

...UNTIL NEXT TIME...

Written by

Garret Ray Brinkley

INT. NETWORK BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

A muttering CROWD forms down a desolate, confined hallway. SERENA, 40s, frantic and sweaty, claws at a clear plastic box labeled ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE. A frustrated NETWORK EMPLOYEE struggles to keep her hands away from the box.

SERENA

That tape is show property...

NETWORK EMPLOYEE

Read the fine print, Ms. Jones. The final asset belongs to the network. Please, leave.

SERENA

I need to see it first. You don't have a fucking clue what will happen if you air this!

NETWORK EMPLOYEE

(calling out, agitated)

Do we have any security in this building?

Serena snatches the tape from the box.

NETWORK EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)

Hey! Stop her!

No one dares.

Serena shoves the tape into her bag and runs, disappearing around a corner.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The room is dark, lit only by a single desk lamp casting deep shadows. The atmosphere is quiet, tense.

Serena, tired, but with a sharp intensity in her eyes, stands before a metal desk. On it sits a vintage U-MATIC VCR and a large monitor.

She removes the tape from her bag. The label is handwritten: DOC: WILLIE R. - BACKUP COPY.

Her hands are steady as she slides the tape out of its sleeve, walks to the VCR, and inserts it. The machine WHIRS to life.

Serena steps back, watching the monitor. The screen flickers once with a burst of static, then stabilizes to black.

SUPER/OVER MONITOR: WARNING: THIS PROGRAM DETAILS THE BREAKDOWN OF ONE OF THE 1990S' MOST SUCCESSFUL TALK-SHOW HOSTS.

THE FOLLOWING FOOTAGE IS COMPRISED OF RAW, UNEDITED ARCHIVAL MATERIAL. DUE TO THE SOURCE, THE FOOTAGE CONTAINS UNEXPLAINABLE CONTENT THAT MAY DISTURB SOME VIEWERS. VIEWER DISCRETION IS STRONGLY ADVISED.

THE FOOTAGE BEGINS. EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWS IS FOOTAGE FROM THE U-MATIC TAPE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

A TV PROMO.

The footage has a grainy, worn quality.

The sprawling stage is designed to look like a high-end courtroom. The entire set is finished in glossy cherry wood and brass rails.

THE STUDIO AUDIENCE, a humble thirty guests - small, but psyched, is banked tightly in plush, dark-green velvet seats - rising like a massive jury box.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Order! Order! Order at 6 o'clock.
Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for
another episode of 'The Carmichael
Hour.' On tonight's show...

TALK-SHOW GUEST MONTAGE.

A DOCTOR whose stiffness suggests he was cursed into a perpetual state of contempt.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Dr. Benjamin Guille and Vance will
discuss his new book...

Image of a hardcover book.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
'With your own eyes.'

A disheveled MOTHER and her carefree SON.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Vance looks to help single-mother,
Norma, get her son, Gregory, away
from the video games...

AN INMATE. MILES FREEMAN. Pale white, caked in cigarette burns, trembles like he's in the Arctic. He's chained up in a dressing room, kept in check by a group of POLICE OFFICERS.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And for this week's edition of
'What goes around...', Death-row
convict Miles Freeman faces
justice.

CUT TO BLACK.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE/MONTAGE.

- Snippets of Jerry Springer, Morton Downey Jr., and Geraldo giving separate introductions to their shows.

SHAWN (O.S.)
The early 1990s became a
transitional period for America...

INT. DARK INTERVIEW ROOM

SUPER: SHAWN MORIARTY - EX-DIRECTOR, THE CARMICHAEL HOUR/KEY WITNESS.

SHAWN MORIARTY, 50s, sits under the glow of a single spotlight in an otherwise pitch black room. Mad scientist hair conjoined to a mangy salt and pepper beard. Thinks fast, talks faster. Doc Brown crossed with the Energizer Bunny.

SHAWN
My name is Shawn Moriarty, and I
am, or was acting director for The
Carmichael Hour.

INT. CAB/MOVING - DAY

VIGNETTE: Shawn sits in the back of a moving cab, pen cap tucked neatly in the side of his mouth, scribbling notes hastily inside a worn binder.

SHAWN (O.S.)
If you are a fan of wholesome,
family-friendly content... Well,
this might not be your favorite
decade.

INT. DARK INTERVIEW ROOM

SUPER: SERENA - PRODUCER/EX-WIFE TO VANCE CARMICHAEL.

Serena radiates wholesome and professional in this interview, from the same location as Shawn's interview.

SERENA

My name is Serena Jones. I was a producer for The Carmichael Hour ...I've worked in television for many years...

BLACK AND WHITE B-ROLL FOOTAGE.

Serena sits alone in a dark room, reviewing a small monitor. She slowly removes her glasses and looks over the frames at visually distant clips, her face unreadable.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...and the transition from Phil Donahue, the wholesome, conversational type...

- Different snippets of fighting and chaos on the respective '90s talk shows.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...to the utter madness of this new generation was so jarring that most of us didn't know how to react.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

A new line was drawn, and crossed, and drawn, and crossed. At some point, the line no longer exists.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

Back to the stage. The crowd is in a frenzy, chanting "Vance, Vance, Vance."

VANCE CARMICHAEL glides from the shadows backstage. Slicked back golden locks and a professionally-tailored suit. He's a man who could talk his way out of anything, and he's about to prove that.

Vance takes a moment to soak in the love of the crowd before half-heartedly calming them down...then building them up...them back down...up...down...finally motions for them to stay seated.

SHAWN (O.S.)

The shift in television was bringing some fresh faces. Vance Carmichael was one of them. A clean cut, good looking guy. Had a retro sort of aura for the older folks, but his content was geared towards the changing audience.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

Law and television don't exactly mesh. That wasn't gonna stop him.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

An out-of-focus camera. A STAGEHAND adjusts it. The camera quality is not the same as the previous interviews, indicating a past production.

Off to the side, Vance appears, speaking one on one with someone unseen.

He prepares to sit in an awaiting chair, but he drops something before he can. It RATTLES - like pills in a bottle.

Whoever is off camera leans down to pick them up at the same time Vance is leaning down.

VANCE

(aggressive)

I got it!... Thank you.

The other person backs off. Vance takes up 'whatever' and pockets it. Takes a seat.

Beat.

VANCE (CONT'D)

(into camera)

My name is Vance Carmichael and I am the host of The Carmichael Hour on NYS National Network.

LATER--

VANCE (CONT'D)

Who am I? Starting off with an easy one, I see.

Vance cackles. He's got a great smile and radiates charm.

MONTAGE.

— FOOTAGE of Vance on the red carpet. A hundred flashbulbs pop. Vance poses, his grin blinding.

— STOCK FOOTAGE of his book cover (Vance Carmichael's Truth: A Guide to Unmasking Liars) soaring to the top of the New York Times Bestseller list.

— B-ROLL FOOTAGE of Vance stepping out of a pitch black SUV, waving to fans on the sidewalk.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: GAVIN BRANCH - MEDIA ETHICS PROFESSOR - NYU

New interview footage with GAVIN BRANCH, 30s, plain.

GAVIN

I refer to it as..."the
weaponization of talk shows" or
"the death of nuance". Vance
Carmichael had the kind of
influence politicians dream of. He
wasn't everywhere, but where he
was, people tuned in.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

Regardless of how you felt, Vance
was unstoppable.

Vance continues his saunter down the red carpet, his cheeky grin seamlessly elevating the mood. His movements slow to a sudden crawl, and the footage pauses on a camera's SNAP. A divine light has engulfed his profile, transforming his handsome features into an outline of a shadowed skull.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. DARK INTERVIEW ROOM

The same dark room where Serena and Shawn's interviews are taking place. A door opens and closes in the background.

FOOTSTEPS approach. The SQUEALING of chair legs as someone sits under the glow of the overhead light.

SUPER: HEATHER/LIGHTING TECHNICIAN/SURVIVOR

INTERVIEW. HEATHER JENKINS, 20s, bespectacled and focused. She has 3rd degree burns on her face and body. A slight tremor - she's subdued and fragile.

HEATHER

My name is Heather, and I was a Lighting Technician for The Carmichael Hour. My job was simple: make sure the lights don't glitch and make sure Vance's good side is always properly lit.

VIGNETTE: Heather, without burns, carefully works the dial on a simple, worn lighting adjustment tool.

HEATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We were hitting on so many hot-button topics that you just knew they were striking a nerve with people.

IMAGES OF VANCE WITH HIS ARM AROUND SERENA.

SHAWN (O.S.)

Vance came from a fairly-wealthy background. His dad was the owner of a successful machining company before he sadly passed away.

PHOTOS OF VANCE IN A CAP AND GOWN.

SHAWN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

His grandfather left him a sizable inheritance. Large enough to put him through law school.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

He had the gift of the gab. He could draw emotion seamlessly. They had a nickname for him when he was rising through the ranks...

BACK TO SERENA.

INTERVIEWER 1 (O.S.)

What was Vance's nickname when he practiced?

Serena shifts in her seat, looks away, not appearing pleased with the question. Sits in silence.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

Loose tongue. He... I guess it was a gift.

PHOTOS OF VANCE IN THE COURTROOM. SITTING, FOCUSED. OTHERS PORTRAY HIM FACING THE JUDGE, ANIMATED.

SHAWN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It was just the beginning for him.

INT. STUDIO BACKROOM - DAY

SUPER: SECURITY FOOTAGE: 01/09/1998 - 6:13 PM.

Serena sits at a cluttered table looking through a stack of manila folders. Vance appears behind her, kissing her head.

Shawn scribbles on a white board behind them.

VANCE
What do we got?

SHAWN
Double murder homicides, bombings,
hit and runs, abductions. A couple
of them have pending appeals...

Serena scatters the envelopes out, opening them one by one.

SERENA
Here are the files for them.

Vance takes note of one of the envelopes. Staring intently.

VANCE
I'll be damned. Willie Reams. I
think we're set.

Serena takes a look, stares up at Vance.

A MUGSHOT IMAGE OF WILL REAMS, 40s, a husky, timid-looking man.

BACK TO SERENA.

INTERVIEWER 1 (O.S.)
You were Vance's wife?

SERENA
And producer.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
How did you feel about the premise
of the show?

SERENA
(deep breath, pause)
I loved him. Some things you
question, but... It's complicated.

BACK TO SHAWN.

INTERVIEWER 1 (O.S.)
Take us back to the inception.

SHAWN
As far as the show itself...?

IMAGES: VANCE SHAKES HANDS WITH UNNAMED PEOPLE/ARMS AROUND
TWO IMPORTANT-LOOKING SUITS/VANCE SIGNS SEVERAL DOCUMENTS.

INTERVIEWER 2 (O.S.)
You had a successful practice. Why
did you step away?

BACK TO VANCE.

Vance takes a moment to ponder.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

STOCK FOOTAGE FROM A TRIAL.

Vance, eyes blazing with righteous fury, addresses the jury.

VANCE
Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,
if you can not clearly see that
this man is guilty on all counts,
then I will quit my practice and
start selling bridges, because I
got one to sell you...

JUDGE
Order, Counselor.

VANCE
Your honor?

JUDGE
Order!

VANCE
(addressing the jury)
Are you listening? Good, because...

JUDGE
Mr. Carmichael, stop now or you
will be in contempt of court.

VANCE

Do what you gotta do, your honor.
These people need to hear the rest-
-

The judge HAMMERS down the gavel. THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

BACK TO VANCE.

He's looking off to the side.

VANCE (CONT'D)

When you lose a trial, and a suspect goes free, the victim's family has to watch them leave. Who's the first person they look to for an answer? How is he leaving right now? You told me he was going away. I just... Those looks will haunt your dreams. Even when a suspect was convicted and sentenced, it never seemed enough. Nothing heals all wounds, but I had to think of something because our current system was accomplishing so little for them. I believe we have the solution. Does that answer your question?

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING - DAY

STOCK FOOTAGE OF VANCE SPEAKING BEFORE A HEARING COMMITTEE.

VANCE

(to Congress)

A 1990 study on homicide survivors confirmed 'Indirect victimization' is a real thing. We must address it. I call upon the members of this Congress to support the amendment Ex. 21:24, guaranteeing victims' families a chance for real closure. Thank you.

Vance steps up from his seat and shakes hands with several people around him.

SHAWN (O.S.)

Ex. 21:24 amendment. Exodus 21:24. Lex talionis, in Hebrew, translates to "eye for an eye."

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

This amendment would allow live executions of death row inmates on his show, and if the family wished, they would be the ones to carry it out.

STOCK NEWS FOOTAGE MONTAGE.

Different stations show polls for the support of the amendment.

Each one is slightly different, but the options remain the same: SUPPORT or DON'T SUPPORT.

Support has a significant lead on each station.

NEWS ANCHORS (O.S.)

...Overwhelming support/Landslide/Unquestionable/ The people are clearly in favor/ In a wild turn of events/ I don't know what to say, this is straight out of a sci-fi movie...

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

No one had ever really done anything like this before. Certainly not to the extent that the federal government was involved.

SHORT MONTAGE.

Prisoners packed into crowds in different prison yards.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Prisons were overcrowding. Superintendents and wardens would happily hand over those they didn't want to deal with. A win-win for them.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER

I was fresh out of film school, looking for internships, when news broke that Congress was actually voting on this amendment.

(MORE)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

My...journalism professor always told me not to brace for the unexpected, but to accept it as inevitable so that you can counter it. I don't think anyone thought it was really possible.

STOCK NEWS FOOTAGE.

In the Congressional hall. THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, male, 60s, reads from his podium.

SPEAKER

Motion 6748932A, ex. 21:24, vote is 310 against 58 in favor. Motion is accepted.

The speaker bangs his gavel.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

The media hype was so powerful, the government had no choice. They just 'tweaked' the existing capital punishment statute - called it a 'justice reform amendment,' and gave Vance's show all the legal cover it needed. No one fought back.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

Even today it sounds completely insane, but once again, Vance knew how to bypass the intellectual spectrum of the brain and drill right into the emotional core.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE

Vance addresses his audience and the camera.

VANCE

As you all may be aware, recently we've been fighting like hell to get our next segment approved. It went all the way to the Congress of the United States of America, and thanks to your support, and...

(MORE)

VANCE (CONT'D)
(addressing the camera)
Thanks to your support at home,
this "crazy" idea is our next
segment. However, I must warn those
of you in the audience and those of
you at home that what you are about
to see will likely shock you,
possibly disturb you. This is very
serious. So, if you are squeamish,
I encourage you to leave the set
now and, for you at home, change
the channel. You've been warned.

Vance studies various members of his loyal club, waiting
patiently for anyone to exit. Everyone stays put.

VANCE (CONT'D)
Ladies and gentlemen, it is time
for "What goes around..."

The two-way curtains part on stage, revealing an ELECTRIC
CHAIR, resting under a spotlight like a horrifying final act
of a stage play.

Some audience members applaud, some stare with anticipation,
others grip hands with the person in the next chair.

SERENA (O.S.)
It started as morbid curiosity, a
peek behind the curtain of death.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA (CONT'D)
But Vance dressed it up in terms of
"closure" and "justice," and
suddenly, that twisted curiosity
became morally sanctioned. You
weren't watching an execution; you
were participating in a public
service. It was the digital town
square, and everyone was clutching
a stone.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN
In the beginning, it seemed like
the studio audience was just there
for the shock value. But Vance
permitted them to be there.
(MORE)

SHAWN (CONT'D)

He took something ugly - the same gruesome curiosity that made people attend public hangings in the old South -and broadcast it into their living rooms. Overnight, watching death wasn't just entertainment; it was a moral obligation.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE

VANCE

Let me introduce you to our first... My apologies, I'm not sure what to call him. Might've helped if I rehearsed this part...

Soft laughter.

VANCE (CONT'D)

I suppose our first... Casualty of injustice. Miles Freeman.

Miles Freeman, the same man seen earlier, is aggressively thrust on stage by security. Several POLICE OFFICERS follow him up, hovering their hands over their firearms - ready for a worst-case scenario.

Miles shivers from shock, surveying the ruckus humanity he's been thrust into.

The audience instantly BOO at the sight of his presence. Vance waves the audience's enthusiasm down.

Vance steps down towards the stage.

VANCE (CONT'D)

For those of you unaware, on the night of November 4th of last year, Miles Freeman attempted a carjacking of a young man named Henry Griffith.

MILES

Please...

A security guard gets in his face, mumbling something to him.

VANCE

Miles held young Henry at gunpoint...

MILES

The gun wasn't loaded. I--

The same security guard pops Miles in the jaw. Shutting him up.

VANCE

Henry was on his way home from a school social when Miles waved him down. Henry refused to hand over the keys to his vehicle. According to reports, Miles is correct, the gun was not loaded, but that did not stop him from using the gun as a blunt object on poor Henry. Killing him slowly.

MILES

Please. I'm so sorry...

VANCE

Put him in.

Security and officers strap Miles' arms, legs, and neck to the chair, rendering him utterly defenseless.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman, I'd like to bring out Henry's mother, Ann, and his father, Corbin.

ANN and CORBIN, 40s, trudge themselves to the stage, staring hate-filled daggers through Miles.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Ann, Corbin, we've gone over with you what will be done, as you have wished for. Do you have anything you want to say to Miles before justice is carried out?

Ann spits in Miles' face.

ANN

Rot in hell you bastard!

MILES

Please! I'm sorry!

CORBIN

You're about to be sorry. Just wait.

Vance nods.

VANCE
If there's nothing further...

MILES
Please! Oh my God! Please!

VANCE
Officers...

The officers lead Ann and Corbin over to the KILLSWITCH for the chair.

VANCE (CONT'D)
(to camera)
Folks, once again, you've been warned.
(to Ann and Corbin)
Whenever you're ready.

MILES
Please! I'm so--

Ann and Corbin waste no time and flip the switch.

Miles' body instantly convulses.

His eyes roll backwards and a steady, horrid HUM buzzes from his mouth.

Ann and Corbin watch with soft glints of closure. Soon enough, Miles' body goes limp. Officers flip the switch back, killing the current.

Vance watches intently, his gaze not one of satisfaction, but resolution, like justice is dispensing before his eyes.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

A PBS interview. Vance sits on a couch opposite the INTERVIEWER, CHUCK, 40s.

CHUCK
You feel no shame with what you do?

VANCE
They were doomed regardless, Chuck.

CHUCK
Yes, but you're countering one unspeakable act with another? Why plaster it on every TV screen I guess that's my question?

VANCE

(shrugs)

There's a disclaimer at the start of each episode. People choose to tune in or not. Perhaps this is what people need to make them think twice before they do something heinous.

BACK TO GAVIN.

GAVIN

Most people had this idea that, well, they're going to die anyway, so it's okay to do it on live television, because...because, get this, we will let the families take their lives if they wish. It's all about closure and healing. That's not healing to me.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

It worked. Before too long, we became the highest-rated talk show among all the other hosts. I don't think even he knew how far it was gonna go.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Back to the footage from earlier of Vance's animated plea to the Judge and jury.

The camera zooms in on Willie Reams on the defense side, and he appears so nervous he could vomit.

HEATHER (O.S.)

William Reams, or Willie as he preferred...

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

...was on trial for the abduction and drowning of his own daughter, Sasha.

AN IMAGE OF LITTLE SASHA PLAYING WITH PLAYDOUGH ON A MINI TABLE.

HEATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
According to evidence from the
prosecutor, they obtained skin
fragments from under Sasha's
fingerprints whose blood type
matched Willie's. He was the last
one seen with her. That was Vance's
smoking gun.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Willie's in the hot seat.

VANCE
(holding up a manilla
folder)
Mr. Reams, what is your blood type?

WILLIE
I... I--

VANCE
It is O negative, correct?

WILLIE
I believe--

Vance gets within inches of Willie's face, leering down on
him.

VANCE
It is, which is the same found
under the skin samples taken from
Sasha's fingernails, correct?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY (O.S.)
Objection. Badgering.

JUDGE
Sustained.

VANCE
Your honor, if he doesn't know his
own blood type or where he was that
day, at that time, what he was
doing, why--

JUDGE
Easy, counselor.

VANCE
Your honor...
(MORE)

VANCE (CONT'D)
(addressing the jury)
Please, listen to your heads and
your guts, it's obvious.

JUDGE
I'm done. Mr. Carmichael, you're
excused.

Vance hesitates.

VANCE
Please reconsider, your honor--

JUDGE
No. Court is adjourned for now...

A BANG of the gavel.

Vance snatches his belongings, which include a briefcase,
documents, and a coffee thermos, and jolts out of the
courtroom.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
Willie was found guilty. But, his
guilty verdict couldn't go anywhere
because the lawyer brought forth to
prosecute was no longer there.

BACK TO VANCE.

INTERVIEWER 2 (O.S.)
You were disbarred?

Vance pauses, nods.

VANCE
I was...

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
In all actuality, Willie should've
gone free after the dismissal of
the prosecuting attorney. He chose
to appeal. Things were actually
moving in his favor.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Willie sobs uncontrollably, barely keeping it together.

WILLIE

She was my daughter. She's all I had in this world. She was taken from me. Look at me, I'm telling the truth. Please, believe me. I'm not lying. She was all I had--

Willie's lawyer has to softly lead him back to a seated position. Despite initial protests, Willie obliges, continuing to weep into his hands.

LATER--

Every occupant in the courtroom stands, anticipating.

Willie's bottom lip quivers, and he nervously stretches the fabric on his prison shirt.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Docket number 48901. State vs. William Reams. I have heard your testimony for appeal, and, after much deliberation of evidence presented, Mr. Reams, I don't see any cause for this judgment to be overturned. Your appeal is denied.

The BANG of the gavel echoes.

Willie faints, collapsing into their defense-side table, flipping it backwards on top of himself. His lawyer and awaiting OFFICERS all come to his aid.

A thickset WOMAN in the spectator seating casts a pure loathing gaze at Willie down on the floor. This is YVONNE, 40s, Willie's ex-wife.

SERENA (O.S.)

Willie had no one on his side. Not even his wife, Yvonne. She was convinced he did it.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA (CONT'D)

That overwhelming sense of loneliness can do crazy things to people.

BACK TO VANCE.

VANCE

Could I have been more professional? Possibly.
(MORE)

VANCE (CONT'D)
Would I do what I did again if I
could? Absolutely. 'Eye for an eye'
affects me too. At the end of the
day, the result is what matters.
Loose tongue is here...deal with
it.

The footage momentarily HICCUPS. A flicker of ANALOG STATIC
briefly appears and vanishes. The sound dips for a fraction
of a second, then returns to normal, like it never happened.

A soft grin from Vance. CAMERA PAUSES. A still image of
Vance's grinning face fades...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

RAW B-ROLL FOOTAGE (HANDHELD/SHAKY)

The camera bounces about roughly, focusing on the feet of
people walking. The image is '90s Broadcast quality.

HEATHER (O.S.)
Jesse. This way.

JESSE (O.S.)
Why does he want us recording?

HEATHER (O.S.)
Because he's weird. Just humor him.

INT. STUDIO LOT/BACKSTAGE - DAY

The B-Roll footage is unsteady as it pans through the
backstage area. It settles on a MASSIVE, CIRCULAR TANK being
assembled.

A CREW MEMBER, BRIAN, instructs workers.

BRIAN
Yeah, just a straight, dead-on shot
when he goes in. Make sure we have
two overheads, not one.

Brian notices the camera and grins directly into the lens.

BRIAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Just in time to see the finished
product. This is for Willie
tomorrow. Over a thousand gallons
are gonna flow in this baby. You
got my good side?

Brian cackles at his own joke. The camera operator (Jesse) quickly pulls the camera away from Brian, framing the tank instead.

HEATHER (O.S.)
You seem a little too into this,
Brian.

BRIAN (O.S.)
Gotta love the big props, Heather.
Big production!

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER
We weren't nationally syndicated at
that point. We were a lead-in show
at 6 pm. It didn't take long for
the right people to get wind of us.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN
He was already a big deal in
Cleveland. Why not be a big deal
period?

EXT. NETWORK BUILDING - DAY

HOME VIDEO FOOTAGE.

Vance strolls out the doors of a multi-storied, plexiglass building. He appears to be withholding contagious excitement, mixed with some reserved doubt.

VANCE
You're filming?

SERENA (O.S.)
I am. Good news?

VANCE
We're getting an audition episode
next month.

SERENA
For?

VANCE
The primetime slot. National and
live. If it goes well, they might
keep us there.

SERENA (O.S.)
That's great news, babe. Aren't you excited?

VANCE
Yeah, but we just can't screw anything up.

SERENA (O.S.)
Who would screw something up?

Vance shakes his head.

VANCE
I don't know. I'm just thinking out loud.

SERENA (O.S.)
You have nothing to be nervous about.

VANCE
I know. You're right.

SERENA (O.S.)
I know I am, sir.

Vance shoots her a 'really?' glance.

VANCE
Come on. We got a lot of work to do, and I love you.

SERENA (O.S.)
Love you, too.

SUPER/OVER BLACK:

DAY OF WILLIE REAMS' EXECUTION.

INT. TRANSPORT VEHICLE - DAY

A husky, southern good ole' boy named LOUIS, 50s, the transport truck driver, drives down the road. Several shots of him, maintaining focus on the road.

LOUIS (O.S.)
I remember when they brought him out...

Passenger-side view of Louis driving, giving his recounting of events.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
I usually like to read the paper or
occupy my time while I'm waiting to
drive them to the studio, but, for
some reason, this time was
different.

INTERVIEWER 3 (O.S.)
Different how?

LOUIS
You're gonna think I'm crazy.

He chuckles.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
But, it's like, I could feel him
come out, like his presence was
so...profound I had to look at him.

INTERVIEWER 3 (O.S.)
What did you see when you looked at
him?

LOUIS
He wasn't smiling or frowning. He
just looked...content. Best way I
can describe it.

INT. PRISON - DAY

POLICE SECURITY FOOTAGE.

Willie steps from his cell. He's not the same man - lanky,
shaved head, scraggly grey beard. TWO OFFICERS point in the
direction to go.

INT. TRANSPORT VEHICLE - DAY

Back to Louis driving.

LOUIS
It was like he had some secret
knowledge we didn't. One of the
officers told me he was repeating
something to himself when they came
to get him. Didn't sound like
English.

INTERVIEWER 3 (O.S.)
No?

LOUIS
According to Glen, one of my
buddies. A guard over there, it
sounded like he was speaking some
kind of crockanese Japanese or
something.

Louis chuckles. His light expression soon shifts to a more
somber tone.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
Makes sense now, I suppose.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER/OVER BLACK:

THE FOLLOWING IS SECURITY FOOTAGE TAKEN OUTSIDE THE STUDIO
WHEN WILLIE ARRIVED.

EXT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STUDIO - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: WEST ENTRANCE 01/14/98 4:17 PM.

The transport vehicle arrives into the opening transport
area just outside the studio. The back doors of the van pop
open. Two officers jump out the back and lead Willie out.

Willie takes a few steps, stops. He turns and gazes up to
the sky. The officers give him a moment to soak up the sun
one last time. Willie gives them a nod and they keep moving.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
It began like any other show.
Something felt different about this
one.

IMAGES OF THE WATER TANK.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
This was the first time in the
show's history they were using a
different method. The same way
Sasha died.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

Applause from the studio audience leads to the familiar
transition of Vance up in the studio audience.

VANCE

Welcome back to The Carmichael Hour, everyone. It is that time once again for "What goes around..." Our...justice participant today, obviously, has committed a heinous action. On the night of December 1st two years ago, this man abducted his own daughter and drowned her in the Subbato Reservoir not far from here. I...honestly don't want to say anymore, otherwise I'll do the job myself. Here with us today we have the young girl's mother, Yvonne. Yvonne, stand up please.

Yvonne stands and shifts toward Vance.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Yvonne, ladies and gentlemen, is Sasha's mother and Willie's ex-wife. I have consulted you about what will be taking place on stage. Do you have any questions for me?

Yvonne simply shakes her head, no.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Before we do begin, fairness, of course. Let's bring out the person who committed this horrific crime. William Reams, aka. Willie.

SECURITY and POLICE OFFICERS escort Willie onto the stage to an awaiting seat. Not the same seat as previously seen, as his punishment will be different.

Security and the officers crowd Willie while he sits.

Vance seems taken aback by Willie's shift in appearance.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Willie, do you have anything you'd like to say to us? To Yvonne? Do you feel any remorse for your actions?

Willie sits in silence, the tension beyond uncomfortable.

VANCE (CONT'D)

I guess not. In that case...

WILLIE

I had a friend named John...

Willie's voice is deeper, penetrating. Catching Vance off guard.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

He died. August last year at 3:20
in the morning. Maybe I'll see him
soon.

YVONNE

You murdered my only child you
piece of shit! I'll see you in hell
where you belong!

The audience CHEERS.

WILLIE

(to Yvonne)

I love you, Yvonne. Why couldn't
you believe me?

Tears well in Yvonne's eyes. She charges Willie, ready to strike, but security quickly step between them.

VANCE

Enough stalling, Willie. Let's go.

He waves his hand and the curtains open up, revealing the tank loaded to the brim with water. On the front side of the tank is a window that emanates clear, crystal liquid glints inside.

Above the water at the top of a staircase rests a hydraulic platform housing a thick metal frame in the middle.

Security and the cops take Willie up the stairs leading to the top of the tank. They strap Willie to clamps chained taut to the metal frame.

Vance hands Yvonne a remote.

VANCE (CONT'D)

(to Yvonne, quieter)

You ready?

Yvonne seems caught up in what's in front of her.

YVONNE

I want to face him.

VANCE

Of course.

They make their way to the front of the tank, face the window looking in.

Yvonne is about to press the button, when...

WILLIE

(to Vance)

You value justice, revenge, but
they always cost you what you value
most. This is your chance to admit
what we both know.

A jagged green line races across the bottom of the frame. The sound of Willie's voice is briefly DISTORTED and pitches down.

The footage goes back to normal, revealing a puzzled audience. Yvonne also. She shoots Vance a troubled glance.

Vance's expression is troubled, concerned, like he wants to speak, but something is holding him back. Finally...

VANCE

What we both know? You know as well
as I do that you deserve every bit
of this.

(to Yvonne)

Do the honors.

Yvonne delays, seething through labored breaths.

Her hand shivers from a tense grip. Her thumb hovers over the glint of the DOWN button for what seems like an eternity.

She bites her lip and locks eyes with Willie one last time. He puts a hand to the glass, beckoning her.

Yvonne has to avert her gaze. She presses the button.

The hydraulic platform comes to life, WHIRRING as it slowly lowers Willie to the bottom of the tank. He can move his arms, but everything else is firmly locked in place. He's not going anywhere.

Vance tries to keep his focus on the tank, but can't meet Willie's gaze. Inside the tank, Willie has been lowered, but his attention fixates through the window, square at Yvonne. He presses a hand to the dual-sided viewing glass window.

The audience is dead silent.

BHAM.

The lights go out. The atmosphere becomes a cacophony of murmur and confused crosstalk.

The lights flicker. In and out.

For a split second, when the lights return, Willie appears to be out of the tank, facing Yvonne. No one notices.

The back and forth continues.

VANCE (CONT'D)

It's okay, everyone. Just give it a moment.

(to any crew member)

What's going on with the god damn back up generator?

VOICE (O.S.)

It's not kicking up yet. I don't know why.

VANCE

Figure it out.

Just then, the lights return. Willie's lifeless body stiff against the metal frame through the window, motionless, eyes fixed forward, gone.

Vance turns to see Yvonne is gone...

Sudden SCREAMS. Vance turns to spot Yvonne on top of the stairway to the tank, facing away from it. Before anyone can call for her, she falls backwards. SPLASH. She sinks to the bottom.

Vance and security rush the stairway. Through the window of the tank, no bubbles spew from her mouth.

Vance and security jump in the water and paddle to get her out. The audience is in disarray, rushing the stage to offer any assistance.

A swarm of people surround Yvonne at the bottom, yanking with all their might, but they can't move her. Several more AUDIENCE MEMBERS leap in to lend their hands. With the assistance of about a dozen audience members, they finally get her out and onto the top of the stairway.

One security guard dials 911.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Medics! Where the fuck are the medics?!

Vance notices a camera pushing in close on the chaos.

VANCE (CONT'D)
Cut the cameras!... I said cut the
fucking cameras!

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

Frantic camera static. Slowly stabilizing, revealing...

INT./EXT. STUDIO/BACKSTAGE/LOT - NIGHT

SECURITY FOOTAGE: BUILDING/LEFT WING 01/15/98 12:22 AM.

Nearly pitch black security footage shows Vance, tie undone, illuminated by the building's night lights, leaning against the side of the building, taking drags from a cigarette. He flicks the butt away.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
According to her siblings, she
never showed any suicidal
tendencies. They always kept up
with how she was doing after
Sasha's death. By all accounts, she
was doing alright.

STILL IMAGES OF VANCE AND THE FEW AUDIENCE MEMBERS IN THE
POOL.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
With the number of people trying to
get Yvonne out, it didn't make
sense why they couldn't.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - NIGHT

A camera comes on revealing the Carmichael Hour stage once more. Vance, droopy-eyed and exhausted, steps into the frame and sits on the stage steps. He fixes his tie and rubs through his hair. He makes soft eye contact with the camera.

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)
Start whenever you're ready.

VANCE
I know.

Vance takes a breath.

VANCE (CONT'D)

(into camera)

This concludes another episode of the Carmichael Hour. I want to thank each of you for tuning into the broadcast today. Remember, those affected by these tragedies will never truly be at peace unless they show, first hand, these acts have consequences. We will continue to be a symbol for that message. Until next time, I'm Vance Carmichael. Good night.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. CONTROL PANEL ROOM - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CONTROL ROOM 01/15/98 12:12 PM

Vance, Shawn, and Heather stand before a control station lined with monitors, sound equipment, etc.

Two TECHNICIANS, JESSE (sound) and SIMON (video), both in their 20s, sit in front of the monitors.

HEATHER

Lights were fine during rehearsal.

SHAWN

There was a storm in the area. Probably killed the power for a second.

VANCE

Yeah, or faulty wiring. I'll get an electrician out here--

SIMON

We're all just gonna ignore the obvious?

Shared glances of casual annoyance between the group. This is Simon - 'Mr. No Filter.'

VANCE

(tongue in cheek)

Whoops. My apologies for not consulting the electrical engineer. Simon, due tell?

Hints of smiles from the other crew members.

SIMON
You guys don't find it interesting?

HEATHER
What?

Simon and Jesse share a look.

JESSE
Willie said those things on camera,
then--

VANCE
He was running on blind luck for a
long time. He got one more. It's
over now.

SIMON
Okay. If you say so. It is weird.

JESSE
(to Vance)
What do you want do about the
ending? We can't air that.

Vance takes a moment to process, thinks.

VANCE
Just...cut it when the lights go
out. Cut straight to the outro.

SIMON
People are gonna wonder--

VANCE
Let them wonder. We got what we
needed.

SHAWN
You did the re-shoot of the outro?

VANCE
Yes.

HEATHER
She was a bigger woman. Yvonne. But
you guys couldn't get her out? Then
the lights--

SIMON
That's my point.

VANCE

We got her out. She was under a ton of water. You guys make it sound like there's some supernatural shit going on. It was an accident. Tragic, but an accident. It happens.

SIMON

You can't tell me it's not a little freaky?

VANCE

Guys, save all the superstitious mumbo for the Halloween special--

JESSE

(to everyone)

Guys. Listen.

Jesse unplugs his headphones and turns up the volume on the monitors. The group listen in, but don't appear alarmed.

VANCE

What?

SHAWN

There's nothing there.

JESSE

It's subtle, but it's there. Some kind of sub-audio frequency. It happens right after he goes in the water. Wait.

The group wait as the footage replays. Still nothing.

JESSE (CONT'D)

You're kidding me. You guys don't hear that?

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

Jesse wasn't just 'the sound guy.' The kid was an acoustic genius. He won a national engineering award in college for noise isolation. He could hear things in the board that no one else could. That's why, when he said he heard that, we should have listened.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER

It raised his curiosity enough that
he had to get proof.

INT. CONTROL PANEL ROOM

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CONTROL PANEL SECURITY 01/16/98 11:16 PM

Jesse enters the security room, alone, and goes to the control desk. He taps and moves some switches. He places the headphones over his ears and starts Willie's footage back up, listening.

Sudden static. The footage seems to morph into an oily green art picture.

Jesse leans in, headphones secured, furiously adjusting the gain.

He hits a specific frequency. A moment of clarity. A triumphant smile touches his lips.

Then, Jesse halts. He shifts uncomfortably in his seat. His face tightens, he shakes his head - something is seriously wrong.

He tries to rip the headphones away...

But he can't. It's as though they've been cemented to his ears.

Jesse screams. His body seizes, arching high above the chair. His hands fly up to his head, trying to tear the headset away.

Jesse MOANS with panicked, boisterous SHRIEKS of painful agony until his body silences. He collapses, motionless.

The time on the security feed FAST FORWARDS to 4:02 AM.

The door to the room re-opens. The footage slows down. The BUZZING of flies penetrates the interior, followed by the sound of HEATHER'S GUTTURAL SCREAM.

BACK TO HEATHER.

She's about to speak, but struggles. Eyes misting over.

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CARMICHAEL HOUR HALLWAY 01/17/98 4:57 AM.

The whole crew collect around an ambulance as Jesse's body-bagged corpse is placed in the back.

Several OFFICERS question various crew members, including Vance, who holds Serena tight next to him. Heather sits on a piece of sound equipment, severely shaken up.

HEATHER (O.S.)

I couldn't answer any questions.
None of us could. This was...this
was one of our own. How could this
happen? To our friend?

BACK TO SHAWN.

Shawn plugs headphones into a microcassette player and puts them over his ears. He hits play, listens. SOFT AUDIO from the 'Willie execution' broadcast plays.

Shawn stops the cassette player.

SHAWN

I've listened to that broadcast
recording a dozen times, and I
can't hear anything on it. I spoke
with his family and he's never
displayed any signs of seizures,
hearing problems, or... anything
really. He was a professional for a
reason.

BACK TO HEATHER.

Heather winces. Lightly dabs her face.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

You okay, Heather?

HEATHER

Yeah, it acts up occasionally.
(Heather refocuses)
Vance wanted to see the footage.
The cops were gonna take it as
evidence, but they ruled it an
accident, so, since there was no
crime committed, they had no
purpose for it. They let Vance keep
it.

INT. CONTROL PANEL ROOM

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CONTROL ROOM SECURITY 01/18/98 9:37 AM.

Vance, Serena, Shawn, and Simon replay the footage. Serena averts her gaze. Shawn removes his glasses and wipes his eyes.

SHAWN

What would cause that?

SERENA

The police said cerebral
hemorrhaging followed by a stroke--

SHAWN

No, not just that, that
green...stuff?

SERENA

Simon?

SIMON

I've never seen that before in my
life.

VANCE

You're the visual wizard, man. Give
me a theory. Any theory.

SIMON

I mean, maybe, a corrupted color
space signal caused by power
fluctuations.

VANCE

The power was acting up all week.
Works for me.

SIMON

I've never seen it. Ever. I've
heard of...maybe two cases...

VANCE

But it can happen, right?

SIMON

... Yeah, so can a lightning
strike. Doesn't--

VANCE

That's it. Solved--

SIMON

It only ever lasts a second before
auto correction.

VANCE

Chalk this up to an unknown case.
Any other theories?

Simon shrugs.

SIMON

Not yet.

VANCE

Then there you go.

SIMON

That's not the only thing. Jesse used to turn the dial up as high as he could during playback. It hurt like hell. He told me, "Relax, dude, it can't get high enough to kill you." Damage like that'd need to get up to over one hundred thousand decibels, which is impossible on this equipment.

This silences the crew. The stand in stunned disillusion.

VANCE

Okay, what exactly are you getting at? That...that 'something else' did it?

SHAWN

(to Vance)

I think we need to postpone the next show, hoss.

VANCE

Why?

Shawn shoots him a confused glance. *Why? Really?*

VANCE (CONT'D)

Nope. No. Not a chance.

SERENA

Vance--

VANCE

We're getting a primetime audition. We stop taping shows, they'll wonder where the hell we went and probably give up on us--

SHAWN

No one said stop, just postpone. These guys need time to grieve. I'm making the executive decision--

VANCE

No, I'm making the decision as the host of the goddamn show...

(MORE)

VANCE (CONT'D)

Take the rest of the day off, all of you. I'll do something for Jesse on the next taping. But I'm not taking any chances. So, grieve, please, but I need you guys locked and loaded for the next few weeks. Sound good?

(without waiting for an answer)

Great.

Vance leaves the room. The rest of the crew catch each other's eye, taken aback by Vance's sudden outburst.

SERENA (O.S.)

He was stressed...

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA (CONT'D)

Completely stressed. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity for not just him but all of us. My hope was he was looking out for the team. Intruding thoughts told me he just wanted to move on and not think about it.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STUDIO - HALLWAY - DAY

Vance strolls down the studio hall, high-fiving several passersby. He stops to have a quick word with a WORKER. Pats them on the back before continuing on.

SERENA (O.S.)

Vance genuinely loved what he did.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA (CONT'D)

And he loved the people he worked with. It was a team. Vance prided himself on being 'the approachable boss.' He valued the personal approach to employment. They were his friends, and they knew that. The rapport was always there. But the bigger the show got, the smaller the room for friends became.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

Vance takes in his usual position up on the stage steps, looking into the camera. The crowd is silent, the atmosphere is somber.

VANCE

I want to start today's show on a more somber note. Several days ago, a member of our team was involved in an accident that, tragically, took his life. Jesse Duarte...

IMAGE OF JESSE WITH HIS ARM AROUND A MAN.

VANCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

...passed away at the young age of twenty-four. He was a bright, funny, kind-hearted individual who gave his all to this show. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family, and from all of us here, my friend, you will be missed.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

Vance spent so much time creating this amorphous world. Law, order, justice, it was almost a catchphrase. It's like that world was starting to tilt the other direction.

INT. CONTROL PANEL ROOM - MORNING

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CONTROL ROOM 01/19/98 9:09 AM.

Vance enters the control room and locks the door behind him.

He removes a bottle of pills from his blazer pocket. Pops the cap and empties a couple into his mouth. Swallows. Breathes deep with a long, sustained exhale.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

I had no idea he was on any sort of medication until... If he didn't want to talk, that was usually the end of the conversation.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER/OVER BLACK.

THE FOLLOWING IS A RECORDING OF A PHONE CALL BETWEEN VANCE AND HIS DOCTOR (NAME REDACTED). IT HAS BEEN ACQUIRED FAIRLY UNDER A MALPRACTICE LAWSUIT AGREEMENT. THOSE DETAILS ARE STILL ONGOING.

A microcassette recorder plays, its wheels spinning film in opposite directions. The VOICES come out grainy and static, but audible.

DOCTOR

Hey, Vance, sorry to keep you waiting. What can I do for you?

VANCE

I need a higher dosage **BEEP**.

DOCTOR

Is everything alright? What's going on?

VANCE

What you got me on is doing nothing for me right now.

DOCTOR

Well, you'd have to come in for an evaluation--

VANCE

I-- I need them as soon as possible **BEEP**. I'm having attacks again.

DOCTOR

Can you come in tomorrow? Around 9, 9:30. I'll see what I can do.

VANCE

I'll see you then.

DIAL TONE.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: TWO WEEKS FOLLOWING WILLIE'S DEATH/THREE WEEKS UNTIL THE PRIMETIME AIRING.

The Carmichael Hour returns from a commercial break.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Welcome back to the show. If you're just joining us today...

On stage, CARSON, a troubled teenager, and ANGELA, 40s, his mom, tough, sit side by side.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Carson, an adventurous teenager, decided to steal the keys to his mother's car and take it for a joy ride. This joy ride led to an accident totaling several thousand dollars in damages. Carson, before the break, you said you initially lied about stealing the car. Why?

CARSON

I don't know. I guess I was worried is all.

ANGELA

You and your excuses, boy.

CARSON

Why you gotta always talk to me like that.

VANCE

Carson, don't you feel even a little bit bad about lying to your mother?

CARSON

I mean, yeah, but we all lie. You do. I know that.

Vance regards Carson, unsettled.

VANCE

I can assure you I have never once lied to my mother, because I value my life...

Several audience members cackle.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR - HALLWAY - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: HALLWAY 01/22/98 6:23 PM

Brian and a BLONDE STAGE HAND flirt in an empty hallway.

BRIAN

It's a magic trick.

BLONDE STAGE HAND

Can I see it?

BRIAN

I don't have the equipment. Come to the green room in ten minutes.

BLONDE STAGE HAND

I can't. There's cameras in there.

BRIAN

Fear not, for I have the power of knowing where the off button is.

She giggles. Playfully 'thinks about it.'

BLONDE STAGE HAND

See you in ten.

She lightly strolls away. Brian regards her, proud of himself.

BRIAN

Damn right you will, girl.

INT. GREEN ROOM - LATER

SECURITY FOOTAGE: GREEN ROOM 01/22/98 6:26 PM

Brian enters the green room and approaches each security camera - three total.

One by one, he shuts them off...

BLACK.

But only for a beat. Sudden static, followed by the camera footage jolting back to life, only it is not standard black and white. Instead, it is the same dark, oily, green-textured footage from Jesse's death. A sickly color shift.

Brian pours himself a glass of water and plops down on the sofa reserved for guests. A coffee table sits adjacent to the recliner, free of debris. He begins stroking his genitals on the outside of his jeans, eyes shut.

Different camera shots show a piece of paper now rests on the coffee table. Brian gradually opens his eyes and spots the paper. He gapes in befuddlement.

He snatches the paper up. Perplexed, he crumbles the paper up and tosses it towards a nearby trash container. He takes another drink of his water, waiting, appearing antsy.

He returns his attention to the table and spots another piece of paper. This time, Brian cautiously picks it up and looks...

His breath quickens, his eyes widen, gulps.

Suddenly, a thick, black, oily SUBSTANCE begins to rise rapidly in the clear water, bubbling up from the bottom of the glass. Brian stares at it, frozen, dropping the glass. It shatters off-screen.

Brian whirls around, terrified, but sees nothing.

Brian suddenly hacks, then coughs, then begins a coughing fit. Crystal clear water begins seeping from his mouth. He's gagging and struggling, scratching and clawing at his neck, the sofa, and anything he can find to help himself.

The clear fluid soon mixes with the unmistakable beet-red appearance of blood. Brian's eyes are waterfalls of tears. He struggles valiantly.

In the wide-angle camera shot, Willie's distorted, wet face briefly superimposes over Brian's own agonizing face on the footage. The signature HUM/HISS and the distinct, choking sound of bubbling water.

As Brian's struggles weaken, the surveillance camera, which he could not turn off, tilts down to focus on his convulsing feet before the feed cuts to total static.

The footage FAST FORWARDS TO 6:41 PM. The same blonde opens the door to the green room.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - SAME TIME

Vance gives Carson a lesson in humility.

VANCE

Bottom line: At the end of the day,
family is all you got in this
world. I don't want to frighten
you, dude, but, your mom's here
today, she may not be tomorrow.
Then what do you have? How would
you--

The immediate, clear uproar of the blonde's agonizing bellow reverberates through the studio.

Everyone stops talking and listens. Crickets in the studio.

Vance surveys the audience. Time to play damage control.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, everyone. Most likely,
our guest of honor is just playing
hard to get.

This seems to ease the audience slightly. Some laughter, but not enough to quell Vance's anxieties.

He turns to a female STAGE HAND. Lifts both hands - the physical gesture of, *"What the hell is going on?"*

She returns a puzzled reaction, trying to speak into her ear piece. She shakes her head, has no idea.

Vance clears his throat, forces a grin and continues...

VANCE (CONT'D)
Anyway. Carson...

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR - EAST WING HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

SECURITY FOOTAGE: EAST WING/HALLWAY 01/22/98 7:12 PM.

Vance sprints down the halls. He wraps around a corner and spots a crowd formed around the green room. POLICE, EMTs, CORONERS, etc.

The blonde stage hand has an officer's jacket around her, shaking, traumatized.

Officers position themselves with the group, guarding the entrance, speaking one on one with the usual crew members.

A gurney soon emerges from the green room, a zipped up body bag perched on top. EMTs roll the gurney past the freaked-out crew - sobbing, holding each other, soaking in unexpected grief.

BACK TO SERENA.

In her hands is a cross necklace. She anxiously rubs it.

SERENA
The doctors assumed it was a severe manic episode. But they couldn't categorically say it was.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN
The next box to tick was, of course, drugs...

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER
Brian was a pain in the ass. But, he'd been clean for two years.
(MORE)

HEATHER (CONT'D)

He never stopped talking about how proud he was of that.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

The toxicology report came back squeaky clean. We all knew it would.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

We were getting bounced around from officer to detective for questioning. This should've been the last straw...

INT. CONTROL PANEL ROOM - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CONTROL PANEL SECURITY: 01/27/98 5:22 PM

Shawn and Serena stand in the control room, the tension suffocating. Jesse's empty seat is draped with a cloth.

SERENA

We have guests slated for the next week. I'll get a hold of them.

SHAWN

Hold off on that. You know he's gonna fight us.

SERENA

I hope not.

SHAWN

How are you doing?

Serena chuckles. Shawn follows suit.

SERENA

Swell. You?

SHAWN

Oh, I... Can't complain.

The door swings open.

VANCE

Func check, func check. Everything up and ready?

SHAWN
Can we talk for a second?

Vance checks his watch.

VANCE
Now?

Shawn nods. Vance sighs, enters, shuts the door.

SERENA
We gotta stop the show.

VANCE
Serena--

SERENA
Vance. Something is going on around
here. Something...bad.

VANCE
... Something? Serena?!

Vance rubs his eyes.

VANCE (CONT'D)
Oh my God.

SHAWN
Vance, look...

Shawn goes to the monitor and pulls up a still image of when
the footage turned dark green.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Same exact color when Jesse died.
That is not a coincidence.

VANCE
Simon explained what would cause
that.

SERENA
He also said he'd never seen it
before. It's happened twice now.

Vance is quiet, unsure.

VANCE
What am I supposed to do? Any
suggestions?

SHAWN
We need help.

VANCE

From who? A priest? Are we cursed?
You wanna exorcize the place?

SHAWN

You're being an asshole now.

VANCE

You wait thirty minutes before the
show starts to tell me we should
cancel the show, and I'm the
asshole?

SHAWN

(stern)

I never said cancel-- You know
what? Fuck the show, Vance! Fuck
it! Cancel it. Yeah. Please.

Vance thinks for a beat.

VANCE

Simon!

Vance stands stiff until Simon opens the door, enters.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Func check, please.

Simon doesn't look thrilled, but does as instructed.

VANCE (CONT'D)

We'll continue this later...

Vance begins his exit...

SHAWN

No, we won't, Vance.

Shawn squeezes past a suddenly discombobulated Vance. He
averts his gaze to Serena. They lock eyes for a beat.

VANCE

Where are you going? Huh? Shawn?!

No response from Shawn. Vance turns back to Serena.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Congrats, honey. You've just been
promoted to director--

SERENA

Vance... No.

VANCE

I'm supposed to pause the show for two accidents?

She approaches him.

SERENA

No, pause the show, or stop the show because two of your employees are dead... If you won't do it for that, will you do it for me? Just wait until we can figure out what's going on. Please, Vance.

Vance genuinely appears to consider. He gives her one last look before letting the door shut behind him, leaving Serena to weep softly.

SHAWN (O.S.)

I am not a religious guy. Never went to church, never believed any of that.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN (CONT'D)

You didn't need to be to see that something was going on. I guess in a way, I was using my exit to try and scare him. Didn't hear a peep from him for weeks. I thought, okay. I suppose the pecking order is apparent.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

I talked earlier about the rapport Vance had with everyone. That was long gone by this point. Vance was becoming what he always told me he hated - the boss who's only interested in furthering themselves.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER/OVER BLACK: THREE WEEKS FOLLOWING WILLIE'S DEATH/TWO WEEKS UNTIL THE PRIMETIME AIRING.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

Vance is in mid-broadcast, speaking to TYRELL, 19, a tough kid wearing a black tank top and jeans too large for his skinny frame.

VANCE

So, this is really the life you
wanna live? Selling drugs? Whoring
out girls?

TYRELL

Man...

VANCE

You're a child, dude.

TYRELL

Yo, don't stand up there and act
like you know anything about me.
You fucking murder people up here,
dawg.

VANCE

That is not what we do. I'm not
trying to. I just...

Tyrell's mom, JENEANE, 40s, stands in the background. Tyrell turns to her.

TYRELL

Why'd you bring me here, momma?

JANEANE

I had to do something.

TYRELL

Put me on TV for all these fools to
laugh at? Is that it?

JANEANE

Of course not...

TYRELL

That's some shit right there.

INT. CONTROL PANEL ROOM - SAME TIME

SECURITY FOOTAGE: CONTROL ROOM SECURITY 02/07/98 6:19 PM

From the chaos of the stage, to the noiseless overtone of the black and white security footage of the control room, where Simon sits at the desk, eyes glued to the monitors. His focus unwavering, until...

POP! A sound in the corner instantly draws his attention. He stands and goes to the corner - off camera. Items CLINKING and CLANKING echoes.

As he does so, static envelopes the footage.

Within seconds, the familiar black and white is replaced, once again, by the uncomfortably familiar oily green.

Simon stands back at attention, confused. He backs away from the corner.

SUDDEN STATIC once more. This time when the picture settles...

A figure resembling Jesse sits in Jesse's old chair. Simon is oblivious.

He continues backing up, farther still. As he turns back, Jesse is gone.

The monitors shut off at the same time. Flustered, Simon begins tapping keys. Nothing.

He reaches under the monitors and tries several buttons. Still nothing.

His frustration reaches a peak and he smacks all three monitors - the image resurfaces. Simon breathes relief and sits back in front of them.

He views them as he was... Until...

FLASH! BANG! The monitor he's staring at head on EXPLODES in front of his face! Instantly sending him careening over his chair to the floor below. His leg twitches. After a beat, the footage returns to its normal black and white.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - SAME TIME

TYRELL

You tryin' to keep me from livin'
my life. You scared, I'm finna die
out there. Maybe I should just
speed up the process.

VANCE

No. No. No one is saying that
whatsoever. We want the opposite
for you.

Several audience members point to Vance - blood trickles down his nose. He takes a moment to hide it, but then he begins coughing. Loudly. Hacking.

Some of the audience members appear concerned, check on him. A stage hand gives him some water and a Kleenex. He plugs his nose.

VANCE (CONT'D)
Sorry, everyone. I'm good.

Vance appears to have regained control, until...

The all-to-familiar harsh-sounding reverberations of SCREAMS off camera.

This shocks Vance, who attempts to timidly keep the audience calm with waving of his hands, but the audience can't help but murmur to each other.

Vance's face tightens under total distress.

NEWS MONTAGE:

A SWATH OF DIFFERENT REPORTERS PRESENT NEWS OF THE ACCIDENTS AT THE CARMICHAEL HOUR SHOW.

INTERVIEW FOOTAGE - OUTSIDE THE STUDIO BUILDING

Vance positions himself outside the studio building. The studio door is open in the background. The camera footage is on the grainier side. Wind HOWLS in the background. Vance attempts damage control.

REPORTER 1 (O.S.)
Three of your employees died here at the studio. What is the reason behind it?

VANCE
There have been mishaps. I assure you we've taken the necessary steps to ensure it does not happen again.

REPORTER 2 (O.S.)
What exactly happened to them?

VANCE
I can not get into that. What I can tell you is we've been compliant with local authorities and regulatory agencies, and they have informed us that what occurred was unforeseen and we could not have prevented it. No further questions. Thank you.

Vance hurriedly steps from the reporters and back inside the building.

SERENA (O.S.)
Accidents happen. Once, twice. But
three times?

BACK TO SERENA.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
In your opinion, what do you think
was happening?

SERENA
I felt the show was cursed. Point
blank.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
Literally?

SERENA
... Yes.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
What happened after that? How did
Vance take it?

SERENA
When the media gets their claws in
a story, they're not letting go.
When that happened, it was only a
matter of time until the network
caught wind.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN
The prevailing "theory" on the news
outlets was either Vance was not
maintaining safety standards
backstage, he was grossly unlucky,
or...this was a hoax, aimed at
getting eyeballs on the primetime
show. How could three employees die
in succession like that? No way. At
what point does it become the
network's responsibility to face
the public?

EXT. NETWORK BUILDING - DAY

INTERVIEW FOOTAGE OUTSIDE NYS BUILDING.

Mr. Hines stands before a swath of reporters, microphones collect around his spewing lips.

MR. HINES

I assure you we have the best people looking into these tragedies. This is in no way a reflection of NYS and our operation here. Their families deserve closure, and we will provide that. Thank you.

Mr. Hines begins to walk away...

REPORTER (O.S.)

Is Vance still slated to host the primetime show coming up?

MR. HINES

Thank you...

Mr. Hines moves with a quick saunter.

HEATHER (O.S.)

By "best people," he was referring to Vance...

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Vance received a...sternly worded letter from NYS, basically telling him he needs to figure out what's going on, or the deal's off. In Vance's mind, there was nothing to figure out, but he had no choice. Fortunately, he never lost his connections.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - EARLY MORNING

A crowded subway car. A MAN radiating importance sits reading a magazine. This is MARC, 40s, dressed in a severe power suit, holding a massive, brick-sized, '90s phone that isn't ringing.

He is reading a copy of a celebrity tabloid magazine titled: The Star. Vance is on the cover next to an article about a minor celebrity scandal.

The other commuters around him listen to Walkmans and read newspapers.

MARC (O.S.)
Vance and I have known each other
about fifteen years...

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Marc is now sitting behind the desk in his office, colored with plaques, awards, and numerous hard-back copies.

MARC
We hadn't spoken in some time. He contacted me to gather some information on someone. I asked whom. He said, "William Reams." More specifically, prison records. I knew about his show, of course. I found this a rather odd request, but he sounded very desperate. Long ago, we said we'd have each other's backs if the other ever needed anything. I'm not one to go back on my word.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
Was it a step in the right direction? Sure. Was it enough to settle everyone's fears? Absolutely not.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN
The sheer volume of calls I received from the crew was astounding. No one wanted to go anywhere near that building.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER
I would get panic attacks when I woke up. I would be driving up to the entrance gate, and I had to pull over to do some breathing exercises because...

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)
Can I ask why you didn't just quit.

Heather struggles to find the right words. Clears her throat.

HEATHER

Despite everything, we were still a team. I didn't want to feel like I was abandoning the team when they needed me most. I can't speak for the rest of them, but that's how I felt.

Heather nods, assured her answer suffices.

LATER--

She removes a folded sheet of paper from her pocket. The paper is crumbled and torn, but intact.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Can you tell us what that is?

HEATHER

This is the paper Brian saw in the footage before he died.

She unfolds it and shows it to the camera.

It's a crayon drawing of a dinosaur.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

I found it nestled under the fridge. Cops never found it.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

What does it mean? Do you know?

HEATHER

I didn't at first. But I had to find out.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR - HALLWAY - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: EAST WING/HALLWAY 02/21/98 4:54 PM

Heather knocks loudly on Vance's green room door.

Vance answers.

HEATHER

I need to talk to you.

VANCE

About...?

Heather removes the paper and shows it to Vance.

VANCE (CONT'D)
What is this?

HEATHER
That's the paper Brian saw in the
footage. The one that appeared
twice.

VANCE
How do you know that?

HEATHER
It was crumbled up under the
fridge.

VANCE
Okay. It's a drawing.

HEATHER
I did some digging. That is the
same exact drawing Willie did for
Sasha once.

Vance takes a beat to ponder.

VANCE
Of course it is.

HEATHER
Of course it is. Serena and Shawn
were right. Something crazy is
happening and we need to leave.

Vance tries to be as delicate as he can be.

VANCE
I appreciate your concern, Heather.
You're a valued employee, but you
are just an employee. I'm the host,
and I have obligations to everyone
here, including you.

HEATHER
Your obligations should be our
safety. Who's next? Me? Seren--

VANCE
Hey!

HEATHER
Why not? At the rate this is going-
-

VANCE

There is no this?!... There's a
'you guys' making some X-Files
bullshit out of tragic accidents.
I'm tired of it, Heather. We're
starting soon. With or without you.
Tell me now.

Heather takes a moment to think, contemplate.

HEATHER

Okay.

She trudges away, shoulders slightly slumped, submitting.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

He never referred to me as 'just an
employee.' He always saw us as a
unit. This wasn't the boss I knew
anymore. But, still, I...
That...stupid feeling that I owed
it to him just...

Heather's gaze moves to the side as tears well in her eyes
and her lips quiver - an emotional whirlwind of thoughts
eating her alive.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

There are a lot more empty seats now than there usually are.

Another death-row inmate, AHEN, 30s, is strapped to the
chair. Vance stands in his usual place in the crowd.

Unlike the previous inmates, Ahen seems content and ready to
receive his fate.

VANCE

Ahen, you've been sentenced to die
on this broadcast today by a jury
of your peers. Do you have any last
words?

AHEN

Alah be with you all in this life
and the next.

VANCE

Fair enough.

Security and police officers strap him to the chair.

A blonde woman named KIM, 40s, steps onto the stage.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Kim, Ahen took the life of your
loving husband. Do you accept the
responsibility of exacting justice?

KIM

Yes. God yes.

He guides her shoulders to face the cameras.

VANCE

To the camera for liability
purposes.

KIM

Yes.

Vance takes her over to the switch.

VANCE

Whenever you're ready, Kim. Take
your time.

Kim puts her hand over the switch...

Kim weeps softly as her fingers inch over the lever. She
squeezes, little by little, until...

FLIP. She's done it, but... Nothing.

An officer strolls over and flips it back and forth.

Security, the officers, and Kim look to Vance, who doesn't
have a good answer.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Just some technical difficulties,
folks.

INT. ELECTRICAL CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

SECURITY FOOTAGE: ELECTRICAL ROOM 02/27/98 6:49 PM

A cramped, windowless electrical closet. The room is
dominated by three walls of towering, gray Dimmer Racks,
their interiors a terrifying web of circuits, fans, and
glowing pilot lights.

Thick bundles of black high-amperage cables snake across the
ceiling and floor, vibrating with a constant, low HUM.

On the far wall, a large, industrial breaker box sits, waiting. The air conditioners are WHIRRING loudly, trying to fight the electrical heat.

Heather emerges, cautiously stepping down an intensely shadowed gap between the racks.

BEEP BEEP. Heather answers a walkie.

HEATHER
I'm checking it right now.

VOICE (O.S.)
Did anything go off on your end?

HEATHER
Nope.

VOICE (O.S.)
Let us know...

Static. The creepy, oily green overtakes the camera feed once more. The feed bounces to two different angles in separate corners of the closet.

Heather approaches the breaker box and lifts the door off its latch.

ANGLE ONE: Behind her as she attempts to work her magic...

ANGLE TWO: Directly over the breaker box...but someone stands behind her. ZOOMING IN: it's SIMON! Unmoving, not even appearing to breath, just a frozen, upright corpse.

ANGLE ONE: Heather spins, sensing something, but Simon is gone.

ANGLE TWO: Heather gets back to it, a mish-mash of tiny wires snaking between each other. SNAP! A sudden electrical pop from the breaker. Heather jolts back in horror and shock.

She gets back on her radio and begins marching back the other way...

ANGLE ONE:

HEATHER
I couldn't find anything. I don't
know what to tell him.

No answer.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Hello?

Over the walkie, static. Crackling in and out. But then the sound of a CHILD CRYING seeps into the feed. Heather listens closely.

She doesn't realize an oily liquid steadily forms under her feet.

She continues to listen, befuddled and unnerved.

POP! The same spark from the breaker box belts from the walkie. Heather inevitably loses it down in the substance.

In a matter of seconds, Heather is engulfed in flames!

Roaring out ear-piercing HOWLS of pain and anguish.

Her screams carry over into...

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - SAME TIME

Ahen's execution, which has still not occurred.

Several members eye Vance as though this is all too familiar.

VANCE

Oh, god dammit!

Those same audience members rise and run backstage to lend a hand to whomever is making that sound, as do Kim, security, and the other officers.

Vance's breath quickens as he watches them run, his eyes spewing pure intense anger.

VANCE (CONT'D)

(into camera)

Cut the god damn feed right now!

Cut it!

The CAMERAPERSON doesn't do it quick enough for Vance's liking, so he wrestles the camera away.

The last image is a shaky, spinning shot of the Carmichael Hour logo.

CUT TO BLACK.

BACK TO HEATHER.

She removes a large tube of burn gel from her pocket. Squeezes a decent amount onto two fingers. A subtle glint of a tear in her eye.

HEATHER

This is my life now. Twelve times a day.

She dabs the gel onto various areas of her face.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

If that fire was put out...ten seconds later, I'd probably be dead.

She packs the gel up. She sniffs, staring down, thoughtful. Her eyes glisten from the shine of tears under the spotlight.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Can we take a break?

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Of course.

CUT TO BLACK.

NEWS MONTAGE: THE GLOBAL FALLOUT.

More internationally recognized news organizations, including GNS (Global News Service), The Continental Press, and Omega Broadcast Group, give various reports on the fire.

EXT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STUDIO - DAY

The studio entrance is blocked by hundreds of PROTESTERS holding makeshift signs that read "NO MORE BLOOD" and "VANCE KILLS UPSTANDING CITIZENS NOW?" Police in riot gear form a line.

A massive, crumpled CARMICHAEL HOUR POSTER burns in a trash can in the foreground.

REPORTER (V.O.)

The unthinkable tragedy has sparked protests across the nation...

GNS (GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE)

Text on screen reads: THIRD DEATH, FIRST MAJOR INJURY: LIGHTING DIRECTOR SEVERELY BURNED.

REPORTER 2 (V.O.)
...officials are scrambling to
explain what triggered the fire in
the electrical closet.

THE CONTINENTAL PRESS

A stern European anchor speaks over a graphic showing Vance Carmichael's shocked face.

ANCHOR (V.O.)
...questions of negligence,
reckless endangerment, and the
complete moral bankruptcy of
American television are being asked
in capitols worldwide.

IMAGE FLASHES OF A RATINGS REPORT.

ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... Ratings in free fall.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
Everything was falling apart. Our
friends were gone. The word was
out. But Vance being Vance, the
show must go on. He was going to go
until the network told him to stop.
Despite the lack of a crowd in the
studio, ratings were actually
climbing. For all the wrong
reasons, but nonetheless. He was
still their cash cow. Instead of
canceling, they decided to ramp up
the urgency of...whatever Vance was
doing about the situation.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: THE FOLLOWING FOOTAGE WAS ACQUIRED BY MARC DURING HIS
INVESTIGATION INTO WILLIE REAMS' PRISON SENTENCE.

MARC DECLINED TO COMMENT FURTHER ON THE EVIDENCE PRESENTED.

INT. POLICE QUESTIONING ROOM - DAY

INTERROGATION ROOM FOOTAGE.

Willie, familiar, but frail, leans back in his chair. He
stares into the camera with inhuman resolve, not blinking an
eye.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Today is November the 6th at 2 Pm.
This is officer Holmes with Canton
County police department. I'm here
with William 'Willie' Reams, who
has something he would like to
confess, is that right?

WILLIE
Yes.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Go ahead.

Willie's stoic gaze remains unrelenting as he begins...

WILLIE
Today was her birthday. She used to
love it when I drew for her.
Dinosaurs were her favorite. Do you
like dinosaurs, Vance?

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Willie, I'm gonna ask that you
remain on topic--

WILLIE
The Judge who fails to see must be
rendered blind. The mouthpiece of
the lie must be silenced. I was the
student, but you are the final
lesson.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Can I ask what you mean by that?
For the record.

WILLIE
I don't have anything left. True
love is lost. The best gift I can
give you is reciprocation.

The footage cuts back to static.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
During his time in prison, Willie
developed a fascination with the
occult. Police found books in his
cell...

IMAGES OF DIFFERENT RIPPED AND DUSTY HARDCOVERS APPEAR...

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 With names like 'The Severed Veil',
 'The Signal Ascendant', and 'The
 Empty Hand.'

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA (CONT'D)
 Frameworks for curses and occult
 rituals. If it wasn't obvious
 before, now... This was going to be
 the last time I tried to convince
 him.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: STAGE/CAMERA 1 03/04/98 3:03 PM.

Vance sits in the stands, lost in thought. Serena approaches
 from an entrance door reserved for audience members and
 takes a seat next to him.

SERENA
 You know what I'm gonna say.

VANCE
 ... You know what my answer's gonna
 be.

SERENA
 (fast and sharp)
 Vance... Three people are dead.
 Heather's lying in a hospital bed.
 It's no longer the convicts, it's
 us--

VANCE
 I know, I know...
 (rises, pacing)
 I know, okay. I fucking know. How
 do I stop it?

SERENA
 By stopping the--

VANCE
 Stopping the show. Very original.

Serena jolts to a standing position.

SERENA
 It's not about being original, you
 son of a bitch! Listen to me!

Serena pauses at her own outburst. Takes some breaths.

SERENA (CONT'D)
If you don't stop, I quit.

VANCE
You quit?

SERENA
... Yes. Vance, you are
prioritizing your empire over human
lives. If that's what you want,
then I can't be apart of it
anymore.

Vance sits back in his chair. Wipes his face. He steps up
and inches past her.

VANCE
(chuckles)
When I need you most.

SERENA
Vance--

VANCE
I guess I have no choice then. I'll
make some calls tomorrow. See you
at home.

Vance rises and inches past her. No hug, no kiss. It's like
she doesn't exist.

KNOCK KNOCK.

EXT. PARISH - DAY

The door opens, revealing a priest. FATHER FRANKLIN, 60s. He
welcomes the unseen camera crew in.

FATHER FRANKLIN
You're filming?

VOICE (O.S.)
We can turn it off if you wish,
Father.

FATHER FRANKLIN
Oh, no, no, don't be silly. Free
advertising.

The group cackle.

FATHER FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
This way. This way.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER
Father Franklin helped me when I
was at my lowest point years ago.
He's been doing this all his life.
If there was an answer to the
curse, he could find it.

INT. FATHER FRANKLIN'S PARISH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Father Franklin shuts the door behind the crew. His office
is akin to a psychiatrist's office, with lots of hardback
books on shelves and couches angled adjacent to each other.
Father Franklin sits on the couch.

FATHER FRANKLIN
Vance came to me worried he may be
cursed. I told him the first step
is admitting it. That's good. Now,
I do not condone what he does at
all. But I'm here for all God's
children. He...wanted to show me a
VHS tape. He found something he
thought I should see.

REPLAY OF THE FOOTAGE FROM WILLIE'S EXECUTION. The footage
pauses, and when it does, it pauses at a point where Willie
is submerged in the tank, but a translucent figure of a girl
is facing Willie, her hand over the window of the tank, at
the very moment Willie did the same gesture earlier.

Father Franklin takes a deep sigh.

FATHER FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
He was convinced that was Willie's
daughter, Sasha. I did not doubt
it. Although its meaning was
perplexing, even to me. He said his
friend John died in August at 3:20
in the morning. John 8:32 - "The
truth shall set you free." Vance
did not know what that meant. I
advised him to stop his show so
that our parishioners and I could
inspect the building. Vance wanted
a quick solution. I could not give
it to him.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

Vance decided to hire his own PI. Specifically, to dive into the occult. As usual, Vance wanted to solve the issue himself. That's when it got really bad. He...

FOOTAGE MONTAGE.

- CAMERA FOOTAGE: VANCE HAS FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE CONTROL ROOM OF THE STUDIO.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He started sleeping in the studio...

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA (CONT'D)

I think on some level that made him feel safer. Like he was standing guard over his creation, his baby.

- SECURITY FOOTAGE SHOWS VANCE SCREAMING AT EMPLOYEES.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

For the rest of the crew, they became collateral damage...

- SECURITY FOOTAGE SHOWS VANCE STORMING AWAY, THEN HUNCHING OVER WITH HIS HANDS ON HIS KNEES. SPENT.

SERENA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He couldn't go much longer at that rate. We all knew that.

INT. GREEN ROOM - DAY

SECURITY FOOTAGE: GREEN ROOM 03/09/98 2:39 PM.

Vance, haggard and unrested, tie undone, hair a mess, rests a brick phone under his chin. He's listening while frantically turning the pages of a book. Two other hardcovers nestled next to them. He roughly scratches his brows.

VANCE (INTO PHONE)

That's all you found?... So, you're telling me the son of a bitch reads these books, and suddenly he's got god like powers?... Apparently, that's exactly what you're saying...

Vance seems unsure in his own proclamations.

Serena enters the green room. Vance holds up a finger, *hold on!* Serena obliges.

VANCE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)
Well, thanks. Thanks, anyway.

Vance punches a button, hanging up. Serena softly approaches. Speaks in a calm, non-confrontational tone.

SERENA
Was that the PI?

Vance returns his attention to the book.

VANCE
I'll be out in a second.

SERENA
Vance, hear me out. You and I both know Father Franklin was right.
(getting closer)
You are strong, but this is too much even for you. Let him do what he needs to do. You're reading these books. I know you believe it now too.

Vance's reaction is a mixture of understanding, like he knows he totally needs to, but also fighting the urge to give in to others opinions.

VANCE
I'm just looking through the playbook, Serena. I'm not joining the club. I'm solving this. So, please, just back away and let me work!

Serena waits a moment, possibly Vance will stop her from walking away...

He doesn't. Gaze fixed in the book. Serena steps away, dejected.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
The PI didn't find any external threat. But he did send me a list of books Vance requested...the same books Willie had in his cell.
(MORE)

SERENA (CONT'D)
 That's when I knew he wasn't
 looking for a person anymore, but
 an idea...

Eyes brimming with tears, Serena pushes to get out her last thought.

SERENA (CONT'D)
 I knew what I signed up for when I
 married him. But Vance was never
 the obsessive type. This was
 wrecking his life. Maybe leaving
 the show wouldn't have solved
 anything, but he wasn't willing to
 consider it. We started only seeing
 each other in passing, if he came
 home at all. The laughter, the joy,
 the fulfillment, it was all gone.
 It wasn't a marriage anymore... I
 gave my ring back.

Serena breaks down, heavily.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER
 He came to visit me in the
 hospital. I still couldn't talk. I
 wrote down, asking how he was. If
 things had gotten better? He
 just...didn't wanna talk about
 work. First time he's never not
 wanted to talk about it.

IMAGE MONTAGE.

- THE SAME IMAGE FROM EARLIER OF VANCE WITH HIS ARM AROUND
 SERENA.

HEATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I asked him how Serena was. He
 didn't want to talk about that
 either.

- VANCE AND SERENA ACTING GOOFY AT A BIRTHDAY, FROSTING ON
 THEIR NOSES.

HEATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You could tell he was guarded and
 hurt....

- THEM AT THE SHORE OF A LAKE, KISSING, THEN SMILING. SERENA
 FLASHES HER ENGAGEMENT RING FOR THE CAMERA.

HEATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(choking up)
It was like our parents just got
divorced. It was devastating.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER/OVER BLACK: FIVE DAYS UNTIL THE PRIMETIME EPISODE.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE (STAFF MEETING) - NIGHT

SECURITY FOOTAGE: STAGE/CAMERA 2 03/11/98 9:39 PM.

Staff and crew gather on stage for a staff huddle. Vance stands in the middle, addressing them.

VANCE
You guys all wanted to talk?

The blonde stagehand from earlier steps forward.

BLONDE STAGE HAND
Vance...none of us want to do the
show.

Vance's face tightens.

VANCE
You don't want to do the show? It's
in less than a week.

Collective shaking of heads from the crew.

VANCE (CONT'D)
None of you?... I managed to
convince the network not to can our
ass despite them really wanting to,
our ratings are in the shit. This
is our chance for a comeback, and
all of the sudden none of you want
to do the show?

Vance coughs loudly. Several crew members step in to check on him.

VANCE (CONT'D)
I'm fine. Just... I'm fine. You're
all really gonna do this to me?
When we're so close?

VOICE (O.S.)
It's not worth it, Vance.

Vance rests his hands on his hips.

VANCE

So, I gotta do this alone?... Fine.
Leave then. All of you! Get the
fuck--

Vance coughs again, this time violently. He doesn't stop.

THE SECURITY FOOTAGE SWITCHES TO THE OILY GREEN, BUT ONLY
FOR A SPLIT-SECOND. RETURNS TO NORMAL.

Vance coughs up blood. Crew members panic, SCREAMING
intensely. Several run off stage to call 911. Others stay
around Vance.

CUT TO BLACK.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

The...doctors told me they couldn't
figure out what was wrong. Possibly
a severe side effect from his
medication. His doctor never
should've upped the dosage like he
did, but even a massive dose
would've had a gradual progression.
It didn't matter...

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

HOSPITAL HALLWAY SECURITY FOOTAGE: 03/12/98 7:14 AM.

Vance exits his room, throwing on his blazer jacket. He rips
his hospital wristband off and crumbles it.

SERENA (O.S.)

By the time I got there, he'd
discharged himself.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

Out of the blue, he calls me.
He...apologized for everything he
said and did. I asked him how he
was doing. He simply asked me if I
would tune into his primetime show.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER

I really just wanted to put that portion of my life behind me, but Vance was adamant that this would be unlike anything we'd ever done.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN

As much as I wanted to say no, our history flooded my brain. I should've told him no, I'm gonna boycott it if you even try. Against my better judgment, I told him I wouldn't miss it for the world.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

I temporarily moved back into my mother's house. Vance wasn't answering any phone calls. I figured he just needed time to himself. I'm watching TV, and, suddenly...

TV ADVERTISEMENT--

Dark, static-filled, grainy footage. The same familiar oily green footage, except what's playing is a snippet from the news report where the Carmichael Hour logo burns.

Vance's voice sounds off, only not his usual chit-chatting self. This voice is cold, defiant, and on a mission.

VANCE (V.O.)

I know my show is cursed. The dead walk my stage. I am through denying the cost. This Friday, Primetime, I invite the spirit back. This time, I'm ready to talk.

Static reappears before the footage...

CUT TO BLACK.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA

He was going to call out Willie's spirit. I can't recall anyone ever doing that on television in general, let alone live television.

(MORE)

SERENA (CONT'D)
Overnight, everyone was talking
about it.

BACK TO SHAWN.

SHAWN
The number one most
searched...thing online was tickets
to Vance's show. He wasn't selling
them. You had to watch live on TV.
Credit where credit's due, that's
one hell of a marketing strategy.

BACK TO HEATHER.

HEATHER
As much as I wanted to avoid it, I
just couldn't. Nurses, doctors, and
everyone would gossip openly. I
guess I also felt some...residual
obligation towards him. This was
what he'd worked for. I owed him
one last thing - to see him in his
proudest moment.

BACK TO SERENA.

SERENA
Was Vance really going to try and
summon a spirit? Has he lost his
mind? Over thirty million people
turned into the show to get the
answer... They weren't ready for
what they got.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER/OVER BLACK: WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE IS THE OFFICIAL
PRIMETIME EPISODE OF THE CARMICHAEL HOUR.

THIS FOOTAGE HAS NOT BEEN EDITED OR ALTERED IN ANY WAY.
REDISTRIBUTION OF THIS FOOTAGE IS PROHIBITED AND PUNISHABLE
BY LAW.

VIEWER DISCRETION HEAVILY ADVISED.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - DAY

Spotlights cue up, illuminating the stage below. Silence, no
audience.

THROUGH THE LENS OF A SINGLE CAMERA SHOT ANGLED HEAD ON WITH
THE STAGE.

The set feels different. Quiet, lonely, the adrenaline-fueled atmosphere is gone, replaced by a humble, intimate experience. Two chairs face each other on stage.

Vance steps out of the shadows, strides with purpose. He takes a brief moment to look the camera head-on before beginning...

VANCE

Hello, and thanks for tuning into the very first primetime episode of The Carmichael Hour. I am your host, Vance Carmichael. Shortly after our last broadcast — the one with William Reams — tragedy befell this studio. You know the news. We lost several crew members. I stand here today as the only remaining rubble from the fire. Alone. I know many of you think this is brilliant marketing. The most brilliant strategy in television history. I can promise you, ladies and gentlemen, I am not that brilliant. What happened here ruined lives. My friends tried to convince me that something supernatural was going on, and I refused to listen. Because of that, people died. I'll have to live with that. But I, for one, am very tired. There's no audience here this time. Just... two seats. A one-on-one interview. It's time to end this.

Vance spins and takes a seat in one of the chairs.

VANCE (CONT'D)

To that end, I know he's here. He never left. I know you're listening to me right now. Willie... Why don't you have a seat so we can talk?

Silence. The vast emptiness of the stage is deafening. Vance stares at the empty chair. He waits. A bead of sweat traces a path down his temple.

VANCE (CONT'D)

I know you're here... This is what you wanted right? The whole time--

The oily green overtakes the camera feed. Accompanied by the familiar static.

The footage cuts in and out, back and forth, static, clear. During the clear cuts, a dark blob floats around the chair facing Vance. Slowly manipulating into a silhouette.

Vance just stares forward, waiting.

The oily green becomes so thick, the translucent appearance is gone. Until... It begins to fade out. The bright colors of the studio return. The footage returns to normal, displaying...

A little girl, 8, sits across from Vance. This is SASHA. Her skin is an unsettling grey color, and her eyes are bloodshot, but she's kicking her legs in the chair back and forth, and tilting her head, facing Vance - her childlike innocence still very much with her.

Vance regards Sasha, clearing his throat, trying to maintain control.

Before he can speak...

SASHA

My father's not ready to speak to you yet...

Her voice comes out a smooth, monotone, but chalky and gravely, like she's been sick for weeks.

Vance gazes around the studio. Yes... *This is all real!*

VANCE

Okay. Sasha, I presume? Why are you here?

She shrugs.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Alright. Sasha... I can help you. I can help put your spirit to rest. Just tell me...did your father murder you?

Sasha glares into Vance's eyes with an unwavering, unblinking gaze. Vance slowly leans back in his seat.

SASHA

But you know, don't you...?

Vance remains silent, processing the eery response.

Sasha keeps her gaze steady... Until a pair of moist, crumpled hands creep down and grip her shoulders...

Vance jumps back with a start. Slowly moving his attention up...

On WILLIE! All burnt, blackened skin, bone, and eyes the same bloodshot as Sasha's.

He shoots Vance the most hateful death stare one could imagine. He taps Sasha's shoulder a few times with one hand. She jumps out of the chair and runs into the darkness behind the camera. Willie takes his time moving into the seat to finally go face-to-face with his rival...

Vance takes a moment to process. This is what he wanted, but now that it's here, he seems unprepared. Nevertheless...

VANCE

Well, here I am. Why are you doing this to us?

Willie's words spew like the static footage itself. Waves of highs and lows, raspy and deep.

WILLIE

Thanks for having me on, Vance.

VANCE

You've proved your point. Please--

WILLIE

You misunderstand. I've not set out to prove a point. No.

VANCE

Then what the fuck do you want?

Willie chuckles. Water drips from his lips.

WILLIE

I simply want to hurt you, as you've hurt me.

Vance breathes deep. Doesn't break Willie's gaze.

VANCE

You're gonna hurt me?

WILLIE

More like... You will hurt yourself.

VANCE

I have nothing left to hurt.

WILLIE

Oh...you do.

(motioning to the camera)

Tell them what we both know.

Vance appears trapped in a corner. He doesn't have much of a choice. He turns to the camera.

VANCE

Years ago, when I was a hungry young lawyer covering your case... I found the file that proved the death sentence wasn't warranted! I had the ethical duty to present it! And I did nothing! I let it happen... I kept that report locked in a desk drawer, because getting my name on that high-profile conviction - that was my ticket out of the courtroom and into a TV contract! This...everything you see here, has been a long time coming. You want to stop the evil in this world, show every piece of it die before their eyes. Is it just a coincidence the crime rate's at a record low in the state? No...

Vance turns back to Willie.

VANCE (CONT'D)

It was worth more than your truth. I'm sorry, Willie, but I did what I needed to do, and I would do it again if given the chance.

Willie doesn't blink once. A long, uncomfortable leer towards Vance.

WILLIE

What do you value most?

VANCE

What do you mean? I did what you want. Leave us alone!

Vance is hysterical, but Willie remains calm and composed.

WILLIE

Turn off the camera.

Vance double-takes...

VANCE

What do--

WILLIE

What do you value most?... Turn off the camera. Or...keep it on, and get what you've wanted for so long.

VANCE

Turn the...?

WILLIE

Everyone will see what you've done here. Your love will be preserved. Or, keep it on, and show your true nature to all your followers.

A tear trickles down Vance's cheek. Words catch in his throat. He looks down, contemplating. He moves his attention back up with a glance of utter defiance.

VANCE

Welcome to The Carmichael Hour,
Willie. You got what you deserved.
Fuck you!

Willie keeps his eery gaze on Vance.

WILLIE

Your left hand looks a bit lighter.

Vance instinctively checks his left hand. His wedding ring is off. He softly rubs the imprint of the ring on his finger.

The lights go out. A spotlight pops on, illuminating Vance - alone facing an empty chair.

Behind him, another spotlight flashes over the dual curtains. They part...revealing SERENA STRAPPED TO THE ELECTRIC CHAIR.

Her makeup is smudged and she's fighting against the restraints.

Willie stands with his hand firmly around the switch lever.

SECURITY FOOTAGE: STAGE/CAMERA 1 03/27/98 7:27 PM.

The same oily green footage displays Sasha bouncing excitedly in the audience, cheering on the commotion.

SINGLE CAMERA SHOT.

Vance bolts to Serena and tries removing the restraints. He can not. Vance slowly approaches Willie. Out of options, Vance has but one option left...

VANCE
Willie... Willie, listen, please.
I'm so sorry for what I did to you.
I am. She's innocent. She did
nothing to you. Just...please. I
will do anything. Anything. Just
let her go!

WILLIE
Turn the camera off, or she dies.

Vance shoots the camera a tearful, terrified gaze. Shaking, but not moving to the camera.

VANCE
Just let her go!

WILLIE
Choose!

VANCE
Please... I can't!

WILLIE
Choose! Now!

VANCE
... I can't.

Willie lets go of the lever.

He makes a casual stroll over to Serena. He softly removes the duct tape from her mouth. Inches stray hairs from her eyes.

Willie reaches down and takes up Serena's cross necklace she was nervously handling earlier. A soft grin parts his lips.

WILLIE
You're religious?... I can see you
value life. You chose to leave the
show. Commendable. Your husband,
however, showed little interest in
the lives of others. Do you still
love him?...

It takes a moment, but Serena does nod, yes.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm giving you what your husband never gave me...a choice. Eye for an eye, the curse's work is done. The broadcast will forever remain contaminated, but we will rest in peace. Gone. Otherwise, we will not rest, neither will our vengeance. The choice is yours, Serena... What do you value most?

Serena, trembling, peers over toward her husband, still begging on his knees. Her face tightens, tears well and flow down her face. She looks back up to Willie, breath catching.

Willie leans down, ear to her mouth, listens for a beat.

Vance shuts his eyes...

VANCE

Serena... Don't... What are you doing? Don't listen to him! Serena!

Willie leans back up. Gives a nod of understanding to Serena.

BHAM! The lights go out, but only for a moment. They return.

Willie is gone...as is Sasha in the audience...and Serena!

Vance shifts his gaze around, confused and frightened.

Lost and alone, Vance collapses to his knees. Breath heavy. He fully breaks down.

He looks back up to spot Serena approaching him. He gives himself to her, wrapping his arms around her waist. She moves him back, strokes his face, smiling warmly.

He does not notice Willie behind him. Serena saunters away into the darkness of the audience seating. Willie strolls around to face Vance. He sobs even further.

Willie snatches him by the collar...

WILLIE

Oculum pro oculo. Time to set you free.

Vance shakes his head, no. Sobs getting more intense, like he knows what's coming.

Willie takes both hands and digs into Vance's eyes and removes them like they weren't even attached.

Vance's screams are primal and gut-wrenching. He pounds his fists on the stage and tries like hell to stop the blood.

Willie brings Vance's chin up. He leans in to whisper, although it can still be heard.

WILLIE (CONT'D)
The words you spew from your tongue
have brought death and misery. See
what I see? Now...

Willie reaches into Vance's mouth and tugs at his tongue. Vance mumbles out inaudible shrieks. Choking on his own blood.

The tongue stretches like taffy until it finally snaps.

Vance collapses in a heap of blood and ooze. Seizing from shock.

WILLIE (CONT'D)
... You are free.

Vance continues to flop around like a fish.

Willie leers into the camera. Motions for Sasha to follow him.

She gives Vance's corpse a wave before joining Willie in step. The spotlight above them flashes to darkness...

Vance's seizing calms until he lies motionless. Dead!

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER/OVER BLACK:

THE TAPE OF THE FINAL EPISODE WAS GIVEN TO CANTON COUNTY POLICE. UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO THE SUPERNATURAL NATURE OF THE FOOTAGE, POLICE WERE UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

THE BROADCAST DIVIDES THE PUBLIC TO THIS DAY, WITH SOME CITING IT AS AN ACT OF SUPERNATURAL REALISM, AND OTHERS MAINTAINING IT IS A HOAX.

THE SHOW WAS TAKEN OFF THE AIR IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE LIVE BROADCAST.

WHEN IT AIRED, THE SHOW BECAME THE MOST VIEWED EPISODE IN TALK SHOW HISTORY. THAT RECORD CONTINUES TO THIS DAY...

THE FOOTAGE WAS TAKEN ALL THE WAY TO THE ARCH DIOCESE IN ROME. IT IS THE CHURCH'S HOPE THAT THE FOOTAGE WILL BE INDISPUTABLE EVIDENCE OF THE PRESENCE OF DEMONIC SPIRITS.

THIS DOCUMENTARY WAS COMPILED BY FORMER CARMICHAEL HOUR DIRECTOR SHAWN MORIARTY AND LIGHTING TECHNICIAN HEATHER JENKINS TO ENSURE THE RECORD IS COMPLETE.

THE FOOTAGE HAS BEEN KEPT SECRET UNTIL THIS TIME. CAREFUL COORDINATION BETWEEN SERENA, SHAWN, HEATHER, AND THE CHURCH LED TO THE FOOTAGE BEING COMPILED INTO THIS DOCUMENTARY.

INT. CARMICHAEL HOUR STAGE - NIGHT

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE:

VANCE

This concludes another episode of the Carmichael Hour. I want to thank each of you for tuning into the broadcast today. Remember, those affected by these tragedies will never truly be at peace unless they show, first hand, these acts have consequences. We will continue to be a symbol for that message. Until next time, I'm Vance Carmichael. Good night.

TOTAL STATIC ENGULFS THE CAMERA...

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT (FOUR MONTHS LATER)

Back to Serena watching the footage in her apartment. The static plays over the monitor.

Serena remains in the same position she was when she inserted the tape at the beginning, but something is off...

Serena does not move to remove the tape.

Instead, she stands still, a frozen statue with the flickering static waving before her eyes.

After a beat, the static switches to a pulsing green light, soon smoothing out into the OILY GREEN contamination.

Serena continues to peer into the monitor, like she's waiting.

The static morphs on the monitor. Colors appear, molding and shifting itself.

The image smooths into the outline of a face. More colors jell together, like an invisible artist at work.

Soon, the colors overtake the shaky static and the face becomes clear...

IT IS VANCE'S FACE ON THE MONITOR SCREEN.

Eyes shut. Unmoving. A still image.

The static returns. Popping the image in and out, unsteady.

It finally settles...

Looking at Vance here seems akin to seeing him inside his coffin...

Except... Out of nowhere...

His eye SHOOT OPEN.

But his eyes are not there...

Just two deep, black holes, peering forward...

He belts out the most ear-piercing, horrifying DEATH SHRIEK...

THE TAPE BEGINS TO UNSPOOL. The thin, dark tape spews out of the VCR slot and starts to coil, not on the floor, but around Serena's wrist.

She yelps, trying to rip her arm free. The magnetic ribbon is suddenly hot and tight, shackling her to the desk.

The tape flies up, snaking across her neck and over her mouth, muffling her scream. The sound is a horrifying, high-pitched WAIL (Jesse's frequency).

The oily green contamination oozes from the VCR slot, running down the tape, onto Serena's hand, flowing up her shirt sleeve and inching past her neck and into her mouth.

She stares at the black holes on the screen, frozen, suffocating. She survived the physical death, only to be forever enslaved by the evidence.

CUT TO BLACK.