

# "THE TEST"

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"THE TEST"

FADE IN:

TITLES SHOTS - JUST JIM'S HEAD - FUZZY/IN AND OUT OF BLACK

JIM DAVIS, 45, mouth gagged with a T-shirt. Eyes fight to open. His head lolls from side to side. His eyes close. Open again. Close again. His head rolls back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAFÉ- DAY

DEBBIE, 42, a tense, former-but-fading beauty, stirs a glass of iced coffee with a straw, watches as MAUREEN, a surgically improved-upon 44, carries a lunch salad over to the table and sits close beside her, nudges her conspiratorially.

MAUREEN

So?

DEBBIE

So, I don't know.

MAUREEN

You said yourself --

DEBBIE

No. I didn't say anything. It's just, a feeling I've had lately.

MAUREEN

(digs in)

Mmm. God, these caramelized pecans.  
Yum.

(notes Deb's distraction)

Look, I had the same exact feelings.

DEBBIE

I know, but --

MAUREEN

Every married woman has. He's distant, not as affectionate, barely notices you, even when you're bare patch naked. He's feeling old, and, no offense, but looking at you makes him feel even older. Have you checked his browsing history?

DEBBIE

His what?

MAUREEN  
His browsing history. The web. Sites  
he's visited. C'mon!

DEBBIE  
I wouldn't even know --

MAUREEN  
Did I not tell you before to get into a  
Learning Annex class?

DEBBIE  
You don't think he's one of those  
Dateline predators or something?

MAUREEN  
NO! Well... Hmm. No. Look, if I were  
you I'd lay the goddamned test on him.  
It's time.

DEBBIE  
I don't know, Maureen. That seems so  
drastic.

MAUREEN  
Drastic. You know what's drastic?  
Approaching mid life without knowing  
where you stand, that's what's drastic.  
You want your head permanently on a  
swivel? Hell no. It's better just to  
cash in your chips while you're still  
ahead... and live to fuck another day.

DEBBIE  
God... I should get home.

MAUREEN  
You're going to Frisco, right, for your  
anniversary?  
(Debbie nods)  
Perfect.

Maureen chomps away on her salad, gulps some drink, grins.

EXT. A GYM - NIGHT

The front door of Jim's BMW SLAMS shut. JIM, 46, a waning  
hairline and waxing midriff, still dressed for the office,  
reaches into the back seat and pulls out a gym bag just as

a motorcycle pulls up beside him, engine ROARING in quick  
revs as its driver BILL SHERMAN, 49, helmet on, winks at  
Jim, who SLAMS his back door shut. Jim stands back,  
scrutinizing the shiny black Harley.

JIM  
So, this is the bad boy?

Bill kills the beastly ROAR, loosens his silk tie, climbs off, and uses the tie to wipe a spot off the gas tank.

BILL  
Yup. Hear me roar.

He reaches into one of the saddle bags for his gym tote.

JIM  
Impressive.

Bill walks quickly by him, toward the gym.

BILL  
Not to mention...

He lifts off his helmet, revealing a full head of hair, new hair, which he smooths into place.

JIM  
Wow.

INT. A GYM - NIGHT

Sneakers SQUEAL as two teams of guys, in their thirties and forties, including Jim and Bill, play half-court basketball in slow motion, banging shoulders, losing dribbles, missing easy lay-ups, but high-fiving at every opportunity.

One player stands out, IVORY JACKSON, 30, a handsome black man, who steals the ball from Jim's dribble and heads for the hoop, looping the ball around his back before laying it up and in. Jim, winded, beaten, can only watch.

INT. SAUNA - NIGHT

Jim, white towel wrapped like a skirt, sits against the wood wall, his head back, eyes closed.

Bill sneaks up on him and gives him a gentle shot in the arm.

BILL  
Looking a little slow out there tonight. Gotta play more proactive, physical. More physical equals more power. LeBron James, baby.

Jim eyes Bill's toupee, pats down his own hair.

BILL (CONT'D)  
The old orchard lost a few trees, buddy?

JIM  
Five grand, huh?

BILL  
Plus the monthly.

JIM  
Christ, what is it, gold?

BILL  
It is to Jacqué.

JIM  
Who's Jackie?

BILL  
Jacqué. French. Canadian, really, but  
you'd swear she was from down under...  
if you catch my sum and substance.

Bill lifts his towel a little, fans himself downstairs.

JIM  
What about Maureen?

BILL  
Who?

JIM  
Um... your wife?

BILL  
Ex-wife. You didn't hear?

JIM  
God, no. I'm sorry.

BILL  
Yeah, well, don't be. No way this  
captain goes down with the ship. Jim,  
guys like you and me missed the gravy  
train. You know, back in the day we  
laid all the tracks, but we never got  
our damned tickets punched.

He looks off, carried away by his own metaphor.

BILL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
Nowadays, women are free. The younger  
the freer. They expect things of men.  
Come right up to you, all full of piss,  
vinegar, that glass ceiling slash Me  
Too resentment crapola, grab your  
pecker, and hang on for dear life.  
Jesus, I had no clue what was happening  
out there.

Jim watches him walk off, whistling.

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - DAY

Jim, his back to the door, facing his computer screen which flashes between the DOW and Nasdaq charts, eyes a magazine.

INSERT MEN'S MAGAZINE: an article on how to deal with male pattern baldness. A KNOCK on his door.

LARRY JACOBSON, 55, dressed for success, peeks his head in.

LARRY  
Got a minute, Jimbo?

JIM  
Sure.

Larry steps in, followed by Ivory Jackson.

LARRY  
You know Jackson here, right?

JIM  
Yeah, sure. We play roundball together.

Ivory smiles, graciously.

LARRY  
Great. Super. Listen, while you're away, I'm gonna let Jackson keep an eye on your clients. Okay?

JIM  
Yeah, uh, sure. But you know Maryanne can handle just about anything that --

LARRY  
I think the girls do enough around here as it is. Don't you? Jim, business doesn't take a vacation. Right? I mean, with every jerkoff in the world thinking all he needs to do business is a damn cellphone and wifi connection, we'll go the way of the dial-up if we don't stand sentry. Besides, it's no problem for Jackson to take a few calls.

(to Jackson)  
Right, son?

IVORY  
No problem whatsoever.  
(re Jim's magazine)  
I like to keep busy.

Jim tucks the magazine away.

LARRY  
Okay, buddy? Super for you?

Larry makes a six gun out of his hand and shoots a finger at Jim, then blows off the barrel before exiting with Jackson.

JIM

Super.

INT. JIM'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jim reads the directions on a bottle of Minoxidil 5%, pulls the eyedropper out of the bottle, holds it above his head and squeezes out a burst of solution onto the back of his head.

He waits for the drops to penetrate, but, as he does, one drizzles down off his forehead and into his eye, burning.

JIM

Shit!

INT. JIM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT, LATER

While Debbie snores lowly, Jim, shorts and T-shirt, sits up on the edge of the bed, turns the alarm clock toward him, as it clicks over to 3:01.

He tiptoes toward the door.

DEBBIE

Where are you going?

JIM

Gotta pee.

DEBBIE

Is everything okay with you, anything bothering you you wanna talk about?

A beat.

JIM

No. I'm okay. Hey, did you know Bill and Maureen split up?

DEBBIE

Yes. We talked about that.

JIM

We did? When?

DEBBIE

Months ago. Why?

JIM

Whatta ya mean, why?

DEBBIE

Go pee.

Jim feels his way toward the door, bangs into it, grumbles.

INT. JIM'S DEN - NIGHT

Jim, still in his T-shirt and shorts, now wearing reading glasses, sits at his desk in front of his laptop.

The computer screen shows the Email Main Menu. Jim's portfolio window pops into view. He slides the mouse and clicks it. A popup opens, revealing his bond fund account. \$348,456. A new email pops up.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN:

"Lonely Women Seek Partners in Your Area."

BACK TO JIM:

his hand sliding the mouse closer to the new email.

DEBBIE (O.S.)

Thought you had to pee?

JIM

Jesus, Deb!

She covers a yawn with her bathrobe sleeve, as Jim begins to shut down the system.

JIM (CONT'D)

I did pee. Then I checked our bond fund. Left in such a hurry, forgot to see how it closed today.

Debbie slides up a chair.

DEBBIE

Can I watch?

Shut down complete.

JIM

Let's get to bed. It's late, and we've got an early flight.

He clicks off the desk light. In darkness:

DEBBIE

You would tell me if there was anything bothering you, right?

JIM

Uh, sure.



INT. A JETLINER - DAY

A pretty, young FLIGHT ATTENDANT glances at Debbie's boarding pass and points the way down the right aisle. Jim, trailing Debbie by a few carryons, flashes a smile at the Attendant. Debbie notices.

EXT. REGENT HOTEL - DAY

As Jim and Debbie exit the Super Shuttle bus, a scraggly white PANHANDLER #1 hits them right up. Jim ignores him and hustles Debbie in front of him and into the hotel.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Small room: double bed, dresser, TV armoire, chair, desk. Jim, dressed for dinner, sits on the end of the bed, laptop computer beside him, and flicks the remote control at the TV.

ON TV: TV REPORTER #1 stands on a bustling street.

TV REPORTER #1(ON TV)  
Bicyclists are up in arms about the new ordinance --

Jim flicks the TV again and checks his watch.

JIM  
We're gonna be late, Debbie.

ON TV: TV REPORTER #2.

TV REPORTER #2  
Responding to continued complaints from tourists about the proliferation of aggressive panhandling and crime in the streets, city officials have pledged additional police presence as yet another visitor today was --

Jim mutes the TV, calls out toward the bathroom.

JIM  
They won't hold those reservations.

Debbie pulls open the bathroom door and stands there. She's a knockout -- snug-fitting black dress, pearls.

DEBBIE  
Well, how do I look?

JIM  
Fine.

Without so much as a glance toward her, Jim clicks off the TV, picks up his jacket, heads for the door and opens it.

Debbie walks into the room and sits on the bed. She turns her wedding band around her finger, starts to SOB lowly.

Jim closes the door. Without turning...

JIM (CONT'D)

What?

DEBBIE

Nothing. Let's go.

(rises, plops back down)

Why don't you just go without me?

You're in such a hurry.

Jim turns back to her, leans close and holds her by the shoulders.

JIM

Hon, you know how these places are -- they fill up. You don't get in on time, you wait an hour. You look great, really.

DEBBIE

Remember when we were here twenty years ago? Did it seem different to you then?

JIM

Yeah, it was cheaper. Can you believe what they get for a room like this now?

DEBBIE

What happened to you?

JIM

What?

DEBBIE

Why are you... ?

JIM

(sits down beside her)

What are you talking about, Deb?

DEBBIE

I don't know. Remember all the things we used to do together?

JIM

Like... ?

DEBBIE

Like making love.

JIM  
We still have sex.

DEBBIE  
Yeah, well, it would be nice if we could have it some night when I was awake.

(a beat)  
And it's not just that. That I can live with... or without... or whatever, but you know what I miss most? You used to be so funny. I love the sound of you laughing... us laughing together. We never laugh anymore, Jim.

JIM  
We don't?  
(she shakes her head sadly)  
Look, if I've been awol lately, I mean from our relationship, I'll try to do better. I'll work at it. I really will. There's so much going on at work, and... I don't know, I guess I'm just feeling like I'm getting this close to being obsolete.

Debbie nods in acknowledgement, but says...

DEBBIE  
You're not obsolete.

JIM  
Thanks. You're great. You really are. I'm gonna try harder. You'll see.

She looks for the old Jim deep in his eyes, rubs her hand through what's left of his hair and tears up.

DEBBIE  
Thank you.

JIM  
For what?

DEBBIE  
For hearing me. What a beautiful gift.

Jim looks slightly confused, but kisses her on the forehead.

JIM  
We should go, huh? We can talk over dinner, too.

DEBBIE  
Yeah? And leave the cellphone here?

JIM  
Sure.

Jim pulls the cell out of his pants, drops it on the bed beside him, reconsiders, then hides it under a pillow. He holds open the door for Debbie, reaches back inside for his laptop and the remote, which he CLICKS.

The TV screen lights up, and Jim raises the volume on the WEATHERMAN, tosses the remote on the bed, exits.

WEATHERMAN (ON TV)  
So, there's a chill on the way to the  
bay this weekend. Let me show you why.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY CORRIDOR - DAY

Debbie, huddled in a corner on her cellphone, watches the elevator number lights descending.

DEBBIE  
(into phone)  
Just call it off.  
(...)  
We had a great dinner and a wonderful  
night together.

INT. MAUREEN'S OCEANVIEW CONDO - DAY

Maureen applies some gloss to her lips, walks out of her bath into the expansive living area, her cordless wedged between her shoulder and ear.

MAUREEN  
Look, you already paid, right?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

DEBBIE  
What? You sound funny.

MAUREEN  
Gloss. Look, get your money's worth,  
hon. You owe it to yourself. If  
everything's cool, no harm no foul.

Debbie watches the elevator number "1" light.

DEBBIE  
Look, I... Gotta go.

Debbie tabs off, allows herself an instant of self-loathing, grabs a random handful of tourist brochures from the rack beside her, and turns to greet Jim just as he steps off the elevator. Jim's toting his computer bag.

JIM  
Okay. All set. Sorry, I just don't  
trust these hotel types.

Together, they stride through the lobby and out.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

A skinny, black, PANHANDLER (#2), wearing a grungy topcoat, GROANS something and aims a cup at Jim and Debbie as they walk toward the center's entrance. Jim, the laptop carry bag hanging from his shoulder, MUMBLES under his breath.

The Panhandler moves on, setting his sights on more tourists.

Jim and Debbie stop near the huge entrance.

JIM

Are you sure?

DEBBIE

Yes. I'm sure. You hate shopping.

JIM

But it's our anniversary. I wanna spend it with you.

DEBBIE

Tomorrow's our day. We're touring Alcatraz, right? You promised.

JIM

Right, but...

DEBBIE

No buts. I called over and bought you a ticket. Pick it up at the front window. You wanted to see this one, and I didn't. So... enjoy. My treat...

JIM

(hesitates, checks his watch)  
Okay, I'll call the office first. Tomorrow's triple witching. Tax deadline. Things could get crazy.

DEBBIE

So, you do have your cell with you?

JIM

What is this, a setup?

DEBBIE

(with a nervous laugh)  
What? Why would you say that?

JIM

I promised you I wouldn't bring my work with me. Cell's back at the hotel.

(pats himself down)

(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)  
Clean. Okay. We just passed a  
payphone. One quick check-in and done.

Panhandler (#2) approaches them and Jim stares him away.

DEBBIE  
Okay. But maybe you should go back and  
get your cell, just in case, you know.  
Whatever you want. Up to you.  
(pulls a slip from her purse)  
Here's where you're going. It's just a  
few blocks.

Jim takes it from her, looks at it.

JIM  
This was really, really nice of you.  
And no, I'm not going back to the  
hotel.

DEBBIE  
Okay. So, um, don't be late.

JIM  
For what?

DEBBIE  
The movie. Why?

JIM  
Why what?

DEBBIE  
Jim, you're confusing me, and I've got  
shopping to do.

JIM  
Huh?

Debbie suddenly grabs him, hugs him, a little too hard.

DEBBIE  
Don't go. Stay with me.

JIM  
Okay. I won't go.

DEBBIE  
No. I'm just being selfish. You  
should go. You really should.

JIM  
O-kaaay, then, I will go?

Debbie pats him all over, brushes back his hair, like she's  
sending him off to the first day of school. She puts on  
her bravest face, kisses his cheek. Pre-execution goodbye  
style.

DEBBIE  
I'll meet you inside by the escalator  
in three hours. 4 o'clock. That work?

JIM  
Sure.

DEBBIE  
(hugs him again, hard)  
Be good... safe... careful.  
(sotto)  
Shit.

She wheels, walks toward the shopping center entrance,  
leaving a slightly puzzled Jim outside.

EXT. OUTSIDE A COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jim, at a payphone, waves to Debbie, as she stands at the  
center entrance.

JIM  
(into phone)  
Maryanne. Hi! How's it going?  
(...)  
Who does?  
(...)  
Oh, right. Okay, put him on.

Jim watches Debbie step inside the shopping center.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION W/IVORY'S OFFICE

IVORY  
Jimbo, what can I do ya for?

Jim watches two men walk by holding hands.

JIM  
Checking in.

IVORY  
Well, I've got good news.

JIM  
(tentatively)  
Yeah?

IVORY  
Your client, Mr. Van Huesen?

JIM  
Van Dusen.

IVORY  
Right. He called this morning. I put  
him in 4,000 shares of Richmond Oil.

JIM  
He doesn't buy oil stocks. Why'd you --

A line in Ivory's office BUZZES.

IVORY  
Jimbo, can you hold?

JIM  
No, I --

"On Hold" MUZAK plays.

IVORY  
Listen, bud. I've gotta run. Mrs.  
LeGrand's on three and wants to sell.

JIM  
She does? Sell what?

TONE. Jim draws in a deep breath, hangs up, walks off.

EXT. NEAR SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Jim eyes a Panhandler (#3) who holds a sign that reads: "No bullshit. I just need a beer."

Jim glances down at the Panhandler's newspaper, spread out like a tablecloth before him, laden with popsicle figures.

INSERT:

Newspaper heading. "Transit Strike Averted". Below that in smaller print: "Conventioneer Still Missing".

When Jim looks up, Panhandler (#2) is in his face. Jim reaches into his pants pocket, pulls out a wad of bills, peels off a five and gives it to him.

JIM  
That covers me for the next couple  
of days, okay? Remember my face.

The Panhandler tips his cap. With that, Jim is off down the sidewalk which is bustling with foot traffic. Panhandler (#2) glances back at Jim with a smile.

EXT. LEAVENWORTH STREET - DAY, LATER

Less crowded. Jim walks along briskly, his laptop bag still hung over his shoulder, the sun shining brightly in his face.

A chubby HOOKER in fishnet hose dashes across the street between parked cars, and a BICYCLIST has to slide sideways to avoid her.



The Bicyclist shoots her a bird as she hustles off into a car. She returns the salute.

Jim looks both ways, crosses Leavenworth, and walks East. He heads for California Street a few blocks up ahead.

On the steps of an apartment building, an attractive, ethnic-looking woman, VERONICA, 29, sits, her head in her hands.

Behind her in the window a sign: "Furnished Apartment for Rent -- 541-1418. The "8" has been converted from a "3".

Elbows on her knees, long, raven-haired Veronica wears a scoop-neck, long-sleeve jersey and tight jeans. As she leans over, her breasts hang free and in full view.

Jim slows his pace. He lingers, watching her talk to a gray-haired, uniformed POLICEMAN, 58.

The Policeman glances up, walks off quickly, crosses the street, leaving Veronica WEEPING... too much.

Jim walks along, tries to avoid eye-contact with her, but doesn't quite pull it off, as he goes by.

VERONICA

Yeah, don't you worry about me, mister.  
You know I'll be fine. You just go on!

Jim stops, turns.

JIM

Are you okay?

VERONICA

Oh, sure, I'm fine. I sit here and cry  
for the sport of it.

She uses her hand to shield the sun.

JIM

What, did that cop hassle you?

VERONICA

(with a laugh)  
Him? He wishes.

Jim looks across to the Policeman, who climbs into an unmarked Crown Victoria.

JIM

So, you're okay, then. You don't need  
any help?

VERONICA

You really want to help me? Why?

JIM  
Well, you yelled at me.

VERONICA  
No, I didn't.

JIM  
Sure you did.

VERONICA  
I did NOT YELL AT YOU!

A bus GRINDS by. Jim starts off slowly.

JIM  
O-kay. I'll just get to my movie  
then. It's right up the --

Veronica gushes out some tears. Jim stops, glances back.

She's beating herself in the stomach and chest, mock blows,  
but still...

JIM (CONT'D)  
Look, you shouldn't hit yourself.  
Really.

Veronica keeps at it, until Jim physically stops her.

JIM (CONT'D)  
You need a few bucks to tide you over?  
Maybe I can help you out, huh? What'll  
it take? Ten?

He reaches into his pocket. She stares at him.

VERONICA  
You think I'm like them?

She points at the chubby Hooker climbing out of the car  
that picked her up earlier.

JIM  
No! No. Of course not. It's just  
that when someone's in trouble, it's  
usually about money.

Jim pulls out his fat wallet. Veronica eyes it.

VERONICA  
Put your money away, movieman. You  
insult me. You insult me when I'm in a  
bad place.

JIM  
Well, I'm sorry about that. I didn't  
mean to --

VERONICA  
See, I got this disease.

JIM  
Jeez, I'm sorry.

He steps back cautiously.

VERONICA  
It's not like that. My disease is I  
attract problems. For instance, like  
the problem upstairs... I don't know  
how to fix. Maybe you would know about  
it. It's man shit, not woman shit.

JIM  
Well, what kind of man shit is it  
exactly?

VERONICA  
I just told you. I don't know.

Jim glances at his expensive-looking watch.

JIM  
Well. I'm just gonna... I don't want  
to miss my movie.

Veronica waves him off.

VERONICA  
Yeah, right. The movie. What's it  
about, some made-up person in some made-  
up trouble or something? Better go on  
then. Hurry. Go. GO!

INT. NORDSTROM'S - DAY

Debbie picks up a clunky-heeled shoe, sets it down and  
grabs one with a longer, sexier heel. She notices the  
entrance to the Men's department.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

The door opens into the small, sparsely furnished, one  
bedroom apartment. Veronica's hand reaches in and flips  
the switch. The room remains dimly and naturally lit.

VERONICA  
See, nothing. Pop, then nothing.

Veronica steps inside, looks back at him.

Jim, still at the door, leaves it open. She finally  
returns to deadbolt the door closed, then walks off to a  
small dining area.

JIM  
Seems a little stuffy in here, maybe we  
should keep the door --

Veronica's SNIFFLING cuts him off. She's stopped at the  
rickety dining table, a clunky old phone receiver in hand.

JIM (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

VERONICA  
My damn phone's dead now, too.  
Something's really fucked up up in  
here.

Jim lingers by the wall closest to the door. There are  
provocative, framed photos of Veronica, in her younger  
days, as a cheesy model or actress.

JIM  
Is this you?

VERONICA  
Not anymore.

Veronica starts to cry again. Jim rushes over to her side  
and sits at the table.

JIM  
Look, I told you I could lend you some  
money. How much you need?

Veronica pushes away from the table.

VERONICA  
Listen, I told you. I don't want your  
money. If that's all you're about,  
just get your ass to your stupid movie,  
okay?

She stands at the window overlooking the city and pulls the  
drapes partially open, allowing light into the room. Jim  
walks toward her, but stops at the photos again.

JIM  
I can't get over these. They're...  
wow. You look so --

VERONICA  
Not like now. All used up.

JIM  
No. My god. Not what I meant at all.

VERONICA  
(barely audible)  
Thank you.

She moves into a small kitchen. Water running. She returns with a glass of water, eyes the bag on his arm.

VERONICA (CONT'D)  
What's that?

JIM  
What?

Her chin points at the computer under his arm.

JIM (CONT'D)  
Oh, that's my computer.

VERONICA  
Wow, a computer so little?

JIM  
Okay. Can you show me your breaker box?

VERONICA  
You wanna see my box? Moviemane. That sounds a little nasty to me.

JIM  
Gosh. No, I'm sorry. The breaker box controls all your power. Maybe the pop you heard was a breaker tripping or a fuse.

She shrugs. Jim wanders down a hallway, feeling for a wall panel. She follows. He's sweating.

VERONICA  
You look like you could use this more than me.

JIM  
Oh. Thanks.  
(gulps some down)  
They're usually in the hallways in apartments.

He feels around some more, slugs down more water. She grabs his hand, pulls it down, presses it to her bosom.

VERONICA  
Maybe it's here.

JIM  
Oh, no. No! I have to --

Before he can finish, Veronica reels him in for a megakiss, complete with tongue. Jim DROPS the glass.

INT. NORDSTROM'S - DAY

Debbie waits in the Men's Department. A short haired, tall SALESGIRL, 31, brushes by her, holds up one finger, as if to say "still checking". She ducks into the back room, and after a beat steps out with a snappy, navy blazer.

SALESGIRL  
It's a 44! Last one.

Debbie distractedly nods her approval.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim's fighting Veronica off, but she's locked on and pushing him toward the tiny living room area and the couch.

JIM  
Stop! C'mon...

VERONICA  
What's wrong? You said I was beautiful, didn't you?

JIM  
Did I? I don't think I --

She shoves Jim down onto the couch, and flies on top of him. Jim fights to get up, but she overpowers him.

SALESGIRL (O.S.)  
Now, if that doesn't reek of "man on his way to the top", what does?

INT. NORDSTROM'S - DAY

Salesgirl lays a tie against a light blue pinpoint shirt inside the blazer, which drapes across the counter. She reaches back to the tie rack, grabs a matching pocket scarf, and fixes it just-so in the breast pocket.

Debbie looks down at the watch (black with a rainbow triangle on a white face) on the Salesgirl's wrist.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim's eyes are closing. Veronica's using her tongue to virtually paint his face. She pulls back quickly, suddenly, brushes the hair away from her eyes, pulls off her blouse.

Jim tries to lift up; she pulls his head into her chest and swallows his ear. He rolls his head back, eyes closed.

She pushes down on top of him and rubs herself against his package, then reaches down there with her long fingers.

JIM  
(mumbling, groggy)  
Wait. What's going on... ?

VERONICA  
Checking your fuse, baby.

INT. NORDSTROM'S - DAY

Decorated gift boxes adorn the wall across from her as Debbie stands at a customer service window. A CUSTOMER SERVICE REP walks up, smiles and hands Debbie a big, wrapped gift box, which she puts in her shopping bag.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Veronica grips Jim downstairs tighter and harder now and he GRUNTS in pain. His body's rubbery, useless, like it's fallen asleep.

On the other side of the wall, a MOAN. Jim's eyes flash open. His breath is short and erratic. He looks down, both his hands on Veronica's breast. Realizing, he immediately removes them... His words fall out clumsily.

JIM  
What? What-was-that?

VERONICA  
My little chocolate chip muffins.

From the other side of the wall, still another MOAN. Jim fights his way around her and sits upright, but tilting.

JIM  
No, no, that!

VERONICA  
Oh, that.

She pulls her hair back behind her and pushes him back down.

VERONICA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
That's just Buddy.

Jim falls away.

JIM  
What? Who... ? Who the hell's Buddy?

Veronica pops up off the couch.

VERONICA

I should've introduced you.

She takes a couple of steps backwards.

VERONICA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Buddy's... my hubby.

She wheels and skips playfully toward the bedroom, as Jim grabs up his laptop and slogs for the door, falling, rolling. He reaches up, fumbles with the deadbolt, but everything's fuzzy, loose. He can't pull it off.

JIM

(under his breath)

C'mon!

VERONICA (O.S.)

Where are you goin', Moviemane?

When Jim turns around, he sees Veronica standing behind a wheelchair. In the chair is BUDDY, 38, husky, bearded, white man, ponytail hanging from behind his SF baseball cap. His head is cocked to one side.

Veronica wipes a little spit from Buddy's mouth and wheels him into the room and over in front of the draped window, turned so he faces them both. A stare off. But Buddy's stare is expressionless.

Veronica leaves Buddy's side, grabs Jim's hand and drags him back toward the couch. He resists.

JIM

I've gonna go... (sic)

VERONICA

What? Don't let Buddy scare you. He doesn't mind when I have company.

JIM

How... you know?

VERONICA

He's my hubby. I know him inside and out. You're married, right.

(shows him his ring)

You know what I'm saying.

Jim flops onto the couch, Veronica at his side. She wraps herself around him, but Jim stiffens up.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

I'll get you a beer.

JIM

NO!

She skips off to the kitchenette.



Jim looks anywhere but across at Buddy. He puts it off as long as he can, but Buddy's blank stare reels him in. But now, there appears to be a little glint in Buddy's eyes.

Veronica stands over Buddy, uses her pointer finger to open his mouth and pours a little beer inside... which drains down his chin, onto his 49er's T-shirt.

Veronica strokes Buddy's hair, winks at him.

VERONICA

Sorry, baby.

She licks the beer off his shirt.

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

Debbie sips from a Diet Coke, as the Salesgirl wipes some pizza off her cheek.

SALESGIRL

He's gonna love that outfit.

DEBBIE

God, if he ever heard you call it an outfit.

SALESGIRL

Oh, I know, men hate that.

DEBBIE

It's a beautiful outfit. You certainly have a knack.

SALESGIRL

That's why they pay me the big bucks.

They both laugh. Debbie glances at the Salesgirl's left hand. Nothing on her ring finger.

DEBBIE

It must be great having all those amazing clothes to pick from when it's your boyfriend's birthday, huh?

The Salesgirl takes a sip of her Coke.

SALESGIRL

Mm-hmm.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Veronica pulls her finger out of the beer bottle and rubs it inside Buddy's mouth. He MOANS.

Jim struggles to rise from the couch.

VERONICA

Don't move!

Jim falls back in a lump. Veronica, wild-eyed, leaps over and mounts him.

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

Debbie, her elbows on the table between her and the Salesgirl, her chin resting on her hands, listens in awe.

SALESGIRL

... and that's when I stopped dating boys. I just knew they didn't have what I needed. You know?

DEBBIE

Huh? No. But, go on.

SALESGIRL

Well, in high school there was this one girl on the track team. She was, I don't know, different, odd, in a very appealing, offbeat, coolish way, ya know?

Debbie is too rapt to even nod.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)

I'd noticed her. She had no clue I was even alive. You can tell, ya know, when someone really sees you, acknowledges you?

Debbie does nod this time.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)

Short version -- we end up in chemistry together, lab partners. She didn't seem interested in all the stuff the other girls always talked about. You know, make-up, clothes, boys, especially boys. And when she looked at me I could feel her eyes, literally feel them penetrating me. Goosebump time.

(pause)

What about you?

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

She's all over him like an octopus. Jim tries to fight her off, but he's too weak.

VERONICA

What's a matter?

She grabs his crotch again. Jim looks over at "the stare."

JIM  
I'm going. Right... now.

He rises, shaky, but falls back down on the sofa. Jim presses his head between his hands, forcing his eyes to stay open. She's rubbing him, still, and he can't stop her.

JIM (CONT'D)  
Him... Use him.

VERONICA  
He's not capable.

JIM  
What?

Jim's eyes cross, then close.

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

The Salesgirl glances at her watch.

SALESGIRL  
I think what you did is very brave.

DEBBIE  
It is?

SALESGIRL  
Uh-huh.

DEBBIE  
How? Please?

SALESGIRL  
Well, it takes guts to throw something like that at a man you love, like firing an inside fastball to Brandon Belt and catching too much plate.

DEBBIE  
I'm sorry?

SALESGIRL  
Swing and a miss... or McCovey Cove time.

DEBBIE  
I still don't.

The Salesgirl laughs.

SALESGIRL  
It's all good. You'll see. You had to know, right?

DEBBIE  
(unconvincing)  
Right. I just hope she doesn't go too far.

SALESGIRL  
Well...

DEBBIE  
No, that's not what I meant.

Salesgirl glances at her watch again.

SALESGIRL  
Oops, better head back. Thanks again for lunch. Good luck. Will you let me know what happens?

DEBBIE  
Yeah?

Salesgirl jots a number on a napkin.

SALESGIRL  
Hell, yeah. Are you kidding? I'd love to hear all the gory details.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON

Jim's closed eyes flutter, then plink open.

JIM'S POV:

Through blurred vision, he watches Veronica, sitting over him, tie off her arm with Jim's belt and tap a vein until it rises up thick and ready. She eases a syringe into that vein just below her elbow, and smiles up at him dreamily.

She unties the belt and drops it on him, as she rolls down her sleeve. His eyes close again.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - RESTROOM - DAY

Debbie primps in the mirror. Checks for flecks of lunch in her teeth. All clear. She hikes her shoulders wistfully, glances down at her watch.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Jim wakes with a start. He sits up and looks around, disoriented. On the floor beside the bed, his clothes in a heap.

FLASHBACK

The image of Veronica tying off her arm, smiling.

BACK TO SCENE:

JIM  
Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

Jim touches his forehead, pain, as he gathers up his clothes. Wearing only his underpants, he trips toward the closed door, presses his ear against it. Quiet. He staggers to the bathroom, tries the light. Nothing.

BATHROOM

Dark. He turns the faucet on the tiny sink. Water runs.

He looks at himself ruefully in the mirror. He spots the tiny shower. No towels. He scratches his body all over.

He steps into the shower, reaches for the left knob, turns it. Water pours out from the shower head, his hand under the stream. He waits.

JIM (CONT'D)  
C'mon... c'mon.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Shoppers glide down the escalator to where Debbie sits, a shopping bag with the gift-wrapped box protruding. She looks over at a fountain, children fishing for coins.

INT. VERONICA'S BATHROOM - DAY

The shower drizzles weakly. Jim can wait no longer. He drops his underpants, steps in, so his lower half is in the spray, but his whole body shakes, uncontrollably, as he splashes freezing water on his crotch area.

JIM  
What did I do? What did I do?

The door behind him CREAKS.

Jim turns. A GROWL. A giant fist coming fast. Boom!

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie checks her watch, bites her lip. She gets up and walks through the center toward the front doors where she'd left Jim. She looks out through the glass.

DEBBIE'S POV:

A street full of strangers. She checks out her own reflection.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JIM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

DEBBIE'S FACE. Anxious. Excited. She sits up in bed, holding the sheet up to cover her nakedness.

DEBBIE  
What's going on in there? You need  
any help?

Debbie smiles, switches off the light, drops her sheet.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)  
Hurry, I can't wait, you big hunk.

Ivory Jackson, naked, strolls into view, slides in on top of Debbie.

IVORY  
I like to keep busy.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

CLOSE ON

Jim's closed eyes. They burst open. Jim GASPS!

JIM'S POV:

On the couch across from him sits Veronica, hair cropped close, smoking. She's messing with Jim's laptop.

Buddy, the picture of good health, stands at the window, drawing a bead on passersby with a 9mm pistol.

BUDDY  
Man, I could inflict a world of hurt  
from here. Bang! You are completely  
over.

VERONICA  
Come help me.

BUDDY  
This is real fun, huh, kid?

He sidles over to her playfully.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie, a newspaper folded in her right hand, stands near the escalator, cellphone to her ear. Her purse and packages at her feet.

DEBBIE  
(into phone)  
No, what I'm asking you is do you remember a man anything like that at the show this afternoon? He might have been with a woman. He was with a woman. I mean, I'm not sure if he was with a woman.

Debbie listens.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)  
Yes, I do understand it's a big city full of men and women.

She tabs her phone, glances up the escalator.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim's eyes open. He focuses on Veronica.

Beside her, Buddy now explores the intricacies of Jim's laptop.

BUDDY  
Man, this baby is choice.

VERONICA  
You are so good at that. I wouldn't have a clue.

BUDDY  
Can't say enough good things about the State of Utah's correctional facilities' rehab program.

Jim, still in his undies, sits in the wheelchair, hands bound to the chair's arms by his own canvas belt and the strap from his computer carry case on the other. His T-shirt wrapped in a gag across his mouth, legs tied.

He GRUNTS, frantically.

VERONICA  
 (nonchalantly)  
 He's awake again.

BUDDY  
 Light him up, dollface.

Veronica reaches beside her to the arm of the couch, where her syringe rests on the glass of one of her framed photos.

Jim's eyes bug.

Veronica aims the needle at Jim's arm, but thumps on his forearm first.

VERONICA  
 (to Buddy)  
 I think all the freakin' blood's  
 scared outta him.

BUDDY  
 Fuck it, then.

Buddy picks up his pistol, aims it at Jim.

Jim goes stiff, his eyes saucers.

VERONICA  
 You're so bad, Buddy.

Buddy grins, lowers the gun, reaches across the coffee table and nails Jim in the chin with a right cross. Jim's eyes roll back. His head drops.

BUDDY  
 Sweet dreams, pissant.

Veronica giggles as she sets the syringe on the coffee table.

Buddy pecks on the keys of the laptop.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 Yeah, our boy's quite the little  
 computer geek. He's got all kinds'a  
 fun info in here. Aw, shit.  
 (flips the laptop closed)  
 Keep your orbs on him. I'll be back in  
 a jif.

VERONICA  
 Where you goin', baby?

BUDDY  
 (off the laptop)  
 Battery's running low and I've got  
 more research to do. Gotta fire off  
 an audible here, change plans.



Buddy reaches down and kisses Veronica on the head, steps across the coffee table, pats Jim on the head and makes for the door with the computer under his arm.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
I got a feeling about your little  
boyfriend. I think maybe you done  
real good for yourself today.

Buddy undoes the deadbolt, starts to leave, thinks about it.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
What'd you do with his platinum  
skymiles card?

Veronica reaches into her pants pocket, shows him a card. He gestures for it with a come-hither hand move.

Veronica flies it to him like a frisbee.

VERONICA  
Don't leave home without it.

BUDDY  
Not on his life.

VERONICA  
Got you this, too, baby.

She tosses Jim's cellphone. Buddy catches it in his fingertips.

BUDDY  
(big old smile)  
Well, thank you. That's a tad newer  
than mine.

He pulls his flip phone from his pocket. Old school.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
Most likely unlimited minutes, too.  
Think I'll surprise mama. Wish her  
well on her parole hearing.

VERONICA  
Say hello for me.

BUDDY  
Will do. Love you.

He blows her a kiss.

VERONICA  
Love you too, baby.

BUDDY  
Come'ere, you little sexpot.

VERONICA

Why?

BUDDY

Just come'ere. Obey me, fair lady, or  
I'll have ye tied to a post.

Veronica sashays flirtatiously toward Buddy. He reaches  
out and scoops her up in one arm.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Did you have to show him your mommy  
glands?

VERONICA

It took him forever to pass out.

BUDDY

How many drops you give him?

VERONICA

Like always.

BUDDY

(eyes her playfully)  
Okay, then. I guess I'll forgive ya.

VERONICA

(thumps him softly on the arm)  
How 'bout you? You didn't tell me we  
were doing Christopher Reeves today.

BUDDY

Reeve. Reeves was the real Superman.  
Reeve is the dead one. Well, they both  
are. Reeve more recently. Poor guy.  
Damn horse.

VERONICA

Either way, you surprised me too much.

BUDDY

Gotta keep it fresh, babe. Nothing  
will bust up a relationship faster than  
boredom and predictability. Ask your  
pal there.

(off her doe eyes)

Aw, don't you worry. You and me's  
soulmates. Heck, someday they'll write  
a paperback about us, turn it into a TV  
movie or something.

VERONICA

(baby talk)

Who's gonna play me, daddy?

BUDDY

(baby talk right back)  
Nobody could, babydoll.

(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
You're the only one. You'd just have  
to play yourself. You washed up, right?

She nods slowly. Buddy aims his gaze at her dramatically.  
He grabs her by the hair and liplocks her.

BUDDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
Lock me out and make that call. And no  
more candy for you. We're working now.

Veronica salutes him.

VERONICA  
Okay, boss-man.

Buddy exits, all eyebrows, pulls the door closed behind  
him.

Veronica dances her way right back to the wheelchair, holds  
Jim's chin up.

VERONICA (CONT'D)  
Shouldn't help strangers, limp dick.

She lets his chin drop, laughs as she sings something in  
Spanish, sounds vaguely operatic, picks up the needle from  
the coffee table and smiles. She pulls a cellphone out of  
her back pocket.

INT. THE AGENCY - DAY

Maureen's at her desk, leafing rapidfire through test  
photos of a hot, new prospect, a wafer-thin young MODEL  
with sunken eyes and lips like a hamburger bun.

The Model's there in the almost flesh right across from  
Maureen.

MAUREEN  
These are fabulous. May I take a quick  
peek at your ankles?

The Model lifts her leg right onto Maureen's desk. She  
checks the ankle out.

MAUREEN (CONT'D)  
Very, very nice. Merci!

Her intercom BUZZES. She looks disgusted and nods for the  
Model to remove her leg, as she presses her phone button,  
noting the FLASHING LIGHT.

MODEL  
Want to see anything else.

Maureen just might like the sound of that.

MAUREEN  
This isn't exactly holding my calls, is it, Renee?

RENEE (ON INTERCOM)  
I am holding them. But this is the one you told me to put through.

Maureen smiles conspiratorially, holds up a finger for the Model. The Model takes that finger and pulls it close to her mouth. Maureen speaks into the intercom.

MAUREEN  
I've left for the day...

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie sits on a bench, phone to her ear.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION/ASIAN HOTEL CLERK

HOTEL CLERK  
Yes, ma'am. There is a message. Came in just a few minutes ago.

DEBBIE  
Thank god.

HOTEL CLERK  
(off message)  
It's from a... I can't read this writing.  
(behind him)  
Who wrote this message?

DEBBIE  
Please...

HOTEL CLERK  
Does Jennifer sound familiar?

DEBBIE  
Oh...

A beat.

HOTEL CLERK  
Ma'am, are you still there?

DEBBIE  
Yes, I'm here. Could you read it for me?

HOTEL CLERK  
Sure. I can try.  
(hard time reading)  
Mom and Dad. Happy Anniversary. Love you bunches. Jennifer.

DEBBIE  
That's it?

HOTEL CLERK  
I'm afraid so.

DEBBIE  
Okay. Thank you.

HOTEL CLERK  
Yes, ma'am. Oh, and Mrs. Davis?

DEBBIE  
Yes?

HOTEL CLERK  
Happy anniversary to you and your husband.

DEBBIE  
Yes. Thank you.

She kills the call, looks around, worried, then to her watch.

INSERT:

Watch. It reads 5:00 p.m.. Way late. She lifts the phone again, fumbles through her purse.

INT. MAUREEN'S OCEANVIEW CONDO - DAY

The cordless phone RINGS and RINGS. Finally the machine CLICKS on.

A HUSKY MACHINE VOICE  
"Maureen's not available. Wish I could tell you why. Leave a message."

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie kills the call.

INT. FED EX COPY CENTER - DAY

Buddy's huddled before a computer. We see Jim's financial account on the screen. A Fed Ex Kid walks by. Buddy gives him the evil eye, and the kid moves on.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jim, awake again, struggles in his restraints, while Veronica sleeps on the couch, the syringe in her left hand, dangling.

His eyes scan the room: His clothes in a heap on the floor. The pictures, once on the wall, are stacked near the door.

He glances toward his watch. No watch, gone.

He rocks the wheelchair back and forth. The right wheel is locked in place. He struggles to reach his leg around the side to release the lock lever. No luck.

He slams his fist as much as it will move on the armrest. The canvas strap loosens ever so slightly, the buckle giving a little. Veronica stirs.

Jim wriggles his arm from side to side, back and forth, the belt loosening more with each movement.

Finally, the belt, still looped around his forearm, swings under the chair's arm, allowing Jim to pull his arm out. He does so, quietly.

He uses his free arm to release the other strap, then his gag, then his legs.

He steps quietly away from the chair and tiptoes toward his clothes.

Veronica stirs again.

Jim turns in time to see

the syringe drop from her hand... and fall toward the floor where it plunges needle first into the carpet and sticks.

Jim looks at her, breathes again.

He slips on his slacks and loafers, tosses the T-shirt away, pulls on his golf shirt and goes for the deadbolt, as quietly as possible.

He works it slowly open. He notices the door knob catch is broken, so only the deadbolt could keep the door closed. He begins to open the door wider, but there's A CLOMPING in the hallway, followed by FOOTFALL on the steel staircase.

Jim holds his breath again, waits. Quiet.

With every ounce of control left in his body, he eases the door open and... escapes.

INT. VERONICA'S STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Jim pads slowly down the steps toward the daylight. Closer, closer, to the second landing.

He looks below him. All clear.

He starts down the second flight, closer still to the light breaking into the hallway through the window on the door.

Almost there, so close to the door and the light he can touch it. A figure casts a shadow against the light of the door.

Jim looks for somewhere to hide, anywhere. He ducks into a dark corner. His heart BEATING so loud it will surely give him away, he holds his chest with both palms over his heart.

TALKING outside the door. Indistinguishable, muffled words.

Just as Jim leans closer toward the door to hear, Buddy pushes through the doorway, past Jim and CLOMPS up the stairs, Jim's laptop in the crook of his arm.

EXT. 850 LEAVENWORTH STREET - DAY

The door pushes open and Jim rushes out into the daylight.

He turns, stops, disoriented, decides to run one way, then heads the other way, right into the arms of the Policeman, who's getting out of his unmarked car, a plain manila envelope in his hand.

JIM  
(breathless, still  
disoriented)  
Oh, thank god. You've got to help me,  
please.

The Policeman closes the door of his car casually and drops the envelope back inside.

POLICEMAN  
Okay, okay. Settle down. What's going  
on?

JIM  
I was kidnapped, drugged, robbed...  
I've gotta get outta here. He's back.  
He'll kill me. Gun...

The Policeman walks him to a more discreet area, by the car.

POLICEMAN  
Slow it up, sir. Who did this to you?

JIM  
Up there!

He points to the window in Veronica's apartment.

Buddy looks out, draws a bead on Jim.

JIM (CONT'D)  
Oh, shit! That's him. That's the guy!  
I can't stay here. They'll kill me.

POLICEMAN  
Who's they?

JIM  
Him. That guy and... a woman.

POLICEMAN  
A pretty woman?

JIM  
Yes! Yes! You were talking to her  
before. She's a criminal. I've got to  
get to my wife. Gotta find Debbie...  
It's our...

He can't even say it. Policeman looks up at the window.  
The drapes fall closed.

POLICEMAN  
Okay, let me call this in. Where's  
your wife?

JIM  
She's, uh... she's at the big shopping  
center on Market.

POLICEMAN  
Exactly where, sir?

JIM  
Waiting by the escalator street level.  
What time is it?

The Policeman glances at his watch and at the people  
walking past, watching them.

POLICEMAN  
Five-forty.

JIM  
Shit. Dammit. Shit.

The Policeman looks at him sternly.

JIM (CONT'D)  
I'm never late. She must be going  
nuts.

POLICEMAN  
Do you have a car?

JIM  
No, I'll walk... run. I can't stay  
here.



POLICEMAN  
Hold up. Let me call this in first.

JIM  
No.

POLICEMAN  
Sir, you can wait one second, can't  
you... for... your wife's sake?

JIM  
Yes, okay.

POLICEMAN  
What'd you say her name was?

JIM  
Veronica.

POLICEMAN  
No, I mean your wife, sir.

JIM  
Oh... um... my wife's name is...  
Debbie.

POLICEMAN  
You're sure?  
(off Jim's nod)  
Okay, wait right here. I'll make a  
quick call in.

JIM  
Okay. Hurry. God, just... hurry.

The Policeman climbs into his car, pulls the door closed.

Jim watches as the Policeman tabs the numbers on a  
cellphone, then gazes up toward Veronica's apartment.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie's pacing nervously at the escalator landing.

EXT. 850 LEAVENWORTH STREET - DAY

Jim's chest convulses. The Policeman SLAMS his car door  
shut, unclips his revolver holster.

A Passerby gawks at Jim.

POLICEMAN  
Why don't you wait in the car for me,  
then I'll take you where you need to  
go.

JIM

NO! Jesus!

POLICEMAN

Sir, please refrain from using that tone with me.

JIM

Sorry, sorry. But there's no time. I can't hang around here all day. They'll be coming after me any second.

POLICEMAN

Not if they see you're with me.

Jim walks away backwards.

JIM

You do what you have to do. I'll come back when you've got some backup.

POLICEMAN

Huh? Sir? Don't --

JIM

They're going to give me all my shit back! Bastards!

The Policeman jogs toward the doorway, turns to watch Jim dash off.

Jim wheels, points back at the apartment.

JIM (CONT'D)

You thought you could get me! But you didn't! You FUCKERS!

The Policeman hustles up the stairs, his pistol still in its holster.

EXT. POST STREET - DAY

Jim, nearly out of breath, ragged-looking, his hair completely a mess, shirt out of his pants, stops an old ASIAN MAN & ASIAN MAN'S WIFE on the street. They both carry shopping bags laden with groceries.

JIM

Help me, please. The big shopping center? I'm all turned around. The fastest way there?

(They speak in Mandarin, with English subtitles.)

ASIAN MAN'S WIFE

Don't give him any money.

ASIAN MAN  
 (to his wife)  
 He doesn't want money. He wants  
 directions.

ASIAN MAN'S WIFE  
 That's how they start.

The Wife tugs at the Asian Man's sleeve. The Asian Man shrugs, walks on with his wife, turns back.

He hand-signals two blocks that way, then right.

Jim dashes off.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Jim, out of breath, darts across Market street toward the front of the building and the doors where he left Deb.

JIM  
 (mumbling)  
 Debbie. Debbie.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Jim stands inside the mall, looks around toward the escalator and spots Debbie sitting talking to a tall red-haired woman. He watches Debbie laugh. Exhausted and breathless, he lowers his head and rests his hands on his knees. Safe.

He looks up, but just as he does, Buddy's arm grabs him around the shoulder, his fist pitched hard into Jim's windpipe. He pulls Jim back toward the glass doors, and behind a column, discreetly.

BUDDY  
 Don't worry about her, Jimmy. She's in  
 good hands. See.

Buddy, wearing Jim's watch, as well as his wedding band on his pinky finger, points toward Debbie, where Veronica stands, red bob wig on, and shakes Debbie's hand.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 (quietly)  
 Ronnie will hurt her if she has to.  
 It's up to you.

JIM'S POV:

Veronica brushes back her hair, revealing the syringe cupped in her hand, making sure Jim sees it.

BUDDY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Pretty handy with that needle. None too happy about it. I guess we all got our A-chilli's heels. I'm sure you'd be the first to agree.

JIM  
 (forcing it out)  
 You hurt her... I'll get you. I swear --

BUDDY  
 Now, she would be real proud to hear that, I betcha. Real proud.

Buddy turns Jim around. Jim looks up at him. Buddy grins.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 Yep, seems as though you met Veronica's hubby at a movie, seeing as how you're so gregarious and all, and he asked you if you wanted his wife's box seat ticket to the ball game. Course you said, "You betcha" being the big sports nut that you are, and Veronica was sweet enough to come and update the little woman, so's she wouldn't fret. Oh, by the by, that iron-y feeling against your ribs... that's my nine. Just lemme give ya a big ol' brokeback hug. We'll blend right in here.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Buddy and Jim walk out onto the street, Buddy wrapped around him like a lover, past Panhandler (#2), who watches them, and across Market Street, where they wait on a corner.

BUDDY  
 Funny coincidence you and Veronica's hubby being at the same movie.

They wait. Buddy looks up.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 Man, you gotta love our weather.

The unmarked car slides up in front of them. Buddy pulls open the back door and pushes Jim in.

The Policeman sits behind the wheel. Veronica rides shotgun. Jim and Buddy climb in.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR - DAY

The car pulls away. Veronica yanks off the wig.

VERONICA

Hi, Movieman. Wow. Your wife's real friendly. Very cool. Wanted to know if you was nice to me. I told her you were real sweet and polite. What's weird is, she asked me if I needed any more money.

BUDDY

Damn. Now that is real nice.

Jim looks over at the Policeman.

VERONICA

Oh, he's with us. Him and me thought we were doing "Law and Order" today.

JIM

You bitch.

VERONICA

Buddy?

BUDDY

Jim?

Buddy rams his pistol down Jim's mouth, rolls the barrel around like a dentist exploring for cavities. Jim's eyes mushroom with fear.

The Policeman turns the rearview to watch. Veronica rests her head on the top of the front seat for a bird's eye.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Uh-oh, that molar looks impacted. You're not flossing regular. I can tell. Now, don't worry. I studied to be a dentist.

(Jim's eyes close, as Buddy explores more.)

Yep. Correspondence course. I was getting pretty good, too, practicing up on my pooch Clyde. Boy, that pup was a bleeder. I miss him. Anyhew, I find out the whole entire thing's a big old ripoff. Can you believe it? People in general are total take advantage a-holes. You feel me?

Jim nods, carefully, while Buddy wrangles the barrel around, extracts it.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Okay, you can rinse. Hah! Now, apologize to the lady. Apologize. C'mon.

JIM

I'm... sorry.

BUDDY

Mucho better.

With that Buddy knocks him out again. Jim's head bangs off the window, then hangs down, his chin against his chest.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

(shakes the sting from his  
right fist)

I gotta develop my southpaw.

EXT. MARKET STREET - DAY

As the car pulls away, Panhandler (#2) stands in the median, watching it leave. A wheelchair arm protrudes from its trunk.

Panhandler (#2) spots Debbie exiting the center.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - DAY

Light pushes into the space through a door, which SLAMS shut.

Veronica switches on a light. Buddy, Jim's computer hanging under his arm, pushes a groggy, gagged, tied-up Jim (double ties this time on the arms) in the wheelchair. Buddy pulls off his ponytail cap and tosses it.

The Policeman sets Veronica's photos on a shelf, removes his cap and holster and hangs them on a rack next to a fireman's helmet, next to a construction helmet, right beside a doctor's stethoscope and smock. He reaches into a tiny refrigerator under box-laden shelves.

A table in the middle of the long room, playing cards left in neat stacks in front of each chair. Folding chairs around the table. A folding cot in one corner, next to a City of SF Portajohn.

Veronica sits at the table. Buddy wheels Jim up.

Jim struggles, YELLS, muffled.

BUDDY

(pulls Jim's gag down)

Go ahead and scream if you want. Did you know some people scream as a kind of therapy? Some folks fall for anything. But, as far as attracting attention, it's an exercise in futility.

He whips out his gun and fires off a shot right over Jim's head. It PINGS off a wall behind Jim.

JIM  
 JESUS CHRIST!  
                     (under his breath)  
 Asshole.

BUDDY  
                     (to Jim/sizing up his gun)  
 What'd you say?

JIM  
 Nothing.

BUDDY  
 Well, I'm glad to hear that. I am.  
 However, any future foultries cast in my  
 direction and I'll --

JIM  
 You'll what? You took everything I  
 had. What more do you idiots want from  
 me?

VERONICA  
 Idiots. He said idiots, Buddy?

BUDDY  
                     (sits down, eyes his gun)  
 Jimmy, does the number 366 ring any  
 bells?

JIM  
 What? No.

BUDDY  
 Well, it should. That's your room  
 number at the Regent Hotel. Yep, your  
 little lady and mine traded info like  
 old pals. I'd say 366 is most probably  
 where your better half is right now...  
 all by her lonesome, waiting for you to  
 come home from the ball game and sweep  
 her up in your arms.

EXT. GEARY STREET - DAY

Debbie glances back, hurries her step. She spots  
 Panhandler (#2) hustling to catch up.

BUDDY (O.S.)  
 She feels all safe and secure. But,  
 you know what? She ain't.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - DAY

Buddy lifts his eyebrows, just for Jim, reaches into his  
 pocket, pulls out Jim's wallet. Jim's eyes rivet on it.

BUDDY

Funny, you were tons feistier before your dentist appointment. By the by, your daughter, the one who lives on Buckhorn Lane in Atlanta... not the one who lives in Redondo Beach with her husband Carl.

He slides a snapshot out of Jim's wallet, then another so they're side by side.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

She does favor her momma. And I'd say she's pretty danged hot. Or does she just take a good picture. Oh, and speaking of pictures...

He eyes Jim, hoping for a greater effect, lifts his head toward the Policeman. The Policeman pulls up a chair across from Veronica, sets down a bottle of wine and 3 plastic cups.

From inside his shirt the Policeman pulls out the manila envelope and slides it across the table to Buddy.

Buddy opens the envelope and pulls out photos, one at a time.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

(re photo, cranking his head)  
A naked man in a wheelchair. What the heck would another naked man -- oh, that's you -- be doing with his head down there? Damnation.

Jim kicks and twists in his chair.

Buddy sails the photo at Jim's head. It hits him there and slides down in his lap. He looks down.

INSERT: COCKEYED PHOTO

Buddy naked in the wheelchair. Jim's head between his legs. Veronica naked beside them, kissing Buddy.

Jim GROANS (OS).

BACK TO SCENE:

BUDDY (CONT'D)

You made up plenty of copies, so Jim's family and coworkers can share his Kodak moments?

The Policeman nods.

Jim's face, frozen in shock.



Buddy "tsks" as he and Veronica peruse the rest of the photos in the envelope.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
Oh, that's good of you, honey.

POLICEMAN  
Ronnie had a lot of good ones.

Buddy lasers him with a glare.

BUDDY  
Ronnie?

The Policeman pours wine into the three cups and pushes them across to Buddy and Veronica. Buddy unlocks his gaze on the Policeman.

BUDDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
(to Jim)  
Pal, I know it's a real pain in the keister, but you really oughta not program in your passwords. You never know who might be interested in the life and times of one Jim Davis.

Buddy lifts them into a toast.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
Another day, another dickwad.

EXT. REGENT HOTEL - DAY

Debbie whispers in the DOORMAN's ear, slips him a buck. He tips his cap, pulls open the front door and looks back toward the street.

The Panhandler (#2) pushes his way closer.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - DAY

Buddy, wearing spectacles, flips open Jim's laptop. Veronica and the Policeman play the card game "War", laying down and taking, over and over. The Policeman lays out an eight of spades. Veronica lays out an eight of clubs. She nudges Buddy, who looks over his glasses. He gets into it.

BUDDY  
(deadpan serious)  
War. Roll out your troops.

Veronica reaches for the card pile. Jim stares at her hand, sees...

INT. JIM'S KITCHEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

... JENNIFER, 12, as her small hand reaches for the card pile in the middles of the kitchen table. Sister ANNE, 13, watches, as does a younger Debbie. A big bowl of popcorn on the table.

ANNE  
Wait. That's war again. You didn't win yet.

Jennifer pulls her hand back, looks to Debbie.

JENNIFER  
Mom? It's the best card, right? The ace of spades. I won that one. It's a spade.

ANNE  
So why doesn't the eight of spades beat any other eight?

DEBBIE  
(notes Jim walking by)  
Hmmm, ask your father.

Jim, with fuller hair, in a bathrobe, stands at the refrigerator, nose buried in a Wall Street Journal, a huge cellphone to his ear, opens the fridge, and grabs a beer.

JENNIFER  
I won this one, right, Daddy?

Jim stops long enough to look at the cards.

JIM  
Uh-huh.

ANNE  
Dad!

He walks off.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

Jim stares through Buddy, who glares at the Policeman.

BUDDY  
Uh-uh. Check your Hoyle on that one. The ace of spades prioritizes all other cards.

They look at one another, Veronica, to Buddy, Buddy to Veronica, both to the Policeman who SLAMS his fist on the table. A beat.

JIM  
You're wrong...

POLICEMAN  
Huh?

BUDDY  
(to Jim)  
Butt out, you.

POLICEMAN  
Let him talk.

Buddy glares at Jim, slaps the laptop closed, stands up.

BUDDY  
The spade's the damn prioritizer.

POLICEMAN  
That's bull.

Buddy reaches over the table and grabs the Policeman by the collar, choking him.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
Let go, Buddy. Please.

JIM  
So, why doesn't the eight of spades  
beat any other eight?

POLICEMAN  
Buddy?

Buddy starts to respond, stops, shakes the Policeman loose.

BUDDY  
(to Jim)  
You are pushing me beyond a point.

POLICEMAN  
Yeah, why doesn't it?

BUDDY  
Because... it only works with aces,  
dammit.  
(off Jim)  
Look at him. We're both of the male  
persuasion, sort of. Let's say he's  
the ace of what-the-hell-ever, and I'm  
the ace of spades.

He pulls his .9 mm out from behind his back, shows it.

Jim looks away.

Buddy pushes away from the table and storms toward Jim, sticks the barrel of the gun into Jim's nostril and presses it hard, so Jim's nose is crunched flat. Sweat drains down Jim's forehead.

POLICEMAN

Oh, okay. I get it now. It only works on aces.

Buddy looks back at the Policeman. He pulls the gun away from Jim's face.

BUDDY

That's what the heck I've been trying to tell you all along the pony ride here.

Buddy jams his pistol into his pants, in front of him.

The Policeman and Jim share a quick glance. The Policeman shakes his head -- a warning.

Buddy gestures for Veronica to take the cards. She scoops them up, gleefully.

Buddy returns to his seat, opens the laptop back up, glares at Jim, who's still trying to catch his breath.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie, still dressed, sits on the edge of her bed, checks the alarm clock: 7:00 p.m.

She picks up the phone, punches one button and waits, as she pulls off her earrings.

DEBBIE

(into phone)

Yes, hello. This is Mrs. Davis in 366. I wonder if anyone down there can tell me about what time today's baseball game would be over.

DESK VOICE (FILTERED)

Yes, ma'am. Let me check on that for you.

Debbie wedges the phone between her chin and shoulder, lifts the gift box out of her shopping bag and sets it down on the bed. The bow's not quite perfect. She adjusts it.

DESK VOICE (CONT'D)

Ma'am. No ball games today.

DEBBIE

Oh, yes, I'm sure there was.

DESK VOICE  
No. Tomorrow, though. Do you need tickets? We can help --

DEBBIE  
You're sure there was no baseball?

DESK VOICE  
Giants start a series with the Padres tomorrow. Oakland's in Anaheim. Hang on.

(beat)  
Ma'am? Warriors finish up tonight over in Oakland.

DEBBIE  
Warriors? Is that baseball?

DESK VOICE  
No, ma'am. Basketball. Might be a ticket or two left for that one.

(a beat)  
Ma'am?

Without answering, she hangs up the phone, sits, stunned, stares at the alarm clock. The number flips over to 7:01.

The TROLLEY CAR BELLS CLANG outside.

Debbie tries to compose herself...

DEBBIE  
He's fine. He passed, and everything's fine. She got it wrong. That's all.

She rocks on the edge of the bed.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Jim sits rigidly in his chair, the Policeman across from him, playing solitaire.

LOVEMAKING SOUNDS behind them. A wall of boxes. Behind the wall, Buddy and Veronica getting it on.

The Policeman, wielding an easy smile that lines his face with a map of deep wrinkles, lays down a card, surveys the wall of cards before him, cheats.

POLICEMAN  
Another winner.

Jim watches him carefully, as the Policeman deals out another game, and glances back toward the boxes.

JIM  
What's he gonna do with me?

POLICEMAN  
 You keep ticking him off...  
     (gestures at his own throat)  
 He'll O.J. ya. His temper's gone awful  
 sketchy lately.  
     (behind his hand)  
 Form of depression. Uncontrolled, out-  
 of-nowhere rage. Then he'll just nod  
 off. Textbook stuff. Bi-polar.

Jim watches as the Policeman starts a new game.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
 How's a guy like you get in a situation  
 like this?

JIM  
 I was stupid.

POLICEMAN  
 She's a hard one to resist.

JIM  
 NO! Not about her. Me.

Jim looks at the Policeman, as he peeks up from his game.

JIM (CONT'D)  
     (whispering)  
 Listen, you get me outta this, I'll  
 make it worth your while.

POLICEMAN  
 Uh-huh. Worth my while.

JIM  
 I've got money. I can pay you.

POLICEMAN  
 We got all your money. Soon, anyway.

JIM  
 No, I mean other money. More money.

The Policeman puts the cards down in a stack, rises and  
 walks around to Jim. He pulls up a chair, sits.

POLICEMAN  
 I'm all ears. You were saying  
 something about money.

JIM  
 Untie me. Take me back to the hotel.  
 I'll take care of you. I swear it...  
 it'll be a win-win.

POLICEMAN

What, you gonna give me a hot stock tip? Don't talk to me like I'm some stupid, rube investor, okay?

JIM

No. I mean okay.

POLICEMAN

Well, then? How will you take care of me?

JIM

I'll write you a damned check.

POLICEMAN

You will, huh? How much?

Jim grabs a look back toward the wall of boxes. The LOVEMAKING SOUNDS continue, fever-pitched.

JIM

I don't know. What's it worth to you?

POLICEMAN

What's it worth to you?

JIM

That's not fair. C'mon.

The Policeman frowns, begins to rise.

JIM (CONT'D)

Five, ten thousand?

POLICEMAN

Wow. Really? Huh... I help you get outta this mess, save your neck... and you write me a check for a stinking ten grand? I try to cash it and I get pinched. What do I look like to you...

A beat.

JIM

Okay, twenty-five. Cash.

POLICEMAN

What do you think a life is worth, anyway?

JIM

God! How the hell can I answer that? Are you gonna help me, or what? Jesus!

The Policeman gets right in his face.

POLICEMAN

Listen, bud. I know the plan. I've got time to think on it and I'm gonna take that time. I'd be burning a pretty big bridge, if I took up with you all of a sudden.

JIM

Shit.

(a beat)

What's the plan?

POLICEMAN

Can't say. But I can tell you one thing. If you knew the plan, you'd say twenty-five grand was only be a down payment.

JIM

Christ almighty.

POLICEMAN

You have a nasty habit of taking the Lord's name in vain, you know that? You'll have to get yourself ready for an accounting someday. Sooner than you think maybe.

JIM

Sorry. Please tell me the plan.

POLICEMAN

You know that three hundred plus grand you got in that no tax bond fund? Buddy says you can write checks from that fund. Is he right?

Jim's eyes rivet on the Policeman's.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

Well, anyway, my quarter of that dough comes to quite a bit more than 25 grand, now, doesn't it?

Jim thinks a beat.

JIM

Why a quarter... and not a third?

The Policeman starts to answer, just as the LOVEMAKING SOUNDS reach their zenith.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie looks out the room window. Quiet. Two RAPS on the door startle her. She rushes toward the door.



DEBBIE

Jim!

She fumbles with the chain lock, finally gets it, pulls open the door, sees the Panhandler (#2) standing there. She SCREAMS and SLAMS the door closed.

She quickly re-locks the door and stands behind it, back pressed against it, as if holding it closed.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Go away.

(three hard RAPS)

I'll call the Police.

She hustles for the phone, picks it up, holds it to the door, tabs any buttons.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Are you going away?

PANHANDLER (O.S.)

No, ma'am. Please --

Debbie SCREAMS, runs for the window, opens it, SCREAMS out.

DEBBIE

HELP!!

Looks down. No one pays any attention.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

PANHANDLER

(over her screams)

Shit. Stop screaming, Mrs. Davis.  
Mrs. DAVIS!

The screaming stops.

PANHANDLER (CONT'D)

Mrs. Davis. May I ask you a question?  
(reaching inside his topcoat)  
Please look out through your peephole.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She peeks out through the peephole.

INSERT:

Through the peephole view. The Panhandler stands back and holds up his gun.

Debbie SCREAMS anew.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

PANHANDLER  
Oh, shit. Sorry.  
(He holds the other hand up,  
the one with the badge.)  
San Francisco P-D, Mrs. Davis.  
Detective Mick Bass, undercover.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Debbie stops screaming, peeks out again.

She slowly opens the door, leaves the chain in place, and looks out through the crack in the door.

DEBBIE  
How do you know my name?

PANHANDLER/BASS  
It's my job. It's what I do.

Bass holds the I-D right up to her.

PANHANDLER/BASS (O.S.)  
(CONT'D)  
Mrs. Davis, just checking to see if everything's okay.

DEBBIE  
Huh? Well, yes, why wouldn't it be?

PANHANDLER/BASS (O.S.)  
And your husband, he's all right? You know where he is?

DEBBIE  
Jim. Yes... I think I do.

Debbie slides the chain off its catch. She eases open the door. Bass holds the ID close to his face.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
You think?  
(beat)  
You can call the manager, if you...  
or we can...

He gestures down the hall. She pulls open the door just enough.

DEBBIE  
Why would you ask about Jim? Tell me.

Bass steps sideways into her room, looks around.

PANHANDLER/BASS

You do know where he is?

She lifts a carry-on off the desk chair and motions for him to sit. He shakes his head. She sits there.

DEBBIE

I was told he went to a baseball game,  
but I think she meant basketball.

PANHANDLER/BASS

So, he took off with some friends to a  
game?

(she nods)

Who's she?

Filthy as he is, he sits on the bed, which surprises  
Debbie. He pulls a small spiral notepad out of his coat.

DEBBIE

A woman. A pretty woman. She's an  
actress, I think.

PANHANDLER/BASS

Actress. Did she give you a name?

DEBBIE

Yes, I wrote it down right here.

(picks up a note)

A name and a number.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

With the sound of Buddy SNORING behind the boxes, Veronica  
fixes a platinum wig into place and styles her way toward  
the table where the Policeman sits dealing his cards.

PANHANDLER/BASS (V.O.)

Tyra Bankson? Her name was Tyra  
Bankson?

She applies gobs of lipstick as she moves.

Veronica strolls up behind Jim, hugs him, nibbles at his  
ear.

VERONICA

(whispering)

You want me, baby? I'm so hot now.

Veronica works her way around to Jim's face and mouths him  
but good on the lips.

Jim's hands hang off the end of the chair arms. He tries  
to push her away with them. She pushes her legs against  
his hands, bending them back. Jim grimaces in pain.

Lipstick all around Jim's mouth, she comes at him with the tongue, but Jim fights to keep it out.

Veronica trying to force her tongue into Jim's mouth, gives up and SMACKS the shit out of him. She laughs wildly.

Jim, red all over his face, stinging from the slap, smiles at her sarcastically.

BUDDY (O.S.)

Damnation. You try and catch a little blink of shuteye around here and the whole entire world throws a party.

Veronica runs up to Buddy and jumps onto him, rides him like a Koala on a tree trunk. Buddy nuzzles her neck.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Okay, baby. Gimme at least a half hour, 'til the reservoir fills back up.

VERONICA

I don't know if I can wait that long. I'm deprived.

BUDDY

Well, get with Pops, then. He's probably full up to his eyebrows.

The Policeman cheats a look away from his cards toward Buddy.

VERONICA

You mean it?

BUDDY

(smiling bigtime)  
I'd kill you both.

Veronica hops down off him.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Now, anybody else around here hungry? How about our guest of honor?

(off Jim)

Wow, he's got a nice rosy flush to him, don't he?

Veronica giggles. Buddy smacks her hard on the rump.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

(to Veronica)

Now, work is one thing. No need to be taking your nymphoma out on him after you punched out for the day. Okay, sweetie?

VERONICA

(baby voice)

I was a bad girl, huh?

BUDDY

Yup, but you wasn't the only one.

He pulls the gun out from behind him, strides right up to Jim, but turns and aims the barrel at the Policeman.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

You ever get even so much as a notion to touch my girl and I will not hesitate to introduce you to that glorious maker of yours.

POLICEMAN

Buddy, I never would.

BUDDY LINES THE POLICEMAN UP IN HIS SIGHTS.

BUDDY

Yeah, well, you better not. Not so much as a notion. Comprende?

POLICEMAN

Yeah, of course.

BUDDY

Now, about our dinner.

(to the Policeman)

Go grab us some Chinese...

(pulls a credit card out)

His treat. They double the fly miles at restaurants, don't they?

He eyes Jim, notes his disdain.

BUDDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

On second thought, me and Jimbo's going. Just him and me. A little practice excursion. Cut him loose.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bass hands Debbie a card.

PANHANDLER/BASS

Well, I'm sure everything's fine, but if you don't hear from him by 4 p.m. tomorrow. Well, you know, just in case that happens, you call me.

He notes the sudden terror in her eyes.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

Look, it's my job to be overcautious, especially with our tourist business.

(MORE)

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

(grins)  
She probably meant basketball, in which  
case he won't be back tonight 'til  
pretty late, maybe elevenish.

DEBBIE

You think so?

PANHANDLER/BASS

Sure. It's nothing.

Debbie wants to tell him more, clue him in all the way.

DEBBIE

Detective Bass?

Bass turns back.

PANHANDLER/BASS

Yes, ma'am.

DEBBIE

No. Nothing. I guess you're right,  
it's probably nothing. Right?

Bass's cellphone CHIRPS. He holds a finger up to Debbie.

PANHANDLER/BASS

(into phone)  
Yeah?  
(...)  
Uh-huh. Okay. Right. Hold on.  
(covers the phone, then)  
Call me... 4 o'clock. If, big if.

Debbie nods. Bass walks down the hall, talking into his  
phone.

Debbie watches him, as he waits by the elevator. He turns  
to her, nods.

She ducks back inside her room.

Bass tabs the elevator button.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

(into phone)  
No baseball games today, right?  
(...)  
Got a BOLO for you. Ready?

The elevator doors open. He steps inside.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR/MOVING - NIGHT

Buddy, the gun in his hand, steers around a corner.

BUDDY

I had this fella ready to roll me out  
35 video poker machines, good as new,  
stole from the choicest resorts west of  
the Rockies. Could'a loaded me up a  
truck, sprinkle 'em all over the place.  
Gone into business. You can get a  
pretty fancy return on them things.  
People love to hope on quarters. It's  
innate.

(thinks hard a moment)

You know what'd make a person a  
shitload of money selling? Second  
chances.

Jim, hands tied behind his headrest, stares out the window.

JIM

So, why didn't you?

BUDDY

What? Go into business?

(Jim doesn't answer)

Undercapitalized. Death knell for any  
startup. Maybe that's about to change.

(taps Jim on the head)

I got you all figured out. You think  
you're better than me, don't you?

(still no answer)

You know what that is? That's haughty.  
But the shit of it is I got the power.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie, the note in her hand, lifts her room phone, dials  
"9", then the number on the note. She listens...

AUTOMATED VOICE (FILTERED)

The number you have dialed is no longer  
in service... If you feel you have  
reached --

Debbie hangs up the phone, thinks a beat, searches through  
Jim's suitcase, frantically pulling out everything until  
it's empty. She repeats the action with his travel kit,  
dumps it out onto the bed.

DEBBIE

Shit.

She grabs her cell, tabs it...

INT. MAUREEN'S OCEANVIEW CONDO - NIGHT

Maureen stands at the sliders, highball in one hand,  
smoking a cigarette with the other, and blowing smoke out  
into the night.

She picks up the phone on the first RING, switching the smoke into her drink hand. Listens a beat.

MAUREEN

Well, obviously I'm a little ticked at you.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

DEBBIE

You're ticked at me? Why would you be ticked at me? What, you're jealous because Jim passed the test and your ex didn't?

MAUREEN

Please. Don't play with me, Debbie. It's late and I'm tired. You just blew your money. She's not giving it back.

DEBBIE

I don't want it back.

MAUREEN

Good. Because you're not getting it. You'll be lucky if she doesn't bill you more, making her wait all that time.

DEBBIE

What are you talking about?

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE LOBBY - DAY

A VOLUPTUOUS WOMAN, late 20s, waits near the glass doors, sipping a small bottled water.

MAUREEN (V.O.)

I should have known you were gonna pull the plug on it.

The Voluptuous Woman looks up at the clock inside the ticket window. She then checks the PHOTO OF JIM in her hand against a man who walks up alone.

MAUREEN (V.O.)

She waited two hours. She's an actress, Deb. She missed her callback on a national laxative commercial. Needless to say, she wasn't a happy camper.

The Voluptuous Woman pulls out her cellphone and tabs it roughly.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie slowly sits down on the bed.



MAUREEN (FILTERED)  
I just hope you two had a wonderful day  
together. You're only hurting  
yourself, you know? It's always better  
to know, Debbie. Remember that.

Debbie drops her phone, stares blankly at the wall.

DEBBIE  
He wanted to shop with me.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Buddy wags the gun toward Jim, pulls the car to a stop in  
front of Mr. Wu's Chinese Restaurant.

BUDDY  
Now you go in there and get us a poo-  
poo platter, some kung bo chicken and a  
couple orders of pork fried rice.

JIM  
Fuck you.

BUDDY  
Maybe later. Right now I'm hungry. Go  
on. Go, go, go. Chop-chop.

A cellphone RINGS. Jim recognizes the ring, eyes Buddy,  
who digs into his pocket, pulls out Jim's cell.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
(off the phone)  
Wife? Know anybody named wife?

Jim glares at him.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
S'wat I thought.

He opens the door, lays the phone under the car, cranks the  
engine, pops it into reverse, backs up until a CRUNCH is  
heard and the RINGING CEASES.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie stares at her cellphone, covers her mouth with her  
hand like she might lose it.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Buddy grabs a hair brush off the dash, points to the Wu's  
restaurant.

BUDDY  
Now go get our grub.

Jim realizes the futility in resisting, sighs.

JIM  
Give me some of my money.

BUDDY  
(strokes the brush through his hair)  
Jimbo, here's what we're gonna do.  
(hands him the brush)  
Take this.

JIM  
For what?

BUDDY  
(shows him)  
Stick her inside your pocket like so.  
When Mr. Wu tells you to pay up, you  
say, "I got your pay right here,  
Chinaman." Got it? Try anything  
funny, I turn the old man off.  
(aims the gun over the dash)  
Plinko-chinko.

JIM  
You're crazy. I'm not gonna do it.  
I'm no criminal.

Buddy rolls his eyes, feigns a right, elbows Jim square in the jaw.

BUDDY  
We're all criminals, pal. Just a  
matter of degrees... and opportunity.

INT. MR. WU'S CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jim, right hand in his pocket, waits nervously by a fish tank. On a stand beside the tank, a big fish bowl full of business cards, right at Jim's eye level.

A drip of blood slips from Jim's mouth down his chin. He swipes at his mouth with his free hand from which a leatherette computer bag strap dangles.

MR. WU, 73, walks up to the register with a brown paper bag, rings up the total -- \$24.50.

MR. WU  
(very poor English)  
Twenny-four-fifty.

Jim looks behind him to see...

Buddy flash on his brights.

JIM  
(to Mr. Wu)  
Help me. Can you... help me? He wants  
to kill me. Him... out there.

A beat. Mr. Wu nods, looks beyond Jim, who's nodding slowly, as though Wu's getting it. Wu extends his hand.

MR. WU  
Twenny-four-fifty. Now!

Jim looks behind him again.

THROUGH THE FISH TANK, Buddy's lights flash, as the car backs up. Jim swallows hard, pushes the brush out.

JIM  
I was just going to a movie. You know?

MR. WU  
Mo-ney. Prease!

His eyes widen with frustration, like Jim's the one who doesn't speak the language.

JIM  
Shit. Never mind. Just gimme the  
food!

MR. WU  
What?! You pay, ri-now.  
(boldly)  
Hon-ky fuck-er!

Jim reaches out and grabs at the bag. Mr. Wu tugs on it, shouts something in Mandarin. MR. WU'S SON, 33, runs toward the register with a shotgun.

Jim tugs until the food is his, and he breaks for the door.

Mr. Wu's son stops, aims, FIRES... blows out the fish bowl beside the fish tank. A shower of business cards.

Jim hits the deck, scrambles to his feet, sliding all over business cards, bag still in his hands, and out the door, where the Policeman's car swings up, passenger door open. Jim dashes in the other direction.

The car SCREECHES backward, blocks him off. Jim takes off. Car follows.

INT./EXT. POLICEMAN'S CAR/MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Jim runs alongside the car for several yards.

BUDDY  
 (kicks the passenger door  
 open)  
 Devil or the deep blue. Frying pan or  
 fire. Yours truly or honorable scatter  
 gun.

Jim looks behind him where

Mr. Wu's Son slides out the front door and slips on his  
 ass. When he hits the deck his shotgun fires off another  
 BLAST.

Jim hops in, and the car speeds away. He looks back...

Mr. Wu's Son pops up, throws the emptied shotgun aside,  
 pulls a pistol out from behind his back, POPS off a couple  
 of rounds, as the car disappears.

Jim turns back around to see...

Buddy nonchalantly poking through the food bag.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 I hope you didn't forget my fortune  
 cookies.

Jim projectile pukes right there on the front seat. Buddy  
 moves the bag of food out of harm's way, uses one hand to  
 tie Jim back up.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 Now, that's gonna stink, Jimbo, you bad-  
 ass criminal you.

INT. SFPD OFFICE - NIGHT

Bass chomps on a foot-long hotdog while he scrolls through  
 a computer file, stops on

INSERT: COMPUTER SCREEN

VERONICA'S FACE above a rap sheet and a series of aliases,  
 all names of models and actresses, like "Aka - Cynthia  
 Crawford", "Aka - Jenny Lopez", "Aka - Julia Robertson."

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Buddy, Veronica and the Policeman sit at the table, eating.

BUDDY  
 (to Jim)  
 And you're sure I can't offer you any?

Jim, tied back up in the chair, looks away.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Okay. More for us.

(to Veronica, cracks open a  
fortune cookie, reads)

Hon, pass me the poo-poo platter, would  
ya? Catch this one, "He who betrays a  
trust, quickly loses face." Damn, who  
belongs to that one?

Veronica slides the Styrofoam plate in front of Buddy, who  
eyes her, then Jim, then the Policeman.

POLICEMAN

You think maybe we oughta make him eat  
something?

BUDDY

Huh?

(looks at Policeman)

Sure, exactamente, Pops. He's got a  
big job to do come morning. We don't  
want him crapping out on us. Feed the  
man.

JIM

I just said I don't want any of your  
god--

(eyes the Policeman)

-- of your damned food.

POLICEMAN

Let me give you a little something,  
pal.

Jim looks over at the Policeman, who winks.

JIM

Okay.

The Policeman carries a pint of rice over to Jim's chair.  
He looks back at Buddy, who's eating, then sticks a forkful  
of brown rice into Jim's waiting mouth.

POLICEMAN

(whispering to Jim)

Okay, I'm in. Little booze, little  
MSG, it's sleepy-pie time. So we go  
quick. Got it?

Jim nods. Buddy glances up, catches the little exchange.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

Want more?

JIM

No. Thanks.

The Policeman nods, carries the pint container back to his  
place at the table, heads for the refrigerator.

A beat.

Buddy watches the Policeman all the way to the refrigerator, then stares back at Jim, who looks away.

Buddy goes back to his food.

The Policeman stands by the refrigerator, twists off the cap of his beer bottle, takes a sip.

Jim nods his way. He nods back.

A bud of a smile blossoms on Jim's face.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie, still dressed, sits on the bed, telephone to her ear, a napkin in her hand.

DEBBIE

Yes, I'd like that. Thanks so much. I didn't know who else to call.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Jim sits. His eyes survey the room.

Buddy's passed out on the floor, Veronica's head across his lap, eyes closed. Very quiet.

The Policeman pretends he's cleaning his gun, nods to Jim, pads quietly over to him, leans close... whispers...

POLICEMAN

Now, you sure you got plenty of money?

JIM

Yes.

POLICEMAN

How much can you get your hands on... all told? Don't hold back on me. Quick now.

JIM

I don't know, maybe... half a million or so.

POLICEMAN

Where?

JIM

Get me out first.

POLICEMAN

I want 33 per cent.

JIM  
From me you want 33, from him 25?

POLICEMAN  
Yeah, that Buddy. Saw him once bite a  
dude's finger clean off. Fella just  
cut him off at a burger drive through.

Jim stares at the Policeman, but all he sees is...

INSERT SHOT:

Buddy biting down hard and cleanly separating Jim's ring  
finger from his hand, ring and all.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jim gives in with a nod. Policeman unties Jim, grabs him  
by the underarm, leads him to the door, looks back at Buddy  
and Veronica, both SNORING loudly.

Policeman edges the door open, ever so slowly, quietly. It  
SQUEAKS. They freeze... look back. Buddy GROWLS LOWLY in  
his sleep.

EXT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Jim heads right for the car. The Policeman pulls him back.

POLICEMAN  
No, he'll hear. This way.

The Policeman points.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
We'll walk out, hitch a ride or  
something... Now, you can't fuck with  
me after, understand? No shit.

JIM  
Yeah.

POLICEMAN  
Half million. What bank?

They creep slowly around the building, and disappear.

EXT. A ROAD - NIGHT

Jim and The Policeman hustle along. An occasional car  
flies by.

JIM  
Should we put our thumbs out or  
something?

POLICEMAN

Not yet. Too conspicuous. Let's walk.

They walk on in the darkness. Finally, the Policeman turns, sticks out his thumb.

Headlights flash, drift closer to them...

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

Okay, just be cool. Let me do the talking.

Jim nods. The car pulls up, stops in a dark place. The headlights blind them, but they hustle toward the light.

The Policeman pulls open the back door, hustles Jim inside, where a big, bearded, white-haired man, waggles his fingers, "hello."

INT. BEARDED MAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The Policeman slides in beside Jim. The dash lights are dimmed, barely visible. The car pulls away.

BEARDED MAN

(gruff, gravel-throated)

Any trouble, officer?

POLICEMAN

No. Everything's in order.

JIM

I appreciate the ride. You don't know how much.

BEARDED MAN

I got a pretty good idea... Thought maybe you were hot on the trail of that Carmel killer.

JIM

Carmel killer?

BEARDED MAN

Yep, not the candy kind, the place kind. Down Carmel way. People disappearing right off the face of the planet, no explanation. Normal people. Tourists mostly. Bodies turn up weeks later on the beach, all cut up, massacred (sic), best they can surmise. Call him the Carmel killer. Scary. Such tragedy in the face of all that grandiose beauty.

JIM

Jesus.



He glances at the Policeman, whose face is in his hand.  
Jim sniffs... his own vomit.

JIM (CONT'D)

Shit.

A bellowing LAUGH from the Bearded Man, as he yanks off his wig and beard, turns -- Buddy, big, old, goofy smile.

BUDDY

Boo! Hey, no one ever told you  
hitching's dangerous? Some nut could  
pick you up, do god knows what to you.

JIM

Fuck you!

The Policeman leans across to Buddy.

POLICEMAN

Bank of North America. Over half a  
million liquid.

Buddy BELLOWS in delight!

Jim grabs the door handle, pulls it... and flies out.

EXT. A ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Jim rolls on the pavement and off onto a shoulder. Hurt,  
he pushes himself up slowly, limps, breaks into a gimpy run  
toward...

a feint light, a match maybe...

The Bearded Man's/Policeman's car makes a tight u-turn,  
SCREECHES back toward him.

Jim hobbles faster, closer to the light...

JIM

Help! Help me!!

He staggers up to a person, who turns just in time to be  
caught in Buddy's headlights...

Veronica finishes lighting her cigarette, flips the match  
away. She kicks Jim right in the crotch.

He drops right where he stood.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR/MOVING - NIGHT

Jim's drained face is pressed up against the window glass.

The Policeman has a gun pointed at him, but he's really more interested in watching

Veronica smother Buddy with kisses up in the front seat.

BUDDY

God, I love the sport in this. If I never got nothing else out of it. The sport would be enough. I'm kind of pure in that, like a true athlete, not the modern steroid-injecting money-grubbing kind, the old-timey drunkard baggy-pants kind.

POLICEMAN

That Carmel Killer stuff was priceless.

BUDDY

Señor Davis, seems you got access to more dinero than we first were made privy to. We'll have to change our plans a little now, tap into the bigger financial picture. Savvy?

(Jim just stares at him)

What, you got a problem with me?

JIM

No, sir.

BUDDY

Sir?

(to Veronica)

Did you hear that, sugar? Sir. He gave me the priority.

VERONICA

That's a sign of respect. You're the ace of spades, baby.

BUDDY

Am I? I wonder...

POLICEMAN

Sounds like respect to me. I'm with Ronnie.

BUDDY

Ronnie? You and "Ronnie" both see it the same way...

VERONICA

(to Buddy)

I'm so proud of you.

Buddy eyes the Policeman in the rearview, drives on.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

Let's go to the beach, huh? Puh-lease.

BUDDY

Why not? Be there for sunrise. New day. Know what they call that -- symbolism. Let's go get us some damn symbolism.

Veronica's even more smitten now, as Buddy cranks the wheel hard...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Debbie, still dressed, sits asleep on her made bed, two pillows supporting her upright position.

The PHONE RINGS, startling her awake. She gasps, goes for the phone, knocks it off the night stand, falls off the bed after it, but inadvertently hangs it up.

DEBBIE

Yes, hello?  
(listens, DIAL TONE)  
Shit!

She gathers up the phone, sets it back in place, re-cradles the receiver, waits, ready to pounce.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

Come on... come on.

Quiet. A KNOCK at the door, startles her again. She gathers herself, runs to it, peeks out through the peephole.

PEEPHOLE VIEW:

The Salesgirl holds up a white bag.

SALESGIRL

Hope you like Chinese.

EXT. A DESERTED STRETCH OF BEACH - DAWN

Buddy, in his skivvies, wades out into the freezing water. A wave crests and breaks. Buddy dives into the foam, body surfs toward shore, stands up, his shorts barely hanging on.

BUDDY

Woo-hoo! Did you see that, baby?!

He waves toward Veronica and the Policeman who sit beside a fire in the sand. Jim is buried in the sand between them, Buddy's socks in his mouth.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
C'mon out, Pops. Water's a real kick-  
in-the-tail-wake-me-up!

POLICEMAN  
No, I'll pass, Buddy!

BUDDY  
(sotto)  
Yeah, I bet you will.

Buddy hikes up his shorts and slogs up the beach, grabs Jim by the feet, drags him toward the water.

BUDDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
Okay, let's washy youey.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Discarded food containers, beer cans all over.

Debbie, in a bathrobe, sleeps in a chair, the comforter over her lap. The phone RINGS under the comforter. She digs under the comforter, retrieves the phone...

DEBBIE  
(into phone)  
Yes, hello?  
(...)  
Oh, hi, honey. Thank you.

She turns to the Salesgirl, who's in bed under a sheet, shakes her head.

The Salesgirl, half-naked, climbs out of bed, strolls groggily toward the bathroom.

Debbie's eyes follow her, until she remembers the phone in her hand. She listens, distractedly...

DEBBIE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
Yes... Annie, everything's fine here.  
(...)  
Dad? He's, um, out right now.  
(...)  
Okay. Love you.

Debbie's eyes stay on the bathroom door, as the SHOWER RUNS.

EXT. GEARY STREET - DAY

The Policeman's car pulls up. Veronica, brown bob wig on just like the red one, climbs out. Buddy pokes his head out the window, speaks so Jim, spiffed up, can hear from the back where the Policeman, in street clothes, keeps him company.

BUDDY

He does what he's supposed to, I'll  
call and come get you. He doesn't...  
(looks back inside car, then)  
... you know what to do.

Veronica nods, kisses him with her fingertips, walks over to the Regent Hotel, steps inside.

The Policeman's car pulls away.

Veronica pushes the hotel door open, steps outside, walks down the block, and into a coffee shop.

EXT. BANK OF NORTH AMERICA - DAY

The Policeman's car is parked in a handicapped spot, a handicapped hanger on its rearview. Buddy sits at the driver's seat, sings along with the cassette player rendering of "Don Giovanni." He's actually quite good...

BUDDY

"Va' la, che se' il grand'uom!  
Sappi ch'lo sono innamorato d'una bella  
dama, e son certo che m'ama..."

INT. BANK OF NORTH AMERICA - DAY

Jim, new jacket, shirt and tie, sits at a desk with the Policeman, also now in street clothes.

A pretty sexy BRANCH MANAGER, 33, sits across from them, a counter check and Jim's ID in her hand. She looks up.

BRANCH MANAGER

That's a lot of cash, Mr. Davis.

JIM

Anniversary present.

The Branch Manager eyes them both, smiles as she rises.

BRANCH MANAGER

Well, I'd really like you to speak  
to...

(leans closer)

... my fiancé as soon as possible.

She smiles, walks away.

POLICEMAN

Nice touch, that anniversary bit.

Jim stares straight ahead.

EXT. BANK OF NORTH AMERICA - DAY

Jim and the Policeman walk out through the brass and glass doors and climb into the back seat of the car.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

BUDDY  
Well, how'd our boy do?

POLICEMAN  
Fifty G's. No questions asked.

BUDDY  
Excellent. Okay, next stop San Jose.  
Do you know the way, Jimbo?

POLICEMAN  
He was actually helpful.

BUDDY  
Do tell.

Buddy CACKLES... turns up his stereo, sings, drives...

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
"Udisti! qualche bella. Dal vago  
abbandonata. Poverina! Cerchiam di  
consolare il suo tormento..."

EXT. REGENT HOTEL - DAY

The Salesgirl hugs Debbie hard, lets her go.

SALESGIRL  
You go right down there and tell them  
to start looking right now. Screw 24  
hours. Your husband's missing, dammit!

DEBBIE  
No, I know you're right.

SALESGIRL  
And you're sure it has nothing to do  
with your --

DEBBIE  
Yes.

SALESGIRL  
I'd go with you, but I'm totally late  
already.

DEBBIE  
No, no. You go.

The Salesgirl takes one more opportunity to hug Debbie again.

SALESGIRL  
You're going that way. Best place to  
catch a cab is over on that corner.  
Tell them everything. Right?

Debbie nods. The Salesgirl steps right out into the traffic, jams her fingers in her mouth and WHISTLES. A cab pulls up. She waves back at Debbie, climbs in the cab.

EXT. GEARY STREET - DAY

Debbie stands at the appointed corner, tries to hail a cab, which sails right by her. Frustrated, embarrassed, she turns to see...

Veronica sitting in the window of the coffee shop, sipping an espresso.

Veronica stops sipping, recognizes Debbie, disappears...

Debbie dashes for the coffee shop...

INT. COFFEE BEAN - CONTINUOUS

Debbie fights her way through a line of coffee hounds...

DEBBIE  
Where'd that woman go?!

Debbie's virtually ignored. She wheels to a RUCKUS of falling stools, catches sight of Veronica kicking a stool and Patron out of the way and scrambling out the door.

Debbie starts after her, turns back...

DEBBIE (CONT'D)  
Someone call the police... please!

Debbie breaks for the door.

EXT. GEARY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Debbie kicks it into high gear, hauls ass after Veronica, who's trying to dial her phone as she runs. Debbie gains on her, finally reaches her, pulls her down from behind and settles on top of her, her hands on Veronica's throat.

VERONICA'S HAND slips into her pocket, pulls out a syringe, which she cups.

DEBBIE  
Where is he!?

Veronica, starts to raise her cupped hand... notices the crowd.

VERONICA  
Help... Help! This woman attacked me!  
She's crazy. Get her off me!

A couple of guys in the crowd pull Debbie off, restrain her.

DEBBIE  
Huh? No!

Veronica gathers herself, scrambles to her feet, takes off running, crosses Geary, cuts through traffic.

Debbie dashes out into the traffic, nearly gets run down, has to stop, wait, runs down the other side of the street, looks... Veronica's gone.

INT. THE POLICEMAN'S CAR/MOVING - DAY

Buddy's phone BEEPS. He grabs it from under his leg, flips it open.

BUDDY  
(into phone)  
Yel-low...

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - CONTINUOUS

Veronica's walking along, her phone to her ear.

VERONICA  
That fucking bitch tackled me...

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

Buddy tries to play it off, maintain the ruse.

BUDDY  
Yeah, well, we'll be done here soon, cherish. We'll finish up today and put our pal back to work on Monday, head down to plastic-land. Whatta ya say?

Veronica smacks the phone a few times.

VERONICA  
She made me. You understand?

BUDDY  
I sure do. He's cooperating, so you don't have to mess with his honey... yet.

(MORE)



BUDDY (CONT'D)  
I love you, too, and I'll pick you up  
at our love nest in a couple hours.  
Okay, I'll tell him. Byeee!

Veronica's ready to throw a fit... or the phone.

Buddy clicks his cell closed, turns to Jim, nonchalantly.

BUDDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
Ronnie said your little lady's holding  
down the fort just fine.

JIM  
She better.

Buddy turns to Jim, a puzzled look on his face.

INT. SFPD LOBBY - DAY

Debbie sits, taps her finger, spies a spruced-up Bass  
walking down a hallway.

She rushes after him, calls out...

DEBBIE  
My husband was kidnapped, Detective  
Bass, and I'm not waiting any 24  
fucking hours.

Bass stops short, as does just about everyone else.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Policeman's car heads up onto a ramp, past a sign that  
reads "San Francisco, 20 miles."

INT. SFPD OFFICE - DAY

Bass pushes away from his desk, comes around to Debbie's  
side, sits on the edge, right in front of her.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
This test. You were testing what, his  
fidelity?

She nods.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)  
I didn't know wives did that.

DEBBIE  
Well, we do. I guess.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
Huh. Why wouldn't you just hit him  
with it face to face? Ask the  
question?

DEBBIE  
I... don't know. Looking back on it  
now... Maybe I just got some bad  
advice. Or maybe it wasn't so bad.  
Like I said, I don't know, Detective.  
I just don't.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
Okay. I understand.  
(a beat)  
I've got good news and not so good  
news. Which do you want first?

Debbie shrugs.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)  
We checked with the actress. The real  
one. She confirmed your husband never  
showed up at the theatre.

DEBBIE  
Was that good or bad news?

PANHANDLER/BASS  
The cellphone number you gave us  
helped. There was a call made from it  
yesterday. We know who they are.

DEBBIE  
Thank god. That's good.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
Yes, but not so good is we also know  
what they're capable of.

DEBBIE  
They?

Bass hands her mug shots of Ronnie and Buddy.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
Ronnie Delgado and her boyfriend Buddy  
Parisi.

DEBBIE  
So, two people have my husband?

PANHANDLER/BASS  
Yes. They operate by going after  
vulnerable people, set up guys like  
your husband.

EXT. CHINATOWN - DAY

The Policeman's car rolls through a light. Another car nearly clips it in the intersection, has to hop a curb to avoid an accident. That car's Driver climbs out, curses, throws a fit, writes numbers in the dust on his hood.

A marked Police Cruiser pulls up...

INT. A WAREHOUSE - DAY

Jim's back in the wheelchair, tied up, worn out, bruised and defeated. Buddy's humming something that sounds vaguely operatic, and using lipstick to outline Jim's features.

BUDDY

Damn, you're almost pretty, in a clowny, trans-generous sort of way.

The Policeman walks in, tosses the car keys on the table. Veronica strolls in, a bag of Oriental food in front of her.

BUDDY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What, Chinko again?

POLICEMAN

It was close. Said you were hungry.

BUDDY

I am. What took you so long?

The Policeman ignores him, grabs a bottle of beer out of the refrigerator and kicks the door closed.

Buddy finishes up with Jim, hustles around to the opposite side of the table.

Veronica sets the food on the table, sits close to Buddy, grabs her lipstick from Buddy's hand, tucks it away.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

(to Veronica)

What took you so long?

Veronica shrugs.

POLICEMAN

Hundred G's today. We're some team, right, Buddy?

Buddy gobbles on a rib, gestures with it.

BUDDY

Sure we are. We're just one big happy family. You're part of our family now, too, huh, Jimmy?

JIM

Yeah...

POLICEMAN

So, I was thinking, Buddy... since we're such a good team and all...  
(glances over to Jim, back)  
... maybe we could divvy up the pot three ways instead of four.

Buddy wipes his mouth. The Policeman strolls over and stands between Jim and Buddy, across the table, picks up a carton of rice, pokes at it with a fork.

Buddy opens another fortune cookie, reads the paper sliver.

BUDDY

Well, I'll be damned. Somebody's trying to tell me something here.

Veronica picks up the discarded sliver, reads.

VERONICA

"He who betrays a trust, quickly loses face."

INT. SFPD OFFICE - NIGHT

PANHANDLER/BASS

How about bank accounts, stock portfolios, things like that?

DEBBIE

Jim handled all of that.

PANHANDLER/BASS

Could you get your hands on last year's tax papers or someone at home to help?

Debbie stares far off at nothing. Bass's desk phone BUZZES. He picks up the receiver.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Yeah?

He covers the mouth end of the phone.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

(to Debbie)

Any other credit cards you can think of?

Debbie shakes her head.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)  
(CONT'D)

(into phone)

No. What about the car from the Wu Restaurant robbery?

(...)

Get it on the hot sheet. If they're still in this city, I want to know --

(...)

Right. Yeah.

He hangs up the phone. She looks at him fearfully.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

Okay. Here it is. Buddy's a Grade-A nutbag. He's done time all over the northwest. Strong armed stuff mixed with robbery, extortion, blackmail. That's where Ronnie comes in. You said it yourself. She's a real looker. Hard for any man to resist her.

A tear rolls down Debbie's cheek. Bass pulls a hankie out of his pocket. Debbie takes it, uses it.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)

M-O is they set up little scenarios.

He pulls a pack of cigarettes out of his drawer, offers her one. She declines. He lights up.

DEBBIE

Scenarios?

PANHANDLER/BASS

Yeah. Car broke down. Doctor needs to get to surgery. How about a ride? Thanks for the car. Old man with Alzheimer's, lost, poor guy gets you to take him home... your home. Bye-bye TV, jewelry, etcetera. Pretty girl all depressed cause she's down on her luck looking for somebody's ear to bend, shoulder to lean on. That's how they get the husbands and conventioners.

DEBBIE

Would they hurt him?

Bass takes a long draw on his cigarette, surveys the damage.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

So, what do we do? Just sit here?

Debbie looks at her wedding ring, then around -- the cabinets full of files, the corkboards crammed with push-pinned criminal faces, back to her ring, then to Bass.

PANHANDLER/BASS

No, we don't just sit here.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Buddy eyes Jim, then the Policeman who leans against the table, his beer in one hand.

Veronica stands beside Buddy, rubbing her arm.

VERONICA

Buddy, I got this feeling. Maybe we should close this place down and take off, huh? We got good money now.

Buddy gets real quiet, pensive.

VERONICA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Buddy... You know my funny feelings when I get them, right?

He's about to take a chomp out of a spare rib, but puts it back down on his plate.

BUDDY

Timing's everything, babe. Time's right, we'll vanish like a bad dream. Til then, go fix yourself up. You're looking a little puny right now. Hell, Jim there's running you some competition.

POLICEMAN

Nah, she looks fine. You look great, Ronnie.

Buddy stops eating.

BUDDY

Pops? Is it me, or is there something hinky going on between you and my woman? I mean, of course, mostly on your behalf.

THE POLICEMAN

C'mon, Buddy...

VERONICA

No, baby, no.

The Policeman waves him off like he's nuts, tilts his beer back, guzzles.

Buddy nonchalantly draws his gun and almost without taking aim, blows a hole through the beer bottle. The bottle EXPLODES in the Policeman's hand, and falls away, revealing a smoking hole in the bridge of his nose.

The Policeman staggers, falls back... and face-up across Jim's lap.

Veronica SCREAMS.

Jim starts to tremble, uncontrollably.

Buddy jams the gun down the front of his pants again.

BUDDY  
Quickly loses face. At least 33 per  
cent of it, anyway. Honey, pass me  
that  
rice. I think he's finished with it.

Veronica, CRYING, pushes away from the table and runs off toward the wall of boxes.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
It's okay, baby girl. Settle down.

BEHIND THE BOXES:

Veronica, trembling, pulls a half-full syringe out of her pocket. She sticks the plastic tip in her mouth to remove it, but...

BUDDY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
No candy! Okay, Ron? I need you clean  
and sober. Promise me, sugar? Just  
say nope.

Veronica pulls the works slowly out of her mouth, plastic still on the tip, and puts it back in her pocket.

VERONICA  
Okay, baby. I-I promise.

BACK TO SCENE:

JIM  
You sick bastard! Get him off me!

Jim looks down. The Policeman's staring up at him, blood oozing from the fleshy crater in his face.

BUDDY  
I'm sick? Ho-ho, would ya look at  
who's callin' the kettle black?  
(reaching for rice)  
You got yourself one huge slice of the  
ever-famous American pie. All anybody  
could ask for, and what do you do with  
it?

(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 You chuck it right into the old garbage  
 can, just for a taste 'a strange. I'm  
 sick. That's twisted, pal.

JIM  
 I stopped to help her. That's all.

BUDDY  
 Uh-huh. But, what do you phony  
 business types say, "at the end of the  
 day" maybe there was a little more to  
 it?

Jim wrenches in his chair, watches Buddy spoon out rice  
 onto his paper plate and scarf more down.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 This rice is too dry, dammit.

He chucks the rice at Jim, hitting him squarely in the  
 chest. Rice all over him and on top of the Policeman.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 Look at you, all full of rice and my  
 girl's lipstick.  
 (he thinks about it)  
 Rice and Ronnie. I guess you're the  
 San Francisco treat. Hah! I'd'a made  
 a killing in advertising. I simply  
 have wasted my talents on the likes of  
 you.

Jim tries in vain to shake the Policeman off his lap.

EXT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The Police cruiser from the near accident scene, its  
 spotlight on, pulls up behind the Policeman's Crown Vic.

Inside a POLICE OFFICER aims his spotlight on the license  
 tag.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Buddy pushes away from the table. Jim stares at him.

JIM  
 Buddy, I want in.

BUDDY  
 You want in? In what?

JIM  
 Look, you said it yourself. And you  
 were spot on. I had the apple pie and  
 I pissed it away. You know why?  
 'Cause I'm bored with my life.  
 (MORE)



JIM (CONT'D)

So fucking bored you wouldn't believe.  
This is what I've needed all along.  
I've been kidding myself for years.  
Look, you're gonna need a partner now  
with...

(re Policeman)

... him gone. I can set you up. I  
know plenty of marks. Trust me. Ever  
been to Newport Beach? Highest per  
capita income in the country. I got  
clients up the yin yang down there.  
Loaded. Make my portfolio look like it  
belongs to some fucking illegal blowing  
leaves off their driveways.

BUDDY

Damn, you mean, you'd take up with us  
malefactors? Give up the straight and  
narrow for the wiggly and wide.

JIM

He told you how I helped today, right?

BUDDY

Said you did your part.

JIM

See, I'm digging this. It's crazy. I  
was out there today at those banks, and  
I felt like... I don't know...

BUDDY

A real bad boy?

JIM

Yeah. Maybe.

BUDDY

The distaffers do love the bad boy.

JIM

Get him off me. He's bleeding on my  
clothes. Next bank, I'll show you.  
I'll walk in there and show you what I  
can do.

BUDDY

You will, huh?

JIM

Hell, yes, I will. Hell yes!

Buddy eyeballs Jim but good.

BUDDY

Ronnie!

VERONICA (O.S.)

What?

BUDDY  
C'mere, baby. I need your help.

Veronica, pulling her wig off slowly, hands trembling,  
peeks out from behind the boxes.

VERONICA  
You scaring me now.

BUDDY  
Aw, nothing to be scared of. It's just  
me, baby. How about a little twirl to  
relax you?

Buddy lifts a boom-box off a shelf, plugs it in and slips  
in his "Don Giovanni."

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
You think we might could use a yuppie  
partner?

Veronica tip-toes out to Buddy. He tangoes toward her,  
mouths the vocals.

VERONICA  
I don't know, baby. I don't think so.

Buddy reaches out for Veronica, pulls her toward him, hard.  
She winces, but his touch is deft, soft and gentle, and he  
shifts his .9 mm to one side, to pull her even closer.

They dance in a circle around Jim, who eyes their every  
move, turning his head slowly. The music builds...

Buddy twirls Veronica out at arm's length, then reels her  
in.

Buddy stops the dance near the table. He takes Veronica by  
the chin.

BUDDY  
You know I'd never hurt you.

VERONICA  
I... Uh-huh.

He kisses her on the lips, long and hard. She climbs all  
over him.

Jim watches them, but sees...

INT. JIM'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jim sits watching a football game on TV. Debbie walks by,  
humming. A small Christmas tree on a table in the corner  
of the room.

Debbie stops at the entertainment center, slips in a C-D. Something romantic. She listens, her body swaying, finally dancing toward Jim. She reaches out to take his arm.

DEBBIE

C'mon, dance with me, Jim. It's New Year's Eve. We never dance anymore.

JIM

C'mon, it's sudden death. Not now, okay.

Jim turns the game volume up.

Debbie, disappointed, marches out of the room.

INT. A POLICE CAR/MOVING - NIGHT

Debbie looks out the window, as Bass drives.

DEBBIE

She flirts with him. If he takes the bait, she pushes it until there's no question, then she pulls the plug, and reports back.

PANHANDLER/BASS

And if he doesn't take the bait?

DEBBIE

She reports back.

PANHANDLER/BASS

And that's the end of it. After that, you trust him? It's all good?

DEBBIE

I really don't want to talk about that anymore.

A beat. Bass watches her smudge a tear away.

PANHANDLER/BASS

We have ways of tracking people down. It won't take long.

DEBBIE

You'll tell me as soon as you hear anything?

PANHANDLER/BASS

Sure. Of course. It's a messed up world, Mrs. Davis. Everything going so crazy, so fast, maybe you just fly off it for a minute... a second... maybe if you don't even mean to... and it's a whole new ball game.

His radio SQUAWKS. He hesitates, picks it up.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

Jim wriggles under the Policeman's body, turning his hands in a frenzy, but to no avail. The Policeman will not be moved.

Buddy and Veronica are right there on the floor in front of Jim. Buddy's hands work her breasts.

JIM

C'mon! Whatta ya say? You gonna let me show you what I can do or what?

Buddy rolls over and looks right up at Jim.

BUDDY

What if I was to do this to your girl, Jimmy? How'd you feel?

JIM

Screw you!

BUDDY

Listen at you. You damn bad boy!

JIM

You better fucking believe it!

BUDDY

What about your woman, Jimmy? What about her?

JIM

Fuck her. Boring bitch.

BUDDY

Woo. See now, that's the difference between you an' me. I wouldn't even think about casting my lady aside. No way. No matter what.

VERONICA

Oh, Buddy...

BUDDY

I got my one true girl right here. Why, that's all a man needs. Huh, baby?

VERONICA

Yes, daddy.

They go at it some more.

JIM  
Yeah, well, that's the difference  
between you and me -- you're pussy-  
whipped, and I'm not!

Buddy stops. He rolls to Jim, zaps him with his beady eyes. Buddy pushes himself up, dusts himself off, strides closer to Jim, who's trying to back the chair away.

BUDDY  
Mister, did you mean what you just  
said?

Buddy cranks his head, like he's fighting off a brain freeze.

JIM  
Hell, yes I meant it.

Jim struggles, shifting his body under the Policeman. Veronica rushes to Buddy's side. A long, tense moment. Finally, Buddy reels her in for a giant smackeroo, wipes his mouth, licks his finger.

BUDDY  
Hmmm, finger licking good. First thing  
Monday morning, Los Angeles... the city  
of angels.  
(turns to Jim)  
All three of us.

VERONICA  
(hard on the "g")  
Los Angeles...

JIM  
Fuckin' A!

BUDDY  
Let's get our new partner cleaned up.

VERONICA  
(looks down at Policeman)  
I'll get his feet. I don't wanna look  
into no dead man's eyes. It's bad  
luck.

Veronica goes for the Policeman's feet. Buddy reaches down to grab him under the arms.

Jim and Buddy lock eyes.

BUDDY  
On three. Ready?

JIM  
Yes.

BUDDY  
Not you. Her. Ready, sweets?

VERONICA  
Yup.

BUDDY  
One... two... three.

Veronica lifts. Buddy lifts. They both lean against the arms of the wheelchair. A BLAST.

Buddy, shocked, looks across at Jim, who's wild-eyed. Buddy's eyes slowly drift down.

Smoke lifts from his crotch. Buddy falls away, pulling the Policeman down on top of him. He GRUNTS in pain.

Jim now holds Buddy's gun on him, then twists it, rocking the chair to one side, toward Veronica, then back to Buddy, then back to Veronica.

JIM  
(to Veronica)  
UNTIE MY GOD-DAMNED ARMS!

Veronica jumps backwards.

JIM (CONT'D)  
DO IT... BITCH!

She looks at Buddy. Jim turns the gun back on Buddy now.

JIM (CONT'D)  
I'll fuck him up... more!

BUDDY  
(churning in pain)  
Untie him. He's crazy. Do it!

Veronica hustles to Jim, unties his left arm first.

Jim's eyes are riveted on Buddy, who struggles on the floor.

Veronica bends to untie the leatherette strap on the gun arm, but as she does, she stealthily pulls a now empty syringe out of her pocket, slides the plastic protector off the needle and jabs it deep into Jim's neck. Jim twists, FIRES OFF A SHOT.

Veronica falls away. Jim yanks the syringe out of his neck, throws it across the room, unties himself and turns to Veronica. She stares in Buddy's direction, lets out a blood curdling SCREAM.

Buddy's face is blown apart.

BUDDY (CONT'D)  
 (through a gurgling half-  
 mouth)  
 Ba-by doll...

His body kicks, goes stiff.

Veronica runs to Buddy and kneels over him.

Two bloodied faces now stare up at her.

JIM  
 TAKE THAT OFF HIS HAND!

Jim nestles the gun muzzle in her ear.

Veronica, shaking, goes for the watch...

JIM (CONT'D)  
 No, goddammit, the ring, you stupid  
 cunt!

She pulls the ring off Buddy's pinky, hands it behind her.  
 Jim drops it in his pants pocket.

JIM (CONT'D)  
 I should kill you right now!

VERONICA  
 Yeah, why don't you?

She looks back at him, reaches out and, GROWLING, bites him  
 on the leg. Jim kicks her in the head. She falls back.  
 Jim steadies the gun over her.

VERONICA (CONT'D)  
 You won't shoot me, pussy. You don't  
 got the balls.

Jim takes aim. She stares up at him, closes her eyes, then  
 opens them wide, waiting for it. Neither moves.

Buddy kicks once more. Veronica SHRIEKS. Buddy goes  
 stiff.

Jim glares down at Buddy's face, then to the gun in his  
 hand. His whole body shakes uncontrollably.

VERONICA (CONT'D)  
 You wannabe bad boy loser fuck. He was  
 better than you. He was a man. What  
 are you? Huh? C'mon, do me, too. Do  
 me.

She spits at him. Jim slowly turns the gun on her. She  
 smiles up at him... wickedly, eyes brazen, wide open. A  
 beat.

The door into the warehouse KICKS open.

PANHANDLER/BASS (O.S.)  
Police. Put it down! NOW!

Jim, vibrating, turns the gun that way, his hands shaking.

Veronica kicks him hard between his legs into his crotch.

Jim's gun FIRES. The Police Officer ducks, FIRES one shot back. Bass, weapon drawn, kneels beside the Police Officer.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)  
NO!

Jim takes a bullet in the torso, spins, falls on the pile of dead people.

Veronica SCREAMS, slithers away along the floor.

Jim rolls over and off the pile, his eyes blinking open and closed, fluttering,

He sees...

Debbie, sideways. Her mouth is screaming his name, but he can't hear it. Jim's eyes finally close.

Bass runs to the bodies, kicks the nine away, aims his weapon at Veronica, who stands, SCREAMING and RANTING, hands reaching for the sky.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)  
(to Veronica)  
Shut the hell up!  
(behind him)  
Get an ambulance! Shit! Shit.

DEBBIE  
Oh, my god. What did I do?

Debbie's being restrained by the Police Officer.

PANHANDLER/BASS  
(re Debbie)  
Get her outta here.

He reaches down and presses his finger against Jim's neck.

Veronica creeps toward the .9 mm on the floor. Bass peers up at her, gestures with the gun.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)  
GIMME HALF A HALF-ASSED EXCUSE!

A SIREN (OS) in the distance. Bass looks down at the dead pile.



EXT. A CEMETERY - DAY

SOBBING. A woman's hand lays a grocery store bouquet of simple flowers on a freshly dug grave. A simple marker.

The woman, Veronica, steps back and we see she's wearing cuffs, as two PLAIN CLOTHES OFFICERS escort her away.

VERONICA  
(wiping away tears)  
He was always good to me.

INT. A HOSPITAL - DAY

Jim sits on the edge of a bed, as Debbie wraps a jacket around him, his chest bandaged, a tiny band-aid on his neck.

A NURSE, 25, wheels a wheelchair into the room.

JIM  
I'm gonna have to pass on that.

NURSE  
I'm sorry, sir. Rules are rules.

DEBBIE  
(to Nurse)  
Could I have a word with you?

The Nurse nods. Debbie leads her out into the hall.

Jim watches as she speaks calmly with the Nurse.

Debbie walks back into the hospital room, Nurse behind her.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)  
Ready to walk out, hon?

JIM  
You are amazing. You know that?

Jim kisses her, holds her as tight as he can. She helps him up. Together they exit the room and walk out into the hall, the Nurse watching them with admiration. A young ORDERLY enters the room.

NURSE  
God, don't they look so cute together?

The Orderly watches them, too, nods.

ORDERLY  
I guess. For an old couple.

INT. A CAB - DAY

Jim sits inside already. Debbie climbs in and pulls the door closed. The CAB DRIVER looks back.

CAB DRIVER  
Where to?

DEBBIE  
The Regent Hotel.

JIM  
Then the airport. Home.

CAB DRIVER  
(steers into traffic)  
You got it, pal.

Jim settles back and looks out the window. City flying by.

INSERT SHOT:

Spinning. Jim's face. Mouth gagged with a T-shirt. Eyes fight to open, not from the damage, more from the delirium. His head lolls from side to side. His head stops spinning, rolls back, eyes bulge as a huge syringe moves into view.

INT. JIM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jim sits straight up in bed, sweating, panting in panic.

DEBBIE  
Jim? Are you all right?

She switches on the light by the bed.

JIM  
Oh... yeah. Just a really weird dream.

Jim settles back down.

DEBBIE  
Want to talk about it?

JIM  
No. Best just to let it fade away.

She reaches over, kisses Jim on the cheek, CLICKS off the light.

DEBBIE  
Okay. Good night.

JIM  
Night.

They lie in the growing darkness. A long moment.

DEBBIE  
Jim?

JIM  
Uh-huh.

DEBBIE  
Those... pictures they found.

JIM  
I was drugged. They posed me.

The light CLICKS on. Debbie sits up.

DEBBIE  
You didn't sleep with that woman,  
right? I'm sorry, I just need to know.

JIM  
No! Hell, no... I didn't even want to  
touch her.  
(a beat)  
I was so stupid. Jeez. They got me.  
Bastards. How did I fall for her crap?

DEBBIE  
(holds a pillow close to her)  
On our anniversary.

JIM  
Yes. I do know I was being tested.

DEBBIE  
You do?

JIM  
Hell yes. And it pisses me off.

DEBBIE  
Jim, I --

JIM  
No. Let me finish. I was being tested  
by...

DEBBIE  
By...

JIM  
By... my own wife. What do you think  
about that?

After a moment to absorb the shock...

DEBBIE  
Well, in my own defen --

JIM

I mean, you set it all up. Didn't you?  
San Francisco. The movie. You set it  
all up...

(Debbie's biting her lip)

And you didn't even know it. So,  
something bigger than you, than us,  
was using you to test me.

DEBBIE

Really?

JIM

Hell, yes. Really.

DEBBIE

Wow... I don't know what to say.

Deb lies back down, stares at the ceiling.

JIM

It just pisses me off that I failed. I  
thought I was doing the right thing and  
I wasn't. Shit. I should have just  
walked away and gone to that movie.

DEBBIE

Well...

JIM

I'm glad it happened. I am. Because  
it made me appreciate you even more.  
You always support me, believe in me,  
trust me, no matter what. And that's  
huge. I swear to god, it is enormously  
huge.

DEBBIE

If you say so.

JIM

I do say so. Here's what I realized  
after all this -- I am who I am.  
Hairless, overweight, whatever... This  
is my life. No replays, no do overs.  
Screw work. Fuck getting older... who  
cares? As long as I get older with  
you, that's fine with me. Fuck fine,  
it's damn perfect is what it is.  
You're goddamn perfect. And if you  
ever see me starting to take you for  
granted, you call me on it. Right  
away.

Debbie laughs out of relief.

JIM (CONT'D)

This is funny?

DEBBIE

No. Sorry. It's just... I don't know.  
I guess it is funny in a way. Weird  
funny, though, not laugh at you funny.

JIM

Oh... Yeah. Okay. I guess it is, all  
coming out like this...

Jim laughs with her. Debbie offs the lamp again, and we  
see them now only in the dying light that's left behind.

A long, quiet moment. Only breathing now. Jim spoons  
closer, works his hand into her nightgown.

JIM (CONT'D)

So, are you awake?

DEBBIE

Yeah, I am.

Jim moves in for the kill, but, instead of making love to  
Debbie, he edges her off the bed.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Jim reaches over and turns on the radio/alarm clock,  
dialing until he finds something that works, maybe a not-  
quite-tuned in version of Harold Melvin's "If You Don't  
Know Me by Now", in progress.

JIM

Shh. Give me your hand, baby doll.

He takes his wife hand, pulls her in, and leads her in an  
awkward slowdance, SINGING ALONG badly with Harold and the  
boys, as we...

FADE OUT.