

Adverse City

based on true events

A struggling artist travels across New York City in search
of a new home.

1 EXT. LOWER MANHATTAN - MORNING 1

ROBIN MORRIS, 30, bikes down a moderately crowded street with nothing but a ratty MESSENGER BAG strapped to her back. She weaves between pedestrians, passes CITY HALL, then takes the ramp to the Brooklyn Bridge.

2 EXT. THE BLOCK - DAWN 2

Orange light streams between the buildings onto the neighborhood. The sun has just broken the horizon.

MUSIC plays from a loudspeaker somewhere as local residents dance and fellowship in a block party of sorts. LESLIE BOWMAN, 27, laughs it up with the boys, his dyed-black hair contrasting his pale denim jacket.

He cocks his head away from the group for a moment, noticing the faint sound of SIRENS in the distance.

Half a dozen NYPD squad cars showing lights speed into view. They arrive at the block accompanied by two police vans and two ambulances bringing up the rear.

Les and the rest of the party disbands. Around the neighborhood, residents watch in confusion and terror as thirty uniformed officers storm the street--each outfitted with varying combinations of helmets, riot gear, and automatic weapons.

3 INT. ROBIN'S BUILDING - DAY 3

At first glance, the building appears to be run-down and out of shape, almost as if it were condemned. Decayed siding and wallpaper exposes the cracked brick and concrete underneath. The floors are uneven and graffiti litters the walls.

PAIGE

Okay now tell me, what kind of work
has been done over the last 6
months?

PAIGE, 35, dressed in business attire, takes notes on a clipboard.

ROBIN

The residents have been working so hard restoring the walls, setting traps, we've even been able to restore lighting throughout most of the buildings.

Paige walks over to a sink and turns a knob. Nothing happens. Robin watches nervously.

Paige takes more notes on her clipboard, then wanders off to continue inspecting the building.

4 EXT. THE BLOCK - DAY

4

Paige steps out onto the sidewalk, finishing her notes on her clipboard. Robin follows her out.

ROBIN

Also, the whole block has gotten cleaner, not just the squatters. Ask anyone around, this place used to be covered in needles and dead rats, it was a health risk for everyone, but we really care about our home and we care about our neighborhood, and--

PAIGE

Robin. Relax.

(beat)

The building is in good shape. No sign of structural damage or infestation. No sign of imminent danger. You guys have done a lot of good work. I'll make sure the city knows.

Paige flashes a reassuring smile at Robin, then gets in a Department of Buildings fleet car.

5 EXT. PROSPECT PARK - MORNING

5

Robin whizzes by lush, dense greens on her bicycle. Her MESSENGER BAG flaps in the wind behind her. As she exits the park she notices a humble bike repair shop tucked between two restaurants.

6 INT. ROBIN'S BUILDING - DAY

6

Robin works on a bicycle sitting wheels-up on a work bench surrounded by rusty tools and scrap metal. She uses an old multi-tool to string a piece of wire through the front-tire brake. She cuts the wire, tightens the screws, then turns the bike over and wheels it back to its owner.

EDDIE

You're a miracle worker.

He tests the brakes, then hands Robin some cash.

ROBIN

Thanks, Eddie.

EDDIE

Thank you!

Eddie leaves and Robin tries to wipe the black stains off her hands with a dirty rag. She notices Les through the window, trying to line up a shot on his camera. She drops the rag and leaves the room.

7 INT. LESLIE'S BUILDING - EVENING

7

The inside of the building has been transformed into a gallery, photography hanging from every graffiti-covered wall.

Les picks out pieces of salvaged stereo equipment and old records from an overstuffed MESSENGER BAG and scatters them across the table. Robin leans over the table, watching him fiddle with the dusty machinery.

LES

Ah shit, what we got here?

ROBIN

Look, the arm here is still good.

LES

Yea. Hasn't been fried, either.
This one might get to live.

ROBIN
You can fix it?

Les stands up and starts to head out.

LES
Maybe. You gonna have the city come
inspect this too?

ROBIN
Whatever, Les.

LES
Your best friend from City Hall
told you it's a good idea to invite
her in for tea?

ROBIN
My best friend told me they can't
evict cause of the restraining
order and we might get to work out
a deal.

LES
And clearly you believed her.

ROBIN
Can you fix it or not?

Robin and Les meet each other eye-to-eye for a long brief
moment. He smirks.

LES
Maybe.

Les leaves the room. Robin rolls her eyes.

8 EXT. THE BLOCK - DAWN

8

Another dozen or so squad cars have arrived, accompanied by
at least a hundred additional uniformed officers. Police
have barricaded surrounding streets, creating a perimeter
with a 3-block radius surrounding the neighborhood.

Riot police flood the block. Some residents have taken
notice, watching from their window in fear. A local bangs a
street sign with a pipe in protest. He runs into the crowd
of helmets unleashing a can of silly string on the officers.

He is swiftly seized and detained.

9 INT. LESLIE'S BUILDING - EVENING

9

Music plays softly as locals and visitors curiously mill around the room, taking in the walls adorned with art.

Les watches over the action, lazily shuffling through a thick packet of papers.

LES

This is a shit ton of work.

ROBIN

Court said we have to do this and then--

LES

They'll let us have it? I won't hold my breath.

ROBIN

If we fix up the buildings they might, under adverse possession.

LES

What?

ROBIN

Are you gonna help? I can't do this all myself.

LES

Yea I'll get the whole building to help out. But not cause of this.

He holds up the papers from court and hands them back to Robin before mingling with visitors. Robin smiles.

10 EXT. EAST FLATBUSH - MORNING

10

Robin comes to a stop on her bicycle and rests for a moment, the MESSENGER BAG hanging from her shoulder. The building across the street from her has an eviction notice posted to the entrance. A rat squirms on a homemade glue trap by the door.

11 EXT. THE BLOCK - EVENING 11

Les returns home, walking up the sidewalk carrying his camera. On his way in he sees an eviction notice posted to the door. He rips it down in a rage.

12 INT. ROBIN'S BUILDING - EVENING 12

Les storms into Robin's repair shop, holding up the eviction notice.

LES

You see this? You happy now, after all we've done?

ROBIN

No I'm not fucking happy, you asshole.

LES

This is what happens when you bring them here, they take everything.

ROBIN

No she said she had our back, she said there was no sign of imminent danger.

LES

Like they fucking care!

ROBIN

What about your mom and pop, huh? Can they kick over a couple mil?

LES

Fuck off!

ROBIN

This is my only home, it's not a choice for some of us.

LES

What do we do? Go back to court and ask nicely while they lock us up?

Robin glares back at Les.

13 EXT. THE BLOCK - NIGHT

13

Robin and Les get to work mobilizing the neighborhood. Robin and a team of squatters from her building pass around leaflets to the locals and canvass the block.

Meanwhile Les and dozens of other squatters pull out all the large furniture from all four buildings and stack them into street barricades.

Inside each of the buildings, the squatters grind hinges off doors and weld entrances shut from the inside.

14 EXT. THE BLOCK - DAWN

14

Riot police keep pouring into the block but are unable to penetrate the furniture barricade. Elsewhere officers step on hidden boards with nails and other various booby traps laid out all around the street.

The entire block is awake. Sirens fill the air. Several dozen locals line the streets in protest, Robin and Les amongst them.

They bang on pots and trash can lids and street signs while jeering at the officers. The roar of the protesters grows deafening as cops are forced to retreat from the barricade.

15 EXT. THE BLOCK - DAWN

15

Orange light streams between the buildings onto the neighborhood. The sun has just broken the horizon.

Robin DJs on the salvaged stereo set, now fully functional. Listening on one side of a headset, she cues the next track, then mixes it in.

The MUSIC plays from a loudspeaker as local residents dance and fellowship in a block party of sorts. Les laughs it up with the boys, his dyed-black hair contrasting his pale denim jacket.

He cocks his head away from the group for a moment, noticing the faint sound of SIRENS in the distance.

Half a dozen NYPD squad cars showing lights speed into view. They arrive at the block accompanied by two police vans and two ambulances bringing up the rear.

Les and the rest of the party disbands. Around the neighborhood, residents watch in confusion and terror as thirty uniformed officers storm the street--each outfitted with varying combinations of helmets, riot gear, and automatic weapons.

16 EXT. THE BLOCK - MORNING

16

Helicopters circle the buildings overhead. An armored tank emblazoned with the NYPD shield tumbles down the street accompanied by two fire engines.

The tank crushes through the furniture barricade. The riot cops on the scene move back into action, charging the barricade and firing tear gas into the crowd.

Cops storm the door of Robin's building, the first dozen to get there falling over each other on a hidden sheet of flypaper--like rats in a trap.

The cops advance, bringing in battering rams against the welded doors. They slowly break their way in, all the while arresting anyone in their way.

Robin and Les watch as cops break through and file into her building. They give each other a look and Les runs off. She heads up the block away from the tank to a bicycle and her MESSENGER BAG laying in the street. She straps the bag and picks up the bike.

Locals form a human chain in front of Leslie's building. The cops pull them aside and arrest most of them before breaking in.

Dozens and dozens of officers rush into each building, breaking down each door inside, and taking control.

17 ARCHIVED FOOTAGE: MAYORAL PRESS CONFERENCE - MAY 30, 1995

17

MAYOR RUDY GIULIANI takes questions from reporters at City Hall.

RUDY GIULIANI

...the fact is you can't occupy city buildings and not pay rent, have them in the conditions that these buildings were in which were

dangerous... God forbid that something happens to these buildings, the first thing would have been the city would have been blamed for not doing something about it.

18 EXT. EAST NEW YORK - MORNING

18

Robin pulls up to a dilapidated, short, red brick building. The doors and windows are boarded up. The building appears empty. She gets off her bike and takes off the MESSENGER BAG, walking up to the building to get a good look.

Les pulls up to the same building on a bicycle of his own. They smile at each other for a moment. Six other bikes pull up to the building. They're home.

CUT TO BLACK

WORDS ON SCREEN:

On May 30, 1995, over 200 uniformed NYPD officers were deployed in the Lower East Side, acting on eviction orders for 541 and 545 East 13th.

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development later clarified police were acting on emergency vacation orders issued over a month earlier. The department claimed the buildings posed a danger to the community, citing evidence from a walk-through inspection conducted a week prior.

The order was carried out despite a local court ruling which found no evidence of imminent danger and granted the residents provisional ownership via adverse possession.

31 people were arrested.

THE END