WATCHING
THE
DETECTIVES

by
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EXT. DARK ALLEY - NIGHT

A film-noiry black & white image of a GRITTY DOWNTOWN STREET.

A DESPERATE-LOOKING UNSHAVEN MAN sneaks into frame. He looks back over his shoulder, then sneaks down the alleyway.

He slinks nervously along the side of a brick wall. Clutched tightly in his sweaty hands is a SMALL PACKAGE.

He turns the corner, then carefully makes his way to a MAIL SLOT on the front of a building.

His eyes dart back and forth.

He goes to slide the package into the slot, when A HAND GRABS HIS WRIST. He looks up in terror, gulping when he sees...

A DARK FIGURE in a trenchcoat. The shadow of his fedora hides his face, but not the glowing end of his CIGARETTE.

The sweaty character drops the package on the ground and begins to back away, his hands trembling.

SWEATY CHARACTER

No. No, please.

He can’t take his eyes off the trenchcoated figure who TRAINS HIS PISTOL at the terrified man’s heart.

He makes a break for it, but the gunman SHOOTS HIM ONCE IN THE BACK.

He slumps to the ground, dead.

As the gunman stands over the body, holstering his pistol, a GLAMOROUS BOMBSHELL steps out of the darkness and puts her arm around the murderer.

BOMBSHELL

Nice shot, lover. What was that for?

The murderer bends down and picks up the package. He lifts it up to his face, revealing that it is a VHS COPY OF CASABLANCA. Now that his face is visible, he appears a lot less like a gangster-movie hard guy, and a lot more like a boyish blonde goofball.

He speaks in his best Humphrey Bogart voice. (which is not that good)

BOYISH BLONDE

Thish was due back Thurshday, shweetheart. And beshides ... he forgot to rewind.
A sultry saxophone riff plays in the background as a passing car’s headlights briefly illuminate the couple, revealing that this scene has taken place in front of a MOM AND POP VIDEO STORE.

A cheap-looking video graphic fills the screen.

GUMSHOE VIDEO  115 LOWELL (between 7th and 8th) Specializing in hard-to-find.

NARRATOR V.O.
Gumshoe Video. If we don’t have it, we’ll hit the pavement looking for it.

Camera pulls back to reveal that we are watching a tv.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO

A crowd cheers as the commercial gives way to an ad for a used car dealership.

Filled with college students and young adults, GUMSHOE VIDEO looks like a film buff’s wet dream. Shelves along the wall are stacked high with videotapes. Posters of old and obscure movies are plastered all over the ceiling. Cardboard cutouts of Silver Screen legends populate the floor. Videos are categorized by JAPANIMATION, HEIST FLICKS, EURO-TRASH, SLASHER, etc. One small shelf is labelled RUTGER HAUER.

And in the center of it all, a COFFEE-HOUSE type of set up. COUCHES. COFFEE TABLES. BOOKS ABOUT CINEMA. All set up in front of an impressive tv screen that, if it weren’t for this occasion, would be running a steady stream of B-movies.

Standing next to the tv screen, wearing a burgundy tux and bowing to the applause, is the star of the commercial. NEIL LEWIS, 28, cute. Pleasant as hell. The owner and proprietor of Gumshoe Video.

NEIL
Boy. Wow. This is amazing. I don’t know where to begin. (phony choked up) I told myself I wasn’t gonna cry.

The crowd laughs. Neil fishes a speech out of his pocket.

NEIL (cont’d)
I have so many people to thank. But let me just start by saying...

Neil is suddenly drowned out by BLARING CHEESY ROCK MUSIC coming from the tv. He looks over at the screen.

ON THE TV
A loud, colorful, expensively produced commercial for what is obviously a national videostore chain, MEDIA GIANT.

To the strains of god-awful music, great looking young people are running and jumping around the vast interior of a Media Giant franchise. Smiling, gorgeous clerks rent stacks of movies to maniacally satisfied customers.

NARRATOR V.O.
...and if we don’t have at least TWENTY copies of your favorite new releases!...

IN THE STORE

The crowd starts to boo the tv. A few people hurl fistfuls of popcorn at the screen, most of it hitting Neil.

Neil makes a pleading gesture to his friend JONATHAN, standing behind the counter. Jonathan points a remote at the screen, muting it. But the damage has been done. Neil, deflated, addresses the crowd.

NEIL
Nah, nah. That’s okay. I know I can’t compete with the big boys. As long as I have my small, loyal following of geeks and weirdos, I’ll be fine. Everybody just have a good time. Have some beer!

(the crowd cheers)
And stick around, cause we’re gonna have a very special midnight screening of the 1949 classic...
"She-Gorilla!"

This doesn’t seem to mean much to most of the crowd, so Neil just waves and signals for Jonathan to put on music.

**(Komeda’s “B.L.O.S.S.O.M.” over credits and images of the party.)

Neil dips into the party, receiving handshakes and back slaps that seem a little more consoling than congratulatory.

BEHIND THE COUNTER

Jonathan hands Neil a beer and gives him a nice chuck-on-the-shoulder.

NEIL (cont’d)
What the hell, man? They’re not supposed to show ads for two different video stores in the same commercial break. I mean, come on.

JONATHAN
When’s it gonna run again?
NEIL
3:13 am. During the Scottish Log Throwing Semi-finals or some goddamn thing.

JONATHAN
Those are your people.

NEIL
Scottish people?

JONATHAN
No. The freaks that are up all night. Sniffing glue, watching competitive jump-rope on ESPN. Those are the people who are keeping you in business.

NEIL
I suppose.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - NIGHT

In front of the store, TWO NO-GOOD TEENAGERS, MARK AND CRAIG, are attracted by the party atmosphere inside.

They look through the glass and see Neil and Jonathan handing out beers behind the counter. They look at each other, psyched, and step inside.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - CONTINUOUS

The teenagers step in line behind a partygoer. When their turn comes up, they coolly step up to the counter.

CRAIG
Beer me right, dude.

Neil gives the teenagers an exhausted look.

NEIL
Guys. I can’t do it. I would love to do it, but I can’t.
(off their pissed looks)
How ‘bout porn? I’ll rent you some porn! Good stuff! No one has to know. Or how about “Faces Of Death?” Banned in America! You guys love that shit, right?

The teenagers turn and walk away.

MARK
Fuck that guy.
CRAIG
Snake some tapes on the way out.

They each quickly grab a videotape on the way out.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - CONTINUOUS

Right outside the door, the teenagers stop and look at what they grabbed.

CRAIG
(reading the label)
“I Am Curious Yellow?!?”

MARK
(reading his label)
“Yojimbo?!?”

They look at each other.

MARK (cont’d)
It’s not even fucking worth it.

Mark grabs the tape from Craig, goes back inside the store, slams the two tapes back on the shelf, then steps back outside.

MARK (cont’d)
Yojimbo.

The teenagers walk away, shoving each other and laughing.

CRAIG
Yo! Jimbo!

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO

Neil approaches another friend LUCIEN, a film school student. Lucien is pontificating to a small group. He doesn’t know Neil is behind him.

LUCIEN
Look, I love Neil as much as anyone here, but I’m sorry. It was basically a ripoff of Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid!

Lucien sees that everyone is looking behind him. He spins and sees Neil. Awkward pause.

LUCIEN (cont’d)
Well it was!

NEIL
Thanks, man.
Neil walks away as Lucien addresses the group again.

LUCIEN
See, what I would have done is something more deconstructive...

Neil walks through the party towards his office in the back. Standing in front of his door are two more of his film dork friends, gently arguing. MARCIA and BUDDY, early 30’s, married. Buddy holds a 9 MONTH OLD BABY in his arms.

MARCIA
...well he’s gonna end up seeing it eventually. I don’t see why we should shelter him.

BUDDY
You don’t think it might be too much?

MARCIA
He’s gonna sleep through the whole thing.

BUDDY
(spotting Neil)
Ah, Neil. Question: Do you think “She-Gorilla” is appropriate viewing for a nine-month old baby?

Neil, puzzled, looks hard at the baby.

NEIL
Well, I don’t know that I’m comfortable making that kind of judgement...

MARCIA
Don’t worry about it.
(kissing Neil)
Congratulations. The commercial is dynamite. Where’s Denise? She played such a great femme fatale.

NEIL
Yeah, I guess she didn’t show up. I think she thought the whole thing was kinda stupid.

Marcia and Buddy study Neil.

MARCIA
Neil, are you alright? You look like someone put a turd in your tuxedo.

Buddy points to the baby and looks at Marcia disapprovingly. Marcia rolls her eyes.
NEIL
I’m fine. Thank you. But I’m
totally fine.

Neil steps inside his office and shuts the door.

The smoked glass door has NEIL LEWIS, P.I. painted on the
front. Marcia and Buddy can see Neil standing on the other
side, silhouetted against the glass.

Neil’s silhouette leans back against the glass, then breaks
down in a silent sob, shuddering and biting his knuckle.

Marcia and Buddy look at each other in alarm, then look up
startled to hear Neil laughing on the other side. His face
is pressed against the glass.

NEIL (cont’d)
(from the other side)
I’m fine. Really. Get outta here.

EXT. OUTDOOR CAFE – DAY

A lovely woman sits at a table for two, looking at her watch.
It is DENISE, Neil’s gun moll from the commercial. She
fusses with her clothes.

Camera pulls back to reveal Neil, lurking at the edge of the
cafe, watching Denise from the shadows. He can’t seem to
make up his mind about whether to approach.

A WAITER walks up to him.

WAITER
Can I help you?

NEIL
Um, no that’s alright. Wait, you
know what? Yeah. You see that
woman in the tank top? I want you
to spill a glass of water on her.

WAITER
(psychéd)
What, like...on her breasts?

NEIL
No. In her lap. Just a little.

He takes the GLASS OF WATER off the waiter’s tray, takes a
sip, studies the level, takes another sip, studies the level
again, spits a little water back in, then puts it back.

He stuffs a five dollar bill in the waiter’s shirt, points
him toward Denise, and steps back in the shadows.
He watches intently from a distance as the waiter walks over toward Denise, stops to look back at Neil, then after he gets the go-ahead, stumbles, spilling a little bit of water onto Denise’s lap.

Denise jumps to her feet and makes a dramatic stink.

Neil watches the scene, shaking his head in disappointment. He approaches Denise just as she’s sitting back down.

    NEIL (cont’d)
    Hey. Sorry I’m late.

    DENISE
    I guess that’s what happens when you turn into a big tv star.

    NEIL
    What happened to your pants?

    DENISE
    Oh, it’s nothing.

The waiter comes over with a dry napkin for Denise.

    WAITER
    Again, I’m really sorry.

    DENISE
    Don’t be silly, Sweetie. Just a little water.

The waiter throws a wink at Neil, then disappears.

    NEIL
    You were a little hard on the waiter before.

Denise understands immediately. She looks at Neil, peeved.

    DENISE
    I get it. Another one of your games. Neil, what do you get out of hiring some goon to throw a pitcher of water in my face while you hide?...

    NEIL
    It was hardly a pitcher...

    DENISE
    ...while you hide in the bushes?

Neil can only smile and shrug.
DENISE (cont’d)
When you’re not sitting in front of some movie, you’re acting out some immature little game. If you want this thing to work, you’re really gonna have to grow up.

NEIL
Conversely, we could just stop seeing each other.

DENISE
What?

NEIL
Well, obviously you’re not happy with the way I am. And I am happy with the way I am. It’s what we call in the video store business a win-win situation.

DENISE
Wait a minute! I came here to tell you to get your shit together! You can’t turn this into breaking up with me!

NEIL
And yet here we are.

DENISE
I don’t believe this. The next thing, you’re gonna say “It’s not you. It’s me.”

NEIL
No, no. It’s definitely you. You’re not... enough like Katherine Ross in Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid.

DENISE
Oh, Jesus Christ, Neil. This is exactly what I’m talking about.

NEIL
She was so supportive. She didn’t make Paul Newman feel stupid. She went along with it.

DENISE
Well you know what, Neil? You can’t “go along with” somebody who’s totally going nowhere!

(MORE)
DENISE (cont'd)

Somebody who runs a shitty little video store that doesn't make any money, and spends his days hanging around with a bunch of dorks talking about “The Seventh Seal!”

Denise grabs her purse and gets up.

NEIL
I thought you liked “The Seventh Seal.”

DENISE
I was faking it, you sucker!
(putting on an interested face)
“Oh wow! This is Bergman? The imagery is so...powerful! What a genius! I’m SOOOOOO glad you made me watch this!”

She humphs and storms out of the restaurant just as the waiter returns to the table.

WAITER
Is everything alright?

Neil picks up a menu.

NEIL
Yeah, sure. I’ll have the roast beef sandwich with the au jus sauce.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Establishing shot of store exterior.

A SIGN hangs in front of the store. “PRISON MOVIES 2 FOR 1!”

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil is restocking movies while talking to Jonathan. Neil is wearing PRISON ISSUE STRIPPED SHIRT AND PANTS.

NEIL
I can’t keep sponsoring Monday night shows at the club.

JONATHAN
Aw, come on!

NEIL
I just can’t do it, man.
JONATHAN
But I’m gonna get killed on Mondays! Nobody comes out to see these local bands. These are shitty bands, man. Who wants to see a bunch of high school metalheads with names like Shittin’ Brix and Trojan Whores.

NEIL
Trojan Whores. I like that. Why don’t you just make Monday Ladies Night.

JONATHAN
Wednesday night is Ladies Night!

NEIL
Really? How’s that work out for ya?

JONATHAN
Not bad. 2 for 1 well drinks. You should check it out.

NEIL
I might.

JONATHAN
You gotta help me out. I’m taking a bath on these live shows.

NEIL
I can’t even afford new uniforms for the softball team. The other teams are laughing at us. It’s a joke.

JONATHAN
Shit, man.

Neil points to the film playing on the tv set. It’s Veronica Lake’s entrance in This Gun For Hire.

NEIL
Check this out. I love this entrance.

As they stare at the screen, another figure enters the store. The sexy scoring of the film matches the reveal of...

AN EQUALLY BEAUTIFUL, BUT SOMEWHAT ODD-LOOKING WOMAN. Her name is VIOLET. Fetching and confident, but as we make our way up, it looks like she may have gotten dressed in the dark. Green toenail polish. Brown, patchy corduroys, and a purple sleeveless t-shirt that reads Tickle Me.

She’s talking into one of those hands-free cell phones.
VIOLET
No, I don’t mind... I’m in the video store right now... No, it’s one of those little shitty ones...

Neil’s attention shifts dramatically from Veronica Lake to Violet.

Neil watches her peruse the aisles.

VIOLET (cont’d)
(talking into phone)
What do you think about “City of Lost Children?”

Neil steps out from behind a shelf and eagerly approaches.

NEIL
Ah! Excellent film! The same guy who made “Delicatessen.” Really amazing visual...

VIOLET
(to Neil)
I’m on the phone actually.

Neil stops in his tracks, then walks away sheepishly.

CUT TO:

ELSEWHERE IN THE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Neil is still putting movies away. Violet steps past him.

VIOLET
(into phone)
What’s the deal with “Casino?”

Neil instinctively addresses her.

NEIL
To be honest, I wouldn’t recommend it. It’s basically a poor man’s “Goodfellas”...

(off her blank stare)
...in...Vegas.

VIOLET
(into phone)
Hang on.
(to Neil)
I’m still on the phone.

Neil holds up his hands and backs away again.

CUT TO:
ELSEWHERE IN THE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Violet is holding a video box. She checks to see if the coast is clear before speaking into her phone.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    “Midnight Cowboy.” ... I don’t know. I’ve never seen it.

From the other side of the shelf...

    NEIL (O.S.)
    You’ve never seen “Midnight Cowboy?!”

Violet peeks her head around the aisle, where Neil is standing, looking guilty. He zips his lips shut.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - MOMENTS LATER

Neil is working behind the register. When his back is turned, Violet walks over and puts two tapes on the counter.

    VIOLET
    (to Neil)
    So which one should I rent?

When Neil turns around, Violet is digging around in her purse. The phone is still in her ear.

He looks at her, then goes back to work.

Violet looks up, annoyed.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    So, which one’s better?

When Neil looks up, Violet is looking at the two tapes. He still doesn’t know if she’s talking to him or the phone.

When Violet looks up at him, he’s just standing there, smiling.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    All of a sudden you’re a mute?

    NEIL
    Oh! Ha-ha. You’re talking to me.

    VIOLET
    Who else would I be talking to?

Neil looks at her cell phone, but decides to let it go.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    It’s for a friend who’s at home sick. Which one do you recommend?
NEIL
Well, what’s the matter with your friend?

VIOLET
Why?

NEIL
If your friend has the stomach flu and is gonna be running to the bathroom every five minutes, I’d recommend this one.

(holding up a tape)
But if your friend is just laying in bed, I’d go with this. But if your friend is on medication, like, say erythromycin...

VIOLET
You know what? Just surprise me.

Neil holds up the second tape.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Great. So how does this work?

NEIL
(jokey)
Well, you just stick this thing in the vcr...

VIOLET
Sounds easy enough. And what about this whole... transaction.

NEIL
What do you mean?

VIOLET
I’ve never been to one of these...
(looks around)
places.

NEIL
What? You’ve never been to a video store?

Violet smiles and shakes her head.

Neil looks around for somebody to get a load of this.

NEIL (cont’d)
Well, first you have to, uh.... you need to... You’ve never rented a movie?
VIOLET
I’ve been to a movie. Does that count?

Neil stares at her in disbelief.

NEIL
First you have to have a membership.

VIOLET
I knew there was a catch. Sounds like some kind of racket.

NEIL
Not really. You just have to give me your driver’s license.

VIOLET
I don’t have one.

NEIL
How do you get around?

VIOLET
I get around.

NEIL
I can’t give you a membership without a driver’s license.

VIOLET
Hm. What about a cash deposit? I’ll give you twenty bucks.

NEIL
Twenty bucks?

VIOLET
Yeah. Twenty American Dollars.

NEIL
You know, these old tapes are kinda hard to find....

VIOLET
Alright. Fifty bucks and I don’t wanna hear anything more about it.

She digs through her purse and pulls out a wad of cash.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Lucky for you, I saw my pimp today.

NEIL
Ha-ha! That’s “Fletch” right?
VIOLET
No. His name is Donald.

She tucks the money into his prison shirt.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Don’t blow it all on cigarettes and toilet wine.

Neil takes the cash out of his pocket and puts it in an envelope. He seals the envelope and slides it under the cash register.

NEIL
It’ll be right here.

Violet winks and strolls out of the store. Neil watches.

INT. NEIL’S HOUSE – DAY

Neil walks out of his bedroom, heading for the front door, carrying a softball bat and glove.

He wears a faded, tattered jersey with “Mean Machine” printed on the front, and the “Gumshoe Video” logo on the back.

When he points his remote to shut off the tv, he hesitates.

ON THE SCREEN, The Bad News Bears.

Neil looks at his screen, then at his watch. Then at the screen. Then at his watch.

He plops down on the couch in front of the tv.

EXT. HINOTE PARK – LATER

Neil steps out of his car. He can see that the game is over. His teammates sit on the bleachers chatting.

They are wearing SHARP NEW UNIFORMS. Black jerseys with “Mean Machine” written in bold red.

NEIL
Holy shit! Look at you guys!

A teammate, JAY, throws a jersey at Neil.

JAY
What happened to you?

NEIL
Something came up. Work stuff.

Neil admires the front of this nice new jersey.
JAY
Not too shabby, right?

NEIL
How did you pull this off?

JAY
Ah, you know. I’m a man who knows how to get things.

NEIL
I can’t tell you what a relief this is. I’ve been losing sleep over this.

JAY
Right on. Now all you have to worry about is that you hit like a girl and only show up half the time.

He punches Neil on the shoulder.

JAY (cont’d)
Come on. We’re going to The Cozy.

When the team turns leave, Neil stops in his tracks.

The backs of the jerseys are emblazoned with a gaudy logo: “MEDIA GIANT.”

Neil looks at the back of his own jersey. He looks like he’s been punched in the nuts.

NEIL
Are you kidding me?

JAY
I know! Double stitching!

Jay runs off to join the other guys.

Left behind, Neil shakes his head in defeat. He chuck the shirt in a trash can, gets in his car, and drives off.

INT. NEIL’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil sits on his couch in the dark. Watching an old black and white movie on tv while he talks on the phone.

NEIL
...well, keep the store open for another hour....yeah, sometimes you get the Stoner’s Rush around eleven...thanks, man.

He hangs up and settles in to the movie.
A FLASH OF MOTION at his window catches his eye. A SILHOUETTED FIGURE in the corner of the window. Then gone.

Neil bolts upright. Then heads for his back door.

EXT. NEIL’S HOUSE – NIGHT

Neil steps outside, looking around suspiciously. There’s nobody there.

He takes a long look around, then heads back inside.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO – DAY

In the coffeehouse section of the store, Neil shoots the shit with Jonathan, Lucien, Buddy and Marcia.

Violet walks into the store with her videotape.

She sees that nobody is behind the counter, then spots the gang assembled in the coffeehouse.

She peeks under the counter and sees that the envelope with her deposit is still tucked underneath.

She makes sure nobody is looking, then GRABS THE ENVELOPE. On it is written “weird chick. no drivers license.”

She smiles and slips the envelope into her purse.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey!

Violet looks up, startled. Neil approaches her.

NEIL
Hey. Did you like the movie?

VIOLET
Um, yeah.

He takes the movie from her, noticing that it is stopped in the middle of the tape. He gives her a stern look.

NEIL
Didn’t quite make it all the way through, huh?

VIOLET
(sheepish)
Yeah. Sorry.

NEIL
You wanna see something cool?

Before she can answer, Neil tosses the tape over to Lucien.
Lucien studies the tape intently, then passes it off to the others, who each, in turn, study where the tape is stopped.

When they’ve all finished, Marcia steps up.

MARCIA
OK. She stopped it where Clancy follows the professor to the nightclub.

BUDDY
No. It’s the scene at the race track.

JONATHAN
Pfff. Please. It’s obviously where the goons jump Clancy back at his apartment.

Lucien takes the tape away from Jonathan and stands up, pacing around like a lawyer.

LUCIEN
Yes, those are all very interesting theories. But I don’t think so. I believe that the movie is stopped at the scene in the drug store, just as Baxter confesses to killing the gypsy.

BUDDY
That’s crazy. Who would stop it just as Baxter is about to confess?

LUCIEN
Precisely! She wouldn’t. She’d be dying to know who killed the gypsy. And so I put it to you, ladies and gentlemen, that she FELL ASLEEP before the gypsy got murdered! She then WOKE UP during the scene in the drug store. And not being able to appreciate the irony of Baxter having killed the one person who could clear his name, she shut it off.

Lucien tosses the tape back to Neil, who jumps over the counter and pops the tape into the vcr.

Everyone stands back and looks at the tv monitor.

ON THE SCREEN IN BLACK AND WHITE
A FRANTIC, DISHEVELLED MAN addresses TWO DETECTIVES.
FRANTIC MAN
Alright! I did it! I killed the gypsy! Are you happy?!

He breaks down sobbing.

BACK IN THE STORE

Marcia, Buddy, Jonathan and Neil break into applause.

Lucien takes a theatrical bow.

VIOLET
OK. Now I’m scared.

Neil takes the tape out of the vhs and starts fishing for the envelope under the register.

NEIL
Pretty cool, yeah? Well, I’m still gonna have to charge you full price, even though you only watched half...

He grows concerned when he can’t find the envelope. He lifts up the register. Then yells to the gang.

NEIL (cont’d)
Hey. Did somebody take an envelope from under the register? A white envelope? Written on the front was....
   (looks at Violet)
   ...nothing at all.

The others just shrug.

NEIL (cont’d)
I... um... can’t seem to put my hands on that deposit of yours.

VIOLET
Hmm. And this is where you offer me fifty dollars worth of movie rentals.

NEIL
Hey, that’s not a bad idea.

VIOLET
No offense, but I don’t think I’ll really use it.

Neil reaches for his wallet, grumbling.

NEIL
You could rent a lot of great movies for fifty bucks...
VIOLET
Why don’t you just take me out for a fifty dollar dinner?

NEIL
Oh.

VIOLET
It’s just an idea. I guess I could take the cash as well.

NEIL
No. No. That would be great. I can write it off as a business dinner.
(waits for laugh. nope.)
What about tonight?

VIOLET
Sure.

NEIL
I just have to see if any of these guys can cover for me.

They look over to the lounge, where the rest of the gang are planted on a couch, playing Trivial Pursuit. Jonathan has just pulled out a case of beer.

NEIL (cont’d)
Shouldn’t be a problem. There’s a place called Lightsides. Can you meet me there at 8?

VIOLET
Done.

NEIL
Done.

VIOLET
Violet.

NEIL
Neil.

Violet gives him a wave and backs out of the store.

INT. NEIL’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil is grooming himself in the mirror while he watches an old 1950’s hygiene film on tv.

NARRATOR
...Yes, nothing makes a good first impression like a clean scalp.
Neil parts his hair and inspects his scalp. Looks good.

NARRATOR (cont’d)
And having fresh breath just might
get you invited home to meet Mom
and Dad!

NEIL
Oooo.

He takes a swig of Listerine.

EXT. LIGHTSIDES RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Violet walks down the street toward the restaurant.

INT. LIGHTSIDES RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Violet looks around the restaurant. She doesn’t see Neil. She checks her watch and plops down at a table.

She then looks out the window and spots Neil parking his car.

Violet quickly gets up, rushes to a nearby table, and grabs SEVEN OR EIGHT used wine glasses that haven’t been bussed yet.

AT THE ENTRANCE

Neil looks around. When he finally finds Violet, a look of bewilderment crosses his face.

He approaches Violet tentatively.

Violet is slouched in a booth with seven or eight empty wine glasses in front of her.

VIOLET
(in a shit-faced voice)
Well, well, well. Look who decided
to finally show up for our date.

NEIL
Um...I’m only three minutes late.

VIOLET
Nah, nah. Don’t sweat it, kid.
You got a business to run.

She pats the seat next to her. Neil gingerly sits.

VIOLET (cont’d)
I gotta tell you though. Ya missed
one hell of a Happy Hour. They got
the best goddamn peanuts in town.
She slaps him on the back.

NEIL
So I guess you’ve been here awhil...

VIOLET
OK, so enough with the chit chat. We going back to your place or what? I bet you got a waterbed.

Neil is taken aback.

NEIL
Looks like you haven’t eaten yet. Maybe we should get some food in you...

VIOLET
That’s right. I bet you got some whipped cream and strawberries back at the love shack, right Tiger?

NEIL
Listen. Why don’t I drive you home, or call a cab for you. I just don’t think going back to my place is a great idea.

VIOLET
You’re sure you don’t wanna take me home? I mean, just look at me. I’m wasted. It’d be like shooting fish in a barrel.

NEIL
I think that you are a very attractive woman. Really. But, come on? What kind of guy would I be if I took you home and took advantage of you?

Violet smiles at him, genuinely touched, and breaks out of her drunk routine.

VIOLET
You are such a nice guy, Neil. I’m gonna cry.

Neil stares at her, confused.

VIOLET (cont’d)
You have no idea how many guys bite on that act. It’s just really refreshing to meet such a decent person these days.

A waiter stops by.
WAITER
Can I get you folks something to drink?

VIOLET
I’ll have a vodka and soda.

The waiter looks to Neil, who is perplexed and keeps looking back at Violet.

NEIL
I uh... I will uh...

Violet looks sympathetically at the waiter. She points to all the wine glasses, then to Neil, then makes the drinky-drinky gesture.

NEIL (cont’d)
I think I’ll have a screwdriver.

CUT TO:

HOURS LATER

Neil and Violet sit at the table, more relaxed. Empty plates and glasses are strewn across the table.

NEIL (cont’d)
...so I thought that there’d always be a market, you know, a group of customers who wanted something a little more personal, more intimate...

VIOLET
Sure.

NEIL
Plus, these big places don’t even carry more than a few old films. Hardly any b-movies. Sci-fi? New Wave? Forget about it.

VIOLET
That’s a bummer.

NEIL
And then I just found out that there’s gonna be another Media Giant store less than a mile away.

VIOLET
Did they send a bunch of guys in suits over with cash in their briefcases? Try to buy you out?
NEIL
They don’t need to buy me out. I’m not really a threat.

VIOLET
They didn’t have goons come over with crowbars to push you out of the neighborhood?

NEIL
Uh, no.

VIOLET
Too bad. I bet that’d be exciting.

NEIL
Yeah. I guess so.

Neil gives her a look as he signals for the check.

NEIL (cont’d)
(trying to joke)
Well, I guess we’ve just about eaten fifty dollars worth of food.

VIOLET
Not so fast, big boy. You owe ME a fifty dollar dinner. I put my own tally at about thirty-seven bucks. I may have been born at night, but I wasn’t born last night.

She waves the waiter over.

VIOLET (cont’d)
I will have the Brownie Sundae and a cup of coffee, and...
(trying to joke)
...a piece of Key Lime Pie.

The waiter walks off.

VIOLET (cont’d)
(to Neil)
So what are we gonna do about those assholes over at that big video store?

EXT. MEDIA GIANT VIDEO - NIGHT

Neil and Violet stand in front of a strip mall, looking at the glass facade of the enormous video store. Neil scowls at it with disgust.

NEIL
See, the thing is, I assumed most people would feel like I do.

(MORE)
But it turns out that most people just want to drive to the closest store and pick up a copy of the latest Tom Cruise movie...

While Neil is ranting about the store, Violet bends down, picks up a FIST-SIZED ROCK and reaches back to throw it at the store window.

NEIL (cont’d)
...there just aren’t that many people who come in for a leisurely look around. Maybe talk about Kubrick...hey!

He grabs Violet’s wrist just as she’s about to let fly.

NEIL (cont’d)  
Jesus!

VIOLET
What?

NEIL
Let’s get out of here.

VIOLET
Come on. Let’s at least go inside.

NEIL
Nah. That’s alright.

She takes his hand and leads him into the store.

INT. MEDIA GIANT VIDEO - CONTINUOUS

Neil and Violet walk in and marvel at the vast, sterile interior. Neil shakes his head.

NEIL
Watch this.

Neil turns and addresses A CLERK behind the counter.

NEIL (cont’d)  
Excuse me. Which “Invasion of the Body Snatchers” would you recommend? The 1956 or 1978 version?

CLERK
(without looking up)
We’re closing in a few minutes.

Neil flips off the oblivious clerk with both fingers. Violet leads him away.
Violet walks Neil to the back of the store. She walks into the EMPLOYEES ONLY door.

Neil looks back at the clerk, sees that he still hasn’t looked up at them, then follows.

INT. EMPLOYEES ONLY ROOM OF MEDIA GIANT - NIGHT

Neil walks into the back room just in time to see Violet sneak into a UTILITY CLOSET. She peaks her head out and waves him over. He hesitates, then steps in the closet.

Violet closes the door behind them, leaving them cramped together in the dark.

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

Neil is pressed up against Violet.

NEIL
Why are we hiding inside a...

VIOLET
Shhht. After he’s gone, we’ll go out and switch the dvds so that they’re all in the wrong boxes.

NEIL
Are you kidding? We’ll be here all night.

VIOLET
Well, it would’ve only taken a second to chuck a rock through the window, smart guy.

INT. MEDIA GIANT VIDEO - LATER

The clerk makes a pass through the store, locks the front door, then ducks into the employee room.

He comes back out a few seconds later, holding his tupperware.

He shuts off the lights, then leaves through the back exit.

EXT. MEDIA GIANT VIDEO STORE - NIGHT

Establishing shot of the darkened video store.
INT. MEDIA GIANT VIDEO STORE

Violet and Neil hang out in the family section, switching dvds. Neil keeps looking over his shoulder.

VIOLET
“Bambi.” Put something really dirty in here.

NEIL
(hands her a dvd)
Here you go. And don’t call me Bambi.


NEIL (cont’d)
So, we never really got to talk about you so much. I don’t even know what you do for work.

VIOLET
Mm. I’m trying to find something I really like.

NEIL
What was your last job?

VIOLET
Doing a little of this. A little of that.

NEIL
What is it that you want to do?

VIOLET
I don’t know. Something exciting. Have you noticed how most jobs get boring pretty quick?

NEIL
Well, I’d hire you myself, but it looks like you’d totally fuck up my inventory.

Neil stops, then cocks his head. He moves toward the window.

VIOLET
What’s wrong?

NEIL
I think maybe I hear...

SIRENS! TWO COP CARS with lights flashing, scream into the parking lot.

Neil is frozen for a second, then he races for the back door.
He tries to leap a display of video games, catches his foot, and goes flying into a shelf of new releases.

Violet helps him up and they race for the back exit, stopping only so that Violet can push over another shelf of movies.

EXT. BEHIND MEDIA GIANT VIDEO - CONTINUOUS

Neil and Violet burst from the store’s back exit. They look both ways, and see the FLASHING LIGHTS from one of the cop cars coming around the corner. They bolt down the alley.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Neil and Violet haul ass. When they look back, they see cop car lights about to turn the corner behind them. They cut down a side street, run across a lawn, and hop the fence, landing in a back yard.

EXT. SOMEONE’S BACK YARD - NIGHT

Neil and Violet sit up against a wooden fence, panting. After a while the reflection of the cops’ lights passes. Neil is clutching his chest.

NEIL
I think I’m having a heart attack.

They sit there catching their breath as the sound of sirens becomes more and more distant.

NEIL (cont’d)

VIOLET
(holding her stomach)
Ungh. Why did I eat all that dessert?

Neil starts to calm. He laughs.

NEIL
That was fun.

VIOLET
Yeah. Not bad for a Tuesday.

NEIL
So, if we can make it back to the car, can I give you a ride home?
VIOLET
You go. I think we ought to split up for the night.

NEIL
Oh, Okay. What are you gonna do?

VIOLET
I think I’ll just lay low until the heat dies down.

NEIL
You’re just gonna hang out in this yard?

VIOLET
I’ll be fine. It won’t be so bad. There’s probably a frisbee around here somewhere.

She unzips his jacket, turns it inside out, and puts it back on him.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Look at that. A whole new guy. Just remember, if they catch you, deny everything.

Violet helps him to his feet.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Well, Neil, you’ve certainly given me a lot to think about. I’ll never rent from that store again. And not just because they’ll almost certainly have our picture up behind the counter.

Before Neil can say anything, Violet gives him a boost up over the fence.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

Neil lands on the grass and checks for cops.

From behind him, a whisper...

VIOLET (O.S.) (cont’d)
Hey! Hey, Neil!

Neil squints through the dark and finally spots Violet’s mouth, visible through a knothole down low in the fence.

NEIL
Yeah?
VIOLET
We forgot the goodnight kiss. I mean, you know, if you wanted a goodnight kiss...

NEIL
Yeah, sure.

Neil gets down on his hands and knees, looks around twice, then puts his mouth to the knothole. Nothing.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

Violet laughs at Neil’s puckered mouth through the knothole.

NEIL (cont’d)
(through the knothole)
Um, hello?

Violet smiles and gives him a quick kiss through the hole.

VIOLET
Catch you later.

ON NEIL’S SIDE

Neil waves at the fence, then steps away.

He gives an odd, puzzled look back at the fence, then cautiously walks off down the street.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO PARKING LOT – DAY

Neil is standing in the dirt parking lot, playing basketball with Jonathan. They have to maneuver around parked cars to make certain shots.

NEIL
I tell you what, though. I’ve never had a first date like that.

JONATHAN
Sounds like she might be crazy. Was she, like, muttering to herself?

NEIL
No.

JONATHAN
So she’s not schizophrenic. What about wild mood swings?

NEIL
No, she was pretty consistently Out There.
JONATHAN
Then she’s not bi-polar. What about an unusual tendency to count things?

NEIL
Are we gonna play this game where you name every diagnosis just to show me how much you know about psychology? I really don’t think she’s crazy.

JONATHAN
You gonna go out with her again?

NEIL
Who knows? I don’t have a phone number. I don’t know where she lives...

AN ANGRY CUSTOMER peers his head around the corner.

ANGRY CUSTOMER
Hey! Does anybody work at this friggin’ place? Or do I just leave money on the counter?

JONATHAN
(to Neil)
I got this.

NEIL
Thanks, man.

Neil takes a shot that hits off the rim and rolls underneath Jonathan’s Plymouth.

He’s digging for the ball under the car when he sees A PAIR OF SANDALED FEET, wearing green nail polish.

He grabs the ball, gets to his feet and brushes the dirt off the front of his t-shirt.

Violet is standing there, admiring him.

NEIL (cont’d)
Hey.

VIOLET
Hey. I was looking for you inside, but your store was totally empty. It was creepy. I thought maybe it was one of your little promotional deals. Like you were having a special on post-apocalyptic movies.

NEIL
Nah. Just passing the time.
He executes a stylish lay up and shoots her a wink.

**VIOLET**
Do you know how to dunk-slam it?

Violet puts down her bag, picks up the ball and dribbles it with zero style.

**NEIL**
I can “dunk-slam” it on a good day.

Violet takes the ball in both hands, looks around at invisible defenders, does a full 360 DEGREE SPIN on one foot, then throws the ball as hard as she can against the side of the store. BOOM. Neil flinches.

**NEIL (cont’d)**
Except it’s called a “slam dunk.”

**VIOLET**
I wanna learn how to do it.

She cocks back like a pitcher and throws the ball dangerously hard against the backboard. It comes back fast and careens off the Plymouth. Neil tries to casually stop it with his foot before it rolls back to her, but she’s too fast.

**NEIL**
Well, you know, you gotta take these things in small steps. Today you learned that it’s actually called a “slam dunk.” Next time we... can... move on to...

He starts to edge away as she cocks the ball again.

**INT. VIDEO STORE - SAME TIME**

Jonathan moves along the wall, investigating these noises...

BAM! 6 or 7 videotapes fly off the wall at him. He jumps backward.

**EXT. VIDEO STORE PARKING LOT - DAY**

Violet dribbles the ball again. Neil has moved safely behind the Plymouth.

Violet scrambles up onto the bed of a pickup truck and takes a few paces away from the basket.

**VIOLET**
This one’s for all the marbles!
The World Finals! Five...four...three...two...ONE!
She TAKES A RUNNING LEAP off the edge of the truck bed.

NEIL
Hey. No.

Neil cringes as she flies through the air and STUFFS THE BALL through with both hands, then hangs on the rim.

VIOLET
CUBS WIN!!! CUBS WIN!!!

Neil steps back around Jonathan’s car and stares up at Violet as she dangles.

NEIL
The ball has to be in the air when the clock runs out. You counted down the clock and THEN you jumped off the truck. The game was already over.

VIOLET
I thought as long as the player was in the air when time runs out.

NEIL
No. It’s the ball.

VIOLET
I’m pretty sure it’s the player.

NEIL
(laughing)
It’s the ball.... You can come down now.

VIOLET
No. Why don’t YOU come up here? It’s nice. You’d like it.

NEIL
Isn’t it killing your hands?

VIOLET
Yeah. But I can see for miles.

She takes a long, lingering look around, then drops to the dirt. Viola.

They sit on the bed of the truck.

VIOLET (cont’d)
You wanna go pool hopping?

NEIL
Uh, no.
Silence. Neil looks down at her purse and can’t help but notice a pair of binoculars peeking out.

NEIL (cont’d)
You carry binoculars?

VIOLET
Oh yeah. You’d be surprised how often these babies come in handy.

Violet holds the binoculars to her eyes and looks around.

VIOLET (cont’d)
People are doing all sorts of nasty things in the privacy of their homes. Seems unfair that we shouldn’t get a peek at it, right?

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. MEDIA GIANT VIDEO STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

Violet and Neil are sitting on a bench at the far end of the strip mall from the Media Giant store.

Violet has her binoculars trained on the glass facade of the video store.

THROUGH THE BINOCULARS

Someone who looks like a store manager is talking to a uniformed cop.

VIOLET
It looks like the manager is saying that they still can’t seem to find anything missing. And it looks like the cop is saying well maybe they were just kids having some fun. And the manager is saying that from the security tapes, they don’t really look like kids, although the female culprit seemed quite fetching and I suppose she could pass for a college student in a TV show, and the cop is like, “Yes. She was quite beautiful, in a unique and fascinating way. Almost like the sunrise on a misty morning...”

NEIL
Isn’t this how they catch most people? Returning to the scene? Why don’t we go back to my store? We can watch a movie.
VIOLET
Always with the movies. You know, that’s the difference between you and me. I mean, I like you Neil, but clearly you’re content to sit around and watch. Me, I have to be doing things.

Long pause as she peers through her binoculars again.

VIOLET (cont’d)
And I realize that what I’m doing right now is sitting around watching somebody. So don’t bother pointing out the irony.

NEIL
Don’t get me wrong. I thought last night was really exciting. And I guess this is kind of exciting, seeing how we’re definitely gonna get busted sitting here. But I just don’t think I need this excitement on, you know, consecutive days.

Violet watches as the uniformed cop leaves the video store and gets in his cruiser.

She puts the binoculars back in her purse and smiles at Neil.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Neil and Violet walk.

NEIL
Where did you grow up?

VIOLET

NEIL
Wow. That sounds incredibly...

VIOLET
Exciting?

NEIL
I was gonna say “made up.” Where’d you go to school?

VIOLET
“Miss Stern’s School For Young Women.”
NEIL
Mmm. That sounds hot.

VIOLET
Oh yeah. We all wore baby-doll pajamas and had pillow fights every night. And when Miss Stern caught us, she doused us all with baby oil.

NEIL
Terrific.

Neil looks around the neighborhood.

NEIL (cont’d)
So you live around here somewhere?

VIOLET
No. Did you think we were headed back to my place? Slow down, Casanova.

NEIL
No. I was just hoping to get confirmation that you actually live here somewhere. I can’t shake this feeling that you’re just blowing through town with the carnival.

VIOLET
I can’t give out my address to just anybody. I’m sure you understand.

They reach an intersection. Violet stops.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Well, I gotta go do stuff.

NEIL
Well, thanks for stopping by. Maybe you’ll stop by again some time.

VIOLET
Nah, I think I’m ready to give you my phone number.

She fishes pen and paper out of her bag. She writes down her number and hands it to him.

VIOLET (cont’d)
I want you to be very careful with this number, Neil.
NEIL
I’ll memorize it and then eat the paper. How’s that sound?

VIOLET
(spesious)
I wouldn’t recommend it. It’s scented notepaper. I think you’d be better off flushing it down the toilet.

NEIL
Oh. I wasn’t actually gonna do that. But I can, definitely flush it, if that’s what you want.

VIOLET
You’re a sweetheart.

She kisses him on the cheek, and strolls off down the road. Neil watches her go.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil sits with Jonathan and Lucien in the coffeehouse section of the store, watching a movie.

LUCIEN
So what are you gonna do when this place goes tits-up?

NEIL
It won’t happen for a couple years. Until people can get any movie they want beamed into their tv set. Then I’m dead meat.

LUCIEN
You can always go back to school. Look at me. I have absolutely no concept of the real world.

JONATHAN
I think you need to find a way to supplement your business. Why don’t you make this place a singles club? People can come here at night, tell you their favorite films, and you can use that information to match them up with the perfect mate.

LUCIEN
Right! Women will pay you a hundred bucks, and no matter what they tell you, you’ll just give them Jonathan’s or my phone number.
NEIL
Give me a break. If I set you up with some woman who liked Ben Affleck, you’d push her out of a moving car.

LUCIEN
I don’t know. Is she hot?

JONATHAN
This is what you gotta do. You’ve gotta turn this place into a late-night underground casino.

NEIL
What?

JONATHAN
I’ve been reading about this. Lots of towns have secret gambling clubs. They say these places take in fifty thousand a night.

NEIL
But if it’s a secret club, how would anybody know to come?

JONATHAN
You’d let it leak out. Word of mouth.

NEIL
Then it’s not a secret anymore. You’d get busted.

JONATHAN
You’d have a secret password. Like “Ice Station Zebra.” Or “Rosebud.”

LUCIEN
Don’t you think “Rosebud” might be a little cliche?

NEIL
How would you let people know what the password is?

JONATHAN
You’d let it leak out, what the password is.

NEIL
Then it wouldn’t be a secret password! You’d get busted.

Long pause.
JONATHAN
Dude, I think you’re overanalyzing this whole thing.

TWO BIG GUYS IN JACKET AND TIE come into the store.

JACKET AND TIE 1
Excuse me. We’re looking for Neil Lewis. The guy who owns this place.

NEIL
That’s me.

JACKET AND TIE 2
I’m Detective Loewenstein and this is Detective Barlow. We were wondering if we could have a word with you in private.

NEIL
Yeah. Of course. Um, why don’t we go into my office?

Neil stifles a look of panic. He turns to the guys.

NEIL (cont’d)
Can you guys hold down the fort?

Neil leads the detectives back to his office.

Jonathan and Lucien exchange looks. Lucien whispers.

LUCIEN
And you don’t think we live in a totalitarian society? All you have to do is talk about opening a secret gambling club, and the cops crack down.

JONATHAN
Shut up.

INT. NEIL’S OFFICE - DAY

Neil’s private office has clearly been modeled after Sam Spade. A maltese falcon is perched on his desk.

NEIL
So what can I do for you fellas?

The detectives look around the office.

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
So you own and operate this store?
NEIL
I do.

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
And you have just this one store?

Neil nods.

DETECTIVE BARLOW
So it must be tough for you with all these big franchise video stores springing up every day? It must really tick you off that these big guys are driving you out of business.

Tense silence.

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
What’s the deal with the costumes?

Barlow points to NEIL’S RACK OF PROMOTIONAL COSTUMES.

NEIL
I use them for promotions, you know? If I’m having a special on classic horror films, I might dress up as Bela Lugosi. Or if I’m...

DETECTIVE BARLOW
I think you like to play games, you little cocksucker.

Neil just about chokes.

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
We’re not gonna beat around the bush with you, Mr. Lewis. We know that you vandalized the Media Giant video store on Tuesday night.

DETECTIVE BARLOW
You’re in a shitload of trouble, Shitface.

NEIL
Wait. I...uh...

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
You’re actually in a very fortunate situation. The person we’re more interested in is your accomplice.

NEIL
Accomplice? I was...we were just...
DETECTIVE BARLOW
Cut the mealy-mouthed act, shithead. We want to talk about the girl.

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
We’re willing to let you slide on this thing if you can just tell us where we can find the girl.

NEIL
Why? I mean, I barely know her. How come you’re looking for her? What did she do?

DETECTIVE BARLOW
You don’t ask the goddamn questions! WE ask the questions!

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
You don’t need to know what she did, Mr. Lewis. What you need is to tell us where we can locate her.

NEIL
I don’t know where she lives! I swear!

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
You obviously have some way of reaching her. A phone number maybe?

Neil hesitates.

NEIL
I...I don’t. She never gave me a phone number.

DETECTIVE BARLOW
So you two just communicate through mental telepathy? Is that what you want us to believe?

NEIL
She just came into the store! And then we met up at a restaurant. And then we went to Media Giant.

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
So you’re willing to go to jail. And lose your business. In order to protect this girl that you hardly know...
DETECTIVE BARLOW

Enough of this shit! You’re gonna
tell us how to find this girl, or
the only costume you’re gonna be
wearing is...

He looks at the clothes rack and sees Neil’s jailbird outfit.

DETECTIVE BARLOW (cont’d)
...this one!

Detective Barlow moves toward Neil, unzipping his pants.

NEIL
What are you doing?!

DETECTIVE BARLOW
You know damn well what I’m doing!

NEIL
No I don’t!

DETECTIVE BARLOW
(reaching in his pants)
Oh, I think you know!

NEIL
God, I really don’t know!

DETECTIVE LOEWENSTEIN
(to Detective Barlow)
Don’t do it, Tony!

DETECTIVE BARLOW
Out of my way, Rick!

Detective Barlow shoves Detective Loewenstein to the ground
and advances on Neil, who looks terrified and baffled.

As Neil backs into a corner, he hears the sound of FEMALE
LAUGHTER, coming from outside his office door.

He looks over at the glass door and can make out the
silhouette of a woman roaring with glee.

Detectives Barlow and Loewenstein start laughing.

The door opens and Violet steps in, wiping a tear.

NEIL
What the hell is this?

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

"Detectives" Loewenstein and Barlow are about to drive off. Violet slaps the top of their car. Loewenstein and Barlow drive off, still chuckling.
Violet turns to Neil, who is standing with his arms crossed.

VIOLET
I met Tony at a Karaoke bar and
Rick is my next door neighbor.
Don’t they look like cops?

Neil doesn’t say anything.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Oh, come on. You can’t be mad
about that.

NEIL
Are you kidding? I thought I was
going to jail! I thought I was
gonna lose the store!

VIOLET
Right! Wasn’t it wild?

NEIL
I thought that guy was gonna... do
something to me!

VIOLET
You thought he was gonna bugger
you?

NEIL
Yeah.

Violet starts laughing again. She puts her arms around him and kisses him.

VIOLET
But you didn’t give them my phone
number. Even though you thought
you were gonna get buggered.

NEIL
(warming)
Well, I didn’t really think I was
gonna get buggered. I mean, the
whole good cop-bad cop routine was
a little over the top.

VIOLET
You were so brave.

Violet kisses him again.

VIOLET (cont’d)
I have to go home and take care of
some stuff.

NEIL
Of course.
VIOLET
No, really.

NEIL
At least let me give you a ride.

VIOLET
No. I like to walk. It gives me time to think up devious ways to drive you crazy. What are you doing tomorrow?

NEIL
I don’t know, Violet. I should probably spend some time in the store. We actually do a little business on Fridays...

VIOLET
I’ll come visit you. You can teach me the difference between thrillers and chillers.

Before he can answer, she kisses him and runs off.

Neil walks back into the store. Lucien and Jonathan watch.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO – DAY

JONATHAN
So what the hell was that all about?

Neil looks back out and watches Violet walk down the street.

NEIL
Can you guys watch the store for awhile?

EXT. STREET – DAY

Violet walks along, smiling and swinging her purse.

Behind her and across the street, a head pops up from behind a car. It’s Neil. He watches her turn a corner.

Neil looks both ways, then follows.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET – DAY

Neil sneaks from car to car. Ducking behind one, then the next, keeping Violet in his sight.

He dashes across a lawn, then flattens himself against a tree.
He peeks around the tree when...

VOICE (O.S.)
NEIL!

He jumps. Then sees his friends Marcia and Buddy on the sidewalk with their baby in a stroller.

MARCIA
What are you doing?

He waves them off, but they push their stroller over to him.

BUDDY
This is good. You can settle an argument.

MARCIA
(to Buddy)
It’s not really an argument.

BUDDY
(to Marcia)
Well it’s a difference of opinion anyway...

NEIL
(sneaking a look at Violet)
Shhh! What? What is it?

He sees that Violet has turned one block up. He takes off after her.

Buddy and Marcia push the stroller along with him.

MARCIA
What are you doing, Neil?

NEIL
I’m following a girl. And it’s kind of important. So what’s up?

BUDDY
I think that the baby should wear sunglasses so she doesn’t stare at the sun and go blind.

NEIL
(to Marcia)
And you think that’s stupid.

MARCIA
Why would a baby stare at the sun?

BUDDY
Why wouldn’t a baby stare at the sun?
Neil catches sight of Violet again.

    BUDDY (cont’d)
    (too loud)
    A baby doesn’t know any better.

Up ahead, Violet starts to turn around.

    NEIL
    Get down!

The three of them hit the deck.

Violet turns around, takes a long look at the unaccompanied baby stroller, then keeps walking.

ON THE GROUND

    NEIL (cont’d)
    Goddamnit, Buddy. You’re killing me here. A baby wouldn’t stare into the sun any more than it would hold its breath until it dropped dead.

    MARCIA
    Thank you.

    NEIL
    (to Marcia)
    Is this what married life is like?

Neil steals a look, then gets to his feet.

He sees Violet up ahead and takes off after her.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Neil spies from behind a car. He watches as Violet peels off the sidewalk and approaches A SHITTY, DILAPIDATED OLD HOUSE.

Violet pulls out a set of keys, opens the door and heads in.

EXT. SHITTY OLD HOUSE

Neil creeps around the side of the house. He edges up to a window and looks inside.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Violet stands in a dingy kitchen, surrounded by AT LEAST A DOZEN CATS. They rub against her leg as she pulls cat food out of the cabinet.

A look of sympathetic anguish crosses Neil’s face as he watches her.
He moves along the side of the house, looking into another window.

He shudders at the sight of a grimy, cramped bathroom, then moves along to another window.

Looking inside, Neil takes in the depressing scene....

Chintzy furniture, scratched up by the cats. Crappy looking antiques. An old tv sitting on top of a card table.

Neil lets out a long sigh, when...

BOO! Violet pops up on the other side of the window, scaring the shit out of Neil and sending him on his ass.

He looks up and sees Violet smiling through the window.

VIOLET
(through the window)
You’d be a lousy spy, Neil.

Neil gets up and walks over. He yells into the window.

NEIL
(embarrassed)
I... I’m sorry. I had no idea that you... I just... Listen. It’s gonna be alright. I’m totally cool with this...

VIOLET
Wipe that look of pity off your face. It’s not my house.

NEIL
It’s not?

VIOLET
My place is a dump, but trust me it’s a step up from this place.

NEIL
Oh.

VIOLET
Give me a minute to finish feeding these... things. I’ll be right out.

Neil smiles and nods. He dusts himself off and walks around to the front of the house.

Violet steps out, locks the door, and takes Neil’s arm.
VIOLET (cont’d)
I sneak over every now and then to make sure Mrs. Calman doesn’t forget to feed them. I have this fear that one day I’ll walk in and find them eating her fingers and toes.

Violet walks him across the street to A MUCH NICER, BUT STILL MODEST HOUSE.

INT. VIOLET’S HOUSE – NIGHT

Violet and Neil lounge on pillows on the floor of Violet’s faux-Arabian living room, drinking wine.

NEIL
I should have known it wasn’t your place when I saw the tv set.

VIOLET
I have a tv set. Look.

She points to an old tv set in the corner behind them. The picture tube has been replaced with a fish tank. A FEW EXOTIC LOOKING FISH swim back and forth.

NEIL
Do you ever think that if you had a real tv, you wouldn’t need to go around playing out all these little adventures?

VIOLET
I like to think that because I lead a life of adventure, that I don’t need a tv.

Neil thinks about this.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Besides, what has television got that I haven’t got?

NEIL
Game shows.

VIOLET
I have a Monopoly set here somewhere. Except all the pieces are missing except the top hat and the little dog.

NEIL
ESPN Classic.
VIOLET
I don’t know what that is.

NEIL
I’ve got something called The Space
Channel.

Violet reaches for a dimmer switch and turns down the lights. Glow-in-the-dark stars appear on the ceiling.

Violet pulls herself close as they look up at the stars.

NEIL (cont’d)
I also happen to have a wide assortment of pornographic channels on my cable package.

They share a long look.

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Neil, shirtless, leans back on Violet’s bed. A second later, Violet, also topless, crawls on top of him. They kiss.
**(music: Yo La Tengo’s “Little Eyes.”)**

EXT. SWIMMING POOL – DAY

Neil and Violet are grab-assing in a pool. They get out and towel off quickly. They throw on shirts, and Neil keeps a lookout as Violet hops over the fence and out of the yard. Neil follows.

EXT. A FRONT YARD – CONTINUOUS

Neil and Violet make sure the coast is clear, then make their way across the yard and down the sidewalk.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD – CONTINUOUS

Neil and Violet chat comfortably as they walk down the street, towelling themselves.

Neil and Violet get into his car. They drive away, still in conversation.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO – DAY

Neil exits the store and is about to get into his car, when Marcia and Buddy (baby in tow) stop him.

MARCIA
Hey Neil. What’re you doing?
NEIL
(cagey)
I’m, going to the park.

MARCIA
We were gonna take the baby to the park! We’ll go together.

NEIL
Oh. Well, I’m supposed to be meeting somebody.

BUDDY
The new girlfriend!

MARCIA
The one you were stalking the other day?

Pause.

NEIL
Yes.

MARCIA
Oh, I want to meet her, Neil. Please?

EXT. HINOTE PARK – DAY

Neil, Marcia, Buddy, and baby all pile out of Neil’s car.

They find Violet. She gets up when she sees them.

While Marcia and Buddy pull out the stroller, Neil moves ahead to get in a word with Violet.

VIOLET
(so pleased)
You brought friends.

They kiss. Violet sniffs at him.

VIOLET (cont’d)
You nervous about something? You have that stinky breath that people get when they’re nervous.

NEIL
(quietly stern)
Yeah. These guys are really nice, quiet people, okay? So, you know... please. They have a baby, so they can’t really be getting chased by cops or anything, alright?
VIOLET
Oh, Neil.

Violet greets the family warmly.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Hi!

MARCIA AND BUDDY
Hi!

NEIL
Violet, this is Marcia and Buddy.

MARCIA
It’s so nice to meet you.

VIOLET
We actually kinda met back in the store. Returning a movie. You guys guessed where I stopped it.

MARCIA
Right!

VIOLET
(beaming at the baby)
And who is this?

BUDDY
This is Emerson.

VIOLET
Oh my god. Can I hold him?

MARCIA
Of course!

Marcia tries to pass the baby to Violet. Neil, nervous, tries to intercept the hand-off.

NEIL
I want to hold the baby!

MARCIA
Neil!

Marcia elbows Neil aside and hands the baby to Violet.

MARCIA (cont’d)
I know we’re butting in on your date, but we really wanted to meet you.

VIOLET
Don’t be silly.
She gestures to a BLANKET and PICNIC BASKET laid out on the grass nearby.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    There’s plenty of food.

They walk over to the blanket.

    NEIL
    You made food?

Violet winks at him. Neil looks at her suspiciously.

They all hunker down on the blanket. Behind them, A YOUNG COUPLE plays frisbee. It’s a beautiful picture. Except Neil looks uncomfortable.

    BUDDY
    This is great!

Violet digs in to the picnic basket.

    VIOLET
    Let’s see what we’ve got.

She pulls out a CONTAINER OF FRIED CHICKEN.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    Now, I wish I could say that I made this, but...

Everyone laughs, except for Neil, who mutters quietly.

    NEIL
    What...are...you...up...to?

Violet pulls a LOVELY JELLO SALAD out of the basket.

    VIOLET
    Now this I did make.

    MARCIA
    Oh, I love this! I’ve tried to make this a couple of times, but it never comes out right.

    BUDDY
    It’s true!

Marcia playfully slaps Buddy. They all laugh. Neil has a visible amount of sweat on his brow.

While Buddy and Marcia situate the baby in the stroller, Neil whispers in Violet’s ear.
NEIL
What is it? Is there something in
the jello? LSD? Did you put LSD
in the jello?

VIOLET
(sotto voce)
Oh my god. How did you know?
(to the others)
Believe it or not, the secret
ingredient is salt.

MARCIA
Really?

VIOLET
It sounds gross, but it’s true.

Behind them, the frisbee couple have stopped playing and are
walking toward them.

MARCIA
No. It’s not surprising. There
are a lot of dessert recipes that
call for salt.

BUDDY
Really?

VIOLET
I know. It’s amazing.

Neil squirms. Violet looks back and sees the frisbee couple
approaching.

VIOLET (cont’d)
If you’ll excuse me for a minute,
I’m going to go throw breadcrumbs
at the ducks.

She gets up and walks away.

MARCIA
Neil, she is so sweet!

NEIL
Yeah.

The frisbee couple come over and greet them.

FRISBEE GUY
Hi there.

BUDDY
Hi! Beautiful day, isn’t it?

FRISBEE GUY
It really is.
NEIL
(to himself)
Oh no.

FRISBEE GUY
Um. How come you guys are eating our food?

Buddy and Marcia look stunned.

Neil looks around for Violet. She’s nowhere to be seen.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Establishing shot of the store exterior. A banner out front reads “ALL-OUT WAR MOVIE BLITZ: 2 FOR 1!”

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil helps customers. He’s wearing ARMY FATIGUES and CAMOUFLAGE PAINT on his face.

Jonathan and Lucien are debating nearby.

LUCIEN
What was the bet?

JONATHAN
If the Bucks won, I could shove a burrito in your face.

LUCIEN
And who won?

JONATHAN
The Bucks. And I never got to shove the burrito in your face.

LUCIEN
Yeah, well the last time you lost, I was supposed to get to piss on your foot, and I never did.

JONATHAN
What are you waiting for? Anytime you want to piss on my foot, be my guest. I don’t welsh on a bet.

LUCIEN
I could piss on your foot right now?

LUCIEN (cont’d)
Hey Neil! Do you wanna see me piss on his foot?
NEIL
Yeah, I do. Just not in the store.

JONATHAN
So you wanna go Double Or Nothing on tonight’s game?

LUCIEN
I don’t understand what I would get if I win. How do I double up on pissing on your foot?

JONATHAN
Both feet.

NEIL
Shit. I forgot about the game tonight. I’m supposed to go to Violet’s.

JONATHAN
The Prankster? What, she doesn’t let you watch tv?

NEIL
It’s not that. She just likes to act out stuff... you know, like scenes, I guess.

LUCIEN
She couldn’t be more perfect for you.

NEIL
You’d think that, wouldn’t you?

JONATHAN
Well, too bad, man. It’s gonna be a great game.

NEIL
Yeah, I know. Shit.

INT. VIOLET’S HOUSE – NIGHT
While Violet lights candles, Neil looks out the window, at the house across the street. He sees that the house is dark.

Violet walks over and wipes camouflage paint off his face.

VIOLET
You have paint in your ears.

NEIL
Oh, yeah. From today.
VIOLET
Are your friends mad at me?

NEIL
No. They thought it was cute.
Where’s the cat lady tonight?

VIOLET
I don’t know. Sometimes she goes out. I think she’s balling that guy who picks up the aluminum cans.

NEIL
Well, aren’t you worried about those cats?

VIOLET
Not especially.

Neil looks longingly at the house across the street.

NEIL
It’s been dark over there for a while now. Maybe we should check on the cats.

VIOLET
What’s your angle?

NEIL
Hunh?

VIOLET
Why do you wanna go in that house? You want to see if we can just barely avoid getting caught doing it in that poor old woman’s bed?

NEIL
I just thought you might want to feed the cats.

Violet looks at him curiously.

VIOLET
Yeah. I guess we could.

INT. MRS. CALMAN’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil and Violet are parked on Mrs. Calman’s couch, watching the game on tv. Cats are perched peacefully on the couch. On the tv. In their laps.

Neil follows the game intently. Violet looks bored.

Something happens in the game and Neil shouts.
NEIL

YES!!!

When Neil screams, the cats go flying in every direction.

NEIL (cont’d)
Whoa! Sorry.

VIOLET
Why?
(re: the cats)
That was the first cool thing to happen all night.

NEIL
You’re pissed that I wanna watch this game.

VIOLET
No. I just don’t get it. If you like basketball, we could be out playing basketball right now. We could be sneaking into a high school gym playing basketball by candlelight. That’d be fun.

NEIL
Yeah. But this is fun too. And it’s nice when something is fun without being sort of...fucked up and weird.

Violet gets up and walks out.

NEIL (cont’d)
Shit.

Neil gets up, turns off the tv, and goes after her.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Neil and Violet walk silently in the dark.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Neil and Violet walk along rows of headstones.

VIOLET
Whenever I’m in a cemetery, I try to find the grave of somebody who died the day I was born.

NEIL
And then you steal the headstone and leave it on somebody’s doorstep.
Violet chuckles.

VIOLET
It just gives you something to think about. That guy was here, and now he’s gone and I’m here. I’m taking over for this guy. Would he want me to sit around watching tv? No. He’d want me to run around doing all sorts of shit.

NEIL
And this is why you feel the need to go around making trouble?

Violet kicks at a headstone.

VIOLET
Nah. I just thought it fit in well with us being in a cemetery.

NEIL
Alright, so what is it?

Violet stops and looks at Neil.

VIOLET
Maybe I just have an aversion to boredom. Is that so hard to accept?

NEIL
I get what you’re saying. I do. I wish I could be more that way, you know? And I’m trying. I mean, if you want to go nude hang gliding, I’ll go nude hang gliding...

VIOLET
Really? ’Cause I know a guy...

She pulls out her cell phone. Neil grabs her hand.

NEIL
Not right this minute. Let me finish. I’m willing to do those things. But in a more...sane capacity, I guess. I’d go nude hang gliding. I just don’t want to go to bed one night and then suddenly wake up, to find that I’m in a hang glider and I don’t have any clothes on.

He looks at her very seriously.

NEIL (cont’d)
Are you okay with that?
VIOLET
I understand.

They starting walking out of the cemetery.

NEIL
You want to come stay at my place tonight?

VIOLET
No. I don’t think so.

NEIL
Are you upset with me?

VIOLET
Not at all. It’s just, you’ve got it in my head now, the idea of getting you out of your clothes and into a hang glider without waking you up. My wheels are spinning, and I, just don’t think you want me in bed with you tonight.

NEIL
Fair enough.

They walk down the street together.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil is behind the counter, talking into the phone.

NEIL
Yeah, so I just wanted to check in. Make sure everything is cool. Um, it’s Tuesday. Gimme a call...

INT. NEIL’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil is sitting on the couch, talking into the phone.

ON TV

In black and white, a good guy and a bad guy are wrestling over a pistol, while the good guy’s girlfriend is tied to a giant log, inching toward a huge buzzsaw.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Neil talks into the phone.

NEIL
It’s on the corner of 13th and Karuna. Place called Baltimore Jack’s.

(MORE)
My buddy Jonathan manages it. I think you’ve met Jonathan. So you should come! ...if you get this message in the next few hours, otherwise, I’ll just see you on Saturday. Bye.

EXT. BALTIMORE JACK’S - NIGHT

Neil gets out of his car and heads into a hipster nightclub.

INT. BALTIMORE JACK’S - NIGHT

A decent sized crowd fills the place, watching a live band. Neil is greeted by Jonathan, who is tending the bar. Neil checks out the scene.

NEIL
Pretty good crowd tonight.

JONATHAN
Yeah. These guys are pretty good. It’s the singer and the keyboard player from American Sex Club, and the guitar player and the bass player from the Mustache Rides. Plus tonight they’ve got the drummer from Tard sitting in.

NEIL
You lost me, dude.

JONATHAN
(patiently)
Okay. The drummer is in a band called Tard...

NEIL
That’s alright.

Neil grabs his beer and moves through the crowd.

The band finishes a song. And while the guitar player retunes, the keyboard player flirts with a girl up front.

Neil gets a glimpse of the girl through the crowd. From behind, it looks like Violet.

Neil moves forward to get a better look.

Sure enough, it’s Violet, handing a beer to the musician and laughing affectionately.

NEIL (cont’d)
So that’s how it is.
Neil watches for awhile, then makes his way out of the club.

EXT. NEIL’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Violet approaches Neil’s house. Before she reaches the door, she can hear LOUD ROCK MUSIC coming from inside.

She knocks on the door. Waits for a response. She knocks again. And waits.

Finally, she turns the doorknob and sticks her head inside.

She doesn’t see Neil, so she steps inside.

INT. NEIL’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Violet walks down the hall, following the music.

She sees colored, flashing lights ahead. She turns the corner and smiles.

Neil has set up a SMALL STAGE at one end of the living room, up against the back door.

Facing the stage are A DOZEN LIFESIZE CARDBOARD CUT-OUTS OF HOLLYWOOD LEGENDS from the video store.

Neil is onstage with a Gibson SG guitar, playing along with a cd. He plays to the crowd like a genuine rock star.

Violet stands among the cut-outs, enjoying the performance.

She whips out a cigarette lighter, sparks it, and holds out the flame, until she realizes that she’s set fire to A CUT-OUT OF W.C. FIELDS.

She quickly snuffs out the smoldering cardboard.

Looking around, embarrassed, she sees that the doorway to Neil’s bedroom has a VELVET ROPE stretched across. The door is guarded by a cardboard cut-out of MISTER T.

When the song ends, Neil takes a bow, then takes off through the back door.

Violet applauds, then looks around for a while, not sure what to do.

She sees that the cut-out of Marilyn Monroe is wearing a LAMINATED BACKSTAGE PASS around her neck.

Violet slips the backstage pass off Marilyn’s neck, and slips over toward the velvet rope.
INT. NEIL’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Neil and Violet lay in bed, under a sheet. They’re both undressed, but Violet has the backstage pass around her neck.

Neil wears sunglasses and is smoking a post-coital cigarette. Real rockstar-like.

VIOLET
Mmmm. That was great.

Neil blows smoke into the air. Super fucking cool.

NEIL
Whatever. Why don’t you go get me a beer?

Violet laughs. Neil tries to stay ultra-cool, but is clearly fishing.

NEIL (cont’d)
So, um, you do this kinda thing much?

VIOLET
Balling guitar players? Meh. I don’t really go for musicians.

NEIL
Really?

VIOLET (coyly)
Why would you think that I did, Neil?

NEIL
Well...you know. I’ve heard that chicks dig musicians.

VIOLET
No. Magicians. We go nuts for magicians. Get the wax out of your ears.

Neil smokes in silence.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Are you figuring out how long it’ll take to work up a magic act?

NEIL
Gimme a break. Just because I staged a rock concert for you, doesn’t mean I’m your puppy dog.

Silence.
NEIL (cont’d)
So, what do you like? The rabbit-out-of-a-hat kinda magician? Or the live-in-a-glass-box-for-a-month kinda magician?

VIOLET
Well, they both have their drawbacks. One of them lives in a glass box. The other one smells like rabbit shit.

NEIL
So you’re telling me you’ve never dated a musician? Not even the guy I saw you with at Baltimore Jack’s?

VIOLET
(smiles)
I always know when you’re spying on me. I get a little warm spot on the back of my neck.

NEIL
So that was all for my benefit? You’re a sicko.

VIOLET
Maybe. But I managed to bring out the rock star in you.

She kisses him right on the lens of his sunglasses, leaving a big smudge. Neil has to take them off and wipe it off.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Sure. I’ve dated a few musicians. But I swore off.

NEIL
Why’s that?

VIOLET
Well, first there was Gary Leathers...

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

A POSEURY DUDE walks backstage at a club, fixing his hair. Circa 1990. Behind him comes a YOUNGER VIOLET, burdened with a shitload of drum equipment.

VIOLET (V.O.) (cont’d)
I guess you can chalk that one up to youthful stupidity.

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD
NEIL
At least he had a great stage name.

VIOLET
Except that wasn’t his stage name. Gary Leathers was his given name. His stage name was Randy Coxx.

NEIL
Nice.

VIOLET
Then there was Nick Neonakis....

CUT TO:

ANOTHER FLASHBACK

A HEAVY METAL DUDE plays guitar on a rooftop. Three of his friends, (including Violet) drink beer and watch.

VIOLET (V.O.) (cont’d)
Nick’s only ambition in life was to play the entire guitar solo from “Hot For Teacher.”

Nick Neonakis is intently whaling on his Flying V.

VIOLET (V.O.) (cont’d)
And one summer day, on the roof of my apartment, he did it. After more than ten years, he finally nailed it.

Nick Neonakis finishes the solo and looks up, sweating and beaming. He pumps both fists in the air. He bounces around frantically, not knowing what to do with himself.

VIOLET (V.O.) (cont’d)
And having fulfilled his only ambition, there was really only one thing left to do...

Nick Neonakis unplugs his guitar, then takes a RUNNING LEAP OFF THE ROOF.

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD

Neil looks at Violet, horrified.

NEIL
Whoa. And that put you off musicians forever.

VIOLET
You would think so.

She takes a puff of his cigarette and hands it back.
Finally there was Garth Brodka, a big, bald, scary musical prodigy from Poland.

CUT TO:

STILL ANOTHER FLASHBACK

A huge, bald TERRIFYING-LOOKING DUDE sits on the floor of an empty apartment, playing a GLOCKENSPIEL.

Another shot of him playing a BAGPIPE. He plays piano with his free hand.

One more shot of Garth, now playing a THEREMIN, his massive Polish eyebrows furrowed in concentration while he waves his hands in front of the strange instrument.

VIOLET (V.O.) (cont’d)
See, I thought rock 'n' roll was the problem. But this classically trained son-of-a-bitch was ten times worse than the others.

Garth chases a scared Violet around the house, while he plays FRANTIC GYPSY MUSIC on a violin.

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD

NEIL
What happened to that guy?

VIOLET
He’s been chasing me all over the country for three years. I move to another city, he finds me. Breaks down my door. So I move again, and he tracks me down again. Breaks down my door. And so on.

Neil sits up straight and stares at Violet.

VIOLET (cont’d)
(yawning)
Well I don’t know about you, but I’m tired.

She reaches up and turns off the lamp.

In the dark, we can see from the position of Neil’s glowing cigarette, that he’s still sitting upright.
EXT. NEIL’S HOUSE - MORNING

Neil is on his porch, in his robe, picking up the newspaper, when he looks up to see a car driving slowly by, driven by A BIG BALD MAN.

They look at each other. Neil squints to get a good look at the dude as he drives by.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil is restocking tapes, when he catches ANOTHER SUSPICIOUS-LOOKING BALD CUSTOMER in the store, looking at him. When Neil catches him looking, the Bald Customer looks away.

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

Neil sees that the Bald Customer is at the counter. Baldy finishes filling out a membership form and hands it to Lucien.

Neil grabs the application out of Lucien’s hand.

NEIL
(aggressively)
I’ll take this.

Lucien shoots him a dubious look.

LUCIEN
Okay.

Neil takes a long look at the application, then a long look at the Bald Customer.

He grabs the Bald Customer’s drivers license, and takes a long look at it. He holds it up to the light.

The customer frowns.

NEIL
(reading the license)
“Steve Jackson.” That’s a nice generic name.

BALD CUSTOMER
I guess.

NEIL
(studying him)
That’s an interesting accent you’ve got there, Steve. What kind of accent is that?
BALD CUSTOMER
Um, Wyoming?

NEIL
Right.

Neil proceeds to write up a membership card.

NEIL (cont’d)
You catch that game last night? I tell you, I think the Lakers are gonna win it all again this year.

Steve Jackson smiles patiently.

NEIL (cont’d)
Just like they won it all last year.

Neil intently awaits Steve Jackson’s reply.

BALD CUSTOMER
Yeah.

Neil smiles, starts to hand him the membership card, then pulls it back.

NEIL
The Lakers didn’t win the championship last year.

Tense moment.

BALD CUSTOMER
Can I just have the card, please?

Neil hands him the card, then watches him walk out the door.

Once outside, Steve takes his boyfriend’s hand and shoots a nasty look back at Neil as they walk off.

EXT. THE NEW ESOTERICA CINEMA

Establishing shot of a old-timey movie theater. The marquee reads “JERRY LEWIS FILM FESTIVAL.”

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Neil and Jonathan are watching a film.

Two rows behind them, YET ANOTHER BIG BALD CREEP sits with his feet up on the seat in front of him. He is smoking a cigar and laughing exponentially louder than everybody else in the theater. (oh my god, just like Cape Fear!)

Every time Neil looks back, the Bald Creep smiles at him.
NEIL
(to Jonathan)
That’s him. That’s the guy.

JONATHAN
What are you talking about?

Finally, Neil can’t take it anymore. He whips around.

NEIL
ALRIGHT KNOCK IT OFF YOU CRAZY FUCKING POLACK!

A big round of applause from the other theater-goers. “Yeah!” “You tell him!”

NEIL (cont’d)
I GOT MY EYE ON YOU, OKAY? AND IF YOU SET ONE FOOT ANYWHERE NEAR VIOLET I’M GONNA PERSONALLY SHIT DOWN YOUR THROAT, GOT IT?

The grateful audience members stop clapping and look at each other in confusion.

The Bald Creep, really confused, takes his feet off the seats and puts out his cigar. He mutters sheepishly.

BALD CREEP
You’re the crazy one, dude.

Neil suddenly looks self-conscious. When he turns around, Jonathan is staring at him.

JONATHAN
What the hell was that?

NEIL
(embarrassed)
It’s nothing. It’s just Violet. She likes to play these tricks on me. She tries to get in my head, you know, she thinks it’s funny. She told me there was this guy after her, her ex-boyfr...

OFFSCREEN VOICE
Sssshhh!

Neil turns around.

BALD CREEP
I’m trying to watch the movie!
(under his breath)
You’re the polack.
EXT. VIOLET’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Neil walks toward Violet’s front door, his jacket slung over his shoulder.

When he goes to knock on the door, he sees that it is slightly ajar.

He pokes his head inside and knocks on the open door.

    NEIL
    Ahoy?

He hears nothing, so he steps inside.

INT. VIOLET’S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Neil investigates his way around the house.

INT. VIOLET’S LIVING ROOM

Neil comes around the corner into the living room and is taken aback.

In a corner of the room, Violet is GAGGED AND TIED TO A CHAIR.

    NEIL
    Oh, come on now.

Just as he moves toward her, Neil hears a sound down the hall. He looks over.

At the far end of the hall, AN ABSOLUTELY ENORMOUS BALD DUDE is sprinting towards him. This guy makes all the previous bald dudes look like shrimp.

    NEIL (cont’d)
    ALRIGHT COME ON NOW!

The Bald Giant keeps charging.

    NEIL (cont’d)
    THIS IS BULLSHIT!

The Bald Giant gets closer and closer.

Neil looks back and forth between Violet and the Bald Giant, pleading.

    NEIL (cont’d)
    ALRIGHT NOW! COME ON!

Just as the Bald Giant is about to collide with him, Neil throws his jacket in his face.
Neil makes a mad dash for the bathroom, diving inside and locking the door behind him.

INT. VIOLET’S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Neil stumbles back from the door and lands on his ass.

    NEIL
    Jesus Christ!

He looks around for some kind of a weapon. He grabs a CANISTER OF AIR FRESHENER.

    NEIL (cont’d)
    Okay. What else?

He looks around, stymied.

In a moment of inspiration, he pulls the toilet paper roll off, dispenser and all. He tosses the t.p. aside and presses the two metal pieces of the dispenser together. He lets go and the top piece of metal springs out and shoots across the bathroom.

    NEIL (cont’d)
    Nice!

He fetches the top end of the dispenser out of the bathtub and reassembles his little makeshift weapon.

INT. VIOLET’S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The bathroom door flies open and Neil leaps out, brandishing the air freshener in one hand and the t.p. dispenser in the other.

He stops in his tracks, puzzled.

At the other end of the room, the Bald Giant sits on the floor. Violet blots a trickle of blood from his forehead.

    BALD GIANT
    (to Violet)
    You said nobody was gonna get hurt.

    VIOLET
    (to Neil)
    What was in your jacket?

She rifles through his jacket and finds A VIDEOTAPE, clearly the source of the injury.

    VIOLET (cont’d)
    God, Neil. You and your videotapes.
Neil drops his weapons and walks over.

NEIL
(to the Bald Giant)
Do you know her? Do you know this person?

BALD GIANT
Sure. I’m Garth, her violent ex-boyfriend, and I’ve been chasing her from town to town, for...
(looks to Violet)
...five, six years?

VIOLET
It’s okay, Dennis. The gig is up.

BALD GIANT
Oh.
(to Neil)
We used to be in the same bowling league.

NEIL
Is she sick? Is she damaged somehow? I mean... why does it have to be like this?
(to Violet)
You’re in a bowling league! Great! Why can’t we just go bowling? I love bowling! You need more excitement? We can make it ten dollars a pin!

Violet helps Dennis to his feet.

VIOLET
I’m sorry about your head. Think you can make it home alright?

BALD GIANT
Yeah, I’m okay.

Dennis shakes Neil’s hand.

BALD GIANT (cont’d)
Nice to meet you.

NEIL
Yeah, likewise.

Neil stands there while Violet shows Dennis to the door. She comes back looking a little sorry.

They stand there looking at each other for a minute.
NEIL (cont’d)
Every time I see you, I feel like I’m on one of those hidden camera shows.

VIOLET
That’s not so bad. People love those shows, right?

NEIL
I hate those shows. And I really don’t want to be IN one of those shows.

Silence.

NEIL (cont’d)
I mean, what was supposed to happen tonight? What was I supposed to do?

VIOLET
Whatever you wanted to do. All you had to do is play along. It could go any way you want. You sit around all day, watching this shit on tv. What does the guy on tv do?

He gives her a confused look.

VIOLET (cont’d)
I don’t get it, Neil. You obviously have some kind of attraction to this. I figured you’d jump at the opportunity to act it out. I mean, at least you’d be getting some kind of exercise.

NEIL
What do you mean this is the kind of shit I watch? How do you know what I’m watching?

Long pause. She smiles at him.

NEIL (cont’d)
Do you spy on me?

VIOLET
Duh.

It takes a while for this to sink in.

NEIL
That’s crazy! Don’t you see how crazy that is?
VIOLET
Why?

NEIL
Are you kidding? There’s not a guy in the world who wants to go out with a girl who spies on him!

VIOLET
But we’re not going out. We’re getting to know each other. We’re finding out about each other. And frankly, there’s no better way to get to know somebody than to catch them in their unguarded moments. Anybody can say all the right things on those first few dates. I find that it’s an effective way to cut through the bullshit.

Neil just shakes his head.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Besides, YOU followed ME home just the other day.

NEIL
That’s different. You were being cagey. You were practically begging me to follow you home.

VIOLET
Look, I’m not the insecure girl who spies on her boyfriend because she thinks he might be cheating on her. That’s just sad.

NEIL
Yeah, that is sad.

VIOLET
Do I come across as insecure to you?

NEIL
No. You definitely project... confidence.

VIOLET
Yeah. I happen to think that I’m a real catch. So why shouldn’t I be thorough about who I go out with? I’ve watched you, Neil. And I’ve found out that you’re a really sweet and decent person. So, if it’s the spying you’re worried about, I promise to put away my binoculars.

(MORE)
VIOLET (cont'd)

Unless you want to go bird-watching. Which I’ll gladly do.
(pause)
Even though it sounds kinda boring.

Neil takes this all in. He looks down at the floor and
surveys the scene. Ropes. Can of air freshener. Toilet
paper dispenser. A spot of blood on the floor, from the Bald
Giant’s headwound.

He looks up at Violet.

NEIL
I’m sorry. I just....
  (he shakes his head)
I’m sorry.

He picks up his jacket and the videotape, gives Violet an
apologetic smile, and walks out the door.

Violet walks to the window and watches Neil get in his car.

As Neil starts his car, he looks up and catches her watching
him. Violet ducks away from the window.

Neil shakes his head and drives away.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil sits glumly in the coffeehouse section. Lucien sits on
one side of him. Jonathan on the other. They are arguing.

LUCIEN
Well, I say that Korean Snuff
Cartoons are better than Japanese
Deathmatch Anime.

JONATHAN
Well, I say that Japanese
Deathmatch Anime is better than
Korean Snuff Cartoons.

LUCIEN
And I still say that Korean Snuff
Cartoons are better than Japanese
Deathmatch Anime.

JONATHAN
That’s crazy. Japanese Deathmatch
Anime is much better than Korean
Snuff Cartoons.

LUCIEN
You’re the one who’s crazy. Korean
Snuff...

NEIL
Shut up shut up shut up shut up!
Lucien and Jonathan look wounded.

A TEENAGE CUSTOMER approaches the couch.

TEENAGE CUSTOMER
Do you guys have any Japanese Deathmatch Anime?

LUCIEN
Yes, but we’re not allowed to talk about it because our boss broke up with his girlfriend.

Neil gets up off the couch.

NEIL
I’ll leave you guys alone.

He goes into his office and shuts the door.

INT. NEIL’S HOUSE – DAY

Neil sits around, bored and mopey. His doorbell rings.

When he opens the door, a BLOW-DRIED BUSINESSMAN greets him.

BUSINESSMAN
Mister Neil Lewis?

NEIL
Yeah?

BUSINESSMAN
My name is Dwayne Cokejoy and I’m a representative of Media Giant Enterprises.

NEIL
Oh. Hi.

BUSINESSMAN
May I come in?

NEIL
Sure.

The businessman enters. He takes an amused look at the surroundings.

BUSINESSMAN
You’ve probably heard that we’re opening another location over on 13th and Downey. Fairly close to your Shoe-Gum video store.

NEIL
Gumshoe.
BUSINESSMAN
Right. Sorry. Media Giant has a proposal for you, Mister Lewis. We’ve been getting a bit of a black eye, p.r.-wise, based on the perception that we roll into towns and choke the mom-and-pop stores out of business.

NEIL
Is that a fact?

BUSINESSMAN
We’ve embraced a radical new policy of buying out these small video stores. We offer the owner substantial compensation, and in return, the owner turns his property into a Smoothy-B’s Yogurt franchise, which as you may or may not know, is a subsidiary company of Media Giant.

Neil listens in disbelief.

NEIL
Of course, you could simply take the money and move your business elsewhere.

Neil looks around, taking this all in.

His eye wanders over to the open door of the HALL CLOSET. When he looks carefully, he can just make out A FEMININE FIGURE inside the closet.

Neil finally understands. He turns back to the businessman with a smirk on his face.

NEIL (cont’d)
You know what, Mister Cokejoy? Why don’t you take a flying fuck at a rolling donut?

BUSINESSMAN
(flabbergasted)
Excuse me?

NEIL
I’m sorry. That was a terrible thing to say. I’ve had a change of heart. I will sell you my store for half a million dollars, and...

BUSINESSMAN
Mister Lewis, I think that’s an unreasonably inflated figure...
NEIL
I’m not finished. AND...

He picks a pizza crust off the coffee table.

NEIL (cont’d)
... you eat this pizza crust out of the crack of my ass.

The businessman starts to head for the door.

BUSINESSMAN
I can see that it was a mistake to come here.

Neil chases after him.

NEIL
Wait! Don’t go! Forget the money! Just eat the pizza crust off my ass!

BUSINESSMAN
Good day, Mister Lewis.

NEIL
Please! You can’t leave! I’m so lonely!

The businessman hustles out the door.

Neil laughs and makes his way over to the closet.

NEIL (cont’d)
Nice try, Violet...

He turns on the closet light.

The cardboard cutout of Marilyn Monroe stares back at him.

EXT. NEIL’S HOUSE - SAME TIME

The businessman gets in his car, pulls out a check written to Neil Lewis, and tears it up into little pieces. He shrugs and drives off.

EXT. FOSTER’S FREEZE TAKEOUT STAND - DAY

Neil picks up his lunch from a takeout counter. He turns around and bumps into Denise, his old girlfriend.

NEIL
Oh, hey there.

DENISE
Hi, Neil.
NEIL
How’s.... how’s it going?

DENISE
Pretty good. How are you?

NEIL
I’m good. You’re looking good.

DENISE
Thank you. You look good.

NEIL
Thanks.

DENISE
It’s funny, I was just thinking about you.

NEIL
Is that a fact?

A GREAT-LOOKING GUY, CHAD, comes up and puts his arm around Denise.

CHAD
Hey you.

DENISE
Hey. Neil, this is Chad.

The guys shake hands.

DENISE (cont’d)
(to Chad)
This is the guy I was just telling you about.

CHAD
The ex-boyfriend?

NEIL
(big smile)
Guilty.

Chad becomes a bit menacing.

CHAD
The guy who hid in the bushes and watched a waiter throw a bucket of water on you?

NEIL
Well, first of all, it wasn’t a bucket. And, I was just trying to observe her... from a distance... to see her reaction...
He trails off as he thinks about what he’s saying.

CHAD
Sounds kinda perverted to me.

NEIL
(distracted)
Yeah, definitely.

CHAD
Hiding in the bushes, jerking off like some kind of pathetic peeping tom.

Neil snaps out of his reverie.

NEIL
Yeah. No. We should definitely get together.

He nods to both of them and walks off, lost in thought.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Neil and Lucien are going over some paperwork.

LUCIEN
...and finally there’s this letter from a place called Movie Dork Video in San Clemente. The guy’s going under, and he needs to liquidate. He’s wants to sell the whole library. He’s quoting three thousand all in, and willing to pay for shipment if we take it all. Now obviously there’s a lot of shit in here that we don’t need. But looking at the list, he’s got a bunch of stuff we don’t have, and it might be worth it to take the whole bunch because if we pick and choose, we’re gonna get stuck paying for the shipping. I did a quick pass at the numbers and it looks like we come out a little better avoiding the shipping. We might be able to pass off some of the extra titles to that guy online...

Lucien notices that Neil is BANGING HIS HEAD against the counter.

LUCIEN (cont’d)
We can do this later, if you want.
NEIL
She’s ruined it for me, Lucien. She’s made it all so boring. I can’t stand it.

LUCIEN
Well, we can take a break. You want to put in a movie?

NEIL
No! No movies.
(he sighs)
It’s no use. It’s not enough anymore. I feel like all this is so mundane now. All this routine that I used to be able to enjoy. Now it makes me itch.

He points outside to where the UPS truck has just pulled up.

NEIL (cont’d)
Look, here comes Jason. And he’s gonna come in here, and he’s gonna hand me a package, and then he’s gonna hand me an invoice, and I’m gonna sign it and hand it back to him, and he’s gonna make some kind of funny comment, and then he’s gonna go back outside and get into his truck and drive off!

Jason, the UPS guy enters with a package in his hand.

NEIL (cont’d)
It’s so predictable, Lucien! And it’s not enough anymore! There’s no…. there’s no… adventure!


NEIL (cont’d)
Where’s the adventure, man?

He looks off into space as he signs the invoice.

NEIL (cont’d)
(quietly)
Where’s the adventure?

He hands the invoice back to Jason, who looks at it, then hands it back to Neil.

JASON
Um, you signed it “Neil Adventure.”

NEIL
Did I?
He signs the invoice again and hands it back to Jason. Jason looks at it.

JASON
You crossed out “Adventure” and then wrote “Adventure” again.

NEIL
What does it matter?

Neil storms off and goes into his office, leaving Jason holding the invoice.

JASON
(to nobody)
Well, it matters because I’m actually responsible for any package that doesn’t have a valid signature of receipt.

Lucien goes over and signs the invoice.

INT. NEIL’S OFFICE

Neil feverishly dials the phone, then waits for a response.

EXT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - NIGHT

Establishing shot of the video store. There’s a banner out front that reads “WESTERN ROUND-UP: 2 FOR 1!”

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - NIGHT

In the empty store, Neil sits on the couch.


The phone rings. Neil looks at it expectantly before picking up.

NEIL
Gumshoe Video.

VOICE ON PHONE
Yeah. Do you guys have Westerns?

NEIL
Yeah, we do.

VOICE ON PHONE
Okay, well, I really want to rent a couple of Westerns, but I only have enough money for one.
NEIL
Well, actually we’re having a special tonight, and you can get...

VOICE ON PHONE
Yeah, but here’s the thing. I really only feel comfortable renting Westerns from a guy dressed as a cowboy. Do you have anybody there dressed up like a cowboy, who can...

NEIL
Fuck you.

Neil slams down the phone, and stands there feeling stupid. He takes his hat off and throws it across the store.

The phone rings again. Neil picks it up.

NEIL (cont’d)
Video store.

He can hear FEMALE LAUGHING on the other end.

VOICE ON PHONE
Why’d you hang up on me?

He recognizes the voice as Violet’s. He laughs.

NEIL
I guess I’m never gonna learn.

VIOLET (ON PHONE)
I know. It’s brilliant.

Neil takes the phone to the window and looks outside.

NEIL
So, I wonder how you knew what I was wearing.

VIOLET (ON PHONE)
Don’t bother looking out the window. I’m actually at work.

NEIL
You have a job?

VIOLET (ON PHONE)
Yeah, you wanna come pick me up from work?

NEIL
I was gonna keep the place open for another hour...
VIOLET (ON PHONE)
You have to come now.

NEIL
...but I suppose I could come over now.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOT - NIGHT

Neil steps out of his car and looks around the parking lot behind a row of downtown buildings.

He’s still in his Clint Eastwood outfit.

We can still hear the rest of Neil and Violet’s phone conversation in voiceover.

VIOLET (V.O.)
Park in the lot behind the bookstore, and then walk north up the alley.

NEIL (V.O.)
This sounds dubious.

VIOLET (V.O.)
Oh, it’s very dubious.

Neil walks along the back alley.

VIOLET (V.O.) (cont’d)
Three buildings up, there’s a stairway that leads up to a door on the second floor.

NEIL (V.O.)
Doorway to second floor. Got it.

Neil finds the metal staircase and approaches A METAL DOOR.

VIOLET (V.O.)
When you get to the door, you’re gonna give it three short knocks and three long knocks.

NEIL (V.O.)
What the hell have you got up your sleeve?

Neil gives the door three long knocks and three short knocks.

VIOLET (V.O.)
And Neil, you absolutely have to keep the cowboy outfit on.

The door swings open, revealing a SCUZZY DUDE with a mustache.
He takes a long look at Neil’s get-up. His eyes stop on the gunbelt slung around Neil’s waist.

Before Neil can speak, the Scuzzy Dude THROWS HIS HANDS IN THE AIR and backs away into the room.

SCUZZY DUDE
Take it easy, brother!

Neil follows him inside.

NEIL
Hey! Hang on!

INT. SECOND STORY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Neil steps into SOME KIND OF OFFICE. He takes in his surroundings. There’s a desk. A safe. Another door. And A BIG PICTURE WINDOW, covered in blinds.

And in one corner, the Scuzzy Dude cowering with his hands up. Standing next to him is Violet, dressed in some kind of VEGAS COCKTAIL WAITRESS outfit.

SCUZZY DUDE
Okay cowboy! Don’t do anything crazy! Just be cool.

Neil looks over at Violet and tries not to smile. Before he can even speak, Violet screams at the Scuzzy Dude.

VIOLET
Goddamnit, Glenn! Just give him the bag!

The Scuzzy Dude inches over to the desk and grabs A ZIPPERED VINYL POUCH. The same kind that Neil uses to take his deposits to the bank.

SCUZZY DUDE
Nobody needs to get hurt, okay guy?

Neil looks at the terrified Scuzzy Dude, then at Violet who gives him the TINIEST WINK.

Neil relaxes, puts on a smile, and rubs his hands along the handles of his guns. This is his time to shine.

NEIL
(real tough)
Well, why don’t you toss that pouch over here real nice and easy-like, and we’ll just take it from there.

The Scuzzy Dude carefully tosses the pouch over to Neil. He catches it and tucks it into his belt.
NEIL (cont’d)
(to Scuzzy Dude)
Alright, Glenn. You just stand in that corner. I’m gonna take a look at the little missus here.

Neil sidles over toward Violet, but is stopped by A VOICE AT THE BACK DOOR.

VOICE
What the Sam Hill is going on in here?!

Neil whips around and sees AN OLDER MAN IN A SUIT step through the rusty outside door.

SCUZZY DUDE
(to the older man)
Be careful, Andy! He’s got a gun!

ANDY
How the hell did he get in here?

SCUZZY DUDE
We let him in, Andy!

ANDY
Why the hell did you let him in?!

SCUZZY DUDE
He knew the secret knock!

NEIL
Alright. Everybody just calm down. Andy, you just step behind the desk with old Glenn there.

Andy moves over to join Glenn. Neil shoots a wink at Violet. Violet doesn’t wink back. Now she seems genuinely nervous.

NEIL (cont’d)
So what exactly do you guys have going on here?

Neil moves aside the blinds in front of the window and glances out. He does a double-take.

The window looks out onto a huge floor below. There are ten BLACKJACK TABLES, dozens of gamblers milling around, and three or four COCKTAIL WAITRESSES dressed just like Violet.

Neil yells out in a dorky, boyish voice.

NEIL (cont’d)
Holy shit! It’s an underground Blackjack club!
He looks at Violet, whose eyes have gone very wide. Just as the reality of the situation dawns on him, Neil hears the unmistakable sound of a SHOTGUN BEING COCKED.

Neil whips around to see Andy holding a BADASS-LOOKING SHOTGUN.

Neil bolts for the interior door, just as A CHUNK OF WALL EXPLODES NEAR HIS HEAD.

INT. UNDERGROUND BLACKJACK CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Everybody on the floor looks up as the door at the top of the stairs flies open.

A terrified-looking cowboy bursts out of the doorway and FLIES DOWN THE STAIRS in a single leap. The cigarillo is still chomped between his teeth.**{(music: Jason Loewenstein’s “Transform”)}

Neil lands at the bottom of the stairs, slamming into a cocktail waitress, sending drinks flying.

Neil hits the floor and picks himself up, just as Andy and Glenn appear at the door to the office, now both armed.

As the two men rush down the stairs, Neil makes a mad dash across the floor, SMASHING INTO PATRONS and KNOCKING OVER BLACKJACK TABLES. Blackjack chips fly everywhere. Gamblers scramble to snag the scattered chips.

Amid the chaos, Andy and Glenn chase Neil, guns drawn.

Neil can just make out the front entrance up ahead. He frantically squeezes through bystanders.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

A DUMB BOUNCER turns toward the melee and sees Neil running toward him.

DUMB BOUNCER

Hey! Clint Eastwood from “The Good, The Bad, and The oooof....”

Neil drives his shoulder into the dumb bouncer’s chest, sending him backward.

Neil spins off the impact and DASHES OUT THE FRONT DOOR.

EXT. UNDERGROUND BLACKJACK CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Neil runs blindly into the street.
A car SQUEALS TO A HALT just inches away from creaming Neil. He rolls off the hood, regains his balance and keeps hauling ass down the street.

He looks back in time to see Andy and Glenn run out of the club, looking around. Glenn points to Neil and the two men run after him.

Just as Neil turns back, he COLLIDES with a mailbox.

Neil writhes on the sidewalk, the wind knocked out of him. He looks up to see Andy and Glenn GAINING ON HIM.

He struggles to his feet, and takes off down an alley.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Neil limps along an alley, panting. He cuts a left between buildings and keeps hobbling along.

He ducks behind a dumpster and peeks back at the alleyway.

He sees Glenn and Andy hit the spot where he peeled off. Andy keeps going down the alleyway, while Glenn heads between the buildings and straight towards Neil.

Neil crouches low behind the dumpster, listening as Glenn’s footsteps get closer and closer.

Just as Glenn’s footsteps are upon him, Neil grabs a metal trash can, and spins out from behind the dumpster.

He FLINGS THE CAN AT GLENN, aiming for the legs.

The trashcan hits Glenn just below the knees, sending him FLYING THROUGH THE AIR and skidding on his face.

Neil grimaces at Glenn’s fantastic wipeout and takes off running again.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Glenn hobbles around slowly and finally comes to a halt alongside a SPARKLETTES BOTTLED WATER TRUCK.

He points his gun at the truck and SHOOTS ONE OF THE HUGE BOTTLES OF WATER. He lets the water run over his head, then tilts his head and drinks the gushing water.

Wet and bloody and frustrated, Glenn reholsters his gun and limps back where he came from.

Camera pans down as the rest of the water pours out onto the street. Down below the truck, Neil is huddled. He watches nervously as Glenn walks out of sight.
Neil puts his head down in relief. He fishes the vinyl pouch out from under his belt and unzips it.

Inside, stacks and stacks of HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

EXT. NEIL’S HOUSE - MORNING

Violet approaches the front door, begins to knock, then stops and walks around and peers in his window.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

She can see Neil asleep on a chair in front of the door. He’s out of his cowboy costume. He sleeps with a baseball bat clutched in his hands and the vinyl pouch in his lap.

Violet taps on the window.

Neil wakes with a start, brandishing the baseball bat. He looks around, confused, then sees Violet at the window. She gives him a little wave.

He looks at her with wild eyes, and rushes to unlock his front door.

VIOLET
(nervous)
Oh boy.

She steps out onto the lawn to meet him.

Seconds later, Neil bounces out the front door, still holding the bag. He runs over to Violet and grabs her, spinning her around in circles.

NEIL
Oh my god! Do you know what we just did? I can’t believe it!

They stop spinning.

VIOLET
Listen to me, Neil. It wasn’t supposed to be dangerous. The owner wasn’t supposed to be there. I never thought for a minute that somebody would shoot at you. I’m so sorry.

NEIL
Yeah, I didn’t need that thing going off next to my head, but... holy shit! I mean, that was the wildest thing I’ve ever seen! Most people will go their whole lives and never experience anything like that!
VIOLET
Wow. To be honest, I thought you’d never want to see me again.

NEIL
Are you kidding? Look what we did! There’s like, twenty thousand dollars in this bag.

He hands her the pouch, she takes a look inside.

VIOLET
Yep.

NEIL
How long have you been planning this? It’s brilliant! They’re not gonna think it’s an inside job, are they? You’re gonna have to quit.

Now he’s thinking aloud.

NEIL (cont’d)
But if you quit right away, that might look suspicious. Are you okay staying there for a couple of weeks? You could just tell them that you’re suffering some kind of post-traumatic stress syndrome from the big hold-up. I bet they won’t suspect anything. I mean, come on, if you can pull this over...

VIOLET
I’m serious. I really thought that you wouldn’t want to have anything to do with me after this.

Neil isn’t even listening.

NEIL
Now, we just have to deal with getting my car back. Smart thing, you telling me to park it up the street, but still, they might be keeping an eye on the whole area. I suppose I could use a different costume from the store. But hell, they don’t even know what I look like! You know, between the hat and the whiskers. Still, I wonder if I could get Lucien to go get it.

Violet is counting out money. She takes a stack of bills and stuffs them into Neil’s front pocket.

Neil looks down at the money in his pocket.
NEIL (cont’d)
Ooh. Is that my cut? What’s the breakdown? Ah, I don’t care. You were the brains. I was just the monkeywrench.

VIOLET
You know what I really hate about all those dumb old detective movies that you watch?

NEIL
No. What?

VIOLET
It’s always so obvious that the dame is up to no good.

Neil gives her a funny look.

VIOLET (cont’d)
It always turns out that the girl is playing the guy for a sap. Every time. And everybody knows it except for the poor sap.

NEIL
(not quite getting it)
No. There are some movies where the dame turns out to be alright. “Key Largo” for instance. Or....

Violet kisses Neil on the cheek.

VIOLET
You’re the nicest guy I’ve ever met. And I’m a terrible person.

Violet walks off down the sidewalk.

Neil stares after her with a dumbfounded look on his face.

Violet walks all the way down the block and disappears while Neil stands on his lawn. **(music: Calexico’s version of “Alone Again Or”)**

Pretty soon, the world begins to move around him in high speed. People drive by. Kids playing in the street come over and stare and him, then go back to playing. The sun goes down and comes back up again. And Neil just stands there looking after her.

INT. GUMSHOE VIDEO - DAY

Business as usual at the store. Camera pans across the store. A customer is at the counter, renting a tape.
Across the counter, Neil is ringing up the customer. He’s bawling his eyes out.

The customer has an awkward look on his face.

Neil has a hard time counting out the change, so Lucien comes over and takes over.

Neil slinks out of frame while Lucien smiles apologetically at the customer.

EXT. HINOTE PARK - DAY

A softball game is in progress. A PITCHER on the mound is giving strange looks to the batter, Neil, who is standing in the batter’s box, sobbing unashamed.

The pitcher delivers, and Neil SMACKS THE BALL deep into rightfield.

He takes off running around the bases, crying like a baby.

He rounds second base, trying to leg out a triple. The throw comes in from the outfield way ahead of Neil, who slides, but is out at third by a mile.

He convulses in the dirt, wracked with sobs.

The UMPIRE doesn’t have the heart to call him out. The THIRD BASEMAN looks at the ump in agreement. Safe at third.

INT. NEIL’S BATHROOM - DAY

Pan across the bathroom, coming to a stop on Neil sitting in the bathtub, soaking with a wet rag over his head. He looks like he hasn’t slept in a while.

EXT. VIOLET’S HOUSE

Neil peers into the window. The house is empty and vacant.

NEIL
That’s fine. Even better. I’m fine. I don’t need this shit.

Neil storms away from the house with a look of determination. He grabs his cellphone and dials.

NEIL (cont’d)
(into phone)
Hey Betty! It’s Neil Lewis! Yeah, how’ve you been?.... Uh-huh.
Listen, do you want to go hanggliding?
INT. A NICE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Neil is on a dinner date with another woman. As soon as the waiter drops off the check, Neil grabs his date’s hand and whisks her toward the door.

They run smack into a rather burly maitre d’. Neil looks sheepish as both the maitre d’ and his date glare at him.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Neil sits on the 16th floor ledge of a building. He has a picnic lunch spread out on the ledge.

Nearby, another woman, Millie, stands in the window frame with her arms crossed.

MILLIE
Are you out of your freaking mind?

NEIL
Come on!

MILLIE
Forget about it!

NEIL
(gestures to the picnic)
There won’t be any ants.

Millie turns and disappears inside the building.

Neil sits alone and glumly starts eating the lunch. A second later, Lucien pokes his head through the window.

LUCIEN
No dice?

NEIL
It’s no use. This isn’t gonna work.

Lucien reaches out and starts picking at the food.

LUCIEN
Yeah. Not to mention it’s a total ripoff of Annie Hall.

INT. NEIL’S BATHROOM - DAY

Neil is back in the bathtub again, looking miserable.

Slowly, slowly, he sinks under the surface of the water. A few little bubbles rise to the surface.
We see his face under the water, staring up.

UNDER THE WATER

From Neil’s pov, we see VIOLET’S FACE lean over the tub. She’s a box of VALENTINE CHOCOLATES.

ABOVE THE WATER

Neil just stares ahead.

UNDER THE WATER

Violet’s face seems to be saying something, but we can’t make out the words.

She’s yelling now. But we still can’t make it out.

ABOVE THE WATER

There’s finally a look of recognition on Neil’s face.

Neil BURSTS OUT OF THE WATER, panting.

Violet is still there. She holds out the box of chocolates. Emblazoned on the front of the box, in gold lettering... "Just Kidding About Our Breakup."

VIOLET
Are you never gonna stop falling for this shit?

Neil stares at her for a second, dripping and panting.

Then he SCREAMS and LUNGES FOR HER.

Violet screams and runs out of the bathroom.

Neil leaps from the tub and goes after her.

INT. NEIL’S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Violet flees through Neil’s house.

Neil, naked and wet, takes a FLYING LEAP and tackles Violet onto the sofa.

Neil pins her down and leans over her face.

NEIL
What are you doing? What are you doing to me?
(quietly)
Why are you like this?

VIOLET
I’m crazy about you.
NEIL
I believe the first half of that.

VIOLET
Heh. Good one. But seriously, what can I say? I’ve started to fall for you, Neil. And I’m just trying to protect myself.

NEIL
That doesn’t make any sense.

VIOLET
It doesn’t? Let me guess, you’ve never been in a relationship longer than a year, right?

NEIL
I think I made it to the 15 month mark once in colleg...

VIOLET
15 months before you start to get restless. Only one year before you start to look at your girlfriend like she’s an old comfortable shoe. Because she’s not Greta Fucking Garbo and Faye Goddamn Dunaway and whoever the hell else all rolled up together. Then it’s just a matter of time before zip! Out the door! Nice knowin’ ya! Right, Neil?

He looks at her intently.

VIOLET (cont’d)
Does it make me crazy because I don’t want you to ever look at me like an old comfortable shoe?

Neil’s bathwater is dripping onto Violet’s face. She wipes it off with her sleeve.

VIOLET (cont’d)
You’re the sweetest, most creative, most interesting guy I’ve ever met. But you’re fundamentally screwed up. You spend half your life hanging out with fictional characters, and what woman can live up to that?

Neil puts his head down on Violet’s chest.
VIOLET (cont’d)
And I should point out, Neil, that it takes two to tango. I mean, if you weren’t the most gullible son of a bitch I’ve ever met, I wouldn’t feel obliged to do these things to you. I mean, gimme a break, you’re like the baby that never gets tired of playing Peekaboo. Every time, it’s like you’ve never seen this trick before.

NEIL
Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’m some kind of sick, twisted baby. But... how can two people live this way? I mean, how do I know that you’re not just gonna... vanish in a couple days?

Violet kisses him.

VIOLET
That’s easy. Just don’t let me out of your sight.

NEIL
How do I know that I’m not gonna wake up in a bathtub full of ice with my liver taken out?

VIOLET
That I cannot promise. But it’s either spend your life trying to find a woman you’ll never take for granted, or spend your life wondering if I’m gonna steal your liver. You choose.

Neil thinks about it. He grabs his own gut.

NEIL
Can a person live without his liver?

VIOLET (shrugs)
What do I look like? The Surgeon General?

She grabs a shirt off the floor and hands it to him.

VIOLET (cont’d)
So put some clothes on, for god’s sake. You gotta come take a ride in my new car.
As Neil gets dressed, Violet walks over to the window and points to a SPORTY MINT GREEN CONVERTIBLE parked out front.

Neil steps over to have a look.

NEIL
You spent all that money on a car?

VIOLET
You think I wanted to walk around forever like a shmuck?

NEIL
It’s nice.

VIOLET
And I didn’t spend all the money. Not even close. That was a lot of money that we stole.

NEIL
I stole.

VIOLET
Yeah, well, there’s enough money left for a week in Vegas.

Neil shakes his head and groans.

NEIL
I don’t even want to think about what kind of trouble you’d get me into in Vegas.

VIOLET
Puerto Vallarta?

NEIL
No. No Mexican prisons. I’ve heard stories.

VIOLET
Mount Rushmore?

NEIL
Defacing a national monument. Five to ten years.

VIOLET
Graceland?

Neil wracks his brain for a response.

EXT. NEIL’S HOUSE - DAY

Neil and Violet walk over to Violet’s convertible. Neil tosses his backpack into the back seat.
Violet is about to jump into the driver’s seat, when Neil stops her.

NEIL
You gotta let me drive.

VIOLET
How come?

NEIL
I don’t know. I just have this vision in my head of you pulling a “Thelma and Louise” and just...

He makes a gesture with his hand of a car going over a cliff. He makes a long whistling sound to demonstrate the car going over the edge.

Violet chucks the keys at him, and goes around to the passenger side.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Neil and Violet drive down the highway in a mint green convertible.

Violet pulls out a COWBOY HAT and puts it on Neil.

She takes a NECKERCHIEF and ties it over her hair and under her chin. She puts on DARK SUNGLASSES.

They look like Thelma and Louise.

Neil starts to object, but we can’t hear it.

**(music: Frank Black and The Catholics’ “His Kingly Cave”)

THE END