

RAT OUT

Written by

Jasmin Benward

4227 Leimert Blvd
Apt. 2, Los Angeles, CA 90008
writeonjas@gmail.com
(678) 793- 1576

FADE IN:

EXT. MARKET STREET - DAWN

A bright, brisk, fall day on a filthy Brooklyn sidewalk. A familiar neighborhood with too many *FOR SALE* signs, too many. Survival first. Luxury under construction. *BOOM! CLACK!* The construction scaffolds prove it. Rat ROLAND (late teens), takes the scenic route home. He's street fresh and sports a backpack and gold chain. He passes trees, brownstones, playgrounds with few children. Masked humans run after buses. Roland bounces to the beat of the vibrant city and stops to tease hefty pigeon, MARVIN (middle-aged):

ROLAND

Someone needs to spend a little more time flying around. The streets have slowed you down my friend.

Marvin huffs and attempts to reclaim his breath.

MARVIN

Give me a break, kid. You should be so lucky to get my age. What are you doing running around by yourself anyway? You're begging for trouble.

Roland uses his sharp nails to RIP through garbage bags. He speaks to Marvin from the inside of a trash bag as he CRAWLS around and searches for grub.

ROLAND

The way I see it, things are looking up for us. I'm not sure what's going on with the humans, but they aren't around like they used to be. They all have these goofy costumes and it's not even Halloween yet.

Roland DRAGS preferred rubbish out of a bag, a doughnut and bacon-egg-cheese corner, jellied toast.

Marvin ruffles his feathers and flicks a lemon peel into the street. *WHOMP!*

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Our kind doesn't have to be at odds with each other like before. There's plenty of food to go around and there's enough space to spread ou--

Roland enjoys a mouth full of bacon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARVIN

I hear ya. Things *are* different, but that doesn't mean that the city's free game. There's danger lurking around every corner. I'm just saying, keep your eyes open.

Roland wipes his mouth.

ROLAND

(matter-of-factly)

Yeah, yeah. They're open alright. I'm out for the same reason you're not here with your family. Sometimes you just need some space to be alone. Our jobs are to provide provision for everyone else, it never changes. As long as there's grub on the table, I deserve a break. I'm heading home now, thank you very much. Hey Marvin--head's up!

We see yellow cabs weave around each other in a sea of vehicles. May the *HONK!* fest begin. Roland initiates his departure. He pauses midway on the sidewalk to address the audience:

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Pitiful. Pigeons--The wannabe rats of the sky. When they stay out of my way, I stay out of theirs. It's simple. I gotta be honest with you, every year is the year of the rat when you live in the Big Apple. I don't care what anybody says, rats run this town. This is the city that never sleeps, baby. I take the day and the night is my playgr--

Roland turns around to face Marvin once more. He shuffles backwards and uses his tail to sweep some of his treat in Marvin's direction like a hockey puck. A favor.

MARVIN

Roland-

Marvin waves his wings in a frenzy. *SWISH!* Roland dismisses Marvin and shoos him with this hands.

ROLAND

No need to thank me. Dessert for breakfast, yeah? Today will be a good day. Believe it.

Roland SNAPS his fingers and gives Marvin an 'attaboy' point.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Catch you later old-

MARVIN

ROLAND!

Roland shuffles away in a two-step dance. He nibbles at his stash oblivious to the going-ons around him. Suddenly, a street sweeper approaches. *SWOOSH! SWOOSH! SWOOSH! CLICK!* Too late. The street sweeper snatches the young knucklehead up by his tail. Roland spins around in a whirl and barely avoids oncoming traffic. The sweeper flings him to the following corner.

OPPOSING SIDEWALK

Roland rolls from side to side and manages to get up. He limps. A LITTLE HUMAN (primary school age) almost tramples him with her foot.

LITTLE HUMAN
(towards Roland)
Eww!

Offended, Roland hops over the Little Human's feet.

ROLAND
(laughing)
Eww, you! Take that!

The Little Human SQUEALS from the contact and trudges in disgust.

1

EXT. STREET (ROLAND'S NEIGHBORHOOD) - CONTINUOUS

1

Roland continues his route back home with a single HEADPHONE in for MUSIC. Runners, fruit stands, more markets.

ROLAND (V.O.)
I live right in the middle of BedStuy.
It's my hood and it's what I know.
Borough, shmorough when you live in the
best. BK all day. I've never even been
above Dekalb Ave.

Still in route, Roland stops at a sidewalk to help an elderly squirrel and family friend, MRS. MERYL, cross the street. She uses a cane. *CLICK! CLACK!* Her silver hair is coiled into a tight bun. Modest dress, orthopedic shoes.

MRS. MERYL
Thanks, Ro! Tell your folks I say
"hello."

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

1

ROLAND
(drags voice)
Yes, Mrs. Meryl. I'll do it.

Roland looks at audience and sighs:

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

2 **EXT. BROOKLYN ST- DAY (1976)**

2

Mrs. Meryl exits her home. An arched hole out of a brownstone. Younger MA and PA (pre-teens) appear with other animal youth from the community. No shortage of vests, afro pics, and ruffles. A younger, still older Mrs. Meryl hands out food plates to help nourish the hungry school goers.

ROLAND (V.O.)
Mrs. Meryl is noseey, but she's been the heart of our neighborhood ever since I can remember. She's a widow and retired cook. 'Old enough to have looked after my parents when they were my age and they've been married for awhile. Mrs. Meryl and my folks are kind of protected if you ask me. Our kind doesn't really live long.

END FLASHBACK:

Roland continues up blocks of homes stuck together and arrives home to his family's apartment. He finishes all but a piece of the morning's finds. He scurries through the door of the mid-sized building and climbs up hidden flights of stairs behind the walls of the humans. He stuffs a sprinkle bit out of sight into his pocket.

3 **INT. ROLAND'S HOME - LATE MORNING**

3

ENTRYWAY

Roland enters his family's home. It's fully furnished. Budget gaudy. All gold everything. Warm, quaint, clean. Family members scatter about doing their daily routines. They clean, snack, read, you name it. Roland hangs his backpack up on a hook. He glances next to it at a FAMILY PHOTO.

ROLAND
Don't get me wrong, being the oldest out of the pack has some perks, but it isn't all that, because...

Roland examines the portion of the photo with his parents MA and PA (40s) in the picture. Roland addresses the camera:

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 (mocking impression of Ma
 and Pa)
 "With freedom comes a lot of *re-spon-*
sibility."

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 Ma and Pa remind me of this every single
 time I leave the house. Well, we don't
 exactly live in a house. It's an
 apartment, in a 5 floor walk-up behind
 the Vegas' place-5H. My mother and
 father met in school, married, and *BOOM!*
 there I go, baby Roland. I like to go by
 Ro. I have a bunch of siblings. We won't
 talk about the process, let's just say
 my folks really love each other, because
 after me it kept going, and going, and
going...

Roland takes a deep preparation breath.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
 (rapid fire roll-call)
 Mariah, Jacoby, Donovan, Lyndsay,
 Trevor, Sadie...I'll spare you. Just
 know that they love each other. How
 100's of us manage to fit behind these
 thin walls is beyond me, but Ma's
 managed to make it a home.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

CHATTER and playful SQUEALS fill the home. Roland searches
 for his younger sister, MARIAH (pre-teen) around their home.

QUICK CUTS:

--SIBLINGS (various) play board games and watch t.v.

--Roland peeks into the outdated kitchen. Nothing.

--Roland searches the quaint dining room. Nothing.

--Roland ventures to Mariah's bedroom.

END MONTAGE.

4 **INT. MARIAH'S BEDROOM- MOMENTS LATER**

4

Roland CRACKS the door open slowly. It's mauve colored. Full
 of posters and trinkets.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

MUSIC blares from Mariah's HOME SPEAKER. Mariah dances. She wears a pink tank top, shorts, and full novice makeup. She makes a *Tik-Tok* dance video.

MARIAH
(sings to self)
I'm a scavenge, yeah. Sneaky, cheeky,
swanky.

Mariah FREEZES when she notices her newfound company.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
(squeaks)

RO-LANNND! Get out of my room! Moooo-
oom!

Roland slightly panics. He kneels and FLICKS his ear to listen for immediate consequence.

ROLAND
Shh!

Roland turns the MUSIC up LOUDER and gently covers Mariah's mouth to prevent parental intervention. He pulls out the sprinkle he saved from his pocket. Mariah sees the treat and quiets.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
For you, *almost-birthday* girl.

Mariah rolls her neck and body.

MARIAH
Now we're talking!

Mariah examines the treat again. So little. She's suddenly unimpressed.

MARIAH (CONT'D)
That's it?!

Roland inspects his pant pockets to appease Mariah, playing the game. Nada.

ROLAND
Look, I'll get you something else on tonight's run. Whatever you want, just keep your mouth shut about you-know-what.

MARIAH
(sarcastically)
Not sure if I do know what.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED: (2)

MARIAH (CONT'D)

Do you mean the part about you sneaking out by yourself after dinner? You hanging with Las Ratas when Pa already told you they're no good? Or the time I caught you kissing your pillow pretending it was your "friend," Ally? *Remind me.*

Roland lunges towards Mariah. He jerks her ear playfully.

ROLAND

You're such a little brat. If I tell you something else, do you promise not to tell?

Roland extends his hand for he and Mariah's secret handshake. Mariah places her hand on her hip and pokes it out.

MARIAH

I'm listening...

ROLAND

Shake on it first.

Mariah gives in and returns the handshake. Roland takes a seat on Mariah's bed.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(excitedly)

I was with Las Ratas last night. They want me to join their crew! They said I'm super fast and that they could use me on their food runs. These aren't just any runs, we're talking bigger than Brooklyn. Jefe and the other guys go to all the coolest places. Restaurants all over the city. You think you like doughnuts? You ever had sushi?--Yeah, that type of stuff.

Mariah folds her arms across her chest. She's not entirely sold.

MARIAH

I don't know Roland. It sounds cool and all, but how do you know that you can really trust them? Wouldn't it be better if one of us went with you?

Roland LAUGHS.

ROLAND

(scoffs)

No way!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED: (3)

4

ROLAND (CONT'D)

You're not going on any runs ever as long as I'm around. Pa thinks Jacoby is going with me, but I have him hide in our room each night until I get back. I got it. I don't need your guys' help. I'm not a baby anymore. Besides, you worry too much. Everything's gonna be fine, okay?

Mariah NODS her head reluctantly. Roland gets off Mariah's bed. *THUD!* He walks to her dresser and moves the SPEAKER knob DOWN. The MUSIC returns to a reasonable volume.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

So, what do you want for dinner tonight? I'm going to take a nap and head back out in a little bit.--I'm seeing Ally again.

Mariah teases Roland. She PUCKERS her lips, *MUAH!* and makes KISSING SOUNDS. She swings her hips from side to side.

MARIAH

Oooh-OOH!

She stops swaying and shrugs to respond to Roland's original question:

MARIAH (CONT'D)

...and I don't know, make it good.
Surprise me.

5 **INT. ROLAND'S HOME - CONTINUOUS**

5

Roland exits and closes the door. He doubles back to the common areas in search of Ma and Pa. Not around. The household generally appears the same. Everyone's doing their own thing-together.

6 **INT./EXT. MA AND PA'S BEDROOM DOOR- CONTINUOUS**

6

HOME HALLWAY

Roland turns the KNOB of his parents' bedroom door. He's met with a slither of a flushed face. It's PA (40s). He's stalky. Gray whiskers make a debut in his beard. Kind, but don't push him. Pa opens the DOOR just enough to step out in front of it.

PA

(sighs)
Son...

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

Pa spells it out. He breaks his words down to Roland for what seems like the umpteenth time:

PA (CONT'D)
(staccato-like)
How. many. times. do. I. have. to. tell.
you? If you see my tail coming out from
underneath the door you need to knock
first.

Embarrassed, Roland steps back and away from the door. He surrenders his hands up close to his chest.

ROLAND
(lowered voice)
Sure. Sorry about that. I just wanted to
let you and Ma know that the run went
fine and the food's in the kitchen. I'm
going to rest up before dinner.

Pa PATS Roland on his shoulder.

PA
Good son. I'm glad you made it safely.
Did you and Jacoby make out pretty well?
I meant to tell you earlier that we're
celebrating all September birthdays
tonight. Are you guys able to run out
and pick up cake? The bodega right over
here is just fine.

ROLAND
(sighs)
But, dad--Whiskers.

PA
Boy, Whiskers is on his 9th life as it
is. He's not fast enough to catch you.
Go on.

ROLAND
(purses lips)
Yep. Later, Pa.

Pa slams the door and locks it.

7 **INT. ROLAND AND JACOBY'S BEDROOM- CONTINUOUS**

7

Roland heads to his bedroom and looks under his bed. He finds brother JACOBY (mid-teens) SNORING loudly. Jacoby's goofy-looking. A chipped tooth. Loyal. Roland PATS Jacoby's fat belly.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Up, chubbers. I'm going to make a quick run for cake in a minute. Wanna roll?

Jacoby wipes slobber from his face and gets the crust out of his eyes.

JACOBY

(yawning and drowsy)

Sure, give me a minute to put myself together.

Jacoby drags over to his side of the closet and pulls out a shirt to throw over himself.

ROLAND

Well, look alive. You never know if Whiskers will be around. Hey, if Pa asks about the runs they've been fine. Got it?

Jacoby lowers his head.

JACOBY

Yeah, got it.

Roland and Jacoby exit their home.

8 **EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET- MOMENTS LATER**

8

Last call on the sun for today. Humans wander about, play, frolic, and rush back home. Roland and Jacoby fool around in the street. Each tries to bump one another over the curb into the bike lane where cruisers *ZIP!* and *ZOOM!* Equally exhilarating and dangerous.

9 **EXT/INT. BODEGA-EARLY EVENING**

9

BODEGA EXTERIOR

Roland and Jacoby settle on a plan before entering the bodega. It's on the dingy side, but not gross enough to not eat from. Brick exterior.

ROLAND

Check it out. I'll keep an eye out on Whiskers and humans. You need to get into the display case for the cake and get as much as you can handle. Get in, get out. No messing around. Clear?

(CONTINUED)

JACOBY

Bet. And you'll meet me by the counter
when I'm ready? 'We'll head out
together?

Roland nods his head 'YES' and FLICKS Jacoby on his nose.
THUMP!

ROLAND

Cake time.

BODEGA INTERIOR

The two await a CUSTOMER'S exit and swiftly make their entry. They run along the perimeter of the store- as out-of-sight as possible. Roland SNIFFS around for signs of the bodega security cat, WHISKERS (20s). He's an orange tabby. Mall cop attitude.

The coast is *clear*. Roland keeps an eye on Jacoby as he climbs up the stairs to the back of the counter and into the display. The plan is *working*. Jacoby stuffs a sack full of cake flavors: strawberry, chocolate, vanilla. Jacoby admires his fully-loaded bags, pleased.

JACOBY

(to himself)

This'll show Roland I'm good for runs.

Roland watches the CLERK (40s). He's Middle-Eastern, mega-mustache. He may even allow merch on credit, just don't steal.

Roland surveys the front door. In walks rat, ALLY (late teens). She's curvy. Big enchanting eyes and the perfect coat of fur. Roland's immediately distracted. Ally has yet to spot Roland back, he plays it cool. Roland shifts his gaze around: Ally, Jacoby, Clerk, Humans, back to Ally.

He breaks his sight line to holler at Ally. Jacoby puts one last round of goodies in his sack. He scatters to the meet Roland as fast as he can. Roland makes his move to speak to Ally.

ROLAND

(clears throat)

Hey, Ally. What are you doing here?

Roland quickly checks his breath in the cooler door-*BLAZING!* He steps back to create more space. The sound of Roland's VOICE startles her. Ally CLOSES the ice cooler with a *THUD!* to the head. She looks up.

(CONTINUED)

ROLAND (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.
Ar- are you okay?

Ally rubs her head.

ALLY

Hey Ro. I'm okay, just tagging along
with my brother, Jefe. We're grabbing
dinner. I love their deli. I either get
tuna or salad.

Roland squints at Ally confused. He's completely bewildered.
Roland addresses audience. His head is cocked. His body
slumped:

ROLAND

Really?!

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(to Ally nervously)
Nice, well save some room. What do you
think about grabbing a late slice with
me later, say 10 pm?

The Clerk drops a pen at the counter and sees Jacoby. He
CALLS for security:

CLERK

Rascal! Ohhhhh, Whiskerssssss...

Roland hears the Clerk and panics.

ROLAND (V.O.)

Whiskers... Jacoby!

The Clerk searches for an object to help Whiskers handle the
situation.

ROLAND

(to Ally)
So, I'll see you later?

ALLY

Sure, whatever- just go!

Roland scurries to the meeting place. In an instant, Whiskers
WHIPS from the back of the store. He CHARGES for Jacoby.
Jacoby runs and SHRIEKS for help.

JACOBY

Roland, **help!** Where are you?!

(CONTINUED)

Roland scampers quickly to the SOUND of his brother. He's too late. Whiskers SNATCHES Jacoby into the side of his mouth by Jacoby's ear. Jacoby dangles. Whiskers CHUCKLES, careful not to release Jacoby from his tight grip. Roland SKIDS in front of Whiskers and pleas.

ROLAND

(begs)

C'mon Whiskers, let 'em go.

Whiskers taunts Roland and frightens Jacoby. Whiskers SHAKES Jacoby from side to side like a rag doll. Jacoby drops his sacks full of cake. SPLAT! Whiskers GROWLS.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Please, Whiskers--take me instead.

Jacoby's eyes widen.

JACOBY

What? No!

Whiskers scans back and forth at Roland and Jacoby in an effort to decide.

JEFE

How about neither!

Rat JEFE (20s) appears. He's laid-back and confident. Scared of what? Pierced ear, cool. Leather jacket type. A pack, not a 'murse'. He WHISTLES from the back of Whiskers, leaps onto a box of sodas, and onto Whiskers' tail. He takes a big bite of Whiskers' tail and spits it out. CHOMP! PWLEA!

JACOBY

Arughh!

Jacoby lets out a grunt and falls to the floor. His wide eyes shrink and water. He SCUFFLES away from Whiskers fast and sees a piece of his ear in Whiskers' mouth.

Jacoby's mouth trembles.

Roland, Jefe, Jacoby, and Ally all SPRINT for the door as Whiskers chases them out. Whiskers stops at the entrance as the others scramble to safety on the sidewalk.

BODEGA EXTERIOR

WHISKERS

(to the bunch from the door)

If you come back, I'll have no other choice.

10

EXT. CURBSIDE- EVENING

10

The crew runs further away from the shop. They gather under a tree near a curb.

ROLAND

(to Jacoby)

What happened back there? I thought you had it.

Ally cuts Roland a SHARP look.

ALLY

Uh, is everyone okay? Oh, Jacoby--will you be alright?

Jacoby catches his breath. Blood DRIPS from his ear.

JACOBY

Yeah, I'll make it. Thanks for asking.

Jefe UNZIPS his pack. He reveals some of the cake Jacoby dropped.

JEFE

(to Jacoby)

You dropped this back there, man. I'd say you deserve some cake right about now. I think you'd better get home and take care of that.

Jefe avoids staring at Jacoby's torn ear. The bunch dust themselves off and check for scratches, etc. Ally rubs her head and Jefe removes his leather jacket to drape over Ally. Roland glances at Jacoby who sulks in a pulsing manner.

ROLAND

We're gonna head back. See you later.

Roland looks at Ally, then Jefe. Jefe looks at Ally, then Roland. Roland puts his arm around Jacoby's shoulder. Jacoby coldly shakes it off. Jefe looks at the brothers as rain droplets begin to TRICKLE down followed by sudden LIGHTNING and a thunder BOOM!

JEFE

(to Roland)

I'll need a word with you tonight. Same time, same place--don't be late.

Ally exchanges wide eyes toward Roland. *Uh oh!*

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

ROLAND
(to Jefe)
Same time, same place.

Jefe and Ally exit down the block in a separate direction. Ally throws the jacket over her head. Roland and Jacoby linger, for a bit to take in the news when *TAT! TAT! TAT!* Rainfall SLAMS down with a fury. Sewer smoke is more VISIBLE and smells amplify.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
Wow...

The newly soggy pair head back home.

BROOKLYN BLOCKS

JACOBY
But Ro, I *did* have it. I thought you were going to cover me? What happened?

ROLAND
Not that, I just wish I knew that Ally was Jefe's little sister. This changes everything.

Jacoby shakes his head in disbelief continuously. They walk down the street far apart in silence.

11 **EXT. FRONT OF FAMILY HOME-CONTINUOUS**

11

They stop in front of their home. Jacoby breaks the silence.

JACOBY
I was nearly catnip back there and you're worried about some *girl*? I went on the run to show you I could help. I always looked up to you. Ma and Pa, Mariah...everyone raves about you. *For what?* I would have never taken my eyes off you in that store.

Jacoby uses his key to try to get in the door, but his hand SHAKES too much. Roland steps up to help.

ROLAND
Yeah, well. I'm sorry, it's just-

JACOBY
(scoffs + talks under his breath)
There's nothing you can say that will make me change my mind about what you did. Excuse me, what you didn't do.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

JACOBY (CONT'D)

You wanna be on your own so bad, you don't have to worry about me asking again or trying to tag along.

12 **INT. FAMILY HOME DINING AREA - CONTINUOUS**

12

Jacoby NUDGES the door open and SLAMS the cake into Roland's chest. He runs to their bedroom and LOCKS the door. Suppertime approaches. Soup, bread, salad, birthday cake for dessert. A lively bunch. Too many rodents to count, too many. Everyone CHIT-CHATS around the table. Ma and Pa join. They sit next to one another at the center of the table. Mariah, Jacoby, and Roland sit on the end. Jacoby and Roland sit across from each other. Neither make eye contact. SIBLINGS #1 (pre-teen), #2 (teen), #3 (pre-teen) are more AUDIBLE than others.

SIBLING #1

What do you mean I'm a weirdo? Says the dude who chases his own tail, *please!*

SIBLING #2

But, how did it happen? I promise I won't tell...

SIBLING #3

I didn't say the real word. I said "motherfather."--Not a curse.

Pa has enough of the chatter. He CLINKS! his cup for everyone's attention. Quiet trails in a DOMINO REACTION. He addresses Siblings #1-3 who sit next to each other.

PA

(points to Sibling #1)
You're not a weirdo.

Sibling #3 smiles and sticks out her tongue.

PA (CONT'D)

(points to Sibling #3)
That won't work either. It's too close to the real thing, back to the drawing board you go.

Sibling #2 MUMBLES under breath a parting "motherfather."

PA (CONT'D)

(points to Sibling #2)
And you-- you know we don't keep secrets in this family, go ahead and let whatever it is be known while we're all here.

(CONTINUED)

Pen-drop silence. Everyone stares in the direction of Sibling #2. MA scans the pack, sees a bandage on Jacoby's ear, PATS Pa on his chest, and nods her head in the direction of Jacoby.

MA

Jacoby, *what happened?* This is why I tell you all to be careful.

Roland stares Jacoby in his eyes. Jacoby stares back with an angered face. He turns to face Ma.

JACOBY

I think the Vegas' are on to us again. They thought they got rid of us, but we never left.

Jacoby LAUGHS nervously. He shrugs.

JACOBY (CONT'D)

There was this metal wirey stuff near their kitchen I didn't know about, so when I turned the corner, I got nicked. No big deal, I'm alright, Ma.

Ma SIGHS deeply, presses her hand on her heart. Roland looks just beyond Ma's head at the wall clock. Ally...Jefe.

MA

(nods head in Jacoby's direction)

Well, please, please try to mind your surroundings.

Pa rubs Ma's back. Roland looks at Jacoby with a hopeful glance. Jacoby turns away. Mariah looks at both Jacoby and Roland. She knows something is up, but she can't put her finger on it. Pa turns in the direction of Sibling #2.

PA

You aren't off the hook, no indeed. The rest of you-- your mother and I have some exciting news! Our family will get even bigger in, oh, about 3 weeks or so.

VARIOUS SIBLINGS

(react simultaneously)

Uh!/Again?/Gross./Motherfather!/Ooh!/Yay!
!

Ma and Pa twist their faces at the mixed reactions.

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED: (2)

MA

Well, like it or not--it is what it is.
Eat your supper, then we'll have some
cake in celebration of this month's
birthday crew. Mommy loves you all
dearly.

Ma LIGHTS CANDLES in the smashed cake pieces for her babies.

MA (CONT'D)

Make a wish!

13 **INT. VEGAS' APARTMENT - LATE EVENING**

13

VEGAS' LIVING ROOM

Just in front of Roland's home live a Latin family, the Vegas'. MARIANA (pre-teen), is obedient, studious. Long, brown, wavy hair. She sits on the couch in their living room, completes her homework. She talks with her mother, MS. VEGA (40s). Short curly hair. Power mama. Grandma, ABUELA (70s) is also present. Her hair waves a refined silver. Petite with a punch.

MS. VEGA

Mariana, honey. Do you mind going to the bodega to grab some packing tape? Oh, and see if you can get a few empty boxes, too. We need to store everything away for the exterminator. We'll do a full bomb this time, mija. The traps aren't working.

VEGAS' KITCHEN/ LIVING ROOM

Ms. Vega wipes out fridge. Mariana throws on a jacket and boots. She KISSES Abuela, who has fallen fast asleep on the adjacent recliner.

MARIANA

Okay. Tape, boxes, *anything else*? May I have a little extra for a salad, I'm still a little hungry.

MS. VEGA (O.S.)

Of course, take my card. Don't be long.

14 **INT. ROLAND'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

14

MA + PA'S BEDROOM

Night lamps, bonnet, pajamas, night reads. Ma and Pa sit up in bed, frozen.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

MA

Did you hear that, or am I tweakin'?

PA

I heard it.

(sighs)

The Vegas' are getting aggressive. This may be it. We may have to really leave this time.

Pa RUBS Ma's oversized belly.

PA (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

Some timing, hunh?

MA

We'll wait to tell the kids while we figure this whole thing out. I think they've had enough excitement already.

Pa kisses Ma on the forehead, turns off his light, and rolls over.

PA

You got that right.

15 **INT. ROLAND'S HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT**

15

ROLAND + JACOBY'S BEDROOM

Roland dresses. Ally's waiting, Jefe to follow. Roland PATS Jacoby's leg. He's sound asleep. He SHUTS the door behind him softly.

KITCHEN

Roland carefully makes his way into the long hall and sneaks past the kitchen table. He's suddenly met with a pair of eyes.

MARIAH

And just where do you think you're going?

Mariah FLICKS a soft light on. Roland's shook. He doesn't move.

MARIAH (CONT'D)

(hushed, firm tone)

You know, I saw Jacoby's ear before dinner. I'm the one who helped him bandage it. Why didn't you protect him?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

MARIAH (CONT'D)

I could barely get the wrap around his ear. He just kept crying.

Roland adjusts his backpack signaling his readiness to leave. He walks towards the living room to make his exit.

LIVING ROOM

MARIAH (CONT'D)

I know my brothers. He *wasn't* crying because of his ear.

ROLAND

Yo, are you done? I said I was sorry. Can I go now?

Roland laces up his shoes. Mariah JUMPS UP from the kitchen table. She FLINGS herself across the front door to block Roland. Her arms cross in front of her chest. No budging.

MARIAH

Not until you tell me where you're going.

Roland SUCKS his teeth.

ROLAND

I have to meet Jefe tonight. I may have gotten myself into something this time. He's the one who saved Jacoby, not me.

Mariah SIGHS. She's partly surprised, partly confused.

MARIAH

But I though Jefe and Las Ratas--

ROLAND

Yeah, it's the truth.

The frustration is real.

MARIAH

(growling)

But, we're all counting on you to--

ROLAND

Word. Well how about this. Count me out. Peace.

Roland gives Mariah a glance and walks out of the door.

16 **EXT. PIZZA SHOP - CONTINUOUS** 16

Roland grabs cologne from his bag and SPRAYS it all over. He GARGLES travel mouthwash, SPITS. *Show time.* He struts near the pizza shop's wall crevice. As he walks, **two shadows** lurk behind him. He picks up his pace. The shadows persist. Faster, okay time to RUN! He HOPS on the back of a delivery moped just as a DRIVER mounts for takeoff. The MOPED CLICKS! and REVS!

17 **EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - CONTINUOUS** 17

The Driver RAPS and BLASTS MUSIC towards downtown Brooklyn. Lights ILLUMINATE the dark sky. Roland bops his head and SINGS along. He closes his eyes to take in the cool breeze when suddenly, he slips out of the hinged crate and into the street! PLOP!

Roland runs after the moped and LEAPS up just before the GREEN LIGHT comes on. *Whew!* Roland looks around at the smoky nightlife underneath a delivery hot/cold bag. Other deliveries and human SPORTS FANS crowd the pavement and walkways. Roland DUSTS himself off and takes in the sights. The shadows are no where in sight.

ROLAND
(to himself aloud)
Whew, lost 'em. Suckas'.

Roland LEAPS off the moped and rolls.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
(addresses audience)
Now that's what I call Lyft service.

18 **EXT. PIZZA SHOP - MOMENTS LATER** 18

The moped PARKS at the pizza shop, **again**. SAD TROMBONE.

Roland stands in front of the pizza shop. Ally is no where in sight. The shadows **reappear**. Roland rolls his eyes.

ROLAND
(addresses audience again)
Seriously?!

Roland is met with two big scary rats, members of Las Ratas. MIGUEL (20's) and TONY (20's) corner him in front of the pizza shop. Miguel is tall-big and fitted in a stylish neon windbreaker and glasses. He's obviously the brains of the pair. Tony is arm-day meaty and round all over. He wears a fitted hat and too-tight shirt. Common sense is relative. He's definitely the muscle.

(CONTINUED)

MIGUEL
(to Roland slyly)
Waiting on somebody?

Miguel inches closer to Roland. He's up against the brick siding at this point. Tony chimes in on the interrogation.

TONY
Yeah, like a date?

Tony LAUGHS a rare laugh.

MIGUEL
(to Tony)
Uh, I think that was implied, man. You just grab him for now and let me do the talking, claro?

TONY
Crystal.

Tony hems Roland up against the brick wall. His feet dangle off the ground.

MIGUEL
So you want to be down with Las Ratas, eh? I hear you've got a lot of proving to do. This ain't just any crew.

Roland's breath is shallow under Tony's arm.

ROLAND
(winded)
You know me, I'm good for it.

Miguel LAUGHS and WAVES his arm to signal that Tony can drop Roland.

MIGUEL
Yeah, we'll see about that. I heard all about your little mishap with Whiskers. You're coming with us.

Tony shoves Roland towards the street.

TONY
Walk, and don't try anything cheeky.

Miguel, Tony, and Roland walk towards the park. Roland is sandwiched between the two big fellas.

19

EXT. PROSPECT PARK - CONTINUOUS

19

The trio arrive at a hollow tree with lights, carvings.
Miguel CALLS OUT:

MIGUEL

Heeey boss...

JEFE'S PLACE

Jefe appears from a hole in the tree trunk. Well dressed per usual, upscale loungewear.

JEFE

Thanks boys, I'll take it from here. Go around back if you'd like, have some bevs.

Roland looks around at the immaculate lawn and ornate exterior of the home.

ROLAND

You live here?

JEFE

Let's try good evening for size, eh?

Roland changes his tune.

ROLAND

Good evening, Jefe.

Roland GULPS quietly.

JEFE

Better. I hear you're quite the multi-tasker. Did you really think you were going to take my little sister out for freakin' pizza after the stunt you pulled earlier today? If I find out you're even *looking* in her direction, we're gonna have problems and you can one-up Jacoby as having far more than a chunk of your ear missing.

Roland tries his best not to scrunch his face with fear and shame.

ROLAND

Bro, I didn't know she was your sister. I mean, not unti--

Roland lowers his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

JEFE

What difference does it make? You can't even look out for your own. Forget my sister all together. Not happening.

Roland's head SINKS as low as his eyes can. A light FLICKERS on above Jefe's head, soft LAUGHTER escapes the window. He knows it's Ally. Roland doesn't dare look up.

JEFE (CONT'D)

You say you want to be in my crew, but I doubt your loyalty. How do I know that if I send you out with one of my guys that you won't slip up again? Rats aren't exactly known for having clean reputations, you know. Therefore, a rat is only as good as his word.

Roland shakes his head in agreement.

JEFE (CONT'D)

You definitely owe me. -- Big time. This is your chance. You, Tony, Miguel-Lower East Side diner. They'll lead, you follow. I'll get a report, the full picture. Miguel doesn't leave out details, *you get me?*

ROLAND

Whatever it is, consider it done. You have my word.

20 **INT. Q TRAIN- CONTINUOUS**

20

Roland, Tony, Miguel leave the park and squeeze onto the Q train. Roland fights the urge to sleep. A PLUCK! to the nose from Tony awakens him.

TONY

Wake up, fool. We're here.

They quickly exit the train.

21 **EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE DINER - CONTINUOUS**

21

The bunch walk for a bit. Graffiti, night skateboarders. Humans grab their take-out and go back home.

The rats stop in front of the diner per Jefe's instructions. Roland's disoriented and frazzled. He looks around, feeling small.

(CONTINUED)

Roland, Tony, and Miguel face off in a triangle. Las Ratas v. Roland. Roland observes the guys. He waits for his assignment.

ROLAND

Alright. So we made it, now what?

Miguel and Tony LAUGH in unison.

MIGUEL

Well, we'll be here while you grab Jefe steak.

Miguel and Tony rest their backs to the diner, casually. A group of dressed up LADY RATS (20s) pass the fellas. Sequins, heels, and lipstick.

TONY

(raps gruffly to the ladies)

Oh, bay-be! Cheese rules everything around me, all about the chedda'...get with the winning team, yo! Shimmy, shimmy, ya! You and your friend.

Miguel PUNCHES Tony in the chest.

MIGUEL

C'mon, man. Not now.

Tony makes a PRETEND PHONE with his hand.

TONY

(mouths silently)

Call me.

The ladies leave to a nearby lounge. Roland is anxious with uncertainty. He stands by and witnesses the foolishness. It's all too much. He speaks up:

ROLAND

What? But what if I need backup?

Miguel and Tony LAUGH HARDER. Tony SLAPS the wall and bends over with HARDY CHUCKLES.

MIGUEL

Listen, this job should be a piece of cake--

An apparent LIGHT BULB moment goes off in Tony's head. This doesn't happen often.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (2)

TONY

Dang, son. I see what you did there!

Tony ELBOWS Miguel in his ribs.

TONY (CONT'D)

(faux sympathy)

*Too soon, my guy. Too soon.*Roland SNARLS. *He didn't have to go there.*

MIGUEL

(to Roland)

The reality is, we do way bigger jobs than this. You wanna get back in Jefe's good graces or not?

ROLAND

Yeah, but... whatever. Be right out.

22 **INT. LOWER EAST SIDE DINER - CONTINUOUS**

22

Roland enters the upscale diner without a hitch. There are undeniable AROMAS, a bar, booths and tables for sitting. More humans in an enclosed space than he's comfortable with. Dates, families, loners, socially distanced. An occasional blue-orange flame from the half-exposed kitchen. He breezes through the dining area and SCRAMBLES to the kitchen. Out of sight. He hears COOKS (various) mutter unfamiliar dishes indistinctly. His ears PERK when CHEF (30s) calls out an order:

EXPOSED KITCHEN

CHEF

Steak and sweet potato hash up!

Roland ZIPS and ZOOPS his way to the platter on the counter. *Too easy.* He takes a ginormous bite.

ROLAND

(chewing)

Yum!

He takes another BITE, and another, until the steak falls to the floor. *PLAP!* It's now the perfect size to fit inside his bag. He enjoys a little too much.

CHEF

Rat!

Roland's eyes widen.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Uh, oh!

DINER DINING SPACE

Roland RUNS as fast as he can. He dodges a pan that HOVERS over his head and the many feet that could *STOMP!* and step on his tail and body at any moment. He makes his way under the bar stool shoes. The human feet SWING. Roland DODGES each back-and-forth sway like a contestant on *Wipeout* and RUNS out of the door. *Close call.*

23 **EXT. LOWER EAST SIDE DINER - MOMENTS LATER**

23

Roland catches his breath. His heart nearly *LEAPS!* right out of his chest. He NODS his head in either direction in search of Miguel and Tony.

ROLAND

(calls out)

Hey guys, I did it! I did it!

Roland peers around once more, but doesn't see Miguel. No Tony, either.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Miguel? Tony?

Roland looks across the street, sees Miguel and Tony RUNNING. Miguel looks behind him, calls out to Roland.

MIGUEL

Congratulations, kid. You did it, now find your way back.

Roland attempts to CHASE after them, *DASH! DASH! DASH!* He can't, too much oncoming traffic.

ROLAND

(calls out after Tony and Miguel)

Wait a minute! We never discussed this!
I don't know where I'm go--

Roland sees an unfamiliar pigeon, JOHNNY (40s) looks rougher than rough. Haggard and dirty. Grunge acid-wash jacket.

JOHNNY

Zip it, zip, zip, zip. Where the heck did you come from?

Johnny searches Roland over with her eyes. *Weird.* She runs her wing over her greasy hair.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You don't look like you're from around here. *Hot or cold?* Don't you know you're not supposed to say that kind of thing aloud?

Johnny gets closer to Roland and sniffs him.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

(creepily)

You smell mighty fine. Cologne with a hint of high grade meat. *Hot or cold, am I right?* No doubt there's more nestled in that nice bag of yours. How much?

Roland backs away. He scared.

ROLAND

(shaky voice)

Nothing I have is for sale.

Johnny extends one wing at a time and shakes her stuff. *Uhhh...*

JOHNNY

Is that right? Because I'm no mind reader, but it seems to me that you were about to say that you don't know where you are... Where you're going...something along those lines.

Roland sticks his chest out. It's all for show. He's terrified.

ROLAND

Yeah, well...what's it to you?

JOHNNY

(smirks)

Oh, I can have a time watching you try to make it through the night. Here- in a place you know nothing of or I can show you how to get home. It'll cost you, though. Give up the MEAT!

ROLAND

(backs away)

Actually, this is really important. You see, those guys brought me out here-

Johnny returns to Roland's face, BREATHES a rancid breath, and walkS away slowly.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: (2)

JOHNNY

I don't got the time for your stories. I know these streets like the back of my wing. No one's gonna help you get back as fast as I can. Either you want to go home or you don't. What's it gonna be?

Roland thinks long and hard for a moment.

ROLAND

Okay, but not the whole piece. Most of it, though.

Johnny inspects the piece and takes a big HUNK.

JOHNNY

Good deal, follow me. Oh and, how rude of me. Name's Johnny.

24 **INT. F TRAIN- CONTINUOUS**

24

Johnny ushers Roland to the F train, they get on. Pretty empty. A HUMAN lies across all seats. He makes Johnny smell like a field of roses. Roland sees a sign that reads: *Brooklyn. Maybe Johnny isn't a complete lunatic after all.* They sit. The train MOVES.

ROLAND

This doesn't exactly look like the way that I came.

JOHNNY

That's because there's construction going on late nights. If you rode trains you would know that. Who's in charge here? Don't 'cha trust me?

Roland looks around flustered and helpless.

ROLAND

(mumbles under breath)
Not exactly, but we're going with it.

Johnny digs in her ear and SMEARS wax under the seat.

JOHNNY

Say something, son?

ROLAND

(disgusted)
Nope.

Roland falls asleep, but doesn't realize it. It's been a long day. After 1 stop, Johnny SMACKS Roland with her wing.

(CONTINUED)

JOHNNY

(sarcastically)

Alright. Here's where we part. You're going to go to Penn Station, follow the signs that say Amtrak. Get on any train. You need to go southbound. You know your way from there, right?

Johnny PEERS at Roland closely to see if he'll buy her lie. She raises her eyebrows and holds the door OPEN. She turns her head for a final word from Roland:

ROLAND

Uh, yeah. I think I follow you. Thanks.

Johnny CLEARS her throat. Her wings behind her back.

JOHNNY

Ahem, my finder's fee...

DING-DING! The OPEN subway door sounds. GROANS are AUDIBLE from nearby train cars.

ROLAND

Right...

Roland reaches into his pocket to take out a piece of the steak, nothing comes out. He digs deeper and feels a **hole** at the bottom of his bag. His hand goes straight through!

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Wait a minute, you--

DING-DING! Another round.

JOHNNY

(chuckles)

Yep, you're a sucker if I ever saw one. Little tip. Stop falling asleep on the train, dweeb.

A furious PASSENGER (50s) yells from the train car behind them.

PASSENGER (O.S.)

Close the god--

DING-DING! Final round. Johnny exits. The door closes.

25

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EARLY MORNING

25

BUILDING LOBBY

Tenants from the cob-webby apartment building gather in the lobby for a community meeting. Can we still call this a grout line? Ding!

DIVERSE CROWD (Various Ages) Lots of masks. Notebooks, folders, sturdy and concerned stares. Ms. Vega receives a FLYER from NEIGHBOR (40s).

NEIGHBOR

Take a close look at this. Tell me what you see.

Ms. Vega examines the flyer.

MS. VEGA

Well, I see new construction, amenities. The facilities look great- where is this?

NEIGHBOR

(detached)

Uh hunh... Look at the address.

Neighbor POINTS to the bottom corner of the handout.

MS. VEGA

But this is the address. This is our address. Mixed-use commercial and residential building set to break ground in 9 months? That would mean the building is already sold. *Where did you find this?*

NEIGHBOR

(proudly)

I have my sources. Prepare to move or be moved. Not me. I'm not going anywhere. I've been here for 28 years. You ever wonder why the pest situation got worse or why the super's gotten lax on maintenance -- They knew.

Reality settles in for Ms. Vega. She adjusts her stance and RUBS her temples.

MS. VEGA

(gasps)

Unbelievable. They told us-

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

NEIGHBOR

And they lied. I've got my hands on the city plans and it's not just us. They are set to rezone the schools and everything. It's a wreck. Criminal if you ask me.

MS. VEGA

(firm tone)

Well, you can't fight alone. I'm with you.

Neighbor smiles.

NEIGHBOR

Atta girl!

26 **INT. ROLAND'S HOME - EVENING**

26

DINING ROOM

Suppertime. Meatloaf, potatoes, cookies. Everyone CHATTERS. Mariah SHAKES her foot under the table-she's nervous. Mariah looks at Jacoby. He rolls his eyes and cocks his head. They whisper to each other:

JACOBY

He'll be here. Roland never misses dinner. He's so greedy, yet I get called, "chubbers." He's probably running around with his friends or chasing after Ally.

Mariah fiddles with her fork and *TAPS!* it against her plate.

MARIAH

I don't know. Last night I caught him stepping out much later than he usually does. Something's not right, I can feel it.

JACOBY

You better hope nobody notices. Ma doesn't need that kind of stress right now.

Ma scans the room. She notices Mariah picking at her plate.

MA

(concerned)

Mariah, sweetie. You love meatloaf night...What's wrong?

(CONTINUED)

Mariah looks up at Ma, tears well in her eyes. She fakes a *SNEEZE* to mask her cry.

MARIAH

I'm cool, Ma. I snacked a lot today so
I'm not that hungry.

Ma doesn't buy it. She signals Mariah to come around the table to loop her in. Ma HUGS Mariah from the side. Ma's belly is pudgy in the front.

MA

(lovingly)

What's wrong with my baby girl?

Mariah hesitates. This is big.

MARIAH

It's Ro. He hasn't come home yet.

Ma rubs Mariah's shoulders.

MA

(strict)

And you haven't said anything? For how long?

HOME HALLWAY/ ROLAND + JACOBY'S ROOM

Ma JUMPS up from the table and WOBBLER to Roland's room. The dining room falls silent. Mariah quickly follows behind her.

MA (CONT'D)

I thought he was sl-

Mariah full-out CRIES. No reservations this time. A tired Ma sits on Roland's bed.

MA (CONT'D)

Mariah, I don't care what he told you.
You gotta talk. What do you know?

Mariah SINKS down, lowers her stance.

MARIAH

Since late last night. -- He's been running with Las Ratas and seeing some girl named Ally. Please don't be mad at me.

Ma GASPS. She covers her mouth, lets out a muffled SQUEAL.

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED: (2)

MA
(sobs loudly)
Where is he?

27 **INT. AMTRAK STATION PLATFORM - AFTERNOON**

27

Roland's curled up asleep under a train bench. The GROWL of a dog, Emmy (20s) awakes him. A pompous, brown Chihuahua with big, bulgy eyes. OWNER (30s) sets Emmy down and twirls her hair. Roland JUMPS up.

DOG
Relax. Can't you see I'm in a carrying case? Also, I have no interest in you whatsoever. I find rats to be utterly and completely filthy beings. No offense.

ROLAND
Says a pup who would eat his own sh--
Emmy BARKS and GROWLS. It's personal now.

OWNER
Shh, it's okay, Emmy. Don't bark. You're okay.

Passengers give Emmy and Owner dirty looks.

EMMY
So, what are you doing here anyway?
Travel plans, runaway?

ROLAND
I'm not a runaway. I'm going home to Brooklyn, right where I belong.

DOG
(chuckles)
I'm no expert at directions, but you're going far more downtown than you think buddy. The next train is Atlanta bound.

Roland stares, puzzled.

ROLAND
What part of the city is that? Never heard of it.

Emmy returns puzzled stare.

EMMY
(sighs)
It's, uh...just outside of it.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED:

EMMY (CONT'D)

You seem like you're in a bit of a pickle. I mean, you could embrace the journey, see what happens along the way... You'll get back home...eventually.

ROLAND

(laughs)

Are you kidding me?

Emmy LICKS her paw.

EMMY

Afraid not.

28 **INT. ROLAND'S HOME - EVENING**

28

MA + PA'S BEDROOM

Ma and Pa ARGUE indistinctly. Still no Roland. The family is not complete. *Time is of the essence.*

PA

(sighs)

I hear you. I know you want to wait for Roland to make it back, but we've got babies on the way, the exterminator is set to come, and I've seen the new construction flyers strewn about the lobby for myself. Baby, we've got to get a move on this and find a new home.

Ma SHAKES her head 'no'.

MA

(frantic)

He won't know where to go! Get everyone we know together. Let's start a search party. Better yet, you can start by trying to get a hold of that Ally girl and whoever is in Las Ratas. I heard he was running around with them before he went missing.

Ma NUDGES Pa in his chest. **Urgency!**

MA (CONT'D)

Go on, take Jacoby and some of the others. Get out of here!

Pa KISSES Ma on the cheek, WIPES her damp face.

PA

On it.

(CONTINUED)

28

CONTINUED:

Rat Out

36.
28

FADE OUT: