

"LEAVING LAS VEGAS"

by

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Based on the novel

by

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SHOOTING SCRIPT

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TITLE ON BLACK; '10 P.M. - LOS ANGELES'

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SMART BAR IN BEVERLY HILLS - NIGHT

It is the kind of bar where the well-to-do folks of LA go to pick up - or be picked up. Lesser-known actors, agents and executives of all ages.

Into this bar comes Ben.

Ben is in his thirties. He is wearing an Armani suit that could use a visit to the dry-cleaner's. He hasn't shaved in the last twenty-four hours (but neither has any of the actors in the bar). He is a good-looking man but is clearly in trouble of some kind. Although still in control of his faculties, it becomes clear in the following scene that he is much the worse for wear with drink. He looks around the room until he sees someone he recognizes and then walks over to a table where two couples are seated. The men are young execs, the girls, both blonde and busty, have very white teeth and smile all of the time. The camera follows Ben over to the table. One of the execs looks up as Ben gets close. He recognizes him but delays his recognition until the last moment in the hope that Ben is not looking at him.

BEN

Peter

PETER

Ben... how are you, man?

They shake hands. Ben is not invited to take a seat and Peter waits for a while before being forced to introduce him to the table.

PETER

Ben Sanderson, Marc Nussbaum, Sheila, Debbie.

MARC

Nice to meet you. I think I spoke to you on the phone a couple of years ago. Weren't you both at MGM with Laddie?

BEN

That's right. Are you still at ICM?

MARC

No, I'm at Tri-Star now.

BEN

That's great. Say hello to Mike for me. That's a beautiful dress, Debbie, and those are fabulous earrings, Sheila.

There is an awkward silence. Ben does not make a move and is not invited to join them. The girls smile.

MARC

I gotta tell you, I'm a big fan of your writing. I loved Bay of Pigs.

BEN

Thanks a lot. I didn't actually write it, I just got the credit. I was fired.

(to Peter)

Can I talk to you for a moment?

Peter gets up and he and Ben walk to the door together.
Peter speaks very quietly.

PETER

Listen, Ben, I can't help you any more. Do you understand?

BEN

This is the last time. Promise. I just need some cash tonight. I lost my credit cards. The money'll be on your desk first thing tomorrow morning, Scout's honor. How's the new one coming along? I here you got Richard Gere.

The two men look at each other for a while. Peter's friends are looking at them, as are other people in the room. Peter takes out his wallet and extracts some notes.

PETER

This is all I have in cash. Please don't drink it here.

BEN

Yes, that's fine. I'll messenger it over to you tomorrow.

PETER

I don't want it. Ben... I think it would be best if you didn't contact me again.

And he turns and walks away, back to his table.

CUT TO BLACK:

TITLE ON BLACK; 'LAS VEGAS - 1.20 A.M.'

FADE UP ON:

EXT. HELICOPTER SHOT - DAY

Las Vegas. A blaze of color in the middle of a desert.

Credit sequence begins.

CUT TO:

INT. LOBBY OF EXPENSIVE HOTEL - NIGHT

A mixture of businessmen and gamblers creates a sense of activity and superficial excitement. Music wafts across the soundtrack, almost drowned by the dense texture of thousands of slot machines, creating an insane New Age symphony.

Credit sequence ends.

Into the lobby from the street comes Sera.

It's hard to tell how old Sera is – somewhere between twenty-five and thirty-five. She is a beautiful American girl. Her face has the freshness of a model in a Sears catalogue. She is dressed simply in a short black skirt and matching jacket. High heels complete the picture.

Heads turn as she passes a group of businessmen and it's clear they find her very sexy. She acknowledges their glance with a half-smile and steps into the elevator.

She could be a secretary, or a PA to one of the many execs here in Las Vegas at a convention. The body language is a bit different, though.

INT. PENTHOUSE SUITE OF HOTEL - NIGHT

A view of night-time Las Vegas through a window. Traffic up and down The Strip; bright, gaudy neon flashing and winking. We hear the sound of men laughing and the camera pulls focus and we see reflected in the glass...

...a group of people.

On the table are bowls of potato chips and dip and sandwiches. The TV is on at a sports channel and two boxers pound the shit out of each other.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Sera looks at herself in the gold-tinted mirror in the elevator. She takes out a lipstick and freshens her lips. Some people get out and the elevator climbs higher. We see from the indicator that she has punched the Penthouse button. Camera moves in tighter and we see that she is nervous but concealing it well. The elevator stops, the doors open and she steps right into the Penthouse.

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

A bottle of Scotch is almost empty. The man talking is Yuri.

He is Russian, in his early forties, a little overweight, a big man wearing a blue silk suit. His thick black hair is greased and combed back. He wears a lot of jewelry, all gold. Rings, a bracelet and a Rolex. Two men in business suits and a weird stoned woman in her late thirties listen to him.

YURI

...but please, my friends, call me Yuri. It is my American name... I picked it myself.

The three people laugh. There is a hint of contempt in the way that they speak to Yuri.

FIRST BUSINESSMAN

Where are you from, Yuri? I mean, you sure don't talk like you're from this neck of the woods.

Yuri smiles at them.

YURI

(silky voice)

No... you are right, my friend. How very observant you are. I am from Latvia.

WEIRD WOMAN

Tough place.

YURI

Yes, I hear this too. But I am not a tough man. I am a simple man who is here to learn from my new American friends.

The door opens and Sera comes in. Everybody stares at her.

WEIRD WOMAN
(turned on)
Is this your friend, Yuri?

YURI
Ah, yes... Sera.

The second businessman takes out a small manila envelope from his inside pocket.

YURI
Sera is my gift to you, my friends from New York City. You may do with her as you wish in this beautiful room, which is also my gift for the night to my friends. You will find her a very willing girl, for all of you... just as we arranged.

Yuri smiles again as the Second Businessman hands him the envelope. The rest of them just stare at Sera, aroused by the idea of her.

SECOND BUSINESSMAN
Of course, Yuri. I think you'll find this just as we discussed.

Yuri gets up.

YURI
So, my friends... I have other business to attend. Enjoy.

He heads for the door, passing Sera. She holds out his arm as he passes.

SERA
(whispering)

Yuri... please! Can I talk to you
for a moment.

Still smiling, he takes Sera's arm and leads her into the
bedroom.

YURI

My friends... excuse me for just one
moment.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mirrors reflect mirrors.

SERA

I don't want this. Yuri, please. I
really don't want this. You know I
don't like to do groups.

YURI

(playful)

I want this, Sera. I need this!

SERA

Please, Yuri.

He holds put his arms. Sera goes to him. He hugs her with
one arm. He pulls up her skirt so that her panties are
exposed.

YURI

(seductive)

These are pretty.

Sera watches in the mirror as he pulls her panties to reveal
her buttocks. He strokes her there gently with his other
hand. We see that there are two fine scars there. He speaks
gently, like a father to a daughter.

YURI

Is this how you would repay me for
coming all this way to find you again?
Driving through the desert to protect
my little Sera.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - SILENT - GRAINY BLACK AND WHITE

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Yuri and Sera – different time, different place. Sera looking frightened, backing away from Yuri, who pulls a switchblade from his jacket and opens it.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Yuri enters from the bedroom. The weird woman is doing a line of coke.

YURI

(cheerful)

Sera wanted me to ask if she might undress at once for you. She has a very beautiful undergarment which she would like you to see.

ANGLE ON BEDROOM DOOR

Sera comes into the room. She smiles and begins unbuttoning her jacket.

She takes it off and drops it on the floor, and then unzips her skirt and steps out of it. Sera is now in control and playing the room. In the background. Yuri leaves the room.

WEIRD WOMAN

(strange voice)

Come here.

Sera walks over and something strange takes place between them.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BAR. LA - MORNING

The bar is dark but through a small window we see that it is

a very bright sunny day outside. The bartender reads the Los Angeles Times. The bar surface is red vinyl. There are five customers, all single men. One of them is Ben and he is sitting at the bar watching TV. A game show is in progress and the TV sound is loud. Ben finishes his drink and grimaces before indicating to the barman that he'd like a repeat. Barman pours him a whiskey – Cranberry – and the camera moves in closer to Ben, ending in a close-up. Ben takes a big hit from the drink and concentrates on the TV. We hear from the TV sound that it is a word game with a big prize. Ben smiles to himself.

BEN'S POV OF TV

The talk show hostess, an American TV beauty, is showing the audience the prizes available in today's game show.

ANGLE ON BEN

As he finishes that drink and asks for another. The camera moves in close on his eyes.

BEN'S POV OF TV

She turns from the prizes and looks straight into the TV camera, which starts zooming into her. At first, what she is saying makes complete sense, but then things change...

HOSTESS

(smoky, sexy voice)

Just look at this studio, Ben, filled with glamorous merchandise, including an extra special prize chosen just for you! A big, bad, BMW motorcycle, complete with saddle bags stuffed with thousands of US dollars.

"There are oohs" from the audience.

HOSTESS

So, Ben,
(tosses her hair)
let's find a bar, get drunk and go
for a ride.

The studio lights dim.

HOSTESS

Then we can get a suite somewhere
and order up a case of champagne
while we fuck ourselves silly.

Close-up on males in the audience doing the grunt.

HOSTESS

This is it, just for you, Ben.

She unbuttons her top, licks her fingers and makes her nipples
hard.

HOSTESS

Because you've been so patient, and
because I want to fuck you, take
care of you, and because there's
nothing else in the world worth doing.

Section of the audience clapping – some women dabbing their
eyes.

HOSTESS

Tell you what, Ben, let's go to Las
Vegas. The bars stay open twenty
four hours night and day. Just you,
just me, Ben, think about it, all
right?

ANGLE ON BEN

LOST IN HIS FANTASY

BEN

I'll think about it.

He looks back at the screen, but the show has returned to
what is known as "normal". He finishes his drink and then an
attack of nausea hit him. He takes a deep breath and rolls
his neck and his head. The barman puts down a fresh drink.
Ben looks at his own hands... which are steady.

BARMAN

You should go on that show.

CUT TO:

INT. SMART BUSINESS SPACE - MORNING

Ben sitting at a desk with a phone wedged on his ear, a cup of black coffee on the desk. The walls are covered with framed film posters and one complete wall has shelves jammed with scripts. He nods from time to time and sometimes says 'yes' or 'OK', but it becomes clear that there is no one on the other end. He drinks from the coffee cup. A woman comes up to his desk, a business colleague. She puts a wad of messages down on the desk.

BEN

Yeah, but what's the back end like?
By the time we're through with P and
A, the above-the-line is going to
take it to about fifteen and with
something like this... I don't know
if Disney will go for it... can I
call you back on this? OK... chow
for now.

(to the woman)

Good morning.

WOMAN

(cautious)

Ben... Mr. Simpson was looking for
you. I said that you had a doctor's
appointment. He said for you to go
in as soon as... are you OK?

BEN

(pulling himself
together)

I'm fantastic, but I gotta go out
now... very important meeting, could
make a coupla million for the company.

Ben gets up and as he passes her he grabs her and dances a few steps. It is clear that she likes Ben, but when his face gets close to hers she smells the alcohol on his breath and she turns away. Ben stops dancing and smiles sadly.

WOMAN
(tender)
Ben?

BEN
What?

WOMAN
You should go now.

She leaves the room and Ben goes through some routine at the desk. He opens a drawer of a filing cabinet and puts in his whole arm, looking for something at the very back. He pulls out a small vodka bottle and opens it and then pours the contents into his coffee cup. With cup in hand he leaves the room.

CUT TO:

INT. SMART OFFICE - DAY

Ben is sitting opposite his boss, Mr. Simpson, who is very upset. He hands Ben an envelope. Ben opens it and pulls out a check. He looks at the amount.

BEN
(genuinely moved)
This is to generous Peter.

SIMPSON
(close to tears)
Well... we liked having you around,
Ben, but you know how it is.

BEN
(ashamed)
Sure thing... and I'm sorry.

Ben takes a swig from his coffee cup.

SIMPSON
(trying to cheer things
along)
Well... what are you going to do

now?

BEN

I thought I might move out to Las Vegas.

Simpson looks puzzled.

BEN

The bars never close.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BMW , DAY

Ben drives through Beverly Hills. He pours the content of a small bottle of vodka into an empty Coke can, puts the empty bottle under the seat and then drinks from the can.

He slips a tape into the player and we hear "Lonely Teardrops", by Michael McDonald, one of Ben's favorite songs. At a traffic light a cop on a bike pulls up next to him and Ben takes a pull from the Coke can and smiles, mouths the word "hot". The cop nods back at him, the light changes and they both pull away.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA STREET , DAY

Ben carries a brown paper bag which clinks. Camera follows him as he walks down the street. He looks at...

BEN'S POV

A girl walking ahead of him in the same direction. She is walking her dog. She is attractive from behind. We hear Ben's thoughts.

BEN (V.O.)

Beautiful, not just the shape which is nice, but the whole walk, the feeling, the movement. This girl is pleased with herself. Maybe this is the only art I can appreciate... I

don't know if this is good or bad,
but right now she is really beautiful.
When I was a boy it would have been
really important that she have a
pretty face, to go with this body, I
mean. I still would like to see her
face, but her beauty is no dependent
on her face.

The dog gets interested in something on the sidewalk and she
bends down to pull at its collar.

BEN (V.O.)

I wonder what kind of panties she's
wearing. Shit, that's too specific,
but... on the other hand, you can
never be too specific... but then,
the infinitesimal must be, by
definition, as infinite as the
infinite.

Suddenly the girl stops. Ben catches up with her and cannot
resist looking into her face.

BEN (V.O.)

God, she's so young.

The girl sees Ben and smiles an innocent smile,

GIRL

Hi!

BEN

Hi...

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE IN SANT MONICA - DAY

Ben walks up to his house still carrying the paper bag. A
young boy of about thirteen years of age is fixing a beat-up
bike. Ben greets him.

BEN

Hey, Brad... how's it going?

BRAD

Hey Ben. There were a couple of guys looking for you.

BEN

What did they look like?

BRAD

Suits. I didn't tell them anything. You know anything about gears?

Ben takes a look. The gear mechanism is all bent out of shape. He bends down to have a look. It is clear from the way he deals with this mechanical problem that he's good with his hands. He doesn't try to force anything but he moves the chain and gear mechanism to get to the problem.

BEN

How'd this happen?

BRAD

I was going real fast down on the beach and something slipped and everything got jammed up.

BEN

The news is not good, kid. This bit here... see there... it's broken. You need a new one.

BRAD

(upset)

How much, do you think?

BEN

I don't know. I'll find out though.

Ben gets up, picks up his bottles and heads for his house. He looks back and Brad is sitting still by the bike, looking totally dejected. This really seems to upset Ben.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Ben is naked and the shower can be heard in the background. The house is austere, only the minimum of furnishing. He pours a large tumbler of vodka and takes a gulp, then tops up the glass. He turns on the stereo, selects a record – Miles Davis, Kind of Blue – and puts it on the turntable. He turns on the cassette recorder and inserts a new blank tape. He puts the machine into the record mode. He kneels down next to the deck and with complete precision puts the needle on the second track without any problem. The music starts and continues through the next sequence.

INT. SHOWER - DAY

Ben is in the shower with the glass in his hand.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Ben shaving with the glass in his hand. He does the area around his mouth first so that he can drink while he does the rest.

INT. LIVING SPACE - DAY

Showered and shaved and wearing a smart dark suit, Ben looks handsome and normal. He selects another record and again sets up the cassette machine to record. He turns the stereo up full and dances by himself while watching MTV silent. He tries a turn which is a bit ambitious and loses his balance.

In slow motion we see him fall. Ben lies still on the floor.

He smiles to himself and decides to stay there for a while...

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. SERA'S BEDROOM. LAS VEGAS - DAY

Sera wakes up in bed next to Yuri. (The camera is high above the bed looking down.) She is completely drenched in sweat. A thin shaft of light comes from the crack in the drapes and falls across their bodies. Other than that, the room is in darkness. To get out of bed she would have to climb over

him.

She lies still. Yuri speaks without opening his eyes...

YURI

I missed you, Sera. You have been lonely?

Sera blinks and turns her head towards him.

SERA

I'm older now, Yuri.

He puts his hand between her legs, over the sheets and grasps her there.

YURI

You have been lonely?

SERA

(tensing a little)
I've been all right.

YURI

I will keep you safe. We are both older.

He climbs on to her and mounts her. Familiarity.

YURI

You have been lonely?

SERA

(flat voice)
I am lonely, Yuri.

He begins thrusting into her.

YURI

Yes... so am I.

Camera move slowly into a tight portrait of Sera.

SERA (V.O.)

I had a new dress... we were at the

fair, Daddy bought me an ice-cream
and I spilt it on my dress...

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Sera is sitting on a sofa talking to an unseen person.

(Although it is no entirely clear when this is taking place,
the sense of it is that we are in present, i.e. all the events
in the film are in the past tense.)

SERA

...Mom was with Helen, and Dad looked
around first to see if she was
watching and then he scraped it all
off and threw it on the grass and
then he kissed me and hugged me and
told me it was all right...

INT. SERA'S KITCHEN. LATER THAT DAY

Yuri is tucking into a hearty breakfast. Sera plays with her
food.

YURI

(planning his day)

This is such a small apartment, Sera.
I cannot stay here. We will find a
big apartment. You know how much
money I can bring you. I belong in...

(laughs)

...wealth and luxury.

He suddenly looks up from his food and smiles at her.

YURI

Why did you run away from me in Los
Angeles?

Sera says nothing.

YURI

Because you are sly. Mmm? You knew

all along that there was more money
in Las Vegas. Didn't you?

Sera nervously plays with her food.

YURI

You have nothing to fear from me.
You know why? Because we belong
together, Sera. Don't we?

Sera forces a smile.

SERA

(quietly)
Yes.

QUICK CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Grainy black-and-white image. Sera on a bed, pinned down by
Yuri, who has a knife.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAY

YURI

I'm pleased with you, Sera... how
you have moved up in the world. I
showed you a glamorous world when I
took you off the streets...
(shaking his head)
and how you repay me.

SERA

Where have you been staying?

YURI

With an old friend.

He drops his fork.

YURI

But that is none of your affair. You will call this morning and book me into a hotel suite where I will make new contacts for us.

The mood has changed and Sera does her best to move out of these dangerous waters.

SERA

You'll need some money, then.

Yuri nods. Sera rises goes to a kitchen drawers and finds money.

YURI

(becoming angry)

It is, after all, Sera, my money.

SERA

(calmly)

Yes, of course. How much do you need?

YURI

(shaking his head)

All of it. I need to buy many things... all of it!

Yuri is very angry and as Sera hands him the money, he hits her, hard, knocking her back into the refrigerator. His ring cuts her cheek.

YURI

(shouting)

Don't look at me like that.

And then his anger goes and he becomes quite tender with her. He takes her face in his hands to look at the cut.

YURI

It's not so bad. It is nothing.

(whispers)

I need money, Sera. I need it fast.

You must go on the street tonight.

For me.

He sits down with shaking hands. He suddenly seems more vulnerable than she is. He goes to the window and looks out, left and then right, as if he expects to see something.

YURI

I need money fast, Sera. I want you back on the street. Tonight.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN SLOWLY - SOUND FIRST:

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben opens his eyes. The only light comes from the TV. The Miles Davis record has got caught on a scratch and is repeating the same phrase over and over again. He looks at his gold Rolex and then fingers the wedding band on his finger.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BAR. LA - NIGHT

Ben is sitting at the bar. He drinks a large glass of something very quickly and then immediately orders another.

He drinks this a little slower but still too quick, finishes it and then orders another. He looks around the bar and sees a woman sitting by herself, thirtyish, pretty and receptive.

She looks and sees Ben, and he smiles at her. She smiles right back. Ben talks across the bar.

BEN

(charming)

Good evening.

PRETTY WOMAN

(pleased)

Hi.

BEN

I'm Benjamin... Ben.

PRETTY WOMAN

I'm Teri.

Ben walks over to where she is. She is pleased that this good-looking man has come over to make a play. She makes a noise with her straw to indicate that her glass is empty.

BEN

I'll get you another one... and me too. Mind if I join you?

She watches him walk to the bar. He gets the drink and walks back to her. He sets the drinks down on the table and sits down. As he does so, his face gets close to hers and she smells the booze on him.

PRETTY WOMAN

Wow... been drinking all day?

BEN

But of course.

She looks at him, a disappointed expression on her face. She is no longer interested in being seduced by this man and this much is clear to Ben.

BEN

Why don't we finish these and go to my apartment on the beach?

She doesn't respond.

BEN

We can watch a movie and I'll mix you up a gooey blender drink.

Ben winces at his own words. He shakes his head.

PRETTY WOMAN

I have to get up pretty early tomorrow. I'll just finish this and go. Thanks anyway.

They drink in silence for a while. Ben takes a deep breath.

BEN

(pathetic)

I really wish that you'd come home with me. You're so cute and I'm really good in bed... believe me... you smell good too...

He stops and frowns as he stares into his empty glass.

BEN

No, OK.

Ben tries to stand and has to pull himself up by holding the bar. It's a strange thing with drunks like Ben... when they're up they have balance and timing, but when they're down it all falls apart. She starts to speak but then doesn't. A look of great sadness comes over her.

PRETTY WOMAN

I have to go now. Thanks anyway.

She stands to go.

PRETTY WOMAN

Maybe you shouldn't drink so much.

She walks to the door and Ben turns to the bar, watched by the Barman, who is a little concerned.

BEN

(to himself)

Maybe I shouldn't breathe so much, Teri. Ha... ha.

BARMAN

(sever voice)

Time to go, buddy... We're closing up.

Ben gets out his wallet but his hands are shaking so much that he cannot extract any bills. He is very embarrassed and tries again, but to no avail.

BEN

Would you...?

The barman shakes his head in disgust as he goes into the wallet and takes some money.

CUT TO:

EXT. LA STREETS - NIGHT

Ben is cruising in his car, listening to music on his stereo.

CUT TO:

INT. STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

Ben comes into the club and sits down next to the stage, where a dancer is doing her thing accompanied by a live blues trio. A swimsuited waitress comes to the table.

WAITRESS

There's a one-drink minimum per show, I hope you saw the sign when you came in. Anyway, they're supposed to tell you.

BEN

Yes, I heard, and it's not a problem.

WAITRESS

What do you want?

BEN

What are my choices?

WAITRESS

Everything's ten dollars, and there's no alcohol.

BEN

No alcohol?

WAITRESS

No alcohol. You gotta get something else. Everything's ten dollars. What do you want?

BEN

What do you think I should get?

WAITRESS

Non-alcoholic malt beverage?

BEN

...Nooooo.

WAITRESS

Orange soda?

BEN

No.

WAITRESS

Coffee?

BEN

No.

WAITRESS

Sparkling apple cider?

BEN

No.

WAITRESS

Water?

BEN

Water?

WAITRESS

One drink minimum per show.
Everything's ten dollars. Now...
tell me what you want or I'll eighty-
six you.

BEN

(decides)

Water.

She writes down W.A.T.E.R. and walks away. Ben calls her

back.

BEN

Just how much would it cost for you
to eighty-six me?

ANGLE ON THE STAGE

A tough black girl dances in a world of her own, impervious to the men who stare at her. The trio grinds out a dirty blues. A man opposite Ben places a dollar bill on the stage and as the dancer squats down to pick it up he stares between her legs and winks. The Waitress puts down a styrofoam cup and a bottle of water in front of Ben but refuses to look at him.

WAITRESS

(hostile)

Three-fifty.

Ben puts down a hundred on to her tray.

BEN

(polite)

Could I have fives please? Keep one
for yourself.

This throws the Waitress for a loop.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM OF STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

Ben drinks all of a fifth of bourbon. Other guys come and go, peeing against the urinal. Ben offers one of the guys a drink, the pianist from the trio. He takes a shot.

CUT TO:

INT. STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

Ben sits next to another man watching the show. On stage a tall blonde dances with her own reflection in a mirror. Ben turns to his neighbor.

BEN

To me nothing is more beautiful than the relationship between the reflection of a woman and the woman who has created it.

NEIGHBOR

(completely
uninterested)

No shit!

EXT. LA STREETS - NIGHT

Ben drives in his car.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ben is cruising in his car, listening to 'Lonely Teardrops' again. He's looking for a prostitute. He sees a girl, but when he slows down she ducks into a doorway.

He looks in his rear-view mirror and sees a cop car coming up fast. Ben panics for a second. There is a bottle between his legs. The cop car draws level and cruises alongside him for a while, but then puts its lights and siren on and speeds off, doing a U-turn.

Ben continues and then sees an Hispanic girl and stops. He winds down the window. He is by now almost incoherent.

BEN

Good evening.

EXT. KERBSIDE - NIGHT

The girl looks up and down the street and then walks over to the car and bends down to the window.

HISPANIC GIRL

You wanna date? You wanna date me?

The girl's eyes shift constantly from Ben to the street and then back again.

BEN

(cut to the chase)

I'll give you a hundred dollars for a straight forty-five minutes. You get the room.

Ben shows her the money.

HISPANIC GIRL

(trying to take him)

The room is twenty. You pay for it.

Ben laughs.

BEN

OK... but only because I think that the concept of surrender fits in with the big picture right now. How about over there?

He gives her a twenty and indicates a motel across the street. She sets off and he gets out of the car. As he does, a wave of nausea hits him. He shakes his head violently and then lurches across the street, causing two cars to hit their brakes. The camera follows him into the dark parking lot of the motel, where the Hispanic girl is waiting.

BEN

(slurring badly)

I can remember... if my wife left me... or I left her... but fuck it anyway...

The girl laughs at Ben and says something in Spanish.

Slowly the picture gets darker, until all that can be seen is the headlights from the passing cars on Sunset... and then...

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAWN

Ben wakes up on the kitchen floor. The fridge door is open and its light is what lights Ben. Inside the fridge are one green pepper and four bottles of vodka. Without too much effort Ben feels for his wallet and sees that it is still

there, as are his car keys. He closes the fridge door and in the green light from the window he lies still. The first birds start singing. (the birdsong continues through the following sequence, which does not have sync sound.)

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD MOTEL. PARKING-LOT DUMPSTERS - NIGHT

At the rear of the motel. Next to some garbage hoppers, the Hispanic girl hugging him and kissing his neck. He tries to kiss her on the mouth, but she turns her face away.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAWN

Ben lying on the floor, thinking.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD MOTEL. PARKING-LOT DUMPSTERS - NIGHT

The Hispanic girl kneeling in front of him, unzipping his trousers. Through a gap in the fence, we see traffic going up and down Sunset.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAWN

Ben lying on the floor, thinking...

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD MOTEL. PARKING-LOT DUMPSTERS - NIGHT

The girl takes his hand and kisses it. She begins sucking the fingers, taking the whole hand into her mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAWN

Ben suddenly sits up and looks at his hand. His wedding ring has gone. He thinks about this for a long time.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK - MORNING

Ben waiting in line to cash a check. He looks unwell and is having difficulty standing straight. At last it is his turn. He goes to the counter and hands over a check to the girl.

BANK GIRL

OK... four thousand, six hundred dollars... one moment, sir...

She looks at her computer read-out.

BANK GIRL

That'll leave five dollars in your account. Would you sign the back of the check, please?

BEN

(surprised)
You couldn't cash it just like it is?

BANK GIRL

(puzzled)
I'm sorry, sir. Is there a problem?

Ben picks up a pen and tries to sign, but his hands are shaking so much that he cannot do it.

BEN

(embarrassed)
Well... to tell you the truth, I'm a

little shaky right now. I just had a brain surgery... Why don't I come back after lunch, when I'm feeling a little better? We can take care of it then.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BAR. LA. - MORNING

Ben seated at the bar, a pile of bills in front of him. The Barman sets down a vodka, picks up the empty glass and takes some bills, shaking his head in disapproval. The TV is on, some game show as before, and Ben watches carefully, looking for a sign from the girl, but the show proceeds in its 'normal' fashion. The only difference is that the hostess is played by the girl in the bank. Ben grabs the Barman's attention.

BEN

I think, when I'm done with this, I'll have gin and tonic... Bombay gin and tonic.

The Barman loses it.

BARMAN

(angry)

You should be having coffee. Do you know what time it is? You're a young man.

(calmer)

It's none of my business, but if you could see what I see, you wouldn't do this to yourself.

Ben is taken aback by the emotion in his voice. In his mind, cynicism and the desire to cry fight it out. He holds the emotion back, and looks down at the bar.

BEN

I understand what you're saying... I appreciate your concern. Its not my intention to make you uncomfortable. Please... serve me today and I will

never come in here again.
(cheerful)
If I do, you can eighty-six me.

BARMAN

Sure, sure, I can eighty-six you now
if I want to. Stop fucking with me.
I don't give a fuck what you do.

He picks up a bottle of gin, fills a glass, slams it on the counter in front of Ben and knocks twice with his knuckles on the bar.

BARMAN

On the house, son.

Ben looks at the TV for a sign. None is forthcoming.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK - DAY

Ben waiting in line again. The same Bank girl is there and she is dealing with her customers in the same inanely cheerful way that the game-show Hostess dealt with her prize-winners. She notices Ben waiting and an irritated look flashes over across her face. Ben studies her. She is pretty in an ordinary kind of way. We hear Ben's thoughts as voice-over (or maybe he says them out loud to himself).

BEN (V.O.)

Are you desirable? Are you
irresistible? Maybe if you drank
bourbon with me, it would help. Maybe
if you kissed me and I could taste
the sting in your mouth, it would
help.

Close-up on the Bank Girl as she does her thing, efficiently counting money, smiling, perfect teeth framed by a Cupid mouth. She is wearing a white blouse through which frilly lingerie can just be made out.

BEN (V.O.)

If you drank bourbon with me naked...

if you smelled of bourbon as you fucked me, it would help... it would increase my esteem for you. If you poured bourbon on to your naked body and said to me... drink this...

Camera moves in tighter on her face as she chats with a customer about the weather.

BEN (V.O.)

...if you spread your legs and had bourbon dripping from your breasts and your vagina and said drink here... then I could fall in love with you, because then I would have a purpose, to clean you up, and that would prove that I'm worth something. I'd lick you clean so you could go away and fuck someone else.

BANK GIRL

Next!

Ben takes a moment to come out of his reverie. He smiles and comes to the counter, completely in control of himself.

BEN

I'm back, I've got my check... and baby... I'm ready to sign.

He flips the check over, makes sure she is watching and signs with a flourish.

BEN

There... Steady as a fucking rock, excuse my French.

(serious)

Wanna have dinner with me?

She counts the money out and glares at him as she hands it over.

BANK GIRL

I'm glad you're feeling better. Do you need a validation?

Ben looks at her and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Ben throws items into a trolley. Garbage bags, firelighters and charcoal lighter fluid.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ben putting all the kitchen utensils into a large garbage bag. Three other bags are already filled and the kitchen is looking empty.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ben is stuffing all the bedding into a garbage bag. Next he opens a drawer on the dresser and begins taking out clothes and stuffing them into another bag. He pauses for a moment to take a drink from a tall glass.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

All the books from the bookcase go into another bag. Then all the records. But he selects certain favorites and as this sequence progresses we can see that Ben is making tapes of these tracks. As soon as he is done with the recording, he throws the album into a garbage bag.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S YARD - NIGHT

Ben pours lighter fluid on to a pile of photographs and then throws a match on to it. It bursts into flames. He throws more stuff on and the fire blazes. A curious neighbor watches from a safe distance, not wanting too get involved.

ANGLE ON THE FIRE

A watercolor, a poem to his wife, photograph of him and his wife, a Polaroid of a naked woman, his medical records, his birth and marriage certificates, divorce papers, strips of photographs from booths, postcards from Hawaii. Two small children (his?).

ANGLE ON BEN

Now the flames are high and Ben has to stand back as he throws things on to the fire... his camera, an engraved box, his wife's 'left behind' clothing , a clock...

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAWN

Fifteen neatly tied garbage bags and Ben's furniture are stacked up on the sidewalk. Ben comes out of his front door carrying a racing bike. He walks to the neighbors' house and places the bike on the porch. We see a label saying 'To Brad from Ben'. He walks to his black car with a small suitcase, gets in and drives off.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT LANDSCAPE WITH ROAD - DAY

A high wide shot shows a small black car making its way across the frame.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Through the window we see a dead straight road stretching to infinity.

The sunlight is painfully bright. On the soundtrack we hear one of Ben's chosen tapes, which continues through into the next shot.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GAS STATION IN THE DESERT - DAY

Ben is filling his car. A Town Car drives in and stops next to the BMW. Three men get out. They look like Russian Mobsters. Ben nods at them and they nod back.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Same angle through the window but this time we see Las Vegas at night as Ben drives down the main drag. An overdose of neon.

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT

Ahead we see the light changing, but Ben doesn't notice until it's almost too late. The car stops and we see Sera crossing in front of the car. She gives Ben a look of real attitude because he is over the line and she has to change course to cross in front.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL FORECOURT - NIGHT

Sera is talking to Yuri. A middle-aged man gets out of a cab and Yuri shakes him by the hand and introduces him to Sera.

He hands Yuri an envelope and then Sera and he go into the hotel together. Yuri looks around thoughtfully before getting into a cab and driving off.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

IMPROVISED SCENE.(1)

INT. MOTEL RECEPTION - NIGHT

Ben waits to check in while the manager explains the house rules to a family of large people from the Midwest.

MANAGER

All rooms to be paid a week in

advance, maid service is optional,
use of the pool is at your own risk,
there is no lifeguard on duty.

Above the manager's head is the name of the motel, The Whole
Year Inn. Ben stares at it and then smiles.

BEN'S POV

The sign has changed to The Hole You're In.

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Ben has almost filled a trolley with bottles of various
brands. He is whistling and seems happy.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

IMPROVISED SCENE.(2)

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Ben driving. He sees Sera and follows her, then drives up on
the sidewalk. She sees him.

BEN

Hello!

SERA

Hello.

BEN

Are you working?

SERA

(tough)

Working? What do you mean, working?
I'm walking.

And she walks a few steps to prove it, stopping on the
passenger side of his car. They pause for a moment and Ben

is confused. He is quite taken with her beauty, but this is not going according to plan. He reaches into the car quickly and picks an open can of beer, draining it before tossing the empty back on to the rear seat.

SERA

Isn't it illegal to drink and drive?

BEN

(laughs)

That's funny.

(seriously)

I wonder if you'll take two hundred and fifty dollars to fuck me?

Sera doesn't say anything.

BEN

That is, if you'll come to my room for an hour, I will give you five hundred dollars.

SERA

Maybe you shouldn't stand in the road like that. You're pretty drunk.

He bites his lips as he waits for her to respond.

SERA

(softer)

You're pretty drunk.

BEN

(factual)

Not really. My room's not far. The Whole Year Inn. You can drive with me if you want...

She makes no response.

BEN

...or we can walk... or I'll give you cab fare.

Takes out his money.

BEN
Whatever you want.

She touches the door handle.

SERA
Why don't you give me the money when
I'm in the car, and I'll drive you.

It takes a moment or two to register that she is saying yes.
He comes around the car to open the door for her.

BEN
I'm Ben.

They shake hands.

SERA
I'm Sera.

She gets in. Ben gets in.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Ben hands her the money.

BEN
Sarah – with an H?

SERA
No – S.E.R.A.

They grin at each other.

SERA
You wanna start the engine?

They drive off.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

They sit in the car for a while before speaking.

SERA

I'm sort of curious... if you're willing to pay me two-fifty... not that I mind... I mean, I'm OK with that – why aren't you staying in a hotel?

BEN

We can go to one if you'd prefer.

SERA

No, this is fine. I was just wondering.

Ben switches off the engine but makes no move to get out of the car.

BEN

Well... I'm here because I'm a drunk who tends to pass out at odd hours for unpredictable stretches. I'm going to a hotel soon. A room with a balcony to pass out on... or off.

He falls silent.

SERA

Umm. We can stay in the car for an hour if you want. But I really have to go then. It's your time.

BEN

Right, I'll get your door. I tend to fade in and out lately.

SERA

I guess I do too.

BEN

You what?

SERA

I sometimes fade out.

BEN

Oh... well, maybe we better
synchronize our spells... or stagger
them.

SERA

(gently)

You were going to get my door.

He gets out and she waits for him to open the door. She gets
out and he offers her his arm. She takes it and they walk
into the motel.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

As Ben closes the door. Sera surveys the room.

SERA

(amused)

What this room needs... is more booze.

SERA'S POV

There are bottles everywhere. Ben has gone to a lot of trouble
to lay them out in a pleasing way.

BEN

Do you think so?

She turns and looks at him, appraising him. Suddenly she's
all business, in control, and Ben likes it.

SERA

Mind if I use the bathroom?

BEN

Of course.

She goes into the bathroom.

BEN

Want a drink? I'm having one.

SERA (O.S.)

A shot of tequila, if you can spare it.

BEN

Of course.

Ben smiles, happier than we've ever seen him. He gets her order ready and then he takes a big swig from a bourbon bottle. He sits on the edge of the bed.

The bathroom door opens and Sera comes in wearing a black bra and panties. She's acting the hooker now, tough and sexy.

SERA

For two-fifty we can do pretty much what you want. You've been drinking, so it might be better if I got on top, but the other way's fine too. I have some jelly in case you want to fuck my ass, that's up to you. If you want to come in my face, that's OK too, just try to keep it out of my hair, I just washed it... and my eyes, it stings.

She walks to the table and downs her tequila in one. Then comes to the bed, where Ben is sitting. She kneels, unzips his fly and begins sucking him. Ben watches her, looks at her reflection in the closet mirror, reaches for the bottle and drinks some, being careful not to disturb Sera. After a while Sera comes up.

SERA

Do you want to fuck now?

BEN

(confused)

Maybe another drink first. More tequila?

SERA

OK... whatever.

She takes the bottle and drinks. She goes down again. Ben

stops her.

SERA

What's the story? Are you too drunk to come?

BEN

(sincere)

I don't care about that. There's time left. You can have more money. You can drink all you want. You can talk or listen. Just stay, that's all I want.

She looks at him, confused. She sees a strange look on his face. It throws her.

This is a turning point. Both of them are momentarily exposed.

Ben lifts the sheet and moves to one side, indicating that she should come into the bed. She's as confused as he is. She gets in with him and he hands her the bottle.

CUT TO:

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Yuri is losing at one of the tables. He continues to bet though, putting half of what he has left on one number. He loses again. He mops his face with a red silk handkerchief and places another bet.

INT. SOMEWHERE IN THE CASINO - NIGHT

The three Russian Mobsters we saw in the desert are walking through the casino, looking for someone.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

They are both in bed, drinking.

SERA

So, Ben, what brings you to Las Vegas?

Business convention?

They both laugh and Ben hands her the bottle.

BEN

No, I came here to drink... myself...
you know...

SERA

To death?

BEN

Yes, that's right.

He looks at her, she at him, not sure whether to believe him
or not.

BEN

I cashed in all of my money, paid my
AmEx card, gonna sell the car
tomorrow.

SERA

How long's it gonna take, for you to
drink yourself to death?

BEN

I think about four weeks, and I've
got enough for about two hundred and
fifty to three hundred dollars a
day.

SERA

Yes... that should do it. What am I?
A luxury?

BEN

Yeah. And your meter just ran out.

Ben looks at his watch.

SERA

It's OK... nice watch. Go on. Talk
some more.

Ben yawns, suddenly deeply tired.

BEN

In LA I kept running out of booze
and the store would be closed because
I'd forget to look at my watch... so
I decided to move here because nothing
ever closes and because I got tired
of getting funny looks when I would
walk into a bar at six o'clock...
even the bartenders started preaching.

(yawns again)

Here, everyone's from out of town so
no one cares, no one is overtly
fucking up

CUT TO:

Later.

SIDE ANGLE

Sera is in focus, Ben is asleep.

SERA (V.O.)

I guess I was intrigued by him...
There was a lot of stuff that I wanted
to ask him about but didn't because
I didn't want to sound too interested
in a trick. But I felt as if a
relationship was being forged very
quickly.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

IMPROVISED SCENE. (3)

CUT TO:

EXT. SERA'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAWN

Sera gets out of a cab and makes her way towards her
apartment, changing out of her high heels as she walks.

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAWN

Sera lets herself in. Yuri is standing in the shadows. She gets a fright when she sees him.

YURI

Where have you been?

SERA

It was a slow night. I went to a hotel for a few drinks.

Yuri holds out his hand for her bag. She gives it to him. He finds the money and counts it.

YURI

A full night on the street and this is all?

SERA

Like I said... it was a slow night... I'm sorry. It was hard to score.

Yuri slaps her.

SERA

Don't hit me.

YURI

What do you think... you are sixteen years old on Hollywood Boulevard?

Yuri talks in Russian, becoming angrier, and slaps her again. He spits on the floor.

Sera falls against the kitchen table and picks up a lethal-looking knife. Yuri stops.

SERA

Maybe nobody wants to fuck a chick with a cut on her cheek.

She throws the knife to Yuri, who catches it. She bends over the table and pulls up her skirt.

SERA

There, go ahead!

She mimics him.

A shower of Russian comes out of Yuri, but he doesn't touch her. He tries to regain his dignity by putting on a coat.

YURI

I could kill you. You know that.

He goes to the door.

YURI

Work, tonight, bring me money, no matter the hour.

And he exits. Sera is still on the table.

SERA

I will Yuri. I will.

CUT TO:

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

The proprietor is handing over some cash to Yuri, whose jewelry is on the counter. He pockets it and as he turns to leave, Ben comes in. They pass without taking much notice of each other. Ben removes his Rolex and shows it to the man.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET, LAS VEGAS - DAY

Yuri is walking in the hot sun, sweating. We see him through long-lens heat haze. The camera wanders into the traffic and we see the black Town Car crawling along behind him, three men inside.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

IMPROVISED SCENE. (4)

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN BAR, HOTEL - NIGHT

A lounge singer belts out a fair rendition of a Tony Orlando number. Sera sits at the bar, an empty seat on either side of her. She watches a younger hooker in the final moments of pulling a dangerous-looking man. The girl is aware of Sera without even looking at her. The guy she is with looks around and sees Sera. The girl shoots an icy look. A man sits next to Sera: a conventioneer.

CONVENTIONEER

About ready for another drink?

SERA

Yes, that would be great. Are you her for the convention?

CONVENTIONEER

Do I look that obvious? My name's Paul.

They shake hands.

SERA

No, of course not, just a wild guess. I'm Sera and that's a margarita.

The barman is already pouring. The young hooker leaves with her dangerous guy. She pauses long enough to give Sera a nasty smile. The conventioneer pays for the drink and is a little lost for words. Sera tries to help.

SERA

So... are you alone, or are you just using me to make someone else jealous?

CONVENTIONEER

(laughs nervously)

Alone. Alone. I'm here alone.

SERA

(friendly)

Where are you staying?

CONVENTIONEER
(suspicious)
Right here at the hotel. Why?

SERA
(moving a little closer)
Well... I thought you might be looking
for a date.

CONVENTIONEER
(shocked)
A date. What, are you a hooker?
(voice getting louder)
What do you mean a date?
(and louder)
I've got a wife back home. I just
came over to talk for a few minutes.

SERA
(quietly)
I'm sorry, I guess I misunderstood.

She looks around.

SERA
Please don't raise your voice. I
won't bother you about it again.

CONVENTIONEER
(calmer)
Sorry. Look... you seem like a nice
girl. I'm just sick of everyone in
this town trying to get my money.

He gets up.

CONVENTIONEER
Here, have another drink. I gotta
go.

He leaves. Sera is uncomfortable. People are watching her,
aware that something has been going on. The Barman comes
over to where Sera is sitting.

BARMAN

Maybe you should give it a miss for this evening.

He walks away. Sera finishes her drink and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Sera at work is looking more carefully than usual, hoping to see Ben. A huge silver limo pulls up and, after some negotiation, she gets in.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Long-lens shot of Ben, very drunk on the street. He falls and lies still for quite a long time before getting up. He falls into the road and tries to hail a cab, but none stops. A cop car cruises to a halt and Ben more or less imitates a normal person as he walks out of shot.

EXT. THE POOL, MOTEL - DAY

Ben dives in and swims a length under water. He pulls himself out and sits next to the large Midwestern family. The father says hello and introduces his family to Ben. They are all very friendly. It's a nice atmosphere around this pool and for a moment Ben even looks healthy.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

A limo pulls up and Sera gets out. She sees something.

SERA'S POV

Ben sitting at a bus stop, drinking out of a cocktail glass. When he sees her he gets up, a little unsteadily.

BEN

I couldn't remember what happened

last time. I was afraid that I might
have been rude, or mean to you.

He looks at her.

BEN

If I was I'm sorry.

SERA

No, just drunk... but that's OK.
Where's your car?

BEN

I sold it this morning. I'm going to
take cabs from now on in.

Sera looks up and down the strip.

BEN

Don't run away.

SERA

(defensive)

Why should I? I know you're not a
cop, so what is it tonight? Another
two-fifty to watch you sleep?

Ben sits down, a little hurt.

SERA

What's up?

BEN

I was looking for you tonight. I
don't know if you have a boyfriend...

He thinks.

BEN

...or a girlfriend, but if you have
some free time... maybe we could
have dinner.

SERA

(tough again, but

pleased)
Are you serious.

BEN
(deadly serious)
I think you know I'm serious. I'll
pay you if you like... but I'd like
to see you.

SERA
No, I can't have dinner with you.

And she hails a taxi, which stops immediately and she gets
in.

SERA
The Mojave Hotel, please.

Ben watches the cab drive off.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR OF HOTEL - NIGHT

Sera walks along, checking numbers on the doors. She finds
the right one and knocks firmly.

YURI (V.O.)
Yes? What?

SERA
It's me, Yuri.

The door opens a crack and Yuri peers out.

YURI
Sera! It's...

He looks around for a clock.

YURI
...it's late.

INT. YURI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sera comes into the room, takes her purse out and counts out seven hundred dollars.

SERA

Sorry, Yuri... good night... lots of tricks... I think things are picking up.

Yuri sits on the bed. He looks unwell and disoriented. His face is covered with a thin film of sweat. He seems to be listening for something, because he stops her talking by putting his fingers to his lips. He looks at her and then beckons her to the bed. Sera is nervous. As she walks to the bed, she begins unbuttoning her blouse. Yuri stops her with a wave of his hand. Sera is puzzled and frightened now. Yuri seems to be deranged.

YURI

Have you told anyone that I'm here?

SERA

No.

Yuri suddenly hears something. He grabs Sera's hand and takes her to the wall. He presses her head to the wall.

YURI

Do you here that?

He looks at her.

YURI

They're talking about me.

He pulls himself together.

YURI

Go, Sera.

(whispers)

Go. Stay at home. I will call you tomorrow.

SERA

Yuri... are you...

YURI
(patiently)
Sera... please go.

He indicates the wall.

YURI
This is very important... and I must
listen. Now go.

They face each other for a moment and then Yuri does an almost comic gesture to tell her to go. He hustles her to the door and shoves her out as she is still buttoning up her blouse. He slams the door.

YURI
(through the door)
Goodbye, Sera. Don't come back here.
I will not see you again.

Sera stands there for a while, almost in shock, and then she begins to walk. The camera follows her as she makes her way down the endless corridor of doors. Ahead of her, three men are walking towards her, checking the door numbers as they make their way. Sera doesn't take them in. They pass and turn a corner. We recognize them as the men from the black Town Car.

ANGLE

The men have stopped outside Yuri's room. The camera pans and we see Sera down the other corridor getting into the elevator.

FADE OUT:

INT. BEN'S ROOM AT THE MOTEL - NIGHT

Ben is lying on the bed watching a game show, drinking.

A coughing fit hits him. He is very short of breath. We see how ill he really is.

There is a tap at the door.

BEN

No thanks... I'm fine.

The tapping persists and eventually Ben gets off the bed and unlocks it, but keeps the chain on. It is Sera.

SERA

Still want to have dinner?

Ben stares at her for a while.

BEN

Yes.

SERA

I have to change and take a shower first. If you want to come home and wait.

Ben opens the door.

SERA

We should pick up a bottle of tequila on the way. I owe you one.

BEN

You do?

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sera is finishing in the shower and Ben is sitting at the kitchen table. He gets up and walks around the house, trying to get a sense of her. The furniture is very plain and there is spartan quality about the house. He looks with interest at the bookshelf, which has a good selection of literature.

BEN

(to himself)

This is the home of an angel.

SERA

You OK out there?

BEN

Yes. Take your time. I'm fine.

He pours himself another drink.

SERA

Pour yourself another drink.

He sits down and she comes in, toweling her hair.

SERA

You OK?

BEN

Of course. Wow... you look extremely beautiful.

SERA

Thank you. What time is it?

BEN

Don't know. My watch went the way of the car.

He holds up his empty wrist for her to see. Then looks up and sees her watching him.

BEN

I'm rambling. I really like you. You make me want to talk... I don't know what time it is.

SERA

I like hearing you talk.

(businesslike)

If you feel up to a short walk, there's a place to eat around the corner. All the food in Vegas is terrible so the place doesn't really matter. How does that sound to you?

BEN

Do they have drinks?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Ben and Sera walk and talk.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ben and Sera are eating. He plays with his food, eating very little of it. Finally he pushes it away and orders another drink.

SERA

I'm from the East. I went to college, did an arts course. I now live in Vegas. I think of it as home. I came here deliberately to carve out a life. I was in LA before, but I'll come back to that later.

(pause)

The tough times are behind me now. I can deal with the bad things that happen. There will always be dark characters. But my life is good. It is as I would want it to be. So, why are you a drunk?

BEN

Is that really what you want to ask me?

SERA

Yes.

BEN

(worried)

Well, then I guess this is our first date... or our last. Until now, I wasn't sure it was either.

SERA

Very clever.

Sera thinks for a while and decides to give in to him on this.

SERA

First. It's our first. I'm just concerned. So... why are you killing yourself?

BEN

Interesting choice of words. I don't remember. I just know that I want to.

SERA

Want to kill yourself? Are you saying that you're drinking as a way to kill yourself?

And she leans across the table to be close to him, listening intently. Ben becomes uncomfortable and tries to joke it off.

BEN

Or killing myself as a way to drink.

Sera continues to stare at him, wanting to know the real answer. He takes a slug from his drink. She sits back.

BEN

We'll talk about it some other time maybe. OK?

Sera relaxes and continues with her food. We hear her thoughts for a moment.

SERA (V.O.)

It wasn't so important to me. I mean, he never asked me why I was a hooker, and that was impressive. I really liked him. So I decided to just play my part. I mean... it's good to help someone once in a while, it's a bonus to being alive, and that was my plan... to stay alive. I suddenly came to a decision.

BEN

What are you thinking? Are you angry

with me?

SERA

(decides something)

Ben, why don't you stay at my place tonight? I mean... look, you're so drunk. I like you. I trust you.

BEN

That's astonishing. Sera, look...

SERA

I hate to think of you in that cheesy motel. I mean...

And she folds her arms and grins at him.

SERA

Let's face it, what the fuck are you doing in Las Vegas?

BEN

(overwhelmed by her)

I'm going to move to a smart hotel, tomorrow if it'll make you feel better.

(looks at her)

Let's talk about tomorrow. Wanna do something?

SERA

(warmly)

Sure... tonight. Then please stay at my place.

BEN

Sera... you know I'm not much good in the sack.

SERA

It's not about sex, Ben. I'll make you up a bed on the sofa. Do it for me. We can talk till late and then sleep till late. As you know, I am my own boss.

Ben laughs loud, the most animated we've seen him, and his laugh as infectious, and Sera join in. Other diners turn to stare at them. They seem like a couple.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Ben and Sera walk and talk, holding hands.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A wide shot. The black Town Car makes its way across frame. Left to right.

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben is asleep on the sofa. As he wakes up, he becomes aware that Sera is watching him from across the room. They smile at each other.

BEN

How long have I been here?

SERA

Three nights, two days. When is your rent coming up at the motel?

BEN

I don't know.

(sits up)

I'll go and sort it out today. Why don't you come?... We'll find a real room for me. You can pick it out, a tower on the strip.

SERA

There's no reason to blow all your money on a hotel room.

BEN

What do you mean?

SERA

What I mean is that you should bring your stuff over here. We're spending all this time together... what the fuck!

BEN

Sera...

SERA

Let's face it, Ben, we're having fun here. I've never done so much talking in my life.

BEN

Me neither.

SERA

So! Let's dispense with the formalities. I want you here... now!

BEN

Sera you are crazy.

SERA

So... I'm not too concerned with long term plans.

BEN

Don't you think you'll get a little bored living with a drunk?

SERA

That is what I want. Why don't you go and get your stuff?

BEN

You haven't seen the worst of it. These last few days I've been very controlled. I knock things over... I throw up all the time.

(looks at her)

Now I feel really good... You're like some kind of antidote that mixes

the liquor and keeps me in balance,
but that won't last forever. You'll
get tired of it really quickly.
Believe me.

They sit in silence for a while.

SERA

OK, you go back to your hotel and
I'll go back to my glamorous life of
being alone.

She walks out of the room, and into the bathroom, where she
sits on the toilet to pee.

SERA

(to herself)

The only thing I have to come home
to is a bottle of Listerine to wash
the taste of come out of my mouth.
I'm tired of being alone... that's
what I'm tired of.

She finishes, wipes herself and flushes the toilet. Pulling
up her panties, she walks back into the bedroom, where Ben
is putting on his shoes.

SERA

Don't you like me, Ben?

BEN

(devastated)

Don't be silly?

Ben is unable to deal with the fact that he is absolutely in
love with her. He walks out of the room. She follows.

SERA

We gotta decide this... right now.
Before we go any further. You either
stay here with me or...

Ben turns to look at her.

SERA

...we can't see each other any more.

Ben and Sera look at each other for a long time.

BEN

Sera... what you don't understand
is...

SERA

What?

Ben is deeply troubled. He comes to a decision.

BEN

You can never... never... ask me to
stop drinking. Do you understand?

SERA

(dead serious)

I do. I really do.

(smiles)

OK. I have to do some shopping alone.
You go out for a few drinks and then
pick up your things. Don't hurry and
I'll be back before you to let you
in.

Sera grabs him in a big embrace that knocks him off balance
and into the wall. She kisses him all over his face and
squeezes his skinny frame.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S ROOM AT THE MOTEL - DAY

Ben is packing his liquor into his suitcase. The almost-empty
bottles he pours into a large cup, which he drinks from. The
suitcase is now full and Ben suddenly realizes that he hasn't
packed any clothes. They are all in a pile on the bed. He
talks to himself.

BEN

Maybe this isn't a good idea after
all.

He tries to put clothes in with the bottles, but the lid won't close. He sits on the bed and has an imaginary conversation with Sera.

BEN

Listen, angel... the thing is that I'm nuts about you and this is a bad thing... because my real plan is to die here and you were never even part of my plan... but like I said, I'm nuts about you... wait a minute, I have an idea, angel.

And he opens the closet and finds some plastic laundry bags, which he puts his clothes in.

CUT TO:

EXT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sera's neighbors, a husband and wife, are standing outside her house. They stop her. They are also her landlord.

HUSBAND

We didn't know whether to call the police or not.

And they indicate the sleeping figure of Ben, in the doorway, clutching a bottle of bourbon, using his suitcase as a pillow.

WIFE

He's been there for about half an hour. My husband thought he'd seen you two together, but I thought it best to wait until you got home.

SERA

Yes, he's my friend. I guess he just had a little too much to drink.

(smiling uncomfortably)

I'll help him inside.

(puts down her packages)

Thanks for the concern. Sorry to trouble you.

HUSBAND
(gallantly)
Well, call me if there's anything I
can do.

They go to their own house. Sera opens the front door, kneels
down next to Ben and shakes him gently.

SERA
Can you wake up?

Ben opens his eyes and looks around with a pleasant, cheerful
expression.

BEN
Hi!

SERA
Why don't you go in and sit down. I
have some gifts for you.

BEN
Right... OK...

Ben stands and almost loses his balance. He picks up his
suitcase and attempts to pick up her packages as well, but
she stop him.

SERA
Don't worry... I got'em.

Ben staggers in with his case. As Sera enters, she looks
around and sees Husband and Wife at the window, still
watching.

BEN (O.S.)
Want a drink? Great nap. Wanna go
out tonight?

SERA
Seriously, Ben... I need to keep
pretty low-key around here. Maybe
next time you could nap this side of
the door. That was the landlord.

BEN
Of course.

She reaches into her purse.

SERA
Gift number one.

And she gives him a newly cut key. He takes it and tries it in the lock, then drops it into his pocket.

BEN
I used to carry a lot of keys, but one by one they all fell victim to the great condensation. Now I have just this one... which is...

And he tails off and stares at the floor. She waits for him to continue and then comes to him and touches him on the arm.

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAY

SERA
Ben?

BEN
Sorry.

He shakes his head.

BEN
I was miles away.

He sees the parcels.

BEN
Ah... more gifts. I have to sit down for this.

He strides into the living room and flops on to the sofa. She follows.

BEN
Sera, I love that name... S.E.R.A.

Before we proceed onwards, there is something I need to say. OK?

SERA
OK.

BEN
I've come this far... here I am, in your house. I want you to let me pay the rent for this month. All right?

And he stares at her as if to say that nothing can happen until this matter is resolved.

SERA
Why?

BEN
Because... it's better for me that way. OK?

SERA
Well... OK...

She is uncomfortable.

They sit in silence for a while.

BEN
Sera... I hope that you understand how I feel about this. First of all, you're welcome to my money. We can buy a couple of cases of liquor and you can have the rest. But I don't think you're talking to me right now about money.

SERA
(smiling)
No?

BEN
No. I think you're talking about you. I'll tell you right now that I'm in love with you... but, be that

as it may, I'm not here to force my twisted life into your soul.

SERA

I know that...

BEN

...and I'm not here to demand your attention to the point where it changes your life. We know I'm a drunk... but that seems to be all right with you. And I know that you're a hooker. I hope you understand that I'm a person who is totally at ease with this... which is not to say that I'm indifferent or that I don't care... I do... it simply means that I trust and accept your judgement. What I'm saying is... that I hope you understand that I understand.

SERA

Thanks, I do understand. I was worried about how that would be... but now I'm not. And you should know that included with the rent here is a complimentary blow job.

BEN

Ah, yes... I suppose sooner or later we ought to fuck.

SERA

Whatever that means. Open your presents.

She hands him the larger of the two parcels.

SERA

Open this one first.

Ben awkwardly unwraps the present, a large, colorful shirt. A genuine smile comes on to his face.

BEN

Very nice.

He holds the shirt against himself.

BEN

This should work very nicely with my suit, which, by the way, is the only item of clothing I brought over from the motel with me.

Sera raise an eyebrow.

SERA

Right... the suitcase was clinking. So what did you do with your clothes?

BEN

(laughing)

I threw them into the garbage, which was perhaps immoral, but I wanted to come to you clean, so to speak. I thought we could go shopping and pick up a pair of jeans and forty-five pairs of underwear and just throw them out each day.

SERA

(smiling)

Nice talk, Ben. Keep drinking. In between the hundred and one proof breath and the occasional drool, some interesting words fall from your mouth.

She hands him the last present.

SERA

Now, try this one.

Ben unwraps the smallest gift. It is a silver hip flask. He is very touched and a little tear trickles down his cheek.

BEN

Well... looks like I'm with the right girl.

He turns it in his hands.

BEN

I must say that I'm very impressed that you would buy this for me. I know you wouldn't do this without thinking about it. Funny... you did just what I would have done.

Ben stands and tries the flask in his pocket for fit. It is fine. He walks to the door.

BEN

I'm going to fill it right now.

SERA

Do you want to go gambling tonight? We could go out and play for a few hours.

Ben comes back into the room, takes the flask out of his suit pocket and has a drink.

BEN

I hadn't planned to gamble... but if you would keep the bulk of my money here, then I could safely blow a couple of hundred bucks.

He takes out all of his money, peels off a few hundreds and then gives her the rest.

BEN

Giving you money makes me want to come.

SERA

Then come.

(pause)

I'm going to change. Watch TV. I'll be half an hour.

And she leaves. There is a slight edge to her voice and Ben is not sure if he offended her or not. He watches through

the small angle of the door as she changes.

SERA

I am planning to go out and do some work.

BEN

When?

SERA

Tomorrow night as a matter of fact.

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Ben and Sera walking. The camera follows them. He is wearing his new shirt and looks good in it. She is wearing a green dress and mismatched earrings and looks great. They walk and talk.

BEN

I like your earrings.

He changes sides.

BEN

I like women who wear mismatched earrings.

SERA

Well, then... I hope we don't run into any tonight.

BEN

(laughs)

What do you mean?

SERA

I expect some kind of loyalty here. Just because I fuck for money doesn't give you cause to start picking up women and leaving me looking silly.

And she stops and looks at him, smiling but serious.

BEN

And I only have eyes for you. And we both know that you would never become romantically involved with a trick, right?

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

They walk around the huge space, which is full of people and energy, and suddenly Ben grabs Sera and pushes her against a slot machine and kisses her deeply. At first she resists and then she gives in to him and responds. They knock over some change, which falls to the floor, and Ben pulls from her a beat to bend down and scoop up all the change and hand it to the bemused player, before returning to Sera's mouth or more. They break for air and then Ben leads her towards the bar. As he waves to attract the barman's attention, she squeezes his arm.

SERA
(quietly)
I love you.

But he doesn't hear her.

ANGLE ON CASINO ACTIVITY

On long lens we see Ben and Sera at the bar. Suddenly Ben seems to fall asleep. Sera tries to wake him and then he goes crazy and falls backwards off his stool, knocking a waitress and her drinks over. Security Guards appear and begin arguing with Sera.

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben wakes up on the sofa, fully dressed. A night-light gives a soft glow. He rolls off the sofa, landing on all fours on the floor. He crawls to the kitchen, opens the fridge door and takes out a vodka bottle and carton of orange juice. With difficulty he gets to his feet, finds a glass and pours a drink. He swallows the mix and then stands over the sink just in case he has to vomit.

INT. SERA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sera wakes and Ben comes in and gets into bed with her.

SERA

How are you doing?

BEN

Very well... umm... I never expected to have to ask you this again... but how did our evening go? I remember getting to the casino... I remember kissing you... that was really nice but everything after that is a blank.

SERA

Well – I was prepared for worse, but it wasn't so bad. We were sitting at the bar, talking about blackjack. You seemed just fine, a little drunker than usual, but nothing really strange, but then your head started to droop and I put my arm on your shoulder and then, wham, you swung you arm at me, and fell backwards off your stool into a cocktail waitress. You smashed everything on her tray, it was a real mess. You kept yelling and yelling.

BEN

Oh, and what did you do?

SERA

I tried to shut you up and help you to your feet but you kept swinging at me – not like you wanted to hit me, but more just waving me away. Security came and when you saw them you stopped yelling. They wanted to carry you out and dump you on the street, but I talked them into letting me walk you out.

BEN

That's impressive. How did you do

that?

SERA

I told them you were an alcoholic and I would take you home. I also promised that we would never come in there again.

BEN

We?

SEAR

Yes, we.

BEN

(holds her hand)

What happened then?

SERA

You were OK for a while, so we walked for about a block and then you said you wanted to go home and fuck, but I think even you knew that wasn't going to happen. We got a cab and you asked him to stop at a liquor store, even though I told you that we had plenty at home. In the store you gave the kid a hundred and told him to keep the change. I asked you if you knew it was a hundred. You said you did, so I let you do it. We got here, you fell asleep on the couch and I covered you up and came to bed.

BEN

I warned you...

(kisses her hand)

...but I'm sorry.

SERA

Here's my speech...

(kisses his hand)

...I know this shouldn't be acceptable to me, but it is. Don't ask me why.

I sense that your trouble is very big... and I'm scared for you... and so I'm doing what I think you need me to do. Falling down in casinos is little stuff. It doesn't bother me. It has nothing to do with us.

BEN

That's amazing. What are you? Some sort of angel visiting me from one of my drunk fantasies? How can you be so good?

She turns away to the wall and curls up like a small girl.

SERA

I don't know what you're saying. I'm just using you. I need you. Can we not talk about it any more, please. Not another word.

He thinks about this. He gently pushes her until she is lying on her front and then he pulls up her nightdress and strokes her naked back. He kisses her in the small of her back.

BEN

Why don't you go back to sleep. I'll go out and buy us some breakfast.

SERA

Be careful.

He stands and goes to the door.

BEN

Don't worry.

As he leaves the room, she calls after him.

SERA

Ben, I'm working tonight.

He opens the door and smiles at her.

BEN

I know.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - EARLY MORNING

Ben gets out of his cab and walks up to the doorway of a grocery store. It is locked. Ben looks at his wrist and then remembers that he no longer has a watch. He looks around, sees something and exits frame.

CUT TO:

INT. ROUGH ENGLISH BAR - EARLY MORNING

Ben enters and makes his way to the bar. This is a dirty, dark place. An ageing blonde in leather hot pants is dancing by herself at the jukebox. A very drunk Biker Couple argue noisily in a corner, slurring their words. There is not much gambling taking place at the eight slot machines. Ben sits at the bar and the Bartender slaps down a paper napkin.

BEN

A beer and a double kamikaze please.

BARTENDER

Sure thing. Anything to eat?

BEN

Not quite yet. First I have to drink myself sober, then... a few crackers, maybe an egg and toast...

The Bartender walks away to get Ben's drinks, Ben continues anyway.

BEN

...then I'll go home with the groceries and we'll have breakfast together, and that'll make her feel better about my condition...

Ben is interrupted by the arrival of the Biker Girl. She is young tough and pretty. She puts an arm around him and presses against him.

BIKER GIRL

Who the fuck are you talking to, Mr?

(laughing)

Why are you all dressed up, honey?

My, don't you look fine.

She runs her tongue around her mouth.

BIKER GIRL

I am very bored with my date. Would you like to buy me a drink?

Ben looks around and sees the Biker staring at the two of them.

BEN

(loudly)

Do you mind if I buy her a drink?

BIKER

Fuck her. I don't care what the fuck you do with her.

BEN

Maybe I could buy you both a drink?

BIKER

Fuck you. Don't fuck with me, motherfucker. Fuck off. Go to it, she's waiting for her drink.

The Biker walks over to the slot machine and begins dropping in quarters, never taking his eyes off Ben and the Girl.

BIKER GIRL

See what an asshole he is.

(big smile)

I'll have a rum and Coke.

BEN

Barman? A rum and Coke, please.

The Girl leans with her back to the bar, closer to Ben, who is facing the bar on a stool. She brings her face closer to

his.

BIKER GIRL

Can I stay with you for a while?

BEN

You mean move in with me? Isn't this a bit sudden?

BIKER GIRL

Oh, I don't have a lot of stuff.

BEN

(smiling)

I don't think my wife would dig it too much.

She moves to his ear to whisper.

BIKER GIRL

Maybe we could just go find a room and fuck all day. You wouldn't have to tell your wife about that, would you? I could suck you like this.

And she begins sucking on his lobe. Behind them. At the slot machine the Biker is still watching. His face fills with a drunken rage.

BEN

See, the thing is... fucking you would be wonderful, but I am deeply in love with Sera...

The Biker throws down his beer can and walks towards the bar.

BEN

...and it's almost impossible for me to imagine being with someone else...

The Biker arrives at the bar and grabs Ben.

BIKER

Now listen, asshole, I'm not gonna

just sit around and watch her suck
on your ear.

The Biker is about to hit Ben then holds back. He leans in
and puts his face next to Ben's.

BIKER

Now, I know that she came over to
you, like she does, so I'm gonna
pretend that you're innocent and
give you one chance to walk out of
this place... right now.

BIKER GIRL

(to biker)

Get lost, jerk.

The Biker slaps her and then grabs Ben by the collar.

BIKER

What do you say?

Ben shakes his arm free from the Biker's grip. He thinks
about it for a couple of beats and then decides.

BEN

I'm sorry... but she and I have
decided to spend a few hours together
in a mo –

The Biker headbutts Ben in the face, sending him crashing
off his stool to the floor. His head cracks against the tiled
floor. The Biker walks over to him, picks him up by his shirt
front and punches him in the nose. Blood sprays on to his
face. The Biker walks out of the bar. The Girl follows him
quickly. The Bartender takes a wet towel and walks over to
where Ben is struggling to get up, holding his face.

BARTENDER

You're quite a fighter.

He gives him the towel.

BARTENDER

This may sound silly, but I'm going

to have to ask you to leave. It's what we do around here when there's a fight. Men's room is around the back.

CUT TO:

EXT. SERA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ben lets himself in with his key. He is carrying a big bag of groceries. His clothes are bloodstained. The Landlady watches from poolside.

BEN

I'm back.

He walks into the living room and finds Sera reading on the couch. She looks up and sees his face and his bloodstained shirt.

SERA

Oh, no! Oh, fuck, Ben, look at your face. You get in a fight? I thought you didn't fight. Goddammit. How do you feel? Wait here. Sit down.

She goes to the bathroom and we hear her rummaging in the medicine cabinet.

SERA

Did you stop at the bar?

She comes back into the room, armed with bottles and cotton wool.

SERA

Did you say something stupid to someone stupid?

She goes to work on his face, dabbing an open cut with some mercurochrome.

BEN

Absolutely not... ow... I was defending the honor of some poor

wayward maiden.

She thinks about this for a moment and then kisses him on the forehead.

SERA

Why don't you go and finish this in the bathroom. Take a shower and put on your other shirt. I'll fix breakfast and then we'll go shopping and get some new clothes. I think this suit must be unlucky.

CUT TO:

INT. MALL - DAY

Ben and Sera come out of a clothing store. Ben is wearing black jeans, red socks and a white dress shirt. They go up the 'up' escalator.

SERA

Very creative. Now we can get you a black bow tie and you can look like one of those casino dealers.

BEN

OK, but remember that they wear it because they have to. I wear it because I want to. That'll make me look different. Let's get a drink.

Ben somehow gets on the 'down' escalator, leaving Sera on the higher level.

SERA

Ben?

CUT TO:

INT. SHOPPING MALL BAR. DAY

Ben needs a drink badly but this is not the best place. Mothers with children, old people and a Waitress with attitude. Ben tries to order but becomes angry when she

doesn't bring it straight away. People begin staring. At the next table a dignified older man sits alone.

Ben hands Sera a small package.

CLOSE ANGLE

BEN

There was no time for me to write a card, with you breathing down my neck all day, so you'll just have to wing it, baby.

He laughs and this induces a coughing fit. He downs his drink and holds up the empty glass to let the waitress know she should bring another.

BEN

Open it.

She does so. It is a pair of onyx earrings. Black onyx set in white gold.

SERA

(pleased)

Your color.

BEN

I think you should wear one at a time. One of these... and one of your others. In fact, I was going to buy just one, but I didn't think it would fly... as a gift, I mean.

His new drink arrives and he takes a swallow straight away.

SERA

I'll wear them tonight... one of them.

She looks at him, aware of what she has said, wondering how he is reacting. She smiles and Ben takes a deep swallow, finishing his drink. His mood suddenly changes.

BEN

Yes... tonight. Put it on.

She does so. Ben helps her, bringing his face down close to hers.

BEN

You'll be able to feel it, sharp and hot under your ear, as one of the brothers is driving your head, face down into one of the penthouse pillows.

They are both suddenly deeply shocked by what he has said. They sit in silence for a while. Sera is close to tears. Ben gets up suddenly, puts down a couple of bills and walks away from the table. When he is almost at the door Sera gets up and quickly tries together up all of the packages.

SERA

Ben, wait... please wait for me.

ANGLE ON THE DOOR

The dignified older Man stands in Ben's path and places his hands on Ben's shoulders.

MAN

Maybe you should wait for her, sir.

BEN

Why?

MAN

Because... you can hear in her voice that she really wants you to.

Sera catches up and the Man lets go of Ben. Ben takes the packages from Sera and the two of them step out into the mall.

INT. MALL - DAY

They walk together.

SERA

What was that all about?

BEN

Can we just forget it?

SERA

I don't understand any of that.

BEN

Can we just ignore it?

They stop and look at each other. The PA system gives an inane message.

BEN

Please!

SERA

Yes... I'll give you that.

BEN

Thank you, Sera.

SERA

Do you want me not to go tonight?

BEN

No... we already talked about that.

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sera is preparing for work. In the background we can hear the TV next door. She dresses carefully. Black underwear, stockings, heels, a tight black skirt.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben is watching TV and drinking.

INT. SERA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sera at the mirror, putting on her make-up. Her make-up is more pronounced than we have seen it before. Everything is

more extreme.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sera comes into the room. Ben looks up at her and sucks in his breath.

BEN

Wow.

She walks over to him and takes his head and places it between her breasts and kisses the top of his head.

BEN

Maybe I should follow you around and ask one of your tricks what it's like to sleep with you.

SERA

They wouldn't know.

She comes on to him.

SERA

Maybe you should ask me sometime. I'd be happy to show you.

She goes to the door.

SERA

I'll be back home around three. If you're back by then we can watch TV or something... I guess what I'm saying is... that I hope you are back when I get home. Please be careful.

BEN

You be careful to. I'm going to miss you.

SERA

Shall we go away for a couple of days?

BEN
Yeah... I'd like that.

CUT TO:

INT. SMART HOTEL - NIGHT

Sera walks through the lobby, looking for business.

EXT. A STREET - NIGHT

Ben lying down with people walking past and over him.

ANGLE ON BEN'S FACE

A big smile appears on his face. He starts to laugh.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. DESSERT - DAY

A blue car drives across frame. The sun is bright.

EXT. DESERT MOTEL, POOL - DAY

Sera is a very good swimmer and we see that Ben must have been quite an athlete. They look at each other under water. They're under water for a long time. Ben exhales. Sera pushes him towards the surface.

Ben and Sera come to the surface. Ben has swallowed water and has a coughing fit. Sera hugs him until the fit passes. The camera moves in tighter on them and music gives the moment a strange chill.

SERA
Don't do that to me. Don't frighten
me like that.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL - NIGHT

Ben and Sera are watching the TV next to the pool. They are sitting in reclining chairs. In the distance a coyote howls.

SERA

Years ago, in LA, I turned a trick on Sunset and Western. The guy was polite and didn't argue about the price. He parked his car and I took him to a house that I had an arrangement with. A fat Mexican woman was watching a TV and I told him to give her the twenty for the room. There were three or four small naked children playing on the floor and we had to step over them to get into the room. The room had a bed and a dresser. He lay on his back on the bed and I put a rubber on him and sucked him for a while until he was hard and then I eased on to him. About twenty minutes later there was a knock on the door and it was the woman saying our time was up. I felt kind of guilty because he hadn't come and I offered to reason with the woman and get another ten minutes, but he said it was all right and began dressing. When we were ready to leave the room he stopped me and... hugged me and kissed me on the cheek. He gave me an extra hundred as a tip and went back to his car. I remember being relieved that I wouldn't have to work again that evening.

BEN

Last spring I happened to walk past a house that I had once patronized. There was a cool breeze blowing off the ocean and through the window I could see a bare leg. The girl must have been taking a break between customers. It was a strange moment for me because it reminded me of my mother and despite the fact that I

was late for something already I just stayed there, loving the atmosphere of it and my memory and... the reason I'm telling you this epilogue is that I felt that I'd come full circle.

SERA

Where was that house? The one in LA, I mean.

BEN

Fifth and Mayflower. You know it?

SERA

Yes. One of my friends was there. I wonder if you ever clipped her.

They watch the TV in silence for a while. Sera holds his hand.

BEN

I like it here with you.

SERA

Let's stay for a while.

BEN

OK.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Ben mixes a cocktail for himself, then one for Sera. The camera follows him as he goes...

EXT. POOL-SIDE - DAY

...to the side of the pool, where Sera is sunbathing. He lowers himself unsteadily into the chair but avoids spilling a drop of the drinks, which he puts down on to a glass-topped table. He is pretty loaded. Sera turns over and moves out of his shadow.

SERA

I've missed the best sun. Why did you have to pawn your watch?

BEN

I didn't know I'd ever need it again.

Sera gets up, takes a drink and then walks to the diving board. As she takes a position at the end, she pulls the bathing suit out from her bottom, does a very natural dive into the pool, swims a length under water and then comes out near Ben, pulls herself out of the pool in one move and bends down and kisses Ben for a long time. Ben responds and kisses back. There is no one else around the pool.

The kiss becomes heated and urgent and Sera sits on Ben, making him wet from her. He pushes the top of her suit down and kisses her breasts. She picks up the glass and drinks, letting the alcohol spill from her mouth, over her breasts. Ben drinks from her.

BEN

Take this off.

He tries to pull her swimsuit down.

SERA

Maybe we should go inside. Come on.

She stands up, covering herself. Ben stands up, laughing, loses his balance and slips on the wet concrete. He falls backwards, half on to the chair, which he breaks, and then on to the glass table. The table goes over and it and the glasses all shatter on the concrete. Ben falls on the broken glass and cuts himself all over his back and his arms. Glass goes into the pool. Blood mingles with the water on the steaming cement.

BEN

Whoops.

Sera picks up her towel and lays it down next to him. She kneels and helps him up, trying to pullout the little bits of glass sticking to him. Ben stands unsteadily.

BEN

I'll go and clean up. Perhaps you could take care of this.

He indicates the mess, then walks to their room. Sera begins carefully picking up the broken glass. The desk clerk appears with a broom and a dustpan.

DESK-CLERK

(cheerfully)

Everybody OK?

SERA

Yes, fine. Don't worry. We'll pay for the chair, and I'll clean all this up, the pool too.

DESK-CLERK

Don't worry.

He begins sweeping the broken glass into the pan, cheerfully ignoring Sera.

SERA

You seem prepared for accidents.

DESK-CLERK

(still smiling)

Yeah... we get a lot of screw-ups here.

He looks directly at Sera.

DESK-CLERK

Now, you two keep your loud talk and your liquor to your room. Check out first thing tomorrow and after that I don't want to see either of you here again. I don't need you paying for the chair or cutting your pretty hands on the glass. Let's leave it at that.

Nodding firmly, he goes back to the mess, indicating that the conversation is over.

DESK-CLERK
See ya in the morning.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Sera comes into the room.

SERA
Ben?

She sees that he is already asleep on the bed, his half-naked body covered with countless bits of bloodstained tissue. The image has an almost religious feel to it. The TV is on and a sitcom is playing.

Something funny catches Sera's attention. She laughs and sits on the bed next to Ben.

SERA
I think we realized that we didn't have long and accepted it. My charm, for him, was that I accepted him exactly as he was and didn't expect him to change. I think we both realized that about each other. Ben needed me and I liked his drama. I loved him.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT LANDSCAPE - DUSK

We see Las Vegas lighting up. The blue rental car passes through frame and drives towards the town.

FADE OUT:

FADE UP ON:

INT. SERA'S BEDROOM, LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

Ben wakes from a dream. He is fully clothed and very agitated.

BEN
Sera?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sera is cooking.

SERA
I'm in here. You probably don't want to hear about it right now, but I bought some plain rice. I thought it might be something you could eat. So if you get hungry later on, just let me know.

Ben comes in from the kitchen and takes vodka bottles from the fridge.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ben's hands are sweating and it's difficult for him to keep hold of the bottle as he drinks. He gets most of it down and then he hunches over the sink and immediately vomits. He takes the second bottle and tries again.

CUT TO:

INT. SHOWER - NIGHT

Still holding the bottle, Ben stands in the shower. He drinks some more and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben enters, smartly dressed and smiling.

BEN
I think I'm ready for the rice!

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ben and Sera sitting opposite each other. He has a bowl of rice, which he is pretending to eat in between sips of vodka. She has a bowl of vegetables and rice. She sits, silently for a while, and then puts down her chopsticks.

SERA

You're pretty sick.

Ben looks away.

SERA

What are you going to do?

She folds her arms.

SERA

I want you to go see a doctor.

He thinks for a while and then turns to meet her gaze. They look right into each other's eyes.

BEN

Sera... I'm not going to see a doctor.

Sera continues to look at him almost defiantly.

BEN

Maybe it's time I moved to a hotel.

SERA

And do what... rot away in a room?

(becoming angry)

We're not going to talk about that.

Fuck you! I will not talk about that.

You're staying here. You are not moving to a hotel.

BEN

Will you lighten up, please?

SERA

(close to tears)

One thing... one thing... this is one thing you can do for me. I've

given you gallons of free will here!
You can do this for me.

She leans right forward.

SERA

Let's face it. Sick as you are, I'm probably the only thing that's keeping you alive.

She stands up.

SERA

I have to go to work now.

Ben doesn't say anything. He just stares a hole in his bowl of rice.

CUT TO:

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Ben walks by himself. He is deep in thought.

CUT TO:

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Ben recklessly bets two hundred dollars at the craps table... and wins. As he leans forward to collect his winnings, he sees...

ANGLE

...a Blonde in a very low-cut outfit. She smiles at Ben and walks around the table to pick him up. Ben puts all of his winnings on one bet and wins again. This pattern repeats a few times and drinks are on the house.

BLONDE

Hey... that was quite a play. You in for the convention?

Ben gets to the point.

BEN
I'd like to fuck you.

A few people hear Ben and the Blonde is almost put off, but he does have about eight thousand dollars in winnings and so she leans in very close so that she can talk quietly.

BLONDE
I'm very expensive.

BEN
How much to lick your pussy?

The Blonde picks up a sizeable stack of chips and looks at Ben.

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sera lets herself in, looks around and opens the bedroom door.

ANGLE

In one fluid movement the naked blonde gets off the semi-conscious Ben, pulls her dress over her head and walks past Sera. Moments later we hear the front door slam. Ben comes to and looks at Sera. He is more or less unaware of what has just happened.

BEN
Hello...

ANGLE ON SERA

Her eyes are wet.

SERA
There are limits.

BEN
(remembering)
Yes... I guess I knew that.

Ben gets out of the bed. He picks up the bottle on the bedside table and stands.

BEN

Perhaps I could crash on the couch for a few hours... and then I'll leave.

He walks out of the room and closes his the door. Camera moves in on Sera. She covers her face with her hands. She drops her purse and slides down the wall to the floor, weeping quietly.

SERA (V.O.)

I heard the door slam a couple of hours later and he was gone.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Ben coming out of a liquor store with a large brown bag.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Sera getting out of a car. The car drives off. Sera examines her face in a pocket mirror. Puts on more lipstick.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Ben is on all fours in the bathroom trying to vomit. His thin frame is heaving. Bottles everywhere.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Three college boys with beer bottles walk the The Strip. They are all wearing the same numbered jersey. Nice middle-

class boys looking for an adventure. They see Sera and go into a huddle before walking over to her.

TALLEST COLLEGE BOY

How much will it cost us to fuck you?

The other two College Boys titter. Sera starts to walk away and then hesitates.

SERA

Sorry, guys, but I don't know what you mean. Anyway, I never date more than one guy at a time.

SMALLEST COLLEGE BOY

Come on... we got money... show her the money.

The other College Boy gets out his wallet and opens it to show her. Sera hesitates, not somehow comfortable with the situation, then goes ahead.

SERA

How much of that money did you guys want to spend?

TALLEST COLLEGE BOY

How much you want? How about two hundred for an hour?

SERA

(becoming annoyed with them)

Don't your friends talk?

(no answer)

Try three-hundred for a half hour.

OTHER COLLEGE BOY

(nervous)

Three hundred for the hour.

SERA

OK... three... and we'll see how it goes. Where are you staying?

TALLEST COLLEGE BOY
The Yukon, room twenty-four.

SERA
I'll see you there in fifteen minutes.
You can pay me then. Why don't you
all take a shower while you're
waiting.

OTHER COLLEGE BOY
A shower? In fifteen minutes?

SERA
Look... I'll only need one of you at
a time. RIGHT? UNDERSTOOD? So... the
other two can shower while I'm there.
OK?

They walk off in a huddle, giggling – three small boys.

CUT TO:

EXT. YUKON MOTEL - NIGHT

Sera drinks from a beer bottle as she approaches their room.
She talks to herself.

SERA
Where are the boys this weekend,
Frank? Why, hell, Charlie, I sent
'em off to learn the one thing I
couldn't teach 'em.

She looks at the numbers and finds the room. She knocks and
a moment later the Tallest College Boy opens the door in his
jockey shorts.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sera steps in. One boy is coming out of the bathroom wearing
a towel and the third is sitting in a chair smoking a
cigarette, which he passes to the boy in the towel. The other
boy is fooling around with a video camera. The atmosphere is
weird and Sera is suddenly alert.

The Tallest College Boy hands her the money. He is very well built, a football player. Sera hesitates, holding the money. The Tallest College Boy closes the door and then leans against it. They are all staring at her now. No one says anything. Sera smiles suddenly and puts the money in her purse. All business.

SERA

OK... where's the bedroom, and who's first?

They all look at each other.

SMALLEST COLLEGE BOY

I want to fuck her in the butt...

He looks at the other.

SMALLEST COLLEGE BOY

...you too, right?

SERA

Forget that. No one's doing that. You'll all go one at a time. If you want I'll suck you instead, but that's all. Then I'm out of here.

SMALLEST COLLEGE BOY

(looking at tallest)

You said I could fuck her in the butt.

OTHER COLLEGE BOY

Shut up.

SMALLEST COLLEGE BOY

(shouting)

It's my fucking money!

SERA

That's it... Take your money back. I'm leaving.

The Smallest College Boy gets off the bed and comes over to

Sera.

SMALLEST COLLEGE BOY

No... don't go.

The Tallest Boy is still standing in front of the door and things are getting strange. The Other Boy turns on the video camera. Sera loses her cool.

SERA

(to the Smallest Boy)

Maybe you'd like to fuck one of your friends in the butt instead.

The room goes very quiet. The kid tears up. Sera tries to back-pedal.

SERA

Hey... I'm sorry...

The kid punches her hard in the stomach, knocking her to the ground.

CUT TO BLACK:

QUICK FADE IN:

Close-up on Sera's face pushed into a bloodstained pillow, her body being pounded from behind. The naked legs of two of the boys behind her. We hear voices, filtered, from a long way off.

VOICE

Go on... fuck her ass...

OTHER VOICE

Look at me... look at me... look at me.

A hand comes into frame and pulls her head up by the hair. A pair of legs moves in. There is the sound of a punch.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

Sera's body on the floor. In the background trousers being hastily pulled on to legs. The boys exit with sport bags.

The last one turns out the lights and closes the door.

FADE OUT:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAWN

In the half-light Sera gets up and walks with difficulty to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAWN

She clicks on the mirror light. Her face is awful. One eye is swollen almost shut. Her top lip is cut.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. CAB - EARLY MORNING

Sera gets into the cab with considerable difficulty. The cab driver is a cynic.

CAB DRIVER

What's the matter, honey, get a back-door delivery you weren't expecting?
You gonna be able to pay the fare?

Without speaking she takes out a twenty, leans forward and drops it on the front passenger seat. He drives. Looks at her in the mirror.

CAB DRIVER

Oh, don't wanna talk to me, unh?
Well, don't take it out on me, I'm just covering my ass. What the hell do you expect, stuttin' around like that... dressed like that? You oughta be glad the creep didn't nail ya.

CUT TO:

EXT. SERA'S HOUSE - MORNING

As the cab drives off, Sera walks slowly to the door.

Her Landlord's wife passes and takes in her face.

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S SHOWER - DAY

Sera is slumped on the floor of the shower, her arms hugging her legs, the water pounding down on her.

CUT TO:

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sera opens the door and we see the Landlord. Behind him, on the sidewalk, we can see his wife. He is embarrassed.

ANGLE

Sera, wearing dark glasses. She looks terrible. Her mouth is swollen and some of the bruising around her eye is visible.

LANDLADY

I'm sorry... but we'd like you out
by the end of the week.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHOLE YEAR INN - DAY

Sera gets out of a cab and goes into reception. She is wearing huge dark glasses to hide the black eye and the bruising.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL - DAY

The desk clerk is wearing a shirt of Ben's that we recognize from an earlier scene.

DESK CLERK

I'm sorry, ma'am. He never checked
back in.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRIP - NIGHT

Sera walks alone. She's dejected as she looks for Ben.

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Sera comes to an elevator and waits. She is wearing a thin black top without a bra. Her bruised face makes her suddenly very conspicuous and vulnerable. A big man in a white stetson stands next to her. He looks at her and grins. She smiles, coldly. He takes from his pocket two black, hundred dollar chips, places one in each hand and deliberately places each one against her nipples. Other people see this and stop and watch. Sera looks down at his hands and stares until the man becomes uncomfortable.

STETSON MAN

What's the problem, honey?... You on strike?

And he walks away laughing.

CUT TO:

EXT. 7-ELEVEN - DAY

Sera is sitting on a freshly-painted red kerb. She smokes a cigarette and doesn't give a damn that her short skirt is somewhat revealing. Opposite her a bum is sleeping on the pavement. For a moment it looks like Ben. The camera comes in tight on to her face. She looks more lost than we've ever seen her. She drinks coffee from a styrofoam cup. The sun is bright and hot and traffic is noisy.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

IMPROVISED SCENE. (5)

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Sera comes in and the camera follows her as she makes her way to the bar. She has covered up much of the bruising with

make-up but it is still pretty obvious. In wide shot we see her strike up a conversation with the man next to her at the bar.

CLOSE SHOT - THE BAR

A hand comes in to shot and grips her arm firmly. We see that it is a casino security guard.

SERA

Let go. What's the problem.

SECURITY GUARD

We don't want you in here, that's the problem. Let's go.

And he jerks her arm. People are watching now.

SERA

Don't worry... If you don't want me in here, then I don't want to be in here. Just let go of my arm and I'll walk out of here.

SECURITY GUARD

Yeah... we'll both walk out now.

He steers her firmly across the floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASINO. NIGHT

They reach the sidewalk and, without relaxing his grip, he grabs her between the legs with his free hand and says in her ear:

SECURITY GUARD

Next time it won't be so fucking easy.

And he pushes her towards the street and walks back into the Casino. Sera is shocked. She looks around and the group of people who have stopped to watch the event move away.

INT. SERA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sera is throwing clothes into a suitcase. The phone rings. She thinks about it for a long time and then it stops. She carries on packing and then the phone rings again. She pick it up.

SERA

Hello... hello...

(suddenly alert)

Ben? Where the fuck are you? Give me the address.

CUT TO:

INT. CAB - LATE AFTERNOON

The driver is black and friendly. The radio drones quietly – a religious program. The Rev. Ike is taking listeners' calls.

BLACK DRIVER

What in the hell happened to you, Miss?

SERA

Oh... it was an argument.

BLACK DRIVER

Leave him, Miss. Pretty girl like You could get any man that you wanted.

INT. BEN'S MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

The door opens. Ben is naked. His body looks bad. Leaving the door open, he retreats to the bed.

INT. BEN'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sera comes in, closing the door behind her. The shades are drawn and the room is gloomy. Ben has got back into bed. She comes to the bed and sits.

SERA

Ben... I've been looking for you.
Have you been here since you left?

It smells bad in here. It's so dark.

She clicks on the bedside light and is truly shocked by his face.

BEN

I wanted to see you...

SERA

Oh, Ben... you look so very sick...
my love... you're so pale.

She goes to the bathroom and returns with a wet face-cloth.

She wipes his face.

BEN

I wanted to see you... you're my
angel.

He sits up painfully and finds a bottle, summoning up some last strength to drink. His entire body shudders as he drains the bottle. He puts it down and focuses on her for the first time. He sees her damaged face, touches her face, looks at her questioningly.

SERA

Something went wrong... I'm OK.

Ben begins to cry and that sets her off.

BEN

I'm sorry I put us asunder.

She shakes her head, unable to speak for the moment. She gets into bed with him, kissing his face. She caresses his whole body, which is shaking, possessed by an uncontrollable fever.

BEN

See how hard you make me angel.

She excites him with her hand, kissing his face gently. When he is about to come, she straddles him and brings him inside. As he comes, he opens his eyes wide and looks at her.

BEN
You know I love you... yeah?

SERA
(she comes)
Yes.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

Sera is sleeping. A sudden gasp wakes her. Ben is having a spasm. Suddenly his body relaxes. He turns his head, opens his eyes wide and looks straight at her.

BEN
Oh... I'm so sorry...

He smiles and turns his head away. He is very still.

SERA
Ben... Ben... Ben?

CUT TO:

INT. BEN'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

In the darkened room we can just make out Sera sitting on the bed, looking at the still form of Ben.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET NEAR MOTEL - DAWN

Sera walking. A paramedic van goes past with its lights flashing. The soundtrack is empty – silent. We slowly fade in theme music and titles start to roll.

FADE OUT:

THE END