

# **VILLAINIZED**

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Beneath the full moon, a tree-lined road stretches into the horizon. In the distance, a pair of headlights emerge. They belong to a nondescript car which speeds past seconds later.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The driver is dressed in all black, hooded and masked. His face is a grinning skull. A black bag sits on the seat next to him, and a thick liquid - possibly blood - drips from one of his hands onto the steering wheel. This is THE SKULL.

There is faint thumping and muffled shouting coming from the trunk, mostly drowned out by the classic rock playing softly on the radio.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

The car passes a road sign that says NOW LEAVING CAMERON CITY, but someone has altered it with spraypaint to say NOW LEAVING, CAMERON IS SHITTY.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Slowing down now, The Skull concentrates on the road, looking for an exit.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

The car slows almost to a stop before turning down a smaller road leading to the forest. It disappears into the trees.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Skull stares ahead intently, drumming his fingers on the wheel. The muffled sounds from the trunk grow increasingly loud. He reaches down and turns up the music.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The car pulls to a stop next to a shallow grave. A shovel protrudes from the neighboring pile of dirt. The engine goes quiet.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Skull reaches into his bag and takes out a gun. Contemplates it for a moment.

INT. CAR (TRUNK) - NIGHT

Blackness. Sounds of shuffling and laboured breathing. The trunk opens and The Skull hovers motionless in the misty exhaust, illuminated red from the brake lights.

Looking down on us with cold detachment, he aims the gun. The muffled screams grow louder and more urgent.

CLOSE on The Skull as we:

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

SUPER: "5 DAYS EARLIER"

The Skull is replaced by the face of CONRAD, 30, handsome in an average kind of way. His eyes are glazed over. We hear the sporadic *clack-clack-clack* of a keyboard.

VOICE (O.C.)

Conrad?

Conrad turns to see his boss, STEVE LEWIS. Mid-forties, badly died hair failing to hide male pattern baldness. A moron.

CONRAD

Oh, hey Mr. Lewis.

STEVE

Dude, I've told you: It's Steve. Or just Lewis. None of this mister crap.

CONRAD

Yes, right. Sorry Steve.

STEVE

No apology necessary, for reals. So are you up to anything this weekend?

CONRAD

No. I mean, sort of. I was just going to do some-

STEVE

Oh man, last weekend I went out with Jerry and Phil, and that new guy Ben from accounts. Holy crap did we ever get wasted. Ended up meeting this girl, who wasn't really that attractive, but just seemed ready to party? Took her back to my place.

CONRAD

OK, great-

STEVE

And totally had sex with her.

A beat.

CONRAD

Can I help you with something?

STEVE

Yeah, how's that Contenta account going? You keeping them happy?

CONRAD

Sure. I mean, right now they have me working on a fun, edgy way to let people know that taking their medication can lead to increased risk of bowel cancer.

STEVE

Good job. Listen man, here's the dealio. We've got a big client presentation on Monday, outlining our whole brand awareness viral content strategy. So I'm going to need you take care of that.

CONRAD

Take care of what, exactly?

STEVE

The presentation.

CONRAD

Hmm, well a few problems there. As I'm sure you know, I am getting married in a few weeks, there are lots of things to take care of in the meantime, so my weekend is booked pretty solid. I'm also not sure that that's even my job-

STEVE

You'll do great. Just add some flowcharts. Clients love flowcharts. That's just a cold hard fact.

CONRAD

OK, but I-

STEVE

Thanks buddy.

He walks away leaving Conrad staring ahead blankly.

INT. TAILOR SHOP - DAY

Conrad is standing next to his best friend, GARRETT. The same age, bearded and shaggy haired. They are wearing tuxedo tops and no pants. An old man is measuring their legs.

GARRETT

The guy sounds like a monumental asshole.

CONRAD

He's really not that bad.

GARRETT

A titanic dick face. I keep telling you man, you need to get out of that corporate hellhole.

CONRAD

And do what, exactly? There's not even a depressing factory job left in this town that I could go to.

GARRETT

I don't know, anything other than just spending your day getting people to be OK with the fact that the antidepressant they're ingesting could eventually lead to anal tumors.

CONRAD

I like to think of that as a valuable public service.

GARRETT

Why don't you go into business with me?

CONRAD

Right. Somehow I doubt that Beth is going to be comfortable with me paying our mortgage by slinging dimebags to college kids.

JERRY, the old man measuring Conrad's leg, glances up.

GARRETT

Don't judge me, Jerry.

CONRAD

My point stands.

GARRETT

Fine, stay at your shitty job.

CONRAD

I will, thanks. So have you decided who you're bringing yet?

GARRETT

I've narrowed it down to a few possibilities. Why do you have to keep getting on my case about that?

CONRAD

I'm just asking.

A beat.

GARRETT

Hey, did you ever realize that when you say the word "asking," it really sounds like "ass king?"

CONRAD

No, I hadn't realized that.

GARRETT

It occurred to me the other day and now I can't get it out of my head. Asking. Ass king. So weird.

CONRAD

Yes, it is.

Jerry shakes his head sadly.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Conrad drives ahead slowly, caught in heavy traffic. He's listening to a radio broadcast.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

-In the midst of record unemployment numbers, Cameron City police are investigating a series of violent crimes which they believe are related to the local narcotics trade, controlled by an organized criminal syndicate which has been steadily gaining influence over the last several years. Sources say-

CONRAD

My God, this town sucks.

His phone rings. He turns down the volume and picks it up.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Hello?

VOICE (V.O.)

Hello there Mr. Grey, I'm calling on behalf of your friends down at AmeriBank, and how are you today?

Conrad cringes.

CONRAD

I'm fine, thanks.

AMERIBANK ASSOCIATE (V.O.)

That's super. This is just a cursory call just to let you know that we are now approaching three months since we've received a student loan payment from you.

CONRAD

I know, I know. Look I'll be able to start making payments again next week-

AMERIBANK ASSOCIATE (V.O.)

That's fantastic sir, just please keep in mind that if we do not start receiving payments from you by Monday we will be forced to start seizing your possessions.

CONRAD

You say that with such a pleasant disposition-

AMERIBANK ASSOCIATE (V.O.)  
Thank you, we look forward to  
receiving your payment as soon as  
humanly possible.

Conrad stabs at the phone with his finger, attempting to  
emphatically end the call.

CONRAD  
(exaggerated pleasant voice)  
Thanks, I'll get right on that you  
soulless fucking ghouls.

AMERIBANK ASSOCIATE  
I'm... I'm still on the line.

INT. CONRAD AND BETH'S APARTMENT - DAY

BETH, late-twenties, is lying on the couch of the first floor  
apartment, vacantly flicking through channels on the  
television. Pretty, but distracted.

CONRAD  
Hey honey!

BETH  
Hi Connie.

Conrad kisses her on the cheek, she doesn't look up from the  
television.

CONRAD  
Hi Edgar!

He attempts to pat EDGAR, their persian cat, on the head.  
Edgar withdraws and glares at him disapprovingly.

CONRAD (CONT'D)  
Hm. OK then.  
(to Beth)  
So how was your day? Were you able  
to come back right away, or did you  
have to stay again?

BETH  
I just came straight home.

CONRAD  
So no tutoring today?

BETH

No, no tutoring. I don't think I'll be doing that anymore. It's just not working out.

CONRAD

Well that's good. It seems like that was taking up all your free time. And didn't even pay that well really.

BETH

Yeah. Exactly.

Conrad walks to the fridge, pulls out a carton of milk. Takes a sip.

BETH (CONT'D)

Did you pick up the invitations?

CONRAD

Oh, shit. No, I didn't.

BETH

Conrad, come on. I just asked you to do one thing.

CONRAD

I'm sorry, I had so much going on, and Mr. Lewis asked me to work on a presentation this weekend-

BETH

Well we need to invite people to our wedding. Otherwise no one will be there.

CONRAD

Right, of course. Sorry. I'll go back out and get some.

BETH

Thanks.

CONRAD

Can I get you anything else while I'm gone?

BETH

Diet soda.

CONRAD

I knew that's what you'd want! I think our aspartame cravings are syncing up. We're like two peas in a-

He waits for her to complete the sentence.

BETH

What are you doing?

CONRAD

I... was just waiting for you. To finish the sentence.

BETH

You are a ridiculous person.

He shrugs and looks down at Edgar, who is staring directly into his eyes while frantically tonguing his nether-regions.

CONRAD

It really creeps me out when he looks at me like that.

INT. CONRAD AND BETH'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Conrad and Beth are asleep. Beth begins to stir slightly and quietly mumble. Conrad lazily opens his eyes.

BETH

Mmm. Not right now.

CONRAD

Um, honey?

BETH

I can't. Got to go.

CONRAD

Beth, you're just dreaming.

BETH

Not right now Benny.

His eyes widen.

BETH (CONT'D)

Mm. Maybe next time.

He is completely still, listening for more. But she seems to be finished. He reaches over and puts a hand on her shoulder.

CONRAD  
Beth, hey. Wake up.

BETH  
(half-asleep)  
Hmm? What's the matter?

CONRAD  
You were dreaming. And you were saying stuff.

BETH  
Oh, sorry babe.

She rolls over.

CONRAD  
Who's Benny?

BETH  
Mm. I love you too.

She's snoring softly within seconds. Conrad stares at the ceiling, wide-awake.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

Conrad is wearing the same face of distracted consternation, but sporting a headband. We hear sneakers squeaking, some shouting and a ball bouncing.

VOICE (O.C.)  
Conrad!

CONRAD  
Hm?

A basketball SMASHES him in the face. He crumples to the gym floor in a heap. A few of the overweight, sweaty guys who make up his pick up basketball team make a tentative circle around him. Garrett is the last to arrive.

GARRETT  
OK everybody, back up, give him some space.

He looks down at Conrad, blinking in the gym light, blood trickling from his nose.

GARRETT (CONT'D)  
How are you feeling, big guy?

CONRAD  
(slurred)  
I think my face is broken.

GARRETT  
Don't lose your faith, we're just  
down a few points!

CONRAD  
No, my face. My face is broken.

GARRETT  
Ohh... yeah, that's a problem.

INT. GYMNASIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Conrad is sitting on the bench in front of a row of lockers, leaning his head back and pressing an ice pack against his face. Garrett approaches and sits down next to him.

GARRETT  
How's the nose?

CONRAD  
It's not great.

GARRETT  
Bummer. If it makes you feel  
better, we won. Actually not having  
you out there opened up the floor a  
little bit and we were able to-

CONRAD  
Yeah, I know. I'm awful.

GARRETT  
You are. But seriously, what's  
going on man? You were even more  
distracted and clumsy out there  
than usual.

CONRAD  
It's Beth.

GARRETT  
What about her?

CONRAD  
She said "Benny."

GARRETT  
What does that even mean? Is that  
some kind of euphemism?

CONRAD

No, she said "Benny." While she was sleeping. "Not right now, Benny" were her exact words.

GARRETT

Huh.

CONRAD

Yeah.

GARRETT

It's probably nothing. I'm sure Benny is just one of her asshole students.

CONRAD

I know, I know. That's what I thought. It just really weirded me out.

GARRETT

Just talk to her about it dude. Don't let this be one of those things where you don't ever mention it, then you get married and it slowly eats away at you over the decades until it literally burns a hole into your stomach lining, causing corrosive acids to flow into your body, killing you slowly and painfully.

CONRAD

Wow. That sounds awful.

BOB, 40, approaches. Stops at the bench. He's completely naked.

BOB

Good game, Garrett.

GARRETT

Thanks, Bob.

BOB

Conrad, are you ok?

CONRAD

I'm fine, thanks.

BOB

Cool. I'll see you guys next week.

GARRETT  
Sounds good buddy.

Bob makes his way towards the showers.

GARRETT (CONT'D)  
Man, Bob's penis is impressive.

CONRAD  
It really is.

INT. CONRAD AND BETH'S APARTMENT - LATER

Conrad opens the door and put his gym bag down. He's got toilet paper stuffed in each nostril. Once again Beth is lying on the couch, flicking through channels. Her eyes are puffy and red.

CONRAD  
Hey honey.

BETH  
Hi Connie.

CONRAD  
How was your morning?

He goes to the fridge and pours an orange juice.

BETH  
Fine, how was basketball?

CONRAD  
It was great. I played really well,  
and the guys were super impressed.  
I made several difficult shots.

BETH  
Really?

CONRAD  
No, not at all. I think I broke my  
nose.

She sits up, worried. Sees his busted face.

BETH  
Oh, Connie!

She gets up to look at his nose, gets some peas out of the freezer and places them against his face.

CONRAD

Ah, thanks.

BETH

Poor guy.

Conrad notices her eyes.

CONRAD

Honey were you... were you crying?

She turns away.

BETH

No. It's nothing, don't worry about it.

CONRAD

Beth, whatever it is, you can talk to me about it.

BETH

Conrad, it's nothing.

CONRAD

Who's Benny?

Beth inhales sharply, still turned away from Conrad, her eyes wide.

BETH

Who?

CONRAD

Benny. You were sleeping last night and you said his name?

BETH

Oh, I don't think so.

CONRAD

No, you definitely did.

BETH

Benny... Benny is one of my students.

CONRAD

Yeah, of course. That's what I figured.

He breathes a sigh of relief.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Oh, man. I thought maybe you were having an affair.

BETH

You did?

CONRAD

Yeah, can you imagine? Sorry honey, I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions. Will you forgive me?

He hugs her tightly, she looks mortified.

BETH

Yes. I forgive you.

There is a knock at the door. It's oddly authoritative.

CONRAD

Are you expecting someone?

BETH

(weakly)  
Kind of.

VOICE (O.C.)

Ms. Richards? Open up please, it's the police.

CONRAD

What the-

He glances at Beth who looks defeated. He moves to the door and opens it. A female detective in plainclothes is holding a badge and a warrant. This is DETECTIVE JENNIFER MOORE, 30, beautiful but with a chip on her shoulder. She's flanked by two uniformed officers.

DET. MOORE

Is this the apartment of Beth Richards?

CONRAD

Um, yes.

DET. MOORE

Beth Richards who teaches 10th grade at Robert Collins high?

CONRAD

Yes, is there something wrong officer?

DET. MOORE

We'd like to have a few words with her please.

CONRAD

Sure, I guess. She's back here. Um, honey?

He opens the door for the officers and gestures to where Beth was just standing but she is no longer there. A window nearby is open. He rushes over and looks outside.

CONRAD'S POV

Beth is running down the sidewalk. Another officer intercepts her at full speed and TACKLES her onto the grass of their neighbor's yard.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

What the fuck?

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The officer has a knee in Beth's back, handcuffing her. She looks miserable. Conrad comes running up, with Jennifer and the other officers close behind.

A news van has pulled up and a small-time looking reporter is taking in the situation with her cameraman capturing it all.

OFFICER 1

Press is here.

JENNIFER

Goddamnit, they must have heard us on the scanner.

CONRAD

Can someone please explain what is happening right now?

JENNIFER

We're placing your girlfriend under arrest for sexual assault of a minor.

CONRAD

Um, excuse me?

BETH

I'm sorry Connie.

CONRAD

What do you mean, you're sorry?  
This is some kind of mistake right?

She hangs her head. The officer puts her in the back of the squad car and slams the door.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Ma'am, please. This has got to be some kind of mix up.

JENNIFER

I'm afraid not sir. We take child molestation very seriously around here.

CONRAD

Child molestation? Jesus Christ.

JENNIFER

She's going to be taken downtown and interrogated. Here's my card. If you get in touch with me I'll let you know when she's been processed. Maybe you can talk to her yourself.

CONRAD

But-

JENNIFER

Have a nice day.

CONRAD

I-

She enters the passenger side and closes the door. The car pulls away. Conrad stands there, alone and stunned.

The reporter sticks a microphone in his face.

REPORTER

Sir, you must be the significant other. What's your reaction to this horrific development?

Conrad, stunned, searches for an answer. He still has tissues sticking out of his nose.

CONRAD

Fuck.

Perched in the window, Edgar looks pleasantly bemused.

INT. POLICE STATION - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Conrad is sitting in a chair with a small crowd of sad-looking strangers. He's staring in disbelief at the small television in the corner of the room.

TELEVISION

It's Conrad's "interview". His one response is bleeped out as the camera zooms in on his face, broken and pathetic, before he stumbles away, back towards the apartment.

REPORTER

So there you have the significant other of Ms. Beth Richards, the local teacher and accused child-predator who was just led away moments ago. He seemed to be injured, whether these injuries were inflicted by Ms. Richards is unclear at this time, though it seems the most likely scenario. Of course these are all just allegations right now, but this reporter would like to add that if guilty, Beth Richards truly is a horrible, disgusting, sub-human monster. And her alleged acts will haunt this community until the end of time. Bill?

The broadcast cuts to a conservative-looking male anchor.

BILL

Thanks Nancy. Boy, just a heartbreaking situation developing there. The spouses in child abuse situations are often the forgotten victims. That man's life has been irrevocably torn apart. Nothing will ever be the same for him again.

Conrad throws up his arms.

CONRAD

Oh, come on!

An ELDERLY WOMAN taps him on the leg.

WOMAN

I'm so sorry, I can't imagine what that's like. My son is only in here for murder, thank God.

Conrad puts his head in his hands.

The door opens and Jennifer sticks her head in.

JENNIFER

Mr. Grey? You can come in.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Rows of desks, with annoyed-looking police officers bustling about doing police officer things. Jennifer leads Conrad to a desk cluttered with paperwork and an open laptop. Her screensaver is Detective McNulty from *The Wire*. They sit down.

CONRAD

Is this the part where you explain that this was all some colossal fuck up and you're sorry for wasting everyone's time?

JENNIFER

I'm afraid not. We ID'd her from some... illicit photos we discovered on the victim's cell phone.

CONRAD

Illicit?

JENNIFER

They were quite provocative.

CONRAD

Oh my God.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry Mr. Grey, I know this must be difficult for you.

CONRAD

Do you? Did your fiancée molest someone too? What a crazy coincidence!

JENNIFER

She's nearly finished her interview. Her parent's lawyers got here an hour ago and they have been discussing terms for a plea bargain.

CONRAD

You mean she's going to plead guilty?

JENNIFER

Well, yes... she is guilty. We kind of established that already.

CONRAD

Ah, right.

JENNIFER

If you want, I can get you in to speak with her for a few minutes.

Conrad pauses.

CONRAD

Yes, I'd like that. I need to find out what just happened to my life.

JENNIFER

Alright, just wait here please.

CONRAD

Thanks, officer... detective... I'm sorry, what was your name?

JENNIFER

Jennifer. "Detective Moore" was my father's name.

CONRAD

Really?

JENNIFER

No. My father was a real estate agent. I'm not sure why I said that.

CONRAD

Oh. OK?

JENNIFER

Right, um... I'll be right back.

She hustles away. Conrad's face is still utter devastation, but he manages a hint of a smile.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM

The door opens and Jennifer ushers in Conrad. Beth is sitting at the desk with two stern, important looking LAWYERS.

Conrad sits down across from her. She looks at him hopefully, not unlike a puppy after being caught spreading garbage around.

Her eyes are still puffy and red, and her attempt to appear composed just makes her seem totally unhinged.

BETH

Before you say anything, I really don't think 'child molestation' is an accurate description of what's happened here.

CONRAD

Oh no?

BETH

No, he wasn't a child. Not even close. He was 15.

CONRAD

I think I'm going to be sick.

BETH

(to lawyers)  
Can you two leave us alone for a few minutes?

They shuffle out of the room and close the door.

BETH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Conrad, I don't know what happened. It started out as just tutoring, then it developed. I knew it was bad but it felt so dangerous.

CONRAD

Sexual abuse often is! Wait, what do you mean developed? Did this happen more than once? I thought it was just a one time thing!

BETH

I made a mistake Connie. I'm sorry.

CONRAD

I just don't understand. What does this kid have that I don't?

BETH

I don't know. Benny wasn't you, that was the whole point.

(MORE)

BETH (CONT'D)

And he has this rough exterior, but as I got to know him I saw his softer side. So misunderstood.

CONRAD

But he's 15!

BETH

I told you I made a mistake. It's over now. My dad's lawyers are going to plea-bargain the charges down to 'wrongful sexual imprisonment of a minor.'

CONRAD

Ah, we're going all the way down to 'wrongful sexual imprisonment.' What amazing progress.

BETH

Exactly. So once I'm out of here in a few months, we can get married, and it will be like nothing ever happened.

CONRAD

Wait, you still think we're getting married? Are you fucking crazy?

She starts to tear up, her facade crumbling. She's losing it.

BETH

You're not thinking of leaving me, are you?

CONRAD

Are you being serious right now?

She starts crying.

BETH

Oh, Connie. How could you be so cruel?

He stares at her incredulously, unable to speak.

EXT. POLICE STATION - EVENING

Conrad stumbles out into the night, his frustration and confusion explodes into a series of spastic movements and guttural sounds. Attempts to kick a newspaper stand, but screams and holds his foot tenderly, hopping up and down.

A grungy SKATEBOARDER approaches him.

SKATEBOARDER  
Hey, are you all right man?

CONRAD  
I'm fine.

The skateboarder, red-eyed, squints at him.

CONRAD (CONT'D)  
Can I help you with something?

SKATEBOARDER  
Aren't you that guy? Who was on the news today?

CONRAD  
What? No. Go away.

SKATEBOARDER  
I'm pretty sure you are dude. I'm so, so sorry man.

CONRAD  
What, does everyone around here watch the shitty local news coverage?

SKATEBOARDER  
Naw bro, Youtube. That shit is all over the place. Here, I'll show you.

He types something into his smartphone, and shows Conrad.

PHONE

The video's title is MAN HAS LIFE RUINED ON LIVE TELEVISION. It's the interview again. Beth gets put in the car, the reporter approaches Conrad, the camera zooms in on his face as he attempts to process the worst moment of his life.

The video slows down to slow motion while tragic strings swell in the background.

CONRAD  
Jesus. How many views does this have?

SKATEBOARDER  
Closing in on half a mill, just since this afternoon.  
(MORE)

SKATEBOARDER (CONT'D)

Look on the bright side, you're famous dude! Yeah!

He extends his hand for a good-natured fist bump. Conrad just stares at him.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Conrad is parked at a red light, fuming. The song playing on the radio ends and some obnoxious DJs begin speaking.

FABULOUS PHIL (V.O.)

Hey hey folks, this is Fabulous Phil over at 97.9, ROCK FM, hope you're all having a lovely Saturday. Let me tell you one guy who's not having such a great night right now, have you seen this new viral video floating around the interwebs, Sergeant Steve?

SERGEANT STEVE (V.O.)

Oh is that the one where that guy's whole life is destroyed and he's just kind of staring helplessly?

FABULOUS PHIL (V.O.)

You bet, his wife is this babe of a high school teacher who just got caught boning one of her st-

He clicks off the radio angrily. Spots a supermarket and cuts across traffic to get into the parking lot.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

He paces furiously through the aisle. Straight to the beer section.

CHECKOUT COUNTER

He's waiting impatiently to pay for his six pack. Across the aisle he notices a couple whispering to one another and gesturing in his direction. He's had enough.

CONRAD

OK everyone. Attention please.

The other cashiers and customers stop what they are doing and look at him.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Yes, my fiancée was just arrested for molesting a teenager. I'm glad you find this horrible, life-altering tragedy so amusing and I hope you're all thoroughly entertained. Please, continue pointing at me and judging me like I am some kind of goddamn animal. You people make me sick.

No one knows how to respond.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

I am a human being! I am not an animal!

The man half of the couple across the aisle meekly raises his hand.

MAN

I'm so sorry. We were actually gesturing behind you, towards that table of complementary meatballs.

WOMAN

We were just wondering if we should try some.

Conrad looks behind him, and yes, there's a table of meatball samples complete with a shocked-looking meatball woman.

MEATBALL WOMAN

I'm sorry to hear about the molestation.

CONRAD

Me too, meatball lady. Me too.

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Garrett sits on a reclining chair, watching television. A recently used bong sits on the coffee table next to a large bag of marijuana and a scale.

TODD, overweight and disheveled, is sprawled out on the couch next to him.

GARRETT

Do you think the yeti is just a sasquatch that lives in the mountains?

TODD

The sasquatch is a woodland creature. It wouldn't survive at those climates.

GARRETT

You don't think there's any way they could be genetically linked?

TODD

We share ninety-eight percent of our DNA with chimps. It doesn't mean we're the same species.

GARRETT

Hm. That's a great point.

Conrad bursts in.

GARRETT (CONT'D)

Jesus, where have you been? I've been calling you like crazy.

He places the six pack on the table and sits down.

CONRAD

Where have I been? I've been at the police station visiting with my lovely fiancée, being held on charges of wrongful sexual imprisonment of a minor.

TODD

At least it's not child molestation.

GARRETT

Todd, please.

CONRAD

And guess what the kid's name is.

GARRETT

Benny?

CONRAD

Precisely. Get your computer, you're going to help me find this little shit.

GARRETT

Um, are you sure that's a good idea dude? What are you going to do to him?

CONRAD

I'm not going to do anything. This kid just destroyed my entire life and I want to know who he is.

GARRETT

Listen man, I don't think finding out who he is will help fix the situation. It's just going to make you feel worse.

CONRAD

Garrett, I'm going to find this Benny with or without you.

GARRETT

OK, fine. But will you at least smoke some pot first? Your negative energy is really disruptive to the positive vibes we've been trying to cultivate here.

Todd nods knowingly.

CONRAD

Yeah, OK.

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - LATER

Conrad and Garrett are huddled over a laptop, clicking through Facebook profiles. Garrett sits back, sighing.

GARRETT

I don't get it. We've been over every Ben or Benjamin that goes to Robert Collins High. Unless we're missing something, I haven't seen anything that conclusively links any one of them to Beth.

CONRAD

Goddamnit. He has to be in here. We must have overlooked something. Let's start again.

GARRETT

Dude, come on. Let's just give this up. We'll go grab a few beers or something. We can check again tomorrow, maybe it will be clearer-

CONRAD

Wait a minute, who's this? 'B-Killa.'

GARRETT

I don't know, let's check him out.

They click on B-Killa's profile. In his photo, he is wearing a beanie and an oversized jacket, scowling and throwing up what appear to be gang signs.

CONRAD

Well this can't be him. Let's move on.

GARRETT

Yeah, not so fast. Look at this.

Conrad looks closer at the wall posting Garrett indicated.

COMPUTER SCREEN

B-KILLA: got tutoring after class wit Ms. R ;)

CONRAD

OK, but this doesn't mean anything. She tutored a lot of kids.

GARRETT

It's the winky face, my friend.

CONRAD

What about it?

GARRETT

The winky face suggests that there's something else going on besides just studying. And hey, look at this one.

He indicates another wall posting further down the page.

B-KILLA: Can't wait 2 study more tonight <3

GARRETT (CONT'D)

I refuse to believe a kid who calls himself "B-Killa" and proudly wears a beanie that silly-looking is so into studying he needs to emphasize his statement with a heart. Todd, what do you think?

TODD  
(watching tv)  
He totally did Beth.

Conrad takes a deep breath.

GARRETT  
Dude, can we show a little  
sensitivity here?

TODD  
Sorry.

CONRAD  
OK. Let's find out everything we  
can about this guy.

Garrett clicks around.

GARRETT  
Benny "B-Killa" Gibbons. Lives in  
Charles Heights.

CONRAD  
Isn't that the gated community  
north of the city?

GARRETT  
The very same. Interests include  
rap/hip hop, straight thuggin,  
hoes, bitches, 420, making  
benjamins. That's money, by the  
way.

CONRAD  
Thanks.

GARRETT  
And hello, look at that. Even a  
cell phone number, freely available  
to anyone. Kids these days.

CONRAD+  
So what do we know?

GARRETT  
If I had to guess based on this  
little info, I'd say we're looking  
at an affluent, suburban hip-hop  
fan with a possible small-time pot-  
dealing operation. Fuckin' little  
usurper.

CONRAD  
This is who I'm up against?

GARRETT  
Well you're not really up against  
him. He kind of already-

Conrad glares at him.

GARRETT (CONT'D)  
Never mind. You're right, I think  
this is our guy.

CONRAD  
So what do we do now?

GARRETT  
My recommendation is that we get as  
drunk as possible, as soon as  
possible.

CONRAD  
Make it so.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

-- Conrad and Garrett are each drinking a beer, nodding their heads calmly to the music.

-- There are several empty beer bottles on the table. Garrett pulls out a small box and takes some pills from it, they each take one, clinking bottles and drinking.

-- They are much more animated in their appreciation of the music. The table is littered with empty bottles. They are now drinking scotch. That bottle also sits in front of them, half empty.

-- The scotch bottle is empty. Conrad and Garrett are wearing jackets, heading out the door. Garrett clicks off the light. Todd is stretched out on the couch, sleeping.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

-- They stumble through a crowded street, bumping into pedestrians and laughing as they pass blurred neon lights.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

-- They are sitting at a small table, a pitcher of beer between them. They clink glasses again.

-- They're sitting at the bar, laughing and doing shots with the bartender.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

-- They are stumbling through the street again, concentrating intently, struggling to remain upright.

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

-- Garrett is cutting up lines on the coffee table.

-- They are hunched over the table

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - MORNING

-- They are having an animated discussion, possibly about the meaning of life/nature of existence.

-- An impromptu wrestling match has broken out, they fall back towards the couch and land on the still-sleeping Todd. It tips over, spilling all three men to the floor.

-- Todd and the couch are back in their rightful spot, and Conrad and Garrett are leaving the apartment again. Garrett clicks off the light.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

-- They're continuing their animated discussion in the street, attracting nervous glances from regular morning people.

-- Garrett looks up and gestures toward a gate. It's the entrance to the city zoo.

EXT. CITY ZOO - DAY

-- They are walking around the cages holding bags of popcorn, pointing and grinning like lunatics.

-- They peer into a monkey cage and a masturbating chimp smiles at them. They laugh hysterically.

-- They gaze at a sad looking polar bear, Conrad is crying. Garrett puts his arm around him.

-- They're desperately trying to open the door to the polar bear cage. They are tackled by security.

-- They're escorted out of the zoo and thrown into the street. A father in the entrance shields the eyes of his two daughters.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

-- They dance terribly to a group of three Spanish looking buskers, two with acoustic guitars and the last one blowing into a pan flute.

-- Conrad is playing the pan flute. The two guitar players smile and play along. The former pan flute player and Garrett laugh boisterously, their arms around each other.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

-- Conrad, Garrett, and the Spanish buskers are sitting around a table, clinking beer bottles, laughing and shouting.

-- A scuffle has broken out, some jock-types are holding Conrad by the front of his jacket, Garrett shoves one of them and gets blind-sided by a punch. One of the buskers comes out of nowhere with a guitar shot to the head of the assailant.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

-- Conrad and Garrett are running away from the commotion on the patio, we can see police cars beginning to pull up.

-- They arrive at a corner where Conrad is able to hail a cab. They bump fists and he gets in.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

-- Conrad's head is slumped against the window as the cab comes to a stop outside his apartment.

INT. CONRAD AND BETH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

-- The door opens and Conrad steps unsteadily inside.

-- He stumbles awkwardly to the kitchen floor, halfheartedly attempts to get up but it seems comfy. His face presses against the floor. His eyes slowly close.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Conrad is sprawled out in a luxurious bed. Beth is curled up next to him, he slowly yawns and opens his eyes. Sees her, looks relieved.

CONRAD

I had the strangest dream last night.

BETH

Oh, Connie, don't worry. It wasn't real.

She takes his hand and kisses it. Starts licking it sensuously. He looks confused. A buzzing noise begins to grow louder.

CONRAD

Um, honey?

She starts gnawing on his finger, making a purring sound.

INT. CONRAD AND BETH'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING

Conrad's eyes open, his face pressed against the linoleum. Edgar is chewing on his finger and purring. His phone is buzzing. He peels his face off the floor and checks it. It's 8:15 am.

CONRAD

(weakly)  
Mother of God.

INT. OFFICE CUBICLE - DAY

Conrad stares at his computer monitor, eyes puffy and red, looking like death incarnate. We hear the *clack-clack-clack* of the keyboard, but more sporadic and labored, interrupted by the familiar beep of an incoming email.

COMPUTER SCREEN

STEVE LEWIS: Yo C-Rad, come see me in my office real quick.

Conrad, muttering, reluctantly stands and shambles down the hall, knocks on a door.

STEVE (O.C.)

Come on in!

Conrad sighs. He's not in the mood for this. Not today. Opens the door to see Steve, making an attempt at looking somber.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Hey buddy.

CONRAD

Hi Mr. uh... Steve. Hey, about that presentation-

Steve holds up his hands, dismissing him.

STEVE

Don't even worry about it. Listen man, I know what happened to you. I saw you on the internet-

CONRAD

Yes-

STEVE

Where they took away your fiancée. For having sex with that teenager. That's rough. So if you didn't get to the presentation, that's fine. Totally understandable.

CONRAD

Well thanks, I appreciate that.

STEVE

Having said that, I do also have to let you know that the your employee status is being changed from 'full-time employee' to 'freelance advisory specialist.' Which is really a way cooler title, if you ask me.

CONRAD

What does that even mean?

STEVE

Oh it's practically the exact same thing. It's just that the company is going to be scaling back your hours and benefits. And vacation time.

Conrad is barely able to speak.

CONRAD

...I-

STEVE

Listen bro, I know the timing  
sucks, but it's a tough economy out  
there. This is just going to give  
us the flexibility moving forward  
to-

Steve's voice slows and devolves into an unintelligible mumbling, as though we are hearing him through a wall. A bead of sweat snakes down Conrad's face as he attempts to process this new information.

The world has slowed down almost to a standstill. Conrad turns and stumbles out the door, Steve still droning on behind him.

He reaches the water cooler, drinks eagerly from a paper cup. Everything slowly returns to normal. He stands up straight, and pushes the water cooler to the ground.

The typing and office chitchat stops. The only sound is the glug-glug of water spilling onto the carpet.

CONRAD

What are we even doing here?

His colleagues look at each other nervously, unsure of how to react. Conrad looks to the nearest cubicle and gestures to BILL, a nervous young man in his early twenties.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Bill, what was your dream? Before  
it occurred to you that being an  
adult meant giving up the hope of  
ever doing something interesting?

BILL

I... I wanted to be a sailor.

CONRAD

A sailor, like in the Navy?

BILL

No, I wanted to compete in races.

CONRAD

(to everyone)  
Bill wanted to compete in  
competitive sailboat racing. That's  
fantastic.

He turns to MARILYN, a frumpy, overweight woman in her  
fifties.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

How about you Marilyn?

MARILYN

I wanted to join a cult that our  
neighbor started after he claimed  
he could communicate with the souls  
of dead philosophers who were  
trapped on the moon.

He swallows.

CONRAD

And that didn't work out for you?

MARILYN

My parents wouldn't let me. They  
wanted me to go to college.

CONRAD

Of course they did.

MARILYN

Turns out they were right, all the  
moon spirit philosophers ever told  
him to do was have sexual relations  
with the female cult members.

CONRAD

It's probably for the best that you  
didn't do that.

LARRY, a middle-aged bald man raises his hand meekly.

LARRY

I wanted to be an astronaut.

CONRAD

An astronaut, yes! That's wonderful  
Larry. Now we're talking. I wanted  
to be a comic book writer.

LARRY

Why didn't you?

CONRAD

I don't know. It was too hard. I didn't know what to do. So I just gave up. And now I've wasted five years of my life in this nightmarish, fluorescent-lighted, migraine-inducing, soul-destroying Hell hole. I'm done. I'm going back to following my dreams. Who's with me?

Silence. Conrad looks around for potential support. Finds none. Steve approaches him cautiously.

STEVE

OK buddy. I think you need to calm down a little bit.

CONRAD

(losing it)  
You need to calm down!

He looks to Larry desperately.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Come on Larry, what happened to your dream of being an astronaut? It's not too late.

LARRY

Actually, it really is too late.

CONRAD

Well... yeah. It probably is too late for that.  
(to Bill)  
What about you Bill? You can be a competitive sailboat racer, I believe in you.

BILL

I don't know man. It's a pretty uncertain job market, and I'm comfortable here. I'd rather just continue working here and sail in my free time.

CONRAD

That's pretty reasonable.

Marilyn looks at him hopefully.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Marilyn, you probably can't join your perverted old neighbor's moon spirit cult, but I'm sure there's plenty of other interesting cults you could look into.

She smiles. Steve has slowly made his way over to Conrad. He puts a hand on his shoulder.

STEVE

Easy now, big guy. Let's all try and cool out now.

In one smooth motion Conrad smacks his hand away and puts him in a headlock. The room is silent except for the sound of Steve struggling to free himself. Everyone stares at them blankly.

CONRAD

This is our chance, fellow drones!  
Rise up! Our time is now! To  
victory!

He vomits. Everyone recoils in disgust.

INT. CONRAD AND BETH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Conrad and Garrett are taping up boxes, the apartment is mostly barren.

GARRETT

Did you puke *on* anyone?

CONRAD

No, not really. Mostly just the floor.

GARRETT

Fuck. So what happened after?

CONRAD

What do you think? I gathered up the things from my desk and security escorted me out. I've been indefinitely suspended, guess they need some time to figure out what to do with me.

GARRETT

And when you came home?

CONRAD

A bunch of surly guys were here on behalf of Ameribank, taking away my furniture and television.

GARRETT

So now you are-

CONRAD

Moving back into my mom's basement. I can't stay in this place anymore. I couldn't afford it even if I wanted to.

GARRETT

Fuck.

CONRAD

You said it. Again.

GARRETT

Man, you don't have to do this. Just come stay with me.

CONRAD

Garrett, I'm thirty years old. I can't do the 'guy on the couch' thing now. I'm an adult.

GARRETT

But you are perfectly comfortable with the 'moving back into mom's basement' thing?

CONRAD

Exactly.

Conrad duct tapes the final box aggressively. Looks over at Edgar, sitting a few feet away, eyeing them suspiciously.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

(to Edgar)

Looks like it's moving time, pal. What do you say?

Edgar hisses at him.

GARRETT

Dude, your cat is kind of an asshole.

CONRAD

Yeah. I know.

EXT. ELLEN GREY'S HOUSE - SUBURBS - DAY

Conrad and Garrett pull into the driveway in Conrad's beat up car, the back seat filled with boxes, garbage bags and a cat carrier containing a visibly annoyed Edgar.

Conrad's mother ELLEN, mid-fifties, appears in the doorway holding a glass of wine and looking genuinely thrilled. She opens the door and greets them as they leave the car.

ELLEN

Connie!

She throws her arms around him, careful not to spill the wine. He grunts.

CONRAD

Mom, you're... you're hurting me.

ELLEN

I'm just so happy you're home, this is going to be great!

CONRAD

Yeah. Great.

GARRETT

Hi Ms. Grey.

ELLEN

Garrett, bless your heart for being here for him right now during this (whispers) troubling time.

CONRAD

I can still hear you.

GARRETT

It's no problem, really. Turns out Conrad doesn't actually have very many real possessions, so it was a pretty simple operation.

ELLEN

Well you're a true friend. Come on, I'll make you guys some sandwiches.

She goes back into the house, humming.

GARRETT

This is your last chance man. You don't have to do this.

CONRAD

Yes... I do.

GARRETT

Alright. Have it your way. Let's get you moved in and then I'm going to steal your mom's innocence.

CONRAD

What was that?

GARRETT

Wine. I'm going to steal her wine. Let's just go inside.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Conrad, Ellen and Garrett sit around the dinner table, some mostly-finished dinner plates and a few empty bottles of wine in front of them.

ELLEN

This was Conrad's first day of school. He was so excited. Nervous too, but God... it was adorable.

CONRAD

Mom I think Garrett has heard this story multiple-

Garrett wordlessly silences him.

GARRETT

Sorry Ellen, please continue.

ELLEN

Now I wasn't there to witness this next part, but what happened was: Conrad was playing in one of these plastic playground things-

CONRAD

It was a tube.

ELLEN

Yes, a plastic playground tube, and he peed his pants. But apparently they got some older kids to help him out, you know, track down some spare clothes, get him cleaned up.

(MORE)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

I'm not sure whether it was  
malicious, or whether they just  
genuinely thought he was a girl-  
(to Conrad)  
You do have my face, honey.

CONRAD

I do.

GARRETT

He does.

ELLEN

You do, but in any case they put  
him in a dress.

Conrad puts his head in his hands.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

So when I show up to pick the  
little man up, he's wearing this  
frilly dress - still looking mighty  
cute I would add - but definitely  
confused and uncomfortable also.

Garrett smiles, he's heard the story countless times, but  
still savors it like an aged scotch.

GARRETT

Marvelous.

CONRAD

OK, now if you two don't mind, I  
think we've discussed my consistent  
record of embarrassing failures  
enough for one evening.

ELLEN

Oh, Connie. It doesn't have to be  
like that.

CONRAD

Yes it does, mom. My whole life  
feels like it's been some kind of  
joke, and now this debacle is the  
punchline.

ELLEN

Conrad, why do we fall?

CONRAD

So... we can learn to pick  
ourselves up again?

ELLEN

No. Because we weren't watching  
where we were going.

CONRAD

Oh. That's not quite as inspiring.

She leans forward, with the look of someone who is possibly  
being a little too honest. Garrett is enthralled.

ELLEN

You've got all the tools to have a  
happy life, you've just made some  
bad choices. You're young. You've  
got time to turn this around.

CONRAD

Mom, I-

ELLEN

No more excuses, Connie. You've got  
a fresh start at thirty, not a lot  
of people get that. What are you  
going to do with it?

Conrad is taken aback, unable to answer.

GARRETT

Ms. Grey?

She relaxes, her moment of seriousness has passed.

ELLEN

Yes dear?

GARRETT

Can you tell the story of the time  
Conrad burned his genitals in the  
chemistry lab in high school?

ELLEN

I can.

INT. BASEMENT (CONRAD'S ROOM) - NIGHT

The light clicks on and Conrad surveys the room. His boxes  
are strewn about, open and half-unpacked. On a shelf an  
elaborate action figure collection. Posters of Star Trek: The  
Next Generation and Terminator Two. He sighs, steps forward  
hesitantly and sits down at his desk, opening his laptop.

CONRAD

Where are you, Benny?

A few clicks of the mouse later, he sits back, staring at the screen dispassionately.

COMPUTER SCREEN

Benny's smug grin beams back at him.

Conrad turns to the Darth Vader bust next to the desk lamp. He can still hear his mother's advice ringing in his ears. He turns back to the screen.

COMPUTER SCREEN

Benny's profile has a "Where I've been" section. Conrad clicks on it, bringing up a map with multiple points on it and a text side bar containing several entries: "Benny checked in at Vista View Mall." "Benny checked in at McHappy's." "Benny checked in at Bob's Krazy Karting," and so on.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Hrm?

He looks somewhat surprised that he has access to this information. He glances at Darth Vader one more time. Back at the screen.

COMPUTER SCREEN

He clicks on the map again, bringing up a menu. Clicks "save."

INT. CONRAD'S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Conrad is hunched at his closet, a pile of old clothes and other junk next to him. He's looking for something.

CONRAD

I know you're in here.

Finally he pulls out a box, opens it and looks inside. Removes a layer of old sweatshirts and finds what he was searching for: a weathered old grinning skull mask.

He picks it up slowly and considers it, expressionless. From his bed, Edgar looks on approvingly.

Back at his desk, Conrad picks up a notepad and begins to scrawl something down.

NOTEPAD

The Skull to-do list.

1. Find Benny and destroy him.

He underlines it emphatically. From the edge of his desk the skull mask grins up at the ceiling. He snatches it and stuffs it into a black backpack.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Conrad is rooting through some shelves, trying to be as quiet as possible. Finds a shovel.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

He opens the trunk to his car and puts the shovel inside, next to the black bag. He gets in, releases the emergency brake and the car rolls silently down the driveway, reaches the street, starts up, and drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Conrad is parked on the street a block away from the rear of John Collins High School, surveying the parking lot where groups of grungy-looking teens are congregating and smoking. There's mud caked around the wheels of the car and he's slumped in the driver's seat, wearing sunglasses and nursing a coffee. His phone rings. He answers.

CONRAD

Hello?

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Garrett is eating a bowl of cereal while he talks. Todd is once again leisurely stretched out on the couch.

GARRETT

Dude, where did you go? I woke up this morning and you were no where to be found. I had to get a lift home from your mom, dick.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CONRAD AND GARRETT

CONRAD

Sorry, I... I had some stuff to do.

GARRETT

It's fine, you know I'm always down for more quality time with your mom. Hey, why don't you come by later? You're unemployed now, we should take advantage of that by playing video games all afternoon. Seriously, once you just embrace it, it's not that bad.

CONRAD

Maybe later, I'm kind of still in the middle of something.

GARRETT

More important than playing video games all afternoon? That's not cool man.

Down the street from Conrad, the bell sounds and students start flooding out the doors.

CONRAD

Listen, I've gotta get going. I'll call you later.

GARRETT

Was that a bell? Where are you? Are you doing something creepy right now-

CONRAD

OK, good talk, take care.

END INTERCUT

He hangs up, glances around to see if anyone is watching, and looks into a small pair of binoculars.

BINOCULARS

He scans over groups of students, until he finds who he is looking for: Benny. Wearing the oversized jacket, beanie, and walking with an exaggerated limp. Doling out fist bumps to his friends.

Conrad drops the binoculars and squints.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

There you are you son of a bitch.

He peers back through them.

BINOCULARS

Benny walks to a minivan and stops at the driver's side door. Types something on his phone.

Conrad's phone buzzes, he picks it up and looks at it.

PHONE

A new update pops up on Benny's profile: On my way to the mall. Text if u need anything ;)

In the distance, Benny's minivan pulls out of the parking lot, heads down the street. Conrad starts his car and follows him.

EXT. VISTA VIEW MALL (PARKING LOT) - DAY

Conrad is parked in a space on the outer fringes of the parking lot. He takes out the binoculars and peers toward the entrance.

BINOCULARS

Benny struts towards the front doors, enters.

Conrad clicks open his door.

INT. VISTA VIEW MALL (FOOD COURT)

From above we see Benny take a tray of fast food and sit down in a booth. Conrad is silently observing him from the second level, carrying the black bag and pretending to leaf through a magazine.

After a moment a GRUNGY LOOKING TEEN sits down across from Benny. They exchange a few words and Benny nonchalantly slides the takeout bag across the table. The other teen reaches inside, takes something out and stuffs it in his pocket.

Trying to act casual, he stands, shakes hands with Benny, passing him a bill, and walks away to rejoin his posse.

CONRAD

I saw that, B-Killa.

INT. VISTA VIEW MALL - LATER

Benny emerges from a VIDEO GAME STORE, holding a bag. Starts walking down the corridor towards the exit.

Above him Conrad, still tailing him, pulls out a phone, older and cheaper than his other device. He takes out his notebook, opens it to The Skull's To Do list. Scrawled in the margins is a phone number. He begins to type it in.

VOICE (O.C.)

Mr. Grey? Um, Conrad?

He turns around, surprised. It's Jennifer. She's holding a few clothing store bags. He covertly stuffs the notebook and phone back into his bag.

CONRAD

Oh, Officer Moore. Er, Jennifer.  
What are you doing here? Were you following me?

She looks at him, puzzled. Gestures to her bags.

JENNIFER

No, I was just buying clothes.  
Hence the bags.

He laughs nervously.

CONRAD

Ha! Of course you are! Wow, that was super weird.

JENNIFER

A little bit. Should I leave you alone?

Conrad glances toward the entrance one last time, sees Benny disappear through the doors.

CONRAD

No, of course not. Sorry, I think I'm just a little on edge after everything that's happened over the last few days.

JENNIFER

Would it make you feel any better if I bought you a cup of coffee?

CONRAD

Better is a bit of a stretch. But it may make me feel slightly less bad. Let's do it.

JENNIFER

Boo ya.

He cocks an eyebrow at her.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I don't know where that came from.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Conrad is sitting at a table, Jennifer approaches carrying two drinks. Places his in front of him, a caramel-whipped cream-chocolate monstrosity. She just has a normal black coffee.

JENNIFER

Here's your drink. Do you have any idea how unhealthy this is? I feel fatter just looking at it.

CONRAD

Leave me alone, I'm drinking my emotions. Did you just get a black coffee? That's such a hard-boiled detective thing to order.

JENNIFER

I showed up at the station on my first day and everyone was drinking it like this. I didn't want to look like a wuss, so I did too. It's horrible. But I kind of got used to it.

Beat.

CONRAD

So what are we doing here?

JENNIFER

I don't know, you seem nice? And also, I kind of-

CONRAD

Feel sorry for me?

JENNIFER

Maybe just a little.

CONRAD

Listen, I appreciate it, but I don't need a charity date.

JENNIFER

Come on, how could I not be sympathetic? What happened to you was pretty shitty.

CONRAD

That's true. I guess I can't hold it against you. I feel pretty sorry for me too.

JENNIFER

Look, the reality is that I've only been a Detective for 3 months, everyone I work with thinks I'm a joke. I just moved here. I don't know anyone. I don't know how to meet new people anymore.

CONRAD

Ugh, don't remind me. I've been trying to avoid thinking about having to rejoin the dating scene.

JENNIFER

So I met you under slightly... different circumstances. When I arrested your fiancée. Why should that mean we can't have a cup of coffee and talk about stuff for an afternoon?

CONRAD

I'm happy I bumped into you. I do feel better.

She smiles. He attempts to take a sip of his drink, struggles to find a proper place to put his mouth amidst all the cream and chocolate.

JENNIFER

Hopefully you can make it through the rest of the afternoon without getting diabetes.

EXT. SIDEWALK - EVENING

They're leisurely walking down the street, eating hot dogs.

CONRAD

So what made you want to become a cop?

JENNIFER

Lethal Weapon.

CONRAD

Seriously?

JENNIFER

Absolutely. I always thought that being a cop meant chasing guys through alleys, and getting in car chases, and hanging on to the bottoms of helicopters.

CONRAD

And it's not like that?

JENNIFER

Not at all. It's a lot more just filling out paperwork and trying to intimidate loitering teenagers.

CONRAD

So you wanted to be Riggs, but you ended up Murtaugh.

JENNIFER

Exactly. I begged them to assign me somewhere it's a little more exciting, but no one believed I could do it.

CONRAD

So you ended up in good old Cameron City.

JENNIFER

You bet. Is it really as crappy here as it seems so far?

He laughs.

CONRAD

Absolutely.

JENNIFER

Fantastic. How about you, what made you want to be a... former copywriter?

CONRAD

I just didn't know what else to do really. I graduated with an obscene amount of debt.

JENNIFER

Didn't we all.

CONRAD

I had to pay the bills somehow.  
There wasn't a lot of other jobs I  
could take. So I just kind of got  
stuck.

JENNIFER

What are you going to do now?

CONRAD

Seek revenge on all my enemies.

She chuckles.

JENNIFER

Right. You don't really strike me  
as the type.

CONRAD

Uh-

JENNIFER

Hey I've got to get going. I have a  
bunch of reports to fill out. This  
was fun though.

CONRAD

Yeah, it was.

JENNIFER

You still have my card?

CONRAD

I do.

JENNIFER

Well give me a call sometime. Let's  
do it again.

CONRAD

I'd like that.

She kisses him on the cheek, turns and hails a cab. As it's  
pulling to a stop she glances back again.

JENNIFER

Have fun with your revenge!

He smiles nervously and waves at her as the taxi drives away. His eyes follow it for a few moments until they land on someone standing across the street, aggressively hitting on a woman who couldn't be less interested. It's Steve Lewis.

CONRAD  
Hello, Mr Lewis.

He quickly ducks into an alley and peers out from behind a dumpster.

CONRAD'S POV

Steve is desperately trying to get the woman to talk to him but she's not hearing any of it. She walks away, and he looks around, trying to assess how many people just witnessed his failure. He begins walking down the street in the opposite direction as casually as possible.

Conrad leaves the alley in pursuit, remaining at a safe distance half a block or so behind, the black bag slung over his shoulder.

EXT. SLEAZY MASSAGE PARLOUR - DUSK

In a less populated area, Steve approaches a scummy building with a neon sign advertising "full service massage treatment." He glances in both directions before opening the door and walking up the stairs to the parlour entrance.

Up the street, Conrad leans out from behind a telephone pole to see Steve disappear inside. He smiles, patting the black bag. He opens it, peeking inside. The skull mask grins up at him. He cracks his knuckles.

EXT. SLEAZY MASSAGE PARLOUR - NIGHT

Some time later. Steve re-emerges from the parlour and starts walking up the street with a satisfied, shit-eating grin plastered on his face.

As he passes a dark alley, a sounds gets his attention.

VOICE (O.C.)  
Psst.

He stops, confused. Looks into the darkness of the alley but can't see anything clearly.

STEVE  
Who's there?

Footsteps. Steve glances around anxiously, and The Skull steps out of the darkness. Steve is taken aback.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Who are you? What do you want?

He attempts to respond in the icy whisper of the Nazgul, but probably lands closer to Christian Bale as Batman.

THE SKULL

I'm The Skull. And I want to hurt you.

Steve doesn't back down.

STEVE

Careful bro, I'm warning you. I do CrossFit.

The Skull begins to advance.

THE SKULL

I am going to enjoy this.

He takes a wild swing which Steve ducks easily, shoving him back. The Skull stumbles.

STEVE

This is your last chance, my man.

THE SKULL

Damnit, I was supposed to say that.

He lunges at Steve with another haymaker. Steve blocks it and kicks him in the crotch, really hard. He drops into a heap, moaning.

STEVE

I didn't want to have to do that, dude. You forced my hand.

The Skull continues favoring his groin, groaning miserably.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Why do you have to wear a mask? Did you get burned by acid or-

Like a crazed pit bull, The Skull leaps forward and seizes Steve's leg, biting him on the calf.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Ah! Fuck!

He frantically attempts to free himself.

STEVE (CONT'D)  
Get off! Get off me!

Finally The Skull releases his leg and Steve takes off at a run. The Skull remains lying on the ground.

STEVE (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
Stay away from me, you freak!

After lying on the cement for a moment, collecting himself, The Skull stands gingerly. He looks around him for witnesses and removes the mask, stuffing it in the bag.

With a final glance around him, Conrad limps away into the night.

INT. CONRAD'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Conrad is watching cartoons, halfheartedly pushing around some remaining cereal in a bowl in front of him.

Ellen enters the room, holding some laundry. Notices him sitting there, dejected.

ELLEN  
Well hello Mr Grumpy.

CONRAD  
Mom, don't call me that. I had a horrible day yesterday.

ELLEN  
You want to talk about it?

CONRAD  
Well actually I... I was out handing out resumes. You know, trying to find a new place of employment. I really struck out. I got my ass kicked, actually. I feel like a failure.

ELLEN  
Oh Connie, you aren't a failure. It's a cutthroat world out there. Everyone's looking to get ahead at the expense of everyone else. You've just got to make sure you've got the right ammunition to fight fire with fire.

CONRAD  
Ammunition?

ELLEN

Sure! You've got to be prepared to do whatever it takes to put yourself ahead. You've got to be ruthless.

CONRAD

Hm. Thanks Mom. That's actually really helpful.

ELLEN

You're welcome, sweetie. You want anything from the kitchen?

CONRAD

No thanks.

She leaves. He considers what she just said.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Ruthless...

Wincing, he reaches into his pants and removes the package of frozen peas that had been pressed against his groin.

INT. CAR - DAY

Conrad drives along, glancing around. Something catches his attention and he pulls into a parking lot. Looks up at a pawn shop with a sign that says SCHILLINGER SECURITY AND USED GOODS. He gets out of the car.

INT. SCHILLINGER SECURITY AND USED GOODS - DAY

Conrad is standing at the counter speaking to JACOB SCHILLINGER, sixty, balding and paunchy, but imposing. Old combat fatigues. Has the eyes of someone who has seen and done things you can only dream of. He's showing several different tasers to Conrad.

SCHILLINGER

This last one is the real bad ass. It's not even legal in this country, I got it from a contact in the Cambodian military. They have less stringent safety regulations there.

CONRAD

I like what I'm hearing.

SCHILLINGER

Oh yeah. You stick a guy with this  
it's going to feel like he's  
getting buttfucked by Thor himself.

CONRAD

Jesus.

SCHILLINGER

Hey, you need to protect yourself.  
There's some bad people out there.  
Some real darkness.

CONRAD

Tell me about it.

SCHILLINGER

I will. I've seen the darkness. I  
know its true face.

He leans closer.

SCHILLINGER (CONT'D)

When you look a man in the eye and  
know in your heart that to continue  
living you will have to take his  
life, you will understand the cruel  
nature of the universe.

Beat.

CONRAD

OK great, I'll take that one. Thor.

SCHILLINGER

Sure thing my man.

He begins to prepare the taser for sale.

SCHILLINGER (CONT'D)

Mind if I ask what you need this  
for?

CONRAD

Oh you know, the usual. Protection.  
To protect me. From the bad people  
that you mentioned, and the  
darkness and whatnot.

SCHILLINGER

Alright, you don't have to tell me.  
I don't pass judgment, kid. Just  
don't do anything stupid.

(MORE)

SCHILLINGER (CONT'D)  
Especially anything that's going to  
lead back to me.

CONRAD  
Don't worry about it.

He hands him the brown bag with the taser in it.

SCHILLINGER  
And hey, just because I like you,  
I'll throw this bad boy in.

He takes a small black cylinder, and with a flick of his  
wrist snaps out the telescopic police baton inside.

CONRAD  
Cool.

SCHILLINGER  
You're damn right it is.

He snaps it back into place, puts it in the bag, and hands it  
to Conrad.

Conrad stuffs it into his backpack.

SCHILLINGER (CONT'D)  
It's cash only, chief. This isn't  
the type of item that you want  
leaving a paper trail.

CONRAD  
Sure, no problem. I just cashed my  
rent cheque.

He hands him the money.

SCHILLINGER  
It was a pleasure doing business  
with you. If you have other  
security needs please feel free to  
come back any time.

He's about to turn away, but he stops himself. He glances  
down the counter to a row of handguns.

CONRAD  
How much for one of those?

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DUSK

Benny is playing basketball with a few friends. Conrad's car  
is parked across the street.

INT. CAR - DUSK

Conrad peers through the binoculars, taking a long sip from a cup of coffee, black.

BINOCULARS

Benny breaks away from the game and heads towards a set of bleachers. Picks up his phone to check something.

Conrad, looking more intense than we have yet seen him, pulls out his old phone and the notepad, flips open again to The Skull to-do list. Punches in the number.

PHONE

Conrad types: Benny it's Beth. I need to see you.

He clicks 'send.'

Across the street, Benny appears taken aback for a moment. He types something in.

PHONE

Benny: When and where? I miss u. I'm sorry about what happened. My parents found your pictures.

Conrad shudders. Looks back at the phone.

PHONE

He types: I miss you too. The parking lot at 567 Paper Street outside of town at midnight. Come alone.

A beat. Across the street, Benny considers something. Types again.

PHONE

Benny: See u soon.

Conrad nervously exhales. This is it.

He starts the car and pulls away.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Conrad is driving down a silent, dark road through the outskirts of town. Appropriately dark music playing softly on the stereo.

CLOSE on Conrad's face. Utter determination.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Conrad's car pulls into the empty parking lot of a boarded up warehouse. He pulls to a stop near a blinking, yellow street light.

INT. CAR - MIDNIGHT

Conrad is staring ahead intently. Reaches over to the passenger seat and takes the bag, places it in his lap.

In the distance, on the solitary road leading to the parking lot, a vehicle appears: Benny's minivan. Conrad reaches into the bag. Pulls out the skull mask. Takes a deep breath. He puts on the mask and pulls his hood up, just as Benny reaches the parking lot.

He reaches into the bag and pulls out the taser. The minivan comes to a stop a few spaces away. Benny steps out, takes a few hesitant steps towards the car. Tries to see who is behind the wheel but it's pitch black except for the light from the headlights and the flickering street lamp.

BENNY

Ms. Richards?

The Skull opens the door.

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - MIDNIGHT

The Skull gets out of the car, stands staring at Benny silently. Benny takes a step back, trying not to show fear.

BENNY

What the fuck is this?

THE SKULL

You've been a bad boy, B-Killa.  
It's time for detention.

BENNY

Listen man, I don't know who you  
are but don't make me hurt you.

Benny pulls out a knife. He's scared, but trying to hold his ground.

THE SKULL

You'll have to if you want to make  
it through the night, Benny.

He starts walking methodically towards his prey. When he's only a few feet away, Benny slashes out at him with the knife.

The Skull steps back to avoid the blade and does, just barely. He lunges forward and jabs, the taser crackling. Benny twists out of the way and counters, slashing The Skull across the upper arm.

He recoils, clutching the wound and groaning. Benny stays on the attack with a left-handed clip across the jaw which sends him sprawling. He tries to get up but can't seem to get to his feet. Benny approaches slowly, getting a bit cocky now.

BENNY

Who the fuck are you?

He reaches out and takes hold of the mask. The Skull grabs a fistful of gravel and throws it in his eyes. He covers his face and screams, and The Skull jams the taser into his ribs. His body goes rigid and he collapses.

The Skulls sits there for a moment, breathing heavily. He stands up and goes to the trunk of his car, favoring his arm. Opens the trunk. Reaches in and takes out a roll of duct tape. Starts walking toward Benny's lifeless body.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Skull drives silently, blood dripping onto the wheel, thumping and muffled shouting coming from the trunk.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The car pulls up next to the shallow grave.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Skull pulls out the gun. Opens the door.

INT. CAR (TRUNK) - NIGHT

The trunk opens and The Skull, illuminated red in the mist like the angel of death himself, aims the gun towards us.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The Skull pulls Benny out of the trunk, deposits him next to the shallow grave. He lies there, groaning miserably, his mouth taped shut. The Skull points the gun at him.

THE SKULL

Get on your knees.

Benny complies, sobbing now. The Skull, still pointing the gun, reaches out with his other hand and removes the tape covering his mouth.

BENNY

(crying)  
Oh man. Don't kill me. Please don't kill me. I've got money. My parents do. They'll pay you.

THE SKULL

I don't want your money, Benny.

BENNY

What do you want?

THE SKULL

I want you to beg.

He presses the gun against his head, Benny groans.

BENNY

Oh God, please. Listen, I'm sorry, OK? For everything. I'm sorry I've been selling pot. My mom found some in my drawer last year and cried, she made me promise not to do it anymore. But I did anyway, I just wanted people to think I was cool.

THE SKULL

Go on.

BENNY

I'm sorry I'm rude at school. I'm sorry I called Darren Barker a fag. I'm sorry I screwed Ms. Richards so many times. I'm sorry I-

THE SKULL

OK, enough! That's sufficient.

BENNY

Wait, you... you texted me. You said you were her. Is that what this is about?

THE SKULL

I got your attention the only way I knew how, Benny. And here we are.

BENNY

Then how did you know?

THE SKULL

I know everything about you. And I've determined that you are worthless, a waste of space. An evolutionary blight. And you must be destroyed.

Benny whimpers.

BENNY

Come on man, don't do this. Please.

THE SKULL

Did you think you could just do whatever you want? That there wouldn't be consequences to your actions?

BENNY

I don't know, my parents... I never see them. All they do is work.

THE SKULL

Spare me the sob story. We all get to make choices. You've wasted the precious gift of free will and decided to spend your life acting like an overgrown parasitic worm in a silly hat.

BENNY

I'm sorry, please... I'll change. Just don't kill me.

He steps back and points the gun at his chest.

THE SKULL

I'm afraid you haven't left me much choice.

BENNY

Please don't! Oh, man... I just  
pissed myself.

The Skull clicks back the hammer.

THE SKULL

Goodbye, Benny.

He pulls the trigger. It fires a pellet which bounces  
harmlessly off Bennie's chest. He shrieks and tumbles  
backwards into the shallow grave.

THE SKULL (CONT'D)

Bang.

He silently observes him for a moment, crying and sputtering  
in the dirt.

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Skull's car pulls into the lot, making its way towards  
the minivan. The car stops and The Skull steps out and opens  
the trunk. Pulls out Benny, filthy, taped up again and  
moaning miserably. Deposits him next to the van. He crouches  
and again removes the tape from Benny's mouth.

THE SKULL

Now, Benny... If you ever tell  
anyone about this, or about me, I'm  
going to come back for you. And  
next time I'm not going to be so  
generous.

BENNY

(shell-shocked)  
I won't... I won't tell anyone.

THE SKULL

There's a good boy. You'd better  
keep a low profile from now on. If  
I hear about you so much as selling  
a dimebag in a parking lot  
somewhere across the country, I'll  
find you.

He dangles Benny's key ring in front of him, then throws the  
keys into the night. We hear them hit the pavement somewhere  
in the lot. The Skull walks back to his car. Opens the door.

BENNY

Wait... who are you?

He turns back.

THE SKULL

I'm The Skull. You'd better pray  
you don't see me again.

He gets in, starts the car and drives away, leaving Benny  
sniffing and searching for his keys in the darkness.

INT. CAR - DAWN

Conrad removes the mask, the first light of morning  
illuminating the empty city streets. He smiles. He begins to  
chuckle. The chuckle evolves into pure, full-throated  
laughter.

EXT. CONRAD'S HOUSE - MORNING

The door to Conrad's car is open and he's half in the  
driver's seat, spraying cleaning solution on the steering  
wheel and dashboard and wiping it up with paper towel. Ellen  
steps out of the front door, wearing her robe.

ELLEN

You're up early!

CONRAD

Hi mom, good morning.

He stuffs the bloody paper towel he's holding into the trash  
bag at his feet, stands up and gives her a kiss on the cheek.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Just thought I would get an early  
start at the day. Clean up the old  
Conrad-mobile.

ELLEN

I like the initiative! When you're  
finished, come on inside, I'm  
making bacon.

CONRAD

You know how I love bacon. You're  
the best, mom.

ELLEN

What's gotten into you today? You  
seem chipper.

CONRAD  
I don't think I've ever felt better  
in my whole life.

She beams.

ELLEN  
That's my boy.

She returns inside as Conrad ties up the garbage bag and tosses it down the driveway, it lands perfectly in the bin.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Conrad sits at the kitchen table, opens his laptop. Types something in on the keyboard. Checks the screen. Takes a fresh piece of bacon.

COMPUTER SCREEN

We're sorry, but user "B-Killa Gibbons" has deleted his/her account.

He smiles and closes the computer. The phone rings.

CONRAD  
Hello?

INT. POLICE STATION - JENNIFER'S DESK - MORNING

Jennifer attempts to respond but her mouth is filled with donut.

JENNIFER  
Sorry... one second...

INTERCUT BETWEEN CONRAD AND JENNIFER

CONRAD  
Jennifer is that you?

She frantically tries to chew and swallow. Finally does.

JENNIFER  
Yes, oh my God I'm sorry. I didn't  
expect you to pick up so fast.

CONRAD  
Oh yeah, I was just up... doing  
pushups.

He rolls his eyes.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

And I was right by the phone.

JENNIFER

Well I'm sorry to interrupt your pushups. I had fun yesterday.

CONRAD

I had fun too.

JENNIFER

Have you ever heard of The Phoenix?

CONRAD

Of course. Do you mean that, like the phoenix, I am going to symbolically rise from the ashes of my former life, stronger and more resilient than ever?

JENNIFER

Um, no. The Phoenix is a bar near the station. Do you want to meet there later?

CONRAD

Oh. Yes.

INT. THE PHOENIX - EVENING

It's a divey place, with an old jukebox, some grizzly regulars and a few adventurous younger patrons. They're at a table with half of a pitcher of beer between them.

JENNIFER

So how is it going back to living with your mom?

CONRAD

It's not ideal. But it's alright. My dad hasn't been around since I was a kid, so when I was growing up it was mostly me and her. I'm pretty sure it's why she never put away any of my old stuff. She was always hoping I'd be back someday.

JENNIFER

You mom sounds like a really cool lady.

CONRAD

Oh she's great, I'm just still not exactly thrilled to be living there again now that I'm a grown-ass man.

She laughs.

JENNIFER

Fair enough.

CONRAD

How about you, what do your parents do?

JENNIFER

My mom is a wedding planner. She wanted me to take over the family business.

CONRAD

Let me guess, she's not really pleased that you chose to get shot at for a living.

JENNIFER

No, not pleased, but she knows it's what I wanted so she's there for me. She's good people.

CONRAD

What about your dad?

JENNIFER

He died when I was five.

CONRAD

I'm sorry.

JENNIFER

Don't be. I don't really remember him. But I know he was a good guy.

CONRAD

To family.

They clink glasses and drink. Jennifer empties her glass.

JENNIFER

Got any requests? This place has a great jukebox.

CONRAD

Anything that's fun to play air drums to.

She wanders off towards the jukebox. Conrad sips his beer, notices a law school HOTSHOT and his SIDEKICK at the table next to him, staring and grinning.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Can I help you two?

HOTSHOT

You're that guy.

CONRAD

That's... quite the power of observation you've got there, sir.

SIDEKICK

Didn't your wife blow some high school kid? Dude, that's rough.

HOTSHOT

I saw her picture man, she was hot! What was the problem? You couldn't satisfy her?

CONRAD

Listen guys, I've had a pretty shitty last few days. I'm sure making fun of me makes you feel better about whatever horrific event occurred in your childhood to make you act this way, but I'm just not in the mood.

The Hotshot leans forward, flashes a shit-eating grin.

HOTSHOT

Neither was your cradle-robbing fiancée.

Conrad's had enough, he quickly stands, Hotshot and Sidekick stand, it looks like violence is about to erupt.

JENNIFER

Is there a problem here?

Her voice, playful a moment ago, now has the authoritative tone of a police officer.

HOTSHOT

You're here with this loser? Come on.

JENNIFER

That's none of your concern. Now stop bothering this man. Please.

SIDEKICK

Or else what?

JENNIFER

Or else I will fucking arrest you.

She pulls out her badge. Hotshot and Sidekick look at each other and wordlessly decide it's time to go.

HOTSHOT

Have a nice night, officer.

They casually retreat towards the rear of the bar. Jennifer sits back down.

JENNIFER

Well that was exciting!

CONRAD

You didn't have to do that.

JENNIFER

Actually I kind of did. Those guys were just about to kick your ass.

CONRAD

So that's it, huh? I'm just some weakling who you feel bad for? I told you I didn't want your pity.

JENNIFER

Conrad, I was just trying to help-

CONRAD

I need some fresh air.

EXT. THE PHOENIX - NIGHT

Conrad is leaning against the brick wall, staring out into the street. On the sidewalk next to him sits a disheveled homeless vet. Holding a sign that says: NEED MONEY FOR MY FAMILY.

Jennifer emerges from the doorway and joins him.

JENNIFER

You don't have to go through this alone you know.

CONRAD

It sure feels that way right now.

JENNIFER

It wasn't your fault. There's nothing you could have done.

CONRAD

Listen, I had a great time with you tonight. But what are we doing? I'm in... kind of a dark place right now. My whole life just blew up in my face. You don't need this.

JENNIFER

Why don't you let me make that decision?

CONRAD

I'm sorry. I just want to be alone right now.

She's trying to play it cool, but that hurt.

JENNIFER

Fine. I get it. Hope you feel better.

CONRAD

Yeah, thanks.

She turns and walks to the street. Conrad watches her go, looking like he wants to say something. She disappears into a waiting cab, which drives away.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Goddamnit.

At the entrance of the bar a few yards away, Hotshot and Sidekick emerge. Conrad ducks into the alley so they won't see him.

He peeks out. Sidekick is on his cell phone, his finger jammed in one ear. Hotshot is getting in a cab. He's drunk and not properly controlling the volume of his voice.

HOTSHOT

54 Charles Court, good sir. I just need to stop and pick up some cigarettes first-

The door closes and the cab begins to drive away. Conrad thinks for a second. He begins to hustle down the alley in the opposite direction. Emerges onto a sidestreet, and sees his car.

EXT. CHARLES COURT - NIGHT

The taxi pulls into the apartment complex parking lot, slows to a stop. A moment later the Hotshot gets out, starts stumbling towards his building. Approaching the entrance, he slows down. Squints. There's a figure standing in the shadows next to the building.

HOTSHOT

Hello?

The figure takes a step forward out of the inky darkness, into the yellow light of the street lamp. It's The Skull. Hotshot takes a step back.

HOTSHOT (CONT'D)

Whoa. What the fuck? Is it halloween or something?

The Skull remains silent.

HOTSHOT (CONT'D)

Who are you?

THE SKULL

I'm your worst fucking nightmare.

Hotshot is taken aback, but doesn't yet realize that he is in danger.

HOTSHOT

Come on. Chris, is that you?

THE SKULL

Yes, it's me. Chris.

HOTSHOT

Jesus man, you scared the shit out of me. Where'd you get that mask?

THE SKULL

Come over here and I'll show you.

The hotshot walks towards him, drunkenly sure of himself.

HOTSHOT

Bro, take that thing off, you look like the bad guy in a superhero movie.

THE SKULL

Exactly.

Hotshot reaches out and The Skull produces the taser, it lights up and he JAMS it into his side before he can react.

HOTSHOT

Arrgh!

He hunches over, collapsing, and in one motion the Skull puts a hand over his mouth and pulls him into the alley.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLEN GREY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Conrad is lying on the couch, petting Edgar absentmindedly and watching television. He's half-smiling, lost in the memory of last night. Ellen enters the room.

ELLEN

Someone was out late last night.

CONRAD

Yeah, I guess. I was with someone actually.

ELLEN

Oh, do I know him?

CONRAD

A lady someone.

ELLEN

Look at you go! When do I get to meet her?

CONRAD

Probably never, seeing as I hopelessly screwed it up.

ELLEN

Oh nonsense. You're such a good boy. How could someone not see that?

CONRAD

Um-

They are interrupted by the 'breaking news' music of the local station. They both watch as the same anchor from Conrad's interview appears.

TELEVISION

BILL

-and in other local news, an early morning assault took a turn for the terrifying for one unlucky law student. Watch what happened in this exclusive raw footage.

The station cuts to a clip of shaky cell phone camera footage. It's the interior of an apartment, the person holding the camera is walking towards a window.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.C)

What is it?

CAMERA WOMAN

There's some guy outside. You should call the police!

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.C)

What do you mean some guy?

CAMERA WOMAN

He's tied up or something. Just call the cops, this is freaky!

She reaches the window and aims the camera toward the courtyard, which we recognize as Charles Court. There's a man, stripped to his underwear, taped to the lamppost. The camera zooms in. It's the Hotshot, beaten, bruised, and struggling meekly.

BILL

After the man was freed, he described his attacker as physically imposing, dressed all in black and wearing a mask. We were able to obtain the police sketch artist's illustration.

The police sketch of The Skull fills the screen.

BILL (CONT'D)

Pretty spooky. Remember folks, if you see someone fitting this description in your neighborhood, we urge you not to engage him yourself. He could be extremely dangerous. We'll have more details on this story as it develops.

The program cuts to an obnoxiously cheery breakfast cereal commercial.

ELLEN

Can you believe this? What's the world coming to?

CONRAD

Yeah. There are some real sickos out there.

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Conrad and Garrett are talking while shooting at each other in a futuristic video game and passing a joint back and forth. Todd is holding court in his rightful place on the other couch.

GARRETT

So let me get this straight. You went out on a date with the lonely, hot police detective that arrested your sociopathic fiancée, and you managed to offend her and make her go home alone?

CONRAD

Pretty much.

GARRETT

Dude, I don't know about you sometimes. I really don't.

CONRAD

I just have a lot on my mind right now.

GARRETT

Of course you have a lot on your mind. Everyone does. Just the other day, I was thinking that it would be really cool if we could train dolphins to rescue the victims of underwater submarine crashes.

CONRAD

...What?

GARRETT

My point is that this is how you take those things off your mind. It's the ultimate rebound scenario. Just imagine how much this would screw with Beth.

(MORE)

GARRETT (CONT'D)

Come on, she gets out of jail, and not only are you dating someone already, but it's the lady cop that collared her in the first place? It's perfect!

CONRAD

This girl is nice though, she doesn't deserve to get used as a prop in some revenge scheme.

GARRETT

Well if she's nice, then there's no reason not to pursue her for totally legitimate reasons. And still reap the benefits of the revenge aspect as an added bonus.

CONRAD

That's not a bad point. I would be stupid not to pursue this.

GARRETT

I'm glad you're finally starting to listen to the voice of reason.

CONRAD

You're the voice of reason?

GARRETT

Absolutely.

CONRAD

Remember that time you dropped acid at a Van Halen concert and had to be carried out by security, screaming about Sammie Hagar being an interdimensional lizard creature?

GARRETT

That imposter is not of this Earth!

INT. CAR - DAY

Conrad is driving along, whistling. His phone rings.

CONRAD

Hello?

AMERIBANK ASSOCIATE  
Hello Mr. Grey? I'm calling on  
behalf of your good friends down at  
Ameribank. This is just a cursory-

CONRAD  
Don't ever call me again or I swear  
I will find out where you live and  
I will hurt you.

AMERIBANK ASSOCIATE  
...I-

He hangs up, resumes whistling.

EXT. POLICE STATION - AFTERNOON

Jennifer exits the building, absorbed in something on her  
phone. Conrad pulls up just as she's walking away. He hustles  
to get out and catch up to her.

CONRAD  
Jennifer, wait up!

She turns around and regards him skeptically.

JENNIFER  
Oh. Hello.

CONRAD  
I know, I'm a dick.

JENNIFER  
You kind of are.

CONRAD  
I'm sorry. This whole situation has  
been difficult. I had no right to  
take that out on you.

She relaxes a little.

JENNIFER  
No, it's fine. I can't really  
imagine what you're going through  
right now. I don't know what I was  
expecting to happen.

CONRAD

You were probably expecting me not to act like an asshole after you were the only person who was nice to me during the worst week of my life.

JENNIFER

I guess that is kind of reasonable.

CONRAD

Let me make it up to you. Come have dinner at my mom's house.

JENNIFER

I have to ask you something first.

CONRAD

Shoot.

JENNIFER

Are you The Skull?

CONRAD

Wh... what? The who?

JENNIFER

Don't you watch the news?

CONRAD

No. I mean, I do but I haven't yet today-

JENNIFER

That douchebag who made fun of you last night got attacked by some guy in a mask outside his apartment.

CONRAD

Jesus... And you think that was me? Do I honestly strike you as the type of person who wears a mask at night and beats people up?

JENNIFER

Honestly? No. But they've asked me to find out who he is, and it could be a big deal for me. I had to ask.

CONRAD

Jennifer, that guy was a dick. He probably had dozens of people wanting to put on a mask and kick his ass.

JENNIFER

That's true...

Conrad raises his hand.

CONRAD

I, Conrad Grey, solemnly swear that I am not... The Skull? Is that what you called him?

JENNIFER

OK. That's good enough for me. You'd better not be lying though. I'll find out.

He laughs, trying not to show how nervous he is.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Can I still come to your mom's?

CONRAD

Of course you can. Do you want to come with me now?

JENNIFER

No, I have to go pick up the dry cleaning for the middle aged men I work with. I hate them so much. I'll be there at 8.

INT. CONRAD'S HOUSE - EVENING

The door opens and Conrad greets Jennifer.

CONRAD

Hi! Come on in.

JENNIFER

Sure.

ELLEN (O.C.)

Conrad? I found a big box of your old GI Joes in the garage, I thought you could put them with your other toys, and-

She walks into the room and notices Jennifer.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Ah... hello! You must be Jennifer, I'm so happy you're here.

She hugs her, not letting go for several seconds.

JENNIFER

Hi Ma'am.

ELLEN

Ellen, please! Conrad tells me you're a police officer.

JENNIFER

Detective, actually.

ELLEN

Oh my. How exciting!

JENNIFER

It really isn't.

ELLEN

Nonsense, have you heard about this Skull character that's been roaming around-

CONRAD

Mom please, let's not get into that right now.

ELLEN

Alright, fine, fine. Come on Jennifer. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes, so I have some time to show you some pictures of Conrad when he was a baby.

CONRAD

Mom, you don't have to-

ELLEN

Wait until you see his tiny little penis, it's adorable!

Jennifer laughs, and Ellen begins to lead her away. Conrad covers his face in humiliation.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The door opens and Conrad is about to enter. In the background we hear Ellen telling the story of the time he peed his pants in the playground tube, again. Conrad sighs.

His phone buzzes. Confused, he locks the door, sits on the toilet and takes out the Skull phone.

PHONE

Benny: We need to talk. Meet me at the Paper Street warehouse.

Conrad is taken aback. He's not sure how to handle this.

PHONE

He types: I thought I told you I didn't want to hear from you again.

He clicks send, waits a moment, and the phone buzzes again.

PHONE

Benny: Be there at midnight. I know who you are.

He stands up. Runs his fingers through his hair. Looks in the mirror, thinking desperately. He seems to settle on an idea. Dials in a number on his phone and puts it to his ear. Someone answers.

Conrad speaks with a weirdly-executed baritone, trying to keep his voice down.

CONRAD

Hello, officer. Yes, my name is Edgar... Katz. Edgar Katz. I live on 25 Water Street... yes, exactly. Right next to the pier. Well, I watched the report on this Skull character on the news today. I just wanted to let you know that I just saw him. Near the docks. He was following someone. Please send someone immediately. He's very frightening. OK. Thank you.

He hangs up. Tries to calm down. Opens the door.

ELLEN (O.C.)

Make sure you spray the air freshener if you just pooped, honey.

CONRAD

Jesus Christ mom!

INT. CONRAD'S ROOM (BASEMENT) - NIGHT

Conrad enters the room, carrying two glasses of wine. Jennifer is on his bed, sitting against the headboard, the opening frames of Lethal Weapon playing on Conrad's 90's era television.

Edgar is lying next to her, purring. Conrad hands her the glass of wine and sits down in the chair next to her.

JENNIFER

Thank you sir. Your cat is really friendly.

CONRAD

I don't think anyone has ever described him that way before.

She takes a sip of wine. He looks anxious.

JENNIFER

Is everything alright?

CONRAD

Of course. Everything's fine. To be honest I think I'm just a little surprised, the last time I was living in this room, I couldn't even have imagined a scenario where a woman would be hanging out on my bed.

JENNIFER

Well believe it buddy. Your Mom is great, by the way. Thanks for bringing me to meet her.

CONRAD

It was fun, except for the constant humiliation.

JENNIFER

Oh, stop. She's funny. You're really lucky to have her.

She's about to take another sip when her phone buzzes. She looks at it.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Crap. I've gotta go. Looks like we've had a Skull sighting.

CONRAD

Oh, wow. Creepy. You think it's really him?

JENNIFER

Nah, probably some lonely old lady that saw him in her toast. But I have to go check it out. I'm kind of a big shot.

CONRAD

You are.

JENNIFER

Call me?

CONRAD

Absolutely.

She kisses him on the cheek and he stands as she makes her way out of the room. Listens to the door close. Turns toward the closet.

INT. CONRAD'S ROOM (BASEMENT) - MINUTES LATER

Conrad is dressed in black, stuffing the skull mask into his backpack.

He checks the time. 11:30. Hurries out of the room and out the door.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Conrad is trying to keep his eyes on the road as he puts on the skull mask, making his way through the dark industrial roads leading to the warehouse.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The Skull pulls to a stop in a deserted alley. Exits the car and walks into the street, where we can see the solitary light outside the warehouse, a few blocks away. There's a car parked there. Two men are waiting for him.

CLOSE on The Skull, the demonic grin is unchanging but there is concern in his eyes.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Outside the parked Cadillac stand two THUGS. TOMMY, 35, slicked back hair, handlebar moustache and leather jacket, and TIMMY, 20s, clean-shaven in a track suit.

At the parking lot entrance The Skull steps out of the darkness. Timmy nudges Tommy on the arm.

TIMMY

Tommy. There he is.

TOMMY  
Well, well, well.

The Skull approaches them cautiously. Stops ten feet away and stares them down without saying a word.

TOMMY (CONT'D)  
Hello there, Mr. Skull.

THE SKULL  
What do you want?

TIMMY  
Hey, don't be rude you freak.

TOMMY  
A few nights ago you kidnapped an associate of ours. Took him out into the woods and put a gun to his head. Didn't you?

THE SKULL  
That's none of your goddamn business.

TOMMY  
Actually, that's where you're wrong. It is our business.

THE SKULL  
Your associate is a little shit.

Tommy chuckles.

TOMMY  
That may be true, but he's a pretty profitable employee. And what kind of a boss would I be if I didn't look into it. Timmy?

Timmy lifts a gun, aims it at The Skull.

TIMMY  
Don't fucking move.

TOMMY  
Search him.

Timmy approaches cautiously. Searches The Skull. Finds the taser, which he kicks over to Tommy.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

You know, we lied about knowing who you are, but I'm pretty interested to see what's under that mask. I want to know what kind of a psychopath dresses up like a goddamn demon and throws high school kids in his trunk.

Timmy turns back to Tommy.

TIMMY

I wonder if he's all scarred up, or mutated or something-

In the few seconds Timmy takes his eyes off of him, the Skull reaches into his sleeve and extends the telescopic police baton in one motion, bringing it down HARD on Timmy's forearm. He screams and drops the gun.

Tommy, surprised, tries to reach into his jacket but The Skull takes a step forward and connects with a full-force golf swing directly into his jaw, he flies back, spraying blood from his mouth, and flips over the hood of the Cadillac.

He turns back to Timmy, still screaming and holding his arm, and spins him around with a blow to the temple. He collapses, unconscious.

The Skull stands there for a moment, breathing heavily, unsure of what to do.

He moves swiftly to the Cadillac, opens the door and reaches inside. Pulls a lever under the front seat and the trunk pops open.

EXT. WAREHOUSE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Skull struggles with Tommy's limp body, manages to get him over the lip of the trunk. He tumbles inside on top of a prone Timmy. Before closing the trunk he notices a DUFFEL BAG. Takes it and locks Timmy and Tommy inside.

He places the duffel bag on rear of the car and opens it. We can't see what's inside, but he stares at it for a moment before zipping the bag back up hastily.

He picks up the taser and Timmy's handgun, stuffs them in his pockets. Turns towards the entrance to the parking lot, and there's two POLICE CRUISERS parked there.

He stands there, frozen. The cruisers silent and unmoving. The passenger door on the lead car opens and Jennifer emerges. Raises her gun, aiming it right at him.

JENNIFER

Don't fucking move!

In instant he's off, sprinting towards the fence at the back of the lot. Jennifer fires, a bullet ricochets off the cement, inches from his feet.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Shit.

(to the lead car)

Stay here!

(to the other car)

Go around! Cut him off!

The lights on the rear car flare up and it turns back towards the street as Jennifer takes off, sprinting in pursuit.

AT THE FENCE -- In one motion, The Skull throws the duffel bag over and leaps to the top of the fence, flipping over and landing awkwardly.

He gets up, stumbles, takes the bag and sprints ahead into an abandoned BUS DEPOT. He disappears into a row of rusted schoolbuses.

Seconds later Jennifer reaches the fence, takes a split second longer to climb but lands gracefully on the other side. Looks up and sees nobody. She makes her way toward the bus depot.

EXT. BUS DEPOT - NIGHT

Her gun drawn, she moves cautiously from row to row of parked buses, peering under, around, anywhere he could be hiding.

She makes her way slowly down a narrow passageway between buses. Ahead is an empty terminal. Jennifer squints, notices that the door is swinging open. Takes off, running toward it.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

The Skull, silently lying on the floor and clutching the duffel bag, watches her pass the window.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - NIGHT

Jennifer enters, aims her gun into pockets of darkness where he could be hiding, breathing heavily. She's scared.

She hears something, immediately aims the gun in the direction of the sound. It's a rat, skittering across some old newspaper. She relaxes, exhaling.

BACKUP OFFICER (O.C)  
Detective Moore?

She puts down her gun and leaves the terminal. Her backup is standing behind a bus, the same one The Skull had been hiding in. Shining a flashlight at something.

She approaches the officer, he's indicating the back door of the bus, open. She peers inside. It's empty.

JENNIFER  
You're kidding me.

She turns and runs into the street, but it's empty. He could be anywhere. In the distance, a city bus passes.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)  
Son of a bitch.

INT. CITY BUS - NIGHT

Conrad, unmasked, makes his way towards the back of the bus. Sits down, holding the bag close.

INT. CONRAD'S ROOM (BASEMENT) - MORNING

The sun streams through the window as Conrad lies face down, fast asleep. He's woken up by the phone.

CONRAD  
Hello?

INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Jennifer is at her desk, tired-looking but excited.

JENNIFER  
Are you watching TV?

INTERCUT BETWEEN CONRAD AND JENNIFER

CONRAD

No, I'm not... I was still asleep.

JENNIFER

Well wake up, lazy-ass. I'm famous!

He flicks on the television.

TELEVISION

The familiar local news correspondent stands in front of Jennifer with a microphone.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

-and at that point, I pursued The Skull into a nearby bus depot. Unfortunately I was not able to apprehend him, but it is only a matter of time before we are able to-

Conrad turns down the volume, returns to the phone call.

CONRAD

Wow-

JENNIFER

I know. I totally chased a masked criminal. I even fired my gun. It was so cool.

CONRAD

That's great. I'm so happy for you. So, how did you find him? I thought you were headed to Water Street-

JENNIFER

An advance patrol went and checked it out, found nothing. Then we got the call about a new sighting in the industrial district. Turned out to be legit.

CONRAD

Huh. Well, it's too bad you didn't catch him.

JENNIFER

Yes, it is. I got close though. I felt like Riggs, Conrad. Riggs!

CONRAD

You're a superstar. I feel special even knowing you.

JENNIFER

Aw, thanks. Listen, I've got to get going. Important police paperwork needs my attention. Turns out firing your gun is really not worth it unless you actually shoot someone. I just wanted to let you know what happened, and to say thanks for last night.

CONRAD

Oh, it was my pleasure.

JENNIFER

Talk soon?

CONRAD

You bet, bye bye.

END INTERCUT

He hangs up. Turns the volume back up. It's Bob the news anchor.

TELEVISION

BOB

-just joining us, the mysterious figure known as The Skull was spotted again last night in another violent confrontation that has rocked the community and left both ordinary citizens and members of the criminal underworld searching for answers. We once again bring you exclusive raw footage, taken by an amateur astronomer last night shortly after he alerted the police.

The footage begins on a secluded hilltop overlooking the city, outside an old observatory. We can see a telescope set up and aimed towards the stars, but the camera turns towards what we recognize as the Paper Street warehouse. Zooms in on Timmy and Tommy, holding a mysterious dark figure at gunpoint.

The altercation is over in seconds, the dark figure destroys the two men and stands alone.

ASTRONOMER (O.C.)

Oh my God.

The footage speeds up to the figure slamming the trunk, and as he pauses to check his surroundings, the camera zooms in even more and finally we see him: Terrifying. Mysterious. The Skull.

The police cruisers pull up and Jennifer pursues The Skull into the shadows, toward the fence.

We cut back to Bob and the grainy image of The Skull hovers over his right shoulder like a spectre.

BOB

Once recovered, the two men were hospitalized with severe injuries but are now said to be in stable condition. They have since been identified as Tommy "The Iceman" Blake and Timmy "Two-Time" Patrick, both known members of the notorious McCormac crime syndicate.

Conrad lifts an eyebrow.

BOB (CONT'D)

Only questions remain in the wake of this brutal attack. Just what are The Skull's motivations? Is he a vigilante attempting to bring down local drug gangs? Is he a new breed of criminal sociopath out to take over the city underworld? All we know is that the police have initiated a citywide manhunt to capture The Skull, so we'll have more on this story as it dev-

Conrad clicks off the television. Reaches under his bed, pulls out the duffel bag he took from Tommy and Timmy's trunk. Places it on the bed, where Edgar rubs himself against it, purring. He slowly opens the zipper.

CLOSE on his face, taking it in.

The bag is filled with money.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

His car is parked just where he left it. He approaches cautiously, holding the bag, checking to see if anyone is watching the car. He doesn't see anyone.

He opens the door, throws the bag into the passenger seat, and drives away.

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Garrett is in the midst of a bong hit, enthralled by the television. Bob the news anchor is interviewing a college-professor type with a trim beard and glasses.

TELEVISION

BOB

So professor Brooks, as someone who has studied extensively in clinical psychology, what can you tell us about this mysterious criminal, and do you have any idea where he is going to strike next?

PROFESSOR BROOKS

That's a difficult question, Bob. The one thing I can say for certain is that this is a very sick man-

Conrad enters, he's carrying the duffel bag.

GARRETT

Yo, Conrad. Have you been watching this? There's some psycho running around in a mask who's-

CONRAD

Where's Todd?

GARRETT

He's meeting one of our clients, what's up?

Conrad unzips the bag, the stolen handgun rests on top of the pile of money. Garrett slowly looks from the bag to Conrad. He implicitly understands but almost seems incapable of truly putting it together.

CONRAD

How much trouble am I in?

INT. GARRETT'S APARTMENT - LATER

Garrett is nervously pacing back and forth, Conrad sits on the couch, waiting for him to calm down.

GARRETT

Dude, what the fuck were you thinking?

CONRAD

I wasn't thinking. I was just tired of having people walk all over me. I've been letting it happen my whole life. It's bullshit.

GARRETT

So you stole five hundred grand from fucking professional criminals who are going to kill you at the earliest available opportunity?

CONRAD

Things escalated quickly. Just tell me. How dangerous are these guys?

GARRETT

Very. The McCormacs are the top of the food chain around here. They don't fuck around.

CONRAD

Where can I find them?

GARRETT

They own a club downtown, Cafe Cleopatra. Why are you even asking that? You're not thinking of going down there are you?

CONRAD

What choice do I have?

GARRETT

Go to the cops. They can protect you.

CONRAD

Yeah. Just long enough to arrest my ass and put me in prison.

GARRETT

This isn't a fucking game, man. You're going to get yourself killed.

CONRAD

You're right. I don't stand a chance against these guys. But The Skull can beat them.

GARRETT

Jesus Christ. You've lost it.

He sits on the couch, head in hands.

GARRETT (CONT'D)

Though I have to admit, if I wasn't paralyzed with fear right now I would probably think this was pretty cool.

CONRAD

Thanks buddy. I'm going home. I've got to figure something out-

GARRETT

Conrad, please. Just go to the cops. This will not end well. Trust me.

CONRAD

I told you. I go to the police, all that happens is I get thrown in jail.  
(thinks)  
But maybe I can bring them down with me.

GARRETT

Conrad-

CONRAD

Wish me luck.

He turns and leaves.

GARRETT

He's totally fucked.

INT. CAFE CLEOPATRA - DAY

A dingy-looking strip club. A bored-looking dancer gyrates lazily for the benefit of the pathetic drunks that make up the day crowd.

Behind the bar, CANDY, 40, looking like she's been around the block so many times that they named it after her. The phone rings, she picks up the wireless receiver.

CANDY

Yeah? ...Uh huh. OK. Just hold on for a minute please.

She makes her way through the bar, down some creaky stairs to a lone, closed door. Knocks.

VOICE (O.C.)

Not now!

CANDY

Mr. McCormac? There's someone on the phone for you. He said you'd want to hear what he had to say. Something about a bag of money.

The door opens.

INT. CLEOPATRA BACK ROOM

The door is opened by JOE MCCORMAC, 50, gruff with grey slicked back hair in an open-collared shirt and leather blazer. He takes the phone. Glances at the desk, behind which is his brother, DANIEL MCCORMAC, 60, equally rough-looking but in a more stylish suit.

Sitting in front of the desk are Tommy "The Iceman" Blake, jaw wired shut and bandages around his head, and Timmy "Two Time" Patrick, his arm in a sling, the right side of his face purple and swollen. Joe lifts the phone to his ear.

JOE MCCORMAC

Who is this?

INT. CONRAD'S ROOM (BASEMENT)

The Skull sits on the bed, stroking Edgar, purring in his lap.

THE SKULL

I think I have something of yours.

INT. CLEOPATRA BACK ROOM

Joe cups his hand over the receiver, indicates to his brother: it's him. He places the phone on the desk and activates the speaker.

JOE MCCORMAC

What do you want?

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE SKULL AND THE MCCORMACS

THE SKULL

What every man wants. A chance to go about his business in peace.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Well, you stole from me. My brother and I, we don't take too kindly to that.

THE SKULL

Your thugs came after me, and I taught them a lesson. I didn't take your money. They lost it. Maybe you should talk to them.

JOE MCCORMAC

Don't worry, I will.

He shoots Iceman and Two-Time a look of disdain.

JOE MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

But there's still the matter of our money-

THE SKULL

I'll give you your money back. You don't even have to come get it. I'll bring it to you.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

What's the catch?

There's a knock on Conrad's door, he barely has time to remove the mask and stuff it under his pillow with the Skull phone. Ellen opens the door.

CONRAD

Mom not now, I'm really busy.

ELLEN

I'm reheating some of that macaroni and cheese, do you want some?

CONRAD

Sure, that sounds good. Now go away please.

ELLEN

OK, OK. Sheesh.

She leaves, closing the door behind her. Conrad listens to her footsteps walking away before retrieving the mask, putting on, and lifting the phone to his ear again.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

-ello? Are you still there?

THE SKULL

I'm here.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Good. I asked you what the catch is.

THE SKULL

No catch. I'll bring you your money back. All I want is for you to leave me alone.

The McCormacs share a glance. Is this guy for real?

JOE MCCORMAC

Sounds reasonable.

THE SKULL

I'm a reasonable person. I'll come to the club tonight. Midnight. And I want to deal with you two. No more thugs.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Of course.

THE SKULL

No tricks, no traps. You've already seen what I can do. I want to end this peacefully, but it doesn't have to go that way. It's entirely up to you.

JOE MCCORMAC

We get it.

THE SKULL

Good. Until then.

END INTERCUT

He hangs up the phone. Removes the mask. Looks at Edgar.

CONRAD

If anything goes wrong I hope you know I'm holding you personally responsible.

Edgar meows.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Conrad, looking determined, puts the duffel bag and his Skull gear in the trunk. As he closes it, he reveals someone standing a few feet away. It's Beth. She's holding a bouquet of flowers.

CONRAD

What the fuck are you doing here?

BETH

I'm out on bail. I had to see you.  
I wanted you to know that I'm ready  
to forgive you.

She extends the flowers toward him.

CONRAD

Jesus Christ Beth, I don't have  
time for this right now.

BETH

Wait, I can make this right. We can  
go back to how things were before.

CONRAD

No. We can't. I can never go back  
to how things were before.

Beth starts to tear up.

BETH

Oh, Connie. Please just give us one  
more chance.

CONRAD

Don't call me that. I want you to  
listen to me very carefully. There  
is no "us." In fact, in about  
thirty seconds I am going to slam  
my face into the hood of the car  
until my nose is broken. Then I'm  
going to the police. I'm going to  
tell them you came here and started  
arguing with me. That you became  
unstable. That you attacked me. I'm  
pretty sure aggravated assault  
would violate the terms of your  
parole. I'll make sure they put you  
away for so long you'll be a senior  
citizen before you can go to the  
bathroom unsupervised again.

BETH

Conrad... what's come over you?

CONRAD

The old Conrad is dead. I'm a whole new man. Now if you'll excuse me.

He gets into the car and slams the door. He drives away, leaving Beth holding the flowers and looking completely stunned.

INT. CAR - DUSK

Conrad is driving through traffic. His phone beeps.

PHONE

Garrett: Package delivered. You can still call this off you know.

He types something in.

PHONE

Conrad: No turning back now.

INT. POLICE STATION - DUSK

Jennifer is at her desk, absorbed in a police report. Behind her is a bulletin board with the grainy image of The Skull in the center, with crime scene photos of his handiwork, shots of the beaten Hotshot, and mugshots of Iceman and Two-Time, directly below an older photo of the McCormac Brothers.

Her phone rings.

JENNIFER

Hello?

INT. CAR - DUSK

CONRAD

Hey, it's me.

INTERCUT BETWEEN JENNIFER AND CONRAD

JENNIFER

Hey you. What's up?

CONRAD

I just wanted to hear your voice.

JENNIFER

Aw, that's sweet. What's the occasion?

CONRAD

No occasion. You're just really great. I need you to know that.

JENNIFER

Is everything OK? Why do you sound like you're saying goodbye?

Someone taps her on the shoulder. Hands her a piece of paper.

NOTE

The words are written in cut-out letters from magazines.

CAFE CLEOPATRA. 12:15. BRING YOUR FRIENDS. -THE SKULL

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Conrad, I'm sorry. I've got to go.

CONRAD

I understand.

JENNIFER

Are you sure everything is alright?

CONRAD

Everything is fine. I'll see you soon.

He hangs up.

END INTERCUT

EXT. HILLTOP - OBSERVATORY - EVENING

Conrad's car pulls up outside the old observatory overlooking the city, the sun just dipping below the horizon.

He gets out and walks to the edge, taking a moment to see the urban sprawl stretched out in all its glory - possibly for the last time.

Satisfied, he returns to the car and opens the trunk. Reaches into the duffel bag and pulls out the handgun. Cocks it and sticks it in his waistband.

Finally he takes out The Skull mask. Puts it on as darkness descends around him. Sneaks one final glance at the city before getting in the car and closing the door.

EXT. CAFE CLEOPATRA - NIGHT

A neon sign of a scantily clad woman and promises of NUDE DANCING and CHEAP DRINKS blinks on and off.

A stray cat darts across the street, and brushes past a solitary figure standing in the darkness. It's The Skull. Holding the duffel bag and observing the club.

He begins the march towards his final destiny. Arrives at the entrance and knocks three times.

INT. CAFE CLEOPATRA

Candy opens the doors to reveal The Skull, silhouetted in the entrance. She is taken aback, but mostly unimpressed.

CANDY

You must be Mr. Skull. Come on in.

He follows her inside. Business has been shut down for the evening. It's empty except for the McCormacs who sit at a booth in the back.

The Skull approaches and sets the duffel bag down.

JOE MCCORMAC

We were wondering if you were actually going to show up.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Can we offer you a drink?

He gestures toward a bottle of Scotch and glass on the table, but The Skull silently shakes his head.

DANIEL MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

Suit yourself.

Without warning, Tommy The Iceman emerges from a shadowy corner and clips the back of The Skull's legs with a baseball bat. He falls to his knees, groaning from the pain.

Candy makes herself scarce as The Iceman attempts to gloat through his wired-shut jaw.

TOMMY

Gt yuh, yuh sn uf uh bchh.

JOE MCCORMAC

You didn't seriously think we were going to let you walk out of here, did you?

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Timmy, search him. And make sure  
you find everything this time.

Timmy Two Time steps forward, holding The Skull at gunpoint.  
Goes through his pockets, pulls out the handgun. Puts in on  
the table.

DANIEL MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

Is that it?

TIMMY

That's it boss. Can I hit him now?

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Sure.

Timmy turns and directs a savage kick directly into The  
Skull's guts. He doubles over, collapses on the ground.

JOE MCCORMAC

Check the bag. Make sure it's all  
there.

TOMMY

Srr thng, brss.

Behind him, Tommy opens the duffel bag and peers inside.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Rrm, brss?

JOE MCCORMAC

What is it?

TOMMY

Ss flll rrf srcks.

JOE MCCORMAC

I can't even understand you, you  
moron.

Tommy just gestures frantically toward the bag. Joe  
approaches and looks inside.

JOE MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

What is it?

JOE MCCORMAC

It's full of socks.

He upturns the bag, dozens of pairs of socks fall out. Joe turns to the Skull, incredulous.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

Is this some kind of a fucking  
joke?

The Skull shrugs. Joe thinks for a moment, then actually chuckles.

DANIEL MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

You've got balls, I'll give you  
that.

He nods at Timmy, who grips the back of his clothes and flings him like sack of potatoes, he crashes over a table which splinters, sending chairs and glasses flying everywhere.

The Skull struggles to get to his feet. Tommy The Iceman restrains him from behind, and the McCormacs approach. Joe connects with a vicious jab square in the face, snapping his head back.

JOE MCCORMAC

That's for kidnapping our employee  
and putting a gun to his head.

He hits him again, The Skull goes down to one knee, spitting blood, but Tommy the Iceman pulls him back up.

JOE MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

That's for hurting Timmy and Tommy,  
and making us bail their dumb asses  
out.

He winds up and levels him with a powerful haymaker, sending him sprawling. The Skull makes a halfhearted effort to get up, collapses.

JOE MCCORMAC (CONT'D)

And that's for stealing our money  
and not giving it back like you  
said you would, you fuck!

Daniel McCormac pulls out a particularly scary looking silver handgun.

DANIEL MCCORMAC

I haven't killed anyone since the  
early nineties. You should consider  
yourself lucky.

JOE MCCORMAC  
Wait. If this guy dies we don't get  
our money back.

Daniel smiles.

DANIEL MCCORMAC  
We'll make more.

Timmy Two Time pulls him to his knees.

DANIEL MCCORMAC (CONT'D)  
Take off that mask. I want to get a  
look at this guy before I blow his  
head off.

Tommy The Iceman grabs hold of the mask. Yanks it off.

It's not Conrad. It's a disheveled-looking man in his  
sixties. We've seen him before, holding a sign outside The  
Phoenix.

JOE MCCORMAC  
Hm. Kind of disappointing. I was  
expecting something a bit more  
sinister.

DANIEL MCCORMAC  
In any case...

He levels the gun at the old man's head. Cocks back the  
hammer.

Before he can pull the trigger, the door bursts open, and  
several armored SWAT officers pour in, shouting and waving  
automatic weapons.

The McCormacs and their accomplices all drop their weapons  
and get to their knees with their hands behind their heads,  
as instructed.

After everything has settled down, Jennifer enters, wearing a  
bulletproof vest and police jacket.

JENNIFER  
Surprise, assholes.

DANIEL MCCORMAC  
What the fuck is this?

JENNIFER  
This is me, arresting all of you.  
I... kind of thought that was  
obvious.

The lead SWAT officer gestures to the old man, the Skull mask lying prone next to him.

SWAT OFFICER  
Looks like we bagged our villain.

JENNIFER  
Looks like it.

SWAT OFFICER  
Get these guys out of-

JENNIFER  
Wait, wait. Can I say it?

SWAT OFFICER  
Be my guest.

JENNIFER  
Get these guys out of here. Oh wow,  
that felt amazing.

As the SWAT team begins leading the parade of criminals out of the club, we...

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: ONE WEEK LATER

FADE IN:

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

From across the street we see Conrad waiting on the sidewalk, holding a bouquet of daisies. Jennifer emerges from the station, smiling, surprised to see him. She takes the flowers and kisses him.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

They're at the coffee shop where they had their first pseudodate. They sit down, each with black coffees.

JENNIFER  
No dessert coffee for you this  
time?

CONRAD  
No, I've decided I'm going to be  
hard-boiled too.

JENNIFER

You're so dark and mysterious.

Conrad laughs, awkwardly.

CONRAD

So how's everything going? What's happening with the case?

JENNIFER

Well, we did it. We flipped Iceman and Two-Time. They're going to name names, we should be able to put the McCormacs away for a long time. It's a pretty big win.

CONRAD

Wow, look at you go! That's fantastic. What about that Skull guy? What was his story?

JENNIFER

Vietnam vet. He had been living on the streets for a while. Seems like he just snapped, started taking out the trash like the guy in Taxi Driver.

FLASH TO:

EXT. ALLEY - LAST NIGHT

The homeless vet sits on a flattened cardboard box, meekly holding his usual sign: NEED MONEY FOR MY FAMILY. A shadow passes over him. He looks up. It's The Skull, standing above him.

He slowly offers one of the stacks of hundred dollar bills.

BACK TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

CONRAD

What is it? You don't seem convinced.

JENNIFER

I don't know. The guy confessed. Swears up and down that he is The Skull.

(MORE)

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I just have a funny feeling about it. Something doesn't add up to me.

CONRAD

What do you mean?

JENNIFER

The note. Why would he tell me exactly where the meet was going down just to get himself arrested?

CONRAD

Maybe he felt bad about what he was doing. Maybe he didn't want anyone else to get hurt.

JENNIFER

You might be right. But remorseful isn't a word I would attach to this guy's actions. There was a certain joy to it. I don't think he wanted to stop. I think he wanted us to stop looking for him.

CONRAD

So you think he's still out there?

JENNIFER

Pretty spooky right? Either way, they love my ass down at the station right now.

CONRAD

I don't blame them. It's an easy ass to love.

She blushes.

JENNIFER

How about you? Have you heard what's happening with your work?

CONRAD

They offered me my job back. Full pay. I think they understood that I was having a bit of a rough time.

JENNIFER

That's great!

CONRAD

I said no. I think I'm going to find something else to do.

JENNIFER

So it's mom's basement for the immediate future?

CONRAD

Looks like it. Does that make me a loser?

JENNIFER

Nah. Your mom is cool. And so are you.

CONRAD

Thanks. You're pretty cool too.

She smiles.

JENNIFER

Listen, I've got to get back. Come pick me up later?

CONRAD

I'll be there, Riggs.

She kisses him, takes the flowers and leaves. He sits there for a moment, sipping his coffee. Looking optimistic.

INT. CAR - DUSK

Conrad is listening to the radio, drumming softly on the wheel. It's the same song that was playing as he was taking Benny to the grave, the night he truly became The Skull.

His phone rings, he answers.

CONRAD

Hello? Hi mom. Everything is great. No, I didn't tell her you said hi. I'm sorry, I forgot. You can tell her yourself, she's coming over later. I know you're proud of me. Yes, I can pick up some milk before coming back. I just have to do something first. OK. See you soon.

He hangs up. Turns up the radio.

He's making his way through a now-familiar industrial area. Pulls into the parking lot of the Paper Street warehouse.

He comes to a stop in front of a large garage. Reaches across the seat and opens the glove compartment.

Removes a small black box with a single white button on it, and pushes the button. The doors open. He drives in and they close behind him.

INT. PAPER STREET WAREHOUSE - GARAGE - DUSK

Conrad gets out of the car, next to the garage door there is a mail slot, and a package is lying on the floor. He picks it up and brings it to a service elevator. He closes the door and it starts to ascend.

INT. THE SKULL'S LAIR - DUSK

The elevator comes to a stop and Conrad opens the doors to a large loft-like space, old and falling apart like the rest of the warehouse, but with signs of recent renovation.

Garrett is in the process of painting one of the walls black.

GARRETT

Hey buddy.

CONRAD

Looks good in here.

GARRETT

It's getting there. I still can't believe you bought this place.

CONRAD

It just felt right. How is everything else coming along?

GARRETT

It's all falling into place. Now that the McCormacs are out of business, we're going to have free run of this city. Todd is getting everything together now, we'll have people on the street by the end of the week.

CONRAD

And it won't lead back to us?

GARRETT

No, I made sure of that.

CONRAD

Excellent.

GARRETT

You know, there's still time to stop this. All that money, you could live like a king for the next few years. And you wouldn't be in any danger.

CONRAD

Garrett-

GARRETT

This is the real deal now man. I know I wasn't exactly a saint before, but I still don't know if I'm cut out for the criminal life. This plan of yours-

CONRAD

Don't worry. I'm in charge of this city now. And you...

He grabs his shoulders.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

You are my number one guy.

GARRETT

So I guess this means I'm kind of like your henchman now?

CONRAD

Whatever it takes to make you feel better, champ.

GARRETT

Far out.

CONRAD

Listen, you've done enough for today. Take the rest of the night off.

GARRETT

Want to grab a beer?

CONRAD

Not right now. I'll call you later.

GARRETT

Suit yourself. Till next time.

CONRAD

Same Skull time, same Skull channel.

They bump fists and Garrett enters the elevator. The doors close behind him. Conrad steps past a new-looking black motorcycle parked just outside the elevator entrance.

On a table in the center of the room is Thor, the taser. The telescopic police baton. A brand-new handgun. An intimidating SWAT riot gun. Smoke grenades.

Also on the table are half a dozen photographs. Moving closer, we see that one of the photographs is of the outside of a building in a crowded business area. The sign above the revolving door says AMERIBANK.

A few more photos were clearly taken covertly inside the bank, showing the internal layout.

Conrad's notepad is open next to the photographs, scribbled down is info about the inner workings of the bank, number of security guards, shift times, other observations.

After taking a moment to peruse his new toys, Conrad turns his attention to the package he just received. Opens it. Under the torn paper is a plastic-wrapped item, the cardboard strip on top says SCARY DEATH HEAD MASK.

He opens it and pulls out the mask. It looks just like the original. Conrad smiles as if he's seeing an old friend. He puts it on.

The Skull walks to the end of the room, to a large window where he can see the industrial warehouses and factories gradually turning into residences and office buildings, stretching out into the distance.

Edgar approaches and rubs up against his leg, purring.

He leans against the window as the sun goes down over the city. His city.

CUT TO BLACK.