

**The Game**

**Screenplay**

**by**

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*HOME MOVIES from the 60's, SILENT and grainy:*

## **EXT. MANSION - DAY – HOME MOVIES**

*A stately mansion. A perfect lawn. A BUTLER carries a birthday cake with sparkling sparklers...*

*Past wealthy MEN in crewcuts and thin ties, WOMEN in cat-eye sunglasses. Everyone sings (silent) "Happy Birthday"...*

*CHILDREN follow the cake, in dresses and suits, gathering round NICHOLAS VAN ORTON, 7, guest of honor, who wears a blindfold. MOTHER comes to remove the blindfold and Nicholas ogles the cake, laughs. He reaches for a sparkler. STEP PRINT: Mother intercepts, fussing, fixing his hair...*

*Nicholas' FATHER sits near, smoking, nodding. He's intense, thin, wearing a party hat. He notices the camera without mugging for it, bends to snuff his cigarette in an ashtray.*

*SPLICE-JUMP TO/STEP PRINT: a Harlequin CLOWN ties balloon animals. Nicholas assists, distracted by the inattentive children who look into the camera and pull hair and stand on their chairs...*

*Men are drinking, storytelling, laughing. A fraternity...*

*The women are elsewhere, doing movie-vamp poses for the camera, blowing cigarette smoke, brightly dressed, eyelids blue and green, lipstick perfect...*

*Servants clear the table. Father holds a piece of untouched cake. A man talks to him, but Father stares off, lost in thought. He's forgotten the party hat on his head...*

*STEP PRINT: Mother puts her arms around Father and makes him face the camera. He leans in, posing dutifully.*

*SPLICE-JUMP TO: a nanny in uniform, ILSA, holds an INFANT (CONRAD) to the camera, places the baby in Nicholas' arms. STEP PRINT: Nicholas is gentle, overwhelmed by cradling his tiny brother.*

*SPLICE-JUMP TO: children play tag. Across the lawn, Father heads to the house. He looks back, walks backwards. STEP PRINT: he gives a small wave, continuing away...*

*Kids chase past. Nicholas and two other kids huddle, arms locked, spinning round and round, till they stumble different directions, falling, laughing, dizzy...*

*Nicholas gets up, wearing a PUPPET on each hand. STEP PRINT: He walks CLOSE and peers in the camera, steps back, happily talking. We can't hear because it's SILENT...*

*DISSOLVE TO:*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, BATHROOM - MORNING**

*The emotionless face of NICHOLAS VAN ORTON, just today 40, looks upon itself in a mirror. He brings an electric shaver across his chin, shuts it off, wipes his face with a towel.*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM – MORNING**

*Nicholas crosses. The bedroom is spacious, devoid of clutter. A weight-machine in a far corner. A big T.V. shows CNN with no sound.*

*At a bedside table, Nicholas picks up a heavy, gold ROLEX, sliding it on, checking the time. 6:32.*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - MORNING**

*Nicholas stands at the kitchen island, his tie thrown over his shoulder, eating breakfast. ILSA, now elderly, is across the way doing dishes.*

*The only sounds are the tiny clicks on Nicholas' knife and fork against his plate. He's reading a German newspaper.*

*Nicholas jabs the last piece of egg, skewers the last bit of ham and last square of toast. Plate's clean.*

*He sips his last swallow of juice, dabs his mouth with a napkin, picks up his briefcase and heads to a back door.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(without looking)*

**Thank you.**

**ILSA**

**Have a nice day.**

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION, BACKYARD – MORNING**

*Nicholas walks down a garden pathway to a three-car garage. He looks at his Rolex.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. NICHOLAS' BENTLEY - MORNING**

*Bentley Continental Coupe. Quiet. Nicholas drives, begins humming, barely audible. A Prince song, "Erotic City."*

**NICHOLAS**

*(sings, to self)*

**...until the dawn... making love till cherry's gone...**

*(humming, quiet)*

**...Erotic City, you and me...**

*Nicholas changes lanes, HONKING the HORN, impassive. We can BARELY HEAR the BEEPING in here. He glances back.*

*He drives, adjusts his mirror. Resumes humming.*

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. VAN ORTON BUILDING – MORNING**

*Distinctive SAN FRANCISCO skyline on the horizon. Nicholas' building is a brownstone bookended by skyscrapers. Old money dwarfed by new. The Bentley arrives...*

**INT. VAN ORTON BUILDING, UNDERGROUND GARAGE – MORNING**

*The Bentley moves past a valet station. One VALET follows.*

*The Bentley takes its space. A brass plaque reads: "NICHOLAS VAN ORTON, Van Orton Enterprises." The valet opens the car door for Nicholas.*

**CUT TO:**

**INT. VAN ORTON OFFICE – MORNING**

*Two objects on Nicholas' desk: phone and laptop computer. He's on the phone, operating the laptop with one hand. Business talk, mile-a-minute:*

**MALE VOICE (V.O.)**

*(from phone)*

**...might be perched up on majority shares, but you're not the only one who gets hurt if the actuals crash. Forecasts were fucked to begin with.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(into phone)*

**The moment Baer/Grant's P and L report is placed in my hand,  
I will be speed dialing your number.  
Empty walls. No distractions. MARIA, the proper executive  
assistant, stands practically at attention.**

**MALE VOICE (V.O.)**

**Is that a promise?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm sorry... I'm unfamiliar with the term.**

**MALE VOICE(V.O.)**

**What if Alan calls me with a sob story about substantiation  
procedure?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Take evasive action: have your secretary say you're in a meeting.  
Goodbye, Jack.**

**MALE VOICE (V.O.)**

**Yeah.**

*Nicholas hangs up, shuffling computer windows: stock quotes, pie-charts, graphs, lists. Maria refers to  
an index card.*

**MARIA**

**Invitations: the Museum Gala.**

**NICHOLAS**

**No.**

**MARIA**

**The Fitzwilliam Botanical Garden Annual Fundraiser.**

**NICHOLAS**

**No.**

**MARIA**

**The Hinchberger wedding.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Let me think...**

*(sits back, eyes closed)*

**Hordes of men in tuxedos. Everyone's droning. Ludwell's trying to break the ice by reciting an off-color limerick.**

**MARIA**

*(impatient)*

**I'll send your regrets. Honestly, why must I even bother?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Because, if you don't know about society, you don't have the satisfaction of avoiding it.**

*A KNOCK and a female ASSISTANT enters. There's a lot more NOISE and ACTIVITY behind her.*

**ASSISTANT**

**Elizabeth on line three.**

*Nicholas taps his fingers on his lips, considering.*

**MARIA**

**Your ex-wife.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I know who she is.**

*(to assistant)*

**Take a message.**

**ASSISTANT**

**Um... Happy Birthday, sir.**

*Nicholas squints.*

**MARIA**

*(icily)*

**Thank you, Maggie.**

*The assistant backs out. Nicholas returns to his computer.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I don't like her.**

**MARIA**

**I wouldn't mention the following, except he was very insistent. It's obviously some sort of prank...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What?**

**MARIA**

**A gentleman left a message requesting a lunch, but I assured him...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What gentleman, Maria?**

**MARIA**

**A Mister... Seymour Butts.**

*Nicholas looks up. He sits back, lost in thought.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to himself)*

**"Under the Bleachers"... by Seymour Butts.**

**MARIA**

**Pardon me? I'm afraid I don't...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Cancel lunch. Make reservations at Campton Place for me and Mr. Butts.**

*Maria nods, heading out, high heels clicking as she crosses.*

**NICHOLAS**

**And, put the reservations in my name.**

*CUT TO:*

**INT. CAMPTon place restaurant - day**

*Upscale. Quiet. Nicholas is in a booth facing the rear, studying a thick FINANCIAL DOCUMENT, making tiny notations. A WAITRESS arrives.*

**WAITRESS**

**Ready to order, sir?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm still waiting...**

*Nicholas points out the other plate. The waitress leaves.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Excuse me...**

*She returns. He slides his empty glass toward her.*

**NICHOLAS**

**This was iced tea.**

*He's returned to his report. The waitress takes the glass and leaves, irritated. Nicholas checks his watch. An EXAGGERATED SNEEZE is HEARD and liquid hits the back of his neck - AH-CHOO!... Nicholas jumps, sickened, turning to face CONRAD, who holds a SPRAY BOTTLE and smiles.*

**CONRAD**

**Hey, there, Nickie.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(repulsed)*

**Conrad, what a surprise. Gesundheit.**

**CONRAD**

**Happy Birthday, man.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(nods)*

**"Seymour Butts." I never get tired of that one.**

**CONRAD**

**That's why it's a classic. Come one, man... how 'bout a hug...?**

*Nicholas is wiping his neck with a napkin as Conrad forces a hug on him. Conrad takes a seat, good-looking, unkempt, tan, wearing a too-big suit jacket.*

**CONRAD**

**They gave me a free jacket at the door.**

**NICHOLAS**

**They'll be wanting it back.**

**CONRAD**

**Not after I'm done with it.**

*(laughs)*

**Actually, I've been here. In grad-school I bought crystal-meth from the maitre d'.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Which grad-school?**

*Conrad smiles. The brothers take each other in for a moment. Long moment. They're a bit stunned to be reunited.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You look good.**

**CONRAD**

**So do you. And to think I was worried...**

**NICHOLAS**

**About me?**

**CONRAD**

**How long's it been? Since mom died... four years? How are you?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Never better.**

**CONRAD**

**Elizabeth?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Divorced. Remarried to some pediatrician or gynecologist, or pediatric gynecologist, in Sausalito.**

**CONRAD**

**Too bad, I liked her. So, you're all alone in the House of Pain.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I redecorated. What about you?**

**CONRAD**

**Nowhere in particular. Don't you keep track of my whereabouts anymore?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Connie... what brings you here? Is everything alright?**

**CONRAD**

**Yeah.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You need anything?**

**CONRAD**

**No.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Really?**

**CONRAD**

**I don't need anything from you. I was laying on a beach somewhere in Spain, naked, and, it hit me - Nickie's birthday. So, here I am, four layovers, twenty-seven hours flying and one donkey ride later. Not necessarily in that order.**

*Conrad drops an envelope on the table.*

**CONRAD**

**For you.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You shouldn't have.**

*Nicholas opens it, takes out a sappy, Hallmark B-day card. A BUSINESS CARD falls out. Nicholas picks it up...*

**CONRAD**

**What do you get for the man who has just slightly more than everything?**

*The card: "Consumer Recreation Services." With a PHONE NUMBER and ADDRESS below.*

**CONRAD**

**Call that number.**

**NICHOLAS**

**"Consumer Recreation Services." What, do they make golf clubs?**

**CONRAD**

**Trust me. Call that number.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Why?**

**CONRAD**

**They make your life fun. Their only guarantee is you will not be bored.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Fun?**

**CONRAD**

**You've heard of it. You've seen other people having it. They're an entertainment service, but more than that.**

**NICHOLAS**

**This isn't an escort service?**

**CONRAD**

**It's a profound life experience.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Like a stroke?**

**CONRAD**

**Call them. Trust me.**

*The waitress shows up with Nicholas' iced tea, spills some. Nicholas blots it up with a napkin.*

**WAITRESS**

**Sorry. Let me get you another napkin.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'll be fine... if we could just...**

*She moves off as Nicholas raises a finger to order, ignored.*

**CONRAD**  
Tell me you'll call.

**NICHOLAS**  
Okay.

**CONRAD**  
Will you?

**NICHOLAS**  
I said I would...

**CONRAD**  
But, will you?

**NICHOLAS**  
Are you still on medication?

**CONRAD**  
*(taken aback)*  
Why would you say that?

*The waitress arrives.*

**WAITRESS**  
Ready to order, gentlemen?

**NICHOLAS**  
*(ignores, to Conrad)*  
I didn't mean it like it sounded...

**CONRAD**  
I'm not on anything anymore. I'm not even seeing a shrink. I'm happy.  
*(notices waitress, turning to her)*  
Do you mind... ?!

*The waitress gives him a look, leaves.*

**CONRAD**  
*(to Nicholas)*  
I thought you'd like this. best thing I ever did. If you don't want to do it, don't...

**NICHOLAS**  
I'll call them, okay?

**CONRAD**  
It doesn't matter...

**NICHOLAS**  
I'm going to call.

**CONRAD**  
Do it for you.

**NICHOLAS**  
Okay, okay... okay?  
*(pause, studies card)*  
I just... you know I hate surprises.

**CONRAD**  
I know.

*Conrad CLINKS his fork against a glass, motioning... Behind Nicholas, WAITERS, WAITRESSES and BUS-BOYS, lying in wait, now come to SING "HAPPY BIRTHDAY."  
Conrad stands, loving it. Nicholas forces a fake smile.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. NICHOLAS' NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT**

*The Bentley cruises hilly streets, ESTATES on all sides.*

**INT. NICHOLAS' BENTLEY - NIGHT**

*Nicholas is on his CELLULAR PHONE. CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYS.*

**FEMALE VOICE (v.o.)**  
... seen the profitability report. No one's happy with the numbers.

**NICHOLAS**  
*(into cellular)*  
Imagine how much more unhappy I am.

**FEMALE VOICE (v.o.)**  
**You'll deal with Alan?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Correct.**

**FEMALE VOICE (v.o.)**  
**Okay, NICHOLAS. Sleep well.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**I plan to.**

*He increases VOLUME on the CLASSICAL MUSIC, makes a turn.  
He looks out his window, watching the street roll past...*

*FLASHBACK/GRAINY HOME MOVIES - 1960's - DAY*

*SILENT, HOME MOVIE-ISH IMAGES as before: YOUNG NICHOLAS, 10, peers out from a LIMOUSINE, watching his neighborhood pass... PERIOD FASHIONS, PERIOD CARS and HOUSES...*

*BACK TO SCENE, IN THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas faces front. The Bentley comes to the formidable FRONT GATE of the mansion. The gate begins to slide open.  
Nicholas stares ahead, expressionless.*

*FLASHBACK/GRAINY HOME MOVIES - 1960'S - DAY*

*The LIMOUSINE pulls up the ungated driveway. Young Nicholas emerges, carrying book, waving goodbye to the CHAUFFEUR.*

*Young Nicholas runs past rose bushes, heading to the house, but slows, looking up...*

*High up, Nicholas' FATHER, in a robe, stands on a balcony railing, looking to the sky. He's weary, lowers his gaze...*

*Young Nicholas is puzzled, gives a tentative wave.*

*Father just stares, eyes dead, expression blank.*

*BACK TO SCENE, IN THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas looks down, puts the car in gear and drives...*

*THRU THE WINDSHIELD: the Bentley's headlights sweep the stately Van Orton house.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION, BACKYARD - NIGHT**

*Nicholas exits the garage, walks up the garden path. Ahead, Ilsa's leaving through the kitchen door of the house, heading across the yard to the GUEST HOUSE.*

**ILSA**

**Dinner's in the oven.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Thank you. Goodnight.**

*At the rear door, Nicholas stops himself.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Oh, I saw Conrad today.**

*Ilsa stops, looking back. They're far from each other.*

**ILSA**

**Did you? How is he?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Okay. I think he's into some sort of new personal improvement cult.**

**ILSA**

*(nods, at a loss)*

**Well... send my love, if you see him again.**

*Nicholas nods. Ilsa leaves.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*Nicholas uses mitts to remove a dinner plate from the oven, sets it on a waiting tray: huge cheeseburger and hand-cut french fries, perfectly presented.*

*Nicholas picks up a CUPCAKE with a B-day candle in it.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, DEN - NIGHT**

*Nose-bleed-high ceilings. Cavernous fireplaces. THREE TVs in the ENTERTAINMENT WALL, the largest showing CNN. Nicholas is seated in a chair facing his meal, pouring a glass of champagne.*

*He toasts to no one, takes a sip. The PHONE RINGS. Nicholas looks to it, hesitates. he hits SPEAKERPHONE.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to speakerphone)*

**Elizabeth.**

**ELIZABETH** *(v.o.)*

*(from speakerphone)*

**Happy Birthday, Nick.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(looks at his watch)*

**Eleven forty. You almost didn't make it this year.**

*Nicholas uses a REMOTE to MUTE BERNARD SHAW on the TV.*

**ELIZABETH (V.O.)**

**Did you have a great birthday?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Does Rose Kennedy have a black dress? You know my parties. I went not once, but twice through the spanking-machine.**

**ELIZABETH (V.O.)**

**I can only imagine. How are you?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Connie asked me the same thing today.**

**ELIZABETH (V.O.)**

**Connie, really? I always liked him.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Anyway...**

**ELIZABETH (v.o.)**

**I just thought this... might be difficult for you.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Just another birthday.**

**ELIZABETH (v.o.)**

**I meant because of your father.**

**NICHOLAS**

**That's right. He was forty, wasn't he? Hadn't thought about it, to tell you the truth, thanks for the reminder.**

**ELIZABETH (v.o.)**

**Why do I call you... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I honestly don't know. Listen, give my best to Doctor Mel and Rachel...**

**ELIZABETH (v.o.)**

**She has a little brother on the way. We just did the ultrasound.**

**NICHOLAS**

**No kidding? An official nuclear family. You must be pleased.**

**ELIZABETH (v.o.)**

**We are. We couldn't be happier.**

*Nicholas smiles thinly, bored, waiting for more...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Well, so... thanks for calling. I've got some work here...**

**ELIZABETH (v.o.)**

**I should let you go.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Take care of yourself.**

**ELIZABETH ( v.o.)**

**You too, Nicholas. I mean that, I really do.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Um-hm. Good luck. Bye.**

*He PUSHES OFF the PHONE in the middle of her "goodbye." He uses the t.v. remote to give BERNARD SHAW back his VOICE.*

*Nicholas eats, watching the news. He takes out the business card Conrad gave him, looks at it, puts it on the table.*

*The card: "Consumer Recreation Services."*

*Nicholas sits back, chewing. He stares at the ceiling.*

*FLASHBACK/GRAINY HOME MOVIES - 1960'S - DAY*

*SILENT IMAGES: Nicholas' FATHER stands on the high balcony, as before. He looks skyward one last time, then LAUNCHES INTO SPACE...falling in EXTREME SLOW MOTION...*

*A head-first dive...*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. OFFICE BUILDING, 10TH FLOOR - DAY**

*"DING," elevator doors open. Nicholas and TWO EXECUTIVES are talking. As PEOPLE get on, the two executives get off.*

**EXECUTIVE 1**

**We're getting off here.**

*Nicholas follows. He and the executives huddle nearby.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(voice low)*

**So, we understand each other?**

**EXECUTIVE 2**

**We do.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Make it work on paper, and you can count on my full support.**

**EXECUTIVE 1**

**Right-o. We'll talk. Soon.**

*They shake. The executives walk away. Nicholas returns to elevator, pushes the button, waiting. He turns, noticing...*

*A massive WALL OF TRANSLUCENT GLASS marks the offices of "C.R.S." Modern. Activity beyond it.*

*Nicholas finds this disconcerting. He takes out his wallet, digging up the C.R.S. business card, studying it... looking again to the glass facade to double check.*

*He looks at his Rolex.*

*ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GLASS DOORS*

*Nicholas enters. A female RECEPTIONIST speaks into a HEADSET/PHONE. EMPLOYEES mill about. UTILITY MEN sort crawlspace wiring.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to receptionist, shows "C.R.S." card)*

**Is this Consumer Recreation Services... ?**

*The receptionist takes the card. In the b.g., JIM FEINGOLD pays a DELIVERY GUY for CHINESE FOOD.*

**RECEPTIONIST**

*(into PHONE)*

**You shouldn't feel this reflects negatively upon yourself.**

*(to Nicholas)*

**Just a moment.**

*(back into phone)*

**We hope we haven't caused you any inconvenience. Thank you for considering C.R.S.**

*She studies the card, hangs up and motions to Feingold, a bald, amiable engineer-type who passes with his food bag.*

**RECEPTIONIST**

**Mister Feingold... could you assist this gentleman?**

*Feingold spins on his heels, looking, walking over with his hand out. Nicholas shakes.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Jim Feingold, V.P., E.D.A. Engineering and Data Analysis.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm not quite sure how this works. My brother...**

**FEINGOLD**

**Oh, here we go...**

*Feingold takes the car the receptionist offers, examines it, turns it over: finds FOUR NUMBERS on the back.*

**FEINGOLD**

*(of the numbers)*

**Excellent. Lets' get started.**

*Nicholas picks up his briefcase to follow Feingold.*

**INT. C.R.S. OFFICES - DAY**

*Big operation. Feingold leads past partitioned cubicles that seem to go on forever. C.R.S. WORKERS abound. TELEPHONE CO. WORKMEN operate on the phones.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Sorry about all the hullabaloo. We're still moving. Stick with me... I've got an office around here somewhere.**

*Feingold reaches open BOXES, begins collecting pages from each, loading up on all sorts of forms. He holds out his leaking, greasy food bag to Nicholas.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Mind holding this... ?**

*Nicholas reluctantly takes it, keeping it at arms length.*

**INT. FEINGOLD'S OFFICE – DAY**

*Feingold types at his computer. Nicholas stands, looking through the pile of forms on a clipboard.*

**FEINGOLD**

*(TYPES in keyboard)*

**V-A-N... O-R-T-O-N...**

*(studies screen)*

**A gift from Conrad Van Orton. Interesting...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What is?**

*Feingold picks up his Chinese food, eats using chop-sticks. The BOX features a grinning CARTOON PANDA mascot.*

**FEINGOLD**

*(still studying screen)*

**Your brother was a client with our London branch. We do a sort of informal scoring. His numbers were outstanding.**

*(holds up box)*

**Sure you're not hungry at all... ? Tung Hoy, best in Chinatown...**

**NICHOLAS**

**No, thank you.**

**FEINGOLD**

*(eating, mouth full)*

**You need to fill out those forms. Application, psych-tests: M.M.P.I. and T.A.T. For the financial questionnaire, don't answer anything you don't feel like. We'll run a T.R.W....**

*Nicholas looks through the densely written forms.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(reading FORM)*

**"I sometimes hurt small animals. True or False?" "I feel guilty when I masturbate..."**

*Nicholas looks up, skeptical. Feingold shrugs, embarrassed.*

**FEINGOLD**

**I don't write the questions. I just review them.**

**NICHOLAS**

**What's all this for?**

**FEINGOLD**

**We want a sense of your overall capabilities, limitations, turn-ons, turn-offs...**

**NICHOLAS**

**No, I mean, what is it for? What are you selling?**

**FEINGOLD**

**Oh... it's a game.**

**NICHOLAS**

**A game?**

**FEINGOLD**

**Tailored specifically to each participant. Think of it as a great vacation, except you don't go to it, it comes to you.**

**NICHOLAS**

**What kind of vacation?**

**FEINGOLD**

**It's different every time.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(patience waning)*

**Humor me with specifics.**

**FEINGOLD**

**We provide whatever's lacking.**

**NICHOLAS**

**And if nothing's lacking?**

**FEINGOLD**

**May I make two suggestions... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Do you really expect me to participate without knowing a single thing?**

**FEINGOLD**

**First, admit to yourself that it sounds intriguing. Second, you don't have to decide today. Take the silly tests, fill out the forms. One day, the game begins. You either love it or hate it. Decide then. We're like an experiential Book-of-the-Month-Club; drop out at any time with no further obligation.**

*(smiles)*

**That was my sales pitch.**

*Nicholas thumbs thru the forms one last time...*

**NICHOLAS**

**How long will these take?**

**FEINGOLD**

**An hour for those... maybe another for the physical.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Physical?**

**FEINGOLD**

**Cursory examination. Turn-your-head-and-cough sort of thing. You'll be out of here in no time.**

*Feingold takes out a ballpoint pen, clicks it and offers it to Nicholas. Nicholas takes it.*

*On the pen, in tiny letters: the C.R.S. LOGO.*

*CUT TO:*

*TESTING MONTAGE - VARIOUS C.R.S. offices - day*

*- Nicholas fills out an APPLICATION of endless questions.*

*- A #2 pencil fills in circles on a long M.M.P.I. form. CLOSE ON: "I often feel someone is following me. True/False." "I hate vegetables. True/False."*

*- WHITE ROOM. A stone-faced PSYCHOLOGIST holds up CARDS. Nicholas gives his unenthusiastic interpretation into a TAPE RECORDER, checks his Rolex.*

*One CARD shows a large ant in an apron feeding a TV dinner to a human child. That card is replaced by another of a man slipping head over heels on a banana peel.*

- *Nicholas wears HEADPHONES, facing a TECHNICIAN, raising a finger on his left fist or right fist for each low BEEP. Nicholas sighs, can't believe he's doing this.*

**INT. C.R.S. OFFI**

- *CEs, exam room - montage continues*

*Electronic MONITORS and PRINTERS record Nicholas' EEG and EKG. He's on an exam table, wearing a paper gown, covered in SENSORS and WIRES, talking on a C.R.S. telephone.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(into phone)*

**... cancel. Push Cooper back to Wednesday afternoon.**

*A TECHNICIAN studies readouts. A NURSE takes BLOOD PRESSURE.*

**MARIA (v.o.)**

*(from phone)*

**Mister Sutherland called about Baer/Grant Publishing.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(into phone)*

**Tomorrow. Hold on...**

*(to NURSE)*

**How much longer?**

**NURSE**

**Almost done.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I heard that two hours ago.**

*The nurse smiles, pumping up the blood-pressure cuff. Nicholas returns to the phone.*

*- DARK ROOM. Images FLASH on a screen: SHAPES, CURSE WORDS, PICTURES of U.S. PRESIDENTS, INSECTS...*

*In flickering light, Nicholas, still in his gown, watches with THREE BUTTONS before him, pushing one from time to time. Frustrated, he looks around. He stands and turns...*

*Directly into the projector's bright BEAM OF LIGHT.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Hello... ? Anyone there?**

*(squints, holds up hand)*

**Hello?!**

**INT. C.R.S. OFFICES, EXAM ROOM - DAY**

*Nicholas dresses, alone, pulling up his pants. He notices above: a MIRRORRED DOME in the corner, obviously a camera.*

*Nicholas pulls on his jacket as Feingold arrives.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Sorry to keep you waiting.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Don't worry. It's been terrific spending the entire day with your "crack team".**

**FEINGOLD**

**It's all down to this...**

*Feingold holds out a CLIPBOARD with PAPERWORK in it. Nicholas takes it, studies it, wary.*

**FEINGOLD**

**An insurance company requirement. It states that you are aware "the game" exists and that you are a willing participant in said game, so on and so forth.**

*Nicholas flips a page and Feingold leans over, pointing.*

**FEINGOLD**

*(of the paperwork)*

**Our guarantee. Payment's entirely at your brother's discretion and, as a gift, dependent on your satisfaction.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(still reading)*

**You mean, I don't like it, he doesn't pay?**

**FEINGOLD**

**It's never happened. We've never had an unsatisfied customer.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You mean, dissatisfied.**

**FEINGOLD**

*(glances at form)*

**That's right - you're a left-brain word fetishist.**

Nicholas uses the C.R.S. pen to sign. Feingold turns pages.

**FEINGOLD**

**Initials... initials, and...**

*(another page)*

**Sign here.**

*Nicholas is about to sign when Feingold grabs his wrist...*

**FEINGOLD**

**In blood.**

*(laughs)*

**Just kidding.**

*Nicholas signs. Feingold tears out a few PINK TINTED COPIES and hands them to Nicholas, kind of in a hurry now.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Your copies, thank you. Keep the pen. We'll let you know.**

*Feingold exits, gives a thumbs-up and a WINK, shuts the door. Nicholas is a bit bewildered. He continues dressing.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(muttering to self)*

**... grown man just winked at me.**

*CUT TO:*

**INT. ATHLETIC CLUB, RACQUETBALL COURT - NIGHT**

*WHAM! - a blue racquetball BALL SLAMS a wall...*

*THRU A WINDOW: Nicholas plays, alone, swatting violently at the ball. We HEAR a PHONE CONVERSATION in VOICE OVER:*

**CONRAD (v.o.)**  
**What about Monday or Tuesday?**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**  
**Bad for me.**

**CONRAD (v.o.)**  
**How 'bout tonight?**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**  
**Unfortunately I'm working all evening. Wednesday's the only possibility right now...**

**CONRAD (v.o.)**  
**Okay.**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**  
**Dinner?**

**CONRAD (v.o.)**  
**Fine. I get to pick the restaurant.**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**  
**By the way, I went to C.R.S...**

**CONRAD (v.o.)**  
**Really? What'd you think?**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**  
**They seemed disorganized.**

*Nicholas finishes playing, exits. The ball keeps bouncing.*

**CONRAD (v.o.)**  
**Well, the office is new. When I did it in London, they'd been around awhile. You gonna do this?**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**  
**Haven't decided yet.**

*CUT TO:*

**INT. ATHLETIC CLUB, LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT**

*Carpeted floors and mahogany lockers. Nicholas sits at his locker, wet, in a monogrammed robe, toweling his hair. VOICES can be heard O.S.: BUSINESSMAN 1 and BUSINESSMAN 2.*

**BUSINESSMAN 1** (*o.s.*)

**... getting in on the ground floor of the next Disneyland.**

**BUSINESSMAN 2** (*o.s.*)

**C.R.S. will not go public. They're family owned.**

**BUSINESSMAN 1** (*o.s.*)

**Stranger things have happened.**

**BUSINESSMAN 2** (*o.s.*)

**No, they haven't, actually.**

*Nicholas leans to looks around a locker. Businessman 1 and 2 dress, two fat-cats. Nicholas leans back, still listening.*

**BUSINESSMAN 1** (*o.s.*)

**They just opened here.**

**BUSINESSMAN 2** (*o.s.*)

**The game in San Francisco? You see, they're doing fine without any of us.**

**INT. ATHLETIC CLUB, LOUNGE/BAR - NIGHT**

*Nicholas enters, looking around, spotting Businessman 1 and 2 across the room. He gets the BARTENDER'S attention, motioning to the businessmen.*

**NICHOLAS**

**New members?**

**BARTENDER**

**I believe so, sir.**

**NICHOLAS**

**This round's on me.**

*Nicholas moves casually toward the men...*

**INT. ATHLETIC CLUB, BAR/LOUNGE - TIME CUT**

*LATER. Another round arrives at the table where Nicholas and Businessman 1 and 2 chat. The businessmen smoke cigars.*

**BUSINESSMAN 1**

**... last time I played Pebble, I swore I'd never pick up a club again.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Speaking of games... I couldn't help but overhear you talking about C.R.S.**

*Businessman 1 and 2 share a furtive glance. Nicholas discretely waves cigar smoke out of his face.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I only mention this because I took the test this afternoon, down on Montgomery Street.**

**BUSINESSMAN 2**

**Did you? Kudos.**

**BUSINESSMAN 1**

**So, yours hasn't started?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Not yet. I was hoping you could tell me... uh...**  
*(almost embarrassed)*

**What is it?**

*Businessman 1 and 2 smile. Shared enlightenment.*

**BUSINESSMAN 1**

*(to Businessman 2, knowingly)*

**Ahh, what is it?**

**BUSINESSMAN 2**

**The eternal question.**

**BUSINESSMAN 1**

*(to Nicholas)*

**I envy you. I wish I could go back and do it for the first time all over again...**

*He raises his glass. They toast.*

**BUSINESSMAN 1**

**Here's to... new experiences.**

*(gulps drink)*

**If you'll excuse me, I've got to be going. 'Night, Jon... Nicholas.**

*He leaves. Nicholas focuses on Businessman 2.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Did you play recently?**

**BUSINESSMAN 2**

**Hm? No, about a year ago. I was working out of Los Angeles.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(nodding)*

**I've heard good things about their London branch.**

*(leans in)*

**You have to admit, it sounds like some fantasy, role-playing nonsense.**

**BUSINESSMAN 2**

**You want to know what it is? What it's all about?**

*(off Nicholas' nod)*

**John. Chapter nine. Verse twenty-five.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I, uh... haven't been to Sunday school in years...**

**BUSINESSMAN 2**

**"Whereas once I was blind, now I can see."**

*(rises)*

**Night, Nick. Best of luck.**

*Businessman 2 puffs his cigar, walks away. Nicholas watches him go, then pauses, puzzled, mouthing the words to himself.*

**CUT TO:**

**INT. LAW FIRM, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

*A table of unhappy LAWYERS. Nicholas goes thru a thick CONTRACT with a red pen, CIRCLING, CROSSING-OUT and SCRAWLING QUESTION MARKS ON paragraphs that displease him.*

*SUTHERLAND, trust personified, in his late 50's, stands behind Nicholas, imperturbable.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(still scrawling)*

**As far as I'm concerned...**

*(reading, x-ing out)*

**... if the Baer/Grant meeting does not take place tomorrow, it might as well never take place at all.**

*Nicholas slides the contract to the center of the table.*

*Sutherland*

*When Mr. Van Orton boards his plane in the morrow, he will have every contract, side agreement and addendum; the complete closing package, flawlessly revised.*

*INSTANT UPROAR as the contract is grabbed up. All the lawyers talk at once, fearful, arguing, protesting.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**Ladies and gentlemen...**

*(as they quiet)*

**This is why you're paid twice what you deserve. So you will miss another opera you would've fallen asleep during anyway...**

*During this, Nicholas' CELLULAR PHONE is HEARD RINGING. Nicholas takes it out, irritated.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**The meeting has been moved forward. It affords you the opportunity to show our client how well you will rise to his exhilarating challenge.**

*QUIET COMMOTION resumes as Nicholas takes his cellular phone to a corner, answering impatiently:*

**NICHOLAS**

*(into cellular)*

**Yes?**

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (v.o.)  
(from cellular)

**Nicholas Van Orton?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes, who is this?**

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (V.O.)  
**This is Cynthia calling from C.R.S...**

**NICHOLAS**  
**How did you get this number?**

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (v.o.)  
**We've finished processing your application...**

**NICHOLAS**  
**I'm in a meeting...**

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (v.o.)  
**... I'm afraid your application was rejected.**

**NICHOLAS**  
(pause)

**Pardon me?**

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (v.o.)  
**You shouldn't feel this reflects negatively upon yourself. We  
hoped we haven't caused you any inconvenience...**

**NICHOLAS**  
**This is absurd...**

**WOMAN'S VOICE** (v.o.)  
**Thank you for thinking of C.R.S.**

*CLICK - she's hung up. Nicholas folds the phone and pockets it, his mind suddenly far away from the meeting behind him. Sutherland steps close, concerned, quiet...*

**SUTHERLAND**  
**Anything wrong... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Nothing. Nothing at all.**

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. FINANCIAL DISTRICT STREETS - NIGHT**

*Nicholas guides the Bentley down streets lined with skyscrapers, staring ahead. A previous PHONE CONVERSATION is HEARD in V.O., a PHONE RINGING... RINGING... RINGING...*

**SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR (V.O.)**

**Would you like voice-mail?**

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**

**I suppose.**

**SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR (V.O.)**

**I'll connect you. Thank you for calling the Four Seasons.**

**EXT. NICHOLAS' NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT**

*The Bentley heads towards home. The V.O. PHONE CONVERSATION CONTINUES uninterrupted, CLICKING, then...*

**CONRAD'S VOICE (v.o.)**

*(voice-mail recording)*

**This is Conrad. Leave a message.**

**NICHOLAS (V.O.)**

*(waits till after BEEP)*

**Connie, it's Nicholas. Give me a ring when you get a chance...**

**INT. BENTLEY - NIGHT**

*The Bentley reaches the VAN ORTON GATES, which open slow. V.O. CONVERSATION CONTINUES:*

**NICHOLAS (v.o.)**

**About your birthday gift. Things are tight right now. I'm just not sure whether it'll fit my schedule. Anyway, see you at dinner tomorrow.**

*The PHONE is HEARD DISCONNECTING.*

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION - NIGHT**

*The Bentley's headlights sweep the front of the Van Orton house. There's something there, on the ground...*

*INSIDE THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas stops the car, peering ahead, worried...*

*THRU THE WINDSHIELD: A BODY lies face down on the edge of the driveway.*

**FLASHBACK/GRAINY HOME MOVIES - 1960'S - DAY**

*The BODY of Nicholas' FATHER, sprawled face-down, in nearly the same place, head twisted, mouth bloody.*

*BACK TO SCENE*

*Nicholas gets slowly out of the Bentley, reluctant.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Hello! What are you doing there?**

*(no reaction)*

**Wonderful...**

*Nicholas CLAPS his hands. The body doesn't stir. Nicholas looks all directions, then approaches.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Are you okay?**

*Nicholas nudges the body with his foot. He crouches, confused, turning the limp body. It's a grotesque HARLEQUIN, not unlike the clown from Nicholas' seventh birthday, with a shiny face of painted wood.*

*Nicholas looks around for an explanation.*

**CUT TO:**

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, FOYER - NIGHT**

*The front door opens. Nicholas enters with the Harlequin, depositing it on a hallway BENCH.*

*A half-inch of RED RIBBON sticks out from the Harlequin's lips. Nicholas tugs the ribbon... pulling out a GOLD KEY tied to the other end.*

*Three letters embossed on the key: "C.R.S."*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, DEN - NIGHT**

*Nicholas sits with his evening's meal, examining the key. CNN on TV. He looks across the room to the couch where the Harlequin is slumped staring back.*

**BERNARD SHAW** (v.o.)  
*(from television)*

**... according to Nicholas Van Orton, millions of Americans will be affected by this legislation.**

*Nicholas hears this vaguely in the back of his mind, looks to the TV. BERNARD SHAW has moved on to the next story.*

*Nicholas goes to the Harlequin, opening its hinged mouth, attempting to look inside. He gets a knife from his tray, uses it to probe the Harlequin's mouth, jabbing, prying.*

**BERNARD SHAW** (v.o.)

**... number of criminals behind bars growing by record numbers, with Van Orton pointing the finger at stiff, anti-crime regulations...**

*Nicholas looks up. He heard that. He walks toward the TV. Bernard Shaw is reporting, nothing strange.*

*Nicholas waits. Nothing. He walks away...*

**BERNARD SHAW** (V.O.)

**... largest portion of population incarcerated. These figures were given at a press conference called today by Mr. Nicholas Van Orton.**

*Nicholas turns, disbelieving. Bernard Shaw apparently looks out FROM THE TELEVISION, perturbed...*

**BERNARD SHAW** (*v.o.*)

**You going to spend the rest of the evening prying at that clown's mouth.**

**NICHOLAS**

(*dumbfounded*)

**I... I don't...**

**BERNARD SHAW** (*v.o.*)

**It's frustrating for me if you don't even pretend to pay attention.**

**NICHOLAS**

**What is this... ?**

**BERNARD SHAW** (*v.o.*)

**This is your game, Nicholas, and welcome to it. I'm here to let you in on a few ground rules...**

*Bernard Shaw's FACE RIPPLES and GLITCHES occasionally, revealing its true, computer-generated nature.*

**BERNARD SHAW** (*v.o.*)

**You've received the first key and others will follow. You never know where you'll find them, or when or how you'll need to use them, so keep your eyes open.**

**NICHOLAS**

(*waves his hand*)

**How do you... ? You can see me?**

**BERNARD SHAW** (*v.o.*)

**I see you, I hear you. Why don't we save the questions till...**

**NICHOLAS**

**How does this work?**

**BERNARD SHAW** (*v.o.*)

**There's a tiny camera looking at you right now.**

**NICHOLAS**

**That's impossible.**

**BERNARD SHAW** (v.o.)

**You're right. Impossible. You're having a conversation with your television.**

*Nicholas touches the TV, feeling the seams.*

**BERNARD SHAW** (v.o.)

**It's miniaturized.**

*Nicholas begins poking his butter knife between slots of the television's speaker, stabbing, poking...*

**BERNARD SHAW** (v.o.)

**Do you know how dangerous that is?**

*Nicholas pries at the plastic speaker cover. It's not easy, but he's determined, cracking the plastic...*

**ILSA** (o.s.)

**Mister Van Orton... ?**

*The speaker cover breaks off with a SNAP! and Nicholas spins, holding the broken piece.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes... Ilsa, what is it?**

*ON T.V., Bernard Shaw grabs up pages, resumes...*

**BERNARD SHAW** (v.o.)

**... and in other news, auto workers vowed to remain on picket lines...**

*Ilsa's in the doorway, wondering.*

**ILSA**

**Is everything alright?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Fine.**

**ILSA**

**I've finished for the evening. Will you be needing anything else?**

**NICHOLAS**

**No, thank you. Goodnight.**

**ILSA**

**Goodnight then.**

*She leaves. Nicholas throws the piece of television away. Bernard Shaw stops reading now that the coast is clear.*

**BERNARD SHAW (v.o.)**

**Who was that?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Never mind who that was.**

**BERNARD SHAW (v.o.)**

**You're uncomfortable. You want to know how a camera got into your home, don't you?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes, I do.**

*ON TELEVISION: Bernard Shaw is REPLACED by a FISH-EYED IMAGE of NICHOLAS' DEN. It shows Nicholas from behind.*

*The P.O.V. is not from the TV. Nicholas crosses the room, keeps his eye on the TV as a guide...*

**BERNARD SHAW (v.o.)**

*(from t.v., o.s.)*

**... cold... cold... warmer... warmer...**

*ON TELEVISION: Nicholas gets bigger as he gets closer to...*

*The Harlequin. Nicholas leans, looks at the clown's eyes...*

*ON TELEVISION: Nicholas' face is huge, distorted.*

*Nicholas pries one of the Harlequin's glass eyes with his knife, pulling it out and examining it.*

*ON TELEVISION: the Harlequin's P.O.V. turns to STATIC. Bernard Shaw returns with a PHONE NUMBER SUPERIMPOSED.*

**BERNARD SHAW (v.o.)**

**Write this number down. It's a 24-hour Consumer Recreation Services hotline, for emergencies only. But, don't call asking what the object of the game is; figuring that out is the object of the game.**

*Nicholas feels his pockets, finds the C.R.S. pen. He comes up with a VALET PARKING TICKET to scrawl the number on.*

**BERNARD SHAW (V.O.)**  
**Good luck and congratulations on choosing C.R.S. We now  
return you to your regularly scheduled program...**

*STATIC and SNOW, then CNN's Bernard Shaw is back for real, newscasting. Nicholas reads the number he wrote.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION - NIGHT**

*Nicholas crouches at a coaxial CABLE LINE at the side of the house. He fingers a BOX with a miniature LOOP and RABBIT EAR ANTENNA that's been spliced into the line.*

*He starts to unscrew it... then thinks twice. He leaves it.*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*Nicholas enters thru the back door. He pauses, looking out at the night. He closes the door and locks it. He PUNCHES the ALARM CODE into a KEYPAD.*

*Nicholas takes his Bentley key chain from its hook, takes out the gold, "C.R.S." key... adding it to the keychain.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY**

*Nicholas enters the vast, busy terminal, briefcase in hand. He walks with purpose, but is extra-aware of the world around him. He notices...*

*A MAN and WOMAN engaged in a SIGN LANGUAGE conversation.*

*A MAN reading a newspaper peers from behind the pages.*

*A JANITOR opens a door with a big KEY CHAIN full of keys.*

*A MAN on a payphone seems to be staring at Nicholas...*

*Nicholas turns his head to keep an eye on the man, practically bumping into a grimy HOMELESS BUM...*

**HOMELESS BUM**

**Help me out there? Used to be an affluent fella, till some folks did this to me...**

*Nicholas moves away, leaving the homeless man behind.*

**HOMELESS BUM**

**Don't ignore me. I got screwed.**

**INT. AIRPORT, RED CARPET LOUNGE - DAY**

*Quiet MUSIC. Rich people's lounge. Nicholas sits with a cup of coffee, considering magazines on a coffee table. Two seats down, a BUSINESSMAN coughs and rises, leaving his newspaper on the empty seat between Nicholas and himself.*

*Nicholas glances down, curious when he sees... A smiling-clown-face INFANT'S RATTLE on the seat beside, sticking out from under the paper.*

*Nicholas catches only a glimpse of the exiting businessman. Nicholas looks around, picks up the rattle.*

*He rattles it, studies it, rattles it in his ear. He tries to see thru it by holding up to the light. He doesn't notice the MOTHER who enters with a baby, watching him.*

**MOTHER**

**Excuse me...**

*Nicholas looks up, realizes, awkward, offering the rattle. She takes it and exits.*

*There's a BESPECTACLED MAN watching Nicholas.  
Nicholas notices. Tries to ignore.*

*But, bespectacled man is really staring.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(sits forward, fed up)*

**May I help you... ?**

*Nicholas' tone has turned other heads. Bespectacled man seems embarrassed, shy, taps his chest.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What... ? What is it?**

*Besppectacled man taps his chest again, points at Nicholas.  
Nicholas looks down. Inside his suit jacket - a huge blue INK STAIN across his shirt. Nicholas stands, aghast, taking out the offending pen.*

*It's the "C.R.S." pen, dripping ink.*

## **INT. AIRPORT, BATHROOM - DAY**

*Running water. Nicholas tries to clean his shirt, blotting it ineffectually with wet paper towels. He looks in the mirror, crestfallen. The stain's worse.*

**DEEP VOICE (o.s.)**

**Hey, buddy... you still out there?**

*Nicholas looks around. He's alone, except for a MAN in a TOILET STALL. All we see are the man's brown shoes.*

**DEEP VOICE (o.s.)**

*(from toilet stall)*

**I'm in a little bit of trouble...**

*The man's hairy hand motions from below the stall. Nicholas backs away, nervous, grabs his briefcase.*

**DEEP VOICE (o.s.)**

**I need paper. There's none in here. Come on, help a guy out...**

*Nicholas considers, then hurries to exit.*

**DEEP VOICE (o.s.)**

**Hello?! Anybody? Hello?**

## **INT. AIRPORT, METAL DETECTORS - DAY**

*Nicholas' briefcase rides into the x-ray machine.*

*Nicholas drops his keys, cellular phone and Rolex in a tray. He passes thru the metal detector. A SECURITY GUARD brings the tray to him.*

**SECURITY GUARD**

**Nice watch.**

*Nicholas smiles tolerantly, collects his belongings. He waits at the x-ray conveyor belt, which is stopped. A FEMALE GUARD studies the x-ray monitor.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Is there a problem?**

*The female guard looks up, turns the conveyor belt back on. Nicholas' briefcase arrives.*

*Nicholas moves on, aggravated. Ahead, Sutherland rises from a seat along the concourse hallway, walking to meet him.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I wasn't expecting you.**

**SUTHERLAND**

**Wanted to wish you luck. Not that you'll need it.**

*Sutherland offers the contract, points to Nicholas' shirt.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**Attractive...**

**NICHOLAS**

*(paging thru contract)*

**Don't ask.**

**SUTHERLAND**

**I checked it personally.**

*Nicholas nods, props his briefcase up on a window ledge, opens it and drops the contract in.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. SEATTLE AIRPORT, RUNWAY - DAY**

*Nicholas' jet touches down.*

**EXT. SEATTLE AIRPORT, LOADING ZONE - DAY**

*Nicholas follows a CHAUFFEUR. The chauffeur opens a LIMO door. Several pressed SHIRTS hang waiting.*

**EXT. BAER/GRANT BUILDING - DAY**

*In the shadow of the Baer/Grant Publishing offices, the limousine idles. Downtown Seattle.*

**INT. BAER/GRANT PUBLISHING, ALAN BAER'S OFFICE - DAY**

*Meet ALAN BAER, elderly CEO, blue-blooded, pissed.*

**ALAN BAER**

**All these years... the first time you ever step foot in these offices,  
it's to ask me to step down?**

*Nicholas stands by CHILDREN'S TEXT BOOK mock-ups. "Math-Magic." "Wonder Words." They're  
"Little Baer Books."*

**NICHOLAS**

**You promised you'd meet projections, Alan. A dollar sixty per  
share you said. So, I don't think this is so surprising a visit.**

**ALAN BAER**

**Projections were far too optimistic.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Admittedly...**

**ALAN BAER**

**Our E.P.S. was one fifty last quarter. We're up eight cents per  
share.**

**NICHOLAS**

**But, the expectation was ten. And, in this case, expectation is  
everything.**

**ALAN BAER**

**Will you really hold me to it over pennies?**

**NICHOLAS**

**My stock's falling. Isn't yours? Those pennies are costing me  
millions.**

**ALAN BAER**

**The stock will turn.**

**NICHOLAS**

**It probably will. In fact, I'd go so far as to say it almost certainly will, in time. Why should I settle for that?**

**ALAN BAER**

**Because it's fair. Give me next quarter. If you still feel this way, vote your shares...**

**NICHOLAS**

**You're talking tomorrow. Today is what counts.**

**ALAN BAER**

**You intractable son-of-a-bitch. If your father could see you now...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What?**

**ALAN BAER**

**Your father was a friend. Goddamn it... I watched you grow up. How do you end up treating me like this?**

*This swings Nicholas into a new mode: acutely-focused anger.*

**NICHOLAS**

**It is so very inappropriate for you to mention my father. Or, did you think this, between us, was friendship? Just because you went fishing with my father, I should sit on my hands while you throw my money away?**

**ALAN BAER**

**Now, look...**

**NICHOLAS**

*(holds up his hand)*

**I'll be done in a minute. You misspoke before. You're not "stepping down." I'm taking you out at the knees. The whole point is to prove that you're not deciding anything anymore. I'm firing. Action's taken. Confidence restored. Stock goes up. I sell my shares.**

**ALAN BAER**

**There is no Baer/Grant Publishing without Alan Baer.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Remember Daniel Grant? Do they say, "without Daniel Grant, there is no Baer/Grant Publishing?" He's gone sailing, Alan. He's out there enjoying his golden years, probably wondering where you are.**

*At Alan's desk, Nicholas clears a space for his briefcase.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You made a promise. You failed. The severance I'm offering is more than equitable. Valid tonight only.**  
*(looks at watch)*

**For one hour.**

*Nicholas takes a pen from holder, lays it on the blotter.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'll step outside, so you'll have the privacy you need to read and sign it.**

*He tries to unlatch his briefcase clasp. It's stuck.*

**ALAN BAER**

**I could fight you on this.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You could. But, if I leave without your signature, this agreement begins to disintegrate; benefits shrink, options narrow, compensations shrivel.**

*Nicholas works on the briefcase the whole time, distraction growing as it becomes a true struggle...*

**NICHOLAS**

**So... it is in your best interest... to sign presently.**

*Nicholas sits, pulling the latch, trying to see what's jammed. It refuses to open. Nicholas stares at it, frustrated, then... an odd realization...*

*He takes his keys out, finds the C.R.S. KEY, tries it...*

*It doesn't fit. It was never meant for this lock. Alan Baer watches, wondering.*

*Forgetting himself, Nicholas grabs up his briefcase, pulling, grunting, desperate, striking it with his palm.*

*Nicholas straightens, immediately composed.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Well... as luck would have it, you've just gotten a reprieve. I'm sure you'll come around to my way of thinking**

*(picks up briefcase)*

**I have a plane to catch. My attorneys will contact you.**

*Nicholas exits. Alan Baer doesn't know quite what to think.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. SEATTLE AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY**

*On the sidewalk, Nicholas bashes his briefcase over and over again against a fire hydrant.*

**EXT. SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT, RUNWAY - SUNSET**

*Nicholas' jet touches down.*

**INT. CAMPTON PLACE RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

*Nicholas sits staring. His battered briefcase is near. He checks his watch, impatient, flags down a WAITER...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Is there a message up front from a Conrad Van Orton?**

*The waiter goes. Nicholas drums his fingers. He slides out of the booth, rising, when a WAITRESS knocks into him with a tray. Wine spills. Glasses crash.*

**WAITRESS**

**Oh, excuse me...**

*Nicholas looks down at his wine-stained front. The waitress is CHRISTINE, same waitress as the other night. She tries to clean him up with a napkin.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I'm so sorry.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Please, don't do that...**

*Nicholas snatches the napkin from her, wiping his suit.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I apologize sir, I'm really having a bad day...**

**NICHOLAS**

**A bad month. You did the exact same thing to me last week.  
Christine's taken aback.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Don't help me, just get more napkins. And soda water.**

**CHRISTINE**

*(gets more napkins)*

**It was an accident.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Terrific. I now have a hundred dollar dry cleaning bill.**

**CHRISTINE**

**I said I was sorry...**

*Nicholas turns his back on her, throwing wet napkins, picking up clean ones, still patting at the stain.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(stews)*

**Asshole.**

*Nicholas turns, angry. The MAITRE D' arrives, shocked.*

**MAITRE D'**

**Christine! Mister Van Orton is a valued customer...**

**CHRISTINE**

**Then, you kiss his ass.**

*She's leaving, but the maitre d' pulls her aside.*

**MAITRE D'**

**You don't talk to me like that.**

**CHRISTINE**

*(quiet, evenly)*

**I apologized, I offered to help.**

**MAITRE D'**

**Clean out your locker.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Fine, Dennis. Soon as I get my money for this week.**

**MAITRE D'**

**I'll be right with you.**

*Christine heads to the back. The maitre d' motions for BUS BOYS to clean, smoothly guiding Nicholas to a new table...*

**MAITRE D'**

**I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Van Orton. If you're not too uncomfortable, will this table suit you for a complimentary meal... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes. Fine.**

**MAITRE D'**

**I'll fetch you waiter.**

*Nicholas sits, keeps wiping his shirt as the maitre d' hurries away. After a moment, a uniformed WAITER moves past, leaves a CHECK...*

**WAITER**

**Check, sir.**

*Nicholas picks up the check, indignant.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Excuse me...**

*But, the waiter is long gone. Nicholas shakes his head, then the check catches his eye... "DON'T LET HER GET AWAY" scrawled across it.*

*Nicholas turns to look. The waiter who brought the check crosses the room, goes out the front door. Nicholas rises, following...*

**EXT. CAMPTON PLACE RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

*Nicholas comes out the front, sees: the waiter has crossed the street, still moving...*

*The waiter gets in a CAR as the car pulls quickly away.  
Nicholas is baffled, looks at the check, heads back inside.*

**EXT. ALLEY, BEHIND RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

*Christine exits the kitchen door, purse over her shoulder.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(back to doorway)*

**Yeah... ? Well, fuck you and your vichyssoise, prick.**

*She heads down this dark alley. After a moment, Nicholas follows, hurrying to catch up, briefcase in hand.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Pardon me... Miss... ?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Oh, no... you.**

*Christine picks up the pace.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm not sure how this works. Do you have something for me... ? I got this note...**

**CHRISTINE**

**What are you babbling about, psycho?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I want to know what's going on. Are you part of this?**

**CHRISTINE**

**What's going on? I'm going on my second job this month, and now I'm going on unemployment.**

*She keeps walking. Nicholas stops, ponders. He follows. They're nearing the end of the alley.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**Excuse me, I need to explain...**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Don't explain. Fuck off. Goodbye.**

*Nicholas steps in a deep, splattering pot-hole, stumbles, pants soaked, stopping, fed up.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**Son of a bitch!**

*Christine rounds the corner, heading down the street. Nicholas reaches the sidewalk, watches her go.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(shouts after)*  
**I'm trying to... ask you...**  
*(giving up)*  
**I'm apologizing...**

*He heads back the way he came. A strangled CRY is HEARD. Nearby, a HEAVY MAN falls to his knees, then falls face forward to the concrete. Nicholas looks around, alone...*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(to Heavy Man)*  
**Are... are you okay?!**

*DOWN THE SIDEWALK, Christine slows, looks back...  
Nicholas bends, trying to see the man's face, seems afraid to actually touch him.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**Jesus... this can't be...**

*Nicholas looks up to see Christine running back.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**What's with him?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**I don't know... he fell.**

*Christine kneels, turns Heavy Man on his side and feels for a pulse. Heavy Man convulses.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**Do you know what to do?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I don't think he's breathing.**

*Christine clears Heavy Man's airway, pulling saliva and mucus from his mouth with two fingers.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Oh, God... !**

**CHRISTINE**

**Don't just stand there, get help!**

**NICHOLAS**

*(taking out his CELLULAR)*

**This can't be real...**

**CHRISTINE**

**He's pissing his pants. Is that real enough for you? Call 911!**

**NICHOLAS**

**Alright... okay...**

**CHRISTINE**

**He's turning blue!**

*Nicholas is starting to believe, dialing, circling as Christine gives C.P.R. He listens to his phone -  
STATIC.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Damn...**

*He backpedals in the street, cellular to his ear, trying to catch a signal, tilts his head. STATIC. A  
HORN BLARES - a CAR barely misses Nicholas, DRIVER cursing.*

*Nicholas anxiously punches buttons. He spots a SQUAD CAR and runs toward it...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Police!**

**SAME STREET - TIME CUT...**

*SIREN BLASTING, an AMBULANCE is parked. PARAMEDICS pull a stretcher, helped by TWO  
COPS, hurrying to the prone Heavy Man. A crowd is gathered.*

*Nicholas and Christine watch the paramedics work. COP ONE hands Nicholas a clipboard, everything hurried, overlapped:*

**COP ONE**

**You have to fill these out.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I don't know this man.**

*Christine takes the clipboard.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(to cop, of clipboard)*

**What do you need... ?**

*Paramedics hoist Heavy Man on a stretcher and take him to the ambulance. Cop Two goes to help them lift.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to Christine)*

**I can't get involved in this.**

*Christine moves to climb into the ambulance.*

**COP TWO**

*(to Nicholas)*

**We'll have to detain you.**

**COP ONE**

**Report's got to be filled out. Ride with your wife. We'll meet at the hospital.**

**PARAMEDIC**

*(shouting to cop)*

**We're moving!**

*Cop One leads Nicholas to the ambulance.*

**NICHOLAS**

**She's not my wife.**

**COP ONE**

**It's a few blocks. Help me out, huh, pal?**

*Nicholas reluctantly gets in.*

## **EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT**

*Busy streets. The ambulance rockets on...*

## **INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT**

*SIREN WAILING. Paramedic works. Christine fills out forms. Nicholas tries to see where they're going, frustrated.*

**NICHOLAS**

**This is nuts.**

**CHRISTINE**

*(without looking up)*

**What is your problem?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(digging in his pocket)*

**Ten minutes ago, I'm looking forward to a quiet dinner. I get a note...**

*Nicholas slaps his CHECK on top of Christine's paperwork.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Suddenly I'm in an ambulance. Why am I in an ambulance?!**

*He looks out the window. Christine studies the check: "DON'T LET HER GET AWAY," finds it odd, looks to Nicholas.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(wincing, to paramedic of Heavy Man)*

**He's breathing, isn't he? Is the siren entirely necessary?**

## **INT. UNDERGROUND EMERGENCY ENTRANCE - NIGHT**

*"Emergency Vehicles Only." The ambulance races down a RAMP, moving across this big underground garage, doing a u-turn...*

*Backs up toward a busy EMERGENCY ROOM ENTRANCE. MEDICAL PERSONNEL everywhere. Other ambulances. INJURED PEOPLE. Our paramedics get out and unload Heavy Man.*

*Nicholas and Christine get out, disoriented. Heavy Man's rushed inside via automatic doors. Christine hands off the clipboard to Nicholas, following the stretcher...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Let's talk to whoever can get this over with...**

**NICHOLAS**

*(reading clipboard)*

**Hold on...**

*(of the clipboard)*

**They want your driver's license number.**

*Christine returns to look, and suddenly ALL THE LIGHTS GO OUT. Nicholas and Christine look up. In the surrounding darkness, we HEAR EVERYONE FLEEING...*

*FOOTSTEPS SCATTER... then, SILENCE.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You've got to be kidding.**

**CHRISTINE**

**What... is... happening... ?**

*The only light is a BULB inside the ambulance.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(disgust)*

**I was trying to tell you... it's a game.**

**CHRISTINE**

**A game?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(tosses clipboard)*

**It's run by a company... they play elaborate pranks. Things like this. I'm really only now finding out myself.**

**CHRISTINE**

**What are you talking about?**

**NICHOLAS**

**The lights went out, one hundred people ran away...**

**CHRISTINE**

**You mean, the guy who turned blue and wet himself... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm sorry, about this...**

**CHRISTINE**

**You should be.**

*Christine climbs into the ambulance, searching.*

**CHRISTINE**

**There's got to be a flashlight.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(quietly)*

**I don't understand why they're getting you involved.**

*INT THE AMBULANCE, she finds all drawers and cabinets EMPTY.*

**CHRISTINE**

**This is so fucked. You don't fuck with people like this. I thought that guy was gonna die. I gave him mouth to mouth!**

*She digs in her purse, finds a book of restaurant MATCHES. She lights a match, climbing out.*

**CHRISTINE**

**See you around.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Where are you going?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Home.**

**NICHOLAS**

**How do you know that's the way?**

*She just keeps walking.*

*A distant "DING" is HEARD. Far away, an ELEVATOR OPENS with a light inside. Christine stops.*

*Christine changes direction, heading for the elevator. Nicholas hurries to follow. the match burns out. A moment, then Christine strikes another, lighting the way, barely. As they squeeze between parked cars, Christine searches...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Where'd you all go? Motherfucking frat boys. You better hide.**

*(to Nicholas)*

**Is your life so pathetic that this is something you're willing to pay for?**

**NICHOLAS**

**It was a gift... from my brother.**

**CHRISTINE**

**How thoughtful. The gift of inconvenience.**

*Nicholas stumbles. A beer bottle is HEARD SKITTERING away.*

**INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT**

*They reach the elevator. Nicholas pushes a button.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Ground floor.**

*He and Christine step back and wait, looking up. And wait... and wait, looking unhappily to each other.*

*Nicholas pushes all the buttons. Nothing happens. Christine opens the EMERGENCY PHONE door: NO PHONE. Nicholas touches his finger to a KEY HOLE below the buttons.*

*He takes out keys, finds the C.R.S. KEY, tries it... it fits. He turns it. DOORS CLOSE and the ELEVATOR MOVES. Nicholas is pleased, sees Christine wondering.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(of the key)*

**Long story.**

*(off her stare)*

**I found this key in the mouth of a wooden Harlequin.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Never mind.**

*The ELEVATOR LURCHES, DROPS, then HALTS. LIGHTS OUT, replaced by RED EMERGENCY LIGHT. A MOTOR is HEARD DYING.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I don't like that.**

*(pushing BUTTONS)*

**We're stuck.**

*Nicholas takes out his phone, puts it to his ear. STATIC.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(pockets phone)*

**No signal.**

*Christine pounds on the buttons and doors, frustrated. She tries to pry the doors open. Can't.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What's the going rate for the "trapped-in-elevator-adventure" these days?**

*Nicholas hits BUTTONS hard. Christine studies the ceiling, moving under the square seam of the TRAP DOOR, pointing.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Don't even think about it.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Why not?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Read what it says: "Warning, do not attempt to open. If elevator stops, use emergency... "**

**CHRISTINE**

**If there was one.**

**NICHOLAS**

**"... wait for help." Wait for help. I'm not opening a door that specifically warns me not to.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Are you suggesting we wait till someone finds us.**

*Nicholas considers this, looks around.*

**INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT - NIGHT**

*The trap door CREAKS open. Nicholas looks up from the elevator, standing on hand rails. He gets down.*

*IN THE ELEVATOR*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'll give you a boost.**

**CHRISTINE**

**You first.**

**NICHOLAS**

**This isn't an attempt to be gallant. If I don't lift you, how are you going to get there?**

**CHRISTINE**

**You can pull me up.**

**NICHOLAS**

**It's much easier this way. Come on, step up...**

**CHRISTINE**

**No.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Please...**

**CHRISTINE**

**I'm not wearing any underwear. Okay? There, I said it. Satisfied?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(looks at her skirt)*

**Oh. Fine.**

*Nicholas starts climbing...*

*IN THE ELEVATOR SHAFT*

*Nicholas comes up, batting cobwebs, tentative. He grips a handful of grease, disgusted. He climbs thru, catching his jacket on a jutting screw, FABRIC RIPPPPPPPING...*

**CHRISTINE (o.s.)**

**Oops.**

*Nicholas stands in the shaft, pissed. He looks for a place to wipe his hand, wipes it on his jacket, looking up.*

**NICHOLAS**

**There's a ladder here.**

*IN THE ELEVATOR*

**CHRISTINE**

**My hero. Let's go.**

*Nicholas offers his grease covered hand from above.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I don't think so.**

*Nicholas withdraws that hand, offers the clean one.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT**

*Elevator doors shift, forced from inside. Nicholas climbs out, then pulls Christine out behind him. They're head-to-toe filthy, clothing ruined.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Damn. My briefcase.**

*He looks back down the shaft.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I'll wait.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(resigned sigh)*

**It's not like anyone could actually open it.**

*They walk, looking at the vast LOBBY and sky-lit ATRIUM.*

**NICHOLAS**

**This is C.R.S.**

**CHRISTINE**

**What's C.R.S.?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Consumer Recreation Services. It's their building. They...**

*A BEEP is HEARD. Nicholas looks above... Sees a MOTION SENSOR with a green light blinking.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Oh...**

*An ALARM SOUNDS; a loud RINGING BELL. Nicholas backs away.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Don't panic. When security gets here, we simply explain what happened...**

**CHRISTINE**

**They'll love that.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes... well...**

*FOOTFALLS. Nicholas turns to see Christine running away.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(over her shoulder)*

**Explain for both of us!**

*Nicholas looks around, unsure. He follows...*

**EXT. ALLEYWAY, BEHIND C.R.S. BUILDING - NIGHT**

*Christine bursts thru "EMERGENCY EXIT" doors. Nicholas arrives. He grips her arm and they walk, out of breath.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Walk, slowly. Don't draw attention. Out for a stroll.**

*TIRES SCREECH. A SPOTLIGHT HITS them from behind.*

**ANGRY VOICE (o.s.)**

**You! Stay where you are!**

*It's a SECURITY CAR on the other side of a fence.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Run!**

*They run, down the alley.*

**ANGRY VOICE**

**Stop!**

**EXT. NARROW ALLEYWAY - NIGHT**

*SIRENS HEARD. Christine and Nicholas sprint round a corner, all out... thru puddles, glancing back. Ahead, a SECURITY CAR skids, starting for them. Christine and Nicholas double back. She takes the lead...*

*Christine spots something, stops, makes a choice, moving into a very NARROW ALLEY space.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Where are you going?**

*(looks in, worried)*

**You can't fit in there.**

*She's making fine progress regardless.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I can't!**

*Nicholas sees the SECURITY CAR bearing down. He must turn sideways to fit in the narrow alley, shuffling after.*

*BEHIND, the car stops and SECURITY GUARD gets out, club in hand. In the car, a GERMAN SHEPHERD barks.*

*Security Guard tries to fit down the space, but can't. His belly's too big, his utility belt catching. He runs back to the car, opens the door...*

*The German Shepherd shoots down the alley, a projectile...*

**DOWN THE TIGHT ALLEYWAY**

*Christine comes out into OPEN AREA, running on, looking up. Ruined buildings on all sides, CHAIN LINK FENCES everywhere. Nicholas arrives, pissed, trying to catch up...*

**NICHOLAS**

**You deserted me.**

**CHRISTINE**

**You're a grown man. I'm not responsible for you.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You're the one who started running.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Me? You're the one who... ?**

*(sees something)*

**Shit!**

*Christine runs faster. Nicholas looks back...*

*The German Shepherd's on its way...*

*Nicholas faces front, runs, arms pumping, terrified...*

*The German Shepherd's closing, growling...*

*Christine and Nicholas reach into the CHAIN LINK FENCE ahead...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Climb!**

*Christine makes the leap first, scrambling up the fence. Nicholas climbs beside her, pulling himself up...*

*The German Shepherd leaps... bites Nicholas' leg...*

*Nicholas YELLS - PANTS RIPPING. The dog falls with a mouthful of cloth.*

*Christine and Nicholas reach the top of the fence, clinging, balanced on their elbows, looking back. The German Shepherd barks and leaps.*

*Christine and Nicholas start over the fence, beginning their climb down the other side...*

*ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE: three OTHER DOGS run from the shadows, Pit-Bulls and a Doberman, jumping and biting...*

*Nicholas and Christine scramble back to the top.  
All the dogs hop up and down, snapping. They gnash at each other and bark at each other, frenzied.*

*Nicholas and Christine have no choice but to hang, stranded.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Now what?**

*Nicholas looks up, daunted. He spots something...*

*There's a place where the fence runs under a FIRE ESCAPE.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Follow me...**

*Nicholas gets a toe-hold, shifts his elbows, grunting, beginning the herky lateral climb toward the fire escape. Christine follows his example.*

*Slow going. DOGS BARKING NON-STOP, nipping at their heels.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Shut up, you stupid, fucking dogs!!**

*BARKING AND BARKING AND BARKING.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What are they guarding around here? Each other?**

*Nicholas slips, keeps grip, but loses a SHOE...*

*The dogs catch the shoe in their jaws, fighting for it. Nicholas watches the shoe get torn to pieces, keeps moving.*

**NICHOLAS**

**There goes a thousand dollars.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Your shoes cost a thousand dollars?**

**NICHOLAS**

**That one did.**

**CHRISTINE**  
*(to herself)*

**... two hundred dollars a toe.**

*Nicholas reaches the fire escape, balancing precariously to reach it. He climbs gracelessly up...*

*He helps Christine after him, bringing her on board. They lean against the rail, exhausted. Nicholas looks to the multi-leveled ladders above.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Let me guess. Me first?**

*He climbs. Christine looks down at the dogs, stupefied, looks up at Nicholas on the CREAKING rusty fire escape.*

**CHRISTINE**  
*(to herself)*

**This is getting out of hand.**

*As she starts up.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. GARBAGE ALLEY - NIGHT**

*ABANDONED BUILDING. Boarded-over windows are kicked open from inside. Nicholas and Christine look out.*

*They climb out onto ANOTHER FIRE ESCAPE, two stories up above a trash filled, dumpster crowded alley.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**Never did catch your name.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Nicholas. Nicholas Van Orton.**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Nicholas Van Orton? What are you, a czar?**

*Nicholas moves to the catch of the fire escape ladder, unhooks it. The LADDER DROPS to bridge the gap to the ground, KEEPS GOING, sliding free and disconnecting - falls flat to the ground below with a LOUD, ECHOING CLATTER.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(pause)*

**That's classic.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(staring down, misery)*

**Why... ?**

*Christine crosses to the far edge of the railing, points.*

**CHRISTINE**

**We hang down here and drop. The garbage'll break our fall.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I think not.**

*Christine climbs over the fire escape railing...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Afraid you're going to ruin your one-legged suit?**

*She lowers herself down, hanging off, legs dangling...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Be careful...**

*A metal door is THROWN OPEN below. TWO THAI BUS-BOYS come out, dumping garbage, smoking cigarettes, laughing.*

*Above, Christine looks up at Nicholas, mortified. She nods urgently for him to help her back up. Nicholas climbs the rail, beside her, trying to get a grip, none too effective.*

*Below, one bus-boy looks up, shouting. The other bus-boy looks. They back away, SPEAKING RAPID THAI, pointing.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What are they... ?**

*(realizing)*

**Hey!**

*Christine lets go with one hand, trying to pull her skirt shut. Nicholas loses hold, drops her...*

*Christine lands hard in garbage.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Are you okay... ?!**

*Nicholas drops, alarmed... lands in broken plastic bags of wet garbage, slipping as he moves to Christine. Bus-boys are helping her up.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I'm okay... I'm okay, thank you...**

*Bus-boys keep questioning in Thai. Nicholas and Christine brush off. Nicholas takes off his spewed jacket, shakes it in disgust, straightens his tie. They stop...*

*At the doorway, all the COOKS, BUS-BOYS, WAITERS and DISH-WASHERS stare at Nicholas and Christine in wonder.*

*Nicholas and Christine stare back. Nicholas looks to Christine, brushing rotten lettuce off her shoulder, nods to the restaurant workers, clears his throat.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Table for two, please.**

*He offers his arm to Christine, she takes it, they head in.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT**

*ONE CONTINUOUS LONG SHOT: Nicholas and Christine walk, taking their time, eating out of take-out boxes.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Where are we going?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(points at skyline)*

**That tall, bright building. Near there.**

*They walk a long time in silence. A POLICE CAR moves from behind. POLICEMAN shines a flashlight up and down Nicholas.*

**POLICEMAN**

**Everything okay, miss?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Yeah. How are you?**

*The police car keeps pace, then drives on.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE - NIGHT**

*Nicholas enters, turning on lights, which dim to a warm glow. Christine takes in the impressive office. Nicholas crosses to a wall, opens a hidden closet, chooses a shirt.*

**NICHOLAS**

**There's a shower, if you'd like.**

*Christine leans to peek in the bathroom.*

**CHRISTINE**

**A shower in your office? You an athlete or something?**

*Nicholas puts on a new shirt.*

*Christine circles the desk, runs her fingers down his phone.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What exactly do you do?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Investment banking. Moving money from place to place.**

*Christine has wandered to the closed blinds, opening them to reveal a breathtaking view of the city.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Nice.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Hm?**

*(looks)*

**Oh, yes.**

*Nicholas takes out a SWEATSHIRT and offers it.*

**NICHOLAS**

**A fresh shirt...**

**CHRISTINE**

*(takes shirt, crossing)*

**If this was my office, I wouldn't keep that closed.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I don't spend much time looking out the window.**

*(goes to desk)*

**I'll call your taxi.**

*Christine faces away, throws off her filthy shirt...*

*Nicholas, on the phone, looks to Christine's shapely back and RED BRA. He averts his eyes, embarrassed...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Oh! Uh...**

*Christine puts on the PENN STATE sweatshirt, straightens it.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Thanks.**

*Nicholas nods, phone to his ear.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. VAN ORTON BUILDING - NIGHT**

*TWO CARS. Nicholas opens the door of the first for Christine. She faces him, close.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I know the owner of Campton Place. I could talk to him in the morning.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Don't. It was a shitty job anyway. I overreacted.**

*Christine sits, keeps her legs out of the door of the cab. Nicholas stands waiting for her to pull her legs in.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Goodnight.**

**CHRISTINE**

**I don't think I've ever spent this much time with someone who didn't even ask my name.**

**NICHOLAS**

**The maitre d' called you Christine.**

**CHRISTINE**

*(remembering)*

**Right. Call me Christy.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Goodnight, Christy. IT was nice meeting you.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Give me an address so I can send your shirt back.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Keep it.**

*She looks up at Nicholas, sits inside. He shuts the door and steps back. Christine rolls her window down.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I have a confession to make. Someone gave me six-hundred dollars to spill drinks on you, as a practical joke.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Seriously? What did they say?**

**CHRISTINE**

**They said five hundred. I said six. They said, the guy in the gray flannel suit. I think I said, you mean the attractive guy in the gray flannel suit?**

*Christine smiles, rolls up the window. The taxi leaves. Nicholas watches it go. A twinge of regret.*

**EXT. CAMPTON PLACE RESTAURANT - LATER NIGHT**

*Nicholas' cab pulls up at the closed restaurant, behind the Bentley. A restaurant VALET sweeps the sidewalk, waves to greet as Nicholas gets out of the cab.*

**CUT TO:**

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT**

*Nicholas comes from the bathroom, just showered. He looks at CNN on TV. He walks to change channels: infommercials, B+W movies, cartoons. BUGS BUNNY. Nicholas leaves Bugs Bunny on, steps back, watching.  
He sits on the bed.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM - DAY**

*Nicholas sleeps. Cordless PHONE RINGING. He stirs, awakens, face creased, hair mussed.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(in phone, voice cracks)*

**Hel... hello?**

**MARIA (v.o.)**  
*(from phone)*

**Mr. Van Orton, it's Maria. I... I wasn't sure I should call...**

**NICHOLAS**  
*(into phone)*

**What time is it?**

*Nicholas studies his CLOCK RADIO: 11:05. He picks it up and examines it, suspicious.*

**MARIA (v.o.)**  
*(from phone)*

**Eleven o'clock. I took the liberty of rescheduling your nine a.m. with Allison and Dietrich. Are you... not feeling well?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**I'll be in in an hour. I left my briefcase at fifteen-thirty-three Montgomery. Check with their lost and found.**

**MARIA (v.o.)**  
**Alan Baer's in town, at the Ritz-Carlton.**

**NICHOLA**  
**Really?**

**MARIA (v.o.)**

**He's requesting dinner tonight.**

**NICHOLAS**

**We'll let him know.**

**MARIA (v.o.)**

**Also, the Claremont Hotel called to say they have your American Express Card at the front desk. You left it last night?**

*Nicholas is confused. He crosses with the phone, finds and studies his wallet. He fingers an empty plastic pocket.*

**MARIA (v.o.)**

**Should I send someone... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**No. Give me their number.**

**MARIA (v.o.)**

**Eight, four, three, three-thousand.**

**NICHOLAS**

**See you in awhile. Goodbye.**

*Nicholas hangs up, dials.*

**HOTEL MANAGER (V.O.)**

*(from phone)*

**Claremont Resort and Spa.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(into phone)*

**This is Nicholas Van Orton. I'm told my American Express card...**

**HOTEL MANAGER (v.o.)**

*(from phone)*

**Yes, Mister Van Orton. Everything's in order. The concierge has arranged for the wine and flowers in the room.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Has he?**

**HOTEL MANAGER** (v.o.)

**And, a young woman phoned just now to say she's on route but running a little late.**

**NICHOLAS**

(*pause*)

**Did this young woman leave her name?**

**HOTEL MANAGER** (v.o.)

**I'm sure I don't know.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Thank you.**

*Nicholas hangs up, interest piqued.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. BAY BRIDGE - DAY**

*Nicholas drives the Bentley.*

*PREVIOUS CONVERSATION:*

**SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR** (v.o.)

**There's no answer. Would you like his voice mail?**

**NICHOLAS** (V.O.)

**Tell him his brother called, and to call back as soon as he can.**

**SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR** (v.o.)

**Yes, sir.**

*CELLULAR DISCONNECT. Nicholas looks in his rearview mirror.*

*THRU MIRROR: a grimy BLACK SEDAN follows... keeps distance.*

**EXT. CLAREMONT HOTEL - DAY**

*Grand hotel. Nicholas leaves his car with the valet.*

**INT. CLAREMONT HOTEL, LOBBY - DAY**

*At the GLASS DOORS, Nicholas pushes thru. A THIN MAN in a plain suit isn't looking, BUMPS Nicholas.*

**THIN MAN**

**Sorry. My fault.**

*Thin Man exits. Nicholas crosses the opulent lobby to the desk. The grinning HOTEL MANAGER spots him coming.*

**HOTEL MANAGER**

**Ah, Mr. Van Orton. Here you go...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Have we met?**

*He hands over Nicholas' AMEX CARD, which Nicholas studies.*

**HOTEL MANAGER**

**I believe so. If you would just sign here...**

*The manager offers a CHARGE CLIP and pen. Nicholas looks at the manager, the slip, then signs. The manager hits a BELL. A BELLHOP arrives.*

**HOTEL MANAGER**

**Show Mr. Van Orton to his room.**

**NICHOLAS**

**The key?**

**HOTEL MANAGER**

**Hm?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Is there a room key?**

**HOTEL MANAGER**

**Didn't I give you two?**

**NICHOLAS**

**No, you didn't...**

*Nicholas shakes his head and pats his pockets, stops, feeling one pocket... reaches in and takes out a GOLD KEY on a hotel key chain. Nicholas looks to the GLASS DOORS.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Cute.**

**INT. CLAREMONT HOTEL, HALL - DAY**

*Long hallway. Nicholas follows the Bellhop. They arrive at the door to ROOM 277.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'll take it from here.**

*He tips the Bellhop, who leaves, uses the key, entering...*

**INT. CLAREMONT HOTEL, ROOM 277 - DAY**

*Nicholas shuts the door. There's a room-service cart with wine chilling. Nicholas moves down this short hall...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Hello... ?**

*His jaw drops. The room is TRASHED. Curtains shredded, furniture overturned, television imploded, mirror spiderweb-smashed, walls full of holes.*

*Nicholas moves forward, having spotted...*

*His battered BRIEFCASE on the ruined mattress.*

*The latch is undone. Nicholas opens it.*

*Inside: MANY PHOTOGRAPHS of blurry sex acts. Bodies in motion. Limbs. Breasts. A NAKED WOMAN tied to the bed. One PHOTO shows two women entwined with a NAKED MAN who appears to be Nicholas. It's a so-so cut-and-paste job.*

*A LOUD KNOCKING at the door startles Nicholas. He closes the briefcase, freaked.*

*He hurries to the door as POUNDING is HEARD again, puts his eye to the peephole.*

*THRU THE PEEPHOLE : a MAID gets out her keys.*

**MAID**  
(thru door)

**Time to make up the room.**

*Nicholas fumbles with the SECURITY CHAIN, slides it in place as the door opens - stopped. Nicholas keeps hidden.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**Could you come back later?**

**MAID**  
**Yes, sir. Sorry.**

*THRU THE PEEPHOLE: the maid moves away.*

*Nicholas crosses to retrieve his briefcase, and is crossing back when he stops in his tracks upon seeing...*

*On a dresser, a MIRROR covered in COCAINE lines and residue.*

**IN THE BATHROOM**

*Nicholas turns on the faucet, washing the cocaine down the sink, hands shaking. The mirror edge cuts his thumb and he gives a cry, drops the mirror, which SHATTERS on the floor.*

*Nicholas sucks his thumb, puts it under the faucet. He finds a hand cloth and wraps it round his thumb.*

*There are big blood droplets on the sink and floor.*

*Nicholas grabs wads of tissues from a box on the back of the toilet, using them to blot up the blood, throwing tissues in the toilet and flushing.*

*Nicholas keeps wiping blood. The toilet burps, OVERFLOWING.*

**WATER SPILLS OUT...**

*Nicholas backs away, panicked, exiting...*

**INT. CLAREMONT HOTEL, HALL - DAY**

*Nicholas looks out from Room 277. He sees a MAID CART, HEARS an O.S. VACUUM CLEANER. He run-walks down the hall, hugging his briefcase. He pushes thru a STAIRWELL door.*

**EXT. CLAREMONT HOTEL - DAY**

*Nicholas takes his Bentley back from the valet, pulling out fast to the street. Further back, the grimy BLACK SEDAN moves from the curb.*

**INT. NICHOLAS' BENTLEY - DAY**

*Nicholas' mind races. He wipes sweat off his face. He glances in his rearview...*

*THRU MIRROR: the black sedan, following again.*

*Resolve comes to Nicholas, and anger. He speeds up.*

**EXT. BERKELEY STREETS - DAY**

*The Bentley weaves thru traffic, taking a corner sharp. Nicholas spins the wheel, heading...*

*DOWN AN ALLEYWAY*

*Nicholas brakes hard, gets out of the Bentley and heads for the mouth of the alley...*

*As the black sedan follows, blocked, stopping. Nicholas comes to pull open the car door, confronting the rumped, PLUMP GUY behind the wheel.*

**PLUMP GUY**

**What the fuck... ?!**

**NICHOLAS**

**Why are you following me?**

**PLUMP GUY**

**I don't know what you're talking about. I'm just driving...**

*He falters as he follows Nicholas' angry gaze to the seat beside him where a FILE is open to a PHOTO of NICHOLAS.*

**PLUMP GUY**

*(fumbling to close file)*

**Look... what I'm doing is none of your business...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Is Alan Baer "the Game?" Is that what this is?**

**PLUMP GUY**  
(defiant pause)

**Friend... why don't you back off.**

*He leans as he talks... inside his jacket, he wears a gun.  
Nicholas reaches across and pulls the gun, hefting it.*

**PLUMP GUY**

**Hey... !**

**NICHOLAS**  
(of the gun)

**Nice touch. Does the game use real bullets... ?**

*Nicholas points the gun at the sedan's rear tire, FIRES! The gun is SHOCKINGLY LOUD - BURSTS the TIRE!*

*Nicholas looks to the smoking weapon, blanching.  
Plump Guy leaps to the other seat, scrambling out the passenger door, submissive...*

**PLUMP GUY**

**Okay, I'm a private investigator. Somebody hired me to keep tabs on you...**

*Nicholas lifts the gun, unsure, pointing it awkwardly...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Who... who hired you?**

*Plump Guy bolts, running away down the alley. Nicholas aims the gun after him, but catches himself, lowers it. He runs the other direction, back to the Bentley...*

*Nicholas gets in the car, drops the gun on the seat, drives.*

**INSIDE THE BENTLEY**

*Nicholas returns to the street, glancing back. He looks at the gun. He opens the glove compartment, throws the gun in. He takes out his CELLULAR PHONE, dialing...*

**MARIA (o.s.)**  
(from cellular)

**Mister Van Orton's office...**

**NICHOLAS**

*(into cellular)*

**Maria. Have Sutherland meet me at the Ritz-Carlton. I'm on my way there now.**

**MARIA** *(o.s.)*

**May I tell him... ?**

*But, Nicholas is already pushing DISCONNECT.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. RITZ-CARLTON HOTEL, LOBBY - DAY**

*Nicholas enters with briefcase. Sutherland rises to follow.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**What's happened...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Follow me.**

**INT. RITZ-CARLTON, ALAN BAER'S SUITE - DAY**

*A HOTEL EMPLOYEE rolls a room service cart out. Nicholas pushes past with Sutherland in tow. Alan Baer, his handsome WIFE and lovely DAUGHTER are seated at a table where a WAITER lays out a splendid meal.*

**ALAN BAER**

**Nicholas... this is unexpected.**

*Nicholas takes out the SEX PHOTOS, throws them on the table.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Do you actually believe that because you publish children's books, anyone's going to care about my reputation?**

*Wife and daughter are frightened. Alan Baer covers the photos with his napkin.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You could print pictures of me wearing nipples rings and butt-fucking Captain Kangaroo... all anyone would wonder was whether the stock was up or down.**

*Sutherland's nervousness grows by the second.*

**DAUGHTER**

**Daddy... ?**

**ALAN BAER**

**It's alright, dear. Mr. Van Orton...**

**SUTHERLAND**

**Nicholas...**

**NICHOLAS**

*(still to Alan Baer)*

**That you've involved Conrad... is unforgivable. I am now your enemy.**

**ALAN BAER**

**Are you finished?**

**NICHOLAS**

**No. This is my lawyer, Samuel Sutherland. I thought you two should meet.**

**ALAN BAER**

**We met, this morning. I signed the termination contract for Baer/Grace. I accepted your settlement, Nicholas. You were right. I'm going sailing.**

*Nicholas opens his mouth, but no words come out. He looks to Sutherland. Sutherland nods to confirm.*

**ALAN BAER**

**You're welcome to join our luncheon. Maybe we can straighten this out.**

*(motioning to)*

**My wife, Mary Carol, and my daughter-in-law, Kaliegh.**

*Wife and daughter give mumbled greetings, having no desire to meet Nicholas. Nicholas just stands stymied.*

**NICHOLAS**

**It seems I've... please, disregard my apparently misguided remarks.**

*Nicholas heads for the door, hurrying out. Alan, wife, daughter, the waiter and Sutherland exchange looks.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**Well...**

*Sutherland walks to retrieve the sex photos.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**Enjoy your lunch.**

*Sutherland smiles, exiting.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE - DAY**

*Nicholas sits at his desk, opens his briefcase, checking the contents. Soon, Sutherland arrives, shutting the door. He watches Nicholas, deciding.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**How concerned should I be?**

**NICHOLAS**

**It was a misunderstanding.**

*Sutherland puts the SEX PHOTOS on the desk.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Someone's playing hardball. It's complicated. Can I ask you a favor?**

**SUTHERLAND**

**You know you can.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Find out about a company called C.R.S. Consumer Recreation Services.**

**SUTHERLAND**

**Sounds like they make tennis rackets. What do we know?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Just what I told you.**

**SUTHERLAND**

**Nothing else?**

*Nicholas remembers. He opens up a file drawer in his desk.*

**NICHOLAS**

**They gave me their waiver. On their... wait...**

*Nicholas hands over a file, returning to his briefcase. He finds an ENVELOPE with a SMILEY-FACE on it. He opens it. He takes out a silver-plated METAL CRANK. Like a handle.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**What is this?**

*Nicholas looks up. Sutherland's looking in the file, quizzically, hands it back...*

*Nicholas studies PINK-TINTED PAGES; the pages Feingold gave him, once dense with words, now completely blank except for NICHOLAS' SIGNATURE and INITIALS several places.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(of the pages)*

**Christ... I can't believe it... invisible ink?**

**SUTHERLAND**

**You're joking.**

**NICHOLAS**

**It's what they do. It's like... being toyed with by a bunch of...**

*(picks up SEX PHOTOS)*

**Depraved children.**

*Nicholas examines each photo. Sutherland goes to leave.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**Very well. If you tell me not to worry, I shan't.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Sam...**

*(as Sutherland stops)*

**Thank you.**

*Sutherland exits. Nicholas keeps examining the pictures. He sits forward, finding something...*

*IN A PHOTO: the out-of-focus back of a NAKED WOMAN wearing only a RED BRA.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(INTO PHONE-INTERCOM)*

**Maria. The other night... last night, there was a woman here named Christine. I called a taxi, from that company we use...**

**MARIA (v.o.)**

*(FROM PHONE-INTERCOM)*

**Elite?**

**NICHOLAS**

**What?**

**MARIA (v.o.)**

**Elite Taxi Company?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Look into it. Find out which car answered and where they took her.**

*Nicholas sits back. He picks up the METAL CRANK, twists it in his hands, frowning, pockets it.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION, GARAGE - NIGHT**

*The rapid SOUND of a PHONE OFF THE HOOK is HEARD OVER: BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP... The Bentley pulls in. Headlights out.*

*INT THE CAR, Nicholas takes the gun from the glove compartment and puts it in his briefcase.*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*Dark. The PHONE OFF THE HOOK is LOUDER, grating: BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP... Nicholas comes in the back door, peering into the weak moonlight.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Ilsa?**

*Nicholas replaces the phone in its cradle. QUIET.*

*He reaches for a light switch, ZAP! - BLUE SPARKS leap to his fingers. Nicholas YELPS and shakes his hand out.*

*The switch has been RIPPED OUT, leaving exposed wiring. Nicholas goes to his briefcase, getting the gun and moving forward, wary, calling out...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Ilsa?**

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, DEN - NIGHT**

*In the blackness, Nicholas comes to stand at the doorway, levels the gun at someone across the room...*

**NICHOLAS**

**I've got a gun!**

*There's a roaring fire in the giant fireplace and a FIGURE in a chair. Nicholas eases forward...*

*It's the HARLEQUIN in the chair, with a GLOSSY B+W PHOTO between its teeth. Nicholas pulls out the picture...*

*A POLICE PHOTO of NICHOLAS' FATHER, his body sprawled. It's stamped "PROPERTY SFPD" in red.*

*There's a NOTE paper-clipped behind: "Like my father before me, I choose eternal sleep." At the bottom, a RED SIGNATURE ARROW affixed, "Please Sign Here."*

*Suddenly, ALL LIGHTS SURGE TO LIFE, icy and ghoulish - each and every bulb replaced by BLACK LIGHT...*

*Nicholas pivots slowly, taking in the horror...*

*The wrecked den is covered in FLUORESCENT SPRAY-PAINT GRAFFITI: "WELCOME HOME" "FUCK YOU" "NICHOLAS VAN COCKSUCKER" "SUCK IT!" "C.R.S. RULES" "HAVING FUN,*

*RICH BOY?" Everywhere. Across windows, paintings and curtains.*

*The ceiling is covered in "MOMMA'S BOY" and OBSCENITIES.*

*Scaffolding's been left behind. Used SPRAY CANS on the splattered Oriental rug. A PAINT/AIR COMPRESSOR.*

**NICHOLAS**

**... fuckers...**

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT**

*A glowing ANARCHY SYMBOL sprayed across the door which is thrown open by Nicholas as he enters.*

*It's all BLACK LIT here too. GRAFFITIED and DESTROYED. "HELTER SKELTER" in jolting letters. Nicholas backs out...*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, VARIOUS ROOMS - NIGHT**

*FOLLOW: Nicholas down the hall and around corners, BLACK LIGHTS above, walls covered in CURSES and MULTI-COLORED SQUIGGLES. Like a bad trip thru the Bat-Cave...*

*DOWN STAIRS*

*Past OTHER ROOMS likewise awash in vibrant slurs...*

*THRU THE KITCHEN*

*Now also revealed as ruined. Nicholas goes out the door...*

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION, BACKYARD - NIGHT**

*Nicholas runs to the GUEST HOUSE.*

**INT. VAN ORTON GUEST HOUSE, FOYER - NIGHT**

*BANGING on the FRONT DOOR. Ilsa comes to look thru the peephole, opens the door to a breathless Nicholas.*

**ILSA**

**Mr. Van Orton... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Ilsa... you're alright?**

**ILSA**

**Yes. What do you mean? What's wrong?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Did the alarm go off? The house... they... you didn't see... ?**

**ILSA**

**I don't know what you're talking about. What's happened?**

**NICHOLAS**

**There's been a break in. Lock this door and stay here. Don't move a muscle.**

*Nicholas runs back toward the house.*

**ILSA**

**Be careful!**

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION, BACKYARD - NIGHT**

*Crossing the lawn, Nicholas pulls out his cellular phone, dialing as he runs, takes out his gun.*

**911 OPERATOR (v.o.)**  
*(from cellular)*

**Nine-one-one, emergency...**

**NICHOLAS**  
*(into cellular)*

**I need the police. There's been a break-in at my home...**

**911 OPERATOR (v.o.)**  
*(from cellular)*

**Okay, sir. Stay on the line and give me your address...**

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*Nicholas enters, still on the phone, locking the door, beginning to punch the security code into the ALARM KEYPAD.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(into cellular)*

**Twenty-two Moore Street. At the corner of Moore and Buchanan.**

**911 OPERATOR (v.o.)**  
**Now, sir, you said it was a break-in...**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Yes...**

**911 OPERATOR (v.o.)**  
**Are you sure they're gone... ?**

*As Nicholas finishes the security code, the KEYPAD BEEPS, and Nicholas straightens, worried.*

**911 OPERATOR (v.o.)**  
**... are you sure there's not still someone somewhere in the house?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**I... don't think so.**

*And with the DYING HUMMMMMMMMM of POWER FAILING, all the BLACK LIGHTS GO OUT. Nicholas raises his gun...*

**NICHOLAS**  
**Oh God...**

*Pointing it into the dark kitchen, backing, hand trembling.*

**911 OPERATOR (v.o.)**  
**Hello? Are you still there?**

*Behind, a DARK FIGURE outside rises against the kitchen door window, POUNDING FRANTICALLY! Nicholas leaps and spins, CRYING OUT in terror, dropping the gun...*

*The gun bounces across the linoleum.*

*It's CONRAD at the kitchen door, haggard and scared, his pale face pressed against the glass, pointing frantically.*

**CONRAD**

**Meet me out front!**

*Conrad ducks away, moving on.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT**

*The Bentley takes a corner fast, heading downhill, moving from residential to mostly urban...*

*INSIDE THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas drives. Conrad looks back over his shoulder, a man on the run, big, dark circles under his eyes.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Tell me where we're going.**

**CONRAD**

**Just drive, man.**

*(slumps low)*

**It's fucking nuts!**

**NICHOLAS**

**What's this all about, Connie?**

**CONRAD**

**Shhhhhhh. Wait... wait...**

*Conrad flips the sunshade, looks behind it, feels the fabric of the roof and the seam of the door.*

*He grips the interior LIGHT, breaks it open, pulling the bulb and wires.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What are you doing?**

**CONRAD**

**They're methodical. They're nothing if they're not that.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Who?**

**CONRAD**

**C.R.S. Who do you think? Jesus H., thank your lucky charms.  
To think what I almost got you into.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(miserable)*

**Yeah, almost...**

**CONRAD**

**You dodged a bullet.**

**NICHOLAS**

**How do you mean exactly?**

**CONRAD**

**They fuck you and they fuck you and they fuck you. And then,  
just when you think it's done, that's when the real fucking  
begins.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Slow down, take a breath...**

**CONRAD**

**It doesn't stop, Nick. I paid the bill, I gave 'em their money, but  
it all started again. They won't leave me alone...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What have they been doing to you?**

**CONRAD**

**Everything. I'm a goddamn human-pinata...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Calm down. Why would they keep playing after you paid?**

**CONRAD**

**You think I know? I paid them more to make it stop.  
BOOM! - the wheel jerks in Nicholas' hand, TIRES SCREAM...**

**CONRAD**

**What the hell... ?!**

*ON THE STREET*

*A TIRE'S BLOWN-OUT. Riding the rim, the car jerks over...*

*INSIDE THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas stops at the curb. Conrad's turned in his seat.*

**CONRAD**

**It's them. They did this.**

**NICHOLAS**

**It's a flat tire. That's all.**

**CONRAD**

**How do you know?**

**NICHOLAS**

**We're going to figure this out. Get a grip on yourself.**

**CONRAD**

**Okay... okay.**

*Conrad faces forward. Nicholas gets out to look at the wheel, using his cellular, then returns to the open window.*

**NICHOLAS**

**The phone's dead.**

**CONRAD**

**Really?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Do you know how to change a tire?**

**CONRAD**

**No. Do you?**

*(off Nicholas' frown)*

**Can't be too hard, can it? I don't think we should be here out in the open like this.**

*Nicholas rubs his temples, looks all around, frustrated.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Check the glove box... might be another battery there.**

*Conrad OPENS the glove compartment: KEYS SPILL OUT. At least fifty, silver and gold, all stamped "C.R.S."*

*Conrad's breath catches in his throat. He looks to Nicholas, afraid. Nicholas leans closer...*

**NICHOLAS**

**How did those... ?**

**CONRAD**

**You're part of it...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What? Connie...**

*Conrad climbs out, pointing across the roof of the car...*

**CONRAD**

**No! You're one of them. Of course, it makes perfect sense!**

**NICHOLAS**

**No, it doesn't! Those keys were put there. I didn't even know...**

**CONRAD**

**You're behind this, aren't you? You and your sick friends. Well, make it stop!**

**NICHOLAS**

**Listen to yourself. why would I do anything like what you're describing?**

**CONRAD**

**Because you hate me. Because you had to be here, when mom died. Because you had to do it alone.**

*(near tears)*

**Well, don't you think if I'd known... I'd've been here too. I'd have been here...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Stop this. It's not true...**

**CONRAD**

**I'm sorry, Christ, I'm sorry! How many more times do I have to say I'm sorry before you forgive me... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Stop it!**

*Conrad bolts away, full tilt, into a nearby PARK and PUBLIC GARDENS. Nicholas gives chase, calling after.*

*AHEAD, Conrad runs headlong, disappearing thru thick bushes. Nicholas follows, downhill, falls and slides, gets up. At the bottom, he shoves thru vegetation...*

*On the other side, Nicholas looks all directions, gulping air. Conrad's nowhere to be seen. Nicholas stops.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(shouting)*

**Connie!**

*Far off, there's a concrete path winding thru the park past a BANK OF PAYPHONES. ONE PAYPHONE starts RINGING. Nicholas starts back the way he came.*

*Behind, ALL THE PAYPHONES start RINGING. Nicholas halts. He runs to the phones, answers one...*

**NICHOLAS**

*(into phone)*

**You sons-of-bitches...**

**MAN'S VOICE** *(v.o.)*

*(from phone)*

**Flippy? Is Flippy there? Flippy?**

*Nicholas slams the phone down, picks up another...*

**RECORDING** *(v.o.)*

*(from phone)*

**If you'd like to make a call, please hang up and...**

*PHONES STOP RINGING. Nicholas hangs up, digging out his wallet. Rifling thru it, he comes up with the VALET TICKET with the C.R.S. EMERGENCY 800-NUMBER on it. He dials...*

*Puts the phone to his ear. BUSY SIGNAL. He slaps the headset-tongue, redialing, waiting...*

**RECORDING** (v.o.)  
(from phone)

**We're sorry. The number you have dialed has been disconnected  
or is no longer in service...**

*He throws the receiver, tears the valet ticket in half and tosses it, then steps back - KICKS the phone.*

**EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT**

*Nicholas returns to his car, looks down at the flat tire.*

*At the rear, Nicholas opens the trunk. He reaches in and takes out the car's JACK. He looks at it like an alien thing, turns it over, tosses it into the street.*

*He closes the trunk, REMOTE's the ALARM, walking. There's a TAXI heading this way. Nicholas hails it...*

**INSIDE THE TAXI**

*Nicholas gets in. GLASS separates him from the CAB DRIVER.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**Twenty-two Moore Street.**

*The driver nods and hits the gas.*

**EXT. CITY STREETS, FURTHER ON - NIGHT**

*The taxi roars down the street.*

**INSIDE THE TAXI**

*Nicholas has his head back, eyes closed, loosening his tie. He looks out the window, narrows his eyes.*

**NICHOLAS**  
(pointing)  
**Um... you want to turn here...**  
(TAXI KEEPS GOING)  
**Excuse me, you missed the turn.**

*The driver says nothing. Nicholas knocks on the glass.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Did you hear me? You're...**

*Nicholas stops, noticing the DRIVER I.D. on the other side of the partition. "California Regal Sedans." C.R.S.*

**NICHOLAS**

**No... no, no, no. Stop the car!**

*The taxi HALTS at a LIGHT. Nicholas tries the DOOR HANDLE. Doesn't work. He tries the WINDOW HANDLE - it COMES OFF.  
ON THE STREET*

*The cab PEELS OUT as the light turns green.*

*INSIDE THE TAXI*

*Nicholas tries the other door, panicky. Same results - locked in. The taxi makes a SCREEEEECHING TURN...*

*ON THE STREET*

*The taxi speeds up... heading for a WHARF AREA and PIERS.*

*INSIDE THE TAXI*

*Nicholas presses against the partition, urgent, calm...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Listen. I am a very wealthy man. Whatever they're paying you, I'll double it.**

*The taxi driver simply opens his door and leaps out.*

*THRU THE WINDOW: the driver ROLLS, a perfectly executed stunt fall. Nicholas can't believe. He grabs frantically for his seatbelt, SNAPS it around him, looks up...*

*Opens his mouth to SCREAM...*

*ON THE WHARF*

*The taxi goes FLYING off a deserted pier... airborne...*

*SPLASHES DOWN! in the San Francisco Bay.*

*INSIDE THE TAXI*

*Nicholas is jerked forward, breath slammed out of him.*

*ON THE SURFACE OF THE WATER*

*The taxi goes under in an eruption of bubbles.*

*UNDERWATER*

*THRU THE TAXI WINDOW: Nicholas pulls off his seatbelt, extricates himself and starts kicking the window. Dashboard lights grow eerie as they submerge.*

*INSIDE THE TAXI*

*Nicholas stops kicking, trying to calm. He looks to the front: water's gushing in through two-inches of open window. The taxi's less than half full.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(to himself)*

**It's a game... it's a game...**

*He tries the DOOR HANDLE again, yanking, to no avail. He realizes something, searches his pockets...*

*UNDERWATER*

*The taxi sinks, headlights dimming in murkier depths.*

*INSIDE THE TAXI*

*Nicholas finds the METAL CRANK. He takes a deep breath...*

*SUBMERGING. He puts the crank in the WINDOW HANDLE HOLE, turns the crank. The WINDOW LOWERS, water flooding in...*

*UNDERWATER*

*Nicholas swims out the window, heading upwards...*

**EXT. SAN FRANCISCO BAY - NIGHT**

*Nicholas bursts to the surface, sucking air. He treads water, catching his breath.*

**GIRL'S VOICE ( o.s.)**

**Hey, mister... are you alright?**

*Nicholas turns. There's a CABIN CRUISER docked nearby. A beautiful GIRL in a yellow raincoat throws a life preserver. Nicholas swims to it.*

**EXT. CABIN CRUISER - NIGHT**

*Nicholas climbs the rear ladder with the girl's help. He stays on his knees, teeth chattering. The boat's luxurious.*

**GIRL**

**You could get hepatitis from that water.**

*She helps Nicholas up, keeps a grip on him.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I need the police.**

**GIRL**

**Let's get you dried off first. I might have some clothes below.**

**INT. CABIN CRUISER, BATHROOM - NIGHT**

*The shower and mirrors are fogged. Nicholas' wet clothing sits in the sink. He's wearing a short-sleeved shirt, pulling on trousers.*

*IN THE ADJOINING BEDROOM*

*QUIET MUSIC. Nicholas comes from the bathroom, feeling the waistband of the pants, checking out the cuffs.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You know, these fit... perfectly.**

**GIRL**

**They were my husband's. My late husband... may he rest in peace.**

*Nicholas looks to the girl. She rises from the bed and slides the raincoat off, wearing only a BIKINI. A Playmate.*

*Nicholas just sort of sags.*

*The girl undoes her top, which falls. She steps forward.*

**GIRL**

**I've been so lonely.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I can't tell you how not interested I am.**

**GIRL**

**Don't be nervous. They said you'd be nervous.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Don't take another step.**

*The girl covers her breasts, confused. Nicholas gathers his clothing from the sink, heading for the stairs.*

**GIRL**

**Isn't this what you like? They told me you had a thing for boats.**

**NICHOLAS**

**First they try to kill me, now you?**

*(to girl)*

**Put your damn clothes back on.**

*Nicholas scrambles upstairs...*

## **EXT. CABIN CRUISER - NIGHT**

*Nicholas leaps off onto the wharf. The girl, pulling on her raincoat, crosses to the boat's rail, waving a box. Thru the box's window: a gold GLASS CUTTER nestled in velvet.*

**GIRL**

**Don't you want your thing? I was supposed to give you this thing.**

**Nicholas just keeps walking.**

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. C.R.S. BUILDING - DAY**

*TWO POLICE CARS, marked and unmarked, pull to the curb. From the plainclothes car, MALE DETECTIVE and FEMALE DETECTIVE get out. Nicholas and Sutherland get out.*

**INT. C.R.S. BUILDING, LOBBY - DAY**

*Nicholas, Sutherland, Male and Female Detective cross the busy lobby with TWO UNIFORMED OFFICER'S behind.*

**INT. C.R.S. BUILDING, OFFICES - DAY**

*Nicholas enters, followed by the others. He stops short... REVEAL: this huge room, once filled with cubicles far as the eye could see, is now entirely EMPTY. Trash. Dust. Fixtures jutting from the floor.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE - DAY**

*Nicholas stands with hands in pockets, staring at the floor. Sutherland's here. Female and Male Detective stand together. She's checking notes.*

**FEMALE DETECTIVE**

**Management for the building says that space hasn't been officially rented yet. The county recorder has no listing for "Consumer Recreation Services" or any derivation thereof. No sign of the boat or the girl. We're checking escort services, but it's unlikely. Divers are looking for the taxi, and soon as they find it they'll pull the plates and V.I.N.**

**MALE DETECTIVE**

**Have you gotten in touch with your brother?**

**NICHOLAS**

**He hasn't called back.**

**SUTHERLAND**

**What about the house?**

**MALE DETECTIVE**

The graffiti was painted in an oil-based marine marking solution. Illegal in the states. Not impossible to trace, but it'll take time.

**FEMALE DETECTIVE**

The photos, gun, the clown, the ambulance, cab;e box, everything else... it's all pending.

*(shuts notebook)*

Breaking and entering we have, solid. Malicious mischief, vandalism, harassment. But, that's about all.

**SUTHERLAN**

Illegal surveillance, reckless endangerment...

**NICHOLAS**

Attempted murder.

**MALE DETECTIVE**

Except... you said you hired these people.

**SUTHERLAND**

That's irrelevant.

**MALE DETECTIVE**

It's our job to let you know what we have. We haven't got motive.

**FEMALE DETECTIVE**

*(to Nicholas)*

You are who you are, so we know you're not making it up. But, we've never dealt with anything quite like this. Be appropriately cautious.

*(pause)*

Unless you think they're done with you.

*CUT TO:*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*Ilsa sets down a plate: sandwich with crust cut off, potato chips and carrot sticks. Nicholas eats, pondering.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What was my father like?**

*Ilsa's at the fridge, near where drop-cloths, paint cans and other repair preparations are piled.*

**ILSA**

**What makes you ask?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm not sure.**

*Ilsa comes to set down a glass, fills it with milk.*

**ILSA**

**All the time I've known you, you've never once asked about him.**

**NICHOLAS**

**He came to my mind recently, that's all.**

*Ilsa moves to put food back into the refrigerator.*

**ILSA**

**Your mother thought he was a good man. He worked very hard. What I remember most was his manner was so... slight. It was easy to spend time in a room, and not realize he'd been there the whole time.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Was he morose, or...? I mean...**

**ILSA**

**No. What happened... no one expected it.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Sometimes I wonder how much of him there is in me.**

**ILSA**

**Not much, I think.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm just like him.**

**ILSA**

**You're not like him at all. I don't know exactly what's going on around here lately, but don't make me start worrying about you.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Did you worry about him?**

**ILSA**

**Nobody worried about your father.**

*Nicholas stares at his milk. PHONE RINGS. He answers...*

**NICHOLAS**

*(into phone)*

**Hello.**

**MARIA (v.o.)**

*(from phone)*

**It's Maria. I found the address you wanted from Elite Taxi.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(picks up pen and paper)*

**Go ahead...**

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT**

*Rows of lower-middle-class homes. Nicholas parks. A WHITE VAN sits near, a wrench-wielding WORKMAN painted on the side. "Cab;e Repair Specialists."*

*Nicholas crosses the lawn of a WHITE HOUSE, to the porch. He rings the doorbell and waits. Finally, an older man in a bathrobe answers, CHRISTINE'S DAD, puffy-eyed.*

**CHRISTINE'S DAD**

**Yeah?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Hello. Is Christine in?**

**CHRISTINE'S DAD**

**She's sleeping.**

**CHRISTINE (o.s.)**

**Who is it, dad?**

**INT. CHRISTINE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

*Christine looks down from the top of the stairs. Below, Nicholas looks up past Christine's dad.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What are you doing here?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Can we talk?**

**CHRISTINE**

**It's okay, dad.**

*Christine's dad opens the door and heads away. Christine comes down, in a pajama top and shorts, pleased.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Didn't think I'd ever see you again.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Come here...**

*He watches to make sure dad's gone, leads Christine to the middle of the room, takes out a PHOTOCOPY, unfolds it.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What can you tell me about this?**

*The SEX PHOTO of the woman in the RED BRA.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What is it?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Is this you?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Where'd you get this?**

**NICHOLAS**

**It was left in my hotel room, well, not really mine. You're saying it's not you?**

**CHRISTINE**

**I think I would remember.**

*(hands it back)*

**What makes you think it's me?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Well... the red bra.**

**CHRISTINE**

*(like he's crazy)*

**Okay.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I thought...**

*He's at a loss, drained.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Do you mind if I sit?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Sure. You alright? Is this still that contest you're in...**

**NICHOLAS**

*(sits)*

**I'm tired. I'm sorry, I should go. I've been enough of a nuisance.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Let me go get some clothes on. We'll talk, okay? Be right back.**

*Christine hurries upstairs. Nicholas stands, calls after.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Do you have any aspirin?**

*Nicholas takes in the room, unhappy. He squints at a VIRGIN MARY figurine, picks it up... unscrews the head. It's a decanter. He sniffs it and puts it back. He sniffs the air, noticing...*

*A WISP OF SMOKE rises from a bright LAMP.*

*INSIDE THE LAMPSHADE: Nicholas peers inside. A PRICE TAG dangles against the bulb, turning brown, smoking.*

*Nicholas reaches to remove the tag - burns his finger on the bulb, jerking his hands away. He blows on his finger, sighs, walks to poke his head thru a swinging door...*

#### **INT. CHRISTINE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*Modest, cluttered. Nicholas goes to the sink, holds his finger under the faucet. NO WATER. He jerks the faucet handle, but gets nothing. He looks around...*

*Opens a drawer - EMPTY. He opens another drawer - EMPTY. He opens more EMPTY DRAWERS, a disturbing thought forming. Opens a cabinet - EMPTY.*

#### **INT. CHRISTINE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

*Nicholas returns, scanning the room. He picks up a FRAMED PHOTO of a LITTLE GIRL in a dress, takes the frame apart...*

*The picture is an ADVERTISEMENT from a glossy magazine, with TEXT folded behind and print on the back.*

*Nicholas takes a breath, quickly replaces the clipping just as Christine returns from upstairs. She's in a pull-over dress, putting her hair up.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Want anything to drink?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(holds up frame)*

**You?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Yeah. First Communion. Aren't I a little angel?**

*Nicholas offers the frame to Christine, fury showing...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Take the picture out.**

**CHRISTINE**

**What's wrong?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Take the picture out of the frame and show it to me.**

**CHRISTINE**

**I don't...**

*Christine tries to assess the situation... realizes he's onto her. She swallows, making a quick decision, drops her facade, her voice a desperate WHISPER.*

**CHRISTINE**

**They're watching.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Wha... ?**

**CHRISTINE**

*(under her breath)*

**Not here! They can see.**

*Christine motions with her eyes. Nicholas looks...*

*ON THE CEILING, a red-bulbed SMOKE DETECTOR.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(cheery, in character)*

**So, what do you say we go for a drive? We'll take your car...**

*She takes his hand and pulls him. Nicholas yanks away.*

**NICHOLAS**

**No! I'm sick of this...**

**CHRISTINE**

**Nicholas...**

*Nicholas points up at the smoke detector, addressing it...*

**NICHOLAS**

**You can come out now, if you're there. Come on out! Let's go!**

*Nicholas walks to the fireplace, picks up a FIREPLACE POKER. He moves to SWING it up - SWATS the smoke detector.*

*Christine runs to the picture window.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Now you've done it!**

*THRU WINDOW: THUG 1 and THUG 2, muscle men, climb out from the CABLE REPAIR VAN, running this direction.*

*Nicholas comes to look, poker in hand.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What? Oh, and I suppose they're going to...**

*THRU WINDOW: Thug 1 and 2 draw guns, pointing...*

*Nicholas furrows his brow, unsure.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Get down!**

*WINDOW'S BLOWN IN by GUNFIRE! as Christine tackles Nicholas.*

*Shattered glass showers down. KNICK-KNACKS FLY TO PIECES.*

*Christine crawls. Nicholas follows. They flee, Nicholas gasping and glancing back, terrified...*

*IN THE KITCHEN*

*Christine pulls Nicholas thru a door...*

**INT. CHRISTINE'S GARAGE - NIGHT**

*Christine and Nicholas come downstairs to the empty garage. Christine's dad looks up from his solitaire game at a card table, a day player thrown off by this backstage intrusion.*

**CHRISTINE'S DAD**

**What the hell... !?**

*Christine leads Nicholas out the REAR DOOR...*

**EXT. CHRISTINE'S BACKYARD - NIGHT**

*They run along the back of the house...*

**NICHOLAS**

**What is this!?**

**CHRISTINE**

**God, wake up, it's a con!**

*Around the corner, toward the front, Christine stops, looking across the front lawn to Nicholas' Bentley.*

**INT. CHRISTINE'S GARAGE - NIGHT**

*Thug 1 and 2 bluster in, guns up. Christine's dad points to the open rear door, afraid. Thug 1 thinks quick - SLAMS the GARAGE DOOR OPENER...*

*The OPENER'S MOTOR RATTLES to life, GARAGE DOOR RISING...*

**EXT. CHRISTINE'S FRONT LAWN - NIGHT**

*Nicholas and Christine speed away in the Bentley. Behind, Thug 1 and 2 crawl under the garage door, giving chase, FIRING. Too little, too late. They run to the van.*

**EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS - NIGHT**

*The Bentley roars onwards...*

*IN THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas drives, white-knuckled. Christine watches behind.*

*ON THE STREET*

*The van pursues, far behind, but closing ground.*

*IN THE BENTLEY*

*Nicholas checks his mirror. Christine looks forward...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Look out!**

*ON THE STREET*

*The Bentley SIDESWIPES another CAR as Nicholas runs a light.  
The Bentley keeps going, the other car SPINNING...*

*The van BRAKES HARD to avoid the spun-out car. The van reverses, angling to get around...*

**FURTHER ON**

*The Bentley SKIDS into an alley, lights off, still moving.  
The van, having lost half a block, misses this and continues straight, raging forward, then  
SCREEEECHING to stop...*

*In the middle of a four-way intersection, stumped. The van chooses a direction, cutting a corner,  
roaring away...*

**INT. BENTLEY - NIGHT**

**CHRISTINE**  
*(looking back)*

**Okay... they're gone...**

*She's thrown forward as Nicholas SLAMS BRAKES. He reaches across and throws Christine's door  
open.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**What are you doing... ?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Get out.**

**CHRISTINE**  
**I could've handed you to them. They find me now, I'm dead...**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Get out of my car!**

**CHRISTINE**  
**You don't have a choice. No one else is going to tell you what's  
going on.**

*Nicholas stares at her with hatred.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**Do you want to know? If I'm gone, you never will.**

*Nicholas flips the headlights on, puts the car in gear and drives. She pulls the door shut.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You can talk while I drive us to the police.**

**CHRISTINE**

**No cops. I've got a warrant out. Mail fraud. They'll take me in, but you won't be able to prove anything else.**

*Christine takes out cigarettes, lights up.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I can't believe they didn't take the time to get the house right.**

*Nicholas grabs the cigarette, throws it out his window.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Who are "they?"**

**CHRISTINE**

**I don't know, nobody does. I'm an employee.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Then, what good are you?**

**CHRISTINE**

**I know things... like who you can trust. Like that your brother was in on it from the beginning.**

**NICHOLAS**

**That's a lie...**

**CHRISTINE**

**Yeah? I was your waitress on your birthday. Connie told you about C.R.S. that day, remember? I was already playing my part, before you started the game.**

*Nicholas looks to her, realizing the truth of it. Christine's lighting up a new cigarette.*

**CHRISTINE**

**It wasn't his fault. He thought it was his only way back. They fleeced him real good.**

**NICHOLAS**

**How? How could they have gotten anything?**

**CHRISTINE**

**They did the same to him as they did to you.**

**NICHOLAS**

**What are you talking about... ?**

*She gives him a pitying look.*

**CHRISTINE**

**They've already got it, Nicholas. They got everything.**

*Nicholas shoots her a glance; this is absurd.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Check your accounts. That night in your office, when we were there...**

*FLASHBACK - nicholas' office - that night*

*Christine runs her finger down Nicholas' TELEPHONE. She looks to see Nicholas is preoccupied, lifts the receiver...*

*Reads the PHONE NUMBER underneath. She turns, looks down...*

*There's a NUMBER written on the PHONE JACK on the wall: #C4.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I got the number to your private line and modem. I gave C.R.S. remote access to your computer...**

*FLASHBACK - VARIOUS INSERTS*

*NICHOLAS' C.R.S. TESTING: Nicholas' hand scribbles his SIGNATURE... fills out a FINANCIAL QUESTIONNAIRE. A TAPE RECORDER'S REEL SPINS... a PENCIL blackens TEST BLOCKS...*

**CHRISTINE**

**You already gave them everything else. Handwriting, voice samples, psych-info. They used it all to figure out your passwords.**

*FLASHBACK: ON A MONITOR, combinations of LETTERS and NUMBERS SCROLL BY, multiplying, too quickly for the eye to see...*

**CHRISTINE**

**From there, they only had to keep you distracted while they broke into the network and transferred your holdings to dummy accounts.**

*FLASHBACK: FIGURES appear on a COMPUTER SCREEN; HIGH NUMBERS flying down to 000,000,000's. More NUMBERS, falling.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Remember Jim Feingold, the guy who signed you up? He did five years for hacking Citibank in eighty-four...**

*FLASHBACK: PAN UP from deft fingers at a keyboard to JIM FEINGOLD, lit by cold COMPUTER SCREEN GLOW.*

*BACK TO SCENE IN BENTLEY*

*Nicholas sweats. He checks his watch, takes out his cellular, dialing with his thumb. Christine smokes.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Why else would they be willing to put you under... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(into cellular)*

**Overseas operator? Please dial Allgemeine Bank, Zurich.**

**CHRISTINE**

**They don't care about you anymore. Alive or dead is the same, as long as they bury you deep enough.**

**EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

*The Bentley SPEEDS out a tunnel on the highway toward S.F.*

*INSIDE THE BENTLEY*

**NICHOLAS**

*(into cellular)*

**Guten tag. Vilen dank, Englisch. Blue-two-backslash-five.  
Mother's maiden name: Miller. Six-nine-zero, D as in David.  
Yes. The balance...**

*(listens)*

**That's impossible. When did... ?**

*Nicholas listens, scarcely breathing. Christine seems regretful. Nicholas lowers the phone, shuts it off.*

**CHRISTINE**

**They got everything.**

*Lights flash across Nicholas' sweaty features.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. GAS STATION/CONVENIENCE HUT - NIGHT**

*Nicholas pumps gas, pale, on his cellular. Christine stands across the lot, out of earshot, watching the dark freeway.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(into cellular)*

**Call soon as you get this message, Sam. I checked them all, I don't know how, but they drained my accounts. Now they're trying to kill me. You tell the cops, I've got one with me. We'll make her testify. I know how it must sound. Call on my mobile. Be careful.**

**INT. CONVENIENCE HUT - TIME CUT**

*A FEMALE CLERK taps a gold credit card, listens on a PHONE. She hangs up, goes to the BULLETPROOF WINDOW. Nicholas and Christine wait on the other side with armloads of food.*

**CLERK**

*(into intercom)*

**They say I have to take the card.**

*Nicholas seems numb. Christine checks her pockets.*

**CHRISTINE**  
(via intercom)

**I think I've got some cash.**

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. DIRT ROADWAY - NIGHT**

*The Bentley overtakes a logging TRUCK on this dirt road.*

*IN THE BENTLEY*

*QUIET NEWS RADIO. Nicholas drains coffee from a styrofoam cup, rolls his window and tosses the cup out, trying to stay awake. He looks beside him.*

*Christine's asleep against her door, placid and innocent-looking. Nicholas stares at her.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. LAKE, VAN ORTON CABIN - NIGHT**

*Beautiful lake. Dense forest. The Bentley's parked near a relatively humble CABIN. LIGHTNING FLASHES across the sky.*

**INT. CABIN - NIGHT**

*FIRE in the fireplace. Christine tends a metal pot over the flames. Nicholas sleeps slumped in a low chair. Christine passes with the pot. Nicholas awakens, disoriented, searching for familiarity. He sits forward...*

*Christine's in the candle-lit kitchenette. He watches her, grim. She makes coffee. He sits back.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What?**

*Christine comes over and gives him a mug of coffee.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What did you say?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I didn't say anything.**

*He gets up, walks, sipping coffee. Christine watches him. Nicholas stares at FAMILY PHOTOS on the mantle.*

**CHRISTINE**

*(sad, unsure)*

**My name's not Christine. It's not my real...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Who the fuck cares?**

*He doesn't even look at her, picks up a PHOTO: FATHER and YOUNG NICHOLAS, holding up fish. Nicholas rubs the dust off his father's face.*

**CHRISTINE**

**It's just money. You should be glad you're alive.**

**NICHOLAS**

**It might be best if we didn't talk.**

**CHRISTINE**

**All I mean is... someone like you...**

**NICHOLAS**

**How many times have you done this? I'm interested.**

**CHRISTINE**

**What?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Scams, con games. How many?**

**CHRISTINE**

**I don't know. A lot.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Whatever kind of nickel-and-dime shit you did before, this is more than just me. Your friends raided pension plans, and payrolls... they took just over six-hundred million. You ruined people's lives.**

*Christine looks sick and truly scared. The CELLULAR CHIRPS. Nicholas goes to pick it up off a table.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(into cellular)*

**Yes.**

**SUTHERLAND** *(v.o.)*  
*(from cellular)*

**I got your message. I was disturbed, to say the least...**

*Christine stands.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Who is it?**

**NICHOLAS**  
*(into cellular)*

**What do we do?**

**SUTHERLAND** *(v.o.)*  
*(from cellular)*

**I've been on the phone for an hour already. Nicholas, your funds are intact. Nothing's been touched.**

**CHRISTINE**  
*(worried, insistent)*

**Who is it?**

**NICHOLAS**  
*(still into cellular)*

**What do you mean? I checked them myself. I made the calls...**

**SUTHERLAND** *(v.o.)*  
**Nothing's changed. I'm telling you, not a cent is unaccounted for...**

**NICHOLAS**  
*(cups phone, to Christine)*  
**My lawyer... says nothing's missing.**

*She shakes her head ominously.*

**CHRISTINE**  
*(fear, whisper)*

**He's in on it...**

*Nicholas stares at Christine, trying to comprehend...*

**SUTHERLAND (v.o.)**

**I don't know what's happening, but stay where you are till I get to you. give me your precise location...**

**CHRISTINE**

**Sutherland's in on it.**

**SUTHERLAND ( v.o.)**

**I'll come there. Hold on, Nicholas, I have another call. Tell me where you are.**

*Nicholas lowers the phone, pushes DISCONNECT, afraid.*

**NICHOLAS**

**We have to get out of here.**

*The PHONE CHIRPS again. Nicholas looks at it, flicks a switch on the side, silencing it. He sits, sickened.*

**NICHOLAS**

**How did they get to him? Why didn't you tell me?**

*She lights a cigarette, backing toward the kitchenette.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Mm... I wouldn't worry about it.**

**NICHOLAS**

**What... what do you mean?**

**CHRISTINE**

**It's out of your hands.**

*He looks up, trying to figure. His head lulls... He takes a breath, looks at his trembling hands. Drugged.*

*He looks around, confused... spots the COFFEE CUP, realizes.*

*With a CRY of RAGE, he LUNGES toward Christine, but comes up short, toppling a shelf, contents CRASHING DOWN...*

*Nicholas rolls, pained, clutching his throat, taking air in RASPING GULPS. He crawls, swings his fist, slams a table...*

**CHRISTINE**  
**Cellular calls can be intercepted, you know.**

*Christine backs to avoid, hefts a heavy cooking POT in case. She maneuvers, steps over him. He grabs, blindly...*

*She scoops up the dropped PHONE and crosses away.*

**CHRISTINE**  
*(cigarette 'tween lips)*  
**All those calls you made, to B of A, France, Switzerland... you were talking to my people.**  
*(hits REDIAL on cellular)*  
**You filled the blanks. Access codes, passwords, stuff even your lawyer didn't have - but we have it now.**

*Nicholas tries to stand, falls, clutching his gut, CRYING OUT in great pain, frothing at the mouth.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**It's over, Nicholas. Goodbye.**

*THE ROOM SPINS round and round, spinning OUT OF CONTROL...*

*FADE TO BLACK*

*BREATHING... then a STRUGGLE... POUNDING, KICKING...*

## **INT. CRYPT - MORNING**

*A PARTICLE-BOARD LID SPLINTERS as Nicholas pounds his way out of a COFFIN, looking wildly around, eyes blood-shot...*

*A moldering MAUSOLEUM. Light seeps thru cracked walls. Piles of rotten flowers. Coffins. Hundreds of files.*

*Nicholas gags on the air, climbing free and falling to the floor, legs weak. He's in a WHITE SUIT, dazed and afraid. There's a RED ROSE taped to his chest.*

## **EXT. MEXICO CEMETERY - MORNING**

*Pushing the plywood door of the MAUSOLEUM outward, Nicholas tumbles into dawn light. He's in a ramshackle GRAVEYARD. Tombs for miles. Misty, tropical vegetation. Third world.*

*Nicholas walks, trying to figure this. He notices the red rose, pulls it off and throws it. An OLD*

*WOMAN sits at a grave with her rosary. She watches Nicholas, emotionless.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Where am I? What is this place?**

*The OLD WOMAN speaks SPANISH. Nicholas stares blankly. She seems to be asking questions. Nicholas finally realizes it's a foreign language, turns, walks away.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. MEXICO STREET - MORNING**

*A busy downtown street. A sea of MEXICAN PEOPLE, many poor. Nicholas walks, caught in the flow of the crowd, JOSTLED, aimless. The world's a NOISY BLUR around him.*

*Nicholas pushes to the TRAFFIC JAMMED street, spotting a POLICEMAN directing traffic, heads for him...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Officer... officer...**

*HORNS BLAST. Nicholas comes to the officer, relieved...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Do you speak English? I'm an American.**

*The policeman scolds Nichols in SPANISH, shoos him away. Nicholas searches his empty pockets...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Listen... they took my wallet...**

*(insistent, of himself)*

**American. I am an American citizen.**

*The policeman shouts angrily, grabs Nicholas' arm. Nicholas reflexively pulls away...*

**NICHOLAS**

**No, you don't understand, I'm an American...**

*The policeman unsheathes his baton - STRIKES Nicholas. Nicholas hits the street, raising his arms in defense. The policeman SWINGS AGAIN...*

*Hits Nicholas' skull. Nicholas runs, escaping thru traffic. The policeman curses after him.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. MEXICAN BUS STOP - DAY**

*Hot. Nicholas sits on a bench, a dried blood trail down his face, holding balled-up newspaper to his bleeding head. Others on the BUSY SIDEWALK don't even take notice of him.*

*Nicholas checks to see if he's clotted, tosses the newspaper. He watches traffic pass, sits forward, elbows on his knees, staring at the sidewalk.*

**NICHOLAS**

**... fuck...**

*Tears forming in his eyes. He takes a deep breath, stops himself, swallowing back despair, deciding. Determined...*

*He gets up and walks. He picks up the pace, running.*

*LONG SHOT: Nicholas running, across one street, down another, a strange sight in his filthy white suit. Stopping now and then to ask questions of passerbys, moving on...*

*FOLLOW: Nicholas continuing, stopping in a SHOP DOORWAY.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to SHOPKEEPER)*

**The embassy? Please... the American embassy, do you know it?**

*No answer. Nicholas continues, slowing. Ahead down the sidewalk, there's another MEXICAN COP, tough-looking. Nicholas hesitates, then, approaches...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Excuse me... Buenos Diaz, I'm looking for the United States embassy. U.S. embassy, please... pour fa vor?**

*The cop seems angry, eyeing Nicholas' appearance, deciding. The cop points down the street. Nicholas heads away.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Thank you. Thank you, sir.**

*Nicholas runs.*

**EXT. AMERICAN EMBASSY - ESTABLISHING - LATER DAY**

*"Embassy of the United States of America, MEXICO CITY."*

**INT. AMERICAN EMBASSY, OFFICE - DAY**

*A secretary leads Nicholas in from a crowded hallway. An American COUNSELOR rises from his small desk in his small office, shaking Nicholas' hand, taking PAPERWORK.*

**COUNSELOR**

**Please, sit...**

*Nicholas sits in a metal chair. A fan blows, poor remedy in the heat. The counselor reads the paperwork.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Mister...**

*(sees desk name plate)*

**Mister Patterson. Some things have happened... it's important that I...**

*The counselor holds up his hand, still reading...*

**COUNSELOR**

**No money, no identification or passport. You are in a fix.**

*(looks up from papers)*

**What did happen to you?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Well, where to begin. It's complicated...**

**COUNSELOR**

*(matter of fact)*

**It always is.**

*Nicholas looks to the counselor, who sips a glass of water and looks at papers. Nicholas takes a moment, rethinks.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What happened was, I'm on vacation, alone... I was robbed, at gunpoint. They hit me and ran. Two men, a few blocks away. They took my wallet, money... all of it. So...**

**COUNSELOR**

**Robbed?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes.**

**COUNSELOR**

**Have you gone to the police?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I don't speak Spanish. All I need is to get back... just enough for that.**

*The counselor taps his finger on desk's edge.*

**COUNSELOR**

**We'll help with the police, if you want to bother. As far as money goes... can I make a suggestion?**

*(off Nicholas' nod)*

**You say you were mugged?**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes.**

**COUNSELOR**

**And, they didn't take that watch?**

*Nicholas looks at the ROLEX he's wearing, didn't realize it till now, having taken it for granted.*

**COUNSELOR**

**How much is it? A few thousand, at least. A Rolex like that... lucky for you they missed it.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Yes, very lucky.**

*CUT TO:*

**INT. MEXICO CITY PAWN SHOP - LATER DAY**

*INSCRIBED on the back of Nicholas' ROLEX: "On your 18th birthday, your father's watch. Love, Mother"*

*The FEMALE OWNER examines the Rolex inside a rusty metal cage, makes a face. Nicholas is at the*

*front of the long line in this impossibly cluttered pawn shop.*

**PAWN SHOP OWNER**  
**Cincuenta dolares Americano. Fifty.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Fifty? Do you know...**  
*(deep sigh)*  
**It's a Rolex. It's gold. Not gold colored, actual gold.**

**PAWN SHOP OWNER**  
**Si, oro. Cincuenta y cinco. Cincuenta y cinco Estados Unidos.**  
**Nicholas runs his hands thru his hair... resigned.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**You see, all you had to do was get in the ballpark. Yes, fifty-five... si, senorita.**

*The owner counts battered dollar bills from a cigar box.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. BUS STOP/TACO STAND - DAY**

*At a faltering TACO STAND painted in peeling orange paint, Nicholas pays for tacos wrapped in paper and a bottle of Budweiser. A bus ticket sticks out his breast pocket.*

*Nicholas steps away, wolfing down the food, following it with guzzled beer. MANY PEOPLE are waiting for the bus, on and around benches, suitcases and belongs in piles.*

*Nicholas looks, still chewing, to THREE YOUNG MEXICAN CHILDREN staring at him. They stand with their plump MOTHER, just watching him. Nicholas faces away, eating.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - DUSK**

*A repainted SCHOOL BUS zooms past, trailing exhaust.*

**INT. BUS - DUSK**

*Not one empty seat. At the back, Nicholas' eyes flutter under their lids. He SNORES QUIETLY. The MOTHER of the three Mexican children is next to him, one child in her lap. She's asleep, leaning toward Nicholas. The child's awake.*

*The bus shifts, GEARS GRINDING, and mother slides further over till her head rests on Nicholas' shoulder. Nicholas awakens, looking at Mother against him.*

*The child looks up at Nicholas. Nicholas looks at the child. Nicholas puts his head back, closes his eyes.*

*After a moment, the bus jerks and Nicholas opens his eyes, turning to look out the window, watching a far-reaching SUNSET. Crimson and gold clouds.*

**CUT TO:**

## **EXT. MEXICO/UNITED STATES BORDER - NIGHT**

*In the line of vehicles at the U.S. BORDER, the BUS' BRAKES HISS, doors swinging open for an AMERICAN BORDER OFFICER...*

## **INT. BUS - NIGHT**

*The BORDER OFFICER comes on, not a calming presence. The Mexican passengers know what to do, holding up GREEN CARDS and PASSPORTS for perusal...*

*The officer grunts at each passenger he approves, moving on. Nicholas slides lower in his seat. Mother, beside him, produces her GREEN CARD and holds it aloft, waiting. The officer comes to glare at Nicholas.*

*Nicholas looks back at him, unblinking.*

*The officer looks to Mother's card. He says something in SPANISH. Mother responds in SPANISH.*

*The officer grabs her card, speaking, dissatisfied.*

*He shouts for Mother to get off... hurrying her up, moving her out...*

*Mother moves, carrying the child in her lap, hastening the other two children seated in front of her. Mother protests about her rope-bound SUITCASES in the overhead shelf, trying to grip one, arms full of child. The official pulls her along, ignoring...*

*Nicholas watches. He rises...*

## **OUTSIDE THE BUS**

*Mother and three children are unloaded. The official waves the bus on to the border, despite Mother's protest.*

*The bus sets in motion... AT THE BACK OF THE BUS, the rear emergency door is forced open. Nicholas is there, dropping one suitcase...*

*Following with a second suitcase, tossing it to the ground gently as the bus' motion allows. Mother spots this, moving to collect the suitcases, children following...*

**ON THE BUS**

*The BUS DRIVER shouts a complaint in SPANISH.*

*At the rear, Nicholas pulls the door shut and latches it, watching thru the window as Mother and children drag their suitcases out of the path of other vehicles.*

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

*Nicholas walks backwards, exhausted, hitchhiking on the freeway shoulder. TRAFFIC absolutely SOARS PAST.*

**EXT. BOB'S BIG BOY RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

*Highway in the b.g., Nicholas hikes across the parking lot of this 24-hour DINER, past many parked TRACTOR TRAILERS.*

**INT. BOB'S BIG BOY RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

*There's a heavy duty TRUCK DRIVER clientele elbow to elbow at the counter, eating, drinking coffee. The BELL above the door TINKLES as Nicholas enters.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Pardon me...**

*Nicholas moves to the end of the counter, louder...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Excuse me, please, if I could have your attention...**

*Conversations stop. Everyone looks to Nicholas. He's scruffier than ever; a hobo freak in a white suit, fed up.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Thank you. If anyone's heading to San Francisco, I need a ride.**

*Met with silence. Nicholas clears his rough throat.*

**NICHOLAS**

**There's...**

*(digs in pockets)*

**There's all the money I've got left in it for you... eighteen dollars  
and seventy-nine cents...**

*Nicholas puts his crumpled bills and coins on the counter. One penny falls. You can hear it hit the floor and roll.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. UPSTATE CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY - DAY**

*BRIGHT DAY. A big, Baskin-Robbins TRUCK rumbles by...*

**INT. BASKIN-ROBBIN'S ICE CREAM TRUCK - DAY**

*ENGINE and ROADWAY ROARING. Windows open, wind whipping. Beside the DRIVER, Nicholas sleeps wrapped in a blanket.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - EARLY EVENING**

*The Baskin-Robbin's tractor trailer keeps on truckin'. AHEAD: the San Francisco skyline.*

**EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - NIGHT**

*Nicholas climbs down from the Baskin-Robbin's truck, thanks the driver. The truck lurches away. Nicholas walks.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. VAN ORTON MANSION - NIGHT**

*The gate is WRAPPED IN CHAINS. Nicholas arrives, trudging. He pulls to test the chains. There's a "PUBLIC AUCTION" SIGN hung. Nicholas tears it down, begins climbing...*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, KITCHEN - NIGHT**

*A ROCK SMASHES a glass pane in the door. Nicholas reaches thru to let himself in. No electricity. Graffiti's gone. There's scaffolding. Work in progress. Appliances gone. Nicholas checks the PHONE, finds it dead.*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, DEN - NIGHT**

*Nicholas looks in. Furniture's wrapped in thick plastic. Curtains and paintings are gone. Like the kitchen, this room's repainted. Cold and bare.*

**INT. GUEST HOUSE, FOYER/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

*The front door's ajar. Nicholas pushes it open slow, entering darkness. The living room is completely empty.*

**NICHOLAS**  
*(calling upstairs)*

**Ilsa.**

*Pitch dark at the top of the stairs. Nicholas moves forward into another EMPTY ROOM. It's creepy quiet.*

**INT. VAN ORTON MANSION, GARAGE - NIGHT**

*Nicholas enters the moonlit garage. THREE EMPTY SPACES.*

**INT. MANSION, MASTER BATH - NIGHT**

*IN THE SHOWER, Nicholas scrubs his hair with a bar of soap, huddled under the cold spray, shuddering.*

### **INT. MANSION, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT**

*In the stripped bedroom, Nicholas, in a baggy t-shirt and jeans, pulls a paper wrapped package from a dresser. On the bed, he tears open the paper, pulling out a long OVERCOAT.*

### **INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - MORNING**

*Dawn light. BIRDS HEARD SINGING. Nicholas opens drawers. He finds a mason jar with CASH inside, unscrews the lid.*

### **INT. MANSION, LIBRARY - MORNING**

*Moving boxes. Half the shelves of this impressive library are emptied into high stacks of books on the floor. Nicholas moves to search a section still lined with books...*

*... looking for one in particular, reading spines...*

*"To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee, leather bound. Nicholas takes it down.*

### **INT. MANSION, FOYER - MORNING**

*Nicholas heads for the front door. He halts, noticing... An ENVELOPE on the counter, "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN."*

*Nicholas opens the envelope, unfolding a letter... "Like my father before me, I choose eternal sleep." Still with the RED SIGNATURE ARROW affixed below.*

### **INT. MANSION, KITCHEN - MORNING**

*The "suicide note" lands in the sink, BURNING.*

*CUT TO:*

### **EXT. UNION SQUARE, GEARY STREET - DAY**

*A MINI BUS halts at a corner. Nicholas is the second rider off, paranoid, book under his arm. He moves down the sidewalk... toward the FOUR SEASONS HOTEL.*

**INT. FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, FRONT DESK - DAY**

*Unkempt, unshaven Nicholas is a blight in this flawless hotel. At the desk, he gets the CLERK'S attention.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm here to see Conrad Van Orton. Ring his room.**

*The desk clerk gives a pause while Nicholas scans the lobby.*

**DESK CLERK**

**One moment, please...**

*The desk clerk crosses to a gray, elder statesman MANAGER, huddling to speak in hushed tones. Nicholas watches them, concerned. The manager walks over...*

**NICHOLAS**

**What's the trouble?**

**MANAGER**

**You're here for Conrad Van Orton? I'm the hotel manager...  
He offers a handshake which Nicholas ignores.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Pleasure to meet you, I'd like to see my brother, thank you.**

**MANAGER**

*(worry, guiding Nicholas)*

**Your brother. Will you come with me?**

**NICHOLAS**

**What's this about?**

**MANAGER**

**It's a private matter, for you... I think you'll be more comfortable...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Where's my brother?**

*The manager looks around, feeling indiscreet, voice low.*

**MANAGER**

**There were complaints by other guests, and damage to his room.  
We did the best we could to accommodate his behavior.**

**NICHOLAS**

**His behavior... ?**

**MANAGER**

**He couldn't, or refused to pay. We extended credit...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Look, where is he?!**

**MANAGER**

**There was an incident a few days ago... a nervous breakdown,  
they said. The police took him. They left this address, in case  
anyone...**

*Nicholas struggles to absorb this while the manager takes out a BILLFOLD of business cards, offers a SLIP OF PAPER...*

**MANAGER**

**It's a hospital in Napa. I'm terribly sorry. If you'd have been  
here, you'd have seen, there was nothing else to do.**

*Nicholas regards the paper, disbelieving, sorrow welling up.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. ELIZABETH'S HOME (SAUSALITO) - DAY**

*ELIZABETH, Nicholas' ex-wife, bends to kiss her young DAUGHTER. The daughter runs to a waiting, luxury MINI-VAN. The female driver waves as the van pulls away.*

*Across this suburban street, Nicholas stands watching.*

*Elizabeth is about to go back inside, but she sees Nicholas. She's surprised, smiling at first instinctively, but then she looks concerned.*

**INT. RESTAURANT - DAY**

*BUSINESS PEOPLE chat over breakfast. A TV at the bar shows GOOD MORNING AMERICA. Nicholas and Elizabeth are seated near. He's edgy, fingering a spoon, hand on his book.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I need your car, Elizabeth.**

**ELIZABETH**

**What happened to you, Nick? I mean, look at yourself...**

**NICHOLAS**

**I know, look at me, well...**

*(short laugh)*

**What happened? I don't know. I don't even really know. I have some things to try to take care of... I need the car a little while.**

**ELIZABETH**

**Of course you can have it if you need it. Can I get you something to eat?**

*She starts working the CAR KEY off her keychain.*

**NICHOLAS**

**You're the only person I can trust. Everyone else...**

*(pause)*

**If Sam Sutherland calls, don't tell him you saw me. Lie to him. And, whatever you hear, whatever anyone tells you when this is over...**

*Nicholas straightens as a PALE WAITRESS arrives. He studies her. She notices his fixation, tries to ignore.*

**PALE WAITRESS**

*(serving...)*

**There we go... coffee and English muffin, water**

*(smiles)*

**So, if there's anything...**

*Nicholas picks up his bottled water, examining the broken plastic SAFETY SEAL around the cap.*

**NICHOLAS**

**This is open. Someone opened it.**

**PALE WAITRESS**

**Yes sir, I...**

**NICHOLAS**

**I can't have this open.**

*(gives it back)*

**I'd like another unopened. And I don't want ice. I need a glass without ice.**

*The waitress leaves, glad to get away from this freak. Nicholas keeps looking all around the restaurant and over his shoulder. Elizabeth takes Nicholas' hand, worried.*

**ELIZABETH**

**Nick, talk to me. You're scaring me. I don't even know what you're saying.**

*He faces her, looks down at her hand in his.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm sorry, Liz... I don't mean to.**

*Nicholas clasps her hand, caresses it, looks at her.*

**NICHOLAS**

**The last few days, um... I've been thinking... had a lot of spare time.**

*(pause, sad)*

**I want to tell you... I'm starting to understand why you left me. I've been resenting you for it, maybe, but... I want to apologize, for all of it. For shutting you out, for not being there. I...**

*(swallows)*

**Anyway, I hope you can forgive me.**

**ELIZABETH**

**There's nothing to forgive.**

**NICHOLAS**

**It would mean a lot to me... if you and I could be friends. If I could have you back in my life... in some small way. It would be important.**

**ELIZABETH**

**Of course, Nick...**

*Nicholas tries to smile. He glances away for a second, and he lets out a STRANGLED CRY because he SEES SOMETHING...*

**NICHOLAS**

**No...no!**

*He stands, agonized, looking across to the... TELEVISION, where JIM FEINGOLD is ON SCREEN in C.U.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to television)*

**You fucking bastard!**

*ON TELEVISION: Feingold looks menacing, the top of his HEAD REDDENING and beginning to THROB. CHEESY SOUND EFFECTS...*

**NICHOLAS**

*(still to t.v.)*

**How did you find me here?!**

*Obviously, everyone's watching Nicholas, Elizabeth included.*

**FEINGOLD (v.o.)**

*(ON TELEVISION)*

**Honey, my head is killing me!**

**WIFE'S VOICE (v.o.)**

*(from t.v., o.s.)*

**Did you take anything, sweetie?**

**FEINGOLD (v.o.)**

*(on television)*

**I took aspirin, but it's not working!**

*ON TV: a FEMALE HAND appears, offering a BOTTLE OF PILLS.*

**WIFE'S VOICE (v.o.)**

*(from television)*

**Try Ambutol, you silly goose. It's stronger than aspirin and...**

*Nicholas is starting to understand, stunned.*

**NICHOLAS**

**He... he's an actor...**

*ON TV: Feingold, now cured, holds up the pills and smiles.*

**FEINGOLD (v.o.)**

**Thanks to Ambutol, I've got my head back together.**

*JINGLE MUSIC. Nicholas looks to Elizabeth, points to t.v.*

**NICHOLAS**

**It's just a t.v. He's just an actor.**

**ELIZABETH**

*(slowly)*

**Yes.**

*Nicholas realizes how he must look. He picks up the car key, gives Elizabeth a kiss on the forehead.*

**NICHOLAS**

**I'll explain someday.**

**ELIZABETH**

**I hope.**

*She watches Nicholas hurry away. She sits forward, wondering, shaking her head.*

*NEAR THE CASH REGISTER, Nicholas moves to the door, but stops. He goes to the CASHIER.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Can I borrow your Yellow Pages... ?**

*The cashier digs under the counter, comes up with the PHONE BOOK. Nicholas takes it, leaving...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Thanks.**

*Nicholas goes out the door, gone. The cashier does a double-take, about to say something, confused, dour.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. URBAN STREET - DAY**

*A run-down neighborhood. Nicholas drives Elizabeth's VOLVO, erratically, distracted...*

*INSIDE THE VOLVO*

*He steers with one hand while paging thru the YELLOW PAGES open on the seat. He gets to RESTAURANTS, trading glances between the book and the street.*

**ON THE STREET**

*Red light ahead. The Volvo stops.*

**INSIDE THE VOLVO**

*Nicholas finds ads for CHINESE RESTAURANTS, running his finger down, flipping the page. His finger hits it - a grinning CARTOON PANDA. "TUNG HOY Chinese Restaurant."*

**NICHOLAS**

**Tung Hoy. Tung Hoy... best in Chinatown.**

*He tears the page out and studies it like a pirate with a treasure map. Suddenly, an arm reaches in thru the window, putting a KNIFE to Nicholas' throat...*

**MALE VOICE (o.s.)**

**Get out of the car, fucker...**

*Nicholas holds still, eyes shifting to look at the wasted, skittish TEEN THUG threatening.*

**TEEN THUG**

**Open the door and climb out. Leave it running.  
Nicholas is twitchy calm, motionless.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You're making a mistake...**

*The knife presses harder against Nicholas' throat.*

**TEEN THUG**

**Get out of the car.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You don't understand...**

**TEEN THUG**

**Get out of the car, motherfucker! Get out of the car... !**

*Nicholas' hand finds and opens the book "To Kill a Mockingbird" beside him. It's HOLLOWED-OUT with a GUN hidden inside, a revolver, which Nicholas grips...*

*Nicholas brings the gun across, into the thug's face...*

**NICHOLAS**

**You have no idea how fragile I am right now.**

*The thug backs off... runs away. Nicholas watches him go, puts down the gun, drives.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. TUNG HOY - DAY**

*A festive Chinatown neighborhood. At "TUNG HOY," ducks hang behind the CARTOON PANDA painted on the window.*

**INT. TUNG HOY - DAY**

*Cramped. Walls covered in CELEBRITY HEADSHOTS. Nicholas faces an OLD CHINESE WOMAN behind the counter.*

**NICHOLAS**

**He's an actor. He does television commercials...**

**CHINESE WOMAN**

**Do you know how many customers we have? Hundreds.  
Thousands.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I know he orders from you. He had his food delivered to  
Montgomery Street. Fifteen-thirty-three...**

*The woman just shakes her head, continues bagging orders. Nicholas realizes it's futile. He bends over the counter.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Is there anyone else I could ask? Maybe they'll remem...**

*Nicholas stops, eyes locked...*

*Low on the wall, amongst the grease-browned pictures of pseudo-celebs, there's a newer GLOSSY OF FEINGOLD, smiling big, labeled "William Fisher."*

*Nicholas looks to woman who's shouting into the kitchen. He jumps up on the counter, reaching with his fingertips for the "Feingold" PHOTO, straining, almost has it...*

**EXT. CHINATOWN STREET - DAY**

*On a PAYPHONE, Nicholas looks at the BACK OF THE HEADSHOT - credits, phone number - flips it to show Feingold/Fisher.*

**NICHOLAS** (v.o.)

*(into phone)*

**... I know it's short notice Mrs. Fisher, but we were hoping your husband could audition today. He's perfect for the part...**

**MRS FISHER** (v.o.)

*(from phone)*

**Oh, this will break his heart...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Is there any way we can get in touch with him?**

**MRS FISHER (V.O.)**

**His beeper's here on the table. He took the kids to the zoo.**

**NICHOLAS**

**The zoo. How sweet. Which zoo?**

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. ZOO - DAY**

*ANIMALS lounge in their cages. TOURISTS wander, mostly families. Here comes Nicholas, running, searching...*

*Ahead: Feingold's in casual clothes, eating ice cream, doing his best to supervise THREE OBNOXIOUS CHILDREN. Nicholas moves in, slows when he's close...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Bill Fisher, I love your work...**

*Feingold turns, smiling... till he sees Nicholas and recognition sets in. He goes pale, sheepish.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Okay, please.. I got my kids...**

*Nicholas casually shows him the gun.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Get rid of them.**

**FEINGOLD**

**Hey, everyone - snack time! Here... here you go...**

*Feingold takes out cash and dispenses it. KIDS CHEER and run to a nearby SNACK CART.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Look, it was just a job. Nothing personal, ya know? I play my part, improvise a little. That's what I'm good at.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm tired of dealing with peons. I need to get to whoever's in charge.**

**FEINGOLD**

**Nobody knows, pal. Nobody gets the big picture...**

*(looking away)*

**Jason, Tommy, cut it out!**

*His BOYS are THROWING ROCKS at the MONKEYS. They look to their father, drop the rocks and saunter away.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Goddamnit, why do they do that?**

**NICHOLAS**

*(grips Feingold's shirt)*

**How do I find them? Their offices are empty.**

**FEINGOLD**

**They own the whole building. They just move from floor to floor.**

*Nicholas releases him.*

**NICHOLAS**

**They know you... you worked for them. You can get me in.**

**FEINGOLD**

**No, I can't. I'm sorry and all, but...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Tell them the cops are after you... tell them you've got to talk to someone, I'm threatening to blow the whistle.**

**FEINGOLD**

**What whistle? There's no fucking whistle. This is fucking Dangerous.**

**Nicholas gets in Feingold's face, furious.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You don't seem to understand. Right now - I'm dangerous.**

*Feingold gets the message.*

*CUT TO:*

**EXT. C.R.S. BUILDING - EARLY EVENING**

*Dusk. Lights off in the towered building. A battered STATION WAGON rounds a corner, PAUSES at the GARAGE RAMP.*

*IN THE STATION WAGON*

*Cluttered car. Feingold at the wheel, tense, appears alone.*

**FEINGOLD**

**We're here.**

*BEHIND THE SEAT, Nicholas peeks from under a blanket.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Drive in.**

**FEINGOLD**

**What are you gonna do anyway? You won't get your money back.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(muffled, under blanket)*

**I don't want money. I'm pulling back the curtain. I'm here to meet the wizard.**

**INT. C.R.S. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - NIGHT**

*The station wagon comes down the ramp to a closed GATE. A BEEFY GUARD looks from his booth. Feingold waves timidly. The GATE RISES and the station wagon moves on...*

*IN THE STATION WAGON*

*IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR: Beefy Guard watches, suspicious.*

**FEINGOLD**

*(under his breath)*

**He's eyeing us like Tiffany Towers.**

**NICHOLAS** *(o.s.)*

**Just go. Park where he can't see.**

*IN THE UNDERGROUND GARAGE*

*ACROSS THE GARAGE, near elevators, the station wagon parks. Feingold gets out, scared. Nicholas climbs out, crouched, gun in hand, points for Feingold to go first.*

*Feingold goes to push the elevator button, sweating. Nicholas remains hidden between cars.*

*A few elevators down, ELEVATOR DOORS open and a fierce C.R.S. SECURITY GUARD gets off, spots Feingold, murmurs into a WALKIE-TALKIE while taking out a gun.*

**C.R.S. GUARD**

**You're not allowed to be here.**

**FEINGOLD**

**No, they called me back... I have a fitting...**

*Behind, Nicholas puts his gun to the guard's neck.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Give me the gun.**

*Security Guard gives it up, an automatic, which Nicholas throws across the garage. Nicholas forces the guard to the open elevator, takes the WALKIE-TALKIE and pockets it, pulls Feingold along...*

**IN THE ELEVATOR**

*Nicholas frisks the Guard... pulls out HANDCUFFS.*

**FEINGOLD**

**You don't need me...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Shut up. Cuff him to the rail.**

*Feingold takes the handcuffs and obeys. Nicholas jams the gun against the guard's neck.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What floor?**

**C.R.S. GUARD**

**Fourteen. But this elevator ain't gonna get you there, college boy.**

*Nicholas pulls off the guard's KEYCHAIN, sorts keys...*

*He uses a GOLD C.R.S. KEY on the control pad, turns it and hits 14. DOORS CLOSE. The elevator sets IN MOTION.*

**C.R.S. GUARD**

**You'll never get away with this. These people will fuck you up.**

*Nicholas ignores. Feingold whimpers.*

**INT. C.R.S. BUILDING, 14TH FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT**

*ELEVATOR OPENS. Nicholas peers out. No one in the hall. He pushes Feingold ahead, pushes ALL THE FLOOR BUTTONS.*

**C.R.S. GUARD**

**You're fucked. You're both...**

*ELEVATOR SHUTS. Nicholas and Feingold move on.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Where?**

**FEINGOLD**

**I told you, they hired me over the phone. I never met anyone.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Where'd you pick up your checks?**

**FEINGOLD**

**It was a different floor then...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Guess!**

**FEINGOLD**

**Like, this way... sort of...**

*Nicholas nudges Feingold ahead with the gun.*

## **INT. COMMISSARY - NIGHT**

*Door swings open. Nicholas and Feingold enter... A BUSTLING, NOISY COMMISSARY. A cafeteria counter along one wall. People CHATTING and LAUGHING at rows of long tables.*

*Nicholas keeps a grip on Feingold, walks forward, stunned...*

*EVERYONE FROM THE GAME IS HERE: the PARAMEDICS eat with the HEAVY MAN who faked the heart attack. CHRISTINE'S FATHER is seated near the airport HOMELESS BUM, BIKINI GIRL and the MEXICAN MOTHER with her THREE CHILDREN from the bus.*

*PLUMP GUY, the P.I. who followed Nicholas and had his gun taken, comes off the cafe line with a soda, spotting Nicholas... spotting the gun, quaking. He flees...*

*Nicholas and Feingold continue. BUSINESSMAN 1 and 2 from Nicholas' club sit near AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS. The TAXI DRIVER and the FEMALE DETECTIVE chat.*

*There's the HOTEL MANAGER from the Claremont... the BELLHOP... the CHINESE WOMAN from Tung Hoy... the DESK CLERK from the Four Seasons and TEEN THUG. Every incidental character from Nicholas' recent life.*

*Nicholas inches into the room. A few of the players begin to notice him, some trying to place him, others pointing him out to their dining partners. Nicholas halts, sees...*

*CHRISTINE rising, picking up her dirty tray, in mid-conversation till she turns and sees...*

*Nicholas, who raises his gun.*

**CHRISTINE**

**Oh, fuck...**

*People notice the gun. SOME SCREAM. Everyone goes HUSHED.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What are you doing here?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'm back from the dead.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Nicholas, okay... you're not about to shoot anyone...**

*Nicholas moves to grab Christine. She drops her tray...*

**NICHOLAS**

**You're coming with me!**

**MALE VOICE (o.s.)**

**Everybody down!**

*Nicholas spins. At a far entrance, TWO SECURITY GUARDS aim guns.*

*PEOPLE SCREAM. Some run. Many dive for cover. PANIC. Nicholas gets behind Christine...*

*He uses Christine as a shield, arm around her throat, pulling her backwards. Feingold's frozen, hands held high...*

**SECURITY GUARD 1**

**Don't move!**

*Nicholas glances at the door, moving for it, dragging Christine.*

*Feingold's still got his hands up...*

*Nicholas and Christine near the doors...*

*Feingold bolts another direction, leaping tables...*

*Security Guard 1 shifts aim to Feingold...*

**SECURITY GUARD 1**

**Stop!**

*Security Guard 1 FIRES...*

**INT. 12TH FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT**

*Nicholas shoves out into the hall with Christine just as GUNSHOTS ECHO behind. MORE horrified SCREAMS HEARD and TABLES TOPPLING and PLATES CRASHING.*

*Nicholas shoves Christine ahead, searching desperately...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Get us out of here...**

**CHRISTINE**

**Nicholas...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Get us out!**

*He shoves. She falls. He pulls her back up...*

**INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT**

*They enter. He makes her climb at gunpoint...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Move, move, move!**

*They climb stairs... up towards the "HELIPORT..."*

**EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT**

*Air ducts, etc. A MUFFLED ALARM SOUNDS as Christine comes out the door onto the windy rooftop, followed by Nicholas. She backs against the railing the borders the huge BLACK PIT at the center of the building; an atrium SKYLIGHT.*

*Nicholas SLAMS the door, throws the HEAVY BOLT, searches to make sure the rest of the roof is clear.*

**CHRISTINE**

**What do you think you're doing?**

**NICHOLAS**

**You tell me... I want to know who's behind this. Who did this to me... how, why... ?**

**CHRISTINE**

**How deluded can you be? There's no why...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Who's responsible?!**

**CHRISTINE**

**It wasn't you. It wasn't personal...**

**NICHOLAS**

**You call them...**

*Nicholas pulls out the WALKIE-TALKIE, throws it to her.*

**CHRISTINE**

**It could have been any asshole with a couple hundred million in the bank.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Call them, tell them to get the boss up here. Tell them I'll kill you...**

*POUNING is HEARD from the other side of the roof DOOR. MUFFLED VOICES. Nicholas reacts.*

**CHRISTINE**

**They won't...**

**NICHOLAS**

**They will! You tell them if they don't come now, I will shoot you!**

*STATIC and GARBLED ORDERS HEARD from the WALKIE-TALKIE.*

**CHRISTINE**  
**I'm telling you... they'll let me die first. You're not in a position to threaten them. You're trapped. You're the one who...**

*Christine freezes, thrown...*

**CHRISTINE**  
**... wait a minute...**

*She's taking notice of the revolver Nicholas brandishes...*

**CHRISTINE**  
**Where'd you get that... ?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**... what... ?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**That gun. That... that's not automatic. The guard had an automatic...**

*POUNDING is LOUDER against the nearby door.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**What the fuck are you... ?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Where'd you get that gun?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**It's mine...**

**CHRISTINE**  
**We searched the house.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Guess you missed it.**

**CHRISTINE**  
*(suddenly very afraid)*  
**Just... wait. Just wait! Okay... please, I'm not kidding anymore...**

*Christine brings the WALKIE-TALKIE to her mouth...*

**CHRISTINE**

*(into walkie-talkie)*

**He's got a gun. Everyone, he's got a real gun up here! Real situation!**

*(switching channels)*

**... damn it...**

**NICHOLAS**

**What are you doing?**

**CHRISTINE**

**Nicholas, this is fake. It's all part of the game...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Fuck you.**

*THUMP-THUMP-THUMP against the DOOR...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Listen very carefully, I'm telling the truth... this is the game. This was all the game.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Bullshit. They killed him. Feingold, Fisher, whoever... they shot him...**

**CHRISTINE**

**No, now wait... think about it. What did you see... ?**

**NICHOLAS**

**I saw them kill him!**

**CHRISTINE**

**What did you really see? This whole time... special effects, squibs, like in the movies. Please, you've got to believe me...**

*(into walkie-talkie)*

**He's got a gun, with real bullets!**

**NICHOLAS**

**Stop talking to them!**

**CHRISTINE**

Okay... okay...

*(drops walkie-talkie)*

**I put it down. Now open that door. Mister Fisher's right on the other side of that door. He's an actor...**

**NICHOLAS**

Stop talking...

**CHRISTINE**

Nicholas...

**NICHOLAS**

Shut up!

**CHRISTINE**

Let me show you...

*She takes a step toward the door.*

**NICHOLAS**

**No! You take another step, I'll shoot! They're trying to kill me...**

**CHRISTINE**

**You're wrong. You're about to make the biggest mistake of your life. Put that gun down.**

*POUNING on the DOOR is DESPERATE. Nicholas falters...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Think about it! They followed you every step of the way. There was always a safety net. The taxi, there was a diver. At my house, the window was rigged... they shot at us with blanks...**

**NICHOLAS**

That's not true...

**CHRISTINE**

**It is. It's what you hired us for. Nobody touched your money. Nobody stole anything. They're waiting on the other side of that door with champagne... all your friends... it's a celebration...**

**NICHOLAS**

No...

**CHRISTINE**

**Open that door, you'll see. Your brother's there... Conrad. He's there. It's your birthday party...**

**NICHOLAS**

**Stop it!**

**CHRISTINE**

**Please, Nicholas, let me show you...**

*She takes a tentative step towards the door...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Don't move, you bitch... !**

**CHRISTINE**

*(still moving)*

**I have to show you...**

**NICHOLAS**

**No!**

*And from the static WALKIE-TALKIE on the ground:*

**MALE VOICE** *(v.o.)*

*(thru WALKIE-TALKIE)*

**... Take him down! Take him down...**

**CHRISTINE**

*(shouts to door)*

**He's got a gun!**

*With a CLANK! - the DOOR is POUNDED OPEN, swinging...*

*Nicholas turns, aims at the door...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Don't!**

*Nicholas FIRES, gunshot DEAFENING... !*

*In the doorway, Conrad, in TUXEDO and PARTY HAT, is startled as the magnum of CHAMPAGNE he holds EXPLODES and throws foam and glass in a wide spray...*

*The smile falls from Conrad's face as BLOOD spreads across his chest. He looks to Nicholas, confused, collapsing...*

*A collective cry of horror comes from the gaily dressed PARTY-GOERS behind as Feingold catches Conrad and eases him to the ground, cradles him...*

*Nicholas lowers his gun... realizing...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Connie...**

*Feingold clutches Conrad, trying to stop the bleeding, feeling for a pulse. Blood flows out Conrad's mouth.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Jesus... you shot him... !**

*(back to others)*

**Someone call an ambulance!**

*Conrad's eyes are closed. He's motionless. He's dead.*

*Christine lets out a hysterical sob, hands to her mouth.*

**FEINGOLD**

**Oh, God... oh, God...**

*Nicholas drops the gun, moves forward, stunned, numb...*

**FEINGOLD**

**He's dead... he's dead... !**

*(to Nicholas)*

**You killed him!**

*Nicholas falls to his knees in front of Feingold and Conrad.*

*Christine's eyes fill with tears...*

**CHRISTINE**

*(to Nicholas)*

**Why?! I told you... I told you. Why didn't you listen?**

*Feingold releases Conrad to the floor, rising, bloody...*

**FEINGOLD**

**We're going to jail. We're all going to jail for the rest of our lives...**

*People start clearing out of the stairwell, heading down.*

**FEINGOLD**

*(to Nicholas)*

**We thought you knew! How could you let this get so out of hand?**

*Nicholas just remains kneeled there, breathing unevenly, staring at his brother's corpse...*

**CHRISTINE**

**Why wouldn't you listen to me? What is wrong with you? You killed your own brother!**

*Nicholas looks to the dark sky, tears streaming down his face. He looks all around.*

*Christine stops, looking down at the corpse, crying out of control. Feingold comes to attempt to comfort her.*

*Nicholas gets to his feet, unsteady, backing away, looking to the GLASS SKYLIGHT. He wipes his tears.*

*Nicholas stands motionless for the longest time. Calm.*

*Nicholas moves forward... a goal in mind...*

*Christine turns, sees...*

*Nicholas comes to the edge of the SKYLIGHT...*

*Christine screams...*

*Nicholas leaps...*

**INT. C.R.S. BUILDING - NIGHT**

*Nicholas CRASHES thru the SKYLIGHT, FALLING... SPARKLING SHARDS surround him like stars as he PLUMMETS...*

*The WORLD BELOW is PITCH DARK. Nicholas turns in the air, head thrown back, closing his eyes...*

*FLASHBACK/GRAINY HOME MOVIES - FLASH FRAMES*

*QUICK IMAGES: the CLOWN, CHRISTINE'S FACE, NICHOLAS and CONRAD as children, Nicholas' FATHER striking the ground... IMAGES so RAPID they're hard to process.*

*BACK TO SCENE*

*As Nicholas falls...*

*FALLING forever...*

*He lets out a CRY as the end rushes closer... BRILLIANT LIGHT suddenly illuminates him. Nicholas throws his eyes open, gasping in the brightness...*

*LIGHTS come on from all sides to show NICHOLAS' IMPACT as he lands on his back, arms outstretched, SWALLOWED by an ENORMOUS INFLATED LIFESAVING CUSHION that covers the entire floor of the atrium...*

*AIR is HEARD RUSHING. Nicholas sinks, coming to rest as the cushion DEFLATES. Harmless bits of BREAKAWAY GLASS shower down. He doesn't move...*

*He can't comprehend. Motionless. DOORS are HEARD OPENING.*

*FOOTSTEPS RUSHING FORWARD.*

**VARIOUS VOICES (o.s.)**

**... let's go! ... make sure he's alright... see if he's okay...**

*STUNT COORDINATORS come from all directions, in C.R.S. jumpsuits, wading thru the flowing cushion, coming to help Nicholas up, asking if he's okay. Nicholas just blinks at them, quaking, lips trembling...*

*He's led out of the cushion, barely standing, sees...*

*Conrad runs from the elevators, covered in blood but very much alive, smiling...*

*Conrad reaches Nicholas, throwing his arms around him, giving him a long kiss, laughing...*

**CONRAD**

**Happy Birthday, Nickie. Happy fucking Birthday...**

*Conrad embraces him again, knocks him back into the cushion. Nicholas is still not all there, pulling away...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Get... get off. Get off me!! You... you...**

*Nicholas shoves free, staring at Conrad, looking up, looking back at Conrad, looking all around, terrified, near tears...*

*Emotion overwhelms Nicholas. He laughs and cries at once, takes Conrad in his arms, holding tight, hands balled into fists, clinging gratefully.*

*ACROSS THE ATRIUM, DOORS OPEN and people flow out, cheering: Sutherland, Ilsa and Elizabeth at front, looking unsure, forcing smiles, led by C.R.S. ESCORTS. And behind, DOZENS and DOZENS of C.R.S. WORKERS, ASSISTANTS and TECHNICIANS.*

*At the bank of ELEVATORS, DING, DING, DING... DOORS OPEN and the CAST OF CHARACTERS EMERGES, Feingold leading, holding Christine's hand, everyone elated and shouting victoriously.*

*The crowd encircles Conrad and Nicholas as they climb back out of the cushion. HUNDREDS of WELL-WISHERS gathering...*

*Conrad climbs a few stairs, pulls Nicholas along, motions...*

**CONRAD**

**Ladies and gentlemen...**

*(pause)*

**My big brother... Nicholas Van Orton! He had it all, and now he has it all back!**

*THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. Nicholas looks out over them, flush, awed, unable to catch his breath.*

*CUT TO:*

**INT. C.R.S. BUILDING, ATRIUM/LOBBY - TIME CUT - NIGHT**

*LOUD MUSIC. COCKTAIL PARTY IN PROGRESS. A huge CAKE is being cut. Tables surround a PACKED dance floor area where Feingold dances crazily. Everyone's drinking, eating...*

*INT THE CROWD, FIND: Nicholas stands with a bottle of champagne in hand, watching Ilsa embrace Conrad.*

**ILSA**

**I hope we'll be seeing more of you.**

**CONRAD**

**Count on it.**

*Ilsa reaches to straighten Conrad's hair. She regards Nicholas with affection, kisses his cheek.*

**ILSA**

**Goodnight. See you home.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Goodnight.**

*(watches her go, to Conrad)*

**Where was she?**

**CONRAD**

**In a hotel. Ordering room service and watching pay-per-view.  
She was a real sport.**

*BUSINESSMAN 1 and HEAVY MAN come thru the crowd to Nicholas.*

**BUSINESSMAN 1**

**Hey, congratulations! You did great... really kicked ass...**

**HEAVY MAN**

**Amazing, just wanted to tell you...**

*Nicholas thanks them, shaking hands as they move on.*

**NICHOLAS**

*(to Conrad)*

**You know... how'd you manage the gun? I mean...**

**CONRAD**

**Baby, they were all over the house with metal detectors. They  
switched your gun with a look-alike, rigged barrel, loaded with  
blanks. Pop-gun.**

**MAN'S VOICE** *(o.s.)*

*(from behind)*

**Mister Van Orton... ?**

*Nicholas and Conrad both turn to face a C.R.S. ACCOUNTANT, a nebbish who holds a CLIPBOARD  
and gives an amused look.*

**ACCOUNTANT**

**Conrad Van Orton.**

**CONRAD**

**Yeah... ?**

*Conrad steps aside with the accountant. Nicholas takes a swig off his champagne, nods in response to C.R.S. WORKERS who slap his back as they pass.*

*Nicholas realizes something, begins searching the crowd as Elizabeth arrives with HUSBAND and DAUGHTER hand in hand.*

**ELIZABETH**

**We have to head out... just wanted to say goodbye.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You're going? Well, thanks again.**

*(to DAUGHTER)*

**Good to see you, Rachel...**

*(shakes HUSBAND'S hand)*

**Thanks for coming, Mel. I'll get your car back. Right now it's, uh... at the zoo. Sorry.**

**ELIZABETH**

**Happy Birthday, Nicholas.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I'll call. I really will.**

**ELIZABETH**

**I know.**

*She kisses his cheek. Nicholas waves as they go...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Bye guys.**

*Nicholas looks around, still searching. He walks, receiving more random congratulations, heading to a table where Sutherland sits puffing a cigar. Nicholas sits.*

**SUTHERLAND**

**Bravo, young man. you have to tell me what this was all about sometime.**

*(blows cigar smoke)*

**I want you to know... when it looked there for awhile like you were going fully insane... I was fully prepared to have you committed to the finest mental-health facility available. I mean that sincerely, don't thank me.**

**NICHOLAS**

**You warm my heart.**

*Sutherland smiles, raises his glass. Conrad deposits himself in a seat, holding an inch-and-a-half thick stack of COMPUTER PAPER, studies the last sheet, thumbs the pages.*

**NICHOLAS**

**What?**

**CONRAD**

**This... ? Oh, this is just... this is the bill.**

*Conrad tries to laugh, daunted.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Really?**

**CONRAD**

*(none too happy)*

**Yeah.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Split it?**

**CONRAD**

**Oh, God yes please. Thanks, man. I'll take you up on that.**

**NICHOLAS**

*(leans forward)*

**Where's Christine?**

*(off Conrad's look)*

**The waitress.**

**CONRAD**

**Yeah, yeah. She called a cab. Said something about catching a plane.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Did she?**

*Nicholas looks around.*

**EXT. C.R.S. BUILDING - NIGHT**

*Nicholas comes out of the building to the street, hurrying without wanting to appear hurried, looks both ways. Down the block, a TAXI arrives. Christine's getting in.*

*Nicholas runs to catch it...*

**NICHOLAS**

**Excuse me... Christine... !**

*She looks out, waiting with the door open.*

**NICHOLAS**

**Hi. Didn't get a chance to say goodbye.**

**CHRISTINE**

**That's my fault. I get too worked up at these. I'm very method. You do know... that's not my name.**

**NICHOLAS**

**I didn't know what else to call you.**

**CHRISTINE**

**Claire.**

**NICHOLAS**

**Claire. Pleased to meet you.**

*He holds out his hand. She shakes.*

**CHRISTINE**

**I have to get to the airport...**

**NICHOLAS**  
**WHERE ARE YOU GOING IN SUCH A HURRY?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**There's another gig starting in Saudi Arabia. I'm just a walk-on this time though. Bit-part.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**What about dinner sometime, when you get back? Would that be... ?**

**CHRISTINE**  
*(pause)*  
**Is this something you're interested in? I'm not really that person I was.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**I realize. Maybe you could... tell me a little about yourself.**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Like what... my favorite color... ?**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Like... where are you from?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Originally, Connecticut.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Big family... small?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**One brother, one sister.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Studied acting, I assume?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Julliard, yeah.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Single?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Yes.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Boyfriend?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**No.**

**NICHOLAS**  
**Underwear?**

**CHRISTINE**  
**Always.**

*Nicholas nods, scratches his head.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**I could learn to live with that.**

*Christine smiles.*

**NICHOLAS**  
**See how much I've learned already. Imagine how much more I  
could learn if you let me keep you company at the airport.**

*She considers.*

*She moves over. Nicholas gets in beside her, shuts the door. The cab drives away, into the nighttime city.*

**THE END**