

PSYCHIC FRAUD?

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. THE MIDWEEK SHOW STUDIO - EVENING

Talk show host GARRETT Byron (mid 30s), sporting a slightly brash suit, sits on a set with DON Craxton (about 40), handsome with neat hair, wearing an expensive pinstripe suit and several large rings.

There are cameras and a studio audience. Don lightly strokes a door key that appears to bend.

GARRETT

(returning from a
commercial break)

Welcome back as we witness the most extraordinary event. This key you see was completely straight a few moments ago, and now it is bending before our very eyes.

DON

(smooth talking)

And I'm applying no pressure.

GARRETT

I can see that. So it's all done with your mind?

DON

I just think "bend" and my thoughts melt the metal.

Don holds up the now bent key. There are GASPS from the audience.

GARRETT

Well, that is one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen. I think that deserves a round of applause.

The audience APPLAUDS enthusiastically. Don smiles.

INT. THE MIDWEEK SHOW STUDIO - EVENING (ONE WEEK LATER)

Garrett sits on the set with PAUL Fletcher (mid 40s), not undistinguished in appearance but with a slightly detached air, and wearing a drab suit. Cameras are rolling and there is a studio audience.

GARRETT

So Paul, last week I had on the show the psychic Don Craxton.

PAUL
 (stiff tone)
 So-called psychic.

GARRETT
 Well, I'd dispute that. I was as close to him as I am to you, and I saw him bend a key with his mind.

PAUL
 Did you now?

Paul takes out a key and begins to stroke it from below.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 You see, as I stroke this key, you would swear it was rising.

GARRETT
 OK.

PAUL
 But for the effect to work you have to ensure that it's already bent.

GARRETT
 Don didn't.

PAUL
 Could we just see that footage for a minute?

ON A LARGE STUDIO SCREEN

Footage from the week before shows Don tightly gripping the key with both hands.

DON
 You see, this key can't be bent.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL
 And as he said that, he bent it.

There are both GASPS and GROANS from the audience.

GARRETT
 (jovially cringing)
 Did I fall for an elaborate trick?

PAUL
 (More arrogant than kind)
 Not even an elaborate one. It looks Garrett, like you're just another sucker.

GARRETT

Well, I think for showing us the light at least, you deserve a round of applause.

The audience APPLAUDS although the level is less than it was for Don. Paul looks annoyed.

INT. THE ALTERNATIVE SHOW STUDIO - EVENING

Talk show host JIM Cochrane (40s), sporting a light blazer, sits behind a desk that faces a chair for guests. Don, however, stands addressing the audience as cameras roll.

DON

I am definitely feeling the date September the twenty-second. Does that mean anything to anyone?

A hand goes up from TIM (50s) in a cardigan, with a side parting and spectacles.

TIM

It's my wedding anniversary.

DON

I knew it.

Don gestures to the audience who respond by APPLAUDING.

DON (CONT'D)

And your name is?

TIM

Tim.

DON

And is there anyone in the spirit world you would like to contact?

TIM

Yes, and there's something I'd like to ask them.

DON

OK. Now, I feel this is someone who left you in the past few years.

TIM

He died ten years ago.

DON

There you go.

The audience, on Don's urging, APPLAUDS once more.

DON (CONT'D)

Yes, this person is coming through strongly now. You were very close to him.

Tim, close to tears, nods.

DON (CONT'D)

And he feels very much like a father figure.

TIM

Yes, it's my dad.

DON

I can see him standing right behind you. He says he misses you and loves you very much.

Tim starts to cry. The audience goes wild with APPLAUSE.

TIM

Could you please ask him why he never ...

DON

He tells me he has to go now, but not to worry. He is happy where he is. Now give it up for Tim and his father.

The audience APPLAUDS and CHEERS. Tim looks both tearful and perturbed.

INT. THE ALTERNATIVE SHOW STUDIO - EVENING (ONE WEEK LATER)

Jim sits behind his desk with Paul in the guest chair.

JIM

But he correctly guessed an audience member's anniversary.

PAUL

(matter-of-fact tone)
No, he asked if September the twenty-second was significant to anyone. In an audience that size it's bound to be.

JIM

But then he identified that his father had died.

PAUL

This is what we call cold reading. Don makes statements that sound specific but could apply to millions.

JIM

Could you explain?

PAUL

He said the father died in the past few years but took the credit when it was ten. In the process, Tim said 'he' so Don could suggest a father figure. That might be anyone, but we forgot that when it turned out it was his dad.

JIM

Don knew he was close to him.

PAUL

Sure. Why would Tim want to contact someone who wasn't?

JIM

Still, this doesn't prove he wasn't using psychic powers.

PAUL

But nothing he said would require them. When Tim had a question for his father, Don jumped in to say he loved him and had to go.

JIM

Well, that's your feelings, now what does our audience think?

An AUDIENCE MEMBER (female, 30s) stands up from a row near the front as a microphone is handed to her.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think you're disrespecting Don's gifts.

PAUL

It's those who exploit people's grief who are disrespectful.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Don brought Tim joy.

PAUL

He brought him tears.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So you don't understand human emotions.

There is APPLAUSE from the audience.

PAUL

You don't help people by lying about their loved ones.

JIM

Well, maybe, it's the emotional comfort psychics bring that matters.

PAUL

By exploiting people's vulnerabilities? Eight hundred dollars for a thirty minute session.

JIM

But Don has many satisfied customers.

PAUL

And they're all very gullible.

There are BOOS from the audience.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Come on, why can't you see this?

The BOOS intensify.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(shouting to be heard)

I don't deserve this. I just don't want you to waste your money, I don't want to see you exploited.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - LATE EVENING

The hallway is narrow and dingy. The handle on the front door turns. Paul's wife LAURA (about 40), attractive in an understated way, runs to the door. Paul enters and stands looking despondent.

LAURA

Oh, honey.

Laura steps forward to give Paul a hug. Paul tenses, raises his hand as if to say "don't" and walks past her into the living room.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The living room is small and fairly Spartan. Paul enters the room and sits in a chair. Laura follows him in.

LAURA
(nervously)
Your department called.

PAUL
(sighs)
To tell me to give it up?

LAURA
Why not? You've done your best.
Every time Don Craxton's been on a
show, you've got yourself on the
next one.

PAUL
And it's still made no difference.

LAURA
You've given people the other side.
If they choose to believe Don
rather than you ...

PAUL
I can't stop. You know that.

FLASHBACK - MEDIUM'S ROOM

In a small dark room with candles and incense a female MEDIUM (50s), sporting a head scarf and bangles, sits at a desk. A YOUNG PAUL (10) sits in front of it with PAUL'S MOTHER (late 30s) standing behind him.

PAUL'S MOTHER
Now Paul, I know you miss your
father very much, so this lady is
going to help you talk to him.

YOUNG PAUL
(excited)
Is she?

MEDIUM
Yes, I'm starting to feel someone
very strongly already. I'm seeing a
man who is of ... maybe average
build ...

YOUNG PAUL
He was very tall.

MEDIUM
Ah, now he's coming into focus I
can see he is quite a height.

YOUNG PAUL

You can see my dad?

MEDIUM

Yes, and he says you've always been a good boy.

YOUNG PAUL

I can't hear him.

MEDIUM

And that he loves you very much.

YOUNG PAUL

But I want to talk to him.

MEDIUM

Well, I can ask him anything you like.

YOUNG PAUL

No, I want to talk to him. I want to.

Young Paul begins to cry.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL

For years we went back, each time being told we'd hear him next week if we only had more faith.

LAURA

I know you don't want people to go through that but ...

PAUL

The money my mother threw at those sessions. I swear it sent her to an early grave.

Laura moves to put her arm around Paul. He pushes it off.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Why will no-one listen when I'm trying to stop them being swindled?

LAURA

Because people would rather pay and have it be true.

PAUL

But paying won't make it true.

LAURA

When someone's grieving, it's too easy to believe it will.

PAUL
Which is why I have to keep going.

INT. LARGE HALL - DAY

Hundreds of people are in the hall, which is NOISY as many try to get near the stage at the front. Don is on stage, with several ASSISTANTS close by and others in the auditorium. A BAND and CHOIR are also on the stage PLAYING and SINGING hymns, and there are cameras.

DON
Welcome back to The Miracles Hour
on the Faith for Today Channel. Can
we have our next believer?

TOM (40s), holding a white stick, is led onto the stage by an assistant so that he ends up standing near Don. The assistant hands Don a card, which he reads.

DON (CONT'D)
OK, Tom, you at the moment cannot
see the wonders of God's creation
because you are blind?

TOM
Yes.

DON
Well, live in darkness no longer.

Don places his hands over Tom's eyes.

DON (CONT'D)
Merciful Lord, let your spirit
descend and drive the demons of
blindness from your servant's eyes.
Hallelujah.
(beat)
Now Tom, how many fingers am I
holding up?

Don holds up four fingers close to Tom.

TOM
Four.

The audience APPLAUDS.

DON
He sees. Now follow me around.

Don begins to walk around the stage in a circle, and Tom follows.

DON (CONT'D)
 Yes, keep going, that's it.
 Everybody, witness the miracle
 occurring before you. God is
 gracious, his servant sees.

Both return to their starting point.

DON (CONT'D)
 So give thanks Tom and forever
 praise the Lord.

To rapturous audience APPLAUSE, an assistant approaches Tom
 and surreptitiously helps to guide him off the stage.

INT. THE CAROL CARTER SHOW STUDIO - EVENING

Chat show host CAROL Carter (late 40s), confident and
 attractive in a smart but feminine suit, sits on a sofa with
 Paul, who wears a black jacket.

CAROL
 So you're suggesting that faith
 healing is mere trickery.

PAUL
 That is correct.

CAROL
 And how are you going to
 demonstrate this?

PAUL
 By reproducing an effect that Don
 Craxton created on The Miracles
 Hour.

BOB (30s), holding a white stick, is led onto the stage.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Now, this is Bob, he is registered
 blind and he has agreed to be part
 of this demonstration. So this is
 how Don would do it.
 (putting on an act)
 All right believers, we are
 gathered here to heal this man, our
 brother and the Lord's humble
 servant, Bob. Now, you have been
 blind since birth.

BOB
 Yes.

PAUL
 So how many fingers am I holding
 up?

Paul holds four fingers up about two meters from Bob.

BOB
I don't know.

PAUL
OK.

Paul places his hands over Bob's eyes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Merciful Lord, let your spirit
descend and drive the demons of
blindness from your servant's eyes.
Hallelujah.
(beat)
Now Bob, how many fingers am I
holding up?

Paul holds up three fingers in front of his black jacket.

BOB
Three.

There is a collective GASP from the audience.

PAUL
It's a miracle. Now take this
handkerchief ...

Paul produces a red handkerchief from his jacket and Bob takes it without difficulty.

PAUL (CONT'D)
... and follow me around.

Paul begins to walk around the stage in a circle, and Bob follows.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Yes, keep going, that's it. Witness
the miracle of our Lord, his
servant Bob sees.

Both return to their starting points. There is APPLAUSE.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(no longer putting on an
act)
But, of course, you're not healed
at all.

BOB
No.

There are a few GASPS and then total silence.

PAUL

And I always knew that. Thank you Bob for being a part of the demonstration.

Bob is led out of the studio. Paul sits down.

CAROL

So what did happen?

PAUL

Well, most people we call blind are actually visually impaired.

CAROL

You mean they have some sight.

PAUL

(nodding)

But because those who are registered blind describe themselves as blind, when Don does so, Tom agrees.

CAROL

But how did Bob see your fingers afterwards but not before?

PAUL

The first time they were at a distance, the second up close against a black jacket.

CAROL

But he took your handkerchief.

PAUL

A large, bright object in front of his eyes.

CAROL

And followed you around.

PAUL

By following my voice.

CAROL

It still doesn't prove Don was using trickery.

PAUL

It's a good starting point.

CAROL

Well, let's open this one up. Yes, the young lady there.

A YOUNG LADY (20s) in the audience stands up, and is handed a microphone.

YOUNG LADY
I think it's disgusting getting
that man's hopes up.

The audience APPLAUDS.

PAUL
He knew I had no powers.

YOUNG LADY
So why put on that voice and stir
everything up?

PAUL
I was showing how Don misleads
people.

YOUNG LADY
You were disrespecting a blind man.

PAUL
It's Don who disrespects people by
demanding money for what he does.

YOUNG LADY
When you criticize Don's gifts, you
attack God.

PAUL
It's greed I'm attacking, not God.

YOUNG LADY
How do you know Tom wasn't
completely blind?

PAUL
Because Don has assistants who vet
the audience. Those whose
conditions could never look better
don't get on the stage.

YOUNG LADY
Don Craxton gives hope to millions.

PAUL
It's false hope.

YOUNG LADY
Only to a cynic like you.

PAUL
I'm a realist.

YOUNG LADY

Yeah, well for some people reality
sucks.

Paul falls silent on hearing this.

YOUNG LADY (CONT'D)

And you offer nothing, Don does.

There is APPLAUSE from the audience. Paul looks both
contemplative and hurt.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Paul sits in a chair. Laura enters the room.

LAURA

It's our anniversary tomorrow.
Maybe we could go out and ...

PAUL

I've not got the time.

Laura's face falls.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hope, she said. I give people no
hope.

LAURA

Don't keep dwelling on it.

The telephone on a side table RINGS. Paul rises and answers
it.

JOHN (V.O.)

Hi Paul, it's John.

PAUL

Hello.

JOHN (V.O.)

Sorry to call you at home. Could
you come and see me tomorrow?

INT. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - JOHN KERRIGAN'S OFFICE - DAY

It is a typical Head of a University Department's office. It
is sparsely decorated, but a few scientific posters and
family photos are scattered around. There is a desk with JOHN
Kerrigan (50s), a serious figure, sitting on one side and
Paul on the other.

JOHN

New York University's Department of Physics. World class, and two years ago you were at its forefront.

PAUL

(sarcastically)

So what went wrong?

JOHN

You spent every other night on a chat show and took your eye off the ball.

PAUL

I do my job.

JOHN

The Mackenzie Project's behind, you look dead to the world and half the students are complaining you're bad tempered.

PAUL

Well, if you sacked every staff member who was that.

JOHN

Except none of the others have the nation watching them in slanging matches.

PAUL

That's in my time, it has nothing to do with my work here.

JOHN

Where you're only meeting the minimum standard. If you fall any lower ...

PAUL

(distressed)

Don't threaten me John.

JOHN

This is where you'll make a difference. All that's someone else's job.

PAUL

Whose?

JOHN

Be smart Paul. Give it up.

PAUL
All right, I know I've got to end
it.
(beat)
Somehow.

INT. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - CORRIDOR - 1 MINUTE LATER

Paul emerges from the door to John's office into the
corridor. His cell phone RINGS.

PAUL
Hello, Paul Fletcher.

INT. DON'S GRAND HOUSE - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

The room is huge and grandly decorated, with several high
quality paintings on the wall.

DON
(friendly, but too smooth
to be true)
Hello Paul. It's Don.

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

PAUL
How did you get my number?

DON
Always doubting my talents.

PAUL
(sighs)
What do you want?

DON
You had a hard time on The Carol
Carter Show. I don't like to see
that.

PAUL
You didn't plant that person who
harangued me?

DON
Please Paul, the whole audience was
against you.

PAUL
(despondent)
That's true enough.

DON

You know, it saddens me that one of us can be so moved by the spirit, and the other so unmoved that they want to destroy the one who is.

PAUL

So you are frightened I'm costing you?

DON

(gazing on his plush room)
What's money? I'm worried about you.

PAUL

(sarcastically)
Well, thank you for your concern.

DON

Come on, is this doing either of us any good?

PAUL

Not really. So how do we break the deadlock?

INT. THE CAROL CARTER SHOW STUDIO - EVENING

The studio is set up, with audience and cameras, for the start of a live show.

VOICEOVER (V.O.)

It's Friday night, it's eleven o'clock, it's your favorite show of the week. So will you please welcome your premiere host, the queen of the sofa, the one and only Carol Carter.

Carol appears at the top of a staircase, descends the steps and comes to the front of the stage.

CAROL

Welcome, welcome and have we got a show for you? You'll remember last week we met with Paul Fletcher who was responding to the claims made by psychic Don Craxton. Well, over the years they've been fighting a battle across the chat shows, but tonight we have something special. Will you please welcome for the first time together, Dr Paul Fletcher and Mr Don Craxton.

Paul and Don enter from opposite sides of the studio, shake hands civilly, and sit on the sofa next to each other with Carol at one end.

CAROL (CONT'D)

So Paul, Don, does agreeing to meet represent a reconciliation or the height of the battle?

DON

(confidently)

We both welcomed the opportunity to state our cases.

CAROL

And yours is?

DON

That this man is slanderously and libelously undermining my gifts.

PAUL

So sue me. We'll see what comes out then.

CAROL

(humorously)

And we're off to the races.

PAUL

But isn't it incredible Carol that every one of Don's PSYCHIC effects I've been able to reproduce through trickery?

DON

That proves nothing.

Paul pulls a metal spoon from his pocket and points to halfway down its handle.

PAUL

OK, why don't you bend this spoon here?

(pointing to its head)

Or here? Why only bend it at its weakest point after you've done a bit of preparation?

Paul grips the spoon by its head and handle and starts bending it at its neck.

DON

Don't lower me to your level.

PAUL

And if you have such amazing powers why waste them on bending spoons? They're the right shape already.

DON

I do a lot of different things.

PAUL

OK, agreed. Of all the so-called psychics you're the only one who does metal bending, mind reading, healing AND talking to the dead. But I've still explained every one of your tricks.

DON

Well, you haven't explained this.

ON A STUDIO SCREEN

Don is on a stage in front of an audience. BRIAN (50s), with a beard and slightly disheveled appearance, stands before him.

DON (CONT'D)

So an independent adjudicator has confirmed that we've never met before. You've just stepped up here, I don't even know your name.

BRIAN

That is correct.

DON

Give me your hand.

Brian puts his hand out and Don holds it.

DON (CONT'D)

Your name is Bobby, Brett, no, Brian.

BRIAN

Yes, Brian.

The audience starts to APPLAUD.

DON

No, no time for that. You're 55, you're not currently married but have a long-term partner called Jane, and a 20-year old son named Bruce from a previous marriage. Your mother was called Jackie, no Josie, she was 86 when she died, and she tells you that she loves you and is absolutely fine.

BRIAN
(overwhelmed)
Thank you, thank you.

DON
Was I right?

BRIAN
In every detail.

DON
Well, there you go, may the spirit
of the Lord be with you always.

The audience goes wild with APPLAUSE.

BACK TO SCENE

DON (CONT'D)
So how do you explain that?

PAUL
I don't.

Don smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)
But there's only way I know you can
do it.

CAROL
Which is?

PAUL
You get to them before they even
enter the hall.

CAROL
Could you explain for our viewers
what you mean?

PAUL
You research the person in advance
on the Internet and such.

DON
(scoffing)
What? Knowing they'll be there and
suddenly get chosen?

PAUL
You research twenty people in the
area before each event, and every
now and then, between all of the
cold readings, you get lucky with
one and can show the footage for
years.

DON
Rich words from a disbeliever.

PAUL
Disbeliever??

CAROL
Well, Paul, you are often
represented as an atheist.

PAUL
Misrepresented. When there's so
much that none of us know, I like
to keep an open mind.

DON
Then how do you KNOW I don't have
God given gifts?

PAUL
Well, if you do, why do you only
use them for money?

DON
I have to make a living.

PAUL
Yes, all eighty million dollars of
it.

DON
(angrily)
Sounds like you're stalking me too.

PAUL
It's public information.

CAROL
Now, come on boys ...

PAUL
All right, because I don't know
everything, I will do you a deal.
You provide your services for free
and I'll stay silent.

DON
(slowly; smoothly)
How about this? We hold an event
and if I read twenty people's minds
at it, and you can't explain how,
you will never say another word
against me.

PAUL
And if I can?

DON
I take whatever the consequences
are.

PAUL
Fully controlled conditions?
Broadcast live, close-up cameras?

DON
Sure. In fact, is this something
your show could help with Carol?

CAROL
Er, I guess we have done specials
before.

DON
It would be terrible for another
channel to get this one.

Carol puts her hand to one ear as if listening hard through
an earpiece.

CAROL
Sounds like we've got the go ahead.

DON
OK, Paul?

PAUL
Well ...

DON
Come on, you're never going to get
a better chance to expose me.

Don extends his arm out. Paul hesitates and then shakes Don's
hand.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO CORRIDOR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Paul walks swiftly down the corridor as if wanting to get
away from the place as quickly as possible. A RUNNER (about
20, female) is almost running alongside him to keep up.

RUNNER
So Dr Fletcher, I've spoken with
the producer. He suggests a meeting
at ten o'clock tomorrow to discuss
what the show will entail.

PAUL
OK, I'll be there.

RUNNER
And, perhaps if you could, er ...

PAUL
 (hardly listening)
 Sure, whatever.

The runner gives up and stops. Paul continues and almost walks into Don, who suddenly seems to step out of nowhere.

DON
 Well, you've got your chance.

PAUL
 And I intend to use it.

DON
 So shall we finalize the controlled conditions?

PAUL
 Yes, in front of witnesses. Now, if you'll excuse me.

Paul attempts to move past Don, eager to get on.

DON
 Off to start preparing?

PAUL
 You have a problem with that?

DON
 Of course not.
 (snide; pointed)
 You see I'm a natural communicator, but when you're not you find that preparation is everything.

Don disappears, while Paul stands silent as if contemplating this point.

INT. SIOUX CITY THEATER - EARLY EVENING (A WEEK LATER)

The theater seats about two thousand on several tiers. People are entering the auditorium although most seats are already occupied. Cameramen and producers mill around. Carol and Paul sit on the stage with a camera filming them.

CAROL
 To remind you we are in Sioux City, Iowa, and just an hour away from Don Craxton's big challenge. But with me now is the man on the other side of it all, Dr Paul Fletcher.

PAUL
 Hello.

CAROL

So can you tell me what the challenge will entail?

PAUL

I will select twenty people from the audience. Then Don will be invited to read their minds to provide specific facts about them. If he does so, and I cannot explain how he elicited the information, I will concede that he is psychic.

CAROL

But you won't be giving your verdict tonight.

PAUL

No, on your show next week after studying the session.

CAROL

Now this test is taking place under what we call controlled conditions.

PAUL

Yes, these ensure a scientifically valid experiment can take place by removing the possibility of cheating.

CAROL

You've spent the past week discussing these with Don. What have you agreed?

PAUL

This is to be an unticketed event so there is absolutely no record of who's attending. No-one is to be asked to fill in prayer cards that might provide information, and electronic devices are banned from the hall. We have four radio detectors to ensure nothing is being secretly transmitted to Don, and three experts on cold reading.

CAROL

Can you explain their role?

PAUL

If Don said does the sixteenth of June mean anything to you, have you lost a parent in the past ten years and is there a James in your family, that would likely be cold reading.

CAROL

Because many people might answer
"yes".

PAUL

But if he said your father was
called Horatio, he died seven
months ago and his birthday was the
fourteenth of July, then that's too
precise to be chance. They will
advise me on more borderline cases.

CAROL

Now, there will be no faith healing
or talking to the dead today, so
haven't you made it easy on Don?

PAUL

Oh no. If you're simply cold
reading, twenty people is more than
enough to catch you out.

CAROL

Finally, why did you both agree on
Sioux City for the challenge? It's
a long way from New York --
certainly caused our production
team a few problems.

PAUL

It just seemed a good, neutral
place.

CAROL

Paul Fletcher, thank you. Well, it
isn't long now and the next time
you join us it will be to see Don
Craxton in action.

INT. SIOUX CITY THEATER - AN HOUR LATER

The theater is entirely packed with everyone seated and
cameras rolling. THREE OFFICIAL LOOKING PEOPLE sit behind a
table on the stage. Carol is also seated there, while Don
stands center-stage and Paul slightly to one side.

DON

So Paul could you please choose the
first person?

PAUL

That lady in the eighth row, six
seats in, in the blue top.

DON

Great, come on up.

The LADY IN BLUE TOP (30s) shuffles past the other people in the row, comes down an aisle and walks onto the stage.

DON (CONT'D)

Now, don't say a word.

Don places his hand just above her head for a few seconds.

DON (CONT'D)

OK.

Don gazes out over the hall as if in a trance.

DON (CONT'D)

(slowly)

Your name is Tracey McCubbin, you are thirty-six, you are married and your husband's name is Glen.

(faster)

You have two children, Millie who is ten and Jack who is seven. You are very proud of Millie who just came top of her class in science, while Jack is one of the best runners in the school. Am I right?

LADY IN BLUE TOP

Totally correct.

The audience APPLAUDS although not with excessive enthusiasm.

DON

Thank you Tracey. Next person, please.

PAUL

The gentleman in the fifteenth row of the second balcony, thirteen seats in, in a black jumper.

DON

Now, there's a random selection. OK, come down as quick as you can.

INT. SIOUX CITY THEATER - A SHORT TIME LATER

An ELDERLY MAN stands before Don on the stage.

DON

... and in addition to your two children and five grandchildren, you have two parents in the spirit world. Your father was called Edward and died when he was 87 and your mother Margaret passed away at 92.

ELDERLY MAN

I don't believe it.

DON

Next person, please.

PAUL

Central section, back row, that gentleman on the end in the orange top.

DON

Easy location for once. Come on down.

A YOUNG MAN (early 20s) comes down an aisle and onto the stage.

DON (CONT'D)

(quickly)

Your name is Thomas Fairbrother, and you're a real local. Address 5745, East 17 Street. You were born at six fifteen in the morning on the thirteenth of February 1996, your middle name is James, and your mother Jennifer always bakes you a cake on your birthday with a picture of your latest interest iced on the top.

YOUNG MAN

Spot on.

DON

Last year it was a yacht, the year before it was ... no, I'll keep that one to myself.

The audience LAUGHS.

INT. SIOUX CITY THEATER - A SHORT TIME LATER

A LONG-HAIRED MAN (50s) stands before Don. Don gazes outwards and then turns to the man.

DON

OK, you don't live in the center of the city but ... your wider connection to Iowa goes back quite a way.

LONG-HAIRED MAN

Correct.

DON
 You love sport, you're fond of
 music and enjoy the company of your
 friends, but you also like to be
 alone from time to time.

The long-haired man nods.

DON (CONT'D)
 Now, I am seeing there's certain
 things that you wouldn't want
 everyone to know.

The audience CHUCKLES a little. The long-haired man smiles.

DON (CONT'D)
 So I'm going to leave it there.
 Have I given you enough?

LONG-HAIRED MAN
 Absolutely.

The audience APPLAUDS. Paul looks unimpressed at this one.

INT. SIOUX CITY THEATER - A SHORT TIME LATER

A TALL LADY (early 20s) stands in front of Don.

DON
 OK, final person, here goes.

Don places his hand above the tall lady's head, then gazes
 outwards.

DON (CONT'D)
 Bryony Marshall, age 22, studying
 English at the University of Iowa.
 You have a boyfriend called Graham,
 and you had a falling out with your
 parents three years ago, but were
 reconciled eighteen months after
 that. Am I right?

TALL LADY
 I wouldn't say a falling out.

DON
 But you had less contact for a
 period.

TALL LADY
 Yes.

DON
 And unusually you love an Americano
 but hate lattes.

TALL LADY
That's amazing.

DON
And that's your lot. Thank you
Iowa.

There is rapturous APPLAUSE from the audience, who give Don a standing ovation. Carol walks to the front of the stage.

CAROL
Well, Don, we have a procedure to follow, but I think I speak for everyone when I say that you blew our minds.

There is more APPLAUSE.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Paul, would you like to offer any initial thoughts?

PAUL
Er, no, I would prefer to study the entire session before delivering my verdict.

CAROL
OK, so for now, please give it up for Don Craxton.

The audience goes wild with APPLAUSE once more. Don beams a wide smile while Paul looks extremely perturbed.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul watches footage of the challenge on his television. He pauses it with his remote control as Laura walks in.

PAUL
I still don't get it. There were four I would have readily classed as cold reading, but that leaves sixteen.

Without even waiting to hear a reply from Laura, Paul presses the remote control to start the footage again.

MONTAGE - PAUL CONDUCTING RESEARCH

-- Paul makes a phone call in his apartment.

PAUL

Hello, it's Paul Fletcher. You were on the panel judging what might be classed as cold reading. I'd just like to ask a few things.

-- Paul sits at a computer late at night typing away.

-- Paul makes a phone call in his apartment.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hello, Jonathan? I wanted to check -
- OK, double check -- there was no chance of radio signals transmitting information that you couldn't detect?

-- Paul watches the challenge session on his television, pausing and starting it with his remote control. He falls asleep on his sofa and the remote control drops from his hand.

INT. THE CAROL CARTER SHOW STUDIO - EVENING

Carol stands at the front of the stage, addressing the audience as cameras roll. Don and Paul sit next to each other on the sofa behind.

CAROL

And finally tonight some unfinished business. Last week we had our special up in Iowa, where Don Craxton read the minds of twenty people. Tonight skeptic Paul Fletcher is to deliver his verdict on whether Don was using genuine psychic powers or merely playing tricks.

Carol turns to Paul.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Over to you Paul.

Paul stands.

PAUL

(slowly; nervously)

My research has revealed that at least sixteen of Don's twenty readings were too specific to be explained by cold reading. Having studied all aspects of the session, I acknowledge there was no way he could have known who was going to attend.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

I have also found no evidence to suggest anyone wrote anything down he could have seen, or that information was transmitted to him over the course of the session.

Paul draws a deep BREATH.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I therefore do not have an explanation for how Don Craxton achieved his readings, and so, as is required by our agreement, I declare that I accept he has psychic powers.

DON

Yes.

Don jumps up as the audience APPLAUDS with Don whipping them up to offer even more.

DON (CONT'D)

Thank you, and thanks to everyone for having faith in me. In return I am going to use my psychic powers like never before. Believe me, you ain't seen nothing yet.

The audience rises to its feet. Paul sits quietly, but is clearly distressed.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul and Laura watch the television.

ON PAUL'S TELEVISION

A NEWS REPORTER (female, 30s) is in a studio talking to LOUIS Dexter (50s), in a suit with quite a formal look.

NEWS REPORTER

So as an expert in behavioral psychology, is there any way you could explain what Don Craxton achieved through physical means?

LOUIS

I personally do not have an explanation.

NEWS REPORTER

Louis Dexter, thank you. So all parts of the scientific community have drawn a blank, but I now have two people who may come from a slightly different angle -- the magicians Vaughan and Collier.

VAUGHAN

Hello.

Collier nods.

NEWS REPORTER

So, boys, you're the best in the business, not much gets past you.

VAUGHAN

Thank you.

NEWS REPORTER

So, do you have any rational explanation for how Don Craxton might have achieved those readings?

VAUGHAN

Any conjuring involves a basic trick and then a lot of skill to carry it off. Now, Don displayed skill in the way he effortlessly reeled off all of those facts. We just can't identify any trick that this was covering for.

NEWS REPORTER

(to the camera)

So with scientists and magicians unable to detect foul play, the boost to Don Craxton's credentials could be considerable. He has certainly been quick to maximize on the situation, holding a healing session today that saw record crowds. Meanwhile, there has been silence from Paul Fletcher, which rather shows that he's kept his word.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul switches off the television with his remote control.

PAUL

(sounding defeated)

And just how quickly will "no one has come up with a rational explanation" get translated into "there is no rational explanation"?

LAURA

If you think there is, keep fighting.

PAUL

But I promised I'd stay silent.

LAURA

He promised he'd do it by psychic means.

(beat)

Come on, research it in silence, hit him when you have the answer.

PAUL

No, no, you don't understand.

LAURA

I understand one thing. I'd rather have that stubborn, single-minded, ridiculously irritating crusader for truth than ... well, this.

PAUL

(rising)

I'm going for a walk. Assuming I can fight off all the reporters outside.

LAURA

(suddenly sympathetic)

Honey, there aren't any.

Paul's face drops even more at the thought he has been so completely forgotten. He leaves the room, and can be heard EXITING the apartment.

Laura gazes after Paul with a thoughtful expression. She sits on the sofa, switches on the television and starts watching the footage of Don's challenge. She stares at it with a hawklike gaze.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Laura is still watching the television as before. Suddenly she sits upright, rewinds the recording a little, watches the same bit again and freezes the frame. As she gazes at the still image, she puts her hand to her face but her concentration is broken by the telephone RINGING. Laura rises and answers the telephone.

DAVE (V.O.)

Hello, is that the home of Dr Paul Fletcher?

LAURA

Who is it?

DAVE (V.O.)

My name's Dave Pearson. Would it be possible to speak with him?

LAURA

I'm afraid he isn't here at the moment.

DAVE (V.O.)

Do you know when he'll be back?

LAURA

Well ... Can I help at all? I'm his wife.

DAVE (V.O.)

I was in the audience for Don Craxton's challenge. I thought there was something he'd like to know.

LAURA

Really?

DAVE (V.O.)

Would it be possible to meet?

LAURA

I don't see why not.

DAVE (V.O.)

I mean with Dr Fletcher?

Laura hesitates for a second.

LAURA

I'll make sure at least one of us is there.

Laura grabs a pen and paper lying nearby.

LAURA (CONT'D)

OK, so two o'clock tomorrow, yes I know the place.

Laura hears the front door OPEN.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Sorry, I've got to go, but I'll see you then.

Laura ends the call and exits the living room.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laura enters the hallway to see Paul has just come through the front door.

PAUL
Who was that?

LAURA
It was ... I'll explain later. Come
and see this.

Laura and Paul exit the hallway to enter the living room.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura and Paul enter. Laura points at the frozen frame on the television.

ON THE TELEVISION

There is a shot showing a sweep of the auditorium including all of the back row of the central section of the stalls.

BACK TO SCENE

LAURA
Every person in that back row is
wearing a different colored top.

PAUL
And?

LAURA
Well, what's the probability?

PAUL
I don't know.

LAURA
There was a time you'd have told me
like that. There was a time you'd
have spotted this yourself.

Paul looks at the screen.

PAUL
Those four at the end. Two blues,
two whites.

LAURA
But the others?

Paul shrugs and walks away, leaving the room by another door (into the bedroom).

LAURA (CONT'D)
 There's something else. That phone
 call ...

Laura sighs and gives up.

INT. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - JOHN KERRIGAN'S OFFICE - DAY

John sits behind his desk with Paul, who looks withdrawn and gazes downwards, in front of it.

JOHN
 Look, I watched it and, for what
 it's worth, I'm sorry.

PAUL
 Thank you.

JOHN
 That challenge was an embarrassment
 to you, but it could be a blessing.
 If you're forced to forget this
 whole psychic business, we might
 get you back.

John gives an encouraging smile. Paul does not respond.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Take a few days off, I'll find
 someone to cover, and then ...

Paul remains silent.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 A few weeks?

There is still no reaction from Paul.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 OK, what exactly is the problem? Is
 it that you couldn't work out what
 Don did, or that you had to
 proclaim to the nation you accepted
 he had psychic powers.

Paul continues to gaze at the floor.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (contemplative)
 Or is it something else?

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET WITH LARGE CHURCH - DAY

Paul walks quietly along the street. As he passes the large church he stops, looks up at it and, after a moment's pause, enters.

INT. LARGE CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Paul enters the church and gazes at the vastness of the interior as light floods through the windows. As he looks up, taking everything in, he takes a step back and crashes into GEORGE (50s), a minister dressed in black with a dog collar and kindly persona, who has just walked in.

PAUL
Oh, I'm so sorry.

GEORGE
(friendly)
That's quite all right. A bit awestruck perhaps?

PAUL
I guess.

GEORGE
Your first time in here?

PAUL
Yes.

GEORGE
Well, you're always welcome.

PAUL
Thank you.

GEORGE
Anytime.

George begins to walk away.

PAUL
Excuse me, sir.

George turns.

GEORGE
Yes?

PAUL
Is it possible to speak with you?
In private.

GEORGE
Well, we could try my office. Ever since Carnegie Hall opened it's just not drawn the same crowds.

George smiles, and Paul relaxes just a little.

INT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - CAFE - DAY

Laura sits with Dave (mid 30s) at a table. He is handsome and wears glasses, a T-shirt and casual jacket, but has an air of being a loner. A WAITRESS serves coffee to them. Laura nods a "thank you".

LAURA

So how did you get our number?

DAVE

Kind of child's play in my work.

LAURA

Which is?

DAVE

Identity fraud by day, but I'm interested in everything -- inventions, gadgets, your husband's endeavors.

Laura smiles.

DAVE (CONT'D)

What about you?

LAURA

Pharmaceutical research. When I'm not running around after Paul that is.

Dave laughs.

DAVE

Shame he wasn't free today.

LAURA

(awkwardly)

Yeah.

(beat)

So what did you have to tell me?

DAVE

Well, I live in Sioux City, I was always planning to go to the challenge, but then three days before it I had this phone call from the theater.

LAURA

Saying?

DAVE

That they anticipated vast crowds so advised arriving six hours early to be sure of getting in.

LAURA

But how could anyone know in advance who would attend?

DAVE

Well, they said they were phoning because this event might interest me, so they must have contacted others.

LAURA

How many people live in Sioux City?

DAVE

In the wider metropolitan area, we're talking 170,000.

LAURA

So either they were ringing that number, or they were targeting you.
(beat)

Did you go six hours before?

DAVE

About four. The theater was three quarters full, but then no one else came for another two hours.

LAURA

Did you spot anything strange in the audience?

DAVE

Not really, but considering they'd given up so much time to go, they didn't sound that enthusiastic for Don.

LAURA

They did on the television.

DAVE

Towards the end, sure, but not before. It was as if they needed to be convinced -- and then they were.

LAURA

Well, thank you. Now, please don't tell me you came all the way from Sioux City for this.

DAVE

Let's just say I managed to ensure my work called me to New York for a few weeks.

LAURA

My husband's that important to you?

DAVE

Of course. I'm all for exposing deception and he's the master.

LAURA

I can't help feeling he was a bit naive. When Don offered the challenge, Paul should have known he had something extra clever up his sleeve.

DAVE

He just assumed he could be cleverer still. I would have too.

LAURA

Look, I know this is a big ask, but would you be able to go through some of the footage from the challenge with me?

DAVE

Of course.

LAURA

And would you mind if we did it at your place?

DAVE

(slightly confused)

If you think it will help.

INT. CHURCH - GEORGE'S OFFICE - DAY

It is fairly spacious, with a few religious pictures on the walls. There is a desk but George and Paul sit in front of it so that no furniture separates them.

PAUL

Why is the world so unfair?

GEORGE

That reminds me of a man who once said "I have ten questions about God, and if you can answer them all I'll become a Christian".

PAUL

And?

GEORGE

I told him I had many more than that.

PAUL

But you do put your faith in Him?

GEORGE

Of course. I have faith that, provided you see things through, good will triumph and truth will out.

PAUL

That's how I've always felt but ... it's just the extent to which everything seems upside down.

GEORGE

Something's happened to make you feel like this?

PAUL

There's this man who, as far as I'm concerned, has done the most despicable acts, yet everyone loves him and he's as rich as Croesus.

(beat)

Whereas I've worked hard to help people, only to be humiliated and hated by half the country.

GEORGE

(kindly)

I'm sure that's not true.

PAUL

Do you recognize me?

GEORGE

Sorry, should I?

PAUL

(sarcastically)

You mean you don't own a television?

GEORGE

Actually, no.

PAUL

Oh, well, that's kind of a relief.

GEORGE

If you prefer anonymity, that's fine.

PAUL

No, no, my name's Paul Fletcher.

GEORGE

Pleased to meet you. George Wilson.

(beat)

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Look, I know I could recite some Bible passage to help you make sense of it all, but I'm not going to.

PAUL

Isn't that your job?

GEORGE

My job is many things. Most of all, it's about engaging with the person I see.

PAUL

And who do you see?

GEORGE

A man who is normally fired with passion, and has maybe just had his flames doused.

PAUL

(suddenly quite impressed)

And you say you don't know who I am.

George raises an eyebrow as if to say "I'm a good judge of character".

GEORGE

Seeing things through means when you fall off your horse, you get back on.

PAUL

The trouble is I can't.

GEORGE

Why ever not?

PAUL

Kind of an agreement I made.

GEORGE

You agreed not to remount?

PAUL

Yes, and had my stirrups broken and my saddle trashed.

Paul rises from his chair as if to leave.

GEORGE

Look, you are not obliged to tell me anything, but if you do ever want to talk I am always here.

PAUL
Thank you, that's very kind.

GEORGE
(concerned; as if
checking Paul is not
about to walk away and
commit suicide)
You are feeling OK?

PAUL
(with a small smile)
Better than when I came in.

GEORGE
That's good.

George rises, opens the office door, he and Paul shake hands and Paul leaves before a second later the VERGER (male, 50s, in simple clothes) appears at the office door.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Ah Richard, yes we need to go
through next week's Psalms.

VERGER
You know Paul Fletcher?

GEORGE
You too?

VERGER
From the television.

GEORGE
(vaguely)
Oh yes, of course.

VERGER
Interesting company you keep.

George contemplates this point.

INT. DAVE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (THE FOLLOWING DAY)

The room is light and spacious, but with no personal touches such as family photographs.

Laura sits on a sofa in front of a television. Dave walks across the room (from the kitchen), hands her a cup of coffee and sits on the sofa next to her.

LAURA
Thank you so much for this.

DAVE

You're welcome. I've got the apartment for a month, so if I can help one of my idols ...

LAURA

I've got to be honest, I'm not sure he'll see it as helping.

DAVE

Why not?

LAURA

He's kind of had the stuffing taken out of him.

(beat)

But if we can find something that'll put it back in.

DAVE

Sounds good -- and it's nice to have some company.

LAURA

I expect you miss your family.

DAVE

Not exactly. I'm not married.

Laura smiles sympathetically at Dave, before turning to business.

LAURA

So where do we go with these different colored tops?

DAVE

My work gives me contacts in all sorts of places, and after we spoke I set about getting some security footage from the event.

Dave starts flicking through various screens on his television with a remote control.

DAVE (CONT'D)

It's just come through, it's grainy, but one camera covered that row the entire time.

ON DAVE'S TELEVISION

There is a freeze frame black and white image of the central section of the auditorium of the Sioux City Theater.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVE

This is the start of the session.

LAURA

So what do we do?

DAVE

Stare at this image for the next two hours.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - STUDY - DAY

It is dimly lit with a crucifix on the wall. George sits at his desk in front of a computer.

ON GEORGE'S COMPUTER

The letters of the name "Paul Fletcher" appear one by one as George types them in. Then the "Search" button is clicked on. A list of videos with "Paul Fletcher" in the title appear. George clicks on the top one (which is of Paul's appearance on The Alternative Show).

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL (V.O.)

It's those who exploit people's grief who are disrespectful.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (V.O.)

Don brought Tim joy.

PAUL (V.O.)

He brought him tears.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (V.O.)

So you don't understand human emotions.

As APPLAUSE from the clip is heard, George looks quizzical.

INT. DAVE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Laura and Dave still stare at the footage of the same camera shot on the television. Dave also has a laptop in front of him.

LAURA

This is useless. We don't even know what we're looking for.

DAVE

We've still got to watch the whole thing.

LAURA
But how much longer before ...

DAVE
Wait, what was that?

LAURA
What was what?

Dave rewinds the footage to watch the same bit again.

DAVE
In the back row, that person rose,
then that one, then those four
together.

LAURA
(looking closely)
Natural shuffling?

DAVE
It's subtle, they're only rising a
little, but that's no coincidence.
(beat)
There it is again, only this time
that one towards the center rose
first, the person next to him after
and then four others.

LAURA
But what does it mean?

Dave looks at his laptop.

DAVE
We need to link it to what was
happening on the stage.

INT. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

It is a typical personal office in a university science building, and smaller than John's. It is quite bare, although there is a photo of Paul and Laura on the wall. Paul sits at his desk typing on a computer. There is a KNOCK on the door.

PAUL
Come in.

Don enters.

DON
(too friendly to be true)
Hello Paul.

PAUL
Just what are you doing here?

DON

Well, it's funny you should ask that.

Don shuts the door behind him, and sits down without being invited.

DON (CONT'D)

You see, since your challenge, the scientists are -- I'm happy to say -- taking me a lot more seriously.

PAUL

And?

DON

The University's Department of Parapsychology wants to do some experiments with me.

PAUL

Well, thankfully that's nothing to do with me in Physics.

DON

Oh, come on, Paul. I just thought I'd pop in and see an old friend while I was here.

PAUL

The least you can do is stay away from me.

DON

On the contrary, I thought you might like to observe these experiments.

PAUL

Huh.

DON

It could help open your eyes. The closer you get to me the closer you are to God.

PAUL

And why would you care about that?

DON

You've spent so much time defying God's will, you've got some catching up to do.

Paul rises and opens the door, attempting to expedite Don's departure.

PAUL

Well, please don't worry on my account.

Don rises.

DON

But I do Paul. I remain deeply concerned for your soul.

Don flashes another smile, and exits the room.

INT. DAVE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Hours have passed, but Dave and Laura are still positioned as before.

DAVE

So, there's definitely big activity in this group at the start of each reading.

LAURA

Which would explain why Don gazed out over the auditorium.

DAVE

But what are they telling him?

LAURA

I don't know. Could it be anything to do with the color of those tops?

DAVE

(looking at his laptop)
Well, we've got orange, dark blue, light blue, a mustard color ...

LAURA

Would you call that orange? I'd say it was more amber.

DAVE

I don't think we need worry about the intricacies of ... wait a minute.

LAURA

What?

DAVE

Amber, blue, cyan -- that's light blue -- dandelion ...

LAURA

And?

DAVE
It's the alphabet.

LAURA
So there's twenty-six people?

DAVE
Well, thirty in the row, but that explains why four people on the other end had duplicate colors. They weren't a part of it.

LAURA
But what were they spelling?

Dave points the remote control at the television to rewind the footage.

DAVE
So ... T stands up first, then Y, then R, A, C and E together. That's Tracey. First letter, last letter, then all the others.
(beat)
The next lot spells McCubbin. It's the first participant.

LAURA
But why wouldn't each letter just stand up in turn?

DAVE
Take too long, be too suspicious.

LAURA
What if Don couldn't work it out?

DAVE
Anagrams are easy when you've got the first and last letter. And no one's doubting he can think quick.

LAURA
And if two letters in a word are the same?

DAVE
They only stand up once. All these things are only a push. The tops don't need to be different colors -- that just helps distinguish them on the day -- but they'd have done all the hard work behind the scenes.

LAURA
But you couldn't elicit everything from just a few words.

DAVE

Why not? Most readings were pretty much the same: names of family members, ages -- which you just use the first nine people for -- living or dead, a fun fact or two.

LAURA

They didn't sound the same.

DAVE

Because Don spins how he tells each. You just establish enough protocols in advance about what to communicate -- and then you practice.

LAURA

Sounds like a lot of work.

DAVE

But worth it to get your chief rival out the way.

LAURA

Still, none of this explains how they got the information in the first place.

DAVE

(contemplative)

Yeah, well that's another story.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY (THE FOLLOWING MORNING)

Paul and Laura sit at a table eating breakfast.

PAUL

You were late home last night.

LAURA

Yeah, I was ...

(beat)

Look, Paul, there's someone I want you to meet. He'll be here in a few minutes and ...

The front doorbell RINGS.

LAURA (CONT'D)

That'll be him.

Laura rises and exits the kitchen.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laura enters the hallway and answers the door.

LAURA
(quietly)
Great you're here, and remember
don't be too disappointed by what
you see.

Paul enters the hallway.

LAURA (CONT'D)
(slightly nervously)
Paul, this is Dave Pearson. He was
at the challenge in Sioux City and
has been helping me research the
event.

PAUL
Has he now?

DAVE
Dr Fletcher, may I say what an
honor it is to meet you.

PAUL
(unenthusiastic, but not
mean)
Well, in that case, I guess I've
got to hear what you have to say.

Paul gestures for Dave and Laura to follow him into the living room.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Paul, Laura and Dave enter the living room. Paul and Laura sit down with Laura inviting Dave to do the same.

PAUL
The thing is I have no doubt Don
was employing trickery. Yesterday,
he came to my office.

LAURA
Why?

PAUL
He's trying to control me. You
know, dissuade me from pursuing
this, but in such a way that it's
not obvious he has something to
hide.

DAVE
So you're not dissuaded?

PAUL
(shaking his head)
Look, I'll listen, but I can't believe you've uncovered anything I haven't thought of.

LAURA
(suddenly; monumentally)
"You get to them before they even enter the hall."

PAUL
Sorry?

LAURA
That was how you explained the unexplainable.

PAUL
And you pin all your hopes on that?

LAURA
Why not?

PAUL
Because you can't get to two thousand people.

LAURA
But what if they did?

DAVE
You see Dr Fletcher, we've found lots of things Don said on the Internet.

PAUL
Such as?

DAVE
That last lady, Don noted that she'd had less contact with her parents for a time. Well, we've found her public posts on Facebook, and, yes, there is a period when her parents are mentioned less.

LAURA
Don fabricated this by saying they'd had a falling out.

DAVE
And that was one thing he got wrong, but no one remembered after what he said next.

Dave pulls out his cell phone and shows the screen to Paul.

ON DAVE'S CELL PHONE

There is a Facebook post with a photo of the tall woman from the session next to it and her name, "Bryony Marshall". Next to it reads "Two years ago" and "Am I the only person in the world to love an Americano but hate a latte?!!"

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL

And that's the incredible thing.
Because if there was no way of
communicating that to him ...

DAVE

How about twenty-six people in a
row indicating letters and words?

PAUL

Impossible.

DAVE

No, just very difficult, but with
the right people.

PAUL

What people?

DAVE

Well, they'd have been selected for
their skills in researching and
retaining information.

PAUL

To memorize details for the entire
population of Iowa?

DAVE

No, just two thousand.

PAUL

The theater takes that number, but
they didn't know who was going to
turn up.

DAVE

Why did you decide on Sioux City?

PAUL

Don suggested it. No reason not to
agree.

DAVE

Look, the population of the metropolitan area is about 170,000 but directly around that there's hardly anyone. So the vast majority of your audience will come from that group.

PAUL

You can't assume that.

DAVE

OK, there's a few fans of Don -- and you -- who would cross States, but Don wasn't doing any healing so there was no big incentive to travel far.

PAUL

You still couldn't research anywhere near that number.

DAVE

Three days before the challenge, I got a phone call.

PAUL

(more alert)
Who from?

DAVE

That's the question, but think about it. Don and his team do some Internet research and find two thousand people who would seem likely to attend. Then they tip the odds even further in their favor by advising them to turn up early. That way they only have to memorize two thousand people's details.

PAUL

You still wouldn't capture all twenty participants.

LAURA

But you said yourself that four could be explained by cold reading. They just got forgotten among the other sixteen.

DAVE

Fifteen.

LAURA

Sorry??

DAVE

You see Dr Fletcher, you picked a person in amber on the end of a row who was one of Don's assistants.

LAURA

(thinking)

And he rushed straight into giving information with none of the usual gazing.

DAVE

Varying his style to look even more impressive. But he could have said anything and that man would have said "yes".

LAURA

We've got it solved, Paul.

PAUL

With speculation and conjecture?

LAURA

What are you questioning?

PAUL

That they could memorize two thousand people's details.

DAVE

As a scientist, you know trained people can do that.

PAUL

And the manpower required to do everything else.

DAVE

(utterly confused)

Why don't you believe they made two thousand phone calls?

PAUL

(slowly)

Because that's what I did.

Paul, Laura and Dave stare at each other, taking this in.

INT. MANHATTAN ART GALLERY - DAY

It is light, spacious and uncrowded. Laura and Dave walk from painting to painting, conversing as they do so.

LAURA

So was it Paul who phoned you?

DAVE

Thinking now about that voice ...

(Dave nods)

But how did he make two thousand calls? There's one of him, not twenty-six.

LAURA

I hardly saw him that week. I thought it was all agreeing rules, but ...

(beat)

Just what was he doing phoning all those people?

DAVE

Ensuring skeptics like me turned up. Less inclined to go along with cold reading if they saw it.

LAURA

How did he know you were a skeptic?

DAVE

I've mentioned your husband online. He must have identified others from the area who'd done the same.

LAURA

Well, it's clear why Paul was so dismissive of our suggestions. He'd already covered every point.

DAVE

(sardonically)

And since he threw every obstacle in Don's way and the man still succeeded, it's a wonder he's not really believing Don has psychic powers.

LAURA

So where do we go from here?

DAVE

I could extend my time in New York.

LAURA

You've put yourself out enough.

DAVE

Look, that challenge has left Don more powerful than ever. Credibility enhanced, opposition out the way.

LAURA

And that worries you?

DAVE

Yes, because your husband is the only one with the clout to stop him, and he seems out of the game.

LAURA

Paul always thinks he knows best. If he can see a way forward, he'll take it, but he has to do it himself.

DAVE

You mean if he can't find the answer, he won't believe others will.

LAURA

(nodding)

I know that makes him sound arrogant, but most of the time he's proved right.

DAVE

I'm sure, but it's up to us to make the next move.

LAURA

Well, let's think. If it was Paul who called everyone, how does it fit with the people signaling to Don?

DAVE

Technically they could still have done, but they wouldn't have known who was turning up to know who to research.

LAURA

So what we do now?

DAVE

(thinking)

Well, no use getting to Don's regular assistants. On something like this, he'd have kept even them in the dark. But if there was any signaling, there's twenty-six people out there who know why.

LAURA

And paid enough to keep quiet?

DAVE

Let's concentrate on finding one.

(beat)

I'm glad you suggested this.

Dave indicates the gallery.

LAURA

I know. Just a touch of calm when
you need it most.

Dave and Laura look at each other and smile.

INT. DAVE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATE EVENING

Dave sits at his computer clicking around.

ON DAVE'S COMPUTER

There is a freeze frame of a television shot of the back row of the central section of the stalls from the challenge. A square appears over the face of the person on the extreme left of the row. The words "No matches identified" appear on the screen. A square appears over the face of the next person along. "No matches identified" appears once more.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVE

Stupid, primitive software.

INT. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul sits behind his desk typing on a computer. There is a knock on the door.

PAUL

Come in.

George enters the room.

GEORGE

Hello Dr Fletcher.

Paul, slightly startled, rises.

PAUL

Hello.

GEORGE

I'm sorry for turning up unexpected
... Do you mind if I sit down?

PAUL

Please.

Both sit.

GEORGE

I said I would only know what you told me, but I have to be honest. After our meeting, I was inspired to do some research and ... well, it makes sense now.

PAUL

Oh.

GEORGE

I'm sorry if you feel betrayed.

PAUL

(neutral; not hostile)

It was just nice talking to someone who knew nothing about me.

GEORGE

But now I do, I have to say something.

PAUL

Which is?

GEORGE

It's Don Craxton stopping you getting back on your horse.

PAUL

So you know him.

GEORGE

(nodding)

He's a dangerous man, which is why you've got to keep up the fight.

(beat)

You may have made a promise but ...

PAUL

Look, his cheating would invalidate any I made, if I could show HOW he cheated. But since I can't, I can hardly keep spouting accusations.

GEORGE

You know Don used to encourage sick people to throw away their medicines. "Trust in drugs shows a lack of faith in God. Give your money to me instead."

PAUL

In fairness, he's not done that for years.

GEORGE

And you know why?

(pointing to himself)

Because a group of ministers kicked up such a fuss that even he realized it was bad publicity.

PAUL

Yes, I remember.

GEORGE

But now he's riding a wave, who knows what he might do? I don't think even you appreciate the extent to which he can manipulate. He can plant an idea in your head and you'll never realize it was him who put it there.

PAUL

OK, but why should it be for me to lead the crusade?

GEORGE

Because you're still in the best position to do so.

Paul considers this, but says nothing.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(again suggesting he is a good judge of character)

Besides, would you really want to leave it to somebody else?

PAUL

(smiling; taking the bait)

All right.

GEORGE

Excellent. So what will you do?

PAUL

Oh, I think hold a top secret strategy meeting first thing tomorrow morning.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY (THE NEXT MORNING)

Paul, Laura and Dave sit around a table.

PAUL
 (really taking command)
 So Dave, you'll concentrate on the signaling, Laura you'll continue analyzing the footage, and I'll focus on getting myself out there.

LAURA
 Do you need to do that yet?

PAUL
 If we can prove how Don did his trick, great, but it could take time -- and it's time we may not have.

LAURA
 Why not?

Paul picks up a remote control and switches on the television.

ON PAUL'S TELEVISION

Don leads an episode of The Miracles Hour. There is a huge audience, but when Don speaks he is addressing the camera and viewers at home as much as those present.

DON
 So turn your back on those so-called doctors who fill your body with poison. Forget the lot of them, God is all you need.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul pauses the footage.

PAUL
 That was last night.

LAURA
 Hasn't he always said that?

PAUL
 No, these past few years he's been careful never actually to tell people not to seek other help.

DAVE
 And he'll only get bolder.

LAURA
 So what do you have planned?

PAUL

Well, remember there wasn't a single reporter outside our door after the verdict?

LAURA

What does that show?

PAUL

That the media won't give time to the man who used to undermine the magic when they have every excuse not to.

LAURA

So?

PAUL

If I want to get the message out there, I've got to give them a bit of razzle-dazzle.

LAURA

How?

PAUL

I'll tell you in a minute.

Paul rises and leaves the room like a man on a mission. Laura and Dave smile at each other, happy Paul is back to his old self.

LAURA

(to Dave)

So what have you been up to?

DAVE

Let's just say I've always been interested in many things, but this is the first time I've regretted not focusing more on face recognition.

LAURA

Oh.

DAVE

But I did manage to identify names for five of the twenty-six people. And two are in New York.

LAURA

So concentrate on those?

DAVE

Well, based on what I can find out about one, he'll never talk.

LAURA
And the other?

DAVE
Is a possibility.

LAURA
(smiling)
Well, give it a go.

Paul enters again with a huge grin on his face.

PAUL
That was quicker than I thought.

LAURA
What have you done?

PAUL
Hired the Independence Theater.

LAURA
(confused)
Sorry?

PAUL
I'm going to do an event.

LAURA
In one of Broadway's largest
venues??

PAUL
If I do a lecture on
parapsychology, I can employ weird
and wonderful effects to illustrate
points. Then when I've got
everyone's attention, I can steer
them towards looking for the
rational explanations.

LAURA
And one event's going to do all
that?

PAUL
Just the first of many.

LAURA
How much is this costing?

PAUL
Absolute bargain. Fifty thousand
dollars.

LAURA
(exploding)
What??

PAUL

That includes use of their crew for special effects. Normally, it's seventy-five for the venue.

LAURA

And you've just arranged this without asking me?

DAVE

I think I'll be going.

LAURA

No, you can hear this.

PAUL

We'll get it back from ticket sales.

LAURA

If anyone comes. How will you advertise?

PAUL

I'll do some crowd funding.

LAURA

And what do you know about that?

PAUL

You just set something up online.

DAVE

(nervously intervening)

There is a bit more to it than that.

PAUL

I'll sort it.

LAURA

Too right. You'll get on that phone and cancel.

Paul looks sheepish.

PAUL

They gave it to me cheap after another booking cancelled, but it means no refunds.

LAURA

(bursting into tears)

How could you?

Paul moves to put his arm around Laura.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Leave me alone.

Paul still tries to put his hand on her shoulder.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Just get out.

Paul reluctantly leaves the living room, and they hear the front door SHUT. Dave wonders whether to follow or remain. He decides to stay.

DAVE
(awkwardly)
At least he's got his drive back.

LAURA
Drive? This is desperation. Paul may be hot-headed, but he was always calculating. He'd never have gambled fifty thousand dollars on making himself relevant.
(beat)
No, this time he's lost it. It's his final throw of the dice.

DAVE
Look, I wouldn't have done what Paul did, but I might be able to help make the event a success.

LAURA
Really?

DAVE
Or at least ensure you don't lose your life savings.

LAURA
I'll settle for that.

DAVE
Crowd funding, getting traffic to your page, it's a skill, but I know a thing or two about it.

LAURA
Oh, thank you, Dave.
(beat)
You know, you are such a good man.

Dave and Laura look into each others' eyes, and for a moment it seems as if they might kiss before both suddenly "snap out" of it.

DAVE
I'm sorry.

LAURA

It's OK.

DAVE

No, it's not. Wrecking a marriage?
That's not why I'm here.

LAURA

(kindly)

A kiss that didn't happen is not
going to do that.

DAVE

You really love him, don't you?

LAURA

(nodding)

Oh I know he can be intolerably
frustrating, but he's the only one
for me.

DAVE

And that's why we need to do this
event for him.

LAURA

You are a kind, thoughtful person
Dave Pearson, and why some girl
hasn't snapped you up I'll never
know.

DAVE

Yeah, well, things don't always
work out the way you'd like.

LAURA

(looking into Dave's eyes)

And a bit of a mystery too.

EXT. BROADWAY - DAY (THREE WEEKS LATER)

It is a particularly bustling section that contains several theaters. Paul and Dave stand on a sidewalk looking over the road at a building that bears the sign "Independence Theater". A huge banner hangs from it with a picture of Paul's face and the words "Dr Paul Fletcher - The Power of Parapsychology: This Friday".

DAVE

Looks good.

PAUL

Well, thank you. I do realize
without you, we could have been
sunk.

DAVE

The trick was crowd funding to get the money to advertise. The ticket sales have followed, and now you'll end up in profit.

PAUL

Which I can plough into a second event, then the profit from that into a third ...

DAVE

(gulping)

Let's see how this one goes first. Anyway, got to go, a few things to do.

PAUL

Me too. A meeting with my boss over -- I don't know, a new course or something.

INT. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY - JOHN KERRIGAN'S OFFICE - DAY

John sits behind his desk with PHILIP Ross (about 60), Head of New York University's Department of Parapsychology, and a seemingly distant and authoritarian figure. Paul sits in front of it with a nervous expression.

PAUL

I'm sorry, I don't quite get what you're saying.

PHILIP

(formal; precise)

You are promoting yourself as an expert in parapsychology when you are nothing of the sort.

PAUL

I know enough Philip to give a public lecture.

PHILIP

As the head of parapsychology at the university I have to disagree.

PAUL

Well, thankfully we have a thing called The First Amendment.

JOHN

(being more reasonable)

The issue is we cannot have you as a representative of this university claiming to speak on topics that are the remit of other departments.

PAUL

You've never stopped me doing anything before.

JOHN

I didn't like you going on those shows, but you weren't contradicting anything a physicist should say.

PHILIP

Whereas your past pronouncements on this subject are totally at odds with our work.

PAUL

What else is going on here?

Paul gazes at Philip.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Oh, I get it. There wouldn't be a certain person in the background turning the screws?

PHILIP

I have no idea what you mean.

PAUL

Well, it's no secret you're doing experiments with Don Craxton.

JOHN

No Paul, they won't be happening.

Philip shoots a piercing glance at John.

PAUL

Why not?

PHILIP

(awkwardly)

When we outlined the controlled conditions for each experiment, Don decided to terminate the agreement.

PAUL

What were they?

Philip hesitates, and John jumps in.

JOHN

No audiences present, the room never to be larger than this one
...

PAUL

And you fear the department
couldn't stand another blow to its
reputation.

(beat)

Well, good you found out now.
Because if it had been in a few
years, those who had staked their
careers on believing him would have
really paid the price.

PHILIP

Can we please stick to the point?
If you go ahead you will face an
immediate disciplinary tribunal
before the University President.

JOHN

We don't have to talk like that.
But seriously Paul, couldn't you
just make it a lot easier on
yourself and not pursue this?

PAUL

I'm sorry, I can't do that.

JOHN

No one survives the tribunal.

Paul rises from his chair, intending to leave.

PAUL

Well, maybe I'll be lucky. I mean
there can't be many precedents for
this particular charge.

PHILIP

Which means there's nothing to show
you can't be dismissed.

Paul puts on a brave face in response to Philip's assertion.
He opens the door and exits leaving Philip staring severely
at John.

EXT. MANHATTAN DOCKYARD - DAY

It is a standard scene at a dockyard, with ships moored and
workers unloading goods. There is a barriered entrance, with
a GATESMAN guarding it. Dave approaches him.

DAVE

Is there a Rob Bricknall on site?

GATESMAN

He didn't say anyone was coming.

DAVE

So he is here.

The gatesman looks over to a bearded ROB (mid 40s) who is fairly muscular, but nonetheless has an air that makes him look slightly out of place among the other workers.

GATESMAN

Rob, there's someone here to see you.

Rob walks to the barrier, and talks over it to Dave.

ROB

What can I do for you?

DAVE

Rob Bricknall?

ROB

Yes.

DAVE

The same Rob Bricknall who attended Don Craxton's challenge in Sioux City?

ROB

I've no idea what you're talking about.

DAVE

Who had the ability to memorize hundred digit codes and pass them on to the highest bidder?

ROB

Sorry??

DAVE

Who once received a six figure salary, but following a conviction for large-scale fraud can't find work anywhere?

ROB

I think it's time you left.

DAVE

Just tell me the truth and I promise I'll keep your name out of it.

Rob turns his back on Dave and begins to walk away.

DAVE (CONT'D)

But if you don't, several other cases it seems you got away with might just come to light.

Rob stops dead in his tracks.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul sits in a chair with a book, but he looks pre-occupied. Suddenly there is a RING at the front door. Paul rises and exits the living room.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Paul enters the hallway and answers the door to see Don with two BODYGUARDS, one standing either side of him.

DON
(smooth)
Hello Paul.

PAUL
Don??

DON
Mind if I come in?

PAUL
You or them?

Don raises a hand to indicate to the bodyguards to remain behind. He enters the apartment.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Paul and Don enter the living room. Don gazes around the room with a false smile that says "do you really have such a modest place?".

PAUL
So what's this about? I can't imagine you were "just passing".

DON
I've seen the posters Paul. You seem to be forging something of a new career.

PAUL
And what if I am?

DON
The trouble is this new career seems rather too close to your old.

PAUL
I don't understand.

DON
You promised if you couldn't work out how I read those people's minds you'd stay silent.

PAUL
And haven't I?

DON
You tell me. You see, I just can't help feeling your event is some subtle -- or maybe not so subtle -- way of talking about me.

PAUL
I'm perfectly entitled to say what I like.

DON
I'm not sure I'd agree.

PAUL
Well, whether you do or not is no concern of mine.

DON
I've got twenty lawyers willing to argue that the evidence suggests you're targeting me.

PAUL
And that's supposed to scare me?

DON
It's just a question of common sense. You end up in court, you lose.

PAUL
(bold)
Let's just suppose -- hypothetically for a moment -- that this event did talk about you? If it could prove what it said, what case could you mount?

DON
You promised if you couldn't explain my talents within a week you would say no more. So even if you could suddenly prove I was the biggest Charlatan ever -- which I'm not -- I could sue you for breaking your word.

PAUL
That's ridiculous.

DON
You made the promise on national television.

PAUL
It wasn't a legal agreement.

DON
I've got ten lawyers happy to argue it was the equivalent of one.

PAUL
(sarcastically)
Is this in addition to the first twenty?

DON
Against the team I could assemble you wouldn't stand a chance. I would hate you to lose everything.

Don indicates Paul's apartment. Then he offers Paul a letter.

PAUL
What's this?

DON
A friendly warning.
(beat)
The next one might be less so.

Don leaves the letter lying on a table and swiftly turns and leaves.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Paul sits staring at the now opened letter.

CLOSE-UP on letter. It contains a formal looking solicitor's header and the phrase "In order to avoid the most serious consequences, we recommend you cease and desist immediately ...".

Paul hears the front door OPEN, and a few seconds later Laura enters the living room.

LAURA
Hi honey.

Paul remains silent.

LAURA (CONT'D)
What's up?

Paul hands her the latter, which she reads.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Can he do this?

PAUL
(nodding)
With his money.

Suddenly there is a RING at the front door.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laura enters the hallway and answers the door to Dave and Rob. Rob looks as if he does not want to be there.

DAVE
Hi Laura, I have someone Paul will
want to meet.

LAURA
Oh, it's just ... it's not that
good a time.

ROB
In that case, I'll be going.

PAUL (O.S.)
Oh, no you don't.

The three turn around to see Paul standing in the doorway between the hallway and living room. He gestures for them all to join him.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

All four enter, and all four remain standing.

PAUL
So who's the new addition?

DAVE
May I introduce Rob, who has
something to tell you.

PAUL
Go on.

ROB
I was at Don Craxton's challenge in
Sioux City.

DAVE
More than just there.

ROB

You know Dave's theory that twenty-six people were signaling to Don.

Paul nods.

ROB (CONT'D)

I was one of them.

PAUL

OK.

Paul sits and invites the others to do so.

PAUL (CONT'D)

So what's your background?

Rob remains silent.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Full name?

There is still silence.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, but I have to check your veracity in some way.

DAVE

Rob has reasons for not wanting people to know his personal details -- reasons that kind of explain how I got him here at all -- but he has told me everything from Don contacting him to the process they followed.

PAUL

And?

DAVE

He was first approached before the two of you even appeared on The Carol Carter Show.

LAURA

You mean Don went into it planning for that challenge?

Dave nods.

PAUL

(to Rob)

And you memorized the details of two thousand people?

ROB

Yeah.

PAUL

So how did you decide who to research?

ROB

Went on Facebook, Twitter and everything, and found anyone there who lived in the area and mentioned they liked you.

PAUL

What??

DAVE

You never told me that.

ROB

You never asked.

LAURA

But why focus on people who would be least likely to trust Don?

DAVE

(thinking)

Well, skeptical people might see through cold reading more, but they'd be as convinced as anyone by what Don said that night.

LAURA

But what would be the advantage in picking that group over any other?

DAVE

None.

(beat)

Unless that was the group Don could be sure someone else was contacting.

LAURA

Well, that was how you selected the people to phone, Paul.

Paul nods quietly.

DAVE

So how did he persuade you to do it?

PAUL

(dismissive)

He didn't.

FLASHBACK

Paul is sitting in his office with George.

GEORGE

He can plant an idea in your head
and you'll never realize it was him
who put it there.

BACK TO SCENE

Paul silently gulps.

DAVE

Well, when did you get the idea?

PAUL

Straight after The Carol Carter
Show.

DAVE

Can you describe how it came to
you?

PAUL

(thinking)
I left the set, thinking there was
so much to do, and then ...
(with a sigh)
... oh, I don't believe it.

FLASHBACK

Don and Paul are standing in the corridor backstage of The
Carol Carter Show television studio.

DON

You see I'm a natural communicator,
but when you're not you find that
preparation is everything.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL

Don got his team to research those
people knowing I'd be the one to
get them there. And I never once
realized it wasn't my idea to make
those calls.

Laura, Dave and even Rob sit with their mouths wide open.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - 30 MINUTES LATER

Paul, Laura and Dave sit roughly as before. Rob has now gone.

PAUL

He said "preparation is everything"
which only underlined my sense of
urgency to do something.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

Then the word "communicator" got it into my head that I had to be communicating with people.

LAURA

But how could he be so certain he'd persuaded you?

DAVE

He knows what to say to plant an idea.

PAUL

And we had many meetings that week. With other people present, but ... some of the things he said, they were ... checking I was doing what he wanted.

LAURA

But why not just get his team to make the phone calls?

PAUL

Because if anyone else was ringing them, the news might get back to me.

LAURA

And the risk of that was greater than the risk of you not doing as he wanted.

PAUL

Yes, because he had no doubt about that.

DAVE

But it was Don who suggested Sioux City?

PAUL

And I thought "brilliant" because the population distribution plays into my hands. Turns out I was playing into his.

LAURA

So what do we do now?

DAVE

Expose him to the world.

PAUL

It's not that simple. If I say a word, he sues.

DAVE

If it goes to court, you'll be in the public eye again and we can crowd fund your defense.

PAUL

He'll always have more money for lawyers.

DAVE

We might pull it off.

Paul rises and starts pacing about the room.

PAUL

No, this is reality. Don does as he pleases, I face losing my job, and my wife's about to walk off with another man.

LAURA

What??

PAUL

(resigned)

I've seen the way you look at Dave. And why shouldn't you want someone who makes you happy? Heaven knows I can't.

DAVE

(interjecting)

That's just not true.

(beat)

OK, guess it's time to come clean on why I'm really here.

A confused Paul and Laura stare at Dave.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - 30 MINUTES LATER

There is a kiosk with chairs and tables. Paul, Laura and Dave sit at a table with coffees.

DAVE

So my admiration for you goes hand in hand with my hatred for him.

LAURA

Sounds personal.

DAVE

(nodding)

As a teenager I developed diabetes. My parents took me to Don, and when he said I just had to trust in him that's what I did.

LAURA

Oh, Dave.

DAVE

So it went unregulated for years,
and by the time I realized I had to
do something it was nearly too
late.

Paul gulps.

DAVE (CONT'D)

It's under control now, but the
stress playing catch-up put me
under wrecked any relationship I
ever had.

PAUL

Why didn't you tell us?

DAVE

Because I don't want sympathy. The
delay in getting help means I might
still go blind, but if it was just
about me, I'd get over it.

LAURA

(addressing Paul more than
Dave)

But it isn't, is it?

DAVE

I did some calculations -- crude I
know -- but I estimated if Don did
what he normally does five hundred
people could die this year.

Paul nods his acknowledgement.

DAVE (CONT'D)

But if he explicitly tells people
to turn their back on medicines it
could be twenty times that.

LAURA

With a grieving family behind every
number.

PAUL

OK, I get your point.

LAURA

So?

Paul gives an anguished shake of his head.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - 20 MINUTES LATER

Paul, Laura and Dave enter in the midst of heated debate.

PAUL

You didn't even want me to do this event.

LAURA

So if I'm prepared to take the risk, why won't you?

PAUL

Because it isn't a risk when I'd be certain to lose.

LAURA

You don't know that.

PAUL

Look how sure Don is. He comes here scarcely pretending he didn't cheat. He just knows if I utter a word it's all gone.

Paul indicates the apartment.

LAURA

It would never come to that.

PAUL

Really? The way the university's acting, I only have to go ahead to lose my job.

LAURA

Why are you just imagining the worst?

DAVE

Look, how about we take a bit of time out?

PAUL

Good idea.

Paul sits down and turns the television on with a remote control.

ON PAUL'S TELEVISION

Don is doing a faith healing session in front of a large audience.

DON

Now, I owe you an apology, because
I fear in the past I have not put
my absolute faith in deliverance.
And if I haven't, then how can you?

(beat)

So no more of this dreadful
caution. I tell you now to take
your medicines and cast them aside.

Several of Don's assistants throw medicines onto the stage.
Some audience members, taking their cue from this, run to the
front of the auditorium and do the same.

DON (CONT'D)

Come on, let's see you do it. Don't
place your faith in drugs, put it
in God.

More and more come forward and throw their medicines onto the
stage as Don whips up a frenzy among them.

DON (CONT'D)

Don't waste your money on poison,
give it to the Lord.

Don's assistants walk around the auditorium with buckets for
donations, and people put money in.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVE

And you really feel you can't say a
word?

Paul shakes his head, but then suddenly his face lights up.

PAUL

But you can!

DAVE

Sorry??

PAUL

Don's only on to me, so you could
slip under the radar.

DAVE

What are you saying?

PAUL

Take over my event.

(beat)

Well, why not?

DAVE

Because I'm a nobody.

PAUL

Exactly. So you can forget about the parapsychology part, and just do a faith healing session.

DAVE

I wouldn't know where to start.

PAUL

I'll teach you.

DAVE

I don't want to mislead people.

PAUL

If you just get yourself noticed, we can do all sorts of things. The theater's sold the tickets, so they offer everyone this alternative.

DAVE

And the person who booked to hear you will stick around for an unknown faith healer??

PAUL

Many will say "no", but there should be enough to make it an event.

DAVE

You think?

PAUL

As long as we get it filmed, we'll create the buzz.

DAVE

But if I appear when you were supposed to, won't Don smell a rat?

PAUL

And? Even he couldn't prove that you leading a session equates to me speaking against him.

DAVE

All the same, let's keep it so hush that he discovers too late to do anything.

A smile comes across Paul's face as he realizes Dave has just agreed to do the event.

MONTAGE - PAUL TEACHING DAVE "SPIRITUAL HEALING" TRICKS

-- Paul sits with Dave in Paul's kitchen.

PAUL

Who you select is crucial. You need to quickly assess their condition, and whether you can make it look better.

-- Paul, Dave and Laura stand in Paul's living room. Dave places his hands over Laura's ears.

DAVE

(quite timid)

Lord, drive the demons of deafness from your servant's ears.

PAUL

It's your performance that creates the effect.

Paul places his own hands over Laura's ears.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(loud; inspiring)

Lord, how I hate those demons of deafness. Drive these terrors from your servant's ears, and let her hear the sound of us praising your name. Hallelujah.

-- Paul sits with Dave in Paul's kitchen. Paul hands Dave a thick, dusty book.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Now, Don knows this from cover to cover, and so should you.

CLOSE-UP on the book. It reads "Psychic Powers Today". Dave's hand opens it to reveal the cover page and the date "1876".

Dave's face says "really?" and Paul's says "oh, yes".

-- Paul, Dave and Laura stand in Paul's living room. Dave places his hands over Laura's ears.

DAVE

(huge; inspiring)

Lord, how I hate those demons of deafness. Drive them from your servant's ears, and let her forever hear the sound of us praising your name. Hallelujah.

Paul and Laura smile. Dave gives a big smile in return.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Paul and Dave sit looking at Dave's laptop.

ON DAVE'S LAPTOP

There is footage of Dave at his event in the Independence Theater. The large auditorium is only a quarter full.

Dave stands with MARIAN (30s) on the stage. She hands Dave a card, which he takes and reads.

DAVE
 (looking directly at
 Marian)
 You are Marian, you have been deaf
 since birth and you can lip read.

Marian nods.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 That's how you can understand me.

MARIAN
 Yes.

Dave walks a distance from Marian and turns his back on her.

DAVE
 So you have no idea what I'm saying
 now.

Marian shows no reaction.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Of course, because my back is
 turned. OK.

Dave walks over to Marian and places his hands over her ears.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Lord, how I hate those demons of
 deafness. Drive them from your
 servant Marian's ears, and let her
 hear the sound of this world once
 more. Hallelujah.

Dave turns his back to Marian but remains very close.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Can you hear me speak?

MARIAN
 Yes.

DAVE
 And now tell me how many clicks I
 make.

Dave walks around the back of Marian and clicks his fingers three times.

MARIAN

Three.

DAVE

Say "Praise the Lord".

MARIAN

Praise the Lord.

DAVE

And praise him indeed, it's a miracle.

The audience APPLAUDS. The volume is not deafening but those present seem reasonably impressed.

BACK TO SCENE

PAUL

Three hundred thousand views in twenty-four hours.

Paul sees that Dave looks sad.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Come on, this is the start we wanted.

DAVE

Using money we crowd funded in your name feels dishonest.

PAUL

If my supporters knew the truth they'd be happy.

DAVE

But if I'm to keep doing events, think of the people I'll deceive. Did no one think that woman might have a little hearing so could pick up sounds right next to her?

PAUL

They're hardly the first to be fooled.

DAVE

But by me?

PAUL

We must be hypocrites for a while so the truth may be shown.

DAVE

(smiling)

Where did you get that from?

PAUL

Now, after this we have no further ties. The money's in your account and you pay for everything from that. Don may suspect we're connected, but the less attention we draw the further you go.

DAVE

Couldn't we meet once a week? Secluded spot, no phone calls in advance?

Paul hesitates.

DAVE (CONT'D)

The odd piece of advice might really help.

PAUL

All right, let's do it.

MONTAGE - DAVE MAKING HIS MARK AS A SPIRITUAL HEALER

-- The news reporter seen earlier speaks to the camera from a studio.

NEWS REPORTER

Now, when it comes to spiritual healing, the name on most people's lips is Don Craxton. But there seems to be a new kid on the block who, although not filling out halls like Mr Craxton, is attracting quite a following online.

-- On a computer screen, Dave is shown in a small venue raising and rubbing a SEATED MAN's leg.

DAVE

So this leg that has been troubling you for twenty years now gives no pain.

SEATED MAN

None whatsoever.

DAVE

It's a miracle. Now, go in the peace of the Lord.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

And the more events Mr Pearson posts the greater his following becomes.

Towards the bottom of the computer screen it reads "3,681,237 views".

-- Dave is interviewed in the street by a JOURNALIST.

JOURNALIST

They say spiritual healing is an overcrowded profession. How have you managed to get noticed?

DAVE

By not asking for hundreds of dollars. I just say ten bucks will help pay my rent.

-- Don watches Dave's interview on a television in his study and curses.

-- Dave's interview continues.

JOURNALIST

You think it makes you more authentic?

DAVE

(looking directly into the camera)

Oh yeah, there's a lot of phonies out there, but trust me, I'm the real deal.

-- Don in his study switches off the television, and picks up his telephone.

DON

(on the phone)

Wesley, get me Dave Pearson here ASAP.

(beat)

No contact details?? Find some.

-- Dave sits in his apartment. His cell phone rings, and he answers it.

DAVE

Hello? Yes, this is Dave Pearson.

(beat)

Oh, hello.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

It is an isolated spot, surrounded by trees and bushes. Paul and Dave sit on a bench. They are alone but their eyes constantly look around to check no one is approaching.

DAVE

You know Don's asked to meet with me?

PAUL

Already? Are you going to agree?

DAVE

I think the sooner I get close to him the more power I have.

PAUL

You know he sees this as nipping you in the bud.

DAVE

Well, I won't let him.

PAUL

Just be careful. You know what a charmer he can be.

DAVE

You don't need to tell me.

INT. DON'S GRAND HOUSE - STUDY - DAY

Don sits behind his desk while WESLEY (30s, trimly dressed in a dark suit) stands in front of it looking at an opened folder.

WESLEY

So, Dave Pearson, lives in Iowa, works in identify fraud. Seems an intelligent sort with a range of interests.

Wesley passes Don a newspaper cutting.

DON

What's this?

WESLEY

An article saying he devised a way to switch on all the Christmas lights in Sioux City from a single cell phone.

DON

How very charming.

WESLEY

He was at your challenge, then came to New York, but the evidence connecting him to Paul Fletcher is only circumstantial.

DON
 Oh come on, they're working
 together -- which will make victory
 all the sweeter.

There is a KNOCK on the door.

DON (CONT'D)
 Come in.

Dave enters.

DON (CONT'D)
 Ah, Mr Pearson, good of you to come
 at short notice.

DAVE
 (walking towards Don's
 desk)
 I feel honored to be invited.

Don gestures for Dave to sit, which he does.

DON
 I'm very impressed with what I've
 seen. So where did you get your
 gifts?

DAVE
 I've always thought I had them, but
 never felt confident enough to use
 them. Then I attended your event in
 Sioux City ...

DON
 (feigning surprise)
 You were there?

DAVE
 And it inspired me to come to New
 York and see what I could do.

DON
 Now Dave -- if I may call you that -
 -- there's two things I
 particularly admire about you.
 First, you know how to get noticed.

DAVE
 Thanks. And the other?

DON
 There's a sincerity to you that
 comes across.
 (beat)
 So, I want to help. Come and work
 for me.

DAVE
(modestly)
I couldn't.

DON
I employ a few people like this.
They do their own events, but with
my name they get more work so can
help more people.

DAVE
I see.

DON
I could fix you up with some dates,
say in Iowa.

DAVE
That's very kind, but I'm hoping to
stay in New York. I don't crave
fame and fortune, but it would be
nice to make the odd television
appearance.

DON
I understand, and why shouldn't you
enjoy a moment or two in the
spotlight?
(beat)
Now, normally I ask for a small
proportion of what anyone makes but
in your case I won't.

DAVE
OK.

DON
Instead, I want to offer you a
million dollars.

DAVE
Oh, wow. That's very generous, but
why me?

DON
You don't like asking for a lot,
and that's commendable. This will
ensure you don't have to while
still being able to pay the rent.

DAVE
It would certainly do that.

DON
Yes, I think this works for
everyone. You can focus on doing
what fulfills you while never
having money worries again.

Don rises and extends his arm to Dave, who after a second also rises and shakes Don's hand.

DON (CONT'D)

Excellent. Now, I'll sort the paperwork, and if you have a word with my driver he'll take you home.

DAVE

I can't thank you enough.

DON

No problem at all.

Dave exits the room shutting the door behind him.

DON (CONT'D)

(to Wesley)

You see, people will only take a bribe if they can be persuaded it isn't one.

WESLEY

So now you can accuse him of being a double crossing fraudster if he ever speaks against you.

DON

Yes, but he won't.

WESLEY

Why so sure?

INT. / EXT. DON'S LUXURY CAR - DAY

Dave sits in the back of Don's car as it drives through the streets of Manhattan. He is lost in thought.

DON (V.O.)

Why shouldn't you enjoy a moment or two in spotlight?

Dave smiles to himself.

DON (V.O.)

You can focus on doing what fulfills you while never having money worries again.

Dave gives the look of someone who has just seen what a brilliant opportunity this is and is going to grab it with both hands.

INT. DON'S GRAND HOUSE - STUDY - DAY

This is a continuation of the previous scene in this room.
Wesley still stands while Don sits.

WESLEY

So shall I start sorting some
bookings in Iowa?

DON

He wanted to be on the television,
remember.

WESLEY

Aren't you just going to forget
that part?

DON

I've been doing well with Fletcher
out the way, but without the
controversy the chat shows are less
interested.

WESLEY

Do you need them?

DON

It's all publicity, and now I can
promise something new.

Don picks up his telephone, and dials a number.

DON (CONT'D)

Hello, can you put me directly
through to Carol Carter?

VOICE ON PHONE (V.O.)

I'm sorry, we can't just ...

DON

It's Don Craxton. She'll want to
talk to me.

Don looks up to Wesley as he holds the line.

DON (CONT'D)

Oh, to see Fletcher's face when I
steal his lapdog.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

It is the same spot as Paul and Dave met in before. Both sit
on the bench.

PAUL

So when's the big sting?

Dave remains silent.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Come on, you must be getting close now.

DAVE

It's just ... I'm not sure there's going to be one.

PAUL

Sorry??

DAVE

I'm not going to be handling this the way you envisaged.

Paul looks Dave in the eye.

PAUL

What exactly has happened?

DAVE

Look, Don convinces people he's healing them or talking to their loved ones because they want it to be true.

PAUL

Granted.

DAVE

And when you declared he was conning them, you were dismissed as negative.

Paul nods.

DAVE (CONT'D)

So I've got to find a way of giving them truth AND hope.

PAUL

Fine. How do you propose to do it?

DAVE

For the time being, I focus on being a convincing healer.

PAUL

Until?

DAVE

(shrugging)
It takes time.

PAUL

Time we don't have.

DAVE

You said we must be hypocrites.

PAUL

For a while, not permanently.

DAVE

But if I take no big money, and I give them hope as I heal them ...

PAUL

(jumping up)

You're NOT healing them.

Paul bends down and looks Dave in the face.

PAUL (CONT'D)

He's got to you, hasn't he.

Dave stands to break the eye contact.

DAVE

(trying to laugh off the accusation)

Of course not.

PAUL

Of all the people who should have been on the lookout for how he can get inside your head.

DAVE

(again trying to make light of it)

You're getting a bit het up over a revised time scale.

PAUL

Revised? I don't think you're ever planning to hit him.

Dave gazes downwards suggesting Paul is right.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Don't you remember what he did to you?

DAVE

(philosophically)

I've just realized I have to look to the future, not the past.

PAUL

I entrusted this job to you like you were my heir.

DAVE

You entrusted it to me because you couldn't do it yourself. So it's my gig, and I do it my way.

PAUL

(disparaging)
Or Don's?

DAVE

Look, he's getting me on The Carol Carter Show on Friday.

PAUL

(angrily)
And you're not taking the opportunity to bust him??

DAVE

But he's been so generous. You know, I actually met Carol yesterday. She showed me every nook and cranny of the studio, just the two of us.

PAUL

Blinded by the limelight.

DAVE

Let's not part like this.

PAUL

Part?

DAVE

Well, I only kept this meeting to tell you there won't be any more.

PAUL

If you're intent on doing nothing, I have no choice but to expose you.

Dave suddenly has the smile and smooth voice of Don.

DAVE

But Paul, no one's listening.

INT. THE CAROL CARTER SHOW STUDIO - EVENING

The studio is set up, with audience and cameras, for the start of a live show.

VOICEOVER (V.O.)

It's Friday night, it's eleven o'clock, it's time for another Carol Carter Show Special.

(MORE)

VOICEOVER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So will you please welcome the most special host of all, your very own Carol Carter.

Carol appears at the top of a staircase, descends it and comes to the front of the stage. A BAND with SINGERS is also to the back of the stage and plays some introductory MUSIC.

CAROL

Welcome, welcome and do we have a show for you? In fact, it's something of a first.

(beat)

Regular viewers will know of spiritual healer Don Craxton. Well, he is so impressed with a new kid in town that he wants to give him maximum exposure. And what better way to do that than to turn this very show into a faith healing session.

There are GASPS from the audience.

CAROL (CONT'D)

We'll hear from this person later, but for now will you please welcome Mr Don Craxton.

Don enters the stage to APPLAUSE as the band PLAYS and the singers sing a frenzied, atmospheric SONG.

DON

All right, are you ready to witness some miracles?

There are big CHEERS from the audience.

DON (CONT'D)

I said are you ready to witness some miracles?

More CHEERS.

DON (CONT'D)

Then no time to waste, let's go.

INT. THE CAROL CARTER SHOW - 15 MINUTES LATER

Don stands in front of a WOMAN on the stage, who is staring at her hands with a lit up face.

DON

Another miracle, praise the Lord.

The woman exits the stage as the band plays a celebratory TUNE and the audience APPLAUDS. Carol walks to the center.

CAROL

So Don, we are now going to introduce your new colleague for what will be his first time ever on live television.

There are excited OOOOHS from the audience.

DON

But I would not be inviting him to heal anyone if I did not have total faith in his abilities.

CAROL

So will you please give it up for Mr Dave Pearson?

Dave walks on to rapturous audience APPLAUSE, and shakes hands with Don and Carol.

CAROL (CONT'D)

So Dave, how are you feeling?

DAVE

(nicely)
A little nervous.

DON

Well, there's absolutely no need.

Carol takes a step back so Don can lead the proceedings.

DON (CONT'D)

Just so you can see how our gifts compare, we have selected two people with similar ailments and will each heal one of them. Are you ready Dave?

DAVE

I'm ready.

DON

So can we please have our next believers?

JACK and MARCIA (both in their 50s) are led onto the stage by an assistant who shows their names on a card to Don and Dave. Don turns to Jack.

DON (CONT'D)

So Jack, you have spinal arthritis. It hurts all over your body?

JACK

Yes.

DON

I want you to stand there for a moment and think just how painful it is.

(beat)

Now sit down.

Jack sits.

DON (CONT'D)

OK, spinal arthritis can actually shrink muscles and that's where the pain comes from.

Don raises each of Jack's legs in turn and rubs it.

DON (CONT'D)

Oh Lord, drive the demons of arthritis from your servant's body. In Jesus's name make his pain disappear.

(beat)

I see in your case the muscle shrinkage has made your right leg an inch or two shorter than your left.

(beat)

Oh Lord, relieve this man's suffering, cast out the arthritis, let his leg grow back to its natural length.

Don raises both of Jack's legs simultaneously, and when they are horizontal the left one seems to grow so that his two legs end up the same length.

DON (CONT'D)

Witness the miracle everyone.

There is APPLAUSE.

DON (CONT'D)

Now rise.

Jack rises.

DON (CONT'D)

Do you feel any pain?

JACK

No.

DON

So praise the Lord, and know that you need nothing but his mercy.

(beat)

OK Dave, now it's your turn.

Don and Jack walk to the side as Dave and Marcia come to the center.

DAVE
 (gently; less boisterous
 than Don)
 Marcia, I want you to think how
 much pain you are in from your
 arthritis.
 (beat)
 And now think of the merciful power
 of our Lord, find that inner peace
 that flows only from Him. And as
 you do that feel the pain slowly
 start to ebb away.
 (beat)
 Please sit down.

Marcia sits. Dave lifts each of her legs in turn (she is wearing trousers) and gently rubs them.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 And keep your thoughts on God, keep
 his love and mercy at the front of
 your mind.
 (beat)
 OK, I see that you too have one leg
 shorter than the other.
 (beat)
 Oh Lord, cast the arthritis from
 your servant Marcia's body, let her
 muscles be depressed no more.

Dave raises both of Marcia's legs, and when they are horizontal one apparently grows an inch or two like Jack's.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Her leg has grown, witness the
 miracle.

There is APPLAUSE.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Now rise.

Marcia stands up.

DAVE (CONT'D)
 Do you feel any pain?

MARCIA
 No.

DAVE
 So praise the Lord, and know that
 you need nothing but ...
 (change of tone)
 (MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

No, actually there is something you can do.

Don and the audience both look startled.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Go to your doctor and ask for some pain relief.

DON

(trying to keep calm)
That won't be necessary.

DAVE

Well, if you wake up tomorrow and it hurts again, do as I suggest.

Don gulps.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Also think about your lifestyle, maybe get some physiotherapy.

DON

You mean ask her to have less faith.

DAVE

No, if you find peace through God, pray to him, praise him.

DON

(sarcastically)
While resorting to your man-made remedies.

DAVE

Which God surely gave humans the intelligence to create.

(beat)

Look, I wish I could say you've been dramatically healed, but as I can't I'm offering you the best help I can.

DON

Then you're a fraud.

DAVE

Well, we healed these people in exactly the same way.

DON

Mine was for real.

DAVE

OK, can I suggest the two of you come back next week, Jack having done nothing and Marcia as I've suggested.

DON

(laughing)

There's no slot for us on the show.

CAROL

Oh, I think we can find the space.

Don silently scowls.

DAVE

So that's sorted.

(beat)

Oh, one other thing, could the two of you please wear big boots next week?

CAROL

Why do you ask that?

DAVE

Because they can't be pulled in and out on your feet like slip ons.

Don, Carol, Jack, Marcia and the entire audience look dumb-founded.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Paul sits watching The Carol Carter Show as we have just witnessed it. A wry grin comes across his face.

Suddenly the front doorbell RINGS. Paul rises and exits the living room.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Paul enters the hallway and answers the front door. A COURIER is standing on the other side.

COURIER

A letter for Dr Paul Fletcher.

PAUL

At this time of night?

COURIER

Special instructions not to deliver it a minute sooner.

Paul quickly signs for, and takes, the letter in an envelope.

PAUL

Thank you.

Paul shuts the door. He opens the envelope to find a letter along with another envelope. He reads the letter.

DAVE (V.O.)

Dear Paul, I am so sorry I was rude the other day but Don could have hidden microphones anywhere. I hope you're pleased with my assignment, though I honestly don't know what was harder: making Don believe I'd really been sucked in by him -- or convincing you that I had.

FLASHBACK

Paul and Dave stand in the secluded spot in Central Park.

PAUL

Don't you remember what he did to you?

DAVE

(philosophically)

I've just realized I have to look to the future, not the past.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVE (V.O.)

I can see how easily he could plant ideas in people's heads, but maybe I wasn't so bad at putting a few into his.

FLASHBACK

Don sits behind the desk in his study with Dave in front of it.

DAVE

I don't crave fame and fortune, but it would be nice to make the odd television appearance.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVE (V.O.)

But I was certain that as soon as I said I'd be on the television, you would be watching, no matter how much you disapproved. As for the second envelope, please open it after next week's show.

Paul begins to laugh. He is not loud, but he is very happy.

MONTAGE - AFTERMATH OF THE FOLLOWING WEEK'S CAROL CARTER SHOW

-- The news reporter seen earlier speaks to the camera from a studio.

NEWS REPORTER

People are asking if this isn't the biggest sting in television history after Dave Pearson humiliated Don Craxton on The Carol Carter Show.

-- In The Carol Carter Show, Dave stands by Marcia who stands quite upright while Don stands by Jack desperately trying to support him and make him look more comfortable than he is.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

The challenge was thrown down last week, and tonight Mr Pearson compared the wellbeing of someone Mr Craxton had supposedly healed with a person who had sought more conventional treatment.

-- Don attempts to surreptitiously lead Jack into a clinical building.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Things had already been going badly for Mr Craxton when he was caught last Monday attempting to take his candidate to a physiotherapist.

Just as Don and Jack are about to enter the building several PEOPLE suddenly jump in front of them with placards reading "Busted".

-- The news reporter in the studio.

NEWS REPORTER

He then threatened not to attend the show, but when he realized Mr Pearson might be there without him he came and attempted to mount a defense.

-- In the Carol Carter Show Don SPEAKS trying to rouse the audience, while rattling a money bucket in front of them.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

But the more he pleaded the more the audience turned against him.

The audience BOOS Don.

-- The news reporter in the studio.

NEWS REPORTER

But if things looked like they
might turn ugly, the session ended
with an upbeat feel ...

-- In The Carol Carter Show a host of leaflets fall from the ceiling.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

... when leaflets providing what
were described as "lessons for
life" fell as if from the sky.

-- A BEARDED MAN in the open air outside the studio stares at a leaflet after the show.

DAVE (V.O.)

"Life can be hard, and there aren't
always quick fixes to problems. But
don't let that blind you to its
beauty. If you care to look, you'll
be sure to find it."

The bearded man gazes at the sky, birds and trees.

-- Rob watches The Carol Carter Show on a television in his small living room. He raises an eyebrow as if to say "fair play to him".

-- A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN stands staring at a leaflet at the moment the event has finished, with some people still seated and others beginning to leave.

DAVE (V.O.)

"If you believe in God, keep him
close and he'll see you through.
But beware anyone claiming to grant
His favor in return for money."

At the same time, Dave, standing on the stage, gazes at the cell phone in his hand. He then looks up to the top of the studio to a large bag in the rigging that has just been used to release the leaflets.

Below a FAIR-HAIRED WOMAN (30s) sitting in the front row reads a leaflet.

DAVE (V.O.)

"If you want to find God, don't
think there's one single and right
way. You might start by asking if
you've really found those who are
near and dear to you."

The fair-haired woman looks up from reading it and finds herself staring Dave in the eye. They both smile nervously at each other, before breaking into bigger smiles.

-- A DARK-HAIRED MAN stares at a leaflet outside the studio.

DAVE (V.O.)

"Give to good causes as much as you can, but do it for those it will help, not for your own financial reward."

-- George watches The Carol Carter Show on his computer at home. He laughs.

GEORGE

Paul Fletcher, I don't know how much of your hand was in this, but I can certainly see your spirit.

-- Paul and Laura watch The Carol Carter Show in their living room. Paul opens the second envelope that Dave left him, and finds one of the leaflets. He and Laura read it.

DAVE (V.O.)

"Honor your departed loved ones. No matter how painful their loss feels, respect their memory by showing your love for those you do have around you."

PAUL

Now, there's one good piece of advice.

Laura smiles. Paul throws his arms around her. They hug, laugh and cry tears of joy.

INT. DON'S GRAND HOUSE - STUDY - DAY

Don sits behind his desk while an ACCOUNTANT (40s) sits in front of it, and Wesley stands to one side. The room is barer than before as many of the ornaments and pieces of furniture have gone. WORKERS lift two paintings off the wall and leave the room with them.

ACCOUNTANT

I'm saying your best option is to file for bankruptcy.

DON

(angry)

So there's nothing else you can do?

ACCOUNTANT

It's just in the past six months your income's fallen by seventy per cent, but your expenditure's barely changed.

DON
So if I cut what I spend ...

ACCOUNTANT
It's too late. It's file now and salvage something, or lose every last bit.

The accountant indicates the house they are in.

DON
(rising)
Get out.

ACCOUNTANT
This problem won't go away.

DON
But you will.

The accountant stands and scurries out of the room.

DON (CONT'D)
(to Wesley)
How could they do this to me?

WESLEY
Maybe you should start legal proceedings.

DON
With what? Besides, I can't sue Dave like I could have done Fletcher.

Don stares at a letter on his desk.

CLOSE UP on letter. It reads "Your payment of \$1,000,000 to Mr David Pearson did not go through, having been rejected by the recipient".

DON (CONT'D)
Funny how I've heard nothing about either recently.

WESLEY
Well, my research shows Paul has found a new lease of life at the university. He's published three academic papers, and is about to receive an award for physics.

DON
And Dave?

WESLEY

Still in New York. He's been quiet
in recent months, but it looks like
he's living with someone now.

DON

So after ruining my life they've
just got on with their's.

WESLEY

Sir, I hate to see you like this.
Is there really nothing you can do?

Don waves an arm to say "just leave". Wesley exits the room.

Don stands alone, and gazes around the room with tears in his
eyes. Then a somewhat calmer look comes over his face. He
sits down at his desk and takes a notebook from his jacket
pocket. He opens it to a page where, in large handwriting, it
reads "Spiritual healing".

Don gazes thoughtfully at the ceiling. He then puts a cross
through the words, turns the page to a fresh sheet and writes
"Miracle palm leaves".

Don puts the notebook back in his pocket as he raises an
eyebrow and leans back in his chair.

FADE OUT.

THE END