

CHINESE NEW YEAR

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2nd Draft

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EXT. BATTERY PARK CITY - DAY

We see the Hudson River and New Jersey from a lower Manhattan office plaza. It's deep winter - crisp and cold. A young woman, DANI, 28, is bundled in an overcoat and walking toward a building. There are one or two other people out, scurrying across the plaza.

Dani's phone rings. She stops to dig through her bag and flips it open. We hear only her side of the conversation.

DANI
What's up?

She turns to face the water, re-adjusting the phone to her ear.

DANI (cont'd)
You've gotta be kidding....
Is that even legal?

Dani sits down on a bench facing the water.

DANI (cont'd)
Well, maybe I can pick up some extra shifts. I'll talk to Brad about it today.

She sighs.

DANI (cont'd)
And hey, good luck later. Don't let this throw you... yep, love you too.

Dani flips her phone shut, and looks out across the river for a moment. She is the only one sitting in the empty park. She gets up, walks across the plaza and enters a door in a nearby building.

INT. INDUSTRIAL KITCHEN - DAY

RAFAEL, 56, a kitchen worker, is dressed in restaurant whites and a chef's hat. He is pouring a big pot of broth into quart containers. Dani passes him and takes off her coat and hat to reveal a business attire server uniform: a white button down shirt, black pants. She hangs her coat and purse in a closet as she turns to him cheerily.

DANI
Morning Raf.

RAFAEL
Dani! My one and only, how are you?

DANI

Happy to see you, I'll say that.

RAFAEL

My girl.

DANI

What are we serving the wolves today?

RAFAEL

Duck is cooking, baby. I'll save a plate for you.

DANI

Oooh, fancy! What's the occasion?

RAFAEL

It is the Chinese New Year, child.

DANI

Of course! Peking duck?

RAFAEL

As best I can.

INT. BAR - DAY

Dani enters through a swinging door and moves behind a bar in a corporate, sterile dining room. A wall clock, mounted above an upright piano shows 11:10 am. Four or so small tables are arranged in the main area. Two cases of beer sit on the bar, with a note attached. She picks it up to read it.

NOTE

A little something for the boys for the new year. Let's do \$3/bottle.

Dani pulls open the boxes and starts loading bottles into a cooler behind the bar. As she takes one bottle out, she inspects it, and places it on the bar for display. It reads 'Tsingtao'.

Just then GEORGE, 45 knocks softly on the wall and pops his head in. He's wearing dark glasses and a floor-trader jacket with a name-tag, and looks hungover.

GEORGE

Morning Dani, oh shit. I'm early again?

DANI

C'mon in. I'm just setting up.

He sits down and she points a remote toward an overhead TV for him.

DANI (cont'd)
Anything yet?

GEORGE
Nah. Been quiet. Greenspan's going on about irrational exuberance, as usual.

DANI
OJ? Anything?

GEORGE
Yeah, I guess throw a little bit of vodka in there for me.

Dani pours a drink and places it in front of him. He slides a twenty dollar bill on the bar and stares at the TV. Soft focus of Alan Greenspan talking as closed captioning rolls down the side of the screen and stock prices scroll across the bottom. George watches and intermittently sips his drink.

DANI
Raf is making Peking Duck today.

GEORGE
Nice. I walked through Chinatown on my way in and it was already lit up. Thinking of knocking off early to head to the parade.

DANI
What time do they do it?

GEORGE
Starts at sundown.

Another man, STUART, 42, walks in swiftly, with more vitality, also wearing a floor trader jacket.

GEORGE (cont'd)
Stuey.

STUART
Georgie boy! I think today's gonna be a good one. I'm just about to make... whoa, whatcha got here?

He picks up the Tsingtao bottle.

DANI

Happy New Year - three bucks a bottle.

STUART

Deal, gimme two.

DANI

How 'bout I keep one on ice for you?

STUART

You're the professional. How're you doing? Still got that husband?

He throws a twenty dollar bill on the bar. She takes it and rings in six dollars.

DANI

Every day, my dear.

STUART

You let me know when that changes. It's not too late to get it annulled, y'know.

GEORGE

It's barely lunchtime. Give her a break.

STUART

She knows I'm only playing. He got a job yet?

DANI

He's got a couple of leads this week - we'll see.

She smiles, pushing his change back at him. He turns back to the TV. A FEW MORE MEN, VARIOUS AGES, trickle in, including TOMMY, 38. They are all wearing floor trader jackets - asking for drinks while looking at the TV.

STUART

Tommy! Y'gotta try the Chingtao.

DANI

Tsingtao.

STUART

What'd I say? Three bucks, and not bad.

TOMMY

Nah, too early. Dani, I got an extra ticket to the Rangers tonight with your name on it.

DANI

Too violent for me.

TOMMY

Aw, c'mon, it's theater!

DANI

Those injuries are not theater, my friend.

GEORGE

Jesus, Tommy.

TOMMY

What? You fault me for keeping up with a beautiful girl? Go do what you're good at and provide us some romantic music, would ya?

George puts on his glasses, and wanders over to the piano. He sets his drink on top, sits, and then starts playing a Rachmaninoff concerto.

STUART

No Dracula music, Chrissake it's only noon. Dani, second beer please.

She pops the top off and hands it to him. George switches to heady, upbeat blues.

TOMMY

Now that's what I'm talking about. See?

Suddenly there is a change in tone as all the men look toward the TV again.

STUART

Shit, there it is.

The music stops abruptly; they're all silent and at attention before they collectively dash out of the room, leaving their drinks and money on the bar and tables.

Rafael pops his head through the swinging door.

RAFAEL

Dani-love, kitchen's ready. Wait, where'd they all go?

DANI

Down on the floor again. OPEC said something I'll never understand, but you know how it is - in twenty minutes they'll be back and we won't know what hit us.

Rafael nods and disappears again. Dani starts collecting the few empty bottles and a glass from on top of the piano. While at the piano, she considers it for a moment. Holding the bottles in one hand, she pushes down two or three keys at the treble end before moving back to the bar. She places the bottles down, picks up the remote, and aims it toward the TV, when George pokes his head back in.

DANI (cont'd)

Oh that was fast! Here, I'll turn it back.

She flips back to CNBC and moves behind the bar.

GEORGE

Yeah, wasn't much. Just some movement.

DANI

You need a beverage?

GEORGE

Sure give megimme one of those, I guess. Can I buy you one?

She hands him a beer.

DANI

I'm fine, plus, I've gotta start serving you hounds lunch, after all. You hungry yet?

He throws another twenty on the bar.

GEORGE

Sure, gimme an order of Raf's duck.

She rings it up, then looks at him.

DANI

You okay?

GEORGE

Me? I'm fine. It's just... it's my mother's birthday today.

DANI

On the Lunar New Year this year.
That's kinda cool.

GEORGE

Yeah. I was thinking of taking her to
the parade.

DANI

Oh, you've got to! I'm sure she'd
love that.

GEORGE

Yeah.

DANI

Why the hesitating? What else have
you got to do?

GEORGE

Nothing, that's not it.

She stops what she's doing to look at him directly.

GEORGE (cont'd)

It's just that... y'know. I don't
want her to see how bad I am.

He takes a half-hearted sip of beer. Dani's stature softens
as she comes around the bar to sit with him, but she is
abruptly interrupted by the whooping and hollering of the
elevator doors opening and a CROWD OF MEN pouring in.

Dani moves back behind the bar.

STUART

Gimme some duck and two more of those
Tsingtaos!

DANI

Sounds like somebody hit the jackpot.

Men crowd the bar, tossing money onto it; there is fast
action. DONNIE, 40, walks in. He's taller than the rest,
friendly and sparkly.

DONNIE

Dani! I got this round.

A whoop goes up from everyone. Donnie throws down four one
hundred dollar bills which Dani pulls over to place in the
register, but before she can complete the action, he grabs
her hand and looks in her eyes.

DONNIE (cont'd)

Hey, one of those goes in your tip jar, hear?

DANI

Thanks D.

He smiles and winks at her. She smiles back and starts ringing up orders. Some guys are asking for Dewars and soda, Jameson on the rocks, others for beers while George starts playing the piano, some blues-y number, again. Donnie takes his trader jacket off, tosses it and starts dancing like Jagger.

DONNIE

That's it baby! That's it!

It's a party atmosphere as guys left and right are asking for the duck, Dani is keeping up, writing orders, putting cash in the register. Raf comes out with a couple of lunch plates and places them on the bar. Dani arranges place settings.

DANI

Stu, George, you're up!

George stops playing and sits next to Stuart. Stuart tucks his napkin in his shirt, looking pleased as Dani hands him another beer and silverware

Stuart digs into his food, hungrily, exuberantly.

STUART

Steak knife! Nice touch.

DANI

Stuey, you're the personification of irrational exuberance.

STUART

What, now?

George is sitting with his glasses on, nursing a whiskey and soda with a full plate in front of him. He picks at his food.

GEORGE

What Greenspan's always yammering on about - that we've blown it up and it ain't gonna last.

STUART

Look kids, it's 2005, the market's
never been this great in all of
history - what could go wrong?

They all laugh. Donnie climbs to dance on a chair, while
younger guys party, hollering below him. Dani is frantically
ringing in money and dropping change on the bar, which is
littered with bills.

DONNIE

To the New Year, boys!

More party noise as they all drink up. Some guys are seated,
eating the duck and everyone's in a good mood, except for
George, who remains serious. The light in the room is
changing.

INT. BAR - AFTERNOON

Scored music fills the soundscape as we see different scenes
in the bar. Four men sitting around a table with plates of
food and beers, laughing. You lightly hear ephemeral noise
of the bar, men talking, a guy showing a dime-bag to another
guy as they eagerly walk out of the room together.

Dani is ringing money into the register and clearing plates.

George stands near the piano, looks at it before pulling out
a flip phone. He's about to dial a number, then hesitates.
He takes a swig of beer and puts the phone back in his
pocket.

George returns to the bar and sits before his plate.

DONNIE

Another round of Chinese beer for the
fellas!

DANI

I'm down to my last three, guys, but
I got Bud Light too, y'know.

STUART

Aw man, that ain't Chinese.

DANI

It will be soon enough.

A laugh erupts from everyone.

TOMMY

Wise beyond your years, I tell you.

DANI
I'm 28, Tommy.

STUART
Ah, you're still a kid. Got your
whole life ahead of you.

DANI
That's good news, since I need the
time to make some dough.

STUART
We didn't get here overnight, right
boys? Took a lot of hard work.

TOMMY
And a few shortcuts.

STUART
That's for sure!

Some of them raise a glass while Dani looks on at them. Her expression implies that she sees how different her life is from theirs.

DANI
Good thing we're closing out lunch
hour, I don't know if I can take
anymore.

Another laugh again as they start to order Bud Lights, and more money is being passed back and forth.

DONNIE
Market bell has rung, boys! Where are
we heading next? Dani's kicking us
out!

She smiles and starts collecting plates. Stuart's is clean with his napkin on top, while George's is barely eaten.

DANI
Want me to box this?

GEORGE
Leave it, I'll hang out.

DANI
Didn't like it?

GEORGE
No, it was fine. Raf's cooking, you
crazy?

DANI
I'm worried about you.

GEORGE
Ah, I'm fine. Like any other day.

TOMMY
Ok, I'm heading out. Just a reminder
that you've missed yet another chance
to be by my side at a Rangers game.

GEORGE
Never say die.

DANI
Thanks Tommy, I appreciate you.

They hold both hands across the bar.

TOMMY
See? She gives me just enough.

He smiles and waves goodbye. The rest of the guys start
inspecting change, leaving tips, pocketing money and
starting to leave.

We see Stuart stand up, somewhat drunkenly. He collects
himself and picks up four single dollars in change in front
of him. Upon inspection, he notes that one is a one hundred
dollar bill. He raises his eyebrow and puts it in his pocket
before walking out of the room.

INT. EMPTY BAR - AFTERNOON

George sits at the bar. Dani is busy picking up the
remaining plates and returning them to the kitchen. She
looks at George.

DANI
Need another? I'm gonna start my
closeout.

GEORGE
Yeah, one more.

She pops the cap off a Bud Light, then starts counting
change, printing the receipt of sales from the day. With
piles of money on the bar, she does calculations on a pad
and frowns.

GEORGE (cont'd)
Everything ok?

DANI
Yeah, hold on, think my math is off.

She recounts and starts to get confused and upset.

DANI (cont'd)
Hmm. Shoot....

GEORGE
What's up, want me to make it up?

DANI
No no no... hold on.

Dani picks up a phone and calls the manager in. BRAD, 35, husky and official, appears through the door in slacks and an oxford shirt.

BRAD
What's the problem, Danielle?

DANI
I can't figure it out. I'm exactly \$100 off.

BRAD
Let me see.

Brad looks at the tape and piles of hundreds, twenties, and tens on the back of the bar.

DANI
I can't figure out what could've....

BRAD
Well, whatever happened, you're gonna have to make it up.

DANI
Brad, can you look it over for me? I really can't afford to give over a hundred bucks of my tips right now.

Brad takes her calculator, paperwork and money and sets himself up at a corner at the bar and begins counting.

Dani starts wiping the bar down with a rag. The dining room is pretty much cleaned up and the light is darker. She notices the beauty of the sky out the window when Raf peeks his head out with a box for her.

RAFAEL
Take it home. You didn't get a chance to eat today.

DANI
Oh, thank you.

RAFAEL
You got it.

DANI
Raf?

RAFAEL
Baby.

DANI
Happy New Year.

Raf tips his chef hat and disappears behind the door.

BRAD
Dani, can I talk to you?

Dani scuttles over to the end of the bar where Brad sits. They speak in a low tone, which turns to an argument of sorts. She pleads, then takes the \$100 dollar bill from her wallet and hands it over to him.

BRAD (cont'd)
And if it happens again, I'm gonna have to let you go.

DANI
Brad, it's the first time. And I paid it back!

BRAD
You did. But it can't keep happening.

She nods, defeated, and gathers her coat, purse and lunch from the bar.

GEORGE
Elevator?

They exit the room.

EXT. BATTERY PARK - DUSK

Dani and George sit on the same park bench she sat on earlier. She is eating out of the box with a plastic fork. The sky is brilliant with orange, the sun is a fireball in the sky, and the mood is sullen.

DANI
So whatcha thinking about the parade?

GEORGE
I don't know. It'll start pretty soon, I guess. Maybe I'll take her to dinner instead.

He uncovers his open beer from the bar from under his coat and offers it to her.

DANI
No. Thanks, though.

GEORGE
You gotta let it go, Dani. Shit, yesterday I dropped five hundred bucks in a mailbox by mistake.

DANI
What?!

GEORGE
Yeah, I had my water bill in one hand, and the cash in an envelope to drop to my cleaning lady in the other and I just fucked up.

She stares at him.

DANI
Jesus, I'm sorry.

GEORGE
It's only money.

DANI
I would kill myself.

GEORGE
C'mon.

DANI
I mean, I wouldn't, obviously, but I couldn't handle losing that amount of cash.

He chuckles.

GEORGE
Money sucks.

DANI
Maybe, but what sucks more is not having it. You've dedicated your life to making it, so you can't think it sucks that bad.

GEORGE
Gratitude first, money, I dunno....
second?

He holds up his beer. They smile. The sky is getting darker as the sun lowers. They look out at the water together.

GEORGE (cont'd)
Watch. In twenty-five seconds, that
sun will be completely gone.

DANI
What?

He nods.

DANI (cont'd)
Twenty-five seconds.

GEORGE
You'd be surprised how fast it goes.

Dani looks out at the river, and at George, who takes his sunglasses off, finally. They squint toward the sunset, which is a semi circle now, shining atop the land and casting a brilliant glow on the icy water.

GEORGE (cont'd)
No more than twenty seconds to go, I
guarantee it. Here, I'll time it.

He touches his watch and they count down together, methodically, and watching.

GEORGE AND DANI
12, 11, 10..... 2, 1

We see the river, their faces, and New Jersey as they count down. The atmosphere darkens as the sun gradually, and then completely disappears.

END

