notes Megan staring at Ross.

CLAIRE
How'd they find you?

MEGAN
Answered an ad. Although, when I sat down with Ross the whole thing sounded kinda sketchy. I actually turned him down.

CLAIRE
So what are you doing here?

CONTINUED: (2)

MEGAN
He called me after. Said he was willing to bet that when most people looked at me they just saw a very pretty face, that I was the kind of person who probably got sent on a lot of auditions for parts where the character's name was just 'HOT GIRL'. Which is totally true. He said he thought I could do a lot more than that. And that if I took this job, he'd make sure I got to.

CLAIRE
(watching Megan's stare at Ross)
Can I give you some advice? You don't want to do that.

MEGAN
What?

CLAIRE
I recognize the look. I'm not saying he's not attractive. I'm just saying it would end badly.

MEGAN
How long ago did you guys-

CLAIRE
Three years.

MEGAN
What happened?

CLAIRE
It's hard to boil years of lies down to a single sentence. Just trust me. It would feel great, and then it would hurt. Bad.

MEGAN
And so, now you and Clark...?

CLAIRE
What?

MEGAN
I recognize the look too. I'm not judging. My brother married his ex's roommate. I mean, it's not the same-

CLAIRE
No. No, no, no. We're just close friends. That's all.

As they both watch Clark finishing his song-

MEGAN
Okay.
(beat)
How many times has he sung this song?

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE
I think this is number four. His doctor said it was a good outlet.
(beat)
I had a look?

MEGAN
I thought I saw a look.

CLAIRE
Just friends.

MEGAN
Okay.

ON CLARK as he finishes with a flourish, then jumps down, moves to the table and dives in as if he never left.

CLARK
Also, I just remembered this Danish fisherman study which was interesting because it was scalable, so like if we ever got a job where you were targeting a whole population you-

Clark suddenly stops as he notes the COUPLE now on stage, singing. They LAUGH, hold hands, smile at each other.

CLARK
- they... uh... they told them...

MILES
Is this the one where they convinced the fisherman to tax themselves with mass subliminal suggestion?

CLARK
It uh... what?

CLAIRE
Clark? Are you okay?

CLARK
(still watching the couple)
I.. yeah. Fine.
(suddenly)
Anyway, great night. Good job. I'm super tired. I'm gonna go. I'll see you guys tomorrow.

He barely takes a step when -

ROSS
Whoa! What's the hurry all of a sudden?

CLARK
Nothing. No hurry. I just need to go.

CLAIRE
I'll take you. I'm about ready myself.

CONTINUED: (4)

ROSS
I'll take him. He can survive without you constantly holding his hand.

CLAIRE
Really? Because when he called that's pretty much exactly-

CLARK
Guys! I want to walk. I need to walk. I'm walking. I'll see you tomorrow.

CLAIRE
Clark.

ROSS
Clark.

But he's already rushing for the door. Claire looks at Ross, throws down a twenty, shakes her head is disgust.

ROSS
You're blaming me? You're the one who-

Claire just heads for the door.

EXT. BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Claire steps out.

CLAIRE
Clark?

She looks up and down the street. Clark's gone.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - NIGHT

Clark jogs across campus until he comes to some two story apartments. He rushes to a bottom door and begins KNOCKING.

CLARK
Beth! Beth it's me. Beth we just need to talk. Come on. Please!

More KNOCKING as he dials his phone. He gets voicemail.

CLARK
Beth, come on! Please. I love you Beth! Can I say that to your face? Can I say it to your face and if you don't feel anything, if you don't love me, if it doesn't make any difference then-

A GIRL steps out of an apartment above.

GIRL
Professor Edwards?

He looks up.

CLARK
Oh. Hi. Yes. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be a disturbance. I'm just trying-

CONTINUED:

GIRL
She moved out. Like, two weeks ago.

Clark is stunned.

CLARK
No.

GIRL
Yeah.

CLARK
Where?

GIRL
I don't know. I just saw movers and-

CLARK
NO!

The girl recoils. He rushes back to the door, BEATING on it.

CLARK
No, no, no, no, no, no, no! BETH!

He steps away from the door, looks around, spots a large rock. He picks it up, HEAVES it through a window. The Girl rushes back into her apartment. Clark reaches through the broken glass, unlocks Beth's door.

INT. BETH'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Clark steps inside. It's completely empty. He stares in disbelief. He stalks around, manic, even as tears begin to flow. He spots a wad of paper, picks it up. It's just doodles, markouts. Trash. But he stares at it, begins to openly CRY.

He lays down, clutching the paper. And off his tears -

INT. ROSS'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sunlight. Rumpled sheets. Ross next to a RANDOM GIRL. His cell RINGS.

ROSS
(groggy, into phone)
What?
(suddenly alert)
I'll be right there.

He dives out of bed, grabs keys and bolts. Hold on RANDOM GIRL as she rolls over, discovers he's gone. As she looks around -

RANDOM GIRL
Royce?

INT. CAMPUS POLICE STATION - MORNING

Clark sits silently off to the side as Ross talks with an OFFICER and the UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT.

CONTINUED:

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT
Part of our agreement was that he was not allowed back on campus. Now I don't want to press charges but-

ROSS
I understand. I do. The thing is he was off the medication and- but- we actually just brought in someone to help him. A specialist. So, if there's any way you could-

ON CLARK who watches them talking but can't hear. As they all look his direction -

INT. ROSS'S CAR

Ross and Clark drive in SILENCE.

ROSS
Should I take you-

CLARK
No.

ROSS
You could come to my-

CLARK
No.

ROSS
Clark. You need to rest. If you hadn't been awake for the last-

CLARK
Ross... not now.

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE

Clark and Ross step off the elevators to find Latrell and Miles worked up.

LATRELL
What the hell? Why aren't you answering your phone?

ROSS
Been a little busy.

LATRELL
We have a problem.

ROSS
I have one of those also.

MILES
Murray ok'd the surgery but it got kicked upstairs and-

ROSS
Miles, not now!

CONTINUED:

LATRELL
It's been denied, Ross!

This stops Clark and Ross in their tracks. Before they can ask-

LATRELL
Murray agreed, but they immediately convened a 'review panel' to give themselves another out. And they're-

MILES
It's a sham. Seven people, no medical training, obvious biases, and we'd need a unanimous recommendation to go forward. We could go after them, but you're talking about planning and executing seven different-

LATRELL
We're literally looking at eviction, Ross. We don't have time or resources to chase this and without it we've got nothing to-

CRASH! Everyone looks up to see that Clark has upended a table. Off their looks-

CLARK
Oh, I'm sorry. You're right. It would really work better over there.

CRASH. He hurls the table to the other side of the room.

ROSS
Clark! Stop!

CLARK
Why, Ross! It doesn't matter. None of it matters. They're going to take it all anyway.

ROSS
Relax. We just need to put our heads together and-

CLARK
I don't want to put our heads together! Okay! I don't want to do this. I don't want to be your little golden goose or whatever. I told you this wouldn't work. I told you I didn't belong here.

ROSS
You were doing fine. This is a setback. It's not-

CLARK
I'm not doing fine, Ross! I need to get away from here. Everything here makes me think of her. I -

CONTINUED: (2)

ROSS
Stop it with this girl! Christ! Whatever you think it was, it wasn't.

CLARK
How do you know!

ROSS
I just know! And you need to face that and move on.

As Clark heads for the elevators-

CLARK
Great! Fine. I'll move on. To Alaska, or Spain, or some mental hospital in South America. But I'm not staying here! There's triggers all over the-

ROSS
I can help you if you'll let me! Remember when dad died? You were much worse than this and I put you back together. Me. Why are you shutting me out?

CLARK
Because I'm telling you I want to get away from here and you're not listening. Because you don't care about me, you just can't stand the idea of your latest get rich quick scheme walking out the door before you-

ROSS
This is not about money!

CLARK
Good! Then it shouldn't matter that I QUIT! But you don't seem to grasp that there isn't even anything left TO QUIT. Let me know when you're ready face <u>that</u> and move on.

Clark takes the stairs and SLAMS the door behind him. The others stand in silence until Ross suddenly HURLS a chair.

Latrell just stares at Ross, disappointed.

LATRELL
Feel better?
(beat)
Then knock it off. Last thing I need is to be fighting over security deposits when all this goes back.

Latrell walks into an office. Off Ross -

<u>END OF ACT III</u>

ACT IV

INT. ROSS'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The office is mostly dark, still a mess. Ross is behind his desk. Miles walks past with a cardboard box full of stuff.

ROSS
Miles?

A long beat. Miles reappears in the doorway. They stare.

ROSS
Are you seriously walking out of here with a cardboard box?

MILES
I guess I thought we were pretty much done. I mean, we're out of ideas and time, right?

ROSS
That depends. How do you feel about moral ambiguity?

Miles steps in, puts down his box, intrigued.

MILES
I'm pretty comfortable with it, actually.

ROSS
We hold a press conference.

MILES
(shakes his head)
There's a million stories about insurance companies screwing people. Raking them over the coals is only likely to solidify their position.

ROSS
What if I didn't want to rake them over the coals? What if I wanted to thank them?

MILES
Thank them for what?

ROSS
Approving the surgery.

MILES
But they denied it.

ROSS
No one at the press conference will know that.

Miles begins to see it.

CONTINUED:

MILES
You put the kid up there, ‘thanks for saving my life’, generate a ton of positive press, make it a feel good story and basically dare them to ruin it by backing out.

ROSS
Pretty much.

MILES
I guess I could pull together some data, try to make a real case when they come in with their hair on fire. Still, it’s insanely risky. I mean the kid’s no actor. You want it to seem real it would mean convincing him and his mom we’d actually gotten MetroHealth back on board, and if it went wrong and we yanked it away AGAIN-

ROSS
They’d be right where they are now.

MILES
But we’d be in very iffy legal territory. Probably beyond iffy. MetroHealth calls our bluff, we’d be toast.

ROSS
You’re walking out the door with a cardboard box. I think we’re already staring down the barrel of being toast.

MILES
Do you think Megan would be willing to-

ROSS
I’ll get her on board.

Off Miles, a little hurt that Ross has that ability.

INT. MEGAN’S APARTMENT - MORNING

Megan cups a mug of coffee, still in her PJ’s as she listens skeptically to Ross, who’s noticeably cleaned up.

ROSS
And since Sophie never met you, she won’t know you’re with us.

MEGAN
It doesn’t sound... legal.

ROSS
It’s a gray area. But it’s important. Not just for us. This kid, this changes his life.

CONTINUED:

MEGAN
Suddenly you're concerned about the kid?

ROSS
I'm concerned you'll say no to me, so I'm asking you for the kid.

MEGAN
No you're not. You know I'll say yes to you and you're only bringing up the kid so we can both pretend that's not how you got me to do it.

ROSS
Megan, I wasn't trying to-

MEGAN
Then why come over here looking all... Why not just call? Or have someone else call?

Ross doesn't have a quick answer.

MEGAN
Tell you what. I'm going to change and I'm going to help. For the kid. But for the record, I'd have done it for you. In the future I'd be really careful how you play that card.

OFF Ross as she walks out of the room-

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE - DAY

Miles ushers out a group 15 ADULTS OF VARIOUS ETHNICITIES.

MILES
Thank you all very much.

Claire gets off one of the elevators, confused by the crowd.

CLAIRE
Miles?

MILES
Oh. Hey.

CLAIRE
What's-

Another elevator opens revealing a REPORTER and CAMERA CREW.

MILES
(to camera crew)
That way. Big conference room.

As the crew goes around a corner Ross comes out of his office with Megan, now in sharp business attire. Miles turns to them.

CONTINUED:

ROSS
(to Miles)
We on schedule?

MILES
Yeah. Three local affiliates, someone from AP. If the pictures are compelling it could get kicked up to national.

CLAIRE
What the hell is going on?

MEGAN
I don't like Heather. It doesn't sound professional. I want to go with Dana. Dana Williams. Is it too late?

MILES
Nope. Dana Williams. Got it.

Megan smiles, steps back as if practicing lines. Now Claire's alarm bells are screaming.

CLAIRE
Where's Clark?

ROSS
At home. I thought you guys would be spooning and massaging by now.

CLAIRE
Ross-

Suddenly, Sophie and Tyler step off an elevator looking nervous and confused. Ross rushes over. Warmly-

ROSS
Hey guys. How are we?

SOPHIE
I... think my head is still spinning a little bit. I can't believe you got them to change their minds. Again. How did you-

ROSS
It doesn't matter. What matters is that it's going to happen. Right?
(to Tyler)
How about you? You ready?

TYLER
I'm a little nervous.

ROSS
Just speak from the heart, you'll be fine.

Megan steps over.

MEGAN
Hi. I'm Dana Williams with MetroHealth-

CONTINUED: (2)

As soon as she says it, Claire starts to drag Ross away.

CLAIRE
Excuse us.

She pulls him around a corner.

CLAIRE
What in the hell are you-

ROSS
We needed a new approach.

CLAIRE
Lying? Fraud?

ROSS
It's not- listen, Miles has pulled together a ton of real... data.

Miles steps over.

MILES
I think we're ready.

CLAIRE
Ross.

ROSS
(to Miles)
Give me a sec.

Miles moves off. Ross turns to Claire.

ROSS
Look, I know you don't think much of me-
(off her HUFF)
And you're probably right. But whatever happened between us, whatever was said, whatever I did, you know more than anyone that I love Clark. How many times did I talk about starting a business with him? How many times did I beg him to pick me over some research grant or associate professorship in the middle of god knows where?

CLAIRE
Because you thought you could make a fortune manipulating people.

ROSS
No. I know I can make a fortune manipulating people. I've been to prison for it. I wanted it because I think we're good for each other. Remember when he was staying with us for six months after the med school let him go? He was in good place then.

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE
Yeah, because I sat with him and talked to him every day while you-

ROSS
Fine. Maybe you're the Clark whisperer. Maybe it was always you. But I was in a good place then too. Remember that? I had my act together. Stayed out of trouble. Even you and me... we were happy. So, fine, maybe he doesn't need me. Maybe I need him. Is that the worst thing in the world? To feel like you're a better person when your brother's around?

CLAIRE
Why are you telling me this?

ROSS
Because he's made it clear over and over, he's not interested in staying for me. But maybe he will for you. And if I can keep this thing alive-

MILES
Ross-

ROSS
Okay. Yeah. I'm coming.

CLAIRE
Ross, please, whatever you're planning-

ROSS
Trust me. It'll be fine.

CLAIRE
Can you think of a single time you said that to me and weren't wrong?

Ross SNORTS a laugh, smiles, walks to the others. Off Claire-

INT. CONFERENCE SPACE - DAY

There's a small dais up front, a few of REPORTERS and CAMERAS aimed at Sophie, Megan, and Tyler, who speaks nervously.

TYLER
So, I really just wanted to say thank you.

Ross and Miles watch from the side. Ross leans over.

ROSS
We should have told him to cry.

MILES
Asking someone to express a particular emotion actually makes it harder for them to do so.

CONTINUED:

ROSS
Really? Does that work for anger too?

ON TYLER at the mic.

TYLER
... and now I'm going to get a chance to see what it's like to be well. The doctors said I might even get to do some of the things I always wanted to. Like play soccer.
(beat, then tearing up)
And now my mom won't have to take care of me all the time. And maybe she'll get to do some of the things she always wanted to too.

At that Sophie breaks and moves to hug Tyler. They both CRY.

MILES
Jackpot.

But when he looks over, Ross is tearing up himself.

ON MEGAN stepping to the mic.

MEGAN
We at MetroHealth certainly thank Tyler for those kind words, but our hope is to create a world where an insurance company doing what's right isn't considered an exception. We've been accused of caring more about the bottom line than people, and sadly there have been times where the charges have seemed warranted. But MetroHealth is changing that, and-.

ON ROSS dialing his phone as Megan continues. Miles leans over to him.

MILES
Is it just me, or is this suddenly feeling more like something we could go to jail over?

ROSS
I wouldn't say MORE. The odds of it blowing up in our faces have always seemed relatively high to me.
(into phone)
Yeah. Ross Edwards, Edwards and Associates. No he doesn't, but I assure you he's going to want to speak with me before the afternoon news hits the air.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

INT. CLARK'S APARTMENT

Clark is wildly throwing things into a suitcase when he looks up, sees Claire standing in his room.

CLARK
What are you- how did you get in here?

CLAIRE
The door was open. Like, you literally left the door hanging open.

CLARK
There was a study that showed an open door makes a home a less of a target-

CLAIRE
You're leaving?

CLARK
I don't belong in this kind of environment.

CLAIRE
Then why did you do it in the first place?

CLARK
I guess Ross got me excited about the puzzle of it. Putting the research into the real world. Pull the strings. But I'm not built for the real world. I think that's obvious now. Academics-

CLAIRE
You've been fired, censured, on probation, or quit every teaching job you've ever had. Why do you keep saying that's where you belong?

CLARK
They tolerate me. Write papers, lecture, issue some apologies, repeat. I get that. I know how to do that.

CLAIRE
Tolerating you is not the same as appreciating you, Clark. It's not the same as caring about you.

CLARK
Ross doesn't really care about-

CLAIRE
He does. Believe me, he's a long way from perfect, but he absolutely cares. He cares so much I think he's about to do something colossally stupid to try to 'fix' everything and keep you here. And here's the thing. I think maybe it's a good idea.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Not whatever he's doing, but you staying. I think maybe this is exactly where you belong. A place where people don't just tolerate you, they need you. I know when you called, when you said you needed me... that felt good. I'm not great at a lot of things, but you made me feel like I was great at... whatever it is I do for you, and that was exciting. I guess if I was really any good you wouldn't packing.

CLARK
It's not you. I... I don't know what happens, okay? Things go well for a while, and I feel like I'm building something and then it's like suddenly everything catches on fire and I just end up watching it burn.

CLAIRE
Then just tell me this- do you want to leave? Or are you afraid to stay? Because if it's the first one, I don't think I can do anything. But if it's the second one... I think maybe I could help you. I could be like, your fire department. And for once, instead of seeing everything disappear, you could see what it's like to save it.

OFF Clark, considering-

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

Ross, Miles, and Megan sit across from TOM DANIELS, 60's, and two other ANGRY METROHEALTH OFFICIALS as a monitor shows a clip where Tyler tearfully hugs his mother. Ross hits pause.

ROSS
Something similar's been picked up by the cable news channels and nightly network broadcasts.

Miles brings up charts and graphs on another monitor.

MILES
Not only is the clip in the news cycle, we're seeing power law resharing on social networks that-

MEGAN
He's saying you're going viral.

MILES
Exactly. Viral. Given the cross platform exposure we'd conservatively put the promotional value of the clip at seven million dollars.
(changing graphs)
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

MILES (CONT'D)
Further, initial focus group testing shows that not only does the story skyrocket MetroHealth's positive name recognition, but that the new business revenue potential dwarfs the promotional value and renders the actual cost of the procedure itself completely insignificant.

All eyes go to Tom. A long beat, then he stands.

TOM DANIELS
You are, as a group, beyond delusional.

ROSS
Mr. Daniels-

TOM DANIELS
Was your hope that a few charts would make it seem less overtly criminal?

ROSS
Our hope was that you'd look at what was on them and recognize a fantastic opportunity for your company.

TOM DANIELS
The only opportunity we're remotely interested in is the opportunity to see you dismantled and prosecuted.

INT/EXT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE

Claire and Clark are rushing in when they run into Latrell.

LATRELL
What's going on?

CLAIRE
You really don't know?

LATRELL
Know what? I had a lunch in Long Beach but the guy stood me up.

CLAIRE
Ross set that?

LATRELL
Yes...

CLARK
Probably wanted to keep you clean in case it went wrong.

As they jump into a waiting elevator-

LATRELL
What 'it'? What's going on?

CONTINUED:

CLARK
She keeps saying extortion, but I'm pretty sure it's covered by false pretenses statutes.

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE

As Clark, Claire, and Latrell step in, the group is coming out of the conference room.

ROSS
Mr. Daniels, hold on a minute. There's no reason to turn a misunderstanding-

TOM DANIELS
Extortion is not a misunderstanding.

ON CLARK overhearing-

CLARK
See, I don't think anyone really understands how that's defined.

CLAIRE
Clark-

Clark takes Latrell's briefcase, hands it to Claire.

CLARK
Sit there, look impatient. Latrell, when I put my hands in my pockets, step over and say Dr. Barnes is very busy.

LATRELL
What? Clark, we-

CLARK
Just do it. Please. Now.

As Claire and Latrell look at each other, uncertain, and take seats, Clark takes a breath and walks right to Tom Daniels.

Clark looks at Ross, who's shocked to see him.

CLARK
Is this the idiot from MetroHealth?

ROSS
(lost)
Clark-

CLARK
(to Daniels)
I told him you guys would be too stupid to accept millions in free publicity, but he kept saying win-win. Win-win. That's the difference between us. I'm more win-lose. Win-destroy.

TOM DANIELS
I'm sorry, who are you?

CONTINUED:

CLARK
You're not sorry. You haven't begun to be sorry. That part's my job.
(indicating Claire)
You recognize her?

TOM DANIELS
No.

CLARK
Of course. That would imply you had some clue what you were doing. That's Dr. Claire Barnes, special liaison to the senate subcommittee on health insurance regulation and reform? You know, the people with the fate of your whole industry in their hands? See they don't think you guys should get to decide for yourselves what is and what isn't experimental. They want a panel of doctors and bureaucrats to do it for you, and they're dying for a case just like this to hammer you with. And boy are we going to hammer. Little teary Tyler and his curable heart condition are going to be sitting in front of congress and you're going to be twisting in your chair covered in so much flop sweat Mark McGuire is going to call to say you came off poorly. And when you end up with some committee telling you how and when to pay up, you're going to be sobbing at the memory that someone once offered you a gift wrapped, win-win, get out of jail free card, and you were too stupid to take it.

As Clark slips his hands into his pockets Latrell comes over.

LATRELL
I'm sorry, but Dr. Barnes really is very busy.

CLARK
Of course. Let's go into my office.

Clark turns to leave with Latrell. A beat and then-

TOM DANIELS
Wait.

Clark halts, looks back. Off Ross, cracking a smile-

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE - LATER

As Ross soberly walks Tom and his associates to the elevator-

TOM DANIELS
We'll take the publicity, we'll take the business, but eventually this is going to catch up with you. I'm going to make sure of it.

CONTINUED:

Ross pulls a card from his pocket, hands it to Tom.

ROSS
Meanwhile, you ever find yourself in a tough spot, you know who to call.

Tom steps on and the elevators close. Ross turns, a huge smile on his face, and hugs Clark.

ROSS
That was brilliant!

MILES
I'm curious how you chose your posture. I assume you know about the threat-aggressor studies from-

Suddenly they're staring at stone faced Claire and Latrell.

ROSS
What? Were you guys not here? We just won.

CLAIRE
No, you just lied and cheated to get what you wanted. Like you've always done. Except this time you dragged all of us into it.

ROSS
Hey, I didn't ask you to be here. We-

CLAIRE
You'd be talking to the police if Clark hadn't saved you.

ROSS
I admit it went a little sideways, but-

CLAIRE
If we're going to do this, there have to be rules. You can't just turn your new business into your old one.

ROSS
What is this? You don't issue demands! I don't work for you!

LATRELL
I'm with her. If it's just going to be another boiler room, I'm out.

Ross starts to respond when-

CLARK
Next time we find another way.

Now Ross is listening. He looks at Clark. Then, calmly-

CONTINUED: (2)

ROSS
You may have noticed that the person responsible for finding other ways wasn't here.

CLARK
I know. But I will be.

ROSS
Really?

CLARK
Can you color in the lines?

ROSS
(beat)
Sure. Okay.

CLARK
Then yeah, really.

Ross smiles, grabs his bag, starts to head out.

CLARK
Where are you going?

ROSS
To see if I can get someone to give us some actual money so you guys can get paid to stand around yelling at me.

CLARK
You want me to come with you?

ROSS
That's okay.

LATRELL
No!

As Ross nears the elevator he stops short.

ROSS
You know, I did manage to get that kid his surgery. Does that matter at all?

CLARK
The question isn't whether what you did matters to us. It's whether how you did it will ever matter to you?

Off that landing on Ross -

INT. HIGH RISE - OFFICE

Ross sits on a couch, 90 degrees from Ted Sanders, the investor we met in the opening.

TED
My assistant is usually harder to bribe than this. What'd you part with?

ROSS
Cash.

CONTINUED:

TED
Not exactly cutting edge.

ROSS
I still believe in the classics.

TED
What'd you get? Fifteen minutes?

ROSS
Ten. Fifteen would have exceeded the maximum daily withdrawal on my ATM.

Ross seems focused on a photo on the wall. He nods toward it.

ROSS
You fly fish?

TED
You've got ten minutes to pitch and that's what you want to talk about?

ROSS
Where do you go?

TED
The Gunnison.

Ross makes a SNORT.

TED
What?

ROSS
Beautiful.

TED
You know it?

ROSS
Dad taught Clark and I to fish there. Just above Almont.

TED
(surprised)
My cabin's near Almont. Gorgeous. How often do you make it back?

ROSS
Not as often as I'd like. Not...

Suddenly Ross can't do it. Maybe 'how' does matter to him.

ROSS
Actually, I've never actually been there. My ten minutes started five minutes ago when she let me in here and I looked at your pictures. There's a sign in that one that says it's the Gunnison.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

ROSS (CONT'D)
Pulled it up on my phone which is the only place I've ever seen Almont and I'm pretty sure I couldn't catch a fish in a bowl. Can I be honest?

TED
The odds do seem against it.

ROSS
I'm a little mixed up at the moment about what's good strategy and what's mirroring and priming and Jedi mind tricks and what's just lying. What I do know is in the last two days we convinced an insurance company to say yes to something they said no to for over two years. And because of that this kid, this boy- what we did is going to change his life. It's a good story. I'll send you the news clips. And if you're looking for a track record, they'll have to do. But I'm telling you- if we can do something impossible once, we can do it again. And once people see that, we won't have to go looking for them, they'll be chasing us. We're not asking you to break the bank, we're asking you to help keep the lights on. And for that, you get to be part of something special. Something new. You said you believed in the science, but not us. And maybe with me that's fair, but not with Clark. With Clark it's completely backwards. The science is just science. Disconnected papers, experiments, observations. Clark's the genius who sees how to bring it to life. And the people who do things for the first time, the true pioneers, they usually aren't like the rest of us. But that's not a reason you run from them. It's why you bet on them.

OFF Ted, considering -

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE - EVENING

Ross steps in, finds everything dark but Clark's office. He looks in, sees Clark resting beside Claire. He lets them be.

As he turns for his own office he sees BETH, an attractive, 23 year old in the lobby. A smile of recognition crosses her face. As Ross rushes over, the smile is not returned.

BETH
Ross, I-

ROSS
What the hell are you doing here?
(before she can speak)
Outside.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - EVENING

Ross is reading Beth the riot act.

ROSS
You cannot be here, Beth. This was NOT the agreement. I paid you a small fortune to walk away never to be-

BETH
(holding out a check)
That's all of it. I don't want it.
(off Ross's stunned silence)
I know it was just supposed to be an act, but something happened. I really... I like him. I tried to go away like we said, but... I want to see if maybe we could make it work.

ROSS
It did work. You got him fired! That's all I asked for. That was the agreement! You can't come back now!

BETH
I'm sorry. But I can't let him go. And he obviously can't let me go either. Look, I'm not going to tell him about our deal. I swear. It would be as bad for me as it would you.

ROSS
Oh really? Are you his brother?

INT. CLARK'S OFFICE

Clark and Claire are now sitting on the couch flipping through a magazine. They're smiling, enjoying each other.

CLARK
(re: the picture)
See the red dress? Red's one of the most basic sexual signals. And see how wide her eyes are? It's a two dimensional come on.

CLAIRE
To sell a faucet?

CLARK
To sell anything. It's called experiential transference. You confuse-

Clark suddenly stops. Claire follows his eyes to find Beth standing in the doorway, Ross just behind her. Clark slowly stands, unsure. A beat, and then he rushes to her. They kiss.

ON CLAIRE who seems troubled, maybe slightly jealous. When Clark and Beth break, Clark turns to Claire and Ross. He's practically coming out of his skin with excitement.

CONTINUED:

CLARK
Sorry. Claire, Ross, this is Beth. Like, Beth, the, you know, Beth.

CLAIRE
Hello.

ROSS
We've met. In the lobby.

CLARK
(to Beth)
What are you... I mean, I left all those messages and went to your place-

BETH
I know. I messed up.

CLARK
(beat, smiling)
Have you eaten?

She shakes her head. Clark grabs his coat.

CLARK
(to Ross and Claire)
I'm... I'll see you guys tomorrow.

INT. EDWARDS & ASSOCIATES OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ross watches as Clark and Beth walk toward the lobby, smiling, talking. Claire joins him in the doorway, watches them go.

CLAIRE
Why do I have a very bad feeling about those two?

ROSS
I have no idea.

Claire grabs her purse, starts to leave. After a few feet she stops. Almost as an afterthought-

CLAIRE
How'd it go? With your investor?

ROSS
We got the money.

CLAIRE
Congratulations.
(beat)
Look at it this way- least we got all the ugly stuff out of the way early.

Nervously watching Clark and Beth kiss by the elevators-

ROSS
Right. Smooth sailing from here on.

END OF SHOW