

THE COUNSELOR

Written by

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THE COUNSELOR'S CONDOMINIUM BEDROOM.

The curtains are drawn and it is all but dark in the room. The view is from the rear of the bed and of two figures in the bed. The dialogue is muffled at times by the bedcover and it therefore appears in SUBTITLES on the screen.

LAURA

Are you awake?

COUNSELOR

No.

LAURA

Okay.

COUNSELOR

What time is it?

LAURA

Two o'clock. Almost two o'clock.

COUNSELOR

Two o'clock what.

LAURA

What?

COUNSELOR

A M or P M.

LAURA

You're not serious.

COUNSELOR

Not entirely.

LAURA

It's afternoon.

COUNSELOR

I know. God you're a sexy woman.
What time is your flight?

LAURA

Seven-forty.

COUNSELOR

What are you doing?

LAURA
I'm not doing anything.

COUNSELOR
They're going to take me out of
here on a gurney.

LAURA
We could talk.

COUNSELOR
Do you think we should have some
coffee?

LAURA
You think that we should have
coffee.

COUNSELOR I
Guess not.

LAURA
I haven't seen you for two weeks.
And I have to go back this evening.

COUNSELOR
I know. Tell me something sexy.

LAURA
Okay.

COUNSELOR
Words are everything to a man. Or
to some of us, anyway. I suppose
there's still a contingency out
there that only gets turned on by
enormous asses and tits the size of
crenshaw melons. Maybe even gaudily
striped buttocks. Red and blue. Who
knows?

LAURA
I don't want to paint my buttocks.

COUNSELOR
I know. I don't think you should do
it.

LAURA
Okay.

COUNSELOR
Well.

LAURA
I'm thinking.

COUNSELOR
Okay.

LAURA
I want you to put your hand up my
dress.

COUNSELOR
You're not wearing a dress.

LAURA
What does that have to do with it?
It's something you like for me to
say.

COUNSELOR
I know. But it has to be real,
doesn't it?

LAURA
All right. I want you to put your
hand inside my panties.

COUNSELOR
It's the same problem. Maybe you
should just say what it is that you
want me to do.

LAURA
I want you to touch me.

COUNSELOR
You want me to touch you where.

LAURA
I want you to touch me down there.

COUNSELOR
You really do.

LAURA
I really do.

COUNSELOR
Say it more sexy.

LAURA
I want you to touch it.

COUNSELOR
God. Are you wet?

LAURA
Yes.

COUNSELOR
You really are?

LAURA
Yes. Ooh. Baby?

COUNSELOR
God. You're sopping.

LAURA
I know.

COUNSELOR
How did you get yourself into such
a state?

LAURA
Ooh. From thinking about you.

COUNSELOR
From thinking about me what.

LAURA
From thinking about your sweet face
between my legs.

COUNSELOR
God, woman.

LAURA
Baby? Ooh. I think I should go tidy
up.

COUNSELOR
I don't want you to.

LAURA
Are you sure?

COUNSELOR
Very sure.

LAURA
All right.

COUNSELOR

I want to bury my face in the entire history of last night. Every taste and smell. I want you all over me. Is that okay?

LAURA

Yes. That's okay.

COUNSELOR

What about that? Is that okay?

LAURA

Mm. Yes. That's very okay.

COUNSELOR

How did you get to be such a bad girl?

LAURA

It was from hanging out with you. Can I tell you something?

COUNSELOR

Of course.

LAURA

I think you outdid yourself last night. I thought I would never stop coming.

COUNSELOR

You know what that does to a man's ego?

LAURA

I do. Shall I go on?

COUNSELOR

Please.

LAURA

God. Slow. Slow. God. How do you know how to do that?

COUNSELOR

From hanging out with really nasty girls.

LAURA

You've ruined me. You know that.

COUNSELOR

I hope so. God. You have the most
luscious pussy in all of
Christendom. Did you know that?

LAURA

No.

COUNSELOR

I think there must be certain
responsibilities that go with it.

LAURA

What do girls say when you do that?

COUNSELOR

There aren't any girls. There's
just you.

LAURA

But there have been.

COUNSELOR

A long time ago. I don't remember.

LAURA

Yes you do.

COUNSELOR

Do you really want to know?

LAURA

Yes. I do.

COUNSELOR

Okay. They usually would say one of
two things. Either Oh my God, or
Jesus Christ. But nearly always
something religious like that.

LAURA

You're pretty funny.

COUNSELOR

Women like to be amused.

LAURA

Yes. They do.

COUNSELOR

Tell me what to do.

LAURA
You know what to do.

COUNSELOR
Tell me.

LAURA
What if I shock you?

COUNSELOR
Too bad. Tell me.

LAURA
Are you sure?

COUNSELOR
Yes.

LAURA
Okay. I want you to finger fuck me.

COUNSELOR
What?

LAURA
You heard me.

COUNSELOR
I can't believe you said that.

LAURA
Believe it.

COUNSELOR
You've reached a whole new level of depravity. Haven't you? I thought that didn't mean that much to girls.

LAURA
Depends on the girl.

COUNSELOR
You really do.

LAURA
I want you to stick your finger up me and find my spot and push on it.

COUNSELOR
Jesus. Right now.

LAURA
No. On Thursday.

COUNSELOR
God.

LAURA
Ooh. God. Yes. Yes. Ooh. I thought
you didn't know how to do that?

COUNSELOR
I never said that. God you are
luscious.

LAURA
Shh.

COUNSELOR
Okay.

LAURA
Shh. Oh. God. Oh my God.

MEXICAN GARAGE.

A welder in coveralls and goggles is cutting a line along the side of the tank of a septic-tank truck with an acetylene torch.

MEXICAN GARAGE.

The tank of the truck has been cut in two laterally and a hoist is lowering a fifty-five gallon drum into the open top of the tank. The welder is standing in the tank waiting to unfasten the hooks and the cable.

HIGH DESERT GRASSLAND, SIMILAR TO THE COUNTRY AROUND PATAGONIA ARIZONA OR EAST OF LAS VEGAS NEW MEXICO. EVENING.

A white Cadillac Escalade is parked along the edge of an arroyo under some large cottonwood trees. A two-horse trailer is hitched to the rear of the vehicle and the tailgate of the Escalade is down. The driver's door is open and a man-Reiner-is sitting in the driver's seat looking out the open door with a pair of binoculars. He is well dressed in khaki's and sport shirt and he is wearing a pair of tall Gokey leather snake proof boots.

HIGH DESERT, EVENING.

A cheetah is loping at high speed. A street in Amsterdam, shops, canal. The counselor crosses a bridge. He is dressed in a summer suit with no tie and he carries a black nylon portfolio in one hand.

HIGH DESERT.

A very attractive woman—Malkina—is sitting cross-legged in the luggage rack on top of the Escalade. She is wearing a black western hat with a flat or porkpie crown and a braided leather chinstrap. A white shirt with a leather vest and a pair of whipcord riding pants with expensive leather boots. Her long black hair is pinned back and she is leaning forward with her elbows on her knees looking through a pair of expensive binoculars.

MEXICAN GARAGE.

The welder is welding the top of the tank back in place.

MEXICAN GARAGE.

The welder is grinding down the weld bead along the side of the tank with an electric disc grinder in a huge shower of sparks.

HIGH DESERT.

A jackrabbit is racing through the grass. The cheetah overtakes it and kills it in a cloud of dust.

HIGH DESERT.

The woman lowers the binoculars and closes her eyes and presses her elbows against her sides. She almost winces. At this close distance we can see the tattoo of an Egyptian cat at the side of her neck. A second cheetah is sitting chained at the side of the Escalade and it gets up and circles and sits again and stares very intently into the distance.

MEXICAN GARAGE.

A man in coveralls wearing a canister paintmask is spraying the tank of the truck in a paintbooth.

OFFICE OF A DIAMOND DEALER IN AMSTERDAM.

An old-fashioned wood paneled room. The dealer is in shirtsleeves with gaiters, a tie. He pushes the microscope across the table to the counselor. The counselor puts his eye to the microscope. There is a jeweler's black cloth spread on the desk between them and on it are seven or eight diamonds, three to five carats in size. The counselor looks up and the dealer reaches and pulls the microscope back across the desk and makes a shrugging gesture with one hand and removes the stone from the clip and places it on the black cloth and mounts another stone in the clip and pushes the microscope back. The counselor bends to study it. The dealer watches him.

A SMALL MEXICAN PORT TOWN ON THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA.

Several trucks are being unloaded and are driven along the dock toward a warehouse with a sign over the door that says Aduana. One of the trucks is the septic-tank truck and it is waved aside and the driver hands a brown envelope down to the customs inspector who puts it inside the front of his coat and the truck drives out to the road.

HIGH DESERT, SUNSET.

The woman is riding out across the grasslands at almost a full gallop on a good Arabian horse. English saddle. She turns the horse and looks behind her and bends low over the horse's neck and urges the horse on. The two cheetahs pass her and disappear in the dust.

SOUTHWESTERN DESERT.

Distant mountains shimmering in the heat. Looking down a long straight stretch of empty blacktop road all but liquid in the waves of heat.

SOUTHWESTERN DESERT.

The septic-tank truck is sitting in the chaparral. The driver opens the door and stands up, holding onto the roof of the cab and the top of the open door. The other man watches through the windshield with a pair of binoculars.

In the distance a line of stragglers crossing through the chaparral, men and women, carrying suitcases, carrying laundry bags over their shoulders. The standing man takes a cigarette from his shirt pocket and lights it and blows the smoke gently.

OFFICE OF THE DIAMOND DEALER.

COUNSELOR

I want her to have something that she would not be uncomfortable wearing. I don't want to give her a diamond so big she'd be afraid to wear it.

DEALER

(Nodding, just the trace of a smile)
She is probably more courageous than you imagine.

He takes the stone from the clip and sorts another one and puts it in the clip and looks at it through the loupe. He holds it to his mouth and breathes on it and looks at it again. He leans and fixes it under the microscope and leans back. The counselor bends to study the stone. The dealer watches him.

COUNSELOR

Is this a Pillow?

DEALER

No. It's an Asscher. Look at the corners.

COUNSELOR

It's yellow?

DEALER

(Leaning forward with a small white folded card and placing it under the stone.)
Yes. Look now. Color is difficult.

COUNSELOR

Yes.

DEALER

The color is good. It is nitrogen that gives it the yellow.

(MORE)

DEALER (CONT'D)

The truth is that anything you can say about a diamond is in the nature of a flaw. The perfect diamond would be composed simply of prised light. Do you see the inclusion?

COUNSELOR

No.

DEALER

It is small. What we would call a feather. Look some more.

COUNSELOR

Yes. I think I see it. This would make it what? A VVS-2? A VS-1 maybe.

DEALER

A VS-1. Some might grade it higher.

COUNSELOR

You might. Grade it higher.

The dealer shrugs.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

What is a glitch?

DEALER

That is a type of fish that they eat in Norway.

COUNSELOR

(Looking up)

I'm saying it wrong. Oh. You're joking.

DEALER

I'm sorry. Yes. I am making a joke. A glitch is simply a flaw that is visible to the naked eye.

COUNSELOR

A stone like that would be hard to sell?

DEALER

Not so hard. There are dealers who
make a living repairing stones.

The dealer takes the stone from the clip and selects another.

COUNSELOR

But you like that stone.

DEALER

I like that stone.

COUNSELOR

How many carats is it?

DEALER

Three point nine.

COUNSELOR

It's expensive.

DEALER

It is expensive.

He fits the next stone in the clip. The counselor bends to
see.

COUNSELOR

Is there a perfect diamond?

DEALER

En este mundo nada es perfecto. As
my father would say.

COUNSELOR

You are Sephardic.

DEALER

Yes.

COUNSELOR

Do you know Spain?

DEALER

I do. And Spain me. At one time I
thought that she would return from
the grave. But that is not to be.
Every country that has driven out
the Jews has suffered the same
fate.

COUNSELOR
(Looking up)
Which is?

DEALER
I'm sorry?

COUNSELOR
What is that fate?

DEALER
Ach. You don't want to hear. We should take stones. The most valued stone is the red diamond. From the Argyll mines. So very rare. I have seen two in a long life. A price almost beyond belief.

COUNSELOR
I do want to hear.

DEALER
(Leaning back and studying the counselor)
You do.

COUNSELOR
Yes.

DEALER
Ach. Well. How to say. There is no culture save the Semitic culture. There. The last known culture before that was the Greek and there will be no culture after. Nothing.

COUNSELOR
That's a bold claim.

DEALER
The heart of any culture is to be found in the nature of the hero. Who is that man who is revered? In the western world it is the man of God. From Moses to Christ. The prophet. The penitent. Such a figure is unknown to the Greeks. Unheard-of. Unimaginable. Because you can only have a man of God, not a man of gods.

(MORE)

DEALER (CONT'D)

And this God is the God of the Jewish people. There is no other god. We see the figure of him—what is the word? Purloined. Purloined in the West. How do you steal a God? He is immovable. The Jew beholds his tormentor dressed in the vestments of his own ancient culture. Everything bears a strange familiarity. But the fit is always poor and the hands are always bloody. That coat. Didn't that belong to Uncle Chaim? What about the shoes? Enough. I see you look. No more philosophy. The stones themselves have their own view of things. Perhaps they are not so silent as you think. They were piped up out of the earth in a time before any witness was, but they are here. Now. Who shall be their witness? We. We two. What is wrong with that? Here. (Fitting a stone in the clip) Let me show you. This is a cautionary stone. You will see.

EVENING.

The woman Malkina is sitting in a camp chair at a folding table set with a linen tablecloth, with china and silver. An Aladdin lamp burns on the table and she is reading a book. Reiner places a cocktail glass before her with a cherry in it and leans with a shaker and pours a Manhattan cocktail for her. She looks up and smiles. He goes to the fire and turns two filet steaks on the grill. The two horses are grazing just beyond. The cheetahs at their chains stir, one rises and turns and lies down again. The woman sips her cocktail.

DESERT SUNSET.

Bare purple mountains dark against a darkening sky streaked with deep red. The high thin scream of a motorcycle in the far distance, very slowly becoming louder. Very slowly.

Then it streaks across the middle distance in a small part of a second, really just a blink of lights, and whines away into the distance and the silence.

END CREDITS

A SMALL ELEGANT RESTAURANT IN A PRIVATE CLUB.

Some twenty tables, the diners well dressed, the women in cocktail dresses and jewelry. Chandeliers, crystal, silver, linen. Over the sound system Anne Sophie-Mutter is playing Mozart's Violin Concerto Number Two.

The waiters are in black tie and black trousers with white kitchen coats. Along one wall are eight large oil portraits of celebrities: Bogart, Monroe, Dean, Elvis, Lennon, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, and the Portuguese Formula One race driver The Marquis de Portago. The paintings are bright and quite striking but neither lurid nor cheap. They are oil paintings that look like really high quality pastels. At the far end of the room there is a raised platform—a small stage—and on the platform is a grand piano.

THE TOP OF THE BUNGEE CORDS THAT GO UNDERNEATH THE PIANO.

A cheetah is lying on the piano. The second cheetah comes down through the room past the tables. A woman strokes it absentmindedly as it passes without looking at it. It leaps effortlessly to the top of the piano and sniffs the other cheetah and licks its fur. They wear heavy and elaborate collars. On the third wall there is a complete Formula Two Lotus race car hanging from the actual wall nose down. There is a wall of photographs of cars and drivers and celebrities. At the corner table a man and a woman sit opposite each other. He is forty-three and she is thirty-six. They are well dressed and very attractive. A waiter is clearing the table and another is pouring their champagne flutes. He rewraps the towel around the neck of the bottle and slogs the bottle into the tableside bucket of ice and moves on.

COUNSELOR

Anyway, I have something to discuss with you and I'm a bit scared.

LAURA

(Smiling)

Have you been bad?

COUNSELOR

No. Actually I don't have that much to discuss. So let me just give you this and you tell me what you think.

He takes a small black velvet box from his coat pocket and places it on the table before her. She puts the back of her hand to her mouth and looks up at him. Then she picks up the box and opens it. She looks up at him again.

LAURA

Oh Baby.

COUNSELOR

Will you...

LAURA

Yes. I will.

COUNSELOR

Whew.

LAURA

You didn't know?

COUNSELOR

I knew. But I was scared anyway.

LAURA

Good. It's beautiful.

COUNSELOR

Are you okay?

LAURA

Yes. I feel a bit strange.

COUNSELOR

You're not going to cry.

LAURA

No. I don't think so. Are you sure?

COUNSELOR

Oh I'm more than sure.

LAURA

It's beautiful.

COUNSELOR

You are a glory.

LAURA

I'm a glory?

COUNSELOR

Yes. As in glorious. You are a glorious woman.

LAURA

Thank you. You are a man of impeccable taste. I shouldn't have said that.

He raises his glass.

COUNSELOR

You can't take it back.

She takes the ring from the box and puts it on her finger and holds out her hand to look at it. She turns her hand to show it to him. She picks up her glass and touches his with it and they drink.

LAURA

Okay then.

COUNSELOR

I intend to love you until I die.

LAURA

Me first.

COUNSELOR

Not on your life.

A SMALL GROCERY STORE.

A young man dressed in a bright green leather motorcycle outfit— jacket and tight pants and green boots and gloves—is waiting in line, his helmet hanging over his arm. He is somewhat dark. Part Mexican. The woman in front of him has unloaded her groceries onto the conveyor belt and the clerk is adding them up. She turns and smiles at the boy. He is holding a ten pound bag of dog food.

WOMAN

Do you have a dog?

YOUNG MAN

Do I have a dog.

WOMAN
(Smiling)
Yes.

YOUNG MAN
No Ma'am.

WOMAN
(A bit disconcerted)
Oh.

YOUNG MAN
I don't have a dog.

WOMAN
Okay.

YOUNG MAN
These are for me.

WOMAN
For you.

YOUNG MAN
Yes Ma'am. It's a diet.

WOMAN
A diet?

YOUNG MAN
Yes Ma'am. Well. I probably shouldn't even be telling you this. I've tried it a couple of times and I got to say it works pretty good. You bad boys. I carry a baggie full around with me. Night, you wake up? You don't go down and raid the refrigerator. You got a dish of these on the table by the bed and you just reach and pop a couple. You got your glass of water there. Last time I lost twenty-seven pounds in thirty days. I'd pretty much recommend it to anybody.

These diets you read about?
(Pointing)

I know this works. Of course like anything else you got to use your head. Time before I woke up in the hospital. You just got to keep your mind on business.

(MORE)

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Like anything else. But you want to lose weight? This is it. You got everything you need in here. All your vitamins and minerals. I'll tell you what. After a few days you don't even want anything else. I'd absolutely recommend it to anybody.

The woman turns to the clerk and he gives her back her credit card. The other clerk has finished bagging up her groceries. The boy pushes his bag of dog food forward.

WOMAN

But you said you woke up in the hospital. What happened? Did you have a systematic reaction or what?

BOY

(Taking out his money to pay for the dog food)
Oh no Ma'am. It wasn't anything like that. I was sitting in the street licking my balls and a car hit me. You take care now. You hear?

REINER'S PENTHOUSE.

A large room giving onto a patio with a swimming pool. There are about twenty people in the room and on the patio—including a number of good-looking young women. There are tables and chaise lounges out at the pool and naked girls splashing in the water. On the outer patio there is a cabana and a car with a bartender mixing drinks and a large black weight-lifter beside him at an outdoor stainless steel grill cooking steaks and ribs.

In the room itself are tables and sofas. There are two waitresses on roller-skates taking drinks and food to people, one in a bikini and the other in panties and t-shirt. One of the cheetahs is stretched out on a sofa and the other is crossing the room. The waitress pulls up at the bar and orders two Budweisers. Her t-shirt, worn bra-less, bears a cartoon of a dragster with enormous wheels and a huge 671 GMC supercharger mounted on the engine. The script says: Injection Is Nice But I'd Rather Be Blown.

The bartender opens the cooler and takes out two longneck bottles

BARTENDER
(calling out)
Pilsner!

And the cook, wearing cut-off bib overalls, braces himself and the bartender shoves the bottle into the seat of his overalls and pops the top off the bottle and then does the same with the second beer and puts them on the girl's tray and she glides away and pulls up at a coffee table and sets the beers out and two young women pick them up and sip from them. On the wall there is an enormous screen, which continually flashes color photos taken of people at parties here.

The counselor passes through the room and comes to a door where he pushes three buttons on a keypad. He waits. There is a click and he pushes the door open and enters and turns and shuts the door.

The room is modern and elegant.

A bank of computers and electronic equipment along one wall. An elegant desk of figured hardwood and stainless steel. Reiner is sitting on the edge of the desk talking to Malkina, who stands between his knees. She turns and smiles at the counselor and Reiner greets him.

REINER
Good Morning, Counselor.

COUNSELOR
Morning.

Malkina leans and whispers into Reiner's ear and pats him on the knee and turns to go. She is tall, dark, and very attractive. She smiles again at the counselor as she passes him.

MALKINA
Hola, Guapo.

COUNSELOR
Hey.

She goes out and closes the door and Reiner gets off of the desk and turns his leather swivel-chair and sits in it and motions the counselor to a leather sofa at the end of the desk and at right angles to it. The counselor comes over and sits down.

REINER
How's the bride?

COUNSELOR
Bridal.

REINER
That sounds about right. Nice lady.
I assume she's not privy to your
newest business venture.

COUNSELOR
She's not. And your lady?

REINER
Yeah.

COUNSELOR
Yeah what.

REINER
She's fine. I don't know what she
knows. I don't want to know.

COUNSELOR
You don't trust her.

REINER
Jesus, Counselor. She's a woman.

COUNSELOR
Woo.

REINER
Yeah, well. I don't mean it to
sound that cold. I just mean that
where men are concerned they've got
their own agenda. I always liked
smart women. But it's been an
expensive hobby.

COUNSELOR
Yeah.
(Nodding toward the
electronic wall.)
Do you know what all that stuff is?

REINER

Mostly. Anything I don't know I can ask her. Which worries me even more.

COUNSELOR

Mmm.

REINER

Yeah.

COUNSELOR

You never told me what happened with you and the lovely Clarissa

REINER

Well. Miss Clarissa. Of the extraordinary body. That's what got me in trouble in the first place. She was living with a friend of mine. She used to go around with no bra. These full nipples in her blouse. Or t-shirt. I tried to get the image out of my head but I'm not very good at that sort of thing. Doomed from the start, of course. She knew it before I did. Typically. In the end it was jealousy that undid us.

COUNSELOR

Jealousy?

REINER

Yeah. She was getting more pussy than I was.

COUNSELOR

(Smiling)

Is that true?

REINER

I don't know. Yeah. Probably. She finally left me for a Negress. I don't suppose you can say that nay more. Good-looking black woman. Had a boyfriend played for the Oilers. Nice chap. We met once for drinks at this club in Dallas to discuss our mutual plight. He was taking it rather poorly, I have to say.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

Dating another woman by then too,
but he was heartsick all the same.
Women do better don't they?

COUNSELOR

Maybe they have more practice at
it.

REINER

Yeah, well. It's a painful business
all the same. Still, my guess is
that in most cases if you still had
the woman you're weeping over you'd
be weeping harder.

COUNSELOR

(Smiling)

You can't hear anything in here,
can you?

REINER

It's better than that.

COUNSELOR

Yeah?

REINER

You can't hear anything out there.

COUNSELOR

So is this place secure?

REINER

Who knows? I don't speak in
arraignable phrases anywhere.
There's a scrambler on the phone
but there's a lot of smart people
out there. Of course anybody who
thinks he's the smartest is on his
way to the slam.

COUNSELOR

Would that be me?

REINER

Nah. Although I have to say that I
always did think a law degree was a
license to steal. And that you for
one hadn't really capitalized on
it.

The counselor shrugs.

REINER (CONT'D)

Yeah. Well, you're not the straight dude people think though, are you?

COUNSELOR

I guess not.

REINER

I don't mean the caper. I mean you. Women like you.

COUNSELOR

All right.

REINER

You know what they like about you?

COUNSELOR

I'm a good fuck?

REINER

Yeah, right. They can sniff out the moral dilemma. The paradox.

COUNSELOR

Moral dilemma.

REINER

Yeah. They can smell it. It's what draws them. Not sure why. Maybe it's just that lacking any moral sense themselves they're fascinated by it in men. You think about it. You might think that a guy who's preoccupied with right and wrong would be some dreary sort of dude over in the corner chewing his lip but it's a bit more subtle than that. You want to know if a guy has issues watch the way women react to him.

COUNSELOR

Interesting.

REINER

Men are attracted to flawed women too of course, but their illusion is that they can fix them. Women don't want to fix anything.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

They just want to be entertained.
The truth about women is you can do
anything to them except bore them.

COUNSELOR

Well, there's nothing about Laura
that I would want to fix.

REINER

Maybe not.

COUNSELOR

But you think she probably knows
things about me that I don't know
about myself.

REINER

Jesus, Counselor. I'm not even sure
what sort of a question that is.

COUNSELOR

Yeah. And you? Vis a vi your
inamorata.

REINER

You don't want to know. I don't
want to know.

COUNSELOR

Moral dilemmas.

REINER

Yeah. You pursue this road that
you've embarked upon and you will
eventually come to moral decisions
that will take you completely by
surprise. You won't see it coming
at all.

COUNSELOR

Such as?

REINER

Such as whether to waste somebody
or not. Or have them wasted.

COUNSELOR

You ever been faced with a decision
like that?

REINER

You're a member of the court.

COUNSELOR

Well. I don't intend to take this up as a trade.

REINER

One time deal. Right?

COUNSELOR

Which you've heard a thousand times.

REINER

No. But a few. What usually happens is that after a couple of ideas they know more than you do and they set up shop across the street.

COUNSELOR

How does that work for them?

REINER

Not well.

COUNSELOR

So would that be a moral issue?

REINER

Not for me.

COUNSELOR

Or for your associates.

REINER

Yeah well. They have a real aversion to mixing business with pleasure. Do you know what a bolito is?

COUNSELOR

No. A bolo is one of those skinny neckties. Or is it one of those things you throw? Argentina.

REINER

Yeah. In this case it's a mechanical device.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

It had this small electric motor with this rather incredible compound gear that retrieves a steel cable. Battery-driven. The cable is made out of some unholy alloy, almost impossible to cut it, and it's in a loop, and you come up behind the guy and drop it over his head and pull the free end of the cable tight and walk away. No one ever sees you. Pulling the cable activates the motor and the noose starts to tighten and it continues to tighten until it goes to zero.

COUNSELOR

It cuts the guys head off.

REINER

Yes.

COUNSELOR

There's nothing he can do.

REINER

No.

COUNSELOR

Jesus.

REINER

Yeah.

COUNSELOR

How long does it take?

REINER

Three, four minutes. Five maybe. It depends on your collar size.

COUNSELOR

You're shitting me.

REINER

Nope. Mostly wretched excess of course. It's just that there'd be no easy way to turn the thing off. Or reason to. It just keeps running until the noose closes completely and then it self-destructs. Actually you're probably dead in less than a minute.

COUNSELOR
From strangulation.

REINER
No. The wire cuts through the
carotid arteries and sprays blood
all over the spectators and then
everybody gets to go home.

COUNSELOR
Jesus.

REINER
Yeah, well.

COUNSELOR
Bolito.

REINER
Yeah. Probably a play on words too.
Bolito- with an e- is the Spanish
word for ticket. As in yours has
just been punched.

COUNSELOR
I wouldn't think it would go
through bone.

REINER
It won't. It would have to go
between the vertebrae. So it
doesn't. Always take the head off.
Completely. The gear is a worm
drive with a gain built into it. Or
a reduction, actually. It keeps
getting stronger and slower. To
compensate for the compression of
the tissues.

COUNSELOR
How do you know all this?

REINER
You know how I like gadgets. A
friend of mine bought one. In
Calexico. Stolen out of Country
Property.

COUNSELOR
I would think they'd be expensive.

REINER

They are. This one was used.

COUNSELOR

Sweet.

Reiner shrugs.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Why does no one see him?

REINER

See who?

COUNSELOR

The garrotter.

REINER

Oh. Well, because given a choice between watching someone walk away down the street and watching someone being slowly decapitated by a device apparently engineered and patented in the halls of hell you are going to watch the latter. That's just the way it is. You may think you should avert your gaze.

COUNSELOR

What's the business and pleasure thing?

REINER

They have a saying, I forget how it goes in Spanish. Mata mucho, negocios something or other. It means if you're killing a low of people it's coming off the bottom line.

COUNSELOR

Where's all this beheading shit come from? You never used to see that.

REINER

Yeah. It's blown in here from the east.

COUNSELOR
Meaning the east.

REINER
Yeah. You put nine Mexicans and an Arab in a room and give them each a hundred dollars and come back in eight hours who do you think is going to be holding the grand?

COUNSELOR
So are you gearing to do business with them down the road?

REINER
The Arabs?

COUNSELOR
Yeah.

REINER
No.

COUNSELOR
Why is that?

REINER
Because they don't need your money.

COUNSELOR
So when are you getting out?

REINER
Don't know

COUNSELOR
There's no such thing as enough.

REINER
Don't know. One can hope.

COUNSELOR
Yeah. Well, I suspect you're right about one thing.

REINER
What's that?

COUNSELOR
That you never see it coming.

REINER

That's been my experience. What's the Miller quote? The smallest crumb can devour us?

COUNSELOR

Yeah. Dolph and I had a capital murder case one time and our guy had shot these two girls. One of them was his ex-girlfriend. He just walked up behind then and shot them in the back. Apparently she'd thrown him over for this other girl. Maybe true, I don't know. But she didn't die. So two months later she's on the stand and this is what she has to say: I knew that I'd been shot and just before I fell I saw the bullet that had gone through me hit the sidewalk in front of me. It kicked up this little cloud of dust. And I turned to Dolph and I said: We're dead in the water. And he said: Yes we are. And we are.

SOUTHWESTERN DESERT.

The septic-tank truck and a pickup are parked in the chaparral. The two Mexican drivers are talking to two other men. They squat on the ground. One passes around a pack of cigarettes. Then he picks up a stick and draws a map in the dirt.

A WAREHOUSE WITH FLOODLIGHTS.

The metal door clanks upward and the green leather cyclist comes whining through on the Kawasaki ZX-12 and brakes and does a donut on the concrete floor and stops and shuts off the bike and takes off his helmet. A Doberman runs to him and stands up and he hugs her and tousles her ears and steps off of the bike. There is a black late model Cadillac Escalade parked toward the rear of the warehouse. He crosses the room with her leaping about him to an island in the far corner that contains a kitchen and a bed, a tin locker, a leather easy chair- taking the bag of dog food with him. He fixes her bowl of food and turns on the stereo and opens the refrigerator and takes out a frozen dinner and puts it in the microwave and opens a beer and sits, watching the dog eat.

He puts the beer on the table and stands up and takes off the leather jacket and unzips a pocket and takes out a clear plastic bag and pitches it onto the table. It is full of hundred dollar bills. He opens a drawer and takes out a packet of marijuana and papers and sits rolling a joint. He lights it and leans back with his eyes closed. The dog finishes her dish and comes over and circles and sniffs and sneezes. He blows smoke at her and she sneezes and circles.

YOUNG MAN

Yeah, well. Too bad.

The timing bell rings on the microwave. He gets up and goes over and opens the door and takes out the meal. The dog sits watching.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

You don't eat lasagna. Go lie down.

IN THE CLUB.

The counselor and Laura at a table. A young man in a T-shirt, sport coat, and jeans, with a girl, on their way out. They stop and he pulls back from the girl and smiles at the counselor.

TONY

Well Counselor, how are you making it?

The counselor leans back and studies him.

COUNSELOR

I'm all right.

TONY

Is this your lady?

COUNSELOR

It is.

TONY

How are you, Ma'am?

LAURA

I'm fine. Thank you.

TONY

Me and the counselor go back a ways. Don't we, Counselor?

COUNSELOR

We do. I'm afraid.

TONY

Don't be afraid, Counselor. Hell, I'm okay with everything. You okay with everything, Counselor?

COUNSELOR

I am if you are.

TONY

(Addressing Laura)

See there? Ain't he just the best son of a bitch?

GIRL

Come on, Tony.

TONY

How long you know this guy, Petunia?

LAURA

Long enough.

TONY

Long enough? How long is that, long enough?

COUNSELOR

Maybe you should listen to your lady friend.

TONY

Is that what you do, Counselor?

COUNSELOR

Pretty much.

TONY

Does he keep you entertained?

LAURA

That's none of your business.

TONY

Because you look to me like you might get bored easy. I used to try to spike up the counselor's style.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

He doesn't have the greatest sense of humor. For instance. Maybe you're noticed.

GIRL

Tony. Let's go.

TONY

Okay. I'm gone. Here. Let me try this one on you. See if you can tell me what this is. This is pretty good.

He pulls up his T-shirt and places his hands palm down on either side of his navel and moves the skin of his stomach up and down alternately six or eight times very quickly and then spreads them to show his navel. Then he does it again.

TONY (CONT'D)

You get it?

Laura has turned away with her eyes closed.

TONY (CONT'D)

Let me show you again. Watch.

He repeats the performance.

TONY (CONT'D)

Come on, Counselor. It's a girl running the hurdles.

Laura bows her head, her eyes closed.

TONY (CONT'D)

Come on, Sugardumplin. What? You don't think that's funny? She's a little up tight ain't she Counselor?

The counselor pushes back his chair and stands.

GIRL

Tony, I'm going.

TONY

Hell, Counselor. Keep your seat. You don't have to get up for me.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

You know, Petunia, the counselor here has got a way of sullen up like a possum when he don't get his way. I'm going to say that you have probably noticed it. But that ain't really the problem. The problem is that his thin skin makes it okay in his eyes for you to wind up under the bus. You know what I'm sayin'? Anyway, that's how I see it. (He holds up his hands.) All right. I'm goin'. I'm goin'. You take care now. You hear?

A CAFE IN A SHOPPING MALL.

Malkina and Laura are at a table having lunch.

MALKINA

So how many carats is it?

LAURA

I don't know.

MALKINA

(Pausing with a forkful of salad, then putting it down again)

You don't know.

LAURA

(Smiling)

No.

MALKINA

You have got to be kidding me

LAURA

No.

MALKINA

Let me see it.

Laura holds out her hand.

MALKINA (CONT'D)

No. Take it off.

Laura takes off the ring and hands it across the table to her. Malkina looks at the ring, turns it, holds it up to the light. She hands it back.

MALKINA (CONT'D)

It's a three and a half carat.
Maybe a three point eight. Nice
stone. Asscher cut.

LAURA

(Putting the ring back on)
Thank you.

MALKINA

Good color. Probably an F or a G.
Nothing visible so it's at least a
VS-2. Do you want to know what it's
worth?

LAURA

No.

MALKINA

(Smiling and shaking her
head, stabbing at her
salad)
You really don't, do you?

LAURA

No.

MALKINA

So have you set a date?

LAURA

No. I want to get married in the
Church. Which he says is all right.
He has to take this course. Or we
do. He's been married before and I
though that would be a problem but
the Church doesn't recognize other
marriages. Anyway, I'm looking for
a job here.

MALKINA

Are you scared?

LAURA

(Smiling)
No. A bit nervous. Sometimes.

MALKINA

Are you a church lady?

LAURA

I go. Yes. It's important to me.

MALKINA

What about Confession?

LAURA

Yes. Well, maybe not so much.

MALKINA

Does the priest ask you about sex?

LAURA

He doesn't talk. But you're supposed to tell him everything.

MALKINA

He doesn't press you for the juicy details?

LAURA

(Smiling)

No.

MALKINA

He touched me, Father. Where, my child? In the back seat, Father. But you're supposed to go, right?

LAURA

Yes. So you can go to Communion.

MALKINA

And whatever nasty shit you did you're supposed to promise not to do it again.

LAURA

Yes.

MALKINA

(Shaking her head)

Mmm. What if a non-Catholic went in to confess? What would he do?

LAURA

I don't know. Why would you?

MALKINA

I don't know. Maybe because you're only as sick as your secrets. Would he listen?

LAURA

I don't know. He wouldn't be able to give you absolution if you're not a Catholic.

MALKINA

You believe that only Catholics go to Heaven?

LAURA

I think it's pretty much what the Church teaches. I'm not so sure.

MALKINA

Yeah. But anybody could just wander into the booth, right?

LAURA

The confessional? Yes. I suppose.

MALKINA

So what do you say?

LAURA

You confess your sins.

MALKINA

Yes, but what do you say? You get in there and what? Do you tell him who you are?

LAURA

No. You say: Bless me Father for I have sinned. And you say how long it's been since your last confession. And then you tell him what you've done. Then when you're through you say that you're sorry. Heartily sorry, you say. And that you won't do it again. Or them. Whatever they are.

MALKINA

But you do.

LAURA

Do them again.

MALKINA

Yes.

LAURA
I suppose. Usually.

MALKINA
Do you give him any money or
anything?

LAURA
No.

MALKINA
(Shaking her head)
Mmm. Strange. Suppose you've done
something really nasty. He doesn't
pump you for details?

LAURA
I don't think so. You're
embarrassing me.

MALKINA
I can see. You're blushing. Okay.
We'll change the subject.

LAURA
Good.

MALKINA
We'll talk about my sex life.

LAURA
(Looking up)
You're teasing.

MALKINA
Just rattling your cage. What a
world.

LAURA
You think the world is strange.

MALKINA
I meant yours.

A BAR AT THE EDGE OF THE CITY. AFTERNOON.

The counselor comes in and stands at the door accustoming his eyes to the darkness. A man at a table in the corner raises one hand and the counselor crosses the room and pulls back a chair and sits. The man is the counselor's age.

Nice-looking and well dressed. There are a few customers at the bar. At the far end a young man is playing the pinball machine.

WESTRAY
Counselor.

COUNSELOR
Hey.

WESTRAY
How are you?

COUNSELOR
I'm okay. Is this a place where you hang?

WESTRAY
Never been here in my life.

COUNSELOR
So how did you pick it?

WESTRAY
I opened the yellow pages to Bar.

He is leaning back in the chair, looking.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)
Is there anyone waiting tables here?

COUNSELOR
Here she comes.

The waitress arrives at the table and puts down paper napkins.

WAITRESS
What'll it be?

WESTRAY
Let me have a Heinekens.

COUNSELOR
Make it two.

The waitress moves away. Westray sits back in his chair and studies the counselor.

WESTRAY
Fire away, Counselor.

COUNSELOR
All right. What do you do with the money?

WESTRAY
What do I do or what does one do?

COUNSELOR
You.

WESTRAY
Mine goes off shore. We can talk if you like. But you can't use my people.

COUNSELOR
All right.

WESTRAY
Let me make a call.

COUNSELOR
All right.

WESTRAY
What else? You're not happy.

COUNSELOR
I'm all right. What's the buy-out for this whole deal?

WESTRAY
Net net?

COUNSELOR
Funny. Yeah. Net net.

WESTRAY
Hard to put a cold dollar on it. You don't know what your expenses are until it's actually delivered. It's six hundred and twenty-five kilos. Pure uncut. It sells for about fifty bucks an ounce in Columbia and the street price in Dallas can be as high as two grand.

COUNSELOR
Is that where it's going? Dallas?

WESTRAY

No. It's going to Chicago. If the whole deal were to go tits up in a ditch the papers would put the street value at a hundred mil. We're probably looking at twenty. Maybe a bit more. If you're not in you need to tell me.

COUNSELOR

I'm all right.

WESTRAY

It's not just our people. You've got the money guys. You have to get cash in dollars into Mexico and then they have to get it out again. That's all they do. You have to use US banks. This means you have to have a corporation. And to do that you have to have someone on the inside. You'd be surprised at the people who are in this business.

COUNSELOR

Do you have a corporation?

WESTRAY

No. Of course not. We just pay the points. The other options of course is cash. Which is even a bigger problem. For all the obvious reasons. The biggest issue is not that your guy is going to fall in love with a pole dancer and go south with three million of your ducats. The biggest issue is that someone is going to find out who he is and what he's up to. Here we go.

The waitress arrives and sets down the bottles and glasses. The counselor takes a clip of bills from his front pocket and puts a ten-dollar bill on the tray and she reaches into her apron for change.

COUNSELOR

You're good.

WESTRAY

Thanks.

The waitress moves away.

COUNSELOR

If the drug wars stop this will dry up, right?

WESTRAY

Yeah. Bad times are good times for guys like us. What we deal with are start-up companies. In the present scenario the cartels just don't have time to fool with them.

COUNSELOR

What will happen to them when they do?

WESTRAY

I think you can figure that one out.

COUNSELOR

Does any of this give you pause?

WESTRAY

Does it you?

COUNSELOR

I don't know.

WESTRAY

Mmm. Do you know how many people were killed in Juarez last year?

COUNSELOR

A lot.

WESTRAY

Yeah. I think three thousand is a lot.

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

WESTRAY

It's an interesting history. If you go back a few years, before the drug wars, who was being killed then?

COUNSELOR

In Juarez.

WESTRAY

In Juarez.

COUNSELOR

Young factory girls. The girls who work in the maquilas.

WESTRAY

Young and attractive.

COUNSELOR

Yes.

WESTRAY

Sexually mutilated.

COUNSELOR

Yes.

WESTRAY

Who was doing this?

COUNSELOR

No one knows.

WESTRAY

No one knows? Come on, Counselor. Hundreds of young girls. Thousands, most likely. Follow the money. If you have so much cash that you're using it to insulate your house, and you've bought all the cars and clothes and guns that you can find a place to put, and you are morally depraved out of all human recognition, what do you then spend your money on?

COUNSELOR

Why do they kill them?

WESTRAY

Who knows. For fun. Snuff films. You'll see. Those will start turning up. If they haven't already.

(MORE)

WESTRAY (CONT'D)

Anyway, what would you do with a sixteen-year-old girl that you'd just violated with a tire tool?

COUNSELOR

You think the druglords hire kidnapppers to keep them supplied with young girls.

WESTRAY

No. I think they have kidnapppers on full retainer.

COUNSELOR

Where is this going?

WESTRAY

You tell me. But here's what is true. If whole nations are capable of love and hate and greed and envy—which they are—then it's just more than possible that murder itself can become a collective enterprise. Murder as a national pastime. You're smiling. I think there's probably only one thing reserved exclusively to the individual.

COUNSELOR

And that would be?

WESTRAY

Forgiveness. People as a group can love or hate or admire or malign. But there's no such thing as collective forgiveness.

COUNSELOR

I'd have to think about that.

WESTRAY

I know.

COUNSELOR

You sound like you're trying to talk me out of it.

WESTRAY

I just want to be sure that you're in it. I don't know. Maybe you're right.

(MORE)

WESTRAY (CONT'D)
Probably I should tell you what
Mickey Rourke told what's-his-face.
That that's my recommendation
anyway. Don't do it.

COUNSELOR
(Smiling)
Because I'll tell you something,
Counselor. This arson is a serious
crime.

WESTRAY
Yes. And so is this.

COUNSELOR
What about you?

WESTRAY
I can vanish. In a heartbeat. With
my money. Can you?

The counselor sits looking out across the room. Outside the
bar.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)
Where are you parked?

COUNSELOR
(Pointing to his Bentley)
That's me over there.

WESTRAY
Law business must be good.

COUNSELOR
(Shrugs)
It's ten years old. Twelve.

WESTRAY
(Looking around.)
Nice neighborhood I picked.

COUNSELOR
At least there's no dead bodies in
the street.

WESTRAY
Yet. You know that Latin America
starts at that bridge down there.

COUNSELOR

I know.

WESTRAY

I know you do. Sort of. But even when you live here Mexico is not real. Not really. Anyway. You take care. You hear?

The counselor starts across the street. Westray watches him.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)

Counselor.

The counselor stops in the middle of the street and turns.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)

You know why Jesus Christ wasn't born in Mexico?

COUNSELOR

No. Why?

WESTRAY

They couldn't find three wise men or a virgin.

The counselor shakes his head. He turns to go.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)

Counselor.

The counselor stops and turns.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)

Here's something else for you to think about. The beheadings and the mutilations? That's just business. You have to keep up appearances. It's not like there's some smoldering rage at the bottom of it. Not that their love of bloodshed is insincere. But let's see if we can guess who it is that they really want to kill.

COUNSELOR

I don't know. Who?

WESTRAY
You, Counselor. You.

A SMALL AND BARE CONFERENCE ROOM FOR LAWYERS AND THEIR
CLIENTS AT THE TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY FOR WOMEN.

No windows. A table and two chairs. The counselor is standing
at the table with his briefcase, going through his documents.
The door opens and a guard hands in a woman in prison uniform
and closes the door behind her. She is an attractive woman in
her early forties.

COUNSELOR
Hey.

RUTH
Did you bring cigarettes?

COUNSELOR
Yeah.

He digs into his briefcase and comes up with a carton of
cigarettes and slides them across the table and she sits and
starts to open the carton.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
(Arranging his files on
the table)
I know you use those things to
trade with but I still don't
understand what it is that you
trade for.

RUTH
(Opening a pack of
cigarettes and tapping
one out)
You don't want to know.

COUNSELOR
They treating you well?

RUTH
Oh yeah. Peachy.

COUNSELOR
You've got a preliminary hearing on
the seventeenth. What size dress do
you wear?

RUTH
I wear a seven.

COUNSELOR
What about shoes?

RUTH
Otra vez.

COUNSELOR
Seven?

RUTH
Yeah.

COUNSELOR
Hat?

RUTH
What?

COUNSELOR
What size hat?

RUTH
Hat? I don't know what size hat.
Goddamn. What do I need a hat for?
A hat? You're shittin' me, ain't
you?

COUNSELOR
Yes.

RUTH
Smart-ass. You had me goin' there
for a minte.

She lights a cigarette with a lighter and looks up and blows
some.

RUTH (CONT'D)
You goin' to get me something sexy
to wear?

COUNSELOR
No.

RUTH
You'll have me lookin' like a
fucking schoolmarm.

COUNSELOR
How about a business woman?

RUTH
Yeah. Some business.

She leans back and blows a stream of smoke across the table and the counselor waves his hand back and forth to waft it away. He pulls back the chair and sits at the table.

COUNSELOR
All right.

RUTH
I know you don't think this room is bugged but you don't really know, do you?

COUNSELOR
No. Not if you put it that way.

RUTH
I don't know any other way to put it.

COUNSELOR
What did you want to tell me?

RUTH
My kid's in jail.

COUNSELOR
Oh boy. Where?

RUTH
Fort Hancock.

COUNSELOR
Fort Hancock.

RUTH
Yeah.

COUNSELOR
What was he doing in Fort Hancock?

RUTH
He was comin' to see me.

COUNSELOR
What's he in jail for?

RUTH
Speeding.

COUNSELOR
Speeding?

RUTH
Yeah.

COUNSELOR
He couldn't pay the fine?

RUTH
No. He had twelve thousand dollars
on him but they took that off of
him.

COUNSELOR
Where was he going with twelve
thousand dollars?

RUTH
He was comin' here. Like I said.

COUNSELOR
How did you find this out?

RUTH
He called.

COUNSELOR
What else is he charged with?

RUTH
I don't know. Some other stuff.
Reckless endangerment or whatever.
He said they just piled that stuff
on on account of how fast he was
goin'.

COUNSELOR
How fast was he going?

RUTH
Two o six.

COUNSELOR
Two o six.

RUTH
Yeah.

COUNSELOR

What is that? Two o six? That's not a speed.

RUTH

That's what he said. He didn't want to tell me.

COUNSELOR

That's a time of day. Or somebody's weight. Two o six? Are you telling me he was going two hundred and six miles an hour? In what?

RUTH

On that Jap bike of his.

COUNSELOR

Jesus.

RUTH

If you could get him his money back he could pay off the fine and get out of there.

COUNSELOR

Where did he get the money?

RUTH

I don't know.

COUNSELOR

I know you don't. That's the problem.

RUTH

What's the problem?

COUNSELOR

If you have more than ten thousand dollars on you it belongs to the United States Government.

RUTH

How is that?

COUNSELOR

Because they say so. If you can't explain where you got it they take it.

(MORE)

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

You might think you should get to keep everything up to ten grand and the government would just get the overage but the government doesn't think like that.

RUTH

He ain't getting his money back.

COUNSELOR

No.

RUTH

Well I don't see how you can just take somebody's money.

COUNSELOR

Yeah, well. Welcome to America. How much is the fine?

RUTH

Four hundred dollars.

COUNSELOR

Jesus.

RUTH

I don't guess you'd spring for it, would you?

COUNSELOR

Christ. All right. Four hundred dollars?

RUTH

All right what?

COUNSELOR

Al right I'll get him out.

RUTH

You will?

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

RUTH

Really?

COUNSELOR

Yes really.

RUTH
Thanks. I owe you.

COUNSELOR
Yes you do.

RUTH
How about a blowjob?

COUNSELOR
Well, you'd still owe me three
hundred and eighty.

RUTH
Damn but you are a smart-ass.

COUNSELOR
I know. You bring it out in me.
Lighten up, Ruthie.

RUTH
Don't call me that. I hate that
name. I don't even like Ruth.

AN INSPECTION STATION ON INTERSTATE 10.

Vehicles of various sorts are inching along. The border patrol agent waves several cars past and stops a truck and talks to the driver, then waves him past. The septic-tank truck pulls up and the driver nods and smiles.

DRIVER
How you doin'?

AGENT
(Making an unpleasant
face)
All right. Get that thing out of
here.

DRIVER
You got it .

The truck pulls away and out onto the highway. The driver shifts gears. He is suddenly a very serious-looking person.

THE COUNSELOR'S CONDOMINIUM.

Night. He is sitting in his leather chair wit a drink, talking on the phone.

COUNSELOR

I know. I just wanted to hear your voice.

Yeah. I really miss you. Don't go there.

Yes. Bad. Badly.

You haven't been taking liberties with your person have you?

(Smiling, almost chuckling)

You couldn't touch it with a powder puff?

It's too boring.

I kept waking up thinking you were there. I could smell your perfume on the sheets. I had such an enormous erection I had to get out of bed in order to turn over.

Yes. In the airport parking lot. Of course.

Did I know that you would do it without me? Of course. I don't know. I thought it would be exciting.

Like high school. Yes.

I remember asking if you were all right. Because you were gasping like an asthmatic.

Of course I remember. What I said was: Here, let me help you off with your damp things. And then I pulled down your panties.

Yes. Ooh. Oh my goodness. Is this phone sex?

I don't know. Because I'm sort of a hands-on guy? I know.

Life is being in bed with you. Everything else is just waiting.

The Flying Wallendas. Yes.

(MORE)

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

I love you very much. Yes.

You too. Good night.

He lowers the phone into his lap and leans his head back in the chair with his eyes closed.

REINER AND THE COUNSELOR IN AN EMPTY NIGHTCLUB. LATE AFTERNOON.

REINER

You see a place like this in the cold light of day it looks pretty seedy. It is pretty seedy. Everything's lighting, really. Lighting and music. You get the right lighting in here and some music and some good-looking girls and suddenly it's a whole other world. We're going to have to spend some money. Sure. But we're looking for cash flow here. The dinner club breaks even any given month that's manna from heaven. This is going to be just quick and dirty and open the doors.

COUNSELOR

How soon do you think?

REINER

Two weeks. Three, max.

COUNSELOR

You're keeping the dance floor.

REINER

Yeah. A dance floor takes up a lot of space but when you have live music and dancing you have a very different sort of place. The door fees don't really amount to all that much but you can charge more for drinks. But mostly it's just a different milieu. You try and chat up a girl at a bar? That's a no-man's land. How many guys are good at that?

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

But you ask a chick to dance, well, she doesn't want to look like a bitch. You got a better shot. Sitting at the bar she's supposed to tell you to fuck off. You know Peterson, right?

COUNSELOR

Sure

REINER

Did you know he speaks Portuguese?

COUNSELOR

I didn't know that.

REINER

His mother was from Brazil. She grew up here but her whole family's from Brazil. So this cousin of Peterson's shows up and he speaks about three words of English. If that. This is maybe three years ago. We're all out here on Saturday night and the cousin is asking Peterson how do you say may I have this dance, only we get wind of it and we shut Peterson up and we're coaching the cousin on how you say it.

Repeat after me: I. Want. To. Eat. Your. Pussy. And we work with him till he's pretty much got it down. I want to ate you poosy. And we send him off. He's this kind of elegant looking guy anyway, He's wearing a suit and everything. And he goes off across the room and he picks out this really great looking girl and he stands in front of her and gives her this little bow and he says: I want to ate you poosy. Well. The table gets pretty quiet and this girl looks up at him and she says: What did you say? So of course he says it again. Little bow. I want to ate you poosy.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

So she studies him for a minute and then she leans over to see past him and of course here's these three guys across the room all hugging each other and just weeping with merriment and she gets up and she takes Peterson's cousin by the hand and she says something like: Well Buster, this is your lucky night.

And she takes him out to this Mercedes van in the parking lot and proceeds to fuck his brains out. He's gone for an hour. We don't know what the hell is going on. But everything he's ever heard about American girls is true. Finally she leads him back in and she gives him this big sexy kiss and she cuts her eyes over at us to make sure we're watching and she sends him back to the table.

Well. We're going nuts. Peterson is trying to get the story out of him and he's jabbering away and rolling his eyes and we're like, what's he saying? What's he saying? And finally it all comes out. And we're just fucking flabbergasted. No way is this guy lying.

We look at the girl across the dance floor and she blows us this big kiss. Jesus. We're just fucking stunned. We want all the details of course and fucking Peterson is feeding it to us in dribblets. And of course it's the whole thing. Blowjob. The works. Until we're just sitting there staring at each other. And after a while Peterson gets up and he looks at us and he says: I'm going for it. And off he goes.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

He crosses the floor to this other table where this really cool looking girl is sitting by herself and he gives her the little bow and announces that he wants to eat her poosy.

Well of course about this time the husband is coming out of the mens room and he's about eleven feet tall and he looms up behind Peterson and the girl says: Why don't you tell him what you just told me? Anyway, to make a long story short, this guy hits Peterson so hard that he goes completely across the dance floor on his back with his arms at his sides and comes up against the wall with his head under a chair and just lies there. Apparently dead.

This guy hit him so hard that he came out of his loafers. His loafers are still standing at the table. Peterson is lying dead on the dance floor in his sockfeet with his head under a chair.

Now I know what you're thinking. The guy grabs his wife, throws some money on the table, and they split. Right? Not a bit of it. He sits down and snaps his fingers and they order fresh drinks. Like this is every day for him.

Anyway they call an ambulance and they haul Peterson off to the hospital and he's got a concussion and a broken jaw. And his loafers are still at the table.

COUNSELOR

Jesus. What happened with you guys?

REINER

Nothing. We left. We'd had enough fun for one evening.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

Somebody wanted to go over and get Peterson's loafers but I didn't think that was such a good idea.

Anyway. The other big space-eater is the bandstand. They just had a jukebox in here. I think what I'm going to do is take that wall out and get rid of the hallway. I think that will do it.

YARD OF THE PUMP MASTERS SEPTIC TANK PUMPING COMPANY.

Early morning. The trucks are pulling out one by one and the yard master is checking them off on his clipboard. When they are all gone there is one truck left in the yard.

A LARGE MOTORCYCLE STORE IN THE CITY.

A man enters and stands looking. He crosses to where a Kawasaki ZX-12 motorcycle is mounted and circling slowly on a motorized dais. The dais is marked off with a blue felt rope and the man approaches and stands looking at the bike for a moment, then unhooks the rope and lets it fall to the floor and mounts the dais and stands circling with it. A clerk talking to a customer nearby sees him.

BIKE CLERK

Excuse me a minute.

The clerk comes over to the dais. The man has taken a steel tape measure from his coat pocket and is measuring the height of the Kawasaki at the handlebars.

BIKE CLERK (CONT'D)

Sir, may I help you?

TAPE MEASURE MAN

looking at the bike while the steel tape spools up and clicks home. He pops his lips.

TAPE MEASURE MAN

Nope. I'm all done.

The man steps down from the revolving dais and puts the tape measure back in his coat pocket and goes past the clerk toward the door. The clerk bends and picks up the rope and hooks the end of it back in the stand and turns and watches the man as he leaves.

CHURCH, INTERIOR.

Five women are standing in line along the rear wall of the church waiting to go to confession. The women are both Hispanic and Anglo. At the front of the line is Malkina, dressed casually but fashionably. The woman in the confessional pushes back the curtain and exits with her head bowed and Malkina enters the confessional booth.

MALKINA

Hi.

PRIEST

Hi?

MALKINA

Oh. Bless me father for I have sinned.

Silence.

PRIEST

How long has it been since your last confession?

MALKINA

I've never been before. This is my first.

PRIEST

Are you Catholic?

MALKINA

No.

PRIEST

Why are you here?

MALKINA

I wanted to confess my sins.

PRIEST

Have you ever done this before?

MALKINA

No. I told you.

PRIEST

I couldn't give you absolution. Even if you did. Confess. You couldn't be forgiven.

MALKINA

I know. I just wanted to tell someone what I'd done and I thought why not go to a professional.

PRIEST

Have you thought about taking instructions?

MALKINA

That's not something I do very well.

PRIEST

I mean in order to become a Catholic. You take what are called instructions. You learn about the faith. What it means. Then you could confess and you would be forgiven for your sins.

MALKINA

How do you know?

PRIEST

Excuse me?

MALKINA

What if they're unforgivable?

PRIEST

Nothing is unforgivable.

MALKINA

Yeah? What's the worst thing anyone ever told you?

PRIEST

I wouldn't be at liberty to tell you a thing like that. The priest can never reveal anything from the confessional.

MALKINA

That bad, huh? Well, I haven't killed anybody. But I've been pretty bad. I think. I don't really know because I'm not all that sure about the rules.

PRIEST

Where are you from?

MALKINA
Buenos Aires. You?

PRIEST
Excuse me?

MALKINA
Where are you from?

PRIEST
Phoenix. Arizona.

MALKINA
I know where Phoenix is. Do you
ever go out on dates with girls?

PRIEST
No. Of course not.

MALKINA
Boys?

PRIEST
No. What did you want to tell me.

MALKINA
What if I'd done something really
bad? What if I'd killed somebody.
Would you call the police?

PRIEST
No.

MALKINA
I killed somebody.

PRIEST
You said that you hadn't. Look. I'm
sorry, but we have people here
waiting to go to confession.

MALKINA
They can wait. I did. You want to
throw me out because I'm not a
Catholic but what if I'd said I was
one? I mean, you don't carry a card
around do you?

PRIEST
Who did you talk to about this?

MALKINA

Why did I talk to somebody?

PRIEST

You said Bless me father.

MALKINA

I asked a friend. But she didn't know I was going to do it. I asked her if non-Catholics could go to confession but she said no you couldn't.

PRIEST

But you didn't believe her.

MALKINA

No, I believed her. But I'm a curious person. I just waited to see what would happen.

PRIEST

So are we done here then?

MALKINA

I haven't told you my sins yet.

PRIEST

I don't want to hear your sins. There would be no point. Are you baptized?

MALKINA

I don't know. It's possible.

PRIEST

Your parents never told you?

MALKINA

I never knew my parents. Look, you don't have to do the forgiveness thing. All you would have to do is listen. To the sins. You could even pretend I was lying. If you didn't like what you hearing.

PRIEST

Why would you lie?

MALKINA

I wouldn't. But you could think that I was. Maybe I wanted to be wicked but I didn't have the stones for it. So I would just make up stuff. Women tell you about sex, don't they?

PRIEST

I can't talk about that.

MALKINA

Yes. But every woman who comes to confess tells you that she is an adulterer or a fornicator or something of else why would she be here? The only women who don't come are the ones who aren't doing anything. So you must get an unusual picture of women.

You must think that they are just having sex all the time. That that's all they do. Anyway I think that women might make up sexy things to tell you just to make you crazy. Do you think that they do that?

PRIEST

No. I don't.

MALKINA

But you don't know, Suppose that I told you that I had sex with my sister. Would you believe that?

PRIEST

You really have to go now.

MALKINA

Because I did. We did it every night. As soon as the lights were out we were at it. We'd be falling asleep at our desks the next day at school. They didn't know what was wrong with us. But that's not the worst thing. Do you want to hear the worst thing?

(MORE)

MALKINA (CONT'D)

You might say that it's not really about sex but it is about sex. It's always about sex. Wait. Where are you going?

The priest pushes back the curtain and exits the confessional. Malkina, kneeling, turns and pushes aside the curtain. The priest is hurrying up the aisle, blessing himself.

MALKINA (CONT'D)

(Standing up and calling to the priest.)

Wait! I wasn't finished!

The women waiting to go to the confession are confused, horrified. One of them blesses herself.

BORDER CITY. EVENING.

An outdoor Cafe adjoining a parking lot. Metal chairs and tables. Traffic. A Mexican man is sitting at one of those tables with a cup of coffee before him and a newspaper. The young man in green pulls up on the Kawasaki ZX-12. He takes off the gloves and the helmet and puts the gloves inside the helmet and steps off the bike and walks down to where the man is sitting and kicks back a chair and sits down.

A man and a girl are sitting in a parked car. The girl is watching the table through a pair of binoculars.

GIRL

I won't be able to get what the kid is saying. Is that okay?

MAN

We don't care what the kid is saying.

She is watching through the binoculars and writing on a pad on a clipboard.

The man at the table rises and leaves, leaving the paper on the table. The kid sits at the table and opens the newspaper and sits reading.

MAN (CONT'D)

Did you get it?

GIRL
Yeah. It's not much.

MAN
That's okay. Keep your eye on him.

GIRL
I am.

MAN
This guy doesn't read the fucking newspapers.

GIRL
I know.

The kid rakes an object from under the paper into his helmet and puts down the paper and stands and puts the helmet under his arm and crosses the plaza to his bike and puts his foot over the bike and starts it with the starter and pulls his gloves from the helmet and lays them on the tank in front of him and pulls on the helmet and fastens the strap and then pulls on the gloves and kicks back the stand and pulls away into the traffic.

MAN
Could you see what it was?

GIRL
No. But it's in the helmet.

MAN
Yeah. It's in the helmet.

The man is dialing a number on his cell phone.

CORNER TABLE IN AN UPSCALE CLUB.

The counselor and Reiner.

REINER
I don't know. Women have funny ideas about sex. They're supposed to be so modest? Let me tell you. When they get it into their head that they want to fuck they're like a freight train. Men think they want the unusual? They don't even know what that is. By the time they find out it's too late.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

You don't even know the name of the train you're on. You can't keep up. No way. The things I've learned about women? Fuck. About half of it I'd like to forget.

He takes a sip of his drink.

COUNSELOR

I'm not sure I follow you. What is it you'd like to forget? For instance.

REINER

You don't want to know.

COUNSELOR

Sure I do.

REINER

Not the worst things.

COUNSELOR

Those in particular.

REINER

Not the very worst.

COUNSELOR

Come off it, Reiner.

REINER

I don't know. Let's talk about something else.

COUNSELOR

Are you shitting me? What else?

REINER

Yeah. I don't know. I shouldn't tell you this.

COUNSELOR

Just pull up your socks and tell me. What is it you'd like to forget?

REINER

All right. I'd like to forget Malkina fucking my car.

COUNSELOR

What?

REINER

See?

COUNSELOR

What did you say?

REINER

I said I'd like to forget Malkina
fucking my car. I think.

COUNSELOR

What the hell are you talking
about?

REINER

You remember the 328 I had.

COUNSELOR

Sure. Nice car.

REINER

Very nice car. Not a V-12 but a
better car than the 308. Which was
an embarrassment for a Ferrari.
Westray had one and he said that it
wouldn't pull a greasy string out
of a cat's ass. His metaphor. Is
that a metaphor? Anyway, this was a
while back. Not that long.

We'd been getting it on for a while
and we care back one night - we
were staying up at Cloudcroft -
and we drove out on the golf course
and parked and we're sitting there
talking and for no particular
reason that I could see she lifts
herself up and slides off her
knickers and hands them to me and
gets out of the car. I asked her
what she was doing and she puts her
finger to her lips. Like the car is
listening. And then she says: I'm
going to fuck your car.

Jesus. She tells me to leave the
door open. Turns out she wants the
domelight on.

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

So she goes around and climbs up on the hood of the Ferrari and pulls her dress up around her waist and spreads herself across the windshield in front of me with no panties on and begins to rub herself on the glass. Don't even think I'm making this up.

You can't make this up. I mean, she was a dancer, right? In Argentina? She danced at the opera thing down there. I've seen the clippings. And she does this full split and starts rubbing herself up and down on the glass and she's lying on the roof of the car and she looks down over the side to see if I'm watching. Like, no, I'm sitting there reading my e-mail. And she gestures to me to crank down the window and she leans in and kisses me. Upside down.

And then she tells me that she's going to come. And I thought, well, I'm losing my fucking mind. That's what's happening here. It was like one of those catfish things. One of those bottom feeders you see going up the side of the aquarium. Sucking its way up the glass. It was just. I don't know. It was just Hallucinatory. You see a thing like that, it changes you.

COUNSELOR

Jesus.

REINER

Tell me about it.

COUNSELOR

Did she?

REINER

Did she what?

COUNSELOR

Did she come?

REINER

Yeah. Sure. Then she just laid there. Spread out across the windshield. Finally she climbs down and gets in the car and shuts the door and I hand her her knickers and she puts them in her purse and she sort of looks at me. Like to see what I thought about that.

What I thought about that? Jesus. I don't know what I thought about that. I still don't. It was to gynecological to be sexy. Almost. But mostly I was just fucking stunned. Maybe I was thinking about the leather. I don't know.

COUNSELOR

The leather.

REINER

Yeah. The seats. You know. Where was she sitting? I mean the car is about two weeks old. Finally I asked her if she'd ever done that before and she said she'd done everything before. And I believe her. So I star the engine and turn on the lights but the windshield is all smeared and I didn't have anything to wipe it off and I tried the wipers but naturally the windshield washer thing doesn't work because the Italians don't really believe in that sort of thing and finally I took off my socks and got out of the car and used them.

COUNSELOR

Catfish?

REINER

I don't know. Yeah. I think so.

COUNSELOR

Do you think she knew the kind of effect that might have on a guy?

REINER

Jesus, Counselor. Are you kidding?
She knows everything.

COUNSELOR

You don't think this is an odd
thing to tell me?

REINER

I think it's an odd thing.

COUNSELOR

Yes, but I mean why would you tell
me this? I mean, I know this woman.
Why is it okay to tell a thing like
that about somebody?

REINER

Somebody I'm banging?

COUNSELOR

Come on, Reiner.

REINER

I don't know. You're probably
right. Maybe I wanted to see what
you would say. Maybe there's more
to it than that. Maybe I'm scared.

COUNSELOR

You're scared?

REINER

Yeah. Probably. Yeah. Sometimes she
scares the shit out of me.

COUNSELOR

Because of that?

REINER

No. Not because of that.

COUNSELOR

You're in love with her.

REINER

I don't know what I am. Yeah. I
suppose I am in love with her. You
don't think that's cause for worry?
It's like being in love with what?

(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

Easeful death? Fuck it. Fuck it, counselor. Just forget the whole thing.

COUNSELOR

It's just that I don't know what it is that you're trying to tell me.

REINER

I know.

COUNSELOR

Does this have anything to do with the deal?

REINER

I don't know. You're right. I shouldn't have told you. Just forget it.

COUNSELOR

Forget it.

REINER

Yeah.

COUNSELOR

How do you propose that I do that?

REINER

I don't know. Jesus, Counselor. How do I know?

MALKINA'S BEDROOM.

She sits in a robe in front of the fire. The cheetahs are lying on the rug at her feet. She is listening on the phone.

LAURA

No. I had a dream about you. And when I woke up I couldn't remember why the dream was so troubling even though I could still remember the dream. I just wanted to call and see if you were all right.

MALKINA

Are you superstitious?

LAURA

I don't think so. No more than the next person.

MALKINA

And who would that be?

LAURA

Excuse me?

MALKINA

The next person. You're not gay are you?

LAURA

No. Of course not. I shouldn't have called. I think what I wanted to say is that although we may have lost, it doesn't mean we are lost. I know you think my world naive. But is that so bad? Is hope a curse?

Silence.

MALKINA

You should be careful what you wish for, Angel. You might not get it.

LAURA

I know.

MALKINA

Do you?

LAURA

Yes. I do.

MALKINA

Good. I'll see you at the club.

NIGHT. TWO LANE BLACKTOP ROAD THROUGH THE HIGH DESERT.

A car passes and the lights recede down the long straight and fade out. A man walks out from the scrub cedars that line the road and stands in the middle of the road and lights a cigarette. He is carrying a roll of thin braided wire over one shoulder. He continues across the road to the fence.

A tall metal pipe is mounted to one of the fenceposts and at the top - some twenty feet off the ground - is a floodlight.

The man pushes the button on a small plastic sending unit and the light comes on, flooding the road and the man's face. He turns it off and walks down the fence line a good hundred yards to the corner of the fence and here he drops the coil of wire to the ground and takes a flashlight from his back pocket and puts it in his teeth and taken a pair of leather gloves from his belt and puts them on.

Then he loops the wire around the corner post and pulls the end of the wire through the loop and wraps it about ten times around the wire itself and tucks the end several times inside the loop and then take the wire in both hands and hauls it as tight as he can get it. Then he takes the coil of wire and walks out and crosses the road, letting out the wire behind him. In the cedars on the far side a flatbed truck is parked with the bed of the truck facing the road.

He walks up to the rear of the truck and turns and pulls the wire taut and shines his flashlight back along the length of it. There is an iron pipe at the right rear of the tuck bed mounted vertically in a pair of collars so that it can slide up and down and the man threads the wire through the hole in the pipe and pulls it taut and stops it from sliding back by clamping the wire with a pair of vice-grips. Then he walks back out to the road and takes a tape measure from his belt and measures the height of the wire on the road surface. He goes back to the truck and lowers the iron pipe in its collars and clamps it in its place again with a threaded lever that he turns by hand against the vertical rod. He goes out to the road and measures the wire again and comes back and wraps the end of the wire through a heavy three inch iron ring and walks to the front of the bed where he pulls the wire taut and wraps the wire around itself to secure the ring at the end of the wire and then pulls the ring over a hook mounted in the side rail of the truck bed.

He stands looking at it. He strums the wire with his fingers. Its gives off a deep resonant note. He unhooks the ring on the truck bed and goes around and he takes a walkie-talkie from a work-bag in the cab of the truck and stands in the open door of the truck listening. He checks his watch by the dome light in the cab.

WIRE-MAN

Anything?

VOICE

He's coming.

WIRE-MAN
You're at eight miles.

VOICE
Yeah.

WIRE-MAN
That's less than three minutes.

VOICE
Yeah. Flat out it's about two
minutes and twenty seconds.

WIRE-MAN
Can you hear him?

VOICE
Not yet.

They wait.

VOICE (CONT'D)
There he is.

WIRE-MAN
Yeah. I hear him. All right. Let's
do it.

He hangs up the walkie-talkie and takes the cigarette from his mount and grinds it into the dirt and shuts the door of the truck. He stands at the rear of the truck. He looks at his watch. Very thin in the distance we can hear the high-pitched scream of the Kawasaki bike flat out at eight thousand rpm.

Shot of the green rider bent low over the bike at one hundred and ninety miles an hour. Suddenly the floodlight comes on and he raises up and turns his head to look at it.

THE TRUCK.

The desert is suddenly lit to the north of the wire-man and he takes the ring and carries it forward and pulls it over the hook. The wire hums.

Shot of the green rider with his face turned back to the floodlight now behind him. Suddenly his head zips away and in the helmet it goes bouncing down the highway behind the bike. The bike continues on, the motor slows and dies to silence, and in the distance we see a long slither of sparks recede into the dark.

THE TRUCK.

The man clips the wire at the ring with a pair of wire-cutters and the wire zips away. He walks out to the road with the walkie-talkie. In the road he shines the light down the blacktop and then walks down the roadside ditch until he comes to the helmet.

WIRE-MAN

(Into walkie-talkie)

We're good. Yeah. Over and out.

He puts away the walkie-talkie and bends over and picks up the helmet. It is surprisingly heavy. He goes back to the truck and opens the cab door on the driver's side and puts the helmet on the floor and shuts the door and goes out to the road and crosses to the fence where he cuts the wire free from the fence post and begins to wind it up as he walks, passing the wire over his elbow at each turn to make a coil of the wire. At the truck he stows the wire in a toolbox under the bed of the truck and gets in the truck and starts it and turns on the lights and turns out into the road.

DESERT, NIGHT.

At the fence the man is disassembling the pole and floodlight. Disconnecting the wires. The pole is made of sections of 1 5/8 inch galvanized chainlink fencepost that slide one into the next and he puts these in the bed of the truck and puts the small components in the under-bed toolbox.

DESERT. NIGHT.

The truck pulls out into the road and rives past the headless body sprawled in the road. Then it stops. The man looks out the window of the truck back at the body, then backs up the truck and gets out. He picks up the feet and drags the body into the ditch and wipes his hands on his pants and then gets back in the truck and pulls away down the highway.

DEATH ROW CELL, TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY. NIGHT.

Ruth wakes and lies looking up at the ceiling. She sits up, pushing back the bed covers. She sits on the edge of the bunk with her hands folded.

FRONT GATE OF THE SEPTIC TANK COMPANY.

The flatbed truck pulls up and the wire-man gets out and shuts the door. He is holding a battery-driven die grinder in one hand and he watches the road behind him where a single light is approaching. Sound of a motorcycle.

The cycle pulls up and halts and the rider gets off and kicks down the stand and the wire-man goes to the gate and turns on the die grinder and bends to put the padlock on the gate. A sheaf of sparks lights up the area and the lock falls to the ground in about twenty seconds. He pushes open the gate then bends and picks up the lock and juggles it in his hand and throws it into the bushes.

WIRE-MAN
(Shaking his hand)
Hot son of a bitch.

The second man goes past and turns on a flashlight.

SECOND MAN
You know which one it is?

WIRE-MAN
Yeah. It's got Arizona plates.

The wire-man goes back to the flatbed truck and opens the passenger side door and takes the green motorcycle helmet off the seat and takes out of the helmet a set of keys and a computerized jumper cable with three color coded jacks and shuts the door and follows the second man into the yard where the septic tank trucks are parked. The second man has opened the door of the truck and pulled the hood release and he goes around to the front of the truck and opens the hood.

WIRE-MAN (CONT'D)
Let me see your light.

He takes the light and goes along the side of the truck and picks up a loose set of wires.

SECOND MAN
You know how it goes?

WIRE-MAN
Yeah. It's color coded. Red to red,
green to green. Black to black.
Here. Hold the light.

He plugs in the connections and hands the keys to the second man.

WIRE-MAN (CONT'D)
See if it'll start.

The second man gets in the truck and cranks it. He cranks it again.

WIRE-MAN (CONT'D)
Give it some gas.

SECOND MAN
I am.

WIRE-MAN
Wait a minute. This thing's got a switch on it. You know how you say on and off in Spanish?

SECOND MAN
Fuck no.

WIRE-MAN
I'm just fuckin' with you. Try it now.

The second man cranks the engine and it starts. Wire-man drops the hood and steps back.

COUNSELOR'S CONDOMINIUM

The counselor is listening to Westray on the telephone, sitting in his chair in his condo.

WESTRAY
Counselor.

COUNSELOR
Que pasó?

WESTRAY
We've got a problem.

Silence.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)
You there?

COUNSELOR
I'm here. How bad a problem?

WESTRAY
Let's say pretty bad. Then multiply by ten.

COUNSELOR

Fuck.

WESTRAY

What time can you meet me tomorrow?

COUNSELOR

It is tomorrow.

WESTRAY

What time?

COUNSELOR

Nine o'clock.

WESTRAY

All right. Where.

COUNSELOR

How about the coffee shop at the Coronado.

WESTRAY

How about McDonald's? We can start getting used to our new life style.

COUNSELOR

(Softly)

Jesus. Coronado. Nine o'clock.

WESTRAY

See you at nine.

The counselor hangs up the phone and leans back and puts his hand over his eyes.

COUNSELOR

Fuck. Fuckety fuck fuck fuck.

COFFESHOP OF AN ELEGANT DOWNTOWN HOTEL.

The counselor is seated at a corner table watching Westray enter and scan the room. Westray is dressed in a good-looking suit, no tie. Carrying a newspaper. The counselor looks at his watch. Westray crosses the room to the table.

WESTRAY

Morning.

COUNSELOR

Good morning.

Westray lays the paper on the table and sits.

WESTRAY

You seen the paper?

COUNSELOR

No.

The waitress puts down menus and glasses of water. She knows the counselor and flirts a bit with him. They wait till she has gone before they talk again.

WESTRAY

Do you know who the Green Hornet is?

COUNSELOR

The Green Hornet.

WESTRAY

Yeah.

COUNSELOR

He's a cartoon character.

WESTRAY

Not exactly. It's all right. The newspaper doesn't know either. He's a biker.

COUNSELOR

Shit.

(Leaning back.)

All right. What? Is he in custody?

WESTRAY

In a manner of speaking, yes.

The counselor reaches for the paper.

COUNSELOR

It's in the paper? What has he done?

WESTRAY

You don't know anything about this.

COUNSELOR
 (Thumbing through paper)
 About what? The counselor stops and
 looks at Westray.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
 What?

Westray holds out his hand in a gesture that says: Go ahead.

WESTRAY
 Like I said: They don't even know
 who he is.

COUNSELOR
 He had no ID on him.

WESTRAY
 No. No I.D. And no head.

COUNSELOR
 No head?

WESTRAY
 Mmm.

The counselor sits reading. He looks up.

COUNSELOR
 What the hell is this? Does his
 mother know?

WESTRAY
 Oh yes. She thinks they'll
 probably get to her before the
 State does.

COUNSELOR
 Who is he?

WESTRAY
 One of your clients. Anyway they
 did find his head. Read on. It
 appeared to have been thrown from
 the window of a car at speed. I
 sort of liked that. Car at speed.

COUNSELOR
 He's not one of my clients.
 (Reading)
 Mother of God.
 (Looking up)
 (MORE)

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
A police spokesperson said the
matter is under further
investigation?

WESTRAY
I hope you haven't done something
stupid.

COUNSELOR
(Folding the paper)
All right. Why don't you tell me
what this is about.

WESTRAY
I don't know. I'm perfectly willing
to believe that you don't know
anything about it. But I'm not the
party that you have to convince.

COUNSELOR
Convince of what?

WESTRAY
Convince that this is just some
sort of odd coincidence. Because
they don't really believe in
coincidences. They've heard of
them, they've just never seen one.

COUNSELOR
Who are they? Specifically.

WESTRAY
Our people in Latin America.

COUNSELOR
What do they want?

WESTRAY
They want to talk to you.

COUNSELOR
Talk.

WESTRAY
Mmm.

COUNSELOR
Do I want to talk to them?

WESTRAY
I don't think so, Counselor.

COUNSELOR

So I guess my next question is what has happened to the shipment.

WESTRAY

I asked them that.

COUNSELOR

And they said?

WESTRAY

They said se fue.

COUNSELOR

Se fue? Jesus.

WESTRAY

Mmm.

COUNSELOR

They think the kid is responsible? What was he, a runner of some sort?

WESTRAY

The kid? Well yes. He apparently thought that he might come under scrutiny and had himself beheaded so as to allay suspicion. Something you might even think about considering for your self, Counselor. His mother is pretty unhappy with you also.

COUNSELOR

You talked to her?

WESTRAY

My guy talked to her.

COUNSELOR

What did she say?

WESTRAY

He said that she was going to have you killed.

COUNSELOR

(Softly)
Sweet Jesus.

WESTRAY

It might even be that a line could be forming.

COUNSELOR
Do you think she was serious?

WESTRAY
I don't know, Counselor. You might ask yourself what it is that she's in jail for now.

COUNSELOR
God.

The waitress comes to the table.

WAITRESS
Sorry about that. What can I get you to drink?

COUNSELOR
Hemlock.

WAITRESS
Excuse me?

WESTRAY
I'd like orange juice and coffee and he's having a double Maalox with a side of Oxycontin.

WAITRESS
I'm sorry.

WESTRAY
Just bring us two coffees. And my O.J.

The waitress moves away.

WESTRAY (CONT'D)
How did you wind up with her?

COUNSELOR
The mother?

WESTRAY
Yeah. The mother. The mother of all mothers.

COUNSELOR
Court appointment. It's an appeal. One of Ferguson's fucked up deals. Why would they cut his head off?
(Reading the paper again)

(MORE)

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
Gang related violence? Did you
read this fucking thing?

WESTRAY
I did read it.

COUNSELOR
Who writes this shit?

WESTRAY
They're called journalists. You
want to avoid them.

COUNSELOR
They can't hook me up to this.
Mother or no mother. What do they
think I would do with the stuff?

WESTRAY
They don't know. They don't care.
They assume that everybody knows
somebody. They do. You might try
telling them how stupid you are but
they're not going to believe you.
Do you have any money?

COUNSELOR
No.

WESTRAY
(Sitting back)
Well.

COUNSELOR
What else did they say?

WESTRAY
I don't know what they said. I
didn't talk to them after the se
fue. My guy talked to them again
but they didn't seem to even have a
lot of questions.

COUNSELOR
That seems odd.

WESTRAY

Don't it though? When people don't have questions it means they already know the answers. Or think they do.

COUNSELOR

Why his mother making me the heavy?

WESTRAY

Your head tends to get muddled at the prospect of death and dismemberment, doesn't it? What is it that you imagine she won't she won't say to stay out of the electric chair at Huntsville?

COUNSELOR

There's nobody I can talk to?

The waitress comes and set down their coffees.

WAITRESS

Will there be anything else?

WESTRAY

No thank you.

COUNSELOR

This is fine, Alexis.

The waitress moves away.

WESTRAY

It's a small world, Counselor. But maybe it's not small enough. I told my guy to say that you were out of town and that you'd be back Thursday.

COUNSELOR

I've got four days to what? Put my affairs in order?

WESTRAY

I don't know.

COUNSELOR

What are you going to do?

WESTRAY

Don't know.

COUNSELOR
What do you think they'll do?

WESTRAY
(Shaking his head.)
Jesus.

COUNSELOR
Well what?

WESTRAY
These people are out twenty mil,
Counselor. Do you know how serious
that is?

COUNSELOR
Fuck.

WESTRAY
Have you ever seen a snuff film?

COUNSELOR
No. Have you?

WESTRAY
No. Would you?

COUNSELOR
I would not.

WESTRAY
Because the consumer of the product
is necessary to its production. You
can't watch without being
implicated in a murder.

COUNSELOR
Yes. Would you watch one?

WESTRAY
No. But in my case I just wouldn't
want to see it. I know what takes
place. What can take place.

COUNSELOR
You know somebody who's seen one.

WESTRAY
Sure. You're probably at no more
than three degrees of separation.
Maybe two. He said that the girl
was beheaded with a machete. While
being sodomized by a hooded figure.

(MORE)

WESTRAY (CONT'D)

She was about thirteen and she was looking into the camera and crying when her head fell off.

COUNSELOR

Jesus, I can't even imagine watching that.

WESTRAY

Well. You might want to think about your involvement the next time you do a line.

COUNSELOR

I don't do drugs.

WESTRAY

I'm glad to hear that, Counselor. Because it was what was done to her next that you really wouldn't want to see. And I won't ask you to use your imagination because I sincerely hope that it's not equal to the task. They led from the wings a portly and slightly older fellow naked and erect wearing like the others only a black hood with eye holes. To address himself to the headless and quivering corpse in all its gushing menses which you must remember would serve him no purpose at all had she not been young and pretty. And all of this he has paid for. What do you think it cost? Ballpark.

The counselor sits with a blank face. Then suddenly he grimaces and turns his face away.

COUNSELOR

Oh, Jesus.

WESTRAY

Mmm.

COUNSELOR

God. Do you think that's true?

WESTRAY

I know it's true.

COUNSELOR
They can't be such people

WESTRAY
Think again.

COUNSELOR
Jesus

WESTRAY
The point, Counselor, is that you
may think there are things that
these people would simply be
incapable of. There are not.

The counselor sits staring at the table.

REINER'S OFFICE.

The counselor is pacing up and back. He stops and turns.

COUNSELOR
You talked to him.

REINER
Yeah. I talked to him.

COUNSELOR
Can we go somewhere?

REINER
(Rising)
Sure.

COUNSELOR
I don't feel comfortable in here.

REINER
Come on.

BOOTH IN A COFFEE SHOP.

REINER
You asked me that.

COUNSELOR
Yeah. But you didn't answer that.

REINER
Because I don't know. What? You
think I know something you don't?
(MORE)

REINER (CONT'D)

What would it be? I don't know what
how bad means. Bad is bad. That's
all

COUNSELOR

Westray thinks we're fucked.

REINER

We.

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

REINER

Well. I suppose I could ask you if
you've got a rat in your pocket.

The counselor leans back.

COUNSELOR

You're not serious.

REINER

When was the last time you tried to
call him?

COUNSELOR

Yesterday. Two days ago. Why?

REINER

Why?

COUNSELOR

Because I couldn't reach him now.

Reiner doesn't answer.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

All right.

REINER

What are you going to do?

COUNSELOR

I don't know. What are you?

REINER

Don't know.

COUNSELOR

That's what WESTRAY said. But he did know, didn't he?

The waitress brings them coffee.

REINER

What are you going to use for money?

COUNSELOR

I've got some money.

REINER

I don't think so. If you had any serious money you wouldn't be in this jackpot in the first place

COUNSELOR

I might.

REINER

Yeah? Well. I know why I'm in it. Do you?

COUNSELOR

Sure. Same as you. Greed.

REINER

No. You got in trouble. I tried to appeal to your greed two years ago. No deal. Now it's too late. Greed is greatly overrated. But fear isn't.

COUNSELOR

What do you think I should do?

REINER

I don't know, Counselor. They know that you're stupid. They just don't know how stupid

COUNSELOR

You say that like it's my hole card.

REINER

Maybe it is. Suppose you could sit down and have a chat with these guys. What would you say?

COUNSELOR
I'd tell them the truth.

REINER
You're just a fucking wonder. Did you know that? Go ahead.

COUNSELOR
Go ahead what?

REINER
With the truth. I'd like to hear it.

COUNSELOR
I'd tell them that I'd never even met this kid. That I'd gotten him out of jail on a speeding charge.

REINER
Okay. How did he happen to hire you?

COUNSELOR
He didn't. I got him out of jail as a favor to his mother.

REINER
Okay. How did you happen to know the mother?

COUNSELOR
I was appointed by the court to represent her in an appeal on a capital murder case.

REINER
Did you know what her son did for a living?

COUNSELOR
No.

REINER
But you do now.

COUNSELOR
I do now. Yes.

REINER
And would it please you to tell the court what that occupation was?

COUNSELOR

How did I get in court? I thought I was talking to the cartel guys?

REINER

Sorry. I guess I was getting ahead of myself.

COUNSELOR

Very funny.

Reiner stirs his coffee. He lays the spoon steaming on the table.

REINER

Yeah. Well. Probably not.

THE COUNSELOR IS ON A BUSY STREET DOWNTOWN.

It is raining. He turns into a Cafe and approaches a woman at a table.

COUNSELOR

Ma'am, I'm terribly sorry to bother you but my phone is out and it's something of an emergency. Could I use your phone for just a minute?

The woman looks at him and then hands him her phone which is lying on the table. The counselor dials.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Where are you?

I can't call you on my phone. You can't.

Go to a hotel and call me later.

Don't go to the apartment. Just don't.

It's very important. I've got to go.

Don't call anyone. No.

Anyone. I love you.

He rings off and hands the woman her phone.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Thank you very much. Very kind of you.

He turns and goes out. The woman finishes her coffee and rises and goes out. She puts up her red umbrella and stands looking out at the street in the rain.

THE SEPTIC-TANK TRUCK ON A TWO-LANE BLACKTOP ROAD IN CENTRAL TEXAS.

A late-model sedan is following it, two men in a car. The passenger in the sedan plugs a flashing red rooflight into the cigar lighter in the dash and reaches out the window and places the light on the roof of the car. Then he takes a black box off the seat and holds it at the window and turns it on and it begins to emit a police siren sound. The septic-tank truck slows and pulls over onto the verge and comes to a halt. The sedan pulls in some distance behind it and the two men get out, putting on white Stetson hats. They are dressed in boots and tan slacks and white shirts and wear automatic sidearms.

THE DRIVER OF THE TRUCK - WIRE-MAN-

-- watches them in the rearview mirror. The boots of the co-driver of the truck are moving back along the passenger side of the truck. The driver starts the truck and pulls away. The two men in the road have almost reached the truck and they draw their pistols and run forward.

The co-driver of the truck is now lying in the bar ditch and when the truck clears his position the two men in the road are exposed directly in front of him and he opens fire on them with a pistol, dropping one of them dead in the road and wounding the other in the leg. The wounded man dives into the ditch on the other side of the road.

The truck has come to a stop again, angled slightly toward the road, and the driver opens fire on the wounded man with a pistol from the truck window. The wounded man presses himself flat in the ditch toward the truck. The wounded man sees the man's back moving along the ditch and he stands and fires three rounds after him. The last round hits the tank of the truck and brown sewage starts to spout from the hole. The co-driver reaches the truck and opens the door and clambers in over the body slumped in the floor and crouching over the body he reaches and pushes the clutch to the floor with his hand and reaches and releases the emergency brake.

He pushes down the accelerator with one hand and lets the clutch out with the other and the truck moves forward into the road.

The wounded man climbs out of the ditch and hobbles back to the car and gets in and shuts the door. He lays the pistol on the seat and reaches under the seat and takes out a Glock machine-pistol and pushes off the safety and starts the car and pulls out down the road after the truck. The truck has wandered to the far side of the road and the car pulls up along the passenger side of the truck and the wounded man opens fire with the Glock, emptying the clip into the door of the truck.

Then he slows the car and backs away and pulls to the verge and sits watching. The truck veers off in front of him and rolls down into the bar ditch where it tilts up onto two wheels and balances for a moment and then drops back onto all four wheels and sits there in silence. The man in the car sits watching. In the rearview mirror again. The approaching car is shimmering in the heat waves off the road. The man's trouser leg is dark with blood to his boot. He places his hand on this thigh and leans forward slightly in pain. He turns the Glock on the seat and ejects the empty clip and reaches under the seat and gets hold of a small canvas bag and puts it in his lap and unzips it and takes out a loaded clip from among the half dozen in the bag and loads the Glock and pushes back the slide with the heel of his hand.

The approaching car has slowed. Now it stop. It turns sideways in the road and backs up and swings around and heads back the way it came. The wounded man has opened the door and he steps out and levels the Glock and opens fire on the fleeing car. HE empties the clip and then lowers the gun and stands watching. The car slows and drifts off the road and down into the bar ditch and comes to a stop. The man reaches into the car and gets another clip and reloads the Glock and turns and goes down the bank to the truck.

Sewage is still leaking from the bullet hole in the tank. The man limps up to the passenger side of the truck with the gun at the ready and pulls open the door and stops back. Then he steps up and reaches into the truck and pulls out a body by the belt and lets it fall into the grass. Then he pulls the other one out on top of it. He turns and goes and climbs up out of the ditch and stands in the road and looks up the road and down. He limps down the road to the car and gets the pistol and the pouch of clips off the seat and takes the keys from the ignition and goes to the rear of the car and opens the trunk and gets out of his bag.

He opens the bag and puts in the machine-pistol and the clips and closes it again. He puts the pistol in his belt at the rear and closes the trunk and walks down the road to the body and sets the bag in road and takes his knife from his pocket and opens it and kneels painfully and cuts open the dead man's rear pocket and takes out the man's billfold and opens his bag and puts the billfold in and shuts the bag and gets to his feet and picks up the bag and goes back up the road toward the truck.

The man is sitting in the front seat of the septic-tank truck whittling with his knife on a tree branch. His open bag is sitting on the seat beside him. There is a box of revolver cartridges in the open bag and he takes one of the cartridges out and compares the diameter of the bullet to the diameter of the stick he is whittling. Now he cuts a ring around the branch about three inches from the end.

The man climbs down from the cab of the truck and walks back and jams the end of the stick into the hole in the truck. He breaks off the branch and throws it to one side and folds away his knife and wipes his hands on his trousers and taps the plug in more firmly with the pistol and then goes back and climbs painfully up into the cab and shuts the door and rests for a minute with his eyes closed. Then he takes out his cell phone and dials a number and puts the phone to his ear.

WOUNDED MAN

Bueno. Tenemos la troca.

No. Mas tiempo.

Yo creo por la mafiana. Si. A las siete, como no.

Problemas? No. Nada de importancia, Andale pues.

He folds away the phone and rests for a few seconds. Then he starts the truck and drives up out of the ditch and the truck pulls away down the road, the gears shifting.

A BUSY STREET DOWNTOWN.

The woman with the red umbrella is walking up the street in the rain. A black Escalade pulls up alongside her splashing her with water from the gutter and two men get out.

They approach her from behind with a cloth bag that has a leather belt around it and they pull this over her head and down almost to her knees and one of them pulls the strap and it draws shut instantly about her. They then pick her up by the belt at either side and literally throw her into the rear seat of the vehicle and shut the door and get in and drive away leaving her purse and umbrella on the sidewalk in the rain. Elapsed time about fifteen seconds.

AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The counselor is in the handicapped booth of the mens room at an international airport talking on a cell phone.

LAURA

I'm really worried, Baby.

COUNSELOR

It's going to be all right. I'll call you.

LAURA

Can't you meet me someplace?

COUNSELOR

I can't.

LUARA

That's not possible. That you can't.

COUNSELOR

We really have to be careful.

LAURA

You said that if they were looking for you they would have found you. Isn't that what you said?

COUNSELOR

No. Not exactly.

LAURA

How bad is it? Baby?

Silence.

COUNSELOR

Alpha Centauri.

LAURA
That's too far. We'd be too old to
do it. How about Boise?

COUNSELOR
Boise?

LAURA
Boise.

COUNSELOR
Why Boise?

LAURA
What's wrong with Boise?

COUNSELOR
Have you have ever been to Boise?

LAURA
No. Have you?

COUNSELOR
No. What will you be wearing?

LAURA
A red dress.

COUNSELOR
The lady in red.

LAURA
Yes.

COUNSELOR
What else?

LAURA
That's all.

COUNSELOR
No knickers.

LAURA
No.

COUNSELOR
Boise.

LAURA
Yes.

COUNSELOR
Do you have a hotel?

LAURA
I'm looking as we speak.

COUNSELOR
Wednesday.

LAURA
Tomorrow.

COUNSELOR
Wednesday. Leave me a message at
the Delta Counter.

LAURA
I love you.

COUNSELOR
I love you.

The counselor folds the phone and drops it into the toilet
and flushes it.

INSIDE THE CONFERENCE ROOM AT THE WOMEN'S PENITENTIARY.

Ruth is leaning back in her chair smoking a cigarette.

RUTH
You people are just a fucking
mystery. You know that?

COUNSELOR
We people.

RUTH
Yeah. You and your kind. Enough
ain't in your dictionary, is it?
Well, fuck it. You shouldn't be
even talking to me. You know that?
Because I'll rat your sorry ass out
in a New York second.

COUNSELOR
Yeah, well. I won't be
representing you any more.

RUTH
You got that right.

COUNSELOR

You should have left him in Fort Hancock.

She takes a pull on the cigarette and shakes her head.

RUTH

You're so full of shit.

COUNSELOR

Well, don't worry about it. I've got some things for you to sign and then I'm out of here.

RUTH

Well Counselor you'll be gone but not forgotten. Because I got plans for you.

COUNSELOR

Yeah? Well, you better hurry, whatever they are.

RUTH

Why? You goin' to make a run for it? That's good. Because I want you out there where my people can get to you.

COUNSELOR

Your people.

RUTH

Yeah? You told me that nothin' was just a question.

COUNSELOR

Anyway, I'm sorry. For what it's worth.

RUTH

Well. It ain't worth shit. Because you ain't. You don't know what sorry means. You never lost a child. So you don't know what sorry is. But you're fixin' to find out.

COUNSELOR

I don't know who the court will appoint, but you should get someone pretty quick. Maybe next week.

She turns away, suddenly crying softly.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
I really am sorry.

RUTH
Don't say that again, you son of a bitch. Just get the fuck out. Oh Baby. Baby.

COUNSELOR
Can I ask you one other thing.

RUTH
He grew up in Juarez. Of course he spoke Spanish.

The counselor nods.

COUNSELOR
I'm sorry anyway.

RUTH
Just get the fuck out. Goddamn you. Goddamn you.

PLYWOOD OFFICE OF A JUNKYARD IN THE DESERT.

The junkyard man is talking on the phone. A pitbull lying on a mat at the side of his desk growls and stands up. The man looks up.

JUNKYARD MAN
Tengo un cliente.

He hands up the phone and looks at the client. The client comes forward in his bloodstained clothes and limps to a stop and reaches into his jacket. The junkyard man looks somewhat alarmed. The dog growls.

WOUNDED MAN
Esta bien. No le preocupe.

He takes a false-leather pouch with a bank logo from his coat and unzips it and takes out three banded sheaves of hundred dollar bills and drops them onto the desk. The junkyard man stands up.

JUNKYARD MAN
Callete, Dulcinea. Callete.

The dog lies down, grousing.

The junkyard. The junkyard man is harrying two boys.

JUNKYARD MAN (CONT'D)

Andale. Prono! Pronto!

JUNKYARD BOY

Pero es un pickup.

JUNKYARD MAN

Si, si. Claro. Es lo mismo. Solo la frente es diferente. La cabina es la misma. La cabina y los puertos. Andale.

They run out through the lot, carrying a battered-looking toolbox.

THE SEPTIC-TANK TRUCK, PARKED IN THE JUNKYARD LOT.

One of the doors --- bullet-riddled -- is off and is standing against the front wheel of the truck. A boy is unscrewing the other door with an electric screwdriver while a second boy hold the door open. The door is propped up on a crate with a two-by-fourer its bottom edge and the second boy levers it up to take the weight off it. It falls away and the two boys catch it and take it off and stand it in the weeds against a wrecked car. The driver's door has exit holes and the passenger door entry holes --- and more of them.

THE JUNKYARD.

The two boys with the toolbox catch the door they've removed from a pick up truck and carry it down past the rows of wrecked cars to the septic-tank truck.

THE JUNKYARD.

The door-less septic-tank truck is being jacked up on one side with three floor jacks. The junkyard man operates one of the jacks. The plug has been removed from the hole in the tank and the sewage is leaking from the hole.

JUNKYARD MAN

Mas enfrente. Mas.

The truck tilts up and the leak slows and then stops.

JUNKYARD.

The owner is standing in a chair with welding goggles on and holding an oxyacetylene torch. He melts lead from a stick and spreads it over the bullet hole in the tank with a wooden paddle.

SEPTIC-TANK TRUCK.

Two girls are scrubbing out the cab with brushes and pails of water. The seat is out of the truck. One of the doors has been put on and the junkyard man swings it shut and opens it again and adjusts the latch with a screwdriver. One of the boys is spray-painting the other door where it stands against some stacked parts with the window down.

A MOBILE HOME AT THE EDGE OF THE JUNKYARD.

A car pulls up in the drive and a woman gets out carrying a red plastic toolbox. She climbs the stairs where a girl holds the door for her.

INTERIOR MOBILE HOME.

The wounded man is lying on a cheap sofa with his leg stretched out on a coffee table that is covered with a sheet. There is a plastic bucket in the floor with bloody gauze. The woman finishes wrapping his leg and turns and takes a syringe from her toolbox and sets about unwrapping it.

CITY STREET AT NIGHT.

A light rain is falling. Reiner in the white Cadillac Escalade. The two cheetahs are in the rear. A black Escalade pulls past and turns in front of him and cuts him off and stops. Reiner hits the brakes and jams the gearshift into reverse and turns to back up, his arm over the back of the seat. The cheetahs are slammed about. Another Escalade pulls in behind him and he slams the shifter back into drive again and cuts the wheel to try to pull around the Escalade in front of him but it has backed up and he is trapped between the two vehicles. The driver has jumped out of the front Escalade and he comes to Reiner's window and slams a prybar against it but it only bounces off the glass. He slams it again. A second man comes up and waves him away and jams a device against the door that looks a bit like a shop router.

He pulls down a lever over the top of the machine and it fires a plunger into the door with a sound like a pistol shot and he pushes another lever up and pulls the door open with the device still attached. He reaches in and grabs Reiner by the collar and pulls him half way out of the vehicle.

Reiner claws at his trouser leg and comes up with a short barreled revolver from an ankle-holster.

MAN WITH PRYBAR

Cuidado!

The man pulling Reiner from his vehicle drops him and leaps back and pulls an automatic pistol from the rear of his belt. Reiner fires wildly and the man fires three rounds into Reiner and Reiner slides out to lie face down in the street. The gun clatters away. The man with the automatic pistol half turns away and bangs the sides of his head with the heels his fits in frustration. The man with the prybar throws up his hands.

MAN WITH PISTOL

Madre de Jesus! Hijo de puta!

He kicks the dead man in the head and turns. He throws one hand up in the air.

MAN WITH PRYBAR

Vamos.

The man with the pistol shoves the gun into the back of his belt and pulls up the lever on the doorjacker and pulls it away and turns and kicks the corpse again.

MAN WITH PISTOL

Pendejo.

The two men turn and go back to the Escalade and get in and pull away. The Escalade blocking Reiner's vehicle at the rear pulls past and follows and they disappear down the street in the rain. The two cheetahs at the rear window of the vehicle move to the side and sit looking out. A few people come forward from the surrounding buildings and stand looking. Two teenagers who are watching run out into the street and one takes Reiner's gun and the other his wristwatch and they take his billfold and turn him over face up and search the inside pockets of his coat and then they disappear in the rain. Reiner is lying face up in the street with the rain falling into his eyes.

NIGHT. CITY STREET IN THE RAIN.

Reiner is lying face up in the rain beneath the open door of the Escalade and the two cheetahs are crouched at the either side of him and looking about furtively. One of them circles and paces and looks up at the rain. Then it crouches beside Reiner and nudges his body with its nose.

COUNSELOR ON PHONE AT HIS CONDOMINIUM.

COUNSELOR

Do you know where Reiner is?

VOICE

No.

COUNSELOR

He doesn't answer his cell and the phone at the club doesn't even ring.

VOICE

The club's closed. Some of Reiner's little friends showed up looking for him and it wound up with them roughing up some of the customers. All the help ran out the back door. The cats are missing. So that's pretty much that. I mean if you wanted to get shot having dinner you could just go to Juarez.

COUNSELOR

When was this?

VOICE

Two nights ago.

COUNSELOR

Did you talk to Reiner?

VOICE

Yeah. I talked to him?

COUNSELOR

What did he say?

VOICE

He said he was going to try and find his cats.

(MORE)

VOICE (CONT'D)

Before some dumb fucking cop shot them - his words. Apparently they've got these electronic tracking collars on but they can cover a hell of a lot of ground in pretty short order. Where are you?

COUNSELOR

I'm home. And you haven't talked to him since.

VOICE

No. I haven't. I'm surprised you're still at home.

COUNSELOR

I won't be in an hour.

VOICE

An hour.

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

VOICE

Well, you might want to think about whether you want to lollygag around all that long.

COUNSELOR

Where are you?

VOICE

I'm not at home.

Silence.

COUNSELOR

All right. I'm just going to throw some things in the car.

VOICE

In the car.

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

VOICE

What are you, nuts?

The counselor goes to the window and looks out.

COUNSELOR

What am I supposed to drive?

VOICE

I can't advise you, Counselor. Call a cab.

Silence.

VOICE (CONT'D)

You're pretty quiet.

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

VOICE

Let me tell you something, Counselor. If your description of a friend is someone who will die for you then you don't have any friends. All right. I've got to go.

COUNSELOR

All right.

VOICE

You take care now. You hear?

COUNSELOR

Yeah.

The phone clicks to dial tone.

BACKYARD OF A SUBURBAN MIDDLE CLASS HOME.

The two cheetahs are walking along the edge of the swimming pool. One stops to sniff at the water. In the pool are two boys, aged eight and ten. They stand frozen. A man reclining in a poolside canvas chair lowers the paper he is reading to see what the silence is about. He freezes, holding the paper at the level of his chest. The cheetahs amble slowly along the edge of the pool and out across the lawn. The man lowers the paper into his lap. The two boys turn to look at him. The oldest turns to look where the cheetahs have gone and turns to the man again.

BOY

Dad?

The man closes his eyes and raises one hand palm-out.

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

Laura gets out of a rental car at the airport rental parking lot and pulls her bag over her shoulder and takes her suitcase off of the passenger seat and shuts the door.

Laura coming down the aisle of the parking lot trailing her suitcase on wheels behind her. A black Escalade is coming down the row behind her. At the end of the row of cars another Escalade pulls in front of her and stops. Two men get out. She turns but the other Escalade has pulled up behind her. She drops the handle of her suitcase and turns to run between the parked cars but a man seizes her by the arm and pushes her back toward the vehicle. She is struggling furiously but the other man grabs her hair and pulls her around and opens a switchblade knife in her face and she stops and lowers her head.

AN UPSCALE HOTEL ROOM, KING SIZE BED, FLOWERS IN A VASE ON THE DRESSER. NIGHT.

The counselor is at the window looking out at the rain.

ENTRANCE TO THE HOTEL.

The counselor is standing looking out at the street.

DOORMAN

Sir? Did you need a cab?

COUNSELOR

No. Thank you. I'm all right.

HOTEL BAR.

The counselor is sitting at a small table in the corner. The waiter passes his table and stops.

WAITER

You all right here Sir?

COUNSELOR

Sorry?

WAITER

Can I bring you something?

COUNSELOR

No. Thank you.

The waiter turns to go and then turns back.

WAITER

Are you all right Sir?

The counselor looks up at the waiter.

COUNSELOR

Will you do something for me?

WAITER

Yes sir. Of course.

The counselor takes out his billfold and takes out a card and hands it to the waiter.

COUNSELOR

That's my card. I'm a guest at the hotel. What I wish you would do for me is go to the desk and see if I have any messages. I know you're wondering why I don't go myself. But I've bothered them so much I think they're beginning to figure me for some sort of nutcase and I'm afraid they'll stop looking.

WAITER

(Taking the card)

You got it

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

Westray exits carrying a medium sized bag and a shoulder bag. He is dressed in a dark suit. He stands at the curb studying the cabs and limousines and then he crosses the street to a black town car and opens the door and gets in. The driver is an attractive woman who wears a chauffer's cap. She turns and smiles at him.

WESTRAY

Me gusta su sombrero.

CHAUFFER

Thank you.

WESTRAY
The International.

CHAUFFER
(Smiling)
I know.

She turns and starts the engine and they pull out into the traffic.

LAW OFFICE, JUAREZ MEXICO.

The counselor and a Mexican attorney or abogado. He is seated at his desk, his crocodile boots crossed on the desktop. He looks thoughtful. The counselor sits waiting.

ABOGADO
(Mexican accent)
All right. I will have to make a call. You understand. Then if its is all right. Don't put me in the center. Okay?

COUNSELOR
In the middle.

ABOGADO
In the middle. Yes.

COUNSELOR
What do I owe you?

ABOGADO
You owe me nothing, Counselor. We are friends. A handshake. Wait for me. Have a coffee. I will have a yes or a no.

The counselor rises and reaches across the desk. The abogado rises. They shake hands.

COUNSELOR
Thank you.

The counselor turns to go.

ABOGADO
Counselor.

COUNSELOR
 (Turning)
 Yes.

ABOGADO
 I will do what I can do. But you
 must know that this is the long
 shot.

COUNSELOR
 Yes. I do. Thank you.

ABOGADO
 You're not - what do you call it?
 In hiding?

COUNSELOR
 No. I was hiding. Now I'm seeking.

ABOGADO
 Of course.

COUNSELOR
 Thank you.

The abogado nods.

THE COUNSELOR ON THE PHONE IN A HOTEL ROOM IN EL PASO.

JEFE
 (Spanish accent)
 Yes. But I can only tell you what I
 told our friend. That there is no
 one to talk to.

COUNSELOR
 Could I come to Florida?

JEFE
 The Florida is closed.

COUNSELOR
 I would do anything you suggest.

JEFE
 But I have nothing to suggest,
 Counselor. I am sorry.

COUNSELOR
 We could meet someplace.

JEFE

We are meeting now.

COUNSELOR

There must be someone I could see.

JEFE

I am afraid that there is no longer such a person. That is a thing of the past. I am afraid that there is no one to see.

COUNSELOR

Please don't hang up.

JEFE

I have some time. It is all right. I am just having my lunch.

COUNSELOR

There are people here.

JEFE

There is no one here. The waiter. I enjoy to have my lunch alone. It is more peaceful.

COUNSELOR

I'm not sure that you understand my position.

JEFE

But I do, Counselor. I lost a son. Two years ago. I thought that someone would call. To demand money. But there was no call. I never saw my son again. He was sixteen.

COUNSELOR

I'm sorry.

JEFE

Where the bodies are buried in the desert is a certain world, Counselor. Where they are simply left in the street is another. This is a country heretofore unknown to us. But it must have always been here, must it not?

COUNSELOR

I don't know.

JEFE

Si, Si. Con hielo, por favor. I'm sorry. You were saying.

The counselor is clutching the phone and leaning with the heel of his hand against his forehead, his eyes closed. He opens his eyes.

COUNSELOR

I don't know what I was saying.

JEFE

People are waiting. For what? At some point you must acknowledge that this new world is at last the world. There is not some other world. It is not merely a he ate us.

COUNSELOR

Hiatus.

JEFE

I'm sorry.

COUNSELOR

Hiatus. I believe the word is hiatus.

JEFE

Hiatus. Thank you, Counselor.

COUNSELOR

Will you help me?

JEFE

I would urge you to see the truth in your situation, Counselor. That is my advice. It is not for me to say what you should have done. Or not done. I only know that the world in which they are made. You are at a cross in the road and here you think to choose. But there is no choosing. There is only accepting. The choosing was done long ago.

Silence.

JEFE (CONT'D)

Are you there, Counselor?

COUNSELOR

Yes.

JEFE

I don't mean to upset you, but reflective men often find themselves at a certain remove from realities of life. In any case, to prepare a place in our lives for the tragedies to come is an economy few wish to practice. Do you know the works of Machado?

COUNSELOR

No. I know his name.

JEFE

A lovely poet. I think his work does not translate well. But the Spanish is very beautiful. He was a schoolteacher and he married a very beautiful young girl whom he loved very much. And she died. And so he became a great poet.

COUNSELOR

I'm not going to become a great poet.

JEFE

Perhaps not. But even were you to do so, it would be of little help to you. Machado would have given every line he wrote for one more hour with his beloved. There is no rule of exchange here, you see. Grief transcends every value. A man would give whole nations to lift it from his heart. And yet with it you can buy nothing.

Silence. The counselor holds his wrist to his forehead, his eyes closed.

JEFE (CONT'D)

When my son was lost I would not pray for that which I should most fervently have desired. I could not.

COUNSELOR

A speedy death.

JEFE

I'm sorry.

COUNSELOR

Why are you telling me this?

JEFE

Because you stand at the crossing of which we spoke. You may dedicate your life to grief or not. The choice is yours. The assassin would claim you as well, but he will require your compliance. And of course he puts nothing of himself at hazard. He seeks to know what the warrior knows, but he has no stomach for the warrior's way. He is a usurper and a pimp. And as he is without courage he is greatly to be feared. He would explore that realm to which we are all consigned, but his way is to send an emissary. To bring his victim to the edge of the precipice with the greatest care and then learn to inquire if there be any news. Some word amid the sobbing. Amid the bleeding and the cries. Not even in the act of love will one be the object of such solicitation and such care.

COUNSELOR

Why are you telling me this?

JEFE

Because you cannot accept the reality of your life.

COUNSELOR

Why do you care?

JEFE

Do you love your wife so completely that you would take her place upon the wheel? Not die for her. That is easy. But that your nerve would not fail you as they bend to buckle the straps?

COUNSELOR

Yes. Yes, damn you. Silence.

JEFE

That is good to hear, Counselor.

COUNSELOR

What are you saying? Are you saying that this is possible?

JEFE

No. It is not possible. Si. Un cafecito. Por favor. Negro. Negro, si. Gracias. I'm sorry, Counselor.

COUNSELOR

You said I was that man. At the crossing.

JEFE

Yes. At the understanding that life will not take you back. I have no wish to paint the world in colors more somber than those it wears but as the world gives way to darkness it becomes more and more difficult to dismiss the understanding that the world is in fact oneself. It is a thing which you have created, no more, no less. And when you cease to be so will the world. There will be other world. Of course. But they are the worlds of other men and your understanding of them was never more than an illusion anyway. Your world - the only one that matters - will be gone. And it will never come again. And now I must go. I have calls to make, and then, if there is time, I will take a little nap.

The phone rings off.

NIGHT.

Malkina and the black weight-lifter are driving through the outskirts of the city. She is sitting with a GPS and a tracking monitor for the transponder. A two lane blacktop road in the headlights. Some lights in the distance. They come to a crossroads and the weight-lifter slows and looks at her.

MALKINA

Left. Go left.

They drive slowly along the road. Suddenly one of the cheetahs crosses the road ahead of them in the lights.

MALKINA (CONT'D)

(Almost crying)

It's Silvia. Hi, Baby. Hi Baby.

A GARAGE, THE SEPTIC-TANK TRUCK.

There is a gantry crane overhead - a chain hoist that slides on iron rails - and a man in coveralls and welding glasses is slicing open the tank of the truck laterally from the front to rear with a cutting torch.

GARAGE.

A welder is on top of the tank welding a metal bar to the tank. There is a heavy metal hook bolted through the bar and a similar hook is already in place toward the front of the truck. He finishes and tips up his mask and stands and pulls the hoist toward him along the rails with its chains swinging.

GARAGE.

The top half of the tank is being lifted by the two hooks and the chains from the single hook hanging from the pulley. Inside the severed tank lie forty five gallon steel drums. The gantry crane moves down the rail and lowers the top of the tank to the concrete floor behind the truck and a worker - in coveralls and wearing a mask - unhooks the chains and then the gantry moves back over the truck and he hooks a crosschain to the first of the barrels and tightens it with its turnbuckle and the first of the drums is lifted out of the tank.

THE WASH BAY IN THE CORNER OF THE GARAGE.

The four drums are standing upright on pallets and the worker in coveralls and rubber boots is hosing them down with a steamwasher.

STREETS OF JUAREZ, MEXICO.

There is a yellow police ribbon strung across sawhorses blocking off the street and in the middle distance is a car that has been machine-gunned. One door is open and there is a dead body in the street. Police cars with their rooflights strobing. In the foreground people are marching with signs and with banners. They contain large full color portraits of the missing. The signs say: Desaparecido or Desaparecido with a date following. They say: Se Busca A with a name following. Some of the women carry umbrellas against the sun and some carry crosses of raw wood and crosses with wreaths mounted on them. A khaki-colored Army jeep with a soldier in battle dress at the rear of a mounted machinegun fords its way through the crowd. The counselor is among the mourners, carrying a poster with a color photograph of Laura. These are the names that can be used on the posters and placards. They are names common to Juarez, Mexico, but not actual names. They read from left to right, three names, or four.

Carmen Blanca Silva Alejandra Maria Esther Inez

PaulinaBaeza Saucedo Casillas Villeda Antonia Graciela

THREE MEN IN BREATHING MASKS AT THE WASH BAY.

One is in work clothes and one is in white coveralls. The third, well dressed in slacks and sportcoat, is the Buyer. The worker has an electric driver and is unfastening the tops of the drums. One of them is already open and the man in coveralls takes out four clear plastic bags each holding a kilo of cocaine. The worker unscrews the bolt on the second drum and lifts away the rim that circles the top of the drum and then lifts away the top of the drum and moves on to the next drum.

The buyer follows the man in coveralls across the garage. They have removed their masks.

BUYER

Why are there four drums?

COVERALL MAN

(Mexican accent)

I don't know. I think maybe we have
a traveler.

BUYER

A traveler?

COVERALL MAN

Yes. A free rider. How do you say?
Like you have on a ship. A
something away.

BUYER

A stowaway?

COVERALL MAN

Yes. A stowaway.

WORKMAN

Madre de Jesus!

The coverall man turns, smiling. The workman has left the washbay and he has pulled away his mask and is almost gagging.

WORKMAN (CONT'D)

Son if a beetch!

COVERALL MAN

Cierrelo! Pronto! Pronto!

He turns and goes through a metal door, laughing. The Buyer follows him up a set of concrete steps, iron pipe railing.

A small office with a glass window looking down to where the septic-tank truck is parked. Coverall man and the buyer are sitting at a cheap metal table. There are computers on the table. A scale and some plates and the plastic bags of cocaine.

BUYER

In the last two accounts we're only
an hour different. But it's another
day. It's tomorrow.

COVERALL MAN

Yes. I love that.

BUYER
We're okay. We have eight minutes

COVERALL MAN
Yes.

BUYER
Why do they send you a dead body?

COVERALL MAN
No Reason. It is convenient.

BUYER
Convenient.

COVERALL MAN
Yes. There is always somebody you wish for him to go away. So you send him to America.

BUYER
Do you know who he is?

COVERALL MAN
No. Of course not. He is a pasajero.

BUYER
A passenger?

COVERALL MAN
Yes. An immigrant.

BUYER
It's just a way to get rid of a body.

COVERALL MAN
Yes. Just a way. Somebody you don't want around.

BUYER
From Mexico.

COVERALL MAN
From Columbia.

BUYER
He came from Columbia.

COVERALL MAN
Yes. Of course.

BUYER

What will you do with him?

COVERALL MAN

Nothing. He goes back in the truck.

BUYER

He goes back in the truck.

COVERALL MAN

Of course.

BUYER

And then what?

COVERALL MAN

Nothing. It is normal. Well. Not so normal I suppose. They think it is funny. A sort of joke. You have to have a sense of humor in this business.

BUYER

So what happens to him?

COVERALL MAN

Nothing. The truck goes back together. They paint it. He is inside. He rides around. Maybe they sell the truck. At auction maybe. It's all the same. He rides around some more. Sucking up the shit. Welcome to America.

He smiles broadly. He checks the time by his Rolex.

A CAFE IN A BORDER TOWN.

The counselor is lying at one of the cheap Formica tables with his head in his folded arms, the photograph poster of Laura on the table.

CAFÉ MAN

Señor.

COUNSELOR

Yes.

CAFÉ MAN

Señor.

The counselor sits up and looks at the man.

CAFÉ MAN (CONT'D)
I must close.

COUNSELOR
I know.

The counselor is haggard and unshaven.

CAFÉ MAN
What you do? You have no place to
go maybe.

COUNSELOR
You don't have to go home but you
can't stay here.

CAFÉ MAN
Como?

COUNSELOR
It's all right.

The counselor rises, picking up the photograph.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
I fell asleep. I'm sorry.

CAFÉ MAN
There is no harm.

COUNSELOR
No harm. Lovely thought. Magical
thought.

CAFÉ MAN
Como?

COUNSELOR
Good night.

CAFÉ MAN
Es muy peligroso. En las calles.

COUNSELOR
I know.

CAFÉ MAN

They hear somebody in the street
they shoot them. Then they turn on
the light to see who is dead.

COUNSELOR

Why do they do that?

CAFÉ MAN

(Shrugging)

To make a joke. To show that death
does not care.

That death has no meaning.

COUNSELOR

Qué piensa? Usted. Do you believe
that?

CAFÉ MAN

No. Of course not. All my family is
dead. I am the one who has no
meaning.

COUNSELOR

Entiendo.

CAFÉ MAN

Cuidado. Si?

COUNSELOR

Sí. Cuidando.

CAFÉ MAN

Quién es? La Señora.

COUNSELOR

(Turning at the door.)

Mi esposa.

CAFÉ MAN

Ah. Guapa.

The counselor stands at the door.

COUNSELOR

Sí. Guapa. What is that?

CAFÉ MAN

It means she is beautiful.

COUNSELOR

No. I mean what does that mean?
What is it? Beautiful.

CAFÉ MAN

I don't know. It is late.

COUNSELOR

Yes. Good night.

CAFÉ MAN

Good night, Amigo. Good night.

The counselor goes down an alley to a door and takes out a key and lets himself in at a door. A bleak hallway, linoleum floor. A light bulb hanging from the ceiling. He lets himself in at the first door on the right and turns on the light. A room with an iron bed and a cheap dresser and a sink. He fastens the chain and crosses to the bed and sits. He puts his poster on the bed beside him and lowers his face into his hands. Machine-gun fire briefly in the distance.

DESK AT A MAJOR HOTEL IN A WORLD CITY.

Westry is standing at the counter with his passport and credit card. He is waiting while the clerk checks his reservation. A very attractive blonde is standing a few feet away, checking in. She is dressed in a dark business suit and carries a large shoulder bag. Westray looks her over. She glances at him.

WESTRAY

How you doin'?

BLONDE

Okay. You're Canadian.

WESTRAY

You saw my passport.

BLONDE

New Mexico.

WESTRAY

Have a drink with me.

BLONDE

What?

WESTRAY

Have a drink with me. You're not married.

BLONDE

No.

WESTRAY

Get checked in. We can sit right over there. They'll bring us whatever we want.

BLONDE

You're a masher.

WESTRAY

A masher? Lord. Where did you hear that?

BLONDE

I'm teasing. I think.

WESTRAY

I'm a good guy. You'll see.

BLONDE

You have any references?

WESTRAY

Mmm. This is getting better all the time.

WORLD CITY.

Malkina, dressed in a business suit, is crossing the street. She walks down the sidewalk to a jeweler's window and stands looking at the display behind the glass.

SIDEWALK CAFE IN THE CITY.

Malkina is looking at a scrap of paper and talking to the blonde from the hotel desk.

MALKINA

Five digits. Who's Rowena?

BLONDE

I don't know.

MALKINA

Social. His driver's license is Nevada?

BLONDE

Yes.

MALKINA

All right. Your little bonus is under the mirror in a compact in the top of my purse.

The Blonde opens one of two purses on the table and takes out a large compact and opens it and studies her face in the glass for a moment and then closes it and puts it in the other purse.

MALKINA (CONT'D)

Are you going to see him again?

BLONDE

What would be the point? He'll be broke.

MALKINA

Smart girl.

BLONDE

Or is it worse than that?

MALKINA

What do you care?

BLONDE

I don't want to get mixed up in something heavy.

MALKINA

You already are. And he's not stupid.

BLONDE

How do you mean?

MALKINA

What makes you think he won't come looking for you?

BLONDE

Will he?

MALKINA

No. He won't.

BLONDE

Yeah. Okay. Jesus. Okay. I gotta go.

She gets up and takes her purse and turns to go.

MALKINA

You know what I like about
Americans?

BLONDE

No. What's that?

MALKINA

(Smiling)
You can depend on them.

MORNING.

The counselor is asleep on the cot with his clothes on. There is a knocking at the door. He sits up. The knocking again.

COUNSELOR

Momento. Momento.

He crosses the room and undoes the chain and opens the door. A young man is standing there holding a package.

DELIVERY BOY

Está el abogado?

COUNSELOR

Sí.

The boy hand him the package and smiles and touches his cap and turns to go.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Momento. Qué es esté?

The boy is at the outer door. He turns and holds out both hands.

DELIVERY BOY

Yo no sé. Un regalo. Quién sabe?
Abraalo.

The boy goes out. The counselor goes back into the room and sits on the cot looking at the package. It is about five inches square and wrapped in paper and ties with a blue ribbon. He pulls the ribbon loose and it falls to the floor. He unwraps the paper and sits looking at a DVD.

Suddenly he realizes what it is and he turns and drops it onto the bed like something hot and clutches at his face, his hands clawed.

COUNSELOR

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.

A MAJOR STREET, WORLD CITY.

Westray comes out of a large building, possibly a bank. He is dressed in a tan summer business suit and he carrying a small black canvas bag. As he exits into the street a man comes up behind him and drops the wire of a bolito over his head and pulls the wire taut by its loop. Westray instantly drops the bag and seizes the wire about his neck and turns wild-eyed. The assassin picks up the bag in one movement and steps from the curb into the street where he gets into a taxicab that is waiting for him with the door open. The cab pulls away from the traffic.

Westray turning the fingers of one hand caught in the wire now being severed and the wire drawing into his neck. His collar is red with blood. He sits down on the pavement and kicks his feet, as if in annoyance. Almost like a petulant child. Pedestrians have begun to stop, although at a distance. The gear motor of the bolito is grinding. Westray falls over, kicking. His left carotid artery bursts and bright red blood sprays in a fountain into the air and splashes back on the sidewalk. The spectators draw back.

INSIDE THE CAB

Malkina is sitting in the back seat with the assassin. She takes the case and puts it in her lap and unzips it and sorts through it. She takes a out a computer and she looks through the papers in a folder. She unzips a pocket in the case and takes out a pair of passports. She takes out an envelope. A jump drive. She puts all these things in her shoulder bag and takes out an envelope and hands it to the assassin and he puts it in his shirt and she zips shut her shoulder bag and leans and taps the cab driver on the shoulder.

MALKINA

Aquí, por favor.

CABDRIVER

Aquí?

MALKINA

Sí.

The cab pulls to the curb and Malkina hands the driver some bills and gets out and shuts the door. The cabdriver looks at the money and pursues his mouth in surprise and approval. He turns to the man in the back.

CABDRIVER

A dónde?

The assassin is watching Malkina as she disappears among the pedestrians. Her elegant fitted clothes.

SIDEWALK CAFE. WORLD CITY.

Malkina at a table with Lee - a 25 year old Chinese American,

LEE

Do you have any of the CA's

MALKINA

Certificate Authorities.

LEE

Yes.

MALKINA

I have two of them.

LEE

Can you get the other two?

MALKINA

Yes.

LEE

You have the two that are the same one.

MALKINA

It's still two.

LEE

Okay. What else.

MALKINA

Routing numbers and account numbers.

(MORE)

MALKINA (CONT'D)

I have the source code but you'll still need a compiler to translate them into machine readable code.

LEE

VPN's and Routers.

MALKINA

No.

LEE

Passwords.

MALKINA

Everything I have is in there.

LEE

Yeah. Who else is in this?

MALKINA

Nobody. An advisor.

LEE

Bank guy.

MALKINA

Yes.

LEE

What's his cut? Or does he get paid in kind?

MALKINA

That's for me to worry about.

LEE

Are you Ukrainian? I know you're from Buenos Aires.

MALKINA

No. Soy pura Porteña.

LEE

Yeah, well. If you weren't connected we wouldn't be having this conversation.

MALKINA

Does that worry you?

LEE

We're still talking. This is going to be like past posting a horse race.

MALKINA

I don't have a good metaphor for you. The keys work like a safety deposit box. You log one in and the other out. They're two thousand and forty-eight bits each.

LEE

All right. What else? This is basically a spoof, isn't it?

MALKINA

If you like. Let's keep going. I travel pretty clean but I'm not so sure about you.

LEE

Well. It's a going concern. I don't keep anything around that I don't have to.

MALKINA

Yes, well. You can have a basic toolkit with SQL servers and whatever, but a Remote Access Trojan Horse like Zrizbi or Torig is not for keeping track of your household expenses.

LEE

It's not illegal to own one.

MALKINA

That's not the point. When they find it they keep looking. It doesn't make any difference how smart the hack is if you get caught. You can clone your cellphone with a SIM writer, for instance, and It's not traceable - pretty much - but the bills still go to the number you're cloned off of so you can't use it forever.

LEE

We don't want to use it forever.

MALKINA

No. But we don't know what forever is. Forever can be pretty fucking short.

LEE

You can't pull this off without a phone.

MALKINA

No. Of course not. But if there's a weak link that's probably it. Hackers think you can't trace a cloned cellphone but that's not exactly true. It's just difficult. And if they get a trace they can use a stringray and locate you physically to within about five feet. You don't want that in your life.

LEE

How many calls total.

MALKINA

Four.

LEE

Four phones. Voice-crypt.

MALKINA

Yes. Separate shoes.

LEE

Yeah, well. On the subject of security you know that nothing gets deleted off the hard drive. I mean I know you know that but this would come under time-constraints.

MALKINA

I'm not worried about that. What's out there is out there. They think their traffic analysis is sophisticated but by definition it has to lag the protocols that generate it. As for the physical computers, you put them in the oven, set it to four-fifty and walk away. Or just pour thermite on them.

(MORE)

MALKINA (CONT'D)

I can download everything I need to take with me onto a USB stick.

LEE

Double encrypted.

MALKINA

Yes.

LEE

Random Seed.

MALKINA

Yes.

LEE

All right. Let me look at it.

MALKINA

It's doable.

LEE

We haven't talked money.

MALKINA

Quarter mil.

LEE

I don't suppose you'll tell me what the caper is worth.

MALKINA

Why not? You're going to see it up there on the screen anyway. It's twenty-two mil, give or take whatever. And if we nail all four accounts.

LEE

You could boot that quarter up a bit.

MALKINA

All right.

LEE

Five hundred K.

MALKINA

That's not a bit. That's double.

LEE
Four hundred.

MALKINA
Done.

LEE
Cash.

MALKINA
Cash.

LEE
Will you have it?

MALKINA
I'll have it by tomorrow. Do you
need something up front?

LEE
No. What are you going to do? Float
a bank loan?

MALKINA
Something like that.

CITY STREET. AMBULANCE SIREN.

The ambulance pulls up to the sidewalk where Westray is lying, parting the crowd. Three medics get out and go to the body and place a sheet over it and one of them takes a pulse at the wrist and then they get a gurney out of the ambulance and place it on the sidewalk and one of the medics picks up the body by the feet and the other two take hold at either side and they lift the body onto the gurney still covered by the sheet.

A gasp goes up from the crowd and when the medics turn to look Westray's severed head is still lying on the sidewalk together with the bolito. Landfills on the outskirts of Juarez Mexico Bleak desert landscape with raw mountains hazy in the distance. Sound of a bulldozer. The landfill is a rubble of nameless trash. There are fires burning and smoke drifts across the fill. Families in the distance are picking through the garbage. Women and children. They carry woven shopping bags over their shoulders. A few buzzards strut about.

An old ten-ton dump truck labors across the landfill and turns and halts and backs and comes to a stop and the driver pulls the lever and the bed tips up and dumps its load of trash. The driver jiggles the lever and the bed clangs and then he lowers the bed into place and the truck lumbers away. A dusty yellow bulldozer pulls up and begins to grade the trash away into the fill. A girl's body comes up in the trash and then rolls under again. The bulldozer backs and then goes forward again. The headless body of Laura in her red dress appears briefly and then disappears in the trash and garbage.

APARTMENT IN A HIGH RISE BUILDING, WORLD CITY. NIGHT.

The reflection of Lee's face in the glass. Reflection of a bank of computers behind him. The lights of the city below Malkina crosses the room and then crosses back.

Lee and Malkina sitting at the computers. She is wearing a set of headphones. Lines of text running on the screens.

LEE

What's the time delay again?

MALKINA

Why?

LEE

I'm just rattling your cage.

MALKINA

Don't.

LEE

All right.

MALKINA

What does this do?

LEE

What? Jesus. Remind me not to play chicken with you.

MALKINA

I am reminding you.

Malkina brings tea from the kitchen. They sit at the screens.

MALKINA (CONT'D)

We've got two hours.

LEE

You want to try and get some sleep?
I'll wake you.

MALKINA

I'm too wired.

LEE

You want to go for a walk?

MALKINA

I'm not leaving this suite if the
building catches fire. Let's see
what's on television.

LEE

What if it's us?

MALKINA

I don't know. Maybe they have
virtual prisons for virtual felons.

ARIZONA HIGH PLAINS.

The male cheetah is lying under a tree. He gets up and walks
out to the edge of the grass and stands looking into the
distance.

A PENTHOUSE RESTAURANT IN A MAJOR CITY AT NIGHT,

The lights of the city spread out below. Malkina is at the
door being greeted by the maître'd.

MAITRE'D

Buena noches, Señora. Buena noches.

With her is a tall and elegant man in his forties dressed in
a black business suit with an expensive gold silk tie. The
maitre'd holds out his hand for them to enter.

MAITRE'D (CONT'D)

Bienvenidos. Bienvenidos.

She is dressed in an ankle-length black pleated skirt, a dark
green bolero jacket with black braiding. She wears a heavy
graduated swag choke necklace of emeralds with matching
earrings. She is about five months pregnant, just noticeable.
They cross through the room and the maitre'd gestures them to
a window table where a waiter holds a chair for her.

A second waiter is unfolding their napkins and third is crossing the room with a champagne bucket on a pedestal, which he positions at the man's elbow.

He lifts a bottle of Dom Pérignon from the bucket and wraps it with a towel and twists out the cork and pours two flutes of the champagne and then twists the bottle back into the ice. The maitre'd bows.

MAITRE'D (CONT'D)

Buen appetivo.

He moves away. They touch glasses. The escort speaks with an accent possibly European.

ESCORT

To the heir then.

MALKINA

Thank you.

ESCORT

Will you return to the states then?
At that time?

MALKINA

I don't think so.

ESCORT

Where will you go?

MALKINA

I can go wherever I choose.

ESCORT

To Europe?

MALKINA

There's not going to be a Europe. I think I might like China.

ESCORT

China. Really?

MALKINA

Yes.

ESCORT

You don't speak the language.

MALKINA

(Smiling)

I'm a quick study.

ESCORT

How do you get money into China?

MALKINA

It's not a problem. You can buy into the market. Heavy industries, primarily. Pohang Iron and Steel I like.

ESCORT

What about cash?

MALKINA

The easiest way to compress wealth is with diamonds. They're highly negotiable and they weigh nothing. Although a Picasso painting - out of the frame and rolled up - is worth about the same. Ounce for ounce.

ESCORT

And how much would that be?

MALKINA

(smiling)

Is this an idle curiosity?

ESCORT

It's a curiosity.

MALKINA

Well. There are roughly a hundred and fifty carats in an ounce. And diamonds average out to about ten thousand dollars a carat. Stones in the two to five carat range. Can you do the math?

ESCORT

You do it.

MALKINA

Diamonds are worth about one point five million an ounce. You can hold twenty million dollars in the palm of your hand. Money itself weighs about three thousand dollars to the ounces. Roughly fifty thousand dollars a pound.

(MORE)

MALKINA (CONT'D)

So that twenty mill in your hand
would be about five hundred pounds
of paper in hundred dollar bills.

ESCORT

Can you sell diamonds in China?

MALKINA

You can sell diamonds on Mars.

ESCORT

What if it's a girl? Wouldn't that
be a problem?

MALKINA

It would. But he's not.

ESCORT

I see.

MALKINA

I want to cheer you up.

ESCORT

Yes. Of course.

MALKINA

Good.

ESCORT

But you're very sure.

MALKINA

Look at me.

ESCORT

All right.

MALKINA

I won't ask you to tell me what you
see.

ESCORT

I'm not sure I understand you.
Well, I suppose I am sure. May I
ask you something?

MALKINA

You may ask.

ESCORT

Is the child Reiner's?

MALKINA

Is that what you want to know?

ESCORT

Yes.

MALKINA

No. It's not. Reiner had had a vasectomy. The counselor used to tell people that it was court-ordered. I told him the day that I found out. He was all right with it. He wanted me to get an abortion and we would go on as if nothing had happened. He was actually somewhat emotional about it. It surprised me. I told him that if it was a girl I would abort it. But it wasn't. And I didn't.

ESCORT

I see.

MALKINA

If I were a woman you could have, then you would not be interested. The curse of the player.

ESCORT

I hope that is not true.

MALKINA

Hope then. People want many things. In their idles hours they can sort among them. Like shopping in a catalog. You can change your mind. You can return things. If you are so minded.

ESCORT

I don't want many things.

MALKINA

I know. If you did you would not be so unhappy.

ESCORT

Perhaps I'm not so unhappy as you think.

MALKINA

Good. No one wants to admit that the object of his desire has weighed him and found him wanting. That is a very hard thing to accept. Better to imagine the desired one as whimsical and irresolute. Would you agree?

ESCORT

(smiling)
You are quite cruel.

MALKINA

You will thank me.

ESCORT

What is it that you want?

MALKINA

(smiling)
I used to ask my stepfather on his birthday what he would like for a present and he always said the same thing.

ESCORT

Yes?

MALKINA

He said that if there were anything that he wanted he would already have it. The truth is that I own very little. Mostly some jewelry. I still like cars, but I don't own one. No house. A few clothes. What do I want? There are times when I imagine that I would like my innocence back. If I ever had it. But I would never pay the price which it now commands in the market.

ESCORT

So. To own nothing. Is that your secret?

MALKINA

No.

ESCORT

What about the cats?

MALKINA

The cheetahs? You don't own a cheetah. Silva died. She had a congenital heart condition. Which we knew. Raoul is alive and well in Arizona. He rules over a domain of a thousand hectares and he has a special rock where he can take the sun and watch for quarry. That's all. Dogs bring people together. Cats don't. Still, I miss him.

ESCORT

Raoul.

MALKINA

(Smiling)

Yes. Raoul. I miss watching him bring down jackrabbits out on the desert at seventy miles an hour. I never tired of that. To see quarry killed with elegance is very moving to me. It always was.

ESCORT

Is it sexual?

MALKINA

Of course. A thing like that is always sexual. For the sexual. I think I could have had sex with him. I never did. I see your looks. You don't think a girl should date out of her species. Well, there are girls and there are girls. Grace. Freedom.

The hunter has a purity of heart that exists nowhere else. I think he is no defines so much by what has come to be as by all that he has escaped being. You can make no distinction between what he is and what he does. And what he does is kill.

We of course are another matter. I suspect that we are ill-informed for the path we have chosen. Ill-formed and ill-prepared.

(MORE)

MALKINA (CONT'D)

We would like to draw a veil over all that blood and terror that have brought us to this place. It is our faintness of heart that would close our eyes to all of that, but in doing so it makes of it our destiny. Maybe you would not agree. I don't know. But nothing is crueller than a coward, and the slaughter to come is probably beyond our imaging.

Should we think about ordering?
I'm famished.

THE END