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EXT. A DITCH - NIGHT

A full moon and crickets CHIRPING. Somewhere in the night, DANCE MUSIC is blaring, but here it's only a whisper with a beat.

Water trickles out of a jagged pipe. Splashing up mud, the riverlet weaves through hamburger wrappers and sunbleached beer cans, spent condoms and an old Rolling Stone.

The tiny stream ripples past glass and trash and the body of a woman. Face up, breathing. Dead grass caught in her braids. Her name is RONNA MARTIN. She's eighteen, black and bleeding.

Bleeding a lot.

She tries to push herself up, but the dirt around her crumbles. Her legs are useless. Despite it all, there's a smile of perverse joy to her face, like she's just remembered the punchline to a favorite joke.

CLAIRE (v.o.)
You know what I like best about
Christmas? The surprises.

CUT TO:

INT. A DARK PLACE - DAY? NIGHT?

Pitch black. We hear an ENGINE and ROAD NOISE.

CLAIRE (v.o., cont'd)
It's like, you get this box, and
you're sure you know what's in it.

SPARKS. A cigarette lighter flares.

We're in the trunk of a car with SIMON BAINES (22), a skinny Brit with surfer hair. He looks around, realizes where he is. Panicked, he starts POUNDING and KICKING.

CLAIRE (v.o., cont'd)
You shake it, you weigh it, and
you're totally convinced you have
it pegged. No doubt in your mind.

The lighter goes out. It's black again.

CUT TO:

INT. JAVA JUNCTION - DAY

A tiny cafe in Hollywood. CLAIRE MONTGOMERY (19) sits at a booth, hair wet and eyes wired. We keep tight on her as she talks to an unseen guest.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
But then you open it up, and it's
something completely different.
Bing! Wow! Bang! Surprise! I
mean, it's like you and me here.

She takes a sip of coffee, smiles. She has a bewitching smile.

CLAIRE
I'm not saying this is anything
it's not. But c'mon. This time
yesterday, who'dda thunk it?

CUT TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK:

Part One: 'X'

Christmas MUZAK plays. A baby CRIES.

FADE IN:

INT. RUNDOWN SUPERMARKET - DAY

A cash drawer slides shut.

On the far side of the checkout stand, a STRINGY HAired WOMAN counts food stamps. Her eyes are sunken, black. She's got a screaming BABY on her arm and two rambunctious BOYS in the cart. They're wearing pajamas and raincoats.

It's five a.m. and the store is almost empty.

Containers of frozen orange juice spin endlessly on the conveyor belt. Ronna Martin -- the girl in the ditch -- is bagging groceries.

Ronna
Paper or plastic?

She wears a green apron with a red "Yule Save More" button.

RONNA
Paper or plastic?

She's been working for fourteen hours, and it shows. Her intonation doesn't change at all.

RONNA
Paper or plastic?

STRINGY HAired WOMAN
Both.

Finally satisfied she has all her stamps, the Woman starts looking through the receipt. In the cart, the boys knock gum from the stand.

STRINGY HAired WOMAN
You didn't double my coupons.

RONNA
They're at the bottom. In red.
Where it says, double coupons.

She finishes one bag and starts another. The Woman is watching her carefully.

STRINGY HAired WOMAN
You can't do that. You can't put
Windex in the same bag as food.
It's poison.

Ronna fishes out the Windex and makes a big show of wrapping it in a plastic bag.

STRINGY HAired WOMAN
Don't think you're something
you're not. I used to have your
job.

Ronna puts the bag in the cart. Looks her dead in the eye.

RONNA
Look how far it got you.

INT. SUPERMARKET AISLE - DAY

Ronna pulls off her apron as she heads for the back. In the BACKGROUND, the Stringy Haired Woman is bitching to an overweight STORE MANAGER.

INT. STORE BREAK ROOM - DAY

Dark and dusty, with boxes of expired snack foods. Offscreen, a SOAP OPERA plays on TV.

MALE VOICE #1

Don't forget, detective. I was cleared of all charges.

MALE VOICE #2

I don't care how many high-priced lawyers you bring in. Eden Valley will never stand for your kind of scum.

By the clock on the timecard machine, it's seven a.m.

Ronna is asleep on the couch. A light sweeps over her as the outside door opens. It doesn't wake her.

Simon -- the skinny Brit from the trunk of the car -- sees Ronna asleep. Approaching quietly, he leans over her, his lips just an inch from hers. Her nose crinkles, smelling his breath. He almost kisses her, decides against it.

Instead he digs through her backpack, finally finding gum. He also finds a letter, which he skims. It's not good news.

He finishes to see Ronna awake and staring at him. He hands the letter over, embarrassed.

EXT. STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

Simon follows Ronna as she walks to the bus stop.

SIMON

They wouldn't evict you at Christmas. You'd be ho-ho-homeless.

She's ignoring him.

SIMON

Is that why all the overtime? How much do you owe?

RONNA

Three eighty.

SIMON

That's nothing.

RONNA

More than I got.

SIMON

I'll give you twenty right now for a
blowjob.

(off reaction)

Handjob?

He stops, letting her walk away. After a beat...

SIMON

(calling out)

Ronna! Do you want my shift?

She stops.

RONNA

Are you serious?

SIMON

I haven't punched in yet. I could
have 24 hour ebola. Switterman is so
short he'll have to you put you on.

She only half believes him. Simon's not prone to benevolence.

SIMON [cont'd]

Besides, I really want to go to Las
Vegas. I'm told it's extraordinary.
I could get a group of friends to go.

RONNA

You don't have friends, Simon.
You have a funny accent and a thin
coat of charm, that's all.

SIMON

Rather harsh for someone who's
doing you a favor.

RONNA

No, I'll take it. Thank you.

Beyond exhausted, she starts walking back to the store. After a
beat...

SIMON

Ronna? Are you certain I couldn't
have a blowjob?

RONNA

(finger and thumb)

Thin coat of charm.

INT. BREAK ROOM - DAY

Shedding her coat, Ronna retrieves her time card from the rack. Claire -- the girl from the coffee shop -- is sorting through old Corn Nuts.

CLAIRE
Ronna. Are you still here?

RONNA
24 hours, 7 days a week.

She slides the time card in. The machine BANGS down.

EXT. BEHIND A SUPERMARKET - DAY

Ronna shares a cigarette with MANNIE (17) and Claire. They're on break.

MANNIE
Judy Garland.

RONNA
George Peppard.

CLAIRE
P...P...Paul Lynne.

MANNIE
Lucille Ball.

We MOVE CLOCKWISE with a rapid, snooze-you-lose pace.

RONNA
Burt Lancaster.
(to Mannie)
Can you drive?

CLAIRE
L...L...

MANNIE
If you don't mind The Beast.

RONNA
I love The Beast.

CLAIRE
Lane Staley.
(off reaction)
Alice in Chains.

RONNA
He's not dead yet.

MANNIE
It's true.

CLAIRE
(substituting)
Laurence Olivier.

Ronna takes the cigarette from Mannie.

MANNIE
Omar Shariff.

RONNA
Steve McQueen.

CLAIRE
M...M...

MANNIE
Don't say Molly Ringwald.

CLAIRE
Marilyn Monroe.

MANNIE
Mickey Mantle.

RONNA
Shit! MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMalcolm X.

Claire just stands there confused, mouthing "X...X..." Mannie takes back the cigarette from Ronna.

CLAIRE
You can't say Malcolm X.

RONNA
He's famous, he's dead.

MANNIE
That's like a rule or something.
Nothing starts with X.

RONNA
That's not my problem.

MANNIE
(to Claire)
You can challenge.

CLAIRE

Okay, I challenge. Give me one dead
celebrity that starts with X.

Ronna takes the cigarette back from Mannie.

RONNA

This is bullshit. You're
conspiring against me.
(takes a drag)
I'm always working the fucking
register.

She's winning no sympathy. Mannie starts to hum the "Tic Tac
Dough" theme. She slugs him in the arm. Hard.

RONNA

X...X...There is one. I know I
thought of one before.

The door behind Claire suddenly opens, nearly smacking her. The
Store Manager squints in the light.

SWITTERMAN

Break was over four minutes ago.
Who's up front?

Claire looks at Mannie. Mannie looks at Ronna. Ronna crushes
the cigarette under her foot, resigned to martyrdom.

RONNA

I am.

INT. SUPERMARKET / CHECKOUT LANE- DAY

Ronna rips off a receipt, handing it to a CLUTCHY OLD WOMAN.
Starts scanning someone else's groceries. Mannie is digging out
returns from under Ronna's checkstand. He suddenly looks up.

MANNIE

Xerxes.

RONNA

What?

MANNIE

Xerxes. Some dead pharaoh guy.
Starts with X.

RONNA

That wasn't it. I never heard of
fucking "Xerxes."

MANNIE

Pharaoh coulda saved your ass.

Mannie pushes his cart down to the next checkstand.

VOICE (o.s.)

There's an opera about him.

Ronna looks up at the customer, a HANDSOME COLLEGE GUY. He's cute in that fresh-scrubbed, Midwestern way.

ADAM

Xerxes. I took music appreciation twice.

ON RONNA

Whatever.

Adam's friend ZACK is behind him in line, YABBERING into a cellular phone. Ronna hits total. \$25.12. Adam hands her a credit card. She swipes it through the machine and starts bagging his groceries.

ADAM

Betcha wonder why we're buying all this orange juice.

RONNA

Scurvy?

Zack is suddenly all aflurry.

ZACK

Hold up Hold up Hold up.

(to Adam)

He can't get it. I mean, he's got it, but he's stuck in Chicago. There's a blizzard or something.

ADAM

Shit.

He stops to think for a moment. Another moment. Ronna is half-watching. Finally he looks over at her sheepishly.

RONNA

You wanna return the o.j., don't you?

ADAM

Sorry.

She starts to cancel out the register. Zack looks over at Adam, then to Ronna.

ZACK

Say...

(checks nametag)

Ronna. You don't know where we could get something to get with this orange juice, do you?

RONNA

Doughnuts, aisle four.

ZACK

But then you get the weird taste in your mouth. I was thinking something a little more euphoric.

She stops scanning. Looks at Adam. At Zack.

RONNA

How much?

ADAM

Twenty at twenty.

RONNA

You're overpaying.

ZACK

We're desperate. A bunch of us are going to this party tonight, this warehouse thing...

He pulls out a postcard-sized invite. Bright colors, slick printing...

RONNA

Mary Xmas Superfest.

ADAM

You're going?

ZACK

And we had planned this kinda pre-party. Only there's 20 of us, it's like all or nothing.

Switterman walks down the end of the aisle, headed for the manager's desk. All three watch him pass. It gives Ronna a beat to think. She hands Zack a post-it note and a pen.

RONNA
Gimme a number. Let me see what I
can do.

ZACK
Kick ass.

Adam smiles. It's a nice smile. Even Ronna notices.

RONNA
So do you want the o.j. or not?

ADAM
Yeah. Sorry.

Clearing the register once again, she starts re-scanning.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

6:32 P.M.

INT. MANNIE'S CAR / PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Beast is Mannie's pride and joy, a late-70's Toyota held together with duct tape and prayer. It's outfitted for the season with Christmas lights lining the windshield and back window. Santa has replaced Jesus on the dashboard.

Ronna climbs in the passenger door, counting a stack of 20's fresh from the ATM. Claire's in back.

CLAIRE
You know that Simon's in Vegas.

RONNA
I don't need Simon. I'm going to
Todd.

MANNIE
Todd GAINES?

CLAIRE
Who's Todd Gaines?

MANNIE
Simon's dealer.

Claire sits forward in the seat, suddenly worried.

CLAIRE
You can't do that, can you? I
mean, go around Simon.

She looks at Mannie. He shrugs, unsure.

RONNA

Ok, listen up. If Simon were here -- which he's not -- he would charge fifteen, when I know he gets it for ten. Times twenty hits, that's a hundred bucks I'd be pissing out my dick.

MANNIE

But it's like an evolutionary leap. You're moving up the drug food chain. Without permission.

CLAIRE

Ronna, you shouldn't do this.

Ronna pockets the cash. Mannie's about to say something when she stops him.

RONNA

Both of you chill the fuck out. It's just once. When Simon gets back, we can still overpay for quarters if it makes you feel all warm and happy. But this is my deal, so just sit back and watch.

Mannie and Claire remain unconvinced. Ronna reaches for the keys, CRANKING the ignition even though Mannie's driving. The ENGINE purrs.

RONNA (cont'd)

Besides, Todd likes me. This won't be any problem.

A BUZZER sounds.

EXT. DOORSTEP - NIGHT

Ronna stands by the intercom of a two-story walkup in Hollywood. Waiting, she looks back to the street, where The Beast sits idle at the curb.

INTERCOM VOICE

Speak!

RONNA

Todd! It's Ronna Martin. You know me through Simon.

A long pause.

INTERCOM VOICE

Yeah?

RONNA

Can I come up?

Another long pause. Ronna looks back at The Beast, embarrassed. Finally the door BUZZES and a latch CLICKS open. Stairs lead up. She motions back "five minutes" to The Beast.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Three out of four lights are burned out in the hallway.

A few feet ahead of Ronna, a door stands partly ajar. A weird red-and-green light spills out through the crack, along with an Alice in Chains SONG.

INT. APARTMENT / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ronna pushes the door open from the hallway.

RONNA

Todd?

Shades drawn, the room is completely insulated from reality. The light bulbs have been marked over, casting eerie pools of red and green light. Broken CD's dangle off a tiny Christmas tree by the stereo. Slacker seasonalism.

GAINES (o.s.)

Don't let the cat out.

Ronna closes the door behind her.

TODD GAINES emerges from the darkened bedroom, tying the string on a pair of sweat pants. That's all he's wearing.

GAINES

Hey Ronna.

RONNA

I didn't wake you up, did I?

GAINES

Nah.

He settles into an overstuffed couch and lights a Marlboro. Adjusts himself in the crotch. Motions for her to take a chair. She's more nervous than she wants to let on.

GAINES

I thought you were still buying quarters off Simon. Least what Simon pretends are quarters.

RONNA

I keep him honest.

GAINES

At that level you're supposed to pinch. It's the economics of it.

IN THE BACKGROUND

A WOMAN with a ballerina's body comes out of the bedroom. She tucks an unrealistically large breast down into her tight top.

GAINES

You leaving?

She leans over the back of the sofa for quick, tonguey kiss. In a sneak attack, she shoves a Santa's hat down to his ears. He bats the white pom out of his eyes.

GAINES

Be good.

The woman is out the door without a word. Gaines looks back over a Ronna, not the least bit self-conscious about the hat.

GAINES

I take it this is not a social call.

RONNA

I need a favor.

GAINES

A favor? Wow. I didn't know we were such good friends, Ronna. Because if we were, you would know I give head before I give favors. I don't even give my best friends head, so the chance of your getting a favor right now are pretty fucking slim.

(beat)

You might try just telling me what you want to buy.

RONNA

Twenty hits of ecstasy.

He takes a deep drag on the cigarette, looking at her. Blows the smoke out. He picks up a remote control. Aims it at the stereo.

CLOSE UP

The volume meter, climbing fast.
Out of the green, into the red.
The MUSIC is deafening.

ON GAINES

On top of Ronna, face in her ear. His hand wraps around her head, holding her tight. We can't HEAR what he's saying. Ronna's eyes betray her fear.

He backs off. She looks confused.

He nods. Do it.

The MUSIC still BLARING, she stands and slowly unbuttons her shirt. Takes it off -- very self-consciously. Pulls her t-shirt off over her head. Just her bra underneath. He motions for her to turn around. She does, then back.

Her hands are shaking. She holds them together.

Gaines aims the remote at the stereo. The MUSIC retreats.

GAINES

You come here out of the blue asking
for twenty hits. Just so happens
twenty is the magic number where
intent to sell becomes trafficking.

RONNA

Todd, I would never fuck you like
that.

GAINES

How would you fuck me? Would you
strap it on?

He climbs over the sofa to a dresser. In a drawer, he digs down through a pile of socks to find a wide-mouthed bottle. And an empty Tylenol bottle. Blows out the dust.

GAINES

What's the occasion?

RONNA

There's this big Christmas party
thing. Warehouse, you know. A
bunch of us are doing sort of a
pre-party thing.

GAINES

Friends of yours. You're not going to go and try to sell this on me, are you?

RONNA

No.

GAINES

You're not dealing.

RONNA

Swear to God.

He transfers pills from the big bottle to the Tylenol bottle.

GAINES

This is the real thing. Pharmaceutical grade, not that crunchy herbal rave shit. Don't let anyone double dose or you'll be frying eggs off 'em in the emergency room. One hit per headbanger.

RONNA

Understood.

He snaps the cap on tight.

GAINES

Twenty at fifteen is 300.

RONNA

Fifteen? I was thinking more like ten.

GAINES

You already did strap it on.

RONNA

It's just that I know you charge Simon ten.

GAINES

Inflation's a bitch.

He offers it to Ronna, who doesn't reach out for it.

RONNA

Here's the deal. There's 20 of us. I need all of this. But I only have two hundred. I mean, that's all I have.

Gaines undoes the cap the cap of the bottle, starts pouring the pills back out.

RONNA (cont'd)

No, hear me out. This two-hundred is like a downpayment. You give me the stuff, I get the extra hundred from them, then I come right back and pay you.

GAINES

See, that would be doing you a favor, and you know how I feel about favors.

RONNA

I could leave something with you. Collateral.

He gives her a quick look over.

GAINES

I already got a fucking Swatch. I need something I know you'll come back for.

Ronna looks at the Tylenol bottle in his hands. Thinking...

EXT. THE BEAST - NIGHT

Ronna kneels down beside the passenger window. Knocks on the glass. Claire rolls down the window. MUSIC spills out.

RONNA

Claire, could you come up with me for a sec?

EXT. DOORSTEP - NIGHT

The release BUZZER stops as Ronna pulls open the door to the stairs. Claire just stands there, disbelieving, making no motion to go in.

RONNA
 Forty-five minutes. Hour, tops.
 You just have to sit there.

CLAIRE
 Hello! He's a drug dealer.

RONNA
 Jesus, Claire. Don't get 818 on
 me here. How much shit have I
 done for you? This is nothing.

CLAIRE
 No. No! You're making me an
 accessory.

RONNA
 Claire. That belt of mine you're
 wearing is an accessory. You are
 just some chick who's sitting in an
 apartment. That's it.

They trade stares. It's not just the matter at hand, but years
 of minor adjustment and one-upsmanship. Ronna finally drops the
 bravado.

RONNA
 Okay, no bullshit. I need this. I
 don't get this money, I get evicted.
 My ass is out on the street...

CLAIRE
 (interrupting)
 You could...

RONNA
 (stopping her)
 I don't have anyone else to go to.
 I am coming to you and I am asking
 for your help. Please. Help me.

A beat.

CLAIRE
 Forty-five minutes. That's like
 eight o'clock.

RONNA
 We'll be back by eight, I promise.

Ronna holds the door as Claire reluctantly steps inside.

CUT TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK:

8:04 P.M.

RONNA (v.o.)
Is this it? Are you sure?

INT. MANNIE'S CAR - NIGHT

ENGINE running, The Beast is parked along a residential street in Venice. In the driver's seat, Mannie looks for an address.

MANNIE
Six-forty-four. Jesus, next time
ask for directions.

He kills the engine. Ronna does a quick face-check in the rear view mirror. She's out the door, moving a hundred miles an hour.

MANNIE
Ronna!

She looks back in. Mannie shakes the Tylenol bottle she forgot. Tosses them to her.

MANNIE
You're a pro.

RONNA
I'm a top-seeded amateur.

She pockets the bottle. SLAMS the door. Mannie tracks her as she circles the car.

MANNIE
And I'm a very happy man.

In his palm, two tablets. He works up a good gob of spit, then swallows them both. They're bitter as hell.

INT. VENICE HOUSE / MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

A BEEFY GUY in a UCLA sweatshirt reaches out a hand.

BURKE
Damn good to meet you, Rhonda.

RONNA
Ronna.

BURKE

Ronna. When I heard Philly got snowed in, I thought we were fucked for sure. Glad we found you.

Her PAGER goes off, a shrill CRY. She quiets it, checks the number. Burke smiles.

BURKE

Work work work. Friday must be a busy night.

RONNA

That was just a friend.

Only now do we TURN to see Adam and Zack standing nearby, trying to look cool. Their house is spartan even by frat-boy standards, just goodwill furniture and as-is Ikea.

BURKE (o.s.)

Hey. What can I get you to drink?

RONNA

O.J.'s fine.

BURKE

Civil or criminal?

RONNA

(beat)

In a glass.

Burke does a hepcat swing through the kitchen door, leaving Ronna alone with Adam and Zack.

ZACK

So this party tonight sounds like it's gonna be huge.

ADAM

I heard Traci Lords is one of the promoters.

ZACK

She is a fucking entrepreneur.

BURKE (o.s.; yelling)

Ronna hun, we are fresh out of o.j...

Adam looks at Zack. Ronna catches it.

BURKE (cont'd)
 (back thru door)
 Corona?

He hands her a beer.

ADAM
 (to Burke)
 Oh yeah. Hey. We bought a whole bunch
 of Tropicana. It's in the car.

ANGLE ON RONNA

watching them with a lion tamer's concentration. Burke looks
 back over at her.

BURKE
 Now, Zack tells me you got 20 at 20,
 is that right?

RONNA
 (suddenly)
 You got a bathroom?

ADAM
 Down the hall on the right.

ZACK
 Let me show you...

He moves at Ronna strangely. It freaks her out.

BURKE
 Maybe we could do this first.

Burke shoots Adam a look. Ronna's already headed down the hall.
 They wait silently until Ronna's out of earshot.

BURKE
 What was that?

ADAM
 We said Chicago. You said Philadelphia.

BURKE
 It is Philadelphia. It's always
 Philadelphia.

NEW ANGLE / BLACK AND WHITE VIDEOTAPE

We're looking down on wide-angle view of the entire room -- a
 surveillance camera.

ADAM (filtered)
Maybe she didn't notice.

Burke walks off camera, headed for the hall. Zack hangs his head. Adam looks up at the camera.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE UP: Ronna locks the door.

She leans back against the frame, panicking.
She turns on both faucets.
She checks the window.
Nailed shut.

She looks at herself in the spotless mirror.

RONNA
You're fine. You're fine.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Burke leans up against the outside of the door, listening.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

She pulls the Tylenol bottle out of her pocket.
She looks down at the toilet.

Hesitating, until...

A KNOCK on the door.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

BURKE
Everything all right in there?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ronna's heart is in her throat.

CU: The handle, rocking back and forth, locked.

RONNA
Fine.

She struggles with the cap.

Child safety.
 It finally POPS open.
 A few pills scatter on the carpet.

She dumps the contents into the toilet.
 FLUSHES.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Burke hears it. Freaks out.
 Rifles through the keys on his belt.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ronna's on all fours, searching for spilled pills.
 She tosses them into the swirling water.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

CU: The hole in the center of the door knob. A thin allen
 wrench slips in.

Burke forces the door open to reveal

RONNA

standing with her beer, cool as an Eskimo.

RONNA

All yours.

She pushes past him into the hall.

INT. MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Ronna is headed for the front door. Following behind her, Burke
 waves at Adam -- BLOCK THAT DOOR!

Adam steps in her way.

BURKE

Ronna, hun, do we got a deal here
 or not?

RONNA

(turns,
 backing away)

No. No, see we don't. That's
 what I came here to tell you. I
 couldn't get anything.

She bumps back into Adam at the door. Burke is closing in.

BURKE
C'mon, resourceful girl like you?
I don't believe it.

RONNA
It's true.

BURKE
I just want to make a deal here,
Ronna. Can we make a deal?

RONNA
Who the fuck are you? Monty Hall?

Zack chokes a laugh. Burke stares right through her. Ronna swigs her beer like a trucker.

RONNA
Did you know I'm only 17?

BLACK AND WHITE / SURVEILLANCE CAMERA

RONNA (filtered)
I probably shouldn't be drinking
this beer, should I? Being so
underage and all.

The men just stand there, watching.

BACK TO COLOR

CU: Burke, dumbstruck. He nods at Adam.

Adam steps away from the door.

Ronna backs her way out the door, never taking her eyes off them.
The door CLOSES.

A BEAT. Adam and Zack await the fury. Burke looks up at the
surveillance camera.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT (NORMAL)

A white guy with dreadlocks comes out of a locked door. His name
is LOOP.

LOOP
Man, I don't know what happened,
it's like the machine just ate the
tape.

He cracks a videotape against the doorframe, pulling out the innards.

CUT TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK:

8:27 P.M.

MANNIE (v.o.)
Why would they go after you?

EXT/INT. THE BEAST ON STREET - NIGHT

The car is parked on the side of another residential street. The hazards are FLASHING.

RONNA
I think it was Simon they were after. He deals all the time out of the store. I mean, he makes change out of the fucking register.

MANNIE
They didn't know who was dealing, just that it was someone at the store?

RONNA
They were fishing. I bit.

Ronna's PAGER goes off with a shrill BEEPING. She checks the number.

RONNA
It's Claire. She paged me while I was in there.

MANNIE
We go back to Todd. Tell him they didn't show up, whatever. And then just swap the pills for Claire.

RONNA
We can't.

MANNIE
Why not?

RONNA
They're gone. I flushed them.

MANNIE

Oh shit.

RONNA

Think of something. I need a
hundred bucks or 20 hits of X.

A long silent beat as both put on their thinking caps. Mannie tries to beat down a smile that curls the edges of his lips. He clenches his jaw, trying to keep it in.

RONNA

What?!

She turns his chin to hold his eyes to the light. They're wild and dilated.

RONNA

You took one, didn't you? Fuck
you, Mannie! How could you do
this to me? I need you now.

He sits quietly, a scolded dog.

RONNA

Drive.

MANNIE

Where?

RONNA

Just drive. I have an idea.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

A sign over the entrance reads "Yule Save More." Christmas MUSAK blares "Jingle Bell Rock" overhead.

The automatic doors slide open to reveal Ronna and Mannie, who split up. We follow Ronna, who is now wearing Mannie's black trench coat. The store is almost empty, with STOCKMEN beginning to unload palettes.

Ronna turns down an aisle marked "Soap/Shampoo/Drugs."

INT. AT THE MANAGER'S COUNTER - NIGHT

Mannie scans his hand on a UPC register, watching the laser on his fingers, listening to it BWOOP. He smiles broadly at an idle REGISTER WOMAN, who doesn't even look up. He then ducks down behind the counter.

A CRAPPY CD PLAYER

spins away. He presses the "◀◀" button, then cranks the volume dial all the way up.

The opening FLOURISHES of "Jingle Bell Rock" BLAST through the PA system.

INT. AT CHECKSTAND - NIGHT

The Register Woman looks up.

INT. AN AISLE - NIGHT

Two STOCKBOYS look up.

INT. DRUG AISLE - NIGHT

A COUPON-WIELDING WOMAN looks up, confused, but proceeds to push her cart around the end of the row.

Ronna looks both ways. She's alone.

She starts grabbing boxes off the shelf and shoving them into the pockets of Mannie's coat. Cold medicine. Allergy medicine. Every pill she can find.

SWITTERMAN

comes ROARING by behind her, heading for the front. She tries to duck away, but he's too steamed to even notice her.

Ronna does a quick check to see if she got everything. Hurrying down the aisle, she swipes a bottle of Evian.

INT. END OF ANOTHER AISLE - NIGHT

The two stockboys give a wide-eyed, Spielberg™ stare...

We MOVE to the next aisle, where the Coupon Woman is staring at the same thing...

We MOVE again to

RONNA

at the end of her aisle. She just now sees it...

INT. FRONT OF THE STORE - NIGHT

CU: Mannie. He sticks his hand out.

CU: The Register Woman. She sticks her hand out.

Their palms meet. Their hips come together.

And they dance.

What starts as a tango, spirals into a STAR SEARCH-y routine of dips, spins and Arthur Murray nightmares. Torville and Dean on linoleum.

The stockboys watch, horrified but transfixed.
The Coupon Woman taps her shoe against the wheel of her cart.

ANGLE ON MANNIE

dancing his heart out. His face is red and dripping sweat.
He's too out of it to notice.

HIS POINT OF VIEW

a JET ENGINE ROAR, swirling light. The MUSIC is stacked up on itself, overlapping and bizarre. For just a moment, horrifying.

ANGLE ON MANNIE

he stops mid-twirl. Holding himself against a magazine rack.
Ronna takes him by the shoulder.

MANNIE'S POINT OF VIEW

Ronna leans into a fish-eye swirl. The ROAR grows louder,
continuing as we

CUT TO:

TITLE OVER BLACK:

9:17 P.M.

INT. THE BEAST / DRIVING - NIGHT (PROCESS)

Behind the wheel, Ronna's ripping open boxes of medication.
Cracking open jars, she spills the tablets out on her hand.

RONNA
Were they round or oval?

MANNIE
 (recovering)
 Round. White. Like aspirin.
 Like baby aspirin.

She digs through the pockets of the coat, seeing what else she grabbed. Her BEEPER goes off. She hits it to make it stop.

She pops an allergy pill out of its blister pack. Compares it to another pill, almost the same.

RONNA
 (holding them up)
 A or B?

MANNIE
 B.

RONNA
 You're sure?

MANNIE
 I wasn't really looking.

Making a decision, Ronna starts popping the rest of the pills out of the blister pack, dumping them into the Tylenol bottle.

Her BEEPER goes off again.

RONNA
 Stop fucking paging me, Claire!

Mannie nurses the Evian bottle.

A PHONE rings.

INT. GAINES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gaines picks up the receiver, clicking the remote to mute the CD player. He's still shirtless and wearing the Santa Claus hat.

GAINES
 (on phone)
 Speak!...Just licking my dick,
 whazzup with you?...Yeah...The
 Boom Room, you'll have to look it
 up...I don't know what I'm up to.
 (to Claire)
 Where's this party at?

Claire is sitting in the corner, holding herself very still.

She digs a postcard-ish invite out of her purse. He snaps his fingers. She hands it over.

GAINES

(on phone)

It's called "Mary Xmas." Mary like a chick...Like her name is Mary, not like you marry her. You fucking moron...I dunno, some warehouse shit.

(to Claire)

Is this gonna be cool?

CLAIRE

Yeah, I guess.

GAINES

(on phone)

My friend Claire here says it's going to be a kick-ass-fucking-time...What, you know her?

(to Claire)

It's your buddy Simon. He's in Vegas.

CLAIRE

I know.

GAINES

She knows...Hell, I dunno...

(looks at
Claire)

Maybe...Yeah, well save a load for me big boy...Whatever.

He hangs up. The CD player is still muted. The silence is vast. Gaines scratches an armpit. Checks his watch. Claire looks away.

GAINES

What do you want for Christmas, Claire?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

GAINES

Do you want to get laid?

CLAIRE

No.

GAINES

No, you don't wanna get laid or
no, you do, but you don't want to
get laid with me?

CLAIRE

You can't answer that. I mean,
it's like...

GAINES

Either way you're fucked. Where
are they, Claire?

CLAIRE

They'll be here.

GAINES

They'll be here. Huh.

He gestures like he's going to click on the CD player, but
instead points it at her.

GAINES

Are you a virgin?

CLAIRE

What?

GAINES

C'mon, Claire. Answer the
question. Answer the question,
Claire.

She doesn't say anything. Gaines laughs his ass off.

CLAIRE

Breakfast Club. I get it.

GAINES

Look at me. I want to show you
something.

She looks back over at him. He slowly undoes the drawstring to
his sweat pants. Starts to reach inside. Claire watches,
revolted and disbelieving. A beat.

GAINES

I'm kidding!

His hand reaches between the cushions of the couch, where he
pulls out a 9mm handgun.

GAINES
I'm not kidding. Where the fuck
are they, Claire?

The gun pointed at her, Claire is losing her shit. Her face squeezes tight, like her head's being sucked through a tiny hole. Just when she's about to pop...

The BUZZER sounds.

Saved by the bell.

Gaines pushes the TALK button on the intercom.

GAINES
Speak!

FILTERED VOICE
It's Ronna!

Smiling, Gaines hits the DOOR button. Claire collects her wits.

INT. THE STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Climbing the stairs, Ronna looks back at Mannie.

RONNA
Don't say anything. And try not
to look so stoned.

He nods, wiping a finger across his forehead to squeegee off the sweat.

INT. GAINES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gaines sits pensively on the edge of the couch, then smiles warmly.

GAINES
That's no problem. These things
happen, I understand that.

Claire smiles, relieved. She and Mannie are standing behind Ronna.

GAINES (cont'd)
Let me just fill out a return slip
here, and I'll have the manager
give you a refund.

RONNA

Todd, I'm trying to explain what happened. They had already gotten stuff from somewhere else. It was just a case of miscommunication, I thought...

Ronna's VOICE fades to nothing as we PUSH IN on Mannie.

A SIAMESE CAT

lays down on a table in front of him, staring at him.

HUXLEY [SUBTITLES]

I can hear your thoughts.

Mannie squints, looks around. He and the cat are alone in the room.

HUXLEY [SUBTITLES, ONE AT A TIME]

Xiang Kai-Shek.
Famous Chinese ruler guy.
Starts with X.

Mannie smiles.

MANNIE [SUBTITLES]

No. "C"
Chiang Kai-Shek.

The cat curls itself.

HUXLEY [SUBTITLES]

You're going to die.

Mannie snaps back, eyes panicked.

It's a few minutes later. Everyone's in different places, different moods.

GAINES

(handing back cash)
I'm keeping fifty. Call it interest.

RONNA

That's fine. Todd, I'm really sorry about all this.

Claire pulls Mannie towards the door.

GAINES

Hey Ronna.
 (shakes pill
 bottle)
 I just gave you a favor.

RONNA

(a smile)
 And here I thought you just gave
 me head.

They trade a look as she exits. Gaines picks up the cat, gives it a scratch. Silly humans.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Mannie lies on the roof of The Beast, arms spread wide, cigarette in his fingers.

Ronna sucks in deeply on a joint. Holds in the smoke.

She passes the joint to Claire, who almost inhales it.

The girls sit facing each other on the asphalt, neither wanting to exhale first. Hands waving, Claire struggles to keep herself from laughing and choking. Finally she gives in, coughing up smoke and snot.

RONNA

Forgiven?

CLAIRE

Forgiven.

They bonk foreheads, ritual. Ronna pulls out a wreath of plastic holly.

RONNA

Pin me.

She leans down to let Claire pin the holly in a crown around and through her hair.

CLAIRE

Okay, at the risk of sounding like. You know. Me. What are you gonna do about getting evicted? You're still short, aren't you?

RONNA

Watch and learn.

EXT. FIELD / PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ronna and Claire weave through the densely packed lot, where RAVE-GOERS party in and around their cars, drinking and smoking.

As they walk, Ronna pops allergy medicine out of a blister-foil pack. She tosses the box on the pavement. Scanning the lot, she points to a mini-van.

EXT. AT THE MINIVAN - NIGHT

Ronna knocks on the window. A NERVOUS TEENAGER rolls it down, releasing a cloud of smoke. Ronna smiles.

RONNA

Hi. I'm Kelly, and this is Donna.
We were wondering if you might
want to hang out.

INT. THE MINIVAN - NIGHT

Ronna and Claire are packed in tight with three VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL COUPLES. The guys are stoned, the girls uptight. They're all breaking curfew.

FILA GUY

I think I feel something.

RONNA

It's really smooth, isn't it?
Donna's brother is a pharmacist.
He got it for us.

CLAIRE

Chip. His name is Chip. My
brother.

Ronna shoots a look over to Claire, trying not to smile.

NIKE HAT

Is it like a wave, or is it like a
zoom?

FILA GUY

It's like floating. Like, "Hey
down there, how's the ground and
shit."

NIKE HAT

I got it. Oh, fuck. Yeah, I feel
it.

ANOREXIC GIRL
Is it really that cool?

FILA GUY
You gotta try it. Shit, I'll buy
for you.

He pulls out his wallet and hands Ronna a twenty. She gives the Anorexic Girl a tablet, who downs the pill with a swig of Diet Coke.

RONNA
And you know what makes it even
better? If you smoke a lot of
pot. I mean a lot of it.

Fila Guy nods, firing up the mini-bong again.

Claire can't help but laugh, trying to cover it by COUGHING. She leans into Ronna, who pats her on the back.

EXT. LINE OUTSIDE A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Mannie leans against a wall, pale and out of it, a nauseated smile on his face. Claire holds Ronna tight, giggling.

CLAIRE
(low)
I can't believe you are selling
allergy medicine.

RONNA
We're out of that. We're down to
chewable aspirin.

A SKATE-PUNK GUY comes up to them, money in hand.

SKATE-PUNK GUY
Hey. People are saying you have
some really good stuff.

Ronna takes the money, looks him over.

RONNA
Show me your tits.

A beat. He pulls up his shirt to show his skinny white chest. The girls deem him worthy. Ronna hands him a pill and sends him on his way. She adds the twenty to her stack.

CLAIRE
How much have you made?

RONNA
Four hundred.

The opening RUMBLES of an industrial ANTHEM rise as we cut to:

INT. GAINES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

MUSIC builds throughout.

Standing at the dresser, Gaines cracks open Ronna's bottle.
Pills spill out on a plate.
He counts them, pushing them aside in groups with a card.
Stops.
Picks one up. Looks at it more closely...

Pulls open a drawer full of socks.
Digs out the wide-mouthed bottle.
Shakes out a pill.
Flicks on a desk lamp.
Looks at both pills in his hand, comparing...

Fuck.

He flips over the card on the dresser.
Mary Xmas.
The invite Claire gave him.

With a sudden RAGE, he WINGS the plate against the far wall.
It SHATTERS.

The music EXPLODES and we're...

INT. WAREHOUSE / MARY XMAS SUPERFEST - NIGHT

A grinding, sweating sea of humanity. In the mosh pit,
SKINHEADS and coked-up POSEURS run in blind circles. A stringy-
haired EYELINER BOY crashes into

RONNA

who had her own groove going. She shoves him back into the
wheel, a foot on his ass.

Claire, behind her, YELLS something in her ear. We can't hear a
thing. But Ronna nods, downing the rest of her drink. Claire
takes the cup and heads out of the crowd.

Both hands free, Ronna pushes her way deeper into the eye of the
storm. She adjusts her holly crown.

She's sky high and loving every minute of it.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The line to get in is longer still, snaking down the wall. Fila Guy is talking to a friend in a SPIDER MARINE shirt.

FILA GUY
This girl inside. She and her
friend have it.

SPIDER MARINE
Ecstasy? The real shit?

FILA GUY
Pharmaceutical grade. None of
the crunchy herbal rave shit.

ANOREXIA GIRL
Best twenty bucks you could
spend.

We look past Fila Guy to see Todd Gaines, who's been listening. Seething.

INT. BY THE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Sweating hard, Mannie is pressed back against a pole, shirt over his head. Two nose-ringed RIOT GRRRLS are drawing a Christmas tree on his chest and stomach with a fat magic marker.

Looking over at the entrance, he watches some GAPSTERS move past the BOUNCERS. And behind them,

TODD GAINES.

Mannie's drugged eyes go wide with panic. He hunches down. Gaines starts looking around the edge of the crowd. Mannie works his way into the mob.

STROBES fire overhead as we enter SLOW MOTION:

Ronna dances on, oblivious...

Gaines circles, searching...

Mannie fights his way through the outer ring of MOSHERS...

Through the crowd, we see Gaines looking in...

Mannie grabs Ronna...

She smiles, tries to kiss him...

He YELLS in her ear. He has to repeat himself...

RONNA

Listen to me. We're going to find
Claire and get out of here.

EXT. ALLEY / DUMPSTERS - NIGHT

Ronna half-carries Mannie down the alley. He's too heavy to lift, and too out of it to go much further. He collapses to his knees. She can't get him back up.

Without warning, he HEAVES. We hear the SPLASH on the asphalt.

She props his head back against a dumpster. Wipes his face.

RONNA

Sweetheart. Mannie. I'm going to
leave you here. I'm going to get
the car and come back for you.

She fishes the keys out of his pocket. Mannie grabs onto her arm, tight.

RONNA

I can't carry you! Mannie, just
hide here. Just like a little
mouse, okay? You're going to be
fine. Ain't nobody leaving.

She pushes his legs into the shadows. He's crying.

EXT. FIELD / EDGE OF PARKING LOT - NIGHT

In the distance, we hear the RUMBLE of the music. Keeping low, Ronna works her way down a row, looking for Mannie's car. A pickup passes her on its way out. There's no one else in sight.

AT MANNIE'S CAR

Still crouching low, Ronna tries one key, then another. We REVERSE to see Todd Gaines watching her from the hood of a nearby car.

GAINES

How's it going, Ronna? How are
sales?

Her heart skips a beat. She drops the keys.

RONNA

Todd, I can explain.

GAINES

I'm not going to ask you to.

He climbs off the car, approaching.

GAINES [cont'd]

The thing is, it's not like I'm in a highly ethical industry. But goddamn, Ronna. You fucked me over for 20 lousy hits.

He pulls his gun from the back of his jeans. By instinct, she starts to move away.

A red Miata moves down the row behind Ronna. She looks to it for help, but it's already passed.

RONNA

It's not what it looks like. I mean, it sort of is, but it's complicated.

GAINES

Not really.

He cocks the gun.

RONNA

I know I fucked up, but I can make it up to you. Please, Todd.

GAINES

I'm the last fucking person you should be expecting a favor from.

RONNA

I have the cash.

He doesn't care.

At the last moment, Ronna bolts. She ducks around the corner of a van, only to see...

THE RED MIATA

doing 20 in reverse.

Tailights glow red.
Brakes SQUEAL.
But it's too late.

PUSH IN ON GAINES

seeing the hit. HEARING it. Horrified.

INT. THE MIATA - NIGHT

A heavy weight CRASHES down on the soft roof of the car.

Ronna's body rolls down the windshield, smearing blood. It slides across the hood of the Miata, disappearing over the headlights in front.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Ronna's body rolls down the slope at the edge of the field, toppling ass-first into a drainage ditch. It lands with a sickening THUD.

GAINES

stands where he is, dumbfounded.

He looks to the Miata. It suddenly takes off, kicking up dirt and grass.

Finally, Gaines tucks the gun into his jeans. One last look around, then he starts working his way back across the parking lot. Disappears.

EXT. IN THE DITCH - NIGHT

Somewhere in the distance, the Mary Xmas Superfest is still RAGING, but here it's only a WHISPER with a beat.

ANGLE ON RONNA

with a sudden SPASM, she moves. Turns herself over on her back. Each breath WHEEZES and GURGLES.

She pulls the remainder of the holly crown out of her hair and tosses it aside. She tries to push herself up. Her legs won't move.

Catching her breath, she looks to the top of the ditch, waiting for somebody to look in. No one does. Adjusting herself, she slides against a weathered magazine. Rolling Stone. Jane's Addiction on the cover.

She collapses back, a new wave of pain.

After a beat, she suddenly LAUGHS, until gradually it becomes a COUGHING. She pushes her hair back, streaking blood across her face.

RONNA

Mannie!!

There's no answer. The YELLING hurts. She won't do that again.

RONNA

Mannie, I got it! I remembered
who the fuck it was! Perry
Farrell's dead girlfriend. Xiola
Blue. X-I-O-L-A. Fuck, I knew
there was one.

A sudden spasm of pain. She winces, sobbing. It passes.

RONNA

Don't you get it? I win.

She COUGHS as she laughs, spitting out some blood. We PULL BACK,
rising higher until we slowly

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

A CLOCK FACE

It's the timecard clock in the break room at the supermarket.
The hands are running backwards, winding off hour after hour.
They slow, finally stopping at 7:03 a.m.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

Ronna is walking away.

SIMON

(calling out)

Ronna! Do you want my shift?

She stops.

RONNA

Are you serious?

SIMON

I haven't punched in yet. I could have 24 hour ebola. Switterman is so short he'll have to you put you on.

(beat)

Besides, I really want to go to Las Vegas. I'm told it's extraordinary.

CUT TO:

Darkness. We hear an ENGINE and ROAD NOISE.

SPARKS

A cigarette lighter. The flame finally catches and we see Simon. He feels around, touching the ceiling, the walls, the floor. He's locked in the trunk of a car.

SIMON

Shit. Shit!

He starts kicking, hyperventilating. The lighter goes out.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

Part Two: 'Shoot'

INT. THE TRUNK - DAY? NIGHT?

Simon keeps KICKING.

SIMON

Fucking let me out of here!

The lighter burns his thumb. He switches hands. Listens for a second. The car isn't driving anymore.

He tries to catch his breath, but keeps getting more panicked. A key SCRAPES in the lock.

The trunk lid opens a crack. Bright daylight spills in.

Simon KICKS the lid and pops up, ready to swing a tire iron.

THREE MEN

back off, laughing. We are...

EXT. SIDE OF INTERSTATE - DAY

TINY
Mo'fuckin Jack-in-the-box.

TINY (19) is not black, but thinks he is.

Simon climbs out of the trunk and does a face-plant in the gravel. He's shit-faced drunk.

MARCUS
Dude, you passed out before we
left L.A.

MARCUS (24) is a former tailback at UCLA, and still has the build. He is black, and has no confusion over this matter.

Simon is about to reply when he suddenly HEAVES. Everyone backs away. Tiny takes the tire iron, puts it to the side of the trunk. He starts cranking it while HUMMING "Pop Goes the Weasel," ending with...

TINY
Pop! Goes the asshole.

INT. SINGH'S CADILLAC / DRIVING - DAY

A massive land yacht from the pre-Embargo era. SINGH (23) is driving, nursing a Rolling Rock. Marcus reads Sports Illustrated. Tiny talks from the enormous back seat, where Simon is recuperating.

TINY
So this chick, she's bobbing up
and down on my dick like she's
fucking Marilyn Chambers.

SINGH
She actually found your dick?

TINY
(ignoring)
Then she starts going around the
outside--you know, painting the
tree--when WHACK! It hits her in
the eye. And her contact, it's
like stuck on my dick.

The passengers don't seem impressed.

TINY

Her contact lens. It's stuck on the end of my dick.

MARCUS

Was it hard or soft?

TINY

What, my dick?

SINGH

The contact lens.

MARCUS

Do you remember if it was a colored lens? That she used to have two blue eyes and now she had one blue and one brown?

TINY

What the fuck does that matter?

MARCUS

(leaning over seat)

It matters because it happened to me. It was my story. I told this story about a year ago. The difference was, I knew those small-but-important details. That, and it was true.

TINY

Oh. Whatever.

MARCUS

Whatever?

TINY

Whatever.

A beat. And another. The matter just won't drop.

TINY

Yo, pull your stinky dinky out of my ass. I was just trying to make conversation. Fuck. Give a nigger a break.

Singh MOANS, not again.

MARCUS

What nigger? This nigger?

TINY

My mother's mother's mother was black.

MARCUS

So you say, yet we have never seen a picture of this Ebonic woman.

SINGH

Stop. Truce.

MARCUS

If you were any less black, you would be clear.

SIMON

(moaning)

Stop.

MARCUS

Look at your skin.

TINY

I see black because I know I am. Color is a state of mind.

MARCUS

Thank you Rhythm Nation.

INT. SILVER STAR CASINO RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It's a dive, and nearly empty. The men work their way down both sides of a self-service food bar. Simon is mostly recovered.

SIMON

So what does Valentina do?

MARCUS

She's a nutritionist. She also teaches a class at this college.

SIMON

What class?

MARCUS

Tantric sexuality for couples.

SINGH

She teaches people how to fuck?

TINY

Man, I taught myself.

MARCUS

(to Simon)

You shouldn't eat shrimp. It's loaded with iodine.

TINY

This shit is expensive. You're paying five bucks for lettuce and seeds and shit.

Tiny up-ends the rest of the shrimp cocktail onto his plate. Pissed, Singh scoops away a handful for himself.

AT THE TABLE

The men eat. Tiny tries to make a sandwich out of the various foods on his plate, but the bread keeps crumbling.

MARCUS

Thing is, most people really don't know how to make love. They just put it in and move it around until they get off. What tantra teaches you is how to prolong and deepen the experience, bring it to a higher level. If one man in ten were having the sex I'm having, there would be no war.

SIMON

What's the longest you and her ever did it?

MARCUS

Fourteen hours.

SINGH

Holy shit!

TINY

How many times you shoot?

MARCUS

Not once.

SIMON

Fourteen hours, you didn't go once. Not even at the end?

MARCUS

You redirect the orgasm inside.

He's greeted with skeptical looks.

MARCUS (cont'd)
How long does your orgasm last? A couple seconds? I've had orgasms that lasted an hour and a half.

SIMON
Bullshit.

MARCUS
Swear to God. And I do mean Allah.

SINGH
When was the last time you got off? I mean like, wet.

MARCUS
I haven't ejaculated in six months.

TINY
Six months!

MARCUS
Anyone can do it. All it takes is discipline.

TINY
You are some kind of Obi Wan Kenobi motherfucker. Call me old school, but I am still down with coming and going. Am I right?

Singh agrees. Simon, however, is still intrigued.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

We hear slot machines CHIMING in the distance. At the counter, Simon signs a receipt. Marcus looks over his shoulder.

MARCUS
Since when do you have a gold card?

SIMON
What do you mean? I'm an upstanding citizen.

He smiles as he slides the form back across to the pretty blonde DESK WOMAN. She rips apart the carbons and heads to the back. Marcus takes the credit card from the counter.

MARCUS

Todd Gaines. The drug dealer.

SIMON

He gets a discount. He let me use it. He's a good guy.

MARCUS

He's the good drug dealer. I get confused.

The Desk Woman returns with their keys.

SIMON

Could you answer a question...
(checks nametag)
...Rachel? Hypothetically, do you think a man could make love to a woman for 14 hours without ever achieving climax?

DESK WOMAN

I think my manager would be better able to answer that question. Would you like me to call him over?

SIMON

No. Not necessary.

DESK WOMAN

Great then. Enjoy your stay.

Simon walks away with Marcus.

SIMON

(low)
Lesbian.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Doubled over, Tiny BANGS on the bathroom door. Singh emerges, pale and sweating. He steps over Tiny, who crawls in. Hanging up his clothes, Marcus waves away the smell.

Singh MOANS, lying down on a bed.

MARCUS

Did I tell you not to eat the shrimp?

SINGH

I have something for you. Where did I put it? Oh, it's right here.

He gives him the finger. Simon is on the phone by the window.

SIMON

(over action)

Todd, it's Simon. What's up?...I'm in Vegas. You were right. It's extraordinary. And your card worked, thank you. What was the name of the place you said we should go...The Boom Room. What are you doing tonight?

Marcus makes a toking gesture, points to Simon, who thinks he's asking for smoke. He motions he doesn't have any. Marcus repeats the signs for toke, walking man, telephone. Simon finally gets it, gives the thumbs-up.

SIMON

(on phone)

You're going to a wedding?...What is it, a rave?

From the wall, KNOCKING. Simon and Marcus look to a door by the window.

SIMON

(on phone)

No, I know Claire. She works at the store...Are you going to fuck her?

Simon points at the KNOCKING door. Marcus finally goes over to get it.

SIMON

(on phone)

All I know is I plan to get myself thoroughly laid...

Marcus opens the door to reveal a 12 year-old BOY in the adjoining hotel room.

BOY

Who are you?

MARCUS

This is our room.

Simon leans around to look.

BOY

Oh. What are you doing?

SIMON

Raping small children.

The Boy's MOTHER yanks him back from the door, shutting it.

INT. MIRRORED ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Simon and Marcus are fully macked out. Marcus adjusts the shoulders of his bright yellow jacket.

SIMON

Did I mention how much I like your jacket?

MARCUS

No.

SIMON

There's a reason.

The elevator bell BINGS.

INT. THE CASINO - NIGHT

Simon finds Marcus at the blackjack table.

SIMON

Let me borrow some money.

MARCUS

Where's your money?

SIMON

I lost it.

MARCUS

We've been here five minutes.

The DEALER is waiting for Marcus to play. He takes a card, bust.

SIMON

I was playing this game at a hundred dollar table and I didn't understand it, but now I do. I think I figured out how to beat it.

MARCUS

Let me see your wallet.

Simon hands it over. Marcus pockets it.

MARCUS

You can have it back in an hour.
No, no. No buts. One hour, right
here.

EXT. CASINO ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Smoking on a bench, Simon makes eyes at a WOMAN IN SUNGLASSES. She's looking directly at him, a smile that could mean anything. Simon gives her an unequivocal sex look. She doesn't flinch.

Simon is in the zone.

A few moments later, the woman's HUSBAND returns with their key. She takes his arm. She's blind.

INT. SLOT MACHINE BANK - NIGHT

Simon hits on a WOMAN at the nickel slots. When she rebuffs him, he turns his attention to the COCKTAIL WAITRESS.

INT. CASINO HALLWAY - NIGHT

Simon wanders amid the GUESTS spilling out of the Shapiro wedding reception. He helps himself to a glass of champagne.

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Simon shares the elevator with drunken bridesmaids BECKY GOLDMAN and REBECCA GOLDSTIEN. Both are 19.

BECKY

Okay, if you're from over there,
then where did you meet these
friends? Of yours. Who I don't
see.

SIMON

They already knew each other, but
Marcus I met in traffic school.

His accent is suddenly Irish. It's weirdly charming.

REBECCA

(mocking)
Een traffic skewl?

SIMON

I'm a good driver, I am. I learned everything from American television. Hunter, Magnum P.I. -- The Knight Rider is an excellent program.

The doors open at the Beckys' floor. They get off. Rebecca turns...

REBECCA

Do you want to be getting high with us?

INT. THE BECKYS' HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

While Rebecca smokes up, Becky tears a kleenex in half. She rolls each piece into a plug, shoving one up each nostril.

BECKY

(explaining)
Otherwise, I can't hold it in.

Simon hands her the pipe and the lighter.

Rebecca blows a perfect smoke ring at Simon. He smiles, a little smoke escaping. She leans close and kisses him. Softly at first, then harder. They're a few beats into it when...

BECKY

Oh my God!

Her kleenex is on fire, flames in each nostril. Hands waving, she stands up. Snorts hard. The plugs shoot out, landing on the carpet, which begins to smolder. Simon stamps the flames out.

REBECCA

You're fine. You're fine.

Becky is crying.

REBECCA

(to Simon)
Tell her she's fine.

SIMON

You're beautiful.

He kisses her. After a moment, her panic subsides. She kisses him back.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Simon slides between the two Beckys, three naked bodies clenching and releasing.

CLOSE ON SIMON

breathing harder and faster, faster, until he suddenly stops. The expression on his face is agonizing, like a tightrope walker about to lose his balance. The Beckys stop to watch him, worried he might be hurt.

Finally, he breathes again.

BECKY
Did you go?

He shakes his head.

BECKY
Why not?

SIMON
Tantra, baby.

LATER

A new position, Rebecca on top and sweating. Next to Simon, Becky is passed out and SNORING. It's only as we look over Rebecca's back that we see

THE CURTAINS ARE ON FIRE.

On the bed, Simon lies motionless in aching nirvana. His head turns. He sees the flames. And does nothing.

Rebecca reaches climax with an inhuman series of MOANS. It's on the third of these that the smoke alarm suddenly BLEATS. It settles into a piercing WHINE.

Becky falls out of bed, disoriented. Sees the fire and SCREAMS. Rebecca climbs off Simon to attack the flames with a pillow, beating them down. Holding her head together, Becky tries to reach the smoke detector itself.

Amid the chaos, Simon feels for his shoes.

INT. HALLWAY / ELEVATOR BAY - NIGHT

In the elevator on the right, Simon jabs at the button while getting his jeans on. As his doors slide closed, the left elevator opens, revealing hotel SECURITY.

INT. CASINO MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gentle Christmas MUZAK.

At the sinks, Marcus wets his fingers to fix his hair. An OLD TEXAN washes his hands at the next sink, looks around for a towel. Marcus takes two from the dispenser, hands them over.

When he's finished, the Texan sets the crumpled towels on the counter, along with a dollar bill. He taps his hat and leaves.

A beat before Marcus sees the bill and makes the connection. He shouts to the closed door...

MARCUS

I am not a bathroom attendant!

INT. BY THE ELEVATORS - NIGHT

Not breaking his stride, Simon catches Marcus coming out the restroom.

SIMON

Hey. We're leaving.

MARCUS

Fuck yeah.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

As they head out, Marcus holds the door for a PREGNANT WOMAN, who smiles. Then a MIDWESTERN FAMILY, right on her heels.

SWEATSHIRT LADY

Which way is the pyramid?

MARCUS

I don't work here.

FAT BOY

Are you Hootie?

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Seething, Marcus joins Simon in line for a cab. A white Ferrari pulls up to the curb beside them. The FERRARI MAN tosses the keys at Marcus, who can't help but catch them.

FERRARI MAN

Keep it close and there's an extra ten bucks for you.

He slips Marcus a five as he rushes into the casino. A beat. Simon is cracking up. As we REVERSE, we see the valets are wearing the same yellow sportcoat as Marcus.

MARCUS

Get in. Get in the car. Get in.

INT. THE FERRARI / DRIVING ON FREEWAY - NIGHT

Top off, wind whipping. Marcus downshifts, letting the engine RACE as he passes another sports car. The STEREO is blasting.

Pale and dazed, Simon tries to light a cigarette. It blows out of his fingers. It was his last. He adjusts himself in his seat, uncomfortable.

SIMON

(shouting over noise)

Question. When you're doing tantra, you hold it in at the end, right?

MARCUS

No. Never. Redirect the energy, but you never hold it in. Haven't you ever gotten blue balls? Hurts like a bitch.

SIMON

(nodding)

Sort of a dull ache.

MARCUS

Exactly.

Marcus looks over to Simon, who is trying to get his breath.

INT. FERRARI / DRIVING DOWNTOWN - LATER

Empty intersections, no traffic to speak of. Marcus is looking for a cross-street. They're lost.

MARCUS

See if there's a map.

Simon goes through the glove compartment. Amid the condoms and parking tickets, he finds one.

SIMON

Orange County.

He throws it out. He tries to shut the compartment, but it's caught on something. He reaches in...

SIMON

Holy shit.

Marcus looks over. Simon gently pulls out a 9mm Baretta. Fascinated, he turns it over in his hands. Marcus tries to keep an eye on the road.

MARCUS

Don't point it at me!

SIMON

How do I know if it's loaded?

MARCUS

First, you stop pointing it at me.

Simon aims the other way, out the window. As they drive through an intersection, they pass a carful of LOCALS.

MARCUS

Floor. Floor!

Simon throws the gun to the floor. Marcus flinches, expecting it to go off. It doesn't. He checks the rear-view mirror. No trouble. Simon picks up the gun again.

SIMON

I've never held a real gun before.
It's heavier than I thought.

MARCUS

Great, put it back.

SIMON

I want to know if it's loaded.
How do I...

He starts pulling and pushing on it, trying to get the clip out. He's not going to stop until he does it or shoots himself trying.

MARCUS

Hold the wheel.

Marcus removes the clip, hands it over. Simon counts the bullets.

SIMON

I hold ten men's lives in my hand.

MARCUS

It's a nine millimeter. It doesn't have stopping power.

SIMON

Right. For that you'd need Magnum Force.

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - NIGHT

At a pull-up payphone, Marcus is looking through the map in the phone book. Simon is still fondling the gun.

SIMON

This is why I came here. This is America. I'm serious. You want to take one symbol for all of America, it's not the flag or the hawk...

MARCUS

...eagle...

SIMON

...or the automobile. America is about a man and a gun. From the American revolution, to taking the West, killing Indians, American history is all about access to firearms. In England, we can't even own a gun. Here, it's a birthright.

(beat)

If I were an American, I'd join the E.R.A.

MARCUS

The N-R-A.

He tears the page out of the phone book.

SIMON

You're certain.

MARCUS

E.R.A. was this chick thing in the 70's.

SIMON

Chicks with guns? That's fabulous.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Tiny lies on the bed, watching a bad hotel porno. Singh comes out of the bathroom, pale and shivering.

SINGH

Kill me.

TINY

I ain't your bitch. Kill yourself.

KNOCKING at the adjoining room door. They try to ignore it, but it's relentless. Finally, Tiny answers it.

TINY

What the fuck?

It's the same boy.

BOY

You got some smoke?

TINY

You got some pubic hair yet?

BOY

Man, I've been smoking up since I was eight.

TINY

Where is your mom at?

He pushes past the kid...

INT. THE OTHER ROOM - NIGHT

The mirror image of their room. The same porno plays on the TV. Kleenexes on the bed.

BOY

She's not my mom.

Tiny rummages through the open suitcases, finally finding a bottle of Pepto-Bismol. He cracks the seal and drinks half of it on the spot.

BOY

Are you on heroin? Are you kicking?

TINY
I'm kicking your ass if you knock
again.

Tiny goes back into the other room, pulling the door shut.

BOY
Fuck you.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A strip mall on the edge of downtown. Sodium vapor lights BUZZ overhead. Simon adjusts something in his coat while Marcus locks the Ferrari.

APPROACHING A DOOR

A blue light reads, "THE BOOM ROOM."

MARCUS
Listen up. They're going to ask
if you want buy a bottle of
champagne. You don't, but don't
say that right off.

SIMON
Explain.

MARCUS
Champagne means you want a
private dance. You can't afford
it, neither can I. But if they
know we're not biting, they don't
even dangle the bait.

SIMON
So, "champagne" is a code.

MARCUS
Exactly.

A beat.

SIMON
What does vodka mean?

MARCUS
Nothing.

SIMON
Do they even have vodka?

MARCUS

It's a bar, I'm sure they have
vodka.

SIMON

I'll have vodka, then.

At the door, Marcus stops Simon before he goes in.

MARCUS

We have one magic word,
champagne. You can order
anything you want, anything, as
long as it's not champagne.

Simon nods. He understands.

INT. THE BOOM ROOM - NIGHT

Pitch black except for tiny Christmas lights. To Simon's left,
a skanky MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE plays video poker. At the bar,
Marcus SHOUTS to the BARTENDER -- the MUSIC is deafening.

Out of the shadows, two dancers approach. They split up, blonde
HOLLY taking Simon, while brunette NOELLE heads for Marcus.

Holly offers Simon a hand, they shake. She leans close to talk
into his ear. He smiles.

Noelle taps Marcus on the shoulder, ducks to the other side
playfully. Takes a sip of his drink.

Simon points to Marcus. Holly nods, feeling the fabric of his
shirt.

Noelle laughs at something Marcus said.

Holly measures her hand against Simon's, rubs it against her
neck. He is staring at her magnificent breasts.

At Noelle's urging, Marcus flexes his bicep. Noelle flutters.

We come in CLOSE as Holly leans over to say something. Simon
speaks first...

SIMON

I'd like to buy your most
expensive bottle of champagne.

INT. SHORT HALLWAY - NIGHT

A curtain at the end, blue light overhead. Holly leads the way with a bottle of champagne. Noelle follows with glasses. Behind them, the guys.

Marcus gives Simon a look. Simon shrugs it off.

The curtain parts, letting the women through. From the darkened space beyond, a giant BOUNCER steps out -- massive even compared to Marcus. He's sucking on a lollipop.

VIC JR.

I need a major credit card.

Marcus looks to Simon, who hands over the gold card. Vic Jr. reads them the boilerplate...

VIC JR.

This is a gentlemen's club. You are expected to behave as gentlemen. I will be giving you one rule. If you break this rule, I will break your arm. Are we clear?

MARCUS

Yes.

VIC JR.

The ladies can touch you. You cannot touch them. At any point, for any reason. Is this clear?

SIMON

Crystal.

VIC JR.

Enjoy your evening.

He pulls back the curtain.

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

A mirrored ball spins overhead, stars racing across the black paneling. Holly nudges Simon into his chair. He and Marcus sit back to back.

As the champagne POPS, we move into a series of overlapping shots:

Noelle licks the foam from Holly's fingers.

Holly rubs the bottle against herself, pours.

Noelle and Holly dance together, a tinsel ribbon around them.

Simon adjusts himself in the crotch.

Noelle lights a cigar for Marcus as Holly dances alone.

Holly lifts her miniskirt to reveal a g-string.

Simon cranes his neck back, banging heads with Marcus.

Noelle takes a puff off the cigar.

Holly straddles Simon, rubs against him. He shudders. His hands start to rise. She gently pushes them back down.

Marcus whispers something to Noelle.

Noelle comes up behind Holly, moving with her as she rubs against Simon.

Marcus turns to watch.

Enraptured, Simon watches the four-armed woman on top of him.

His fingers start to twitch.

Noelle kisses the edge of Holly's neck.

Simon's hands rise, reach...

Holly MOANS...

And suddenly...

Simon grabs Noelle's ass.

It's Heaven.

NOELLE
(yelling)
Hands! Hands!

Noelle and Holly both get off him. Holly kicks his leg. From behind the curtain, Vic Jr. charges in. He heads straight for Marcus.

NOELLE
The other one!

Simon tumbles off his chair, scrambling.

VIC JR.
What the fuck did I tell you!

He kicks Simon in the ass.

MARCUS
Yo. Yo! He fucked up, he lost
control.

VIC JR.
Am I talking to you? I'm talking
to your faggot friend here.

He kicks Simon again. Holly and Noelle stand in the corner.
This has happened a hundred times.

MARCUS
We're leaving.

Vic Jr. kicks Simon again.

MARCUS
Enough! Stop kicking him.
(no effect)
I said to fucking stop kicking
him.

Vic Jr. turns on Marcus. A beat. He shoves him, hard.

MARCUS
I'm not trying to throw down here.

VIC JR.
(another shove)
You think you can kick my ass?

MARCUS
I don't want to try.

Vic Jr. WHACKS Marcus, an old-fashioned bitch slap. A beat.
Marcus tries to keep the rage down. Feels his nose bleeding.

He backs away, but Vic Jr. keeps coming. Suddenly...

A GUNSHOT.

SCREAMS.

For a beat, no one's sure what happened. We look around to
Marcus. Vic Jr. Holly. Noelle. Then finally Simon.

He just fired. The gun is steady in his hand.

Marcus checks his shirt. A spray of blood.

Vic Jr. checks his arm. It's bleeding.

We HOLD for a moment, the mirrored ball still spinning overhead.

SIMON
Everybody back the fuck away.

They do. Marcus holds his place.

MARCUS
Oh, man. Fuck.

Blood is squirting out of Vic Jr.'s arm. He holds it, dumbfounded.

SIMON
(to Holly)
Is there another way out?

HOLLY
Behind you.

A fire escape door. Simon motions for Marcus to come. Pushing the bar, no alarm sounds. They back out, into the night. The door swings shut.

A beat.

Suddenly, an MAN charges in with a silver .45. He is Vic Sr., 60, owner and proprietor. You don't fuck with Victor.

VICTOR
What happened!

HOLLY
They shot Vic. They went out the back.

Victor KICKS the door open, ready to fire. The alley is clear. The BARTENDER comes through the curtain.

VICTOR
(handing off gun)
Find them.

The man races out. Victor looks at his son's arm. It's bloody, but he'll live. Holly SHOUTS down the hallway.

HOLLY
Call 911.

VICTOR
No! No cops.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Ferrari SCRAPES as it takes the curb too fast.

From the alley, the Bartender chases after it, finally stopping to take aim. By the time he's ready, the Ferrari is long gone.

INT. FERRARI / DRIVING - NIGHT

Taking a left, Marcus slows down a little. We're on an empty street well away from the Boom Room. He dabs at his bloody nose.

In the passenger seat, Simon looks at the gun in the hand. He suddenly throws it out.

MARCUS

What are you doing?

SIMON

Getting rid of the weapon.

Marcus slams on the brakes.

MARCUS

It has your fingerprints on it.

SIMON

Oh shit.

Craning around, Simon looks for it in the street. Marcus backs the car up. Suddenly, a phone RINGS. Lights flicker on the car phone.

SIMON

Do we answer?

Marcus brakes again. The phone keeps RINGING.

MARCUS

It's probably Orange County asking where the hell his car is.

SIMON

It's a cell phone. They can trace where we are even if we don't answer.

MARCUS

Get the gun. Go. Find it.

Simon climbs out and starts looking, crouching to look under cars.

In the Ferrari, Marcus sits back and kicks the phone with his boot, over and over until it stops, dead.

For a moment, silence.

Then the car's ALARM starts going off. Marcus SCREAMS with frustration. He punches buttons on the keychain, but nothing will quiet it. He tries the key in the ignition. It won't turn over. Climbing out of the car, he kicks it with all his might.

Simon finds the gun, crawling under a truck to get it.

Using his jacket, Marcus starts frantically wiping off the inside and outside of the Ferrari. Simon joins him. The whole time, the alarm is still WAILING.

Satisfied, Marcus motions that they're done. He and Simon take off running down the street. Simon breaks off, returning to get the gun he left on the hood.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A bent needle pierces two flaps of skin, drawing a line of blood with the thread.

Victor ties another stitch in Vic Jr.'s arm. He's had practice at this. In the background, the Bartender and Noelle are watching. Victor's tirade is directed at all of them.

VICTOR

Just because a rapper has a white
buddy doesn't mean he's Sidney
Fucking Poitier. You check them.
You pat them down.

VIC JR.

(gritted teeth)
I know.

VICTOR

(to Noelle)
And you, you were on top of him.
You didn't feel anything.

She shakes her head, crying.

VICTOR [cont'd]

This thing. This thing is a wall
of shit. It is a fucking call
from on high that I have to leave.
I have to get out before this all
just falls in on me.

Vic Jr. winces with pain.

VICTOR [cont'd]
 You know what wakes me up in the middle of the night, covered in sweat? You aren't any worse than anyone else of your fucked up generation. Towel.

Noelle hands him a towel to mop up the blood.

VICTOR [cont'd]
 In the old days, you know how you got to the top? By being better than the guy ahead of you. How do you people get to the top? By being so fucking incompetent that the guy ahead of you can't even do his job, he falls on his ass and congratulations, you're on top. Only now the top is down here when it used to be up here and you don't even know the difference.

He finishes the last stitch, tying it off.

VICTOR [cont'd]
 My generation, we're dinosaurs. We're gonna die. You're gonna kill us off. But you'll never be dinosaurs. You're little fucking rats and that's all you're ever going to be.

Holly looks in, holding a gold card. Victor motions, "well?" She hands it over.

HOLLY
 They said they were from Los Angeles.

Noelle nods.

VICTOR
 Then they must be staying somewhere, isn't that right Noelle?

Noelle nods harder, crying again.

INT. HOTEL ROOM BATHROOM - NIGHT

Pale and dehydrated, Tiny sits on the toilet. He HUMS the theme to "I Dream of Jeannie."

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ON THE TV, a YOUNG MIDWESTERN WOMAN and her HUSBAND/BOYFRIEND sit at a blackjack table.

ANNOUNCER

Once Karen learned these simple rules, she discovered blackjack was as easy as it was fun.

REVERSE to Singh, propped up on one of the beds. He's just this side of death. Toilet FLUSHING. Tiny comes out of the bathroom, takes the other bed.

ANNOUNCER

Steve decided to try his hand at craps.

Tiny resumes HUMMING. After a few beats, Singh joins in with the theme to "Bewitched." The melodies blend surprisingly well. Just into the second chorus, the phone RINGS.

TINY

Yo! Mmmhmm. Room 875.

He hangs up.

SINGH

Who was that?

TINY

Some shit, I dunno.

INT. RAM CHARGER - NIGHT

In the passenger seat, Vic Jr. flips a cell phone shut. He was working through the yellow pages.

VIC JR.

Room 875.

Victor changes lanes. He SLAMS on the horn, SHOUTING at the car that cut him off.

VICTOR

Motherfucker!

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Climbing out of a cab, Marcus throws two bills at the DRIVER. Simon is already running down the sidewalk.

INT. ELEVATOR / LOBBY LEVEL - NIGHT

Victor presses the '8' button. The mirrored doors close. Half a beat later, they open again.

A PLEASANT RETIRED COUPLE get on. Press '4.' The doors don't close. The Woman presses the 'Door Open' button.

THE MAN

The other one, honey.

She sees her mistake. The doors finally close. In the reflection, the Man looks back at Victor and Vic Jr. Smiles.

THE WOMAN

Sure is a fun way to spend
Christmas, isn't it?

No answer. The doors open.

THE WOMAN

This isn't our floor.

The Man steps out of the elevator, looking around.

THE MAN

Maybe we're five.

THE WOMAN

Or six. We'll try both.

She reaches for the panel. Victor grabs her hand. She GASPS, startled. Without saying a word, he shoves her off the elevator, BANGING on the door close button until it finally responds.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus and Simon burst in like a cyclone. Marcus grabs his clothes out of the closet.

MARCUS

All right, listen up. We're
leaving in 30 seconds. Grab what
you can.

TINY

What the fuck?

Simon tosses Singh his wallet, pockets the keys.

MARCUS

Just do it. Now!

The panic is contagious. After a stunned beat, Tiny and Singh start moving, putting on shoes and restuffing suitcases.

A KNOCK at the door. Everyone freezes. More KNOCKING.

VOICE IN HALL
Room service.

Simon steps gingerly to the door, looks out the peephole.

HIS P.O.V.

A fleshy hand blocks the fisheye.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Victor and son smile at a COUPLE walking past. When they're gone, a giant orange plumber's wrench drops down from Jr.'s jacket sleeve.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Simon backs away from the door, freaking out. Marcus checks the windows. They're eight stories above a parking lot.

Tiny knocks on the door to the adjoining room

TINY
(low)
Hey. Kid.

INT. OTHER ROOM - NIGHT

The kids mutes the TV.

TINY (o.s.)
Kid. Open up the door.

BOY
Fuck you.

INTERCUT

TINY
Look, I'm really sorry, you know?
It's just, it would be really
swell if you would open this door.
Now. It's kind of an emergency.

BOY
Hundred bucks.

TINY
Fuck!

SIMON
Give him the money.

He gathers money from their wallets.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pulling all his weight into it, Vic Jr. begins to pry the door handle off.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The door knob jiggles. WHIP back to the men.

Tiny finally chips in. Simon shoves the cash in a wad under the door. They wait.

OTHER SIDE

The Boy counts the money, straightening the bills.

TINY (o.s.)
Open now!

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The door handle bends further, further. Finally SNAPS.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The far side of the lock mechanism drops to the floor.

TINY
Fuck!

Fingers reach into the hole, trying to pull back the bolt. Finally catch it. The door swings open, revealing...

...an empty room. Colt .45 in hand, Victor storms in. Checks behind doors and under beds. The suitcases are half-packed.

INT. ADJOINING ROOM - NIGHT

Singh has his ear to the door.

SINGH
(whisper)
They're in.

Simon peers out the peephole into the hallway. Marcus lifts the Boy against the wall.

MARCUS
(whisper)
If you let them in here, they will
kill you. Understood?

The boy nods. Marcus drops him. Simon opens the hallway door a crack. It's clear. On the count of three, they go.

We stay with the boy, who sits back against the windows, excited and rich. There's a KNOCK at the adjoining door. The boy tucks the money away.

With a BOOM, we hear the door being kicked open. It only takes four blows.

BOY
(pointing)
Down the hall. That way.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Swinging off the railings, the four men race down the stairs. Up above, a door SLAMS open.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Running to the Cadillac, Singh feels for his keys.

SIMON
I got 'em.

As Simon unlocks the door, the other three look at each other -- should he really be driving?

THE TIRES SMOKE

as Simon backs out. In the distance, Victor and son appear around the corner. Victor motions to go for the truck.

INT. CADILLAC / PARKING GARAGE EXIT - NIGHT

A line of cars wait to pay at the booth. Simon slams on the brakes. Looking out the back window, Marcus sees the bright lights of the Ram Charger approaching.

MARCUS

They're right behind us.

TINY

Who?

In answer to his question, the Ram Charger SLAMS into the trunk of the Cadillac. Simon cranks the wheel, barely avoiding the car ahead of him.

Not slowing, Simon aims for the entrance lane, where the bar is coming down behind a small Nissan. Threading the needle, Simon makes it past the car and the gate. The Ram Charger smashes through the bar.

EXT. FLAMINGO ROAD - NIGHT

Four a.m., but there's still traffic. The Cadillac slaloms between taxis and tourists. Approaching an intersection, yellow light...

INTERCUT

MARCUS

Cop. Cop!

There's a police car waiting at the stoplight. Simon hits the brakes, just short of a SQUEAL. They stop in the left lane, next to the cop. Simon and Marcus look over to the OFFICER, trying to be calm. Singh and Tiny peer out the back.

The Ram Charger slowly approaches, no hurry. In the squad car, the Officer takes a radio call. Drunken TOURISTS walk past. The crosswalk switches to a flashing red hand.

SIMON

How did they find us?

MARCUS

It's their town. I'm sure they have people.

The Ram Charger pulls in right behind the Cadillac. It's so tall, all we see are the blinding headlights through the back window. Singh and Tiny slink down. Marcus checks the gun on his lap.

The red hand stops flashing. The opposing light goes from green to yellow. Simon gently REVS the engine. Suddenly, a WHOOP.

Lights flashing, the police car makes a U-turn in front of them. The SIREN is deafening. Simon sees his opportunity.

Gunning the engine, he hangs a hard right, cutting across three lanes. The Ram Charger tries to follow, but the traffic is already moving. Over the protest of many HORNS, the pickup finally forces its way through.

EXT. A SIDE STREET - NIGHT

The Cadillac takes a corner hard, fishtailing into oncoming traffic. Tiny SCREAMS. Simon pulls it back into the lane. In the rear-view mirror, we see the Ram Charger, gaining.

MARCUS

We have to get off the major
streets. Take a right up here.
No, not here!

It's too late. Simon mistook an alley for an actual road.

SIMON

Hold on.

Aiming for the alley, Simon hits a curb on the way in. Singh's head BANGS against the roof. The passenger-side mirror smashes off against a post.

TINY

Mother of fuck!

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Strewn with trash, never-emptied dumpsters, the alley runs behind a series of strip malls and office buildings. There's only one way out -- Simon's aiming for the boulevard on the far side.

SINGH

(looking out back)
I don't see 'em.

UP AHEAD

The end of the alley approaches. From the left edge, a flashing orange light. A giant street-sweeper is slowly crossing the alley.

MARCUS

Shit.

SINGH

(looking back)

Wait, no. They're coming in.

Behind them, the Ram Charger is gingerly turning into the alley. Wider, it scrapes against one side. It backs up, trying again.

Ahead, the street sweeper is blocking one-quarter of the alley. One-third. A moment of hesitation, then Simon floors it. The Caddy hits thirty, forty. Engine RACING --

MARCUS

We can't make it!

The sweeper is already halfway across the alley. Singh braces for impact. Somehow, Simon still thinks he can clear it.

MARCUS

STOP!

The sweeper is almost completely blocking the alley. At the last moment, Simon SLAMS on the brakes. They're skidding towards it.

Marcus grabs the wheel and jerks it. The left front bumper catches the wall, sending the trunk SLAMMING against the far alley wall. A ear-piercing SCREECH.

A ribbon of sparks shoots off as the front and rear bumpers are scraped away. Forward momentum finally stops. The street sweeper passes without slowing, just inches away from the protruding corner of the Cadillac.

INT. THE CADILLAC - NIGHT

The abrupt stop sends Tiny flying into the front seat, where his head CRACKS the windshield. Marcus's seat breaks, PINNING him against the dash. He pushes back, but Singh YELPS in protest.

Simon blinks, trying to figure out if he's alive. With Tiny's bleeding head on his lap, he shifts into reverse.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

The tires SPIN in place. The car is wedged in tight. Further down the alley, we find the broken-off

SIDE MIRROR.

In its cracked face we see five Ram Chargers approaching. A giant tire smashes the mirror to bits.

INT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

Shifting gears, Simon tries to rock the car back and forth. He's making a little progress. Looking over his seat, Marcus sees the giant pickup heading right for them. The headlights are bright enough to cast shadows.

Still rocking the car, Simon turns the wheel hard. The tires SQUEAL in protest.

Forcing back the seat, Marcus stands up through the open sunroof. Aims and FIRES. Once. Twice. Three times.

INT. RAM CHARGER - NIGHT

On the first shot, Vic Junior ducks down. Two bullets punch through the windshield. The third ricochets off the hood.

Victor keeps the pedal to the floor. He's not stopping.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Marcus ducks back in just before impact. With a sickening CRUNCH, the collision knocks the Cadillac free, sending it shooting into the street. Hanging a hard left, the car swerves to avoid a light post, instead WHACKING it with the rear fender.

Just behind it, the Ram Charger locks its brakes, SKIDDING to avoid the same post. It clips the Cadillac before taking out a concrete bus bench.

INT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

Simon fights to regain control, the street outside a blur. Over his shoulder, an oncoming Yugo can't stop fast enough. The little car hits just in front of the tire, sending the Cadillac spinning back the opposite direction.

The passenger door breaks open. Tiny's unconscious body starts to roll out. Marcus and Singh both grab hold. As Simon rights the spin, the door slams back, nearly decapitating Tiny.

Simon swerves to avoid another oncoming car, nearly hitting the green street sweeper, which is still inching along. Finally he settles into a lane, checking the rear-view mirror.

INT. RAM CHARGER - NIGHT

Victor revs the engine but they're not moving. Forward, reverse, nothing. He climbs out to look --

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

-- under the truck. The rear axle is caught on one of the concrete bench supports.

From the cab, Vic Jr. looks to see the Cadillac turning down a side street, out of sight.

VICTOR
Sonofabitch!

He kicks the truck.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Cadillac, bruised but unbroken, heads west. Las Vegas shimmers in the distance.

INT. CADILLAC - DAWN

In the back seat, Tiny is propped up with a bloody shirt pressed to his head. Singh has his feet up to brace the back of Marcus's seat.

SINGH
Just so we're clear. You stole a car, shot a bouncer, and had sex with two women?

TINY
You had sex with two women?

Simon ignores them, still checking his rear-view mirror.

SIMON
We can be in Mexico by noon. I say we split up from there. I'll take Baja.

MARCUS
Fuck Mexico. We're going home. To L.A.

SINGH

Simon, think about it. If they were going to call the cops, they would have called them in Las Vegas. They just wanted us gone, and we're gone. It's over.

Simon checks the mirror, checks the road. With a deep breath, he tries to believe. But doesn't.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAWN

By the bathrooms, Vic Jr. peels back his bandage to check the bleeding. His father is on the payphone.

VICTOR

I need to book two tickets to Los Angeles. On Visa.

He takes the gold card from his pocket.

VICTOR

First name 'Todd.' Last name 'Gaines.' G-A-I-N-E-S.

Vic Jr. looks to his dad.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

A CLOCK FACE

It's the timecard clock in the break room at the supermarket. The hands run backwards once again, finally stopping at 7:00 a.m.

INT. BREAK ROOM - DAY

Ronna is asleep on the couch. Offscreen, a SOAP OPERA plays on TV. The voices seem familiar.

MALE VOICE #1

I'm not the man you're looking for.

MALE VOICE #2

We both know you were on the pier.
You saw what happened to Carmen.

We REVERSE to see the TV. Onscreen, a police interrogation room. The Cop is played by Adam. The Accused is played by Zack. They're the frat boys who bought the orange juice.

ZACK

Don't forget, detective. I was cleared of all charges.

ADAM

I don't care how many high-priced lawyers you bring in. Eden Valley will never stand for your kind of scum.

As the MUSIC rises, we PUSH IN on Zack. PUSH IN on Adam. The TV image FADES OUT.

TITLE OVER BLACK:

Part Three: 'Common Enemies'

INT. FALAFEL HUT - DAY

A small sit-down dive in West Hollywood. Adam and Zack finish an early lunch with Burke and Loop -- the white dreadlocked guy.

LOOP

I think my girlfriend watches your show.

BURKE

Tell them what your girlfriend does.

LOOP

She doesn't do anything.

BURKE

They're not even married and she does nothing. My wife -- we've been married two years -- she still takes overtime three nights a week.

Loop bows to Burke's superiority.

BURKE [cont'd]
 My wife's a deputy sherriff, you believe that? A cop and a sherriff, married. It's like the freakin' odd couple.

ZACK
 I smell a pilot.

Burke is oblivious to sarcasm. Loop's pita is self-destructing. He eats faster, trying to finish before it falls apart.

BURKE
 You guys got girlfriends?
 What am I saying? You gotta lot of girlfriends don't you? You got women sending you their panties. Two good-looking guys...
 (to Loop)
 What do you say?

LOOP
 (mouth full)
 Pussy magnets.

BURKE
 If I was not a happily married man I would be rubbing up against you to get some of that.
 (off Loop's reaction)
 Some of the pussy power.

Zack offers Loop a napkin. He passes.

ADAM
 Actually, I'm settled down. Four years now.

LOOP
 (still chewing)
 No ring.

ADAM
 Nothing legal.

BURKE
 (to Zack)
 How about you?

ZACK
 Same.

BURKE

This is a crime. You two should
be out getting laid.

From the door to the kitchen, a MAN waves to Burke.

BURKE

Excuse me.

He follows the man into the kitchen, shuts the door. Adam
watches with unusual interest. Loop finally swallows.

LOOP

Did you ever see "The Hard Way?"

Zack shakes his head. Adam is still watching the door.

LOOP

Michael J. Fox was up for this
part where he had to play a cop,
so he rode around with this real
cop in New York. It's just like
what you guys are doing.

ADAM

When did Michael J. Fox play a
cop?

LOOP

No, see, he was an actor.

ZACK

Playing an actor.

LOOP

Playing a cop.

ADAM

In the movie. I get it.

ZACK

We'll have to rent that.

Burke returns from the back, tucking something into his pocket.
We stay CLOSE on Adam as Burke approaches in SLOW MOTION. In the
background, the Man he was talking with moves behind the kitchen
window.

WOMAN'S VOICE (v.o)

Who was Officer Burke talking to
at the restaurant?

ADAM (v.o.)
I didn't get a good look. I think
it was the owner, maybe the
manager. Cook. They went into
the kitchen.

INT. MEN'S ROOM AT BEVERLY CENTER- DAY

Adam winces.

In the oversized handicapped stall, Adam has his jeans around his ankles as a TECHNICIAN retapes a transmitter on his thigh. A wire runs up to a microphone on his chest.

The third person in the stall is dwarfish inspector CLAUDIA MARX (50), Internal Affairs. She checks through her notepad.

MARX
At any other time did he leave
your presence?

ADAM
No. Listen, I think you got bad
information or something. This
guy seems like a Boy Scout. A
Mormon Boy Scout.

MARX
He's a junior detective who is
somehow pulling in \$175,000 a
year. I think we have reason to
be suspicious.

TECHNICIAN
I put in a stronger transmitter,
so we shouldn't lose you again.
Just try not to sweat.

ADAM
Is it safe to have a radio against
my balls like this?

A beat.

TECHNICIAN
Safe enough.

Adam pulls up his jeans.

ADAM

Just so we're clear. Whether you
get something on this guy or not,
Zack and I are done today.
Finished. Charges dropped.
That's the deal, right?

MARX

I am aware of the deal you cut.
But I intend to make it
profitable.
(to Technician)
Are you set?

A BEEP as he presses a button. His headphones register.

Marx and the Technician exit the stall, walking past a GUY AT THE
SINKS, who's surprised to see a woman in here.

INT. VICTORIA'S SECRET - DAY

Crowded with Christmas shoppers. Burke holds a teddy against
Loop, who models. It's an ugly sight.

BURKE

You ought to get your girlfriend
something. A pair of these
panties, you can get out of
anything. You could have just
fucked her sister's dog and she'd
be like, "Stop fucking Fido and
come over here you big stud."

Loop considers the panties. Zack stands a few feet away,
awkward and out of place. Burke throws him a pair of panties.
Zack smiles.

ZACK

Mine's not really a lace kind of
girl.

BURKE

What, is she kinky?

ZACK

I guess.

BURKE

(lecherously)
She like cops?

ZACK
Playing the cop.

Burke makes a WOOO at Loop.

BURKE
 What does she look like?

ZACK
 About my height. Blonde. Sort of
 nordic looking.

BURKE
 Hot.

ZACK
 Yeah.

BURKE
 She faithful?

A beat. Zack puts the panties back on the rack.

ZACK
 No. I don't think so.

BURKE
 You faithful?

ZACK
 Not anymore.

INT. BURKE'S CAR / GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

Burke kills the engine. Loop leans over the seat.

LOOP
 Who wants to wear the wire?

ADAM
 Wire?

LOOP
 (showing)
 Microphone. We tape it under your
 shirt.

Adam shoots Zack a panicked look.

ZACK
 That'd be me.

He unbuttons his shirt.

BURKE

So Zack, how did you find out your girlfriend was fucking around on you?

ON ADAM, corner of his eye.

ZACK

I found socks.

BURKE

What, red socks, blue socks?

ZACK

White socks. You know how the good kind of socks have band around the ankle that keeps them from stretching out? When I moved in, every one of the socks had that. Suddenly, there was one sock that didn't.

BURKE

You hear that? We got John Sherlock Holmes in the car here.

Adam turns on Zack.

ADAM

Alright. But you've been fucking around, too.

ZACK

Only after I found out.

ADAM

Huh.

Loop connects the power. A buzzing WHINE.

LOOP

We got feedback off something.

The NOISE diminishes as Adam moves away.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

At the refrigerator section, both Adam and Zack reach for orange juice. When they get close, the feedback starts WHINING again. Both back off. Adam motions, after you.

ADAM

So, Zack. Do you know who your girlfriend's fucking?

He over-articulates, as if speaking for a Learn English Now! tape. Zack does likewise. Their animosity is palpable.

ZACK

No, Adam. I do not. I have suspicions. Mostly former boyfriends who keep calling.

ADAM

What a coincidence. I have the exact same problem with my girlfriend. In fact, I think she's been sleeping around on me, too.

ZACK

How ironic.

ADAM

Don't you think?

(beat)

Maybe I should start checking for socks, too.

Zack's glare could strip paint.

As Adam and Zack head for the front, we REVERSE to find Mannie and Claire, who have been watching the spat while restocking.

CLAIRE

Gay men are so hot. It's tragic.

INT. CAR IN PARKING LOT - DAY

Burke is flipping through a book of Madlibs.

BURKE

Adverb.

LOOP

Christ. I dunno. Green.

BURKE

Adverb. Has to end in "ly."

A long beat.

LOOP

Golly.

BURKE
That doesn't work. Say
"moistly."

LOOP
Moistly.

Burke chuckles to himself.

BURKE
This is going to be great.

As he writes it in the blank, Adam and Zack approach on either side of the car, get in the back.

ZACK
He wasn't there. The guy wasn't there.

LOOP
No, we heard. We heard everything.

ADAM
There was no guy working. Two women, that's it.

BURKE
You were good. No really, you were smooth. Loop, back me up here. How long have I been doing this? Year, year and a half. How long did it take me before I got good at it?

LOOP
You're still not good at it.

BURKE
That's what I'm saying. You guys are professional actors and shit. I should be taking lessons from you.

ADAM
But it wasn't the guy.

BURKE
This chick, Ronna, you think she can score?

ADAM
Maybe.

ZACK

Probably.

BURKE

Then that's all we need. It's all connected. The circle of life.

He starts the car.

EXT. STREET IN HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT

Waiting in The Beast, Mannie drums his fingers to the MUSIC.

EXT. FRONT OF GAINES' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Claire is arguing with Ronna. She finally relents and goes upstairs with her.

INT. BURKE'S CAR - NIGHT

Burke is watching through binoculars.

BURKE

Now they're both going. What's up with that?

As Loop removes the last wires of the microphone, Zack buttons his shirt back up. He and Adam are as far apart as they can be and still be in the back seat.

ADAM

So if she gets the stuff, what, you arrest her?

BURKE

We try to bring her over.
(leaning around)
See like, we arrest her and then what? One crack whore off the street. So we cut her a deal. She helps us get this guy. We cut him a deal. He helps us get the guy above him.

ZACK

So, sooner or later, everybody's working for The Man.

BURKE

Exactly.

INT. VENICE HOUSE - NIGHT

BURKE

Corona?

He hands Ronna the beer.

ZACK

(to Burke)

Oh yeah. Hey. We bought a whole bunch of Tropicana. It's in the car.

Ronna has halfway figured out what's going on.

BURKE

Now, Zack tells me you got 20 at 20, is that right?

RONNA

(suddenly)

You got a bathroom?

ADAM

Down the hall on the right.

ZACK

Let me show you...

SLOW MOTION

Stepping towards Ronna, his back to Burke. He very deliberately mouths a silent...

ZACK

Go.

Ronna sees it. Her eyes go wider. Zack nods.

In the background, Burke is trying to look around. Ronna turns, heading down the hall. Up above, the camera is watching.

For a just a second, Zack smiles.

BURKE (v.o.)

The important thing is, nobody saw anything. She just never got the stuff, that's what the report's gonna say.

INT. BURKE'S CAR / DRIVING - NIGHT

Loop is gone. Zack is in the back, Adam in front.

BURKE [cont'd]
 It's anarchy, this shit. You can never predict what's gonna to happen. But you guys, you did pretty well for your first time. You just better thank me when you get your Oscar.

ADAM
 Emmy.

Burke turns down the ZEPPLIN on the radio.

BURKE
 So. I was wondering if I could ask you kind of a personal question. You're not going to be like, offended.

ADAM
 (cautiously)
 No.

BURKE
 Neither of you are like, Jewish or something.

ADAM
 No.

BURKE
 Because the thing is, my wife and I -- Irene, she's my wife -- we're both working on Christmas so we're gonna have Christmas dinner tonight and I was wondering if you guys might want to come.

A beat.

ADAM
 Oh.

ZACK
 See, the thing is we have plans.

ADAM
 That's right.

BURKE
 Together?

ADAM
Yes.

ZACK
No.

ZACK
(covering)
We have separate plans for the same thing. It's a party one of our producers is throwing.

BURKE
He's throwing a party on Christmas Eve?

ADAM
He is Jewish.

Zack's cell phone RINGS. He answers.

ZACK
Hello...Yeah, uh-huh...I don't remember that being discussed. I thought we were...Okay. Great. Later.

Adam looks to Zack, who hangs up, pissed.

ZACK
What do you know? It looks like we are free.

EXT. A TINY HOUSE IN CULVER CITY - NIGHT

Zack hits the alarm for his red Miata, which BWOOPS.

A prefab Nativity scene glows beside the front door. Adam pushes the doorbell, which CHIMES "Hark Ye Herald Angels Sing."

Horrorified, Zack turns to leave. Adam stops him.

INT. LIVING / DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Too tall for the room, a Christmas tree leans back in a corner. The rest of the living room is dominated by a giant leather sofa pit.

Bored, Adam lifts a plate to check the imprint. He sets it down, straightening it. Now it's out of alignment with the other plates. He looks around casually. No one's watching.

Circling the table, he fixes all the plates and moves silverware to its proper position.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Burke's wife IRENE is mashing potatoes with considerable zeal. Adam leans in, sees her dedication and tries to duck out. But she saw him.

IRENE
Yes? Hi?

ADAM
Sorry. Phone. Messages. Check?

IRENE
Here.

She points. He sheepishly crosses to get it. While he's dialing, Irene starts in with the electric mixer. Butter. Milk. Salt. Adam doesn't know where to look while he's listening to his messages.

He suddenly smiles. Irene notices and stops mixing.

ADAM
(re: phone)
They're singing Christmas carols.
My family. Minnesota, they do
that.

She leans close to listen. Smiles. She continues to lean close -- uncomfortably close -- for a long beat.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Zack snorts a keyful of something up his nose, carefully wipes off any trace. He FLUSHES the toilet.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zack emerges from the bathroom to find Burke stark naked, rubbing his hands over his body.

ZACK
Sorry.

BURKE
No, stay for a sec.

Burke sprays more cologne on his hand.

BURKE
Smell this. What does it smell
like?

Zack shakes his head, doesn't know.

BURKE
CK One. But it's not.

ZACK
Really.

BURKE
I get this for a quarter what that
stuff costs.

ZACK
It's nice.

BURKE
Here.

He sprays some on Zack's hands, who didn't want it. While Burke turns to get some underwear, Zack tries to rub it off on the bedspread.

BURKE
(re: bedspread)
It's down. So is the liner.

ZACK
It is soft.

BURKE
Get on.

ZACK
That's okay.

Burke pushes Zack back flat the bed.

BURKE
Did you hear that?

ZACK
Hear what?

BURKE
Exactly. Individually wrapped
springs. Top quality.

Burke climbs onto the bed beside him.

BURKE
I could be doing aerobics over
here and you wouldn't feel it.

ZACK
I sure wouldn't.

A beat.

BURKE
So, Zack. Would you say you're
open to new things?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Irene is back whipping the potatoes.

IRENE
Of course you like your job. You
get to kiss all those pretty
girls.

ADAM
(mock bashful)
It does have perks.

Irene pops the beaters out of the mixer, hands one to Adam. They
lick the potatoes off them.

IRENE
Tell me something. When you kiss
those girls, you're not really
kissing them, are you?

ADAM
It's a stage kiss. Your lips
touch, but there's no tongue.

IRENE
There's no feeling. Nobody gets
jealous.

ADAM
It's acting. It's not real.

She takes his cleaned beater from him, dumps it in the sink.
Turning back, she kisses him. Caught off guard, he backs into
the refrigerator. It's a good three-second lip lock.

She backs off. There's an awkward beat.

ADAM
See, now, that. There was a
tongue there.

BURKE (o.s.)
Honey, red or white?

Now dressed, Burke comes in with two bottles of wine. Zack is behind him at a distance, still creeped out from the bedroom encounter. He and Adam trade panicked stares.

IRENE
What goes with turkey?

ADAM and ZACK
White.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Burke says grace.

BURKE
Our Heavenly Father, bless this
food we have received from your
bounty and the company you have
brought to our table.

While Burke and Irene have their heads bowed, Adam and Zack exchange panicked glances, each trying to pantomime what has just happened. It leads only to confusion.

BURKE
Remind us of your only son Jesus
Christ who died for our sins so
that we might forever be saved.
Yours is the kingdom and the word
forever and ever, amen.

THE REST
Amen.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Irene slides a plate under the candlestick, where wax is dripping onto the tablecloth. Burke tips the bottle at Adam.

BURKE
More wine?

ZACK
No. He doesn't want any more.
Unless he does, do you?

ADAM
No.

ZACK

This has been great, just wonderful, but we're going to need to leave. Soon.

IRENE

We haven't had dessert.

ZACK

Adam's not feeling well.

ADAM

I'm not. It's true.

Burke and Irene share a look.

BURKE

If you gotta go, then I understand.

(awkward beat)

But Irene and I sort of had an ulterior motive inviting you here.

Zack looks to Adam.

IRENE

He makes it sound sinister. It's not.

BURKE

She's right. Okay, you've looked around our place. Where do you think we got most of this stuff?

Adam and Zack shake their heads.

IRENE

Just guess.

ADAM

Sears?

ZACK

J.C. Penney's?

Irene and Burke both smile.

BURKE

It's actually from American Products. Almost everything in this house is from American Products, from the toilet paper to the mattress to those candles.

IRENE

The wine.

BURKE

Even that cologne you liked.

(practiced)

See, American Products is a multi-level direct wholesaling company. That means we don't just sell the products ourselves, we also recruit and manage teams who work under us. Irene and I started eight months ago and we're already bringing in fifty thousand a year in revenues.

IRENE

We're the number four distributor in Southern California. By March, we might be number three.

She crosses her fingers. So does Burke. We look to Zack, horrified.

BURKE

Now, as law enforcement officers, Irene and I can't recruit distributors from inside the force. It's against the rules and we'd get fired. So what we do is look for people in other industries...

IRENE

...like the entertainment industry.

BURKE

Look at you two. I know you work hard, but you must have 15 to 20 hours a week where you're not doing anything, and what you could be doing is making money. Selling products yourself to directors, camera guys...

IRENE

...makeup people, hair people...

BURKE

...and other actors. And then you bring them on board to work for you. Everybody makes money, everybody wins.

A beat.

ZACK
(realizing)
You want us to sell Amway.

BURKE
American Products. It's a
different company, different
quality of product.

ZACK
That's where you're getting all
your money. That's why you were
talking to those people today.
They sell Amway too.

He starts to laugh uncontrollably, finally BANGING his head down
on the table. Adam is holding it together better.

ADAM
He's had a really stressful week.

EXT. FRONT OF BURKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Walking to the Miata, Adam takes the keys from Zack.

ZACK
I need to do something
terrifically unwholesome. I need
to bathe in sin.

ADAM
With me, or one of your other
boyfriends?

INT. LIQUOR STORE ON PICO - NIGHT

Adam checks a low shelf for the right brand of Scotch. Zack
kneels beside him.

ZACK
I have cheated on you with exactly
one guy.

ADAM
Ditto.

ZACK
Who?

ADAM

No. See, if I tell you, you will
freak out and it will be drama.
Bad not-funny Roseanne kind of
drama and I am just not up for it.

He finds the right brand.

BY THE REGISTER

They wait in a short line.

ZACK

I'll tell you mine.

ADAM

No.

ZACK

Why not?

ADAM

You can't wait to tell me, can
you? You're gloating. You think
yours is better than mine.

ZACK

I don't.

ADAM

It's Sean Connery, isn't it?

ZACK

Count of three.

ADAM

Alright. Sure. Wait.
(reconsidering)
Okay.

With fingers, they both count off "One. Two. Three."

ADAM

Jimmy.

ZACK

Jimmy in makeup.

ADAM

Jimmy?

ZACK

Jimmy. Jimmy.

They both stand for a moment, bewildered. It's their turn at the register. Adam sets the bottle down.

A doorbell RINGS.

INT. HIGH RISE APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

An apartment door opens to reveal a chubby girl in sweats (SANDRA) with a cordless phone and giant bowl of popcorn. She drops the former into the latter.

ADAM
Is Jimmy here?

SANDRA
Oh my God. Oh. My God.

She's thrilled and disbelieving at the same time. She fishes the phone out of the bowl.

SANDRA
(to phone)
I'll call you back.
(to them)
Jimmy's not here. He went to this thing. Let me find it.

She can't decide whether to close the door on them or not, so she only shuts it halfway. She pokes her head out the door again.

SANDRA
You do know, don't you?

ZACK
We know.

SANDRA
I take no responsibility. I was only an innocent bystander. But there was once where you missed each other by three minutes. It was so exciting.

She finds what she was looking for on the back of the door. Peels off a printed card.

SANDRA
It's some sort of rave thing.

ZACK
(takes card)
Mary Xmas Superfest.

SANDRA
He left an hour ago.

Adam and Zack head back down the hall. She calls out after them.

SANDRA

You're not going to kill him, are you? The little shit owes me rent.

EXT. WAREHOUSE / MARY XMAS SUPERFEST - NIGHT

Wearing a turban, a CLUB KID leads a donkey to the entrance. A pregnant DRAG QUEEN follows as Mary. We move down the line of people waiting to get in.

SPIDER MARINE

Ecstasy? The real shit?

FILA GUY

Pharmaceutical grade. None of the crunchy herbal rave shit.

Beyond them, Todd Gaines, seething. Beyond him, Adam and Zack.

ZACK

Okay, I just have to say this. The thing is, about Jimmy, he wasn't even that good.

ADAM

I know.

ZACK

Mediocre at best. And the sounds he made, God. It was like having sex with Nell.

Adam imitates the MOAN.

ZACK

Somewhere off Greenland, hunchback whales were beaching themselves.

ADAM

And the ear thing.

He reaches his tongue out. Zack shudders.

ADAM

Hello, I have Q-Tips. That's really not necessary.

ZACK

The only thing I will give him credit for is the oral.

ADAM

What do you mean? He was terrible. At some point I just had to stop him and correct years of bad technique. I had to take him by the ears and retrain him from the throat up.

A beat.

ZACK

When was that?

ADAM

October, maybe?

ZACK

Early October. And he suddenly got so much better.

A beat.

ADAM

That is so disturbing. It's like you were there.

INT. SUPERFEST - NIGHT

Claire cuts through the crowd with two empty cups, in search of beverage.

AT THE BAR

A sloe-eyed blonde boy (JIMMY) makes friendly with the BARTENDER, who is too busy to flirt. Rebuffed, Jimmy scans the crowd.

Zack comes up behind him, grabs him by the waist. Jimmy smiles, kisses him hello.

Adam comes up from the other side, blows in Jimmy's ear. Jimmy is so coked up that it takes him a beat to make the connection. Zack plus Adam equals bad.

He smiles nervously.

Zack takes a pair of child safety scissors from his jacket. Confused, Jimmy tries to back away. Adam holds him tight.

Grabbing a fistful of hair, Zack cuts it off at the scalp. He lets the hair fall to the floor.

Tucking away the scissors, he and Adam walk off.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The tiny Miata maneuvers through the badly organized parking lot, trying to find the way out.

INT. MIATA - NIGHT

Zack points.

ZACK

Through there, along the edge.

Adam drives along the perimeter of the field, still looking for where they came in. As they pass a row...

ZACK

Holy shit!

He saw something.

ZACK

Wait, back up. Back up!

ADAM

What?

ZACK

It was her. Ronna.

Adam stops, puts it in REVERSE. They are almost to the row when...

IN THE SIDE MIRROR

Ronna runs out from behind a parked van.

Foot on the brake.

Adam flinches.

Zack ducks.

Contact.

A CRUNCH.

Ronna SLAMS against the soft top.

Rolls across the windshield.

Slides off the hood.

Over the headlights.

A smear of blood.

A beat.

Adam is frozen with fear.

ADAM
Oh my God.

Zack looks past him to see Gaines standing there, gun drawn.

ZACK
Go. Go. Go!

ADAM
What if she's...

ZACK
Go!

Zack forces the stick into first. Gears GRIND. Adam pops the clutch and they lurch forward, out of there.

IN THE MIRROR

Gaines steps out to watch them go.

EXT. 24/7 GAS - NIGHT

The Miata is parked at the far island.

INT. MIATA - NIGHT

Adam steadies his hands on the wheel. Zack passes him the scotch. He takes a gulp, passes it back.

ZACK
Let's think about it logically.
Either she's alive, or she's
dead. If she's dead, then there's
nothing we can do. If she's
alive, then the guy with the gun,
who seemed to want to shoot her,
probably did shoot her.

ADAM
So even if she's alive, she's
dead.

ZACK
Exactly.

A beat. Adam gets out of the car, walks away. Zack takes another swig.

EXT. SIDE OF THE GAS STATION - NIGHT

Adam stops at a payphone. A long moment before he reaches for the receiver. With a breath, he dials 911.

OPERATOR (v.o.)
911 Emergen...

He hangs up.

EXT. GAS STATION ISLAND - NIGHT

Zack dunks the squeegee back in the bucket. With a wad of paper towels, he cleans the hood of the car. The towels come up red.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - NIGHT

Washing his face, Adam looks at his reflection in the scratched mirror. He steps to the urinal, unbuttons.

Before he can start to piss, he notices something strange. He looks down at his crotch.

EXT. GAS STATION ISLAND - NIGHT

Zack throws away the last of the towels as Adam approaches.

With a finger to his lips, Adam holds out a mess of tape and wires, all connected to a battery pack. It's the microphone he was wearing.

ZACK
Holy sh...

He stops himself. Adam throws the bundle as far as he can. They keep their voices low anyway.

ZACK
They wouldn't have been listening
all this time.

ADAM
Hello, they could have been
recording it. Everything we said
could be on tape somewhere. They
would know we did it.

A beat.

ZACK
(an idea)
What if we were just running
lines? For a scene?

Adam won't even dignify that with an answer. A long moment, just the BUZZ of the lights overhead.

ZACK
There's a pretty good chance no
one's found her yet.

ADAM
They will.

ZACK
If there's no body, there's no
crime.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

It's just starting to drizzle. The Superfest is still RAGING in the distance.

Adam digs through the trunk of the convertible, frantically rearranging the junk inside. He keeps looking around the lid, waiting for someone to sneak up on them.

Zack watches Adam's fruitless arranging efforts.

ZACK
Stop. Okay, stop!

ADAM
What?

ZACK
It's a Miata.

All Adam's effort, he's made enough room for a pizza. Maybe.

ZACK
We'll put her in the passenger
seat.

ADAM
Where will I...Or you...

ZACK
In the passenger seat. Holding
her up.

Adam shudders at the thought.

With a flashlight, Zack jumps down into the ditch. He nudges Ronna's body with his foot. She's dead alright.

He rolls the body over, grabbing under her arms. He tries to hoist her up, but she's too heavy and the ditch is too deep.

ZACK
Little help?

ADAM
(not moving)
I can't.

ZACK
What do you mean?

ADAM
I can't do this.

Frustrated, Zack tries again to lug the body out. He can't do it by himself. Meanwhile, Adam is starting to hyperventilate, tears swelling.

ZACK
Okay, listen to me...

ADAM
She's dead.

ZACK
She's not dead.

ADAM
She's dead. I hit her and I
killed her.

He looks around, expecting someone to walk up and see them.

ZACK
No you didn't, okay? This is all
just make-believe. This is a
scene. She's just acting dead.
And you're just acting scared.

Adam laughs to himself, still crying.

ZACK
See, there's the lights, and
there's the camera. Watch your
blocking.

ZACK [cont'd]
 (pointing)
 There's Michelle in wardrobe, say
 "Hi, Michelle!"

ADAM
 Hi, Michelle.

ZACK
 The craft service truck is right
 around the corner, and they have
 lots of little veggie burgers on
 the grill. And you can have one
 if you just help me finish this
 scene.

(sniffing)
 Can you smell them? Can you smell
 them on the grill?

A beat.

ADAM
 I'm not delusional.

ZACK
 Then take her fucking arms!

Obeying, Adam grabs Ronna's wrists as Zack pushes from below.
 Together they get the body out of the ditch. Zack climbs up to
 help maneuver her into the car. Just then...

Ronna MOANS.

Adam freaks out, dropping his side. Ronna's head hits the dirt.
 Louder MOANING.

ADAM
 She's not dead.

ZACK
 No shit!

They stand back, watching Ronna MOAN as she lies half-in, half-
 out of the car.

ADAM
 If she's not dead, that means we
 didn't kill her. We can just
 leave her.

ZACK
 She's almost dead. We leave her
 and she dies, why did we bother
 coming back? I mean, you still
 killed her.

ADAM

What do you mean, I killed her?

ZACK

Christ, I didn't mean it that way.
C'mon. I would never testify
against you.

Adam is not reassured.

ZACK

We have to stick with Plan A.

ADAM

In Plan A she was dead.

Zack reaches into the car, pulling out The Club. Trades a look with Adam, who finally acquiesces. Almost says something, doesn't. They both look around, making sure no one's coming.

Zack grips the bar like a baseball bat. Adam turns his back, covering his ears.

Zack raises the bar. Adam scrunches his face tight.

Zack takes two quick breaths. And holds.

And holds. And holds.

Adam opens his eyes, looks back. Zack isn't swinging. He lowers the bar. They both breathe again, relieved.

ZACK

Okay. New plan.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Coming out the admitting entrance, A NURSE in a raincoat takes a seat on the bench. We stay CLOSE on her as she digs for a cigarette. She clicks her lighter again and again and again, but there's no flame.

Looking off-screen...

NURSE

Do you have a light?

No answer. Perturbed, she goes back to clicking the lighter, until it finally works. The first puff is like Heaven.

A beat. Ronna's body slumps into frame, falling against the nurse. Unfazed, the nurse checks for a pulse.

NURSE

Christ.

She takes an unhurried drag on the cigarette, then crushes it underfoot.

INT. JAVAMAN CAFE / HOLLYWOOD - DAY

Too early for the brunch crowd, just a smattering of vampires. Todd Gaines sits alone at a booth by the window, disassembling a newspaper. He finds the comics. Laying the paper flat, he tears off the bottom corner of the page and starts reading like a kid, his whole body leaning over the table.

At the door, Claire comes in, shaking the rain out of her hair. After a beat, she does it again, as if she doesn't remember doing it the first time. She's all nerves and raw edges, like there's static only she can feel.

She looks right past Gaines, out to the rain on the street. He doesn't try to catch her eye. The Jamaican WAITER walks past her with a pot of coffee.

WAITER

Anywhere you want.

CLAIRE

I'm meeting people.

He doesn't care. Claire takes a seat at the table in front of her, but it's not to her liking. Then a booth. She plays with the salt shakers. Bad. She moves them to another table.

It's only now that she sees Gaines watching her. At first she doesn't recognize him. Then a light goes on. She climbs over the booth and into his, facing him.

CLAIRE

Hey.

GAINES

Hey.

The Waiter comes with coffee, refills Gaines' cup.

Tugging on the Waiter's apron, Claire overturns the cup in front of her. He fills it. Claire overturns a second cup, points to it. A big weird smile. Reluctantly, the Waiter fills that too. Then leaves.

CLAIRE
(to Gaines)
I'll pay you back for breakfast.

GAINES
I'm buying you breakfast?

CLAIRE
You are? That's so sweet. But
I'm not really that hungry.

She sheds her coat, having great difficulty with one sleeve.

GAINES
Professional curiosity. What
are you on?

CLAIRE
Ginseng and Dexatrim.

GAINES
Now there's a speedball you don't
want to miss.

She drinks her entire cup of coffee, seemingly unaware how hot
it is. Afterwards, she feels her tongue.

CLAIRE
See, I had a feeling you weren't
all evil. That was a really sweet
thing you did for Ronna, letting
her return "merchandise" and all.

She looks around warily, as if somebody might have heard. Or
cared. Coast is clear.

CLAIRE
Have you seen her? Her and
Mannie?

He shakes his head.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
See, when we go out, we always
meet here afterwards in case we
get separated. It happens more
than you think.

The Waiter returns, ready to take their order.

GAINES
(to Claire)
So you don't know where they are?

CLAIRE

For all I know, they could be...

She stops short. A beat.

CLAIRE

...dancing.

She smiles as she hands the Waiter her menu.

INT. CAFE - LATER

Gaines scrapes the last of his eggs off the plate. Claire sits with two pieces of toast, untouched. She takes the scrap of the newspaper he tore off, looks at it.

CLAIRE

What do you have against The Family Circus?

GAINES

It's evil.

CLAIRE

Besides that.

GAINES

Okay. You sit down with your paper, and you're enjoying your entire two-page comic spread, everything from Close To Home to Dr. Katz to Mutts -- God knows I love those little guys -- but then there's The Family Circus, bottom right corner, just waiting to suck. It's the last thing you read, and it spoils everything you read before it.

CLAIRE

You could just not read it.

GAINES

I hate it, yet I'm uncontrollably drawn to it. Are you going to...

He points to her toast. She slides it over. He slathers on a thick coat of jelly.

CLAIRE

Do you know what I like about you?

GAINES

What?

CLAIRE

I'm asking, I don't know. It's not your face, because you're only medium cute. Good upper body, decent ass. I think what it is, is you might be the first non-fake person I've met here.

GAINES

Me.

CLAIRE

I'm serious. My whole life seems to be this giant audition for the Real World. It's like, my friends, everybody here, they're always trying to front themselves as something they're not. And then no matter what, they always get screwed in the end. It's inevitable.

GAINES

Maybe so.

CLAIRE

I say, set your expectations low and be happy if anything remotely good happens.

Gaines leaves money for the check.

CLAIRE

You know what I like best about Christmas? The surprises. It's like, you get this box, and you're sure you know what's in it. You shake it, you weigh it, and you're totally convinced you have it pegged. No doubt in your mind. But then you open it up, and it's something completely different. Bing! Wow! Bang! Surprise! I mean, it's like you and me here.

She takes a sip of coffee, smiles. She has a bewitching smile.

CLAIRE

I'm not saying this is anything it's not. But, c'mon. This time yesterday, who'dda thunk it?

INT. STAIRWELL TO GAINES' APARTMENT - DAY

Claire kisses Gaines, pinning him against the wall.

She fumbles with his belt. His hand slides under her jacket, trying to undo her bra. They take a break from undressing to kiss harder.

Reclining on the steps, Claire tries to push his jeans down with her toes. Her foot gets caught in the chain from his wallet. Her butt slides down a step. They laugh.

The waistband of his briefs are caught on his erection. She reaches in.

GAINES

Oooh. Ow. Better.

As they start to work up a rhythm, Huxley the cat comes down the steps, curious. He brushes against them, unnoticed. Finally, he MEWS.

GAINES

(stopping)

How did you get out?

He looks to the top of the stairs, where a MAN is watching them.

It's Victor.

He has the silver .45 drawn on them. Gaines looks down to the door at the bottom. Vic Jr. is blocking it. They're trapped. Claire looks around, trying to figure out what's happening.

A phone RINGS.

INT. A CRAPPY APARTMENT / MIRACLE MILE - DAY

Rain drips in through a half-shut window, soaking into the dirty carpet. We hear KEYS in the lock as the phone keeps RINGING.

Simon opens the door, letting Tiny and Singh race for the bathroom. Simon reaches for the phone. Marcus stops him. It rings through the answering machine.

SIMON (on tape)

This is Simon, leave a message.

The machine BEEPS. A pause, then DIAL TONE.

INT. GAINES' APARTMENT - DAY

Gaines hangs up the phone. He's sitting next to Claire on the couch, where Victor can keep the gun on both of them.

VICTOR
How many times was that?

VIC JR.
Five.

CLAIRE
Six.

VICTOR
What did you say?

CLAIRE
Six. You've called him six times,
and no answer. Maybe it's a sign
that, oh, I don't know, he's not
there.

A beat.

VICTOR
Why are you talking?

INT. SIMON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marcus nods, do it. Simon lifts the receiver, dials *69.

INT. GAINES' APARTMENT - DAY

The phone RINGS. No one is sure what to do. Finally, Victor decides...

VICTOR
Let it ring.

It RINGS. And RINGS. Finally, the machine gets it.

GAINES (on tape)
This is Gaines, leave a message.

INT. SIMON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Simon looks at the phone for a beat, then SLAMS it down.

SIMON
Why would Gaines call me? He
knows I'm not supposed to be back
until tomorrow.

A beat.

Simon takes out his wallet, sorting through the credit cards.
Figures out what's missing.

SIMON
Oh shit.

CUT TO:

A series of shots:

Marcus and Simon move the couch to block the door.

Marcus up-ends the table in front of the window.

Simon goes through drawers, pulling out knives and scissors.

Marcus peers out the blind, gun in hand.

Simon SMASHES a kitchen chair, sorting out the jagged wooden
legs.

MARCUS
Simon. Simon! They're not
vampires.

INT. GAINES' APARTMENT - DAY

Victor looks at his watch.

VICTOR
(to Vic Jr.)
Make me a sandwich.

VIC JR.
What kind of sandwich?

VICTOR
How can I tell you what kind of
sandwich until you tell me what's
in the refrigerator?

Jr. shrugs, goes.

VICTOR
Moron.

INT. GAINES' KITCHEN - DAY

Vic Jr. smells the turkey, puts it on anyway. Cuts the sandwich in half.

VICTOR (o.s.)
Did you put mayonnaise on it?

VIC JR.
No!

INTERCUT WITH LIVING ROOM

VICTOR
Jesus! When did you ever see me eat a sandwich without mayonnaise?
(to Gaines and Claire)
I wasn't there, I didn't see it, but I can guarantee you he was a breach birth. Only way a head could enjoy being so far up an ass.

LOOKING IN THE REFRIGERATOR

Vic Jr. hears his father, ignores it. Pushing aside jars, he finally finds the mayonnaise. And something beyond it. A box of ammunition. Nine millimeter rounds.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Gaines' gun is tucked between the cushion and the armrest of the couch. Claire is sitting closest. Her hand is just inches away.

Gaines can see what she's thinking. He shakes his head. Don't do it.

VIC JR. (o.s.)
Dad?

VICTOR
Jesus! How hard is it to make a fucking sandwich?

He turns just slightly towards the door. It's all the opening Claire needs. With one smooth motion, she grabs the gun and stands.

CLAIRE
Drop the fucking gun!

Victor doesn't flinch, turning to aim right for her head. This isn't how she planned it, but she holds her ground. Gaines slowly stands. Vic Jr. approaches from the kitchen.

GAINES
Okay, okay. Don't shoot. It's not loaded. Her gun is not loaded.

ON CLAIRE -- disbelieving.

ON VICTOR -- aiming tighter.

CLAIRE
He's lying.

GAINES
I'm not.

They talk at once.

CLAIRE
He's lying. It is loaded.
(to Gaines)
Shut up! Just shut up!
(to Victor)
He's just saying
that because he doesn't
think I'll do it. And I will
so fucking kill you.

GAINES
It's not loaded. I
don't keep a loaded gun
in the fucking couch.
(to Claire)
Just give him the gun.
Give him the gun.
Give me the gun.

GAINES
Claire. It's. Not. Loaded.

He reaches for it. She turns on him. He backs off. She aims back to Victor.

CLAIRE
If the gun isn't loaded, why did
he flinch?

ON VICTOR

Trying to sort this out. The .45 is starting to wobble in his hand. He's not as steady as he used to be.

VICTOR
(to Gaines)
You. Sit down.

He doesn't.

CLAIRE

Do it.

Gaines sits. He shakes his head. This is bad.

VICTOR

(to Vic Jr.)

Get her gun.

ON VIC JUNIOR

He looks at his father, disbelieving.

VICTOR

Get her fucking gun.

The .45 continues to shake in the old man's hand. He tries to steady it.

CLAIRE

Don't do it, junior. I'll blow your head off.

VICTOR

Do it.

Vic Jr. looks to Gaines, who is staying out of it.

VICTOR

Do it!

Accepting his fate, Vic Jr. finally moves. Claire steps back once, twice. Aims at Vic Jr. He's still coming. Closing her eyes, she pulls the trigger.

CLICK.

Empty.

With a sudden burst, Gaines launches himself at Victor, taking him from the side. The old man tries to squeeze off a shot, but Gaines slams his wrist against the stereo cabinet. The gun drops.

Claire and Vic Jr. both dive for it.

In the melee, the gun slides deep under the cabinet. Claire reaches in after it, but Vic Jr. drags her away by the belt. She kicks at him, tagging him once in his wounded shoulder.

Victor lands a few good punches, but Gaines has the advantage of youth. Finding a solid grip, he pulls a Mortal Kombat, throwing the older man to the floor. Victor SCREAMS.

And SCREAMS.

Claire grabs under the cabinet, pulling out a dusty remote control. She reaches in again.

Victor is still MOANING. His limbs flail helplessly -- a turtle on its back. Vic Jr. is about to go after Gaines when he stops, watching his father.

Claire gets the gun, sits up. But suddenly, no one's fighting.

VIC JR.

Dad, are you okay? Is it your back?

Victor MOANS an angry yes.

VIC JR.

(explaining)

He has a bad back. It goes out on him.

The three watch Victor writhe on the floor, spewing half-formed epithets.

VIC JR.

Do you have any painkillers or anything?

GAINES

Actually, yeah. I do.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Gaines and Claire watch from the top as Vic Jr. helps his MOANING father down the stairs.

CLAIRE

Junior! Bit of advice. Cut the cord.

She heads back to the apartment. At the door, she turns...

CLAIRE

(to Gaines)

Are you coming?

He follows her in.

INT. SIMON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Singh and Tiny open the door very carefully, trying to be quiet. We REVERSE to see Simon and Marcus, both asleep at their posts.

The door SQUEAKS.

Marcus wakes up, disoriented. Sees Tiny and Singh at the door. A beat.

Marcus motions for them to wait a sec. He gets his jacket and quietly follows them out.

In his chair, Simon continues to SNORE. The gun dangles in his hand.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

An OLD MEXICAN WOMAN eats grapes from her breakfast tray, mashing the fruit between her dentureless gums and setting the skins aside. She looks over to the other bed in the room, where

RONNA

wakes up, a bit at a time. Her nose crinkles, her tongue finds her lips. Finally a swollen eye opens, looks around. She sees the IV dangling from her arm. Around her wrist, a hospital bracelet.

CLOSE UP: JANE DOE, FEMALE

She smiles. Even that hurts. She lies still for a few beats, until suddenly...

RONNA
Shit. Oh shit!

She sits up with difficulty, gets her bearings. Rips off the tape and carefully pulls the needle out of her arm. Climbs out of bed and collapses.

The Mexican Woman stares at her, saying nothing.

Ronna tries to stand back up, but her legs won't cooperate. She crawls across the floor on her knees, heading for the closet.

In a bathroom door mirror, she sees herself. Her body is one big bruise: face swollen, stitches on her chin, an ACE bandage around her leg.

AT THE CLOSET

Ronna pulls herself to her feet. She finds her clothes in a neat pile. Checks the pockets -- her pager, the party invitation, a wad of cash.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Ronna limps through a pack of happy CHURCH CAROLERS as they travel from room to room. In the background, a NURSE calls after her.

NURSE

Miss? Miss! You can't leave.
You have a concussion.

Ronna ignores her, heading down the stairs.

INT. A CAB - DAY

Bad wipers leave streaks across the windshield. We're in the warehouse district, inching down an alley.

RONNA

Next block down.

CAB DRIVER

You know where you're going?

RONNA

Next block down, okay?

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

The cab waits while Ronna limps ahead, yelling...

RONNA

Mannie? Mannie?

All the alleys look the same. He could be anywhere. The cab rolls up behind her.

CAB DRIVER

It's Christmas. There's nobody here.

RONNA

Just wait for me. I'm gonna find him.

By his expression, he doesn't believe her. She peels two twenties off her stash, hands them over.

RONNA

Wait for me. I'll be back in ten minutes.

She limps away in the rain. Two beats, then we HEAR the cab shift gears. It starts backing away.

RONNA

Hey! Hey! You fuck. You fucking fuck.

There's no point chasing it. Ronna throws trash after it, hitting once with a can.

EXT. BEHIND A DUMPSTER - DAY

A stray black cat scratches through a pile of foam peanuts, looking for bugs. Another cat crawls up the body of Mannie, propped against the dumpster. A trickle of water drips off the garbage onto his face. The cat licks it clean.

Mannie smiles.

EXT. ALLEY INTERSECTION - DAY

RONNA

Mannie! Can you hear me?

MANNIE (o.s.)

Yeah!

Ronna turns to see Mannie behind her, stretching his neck. He's pale. His eyes are bloodshot. But otherwise, he's fine.

MANNIE

You look like shit.

INT. THE BEAST - DAY

Mannie puts the car in park. They're outside an apartment building in Hollywood. Ronna counts through her money.

MANNIE

You have enough to pay off your rent?

RONNA

And twenty left over. Maybe I'll
open a savings account.

She tucks the money away and rests for a moment.

RONNA

You might have brain damage from
overdosing.

A beat.

MANNIE

Dain brambage?

RONNA

Dain brambage, you shit.

MANNIE

Are you calling in sick today?

RONNA

You know, I just might.

With great effort, she gets out of the car. Slamming the door
almost knocks her over. Regaining her balance, she aims for the
apartment building. Mannie rolls down the window.

MANNIE

Wait, Ronna!

She turns.

MANNIE (cont'd)

You got plans for New Year's?

She smiles.

RONNA

Merry Christmas, Mannie.

She continues limping towards the apartment building as we
slowly...

FADE OUT.