

The Big Cut

By

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OVER BLACK.

White credits appear on the blank screen. As these credits appear we hear a PHONE RINGING. After a few rings we hear someone push the speakerphone button.

FADE IN.

INT. OFFICE

A typical film director's office. Film posters cover the walls of the room. In the back of the room is a small collection of alcoholic beverages. The furniture seems cheap, as if to imply this director has not made it yet... which he hasn't. There is a desk with the ringing phone on it. There is also a couch in the room. BARTON, the film's director, has just made his first major film. On the other end of the phone is one of the studio executives (his name is David). All through this phone call, and during the entire film, we never leave the office.

BARTON
Hello?

DAVID
Barton?

BARTON
Yes.

DAVID
It's David.

BARTON
Hello, David.

DAVID
We got the results back.

BARTON
And?

DAVID
They loved the movie. They think
it's a masterpiece.

BARTON
But?

DAVID
The shootout at the end. They feel
it was too violent.

(CONTINUED)

BARTON
Too violent?

DAVID
Yes. They believe the last few moments of the film could be less violent.

BARTON
But it's the ending of the film.

DAVID
I know that.

BARTON
So what's the problem?

DAVID
They've given the film an X rating.

BARTON
An X rating?

DAVID
Well, an NC-17. They feel the amount of blood used is too much.

BARTON
It's a realistic amount. I made sure of that.

DAVID
I'm sure it is. But they don't feel that way.

BARTON
I don't care how they feel. It's my film.

DAVID
I know it's your film. But it's everyone involved in it's film also.

BARTON
And they all feel the same way.

DAVID
Barton, listen to me, If you release this film with an NC-17 rating you will be finished before you even start.

BARTON

I'm not changing the ending. I'm not cutting one frame from this film.

DAVID

It won't make any money.

BARTON

It's not about money! I didn't make this film for money! This is my film. I made it for me. The film is my masterpiece.

DAVID

Listen to me-

BARTON

No! You listen to me. Not one frame of that film gets cut. Not one second goes through re-shoots.

DAVID

Listen to me, Barton. You don't have final cut. I'm giving you this warning because I like you. I think you've got great talent. But if you don't make the changes I'll cut the film myself.

BARTON

But I can't change it. I won't. An you won't either.

DAVID

What about the producers who took a risk with letting you direct this film? Sure we all loved your script, but being a good writer doesn't make you a good director. Listen, Bart, For every Tarentino there's a hundred other guys who fail miserably. We can't afford that here. Our producers can't afford that. You can't afford that.
(pause)

You have until tomorrow to make the changes. If I don't hear back from you I'll change it myself.

David hangs up. The sound of the RING TONE buzzes through the room. It goes until the beeping sound starts, that's when Barton turns it off. Barton stares blankly at the

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phone. He makes his way over to the alcoholic beverages and pours himself a glass. He takes a drink and winces at it's effect. He pours himself another drink. He grabs the bottle and his glass and makes his way to the couch. He drinks what's in his glass and pours himself another. Just then, the PHONE RINGS. Barton looks over to his desk. He lets it ring a few times before getting up and walking to the desk. He sits down in the desk chair and presses the speaker phone button. On the other end of the phone is Julia, Barton's love interest.

BARTON

Hello?

JULIA

Bart? What's wrong.

BARTON

Julia. They want to change my film.

JULIA

What do you mean? Filming already wrapped.

BARTON

They want me to make cuts.

JULIA

Who does?

BARTON

The studio. They showed the film to the MPAA and they gave it an NC-17. They feel the film won't make any money with an NC-17 rating.

JULIA

Who cares how they feel? It's your film.

BARTON

They have final cut.

JULIA

What does that mean?

BARTON

They get to decide what the final version of the movie looks like.

JULIA

I thought that was your job?

(CONTINUED)

BARTON

It's not part of my contract. They have a legal right to it.

JULIA

What are you gonna do?

BARTON

I don't know. I have until tomorrow to make the changes.

JULIA

What do they want changed?

BARTON

The ending. They feel it's too violent.

JULIA

Is it?

BARTON

It's the perfect ending for the movie. Our main character realizes he's between a rock and a hard place. He realizes there's nothing he can do. So he decides to shoot his way out. And when he can't take it anymore... he puts the gun to himself. The film ends with his brains splattered on the wall.

JULIA

That sounds a little extreme, Bart.

BARTON

Extreme? It's my ending. I can't change it. I can't ruin my masterpiece.

JULIA

Do you really think altering the ending will change the entire movie?

BARTON

The film is perfect as is.

Barton pours himself a drink and downs it.

JULIA

Bart, Are you drinking?

BARTON

Yes.

JULIA

You shouldn't be. You know what the doctor said... about last time.

BARTON

I don't care about the doctor. I'm drinking, and I'm going to enjoy it.

He pours another drink and, again, downs it.

JULIA

I'm really worried about you, Barton.

BARTON

I'm worried myself.

JULIA

What does that mean?

BARTON

I'm afraid I'll do something if they change my movie.

Barton looks at a poster of the 1924 film *Greed* on his wall.

JULIA

What are you talking about.

BARTON

In 1924, Erich von Stroheim completed the film *Greed* for MGM. It ran about nine hours long. After being screened once He was forced to cut the movie to a reasonable length. He reluctantly cut the movie to about four hours. Irving Thalberg, who was head of MGM, took the film over and, against the director's protests, edited the film down to two hours. The deleted footage was then destroyed.

JULIA

What happened?

BARTON

The film went on to be a box office disaster. What was once a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BARTON (cont'd)
masterpiece of cinema was reduced
to garbage. The next time Erich von
Stroheim saw Irving Thalberg he
almost murdered him by beating him
so badly.

JULIA
Barton?

Barton pours himself a drink and downs it.

BARTON
If they touch my film...

Barton opens a drawer in his desk. A gun is inside it. He
takes it out and sets it down on the desk.

BARTON
I don't know if I could act
rationally.

JULIA
That was years ago, Barton. They
didn't know any better. People make
mistakes. And you have to live with
those mistakes. I know you love
this film, trust me I do. But after
this one you can make another one
just the way you want it. There
will be others, Barton.

BARTON
There are no others, Julia. This is
the only one. This is my film. If
they change it...

Barton grips the gun.

JULIA
Barton. This is the business. It's
about making money. Producers are
not concerned about the artistic
quality. They just want to make
money. It's not right. It's not
fair. It's show business.

BARTON
They won't change my movie.

JULIA

Do you think you're the only one
who's had this happen to them?

Barton looks at a poster of the 1984 film *Once Upon A Time
In America*.

BARTON

In 1984, Sergio Leone made *Once
Upon A Time In America*. The studio
had it shortened from four to two
hours. Destroying Leone's vision.
That film went on to fail
miserably.

JULIA

What did he do?

BARTON

Leone had died before he ever saw
the completed film... He died
knowing his own version of the
film.

JULIA

Barton...

Barton pours a drink... and downs it.

BARTON

Ignorance is bliss.

Barton puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. His
brains splattering against the wall. Julia screams at the
other end of the phone. Her end hangs up. We hear the RING
TONE and the eventual BEEPING sound it makes after. Over
these sounds roll the end credits.

THE END.