

RECALL

Written by

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Pattern Films  
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FADE IN:

## ACT ONE

## 1. THE WALL

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Darkness. A click. A lamp flickers on.

The wall.

A corkboard covers one entire wall of the small trailer. It's not decorated - it's consumed. Newspaper clippings. Government forms. Photographs with faces circled. Permit applications. A map of New Mexico with colored pins marking locations. Red string connecting some pins. Handwritten index cards with numbers, dates, questions.

On a shelf below the board: an old Civil Defense Geiger counter. Yellowed plastic. Dust in the seams. A strip of tape on it reads: ROSA.

At the center of everything: a framed letter. Official government seal. The words CLAIM DENIED visible even from across the room. A case number stamped in red: #1638. Below the letter, a photograph. A woman in her sixties. The glass is cracked - an old break, never repaired. The crack runs directly through her face.

And below that - something half-visible. Words scratched out. Rewritten. Scratched out again. We can't quite read them.

GIL PADILLA (50s) stands in front of the wall, studying it. He's wearing yesterday's clothes. Coffee cup in hand - cold, forgotten.

He touches the photograph.

GIL

(quiet)

Case 1638.

He turns to the map. Traces a line between two pins with his

finger - then lets it drift, following the base of the mountain range. The baseline. Measures the distance with a worn ruler.

Writes on an index card: 16.38 miles.

Writes on another card: BASELINE = WIND PATH. Pins it beneath the miles.

Pins it to the board.

Steps back. Studies the whole thing.

GIL (CONT'D)

Forty-three people. Let's see.

He picks up a marker. Writes on a fresh card:  
                   1638 ÷ 43 =

He stops. Puts down the marker.

                  GIL (CONT'D)

                  Division -

He doesn't finish. Puts the card in his pocket.

                  A faint tremor. Barely  
                   perceptible. A pushpin snaps loose  
                   - plink - and an index card slides  
                   off.

Gil watches it fall. Picks it up. Re-pins it without  
 expression.

                  His phone buzzes. He ignores it.

                  It buzzes again.

He glances at it:

                  Reminder: Your installation is  
                   tomorrow at 10 AM.

He silences the phone.

                  Looks back at the wall.

                  GIL (CONT'D)

                  (to the photograph)

                  I'm still here, Mom. Still  
                   counting.

He turns off the lamp.

                  Darkness.

                  But in the darkness, we can still  
                   see the faint glow of streetlight  
                   through the blinds catching the  
                   string on the wall. The pattern.  
                   Waiting.

CUT TO:

2. GIL'S TRAILER - PRESENT

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil stands before the wall. The same wall. Five years of  
 additional material.

He's looking at a printout of the news interview. Destiny's  
 face, frozen mid-sentence.

He unpins it. Puts it in a drawer.

Looks at the wall.

                  GIL

                  (to himself)

                  Forty-three votes. Don't talk  
                   about the pattern. Just... do the  
                   job.

He picks up a fresh index card. Writes:

                  RULES

FOR BEING MAYOR: 1. Don't mention  
1-6-3-8 2. Don't mention the  
podcast 3. Don't mention Mom 4. Be  
boring 5. Win by being boring

He pins it to the wall.

Stares at it.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Boring.

He doesn't sound convinced.

3. MORNING - THE DRIVE

EXT. NEW MEXICO HIGHWAY - DAY

Gil's truck on the road. Old Ford. Rust spots. Reliable.  
The landscape is huge. Empty. Beautiful in a way that makes  
humans feel small.

Gil drives with the window down. No radio. Just wind and  
engine.

On the seat beside him: the binder. Thick. Tabs visible.

On the dashboard: a photograph taped to the sun visor. Rosa  
Elena Padilla. His mother. The same photo from the wall.

He glances at it.

GIL

Forty-three votes, Mom. Wish me  
luck.

The photograph doesn't respond.

He drives.

4. AGUAVERDE - ESTABLISHING

EXT. NEW MEXICO HIGHWAY - DAY

Gil's truck on the road. Old Ford. Rust spots.

The landscape opens up. High desert. Yucca and chamisa.

Rolling terrain stretching toward mountains - the Manzanos,  
blue-gray in the distance.

Wind. Always wind. Dust devils spin across empty fields.

It comes down off the Manzanos and rides the baseline like  
a river. The wind doesn't just blow here - it delivers.

EXT. AGUAVERDE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Small town. Not dying, but not thriving. The kind of place  
that exists because it always has.

A Desert Freeze. A hardware store. A laundromat. A church  
with a marquee that reads: "GOD ANSWERS KNEE-MAIL."

Older buildings are adobe - thick walls, rounded corners,  
the color of the earth. Newer buildings are cinder block.

The clash tells the town's history: generations here, then  
money arrived, then the money built cheap.

A water tower reads: AGUAVERDE - EST. 1923

Green water. The name is a memory now. Or a prayer.

Town Hall: two-story, 1970s brown brick. American flag hanging limp.

Gil parks. Gets out. Binder under arm.

He looks at the building.

GIL

(to himself)

Forty-three votes. Here we go.

He walks in.

## 5. THE INSTALLATION

INT. TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY

The room is small. Wood-paneled walls. Fluorescent lights that buzz slightly. Folding chairs for the public, mostly empty. A raised dais for the council.

At the center of the dais: WADE SUTTER (50s). Good suit - not expensive, but well-maintained. The kind of handsome that comes from confidence more than genetics. He's been running this room for twelve years and everyone knows it.

Flanking Wade: four COUNCIL MEMBERS. They have the look of people who showed up because someone had to.

At the staff table: SANDRA WALSH (40s). Town manager. The person who actually knows where the bodies are buried, metaphorically speaking. She has a legal pad and a pen and the expression of someone who has seen many installations and expects nothing from this one.

ANGLE ON: SANDRA'S LEGAL PAD. ELECTION RESULTS. THE NUMBER WRITTEN

there, clear: 42.

The shot holds for one second.

Scattered in the folding chairs: a REPORTER from the local paper (young, bored), an ELDERLY COUPLE (here for the air conditioning), and DOLORES VEGA (60s), Town Clerk and Election Supervisor - thirty-two years in the same office, longer than anyone else in the building. She's knitting something indeterminate and watching everything.

Gil stands at the front of the room. Binder under arm.

Wade bangs the gavel.

WADE

This special session of the  
Aguaverde Town Council is called  
to order.

We are gathered to administer the  
oath of office to the winner of  
last  
month's special mayoral election.

He pauses. Looks at his notes. The pause is theatrical.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Mr. Gilbert Padilla received forty-three votes in the special election, representing a plurality of ballots cast.

ANGLE ON: SANDRA. A MICRO-HESITATION. SHE GLANCES AT HER LEGAL PAD - AT

the 42 - then back at Wade. Says nothing.

ANGLE ON: DOLORES. SHE LOOKS UP FROM HER KNITTING. HER EYES FIND

Sandra's legal pad. Then Gil. Then back to her needles.

She's smiling. Slightly.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLT

How many total votes were cast?

WADE

Forty-three.

GIL

Forty-three votes. I'm aware.

Scattered, uncomfortable laughter.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLT

So he got... all of them?

WADE

All forty-three, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORALES

How is that possible?

WADE

Low turnout. The election was held on a Tuesday in April. During a thunderstorm.

SANDRA

(checking notes, a beat of hesitation)

Technically, the lowest turnout in town history. The previous record was the 1987 water board election, which had fifty-one votes.

WADE

So we're making history.

GIL

Forty-three votes' worth of history.

WADE

The town charter requires that special election results be certified

regardless of turnout, provided  
the election was properly noticed  
and  
conducted. It was. Mr. Padilla  
won. And so.

He gestures.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Mr. Padilla. Please approach.

Gil walks to the dais. His boots are loud on the wooden  
floor.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Raise your right hand.

Gil raises his left hand. Realizes. Switches.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Do you, Gilbert Padilla, solemnly  
swear to faithfully execute the  
duties of Mayor of Aguaverde, to  
uphold the constitution of the  
State  
of New Mexico and the charter of  
this town, and to serve the  
citizens  
of this community to the best of  
your ability, so help you God?

GIL

I do.

WADE

Then by the authority vested in me  
as Council President under Section  
2.4 of the town charter, I hereby  
declare you Mayor of Aguaverde.

He doesn't extend his hand.

Instead, he slides a manila folder  
across the dais.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Your welcome packet. Meeting  
schedules, contact information,  
parking  
validation procedures. Sandra can  
answer any questions about  
day-to-day operations.

GIL

Thank you. I'll try not to let my  
 forty-three constituents down.  
 He picks up the folder. Doesn't open it.

WADE

The next regular council meeting  
 is Thursday at seven PM. Agenda  
 items  
 must be submitted by Tuesday at  
 five. I'd recommend reviewing the  
 procedures manual before then.  
 Section four covers speaking  
 privileges. Section seven covers  
 motions and voting. Section twelve  
 covers -

GIL

I've read the procedures manual.

WADE

Have you.

A beat. Wade glances at the  
 reporter. Then back at Gil.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Well. I'm sure the council looks  
 forward to your... perspective.  
 Though I'd suggest keeping the  
 agenda focused on municipal  
 matters.  
 Roads. Drainage. Zoning. The  
 things people actually voted for.  
 The room is quiet. Everyone  
 understands what he's not saying.

WADE

(CONT'D)

(to the reporter, almost  
 casual)

You can quote that. "Council  
 President welcomes new mayor,  
 encourages  
 focus on local issues." That's the  
 story.

The reporter writes it down. Gil  
 watches.

The nickname is never spoken. It  
 doesn't have to be. The  
 containment is already complete.

GIL

Twice. Also the charter, the municipal code, the budget documents going back to 2018, and the council minutes from the past three years.

Silence.

WADE

That's... thorough.

GIL

I like to be prepared.

WADE

For what?

Gil doesn't answer.

He opens his binder. Flips to a tabbed section. Pulls out a single sheet

of paper.

GIL

I'd like to submit an agenda item for Thursday's meeting.

WADE

Already?

GIL

A resolution requesting water quality testing data from the state Environment Department. Specifically, any testing conducted within ten miles of Aguaverde related to injection well operations. The room shifts. Something in the air changes.

WADE

That's... an unusual first request.

GIL

There are fourteen households on Oak Street reporting brown water and foundation damage. I'd like to know why.

WADE

Those are separate issues. Water quality and foundation damage aren't -

GIL

Maybe. Maybe not. That's what testing would tell us.

WADE

Injection well regulation is a state matter. The town doesn't have jurisdiction.

GIL

I'm not asking for jurisdiction. I'm asking for information.

Wade looks at him. Really looks at him. The way you look at something

you thought was harmless and now aren't sure.

WADE

We'll add it to the agenda.

GIL

Thank you.

WADE

Is there anything else?

GIL

Not today.

WADE

Then this session is adjourned.

He bangs the gavel.

Gil gathers his binder. Walks out.

As he passes Dolores, she looks up from her knitting. Their eyes meet.

She glances at Sandra's legal pad - still visible on the staff table.

Then back at Gil.

DOLORES

(quietly)

Congratulations, Mayor.

GIL

Thank you.

DOLORES

Forty-three votes.

GIL

That's what they tell me.

She holds his gaze a moment too long. Then goes back to her knitting.

But she's smiling. Slightly.

6. THE HALLWAY

INT. TOWN HALL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Gil walks out of the chamber. Sandra catches up, heels clicking on the linoleum.

SANDRA

Mayor Padilla.

GIL

Gil.

SANDRA

Gil. Sandra Walsh. Town manager.  
We spoke on the phone.

GIL

I remember.

SANDRA

That was... something.

GIL

I submitted an agenda item.

SANDRA

You ambushed Wade with an  
injection well resolution on your  
first day.

GIL

Is that what I did?

SANDRA

That's what he's going to think  
you did.

GIL

I asked about water quality.

SANDRA

You asked about injection wells.  
That's not the same thing. Not in  
this town.

They stop walking. Sandra looks both ways. Lowers her voice.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

Rayborn Energy is the largest  
employer in the region. They fund  
the  
community health initiative. They  
sponsor the Little League. They  
donate to the volunteer fire  
department. Half the town works  
for them  
directly or indirectly.

GIL

I'm aware.

SANDRA

You know about the aquifer?

GIL

Estancia Basin.

SANDRA

There's no backup. No river to tap. No pipeline from somewhere else.

If the aquifer goes bad, the town goes with it. That's not metaphor. That's hydrology.

GIL

I'm aware.

SANDRA

Are you? Because when you ask questions about injection wells, you're asking questions about Rayborn. And when you ask questions about Rayborn, people get nervous.

GIL

Should they be nervous?

SANDRA

I don't know. That's above my pay grade. But I know that Wade has been council president for twelve years, and in that time, nobody has asked the questions you just asked.

GIL

Why not?

SANDRA

Because nobody wanted the answers.

GIL

I got forty-three votes. How much more difficult can things get?

Sandra almost says something. Stops. Her expression flickers - something

about the number. But she lets it go.

She hands him a key on a plain ring.

SANDRA

Your office. Room 104. The key sticks. Jiggle it left, then right, then pull while you turn. The coffee maker hasn't worked since

2019. IF YOU NEED ANYTHING, MY OFFICE IS DOWN THE HALL.

GIL

And if I need records?

SANDRA

Dolores Vega. Clerk's office. End of the hall. Window six. She handles

all the records, certifications, elections - anything with a stamp goes through her.

GIL

The woman with the knitting.

SANDRA

She's been here longer than the building. You noticed.

GIL

I notice things.

Sandra looks at him.

SANDRA

I know. I've listened to your podcast.

Gil goes still.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

All of it. One hundred and fifty-three episodes. Took me about a month.

GIL

And?

SANDRA

And I think you're either the smartest person who's ever held this office or the craziest. Possibly both.

GIL

Which do you want me to be?

SANDRA

I want you to be careful. Wade plays a long game. He won't confront you directly. He'll just... make things difficult. Procedures that take longer than they should. Documents that get lost. Meetings that get rescheduled.

GIL

Death by bureaucracy.

SANDRA

It's effective.

GIL

I know. That's how they denied my mother's claim. Not by saying no. He doesn't finish the sentence. Sandra is quiet for a moment.

SANDRA

I'm sorry about your mother.

GIL

Everyone is.

SANDRA

Is that why you're here? The pattern?

GIL

I'm here because forty-three people voted for me.

SANDRA

That's not an answer.

GIL

It's the only one I have. He walks toward his office.

SANDRA

Mayor.

He stops.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

The number. 1-6-3-8. Does it mean anything to you here? In Aguaverde?

Gil turns.

GIL

Not yet.

He walks away.

Sandra watches him go. She looks down at her legal pad. At the 42

written there.

She crosses it out. Writes 43.

7. GIL'S OFFICE

INT. TOWN HALL - GIL'S OFFICE - DAY

Small. A desk that's older than Gil. A window that looks out on the parking lot. A corkboard on the wall, empty. Gil enters. Jiggles the key left, right, pulls while turning. The door opens.

He sets down his binder. Looks around.

Opens the desk drawers. Empty except for paper clips, a dried-out pen, and a 1994 calendar.

He takes out his phone. Photographs the room.

From his bag, he pulls: pushpins, red string, a ruler, a black marker, a red marker, a stack of index cards.

He begins.

TIME

PASSAGE - MONTAGE:

- Gil pins a map of Aguaverde to the corkboard.
- He marks Oak Street with a red dot.
- He pins the invoice he received in his welcome packet. Something catches his eye. He circles a number: the invoice total. \ \$16,380.00.
- He pins a yellowed MATERIAL REQUISITION packet: OAK STREET SUBDIVISION - FOUNDATION FILL: 1,638 CUBIC YARDS. Supplier: RED MESA RECLAMATION (RECLAIMED). A box is checked in pen: 'NO CERTIFICATION ON FILE.'
- He pins a printout of injection well permits. Circles another number: PERMIT #2024-1638.
- He sits back. Stares.
- From his bag, he pulls the framed photograph of his mother. Sets it on the desk, facing him.
- He writes on an index card: "COINCIDENCE?"
- Pins it to the board.
- Writes on another card: "DON'T MENTION THE PATTERN."
- Doesn't pin this one. Puts it in his pocket.

END

MONTAGE.

Gil stands before the corkboard. It's sparse. Nothing like the wall at

home. But it's a start.

A knock at the door.

He turns. Dolores stands in the doorway, knitting in hand.

DOLORES

Settling in?

GIL

Trying.

She looks at the corkboard. At the circled numbers.

DOLORES

Interesting decorating choices.

GIL

I like to see things.

DOLORES

Most mayors put up pictures of their family. Maybe a calendar. A plant.

GIL

I don't have a plant.

DOLORES

No.

She steps into the room. Looks at the board more closely. Her eyes find

the circled numbers.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Sixteen three eighty. That's an unusual amount for a drainage invoice.

GIL

Is it?

DOLORES

Usually they round. Fifteen thousand. Twenty thousand. Easier for everyone.

GIL

But this one didn't.

DOLORES

No. This one didn't.

She looks at him.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

I've been here thirty-seven years, Mayor.

GIL

Gil.

DOLORES

Mayor. I've seen a lot of people come through this building. Council members, managers, mayors. Most of them want the title. The parking space. The chance to feel important.

GIL

And me?

DOLORES

I don't know yet.  
She turns to leave.

GIL

Dolores.  
She stops.

GIL

(CONT'D)

The permit number. 2024-1638. Is that sequential? Or is there a system?

DOLORES

Permit numbers are assigned by the state. I don't control them.

GIL

But you've seen them. For years.

DOLORES

I've seen a lot of things for years.

GIL

Have you ever seen that sequence before? One-six-three-eight?

Dolores is still.

DOLORES

Why do you ask?

GIL

I notice things.

DOLORES

So I've heard.

She doesn't answer the question. Instead:

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

If you need records, my window is open until four-thirty. Requests submitted after that wait until the next business day.

GIL

I'll remember that.

DOLORES

Most people don't.

She leaves.

Gil looks at the corkboard.

Pulls the index card from his pocket. "DON'T MENTION THE PATTERN."

He pins it to the board.

Then unpins it.

Puts it back in his pocket.

## 8. THE RECORDS REQUEST

INT. TOWN HALL - CLERK'S OFFICE - DAY

A window. Small. Sliding glass panel. A slot for documents. Behind the window: Dolores, back at her station. Knitting resumed.

Gil approaches with a stack of forms. He slides them through the slot.

They don't fit. Too thick.

DOLORES

Fold them.

GIL

What?

DOLORES

Lengthwise. Then they fit.

Gil folds. Slides.

Dolores picks them up. Examines each one.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

All correspondence between the town and Rayborn Energy, 2020 to present.

GIL

Yes.

DOLORES

That's five hundred pages. Minimum.

GIL

I'll read them.

DOLORES

Permit applications for injection wells, same period.

GIL

Yes.

DOLORES

That's state jurisdiction. We only have copies of what was filed locally.

GIL

I understand.

DOLORES

Payments to Rayborn contractors, 2020 to present.

GIL

Yes.

DOLORES

You want to see how much we've paid them.

GIL

I want to see how much we've paid, what we paid for, and who approved the payments.

DOLORES

That's thorough.

GIL

I'm a thorough person.

Dolores looks at the last form.

DOLORES

Council executive session minutes. 2020 to present.

GIL

Yes.

DOLORES

Those are confidential.

GIL

I'm the mayor.

DOLORES

Mayors don't automatically get executive session minutes. Section 8.4

of the charter. Executive session records are only released by majority vote of the council or pursuant to a court order.

GIL

Then I'll request a council vote.

DOLORES

That requires a motion. Which requires agenda submission. Which closes

Tuesday at five. It's currently Friday at three forty-seven.

GIL

Then I'll submit it Tuesday.

DOLORES

And the council will vote Thursday.

GIL

And if they say no?

DOLORES

Then you don't get the minutes.

GIL

What's in the minutes that requires a vote?

DOLORES

I wouldn't know. They're  
confidential.

She stamps the first three forms. RECEIVED. RECEIVED.  
RECEIVED.

She sets aside the fourth.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Fifteen business days for the  
first three. The fourth requires a  
council vote before I can process  
it.

GIL

Fifteen business days. The policy  
says five.

DOLORES

The policy says five. Legal review  
adds ten.

GIL

Legal review? For correspondence?

DOLORES

For everything involving Rayborn.

GIL

Why?

DOLORES

Because the town attorney advised  
it.

GIL

Who's the town attorney?

DOLORES

Gerald Foster. Wade appointed him  
in 2019.

GIL

Wade appointed the town attorney.

DOLORES

The council president has  
appointment authority under  
Section 3.2.

GIL

So Wade controls what records get  
released.

DOLORES

The town attorney advises on legal  
review. The council president  
appoints the town attorney. I just  
stamp things.

GIL

And if I wanted to expedite the review?

DOLORES

You'd need to convince the town attorney that expedition was warranted.

GIL

And if I went to the state? Filed a complaint about the delay?

Dolores looks up from her knitting. For the first time, something like

approval in her expression.

DOLORES

That would be... unusual.

GIL

Unusual good or unusual bad?

DOLORES

Unusual interesting.

She hands him his receipts.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Fifteen business days, Mayor. I'll call you when they're ready.

GIL

Thank you, Dolores.

DOLORES

Don't thank me. I just stamp things.

Gil turns to leave.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Mayor.

He stops.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

The number you asked about. The sequence.

GIL

Yes?

DOLORES

I've worked in this office for thirty-seven years. I've processed thousands of permits, hundreds of invoices, dozens of contracts.

GIL

And?

DOLORES

And elections. I process those  
too.  
A beat.

GIL

The elections.

DOLORES

The certifications. The ballots.  
The counts. All of it goes through  
this window.

GIL

Including mine.

DOLORES

Including yours.

She picks up her knitting.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

I've never noticed a pattern.

She pauses.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

But I've never looked.

She goes back to her work.

Gil leaves.

9. WADE'S OFFICE

INT. TOWN HALL - WADE'S OFFICE - DAY

Larger than Gil's. Better furniture. A window with an  
actual view. Photos on the wall: Wade shaking hands with  
governors, senators, executives.

Wade sits behind his desk. Sandra stands by the door.

WADE

He filed records requests?

SANDRA

Four of them. Rayborn  
correspondence, permits, payments,  
and executive  
session minutes.

WADE

The executive sessions are  
confidential.

SANDRA

I told him. He's going to ask for  
a council vote.

WADE

On Thursday?

SANDRA

That's my assumption.

Wade leans back in his chair.

WADE

The podcast guy.

SANDRA

He prefers "mayor."

WADE

Forty-three votes.

SANDRA

Still mayor.

WADE

You listen to his podcast?

SANDRA

I did some research. After he filed.

WADE

And?

SANDRA

He's not stupid. He's... thorough. Obsessive. He sees connections between things that may or may not exist.

WADE

The number thing.

SANDRA 1-6-3-8. He believes it's embedded in government documents. Connected to nuclear testing, institutional cover-ups, his mother's denied RECA claim.

WADE

So he's crazy.

SANDRA

Maybe. Or maybe he's the kind of crazy that's also right sometimes.

WADE

He asked about injection wells. In his first meeting.

SANDRA

He asked about water quality on Oak Street.

WADE

Same thing.

SANDRA

Is it?

Wade looks at her sharply.

WADE

What's that supposed to mean?

SANDRA

Nothing. Just that he asked about water, not wells. The connection was... implied.

WADE

The connection was obvious.

SANDRA

To you.

WADE

To anyone who's paying attention.

SANDRA

Then maybe we should figure out  
what he's paying attention to.

Wade stands. Walks to the window.

WADE

What do you know about Oak Street?

SANDRA

Fourteen households have filed  
complaints about water quality in  
the  
past year. Brown water, low  
pressure, occasional odor.

WADE

And foundation damage?

SANDRA

Six reports. Cracks, settling,  
some flooding. All within the past  
eighteen months.

WADE

What did we do about it?

SANDRA

Referred them to the water  
utility. The utility tested at the  
main and  
found nothing. They advised the  
homeowners to check their internal  
plumbing.

WADE

And the foundation damage?

SANDRA

Not our department. We suggested  
they contact their insurance.

WADE

Did anyone follow up?

SANDRA

No.

Wade is quiet.

WADE

The drainage project. The one  
Rayborn did in 2022.

SANDRA

What about it?

WADE

It was supposed to fix the flooding on Oak Street.

SANDRA

Did it?

WADE

I don't know. That's the problem.

SANDRA

What do you mean?

WADE

I mean I signed the payment authorization. But I don't remember who verified the work.

SANDRA

There should be a verification signature on the invoice.

WADE

There should be.

SANDRA

Is there?

Wade doesn't answer.

SANDRA

(CONT'D)

Wade. Is there?

WADE

I'll have to check.

Sandra looks at him.

SANDRA

You don't know if the work was verified.

WADE

I know it was done. I saw the trucks. I saw the crews.

SANDRA

But you don't know if anyone confirmed it was done correctly.

WADE

It was a reputable contractor.

SANDRA

That's not verification.

WADE

Sandra.

SANDRA

I'm not accusing you of anything.  
 But if the new mayor starts  
 pulling  
 records and he finds invoices  
 without verification signatures...

WADE

It was an oversight.

SANDRA

One oversight?

WADE

I don't know.

SANDRA

How many invoices have you signed  
 without verification?

WADE

I don't know.

SANDRA

Wade.

WADE

I don't know, Sandra. That's the  
 honest answer. I trusted the  
 contractors. I trusted the  
 process. I didn't check every line  
 on  
 every invoice.

SANDRA

And if he finds that?

WADE

Then I'll explain it was an  
 oversight.

SANDRA

Multiple oversights? Over multiple  
 years?

Wade turns from the window.

WADE

What do you want me to say?

SANDRA

I want you to tell me if there's  
 something I should know.

Long pause.

WADE

There's nothing to know.

He doesn't sound convinced.

10. THE PODCAST - GIL RECORDING

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil sits at his desk. The wall looms behind him. Microphone  
 in front of him. Recording equipment.

He hasn't published a new episode in three years. But the setup is still there.

He's not recording for the public. He's recording for himself. A habit. Thinking out loud.

GIL

(into microphone)

Day one. Installation complete.  
Wade Sutter looks at me like I'm  
something he found on his shoe.

He pauses. Looks at his notes.

GIL (CONT'D)

The drainage invoice. Rayborn  
Environmental Services. Sixteen  
thousand  
three hundred eighty dollars. I  
noticed it the moment I saw it.  
1-6-3-8.

He pins the invoice to the wall. Steps back. Stares at it.  
He looks at the microphone.

GIL (CONT'D)

I don't know how many of you are  
left. The numbers don't update  
anymore. Could be thousands. Could  
be twelve. Could be one.

Beat. His eyes drift toward the lens - almost. Not quite.

GIL (CONT'D)

I'm not talking to everyone. I'm  
talking to the one person who's  
still listening. The one who  
hasn't turned it off yet.

He pauses.

GIL (CONT'D)

If you're out there... stay with  
me.

He stops recording.

CUT TO:

11. WADE'S HOUSE

INT. WADE'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

Wade alone at his desk. Documents spread before him.  
Financial statements. Medical bills. A calculator.  
He's doing math. The kind of math that never works out.  
He opens a drawer. Pulls out a file. RAYBORN COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIP - CONFIDENTIAL.

Inside: a letter. He's read it before. Reads it again.  
"In recognition of Council President Sutter's ongoing  
support for regional economic development, Rayborn Energy  
is pleased to extend..."

He closes the file. Puts it back.  
Picks up his phone. Dials.

WADE

(into phone)

This is Wade Sutter. I need to  
speak with someone about the  
community  
health initiative... Yes, I'll  
hold.

He waits. Looks at the medical bills.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Yes. I'm calling about the  
prescription coverage for my wife.  
Caroline Sutter... There was a question about  
authorization...

He listens. His expression shifts. Relief. Then something  
darker.

WADE

(CONT'D)

It's been resolved? When?... I  
see. Thank you.

He hangs up. Stares at the phone.

Someone made a call. Someone took  
care of it. Someone wants him to  
know they can take care of things.

He walks to the window. Looks out at the dark.

WADE (CONT'D) (to himself) Forty-  
seven jobs. Forty-seven families.

He counts them in his head. The names. The faces.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Martinez. Garcia. Salazar. The  
Benavideses -

He stops. Tommy Benavides. The one who asked questions. The  
one who's

in Odessa now.

WADE

(CONT'D)

The clinic. The school. The roads.

He turns from the window.

WADE

(CONT'D)

And the water's been the same for  
thirty years. Same tests. Same  
reports. Same "within acceptable  
limits."

He sits down. Heavily.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Nothing changes. Nothing ever changes. Except now there's a mayor who got forty-three votes and thinks he can -  
A door opens upstairs. Footsteps on the stairs.

CAROLINE

SUTTER (50s) appears in the doorway. Robe. Slippers. She was pretty once, in a way that suggested energy. Now she looks diminished.

CAROLINE

Who was that?

WADE

Work.

CAROLINE

It's eleven.

WADE

The new mayor. He's causing concerns.

CAROLINE

The podcast man.

WADE

You know about him?

CAROLINE

Martha texted me. She said you looked upset at the installation.

WADE

I wasn't upset.

CAROLINE

What were you?

WADE

Annoyed. There's a difference.

Caroline moves to the refrigerator. Opens it. Stares inside the way

people do when they're not really looking for food.

CAROLINE

What does he want?

WADE

I don't know yet. Records.  
Information. Questions nobody's  
asked in  
a long time.

CAROLINE

About Rayborn?

WADE

About everything. But Rayborn is  
where it leads.

CAROLINE

Is that a problem?

Wade doesn't answer right away.

WADE

You know what happens if that  
plant closes?

CAROLINE

Jobs.

WADE

Forty-seven jobs. Forty-seven  
families. The clinic loses its  
biggest  
donor. The school loses half its  
tax base.

He stands. Walks to her.

WADE

(CONT'D)

And the water? Gets tested by the  
same state agency that's been  
testing it for thirty years. Same  
reports. Same limits. Nothing  
changes except people lose their  
houses.

CAROLINE

And if the water is actually bad?

WADE

Then it's been bad for years. And  
we've all been drinking it.

He looks at her.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Including you.

Silence.

CAROLINE

I need to refill my prescription  
tomorrow. The pharmacy said there  
was

a question about the authorization.

WADE

It's been resolved.

CAROLINE

How do you know?

WADE

I called.

CAROLINE

When?

WADE

Just now.

CAROLINE

And it's resolved. Just like that.

WADE

Just like that.

She looks at him. Knows something is wrong. Knows better than to ask.

CAROLINE

I'm scared, Wade. Not of the cancer. Of whatever you're not telling me.

She goes upstairs.

Wade stands alone in the kitchen.

12. DESTINY'S APARTMENT

INT. DESTINY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Small. Clean. The apartment of someone who has carefully constructed a normal life.

Plants on the windowsill. A bookshelf with nursing textbooks and romance novels. A cat tree in the corner.

DESTINY PADILLA (30s) sits on the couch, laptop open, scrolling. She's looking at news articles about the installation.

On the screen: "CONSPIRACY PODCASTER BECOMES AGUERVERDE MAYOR WITH 43 VOTES"

She closes the laptop.

LORETTA, a tabby cat, jumps onto the couch. Destiny pulls her close.

DESTINY

(to the cat)

He's going to do it again. You know that, right? He's going to start a crusade, make enemies, burn everything down, and I'm going to have

to explain to my boss why my  
father is on the news.  
Loretta purrs.

DESTINY

(CONT'D)

I moved back here because it was  
supposed to be quiet. Because rent  
was cheap and the clinic was  
hiring and I thought - I thought  
maybe I  
could have a normal life.

She sets down the cat.

DESTINY

(CONT'D)

Normal. With him as my father.

She pulls out her phone. Types: Can we talk?  
Sends it.

Waits.

The reply comes: Tomorrow. Desert  
Freeze. 11 AM.

She stares at the message.

DESTINY

(to Loretta)

Desert Freeze. Of course. Because  
nothing says "serious  
conversation" like soft-serve.

13. DESERT FREEZE - DESTINY AND GIL

INT. DESERT FREEZE - DAY

Plastic booths. Fluorescent lights. The smell of fryer oil  
and frozen dairy.

Gil sits in a booth. Binder on the table. He's made notes  
on index cards.

Destiny enters. Sees him. Sighs.

She gets in line. Orders. Pays. Sits across from him with a  
Mesa Swirl she doesn't want.

GIL

You look tired.

DESTINY

I worked the night shift.

GIL

You should sleep.

DESTINY

I will. After we talk.

She stirs the Mesa Swirl. Doesn't eat.

DESTINY

(CONT'D)

Dad. What are you doing?

GIL

My job.

DESTINY

Your job is to cut ribbons and smile for photos.

GIL

I don't smile.

DESTINY

I know.

GIL

And I'm not good at ribbons.

DESTINY

I know that too.

She sets down her spoon.

DESTINY

(CONT'D)

I saw the news. "Conspiracy podcaster becomes mayor." The article mentioned your podcast. All one hundred and fifty-three episodes.

GIL

I haven't published anything in three years.

DESTINY

It doesn't matter. The internet remembers. My coworkers remember. When I got to the clinic this morning, three people asked me if my father really believes a four-digit number controls the government. One of them found that old interview - the reporter who ambushed me outside the hospital. Five years ago. Still circulating.

GIL

That's not what I believe.

DESTINY

Then what do you believe?

Gil is quiet for a moment.

GIL

I believe patterns exist. I believe powerful institutions leave

traces. I believe that when people in power want to hide something, they hide it in plain sight - in numbers, in forms, in the boring details nobody looks at.

DESTINY

And 1-6-3-8?

GIL

Was Mom's case number.

DESTINY

I know what it was.

GIL

Then you know why I can't let it go.

DESTINY

She's been dead for twenty years, Dad.

GIL

Twenty-two.

DESTINY

Twenty-two years. And you're still fighting the same fight.

GIL

I'm fighting a different fight.

Oak Street. Brown water.

Foundation

damage. Real problems affecting real people.

DESTINY

And it has nothing to do with the pattern?

Gil hesitates.

DESTINY

(CONT'D)

Dad.

GIL

The drainage invoice is sixteen thousand three hundred eighty dollars.

DESTINY

Jesus Christ.

GIL

The permit number for the nearest injection well is 2024-1638.

DESTINY

Dad -

GIL

I'm not saying it means anything.  
I'm saying I noticed. That's all.  
I noticed, and I'm going to look  
into it, and if there's nothing  
there, fine. But if there's  
something -

DESTINY

If there's something, you'll tear  
this whole town apart looking for  
it. Just like you did before.

GIL

I didn't tear anything apart. I  
asked questions. I made a podcast.  
I  
followed the paper.

DESTINY

And Mom still died. And you still  
spent every Christmas talking  
about  
RECA amendments instead of asking  
me about my life. And I still had  
to  
explain to every boyfriend I ever  
had why my father thinks the  
government encodes secrets in  
bureaucratic forms.

Silence.

GIL

I'm sorry.

DESTINY

I know you're sorry. You're always  
sorry. That's not the point.

GIL

What's the point?

DESTINY

The point is I moved back here to  
have a normal life. The point is I  
work at a clinic that's forty  
percent funded by Rayborn Energy.  
The  
point is if you start a war with  
them, I'm the one who pays for it.

GIL

I'm not starting a war.

DESTINY

You asked about injection wells.  
In your first meeting.

GIL

I asked about water quality.

DESTINY

Same thing, Dad. You know it's the same thing.

Gil looks at her.

GIL

If the injection wells are contaminating the water, don't you want to know?

DESTINY

I want to keep my job.

GIL

Even if your job is funded by people poisoning your neighbors?

DESTINY

You don't know they're poisoning anyone.

GIL

No. I don't. That's why I'm asking questions.

DESTINY

And what gives you the right? You got forty-three votes, Dad. Forty-three people in a town of eight thousand. That makes me the mayor. I'm already the crazy conspiracy mayor. I might as well be a useful one.

Destiny pushes her Mesa Swirl away.

DESTINY

I'm not asking you to stop. I know that's pointless. I'm asking you to be careful. To think about consequences. To consider, just once, that other people exist and that your actions affect them.

GIL

I think about you.

DESTINY

Do you?

GIL

Every day.

DESTINY

Then think about this: if you  
become the crazy conspiracy mayor  
who  
attacks the town's biggest  
employer, my life gets very hard.  
My job  
gets very hard. Everything gets  
very hard.

GIL

And if I don't say anything? And  
the water stays brown? And the  
foundations keep cracking?

DESTINY

Then someone else can fix it.

GIL

Who?

She doesn't have an answer.

DESTINY

I have to go. I need to sleep  
before my shift tonight.

GIL

Destiny -

DESTINY

Loretta needs to be fed.

GIL

Who's Loretta?

Destiny stares at him.

DESTINY

My cat. She's been my cat for two  
years.

GIL

I didn't -

DESTINY

No. You didn't know. Because you  
don't ask. You don't visit. You  
don't call unless you want  
something. You notice patterns in  
government documents but you can't  
remember that your daughter has a  
cat.

She stands.

GIL

I'll do better.

DESTINY

Mom always said you gave me your  
attention. Like it was genetic.

Like I couldn't help but notice things.

GIL

That's not a gift.

DESTINY

She didn't say it was a gift. She said it was yours.  
Beat.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

I didn't want it. But here I am - counting your bank steps in my head.

GIL

Destiny -

DESTINY

Don't make promises, Dad. Just... be careful.

She walks out. Gil follows.

14. THE BANK STEPS

EXT. FIRST STATE BANK - DAY

Late afternoon. Golden hour light cuts across the stone. Destiny pushes through the Desert Freeze door and heads for her car. Gil follows - half apology, half reflex. They pass the steps of FIRST STATE BANK. Wide stone stairs. Municipal grandeur from another era. Gil stops.

DESTINY

Dad, my car is -  
But he's already crouching. The worn ruler comes out of his binder like a reflex. He extends it across the width of the top step.

GIL

One-forty-one.

DESTINY

Dad. Please.

He doesn't hear her. He's measuring the next step down. Then the next.

A WOMAN

WITH A STROLLER passes. Glances at the man crouching on the bank steps with a ruler. Looks at Destiny. Keeps walking.

Destiny doesn't move. Arms crossed. Jaw tight.

GIL

Code says you need a center rail every sixty inches. These steps are a hundred forty-one inches wide. Should be three rails. There's two.

DESTINY

This isn't -

GIL

(still measuring)

They skipped the middle one. The one you'd actually grab if you fell.

Because it's cheaper. Because nobody checks.

A BUSINESSMAN in a suit walks up the steps, giving Gil a wide berth. He catches Destiny's eye. She looks away.

GIL (CONT'D)

This is life safety, Destiny. This is the promise. The thing they sign off on and then forget.

He stands. Brushes off his knees. Looks at the steps like they've

confessed something.

He notices something in the concrete. Crouches again. Scrapes at the

aggregate with his thumbnail. Gray grit. Unusual texture.

He writes in his notebook: "Fill source?"

GIL (CONT'D)

If they'll cheat in daylight - on something everyone walks past - imagine what they'll bury under a slab. Where nobody looks.

Destiny watches him. Not the steps. Him.

The way he sees what no one else sees.

The way it costs him everything. A gust of wind pushes grit across the concrete.

DESTINY

(quiet)

I'm going to work.

She walks to her car. Doesn't look back.

HOLD

ON: GIL.

He stands at the bottom of the steps. Looking up at the absent rail. The empty space where safety should be.

He doesn't follow her.

After a moment, he goes back inside the Desert Freeze.

INT. DESERT FREEZE - CONTINUOUS

Gil sits alone at the booth. The binder closed in front of him.

Destiny's Mesa Swirl sits across from him. Untouched. Mint chip melting.

He looks at it.

Pulls it toward himself. Takes a bite.

Looks out the window at her car pulling away.

The "Home of the Mesa Swirl" sign buzzes in the window. Neon flicker.

15. WADE'S HOUSE - THE WEIGHT

INT. WADE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wade stands at the sink. Doesn't turn on the water. Just stands there.

The kitchen is modest. Clean. Photos on the refrigerator - Wade and Caroline at various ages. A calendar with doctor's appointments marked in red.

He's alone. Caroline is asleep upstairs. The house is quiet.

He's doing the math. The math he does every night.

WADE

(to himself)

Forty-seven jobs.

He looks out the window. At the dark.

WADE (CONT'D)

Forty-seven families.

He starts counting on his fingers. Not theatrically.

Privately. The way

someone does when they're trying to hold onto something.

WADE (CONT'D)

Martinez. Garcia. Salazar. The Benavideses -

He stops.

Tommy Benavides. The one who asked questions. The one who's in Odessa

now. Lost his job. Lost his marriage.

Wade stares at nothing.

WADE (CONT'D)

(quieter)

Tommy.

A long beat. The weight of that name.

Then he continues. Quieter now.

WADE (CONT'D)

The Romeros. The Padillas - no relation. The Vigils.

He runs out of fingers. Keeps going anyway.

WADE (CONT'D)

Half the volunteer fire department. The clinic's biggest donor. The school's tax base.

He turns from the window.

WADE (CONT'D)

If Rayborn closes, this town dies. Not slowly. Fast. The way towns die when the money leaves.

He sits down at the kitchen table. There's a pill organizer there.

Caroline's. Seven days. Morning and night.

He touches it.

WADE (CONT'D)

And Caroline's insurance. The experimental treatment. The one that's working.

He doesn't say the rest. Doesn't need to. Rayborn's supplemental

coverage. The coverage that appeared after Wade stopped asking questions.

He looks at his hands.

WADE (CONT'D)

I'm not a bad man.

Silence.

WADE (CONT'D)

I'm a man who made a choice.

He hears footsteps upstairs. Caroline moving. Maybe awake. Maybe just

shifting in her sleep.

He waits.

The footsteps stop.

He exhales.

WADE (CONT'D)

And the water? Gets tested. Same agency. Same reports. Same limits. Thirty years, nothing changes. He's rehearsing. Preparing for a conversation he might have to have.

Or a conversation he's already had with himself a thousand times.

WADE (CONT'D)

If it's bad, it's been bad for years. We've all been drinking it.

He looks at the ceiling. At where Caroline sleeps.

WADE (CONT'D)

Including her.

He puts his head in his hands.

This is Wade's tragedy. Not that he's evil. That he's not. That he's a man who loves his wife and knows his neighbors' names and made a choice that poisons both. The kitchen clock ticks.

Wade sits alone with the weight of forty-seven families.

And one name he can't say twice.

16. THE WALL COMES DOWN

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil enters. Slams the door.

He stands in front of the wall. The pattern. Years of work. Red string and pushpins and documents and photographs.

He stares at it.

Then he rips down an index card.

Then another.

Then a photograph. A permit. An invoice.

He's not crying. He's not screaming.

The red string tangles in his hands. He pulls. Pushpins scatter across the floor like teeth.

The map of New Mexico tears. The timeline shreds.

He reaches the center. His mother's photograph. The cracked glass. The denial letter. Case #1638.

He stops.

His hand hovers.

He can't do it.

He sinks to the floor. Surrounded by the wreckage of his obsession. Index cards and permits and string.

He picks up his mother's photograph. Holds it.

GIL

(quiet)

I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry I  
couldn't -

He stops. Looks at the mess around him.  
Picks up an index card. Reads it.  
Pins it back to the wall.  
Picks up another. Pins it.  
He's rebuilding. Slowly.  
Methodically. The same compulsion  
that made him tear it down now  
makes him put it back together.  
He can't stop. He doesn't want to stop.  
The wall will be rebuilt by  
morning.

CUT TO:

17. ELENA'S HOUSE - THE BASEMENT

INT. ELENA'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

The smell of mold. Water stains on the walls. A crack  
running from floor to ceiling, wide enough to see daylight  
through.

Gil photographs everything. The crack. The water stains.  
The warped floor tiles.

Elena watches from the stairs.

ELENA

It started about a year ago. Right  
after they opened that new  
injection site.

GIL

Which site?

ELENA

The Rayborn one. West of town.  
Five miles maybe.

GIL

Did you notice a connection?

ELENA

I noticed my house started falling  
apart at the same time they  
started  
pumping wastewater underground.  
I'm not a scientist, but I can add  
two and two.

Gil walks to the crack. Runs his finger along it. Gray grit  
crumbles

away - the same texture he noticed  
in the bank steps. He pinches some  
between his fingers, frowns.

GIL

What's this foundation sitting on?

ELENA

Whatever they poured it on. Fifty years ago. Why?

Gil doesn't answer. He takes out a small ziplock bag, scrapes some of

the grit into it.

GIL

When was the last tremor?

ELENA

Two nights ago. Rattled the windows.

GIL

Did you report it?

ELENA

Report it to who? Nobody cares about a 2.8.

GIL 2.8?

ELENA

That's what the app said. I have one of those earthquake apps.

Gil pulls out his phone. Opens a USGS app. Scrolls.

GIL

March 14. Magnitude 2.8. Five miles southwest of Aguaverde.

ELENA

That's the one.

GIL

There was another one on March 8. Magnitude 2.3.

ELENA

I remember that one too.

GIL

And March 2. Magnitude 2.1.

ELENA

Smaller. I didn't feel that one as much.

Gil looks at his phone. Something in his expression changes.

GIL

(almost to himself)

March 2. March 8. March 14.

ELENA

What about them?

Gil hesitates.

GIL

The intervals. March 2 to March 8  
is six days. March 8 to March 14  
is  
six days.

ELENA

So they're regular?

GIL

Maybe.

He scrolls further back.

GIL

(CONT'D)

February 25. Magnitude 2.0. That's  
five days before March 2.

He keeps scrolling.

GIL

(CONT'D)

February 17. Magnitude 1.9. Eight  
days before February 25.

ELENA

Is that significant?

Gil looks at the screen. His face is unreadable.

GIL

I don't know yet.

He puts the phone away.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Mrs. Marsh. Can I show you  
something?

ELENA

Elena. And yes.

He takes out his binder. Flips to a page. A timeline he's  
been

building. Seismic events plotted  
on a graph.

GIL

These are all the recorded  
earthquakes within ten miles of  
Aguaverde  
in the past year. Sixty-three  
events, most of them small. Under  
magnitude 3.

ELENA

That's a lot.

GIL

Before 2018? Two or three a year.

ELENA

And now?

GIL

Sixty-three. In one year.

ELENA

(staring at the graph)

And nobody's investigating?

GIL

The state says the wells are operating within permit parameters. The EPA says it's a state matter. The town says it's not our jurisdiction.

ELENA

So everybody points at everybody else.

GIL

That's how it works.

ELENA

Then how do we make it stop?

GIL

I don't know yet. But I'm going to find out.

Elena looks at him. At his binder. At his timeline.

ELENA

You're not like other politicians. I'm not a politician. I got elected by accident.

ELENA

What are you then?

GIL

Persistent.

18. ELENA'S HOUSE - THE KITCHEN

INT. ELENA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Elena pours coffee. Sets a cup in front of Gil.

He opens his binder to a new section. Pulls out a folder.

GIL

Can I show you something?

ELENA

Show me.

He opens the folder. Inside: government forms. Old.

Creased. Stamped in

red: DENIED.

GIL

This was my mother's RECA claim. Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

She filed it in 1998.

Elena looks at the form.

ELENA

What's RECA?

GIL

Federal program. Compensation for people exposed to radiation from nuclear testing. Downwinders. Uranium miners. Test site workers.

ELENA

Your mother was exposed?

GIL

She grew up in Carrizozo. Forty miles from Trinity. She was eight

years old when they detonated the first atomic bomb. Nobody warned them. Nobody evacuated them. The fallout drifted over their town and they didn't know what it was.

ELENA

What happened to her?

GIL

Thyroid cancer. Diagnosed in 1995. She filed her first claim in 1998.

He pulls out a document. Stamped: DENIED - INSUFFICIENT DOCUMENTATION.

GIL (CONT'D)

Denied.

Another document. Same stamp.

GIL (CONT'D)

2000. DENIED.

Another.

GIL (CONT'D)

2002. DENIED.

Another.

GIL (CONT'D)

2004. FOURTH DENIAL. SHE DIED THREE MONTHS LATER. STILL WAITING FOR the appeal.

He spreads the four denial letters on the table. Four documents. Four stamps.

GIL (CONT'D)

The case number was 1638.

Elena looks at him.

GIL (CONT'D)

After she died, I started seeing that number everywhere. In government documents. In permit applications. In financial records. I know how that sounds.

ELENA

Are you crazy?

GIL

Maybe. Or maybe once you start paying attention, you see things other people miss.

ELENA

Like what?

GIL

Like the drainage invoice for Oak Street was exactly \ \$16,380. Like the permit number for the nearest injection well is 2024-1638. Like you live at 1638 Oak Street.

He stops. Something crosses his face.

ELENA

Is that connected?

GIL

I don't know. The numbers are there. I don't know what they mean.

He gathers the denial letters. Returns them to the folder.

GIL (CONT'D)

Four times she proved she was sick. Four times they said it wasn't enough.

ELENA

That's not a number. That's cruelty.

Silence.

ELENA (CONT'D)

My mother-in-law was from Tularosa.

Gil goes still.

ELENA (CONT'D)

She never talked about it. But I know she was there when it happened.

The fallout. The ash. She used to say it looked like snow.

GIL

Downwinder.

ELENA

She filed claims too. Same answer.

GIL

How many times?

ELENA

At least three. She died in 2008.  
Lung cancer. Never smoked. Never  
got  
a dime.

Silence.

ELENA (CONT'D)

What do you need from me?

GIL

Documentation. Every time your  
water's brown, photograph it. Date  
and  
time. Every complaint you file,  
keep a copy. Every phone call,  
write  
down who you talked to and what  
they said.

ELENA

And then?

GIL

Then we build a paper trail. So  
when someone finally asks  
questions,  
the answers are on the record.

ELENA

My mother-in-law would have liked  
you.

GIL

My mother would have liked you.

19. GIL'S TRAILER - THE PATTERN

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - EVENING

Gil stands before the wall.

He's adding new materials. The photographs from Elena's  
basement. The timeline of earthquakes. A map of Oak Street  
with dots marking each damaged house.

And something else.

He's written the earthquake dates on index cards.

Calculated the intervals between them.

FEB 17 → FEB 25: 8 DAYS FEB 25 → MAR 2: 5 DAYS (= 6 - 1)

MAR 2 → MAR 8: 6 DAYS MAR 8 → MAR 14: 6 DAYS (= 3 + 3)

He steps back. Stares.

GIL

(to himself)

Eight. Five. Six. Six.

He writes another card:

8 - 1 - 6 - 3 - 8 OR 1 - 8 - 5 (6-  
1) - 6 - 6 (3+3)

He pins it to the wall.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Not clean. Not obvious.

He crosses it out.

Writes:

MAYBE

NOT THE PATTERN. MAYBE JUST  
EARTHQUAKES.

Pins it.

Stares.

GIL (CONT'D) (to himself) Stay  
boring. Win by being boring.  
Forty-three votes and a binder.

His phone buzzes.

Text from Elena: Meeting starts at  
7. 1638 Oak Street.

Gil freezes.

He reads the message again.

1638 Oak Street.

He types: What's your address?

Elena: 1638 Oak Street. The blue  
house with the porch swing.

Gil stares at the phone.

Looks at the wall. At his mother's  
denial letter. Case #1638.

Looks at the phone.

1638 Oak Street.

He pulls out the index card from his pocket. The one that  
says: DON'T

MENTION

THE PATTERN.

Puts it back in his pocket.

20. THE NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

INT. ELENA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The house number is visible from inside: 1638, stenciled on  
the mail slot.

Eighteen people. Folding chairs. The brown water jug from  
Elena's tap sits on the coffee table like an accusation.

Gil stands at the front of the room, binder open.

GIL

My name is Gil Padilla. I'm the new mayor.

GIL (CONT'D)

Most of you don't know me. Some of you know my podcast. If you listened to it, you probably think I'm crazy. Nobody denies it.

GIL (CONT'D)

Maybe I am. But I'm also the only person in town government who's asked why your water is brown and your basements are flooding and nobody's doing anything about it. The room shifts.

GIL (CONT'D)

In the past year, there have been sixty-three recorded seismic events within ten miles of Aguaverde. Before the injection wells opened, we averaged two or three a year.

He holds up a map.

GIL (CONT'D)

Fourteen households on this street have reported water quality issues or foundation damage. The town says it's your plumbing. The utility says it's your problem. The state says it's not their jurisdiction.

MAN IN BACK (RICK SALAZAR)

My brother works for Rayborn.

Silence.

RICK

He's been there eight years. Feeds his family. Pays his mortgage. Good job. Good benefits.

GIL

I'm not here to attack Rayborn.

RICK

Then what are you here for?

GIL

Elena's water is brown. Her foundation is cracked. Nobody will tell

her why.

RICK

And you think it's the wells.

GIL

I think it might be connected. I don't know for certain. That's why I'm asking questions.

RICK

And if the questions hurt people? People like my brother?

GIL

Then we deal with that when we get there. But right now, the people being hurt are in this room. Rick studies him.

RICK

My basement flooded in March.

GIL

Tell me.

RICK

Sump pump couldn't keep up. Three inches of water. Ruined everything in storage.

GIL

When exactly?

RICK

March 14. The night of the big tremor.

GIL

The 2.8.

RICK

Yeah.

Gil makes a note.

GIL

Anyone else have damage from that night?

Hands go up. Six. Eight. Eleven.

GIL (CONT'D)

Did anyone file reports?

Hands drop. Three stay up.

GIL (CONT'D)

What happened when you filed?

WOMAN

Nothing. They said they'd look into it.

MAN

Same. I called three times.  
 "Natural settling."

ANOTHER WOMAN

My insurance said earthquakes  
 aren't covered unless you have a  
 special rider. Which nobody told  
 me I needed.

Gil writes all of it down.

GIL

Here's what I'm going to do. I'm  
 going to file records requests  
 with the town. Correspondence with  
 Rayborn. Payment records. Permits.  
 Everything.

RICK

And if they don't give them to  
 you?

GIL

Then I'll go to the state. And if  
 the state doesn't listen, I'll go  
 to the press. And if the press  
 doesn't care, I'll go back to my  
 podcast.

VOICE

The crazy podcast?

GIL

The thorough podcast. Nobody takes  
 me seriously anyway. Might as well  
 use that.

He looks around the room.

GIL (CONT'D)

I'm not promising anything. I'm a  
 binder and a headache. But you  
 elected me to ask questions. So  
 I'm asking.

ELENA

What do you need from us?

GIL

Documentation. Every problem  
 you've had - water, flooding,  
 foundation  
 damage - write it down. Dates,  
 times, who you called, what they  
 said.

Take photos. Keep records.

RICK

And then?

GIL

Then we build a case. Not a court case. A paper case. Enough documentation that when someone finally looks at this, they can't say there's no evidence.

WOMAN

Will that work?

GIL

I don't know. My mother tried for fifteen years. Documented everything. Every doctor's visit, every test result, every denial letter. She died waiting.

Silence.

GIL (CONT'D)

But her documentation is still there. Her case is still on record. And someday someone's going to look at that record and see what happened. He looks at Elena's jug of brown water.

GIL (CONT'D)

I'm not asking you to fight a war. I'm asking you to keep receipts.

21. AFTER THE MEETING

EXT. ELENA'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

The meeting has ended. Most people have left. Gil stands on the porch, looking at the house number: 1638. Elena comes out.

ELENA

You keep staring at my address.

GIL

I know.

ELENA

It means something to you. The number.

GIL

It was my mother's case number. Her RECA claim.

ELENA

Oh.

GIL

I see it everywhere. That probably makes me crazy.

ELENA

Or it makes you paying attention.

GIL

Most people think it's the first thing.

ELENA

Most people don't have brown water and cracked foundations.

Gil turns to face her.

GIL

Mrs. Marsh -

ELENA

Elena.

GIL

Elena. I want to be honest with you. I notice patterns. I can't help it. It's how my brain works. And sometimes the patterns are real and sometimes I'm just seeing what I want to see. I can't always tell the difference.

ELENA

What are you trying to tell me?

GIL

I'm trying to tell you that I might be the wrong person to help you.

I have... baggage. History. A reputation.

ELENA

You're the only person who's listened.

GIL

That's not a high bar.

ELENA

In this town, it's the only bar. Rick Salazar appears on the porch. He's been waiting. Smoking.

RICK

Mayor.

GIL

Rick.

RICK

Can I talk to you for a minute?

GIL

Of course.

Rick glances at Elena. She nods and goes inside.

RICK

I meant what I said. About my brother.

GIL

I know.

RICK

He's not a bad guy. He just needs the paycheck.

GIL

I understand.

RICK

But.

GIL

But?

RICK

He talks, sometimes. After a few beers. About things at work that

don't add up.

GIL

What kind of things?

RICK

Pressure readings that seem wrong. Disposal volumes that keep going up. Equipment that's supposed to be monitored but isn't.

GIL

Has he reported it?

RICK

To who? The company? They'd fire him. The state? They don't care.

GIL

Would he talk to me?

RICK

No. He doesn't even know I'm here.

GIL

Then why are you telling me this?

RICK

Because something's wrong. I don't know what. But my basement flooded and my wife is afraid to drink the water and my brother comes home looking like he's seen something he wishes he hadn't.

He takes a drag.

RICK

(CONT'D)

You want to find the truth? Fine.  
But leave my brother out of it.

GIL

I can't promise that. If I find  
something that leads to Rayborn -

RICK

Then you be careful how you find  
it. Because there are a lot of  
families in this town depending on  
those jobs.

GIL

And there are families in this  
town whose houses are falling  
apart.

RICK

Yeah. I know. That's the problem.  
He finishes his cigarette. Drops it. Steps on it.

RICK

(CONT'D)

My brother mentioned a name once.  
Guy who asked too many questions.  
Got transferred to West Texas.  
Middle of nowhere. His wife left  
him  
within six months.

GIL

What was his name?

RICK

I don't know. But I can find out.

GIL

I'd appreciate that.

RICK

And if I do - you didn't get it  
from me.

GIL

I understand.

RICK

No. You don't.

He walks to his truck.

RICK

(CONT'D)

But you will.

He drives away.

Gil stands on the porch.

Looks at the house number.

1638.

22. THE TREMOR

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil at his desk, organizing notes from the meeting.

His phone buzzes. USGS EARTHQUAKE ALERT.

MAGNITUDE 3.4 - 5 MILES SW OF AGUAVERDE

The trailer shakes.

Not violently. But more than before. Books rattle on shelves. The photograph of his mother slides across the desk.

He catches it.

The shaking stops.

Gil sits still.

His phone buzzes.

Elena: Did you feel that?

Gil: Yeah. 3.4.

Elena: My grandmother lived in this house for sixty years. She never felt an earthquake. Not once.

Gil stares at the message.

Types: When did they start?

Elena: Three years ago. When they opened the new injection site.

Elena: It wasn't like this before.

He looks at his timeline. The earthquake dates. The well permits.

Types: I'm going to find out why.

He puts down the phone.

Looks at the framed denial letter. Case #1638.

GIL

(to his mother)

Something's wrong here. Something that wasn't wrong before.

He writes on an index card:

8 - 5 - 6 - 6 - 6

Stares at it.

GIL (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Not the pattern. Just... numbers.

He pins it to the wall anyway.

23. THE COUNCIL MEETING

INT. TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT

Three days later.

The room is full. Word has spread. Something might happen.

Wade sits at the center of the dais. The council members flank him. Sandra at the staff table.

In the audience: Elena, front row, holding her jug of brown water. Rick Salazar, near the back. Dolores, knitting.

And reporters. Three of them. The 3.4 made the regional news.

Wade bangs the gavel.

WADE

The regular meeting of the Aguaverde Town Council is called to order.

The meeting proceeds: roll call, minutes, routine business.

Then:

WADE

(CONT'D)

We now move to new business. Mayor Padilla has submitted two agenda items. Mayor, you have the floor.

Gil stands.

GIL

Thank you, Mr. President. My first item is a resolution requesting water quality testing data from the New Mexico Environment Department.

Specifically, any testing conducted within ten miles of Aguaverde related to groundwater or surface water that may have been affected by injection well operations.

WADE

Discussion?

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLT

What prompted this request?

GIL

Fourteen households on Oak Street have reported brown water and foundation damage in the past year. The timing coincides with -

He pauses. Almost says something.

Sandra, at the staff table, coughs. Lightly.

Gil glances at her.

GIL (CONT'D) - with increased activity in the area.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORALES

Is there evidence of a connection?

GIL

That's what testing would tell us.

WADE

The state has jurisdiction over injection wells. This is outside our authority.

GIL

I'm not requesting authority. I'm requesting information.

WADE

And if the state declines to provide it?

GIL

Then at least we'll have asked. On the record.

WADE

Further discussion?

Silence.

WADE

(CONT'D)

All in favor?

Four hands go up.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Opposed?

Wade raises his hand alone.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Motion carries. Four to one.

He doesn't hide his displeasure.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Your second item, Mayor.

GIL

A request for access to executive session minutes from 2020 to present.

The room stirs.

WADE

Executive sessions are confidential.

GIL

Section 8.4 of the charter allows release by majority vote of the council.

WADE

For what purpose?

GIL

To understand what decisions have been made in closed session regarding Rayborn Energy, Oak Street infrastructure, and related matters.

WADE

You're implying that something improper occurred.

GIL

I'm implying nothing. I'm requesting information.

WADE

Executive sessions exist to protect sensitive deliberations.

GIL

And public accountability exists to ensure those deliberations serve the public interest.

WADE

Is there a specific executive session you're concerned about?

GIL

I don't know. That's why I'm requesting the minutes.

WADE

This is a fishing expedition. It's a records request. From the mayor. About matters affecting this town. The least the public deserves is transparency.

WADE

Discussion?

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLT

Why now? You've been in office less than a week. Because people on Oak Street have been waiting six months for help. Someone needed to make it their concern.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORALES

And you think the executive sessions have answers?

GIL

I think they might have context.  
 What did the council discuss when  
 the  
 injection wells were first  
 proposed? What did they discuss  
 when Oak  
 Street residents started  
 complaining? What did they discuss  
 when the  
 first tremors were reported?

WADE

The council discussed what  
 councils always discuss. Policy.  
 Procedure.  
 The appropriate response to  
 constituent concerns.

GIL

Then there should be nothing to  
 hide.

Silence.

WADE

All in favor of releasing  
 executive session minutes?  
 Two hands go up.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Opposed?  
 Three hands, including Wade's.

WADE

(CONT'D)

Motion fails. Three to two.

Gil nods. He expected this.

GIL

For the record, I intend to file a  
 formal request with the town  
 attorney. If that request is  
 denied, I'll appeal to the state.

WADE

That's your prerogative.

GIL

I know.

They look at each other. Something passes between them. An  
 acknowledgment.

This is the beginning of  
 something.

WADE

Is there any other new business?

GIL

Not tonight.

WADE

Then we're adjourned.

He bangs the gavel.

24. THE PARKING LOT

EXT. TOWN HALL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Gil walks to his truck.

WADE (O.S.)

Mayor Padilla.

Gil turns. Wade approaches.

WADE (CONT'D)

A word?

They stand in the parking lot. Long shadows from the town hall lights.

WADE (CONT'D)

You're good at this.

GIL

At what?

WADE

Making people uncomfortable.

GIL

Is something being hidden?

Wade doesn't answer directly.

WADE

You ever hear of the golden rule?

The one about gold?

GIL

He who has the gold.

WADE

Rayborn has the gold. Has for thirty years.

GIL

And in exchange?

WADE

We don't ask too many questions.

GIL

That's worked for you.

WADE

For this town.

GIL

Tell that to Elena Marsh.

WADE

Elena Marsh is one person.

GIL

Elena Marsh is fourteen households. Maybe more.  
Silence.

WADE

What do you want? Really.

GIL

(quiet) Case 1638. RECA. Denied four times.

WADE

What does that have to do with -

GIL

I don't know yet.

WADE

Your mother?

Wade studies him.

WADE

You're going to be a problem for me.

GIL

Good. That means I'm doing my job.

WADE

Your records request will be routed through counsel.

He turns. Walks away.

Gil stands alone.

25. THE SECOND BOX OF RECORDS

INT. TOWN HALL - CLERK'S OFFICE - DAY

Two weeks later.

Gil approaches Dolores's window. She's knitting. Always knitting.

GIL

My records request.

DOLORES

Which one?

GIL

Rayborn correspondence. Permits. Payments.

DOLORES

Fifteen business days.

GIL

It's been seventeen.

DOLORES

Has it?

She reaches under the counter. Pulls out a box.

I'm the mayor of a town that barely votes. You'd think that would make me easy to ignore.

DOLORES

You'd think.

Gil opens the box.

Half the pages are black.

Redacted.

He holds one up. The entire page is black except for a date: 03/14/2022.

GIL

What is this?

DOLORES

That's what was provided.

GIL

I asked for correspondence. This is... ink.

DOLORES

Legal review determined certain portions were confidential.

GIL

The whole page?

DOLORES

Confidential portions.

GIL

Dolores.

DOLORES

Mayor.

They look at each other.

GIL

Is there anything in here I can actually read?

DOLORES

Page thirty-two.

Gil flips.

Page thirty-two: an invoice.

RAYBORN

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DRAINAGE  
ASSESSMENT - OAK STREET  
\\$16,380.00

At the bottom: two signature lines.

PAYMENT

AUTHORIZATION: Wade's signature.

WORK VERIFICATION: Blank.

GIL

The invoice.

DOLORES

What about it?

GIL

The amount. Sixteen thousand three hundred eighty dollars.

DOLORES

That's what it says.

GIL 1-6-3-8-0.

DOLORES

It's an invoice amount.

GIL

And this line. The verification line. It's blank.

Dolores's needles pause.

DOLORES

Is it?

GIL

Someone was supposed to verify the work was completed. Before payment was authorized. Nobody signed.

DOLORES

That does seem like an oversight.

GIL

How many other invoices have blank verification lines?

DOLORES

I wouldn't know. I just stamp things.

GIL

But you've been here thirty-seven years. You've seen thousands of invoices.

DOLORES

I've seen what I've seen.

GIL

And what have you seen?

Dolores sets down her knitting. For the first time, she looks at him

directly. Something in her eyes.

Not warning. Not encouragement.

Something more like recognition.

DOLORES

I've seen people come and go. I've seen questions asked and not answered. I've seen paperwork filed and lost and found and lost again. I've seen patterns.

GIL

What kind of patterns?

DOLORES

The kind nobody wants to see.

She picks up her knitting.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

You asked about the number. 1-6-3-8.

GIL

Yes.

DOLORES

The invoice amount. The permit number. Your mother's case.

GIL

Yes.

DOLORES

I don't know if it means anything. I've never looked for patterns. That's not my job. My job is to stamp things and file things and pretend I don't notice what I notice.

GIL

What have you noticed?

Long pause.

DOLORES

I've noticed that some numbers come up more than others. I've noticed that certain invoices have certain amounts that don't round the way invoices usually round. I've noticed that when certain questions get asked, certain files become harder to find.

GIL

Are you telling me something?

DOLORES

I'm telling you what I've noticed. What you do with it is your business.

GIL

Dolores -

DOLORES

Eighteen more pages in that box, Mayor. Not everything is redacted.

Gil looks at the box. Looks at her.

GIL

Thank you.

DOLORES

Don't thank me. I just stamp things.

Gil takes the box. Turns to leave.

At the bottom of the box, beneath  
the last document, he notices  
something.

A POST-IT NOTE. Yellow.  
Handwritten. Block letters.

WRONG

QUESTIONS.

He stares at it. Turns it over. Nothing.  
He looks back at Dolores. She's knitting. Not looking at  
him.

He puts the note in his pocket and leaves.

26. GIL'S TRAILER - THE DISCOVERY

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil sits at his desk. The box of records open. Papers  
spread across every surface.

He's sorting. Categorizing. Looking for patterns.

On the wall: new additions.

- The invoice: \ \$16,380. Circled. - The permit: #2024-  
1638. Circled. - The earthquake timeline. Intervals  
marked. - Elena's address: 1638 Oak Street. Circled. -  
The POST-IT: WRONG QUESTIONS.

He holds up a page. Another invoice. \ \$32,760.00.

He writes on a card:  $32,760 \div 2 = 16,380$ .

Pins it to the wall.

Another invoice: \ \$81,900.00.

Card:  $81,900 \div 5 = 16,380$ .

Pins it.

Another invoice. This one different: \ \$16,379.00.

Gil stops.

GIL

(to himself)

Sixteen three seventy-nine.

Off by one.

He stares at it. Writes on a card:

\ \$16,379 = \ \$16,380 - 1 TYPO?

ERROR? OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Pins it to the wall. Frowns. It  
doesn't fit.

He sets it aside. Keeps sorting.

More invoices. More multiples.

GIL (CONT'D)

\ \$16,380. \ \$32,760. \ \$49,140.

\ \$81,900. \ \$163,800.

He writes:

$16,380 \times 1 = 16,380$   $16,380 \times 2 =$   
 $32,760$   $16,380 \times 3 = 49,140$   $16,380$   
 $\times 5 = 81,900$   $16,380 \times 10 = 163,800$

Pins it to the wall.

GIL (CONT'D)

All of them. All divisible by the same base number.

He stares.

GIL (CONT'D)

That's not coincidence. That's a unit price.

He looks at the framed denial letter.

GIL (CONT'D)

Case 1638.

He looks at his mother's photograph.

GIL (CONT'D)

What am I looking at, Mom?

The photograph doesn't answer.

Among the documents, he finds something else. An old permit application. Faded. A date stamp:

PROCEDURE

ESTABLISHED: 1958

He pauses. Looks at it.

GIL (CONT'D)

1958.

He pins it to the wall. Doesn't know what to do with it. A thread he

can't follow. The system is older than Rayborn. Older than the injection wells. Older than his mother's claim.

He sits down. Puts his head in his hands.

GIL (CONT'D)

Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe I'm finding what I want to find.

He looks up at the wall.

GIL (CONT'D)

Or maybe I'm right.

He picks up his phone. Types a text to Sandra:

I need to see all Rayborn invoices from the past five years. Not just the summaries. The originals.

Sends it.

He looks at the POST-IT.

WRONG

QUESTIONS.

GIL (CONT'D)

Wrong questions. What are the right ones?

He stares at the blank verification line on the invoice.

GIL (CONT'D)

The pattern. The number. That's what everyone expects me to chase. That's how they'll dismiss me.

He stands. Walks to the wall.

GIL (CONT'D)

But the blank line. That's not pattern. That's procedure. That's a signature that should be there and isn't.

He picks up a red marker. Writes across the top of the corkboard:

WHAT

AM I MISSING?

Below it:

THE

BLANK LINE.

27. THE 4.1

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

4:16 AM.

Gil is asleep at his desk. Head on his arms. The binder open beneath him.

The trailer starts to shake.

Not like before. This is different. This is sustained.

Five seconds. Ten seconds. Fifteen seconds.

Books fall from shelves. The coffee cup slides off the desk and shatters. The corkboard rattles against the wall - pins popping loose, papers fluttering to the floor.

Gil wakes. Grabs the desk. Holds on.

The shaking continues.

His mother's photograph slides across the desk. He catches it before it falls.

Twenty seconds.

The trailer groans. Something in the structure shifts. A crack appears in the ceiling - hairline, but visible.

Twenty-five seconds.

And then it stops.

Silence.

Gil sits in the dark, breathing hard. His mother's photograph in his hands.

His phone buzzes. USGS EARTHQUAKE ALERT.

MAGNITUDE 4.1 - 3 MILES SW OF AGUAVERDE

He stares at the number.

4.1.

His phone buzzes again. And again. And again. Text messages flooding in.

Elena: Are you okay?

Destiny: Gil? Gil?

Sandra: Emergency session. 8 AM. Be there.

Marlene: Biggest one yet. You feel that?

He doesn't answer any of them.

He looks at the wall. At the papers on the floor. At the pins that popped loose.

He gets up. Starts re-pinning. Methodically. One document at a time.

His hands are shaking.

Outside, he can hear sirens. Car alarms. Dogs barking.

He keeps pinning.

The equation is still there. Still unfinished.

$1638 \div 43 =$

He looks at it.

GIL

(to himself)

This isn't supposed to happen here. Not like this.

He picks up his phone. Types a reply to Elena:

I'm okay. You?

Elena: Foundation cracked. All the way through. I can see outside through my basement wall.

Gil closes his eyes.

Types: I'm coming.

Elena: No. Stay. We need you at that meeting.

He looks at the wall. At the pattern. At the evidence he's gathered.

Types: I'll be there. 8 AM.

Elena: Make them listen.

He puts down the phone.

Looks at his mother's photograph.

The crack in the glass has spread.

A new fracture, running from her face to the edge of the frame.

GIL

(to the photograph)

This isn't normal. This isn't supposed to happen.

He sets the photograph on the desk.

Looks at the ceiling crack. At the damage to his trailer. At the

papers still scattered on the floor.

GIL (CONT'D)

Something is wrong with the ground beneath us.

He starts gathering the fallen documents. Outside, the sirens continue. The Martinez family's adobe - the one that's stood for eighty years - has partially collapsed. He'll learn this later. Right now, he's just gathering papers. Preparing for a meeting. Trying to make sense of numbers that won't add up.

The sun is starting to rise.

Gil works in the early light.

The wall watches him.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

28. EMERGENCY SESSION

INT. TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBER - MORNING

8 AM. The room is fuller than it's ever been. The 4.1 made the news - not just local, regional. A camera crew from Albuquerque sets up in the back.

Gil sits at the far end of the dais. His binder is thicker than before. He looks like he hasn't slept.

Wade sits at the center, composed. Too composed. The composure of a man who's had practice.

Sandra at the staff table. She's drawn three boxes on her legal pad already. Dolores in the back, knitting. Watching. In the audience: Elena, front row. Rick Salazar, middle. More Oak Street residents than before - word has spread. Wade bangs the gavel.

WADE

This emergency session is called to order. We're here to discuss the seismic event that occurred last night at approximately 4:16 AM. Magnitude 4.1. The largest recorded earthquake in this area in over twenty years.

GIL

4:16 and 38 seconds.

Wade looks at him.

WADE

I'm sorry?

GIL

The exact time. According to the USGS. 4:16:38 AM.

WADE

Is that relevant?

GIL

Probably not. I just notice things.

Wade holds his gaze a moment. Then continues.

WADE

I want to begin by assuring residents that town services are operating normally. Public works has assessed critical infrastructure. No major damage has been reported to municipal facilities.

VOICE FROM AUDIENCE

My chimney collapsed.

ANOTHER VOICE

My foundation cracked clean through.

ANOTHER

The water main on Elm Street is leaking.

Wade holds up a hand.

WADE

I understand there's been property damage. We're compiling reports. Anyone with damage should contact the town clerk's office to file a formal complaint.

ELENA

We've been filing complaints for a year.

WADE

Mrs. Marsh -

ELENA

Fourteen houses. Brown water. Cracked foundations. Nobody responds.

WADE

This isn't the forum for -

GIL

Point of order.

Wade's jaw tightens.

GIL (CONT'D)

Section 5.3 of the procedures manual. Emergency sessions allow public comment on matters related to the emergency. Mrs. Marsh's concerns are directly related.

WADE

The seismic event is the emergency. Prior complaints are a separate matter.

GIL

Are they? The seismic event caused foundation damage. Mrs. Marsh has been reporting foundation damage for a year. Either the issues are connected or they're not. But she has a right to speak.

WADE

The council will hear public comment at the appropriate time -

GIL

The appropriate time is now. People's houses are falling apart. They came here for answers. Are we going to give them answers or are we going to hide behind procedure?

Silence.

WADE

You want to talk about procedure, Mayor?

GIL

I want to talk about accountability.

WADE

Accountability for what?

GIL

For this.

Gil opens his binder. Pulls out a document. Holds it up.

GIL (CONT'D)

This is an invoice. Rayborn Environmental Services. Drainage

assessment, Oak Street. \\$16,380.  
Paid in full. March 2022.

WADE

I'm aware of that invoice.

GIL

Are you aware that the  
verification line is blank?

Silence.

GIL (CONT'D)

Someone authorized the payment.  
That's your signature, Council  
President. But nobody verified  
that the work was actually done.

WADE

It was an oversight.

GIL

One oversight?

He pulls out another document.

GIL (CONT'D)

Another invoice. Same contractor.  
Same blank verification line.  
\\$32,760.

Another document.

GIL (CONT'D)

And another. \\$49,140.

Another.

GIL (CONT'D)

And another. \\$81,900.

He spreads them across the dais.

GIL (CONT'D)

Four invoices. Four blank  
verification lines. \\$180,080 in  
payments  
to Rayborn contractors with no  
confirmation that any work was  
completed.

WADE

Those are legitimate invoices for  
legitimate services -

GIL

How do you know? Nobody verified  
them.

WADE

I saw the trucks. I saw the crews.

GIL

You saw activity. Did you see  
results?

WADE

That's not my job.

GIL

Whose job is it?

Wade doesn't answer.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLT

This is highly irregular -

GIL

The blank lines are highly irregular. That we've paid Rayborn contractors almost two hundred thousand dollars without a single verification signature is highly irregular.

WADE

Pattern? What pattern?

GIL

(catching himself)

The pattern of... procedural failures. Repeated failures.

WADE

You said "pattern." You meant something else.

GIL

I meant that when the same mistake happens over and over, it stops being a mistake.

WADE

What are you implying?

GIL

I'm asking questions. That's what forty-three people elected me to do.

He turns to the audience.

GIL (CONT'D)

Here's what I know. Oak Street has been flooding for eighteen months. Fourteen households have reported damage. The town paid for a drainage assessment that nobody verified. The earthquakes are getting stronger.

And when I ask questions, I get told it's not our jurisdiction.

He turns back to Wade.

GIL (CONT'D)

So I'm making it our jurisdiction.  
I'm asking the council to  
commission an independent audit of  
all Rayborn-related expenditures  
for the past five years.

WADE

That's a significant undertaking -

GIL

It's a significant amount of  
money.

WADE

The cost alone -

GIL

The cost of doing nothing is  
fourteen houses with brown water.

The

cost of doing nothing is a 4.1  
earthquake at four in the morning.

WADE

I move to table this discussion -

COUNCIL MEMBER MORALES

I second the motion to... wait. I  
want to hear more.

WADE

The motion is to table -

COUNCIL MEMBER MORALES

I withdraw my second.

Silence.

WADE

Fine. Discussion.

GIL

All I'm asking for is an audit. An  
independent review. If there's  
nothing to hide, the audit will  
show that.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLT

What would this audit include?

GIL

All payments to Rayborn and  
affiliated contractors. All  
permits  
issued. All inspection reports.  
All correspondence between the  
town  
and Rayborn regarding Oak Street  
infrastructure.

WADE

And who would conduct this audit?

GIL

An independent firm. Selected by the full council. Not appointed by any single member.

Wade looks at him. Long and hard.

WADE

All in favor of commissioning an independent audit?

Hands go up. Holt. Morales. The two who voted for the executive session minutes.

Three to two. Wade opposed.

WADE (CONT'D)

Motion carries.

SANDRA

(quietly, to Gil)

An independent audit gives us subpoena power. Records Rayborn wouldn't release voluntarily.

GIL

And if they find discrepancies?

SANDRA

Automatic referral to the state AG. It's not a town matter anymore.

Wade doesn't hide his anger.

WADE

Is there anything else, Mayor?

GIL

Not from me. But I believe Mrs. Marsh wanted to speak.

Elena stands. She's holding her jug of brown water.

ELENA

My name is Elena Marsh. I live at 1638 Oak Street.

Gil's expression flickers at the address. Nobody else notices.

ELENA (CONT'D)

This is my water.

She sets the jug on the edge of the dais.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Last night, the earthquake cracked my foundation from floor to ceiling. I can see daylight through my basement wall. My insurance

says it's not covered. The town  
says it's not their jurisdiction.  
She looks at Wade.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Why?

WADE

Mrs. Marsh, I understand your  
frustration -

ELENA

I'm not frustrated. I'm scared.

WADE

The town is doing everything in  
its power -

ELENA

No. They're hiding.

She picks up her jug.

ELENA (CONT'D)

The mayor showed up. That's more  
than anyone else did.

She sits down.

WADE

Is there any other public comment?  
Three more people stand. Then  
five. Then eight.

They tell their stories. Brown water. Cracked foundations.  
Insurance

denials. Ignored complaints.

Gil writes everything down.

When the last person finishes,  
Wade bangs the gavel.

WADE (CONT'D)

This session is adjourned. The  
audit will be scheduled at the  
next

regular meeting.

People start to leave.

GIL

Council President.

Wade stops.

GIL (CONT'D)

Thank you.

WADE

For what?

GIL

For the vote. Even if you opposed  
it.

WADE

I opposed it because I know what you're doing.

GIL

What am I doing?

WADE

You're looking for something that isn't there.

GIL

Then the audit will prove you right.

Wade shakes his head.

WADE

You really believe it, don't you? The pattern. The numbers.

GIL

I believe in documentation. I believe in verification.

WADE

(quietly)

You're going to tear this town apart looking for a number.

GIL

I'm going to tear this town apart looking for a blank line. The number is just how I noticed.

He walks away.

Wade watches him go.

## 29. THE AFTERMATH

INT. TOWN HALL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Gil walks out of the chamber. Sandra catches up.

SANDRA

That was something.

GIL

That was an audit request.

SANDRA

That was a declaration of war.

GIL

I asked for documentation.

SANDRA

You accused Wade of financial impropriety in front of a TV camera.

GIL

I pointed out that verification lines were blank. If that's an accusation, it's an accusation of negligence, not corruption.

SANDRA

You think there's a difference?

GIL

There's a legal difference.

SANDRA

Wade won't see it that way.

Wade can see it however he wants.

Sandra stops walking.

SANDRA

Can I give you some advice?

GIL

Can I stop you?

SANDRA

The audit is going to take months.

Independent firm, comprehensive

scope, political sensitivity -

you're looking at six months

minimum

before you see any findings.

GIL

I can wait.

SANDRA

Can the people on Oak Street?

GIL

What's your point?

SANDRA

My point is that the audit is the

long game. You need something in

the

short term. Something that shows

progress. Something that gives

people

hope.

GIL

Like what?

SANDRA

Like water testing. Independent

testing. Not from the

utility - they've already said

everything's fine. From an outside

lab. Something that can actually

tell people what's in their water.

GIL

The council approved the request

for state testing data.

SANDRA

The state will take three months to respond, and when they do, it'll be a form letter saying their tests show no abnormalities. You need your own data.

GIL

That costs money.

SANDRA

The mayor's discretionary fund. Section 4.7 of the budget. You have \ \$5,000 for expenses that don't require council approval.

GIL

I didn't know about that.

SANDRA

Most mayors don't. They use it for community events. Pancake breakfasts. Christmas decorations.

GIL

I'm not good at pancakes.

SANDRA

Then use it for water testing. Get samples from Oak Street. Send them to a certified lab. When the results come back - and they will come back, one way or another - you'll have evidence that nobody can deny.

GIL

Why are you helping me?

SANDRA

Because I've worked in this building for twelve years, and I've watched Wade not ask questions for twelve years, and I'm tired of not asking questions.

GIL

That's a dangerous thing to say out loud.

SANDRA

I'm the town manager. I'm supposed to be neutral. But neutral

doesn't mean blind. And I've seen enough blank verification lines to know that something is wrong.

GIL

You've seen the pattern too.

SANDRA

I've seen the absences. The places where things should be and aren't. That's not a pattern - that's a symptom.

GIL

Of what?

SANDRA

Of a system that stopped working a long time ago. Or maybe never worked at all.

She hands him a folder.

SANDRA

(CONT'D)

Budget document. Section 4.7 is highlighted. The discretionary fund requires a written justification but no approval. File the paperwork and the money is yours.

GIL

Thank you.

SANDRA

Don't thank me. I'm not on your side.

GIL

Whose side are you on?

SANDRA

The town's. Whatever that means.

She walks away.

Gil looks at the folder.

30. DOLORES'S WARNING

INT. TOWN HALL - CLERK'S OFFICE - LATER

Gil approaches Dolores's window. She's knitting. The same project. It never seems to get any longer.

GIL

I have a budget request.

DOLORES

Section 4.7?

GIL

How did you know?

DOLORES

Sandra walked past my window ten minutes ago. She had that look.

GIL

What look?

DOLORES

The look of someone who just did something they can't take back.

She takes the form. Examines it.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Water testing. Independent lab.  
\\$4,800.

GIL

Is there a problem?

DOLORES

The form is complete. I'll process it today.

She stamps it. RECEIVED.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

You should have results in two weeks.

GIL

Thank you.

DOLORES

Mayor.

GIL

Yes?

DOLORES

The note in the box.

Gil goes still.

DOLORES (CONT'D) "Wrong questions."

GIL

You left that.

DOLORES

I stamp things. I don't leave notes.

GIL

Then who -

DOLORES

I don't know. But I noticed that the note appeared in a box that was

under my control, in a building  
 where I know every lock and every  
 key,  
 and I don't remember putting it  
 there.

GIL

What are you saying?

DOLORES

I'm saying that someone is  
 watching. Someone who has access  
 that they  
 shouldn't have. Someone who knows  
 what questions you're asking  
 before you ask them.

GIL

And the second note? The one in my  
 trailer?

Dolores's needles stop.

DOLORES

What second note?

GIL "Right questions." With an  
 invoice. \ \$163,800.

DOLORES

I don't know anything about that.

GIL

Then there are two of them. Two  
 people leaving notes.

DOLORES

Or one person who can get into  
 places they shouldn't.

GIL

That's not reassuring.

DOLORES

It wasn't meant to be.

She resumes knitting.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

You asked me once if I'd ever seen  
 the number. 1-6-3-8.

GIL

You said you'd never looked.

DOLORES

I lied.

Gil waits.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Thirty-seven years in this office.  
I've seen a lot of numbers come  
through. Most of them don't mean  
anything. But some of them...  
some of them come up more than  
they should.

GIL

The invoice amounts.

DOLORES

Not just invoices. Permits. Case  
numbers. File codes. Even  
addresses.

GIL

Elena Marsh lives at 1638 Oak Street.

DOLORES

I know.

GIL

Is that a coincidence?

DOLORES

I don't believe in coincidence.  
But I don't believe in what you  
believe either.

GIL

What do I believe?

DOLORES

You believe the number means  
something. That it's a code or a  
signature or a pattern with a  
purpose.

GIL

And you don't?

DOLORES

I believe it's there. I don't know  
why it's there. But I've  
learned to notice when it appears,  
because when it appears, things  
get  
complicated.

GIL

Complicated how?

DOLORES

People start asking questions.  
Files go missing. Procedures that  
usually work stop working. It's  
like... like the number is a  
marker. A flag. Something that  
says "pay attention here."

GIL

A warning?

DOLORES

Or an invitation. I've never been sure which.

GIL

Dolores. Do you know something you're not telling me?  
Long pause.

DOLORES

I know a lot of things I'm not telling you. That's how I've survived thirty-seven years in this office.

GIL

But?

DOLORES

But I'll tell you this. The number isn't the answer. The number is how you find the answer. The answer is in the blank lines. The missing signatures. The procedures that weren't followed.

GIL

That's what I said at the council meeting.

DOLORES

I know. I was listening.

GIL

Were you surprised?

DOLORES

I was... hopeful.

GIL

Hopeful?

DOLORES

That someone finally figured out the right approach. You don't prove the pattern - you can't prove the pattern. But you can prove that someone didn't sign a form. You can prove that money was spent without verification. You can prove negligence. And negligence opens doors that conspiracy closes.

GIL

Boring is where they hide.

DOLORES

Exactly.

She finishes a row. Starts another.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

There's something else. Something I noticed in the records before I gave them to you.

GIL

What?

DOLORES

One of the invoices didn't match. \ \$16,379. One dollar off.

GIL

I saw that. I thought it was a typo.

DOLORES

Maybe. Or maybe it's not the same pattern.

GIL

What do you mean?

DOLORES

I mean that maybe there's more than one system at work here. More than one... author.

GIL

Author?

DOLORES

(almost to herself)

Or maybe I'm as crazy as you are.

She looks at him directly.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Be careful, Mayor. You're not just looking at numbers. You're looking at something that's been here a long time. Something that doesn't like being seen.

GIL

That sounds like superstition.

DOLORES

It sounds like thirty-seven years of paying attention.

She goes back to her knitting.

DOLORES

(CONT'D)

Your budget request will be processed by end of business. Is there anything else?

GIL

Yes. The election results. Dolores's needles pause. Almost imperceptibly.

DOLORES

What about them?

GIL

You said you process elections. Certifications. Ballots. Counts.

DOLORES

I did.

GIL

How does that work? The counting.

DOLORES

Paper ballots. Hand-counted. Two poll workers plus a supervisor. Standard procedure.

GIL

And after the count?

DOLORES

The ballots go in a box. The box goes in my cabinet. Nobody checks it unless there's a recount.

GIL

How often is there a recount?

DOLORES

In thirty-two years? Never. Nobody cares enough.

GIL

And the certification?

DOLORES

The count is recorded, reviewed, and certified by the town clerk.

GIL

That's you.

DOLORES

That's me. I write the number. I stamp the paper. Nobody double-checks.

GIL

So you certified my election. Forty-three votes.

DOLORES

I certified the official count.

GIL

Which was forty-three.

DOLORES

Which is what the official record shows.

Something in her tone. Gil catches it.

GIL

Is the official record accurate?  
Long silence.

DOLORES

The official record is what I stamped. I just stamp things, Mayor.

She doesn't look at him.

GIL

Dolores.

DOLORES

Window closes at four-thirty. You have a water test to commission.

She slides the glass panel shut.

Gil stands there for a moment. Then walks away.

Behind the glass, Dolores watches him go.

She looks down at her knitting. At the pattern emerging from her

needles. A pattern she didn't intend.

She unravels the last few rows and starts again.

31. TOMMY'S SECRET

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil on the phone. Pacing. The wall behind him.

TOMMY (V.O.)

You the mayor? The one asking about Rayborn?

GIL

Who is this?

TOMMY (V.O.)

The pressure data. The disposal volumes. They're falsified.

GIL

How do you know?

TOMMY (V.O.)

Because I used to record them.  
 Before they transferred me. Before  
 they  
 took everything.

GIL

Can you prove it?

Silence.

TOMMY (V.O.)

There's a storage unit. Tucumcari.  
 Unit 1638. I hid copies before  
 they  
 cleaned me out.

GIL

What's the combination?

TOMMY (V.O.)

42-39-81.

Gil writes it down. Stares at it.

GIL

42 times 39 equals 1638.

TOMMY (V.O.)

You see it too.

Click. Dead line.

Gil looks at the numbers. Then grabs his keys.

CUT TO:

EXT. TUCUMCARI - STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

A row of metal units. Small. Anonymous. The kind of place  
 where people store things they want to forget.

Gil parks. Gets out.

Unit 1638 is at the end of the row. Smaller than the  
 others. A padlock on the door.

He enters the combination. 42-39-81.

The lock clicks open.

He lifts the door.

Inside: boxes. Filing boxes. A dozen of them, stacked  
 neatly.

On top of the nearest box: a POST-IT NOTE. Yellow. Block  
 letters.

YOU FOUND IT.

Same handwriting as before. Same block letters.

Gil opens the first box.

INT. STORAGE UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Gil sits on the concrete floor, boxes open around him,  
 papers spread everywhere.

What he's found:

Pressure logs. Columns of numbers showing injection well  
 pressure readings. Handwritten notes in the margins:

"Adjusted per management directive." "Original reading: 3,200 PSI. Reported: 2,800 PSI."

Volume records. Disposal quantities. The official records show the wells operating at 80% capacity. Tommy's records show 140%.

Emails. Printed copies. Internal communications. "Need to stay under the EPA threshold or we'll trigger an audit." He photographs everything.

CUT TO:

## 32. THE EVIDENCE

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil at his desk, surrounded by Tommy's documents. He's organizing. Categorizing. Building a timeline. On the wall: new additions.

### PRESSURE

DATA - FALSIFIED VOLUME DATA -  
FALSIFIED INJECTION CAPACITY -  
140% OF LEGAL LIMIT

On the desk: a thin construction folder that doesn't belong with oilfield logs. OAK STREET

SUBDIVISION - PHASE I. MATERIAL REQUISITION:

### FOUNDATION

FILL - 1,638 CUBIC YARDS.

Supplier: RED MESA RECLAMATION (RECLAIMED). A stamped note: NO TESTING REQUIRED.

Beside it, a folded government map on old letterhead. A plume diagram traced in pencil - fallout drift plotted along the base of a mountain range. A handwritten label: BASELINE WIND PATH.

He picks up his phone. Texts Elena:

Found something. Big. Need to talk.

Elena: Tomorrow morning?

Gil: Can you come to my place? I don't want to discuss this in public.

Elena: Address?

He hesitates. Then sends it.

A few minutes later, his phone buzzes again.

Destiny: Dad, are you okay? I heard about the council meeting.

Gil stares at the message.

Types: I'm fine. How are you?

Destiny: Worried about you.

Don't be. What's the worst that can happen?

Destiny: That's not funny.

Gil: I wasn't joking.

Pause.

Destiny: Can we talk? Really talk?

Gil looks at the documents surrounding him. At the wall. At the evidence

of falsification and cover-up.

Types: Soon. I promise. But not tonight. Tonight I'm working.

Destiny: You're always working.

Gil: I know. I'm sorry.

Destiny: You're always sorry too.

She's right. He is always sorry.

It doesn't change anything.

He puts down the phone.

Picks up the photograph. The one with the impossible date.

June 16, 2038.

"The first fault line."

He studies the date stamp. The format is wrong - it doesn't match any

government dating system he's seen. The font is off. Like someone created this to be found.

GIL

(to himself)

Disinformation. Or a warning. Or a test.

He pins it to the wall anyway.

He doesn't know what it means. But someone wanted him to find it. That

makes it important.

33. THE REALITY TEST

INT. DESTINY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Destiny at her kitchen table. Laptop open. Papers spread out - Gil's documents, photocopied.

She's doing what she does: procedure. Verification. The medical mind refusing to believe without evidence.

On her notepad:

CLAIMS TO VERIFY: - Pressure data falsified (need original EPA filings) - Disposal volumes exceeded (need permit

limits) - Invoice amounts match 1638 pattern (need independent sample)

She's crossed off the first two. Checkmarks. Verified. The third one is circled. Unresolved.

She stares at it.

Loretta jumps onto the table. Destiny pushes her off.

DESTINY

(to herself)

It's confirmation bias. He finds the number because he's looking for it.

She opens her laptop. Pulls up the county permit database. Types:

RAYBORN ENVIRONMENTAL.

A list of permits. Dates. Amounts.

She scrolls. Looking for 1638. Looking for the pattern.

Nothing obvious.

She exhales. Relief.

Then stops.

Goes back to Gil's notes. His claim wasn't about permit amounts.

It was about permit `\*intervals\*`.

She checks his handwriting: "Days between permit renewals follow the

sequence."

She doesn't believe it. She's going to prove it wrong.

She pulls up the dates. Types them into a spreadsheet.

First permit: March 3, 2019.

Second permit: July 18, 2019.

Days between: 137.

Third permit: November 19, 2019.

Days between: 124.

Fourth permit: April 2, 2020.

Days between: 135.

She frowns. No pattern.

Then she sees Gil's note: "Add the intervals."

$137 + 124 + 135 = 396$ .

She stares at it. 396. Not 1638.

She laughs. Quietly. With relief.

DESTINY

(to Loretta)

See? Nothing.

She starts to close the laptop.

Then stops.

Gil's note has one more line:  
 "First four permits = baseline.  
 Pattern emerges in deviation from  
 baseline."

She doesn't want to keep going.

She keeps going.

Fifth permit: August 14, 2020.  
 Days from fourth permit: 134.  
 Baseline average: 132.  
 Deviation: +2.

She adds the next permit. And the next. And the next.

Building a column

of deviations from baseline.  
 +2, -4, +6, +3, -8, +1, +6, +3,  
 +8...

She stares at the numbers. They mean nothing.

Then she sees Gil's final note:  
 "Sum the absolute deviations for  
 permits 5-20."

She does the math.

$2 + 4 + 6 + 3 + 8 + 1 + 6 + 3 +$   
 $8...$

Her pen stops.

The sum is 38.

She checks it. Checks it again.

On the table next to her laptop: a  
 glass of water. Half full.

She reaches for it.

Stops.

Looks at the glass.

The surface of the water is  
 trembling. Barely. Concentric  
 rings expanding from the center.

She didn't feel anything.

Loretta is frozen. Ears flat.

Staring at the wall.

Destiny looks at her phone. Opens the USGS earthquake app.

A notification appears:  
 MINOR SEISMIC EVENT - MAGNITUDE  
 2.1 - TORRANCE COUNTY, NM -  
 16:38

UTC

She stares at the timestamp.

16:38.

The glass of water keeps  
 trembling.

She doesn't drink it.

CUT TO:

## 34. DESTINY'S CONFESSION

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - DAY

Gil at his desk, surrounded by Tommy's documents. The wall behind him, rebuilt.

A knock at the door.

He opens it. Destiny. She's holding a folder.

GIL

I didn't expect -

DESTINY

Can I come in?

He steps aside. She enters. Looks at the wall. At the documents

everywhere.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

You're still doing this.

GIL

I found evidence. Real evidence. Falsified pressure data, disposal volumes -

DESTINY

I know.

Gil stops.

GIL

What do you mean you know?

Destiny sets the folder on his desk. Opens it.

Inside: veterinary records. Lab results. A highlighted line: ELEVATED CREATININE. RECOMMEND FURTHER TESTING.

DESTINY

Loretta. My cat. She's had kidney problems for two years. The vet couldn't explain it. She's an indoor cat. Eats premium food. No reason for it.

She pulls out another document.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

Then I started asking around. My neighbor's dog. Same thing. The woman downstairs? Her son has nosebleeds. Every week. No explanation.

GIL

Destiny -

DESTINY

I wasn't investigating FOR you,  
Dad. I was investigating AGAINST  
you.

She looks at him. Her eyes are wet.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

I wanted you to be crazy. I NEEDED  
you to be crazy. Because if you're  
not crazy, then -

She stops. Looks at the wall. At the pattern.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

Then it's real. And if it's real,  
then I've been drinking that  
water.  
I've been BREATHING that air. For  
three years.

GIL

I'm sorry.

DESTINY

Don't be sorry. Be right.

She looks at him.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

Are you right, Dad? About all of  
it?

Gil looks at the wall. At the evidence. At his daughter.

GIL

I don't know. I think so. But I've  
thought so before.

DESTINY

What's different this time?

GIL

This time I have documents. Not  
patterns. Documents. Things that  
can  
be verified. Things that don't  
require you to believe me.

Destiny looks at the folder she brought.

DESTINY

What do you need?

GIL

I need someone who isn't me.  
Someone who can look at this and  
tell me  
if I'm seeing what's there or  
seeing what I want to see.

DESTINY

Someone like me.

GIL

Someone exactly like you.  
Destiny picks up a document. Starts reading.

DESTINY

Then show me. All of it. From the beginning.  
Gil looks at her. At his daughter. Sitting in his trailer. Willing to look.  
He pulls up a chair.

GIL

It starts with a number.

CUT TO:

35. WADE'S DESPERATION

INT. WADE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wade on the phone. Caroline is upstairs. He can hear her moving around, getting ready for bed.

WADE

(into phone, low)  
The audit passed. Three to two...  
No, I couldn't stop it... He had documentation. Invoices with blank verification lines. The council couldn't ignore it.  
He listens.

WADE

(CONT'D)

I understand the concern, but there's nothing I can do. The audit is happening. An independent firm. We have no control over who they select.  
Longer pause.

WADE

(CONT'D)

I'm not saying that. I'm saying we need to be prepared. If they find irregularities...  
His voice drops even lower.

WADE

(CONT'D)

I know what's at stake. But I can't make this disappear. He's got

forty-three votes and a grudge and  
he's not going to stop until he  
finds something.

He listens.

WADE

(CONT'D)

What do you mean, "handle it"?  
His expression changes. Fear.

WADE

(CONT'D)

I'm not comfortable with...  
No. That's not... We're talking  
about a mayor. An elected  
official. You can't just...

He stops.

WADE

(CONT'D)

I understand. I'll... I'll think  
about it.

He hangs up.

Stands in the kitchen. Breathing  
hard.

Caroline appears in the doorway.

CAROLINE

Who was that?

WADE

Work.

CAROLINE

It's midnight.

WADE

The earthquake. The council  
meeting. People are upset.

CAROLINE

You look scared.

WADE

I'm not scared.

CAROLINE

Wade.

WADE

I'm fine.

He's not fine. She can see it. He  
can see that she can see it.

CAROLINE

The prescription. I got it filled  
today.

WADE

I thought there was a problem with the authorization.

CAROLINE

There was. And then there wasn't. Someone made a call.

WADE

Who?

CAROLINE

I don't know. The pharmacy just said it was resolved. No co-pay. No authorization needed. Full coverage.

WADE

That's... good.

CAROLINE

Is it?

WADE

Why wouldn't it be?

CAROLINE

Because nothing is free, Wade. Someone paid for this. Someone who wants something from you.

WADE

You don't know that.

CAROLINE

I know you. I know that look. I know what it means when you can't meet my eyes.  
Long pause.

WADE

I'm trying to protect us.

CAROLINE

From what?

WADE

From... consequences.

CAROLINE

Whose consequences?

WADE

Everyone's.

She looks at him. The man she married. The man who's kept secrets for

so long that he's forgotten what truth feels like.

CAROLINE

I'm going to bed.

WADE

Caroline -

CAROLINE

Whatever you're doing, Wade.  
 Whatever you've done. It's not  
 worth  
 it. It's never been worth it.

She goes upstairs.

Wade stands alone.

He pulls out his phone. Looks at a contact labeled RAYBORN  
 EXEC.

Doesn't call.

Puts the phone away.

Sits down at the kitchen table.

Puts his head in his hands.

36. THE WATER TEST

EXT. OAK STREET - DAY

Gil goes door to door with Elena. A box of sample bottles.  
 Labels. A clipboard. Evidence bags. And the old Geiger  
 counter from his shelf - unexpected weight in his hands.  
 They collect water from each affected household. Fourteen  
 samples. Fourteen brown jugs of liquid that should be  
 clear.

At two of the worst houses, Elena leads him downstairs. A  
 crack runs through the basement wall. Gil puts on a paper  
 mask, scrapes a teaspoon of gray grit from the seam into a  
 ziplock bag, and holds the Geiger counter close. A slow  
 click. Then another.

At each house, the same story. The same frustration. The  
 same fear.

HOMEOWNER 1 My kids won't drink it. They think it's poison.

HOMEOWNER 2 The utility says it's fine. You tell me - does  
 this look fine to you?

HOMEOWNER 3 I've been boiling it for six months. Buying  
 bottled water for drinking. Do you know how much that  
 costs?

HOMEOWNER 4 My husband works for Rayborn. He's afraid to  
 say anything. Afraid we'll lose the house.

HOMEOWNER 5 I don't know who to trust anymore. The town.  
 The state. The company. Everyone's lying.

Gil writes everything down.

When they finish, Elena drives him to the shipping center.

ELENA

How long for results?

GIL

Two weeks.

ELENA

And then?

GIL

And then we'll know what's in the water. And we'll have proof that nobody can deny.

ELENA

What do you think they'll find?

GIL

I don't know. But I know what I hope they don't find.

ELENA

What's that?

GIL

Radiation.

Elena looks at him sharply.

GIL

(CONT'D)

The injection wells are disposing of wastewater from oil and gas operations. Some of that wastewater is naturally radioactive. If they're exceeding their disposal limits - if they're pumping more than the wells can handle - the radiation could be leaching into the groundwater.

ELENA

Like your mother.

GIL

Not the same thing. But related. Same principle. Same pattern. Contaminate the environment. Deny the victims. Delay until they give up or die.

ELENA

But the Geiger counter clicked in my basement. Away from the water.

GIL

That's what worries me. The injection wells might not be the only source. When the ground shakes, it opens pathways. Fractures. And whatever's already in the fill - legacy material from before anyone was testing - that can migrate too.

ELENA

You're saying there might be two problems.

GIL

I'm saying the quakes might be connecting them.

ELENA

You really believe that.

GIL

I've seen it happen. Again and again. Different places. Different poisons. Same system.

ELENA

And the number? 1-6-3-8?

GIL

I don't know. Maybe it means something. Maybe it's just... how I notice. A way of seeing what's hidden in plain sight.

ELENA

You're not crazy.

GIL

How do you know?

ELENA

Because crazy people don't question whether they're crazy. They're certain. You're the least certain person I've ever met.

GIL

That's not reassuring.

ELENA

It wasn't meant to be.

She smiles. Slightly.

ELENA

(CONT'D)

Thank you. For doing this. For listening. For showing up.

GIL

I got forty-three votes. Showing up is the least I can do.

ELENA

You say that a lot. Forty-three votes.

GIL

It's what I have. It's who I am.

ELENA

No. It's what you tell yourself.

Who you are is more than that.

Gil doesn't answer.

He ships the samples. Two weeks until answers.

37. THE ANOMALY

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil at the wall, organizing Tommy's documents.

He's found more anomalies. More numbers that don't quite fit.

An invoice for  $\$8,361$ . Half of  $\$16,722$  - which is almost  $\$16,380$ , but not quite.

A permit numbered #2024-8361. The inversion of 1638.

A pressure reading logged at 08:36:01. Again, the inversion.

He writes on a card:

8361  $\neq$  1638 INVERSION? SECOND PATTERN?

Pins it to the wall.

Stares.

GIL

(to himself)

There's something else. Something

I'm not seeing.

He picks up the photograph. The one from the storage unit.  
June 16,

2038. "THE FIRST FAULT LINE."

He looks at the date again.

June 16, 2038.

6/16/38.

6-16-38.

61638.

He writes it down. Looks at it.

Not 1638. 61638.

Or: 6, 1638.

Or:  $6 + 1638 = 1644$ .

Or:  $6 \times 1638 = 9828$ .

None of it makes sense.

He flips the photograph over. On the back, in pencil,  
barely visible: a

watermark. "AGUAVERDE COPY  
CENTER."

GIL

(to himself)

Someone made this. Locally.

Recently.

Not a prophecy. A provocation.

Someone wanted him to chase this

number instead of looking at  
something else.

He puts down the photograph.

Looks at the wall.

All the patterns. All the numbers.

All the connections.

And then: all the anomalies. The  
inversions. The near-misses.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Two patterns. Dolores said there  
might be two.

He writes on a card:

SYSTEM A: 1638 SYSTEM B: 8361? TWO  
SETS OF BOOKS?

Pins it to the wall.

Then looks at the card and laughs.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Two accounting systems. Two ways  
of hiding. Now I really sound like  
an auditor.

But he doesn't take it down.

38. MARLENE VALDEZ

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

A small office. The Aguaverde Gazette. Two desks, one  
occupied. MARLENE VALDEZ (40s) sits behind a computer,  
surrounded by coffee cups and notepads. She's been here  
twenty years. She's seen everything.

Gil enters.

MARLENE

Mayor Padilla.

GIL

Ms. Valdez.

MARLENE

Marlene. I've been expecting you.

GIL

Have you?

MARLENE

You're the most interesting thing  
that's happened in this town in  
years. The podcast guy. The forty-  
three votes. The council meeting.  
Of

course I've been expecting you.

GIL

I have information.

MARLENE

I assumed.

GIL

And I need to get it published.  
Before the audit is complete.  
Before  
someone tries to make it  
disappear.

MARLENE

What kind of information?

Gil opens his binder. Pulls out copies of Tommy's documents.

GIL

Falsified pressure data. Exceeding  
disposal limits. Internal memos  
showing management knew.

Marlene takes the documents. Flips through them.

MARLENE

Where did you get these?

GIL

A source. Someone who used to work  
for Rayborn.

MARLENE

On the record?

GIL

Absolutely not.

MARLENE

Then I can't use them.

GIL

You can report that they exist.  
You can report that someone is  
making  
allegations. You can file FOIA  
requests based on specific  
documents  
and see what the company provides.

MARLENE

That's journalism 101.

GIL

I know. That's why I'm here.

Marlene looks at him. Appraising.

MARLENE

You listen to a lot of podcasts  
about how to take down  
corporations?

GIL

I made a lot of podcasts about how they took down my mother.

MARLENE

The RECA case. 1638.

GIL

You've done your research.

MARLENE

I told you - you're interesting.

She sets down the documents.

MARLENE

(CONT'D)

Here's the problem. Rayborn is the largest advertiser in this paper. Has been for twenty years. If I run this story, I lose that advertising. If I lose that advertising, I might lose the paper.

GIL

So you won't run it.

MARLENE

I didn't say that.

She looks at him.

MARLENE

(CONT'D)

I've watched Wade Sutter not ask questions for twelve years. I've watched this town take Rayborn's money and look the other way. I've watched people get sick and get ignored and get dismissed. And I've kept my head down because I had a paper to run and a life to live.

GIL

And now?

MARLENE

Now there's a 4.1 earthquake and fourteen houses with brown water and a mayor who actually seems to give a damn.

GIL

I got forty-three votes.

MARLENE

Yeah, I know. You mention it a lot. It's a good line.

Self-deprecating but with teeth.

GIL

It's not a line. It's the truth.

MARLENE

The truth is you're asking the questions nobody else will ask. That's worth more than forty-three votes.

She picks up the documents again.

MARLENE

(CONT'D)

I'll need time. A week to verify what I can, file the FOIAs, build a story that Rayborn's lawyers can't tear apart.

GIL

A week.

MARLENE

And you don't talk to anyone else. No other outlets. No social media. This is my story until I publish.

GIL

Agreed.

MARLENE

And one more thing.

GIL

What?

MARLENE

The pattern stuff. The number. 1-6-3-8. Keep it out of my story.

GIL

Why?

MARLENE

Because it makes you sound crazy. Because it gives Rayborn's lawyers a hook to dismiss everything else. "The conspiracy podcaster thinks a number controls the government." You want this story to land, you keep the numerology to yourself.

GIL

It's not numerology.

MARLENE

I know. But that's how it'll play. Trust me. I've been doing this a long time.

Gil considers.

GIL

Fine. The story focuses on the procedural failures. The blank verification lines. The falsified data. The exceeding of disposal limits.

MARLENE

Exactly. Boring. Verifiable. Actionable. That's how you win.

GIL

Boring is where they hide.

MARLENE

Is that from your podcast?

GIL

It's something I'm learning.

She extends her hand.

MARLENE

One week, Mayor. Then we blow this up.

They shake.

39. DESTINY'S DISCOVERY

INT. AGUAVERDE COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY

Destiny at her station. Filing paperwork. The kind of mindless work that lets your thoughts wander. She's thinking about her father. About the council meeting. About the news coverage that's starting to spread. A colleague passes by - JANET, 50s, senior nurse.

JANET

Your dad's the mayor, right?

DESTINY

Unfortunately.

JANET

He's stirring up trouble with Rayborn.

DESTINY

He's asking questions.

JANET

Same thing, around here.

Destiny doesn't respond.

JANET

(CONT'D)

My sister works for them. Admin. She says people are nervous. Management's been having a lot of closed-door meetings since the council session.

DESTINY

That's not my business.

JANET

Your father made it everyone's  
business.

Destiny stands.

DESTINY

I need to file these.

She walks away. Into the records room.

Starts filing. Alphabetical.

Mindless.

Then she stops.

She's looking at a folder. RAYBORN

ENERGY - COMMUNITY HEALTH GRANT.

The folder that funds forty  
percent of this clinic.

She opens it.

Inside: grant documents. Payment

records. Correspondence.

And an invoice.

RAYBORN

ENERGY FOUNDATION COMMUNITY HEALTH

INITIATIVE - ANNUAL GRANT

\\$163,800.00

Destiny stares at the number.

\\$163,800.

She knows that number. Her father mentioned it. One of the  
invoices he

found.

She flips through more documents.

Another invoice: \\$81,900.

Another: \\$49,140.

Another: \\$16,380.

All the same amounts her father  
has been tracking.

She sits down on the floor of the records room.

The clinic. Her clinic. Her  
salary. Her health insurance. All  
funded by the same money her  
father is investigating.

She's part of it. She's been part  
of it all along.

She pulls out her phone.

Starts to text her father.

Stops.

Puts the phone away.

She doesn't know what to do with this.

## 40. THE RESULTS

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - DAY

Two weeks later.

Gil opens an envelope from the lab. The water test results.  
He reads.

His face goes pale.

ELEVATED

LEVELS OF: - Barium - Radium-  
226 - Radium-228 - Total  
DISSOLVED SOLIDS - CHLORIDES -  
BROMIDES

A second page. Smaller print. An  
add-on Elena talked the lab into  
running: FOUNDATION DUST SAMPLE. A  
highlighted note: ELEVATED GAMMA  
ACTIVITY - CONSISTENT WITH OLDER  
CONTAMINATION. Gil stares at it,  
like the house itself just tested  
positive.

RECOMMENDATION: Water unsafe for  
drinking. Further testing  
recommended. Notify state  
environmental agency.

He reads it again.

Radium-226. Radium-228.

Radioactive isotopes.

The same isotopes that appear in  
oil and gas wastewater.

The same isotopes that have been  
linked to cancer in communities  
near disposal sites.

He picks up his phone. Calls Elena.

GIL

The results are back.

ELENA

(V.O.)

And?

GIL

You need to stop drinking the  
water. Everyone on Oak Street  
needs to  
stop. Now.

Silence.

ELENA

(V.O.)

How bad?

GIL

Radioactive. Barium. Radium.  
Silence.

ELENA

(V.O.)

Like your mother.

GIL

Yes.

ELENA

(V.O.)

What do we do?

GIL

We go public. Today.

41. THE PRESS CONFERENCE

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Steps of Town Hall. Microphones. Cameras from three stations.

Gil at the microphones. Elena beside him. Oak Street residents behind them.

Marlene's story broke this morning. Now Gil has something to add.

GIL

Good morning. I'm Gil Padilla.

Mayor of Aguaverde.

He doesn't say '1638.' Not here. Not to them.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Two weeks ago, I commissioned independent water testing for fourteen

households on Oak Street.

He holds up the lab report.

GIL

(CONT'D)

Every sample showed elevated levels of radium-226, radium-228, and barium. Radioactive contaminants.

GIL

(CONT'D)

And we submitted dust scraped from cracks in those foundations. That came back elevated too. Not just in the water. In the houses. In what

they're built on.

Murmurs.

GIL

(CONT'D)

The people of Oak Street have been drinking radioactive water. For months. Nobody tested. Nobody told them.

He sets down the report.

GIL

(CONT'D)

I'm calling on the state to conduct emergency testing. I'm calling on the EPA to investigate. And I'm calling on Rayborn Energy to suspend operations until the safety of our water can be verified.

REPORTER 1 Mayor Padilla, Rayborn denies any connection. How do you respond?

GIL

With data. Independent lab. Certified results.

REPORTER 2 Some have criticized your investigation as politically motivated.

GIL

I got forty-three votes in a special election nobody attended.

I don't have politics. I have documentation.

REPORTER 3 There are reports you believe in a conspiracy theory involving a four-digit number. Care to comment?

Sandra is standing to the side. She shifts her weight. Her hand moves

toward Gil's binder - not touching, just... present.

Gil sees it.

GIL

I believe in verification. I believe when someone says there's no problem, you check for yourself.

REPORTER 3 But the number - 1638 -  
you've discussed it on your  
podcast -

GIL

Today I'm discussing radium in  
drinking water. That's the story.  
He turns to Elena.

GIL

(CONT'D)

This is Elena Marsh. She's lived  
at Oak Street for thirty-four  
years.  
She deserves to speak.  
He steps back.  
Elena steps forward. Holds up her jug of brown water.

ELENA

My name is Elena Marsh. This is  
what comes out of my tap.  
She doesn't elaborate. She doesn't need to.

ELENA

(CONT'D)

The mayor showed up. He asked  
questions. That's more than anyone  
else  
did.  
She sets down the jug.  
The cameras flash.  
In the back: Wade, watching. A man  
in an expensive suit beside him.  
They whisper. They leave.

Gil sees them go.

His hand finds his binder. The  
number written on the first page,  
visible through the plastic.

He flips it to a blank page.

42. THE AFTERMATH

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil's phone hasn't stopped buzzing. Calls from reporters.  
Calls from other mayors. Calls from environmental groups.  
He ignores most of them.  
He's at the wall. Looking at everything.  
The invoices. The permits. The earthquake timeline. The  
water test results. Tommy's documents. The photograph with  
the impossible date.  
And the anomalies. The inversions. The numbers that don't  
fit.  
His phone buzzes again. Destiny.

He answers.

GIL

Hey.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

I saw the press conference.

GIL

And?

DESTINY

(V.O.)

You did good, Dad.

Gil is quiet for a moment.

GIL

Thank you.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

I mean it. I've been... I've been hard on you. About the pattern stuff. The podcast. The obsession. But this - what you did today - this mattered.

GIL

It's not over.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

I know. But you proved something. You showed that asking questions matters. That documentation matters. That one person can -

GIL

Forty-three people.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

What?

GIL

Forty-three people elected me. It wasn't just me. It was everyone who voted. Everyone who showed up at the council meeting. Everyone who gave water samples. I'm just the one with the microphone.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

That's... very humble of you.

GIL

I don't feel humble. I feel  
scared.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Why?

GIL

Because this is when it gets  
dangerous. This is when people  
start to  
push back. This is when accidents  
happen.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Dad -

GIL

I'm not being paranoid. I've seen  
it before. You ask questions, you  
get transferred to West Texas. You  
keep asking, you lose everything.  
Tommy Benavides. The name Rick gave me. He lost his job,  
his marriage,  
his life. All because he told the  
truth.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Is that what's going to happen to  
you?

GIL

I don't know. I hope not. But I  
need you to know... if something  
happens to me -

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Dad, stop.

GIL

If something happens to me, the  
documentation is here. The wall.  
The  
binder. Everything is labeled,  
organized, indexed. You can find  
it.  
You can continue it.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

I don't want to continue it. I  
want you to be safe.

GIL

I'm trying. But I can't stop now.  
Not when we're this close.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Close to what?

GIL

Close to the truth.

Long silence.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Dad. I found something.

GIL

What?

DESTINY

(V.O.)

At the clinic. In the records. The  
Rayborn funding. The grants that  
pay for our work. The amounts  
match. \ \$163,800. \ \$81,900.  
\ \$16,380. All the same numbers  
you've been tracking.

Gil goes still.

GIL

They're everywhere.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

Yeah.

GIL

What are you going to do?

DESTINY

(V.O.)

I don't know. I work there, Dad.

If I say something -

GIL

You don't have to say anything.

You don't have to be part of this.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

I'm already part of it. I've been  
taking their money for three  
years. Does that make me  
complicit?

GIL

No. It makes you an employee at a  
clinic that helps people. That's  
not a crime.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

But taking money from a company  
that's poisoning people -

GIL

You didn't know. Nobody knew.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

You knew. Or you suspected.

GIL

I suspected. I didn't have proof  
until now.

DESTINY

(V.O.)

And now that you have proof?

GIL

Now I make sure it can't be  
buried.

#### 43. THE CONFRONTATION

INT. TOWN HALL - WADE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Wade alone. Late. The building is empty.

His phone rings. He looks at the caller ID. Grimaces.  
Answers.

WADE

Yes?

VOICE

(V.O.)

The press conference was  
unfortunate.

WADE

I couldn't stop it.

VOICE

(V.O.)

You didn't try.

WADE

What was I supposed to do? The lab  
results are public. The story is  
out. There's no putting that back  
in the box.

VOICE

(V.O.)

The mayor is a problem.

WADE

The mayor is a symptom. The  
problem is that Rayborn exceeded  
its  
disposal limits and contaminated  
the water supply.

VOICE

(V.O.)

Allegedly.

WADE

The lab results aren't allegations. They're facts.

VOICE

(V.O.)

Facts can be interpreted. Facts can be contextualized. Facts can be challenged.

WADE

You're going to challenge independent lab results?

VOICE

(V.O.)

We're going to question the methodology. The sample collection. The chain of custody. The mayor's political motivations.

WADE

That's not going to work.

VOICE

(V.O.)

It's worked before.

WADE

Not this time. The story is too big. The Albuquerque stations are covering it. It's going national by tomorrow.

VOICE

(V.O.)

Then we need to contain it.

WADE

How?

VOICE

(V.O.)

The mayor's reputation. His podcast. The conspiracy theories. There's plenty of material there.

WADE

He didn't mention the number today. He kept it to data and documentation. He's smarter than he looks.

VOICE

(V.O.)

Then find something else.

WADE

There's nothing else.

VOICE

(V.O.)

Everyone has something. Find it.

The line goes dead.

Wade sits in the darkness.

He looks at the photo on his desk. Caroline. From years ago. Before the

cancer. Before everything.

He opens a drawer. Inside: a file. Old documents. An election

certification from last month.

He looks at the numbers.

Something occurs to him.

He picks up his phone. Calls Dolores.

WADE

It's Wade. I need to see the election records. From the special election. The original count.

44. DOLORES'S CHOICE

INT. TOWN HALL - CLERK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dolores at her station. After hours. The building should be empty, but here she is.

Her phone rings. Wade.

She looks at the screen for a long moment.

Then answers.

DOLORES

Council President.

WADE

(V.O.)

I need to see the election records. The original count from the special election.

DOLORES

It's after hours.

WADE

(V.O.)

I know what time it is.

DOLORES

The records are sealed until the certification period expires.

WADE

(V.O.)

I have authority -

DOLORES

Section 7.3. Sealed for thirty days post-certification. The certification period ends next week.

WADE

(V.O.)

Dolores. I'm asking as a friend.

DOLORES

We're not friends, Council President. We're colleagues. And colleagues follow procedures.

WADE

(V.O.)

There's something wrong with those numbers. Something that doesn't add up.

DOLORES

The numbers add up to forty-three. That's what the record shows.

WADE

(V.O.)

Is that what actually happened? Long silence.

DOLORES

I stamp things. I don't question them.

WADE

(V.O.)

You've been in that office for thirty-seven years. You know everything that goes on in this building. If there's something wrong with those numbers -

DOLORES

The numbers are what they are.

WADE

(V.O.)

That's not an answer.

DOLORES

It's the only one you're getting.

She hangs up.

Sits in the darkness.

Looks at the locked file cabinet  
where the election records are  
kept.

She has a key. She has all the keys.

She picks up her knitting.

The pattern emerging from her  
needles is wrong. She's made a  
mistake somewhere. The stitches  
don't line up.

She unravels the last few rows.

Starts again.

45. THE ESCALATION

EXT. OAK STREET - DAY

Emergency response vehicles. State Environmental Agency  
vans. News trucks.

The press conference worked. The state is here.

Gil watches from the sidewalk as technicians in hazmat  
suits collect water samples. Official samples this time.  
Samples that will go into official records.

Elena stands beside him.

ELENA

You did this.

GIL

We did this. All forty-three of  
us.

ELENA

You keep saying that.

GIL

It's true.

ELENA

It's deflection.

GIL

Credit makes you a target.

ELENA

You're already a target.

She's right. He knows she's right.

A state official approaches. DR.

SARAH CHEN (40s), from the  
Environment Department.

DR. CHEN

Mayor Padilla?

GIL

Yes.

DR. CHEN

Dr. Sarah Chen. State  
Environmental Division. I'm  
leading the

emergency assessment.

GIL

Thank you for coming.

DR. CHEN

We should have been here months ago.

GIL

What caused the delay?

DR. CHEN

The usual. Budget constraints. Complaints that don't rise to the level of investigation.

GIL

Until they do.

DR. CHEN

Until they do.

She looks at the scene. The technicians. The cracked adobe walls.

DR. CHEN (CONT'D)

Your independent testing - the lab you used - it's solid. The results will hold up.

GIL

The question is source.

DR. CHEN

Right. We need to show a pathway.

She pulls out a tablet. Brings up a diagram. Shows it to Gil and Elena.

A cross-section: injection well at 8,000 feet. Aquifer at 200 feet. Between them: rock layers. And cutting through the rock: fractures. Old well bores. Dotted lines showing potential migration routes.

DR. CHEN (CONT'D)

Three potential pathways we've identified so far.

ELENA

Old wells?

DR. CHEN

From the fifties. Never properly sealed.

Elena studies the diagram.

ELENA

So the poison comes up through the cracks.

DR. CHEN

That's what we're testing.

GIL

The disposal volumes are  
falsified.

She looks at him sharply.

DR. CHEN

You have documentation?

GIL

Internal records. Rayborn exceeded  
their limits by as much as 60%.

DR. CHEN

Source?

GIL

Someone who used to work there.  
Won't testify.

DR. CHEN

Then it's hearsay. Useful for  
investigation, not prosecution.

GIL

Can you compare the official  
records to what the geology says  
they  
should be producing?

DR. CHEN

We can try.

GIL

Then try. Please.

She nods.

DR. CHEN

We'll be here at least a week.

GIL

Thank you.

DR. CHEN

Don't thank me yet.

She walks back to her team.

Gil and Elena watch her go.

ELENA

The past coming up through the  
ground.

GIL

That's how it works.

He watches Dr. Chen.

Something about her manner. The  
institutional distance. The  
institutional tone. Always the  
same.

But something about the name stays  
with him.

46. WADE'S GAMBIT

INT. WADE'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

Wade at his desk. Documents spread before him.

He's been doing his own research. His own calculations.

He's found something.

$1638 \div 43 = 38.093\dots$

$1638 = (38 \times 43) + 4$

A remainder. Four extra.

But if the vote count was different...

$1638 \div 42 = 39$

Clean. No remainder.

$1638 = 39 \times 42$

He stares at the math.

If Gil got forty-two votes instead of forty-three, the  
number divides evenly into his mother's case number.

He would be inside the pattern. Part of it. Not  
investigating it - constituting it.

Wade picks up his phone. Calls a number.

WADE

I found something.

VOICE

(V.O.)

What?

WADE

The mayor's vote count. It might  
be wrong. Off by one.

VOICE

(V.O.)

How does that help us?

WADE

If we can prove the election was  
miscounted - if we can show that  
Gil

wasn't legitimately elected -

VOICE

(V.O.)

He got all the votes. There were only forty-three ballots.

WADE

But what if one of those ballots  
was invalid? Or miscounted? What  
if

the true number was forty-two?

VOICE

(V.O.)

That's a thin reed.

WADE

It's something. If we can challenge the election, delay his authority, tie him up in legal proceedings -

VOICE

(V.O.)

Do you have proof?

WADE

Not yet. The records are sealed for another week. But someone changed the count. Someone added a vote or miscounted a ballot. I know it.

VOICE

(V.O.)

How do you know?

WADE

Because the number. 1638. If you divide it by 43, you get a remainder.

But if you divide it by 42, it's clean. Someone protected him by making his count inexact.

Long silence.

VOICE

(V.O.)

That sounds insane.

WADE

Maybe. But Gil believes in the number. He's built his whole investigation around it. If we can show that his own election is part of the pattern - that he's not outside it but inside it -

VOICE

(V.O.)

It would destroy his credibility.

WADE

It would destroy everything he's built.

VOICE

(V.O.)

Get me proof. Get me the election records. Then we'll talk.

The line goes dead.

Wade looks at the math on his desk.

1638 ÷ 42 = 39

He doesn't know if it means anything. But he's going to find out.

47. DOLORES'S CONFESSION

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

2 AM. A knock.

Gil opens the door. Dolores. No knitting. No smile.

DOLORES

Finish it.

GIL

What?

She enters. Sees the wall. Studies it.

DOLORES

The division. Finish it.

Gil reaches into his pocket. The card from Scene 1. Creased now. Worn at

the edges. He's been carrying it.

1638 ÷ 43 =

GIL

I don't -

DOLORES

Now.

Something in her voice. Gil finds a pen. Scrap paper.

He works the calculation. Longhand.

GIL

Forty-three into 163... three times. Remainder 34. Bring down the

the

8...

He writes. Crosses out. Writes again.

GIL (CONT'D)

Eight times. 344. Remainder...

He stops writing.

GIL (CONT'D)

Four.

Silence.

DOLORES

How many times did they deny her?

Gil doesn't answer. He's staring at the number.

DOLORES (CONT'D)

The count was forty-two.

GIL

What?

DOLORES

I added one.

DOLORES (CONT'D) Forty-two is an anecdote. Forty-three is a pattern you can't dismiss.

DOLORES (CONT'D) They don't come for grief. They come for numbers.

DOLORES (CONT'D) Oak Street sits right on the baseline. The wind takes what it takes - then we build on it and call it home.

Gil sits. Heavily.

GIL

You -

DOLORES

Do the other math.

His hands are shaking. He writes:

$1638 \div 42 =$

Works it.

GIL

Thirty-nine. Clean.

DOLORES

No remainder.

Long silence.

GIL

You committed a felony.

DOLORES

I wanted you to win.

She doesn't move. The line hangs there. A felony confession. A love

confession. Both.

Then she turns toward the door.

GIL

From what?

She doesn't answer. She's already leaving.

Gil stands alone.

He walks to the wall. Finds a clear space.

Pins the creased card.

Picks up the marker. Completes the equation - slowly. The r takes longest. Like it hurts.

$1638 \div 43 = 38 \text{ r } 4$

He writes nothing beneath it.

He touches his mother's photograph.

His hand is shaking.

48. END OF ACT TWO - THE STORM (DOCTRINE CARDS)  
HUMANIZED)

EXT. AGUAVERDE - NIGHT

The sky is wrong.

Dark clouds building on the horizon. Monsoon season is early this year. The weather has been strange - everyone says so. The earthquakes. The contamination. The sense that something is shifting beneath the surface.

Gil stands outside his trailer, watching the storm approach.

His phone buzzes.

Elena: News says there's a big storm coming. You okay out there?

Gil: I'm fine. Stay safe.

Elena: You too.

He puts down the phone.

The wind is picking up. The first drops of rain.

Behind him, the wall is visible through the window. The pattern he's built. The evidence he's gathered. The questions he still can't answer.

He looks at the storm.

Thinks about his mother. About the fallout that looked like snow. About the claims denied and the truth deferred and the patterns that run through everything.

He thinks about the real number. Forty-two.

He thinks about what Dolores said. "I added one."

He thinks about what it means to be inside something you're trying to understand.

The rain starts in earnest.

He goes inside.

The trailer shakes slightly in the wind. The corkboard rattles.

His mother's photograph is still cracked. Still looking at him with that patient expression.

He sits down at his desk.

Picks up a pen.

Writes on a card:

42.

Stares at it.

Writes on another card:

$r = 4$

Pins them both to the wall. Next to the equation.

Writes on a third card:

What now?

Doesn't pin this one. Holds it.

The storm intensifies outside.

Lightning. Thunder. Rain pounding on the metal roof.

Gil sits in the noise.

He's scared. He admits it to himself.

Not of the storm. Not of Wade. Not even of the pattern.

Scared of what comes next. Scared of what he might find.  
Scared of what it means to be part of something you can't understand.

But he's not going to stop.

He picks up his phone.

Types a message to Destiny:

I love you. Whatever happens, I love you.

Sends it.

Types a message to Elena:

Stay strong. We're almost there.

Sends it.

Types a message to Marlene:

The election count was wrong. 42, not 43. Someone changed it.

Hesitates.

Doesn't send it.

Deletes it.

Some truths aren't ready yet.

The storm rages.

Gil looks at the card in his hand.

What now?

He pins it to the wall.

Looks at his mother's photograph.

GIL

(quietly)

Forty-two votes, Mom. Let's see if that's enough.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

49. THE MORNING AFTER

EXT. AGUAVERDE - DAWN

The storm has passed. The town is battered but standing. Trees down. Power lines hanging. Debris in the streets. But it's quiet now. The kind of quiet that comes after something has broken.

Gil walks through town. Surveying the damage.

On Oak Street, the situation is worse.

EXT. OAK STREET - MORNING

Several houses have visible damage. One has a tree through the roof. Another has a collapsed porch.

And Elena's house - 1638 Oak Street - has a new crack in the foundation. Wider than before. Running from the basement to the first floor.

Elena stands in her front yard, looking at it.

GIL

Elena.

She turns.

ELENA

It got worse.

GIL

I can see.

ELENA

The storm was just water and wind.  
But the house - it shook. During  
the night. Like there was another  
earthquake.

GIL

There was.

ELENA

I didn't hear about it.

GIL

Small. 2.9. Just after midnight.  
The storm covered it.

ELENA

So it wasn't the rain.

GIL

It was both. The ground is  
destabilized. The water makes it  
worse. The  
earthquakes make it worse.  
Everything makes everything worse.

ELENA

What am I supposed to do?

GIL

Document it. Photograph  
everything. File with the state.  
Add it to the  
record.

ELENA

More documentation.

GIL

It's all we have.

She looks at him. Tired. Scared.

ELENA

Is it enough?

GIL

I don't know.

ELENA

You're supposed to say yes. You're  
supposed to be inspiring.

GIL

I got forty -

He stops.

GIL

(CONT'D)

I got... elected by people who wanted answers. I'm trying to find them. But I can't promise they'll be the answers we want.

ELENA

What's wrong?

GIL

Nothing.

ELENA

You started to say "forty-three" and you stopped.

GIL

It's nothing.

ELENA

Gil.

He looks at her. At this woman who's trusted him. Who's followed him.

Who's put her faith in a man who got forty-three votes - or forty-two - and a binder.

GIL

The number might be wrong.

ELENA

What number?

GIL

The votes. Forty-three. It might have been forty-two.

ELENA

Does that matter?

GIL

I don't know. But it's... it's connected to the pattern. The

1638. IF THE VOTE COUNT WAS FORTY-TWO, THEN 1638 DIVIDES EVENLY INTO

IT.

Which means...

ELENA

Which means what?

GIL

I don't know. I don't know what any of it means.

ELENA

Then why are you telling me?

GIL

Because I'm tired of hiding things. Because you deserve to know the truth. All of it. Even the parts that don't make sense.

Elena looks at him. Then at her cracked house. Then back at him.

ELENA

My mother-in-law used to say: the truth is like water. It finds a way through.

GIL

Even through rock.

ELENA

Especially through rock. Given enough time.

GIL

We might not have enough time.

ELENA

Then we do what we can with the time we have.

She picks up her phone.

ELENA

(CONT'D)

I'm calling the other Oak Street families. We need to assess damage.

Coordinate our documentation. Make sure nobody falls through the cracks.

GIL

That's a lot of work.

ELENA

It's what needs doing.

GIL

You're remarkable, you know that?

ELENA

I'm a woman who wants clean water and a house that doesn't fall down. That's not remarkable. That's basic.

GIL

In this town, it's remarkable.

She almost smiles.

ELENA

Go do your job, Mayor. I'll handle things here.

Gil nods.

Walks back toward town.

50. THE CONFRONTATION

INT. TOWN HALL - WADE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wade is waiting.

He looks like he hasn't slept. His suit is rumpled. His eyes are red.

When Gil enters, Wade doesn't stand.

WADE

Close the door.

Gil closes it.

WADE (CONT'D)

I know about the count.

GIL

What count?

WADE

Don't. The election. Forty-two votes, not forty-three. Someone changed it.

GIL

How did you -

WADE

I did the math. 1638 divided by 43 leaves a remainder. Divided by 42, it's clean. Your whole obsession with the number - it should have included your own election. It didn't. Which means someone hid it from you.

GIL

And you think this matters because -

WADE

Because it proves you're not who you say you are. Not forty-three votes. Forty-two.

GIL

A lie I didn't tell.

WADE

A lie you benefited from.

GIL

A single vote. You think that changes anything?

WADE

I think it changes how people see you. The conspiracy podcaster who missed the conspiracy in his own election.

GIL

That's your play? Discredit me?

WADE

It's a start.

GIL

And the contamination? The radioactive water? Does discrediting me make any of that go away?

WADE

It makes people question the source.

GIL

The message isn't from me. It's from an independent lab. From state inspectors. From whistleblower documents.

WADE

Documents you obtained. Investigations you prompted.

GIL

And people are still drinking radioactive water.

Silence.

GIL (CONT'D)

You know, I thought this was about money. About Rayborn paying you to look the other way. But it's not, is it?

Wade doesn't respond.

GIL (CONT'D)

Caroline. Her medication. The insurance problems that magically resolved.

WADE

Leave Caroline out of this.

GIL

She's already in it. She's been in it for years.

Wade stands. Slowly.

WADE

You don't know anything about my wife.

GIL

I know you love her. I know you want to protect her.

WADE

Get out of my office.

GIL

I know the price of that protection is fourteen houses with brown water.

WADE

Get out.

GIL

And people getting sick from contamination that you helped cover up.

WADE

I didn't cover up anything.

GIL

You signed the invoices. You blocked the investigations. You refused the records requests.

Wade picks up his phone. Dials.

WADE

Security? I need someone removed from my office.

GIL

This isn't your office. It belongs to the people of Aguaverde. All forty-two of the ones who elected me.

He walks out.

Wade stands alone.

He looks at the photo of Caroline on his desk.

His hand is shaking.

51. THE STATE REPORT

INT. TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY

One week later.

The room is packed. Standing room only. News cameras from four states.

Dr. Sarah Chen is at the podium. The state assessment is complete.

DR. CHEN

Our investigation confirms the findings of the independent testing commissioned by Mayor Padilla. Water samples from Oak Street and surrounding areas show elevated levels of radium-226, radium-228, barium, and other contaminants consistent with oil and gas wastewater.

Murmurs in the crowd.

DR. CHEN (CONT'D)

Geological analysis indicates a high probability that the contamination originates from the Rayborn injection well site approximately five miles southwest of the affected area. Pressure data and disposal volume records provided by the company do not match our independent measurements.

Louder murmurs.

DR. CHEN (CONT'D)

Based on these findings, the State Environment Division is recommending a comprehensive safety review of all Rayborn injection well sites in the region. Our report will be submitted to the commission for action.

REPORTER

Dr. Chen, what's the timeline for review?

DR. CHEN

Ninety to one hundred eighty days.

REPORTER

And in the meantime? Are the wells still operating?

DR. CHEN

That determination will be made by the commission based on our recommendations. We've recommended suspension pending review, but the final decision is not ours to make.

REPORTER

So the wells could continue operating?

DR. CHEN

That's a question for the commission.

The room erupts. Questions shouted. Cameras flashing.

Gil sits in the back. Watching.

Elena is beside him.

ELENA

(quietly)

That's it?

GIL

That's it.

ELENA

They're not shutting them down?

GIL

They're recommending. The commission decides.

ELENA

When?

GIL

Ninety to one hundred eighty days.

ELENA

And we keep drinking the water?

GIL

Alternative sources will be provided. That's in the report.

ELENA

Bottled water. While they decide.

GIL

While they decide.

Elena is quiet. Processing.

ELENA

You said documentation matters.

GIL

It does.

ELENA

This is documentation.

GIL

Yes.

ELENA

But it doesn't fix anything.

GIL

Not yet.

ELENA

Maybe not ever.

GIL

Maybe not.

She looks at him.

ELENA

Then what was the point?

GIL

The record. Someone had to make a record.

ELENA

What about the cracks? The foundations? That's not in their report.

GIL

The injection pressure destabilized the substrate. Once the fractures formed, whatever's in the fill had a pathway.

ELENA

A pathway to what?

GIL

The water table. And everything above it.

ELENA

(quiet)

The fill sand. From before the EPA existed.

GIL

From before Trinity.

Elena is silent. Processing the weight of it.

GIL

The point is it's on the record now. The contamination. The falsified data. The pathway. All of it. Whatever happens next, that can't be undone.

ELENA

Is that enough?

Gil looks at the podium. At Dr. Chen answering questions. At the

reporters and the cameras and the machinery of documentation.

GIL

It's what we have.

52. THE RESIGNATION

INT. TOWN HALL - WADE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wade at his desk. A prepared statement in front of him.

He hasn't delivered it yet.

A knock at the door.

Caroline enters.

CAROLINE

I heard about the state report.

WADE

Everyone has.

CAROLINE

It's over, isn't it?

WADE

Probably.

CAROLINE

What are you going to do?  
 Wade looks at the statement.

WADE  
 Step down. Before they remove me.

CAROLINE  
 And then?

WADE  
 I don't know.

Caroline sits down.

CAROLINE  
 I've been thinking. About what you  
 said. About the choices you made.  
 For me.

WADE

Caroline -

CAROLINE  
 Let me finish.

He waits.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)  
 I've been sick for a long time.  
 And you've been carrying that. The  
 cost. The fear. I've watched it  
 change you.

WADE  
 I did what I had to do.

CAROLINE  
 Did you?

He doesn't answer.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)  
 Without the money, we would have  
 been poor. We would have  
 struggled.  
 But we would have been honest.

WADE  
 You don't know that.

CAROLINE  
 I know you. I know what you were.  
 Before.

Silence.

WADE  
 I'm sorry.

CAROLINE  
 I know.

She stands.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Sign the statement. Tell them  
whatever you're going to tell  
them. But  
don't put this on me. I never  
asked you to compromise yourself.

She leaves.

Wade looks at the statement.

Picks up a pen.

Signs.

53. THE PRESS CONFERENCE - WADE

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Wade at the microphones. Alone. No supporters. No allies.  
The cameras are rolling.

WADE

Good afternoon. I'm announcing my  
resignation as Council President,  
effective at the end of the month.

He pauses. Looks at his prepared statement.

WADE (CONT'D)

I want to thank the people of  
Aguaverde for twelve years of  
service.

I'm stepping down to focus on  
prior family matters during a  
difficult  
time.

He folds the statement. Puts it in his pocket.

WADE (CONT'D)

I remain confident that the  
ongoing review will demonstrate  
that all  
procedures were properly followed.  
I will not be taking questions.

He turns. Walks toward the door.

REPORTER

Mr. Sutter, are you facing  
criminal charges?

Wade stops. His hand on the door.

He turns back.

The reporters lean forward.  
His mouth opens -  
He's going to say something.  
Something true. You can see it  
forming behind his teeth. Twelve  
years of knowing. All of it  
pressing against his lips.

Then his eyes find something in the crowd: the Rayborn logo on a lanyard. A face he knows. A family he's protected. His mouth closes.

He turns. Leaves.

REPORTER

Do you have a comment about Mayor Padilla's investigation?

He's gone.

The cameras hold on the empty podium.

In the back of the crowd, Marlene scribbles in her notebook.

MARLENE

(to herself)

That's the story.

54. THE CONFESSION

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gil alone. The wall behind him. The equation at the center:  
1638 ÷ 43 = 38 REMAINDER 4

Headlines pinned around it:

"STATE RECOMMENDS SAFETY REVIEW - TIMELINE: 90-180 DAYS"

"COUNCIL PRESIDENT RESIGNS - CITES FAMILY MATTERS"

He's not looking at the headlines. He's looking at the photograph. Rosa. His mother. The cracked glass.

He takes the photograph down. Holds it.

GIL

I used to tell people you were paranoid.

He sits. The photograph in his lap.

GIL (CONT'D)

When you said the water tasted wrong. When you said you could feel it

in your bones. When you showed me the spots on your skin and asked if

I thought they were getting worse.

He touches the glass. The crack that runs through her face.

GIL (CONT'D)

I said you were imagining things.

I said it was stress. I said -

His voice breaks.

GIL (CONT'D)

I said you were seeing patterns that weren't there.

He laughs. It's not a happy sound.

GIL (CONT'D)

And then you died. And I started  
seeing them everywhere.

He sets the photograph on the desk. Looks at it.

GIL (CONT'D)

Four claims. Four denials.  
"Insufficient documentation." You  
had  
documentation, Mom. You had  
everything. You had thirty years  
of living  
downwind and a body full of tumors  
and it wasn't enough.

He picks up the denial letter. Case #1638.

GIL (CONT'D)

They gave you a number. Filed you away. And when you died,  
the number

was still there. Exposed. No  
amount of investigation will make  
you  
less dead.

He pins the photograph back to the wall.

GIL (CONT'D)

I didn't believe you. That's what  
I have to live with. My own mother  
told me something was wrong and I  
told her she was crazy.

He touches the equation.

GIL (CONT'D)

Thirty-eight remainder four. The  
four was you. Your four denials. I  
was carrying you in every number  
and I didn't even know.

He steps back.

GIL (CONT'D)

The report says 90 to 180 days.  
Then maybe something happens.  
Maybe  
they do something. Maybe they  
don't.

He looks at the photograph.

GIL (CONT'D)

But you're not coming back.  
Whatever they find, whatever they  
do - it

won't bring you back. It won't  
 make me right. It just makes me  
 the son  
 who didn't listen until it was too  
 late.

His phone buzzes. He ignores it.

GIL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Mom. For all of it. For  
 not believing you. For making your  
 death about me.

He touches the cracked glass one more time.

GIL (CONT'D)

I hope it was worth it. I hope the  
 math was worth something.  
 The phone buzzes again. He finally  
 looks.

Destiny: I'm outside.

Gil looks at the photograph. At the wall. At the pattern  
 he's spent

years building.

GIL (CONT'D)

(to Rosa)

She's here. Destiny. She looked at  
 everything. She believes me.

He pauses.

GIL (CONT'D)

She shouldn't have to. That's what you'd say, isn't it? She  
 shouldn't

have to believe her father. She  
 should just have clean water and a  
 government that tells the truth.

He walks toward the door.

GIL (CONT'D)

But she does believe me. And maybe  
 that's enough. Maybe that's all  
 any  
 of us get.

He opens the door.

CUT TO:

55. DESTINY'S ARRIVAL

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - LATER

A knock at the door.

Gil opens it. Destiny stands there. She looks tired.  
 Worried. But present.

GIL

Hey.

DESTINY

Hey.

She comes in. Looks at the wall.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

It's bigger than I remembered.

GIL

It grew.

DESTINY

Like everything you do.

She sits down on the small couch. He sits next to her.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. For doubting you. For being embarrassed.

GIL

You had every right to be embarrassed. I'm an embarrassing person.

DESTINY

You're a persistent person.

There's a difference.

GIL

Not much of one.

She leans against him. The first physical contact they've had in

months.

DESTINY

I found something. At the clinic. The Rayborn funding. All the amounts match the numbers you've been tracking.

GIL

I know. You told me.

DESTINY

I didn't tell you all of it.

She pulls out her phone. Shows him a photograph.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

This is the original grant application. From when the clinic first applied for Rayborn funding. The amount requested was \ \$160,000.

GIL

And they gave you \ \$163,800.

DESTINY

Exactly. \ \$3,800 more than requested. Nobody questioned it. Free

money.

GIL

But it fits the pattern.

DESTINY

It fits the pattern.

Gil looks at the photograph. At the numbers.

GIL

They're everywhere. In everything.

Every institution, every  
transaction, every system.

DESTINY

What does it mean?

GIL

I don't know.

DESTINY

Does it have to mean something?

GIL

I used to think so. I used to  
think the pattern was a code. A  
signature. Evidence of some hidden  
coordination.

DESTINY

And now?

GIL

Now I think maybe it's just... how  
the system works. Not a  
conspiracy. Not a plan. Just the  
way institutions behave when  
they're  
built on denial. The same  
structures repeating. The same  
forms. The  
same numbers.

DESTINY

That's less dramatic.

GIL

That's more frightening. A  
conspiracy can be exposed. A  
system  
just... continues.

DESTINY

So what do we do?

GIL

Document. Record. Try to change  
what we can. Accept what we can't.

DESTINY

That doesn't sound like you.

GIL

I got forty-two votes.

DESTINY

What?

GIL

The real count. Forty-two, not  
forty-three. Someone changed it.

DESTINY

Who?

GIL

Dolores. The clerk. She was trying  
to protect me. To make my number  
inexact so the pattern wouldn't  
include me.

DESTINY

But it includes you anyway.

GIL

It always did. Mom's case number.  
The whole reason I started  
looking.

DESTINY

So you're inside what you're  
investigating.

GIL

I always was. I just didn't know  
it.

Destiny is quiet for a moment.

DESTINY

Does that change anything?

GIL

It changes how I see myself. But  
not how I see the truth.

DESTINY

And the truth is?

GIL

The water is contaminated. The  
data was falsified. The  
institutions  
failed. People got hurt. And  
someone - many someones - chose  
not to  
look.

DESTINY

But the injection wells are  
recent. The foundation damage on  
Oak  
Street goes back decades.

GIL

I know.

DESTINY

So what's under the foundations?

Gil looks at the map on the wall. The baseline wind path.  
The pins.

GIL

Fill sand. Every foundation on Oak Street - every slab, every crawlspace - they used fill sand from the settling ponds east of here. The ponds they drained after Trinity.

DESTINY

After the test.

GIL

The wind carried fallout down the baseline for twenty years. It settled in those ponds. They drained them in the sixties, sold the sand as fill. Cheap. Nobody asked where it came from.

DESTINY

And they built on it.

GIL

Everything along the baseline. The school. The clinic. Oak Street.

He looks down at the floor.

GIL (CONT'D)

This trailer.

Destiny follows his gaze. The worn linoleum. The floor they're sitting on.

DESTINY

We're on it right now.

GIL

We've been on it the whole time. A long beat. The weight of it settling.

DESTINY

Does the state know?

GIL

They know about the water. The injection wells. That's what they're

investigating. The fill sand -  
 that's harder. That's seventy  
 years  
 of paperwork that doesn't exist  
 anymore. But the Geiger readings  
 Elena's been getting in her  
 basement... they're not from the  
 wells.

DESTINY

They're from what's underneath.

GIL

The wells cracked the slabs. The  
 cracks let it up.

Destiny looks at the Geiger counter on the shelf. The one  
 labeled ROSA.

DESTINY

Mom knew.

GIL

Mom suspected. She couldn't prove  
 it. Nobody would test. Nobody  
 would  
 look.

DESTINY

And you chose to look.

GIL

I couldn't help it. I've never  
 been able to stop looking.

She takes his hand.

DESTINY

I know. It's why Mom left. Why I  
 left. Why everyone eventually  
 leaves.

GIL

But you came back.

DESTINY

I came back because this is home.  
 Because the clinic is here.  
 Because  
 you're here.

GIL

I'm sorry I've been difficult.

DESTINY

You've been yourself. That's not  
 the same as difficult.

GIL

It feels the same.

DESTINY

Maybe. But it's also what made you find the truth. So.

She looks at the wall.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

What happens now?

GIL

The state investigation continues. The federal review. Rayborn's lawyers will negotiate. There'll be fines. Maybe settlements. The wells will stay closed until someone certifies they're safe.

DESTINY

And the people on Oak Street?

GIL

They'll get alternative water. Health screenings. Maybe compensation, eventually. It'll take years. It always takes years.

DESTINY

And you?

GIL

I'm still the mayor. Still forty-two votes - or forty-three, depending on who you ask.

DESTINY

What are you going to do?

GIL

Keep asking questions. Keep documenting. Keep showing up.

DESTINY

That sounds exhausting.

GIL

It is.

DESTINY

Is it worth it?

Gil looks at his mother's photograph.

GIL

She died waiting for someone to tell the truth. She never got her

answer. She never got justice.

He looks at his daughter.

GIL (CONT'D)

But the people on Oak Street - they'll know what happened to them.

They'll have proof. They'll have something to fight with. That's worth something.

DESTINY

That's worth everything.

GIL

Yeah. I think so too.

They sit together in silence.

Outside, the night is quiet. The storm has passed. The stars are visible.

56. THE STEPS

EXT. DESTINY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Late afternoon. Golden hour light - the same light that fell on the bank steps.

Destiny walks toward her building. Keys in hand. A normal day. The kind of day she's had a thousand times.

She reaches the concrete steps. Four of them. Worn. Ordinary.

She climbs the first step. The second.

She stops.

Her eyes go to the concrete beneath her feet. A hairline crack runs across the third step. The edge of the step is slightly lower than it should be. Settlement. A quarter inch, maybe less. The kind of thing you'd never notice unless you were looking.

The kind of thing her father would notice. The kind of thing she used to train herself not to see. Before tonight. Before the couch. Before the fill sand.

We stay on her face. Something shifts. Quiet. Not dramatic - just recognition.

A DOOR

OPENS somewhere inside. FOOTSTEPS. Normal life continuing around her.

She reaches for her keys.

Stops.

Pockets them.

She turns away from the entrance. Walks back down the steps. She can't go home. Not to this home. Not anymore.

HOLD

ON: THE STEPS.

The crack. The settlement. The thing that was always there.

Destiny is gone. We don't see where.

CUT TO:

57. DESTINY LEAVES

INT. GIL'S TRAILER - MORNING

Destiny stands near the door. A bag at her feet. The couch where she slept is made - hospital corners, like she was never there.

Gil stands by the wall. Not looking at her. Looking at the pattern.

DESTINY

I called last night. While you were working.

GIL

Called who?

DESTINY

Sarah. From residency. She's chief of pediatrics now. In Denver.

GIL

Denver.

DESTINY

There's an opening. She said she'd hold it for me.

Gil still doesn't turn.

GIL (CONT'D)

Because of me.

DESTINY

Because of the water. Because of what's under the houses. Because of what's under my house - the building I was going to make a life in.

Beat.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

Because you were right.

She picks up her bag.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

I believe you, Dad. That's why I'm leaving.

She moves toward the door. Stops. Reaches into her pocket. She pulls out a single key. Her apartment key. Sets it on the table.

DESTINY

I can't go back there. The steps. The cracks. I see them everywhere now.

Beat.

DESTINY (CONT'D)

That's your inheritance to me.

GIL

Destiny -

DESTINY

Come visit. When you can.  
 She looks at him one last time.  
 DESTINY (CONT'D)

If you can.  
 She leaves.  
 Gil stands alone. The key on the table. The wall behind  
 him.  
 He doesn't move for a long time.

CUT TO:

58. THE FOURTH WALL  
 TITLE CARD: THREE WEEKS LATER  
 INT. GIL'S TRAILER - NIGHT  
 The couch is empty. Not "someone just got up" empty.  
 Uninhabited. No blanket. No pillow.  
 One key on the table. Destiny's apartment key. Untouched. A  
 relic.  
 Gil at the wall.  
 The completed equation is there now. At the center.  
 $1638 \div 43 = 38 \text{ r } 4$   
 He's added nothing around it. Just the math.  
 He pulls the election certification from a folder. Sandra's  
 42 crossed out. 43 written above it.  
 His thumb rubs the crossed-out number. As if trying to  
 erase it.  
 The paper fibers catch. It won't come clean.  
 One vote.  
 He looks at his mother's photograph.  
 The invoices. The permits. The water tests. The falsified  
 data.  
 The photograph dated 2038. Still unexplained. Still pinned  
 there.  
 The \$16,379 invoice. Off by one. Never understood.  
 He just looks.  
 Then - slowly - his gaze shifts.  
 Toward us.  
 Not fully. A glance.  
 His eyes find the camera.

GIL

Forty-three.  
 A pause. The floor seems to shift.

GIL (CONT'D)

Or forty-two. Depending on who you  
 ask.

Longer pause.

GIL (CONT'D)

(quieter still)

Did you see it?

The camera holds.  
He turns back to the wall.  
Five seconds. Ten.  
The equation. The photograph of  
Rosa. The map.  
The camera doesn't stay on the  
wall.  
It drifts down - past Gil's boots  
- past the worn linoleum -  
through a seam in the floor and  
into the dark crawlspace beneath  
the trailer.  
Raw sand. Foundation fill.  
Ordinary grit.  
A slow click begins. The Geiger  
counter. One beat. Then another.  
Above us, the wind presses along  
the baseline of the mountains like  
breath.  
Then -

CUT TO BLACK.

Silence.  
hegot43votes.com  
Below it, in small type: What's under your steps?  
END OF RECALL  
hegot43votes.com