

MATLOCK

The Reunion Episode: "The Hot Dog Tour"

by  
Allison Boley

MATLOCK  
"The Hot Dog Tour"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. FULTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - COURTROOM - DAY

In his signature gray suit, BENJAMIN MATLOCK approaches ZACHARY GOLDEN -- mid-20's, nerves masked by long-perfected speech and grooming -- on the witness stand.

BEN  
That's a nice suit, Mr. Golden.  
The jewelry business must keep you  
in high cotton.

ZACH  
I resent your implication. I was  
not an accessory to Stephen's plan.

BEN  
I'm not getting at anything of the  
sort. I'm just starting to ask how  
you know my client, Brian Abbott.

Ben nods to the defense table, to daughter and associate LEANNE McINTYRE, and client BRIAN ABBOTT -- 40's, rigid, neck muscles hint at an ex-Green-Beret physique under his suit.

ZACH  
Stephen employed us both.

BEN  
And at such a fine store.

Ben holds up his left hand, a wedding band on his finger.

Zach chuckles in spite of himself.

BEN  
What's funny?

ZACH  
You bought the least expensive  
rings we carry.

Disarmed at last.

BEN

I guess we didn't contribute very much to the jewelry business. That hasn't stopped you, though, has it?

ZACH

I was always aboveboard.

BEN

Which makes you just the witness I want. How did you find out about the scam my client was running with the victim, Stephen Barr?

Zach fingers his goatee. Okay.

ZACH

I was completing quarterlies, and I found credits that I couldn't match to sales. Stephen said they were appraisals. Brian's the appraiser, so I asked Brian about them.

BEN

What was Brian's answer?

ZACH

Nothing intelligible. So I searched old records and found more problems. They were entries that corresponded to appraisals, but for wrong amounts. All higher amounts.

BEN

What did you do with them?

ZACH

I told Stephen immediately. That's when he confided in me.

BEN

He told you the plan?

ZACH

He and Brian would quote different appraisal values to customers than they quoted to insurance companies. Then they pocketed the difference.

BEN

He told you all that. Just like that? He didn't try to deny it?

ZACH

He offered to cut me in. Told me he'd been devising scams like this for years. He wanted to escalate this plan but needed a third man.

BEN

For what?

ZACH

I don't know. I declined, because I don't break the law. And knowing Stephen, it would be hazardous.

BEN

Hazardous?

ZACH

Stephen liked being antagonistic, even to the point that he hurt people. Like this scam. He chose customers who bought the most from us, then instead of just pitching them insurance, he and Brian would break into their homes to frighten them into becoming insured.

BEN

Did he ever ask Brian about his experience as a Green Beret?

ZACH

Yes. And lived vicariously.

BEN

Brian ever demonstrate different moves? Or how to use a knife?

ZACH

Same way he killed Stephen.

BEN

Move to strike.

JUDGE JUSTIN

The jury will disregard the witness's last statement.

BEN

So once you knew Stephen had a hazardous plan going, did you quit?

ZACH  
Well, no. He died before --

BEN  
Did you go to the police?

ZACH  
I wanted to talk him out of it. He would have listened to me, if he'd lived, and I owed him the kindness.

BEN  
Plus you'd be out of fine suits.

ZACH  
That's not really fair.

BEN  
Where do you get them anyway?

ZACH  
The suits? Well, I have a tailor.

BEN  
(reading a Post-It)  
Paul Sidney. Your relationship goes beyond suits, doesn't it?

Zach goes from white to tomato red in two seconds.

ZACH  
I don't know what you mean.

BEN  
I mean, if I called Mr. Sidney up here, would he testify that, in the past, you two were, uh... intimate?

Prosecutor DAVID HAWKINS stands before JUDGE CYNTHIA JUSTIN.

HAWKINS  
Objection, relevance.

BEN  
I'm about to show relevance.

JUDGE JUSTIN  
Overruled for now.

Zach looks to the gallery, leans around the microphone.

ZACH  
My mom's here.

BEN  
Just answer the question.

He doesn't.

JUDGE JUSTIN  
Answer the question, Mr. Golden.  
(beat)  
Mr. Golden.

ZACH  
(in re: Ben's question)  
Yeah.

BEN  
And would he also testify that you  
confided in him about a... special  
crush you had on the victim?

ZACH  
I have a thing for dangerous men!  
Is that what you want to hear?

Another glance out to the gallery.

ZACH  
It runs in the family.

BEN  
And when you confronted Stephen,  
was it at his home?

ZACH  
No, at the store.

BEN  
In fact, you told the police you've  
never been to Stephen Barr's house.

ZACH  
That's right.

Ben walks to the defense table and picks up a bag. He carries it back to Zach, showing what's inside: a distinctive black button etched with a dragon design.

BEN  
Do you recognize this button, found  
at the scene of the crime --  
Stephen's living room?

He's already fingering his goatee.

ZACH  
I'm sure I don't.

BEN  
When was the last time you went to  
see your ex-lover?  
(off Judge Justin)  
Your tailor?

ZACH  
I don't remember.

BEN  
What if I showed you a receipt from  
two days after the murder?

He goes back to the defense table for another bag, this time  
with a yellow invoice inside. Walks it to Zach.

BEN  
What'd he do for you?

ZACH  
Paul repaired my jacket.

BEN  
Keep reading.

ZACH  
He replaced a jacket button. A...  
black dragon button.

BEN  
Never been to his house, huh? Tell  
you what I think. He didn't offer  
to cut you in; you asked in.

BEN  
When he said no, you were  
hurt. He brushed you off,  
maybe even laughed at you.

HAWKINS  
Objection.

BEN  
And you remembered how Brian  
said to use the knife.

JUDGE JUSTIN  
Sustained.

BEN  
You went to his house --

ZACH  
I couldn't stab anybody the  
way Stephen was butchered.

BEN  
-- you confronted him --

JUDGE JUSTIN  
Mr. Matlock.

BEN  
-- and you killed him.

ZACH  
Alright! Just shut up!

Ben raises a hand to cut him off.

BEN  
You have the right not to answer  
any more questions without a  
lawyer. Is that what you want?

Zach bores hateful eyes into Ben.

ZACH  
I want a lawyer.

INT. FULTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Ben, Leanne, and Brian push through double doors.

BRIAN  
Think that's enough to get me off?

LEANNE  
We'll see, but I'm optimistic.  
(to Ben)  
You were great in there, Dad.

Ben keeps walking, lost in thought.

LEANNE  
Dad, are you okay?

A commotion behind them catches everyone's attention. Zach slams through the courtroom doors. He surveys the hallway for an escape, then sees Ben.

They lock eyes.

The bailiff bursts through the doors, clutching his side. Zach turns away from Ben and runs straight into -- and through -- the window at the other end of the hall.

LEANNE  
This is the third story!

EXT. FULTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE - HOT DOG STAND - DAY

Prosecutor and Ben's wife JULIE MARCH-MATLOCK, and private investigator CONRAD McMASTERS stand with Ben and Leanne around a tall stone table, hot dogs in hand.



BEN  
Dropping charges already?

JULIE  
Your accusations make a witness  
jump from thirty feet, stand back  
up, and start running. We can't  
get a conviction after that.

CONRAD  
Have the police caught up with him?

Mid-bite, Julie shakes her head "no."

LEANNE  
He's a clever kid. I don't think  
they'll find him.

BEN  
I can't believe he escaped.

CONRAD  
I can't believe you outed him on  
the stand. I especially can't  
believe he was more upset about  
being outed than being arrested.

JULIE  
Murderers forfeit the luxury of  
secrets.

CONRAD  
(to Leanne)  
Mostly I can't believe you think  
there's a better hot dog out there.

LEANNE  
You're going to write off all the  
other hot dogs in the country  
before this trip even begins?

CONRAD  
No way; I'm ready to prove my case.

LEANNE  
You wouldn't say that if you'd ever  
been to Philadelphia. Right, Dad?

Ben's staring at his hot dog.

JULIE  
Ben?

Conrad's watch beeps.

CONRAD  
(to Julie)  
It's five to one.

JULIE  
Oh, thank you.

A wave and a kiss.

JULIE  
Have a wonderful time. I'll meet  
you Saturday in --

EVERYONE  
-- Denver.

INT. BEN'S OFFICE - EVENING

Ben organizes papers. The outer office DOOR CLICKS open.

BEN  
Not quite done. Leanne?

MAN'S VOICE  
Not quite.

Ben looks up to the doorway -- Zachary Golden. He's drunk.

BEN  
You get out of here.

ZACH (MAN'S VOICE)  
I said I wanted an attorney. I  
should have been more specific.

BEN  
I'm calling the police.

ZACH  
Good. Then you can be present when  
they question me.

BEN  
I'm not your lawyer.

ZACH  
Not now. We both know you will be.

BEN  
I don't know anything of the sort.

ZACH  
But you do know you framed me. And  
I know it, too.

BEN  
You're drunk. Now get out of here.

ZACH  
I'm wasted. But I think I have  
proof. Yes, I have proof.

Ben stays quiet.

ZACH  
Proof I can share with my lawyer.

BEN  
What do you want?

ZACH  
Have I been unclear?

INT. OLDSMOBILE (RURAL GEORGIA HIGHWAY) - DAY

Conrad drives. Leanne turns from the front seat to face Ben.

LEANNE  
You can't actually be defending  
him. Dad.

Ben stares out the window.

LEANNE  
Dad! Did he threaten you? Conrad  
will kick his ass.

He ignores her.

LEANNE  
Or the alternative is you've  
finally lost your mind. I won't  
stop talking until you answer me.

Which gets no response. Leanne stops talking.

BEN  
(to Conrad)  
This exit.

INT. MT. HARLAN - LOCAL DINER - DAY

Leanne holds Conrad back as Ben continues through classic red  
and white patchwork.

LEANNE

Tell me you don't know anything about this.

CONRAD

I'm sure gonna find out.

LEANNE

And let me try first. I feel like this is my fault.

CONRAD

We both work with him. You couldn't have seen this coming.

He starts after Ben. Leanne grabs his arm.

LEANNE

Then I want to know everything you find.

Conrad nods. They hurry to catch up with Ben.

Ben and attorney CLIFF LEWIS are awkwardly trying to get their heads in proper position for a hug.

CONRAD

So do we have to call you "Your Honor" now?

CLIFF

Hey, doors open when you have "Associate and errand boy for Ben Matlock" on your resume. Good to see you guys. And this is Colton.

Cliff picks up a grinning, five-month-old Pillsbury Dough Boy. Leanne fingers the boy's cheek.

LEANNE

Oh my gosh, he's adorable.

CLIFF

I know. "What happened," right? I hope you don't mind I brought him. He's super easy, and I think he likes coming to court.

BEN

Of course we don't mind.

CLIFF

Get what you want; lunch is on me.

Ben waves off a SERVER.

BEN

No menus. Hot dogs all around.

CLIFF

That's right. You're on a... hot dog tour?

LEANNE

More like a "visiting old friends" tour, but the plan is to have hot dogs everywhere we go. And then rice cakes for the next month.

CONRAD

And then figure out what's so wrong it's made Ben Matlock spend money on flights, gas, hotels, and lunch.

BEN

Nothing's wrong. I just love hot dogs. This week I'm a connoisseur.

The SERVER brings hot dogs and bowls of onions, relish, etc.

BEN

Gotta have one from Mount Harlan.

CLIFF

Yeah, this is probably where you had your first one, wasn't it?

BEN

Right outside Leo's Drugstore.

Cliff eyes a bearded LOCAL and stands to confront him. He sets Colton in his car seat.

CLIFF

Excuse me.

(to the local)

Haven't I seen that belt buckle on Johnny Holtz?

(off the local)

Now, I know you're just borrowing it. But knowing how much Johnny prizes that belt buckle, wouldn't it be better to give it back to him instead of wearing it here? 'Cause if something spilled on it, now that might ruin your chances with that pretty cousin of his.

Cliff grips the local by the shoulder, leads him to the door.

CLIFF

Actually, maybe you'd better leave  
it with me, and I can drop it by  
Johnny's on my way home today.

The local surrenders the belt buckle and rushes outside to  
save face. Cliff comes back to the table.

CLIFF

Where were we? Leo's Drugstore! I  
just picked up nasal spray there.

BEN

You really like it here, huh?

CLIFF

You know, I wasn't sure. But it  
lets me take care of Pops, I travel  
to other towns that need a judge,  
and all my sweaters match my robe.

BEN

Yeah, that was impressive just now.  
I bet the pay's not bad, either.

CLIFF

No, Sir. And who would have  
thought after all this time a wife  
and kid were in the cards for me?

LEANNE

Not me.

(off Cliff)

I'm joking, Cliff. He's wonderful.  
And one day there will be no one  
better to take care of you than  
your child. Right, Dad?

BEN

I don't need taking care of.

LEANNE

Yes you do.

CONRAD

(re: Colton)

Anyone see the way he's been  
watching us eat these hot dogs?

BEN  
(to Cliff)  
Can he have a bite?

LEANNE  
You can't feed this baby hot dog.

CLIFF  
Oh, it's fine. My parents gave me  
solid food from the time I could  
gum it down. And look at me.

He extends his arms to "present" himself and accidentally  
knocks a bottle of mustard off the table.

LEANNE  
Dad, you really can't feed this  
baby hot dog.

Ben reaches for the baby.

BEN  
Come here, Sweet Boy.

CLIFF  
First bite. The circle of life.  
(realizes, to Ben)  
Not that this is your last bite.  
Or that your part of the circle is  
almost -- or that you're getting...

LEANNE  
You're done, Cliff.

Ben pinches off a tiny bit of hot dog.

BEN  
Now this is full of fat, salt, and  
things that'll never be good for  
you. And if you're lucky, you'll  
get to eat it the rest of your life  
with people you care about.

Whether Ben or his young companion is more eager, he slips  
the pink meat into Colton's mouth.

INT. JULIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Julie thumbs through a deep stack of folders, pulls the right  
one, and compares it to another file next to two open books.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY CHARLES NOCKELS -- 45, an amiable rectangle  
in a suit -- opens the door then knocks, file in hand.

JULIE  
No thank you.

CHARLES  
No thank you, what?

JULIE  
Whatever that case is. Take it  
right back out.

CHARLES  
I thought you worked for me.

JULIE  
Yes, too much. But all this will  
be done by Friday so I can go on  
vacation. A nonworking vacation.

CHARLES  
Then thank me for this one. The  
work is essentially done for us.  
By Matlock and McIntyre, no less.

JULIE  
No, I --

CHARLES  
So I'm really just the messenger.  
Hand-delivery from your husband.

She starts to object, but he cuts her off. Defeated, Julie  
watches him drop the file on her desk.

He pauses on his way out.

CHARLES  
And a weekend is not a vacation.  
Take some real time sometime.

JULIE  
("Yeah, right")  
Just as soon as I finish these?

CHARLES  
And the two dozen other crimes  
being committed as we speak.

He grins and starts out the door.

JULIE  
(re: file)  
You can't be serious.  
(MORE)



JULIE (CONT'D)

There's so much wrong with this file I don't know where to begin.

CHARLES

Julie --

JULIE

No wait, I'll start here. Benjamin Matlock, attorney for the defense.

CHARLES

That's correct.

JULIE

That can't be correct. Ben just implicated Golden in his defense of Brian Abbott for the same murder.

CHARLES

Maybe he needs the business. He has to pay for this weekend vacation somehow.

JULIE

Uh huh. And this invoice for two hundred toothpicks and coffee straws. Who's paying for that one?

CHARLES

Also correct. Don't know what it means, but it's straight from Brian Abbott's credit card statement.

Julie ignores him. She's reading, intrigued.

JULIE

They filed an injunction against Gayle Software? What does that have to do...?

CHARLES

I have twenty more on deck. Don't want this case, take your pick.

JULIE

I think I'll hang onto this one.

Charles shrugs and heads out.

CHARLES

Have fun this weekend.

Julie glances at a photo of Ben on her desk, then turns back the file.

JULIE  
What did you find?

EXT. MT. HARLAN - LOCAL DINER - DAY

Leanne and Ben wait for Conrad.

LEANNE  
Okay, Dad. Long enough. You have  
to tell me what's going on.

BEN  
I just fed a baby his first bite of  
hot dog. Do not ruin this for me.

Conrad adjusts his hat as he comes out of the restaurant.

CONRAD  
That was delicious. Now let's talk  
about Zach Golden.

BEN  
Both of you listen. This trip is  
about family, friends and hot dogs.

Conrad starts to interject.

BEN  
And before you say another word,  
remember who pays your salaries.

LEANNE  
But we know more about this case  
than anyone. I'm the one who  
represented Brian Abbott and  
Stephen Barr at the larceny trial,  
for Pete's sake. Right, Conrad?

CONRAD  
If something's wrong, we can help.

BEN  
No you can't. So shut up.

He steps off the curb and heads toward the car, leaving  
Conrad and Leanne to gape after him.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. HARVARD UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

CHARLENE MATLOCK -- Ben's older daughter, in a cream suit and red hoop earrings -- lectures madly typing students.

CHARLENE

But law is not practiced in model cases. We live in ambiguity, where the right course of action is not always easy to discern.

Ben, Leanne, and Conrad slip in the back.

CHARLENE

Unless you've spent a lifetime cultivating an unquestionable moral character, like my father, who was supposed to meet me at my office.

Heads turn. Leanne waves.

CHARLENE

But since this is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for you, and I've never known him to pass up an opportunity to speak, let's hear what Ben Matlock thinks about legal ethics.

CONRAD

(to Ben)  
Stand up.

He does, reluctantly.

Some expectant faces, some bored. A pen drops.

BEN

Um. There are times when even unquestionable moral character finds itself in unknown territory. And then you make a decision and hope you can live with it.

INT. HARVARD UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL - CHARLENE'S OFFICE - DAY

Books alphabetized along the wall, papers in desk organizers.

BEN

Things sure have changed since I came for office hours.

CONRAD  
You went to office hours?

BEN  
I'd have gone even more often to  
learn from someone like Charlene.

Charlene smiles at him from across the room.

LEANNE  
Wait. What does this smell like?

CHARLENE  
Rum and Maple. I got a pipe stand  
because it makes me think of Dad's  
office building in Charleston.

LEANNE  
You know what it makes me think of?

CHARLENE  
Downstairs. Ernie's Ice Cream.

LEANNE  
Yes! Candy sprinkles after school.

BEN  
And does that make you think of  
your mother?

No. LEANNE CHARLENE  
Should it?

BEN  
That's the reason I let you have  
it. You were both on sugar highs  
by the time you got to the office.

Conrad laughs.

BEN  
Before your mother died, we used to  
get Ernie's Ice Cream every Friday.

CHARLENE  
I don't remember that.

Leanne shakes her head in agreement.

LEANNE  
I do remember Charlene telling me  
if I talked when I ate, the  
sprinkles would grow out my ears.

CHARLENE

You wouldn't shut up. Ernie's was the one place I didn't have to hear about Pete Rose or Eric Burdon.

LEANNE

Oh really, Mrs. Garfunkel?

BEN

Girls.

LEANNE

C'mon, Dad, we're just having fun.

Awkward.

CONRAD

Know what talk of ice cream makes me think of? Lunch.

INT. HARVARD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - DAY

Behind Leanne and Charlene, Conrad helps Ben up the steps.

CONRAD

You had to walk all this way to find hot dogs when you were here?

BEN

No. I had lots of them right back there on Everett Street.

CONRAD

Then why aren't we eating there?

BEN

Because this is where my life changed forever. I met the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen.

CHARLENE

I thought you met Mother in Mount Harlan.

BEN

I did.

CHARLENE

And Julie in Atlanta.

Ben nods toward a large covered internal window.

BEN

They used to keep that curtain open. And in the first crib in the second row I met my first baby.

CHARLENE

Daddy. I don't know what to say.

BEN

I'm so proud of my legacy.

LEANNE

Dad, does it bother you that you don't have grandchildren?

BEN

No!

LEANNE

It's just a question. You gushed all over Cliff's baby, and now you're reminiscing about your own.

BEN

Well...

CHARLENE

Dad?

They come upon --

INT. HARVARD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER - CAFETERIA - DAY

-- and stop just inside the entrance.

BEN

You two girls make me happier than any father deserves to be. As long as you're content, so am I.

LEANNE

That's a very sweet lie. Now let's go make your stomach content.

They slide trays along the metal countertop.

CONRAD

What do you want on your hot dog?

BEN

Ketchup and sauerkraut. Just like March twenty-third --

CHARLENE

You don't have to say the year.

Conrad loads his and starts to pile sauerkraut on Ben's.

BEN

I can get it, Conrad.

LEANNE

Ketchup and cabbage? Could you have had a more bland hot dog? Not that it was an omen or anything.

CHARLENE

(half to Ben, more to Leanne)

And what condiments did you eat when Leanne graced the world? Chili and jalapenos?

BEN

I didn't eat anything.

Ben takes care of the cashier, and they find a table.

CHARLENE

You didn't have a hot dog?

(to Leanne)

How primitive is your birthplace to not have hot dogs?

LEANNE

Shut up. I was born in Charleston.

BEN

I didn't eat when Leanne was born because there were complications.

Conrad laughs, but the mood has changed.

CONRAD

Don't look at me; my mouth is shut.

He fills it with hot dog.

CONRAD

And full of hot dog.

LEANNE

What kind of complications? Dad, you never told me this.

BEN

Eclampsia. It's the first time I remember being truly afraid.

CHARLENE

I didn't know.

BEN

You were only two. The hospital had a mural of angels on the roof, and it slanted up behind a big wooden cross. I said I was sorry for everything I'd ever done, and I begged Jesus to save my daughter.

Speechless. Finally...

CONRAD

(to Leanne and Charlene)

You two are really lucky, you know that? I mean, my dad is great. But the opportunity you had to learn from a principled attorney and a man who's straight as an arrow. Who never runs or hides fr--

BEN

I know what you're doing, Conrad, and guilt doesn't make me happy.

CONRAD

I'm worried about you. What am I doing that you wouldn't do if the situation were reversed?

LEANNE

He's right, Conrad. Whatever it is can wait. Let's just make this trip nice. No one has to investigate the case right now.

CUT TO:

EXT. STEPHEN BARR'S HOUSE - DAY

Julie closes the key back in the lockbox. She ducks under crime scene tape to enter.

INT. STEPHEN BARR'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

She surveys overturned chairs and a broken glass coffee table -- all are blanketed in brown crusted blood. A white outline memorializes Stephen Barr's final gasping breath.



Julie circles the outline. What did he want to reach?

Under the sofa, just shy of the edge of Stephen Barr's fingers, hides a yellow evidence marker. Number 58.

Julie flips through a legal file until she finds a photo of marker 58 next to a small revolver. A notch in the handle.

A SLAMMED DRAWER from the next room steals her attention. She pulls a military medal from a table next to the hallway, slides the sharp edges out from between her clinched fingers.

INT. STEPHEN BARR'S HOUSE - DEN - MOMENTS LATER

Julie finds the intruder -- Brian Abbott, rifling through a large wooden desk. She loosens her grip on the medal.

JULIE

What are you doing?

He lets out a startled exclamation, quickly shuts a drawer.

BRIAN

Who in the Sam H are --

Julie pulls her ADA badge from her purse.

JULIE

Someone you should answer, and I'll ask again what you're doing here.

BRIAN

You're with the District Attorney?

JULIE

And why more than ninety percent of what you and Stephen Barr stole ended up in your bank account.

BRIAN

A jury found me not guilty, Kid.

JULIE

Of murder. What about trespassing? Interfering with a crime scene?

BRIAN

I got better things to be scared of.

(he's done playing)

So do you.

JULIE

I've been threatened before.

He moves toward her.

Julie stands her ground, blocking the doorway. He bends toward her face.

BRIAN

If you're so curious, what are you doing here in the daytime?

He edges past her to the living room. Julie watches him leave, then breathes.

She finds the drawer he shut, pulls its contents. Letters, bills. She stacks them on the desk. A BUZZ from her PURSE interrupts sorting, but not before she finds a flyer from First Atlanta Bank, handwritten notes on the bottom.

In bold type across the top: **Credit Shelter Trusts and Step-Up in Cost Basis.**

She stashes it in her purse and digs out her cell phone.

JULIE

(into phone)

Hi. Where are you now?

CUT TO:

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY - DAY

Little Vegas on the ocean. Establishing.

INT. CAESAR'S CROWN HOTEL CASINO - DAY

Ben hangs up the front desk phone, and a glitter-eyed Conrad joins him from the casino floor.

CONRAD

Hey, you know who would have loved this place? Les.

Ben laughs.

BEN

Yeah, he would have, wouldn't he?

CONRAD

All the lights. And the money.

BEN  
And the women.

CONRAD  
Young women.

BEN  
I miss him.

CONRAD  
I know. Are you sure you're okay?

BEN  
Conrad, you ask me again, I'll  
throw you in that fountain. Tyler!

Across the lobby, TYLER HUDSON -- Ben's former PI, in a deep red suit that would stand out anywhere else -- struts over.

TYLER  
There he is, the man himself.  
Looking good. Old but good.

He and Ben shake hands.

BEN  
Right back at you.

TYLER  
Who's Smiley?

BEN  
Oh, I'm sorry. This is Conrad  
McMasters. Conrad, Tyler Hudson.  
Tyler used to be my investigator.

Their turn to shake.

CONRAD  
How many times did he make you play  
the dead guy?

TYLER  
Aho, I like you already. And  
where's the rest of the entourage?

CONRAD  
Doing sister things in Boston.

TYLER  
Oh, you mean I'm not going to get  
to see Charlene and meet --

CONRAD

Leanne.

BEN

They wanted to eat something other than hot dogs. Speaking of which.

Tyler gestures out the door.

TYLER

Follow the elephant.

Oh. There's an elephant exiting the casino.

TYLER

(sotto, to Conrad)  
What are sister things?

Conrad shrugs.

EXT. BOARDWALK - DAY

The trio carry various New England hot dogs past a merry-go-round and video billboards.

TYLER

No more fake stories, no more hits to the head or gut, and other than today, no more meals on the go.

BEN

Sounds like the life.

TYLER

It's so simple, Ben. All those years playing the stock market's ups and downs. What's the one thing that never goes down?

BEN

What?

TYLER

The house. Casinos never lose.

CONRAD

What exactly do you do for them?

TYLER

Wouldn't you like to know.

BEN

What's that called?

TYLER  
A Bar Harbor dog.

BEN  
Share a bite?

TYLER  
The nacho cheese and bacon bits  
ain't gettin' it done for you?

He offers half-eaten red relish and Grey Poupon.

CONRAD  
I only ask 'cause you'll know what  
cost basis is, a man of the market.

Ben rolls his eyes.

TYLER  
Price you first pay for something.  
You pay taxes on the difference  
between that and its current value.

CONRAD  
So if someone found a way to  
manipulate a valuable's cost basis  
and report different values to the  
authorities and to the taxpayer,  
that someone could make real money.

BEN  
Conrad --

TYLER  
Theoretically, but I don't know how  
you'd do that.

CONRAD  
As a fellow investigator, pretend  
for a second that your clients are  
con artists, jewelry appraisers.  
You know their latest scam involves  
cost basis, but you can't find a  
connection to anything they  
appraise. What do you do?

BEN  
Conrad, enough.

CONRAD  
Am I pestering you? No, I'm doing  
my job, which is to solve the case.

Tyler scrutinizes the two men.

TYLER

My first step would be to think it through. Over a drink.

INT. CAESAR'S CROWN HOTEL CASINO - TYLER'S SUITE - EVENING

Ben, Conrad, and Tyler hold long-stemmed glasses.

TYLER

The Army. Prison. He even made me join a cult.

BEN

As I recall, you also ate some fine food and stayed in some fine hotels in some fine faraway places. And were paid handsomely for it, too.

TYLER

Are you serious?

CONRAD

I woke up in a cage with a tiger.

Tyler raises his glass.

TYLER

Well then here is to you.

Ben gets up.

CONRAD

What's wrong?

BEN

For Pete's sake, Conrad, can't I go to the men's room?

Conrad watches Ben leave, quickly turns back to Tyler.

CONRAD

Can I talk to you?

TYLER

No.

Conrad starts to go on, then stops himself. No?

TYLER

You, my friend, speak with the conspiratorial tone of a man who is about to ask another man to break into something, get shot, or sit up all night in a car with binoculars and a bottle of Milk of Magnesia. And I do not miss those days.

CONRAD

I just want to talk.

TYLER

Well I don't. I want to lean back and sip this fine martini.

CONRAD

Ben's in trouble.

Tyler eyes Conrad.

TYLER

What kind of trouble? Wait. Is it something I can help fix in the single afternoon you're here?

CONRAD

No, but --

TYLER

Can I fix it from eight-hundred miles away?

CONRAD

No, I guess not.

TYLER

If that changes, you let me know.

Ben comes back. In his haste to look normal, Conrad accidentally knocks his drink on Tyler, who jumps up.

CONRAD

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Tyler raises his arms.

TYLER

It's fine.

CONRAD

Here, let me get you something to change into.

TYLER

No!

Too late. Conrad opens ornate closet doors, revealing a wall lined with red suits just like the one Tyler already has on.

TYLER

This is not what it looks like.

Ben just grins.

Tyler knows he's caught.

TYLER

At least mine are in style.

EXT. STEPHEN BARR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Black sweats serve function over style as Julie strides purposefully up the sidewalk. She takes advantage of a dark patch between streetlights and cuts into the side yard.

Light gushes out back windows.

She noiselessly opens the latch to the back gate, cringes as it creaks open. Wait. Watch. Listen.

Nothing. She starts forward again. As she gets closer, voices leak through windowpanes.

Julie peers inside. The kitchen. Brian Abbott opens the fridge, and Julie strains to hear muffled conversation.

BRIAN

Shut up that damn computer.

Brian heads through an archway into the den. Julie follows, stopping just to the side of the den window.

Brian Abbott hands a beer to a man on a sofa. Thick glasses frames, slick black hair, thank goodness no pocket protector. He's poking the inside of a coffee straw with a toothpick.

Julie inches closer.

Brian Abbott gently picks up a clear plastic vial of powder and painstakingly funnels it into a coffee straw.

BRIAN

I told you, you can't get this fuzz close to the computer. You know the heat that machine generates.



GLASSES

Until the machine magically catches  
fire, it's fine.

Julie realizes, steps back -- onto a branch that cracks. She  
doesn't wait to see if they heard, but races into the dark.

INT. JULIE'S CAR (ATLANTA RESIDENTIAL STREETS) - NIGHT

She can't catch her breath.

JULIE

(into phone)

This is Julie March for Lieutenant  
Hargrove or Silverman.

(beat)

No, that's okay. Just tell them I  
need to know what very small  
cylindrical explosives might be  
used for. I'll be available --

She pulls up outside the Matlock residence. The light's on,  
revealing a ransacked mess. A round, splintered hole sits in  
the door where the lock and latch used to be. The handle,  
driven at an angle into the ground, still smolders.

Julie stares.

JULIE

(into phone)

Never mind. But send officers to  
my house.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. DENVER, COLORADO - DAWN

Joggers and mile-high latte seekers greet the weekend.

EXT. VICTORIAN HOME - PORCH - DAWN

Two-story stone and stained wood. Conrad knocks furiously.

Attorney MICHELLE THOMAS answers the door in her robe.

MICHELLE

Conrad? It's five in the morning.

He hands her a steaming travel mug.

CONRAD

Nice to see you, too.

She lets him into --

INT. MICHELLE'S HOME (VICTORIAN HOME) - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

MICHELLE

I'm sorry. Of course, it's nice --

CONRAD

It's okay, I know it's early. I just wanted to get here before Ben.

MICHELLE

Is he coming over now?

CONRAD

I doubt it; we got in pretty late last night. But I don't know anything about him these days.

She ushers him into --

INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

-- and motions to an elegant white sofa. They sit.

CONRAD

Actually, that's not true, and that's why I'm here.

MICHELLE

Tell me what's wrong. Slowly.

CONRAD  
I think Ben's dying.

Michelle puts down the coffee.

MICHELLE  
Of what?

CONRAD  
I don't know.

MICHELLE  
What kind of doctor is he seeing?

CONRAD  
Nobody out of the ordinary. But he's had a lot of recent appointments with his minister.

MICHELLE  
You wake me up and tell me Ben's dying because he's going to church?

CONRAD  
You heard he's representing --

MICHELLE  
-- somebody he accused. It's weird, but it's not dying weird.

CONRAD  
Did you also hear he gave me the wrong information?  
(off Michelle)  
That's right, on this case. He told me Stephen Barr was murdered at the jewelry store. By the time I got to the actual crime scene, the cops had everything tagged, bagged, and taken away.

MICHELLE  
Is he forgetful in general?

CONRAD  
Well, no.

MICHELLE  
He made a mistake; it's not the end of the world. And maybe missing evidence explains why he's trying the case a second time.

CONRAD

Maybe, but put together all of it.  
Not to mention this tour. Don't  
you think it's weird, too?

MICHELLE

Conrad!

CONRAD

Michelle, give me some credit. I  
know this man. That's why I'm  
here. You worked with him for five  
years; you know him, too.

MICHELLE

Have you talked to anyone else?

CONRAD

Julie says he can't sleep lately.

MICHELLE

Is she worried?

CONRAD

She thinks it's the case.

Michelle gives him an exasperated, "see-there" look.

CONRAD

No, wait. They work on opposite  
sides; they can't discuss their  
cases. So something's wrong, he  
won't tell her what, of course  
she's going to think it's the case.

MICHELLE

But you don't think so.

CONRAD

I worked on it. And maybe we  
didn't get the right guy and Ben's  
fixing that. But something's  
different about him.

MICHELLE

So he can't sleep. That's a far  
cry from dying.

CONRAD

Maybe.

MICHELLE

For all you know, he could be retiring. Or transitioning to teaching.

CONRAD

There, you haven't even seen him yet and you think something's up.

MICHELLE

I think if he were sick, he would have broken the news when he was with both his daughters.

CONRAD

Just keep your eyes open. Will you do that?

MICHELLE

Okay.

INT. HEALTH FOOD MARKET - DAY

Tables in the front and aisles of organics in the back. Michelle leads Ben, Conrad, and Leanne to a quiet spot.

MICHELLE

And Saturdays, their special is hot dogs to get out of bed for, made totally out of vegetables.

BEN

Vegetables?

LEANNE

That sounds wonderful.

BEN

What kind of vegetables?

A WAITER comes to take their order.

MICHELLE

We're actually waiting on someone. But in the meantime, we'll have carrot sticks with all your dips.

BEN

(to Waiter)

Do you have any regular hot dogs?

MICHELLE  
Just try one veggie dog. I promise  
if you don't like it, I'll buy you  
something else.

The Waiter leaves.

BEN  
I'm not going to like it.

LEANNE  
C'mon, Dad. It'll be healthier for  
you. God knows we could use some  
of that on this trip.

BEN  
I thought you were going to be nice  
to me the rest of the tour.

LEANNE  
Protecting you against a massive  
heart attack qualifies as nice.

MICHELLE  
(to Ben)  
Would you rather have potato wedges  
instead of carrot sticks?

BEN  
Yes.

Michelle dashes off to catch up with the waiter.

CONRAD  
There she is.

Julie lugs a suitcase inside. Conrad hurries to the entrance  
and takes it for her.

Ben waves her over to the table.

JULIE  
Hi. Hi, Leanne. I'm sorry. My  
flight was delayed.

LEANNE  
We were delayed last night, too.  
At least you gave Dad a reprieve  
before he has to eat a veggie dog.

JULIE  
Well then, I'm glad to help.

Julie kisses Ben's head and sits next to him.  
He sizes her up. Something's wrong.

BEN  
(sotto)  
Are you all right?

JULIE  
I was going to ask you the same  
thing. We need to talk. Later.

Ben starts to object.

MICHELLE (O.S.)  
Julie.

Julie stands.

MICHELLE  
Don't get up. You look good.

JULIE  
You look good. How are you?

MICHELLE  
Better today than the day before.

BEN  
My father used to say that.

MICHELLE  
You used to say that. If I say it  
enough maybe one day it'll be true.

Conrad rejoins them.

CONRAD  
They're going to hold your bag  
until we leave.

JULIE  
Thank you. Now what is this I hear  
about veggie dogs?

INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michelle brings drinks for everyone.

MICHELLE  
So tell me about this latest case.  
Sounds enthralling.

BEN

No cases. We're on vacation. Tell us about you.

JULIE

Your firm must be doing well, to have a lovely place like this.

MICHELLE

Thank you. I'm finally finding the balance of running a business and practicing law. Not as easy as Ben made it look all those years.

Ben stands.

BEN

Excuse me. That veggie dog is kind of coming back on me.

LEANNE

Oh, now you've embarrassed him.

BEN

I just want to take care of it before we fly out.

MICHELLE

You're leaving already? We haven't talked about anything but Denver.

BEN

What do you want to talk about?

She glances at Conrad.

MICHELLE

I don't know. How are you?

BEN

Right now, I have indigestion.

MICHELLE

I've got an idea. Why don't you all stay an extra night? You can stay at my house. No hotel bill.

BEN

We've already bought tickets.

MICHELLE

C'mon, the Carolinas can wait. I'll pay for new tickets.



JULIE  
We can't let you do that.

BEN  
We'd love to stay.

EXT. MICHELLE'S BACKYARD - EVENING

On the path to a converted carriage house, leaves crunch under Ben and Julie's feet.

JULIE  
This is beautiful. Oh, look. Is that a raccoon?

BEN  
I'm glad you're here. And your hair is right on the money.

She kisses him.

BEN  
But something's still bothering you.

JULIE  
Yes. I've been assigned to the Stephen Barr case.

BEN  
That's all? Forget about the case. Just for now.

He offers his hand, and Julie follows around the house to a log bench. Aspen part for a humbling view of the Rockies.

BEN  
I grew up in the mountains.

JULIE  
I know.

BEN  
Always makes me remember how small I am and my problems are.

JULIE  
Ben. I don't want you to get overly upset, but someone broke into our house yesterday.

BEN  
Our house?

JULIE

Nothing's missing. I think it was meant to scare us off the case.

BEN

Are you all right?

JULIE

I'm okay. But I want to ask you some questions. About the case.

BEN

I can't --

JULIE

I know what you can't answer. Was the injunction against Gayle Software part of a different case?

BEN

Gayle Software?

JULIE

To prevent implementation of new mortgage loan software for First Atlanta Bank.

BEN

What are you talking about? Julie, I didn't file any injunction. I've never even heard of Gayle Software.

JULIE

But the rest of the file was right.

BEN

What else did you want to ask me?

She hesitates.

JULIE

Last night, I went to the victim's house. Brian Abbott was there, with another man; they were packing explosives. Ben, the handle was blown off our front door.

BEN

I knew something was wrong! It's written all over you. I'm going to kill him.

JULIE

It's all right. I'm okay.

BEN

I swear I'm going to kill that jackass with my own hands.

JULIE

Who, Ben? I know we're on thin legal ice here, but privilege doesn't extend to ongoing crime.

BEN

Brian Abbott. That jackass swore to me the theft was over.

JULIE

I don't think he's the one calling the shots. Who is this other man?

BEN

He's the reason it looks like Brian Abbott got ninety percent of the loot. The police discovered only a small part of what was stolen.

JULIE

And Brian Abbott's cut wasn't a half. It was a third.

BEN

Exactly.

JULIE

I know everyone thinks Stephen Barr was the one in charge, but I got the feeling that Brian Abbott was afraid of this third man.

BEN

Of course he is. What kind of person would use explosives to break into a house?

JULIE

And why? You'd think it would just draw attention to the crime. Unless that's the idea.

BEN

But you definitely saw the man?

JULIE

Yes.

BEN

That's evidence.

JULIE

There's a brochure, too. It's in my purse. But there are notes on it that don't look like Brian Abbott or Stephen Barr's handwriting.

BEN

A brochure and an eyewitness.

JULIE

Of whom? Who is he, really?

BEN

I don't know. I think it's time we ask for help. But Julie, this is very important. No one else can know this is anything more than a hypothetical. I don't want any of their doors blown open.

JULIE

I agree. It could be dangerous.

BEN

There's something else that's important to me.

JULIE

What?

BEN

I want you to stay away from this third man.

JULIE

Why didn't you just go after him on the stand to begin with?

BEN

'Cause he's not the killer.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Ben, Julie, Conrad, Leanne, and Michelle sit around her coffee table.

LEANNE

Does that mean you know who the killer is?

BEN

I know it's not Brian Abbott, or his conspirator.

CONRAD

Or Zachary Golden.

BEN

Right.

CONRAD

Are you sure? He had a twenty-two that he said was "stolen."

LEANNE

C'mon, Conrad. We act like that's incriminating evidence. I bet we've all had guns stolen.

MICHELLE

Not me, I hate guns.

BEN

Well, regardless, he was stabbed.

JULIE

You never actually got to see the gun at the crime scene, did you, Conrad? There was a mark on it in the evidence photo. I wish I had it with me.

BEN

The man was stabbed, not shot.

CONRAD

So not Zachary Golden.

BEN

Not Zachary Golden.

MICHELLE

So their plan was to slip straws full of explosives in keyholes and burglarize homes? That doesn't make any sense.

CONRAD

I think it's the first thing that does make sense. Here are these two hard core ex-military dudes, running a white collar scam from a jewelry store? No, these are the kind of guys who blow up doors.

MICHELLE

But they were running the scam. At least with this third man. So how does this fit in?

LEANNE

And what does it have to do with none of our suspects being the killer? Dad, what are you not telling us?

Ben hesitates.

JULIE

If we find the link between the explosives and the jewelry store con, we find new suspects.

LEANNE

Well hell, that ought to be simple.

MICHELLE

Does anyone want more coffee?

CONRAD

Yes, please.

Michelle takes both their mugs.

CONRAD

The original scam was to appraise a piece of jewelry and rip off the insurance company by quoting an inflated price. The new scam was messing with the cost basis, but not of jewelry. What does any of this have to do with explosives? Or a nerd who handles them?

Michelle returns energized -- and not from the coffee.

MICHELLE

Not with explosives, with homes!  
Houses get appraised.

CONRAD

Not by the same people who appraise  
jewelry. And who wants to appraise  
a house damaged by firepower?

MICHELLE

That's how they get the owners to  
sell. Drive them out.

CONRAD

But why? There are hundreds of  
houses already on the market.

MICHELLE

Maybe they want certain houses.

CONRAD

Certain damaged houses?

MICHELLE

Or certain people.

The room falls silent.

MICHELLE

They had a list of marks the first  
time, right? And used intimidation  
to get what they wanted.

CONRAD

Zach did say they were getting  
more... what was it?

BEN

Hazardous.

JULIE

Oh my God.

LEANNE

Sounds like the person we're  
looking for did a lot of people a  
big favor.

MICHELLE

But what people? What qualifies  
you to get your house blown apart?

CONRAD

And where does cost basis fit in?

MICHELLE

I don't know about a cost basis, but scams like this are all about information, right? When I applied for a mortgage loan on this house, I had to tell them everything but the names of my childhood pets.

LEANNE

They'd need someone in the bank, though. Insurance seems much more probable; that was their first con.

JULIE

Let's explore the mortgage first. I've never bought a house; what else did you do, Michelle?

MICHELLE

What didn't I do?

JULIE

At the bank.

MICHELLE

Okay, well... Well, first the bank tried to get me to switch all my business there --

CONRAD

That's it. That's the connection between houses and jewelry. They target folks who will consolidate everything, including...

LEANNE

Including what? What do you do at a bank with jewelry?

Conrad shakes his head.

JULIE

Put it in a trust.

BEN

Something's still off. Leanne's right; they would need an accomplice at the bank.



CONRAD  
What does the nerd do?

INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - DEN - EVENING

Everyone hovers around Michelle, who sits at the computer.

LEANNE  
Maybe Stephen Barr and Paul Sidney.

CONRAD  
The tailor?

Leanne shrugs. Michelle types. Shakes her head.

CONRAD  
(to Julie)  
And there was no other information?

JULIE  
Just a photo in a file.

CONRAD  
Just 'cause he's not on the staff  
page doesn't mean he and First  
Atlanta aren't associated somehow.

JULIE  
(to Michelle)  
Try adding "cost basis."

MICHELLE  
Still nothing.

She stretches her neck and yawns.

LEANNE  
Where to from here, Dad? Are you  
sure you're telling us everything?

BEN  
From here to Raleigh-Durham.

MICHELLE  
You're just going to continue the  
trip? Without solving the case?

BEN  
We'll all think better in the  
morning. At least I know I will.

MICHELLE  
You still get up at five?

BEN  
Healthy, wealthy, and wise.

She shoots Conrad a reassuring look, then kisses Ben's cheek.

MICHELLE  
Then I'll get up to see you off.

EXT. RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

The sun squints off a jet plane; dueling guitars drive us to:

EXT. JERRI'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

JERRI STONE -- cop turned PI turned cop -- harmonizes with Ben. Conrad plays second to Ben's lead.

BEN AND JERRI  
(singing)  
See through the portals, he's  
waiting and watching. Watching for  
you and for me.

Leanne claps.

JULIE  
You have a beautiful voice.

JERRI  
Oh, I don't know about that, but it  
definitely came in handy last week.

BEN  
How's that?

JERRI  
Well, my partner and I had been  
tracking this drug lord all across  
the state. We finally found his  
hideout in Roanoke.

CONRAD  
Hey, that's where I'm from.

JERRI  
Good town, usually. But this day  
we had it surrounded in plain cars,  
and as we go to make our move, we  
realize we're surrounded.

JULIE  
What did you do?

JERRI  
Started to yodel.

BEN  
You're just fearless, aren't you?

JERRI  
Oh, I'm afraid of a lot of things.  
(off Ben)  
Yeah. Cooking, getting my picture  
taken, math.

LEANNE  
What happened with the drug lord?

JERRI  
He's in county lockup.

BEN  
We could all use some fearlessness.

JERRI  
(to Conrad)  
Know a building that used to be a  
little bakery on the highway? That  
was the hideout.

CONRAD  
Oh no, Nate's place?

BEN  
We should go by there. Roanoke's  
next on the tour.

CONRAD  
It was the next stop. But we have  
to make up time to get back on  
schedule.

BEN  
You don't want to go? That's where  
we solved our first case together.

CONRAD  
I remember. I'm glad you want to  
go, but we should get to South  
Carolina. Or you can pay to  
switch hotel reservations.

Ben stands.

BEN  
 (to Jerri)  
 I'd say take care of yourself...

JERRI  
 I'll keep singing if you will.

BEN  
 Deal.

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - LOBBY - EVENING

The weary quartet drags itself to the counter.

BEN  
 Matlock.

HOTEL CLERK  
 Yes, Sir. I have three rooms.

JULIE  
 I believe you also have hot dogs  
 for us? I called ahead.

HOTEL CLERK  
 Ah, yes. Right this way.

He leads them down --

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

-- to a darkened ballroom. He turns on the light, revealing

A CROWD OF SMILING FACES

Cliff, Charlene, Tyler, Michelle, and Jerri, as well as  
 CASSIE, BILLY, MRS. McCARDLE, and scores of prosecutors,  
 judges, former clients, and well-wishers wait eagerly.

EVERYONE  
 Surprise!

Julie, Conrad, and Leanne exchange looks of victory as a  
 chorus of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" fills the ballroom.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

Next to a hot dog buffet, hotel personnel slide back room  
 dividers to make space for all the celebrants.

Julie carries a paper plate to the buffet, where Leanne and a handsome PARTYGOER engage in tipsy conversation.

LEANNE

I can't believe you know so much Keats. And Nash. Impressive.

PARTYGOER

Pretty impressive yourself; I'd never heard "The Turtle" before.

LEANNE

I bet you don't know this one. "This was the morning after you dream of dying, of being held and told it didn't matter."

PARTYGOER

Wow. That's fun. Who is that?

LEANNE

Eamon Gayle.

She takes a sip of a green punch and shakes her head.

LEANNE

No, sorry, Eamon Grennan. Just had a case involving an Eamon Gayle.

Julie stops mid-ketchup-pump. She heads straight for Ben, hands him her plate.

JULIE

Will you hold this a minute, please? I'll be right back.

BEN

Okay.

Curious, he watches her leave.

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Julie types "Eamon Gayle" into a search engine on a public computer. Up pops a picture of the third man.

She clicks through search results, long enough to catch key words -- Gayle Software, First Atlanta Bank, easy mortgage loan, credit shelter trust, authorization.

Julie thinks, then pulls out her cell phone, dials.

JULIE

(into phone)

Lieutenant. Julie March.

(beat)

Yes, it's Sunday night, but I need you to look something up. I can't remember exactly, but sometime last year, Leanne reported her gun stolen. Was it a twenty-two?

(beat)

Leanne McIntyre. Did she report any distinguishing characteristics?

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

Julie returns, whispers in Ben's ear. His face falls.

BEN

(to his guests)

Excuse me.

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - BEN & JULIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Julie slams the security bar in place.

JULIE

You actually framed a boy for murder. What were you thinking?

BEN

I was thinking about providing my client with the best defense.

JULIE

Don't give me a line.

Ben sits on the bed.

BEN

Julie, it's a legitimate strategy.

JULIE

I can't believe what I'm hearing.

BEN

I don't mean framing someone. But if I find out a client is guilty, I put someone they care about or feel sorry for on the stand. In the hopes that the client will confess.

JULIE

But this time your client wasn't the guilty one.

BEN

Leanne will come forward. She'll do the right thing.

JULIE

Well, that makes one Matlock. My God, Ben, you're violating everything you've ever worked for.

Ben sits silently.

JULIE

Not to mention jeopardizing my career. Did you think I wouldn't figure it out?

BEN

I didn't think anyone would be assigned to the case this quickly.

JULIE

Well, I was. So now what am I supposed to do? Break the law or turn in your daughter?

He has no answer.

JULIE

I can't help you, Ben. I can't have knowledge of her crime and fail to report it.

BEN

Julie --

JULIE

Don't you ask me to do that. You should send Conrad home, too, before he figures it out. Then he'll be in the same dilemma.

BEN

Julie, I'm not putting you in a dilemma. I promise she'll confess.

JULIE

Is that what this trip is leading to? No, don't answer that.

BEN  
Julie, sit down.

JULIE  
You have to tell her the plan is still in motion. If she thinks it's off, there's no reason for her to confess.

He does nothing. She pulls out the cost basis brochure, waves it at him.

JULIE  
And if she doesn't, there will be nothing linking the third man to any of this. The only reason we even know he exists is I saw him through a dirty window. If she won't confess, whatever his plan is won't come out, and there will be nothing to stop him. We have this brochure and her testimony.

She sits beside him on the bed.

JULIE  
Ben, what can I do?

BEN  
The tour's over tomorrow. She will have turned herself in by then.

JULIE  
I can't wait that long.

She turns to leave.

BEN  
Where are you going?

JULIE  
I have to be back at work tomorrow. At the district attorney's office.

BEN  
I mean now.

JULIE  
I don't know. Somewhere that doesn't make my stomach turn.

END OF ACT FOUR



ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - BREAKFAST ROOM - DAY

Ben sits alone at a table in the empty room until Julie takes the chair next to him. He steels himself.

JULIE

I don't want to know what your plan is. I only know you are honorable and just, and that's enough.

They reach for each other's hands.

JULIE

Do you want me to stay with you today?

BEN

Yes.

JULIE

Then I will.

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Conrad stands, duffel in hand, by Julie at the counter.

CONRAD

I don't understand. Why can't I wait and go back to Atlanta with you all tomorrow?

JULIE

The DA opened an investigation into Golden you'll want to catch up on.

CONRAD

Julie, that's double talk. I already investigated this case. I'm going home to do no work.

The Clerk brings over a ream of paper and a flash drive.

HOTEL CLERK

(to Julie)

The faxes and printouts you requested, Ma'am.

JULIE

Thank you.

CONRAD

And you're having work sent to you here. It's because I'm not family, isn't it?

BEN

Go home, Conrad.

Conrad turns and sees Ben, who has appeared at the entrance. He drops his duffel and envelops the man in a hug.

BEN

Conrad --

CONRAD

Don't say anything, doesn't matter. You're a good boss, and a good friend. I don't like it, but I'm going home because you tell me to.

Over Conrad's shoulder, Ben shares a look with Julie: This day has just begun. Then he pulls back, realizes --

BEN

What's the one thing that never goes down? Oh, not necessarily.

CONRAD

You solved the case. C'mon, I can't go home now.

BEN

Well you can't stay here, either.

Off Conrad --

INT. CHARLESTON PLAZA HOTEL - LEANNE'S ROOM - DAY

Leanne stares out the window, interrupted by a KNOCK at the DOOR. She crosses to open it -- Ben.

BEN

Hi.

LEANNE

Hi, Dad.

After a moment, she stands aside to let him in.

LEANNE

Just saw Conrad leave.

BEN

Yeah. Yeah, he's going to visit his folks.

LEANNE

So this is it, huh?

BEN

Leanne --

LEANNE

I know you know, Dad. So what's the plan?

She pulls the desk around so it faces Ben.

LEANNE

We need a witness stand, so you can ferret out a confession. Got all your evidence lined up? Or is the plan to shame me? Say something.

BEN

Are you finished?

She sits heavily on the desk.

LEANNE

Let's just get it over with. Whatever you came to do.

BEN

I didn't come for anything. There's no plan.

LEANNE

C'mon, Dad. The hot dog tour?

BEN

I love hot dogs.

She gives him a look.

BEN

Why didn't you tell me the truth?

LEANNE

What if I had?

BEN

What if you do?

LEANNE

What do you want to hear? That I discovered Stephen's plan during the larceny trial? But no matter what I did I couldn't prove it.

BEN

After driving people out of their homes, they would take information from the mortgage loan. Including assets in a trust.

LEANNE

That's right. The bank has trust assets on file, and supposedly the software stole that information. I say supposedly because we could not find that part in the code.

BEN

But you didn't confront Stephen. You hired experts.

LEANNE

Of course I hired experts. They're the ones who looked through the software code. But this guy, this Eamon Gayle, he's brilliant. The plan itself. Brilliant.

BEN

A trust, a step up in cost basis. And it would have to involve an appraisal, for the store to be a part of it.

LEANNE

When a beneficiary inherits the trust, the cost basis is calculated from an appraisal, instead of what everything was worth when it was originally bought.

BEN

That's the step up in cost basis.

LEANNE

The idea being that you pay fewer taxes because you're only paying gains since you inherited it, not since your ancestor bought it.

BEN

That's where Brian Abbott came in?

LEANNE

To appraise all the jewelry and quote different prices to the beneficiary and the bank.

BEN

So you went to the bank.

LEANNE

With what? The genius part is no one knows anything's being stolen. Each deduction from the trust looks like a tax charge to the beneficiary and a simple withdrawal to the bank.

BEN

So you went to the police.

LEANNE

Dad, you're not listening. I had nothing. No evidence.

BEN

So you decided to let it play out and catch them red-handed.

LEANNE

Let it play out? That list of names they had. It wasn't just people getting ripped off. You know what has to happen for a someone to inherit a trust?

BEN

(realizes)

Someone has to die.

LEANNE

That was their plan. You know Stephen. He wasn't going to sit around and wait for someone on his list to kick the bucket. So I confronted him.

BEN

That gun, that I bought you for self defense. It was stolen.

LEANNE  
It wasn't stolen.

BEN  
Yes it was. I bought it for you  
and somebody stole it from you.

LEANNE  
I didn't use the gun, does that  
make you happy? Didn't even  
realize I'd left it there until I  
got home.

BEN  
Because you didn't kill him.

LEANNE  
I hired a Green Beret --

Ben loses all his breath at once. Thank God, he was wrong.

BEN  
It wasn't physically you.

LEANNE  
Listen to me. You wanted to  
know the truth. I hired a  
Green Beret to teach me how  
to stab somebody.

BEN  
I was wrong. We don't need  
to do this.

LEANNE  
I cut a button off Zach  
Golden's jacket and found an  
excuse to go to Stephen  
Barr's house.

BEN  
We'll tell the police it was  
Brian Abbott. He can't be  
tried twice.

LEANNE  
The second he turned his back I  
pushed that knife in as hard as I  
could.

Ben closes his eyes. Shakes his head hard.

LEANNE  
He was coming after you, Dad.

Ben looks up.

LEANNE  
You have a credit shelter trust.  
"IRS jackasses aren't taking my  
money," remember? Your name was on  
the list. I didn't have a choice.

BEN

You could have come to me.

LEANNE

So you could come to the same conclusion? I stopped him. I put an end to his plan. Because of me, no one is going to get hurt.

Ben looks at the First Atlanta brochure: she doesn't know the plan's not dead.

BEN

You framed Zachary Golden?

LEANNE

Actually I framed Brian Abbott. But I knew you'd defend him, and you'd need to find the real killer.

BEN

So you let me frame Zachary Golden.

LEANNE

For God's sake, Dad. You were on that list! What would you have done if you'd found my name on it?

BEN

Beat him to death. But I couldn't let an innocent boy take the blame.

LEANNE

And if I say I can?

Ben crumples the brochure.

BEN

I love you no matter what.

Leanne circles the desk. Slides her finger along a groove in the top, and back the other way.

LEANNE

More than hot dogs?

BEN

So much more.

LEANNE

(through tears)  
That's good, because I'm going to need it.

She pulls out her phone, dials.

LEANNE  
 (into phone)  
 Send police to the Charleston Plaza  
 Hotel.

She holds out her hand to Ben, but he holds her instead.

LEANNE  
 (into phone)  
 They need to transport a suspect to  
 Atlanta to give a full confession.  
 A confession of murder.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Julie sits on a bench overlooking a pond and makes notes on an open case file. She looks up, takes off her glasses.

Ben lowers himself to the seat next to her. Stone-faced until he meets her eyes.

JULIE  
 Let's go home.

BEN  
 (voice cracking)  
 Not yet.

He clears his throat and raises a hand. A MAN in a baseball cap hurries over.

BEN  
 Two please. The works.

The Man scurries off again.

Ben slips a weary arm around Julie's shoulder.

JULIE  
 You're a fine man, Ben Matlock.

The Man in the cap carries their hot dogs, his figure silhouetted against a hospital across the pond -- on the roof, a cross in front of a mural of angels.

END OF SHOW