

LAUGHTER, FAR AWAY

Written by

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author.

FADE IN:

INT. SLYDE INN, MAGIC ROOM

A WOMAN sleeps, her face peaceful.

STANTON (O.S.)
Wake up, pretty baby.

The woman's eyes flutter, then open. She struggles inside an ornately painted box, the kind a magician uses to saw someone in two.

WOMAN
Stanton?

STANTON (O.S.)
Hey baby. What's the good word?

WOMAN
What am I doing in here? I thought
we were making a film?

STANTON (O.S.)
We are, pretty baby. Just relax,
while Stanton makes you a star.

The very loud sound of a CHAINSAW sends the woman into hysterics as the shadow of the horrific instrument descends upon the box.

CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE similar to that of a Japanese exploitation film from the '70s. The CHAINSAW growl DISSOLVES into loud music over huge titles and random scenes of porn filmmaking, drug use, and violence. Many of the scenes feature two bodybuilders dressed in identical yellow jumpsuits with a thick, black stripe down each side. They often stare blankly into the camera.

CREDITS END.

CUT TO:

INT. CALEB'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

CALEB is ten years old. He plays with a few other children in the living room. Family celebrates Thanksgiving and prepares for dinner.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Caleb answers it and finds his UNCLE SAM (early 40's, Hugh Hefner type) in the doorway holding a giant, frozen turkey in one hand and a long, brown paper bag in the other. Caleb reaches for the bag, but Uncle Sam pulls it away.

UNCLE SAM

You don't need to know what's in this bag just yet, Cal. Maybe next year.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Uncle Sam and Caleb sit together on the couch. Caleb stares with wonderment as Uncle Sam waves his hands furiously.

UNCLE SAM

And that's what I did in Mexico when some bad banditos wanted to take your uncle's money. They'll not soon forget that lesson. And the señoritas will not soon forget your Uncle Sam.

Caleb's mom enters the room and gathers everyone for dinner. Caleb goes to stand but Uncle Sam grabs his arm. He points his finger at Caleb and cocks an eyebrow.

UNCLE SAM

Who am I?

CALEB

I don't know, uncle. Who are you?

UNCLE SAM

Well, I'm Uncle Sam. Dontcha' get it?

Uncle Sam bursts with laughter and Caleb laughs along with him, though not quite sure what he is talking about.

MONTAGE of dinner celebration.

Women carry plates of food to the table.

An older man pours wine for everyone.

There's a toast and people dig in.

CALEB'S BEDROOM - LATER

Uncle Sam follows Caleb into the bedroom and closes the door, puts his ear to it and listens.

Satisfied, he turns away and pulls up a chair to sit and face Caleb who sits on the edge of his bed, legs dangle, not quite touching the floor.

CALEB

What's going on, uncle? Are you in trouble or something.

UNCLE SAM

Trouble? Why no, boy. I'm about to embark on a journey.

CALEB

Where are you going? Can I go?

UNCLE SAM

Well, no. At least not yet.

CALEB

Then where are you headed?

UNCLE SAM

I'm not going anywhere you know, or your parents know. Where I'm going is not somewhere you can reach by boat or car or plane. That's why it has to be our secret. What I'm about to give you is something that you must guard with your life. You can't tell mom or dad. You can't tell your friends. No one must know. Understand?

CALEB

Yeah.

UNCLE SAM

Say you understand.

CALEB

I understand.

UNCLE SAM

Good. Now, take this paper and hide it. Hide it somewhere so no one can find it except you. It's not important now, but when I come back - *if* I come back - I'll tell you what to do with it. Got that?

CALEB

Mon says it's not good to lie.

UNCLE SAM

Aren't you listening to me? Dammit,
boy. I thought I could trust you.

Uncle Sam's voice makes Caleb wince. He has to concentrate to fight back the tears.

CALEB

I'm listening, uncle.

UNCLE SAM

I don't know if I'm giving this to
the right person. Am I? Am I, Cal?

CALEB

Yes, sir. You can trust me. I'm
sorry.

Sam pauses, just long enough for his stern stare to sink in.

UNCLE SAM

Well, I guess I can trust you.
Here.

He slips the paper into Caleb's hand and closes the boy's fingers around it.

UNCLE SAM

Hide it good, Cal. If you don't,
and someone finds it, you'll be the
sorriest son-of-a-bitch in the
history of civilization. And one
more thing, I brought this back for
you.

Uncle Sam hands him a 45-record. Caleb sees it's for a song called "Lightning Strikes" by Lou Christie.

UNCLE SAM

No need to hide this, just thought
you might like it. Now let's go get
some of your mom's pumpkin pie. I'm
starving.

Uncle Sam exits while Caleb looks around his bedroom.

He lifts the top to his portable record player and sets the 45 on. He drops the needle and the song plays.

He crawls into his closet and lifts a piece of the wood floor from where it lays undetected. Underneath is a small crevice filled with random small toys and coins. He lays the paper among his prized possessions.

EXT. MEMPHIS SIDEWALK - DAY

The same piece of paper, now wrinkled and aged, sits in the palm of an older CALEB MARSH (20's, hip, urban youth).

He steps off a Greyhound bus onto a street just off downtown and stares at his surroundings. Cafe's, shops and bars line the moderately busy area. An old man shuffles by.

CALEB
(to Old Man)
Hey, do you know where I can get
some coffee around here?

OLD MAN
Sure do.

He walks away and disappears into the Memphis Belle Diner.

CALEB
Of course.

INT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER - DAY

The interior of the diner is bright as the large bay windows let the midday sunlight stream in unabated. The waitresses walk with that tired stride you get when you've been on your feet for 12 hours straight, like a dancer at a Bop-Til-You-Drop contest.

Caleb slides into a corner booth and surveys the selections on the small jukebox that is bolted to the wall at the end of the table. Blue Suede Shoes, Back of a Car and other hits from the '50s through the '70s are loaded into the tiny music box.

He notices one song has been scratched out. Stuck over it is a piece of white paper with the title "Lightning Strikes," handwritten in a fancy cursive.

Caleb feels around his jacket pockets for a quarter when a waitress walks up. She is MONA BERGMAN (early-40s, still beautiful but her job has taken its toll, Sigourney Weaver type)

MONA
You need a light?

CALEB
What?

MONA
I said, You need a light?

CALEB

I don't smoke.

MONA

Oh, well I saw you diggin' through your coat. I figured it was matches or a Zippo or somethin'.

CALEB

No, I just wanted a quarter to put in the jukebox here.

MONA

Well, this is a no-smoking area anyway.

CALEB

I guess it's good I don't need a light.

MONA

Yeah, I guess. But I hope you don't need to listen to music right now, either.

CALEB

Why?

MONA

'Cause the jukebox is broken. In fact, all of 'em is broken. Haven't worked in 20 years. Always pisses people off. I hope it won't affect my tip.

CALEB

No, I don't think it will.

MONA

That's good.

She smiles a half-smile. Her blonde hair lays limply on her shoulders, her eyes stare at him beautifully.

MONA

So, what would you like today?

Caleb stares at her a little too long and shifts his gaze to her nametag. It reads "Mona".

CALEB

Ummm, I don't know. I hadn't really gotten to the menu yet. What do you suggest?

MONA

I suggest you order something quick
before I get in trouble.

Caleb opens his menu and orders the first thing he sees.

CALEB

I guess I'll have the Blue Suede
Sole. Is the fish fresh?

MONA

It's Memphis fresh.

Mona takes the menu and walks back down the aisle. Caleb
watches her hips the whole way down.

JON BERGMAN (late-60s) sits at a table across the aisle from
Caleb and catches his stare. He laughs.

JON

Boy, you might want to put your
peepers back in their sockets.

Caleb turns at the voice and his face flushes with
embarrassment.

CALEB

I'm sorry. Couldn't help myself.

JON

I know what you mean. She's been a
favorite of mine for more years
than I can count.

CALEB

You know her?

JON

Know her? Well, I should hope so.
She's my daughter.

Caleb turns a deep scarlet and buries his head in the menu.

JON

Don't worry. I see it all day, and
it don't bother me none. Just as
long as it's your eyes touching her
and not your hands.

CALEB

You don't have to worry, sir.

JON

I'm just pullin' your dick, son.

The old man slides closer to the edge of his booth and extends his hand to Caleb.

JON

My name's Jon, Jon Bergman. It's not German and I ain't no Nazi.

Jon grasps Caleb's arm tightly.

CALEB

I didn't think you were. Swedish, isn't it?

JON

Right the first time.

Jon laughs long and coughs through most of it. To stifle the rasp, he pulls a pack of unfiltered Lucky Strikes from his breast pocket and lights one up.

JON

I'd offer you one son, but I overheard you saying you don't smoke, so I can't see the point in offerin'.

CALEB

Thanks for the thought.

JON

No problem.

A city bus pulls up in front of the diner, its air brakes HISS loudly.

JON

Well, that's my ride, Caleb. Got to be truckin'. Maybe we'll run into each other again.

CALEB

Yeah, maybe. Nice meeting you.

Jon tips his baseball cap and walks slowly to the counter. He kisses Mona goodbye and exits to the awaiting bus. Caleb continues to stare after it, even as it rolled down the street out of view.

MONA (O.S.)

You and my father gettin' acquainted, I see.

Caleb turns to the sound. Mona holds a glass of water and leans against the edge of the table.

CALEB

Yes. He's very nice.

MONA

I know he's nice. He raised me when my momma left with some traveling death dragger. He was all alone, and still is.

CALEB

Well, he has you.

MONA

That ain't enough for a man. He needs more'n a daughter.

CALEB

Yeah, I guess. I practically went nuts when my girlfriend went away to France for the Summer.

MONA

Try not having her for thirty years. My father's done without a woman, good or bad, for too long. I keep trying to fix him up with-

The cook, a very large man named PETE with a grease splattered smock, a deeply tanned and scarred bald head and hands like Christmas hams interrupts Mona.

PETE

(to Mona)

Mona! I need that ass moving or you'll have it kicked out the door.

MONA

(to Pete)

Hold yer water Pete! I'm just taking an order. He can't make up his mind.

PETE

(to Mona)

I know you already took his order so pick up a tuna melt and fries for table 6, pronto!

MONA

(to Caleb)

I've gotta go, but if you want, we could talk more later.

CALEB

Well, I guess so.

MONA

It's just that, you look like you could use a friend in town. I could tell you where the museum is, stuff like that.

CALEB

Oh, right. What time do you get off?

MONA

I worked the morning shift, so I'll be gettin' out of here around seven this evening. You be outside and we'll go somewhere.

CALEB

Sure.

Mona walks off, gives the cook a dirty look and delivers the tuna melt.

EXT. MEMPHIS SIDEWALK, BUS STOP

Caleb stands on the corner in front of the Memphis Belle. He stretches and takes in his surroundings.

CALEB

(sotto)

She could ask me to her house. She could get me drunk and roll me for my money. She could drug me and I could wind up the sex slave of her possibly demented father. The guy hasn't been with a woman in thirty years, I doubt he's picky about what he ends up with.

Caleb reaches into his pant's pocket and pulls out the paper his uncle gave him. He reads the message printed on the paper aloud.

CALEB

(sotto)

Three seven three four, Memphis, Tennessee. Maybe it's a locker, or a safety deposit box. Maybe she'll know.

EXT. MEMPHIS BELLE SIDEWALK, BUS STOP - LATER

Caleb walks up to Mona on the bus stop bench, a sack of leftover cartons in her hands.

MONA

Well, there you are. Another minute and I would have taken the bus. Where you been?

CALEB

I was at a book store. Novel Idea, I think it was called. Weird owner... at least I think he owned it.

Mona reaches into her purse and pulls out a pack of unfiltered Camels. She draws one out with her lips and lights it with a stainless steel Zippo. After the first drag she turns back to Caleb.

MONA

I didn't offer you one because my daddy said you don't smoke.

CALEB

He told you that?

MONA

Yeah, before he left the diner.

CALEB

Why?

MONA

I don't know. He's not all there, if you know what I mean. Some things that we'd forget in a second are important to my daddy. *Real* important.

CALEB

He seems nice.

MONA

Yeah, you keep sayin' that.

CALEB

Sorry.

MONA

S'ok, cause he is. Never beat me, never touched me an any way other than to hug me or help me.

He was all I had when I was a kid
so now I'm all he has.

CALEB
So, he lives with you?

MONA
Yeah. He's got his own room. I hear
him typing away in there but he
never lets me read anything.

Caleb sits down beside Mona.

CALEB
So, he's a writer?

MONA
No. He ain't no writer. I doubt if
anything he's written would make
any sense to you or me. It's
probably one word, over and over
and over again. It sounds like
there's a rhythm to his typing,
like he's hitting the same keys,
like some sort of man... uh-

CALEB
Mantra?

MONA
Yeah, mantra, brainiac. I heard it
one night when he was talking in
his sleep. He has nightmares most
nights. In them, he mumbles about
magic. Tricks and such.

CALEB
Was he in a war or something. Like
post traumatic shock syndrome?

MONA
No. At least I don't think he was.
He doesn't like to talk about the
past. He gets pissy so I don't
bother him about it.

CALEB
Maybe he's writing it all down. So
you can read it later.

Mona looks to the darkening sky and thinks about Caleb's
idea.

MONA

Maybe he is. And maybe he'll go to his grave and take it with him. He just might do that.

They both laugh as the bus arrives.

MONA

My ride's here.

CALEB

Oh, I didn't even find out where the museum is.

MONA

Where are you staying?

CALEB

I hadn't figured that out yet.

MONA

Where are you gonna go?

CALEB

Not sure. Thought I'd ask around about a motel.

MONA

Well, why don't you hang with me, we'll talk about all the great sights in Memphis, and we'll look up a motel in the phonebook. (BEAT) Come on, you're holdin' up the bus.

INT. MEMPHIS BUS - TWILIGHT

They climb on. Mona flashes a card at the driver, walks to the back and slides in a seat to the window. Caleb slides in next to her.

For a few minutes, neither speak. They listen to the rumbling of the bus' diesel engine and watch the city flow by.

They pass the book store Caleb had visited and he points it out. Mona just nods and continues to stare out the window. Caleb is almost afraid to speak, considering the dreamy look Mona has in her eyes as she seeks out the faint stars that start to appear in the evening sky.

CALEB

Mona?

She looks down and slowly turns her head. She is beautiful in the fading light of the falling sunset.

MONA
Yes, Caleb?

CALEB
Where are we going?

MONA
To my house. I thought you knew.

CALEB
I did. I mean, I figured that's
where we were going, but I just
wanted to make sure.

MONA
Well, now you know for sure.

Mona looks back to the stars and appears so dreamy that Caleb can't help but stare. He finally turns away and rests his head against the seat. A moment later, he closes his eyes and sleeps.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DARK TUNNEL

Something is moving down a roughly-hewn tunnel. Caleb runs out of the gloom, pursued by something. He is frightened and looks back over his shoulder. He makes a sudden turn down a side tunnel. On the tunnel ceiling, spaced every 10 yards or so are metal speakers, the kind once used at drive-in theaters. From the speakers we hear a distant, metallic voice repeating the same phrase over and over.

METALLIC VOICE
Wake up, Caleb. You can't run
anymore.

A CHAINSAW revs through the speakers and drowns out the voice.

INT. MEMPHIS BUS - NIGHT

Caleb is shaken awake.

MONA (O.S.)
Wake up. Wake up, Caleb.

Caleb's eyes snap open and he sees a dozen faces staring back at him.

MONA
You're holdin' up the bus again.
Come on.

Mona pulls his arm and he follows her down the aisle and off the bus. The driver gives him a dirty look and slams the door shut.

EXT. STREET NEAR MONA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The bus has dropped them off in a lower-middle class suburb just outside Memphis. They walk the two-blocks toward Mona's house, bathed in moonlight.

CALEB

How long was I asleep?

MONA

Not long. About fifteen minutes.

CALEB

Christ. Seemed like an eternity. I even dreamed.

MONA

About magic?

CALEB

No. I dreamt about my Uncle Sam. He's the reason I'm in Memphis.

MONA

Uncle Sam. Like the posters, during the war?

CALEB

Yeah. He used to imitate it and ask me who he was. I didn't know about the war at the time so I always said I didn't know. Then he'd say, 'I'm Uncle Sam.' I always felt like an idiot because it was so obvious... his name being Uncle Sam and all.

EXT. MONA'S HOUSE - (CONTINUOUS)

They walk across a suburban street and up to a small house. The porch is slightly tilted and the stairs leading to it groan with their weight.

MONA

Are you here to pick something up for your uncle?

CALEB

My uncle is dead. He passed away a few weeks ago.

MONA

I'm sorry.

CALEB

It's okay. If what he told me about his last days was true, he's had an amazing life.

Mona unlocks the front door and holds it open for Caleb. Before he can step across the threshold, Mona stops him.

MONA

I can't ask you in. You have to come in by yourself.

CALEB

Huh?

MONA

In case you're a vampire. Unless you're invited, you can't enter.

CALEB

Oh, right.

MONA

Sorry, it's all the horror books I read. Can't get enough of them.

FOYER

She moves further into the house while Caleb follows. She takes off her coat and hangs it on a row of hooks that also hold a raincoat, an umbrella and a leather whip. She also hangs her purse.

CALEB

Kinda makes it easy for burglars to grab your purse.

MONA

There's nothing in it, except my mace.

(pause)

So what does your uncle have to do with you being in Memphis?

CALEB

He lived here for a while. He told me I should visit the city when I get a chance.

MONA

Well, that's some recommendation.

CALEB
He was some uncle.

LIVING ROOM

Mona leads him on in where she motions for him to take a seat. It is then that he notices the TYPING sound. It is just as she described it. A definite meter and tempo.

Mona walks down a hallway to a door. From where Caleb is sitting, he watches as she raises her fist to knock on the door. The typing stops just before her hand touches the door. The door opens and Mona walks in and out of Caleb's view.

With Mona gone, Caleb feels relaxed enough to check out the room. He sits on a beat-up couch against one wall. A black and white television stands on shaky legs against the opposite wall. A stained coffee table is positioned in front of the couch and copies of Scientific American and New Yorker are stacked and fanned out. A few unremarkable oil paintings hang atop the pea-green walls.

The TYPING begins again.

Then, a loud, AGITATED VOICE drifts from the father's room. A CRASH. GLASS BREAKING. Caleb stands up.

Another CRASH. A SCREAM.

Caleb walks down the hall and stands outside the door. He presses his ear against the wood and listens. He hears nothing. He listens closer and finally hears Mona faintly SOBBING.

Caleb turns the knob and opens the door. He immediately sees an ancient oak desk on top of which sits a typewriter. An Underwood.

FATHER'S ROOM

Caleb sees Mona lying on an army cot, crying into a pillow. The cot is covered in sheets that feature the characters from the Peanuts cartoon strip.

CALEB
Mona? What's wrong? Where's your
father?

She doesn't answer right away. It takes her a minute to compose herself. She swings her legs over the edge of the cot and looks at Caleb.

MONA
He's gone.

CALEB
Gone? I didn't see him leave.

MONA
Of course you wouldn't. He went his own way.

CALEB
The back door?

MONA
No. His own way.

Caleb walks around the room, looking for a door. He finds none. The one window has been boarded up from the inside.

Mona is becoming more and more agitated at Caleb's questions.

CALEB
Where did he leave from?

MONA
I told you. HIS WAY!

Caleb steps back. He wants to leave. Then he NOTICES a rug is barely concealing the edge of a trapdoor.

CALEB
Where does that lead?

MONA
Nowhere... I don't know. He forbids me to go down. I've never had the guts to sneak a peek. Mainly cause he's always in his room. I never know when he's here, or when he leaves by his way.

Caleb turns to go but his feet stay put. His eyes rest on Mona.

CALEB
Let's go down.

MONA
No. We can't.

CALEB
Are you afraid?

MONA
Yes... no... I don't know.

CALEB

I'm going.

MONA

Please don't. Please.

CALEB

Fine. Then I guess you're O.K. I'm leaving.

Mona glides to where Caleb stands and throws her arms around his shoulders. She sobs into his collar. He can feel the tears sliding down his neck.

MONA

Don't leave. Wait until he gets back.

CALEB

O.K. I'll stay for a while.

Her face turns up to him and her eyes say "thank-you". She leads him out of the bedroom.

KITCHEN - LATER

Mona heats-up the food from the diner. They begin to eat.

MONA

Is it O.K.?

CALEB

Yes, Mona. Very good.

MONA

I guess I'll leave some for father. He usually returns very late. He's always hungry.

CALEB

Where does he go?

MONA

I told you, I don't know. Sometimes he is covered in soot. Other times, there are blood stains on his jacket.

CALEB

Blood stains.

MONA

Yes. They can usually be washed out.

Most of the time, I have to throw his shirt or jacket away. But he has many of them. A whole closet full.

Caleb sits with a forkful of food hanging under his chin. He stares at Mona, calmly incredulous.

CALEB

Really?

MONA

Yes. He says Thomas Edison had a closet full of the same kind of clothes, so he wouldn't have to clutter his mind with thoughts of what he would wear each day. I don't know why my father does it. He isn't a scientist.

Caleb pushes his chair back from the table.

CALEB

Let me help you put the dishes away.

MONA

What dishes? Just chuck 'em.

They clean-up and Mona places one of the untouched leftover cartons in the fridge.

MONA

Dad really loves the meatloaf at the diner. He gets it almost every...

Mona turns around and sees Caleb is gone. She panics and rushes out.

FATHER'S ROOM

Mona stops at the doorway. Caleb has lifted the trapdoor and stares into the darkness below.

CALEB

Everything in me is saying run like hell, but for some reason I don't want to. In fact, I want to go down.

MONA

Please, Caleb. Don't.

CALEB

Why not? I just want to see what's
down there.

Mona looks around. She stares intently into a corner, trying to see into the blackness of the shadow. She listens to the soft mumble from the ceiling fan, its occasional CREAK of protest to its neverending rotation.

CALEB

Hand me a flashlight or something.

MONA

No, Caleb.

CALEB

Come on.

Mona opens a drawer in her father's desk and pulls out a flashlight which she hands to Caleb.

MONA

Hurry then. Hurry

CALEB

I'll be right back.

INT. TUNNEL

Caleb eases down the short ladder imbedded into the wall of the tunnel and hits the ground, raising a thin cloud of dust. He switches on the flashlight and scans the area.

The tunnel is stone with a steel beam running the length along the ceiling and low enough so that Caleb's head almost touches it.

His FOOTSTEPS are muffled by a thin layer of sand; sand obviously from a beach for Caleb sees pieces of sea shells peeking from tiny dunes along the base of the wall.

As his eyes adjust to the gloom, Caleb finds chalk arrows pointing every which way. On the left wall, a message is scrawled in white chalk. It reads:

"Be back soon Stop at the North room"

CALEB

(sotto)

North room? Which way is North?

Caleb is already confused. He spins around, trying to remember if he is facing North or South.... maybe West.... possibly East. He suddenly feels dizzy. He stops spinning.

Then he hears VOICES. Very low... very deep... like the wind has carried them from a long way.

CALEB

Hello?

The VOICES stop. Then suddenly, running footsteps...getting closer... closer...

Caleb whips around and jumps to the ladder. He scrambles up and back into the room.

FATHER'S ROOM

Caleb slams the trapdoor down and adjusts the rug.

MONA

What's wrong?

CALEB

I think your father is on his way back.

MONA

What? You saw him?

CALEB

Not exactly. I heard some voices. When I called out, they stopped. And then someone was running in my direction.

MONA

Running? Doesn't sound like father. He was injured in a car accident several years ago. He hurt his legs. He has trouble just standing up for too long. I don't know how he makes it through the tunnels.

Caleb stares at the trap door, waiting for Mona's father to come slithering out of it.

CALEB

He should have made it to the ladder by now. Is he just sitting down there... listening?

Mona turns her ear toward the floor. They listen together. Nothing.

MONA

Maybe, whoever it was, ran down another passageway.

CALEB

Maybe. But I heard a few voices,
Mona. At least two. They were so
faint so I couldn't tell if they
were male or female.

MONA

Well, it couldn't have been my
father. Like I said, he can't run.

CALEB

Christ. Is there some kind of
secret men's club down there?
Secret handshakes and shit?
Worshipping Hitler's brain?

Caleb moves to the cot and sits down heavily. He continues to
stare at the trapdoor. After a moment, his gaze turns to
Mona.

CALEB

I want to talk to your father.
About the tunnels.

MONA

No. Why?

CALEB

Why not?

MONA

I just don't want you to. It'll
only upset him.

CALEB

He seemed perfectly agreeable at
the diner. Don't you want to know?

Caleb stands up and moves in front of Mona. His hands grab
her shoulders. He looks directly into her eyes.

MONA

I don't know.

CALEB

Of course you know... or maybe he
has already told you.

MONA

He hasn't told me anything.

Her eyes stare at the ground, afraid to meet Caleb's gaze.

CALEB

Mona. I want to help you. Maybe he's in trouble. Maybe something is happening here. Or maybe, nothing at all is happening. But I want to know.

MONA

Please, Caleb. Just leave it alone. Why do you even care? You don't know me.

They stare at each other... her pleading eyes... his fingers gripping her shoulders.

CALEB

O.K., Mona. I'll leave it alone. Goodbye.

MONA

Are you leaving?

CALEB

Yes.

Caleb smiles and walks backward.

CALEB

My work here is done.

FOYER

Caleb reaches for the front door handle. Mona follows.

MONA

Please don't.

CALEB

Why shouldn't I?

MONA

I don't want to be alone right now.

Mona's hand moves to her shirt collar. Her fingers pull the collar down and continue until her left breast is exposed, her nipple almost revealed. Caleb turns red as he looks into her eyes, but not before he quickly glances at her breast.

CALEB

Jesus, Mona. I gotta go.

EXT. MEMPHIS SUBURB, BUS STOP - NIGHT

Caleb is sitting at a bus stop. He waits there, looks at his watch and realizes that it is probably too late.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET, DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Caleb walks along a street approaching downtown. He notices a car following him. Caleb looks back at it but can't make out who's inside. The windows are all tinted very dark.

He keeps walking and the car keeps pace for a while before finally pulling alongside. KEVIN BARTHOLOMEW (early 40's) sits behind the wheel of a yellow taxi.

KEVIN

You need a lift?

CALEB

Yeah. Any motels around here?

The cab stops to let Caleb into the backseat.

INT. CAB, DRIVING

The cabby engages the meter and adjusts the rearview so he can look at Caleb.

KEVIN

Something nice?

CALEB

Not too nice.

KEVIN

Sure, pal.

Caleb sits back and stares out at the passing landscape. After a moment, he reaches into his pocket and leans forward toward Kevin. He hands him the paper.

CALEB

Does this mean anything to you?

Kevin takes the paper and stares at it. He eyes go wide for a second before relaxing.

KEVIN

No idea. Could be an address. Could be anything.

CALEB

Can you take me there?

KEVIN

No can do. You're my last fare.

Caleb sits back in the cab and stares at the streetlights rushing by.

EXT. SLYDE INN, DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The cab pulls up to the SLYDE Inn, a six-storey establishment with the words

"F CK FILMS ALL NIG T LONG"

flashing in red neon over the door to the manager's office. A few of the letters refuse to glow.

INT. CAB, PARKED

CALEB

Is this what you mean by 'nice'?

KEVIN

Nice is what you make of it. Just because this establishment advertises adult movies in large, neon type doesn't mean it isn't nice. My wife happens to work here and I know she wouldn't be caught dead in a motel if it wasn't nice.

CALEB

I'm too tired to give-a-shit.

Caleb starts to get out of the car, then ducks back in.

CALEB

Oh, my paper.

KEVIN

Your what?

CALEB

The address I gave you.

Kevin stares at Caleb, as if he has no idea what he's talking about.

CALEB

The piece of paper, with the address on it.

Kevin stares blankly at Caleb and then reaches into his pocket and hands him the paper.

KEVIN

Silly me.

INT. SLYDE INN, LOBBY

Caleb walks into a lobby adorned completely in red velvet. Crushed velvet couches sit on velvety carpet that runs wall to wall. A velvet Jesus hangs on one wall while an equally velvet recreation of the Iwo Jima monument hangs on another. John Lennon resides on a third.

SAMUEL (O.S.)

Can I help you, sir?

Caleb turns and sees the hotel manager, SAMUEL BARNUM (early-40s, Brad Dourif type), standing behind the reception desk.

CALEB

Do I know you from somewhere?

SAMUEL

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

CALEB

Maybe I've seen you somewhere before.

SAMUEL

Maybe. But I don't get out much. In fact, I rarely leave the hotel. I have my own room, and all the movies I want.

CALEB

All night long, right?

SAMUEL

Oh, not those movies. We also have a classic film channel on the cable system.

CALEB

Oh. Sorry. I just thought... well, because of the name of the hotel.

SAMUEL

The name, sir?

CALEB

Yeah. The slide it in.

SAMUEL

Oh no, sir. You are mistaken. The name is pronounced, Shlee-Det. It's Swedish, you see.

CALEB

Oh.

SAMUEL

Common mistake, sir.

(pause)

S'ok.

CALEB

Sure.

They stare at each other, Samuel smiling. Caleb looks around the lobby. He turns back to Samuel who continues to smile and stare. Suddenly...

SAMUEL

Cash or charge?

CALEB

Cash.

SAMUEL

O.K. Just sign this card. I'll get your key. It'll be room 309.

Caleb glances around.

SAMUEL

Looking for something?

CALEB

Well, I noticed you have Jesus, Lennon and the war picture up, but no Elvis.

SAMUEL

Elvis?

CALEB

Yes.

SAMUEL

You mean, Elvis Presley?

CALEB

Yes.

SAMUEL
(smiling, pleasant)
I hate that fuck.

CALEB'S HOTEL ROOM

The room is large. The walls are covered with the same crushed red velvet wallpaper that adorn the lobby. A mirror in an ornate, gold frame is flat against the ceiling, over the bed.

He walks over to the curtains and peeks behind them to find sliding glass doors that open to a balcony. He pulls the curtains together.

Caleb sits on the end of the bed and switches on the T.V. After a few moments of snow, the screen reveals a blindfolded woman tied to a bed. She writhes on it, screaming through her gag.

A man walks from off screen. His bodybuilder physique bulges inside a yellow jumpsuit similar to the one worn by Bruce Lee in "The Game of Death." He sits on the woman's legs, and slowly pulls her panties down her squirming legs. Another man, seemingly a twin to the first, walks from off screen and stands next to the bed. He slowly unzips his yellow jumpsuit.

The scene ZOOMS OUT to show the rest of the room. It appears to be one in the SLYDE Inn.

The second man helps the first off with his jumpsuit. Both are now naked. The man sitting on the woman's legs moves between them. He begins fucking while the other man watches.

The T.V. camera slowly ZOOMS IN on the woman's terrified face.

Caleb switches off the t.v., crawls back on the bed and falls asleep.

INT. SLYDE INN, CALEB'S ROOM - MORNING

The sun bursts through the sliding glass doors of Caleb's room. The curtains are pulled apart. The bright rays sting his eyes.

He sits up, slides to the foot of the bed and switches on the television. A local, morning news show appears. KENT BRILLIANT (late-30s, Stone Phillips type) and his co-anchor MOLLY RAVINE (mid-20s, blonde bimbo) are reading the news.

KENT
(from the T.V.)
Don't worry folks.

Our own Professor Weather says it will be a perfect day for the Veterans of Police Actions parade.

MOLLY

Isn't the sun wonderful, Kent?

KENT

It's a real miracle of nature, Molly. And speaking of miracles, my wife of 8 years -

MOLLY

Carole?

KENT

- the same - is leaving me.

MOLLY

(flustered)

Uh, well... that's terrible, Kent.

KENT

(smiling)

You bet, Molly. That cunt is going to take me for everything she can get. But you'd know all about that, Molly. You're a card-carrying member of the cunt club, right? Tell me, are the dues so high that you need to take everything from a man?

The camera tightens on Molly's chest as technicians drag Kent from his stool. Someone switches to a second camera. Kent isn't wearing pants under his suit, only a leopard-skin bikini with a toy knife hanging off his hip.

The station goes to a commercial and Caleb manipulates the clicker. A children's show complete with puppets and a friendly mailman flashes by... an exercise program... more news... cartoons... a replay of an Australian Rules Football match... more news... more cartoons... a hotel room... news...

Caleb switches back to the hotel room.

On the T.V. is an empty SLYDE Inn hotel room.

The camera angle suggests that someone is filming from the balcony. It is a wide-angle shot, taking in the whole room through the sliding glass doors.

Nothing moves. Silence.

The phone RATTLES, startling Caleb. He picks it up after the second RING.

CALEB
Hello?

Only BREATHING on the other end.

CALEB
Hello?

Caleb hears the STRIKE of a match. Then PUFFING.

CALEB
I can hear you.

STRANGE VOICE
Mr. Marsh?

CALEB
Yes? Who is this?

STRANGE VOICE
Mr. Caleb Marsh?

CALEB
Yes?

A slight pause. Caleb hears more puffing, then an exhale.

STRANGE VOICE
I have a message for you.

CALEB
A message?

STRANGE VOICE
Can you hear me, Mr. Marsh?

CALEB
Yes.

STRANGE VOICE
Here is the message.

More puffing and an exhale.

STRANGE VOICE
Go to the West room.

CALEB
What? Hello?

A CLICK, the phone goes dead. No dial tone, just STATIC. Caleb returns the phone to its cradle and stands up.

HOTEL LOBBY

The lobby is empty, save for TILLINGHAST (70s, spry, Peter O'Toole type) in one of the red velvet chairs. He holds a newspaper, held out in front of him. He is wearing a cardigan, dark pants and no shoes.

Caleb walks over to the reception desk. No one appears to be around.

CALEB

Have you seen the manager?

Tillinghast does not answer.

CALEB

Excuse me.

Caleb walks closer until he can peer over the edge of the old man's paper.

CALEB

Hello. Have you seen the manager?

The old man doesn't look up from his paper.

TILLINGHAST

Scram, you fuck!

Caleb walks away and feels a tap on his shoulder. It's Tillinghast. Caleb never heard him get up. Instead of a mean codger, the old man has turned into a weepy old coot.

TILLINGHAST

Have you seen my wife? I haven't seen her in days. She said she was going down to the pool. Just for a few minutes. She doesn't swim and she hates the sun.

CALEB

Have you told the manager?

TILLINGHAST

No. Hell no! I called the police, but so far, they have nothing.

CALEB

Well, I'm sorry, sir. I wish there was something I could do.

Tillinghast grabs Caleb's shirt and twists the material in his gnarled hands.

TILLINGHAST

There is something... something you can do.

Caleb backs away. He walks out of the motel and into the driveway. Tillinghast follows.

EXT. SLYDE INN MOTEL - FOLLOWING

CALEB

I have things to do, old man.

TILLINGHAST

Wait, hear me out.

CALEB

If you can keep up.

TILLINGHAST

Oh I'll keep up, you just watch.

Caleb turns the corner at one side of the motel and walks aimlessly. He picks up his pace a bit as Tillinghast struggles to hang on.

TILLINGHAST

Good... very good, young man. All I need you to do is...

The old man looks around, as if someone might be listening.

TILLINGHAST

All I need you to do is watch T.V.

CALEB

T.V.

TILLINGHAST

Yes. They took mine from me.

CALEB

They? Who is they, sir?

TILLINGHAST

They! THEY! The ones dressed as maids. I was looking for my wife and they came in. They said they wanted to change the sheets. I went to the balcony, and when I came back, my T.V. was gone. They know! Why would they take my T.V.? WHY?

CALEB

I'm sorry. I don't know why they would take your television.

TILLINGHAST

I know why! It's cause they don't want me to find my wife. They know I won't stop looking. That's why I need you to watch the T.V. If you see her, let me know so I can go get her.

CALEB

Why don't I find the manager. Hmm?

TILLINGHAST

NO! Please... he's involved. I'm sure he was the one who ordered my T.V. taken away. Just like my wife. I bet those maids bundled her up and whisked her away.

CALEB

The manager? What exactly are you saying?

TILLINGHAST

Can't you see?

Caleb turns a corner and sees a yellow cab with tinted windows sitting in the street next to the motel. Tillinghast stops and stares at it until it drives away.

TILLINGHAST

Have you watched T.V. yet?

CALEB

Yes. I did. For a while, last night.

TILLINGHAST

Good. And did you see channel 603?

CALEB

603? I don't know. I don't remember which channel it was set to.

TILLINGHAST

I bet it was 603. Did you see the girl? On the bed?

Caleb is reluctant to answer.

TILLINGHAST

I bet you did! Hah! You saw her!
Admit it.

CALEB

Yes. I saw her.

TILLINGHAST

And the men with her. You saw the
men, right?

CALEB

Yes. The men, too.

TILLINGHAST

And you saw what they did to her.
Yes, yes?

CALEB

Well, only for a minute. I turned
it off. A bit too odd for me.

TILLINGHAST

Odd? Of course it was odd! It was
in a room of this very motel! Shit
yeah it was odd!

CALEB

O.K. So we agree that it was odd.
But what, if anything, is illegal
about it? It may be out-of-the-
ordinary, but I doubt the police
would get involved. Unless it
involves some sort of prostitution.
I mean, they advertise the movies
right out front.

TILLINGHAST

Movies? You think they're movies?

Caleb walks around another corner of the motel and sees the
same yellow cab from before. It makes Tillinghast agitated.
Caleb takes a turn and walks down a sidewalk along the motel.

CALEB

What else are they? Snuff films? I
don't believe in that urban legend
bullshit.

TILLINGHAST

Not films. I believe they are
happening at the same moment as you
are watching it.

CALEB

What? Are you suggesting it's some sort of closed-circuit television set-up?

TILLINGHAST

Yep. Live action.

CALEB

Okay, assuming you are right. So what. I mean, what am I supposed to do about it? It may be perverted, but you just have to change the channel if you don't like it.

TILLINGHAST

No. It's not that. Haven't you seen the woman before?

CALEB

No. Should I have?

TILLINGHAST

Hmm. Maybe not. She may only work on my floor.

CALEB

Work?

TILLINGHAST

I mean, she's a maid. She's the one who took my T.V. And after last night, I haven't seen her around. Another girl, some Spanish little thing, cleaned my room. I asked her about Nancy, and she just looked at me like she didn't know English. Bullshit! They killed her! Like in one of them snuff films you mentioned!

CALEB

Now hold on, old man. This is getting way out of hand. We're going from freaky sex flicks to murder in one sentence. I don't believe that. Have you ever heard of a thing called a day-off?

Caleb rounds another corner and sees the pool area. Beyond it, the yellow cab sits in the parking lot. Tillinghast finally loses steam and stops as Caleb continues toward the pool.

TILLINGHAST

Listen you little fuck! If you
don't want to help me, then fuck
you! Now get outta my goddam face!

HOTEL POOL AREA

The motel pool is very clean. The water looks clear. Caleb stands by the side and looks in. He is mesmerized by the sparkles of light dancing off the ripples.

CALEB

(sotto)

What's in Memphis, Uncle Sam? Why
am I really here?

EXT. CALEB'S CHILDHOOD HOME, DRIVEWAY - (FLASHBACK)

Caleb is slightly younger. He helps his Uncle Sam into a wheelchair while his parents gather his luggage. Uncle Sam is catatonic and looks incredibly old.

GUEST BEDROOM

Uncle Sam lays on the bed, staring blankly at the ceiling. Caleb sits with his mother, EMMA MARSH (early 50's homemaker) at a small table in a corner of the room.

CALEB

How is he doing? What did the
doctor say?

EMMA

The doctors gave me the run around,
just like they did for the ten
years he was away. They know less
than they did then. They say he
doesn't have long. Pre-mature
aging. His organs are failing. All
we can do is make his last days...
hours... comfortable.

CALEB

Why has he been asleep for ten
years? What happened?

EMMA

They said it was mental exhaustion,
but after the first year they had
to change it to catatonia brought
on by stress. After year five it
was something else. By year eight
they gave up naming it.

CALEB
Has he spoken since?

EMMA
Not a word. The doctors never got a response from him. But Dr. Beast did say something strange.

CALEB
What?

EMMA
He said that the entire time he was in that state, his EEG was off the charts. They had never seen a catatonic with so much brain activity. They also watched him age before their eyes. Uncle Sam should only be 48-years-old, but look at him. He looks like a wrinkled old man.

UNCLE SAM (O.S.)
Cal? Cal?

EMMA
Oh my god, Sam.

Caleb and Emma rush to his bedside. Uncle Sam is barely awake. His lids are heavy and his breathing is shallow.

UNCLE SAM
Hey sis'. How are you?

EMMA
I'm fine, Sam. Don't worry.

UNCLE SAM
And how is my man, Cal?

CALEB
Right here, Uncle Sam.

UNCLE SAM
Good. Good. I wonder if Cal and I might have a moment alone, Emma?

EMMA
Uh, sure, Sam. But don't wear yourself out.

UNCLE SAM
I won't, sis'.

Uncle Sam waits for Emma to leave the room before he speaks.

UNCLE SAM

Hey, boy. You look good. Healthy.
Strong. I think you'll do fine.
Still curious as hell, boy?

CALEB

Yes, sir.

UNCLE SAM

Good. Still got that paper I gave
you?

CALEB

Paper?

UNCLE SAM

Jesus, boy!

Uncle Sam is overcome by a coughing attack.

CALEB

Take it easy, Uncle Sam.

UNCLE SAM

Goddam you, Cal. I told you to hide
it somewhere no one could find it.
Can't you do one simple thing.

CALEB

I think I have it still. I haven't
lived in my old bedroom for a few
years. It's probably still there.

UNCLE SAM

If you lost it, you'll be the
sorriest son-of-a-bitch in history.

CALEB

I don't get what this has to do
with where you were.

UNCLE SAM

It has everything to do with it.
It's what sent me to a place you'll
go someday. A place of pure
pleasure, no wars, murders, greed,
hate. And 10 years will seem like a
lifetime. That's why I look so old,
Cal. Feels like I was gone for a
century or more. The secret is on
that paper. Guard it with your
life, Cal.

There's people who'd kill to have
it. When you're ready, go to
Memphis and find it.

CALEB
Find what?

Uncle Sam's eyes close slowly and his breathing stops.

CALEB
Uncle Sam?

FLASHBACK ENDS

EXT. SLYDE INN, POOL AREA - DAY

Caleb is awakened from his memory by a SPLASH. He looks toward the deep end of the pool and sees a slender form gliding under the water. The form shoots to the surface and Caleb sees GUADALUPE (19, Cuban, beautiful). She surfaces at the edge of the pool next to Caleb.

CALEB
Hello.

She smiles.

CALEB
My name's Caleb. I'm staying here.
(BEAT) Are you a guest here?

GUADALUPE
(thick, Cuban accent)
All night long.

CALEB
Hmmm? Just for the night?

She smiles... wider.

GUADALUPE
All night long. You will see me all
night long.

CALEB
I will?

GUADALUPE
Yes. All night long you will see
me.

CALEB
(amused)
Where will I see you?

GUADALUPE

All night long. Channel 603. You will see me. Channel 603. The motel room.

CALEB

Where will you be?

GUADALUPE

Right here. All night long.

CALEB

Where, exactly?

She tilts her head like a confused puppy.

GUADALUPE

I'll be in your room. All night long.

From behind Caleb, a voice cracks.

TILLINGHAST (O.S.)

So, you do know English, you little bitch!

Tillinghast walks toward the pool.

CALEB

Leave her alone.

TILLINGHAST

Shut up. Mind your own business. She knows where my wife is. Don't you, bitch?

The girl submerges and swims back to the deep end.

TILLINGHAST

Dammit, boy. She's getting away. Don't just stand there. Grab her!

CALEB

Sorry. I don't want to get involved in your delusions.

TILLINGHAST

Fuck you, then!

Tillinghast hobbles to the other side of the pool. The girl is already swimming back to Caleb.

TILLINGHAST

Dammit, girl! Sit still!

Caleb helps the girl out of the pool.

GUADALUPE
All night long. I'll be with you.

CALEB
Sure. All night long. I'll be watching.

GUADALUPE
Channel 603.

CALEB
603. Got it. Bye now.

She smiles and walks around a corner of the motel. Tillinghast finally makes it over to Caleb.

TILLINGHAST
Why didn't you hold her? Dammit!
She knows where my wife is.

CALEB
I doubt that very much. Anyway,
she'll be on T.V. tonight. Channel
603.

TILLINGHAST
What? Her? Christ. Hey, can I come
to your room and watch?

CALEB
I don't think that would be a good
idea.

TILLINGHAST
Why not? I ain't no homo.

CALEB
I don't mean that. You seem very
excitable. What guarantee do I have
that you won't go nuts?

TILLINGHAST
I won't, I won't.

CALEB
Yeah, right.

TILLINGHAST
I'll see you at eight. What room
are you in?

CALEB
What? No way.

TILLINGHAST
This is a matter of life and death.
My wife is missing.

Tillinghast reverts back to the weepy old man.

TILLINGHAST
Please.

CALEB
Christ.

TILLINGHAST
Please.

TILLINGHAST
309 it is then. Can we go to your
room now?

CALEB
No. I have something to do. Gonna
grab some lunch first. Do you mind?

TILLINGHAST
Okay, see you later, boy.

INT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER

Caleb sits at a booth near the back of the diner, perusing a menu. He is watching Mona wait on a family. They are obviously tourists... Elvis shirts adorn their worn-out bodies and camera bags sit next to them. The father is videotaping his son and daughter who sit across from him.

Mona notices Caleb and walks over.

MONA
Well, hello Caleb.

CALEB
Hi, Mona.

MONA
Do you forgive me?

CALEB
For what?

MONA
Last night, of course.

CALEB

Sure.

MONA

You left so quickly. Actually, I'm quite embarrassed about the way I acted. You must think I'm a complete slut.

CALEB

No. Not at all. I wouldn't presume to understand what you are going through... with your father and all.

They both pause and stare at each other.

MONA

Did you want to order?

CALEB

Uh, yeah. I'll have the... uh...
Teddy Bear Teriyaki Steak-on-a-stick and a Coke.

MONA

Coming right up.

She smiles and walks away to fill the order.

Caleb looks at the jukebox and notices a man staring at him in the reflection from the jukebox's glass face. STANTON FLEISS (late-40s, Billy Bob Thornton type) is wearing a pure, white suit. A large, wide-brimmed, white cowboy hat squats on his head. He smiles and a gold tooth flashes at Caleb.

Caleb turns to face the man. Stanton gets up with his coffee and strolls over to Caleb's table.

STANTON

Howdy there. Mind if I take a load off?

CALEB

Uh, well...

STANTON

Thank'ya much.

He sits down and slips off his white loafers.

STANTON

Oo-wee, my dogs are tired. (BEAT)
I'm Stanton, Stanton Fleiss. Glad
to meet'cha.

CALEB

Same here.

STANTON

So, Caleb. What brings you to
Memphis?

Stanton begins emptying every sugar packet and cream
container into his coffee.

CALEB

I'm here on business.

STANTON

Ahhhh. A business man. Very nice,
very nice. I myself am here on
business.

Mona returns and sets Caleb's Coke in front of him.

MONA

Well, Caleb. Who's your friend?

STANTON

My name is Stanton, little miss.
Glad to meet'cha.

MONA

What can I get you?

STANTON

I'll take another coffee...
black... like the devil himself.

MONA

One coffee, straight from Hell,
comin' right up.

Mona leaves to get the order.

STANTON

So, you know that pretty lady?

CALEB

Yes. I met her yesterday, right
here in fact.

STANTON

You are a lucky man. Fucked a girl
out back a video store in Dallas,
looked just like her. Still gives
me a stiffy, goddam!

Caleb is shocked by the sudden turn in language.

The coffee and food are served by a rubenesque waitress with
large breasts. Her nametag reads BETTY-JO.

CALEB

Where's Mona?

BLONDE WAITRESS

She had to step out for a moment.

Caleb looks out the window.

CALEB

Is she coming back?

BLONDE WAITRESS

She sure is sugar. I guess you like
them skinny girls, huh?

She and Stanton share a glance and they both snicker.

STANTON

Not me, maam. Give me a big girl
any day and I'll be happier than a
dick in a vagina factory.

The waitress walks away howling with laughter. Stanton's
smile is replaced by a conspiratorial look when his eyes rest
on Caleb.

STANTON

Hey Caleb, mind if I tell you a
little story?

CALEB

Sure.

STANTON

I just need another person's point
of view, ya know?

Stanton takes a long drink from his coffee, lifts it up in
air for the waitress to see, then starts.

STANTON

I have this little problem. You
see, I make films.

CALEB
Anything I might know?

STANTON
You seen the *A'Humping We Will Go*
series?

CALEB
Don't think so.

STANTON
They're skin flicks based on
childrens' fairytales. Won me a AVN
award last year for the one I did
called *Little Hummer Boy*.

The blonde waitress brings Stanton a fresh cup of coffee, and a handful of sugar packets and cream, then departs. Stanton begins to fill his coffee with both. He sips on it while he talks.

STANTON
Anyway, I moved to Memphis to find
some new talent. The Simi Valley is
played out... too much 'caine and
'cone.

CALEB
Cane and cone?

STANTON
Cocaine and silicone.

CALEB
Oh, right.

STANTON
Yeah, I needed some fresh faces,
not the ones wrinkled and worn out
by 28.

CALEB
Can't see the Bible Belt being
prime for recruiting.

Stanton slams his hand on the table. Patrons turn and stare at him.

STANTON
That's *exactly* what my business
partner thought, and therein lies
my problem. He decided to stay in
California and take all my actors.

It's been a bitch finding talent around here, but I did. Only thing is, I need a financial backer to get these films distributed and put the local competition out of business.

Without breaking his stare on Caleb, he lifts his empty coffee cup in the air for a moment, then sets it at the edge of the table.

STANTON

You get where I'm goin with this, Cal?

CALEB

I don't think I'm porn material.

The blonde waitress sets another cup of coffee down along with more sugar and cream. Stanton replays his ritual.

STANTON

(to waitress)

Did you hear that? The kid doesn't think he's built for the movies.

The waitress laughs hysterically as she walks away.

STANTON

Listen, I'm not talking about you whipping out your cock and fucking some farmgirl in the ass. I'm talking about a business partner. Someone to help with the finances I'll need to go national.

CALEB

Oh, right. Well...

STANTON

I know what you're thinking... porn's been done to death. How can anyone compete with the established companies, the internet, amateur hour, strip clubs, you name it. And you'd be right, Cal. I understand these days you need a gimmick to stand out. And I've got just such a gimmick. And it's right under your nose.

Stanton sees someone over Caleb's shoulder and his hand disappears under the table.

STANTON

Goddam, she really gets me going. I swear to God she looks just like that girl in Dallas.

Caleb looks over his shoulder to see Mona standing by the cash register. She looks up and waves to her father who stands outside the diner.

Caleb looks back to Stanton, his arm working furiously under the table.

CALEB

I gotta go.

Caleb leaves the booth as Stanton continues to work himself into a fit.

STANTON (O.S.)

Right under your nose, Cal.

Caleb looks out the window and sees Mona arguing with her father by the bus stop.

EXT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER, BUS STOP

Mona and her father are arguing. Jon is sitting on the bus stop bench while Mona leans over to talk closer to him.

JON

What do you mean he was in the tunnel?

MONA

Dad! We were concerned. So he went to see if you were okay.

Mona's father turns away, disgusted.

JON

You know very well that I am okay down there. I am more okay than at anytime. You know that. Yet you betrayed me.

MONA

No! I was worried. So was Caleb.

JON

Caleb? Is he your lover now? Will you be having his child soon?

MONA

What? No, he left last night. He was angry.

JON

Did you displease him in bed? You were never very....

Caleb walks up. He looks at Mona. Jon's demeanor switches to a smile.

CALEB

I'm sorry about last night. And I didn't mean to intrude on your affairs, Jon. I guess I was curious. I didn't see much.

JON

Not much to see. It's very dark. Easy to get lost.

CALEB

I thought I heard you coming back up the tunnel. But I guess it wasn't you.

John smiles broader.

JON

No, it couldn't possibly have been me.

Mona looks back at the diner and throws her cigarette to the ground.

MONA

I have to go, dad. I'll see you later.

JON

Bring me home something to eat, Mona. Maybe the meatloaf again.

MONA

Okay, dad.

Mona turns and walks into the diner. Caleb is about to follow when Jon grabs his arm.

JON

Wait a second, Caleb. I think you and I need to talk.

EXT. MEMPHIS SIDEWALK, DOWNTOWN - DAY

Jon and Caleb stroll down the sidewalk.

JON

Well, Caleb. You seem to be a bright boy.

CALEB

I try.

JON

Yes, well, you might do well to ignore some of the things that seem to be happening around you. You may perceive them as one thing, while they are something completely different.

CALEB

Such as?

JON

Well, such as the tunnel you dropped down into last night.

CALEB

I apologize for...

JON

No need for that. It's just human curiosity getting the better of you. And I guess you were worried about Mona, right?

CALEB

Sure. I just didn't know what to do.

JON

I thought as much. So, you see, I'm not mad at you. I understand. All I'm saying is that the things some people see as being strange or mysterious, are actually quite common to another person. See what I'm saying?

CALEB

I'm not quite clear on all your points, but I get the picture.

JON

Well, I want you to understand completely cause I'm trying to tell you something.

The two men round a corner and come upon the Novel Idea Bookstore. Jon catches Caleb staring at the store.

JON

You been in there?

CALEB

Just long enough to buy a book.

JON

Really? What book would that be?

CALEB

A collection of short stories by Jean Monnot.

JON

Monnot? Local boy, ya know. Well, well, well. That's pretty obscure for a young man like yourself.

A bus stops in the street next to them even though there isn't a bus stop.

JON

Well, Cal, I must be off. Business is a'callin.

CALEB

See you around, Jon.

JON

Oh, you will.

EXT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER - LATER

Caleb stands outside the diner, staring at Mona as she works.

INT. SLYDE INN, CALEB'S ROOM

Caleb walks over to the air conditioner and turns it on full blast.

He sees that someone has opened a dresser drawer.

Caleb looks in and sees the book he purchased and picks it up.

The cover has the title "The Dark Mind and Other Stories."
The book is written by "Samson M." He turns the next page and
reads the dedication:

"For Mona...you ripped me in two."

Caleb turns another page and scans the table of contents:

The Tunnel To Hell	.....	p.1
The King Is Dead	.....	p.21
The Romance Of Mona	.....	p.29
The Bucket	.....	p.42
Cult Of The Foreskin	.....	p.50
Samuel Is Playing	.....	p.58
Written By His Hand	.....	p.61
Renoir Was Wrong	.....	p.67
The Devil's Teeth	.....	p.92
Abbattoir In Black	.....	p.112
Blonde Venus	.....	p.123
The Dark Mind	.....	p.134
Soul Shred	.....	p.140
Torn, Through And Through	.....	p.162
The Flying Ship	.....	p.186
Run	.....	p.198
Temper Is The Thing	.....	p.209
Barnstorming	.....	p.220

Caleb flips to the last story and reads it aloud:

CALEB

(sotto)

July...and a dark sky hangs over me
like the tall cathedral roof of a
cavern. All black and distorted.
The shimmering barn sprawls next to
me...slumbering in the evening
humid, hoping the rains will go
away to kill another day. And me,
fastened to the moist grass like a
thief...a Roman punishment
perhaps...or an angel. Signals from
home....seems like a long way
away...but I hear her voice fading
in...fading out. Like the radio my
grandfather left me...willed
me...he willed it to me...forced it
upon me. I didn't have to
listen...but the strange ambience
would not be denied. And I heard
their voices...over the
airwaves...air waving at me with
the voices of the dead. Just like
my mother's voice...only I knew it
was real.

And then *the* voice...low and
tarnished...soft and
burning...telling me to wait...wait
for a storm and they would come.
Keep a fire lit to show them the
way. Just a match...let the
festival begin.

He sets the book by his side on the bed and stares at himself in the ceiling mirror. He listens to the LOW HUM of the refrigerators, he feels the heat of the Memphis afternoon encroaching on his air conditioned sanctuary, and he can hear the MUFFLED VOICES of a couple in the next room.

MARY SUE (O.S.)

Jesus, Kevin. Why do you have to act so goddam jealous? You don't seem to mind when I bring home the sack of cash.

KEVIN (O.S.)

I do mind. And the money doesn't mean shit.

Caleb sits up, moves to the wall and listens intently.

INT. SLYDE INN, HOTEL ROOM 311

Kevin Bartholomew (the cab driver) and MARY SUE (late-20s, beautiful blonde) talk while she cleans the room.

MARY SUE

Oh, fuck you, Kevin. You self righteous son-of-a-bitch. Just because you left the business doesn't give you the right to judge me.

KEVIN

I'm not judging you, I'm just thinking about us and what our future holds. You know I want to go to California. My brother does high class adult films and he's got a distribution deal and everything. He must be pulling down at least half a million every year.

MARY SUE

You've been telling me that for five months now. But you know I can't leave yet. I still owe Samuel.

KEVIN

I'll get my brother to send me the money. He's seen your work and he really wants to get you in some videos. We'll be rich, and you won't have to answer to anyone. The manager owns you right now.

MARY SUE

No one owns me, and you'd better get the hell out of here before the people get back. I got to get the rest of this floor cleaned up.

INT. SLYDE INN, CALEB'S ROOM

Caleb moves back from the wall and slides onto his bed.

He turns over onto his side and stares out the glass doors. He is startled to see a bird land on a video camera that is set-up on the balcony. It's one of those hand-held jobs that use the small tapes. It's attached to a sturdy tripod with a black wire running from the rear of it, disappearing over the balcony.

He is about to inspect this intrusion on his sanctuary when someone knocks lightly on his door and speaks a single word.

MARY SUE (O.S.)

Housekeeping.

Caleb opens the door and sees hotel maid MARY SUE. She is of medium height and build. Her blonde hair falls limply around her shoulders and her blue eyes sit dully in their sockets. The lipstick she applied in the morning had long disappeared, leaving her lips blandly pink. Even so, she is still sexy.

MARY SUE

Housekeeping, sir.

CALEB

Of course. Please, come in.

MARY SUE

I won't be long. Already behind.

CALEB

Take your time.

Mary starts by stripping the bed, then empties the trash, soaks up the water that has collected around the bottom of the ice bucket. She wipes down the sliding glass doors and glances at the video camera, yet says nothing about it.

CALEB

Do you mind if I take a couple of those small soaps?

She turns around and smiles.

MARY SUE

Sure. Just grab a handful from under my cart.

CALEB

Thanks.

Caleb rummages through the tiny shampoos and miniature toothbrushes to finally come away with a stack of ten soaps. He sets them on one of the refrigerators.

CALEB

Are you sure you won't get in trouble?

Mary Sue finishes wiping the glass and returns her rag and bottle of cleaning fluid to her cart.

MARY SUE

Nah, the manager don't check.

She arranges her cart and pulls it out the door.

MARY SUE

Well, that's it.

CALEB

Great. And thanks for the soap.

Mary Sue's smile is weak as she departs.

Caleb climbs into the newly made bed and falls asleep.

CALEB'S ROOM - NIGHT

Someone KNOCKS at his door, a sound Caleb tries to ignore. The knocking continues.

Caleb slips from bed and shuffles to the door and opens it to reveal Tillinghast.

TILLINGHAST

Well, well. Taking a little cat-nap? That's smart, real smart. I can tell you, it's going to be a long night.

Tillinghast pushes past Caleb and sits down on the edge of the bed. He stretches forward and turns on the television.

TILLINGHAST

Take a seat, pal. We need to keep vigilant. You never know when they're gonna show you something you want to see.

Caleb sighs and decides to close the curtains over the sliding glass doors. The staring lens of the camera is beginning to annoy him.

TILLINGHAST

Hey, there's a video camera on your balcony.

CALEB

I know.

TILLINGHAST

They probably won't like it if you close the shade. They like to look in. One night I watched myself, watching myself, know what I mean?

CALEB

(sarcastic)
Oh, the life you lead. (BEAT) By the way, what's your name?

TILLINGHAST

You may call me Tillinghast.

CALEB

What may your first name be?

TILLINGHAST

I don't have one.

CALEB

Of course you do. Your parents gave you one.

The old man looks annoyed at this line of questioning, and it makes Caleb happy.

TILLINGHAST

Well, that may be, but I didn't like my name so I have decided to use my last name as my only name.

CALEB

That's a bit strange. Unless you're an international pop star. You wouldn't happen to be one of those, would you?

TILLINGHAST

What?

CALEB

Like Madonna, or Sting, or Prince.

TILLINGHAST

I don't know what the hell you're babbling about.

CALEB

(sotto)

That makes two of us.

(to Tillinghast)

I'm going down to get some ice and some sodas. You want anything?

The old man's eyes light up.

TILLINGHAST

Why, yes. Could you run down to the bar and get me six gin and tonics? I'll pay.

CALEB

No shit, you'll pay. You'll also buy the sodas if I'm gonna run errands for you.

TILLINGHAST

Fine, fine. Just make sure they don't skimp on the gin.

CALEB

God forbid.

Caleb grabs the ice bucket and leaves Tillinghast staring intently at the television.

LOUNGE

The hotel bar is adorned much like the rest of the hotel. Red velvet everywhere with large, leather booths along one wall and the bar along the other. A T.V. is hung from one corner. No one but a bartender is inside.

BARTENDER

What'll you have, sir?

CALEB

I need six gin and tonics.

BARTENDER

How about I give them to you in a bottle.

CALEB

Fine with me. As long as they're strong.

BARTENDER

You trying to knock yourself out?

CALEB

Not myself.

Caleb slides onto a barstool and watches the man make the drinks while they talk.

BARTENDER

It's going to be thirty-seven dollars and eleven cents.

Caleb looks down at the well-worn ten dollar bill laying in his hand.

CALEB

(sotto)

That shithead.

BARTENDER

Is this for you?

CALEB

No. It's for this old man that keeps bothering me. He's in my room right now watching my fucking T.V.

BARTENDER

Are you talking about Tillinghast?

CALEB

Yeah.

BARTENDER

You should see his bar tab. I'm surprised he gave you money.

CALEB

I told him I wouldn't get him the drinks unless he paid for them.

BARTENDER

Is he looking for his wife on the tube?

CALEB

That's what he says. Claims the manager and the motel staff are in some sort of cabal. Says his wife was kidnapped and is now used in S&M live telecasts from rooms in this very establishment.

BARTENDER

Really? Well, I know sometimes this film company rents out the entire top floor to shoot some videos. I don't know what they're doing, but it could be porn stuff. Can't say as I've ever seen them, though. I don't watch much T.V. And that cabal business sounds like the old man might be a bit touched in the head.

CALEB

He's more than touched, but I saw some pretty strange stuff last night on channel 603. And it looked like a room here.

BARTENDER

Could be, but I just do my job, pour the drinks and leave when I can.

CALEB

Sounds like a plan to me. I should've been out of here today. But this town seems to have trapped me.

BARTENDER

Well, it has a way of doing that. I came here in 1978 just to visit a college buddy of mine. I ended up going to school here, and then I got a job deejaying at the local rock station. It switched to a Christian Country format and now I'm here slinging booze for tourists. Go figure.

The bartender pours the mixed drinks into a plastic bottle. The top is screwed on and the bottle handed to Caleb who leaves the cash on the bar.

CALEB

Thanks for the pep talk.

BARTENDER

No problem, and thank you, sir.
Enjoy your drinks.

HALLWAY

Caleb stops to fill his ice bucket. A soda machine sits humming in the corner. He drops some quarters into its slot and presses the button for A&W root beer. He repeats the process, and then does it a third time, choosing Grape soda. He sets the cans on top of the ice and balances everything with one hand while holding his key in the other.

He is almost to his door when two men pass by. They stop at the elevator and press the UP button. They are the same men from the porn film he saw the previous night. They wear the same, matching yellow jogging suits with a thick, black stripe down each side. The elevator arrives and they step in.

The doors close. Caleb watches the numbers click by until they stop at 6, the top floor.

CALEB'S ROOM

Caleb's return surprises Tillinghast, who jerks his hand out of his pants like a boy caught raiding the cookie jar.

TILLINGHAST

Shit, man! Why would you want to sneak up on an old man like that? You could kill old farts that way.

CALEB

And the downside of that is?

TILLINGHAST

Ha, ha. Very funny. Did you bring my drinks?

CALEB

Yes, and you failed to give me enough money. I had to use some of mine, which also meant that I paid for my own sodas.

TILLINGHAST

More than \$20?

CALEB

You only gave me ten. And considering your predilection for alcohol, I find it hard to believe you didn't know the exact cost of these drinks, tax included.

TILLINGHAST

No, I distinctly remember handing you a crisp, new twenty dollar bill.

Caleb sets the bucket, sodas and bottle of gin and tonic down on the dresser next to the T.V.

CALEB

Listen, you gave me a crappy, old ten dollar bill. And even if you had given me a twenty, which you didn't, it still wouldn't have been enough for the drinks. You owe me twenty-five dollars at the very least.

TILLINGHAST

Sure, I'll pay you back tomorrow.

Tillinghast reaches for the bottle, but can't quite get his fingers around it.

TILLINGHAST

Could you hand me that, Caleb?

CALEB

What? Just move your ass off the bed for Chri'sake!

The old man mutters something and stands up.

TILLINGHAST

I hope he made it strong.

CALEB

(sotto)

If there's a God, he did.

INT. SLYDE INN, CALEB'S ROOM - LATER

They sit next to each other at the end of the bed watching a re-run of *The Monkees*.

TILLINGHAST

Can I turn it back to 603?

CALEB

Not yet. *Last Train To Clarksville*
is my favorite song.

TILLINGHAST

My wife might be on.

The old man downs the last bit of gin and tonic.

TILLINGHAST

Well, time for a fill-up.

He nods at Caleb and tries to hand him the empty bottle.

CALEB

Forget it. You can buy your own.

TILLINGHAST

Awww shit-on-a-shoe. I'll give you
the money tomorrow.

CALEB

Nope.

TILLINGHAST

Fine. I'll get it myself. Just keep
watching channel 603.

Tillinghast stands up and Caleb smiles when he hears the
staccato pops of the old man's joints.

CALEB

What am I looking for? I don't even
know what your wife looks like.

Tillinghast reaches into a coat pocket and pulls out a
wrinkled photo. It shows the old man at Disney World, his
arms around his wife. She is much taller than the old man.
Caleb estimates she must be at least six feet tall. Her
blonde hair is thick and falls around her lithe shoulders.
Caleb's gaze moves down her exquisite body.

TILLINGHAST

Okay, that's enough. I don't need
drool all over my photo.

CALEB

Are you sure that's your wife? She
looks, uh, very young.

Tillinghast gives a Cheshire smile.

TILLINGHAST

What can I say? I guess some people have it, and some don't.

CALEB

And some people are full of it.

TILLINGHAST

Jealous?

Caleb's stare returns to *The Monkees* while the old man leaves the room to get his booze.

CALEB'S ROOM - LATER

The Monkees episode ends and Caleb punches in 603 on the television's keypad. The screen shows a motel room, just like his. It is the same angle from the balcony but instead of being empty or showing a porn scene, Caleb watches Tillinghast sit at the edge of the bed watching T.V.

Caleb looks back to his sliding glass doors and sees that someone has opened the curtains. He looks back to the screen and watches as the old man flips through channels, presumably looking for his wife.

The tape is suddenly sped up and time elapses quickly. It slows down at the moment Caleb entered the room, holding the ice bucket, sodas and bottle of gin and tonic. Caleb watches himself bickering with the old man. The tape speeds up again and slows until all it shows is himself, sitting on the bed just like he is now.

He turns to the camera and notices that the same movements are being shown on the screen. He waves his arms, wiggles his fingers, and makes a monkey face.

He is live on channel 603.

He then hears a VOICE from down the hall. Someone is YELLING.

HALLWAY

Tillinghast is running toward Caleb's room, clutching his bottle of gin and tonic.

TILLINGHAST

You're on! You're on!

CALEB'S ROOM

Tillinghast bursts through the door and slides next to Caleb.

TILLINGHAST

I saw you on the bar's T.V. Now
we're on. Look at that. What should
we do?

A red light starts to blink on the T.V.'s keypad. Then a
message scrolls across the bottom of the screen. It reads:

"If you are enjoying this program, please remain seated.

**If you are not enjoying this program, please press the red
button."**

After a moment, the channel changes to a different room. This
time, a couple are making love on their bed, oblivious to the
camera's stare.

TILLINGHAST

Awww shit, Cal. I guess we were too
boring for the viewers, eh?

CALEB

Listen, Tillinghast. You have to
leave now. I'm going to see the
manager and find out what the fuck
is going on here.

TILLINGHAST

I'll go with you.

CALEB

No way.

TILLINGHAST

Aw shit. Then how am I gonna look
for my wife?

CALEB

Take my T.V. I don't care.

TILLINGHAST

Really? Aw shit!

The old man tries to pick it up, forgetting it's bolted down.
He groans as his back pops.

CALEB

Oh, that's right. It's bolted down.
My bad.

MANAGER'S OFFICE

Samuel is receiving a blowjob from the Spanish Maid.

SAMUEL

Uh huh. That's it. Now say the lines.

The maid lifts her head up and stares at Samuel.

GUADALUPE

My name is Natalia. I am with the French resistance. Come with me if you wish to live.

SAMUEL

Not bad, honey.

Samuel pushes her head down to his crotch.

OUTSIDE MANAGER'S OFFICE - (CONTINUOUS)

The door to the office is slightly ajar. Caleb peers through the crack and watches the manager receive a blowjob from the Guadalupe he had talked to earlier by the pool.

Caleb waits a minute before knocking. An audible, "Fuck!" comes from the office and the jangle of a belt buckle announces the arrival of the manager. He speaks through the crack in the door while buttoning his pants.

SAMUEL

What is it?

CALEB

I would like to speak with you.

SAMUEL

Office hours are 7AM to 9PM. Come back tomorrow.

CALEB

It's about channel 603.

Another "Fuck!" drifts from the room and soon the door is opened. The manager waves Caleb in. The maid is nowhere to be seen, which is strange because there are no doors or windows in the cramped space.

SAMUEL

Okay, sir. What is the problem?

CALEB

Well, it's not a problem, really. Just that, there's a camera outside my room and it seems to be filming me and then broadcasting it onto channel 603.

SAMUEL
Really?

CALEB
Yes.

SAMUEL
Hm.

CALEB
Do you know what is going on?

Samuel opens a desk drawer and pulls out a small vial of white powder. He taps out a thin line on his desk. He then quickly snorts it through a tightly-rolled one-thousand dollar bill.

SAMUEL
Man, I don't know what you're talking about.

CALEB
Really? You know nothing about the camera that films my room.

Samuel takes another snort and then puts the vial back in the drawer.

SAMUEL
I do not know about the camera on your balcony. I am not following you, sir.

CALEB
What about channel 603?

SAMUEL
What about it? It shows porn films. We advertise them, remember? Many are filmed in this very hotel, but it's restricted to the sixth floor and does not interfere with the peace and quiet of the guests. You have noticed the peace and quite, haven't you? The almost, primordial silence. You'd swear you were the only one in here. The only one walking the halls. Wouldn't you?

CALEB
Yes, sometimes it feels like that. I only hear the humming of my refrigerators.

SAMUEL

Exactly. So what is the problem?

CALEB

Someone has put a camera on my balcony. It was filming me. And then I saw myself on channel 603. Whatever it was filming was being put on the screen. And then it disappeared.

SAMUEL

Really? No one liked you, eh?

CALEB

What?

SAMUEL

Nothing.

Samuel leans back in his chair and sighs. The rug under his chair shifts and Caleb SEES the edge of a trapdoor, similar to the one in Mona's house.

SAMUEL

Is there anything else you want? I could change your room for you. How about some complimentary coupons to Plato's Fantasy Emporium. It's the best sex shop and gentleman's club you'll find here.

The manager digs into the drawer and retrieves a stack of papers that he stuffs into Caleb's jacket pocket.

SAMUEL

There ya go. I guarantee a good time. You just tell them, Samuel sent'cha.

Samuel cocks his eyebrow, winks and points a finger at Caleb.

Caleb flashes back to his Uncle Sam doing the same thing that Thanksgiving night.

CALEB

You've been ever-so helpful.

Caleb walks out.

LOUNGE

Caleb enters and sits heavily at the bar. There's a man in a booth at the back of the bar sitting with his back to Caleb.

BARTENDER

Back again, eh?

CALEB

This time *I'm* the one who needs a drink.

The bartender starts to make a gin and tonic. Caleb holds out his hand.

CALEB

Wait. This one's for me, so if you could, I'd like a scotch, highball.

BARTENDER

Woah. A real drink. I get so sick of mixing Shirley Temples and those lame drinks frat boys usually order like a shot of Jagermeister and a Corona or some shit. Like it's Spring Break all fucking year long. A buncha' latent homo pussies if you ask me.

CALEB

I hear ya.

The drink is poured. Caleb downs it in one gulp and taps his glass on the bar, a move he assumes will get him another of the same. Instead, it brings a hand to rest on his shoulder.

The hand belongs to SMILIN' ROD (early-40s, Laurence Fishburne type). An enormous smile sits on his face and an equally enormous afro sits on his head, swaying gently in the airconditioned-breeze.

SMILIN' ROD

You like your room?

CALEB

What?

SMILIN' ROD

How... do you... like... your room, man?

CALEB

Well. It's okay. Very quiet.

Smilin' Rod laughs loudly and turns to the bartender.

SMILIN' ROD

Didja hear that? Quiet, he says.

(to Caleb)

Yeah, they are, aren't they?

Smilin' Rod takes a seat next to Caleb and then winks at the bartender. This signal prompts him to begin pouring whiskey into a tall, thin glass. No ice. Just whiskey. The drink is set in front of Smilin' Rod.

He takes a long drink and finishes half of it.

SMILIN' ROD

My name's Roderick but everyone around here calls me Smilin' Rod. How about you?

CALEB

I'm Caleb.

SMILIN' ROD

Hmmm. Caleb, eh? Very biblical name. I think. Or did I read it in some magazine the other day. I love magazines. Recipes, fashion tips, do-it-yourself projects. They also reveal so much about the people of this country. Their habits, likes, dislikes, how often they have anal sex, whether or not they've been circumcised. Are you circumcised, Caleb?

There is a brief pause, during which Caleb has a DAYMARE in which Smilin' Rod pulls a gun and shoots him between he eyes, laughing the whole time. When he returns from the daymare, Smilin' Rod is simply waiting for a response.

CALEB

Uh, no, I'm not.

SMILIN' ROD

Now what in the world would make you answer that question?

Caleb down his drink and taps the glass for a second scotch.

SMILIN' ROD

Ya know, Caleb, I have a feeling that you like to watch naked women have sex. Am I right?

CALEB

Well, sure. Doesn't everybody?

He attempts a laugh but only manages a squeak.

SMILIN' ROD

No, Caleb. I'm afraid not. And most people wouldn't readily admit their affinity for the carnal arts. But then again, I don't always go around asking strangers these questions.

CALEB

So, why me?

SMILIN' ROD

Cause' I like your style, kid. When I saw you last night, I thought, 'Now there's someone with style.'

CALEB

You saw me?

SMILIN' ROD

Yeah. On the tube, last night. Oh, I almost forgot to ask. Are you a homo?

The bartender, who was previously eavesdropping nonchalantly, is now staring intently at Caleb.

CALEB

No. I like women.

SMILIN' ROD

Oh, okay. It's just that, I saw you with some old guy, and you were both sitting on your bed, getting your drink on, you know?

CALEB

Oh shit. Him? No. That's just this guy named Tillinghast. He's nuts. I seem to have a little too much sympathy and it's hard for me to say no to people in trouble.

SMILIN' ROD

Awww. Isn't that sweet.

The bartender smirks and returns to wiping the bar.

CALEB

I hardly even know the guy. He claims his wife was kidnapped by someone at this hotel and she's being forced to do S&M porno flicks.

Rod releases a bellowing laugh.

SMILIN' ROD

Really? That's what he thinks?

CALEB

Yes. And he believes that if he watches channel 603 all day, he'll spot his wife.

SMILIN' ROD

He won't see anything but himself on that channel.

Smilin' Rod finishes the last of his whiskey and slides off the barstool.

SMILIN' ROD

Well, I'm off. Got a lot of work to do upstairs. See ya around Caleb.

CALEB

Yeah, sure.

Rod winks at the bartender.

CALEB

Uh, before you go, Rod, I'd like to know if, uh...

SMILIN' ROD

Yes, Caleb?

CALEB

Oh, nothing. Forget about it.

SMILIN' ROD

Forgotten.

Rod turns and exits from the darkness of the lounge.

BARTENDER

How about another one?

CALEB

Nah. I'm done. See ya'.

BARTENDER

Anytime.

CALEB'S ROOM

Caleb keeps the lights off when he enters his room. All he wants is some sleep without a camera filming him. He sits on the edge of his bed and takes off his shoes. He undresses and crawls into bed. It is warm, wonderfully warm and he suddenly realizes why.

GUADALUPE

I need to talk to you.

Caleb launches himself from the bed and rolls across the floor. He ends up sitting with his back against the wall.

GUADALUPE

I'm sorry. Did I scare you?

CALEB

Shit.

Light seeps through the balcony doors and illuminates her face revealing the girl from the pool.

CALEB

Listen, I don't know why you're here, but I don't need any, uh, I don't need companionship tonight, ok?

GUADALUPE

I am for you, Caleb.

The woman slides off the bed and walks around it toward him, arms out straight, fingers stretching for him.

Caleb stands up and moves away. He stops when his back hits the room's door.

CALEB

Listen, I don't want a good time. How did you get in my room?

GUADALUPE

I am for you, Caleb.

A match suddenly sparks in the corner of the room. It briefly reveals the hotel manager Samuel, sitting in a chair, about to smoke a cigarette.

CALEB

What the fuck is going on? What are you people doing in my room?

The manager puffs once on his cigarette and then speaks.

SAMUEL

Parada, Claudia. Sálganos.

The woman's arms go limp by her sides. She walks slowly backward and disappears into the gloom.

SAMUEL

Samuel... Samuel Barnum. No relation to P.T., or so my mom says.

Caleb reaches for the door handle.

SAMUEL

You're thinking of leaving, aren't you, Caleb? That would probably be a good idea. I heard you talked to Smilin' Rod tonight. At the bar. I heard he's taken a liking to you.

Samuel punctuates the "you" by stabbing out his cigarette on the arm of the chair.

CALEB

I'm not paying for that damage.

SAMUEL

Shut the fuck up, you miserable shit!

Samuel gets up and walks toward Caleb. Caleb tries the door handle, but it seems locked from the outside.

HALLWAY

CLOSE-UP on the door handle to Caleb's room. A muscled hand is holding it, preventing it from turning. The arm is clothed in yellow.

TILLINGHAST (O.S.)

Hey, you!

The hand lets go.

CALEB'S ROOM

SAMUEL

You think you can come in here and just wipe away everything that I've worked for. You think you can be Rod's new golden boy? His new star? Well, I didn't spend 5 years in jail to watch myself be pushed aside for some piece of insignificant shit like you.

Samuel is now reaching for Caleb when someone knocks at the door.

TILLINGHAST (O.S.)

Caleb! It's me, Tillinghast. Open up.

Samuel recedes into the gloom.

SAMUEL

We'll continue this discussion some other time, Caleb.

Tillinghast barges in.

TILLINGHAST

Jesus, boy. You gonna leave me standing outside all night? Why are the lights off? Why aren't you watching T.V.? And who was that guy outside your door?

Caleb sits down on the end of his bed. He puts his head in his hands.

TILLINGHAST

What's wrong?

CALEB

Tillinghast, meet Samuel, Samuel, this is Tillinghast.

TILLINGHAST

Who are you talking to?

CALEB

Samuel...

Tillinghast switches on a light. There is no one else in the room.

CALEB

Shit. They must have secret passageways or something. This is ridiculous.

TILLINGHAST

What the hell are you talking about?

CALEB

The hotel manager was in my room, along with that Guadalupe that was swimming in the pool.

TILLINGHAST

And you let them get away?

CALEB

Oh, shut the fuck up. What do you want?

The old man walks over to the T.V. and switches it on.

TILLINGHAST

I just want to watch television for a while. Listen, I'll buy us some drinks, I owe you for the last ones.

CALEB

Forget it. I'm going for a walk.

TILLINGHAST

Hurry back.

EXT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER, SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Caleb heads toward the diner. He looks through the large glass windows and sees Mona behind the counter.

INT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER

He takes a seat at the end on the counter and waits for her to notice him.

MONA

So, there you are. I didn't think I would see you again.

CALEB

Hi, Mona. How are you?

MONA

Oh, just fine. I haven't seen my dad all day, but that's not too strange.

CALEB

He must be in that tunnel.

MONA

What makes you say that?

CALEB

No reason, I guess.

MONA

What'll you have?

CALEB

What's the special?

MONA

Meatloaf.

CALEB

I'll have a slice of Pricilla's Cherry Pie. And coffee.

MONA

Comin' up.

Caleb looks around and sees Stanton Fleiss. He nods and Caleb looks away.

In another corner sits Smilin' Rod. He is looking at something on a small video monitor. Caleb recognizes it as a portable DVD player.

Rod looks up and motions for Caleb to join him. Caleb walks over and slides into the booth.

SMILIN' ROD

Slide on in, Cal. I could always use the company.

CALEB

Hey, Rod.

Mona sets his cherry pie and coffee down and immediately turns away.

SMILIN' ROD

Mmmm, cherry pie. Looks good, Cal.

CALEB

We'll see.

Smilin' Rod returns his attention to the small video screen. He laughs.

CALEB

What are you watching, if you don't mind me asking?

SMILIN' ROD

Not at all, Cal. Just viewing the dailies.

CALEB

Dailies?

SMILIN' ROD

Yes, Cal. It's part of the motion picture vocabulary. It refers to the film shot that very day, without all the music and production stuff. Just raw, unedited film from the day's shooting.

Caleb takes a bite of his pie. He sees what looks to be letters written on the plate under the slice of pie. He moves the pie to the side and reads:

"Samuel is the devil. I will tell you why tonight. Come to the house."

Caleb looks up to see if Rod has seen the message, but he appears to be concentrating on the movie. Caleb moves the pie over the message.

SMILIN' ROD

No good?

CALEB

Huh?

SMILIN' ROD

The pie.

CALEB

Oh, it's ok... Too sweet right now.

SMILIN' ROD

Wanna peek at my newest creation?

CALEB
No, but thanks. I better get going.
I have some babysitting to do.

SMILIN' ROD
Suit yourself.

Caleb pays his check and leaves.

INT. SLYDE INN, CALEB'S ROOM

Tillinghast is drinking his gin and tonic when Caleb returns.

CALEB
You actually walked your ass down
to the bar?

TILLINGHAST
Hell no. It's called room service.

CALEB
In this place?

TILLINGHAST
I guess.

Caleb sits in the corner chair. He doesn't want to see himself on T.V. next to the old man on the bed.

CALEB
Have you seen anything?

TILLINGHAST
Nothing yet. But the good stuff
doesn't start til after midnight.

CALEB
And I suppose you want to stay.

TILLINGHAST
Well, yeah.

CALEB
Fine. I have to go somewhere later,
so I could care less.

TILLINGHAST
Good.

Caleb tilts his head back and closes his eyes.

CALEB'S ROOM - LATER

Caleb is shaken awake by Tillinghast.

TILLINGHAST

Shit, man! We're on. It's starting.

The screen is blurred for a moment. After Caleb's eyes adjust, he sees his motel room. He looks to the balcony, but sees no camera.

CALEB

(sotto)

Christ, they've got hidden cameras now.

The scene changes and another room flickers on, featuring a honeymoon couple going at it. After a few minutes, it flickers and then an empty room appears. The scene goes from color to the black and white video of a '60s soap opera. A cheap, transparent overlay with titles in thick, white lettering appears on the screen.

The Devil's Lair

Une Film d'Diabolos Fantastik

Avec Samson M.

After the titles, creepy organ music announces the arrival of a woman. Her long, dark hair, dark eyes and voluptuous figure seem familiar to Caleb. Tillinghast begins moaning. It is the same woman from his photograph.

TILLINGHAST

Chantelle. Oh, Chantelle.

She has a sad look. A permanent haze over her eyes, slumped shoulders and cracked fingernail polish.

CALEB

Is it her, Tillinghast?

The old man rocks back and forth, clutching his knees.

CALEB

Is it her?

The woman stands in front of a full-length mirror and slowly brushes her hair.

CALEB

Tillinghast?

She is wearing a tight-fitting, black leather mini dress which she begins to strip off. Tillinghast is groaning now, a sick, low rumble that drips from his throat.

CALEB
What's wrong?

Caleb is about to move toward Tillinghast when the old man jumps up and bolts from the room.

CALEB
Where the hell are you going?

Caleb follows him out into the hallway and watches as the old man runs into a waiting elevator.

A SCREAM sounds from Caleb's television and he returns to his room.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, he watches the woman shriek at herself in the mirror. She rubs lipstick across her lips, smearing it over her cheek. Her eyes go wide from some horrible realization and she leans in, closer to the mirror until her nose almost touches the surface. She sits there, unmoving.

There is a KNOCK at Caleb's door. He peers through the security lens and sees that it is the blonde housekeeper, Mary Sue. He unlocks the door and ushers her in, locking it behind her.

MARY SUE
The manager wants to see you in his office.

CALEB
Why?

MARY SUE
I don't know. He told me to get you.

CALEB
I'm, uh, kind of waiting for someone.

MARY SUE
It shouldn't take long.

CALEB
Fine. Tell him I'll be there in a minute.

MARY SUE
Tell him yourself. I've got work to do.

She winks and then exits.

Caleb sits back down on his bed. The woman is still looking into the mirror when a CRASH sounds off camera. She turns to look to her left and then the screen goes black. A second later, an empty hotel room appears, in color.

MANAGER'S OFFICE

Samuel is in his chair doing a line of coke off his desk. His pants are unbuttoned and his belt is loose.

CALEB

The maid said you wanted to see me.

Samuel waves Caleb into his office.

SAMUEL

Have a seat. I just need a minute of your time.

CALEB

Why didn't you just sneak into my room?

Samuel pours a shot of whiskey for himself and offers the bottle to Caleb.

CALEB

No thanks.

SAMUEL

Suit yourself.

Samuel hides the bottle in a desk drawer, leans back, and sets his heels on his desk.

SAMUEL

Listen, Caleb. I just don't know where you stand, is all. Who are you working for?

CALEB

I'm not working for anybody. I am here on my own. A little personal business.

SAMUEL

But you seem to be palsy-walsy with Smilin' Rod.

CALEB

I've never met the guy before. We talked briefly in the bar. That's it.

SAMUEL

Really? I heard you were having dinner with him tonight.

CALEB

What? I happened to run into him.
(BEAT) Is that all, Samuel?

Samuel grabs a stack of coupons and taps them on the desk.

SAMUEL

Have you been to Plato's yet?

CALEB

No.

SAMUEL

Awww. You just don't know what your missing.

CALEB

I have a pretty good idea.

SAMUEL

I don't think so, 'cause if you did, then you'd be there right now.

Samuel downs the shot and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand. He then wipes his hand on his pant leg and stares at the damp spot for a moment.

SAMUEL

You see, Caleb, what I have offered you is an escape. You're just a tourist here, some guy who's staying long enough to get something done and then you're outta here. But you seem to have gotten sidetracked. I think a visit to Plato's would clear your head, get you to concentrate on why you're here, and then you can be on your way. Sound good?

CALEB

I've never been one to hang out in a strip club alone.

SAMUEL

They've got a killer buffet. All the sushi you can eat. Soup's not bad, either.

CALEB

Just stay away from the cream of mushroom, right?

SAMUEL

Listen Caleb, Plato's isn't just a strip club, it's much more. That's just the facade. With those coupons I gave you, you'll be able to get behind all that... right to the heart of Plato's. It's just a good time waiting to happen. You need to stop hanging around old geezers and meet some people your own age. Some of the female kind.

CALEB

Sure. A night at a sleazy sex club sounds great.

SAMUEL

Suit yourself, Cal. But you have no idea what you're missing and if you did...

CALEB

...I'd be there right now.

Caleb leaves Samuel's office.

EXT. SLYDE INN, POOL - NIGHT

Caleb sits at the edge of the pool, legs dangling in the water. A naked Guadalupe floats in the pool with her arms on the edge next to Caleb.

CALEB

Everyone keeps asking if I like sex, or if I'm gay, or why I don't want to go to some strip club.

GUADALUPE

Plato's?

CALEB

Right, Plato's. And I don't know why I don't want to go. Maybe it's because the manager creeps me out.

GUADALUPE

Samuel?

CALEB

Who comes into someone's room like that? If it weren't for that old man...

GUADALUPE

Tee-lin-gust?

CALEB

...I'd be out of this fucked up hotel. I don't know why I feel so sorry for him. He's a mean drunk and probably certifiable.

GUADALUPE

Loco.

CALEB

And the only normal guy here, everyone tells me to stay away from.

GUADALUPE

Smilin' Rod.

CALEB

Though, how normal can a porn director be? The guy watches them in a diner. I mean, what if some kid is looking over his shoulder?

GUADALUPE

Free show.

CALEB

I want to leave, but I also don't think they have channel 603 at the Holiday Inn.

GUADALUPE

Cinemax.

CALEB

And then there's Mona.

GUADALUPE

Maude.

CALEB

What is it about her? I should go see her tonight. It'll give me some time away from the hotel. (BEAT)
Thanks for listening.

Guadalupe sinks into the pool and lays flat against the bottom. Her hand slides down between her legs and she exhales a massive cloud of bubbles that rush upward.

EXT. MONA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Caleb knocks on her door. After a moment, Mona answers. She has been crying and is dressed in lingerie complete with lace bra, panties, garter belt, stockings and high heels. She immediately hugs him.

CALEB

Let's get inside, okay?

LIVING ROOM

Caleb leads her to the couch and he cradles her head on his shoulder.

CALEB

What's wrong?

MONA

It's father.

CALEB

Where is he?

MONA

In the tunnel. (BEAT) He made me wear this, Caleb. He *made* me.

Mona holds him tightly. Her hands slip into his front pockets. She finds something and slowly lifts the piece of paper Caleb's uncle gave him without Caleb knowing. She moves away from Caleb and deftly hides the paper in her panties.

MONA

I'm worried about him.

CALEB

Why? What did he do to you?

MONA

Don't worry. These are my mom's. He has me wear them so he can remember her.

CALEB

Doesn't that seem wrong to you?

MONA

What the fuck do you know?

CALEB
Calm down, Mona.

MONA
(docile)
I'm sorry, Caleb. You came all the way over here and look what you see. Please don't leave me. Please.

Mona begins kissing Caleb's neck. He makes a weak attempt to push her away. Her lips move from his neck to his face, then to his lips. They kiss, deeply, while their hands roam over each other.

Suddenly, a loud SLAM comes from somewhere in the house.

MONA
Daddy?

Caleb bolts from the couch and runs into her father's bedroom.

FATHER'S ROOM

He arrives just in time to see the trapdoor come to rest. Mona walks up behind him.

MONA
He's gone, Caleb. He won't bother us. Come back to the couch. Please.

Caleb's curiosity and a certain anger force him toward the trapdoor.

MONA
No, Caleb!

He pushes her off him and rips open the trapdoor. He looks down into the darkness.

CALEB
I have to know. I'm sorry. I'll be back.

Caleb jumps into the gloom. Mona falls to her knees at the edge of the tunnel opening and sobs for a moment. Then, her crying stops and she is strangely calm. She closes the trapdoor and rearranges the rug.

She reaches into her panties and pulls out the piece of paper.

Smilin' Rod's hand enters the frame and takes the piece of paper from Mona.

MONA
Did I do good, big daddy?

TUNNEL

Caleb uses a Zippo lighter to illuminate the passageway. He travels slowly, noticing the occasional chalk arrow or cryptic sign.

He stops and listens. He hears whispering coming from down the tunnel.

He advances slowly until he comes to a fork in the tunnels. One seems to continue onward and has a large "N" scrawled in chalk on the wall. The other branches off sharply and has a large "W". He stares at the "W" until he remembers the strange phone call he got in his hotel room.

STRANGE VOICE (V.O.)
Go to the West room.

Caleb moves into the tunnel marked "W" and disappears into the gloom.

EXT. PLATO'S FANTASY EMPORIUM - NIGHT

The facade is typical of most strip clubs, with a gaudy neon sign and blacked out windows. It is presently closed and the parking lot is empty, save for a black Cadillac.

INT. PLATO'S FANTASY EMPORIUM, MAIN ROOM (CONTINUOUS)

Plato's is a medium-sized strip club with similar decor as the SLYDE Inn. Samuel is in a chair at the edge of one of the stages. He stares at a dancer as she writhes in front of him, practicing her moves. He taps out a line of coke on her ass and snorts it.

JOHNNY "PLATO" KENNEDY (50s, James Caan type) walks up and slaps Samuel in the face. The dancer moves off to the other side of the stage. Samuel is clearly intimidated by Plato's presence.

PLATO
What did I tell you about that shit
in here?

SAMUEL
Sorry, Johnny. I forgot.

PLATO
You'd forget your dick if it wasn't
attached to your hand.

SAMUEL

What? Oh... Yeah. Heh.

PLATO

Come on. We got business to discuss.

Plato leads Samuel to a red door at the back of the club.

HALLWAY

They make their way down a hallway padded with red leather. There are three doors on either side of the hallway marked 1 through 6, alternating. At the end of the hall is another red door.

There are little diamond-shaped windows on the hallway doors. Samuel peeks into each one as they walk past.

They reach the red door and walk through.

PLATO'S OFFICE

It is a utilitarian space. There's a wood desk, a few chairs, a couch and a video camera on a tripod in the corner that sits on top of a trap door in the floor. The camera is the same make and model as the one on Caleb's hotel room balcony. Polaroids of naked girls are scattered over his desk. There's a manila folder on top of these.

Plato sits down behind the desk. Samuel takes a chair in front.

Plato opens the manila folder and takes out a picture. He tosses it over to Samuel.

PLATO

Is this him?

Samuel holds the picture up. It's a photo of Caleb taken as he enters the Memphis Belle Diner.

SAMUEL

That's the fucker. Been at the hotel for a day or so.

PLATO

Does he know why he's here?

SAMUEL

I don't know. I guess if he did, he wouldn't be wasting any time.

PLATO
No shit. (BEAT) Did Mona make
contact?

SAMUEL
As soon as he came into town. She's
a pro.

PLATO
Good. Where is he now?

SAMUEL
He's over at Mona's. We should have
it soon.

PLATO
Good. Go by later and pick it up,
then come right back, you hear?

SAMUEL
Will do, Plato.

PLATO
Don't 'will do' me, you junkie
fuck.

Plato stands up and, with one hand, moves the large desk to the side. He walks forward and grabs Samuel by the shirt collar. He lifts him in the air and stands nose-to-nose.

PLATO
If you so much as entertain the
thought of skipping out on me, I
will hunt you down and kill you
hard. Remember Slow Tony?

FLASHBACK montage of SLOW TONY being tortured amidst buckets of blood. Plato forces his mouth open and reaches in.

FLASHBACK ENDS

Samuel nods his head and raises his hands.

SAMUEL
You don't have to worry about me,
Plato.

PLATO
I wish I didn't, Samuel. When your
mother asked me to take care of
you, I wanted to do my best. Don't
make me do something that would
upset her, God rest her soul.

SAMUEL
No way, Plato.

Plato drops Samuel to the floor.

PLATO
Get over to Mona's house. The last thing we need is Rod sniffing around. That son-of-a-bitch suspects something. I don't need that fucker finding the address.

Samuel exits leaving Plato to stare after him.

INT. SLYDE INN, MAGIC ROOM

The furniture has been removed from an average hotel room and replaced by a magician's box, the kind used to perform the trick of sawing a lady in half.

Mary Sue, topless and in a Vegas showgirl outfit, adjusts the focus on a video camera, then walks over to a record turntable. She sets the needle down and "Lighting Strikes" by Lou Christie blares from the speakers.

At one end of the box, Tillinghast's head sticks out while his feet poke out the other. The girl reaches behind and pulls out a chainsaw. She yanks on the cord and it roars to life. Tillinghast begins to SCREAM over the deafening music.

TILLINGHAST
Chantelle!

Mary Sue brings the chainsaw down through the middle of the box and sawdust flies everywhere just as Lou Christie and The Angels hit the high notes in the chorus. A torrent of blood soon follows.

INT. TUNNEL BENEATH MONA'S HOUSE

Caleb stops when he hears Tillinghast's distant scream. It seems to be coming from down the tunnel. Caleb starts to run toward the scream.

INT. MONA'S HOUSE, FOYER

Someone is knocking at the door. Mona answers it to reveal Samuel. He walks in past Mona.

SAMUEL
Where is he?

MONA
In the tunnels.

SAMUEL

Jesus Christ, Mona. Why is he down there?

MONA

He got curious... went looking for Dad.

SAMUEL

Where is the old coot?

MONA

He left.

SAMUEL

Good. That guy scares me.

MONA

You want a drink?

SAMUEL

No, I don't want a goddam drink. Give me the paper.

MONA

Paper?

Samuel punches her in the face. She goes down hard. Her nose a scarlet river.

MONA

Motherfucker, Samuel. Why do you need it? Kevin already got the address, didn't he?

SAMUEL

Rod is after it. Now where is it?

MONA

In Dad's room.

Samuel walks past her and toward her father's room.

FATHER'S ROOM

He walks in and stops short. Smilin' Rod is sitting in a chair at the typing desk. He is reading what is typed on the paper.

SMILIN' ROD

This is one crazy motherfucker. Did you see this? It just says one word. 'Dream.' That's all.

SAMUEL

What the fuck are you doin' here,
Rod?

SMILIN' ROD

I'm not sure. Why don't you tell
me.

SAMUEL

Fuck you...

Samuel reaches behind his back to retrieve his pistol. Smilin' Rod beats him to the draw and has a straight razor against Samuel's throat before he can even pull the pistol all the way out of his waistband.

SMILIN' ROD

You were always slow, Samuel. All that booger sugar got your reflexes dulled. Unlike this razor, which is sharp as the end of a hard-sucked candy cane. Now you tell me what's so important about some kid from out-of-town.

SAMUEL

Plato will have my balls if I...

SMILIN' ROD

I already got your balls,
motherfucker. We're talking about
your ass, now.

Mona comes into the room. She looks like shit. Blood is smeared across her face. Her lingerie is wrinkled and hanging off her. One of her fuck-me pumps has lost a heel and she limps badly.

MONA

You gonna kill him, big daddy?

SMILIN' ROD

(to Samuel)

What does this mean?

Smilin' Rod holds up Caleb's paper in front of Samuel's face. Samuel doesn't look at it. Mona is working herself up into a frenzy.

SMILIN' ROD

Look at it, motherfucker.

SAMUEL

(closes his eyes)

No!

MONA

Kill the pig!

Smilin' Rod takes the razor and lifts Samuel's upper lip to reveal his gums.

SMILIN' ROD

Vikings used to cut out the teeth of defeated foes. They'd start with the gums so they'd have a complete set of choppers to hang around their neck. Scared the shit out of their enemies. (BEAT) What's the paper for?

SAMUEL

Fuck you!

MONA'S FACE

twists into a demented grim while Samuel screams off screen. After a moment, the screaming stops.

SMILIN' ROD (O.S.)

Get me a phonebook.

INT. TUNNEL, WEST ROOM

Caleb enters a chamber at the end of the tunnel. It has metal walls, ceiling and floor. Filing cabinets line one wall. An architect's drafting table and tall chair are against another. A can holds rolled blueprints. In the back of the room sits a metal ladder that runs up to a trapdoor in the ceiling.

Caleb notices blueprints on the drafting table. A folder sits on top. He opens the folder and sees photos of Uncle Sam and a woman with fire-red hair. Each photo shows them leaving or entering the SLYDE Inn. The last photo is a close-up of the couple. Even though the hair is different, there is no doubt that the woman is Mona.

Caleb examines the additional documents. They are lists and receipts of loans to Uncle Sam, or as he is listed on the document, Samson Marsh. The amounts are enormous. \$10,000 on one page. \$34,000 on another. All for something called, 'Exploration Costs.'

Caleb hears someone's footsteps above the metal trapdoor, then muffled voices.

The lock turns and the door lifts open. Plato and Mona's father Jon make their way down the ladder and into the room.

Caleb is gone.

PLATO
Will Mona be OK?

JON
She can take care of herself.

PLATO
She better not fuck us, Jon. And I don't trust Samuel.

JON
Don't worry. I had someone follow him. He'll make sure everything goes down fine.

PLATO
Who did you send?

JON
I sent Peter.

PLATO
I thought he was a drunk.

JON
He is, which means he's cheap. But like his dad, he gets the job done. Though, he'll never make a good assassin like his old man.

PLATO
No way anyone could top that Presley job. No wonder he lives in the man's shadow.

JON
Yeah, but he's good for small shit like this. He'll do fine.

PLATO
All we need now is the kid. Samuel says he's been staying at the hotel. You seen him lately?

JON
Not since yesterday. He doesn't know shit.

PLATO
That's what Samuel says.

JON
For once that coke head is right.

PLATO
Not too smart, is he? At least his
uncle had the good sense to hide
out at that sanitarium.

INT. TUNNEL

Caleb is flat against the wall of the tunnel just outside the West room. He can clearly hear the two men. He checks his pockets for the paper. Nothing.

CALEB
(sotto)
Fuck.

Caleb slowly inches his way down the tunnel until he thinks he's clear of the men hearing him. Then he runs into the gloom.

INT. MONA'S HOUSE, FATHER'S ROOM

Samuel is laying on the ground unconscious, his mouth a gaping, bloody mess. OFF CAMERA we hear Mona laughing hysterically. SLOW ZOOM into Samuel's mouth.

INT. SLYDE INN, MAGIC ROOM

The magic box is sawn in half. The halves are on the floor forming a 'V'. Blood is pooled on the floor and sprayed across the walls.

INT. TUNNEL

Caleb runs through the tunnel and crashes into Smilin' Rod. They both go down in a heap. Caleb scrambles away like a frightened crab.

SMILIN' ROD
Hold on, Caleb. I'm your friend.

CALEB
The hell you are.

SMILIN' ROD
I am. Now calm down.

Caleb backs up to a wall and tries to control his breathing. In the gloom, he sees the bloody razor in Rod's hand, gore splattered all over his suit.

SMILIN' ROD
Don't worry about this.

He folds the razor and slides it into a pocket.

SMILIN' ROD
That's it. Relax. Deep breaths.

Caleb's heart finally slows to a gallop and he let's out a sigh.

CALEB
What is going on?

SMILIN' ROD
Funny how the one person who should know what's going on, don't.

CALEB
This is about my uncle, isn't it?
Did you know him?

SMILIN' ROD
Samson? Sure did. He was my biggest star until Plato convinced him to jump ship. Told him he'd pay for his *research*.

CALEB
My uncle was not a porn star.

SMILIN' ROD
Well, not in the mainstream adult video market. But he was as big a star as any in Memphis, no pun intended. Smart, too. He was into some science shit.

CALEB
Archaeology. He was a professor of archaeology at the University of Damascus.

SMILIN' ROD
Really? Damn. Those professors sure know how to fuck. We had this one guy, a teacher at some local community college. Liked to be tied up, whipped, the whole sh'bang.

That motherfucker could stay hard
through judgement day on an
electric chair.

Smilin' Rod helps Caleb to his feet. They both start back
toward the West Room.

CALEB

What was this research?

SMILIN' ROD

Not sure. But it seemed to interest
Plato.

CALEB

Of Plato's Fantasy Emporium?

SMILIN' ROD

The same. (BEAT) Emporium. It's a
goddam strip club, not a knicknack
shop. Dumb son-of-a-bitch.

CALEB

What did he want with my uncle?

SMILIN' ROD

I thought he was trying to steal
him for his movies, but the fact
is, he wanted him to do research on
something he found while he was in
South America looking for new
talent.

CALEB

What?

SMILIN' ROD

I don't know exactly. Plato thought
the Fountain of Youth or some such
shit was buried in Memphis. Thought
your uncle could find it for him.

CALEB

Fountain of Youth?

SMILIN' ROD

Bullshit, right?

CALEB

Right.

SMILIN' ROD

Wrong. It was true. Your uncle
found it and skipped town.

Plato blew like one o' my girls and hunted him for 10 years. Never found him, though. And he never told anyone where the shit was.

CALEB

He was sick. In a coma. When he came back, he gave me a piece of paper with an address on it. Never told me what it was for before he died.

SMILIN' ROD

I know where it is. The message on that paper *is* an address. And I think Plato already knows it, maybe ever since you got here.

CALEB

Then why are we headed toward Plato? Let's get the hell out of here.

SMILIN' ROD

Can't. I need some insurance that he's not gonna come after me.

CALEB

What kind of insurance?

Smilin' Rod takes the straight razor from his pocket and flicks it open.

SMILIN' ROD

The permanent kind. Now you get going back to the hotel. Grab your shit and meet Mona at the diner. Wait for me there.

INT. TUNNEL, WEST ROOM

Plato and Jon are still rummaging through the filing cabinets when Plato stops and puts his finger to his lips. They both listen.

JON

What?

PLATO

I thought I heard footsteps.

JON

You're fucking paranoid.

Smilin' Rod steps from the shadows of the tunnel and into the dim light of the West room.

SMILIN' ROD
Evening, gentlemen.

JON
Uh oh.

PLATO
Rod, you grinning motherfucker.

Plato pulls a machine pistol from underneath his coat and starts firing. Smilin' Rod is already diving behind Jon. Plato sweeps the gun across the room and hits Jon several times in the chest.

Plato stops firing and looks around the room. Nothing is moving

PLATO
Rod. Rod! Did I get you? Did I? I
bet I did. Got you good, didn't I?

Plato steps to the side and REVEALS Smilin' Rod standing directly behind him. In the blink-of-an-eye, Rod slits Plato's throat.

Plato grabs for his throat while he spins in place firing the machine pistol into the ceiling, screaming through the blood that is filling his windpipe and spraying from his neck. The screaming is so loud the sound DISTORTS.

INT. MONA'S HOUSE, FATHER'S ROOM

Caleb climbs out of the hole and steps around the body of Samuel. He walks out to the living room and sees another body. PETER MONNOT (mid-20s) lays in a heap, his throat slashed.

Caleb stares a moment longer before running out of the house.

INT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER - NIGHT

Mona sits at the counter, sipping from a coffee mug. She checks her watch when Stanton Fleiss walks up and sits next to her.

MONA
Well, hey Stanton.

STANTON
Hey, Mona. What are you doing here
on your day off?

MONA
Just grabbing some coffee.

STANTON
That it?

MONA
I'm waiting for someone.

STANTON
That someone wouldn't happen to be
that little pecker head, Caleb,
would it?

MONA
(nervous)
No. Just waiting for my dad.

STANTON
Jon? I saw him over at Plato's.
Don't think he'll be here anytime
soon.

Something pokes Mona in the ribs. She looks down and sees
it's a gun in Stanton's hand.

STANTON
Why don't we step outside. Looks
like you could use a cigarette.

They both slide off their stools and walk close together to
the exit.

EXT. MEMPHIS BELLE SIDEWALK - NIGHT

As Stanton and Mona walk outside, a cab, driven by Kevin,
drives up. Mona is hustled into the back seat. Stanton
follows.

A moment later, Caleb runs up the sidewalk and sees Mona
being pushed into the sedan. He starts to run faster but
doesn't make it in time before the cab pulls away.

INT. SLYDE INN, LOBBY - (CONTINUOUS)

Caleb pushes through the doors to the hotel and runs to an
awaiting elevator.

HALLWAY

Caleb exits the elevator and runs toward his room when he
sees the two men in yellow jumpsuits waiting by his door. He
is about to return to the elevator when the bartender walks
up.

BARTENDER
Hey, Caleb.

CALEB
Uh, hey.

BARTENDER
If you're headed to the bar, I'll
be down in a bit. Just want to grab
something from my room.

CALEB
I'm leaving, actually.

BARTENDER
So soon?

CALEB
Afraid so.

The two men in yellow jumpsuits hear them talking and walk toward them.

CALEB
I really gotta go.

BARTENDER
Just hang on a moment.

The bartender grabs his arm. He isn't threatening, just insistent.

CALEB
Listen. I really gotta go.

BARTENDER
I think those guys want to talk to
you.

Caleb tries to pull away from the bartender. The bartender pulls a switchblade and flicks it open. They struggle. Caleb grabs his wrist and twists the knife back and into the bartender's stomach. The bartender slumps to the floor.

The two men in yellow jumpsuits start to run after him.

Caleb bolts for the stairs and leads the two men on a chase down the stairs.

PARKING LOT

Caleb makes it to the exit and crashes out the door. He runs without looking back and disappears into the night.

EXT. MEMPHIS BELLE DINER, SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Smilin' Rod stands in front of the Memphis Belle. His cell phone rings and he flips it open.

SMILIN' ROD

Go.

STANTON

(from the phone)

Rod, you smiling son-of-a-bitch.
How's it hanging?

SMILIN' ROD

From your momma's bottom lip.

STANTON

It's always with the mother. Goddam it! You think you're so funny you black-as-night son-of-a-bitch.
How's this for funny?

INT. PLATO'S FANTASY EMPORIUM, PLATO'S OFFICE

Mona walks from OFF-SCREEN to stand by Stanton. He holds the phone up to her face.

MONA

Rod?

STANTON

Mona.

MONA

I'm sorry, big daddy.

SMILIN' ROD

(from the phone)

S'ok, baby. Rod's coming to get you.

Stanton takes the phone away from Mona.

STANTON

You ain't getting shit. You bring the paper to Plato's right fucking now or I use Mona for a few magic tricks. I'll make her the star of a magic show, you fuck! Now get over here!

EXT. DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS - NIGHT

Rod runs down the street, then cuts through an alley and down another street. Then through a park, across a basketball court, over picnic tables, across another street, through the parking lot of a grocery store, down another alley, into a field, across a stream, up a hill and finally into the parking lot of Plato's Fantasy Emporium.

At the same time Rod is running to Plato's, Caleb runs a similar route. He enters the parking lot of the strip club at the same time Rod does. They stare madly at the neon sign. Rod dripping wet from the stream, Caleb breathing heavily.

INT. PLATO'S FANTASY EMPORIUM, MAIN ROOM

The club is occupied by Stanton, Mona, Kevin the cab driver and Mary Sue. They are all watching a big screen T.V. that shows a security camera view of the parking lot. They watch as Caleb and Rod run up at the same time, then make their way to the entrance.

STANTON

Switch that shit to the entry camera.

Kevin reaches back behind the bar and hits a button. The view shifts to a grainy, overhead shot of the front door. There is no one there.

STANTON

What the fuck? (BEAT) Kevin, check the side cameras.

Kevin reaches back and begins hitting the button. The scene on the big screen shifts every few seconds. Shots of the parking lot, front door, and entertainer exit alternate.

STANTON

(sotto)
Fuck me.
(to Kevin)
Make sure the place is locked up.
(to Mary Sue)
Get your shit ready, I want a box on stage, pronto!

Everyone runs off to their respective jobs leaving Stanton to stand in the middle of the club, rubbing his crotch.

STANTON

And put that bitch in the box. I want a magic show!

EXT. PLATO'S FANTASY EMPORIUM, SECRET ENTRANCE

Rod is digging around in the grass 20 yards from the rear of the strip club. He locates a metal ring attached to a chain and pulls open a trap door.

SMILIN' ROD

After you, buckaroo.

CALEB

Is this connected to the tunnel at Mona's house?

SMILIN' ROD

You got that right. Your uncle helped create tunnels all over Memphis. Plato had some bizarre plan to smuggle drugs around the city like this. Stanton has no idea I know about this one, at least I hope he don't.

INT. PLATO'S FANTASY EMPORIUM, MARY SUE'S ROOM

Caleb climbs down the metal ladder into a metal room similar to the one before. But instead of a desk and filing cabinets, it looks like a woodcutter's workshop, with sawdust covering the floor. Wood cutting and sanding machines take up the middle of the floor. Several coffin-sized wooden boxes line the walls. On another wall sit the doors to an elevator.

CALEB

What the hell is this for?

SMILIN' ROD

Mary Sue's playroom.

CALEB

Who?

SMILIN' ROD

That blonde maid at the motel.

CALEB

I don't get it.

SMILIN' ROD

Let's hope we don't.

PASSAGEWAY

Rod and Caleb walk out of the room and make their way quietly down a rough-hewn passageway until they come to another metal ladder ending at a trap door in the ceiling. Rod listens for a moment and hears nothing.

SMILIN' ROD

This opens up into one of the VIP rooms. The place isn't open yet, so no one should be in it. But just in case, take this.

Rod hands Caleb a small pistol.

CALEB

I'll probably shoot myself in the foot.

SMILIN' ROD

You'll be fine. Just point it at any motherfucker tha ain't Mona or me.

VIP ROOM

The VIP room is outfitted to look like a sultan's bedroom, complete with a large, plush couch covered in pillows and silk scarves hanging over everything. A champagne ice bucket and two glasses sit on a table next to the couch. On the walls are ornate coat hangers holding various sizes and styles of whips, evidently not just for decoration.

Mary Sue walks over to one of the coat hangers and turns it 90-degrees clockwise. The couch slides out from the wall on a pivot revealing a trap door in the floor.

PASSAGEWAY

Rod is startled when he reaches up for the trap door and hears FOOTSTEPS from the upper room. Someone JIGGLES the handle on the trap door and then turns it.

VIP ROOM

Mary Sue turns the handle on the trap door and lifts it up. From OVERHEAD we see the empty tunnel with the ladder descending down. Mary Sue turns around and climbs down into the gloom.

MARY SUE'S ROOM

Mary Sue enters her room and goes over to a wall with tools hanging neatly on nails.

She takes a chainsaw with a strap and slings it over her shoulder. She walks over to one of the finished magic-trick boxes and tries to tip it over onto the floor but she can't seem to move it.

MARY SUE

Shit.

She puts all her strength into pulling it down and it finally tips over and crashes to the floor. An audible GRUNT is heard from the box.

MARY SUE

Shouldn't have used oak for this one.

She tip toes over to a table and retrieves a 2-foot railroad spike and a hammer. She places the tip of the railroad spike in the middle of the box's top and raises the hammer over it.

MARY SUE

(sotto)
Say goodnight.

SMILIN' ROD (O.S.)

Goodnight.

Mary Sue whips around at the sound and Smilin' Rod punches her squarely in the face. She goes down in a heap, knocked out.

Smilin' Rod lifts up the top of the box and pulls Caleb out.

SMILIN' ROD

Let's get going.

As they turn to make their way back to the passageway, Mary Sue jumps up and her chainsaw roars to life. Her shrill scream rips through their ears and she charges at them.

Smilin' Rod pushes Caleb out of the way and backs up against the elevator doors just as they are opening to reveal Kevin the cab driver inside. Smilin' Rod falls backward into the elevator. Mary Sue can't stop her momentum and plunges the chainsaw into Kevin's chest. The elevator doors close on the horrific, bloody scene.

Caleb is still kneeling on the floor, dumbfounded. The sound of the CHAINSAW and screaming fade away as the elevator ascends.

He finally snaps out of it and checks for his gun before getting up and running out into the passageway.

PASSAGEWAY

Caleb rushes to the steel ladder and climbs up into the VIP room.

VIP ROOM

Caleb hears shouts from somewhere outside the VIP room. He rushes out to a hallway covered in crushed-velvet wallpaper and finally enters the main room.

MAIN ROOM

Stanton stands at the edge of the stage staring at it while Mona is tied to a chair nearby. They are all watching as the center of the stage opens up and a platform lifts Mary Sue and Smilin' Rod into the lights. Kevin lays dead with the chainsaw sticking out of his chest. Mary Sue is covered in blood and stands unmoving with Smilin' Rod's gun against her temple.

MARY SUE

You motherfucker. I'll kill you!

SMILIN' ROD

Untie Mona, or the bitch gets it.

Stanton immediately bolts for the hallway.

SMILIN' ROD

(to Caleb)

Cap his ass!

Caleb points the gun and fires, but misses badly. Stanton runs past and disappears into the hallway.

HALLWAY

Stanton runs to Plato's office and locks the door.

PLATO'S OFFICE

Stanton finishes locking the bolt and sits down behind the desk. He reaches into a drawer and pulls out a bag of mushrooms. He starts eating them, ravenously.

MAIN ROOM

Caleb rushes over to Mona and unties her. She rubs her wrists and hugs Caleb.

Smilin' Rod pushes Mary Sue off the platform.

SMILIN' ROD
Tie this bitch up, tight.

Caleb sits her down and Mona ties her with the same twine.
When she's done, she goes over to Smilin'Rod and kisses him.

MONA
I knew you'd come for me, big
daddy.
(toward Mary Sue)
Let me do the bitch.

SMILIN' ROD
Later.
(to Caleb)
That fat bastard has probably
locked himself in Plato's office.
Ain't no getting in there without a
bazooka.

MONA
Don't need one. There's keys behind
the bar.

SMILIN' ROD
That's my girl.
(to Caleb)
Grab 'em and follow me.

Caleb runs over to the bar and searches underneath until he
sees a bunch of keys on a keychain hanging from the cash
register. Small, silver charms hang from the keychain,
including a skull and a chainsaw.

CALEB
Got 'em!

On stage, Mary Sue taps a button and the elevator begins to
lower. She cradles Kevin's head and disappears beneath the
floor.

HALLWAY

Caleb and Mona follow Smilin' Rod down the hallway to Plato's
office. He hands his gun to Mona.

SMILIN' ROD
You cover my back. I'll unlock it,
then go in. Ready?

Caleb and Mona nod as Smilin' Rod unlocks the door. He pushes
it in and they all rush in guns at the ready.

PLATO'S OFFICE

Stanton is leaning back in the chair, staring blankly at them. He has bits of mushroom around his mouth and down his shirt. His hand rests inside the bag which still holds a few mushrooms.

SMILIN' ROD
Goddamit, he got 'em all.

Smilin's Rod takes the bag and sniffs it, then seals it up.

CALEB
Is that what my uncle was after? Is that what he risked his life for?

SMILIN' ROD
Sure is. And I hope it was worth it.

Smilin' Rod reaches into his pocket and hands Caleb the slip of paper with the address on it.

SMILIN' ROD
I believe this is yours, Cal. Though, it may have already been picked clean. You'll have to wait 50 years, but they'll be back. And this fucker won't be here to fuck with you.

Smilin' Rod takes Caleb's pistol and shoots Stanton between the eyes.

INT. GRACELAND, MEMPHIS TENNESSEE

A group of elderly people are walking through Elvis Presley's mansion listening to a tour guide explain the history of the estate. As they round a corner, one OLD MAN (70's) breaks from the back of the group and slips through a door.

He makes his way down a passageway and then through a service entrance to the gardens outside.

EXT. GRACELAND, GROUNDS - DAY

The old man walks across the garden and finally stops at Elvis Presley's gravestone. He pauses for a moment before walking around to the back of it, kneeling down with some effort and sifting through the grass at the edge of the stone.

The old man parts the blades of grass and finds mushrooms growing in the shade of the gravestone. He takes a baggie from his pocket and places the picked mushrooms inside.

TOUR GUIDE (O.S.)

Sir? You seem to be off the tour.

The old man looks up and smiles. A TOUR GUIDE stands behind him with her hands behind her back. The sun is behind her, keeping her in silhouette.

OLD MAN

Oh my word. Did I? Well, I just wanted a few minutes alone with The King. I am a huge fan of his.

TOUR GUIDE

I understand, sir, but I have to get you back to the tour party.

OLD MAN

Of course. Just one second.

The old man reaches for the last mushroom.

The tour guide moves out of the sun. Her grey hair betrays her old age. Her arms are clasped behind her back.

TOUR GUIDE

Take your time, Caleb.

Caleb stops picking the mushrooms. He begins to tremble with fear, afraid to look behind him.

The fear that has frozen him turns to desperation and he frantically stuffs mushrooms into his mouth.

The tour guide starts up the chainsaw she holds behind her back and raises the screaming machine above her head.

CUT TO BLACK.