

The Art of Persuasion

By

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INT. CAR - NIGHT

A picture of SARAH (early 20s) cradling a baby displays on a cellphone.

Dressed heavily, MATTHEW (early 20s) sits in the driver seat, looking at the picture.

GABRIELLA (O.S.)  
Let's go home.

GABRIELLA (30s, dressed in all white) sits at the passenger side.

GABRIELLA  
Forget about this.

Matthew remains silent, still looking at the picture.

GABRIELLA  
There are other ways of attaining funds.

ALEXANDER (O.S.)  
Can't you take a no?

ALEXANDER (30s, dressed in all black) sits in the back seat.

GABRIELLA  
Matthew, you're walking a dangerous line here.

ALEXANDER  
Obviously, you don't understand his situation.

GABRIELLA  
I understand that times are rough but, that doesn't mean you have to do this. There's still hope.

Alexander nods.

ALEXANDER  
Go back to job hunting, Matthew. In this tough economical time where businesses are laying off, you have a great shot of nailing a job like the million others. Or ask your family or girlfriend's family who are barely making enough money to sustain themselves to lend you. Or go begging in the streets, I hear people are generous.

Alexander CHUCKLES.

GABRIELLA  
Matthew...

Her voice changes to --

SARAH (V.O.)  
Matthew.

Matthew still looks at the cellphone picture.

MATTHEW (V.O.)  
Hold it.

EXT. PARK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A flash comes from Matthew's cellphone.

MATTHEW  
Got it.

Sarah sits on the bench holding the baby. Matthew stands over them.

SARAH  
Finally.

MATTHEW  
This is a good one.

He shows the cellphone picture to Sarah.

SARAH  
He's smiling.

MATTHEW  
(to baby)  
He smiles for his daddy, don't ya?

Sarah and the baby smile. A Hallmark moment for Matthew.

INT. CAR - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Matthew EXHALES. He turns the phone on vibrate and pockets it in his jeans.

GABRIELLA  
This is not going to turn out well for you.

Matthew reaches into his coat pocket, takes out a snub nose revolver, and examines it.

GABRIELLA  
You're going to die.

He opens the chamber to reveal it's loaded.

MATTHEW  
That's not going to happen.

Pockets the revolver. He puts on his hoodie.

GABRIELLA  
Heed my warning, Matthew.

He INHALES, EXHALES, and exits.

INT. GROCERY STORE - EVENING

Matthew enters.

MUSIC. Glancing around, the place is empty except for the YOUNG CLERK standing behind the counter.

MATTHEW  
Can I get some batteries?

Glances in the back.

MATTHEW  
Double A.

The young clerk turns around and reaches up.

ALEXANDER  
Smooth.

GABRIELLA  
Let's leave.

From his coat pocket, Matthew takes out the revolver.

GABRIELLA  
Put it away.

ALEXANDER  
As you practiced before.

YOUNG CLERK  
A dollar ninety nine.

The young clerk turns back around and faces the barrel of Matthew's revolver.

MATTHEW  
Give me the money in the register.

ALEXANDER  
Great.

The young clerk stands frozen.

GABRIELLA  
Don't do this.

MATTHEW  
Hey!

Slams the counter. The young clerk comes back.

MATTHEW  
Give me the money!

The young clerk opens the cash register.

GABRIELLA  
Matthew, please.

One hand grabs a brown bag. The other hand grabs some cash from the drawer.

GABRIELLA  
Turn back.

Fills the bag with cash.

GABRIELLA  
This is not the answer.

ALEXANDER  
Doing good.

The young clerk repeats the process again.

GABRIELLA  
Think of your baby.

ALEXANDER  
Think of him.

Repeats again.

GABRIELLA  
I'm begging you...

Alexander sees the young clerk return back to the cash register.

GABRIELLA (O.S.)  
Turn back.

ALEXANDER  
GUN!

Instantly, Matthew fires.

Absolute SILENCE. In slow motion, the young clerk flies back and disappears behind the counter.

On his own accord, Matthew snaps back to reality.

ALEXANDER  
Get the bag and run!

Matthew follows.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Several envelopes stamped with "Final Notice" are found on the table.

Bills, ranging from 1s to 100s, fall down and cover it. Next to the bills lies the revolver.

Matthew sits. Alexander and Gabriella stand behind him.

ALEXANDER  
Progress, Matthew. You earned it.

He sees Gabriella's disappointed expression.

ALEXANDER  
Matthew's alive. He can pay his bills now.

Matthew counts.

GABRIELLA  
Where was the gun?

ALEXANDER  
Ah, I saw what appeared to be a gun and notified Matthew dutifully.

GABRIELLA  
You're such a liar.

ALEXANDER  
Did you want the clerk to shoot  
Matthew to prove your point?

GABRIELLA  
He was cooperating.

ALEXANDER  
They all do until they get their  
chance of defending themselves.

GABRIELLA  
You set him up.

ALEXANDER  
I got him cash. You got him stress.

GABRIELLA  
You know there were other ways.

ALEXANDER  
Tried and ended up fruitless.

RING. Matthew grabs the cellphone.

MATTHEW  
Hi, dad.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Where are you?

MATTHEW  
At my apartment.

FATHER (V.O.)  
How was your day?

MATTHEW  
Good. And yours?

FATHER (V.O.)  
Good. Are you sure your day was  
good?

MATTHEW  
That's what I said.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Why are you lying to me?

MATTHEW  
Why I'm going to lie?

FATHER (V.O.)  
Turn on the A.T.N channel.

MATTHEW  
Can you tell me what's going on?

FATHER (V.O.)  
I want to know why you robbed a  
grocery store? They're showing your  
face on the news.

Matthew goes to the

LIVING ROOM

and turns on the tv. A sketch drawing of Matthew's face is  
on screen.

NEWS REPORTER (O.S.)  
Anyone seeing this man should  
contact the police. He is  
considered armed and dangerous.  
Call...

Matthew mutes the t.v.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Tell me that isn't you.

Matthew's silent.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Mind telling me what happened?

Nothing from Matthew.

ALEXANDER  
Lie.

GABRIELLA  
It's hard to lie with that.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Matthew?

ALEXANDER  
Deny it to the end.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Does it have to do with money?  
Paying your bills?

More silence from Matthew

FATHER (V.O.)  
You dumb piece of shit! You could  
never think, could you!?

A FEMALE VOICE sounds pleading in the b.g.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Here's what you're going to do.  
You're going to the police station  
and turn yourself in.

MATTHEW  
I can't...

FATHER (V.O.)  
What the fuck did you just say?!

A second phone line opens.

SARAH (V.O.)  
Matt?

FATHER (V.O.)  
Get off the phone, Sarah.

MATTHEW  
What are you doing over there?

FATHER (V.O.)  
She came to get money from me.

MATTHEW  
What?

SARAH (V.O.)  
Can I talk to him?

FATHER (V.O.)  
Maybe you can get through his thick  
head.

SARAH (V.O.)  
Matt, I was able to get the money  
to pay our bills. I got half from  
my parents and half from your  
parents.

MATTHEW

That can't be.

SARAH (V.O.)

I got it. Can you tell me what happened?

MATTHEW

I'll call you...

FATHER (V.O.)

Don't fucking hang up!

Matthew hangs up.

GABRIELLA

(to Alexander)

You have any bright ideas for this?

ALEXANDER

Skip town.

Gabriella gives him a disgusting look.

ALEXANDER

What's yours?

GABRIELLA

Matthew, I was against this from the beginning. I always have the best intentions...

Alexander COUGHS.

ALEXANDER

It's just occurred to me that your father might have tipped the police off to your location.

Fear shows on Matthew's face.

ALEXANDER

He said some discerning things that would support the idea.

Alexander shrugs his shoulders.

GABRIELLA

Listen to me, I would never lead you astray. I think you should turn yourself in.

Matthew's cell RINGS. Looking at the phone, he sees "brother" on the screen.

MATTHEW

Hey.

MATTHEW'S BROTHER (O.S.)

Get out of the apartment. The cops  
are going over there.

Matthew's brother hangs up.

Looking from Gabriella to Alexander, Matthew makes his  
decision.

INT. BEDROOM (LATER)

Matthew packs clothes into a duffel bag. Gabriella stands at  
his side.

GABRIELLA

You're doing it again.

MATTHEW

I can't turn myself in.

GABRIELLA

How is running better?

MATTHEW

I won't be in jail.

GABRIELLA

How do you know jail is bad?

Matthew halts in packing and looks at her. O.S., Alexander  
LAUGHS.

Following the laughter, Alexander leans against the bedroom  
doorway.

GABRIELLA

Matthew, you've been listening to  
this lowlife and all he's brought  
you is trouble. I understand my  
answers may sound stupid to you,  
but they would to a stressful  
person. Think about it. Going to  
jail is not so bad, especially  
compared to running.

ALEXANDER

Bullied. Alone. Butt-fucked.

Matthew zips up the bag and exits.

GABRIELLA  
That rarely happens!

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
I can fix this situation. Just need  
time.

IN THE KITCHEN

He collects the cash and puts it in the brown bag. Puts the  
coat on.

He looks at the gun.

GABRIELLA  
Why do you need that?

ALEXANDER  
Evidence that puts you at the  
crime.

GABRIELLA  
Throw it away now.

ALEXANDER  
You can use it to get more funds  
when you run out.

GABRIELLA  
We've already seen how unsuccessful  
that was.

ALEXANDER  
You got the cash.

GABRIELLA  
You'll make the situation far  
worse. Throw it out, now.

ALEXANDER  
Wanna risk the cops finding it or  
someone else?

Matthew grabs the gun.

MATTHEW  
I'll throw it away once I'm out.

BOOM! From the sound of it, someone forcefully entered.

MALE VOICE

Police!

GABRIELLA

Give up, Matthew. It's your only option. What else do you have?

ALEXANDER

Shoot your way out or shoot yourself.

GABRIELLA

Please, turn yourself in!

MATTHEW

I'm not a fuck up! I can fix this!

Matthew takes out the gun and points it to his head.

GABRIELLA

Think about what your doing. This is not going to help you or your family.

MATTHEW

They're better off without me.

Fires.

Gabriella covers her mouth. Tears trickle down her face.

Alexander smiles.

ALEXANDER

Did you see that?!

Alexander does a little dance.

ALEXANDER

Thank you, Matthew's dad.

Gabriella glares at him.

ALEXANDER

That's just a taste, dear. There's plenty more of that coming around. And you know what you can do about it.

He moves his hips as if he's having sex.

ALEXANDER

Oh yeah.

Angry, Gabriella runs at him and kicks him in the nuts but...

The kick goes through Alexander.

ALEXANDER

Ha! Can't touch me.

Alexander turns to ass shaking.

Gabriella vanishes. Soon, Alexander vanishes.

INT. LAVISH ROOM - UNKNOWN

Alexander appears in front of --

LUCIFER (50s) sitting behind his desk with a serious expression.

Alexander grins.

Lucifer slowly grins.

LUCIFER

You have a way of gloating.

ALEXANDER

I love pissing people off.

LUCIFER

Well, can't wait for more. I want you to work with Christian on an assignment. He'll fill you in on what's going on. He's in his room.

Lucifer gestures him away, turns around, and stares out of the window.

FADE OUT