

"Strange"

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"STRANGE"

FADE IN:

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

JIM DAVIS, 47, face bruised up pretty good, 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 eyes close. Open again. Close again. His head rolls back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Jim's face, normal now, as he fights to keep his eyes open...

He sits up quick in his chair while a Marriage COUNSELOR, 55, African print dress and too-long grey hair, drones on in session as DEBBIE, 46, attractive, and Jim, soft-centered, thinning hair, confront their marital demons.

COUNSELOR (V.O.)
Remember, Jim, when you contain
Debbie, you become a receptacle for
all her fears... wants... needs...
Will you be her receptacle, Jim?
Will you contain, Debbie?

Debbie sits on a stool in front of Jim and speaks to him, nestles her head on his lap, and the Counselor looks to Jim, then takes it upon herself to stroke Debbie's red-rinsed hair. Debbie cries softly.

The Counselor jogs Jim discreetly with her hip.

EXT. A GYM - NIGHT

The front door of Jim's BMW SLAMS shut. Jim, in office wear, 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 shuts down the 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 laughs, pulls off his helmet, reaches into one of the saddle bags for his gym bag, heads for the building.

JIM
Impressive. Hey, is that new hair?

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.

Jim just stares at him.

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, before sitting down beside him. Jim winces, opens one eye...

BILL
Looking a little slow out there tonight.

JIM
Yeah. Big deal. So, the Jordan mystique's safe for another year.

BILL
You gotta play more proactive, physical. More physical equals more power. That's nature. Dominate.

Jim opens both eyes to grab a better look at Bill's hair.

JIM (CONT'D)
I have to admit. It looks pretty real.

BILL
The old orchard lost a few trees,
buddy?

Jim pats down his own hair.

JIM
Five grand, huh?

BILL
Plus the monthly.

JIM
Christ, what is it, gold?

BILL
It is to Jacqu  .

JIM
Who's Jackie?

BILL
Jacqu  . French. Canadian, really,
but you'd swear she was from down
under... if you catch my drift.

Bill lifts his towel a little, fans himself downstairs.

JIM
What about Maureen?

BILL
Who?

JIM
Um... your wife?

BILL
What about her? Jim, guys like you
and me missed the gravy train. You
know, back in the day we laid all the
tracks, but we never hopped on for
the ride.

He looks off, carried away by his own metaphor. Jim isn't quite catching it.

BILL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Nowadays, women are free. The
younger the freer. They come right
up to you, all full of piss, vinegar
and that glass ceiling resentment
crapola, grab your pecker, and hang
on for dear life. Jesus, I didn't
know what was going on out there. I
didn't have a clue.

He stands, rewraps his towel. Jim is dumbstruck.

INT. JIM'S OFFICE - DAY

Jim, his back to the door, facing his computer screen which flashes between the Dow and Nasdaq charts, and Google searches for Hair Restoration products.

A KNOCK on his door. Jim kills Google.

BACK TO SCENE:

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

LARRY
Got a minute, Jimbo?

JIM
Sure.

Larry steps in, followed by Ivory Jackson. Jim wheels to face them both.

LARRY
You know Jackson here, right?

JIM
Yeah, sure. We play round ball together.

Ivory smiles, graciously.

LARRY
Great. Super. Listen, while you're away, I'll let Jackson handle your clients. Okay?

JIM
Yeah, uh, sure. But you know Maryanne usually takes my messages and answers --

LARRY
I think the girls do enough around here as it is. Don't you? Besides it's no problem for Jackson to take a few calls if they come in.
(to Jackson)
Right, son?

IVORY
No, sir. I like to keep busy.

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 drops out 1 ml of solution onto the back section of hair.

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

JIM

Shit!

Jim leans over the sink, runs water into his cupped hand, but as he does, more solution drizzles down... into both eyes.

JIM (CONT'D)

Damn!

He fumbles blindly for his towel, dabs his eyes.

DEBBIE (O.S.)

Jim, what's going on in there? Are you all right?

JIM

Yes, yes. Go to sleep. I'm fine.

Jim looks up at the mirror. His eyes are burnt red.

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 stands slowly and pauses at the mini-blinds, peeking outside, light revealing his bloodshot eyes.

The clock ticks over another minute. He closes the blinds circles around to the foot of the bed.

DEBBIE

Where are you going? Are you okay?

JIM

Gotta pee.

A beat. Jim reaches an arm out in the dark.

DEBBIE (O.S.)
Honey, what were you doing 25 years
ago tonight?
(he shrugs)
Go pee.

Debbie jams another pillow under her head. Jim feels his way toward the door and finally clunks into it headfirst.

JIM
Shit.

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.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN:

"Lonely Women Seek Partners in Your Area."

BACK TO JIM:

as he guides the cursor toward "HERE", just about to click it, when.

DEBBIE (O.S.)
Thought you had to pee?

Jim, caught by surprise, jumps, then huddles close to his laptop screen.

JIM
Jesus, Deb.

She covers a yawn with her bathrobe sleeve.

JIM (CONT'D)
I did pee.
(deletes, leans back)
Then I checked to see how our bond
fund closed. Left before the bell
today.

Debbie slides up a chair.

DEBBIE
Can I watch?

Jim shuts down the computer.

JIM
All done.

He kisses her on the head, and they walk out of the den together.

DEBBIE

Do you want me to contain you, hon?

JIM

No, thanks.

INT. AN L10-11 JET - DAY

A pretty, young FLIGHT ATTENDANT glances at Debbie's seat assignment stubs and points the way down the right aisle. Jim, trailing Debbie by a few carryons, nods and smiles at the Attendant.

EXT. REGENT HOTEL - DAY

As Jim and Debbie exit a 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.
(under his breath)

Again.

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, turns her wedding band on her finger, cries softly.

Jim closes the door. Without turning...

JIM (CONT'D)
What?

DEBBIE
Nothing. Let's just go.
(rises, sits 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
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 now? You could stick this thing in our bathroom at home.

DEBBIE
What happened to you?

JIM
What?

DEBBIE
When did you give up on us?

JIM
(sits beside her)
Now, why would you say something like that?

(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)
You've got a great home, two great kids. I make decent money and I --

DEBBIE
You see. That's it. I ask you about us and you talk about anything but us. Remember all the things we used to do together?

JIM
Like what?

DEBBIE
Like making love.

JIM
We have sex.

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

Jim, called to task, draws a deep breath through his nostrils. He dabs at Debbie's eyes with his fingertip. She appears so fragile, needy.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
(grabs his forearm)
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
Look, I know I've been awol lately, I mean from our relationship. I'll try to do better.
(he sizes her up)
I gotta tell ya, Deb, this getting older stuff scares the living crap out of me.

She looks for the old Jim deep in his eyes, finds him. She hugs him, rubs her hand through what's left of his hair and cries a little.

DEBBIE
Thank you.

JIM
For what?

DEBBIE
For sharing something like that with me. What a beautiful gift.

Jim looks slightly confused.

Debbie reluctantly pulls away from him, kisses both his cheeks.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
We're gonna have a great vacation,
aren't we?

Jim nods, rises pulls open the door, waits for Debbie to collect herself. She smiles at him, touches his cheek as he holds open the door for her.

She takes Jim by the arm. Jim 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. Here's why.

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 bag hanging from his shoulder, MUMBLES...

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

Jim and Debbie stop at the huge entrance.

DEBBIE
Are you sure?

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

DEBBIE
You promised no phones.

JIM
I said no cell phones. You shop,
I'll take in a movie over on
Leavenworth. Sequel to that one
about the guys who dumped on that
deaf girl.

DEBBIE
God, I hated that one.

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

JIM
That's what I'm saying.

Debbie eyes the center, then looks back to Jim, frowns.

DEBBIE
It's like we're on separate
vacations.

JIM
Not separate vacations. It's both of
us doing something we enjoy. It's a
win-win.

DEBBIE
Jim, please don't talk to me like one
of your clients.

JIM
I'm not. Listen, today we do this,
tomorrow we do Alcatraz... together.

DEBBIE
You're sure?

JIM
Absolutely.

DEBBIE
(checks her watch)
Okay, three hours. I'll meet you
inside by that little bakery.

They kiss each other's cheek.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
Be careful. You gonna drop off your
laptop at the hotel?

JIM
So some maid can rip me off? It's
safe, right here.

Debbie frowns, turns, walks into the shopping center.

EXT. A COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Jim at a PacBell phone stall, phone at one ear, hand over
the other.

JIM
(into phone)
Maryanne. Hi! How's it going?
(...)
Payphone! I'll explain later.
(...)
Who does?

(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)
(...)
Oh, right. Okay, put him on.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION/PHONE BOOTH/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
Mr. Van Huesen?

JIM
Van Dusen, who doesn't --

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.
Market's about to close and Mrs.
LeGrand wants to sell.

JIM
She does? Sell what?

IVORY
Oh, hey, Larry says you can take a
few more days if you want. No
problem at all. Later.

Jim smacks the phone in the palm of his hand.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Jim walks by and checks his watch. He eyes a Panhandler
(#3) who holds a sign that reads: "No bullshit. 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'a
days, okay? Remember my face.

The Panhandler carefully studies his face and nods. With that, Jim is off down the sidewalk which is bustling with foot traffic.

The Panhandler (#2) glances back at Jim with a little smile.

EXT. LEAVENWORTH STREET - DAY, LATER

Jim walks along briskly, his laptop still hung over his shoulder, the sun shining brightly in his face. The street is less crowded, mostly old women, businessmen and the occasional "lady".

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 and as she hustles off into a car, she returns the courtesy.

Jim crosses Leavenworth, and walks East. He pulls the map out of his pocket, checks it, puts it away and heads for California Street a few blocks up ahead.

On the steps of an apartment building, an 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. She's drop-dead gorgeous, model-like features.

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 pure sport of it.

She uses her hand to shield the sun. Jim notices her
fingers, long, thin... and free of jewelry.

JIM
What, did that cop hassle you?

VERONICA
(with a laugh)
Him. No way.

Jim's eyes follow 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
Oh, um ,no, yes. I was just going to
a movie. On vacation. Anyway, saw
you crying here. When you yelled at
me, I don't know, something told me
to stop.

VERONICA
Something? What something?

JIM
(shrugs)
I don't know. It was just like this
little voice inside my head...

VERONICA
You know what that voice is?
Destiny. No shit. I'm like this
huge believer in destiny, even named
my kitty destina. Cutest little
pussy, too.

A bus GRINDS by... Jim swallows hard.

JIM
Well, you also yelled at me...
(a beat)
So, what, need a few bucks to tide
you over? Twenty, thirty?

He digs 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.

VERONICA
Oh, listen to mister voice of
experience.

Jim pulls out his fat wallet. Veronica eyes it.

VERONICA (CONT'D)
I didn't ask for no money. I need
help up in my apartment. Some shit
happened. I can't fix.

Jim glances at his Rolex.

JIM
I might miss my movie.

Veronica waves him off.

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

Jim looks around. The Policeman drives off. Sun high and
bright. Traffic cruising by.

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, sets it down, no line connected.

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 over to your
movie.

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 I do 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? Moviemani.
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 pretty, 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 double-breasted blazer, just like the one on the mannequin.

SALESGIRL
It's a 44! Last one.

Debbie 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?

She shoves Jim down onto the couch, and flies onto him.

He starts to say something, but she mouths him, so he can't get a word out. Jim's eyes are exploding!

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.

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)
Fuck. C'mon!

VERONICA (O.S.)
Where are you goin', Moviemann?

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 you 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 way, ya know?

Debbie is too rapt to even nod.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)

You can tell, ya know, when someone really sees you, acknowledges you?

Debbie does nod this time, unconvincingly.

INT. VERONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Veronica's all over Jim 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

Now, if it's none of my business you tell me to shut up, but it seems to me like that husband of yours needs to wake up and smell the coffee. If he treats you like shit, it's wrong. End of discussion. Nobody deserves that. Life's too short, ya know?

DEBBIE

No, he doesn't treat me like shit. If I said that I didn't mean to.

SALESGIRL

Uh-huh.

DEBBIE

No, really. We're working things out. It's gonna be okay.

SALESGIRL

Someone like you shouldn't have to settle for "okay."

DEBBIE

(whispering)

What do you mean, "someone like me"?

SALESGIRL

I mean someone kind, generous, sensitive, easy to talk to... hot.

Debbie blushes.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)

And I don't necessarily mean that in a hitting on you way. I just mean...

She glances at her watch again.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)
Oops, better head back. Thanks again
for lunch.

DEBBIE
Thank you. For everything.

The Salesgirl gathers up her purse and tray.

SALESGIRL
Like I said, that's why they pay me
the big bucks.

The Salesgirl looks around. No one paying any attention to
them. She leans across the table and kisses Debbie
tenderly on the cheek.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)
(into Debbie's ear)
Don't give up... on yourself.

The Salesgirl reaches in her purse, pulls out a pen and
business card, jots on the back of the card, and hands the
card to Debbie.

SALESGIRL (CONT'D)
Call me if wanna talk more.

Debbie watches her walk away toward the trash can where she
dumps the paper cup and plate from her tray and wipes her
hands, looking back at Debbie as she does.

Debbie touches her kissed cheek.

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. He rubs his eyes.

FLASHBACK

The image of Veronica tying off her arm, smiling.

BACK TO SCENE:

JIM

Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

Jim grabs at his forehead, squeezing away the 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 to switch the light on. 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 APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

The shower drizzles weakly. Jim 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
Christ, 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 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 'a hurt
from here. Bang! You're over.

VERONICA

Come help me.

A KNOCK at the door. Buddy glares at Veronica. She shrugs.

Buddy sneaks over to the door, gun at the ready, listens. Another KNOCK.

BUDDY

(using an old woman's voice)

Yes?

VOICE AT THE DOOR

(man with a feminine voice)

Hello? Is this the apartment that's
for rent?

BUDDY

Well, it was, but I moved in
yesterday.

He turns, grins, now enjoying the ruse. Jim drearily cranes his neck.

VOICE AT THE DOOR

I called a whole bunch of times, but
that number in the window downstairs
is wrong.

BUDDY

Well, it worked just fine for me and
I'm ninety-two. It's a wonderful
apartment, beautifully furnished,
view of both bridges... Would you
care to come in and see for yourself?
I'll just have to put on some
clothes. Why, look at me, I don't
have a stitch on. Oh, what the
heck...

(fiddles with deadbolt)

I'll just open up and you can --

VOICE AT THE DOOR

(exiting quickly)

Uh... no, no thanks.

Buddy listens for the footfall on the stairs, laughs, tucks the nine under his belt and struts over to Veronica, patting Jim on the head as he goes by.

Jim's eyes roll back. He fades out.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie, a newspaper folded in her right hand, stands at a wall phone. 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
any shows this afternoon? He was
alone.

Debbie hangs up the phone, glances back toward the bakery.

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' rehabilitation programs.

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

He GRUNTS, frantically.

VERONICA
(nonchalantly)
He's awake again.

BUDDY
Light 'im up, baby doll.

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 out'a him.

BUDDY
 Fuck it, then.

Buddy picks up his pistol, aims it at Jim.

Jim goes stiff, his eyes saucers.

VERONICA
 You're sooo badass, 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, piss-ant.

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
 Battery's runnin' 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. Find a phone card in there?

VERONICA
Lemme check, big boy.

She shakes her head.

VERONICA (CONT'D)
No phone card... just this.

She tosses a cell-phone. Buddy catches it in his fingertips.

BUDDY
(big old smile)
That'll do. I'm gonna 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 sexpotate.

VERONICA
Why?

BUDDY
Just come'ere.

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.

VERONICA
Either way, you surprised me somethin' awful.

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, baby doll. You're the only one. You'd just have to play yourself.

VERONICA
Am I still pretty enough?

BUDDY
You did wash 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, jefe.

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 cell phone out of her back pocket.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie waits at the payphone, the receiver to her ear.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION/ASIAN HOTEL CLERK/PAYPHONE

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 puts the phone back in its cradle, looks around,
 worried, then to her watch.

INSERT:

Watch. It reads 5:00 p.m..

INT. KINKO'S - DAY

Buddy's huddled around a computer. We see Jim's financial
 account on the screen. A Kinko's 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 chair 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 but is not shaken.

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, but outside a DOOR CLOSES, followed by FOOTFALL on the stairs.

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

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

He looks down 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, thinks about it, 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 tucks the envelope behind him.

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

JIM
I was kidnapped, drugged, robbed...
I've gotta get out'a 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

She'll be waiting outside the bakery on the street level. What time is it?

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

POLICEMAN

Five-forty.

JIM

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

Okay, okay. 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 cell
phone, then gazes up toward Veronica's apartment.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Debbie sits nervously at her place near the bakery. She
glances at her watch, then back out into the shopping
center toward the front doors.

EXT. 850 LEAVENWORTH STREET - DAY

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

A Passerby stares 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.
(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)
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!

EXT. POST STREET - DAY

Jim, nearly out of breath, ragged-looking, his hair all
over the place, 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? 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 hurries away.

INT. VERONICA'S STAIRWELL - DAY

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

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Jim, out of breath, dashes across Market street toward the front of the building.

JIM
(mumbling)
Debbie. Debbie.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Jim stands inside the mall, looks around toward the bakery and spots Debbie sitting outside talking to another woman, the box of eclairs between them. He watches Debbie laugh.

Just as he's about to take a step toward her, Buddy's arm grabs his and twists hard.

Buddy puts his left arm around Jim's shoulder and hugs him.

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.

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
(under his breath)
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 real 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 bein' at the same movie. What do they call that? Oh, yeah, destiny. Hah!

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

Hi, Movieman.

(off Policeman)

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

JIM

You bitch.

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 gettin' 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 ol' 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 removes his cap, 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 Portajohn.

Veronica sits at the table. Buddy wheels Jim up.

Jim struggles, YELLS, but it's 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 founties 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 here hit it
off pretty good at the shoppin'
center. I'd say 366 is most prob'ly
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 thinks maybe she's all safe an'
cozy. 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.
(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)
 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 doin' 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's
 Jim's family and coworkers can share
 his Kodak moments?

The Policeman nods.

Jim's face, a new appreciation for what his captors are capable of, wriggles until the photo falls off his lap.

Buddy shakes his head 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
 (with a glare)
 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 leads them in 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. Buddy watches them, amused.

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, opens it, grabs a beer.

JENNIFER

I won this one, right, Daddy?

Jim stops long enough to look at the cards, but that's it.

JIM

If you say so...

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, jerk-off.

POLICEMAN

Let him talk.

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

BUDDY
The spade's the damn prioritizer.

POLICEMAN
No it's not.

Buddy reaches over the table and grabs the Policeman by the collar, choking off his windpipe.

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 pushin' me beyond a point.

POLICEMAN
But 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, slowly, 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 pushes it hard, so Jim's nose is crunched flat. A beat, as sweat pours 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 tryin'
to tell you all along the pony ride
here.

Buddy jams his pistol behind his belt, 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.

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 so it's perfect, admires 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. Plenty of
 tickets left for that one, I bet...
 (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.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Jim sits in his chair. The Policeman sits at the table
 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 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 tickin' him off...
 (gestures at his own throat)
 He'll O.J. ya. His temper's gone
 awful skittery lately.
 (behind his hand)
 Form of depression. Uncontrolled,
 out-of-nowhere rage. Then he'll just
 nod off. Textbook stuff.

Jim watches the Policeman start 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 around, then whispers...

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

POLICEMAN
Uh-huh.

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. They look at each other, Jim putting
everything on a hunch.

The Policeman pulls up a chair, sits, and leans close to
Jim.

POLICEMAN
I'm all ears. You were sayin'
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.

POLICEMAN
Aw, I'm sorry. I wasn't being fair.

JIM
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... some used-up retiree
living on a fixed income, can't even
punch out a voting ballot?

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?

POLICEMAN
Lemme think on it.

JIM
Think? What's there to think about?
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!!

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY

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 okay? You
know where he is?

DEBBIE
Jim. Yes... I think so.

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 shakes her head, 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?

He sits on the edge of the bed in all his grunginess, which surprises Debbie. He pulls a small spiral notepad out of his coat.

DEBBIE

A woman. A pretty woman.

PANHANDLER/BASS

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 her 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 hand, 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.

Veronica laughs wildly.

The Policeman looks up at Jim, shrugs, gestures to him to wipe off his mouth, giggles. Jim, red all over his face, stinging from the slap, smiles at him 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 prob'ly 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 'bout 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 takin' 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 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. Comprene?

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 goin' for a food run... together. Just him an' 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.

(grins)

She probably meant basketball, in which case he won't be back tonight 'til pretty late, maybe 11, 12.

DEBBIE

You think so?

PANHANDLER/BASS

(not very convincing)

Sure. It's nothing.

DEBBIE

Then, why did you follow me here?

Bass turns back, considers, starts to answer, but his cell phone RINGS. He holds a finger up to Debbie.

PANHANDLER/BASS
 (into phone)
 Yeah?
 (...)
 Uh-huh. Okay. Right. Hold on.
 (covers the receiver, 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)
 Look, there's no baseball games today, right?

The elevator doors open. He steps inside.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR/MOVING - NIGHT

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

BUDDY
 Yeah, I had this fella ready to roll me out 35 video poker machines, good as new, stole from the choicest resorts all over the desert. Could'a loaded me up a truck, dropped one off here and there. 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, his 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.

(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)
 Especially in this economy. 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 picks up the phone again, dials.

INT. POLICEMAN'S CAR - NIGHT

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

BUDDY (CONT'D)
 (off the phone)
 Local number. You know anybody
 local?

Jim shakes his head.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Good.

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 hangs up the room phone, 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

(brushes 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! Now!

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
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)

Sure I can't offer you any?

Jim, tied back up in the chair, looks away, then down at the buckle, which is now closed again.

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 crappin' 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

Lemme 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, eyes brightening, shakes his head.

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.

DEBBIE
Yes, I'd like that. Thanks so much.

INT. A WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Jim sits, sizes up the situation.

Buddy's passed out on the floor, Veronica's head across his
lap, eyes closed. The room is quiet, too 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.

The Policeman's eyes light right up.

POLICEMAN

Where?

JIM

Get me out first.

He unties Jim.

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 in front at a burger drive
thru.

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 nods. A deal.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
Half million. What bank?

They creep slowly around the building, and disappear.

EXT. A ROAD - NIGHT

Jim and The Policeman hustle along, no time to waste.

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.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
So, what's it like living like you
do?

JIM
Like I do? It's, I don't know,
normal, I guess.

POLICEMAN
Normal... but not good enough, huh?

That one stops Jim in his tracks. 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 earth, no explanation. Normal people. Tourists mostly. Bodies turn up weeks later on the beach, all cut up, massacred, 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...

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

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

JIM
No!

The Policeman leans across to Buddy.

POLICEMAN
Bank of North America. Over half a million liquid.

Buddy BELLOWS in delight!

BUDDY
In this economy! Mazel tov, Jimbo!

Jim eyes them both, so full of themselves, 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 gimp run toward...

a feint light, a match maybe...

The Bearded Man's/PoliceMan's car makes a maniac 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 drunk-on-your-ass baggy-pants kind.

POLICEMAN
That Carmel Killer stuff was priceless.

Jim's eyes, stiff, heavy, drift over to the Policeman.

BUDDY

Señor Davis, seems you got access to more dinero than we first were made privy to. Not very nice, holding out on me thataway. 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 agree with Ronnie.

BUDDY

Ronnie? You and "Ronnie" both see it as respect. You two are like a team in this.

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 and watch the sun rise, huh?

BUDDY

Yeah, sure, why not? Start of a new day. You know what they call that -- symbolism. Let's get us some damn symbolism going.

Veronica's even more smitten now, as Buddy turns the car 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 lies face down in the sand between them, hands tied behind him, Buddy's clothes on top of him.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

C'mon out, Pops. Water's a real kick-in-the-butt-wake-me-up!

POLICEMAN

No, I'll pass, Buddy!

BUDDY

(sotto)

Yeah, I bet you will.

Buddy hikes up his shorts and plods 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 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.

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, spiffed up, 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
 That was a 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 large. No questions asked.

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

POLICEMAN
He was actually helpful.

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

BUDDY
"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
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, lets go.

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 right over. 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 SHOP - 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, stops, looks... Veronica's gone.

INT. THE POLICEMAN'S CAR/MOVING - DAY

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

BUDDY
(into phone)
Yellow...

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - CONTINUOUS

Veronica's walking along at a brisk pace, her phone to her ear.

VERONICA
That fuckin' bitch tackled me...
messed up my pedicure.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

Buddy tries to play it off, maintain the ruse.

BUDDY
Yeah, well, we'll be done here soon.
We'll finish up today and put our pal
back to work on Monday, head down to
plastic-land. What'a 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. I love you, too, and I'll pick
you up at our love nest in a couple
hours. Okay, I'll tell him. Bye!!!

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

Buddy clicks his phone 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. She hands
him back Veronica's computer likeness and profile.

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

Debbie shakes her head.

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)
The cell phone number you gave us
helped. There was a call made from
it yesterday. We know who they are.

DEBBIE
Thank god. Good.

PANHANDLER/BASS
Not so good is we also know what
they're capable of.

DEBBIE
They?

PANHANDLER/BASS
They started out as scammers. Two-
bit hustlers. Ronnie Delgado and her
boyfriend Buddy Parisi.

DEBBIE
So, two people have my husband?

PANHANDLER/BASS
They go after vulnerable people, set
up guys like your husband.

DEBBIE
Set up? I don't...

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-genderous 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. I thought 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, then 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."

Jim's head drops.

INT. SFPD OFFICE - NIGHT

PANHANDLER/BASS

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

DEBBIE

He handled all of that. Some chump I am, huh?

PANHANDLER/BASS

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

Debbie looks down.

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?
 (...)
 Put a BOLO out on it. 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 arm stuff mixed
 with robbery, extortion, blackmail.
 And that's right where Ronnie comes
 in. You said it yourself. She's a
 real looker. Hard for any man to
 resist her.

DEBBIE
 Not Jim.

PANHANDLER/BASS
 You and your husband real close?

DEBBIE
 I'm sorry?

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

PANHANDLER/BASS
 Stupid question. I apologize.

Debbie looks up at him, curiously. He scratches the bridge
 of his nose.

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 'bout 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 lookin' for somebody's ear to bend, shoulder to lean on. That's how they get the husbands and conventioners.

DEBBIE

You're saying she lured Jim in? I don't think that could happen.

(a beat)

They wouldn't 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 rubs her arm.

VERONICA

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

Buddy gets real quiet, pensive.

VERONICA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Buddy... You know my 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. 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
somethin' hinky goin' 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, revealing a 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. Babe, pass me
that rice. I think he's done with
it.

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

BUDDY (CONT'D)

It's okay, girl. Just business.
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, babe? 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 mother -- ! 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? You chuck it right into the ol' garbage can, just for a taste 'a strange. I'm sick? That's twisted, pal.

Jim absorbs the words, wrenches in his chair, watches Buddy spoon out rice onto his paper plate and scarf some 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'a rice an' 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 Victoria.

Inside a POLICE OFFICER shines 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. I had the apple pie and I pissed it away. You know why? 'Cause I'm bored with my life. So fucking bored you wouldn't believe. 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 scratches his chin.

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.

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.

(MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)
I'll walk in there and show you what
I can do.

Buddy eyeballs Jim but good. Jim nods, dead serious.

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 scarin' me now.

BUDDY
Aw, nothin' to be scared of. It's
just me, baby. How 'bout a little
twirly twirl to relax you, baby doll?

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 tangos 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.

She dances over to Jim, reaches down to take his arm.

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

JIM
Dance? It's sudden death. Not now,
okay.

Debbie, disappointed, marches over to the music, switches it off, and stomps out of the room.

Jim stares at the TV...

INT. A POLICE CAR/MOVING - NIGHT

Bass drives. Debbie looks out the window.

PANHANDLER/BASS
We have ways of tracking people down.
It won't take long. They start
drawing money out of his accounts,
we'll know.

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

PANHANDLER/BASS
Sure. Of course.

DEBBIE
I just don't understand how things
like this can happen.

PANHANDLER/BASS
It's the world today. It's all
messed up.

(MORE)

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)
Everything going so crazy, so fast,
maybe you just fly off it for a
minute... a second... and it's a
whole new ball game.

He notices Debbie dabbing another tear away. 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 believe it!

BUDDY
What about your woman, Jimmy? What
about her?

JIM
Fuck her.

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, lasers him with his beady
eyes. Buddy pushes himself up, dusts himself off, steps
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.

Buddy reels her in for a giant smackeroo, wipes his mouth,
licks his finger.

BUDDY

Hmmm, finger lickin' good. First
thing Monday morning, Los Angeles...
the city of angels.

(turns to Jim)

The 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.

Buddy looks at her, nods, winks.

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 glares at him wildly. Buddy's eyes slowly drift down.

Smoke lifts from his crotch. Buddy falls away, pulling the Policeman down on top of him. He SHRIEKS 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 stands behind Veronica, nestles the gun muzzle inside 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 holds 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!

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...

INSERT SHOT:

Debbie sitting on the chair in the Counselor's office. She cries lowly. The Counselor looks over at Jim, shakes her head slowly.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jim's head rolls slightly. Now he can see her...

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!

(MORE)

PANHANDLER/BASS (CONT'D)
 (behind him)
 Get an ambulance! Shit! Shit.

DEBBIE (O.S.)
 Oh, my god.

Bass turns to the doorway. 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. 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 adorns it.

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'S POV

As Debbie speaks calmly, the Nurse's stern expression gradually softens.

Debbie walks back into the hospital room. The Nurse stands in the doorway.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
Ready to walk out, hon?

JIM
Who are you?

DEBBIE
What?

JIM
You are amazing. You know that?

DEBBIE
Yeah?

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
 (steering the cab into
 traffic)
 You got it, pal.

Jim settles back and looks out the window. A BEAUTIFUL GIRL strides along a sidewalk with an Afghan dog at the end of her leash.

Jim turns quickly back to Debbie, who's a smiling Mona Lisa. Jim leans back, closes his eyes...

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 stops brushing her hair out in her vanity mirror, turns to him.

DEBBIE
 Jim? Are you all right?

JIM
 Oh... uh... yeah... God. Just a
 really strange dream.

Jim settles back in bed, watches her, admiringly, as she returns to her brushing. The night stand lamp on Debbie's side of the bed is on.

JIM (CONT'D)
 You have beautiful hair.

DEBBIE
 I do?

JIM
 Yes. You do.

Debbie switches off the lamp, drops her robe, revealing her silky, button-up-the-front nightgown, and climbs into bed.

They lie together, staring ahead. A beat.

DEBBIE
 Want to talk about your dream?

JIM

(laughs)

No. Best just to let it fade away.

Debbie reaches over and kisses Jim on the cheek.

DEBBIE

Okay. Good night.

JIM

Night.

They lie in the growing darkness. A long moment.

DEBBIE (V.O.)

Jim?

JIM (V.O.)

Uh-huh.

DEBBIE (V.O.)

Those... pictures they found.

JIM (V.O.)

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, but I just need to
know.

JIM

No! No...

(a beat)

... but what pisses me off is that I
fell for her little act, like some
idiot school kid. She had me going.
Man, was I stupid. Jeez. Those
bastards. How could I let myself --

DEBBIE

(holds a pillow close to her)

On our anniversary.

That stings Jim.

JIM

Yes.

(after a long sigh)

Will you contain me, Deb? Right now?

DEBBIE

Do not play with me. I won't take
that bullshit anymore. I just want
to be clear about that. Am I clear,
Jim?

JIM

Yes.

DEBBIE

Then I will contain you. Go ahead.

Deb lies back down.

JIM

Okay. It... um... was an awful experience, but you know what? 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.

(he hovers over her now)

Here's what I realized after all this -- I am who I am. Hairless, overweight, whatever... This is my life. No mulligans, no do overs. Fuck 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. Strange 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. The radio's dim blue light silhouettes them.

JIM

Shh. Time for a little twirly twirl.
Give me your hand, baby doll.

DEBBIE

Twirly twirl?

Jim takes his wife's hand, pulls her in, and leads her in an awkward, slow dance, SINGING ALONG badly with Harold and the boys, as we slowly...

FADE OUT.