

The Game

by

John Brancato & Michael Ferris

and

Larry Gross

and

Andrew Kevin Walker

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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 sparking 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 -- NIGHT

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 of 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 place. 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.

NICHOLAS

The Fitzwilliam Botanical Garden
Annual Fundraiser.

NICHOLAS

No.

NICHOLAS

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 reservation in my name.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPTON PLACE RESTAURANT -- DAY

Upscale. Quiet. Nicholas is in a booth facing the rear, studying a thick FINANCIAL STATEMENT, 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 on, 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-lookingm 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 gynaecologist, 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.)
(from cellular)
... 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 books, 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

You did? 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 fireplace. 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 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.)

Sue 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 office 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 card the receptionist offers, examines it, turns it over: finds FOUR NUMBERS on the back.

FEINGOLD
(of the numbers)
Excellent. Let's 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 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..."

Nocholas 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 experimental 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." "Vegetables
hate me. 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. OFFICES, 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?!

CUT TO:

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

Nicholas dresses, alone, pulling up his pants. He notices
above: a MIRRORED 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)

One 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, disssatisfied.

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.

INT. ATHLETIC CLUB, RACQUETBALL COURT -- NIGHT

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

THRU A WINDOW: Nicholas plays, alone, sawtting 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 look 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 it 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 tommorow, 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 hope 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 toady 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.

BERNARD SHAW (v.o.)

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 it 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?

Bspectacled 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
ever you 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 you. 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 a 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 the 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 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 your 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, tilst 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 PARKING 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 all 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.

IN 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 HEAR 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 pull me up.

NICHOLAS

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

CHRISTINE

No.

NICHOLAS

Please...

CHRISTINE

I'm not wearing 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 RIPPPPPPPPING...

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.

NICHOLAS
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, makes a chouse, moving into a very NARROW ALLEY space.

NICHOLAS

Where are you going?
(looks in, worried)
You can't fit 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 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 you a 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 CABS. 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 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 man 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: infomercials,
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
(in 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
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.

NICHOLAS
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.

Nichola 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 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 relaves 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 jsut sign
here...

The manager offers a CHARGE SLIP 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... reachse 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 appear 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 LOUS -- 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 alleyway. 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 nipple 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. 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 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 SMILELY-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.

IN 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 on 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 papere-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 throw 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 HUMMMMMMMM of POWER FAILING, all the BLACK LIGHTS GO OUT. Nicholas raises his gun...

NICHOLAS
Oh God...

Pointing it into the dark kitchen, 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, 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?

Nichols slams the phone down, picks up another...

RECORDING (v.o.)
(from phone)
If you'd like to make a call, please
hang up and...

PHONE STOP RINGING. Nicholas hangs up, digging out his wallet. Rifling thru it, he comes up with the VALET TICKET with the C.R.S. EMERGRENCY 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 away. 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, narrow 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 SCREEEECHING 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, cable box, everything else... it's all pending.

(shuts notebook)

Breaking and entering we have, solid. Malicious mischief, vandalism, harassment. But, that's about all.

SUTHERLAND

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. "Cable 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 glassy 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 flies.

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 Nicholas 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 favor?

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.

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 -- DAT

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 towering 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...

POUNING 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 staticy 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...

IN 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 the 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 slowly 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 to 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