

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

An original screenplay
by Gerald DiPego

November 7, 1998

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FADE IN:

EXT. CHASE'S HOUSE - MORNING

A small, very well-kept home in an expensive suburb of San Francisco. We linger on the front door for a few seconds -- and that's the last lingering we do because now that door is opening and out comes CHASE BANNER, 35, all motion, talk and sharp focus. She is attractive, well dressed, but comfortably -- no-nonsense in all aspects. She is talking on a mobile phone with a headset, leaving her hands free for briefcase-with-laptop, steaming grande cup of coffee, bottle of water and car keys with remote lock/alarm -- which is making her expensive car CHIRP and blink as it waits for her in the drive.

CHASE

(on phone)

He never checks his E-mail so print it out and put it on his desk. Oh, I'm going to want to go over all the narration for the classroom series and change the music on our "Stonehenge" game. Listen:

She begins HUMMING a melody as she is reaching her car, finding that her stone deer statue (just a little one) has fallen over in the grass. She uses a toe to lift and stand the statue as she carefully opens her car door, not spilling any coffee, loads in her briefcase, still HUMMING.

CHASE

Yes, tape this so I don't forget it.

INT. CHASE'S CAR

She continues to HUM the melody as she settles into her seat, places the coffee in the cup-holder, keys in the ignition.

CHASE

Got it? Fine. I'm starting now.

She clicks off her phone, takes off the headset, does an automatic primp to her hair, starts the engine, puts both hands on the wheel and takes a long deep breath, lets it out, relaxing a moment, letting loose, closing her eyes. They do not open. Her head nods. She is falling asleep. Her head rocks up, catching herself, but her eyes do not open. Her head nods again. She sleeps. We watch her sleep, one of the few moments we will ever see her still. She has a sweet, soft vulnerability asleep.

Her phone RINGS. She crashes out of sleep, picks up the phone and is immediately focused and speaking.

CHASE

Hi, Did Scheffield confirm 10:45?
 Good. I want Ruth, Henry and Buzz in
 my office when I arrive with updates
 on the Worldnews CD-Rom. Did you call
me? Uh-huh. M-hm. Yes. Do I need
 to know this?

She clicks off and drives away. We linger on the house and
 lawn. The little deer statue falls over.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING - ESTABLISHING

INT. BANNER EDULINK OFFICES - ESTABLISHING

A small, extremely high tech, thriving software company,
 creating, manufacturing and marketing educational materials
 and games.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - MORNING

Chase Banner is the owner and CEO of the company with a great
 office and splendid view, but it is a place to work -- with
 computer, drawing table, conference round-table, etc.

Her executive secretary, CHINA DAVIS, 29, is preparing for
 her boss's arrival as the three executives Chase asked for
 drift about, waiting. China is very bright and efficient
 with a tongue-in-cheek tilt of humor not everyone catches.

The executives: two suits: HENRY and RUTH, and a lab-coated
 messy hyper woman nicknamed BUZZ are quietly waiting until
 Henry happens to glance at the appointment book on Chase's
 desk.

HENRY

Scheffield? Aaron Scheffield is
 coming in this morning?

BUZZ

Who?

RUTH

(also surprised)
 Executive search firm. Why?

They all turn to China, who raises eyebrows and shrugs,
 innocent. The execs are worried now.

RUTH

You don't make an appointment with a
 head-hunter unless you're hunting for
 a head. Since we're fully staffed,
 that means somebody's getting the ax.
 Check my logic.

They stare at her.

HENRY
You're just saying that because she
says that. "Check my logic."

RUTH
Does she?

BUZZ
She always says that.

Ruth shrugs this off, concerned ...

RUTH
Well, who does she want to replace?
Henry, you're the most vulnerable ...

HENRY
(sits)
Oh God.

RUTH
Your game division's been way off.
Check my ...
(catches herself)
Logic -- I said it again. China, has
she heard me say that? Does she think
I mimic her?

CHINA
I don't know. She never talks about
you.

HENRY
Wouldn't you think she'd sit me down
and discuss it with me ... ?

CHINA
She wouldn't have time.

HENRY
So it is me.

CHINA
It might not be anybody. Scheffield
is a friend of her father's.

BUZZ
So this could be social.

They all look at each other -- and then all shake their
heads.

ALL
No. No way.

CHINA

Ready?

China glances at her watch, then the door. Everybody takes a breath. Chase, the whirlwind, enters. She gets settled at her desk, prepares for the day, logs on her computer, all the while talking and listening and not missing a thing. There is no small talk beyond 'hi.' She is not mean. They don't fear her. She is just very very hard to keep up with.

CHASE

Marketing?

RUTH

We think the "Worldnews" software should be released in a classroom edition and a gift edition, targeting parents -- with a slogan such as "Give your child the world." These are sketches for packaging: one for schools, one for ...

CHASE

Blend the best of both boxes into one to keep costs down, and come up with six alternatives to the word 'child' in that slogan, such as 'student.' Let's go on.

RUTH

We'd like to have a roundtable to discuss the best colors for packaging, based on the samples we distributed ...

CHASE

The gold-on-brown. Let's go on.

RUTH

Oh. Well, that's all. We're on track for the release date. So ...

CHASE

R and D?

BUZZ

There's a problem in the animation of segment 4 that Yatori says doesn't matter, but I ...

CHASE

The problem is?

BUZZ

Remember the teacher-at-the-blackboard segment? The little teacher with tufts of white hair and the ... the bowtie that keeps twirling every time he ...

CHASE

Buzz. Deep breath.

Buzz takes a deep breath.

CHASE

Now. Eight words. One sentence. One breath. "The problem."

Buzz is catatonic a moment, then tries to work this out, counting out each word.

BUZZ

The ... teacher ... is ... righthanded ... then ... lefthanded ... writing ... chalk ...

Out of words, she mimics this.

CHASE

Leave it as is. Anything else? On track? Let's go on. Games?

Henry is very concerned about losing his job.

HENRY

Had a departmental meeting at my home over the weekend. I can do that now because of the larger home that Beth and I bought. I feel the big mortgage is worth it for the extra room ...

CHASE

Do I need to know this?

He gives up, sighs, hands her a report.

HENRY

This is an update on the three game spinoffs we recommend. Anything else we need to discuss, Chase?

CHASE

I want to present a rough of 'Worldnews' to a focus group of educators next week. China, set this up. 12 people. 6 teachers.

(MORE)

CHASE (CONT'D)

6 administrators. Half men. Half women. Two African Americans. Two Hispanics. Two Asians. One gay man. One gay woman. Got that?

CHINA

What if I can find a gay hispanic administrator who also teaches?

CHASE

Then we'll only need ten. That's everything then. Thank you.

The execs leave. China moves to the refrigerator, setting up a breakfast of grapefruit and a bagel which she shares with Chase, during ...

CHINA

Did you sleep last night?

CHASE

I don't think I've slept in at least ...

(realizing)

I never sleep anymore.

CHINA

You must sleep. You're just not aware of sleeping.

CHASE

I slept in the car.

CHINA

On the way here?!

Chase takes a bite of grapefruit, makes a sour face.

CHASE

What's with my department heads? Gad!

CHINA

They're afraid for their jobs. They know Scheffield is coming in. Who are we replacing?

CHASE

Last night I was thinking while I wasn't sleeping. I'm 35. Do I want to be single forever?

China stops in mid-bite.

CHINA

I didn't think you thought about things like that.

CHASE

I decided I don't want to be single forever.

CHINA

I'm amazed. Are we dating?

CHASE

Who has time? How did you meet, uhhh, your husband?

CHINA

His name is Harold. You've met Harold. I talk about Harold all the time.

CHASE

Do I need to remember that?

CHINA

Hiking. The Sierra Club. You meet a lot of healthy men with good shoes.

CHASE

How many hikes did you hike before you met him? How many men did you date before him?

CHINA

Uhh, 30 hikes? Countless men.

CHASE

My point.

CHINA

What is your point?

They are both eating, making sour faces; Chase is reading over Henry's report, during ...

CHASE

I've been alone for the first half of my life. I want a husband for the second half, but I don't have time for comparison shopping.

CHINA

What's the answer?

CHASE

Scheffield.

CHINA

You're going to marry Aaron Scheffield?!

CHASE

No. I'm going to hire Aaron Scheffield.

CHINA

To find you a ... ?

CHASE

Check my logic. I give Scheffield all the qualifications I want in a husband. He studies the marketplace, does interviews, provides candidates for the position.

CHINA

He walks in here, and you say, 'Find me a...'

CHASE

Partner. I'll tell him I want to share responsibilities with a CO-CEO. The qualifications for a CO-CEO for this company are the qualifications I'd want in a husband: the experience, the intelligence, dedication to the work, loyalty. Scheffield'll conduct the search without mentioning me or the company. He often does that. He'll present his top choices. I'll study the reports.

CHINA

And then?

CHASE

Then I'll ... arrange to meet the top candidates socially. They won't connect me with the job search. We'll just 'happen to meet.' I'll already know so much about them, what interests them ...

CHINA

How do you know these top candidates will ... I mean, you're great, but ...

CHASE

Will they like me? Will we fall in love? We'll see.

(MORE)

CHASE (CONT'D)

But all the preliminaries will be out of the way and I won't be wasting my time on the unlikely, the uninspired and the unthinkable.

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

Later that morning. A distinguished AARON SCHEFFIELD, 62, sits on Chase's couch, relaxed, a leather notebook open in his lap, gold pen in his hand ...

SCHEFFIELD

I understand. Someone to share the burden of responsibility. You're a growing company -- and you work so hard, Chase. I was just talking about that to your parents. Your Dad drove us out to the vineyard on Sunday. Did you know he was experimenting with Pinot noir? Pretty brave, I said ...

CHASE

Do I need to know this?

SCHEFFIELD

Oh. Well ... all right. So ... You're talking about someone with at least 10-15 years experience in the computer business, preferably software. Age approximately ...

CHASE

Thirty-five to forty-five. Ish.

SCHEFFIELD

That's fairly narrow ...

CHASE

Let's move on.

SCHEFFIELD

Oh. All right. Now I'm not even supposed to raise the gender question, but you may prefer a woman, since you'll be working closely ...

CHASE

A man, let's go on.

SCHEFFIELD

Hmm. Obviously doesn't matter if he's married, family ...

CHASE
Single. Uninvolved. Let's go on.

Scheffield smiles, lowers the gold pen.

SCHEFFIELD
I think I understand this, Chase.

CHASE
Oh? Do you?

SCHEFFIELD
You want someone as driven, as single-minded as yourself with no distractions, no life outside of work. You want another you -- don't you.

CHASE
(thinks)
I suppose I do.

SCHEFFIELD
Well ... It's early in the process, but let me throw out a few names. See where we are. It'll help us define ...

CHASE
Like who?

SCHEFFIELD
You know Bob Thornton, CFO at Nexcom?

CHASE
He's overweight.

SCHEFFIELD
What?

CHASE
He's fat, Aaron.

SCHEFFIELD
As long as he can fit through that doorway ...

CHASE
It's a fitness question. Let's go on.

SCHEFFIELD
Hm. Jim Schools, C.O.O. at Harper-Bunch.

CHASE
Have you see how he dresses?

SCHEFFIELD
Chase! What're you looking for? A
CO-CEO or an Armani suit?

CHASE
Definitely not. Not Brooks Brothers
either ...

SCHEFFIELD
Barney's?

CHASE
Saks men's store. Let's go on.

SCHEFFIELD
Al Boraz at K.L.E.

CHASE
Don't know him.

SCHEFFIELD
He's bald.

CHASE
Fine.

SCHEFFIELD
Well, at least you're giving me some
leeway. Have you thought about
salary?

CHASE
High.

SCHEFFIELD
These are all highly paid men. What's
the carrot?

She seems amused by the question.

CHASE
Full partnership ... all the way.

He is taking notes.

SCHEFFIELD
This search'll be expensive. And you
know I get 1/3 of everything he gets
for the first year.

Another amused smile from Chase.

CHASE
We'll see about that.

SCHEFFIELD
The top man at Ramtec. Dan Dorn.

CHASE
Dan Dorn? Sounds like a doorbell.

SCHEFFIELD
He has all the qualifications and then some. Speaks three languages, knows international law and copyright ...

She leans in for this.

CHASE
What's he like?

SCHEFFIELD
Everything you're asking for -- it seems to me. Good leader. Positive ...

CHASE
I mean ... inside. I mean day to day, night to night. I want that explored, too.

SCHEFFIELD
You mean his personal life?

CHASE
Yes.

SCHEFFIELD
Secrets?

CHASE
Exactly.

SCHEFFIELD
Sorry. That's not my job. I'm not a psychiatrist, and I'm not a snoop. I'll interview based on qualifications and goals, throw in some observations on attitude, and that's as far as it goes -- which is far enough to find a working partner, Chase.

She stares at him. Then we

CUT TO:

INT. BANNER EDULINK OFFICES - CORRIDOR - DAY

Chase and China are walking briskly down the hallway to the elevators.

CHASE
We're going to need a private
investigator.

CHINA
For what?

CHASE
For the search. After Scheffield
delivers the top candidates, it isn't
over. I'll need to know these men in
depth.

CHINA
So, you'll meet them. You'll ask
them.

CHASE
Men don't reveal their inner selves
until ... when?

CHINA
Fourth date. Usually after sex.

CHASE
Who has time?

They reach the elevator as the door opens. Chase enters.
China is handing her her briefcase, notes, address for her
lunch.

CHASE
Car keys?

CHINA
A cab is waiting. You're 15 minutes
late. Do we know any?

The elevator door is closing on Chase's questioning
expression -- so China shouts in a whisper ...

CHINA
Private investigators.

Chase SHOUTS through the doors from her descending elevator.

CHASE'S VOICE
(descending)
When I worked for Apple, we used a
company called ...

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Focused on an office door lettered: STANLEY INVESTIGATIVE SERVICES, and from inside we hear a man shouting.

MAN'S VOICE

Goddammit!

"STAN" STANLEY, sixty and a little beaten down comes out of the door, fuming, into the slightly shabby hallway and is followed by the company receptionist ...

RECEPTIONIST

Stan -- where you going?

STAN

His goddamn phone's unplugged again.

RECEPTIONIST

Whose phone?

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

As Stan KNOCKS on an apartment door, SHOUTING ...

STAN

Buddy! Damn it -- Buddy!

He's knocking loudly when a door opens across the hall, and a big angry neighbor-man gives Stan a scowl. Stan grins sheepishly, knocks very SOFTLY on the door and WHISPERS ...

STAN

Buddy. Come on.

The angry man goes back into his apartment. Stan sighs, looks about. He takes a small case out of his pocket, looks about again as he removes lock-picks from this case.

INT. BUDDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Stan enters what would be a moderately-nice two-bedroom apartment if it were ever picked-up, cared for, cleared of its dirty laundry and empty booze bottles -- and the walls weren't written on. From the table where the telephone sits blooms an explosion of phone numbers scrawled on the wall with marker pens, multicolored. Spreading out from there are addresses and things to remember ("Feed the fish" "Garbage day Tues." "Recycle" "Call bank" "Bury the fish") and even philosophical statements: "Go ahead and sweat the small stuff. What else is there, for christ sake."

Stan shakes his head like a concerned uncle and looks about for a sleeping or dead ...

STAN

Buddy?

He checks the floor behind the couch and even under the bed, then he sits on this unmade bed and sighs and stares at the only clean, untouched wall where hangs a framed drawing, very good charcoal and pencil portrait of a man in his early 30s. Buddy. Handsome man.

INT. BAR - DAY

BUDDY HALLIBECK sits in a neighborhood bar that is empty except for him, the barkeep and a man slouched over and asleep at the end of the bar. Buddy's not in his thirties anymore. Maybe not far beyond, but it's hard to tell. The booze has carved into his good looks a bit, hair's awry, needs a shave, but the eyes are clear enough. He's sipping an early pick-me-up and holding forth to the sleeping customer.

BUDDY

I had Minnesota with 4 points. Not 5. Four. One more point and you know what? You know what my bank account would be, the type of place I'd be patronizing and the quality of the clientele who'd be sleeping on the antique mahogany bar? Hm?

The bartender's busy doing inventory, but he says ...

BARTENDER

Still betting the sports book, hah, Buddy? Lookin' for that clean-up hit. Ever get it?

BUDDY

Lotsa times.

BARTENDER

Guess you don't put your money into your wardrobe.

Buddy glances at his mismatched, wrinkled clothing.

BUDDY

I'm undercover.

BARTENDER

Deep.

BUDDY

Deep.

And Buddy drinks.

INT. BUDDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Back to Stan, waiting, and rising eagerly when he hears a key in the front door. He walks there as the door opens -- and is surprised to be staring at a beautiful young woman who is both sad-eyed and pissed off. This is Claire. He knows her.

CLAIRE

Where is he, Stan?

STAN

Don't know. I'm waiting. There's a job!

CLAIRE

Tell him to call me.

STAN

Will do.

Her sad-mad eyes rake the apartment.

CLAIRE

God, it stinks in here.

She leaves, and Stan begins to study those phone numbers on the wall. He finds a string of names that look like bars: "Mike's" "Jimmy's" "Allendon Bar and Grill." He picks up the phone, plugs the cord into the wall-jack and dials the first bar.

INT. UPSCALE BAR - DAY

We watch first an early coffee meeting, then a lunch, then an early dinner as Aaron Scheffield conducts his interviews of the candidates. He is presently talking to DAN DORN, 40, a fit and hearty guy. We jump into the middle of this and just for a moment.

SCHEFFIELD

I can't mention the company.

DORN

Software?

SCHEFFIELD

I'll say that much.

DORN

You can tell me what the position is.

SCHEFFIELD

It's on top.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. BAR AND GRILL - DAY

Later. Schefffield and candidate number two, a very handsome and polished Paul Dulac, 42, supremely confident, relaxed, charming ...

DULAC

Why should I leave Everet-Stanzell?

SCHEFFFIELD

You'll never run the show. Everet's your age -- there to stay. This could be a full partnership.

DULAC

But you haven't said with whom.

SCHEFFFIELD

I never say 'whom.'

DULAC

I could spend all this time interviewing, make the change, only to find myself in bed with the wrong partner.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Schefffield and JON STILLERMAN, 38, candidate number 3, slightly geeky and very busy but charming in his way. He's on his cell phone.

STILLERMAN

Go ahead. I'm on hold.

SCHEFFFIELD

It's a very exciting, fast growing company. I'll say that much.

STILLERMAN

I think you just surged.

SCHEFFFIELD

I what?

STILLERMAN

(to Schefffield)

Not you.

(to phone)

Play it safe. Download everything.

(to Schefffield)

You mentioned control?

SCHEFFIELD

You'd be at the very seat of power,
Jon. Hands on.

Jon is eating a fruit plate. The waiter places a broiled fish in front of Scheffield.

SCHEFFIELD

Ahh, you have to taste this fish, Jon.
It's caught off the coast of Peru,
actually off an island off Peru.
It's a relative of the tuna family but
nothing like the ahi or the onu or the
mahi mahi ...

Stillerman covers his cell phone to ask ...

STILLERMAN

Excuse me. Do I need to know this?

INT. BANNER - EDULINK OFFICE LOBBY - DAY

The next day. Stan and Buddy sit and wait in the very modern lobby. Buddy slouches in his chair and drums absently on the chair arms. He is still ruffled, but much cleaned up from yesterday. Stan is nervous. Buddy is into some intricate Latin rhythms on the chair arms. The receptionist stares. Stan's eyes plead. Suddenly MUSIC erupts from not far away -- with a rock beat. Buddy stands, looking about. He walks into a hallway, following the music as Stan mouths where are you going?! and the receptionist looks upset and Buddy exits the lobby with a little bounce in time to the music, pretty light on his feet.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

In a glass-walled conference room Chase is presenting her new educational software program "Worldnews" to a focus group. The executive, Ruth stands nearby. Chase has a remote control in her hand. Six T.V. monitors show crisp pictures of this state-of-the-art program with graphics, film clips, narration -- and the MUSIC that has attracted Buddy. Chase is focused and dynamic.

CHASE

Your student encounters an historical event -- a war, a flood, a revolution, and invention -- how will he or she absorb this? How will the student relate it to the contemporary world?

What if these historical events are covered in the style of today's media?

On all the monitors appears a newspaper front page with banner headline "Unknown World Discovered Across Ocean," a photo of Columbus and subhead "Spain's Exploration Gambit Promises High Rewards."

CHASE

A few more samples ...

As she hits the remote, we see the earth spinning, and we come in tight on Asia. The world stops as maps of the central Asian steppes appear ...

NARRATOR

Correspondents in Central Asia report a gathering of nomadic tribes under a leader called Genghis Khan ...

As Chase swishes from one beat to the next in this program, we see Buddy arrive outside the glass wall and stop and watch the show and, especially, watch Chase.

ANIMATED PROFESSOR

(on screen)

I don't believe these are raids for pillage and profit. An empire is being forged here.

The screen now shows "Menu:" "Empire," "Mongol Empire," "Roman Empire," "British Empire..." But Chase fast-forwards again and the globe turns and maps of Europe appear. Buddy is really staring now.

NARRATOR

While the armies of Ghengis Kahn are invading China, another army is being formed, made up of children. The 30,000 member Children's Crusade is marching through Europe on its way to conquer the Holy Land. Correspondent Elizabeth Catana reports from France.

Chase freezes the program there.

CHASE

We present history to your student -- first in media terms: the headlines, the on-the-spot coverage. Then we offer a menu for exploration in depth.

She tosses the remote to Ruth and keeps her eyes on her rapt audience.

CHASE

History ... it's the guidebook. It's the manual.

(MORE)

CHASE (CONT'D)

We keep dropping it, losing it,
ignoring it. Everyone jokes -- if
only life came with an instruction
book. It does. It's history.

As she says that, her eyes land on Buddy's face outside the
glass wall and their eyes lock. He stares with real
appreciation, admiration. He smiles. She looks away.

CHASE

Ruth Fandell will take over now. I
appreciate your coming in. I hope you
like our baby.

She leaves to a smattering of applause and walks out into
the ...

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

.... passing Buddy, who catches up and walks beside her
as ...

CHASE

Who are you?

BUDDY

I'm your two o'clock.

CHASE

Oh. Yes. Well, it's one fifty-four.
Excuse me.

She walks into the executive office area, leaving him there.
He checks his watch and grins and shakes his head, admiring
again, as Stan joins him, worried.

BUDDY

She's something, Stan.

STAN

Don't blow this, Buddy. Jesus. How
long since I've had something
corporate.

Buddy is staring after Chase.

BUDDY

You've never had anything corporate.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

A few minutes later. Chase is at her desk, headset phone in
place, having a conversation as she works at her computer and
China enters excitedly with three folders.

CHASE

(to phone)

Hector ... Hector, just give me the bones, not the fat. One second.

She looks up as China puts the folders on her desk -- with a smile.

CHINA

These are the three top candidates from Aaron Scheffield.

CHASE

Yes, Hector, go ahead -- in one sentence.

She and China open the first folder. It shows an 8x10 of Dan Dorn, resumes etc. They open the second folder to the photo of Paul DuLac, and they both look at each other and mouth the word 'wow.' They open the third to see the slightly nerdy but interesting Jon Stillerman.

CHASE

Yes, Hector. You told me. I don't need you to repeat it. I have a memory for that.

CHINA

It's two o'clock.

Chase gestures for her to let in the waiting two o'clock meeting. China moves toward the door and ushers in Buddy and Stan.

CHINA

This is Al Stanley and ... Buddy Hallibeck of Stanley investigative services ...

Stan perches on a chair. Buddy slouches into another.

CHASE

(to phone)

You're going to want 800 thousand. I'll refuse, and you'll go to seven and a half. My limit is six and a quarter. We can dance all day or make you a back-end deal. I'm in a meeting now. Call me back in ten.

She hangs up, takes off the headset, does the automatic primp. Buddy is further impressed.

CHINA

Gentlemen, this is ...

BUDDY

We know who she is. We're detectives.

He smiles. Chase is staring at each of them. Not impressed.

CHASE

I don't remember you from the MacKintosh case. Didn't you conduct an investigation for Apple in 1987?

Stan looks helpless. Buddy begins to laugh a muffled laugh. They all look at him. He can't keep it in. He laughs.

BUDDY

Sorry. Sorry. There was a company out of San Jose then called Phelps-Stanley. They've busted up. Retired. Different outfit.

CHASE

Oh.

China looks chagrined, apologetic.

CHINA

Sorry. I only had the name and ...

STAN

I could fax a list of references, but ... most of our clients are confidential, so ...

CHASE

(shrugs)

Our mistake, gentlemen. Sorry for the inconvenience. It's a very busy day.

She throws a look to China.

CHINA

I'll uhh show you out.

Stan rises and sighs and starts to leave behind China, but Buddy only leans forward in his chair, elbows on knees.

BUDDY

Look, if you ask your peers to recommend a private investigator, they'll know something's going on. You don't want that, so what'll you do? The yellow pages? Here we are. We've got 8 minutes before your phone call comes back. What've you got? Somebody stealing equipment?

(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Somebody stealing secrets? A simple background check? An in-depth profile.

CHASE

Bingo.

BUDDY

My specialty.

STAN

Mr. Hallibeck is in charge of our field teams.

CHASE

Why do you need to field a team? This isn't soccer.

BUDDY

It's not some guy in a trench coat walking 20 yards behind the subject either, ducking into doorways. Bogart is dead, God bless 'im. Four people. Two cars. We're on the subject day and night. Whereabouts and whyabouts. Who with and how long. Work life, night life, sex life. Habits, rituals, preferences and prejudices. The whole pattern of a life, and we lay it in your lap in say ... three days. We're not pretty, but we're pretty good.

She doesn't want to show it, but she is a bit impressed with this guy.

STAN

Mr. Hallibeck and I spent many years together on the city's police force.

Buddy surreptitiously holds up 3 fingers. Stan doesn't see this. China bites off a smile and even Chase lets some humor lighten her look -- a little.

BUDDY

Absolute discretion, secrecy, mums-the-word, and nobody hears our reports except you or whoever you say, right Stan?

STAN

Certainly.

CHASE
Let me think about it. I might give
your team a try-out.

BUDDY
Just send me in, coach.

He winks at her and leaves -- along with Stan and China.
Chase watches him go.

EXT. STREET - DAY

As Buddy and Stan walk away from the office building toward
Stan's car.

BUDDY
Not one trace of bullshit. She's
really something.

STAN
Don't be an idiot.

BUDDY
Why change now?

STAN
Don't even think about it.

BUDDY
Ever try not thinking about something?
If you're trying not to think about
it, you're thinking about it. It's
better to think about it real hard and
get over it.

STAN
Fine. Get over it.

BUDDY
I will. But first I have to think
about it.

EXT. BUDDY'S STREET - DAY

Stan is dropping Buddy off at Buddy's apartment building.

STAN
Thanks for today, Buddy. Hey, stay
dry for God's sake. I need you.

Buddy gives him a backward wave as he walks into the
building.

STAN
And leave your phone plugged in!

INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

As Buddy trudges up the stairs to his door. He hears his PHONE RINGING inside. He doesn't hurry. He comes to his door and sees that someone has written in purple marker pen -- in BIG LETTERS -- on his door. It reads: "CALL ME. CLAIRE." Then in smaller letters, scrawled, "Remember me?"

He stands there. His mood darkens -- and now he hurries, unlocking and entering in order to stop that incessant phone.

INT. BUDDY'S APT. - DAY

As he rushes in, hurries to the phone -- and unplugs it from the wall jack. He stands there, staring at it, at his thoughts, dark and troubled and hopeless.

EXT. CHASE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

From inside we OVERLAP the tick, tick of a computer mouse.

INT. CHASE'S DEN - OFFICE - NIGHT

In her night clothes, she works at the computer, eyes getting a little bleary. An alarm on the computer buzzes, computer voice tells her ...

VOICE

It's 2 am. Go to sleep. Idiot.

She frowns and shuts off the alarm.

CHASE

Lifeless droid.

She sighs and shuts down the computer. As she rises from the desk, her phone rings and she snatches it up.

CHASE

Hello? Oh, hi. I know. Yes. I'm going to bed now. Why are you still up?

INT. CHINA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

China is cradling her 8-month-old son, talking on the phone as we INTERCUT the call.

CHINA

Tommy's having a bad night again.

CHASE

Oh. I'm sorry. Me, too.

(beat)

I've been trying to imagine what it would be like if I was married.

We see now that the three 'candidates' photos are tacked up on the bulletin board at her desk. She looks at them.

CHASE

Maybe I'd want to go to bed at night. Maybe I'd sleep.

CHINA

I read a theory about people who think they never sleep. They go for a sleep test where a video camera is on all night, and it proves to them that they sleep, so then they sleep better.

CHASE

I'll have to try that.

But she's still looking at those men on her bulletin board.

CHASE

What's the worse thing about being married?

CHINA

Closet space.

CHASE

And the best?

CHINA

The best are all cliches, and you hate cliches.

CHASE

Try me.

CHINA

The caring. The sharing. Having someone to scratch every itch you can't reach.

CHASE

They have devices for that.

CHINA

I know. I pay your electric bills.

Chase frowns wryly.

CHASE

We better both try to sleep.

CHINA

Good luck.

They both say good night and hang up -- and Chase looks once more at the three men, then drifts to her bedroom.

INT. CHASE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A few minutes later. She has set up a video camera on a tripod, pointing at her pillow. She checks it, turns it on 'record,' and gets into bed. She lies there, tries to relax. She looks at the camera -- and then makes a horrendous face into the lens.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dan Dorn is walking briskly along a boulevard, dressed for work, briefcase in hand, cheeks rosy and eyes sparkling. As he leaves the frame, we see that two nondescript cars are moving slowly in the same direction, trailing him.

INT. CARS - DAY

This is a SERIES OF SHOTS between car one -- with Buddy and a young man named CHICK -- and car two -- with Stan and an attractive woman named ILSA. They are professional, casual, good at the job.

CHICK

This guy walks everywhere.

BUDDY

He's extremely fit, and he's pissing me off.

(to radio)

Car one to two. Jump out, Stan. We're driving too slow.

STAN

(to radio)

I'm not wearing the right shoes.

ILSA

Me either.

STAN

(to radio)

Subject is entering a restaurant.

Now a NEW VOICE comes on the radio as the cars pull over and Dorn enters a coffee shop.

VOICE

(on radio)

Ooh, a restaurant. That's exciting.

STAN

Who the hell is that?

CHICK
We've got a citizen listening in.

VOICE
(on radio)
That's me.

BUDDY
(surprised)
That's the same guy as last time.

STAN
(to radio)
Listen asshole, this is a government operation. If you don't get off our frequency, we're going to track you down and plant your ass in jail.

BUDDY
Ooh, good one, Stan. Chick, get into that restaurant.

VOICE
(on radio)
You don't scare me.

BUDDY
(to radio)
Listen, you squirrely brat, get a life.

VOICE
(on radio)
Oh, yeah, like you guys have lives.

Buddy clicks off the radio, looks at Chick.

BUDDY
You think he knows us?
(then)
Go ahead in there. I want to know what Dorn eats for breakfast and if he talks to anybody. Bring back some takeout.
(to radio)
Car one to two. Chick's going in.

STAN/ILSA
(on radio)
Bring back some takeout!

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

Chase and China are watching the t.v. set as Chase also works on her computer. We don't see what they're watching. We are

panning around to get behind them. Just as we see the screen -- they're watching the 'sleep' tape of Chase, who is definitely asleep -- Chase points and ...

CHASE

Was that a snore? Did you hear that? Rewind. Turn up the volume. Play it back. Gad.

As they are playing it back and both leaning in, the lab-coated woman, Buzz, enters the office with something important to say, but stops in mid breath, watching them watching Chase sleep. She stares, wondering -- until they notice her, and China snaps off the set.

CHASE

Buzz ... what is it?

BUZZ

Uhh ... You know how much the 'Worldnews' graphics need to be protected? The uhh master portal we're working on? It's like the biggest secret we have. It's like the most secret thing I've ever been given the responsibility to protect. I'm really ... proud of the protection. It's so ...

CHASE

Buzz. Buzz, you're giving me all the fat, and what is it I always ask you to cut down to?

BUZZ

The chase?

CHINA

(whispering)

The bones.

BUZZ

Oh. Yes. Right. Bones! The graphics, the ... animation for our portal ... I needed to protect it.

CHASE

Yes. It is protected. You did protect it. Didn't you?!

BUZZ

I protected it very well.

CHASE

And?

BUZZ

Very well. I'm telling you. Very, very well.

CHASE

You're not telling me. Tell me!

BUZZ

I protected it to the very best of my abilities and knowledge.

Chase is so frustrated ... trying to hold it together.

CHASE

Buzz ... I realize you're trying to tell me. I realize some repetition might be necessary. Some repetition might be necessary. Yes. But now you can tell me -- the gist.

BUZZ

No one can access the master portal because there's a security code.

CHASE

Yes. Yes ... And?

BUZZ

Somebody's trying to break the code.

A pause -- all around.

CHINA

How can you tell?

BUZZ

I set it up that way. Like a web site. I can tell how many hits on the security fence I programmed around the access code and ... There were three. Three hits. Three different tries. So it can't be random. Three.

CHASE

When?

BUZZ

Since I checked it last. I always check it. Twenty-four hours.

CHASE

Can we tell where these hits are from?

BUZZ

From one of our own terminals -- in marketing.

CHASE
Whose terminal?!

BUZZ
Frank Pallaci's.

CHASE
It's Frank?!

CHINA
No. Frank Pallaci's on vacation!
Who's using his terminal?

BUZZ
Nobody.

CHASE
Where are the original drawings, the
schematics?

BUZZ
In the safe.

CHASE
Now? You checked?

BUZZ
Yes. I'll check again.

CHASE
Did you tell anyone about this?

Buzz shakes her head.

CHASE
Don't!

Buzz nods her head and rushes out. Chase turns off her
computer, sits back. She's scared.

CHASE
If someone gets ahold of that portal
and all the techniques we invented to
make it ... before we're ready to
bring out the programs ... holy
cheese!

CHINA
They tried. They couldn't do it.
Maybe that's it. That's the end of
it.

They look at each other again, hoping.

EXT. FANCY RESTAURANT - BAR - EVENING

Those two nondescript cars are parked not far from the bar. The men are outside, leaning on the cars: Buddy, Stan and Chick. Ilsa is inside the bar and is wired. Buddy is in contact with Ilsa on a radio. We hear Ilsa's voice.

ILSA'S VOICE

He's looking.

BUDDY

Every man in there is looking at you, kid.

ILSA'S VOICE

You're so kind, Buddy.

BUDDY

Does your husband know how lucky he is?

ILSA'S VOICE

Give him a call.

BUDDY

Legs or breasts?

INT. UPSCALE BAR - EVENING

Ilsa sits at the end of the bar, leaning her head in her hand. You'd never know she was talking and listening to her radio. Across the room, at a small table, sits Dan Dorn, having a solo drink and now and then glancing at Ilsa's ...

ILSA

Legs. Mm. Now breasts. But careful. Not exactly furtive. Not flirting ...

BUDDY'S VOICE

I love how you mince words, Ilsa. You're a regular chef. Why don't you do the ... thing.

EXT. BAR - EVENING

Buddy says to the others.

BUDDY

She's going to do the thing.

INT. BAR - EVENING

Ilsa checks her watch, takes it off and shakes it, looks around as if 'discovering' Dorn and comes to him.

ILSA
I'm sorry to bother you. Do you have
the correct time?

DORN
Yes. It's ... 7:13.

ILSA
Thank you.

DORN
Your date is late?

ILSA
Oh. No. I'm ... just killing some
time here until ...

DORN
Well, please join me. I'd appreciate
the company. If you don't mind.

EXT. BAR - EVENING

BUDDY
(to others)
Men are so easy -- aren't we? Hey,
Chet!

He flips the radio to Stan and hurries to a well-dressed man
who is on his way into the bar -- this is CHET, a bookie.

BUDDY
What've you got on Michigan?

CHET
Six. It's a sucker's bet.

BUDDY
Good. Give me a grand. Can you carry
it?

CHET
(interested now)
You have some data? What d'you know?

BUDDY
Nothing. It's a sucker's bet. You
carrying?

CHET
(shrugs)
It's your chapter eleven.

He walks into the bar and Buddy rejoins the others. Stan is
listening to Ilsa's wire.

STAN

This Dorn's a real gentleman.

BUDDY

He's getting on my nerves.

INT. BUDDY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Same evening. Somebody's in Buddy's apartment on a step ladder. We only see the legs, pretty woman's legs. We hear the SQUEAK of a marker pen. Now the legs descend. It's Claire. She leaves the marker on a ladder step and walks out in her sad-mad way. We tilt up to the ceiling. She's written letters so large, they nearly spread over the entire ceiling. Just two words. "LAST CHANCE."

EXT. DORN HOME - NIGHT

Later that night. We are panning off an expensive little house-on-an-acre, a few lights on inside. Dan Dorn passes one of the windows, turns on a t.v. We pan to the bushes and trees and then the hillside next to the house, and a fire road on that hillside and ... There's one of the nondescript cars parked in the darkness with both Stan and Buddy sitting on top of the car, looking down into Dorn's house. Buddy uses binoculars.

STAN

I'm tired, Buddy. I don't do field work anymore.

BUDDY

So bring in another freelance, you cheapskate.

STAN

Do we care what he watches on t.v.?

BUDDY

We care. She'll care. Jesus ... it's an exercise tape. Aerobics. I'm offended by this guy. I'm serious.

STAN

Let's go. We'll pick it up in the morning.

BUDDY

He's getting into his aerobics outfit.

STAN

What are we, voyeurs?

Buddy is surprised by what he sees. He hands the binoculars to Stan.

BUDDY

Voyeur this.

Stan looks -- and he is equally surprised. He hands the glasses back to Buddy, sighs and shakes his head, then raises the long lens camera (that is strapped around his neck) and focuses and clicks and clicks and clicks.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

The next day. Buddy is seated on the office couch, a folder in his lap. China sits nearby, checking her watch. She nods at the door. They both look. Chase enters talking.

CHASE

China, get me Hector, and tell Henry I'm still waiting for the alternate endings on game three. So ... Mr. Hallibeck ...

She sits next to him on the couch.

CHASE

I understand you have Dan Dorn's profile ready in only 24 hours. Shoot.

He spends just a moment taking her in, admiring openly -- which begins to unsettle her. But then he's down to business.

BUDDY

So far I can tell you he's athletic, hard working, gentlemanly, orders the oatmeal for breakfast and the chopped salad for lunch -- no bacon. I have a dozen other details, but there's a wrinkle. It may not be a large wrinkle. That's up to you.

She waits, trades a glance with China. He also looks at China as if to question her presence there -- but Chase nods for him to go ahead.

BUDDY

He likes to dress up as a woman and work out to an aerobics tape. Alone. At night. Privacy of his own home.

They both stare incredulously. China laughs and immediately bites it off.

CHINA

Sorry.

BUDDY

Doesn't mean he's gay or straight. He did some mild flirting with one of our female investigators, took her phone number. Might not affect his performance as an employee. Might not affect his life in any way except to strengthen his thighs and buttocks.

CHASE

You ... watched this?

From the folder Buddy produces five 8x10s, hands them to Chase. China comes closer and cranes her neck. We see them, too -- Dorn in a wig, false breasts, chic gym outfit, moving through his workout. China strangles another laugh, walks away.

Buddy puts his hand out for the photos. Chase hands them over. Buddy rises and walks to a paper shredder. He shreds the photos, then takes a sheet of negatives from the folder and shreds those, too.

CHASE

Are you afraid I would blackmail him?

BUDDY

No. I was afraid you might think I would blackmail him. People think that about private investigators. It's a cross we bear.

CHASE

His wrinkle is safe with me. Well, we can get off Mr. Dorn ...

BUDDY

Kind of sorry I lost him the job. What is the job?

CHASE

... and proceed to candidate number two. Thank you.

She is moving to her desk now, putting on her headset telephone, logging on her computer. Buddy is still standing there, watching her. She glances up.

CHASE

Excuse me, Mr. Hallibeck ...

BUDDY

Buddy.

CHASE

Time is flying, Buddy.

She concentrates on her computer and he says ...

BUDDY

Fleeting.

... And he walks out the door. Chase does throw one glance after him. China notices. Then, as Chase works ...

CHASE

See how much time I'm saving this way?
I might have been dating Mr. Dorn for
weeks. Months. And I hate
aerobics.

They both look up as Buzz enters wearing a bad news face.

CHASE

Oh, no.

BUZZ

Two more hits this morning.
Somebody's still trying to break the
code. I've had my first migraine
ever.

Chase takes her headset off, thinking.

CHASE

All right. That's it. We need
professional help on this.

She rolls her chair over to the paper shredder, during ...

CHASE

Someone we can trust.

She pulls a handful of the shredded photos out of the shredder basket.

CHASE

Someone with integrity.

EXT. BUDDY'S APT. BLDG. - EVENING

That evening we see Chase come out of Buddy's building with an impatient frown. She starts to walk to her car, but stops, looking down the street. There is Buddy with a beautiful young woman -- Claire. Chase's frown deepens.

ON BUDDY, CLAIRE

Not half a block down and heading her way, Buddy and Claire are having an argument. He is a little drunk. She's fuming.

CLAIRE
Oh, so, perfect -- you call me from a bar.

BUDDY
What did you expect?

CLAIRE
Nothing.

BUDDY
You can at least tell me what's wrong.

CLAIRE
What made me think I could bring you my problems? What an idiot I am.

She starts to cross the street. He holds her arm.

BUDDY
Wait. Come on up and ...

She pulls away and hurries across the street, and he calls after her.

BUDDY
You're not an idiot. I'm an idiot!

Then he walks toward his building, mumbling. Walks past Chase and says to her ...

BUDDY
You think she'd know that by now.

Chase turns, mouth open as he enters his building -- and she marches in after him, appalled.

INT. BUDDY'S APT. BLDG. ENTRANCE - EVENING

Buddy enters and starts up the stairs. Chase enters, and without turning to her, he says ...

BUDDY
What are you doing here?

CHASE
Your phone's not working.

BUDDY
You repair phones?

CHASE
I had a job for you that you're obviously not up to.

BUDDY

How would you know what I'm up to?

Chase shouts so her voice follows him up the stairs.

CHASE

It's not a job for a man who has
drunken arguments on the streets with
a girl young enough to be his
daughter.

BUDDY'S VOICE

(trudging up the stairs)

She is my daughter.

(trudge, trudge)

You coming up?

INT. BUDDY'S APT. - EVENING

A minute later. Buddy is doing a very surfacy 'cleanup,' kicking a few thing undercover, picking up a mess of mail off a chair and having nowhere to put it. The front door has been painted purple -- to cover the message that was scrawled on it. The door is open, and Chase is just beginning to enter, saying ...

CHASE

Why do you have a purple door ... ?

But then she sees the inside of the apartment -- the mess, the writing on the wall, and the ceiling, and says a soft ...

CHASE

Never mind.

BUDDY

Have a seat. I admit, you're not catching me at my best, but if I popped in on you after hours ... Nahh, you'd be perfect. Can I get you a drink?

He disappears into the kitchen.

CHASE

No. I'm ... going to to be going.

BUDDY'S VOICE

Look, I'm not drunk. I may have had a few but I can still see that you changed your shoes since I saw you at your office ...

She has.

BUDDY'S VOICE

... That's a designer jacket, about a grand at Saks. Got a stain on the belt ...

She checks. It does.

BUDDY'S VOICE

... and you drive a new black Merc 'cause I know all the cars in my neighborhood.

He comes out of the kitchen with two glasses of orange juice.

BUDDY

Want me to tell you your license plate number?

He hands her a juice.

BUDDY

I'm an addictive personality. That's not an excuse. Alcohol, gambling and cigarettes.

CHASE

How in the world do you deal with that?

BUDDY

I don't smoke.

(pause)

Hey ... you want to hear something great?

He moves to a large cabinet with sliding doors and begins sliding the doors back. He's a little high and also trying to charm her a bit. The cabinet is full of records -- catalogued, alphabetized, 45s, LPs, an island of organization and cleanliness, something he obviously loves and is eager to share.

BUDDY

You're too young to remember when rock and roll was born. I was too young, but my parents were plugged into it. Dad was a D.J. Look at this.

His pride and joy. He pulls a few records, during ...

BUDDY

This is worth major dollars.

CHASE

I thought everything was out on CD now.

BUDDY

These are originals. Some are even signed. Collectors'd pay through the nose for these. But then, collectors are crazy.

She raises an eyebrow, and he realizes he just called himself crazy.

He puts on a dreamy 'Platters' tune. He smiles like a happy fool. But she is looking around the apartment.

CHASE

So ... is this left over from last night's poker game?

BUDDY

Poker? Hah. You kidding? I'm a sportsman. I bet on teams. It takes knowledge. I come from that. I was on every team in every school I went to. Name a team I was on it ...

He sits and leans back, but his chair cushions are disarranged and he nearly falls off, keeps talking.

BUDDY

I don't ... play anymore, but I'm a champ at sports trivia. You can test me.

CHASE

'Sports ... Trivia.' That's redundant, isn't it.

He frowns at her.

BUDDY

You were on the debate team, right?

CHASE

Archery.

BUDDY

You still shoot pretty good.

She puts down her juice, untouched.

CHASE

Someone trying to pirate something from my company. Something very valuable. Someone inside.

BUDDY

My specialty.

(a new thought)

Can I show you something ... in the
bedroom?

He rises and walks into the bedroom. She is exasperated.

CHASE

I'm trying to tell you about a job.

BUDDY'S VOICE

I'll take it. Come look at this.

CHASE

I think not!

BUDDY'S VOICE

Just stand in the doorway, for Christ
sake -- if you're paranoid.

She stares at the open bedroom door, frowns, takes a step
toward it.

BUDDY

It's beautiful. You'll love it.

She approaches the doorway, leans slowly, takes a glance.
She sees him standing there, staring at the wall. She
enters, looking ...

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

They are staring at the pencil/charcoal drawing of Buddy.

CHASE

It's you.

Buddy's eyes grow deep -- a mix of pride and sorrow.

BUDDY

Claire, my daughter, she's a wonderful
artist. She's going to art school
next year. Scholarship. Big dream.

CHASE

She's good. And she's a lovely girl.

He stares at the painting, subdued now.

BUDDY

I'll put the team on candidate number
two, and I'll come to your office and
catch your pirate.

CHASE
What time?

BUDDY
When everyone's gone.

CHASE
Seven thirty.

She leaves, and he follows her to the front door.

BUDDY
So ... What job are these men up for?
You never said.

CHASE
You don't need to know.

She starts down the stairs. His voice follows her.

BUDDY
Why do you need to know their
secrets?

All we hear are her STEPS fading away. He stares after her,
and we OVERLAP a voice from the next scene.

ILSA'S VOICE
Excuse me ...

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - EVENING

The following evening. Ilsa is doing 'the thing' with Man
#2, Paul Dulac, who is having drinks with a male colleague.
She is approaching their table.

ILSA
I'm sorry to bother you, but my watch
just died. I wonder if ...

Paul Dulac, quick and ever charming, covers his own watch
with his hand.

DULAC
I refuse to tell you the time, because
you might rush away. What's your
name? I'm Paul.

EXT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - EVENING

Out near their cars, Buddy is listening to Ilsa's
conversation and commenting to Stan and Chick.

BUDDY

Where has subtlety gone? Let me ask you that. This guy jumps from idle to fourth gear.

He is taking off the headset, handing it to Stan. He checks his watch.

BUDDY

C'mon, Chick. Time to catch the pirate.

INT. BANNER EDULINK OFFICES - NIGHT

Buddy, Chick, Chase, China and Buzz are the only ones present in the offices as Chick installs a video camera in a corner of the room at the ceiling.

BUDDY

Bet nobody even notices. They won't look for it unless they're pros. Doesn't feel like a pro job -- somebody trying to hack their way inside.

CHICK

What you need to do -- is revise your security program.

BUZZ

How?

BUDDY

Let them think they're getting somewhere. Keep them at it.

CHICK

Let them progress through a few levels ...

CHASE

(realizing)

Like a video game.

Buddy nods and Chase walks away to her office. Buddy follows.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A few minutes later. She has brought it up on her screen, the very dazzling, high-tech master portal for 'Worldnews.' Buddy's voice startles her from the doorway.

BUDDY

So that's it, hm?

She shuts it down.

CHASE

It's a breakthrough in design. If it's pirated, or even seen on the net before we're ready, it could do a lot of damage. We need a major release on 'Worldnews.' Major.

BUDDY

You know ... if there's a thief, there's usually a buyer. Who's the buyer?

CHASE

Could be the Japanese. Any competitor.

He nods. The moment hangs. Alone together. She feels it to, moves to put on her jacket.

BUDDY

While I'm here ... want to hear about Paul Dulac?

CHASE

Already? A wrinkle?

BUDDY

No. Very, very smooth.

China enters.

CHASE

I'm tired now. You can report tomorrow. China will show you out. Thanks.

And she leaves. China turns to Buddy, having overheard.

CHINA

Paul Dulac is my fave. What's he like? Wait.

She gets a notebook, pen, opens the book, writes the heading "H.P." at the top of the page, then looks at him to go on.

BUDDY

He's a charmer. Has a degree in glib.

As Buddy speaks, he edges around to read that 'H.P.,' wondering.

BUDDY

He sails a sailboat. 40 footer. He takes classes -- swing dancing. Likes risotto.

CHINA

'Risotto' -- one "T?"

BUDDY

Two "T's." He prefers red wine and uses way too much salt. More to come.

She smiles and closes her book. He sits on the couch.

BUDDY

Mind if I wait here for Chick to finish?

CHINA

Not at all. I'll check on them.

She leaves. Buddy rises quickly, moves to China's computer. He gets to 'Find File,' scrolls the 'H's.' He hits 'H.P.' and 'Enter' -- and a file comes up. The title is: "Husband Prospects." He stares at that -- a while.

BUDDY

Break my friggin' heart.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Students are streaming out of this urban high school at the end of classes -- and Claire is one of them. She looks early 20s, but is only 17. As she hits the sidewalk, says bye to a few pals and walks on, Buddy crosses the street and joins her. She bristles, keeps looking straight ahead. They walk on as ...

BUDDY

Want a ride?

CLAIRE

I'm catching the trolley.

BUDDY

Y'know, I'm in touch with a lot of criminals. Cops and private eyes -- we go back and forth between the underworld and the overworld all the time ...

CLAIRE

What are you talking about? Is this the DTs?

BUDDY

I'm just saying that anytime you want,
I can get you a gun. No registration.
Plenty of ammo.

CLAIRE

For what?!

BUDDY

So you can shoot me! Jesus. I know I
was a shitty father, but that was 10
years ago. You ended up in a good
home. Safe. Quiet.

CLAIRE

Quiet?

BUDDY

Your mom and I did nothing but fight.

CLAIRE

She fought. You drank and mumbled.
Mom's never quiet.

BUDDY

I mumbled?

CLAIRE

When you're drunk, you mumble.

BUDDY

So what do you want with a mumbling
drunk?

CLAIRE

Oh, hey, I recognize that. That's
self pity. We studied that once in
sociology.

BUDDY

Y'know, Claire, you should go out for
archery.

(as they walk on)

I keep my distance for your sake.

She rolls her eyes, pumps her fist.

BUDDY

What was that? What was that gesture?

CLAIRE

Whack whack whack, Dad, you keep your
distance because it's easier on you.

Now he stops.

BUDDY

Because I'm scared you'll depend on me, and I'll screw up again.

CLAIRE

Well don't be scared. I'm not asking you to do anything daddy-like. Just sign your name.

BUDDY

To what?

CLAIRE

Mom and Ben are moving. He's got a job in Florida.

BUDDY

Florida! Jesus -- you couldn't be any further away.

CLAIRE

Like it makes a difference to you. Anyway, I'm not moving. I want to start art school this summer, so I'm renting an apartment and I need you to sign the lease as my California resident, Dad -- until I'm 18 in two months, and I can sign myself. I've got a roommate; it's all set. I'm living there now, but not officially.

She is looking for a pen, paper, in her purse.

BUDDY

So, all you need ...

CLAIRE

Is your signature. Can you do that? Here's the address. Here's the phone number. Call first.

BUDDY

(staring)

I can't believe you're going to be 18.

She hands the paper to him, her sad eyes hard on him.

CLAIRE

Don't get misty, Dad.

BUDDY

Whew. You are your mother.

CLAIRE
 I didn't have a choice.
 (walking away)
 Don't forget.

He spreads his arms wide ...

BUDDY
 Hey -- you know me.

She frowns, walking away. He walks to his parked car.

EXT./INT. BUDDY'S CAR - DAY

As he reaches his car, his cell phone is RINGING on the seat.
 He sits, opens the phone.

BUDDY
 Yeah?

PHONE VOICE - CHET
 Is this the lucky son of a bitch who
 bet on Michigan?

BUDDY
 Jesus, you're kidding.

PHONE VOICE - CHET
 Pulled eleven grand on that sucker
 bet.

BUDDY
 No shit. That's great! Now I can
 quit this lame case.

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

CHASE
 He quit the case?!

Stan is seated across from Chase, the Paul Dulac file on his
 lap.

STAN
 I'm sorry to lose him, but we're
 prepared to carry on.

CHASE
 Did he quit all his cases or just this
 one?

STAN

Well ... this is our only case now.
We like to give our full focus.
So ... about Paul Dulac. So far, so
good ...

CHASE

Leave the report, Mr. Stanley, and
I'll study it.

STAN

Oh. Sure.

He puts it on Chase's desk.

CHASE

I'll call you.

He leaves and Chase immediately shouts to China.

CHASE

Get me Mr. Hallibeck!

But China, anticipating, has already dialed -- and is holding
the phone, shrugging ...

CHINA

Can't.

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S APT. BLDG. - HALLWAY - DAY

Chase is KNOCKING on Buddy's freshly painted red door -- and
then withdrawing her hand to see that her knuckles have red
paint on them.

CHASE

Damn it!

Buddy opens the door and she thrusts her knuckles close to
his face.

CHASE

Look!

She walks in, bustling past him.

BUDDY

Well, you didn't like the purple!
Nobody did.

INT. BUDDY'S APT. - DAY

As Chase bustles into the bathroom, passing drop cloths and rollers. Buddy is painting the walls of his place, painting over all the phone numbers and "messages." Chase gets to the sink.

CHASE

This better be water base.

She washes off the paint, reaches for a towel. The towel racks are empty.

CHASE

No tow ... !

But Buddy is in the doorway with a towel, and she dries her hands while stabbing him with a look.

CHASE

Why did you quit?

He shrugs, moves to a wall, starts to paint. He has a drink on the floor, booze. He sips, puts it down, paints.

BUDDY

I won a bet. Fresh start. And who needs the bullshit.

CHASE

My case is not bullshit.

BUDDY

Sure it is.

CHASE

My company is practically mortgaged into the 'Worldnews' CD-Rom.

BUDDY

Chick'll catch your pirate. Matter of days.

CHASE

I want you to handle it.

BUDDY

(as he paints)

What about your other case? The search for the perfect man. The quest for the ideal partner. The weeding out of the Losers. The choosing of the super man for the super woman. You want a partner for life -- call Stanley Investigative Sercies: Husbands R Us.

This hits her hard, mouth open, breath stuck.

BUDDY

Nobody told me. I snooped.

CHASE

(recovering)

Check my logic. Sixty-two employees depend on me. I have an incredibly busy life. I want to find someone to share it with. The search could be endless. I'm only saving time.

BUDDY

I think you checked your logic at the door, lady.

CHASE

Who are you to give advice about life?!

BUDDY

At least I don't need detectives to find me a mate!

CHASE

No, you just look in a bottle!

Okay. It's a draw. They stare for a silent moment, both punched out, and beneath the battle, feeling a connection. She begins.

CHASE

I've put every piece of me into this company and into this new product, and I was scared enough, not knowing if it was going to succeed in the marketplace, and now somebody's trying to steal it before I even get the chance. I need protection. As if I were protecting my child. Can you understand that? Probably not. I considered cancelling the other thing, the 'candidates.' I'm too upset by this thief, and then I thought, isn't this what it's about -- having someone to come to when you're so scared you can hardly stay inside your skin? Some comfort. Some safety net. Some half of you that you can help and be helped by when the world is tougher than you are.

He's taken with her.

BUDDY
Tougher than you?

CHASE
Yes.

He puts down his paint roller, steps closer to her.

BUDDY
You want somebody to take you in his arms and hold you until you get your strength back?

CHASE
Yes.

The moment hangs. They both feel something for each other -- but he's very wary and she's denying like mad.

BUDDY
Somebody like ...

You think for a minute that someone's going to grab someone.

BUDDY
Somebody like ... Paul Dulac?

Ball's in her court.

CHASE
Yes. Somebody like him.

Only his eyes show he's been dealt a blow.

BUDDY
Well, he's passed the tests. Meet him.

CHASE
Well ... I haven't thought that through. How to meet him. Where ...

BUDDY
He's a boatman. Do you sail boats?

CHASE
Seasick city.

BUDDY
He studies swing dancing. Do you dance?

CHASE
Sort of.

He nods. He shuffles over to the cabinet, throws back the drop cloth, slides open a few doors, revealing again that pristine catalogued collection of classic rock n' roll.

BUDDY

My specialty. When this music was born, everybody was swinging.

He selects a record, uncovers the turntable.

CHASE

You mean ... now?

He puts a forty-five on the spindle, uses his foot to clear part of the floor of drop cloths.

BUDDY

I'll escort you to the dance club he goes to. I'll make you look good. I can do that. But first ... I need to see how you move.

He hits the button, the 45 drops. Intro starts belting out, maybe it's Elvis or Bill Haley. He's watching her. She stands there.

CHASE

You mean just ... ?

Then he moves, quickly and sweeps her into it, and there they go, and he is damn good and helping her get the feel ...

BUDDY

Follow ... let loose and follow ... you'll get it ... watch the paint ... good ...

They dance -- on floor and drop cloth. They kick over his glass of booze. They just miss the paint roller. They dance and then he says ...

BUDDY

Ready?

CHASE

For what?

And he starts to twirl her, and we do an ...

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

... to see Buddy twirling Chase, and now they're both dressed for it and really into it and actually having a very good

time. The number ends, and they return to their table. He's drinking a juice. She's flushed, relaxed (for her) and he's thoroughly smitten.

BUDDY
I knew you'd be good.

CHASE
I'm not used to sweating in public. I work out at home. My hair is crashing, isn't it. Oh, God. He's here! Dulac is here.

Buddy's mood darkens a bit, goes fatalistic.

BUDDY
He's been here about 15 minutes, watching you most of the time.

She is trying not to look at Dulac across the club.

CHASE
Is he alone? He's alone. How did you know he'd be alone?

BUDDY
He's a hunter-gatherer.
(pause)
Ready? He's coming over.

CHASE
Why?!

BUDDY
Probably attracted by your sweat.

Paul Dulac arrives, charming and enthusiastic, eyes on Chase.

DULAC
Excuse me. You are so good out there. I was watching, and then I said, Wow -- I know her. Sorry, Paul Dulac.

They shake. She starts to speak.

DULAC
I know -- Chase Banner.

She points to Buddy.

CHASE
This is ... How do you know me?

DULAC

(sits)

I'm VP marketing at Everet-Stanzell,
and we're always talking about
trying to buy your company.

BUDDY

She's not for sale.

DULAC

I know, and it kills us. We want you
on our team, Chase.

(to Buddy)

She is so sharp. Are you in software?

BUDDY

(they shake)

Buddy Hallibeck, dance coach.

DULAC

No kidding?! That's great.

BUDDY

Private lessons only.

DULAC

So you two are here ... ?

BUDDY

Just finishing up a lesson.

(looks at watch)

I hate to break things up so early,
but ...

DULAC

Oh, Chase, do you have to leave?

CHASE

(shrugs)

Well, we're in two cars, so ...

The band has struck up again, and Dulac rises, puts his hand
out for Chase, gesturing to the dance floor.

DULAC

Can we? Want to?

(to Buddy)

Excuse us. Do you have a card?

He's already sweeping Chase away.

BUDDY

Chase has my number.

He watches them go, watches them dance. Dulac is smooth. Buddy rises from the table, brings his juice to the bar, places it there, looks at it. The bartender comes over.

BUDDY
Ah, the hell with it.

And he leaves the club.

EXT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT BLDG. - NIGHT

He's checking addresses in a rather dingy courtyard building, and he hears a boy-girl argument coming out of a ground-floor flat -- Claire's voice. He knocks and says ...

BUDDY
Open up -- police.

... and it goes dead in there. The door is opened by a frightened young man in a backwards baseball cap and torn-out jeans. In b.g. is Claire, rolling her eyes and saying ...

CLAIRE
Oh God, it's just my Dad.

INT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She's wearing boxers and a pajama top.

CLAIRE
You were supposed to call.

BUDDY
He's the roommate?

CLAIRE
Excuse me.

And she disappears into the bedroom to put on more clothes. The boy is staring at Buddy. The boy's name is WAYNE, and he's still pissed from his fight with Claire and acting a bit like a snot.

BUDDY
What?

WAYNE
She said her dad ...

BUDDY
What?

WAYNE
Was a broken-down drunken ex-cop.

BUDDY
She exaggerated.

WAYNE
We were having a fight.

BUDDY
I noticed.

WAYNE
I suppose you think it's my fault.

BUDDY
No. I lived with her mother for seven years. It was my fault only ... 80 percent of the time. 85.

Claire comes into the room with a robe on and a pen and a document in one hand, glass of water in the other. She hands him the pen and the water.

CLAIRE
Here's the lease. Here's a pen. This is all we have.
(pause)
It's water.

He frowns and nods at the bedroom.

BUDDY
One bedroom.

CLAIRE
Two beds.

BUDDY
Your mother know about this?

CLAIRE
Now you're going to pretend to be fatherly?

BUDDY
(to Wayne)
She's only 17, you know.

WAYNE
So am I.

BUDDY
(to Claire)
So I can see you ten years from now on some cheap tabloid talk show saying, "I left home and moved in with my boyfriend at 17 ... "

CLAIRE

My home left me.

BUDDY

What're you, Oliver Twist?! You have a scholarship. You have a father. I have a job.

The other thing that has made her so sad-mad lately, besides Buddy, is this -- and her lips tremble a bit and she tells him, still trying to be tough:

CLAIRE

I don't have a scholarship. I was a finalist for a scholarship. I didn't get it. But that's okay. I have enough for the first quarter's tuition. I'm going to waitress. It's all set up. I'm sharing this apartment, but I need you to sign the lease. That's all I need.

He stares at her a long while, then hands the pen back to her.

BUDDY

You're going to live with me.

CLAIRE

Hah!

BUDDY

Go to Florida and live with your mother, or live with me.

CLAIRE

Those are not valid options!

She hands him the pen again.

BUDDY

That's all we're offering this week.

He takes the pen apart and drops the pieces on the desk, then he walks to where Wayne is sitting.

BUDDY

Can I see that hat?

Wayne, wondering, takes off his cap, and Buddy pours the glass of water over Wayne's head. The boy stands up, sputtering. He's as tall as Buddy, but Buddy's looking dangerous. Claire gasps. Wayne backs up.

BUDDY
That was mean what you said about the
broken down drunk.

WAYNE
I'm sorry.

CLAIRE
Dad ...

BUDDY
There are consequences for what we
say. We pay.

WAYNE
Hey, I'm sorry ...

BUDDY
I'm an expert on consequences.
(glances at Claire)
My specialty.

And he tosses the empty glass to Wayne and walks out.

INT. DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Same night. Chase and Paul Dulac are dancing a slow one. He
moves her very close against him as he says ...

DULAC
Do you mind?

She's a little wary, but eases against him. It's nice.

DULAC
Dip.

CHASE
Hm?

And he dips her -- very low. Surprised, she laughs. They
dance on.

DULAC
You have a great laugh.

CHASE
I miss laughing. Does anybody laugh
where you work?

DULAC
No more shop talk.

CHASE
What else is there?

Life. DULAC

I've been away. CHASE

Fine dining aboard my sailboat, sea air, dolphins, no stress. DULAC

Mm. I'd love it. Except for the water. CHASE

Afraid? DULAC

Nauseous. CHASE

Pity. A drive out to the redwoods, then. Or the wine country. You have to get away. Nobody gets to know anybody in the city. DULAC

What do you want to know? CHASE

What do you love to eat? DULAC

Risotto. CHASE

Perfect! DULAC

And he twirls gracefully with her.

INT. BANNER-EDULINK OFFICES - MORNING

Buddy stands at China's desk. She is excited, nervous.

CHINA
 These are the surveillance tapes from the camera from last night and this morning, and Buzz said there was an attempt to break the code this morning, so ... somewhere on these tapes ...

He takes the tapes, but is only half interested, glancing at the door to Chase's office. He nods toward the door.

BUDDY
How did it go last night?

CHINA
He really likes her!

Buddy nods, not overwhelmed, and walks to her door, leans in the doorway.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - MORNING

As usual she's on the phone and on the computer.

BUDDY
How'd it go?

She's a bit defensive about it.

CHASE
Oh, uhh fine. Thank you. I'm swamped now so ...

BUDDY
Did you try the double twirl?

CHASE
No. We're not quite there yet. Excuse me.

BUDDY
Late night?

CHASE
What are you doing, investigating? I really ...

Paul Dulac comes breezing in! Notices Buddy.

DULAC
(to Buddy)
Oh -- you do office calls?

CHASE
Paul?!

DULAC
So you practice the dancing here?

Buddy holds up one of the surveillance videotapes.

BUDDY
It's all on tape.

DULAC

Perfect!

(to Chase)

I'm kidnapping you for lunch.

BUDDY

She's swamped.

DULAC

Unplug, cancel, save yourself. There isn't much time. They'll have you surrounded. It's now or never.

Chase is staring, immobile for a moment. China is gesturing -- go! go! Chase suddenly hangs up the phone, unplugs.

CHASE

One hour.

Dulac escorts her out the door, passing a disgruntled Buddy, and, as he passes China, says to her in aside ...

DULAC

Hour and a half.

Buddy and China watch them go. China sparkles.

CHINA

Dreamy -- isn't he?

Buddy gathers up the tapes and leaves.

EXT. HARBOR - DAY

Many yachts and sailboats are anchored and moored here. We pick up Dulac's sleek convertible as he drives Chase along the docks.

INT./EXT. DULAC'S CAR - DAY

Chase is looking at all the boats, nervous.

CHASE

But I told you. Even if your boat is anchored -- one wave, and I throw up everything I've eaten since I was twelve.

DULAC

Not today. There it is. See?

He pulls into a dockyard beside a beautiful sailboat that is in dry-dock, supported on wooden platforms for maintenance

and repair. There is a ladder from the ground to the deck. Dulac grabs a picnic basket and wine out of the trunk, speaking excitedly as he walks Chase to the ladder.

DULAC

We've run aground. We're beached.
Marooned. You first.

They have reached the ladder. Chase is wearing a short skit. She frowns wryly.

CHASE

I think not.

He shrugs and starts up the ladder ahead of her. She looks at the boat, grins, and follows him up.

INT. SHIP'S CABIN - DAY

A half hour later. In the small, polished gem of a cabin, they have eaten most of a picnic lunch, sipping on wine when Chase's beeper vibrates on the table. She snatches it up, checking it.

CHASE

Sorry.

DULAC

That's the third time.

She reaches for her cell phone, and he grabs both phone and beeper from her hands and runs up on deck. She follows.

CHASE

No. Wait!

EXT. DECK - DAY

Dulac hurries to the rail, takes aim and launches both her phone and beeper over the side -- so that they land in his open convertible. She sees this and flaps her arms, sighs -- but then he takes hold of the ladder and pushes it, so that it falls over, and she gasps.

CHASE

No! Now we're stuck here!

DULAC

Possibly for days.

CHASE

This isn't funny! You must have a phone.

And she hurries back into the cabin, and he follows.

INT. SHIP'S CABIN - DAY

As she searches for a phone.

CHASE
How could you do that?

DULAC
Insanity. Try it.

CHASE
I need to get back!

DULAC
Listen to me.

CHASE
No.

He holds her shoulders. They stare.

DULAC
There's another ladder on the other
side of the boat.

CHASE
Oh.

DULAC
But it was a grand gesture, wasn't it?

She begins to smile.

CHASE
Yes.

DULAC
God. You're wonderful.

He kisses her. She begins to kiss him back. She stops.

CHASE
Wait.

He freezes. She stares, then.

CHASE
Okay.

They kiss again, long and deep, and he suddenly puts his hands on her thighs and lifts her and sits her on the table, and she gasps -- and he gently lowers her to the table, brushing fruit and plates aside, until she is on her back and he is on top of her, and they kiss until she is able to say a breathless ...

CHASE
Oh ... God ... stop.

DULAC
Stop?

She nods.

DULAC
Sure?

She nods. He eases off of her.

DULAC
Too fast?

She is getting her breath back, very turned on but gathering herself, sliding off the table, pushing her skirt down.

CHASE
Yes. Too fast.

DULAC
For me, too. Sorry. Couldn't help it.

CHASE
I know. Me too. What was that?

DULAC
Wild horses.

CHASE
You have a name for that?!

DULAC
No. I mean ... it felt like we were a couple of wild horses. I don't have this kind of ... This is rare and wonderful. You are rare and wonderful. Am I talking too much?

She nods. They kiss tenderly. She is excited, flattered by his obviously intense attraction -- and sharing it, in spite of her wariness. The kiss ends and they walk out on deck to the opposite railing and the waiting ladder.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Buddy is in Chick's basement 'studio,' cluttered with electronics, where they pop the surveillance tapes into VCRs and watch the several monitors.

On one set, the tape shows the view from the camera of an empty office. Chick begins to fast-forward that tape as he pops in another to a second VCR. Buddy picks up a tape and

pops that into a third. On monitor #2 comes another view of the empty office. On Buddy's monitor -- as he looks away and then turns back to the screen -- he sees Chase making a horrid face into the camera.

BUDDY

Jesus Christ!

He has taken her sleep tape by mistake. He watches her trying to sleep. He studies this. He fast-forwards.

On one of Chick's tapes, a woman appears in the office and proceeds to the computer-in-question.

CHICK

Got her.

It is Ruth Fandell! She sits at the computer and logs on, looks about, works the machine.

CHICK

Buddy ... we got her. 8:07 a.m. ...
same time as the three hits on the
code. Buddy?

Chick moves over to where Buddy is watching Chase -- who is sound asleep now -- so sweet and soft. He is smitten all over again, staring.

CHICK

What is this?

BUDDY

Dreamy -- isn't she?

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - MORNING

The next morning. We study the faces that are watching a t.v. screen. Chase and China and Buzz are shocked. Buddy and Chick are professional.

BUDDY

Here's where she gets excited.

NEW ANGLE

They are watching Ruth Fandell trying to access the code and pull up the protected graphics.

CHICK

She thinks she's making progress.

BUZZ

Traitor.

CHASE
I can't believe this. Ruth. Why?!

CHINA
Maybe ...

CHASE
What?

CHINA
Well, I know she seems afraid ... for her job.

CHASE
That's ridiculous.

CHINA
And of you.

CHASE
Afraid of me?!

BUDDY
Look at this. She hears something in the outer office. She gives up for now -- and watch this. Chick enhanced it.

We go close up on her hands as they fly over the keypad.

CHICK
Then we slowed it way down ...

Same tape now further enhanced and in slo mo, so we can just barely track her fingers over the keyboard. The tape freezes.

BUDDY
She sent somebody an E mail.

BUZZ
We can check the log on that terminal!

CHICK
No. She deleted it. But we can see which keys she hit, most of them. I tried 36 possibilities, came up with four actual E-mail addresses.

BUDDY
One rings a bell.

He glances at Chase. He reads off a piece of paper.

BUDDY
 pdul@evstnz.com.
 (pause)
 Paul Dulac.

CHASE
 What?!

She is shocked and furious at Buddy.

CHASE
 What are you saying?!

BUDDY
 She called her buyer.

CHASE
 You've made a mistake. Thirty-six combinations?! You've made a mistake.

BUDDY
 Could be.

He glances at Chick. Chick takes the hint and leaves -- so do Buzz and China.

CHASE
 This has nothing to do with Dulac.

BUDDY
 We caught a piece of her message, "I'm almost there. Maybe Tom..." probably 'tomorrow.' Then she stands up and keeps typing and obscures the rest. But we're pretty clear on the address.

CHASE
 "Pretty clear?" This is ridiculous -- and it's slander.

BUDDY
 I know it stinks, and I'm sorry ...

CHASE
 Sorry?! You're wrong!

BUDDY
 Why don't we get Ruth in here. She'll fold. She'll tell ...

CHASE
 (nervous)
 No. No, I'll deal with Ruth later.
 I ...

He leans closer, voice softens, tender with her.

BUDDY

Listen ... Chase ... he's not the guy for you anyway.

CHASE

What can you possibly know about it?!

BUDDY

You get to know people. He's not the kind who holds on tight. He's an angler, a catch-and-release kind of guy.

CHASE

You just don't like him. You're jealous of his looks and his ... style. I saw that. And you can't imagine why he would be so attracted to me so you try to make it part of some plot, part of some ...

She stands up and calls out ...

CHASE

China! Cancel everything. I need to get out of here.

She marches over to the closet, grabs her jacket. Buddy stands, concerned.

BUDDY

Want some company?

CHASE

No! Yes. China! See if Paul Dulac is in.

And she marches out, and he sighs and sits on the couch again.

INT. PAUL DULAC'S OFFICE - DAY

As Chase is shown in, and Paul is so pleased.

DULAC

What an honor. What a treat.

CHASE

I just need a haven for awhile.

DULAC

Well, this is it. Home port. I'm in the midst of things, but you stick with me. When can we get you?

She moves to the couch.

CHASE

Nothing. Go on about your day.

His secretary leaves. Chase settles back.

DULAC

I'll take an early lunch. Can you stay?

CHASE

Yes. I'm hiding out. I'm going to have to fire someone later.

DULAC

That's always damn tough.

CHASE

Didn't use to bother me so much.

DULAC

They wear you down. I have a quick meeting in Everet's office ...

She lies back on the couch, puts her feet up.

CHASE

This is very nice. If you don't mind, I'll just rest here.

He looks her over.

DULAC

Mind? I'll be fantasizing through the whole meeting. Back in fifteen. Do not move.

We (and Chase) hear him leave and say to his secretary ...

DULAC'S VOICE

Do not disturb.

Chase lets the silence settle in -- then she moves quickly, off the couch and over to his computer. She moves to his menu and to his E-mail. She's there. She glances at the door and then looks over his log of mail ... She sees an E-mail from F. Palacci. She taps it for a readout. She looks at the screen and breathes deep, shaken ...

ANGLE ON SCREEN:

"I'm almost there. Probably tomorrow. Ooh, I miss those wild horses."

"Ruth"

ON CHASE

For a moment, deeply hurt, shamed, and then, slowly, the anger rising.

INT. TOM EVERET'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

As Chase marches past Everet's young secretary.

CHASE

Is this Tom Everet's office?

SECRETARY

Yes, but ... there's a meeting ...

The secretary gets up and nervously flutters toward Chase, who continues to the door and swings it open. She is staring at Paul Dulac with his two bosses -- Everet and Stanzel. They stare at her -- surprised.

CHASE

When my 'Worldnews' CD-Rom comes out next month, I'm going to swamp you in the education market and sink your leaky boat faster than a herd of wild horses. Forgive the mixed metaphor. Dulac will explain.

As she slams the door and walks away. We hear an elevator DING as we

CUT TO:

EXT. BANNER-EDULINK OFFICES - DAY

As Chase comes out of the elevator and walks through her lobby in the same pissed-off, I've-been-made-a-fool-of frame of mind.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

As she comes marching in, not happy to see Buddy still there on her couch.

CHASE

Why are you still here?

BUDDY

Well ... I figured you've done your own investigating, and you might be needing a friend, or a bandage.

CHASE

I'm fine. Aren't you supposed to be profiling someone for me? Candidate number three? Isn't he your job now?

Buddy stands, his turn to feel hurt, mad.

BUDDY

Sorry ... guess I forgot my job ...
and my place.

He walks out as China walks in. Chase leans her elbows on her desk, hands in her hair. China watches Buddy go, sad.

CHINA

He was worried. He cares about you.

Chase groans.

CHASE

I know.

CHINA

You were hard on him.

CHASE

I know. Gad. It's because he was
right.

CHINA

He likes you.

CHASE

Oh, please, China.

CHINA

And he's nice.

CHASE

Nice? Yes, he's ... But he just
doesn't compute. Can we drop this?

INT. CHINA'S OFFICE - DAY

Buddy was leaving, but remembered a tape in his pocket. He turns back to China's desk, takes the videotape out of his pocket. He can HEAR the voices from Chase's office.

CHINA'S VOICE

I'll just say one more thing. He's
not bad looking.

CHASE'S VOICE

No. But he's an alcoholic private eye
whose daughter hates him. I think
that qualifies as a wrinkle.

Buddy is punched by this. He doesn't breathe or move for a second. Then, deep eyed and sad, he tosses the camera tape onto China's desk and walks away. We go close on that tape,

Chase's sleeping tape. Buddy has put a label on it. It reads: "Sweet dreams, Buddy"

From inside Chase's office we hear ...

CHASE'S VOICE

Now find me Ruth Fandell. And bring me an ax.

INT. BUDDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

We hear CLAIRE'S VOICE outside the door of the apartment as a key is inserted into the lock.

CLAIRE'S VOICE

I don't care what you say. You can't force me. What're you going to do? Arrest me?

The door is opened by Buddy, who enters with his daughter ...

CLAIRE

Because that's how far you'll have to go to ...

She stops because she can't believe how Buddy's apartment looks -- all freshly painted and so orderly, even some new furniture. She is amazed. He nods toward a second bedroom.

BUDDY

That's your room over there.

She drifts through the immaculate living room, and into the bedroom.

INT. CLAIRE'S ROOM - DAY

She is hit by a double punch here. Her father has created a lovely, cozy room for her -- but he has also decorated the walls with her own drawings -- some that go back to 3rd grade!

CLAIRE

(softly)
You saved these?

BUDDY

I kept the best for my room.

She sits on the bed.

BUDDY

Listen, I can pay our expenses and one year's tuition at art school.

(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)
 Forget waitressing. Concentrate on
 your classes.

She stares at him a moment, absorbing all this.

CLAIRE
 I thought you were broke.

BUDDY
 I won a bet. I wish I could give you
 all four years, but ... we'll get
 along. I'm staying dry.

CLAIRE
 Why would you do all this for me now?

BUDDY
 Because ... I did so goddamn little
 before. But ... I thought you had
 what you wanted.

CLAIRE
 The scholarship.

He comes to sit on the bed beside her.

BUDDY
 All of it. A family -- and yeah, Art
 school. The big dream. It's great to
 have a big dream. I never had one.

CLAIRE
 You didn't? Ever?

BUDDY
 Well, maybe for a minute. Pro ball.
 (shrugs)
 No way. That was that.

CLAIRE
 Got one now? Something ... you want?
 Anything?

He looks at her as certain thoughts play over his face --
 Chase Banner?

BUDDY
 Why don't we go get your things? Try
 it out. Might work.

She tries for some trace of her toughness.

CLAIRE

I don't know, Dad. You still play those lame old records? It would drive me crazy.

BUDDY

I got earphones.

That's too much. She bites her lips. She's crying a bit. He sits there. He wants to put an arm around her, but he's afraid to push it.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

Chase is at her desk. Ruth Fandell sits in a chair, weeping. Chase puts a box of Kleenex on her desk. Ruth is too busy crying to notice.

CHASE

There's Kleenex.

Ruth just shakes her head, more tears. Chase sighs, stands, brings the box of Kleenex to Ruth, drops it in her lap. Ruth blows her nose.

CHASE

Didn't you know how much I relied on you?

RUTH

No.

CHASE

No?! This company is a team.

RUTH

Chase ... This company is you. The rest of us just ... try to get a word in now and ...

CHASE

That's ridiculous. You could have sunk all of us.

RUTH

(pleading)

They just wanted to see what they were up against -- not steal it.

CHASE

Oh, sure.

RUTH

And ... when I met Paul Dulac ...

Chase walks to the window.

CHASE
I don't want to hear this.

RUTH
I guess I've been ... a little out of control since Ben and I separated.

CHASE
You're separated? Since when?

RUTH
Last year. Oh, Chase -- am I going to jail?

CHASE
No. Devil's island.

Chase turns back to the window again, sighs again.

CHASE
Just pack up and slip away quietly.

RUTH
Thank you. I'm sorry.

But Chase stares out the window, at her thoughts.

EXT. CHASE'S HOME - NIGHT

Establishing. We hear the clack, clack of her computer.

INT. CHASE'S HOME - NIGHT

She's in her nightclothes at the computer, weary. The computer voice alarm sounds ...

COMPUTER'S VOICE
It's 2 a.m.. Go to sleep ...

VOICE/CHASE
Idiot.

She shuts down the computer, sighs. She looks at the bulletin board now where only two candidate photos remain: Dulac and Stillerman. She takes down Dulac's photo and tears it and drops it in the wastebasket. She looks at the photo of Stillerman.

CHASE
Well, what do you think, Harvard? You and the idiot? Shall we give it a twirl? Hm? Mr. Two Ph.ds. Any hope for us?

She walks off to her bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

She moves to her bed table, picks up a videotape, her sleep tape. She stares again at her label: "Sweet dreams, Buddy." Her eyes soften. She walks to her vcr/tv, pops in the tape, hits play. She gets into bed and watches herself sleep -- and slowly drifts off.

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

We come out of Chase's repose to a karate YELL and kick by candidate 3, Jon Stillerman. He is in white karate garb, and as we pull back we see that he is one of a group of karate students having an open-air class.

We pull back further to a picnic table where Stan, Iris and Chick are seated, eating takeout burgers and cokes, watching the class. Buddy is approaching their table with a folder in his hand as he, too, glances at Stillerman. He sits with them.

STAN

What've you got?

BUDDY

Double patty, no cheese.

STAN

I mean in your hand.

BUDDY

Burger first.

He is handed his burger. He takes a bite, holds up the folder.

BUDDY

Stillerman was at a retreat called Oregellen in Wales for two months when he was studying in England.

ILSA

He studied in England?

BUDDY

Yeah, France, too, and Sweden and Japan. He's lived in 5 countries, and he's 38 years old, and I spent one weekend in Canada, and it rained. Is that fair?

CHICK

What's the problem?

BUDDY

I called Orengellen. It's a mental hospital. It's always been a mental hospital. Guy had a breakdown, 14 years ago, and you know what pisses me off?

STAN

The thing about Canada?

BUDDY

No. She's going to call this a wrinkle and get off the guy. He's a genius. He's as successful as she is -- even more. He lectures. He wrote a friggin book. She's never written a book. Is that fair?

CHICK

What do you care if she rejects him or not?

ILSA

We don't even know what job she's trying to fill. Who cares, Buddy?

BUDDY

It's nobody's business -- Orengellen.

STAN

We have to tell her. That's what she hired us for.

They hear a phone RINGING and look to the class. Sure enough it's Stillerman, interrupting his set of moves to pull a cell phone out of his gee and walk off a few steps from the class, talking on the phone. Stan takes a picture.

INT. CHASE'S OFFICE - DAY

Chase is receiving her profile of Stillerman from the whole team: Chick, Ilsa, Stan and Buddy. But Buddy is silent at first. Chase is leaning forward, listening in her focused way. She holds a photo of Stillerman on the phone in the park.

ILSA

He seems a bit shy with women, not very polished. Never been married, two long-term relationships, a live-in for 9 months, a live-out for a year and a half. Nothing for the past two years.

CHICK

He's interested in Japanese culture and studies karate and kendo but isn't dedicated to it.

STAN

(surprised)

How do you know?

CHICK

Sloppy Kata.

STAN

He stays in most nights. He's a speed reader. Nonfiction. Gets 3 newspapers a day. Drives a four year old Mercedes. Eats health food. Dinner at his parents once a month. Works on the average of 10 hours a day not counting computer work at home. Keeps a cat named ...

(reading)

'Bas...et' or Bast ... "

CHASE

'Bastet,' Egyptian goddess with the head of a cat. Let's go on. Wrinkles?

The whole team turns to Buddy. He shifts in his seat, takes a breath ...

BUDDY

There's a wrinkle, no doubt about it. If you look long enough and deep enough. There's almost always a wrinkle. Maybe even you have a wrinkle.

CHASE

Let's go on.

Their eyes challenge each other a bit.

BUDDY

Fourteen years ago he's a grad student in England, high pressure -- the kid caves in, is institutionalized for 2 months, goes back into the world, makes a success of himself. 14 years later some guy like me stumbles over this wrinkle and holds it up and says "Look at this," and somebody like you says, "Next." And I wonder if that's fair.

CHASE

A mental breakdown?

Buddy nods, up on his feet now, pacing, Clarence Darrow-like.

BUDDY

Yes. Major wrinkle, right? But before we bury him, let me say something, not for Jon Stillerman, but for all the wrinkled people, 'cause we're legion. We're definitely in the majority. It's the biggest club around. Membership comes by way of tripping and falling down. We've got people who committed crimes, people who caused accidents, people who cheated on husbands, cheated on wives, had a breakdown, took a drug, made a mistake, proved they were human -- and I'm not saying it's nothing. I'm not excusing it. I'm not sweeping it under the rug. I'm just saying that for all the wrinkled of the world, maybe a second chance is in order. That's all I'm saying. If you look at somebody, and all you see is the wrinkle, then maybe you're partially blind.

He's standing near her chair, and she knows he's talking about himself. Once again she's impressed by this guy and fighting it off and confused by her feelings for him. He's one of the impossible -- isn't he?

BUDDY

So ... do you reject this man out of hand?

CHASE

(pause)

No.

BUDDY

Good.

He seems pleased. The moment hangs. Stan breaks the spell.

STAN

So, you want to meet Mr. Stillerman, then?

CHASE

Uhh ... yes.

Buddy stares, nods.

BUDDY

Fine. He's taking his whole game division to the El Vista resort this weekend. Know where it is?

CHASE

Yes.

BUDDY

I'll meet you in the registration lobby at 2 p.m., Saturday, put you two together. Is that good for you?

CHASE

Yes.

BUDDY

Check you later.

He walks out. She stares after him. The rest of the team is getting to its feet, starting to leave. She still stares after Buddy. China notices the look.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A beautiful Saturday. Chase is driving up the coast. Her sun roof is open. (Wild woman) She's playing classical music. She's dressed well, looks great, but that hard-focused look is replaced by a trace of confused emotions. Buddy on the brain? We cut to a second car on the same journey -- Buddy's battered Hyundai, blasting his early rock music. What's that in his eyes? Big dream?

EXT. EL VISTA RESORT - DAY

California-Spanish, lush and beautiful. We're watching Chase walk inside.

INT. EL VISTA LOBBY - DAY

Chase and Buddy see each other across the spacious lobby, walk toward each other. He's never looked so spiffy. They smile guardedly, but a lot is going on.

BUDDY

Hi. You look great.

CHASE

Oh. Thank you. You look ... great, too.

BUDDY

I do?

CHASE

Yes.

BUDDY
I'm holding my stomach in a little.

CHASE
You don't have to for me.

He breathes a deep breath, gestures to a lobby sofa. They sit a moment. She looks about.

CHASE
Where is the uhh Stillerman group?

He doesn't answer.

CHASE
Hm? Mr. Hal ... Buddy. The Stillerman group?

BUDDY
What if they're not here?

CHASE
What do you mean?

BUDDY
What if I set this up -- because I wanted us to meet ... in a beautiful place, as if we didn't know each other. As if it was a clean start.

She is staring, mouth open. He shrugs, nervous.

CHASE
You and me?

He nods.

CHASE
You're serious? You lied to me, got me all the way out here ...

BUDDY
Let's stay with 'you and me,' with the 'what if.'

CHASE
What if what? What can you be thinking?

BUDDY
You know what I'm thinking.

CHASE
(getting upset)
You and me ... you and I are living in two different worlds. We ...

BUDDY

There's only one world.

CHASE

That's naive. That's ... we need people who are like us, who understand us and can share -- what am I talking about?! I won't be tricked into an 'encounter group' with you. I've been tricked enough lately. You're really pissing me off, Hallibeck.

BUDDY

I just said what if.

CHASE

I don't believe in what if. I believe in planning and organizing and studying the options and analyzing the data because that's what works! It's real. I can depend on it. Certain people's profiles fit together. They think alike. They behave alike. They have the same goals. You ... I think you live in a fantasy. Your old records. Your sock-hop dancing, and your belief that if you manipulate me here by lying to me, everything will fall into place, and you're wrong, because I won't be lied to.

She springs to her feet just as two wide doors open onto the lobby, and a group spills out from a business meeting. It is the Stillerman group. Jon Stillerman is with them. Chase stares at this group, then at Buddy. He stares back. The moment hangs. The Stillerman group mills about talking. Chase and Buddy stare. Her eyes are still a bit hot. She turns away and walks toward Stillerman. Buddy watches.

ANGLE - CHASE, STILLERMAN

He is speaking to some colleagues, but turns away at Chase's approach, looks at her.

CHASE

Excuse me. Aren't you Jon Stillerman?

STILLERMAN

Yes. You ... ?

CHASE

Chase Banner.

They shake hands. He's impressed, just a little shy, awkward.

STILLERMAN

Oh. Yes. Banner Edulink. Sure. Our competition. Pleased to meet you.

CHASE

I admire your work. I read your book 'Focused Communication.' Loved it.

STILLERMAN

Well, thanks. I play all your games with my nephews. They beat me badly.

CHASE

I doubt that.

STILLERMAN

Is your company here, too?

CHASE

No, just me. It's a ... retreat.
Well ... I just wanted to say hello.
Take care.

They smile a goodbye. He watches her walk away and we go to ...

ANGLE - BUDDY

Buddy is watching this from across the room with deep, resigned eyes, and he says in low voice, nobody can hear ...

BUDDY

Follow her, idiot. I thought you were a genius.

ANGLE - STILLERMAN

As if he has heard, he takes off after Chase, catches up to her.

STILLERMAN

Excuse me. I just had a pretty boring business lunch, and I'd love a long walk. Would you feel like ... ?

CHASE

That'd be nice.

They walk off together.

ON BUDDY

He watches. Then, in a moment, he looks about. He walks into the bar.

INT. BAR - DAY

As Buddy finds a spot at the bar. Spanish guitar is playing on the stereo systems. It's not crowded. A young BARTENDER puts a napkin down. Buddy sighs, deep in his thoughts.

BUDDY
Well, that's the end of it.

BARTENDER
Pardon me? What can I get you?

BUDDY
An older bartender.

The young man walks away. Buddy broods. An older bartender whose name tag says 'ARTHUR' comes over.

BUDDY
Hey, Arthur. I'm Buddy.

ARTHUR
Hey, Buddy. You wanted to see me?

BUDDY
You got a good ear and an understanding heart?

ARTHUR
Not especially.

BUDDY
Give me a double bourbon, single batch, Arthur, and a glass of water -- and you see those two bottles there? Move them to the left, will ya?

By moving the bottles, Arthur blocks Buddy's image in the mirror.

BUDDY
Thanks, I don't want to look at that jerk. He's naive as hell. You got any other music?

ARTHUR
That's all there is.

Arthur puts the drink in front of Buddy.

BUDDY
Well, it's not taking me away. It's not doing the job.
(he drinks)
Tell me a joke, will you? A-guy-walks-into-a-bar joke.

Arthur smiles at the thought of his joke and leans his elbows on the bar.

ARTHUR

Grasshopper walks into a bar and says, give me a vodka tonic. Bartender says, you sure you want a vodka tonic, 'cause we have a drink that's named after you. Grasshopper says, You have a drink named Fred?

Arthur chuckles. Buddy stares deadpan.

BUDDY

I heard that one. Can I have another bourbon and a telephone?

Arthur puts a phone on the bar and Buddy punches in a number.

BUDDY

(to phone)

Hey. Somebody whispered in my ear today, and you know what they said? Hm? Chet? They said "Missouri." How many points? Fine. I'm going for the touchdown.

EXT. RESORT PATIO - EVENING

We're panning over patio tables at the El Vista, with a sunset still lingering, and in this romantic spot are Chase and Stillerman, sharing a table, both talking on their cell phones. They hang up roughly at the same time and go back to signing their credit card slips, splitting this dinner.

STILLERMAN

I don't tip on the tax.

CHASE

Fine.

STILLERMAN

Tomorrow I have a departmental at 10 and an issue lunch, but then I'll have two hours for a bike ride or ...

CHASE

I'm driving back to the city tonight.

STILLERMAN

Oh. Disappointment. I thought you were staying here.

He is looking mostly at her as he puts a swizzle stick in his pocket and drops the pen into his cocktail glass. Only she notices, and she finds his awkwardness a bit endearing.

STILLERMAN
Idea. Do you like Drake's for
breakfast?

CHASE
Drake's is good. Oman's is better.

STILLERMAN
Oman's. Tuesday morning? Nine?

CHASE
Staff meeting at 9:00. Say eight?

STILLERMAN
Joy. I'll confirm Monday. Do I have
all your numbers?

He reaches into a sport coat pocket.

CHASE
Yes. Other pocket.

STILLERMAN
Got it. I've had such a comfortable
time with you. It's as if we've known
each other, isn't it?

She smiles, rises. He stands, dropping his napkin, doesn't
notice.

STILLERMAN
I'll walk you to your ...

His cell phone rings. He picks it up, shrugging an apology.
She smiles and waves and mouths the word 'Tuesday' and walks
away.

INT. BUDDY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Buddy is asleep on the floor of the living room, a rumpled
mess. A patch of sunlight is striking his face and he fights
it, as if it is a moth or a bird or ... He wakes, terribly
hung-over, tiny-eyed, and tries to make out an image on the
sofa.

It is his daughter. She's dressed, watching him with those
sad-mad eyes, very disappointed.

CLAIRE
I guess you don't need 911.

BUDDY
Oh ... Jesus ...

CLAIRE

At least you came in quietly. I didn't find you until I tripped over you an hour ago.

BUDDY

Honey. I'm sorry. I ...

CLAIRE

I haven't tripped over you in 10 years, Dad. There was something nostalgic about it.

She rises from the couch, grabbing her overnight bag.

BUDDY

What's that?

CLAIRE

I'll come back for the rest of my things later. I'm moving out.

BUDDY

Wait. Wait, baby ...

He rises, in great head pain.

CLAIRE

I just waited to say goodbye. No. That's not true. I figured I'd wait for my check. I admit that. I'll take the year's tuition you offered, but I'm calling it a loan. I'll pay you back every penny -- and then we're finished.

His little eyes slowly open and then pop wide, remembering.

BUDDY

Oh. God! Missouri!

And he rushes out the front door -- as she calls after ...

CLAIRE

Boy! When you get an urge to go somewhere ...

He is on his hands and knees outside the open front door, tearing at the morning paper, unfolding, ripping, finding the sports pages and then dying inside.

BUDDY

Oh, Claire. Claire. Two lousy points.

She is stepping over him, on her way out.

CLAIRE

I guess you're still out of it. I'll pick up the check later.

BUDDY

(wretched)

I bet it, baby. I wanted to get you all four years. The whole dream. I tried to ... Oh, Jesus, I bet it. I lost it, honey. I'm so sorry.

She stands there, staring at her pathetic dad, taking yet another punch. Trying to keep the pain inside, invisible. Her voice is strangely soft.

CLAIRE

Well ... Thank God I wasn't depending on you.

And she walks away, and he, in self disgust, throws the handfuls of newspaper into his apartment.

CUT TO:

INT. CHASE'S HOME - MORNING

Same Sunday morning. Chase is reading her newspaper in a civilized manner, but her thoughts are disturbing her. She rises, dressed in a robe, carrying her coffee. She drifts to her closet, opens it. It is very well ordered. She now imagines what it would be like, and we see her imaginings. We see her closet half cluttered with men's clothes and shoes. Then the image disappears.

She drifts past the bathroom, glances in and imagines Jon Stillerman shaving in there, and smiling at her in the mirror. He disappears, and she shifts her look to the covered toilet seat and imagines it left up.

She drifts away, frowning a bit, moves to the bed, stares at it and imagines a body under the covers. This body turns and smiles sleepily at her, but it isn't Stillerman -- It's Buddy!

Chase jolts and spills her coffee on her robe as this image disappears.

CHASE

Gad!

She hurries into the bathroom and starts working furiously on that stained robe at her sink, wiping at the stain as if she's trying to wipe him out of her mind. The stain remains.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Buddy is driving. He is unruffled now, and intense. We see him drive to his daughter's apartment building.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Buddy knocks on the door. Wayne opens it, and blocks the doorway.

BUDDY
I want to see her.

WAYNE
She's not here.

BUDDY
Out of the way, Wayne.

Wayne moves and Buddy sweeps in.

INT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Buddy checks every room. He notices her overnight bag on the floor.

BUDDY
Where is she?

WAYNE
She just ... she said she had to get out. We're both on her shit list.

BUDDY
Any ideas?
(desperate)
I'm asking you.

WAYNE
She walks a lot.

BUDDY
It's not a great neighborhood, can't you walk with her? Take care of her?

WAYNE
I'm not her father.

Buddy frowns and leaves.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Buddy walks back to the street. It is starting to rain. He looks one way, the other, walks toward a diner to peer

through the rain washed window. No Claire. He walks away. A city bus passes. He tries to catch a glimpse of the occupants. He looks at the streets again, hopeless.

INT. CHASE BANNER'S OFFICE - MORNING

Monday morning and Chase is walking in with full energy, China keeping up, writing down --

CHASE

... a breakfast date with Stillerman tomorrow morning. Not a date exactly, but ... Get me Hector, and tell Henry to come in at noon with a complete game plan on Worldnews or else.

CHINA

Or else what?

Chase is at her desk now, getting started on the computer.

CHASE

Tell him I'm out of patience. I'm hungry. Is there any melon?

CHINA

Sorry. I didn't ... There's no breakfast.

CHASE

You seem low energy. Make yourself some coffee. Caf. And send for some honeydew.

CHINA

I didn't sleep. Tommy again. He ...

CHASE

Didn't Ellen Genaldi give us a great review on our "Living Thesaurus" CD? Get her on the phone, will you. I want to start stirring up some excitement on 'Worldnews.' We'll need it.

CHINA

(quietly upset)

Chase.

CHASE

Hm? Did you call Hector?

CHINA

No. I'm sorry. But ... there's something on my mind, and I can't ...

(MORE)

CHINA (CONT'D)

I'm not functioning very well. I'm really sorry about this.

Chase stares at her, wondering, waiting ...

CHINA

I know you hate this. And I'm trying ...

CHASE

China ...

CHINA

I know. I know. I know. I'm supposed to be giving you the bones. You always say that -- not the fat. You mean not the body. It's not fat. It's me. You don't want me. You want a synopsis of me. An outline. Eight words or less. I'm more than eight words. I know you don't 'need to know this' but I'm hurting, and I need a friend, and I spend so many hours with you, and I know you so well, that I think of you as a friend, and if I'm wrong, and I'm crossing the line, then tell me, and I'll shut up.

Chase is absolutely bewildered. She stands..

CHASE

What can I do?

CHINA

Whatever you want.

CHASE

China, I don't know what to do.

CHINA

Talk to me.

CHASE

About?

CHINA

Tell me what you're feeling right now.

CHASE

Right now?

CHINA

Be honest.

CHASE
I'm ... trying ... very hard ... not
to look at my watch.

CHINA
Oh, God.

CHASE
I'm being honest!

CHINA
Look at your watch.

CHASE
No! This comes first. I want to
talk to you.

CHINA
No, you don't.

CHASE
I do!

CHINA
Then talk.

CHASE
About what?!

CHINA
I don't know. The weather this
morning.

CHASE
I ... didn't notice the weather.

CHINA
Why is that?

CHASE
Probably because it's very bland
today.

China goes to the large window and opens the mini-blinds and we see the rain whipping against the glass. Thunder rumbles. With a resigned and defeated look, China says ...

CHINA
It's time for your first phone call.

CHASE
No. They can wait.
(quickly)
A few minutes. I really want to do
this.

China stares at her for a long beat. Then ...

CHINA
My little Tommy has a heart murmur.

CHASE
Oh, China.

CHINA
He's not in danger, but it worries me. I can't not think about it, and I can't sleep, and that's why I made you talk to me, and I don't want to put your day behind and stress you and get your stomach hurting ... so ... Thanks for listening.

Chase comes close to her. In a moment they hug. China lets herself weep a little. Chase holds her tighter.

CHASE
Cancel my morning.

CHINA
(small voice)
No.

CHASE
Cancel it.

CHINA
No.

CHASE
I'm the boss of you.

China smiles through her tears.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Near the office building, along the wet city streets, Chase and China stroll under umbrellas -- talking. We linger a long while. We see Chase send an arm around China as they walk along.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

It's still raining. We watch Buddy, no umbrella, long raincoat, walk along the street, looking at the buildings. He walks into an alley and grabs a fire escape ladder, pulls it down and begins climbing up.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Buddy is trudging to the top of this 4 or 5 story building. He's got something under his coat -- a wrapped up sheet? He gets to the top, climbs onto the roof. He walks to the roof

edge and stands there in the rain, looking out over the city, so full of sorrow. We linger, then ...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

The next morning, still wet, as students converge on the school -- but many of them are looking up toward a building across from the school. One of the students is Claire, walking from her city bus to the high school, noticing the students looking up as they walk -- and she follows their looks to the roof of the building across the street, and she stops dead, staring.

ANGLE - BUILDING

From the roof hangs a sheet, and on that sheet is scrawled in paint, large letters: "One last chance?"

ON CLAIRE

Staring with a deep look.

INT. RESTAURANT - MORNING

Same morning. Chase and Stillerman are having breakfast, their cell phones on the table. His napkin is wet and stuck to his wrist. He doesn't notice. She peels it off. He is staring at the rain-spattered windows.

STILLERMAN

Sorry it's such a gloomy day.

She is strangely subdued.

CHASE

I like the rain.

STILLERMAN

Oh? You must be Irish.

A phone RINGS and they both reach. It's Chase's.

CHASE

(to phone)

Hello. Yes. Uh-huh. Tell him we'll only take orders of 10,000 units and above. See what he says.

She ends the call. He's busy with his palm pilot.

STILLERMAN

Just ... need to scroll this message. There.

(MORE)

STILLERMAN (CONT'D)

(finishes)

Freedom. More Muesli?

CHASE

No. I've been having a little problem. Personnel.

STILLERMAN

Oh?

CHASE

Maybe I've been ... too far back. First a VP tries to sell me out. Then ... my executive secretary ...

STILLERMAN

Maybe I can advise.

CHASE

She's a wonderful girl -- with a sick child.

STILLERMAN

Ah. Question. Just to cut to the center of things. Does your exec-sec call you 'Chase' or 'Ms. Banner?'

CHASE

Chase.

STILLERMAN

I'm as democratic as the next man -- whoever he is -- but I find with support staff that that fine line is important or they'll invade your life with their personal problems, and we're all empathetic, but who has time?

CHASE

Maybe the problem is where I've been drawing that fine line.

STILLERMAN

Have you read Elston's Managing the Managers?

CHASE

Or maybe it should be a thick line or a broken line.

STILLERMAN

I'm not following you. Just core the apple and hand me the core.

CHASE
What?

STILLERMAN
Condense. Try and give me the pit and
not the pulp.

She stares at him, having a revelation. The PHONE jars her.
It's his.

STILLERMAN
Annoyance.
(to phone)
Hello. Roger, yes ... no, it's not in
front of me, but go ahead. Uh-huh.

She looks at Stillerman, at all the other people, half of
them on phones, too. She looks at the rain on the window.
She suddenly stands up and begins gathering her things. He
covers his phone.

STILLERMAN
You have to go?

CHASE
Yes. There's a club I'm joining.

STILLERMAN
A health club?

CHASE
Sort of. It's for wrinkles. Can I
leave you the check this time?

STILLERMAN
Of course.

CHASE
And, Jon ... go ahead and tip on the
tax. You can afford it.

And she leaves.

INT. BUDDY'S BUILDING - DAY

A half hour later. Chase is climbing the stairs to Buddy's
apartment. The door is open. Noise inside. She wonders,
walks in tentatively.

INT. BUDDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Two steps into the living room and Chase is struck by how
great and tidy the place looks, the fresh paint, new
furniture. Noises like ransacking are coming from the second

bedroom -- and out of that room comes Claire with two armloads of duffle bag, art portfolio, etc. They stare at each other.

CHASE
Claire.

CLAIRE
Do I know you?

CHASE
It looks so nice in here.

CLAIRE
I don't think I know you. Do you work for Stan?

CHASE
No. I'm ... your father's client.

CLAIRE
Oh. Well, good luck.

CHASE
Where is he?

CLAIRE
Can't find him, huh? Typical. I don't want to find him. I'm moving out.

CHASE
You live here?

CLAIRE
Tried to.

CHASE
It's so nice now.

CLAIRE
He has his moments.

Claire is gathering a few more of her things as Chase watches.

CHASE
You're a wonderful artist, you know. He's very proud of you.

That stops sad-mad Claire for a second, but.

CLAIRE
I have a bus to catch.

She starts out the door, just as a surprised Buddy is coming in. He carries two cigar boxes. Claire is trying to move past him.

BUDDY
Hey ... Hey, wait.

CLAIRE
Why?

BUDDY
No, Claire ... Oh.

He sees Chase, stares a second.

BUDDY
You two have ... met? Claire, this is Chase Banner. She reminds me of you. She's ...

CLAIRE
She's your client. I know.

BUDDY
(to Claire)
I need to talk to you. Please.

CHASE
I'll step out.

CLAIRE
No. Stay. I'm leaving.

BUDDY
Will you wait? Let me show you. Give me two minutes. I got your tuition back.

CLAIRE
Oh. You won again?

BUDDY
Yeah.

CLAIRE
How do I know you won't lose it again?

CHINA
You lost her tuition?

CLAIRE
He bet it! He got drunk and bet it and lost it.

They both look at Buddy with harsh looks.

BUDDY

I don't think anybody's listening to me.

CHINA/CLAIRE

Awww.

BUDDY

Look! I won it back. All four years.

He hands the two cigar boxes toward Claire. She stares, wide-eyed, but afraid to take them.

BUDDY

I got it in cash, 'cause I knew you wouldn't believe a check. Just take it, put it in your bank account. I won't be able to touch it.

Claire has put her things down. She reaches out, takes the cigar boxes tentatively.

CLAIRE

I suppose ... you think this means I can ... I can just live with you now, and everything's okay?

BUDDY

I'm not trying to buy that. The money is yours. Whether you stay or go.

CLAIRE

You mean ... ?

BUDDY

Whatever. Yeah. But I want you to stay.

She sits heavily on the couch, the boxes in her lap. She opens a lid, closes it quickly. All that cash. She sits there, staring at her thoughts -- as Buddy now turns to Chase.

BUDDY

Are you here ... about Stillerman?

CHASE

No.

BUDDY

Another thief?

CHASE

No.

CLAIRE
I don't know what to do.

BUDDY
You want to count it?

CLAIRE
No! I just ... need to sit here for a while. And think. I can't think.

Buddy turns to Chase again.

BUDDY
(to Chase)
Why are you here?

CHASE
I came ... to see about ... another dance lesson.

Both Buddy and Claire look at her. She nods.

CHASE
I uhhh really enjoyed it. And I've decided ... I need to get out more.

They stare a moment more, and Claire throws her hands up.

CLAIRE
Perfect. Why don't you start right now?

CHASE
I'd better go.

CLAIRE
No. I insist.

She's up and moving toward that cabinet.

CLAIRE
C'mon, Dad, I haven't seen you dance for years -- without falling down. Here. We'll pick a good one ...

BUDDY
Claire. Don't!

CLAIRE
I won't scratch your precious records.

She is sliding back the doors of the cabinet. The cabinet is empty. The entire record collection is gone. Claire freezes, stunned. Chase is also surprised. Claire turns to her father and stares, her eyes filling.

CLAIRE
Daddy ... What did you do?

BUDDY
I ... All right, I didn't win the
money back, but ...

CLAIRE
Those records were all you ever cared
about!

BUDDY
Wrong. No. They were ... pleasant
memories. A big dream is worth more
than pleasant memories -- just like a
rock breaks scissors. No contest.

Chase has a deep and soft look for Buddy.

CLAIRE
(as tears come)
What are you doing to me?

BUDDY
Look, I quit gambling and I quit
drinking. I swear. I signed up for
counselling. Rehab. I mean it. I
am smoking again, though. Okay,
I'll work on that, but I'm asking you
to please try once more and live here
and ...

CLAIRE
You're driving me crazy. I don't know
what to do. Half of me wants to just
run out that door, and half ...

Her eyes fall on Chase and she says in a little voice ...

CLAIRE
What the hell am I supposed to do?

Chase stares a moment and then, in her focused way, she
says ...

CHASE
Negotiate.

They both stare at her. She looks at Buddy, looks at
Claire -- and she walks to the other end of the room and
gestures for Claire to follow.

BUDDY
She's an expert at this.

ON CHASE AND CLAIRE

They speak low-voiced. Buddy can't hear them.

CHASE

What do you want?

CLAIRE

I won't take care of a drunk.

CHASE

He has to stay sober. How about a trial period. Six months?

CLAIRE

Two months. But I won't live with anybody who smokes.

Chase nods and walks across the room to Buddy.

CHASE

She wants a two month trial period without commitment. One lapse, and she's out of here.

BUDDY

Done.

CHASE

You can't smoke in the apartment, and you're limited to six cigarettes a day elsewhere. Your liver may already be shot. She doesn't want to worry about your heart and lungs.

We catch a slight, admiring smile from Claire.

BUDDY

She said all that? Okay. But she is my daughter. So there'll be some rules. She can't just ... stay out all night ...

CLAIRE

Me stay out all night? That's you.

BUDDY

And she has to go slow with this Wayne character.

Chase nods, walks across the room to Claire.

ON CHASE AND CLAIRE

A low-voiced confab.

CLAIRE
I broke up with Wayne a long time ago.

CHASE
Your father doesn't need to know that.
It's best just to agree and ask for
something in return.

CLAIRE
Oh, yeah. Good. What? I know. He
has to keep out of my private life.

CHASE
I don't think he can do that. He's
your father.

CLAIRE
Whose side are you on?

CHASE
Nobody's. This is mediation.

ON BUDDY

Waiting nervously. He can't hear what they're saying. Chase
now comes to him again.

CHASE
She'll break up with Wayne, but she
won't lie to her mother so she wants
you to call her in Florida and tell
her what's going on.

BUDDY
Oh, Jesus. She's killing me. Her
mom'll scream.

CHASE
Why don't you suggest a letter?

BUDDY
Oh, yeah. Good.

CHASE
Maybe after you've spent a few
days ...

BUDDY
Yeah. In a week ...

Claire is crossing the room, coming to her dad as he goes on.

BUDDY

Okay, Claire, we'll write her -- once you're registered at school and living here and it's all up and running. Okay? Deal?

Claire stares at him, her emotions still in turmoil.

BUDDY

Okay, Claire?

She struggles and then she gives in and hugs her dad. He's amazed and humbled by this. Over Claire's shoulder he turns his wide-eyes on Chase. Claire breaks off the hug, tries to speak in a normal fashion.

CLAIRE

Okay then. Thanks, Dad. Thanks ... Chase. I'll ... I'll get the bag I have at Wayne's and I'll ... I'll be back.

She leaves. Buddy takes a very long breath. Pleased. A little dazed. He sits a moment. Then his eyes find Chase again. Their looks carry a lot that's been buried up until now.

BUDDY

Thanks.

She nods.

BUDDY

You really ... want to learn to swing dance?

She nods.

BUDDY

From me?

She nods. He rises, goes to a bookshelf, starts pulling off books and ruffling through pages. He's a little nervous.

BUDDY

I saved a record. One of the best. Stuck it in a book, but ...

From one of the books he's ruffling falls a photo. She picks it up. It's a photograph made from a videotape. It is a shot of Chase asleep, her soft, sweet face. She looks at the photo. She looks at him. He's staring at her. Then he goes back to the books. He finds the record.

BUDDY

Ah. Got it.

He puts it on the turntable.

Ready? BUDDY

I think so. CHASE

He comes close. The record drops. The MUSIC begins banging out. They don't move -- except to come closer by inches, almost in slo mo, their faces approaching, lips touching -- and then they hold on and kiss through a full 8 bars of rock and roll. When they finally separate, she says in a breathless whisper ...

CHASE
What's the next step?

IMMEDIATE CUT TO:

INT. BANNER-EDULINK OFFICES - NIGHT

Our cut is to Chase and Buddy now dancing to that tune, and are they good, and smiling to beat the band, and we notice we're at the kickoff party for the 'Worldnews' CD-Rom, with banners across the office, champagne flowing and the desks pushed aside for dancing -- and the dance floor is full ...

There's Claire dancing with Chick and Ilsa with Stan and China and her Harold and Buzz and Henry and a dozen others and then we find our way back to Chase and Buddy moving along in perfect synch.

End