

# **THE ROUND ROBIN**

Written by

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**EXT. WORKING CLASS DETROIT NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT**

It's the middle of the night on CHRISTMAS EVE.

Tightly-packed houses on a deserted, snow-covered residential street festooned with CHEESY CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS.

We cut to one particular house with SANTA CLAUS'S SLEIGH on THE ROOF along with RUDOLPH, DASHER, PRANCER etc, who are waiting patiently for SANTA.

**INT. SAME HOUSE SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

SANTA CLAUS surveys the Christmassy scene in front of him, which includes A NICELY TRIMMED, MODEST-SIZED TREE with A SMALL PILE OF WRAPPED PRESENTS underneath it.

However instead of adding to the pile, SANTA begins PICKING UP THE FAMILY GIFTS and STUFFING THEM INTO HIS SACK.

When he's finished taking THEM ALL he goes over to THE TV, RIPS THAT OFF THE WALL and puts it in too.

Next he pulls over THE CHRISTMAS TREE and begins to magically STUFF it into his BOTTOMLESS SACK.

**INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS GOODWIN (early 40s), WAKES-UP WITH A START.

He can hear the COMMOTION SANTA CLAUS is making pillaging the room downstairs and gets up quietly without waking his wife RHONDA.

We follow DENNIS as he goes out onto THE LANDING and DOWN THE STAIRS.

**INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS enters and discovers SANTA stuffing the last ten inches of A FLOOR RUG into HIS SACK.

THE REST OF THE ROOM is now almost entirely stripped of FURNITURE, PICTURES etc.

DENNIS  
(confused)  
What is this?

SANTA CLAUS  
(cool as a cucumber)  
Hey Dennis. How's it going?

DENNIS  
How do you know my name?

SANTA CLAUS  
Duh. I'm Santa Claus. I know  
everyone's name.

DENNIS  
If you're really Santa then why are  
you taking all our stuff instead of  
leaving presents for Kyle and Lucy?

SANTA CLAUS  
I'm diversifying the business.

DENNIS  
Diversifying it how?

SANTA CLAUS takes a letter out of his pocket and reads;

SANTA CLAUS  
(reading from the letter)  
Dennis Goodwin of sixteen-twenty-  
eight Pershing Street Detroit,  
that's you yeah?

DENNIS  
Sure but...

SANTA CLAUS  
You have in the last two years  
accrued outstanding debts in the  
region of two hundred and sixty-  
thousand dollars from your failed  
business venture MEAT AND FISH-FREE  
MEAT AND FISH INC -- which is a  
terrible name for a company by the  
way -- and I Santa Claus, as an  
official representative for the  
Federal Bankruptcy Court am hereby  
authorized to remove such items I  
deem appropriate for resale, to be  
put against said sum owed...

DENNIS  
(stunned)  
*What?*

SANTA CLAUS

Do I really have to read it all again? It's a hell of a mouthful and I'm on a tight turnaround.

DENNIS

(anguished)

What about my kids and their Christmas presents?

SANTA CLAUS

Not my problem.

DENNIS

(devastated)

This can't be right.

SANTA CLAUS

Trust me it's right.

DENNIS

But...

SANTA CLAUS

I'd look on the bright side. According to the paperwork you'll be eligible for Christmas presents again in only eighteen years time.

SANTA smiles. We zoom in on the devastated look on DENNIS'S FACE.

DENNIS

Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

***End dream sequence...***

**INT. BEDROOM - MORNING**

MATCH CUT. DENNIS wakes-up and we PULL BACK to reveal he's in bed again but this time it's daylight outside.

RHONDA (late 30s, gorgeous), DENNIS'S WIFE is getting dressed.

RHONDA

What time did you come to bed last night?

DENNIS

I don't know. Late.

DENNIS THROWS BACK THE QUILT and we get our first proper look at him - a guy who used to be THE BOY NEXT DOOR with charm to spare, but it looks like the fire went out. Just occasionally though, we get a glimpse of the twinkle in his eye that could still make him a catch.

RHONDA

You've got to start pulling yourself together, Dennis.

DENNIS

I'm trying.

RHONDA

But are you really?

DENNIS

Do you have any idea how much emotional energy I've used up in the last two years, Ronnie?

RHONDA

(angry)

Guess what? Losing everything we own isn't something I've found easy to get over either.

DENNIS

I know. I'm sorry.

RHONDA

There's only so much any of us can take.

DENNIS

What's that supposed to mean?

RHONDA

(sullen)

Nothing.

DENNIS looks like he's been stabbed in the heart as he picks up A RUBBER CHEW-TOY from the floor.

DENNIS

At least Mister Scruffs still loves me unconditionally.

RHONDA

Mister Scruffs is a dog, Dennis.

DENNIS

Technically yes he's a dog, but he's also a member of this family.

RHONDA

You want the truth? I think he blames you for what happened too.

DENNIS

How do you know that?

RHONDA

Because when you lost our beautiful home, you also robbed Mister Scruffs of his lush backyard crib and brought him here to doggy Compton instead. It's the reason he farts every time you enter a room.

DENNIS

That's Mister Scruffs? I thought it was you.

RHONDA picks up A SHINY 45 HAND-GUN from THE DRESSER.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

You're not going to shoot me are you?

RHONDA puts the gun into a leather holster and grabs a POLICE BADGE from the back of a chair.

RHONDA

I've got better people to use my ammunition on.

DENNIS

Don't you mean worse?

RHONDA

Trust me I don't.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

TINY, CRAMPED, TIRED-TIRED-LOOKING.

DENNIS and RHONDA'S DAUGHTER LUCY (17), sits with her feet up painting her nails while BROTHER KYLE (15), wearing A HOODIE and HEADPHONES, eats cereal transfixed by his iPad.

DENNIS enters wearing OVERALLS branded with a CABLECO logo.

DENNIS

Happy Christmas eve guys!

Neither LUCY or KYLE answer, so DENNIS turns his attention to MISTER SCRUFFS THE DOG, who is slurping water from his bowl.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
 Come here boy. Happy Christmas eve  
 to you too.

LUCY wrinkles her nose in disgust as THE DOG lets one rip.

LUCY  
 Jesus dad! Why do you always make  
 him do that?

MISTER SCRUFFS gives DENNIS a look that is basically an  
 admission of guilt.

SFX: KNOCK ON THE BACK DOOR

The back door opens and AN OLDER, BURLY GUY IN A CHEAP SUIT  
 (think ED O'NEIL) enters. This is RHONDA'S Detective partner  
 RAY.

DENNIS  
 Morning Ray.

RAY hands DENNIS a stack of MAIL.

RAY  
 I ran into the mailman outside.

DENNIS  
 Thanks.

DENNIS puts THE MAIL on THE KITCHEN COUNTER.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
 How's work?

RAY  
 Work is a psychedelic mind-fuck.

DENNIS  
 (genuinely surprised)  
 For real?

RAY  
 Ronnie doesn't tell you about the  
 crazy Christmas shit we encounter  
 out there?

DENNIS  
 We don't really discuss police  
 business when she's off duty.

RAY

I guess being a cop lacks the wow factor of laying domestic fiber-optic Internet cable.

DENNIS looks a little hurt. RHONDA breezes in.

RHONDA

Can you remember to buy bread and milk for tomorrow?

RHONDA grabs A SLICE OF TOAST from THE TOASTER.

RHONDA (CONT'D)

I'll pick up the salad and candles.  
(mouth full of toast)  
Pizza's in the refrigerator for dinner.

DENNIS

I thought you were on a day shift?

RHONDA

I finish at seven but there are drinks after work.

DENNIS

(disappointed)  
On Christmas eve? But I had our whole evening planned. I made a Motown Christmas playlist on Spotify and bought elf masks for us all to wear and...

RHONDA

I'll be back before midnight.

DENNIS turns to the kids.

DENNIS

We can still have some festive fun though, can't we kids?

LUCY looks at DENNIS like he just threw-up on her Converse.

LUCY

You sound like Michael Jackson, dad...

DENNIS ignores LUCY and ploughs enthusiastically onwards.



DENNIS

(like a big kid)

Christmas S'mores on the barbecue  
out in the yard, a marathon Super  
Mario session followed by The  
Grinch and a trashcan-sized bowl of  
popcorn!

LUCY

Before this becomes anymore tragic,  
TBH I'm going to a house party at  
Brittany's tonight.

DENNIS looks at KYLE hopefully.

DENNIS

Guys night in?

KYLE

Benjy's parents already invited me  
for sushi.

RAY

Looks like you're flying solo dude.  
Go easy on the trashcan of popcorn.

RHONDA kisses KYLE and LUCY and exits.

DENNIS watches miserably through the tiny KITCHEN WINDOW as  
RHONDA and RAY get into AN UNMARKED POLICE CAR and pull away.

He picks up the mail and rifles through some junk, a couple  
of nasty-looking bills and ONE STAND-OUT SMART MANILLA  
ENVELOPE WITH CLASSY PRINTED TYPE.

Ripping open the envelope reveals A HIGH-END CHRISTMAS CARD  
with a photograph of A HANDSOME, FORTY-SOMETHING COUPLE and  
TWO BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN (17 and 21) in front of an opulent  
mansion, giant Christmas tree and A STARS AND STRIPES FLAG.

The message reads: SPIRITUAL YULETIDE GREETINGS FROM THE  
NICHOLSON FAMILY WITH OUR LOVE...

DENNIS

(curious)

Who are the Nicholsons?

LUCY

No idea.

DENNIS

So why have they sent us their  
round robin?

LUCY

It's probably meant for the jerks  
who lived in this shit-hole before  
us.

As DENNIS opens the card and reads we cut away to his fantasy  
of just how amazing THE NICHOLSON FAMILY are and what a  
wonderful life they have, accompanied by his V.O.

DENNIS

(reading aloud)

2018 has been a fantastic year for  
the Nicholson family and life in  
Crest Park Hills, Chicago just gets  
better and better.

(beat)

The pool-house renovation that  
started mid-January was finally  
finished in May and has provided a  
fabulous new social space for  
Charlie and I, as well as becoming  
party central for the kids and  
their friends!

(beat)

Charles Junior began Harvard Law in  
the fall after spending a gap year  
building an orphanage in Rwanda.

(beat)

Meanwhile our baby Katie has  
finally decided she wants to do Pre-  
Med at college next year.

DENNIS frowns. This is clearly torture but he continues.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Charles's business too, goes from  
strength to strength with plans for  
an office in South Korea finally  
coming to fruition...

(beat)

While I've decided to step back  
from the practice a little this  
year and concentrate on pro-bono  
dental reconstruction for the less  
fortunate in society.

(beat)

Thankfully though it isn't all work  
and no play and we've had some  
wonderful weekends on the yacht  
this past year both as a couple  
celebrating twenty-five wonderfully  
monogamous years together or with  
the children and their friends.

(MORE)

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Love and peace to you all this Yule  
and may the light of the Lord shine  
on you as it has on us.

(beat)

God bless America!

KYLE

Sounds like they have a pretty  
sweet deal.

LUCY

So did we once upon a time.

DENNIS

Things will get better, honey.

LUCY

When? We've been in this disgusting  
rental place for almost a year and  
even though you try and hide it I  
know you still owe money to people.

DENNIS

Which I'm managing.

LUCY

That isn't what Mom says.

DENNIS

Well Mom is wrong.

MISTER SCRUFFS lets another fart rip.

LUCY

Ugh!

**EXT. DETROIT FREEWAY - DAY**

Heavy traffic.

**INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS is speaking on his hands-free while driving.

DENNIS

I'm confident in three months time  
I'll be able to increase payments.

THE CUSTOMER REP on the other end of THE PHONE (we only hear his voice) is calm but gloomy.

CUSTOMER REP

Three months is geological time in the finance world, Mister Goodwin.

DENNIS

But with the holiday season and my other commitments there's no way I can do anything sooner.

CUSTOMER REP

Taking that background noise into account it sounds like your only option is to increase the loan.

DENNIS

How can I do that?

CUSTOMER REP

We have a scheme called Kevlar Credit for clients like you.

DENNIS

But doesn't that mean I just get into more debt with you guys?

CUSTOMER REP

That's a very short-sighted way of looking at it...

**EXT. PARKING LOT - CABLECO INC**

DENNIS'S CAR arrives.

**INT. CABLECO OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

FRANK DE'LOSSO, AREA MANAGER (careworn 50s), looks out onto THE SNOWY PARKING LOT where DENNIS pulls into.

FRANK

(anxious)

He's here.

LINDY MARDELL, late 20s, neat, tough-looking, sits at FRANK'S desk checking her smart-phone for emails.

LINDY

(without looking up)

Four minutes late. That there is a potentially fireable offense all on its lonesome.

FRANK

We tend to allow a little wiggle room for guys in the field. Most of them work beyond their official hours, including Dennis Goodwin.

LINDY looks up from her phone and stares out of the window as DENNIS gets out of his car.

LINDY

All I see is a cable-laying retard who's lucky to have a job at all.

FRANK

Yes bu...

LINDY

*As the fuck are you.*

FRANK looks dolefully at his feet.

**INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY**

DENNIS sits - ashen-faced - in front of LINDY and FRANK.

DENNIS

*Fired! On Christmas eve?*

LINDY

Christmas, Ramadan, Mother's Day they're all just cable-laying opportunities at CABLECO. And we don't call it getting fired in Trump's visionary new America.

DENNIS

What then?

LINDY

It's social re-energizement. If I was firing you I'd have security in here.

LINDY looks at DENNIS getting upset.

LINDY (CONT'D)

They can still arrive in less than eight minutes just in case you were thinking of doing anything stupid.

DENNIS

You don't understand. I need this job!

LINDY

If I had a dollar for every time  
I'd heard that one, eh Frank?

FRANK

We've been told to make cuts by  
head office.

DENNIS

But why me?

FRANK

Last in first out Dennis. Sorry but  
it's the fairest way.

DENNIS looks on the verge of tears. FRANK looks away  
appalled, but LINDY'S fascinated.

DENNIS

But if I go home on Christmas eve  
and I've been fired...

LINDY

Socially re-energized.

DENNIS

Whatever. If I get back tonight  
without a job my wife is going to  
leave me for sure.

LINDY

Sounds like you need to show this  
bitch who da boss.

DENNIS

*What did you just call her?*

For a beat it looks like LINDY might call security after all.

FRANK

Go easy Lindy. I don't think that  
kind of language would be  
sanctioned by HR.

LINDY

(unrepentant)

I am HR you fucking moron! And  
don't call me Lindy in front of the  
mark. What if he tries to track me  
down afterwards?

(back on DENNIS)

C'mon Dennis! Focus!

(MORE)

LINDY (CONT'D)  
Give me a compelling reason to  
retract my decision. You're wasting  
valuable pitching time!

DENNIS takes a deep breath and looks stoic. Maybe LINDY just  
threw him a lifeline.

DENNIS  
Until about a year ago I was a  
Senior VP in R&D at one of  
CABLECO's main rivals.

LINDY  
Then what? You got caught drinking  
on the job?

DENNIS  
No.

LINDY  
Kiddie-porn?

DENNIS  
No! A friend of mine told me about  
insect-based meat substitutes.

LINDY  
Is this going to get weird?

DENNIS  
Insect-based meat substitutes -  
IBMS - are the future of nutrition  
for the entire planet.

LINDY  
Unless you're a vegan.

DENNIS  
OK but for the rest of us who crave  
lobster, ribs and cheeseburgers,  
our favorite treats will soon be  
made from freeze-dried mealworm  
larvae.

LINDY  
I think you just made me a little  
bit sick in my mouth there...

DENNIS slips into sales-mode and sounds surprisingly  
passionate and convincing.

DENNIS

In ten years time when we're running out of steak and Ahi it'll be a different story. My mistake was being ahead of the curve.

LINDY

So what happened?

DENNIS

I gave up my job and sunk all my - our - cash into it and lost everything. The house, cars, even our savings.

LINDY

Why didn't you just go straight back into management?

DENNIS

It takes time, and I needed cash to support my family. Plus when recruiters found out, they started offering up my services cheap.

LINDY

So your entire life got ass-fucked?

DENNIS

Yes. Now can I have my job back?

LINDY

Hell no. What kind of dick puts the financial stability of his family at risk for something as fucked-up as a roachburger?

**INT. CAR - DAY**

DENNIS speaks to A POLITE LOAN COMPANY REP on the hands-free.

LOAN COMPANY REP

As a company registered with the S.E.C. I am expressly forbidden to bully you into increasing your repayments. However, it is entirely legal for me to inform you of the dire consequences if you don't.

-DENNIS

I just got fired! A payment increase is out of the question!



LOAN COMPANY REP  
I'll pretend I didn't hear that.

DENNIS  
Why not?

LOAN COMPANY REP  
Because if you did actually say the words "I just got fired" I have to deploy a same-day repo team to collect your assets before any other creditors do the same.

DENNIS  
Is that legal?

LOAN COMPANY REP  
Sure it's legal. And it may already be too late to prevent because the company genuinely does record all of these conversations.

**EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

DENNIS pulls into the tiny driveway and with a sense of barely-concealed panic he gets out.

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS still looks distraught as he enters the kitchen where MISTER SCRUFFS is lying in his basket.

DENNIS  
(shouting)  
LUCY! KYLE!

There's no reply. DENNIS wanders over to MISTER SCRUFFS for a heart-to-heart.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
Hey boy. There could be a team of repo guys on their way to take everything we own.

DENNIS and MISTER SCRUFFS look at each other.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
Would that include a dog with severe flatulence I wonder?

DENNIS looks anguished again.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Ronnie will leave me, the kids'll hate me and I'll die alone in a dumpster, surrounded by empty bottles of cough medicine.

DENNIS'S gaze falls upon THE ROUND ROBIN sent by accident from the NICHOLSON FAMILY. They seem to stare back, taunting him with perfect teeth and back-lit, heavenly glow.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

*How did you get the pool house and the perfect life, while I end up wading through a sea of shitty fiber-optic cable every day? Can you please tell me that?*

A thought hits DENNIS.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

(to MISTER SCRUFFS)

You wanna go for a drive, boy?

**EXT. FREEWAY - DAY**

SFX: HEY SIS, IT'S CHRISTMAS by RU PAUL.

We pick out DENNIS'S BEAT-UP CAR in traffic.

**INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS**

SFX: HEY SIS, IT'S CHRISTMAS by RU PAUL plays on the radio.

DENNIS has a gritty, determined expression on his face as he guns the car down the freeway.

MISTER SCRUFFS sits in the passenger seat. THE NICHOLSON ROUND ROBIN CARD is balanced on the dashboard.

**EXT. FREEWAY - DAY**

DENNIS drives past a signpost that says: **WELCOME TO CHICAGO**

**EXT. FREEWAY RAMP - DAY**

DENNIS drives down the OFF-RAMP and is about to pass A DRIVE-THRU BURGER RESTAURANT when HE BRAKES HARD and screeches to a halt.

**INT. DENNIS'S CAR - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS pulls into THE DRIVE-THRU BURGER RESTAURANT.

DENNIS  
(to MISTER SCRUFFS)  
Maybe we'd better eat something  
before we get there...

**EXT. DRIVE-THRU BURGER RESTAURANT**

DENNIS speaks into the intercom TO A TEENAGE EMPLOYEE.

TEENAGE EMPLOYEE  
May I take your order please?

DENNIS studies THE MENU and frowns.

DENNIS  
Do you have any burgers made from  
insect-based meat substitutes?

TEENAGE EMPLOYEE  
*You want an insect in a burger?*

DENNIS  
No. That isn't what I said.

TEENAGE EMPLOYEE  
Can you repeat your order please?

DENNIS  
Do you have any burgers made from  
Insect-based meat substitutes?  
Because I see on your menu you do  
sell the Eazy Impossible Burger,  
which is plant based but you don't  
have any made from Insect-based  
meat substitute, which is far  
tastier and thirty percent cheaper.

TEENAGE EMPLOYEE  
I - uh - I'm going to hand you over  
to my supervisor.

A short while later THE SUPERVISOR comes on-line.

SUPERVISOR  
Jim Farnsworth. How can I help?

DENNIS

Hi Jim. Yeah I just asked if you sold burgers containing insect-based meat substitutes?

THE SUPERVISOR replies as if he's reading from a press-release.

SUPERVISOR

At Eezy Burger chain we are proud to say our burgers are made from one hundred percent cow. We don't allow insects or any other animals, amphibious, domestic or otherwise in our kitchens or our burgers.

DENNIS

So you wouldn't consider selling a Cheesy Big Eezy made from dried horse-fly larvae?

SUPERVISOR

Are you the guy who allegedly found a toad in his Mega-rib meat bucket last summer?

DENNIS

No but I'm interested to know whether he enjoyed that toad more than the ribs?

SUPERVISOR

OK I'm going to call the cops now unless you order.

DENNIS

Fine. I'll tell you what I'd like;  
*A fat, juicy one hundred percent quarter-pounder fuck-you Impossible burger with a side order of you narrow-minded assholes ruined my life.*

DENNIS screeches away.

**EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY**

DENNIS'S CAR drives past A SIGNPOST that reads: **CREST PARK HILLS - PLEASE DRIVE RESPECTFULLY THROUGH OUR BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBORHOOD**

**EXT. CREST PARK HILLS - DAY**

DENNIS'S SHITTY CAR looks way out of place amongst the upmarket property and wide lawns of CREST PARK HILLS. Everything is covered in a layer of perfect, white snow and there are TASTEFUL CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS on every house.

**INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS drives slowly down the street holding up the NICHOLSON'S CARD against THE CAR WINDOW until eventually he gets a match outside A HUGE, GORGEOUS, MID-CENTURY FAMILY HOME with a NORWEGIAN SPRUCE CHRISTMAS TREE ADORNED WITH LIGHTS. He pulls over to the sidewalk and kills the engine.

DENNIS

I must be crazy doing this...

The camera is locked-off on a profile shot of DENNIS inside the car with THE NICHOLSON HOUSE behind him. He looks way less confident about this being such a good idea.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Let's go home and heat-up that pizza.

In the back of frame we (but not DENNIS) see A BEAUTIFUL, WOMAN (early 40s) emerge from THE FRONT DOOR and march purposefully down the garden path towards the car.

A beat later THE WOMAN - ELLEN NICHOLSON FROM THE ROUND ROBIN CHRISTMAS CARD, looking sluttishly sexy in a designer robe and Gucci sliders, raps on DENNIS'S WINDOW causing him to nearly jump out of his skin.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

What the...?

ELLEN ignores DENNIS'S 'rabbit caught in headlights' expression.

ELLEN

You're late.

DENNIS

I -- err...

Before DENNIS can fire-up the engine and pull away, ELLEN yanks opens the door.

ELLEN

You better get your ass inside.

ELLEN looks furtively up and down the street before marching back into the house watched by a mute DENNIS.

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
(firm)  
Now!

**INT. DINER - DAY**

RHONDA and RAY are sitting in A BOOTH eating breakfast. Outside in the parking lot we can see their police car.

RAY  
You seem tense.

RHONDA  
(clearly really tense)  
I'm OK.

RAY  
Did you have another row with  
Dennis?

RHONDA  
No.

RAY  
(gentle)  
You can tell me if it'll help. I'm  
a pretty good listener.

RHONDA  
(reluctantly opening up)  
This is our first Christmas since  
losing the house and it's been way  
harder than I thought.

RAY  
Once the holidays are out of the  
way you can sit down and try to  
talk all this stuff out.

RHONDA  
I don't know Ray. Right now I'm  
really not sure I can be with  
Dennis anymore.

RAY  
Why not?

RHONDA  
He just can't seem to get over what  
happened with the business.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

As with the exterior of the house, the interior screams quality, with acres of stainless steel and Carrara marble. ELLEN studies DENNIS and MISTER SCRUFFS.

ELLEN

The overalls and the dog are a nice touch.

DENNIS stands awkwardly in the middle of the room with MISTER SCRUFFS next to him.

DENNIS

Umm thanks.

ELLEN

Coffee?

DENNIS

Yes please.

ELLEN

Cappuccino? Latte? Espresso? Flat-white? Macchiato? Frapaccino...?

DENNIS

Just black, no sugar.

ELLEN

How about the dog?

DENNIS

He doesn't drink coffee.

ELLEN looks at DENNIS like he's Forrest Gump.

ELLEN

I meant do you want me to get him some water?

DENNIS

No. He's fine.  
(addressing the dog)  
You're fine aren't you Mister Scruffs?

MISTER SCRUFFS looks dolefully at ELLEN as she switches on a state-of-the-art espresso machine and begins making COFFEE. DENNIS meanwhile, takes in his opulent surroundings.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Beautiful house.

ELLEN

Thank you.

DENNIS

Have you lived here long?

ELLEN hands DENNIS his coffee.

ELLEN

Almost twelve years.

(impatient)

Now shall we get down to business?

DENNIS suddenly looks reticent because of course he has no idea why he has been invited inside. ELLEN picks up on it.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Ahh. I guess you want your money first?

ELLEN exits THE KITCHEN and DENNIS relaxes a little bit. MISTER SCRUFFS however, begins whimpering anxiously.

DENNIS

(whispering to MISTER SCRUFFS)

Relax boy. This could be some good karma at last...

DENNIS strokes MISTER SCRUFFS to calm him down.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

...And you have to admit she's really nice once you get past the abrasive manner.

ELLEN returns carrying A BATTERED DESIGNER SUITCASE, which she puts down on the work surface.

ELLEN

Four hundred grand in non-consecutive bills.

She flicks the catches on the case to reveal BUNDLES OF USED HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Which includes a guarantee Charlie's body will never be found, right?

DENNIS'S eyes widen as he takes in the sight of the money.



DENNIS  
Charlie as in your husband?

ELLEN  
Hole-in-one, Einstein.

DENNIS  
Does this mean the two of you  
aren't getting on?

ELLEN looks at DENNIS to see if he's joking, which of course he isn't.

ELLEN  
I think you can assume I wouldn't  
be paying you to kill him if we  
were.

DENNIS tries hard to mask his shock.

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
Is there a problem?

DENNIS  
(weak)  
No.

ELLEN  
You're sure?

DENNIS  
Can I just ask you something?

ELLEN  
Go ahead.

DENNIS  
How do you reach a point where you  
want to kill a person you used to  
be in love with?

ELLEN is caught off-guard.

ELLEN  
That's not a question I was  
expecting from a hit-man.

DENNIS  
So you did used to love him?

ELLEN  
Sure. But why do you give a shit?

DENNIS has to think on his feet.

DENNIS  
Market research.

ELLEN  
*What?*

DENNIS  
As a small, independent retailer  
it's important to understand my  
customer demographic.

ELLEN  
Isn't it just desperate, vindictive  
people like me?

DENNIS  
That's a very simplistic way of  
looking at it.

ELLEN  
OK, I've been siphoning cash out of  
my business for three years so I  
can pay someone to kill Charlie. If  
you consider that to be simplistic  
then sure, that's what it is.

DENNIS  
I mean why do you want to kill him  
not how?

ELLEN pauses for a beat.

ELLEN  
Where to start?  
(thinks)  
There's his incessant bullshit. The  
discovery that he slept with at  
least four of the bitches from his  
new Seoul office. The fact he's a  
casual transvestite. Oh and in the  
last couple of years his skin has  
inexplicably begun to smell like  
Manchego, which is indescribably  
vile.

DENNIS  
Manchego as in the Spanish mountain  
cheese?

ELLEN  
Yes.  
(quizzical)  
You're surprisingly cultured for a  
hitman.

DENNIS

I think it's important to try and debunk stereotypes.

DENNIS is starting to sweat.

ELLEN

Are you OK?

DENNIS

I need to use the bathroom.

ELLEN points O.C.

ELLEN

Through there on the right.

**INT. CLOAKROOM - DAY**

DENNIS looks at himself in the vanity mirror.

DENNIS

(talking to himself)

Market research! Debunking the stereotype! Manchego! You total asshole Dennis! What are you doing spending Christmas eve with a woman who wants to kill her transvestite husband?

DENNIS retrieves THE ROUND ROBIN card from inside his overalls and looks at it.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

(frantic)

Pull yourself together and get out of here. These are crazy people.

(thinks)

But I can't just leave him here to die. That's not exactly Christmas spirited is it? And nobody deserves to be killed just because they smell cheesy...

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

DENNIS returns from THE BATHROOM.

DENNIS

Just throwing out a curve-ball here but have you thought about couples therapy?

ELLEN  
Jesus, what kind of hitman are you?

DENNIS  
The kind who wants to be sure you  
make the right decision.

ELLEN  
Trust me it's the right decision.  
Now are you going to kill Charlie  
or do I re-list the position?

DENNIS  
(like he's suddenly  
developed Tourettes  
Syndrome)  
I'll do it!

ELLEN  
Good.

DENNIS  
Any particular day suit you best?

ELLEN gives DENNIS a puzzled look.

ELLEN  
How about today between three and  
five like we agreed? I'll be at my  
Zumba class working on my ass and  
of course my alibi, while you take  
care of business back here.

The color drains from DENNIS'S FACE.

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
And remember, you only have a two  
hour window between my daughter  
picking my son up from the airport  
and the caterers arriving to prep  
for the tree trim-athon fundraiser  
in aid of Rwandan orphans.

DENNIS  
You're going ahead with a  
fundraiser even though I'm killing  
your husband?

ELLEN  
Think of the added drama if I find  
a pair of Charlie's blood-soaked  
ladies panties or maybe a severed  
limb while the guests are here!

DENNIS

*You want me to chop off one of his limbs?*

ELLEN

Only if you're feeling it.

DENNIS

I guess I'll wait and see whether I'm in that kind of creative headspace.

ELLEN looks at DENNIS.

ELLEN

You're really not how I imagined a contract killer would be.

DENNIS

What were you expecting? Joe Pesci in Goodfellas?

ELLEN

I don't know. You're more sensitive and I have to say, better looking in the flesh. And the overalls are turning me on.

(matter-of-fact)

You wanna fuck?

DENNIS

(shocked)

I'm married.

ELLEN

Me too, at least for the next three hours or so.

DENNIS

Yes but unlike you I still love my wife.

ELLEN

If I had a dollar for every time a happily married man got an erection while I was fitting his fixed retainer I wouldn't need to practice dentistry at all.

DENNIS

Is that true?

ELLEN

Sure. So how about it? My pussy muscles are tight enough to milk you like a mamba.

DENNIS

It's a very tempting offer but I make it a rule never to be milked before a job.

ELLEN

Whatever.  
(looking at her watch)  
Guess I'd better get my gym kit together.

ELLEN gets up to leave.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Feel free to check out the house and get an idea for where exactly you're going to ice Charlie.

ELLEN grins girlishly.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

Icing somebody? Is that a term you use or have I just watched too many episodes of THE SOPRANOS?

DENNIS

Ice is nice.

ELLEN

Ice is nice. Very good.

ELLEN suddenly wrinkles her nose in disgust.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

What's that terrible smell?

DENNIS looks down at MISTER SCRUFFS, who looks guilty as hell.

DENNIS

It's the dog. Sorry.

ELLEN

Jesus. You need to put that thing on a vegan diet.

ELLEN sweeps out of the room leaving DENNIS and MISTER SCRUFFS alone.

DENNIS  
 (to MISTER SCRUFFS)  
 OK so you were right. She's a  
 heartless homicidal bitch but we  
 can't leave now without warning her  
 husband, can we?

MISTER SCRUFFS looks up at DENNIS with an expression that  
 says otherwise.

**INT. VETERINARY SURGERY WAITING ROOM - DAY**

Full of PEOPLE WITH THEIR SICK PETS.

We focus on one particular guy ZO (30s, Indian) and his  
 German Shepherd dog MAX, who has a home-banded paw. Despite  
 the massive size of the dog he's sprawled across ZO'S lap.

ZO  
 It's OK boy.

ZO looks at HIS WATCH anxiously just as one of the VETERINARY  
 NURSES calls out.

VETERINARIAN NURSE  
 Max!

**INT. TREATMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

THE VETERINARY (female, early 30s), greets them.

VETERINARIAN  
 Sorry about the wait. Two of my  
 colleagues are on vacation.

THE VETERINARIAN gently touches MAX'S head.

VETERINARIAN (CONT'D)  
 So what happened to Max?

ZO  
 We were in the park and he stepped  
 on a broken bottle.

THE VETERINARIAN points to the EXAMINATION TABLE.

VETERINARIAN  
 Do you want to lift him up here?

ZO manhandles MAX up.

VETERINARIAN (CONT'D)  
 You are in the wars aren't you boy?

ZO  
 What kind of a terrible person  
 leaves broken glass in a place  
 where dogs and children play?

THE VETERINARIAN gently takes MAX'S PAW to examine.

VETERINARIAN  
 A very selfish one eh Max?

ZO'S CELLPHONE rings.

ZO  
 I have to take this outside doc.  
 (to MAX)  
 Stay here boy!

**INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

ZO speaks guardedly into his PHONE.

ZO  
 Did you find anyone to cover the  
 job?

**INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

RAJ (late 30s), an INDIAN VERSION of John Bon Jovi, is on his  
 CELL PHONE to ZO.

RAJ  
 Sorry boss but nobody wants to do a  
 hit on Christmas Eve. It's a big  
 festive downer.

We cut between RAJ and ZO.

ZO  
 Not even Swami Rami? I thought he  
 hated Christmas.

RAJ  
 Rami's taken his family to Mumbai  
 to see the rellies.

ZO  
 What about the Mistri brothers?



RAJ  
Skiing in Tahoe.

ZO  
(surprised)  
Both of them?

RAJ  
Plus girlfriends, mums, dads,  
brothers, cousins and various other  
assorted family members who always  
crawl out of the woodwork when  
somebody says free vacation.

ZO  
I must be paying those guys too  
much fucking money!

RAJ  
You need a couple of Muslims or  
Jews on the payroll 'cause they  
don't actually celebrate Christmas.

ZO  
Neither do Hindus! But we seem to  
be seduced by the hideous  
commercialization of the whole  
shebang!

RAJ  
I'd offer to do the job myself but  
I'm taking the girls to see Santa  
Clause at five.  
(as an afterthought)  
I guess I probably have a fifteen-  
minute window between home and the  
mall if you want me to sub for you?  
As long as there isn't too much  
blood-spatter Aisha and Samira can  
wait in the car.

ZO  
It's fine. I'll do it when the  
Veterinarian's patched-up Max.

RAJ  
How is little Maxxy?

ZO  
His paw's all cut-up from a bottle  
some asshole dropped in the park.

RAJ  
There are some evil bastards out  
there, boss.

**INT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - DAY**

DENNIS looks out of a panoramic window onto the rear garden.

DENNIS  
Wow.

MISTER SCRUFFS scratches at the glass excitedly.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
You want to go pee, boy?

**EXT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

MISTER SCRUFFS bounds out into the garden followed by DENNIS.

DENNIS  
Wait up!

MISTER SCRUFFS pees while DENNIS trudges across the snow-covered lawn carrying ELLEN'S SUITCASE filled with money, until he's standing outside THE POOL HOUSE.

Something catches his eye inside so he peers in.

A beat later the door swings opens and he's confronted by A SEXY TEENAGE GIRL (17) in BIKINI, COWBOY BOOTS and COWBOY HAT brandishing A TASER. This is ELLEN'S DAUGHTER KATIE.

KATIE  
Who the fuck are you?

KATIE looks down at THE SUITCASE.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
And what are you doing with my  
mom's old suitcase?

DENNIS points to the CABLECO badge on his overalls.

DENNIS  
I'm working in the house. She gave  
me the suitcase to carry my tools.

KATIE  
So you're not a burglar?

DENNIS  
No but I probably wouldn't tell you  
even if I was.

**INT. POOL HOUSE - DAY**

The interior is set-up with a GO-PRO CAMERA pointing at the sofa, which is connected to a LAPTOP.

KATIE  
The signal from the house is  
garbage.

DENNIS slips effortlessly back into cable-guy mode.

DENNIS  
That's because you only have a  
wireless booster in here.

KATIE looks at DENNIS like he's talking a foreign language.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
What kind of file sizes are you  
trying to send and receive?

KATIE  
See for yourself.

On THE LAPTOP screen we see KATIE dry humping A GIANT TEDDY BEAR dressed in the BIKINI she's currently wearing.

A FEW SECONDS into her show KATIE begins slipping out of her bikini top. However, before she can get topless DENNIS swiftly hits THE SPACE BAR and freezes the action.

DENNIS  
(swallowing hard)  
OK -- I get it.

DENNIS'S FACE turns a shade of embarrassed pink.

KATIE  
What's the matter? Never seen an  
online sex show before?

DENNIS  
Does your mom know you're doing  
this?

KATIE  
Why do you care?

DENNIS

I have a teenage daughter about your age and I wouldn't be happy if she was making porn movies at home.

KATIE

They aren't porn movies stupid! And I don't give a shit what you or my mom think. She's too busy arguing with dad or sucking the pool guy's dick to notice anything I do.

KATIE looks at DENNIS.

KATIE (CONT'D)

In fact I'm surprised she hasn't tried screwing you?

DENNIS goes even redder.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Well I guess that answers that question.

DENNIS

Doing this stuff isn't going to help you get into pre-med you know.

KATIE

What are you talking about?

DENNIS

I thought it was your major for next year?

KATIE

I'm not going anywhere. I'm using my college fund to open the world's first vegan sex shop.

DENNIS

What's the difference between a vegan sex shop and a non-vegan one?

KATIE

Duh. Think about all those leather straps and rape masks vegan bondage fans currently can't use.

DENNIS

That's actually a smart idea.

KATIE

I know right?

DENNIS  
But still a tragic waste of your  
education.

KATIE looks at DENNIS to see if he's joking.

KATIE  
Are you a Mormon or something?

DENNIS  
A concerned parent like I said.

KATIE  
Then save the sermon to fuck-up  
your own kids will you?

DENNIS takes a closer look at KATIE'S technical set-up.

DENNIS  
You actually charge money for this?

KATIE  
Well I'm not letting all those  
Kazakstan oil workers jerk-off to  
my awesome breasts for free.

DENNIS  
How do they know where to find you?

KATIE  
So you are interested. I knew it.

DENNIS  
Cut it out.

KATIE  
I'm not bothered. I already have  
twenty thousand Instagram followers  
who pay to click through and watch  
me bang Sir Humphrey.

DENNIS  
Sir Humphrey?

KATIE gestures towards A GIANT TEDDY BEAR lying on the sofa.

**INT. TREATMENT ROOM - DAY**

MAX is on THE TREATMENT TABLE out cold from a GENERAL ANESTHETIC while THE VETERINARIAN concentrates on stitching him up. ZO looks on, fascinated.

VETERINARIAN

Always tricky stitching the paw area. It's hard for the animal to avoid pulling out the stitches if they're not done properly.

ZO

How long is Max going to be in the hospital?

VETERINARIAN

We don't have the capacity to admit him I'm afraid, and to be honest he'll recover better with you.

ZO

That's a bummer because I have to go to work later.

**EXT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - DAY**

DENNIS plods back across the lawn followed by MISTER SCRUFFS.

**INT. KITCHEN - DAY**

DENNIS enters the kitchen where A SURLY FILIPINO MAID (60s) polishes an already highly polished spotless kitchen surface.

FILIPINO MAID

I'm pretty sure Missus Nicholson gave the last gardener herpes.

DENNIS

(not quite sure he's heard her right)  
Excuse me?

FILIPINO MAID

Just so you know what you're getting yourself into...

A beat later a hot-looking ELLEN breezes into the kitchen wearing SKIN-TIGHT LYCRA ATHLEISUREWEAR.

ELLEN

This guy isn't the new gardener, Maria. He's here to fix the WI-FI so lose the resting bitch face and offer him a sandwich or something.

MARIA mutters something under her breath.

FILIPINO MAID

You want a sandwich or something?

DENNIS

That's a very kind offer but I don't want to put you to any trouble.

ELLEN

It's no trouble is it, Maria?

FILIPINO MAID

No Miss Ellen. No trouble at all.

The look on THE MAID'S face however, says otherwise.

ELLEN

(to DENNIS)

OK I need to leave for my Zumba class now and I expect you to be done and out of here by the time I get back.

DENNIS follows ELLEN as she breezes out into the hallway.

DENNIS

(quietly)

What about her?

DENNIS points towards the kitchen door.

ELLEN

Maria?

DENNIS nods.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

You can kill her too if you like but she'll have to be a freebie.

DENNIS

(appalled)

*I mean what time does she finish work?*

ELLEN

My guess is she'll have her lazy fat Mexican ass on a bus the second I turn my back.

ELLEN exits.

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS re-enters TO FIND MARIA making a fuss of MISTER SCRUFFS.

FILIPINO MAID

I heard you get free Netflix if you work for a cable company?

DENNIS

Not mine. They treat all their employees like shit.

FILIPINO MAID

I know that feeling.

DENNIS

Bad here too huh?

FILIPINO MAID

You've met Missus Nicholson -- and the kids are worse.

DENNIS

(wistful)

I thought they were going to be the perfect family.

FILIPINO MAID

That's what she likes to portray.

DENNIS

What's the husband like?

FILIPINO MAID

Always on a plane, grafting like a dog to bankroll her butter-creamed ass.

DENNIS

She must earn big bucks as an Orthodontist?

FILIPINO MAID

When the bitch actually goes to work, which is basically never because that would mean getting out of bed before noon.

The conversation is cut short by KATIE - now dressed in shirt and jeans - entering THE KITCHEN.



KATIE  
(to DENNIS)  
Shouldn't you be fixing the  
Internet instead of chatting shit  
to the help?

FILIPINO MAID  
He'll do that when you fix your  
manners, girly.

KATIE  
Fuck you Maria.

FILIPINO MAID  
Fuck you back, teen-slut.

KATIE grabs a set of CAR KEYS from the fruit bowl.

DENNIS  
Are you picking your brother up  
now?

KATIE  
How do you know that?

DENNIS  
Your mom told me I might be left  
alone in the house.

KATIE exits.

KATIE  
Stay out of my panty drawer if you  
are.

DENNIS  
Daughters of a certain age, huh?

MARIA  
Takes after her mother that one.

MARIA takes off her overall.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
That's me done for the day.

DENNIS  
I guess I should get back to work.

MARIA  
It's Christmas eve. Don't you have  
a family to go home to?

DENNIS looks down at MISTER SCRUFFS.

DENNIS  
We still have things to do here,  
don't we boy?

**EXT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - DAY**

MARIA dressed in an overcoat and snow boots, slams THE FRONT DOOR behind her and trudges off down the path.

**INT. NICHOLSON SITTING ROOM - DAY**

SFX: Front door slamming O.S.

The house is silent except for MISTER SCRUFFS panting.

DENNIS picks up ELLEN'S SUITCASE filled with THE MONEY and looks around THE ROOM.

DENNIS  
(to MISTER SCRUFFS)  
Need to find somewhere to stash  
this.

MISTER SCRUFFS wander over to the huge Christmas tree and starts sniffing THE PILE OF PRESENTS underneath.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
Good idea boy.

DENNIS follows suit and buries THE SUITCASE underneath, before wandering over to a DRINKS CABINET where he's about to pour himself A GLASS OF VODKA before thinking better of it and taking THE BOTTLE instead.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
OK let's have a little drink and a  
look around this place before the  
husband gets home.

**INT. NICHOLSON HALLWAY - DAY**

DENNIS swigs from A BOTTLE OF VODKA as he studies A LARGE GRAINY BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH of an empty cardboard box discarded on a sidewalk. It's bland, tasteless art for the rich. MISTER SCRUFFS doesn't look impressed.

DENNIS  
Me neither.

**INT. MONTAGE SEQUENCE - DAY**

1. DENNIS (fully clothed) and MISTER SCRUFFS sit in a steam-filled authentic Nordic Sauna.

2. DENNIS and MISTER SCRUFFS walk/run next to each other on running machines in the beautifully appointed gym.

3. DENNIS and MISTER SCRUFFS sit in an empty Jacuzzi in one of the house's opulent bathrooms.

4. DENNIS stands on end of the snow-covered diving board above THE SWIMMING POOL.

5. DENNIS stands at the foot of a giant bed in the master bedroom. A beat later he throws himself onto the crisp white counterpane and begins making snow angels.

MISTER SCRUFFS jumps up and joins DENNIS on the bed. DENNIS smiles and closes his eyes.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAY*****Flashback...***

A younger looking DENNIS lies awake next to RHONDA in a similar bed in a big, simple white bedroom with sun streaming in through the window. They look care-free and happy. MISTER SCRUFFS as a A PUPPY appears and jumps on the bed.

We zoom in on DENNIS'S face as he closes his eyes and the screen FADES TO BLACK.

***End flashback...*****INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY**

CLOSE-UP on DENNIS'S FACE asleep, eyes closed until they slowly open.

SFX: Somebody moving around O.C.

CUT TO. WIDER ANGLE.

DENNIS lies spread-eagled on the NICHOLSON'S BED. He lifts up his head woozily and sees a woman's silhouette framed against the window but it definitely isn't ELLEN.

FIGURE

So you finally decided to wake-up?

DENNIS

Wh - who are you?

THE FIGURE turns around and to DENNIS'S surprise it isn't a woman at all but CHARLES NICHOLSON, SHORT, HAIRY (40s) dressed in expensive women's lingerie.

CHARLES

Who the fuck are you more like? And what are you doing soiling my marital sheets?

DENNIS sits bolt-upright.

DENNIS

I was looking around the house and I guess I fell asleep.

CHARLES

Just like Goldilocks, huh?

CHARLES holds up the HALF-EMPTY BOTTLE OF VODKA and a stray pair of ELLEN'S PANTIES.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

And after you'd tasted my booze and checked out my crib you thought you'd finish up *by screwing my wife?*

DENNIS

That wasn't what happened at all!

CHARLES

Then how about you tell me exactly what did go down in here?

CHARLES pulls A HAND GUN out of nowhere and points it at DENNIS who recoils in terror.

DENNIS

(guilty panic)

OK I admit it. We did discuss the possibility of having sex...

CHARLES

(furious)

I knew it!

DENNIS

I said no!

CHARLES

You turned down the chance to have sex with Ellen?

DENNIS

I'm married. I'd never cheat on my wife.

CHARLES levels the gun at DENNIS'S HEAD.

CHARLES

Then I'm going to shoot you anyway for being a pussy.

DENNIS

Wait! I only stayed to tell you she's paid to have you killed.

CHARLES lowers THE GUN.

CHARLES

(shocked)  
What the fuck?

**INT. UNMARKED POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS**

RHONDA drives. RAY rides shotgun.

RAY

How did you and Dennis meet?

RHONDA

The janitor at his office found a dead homeless guy in the parking lot and I was sent to write-up the report.

RAY

And they say romance is dead.

RHONDA

For a while I thought he had something to do with the body because of the way he kept returning to the crime scene, but when I interviewed him later I knew what he was really interested in.

RHONDA smiles at the memory.

RAY

Did he actually ask you out while you were questioning him?

RHONDA

No. He called the precinct later.

RAY

Classy guy. And you gave up being a cop when you had kids?

RHONDA

Yeah although it wasn't an easy decision.

RAY

Did Dennis talk you into it?

RHONDA

No. He was very supportive about whatever I decided. In the end I just came to the conclusion that other Moms weren't getting shot at in the workplace so I quit.

RAY

But you blame him for having to come back now?

RHONDA

I shouldn't because I still love the job but yeah, the way he's been behaving is making me feel like it is his fault.

RAY

Look on the bright side. You wouldn't have the pleasure of driving around homicidal Detroit for twelve hours a day with me if his business hadn't failed.

RHONDA

I guess every cloud has a silver lining...

**INT. NICHOLSON BEDROOM - EARLY EVENING**

DENNIS sits on the edge of the bed while CHARLES (still in women's underwear and brandishing the gun) paces.

CHARLES

You expect me to believe Ellen just dragged you off the street because she thought you were a hitman?

DENNIS

Yes because that's exactly what happened.

CHARLES

Why didn't you tell her the truth?

DENNIS

I don't know. I was caught off-guard.

DENNIS anxiously scans the room.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

You haven't seen my dog have you?

CHARLES

Your dog?

DENNIS

He was with me when I came up here.  
(calling)  
Scruffs!

CHARLES

Forget the mutt. How much did Ellen offer you to kill me?

DENNIS

Four hundred thousand dollars.

CHARLES

What a cheap bitch!

DENNIS

Four hundred grand is a lot of cash.

CHARLES

Not compared to what she'll get from my life insurance policies.

DENNIS

Can you please stop waving the gun around and try to stay calm. It'll make for a more productive discussion when she gets home.

CHARLES

We're not going to have a productive discussion when she gets home. You know why?

DENNIS

Why?

CHARLES

Because I'm going to shoot her in the fucking face!

DENNIS

This is just a bump in the road you can overcome together.

CHARLES

*Hiring a hitman to kill your husband is a bump in the road?*

DENNIS

It's Christmas. Emotions get heightened, and the way I'm reading it, Ellen's just hurt and angry about you spending so much time away from home.

(as an afterthought)

Oh and...

DENNIS hesitates.

CHARLES

What?

DENNIS

She says you smell like cheese.

CHARLES

*Cheese?*

CHARLES says it like it's shit.

DENNIS

Manchego. It has a nice nutty flavor and a glorious aftertaste.

CHARLES

I know what Manchego is you prick!

DENNIS

My kids used to tell me I stunk of cockroach, which is way worse.

CHARLES

(appalled)

Why would they say you smelled of cockroach?



DENNIS

Because I used to have a business making burger patties out of insect larvae.

CHARLES

That is disgusting.

DENNIS

Actually the predicted sales were stratospheric. A lot of scientists think it's the future of edible protein.

CHARLES

So why are you still a cable guy and not gracing the cover of Time magazine?

DENNIS

I was ahead of the curve.

CHARLES

That's the oldest excuse in the book.

DENNIS

In this case it's true.

CHARLES

No it isn't. It's just a delusional way of dealing with the fact that you fucked-up.

DENNIS

(gloomy)

We're not here to talk about me anyway.

CHARLES sits down in AN ARMCHAIR and crosses his legs SHARON STONE-STYLE.

CHARLES

Did you lose a lot of money?

DENNIS

Pretty much everything and then some.

CHARLES

That must have hurt.

DENNIS

Like hell.

(confessional)

I still owe two hundred and fifty grand to creditors. I think my wife probably hates me because I can't move on. My kids are angry, and even the dog farts whenever I get near him.

CHARLES

Fuck 'em all. I'm sure you didn't intend to get cleaned out?

CHARLES jumps up from THE ARMCHAIR.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Hey! I've suddenly had an intense idea.

CHARLES disappears into AN ADJOINING DRESSING-ROOM.

**INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS goes over to A CLOSET FULL OF SMART BUSINESS SUITS and sweeps them to one side to reveal A SAFE BUILT INTO THE WALL.

CHARLES

(calling to DENNIS)

How about we turn this whole thing on its head...

DENNIS (O.C.)

What do you mean?

CHARLES opens THE SAFE and takes out A SMART LOUIS VUITTON HOLDALL before locking it again.

**INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS waits for CHARLES to emerge from THE DRESSING ROOM.

CHARLES (O.C.)

What if I pay you to kill Ellen?

CHARLES comes back into the room and unzips THE HOLDALL on THE BED.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I'll give you five hundred grand, which to be fair is a hundred more than she offered.

DENNIS

But I'm not even a real hit man!

DENNIS sees BUNDLES OF PRISTINE HUNDREDS inside THE BAG.

CHARLES

Then maybe you should be.

CHARLES leaves THE HOLDALL provocatively on the bed and expertly unhooks the bra he's wearing and replaces it with a smart, conservative man's shirt instead.

DENNIS

Here's a much better suggestion;  
why don't you and Ellen forget  
about killing each other and go to  
couples therapy like anyone else?

CHARLES

Is that what you and your wife do?

DENNIS

We can't afford it.

CHARLES

If you kill Ellen you'll be able to  
buy all the therapy you want.

DENNIS

The answer's still no.

MISTER SCRUFFS enters the room and wanders over to DENNIS.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Hello boy!

DENNIS strokes MISTER SCRUFFS fondly.

CHARLES

Jeez, your dog looks like a roll of  
carpet from a dumpster.

DENNIS

(to MISTER SCRUFFS)

Ignore him. He just asked me to  
kill his wife.

MISTER SCRUFFS looks dolefully at DENNIS.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

It's OK, I'm not going to do it.

From O.C. we hear A YOUNG MAN'S VOICE SHOUTING.

MAN (O.S.)

Dad!

It's CHARLES JUNIOR (23), who KATIE picked-up from the airport.

CHARLES

(shouting back calmly)

Charlie boy!

(back on DENNIS)

It's my son Charles Junior. He's back from Harvard for the holidays.

CHARLES puts on a jacket, picks up THE HOLDALL, zips it up and goes back into HIS DRESSING ROOM.

CHARLES (O.C.) (CONT'D)

We'll resume this conversation later.

DENNIS

It's Christmas eve and I have a long drive home so if it's all the same to you I'll leave you to enjoy your family time...

CHARLES emerges from THE DRESSING ROOM and levels the gun at DENNIS again.

CHARLES

Non-negotiable.

DENNIS

I already told you everything I know.

CHARLES

Exactly. I might need your testimony later on tonight.

DENNIS

(anxious)

Testimony for what?

CHARLES JUNIOR (O.S.)

I'm coming up!

CHARLES

(shouting back)

Stay there CJ, I'll be right down...

DENNIS

Well?

CHARLES  
In case things get ugly.

CHARLES checks himself in the mirror.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
There's one more thing.

DENNIS  
What?

CHARLES  
If you aren't the guy Ellen thought  
she was hiring to kill me then  
where's the real hitman?

We see a look of fear flash across DENNIS'S FACE.

**INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS**

**Smash-cut...**

SFX: Lady In Red by CHRIS DE BURGH is playing on the radio.

ZO drives through heavy Chicago traffic with MAX sitting on the passenger seat beside him.

ZO  
(singing badly)  
*I've never seen you looking so  
gorgeous as you did tonight -- I've  
never seen you shine so bright...*

**INT. NICHOLSON SITTING ROOM - NIGHT**

SMARTLY-DRESSED CATERING STAFF are preparing the room for tonight's fundraising TREE TRIM-ATHON.

There's a CHEESY BANNER stretched out across the wall that says: **TURN THE COOL KIDS OF RWANDA INTO BFF'S!**

CHARLES JUNIOR (early 20s), HANDSOME DEAD-RINGER FOR HIS DAD takes A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE from a tray as CHARLES himself enters the room and makes a beeline for his children.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
Dad hi!

CHARLES and CHARLES JUNIOR embrace warmly.

CHARLES  
How's life at Harvard, son?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
Harvard's great. What about South  
Korea?

CHARLES  
Tricky place to do business but  
rewarding when you get it right.

KATIE  
What he means is it's harder  
getting laid.

CHARLES  
Honey...

KATIE  
So you're not denying it?

CHARLES  
Currently the Seoul operation pays  
for our fancy Chicago lifestyle so  
I'd try and be a little more  
grateful if I were you.

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS wanders in and A WAITRESS collars him.

WAITRESS  
Are you the dad?

DENNIS  
I'm a dad but I'm not sure I'm *the*  
dad.

WAITRESS  
Of the guy hosting the party?

DENNIS  
Not a chance. That kid is  
definitely the fruit of another  
man's loins.

WAITRESS  
He's hot.

DENNIS  
They're a hot family.

WAITRESS  
I don't suppose you know if junior  
has a girlfriend?

DENNIS

No. But if he's like his parents  
he'll screw anything with a pulse.

WAITRESS

So I might have a chance?

DENNIS

Seriously? That doesn't put you  
off?

WAITRESS

My ex-boyfriend robbed a retirement  
village and then set fire to it  
with a flame-thrower. Sleeping with  
a trust-fund sex addict would be a  
high-class problem after that.

DENNIS

Maybe a period of celibacy could be  
even better?

THE WAITRESS smiles sexily at DENNIS.

WAITRESS

That's a great idea. I'll make it  
my new year's resolution.

DENNIS

Yeah right.

MISTER SCRUFFS begins whining.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

You wanna go outside, boy?

**EXT. NICHOLSON HOUSE FRONT - CONTINUOUS**

A SHINY ESCALADE pulls up and GORAN (50s), SMARTLY-DRESSED,  
THICK-SET AND CHUBBY - A BIT LIKE A GONE TO SEED RUSSIAN  
WRESTLER, gets out.

He opens the door for his GLAMOROUS, much younger, SEXY  
RUSSIAN-LOOKING PARTNER LADA (30s), definitely more hooker  
than wife. They walk the short distance to the front door.

**INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT**

WAITING STAFF with trays of drinks and canapés are on  
standby. Tasteful jazz emanates from the sound system.

SFX: DOORBELL RINGING

CHARLES JUNIOR

Showtime!

CHARLES JUNIOR opens the door and greets GORAN and LADA warmly.

CHARLES JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Goran! Lada! So kind of you to give up your Christmas Eve for Rwandan orphans.

GORAN

We wouldn't have missed it for the world, would we honey?

GORAN scans the room.

GORAN (CONT'D)

Where's that smoking-hot mom of yours I've seen on your Facebook page?

CHARLES JUNIOR

She's coming straight from the gym.

GORAN

I guess you don't get an ass like that without putting in the hours.

KATIE wanders over and joins the conversation.

KATIE

The only muscle group she works harder is her vagina.

CHARLES JUNIOR looks annoyed but GORAN just grins.

CHARLES JUNIOR

Goran, Lada, meet my very rude baby sister Katie.

GORAN looks at KATIE like she's a tasty sandwich.

GORAN

Rude I like. And she's not such a baby from where I'm standing.

GORAN lecherously eyes KATIE.

CHARLES JUNIOR

Katie why don't you get these guys a drink?



KATIE  
Sure. Champagne OK?

LADA  
(excitable)  
Ooh champagne. Make mine a double!

GORAN  
I'll have a Scotch on the rocks  
please, honey.

KATIE exits and CHARLES JUNIOR turns his attention to GORAN'S WIFE, LADA.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
ACTION FOR RWANDA is honored to  
have you as a patron, Lada.

LADA  
It is great pleasure Charlie. My  
own childhood in Slovenia was truly  
awful, so anything I can do to make  
sure these kids don't have to grow  
up without Netflix or Tik Tok is of  
great importance.

**INT. SQUAD CAR - CONTINUOUS**

RAY and RHONDA are cruising through the city, past Christmas revelers and lights.

RHONDA  
It's like we're trying to talk to  
each other but having different  
conversations.

RAY  
At least you're still talking.

RHONDA  
But getting nowhere.

RAY  
Is leaving him going to make you  
feel any better though?

RHONDA  
I don't know. Currently it feels  
like if I stay with Dennis nothing  
will ever change.

RAY  
Do the kids know how you feel?

RHONDA  
Lucy can sense it but Kyle's  
oblivious.

RAY  
Would you take them with you?

RHONDA  
Of course.

RAY  
And Dennis has no idea?

RHONDA  
Dennis has his head in the sand.

THE VOICE OF CONTROL squirts over THE RADIO.

CONTROL MVO  
*Papa Tango eight-zero-eight.  
Possible homicide at McDaniels  
Hotel, junction of Fisher and Wolf.  
Are you able to respond?*

RHONDA grabs the radio as RAY hits the siren and accelerates.

RHONDA  
Responding now. ETA ten minutes.

ECU. CAR DASH. RHONDA'S PHONE VIBRATES but she ignores it.

**EXT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - NIGHT**

DENNIS is on HIS CELLPHONE as he stands on the edge of the lawn watching MISTER SCRUFFS sniff his way around the grass.

We hear the call go through to VOICEMAIL.

RHONDA VOICEMAIL  
*Sorry I can't take your call right  
now but leave a message and I'll  
get back to you as soon as I can.*

DENNIS  
(into THE PHONE)  
Ronnie, it's me. I hope you're OK  
and having a good day...

DENNIS tries to keep his emotions in check.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

I just wanted to say sorry about this morning and the way everything turned out this year.

(hesitates)

I don't blame you for hating me. I should never have invested our hard-earned savings into something so damn ridiculous.

(choked)

I should have been a better husband and father to you and the kids too. Happy Christmas honey...

**INT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

The party is now in full swing. GORAN approaches CHARLES JUNIOR who's MINGLING WITH THE OTHER GUESTS.

GORAN

You wanna update me on how the charity is doing, Charlie?

CHARLES JUNIOR

Sure. Let's get a drink at the bar.

GORAN

I was thinking somewhere a little more private.

**EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS is on the edge of the lawn watching MISTER SCRUFFS sniff his way around the garden, when CHARLES JUNIOR and GORAN exit through the glass doors of the sitting room. He pulls back into THE SHADOWS as they walk to THE POOL HOUSE.

**INT. POOL HOUSE - NIGHT**

GORAN confronts CHARLES.

GORAN

Eleven months ago you persuaded me that Rwanda - or wherever the fuck it was you spent your vacation.

CHARLES JUNIOR

Rwanda and it was my gap year.

GORAN

Whatever. You convinced me it was the perfect place to grow weed, and in return I gave you five hundred grand to make it happen.

CHARLES JUNIOR

For which I am eternally grateful.

GORAN

Yeah well fuck being grateful. I wanna know why I haven't seen a dime return on my investment so far?

CHARLES

Let me expla...

GORAN

Just tell me where the merchandise is, you little turd?

CHARLES JUNIOR

You have to understand what we're creating here Goran...

CHARLES JUNIOR looks like he's preparing to deliver a Powerpoint presentation.

CHARLES JUNIOR (CONT'D)

This stuff is the equivalent of a 2005 Chateau Petrus or Fleetwood Mac's RUMOURS album - neither of which just happened overnight.

GORAN grabs CHARLES JUNIOR by the throat and begins throttling the life out of him.

GORAN

(grinning sadistically)

I'd hardly describe the timeframe as overnight - and even though I'm a Bosnian Death Metal guy at heart - I can tell you that RUMOURS took just two months to record and the band were high for most of it...

CHARLES JUNIOR fights for breath as he gestures over to a corner of the pool house.

CHARLES JUNIOR

I-i-i-nside the basket...

GORAN looks towards a LARGE, BRIGHTLY COLORED, BEADED AFRICAN WICKER BASKET in the corner of the room.

CHARLES JUNIOR (CONT'D)

(choking)

I was going to give it to you as a Christmas present later...

CHARLES JUNIOR fights for breath as GORAN casts him aside like a rag doll, removes the lid of the basket and pulls out A PARCEL WRAPPED IN CHRISTMAS PAPER.

**EXT. POOL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS WATCHES THE ACTION through A WINDOW.

DENNIS

(to himself)

So this is the kid who according to the family Christmas card is going to be the next Ban Ki Moon...

**INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

CHARLES and KATIE mingle amongst their well-dressed guests.

CHARLES

Where's your brother?

KATIE

He went off somewhere with that creepy Goran guy.

CHARLES

How did CJ get involved with someone like that?

KATIE

His vacation job delivering pizza. Goran was a customer and CJ persuaded him to donate.

KATIE glances across the room to where LADA, GORAN'S GIRLFRIEND/WIFE is looking straight at them. KATIE smiles back and LADA takes this as an invitation to join them.

KATIE (CONT'D)

His squeeze is coming over. You can ask her yourself.

LADA

Hi guys!

LADA is clearly already quite drunk.

CHARLES  
 (all charm)  
 Hey Lada. Are you having fun?

LADA  
 Well I managed to ditch my asshole  
 husband.  
 (flirtatious)  
 And the company just got a whole  
 lot classier.

KATIE aims a sly grin at CHARLES.

KATIE  
 If you'll excuse me I need to check  
 the ice-buckets.

**INT. POOL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

GORAN RIPS OPEN THE CHRISTMAS PARCEL to reveal a thick dark-brown leafy mulch.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 (fighting for breath)  
 I call it Killer Rwandaddy. It's a  
 cross fertilization of Tahoe OG,  
 Chemdawg and Granddaddy Purps, with  
 a flavor that isn't dissimilar to  
 salted caramel and marshmallows...

But GORAN isn't listening. He's examining the contents of the parcel more closely.

GORAN  
 How do I know it's as strong as you  
 say it is?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 We tested the THC content last week  
 and this batch is over forty  
 percent.

GORAN  
 In English?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 Basically it's weed-dynamite.

GORAN continues to look unimpressed.

CHARLES JUNIOR (CONT'D)  
 Try it if you don't believe me but  
 I wouldn't recommend it.

GORAN  
 Why the fuck not?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 Because you don't look like closet  
 Snoop Dogg and this stuff is rocket-  
 fuel even for hardened stoners.

GORAN  
 Roll me a joint you little pussy.  
 Before I break your fucking legs.

CHARLES retrieves some rolling papers from underneath A SOFA CUSHION and begins expertly constructing a fat spliff.

**EXT. POOL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS DRAGS HIMSELF AWAY FROM THE ACTION and scans the area for MISTER SCRUFFS.

DENNIS  
 (quietly)  
 Scruffs!

Unfortunately THE DOG is nowhere to be seen.

**INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

LADA is flirting embarrassingly with CHARLES.

LADA  
 You have gorgeous children,  
 Charlie. So polite!

CHARLES  
 And you and your husband's support  
 for CJ's charity is graciously  
 appreciated.

LADA  
 I'll tell you secret - me and G -  
 we are not actually married.

CHARLES feigns surprise.

CHARLES  
 Really?

LADA  
It's front for immigration purposes  
only.

CHARLES  
Well you're secret's safe with me.

LADA  
In fact I don't even sleep with him  
anymore because of his penis gout.

CHARLES  
(genuinely shocked)  
Penis gout? What the hell is that?

LADA  
Y 'know I'm not exactly sure but it  
causes terrible itching on the tip  
of his you know what, and sometimes  
he worries about it falling off.

CHARLES looks revolted.

CHARLES  
It isn't catching is it?

LADA  
I don't think so.

LADA whispers to CHARLES.

LADA (CONT'D)  
G is real martyr to it, which means  
no more sexy-time for poor me.

CHARLES  
I have a similar problem with my  
wife.

LADA  
(quizzical)  
She has penis gout too?

CHARLES looks at LADA, unsure whether she's actually joking  
or not.

CHARLES  
No. I mean like you I don't have  
sexy-time anymore.

LADA looks like she could suck the skin off an olive.

LADA  
That is most interesting.



**INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT**

DENNIS examines A SELECTION OF CANAPÉS while A YOUNG WAITER neatly plates them up.

DENNIS  
 (addressing the waiter)  
 Do any of these contain raw meat?

YOUNG WAITER  
 No but the mini risotto cakes with  
 fennel and truffle oil are to die  
 for.

THE YOUNG WAITER offers one to DENNIS.

DENNIS  
 (mouthful of canapé)  
 That is really good.

YOUNG WAITER  
 I know right?

DENNIS  
 Do you have anything that might  
 appeal to a dog?

YOUNG WAITER  
 (surprised)  
 You mean like a dog, dog?

DENNIS  
 Yeah. Mine's gone rogue in the  
 garden and I need to get him back  
 so I can leave.

YOUNG WAITER  
 Maybe try the Wagu beef with  
 Japanese horseradish glaze...

**EXT. MAIN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS stands on the KITCHEN STEPS holding a canapé.

Suddenly MISTER SCRUFFS breaks cover and bounds over to DENNIS, grabs THE CANAPE and runs back into THE UNDERGROWTH.

DENNIS  
 Come back here!

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS enters.

YOUNG WAITER  
How did the Wagu beef work?

DENNIS  
That stuff is pooch crack-cocaine.

YOUNG WAITER  
You want some more?

DENNIS  
Maybe later. Right now I'm going to try and spot him from an upstairs window.

DENNIS exits the kitchen.

**INT. LANDING - CONTINUOUS**

SFX: MUFFLED PARTY SOUNDS COMING FROM THE SITTING ROOM BELOW.

DENNIS gets to THE TOP OF THE STAIRS, wanders along the landing and enters one of THE BEDROOMS.

**INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS goes over to THE WINDOW, where he has a panoramic view of the garden. Unfortunately there's no sign of MISTER SCRUFFS.

**EXT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

A SMART MERCEDES COUPE pulls into the driveway.

ELLEN NICHOLSON cuts the engine and gets out wearing a dress that makes her look every inch the million dollar housewife.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS is surveying the GARDEN BELOW when THE SOUND OF LADA GIGGLING comes from THE CORRIDOR outside the room.

A moment later the door opens and CHARLES and LADA push their way inside kissing hard, prompting DENNIS to duck behind THE DRAPES.

WE CUT TO A CLOSE-UP on DENNIS as a look of horror spreads across his face.

LADA (O.S.)  
Is your bedroom, Charlie?

CHARLES (O.S.)  
No. This is one of our guest suites.

LADA (O.S.)  
Very classy...

For the rest of the scene we cut between CHARLES and LADA, and DENNIS reacting from behind the curtain.

LADA (CONT'D)  
Oh God it's so good to be with man who hasn't got penis gout...

WE CUT TO A CLOSE-UP on DENNIS'S FACE - What the fuck is this crazy woman talking about?

**INT. NICHOLSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

ELLEN makes a dramatic entrance, air-kissing her way over to KATIE, who is standing by THE BAR looking sullen.

ELLEN  
For God's sake smile. I haven't wasted hours of my own time giving you free cosmetic dentistry so you can wander around looking brain-damaged.

KATIE  
I hate you.

ELLEN  
I'm fine with that. Teenage girls are supposed to hate their moms.

ELLEN scans the room.

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
Where's CJ and your father?

KATIE  
CJ's talking to one of his trustees and I have no idea about dad.

ELLEN smiles knowingly.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT**

LADA is STRADDLING CHARLES on THE SOFA, only meters away from DENNIS who is still hiding behind THE DRAPES.

LADA  
Oh fuck yeah big boy!!! Fill me  
with your juicy, bubble tea...

We cut to a close-up on DENNIS'S face grimacing some more and mouthing the words 'JUICY, BUBBLE TEA' silently to himself.

CHARLES  
I want to take you in the en-suite.

LADA  
You mean the ass?

CHARLES  
No. In the bathroom.

LADA  
Sorry. In Slovenia this is term for  
sex in bottom.

CHARLES  
Really? No I just want to watch us  
fuck in the mirror old school.

LADA  
I can poop for you while we're in  
there if you like?

CHARLES  
Is that another Slovenian thing?

LADA  
No. I think poop is universal term  
for shit in all countries.

DENNIS looks like he wants to throw up.

CHARLES  
OK great. Well I guess it's good to  
have options.

CHARLES leads LADA towards THE EN-SUITE and sees an opportunity to escape.

**INT. EN-SUITE - CONTINUOUS**

LADA and CHARLES begin kissing again.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS inches his way across the room tiptoeing past the open door to THE EN-SUITE.

WE CUT TO HIS FACE GRIMACING at whatever is on show (which we don't see) in THE BATHROOM.

Finally he reaches THE BEDROOM DOOR and slips out, silently shutting the door behind him.

**EXT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

CLOSE-UP. DENNIS'S FACE breathing a huge sigh of relief.

ELLEN (V.O.)  
Well, well, well, look what the cat  
dragged in.

DENNIS'S eyes widen with fright.

Smash-cut...

Reveals ELLEN standing right next to DENNIS in THE CORRIDOR.

DENNIS  
Jesus! You scared me!

ELLEN  
(accusatory)  
Why are you still here?

DENNIS  
I err - I can't find my dog.

ELLEN  
Then buy a new one that's less  
gassy. You can afford it after what  
I just paid you.

DENNIS  
Normal people don't abandon their  
pets when they mislay them.

ELLEN  
You're not a normal person. You're  
a hired killer.

DENNIS looks sheepish.

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
And on that particular subject,  
where is Charlie's body?

DENNIS

I thought we agreed it would be better when you talk to the cops if you don't know any of the details.

ELLEN

I've changed my mind. I want to see.

DENNIS

But I...

ELLEN glowers at DENNIS as she cuts across him.

ELLEN

Now.

**INT. EN SUITE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

LADA leans up against THE SINK while CHARLES screws her from behind, trousers around his ankles along with a pair of Victoria's Secret micro-briefs.

LADA

These are beautiful taps. They must have cost a lot of US dollars?

CHARLES

(trying to maintain his rhythm)  
M-y w-i-f-e c-h-o-s-e t-h-e-m.

LADA

She has very expensive taste.

CHARLES

I g-g-g-u-e-s-s...

LADA looks down to where there is an expensive-looking cleaning brush for THE TOILET.

LADA

I am loving your toilet brush too. Very classy.

CHARLES stops thrusting.

CHARLES

Please stop talking! I'm driving the business end of a showcase orgasm back here!

LADA

Sorry.

CHARLES gets back on the job.

**INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

ELLEN stands menacingly close to DENNIS who guards THE DOOR of THE GUEST ROOM.

ELLEN

Well?

DENNIS

I like your dress.

ELLEN

It's Gucci.

DENNIS

It suits you.

ELLEN

I know. I look like a fucking goddess.

(losing patience)

*Now where's Charlie's body?*

THE SOUND OF CHARLES GROANING comes from inside THE GUEST ROOM. DENNIS suddenly looks very guilty.

**INT. EN SUITE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

CHARLES is about to climax until...

LADA

Are those tiles really made of metal?

CHARLES

(furious)

Stop with the tile talk for crissakes!!!

ELLEN (O.C.)

(calm)

Sure they are. Ceramic base, coated with a powdered titanium glaze.

CHARLES and LADA spin round like they're joined at the hip, to discover ELLEN standing at the door of the bathroom.

LADA  
(in shock)  
What the fuck?!!

CHARLES however, remains alarmingly composed.

CHARLES  
Surprised to see me?

ELLEN  
Balls deep in a cheap hooker? Not really.

CHARLES  
I mean alive!

ELLEN  
(off DENNIS)  
Yes. And a little disappointed too.

DENNIS looks at his shoes, embarrassed.

CHARLES  
*You double-crossing piece of shit!*

ELLEN  
(again off DENNIS)  
You took the words right out of my mouth.

LADA watches the exchange between CHARLES and ELLEN with bemusement.

LADA  
Am I missing something here?

ELLEN glances down towards LADA'S lady-garden (which we of course don't see).

ELLEN  
A decent Brazilian wax by the look of it.

LADA  
Fuck you bitch!

LADA lunges at ELLEN but CHARLES reaches inside the pocket of his jacket and pulls out THE GUN he threatened DENNIS with earlier.

CHARLES  
Leave it Lada. I've got this.



Unfortunately LADA trips on her dress (still around her ankles), and knocks THE GUN OUT OF CHARLES'S HAND.

It clatters across the floor and lands at DENNIS'S FEET, whereupon he instinctively picks it up and points it at CHARLES, ELLEN and LADA.

**INT. MCDANIELS HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

UNIFORMED COPS and FORENSIC PEOPLE mill around purposefully and a POLICE CORDON has been set up around ONE OF THE ROOMS as RHONDA and RAY get out of THE ELEVATOR.

They show their ID and duck under THE CORDON into THE ROOM.

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

A MAN'S BODY lies lifelessly ON THE BED covered in blood while a POLICE PHOTOGRAPHER takes pictures. RAY addresses ONE OF THE UNIFORMED GUYS.

RAY

Do we know what happened?

UNIFORMED COP shakes his head.

UNIFORM COP

Maid came in to turn down the bed and found him like this.

RHONDA approaches THE BODY.

RHONDA

Any ID?

UNIFORM COP

Nothing yet.

RAY moves to the other side of the bed from RHONDA and they both study THE CORPSE intently.

RAY

I have a suggestion.

RHONDA

What?

RAY

Maybe you and Dennis should see a counsellor.

RHONDA doesn't seem at all surprised that RAY'S theory concerns her marriage and not THE GRISLY BODY in front of them.

RHONDA

He suggested the same thing.

RAY takes a pair of RUBBER GLOVES out of his pocket and expertly puts them on.

RAY

Then why haven't you done it?

RHONDA

Two reasons: we can't afford it and secondly I don't think our problems are that complicated or deep.

RHONDA follows RAY'S lead and slips into some RUBBER GLOVES as RAY delicately feels under THE PILLOW THE BODY is lying on.

RAY

You can't blame everything on him, Ronnie.

RHONDA

I don't. But it was Dennis who invested our life savings into that fucked-up company and now it's him that can't get over it.

RHONDA and RAY continue to examine THE BODY and BED while they talk.

RAY

Why do you think that is?

RAY looks knowingly across THE BODY at RHONDA.

RHONDA

Because he's a stubborn asshole.

RAY

Seriously.

RHONDA

I don't know. He says he feels bad about putting Kyle, Lucy and me in jeopardy but that's exactly what he's doing now.

RHONDA and RAY conclude their search at THE FOOT OF THE BED.

RHONDA (CONT'D)

(softer)

I just want the guy I married back  
but right now I don't know if  
that's going to happen.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS'S resolve is being tested as he continues to point CHARLES'S GUN at CHARLES, ELLEN and LADA.

CHARLES

Give me that.

For a moment it looks like DENNIS is going to do just that and hand over the gun before thinking better of it.

DENNIS

No.

DENNIS shuffles backwards and awkwardly points the gun in the vague direction of CHARLES, ELLEN and LADA.

ELLEN

What are you doing, fool?

DENNIS

All of you. Get inside the bathroom  
before I...

DENNIS points the gun more assertively and in doing so ACCIDENTALLY PULLS THE TRIGGER, RICOCHETING OFF THE EDGE OF THE SINK and putting a bullet hole in ELLEN'S DRESS without hitting her.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

...shoot somebody. Oops. Sorry.

CHARLES

Jesus Christ!

ELLEN

You're going to pay for this you  
crazy asshole!

DENNIS

Just get in there.

Nevertheless ELLEN moves inside THE EN-SUITE with CHARLES and LADA as DENNIS turns THE KEY and locks it shut.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
 (breathing a huge  
 stressful sigh)  
 I should be at home eating a king-  
 sized bucket of popcorn and  
 wrapping Christmas presents right  
 now...

**INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT**

An anxious CHARLES JUNIOR comes in through the terrace doors and makes a bee-line for KATIE.

KATIE  
 (annoyed)  
 Where have you been? Mom's arrived,  
 Dad's disappeared and some of the  
 guests are asking for you.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 (sheepish)  
 We have a problem.

KATIE  
 What kind of problem?

**INT. POOL HOUSE - NIGHT**

CHARLES JUNIOR and KATIE are in THE POOLHOUSE GYM. In front of them is NAKED GORAN standing on A VIBRO-PLATE with the fat on his body vibrating like a flesh tsunami.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 He's been smoking the world's  
 strongest weed.

KATIE unsuccessfully tries to drag her gaze away from GORAN'S FAT, NAKED GYRATING ASS.

KATIE  
 How? *Why?*

It's confession time for CHARLES JUNIOR.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 When I was doing research for my  
 trip to Rwanda I discovered  
 something unexpected.

KATIE  
 That you were gay for chubby,  
 eastern European dudes?

CHARLES JUNIOR

That the foothills outside Kigali  
have the perfect micro-climate for  
growing marajuana...

KATIE

I knew there had to be something  
else! That's why you started Action  
For Rwanda isn't it?

CHARLES JUNIOR

At the beginning I really did want  
to help those poor kids...

KATIE and CHARLES JUNIOR watch as GORAN shimmies over to THE  
SOFA and spoons HUMPHREY THE TEDDY BEAR.

KATIE

(off GORAN)

Just cut the crap CJ and tell me  
what it's got to do with this  
chugly douche?

CHARLES JUNIOR

Goran invested the seed capital to  
make it happen.

KATIE

So you're risking Harvard for some  
stupid drug money?

CHARLES JUNIOR

Stupid drug money? Do you have any  
idea how much we're going to make  
on this first shipment?

KATIE

How much?

CHARLES JUNIOR

Almost ten million dollars.

KATIE'S eyes widen.

KATIE

OK I guess that is fucking lit.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS carefully arranges THREE CHAIRS IN A SEMI-CIRCLE  
before going back over to THE BATHROOM DOOR and unlocking it.

**INT. EN-SUITE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS opens the door to an immediate VOLLEY OF ABUSE from his THREE CAPTIVES.

ELLEN

I'm a diagnosed claustrophobic you bastard!

LADA

I'm one of those too! Plus my Goran will rip you surplus butthole when he finds out what happened up here.

CHARLES

Do we really want Goran knowing about that?

LADA

OK maybe not everything.

DENNIS brandishes THE GUN at THE THREE of THEM.

DENNIS

Charles, Ellen both of you out now.  
(pointing THE GUN politely  
at LADA)  
I'm sorry I didn't get your name.

LADA

Rapunzel.

CHARLES

Rapunzel? I thought it was Lada?

LADA

Lada is my American name.

ELLEN

And also a cheap eastern European car brand, which somehow seems entirely appropriate.

LADA

(angry)  
How about I come over and slap you in the mouth.

ELLEN

Wanna try it?

DENNIS

(cutting in)  
That's enough!  
(MORE)

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
 (sweetly to LADA/RAPUNZEL)  
 Well Rapunzel, I'm afraid you'll  
 have to stay in the bathroom for a  
 while longer if you don't mind.

LADA  
 I'm OK with that.  
 (moody off ELLEN)  
 This party has turned to shit  
 anyway.

DENNIS locks the door of THE EN-SUITE (with LADA inside) and  
 points THE GUN at CHARLES and ELLEN again.

DENNIS  
 Sit down.

CHARLES  
 What if I refuse?

DENNIS  
 Then I'll shoot you in your thong.

ELLEN looks over at the gorgeous, lacy underwear CHARLES is  
 wearing.

ELLEN  
 You mean my thong.

CHARLES  
 I paid for it.

ELLEN  
 You're a bastard, Charlie.

DENNIS points THE GUN like he means business.

DENNIS  
 Both of you - *sit*.

Finally CHARLES and ELLEN do exactly what they're told and  
 sit down.

CHARLES  
 You know what? For a guy who isn't  
 a real hitman you look mighty cosy  
 with a firearm.

**EXT. HOTEL - DAY**

THE BODY (NOW COVERED UP) is being loaded into the back of a  
 Police truck watched by RAY and RHONDA.

RAY  
I was married once.

RHONDA  
(surprised)  
I didn't know that.

RAY  
Stacey. She was a cop too.

RHONDA  
What happened? Did you get a  
divorce?

RAY  
Breast cancer. Twentieth of  
December Two Thousand and Three.  
Worst day of my life.

RHONDA  
(softer)  
That's terrible.

RAY  
It sure is.

RHONDA  
Do you miss her?

RAY  
Only like every fucking hour of  
every day.

RHONDA  
You've never met anyone else?

RAY  
Dated a few times over the years  
but my heart was never in it.

RHONDA  
That's tough.

RAY  
Yeah. I lost my soulmate. It sucks.

RHONDA  
(wistful)  
Dennis and I used to have so much  
fun before the business. I wish he  
could see it isn't the money I care  
about losing, it's him.



RAY

Which is why you should think real hard before you throw it in the trash.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

CHARLES and ELLEN are sitting next to each other on TWO OF THE CHAIRS. CHARLES is already wrapped like AN EGYPTIAN MUMMY up to his neck in DUCT TAPE while DENNIS finishes doing the same thing to ELLEN.

CHARLES

Where did you get all this tape?

DENNIS

My tool bag. We use a ton of it when we're cable-laying.

ELLEN

I'll hunt you down like a dog if it gives me a skin rash...

DENNIS ignores ELLEN'S threat and finishes wrapping her in duct tape before sitting in THE THIRD CHAIR and taking THE ROUND ROBIN from his overall pocket.

DENNIS

Recognize this?

ELLEN

Our round robin. So what?

DENNIS turns THE CARD over in his hand.

DENNIS

When I read about the family inside this card, I had to meet them in person.

DENNIS opens THE CARD to reveal a gorgeous soft-focus picture of CHARLES, ELLEN, LUCY and CHARLES JUNIOR gathered around a Christmas tree looking like the kindest family in the world.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

(a little emotional)

I was sure they could help me see where my crappy life had gone wrong, rescue my relationship with Ronnie, regain the respect of my kids and teach me how to make things good again for Christmas.

CHARLES

I think you may have read a little too much into it.

DENNIS

*That's turning out to be the understatement of the year!*

ELLEN

Fuck you. We're the guys who run the country. We pay our taxes and help keep America great for lowlife like you.

DENNIS shakes his head in disbelief.

DENNIS

How do I say this without under-cooking it? You are the single most selfish and despicable family I have ever met.

ELLEN

(unmoved)

So what's your point?

DENNIS waves THE CARD around.

DENNIS

My point is your whole existence is a lie!

ELLEN

I'd rather call it positive profiling.

DENNIS

Of course you would.

CHARLES

I'm sure we're no worse than the Kardashians or the Kim Jongs...

DENNIS

Let's see shall we?

(off ELLEN)

Starting with your wife here -- who only invited me into your house in the first place because she thought I'd arrived to do a cut-price hit on you.

ELLEN

You'd never have made it through the front door otherwise.

DENNIS

That's funny because you did ask me to have sex with you to seal the deal.

ELLEN

Only because I'd run out of dildo batteries.

DENNIS

Wow. No wonder your fifteen-year old daughter is an online porn star with you as her female role model.

CHARLES

What the fuck is he talking about?

DENNIS

(to CHARLES)

You don't know about the website and the vegan sex shop?

CHARLES

*What Vegan sex shop?*

ELLEN

Charles has no idea what goes on in the children's lives because he's never here.

CHARLES

Someone's got to work to pay for all of this!

ELLEN

Oh that's right, blame me for walking away from a glittering career in dentistry to be a full-time mother, you bastard!

CHARLES

You've spent the last twenty years shopping at Barneys or kicking back in a spa. You don't know anymore about CJ and Katie than I do!

ELLEN

Bullshit.

CHARLES

It's true!

DENNIS has unconsciously adopted the pose of A THERAPIST as he sits opposite CHARLES and ELLEN, despite the fact that he's still holding A GUN.

DENNIS

This is great! Get all that angst out onto the table!

ELLEN glares at DENNIS.

ELLEN

You sick fuck!

DENNIS

It's progress guys! And based on the observations you're both making I'm assuming neither of you has a clue about Charles Junior's side-hustle as a Rwandan drug lord.

ELLEN

(taken by surprise)  
What the hell are you talking about?

CHARLES

CJ's a straight 'A' student.

DENNIS

Then why is there a scary-looking chubby, Eastern European dude getting naked and high on your son's product down in the pool house?

CHARLES

(anxious)  
Goran.

ELLEN

Who's Goran?

CHARLES

Lada -- Rapunzel's -- husband.

ELLEN

Jesus Charlie! You were screwing the wife of a drug dealer!

CHARLES

I didn't know!

ELLEN

We'll get into that later. Right now we need to extricate CJ from whatever shit he's got himself into.

CHARLES

OK. Focus...

ELLEN

How about we tell Harvard he's taking a sabbatical and send him to Europe for a year?

CHARLES

That could work.

ELLEN

Somewhere dull.

CHARLES

Switzerland?

ELLEN

Duller than that.

CHARLES

(thinks)

There's a guy I know who owns a chocolate factory in Luxembourg.

ELLEN

Perfect.

DENNIS watches the exchange between ELLEN and CHARLES and smiles.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

DENNIS

Just seeing you join forces to help your son instead of trying to kill each other is making me happy.

Neither CHARLES or ELLEN look impressed.

CHARLES

(to ELLEN)

Did you know cable guy's wife hates him because he lost all their money making burgers out of cockroaches?

ELLEN  
 (to DENNIS)  
 Is that true?

DENNIS  
 It's true about the burgers. But  
 spending time with you two has  
 given me renewed faith in my  
 relationship with Ronnie.

ELLEN  
 I thought you said we were  
 despicable?

DENNIS  
 You are. And that's made me realize  
 what I have at home is worth  
 fighting for.

DENNIS walks towards the door.

ELLEN  
 Before you crash and burn like a  
 pussy, how about untying us?

DENNIS  
 Sure. As soon as I find my dog.

DENNIS exits.

ELLEN  
 (screaming after DENNIS)  
 Asshole!

**INT. POOL HOUSE GYM - CONTINUOUS**

CHARLES JUNIOR and KATIE look over at GORAN sprawled naked on  
 THE SOFA cuddling HUMPHREY THE TEDDY BEAR. He appears to be  
 sobering up.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 (nervous)  
 What do you think?

KATIE  
 About what?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
 Should one of us stay here while  
 the other goes back to the party?

KATIE  
 By 'someone' you mean me?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
It is my fundraiser.

KATIE  
It isn't a fundraiser though is it?  
It's a front for selling weed.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
It doesn't mean I don't care about  
the plight of Tumi and his fourteen  
brothers.

KATIE  
God you're an asshole CJ.

CHARLES JUNIOR looks over to where GORAN'S BOXERS are lying  
on the floor.

CHARLES  
Maybe we should give him his  
underwear back.

KATIE  
LMAO if you think I'm touching  
those.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
Then I guess I'll have to do it on  
my own.

CHARLES JUNIOR gingerly picks up GORAN'S UNDERWEAR and  
wanders towards THE SOFA.

**EXT. CREST PARK HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS**

ZO'S CAR drives past well-manicured lawns and huge houses  
until he pulls up outside the NICHOLSON HOUSE, where there  
are A BUNCH OF EXPENSIVE CARS already parked.

ZO  
They're having a party Max. Looks  
like I'm gonna have to dress up for  
the occasion.

ZO grabs A SANTA CLAUSE OUTFIT and A GLOCK PISTOL FROM THE  
BACK SEAT and screws a silencer onto the end of the barrel  
before putting it into A FESTIVE SACK.

**INT. NICHOLSON SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS skirts the edge of the room, ducking through THE PARTY GUESTS until he gets to THE CHRISTMAS TREE where he bends down to retrieve ELLEN'S SUITCASE.

**INT. ZO'S CAR - CONTINUOUS**

ZO, dressed as SANTA CLAUS, opens the car door and gets out.

ZO  
(to MAX)  
Daddy won't be long.

MAX begins to whine.

ZO (CONT'D)  
What's the matter boy? Is your paw hurting?

MAX whines more urgently.

ZO (CONT'D)  
Oh! You wanna go pee.

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Empty except for DENNIS holding ELLEN'S SUITCASE, searching for THE WAGU BEEF CANAPÉS.

**EXT. FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS**

ZO cuts a strange figure as AN INDIAN GUY dressed as SANTA CLAUS with a sack slung over his shoulder and MAX by his side wearing REINDEER ANTLERS. He RINGS THE DOORBELL.

**INT. NICHOLSON HOUSE FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS**

ONE OF THE WAITERS answers THE FRONT DOOR.

ZO  
Someone call the Ethnic Santa hotline?

THE WAITER grins and beckons ZO inside.

ZO (CONT'D)  
You know where I can find the lady of the house?



THE WAITER points O.S.

WAITER

Last I saw she was heading that way.

ZO

And can you also point me in the direction of the garden? My reindeer needs to take a leak.

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS has located THE CANAPÉS and is grabbing a pile to take outside. He exits through THE BACK DOOR seconds before ZO arrives with MAX.

ZO

OK Max, do your business and daddy will be back soon. And don't hold back. These people look like they deserve to have their lawn crapped on.

ZO opens THE BACK DOOR and MAX scampers outside.

**EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS is trudging across THE SNOW-COVERED LAWN holding out THE CANAPÉS.

DENNIS

Scruffs!

MISTER SCRUFFS doesn't appear but MAX bounds over wearing THE REINDEER ANTLERS, tale wagging. He grabs a CANAPÉ.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Hey boy. Who are you?

DENNIS strokes MAX'S head but the dog runs off, leaving DENNIS to wander over to the POOL HOUSE WINDOW and looks inside.

His EYEBROWS RAISE at what he (but not us the audience) sees.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Shit...

**CUT TO. Reverse angle.**

Through the window we can see GORAN and CHARLES JUNIOR wrestling on the floor of THE POOL HOUSE.

**INT. LANDING - CONTINUOUS**

ZO quietly and carefully searches every room (all empty) until he gets to THE GUEST BEDROOM.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

ZO enters and finds CHARLES and ELLEN taped to their chairs.

ZO  
Ho! Ho! Ho!

CHARLES  
Who are you?

ZO  
Who do you think?

CHARLES exchanges a look of realization with ELLEN that this is THE REAL HITMAN.

ZO (CONT'D)  
Fucking Santa Claus of course!

ELLEN  
Santa doesn't use words like  
'fuck'.

ZO  
He does if you've been naughty.

ZO sits down in DENNIS'S vacated chair.

ZO (CONT'D)  
*...And you two look like you've  
been very naughty.*

**INT. POOL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS walks in holding ELLEN'S SUITCASE, pointing THE GUN, and is greeted by the sight of CHARLES JUNIOR trying to use GORAN'S BOXER SHORTS as a cord to strangle GORAN, while the older man brutally strangles him in return. Meanwhile KATIE looks helplessly on.

KATIE  
(desperate)  
Help him! Please...

DENNIS  
What happened?

KATIE  
CJ tried to put Goran's underwear  
back on.

DENNIS  
*He did what?*

DENNIS spontaneously fires THE GUN into the ceiling, which  
grabs GORAN'S attention just long enough for CHARLES JUNIOR  
to pull away from his grasp.

GORAN  
(confused)  
Is this real or is the weed still  
fucking with my head?

DENNIS holds up his remaining WAGU BEEF CANAPÉ.

DENNIS  
How many Wagu beef and Japanese  
horseradish glazed canapés am I  
holding up?

GORAN  
One.

DENNIS  
You're fine.

CHARLES JUNIOR  
(bemused)  
Who are you?

DENNIS  
Someone who doesn't want you to get  
murdered on Christmas eve.

GORAN  
Don't hold your breath. That little  
asshole still has half a mil of my  
money.

DENNIS  
Killing him probably won't recoup  
your investment though, will it?

GORAN  
Says who?

DENNIS

Trust me when I say you don't want to get on the wrong side of his mom.

GORAN

If she's such a fucking hard-ass maybe she could help me get the little bastard to hand over my dope.

CHARLES JUNIOR

It's in the garage. Four backpacks ready to go.

DENNIS

(to GORAN)

I'd take it and get out of here if I were you.

GORAN

Who the fuck are you to tell me what I gotta do?

DENNIS

I'm just giving you some solid gold advice.

GORAN

Well maybe I want to make my own mind up.

DENNIS

OK. Make up your own mind.

GORAN

That's more like it. Show a man a little respect.

DENNIS

So what are you going to do then?

GORAN

Go into the garage, pick up the dope and get the fuck out of here.

DENNIS

Sounds like a plan.

CHARLES JUNIOR

What about me?

GORAN

What about you?

CHARLES JUNIOR  
Don't I get a cut?

DENNIS looks at CHARLES JUNIOR. Who the hell does this kid think he is?

DENNIS  
What you get is to walk away with your life and if you're lucky graduate from Harvard, which right now feels like more than you deserve.

CHARLES is about to open his mouth to protest.

KATIE  
Whatever you're going to say CJ, don't.

DENNIS offers ELLEN'S SUITCASE to KATIE.

DENNIS  
Can you give this to your mom please?

KATIE takes THE SUITCASE.

KATIE  
Sure.

DENNIS tentatively gives her CHARLES'S GUN too.

DENNIS  
And if you could give this dangerous piece of hardware to your dad I'd be very grateful.

KATIE takes THE GUN.

KATIE  
This is very weird...

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

ZO calmly takes THE GUN out of his SANTA SACK and points it into CHARLES'S FACE.

ZO  
(matter-of-fact to ELLEN)  
You might want to close your eyes right now. Things can get very messy from close range.

CHARLES desperately squirms as if he might actually be able to move out of the line of fire.

CHARLES  
For God's sake no...

ELLEN  
Stop!

ZO hesitates.

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
The deal's off.

ZO  
What do you mean the deal's off?

ELLEN  
You were supposed to be here at twelve. It's now eight-thirty. That's breach of contract.

ZO  
I've been killing complete strangers for twenty years and I've never had a job cancelled on me before.

ELLEN  
There's a first time for everything.

ZO lowers THE GUN from CHARLES'S HEAD and points it at ELLEN.

ZO  
(agitated)  
Maybe you should remember who's holding the gun right now...

DENNIS walks into THE ROOM and takes in the scene.

DENNIS  
Is this a bad time?

ELLEN  
Just get your ass in here.

ZO  
Who the fuck is this?

ELLEN  
The guy I hired to replace you.

ZO  
 (even madder)  
*You hired a replacement?*

ELLEN  
 Damn right.

ZO  
 (off CHARLES)  
 So how come he isn't dead yet?

DENNIS  
 It's complicated.

ZO points THE GUN at DENNIS.

ZO  
 Then you better start explaining,  
 replacement trigger man...

**EXT. DETROIT STREET - NIGHT**

RAY and RHONDA'S UNMARKED CAR DRIVES PAST THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS OF DOWNTOWN DETROIT.

**INT. SQUAD CAR - CONTINUOUS**

RAY drives. RHONDA listens to DENNIS'S VOICEMAIL MESSAGE.

DENNIS (V.O.)  
*I don't blame you for hating me. I should never have invested our hard-earned savings into something so damn ridiculous.*  
 (choked)  
*I should have been a better husband and father to you and the kids I really should have been. Happy Christmas honey...*

RHONDA looks emotional as she hangs up.

RAY  
 Everything OK?

RHONDA  
 Not really.

RAY  
 Christmas is a killer. That's why I always work.

RHONDA  
Maybe I should have done the same.

RAY  
You can try to fight it but what  
you seek lies in front of you.

RHONDA  
Sorry but that sounds like it comes  
from a movie.

RAY grins at RONNIE.

RAY  
AVENGERS ASSEMBLY. But the  
sentiment's real good.

RAY pulls into THE POLICE PRECINCT PARKING LOT.

RAY (CONT'D)  
Better get inside before they run  
out of punch.

RAY parks up and kills the engine.

RHONDA  
I'm not coming in.

RAY smiles.

RAY  
Really?

RHONDA  
Maybe Dennis does deserve the  
chance to get over what happened.  
And maybe he needs a little more  
help from me to do it.

RHONDA leans over and kisses RAY on the cheek.

RHONDA (CONT'D)  
I'm going to pick up the kids now,  
so we're all together tonight and  
then go home and surprise Dennis.  
(smiles)  
Although right now he's probably  
asleep in front of the TV with  
what's left of that trashcan of  
popcorn...



**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

ZO has HIS GUN pointed at DENNIS'S HEAD.

DENNIS

First of all I'm not a trigger man. I lay domestic fiber-optic cable for a living -- or at least I did until this morning but that's another story -- and secondly she doesn't want him killed anymore.

ZO

(off ELLEN)

So it's true? You don't want him whacked?

ELLEN

(defensive)

Anyone can make a mistake.

ZO ponders the situation for a beat.

ZO

Then we have a problem.

CHARLES

Where's the problem?

(making it sound casual)

Help yourself to a drink and some of the great food downstairs and let's just pretend none of this happened.

ZO

(to CHARLES)

You, shut the fuck up.

(to DENNIS)

Any idea why the Netflix reception on my TV is so shit?

DENNIS

Not without looking at your set-up.

(as an afterthought)

You could try a light drizzle of WD40 onto the connectors. That sometimes works.

ELLEN

This is insane! You were late. I reconsidered my position and your services are no longer required. That's an end to it.

ZO  
That isn't an end to it.

ZO pushes the BARREL OF HIS GUN into CHARLES'S FOREHEAD.

ZO (CONT'D)  
You still need to pay me.

DENNIS  
I agree.

CHARLES  
*What?*

ELLEN  
Shut up cable g...

ZO  
No.

ZO points HIS GUN at ELLEN to silence her.

ZO (CONT'D)  
I want to hear what this guy has to say.

DENNIS  
It's the same in my business. If someone wants out of a contract with their Internet service provider they have to pay for the privilege.

ELLEN  
We're not interested in your pathetic job.

DENNIS  
Well you should be. I'm suggesting this guy might agree not to kill Charles if you pay him to get out of the contract.

ZO  
Keep talking.

DENNIS  
For say...  
(off CHARLES)  
Half a million dollars in cash.  
(to ZO)  
Does that sound reasonable?

ZO

I guess I could be persuaded.

ELLEN

But that's a hundred grand more than I was paying to have Charlie killed in the first place! Plus we don't just have an extra hundred in cash lying around the place.

CHARLES

Shut up Ellen.

ELLEN

But wh...

CHARLES

(ignoring ELLEN)

If we did have the money would you leave without killing me?

ZO

Hell yeah. I'm not some kind of unreasonable sociopath!

ELLEN

(confused)

What is going on here?

CHARLES

Can we please talk about it later?

ZO

Yeah cause I have a turkey at home waiting to be stuffed.

(to DENNIS)

Do you know where the cash is?

DENNIS

I think so.

**INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT**

DENNIS retrieves THE HOLDALL, which hasn't been put back in THE SAFE. He gives it to ZO.

DENNIS

There you go. Five hundred grand.

ZO unzips THE BAG to verify THE CASH is inside, which it is.

ZO

All good, baby.

DENNIS begins to back out of the room.

DENNIS

OK great to meet you and enjoy the holidays. I must be getting home myself now.

ZO levels HIS GUN at DENNIS.

ZO

How about you walk me out?

DENNIS'S FACE drops.

**INT. POOL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

KATIE is alone and about to exit when she sees ELLEN'S SUITCASE leaning against THE SOFA.

She picks it up and realizes it's very heavy considering it's supposed to be empty, so instead of just walking out she decides to open it and discovers FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS in neat bundles of USED BILLS. Her eyes widen.

**EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT**

DENNIS leads ZO out onto THE SNOW-COVERED LAWN.

ZO

Stop here.

DENNIS

But we're not at the gate.

ZO

This is as far as you go.

DENNIS turns around to face ZO, who is pointing HIS GUN at DENNIS'S CHEST. He knows what's about to happen next and looks destroyed.

DENNIS

You don't have to do this, man.

ZO

Sure I do.

DENNIS

Why?

ZO

You know what I look like.

DENNIS

So do those two upstairs!

ZO

They're implicated. You're not.

DENNIS

I won't tell anyone anything. I swear...

ZO

On your knees. I'll go behind you so you won't know anything.

DENNIS has no fight left in him. He drops to his knees as if the weight of the day has finally pushed him to the ground.

ZO walks around behind him and points HIS GUN at THE BACK OF DENNIS'S HEAD.

CUT TO. CLOSE-UP. DENNIS'S bowed head. It feels like forever as he waits for ZO to pull the trigger.

And then...

MAX THE DOG comes into shot and licks DENNIS on the cheek.

DENNIS

Hey fella...

ZO (O.C.)

Maxxy baby.

DENNIS

He's your dog?

CUT TO A WIDER ANGLE. MAX wags his tail as ZO strokes him with one hand while he keeps THE GUN trained at DENNIS with the other.

ZO

Sure. He's the best friend a guy could have.

DENNIS

Rotweiller?

ZO

No. According to the guy I bought him from as a pup there's a little St Bernard in there too.

DENNIS

I can kind of see that.

A beat later MISTER SCRUFFS appears.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
Scruffs!

ZO  
Your dog?

DENNIS  
Yeah. Had him since he was a pup  
too.

ZO  
He's cute.

SCRUFFS and MAX horse around sniffing each other, tails wagging.

ZO (CONT'D)  
Maxxy doesn't usually like other  
dogs.

DENNIS  
Scruffs is real friendly.

There's a beat that feels like DENNIS and ZO could just be TWO GUYS meeting in a park, bonding over dog-walking.

ZO  
OK let's get back to business.

DENNIS calls to MISTER SCRUFFS.

DENNIS  
Come here boy.

ZO points THE GUN again and prepares to fire.

CUT TO. CLOSE-UP. DENNIS again with his head bowed head. This time he hugs MISTER SCRUFFS tightly.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
I fucked up big time this time  
didn't I boy?

DENNIS closes his eyes tightly and waits for the bullet. And waits, and waits...

KATIE (V.O.)  
*Hey.*

**CUT TO. WIDE AERIAL SHOT OF THE GARDEN.**

DENNIS is kneeling on the snow-covered lawn. He looks up to see KATIE standing in front of him. There's no sign of ZO, just A TRAIL OF FOOTPRINTS (DOG and HUMAN) leading off towards THE BACK GATE.

DENNIS slowly gets up off his knees.

DENNIS

You shouldn't be out here right now.

For the first time since we've met her, KATIE looks like a fifteen year-old girl and not a confident, sassy young woman. She's polite too.

KATIE

You mean because of the other guy dressed as Santa Claus who was going to shoot you and then changed his mind?

DENNIS

Something like that.

KATIE

He left. Out of the back gate with his dog. I watched him go from behind the tree over there.

DENNIS relaxes a little.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Look, I don't know what's going on here tonight but you saved my brother's life -- and I know you didn't come to fix the Wi-Fi today.

DENNIS

Where's CJ now?

KATIE

He gave the fat guy the dope and went back to the party.

DENNIS

Good.

KATIE

He's such an asshole I'm pretty sure he has no idea how damn lucky he is not to be dead.

DENNIS  
 Maybe not right now but I'm sure  
 you won't get tired of reminding  
 him.

KATIE  
 (frowning)  
 God I hate my family.

DENNIS  
 (gentle)  
 Stick with it. You only get one and  
 who knows, they might surprise you  
 one day -- in a good way.

DENNIS brushes snow off his knees.

DENNIS (CONT'D)  
 I'd better go and say my goodbyes  
 to your mom and dad if I want to  
 make it home for Christmas morning.

KATIE smiles.

KATIE  
 Thank-you for everything cable guy.

DENNIS  
 Hey no problem. You take care --  
 and good luck with the vegan sex  
 shop.

KATIE watches as DENNIS followed by MISTER SCRUFFS make their  
 way back across the lawn to THE HOUSE.

**INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT**

CHARLES and ELLEN are still taped to their chairs. DENNIS  
 walks in followed by MISTER SCRUFFS.

ELLEN  
 You've got some cojones showing up  
 here again.

CHARLES  
 He's come to untie us haven't you?

DENNIS  
 No. I'll ask Rapunzel to do that.

ELLEN  
 You can't leave me in the hands of  
 that bitch!



DENNIS  
 Try being nice to her and see how  
 that works for you.

ELLEN  
 Fuck you.

CHARLES  
 If you're not untying us why did  
 you come back?

DENNIS  
 I just thought I'd say goodbye and  
 Merry Christmas.

ELLEN  
 (cold)  
 Goodbye.

CHARLES  
 (warmer)  
 Good riddance...

DENNIS unlocks THE DOOR TO THE ENSUITE and opens it a notch  
 before he exits, leaving MISTER SCRUFFS and CHARLES and ELLEN  
 to stare at each other until they both grimace.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
 Oh God! What is that terrible  
 smell?

MISTER SCRUFFS wags his tail and follows DENNIS out at the  
 same moment LADA/RAPUNZEL enters the room and grins  
 sadistically at ELLEN.

**INT. LANDING CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS heads for THE STAIRS followed by MISTER SCRUFFS.

We hear the voices of ELLEN and LADA/RAPUNZEL from THE GUEST  
 BEDROOM.

ELLEN  
 What the hell do you think you're  
 doing?

LADA  
 Shut up and keep still. I think  
 this is going to hurt you a lot...

**EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT**

SFX: HAPPY XMAS (WAR IS OVER) by JOHN and YOKO

DENNIS'S CAR drives past a sign that says: DETROIT 20 MILES.

**INT. DENNIS'S CAR - CONTINUOUS**

SFX: HAPPY XMAS (WAR IS OVER) by JOHN and YOKO is playing on the radio.

MISTER SCRUFFS rides in the back.

**INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

CHARLES, ELLEN and KATIE look on as CJ delivers a speech to THE HUNDRED-OR-SO-GUESTS at THE AFR BENEFIT.

They look like the perfect family from the ROUND ROBIN again, although ELLEN looks down and frowns as she pulls a stray piece of DUCT TAPE from her dress.

CHARLES JUNIOR

I wish you could all see the tears  
of joy in the eyes of the children  
your generous donations are  
helping...

KATIE catches CHARLES JUNIOR'S eye and mouths the word 'DOUCHEBAG' at him.

**EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT**

DENNIS'S CAR turns into HIS STREET. It's very late and the only activity comes from the twinkling CHRISTMAS LIGHTS that adorn the houses.

**INT. DENNIS'S CAR - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS pulls into the tiny driveway of his house, which looks dark and empty.

DENNIS

Damn! I forgot to get the bread and  
milk.

DENNIS opens THE REAR DOOR for MISTER SCRUFFS and sees ELLEN'S SUITCASE on THE FLOOR OF THE CAR. He picks it up and a Christmas card drops onto THE BACK SEAT.

DENNIS opens THE CARD, which is another NICHOLSON ROUND ROBIN.

Close-up: ROUND ROBIN.

The printed words have been crossed-out with a MARKER PEN and in its place is a HAND-WRITTEN NOTE.

**INT. POOL HOUSE - NIGHT**

**Flashback**

KATIE crosses out the text in THE NICHOLSON FAMILY CHRISTMAS CARD with a MARKER PEN. We hear what she writes as a V.O.

KATIE (V.O.)

Cable guy. I know you asked me to return this to my mom. I don't know why you had it in the first place and honestly I don't want to. What I do know is she has too much disposable income as it is, whereas I get the feeling you might actually do something useful with the money. Don't be angry please. Merry Christmas and thanks again. Katie.

***End flashback...***

**EXT. DENNIS'S CAR - NIGHT**

DENNIS reads the card and smiles. For a beat it looks like he's weighing up what to do with the money before grabbing THE SUITCASE and going into HIS HOUSE.

**INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

DENNIS opens the back door and comes inside. He looks around. Something's different. Everything looks a little cozier. Even the sad-looking tree that was undecorated when he left is adorned with baubles and tinsel.

DENNIS walks through into the TINY LIVING ROOM where there is another bigger tree decorated and to DENNIS'S surprise RHONDA curled up on THE SOFA next to KYLE. They're both asleep.

The TV is on and we can see JAMES STUART in IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE celebrating his return to his family.

On a large COMFY EASY CHAIR, LUCY is half-wrapped in a blanket that has slipped off her. She snores gently.

DENNIS puts THE SUITCASE DOWN ON THE FLOOR and goes over to LUCY where he gently pulls the blanket up around her before going over to RHONDA and KISSING HER GENTLY ON THE LIPS, causing her to wake with a start.

RHONDA

(whispering)

Where have you been? I got your voicemail and I thought maybe you'd done something stupid.

DENNIS

(whispering back)

No I'm OK. I thought everyone was out tonight?

The rest of the conversation takes place in whispers so as not to wake KYLE and LUCY.

RHONDA

I began thinking about how we've never spent Christmas eve apart so I called the kids and told them to cancel their plans.

DENNIS

I don't suppose Lou was happy about missing her party?

RHONDA

She was fine. They love you even though they don't always show it.

DENNIS

I'm so sorry about this year and how it must have made you feel. I promise it'll get better. I feel so lucky to have you and the kids.

RHONDA

I'm sorry too for being a bitch.

RHONDA pulls DENNIS towards her and kisses him more passionately.

DENNIS

I got you something.

DENNIS picks up THE SUITCASE and offers it to RHONDA.

RHONDA

Well I can tell it isn't jewelry.

DENNIS

You can open it tomorrow when I'll  
feel more like explaining...

DENNIS takes in the tiny room, which is so unlike the  
NICHOLSON HOUSE, and breaks into a broad grin as he takes in  
his beautiful wife and kids.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

...Right now I just want to enjoy  
this.

END