

HARD CASE

Written by

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Based on, The Novel HARD CASE

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INT. RUN DOWN WAREHOUSE IN EAST OAKLAND, CA - NIGHT

John Harding, a six foot five inch ex-Marine, weighing almost two hundred and fifty pounds, fights a no holds barred fight in an East Oakland Warehouse with Jesse Brown, another fighter slightly larger than John. Their promoters make side bets. Tommy Sands, a guy Barack Obama claimed his grandma used to hide from on the street, handles John. Harding likes the pain, and Tommy doesn't mind seeing him take some. Tommy gives John the signal to go down, then later in the fight after more betting, the sign to take him out. John throws a left to Jesse's solar plexus and a right to his temple. The fight's over.

John watches Tommy's back while his agent collects their money. Tess Connagher, a lawyer John and Tommy does skip traces for walks up as John grabs a suited guy in the front reaching for a gun. John puts the guy on his knees by closing the man's hand in his powerful grip, stripping him of the gun. Tess yanks the guy's girlfriend's hair when she screams, quieting her. Tommy takes the gun, unloads it, and clears the chamber before handing it back to the guy. Some others escort him out. He won't be allowed back.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(watches the crowd while  
speaking quietly to  
Tommy)  
You get our money, T?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
Yeah, John. Hey, I thought I told  
you not to bring the girlfriend  
along when we're entertainin'.

CAMERA FOCUS ON TESS'S ACTION

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
I heard that!  
(She gives the gun  
holder's blonde  
girlfriend a helpful push  
toward her boyfriend  
before walking over)  
You stink, Hard-head.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Sorry, Tess, I'll use more Sports  
Stick next time.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Can we get out of here? We'll treat  
slinky to a coffee somewhere else  
but I think we need to go now.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Slinky?

(Tess starts in on Tommy  
but John and Tommy are  
already heading away  
toward the parking lot in  
the Embarcadero and Fifth  
Avenue area of Oakland,  
Ca. Tess follows, cussing  
out Tommy all the way  
over to their cars with  
Tommy laughing at every  
jibe.)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Voice over of Harding's  
thoughts in first person)

I'm a killer. I don't take life too  
seriously, mine or anyone else's.  
Tommy keeps me in line like they  
used to in the service. Tommy  
trusts Tess to yank on my reins  
when I do work for her firm if I  
start going overboard on a case -  
if she gets close enough. Tess and  
me been around the block a few  
times. She's seen the look. I don't  
kill randomly but I've killed folks  
no one knows I've killed. They were  
dangerous. I'm not getting paid to  
die. I listen to what Tommy and  
Tess have to say where it concerns  
my civilian life. I weigh the pros  
and cons. Then I take care of  
business.

DISSOLVE TO:  
PAST INTERACTION  
BETWEEN  
CONNAGHER AND  
HARDING

EXT. EAST OAKLAND - NIGHT

(voice over of Harding's  
thoughts in first person)  
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

One time Tess had a client - some slimy drug dealing pimp who wanted more from Tess than her services as a lawyer. When the firm kicked free of the pimp, Tess got her tires slashed, weirdo calls, and then her cat Pretzel was gutted. The pimp came around the next day at Tess's office asking how her cat was. She put me on the payroll through Tommy as a bodyguard. I do okay as a bodyguard but I'm better at killing. I gutted the pimp, quiet like, and heaved him over into a junk yard on East 12th Street. They didn't find him for weeks. I liked Pretzel too. I was careful. Oakland doesn't have CSI teams for dead pimps anyway. Tess asked me about it. I shrugged like I had no idea what happened to the guy. She didn't believe me. Her firm stopped using my services for a while. Like Tommy says though, we're unique. He can dress my white ass up in a tux or put me in street clothes and I blend real good in spite of my size. I secretly think Tess was mad because Tommy billed them for the weeks before they found the scumbag in the junkyard. Tess needed me again soon.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I'm riding along this time.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Shrugs)

I've got no problem with that. Just do what I say.

CUT TO: TWO AM  
OUTSIDE A BAR ON  
INTERNATIONAL  
BLVD

INT. INTERNATIONAL BLVD BAR, EAST OAKLAND - NIGHT

Edward (Lucky) Rivera laughs at his buddy's joke, swilling down the rest of his beer. Harding walks up on him, and grasps his shoulder in a seemingly friendly way. Lucky glances up into Harding's eyes with stunned recognition.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF  
 Shit, John! I'm too small time for  
 you, man.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Are you packin', Lucky?

Lucky's friend starts to reach for Harding's arm, but Rivera  
 waves him off in a hurried and worried motion.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF  
 Don't do it! I ain't packin'. John  
 won't open up if I go along, right  
 John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 That's right, Lucky. C'mon with me  
 quiet and nobody gets hurt. I'm  
 going to pat you down real quick.  
 Be cool, and I won't have to  
 rearrange anyone's looks.

Rivera puts a cautioning hand on his friend and then meekly  
 endures Harding's pat down.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF  
 Do you have to cuff me in here,  
 John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Nope. I'll put a friendly hand  
 around you and we'll go get in my  
 Chevy. No need for any disrespect.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF  
 (Nods his assent as  
 Harding guides him out of  
 the bar)

Harding gets Rivera to his car, finds out Tess is gone. He  
 hears scuffling down the block a ways, Harding plastic ties  
 Rivera's hands behind his back.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Lucky, stay in the car. Play times  
 over. You take off on me and I'll  
 hunt you down, cut your nuts off,  
 and shove them down your throat. We  
 clear?

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF  
 (Rivera leans back in his  
 seat)  
 Yeah, John, I got it.

Harding goes in search of Tess. He comes up on the young men slow and careful. John doesn't trust Tess not to turn him in if there's a body count. Harding's standing over the lovers before they realize he's there. He drop kicks one in the side. The man's ribs crack audibly. Second mugger pops up with some Bruce Lee moves. They mix it up a little with Harding breaking his jaw. John picks Tess up. She's looking pretty good, all mussed up, and biting her lip to keep from crying out. They drop Rivera off and Harding takes Tess to a 24 hour restaurant to calm her down. She's pumped up.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Sips her coffee with  
 shaking hands)  
 I... I've never seen anything like  
 that. I thought I was going to die.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 It's a bad area, Tess. I asked you  
 to stay inside the car

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Whispers under her breath  
 while meeting Harding's  
 gaze)  
 I know. I... I'm sorry.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Smiles)  
 Just so you know I'm billing you  
 for the extra time.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Nods and laughs uneasily)

DISSOLVE TO:  
 TESS'S HOME IN  
 PIEDMONT WHERE  
 HARDING TAKES  
 HER AND IS  
 INVITED IN.

INT. TESS'S HOME AFTER JOHN SAVES HER LIFE - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Good night, Tess. I'll let Tommy  
 know that Lucky's in custody.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Grabs Harding's arm as he  
turns away)  
Stay with me John.

CUT TO: TESS'S  
HOME, A WEEK  
LATER, WHERE  
HARDING HAS BEEN  
INVITED FOR  
DINNER.

INT. TESS'S HOME AFTER JOHN SAVES HER LIFE - NIGHT

Tess gets John to have dinner at her house. She answers the door. They kiss, and nearly forget about dinner, but it goes downhill from there as they sit down for the meal. Tess has the table all fixed nice with candles and everything. She suddenly starts a monologue of things she doesn't like about him - it's you need to answer your phone, and I'm not comfortable with this, and I never did anything like go to bed with a stranger, and I need to know more about what you do. Harding eats his dinner, listens, nodding appropriately, and enjoyed her voice. Even when Tess complains her voice gives Harding chills. Not a whole hell of a lot in this world gives John chills of any kind.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
What do you think about what I  
said, John?

CAMERA PANS FROM TESS TO HARDING'S REACTION THEN ZOOMS OUT TO  
INCLUDE BOTH

(Harding smiles, thinking  
she's looking for some  
kind of applause)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I don't answer phones. I'm sorry  
you're not comfortable. No one will  
ever know what happened the night  
we picked up Lucky, not even Tommy.  
Your firm already has my stat sheet  
and qualifications. You have a  
beautiful voice.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Tess blushes again. She's  
unnerved by Harding.  
Launching again, she  
restates pretty much what  
she'd already said.  
(MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)

She looks down and adds  
one thing Harding likes.)  
No guy ever made me feel like you  
did the other night, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Thank you.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Downturn at the mouth  
with irritation creeping  
into her voice)  
Don't you have anything else to  
say?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Sure, if it's on a different  
subject.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Some things would have to change if  
we continue seeing each other.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Think of it this way, Tess. We  
could get to know each other first  
before you try changing me. Maybe  
I'm not so hard to take like I am.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
You won't even talk to me on the  
phone! I... oh hell... I don't know  
what got into me the other night.  
You're dangerous, John. I'm not  
diving into a relationship with  
some leg-breaker on a whim. I-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Harding stands up)  
Why didn't you say so? Calm down,  
Tess, I won't stalk you or  
anything. Thanks for dinner. It was  
great. Maybe we can do business  
sometime in the future. No hard  
feelings, right?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Tess runs around the  
table as Harding tries to  
make good his escape.)  
Wait a second. I'm trying to be  
reasonable here. If you'd-



JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Holds up his hands in  
surrendering fashion)  
Tess! Let's part company as  
friends. Good-night.

FADE TO: THE  
PRESENT WITH  
TESS OFFERING TO  
BUY HARDING AND  
SANDS A BEER  
AFTER THE FIGHT.  
THEY PICK 'THE  
FIRST AND LAST  
CHANCE SALOON'.

INT. FIRST AND LAST CHANCE SALOON IN OAKLAND'S JACK LONDON  
SQUARE - NIGHT

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Tess pulls a contract out  
of her briefcase. Tommy  
looks it over and laughs)  
It's the standard fee, Tommy.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
That's fine for standard work, but  
John here doesn't do standard work.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Over half the time he doesn't do  
anything at all. Your fee for a few  
hours work is too high.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
Well then, thanks for the beer.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Tommy's my agent, Tess. You know  
that. Sorry our way of doing  
business doesn't suit your firm's  
needs.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Blushes in anger)  
Fine! What would it take to get an  
exclusive on John's work?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

We don't do exclusive. One job from your competitors would be worth more than any retainer you could offer. We work case by case. I'll look over what you want done, price the job, and you decide yes or no, same as the last couple times we worked together.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Tess grabbed the contract and stuffed it back in her briefcase. She took out a folder and handed it to Tommy. Tommy laughed again.)

What?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Your firm issued a bond on this guy? Who the hell provided the collateral?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I can't discuss that. I take it you are familiar with Mr. Ali.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

(Sands jots down some figures on a piece of paper from a note pad he takes out, and shoves it back to Connagher)

Ishmael Ali's a stone killer and a psycho to boot. Anything he got caught doing is like a tiny portion of what he's done.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

That's more than we make on the case!

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Your firm made a mistake. We clean it up - you pay the piper. You don't like the tune, you're free to shop it elsewhere.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Tess stood up, gathered her things and walked out)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
That went well.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
We know where Ali hangs out. It's a  
good gamble, T. If they don't find  
another taker, we'll make a nice  
piece of change.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
You can't kill him, John. We'll  
never collect this playing 'Wanted,  
Dead or Alive'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I'd do Ali free.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
No you won't, John. We don't do  
anything for free. You'll figure a  
way-

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Tess sneaks up on Sands,  
although Harding sees  
her)  
We'll pay it.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
(Tommy stands up, showing  
annoyance at Connagher  
taking him by surprise)  
I'll come by and pick up our  
retainer tomorrow. See ya', Slinky.  
Get some rest John. We have another  
lamb tomorrow.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Good night, you pirate!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Some lamb. Bye, Tommy.  
(Tommy leaves with a wave)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Why the hell do you risk getting  
killed in those stupid street  
fights?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I can't draw or paint, and everyone  
needs a hobby. There's no why. We  
make a lot of money and I'm good at  
it.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
How are you going to find Ali and  
bring him in?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
We'll manage, Tess.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Fine! I guess you can find your own  
way home.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I'll manage. Good-night, Tess.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Gives Harding a backward  
wave without looking back  
as Harding chuckles)

CUT TO: SITTING  
IN TOMMY SANDS'  
CAR OUTSIDE THE  
BAR THEY KNOW  
ISHMAEL ALI  
HANGS OUT IN AT  
THREE IN THE  
AFTERNOON

INT. TOMMY SANDS' CAR - DAY

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
(shakes his head while  
watching the front  
entrance with Harding  
next to him)  
I'll never understand why they even  
allow that psycho Ali and his crew  
in here.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
They're scared he'll come back and  
burn the place down, T.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
The only reason I got a call is  
they think he's going to wreck the  
joint this afternoon.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I guess we better get on in and  
save the day. I have Mr. Sparky all  
set to rock and roll.  
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 (Harding holds up the  
 Taser gun)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 (Sands reaches back to get  
 his short barreled riot  
 gun)  
 You handle negotiations. I'll be  
 the complaint department.

Both men exit Sands' car and slip on long leather coats.  
 Tommy slips the riot gun inside his while Harding does the  
 same with the Taser gun.

FADE TO: THE  
 HEART AND DAGGER  
 SALOON ENTRANCE

INT. HEART AND DAGGER SALOON - DAY

John leads the way inside the quaint neighborhood bar, and  
 spots Ali back at the pool table cowering some workmen having  
 a drink after work. Harding walks back and fires the Taser  
 needles into Ali, cranking up the juice, and then drops the  
 gun to the floor. One of the three men with Ali throws a  
 punch at Harding. John leans away from the punch before  
 counter-punching with a left hook that drops his attacker  
 unconscious to the floor. He gestures at the other two.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Save yourselves some pain, and stay  
 the hell out of this. We've come  
 for Ish here.

Harding picks Ali up off the floor along with his Taser,  
 while Sands shows the other two his riot gun.

Don't follow us out, gentlemen. It  
 won't go well for you.

Harding heads for the door, nodding at the bartender he  
 passes, with Sands backing out behind him.

FADE TO: INSIDE  
 TOMMY'S CAR WITH  
 ALI CUFFED IN  
 THE BACKSEAT

INT. TOMMY SANDS' CAR - DAY

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 (Glances back at Ali who  
 has begun to groan)

CAMERA FOCUS ON A CUFFED AND GROGGY ALI, AND THEN BACK TO TOMMY.

Ali's cute when he's like this.  
Want to juice him again or leave  
him cuffed?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Let's keep him cuffed, T. He'll be  
entertaining on the way to punch  
his ticket.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
(chuckles)  
Okay, but lets leave the needles  
in, just in case he gets annoying.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL  
(struggles upright from  
the backseat, lurching  
back when he sees Harding  
smiling at him)  
What the fuck? You dead, man! You  
dead!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
You missed your court date, Ish.  
It's just business. No need to make  
it personal.

CAMERA FOCUS AGAIN ON ALI IN BACKSEAT

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL  
Harding? Damn... you done me wrong  
on the Castiel fight, cunt. Now you  
pull something like this? You're  
mine. I burn you and your whole  
family!

CAMERA ZOOMS ON HARDING'S TASER GUN FOR A SECOND AND THEN ON  
HARDING

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Holds up the Taser gun)  
Know what this is, Ish? This is Mr.  
Sparky. Best you choose your words  
more carefully.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
Light him up, John. He sucks as  
entertainment.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Harding fingers the  
 controls with Ali  
 cringing against the  
 seat)  
 That's not very professional, T.  
 Ish will just enjoy the ride in  
 silence, right Ish?

CAMERA FOCUS ON ALI AND THEN BACK TO HARDING.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL  
 (Clamps his mouth tight  
 shut and nods)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll give you my Dad's last known  
 address. You can settle with him if  
 you want.  
 (John turns back around as  
 Sands chuckles  
 appreciatively)

CUT TO: OUTSIDE  
 THE USUAL  
 WAREHOUSE IN  
 EAST OAKLAND  
 USED FOR THE  
 PICKUP FIGHTS  
 WITH TESS  
 WAITING  
 IMPATIENTLY FOR  
 HARDING AND  
 SANDS

EXT. OUTSIDE THE EAST OAKLAND WAREHOUSE HARDING FIGHTS AT -  
 NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Waves at Tess as he and  
 Tommy walk out of the  
 warehouse entrance)  
 Hi, Tess. How come you didn't wait  
 inside and watch the fight?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 (Puts an arm around a  
 cringing Tess)  
 She only comes inside when she  
 thinks you'll get your ass kicked.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
That's a compliment, T. She knew  
I'd win tonight.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
I have your check for the Ali  
pickup, and I have another much  
more important one on tap. It  
hinges on Tommy's ability to keep  
your price within the stratosphere.  
I'm in the mood for an omelet.  
Let's go to the Buttercup Grill.  
They serve until eleven. I'll  
buy... as usual.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
Lucky you. John finished early  
tonight. I'm hungry.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Let's do it then. Tommy and I came  
over together so we'll meet you  
there.

DISSOLVE TO:  
TESS, TOMMY, AND  
JOHN SEATED AT A  
TABLE IN THE  
BUTTERCUP GRILL  
IN JACK LONDON  
SQUARE. THEY'VE  
FINISHED EATING.

INT. BUTTERCUP GRILL AT JACK LONDON SQUARE - NIGHT

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Let's cut to the chase and save the  
usual banter for another time.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
(Grins)  
How may we be of service, Ms.  
Connagher?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
John speaks Arabic. We have a  
client's daughter coming to San  
Francisco for a visit from Saudi  
Arabia. Her Father wishes his  
daughter protected. How much for  
six days round the clock?



JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Voice over with John's thoughts when he hears Tess's declaration: Yeah, I speak Arabic, Farsi, Pashtu, Russian, Chinese, French, and Spanish, thanks to immersion training with the Marines and CIA over the years. It's not on the stat sheet Tess has on me. Even Tommy only knows about the Spanish. To my credit, I don't blink. I just smile amiably as I rack my brain for how in hell Tess could find something like that out. Tommy chuckles waiting for me to deny it. His face lights up when I don't. He reaches for his note pad.)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 Oh, Slinky, the price of potatoes just went up. Interpreter/Bodyguard is a very specialized field, especially with exotic languages.

(Tommy jots some notes down. He tears out the page and hands it to Tess.)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Jesus H-!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Don't blaspheme.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I didn't have to tell you I knew he spoke Arabic! You didn't even know, Tommy. I... oh the hell with it... I'll give them the figure.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 Sounds good. I have to get home tonight.

(MORE)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Rachel's making me take the kids to soccer tomorrow morning because of my no account, lazy, shiftless soul. You get some rest. We got Rankin tomorrow night.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

You should wear a mask during these meetings.

CAMERA FOCUS ON TOMMY AND THEN BACK TO TESS AND JOHN.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Chuckles as Tommy waves her off on the way out)

See ya', Tommy.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Well? Want to tell me how a woman living in Saudi Arabia would know to ask for you as a bodyguard by name.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

And this lady's name would be?

(Voice over speaking John's take on it - Samira Karim. I knew it had to be her but I don't volunteer anything.)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Karim is her last name. She told me you were her family's bodyguard in Afghanistan until they could be moved to Saudi Arabia. You saved their lives.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If you know the answer to the question, why ask it? Another thing, I wasn't alone in Afghanistan. How did she know to contact you?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

The State Department put her in touch with me. They know right where you are.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Voice over with John's thoughts - True, they still keep in touch, which is why I'm fluent in a multitude of languages, thanks to a one week intensive follow-up training gig every couple months. Tommy thinks I have a mistress in Virginia. They believe they own me. One day I may have to carve a couple of them up. For now, when they ask me to slip in somewhere occasionally, I do it without bellyaching about it. Usually I'm only used when no one wants to see a particular person ever again. This was a new wrinkle. If they contacted Tess, it must be voluntary. Samira was only a skinny eleven year old girl when I went along with them for the trip out of country. Some of us guys and the Northern Alliance had barely gained a foothold when it was decided Samira and her family were to be moved to Saudi Arabia for their protection. Her Father had been the catalyst allowing us to establish a presence in Afghanistan. The Taliban had reportedly sent assassination teams after them. We found out later how accurate our intel was.)

So, what do you want to know?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Everything. You can trust me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Trust you with what?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You really aren't some double digit  
 IQ leg-breaker, are you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Is that what you thought I was?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Can you answer a simple question  
 without asking your own?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Why should I?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Her lips tighten in  
 annoyance)  
 You're not going to tell me  
 anything, are you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 No.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I like you, John. It was my fault  
 we started off on the wrong foot.  
 Then, on top of giving you short  
 shrift, I badmouth you for killing  
 the drug dealer, knowing I could  
 have ended up like my cat, Pretzel.  
 Don't bother denying it. I knew  
 when they found him in the back of  
 the junkyard with his guts hanging  
 out it was your work. Thank you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Voice over of John's  
 thoughts - I never  
 figured to hide it from  
 her but I wasn't about to  
 admit we billed her firm  
 for a couple weeks  
 bodyguard work when I  
 knew the guy I was  
 protecting her from was  
 already dead.)  
 Believe what you want, Tess. I like  
 you too. We've been over this  
 ground before. I do things a  
 certain way, and you don't like the  
 way I do things. We're friends.  
 It's dangerous for you to start  
 playing Nancy Drew with my life.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Sips her tea)  
 Could we be more than friends,  
 John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Seriously... I don't know. We don't  
 fit together well, Tess. Everything  
 I do pisses you off.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Blushes)  
 Not everything. I could change.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Grins, but stays silent.)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You don't believe me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Where are you going with this,  
 Tess? Want to go see a movie with  
 me, hold hands in the park, put  
 puzzles together in front of the  
 fire place-

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I want you to come home with me  
 tonight. I want to make you  
 breakfast tomorrow morning after  
 you've turned me inside out again.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I stink. Remember?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You're stalling.  
 (She chuckles, putting her  
 cup down and reaching  
 over to clasp Harding's  
 left hand with her  
 right.)

Don't play hard to get. Did you  
 really think I come out to watch  
 you get your brains kicked in on a  
 lark? I care about you and I... I  
 know you care about me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Let's compromise. I'll see you home  
 tonight, have a coffee with you,  
 and come over for breakfast first  
 thing in the morning.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

I want you to think over our going into business together as I've mentioned in the past. I don't want our personal gripes to sour you on it. Like Tommy said, I have another fight tomorrow night. We can go out to dinner afterwards if you don't mind following me back to my place so I can shower first.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I'm still thinking over the business thing. Well, that's two strikes tonight.

(Tess sighed and waited as the waitress delivered their bill.)

First, Tommy gives me a price from an alternate reality. Then you give me the brush off. You're not one of those pugs who think sex will weaken their legs, are you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If it'll make you feel any better, then yeah, that's it.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

It doesn't.

(Tess stands up, tucking twenties in the folder with the bill.)

C'mon, princess, I'll make you some coffee at my house. Where the hell do you live? All I have for you is a post office box. I have some extra large t-shirts at home. You can borrow one.

CUT TO: OUTSIDE  
THE BUTTERCUP  
GRILL, NEAR  
TESS'S CAR.

EXT. TESS'S CAR ON THE WAY OVER TO HER HOUSE IN PIEDMONT -  
NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You know, I'm trying to cut down on the smell factor for you with a shower.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 (Harding opens Tess's  
 driver's door catching an  
 eyeful of leg when Tess  
 slides into her seat  
 behind the wheel)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You smell sexy.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Earlier, it was 'you stink, hard-  
 head'. Now, it's a pheromone?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I didn't know you knew a word like  
 pheromone.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Ouch!  
 (Harding hangs his head as  
 if hurt by Tess's verbal  
 barb)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 How come there is no John Harding  
 before the date you went into the  
 Marine Corps?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I joined from a little town called  
 Plano, Texas. We didn't have to  
 have a passport to join from there.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 No John Harding ever went to school  
 in Plano, Texas.  
 (Tess smiles over at  
 Harding sweetly.)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Harding waves her off.)  
 I was home-schooled.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I'll bet. Tell me something about  
 yourself.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'd rather hear about you. Hell,  
 there's not much to tell about my  
 life before the Marines. I didn't  
 have a record or anything before I  
 joined if that's what you're  
 fishing for.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I graduated in the top third of my  
 class at Harvard law slightly  
 before my twentieth birthday. I  
 have a chance to make partner at  
 the law firm before I'm thirty.  
 Your turn. How many languages do  
 you know?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 A few.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I speak French and Spanish  
 fluently.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Nice.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You speak French. Why does the  
 State Department know right where  
 to find you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'm still in the Marine Reserve and  
 I'm not in hiding.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I know you killed a guy in the  
 ring.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 The ref was a little slow. It's in  
 the public record. Why don't you  
 ask me where I learned how to make  
 you sing out in that high pitched  
 voice just before-

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Shut up! I'm making intelligent  
 conversation and you start diving  
 in the gutter.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Sounds more like an interrogation  
 to me, Tess.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (There is silence for the  
 remaining moments until  
 Tess pulls into her  
 driveway.  
 (MORE)



TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)

She uses her remote to  
open the garage door, and  
drives the BMW inside.  
Tess shuts off the car.  
She turns to John with  
her hand on his arm.)  
Sorry about the interrogation.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No problem.  
(Harding pats her hand)  
Make decaf, okay?

CUT TO: INSIDE  
TESS'S HOME IN  
PIEDMONT

INT. TESS'S HOME - NIGHT

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

C'mon, I'll get you a shirt to take  
in the bathroom with you.  
(Tess hands the shirt to  
Harding and goes into the  
kitchen to make coffee.  
Harding returns within  
fifteen minutes, drying  
his hair with a towel.)  
How do you feel?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm okay.

Harding sits at her kitchen table. Tess brings over a tray  
with full coffee cups, saucers, and all the makings. After  
putting the tray on the table Tess sat down opposite Harding.  
The doorbell rang. Tess gets a startled but knowing look on  
her face.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Excuse me.

CAMERA FOCUS ON ENTRANCE-WAY BEFORE FOLLOWING THE NEW  
ARRIVALS INTO THE KITCHEN.

Harding turns to watch through the kitchen archway leading to  
the living room. He sees Tess open the door from where he  
sits. She steps aside. Two large suits walk in the doorway  
carrying briefcases. Tess leads them to the kitchen while  
making calming motions at Harding with her hands.

It's not what it seems, John. I  
know what you're thinking.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If you're thinkin' All those neat  
little redhead thoughts I had about  
you just melted away, leaving only  
a slight stinging sensation, like  
when one of those meat eatin'  
yellow-jackets porks you in the  
woods... then you're right.

Harding locks eyes with the lead suit. His name's Dennis  
Strobert. He and Harding do government business occasionally.  
He's never pulled anything like this before on Harding.  
Harding gestures at Strobert while turning to Tess.

I'll give Denny here the benefit of  
the doubt. You, Tess... I'll have to  
think on.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Hey, John. You ought to get a  
phone, buddy.

Strobert's about six-two in height and only a small bit desk  
softened. Dennis looks a lot like an ex-Marine, crew cut  
sandy hair, and been around the block. He and Harding spent  
some quality time in Afghanistan together.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You call T and I get back to you,  
just like always. Why all this? I'm  
not in hiding.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

We don't deal with middle men  
anymore, Harding.

Reddig's a little taller than Strobert and half again as  
wide, none of it in his stomach.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Calm down, Ben. John, this is Ben  
Reddig. He's a CIA liaison from the  
State Department-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Before you go on. Since when do you  
use civilians as intermediaries?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

John, I-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm not talking to you, Tess.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Mind if we sit down, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 It's not my house. Why don't you  
 answer my question first?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Ms. Connagher's firm does some  
 contracting for us in a peripheral  
 manner.  
 (Dennis sits down next to  
 Harding.)

Reddig starts walking around behind Harding. Harding gets up.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 You want to sit, Ben, go on over  
 across from Dennis. When you get  
 comfortable, keep your hands up on  
 the table where I can see them.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Do as he says, Ben. Sit over there  
 and tell John what this meeting's  
 all about.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
 THE STATE DEPARTMENT  
 I don't like you.  
 (Pokes his finger at  
 Harding, his voice a  
 growling threat)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 That phrase is on a lot of  
 tombstones. If you don't sit down,  
 I'm leaving. I like Ms. Connagher's  
 house as it is. I'd rather you  
 didn't die in it.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Sit down, Ben! I told you not to  
 make a scene in here, damn it!

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
 THE STATE DEPARTMENT  
 We shouldn't have to take orders  
 from street pugs.

Reddig sits down with attitude. Harding and then Tess sit  
 back down again.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
 THE STATE DEPARTMENT (CONT'D)  
 We want to know everything about  
 Samira Karim, Harding.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I haven't seen her since '03 when  
she was eleven. If you know so much  
about me you ought to know that.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT  
Listen you-

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
(Waves off Reddig)  
What Ben here was getting at, John,  
is did Karim keep in touch with you  
after your last time seeing her... a  
phone call or e-mail?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Not a word.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT  
If that's true... why the hell is she  
so hot about getting you to look  
after her on this trip to the  
states? What kind of relationship  
did you have with her when-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
There was no relationship, moron!  
When you speak to me, remember  
something before allowing words to  
spew out of your pie-hole - if you  
make stupid comments like linking  
me with an eleven-year-old girl I'm  
going to break some important parts  
on your body.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT  
Are...are you threatening me? You  
better get your boy in line,  
Strobert.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
He's not my boy, Ben. If you ignore  
his warning there aren't enough  
people in this room to keep you  
safe even if I was of a mind to try  
and stop him, which I'm not. You  
wanted this meeting. I told you we  
could obtain John's help through  
Ms. Connagher's firm without direct  
contact.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I...I presented John's manager with the body-guarding details.. The figure Mr. Sands gave me was within the range you were willing to pay, although it was very close to the maximum figure you gave me.

Ben sat with his fists clenched on the table. He ground his teeth to keep from shooting his mouth off. He wanted a go at Harding in the worst way. Ben gestured at Dennis before leaning back in his chair. Dennis went on for him.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Can you think of why Ms. Karim would single you out to look after her in the states, John? Apparently, the Saudi's are on edge with her Father. He's still speaking out against the Taliban and Islamic extremists.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Her Father was a stand up guy. The Taliban wiped out Badee Karim's entire family. He escaped with his wife, two sons, and Samira to the Northern Alliance. Badee Karim helped us gain a foothold amongst the tribes at the beginning. There were so many attempts on his life the US decided to move him once we were established. We escorted him to Saudi Arabia where he was supposed to wait until the political turmoil cooled off to the point he could return home. I take it that won't be happening?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

So you were pretty close with the family then?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Me and three other company recruits had to spend a month in not much more than a cave with three families from the tribal area. Badee Karim's family was one of the three. My Pashtu was pretty good by then. I filled in a lot as an interpreter between our forces and the Northern Alliance.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

I see you've kept up on your  
language skills  
(Gestures at the folder he  
had taken out of his  
briefcase.)

Do you think Ms. Karim may have had  
a crush on you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's possible. She was just a kid.  
What the hell is the State  
Department's interest in this and  
why did you involve Tess's firm in...  
oh... wait a minute. I get it. If  
something happens to Samira while  
I'm watching her then she asked for  
me so your hands are clean. If the  
State Department insists on Badee  
allowing them to supply protection  
it's on them if anything happens to  
Samira.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

I guess you haven't had all your  
brains beat out yet. Mr. Karim  
continues to speak out. If he were  
living anywhere but on our base in  
Saudi Arabia, he'd be dead. Ms.  
Karim has become very popular  
abroad speaking up for democracy in  
the Middle East and the evolving  
place of women in Islamic society.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

She's a money maker for the cause.  
We have a huge Afghan population  
here in Northern California and  
Samira is raising money for the  
homeland?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

I believe you have the basics,  
John. There are over 40,000  
Afghani's living in the San  
Francisco Bay area. It's not about  
the money though. She'd be touring  
all over America if this was about  
money. Ms. Karim is passionate  
about her cause. Being young,  
vibrant, and fluent in English, she  
shows the side of Islam we need  
people to see.

(MORE)

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Her Father agreed with us about California being the ideal place for Ms. Karim's first public appearance in the United States. Mr. Karim also okayed his daughter's choice in enlisting your services as an escort.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I take it I won't be alone on this then. The last thing you guys need is a dead young Afghani woman sympathetic to America. You just need a scapegoat in case tragedy strikes.

Ben begins an angry retort only to be hushed by a quick hand motion from Dennis.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Exactly. There is one more thing. We've had reports from inside sources in the community about a cell operating in Fremont.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Using Samira as cover, I might hear something since no one will know I speak a few different dialects.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

The girl's nearly twenty now. We don't want you-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You need to get this clown some life insurance with you as the beneficiary, Dennis!

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

I'm thinking about it. We'll send you a new satellite phone and computer notebook with satellite uplink. All data we get, you get. You recon the spots Ms. Karim will be speaking at and tell us where you want our people situated. Any cosmetic changes in accommodations, call Ms. Connagher. Her firm will handle them. Do we have a deal, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I have a choice?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

We all have choices, John. Of course your country might need to call up a few Marine reserve troops to bolster our presence in Afghanistan. You knowing the language and all might put your name at the top of the list.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Of course if there was such a call up, I'd have to devote all my time to the Marine Corps. I would then forego anymore liaisons with certain agencies which will go unnamed. It might be a great trade-off. You know, Denny, now that I think-

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Fine... fine, you want the job or not? I'll give you the choice.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

(Reddig launches out of his chair into Strobert's face)

What? You don't have the juice to offer choices. Harding does the fuckin' job or we ship his ass over to East Bumfuck, Afghanistan.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Dennis takes out his cell-phone and connects with someone.)

I tried to be reasonable. Tell Reddig here what rung on the ladder he is in relation to John Harding.

Dennis hands the phone to Ben, all smiles. Reddig takes the phone and turns away. He's heard muttering yes sir's into the phone. He then hands it back to Dennis. Red-faced, Reddig turns on Harding, poking his right index finger in his face.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

This ain't over by a long shot, Harding!



Harding stands up. Dennis catches a glimpse of his face and hops up out of his chair too, hands moving in placating fashion. Tess also moves out of her chair and backs away toward the sink.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
That's enough. Let's go, Ben.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Sit down and finish your coffee,  
Denny. I'll walk Benjy to your car  
and let him have a go on the way.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
I knew this was a bad idea. Don't  
kill him, John.  
(Sits down)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Walk out front. Pick a spot you  
won't get too dirty falling down  
on. I'll be right out.

Ben throws a straight right hand at John. He catches it in his left. Reddig throws a left hook. Harding snags that one in his right. Harding has Reddig locked in position across the table. Reddig finds out he can't move or break John's grip - then Harding starts squeezing. The rage on Reddig's face turns into tight lipped pain in seconds as small crackling noises start issuing from his wrists.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
John?

Tess gasps for breath in the background. Harding releases Reddig. He falls back in his chair, holding his arms up like a surgeon waiting for a nurse to put gloves on his hands. Reddig weakly works his fingers, staring up at Harding in disbelief.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Still want some?

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO  
THE STATE DEPARTMENT  
(Shakes head and looks  
down)

Dennis helps Reddig up, steering him toward the door. He waves at Harding and Connagher.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 We'll be in touch. Think on it,  
 John. We need you on this.  
 "Goodnight, Ms. Connagher.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll need some warning. I know you  
 won't want to advertise too soon  
 but can you give me some time to  
 recon the sites?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Would a week be enough between  
 speaking engagements?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Barely.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 I'll have a package for you  
 tomorrow through Ms. Connagher.

Strobert heads out. Harding picks up Tess's phone and calls a cab. As he walks toward the door, Tess catches up to him with a water glass of whiskey she'd poured for herself.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Wait! Stay tonight, John. I-

Harding grabs her shoulders gently, smiling into her face.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'm not staying, Tess. You've been  
 used. It appears you've known my  
 background for quite awhile. Take  
 some advice, Tess. Don't let Dennis  
 talk you into gigs like the one  
 tonight. If your firm does an up  
 and up legal consulting service for  
 the government then there's no harm  
 done. Don't let it get beyond that.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I can take care of myself.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 You thought that the night those  
 guys took you into the alley too.  
 I'm trying to tell you the same  
 hard put down could happen if  
 you're not careful with Dennis and  
 his little section of the  
 government.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Why you arrogant worm!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(laughs)  
Good-night, Tess. I'll be fighting  
at the same place tomorrow night.  
Bring my package there.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
John! Wait!

Harding moves out the entrance and closes the door behind  
him.

DISSOLVE TO:  
INSIDE OF CAB  
HARDING CALLED  
FROM CONNAGHER'S  
HOUSE

I/E. INSIDE CAB ON THE WAY TO HARDING'S HOUSE - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Voice over of Harding's  
thoughts)  
I have a few problems to work out  
now. Allowing Tess to complicate  
them will not be one of the  
options. Samira's being used, but I  
serve only one master. My country  
takes care of me. I take care of my  
country. Sometimes I have to adjust  
the attitudes of people working for  
my country in relation to what I'll  
do for them. Everything has flaws.  
If I can keep Samira alive, while  
getting info on a terrorist cell,  
made up of guys who shouldn't have  
been allowed in America to begin  
with, then great, sign me up. The  
fact the idiots I'm working for  
think nothing of involving  
civilians and law firms in our  
business probably makes sense to  
somebody. Last, but not least, the  
thought has crossed my mind maybe  
one of the geniuses higher up has  
decided me and Samira are  
expendable for a greater cause.  
That doesn't work for me. Shipping  
out to Afghanistan for another tour  
is starting to be more appealing.

The cab pulls up in front of Harding's three bedroom house on Lyon Ave. Harding tips the cabbie well as sees he has company.

CUT TO: HARDING  
GETS OUT OF THE  
CAB TO FACE HIS  
GREETING PARTY

EXT. OUTSIDE HARDING'S HOME ON LYON AVENUE - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Voice over of Harding's thoughts)  
Tomorrow's Friday, still a workday.  
I'm expecting even my questionable  
neighborhood to be quiet.  
Unfortunately, tonight was just not  
my night. A six pack of mixed race  
goons are waiting for me on the  
sidewalk. I see a few of my  
neighbors peeking out their doors  
and windows. I grin appreciatively.  
One of the guys is Ishmael Ali.  
He's such an idiot. I don't know  
how he got out but the last place  
the moron should be is here. I  
wave.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL  
Told you I'd come for you, Harding.  
We goin' to teach you some respect.

Harding moves in amongst them, seeing some recognition.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Should've tried this with a rifle,  
Ish.

ALI'S COMPANION  
(Backing away, his hands  
up)  
Harding... John Harding? I've seen  
him fight over on the wharf. I got  
no beef with him, partner. Unless  
you plan on shooting him, you  
better step off.

SECOND COMPANION OF ALI  
(Reaches inside his  
jacket)  
I got that-

Harding's short right drops Ali's gun toting companion as if he were hit with a baseball bat. Harding spins back, covering the rest with the man's Glock 9mm automatic.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

What'd you guys plan to do in front of my house? Did you all figure to have a group stomp? This won't end well for Ish here.

ALI'S COMPANION

We... we wasn't thinkin'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Anyone else packin'? Pull up the shirts and jackets. Spin slowly around.

Ali and his men do what Harding orders.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL

Big man... holdin' us down the barrel.

Harding grins. He pops the clip out and clears the chamber before heaving the clip onto the yard. He tosses the Glock to the one who saw him fight.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Hold this. I play this straight if the rest of you keep your hands where I can see them. Anybody else takes a hand and I'll have to open up. We clear?

The guys look down at their unconscious comrade and then over at the seething Ali. They're looking at each other for confirmation when the one who knows Harding nods in compliance.

ALI'S COMPANION

I'm cool with that. You want this man, brother, here's your chance.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Beckons with his hands toward Ali)

Come get some, Ish.

The raging Ali throws the first punch. Harding slips under and behind him. Ali's neck snaps with the sickening sound of life leaving its host. Harding drops Ali and steps away from the still twitching body. The neighbors have called the cops.

There are sirens drawing near. They hear the sound of a chopper too. Some of the guys are ready to bolt.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

If you guys run they'll probably stop you. Better put the piece on the sidewalk. Just tell the PD the truth.

CAMERA FOCUS ON THE ARRIVING POLICE AND FOLLOWS EARL TAYLOR TO ALI'S BODY.

The guy holding the Glock drops it. The friend Harding knocked out groans as he sits up. Harding holds his hands up. The others follow his lead as three squad cars drive up. The cops exit the first squad car, guns drawn, and their backups do the same. Harding knows the two cops in the first car. One is Earl Taylor. Earl and Harding were in the Corps at the same time. He starts laughing when he recognizes John, his white teeth gleaming in contrast to his nearly ebony skin. Earl puts his piece away. He moves over to get a closer look at Ali's body, still chuckling.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

(Crouches next to Ali.)

What have we got... oh my God...

(Stands and motions for his partner.)

Did you know Ishmael Ali was out?

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER.

Oh hell no! John and Tommy just put him in. Damn! How the hell he get out and why didn't we get a warning? You do this, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Yeah.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

He pull a gun on you?

Earl bags the Glock.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No. The guy on the sidewalk tried to pull the Glock. I tossed the clip into the yard when I took it off him. Okay if I pick it up for you?

(Points at the clip in the yard.)

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 No, I'll get it.  
 (Bags the clip.)

Enrique does a quick check for weapons on Ali's buddies while another officer watches. Other cops spread out to knock on doors while Earl returns to the group, taking a better look at the crew. He recognizes all of them.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 (CONT'D)  
 What the hell you bunch doing  
 backing Ishmael Ali's play? The  
 murderin' son of a bitch could have  
 gotten all of you killed.

ALI'S COMPANION WHO BROUGHT THE GLOCK  
 If we spite Ali, he come over in  
 the night and torch the house.

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE  
 OFFICER.  
 Looks like Ali ain't torchin'  
 anymore places. Ding dong, the  
 witch is dead.  
 Laughter from the group at Rodriguez's observation.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 Sorry, John. We have to take you  
 in.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Turns, and puts his hands  
 behind his back)  
 I know.  
 (Looks at the group being  
 released)  
 It would be a good idea if I don't  
 see any of you bunch in the near  
 future.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 (Cuffs Harding.)  
 You want me to call Tommy?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 No. He has to take the kids to  
 school. He needs his beauty sleep.

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE  
 OFFICER.  
 How about that lawyer lady you work  
 for? She's always around.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 No. I'll wait this one out on my  
 own. Thanks.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 (Guides Harding into the  
 patrol car.)  
 Suit yourself but you better behave  
 in lockup if it comes to that,  
 John. The city's still paying off  
 on the dental surgery for those  
 three gang-bangers you kicked the  
 crap out of the last time I had to  
 put you inside overnight.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Shrugs)  
 Those guys wanted to get romantic.  
 Let me stay home. You have my word  
 I won't go anywhere.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 You killed a guy. The coroner has  
 to be called. 'Rique and I have to  
 make out tons of paperwork. Even if  
 we could let you go, I wouldn't let  
 you sleep while I'm writing  
 reports.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll sleep anyway.  
 Taylor and Rodriguez both laugh.

DISSOLVE TO:  
 OAKLAND POLICE  
 STATION

INT. OAKLAND POLICE STATION - NIGHT

At the station Harding gets a few hellos from cops he knows.  
 Some have watched him fight and made money. After a couple  
 hours sitting around dozing in his chair and helping  
 Rodriguez fill in his info. Earl returns to the desk, all  
 smiles.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 Good news, John. I hear if the DA  
 was in his office, you'd be  
 walkin'. As it is, we'll have to  
 keep you overnight until the DA  
 comes in tomorrow morning. It seems  
 Ali's lawyer screwed us in court on  
 some technicality.  
 (MORE)



EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

It put one of the new prosecutors on the hot-seat with the DA for blowing Ali's conviction. The kid knew Ali would go out and kill somebody. He wanted to come over and spring you himself but he's on suspension.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Sounds good. I guess you're here to escort me to my room, huh?

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

(Smiles)

We have a very entertaining crowd in lockup tonight. The only thing I can guarantee is there aren't any weapons. A couple guys you know will be sharing lodging with you: Devon Constantine and Terry Nelson.

Harding walks with Taylor toward the cell he will be spending the night in.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Oh goody.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

I figured you'd like the company. I saw you fight Constantine. He never fought again. You were a guest with us because of Nelson the last time. He harboring any bad feelings for you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Nelson put the bangers on me the last overnight stay you were talkin' about. Tommy set up a sweet gig with an out of town couple who wanted to see Jack London Square and the pier. So Tommy's drivin' the limo. I'm doing the escorting. Nelson walks up and tries a quick pick and pull on my clients as they get out of the limo. I hurried around to tell Nelson to keep moving but he's dumber than a bag of rocks. I broke his arm. Naturally, you gentlemen of the law arrested me.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 You know how it is, John. We always  
 have to haul in the one still  
 standing, especially when the one  
 on the ground has to visit the ER.  
 It didn't help your cause when the  
 couple refused to press charges  
 against Nelson.

(Opens the cell door for  
 Harding and takes the  
 cuffs off.)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 They were scared. Tess got me off  
 quick but it cost me two freebies  
 with her firm. I hate freebies.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 (Laughs)  
 I'll check on you later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Thanks, Mommy.  
 Voice over of Harding's thoughts as he looks around the cell.  
 Constantine's over sitting on a  
 bunk against the wall. He gives me  
 a nod and closes his eyes. Nelson  
 hasn't seen me yet. He's jawin'  
 with a few of his jail brethren.  
 Nelson makes his appearance in a  
 detention cell at least once every  
 few weeks. I stay out of his view  
 range and find a spot I can keep an  
 eye on things. It looks like mostly  
 drunks. The cell smells like urine  
 and puke, just like home with my  
 Dad. A kid seventeen or eighteen  
 walks over hesitantly. He sits down  
 a few feet from me. I can see his  
 whole life is passing before his  
 eyes as he looks around the holding  
 cell. He has nearly black hair, cut  
 above his ears, and dark  
 complexion. From his features, I'm  
 guessing he has some Iranian blood.  
 Having spent some covert time in  
 Iran's border communities I  
 recognize a few similar features.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
 DESCENT  
 What are you in for, Sir?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Misunderstanding. How about you,  
 kid?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
 DESCENT  
 (Looks down)  
 I stole my Dad's Town car and tried  
 getting out of the state.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Did that once myself. My old man  
 whooped me one too many times. It  
 didn't go well for him. I ended up  
 in the Marines.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
 DESCENT  
 I didn't hurt my Dad but if I had...  
 you know... stayed any longer at  
 home, he would have killed me. He  
 gets smashed out of his mind about  
 half the week. Those are his good  
 nights. The bad ones are when he  
 doesn't have enough booze to get  
 smashed out of his mind.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Maybe we're related.

Kennington laughed. He remembered where he was, shutting up  
 instantly. It attracted Nelson's attention. When he saw  
 Harding, his eyes lit up. One of those smiles you see on a  
 snake formed but with crooked, missing, and broken teeth. He  
 whispered to his homey's and jay walked over slowly toward  
 Harding who leaned toward the kid.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 Keep your mouth shut. No matter  
 what, stay seated.

CAMERA SHIFTS TO NELSON HEARING KENSINGTON LAUGH, AND SEEING  
 HARDING FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Terry Nelson walks over with his crew, eyeballing Harding all  
 the way.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
 What's so funny, pussy?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Talk to me, Nelson. I'm the kid's  
attorney. I've advised the kid to  
plead the fifth.

CAMERA FOCUS ON NELSON AND HIS CREW, AND THEN ZOOMS OUT TO  
INCLUDE HARDING AND KENSINGTON.

Nelson's friends laugh, but Nelson angrily waves him off.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
Stay the fuck out of this Harding!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I'm on commission. My client is  
simply following my advice. I have  
some advice for you, Terry. Take a  
hike before you get hurt.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
What'd you call me? You talkin'  
like you know me. You don't know  
me... you-

Harding kicks Nelson's right ankle out. When Nelson drops  
forward, Harding meets his face with a right forearm snapped  
at just the right moment. Nelson flies to John's left, hits  
the bars, and slides to the cell floor, unmoving. His homey's  
don't know what to do so Harding helps them out.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Anybody still standing in this cell  
when I finish counting to three,  
party's with me like Nelson over  
there. One... two-

Where there weren't enough seats, guys dropped their asses  
onto the cell floor. Harding looks around and smiles amiably.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Good. Now that the introductions  
are over, you gentlemen go about  
your business. Sorry for the  
interruption.

Devon Constantine starts laughing. The rest of Harding's cell-  
mates at least give it a chuckle. Just like that, all the  
conscious guys in the cell are friends now.

CAMERA FOCUS ON EARL TAYLOR ARRIVING AT THE CELL.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
Damn it, Harding! Drag Terry over  
to the door. He ain't dead, is he?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Nope, just terminally stupid.

Harding walks over to the unconscious Nelson, props him up,  
and begins slapping him.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

Wakey... wakey. The officers saw  
you sleeping on the floor. They  
wanted to make sure you're okay.  
Get up and say hello or I'll punt  
you over in front of them. Take  
your pick.

Nelson scrambles away from Harding, and lurches to his feet.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
I'll kill you man. Nobody do me  
like this and live.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Ishmael Ali told me that. Now his  
head's facing the wrong way on his  
neck.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
Harding already adjusted Ali's head  
tonight. Get over here, dumb-ass,  
before he points yours the wrong  
way too!

Nelson scrambles around Harding and to the cell door,  
presenting his hands to be cuffed. Taylor takes him out.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
(CONT'D)  
No more adjustments tonight, John.  
Hear me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Hey, we're all gettin' along fine.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
You really staked Dracula. Never  
figured anyone'd kill that crazy  
son of a bitch.  
(MORE)

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY (CONT'D)  
 Cats like him got nine lives, John.  
 Are you sure he's dead?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Ishmael's dead, Dev. When he hit  
 the sidewalk, black slimy mist  
 creatures poured up from the cement  
 and ripped his soul right down into  
 hell. Can I get an amen, brothers?

Amens and laughter rang out amongst the cell-mates.

DISSOLVE TO:  
 OAKLAND POLICE  
 STATION OUTER  
 AREA

INT. OAKLAND POLICE STATION

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You stink, Hardhead. When I saw  
 your write up in the Oakland Trib  
 for killing Ali, I figured you'd  
 need a bailout. You were a busy boy  
 last night.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Thanks. I need two more out on the  
 government's tab. Can you do that  
 for me, Tess? I'll make you my  
 famous hangover breakfast.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Rubs her forehead)  
 That obvious, huh? What's their  
 names?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Devon Constantine and Jafar  
 Kensington. I'm recruiting them for  
 our little Samira Karim job.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 I need a favor if I do this for  
 you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Name it.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Hesitates, looks around)  
 I need you to come with me to a  
 school meeting this afternoon.  
 (MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)

My older sister's conned me into it. My eight year old niece Alice is having trouble with another girl bullying her and the girl's parents are taking a threatening tone. My Mom lives with Lora, and I'm getting rolled.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Features narrow in  
confusion)

One eight-year-old little girl is bullying another little girl? Gang-bangers I can help you with. My expertise with childhood consisted of my old man beatin' the crap out of me until I turned fourteen. I'm sure your sister has tried all the usual steps - call the parents, call the teacher, call the police? I'm sure you're not nudging me into whacking the little girl so what can I do?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Pleading tone)

I'm so tired of listening to my sister's whiney-ass voice I'm about ready to kill the girl and her whole family. Lora thinks I can somehow sue these people into making their eight-year-old behave. My Mom can't understand why I haven't already taken care of everything. Think about it, John. You look like Godzilla... even in a suit. The parents will take one look at you and stifle their kid until she's eighteen.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Runs a hand through his  
close cropped hair,  
annoyance plain on his  
face)

Fine. I'll do it, but I can't guarantee you'll like the outcome.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Perks up)

I'll be about forty-five minutes getting your guys out, and the low-down on consequences.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Mumbles as Tess walks  
away)  
You just rolled me.

DISSOLVE TO:  
OUTSIDE OAKLAND  
POLICE  
DEPARTMENT

EXT. OAKLAND POLICE STATION - DAY

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Hands paper to Devon  
Constantine)  
Minor altercation at a bar. The  
Owner says he'll settle for  
damages. I took care of those on  
John's behalf. I called  
Kensington's Father. His Mom  
answered. She says they won't press  
charges but she sounded scared.  
Anything I should know about?

Harding puts an arm around Kensington while smiling over at  
Devon Constantine.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Jafar here told me all about it in  
the tank last night. Drunk Father  
kicks crap out of son. Son splits  
with the family car. Father reports  
it stolen. The kid's half Iranian  
and he speaks Farsi and Arabic. I  
think I can use him. Want in with  
us Dev?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
(Shakes Harding's  
outstretched hand)  
I'm in. I know whatever the hell  
you're doing, there's money in it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
It's legit. You'll be driving. Do  
you still have your weapon permit  
and security job?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
How you know about that?



JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Tommy made some enquiries after our fight. We wanted to make sure there weren't any hard feelings in the form of a drive by.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
(Laughs)  
It's a damn tough way to earn a buck. First you take a chance on ending up dead fightin'. Then you're lookin' over your shoulder for weeks after wonderin' if the pug you knocked out would decide to get some payback. Yeah, I still have my license. Thanks for springin' me. I heard you knocked out Jesse Brown. Think you can take him on too. He and I were in the Rangers together.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Didn't know that. Yeah, I can use him. I'll have Tommy write up all the details. Here.

John takes out five one hundred dollar bills, offering them to Constantine.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Buy something in the 'Men In Black' fashion. Call Jess and tell him to do the same. I'll reimburse him for any clothes money.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
I got to get my car out of impound. You know where to reach me.

Constantine nods at Tess, shakes hands with Jafar, and walks off.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Stay out of the bars, Dev.

Constantine flips Harding off without looking back. John turns to Jafar.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
The job involves body-guarding a young Afghani girl named Samira Karim. She's about your age. You'll be escorting her while I keep her safe. You're eighteen.  
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

I'll let you bunk in with me  
whether you work with me or not.  
Tess told me we have to get your  
parents to sign off on it. Did you  
decide whether you want in?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

(Smiles and nods)  
I'm in, Sir. Will we be getting my  
things now, Ms. Connagher?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Your Mom told me she'd have a bag  
ready along with your computer by  
the time we get over there this  
morning. She said your Dad will be  
sleeping it off for a while yet, so  
now's the time.

DISSOLVE TO:  
OUTSIDE  
HARDING'S HOME

I/E. JOHN HARDING'S HOUSE - DAY

Tess waits outside her car as Harding and Kensington remove  
Jafar's things from the car trunk.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

You fought last night, killed Ali,  
spent the rest of the night in  
jail, ran around all day today, and  
you're still fighting tonight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Gee, it doesn't sound as exciting  
when you run them all off together  
like that. What can I say? I'm like  
the kid hitting himself in the head  
with a hammer. His Mom asks him why  
and he tells her because it feels  
so good when I stop.

Jafar laughs, but Tess rolls her eyes and points at Harding.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Don't forget our school date. I'll  
pick you up at two. Is that Rankin  
guy you're fighting tonight  
dangerous?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 He's the real deal. Rankin ran into trouble on the Ultimate Fighting circuit. He never paid any attention to the rules. After his fourth disqualification they told him to take a hike.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Did he kill anyone?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Sighs)  
 No.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Then he's one up on you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I didn't break the rules. The ref didn't stop the bout in time.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
 DESCENT  
 You killed someone in the ring,  
 Sir?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Yeah, kid, but don't make a big deal out of it. Choke holds are dangerous stuff. If the other guy doesn't tap out in time, there's always a danger the ref will be too late stopping it. I had the guy underneath me and the ref didn't see he was out. I let him go when he went limp but it was too late.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Did he have any family?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 He probably had ten brothers and sisters, Mom, Dad, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins... how the hell would I know?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Didn't you care?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I didn't kill him on purpose. These guys are professional mixed martial artists.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

They can kill with one strike. When you get the guy down, you don't let him up. Rankin could take me out tonight and you can bet he won't be asking around about my next of kin.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I'll see you at two, you unfeeling robot. Rain check on the hangover breakfast.

Tess smiles and hurriedly slips into the driver's seat. The car speeds away from the curb.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

C'mon, kid, I'll get you settled in and give you the guided tour. Main rule in my house: don't get curious. You're eighteen, and we'll be doing business together. I need you on the straight and narrow.

John leads the way inside his house. He takes Jafar around so he can stow his bag.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Very nice home entertainment system.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Keep it that way. Do you have a girlfriend?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

No.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Good. This young woman I'll be looking after is around your age. I don't need you to do anything overt. I need someone her age to be entertaining enough that the people around us will be paying more attention to the two of you rather than me. I'll be up front with you. There are some Islamo nut-bags who want to kill her. This will be dangerous.

John leads Jafar into his kitchen where he gets them both sodas, and they sit at the table.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Are you recruiting me or talking me  
out of it, Mr. Harding?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's John. I'm making sure you know  
what you're getting yourself into.  
I'll find you a place of your own  
in a little while once I get you on  
the payroll.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Will you teach me how to fight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Fighting's for idiots but I'll  
teach you how to avoid a fight and  
when to fight if you can't avoid  
it.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

You're not an idiot. Can I see you  
fight tonight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No, I'm nuts. Maybe another time. I  
don't know how the fight with  
Rankin will end. I know how I want  
it to end but you don't always get  
what you want. I noticed your Mom  
packed a notebook computer. I have  
a DSL router. Do you have WiFi?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Of course.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'll give you the router password.  
Don't make me regret it. Let's get  
cleaned up. I'm putting you in  
school while we're rolling along  
here. That way you can catch up,  
and only miss a half day. I'll pick  
you up after I get done being  
Pseudo-Dad for Tess's sister's kid.  
Will you be okay until around five?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Sure. I'll do my homework in the  
library. I can get back here on my  
own though, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Okay, that works. I'll give you a  
key to get in and show you how to  
disable my alarm system. I have to  
put my suit on, so I'll go first.

DISSOLVE TO:  
OUTSIDE SKYLINE  
HIGH SCHOOL

I/E. SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL CHECK IN AND TROUBLE - DAY

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Looking around as he  
walks next to Jafar  
toward the entrance)

CAMERA PANS AROUND THROUGH JOHN'S VISION, SHOWING A VARIETY  
OF STUDENTS STANDING AROUND AT THE LUNCH HOUR OUTSIDE SCHOOL,  
FOCUSING ON A GROUP OF TEENS IN HOODIES AND PANTS DRAPED  
AROUND THEIR HIPS.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

Have any trouble with those guys by  
the entrance?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Everyone does off and on. They  
claim to be Norteanos, illegal  
alien gang-bangers.

As Jafar and John pass into the entrance Harding's name is  
mumbled by the hoodie crowd.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT (CONT'D)

Good, they must know your rep,  
John. Maybe things will be better  
now.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Or worse.

They walk inside the office, where the secretary directs them  
into the Assistant Principal's office.

The Assistant Principal meets them inside the door with his hand out in greeting. Harding shakes hands with him.

STAN GUERERRO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT  
SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL  
I'm Stan Guererro. Can I help you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
My name's John Harding. I called  
about checking Jafar Kensington  
back into school. He's had some  
trouble at home and will be staying  
with me for the time being.

Harding hands Guererro the folder with Kensington's papers.  
After looking through it and copying the contact numbers,  
Guererro hands it back.

STAN GUERERRO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT  
SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL  
Everything seems to be in order.  
You've been a very good student,  
Jafar. I hope that won't change.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT  
It won't, Sir.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I have had a talk with Jafar. He  
knows my hospitality depends on his  
doing well here at school.

Guererro nods and smiles, jotting down a note and giving it  
to Jafar.

STAN GUERERRO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT  
SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL  
Take this to your class after  
lunch, Jafar. Thanks for coming in,  
Mr. Harding.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
You bet. Call me if there are any  
problems.

John and Jafar leave the office.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Any suggestions on my Pseudo-Dad  
gig working out grammar school  
behavior problems?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

(Shrugs)

Call in sick. The dog ate my  
homework. Aliens beamed me up for  
experimentation?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Get away from me, smart-ass before  
I forget I'm your temporary  
guardian and dropkick you into next  
week.

Jafar walks away laughing. Harding heads out the entrance  
where he walks through the group of Norteanos. They follow  
him to the parking lot. The group starts laughing when  
Harding gets to his old Chevy and unlocks the door.

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Man, I thought you'd roll better.  
You John Harding, ain't you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

She's a beauty alright. Want to buy  
her?

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Saw that fight where you killed a  
guy on YouTube. It was fake.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I've heard that. I have the address  
of the cemetery where he's buried  
if you want to clear things up for  
me.

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Hell, you don't look so bad.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Straightens his collar)

Thanks. You're not coming on to me  
are you, Motor-mouth? I don't roll  
that way.

The teen leader's friends start laughing. The leader doesn't  
like his posse making light of him. Out comes a long bladed  
stiletto which Harding snatches out of his hand before he can  
even point it. John bends it into a ninety degree angle  
slowly and tosses it.



JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 The next thing you reach for better  
 be edible. Run along kids. School  
 starts soon.

Harding grabs the leader by the chin in an unbreakable grip,  
 while his cohorts scramble back and away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 You look for payback on my friend  
 Jafar, your picture will end up on  
 the side of a milk carton. We  
 clear?

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER  
 Yeah!

Harding releases him and he stumbles away after the  
 retreating thugs rubbing his chin to make sure all the bones  
 are in place. John waves.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Have a nice day at school, kids.  
 Remember, no talking in class.

DISSOLVE TO:  
 CORVALLIS  
 ELEMENTARY  
 SCHOOL IN SAN  
 LEANDRO, CA

I/E. CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARKING LOT AND SCHOOL - DAY

Harding is leaning on Tess's car, his arms folded across his  
 chest as Tess paces back and forth in front of him, glancing  
 at her watch every few moments.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Will you relax. You look great. If  
 the principal's a man, the other  
 parents won't have a chance once he  
 gets a look at you.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Stops to glance at John)  
 The principal's a woman as is the  
 teacher. You look good, John -  
 dangerous... but good. I wish Lora  
 and Alice would get here. Remember,  
 you're my fiancé.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Straightens away from the  
car)  
You don't mean with your sister  
too, do you?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
No, just with the staff at the  
school, so it won't seem like I'm  
bringing along some hired muscle to  
intimidate the other parents.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Chuckles)  
Which would be the truth.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Did I not claim to be the biggest  
hypocrite ever? Are you insulted to  
be considered my fiancé?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Of course not. I'd prefer your  
sister doesn't get the wrong idea  
so when you get pissed off and stop  
talking to me for a couple months  
she won't think it's anything more  
than business as usual. Did you  
think about coming in with Tommy  
and me on business.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Still debating that one, John. It  
could get complicated with the  
government ties.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Points at the diamond  
ring on her finger.)  
That's a nice ring I got you.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
(Blushes)  
This is so ridiculous. I don't  
know, John, I'll... oh, there's  
Lora.

Tess waves at a late model tan Toyota Camry arriving in the parking lot. After it's parked, a little strawberry haired girl gets out of the passenger seat, slams the door and runs with open arms to Tess. A red haired woman locked up the Toyota with a remote as she approached us.

Lora looked like a slightly older version of Tess with a bit more sultriness, same height, good figure, long hair in a ponytail, and wearing a striking dark blue dress. She offers her hand to Harding with a welcoming smile.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

You must be John. I've heard a lot about you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If you heard it from your sister, don't believe half of it.

Tess rolls her eyes as Lora laughs and Tess turns Alice around to face John.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

This is my niece Alice. Alice, this is my friend, John.

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER

(Stares up at John for a moment)

You...you're kinda big, mister.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Waves)

Hi Alice, nice to meet you. Did you stay home from school today?

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER

Yeah, I'll come back tomorrow. Are you going to the meeting with us?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Your Aunt Tess asked me to sit in with you if that's okay.

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER

Sure. C'mon... I'll show you where.

Alice grabs Harding's hand and pulls him toward the school. Inside the school Alice walks Harding along the main hall with Tess and Lora chatting behind them to the office, where a startled young lady behind the counter stares up at Harding like he's a troll blocking the bridge entrance she's trying to cross. Tess moves around him.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 Hi, I'm Tess Connagher. My sister  
 Lora Radcliff and her daughter  
 Alice have an appointment with  
 Principal Willis.

CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SECRETARY  
 Yes, of course. I'll tell the  
 principal you're here.

The secretary disappears through a rear door and comes back with a tall black woman in a dark green two piece business type dress. She smiled engagingly at the group, recognizing Lora. She shakes hands with Lora.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY  
 SCHOOL PRINCIPAL  
 You're Lora. I've met you at a few  
 PTA meetings. I'm sure we can  
 straighten this misunderstanding  
 out quickly. Maria Tolver and her  
 daughter Michelle are waiting in my  
 office with Ms. Tolver's husband  
 and grandfather.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 Hi Carol. This is my sister, Tess  
 Connagher and her and her fiance,  
 John Harding.

Willis shakes hands with Tess and John. She then gestures for them to follow her.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY  
 SCHOOL PRINCIPAL  
 I'll try and make this meeting as  
 pleasant as possible. I'll take any  
 help I can get.

Alice clung to Harding's hand with both hers. As they entered the Principal Willis's office, the other little girl, Michelle, stared right at Alice with the malevolent look kids have no trouble summoning. A nervous looking brunette in slacks and blouse sat next to Michelle on her right. On the other side of Michelle sat a very surly looking guy in navy blue work clothes. Next to him sat a gray haired, rail thin man. He looked at Harding with recognition. He immediately stands and offers his hand to John.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
 VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER  
 John Harding, is it not?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Shakes Fialkov's hand)  
 Yes, Sir. Have we met?

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
 VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER  
 (Smiles)  
 We have a common business  
 associate, Van Rankin, who I  
 believe you have a meeting with  
 later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Smiles back)  
 You're right. Van and I will be  
 meeting later. It's good to meet  
 you, Sir.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
 VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER  
 Call me Alexi.

Alexii turned and knelt next to his granddaughter. The look  
 he gives her wipes the malevolent one off little Michelle's  
 face in an instant.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
 VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER (CONT'D)

Did you threaten this little girl, Mishy? Tell me truth.

MICHELLE TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S  
 GRANDDAUGHTER  
 (Nods)  
 Yes, Da.

MARIA TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S  
 DAUGHTER  
 Do you know this man, Papa?

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
 VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER  
 (Holds up a cautioning  
 hand to Maria as he  
 straightens with a sigh  
 to face Principal Willis)  
 I am very sorry for all this  
 trouble. We will make sure my  
 granddaughter is polite and  
 respectful around all other  
 children from now on. Is that not  
 so, Mishy?

MICHELLE TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S  
GRANDDAUGHTER

(Voice quivering)

Yes, Da.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Wonderful. Thank you for your  
understanding.

TIM TOLVER, MARIA'S HUSBAND

Wait a minute! What about-

MARIA TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S  
DAUGHTER

(Grabs her husband's arm  
with a fearful look)

Don't Tim! It is as Papa says.  
Michelle has misled us. Kids are  
kids.

Alexi turns to face his son-in-law, who takes one look at  
Alexi and shifts his gaze to the floor. Fiialkov knelt down  
next to Alice with a big smile.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I hope you and my granddaughter can  
be friends from now on.

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD  
DAUGHTER

(Meets Fiialkov's look  
with a stunned one of her  
own)

Me too, Sir.

Alexi straightened with an appreciative chuckle. He shook  
hands with John, Tess, Lora, and Willis.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I hope we will meet under better  
circumstances in the future. I  
expect we will be meeting later,  
John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I expect so, Alexi. Thanks for  
clearing this up for us.

Fiialkov nods and smiles, guiding his family out of the  
office.

Tess and Lora were still in quasi shock at the surprisingly quick resolution of what they had considered a monumental confrontation. Principal Willis peers up at Harding with that look teachers give to the class clown.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Well, Mr. Harding, it was indeed  
beneficial to have you here.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Thanks. I'm glad it worked out. May  
I be excused now, Ma'am?

She laughed as did Tess and Lora. Alice giggled, more at the adults laughing than her understanding of John's adlib.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Yes, John, you may go now. Stay out  
of trouble. I don't want to see you  
back in my office again.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Me either.

They file out of the office after the usual parting pleasantries. School was ending for the day so they sifted their way out to the parking lot through the streaming kids, teachers, and parents in a comfortable silence. Alice skipped along next to John, obviously happy with the outcome. In the parking lot, Lora hugged Harding long enough to draw the attention of passersby.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

I don't know how to thank you.

John pulls away reluctantly, the attraction for Tess's sister surprising him, and making the exchange a little awkward.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Thank Tess. This was her idea. She  
set up a bomb in my big screen HDTV  
to go off if I didn't come along.  
She has the detonator in her purse.

Lora laughs, hugs a fuming Tess while Alice hugs John, and then moves over to her car. John and Tess watch as she drives out of the parking lot. Tess elbows Harding, which he blocks adroitly.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

What the hell was that for?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Dry humping my sister. I may have  
overreacted.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Ya' think?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
Deny your blood wasn't racing when  
Lora latched onto you like a wet  
sheet.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I can't tell lies to a future  
business partner. So, is this some  
kind of deal breaker?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
No. I've always been jealous of my  
sister. How come my fiancé tapped  
into those long bubbling over  
feelings of inadequacy to make me  
mental?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Laughs)  
I would have been expecting you to  
be more upset with Fialkov knowing  
me. I know I am. I'll play the  
sister card on you later.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
You're fighting Rankin tonight.  
Fialkov has a connection to him,  
and you're wondering if I've made  
the connection between his  
granddaughter threatening my niece,  
and him suddenly showing up to make  
everything better. I did. I detest  
coincidences.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
That makes two of us. Drop me off  
at home, Tess. I have to get some  
sleep before I find out about this  
coincidence. We'll toss around our  
business and sister sharing another  
time.



TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 (Nods and sighs)  
 Yeah, in the mood I'm in right now,  
 maybe that would be best.

DISSOLVE TO:  
 TOMMY AND JOHN  
 APPROACHING THE  
 ENTRANCE TO THE  
 EAST OAKLAND  
 WAREHOUSE WHERE  
 THE RANKIN FIGHT  
 WILL TAKE PLACE

I/E. EAST OAKLAND WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 Here comes security, John.

CAMERA SHOWS EARL TAYLOR AND ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ APPROACHING  
 THEM BEFORE ZOOMING OUT ON THE FOUR.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 We never thought you'd show after  
 last night's festivities, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'm thinkin' of making a citizen's  
 arrest, Earl. How dare you two  
 officers of the law frequent an  
 illegal enterprise like this?

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE  
 OFFICER.  
 (Chuckles)  
 Hell, half the city council's in  
 there. You think they want their  
 BMW's and Lexus's getting broken  
 into while they're gamin'?

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 Your lawyer emptied our jail out.  
 What's that all about? You and  
 Constantine going steady now?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I have some work for him and the  
 kid, Earl. Don't get jealous. How's  
 the under-cards going in there.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
Entertaining, but the big money's  
not coming out until you get in  
there with Rankin. Me and 'Rique  
have a few bucks on you so don't  
blow this for us.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
What's the line on my pug?

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE  
OFFICER.  
It's running three to one against,  
Tommy. If John drills him too quick  
there'll be a riot. Earl called in  
a few more of the guys to reinforce  
us if things get out of hand. You  
are planning to dance a little  
first, right John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Give me a second. I'm still  
outraged at being someone's pug. In  
answer to the question, no, I'm not  
holding back. You guys seem to  
think this is the WWF. I'm not  
waltzing with Hulk Hogan. Besides,  
I don't think you have to worry  
about any quick endings. If Rankin  
gets me on the floor, we'll be  
there a while and I don't think I  
can keep him from taking me there.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
Rankin weighs around three hundred,  
John. I don't think letting him  
take you down is a good idea.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Wow, am I glad you came out  
tonight, Earl. He's a strategist,  
ain't he, T? Write that down so I  
don't forget it - bad idea for  
Rankin to get me down.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
You know what I mean, smart-ass.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I know. Look, you worry about  
winning those three to one odds.  
I'll worry about how to keep from  
gettin' killed while rolling around  
on the floor with Godzilla.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 I'm glad you guys are here tonight.  
 We had a poor sport in front last  
 night packing heat.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 I heard. Last night is why we're  
 getting a nice wage tonight. I  
 think a few of the suits watching  
 last night didn't want to be  
 present at a gun battle.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'm glad you're making out on this,  
 Earl. You do know Rankin's  
 connected, right? I met someone  
 today tied to Rankin: Alexi  
 Fiialkov.

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE  
 OFFICER.  
 No shit, John? That mother's the  
 Godfather. The Russian mob doesn't  
 get feisty at the sporting events.  
 They come around a few weeks later  
 to your house and cut your nuts  
 off.

(Pats John's shoulder)  
 You can take out as many of those  
 pricks you want to. Call us if it  
 happens. Me and Earl will come over  
 and help you set up the scene.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll hold you to it. We better get  
 inside, T. Rankin's probably  
 already claiming I'm a no-show.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 You're right, John. Let's go. See  
 you officers later.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER  
 Good luck, guys.

John and Tommy walk up alongside the line getting in. They  
 meet Jesse Brown who is working security at the entrance.  
 Jesse smiles hugely at John, sticking his hand out which John  
 grips.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
 FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
 Damn, John... what the hell you hit  
 me with?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Attitude, Mr. Brown... attitude.  
Did Devon call you about coming in  
with me?

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
Yeah, thanks. I'm in. Paper say you  
did for that psycho Ali last night.  
Wish I coulda' seen it. My  
manager's not happy with me. First  
I get clocked and then you rough up  
his business partner. I'll need  
another job after tonight.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
He was going to do something I know  
he would have regretted, Jess. John  
helped him see the light. Then he  
went and helped Ali into the light.  
I'll get an employee packet to you  
soon about our other enterprise.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
Thanks, T. You had a busy night,  
John. The partner dropped a couple  
large on me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Want a rematch?

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
No thanks. I thought I had you  
pegged when you went down last  
night, brother. I been watchin' you  
for months... thought I knew all your  
moves. Tell me you and T weren't  
playin' me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I couldn't take any chances with  
you, big man.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
Good. That makes me feel a little  
better. Man, you got a hard road  
tonight.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
That's why girls don't do it, Jess.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

You right about that. I put a few  
bucks on you. Don't let me down. I  
have to recoup my losses from last  
night.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
T... mark that down. I have to try  
and win tonight.

John and Tommy enter the warehouse as Jesse laughs at John's  
quip.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
(Inner thoughts voice  
over)

Even with the cool outside air  
rattling through cracks in the  
sheet metal walls, a pungent mix of  
sweat, cologne, perfume, rage,  
anger and fear assaulted my nose. I  
inhaled deeply. Walking into a  
dirty cesspool of an arena like  
this made my blood pound. It  
reminded me of home, fightin' off  
my old man and the bimbos he  
accumulated. My fingers curled into  
tight fists at my sides - nothin'  
like memories of Pa to get me in  
the mood.

CAMERA FOLLOWS JOHN AND TOMMY INTO THE FIGHT AREA, FOCUSING  
ON THEM READYING FOR THE FIGHT AND CHECKING THE MAT.

Tommy takes charge of John's equipment bag. Harding stripped  
off his windbreaker as he walked. Tommy took it and handed  
him the light boxing gloves which weren't much more than the  
kind you punch the heavy bag with. John slips in his mouth-  
guard and puts on the gloves. The vocal crowd undercurrent  
lapsed into a whispering hum at sight of John and Tommy. They  
walked into the marked off fighting center, covered by a  
square dilapidated mat, stained with God knows what. It  
measured around thirty feet across. It hadn't been there for  
the fight with Jesse Brown the night before, but they drag it  
out for a ground and pounder like Rankin. It smells of the  
disinfectant they spray it with before wiping down the  
surface after each fight. Tommy checks it for slippage. He  
nods at John, indicating the mat's secured properly. The  
audience checks Harding out with excited speculation.  
Rankin's not there yet. The fighters are to stand around for  
a few moments so the final betting and odds can peak. John  
spots Tess opposite him.

She's standing next to Dennis Strobert. That sets off a few warning bells in John's mind. Dennis is grinning. Tess gives John a nervous wave. Harding doesn't respond.

CAMERA PANS TO RANKIN WALKING INTO THE FIGHT AREA

The crowd noise picks up noticeably. Rankin strides across the mat glaring at John. Easily three inches taller than Harding, he carries over three hundred pounds like a ballerina. His tank top bulges around hard muscle. Rankin has his long blond hair tied back in a ponytail. He points a finger at John and then swipes it across his throat, his facial scars glowing as he grins threateningly. The crowd reacts favorably. Tommy snorts and indicates he's going to work the bets. Rankin and Harding glare at each other while their handlers take care of the bets. Rankin keeps mouthing 'You're dead' silently.

The ref the promoters use for most of the big fights walks over to Harding, smiling amiably as he grasps and examines each of John's gloved hands. He's nearly as big as Harding with a scarred, splotched white face, and crooked bulbous nose. Jack Korlos's been around the block. He still has a brain despite over a hundred professional fights.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.

Hey John, didn't you just fight and  
then kill somebody last night?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Yeah, Jack, that prick Ali wanted  
to rodeo on the first date and you  
know me, I'm a strict Catholic.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.

(Laughs)

I guess I don't have to tell you  
but here it is anyway - no groin  
kicks, eye pokes, or head butts.  
Stop if I say to. You don't stop I  
sap you. I won't stop anything  
unless one of you goes limp. I'm  
here to make sure neither of you  
die. I haven't lost anyone yet, but  
I have sapped a few. Clear?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
As a bell, Jack.

VAN RANKIN, RUSSIAN MOB FIGHTER  
 Hey grandpa! Quit cackling and get  
 your fuckin' job done!

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
 HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.  
 (Nods and turns)

Korlos walks over to a now nearly apoplectic Rankin. Rankin  
 bristles at Jack's frisk but endures it with only a few bumps  
 trying to throw the old man off balance. He may as well have  
 tried knocking a cement stanchion off balance. When Jack  
 finishes the frisk he gives Rankin the rule warning. Although  
 Rankin knows the rules he shoots his mouth off anyway.

VAN RANKIN, RUSSIAN MOB FIGHTER  
 I'm killin' that punk tonight,  
 gramps! Stay out of it or I'll do  
 for you too!

Jack chuckles audibly in the hushed silence following  
 Rankin's threat while stepping away and drawing out his sap  
 in a split second.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
 HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.  
 Let me know how that works out for  
 you, Bluto. You don't stop when I  
 tell you to I'll crack your head  
 open like a giant walnut.

Rankin lunges at Korlos but his handlers dive in between to  
 stop him.

VAN RANKIN, RUSSIAN MOB FIGHTER  
 I settle with you another time,  
 gramps!

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
 HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.  
 (Smiles and puts his sap  
 away.)  
 Yeah, you do that sonny boy... you  
 just do that.

Korlos backs to a spot near the mat's edge, splitting the  
 distance between the two fighters. The crowd noise picks up,  
 knowing the fight would be starting momentarily.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
 HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)  
 (Glances at Harding)  
 Ready?

Harding nods as Tommy pats his back and moves away.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)  
(Glances at Rankin)  
Ready?

Rankin growls, making motions as if he plans to bull rush Harding.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)  
(Claps hands together)  
Get it on!

Rankin runs at Harding, waiting until the last instant to lower his head for the take-down. John's knee smashes Rankin's nose to bloody pulp on the way down. Blood sprays everywhere when they hit with Harding twisting out from under after absorbing the painful landing. Rankin's up bellowing and spitting blood instantly when he can't keep John trapped under him. The crowd's screaming.

Rankin launches a flurry of kicks and punches, buying time to recover from his charge. Harding barely blocks a roundhouse kick to his head, but Rankin catches him with a glancing blow to the temple that staggers Harding. John ducks down and throws a left hook under his rib cage. Rankin grunts and breaks off the attack, backing away while keeping his hands up. Harding doesn't follow, still recovering from the slam to the mat.

Spitting blood, Rankin comes at Harding with a new sense of caution after the devastating body blow. Rankin fakes another roundhouse kick with his right leg. John takes the bait and he drops down for the grapple too fast for Harding to counter. John goes down under him without a chance to break his fall. Breath explodes out of Harding in a rush, compressed by Rankin's over three hundred pound bulk.

Harding whips over to his left, raking an elbow across Rankin's ruined nose. Rankin buries his head to the side avoiding more punishment. It gains John room to breathe. Rankin bucks left and right with real hurtful body shots. Arching backwards John blasts the top of his head with elbows he can't avoid. His body shots slow while he tries to duck away from the elbow shots. Rankin moves wrong and Harding smashes a left elbow flush on his skull, opening a scalp wound. It stuns Rankin long enough for Harding to slip out. Rankin tries to stop him, but they're both slick with his blood. John spiders over him, launching knees into his rib-cage while gasping air back into his own lungs. Rankin rolls away, scrambling to his feet.



The fighters circle while the crowd roars out its approval. Rankin throws jabs and left hooks with blood seeping down over his face. Harding counters with jabs to his nose, causing quick cover-ups. Rankin drifts too close. Harding's round house right leg kick smacks loudly into Rankin's side nearly pitching him to the mat. He stumbles to his right and John's left round house kick hits flush on his temple. Rankin crumples. A groan rumbles through the crowd. Harding's not a favorite. Racing over, John does a football kick into Rankin's left side and everyone in the place hears Rankin's ribs crack. The crowds howling, Tommy's cheering, and Harding moves in for the kill. Korlos races in to stop him. John nearly reacts with a body toss but awareness floods through him in time. Harding lets Korlos bear-hug him away from Rankin. Rankin lies still, breath rasping.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)  
You sane, kid?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Drops his hands to his  
sides)  
I'm back, Jack. Go ahead.

Jack hurries over to Rankin's side, gesturing for the med techs they have on hand. Tommy hands Harding a wet towel with a peroxide mix. The med techs wheel a gurney over with them and begin to carefully clean Rankin off. After putting a corset brace over Rankin's back, the techs ease Rankin over onto the corset face up. They make sure his ribs aren't in danger of puncturing his lungs before cinching the corset into place. The oxygen they give Rankin next begins to revive him.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
Wipe off, John. You're covered in  
blood. I'll give you a fresh one  
when you get most of it sopped up.

John follows his advice. After stripping off his gloves, bloody shirt, gym pants and mouth-guard he wipes down real good in only his boxer shorts and tennis shoes. Tommy exchanges the bloody one for a fresh one. Harding repeats the cleaning, giving his face one last wipe before wrapping the stuff up in the towel. Tommy hands him a clean black t-shirt and loose jeans out of his bag. Harding's dressed a few seconds later with all the bloody stuff shoved in a plastic bag before depositing the mess in his equipment bag.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Thanks, T. That feels much better.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Lordy... Lordy, John, that was one righteous set to. Rankin screwed up rushin' you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Yeah, he did. He should have stayed up. He hits like a cement truck. I guess we don't have to worry about the money tonight.

Harding points towards where Taylor and Rodriguez moved through the crowd with a few other OPD roving around the perimeter of the crowd. They're watching for sore losers like Jesse Brown's money backer from the night before. The sight of Rankin lying face down on the mat like he's dead quieted the crowd considerably. This is an ending hard to dispute. Tommy makes his money rounds, trading good natured talk with the losers. He doesn't gloat. Tommy pumps the fight when it means something but never when it's over. Connagher and Strobert approach John as he watches over Tommy.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

You're not going over to check if he's dead?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

What for?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I should have known compassion wouldn't enter into your thinking. Aren't you going to turn around and say hi?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm enjoying the fragrance of your perfume. I got Tommy's back until he comes over with the collection plate. You know that.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

That was horrible, John.

John flexes his arms and bounces around a little, trying to stay loose. He glances back and nods at Denny Strobert who is chuckling over Harding's dispassionate attitude.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Not for me it wasn't. My sides are achin' from Rankin's body shots on the mat - thanks for asking. What the hell you doin' here, Denny?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Can't I come see an old friend  
 fight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Ahhhh... that's so sweet. What the  
 hell you doin' here, Denny?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Making a delivery and an update,  
 John - nothing to get all paranoid  
 over. The gig's been moved up a  
 little with a slight addition I  
 need to talk with you about.  
 Besides, I figured you'd be happy I  
 kept Tess company in a rough crowd  
 like this.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I've left word. Anyone bothers her  
 when she watches me fight or screws  
 up her car I'll slice and dice them  
 like a Thanksgiving Turkey.

Tommy finishes his rounds. He's smiling ear to ear, holding  
 his money bag. Jesse Brown's with him. His smile's just as  
 big, gold tooth gleaming.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
 FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
 (pats John's shoulder)  
 Thanks, John. I'm flush.

Brown keeps walking.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Hey, Jess... where's my cut?

Brown's shoulders shake as he walks away, laughing.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 Hello, Slinky. Who's your  
 boyfriend? You cheatin' on John?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 (Shakes Tommy's hand)  
 We've talked on the phone a few  
 times, Tommy.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 I recognize your voice. John,  
 Rankin's coming around.

CAMERA PANS TO WHERE THE MED TECHS ARE WORKING ON RANKIN.

The med techs had Rankin sitting up. One of the promoters with a worried look brought over a folding chair. Three of them helped Rankin onto the chair. They had already cleaned away the blood. One of the techs removed the oxygen mask and felt Rankin's nose gingerly, eliciting a moan from Rankin. The tech shook his head, meaning Rankin needed more than a straightening. With ice packs held at the back of Rankin's neck, the techs braced him to his feet before helping him onto the wheeled gurney and strapping him in.

The crowd began to wander out in small groups. Except for some grinning gestures and waves from Taylor and Rodriguez, John was the target of some very malicious stares. Tommy nods and waves at all of them, gracious as ever. Harding keeps his eyes on their hands. There are no metal detectors, so the two partners are on their own. Tommy's packing under his shirt. He knows John will see a threat before he does. In most cases Harding can prevent a bad situation before Tommy has to intervene.

The med techs wheel Rankin out in front of where they're waiting for the crowd to thin. Rankin gives Harding a potent death stare for someone that has just gotten his ass kicked. Then he flips Harding off. Only Tess moving in front of him prevents Harding from moving to finish Rankin off.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Chuckles)

You tensed, John. What were you planning, an execution of a belted down invalid?

CAMERA SHOWS JACK KORLOS APPROACHING WITH TWO MEN.

Jack Korlos walks up with two other men. One's a short, fat white guy named James Bonasera. He's sweating even in the cool early morning chill, his bald head glistening. His partner, Ray Alexander, looks like Don King with slightly better hair. They promote the fights. Alexander and Tommy don't get along so he usually lets Bonasera handle negotiations with Sands and Harding.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Take Dennis outside, Tess. We'll find your car.

Tess tugs Strobert toward the exit without another word.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.  
That was a great fight, John. It  
took willpower not to let you  
finish him off.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
Shut up, Jack!

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.  
Eat shit, Ray.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Thanks, Jack. It would have spoiled  
things if I had. I owe you one.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A  
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.  
It was a pleasure watchin' you  
work. See ya'.

Korlos walks away with a wave.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
Some big names dropped a bundle  
tonight, Harding, mostly to you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Boo Hoo!

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
What's your point, Ray? You want us  
to send flowers or somethin'?

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
Just sayin'. Business is business  
and tonight's outcome set us back  
in the goodwill department.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Boo, fucking Hoo!

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER  
We could get shut down, John. You  
know how some of these suits are.  
They're all good sports until they  
drop a bundle. Then all of a sudden  
our sporting enterprise is a blight  
on the city. Ray and I were  
thinking maybe it would be a good  
idea for you to take a break.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 Or maybe we could make a very  
 profitable deal. It's not like you  
 and Tommy don't use some  
 showmanship already.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 Well damn, John, it sounds like  
 these gentlemen want you to take a  
 dive.

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 Ray didn't say anything about  
 taking a dive.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 We get it. I'm not taking a dive or  
 engaging in any showmanship for you  
 two so we'll take a break. Me and  
 Tommy have a gig that'll keep us  
 busy for a while anyway.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 Fuck you, Harding!

John keeps Tommy from moving on Alexander. He glances around  
 at the darkened scaffolding in the upper warehouse area.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 C'mon T, let's get out of here. Ray  
 wouldn't be shooting off his big  
 fat mouth if he didn't have someone  
 with a bead on us.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 You right about that, you cheap  
 pug.

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 Calm down, Ray! I know Harding. We  
 won't always be standing here in  
 this warehouse with backup. He  
 killed Ishmael Ali last night.  
 Don't you read the papers?

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 (Looks startled)  
 What? How come you ain't in jail,  
 Harding?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I was. Self defense. What say we  
 part now as business associates and  
 don't say anything else that might  
 get one or more of us killed?

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER  
 Go on, John. We'll call Tommy if  
 things cool off in the future.

Harding nods his understanding. He grabs up his equipment bag and pulls Tommy toward the exit. When they reach the door, Tommy hands Harding his windbreaker and draws his 9mm Beretta automatic. They get down the street without incident to where Tommy parked. Dennis and Tess are waiting near Tess's BMW a little further away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 You go ahead and split, T. How much  
 we take in tonight?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 It's the biggest payday yet, John,  
 nearly twenty-five grand.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Nice. Give me a little celebratin'  
 money, and I'll call you tomorrow  
 about our other gig.

Tommy fishes in his bag and hands John a fistful of hundreds and twenties.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 You be careful tonight. No more  
 executions, okay?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 You never used to be this touchy-  
 feely, T. Ali had to die. He was an  
 exception.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 I'm referrin' to Alexander. I can't  
 stand the sight of that turd but  
 two killin's in as many nights will  
 get you a one way ticket to Folsom.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Me and Ray are golden, T. We're  
 just like brothers.

Tommy laughs, takes John's equipment bag, and gets in his car.

Harding watches him drive away, before walking over to join Tess and Strobert. Strobert meets him halfway with a packet, without Tess.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

The equipment's in my trunk. The Jack London Inn will be our home base. You have a phone now. Keep it with you, John. I've already heard about your new recruits. I screened them. All good choices, and I like that new kid. Coupling him up with Samira will free you for a little side work on the guy in that folder. We'd like Mr. Claude Chardin to go away. He's a pro in the Carlos the Jackal stature. A few of our guys died getting the info in that packet. He'll be behind anything you hear concerning attempts on Ms. Karim.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

What makes you think they won't blow Samira up with one of those religion of peace suicide bombers. They're shoving explosives up their ass and in their boobs now. Unless she's touring in an explosives proof bubble, why get an international assassin.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

He'll use Samira as a cover. We have intel he's in the country. We don't know who he's been sent after. Chatter has it he's linking up to the Fremont cell we told you about, possibly to trigger a much larger attack than crashing an airliner. Chardin has a multitude of aliases. He was born in Morocco of a French mother and Saudi father. Everything we know about him is on the disc inside the folder, including the only picture we have of him. Use the software we've given you to make up a few images of what he might look like in disguise. I threw in a bunch of networked Blackberries for your crew.



JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 It's nice of Samira to volunteer as  
 bait for all these developments. I  
 take it you have the sites you want  
 checked out in the packet?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 This tour is her idea, John. I have  
 Casey and Lucas ready to back your  
 play on anything. They'll be at our  
 building Z most times until this  
 ends. I'll stop over early to talk  
 with Kensington at your house in  
 the morning. Bring him along to the  
 Jack London Inn tomorrow night for  
 a meet and greet with Samira.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Nods and smiles)  
 I thought you were under orders to  
 shut down our local interrogation  
 spot. You mean me, Lucas, and Casey  
 are back in the interrogation  
 business?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 You know how it is, John. Our  
 fearless leaders are shocked...  
 shocked I tell you, at what we have  
 to do. We deal, they squeal. We'll  
 talk more in a minute. I'm afraid  
 Ms. Connagher has some bad news for  
 you. I'll be by my car.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Grimaces as he looks  
 toward Tess.)  
 She wised up, huh?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 (Turns toward his car)  
 You might say that.

Harding walks over toward Tess. She leans against her car  
 with head down until John gets next to her. Tess meets John's  
 questioning look with a determined set to her features.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 What's up, Tess?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER  
 You're right. I'm not cut out for  
 this stuff.  
 (MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)

I took a job offer back East - a partnership in my old law firm. My Mom's going with me. That Russian mobster thing was the last straw for me. My Mom and I are leaving in the morning. We'll have Lora send our things later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

My business proposition really didn't involve the government.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Shakes her head)

Doesn't matter. You're too damn dangerous to be around, and my present law firm won't be dumping their government connection. This New York offer is too good to pass up. Why don't you come with me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grins)

I'd just bring trouble with me. Good luck, Tess. Have a safe trip East.

Tess gives Harding a quick hug, and slips into the driver's seat of her BMW. Harding watches her drive away before joining Strobert by his car. Strobert hands him a miniature satellite phone.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Sorry about that, John. Keep this with you. Get in. I'll give you a lift. Your phone already has all of Chardin's looks on it as do the Blackberries.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm going to The Warehouse Bar, and kill the taste of Rankin's blood. I'll hang onto the phone. You drop the gear off at the house tomorrow. Don't scare away my recruit.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Get in.

DISSOLVE TO: THE  
WAREHOUSE BAR IN  
OAKLAND

I/E. THE WAREHOUSE BAR, A FAMOUS POLICE BAR IN OAKLAND, CA - NIGHT

Harding walks into the bar area, waving to a few police friends, and acknowledging congratulations.

CAMERA SHOWS ALL THE COP MEMORABILIA ON THE WALLS AND THE GAME ROOM OFF TO THE SIDE WHERE JOHN SEES ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ AND EARL TAYLOR PLAYING PINBALL. THEY GIVE HIM A SALUTE.

Harding continues on to the end of the bar that is closest to the rear exit. He sits down at the bar and smiles at the bartender that hurries over to him with Marla on her name-tag.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE  
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE  
What can I get you, Champ?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Two Bud's and two double shots of  
Jim Beam, Mar. Is it too late to  
get a big Nachos?

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE  
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE  
Not for you it ain't. I made five  
hundred on you tonight. I was  
sweatin' bullets until Earl and  
'Rique busted in to give me the  
news. They're back there playing  
pinball.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Yeah, I saw them. Looks like  
they're celebratin' too.

Marla nods, setting up two beers and two shots in front of Harding. He drains one shot, and then a beer. Marla replaces both.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE  
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE  
Feel better?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Chuckles)  
Bud and Beam kill the blood taste.  
The Nachos makes sure it doesn't  
come back.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE  
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE  
I'm cleaning up. Just yell if you  
want anything, Champ.

CAMERA PANS TO THE ENTRANCE WHERE LORA WALKS IN WEARING AN  
ANKLE LENGTH BLACK CASHMERE COAT.

Lora looks around, spots Harding, waves and smiles. She  
hurries over to the end of the bar and takes a seat next to  
him. John nods at her and polishes off another shot and beer.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
Hi, John. I heard you were  
celebrating your win in... let's  
see... Tess called it - fight club  
for idiots.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Yeah, where's Alice?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
Staying overnight with a friend. We  
already said our good-byes to Tess  
and Mom. Tess told me about why she  
took the job back East. I kind of  
twisted a lot out of her about you.  
They left the moment Tess returned  
from your fight.

John sips another shot while Marla spots his empties and  
replaces them.

MARIA TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S  
DAUGHTER  
Pace yourself, Champ.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Yes, Mommy.

Marla laughed, patted John's hand and went back to her  
cleaning.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
Well?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Well what? Believe what you want,  
Lora. You know everything so what  
is it you want from me? If you're  
dopey enough to start playing games  
with your daughter's life at risk,  
then keep shooting your mouth off.  
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

I suggest you forget everything  
your sister told you.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

You're wound a little tight... even  
with chugging what you're putting  
down. I don't want anything from  
you. I want a job application.  
Alice getting used in a Russian  
gangster's family scenario  
convinced me it doesn't matter what  
the hell I do, I can't protect her.  
Maybe I could learn how from you.

John stares at Lora. She doesn't blink or look away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

For conversation's sake, why not  
relocate to where your ex lives?  
What exactly do you think you'd be  
applying for, Lora?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

He lives in Arizona. I love the Bay  
Area weather. I'm not moving to  
that damn furnace. Tess probably  
never told you but I have a  
master's degree in psychology and-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Big whoop.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

And a BA degree in accounting. I  
also worked five years for a law  
firm in Boston as an intern during  
my college years. In addition to  
that I worked as an intern in  
Washington D.C. for a couple of  
years.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I have an associate who knows  
business. What the hell would I  
need with a bookkeeper?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

I don't look like an East Oakland  
leg-breaker. You need an attractive  
presence out front. I know what you  
do and I don't care.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
You know what Tess knows. Don't  
assume you know me. If you did,  
you'd be catching a ride East with  
her.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
(Giggles)  
I saw the looks she gave us when I  
hugged you in the school parking  
lot. I also felt your interest  
rising, too, by the way. I know you  
need a lawyer. My expertise is I am  
a great recruiter of good talent.  
You want an up and comer with skill  
and no clients. I'll find one for  
you and act as go between. I'll  
work for a third what you planned  
on giving Tess. The rest can be  
used for our law associate - one  
who knows our business comes first.  
In the meantime I'll start working  
on my own law degree. Tess doesn't  
blame you for what's happened.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
That's good because it was her own  
damn fault she ended up in danger.  
She had delusions of grandeur like  
I see dancing around in your eyes.  
The business proposition was not  
related directly to her involving  
herself in my government  
relationship. She did that all on  
her own. What is it you're actually  
auditioning for, Lora?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
I see you as a guy who knows how to  
make money. This new business  
venture of yours in a place like  
Oakland could make a lot of money.  
I'm not independently wealthy. I  
owe my Mom a small fortune and I  
just lost my job as a medical  
receptionist. Tess claims you do a  
lot of things that would scare the  
shit out of me. Is it possible to  
work for you without getting  
involved with your extracurricular  
government activities?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 That's the plan. Your verbal resume  
 is impressive, especially since  
 you've dealt with politicians and  
 lawyers. I'll go over what you said  
 tonight after I get a good night's  
 sleep, Lora. Give me your number  
 and I'll call you with what I  
 decide.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 Hey, are you dismissing me, Dark  
 Lord?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Dark Lord?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 Yeah, you know, like in the video  
 games with Darth Vader. If you blow  
 up enough stuff you get a Dark Lord  
 trophy. You sound like you're  
 giving me the imperial bum's rush  
 and you do look like what I'd  
 imagine the Dark Lord would look  
 like. I guess you don't play many  
 video games.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I've seen 'Star Wars' and I object  
 to being compared to Darth Vader.  
 I'm more of a Han Solo.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 More like Chewbacca.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (In bass, gravelly voice)  
 The Dark Lord takes no disrespect  
 from underlings! You will regret  
 insulting the Dark Lord!

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 (Laughs along with a few  
 people within earshot.)  
 For a guy who does what you do  
 you're pretty funny.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Remember the part about forgetting  
 what I do outside of the business  
 you're applying for?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 (Bows her head)  
 Yes, Dark Lord.

Lora patted Harding's hand where it wrapped around his beer.  
 Then she held on to it.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER (CONT'D)  
 Why don't you come over to my place  
 tonight? You can do your comedy act  
 for me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll call you.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 (Leans forward,  
 whispering)  
 Come home with me, John. I'll turn  
 your world inside out. No one's  
 laid a hand on me since my husband  
 dumped me for that teenage bimbo  
 he's living with in Arizona.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Wow.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 Don't make me beg, Dark Lord. I've  
 wanted you since the school parking  
 lot. I knew Tess would be too  
 stupid to hold onto you with both  
 hands. No strings attached. I'll  
 even sing 'Angel of the Morning'  
 tomorrow when you leave me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Just touch your cheek before I  
 leave you, huh?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 You betcha'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Okay, maybe I am that easy. You'll  
 be gentle, right?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
 (Laughs delightedly,  
 pulling on John's hand)  
 C'mon, I'll show you.



John put two hundred dollar bills down on the bar, even though Marla rushed over to protest, keeping them clamped there.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Tip. Good-night, Marla.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE  
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE  
Thanks, Champ.

Harding leads the way out the exit behind them. Three figures rush at them from the shadows. Harding runs at them. His right hook flattens the man on his left. Without pause, John pivots and launches a low sweeping roundhouse kick that buckles the knee of the man trying to move on him to his right. The attacker screams, falling on his side as Lora retreats to the building's wall. The stunned man in the center fumbles inside his jacket. Harding head butts him square in the face, following him to the ground and ripping the 9mm automatic out of the writhing man's coat. Lora gasps as John moves quickly over and pistol whips the man he hit first, who was getting up to his knees before searching him for weapons. He finds another automatic which he stuffs in his waistband. Harding then moved to the man screaming on the ground still clutching his gruesomely bent leg. John disarms him of another pistol.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
Sho...should I go in and get help,  
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
No, stay where you are. I recognize  
this clown with the facial.

Straightening, Harding kicks the man with the busted leg.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Quiet down, Princess, or I'll do  
your other leg.

The man looks up in horror at Harding and clamps his mouth and eyes tightly shut in pain. John then kicks the man in the center.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Get up, Timmy. I want to hear what  
the hell you think you were doing  
out here tonight. I bet Alexi  
doesn't know about it.

Fialkov's son-in-law rolls awkwardly to his side, blood pouring from his shattered nose, and then to his knees.

After he's standing, covering his face, John goes through his pockets. He finds a cell-phone. Checking the phone, John smiles. He scrolls to a number and presses enter, lifting the phone up to his ear as he covers the three men.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

Yes?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Hi, Alexi. This is John Harding.  
I'm at The Warehouse Bar in  
Oakland. I have Timmy and two of  
your men here. Tell me you didn't  
send them.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER  
Never would I have done such a  
thing, John. Have you killed them?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
No, but you'll need to send a van  
and some men to collect them.  
They'll live.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER  
I come now. Fifteen minutes. Thank  
you.

John backs to where Lora is huddled against the wall without taking his eyes off the men in front of him.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
It's Alexi Fiialkov's son-in-law,  
the father of Alice's schoolmate  
enemy. Still want in on my  
business?

Lora puts her arms around John's waist, her face against his back.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER  
More than ever.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Pats her hands clasped  
around his chest)  
That's the spirit.

CUT TO: VAN  
PARKED RUNNING

IN THE STREET  
WITH FIIALKOV  
TALKING TO  
HARDING

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WAREHOUSE BAR IN OAKLAND - NIGHT

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I am in your debt, John. No one will ever approach you again from my people. You were offered a deal by the promoters. Thank you for not taking it. I wish to take over the fight action here. My son-in-law lost much when you beat Rankin tonight. I found out he has been plotting with the promoters behind my back.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Smiles)

You had a bug at our meeting, huh? Did you plan on leveraging proof of their play with the fight crowd to take over?

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I thought to cover both ends as always. Tim never thought you could beat Rankin. If my daughter and granddaughter did not love him, he would be part of a new parking lot. I have ears everywhere, and I know you have special problems moving into the area. You are not the pug people think. I will provide information necessary to protect our area of the world and your client. I do not wish my investment blown up here by these barbarians.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Interesting, Alexi. We would be grateful for anything you could provide. The school thing was cute. What was Timmy's plan for me tonight?

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND  
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

The dolt thought to threaten your  
friend's life to acquire your  
agreement to the deal made to you  
earlier. I will make this right.

Fiaalakov drove away with a wave as John watched. Only then  
did Lora join him from where she had been waiting at the  
wall.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

Did he use his granddaughter to  
somehow intimidate you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Either he did or Timmy. They must  
have seen Tess and I together after  
a couple of my fights. The Russians  
are taking over the fight game  
around here.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

(Tugs on John's hand.)

Come with me before you change your  
mind. I want you inside me so bad,  
I'm dribbling down my leg.

CUT TO: INSIDE  
JOHN HARDING'S  
HOUSE

INT. HARDING'S HOUSE IN OAKLAND - DAY

FOCUS ON JAFAR AT HARDING'S KITCHEN TABLE DRINKING COFFEE  
WHILE WORKING ON HIS LAPTOP. HE LOOKS UP WHEN HE HEARS THE  
FRONT DOOR OPEN. CAMERA PANS TO KITCHEN ENTRANCE-WAY AS  
HARDING WALKS IN.

Harding walks into the kitchen with a slight wave.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Did you get my message about my not  
coming home?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

(Nods)

I have been reviewing your fights  
on YouTube. They even have the one  
where you killed the guy. It has  
nearly a million hits.

(MORE)

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
The new Rankin one is increasing by  
the thousands every hour. You are  
very popular.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Wonderful. I should have been  
keeping an eye on that stuff.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT  
Mr. Strobert came over very early  
and talked with me this morning. He  
brought over papers for me to fill  
out, and explained many facets of  
what is done in the role I would be  
working in. He told me he recruited  
you in Afghanistan when you were  
about my age.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Sits down with his own  
cup of coffee)  
Yeah, Denny and I go back a ways. I  
want you in with me on my private  
enterprise too. You'll be  
introduced in slowly. If something  
doesn't feel right with you, let me  
know. I'm on a three man team with  
a couple guys. We could use a new  
face with computer savvy in the  
field, especially with your  
language skills.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT  
Mr. Strobert said you can teach me  
many things about prepping for a  
mission where we have to outthink  
people like the ones after the  
Karim woman.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Unfortunately, we have to throw you  
in the deep end. Your main job is  
to be a companion, and keep your  
eyes open. You're training for a  
support role.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT  
I am grateful for this opportunity.  
I don't want to let you down.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Laughs)

You'll be fine. Did Denny drop off  
my packet and gear?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

(Grins)

Yes, but he was a bit uneasy doing  
it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Denny trusts no one. It's in his  
DNA. He must like you.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

He saw my laptop open with your  
YouTube fights. He knows about  
them, and told me he has some plans  
to talk over with you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Sighs)

Figures. Go ahead and take my car  
to school. The keys are on the hook  
by the door.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

It would be much nicer if you  
acquired a more James Bond type  
vehicle.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Apparently the word clandestine  
isn't in your vocabulary, kid.

CUT TO: HARDING  
SITTING ON HIS  
FRONT STEP  
SIPPING COFFEE

I/E. HARDING'S HOUSE IN OAKLAND - DAY

CAMERA FOCUS ON HARDING AND HIS ATTENTION DRAWN TO A NEIGHBOR  
LADY TWO HOUSES DOWN APPROACHING RAPIDLY.

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR

Hi John, I saw your fight with the  
Russian bear on YouTube.

(MORE)

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR  
I thought he crushed you when you  
went down under him.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
He compressed me a little, Lucy.  
How's the twins?

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR  
Real fine. They start school next  
year, thank the Lord. I need your  
take on something. That no account  
thug, Terry Nelson is at the  
McBride house down the street. I  
went to school with that piece of  
crap. I'm worried about Darin. My  
twins said they saw Nelson take  
Darin inside the house about twenty  
minutes ago. His Mom's workin' and  
he's supposed to be in school.

John stood up quickly, putting his coffee cup aside.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Darin's a good kid. You're right.  
There's no reason for Nelson to be  
there. Go back inside, Lucy, and  
keep the kids inside until I sort  
this out.

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR  
(Pats Harding's arm)  
Thanks, John. The whole  
neighborhood knows it's because of  
you the 'bangers stay the hell  
away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Grins)  
You know the old saying, if someone  
wants to place a bomb in your  
house, put one in his first.

Lucy Sparks cracks up while walking away, nodding her head.

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR  
You alright, John! I'll keep the  
kids inside. Anybody ask me about  
'dat rat Nelson, I tell them  
nothin'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Mumbles to himself)  
Let's see what you're up to now,  
Terry.

Harding walks down to the McBride house, noticing the tricked out old Cadillac Eldorado parked in front. He went to the front door, standing off to the side, and knocked. Ten year old Darin McBride answered the door. Harding makes a quieting gesture, pulling the shocked Darin outside behind him. It took only twenty seconds before Nelson walked to the door. Harding's right fist smashes into Nelson's solar plexus with devastating effect. Nelson catapults backwards to the floor, writhing breathlessly on the floor.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
C'mon inside and tell me what this  
is all about, Darin.

Darin scoots in past Harding, avoiding the gasping Nelson. Harding closes the door and drags Nelson further inside by the scruff of his neck.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Do you have any duct tape around?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
Yeah, John. I get it for you.

Darin goes into another room and returns with a half used roll of gray duct tape. Harding duct tapes Nelson's mouth, his hands behind his back, and his ankles. When he finishes, he turns to put an arm around Darin's shoulders.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Your Mom's a good woman, D. What  
the hell you letting this scumbag  
in your house for, and skipping  
school?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
You know how it is. Nelson up with  
the 'bangers. When I go along, I  
don't get schooled.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Nods)  
Okay... what's he want from you  
today?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
He brought over a backpack he wants  
me to deliver to somebody at the  
Jack London Inn. Nelson say nobody  
mess with me 'cause of my age.



CAMERA SHOWS HARDING'S LOOK OF SURPRISE AND THEN PANS TO NELSON, WHO IS STARING UP AT HARDING WIDE EYED.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Where's the backpack, D?

CAMERA PANS TO WHERE DARIN POINTS IN THE KITCHEN, ONE ROOM OVER FROM THE ENTRYWAY WHERE A BLUE BACKPACK WITH A YELLOW SMILEY FACE LEANS AGAINST THE WALL.

Harding gestures for Darin to stay still. He walks over to the bag, which has a silicone seal across the zippered top. Harding takes a knife out, slits the silicone seal in a line. He unzips it and sees a pulsating light inside a Styrofoam nest.

CAMERA SHOWS THE BUNDLED C4 EXPLOSIVES WITH ATTACHED TRIGGERING MECHANISM.

Harding zips the pack again, noticing for the first time Darin staring over his shoulder. Darin stumbles backward.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
That... that's a bomb. He... he-

John grabs the boy by the shoulders, smiling into his face as he crouches at his level.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Here's what we do, kid. I'm going to take the pack and Nelson somewhere special I know about. You will be out of this. All you need do is find me an old tarp or sheet to wrap nitwit Nelson in... okay?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
But John... what about when Nelson... oh... he ain't comin' back, huh?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Glances over at Nelson)  
No. Nelson's going away. You don't give that any thought.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
I know just what you need to wrap Nelson.

Darin runs off into the attached garage and comes back with an old, dust covered bed spread. Harding has Nelson's keys in hand.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Perfect.

John rolls Nelson into the bed cover, duct taping it into place. He straightens from the task and shows Darin his satellite phone.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
Have you seen this guy before? I'm showing you different looks that may be the way he appears now.

Darin peers at the phone screen as Harding slowly shows him different looks. Darin points excitedly at the third photo.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
I saw that guy with Nelson. We was outside the store over on 38th and Penniman. A black van stopped across the street. Nelson ran over and jawed at that guy.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Good. Think D. What kind of van?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
Ford... ah... Edge. Yeah... a Ford Edge.

Harding stands up, squeezing the boy's shoulder reassuringly. He then goes over and shoulders Nelson up effortlessly.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Stay inside today, D. If any of Nelson's 'bangers call, you tell them you haven't seen Nelson and you're waiting for his call.

Darin hugs Harding, who pats his shoulder.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
BOY  
Thanks, John. I... I'm sorry about-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Never mind all that, D. I know how it is.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 When I get clear of my crap with  
 Nelson, I'll make things better  
 around here. Talk to no one.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR  
 BOY  
 (Grins)  
 If it get bad, I'll cry.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Chuckles)  
 That'll work.

John carries Nelson out to the Cadillac trunk, opens it, and  
 heaves Nelson inside. He then gets into the driver's seat.  
 Harding takes out his satellite phone, and connects with  
 Strobert.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Strobert.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 New development. I'll let you in on  
 it if we can agree on the  
 conclusion.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Let's hear it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Gang-banger, Chardin, IED. We meet  
 somewhere quiet for a discussion  
 and then the gang-banger moves on  
 to the happy hunting ground. If  
 you're not pleased with the  
 conclusion say so now and you get  
 nothin'.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 You must think I've turned into a  
 pussy in my old age, Harding. Lucas  
 and Casey are at building Z now.  
 I'll meet you there... okay?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Sounds good. See you then. I'll  
 take my present over now after I  
 alter it slightly.

CUT TO: BUILDING  
 Z, A WAREHOUSE  
 COMPLEX IN SAN  
 LEANDRO, OWNED  
 BY CIA

INT. BUILDING Z, SAN LEANDRO WAREHOUSE COMPLEX - DAY

Lucas Blake waves at Harding as John drives Nelson's Cad into Building Z. Blake closes the overhead door and locks it. Casey Lambert comes over to shake hands with Harding as he emerges from the Cad.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
LANKY TEXAN

Hey Gunny, how's business? Lucas  
here says you called Denny a pussy.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grins)

I may have been a little  
overzealous about making sure Denny  
understood my guest in the trunk  
won't be returning anywhere outside  
the building other than a landfill.  
Denny may have taken offense to  
that.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Walks up from the back)

Damn right I did, meat. You're  
late. I scrambled my buddies here  
special for you. I hope it's worth  
it.

Harding walks around to the Cad trunk and opens it.

CAMERA FOCUSES ON TRUNK'S CONTENTS

Nelson squirms in the trunk. Harding picks him up and pitches him to the warehouse floor. Sweat poured off Terry's face. Harding rips the duct tape off his mouth taking skin with it. Nelson yelps, before going into a nonstop rant about brutality, black men, Rodney King, and defaming Harding's lineage back to the dawn of time. Lucas drop kicks him in the face and looks at Harding with his stern rebuke face.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
LANKY TEXAN

What'd you shut him up for, Lucas?  
Damn... he was just getting funny.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

Why didn't you warm this sucker up,  
John? We'll have to spend at least  
fifteen minutes in preliminaries.

Harding hands Strobert the backpack from the trunk.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Sorry guys, but I didn't have a choice. Nelson here recruited a ten-year-old neighbor boy to strap this Chardin made bomb pack. The boy was to walk in Jack London Inn and get close to Samira Karim's room. The boy even knew the room number.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 Holy shit! Get him on the table. We don't know how much time we have. Were you able to bypass the trigger, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Shakes his head)  
 What'd you think, Denny, I'd haul a live bomb in here? When he checks, Chardin will get a live signal but that's all.

CUT TO:  
 INTERROGATION  
 ROOM INSIDE  
 BUILDING Z

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM, BUILDING Z - DAY

SURROUNDINGS SEEN THROUGH NELSON'S EYES AS HE COMES TO.

Nelson's eyes widen as he realizes he is restrained to a gurney in a plastic draped room with four figures looming over him in surgical type cover gear. He recognizes Harding.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
 Har... Harding? What... what's goin' on?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 This is Terry Nelson. He's a cheap gang-bangin' thug. I've picked up shells on the beach with more brains. He outdid himself this time.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 You mixed with the wrong guy. Now, you're going to tell us everything about Claude Chardin. In case you don't know his name, he's the one that gave you the explosive pack.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
Man... I don't know shit about-

Casey cut Nelson's cheek with a scalpel in a slow deliberate shallow slice from his chin to eye. Nelson's squeal ended in a sobbing, guttural whine.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Look Nelson, you were going to outfit a ten-year-old boy with a bomb to blow up God knows how many innocent people. You ain't ever leavin' this place alive. My associates will get everything you know. How you draw your last breath is in your hands right now. Tell us everything you know about Chardin and this gig at Jack London and you can go out with a smile on your face.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
(Shows Nelson a hypodermic needle)  
This is a wonderland hotshot, Mr. Nelson. Do as John suggests and you get it. Play dumb and in an hour you will be begging us to hear every detail.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER  
Okay... okay... I know the guy. He... he said I'd make twenty thousand if I could get the kid up by the room. Dude didn't tell me why. He gave me ten thou' up front and told me what he wanted done. There... there's a cell-phone in a panel under my driver's seat. He only contact me twice. Honest, that's-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Shut up! I'll be right back. Better start prayin' Terry. If that cell-phone ain't there with all you say I'm going to make you wish you were never born.

Harding returns with Nelson's phone. Strobert hooks it to a laptop already set up in the room. Minutes later Strobert gets up with his features betraying his excitement, and his clenched fists alluding to a controlled rage.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 We've got him. They triangulated  
 the signal to a boat at the San  
 Leandro Marina with Pakistani  
 papers. We have to move before he  
 suspects we're onto him. I found a  
 phone number that explains how  
 Chardin got this close. We'll deal  
 with that later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 It's Reddig, Denny. Tell it  
 straight.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 (Swipes the air with his  
 hand.)  
 Later, John. Let's go get Chardin.  
 We'll settle all other accounts  
 later. I have an idea how to  
 approach the boat, but we'll need  
 the kid to lead us in. Do you think  
 he's up to the mark, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll ask him. First I need to  
 fulfill my word to this asshole.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 You guys put on the EMT outfits.  
 We're taking the wagon over to the  
 marina and rescue poor old Claude  
 Chardin. I'll stick Tweety-Bird,  
 and pull the war wagon around  
 front.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
 5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA  
 C'mon, John. Let's suit up. What'll  
 it be for making the world safe?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 9mm Taurus with AWC Abraxas  
 silencers, and of course our  
 military grade flash-bangs.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
 LANKY TEXAN  
 (Chuckles)  
 We only have one type flash-bang,  
 and it ain't those pussy civilian  
 crowd pleasers. Let's do this.

CUT TO: INSIDE  
MADE UP  
EMERGENCY  
MEDICAL VAN AT  
SAN LEANDRO  
MARINA

I/E. SAN LEANDRO MARINA AND CHARDIN'S CRUISER - DAY

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
You lead us down the pier with our  
gurney, calling out the name of  
Alda Jameson. She's part owner of  
the boat next to Chardin's. We want  
you to run up Chardin's gangplank  
with me right behind you. Someone  
comes out to see what's going on.  
You hit the deck and stay there.  
Clear?

Jafar stared at Harding without blinking until Lucas patted  
his shoulder.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA  
Step up. We need a hero, kid.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT  
Great, where do we find him?  
General laughter at Jafar's remark.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT (CONT'D)  
It is clear. I will do it, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Take us in, Denny!

With sirens blaring, Strobert screeched the fake EMT van to a  
halt in front of the pier leading to Chardin's Bertram  
Cruiser. The team exited in full EMT uniforms and caps. Casey  
raced ahead to the locked gateway, picking it open in seconds  
before holding it open for his teammates with Jafar leading.  
Jafar yelled out the name of Alda Jameson down the pier and  
onto the fantail of Chardin's cruiser. Harding worked the  
gurney onto the fantail decking with Lucas and Casey carrying  
medical shoulder bags. A short dark, clean shaven man in a  
brown suit came through the back hatch waving angrily at  
Jafar and shouting at him in heavily accented English.

Jafar hit the deck as Harding shot the man, and tossed two  
flash-bangs into the boat interior.



The team donned gas masks as the resulting explosions elicited screams. They secured the main deck through the smoky haze and chucked a couple more flash-bangs down into the lower ship area through the hatch. Casey and Harding secured the three guys writhing on the floor with blood coming out of their ears and nose while Lucas dragged the dead greeter inside. Casey and Lucas made sure the upper deck was secure before the Casey and Harding secured the six staterooms with Lucas watching the lower level access. Automatic weapons fire tore through the master stateroom's door as Harding kicks it in. He throws another flash-bang while diving out of the way.

They found Chardin trying to pick up the Uzi he'd dropped, his face twisted in agony as he fought to overcome the stun grenade. Harding kicked him in the temple, plastic tied his wrists, and slit both his Achilles Tendons. He then checked his dental work for any suspicious caps that he could bite down on and avoid interrogation with. Harding duct tapes Chardin to a chair in the room after tightly wrapping the assassin's Achilles Tendon slices.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
LANKY TEXAN

You didn't trust the hypo we brought to keep him subdued, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'd just worry about him, Case.  
Now... I ain't worried.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
LANKY TEXAN

Works for me. It's less blood than blowing his kneecap off. We need to cap him after the questions though. He'd hold a grudge you crippled him otherwise, and come lookin' for payback some day when a suit let him escape.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

My thoughts exactly. Let's go help Lucas do the lower deck and get this ship runnin' for the horizon before somebody thinks that wasn't fireworks.

When Casey and Harding get back to the lower deck access, Lucas throws another stun grenade further into the lower deck area, provoking more screams. Masks still in place, they found five more crew members, two of them dead from ruptured blood vessels.

After securing the lower deck, they bring Jafar back in. Lucas takes the boat out to sea while Casey sweeps the boat for tracking devices, and Harding begins prepping Chardin for interrogation. Jafar stays on the main deck.

CUT TO: MAIN  
 STATEROOM WHERE  
 CHARDIN IS BOUND  
 TO A CHAIR

Chardin's eyes watched Harding, dead dark orbs without expression or light. He waited while Harding checks the makeshift bandages binding his tendons before positioning a chair in front of him and sitting down. Harding then activates the video recorder aimed at Chardin.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 You've probably assumed recruiting that dirt-bag Nelson for an unwilling suicide bombing didn't go well. Want to discuss the details?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
 Why did you maim me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 Professional courtesy.

Watches Chardin clamp down on the pain and rage.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)  
 Maybe you should have put your Uzi into your pie hole instead of pointing it at the doorway when we came through. Hope is a risky business. When dealing with the public persona of America our enemies think we're pussies. You're duct taped to a chair with your Achilles Tendons slashed because of an error in judgment. You don't care about anything. Tell us everything and avoid some pain.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
 I have diplomatic immunity. I wish to negotiate for my release. I know of you, John Harding. I know how you think.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Laughs)  
 No you don't. If you did, you'd be begging to tell me everything.

CAMERA SWITCHES TO STATEROOM DOOR WHERE LUCAS ENTERS

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA  
Look what I found in Claude's  
personal tablet up on the bridge.

SHOWS CHARDIN'S MOMENTARY SHOCK THEN PANS TO THE DIGITAL  
TABLET LUCAS SHOWS HARDING OF A WOMAN AND COLLEGE AGE GIRL  
WITH CHARDIN.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Well... a college age daughter.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA  
I flashed the picture to Denny. He  
says she attends Vassar. You must  
be very proud. Claude here never  
figured on ever coming close to  
getting caught, John. Otherwise,  
he'd never have left a trace like  
this for us to find. Think he'll  
keep silent now?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
How about it, Claude? Want to avoid  
mixing business and family?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
I know you will not torture a  
child.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA  
Why hell no we wouldn't torture a  
child, Mr. Chardin. We now know  
your college kid and her Mom. If  
such information should somehow...  
you know... get leaked to the wrong  
people it would be a real tragedy.  
Right, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
You betcha'.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
You would sign the death warrant  
for an innocent woman and child?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 You did that. We're giving you a way to keep them safe, while making up for being a cold blooded, soulless monster, responsible for probably hundreds of deaths, directly or indirectly. Start talking now. Me and Lucas give you our word no one will find out about your wife and daughter. We'll also make sure they get some of your ill gotten gains.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
 (Spits on the floor)  
 Your word means nothing.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
 5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA  
 John and I are Marines. Our word means everything. We don't strap bombs onto children and blow them up in crowded places so as to kill untold numbers of innocents. If John says your wife and kid will be safe, make book on it. We'd kill our boss if he ever broke our word and he knows it.

Lucas held the picture of his daughter in front of him again. Chardin cared nothing for anything else living. He nodded.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
 It will be as you say. When I stated that I know you, Harding, it was not a cheap ploy. I have something only I can provide alive. It is not something you can torture out of me. That information I will give you first. Will you then listen to my other offer?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 I'll listen, but I don't like your chances, Claude.

By the time Strobert arrives, Chardin has listed everything he knows about the forming of terrorist cells, his Iranian backers, and the fact Karim was a bombing for distraction. Strobert looks up from skimming over the digital transcript as Chardin finishes.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF  
 What do you mean by distraction?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

If non Muslim blacks were involved in a suicide bombing it would have put everything in a state of chaos for at least a few months. I picked that idiot Nelson's crew because they were into everything but religion, and money was their God. Your authorities would have wasted precious time investigating the blacks, leaving the real threat to grow like wildfire.

CAMERA SHOWS THE SILENT FURY CHARDIN'S RECITATION PROVOKES IN THE THREE MEN SEATED AROUND HIM.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You said you had something special. Now's the time.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

Dubai will host a UFC event next April. Ahmed Quadir will be there to assassinate one of the Saudi royal family in attendance.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

So what? Another terrorist backer bites the big one. I'll pass it along. Thanks.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

Harding knows what.

CAMERA SHOWS HARDING GET UP OUT OF HIS CHAIR, FISTS CLENCHED.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL

LANKY TEXAN

What's up, John? You know this Quadir guy?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

He's the one they sent after the Karim family when me and a few other company recruits were guarding them in Afghanistan. He caught Stan Donnelly down in the village, tortured and gutted him. We lucked out and a Warthog was in the area when Quadir's men attacked. It wiped them out, but not Quadir.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

Our embassy in Saudi Arabia got a video of Stan's torture/execution a few days later. You must know Quadir, huh Claude?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

(Nods)

Very well. He underbid me for the Dubai hit, which is why I know of it. I will identify him for you in exchange for my life.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

That ain't happenin'. John here maimed you. We all know what you can do, ass-hole. You die the moment we check your info and your family lives protected. That's the agreement.

CAMERA SHOWS STROBERT WATCHING HARDING WITH A SLIGHT SMILE.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

What about it, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Can you fix this mook up by April, Denny?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Yep. He won't be good as new, but he'll be mobile. I'm thinking we send you, Casey, and Lucas in early through Saudi Arabia backroads with Bambi here as your guide a couple weeks before the fight. Claude ID's the mark. You guys chill him, and John meets his fight team at the airport for a UFC bout if I can make a little side deal with Alexi. I recruited Stan.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,  
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

If John's in, I'm in.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
LANKY TEXAN

(Leans into Chardin's  
face)

(MORE)

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL  
Anything happens to John, me and  
Lucas will carve you and your  
family up and feed you all to the  
pigs. You feel me, Ace?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN  
(Meets Casey's stare  
unblinkingly)  
I am done. If I may live to be a  
part of my daughter's life for a  
while, I will be the most valuable  
asset you have ever had.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
I'm in. Let's do this.

CUT TO: DUBAI,  
UAE

I/E. OUTSIDE CIA SAFE-HOUSE AND DUBAI HILTON - DAY

Harding, Blake, Lambert, and Chardin arrived at the Dubai CIA safe-house, all with beards, sun darkened skin, and Arab dress from their circuitous route through Saudi Arabia. Chardin was rail thin, and walked with metal canes. They changed to clothing already placed in advance. A limousine drops them off at the Hilton Dubai Creek Hotel. The rooms booked were adjacent to Quadir's reservation for two rooms so that no matter which one he slept in, Harding's team would have a room next door. They spoke nothing but Arabic while checking in sporting clean Arab dress, matching their Saudi passport identities.

Strobert's CIA assets working at the Hilton smoothed the way so when Quadir and his men checked in Lucas and Chardin were there. Recognizing Quadir, Chardin snapped a picture and sent it up to Harding's room. Casey stayed out in the hallway as if waiting impatiently for some sort of service after studying the picture Chardin had relayed to the room. Dressed in full flowing robes and his skin darkened, Casey could not be recognized even if Quadir knew who to look for. He exchanges Arabic greetings with Quadir and his crew as the former entered the room to Casey's left with one of his associates, while the other two entered the room on his right.

The team had already drilled tiny holes at floor level nearest where the night-stand stood next to the bed in either room. The tank with knockout gas had been brought up by Chardin, who pretended it to be an oxygen tank he had tubes from to his nose.

No one questioned it because of his already frail condition and canes. Quadir and his crew partied hard until three in the morning, gambling and drinking. Luckily, they had too much to drink, deciding to return to their rooms without company. Harding waited until only the sounds of sleep came from the audio pickup they had pointed at Quadir's room. An hour of the gas and it was show-time.

With a key-card for Quadir's room, Harding went in low and silent, avoiding security cameras already mapped out prior to their arrival. Harding slipped on a gas mask and checked the Iranian bodyguard before advancing on Quadir. He pulls up the bedclothes near his feet. Watching him carefully, John pulls Quadir's left foot over clear of the bed and covers. He injects the death syringe into a spot between Quadir's toes, keeping pressure on the spot until the heart no longer pumped blood. After positioning the foot back under the covers, Harding opens the sliding door leading to an outside veranda. He waits until the electronic sensor he has tests okay for the clearing air, before closing the veranda door and exiting the room.

Staying inside their rooms for the next day, the team waited through the harried noise and confusion when the guard figured out no amount of shaking would bring Quadir back from hell. Shortly after the body was removed the Iranian guards left. As Chardin had figured Quadir played his contracts close to the vest. His men had no idea who the target was or who to contact for information. They had none of the money collected for the hit. Without the man responsible for planning, the guards realized they were out of options and left.

The team checked out a day after they left, returning to the safe-house where Harding donned western clothes and shaved his beard. The others kept their disguises and left the way they had come, after Strobert confirmed the authorities ruled Quadir's death by natural causes. Harding received flight times for meeting his corner crew coming in the next day for the fight.

CUT TO: WEIGH IN  
FOR THE UFC  
FIGHT WITH  
RANKIN AND  
HARDING FACED  
OFF FOR THE  
CAMERAS

INT. DUBAI FIGHT ARENA - DAY



CAMERA SHOWS HARDING AND RANKIN POSED FOR PHOTOS, WITH TOMMY, JAFAR, JESSE, AND DEVON NEAR HARDING.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
 (Smiles)  
 How's the nose, Van?

Harding turns quickly, jumping around with his hands up in the air while Rankin's trainers held on to him for dear life. Harding's crew walled him off from Rankin until the officials stepped in to end Harding's ploy.

CAMERA PANS TO WHERE ALEXI FIIALKOV IS SITTING NEAR THE FRONT. HE SMILES AT HARDING AND SHAKES A CAUTIONARY FINGER AT HIM. HARDING WAVES BACK.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 I saw some of the big names in UFC checking Rankin out and I saw fear. Did you have to poke the bear, John... really?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
 Jess and I haven't been in the sand for quite a while. We had mixed feelings about flyin' into this area. Now this?

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
 Yeah, John. You'll owe us some weekends on your new yacht. Step up and let a brother cruise. What's he call that thing, T?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
 The Ungrateful White Bread, I think.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT  
 (Chuckles)  
 That prick looks like Godzilla. I was startin' to feel good about your chances after working with you the last few days until I saw Rankin up close. Damn! He brushed against me near the scale and tore my shirt and bruised the skin. Now you went and made him mad. Are you mental?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

(Laughs)

Might as well do the Dark Lord for him in the cage, you psycho. If you're lucky, you'll survive with a colostomy bag and breathing through a tube. If you don't survive where do you want your ashes scattered?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's all in the plan, guys. I appreciate the confidence you all have in me. Hey, Jafar, you're pretty quiet.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

(Holds his hand up to his face in a classic shun.)

You are dead to me.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Don't mind the kid, John. He's been in love with the Karim girl ever since our escort gig. I'm pretty sure she was in love with him too. He won't say it, but he wants you to take him to the base in Saudi Arabia to ask her Dad for his blessing.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grins at Jafar)

What's in it for me?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

I will watch out for Alice any time you and Lora want to be alone.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Deal.

FADE TO: OCTAGON  
CAGE INSIDE THE  
DUBAI FIGHT  
ARENA

INT. DUBAI FIGHT ARENA - NIGHT

Rankin and Harding are on the bottom of the fight card as two nobodies in UFC deserve. They fought first. The arena is filled to capacity without an empty seat.

Harding enters the cage to the playing of the Marine's Hymn. Many in the crowd roared in appreciation. Once inside the cage Harding loosens up with his crew near him.

Rankin picked Black Sabbath's 'I Am Ironman'. Rankin stomps down the aisle toward the cage with every beat, his fists hammering forward in rhythm. Timed perfectly, Rankin stalked into the cage at Black Sabbath's declaration 'I Am Ironman'.

CAMERA SHOWS HARDING ENJOYING RANKIN'S ENTRANCE AND TURNING TOWARD TOMMY. THEN IT PANS TO THE CROWD WHERE HARDING SPOTS LORA SITTING NEXT TO ALEXI FIIALKOV. SHOWS HARDING'S STUNNED LOOK. SHE'S DRESSED IN A BLACK, OFF THE SHOULDER DRESS, BLACK HEELS, AND RED HAIR TIED BACK AT THE NECK. HE WAVES LIKE A THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD AT HIS FIRST DANCE.

Seeing the Rankin fight plans temporarily leaving the building. Tommy slaps Harding in the back of the head with attitude. He jams his face two inches away from John's in a rage.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Hello, Dark Lord? Get your fuckin' head in the game!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Voice over of Harding's thoughts in first person)

I saw Alexi give me a finger wave. Apparently, I wasn't the only one with a plan. When I turned to face Rankin he was pointing at Lora, blowing her kisses. The moment he knew I was watching, he turned and gave me the full death-ray eye stare. That's the trouble with cheap, no account, blowhard punks. They don't know it's best not to play with killers.

I closed my eyes. In a spit second my mind's eye had me standing in that Leavittsburg, Ohio hovel, watchin' Pa circlin' me with belt in hand while the rain pounded down outside. I could smell the Mahoning River slime that saturated the house. I could smell his rage. I smelled desperation. Oh mama, I'm home again. I opened my eyes. Rankin grinned.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

No matter how this turned out, I would make sure he wasn't grinning when it ended. The referee motioned us to the center. I have no idea what he said when Rankin and I stared into each other's eyes. I backed to my cage position when he stopped speaking. We didn't touch gloves.

Rankin moved forward in control. He shot out lightning bolts with both arms and feet. Harding blocked, bobbed, ducked, and measured for forty seconds. For all of that nearly first minute, Rankin tuned Harding up for the crowd's pleasure. When John's left leg strike smashed into the inside of his extended left knee, it wasn't nearly as pretty as Rankin's full bore attack, but it nearly put Rankin on the canvas. His eyes widened as he launched a flurry. A left hook caught Harding, and even pulling away from the punch couldn't keep him on his feet.

John flailed around as Rankin dove into full mount position on the attack. Harding absorbs the elbows, blocked a few, and managed a locked leg full guard. Rankin picks Harding up enough to slam him into the cage with his head down. Before Rankin can tie John up with his left and hammer fist him into oblivion, Harding slips his left leg out of locked full guard and around Rankin's right leg, while trapping his left wrist underneath, Harding rolled. Rankin couldn't stop being rolled but threw himself backwards to prevent the reversal. Both men leaped to their feet with the crowd roaring for blood. The buzzer sounds a moment later.

John's crew worked him over without comment until they staunched the flow of blood from the elbow lacerations on his head, washed off the mouth-guard, and cooled him with wet towels.

CAMERA SHOWING RANKIN MASSAGING HIS LEFT KNEE AND THEN HARDING'S SMILING REACTION.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

Nice knee shot, John. Can you smash it again?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
(Gulps a little water  
Jafar serves him)  
I'll get right on that, Jess,  
thanks.

Jesse chuckles but Harding gets a grim response from the rest of his crew.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
How's your plan workin', Ace?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Five by five, brother. Five by five.

John tries to turn with the purpose of catching a glimpse of Lora. Tommy administers another back of the head slap.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER  
You eyeball your woman one more time and I'll bitch slap you right in front of this whole fuckin' crowd!

Tommy jams Harding's mouthpiece back into place.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Ten-four, T.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY  
His left drops when he throws his right, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA  
Shit! Thanks, Dev.

Rankin clocks Harding with a right in the first few seconds of the second round and follows with a roundhouse left leg strike that cracks a rib. Rankin hears it and comes in with murder in his eyes. In a flash Harding is down in full guard blocking elbows. As Rankin draws back to strike, John smashes his rebuilt nose. Rankin immediately goes into a hug for a moment, avoiding further damage.

Harding immediately does double strikes under Rankin's rib cage until he pops out of the hug. Rankin's rebuilt nose takes an immediate right hand shot from Harding. Not figuring Harding quick enough to slip under and up quick enough, Rankin flinches back. Harding locks Rankin's right leg and rolls him, missing an arm bar by a split second. Harding keeps going to his feet. Rankin confidently throws leg strikes, targeting Harding's cracked rib, but another leg strike to Rankin's inside left knee nearly buckles it. Rankin throws the right when Harding feints another left leg strike. Rankin's left hand drops and Harding pops the rebuilt nose with a straight right hand. The new nose job gives and blood spatters down Rankin's front. When Rankin covers up, Harding smashes his inside left knee again.

Rankin drops with a grunt of pain. The round buzzer goes off a split second before Harding can drop kick Rankin's head into next week.

Harding's crew works him over when he returns to his corner, clearing the blood away. Jesse presses an ice pack to the rib area Harding points out.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Was it in the plan to get your rib cracked that round?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's an inexact science, T. That feels good, Jess. Keep it right there. He dropped the left and I said hello to Mr. Nose, Dev.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

(Chuckles as Jafar gives Harding a swallow of water)

We don't know how the judges will score the rounds, John. It might be one apiece or he took the first two. That plan of yours better get launched this round.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Gonna' go get me some, Dev.

The referee tries to get Harding and Rankin to touch gloves starting the third and final round, but Rankin wasn't having any of it. His corner had staunched the flow of blood, but he favored his left leg. Rankin swung for the fences with both hands, hitting Harding's arms and shoulders with pile-driver blows, trying to keep him on the defensive until he got a clear head or rib shot. Unfortunately for Rankin his left dropped a tad too far. Harding splattered Rankin's nose again with a straight right. Rankin dropped for a takedown and Harding goes with him.

Rankin's full mount was too low. Harding kicks off into his sides. He pulls Rankin's right arm down tight against him, wraps his right leg, while reaching under and grabbing Rankin's left leg. Rankin's left knee gives out and Harding locks his legs around Rankin's head in a triangle choke. They lock eyes. Rankin realizes Harding has him with the referee hovering near the fighters, knowing the predicament Rankin was in. Rankin tries to tap out but Harding deliberately flips him, using his left leg, while closing the triangle during the flip. Rankin's neck breaks. Harding immediately pops up, frantically motioning for the referee.

The referee takes one look and motions frantically for the medics. Harding puts on an act of trying to administer to the fading Van Rankin.

They hook Rankin up to oxygen while inflating air harnesses to keep Rankin immobile. They don't want a death announced right in the cage. Harding does an award winning compassionate killer routine while they took Rankin away, even touching his arm soulfully as he goes by. The referee consoles John and does a quick solemn lift of his right arm as the winner. Then came the post fight interviews for the pay-per-viewers, with Harding and his crew bolstering John's initial act of accidental death.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

(Voice over of Harding's  
thoughts in first person)

Blah... blah... blah... Van ain't comin'  
back unless it's an appearance on  
Ghost-Hunters. My crew stayed near  
me the whole time commiserating  
with anyone who would listen about  
what a tragedy it was for the fight  
to end in such a way.

Outside the cage, Lora wraps her arms around Harding with abandon. They engage in a kiss so intense Alexi Fiialkov pats her shoulder like an old uncle, pulling her away while promising Harding would be back soon. He gives Harding a slight salute. Security and Harding's crew rushes him back to the locker room. Rumors circulate about Rankin dying of his injury, so Harding and his crew are met by another host of reporters. They play the grieving card until the press is drawn away to the next fight.

Tommy shakes his head with facial features frozen in grim sorrow.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

You cold blooded, heartless  
monster.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grins)

Whatever do you mean, T?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

You smiled when you broke his neck,  
John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Did not.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

(Laughs)

I saw it too, you sicko.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Most impressive! I will soon be  
with Samira!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If we're all done mourning for poor  
old Van Rankin let me get my shower  
so I can go see Lora.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Go ahead, but because you couldn't  
settle for a win, we'll all have to  
have our sad faces on for the rest  
of our stay. You can bet another  
killing in the cage ain't going to  
get you on the UFC's dance card  
anytime soon.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Shrugs)

Shit happens. Hell, I always liked  
the old, smelly warehouse fights  
anyway.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S  
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

Not everything's about you, John.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

You should have consulted with your  
crew.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

(Laughs uproariously)

Yea...yeah, you selfish bastard.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN  
DESCENT

Most impressive!

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

(Slaps him in the back of  
the head)

Shut up, kid!



JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Chuckles)

All I know is I have Lora waiting  
outside the locker room with that  
fine ass black dress on. Be  
patient, baby, the Dark Lord's on  
his way.

The End