

Life On A Dime

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. OCEAN ROAD - DAWN

A dark sky, fast moving clouds. Lightning cracks over the horizon. Thunder rolls ominously in the distance.

A black convertible, top down, comes into view, flies around a hairpin bend, its V-8 engine roaring.

Behind the wheel, NED, handsome, debonair, foppish hair. Dressed in black-tie, looking a little worse for wear.

One hand draped casually on the steering wheel, he lights a cigarette with a Zippo, inhales the smoke deep into his lungs. The cigarette dangles from his lips.

The NARRATOR stands in the middle of the road. Ned's car whizzes by him.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

Witness Ned Coleman, 33. By all accounts, Ned's a happy man. You might say, he's been blessed.

A briefcase lies on the front passenger seat, along with a cell-phone and a bottle of Jack Daniels.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

Good looking fella, great job - Ned grabs everything life has to offer and he doesn't let go.

EXT. SUBURBS - HOUSE - DAY

Sunshine and blue sky. Picture perfect.

Facing the street, a two-story McMansion, one in a long row of identical McMansions. Manicured lawns, fancy black convertibles parked in front of double garages.

A video camera holds shakily on:

FOUR YEAR OLD, JEREMY, standing curbside, a glazed look in his eyes, MOM, close by his side.

The video camera pans left, stays on:

Jeremy, a HULK action figure in one hand, monster toy car in the other. The camera's point of view switches suddenly to Mom's pregnant belly. It stays on it, preoccupied with it.

Mom's face is unseen, one hand protectively resting on her stomach, the other hand on Jeremy's shoulder.

The camera pans down to a German Shepherd dog, MAX, who sits to attention, completing the perfect family portrait.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

Ned's got it all. Always thinking big, and thinking ahead. He wanted a boy, maybe a girl later... if he's lucky. A successful company director, he's just signed on the dotted line for the deluxe McMansion, right by the coast.

The camera pans around to the backyard, reveals the brilliant aquamarine of the Pacific Ocean right on the doorstep.

EXT. OCEAN ROAD

Ned accelerates out of another sharp bend, turns the radio up full pelt, sings along to a heavy-rock song.

One hand comes off the wheel to reach across for the cell phone. He dials 'MOIRA'.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

Up 'till now everything's been going swimmingly well...

Ned shifts down a gear, expertly navigating the car around another bend.

He looks out at the storm building on the horizon. Raises his head to feel the light rain on his face, smiles his million dollar smile.

Another crack of lightning, an even louder rumble of thunder. The car narrowly misses the Narrator standing on the road.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

The only fly in the ointment is: Despite all life has to offer Ned, it's never enough. There's always a place inside his head and his heart, that's empty. A mind-numbing place he longs to fill. A nagging feeling that just won't go away. A voice that says what everybody else has is just that little bit more perfect.

Ned frowns.

NED
(into phone)
How're you doing? Everything okay?

Frantic breathing on the other end of the line.

NED
What's the matter?

Convulsive breaths, unable to speak.

NED
Calm down, okay. Is it him again?

Ned slams his palm onto the steering wheel.

NED
Fucking bastard! Look, I'll handle
this okay. Lock yourselves in the
bathroom. I'm on my way.

Ned glances down at his fancy gold \$5,000 watch.

NED
Five minutes, tops. Okay, babe?

Ned ends the call, puts his foot hard to the floor.

Small change in the console shimmers in the phosphorous glow of dawn. Ned's gaze is drawn to a rusty old dime in amongst a pile of shiny new coins.

He picks the dime out of the pile, swivels it between his thumb and forefinger. Tosses it into the air. It spins in slow-motion.

Freeze-frame on the dime mid-air directly above Ned's head.

NARRATOR'S VOICE
Ned's about to learn a hard truth
about perfection. That it doesn't
actually exist. That men are ruled
by choices and consequences. That
anytime, anywhere, the perfect life
can turn on a dime -

The convertible climbs a steep hill, dizzying cliff-face below.

NARRATOR'S VOICE
- just-like-that! That the quest
for perfection balances on the most
dangerous of precipices, and the
fall can come at a heavy price.

QUICK FLASH ON -

Ned's beaming grin, wind and rain in his hair. He punches the
air with victory.

NED
Yeah! I got this, you scumbag.
Nobody messes with Ned's life.

NARRATOR'S VOICE
Ned doesn't know it yet, but he's
about to veer, smack-bang, off the
straight and narrow, into a place
known only as the Twilight Zone.

EXT. OCEAN ROAD - HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The McMansion we saw earlier comes into view.

Ned floors it, the car zooms along like a bat out of hell.

SMASH TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

INT. HOUSE - MCMANSION - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Expensive antique furniture meets shabby-chic, floral
wallpaper and chintz.

Windows latched, curtains tightly drawn.

Framed photographs on the walls of a woman and child can just
be made out in the dim light - the boy we saw earlier, as a
new-born and toddler, and the pregnant woman.

Family shots. Happy snaps.

A CLICK, as a digital alarm clock on the bedside table turns
over to nineteen-hundred hours.

Ned wakes with a jolt.

NED
What the fuck?

A sharp intake of breath, he coughs, runs his dry tongue over cracked and bloodied lips.

Panic sets in when he looks down at his wrists bound with thick rope, his legs zip tied. He's battered and bruised, a nasty gash above his blackened eye.

His eyes flit around the room, land on the bedroom door.

NED
(whispers)
Moira?

He tries to move, winces in pain.

NED
Moira!

Not a sound elsewhere in the house.

Using his teeth he bites down hard into the rope, loosens it a little. He grunts, slow progress, pries it open further.

Hands freed, he moves to his ankles, but the zip-tie has a spiked surface. It digs into his flesh, draws blood.

He gives up. Pulls his cell phone from inside his waistband.

A shadow appears in a crack of light under the doorway.

NED
Moira?

Footsteps glide quietly and quickly away. The light stays on.

The sound of a child's laughter, distant.

A door slams shut.

Ned's P.O.V. The room spins, objects blur crazily.

NED
Je-remy?

Ned's eyes roll back, he slumps, falls unconscious.

HALLWAY - LATER

A toy-car zooms up and down, flipping and spinning on the bare boards.

Jeremy, holding a remote control, laughs and giggles.

BEDROOM

Ned's eyes pop open.

He hoists himself over on one side of the bed, leverages his hands on the floor, hurls himself off the bed, lands with an ungainly THUD onto the floor.

Dragging himself to the bedroom door, he turns the handle. No go. Puts his eye to the keyhole.

P.O.V. of Jeremy's sneakers, chubby hands maneuvering the toy car with the remote. The car takes a bad turn, upends into a wall. Quiet.

NED
(whispers)
Jeremy?
(louder)
Jeremy! Come here.

Jeremy moves towards the sound of Ned's voice, alert.

NED
(whispering again)
Buddy, over here. It's Daddy.

HALLWAY

Jeremy crouches down next to the door, presses his eye close to keyhole.

Jeremy's P.O.V. Ned's bloodshot eye, dilating pupil.

NED
Daddy's stuck. You need to let him
out. Get the key.

HALLWAY

Jeremy giggles. Jiggles the door handle, pulls on it.

A key is perched high up on a picture rail. Too high.
Jeremy peers up at it, shakes his head side to side.

JEREMY
(parroting)
Daddy's stuck, let him out. Daddy's
stuck, let him out.

Jeremy's voice gets louder. Enjoying the game.

BEDROOM

Ned's P.O.V. Jeremy's clear big blue eye.

NED
Mommy's in the bathroom. Go get
Mommy.

JEREMY
Mommy's in the bathroom, go get
Mommy. Mommy's in the bathroom, go
get Mommy.

NED
Yes! Go. Now!

Jeremy jumps back from the keyhole, his feet scamper away.

A flash of movement -

P.O.V. Ned's eye, darting rapidly back and forth.

Dog paws patter down the hallway.

NED
Hey, Max!

The German Shepherd stops outside the door.

NED
Hey, buddy.

Ned pokes a finger through the keyhole, wiggles it.

The dog sniffs Ned's finger. It growls, snarls.

Ned yanks his finger back. The dog barks. Shrill, loud.

NED
Max, go! Get help.

The dog cocks its head at the door, whimpers. It sniffs the door again, barks again, growls, snarls, bares its teeth.

Ned rears away from the door, falls heavily on his back.

BEDROOM - LATER

Footsteps clatter along the floorboards in the hallway, come to a stop, casting a larger shadow under the door.

Ned peers through the keyhole.

He sees a woman's red stiletto heels, painted red toenails, a delicate silver chain adorns her slender ankle -

NED

Moira?

Ned shuts his eyes tight, rubs them, opens them again. The stilettos suddenly morph into size ten steel-capped boots.

He tries to shake the image from his head.

When he looks again,

Ned's P.O.V. : a male hand clamps over the woman's red glossy lip-sticked mouth.

Ned puts his ear to the door, listens.

Hushed whispers -

MAN'S VOICE

Shush! ... No! Do as I tell you.

The man yanks the woman's arm. The stiletto heels turn, hurry away. The steel-capped boots follow.

NED

Moira...? What the hell? Moira? Oh, Jesus. Don't hurt her, please.

Ned's pleas echo in the empty silence of the room.

The light switches off under the doorway. A door slams.

Ned holds his breath, shaky hands punch out numbers on his cell phone.

911 OPERATOR
(male dispatch voice)
Nine-one-one, what is your
emergency?

NED
I need help. I'm being held at, um,
My wife has just been -

911 OPERATOR
What is your address, sir?

Ned puzzles for a moment. He shakes his head. Can't remember.

911 OPERATOR
Your address, sir?

NED
Um, I don't know... Sorry, look,
I've been drugged, and tied up. I'm
being held -
(to himself)
Oh, Jesus, what the hell am I -

911 OPERATOR
Calm down, sir. And stay on the
line. Just a moment -

A sudden high pitched ear-piercing screech comes through the
phone line. Ned reels back, drops the phone. It skitters
along the floor boards.

NED
Fuck!

He lurches across the floor on his stomach, grabs the cell,
places it to his ear. Again, the ear-piercing noise.

A few seconds pass. Ned puts the phone gingerly to his ear.

The phone rings right in his ear. He drops it, picks it up
again.

NED
Hello...?

A calm, self assured older male voice speaks.

RUPERT
Hello, Ned.

NED
Who's this?

RUPERT
This is Rupert, Ned. You called me.

NED
Um, who? No, I...

RUPERT
I'm responding to your voice mail.

NED
Look, I'm sorry, I've got an emergency here, so -

RUPERT
Don't hang up. I can help.

NED
What? Look, my wife and child are in danger. I've been tied up, and locked in... Whoever has my wife is intercepting my calls and -

Ned's eyes scan the room,

RUPERT
Oh God, that sounds awful, Ned. Have you called the Police?

NED
Yes. But...

RUPERT
I understand perfectly.

NED
What do you mean you understand perfectly? Who the hell are -

RUPERT
- I can help you, Ned. But it's important you stay calm -

Ned jabs the 'end call' button.

NED
Stoopid goon!

He rubs his head, frowns.

Scrolls down the contacts list again, selects: MACK.

The phone on the other end rings once, connects.

The voice that answers is quiet, gruff, sounds eerily close.

MACK

Yep?

NED

Hey mate, I...

MACK

Get off the phone, Ned.

NED

(shaky, near tears)
I'm in a spot of bother mate, was wondering if you could shed some light. Funny story really, well *not* really... I'm not actually sure what the hell's going on, but -

MACK

I'm not your mate anymore, Ned.

NED

What! Why... ?

MACK

You need to calm the fuck down, okay? It'll all be over soon.

NED

What? What do you mean it'll all be over soon? What will be over?

It dawns on Ned.

NED

It's you isn't it? You're the one fucking with my life...

MACK

It's not *your* life man.

Ned seethes, his voice drops to a low growl.

NED

It's been you all along hasn't it? You're jealous. I see it now. If you touch a hair on my wife's head, I swear I'll kill you, you bastard!

Another sudden realization hits Ned. He holds the phone away from himself, aims it at the bedroom door - listens.

MACK
 (quietly)
 She's not your wife, mate, and it's
 not your house.

The line suddenly disconnects. Ned scrambles to the keyhole.

NED
 Oh, Jesus. Moira?!

Ned loses it completely, he thrashes around, grabs at the tie cutting into his ankles.

The door bursts open.

TWO COPS, mid 20s, barrel through, hands on holsters.

Two male ORDERLIES in white coats, hurry in behind them. A grey-haired GENTLEMAN, 62, brings up the rear. He wears a lanyard around his neck. It reads: DR RUPERT WHITE, Underneath it the words: State Psychiatric Facility.

MACK, 33, a plain looking chap with pock-marked skin and a beer belly pokes his head around the corner, looks at Ned shakes his head slowly and sadly.

MACK
 Get him out.

At the opposite end of the hallway, the Narrator watches, arms crossed, as Ned is lifted onto a stretcher, tied down. An orderly injects something into Ned's arm. Ned resists.

In the fracas a brand new shiny dime rolls out of Ned's pocket, bounces onto the floor.

The action freezes on the dime suspended mid air:

NARRATOR'S VOICE
 Ned Coleman, a man seeking
 perfection. A man destined to be
 unfulfilled. A home with a view, a
 trophy wife, a child created in his
 own image. If only Ned realised
 perfection is an illusion only ever
 found in: The Twilight Zone.

The dime spins fast, it whirls and whirls, drops, shudders, then comes to a final stop. CHINK.

FINAL FADE OUT.