SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

"TO PROTECT AND SERVE"

FADE IN:

CLOSE-UP: DESK DRAWER

Hands yank open drawers in the dark. Searching brusquely through the desk. Restless. Anxious. Papers fly. Pills and change scatter. A stray condom slides by...

Finally, the hands stop. They come to rest on a gun. Not a nickel-plated pop-gun revolver. No, this is a sleek, black 9mm Beretta. Way expensive. Way cool. Makes you want to own a gun.

The hands release the clip. Checks it. It's full. Cool brass bullets softly reflect the moonlight.

Hands slide the clip in with a loud CLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A posh Hollywood eatery. Dimly lit. Lots of hustle and bustle. LOUD CHATTER. Designer suits. People wandering from table to table. Grown men hugging. Stars walking by, acknowledging others.

We enter through the door, picking up a conversation.

GUY (O.S.)
Shelly Winters.

MOE (O.S.)
Who?

CAMERA weaves through the restaurant. Searches for the right table. Comes to rest on a group. Headed by a HEAVY WOMAN with too much make-up. Amidst her CACKLES, the conversation continues off-screen.

GUY (O.S.)
They ask her to do a reading for the part. I mean, this is Shelly Winters.

(MORE)

GUY (cont'd)
She probably hasn't had to read in over 15 years. But Buddy. He can convince a tick it needs fleas. So she comes in...

MOE (O.S.)
Who's Shelly Winters?

JACK (O.S.)
You know, Shelly Winters. The, uh..the actress. Older. You know.

CAMERA continues to search for these guys. Follows a well-dressed OLD MAN to his table. He sits next to a GIRL..and I do mean girl..dressed in something much too tight to look comfortable. She snuggles up next to him. This definitely ain't the right table.

GUY (O.S.)
...comes in and just sits there. Doesn't say a word. Just sits there...

MOE (O.S.)
What's she been in?

JACK (O.S.)
I don't know. Guy, name something she's been in.

GUY (O.S.)
Winchester '73.

JACK (O.S.)
Yeah. You know. The, uh..1973 film.

We move on. CAMERA follows a busboy as he passes the Old Man's table. Heads towards the back. He goes through the kitchen. The double doors swing shut on us. CAMERA pauses as the doors swing back and forth, back and forth...

A second later, we hear a SCREAM, then a CRASH. The TINKLE of broken glass and china. CURSING. Through the swinging doors a RAT emerges. We follow the RAT as it scampers out. Past the bar. Past the giant potted palms. And out into the patio, where we see..

AT A LONE TABLE OUTSIDE

four young MBA-types are huddled together. Sharp suits, ties..young, virile men reeking of ambition. Seated out of the main landing strip for the major Hollywood players. On the outside looking in.

Holding the center of attention is the storyteller, GUY. Everything about him appears to be the same as his yuppie colleagues, except he sports scruffy hair in contrast to their razor sharp, slicked back cuts. And Guy has got the best-looking suit ensemble.

The other guys -- we'll call them MANNY, MOE, and JACK -- look identical: Crisp white shirts, double breasted suits, paisley ties.

Guy continues...

GUY
So, Buddy decides to get things rolling. He asks her if she's read the script. She nods yes. Things are really tense. Buddy's really working in overdrive to keep things loose...

A WAITRESS brings Jack a piece of cheesecake. Jack takes a bite of the cheesecake. Moe leans in and whispers something to Jack. Jack shrugs, annoyed. Moe prods him, gestures 'ask him'.

GUY
But it's just not working. She's cold. She's still not talking...

JACK
Who else was in Winchester '73?

GUY
And so Buddy...Winchester '73? You never heard of it? Jimmy Stewart. Directed by Anthony Mann. And the first movie <u>ever</u> to give out gross participation points.

MANNY
To Shelly Winters?

GUY
No. Jimmy Stewart.

MOE
I never saw that. Give me another credit.

Guy pauses. Thinks. Searches.

MANNY
Jack, how's the cheesecake?

JACK
Tastes like shit. You want it?

GUY
Oh, there's a great question. If it tastes like shit, why would he want it?

MOE
I'll take it.

The rest of the table pauses. Looks at Moe. Looks at each other. Then in unison...

GUY , MANNY , JACK
AGENT!!!!

Laughs all around. Guy waves his hands for attention.

GUY
Listen, do you want to hear the rest of this or not?

JACK
Yeah, we do. Shut up Moe.

Moe digs into the cheesecake.

MOE
I'm sorry. I just want to know who we're discussing here. That a crime?

GUY
So Buddy keeps vamping. But Ms. Winters could not care less what he has to say. She just reaches into her bag and pulls out an Oscar.

JACK
No way.

MANNY
An Oscar??

GUY
Yup, a fucking Academy Award. But does that shut Buddy up? No. He pushes on.

JACK
He is so smooth. He is the best.

MANNY
That's why he's the king.

GUY
So Buddy keeps talking. Finally, Shelly reaches down into her bag again. Pulls out another Oscar. Slams it down on the table. By now, everyone has shut up. Except for Buddy. No, he keeps pushing on. So, she reaches into her bag again and pulls out another one. And then another one. Finally, the room is silent. Even Buddy has shut up. Then Shelly looks up at Buddy and says, 'You know, some people think I can act.'

The table bursts into LAUGHTER. Not all of it genuine. Some of it solely for schmooze.

Moe leans in again to whisper something to Jack. But Guy stops him. Slightly annoyed.

GUY
Moe, how's the cheesecake?

MOE
Jack's right. Tastes like shit.

Moe takes another bite. Big one. Finishes it off. Licks his fingers.

GUY
Moe, you know. If you want to ask me something, I'm sitting right here. You don't need to ask Jack.

MOE
I don't want to interrupt your story. It's a good story.
(everyone nods in agreement)
But who the hell is Shelly Winters? What did she win the Oscars for?

Pregnant pause. Guy searches, thinks. Doesn't really know himself. Tries to play around it.

GUY
Well, it wasn't for costume design.

Couple of polite laughs. Jack punches Moe playfully. Manny sits up excited.

MANNY
Wait. Wait Wait Wait Wait. I know. She's the one who does those Polydenture commercials. You know...

JACK
Right, and she just married that guy who's, like, twenty years younger than her. He's always pushing her around in a wheelchair.

GUY
Stop. Stop it. That's Martha Raye you idiots. Jesus, I am dining with film illiterates.

MOE
Hey. Time out. Check out who just walked in.

We look over to the front entrance of the restaurant and see the back of a tall, silver-haired gentleman with an impeccable suit.

MANNY
Oh my god. It's Cyrus Vance. The king. Hey Guy, introduce us, huh?

GUY
Right. Introduce a table of assistants to the chairman of Mega-Pictures. Oh yeah. That would be a good career move.

MOE
But you know him right? You and he are tight, aren't you?

JACK
Yeah, he does know you, doesn't he?

GUY

Like a trapped animal, he turns around. All eyes are on him. Time to meet the challenge.

He watches CYRUS circulate through the restaurant. Slow motion. Coming towards the back. Near their table. Manny, Moe, and Jack look on eagerly. Guy gets ready to stand...

A loud BEEP BEEP BEEP stops him. Guy reaches down to his belt and pulls off his BEEPER. Saved! Looks at it, and rolls his eyes for effect.

GUY
Gentleman, if you'll excuse me. Duty calls.

MANNY
He's beeping you now??!!

Guy shrugs, 'What can you do'. Leaves the table. As soon as he is out of earshot, Jack turns to Moe.

JACK
What are you doing? You're embarrassing me here! He's the prodigal son of Mega-Pictures. He's our way in. And you're fuckin' it up!

MOE
What? I just want to know who Shelly Winters is.

INT. RESTAURANT LOBBY - PHONE BOOTHS

Guy slides in between two really attractive model-types. Eye candy.

He dials, waits. A FEMALE VOICE answers.

GUY
You rang, Babushkin?

DAWN (O.S.)
Yeah, sorry I had to beep you. Hope I didn't scare you.

GUY
Don't worry about it. If it had been <u>him</u>, I don't think I would have called.

DAWN (O.S.)
Where are you right now?

GUY
Dinner with the guys. You want me to come over?

DAWN (O.S.)
No. I have to read a script overnight. And I just wanted to know if anyone at the studio got it.

GUY
Sure, what is it?

A loud BEEP is heard on the other end. The unmistakable intrusion of call waiting.

DAWN (O.S)
Wait, hold on. I've got another call.

GUY
Yeah, sure.

Guy leans against the phone booth. A second later, he stands up, starts to speak, but then stops. Quickly covers the phone's mouthpiece. He listens, listens. A frown forms on his face. Quickly darkens into a glare.

Hangs up. Steadies himself for a second. Breathing hard.

Guy looks around. Rushes into the men's room.

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Guy looks into the mirror. Paces. Really really pissed-off about something. Mutters to himself. Actually starts yelling to himself.

GUY
God Damnit. Fuck! I don't believe this. I can't believe this. This isn't happening. This can't be happening. It's not fair. It's not right.

Just then, a MAN IN A FRINGE JACKET walks in. Sees Guy and his face lights up.

FRINGE JACKET
Hey, Guy? Guy, how are you? Johnny Bonds. Remember, I was in to see Buddy last week? How is he?

GUY
He's great. He's fuckin' fantastic. Excuse me.

Guy rushes out. Fringe Jacket yells after him.

FRINGE JACKET
Hey, tell Buddy he owes me a call.

EXT. RESTAURANT

GUY pays the valet and screeches out and around the corner.

INSIDE THE CAR

Guy grips, squeezes the steering wheel. Tense. Trying to keep it under control. Mutters to himself. Angry. Pissed. Ready to explode. He screeches around another corner.

EXT. INTERSECTION - BEVERLY & LA CIENEGA

Red light.

Guy's car stops.

INSIDE

Guy whips off his tie. Anxiously waits for the left-turn light to change. But it's taking forever. Finally...

GUY
(loudly)
Fuck! Fuck! FUCK! FUCK!!!!!!

Guy blows up. Throws a violent temper tantrum in the car. Punching, kicking, screaming. Cassettes go flying by. His rear view mirror gets knocked off. Fury unleashed.

Guy finally stops. Out of breath. Suit disheveled. Hair a mess. And the light is still red. Worse yet, Guy looks over and...

IN THE CAR NEXT TO HIM

A CUTE GIRL waves. Smiles. Laughs. Obviously knows Guy.

A humiliated Guy turns burning red. Waves back as best he can.

THE LIGHT

changes to green.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUDDY ACKERMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Nestled in the Hollywood Hills. Off Laurel Canyon. Big giant house on stilts surrounded with ceiling-high picture windows.

Buddy's car pulls up. Buddy gets out, a man on a mission. Walks up to the door.

Lifts up a flowerpot and picks up a key. Punches a security access code. Red light changes to green. Guy turns the lock and enters.

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

The bedroom is a study in opulent self-worship. Mirrors as big as the picture windows. And everything a testimonial to the life of Buddy Ackerman. Movie posters. Big ones in foregin languages.

Signed photos of celebrities cover a wall. Their arms around Buddy with corny sentiments like, "To my best Buddy" or "Thanks for putting me in an 'action Buddy' picture".

BUDDY ACKERMAN, early-40s, receding hairline, and a slight paunch that can only come from living well. Looking way too good for just lounging around the house. Everything about him reads high maintenance. Everything about him also reads self-confident, assured...king of the hill.

Buddy checks his watch. Flips through TV channels. Stops. Sees something that sparks his interest. Picks up the phone, which is always within easy reach. Hits a Speed Dial button.

BUDDY
Guy, tomorrow morning, research who directed this music video. It's the group Slam and Jam and...
(studies the TV)
it's got cheerleaders in some tight purple skirts. Find out who his agent is and what he's doing now.
(Then as an afterthought)
Oh, and see if you can track down the redhead in the leather miniskirt and set up a meeting.

Buddy hangs up. Starts flipping channels, when...

GUY (O.S.)
The video was directed by a she. Tammy Janawa. And you're too late. She's already the newest flavor of the month and has committed to a picture for Universal.

BUDDY
What the hell?

Buddy turns to the dark hallway. Sees the RED GLOW of a burning cigarette. Guy steps out of the shadows. Leans against the doorway. Stamps out his cigarette on the floor.

GUY
As for the redhead, don't you think she's just a little young for you?

Buddy gets to his feet. First, startled. Then, annoyed. Points to the cigarette stub.

BUDDY
What are you doing?! What are you doing here!
(Guy doesn't move)
Jesus. You scared the living shit out of me! Do you realize that if you were an intruder, I..I could have shot you!

GUY
With what? This?

Guy holds up the sleek, black 9mm Beretta. Buddy's tone changes. He backs down a bit, but just an iota. After all, he's still Buddy Ackerman.

BUDDY
Great, my gun. Hand it over.

GUY
Sit down.

BUDDY
What? Come on. Give me the gun.

GUY
Sit.

BUDDY
Have you gone completely insane? Are you nuts? Give me the fuckin' gun. Now.

Guy advances towards Buddy. In one swift motion, Guy chambers a round with a loud CLACK and extends his arm. Gun pointed directly in Buddy's face.

GUY
Sit. The. Fuck. Down.

Buddy sits. Changes strategies. Tries to calm Guy.

BUDDY
Okay, I know things have been kind of crazy in the office. But there's no need for this. Now, why don't you put the gun down and let's talk about this. We're rational adults here.

GUY
Bullshit. You are a fucking child.

BUDDY
(flaring)
All right. Forget it. I gave you a chance. It's late, and I've had enough of this bullshit. I'm calling the cops, and you are going to jail. End of story. Have a nice life.

Buddy picks up the phone and starts dialing. Guy cocks the gun, and in a sweeping motion, swings his arm around and FIRES.

THE PHONE

EXPLODES into a million pieces. In slow motion too. A shower of plastic shards flying into space.

Buddy jumps back. Drops the phone receiver. Now beginning to get just a little nervous.

BUDDY
What do you want?

Guy grabs Buddy with one hand. Cocks the gun with the other. Draws Buddy close. Face to face. Eye to eye. Nose to gun barrel.

GUY
I want you to think and remember. Remember every insult, every offense, every transgression. And think to yourself...it's payback time.

CUT TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE CARD - "DAY ONE"

A phone RINGS and RINGS

FADE IN:

INT. MEGA PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES - DAY

War zone. A blizzard of paper, thunder of phones ringing, a loud jumble of voices everywhere.

GUY waits nervously beside an empty desk. Hair cut short. Ill-fitting suit. Single breasted and un-chic. Boring tie done in an enormous Windsor knot. Face full of anxiety and anticipation.

The phone RINGS and RINGS. Guy looks around. Looks at the phone. Should he answer it, shouldn't he? Finally decides to pick it up.

GUY
Buddy Ackerman's office.

DIAL TONE. Too late. A hand from behind grips Guy's shoulder.

REX (O.S.)
Ready to go to work I see.

Guy turns. Comes face to face with REX COBB, late 20s. All confidence and charm. And really well dressed...for an assistant. The phone RINGS again. Several lines at once. Rex picks it up.

REX
Buddy Ackerman's office. No Brad, he isn't here right now.
(listens, pause)
Yeah, I'll make sure he responds to that submission today. No, love you, babe.
(phone rings again)
Buddy Ackerman's office. No, he isn't here yet. Yes, I know the meeting has started. I'll send him down as soon as he gets here.
(hangs up, picks up another line)
Buddy Acker..Oh, hey Mitzi. How are you gorgeous? No, I didn't know you two were supposed to go out tonight. I'll remind him. Okay, see you.

Guy stands there bewildered, because all of this has been executed in a matter of mere seconds. And he's still waiting to see if Rex comes up for air.

Rex sets the phone down. It rings again. Rex ignores it. Motions for Guy to follow.

DOWN THE HALL

Guy and Rex pass a handful of other assistants at work. All of them busy. It's a war zone.

Rex gives Guy the run-down on the job.

REX
So I don't know what you've heard about this job, but it's going to be a lot of work for shit wages.

(MORE)

REX (cont'd)
(corrects himself)
A lot of shit work for shit wages. Picking up dry-cleaning. Gassing up his car. Getting coffee. Getting lunch. Getting him laid. And he can be...well, difficult at times.

INT. COPY ROOM

Rex leads Guy into the copy room. Grabs a couple packets of coffee from a cabinet. Points to the copy machine.

REX
That thing is going to be the second most important thing in your life. Pity the day it breaks down on you.

Guy studies the copier apprehensively. Cutting-edge technology. Looks like the bridge of the Starship Enterprise. Intimidating.

Rex exits. Guy scurries behind.

INT. HALLWAY

CLOSE-UP on an coffee maker on a table. Coffee drips onto the warmer. SIZZLES. A nearly empty coffee-pot is replaced. Coffee drips into the pot. CAMERA TILTS UP to pick up on...

REX AND GUY

as they reach the coffee pot. Rex picks up an empty wrapper. Looks at it with disgust.

REX
Decaf!? What's the point?

Rex dumps out the pot of coffee. Prepares a new one. Continues his lecture to Guy.

REX
But if you do this job well.
(pauses)
And you will do it well. Then there will be a world of wealth and

(MORE)

REX (cont'd)
opportunity for you. All of Buddy's assistants have gone on to bigger and better things. One is running the Fox network. Another has produced all the Macauly Culkin action pictures. It's a good lineage. A legacy.

GUY
And where are you going?

REX
(beaming)
Vice-President of Production at Paramount. Like I said. It's a good lineage.

Rex sits down back at his desk. As usual the phone RINGS and RINGS. Rex leans back and answers as Guy pulls out a pad to start taking notes.

Rex hangs up. Points to the phone.

REX
And this. This is the most important thing in your life. Works very simply.
(picks up the receiver)
Steady green light, the line is active. If it's off, it's dead. If it's flashing red, it's on hold. Flashing green? Incoming.

Guy jots this down. Rex answers another call. Then Rex sees something that causes him to sit-up.

DOWN THE HALL

BUDDY ACKERMAN comes walking...no, gliding down the hallway. As if on greased tracks. In a beautifully tailored double-breasted suit with a stylishly loud tie, Buddy approaches the desk.

Rex immediately stands at attention while still on the phone. Ready to serve. Guy looks over. Tries to copy Rex's stance.

Buddy approaches. Ignores Rex. Heads directly to Guy.

BUDDY
Guy, so glad to see you here.
(motions to Rex)
It'll be nice to finally get some real help here. And send this mongoloid away so he can do some damage to the competition for a change.

Buddy extends his hand for a shake. Guy, still holding the pad and pen, fumbles about to get a hand free. Rex hangs up the phone.

REX
Meeting's in the conference room.

BUDDY
Have they started?

REX
No. They've been waiting for you. About fifteen minutes now.

BUDDY
Good. Let me tell you something, boys. And learn from this. If they can't start a meeting without you...well, that's a meeting worth going to. And that's the only kind of meeting you should ever concern yourselves with.
(hands Rex his briefcase)
Here, file this. Do I need anything?

REX
Budget and schedule.

BUDDY
Well, where are they? And where's my coffee?

REX
File's on your desk. I'll get it. Guy...coffee?

Rex disappears into Buddy's office.

Guy pours a cup of coffee. Looks at the cream and sugar. Doesn't know what to do. Grabs a handful of both. Brings it to Buddy.

GUY
Cream? Sugar?

BUDDY
(with an edge of impatience)
Sweet and Low.

Guy heads back to the coffeepot. There's no Sweet & Low. Runs to the copy room.

INT. COPY ROOM

Guy walks in. Opens the drawers. Then hears a bellow from down the hallway.

BUDDY (O.S.)
I'M LATE FOR A MEETING HERE PEOPLE!
COME ON LET'S GO! GO! GO! GO!

Guy tears through the drawers. Finds a box of Equal. Triumphant, Guy runs out of the copy room.

EXT. HALLWAY

Guy comes racing down to where Rex stands next to an agitated Buddy. Offers the Equal packets.

Buddy stares at them with disinterest. Doesn't move an inch.

BUDDY
What is this?

GUY
Sweet and Low.

Rex cringes. Shakes his head.

Buddy sets down his folder. Picks up the Equal.

BUDDY
No. This is not Sweet and Low. This is Equal. Blue packet. Sweet and Low is pink. It's not the same thing.
(tosses the Equal)
This shit will kill you. Rex, explain it to him.

REX
Equal has been known to cause cancer in laboratory rats.

GUY
Yeah, but Sweet and Low has saccharin, which...

Rex cringes again. Buddy cuts Guy off. Nice at first.

BUDDY
What Sweet and Low contains is not our concern here. I don't give a shit if one has fucking fairy dust in it.
(grows hostile)
What I am concerned with here is DETAIL. I asked for Sweet and Low and you bring me back Equal. That isn't what I wanted. That isn't what I needed. And that isn't going to work around here.

GUY
But, I thought that..

Buddy raises a hand. Guy stops.

BUDDY
Your thoughts mean nothing around here. Do me a favor. Shut up. Listen. Learn.
(pauses; then, after he's certain he has Guy's attention)
I know that this is your first day and you're not familiar with the way things work around here, so I'm going to tell you.
(MORE)

BUDDY (cont'd)
(sweetly)
You have no brain. No judgement calls are necessary. What you think -- means nothing. What you feel -- means nothing. You are here for me. You are here to protect my interests and serve my needs.
(grows stern)
So when I ask for a fucking packet of Sweet and Low, that's what I want. And it is your responsibility to see that I get what I want. Am I clear?

GUY
(barely audible)
Yes sir.

Buddy smiles, than pats Guy warmly on the back.

BUDDY
Good. Now, I don't mean to be cruel. I'm just trying to help. You do this job right, and you can have whatever you want. Take a look at Rex here.
(picks up coffee and folder)
Rex. What a name. Belongs to a mutt. I mean, if I can get dog-boy here a job, well then....

Buddy heads down the hall. Rex and Guy are silent, holding their breaths, until Buddy rounds the corner.

They exhale. Dismayed, Guy slumps into a chair. The phone RINGS. Rex ignores it. Opens his desk. Pulls out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter.

GUY
I fucked up. It's over.

REX
Relax. He does that a lot. Tomorrow, he'll ask you for an Equal. You can't win.

GUY
Does it still happen to you?

REX
Daily.
(laughs; then serious)
Actually, hourly.

Guy laughs. Sighs. Not convinced.

REX
Look, everyday is something completely different. Nothing is ever the same. What he wants, what he needs can change in a second. The trick is to have everything ready. Anticipate. I would have brought back both an Equal and a Sweet and Low. Remember, protect his interests. Serve his needs. Come on, say it with me.

REX AND GUY
Protect his interests. Serve his needs.

Rex smiles -- Guy's converted. Guy puts his hands in his head. Bewildered.

GUY
That's crazy. You can't run a business that way.

REX
Uh-uh. First mistake. This is not a business. No rules here. Save that candy-striped crap for the Wall Street wimps. This is show business. Punching below the belt isn't only all right. It's rewarded. Half the time, you make things up as you go along. And everything changes in a New York second. Now, a piece of advice.
(leans in)
You are always wrong. No matter what happens -- It's your fault. He'll yell. He'll yell a lot, but don't

(MORE)

REX (cont'd)
personalize it. It's just part of the job.
(pulls a cigarette)
And never try to explain your position. He doesn't care.

GUY
Because I'm wrong

REX
That's right. You're wrong. You are always wrong. The easiest way to deal with it is to just say, 'I'm sorry, it won't happen again.'

Rex lights up a cigarette. Takes a long drag. Holds the pack out for Guy. Guy refuses.

GUY
Thanks. I don't smoke.

REX
(laughs, exhaling smoke)
Won't last.
(holds up the cigarette)
This, and that pot of coffee are going to be your best friends for the next year. Get to know them. Now roll up your sleeves. We got work to do.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY ACKERMAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark. Lit only by outside moonlight. Drapes are open, affording us a luxurious view of the twinkling city lights below. This could be a very romantic scene....if it weren't for the sight of Buddy bound tightly to a chair.

Guy stands looking out the window. Staring. Thinking. Takes a long drag on his cigarette. Holds it in front of him. Chuckles. Walks over to Buddy. Buddy glares.

BUDDY
What do you want?

Guy SNAPS on a lamp. Harsh, glaring light. Right in Buddy's face. Buddy squints.

Guy doesn't answer. Just walks around Buddy. Takes off his jacket. Rolls up his sleeves.

BUDDY
You are in big trouble. You are so dead in this town. When I get through with you...

Guy steps around and lays into Buddy with a full right cross.

Buddy's head snaps back with the punch.

BUDDY
Shit! Fuck! What the...

Guy lays in again with another punch. Draws blood this time. Buddy starts struggling. But he ain't going anywhere.

Buddy starts SCREAMING. Guy continues hitting.

Guy HUMS "HAIL TO THE CHIEF" while leaning in with right jabs. Punctuates the song with left hooks. An uppercut. Then a flurry of combinations.

And Guy is smiling through all this. Couldn't be having more fun. Buddy SCREAMS. YELLS. But Guy isn't listening.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S KITCHEN

Guy opens the freezer. Fills a bowl with ice. Sets it on the counter. Gingerly, he puts his hands in the bowl.

Winces, surprised - this wasn't suppose to be painful for him. Guy inspects his knuckles. Flexes his hand. Places it again on ice.

Guy reaches into his pocket for a cigarette. Doesn't find one. Heads back into the living room.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM

Buddy is breathing heavily. Head down.

Looks up when Guy enters. Scared. Face puffy and red. Flinches when Guy approaches.

BUDDY
Stop! Don't you touch me!

GUY
Relax. I'm not going to hit you.

Buddy SCREAMS for help. Tries to kick Guy. Guy tries to control the situation.

GUY
I said. Cool it. I'm not going to hit you.

BUDDY
Get the fuck away from me, you bastard!

GUY
Calm down. I'm not...

Buddy SCREAMS. Angry, Guy lifts up his arm and backhands Buddy. Buddy's head snaps back. He shuts up. Guy rubs his hand.

GUY
I told you. I'm not going to hit you. Not anymore. It's too hard on the hands.

BUDDY
I am going to fuckin' kill you.

Guy doesn't answer him. Walks over to the coffee table. Fishes out a cigarette. Sits down.

BUDDY
Come on, what do you want?
(still no answer)
Oh, give me a break. This isn't happening. This is too stupid to be happening. Look, you got your rocks off, so untie me and get the fuck out of my house. Oh, and you're fired.

Guy steps up. Picks up the Beretta. Points it at Buddy. Buddy goes into panic mode. Trying anything he can to escape. Kicking, straining to break free. SCREAMS.

BUDDY
Okay, okay. You're not fired! You're not fired.

Guy watches all of this amused. Takes a drag on his cigarette. Then walks up to Buddy, raises his arm and backhands the pistol sharply against Buddy's face with a loud CRACK!

Buddy's head snaps back sharply with a CRY OF PAIN. He brings his head up, spitting blood. Guy's hand is raised, ready to strike again.

BUDDY
Fuck.

GUY
Are you finished?

Buddy just spits blood into Guy's face. Snarling.

BUDDY
I'm going to bury you! You hear me! You are going to pay for this!

GUY
Wrong. You are going to pay. In the name of every poor slob who had to take shit from arrogant jerk-offs like you, you are going to pay.

BUDDY
Oh give me a break. We've got the fucking caped crusader here. YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!!!

Guy shrugs. Walks around the room. A calculated and calm machine of destruction. Knocks down valuables with a CRASH. Porcelain. Glass.

Walks down a row of autographed pictures. SMASHES them all with the butt of his gun. Down the row. Methodical. One-two-three.

Comes back in front of Buddy. Sits down. Crosses his legs. Takes a drag off his cigarette. Blows smoke into Buddy's face. Smiles.

BUDDY
Are you through? Now that you've trashed my place and beaten my face to a pulp, are you satisfied? Are we through?

GUY
Not quite.

BUDDY
Great. So now what?

GUY
We wait. And you suffer.

CUT TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE CARD - "WEEK ONE"

Phone RINGS and RINGS and RINGS.....

FADE IN:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES - DAY

As before, chaos and bedlam. Phones RING off the hook. VOICES clamor to be heard.

At his desk, Guy fields five phone lines as best he can. And he is a mess. But his tie selection has improved -- Snazzy geometric design done up in a nice, tight knot.

Papers are strewn all around him. It doesn't look like it's been a good week.

GUY
(answering phone, flustered)
Buddy Ackerman's office. Uh-huh. I don't know. Can you hold?
(picks up another line)
Buddy Ackerman's office. Umm, no. I don't know. I'll ask.
(switches lines)
Buddy Ackerman's...Yeah? All right. I'll let him know. I really couldn't say.
(yells into Buddy's office)
Costner on 3, and Bergman's unreachable until Monday.

BUDDY (O.S.)
What do you mean unreachable? Get in here.

Guy winces. Picks up a pad and pen and heads into the office.

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE

Minimalist furniture. Simple. Efficient. Cold. Power interior designing. A copy of Machiavelli's THE PRINCE decorates Buddy's desk.

Guy sits down while Buddy wraps up a call. Buddy presses a button on his desk and...

THE DOOR

SLAMS shut. Guy looks towards it - he's trapped.

BUDDY
Kevin, let me call you back, all right? I have to yell at my mongoloid-fag assistant right now.
(chuckles)
No, it's not necessary. But it sure is a lot of fun.
(hangs up the phone; turns to Guy)
You were saying? About Bergman?

GUY
(stammering)
He's..he's in Colorado white-water rafting with Tom Cruise.

BUDDY
Yeah. So? Track him down. Find out where he's staying.

GUY
But he's rafting.

Buddy sits there silent. Waits for more. Guy sweats.

GUY
Um, ..on the Colorado river? He's kind of out there in the wilderness.

BUDDY
I'm sorry. I don't see the problem.

GUY
He's unreachable. On a raft. With no phone. And...

BUDDY
They have forest rangers don't they?

Guy stops. Has no response for this. Buddy loses his patience.

BUDDY
Shut up. Listen. Learn. There is no such word as 'unreachable' for this office. It may work for other hacks out there, but not here. Find him. Get him. I want to talk to him by lunch.

Guy stands up. Has no idea what to do next. Exits the office.

INT. HALLWAY

Waiting outside Buddy's office is DAWN LOCKARD. Mid-20s blonde ambition. And with the looks to back it up. Eagerly introduces herself to Guy.

DAWN
Hi, I'm Dawn Lockard, with Prism Presentations. I have a 12:00 with Mr. Ackerman.

Guy flails. But three reasons why so we don't think he's a complete flounder: 1 - He's confused. 2 - He's just been yelled at. 3 - And he really finds Dawn attractive.

GUY
I do? I mean, you do-do? I..let me check.
(shuffles some papers)
I'm sorry, I don't have anything.. When did you make the..?

DAWN
About a month ago. It's been rescheduled a few times now.

GUY
I'm sorry, but it's my first week and I...I guess Rex must have forgot to put it down. Uh, why don't you have a seat, and I'll tell him.

Dawn sits down. Guy picks up the phone. Whispers into it. Through the receiver and the office door, you can hear the MUFFLED YELLING of an unhappy Buddy.

Guy looks towards Dawn apologetically. Dawn packs up her stuff. Prepares to leave.

Then Guy pauses. The yelling stops. Guy looks at Dawn. Turns his back to her and hunches over the phone. Whispers..

GUY
Well, yes. I suppose. She's not bad-looking. Fairly attractive. All right.

Guy hangs up the phone. Answers another line. Asks them to hold. Turns to Dawn.

DAWN
I'm sorry. The last thing I wanted was to get you in trouble. I'll just call back when it's more convenient and...

GUY
No, he said he'll do it. But it's just going to be three or four minutes.

DAWN
(delighted)
Really?

GUY
Yeah.

Dawn smiles. Gratitude in her eyes. Guy is smitten. Phone RINGS. Guy snaps out of it.

GUY
So, can I get you anything to drink?

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - 45 MINUTES LATER

Guy comes walking down the hall. Cup of tea in hand. Hands it over to Dawn.

GUY
I know you didn't like the coffee or the orange juice. But I promise. The tea is the best, and my personal favorite.
(hands her the cup)
Sorry about the wait. Longest three minutes you've ever lived, I bet.

DAWN
Please. This is the norm. No one got anywhere by being impatient.

The phone is RINGING off the hook. Buddy opens up the door. Motions for Guy to get in. Guy excuses himself.

Dawn sips her tea. Stops mid-sip when she hears SCREAMING coming from Buddy's office. Moments later, Guy appears sheepishly. Embarrassed.

GUY
You want to come on in?

Dawn enters. Guy sits down. Hits the answering machine. Starts playing back the phone calls he missed while talking to Dawn.

BUDDY
(phone message #1)
Hello, where are you?
(message #2)
Where the hell are you. I can't believe this.
(message #3)
God Damn it. Come in here now!
(message #4)
WHERE ARE YOU! WHY AREN'T YOU AT YOUR POST! YOU DESERTED YOUR POST!

And the rest of the messages are all a progression of Buddy's mounting anger. Guy throws down his pen in defeat.

But no sooner than he leans back in his chair does Buddy's office door open again. Yes, it's been a thirty second meeting. Guy jumps to his feet.

Buddy kisses Dawn goodbye as he puts on his jacket. Turns to Guy. Vicious.

BUDDY
Where's the script?

GUY
What script?

BUDDY
The script. The one I was talking about this morning.

GUY
I'm sorry. I don't know what script you're talking about.

BUDDY
You don't know? You don't know!!? Then what good are you, boy? Do you have any brains? Do you want to keep this job?

Buddy continues his TIRADE. SCREAMING. SPITTING. Dawn looks away politely. Everyone in the hall stops. Looking to see what the commotion is. Suddenly, the whole office gets very QUIET.

Guy looks away. Feels everyone's stare on him. Embarrassed. Ashamed.

BUDDY
Get into this "Devil's Advocate" situation. Call every fucking agent and find out why I never got to see this piece of drek crap first. And if that script isn't on my desk when I get back, you'd better not be here either.
(turns to Dawn, sweetly)
If you need anything, call me.

Buddy disappears down the hall. Everyone goes back to work.

Degraded, Guy buries himself in paper. Jots down a bunch of notes. But...

DAWN'S HAND

gently stops Guy's scribbling. It's a nice, soft caress.

DAWN
Rough week, huh?
(Guy nods, dumbstruck)
Don't let it get you down. Listen, why don't we have lunch sometime? I could help you with any questions...

GUY
I don't really get lunch.

DAWN
Well, dinner then.

GUY
I'm usually here really late.

DAWN
Even on the weekends?

Guy is speechless. Shrugs. Finally...

GUY
Sure. Uh, yeah. Why not?

DAWN
Here's my card. Call me, and we'll get together Saturday. All right?

Guy stops. Bewildered. Catatonic. Stammers out...

GUY
Stop me if I'm about to self-destruct here. But surely a woman as attractive and well..
(searches for the right words)
..as pleasant-natured as you must be busy Saturday night.

DAWN

I am now.

She saunters down the hall.

Guy sits back and smiles. For the first time all week.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE - DUSK

Guy enters cautiously. Buddy stands in front of the window, looking out at a brilliant sunset sky. Plays with a paddle-ball. BAP..BAP..BAP..

GUY

Um..Buddy.

Buddy grunts. Doesn't turn to face Guy. Continues with the paddle. BAP..BAP..BAP..

Guy swallows. Scared. Continues..

GUY

About today. I...

BUDDY

No apology necessary. Just make sure it doesn't happen again.

Guy stops. Takes a deep breath...

GUY

No. It's just that I didn't know about the script...

BUDDY

Everyone's allowed at least one mistake. You've used up yours. Let's not dwell on it.

GUY

Well, that's just it, sir.

(with conviction)

I don't think I made a mistake. And I would appreciate it if you didn't yell at me in front of the entire office.

The paddle-ball stops. Buddy turns. Silhouetted against the red sky. Menacing. Guy steps back - a reflex action.

BUDDY
What?

GUY
The, uh.. yelling.

BUDDY
You disapprove?

GUY
No, that's not it. I..I just don't think it's necessary.

Buddy laughs. Congenial. Moves over to his desk.

BUDDY
Well, I'm glad you brought this up.

GUY
You are?

BUDDY
Yes. An office can't run if the lines of communication aren't open. So let's make a couple of things clear.

Buddy motions for Guy to sit. Walks around his desk. Sits in front of Guy. Nicely at first...

BUDDY
First of all. What did I tell you the first day? Your thoughts mean nothing. You are nothing. And yet you have the nerve to tell me...

GUY
No, I...

BUDDY
Please. Shut up. At least allow me the courtesy of finishing what I have to say. Please. That's the very least you can do after I've had to endure your insults.

Guy starts to say something. But Buddy POUNDS on his desk.

BUDDY
Who do you think you are? You snot-faced little punk! You are nothing. If you were in my toilet bowl, I wouldn't bother flushing it. You're not worthy to pick the lint off my toes. See this?
(picks up a clipboard)
This is more important to the office than you. And yet do you hear any complaints when I do this?

Buddy hurls the clipboard across the office. Whizzes by Guy's head. Dents the wall with a loud CRACK.

Guy backs up in his chair. Getting just a little nervous..

Buddy picks up a handful of pens.

BUDDY
These pens? More important than you. These paper clips. More important.

Buddy throws the pens and clips at Guy with disgust. Stands. Looms over Guy.

BUDDY
You miserable little shit. Fuckin' cry-baby. You don't like it here? Leave. There are thousands of people who would kill for your spot. I could spit and hit someone who could do this job better than you. I am sick and tired of running a charity ward here. And I am sick and tired of your whining.

Buddy reaches over. Starts punctuating his speech with little slaps to Guy's face.

BUDDY
Why don't you be a man? Huh? Huh? If you can't do this job, get the hell out of here. If you can't take the heat, go build igloos.

Buddy stands up. Moves behind the desks. Starts pelting Guy with any object he has. Guy stands up, tries to exit.

BUDDY
You gotta be more thick-skinned, son. Bet you're a momma's boy, aren't you. Well, mommy's not gonna protect you here. You gotta be a man to do this job.

Guy finally reaches the door. Runs out.

Buddy throws one last object at the closing door. Chuckles.

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Guy holds Buddy's door closed. Looks around. Totally scared and confused. What has he gotten himself into?

We hear the paddle-ball start again. BAP..BAP..BAP...

CUT TO:

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Guy enters exhausted. Flops onto the couch. Just lays there for a minute. Finally sits up. Looks around his place.

It's a mess. Entertainment magazines and trades lie scattered about with socks and microwave dinner boxes.

And in a lonely corner, apart from the rest of the mess, sits a dusty computer. Film school sticker plastered on the side reads 'REALITY ENDS HERE'. A pile of typed pages stacked neatly in the corner of the desk. Yes, our boy fancies himself a writer.

GUY

gets up with a groan. Walks over to the answering machine and plays back the messages. One from concerned Mom, one from a friend complaining I-never-see-you-anymore-so-let's-do-something-this-weekend, and then..

BUDDY (O.S.)
(from answering machine)
Guy, are you there? Pick up. Hello? Shit...
(beep; next message)
Where are you? Call me. It's important.
(beep; Buddy in a hushed whisper)
Guy, I don't know where you are, but play this back only if you're alone. Highest level of confidentiality. Very important. On your way to work...

Guy sits up. Finally, some responsibility! Encouraged, Guy jumps up. Searches for a pad and a pen.

BUDDY (O.S.)
Top priority. Extremely important.
(Guy stands by attentively)
Go to 9380 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 420 and pick up a package for me. Highly confidential. Wait, I think it's 440. Anyways, you can't miss it. It's the
(in a hushed whisper)
..Rogaine clinic and you're picking up a refill of my usual prescription.

Guy stops writing. Thinks, but Buddy answers for him...

BUDDY (O.S.)
Yeah, yeah, it's for my hair. Yeah, it's thinning. So what? But I cannot stress to you the importance of secrecy and follow-through on this. It's a top priority. Don't fail me. Nothing, nothing is more important than this.

GUY
Great. A college degree and I'm picking up hair tonic. 'Because a mind is a terrible thing to waste.'

Guy throws down his pen. Totally frustrated. Flops back down on the couch with a groan.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK, ROMANTIC RESTAURANT - EVENING

Guy sits across from Dawn. Doe-eyed and completely in love. Just stares at her.

DAWN
And then I went to work for an agent, but I really wanted to get more involved with film-making, not deal-making. So I worked for a studio exec for a year, then got promoted to a creative executive. Did that for another year. Then got an offer to run Prism. And here I am.

GUY
You're beautiful.

Dawn slaps Guy's hand.

DAWN
Stop it! That's all you've been saying all evening.

GUY
But you are. You are so beautiful.

DAWN
Sheesh, you sound like a broken record. So what about you? Tell me your deepest, darkest secrets.

GUY
There's not much to tell. Fresh out of film school. I studied to be a writer, but that doesn't pay the bills.

DAWN
Oh no. Another creative soul lost in the studio morass.

Guy chuckles. Looks at Dawn.

GUY
Say, have I told you that you are beautiful?

DAWN
No, not in the last twenty seconds. Come on, be serious. What do you want to do?

GUY
I just want to make movies.

DAWN
Why?

Guy pauses. Thinks.

GUY
I don't know. All my favorite memories have been of movies. You know, a lot of people remember their past in terms of presidencies, or girlfriends. Even current events. But I remember them by current releases. Like the time that I got accepted to film school. Summer of '88 - INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE. Or when I got this job - weekend that VIGILANTE VENGEANCE opened. A fine Buddy Ackerman film.

DAWN
Uh-huh. How about your first kiss?

GUY
Hmm. That was a while back. Wow. Let me think. You're suppose to remember these things aren't you?
(thinks)
7th grade spring formal. Spring of '79. "FISH THAT SAVED PITTSBURGH" I remember. I took her to see that movie the next weekend. Never heard from her again.

DAWN
What was her name?

GUY
I can't remember. But Gabe Kaplan's hair in that movie. Out of control. Only white man I know with an Afro.

Dawn laughs. Guy gets reflective.

GUY
And I remember all those times when things just weren't going well. Failed a test. Mom was real sick. You know, life sucked. I could just disappear for a couple hours and forget about everything. And I always felt that if I could be a part of that. You know, just help people escape for a minute. Well, that would be something.

Dawn melts. Totally taken by this. Falling in love.

Guy thinks about what he just said. Spits with distaste..

GUY
Yech! Where did that come from? What I really meant to say was I want fast cars and fast chicks. Really beautiful ones.

DAWN
Would you settle for pleasant-natured?

She takes Guy's hand. They kiss for the first time. Nice, soft. They break apart gently, and sit for just a minute. Looking into each other's eyes.

GUY
So, what opened this weekend? Want to catch a movie?

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES OFFICES - LATE AFTERNOON

Guy works behind a cluttered desk, phone cradled over the shoulder.

GUY
Yeah, I really had a great time. Let's do it again. Tonight? Sure.

BUDDY

comes walking down the hallway. Before Guy can react, Buddy grabs the phone, slams it down. Terminates Guy's conversation.

BUDDY
Get me packed up. I need to get out of here now. I got to get to Yom Kippur services.

Guy follows Buddy into his office.

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE

Buddy sorts out what he needs. Guy stands by obediently.

GUY
Ackerman. Is that a Jewish name?

BUDDY
Jewish enough. Lot of people going to be there tonight. You should go.
(Looks at Guy)
Yeah, you could pass.

Buddy stops packing. Searches for something. Guy meekly clears his throat. Takes a chance...

GUY
I was thinking..about the Scotch Tape project.

BUDDY
Yeah?

GUY
How about Penny Marshall to direct?

BUDDY
No way. Piece of advice. Avoid women directors. They get that once-a-month
(MORE)

BUDDY (cont'd)
thing. Sends them into these huge mood swings. And you need a solid, stable environment on the set. Next.

GUY
How about Altman?

Buddy chortles. Still looking around his desk for something.

BUDDY
Altman! That hack! Couldn't direct his way out of a paper bag. Please. You're not seeing the movie here, Guy. This is an epic. We're talking Academy Award stuff. The story of Scotch Tape, one of man's most important inventions...and you want to give it to Altman.
(makes a buzzer noise)
Wrong. You're thinking too small. Think Spielberg. Think Attenborough. Think Lean.

GUY
Lean's dead.

BUDDY
No. Just unavailable. Put him on the list anyway. It'll give people the right idea. In fact, we'll let it leak out that he really wanted to do this before he kicked the old film can.
(gives up searching)
Did you pick up the stuff?

Guy looks at him quizzically. Buddy points to his hair.

BUDDY
You know, the stuff.

GUY
Oh, yeah. Your prescription's in the bathroom.

BUDDY
(pats Guy like a good dog)
Thanks. Good work. Now, remember. Highly confidential. Not a word to anyone.

Buddy heads into the bathroom. Turns on the water. Yells to Guy. Guy starts putting folders in Buddy's briefcase.

BUDDY (O.S.)
Shut up. Listen. Learn. Rumor and hype. They can be your best friends. It can generate heat. Spark interest in projects that have no merit whatsoever. Hell, it can spark interest in people who have no merit.
(turns off the water)
But they can also be your worst enemies. You would not believe how people love to see everyone else fail. And if they can help with the downfall, better yet. Fuckin' back-stabbers. All of them. I'll tell you. This town. Everyone loves to talk shit about everyone else. It's disgusting.

GUY
Yeah, I know. Can you believe what they said about you in that NEWSWEEK article?

Buddy sticks his head out. Covered in a silly shower cap. Alarmed.

BUDDY
What Newsweek article?

GUY
I thought you saw it. One with Idi Amin on the cover. On your desk.

BUDDY
What??!!! Where?!!!

Guy picks up the magazine. Hands it to Buddy. Buddy reads. Getting pissed.

BUDDY
In-fuckin-credible! Where do they get these lies. Shit!

Buddy rushes back into the bathroom.

BUDDY (O.S.)
You have any plans tonight?

GUY
Well, I was going to...

BUDDY (O.S.)
Good. Good.

Buddy comes out of the bathroom. Sharp. Perfectly groomed.

BUDDY
We need to bury this article. I want you to get every copy in town and destroy it.

GUY
Every copy?

BUDDY
Yeah. Every copy. Find it, bury it.

GUY
Bury it? But..but it's Newsweek.
(Buddy doesn't respond)
It's pretty well-read. There are a lot of copies out there.

BUDDY
I don't care. Figure it out.

Buddy grabs his stuff. Exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWS STAND ON ROBERTSON - LATE EVENING.

Guy has an armful of Newsweeks. Pays the guy. Walks over to his car.

INSIDE THE CAR

stacked ceiling high are Newsweeks. Everywhere. Front seat. Back seat. Glove compartment.

GUY

gets in. Has no room for the stack he's carrying..except his lap. Places it there. Starts his car.

CUT TO:

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT - LATE EVENING

Guy flopped out on the couch. Asleep. TV is tuned to American Movie Classics. An old B&W is playing.

Phone RINGS. Guy GROANS. Doesn't lift a finger to answer it. Too tired to move. Waits for the answering machine to pick-up.

MOM (O.S.)
(on machine)
Guy, it's late. Where are you...

Guy reaches across and picks up the phone. (NOTE: The answering machine stays on during the whole conversation, allowing us to eavesdrop. Pretty sneaky, huh?)

GUY
Hi ma.

MOM (O.S.)
Oh, you're home. It's late. Did you just walk in?

GUY
No ma. I was just screening calls.

MOM (O.S.)
Why? Are you getting those dirty sex calls again?

GUY
No Ma. I'm just tired. I don't want to talk to anyone. And he might call.

MOM (O.S.)
Who? Your boss?

Guy picks up a copy of Newsweek.

GUY
Yeah. Hey, I'm going to send you the latest issue of Newsweek. There's an article about him in there.

MOM (O.S.)
Don't bother. Your dad subscribes.

GUY
Oh.

Guy tosses the magazine aside.

MOM (O.S.)
You sound tired. Are you eating right?

GUY
Yes, ma.

MOM (O.S.)
How about the job? How's it going?

Guy pauses. Thinking about the question....

START MONTAGE SEQUENCE (Note: Phone conversation with Mom should be at forefront of the sound mix. Montage scenes should play softly in the background.)

INT. MEGA-PICTURES OFFICE

Buddy is right in Guy's face. Screaming. A shower of spit covering Guy's face. Guy reaches up to wipe his face.

This only pisses Buddy off even more. He slaps Guy's hand down and starts yelling more. Veins pop out of his neck.

MOM (O.S.)
Guy?

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

GUY
It's going all right, I guess.

INT. MEGA-PICTURES OFFICE

Guy is sitting at his desk, working. Buddy comes out of his office, headed down the hall. As he passes Guy, he WHACKS him on the back of the head. Laughs to himself as he walks down the hall. Guy watches him go, unamused.

MOM (O.S.)
What's wrong? You sound unhappy.

INT. COPY ROOM

Guy talks to another assistant while making copies. Buddy passes by the room.

Reappears a second later. Grabs Guy by the ear and pulls him out of the copy room.

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

Guy rubs his eyes.

GUY
No, Ma. Just tired. You know, it's been kind of rough.

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE

Guy sits across the desk from Buddy. Answers the phone. Buddy motions for him to be quiet. Guy tries talking softly on the phone.

GUY (O.S.)
Lot of physical work.

Buddy is still unhappy with Guy's volume level. SNAPS for silence. Guy hunches over the phone, trying to be as quiet as possible. Still not enough,

Buddy starts throwing things at Guy. Heavy objects. Guy throws up his arms in defense.

EXT. ROGAINE CLINIC

Guy walks out. Prescriptions in hand. A couple of cute girls drive by. They look at Guy. Look at the big ROGAINE sign with the before and after pictures in the window. And then burst into hysterical GIGGLES.

Guy is embarrassed. Runs his hands through his hair.

GUY (O.S.)
Lot of important things to take care of...

EXT. MEGA-PICTURES PARKING LOT

Guy comes tearing out of the building. Folder in hand. Chases down Buddy's car. Leaps over a hedge. Nearly gets hit by another car. Horns HONK.

Catches up with Buddy's car. But Buddy doesn't stop. Only slows down.

GUY (O.S.)
..you know. A lot of running around.

Guy jogs alongside the car, explaining the contents of the folder. Buddy grabs folder. SCREECHES off. Guy stops, bending over to catch his breath.

Heads back into the building among the applause of several security guards.

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

MOM (O.S.)
If you don't like it, Uncle Charlie said he's looking for help at the brokerage. You want me to talk to him?

GUY
Ma, no. I don't want to trade stocks. I want to make movies.

MOM (O.S.)
Well, movies don't pay the bills. How are you going to feed a wife and kids?

GUY
I'm 24 years old ma! I don't have a wife. I don't even have a girlfriend.

MOM
It's never too late to start thinking about your future.

GUY
Relax. Ma. It's only been one week on the job.

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Sports highlights on a big projection T.V. Baseball clips.

Guy comes back into the living room with a Louisville Slugger. Makes sure he has the label side up. Takes a couple of check swings...

GUY (O.S.)
Besides...

Then lays a solid swing into Buddy's right knee with a CRACK! Buddy starts SCREAMING and SCREAMING.

GUY (O.S.)
Things will get better.

Guy move around to the other side. Takes another practice swing. Lines up the bat...

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

GUY
They say if you work hard now...

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Guy circles Buddy. Armful of heavy objects. Picture frames, vases, etc.. Throws them at Buddy as hard as he can.

Buddy cowers. Tries to avoid being hit. Unsuccessfully.

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

GUY
..then you're rewarded later. You're given bigger responsibilities. More things to do.

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Guy has an assortment of condiments lined up on a table. Pours a bunch of salt into his hands. Rubs it into Buddy's open, bleeding wounds.

Buddy SCREAMS. Guy appraises his reaction. Sets the salt down on one side of the table.

GUY (O.S.)
You get to have some fun.

Guy picks up some lemon juice. Splatters that into Buddy's face. Buddy winces, but doesn't scream.

Guy, disappointed, sets the lemon juice on another side of the table.

GUY (O.S.)
The whole business is very big on payback.

Guy picks up a bottle of gourmet LOUISIANA CAJUN FIERY CHILI RED HOT SAUCE. Takes a whiff. Pulls back. Eyes water. Dips a finger into it. Tries it. Smacks his lips. Big grin, approaches Buddy with it.

END MONTAGE

SOUND CUTS BACK IN WITH BUDDY SCREAMING, CRYING, TWISTING IN AGONY.

Guy steps back. Delighted. Buddy in tears.

BUDDY
WHAT DO YOU WANT!!! You sick, twisted fuck. Why are you doing this?

Guy shrugs. Toys around with the condiments. Picks up another bottle. Buddy pleads.

BUDDY
This isn't going to fix things. It's not going to help any of your problems. It's..it's unproductive!

GUY
Yeah, I know. But it makes me feel so much better.

CUT TO:

C.U. STEREO

An impressive console. CD slides into place. LED lights bounce to the beat.

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM

Guy futzes with the stereo. Looks at a wall of CD's in awe. Flips through them. Pulls a couple out.

GUY
I'll admit. I love this stereo. You know, for a guy your age, I thought you'd have more Neil Diamond or Barry Manilow. The Streisand collection's pretty good, but what's with all the Metallica? You don't really listen to this, do you?

Buddy doesn't answer. Guy shrugs.

GUY
No, huh? Cool. Then you won't mind if I borrow it.

Guy pockets the CD. Turns on the radio. Futzes around with the stations. Finally finds KJOY - easy listening for the masses. But not that Muzak stuff. Just the soft rock hits.

GUY
Want to make sure we get the mood right. You know, I'm surprised that this station isn't already pre-programmed. Thought for sure this is what loosens up the chicks.
(walks over to Buddy)
Let me ask you, what is the best 'getting laid' music? I'm finding that The Carpenters just doesn't cut it anymore. Just puts them right to sleep. I mean, suppose someone were to come over tonight, you know...

Buddy still doesn't answer. Lips sealed tight in a frown. Guy backs off.

GUY
Sorry, I'm boring you aren't I? What was it you said about me once? Personality of a roof shingle. That was pretty funny. Well then, don't want to bore you. What do you say? Let's get back to work.

Guy rubs his hands in delight. Heads into the kitchen.

Buddy tries to struggle out of his bonds desperately. Listens to Guy search the kitchen drawers.

GUY (O.S.)
Come on, there's got to be one in here. Every kitchen drawer has one.
(a drawer CRASHES)
It's funny. I've only dreamt of doing this. All those late nights in the office. Weekends. It's fun. Playing out all these great torture scenarios in your mind. Thought about it again and again...

There's a CRASH of another drawer being emptied out. Then a CRY of triumph. Guy comes back in. Hands behind his back.

Playful, Guy starts walking around Buddy. Buddy tries to keep an eye on him. Scared. His mind racing furiously with all the possibilities - what kitchen utensil could he possibly have?

GUY
You can't imagine how much I've come up with.

BUDDY
What are you going to do now, huh? Haven't you had enough?

Guy gets right in front of Buddy's face, grinning. With a dramatic flair, pulls out from behind his back...

AN ENVELOPE.

Buddy flinches. Sees the envelope. And relaxes. Relieved.

Guy sees this and smiles even wider. Starts straightening the envelope, SNAPPING it loudly against his hand.

GUY
Paper cuts can be a bitch. Occupational hazard, I guess. But I bet it's been a while since you've gotten one. Now me...

Guy fans his right hand in front of Buddy's face.

4 out of 5 fingers have BAND-AIDS wrapped around them. One finger with two band-aids. One around the finger-tip. And a Tiny Toons band-aid wrapped around the knuckle.

GUY
...I'm getting used to them.

Guy steps behind Buddy. Grabbing his head with one hand, and holding the flap of the envelope with another, Guy cuts away. Draws blood. Runs the razor edge of the envelope against Buddy's face.

Buddy struggles, but to no avail. Guy continues cutting down the cheek.

GUY
I'll tell you though...

Guy inspects his work. Spreads the cut out with his fingers to make sure it's deep enough. Satisfied, he starts on the other side of Buddy's face.

Buddy lets out a MUFFLED CRY of pain. Guy laughs appreciatively.

GUY
(coos)
I know. I know. Stings, doesn't it? Like I said, you get used to them, but the ones I could never handle well.....
(taps Buddy's mouth)
Say 'Ahhhh' Come on..

Buddy doesn't cooperate. Clamps his mouth shut. Guy pries open his mouth. Buddy bites down on his fingers.

GUY
SHIT! Fuckin' A!

Guy backhands Buddy. Pulls his fingers away.

Steps in front of Buddy. Sets the envelope down. Pries open Buddy's mouth with both hands. Grabs Buddy's tongue firmly.

GUY
No no. Don't bite. You're only gonna hurt yourself.
(picks up the envelope; contemplates it)
I mean, forget about the shitty mint flavor on these things when you lick them.
(straightens out the flap)
The real pain in the ass is when you get those paper cuts on your tongue.

BUDDY'S EYES widen in terror. He starts to struggle.

Guy steps in front. Tongue in one hand, Buddy starts cutting away with the envelope. Like a scythe. Swinging it back and forth. Back and forth.

The edge of the envelope getting redder and redder with each swing.

Music SWELLS....

CUT TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE CARD - "MONTH ONE"

Phone RINGS. Just once.

FADE IN:

INT. MEGA- PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Guy answers the phone with pleasant efficiency. Confident. Cool. Bold. In control. And wearing a good-looking suit. Double-breasted number.

GUY
(answering phone)
Buddy Ackerman's office. No, Mr. Blossom, he's not here right now. I will have him call you immediately. No sir, I'm sure he doesn't mean to spoil your appetite. Fine. I will have him call after lunch.
(answers another line)
Buddy Ackerman's office. Hi Derek. Yeah, the agreements were signed last night. You got the deferments, but they're not going to kick in until you reach a rolling break-even. Business affairs should be calling you soon.

Guy continues juggling calls. He's got it down. A ninja phone-master.

Buddy passes him and enters his office. Guy follows obediently.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE -

Guy sits attentively in front of Buddy's desk. Buddy paces. Gesturing enthusiastically with his hands.

BUDDY
This is definitely, without question, the biggest picture of the year.
(grandly)
"TO PROTECT AND SERVE". And we're going to be in charge of it.

GUY
But isn't that Stu's project?

BUDDY
Yeah, and look how long he's been sitting on it. I'm the one who got Sly interested. Not him. It's only fair that I get it, right?

Guy nods, not really certain.

BUDDY
Listen, I'll share some credit with Stu, but it's kill or have your contract terminated early. Before I came along, it was a shitty cop picture with a shitty title. Now...it's a Stallone picture.
(beams triumphantly for a moment; then back to business)
You and I have to really function as one on this. More than ever, you need to get more involved. Can you handle this?

Guy sits up. Eager. Anxious. Licking his lips. Buddy hands him a file folder.

GUY
Absolutely.

BUDDY
Good. Here are the most recent notes. As you can see, we still don't have a real ending. Much too clumsy. Figure something out. Come out to the house this weekend. We'll talk about it. I'll leave the key out for you.

Guy jots this down. Buddy throws him a beeper.

BUDDY
And I'm going to need to be able to reach you at anytime. Start wearing this. You know how to work this?

GUY
(lying)
Uh, sure. Yeah, absolutely.

Buddy steps out from behind the desk. CLAPS his hands with excitement. The team cheerleader.

BUDDY
Excellent. All right. This is it. No mistakes. Hard work. We're headed for the big time now! Both of us.

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES OFFICE - EVENING

Office is empty. Guy is wrapping things up. Puts on his coat. Picks up the beeper.

Inspects it. Not sure how it works. Turns a switch. It starts BEEPING.

Guy smiles. He has it wired. Flips another switch. Nothing happens. Then the beeper leaps out of Guy's hand. Onto the desk. Guy jumps back, startled.

THE BEEPER

BUZZES, JERKS on the table. Like a dying bug.

Guy, hesitant, pokes at it. Beeper buzzes, jerks up again. Guy grabs a script. Starts pounding it...

CUT TO:

INT. DINER

Guy sits across from Dawn. Dawn is reading a script. Guy holds the beeper in front of him.

GUY
...·5740. You're going to be the only other person besides Buddy who has the number. And it's got this great little feature. If you beep me and I have it set here, it gives me this electric shock. Kind of kinky, huh?

Dawn doesn't answer. Guy pulls down the script she's reading.

GUY
Did I say something? Do anything wrong?

DAWN
No.

She pulls the script back up. Guy pulls it down.

GUY
Then is there a particular reason why I'm getting the cold shoulder?

DAWN
You wouldn't understand.

GUY
No?

DAWN
No, because you're one of them.

Dawn goes back to her script. Guy tries to figure it out. Pulls on the script again.

GUY
One of them?

DAWN
Yeah. A big, stupid, dumb male.

GUY
Oh no. Another producer made a pass at you?

DAWN
No.

GUY
An executive? Actor? Director? Agent?
(with distaste & disbelief)
An assistant?

Dawn throws her script down. Fire in her eyes.

DAWN
It's all of you. The old boys club. Churning out stupid male macho films while projects with merit fall by the wayside.

GUY
(dawns on him)
Uh-oh. They passed on another one of your projects. Which one?

DAWN
THE CROWDED HOUSE.

GUY
You're still trying to get that made? It's three women. In a house. That's not even crowded. Nothing happens. They sit around, contemplating shoes.

DAWN
You just don't get it. It's a metaphor. And what you're working on is so much better?

GUY
No, but people want to see it. It's got action. It's got Stallone.

Dawn LAUGHS with contempt.

DAWN
For too long, all you overgrown boys have been deciding what "people want to see." Well, perhaps you haven't noticed yet, but audiences are sick and tired of that same recycled garbage you churn out. It's time for some fresh blood.

Guy sits quiet for a second. Searches for a response. Can only come up with...

GUY
These three women sit around. Looking at shoes. Pumps. High heels. Loafers. That's it.

DAWN
Fine, whatever. Mr. Buddy Jr.
(lifts up her script)
Fuckin' men. Castrate them all I say.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

CAMERA MOVES ALONG THE FLOOR. Follows a WIND-UP TOY RAT as it moves through the wreckage. Broken glass, broken pictures. Condiment bottles, etc..

We hear the SNIP SNIP SNIP of scissors. Buddy WHIMPERS

GUY (O.S.)
I don't feel we've been thinking big enough here. Big. Grand. Supremo Grosso. Stupendo. Abbo-dante.

The WIND-UP RAT bumps into a table leg, continues on. Buddy YELPS in pain. We hear a SLAP.

GUY (O.S.)
Hold still. You're only going to make it worse.

CAMERA follows WIND-UP RAT as it struggles over a large chunk of glass. CAMERA stops on Guy and Buddy's feet. Toe to toe. Wing-tips to Fuzzy slippers.

GUY (O.S.)
They say that real pain, real suffering, comes from loss. Loss of family. Loss of love...

Again, the scissors SNIP SNIP.

Tufts of hair float down into frame. Guy's feet move out of frame....

...and come down with a SHARP CRASH on the WIND-UP RAT.

GUY

stands up. Blows on the scissors. Walks behind Buddy. SNIP SNIP. More hair floats away.

GUY
Loss of the things that matter most to us. Forget about all the other shit we've been doing tonight. That's minor leagues.
(stops; looks around)
Don't go anywhere. Be right back.

Guy runs out of the living room. Re-appears with a large, framed mirror. Excited.

GUY
Yup. Things only get better from here.
(leans the mirror up)
So, what do you think?

BUDDY

studies himself in the mirror. First time we've seen him closely. Face is bloody. Bruised. Left cheek swelling. Teeth missing. Black and blue lip. Head is a rash of stubble and bloody cuts with a few patches of hair. He looks terrible.

Buddy hangs his head. Silent.

Guy looks into the mirror. Looks at Buddy.

GUY
That's it? Come on. Look at yourself. Your face! Your precious hair! You are fuuuuucked-up!

Guy motions enthusiastically to the mirror. Buddy refuses to look up. No reaction.

Disappointed. Guy SIGHS. Drops the mirror with a loud CRASH. Buddy's head snaps up.

Guy brushes off the hair on his clothes.

GUY
You want to to go back to the hot sauce stuff? Fine by me.

Buddy smiles. Amused.

BUDDY
Seven years.

GUY
What? What did you say?

BUDDY
The mirror. Seven years bad luck.

Guy looks down at the mirror. Shattered. Buddy LAUGHS. Actually CACKLES with glee. Pisses Guy off.

GUY
Shut up.
(Buddy still laughs)
I said, shut up!!!

Buddy continues to laugh. Guy whips out the gun and FIRES a warning shot over Buddy's head.

Hits the lamp, and being the only light source on....

Everything goes DARK. Silence.

Then Buddy starts to LAUGH again. Mocking....

BUDDY
Brilliant. Fucking brilliant.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE

Buddy sits behind his desk, reading a set of notes. Guy stands in front of him. Beaming with pride.

BUDDY
Genius. Sheer fuckin' genius. This is great work, Guy.

GUY
Thank you.

BUDDY
How did you come up with this?

GUY
Actually, it's a plot twist from DIABOLIQUE. Old French film. But you see how it ties up the action nicely.

BUDDY
Yeah. It's brilliant.

GUY
Thank you. Thanks.

Buddy stands.

BUDDY
I'm going to see Cyrus about this. He's gonna love it.

GUY
(gulps)
You're gonna show Cyrus?
(grabs the notes)
Let me just clean this up a bit. There are some spelling errors that..

Buddy snatches the notes out of Guy's hands. Pats him warmly on the shoulder.

BUDDY
Minor details. Don't worry. He's going to be too excited to worry about spelling. Good work.

Buddy exits. Guy smiles. Excited. Follows Buddy out into the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

The phone RINGS. Guy answers.

GUY
Buddy Ackerman's office. Hey, Dawn! Guess what? You'll never believe it. Buddy loved my idea. He's talking to Cyrus about it right now. Yeah! Isn't that awesome?

BUDDY AND CYRUS

appear around the corner. Walking down the hallway.

GUY
Oh my God. And here they come. Fine, yeah, I'll ask him about THE CROWDED HOUSE. I'll call you back. Yeah, love you.

Guy hangs up. Stands at attention.

Buddy and Cyrus pass by. Cyrus with his arm over Buddy.

CYRUS
That's a perfect idea! How did you ever come up with a stroke of genius.

BUDDY
It was nothing really. It's from an old French film. But the beauty is in its simplicity...

The two enter Buddy's office. They don't even notice Guy.

Guy's smile quickly fades. Stands there. Disappointed.

Cyrus and Buddy reappear. Cyrus points to the notes.

CYRUS
But you got to fix these spelling errors. It's unprofessional.

BUDDY
I know. You're right. I had Guy type it up, and I should have checked it. But I was just too excited to wait. Can you blame me?

CYRUS
(chuckles)
I admire that enthusiasm.

Buddy throws the notes to Guy. Mouths, "Fix it". And disappears down the hallway with Cyrus. All laughs and smiles.

Guy watches them go. Bitterness building...

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: COMPUTER SCREEN

Loud TAPS punctuate the slow crawl of the BLINKING CURSOR as it moves across a document.

The phone RINGS. And RINGS.

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Guy sits there, smoking. Complete disinterest and boredom. One finger clicking away at the computer. He ignores the phone.

But he can't ignore...

BUDDY (O.S.)
(yelling)
What are you doing!!

GUY
Your notes!

BUDDY (O.S.)
Do them later. Right now we need to make phone calls. Get in here!

Guy stubs out his cigarette. Picks up his pad..

BUDDY (O.S.)
Come on! Hurry it up!

Guy stands up. Index finger extended out like a gun, Guy stabs at the computer switch slowly and deliberately. The COMPUTER SCREEN cuts out to black. Guy heads for Buddy's door.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM

Guy enters from the kitchen. Box of natural muselix cereal in hand. Munches on a handful.

Buddy's leg is shaking. Sits in a new lighting set-up. Softer. Less harsh. Pools of white light filter down from the ceiling. At skewed angles that strike intermittent areas of the room.

GUY
What are you yelling about? Hey, you wouldn't happen to have any Captain Crunch anywhere?
(off Buddy's reaction)
Who am I kidding? Mr. Health Nut here. No wonder you're so irritable all the time. This rabbit food tastes like shit.
(looks up at the ceiling)
Got to tell you. Love these lights. Bet the chicks dig on this. Am I right?

BUDDY
Do you mind? I need to take a leak.

GUY
Really? How interesting.
(devilish grin)
Tell you what.

Guy looks around. Bends down and comes up with the pair of scissors. Guy SNIPS SNIPS them for effect.

GUY
We could install a catheter.
(off Buddy's reaction)
One more way to make the office run efficiently. But first, I'm gonna make a sandwich.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Yet another day at the office. Guy sits across from Buddy, taking notes. Buddy is on the phone. Flipping through a book. Something like ATTILA THE HUN'S LEADERSHIP SECRETS.

Guy SIGHS. Gets up and heads for the door.

BUDDY
(covers phone)
Where are you going?

GUY
Bathroom. I need to...

BUDDY
No. I need you here. Get me on a phone call first.

Guy trudges back to the phone. Sits down. Pulls out the phone sheet. Starts dialing.

GUY
Hi, Buddy Ackerman calling.

MINUTES LATER

Guy is tapping his feet nervously, on the phone. Buddy sits across from him, playing with some stupid, annoying desk toy. One of those perpetual motion machines.

GUY
All right. Leave word please.

CLOSE-UP ON THE PHONE LIST

Several check marks. Guy checks off the last name on the page. Flips the sheets over.

CAMERA SCANS DOWN THE WHOLE PAGE OF NAMES

Intimidating. Goes on forever.

GUY
Buddy Ackerman calling.

GUY'S FOOT

is now tapping really really nervously.

Beads of sweat form on Guy's brow.

BUDDY

yawns. Flips through a Vogue magazine.

GUY
(with a growing edge of hostility)
I'll hold. But do you think he'll be long? Fine. Fine. Just get him. Thank you.

GUY'S WHOLE LEG

is now shaking uncontrollably. BANGS UP against the desk occasionally.

Guy twitches and shifts in his seat. Eyes pleading, he looks to Buddy.

Buddy motions to continue. Pours himself a big, tall glass of water.

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Guy runs out of Buddy's office. Actually, he flies out.

Takes off down the hallway. In bounds and leaps.

BATHROOM DOOR

Guy tries it. Locked. Curses to himself.

Waits...Waits.

Whimpers...Curses...

Then takes off again down the hallway.

AT THE OTHER END OF THE HALL

Guy comes sliding around the corner. Pushing people out of his way. Runs into another bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM

Guy rushes in.

Fumbles frantically with his belt. His zipper. His boxer shorts. Finally reaches the urinal. And with a YELL.....

INT. BATHROOM

Takes a really really long whizz.....

INT. BATHROOM

Guy's expression changes from pain to relief. Guy bangs his head against the wall. Satisfaction. Ecstasy.

Zips up. Washes his hands.

GUY
(sotto)
Fuckin' coffee.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM

Buddy squirms. Uncomfortable. Sound of RUSHING WATER from the kitchen. A toilet FLUSHES somewhere in the house. Then FLUSHES again. And again.

Buddy starts to lose it. Frantically struggles. The chair lifts up on its legs. Buddy tries to stand. No success. He rocks the chair, tries to get some momentum.

Gets up halfway. Then loses his balance. Buddy and chair come crashing down. Buddy lies sideways on the ground, cursing.

Finally, resigns. Relaxes. And urinates.

A pool of piss forms around him, creeps towards Buddy's head. Buddy SOBS. A toilet FLUSHES...bleeds into

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM

HANDS PULL DOWN PAPER TOWELS. Loud SNAP.

Guy washes up. Checks his hair. Straightens his tie. And exits...

INT. RESTAURANT

CAMERA FOLLOWS Guy as he moves through the restaurant. Greets people. Shaking hands. A couple of hugs. A young man on the rise...

Finds his table and sits. Across from him is JACK. Looks almost like Guy did his first day. Geek suit and haircut.

JACK
Boy, you really can work a room.

GUY
Sorry about that. Just needed to do a quick lap around the place.

WAITRESS sets down two cups of coffee and the check in front of Guy. Jack grabs for the check. Comes up empty. Guy pulls out his wallet.

JACK
Please. Let me.

GUY
I can't let you do that. It's your first week at the lot. You're a virgin. Besides, I'll find some way to work this into Buddy's expenses.

JACK
Really? You can do that?

GUY
Oh, my poor child. You have so much to learn...

Guy trails off. Stands. Sees someone....

MICHELLE

Super-model babe. Tall, yet curvaceous. Mane of perfectly coiffed brown curls. Slinky dress. Wow.

GUY
Michelle?

Michelle turns. Sees Guy. Lights up. Squeals..

MICHELLE
Guy??

GUY
(squealing back)
Michelle!

They hug. Michelle plants a juicy one on his cheek. Jack looks on with awe.

GUY
(mock scolding)
Does Buddy know you're here.

MICHELLE
No, but we'll just add this to our closet of secrets.

GUY
You're gonna get me in big trouble one day.

MICHELLE
Gotta go. Love ya.

GUY
Love you.

Guy sits down. Jack's jaw is still open.

JACK
What...who was...

GUY
One of Buddy's. It's a shame she's only in light rotation.

Guy reaches for the cream. Pours it in his coffee. Reaches for the sugar tray. Pulls out an Equal. Snaps it.

GUY
I'll tell you. When I started working for Buddy, everyone said one of the perks would be sloppy seconds. At first, I thought that was disgusting.. But now...
(sighs)
Almost wish I didn't have a girlfriend. Hard to believe that

(MORE)

GUY (cont'd)
Buddy was married once. But you can see why that didn't last.

JACK
(eyes still following Michelle)
Yeah.

Guy throws the Equal packet at Jack. Gets his attention.

GUY
See any Sweet & Low over at that table behind you?

Jack looks. Comes up empty.

JACK
No, only Equal. You want some?

GUY
Naw. Forget it.
(gulps his coffee; throws down some cash)
Come on, let's get out of here. I got a script to read.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Buddy sits upright, wet around the edges. Bathed in a soft pool of light. Helpless. Like a child.

Guy cleans him up as best he can. Towels on the floor around him. Guy chuckles sympathetically.

GUY
Don't worry. This happened to me once too. When I was 7. '75. Summer of JAWS. Anyways, it was at a piano recital, and I was halfway through this Chopin prelude - real bitch to play - when it occurs to me. I really really need to take a piss. But I'd never been able to make it through this damn piece without screwing up.

(MORE)

GUY (cont'd)
And it was going so beautifully. Almost like it was playing itself. So I made a choice. I kept playing and playing...

Guy throws down the towel. Straightens out one of Buddy's few patches of hair.

GUY
I was concentrating so hard, I didn't even realize I'd wet my pants. I got up, took a bow. With a big wet spot on my pants. It was pretty embarrassing.
(looks at Buddy)
But then again, I wasn't lying in it.

GUNFIRE ERUPTS off-screen. Guy looks over to the TV. Some really shitty exploitation movie is on.

GUY
I have to admit. I love that TV. It's so big.
(turns back to Buddy)
You see what I'm saying, don't you?

BUDDY
You want the TV?

Guy shakes his head. Gets up. Buddy flinches.

GUY
No. No. Get it? Meaning over matter. Substance over style.

Guy motions to the TV. Stereo GUNSHOTS erupt on cue. A woman SCREAMS.

GUY
Is that worth everything to you? You're not saving lives. You're not changing the world. There's no reason to be such an ass-hole the entire time. Especially over such garbage.

BUDDY
I was a P.A. on that movie.

GUY
Oh. It figures.

Guy shuts off the TV.

GUY
Years from now, I hope you have kids that you have to protect from this trash.

BUDDY
Protect from what? It's only violence. It's only sex.

Guy looks at him with disgust.

GUY
Only violence? Only sex? You say it like it was some spice you pick up at the market.
(Buddy shrugs)
It figures your wife left you...

Buddy SILENCES.

Guy picks up on this immediately. Turns. Smiles. Eyes dancing with mischief. Gets up enthusiastically.

GUY
Hey. Let's talk about family, shall we? All this time I've worked for you, and I don't know a thing about the ex-Mrs. A.

Guy searches around the wreckage for pictures. Comes up empty.

GUY
It figures. Not one family portrait here. It's so..so you. She beautiful?

BUDDY
Yes.

GUY
Your mom told me that you two were the perfect couple. True love gone awry, she said. You love her?

BUDDY
Yes.

GUY
Yeah? Great. That's great.
(pauses; checks his watch)
All right. Love to meet her. She coming home soon?

No answer. Buddy winces. Looks away. Eyes squeezed shut in pain.

Guy savors the moment. Then twists the knife in...

GUY
Oh, wait. That's right. I forgot.
(dripping with contempt)
She left you.

Again, the inevitable question...

BUDDY
What do you want?

GUY
I want you to tell me a story. Tell me about a young Buddy in love. Crazy about a a woman who didn't want him. I know, I know. I can't believe it either.
(gets in Buddy's face)
Was it a painful separation? It must have been something really horrible to turn you into such a monster. What happened, Buddy? Huh? Caught her in the passionate throes of a secret lover? Or did she take you for everything you had? How about...

BUDDY
She died.

Guy stops. Surprised.

GUY
That's it? That's all? Boooring. Hell, it's almost convenient. I wonder, how many times have you used that as a pick-up? Oh, my wife died. Please come home with me. Please fuck me. Boo-hoo.
(pause)
I should have known. You're just a natural born asshole. You...

BUDDY
Christmas eve. She was driving to the mall. I was supposed to go with her. We needed to start our Christmas shopping. But it was going to be simple. Just our parents. That would be it. We even agreed not to give each other gifts. Money was tight, shopping was a hassle...

Guy YAWNS. Buddy ignores him. Continues.

BUDDY
There was a car that had broken down, so she pulled over to help. I always told her she was such a busybody. She called it being nice.
(smiles at the memory)
She got out and I don't know. She asked if they were all right or something completely unnecessary. Anyways, it was a scam. Bunch of punk kids stealing cars. They shot her.

Guy stops fidgeting. Buddy has his complete attention now.

BUDDY
I was stuck in the office. Doing Christmas gifts for my boss. A lot of gifts. It was a good year for us.
(MORE)

BUDDY (cont'd)
FISTED FURY had been huge. And I was there until 3 A.M. All the time, thinking. Oh boy, she is going to be pissed. I am a dead man.
(pause; then matter-of-fact)
Anyway, I got home, got the message. Went downtown to identify her body.

GUY
(quietly)
I'm sorry.

BUDDY
Her family was devastated. They never said it, but I knew what they were thinking. It was my fault. I mean, who spends Christmas Eve in the office?
(pauses; then, as an afterthought)
It was a whole week into the new year before I found it. A gift. For me. She still got me a gift. These antique wind-up toys with a note. 'In the constant rat-race of life, don't ever forget to unwind. Merry Christmas. Love always'

Silence. Guy looks down at the wreckage. Oops.

BUDDY
(shrugs)
She was never good at writing notes.

Guy walks away. Uncomfortable. Ashamed. Heads to the kitchen.

Buddy STAMPS his feet. Takes the offensive.

BUDDY
Get back here! We're gonna finish this!

GUY
Look. I'm sorry about your wife. I didn't know...

BUDDY
Oooh. Something Guy didn't know. Imagine that. Boy genius here didn't know something.

Guy stops feeling sorry for Buddy right there. Flares..

GUY
But I'm sorry. That's no excuse for your behavior.

BUDDY
You think you know it all, don't you. You're 24. You're a baby. You don't know shit.

GUY
Hey, I know what's right. I know what's fair....

BUDDY
Ha! Believe me, son. That is all going to change real soon.

Buddy motions to all the wreckage with his head.

BUDDY
I can appreciate this. I was young once too. Hated authority. Hated all of my bosses. Thought they were idiots. Hell, I've always said if you're not a rebel by the age of 20, you got no heart.
(pauses)
But if you haven't turned Establishment by 30, you got no brains. So before you run out and change the world, ask yourself...

Buddy GLARES at Guy. Eyes seeing right through him.

BUDDY
What do you <u>really</u> want?

CUT TO:

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

Much neater now. Well, okay. Just slightly organized. The mess is now at least just in one corner -- the computer corner. With the computer hidden behind stacks and stacks of papers, scripts, and magazines, it's obvious that no writing has been going on here. Obscured film school sticker now merely reads 'REALITY...'

Guy nestles next to Dawn on the couch, reading THE CROWDED HOUSE. Dawn reads TO PROTECT AND SERVE.

Guy puts the script down. Sits up. Inspired. He's seen the light...

GUY
Wyoming.

Dawn throws down the script in frustration.

DAWN
God, what a waste of time. I cannot believe the crap that is out there. Please. Please tell me that you write better than this.
(looks over at Guy; smiles)
Well, at least Buddy convinced Mega to pick-up CROWDED HOUSE.

GUY
Maybe Montana. No. Wyoming. Definitely Wyoming.

DAWN
What?

Guy gets up. Passionate.

GUY
I want to move to Wyoming.

DAWN
I thought you wanted to make movies. Wyoming is a place where you go to live. Not where you work. Not if you want to stay in this business.

GUY
I could write. Just come into L.A. for meetings every now and then. But other than that, we could get away from all this crap.

DAWN
We?

Guy sits. Takes Dawn's hands. Looks into her eyes.

GUY
You want to come, don't you?

DAWN
(non-committal)
Uh-huh

Guy kisses her once....

GUY
No more politicking. No more cow-towing to egotistical idiots.

DAWN
Uh-huh

Kisses her again....

GUY
No more shitty scripts to read.

DAWN
Uh-huh

And again....

GUY
No more 250 lb., bald, sweaty producers who are older than your father inviting you to come and see their house.

Guy really kisses her this time. Emphasizes this last point. Nice, long lip-lock.

They break. Dawn thinks. Smiles.

DAWN
Harrison Ford has a ranch in Wyoming.

GUY
Yup.

DAWN
But we could still have a Malibu residence, right?

GUY
Of course. We need someplace to stay when we're in town.

Dawn sits up excited. Really dreaming now...

DAWN
And how about an apartment in New York?

GUY
Anything you want.

DAWN
And a flat in Paris?

GUY
I don't know. Are we really going to spend much time there? And those French are sooooo rude. But it is the city of love.

Guy leans in again for another kiss. Pushes Dawn down on the couch. Dawn wraps her arms around him. Guy reaches down....

And the phone RINGS. Dawn tightens her clench around Guy. Kisses him harder. They ignore the RINGING.

Finally, answering machine picks up. And it's...

BUDDY (O.S.)
Guy. Pick up, Guy. I know you're there. Hello?....

Guy jumps up. Grabs the phone. Dawn lies on the couch. Stunned. Tries to figure out what just happened.

GUY
Yeah. hello....

EXT. SUNSET BLVD.

Buddy's cruising in a convertible. Beautiful day. Wind blowing through the hair, arm resting on the door. He's a commercial for good living and the spoils of the rich.

Buddy yells loudly into the car phone.

BUDDY
Hey. How you doing?

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

GUY
Pretty good. I'm here with...

EXT. SUNSET BLVD.

Buddy cuts him off. He's not really interested in the answer.

BUDDY
Great. That's great. Listen, do you have Tawny's number?

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

GUY
Uh, no. Not on me. I have it at the office.
(listens)
No, I guess it doesn't do me a lot of good there.

EXT. SUNSET BLVD.

Buddy dispenses more advice. Another life lesson.

BUDDY
What have I told you? <u>Anticipate</u>. You knew I was seeing her tonight. Now how am I suppose to get in touch with her? Huh?

(MORE)

BUDDY (cont'd)
(pause)
Listen, I'm sorry to ruin your weekend. Really. Truly, I am. But I bet that after today, this won't happen again. Learn from this. It's for your own good. So call me back in the car once you get to the office.

Buddy hangs up.

INT. GUY'S APARTMENT

Guy hangs up. Dawn hugs Guy from behind. Ready to pick up where they left off.

GUY
(reluctantly)
I have to go to the office.

DAWN
Again? You were there this morning.

GUY
It's only for a little bit. I just need to get a phone number.

Dawn pulls away. Guy gets up. Starts to get his things.

DAWN
What happened to no more cow-towing, huh? What happened to Wyoming?

GUY
I'm sorry, but I have to.

DAWN
Why? It's outrageous what he expects you to do. No one else...

GUY
I know. I know. Look, I gave him a commitment. So for right now, I have to do this job the best I can.

DAWN
Why?

GUY
Because I gave my word.

Dawn lets out a big laugh. Shakes her head.

DAWN
And you think that means anything?

GUY
Yeah, I'd like to think it counts for something. I do this now, and in a year, Buddy said...Anything I want.

DAWN
You poor fool. Haven't you seen how this town works yet? It's all about looking out for yourself. If you don't do it, no one else will.

Dawn packs up her things. Guy notices.

GUY
You don't have to go. I'll be back soon.

DAWN
Guy, I'm not going to be your lady in waiting. If your job is more important, I can accept that. But if it isn't, the next time Buddy calls, you should try saying this. 'I don't care'. Go ahead. Try it. It's like a breath of fresh air. 'I don't care.'

Dawn take a deep breath. Exhales. Waits for Guy to do the same. Nothing.

DAWN
Can't do it, can you? Wyoming, my ass.
(laughs)
When you figure out what it is you really want, Guy, let me know.

Dawn shakes her head. Gets her jacket. Guy watches in silence. Finally..

GUY
(softly)
You.

DAWN
What?

GUY
You, all right. I want you! You're the only thing I care about.

DAWN
(unconvinced)
Right.

Guy grabs her. Angry. Passion bordering violence.

GUY
Don't dismiss me like that. Listen. You're the only thing in my miserable, shitty little existence I have to look forward to. I need you. I love you. So, don't leave. Please.

Dawn continues out the door. Guy watches her go. Sullen. But Dawn stops, turns back. Gives Guy a kiss.

DAWN
You know I'm only doing you this because I love you. People will disappoint you, and I just don't want to see you get chewed up, that's all. Call me later?

Guy nods. Dawn pats him on the cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Dimly lit. Deserted. Guy sits at his desk, on the phone. Spins the rolodex round and round.

Hits redial, only to get a BUSY SIGNAL. He tries it again. And again. Still busy.

Guy hangs up the phone, annoyed. And bored. Wanders into Buddy's office.

GUY
(sotto)
I don't care. Don't care.

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE

Guy walks behind the desk. Fiddles with some of the desk toys. Carefully replaces them back in their spot.

Sits down in the big leather chair. Swivels around in it. Slides around the office with it.

Goes through the desk drawers. Finds a box of cigars. Pops one in his mouth.

GUY
(in a bad Jack Nicholson)
Lesson number 213. Always wear colorful underwear. Because you never know when you're gonna be caught with your pants down.

Continues to search the desk.

Pulls out a file marked BIMBOS. Opens it up. Eyes light up. Impressed and interested. Guy kicks his feet up against the desk.

Flips through headshots...actually, bodyshots. 8x10's of women with big hair, big breasts, and tiny bikinis. Double-Wow.

Suddenly, Guy snaps up. Disturbed. In his hands...

DAWN'S BUSINESS CARD

Guy frowns. Not sure what to think. Shrugs it off. Places it back in the file.

Continues rifling through the desk. Finds...

WEDDING PICTURES OF YOUNG BUDDY

Worn around the edges. A happy Buddy with an equally happy beautiful blonde. Kodak moments of true love.

Guy moves on. In the back of the drawer, finds a...

SLEEK, BLACK 9mm BERRETTA

Cool. Holds it in his hands. Guy toys with it. Experimenting with all the buttons and latches. Not sure how everything works.

Points the gun around the office. Squints an eye.

P.O.V. BEHIND THE GUN

Pans around the office. Stops occasionally to pick out a target. A toy. A poster. Gun continues to pan across from LIGHT...

....into SHADOW. Stops. RACK FOCUS to image of Buddy, tied up. Bloody. Battered.

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Guy sits across the room. Aims the gun at Buddy. Cocks it. Adjusts his aim. Pulls the trigger.

CLICK. Buddy flinches. Guy laughs.

GUY
Scared you, didn't I. Bet you pissed in your pants.
(pauses)
Oh wait. You did that already.

Guy laughs. Buddy's not amused.

BUDDY
(softly; tired)
What do you want?

GUY
I told you.

Guy pulls out a clip from his back. SLAPS it in. Chambers a round. Points it at Buddy. Buddy remains calm.

BUDDY
Yeah, you gave me all that self-righteous bullshit. Great. Save the whales. Save the ozone layer. But what do you really want? You want money? Fine. Get my checkbook. It's in the...

Guy clucks, scolding. FIRES a round.

GUY
Buddy, you haven't been listening.

BUDDY
Oh yes I have. Let's make a deal. You can tell me. You want fancy cars? Fancy girls? I can get that. You want to be an executive? Done.

Guy lowers the gun. Listens. Buddy moves in for the kill.

BUDDY
Think about it. You can make any movie you want. Change the world. Just put a lid on the bullshit you've been feeding me. Spare me the speech and let's get down to business. Enough foreplay. Let's fuck.

Guy is silent. Almost convinced. Buddy presses.

BUDDY
You want me to lay it out for you? Fine. You're no better than anyone else. You're no stronger. Same weaknesses. Same fears. Desires. You want success. You want fame and fortune. You want exactly what I wanted when I was your age...what I have now. So why don't you stop being

(MORE)

BUDDY (cont'd)
a hypocrite and 'fess up. What do you want!!!

Guy FIRES. Shards of glass kick up behind Buddy.

GUY
I told you. I want justice...

FIRES another round.

GUY
..I want retribution...

FIRES another round.

GUY
...I want PAYBACK!

FIRES and FIRES and FIRES. A whirlwind of destruction explodes behind Buddy. One of the ceiling-high picture windows comes CRASHING DOWN.

Finally stops. A couple pieces of glass TINKLE down. A soft evening breeze blows in.

Buddy STAMPS his foot down.

BUDDY
Fuck that bullshit! What do you really want. Huh? Come on. What's in it for you?

Guy walks up to Buddy. Puts the gun right in his face. Up against his nose. Buddy snarls.

BUDDY
Fine. You going to shoot me now? Do it. Put me out of my misery, you fuck. I hope you die.

GUY
That's the problem with you. You think you're so keyed in to everyone's feelings. You think you can predict what everyone's going to do. You think you're a people person...But YOU DON'T LISTEN! YOU DON'T LISTEN!!!!!!!

BUDDY
Rot in hell...

Guy YELLS. Grabs Buddy's head with one hand. Pushes it down. Crosses his other hand over so the gun is right next to Buddy's ear. FIRES.

LOUDEST GUNSHOT we've ever heard. Bursts Buddy's eardrum. Blood EXPLODES out of Buddy's ear. A ROARING EXPLOSION.

Lasts for a second. Then the sound drops out. Silence and Darkness.

CUT TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE CARD - "YEAR ONE"

Phone RINGS. And RINGS. And RINGS. And RINGS. And RINGS.

FADE IN:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Guy sits at his desk, sipping a cup of coffee. Really sharp suit. Attitude reads arrogant and angry. The phone RINGS and RINGS.

He looks over. Pauses. Then goes back to his coffee. The phone RINGS. And RINGS. And RINGS.

CUT TO.

C.U. PHONE

gets picked-up.

INT. BUDDY'S OFFICE

Guy is on the phone across from Buddy, who is pissed-off about something. Guy stands, pacing, whispering harshly into the phone.

GUY
Hector? Guy. What happened to that delivery?

BUDDY
Why didn't it get there? God Damn It! You should be on this instead of fucking gossiping in the fuckin' copy room.

Guy puts a finger in his ear so he can hear. This only pisses Buddy off more. He looks around his desk.

GUY
Uh-huh. But that isn't what I asked for. No, stop. I don't care.

Buddy picks up a book. Hurls it at Guy. Guy turns and paces the other direction. Book misses.

GUY
Just listen. All right. Do I have your attention? Good.

Buddy picks up a clipboard. Sends it spinning at Guy's head. Guy, without even looking, nimbly dodges it. The clipboard hits the wall with a loud CRACK.

Guy launches into a speech, punctuating with dramatic gestures...All the time, ducking and leaping over objects that Buddy starts throwing across the office.

GUY
What we need to be concerned with here is DETAIL. 2:30 is not the same as 2:00, is it? Hello? Stop it, stop. I know you tried to deliver it at 1. And I'm sorry everyone was out to lunch. But that's not what I asked for. That does me no good. I now have a crazed executive throwing paperweights at me because of you.

Buddy heaves a heavy crystal paperweight on cue. Barely even looking up, Guy catches it mid-air. Calmly replaces it back on the desk.

GUY
Do me a favor. Shut up. Listen. Learn. I asked for 2. I expected 2. I want 2. So the next time I ask for something to be delivered by 2:00, get it there!

As Guy continues, Buddy calms. Listens to Guy's speech. Impressed. Like a proud father.

The phone RINGS. Guy makes an effortless transition from one call to the other. Answers. Turns to Buddy.

GUY
It's Cyrus.

BUDDY

snaps to attention. All smiles now. Picks up with Cyrus. Gushing schmooze.

GUY

gets up to leave. But Buddy motions for him to stay.

BUDDY
(on phone)
No sir. Yes sir. Costner will definitely do the reshoots. He liked the first cut of the picture and thought that some improvements will help. Willing and able.. uh-huh.

As Buddy drones on, Guy goes back to doodling on his pad. Puts the finishing touches on..

A SKETCH

of Buddy as the devil. Horns, hoofs...the works. Lifts up the pad, and we see other SKETCHES scattered in the margins. Buddy being hung. Buddy in a guillotine, head rolling away.

The phone RINGS. Guy stops drawing. Looks down.

THE PHONE

starts to blink green. Incoming call. Guy picks up.

GUY
(in a whisper)
Buddy Ackerman's office. Sure, can you hold on a minute? He's on the phone with Cyrus.

Guy puts the call on hold.

THE PHONE

blinks red on one line. The other line steady green. Active.

GUY

looks over to Buddy, still talking. Watches the phone. Bored. Waiting patiently to tell Buddy about his next call.

THE PHONE

active line goes dead. Call is over. Guy turns to Buddy and starts to tell him....

GUY
Morrow on line....

...But Buddy is still talking.

BUDDY
Yes, Cyrus. You'll get those notes by tonight. Guy is working on them. Yeah, he's doing a great job. Phenomenal...

Buddy continues to talk it up about Guy. Guy looks down at the phone again.

THE PHONE

has only one line on hold. Red. Blinking..Blinking... All other lines are dead.

Guy sits there. First confusion. Then disbelief.

Buddy hangs up the phone. Turns to Guy...

BUDDY
See, I take care of you, don't I? Huh? Listen to me..nobody else..me. I am looking out for your best interests. Now, who's holding?

GUY
Moral on line 2.

BUDDY
Who?

GUY
(correcting himself; enunciating)
Morrow. Mor-row

Guy gets up and leaves. Buddy goes back to work, happy & carefree.

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICES

Guy comes out of Buddy's office, still in disbelief. Shock. A amused grin on his face, but anger and frustration in his eyes.

He drops his pad and pen. Runs his hands through his hair. Shakes his head. Plops down in his chair to a TIGHT CLOSE-UP.

GUY
(to himself)
I don't believe this. Unbelievable. I mean, what gives? Do I look that stupid? Do I look that dumb?

REMAINING IN CLOSE-UP

Guy reaches out. Pulls Buddy towards him. CAMERA pulls-back to reveal we are now in...

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Guy continues his speech. With passion and anger.

BLOOD trickles out of Buddy's ear.

A STRONG BREEZE begins to blow through the shattered front window. Whips up around the two.

GUY
Did you think that you could pull that on me? Me? I don't know what's more insulting. You lying to me, or you thinking I wouldn't notice. Just how stupid do you think I am?

BUDDY
I did speak to Cyrus about you...

GUY
BULLSHIT! You took credit for everything I did.

BUDDY
Then how does Cyrus know who you are? Think he can name any other assistant on the floor? Think he can...

Guy is too angry to listen. He yells above Buddy. The two screaming at each other to be heard.

GUY
You lied to me! You handed me down that sanctimonious.

BUDDY
..recognize you? I never lied...

GUY
...bullshit like you do with everyone...

BUDDY
I TOLD YOU WHAT YOU WANTED TO HEAR!

Guy shuts up. Buddy continues. Cold stare. No pity. No remorse.

BUDDY
I told you what you wanted to hear. I told you what you needed to hear.

GUY
I didn't need anymore....

BUDDY
Yes you did. You were getting complacent. Lazy. Complete and total job burn-out.
(off Guy's reaction)
Oh, don't think I didn't notice.

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES EXECUTIVE OFFICE.

Guy sits reading the paper, sipping coffee while the phone RINGS and RINGS and RINGS. Finishes up his cup. Goes to the coffee-maker. Empty.

Guy saunters down the hallway. Phone still RINGING.

BUDDY (V.O.)
You just didn't give a shit anymore. Dragging your feet everywhere. You just didn't care. And you were talking shit.

INT. COPY ROOM

Guy greets another assistant. They laugh. Joke.

IN THE HALLWAY

Buddy passes the copy room. Hears something. Stops.

BUDDY (V.O.)
Telling everyone that you were doing my job. That you were running the show. That I was just some fucking puppet.

IN THE COPY ROOM

Guy mimics some of Buddy s gestures. The other assistant laughs.

OUTSIDE

Buddy seethes.

BUDDY (V.O.)
That if I didn't talk to Cyrus about making you a junior executive by the end of the month, that you were gonna walk. You could get a job anywhere else. And without you, the whole office would come crumbling down.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S LIVING ROOM

Guy is across the room, looking away from Buddy. Embarrassed. Humiliated. Because Buddy is right.

Buddy smiles. Now has the upper hand.

BUDDY
So don't come preaching to me with your ideas of what's fair. You're not a martyr. You're no hero. You're a fuckin' hypocrite. You're just like any other punk kid out there looking for a way in. Any way in. And you need me.

Guy tries to rally another attack. Stands up, indignant.

GUY
That doesn't give you the right to..to abuse people. To belittle them. To steal their girlfriends.

BUDDY
What?

GUY
What gives you the right, huh? To treat people like shit. What?

BUDDY
BECAUSE I EARNED IT! What? You think someone handed me this job? Gave it to me. Don't you think I had to work for it?
(pause)
I've run phone calls. Juggled the bimbos. Put up with the tyrants, the yellers, the screamers. I've done things that you can't even imagine in that small mind of yours. I paid my dues.

GUY
What? And I haven't? I spent a year...

BUDDY
AND I SPENT TEN! It's my turn to be selfish, god damn it! It's my turn.

Guy sits down. Exhausted. Out of arguments. Buddy shakes his head in disbelief.

BUDDY
What? One year in the fucking industry and you deserve to be an executive? Men better than you have spent a lifetime trying to get to your position.

GUY
I can do the job better than you! I deal with the scripts, the production. I...

BUDDY
Fine. But you gotta bleed. You gotta be strong. Tough. You need a shell that only time and experience can give you. And you're too soft. You have no spine. I'll be honest...

(MORE)

BUDDY (cont'd)
(motions to his bonds)
This is the single most impressive thing you've done all year.

Buddy looks at Guy. Sympathetic. Changes to a fatherly tone.

BUDDY
Look. You're bright. Intelligent. You'll go far. I admit. Yes, you do my job for me. And very well. I thank you for that. But you gotta suffer first. And you are far too young to fully appreciate just how valuable that is.

GUY
Don't you start preaching to me. I worked a year for you. That ought to be more suffering than any man should see in a lifetime.

BUDDY
Ha! I hate to be the one to break this to you, but...it doesn't get any better than this.

Guy gets up. Heads for the kitchen. He doesn't want to listen to this.

Buddy glares. Gets angry.

BUDDY
See, that's the problem with your fucking MTV microwave-dinner generation. It's kill your parents, fuck your friends, and have a nice day. You all want it now. You aren't willing to wait for it. You aren't willing to work for it. You expect it because you want it. Well, it doesn't work like that. You have to earn it. You have to take it. Make it yours.
(pauses)
But you need to decide what it is that you really want.

GUY
(yelling)
I want you to stop calling me in the middle of the night! I want you to stop sending me to the office on weekends to pick up your stinkin' sunglasses! I WANT MY LIFE BACK!

Buddy chortles. Yells back.

BUDDY
What life!? What life?! I gave you life! Before me, you had nothing. You were nothing. You were an inkspot. And now, you're playing in the majors. And you love it! Tell me the truth. You're the envy of all your film school friends. I bet any of them would trade in a testicle for just a taste of what you see everyday.
(pause)
I made you. You will always be Guy from Buddy Ackerman's office. You want to go back to your shitty little existence. No one's stopping you. Go. Leave. But you love it, and you know it.

Guy has no response. Sits there. Buddy's right.

BUDDY
So, now you want to tell me what you want? What happened to you this evening? What is this really about?

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES OUTER OFFICE - LATE EVENING

Most of the lights are out. Guy shuffles down the hallway, tired. Same suit we saw him in at the beginning of the movie. Puts on his jacket. Loosens his tie. Presses 'Down' on the elevator button. Leans against the wall. Exhales. Mouthing 'I don't care' over and over.

INT. ELEVATOR

Guy steps in. Doors are about to close when a hand reaches in between to stop them. Guy quickly presses the DOOR OPEN button.

VOICE (O.S.)
Thank you.

And in walks CYRUS VANCE. Tall, dignified. Guy immediately stands at attention. The doors close.

Guy steals a glance every now and then over, but keeps his eyes down. Quiet. Respectful.

The two ride together in silence. Guy tries to think of something clever to say.

CYRUS
Rough day at the office, huh?

GUY
Umm, yes sir.

CYRUS
Don't worry. It'll pay off.

The two continue to ride down. Guy continues his search for something to say. Anything. Opens his mouth, but stops. Shakes his head. Keeps thinking.

The doors open. Guy waits for Cyrus to exit. But Cyrus holds the door open. Motions for Guy to move ahead.

CYRUS
Please.

GUY
Thank you.

The two walk together towards the exit. Cyrus turns to Guy.

CYRUS
You have a wife? Girlfriend?

GUY
Uh, yes sir. Girlfriend, sir.

CYRUS
Good. Go and get yourself a good meal. Then go home to her and hold her tightly.
(pauses)
You don't need to fuck her, mind you. She may not be in the mood. They usually aren't.
(leans in; quietly)
Just hold her. Whisper in her ear. Tell her your hopes. Your dreams. Trust me, does a world of wonders.

Guy smiles. Likes the idea a lot.

GUY
I'll definitely do that.

CYRUS
Of course, if she is in the mood -- well, get it when you can.

They reach the exit doors. Guy holds it open for Cyrus.

GUY
You have a good evening, sir.

CYRUS
You too. And keep up the good work Guy.

Guy stops, amazed. Encouraged. The chairman of the Mega-Pictures Studios just addressed him by his first name! Guy watches as Cyrus disappears into the night. Allows himself a little victory YELP before exiting.

BUDDY (V.O.)
This can't be about Cyrus.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT

BUDDY (V.O.)
And this can't be about a stupid little phone call...

Guy is at the phone booths, just like the beginning of the movie. We pick up on the conversation where...

GUY
...Want me to come over?

DAWN (O.S.)
No, I have to read a script overnight. And I just wanted to know if anyone at the studio got it.

Guy slumps against the booth, disappointed.

GUY
Sure, what is it?

DAWN (O.S.)
Wait, hold on. I've got another call.

GUY
Yeah, sure.

Guy leans against the wall. A CLICK is heard. Then...

DAWN (O.S.)
Hello?

GUY
Yeah, it's...

BUDDY (O.S.)
Dawn? Buddy.

Guy jerks up straight. Covers the mouthpiece. Listens intently. A dark cloud forming...

BUDDY (O.S.)
Are we still on for tonight?

DAWN (O.S.)
Of course. Midnight, right?

BUDDY (O.S.)
Yeah, sorry it has to be so late, but I just don't think I'll get home until then.

DAWN (O.S.)
All right. You want me to bring anything?

BUDDY (O.S.)
Just your cute little butt. See ya.

The phone clicks. Guy is stunned. Starts hyperventilating.

DAWN (O.S.)
Guy? Hello? Are you there?

Guy slams down the receiver. Pissed. Heads for the door.

CUT TO:

INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Guy sits, turned away from Buddy. Scared to meet his stare. Buddy just smiles knowingly.

BUDDY
So we're left with just one thing. The only thing I know that drives men to such foolish, psychotic behavior. This is all about a girl isn't it Guy?
(sees Guy's reaction; laughs appreciatively)
All this over a chick? You fool!

Guy jumps to his feet. Gun leveled.

GUY
You...you shut up.

Buddy smiles. He's totally pegged Guy and he knows it. Shakes his head. Moves in for the kill.

BUDDY
Guy, you disappoint me. You're going to have to be stronger than this.

GUY
I gave you everything. But you weren't satisfied. You had to have her too.

BUDDY
Come on. Be a man. If you're going to lose it every time some fuck towel decides to climb the social ladder, you aren't going to make it.
(pause)
Isn't that right, Dawn?

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL

Dawn stands behind Guy. Shocked at what she sees. Guy with a gun. A bloody Buddy. Wreckage everywhere.

She hugs herself. Chilled. The wind begins to blow stronger...

GUY spins around. Gun leveled at Dawn.

BUDDY
(sing-song; in his best Desi Arnaz)
You got some 'splaining to do..

DAWN
Oh my God. Guy, what are you doing?

BUDDY
What does it look like? He's taken me hostage. Beat me. Tortured me.
(pause; smiles)
And I think you're next dear.

DAWN
(soothing)
Guy, let's be reasonable. Put the gun down. Let's talk about this.

Dawn starts approaching Guy slowly. Guy moves the gun around wildly. From Buddy to Dawn. Dawn to Buddy. Buddy stamps his feet and laughs with glee.

BUDDY
Talk? What do you think we've been doing all night?

GUY
Stay back, Dawn.

DAWN
Give me the gun, Guy. Give me the gun.

GUY
Back off. I'm warning you.

Dawn keeps approaching. Guy FIRES a warning shot. Dawn jumps back. Buddy howls with delight. Loving every minute of this.

Dawn changes tone. No longer nice. Firm mother-tone.

DAWN
Guy, stop! You're acting like a child. You're no better than he is.

GUY
Me? What about you? How long have you been..been...
(spits it out)
...fucking him!

BUDDY
A couple months now. A couple of good months. Real good months.

Guy moves the gun back over to Buddy. Buddy shuts up.

Dawn moves closer to Guy. Puts her hands on Guy gently.

DAWN
Guy, this was just business. It's the only way I could get CROWDED HOUSE bought. You can understand that, can't you?

Guy pulls away. Dawn moves her hand up to Guy's face.

GUY
But you..you fucked him!

DAWN
I was just trying to do my job. Doing whatever I could to get the movie made. What I did with him...meant nothing. I love you, not him. Nothing else matters. Nothing but us. Besides...

Dawn kisses Guy gently on the cheek.

DAWN
...it was only sex.

Guy pulls away sharply. Stumbles back.

DAWN
Come on, Guy. Put the gun down.

GUY
No way. He has to pay.

DAWN
Guy, don't!

BUDDY
Let him do it. Come on, let me have it, Guy. You know what you have to do. Let's finish it.

DAWN
Don't, Guy. Don't you dare. Don't tnrow away everything you've worked for.

BUDDY
Go on, boy. Take it. It's yours and you know you want it.

DAWN
We can fix it now, but if you don't put the gun down..

BUDDY
Do it.

DAWN
You'll lose it all. Everything you've worked for. Everything we've worked for...

BUDDY
Do it.

DAWN
The screenings. The premieres. The expense account. The fancy dinners.

Guy trembles with indecision. Face contorted. Trying to decide.

Buddy turns to Dawn.

BUDDY
Why don't you stay out of this?

DAWN
What? I'm trying to save your life!

BUDDY
And I'm trying to give Guy his. Listen, baby. He can't fuck his way to the top nearly as well as you can. You have nothing to contribute to this. So stay out!

Dawn stands there in disbelief. Speechless. Changes her mind.

DAWN
Shoot the prick, Guy.

Guy calms. Levels the gun at Buddy. Buddy smiles.

Dawn picks up her purse and things. Searches her purse for car keys.

DAWN
But don't expect me to stand here and watch.

BUDDY
Come on, Dawn. What happened to standing by your man?

DAWN
It's your funeral. And his. Not mine. I've got a script to read. Guy, call me when you're done.

BUDDY
Yabba-dabba-doo! All right, Guy. Just the two of us. Let's finish it. Give it to me. Show me what you're made of, boy. Show me what you've learned.

DAWN
(sotto)
Men. Crazy. All of them.

BUDDY
Don't let me down, son. Do it. Finish it.

Buddy leans in, excited. Expecting.

GUY

looks nervous, but determined. Fear mixed in with courage. Kind of like jumping off the high dive at the local pool for the first time.

Guy knows what he has to do. Closes his eyes. Cocks the gun.

DAWN
Good-bye boys.

BUDDY
(yelling)
DO IT! COME ON! DO IT NOW!

Guy FIRES. Once. Then twice. Dawn SCREAMS.

The brass bullet-casings PING to the ground. Wind subsides. Blows by pieces of wreckage and Buddy's life -- pictures, script pages.

Guy lowers the gun. Still smoking. Throws it down with disgust. Backs off. Stumbles into the kitchen.

BUDDY

sits there. Head down. Slowly lifts it up. Eyes gleaming with victory. Smiles....

CUT TO:

INT. MEGA-PICTURES OFFICES - EARLY MORNING

A green EXIT sign flickers in the deserted hallway. The door opens. Guy steps in. Dressed for success. Elegant trenchcoat. Tall umbrella. Pauses. Looks both ways for any sign of life. A new day.

INT. HALLWAY

Guy comes walking...no, gliding down the hallway. Before he reaches his usual desk, though, he makes a sharp right. And enters...

INT. GUY'S NEW OFFICE

Fairly small, but it's all his. Soft, hazy morning light streams in through the blinds. Backlights Guy so he seems to glow. Angelic. It's nice. Peaceful.

Guy sets his briefcase down. Office is cramped with flowers and balloons that read CONGRATULATIONS. Guy pulls out a note from one of the flower arrangements.

Interrupted by a soft KNOCK...

JACK

pokes his head in. Greets Guy warmly.

JACK
Hey, hey. Look who's the new big man on campus!

GUY
Jack! Come on in. Sit down.

Jack steps apprehensively in. Whistles admiringly. Sits.

JACK
What? You got to be the youngest exec they've ever had.

GUY
Yeah, well...

JACK
But you deserve it man. After you saved Buddy from that crazy chick.

GUY
It was really nothing.

JACK
Nothing! Shit. That's just like you. Always underplaying yourself. I mean, you pulled the trigger on her. And you knew that girl and everything. Wow! Above and beyond the call of duty, man.
(leans in, whispers)
Hey, do you think you could put a good word in for me? I mean, my year's almost done here.

Guy leans back. Lights a cigarette. Smiles. CAMERA BEGINS PUSHING IN for a C.U.

GUY
Let me tell you something, Jack. Everyone will want to give you the same advice. Tell you that you have to pay your dues. Ask you to do them a favor.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUDDY'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Wind HOWLS. Palm trees buckle under the gale. Storm clouds moving in. A tempest. RED LIGHTS from an ambulance and police cars spin around and around.

CAMERA MOVES IN ON

Guy stands near a police car, tightly clutching the collar of his jacket against the wind.

INT. GUY'S OFFICE

Camera keeps pushing in on Guy. Moves over Jack's shoulder.

GUY
They all want you to play by the rules. Their rules. Leave that candy-striped crap for the Wall Street wimps.

EXT. BUDDY'S HOUSE

Guy answers some questions for the police. Over the cop's shoulder...

GUY (V.O.)
This town's a jungle. This is your inner city. Your mean streets.

...two attendants wheel out a BLACK BODY BAG. They load it onto the back of an ambulance.

GUY (V.O.)
And the only interests you need to protect are yours. The only needs you have to serve are yours. What they will not give -- you have to take.

INT. GUY'S OFFICE

FULL C.U. of GUY.

GUY
So the only question you need to answer..and think hard about this.

(MORE)

GUY (cont'd)
(stubs out his cigarette)
What do you want?

Guy looks up. Exhales smoke.

BUDDY

stands, framed in Guy's doorway. Leans on a cane. Wearing a hat and trenchcoat. A smirk in his eyes. Sort of like Orson Welles in TOUCH OF EVIL. Menacing. CAMERA pushes in from a low angle until he fills the frame. Imposing.

And tucked under his coat dangles the BLACK 9MM BERETTA...

CAMERA ON GUY

pulls back sharply. Back...back..back...until Guy is merely a speck of dust we see over Buddy's shoulder.

Buddy doesn't say a word. Merely limps away.

Guy gets up. Hangs his jacket. Rolls up his sleeves. Picks up a pad of paper and a pen. Heads out the door to follow Buddy.

Jack follows, saying something, but we can't hear him because the...

The PHONE RINGS. The MUSIC SWELLS.

OUT IN THE HALLWAY

IN DREAMY SLOW MOTION

The floor is slowly coming alive with activity and craziness. A FRESH-FACED ASSISTANT runs up and down the halls with papers flying. The coffee-maker SIZZLES.

Executives greet talent with hugs and kisses.

In the background, a teenage RED-HEAD IN A LEATHER MINISKIRT asks someone for directions. Starts to walk down the hall towards us.

Guy turns and walks towards Buddy's office...
And the phone RINGS. And RINGS...

CUT TO:

C.U. TRAFFIC LIGHT

Solid Green.

A car horn BLARES. And BLARES...

INT. GUY'S CAR

Guy snaps out of his daze. Looks around. MUSIC plays on the tinny car radio.

VOICE (O.S.)
Light's green, asshole. Come on. Move it.

Guy moves forward. Makes a left turn.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY

Brilliant sunset. Purple mountain majesties. God's country.

Guy's car passes a sign. WELCOME TO WYOMING - THE COWBOY STATE.

CUT TO:

EXT. WYOMING LANDSCAPE

Guy rides a horse through the rugged terrain. Dressed in jeans and a flannel. A few days growth of beard.

He pushes the horse. It PANTS, GALLOPS through a stream and up to a ridge. Guy pulls back the reins sharply.

Horse comes to a stop atop the ridge. Guy looks out at the scenery. Takes a deep breath. Closes his eyes. Calm. At peace with himself. Then...

P.A. (O.S.)
Guy, where have you been? Stallone's unhappy with his trailer. And Buddy's been trying to get you for the last half-hour. Really, really pissed.

Guy opens his eyes. Looks down. A HAND WITH A CELLULAR PHONE pops into frame.

Guy dismounts. Takes the phone. MUFFLED SCREAMING can be heard from the receiver.

GUY
Yes sir. Just got here. I know. I'm sorry, it won't happen again. I'll take care of it right away. Anything you want...

Guy leads his horse over the ridge. In the valley below, we see trucks, trailers, two-tons. Lights, cameras, actors.

Guy descends...

FADE TO BLACK: