

# **DRUNK-DIALING**

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FADE IN:

INT. GAS STATION RESTROOM - FRIDAY, 1:30 AM

RONNIE EPSTEIN, 28, grudgingly opens his eyes...

The world is blurry and sideways and disgusting - his head is canted unergonomically against a chipped toilet seat.

In one hand he holds A KEY shackled to a naked Barbie-Doll missing most of her hair. His other hand limply grips his CELL-PHONE to his ear - it BEEPS a busy signal.

Under better conditions he's boyishly handsome, but right now he looks like a corpse washed ashore after a typhoon. His whole body convulses in a COUGHING FIT.

He groggily lifts himself up, but immediately loses his balance on the slippery tile floor. He tries once more...and promptly wipes out again. Finally he braces himself against the stall's handicap rail and inches himself upwards.

Ronnie staggers over to the mirror and notices a gnarly BRUISED LUMP on his forehead. He gingerly pokes it and winces. Curiously, there's also FLECKS OF PAINT peppered all over his dress-shirt and tie.

EXT. GAS STATION - INGLEWOOD, SOUTHWEST L.A. - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie stands outside the gas station restroom looking utterly bewildered. It's an desolate, industrial part of town. Orange sodium vapor lights. Jet engines rumble in the distance. It's a full moon.

Suddenly his cell-phone RINGS. It reads "TEDDY." He answers-

RONNIE  
Teddy...where am I?

TEDDY (V.O.)  
The fuck if I know. I've been  
looking for you for 4 hours!

RONNIE  
...4 hours? I...don't remember  
anything. I think I hit my head -  
must've blacked out.

TEDDY (V.O.)  
Did you wake up in a tub of ice-  
cubes? Ronnie, for the love of god  
check you still have kidneys!

RONNIE  
I still have kidneys Teddy.

TEDDY (V.O.)  
 Good - that's a start. Now where  
 are you?

                  RONNIE  
 I'm at a gas station...

Ronnie hobbles over to the corner and finds the street sign.

                  RONNIE  
 Here we go. Sepulveda & La Tijera.

                  TEDDY (V.O.)  
 Christ, you're near the airport!?  
 I'll be there in like 20 minutes,  
 okay. Don't move.

Teddy HANGS UP.

Ronnie pauses a moment, then lifts up his shirt and fearfully  
 checks that his kidneys are in fact still in his body. He  
 seems satisfied.

Suddenly his coughing fit revs up again.

INT. GAS STATION MINI-MART - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie grabs a large SPORTS-BOTTLE OF WATER from the fridge.

CHECK-OUT

He places the water on the counter and hands the restroom key  
 back to the STORE CLERK, a petite Korean woman, late 50's.  
 She wears an indelible smile of polite deference.

She looks at the key, confused.

                  STORE CLERK  
 On toilet 50 minutes?

                  RONNIE  
 Listen, you really need some  
 floormats. That restroom is  
 violating pretty much every city  
 code. It's like Katrina in there.  
                   (pointing to his lump)  
 I might have a concussion!

The Store Clerk's lip quivers. She tries to maintain her  
 smile though it's clear her feelings are hurt.

Ronnie rolls his eyes. He reaches into his wallet, and hands  
 her a BUSINESS CARD.

RONNIE

Okay, I'm sorry I yelled. Look, I actually sell floormats for a living. Call me tomorrow - I'll fix you up with a nice model, alright?

The Store Clerk nods cheerfully.

Ronnie pays, then steps away from the counter and greedily chugs his drink, water spilling down his chin.

The DOOR CHIME on the mini-mart entrance sounds--

In enters a stocky man TYLER ANSON, 44, dressed in a dime-store polyester suit; he's got the oily, ruddy complexion of a peeled boiled peanut. He scans his surroundings, before making a quick calculation and locking onto Ronnie.

TYLER

Amigo, you got the time?

Ronnie pulls out his cell phone from his pants-pocket.

RONNIE

Uh, yeah, it's about 1:30...

...suddenly Ronnie reads the display text: "78 NEW MESSAGES".

RONNIE

No, I can't have...

He accesses his CALL-LOG. His jaw drops in cartoonish horror.

RONNIE

NO, NO, NO!...

TYLER

Somethin' wrong compadre?

RONNIE

...I've called over 200 people in the last 3 hours!

(scrolling through log)

I don't even know these names. Why do I save the number of every goddamn person I meet!?

TYLER

Oh, I'm sure they're happy to hear from ya--

RONNIE

No, when I get drunk it's like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I'm a monster!

TYLER

I bet ya a dollar to your penny  
they've been waitin' for ya to  
call. I don't believe we ever  
really say goodbye to anyone. Kinda  
think life's like a movie: God  
doesn't wanna pay for more extras,  
so he keeps reusing the same ones  
in different scenes.

RONNIE

(not listening)

Well, that's a fascinating...

Suddenly Ronnie scrolls across the name "MR. PENNINGTON" in  
his call list. He called him 4 times.

RONNIE

--AAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!

Ronnie collapses backwards into a shelf of Butterfingers.

TYLER

What now?

RONNIE

(numbly)

My boss - I called Mr. Pennington.  
Who knows what insane things I  
said. I'm fired.

TYLER

Just calm down kimosabi--

RONNIE

I did this in college once to my  
Professor. Got put on probation. I  
lost my scholarship--

TYLER

(firmly)

Tell me your name.

RONNIE

(barely a whisper)

Ronnie Epstein.

TYLER

Ronnie, I'm Tyler Anson. I dabble  
as a professional life coach so I  
can recognize the patterns of a  
textbook victim when I see them.

RONNIE

You can?

TYLER

Bad things are gonna happen. They just are. But a man ain't judged by how he acts when things are good. It's how he rises to the occasion when things aren't so good.

RONNIE

Really?

TYLER

Really.

Tyler SLAPS Ronnie, shocking him into lucidity.

TYLER

Now how are you gonna save your job?

RONNIE

Well...my boss doesn't use voicemail. He has this old school answering machine, from like 1983. I guess I could just erase the message before he hears it?

TYLER

Damn skippy you're gonna erase that message.

RONNIE

I mean, it's only 1:30, I've got seven hours before he gets to the office.

TYLER

That's the Ronnie I always believed in!

They high-five and hug. When Ronnie pulls away, Tyler has pressed an 8MM HANDGUN into his ribcage.

TYLER

This part's always so awkward. Wallet and cell-phone, c'mon.

Ronnie's eyes go wide.

RONNIE

This is one of your life coaching strategies? Like a trust-fall?

TYLER

I am so proud of you for being able to see this in a positive light. Tremendous progress.

Stunned, Ronnie slowly hands over his wallet and phone.

TYLER

Chin up Ronnie. Gotta feeling your  
night's only getting better from  
here on out.

Tyler FIRES A WARNING SHOT into the air and faces the clerk.

TYLER

Open the fucking register!

The Store Clerk freezes like a cornered rabbit. Then after a  
beat she nods submissively.

With the speed of a mongoose, she dips below the counter and  
returns with a DOUBLE-BARREL SHOTGUN leveled in the direction  
of Tyler. She WINKS at Ronnie.

There's a silent stale-mate...

Ronnie, terrified, edges backwards to the door...

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

As soon as Ronnie appears outside, a cotton-candy PINK  
CORVETTE screeches to a stop next to him...

MARY-LOU WHITMAN, 20's, rolls down her window. She has a  
round face, blonde pageboy haircut, and turtle-shell glasses.  
The longer you stare at her, the prettier she seems. Her  
words are laced with an idealistic Wisconsin accent.

MARY-LOU

Ronnie! Get on over here!

Bewildered, Ronnie scuttles towards the car.

MARY-LOU

Gosh, I'm sorry it took me so long  
to get here!

RONNIE

What...who are you?

A couple of GUN SHOTS ring from inside the store. One of the  
mini-mart windows SHATTERS in a hail of glass pebbles.

MARY-LOU

Please just get in before we're  
both shot!

Ronnie weighs his options for half a second, then DIVES into  
the car...FREEZE-FRAME.

CUT TO:

INTERTITLE: "ABOUT 7 YEARS EARLIER"

INT. PAINTING STUDIO - CAL ARTS - SPRING, 7 YEARS AGO

We PULL OUT from an OIL-PAINT CANVAS: it's a bland pastoral of an alpine log cabin, nestled between two purple mountains. The technique is exact, but it's like something you'd see in a mail-correspondence art degree commercial. It's awful.

Ronnie, age 21, painstakingly applies the last few swaths of paint with a palette knife. There is an identical reference PHOTOGRAPH stuck to the top corner of the canvas.

PROFESSOR WINSLOW, a bald man with a salt & pepper goatee, 50's, approaches Ronnie. He rubs his temples in pain.

PROFESSOR WINSLOW  
 ...Was this a paint-by-numbers? If  
 so, congratulations on staying  
 between the lines.

Ronnie grits his teeth, hiding his disappointment. Professor Winslow sighs sadly.

PROFESSOR WINSLOW (CONT'D)  
 Ronnie, I remember your application  
 portfolio - strong fundamentals,  
 sound craft. But every so often  
 you'd get sloppy or careless or  
 maybe just pissed off, and I'd see  
 a little...promise.

Professor Winslow marks his EVALUATION SHEET and hands it to Ronnie.

PROFESSOR WINSLOW  
 I don't know what you're so afraid  
 of.

Professor Winslow walks off. Ronnie looks at his grade: it reads "D-".

TEDDY WINKLE, also 21, lanky exaggerated features, sporting a Jew-fro, ambles over, a CANVAS under his arm. He seems angry.

TEDDY  
 Could be worse, I got an "F."

Teddy shows Ronnie his PAINTING: it's a poorly rendered image of a white light beam shooting into a prism and coming out a rainbow against a black background.

RONNIE  
 Teddy, you painted the album cover  
 of "Dark Side of the Moon."

TEDDY

Well if I'd realized it was such a well known album, I'd obviously of picked something else to copy!

Ronnie's already started PACKING UP his painting gear.

TEDDY

Guess we'll have to retake this class now.

Ronnie's grim expression says he's not so sure about that.

INT. CINE-REALM NIGHT CLUB - HOLLYWOOD BLVD - THAT NIGHT

The club is packed and the dance floor undulates to live spun techno and trance.

Teddy dances like a diabetic going into hypoglycemic shock, his Mai-Tai sloshing everywhere. He wears a "Legend of Zelda" T-shirt. Ronnie shifts from side to side, sober and uncomfortable.

The DJ, an exotic Euro/Asian girl, KEOKO STARR, 19, is MASHING up a hip-hop track with some weird Medieval chamber chorus. Her hair is shiny, her eyes brilliant and mischievous. She glances down at Ronnie from her booth. He SMILES back bashfully.

TEDDY

You should be drinking.

RONNIE

I thought we agreed that wasn't such a good idea. Starting today I'm straight-edge.

Teddy rolls his eyes - he's heard this before.

TEDDY

Ronnie, why do you waste your time in class with that Bob Ross landscape shit? Your street work's legit, everybody knows it! The piece you threw up on the 11th street bridge--

RONNIE

Yeah, I was wasted when I did that.

TEDDY

People loved it! There was a petition for the city not to buff it. 10 pages of signatures. If I was your manager--

RONNIE  
You'd what? Get rich off a petty  
vandal who can't hold his liquor?

TEDDY  
I don't see why not.

RONNIE  
Maybe I can find you a crackhead  
with an etch-a-sketch. You could  
retire.

Annoyed, Ronnie marches off.

SIDE-ROOM BAR

It's a little more low-key in here - a montage of old B&W  
film clips is being PROJECTED on the wall. Currently a clip  
from the 1931 classic *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* plays.

The BARTENDER, 20's, riddled with tatoos, and sporting  
painful looking earlobe plugs, sees Ronnie and squints in  
recognition.

BARTENDER  
Hey you!

Ronnie looks around, certain he's talking to someone else.

RONNIE  
Me?

BARTENDER  
Were you at the train yards a  
couple weeks ago? Near Lincoln  
Heights?

RONNIE  
...What? No.

BARTENDER  
Yeah you were. Your tag's "R.E.P"?  
I watched you work.

RONNIE  
That weekend's a little hazy.

BARTENDER  
Man, the end-to-end you threw up -  
dopest burner I ever seen. I won't  
let my crew anywhere near it.  
Fuckin' masterpiece I told em!

RONNIE  
I don't really approve of graffiti.

The bartender frowns for a moment, but then cracks a smile-

BARTENDER  
Yeah, me neither boss.

The Bartender taps a finger to his nose and hands him a KETEL ONE on the rocks.

BARTENDER  
Consider it fan-mail.

Ronnie smiles nervously, then retreats with the drink into the corner.

Troubled, he starts watching the current film clip being projected on the wall -- it's an old 16mm HEALTH FILM that might've been shown in a 50's high school:

INSTRUCTIONAL SHORT: A crude jittery ANIMATION depicts the effects of alcohol on the brain and nervous system.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
What Jimmy doesn't realize is that one side effect of "getting drunk" is the lowering of inhibitions. Areas of his brain responsible for planning are dulled. Meanwhile the parts responsible for pleasure seeking, are stimulated. So not only does little Jimmy do foolish things, his brain has convinced him they're actually good ideas.

RONNIE  
Fuck it.

Grimacing, Ronnie DOWNS HIS DRINK...

INT. NEAR THE BACK KITCHEN - CINE-REALM - LATER

DRUNK-DIALING MONTAGE:

Ronnie, clutching a Long Island iced tea, braces himself against a wall. He stabs a number into his CELL PHONE.

RONNIE  
(slurring badly)  
Hey babydoll, Ronnie Epstein here. I think it's time we let everyone know our true feelings for each other. What? Nah...2nd cousins aren't even real cousins...

JUMP CUT:

RONNIE

Hey, I'd like to order all your Chinese food. I want all of it. ALL OF IT! I know you're a Pizza Hut - just figure it out!

JUMP CUT:

RONNIE

Hello, who is this? The Chamber of Commerce? Really? That's so weird. Well... your refrigerator's running. Epic Burn!

JUMP CUT TO:

RONNIE

Hey, Professor Penisface - Where the do you get off giving me a D-? Your goatee should get a D-! If your mom's still alive, I'm having sex with her tonight--

Suddenly Teddy bounds up to him and CONFISCATES his phone.

TEDDY

You know you're not allowed to use this when you're drunk!

RONNIE

(barely coherent)

You got a warrant for that? I will take you downtown to Chinatown!

TEDDY

At least be a useful sociopath.

Teddy opens his satchel - it's full of PRIMERS and SPRAY PAINTS.

EXT. SERVICE ALLEY - BACK OF NIGHT CLUB - A LITTLE LATER

Teddy watches with amazement as Ronnie deftly outlines a GRAFFITI MASTERPIECE on the back wall of the club. He's wobbly, yet as confident and fluid as a drunken fighting master. In the lower corner, he scrawls his stylized tag "R.E.P." In his left hand he protectively cradles a half-empty handle of Midori.

A SMALL CROWD'S gathered to gawk.

RONNIE

Hey Teddy, I was driving through Inglewood yesterday - I saw this killer wall. Just a massive canvas.

Keoko, the DJ spinning earlier, suddenly appears behind him, marveling at the work.

RONNIE  
I'm gonna do a piece there. Biggest  
I've ever done. Hey, Teddy--

Ronnie turns around and is face-to-face with Keoko. He drops his spray Can and fumbles to pick it back up.

KEOKO  
Hey nerd.

A long beat of silence.

AROUND THE CORNER - A LITTLE LATER

Ronnie and Keoko breathlessly MAKE OUT in the jagged shadows of the back alley. A BLUE NEON SIGN hums overhead.

Keoko disengages for a moment, and makes a SHADOW PUPPET against the far wall.

KEOKO  
Guess what I'm making.

RONNIE  
Ummm...a rabbit?

KEOKO  
Nope.

Ronnie leans back in to kiss, but Keoko holds him at bay.

KEOKO  
(giggling)  
Not until you guess.

RONNIE  
Okay, a dog?

KEOKO  
No. It's a ferret. In a top hat.  
His name's Gustav and he's bi-  
polar.

RONNIE  
That was my next guess.

Ronnie tries to do an elaborate shadow puppet, but he can't really make anything work.

RONNIE  
Okay...it's...a hand!

KEOKO  
It's so lifelike.

Ronnie smiles. Keoko bites her lip - she looks pensive.

RONNIE  
What's wrong?

KEOKO  
Ronnie, I got a call from my  
manager this morning.

RONNIE  
Yeah?

KEOKO  
He booked me for six months in  
Ibiza. Couple big clubs - I'll be  
spinning 6 nights a week.

This sobers him up. He tries to smile.

RONNIE  
Wow! You know, Spain's super...far  
away.

KEOKO  
I know. I'm leaving tomorrow.

Ronnie reels backwards.

RONNIE  
Tomorrow!? Like, *tomorrow* tomorrow?

KEOKO  
And I want you to come with me.

RONNIE  
...You do?

KEOKO  
Sure, why not?

RONNIE  
I can't just flee the country like  
a refugee. We've only been seeing  
each other three months!

KEOKO  
For a fruit fly, that's three  
lifetimes!

RONNIE  
But what we have here is perfect.

Keoko stomps her foot.

KEOKO

Perfect!? Who wants anything to be perfect? Where do you go from there? If something's perfect, it's about to end. Ronnie, let's get on a plane and fuck everything up.

RONNIE

Keoko, I know you think I'm this fun, wild guy, but I'm not. I don't wanna be stranded in Spain when you realize that.

KEOKO

You're being ridiculous!

RONNIE

Anyway...I just got an internship.

KEOKO

...You did?

RONNIE

Yeah, it's at this floormat company. Pretty cool stuff.

Beat.

KEOKO

What the hell do you know about floormats?

RONNIE

Well...they go on the floor. Everything else'll be covered in orientation.

KEOKO

What about your art?

Ronnie looks down and shrugs.

RONNIE

At some point I need a real job.

Keoko draws very close to him.

KEOKO

I already bought you a ticket.

She hands him the TICKET and kisses the tip of his nose.

KEOKO

Bradley Terminal. I'll meet you there at 8am. Don't be square.

RONNIE

Keoko...

She WHISPERS in his ear-

KEOKO

What do you have to lose Ronnie  
Epstein?

Smiling, she twirls off. He watches her for a few moments,  
before Teddy SPRINTS by.

TEDDY

Run! The 5-0. They're onto us! Code  
Triage! Code Triage!!!

A SQUAD CAR squeals into the alley, blasting Ronnie with a  
spotlight.

After a moment of hesitation, Ronnie throws the BAG OF SPRAY-  
PAINTS into a dumpster and chases after Teddy. FREEZE-FRAME.

CUT TO:

INTERTITLE: "ABOUT 7 YEARS LATER"

INT. WAREHOUSE FLOOR - PENNINGTON MATS INC. - DOWNTOWN LA -  
MORNING

Ronnie, 28 again, wearing a hard-hat, clean-shaven with a  
conservative haircut. He is surrounded by towering, endless  
AISLES OF FLOOR MATS, and bathed in light from shrill  
overhead fluorescents. Cheerful Muzak excretes from speakers.

He leads a large group of potential WHOLESALE BUYERS.

RONNIE

It's said that the reasonable man  
adapts himself to the world and the  
unreasonable man persists in trying  
to adapt the world to himself. So,  
progress, they say, depends on the  
unreasonable man. But Ladies and  
Gentleman, what could be more  
reasonable than choosing the new  
Pennington CX2000 Floormat.

Ronnie pulls a DISPLAY CLOTH off a brand new sparkling TOWER  
OF MATS. The groups applauds politely.

RONNIE

When you fall down, sure it's  
important to pick yourself back up.  
But wouldn't you rather not fall  
down in the first place?

The group murmurs in agreement.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

A good floor mat will minimize risk  
- and that's the name of our game.  
Let's face it, everyone can use a  
little more traction in their life.  
Unless you're an octopus. Or maybe  
Spiderman.

The group laughs genially. They're eating out of the palm of his hand.

INT. CUBICLE FLOOR - EARLY AFTERNOON

Ronnie, now sans hard-hat, struts down the main artery of the cubicle floor as various COWORKERS fist-bump and high-five him.

COWORKER #1

The wizard of floormats! Heard you wowed the Marriott suits this morning.

RONNIE

Well, the CX2000's sell themselves.

COWORKER #2

Epstein, I heard from Hank in accounting who heard from Jenny in HR, that Mr. Pennington's got you pegged for Sales VP.

RONNIE

Well, it's an honor just to be nominated.

Suddenly, A SMALL MAN darts in front of Ronnie's path, impeding his way. Ronnie looks profoundly annoyed. This is OLIVER PITT, 22, he's dressed like an extra from *The Music Man*: three-piece suit, bow-tie, center-parted greased hair. He has the intense energy of a dachshund.

OLIVER

Mr. Epstein! What do ya say, what do ya know?

RONNIE

Oliver.

OLIVER

Sorry, can't talk now, I'm on my way to tell Mr. Pennington I secured the LA Zoo deal. Primate cage is gonna be completely retrofitted with C-31 mats.

RONNIE  
 ...The Monkey House. You sold floor  
 mats to monkeys?

OLIVER  
 Sure, banana peels everywhere. Do  
 you have any idea how much monkey  
 ACL surgery costs? It's not cheap.

Ronnie is grudgingly impressed.

RONNIE  
 Good thinking Oliver.

OLIVER  
 By the way, I've been meaning to  
 apologize. I forgot your 30th  
 birthday was last week, and I--

RONNIE  
 I turned 28.

OLIVER  
 Oh, well, I just wanted to wish you  
 a happy birthday.

RONNIE  
 ...thanks.

Suddenly Oliver's mood darkens.

OLIVER  
 I guess a couple of the fellahs  
 took you out for lunch. I would've  
 attended, but they accidentally  
 locked me in the ladies' lavatory.

Ronnie shifts uncomfortably under his intense gaze.

RONNIE  
 ...Sorry about that. They can kinda  
 be jerks. I'll see you around.

Ronnie tries to move past, but Oliver obstructs the aisle.

OLIVER  
 It's fine. I'm used to scratching  
 and clawing for everything I have.  
 You know when you and your pals  
 were getting to 2nd base with co-  
 eds at Exeter, I was getting up at  
 4am to bike a paper-route in  
 Encino.

RONNIE  
 ...I went to public school--

OLIVER

I would've killed to go to public school! My school was the streets... and a dirty boxing gym in the worst part of Harlem.

RONNIE

I thought you grew up in Encino.

OLIVER

No siree, we weren't all born with silver spoons in our mouths Ronnie. We can't all afford to have unsanctioned birthday parties at 4-star restaurants during our lunch hour. Some of us are busy selling floor mats to monkeys!

RONNIE

First off, it was at California Pizza Kitchen. Second, let's take a deep breath...

Oliver inhales deeply for a few moments.

OLIVER

Yeah, I'm awful sorry Mr. Epstein. I get my temper from my father. Course he died in chimney-sweep accident when I was two.

Oliver embraces Ronnie making him terribly uncomfortable.

OLIVER

Hey, heard from a little birdie you're up for Sales VP. Don't give em any reason to change their mind.

Oliver winks at Ronnie, then skips merrily off.

CUT TO:

INT. RONNIE'S OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER

The office is impeccably ordered and neat. SEVERAL PLAQUES denote Ronnie the "Salesman of the Month" across the last couple years.

Ronnie pours over various SPREADSHEETS and INVOICES. He power-sips a COFFEE, and from the empty cups on his desk, it looks like he's on his third or fourth.

His office phone RINGS. He presses speaker--

RONNIE

Hi Beatrice.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Ronnie, Mr. Pennington was hoping you could come by his office in 10 minutes.

RONNIE

(smiling nervously)

Tell him I'll be there.

As Ronnie hangs up, Teddy Winkle, now 28, runs into the office, demonstratively SLIPPING and CRASHING to the ground. He pantomimes clutching his back in pain.

TEDDY

This place is a deathtrap! If only there'd been a floor mat, this all might've been prevented.

Ronnie shakes his head - every time the same gag.

RONNIE

Thanks for stopping by Teddy.

TEDDY

(picking himself up)

No problem Ron Ron, just closed up the ol' art gallery for lunch.

RONNIE

Y'know, it's really not an art gallery.

TEDDY

Sure it is.

RONNIE

You sell Magic Eye posters from a kiosk in the Westside Pavilion.

TEDDY

Oh, just 'cause you have to cross your eyes means it's not art? Is that a new rule?

RONNIE

Never mind. Did you bring it?

Teddy nods unhappily. He reaches into his jacket and pulls out a small VELVET CASE. He places it on the table.

TEDDY

My Hasidic buddy got you a retardedly good deal.

Ronnie opens it revealing a DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING. He whistles nervously.

TEDDY

She hates me you know.

RONNIE

Caitlyn doesn't hate you. She just thinks you're disorganized...and lazy...and an anarchist.

TEDDY

Well, she's got a point.

RONNIE

Besides the timing's right if I get this promotion. Better pay, corner office, and I'll finally have a real title, y'know?

TEDDY

What do you care about a title?

RONNIE

It's dumb, but it means I'm actually good at something, y'know? Vice-President of Sales. You can print that on a business card. You can tell people that at your high school reunion.

Teddy frowns, remembering something. He pulls a HOT PINK FLIER from his back pocket.

TEDDY

Oh, so I went to Laser Tag last night, like every Wednesday night, and I'd just set the new high score, 48 kills - which is unprecedented by the way. I'm like a robot from the future. Anyway, I found this flyer on my car. Guess whose name's on it?

Only half-listening, Ronnie starts sorting documents into a manila folder.

RONNIE

Teddy, there's actually a big meeting I've gotta get ready for--

TEDDY

It's Keoko Starr.

Ronnie knocks over his cup, spilling HOT COFFEE on his shirt.

RONNIE

Son of a--!

Ronnie desperately dabs at the coffee, trying to blot it out.

TEDDY

She's in town tonight - headlining  
a rave in Culver City. We could go?

RONNIE

I'm proposing to Caitlyn tonight!

TEDDY

So? Propose tomorrow.

Ronnie attacks the stain furiously with a box of tissues and  
a bottle of hand sanitizer - it's not really coming out.

RONNIE

Why would you even bring Keoko up!?

TEDDY

Just thought you'd be interested.

Ronnie GRABS the flier.

RONNIE

Well...I'm not!

It points at the xeroxed PICTURE OF KEOKO on the flier. It's  
badly BLURRED.

RONNIE

You wanna know why her picture is  
blurry. Because that girl literally  
can't sit still long enough to be  
photochemically captured.

Ronnie CRUMPLES the flier, and stuffs it in his pocket.

RONNIE

She was nuts.

Ronnie loosens his tie. He's completely flushed.

TEDDY

Okay, forget the rave. Come over to  
my place - we'll get bombed and tag  
up an overpass like old times.

RONNIE

Teddy, just drop it--

TEDDY

If you'd loosen up, you could be so  
good! Why do you think I've wanted  
to be your manager since 7th grade?

RONNIE

I don't need a manager, I need a  
friend!

(MORE)

RONNIE (cont'd)  
 And a friend would've realized by  
 now that graffiti's a deadend for  
 burnouts who can't hack real  
 fucking art!

Teddy's stunned. An uncomfortable silence.

TEDDY  
 Good luck with the promotion.

Teddy quietly exits the room. Ronnie kicks himself.

INT. MR. PENNINGTON'S OFFICE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Faux-wood paneling lines the side-walls; the pumpkin and avocado decor would've been the height of fashion in the early 70's. The back wall behind the desk is dominated by a large observation window overlooking the factory floor. A series of PNEUMATIC TUBES snake around the office, delivering memos from all over the company.

In fact the newest thing in the office is an early 80's ANSWERING MACHINE sitting monolithically on his desk.

Ronnie sits anxiously in a overstuffed mustard-colored chair.

MR. PENNINGTON, 60's, the spitting image of Teddy Roosevelt, patrols the perimeter of the room admiring the many framed "AWARD WINNING MATS" that adorn the walls. He straightens a framed HEMP MAT - by far the cheapest looking mat.

MR. PENNINGTON  
 The Model T Pennington. When I was  
 17, I bought a truck load of 'em  
 with my life savings. They're  
 mostly made of old pinatas and  
 cigar butts, but they're sturdy. I  
 walked every block in Tarzana with  
 a wheelbarrow of these bastards,  
 and people knew--

RONNIE  
 People knew you weren't getting off  
 their doorstep until they bought  
 one.

Ronnie just smiles, he's heard this story a thousand times.  
 Mr. Pennington smiles back.

MR. PENNINGTON  
 That's right.

He lowers his head sadly.

MR. PENNINGTON  
 We lost the LA County Public School  
 contract.

RONNIE  
...wait, what?

MR. PENNINGTON  
We lost it. They notified us this morning.

Mr. Pennington hands Ronnie a small pneumatic tube capsule with a NOTE inside. Ronnie scans the note with dismay.

RONNIE  
I've been working them over for six months. I took them to Morton's. I went to the Superintendant's son's little-league game. I learned all the state capitals just to impress them!

MR. PENNINGTON  
Well, they went with another vendor.

RONNIE  
...I...tried my hardest Mr. Pennington.

Mr. Pennington walks over to his desk, and pours himself some scotch from a garish crystal decanter.

MR. PENNINGTON  
I know you did Ronnie. But it takes more than that nowadays.

Mr. Pennington violently yanks a roll-down WORLD MAP from the ceiling in front of the window. It still shows the USSR, East and West Germany, Rhodesia. He points to China.

MR. PENNINGTON  
The Middle Kingdom! I just read an article, said there's a Chinese city that makes nothing but umbrellas. Whole goddamn city! And then another city makes dental floss. And then this city in the South East, they make floormats. 11 factories, 2 million Chinamen, churning them out like fortune cookies. It's a new world Ronnie.

Ronnie puts his head in hands.

MR. PENNINGTON  
Well don't start crying on me!

RONNIE  
I'm not crying! I just thought you were calling me in for...

MR. PENNINGTON  
A promotion?

Ronnie glumly nods.

MR. PENNINGTON  
Well, I still might. I'm gonna  
decide tomorrow.  
(smiling gently)  
I like you Ronnie.

RONNIE  
You do?

MR. PENNINGTON  
Of course. Always have. It's just  
this new kid, Oliver Pitt, the  
board loves him.

This fires up Ronnie.

RONNIE  
Oliver!?! He was an intern six  
months ago. He's a baby!

MR. PENNINGTON  
Well, he just broke the quarterly  
sales record I set 45 years ago.  
And he'd let you saw off his pinkie  
finger if it meant a 5% commission.  
He's got no friends and no life.  
He's a salesman Ronnie.

RONNIE  
...Mr. Pennington. I can step up my  
game. I need this promotion.

Mr. Pennington pats him on the shoulder.

MR. PENNINGTON  
I'll talk to the board, see if I  
can't change their mind.

INT. RONNIE'S APARTMENT - WEST LOS ANGELES - 7 PM

Shoulders slumped, Ronnie trudges into his duplex.

The living room is impeccably manicured, decorated in various  
pastels. Numerous HOME-MADE PAINTINGS adorn the wall, all  
painstakingly detailed pastoral duds.

CAITLYN DUPREE, 26, a strikingly pretty blonde, sporting a  
rigid perm, and tightly-wound demeanor, stands in the den  
next to a packed SUITCASE. She double and triple checks the  
contents against a LIST.

CAITLYN

Hi Sweetie. Okay: 1 teal cardigan  
in case it's cold, 1 cerulean tank  
top in case it's warm, 1 sea foam  
blouse in case it's mild, 1--

Ronnie runs towards her, KISSING her with surprising  
ferocity.

RONNIE

Caitlyn, I really missed you today.

CAITLYN

(looking a little  
embarrassed)

I missed you too baby. Did you get  
the promotion.

RONNIE

Ummm...not quite sure.

CAITLYN

Ronnie we need that promotion. You  
deserve it. You've gotta let them  
know you're their man!

RONNIE

It's complicated...

Ronnie suddenly processes the presence of the suitcase.

RONNIE

Are we going on vacation? Cause,  
you know we have dinner  
reservations - I've got a huge  
evening planned for us.

Caitlyn starts wheeling the suitcase to the door.

CAITLYN

Ronnie, I'm so, so, so sorry, I've  
gotta leave - sort of an emergency  
business trip. You understand.

RONNIE

...Emergency? You work for the  
Department of Weights and Measures.

CAITLYN

It's San Bernadino - they're  
threatening to go metric again.  
They've threatened before, but this  
time they sound pretty serious.

RONNIE

Can't you leave tomorrow?

CAITLYN

By tomorrow they might be selling gas by the liter on I-15! But, I'll be back Saturday. Go out with Teddy, have a little fun tonight.  
(kisses him, winks)  
...But just a *little* fun.

A taxi HONKS outside.

CAITLYN

My cab's here. I love you so much sweetie.

She's almost out the door. Ronnie is shell-shocked - he reaches for her hand, a distant look on his face.

RONNIE

Caitlyn?

CAITLYN

Yeah Ronnie?

RONNIE

Remember how I told you I used to do that graffiti art stuff?

CAITLYN

I'm so glad you grew out of that.

RONNIE

Well, what if I, ya know, got back into it a little bit?

Beat.

CAITLYN

Are you trying to kill my mother? I still haven't told her you have those vandalism misdemeanors on your record!

Before Ronnie can respond, the taxi HONKS AGAIN. She PECKS him on the cheek and gently closes the door.

INT. DEN - A LITTLE LATER

Ronnie sits glumly in front of the TV eating an ice-cream sundae and watching Disney's *DUMBO: It's the scene where the black crows are giving Dumbo his magic feather for the first time, convincing him that it will help him fly.*

He SPRAYS a little more ReadiWhip onto his sundae and takes a bite. Then he pauses, and sprays another SPIRALING DOLLOP on.

As the Whipped Cream continues to SPIRAL, we PUSH-IN on Ronnie...

EXT. TRAIN YARDS AT LINCOLN HEIGHTS - NIGHT - 7 YEARS AND 3 MONTHS AGO - FLASHBACK

Grinning, Ronnie, 21, finishes SPRAYING HIS TAG on the side of a BOXCAR. In his left hand is a 40 of Steel Reserve malt-liquor. He bites down on a FLASHLIGHT to light his way.

The night is quiet save for the HUM OF HIGH-TENSION WIRES, and the area seems to be empty which means the ubiquitous RAZOR-WIRE must be doing its job.

He pauses to admire his work, then moves a little further down the car to finish his graffiti piece.

Suddenly, he hears a RUSTLING from inside the train. Even drunk, he's a little freaked out. He puts down his malt-liquor and shines his flashlight in the box car.

RONNIE  
(a little slurred)  
...Someone there?

No answer.

Curious, as only a foolish drunk can be, Ronnie approaches the box car to investigate.

He looks inside and the flashlight illuminates a girl sitting cross-legged at the far end of the car - it's Keoko, though this will be their first meeting. She wears jeans, a wife-beater, and has a camo-green canvas backpack.

KEOKO  
Gonna tattle on me?

RONNIE  
I'm not supposed to be here either.

Keoko eyeballs him and decides that he's definitely not train security.

KEOKO  
What's your name?

RONNIE  
Ronnie.

KEOKO  
I'm Keoko.

RONNIE  
So what are you doing here?

KEOKO

I'm becoming a hobo. I decided I was tired of LA and this train's gonna leave in the morning, and I'll end up in some cool new city.

RONNIE

You'll probably just end up in Chino or Rancho Cucamonga.

KEOKO

Any place with a name as fun to say as Rancho Cucamonga must have something going for it.

RONNIE

(laughing)

So besides hobo'ing, do you have day-job?

KEOKO

Kind of. I'm a DJ. What about you?

RONNIE

Well, sometimes I get really drunk and like to spray-paint things.

KEOKO

That seems interesting.

A gust of wind howls through the train yard. Keoko SHIVERS. Ronnie gives her his flannel shirt and sits down beside her.

KEOKO

I'm kind of a wimp about the cold.

RONNIE

Y'know, it's like 71 degrees.

KEOKO

When I was 8 I visited my dad in Hokkaido, and he had this lake that would freeze over in the winter. I wasn't supposed to go out on it cause the ice was too thin. But I did anyway, and I fell right through. But I crawled out and made it to this little island in the center of the lake. And I screamed for a while but no one came. They finally found me - covered in snow, almost dead. Ever since, I get cold real easy.

There's an uneasy moment. Ronnie tries to lighten the mood.

RONNIE  
Y'know, I keep my dorm room pretty  
warm.

Keoko smiles coyly.

INT. RONNIE'S DEN - BACK TO SCENE - PRESENT DAY

Ronnie looks lost in thought. There's now an 8-inch spiral of whipped cream overflowing from his sundae.

Suddenly, in one sweeping motion, Ronnie CLEARS EVERYTHING OFF the glass coffee-table. On the glass, Ronnie scrawls in whipped cream his elaborate tag: "R.E.P."

Ronnie is wild-eyed and galvanized. Breathing heavily, he takes out his cell phone and DIALS.

CUT TO:

INT. UTRECHT ART SUPPLIES - WEST L.A. - 9PM

Ronnie and Teddy loiter in the back of the store near the spray-paint racks. A SALES CLERK eyes them suspiciously.

Teddy surreptitiously unzips a BACKPACK. Ronnie looks sick.

RONNIE  
This was a terrible idea.

TEDDY  
No, this is great Ronnie! I'm proud  
of you.

Teddy checks that the coast is clear.

TEDDY  
Okay, on "3" we rack all the paints  
we can, stuff 'em in this bag, then  
run like hell.

RONNIE  
Why can't we just buy them? We both  
have paying jobs.

TEDDY  
Because it doesn't count if you pay  
for them. That's not real street  
art. Okay, 1...2...

RONNIE  
Stop! I can't do this...sober.



EXT. GAS STATION - A LITTLE LATER

The PINK CORVETTE screeches to a stop. Mary-Lou Whitman rolls down her window.

MARY-LOU  
Ronnie! Get over here!

Confused, Ronnie scuttles towards the car.

MARY-LOU (CONT'D)  
Gosh, I'm sorry it took me so long to get here!

RONNIE  
What!? Who are you!?

A couple of GUN SHOTS ring from inside the store. One of the mini-mart windows SHATTERS!

MARY-LOU  
Please just get in before we're shot!

Ronnie weighs his options for half a beat, then DIVES into the car which squeals off--

INT. CORVETTE - CONTINUOUS - PRESENT TIME

The car speeds North up Sepulveda. She accelerates dangerously to beat every yellow light.

MARY-LOU  
You okay? Oh geez, you're not hurt are you?

RONNIE  
(dazed)  
No...I'm fine. Thank you.

MARY-LOU  
What in the heck was going on back there!?

RONNIE  
Not sure. It all happened so fast.

MARY-LOU  
Well, it's a darn good thing you called me Ronnie Epstein!

RONNIE  
...I called you?

Mary-Lou suddenly stops the car on the side of the road, throwing on the emergency blinkers. She hugs him fiercely.

MARY-LOU  
Five whole years Ronnie!

RONNIE  
...five whole years what?

MARY-LOU  
Since that night in Milwaukee, silly. When you came into my bookstore.

Ronnie tries desperately to remember.

RONNIE  
...I think I had a floor-mat conference in Milwaukee 5 years ago. The client took us out for drinks...I finished a bottle of Jäger. Don't remember after that...

MARY-LOU  
It was such a ginormous turning point for me. I'd probably still be stuck there if it weren't for you.

RONNIE  
Oh, well that's terrific...

Ronnie sees her GYM MEMBERSHIP CARD in the cupholder. It reads "MARY-LOU WHITMAN".

RONNIE  
...Mary-Lou! Thanks again for saving me back there Mary-Lou. Look, I hate to impose even more, but you think maybe you could do one more favor for me?

MARY-LOU  
Anything.

RONNIE  
I need a ride downtown. There's this thing I gotta get done, it's kinda complicated.

MARY-LOU  
Oh it's the least I can do. But I just gotta make one teensy stop first. Won't take long, promise.

INT/EXT. CORVETTE - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - LATER

The Hollywood basin twinkles down below like a lite-brite board. The Sunset Strip burns so bright you could read by its light even up in the hills.

They drive insanely fast around the treacherously narrow lanes of Mulholland and Coldwater Canyon. Ronnie grips the dashboard tightly.

RONNIE

You know, everything's a little hazy. What did we talk about on the phone earlier?

MARY-LOU

Well, you asked me to come pick you up at the gas station, said you were trying to get to a party or something. Then you asked me if I'd been following the advice you gave me at the bookstore.

Ronnie can't remove his eyes from the road. They nearly skid off a cliff around a hairpin turn.

MARY-LOU

But then I heard a crash and you stopped talking, so I drove over fast as I could.

RONNIE

About that "advice" I gave you. I'm really bad at giving advice.

MARY-LOU

No Ronnie, you got my life on track. You pushed me out of the nest.

Ronnie manages a smile, which is quickly erased by the next break-neck turn.

EXT. COLONIAL-STYLE MANSION - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - 2:15 AM

A relatively dark, secluded pocket of the Hills. The car skids up to an imposing colonial style MANSION. There are GRIP-TRUCKS parked in the driveway, and massive tungsten lights shine into the house.

An obese 1st AD with headset, GARN, 20's, waddles up to the car, waving his clipboard emphatically.

GARN

Mary-Lou, call was 2 hours ago! Do you know what this is costing us?

MARY-LOU  
I know, I know, I'm so sorry. Tell  
Chase I'll be right in.

Garn scurries off. Mary-Lou and Ronnie get out of the car.

RONNIE  
Oh, so you're an actress now?

MARY-LOU  
Exciting, right? They just need me  
for one quick scene. You should  
come in and watch.

Ronnie checks his watch. It reads 2:15 AM.

RONNIE  
...Yeah, okay. Still have a couple  
hours.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MANSION

Dark oak walls and black slate floors. The living room is set-dressed for 50's domestic Americana. However, there's lots of GOVERNMENTAL PROPS like stand-up American Flags and wall-mounted federal seals.

SEVERAL GIRLS lounge TOPLESS, wearing only US Navy standard issue pants. A FILM CREW sits on apple-boxes, looking bored.

Ronnie freezes.

RONNIE  
Mary-Lou, when you said you're an  
actress, what you really meant was  
you're a...

MARY-LOU  
...what?

RONNIE  
...a porn star?

MARY-LOU  
Well heck, I can't really claim to  
be a "star". Ya know, that term  
gets thrown around a lot - don't  
wanna water-down the title.

The director, CHASE UNDERWOOD, early 30's, approaches: he's high-strung and twitchy, a chain-smoker, doesn't look like he's shaved or slept in days. He wears a USC filmschool cap and a viewfinder around his neck. Several PA's trail him.

CHASE  
(to Mary-Lou)  
We're already in second lunch!

Mary-Lou kisses Chase on cheek.

MARY-LOU  
 Sorry I'm late sir.  
 (nodding her head at Ron)  
 This is Ronnie. He's an old friend  
 and a really talented artist.  
 Ronnie, this is the director, Chase  
 Underwood. He's an "auteur."

RONNIE  
 ...Hello.

CHASE  
 A fellow artist! Always nice to  
 meet a member of the fraternity.

Chase pulls Ronnie aside. WHISPERS conspiratorially-

CHASE  
 Okay, I'll level with you: this is  
 a brand of hard-core erotica that I  
 never pictured myself doing after  
 film school. But you know Orson  
 Welles did some porn early on. Who  
 says this can't be high art, right?

RONNIE  
 Oh, I wasn't trying to judge--

Chase laughs nervously.

CHASE  
 You don't know anyone at William  
 Morris, do you? Cause I have a copy  
 of my thesis film in the trunk of  
 my car. It's about a Romanian widow  
 during the holocaust. It was in the  
 Calabastas film festival!

Suddenly, Chase turns to the listless girls on the couch and  
 SCREAMS into his bullhorn.

CHASE  
 Did I say stop oiling yourselves?

They dutifully resume oiling themselves. Suddenly in the  
 background, we hear a FALL, then a SHRILL CRY! Everyone turns  
 their head...

TONY PISTON, 30, the male lead, costumed as a well-dressed  
 politician, lies on the floor, clutching his leg. Next to him  
 is a SLICK SPOT on the slate tile.

TONY  
 Chase, there's fucking baby oil  
 everywhere! Why does everyone have  
 to be oiled up all the time?

CHASE

Why does Scorcese use so many dolly shots? Because he cares!

TONY

(limping to the door)  
My agency's gonna hear about this.

CHASE

Look, I'm sorry Tony - don't leave!

RONNIE

If you're gonna be working with this much oil, you really might wanna invest in some floormats before OSHA eats you alive. And don't get talked into vinyl backing, insist on Nitrile rubber--

Chase throws his director's megaphone to the ground.

CHASE

Well, this is a clusterfuck! I just lost my Jimmy Carter! We're gonna be here all night.

Ronnie looks alarmed.

RONNIE

(whispering to Mary-Lou)  
I need to leave soon.

MARY-LOU

Don't worry, we'll figure it out.

Garn raises his hand.

GARN

I'll fill in Chase!

CHASE

Thanks Tweedle-Dee! When I remake Alice in Wonderland I'll let ya know. This was gonna be my erotic opus: "*The Camp David Sex Accords!*"

Suddenly, Chase starts staring at Ronnie.

CHASE

No, we need a boyishly handsome everyman. A reluctant hero, as comfortable in a peanut farm as he is in the White House...

Now both Chase and Mary-Lou are staring at Ronnie.

RONNIE

...absolutely not.

Mary-Lou pulls him aside.

MARY-LOU  
 Look, I really need this gig. And  
 you wouldn't have to do much. And  
 it's the fastest way for us to get  
 out of here.

Ronnie actually considers for a moment, then shakes his head.

RONNIE  
 Emphatically no.

INT. GREENROOM / MASTER BATHROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ronnie sits on the toilet, anxiously flipping through the  
 script. He's dressed as Jimmy Carter.

Wearing only lingerie, Mary-Lou sits in front of a mirror  
 ringed with globe light-bulbs. She puts on a BLACK WIG and  
 begins brushing her hair.

RONNIE  
 So lemme get this straight. You're  
 supposed to be Israeli Prime  
 Minister Menachem Bagin?

MARY-LOU  
 Slutty Menachem Bagin.

RONNIE  
 And I convince you and a presumably  
 slutty Egyptian President Anwar El  
 Sadat to 69 each other?

MARY-LOU  
 Chase says it's a powerful  
 metaphor.

Frustrated, Ronnie walks over to her.

RONNIE  
 What exactly did I say to you in  
 Milwaukee that sent you spinning  
 off in this direction?

Mary-Lou unlatches her bra, and grabs Ronnie by the  
 shoulders. His breathing flutters.

MARY-LOU  
 Well, I was telling you that I was  
 bored with life and that I had all  
 this untapped potential inside me.

Mary Lou draws closer.

MARY-LOU

And you looked me in the eye, and told me not to be afraid to embrace my gifts, whatever they might be. And that staying in this bookstore was a terrible waste of my vagina.

RONNIE

JESUS! What does that even mean!?

MARY-LOU

Ronnie, I get letters from women all over the world about how I've helped them get in touch with their femininity. We don't choose our gifts, we just choose what we do with them. You told me that.

Ronnie's speechless. 1st AD Garn pokes his head in the room.

GARN

They're ready for you guys.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The crew's all set up and ready to roll.

GARN

Okay, first team in. Escort Jimmy Carter to his first mark.

A spikey-haired FEMALE PA, escorts Ronnie to a chair at a ROUND TABLE stamped with the Presidential Seal.

Mary Lou as slutty Manachem Bagin and another female pornstar as SLUTTY ANWAR EL SADAT (a voluptuous redhead) take their seat around the table.

CHASE

Sound ready. Camera Ready. Okay, roll camera, and...ACTION!

The cameras are rolling. Mary-Lou's Milwaukee accent is gone, replaced by a throaty purr.

MARY-LOU

Mr. Carter, you can't seriously expect the Israelis to relinquish the Sinai.

SLUTTY ANWAR EL SADAT

Mr. President, it is an outrage that Israel has stolen the West Bank.

Ronnie is silent. Everyone fidgets.

MARY-LOU  
 (whispering)  
 Just read the cue cards.

Ronnie glances over at Garn who's frantically pointing at the CUE-CARDS he's holding. He takes a big breath...

RONNIE  
 Ummmm...Menachim, Anwar, I'm not letting either one of you leave this room until we've come to a diplomatic resolution. It's time for you to put aside your differences and look to a better, brighter future.

Caught in the moment, Ronnie starts gaining steam...

RONNIE (CONT'D)  
 Your lands are the cradle of civilization, and yet they've been blood-stained by war and division. Are Israel and Egypt really so different that they can't sit at the same table and break the same bread? Don't your children look at the sky and see the same stars? Don't they dream the same dreams of peace?

We see Chase in the background, passionately mouthing the words along with Ronnie. He fist-pumps triumphantly.

MARY-LOU  
 Mr. Carter, perhaps you are right.

SLUTTY ANWAR EL SADAT  
 Yes, you are so eloquent Mr. American President.

Mary-Lou and Slutty Anwar El Sadat approach Ronnie and drop to their knees.

MARY-LOU  
 (licking her lips)  
 Maybe we can bang out a peace treaty after all.

She reaches for the fly on Ronnie's pants. Ronnie leaps up--

RONNIE  
 (abandoning the cards)  
 I don't think that's a good idea.

MARY-LOU  
 Of course it is. We yearn for peace.

Anwar El Sadat grabs his crotch. Ronnie swats her hand away.

RONNIE  
 (laughing nervously)  
 Well, truth be told Israel and  
 Egypt are natural enemies. I don't  
 think it's gonna work out after  
 all. Don't forget Jerusalem!

Mary Lou grabs him around the waist, and presses a finger to his lips. She starts unknitting his tie.

MARY-LOU  
 Shhhh! Just relax Jimmy.

RONNIE  
 Look, I've got a girlfriend and  
 I...I just need to get downtown!

Garn looks at confusion at the cue cards.

CHASE  
 Dammit! Cut. Dammit! Extremely  
 unprofessional Ronnie.

Suddenly there's a COMMOTION from the front door--

KYLE WHITMAN, 20, pale, skinny, and buzzcut, struggles with a PA. He BLASTS a SHOTGUN into the air!

KYLE (O.S.)  
 I said let me through!

Everyone shrieks and ducks, including Kyle who seems terrified by the blast.

KYLE  
 Mary-Lou, I can't let you do this  
 to yourself anymore. I love you -  
 come back to Milwaukee!

Mary-Lou rolls her eyes in exasperation.

MARY-LOU  
 Oh, Kyle! Why are you doing this?

CHASE  
 Who the fuck are you? You're  
 trespassing on my set!

KYLE  
 I'm her husband you flesh-peddler!

MARY-LOU  
 We're separated for Pete's sake!  
 Read the papers I sent you.

Kyle FIRES again into the air, this time taking out a crystal chandelier. Everyone screams.

Ronnie raises his hands above his head.

RONNIE

Sir, why don't you just calm down.  
I'm sure we can deal with this diplomatically.

KYLE

Yeah? Who are you? Jimmy Carter?

MARY-LOU

This is Ronnie Epstein. He's the guy who convinced me to go into porn. You'd really like him.

Kyle's eyes nearly pop out of his head. He CHARGES Ronnie-

RONNIE

...no, she's exaggerating. I was drunk at the time! Very very drunk!

Right before impact, Kyle SLIPS on the same spot that Tony slipped before, smacking his head on the ground. Ronnie points accusingly at the spot.

RONNIE

Floormats people - they're no joke!

Mary-Lou grabs Ronnie's hand and yanks him to the door.

EXT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie and Mary-Lou sprint to her Corvette. Kyle's not far behind.

KYLE

I'll kill you pervert!

MARY-LOU

Don't talk that way to my mentor!

RONNIE

I'm not her mentor. She's kidding.

Ronnie and Mary-Lou leap into the Corvette and take off.

Kyle pursues in a jalopy STAKE-BED TRUCK.

INT/EXT. CORVETTE - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - CONTINUOUS

The two cars race back across Mulholland, taunting death at every turn. Ronnie's turned around, monitoring their pursuer.

MARY-LOU

Okay - I have a high school friend who lives in San Felipe. Once we get to the 405, we can drive through the night down to Mexico, then lay low for a couple of months until everything blows over.

RONNIE

What? I have a life. A career. I have to get downtown!

MARY-LOU

(pouting)

Don't guilt trip me. Geez, this is as much your fault as it is mine.

Suddenly there's the sound of POLICE SIRENS behind them.

RONNIE

Thank god, the police. Pull over.

MARY-LOU

Well...funny story - I'm sort of driving on a suspended license. Oopsie.

She opens the glove compartment. Scores of SPEEDING TICKETS tumble out.

Ronnie's eyes go wide. The car actually goes airborne as they crest a bump in the road. Mary-Lou lets out a shriek of delight to match Ronnie's shriek of terror.

EXT. CORVETTE - I-405 SOUTH - NIGHT

From above we see a train of police cars trailing Mary-Lou's Corvette and Kyle's truck.

A news HELICOPTER keeps pace above.

INT. NEWS HELICOPTER

The cameraman's monitor shows a CLOSEUP of Ronnie's face pressed up against the window, mouthing the words "Help me".

INT. CORVETTE

Mary-Lou couldn't be happier right now. Ronnie's face is still pressed against the glass miserably.

MARY-LOU

This is great - just like Thelma & Louise.

RONNIE  
They both DIE at the end!

MARY-LOU  
Really?...I never made it through  
the whole movie.

RONNIE  
Mary-Lou, you've gotta stop the  
car. This is kidnapping.

MARY-LOU  
(not listening)  
Hmmm...maybe we can lose them in  
Culver City.

She suddenly swerves onto the off-ramp.

RONNIE  
Okay, you respect honesty, right?

MARY-LOU  
More than anything.

RONNIE  
I would never encourage someone to  
pick porn over a nice job in a  
bookstore. I was drunk - you can't  
listen to anything I say when I'm  
in that state.

Mary-Lou eyes him sadly for a moment. She grabs him by the  
neck and KISSES him on the forehead, swerving the car  
erratically, and leaving a SMEAR OF RED LIPSTICK on his brow.

MARY-LOU  
Ronnie, you need to follow your own  
advice. Be happy. Embrace your  
gifts whatever they may be!

Ronnie's out of ideas - there's no getting through to her.  
The car reaches the bottom of the off-ramp.

Just as she's turning, Ronnie takes a deep breath, opens his  
car door, and LEAPS out of the car--

MARY-LOU  
Ronnie, NO!

EXT. FREEWAY EXIT SHOULDER - CULVER CITY - CONTINUOUS

He ROLLS violently a few times before landing in the weeds of  
the sidewalk. He hides, keeping his body low in the grass.

Thankfully, Mary-Lou's Corvette roars past, still hotly  
pursued by Kyle and several squad cars.

Ronnie groans, clutching his shoulder. He staggers upwards and hides in the shadowy cover of the highway overpass.

To the north, Sony Studios lights up the sky. But this current neighborhood is a spooky no-mans-land at night.

#### UNDERPASS

On the far side of the underpass, he sees THREE HISPANIC TEENAGERS: OSCAR, NICK, MANNY, all late teens, SPRAY-PAINTING a large support column.

He quietly watches them. They seem happy. They're collectively working on a large MURAL: eclectic, abstract imagery with an anti-war theme.

Ronnie finds himself approaching without even realizing it.

Once he gets within a couple feet, the teens jump back in alarm. They get ready to scatter.

OSCAR

Yo, this was here when we got here.

RONNIE

...I don't care.

NICK

Yeah right, you a cop?

Ronnie shakes his head. They kids glance at each other nervously. He doesn't look like a cop.

MANNY

...So what do you want?

RONNIE

Ummm...can I have a can?

They clearly think he's nuts, but they laugh. Oscar hands him a a SPRAY-CAN of silver paint.

OSCAR

Knock yourself out Homes.

Ronnie does one quick, tentative spray. Nick laughs.

NICK

You gotta hold it down. Don't be scared of it.

RONNIE

I just don't wanna mess up what you guys have done. I don't usually do this sober.

NICK  
 (grinning)  
 Shit, the whole point of this is to  
 mess somethin' up. And maybe you  
 make it better along the way.

Smiling, Ronnie resumes spray painting. The teenagers are surprised that he seems quasi-competent. Soon all four of them are smiling and working on the piece.

RONNIE  
 You know, I used to be halfway into  
 art.

OSCAR  
 No such thing as halfway into art.  
 Either your heart's in it, or it's  
 into somethin' else.

This clicks with Ronnie, he stops for a moment...

Then suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, FIVE CLERICS, 40's, run towards them bellowing a PRIMAL CRY. They're named XAVIER, DANIEL, KEITH, PATRICIA, and TESS.

They're all dressed in ROBES, clearly homemade from old coffee sacks, pillow cases, etc. which are then adorned with a painted SCARLET SQUIGGLE. Each cleric waves an ignited ROAD-FLARE menacingly.

The teens take off running, leaving Ronnie on his own. Trembling, he drops the spray paint.

RONNIE  
 ...this was here when I got here.

XAVIER  
 We have saved you from the  
 nightwalkers peaceful traveler!

RONNIE  
 What? They weren't bothering me.

DANIEL  
 You must come with us. You are in  
 dangerous lands.

Before Ronnie can respond, Patricia and Tess grab him by the arms, then the whole group whisks off into the night.

EXT. L.A. RIVER BASIN - 3:10 AM

The steep cement banks of the LA River make for a sort of gothic corridor. A TRICKLE OF WATER runs down the center.

Ronnie skulks along the "river basin" with the other clerics. They CHANT ominously.

RONNIE  
So...are you guys the Neighborhood  
Watch or something?

PATRICIA  
(smiling vacantly)  
We are The Order of Galactic Truth.

Ronnie laughs nervously.

RONNIE  
Is that a non-profit? My Dad was in  
an Elks Lodge. I don't suppose one  
of you could loan me a few dollars  
for a cab?

TWO MORE CLERICS streak towards them from the banks of the  
concrete River: MING and ANGELICA, 30's. Ming is holding a  
medieval-looking CROSSBOW.

ANGELICA  
We've swept the whole area. There's  
no sign of the Righteous Leader.

Keith spits on the ground.

KEITH  
The moon is fat. We must find him  
tonight!

Daniel notices the crossbow. He suddenly drops his dignified,  
Victorian speech pattern.

DANIEL  
Dude, is that a real fucking  
crossbow?

MING  
Yeah, found it on E-bay. Total  
steal. Stayed up all night bidding.

DANIEL  
That is like the tightest thing  
I've ever seen! Can I hold it?

PATRICIA  
Ooh, me next!

XAVIER  
Clerics! Remember the task at hand.

They all get back into character.

TESS  
Ummm...perhaps the traveler has  
seen the Righteous Leader?

The Clerics turn toward Ronnie who's fairly freaked out now.

RONNIE  
...I don't think so.

KEITH  
He must be sacrificed or the Great  
Reunion cannot come to pass.

RONNIE  
...sacrificed?

PATRICIA  
Of course. He must be returned to  
the spiritual ether!

RONNIE  
Well, I will flag that sucker down  
if I see him. But I'm just slowing  
you guys. I should run along--

Suddenly, Ronnie walks under the glare of a street-lamp,  
bathing his face in light.

The Clerics GASP-

XAVIER  
The Sign of Eternal Suffering!

RONNIE  
...pardon me?

Patricia pulls out a pocket MIRROR and holds it up in front  
of Ronnie's forehead.

He realizes he still has a SQUIGGLY SMEAR of red lipstick on  
his forehead from where Mary-Lou kissed him.

RONNIE  
Oh this, no this is just lipstick.  
Look it comes right off.

He rubs furiously, but it doesn't want to come off.

XAVIER  
The inverse to the Sign of Galactic  
Truth!

They all pound their chest. Ronnie tilts his head to the side  
and realizes the mark on his forehead vaguely resembles an  
upside-down version of the Red squiggle on their cloaks.

RONNIE  
Well, don't worry. I'll wash this  
off as soon as I find a sink.

KEITH  
No traveler. 'Tis the mark of the  
Lunar Snake-Devil.

(MORE)

KEITH (cont'd)  
 Prophecy foretells you will stop at  
 nothing to prevent the Great  
 Reunion.

The Clerics all pull various MAKE-SHIFT WEAPONS from within  
 their cloaks: Xavier draws a LETTER OPENER; Keith pulls out a  
 4-IRON; Angelica pulls out a butterfly CORKSCREW, Tess simply  
 pulls out a STAPLER, etc.

Ronnie's eyes go wide. He thinks fast-

RONNIE  
 ...So who do you guys think would  
 actually win in a fight between  
 this Righteous Leader and Lunar  
 Snake-Devil?

DANIEL  
 Oh, the Snake-Devil would totally  
 dominate.

XAVIER  
 Blasphemy! Of course the Righteous  
 Leader would triumph.

PATRICIA  
 Yes, for the Righteous Leader has  
 laser-beam eyes.

DANIEL  
 No he doesn't! You can't just make  
 up super powers for him.

MING  
 Besides, the Lunar Snake-Devil is  
 immune to lasers, 'cause he has a  
 magic shield created by the US  
 government.

DANIEL  
 That's Captain America!

XAVIER  
 Enough squabbling - the Righteous  
 Leader would be victorious and  
 that's final.

All the clerics nod. They look around and realize Ronnie is  
 long gone. In the distance they see him RUNNING AWAY on foot.

XAVIER  
 Oh, for fuck's sake.

EXT. LA RIVER - A MOMENT LATER

Ronnie sprints furiously, hotly pursued by the Order of  
 Galactic Truth.

Suddenly A HAND reaches out from a UTILITY GRATE, pulling him into a-

SMALL DRAINAGE TUNNEL

Ronnie tries to yell, but his ASSAILANT covers his mouth, muffling his cries.

After a couple of seconds, the Clerics run by.

ASSAILANT

Ronnie, you picked a hell of a night to wander around the LA River.

Ronnie wriggles free and turns to face this mysterious man. He can't believe his eyes.

RONNIE

...Marcus?

MARCUS GLADSTONE, 34, African-American, gangly but devastatingly handsome, smiles guiltily. He's wearing a white *Saturday Night Fever* suit and shark-tooth necklace.

MARCUS

Sorry I missed your call earlier.

Ronnie just shakes his head in disbelief.

RONNIE

So...I drunk-dialed you too?

MARCUS

Said you wanted to meet at some party in Culver. I tried calling you back to say I was busy but you didn't answer, and then I saw you on the news--

RONNIE

The news!?

MARCUS

Yeah, great closeup from the Channel 4 helicopter. I was in the area so I came lookin' for ya. Saw you running away from the toga party.

RONNIE

Well...thank you.

MARCUS

You'd do the same for me Ron. C'mon, let's get outta here.

INT. SERVICE SHAFT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Marcus and Ronnie climb the iron rungs of a utility ladder.

MARCUS

I was really bummed when you stopped coming to my gallery shows.

RONNIE

Sorry, I've been busy with work lately.

MARCUS

Oh, what's your work?

RONNIE

...I sell floor-mats now.

There's an awkward silence.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

All different kinds.

MARCUS

Christ Ronnie, you can't be selling floor-mats, you're an artist! You've done stuff I can only wet-dream of doing!

RONNIE

Spare me - you've had whole exhibitions.

MARCUS

Scams! I tricked yuppies into paying \$10,000 for plastic cubes.

RONNIE

...I liked your cube series.

They finally breach the surface-

EXT. SIDE-STREET - CULVER CITY - CONTINUOUS

Marcus walks towards a CADILLAC ESCALADE parked in the loading zone of a service alley. Ridiculous gold spinners adorn the wheels.

MARCUS

Ronnie, I only ever did art for the casual art-groupie sex. You can't imagine the depraved sex acts those girls would let me do. I'm like the Native American - I use the entire buffalo.

Ronnie and Marcus hop in the Escalade.

INT. ESCALADE - CULVER CITY - 3:30 AM

They drive east down Washington. The interior is tricked out with plasma screens and high-end speakers. Marcus lights up a jay and turns on the MUSIC. He merrily SINGS ALONG to Tom Jones' *"It's not unusual."* Annoyed, Ronnie turns down the music.

RONNIE  
Is there anyway I could ask a favor  
of you?

MARCUS  
You can always ask.

Marcus offers him a puff on the jay, but Ronnie waves it off.

RONNIE  
Get me downtown. I've gotta break  
into my office before morning or my  
career's ruined.

Marcus smiles and turns abruptly North.

RONNIE  
(sighing in relief)  
Marcus, we'll have to really catch  
up some time when things aren't so  
insane.

Marcus starts giggling.

RONNIE  
...What?

MARCUS  
You were gettin' pretty friendly  
with the Order of Galactic Truth.

RONNIE  
You know them?

Marcus shrugs his shoulders guiltily.

RONNIE  
...You're the Righteous Leader!?

MARCUS  
It's a living.

RONNIE  
Is it? Is it really!?

MARCUS

Why do you think I'm skulking around Culver City at 3:30 in the morning? If I want them to keep paying their ridiculous monthly dues, I've gotta indulge their little cat and mouse game. These gold rims aren't free.

RONNIE

This is a game to you?

MARCUS

You gave me the idea!

RONNIE

How is this my fault?

MARCUS

We were out drinking after one of my shows. I was complaining my orgy-fueled lifestyle felt stuck in neutral - and you told me that I wasn't challenging myself. I needed to set my sights on something grand. Think big you said.

RONNIE

And...

MARCUS

And that's when I decided to become a demigod. Wanna see some divine magic?

Marcus reaches behind Ronnie's ear and grinning, withdraws an EIGHT OF DIAMONDS.

MARCUS

Was this your card?

RONNIE

I never chose a card.

MARCUS

Well, then maybe this is your card.

With one hand Marcus cracks an EGG against the steering wheel and a PIDGEON flies out.

RONNIE

That's a pidgeon not a card.

MARCUS

You don't like magic?

Ronnie opens the window releasing the terrified bird.

RONNIE

Marcus, your cult followers are trying to sacrifice you.

MARCUS

Oh, they're harmless. Just a bunch of douchey I-Bankers looking for new direction.

(whispering into his hand)

...Lotta them came from Lehman Brothers.

RONNIE

What about the "The Great Reunion?"

MARCUS

Look, they're motivated, type-A personalities - and they just got a little carried away with their mythology.

RONNIE

(pointing to his forehead)

Well because of *this* they wanna kill me too!

Marcus pulls a pair of half-moon reading glasses from his jacket pocket and examines Ronnie's lipstick squiggle.

MARCUS

Ooh, the Sign of Eternal Suffering. Yeah, you don't want to leave the house looking like that.

RONNIE

Thanks for the tip.

MARCUS

Chin up kiddo! I'll get you downtown or I'm no demigod.

Suddenly a large WEIGHTED NET made of woven neckties and fishing hooks, is thrown over the car!

Marcus swerves, trying to maintain control, but the hooks puncture the tires, sending it into a skidding flip--

EXT. STREET - CULVER CITY

The clerics hop up and down, high-fiving and fist-bumping excitedly.

INT/EXT. ESCALADE - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie and Marcus SCREAM IN TERROR. Finally the car comes to a stop, with our twosome dangling upside down.

MARCUS

I'd be lying if I said I saw that coming.

Upsidedown, they see the clerics marching towards them. They extricate themselves from their seat-belts and flop out of the car. Marcus takes off down an alley. Ronnie holds back.

MARCUS

Come on!

RONNIE

Let's just reason with them. We're all grown-ups, right?

A CROSSBOW BOLT whizzes by Ronnie's head.

EXT. CULVER CITY - WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - 3:15 AM

Ronnie and Marcus sprint down various alleys, staying a few lengths ahead of the Clerics.

EXT. BEHIND DUMPSTER

Our heroes steal a few moments hiding behind a dumpster, catching their breath.

MARCUS

(whispering)

Ronnie, if Monopoly was real life, which piece would you be?

RONNIE

...What?

MARCUS

C'mon which piece?

RONNIE

I dunno...the thimble?

MARCUS

The thimble? That's an old lady answer. No one's used a thimble since the depression.

RONNIE

I'm always the thimble.

MARCUS

I'd be the racecar. How's a thimble gonna beat a racecar around the board? Scientifically impossible.

RONNIE

They all go the same speed.

MARCUS

Very naive.

Suddenly they hear the noise of a large crowd and BLARING ELECTRONIC MUSIC emanating from one of the nearby warehouses.

Marcus perks up...

EXT. WAREHOUSE ENTRANCE - 3:45AM

Even at this late hour, people are lined up around the block to get into the rave: EMO-KIDS waving glow-sticks, ASIAN GIRLS sporting ridiculous glow-in-the-dark fairy wings.

Our heroes cautiously approach.

MARCUS

Ronnie, this must be the party you wanted to go to in your message.

RONNIE

That doesn't make sense. How would I know about some random rave in...

Ronnie pauses, then reaches into his back pocket and retrieves the RAVE FLIER Teddy gave him earlier. He compares the addresses: "5230 Washington Ave." This is it.

RONNIE

I don't think we should go in there.

MARCUS

We need the crowd cover.

Marcus assimilates into a group of spoiled, private-school RAVERS at the front of the line. He grabs some PACIFIERS and GLOW-STICKS from a frightened EMO-BOY. He puts one pacifier in his mouth and hands the remaining goods to Ronnie.

MARCUS

Take these.

RONNIE

I'm not chewing on a pacifier.

MARCUS

You look like a narc. Why does your jacket have a federal seal on it?

RONNIE

I'm supposed to be Jimmy Carter.

Marcus shoves the pacifier in Ronnie's mouth, who sucks on it reluctantly.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The place is packed to capacity - lasers, smoke, gyrating sweaty bodies. It's like a happier Hieronymus Bosch painting.

MARCUS  
Let's split up, lay low, and meet  
back here in 20 minutes.

RONNIE  
What if I can't find you?

MARCUS  
Rendezvous at Cantor's Deli on  
Fairfax.

RONNIE  
...why?

MARCUS  
Because I'm jonesing for a Black &  
White cookie.

Ronnie, frightened, nods in agreement.

MARCUS  
Just keep a low profile!

As soon as Marcus disappears into the crowd, a group of SWEATY TEENAGERS, rolling on ecstasy, surround him, offering him a glow-stick light show.

RONNIE  
No really thanks.

They insist, SPIRALING glow sticks in front of his face with manic glee.

RONNIE  
I'm not a moth!

Suddenly a TALL INDIAN MAN, 30's, slaps him on the back.

TALL INDIAN MAN  
(yelling)  
Hey Ronnie, I made it to the party  
man. You called it - this place is  
rocking my balls off. Ronnie  
motherfucking Epstein!

Ronnie glancing around nervously.

RONNIE

...You've got me confused with someone else.

The Indian man continues undeterred.

TALL INDIAN MAN

Ronnie - it's Ravin! I was your blackjack dealer in Vegas two years back. We got thrown out of Circus-Circus for punching those clowns. You passed out in the Mirage volcano.

Ronnie lowers his head and keeps walking. But then he's waylaid from the other side by a ELDERLY BRITISH GENTLEMAN.

BRITISH GENTLEMAN

Ronnie ol' chap! I got in my car as soon as I got your call. This party is absolutely smashing!

RONNIE

...don't know what you're talking about.

BRITISH GENTLEMAN

Ronnie, that spontaneous deep-sea fishing expedition we went on is still one of my fondest memories. Remember when you finished off the ship's scotch then battled that tiger shark for two days?

Ronnie smiles nervously and scurries away.

But then a pretty orange-wigged RAVER GIRL, early 20's, bounces up to him, waving a SPARKLY WAND. Her eyes are completely dilated, and she can't quite seem to focus.

RAVER GIRL

Ronnie! I came like you told me! I still can't get that night we shared in Temecula out of my head.

Ronnie shakes his head, no recollection whatsoever.

RAVER GIRL

(leaning in)

God we were so wasted. We did things sexually they don't even have names for. You know I cracked 3 vertebrae that night?

RONNIE

(half-smiling)

...I mean, we do have a floormat sister branch in Temecula, but--

Raver Girl SMACKS him in the neck with her pointy wand. He spits out his pacifier in agony-

RONNIE  
Son of a bitch!

She giggles maniacally.

RAVER GIRL  
You're enchanted now Ronnie!

RONNIE  
(clutching his neck)  
Ecstasy can damage your serotonin receptors, ya know. It'll cause long-term depression if you're not careful.

She throws a handful of GLITTER in his eyes.

RAVER GIRL  
Weeeeeeeeeee!

Ronnie YELPS in pain, rubbing his eyes furiously.

RONNIE  
Why would you do that!?

Finally he clears his vision, only to notice his pursuers at the warehouse entrance-

RONNIE'S POV: The Clerics pay off the doorman and disperse into the crowd.

RONNIE puts a new pacifier in his mouth, then ducks down and sneaks to the-

BACKSTAGE WINGS

Ronnie sidles along, trying to look inconspicuous, but then is stopped by a tall, goth stagehand, LARS, late 20's-

LARS  
Clear outta here man. Talent only.

RONNIE  
Please, lemme just hide here for five minutes. I'm in real danger.

LARS  
What are you on? Katymene? Med station's around the corner. The spiders aren't real dude.

RONNIE  
No, this is life or death! There's  
this cult, they think I'm a weapon  
of cosmic destruction--

LARS  
Okay, breathe slow...

Lars starts forcefully evicting Ronnie from the backstage.

RONNIE  
No, you don't understand!

Then, out of nowhere, Ronnie hears a voice he hasn't heard in  
seven years--

KEOKO (O.S.)  
Lars, it's okay. He can stay.

Lars releases him.

Ronnie looks up and sees KEOKO, now 24, backlit angelically:  
She wears a large pair of headphones around her neck and rows  
of glow-in-the-dark bracelets stacked up her forearms; she's  
dusted in glitter and her black hair is streaked with pink;  
on her back she sports a large pair of diaphanous GREEN FAIRY  
WINGS. She's looks like a Hans Christian Anderson creation.

Ronnie is frozen.

KEOKO  
Hey nerd.

Suddenly realizing a pacifier is still in his mouth, he spits  
it out and tries to act nonchalant.

RONNIE  
...hey Keoko... nice wings.

KEOKO  
How'd you know I was here?

RONNIE  
...I didn't. Well there was this  
flyer, but I didn't realize until  
now that...so how are you?

KEOKO  
Good. Really good. Been touring a  
lot this year. Pretty exhausting.

Lars taps Keoko on the shoulder, motioning to the stage.

KEOKO  
I have to go on now.

Ronnie just nods, not blinking.

RONNIE  
Yeah, well I guess it was good  
seeing you then.

Ronnie gives her an incredibly awkward salute.

Keoko bites her lip and smiles, then skips towards him and  
JUMPS into his arms, nearly knocking him backwards.

KEOKO  
I just listened to your message.

Ronnie curses under his breath.

RONNIE  
Please tell me I didn't say  
anything that upset you.

KEOKO  
Upset me? No, Ronnie, it just shook  
me up a little. Did you really mean  
everything you said?

RONNIE  
Well, I...guess I wanted to leave  
it up to your interpretation.

KEOKO  
Y'know, I hadn't forgotten about  
you...

Keoko notices the squiggly smear of lipstick on Ronnie's  
forehead. Frowning, she licks her thumb and cleans it off.

KEOKO  
...I'd just figured you'd forgotten  
about me. Busy night?

RONNIE  
What, this? No, see there was a  
pornstar who gave me a ride...

Keoko frowns even more, but starts giggling when she sees how  
flustered he is.

Suddenly, most of the lights turn off and twinkling LED  
lights illuminate the roof like a starry night sky.

KEOKO  
Wait right here for me. Okay?

She strides onto stage, assuming position behind her  
turntable and mixing board. She begins her set to a CHORUS OF  
CHEERS.

ON STAGE

Keoko's spinning is mesmerizing - graceful and instinctual. The crowd sways and pulses at her whim.

SILVER STREAMERS are released from the rafters. They drift lazily to the ground.

RONNIE watches entranced...

INT. TAXI - LAX AIRPORT - 7 YEARS AGO - 8AM - FLASHBACK

It's POURING RAIN. Ronnie sits in an idling TAXI outside the Bradley International terminal. He holds a PLANE TICKET in his hands.

RONNIE'S POV: Keoko stands under the terminal awning, scanning the crowd for Ronnie. She shivers in the early morning cold.

RONNIE stares at her intensely, but her eyes pass over him.

TAXI DRIVER

So, you gettin' out or what?

Ronnie puts his hands on the door handle but he can't bring himself to open it.

RONNIE

(under his breath)

What do you have to lose Ronnie?

Keoko checks her watch. She places a CALL on her cell.

Ronnie's cell starts RINGING but after a few rings he SILENCES IT...

TAXI DRIVER

You're still on the meter y'know.

Finally, she shakes her head and walks sadly into the terminal.

BACK TO SCENE - PRESENT DAY

Ronnie's distant gaze suddenly focuses on the opposite stage wing, he sees the CLERICS pointing towards him.

Lars momentarily blocks the Clerics way, but they quickly toss him aside.

DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie takes off running again, weaving through the crowd.

Near the entrance he finds Marcus who's now covered in glowing hoops and fairy wings of his own. He's DANCING LIKE A ROBOT in the center of a ring of GIGGLING ASIAN GIRLS.

When Marcus sees Ronnie he grins, and mimes REELING him into the ring like a fisherman.

Entirely unamused, Ronnie grabs Marcus by his collar and yanks him outside--

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie and Marcus sprint along the side alleys, but take a wrong turn and find themselves facing a dead-end.

Suddenly, the Clerics are right behind them.

Marcus manages to jump and pull down a FIRE-ESCAPE LADDER. They start CLIMBING for the roof.

The bloodthirsty Clerics pursue.

EXT. ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Our heroes dart for the rooftop staircase door leading back into the building, but it's locked. They're trapped.

The Clerics crest the rooftop and slowly advance on them, make-shift weapons brandished...

MARCUS

Okay guys, just be cool and leave the righteous leader alone. Do not hassle the righteous leader.

XAVIER

Destiny is not to be feared Master.

MARCUS

(whispering to Ronnie)  
Don't worry, I've got an idea.

Marcus CLAPS his hands together and spreads them over his head dramatically.

MARCUS

If you do not stand down, I shall blot out the moon with my magic, and bring upon you eternal night!

They all pause for a moment, glancing up at the FULL MOON sky with uncertainty. Nothing happens. They resume advancing.

MARCUS

I was hoping for a lunar eclipse.  
Thought I might get lucky.

RONNIE

Oh, brilliant Connecticut Yankee.  
Can't believe it didn't work.

MARCUS

Well, what's your idea Snake-Devil?

Ronnie feels the edge of the roof behind him.

RONNIE

Ummm, Marcus...we're out of roof.

Marcus peeks backwards, then nods resolutely.

MARCUS

Tell everyone I died of a heroine  
overdose while banging Dakota  
Fanning.

Marcus reaches into his pocket and throws a HANDFUL OF POWDER to the ground--

Suddenly he's consumed by a bright FLASH OF LIGHT AND SMOKE.

After a moment, the scene clears and all that remains of Marcus are TWO SHOES wisping with smoke.

Shocked, the clerics look around, then run over to the edge and look down...nothing. They gasp.

PATRICIA

He's sublimated!

Ronnie picks up one of the shoes in disbelief.

XAVIER

(solemnly)  
The Great Reunion has come to  
fruition.

Heads bowed, the Clerics move away from the roof edge.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ronnie sees Marcus emerge from the depths of a GARBAGE TRUCK that's now rumbling away at street level.

From his landing cushion of trash bags, Marcus gives Ronnie a triumphant THUMBS-UP, then sinks back into his garbage cover.

ANGELICA  
 ...Well now what?

KEITH  
 There's still the Lunar Snake-Devil  
 to eliminate!

They all turn to Ronnie.

MING  
 Hey, where'd your mark go dude?

RONNIE  
 It came off - it was just lipstick  
 you retards!

DANIEL  
 ...Oh. Sorry broseph.

Awkward silence.

XAVIER  
 So does this mean I have to go back  
 to work tomorrow?

ANGELICA  
 I haven't done dry-cleaning in 3  
 months. I have nothing to wear.

PATRICIA  
 At least you're going back to  
 Goldman - Bear Stearns doesn't even  
 exist anymore!

DANIEL  
 I hate I-Banking - I can't go back!  
 I won't do it!

Keith starts CRYING into Xavier's shoulder.

KEITH  
 Guys, what the fuck are we doing  
 here in the middle of the night?  
 Doesn't this seem dangerous?

The clerics all nod and fearfully huddle together.

RONNIE  
 Look, I'm sorry the Great Reunion  
 wasn't all it was cracked up to be,  
 but maybe it's for the best. You  
 can't just be in a cult forever,  
 right?

TESS  
 Whatev. This blows.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - A LITTLE LATER

The clerics walk glumly alongside Ronnie.

XAVIER

You sure we can't give you a ride  
or something. I feel pretty bad  
about what happened before.

RONNIE

No - I'm fine! I just have to go  
inside and talk to someone.

DANIEL

That smokin' hot DJ we saw you  
with? You should bone her dude - I  
would!

Daniel high-fives Ming.

RONNIE

Look, why don't you mind your own--

Suddenly they all gasp again!

RONNIE

...What?

PATRICIA

(pointing to his neck)  
That!

Patricia once more hands him her pocket mirror.

There is a STAR OF SILVER GLITTER on his neck, where the  
Raver Girl stabbed him with her wand.

PATRICIA

The Star of the Cosmic King!

RONNIE

No, there was this raver with a  
wand - don't you remember you  
already made this mistake!

ANGELICA

Anyone could get confused about the  
Sign of Eternal Suffering, but  
there's no mistaking the Star of  
the Cosmic King.

RONNIE

Okay fine - I'm the Cosmic King.  
What now?

XAVIER  
We must have a coronation!

RONNIE  
Make it quick.

XAVIER  
Commence the divine ceremony of ten-thousand cuts!

The clerics happily brandish their weapons once again.

Ronnie sighs and nods, then takes off SPRINTING.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOADING DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie sneaks through an unlocked chain-link door into the dimly lit loading dock.

He finds a BUNCH OF TEENAGERS buying drugs from the back of a powder blue, diesel VOLKSWAGON VAN, basically held together with duct tape and coat-hangers.

Suddenly, he makes eye contact with the DEALER, 27.

DEALER  
R-Dawg, it's about motherfucking time. I've been waiting here three hours. I got shit to do!

Slowly, Ronnie recognizes the dealer: he sports a goatee, wears padded-knuckle fighting gloves and mirrored aviators. Also he wears an American Flag YARMULKE. He's quite short.

RONNIE  
...Ray Robinowitz?

He rubs his temples.

RAY  
When my old college roomie sends out the Bat Signal, I answer.

RONNIE  
Look, Ray, I'm being chased - I need some help. For real.

Ray frowns. He SHOOS away his teenage customers.

RAY  
The pharmacy's closed now kids.

Ray flips up the mirrored shades of his sunglasses.

RAY  
 You're lucky I still owe you 3  
 months rent and a George Foreman  
 grill.

EXT. LOADING DOCK - A MOMENT LATER

The Volkswagon SCREECHES out of the loading dock, careening into the alley. Cleric Pursuers SCATTER like bowling pins as the vehicle barrels towards them.

RAY  
 (leaning out the window)  
 Next year in Jerusalem  
 motherfuckers!

As Ray peels away, Keoko burst out of the warehouse through the back exit. She makes it to the street just in time to see Ronnie in the passenger seat.

KEOKO  
 Ronnie, wait!...

She watches, confused, as the van drives away.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN VAN - CONTINUOUS

The interior of the van is filled with Powerbar wrappers and empty Red Bulls. The "Best of Rocky" soundtrack warbles on the old tape deck.

Ray hands him a ZIP-LOCK BAG filled with SMALL BLUE PILLS.

RAY  
 Here's the X you wanted R-Dawg.

Ronnie stares incredulously at the bag of drugs.

RONNIE  
 I called you for ecstasy!?

RAY  
 No you called me for baking soda  
 dipshit.

Ray stabs a pen into the base of a RED BULL and starts SHOTGUNNING it like a beer.

RONNIE  
 I can't believe you're still  
 dealing drugs. I thought you were  
 in law school.

RAY  
 I multi-task.

RONNIE  
Well anyway, thanks for waiting  
Ray.

RAY  
Sugar Ray.

RONNIE  
What?

RAY  
Sugar Ray. I go by Sugar Ray now.

RONNIE  
You're a 5 foot 4 Jew. You can't  
just go around calling yourself  
Sugar Ray.

RAY  
Fuck you. My name's Ray, is it not?

RONNIE  
Doesn't matter. You have to be  
black to call yourself Sugar Ray.

RAY  
No you don't.

RONNIE  
Yes you do.

RAY  
No you fucking don't fag. You just  
have to be sweet!

Ray takes his hands off the wheel to SHADOW-BOX for a moment.

RAY (CONT'D)  
Check this sweetness! It'll give  
you a cavity! Better start  
flossing.

Ronnie grabs his hands and places them back on the wheel.

RONNIE  
Sugar Ray - I need you to drive me  
downtown. My livelihood literally  
depends on it.

RAY  
I'll think about it...but there's a  
stop I gotta make first.

RONNIE  
No! NOOOO! I've already played that  
game tonight.

RAY

Ronnie--

RONNIE

Please let's just go downtown first.

RAY

Ronnie, I'm gonna level with you: I have to hand-off the contents of this van by 5am or the Irish Mob is gonna "saw my arms off." That's a direct quote.

Long pause.

RONNIE

Ray--

RAY

Sugar Ray.

RONNIE

Sugar Ray, what's in this van?

RAY

150,000 pills of uncut MDMA.

Ronnie swivels in his seat and notices the many SEALED TRUNKS in the back of the van.

RONNIE

This is all ecstasy!?

RAY

Surprise! Look, it'll be a real fast hand-off. And it's the last time I'm doing this. I just need a little cash to fund my training.

RONNIE

Training for what!?

RAY

To be a professional cage fighter. All thanks to you dawg!

RONNIE

AAAHHHHHH!

Ronnie starts slamming his head against the dashboard.

RAY

Whoa - easy Ronnie! The dashboard's held together with double-sided scotch tape.

RONNIE

We were roommates for a whole year. I dispensed countless nuggets of sober advice. Like you're not black, and don't masturbate in our room when you know my parents are stopping by with my little sister.

RAY

Ooh...forgot about that.

RONNIE

So why would you finally pay attention the one time I'm wasted and tell you that it would be nifty if you were a cage fighter?

RAY

You didn't say anything about cage fighting, per se. You said that real freedom is throwing away a sure thing to try for something better. So a couple of months ago I decided to forgo the bar exam, and spend all my time training to become "Sugar Ray" Robinowitz: the Hebrew Executioner.

Ray bellows a primordial HOWL, which is cut short when his cellphone starts RINGING Van Halen - he answers.

RAY

Sugar Ray here. Uh huh. You sure? Cops at the checkpoint? How many? Okay. Ummm...well, hold on a second.

Ray covers the phone mouthpiece, and turns to Ronnie.

RAY

Gimme a shitty motel on La Brea.

RONNIE

Ummm...how about The Royal Paradise Motel? Near Airdrome. Me and Caitlyn stayed there when our place got fumigated. It's a dump.

RAY

I like it.

(back into phone)

The Royal Paradise Motel. See you in fifteen.

Ray HANGS UP. He turns to Ronnie concerned.

RAY  
 You're still with Caitlyn? The  
 fucking ice queen! What happened to  
 that Keoko girl? I liked her.

RONNIE  
 Shit! Lemme see your phone.

Ray hands Ronnie his cell. Ronnie scrolls through and finds  
 Keoko's number - he dials.

RONNIE  
 Thank god you never delete a number  
 either.  
 (beat)  
 Fuck, it's her voicemail-  
 (he clears his throat)  
 Hey Keoko, it's Ronnie. I'm sorry I  
 took off, I'll explain later. Meet  
 me at the Royal Paradise Motel on  
 La Brea, be there as soon as--

Ray snatches back the phone and HANGS UP.

RAY  
 What the fuck!? I'm not on my way  
 to a baby shower. Don't tell random  
 ex-pussy the location of my drug  
 deal.

Ronnie sulks in his seat.

EXT. ROYAL PARADISE MOTEL - SOUTH HOLLYWOOD - 4:55AM

It's the dregs of South La Brea. Every wall is made of water-  
 stained, peeling stucco. The sign in front proudly offers  
 "Color TV" as the only real amenity.

Their van fishtails to a stop and parks.

INT. VAN

RAY  
 This'll just take a few minutes.

Ronnie is hyperventilating-

RONNIE  
 You don't understand - something's  
 somehow gonna go terribly wrong!

RAY  
 Chill the fuck out R-dawg, you're  
 makin' me edgy. Why don't you take  
 some of that X I gave ya?

RONNIE  
Impaired judgement is why I'm here  
right now!

RAY  
Who knows why are any of us here  
right now? It's a big fucking  
mystery.

RONNIE  
You're here because your selling  
drugs to the Irish mafia.

RAY  
...a big fucking mystery.

Ronnie gives Ray the evil-eye.

EXT. ROYAL PARADISE MOTEL - OUTSIDE ROOM 112

TWO IRISH GOONS, ANGUS and SEAMUS, stand outside the door.  
Ronnie stares at the ground uncomfortably. Ray tries to act  
confident and blasé.

RAY  
Tell Finnegan I'm here about the  
shipment of "Girl Scout cookies."

Ray WINKS at them.

RAY  
(whispering)  
I'm talking about all the drugs in  
my van.

SEAMUS  
Fer christssake! We know what  
you're talking about. Wait here ya  
half-wit.

Seamus ducks his head into the motel room for a moment.

RAY  
(to Ronnie)  
These guys are totally gangsters!  
Off the fuckin' hook, right?

Angus just shakes his head. Seamus reappears.

SEAMUS  
Get the fuck in there.

INT. MOTEL ROOM 112 - CONTINUOUS

It's pitch black...

Suddenly the light is switched on, revealing our heroes encircled by IRISH MOBSTERS.

The boss, FINNEGAN, walks up to Ray with a STRAIGHT-RAZOR.

FINNEGAN  
Can I ask you a question, Ray?

RAY  
Sugar Ray.

Finnegan presses the razor to Ray's neck.

FINNEGAN  
When I told you this was a one-man operation, was I wrong in assuming you knew how to count to one?

RAY  
What, Ronnie? Nah, he's harmless. Just here for moral support. Right R-Dawg?

Finnegan notices the federal seal on Ronnie's "Porn Jacket". He switches the razor to Ronnie's neck.

FINNEGAN  
Moral support? Cause this looks like a federal agent's jacket.

Finnegan slices open Ronnie's shirt looking for a wire.

RAY  
He's not a cop. He's a street artist! Tell 'em Ronnie.

RONNIE  
I'm not much of an artist. I sell floormats.

FINNEGAN  
Nonsense. O'Malley, give him a pen and paper.

ANOTHER GANGSTER hands Ronnie the complementary motel PAPER PAD AND PEN.

FINNEGAN  
Well here's the deal Picasso: draw a quick little sketch of me, and if it seems like it came from a real artist and not a narc, Patrick here won't saw Ray's arms off.

An extremely stumpy Irishman, PATRICK, approaches Ray with a BONE-SAW, grinning maniacally.

RAY  
 Medically speaking, are you  
 considered a leprechaun?

RONNIE  
 (to Finnegan)  
 Ummm...I'd need like 3 weeks.

FINNEGAN  
 You have 3 minutes.

RONNIE  
 Look, I didn't even make it through  
 art school.

RAY  
 Stop fuckin' around Ronnie! Draw  
 the man so we can get outta here.

Everyone stares at Ronnie. He looks queasy.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM 112 - OUTSIDE DOOR

The two goons stand sentry looking bored.

ANGUS  
 You reckon, they're sawing his arms  
 off, or what?

SEAMUS  
 Nah. Be more screamin' probably.

ANGUS  
 Well, maybe he's one of them  
 sadomasochists. I read about em -  
 they like pain, y'know. LA's got  
 lots of 'em.

SEAMUS  
 Don't reckon they like having their  
 arms sawed off though.

ANGUS  
 Hmmmm...ay, reckon not.

Suddenly APPLAUSE erupts from the room.

The door opens and Ronnie and Finnegan exit. Finnegan has  
 TEARS IN HIS EYES and drapes his arm affectionately around  
 Ronnie.

FINNEGAN  
 I'm sendin' that to me Mum in Cork.  
 Best goddamn picture I ever seen.

RONNIE  
 (dazed)  
 Oh...thank you.

FINNEGAN  
 Now wait the fuck outside until  
 we're done in here. This is no  
 place for an artist.

Finnegan slams the door closed. Ronnie beams.

RONNIE  
 I made something good. And I was  
 sober. I didn't even think about  
 it. It just happened. This is the  
 best night of my life!

Suddenly, all three of them can hear people HAVING SEX from  
 the adjacent room. The walls are paper thin. Angus and Seamus  
 start giggling like school children.

SEAMUS  
 You ain't the only one havin' a  
 good night.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
 Oh yes! Oh god yes! Exactly like  
 that! Faster! A little slower! Now  
 10% faster! More perpendicular!

Ronnie, tilts his head and listens for a moment amused...

RONNIE  
 Weird. She kinda sounds like--

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
 Caitlyn, just hold up a second.  
 Ouch...you're kinda hurting me.

Ronnie cocks his head in alarm. He darts to the window, and  
 peers through a slit in the curtains.

RONNIE'S POV: In the dim lamp-light, Ronnie clearly sees his  
 girlfriend Caitlyn mid-coitus; the man is mostly obscured by  
 the comforter.

RONNIE steps back aghast, unable to process the data--

Then his expression hardens...

He SNATCHES Angus' SILENCED PISTOL and BLASTS the lock off  
 the door-

ANGUS  
 HEY!

INT. MOTEL ROOM 114 - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie strides into the room, gun still wisping smoke.

Caitlyn covers herself with the sheet. She holds a black leather riding crop. The MAN freezes beneath the covers.

CAITLYN  
Ronnie!?

RONNIE  
Caitlyn.

CAITLYN  
What are you doing here!?

RONNIE  
I made some career ending calls to my boss, and I'm trying to erase the messages before I'm fired. But right now, I'm just killing time 'til the drug deal's over next door. What's new with you?

CAITLYN  
Don't you think this is a little melodramatic?

RONNIE  
You're supposed to be on an emergency business trip! Is that San Bernadino under the covers!?

A naked Oliver Pitt slowly emerges from beneath the sheets. His wrists are tied to the corners of the headboard. He looks terrified.

OLIVER  
...ummm, hi Ronnie.

Ronnie staggers against the door frame.

CAITLYN  
Ronnie, are you okay?

OLIVER  
I swear I've never really done anything like this before, but Caitlyn - she's a terrific gal, as I'm sure you already know--

Catlyn stuffs a sock in Oliver's mouth, gagging him.

CAITLYN  
Oh shut up Oliver!

RONNIE  
WHAT THE FUCK! How'd you even meet  
him?

Ronnie gestures wildly with the gun looking for something to shoot. He SHOOTs A LAMP just to make himself feel better.

CAITLYN  
(terrified)  
Your company Christmas party, while  
you were off drunk-dialing in the  
corner. He seemed like an ambitious  
guy. He has five-year plans  
prepared until the year 2125.

RONNIE  
Caitlyn, this asshole might get my  
promotion!

OLIVER  
(muffled)  
I knew it!

Ronnie points the gun at Oliver shutting him up.

CAITLYN  
(near tears)  
Fine! I lied to you. But you lied  
to me too.

RONNIE  
How did I lie to you?!

CAITLYN  
When we first met you acted like  
you were going somewhere. Like you  
had purpose. But you have no clue  
what you want.

RONNIE  
You bitch! You have no idea what  
I've been through tonight for my  
career. For you!

CAITLYN  
For me!? We haven't had sex in  
three months. Do you even want me?

Ronnie is a little punch-drunk from this last jab.

RONNIE  
Well...I thought I wanted you.

Ronnie's eyes narrow and he turns to Oliver.

RONNIE

And you. You little hobbit. I'm gonna get this promotion, and I'm gonna make sure you're selling floormats to monkeys and other zoo animals for the rest of your miserable, fucking life!

Oliver looks like he might cry.

CAITLYN

...Ronnie. Go home. You look tired.

Ronnie considers shooting something else, but instead just leaves the room, SLAMMING THE DOOR behind him.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM 114 - OUTSIDE DOOR

Ronnie looks totally lost. He hands the gun back to Angus.

ANGUS

Aren't ya gonna shoot him?

Ronnie plods down the corridor and leans against one of the hotel ICE CHESTS. The guards follow him with worried expressions.

SEAMUS

At least cut his willy off. I'll do it for ya - it's in my job description.

Ronnie reaches into his pocket for the ENGAGEMENT RING that still resides there. He DROPS IT into the ice chest.

He then slides down the wall into a sitting position. He gazes woefully at his reflection in a small PUDDLE OF WATER.

RONNIE

(emotionless)

You know, any outdoor ice-chest on commercial property is supposed to have an adjacent floor-mat. High risk for standing water. Someone could hurt themselves.

Angus and Seamus back away, certain he's lost his mind. Seamus makes a CUCKOO hand gesture.

ANGUS

Why don't we give you a few minutes. Collect your thoughts.

Ronnie puts his head between his knees. We hear a not-to-distant THUNDERCLAP. It starts to RAIN. A leak in the motel awning allows a steady drip directly onto Ronnie's head. He makes no effort to get out of the way.

Ronnie SWALLOWS THE ECSTASY PILLS Ray gave him. He then waves some leftover glowsticks in front of his face.

After a few moments he decides it isn't helping and tosses the glowsticks away in disgust.

Then, from his periphery, he sees a FLASH OF MOVEMENT behind a hedge. He whips his head around--

RONNIE'S POV: Heavily armed DEA OFFICERS scurry around, ostensibly getting into raid formation.

RONNIE'S eyes go wide, he casually stands up and scampers back to room 112--

INT. MOTEL ROOM 112 - CONTINUOUS

A SUITCASE OF MONEY lies open on the bed along with the TRUNKS OF ECSTASY that have now been unloaded from the van.

The gangsters check through the merchandise as Ray and Finnegan heatedly negotiate--

RAY

No, you're not listening to me! The deal was \$80,000 -- Look, I've already printed up 500 T-shirts. Do you know how much it costs to spell Sugar-Ray in sequins? Way more than you'd think.

Ronnie anxiously enters the room.

ANGUS

I told you to wait outside.

RONNIE

There's a bunch of feds creeping around - I think they're DEA. We need to leave.

Ray starts laughing nervously.

RAY

Artists are so fuckin' imaginative. He probably just saw a squirrel or a Daddy-Long-Legs or something.

He yanks Ronnie aside-

RAY

Ronnie, stop scaring everyone, just wait in the van.

(over-enunciating)

THE DRUG DEAL IS NEARLY OVER. JUST GO WAIT OUTSIDE ROOM 112, WHICH IS WHERE WE ARE.

RONNIE

Why are you talking so weird?

RAY

(whispering)

Just go outside! This'll be over in  
5 minutes!

Suddenly a high pitched FEEDBACK SQUEAL emits from Ray's chest. Ray freezes.

FINNEGAN

What the fuck was that?

RAY

What? Oh, I've got this bad cough.  
Can't get rid of it.

Ray tries to COUGH in a high falsetto but it's not very convincing.

Finnegan tears open Ray's shirt, revealing A WIRE TAPED TO HIS CHEST - everyone's weapon comes out again.

RAY

Oh this is just for dictation purposes. My assistant types up all my ideas at the end of the day.  
(speaking into the mic)  
Rita, make a note: why not ironing boards shaped like shirts?

Finnegan rips the wire off his chest!

FINNEGAN

You're the fuckin' narc!

RONNIE

What's going on Ray?

RAY

I had to do it - it's part of my plea-bargain!

Ray looks panicked, but then regains his composure and starts stretching-

RAY

Don't worry R-Dawg, what they don't know is I've been in seclusion the last 3 months studying the violent yet beautiful art of Brazilian Jujitsu.

Ray begins an elaborate Kata of swirling kicks and punches.

RAY

My left hand is a fountain pen of violence. My right hand, a dragonfly...made of motherfuckin' napalm! My right foot is--

Finnegan TAPS Ray on the forehead with the butt of his gun, dropping him like a sack of potatoes.

Suddenly, HELICOPTER SEARCHLIGHTS blast through the windows--

DEA CAPTAIN (O.S.)

(on bullhorn)

Come out immediately with your hands up. We have the motel surrounded Finnegan.

Finnegan points to Ronnie and the slumped figure of Ray.

ANGUS

Bring them outside. We need hostages!

EXT. ROYAL PARADISE MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The Irish mob explodes from the room with GUNS BLAZING. In a microsecond there's bullets flying in every direction!

Oliver and Caitlyn run from their room, clutching pillows and bedsheets to their naked bodies. Oliver's still attached to the headboard.

A second later, A DEA SNIPER takes out the gangsters holding Ronnie and Ray.

Ray slumps to the ground. Hysterical, Ronnie starts dragging him away from the gunfire...

Finnegan sees the hostages escaping. He aims his shotgun at them and begins pursuit.

FINNEGAN

I'm not dyin' alone you bloody traitors!

Ray is absolute deadweight; Ronnie can't escape Finnegan. Finnegan pulls the trigger...

Suddenly, Finnegan SLIPS on the SMALL PUDDLE in front of the ice chest!

He flies high into the air, and lands hard on his back. His SHOTGUN FIRES into the ice-chest, and an avalanche of ice-cubes spills out onto his unconscious form. Ronnie can't believe his luck.

EXT. BACK ALLEY BEHIND MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie manages to drag Ray away from the eye of the storm. But a few fleeing GANGSTERS spy them in the alley.

IRISH GANGSTER  
There's the snitches!

Suddenly, a BLUE MINI-COOPER screeches to a stop alongside our heroes. Keoko sticks her head out the window.

KEOKO  
Ronnie, why did you invite me to this!?

Ronnie freezes when he sees Keoko. He DROPS Ray on the ground.

RONNIE  
...Keoko, you came.

A bullet SPIDER-WEBS one of her side windows.

RONNIE  
(oblivious)  
I thought your set was great by the way. Very moody.

KEOKO  
Get in the car!

Ronnie snaps out of it. He DUMPS Ray into the car, then leaps into the passenger seat. Keoko speeds off.

INT. MINI-COOPER - CONTINUOUS

The drive east down Pico. RAY is still groggy and moaning in the back seat. Ronnie tries to catch his breath. A HUGE GRIN starts to spread across his face.

RONNIE  
(gleeful)  
Did you see that me back there? Ha!  
I was nearly killed.

KEOKO  
(furious)  
Why are you laughing? This is all Ray's fault isn't it?

Ronnie's face is glazed over now from the ecstasy - his pupils are so large they might burst out of his eyeballs.

RONNIE  
Keoko, it's so amazing to see you  
again. So amazing. I am so  
thirsty...are you thirsty? It's  
really hot in here.

Ronnie takes off his shirt. Keoko eyes him curiously.

KEOKO  
Ronnie?

RONNIE  
My god, this seat-belt is  
fantastic! What's it made of? I  
wanna swaddle myself in it, like a  
cocoon.

KEOKO  
Ronnie... are you... rolling?

RONNIE  
...no.

KEOKO  
You're on ecstasy!

RONNIE  
Maybe.

Ronnie starts turning the interior lights off and on. Keoko's somewhat amused to see Ronnie is this medicated state.

KEOKO  
But you hate drugs.

RONNIE  
(smiling dumbly)  
I know! Crazy right? Oooh...let's  
go to Pinkberry!

Suddenly he stands up in his seat, sticking his head out of the sun roof into the drizzling rain.

RONNIE  
I just remembered something else.  
You gotta take me downtown. I need  
to go save my job! Lemme know when  
we get there.

Ronnie starts singing "*Hooray for Hollywood*" at the top of his lungs. Keoko yanks Ronnie back down, but she can't help from laughing.

KEOKO  
We don't wanna get pulled over.

He nuzzles into the crook of her arm.

RONNIE  
How long are you here for?

KEOKO  
I leave for Tokyo tomorrow morning.  
10 AM flight.

RONNIE  
No - you can't leave! We can live  
in the Floormat Factory and be  
happy together.

KEOKO  
(giggling)  
Ronnie, you know I can't stay put  
in one place.

Ronnie looks distant suddenly--

RONNIE  
You know I had a dream about you  
the other night. We were at your  
Dad's lake in Japan, like from that  
story you told me. And you started  
walking towards the island without  
me, but the ice looked really thin,  
and I was scared, but I followed  
you. And when we got to the island  
it started snowing. And you were  
shivering. So I started chopping  
wood, and I built us a fire. And it  
kept us warm.

Keoko stares at him confused. He stares back with the  
unassuming look of a toddler. Her face softens.

RONNIE  
You wanna make out?

Keoko dodges Ronnie's head, holding him at bay.

KEOKO  
Ronnie, about that phone message  
you left me--

Ronnie grabs at her face.

RONNIE  
Got your nose!

Keoko swerves violently.

KEOKO  
Ronnie, behave yourself!

RONNIE  
Sorry Mom.

KEOKO

About that phone message. Did you really mean what you said? I need to know.

Ronnie looks at her, his focus emerging from the fog--

RONNIE

Keoko, I--

She takes her eyes off the road, meeting his gaze.

RONNIE

Red light! Red light!

Before she can answer, their car barrels through the intersection and is T-BONED by Mary-Lou's pink Corvette!

Both cars SPIN WILDLY down the road.

Keoko and Ronnie start screaming. Ray groggily wakes up in the back.

RAY

Hey guys, what's going  
...AAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

Finally their car SLAMS against a light pole, CRUNCHING to a stop...

EXT. STREET CORNER - KOREATOWN - 5:45 AM

Groaning, they crawl out of the car.

Mary-Lou and Marcus claw their way out of the Corvette which is also totaled.

They stand in a circle. They all look like they've been through a garbage disposal. The adrenaline rush has pretty much sobered Ronnie up.

Mary-Lou looks at her car in disbelief.

MARY-LOU

My car!!! Ronnie, tell that woman you're with she owes me a Corvette!

Marcus, still without shoes, perks up when he sees Ronnie.

MARCUS

Ronnie! How's it shaking? You didn't manage to grab my shoes did you? They were Italian.

KEOKO

...do you know these people Ronnie?

RONNIE

Ummm, yeah. Keoko, this is Mary-Lou and Marcus. They're my... well... their numbers were in my phone.

Marcus takes Keoko's hand and kisses it.

MARCUS

So this is *the* Keoko Starr. Ronnie used to blab about you non-stop--

Ronnie kicks Marcus in the shin.

RONNIE

How did you two end up in a car together!?

MARY-LOU

Well, it was kinda crazy. Kyle started shooting at the cops, and I managed to get away. But you were gone, so I was sad, and I did what I always do when I'm sad: I went to Cantor's Deli for a Black & White cookie. And Marcus was also there, and he had just bought the last one. But he split it with me, and it was the sweetest thing, and we started talking--

RONNIE

Never mind - I don't care.

Marcus sidles up to Ronnie.

MARCUS

(whispers)

Dude...did y'know she's a pornstar. Fucking Triple Cherry Jackpot!

KEOKO

So what now Ronnie?

Ronnie looks at the four eager faces, then he looks at the two steaming wrecks of cars. He shakes his head.

RONNIE

I give up. I'm going home.

Shoulders slumped, he trudges over to the BUS-STOP bench and sits down, staring straight ahead.

Concerned, Keoko, goes over to check on him.

KEOKO

Look, it can't be that hard to get downtown.

RONNIE  
You know, you'd think that!

KEOKO  
Well that's great Ronnie. The  
second things get a little tough,  
you just give up?

RONNIE  
I've nearly been killed more times  
than I can count tonight. I gave it  
the ol' college try!

KEOKO  
So try one more time.

Ronnie doesn't respond. Keoko won't give up.

KEOKO  
Okay, screw the job. Come with me  
to Tokyo tomorrow morning. You'll  
get a new job when you get back. Or  
maybe we won't come back at all.

RONNIE  
(laughing)  
...second verse same as the first.

KEOKO  
What's funny?

RONNIE  
You still talk like this.

KEOKO  
Like what?

Ronnie explodes--

RONNIE  
Normal people can't just pick up  
and leave whenever they feel like  
it! You're so goddamn ADD. Just  
grow up!

Keoko looks like she just got slapped in the face.

She reaches into her purse, retrieves her CELL PHONE, and  
calls her VOICEMAIL. She presses the cell to his ear...

Ronnie's MESSAGE PLAYS. He doesn't sound drunk. He sounds  
lucid and remorseful:

RONNIE (V.O.)

Keoko...hi. It's me, Ronnie. I know this is coming out of the blue - but you once asked me what I had to lose, and I've spent 7 years thinking about the answer. The truth is, I didn't have anything to lose, cause I didn't have anything worth keeping. Except...I had you. I wish I'd gotten on that plane--

Ronnie pushes "7" on the phone.

AUTOMATED PHONE VOICE

Message deleted.

Keoko's trembling now.

KEOKO

One last time: did you actually mean any of that?

RONNIE

Keoko...

KEOKO

You can't just not call someone for seven years and leave a message like that!

RONNIE

...I was drunk. I'll say anything when I'm drunk.

Keoko belies hardly any reaction, but suddenly her eyes are glistening. There's a GUST OF WIND that causes her to SHIVER. She tries to smile-

KEOKO

That's what I needed to hear.

She puts two fingers in her mouth and emits a high-pitched WHISTLE--

Out of nowhere, a TAXICAB pulls up. Without looking back, she gets in the cab which promptly squeals off.

Ronnie's flabbergasted.

RONNIE

Oh...c'mon! I've been looking for a cab all night!!!

Ronnie turns around and finds Ray, Mary-Lou, and Marcus all looking like children who just watched Santa Claus euthanize a reindeer.

RAY

You fuckin' blew it Dawg!

MARCUS

You could've handled that better.

MARY-LOU

You acted like a big mean jerk!

RONNIE

Let me get this straight: a pornstar, a con-man, and a drug running snitch are gonna lecture me on social graces!?

MARCUS

Hey, at least we're pursuing our dreams. You're selling floormats!

RONNIE

It's an honest living Marcus, not that you'd know anything--

MARCUS

You gave up on her like you gave up on the one real talent God deemed fit to give you!

Ronnie's boiling over now.

RONNIE

Any of you ever hear about Jean-Michel Basquiat? Friends with Warhol, toured all over the world? Edgy, radical, pretty much the most famous graffiti artist ever?

All three shake there heads "no". Ronnie rolls his eyes.

RONNIE

Well, he died alone in his apartment, age 27, too many speedballs. Pretty heroic, huh?

MARCUS

...So? Genius burns out fast.

RONNIE

Maybe it's just easy to seem edgy and radical when you're fucking high all the time! That's not real art!

RAY

You don't believe that.

RONNIE

What I believe is that you're all  
such idiots, you modeled your lives  
around my stupid, drunken advice!

Mary-Lou and Marcus are stunned. Ray bursts into tears. Mary-Lou consoles him, petting his head. She fixes Ronnie with an icy glare.

MARY-LOU

The only reason we're here is  
because you called us and we care  
about you!

Ronnie's starts to respond then stops himself. He feels really shitty now...

Silence.

...which is suddenly interrupted by the sound of an approaching HELICOPTER.

Our heroes turn, and see the LAPD and DEA enclosing from the north. Then they hear MACHINE-GUN FIRE, they turn--

And to the south approaches the Irish Mafia, converging towards them in a V of Lincoln Town cars - their heads out the windows, firing into the air with bloodlust. Then suddenly, they hear CHANTING. They turn--

From the west comes a still-enraged Kyle, and riding in the back of his stake-bed truck is the Order of Galactic truth, chanting demonically.

RAY

Ummm...there's no real defense for  
this in Brazilian Jujitsu.

MARY-LOU

...We're all gonna die.

Marcus puts his arm around Mary-Lou and puts on a show of extreme emotion--

MARCUS

In our last few moments, I just  
wish there was some way to  
celebrate life. Maybe...I dunno, a  
quick blowjob?...but no, we  
shouldn't...oh, you're right, if  
not now, when?

Mary-Lou grimaces and unpeels Marcus. Ronny steels himself.

RONNIE

Guys, get out of here right now.

MARCUS

Ronnie, we're not gonna leave you.

RONNIE

Get out of here!...Please. I'll be right behind you. I'm just gonna buy us some time.

Scared, they nod and scamper east down a side street.

LAUGHING fatalistically, Ronnie casually walks to the middle of the intersection and lifts his eyes to the heavens.

His still-naked torso is illuminated by the spot light of a police helicopter.

RONNIE

Boy could I use a drink.

Armageddon descends upon him...

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. JAIL CELL - BEVERLY HILLS - ABOUT 6:55 AM

Ronnie sits alone in a holding cell, exhausted, bruised, demoralized. He wears an orange standard issue prison shirt.

A POLICE OFFICER suddenly unlocks the door and tosses another prisoner in the cell - it's Tyler, from the gas station.

Ronnie tries to avoid eye-contact, but Tyler recognizes him.

TYLER

Ronnie? Is that you? Well, aren't you a sight for sore eyes. What you doin' here amigo?

RONNIE

My night didn't turn go so well.

TYLER

You ever make it to work and erase that message?

RONNIE

(snaps his fingers)  
Must've slipped my mind.

TYLER

Ronnie, when you set out to do something, you gotta follow through, or else you establish a pattern of failure.

RONNIE

It might've been easier if I'd had my phone and wallet.

TYLER

Ooh, don't start pointing fingers. There's always gonna be some reason why you couldn't do something.

Ronnie glares at Tyler, but then softens.

RONNIE

You know...you're right. Four loyal friends tried to help me out tonight, and I was too self-absorbed to appreciate it. I was a total dick.

A long silence. Tyler puts his hand on Ronnie's shoulder.

TYLER

By the way, would it kill you to get a few games on that phone.

RONNIE

...Games?

TYLER

Yeah, you got nothing. Pony up for Tetris and you'd have something to do instead of drunk-dialing.

Ronnie throws Tyler a murderous look.

TYLER

...I'm just saying.

The police officer steps back into the cell.

POLICE OFFICER

Ronald Epstein, you're free to go.

Ronnie looks up confused.

INT. SEIZED ITEMS CAGE - POLICE STATION - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ronnie SIGNS for his WALLET and PHONE, confiscated from Tyler. He checks the phone: it reads "1,002 MISSED CALLS."

He flips the phone close and slides it back towards the property attendant.

RONNIE

Why don't you guys hold onto this.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - POLICE STATION - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Teddy Winkle waits, arms crossed impatiently. As soon as he sees Ronnie he runs up and bear-hugs him.

TEDDY

I thought you were dead. Don't you ever scare me like that again!

Finally Ronnie manages an exhausted smile.

EXT. POLICE STATION - BEVERLY HILLS - 7:55 AM - DAWN

They walk down the steps towards the parking deck holding Teddy's car. Pink clouds striate the dawn sky.

RONNIE

I can't believe they let me go.

TEDDY

Well, apparently three of your friends showed up at the station and answered a lot of questions.

RONNIE

They did?

TEDDY

Yeah, I don't know how they came up with this, but the cops think you helped bring down a major drug cartel. Ridiculous!

Ronnie laughs uncomfortably.

EXT. TEDDY'S CAR - POLICE STATION PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Teddy unlocks the doors.

RONNIE

You know I didn't mean what I said yesterday. You're the best friend I could hope for.

TEDDY

I know.

They grin and awkwardly fist-bump.

TEDDY

So, when I got to the gas station, half the LAPD was there! What happened!?

RONNIE

Teddy, I promise I'll give you a play-by-play of every agonizing second from last night, but right now I just wanna go home and get some sleep.

TEDDY

Sleep? You never miss work. What about your promotion?

RONNIE

I'm quitting. I have an uncle in the insulation biz - my mom said he's lookin' for a new sales guy.

TEDDY

That's fine with me, but what's Caitlyn gonna think?

Ronnie's eye light ablaze.

RONNIE

...Oliver!

Ronnie extends his hand.

RONNIE

Teddy, give me the keys. I've got 29 minutes to get downtown!

TEDDY

...it's rush-hour. That defies the laws of LA physics.

Ronnie glares at him. Teddy nods and hands him the keys.

TEDDY

Shotgun!

INT/EXT. CAR - 10 FREEWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

They weave through the traffic with abandon. As Ronnie drives, he changes into one of Teddy's wrinkled button-downs and clip-on ties from the back seat.

TEDDY

Ronnie - be careful, this isn't Mario Kart!

Ronnie barely hears him. He swerves onto the 110 N Freeway cutting off three cars. Teddy buckles his seatbelt.

TEDDY

It's not like we have any red shells for protection.

(MORE)

TEDDY (cont'd)  
Or a blue spikey shell for that  
matter. Then we'd be in good shape.

                  RONNIE  
I literally have no idea what  
you're talking about.

Long pause.

                  TEDDY  
Hope we don't run into Wario!

                  RONNIE  
Shut up Teddy!

INT/EXT. CAR - DOWNTOWN L.A. - 8:15 AM

Towering glass buildings and one-way streets.

Their car grinds to a stop. Absolute gridlock. Ronnie punches  
the dashboard.

                  TEDDY  
You gotta calm down, we're still  
like 12 blocks away--

Before Teddy can even finish, Ronnie has leapt out of the car  
and started RUNNING down the street.

EXT. PARKING LOT - PENNINGTON MATS INC. - 8:25 AM

Ronnie sprints through the parking lot, his body threatening  
cardiac arrest.

Just behind him, Mr. Pennington PULLS INTO HIS PARKING SPACE.

Ronnie lowers his head and darts for the back stairwell.

INT. STAIRWELL / INT. ELEVATOR

We INTERCUT as Ronnie bounds up the stairs and Mr. Pennington  
cheerily rides up in the elevator.

INT. MAIN OFFICE - 8:29AM

Ronnie crashes into the office like the Tasmanian devil,  
knocking over cubicle walls, sending papers flying.

But Mr. Pennington is already at his office door!

                  RONNIE  
Mr. Pennington! Mr. Pennington!

He makes a bee-line for Mr. Pennington's office. BEATRICE, Mr. Pennington's elderly secretary tries to intercept him.

BEATRICE

Ronnie, you called my house 7 times last night. You woke up the kids.

Ronnie doesn't respond, plowing right past her.

INT. MR. PENNINGTON'S OFFICE - 8:30AM

Ronnie dives into the office, just as Mr. Pennington sits down and reaches towards his blinking answering machine.

RONNIE

STOP! Don't do it!!!

Mr. Pennington freezes, looking up in alarm.

RONNIE

Just...don't listen to your answering machine.

MR. PENNINGTON

Don't be silly Ronnie. You look like Hell by the way.

He presses PLAY...

NOTHING.

Ronnie just stares, mouth agape.

He presses again. Still nothing.

Mr. Pennington frowns then opens up the mini-tape deck. It's EMPTY!

MR. PENNINGTON

Who took the tape out of my answering machine?

Suddenly Oliver Pitt peeks his head into the office. He looks a little disheveled himself.

OLIVER

Good morning Mr. Pennington. Good morning Mr. Epstein.

MR. PENNINGTON

Morning Oliver.

Ronnie just fixes him with an venomous stare.

OLIVER

I don't mean to be nosy... but were you perchance looking for this.

Oliver holds the answering machine MINI-TAPE in his hand.

MR. PENNINGTON

What are you doing with that Oliver?

OLIVER

Just keeping it safe sir. I had an insider tip that someone might try to sabotage it.

Oliver saunters to the answering machine and inserts the tape.

RONNIE

Why are you doing this?

OLIVER

I'm just trying to make sure everyone gets what they deserve.

Oliver goes to press "PLAY"--

RONNIE

Wait!

Oliver, grinning like the Cheshire Cat, stops his finger on the surface of the button.

OLIVER

...Yes?

Ronnie closes his eyes. He's out of ideas.

RONNIE

Nothing, just play it.

Oliver PRESSES PLAY on the answering machine...

ANSWERING MACHINE

You have 1 new message.

The tape starts playing - it's Oliver's VOICE:

OLIVER (V.O.)

Hi, Mr. Pennington. Oliver here. Just wanted to mention something I forgot in yesterday's meeting. Ronnie was crucial in closing that LA Zoo deal. Couldn't of done it without his guidance. That's all. Nighty night sir.

ANSWERING MACHINE  
End of message.

All three of them stand in silence for a moment.

MR. PENNINGTON  
Well, that was a very noble gesture  
Oliver. You surprise me.

RONNIE  
...me too.

MR. PENNINGTON  
Oliver, could you give me and  
Ronnie a moment alone.

Oliver excuses himself from the room. Ronnie is too tired and  
confused to say anything.

As soon as they're alone, Mr. Pennington HUGS him.

MR. PENNINGTON  
Good morning Mr. Vice-President!

RONNIE  
...I got the promotion.

MR. PENNINGTON  
I argued the board til I was blue  
in the face! I'm gonna groom you  
Ronnie. Someday all this can be  
yours: a veritable floormat empire!

Ronnie's eyes light up!

RONNIE  
Mr. Pennington, I'm speechless. I  
finally have...a real title.

MR. PENNINGTON  
Just tell me you're ready for this  
Ronnie. You can't be halfway into  
floormats. Your heart's gotta be  
totally committed to this.

Ronnie's pumped up!

RONNIE  
Mr. Pennington, I'm...

Ronnie stops himself. He looks deeply contemplative for a  
moment, that manages a self-effacing chuckle.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE OFFICE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ronnie exits the office. He takes off Teddy's clip-on tie and starts rolling up his sleeves. As he walks to the elevator, he sees Oliver waiting meekly in the corner.

OLIVER  
 Didn't think you'd get here in  
 time. Thought you might need some  
 help.

Oliver fearfully hands him the ORIGINAL MINI-TAPE. Ronnie looks at Oliver curiously.

OLIVER  
 About last night--

Ronnie's hold's up his hand, silencing him.

RONNIE  
 So what did I really say on the  
 tape anyway?

OLIVER  
 Pretty crazy stuff.

RONNIE  
 Yeah?

OLIVER  
 You quit and told Mr. Pennington to  
 give me the VP job.

Long pause. Ronnie puts his head in his hands.

RONNIE  
 Well, the last seven hours of my  
 life were certainly productive.

OLIVER  
 What do you mean?

Ronnie laughs.

RONNIE  
 Mr. Pennington wants to see you in  
 his office. You guys have a lot to  
 talk about, seeing as how I just  
 quit and told him to give you the  
 VP job.

Oliver looks ecstatic, but then confused.

OLIVER  
 I don't understand.

Ronnie drops the tape in the trash, and gets in the elevator.

RONNIE  
Hey Oliver, next time me and the  
guys do something fun, we'll be  
sure to give you a call.

OLIVER  
...Really?

RONNIE  
Nope. We all hate you.

Ronnie smiles as the elevator doors close on Oliver.

EXT. PARKING LOT - PENNINGTON MATS INC. - 8:55 AM

Ronnie exits the building with the body language of a man on his first day out of prison, but with a face that still registers the pain and exhaustion of 30 years in lockup.

Teddy's waiting for him, leaning up against his car, playing with a YO-YO.

TEDDY  
Well that was fast. Everything turn  
out okay.

RONNIE  
I think so. Yeah.

TEDDY  
Well good.

Ronnie leans next to him against the car.

RONNIE  
You know, I ended up running into  
Keoko last night.

TEDDY  
No shit - what happened?

Ronnie lowers his head.

RONNIE  
Fucked it up. Not my fault really.  
She sees something in me that's  
just not there.

A long silence.

TEDDY  
Well, I'm sorry man. I'll tell ya  
one thing, I'm never tricking you  
into thinking you're drunk again.

Ronnie ever so slowly turns towards Teddy who happily continues yo-yo'ing.

RONNIE  
...come again?

TEDDY  
C'mon, that was straight up  
Hawaiian Punch. I don't trust you  
to hold your liquor.

RONNIE  
...there was no alcohol in that  
drink you gave me?

TEDDY  
But that didn't stop you from  
turning into a drunken retard  
anyway. I swear, it's like deep  
down you just love being that  
drunken retard!

Ronnie performs a yo-yo trick.

TEDDY  
...Hey look - walk the dog!

Ronnie starts VIOLENTLY SHAKING Teddy!

RONNIE  
If I wasn't drunk, then why did I  
blackout for 4 hours!?

TEDDY  
I dunno - probably has something to  
do with that golfball on your  
forehead!

Ronnie lets go of Teddy and touches the walnut-sized lump on his forehead where he fell in the gas station bathroom.

RONNIE  
...I wasn't drunk last night.

TEDDY  
No sir.

Ronnie suddenly has a look of panic on his face. He checks his watch, then leaps back in the car.

RONNIE  
Give me the keys!

TEDDY  
Again?

RONNIE  
We've gotta drive to the airport  
right now!

Teddy sighs and hops in the passenger seat. The car SCREAMS OFF.

INT. CAR - OUTSIDE INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL - LAX - 9:20AM  
Our heroes speed around the far end of the LAX horseshoe.

TEDDY  
What airline are we looking for?

RONNIE  
I don't know - is this  
international?

Before Teddy can answer, Ronnie once more leaps from the car.

TEDDY  
(frustrated)  
...So, I'll just circle for a  
while. Yeah. No problem.

INT. INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL - LAX - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie races across the terminal floor, looking for a departures monitor.

INSERT MONITOR: Gate 18; Flight 2931 to Tokyo...NOW BOARDING.

Ronnie bounds up the escalator to the security line. He side-steps the TSA LADY checking tickets and runs to the front of the line to speak with the X-RAY ATTENDANT, a portly Hispanic man with a bushy moustache.

RONNIE  
Okay, I'm gonna be straight with  
you: I don't have my passport and I  
don't have a ticket. But I gotta  
get in there.

X-RAY ATTENDANT  
What!?

RONNIE  
Just for a couple minutes!

X-RAY ATTENDANT  
This isn't 1988! You're in a  
goddamn airport! You see this TSA  
badge? I oughta waterboard your  
dumb ass just for asking!

Ronnie's hysterical.

RONNIE  
Look, it's about a girl. A girl I'm  
in love with! Haven't you ever been  
in love!?

Ronnie grabs the X-Ray attendant by the collar hysterically.

RONNIE  
Are you made of stone!?!?

X-RAY ATTENDANT 2 (O.S.)  
Ronnie, is that you?

X-RAY ATTENDANT  
You know this clown!?

X-RAY ATTENDANT #2, 40's, with the gruff demeanor of a  
longshoreman, squints at Ronnie, then nods in confirmation.

X-RAY ATTENDANT 2  
Yup...once stayed up all night in  
the terminal 2 bar with this  
feller. Remember, when me and  
Sheila were fightin' all the time.  
Well, Ronnie's advice saved my  
marriage.

X-Ray Attendant #2 puts his arm around Ronnie.

X-RAY ATTENDANT 2  
This is about that Keoko gal ain't  
it?

Ronnie nods dumbfounded. No memory whatsoever.

X-RAY ATTENDANT 2  
Don't let her get on the plane this  
time, Ronnie! Run - I can give you  
five minutes.

Ronnie's already off and running.

RONNIE  
Ummm...thanks x-ray machine guy!

INT. DEPARTURES CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS - 9:40 AM

Ronnie spins wildly, scanning the gates as he runs--

Finally Ronnie nears JAL Gate 18, departing for Tokyo.

RONNIE'S POV: Keoko's at the front of the line having her  
ticket scanned. She enters the accordion tunnel leading to  
the plane, disappearing from sight.

RONNIE  
KEOKO!!!

Everyone stops and turns to stare at Ronnie, but Keoko doesn't reappear.

...Then after a long beat, Keoko reverses back up the tunnel. She does not look pleased.

Ronnie runs up to the gate but is stopped by the JAL GATE CHECKER.

JAL GATE CHECKER  
Unless you have a boarding pass,  
you can't come past here sir!

KEOKO  
What are you doing here Ronnie?

Ronnie is completely out of breath. He stands there panting with his hands on his knees.

RONNIE  
Look, I didn't mean what I said  
last night.

KEOKO  
You don't seem to mean a lot of  
what you say.

RONNIE  
No!...but, I meant the first stuff.  
On the phone! I wasn't drunk when I  
left that message. That was the  
real me. I'm not afraid anymore.

KEOKO  
Ronnie, my flight is boarding...

Keoko cracks just a bit. Ronnie sees he has a chance.

RONNIE  
Keoko, I will get on the next  
flight to Tokyo.

KEOKO  
...Last night we had...a moment,  
but we messed it up.

RONNIE  
No - you said you didn't want  
perfect moments. Remember? Well,  
when have you ever had more  
imperfect moments than last night?

JAL GATE CHECKER  
Ma'am, this is final boarding.

RONNIE  
Keoko, I'm coming with you!

KEOKO  
NO!!!

Ronnie's startled by Keoko's severity. Everyone still in line, turns in alarm to stare at our twosome. Keoko looks terrified.

KEOKO  
Maybe you were right before,  
y'know? I can't fucking sit still.  
You'll come to Tokyo, and then in  
three weeks I'll get bored and  
wanna go to Sao Paolo. And then  
Amsterdam. And on Monday I might  
decide to become a scuba  
instructor. And on Tuesday a Go-Go  
dancer. I don't fucking know. And  
just cause I have feelings for you  
today, doesn't guarantee I'll feel  
that way tomorrow. And none of that  
is fair to you, but that's the way  
it is.

Ronnie can't muster an answer.

KEOKO (CONT'D)  
Look, I'll be back sometime next  
year, I promise. I'll be more  
mature. Maybe we can, you know,  
talk about things then.

RONNIE  
...Keoko, I'm in love with you.  
Please stay.

Keoko breaks eye-contact and flees down the tunnel.

Ronnie just stands there, his heart shattered.

EXT. INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL - LAX - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ronnie sleepwalks outside, his body limp.

He stares up at the sky just in time to see the silver body  
of the JAL JET soar into the sky.

He tracks along the sidewalk for a couple beats, gazing  
intently up at the plane...

When he finally returns his vision to eye-level, he's face-to-  
face with Keoko. She looks out of breath.

KEOKO  
...Hey nerd.

Ronnie blinks furiously in disbelief.

                  RONNIE  
...you're still here?

                  KEOKO  
I'm still here.

                  RONNIE  
But...why?

                  KEOKO  
I guess I started thinking about  
what I had to lose.

Keoko looks downwards, almost embarrassed.

                  KEOKO  
Everyday, I get asked to leave and  
go somewhere new, but you're the  
only one that ever asks me to stay.

Ronnie's draws her close. They KISS long and tenderly.

After a moment, Teddy pulls up in his car and HONKS. He waves  
at the happy couple. They smile back.

INT. TEDDY'S CAR - INGLEWOOD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Teddy chauffeurs as Ronnie and Keoko make out in the back  
seat.

                  TEDDY  
Hate to ruin the moment love birds,  
but I gotta stop for gas.

Teddy turns into the same gas station where our adventure  
started last night.

All three of them notice a LARGE CROWD had congregated in the  
area just behind the gas station.

                  TEDDY  
...Well that's weird.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - BEHIND GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Ronnie, Keoko, and Teddy, walk up to a LARGE CROWD OF  
SPECTATORS, all gawking at the side of a warehouse wall.  
People are taking pictures with their cell-phone cameras, and  
talking in awed, hushed voices.

Then Ronnie sees what they're looking at...

It's a massive GRAFFITI MURAL, a true wall burner, completely covering the side of a two-story warehouse:

The style is bizarre and surreal, but it's clearly a variation on the scene from Ronnie's dream: *There's a sprawling cityscape in the midst of a SNOWSTORM. In the center of the city is a frozen lake, and in the center of the lake is an island. In the center of the island, a boy and a girl warm themselves by a ROARING FIRE.*

At the base of the wall are scores of the EMPTY SPRAY-PAINT CANS from the prior night.

                  TEDDY  
You did this last night!?

                  RONNIE  
...it would seem so.

Keoko looks very serious suddenly. Then she laughs.

                  KEOKO  
Oh Ronnie, it's...perfect.

Ronnie beams with pride.

                  TEDDY  
...It's the most amazing work  
you've ever done!

Teddy stands on a crate and addresses the crowd:

                  TEDDY  
Everyone, I'd like to introduce the  
artist of this piece, Ronnie  
Epstein!

The crowd starts whistling and applauding. Delighted, Keoko hugs Ronnie.

A couple of BUSINESS MEN emerge from the crowd, jostling to reach Teddy, cutting each other off--

                  BUSINESS MAN #1  
Sir, I represent some investors  
from Orange County who might be  
very interested in your clients'  
work--

                  BUSINESS MAN #2  
(handing Teddy his card)  
You know, we're opening a new law  
office in Century City and there's  
a lot of blank walls that might be  
perfect for--

TEDDY

Everybody calm down! I will talk to you one at a time in my office which is temporarily located behind those Carl's Jr. dumpsters.

While Teddy negotiates the throng, a husky bearded man in a John Deere hat, BILL WENDALL, 50's, approaches Ronnie

BILL

You the artist?

RONNIE

...I guess I am.

BILL

Cause this here's my warehouse.

RONNIE

Oh...I'm really sorry. I'll clean it off for you.

BILL

You better not. I think it's dandy. What do ya call it?

RONNIE

...I'm not sure. Graffiti pieces don't usually get a name.

BILL

Well if I want it here, I don't reckon it counts as graffiti, do it?

RONNIE

Maybe not.

BILL

So you should give it a name.

Ronnie thinks for a moment, then smiles.

CUT TO BLACK.

INTERTITLE: "DRUNK-DIALING"

**T H E E N D**