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Dogman's Ensemble

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DOGMAN'S ENSEMBLE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the English

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Thesis Mentor

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All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
English have been completed.

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Dogman's Ensemble

Samuel Feldstein

Honors Thesis

Faculty Mentor: Brooks Landon

Abstract

Dogman's Ensemble is a crime/action/comedy with an ensemble cast. Its major influences include the work of the Coen brothers and Quentin Tarantino, specifically *Pulp Fiction*. It is what is considered a “low concept” film, focussing primarily on the characters and their relationships. Oftentimes scenes are composed almost entirely of dialogue, to the point that dialogue may even overpower the action. As a writer I am particularly interested in what characters do in their downtime as much as how they spend their time pursuing a goal. In this way the script attempts to mimic real life, in which people do take the time to stop and chat about nothing in particular. Naturally, it became challenging at times to keep the scenes interesting, which put more pressure on the dialogue to establish a palpable rhythm and cadence to each scene. In a way this script attempts to push the boundaries of what a viewer will tolerate and accept in terms of action, which scenes hold their interest and which bore them to death. Ideally of course, the viewer is never bored.

The film is arranged in a five-act structure, although the act breaks are not denoted. Act one introduces the conflict, or the inciting incident that sets the rest of the film into motion. Act two presents further complication of the conflict, bringing the characters together in ways that increase dramatic tension. Act three presents an even further complication, a turning point in the story, resulting in a climax-like scenario, in which one or more of the characters makes a decision from which they cannot turn back. Act four is the spiral, in which a number of actions are taken quickly and without much forethought, as the urgency rises. Act five is the resolution,

in which the action is resolved somewhat violently, and from there the film ends. The film is as much an experiment in structure as it is in character.

Acknowledgements

Never before having pursued a project of this scope, I cannot emphasize enough the sheer magnitude to which writing an honors thesis was a learning experience, and the majority of what I learned was attained through the wonderful insights of my peers in the honors thesis workshop, Wyatt Billingsley, Adria Britton, Emma Husar, Heidi Stofer, and Celine Uhl. I thank them all for their honest feedback and for making this process infinitely more bearable. Thanks also goes out to Doris Witt, our workshop mediator, who although is committed to the laissez-faire approach, nevertheless was always diligent about relaying her sincere reactions to my work. The quality of their comments is a testament to their commitment to their peers, and I thank them for their willingness to critically observe a project from a medium with which none of them had previous experience.

I also have to thank Corey Creekmur for the extensive time and effort he devoted to evaluating my thesis. He brought many mistakes to light which I would have kept on making in ignorance had he not pointed them out to me. He provided invaluable feedback to my critical essay, and challenged some of my notions about storytelling such that I had to reconsider my views carefully, and access some of the ways in which I had been defining such things as story, plot and structure. It was a necessary reminder that my views will not always align with that of others, and that to let self-confidence interfere with learning is a path to ignorance, or at least intellectual stagnation.

Lastly, my thanks go out to my thesis mentor, Brooks Landon, for his forthright and unflinching honesty. It is one thing to write something and receive feedback on your work in a classroom setting, but it is another thing entirely to be directly challenged by a professor in regards to the success of the project. It was Dr. Landon's challenging of my work that drove me to bolster my own confidence via a clarity of writing that would ensure the elimination of the (entirely justified) confusion that Dr. Landon felt at the outset of my project. More than that it gave me a taste of what it might be like to see my work rejected in a professional setting, and the feeling of triumph when it is actually accepted. My thanks to Dr. Landon for his honesty; the challenges in the beginning made his compliments all the more meaningful in the end.

DOGMAN'S ENSEMBLE

written by

Samuel Feldstein

Completed 2016

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

EDDY(48), wearing a SHARP blazer and white shirt, finds his way to one of the apartment doors. He knocks.

The door is opened by VINCE, a middle-aged guy in an argyle sweater-vest.

VINCE
Eddy! Come on in.

INSIDE VINCE'S APARTMENT

The apartment is small, but cozy. It's not clear what he does for a living, but Vince seems to have done alright for himself.

Eddy stands awkwardly just inside the door.

Vince goes about preparing coffee. He moves the way he speaks: QUICKLY and NERVOUSLY.

VINCE
So how ya been? Work okay? How's Robin?

EDDY
She moved out.

VINCE
Fuck, I knew that. Did I know that? Anyway, I'm sorry man.

EDDY
It's okay.

VINCE
Can I get you anything? Coffee? Smoke?

EDDY
Too early for me, but coffee sounds good.

VINCE
Sure thing.

The coffee pot gurgles.

VINCE(CONT'D)
So when'd she move out? I didn't

know you guys were fighting.

EDDY

We weren't. Or maybe we were, I don't really know. If we were, the day she moved out was the first I knew about it.

VINCE

That's fuckin' women for you, man, they'll never tell you what's botherin' 'em. Just let you wonder for a while, and just when you think you're doin' okay, BOOM. They fuckin' dump you for an English professor in Iowa.

Eddy looks at Vince, confused by the oddly specific example.

But before he can say anything-

VINCE(CONT'D)

Say, where'd she go anyway? Robin.

EDDY

Seattle.

VINCE

Fuck, man. She got family there or something?

EDDY

No no, she don't know anybody there's far as I know. But she was always going on about how nice it was there, how it never snows--

VINCE

It doesn't snow here.

EDDY

That's what I fuckin' told her. But she had her mind set--apparently.

Vince pours two cups of coffee, gives one to Eddy.

EDDY

Thanks.

Eddy's about to take a sip, but he interrupts himself, SUDDENLY ANGRY.

EDDY(CONT'D)

And you know what the most fucked

up part is?

Vince almost spills his coffee, startled at Eddy's outburst.

VINCE

What?

EDDY

I don't think she'd ever even been to Seattle. How you know you wanna live somewhere you haven't even been to?

VINCE

Fucking crazy.

EDDY

Fuckin' right.

Eddy sips his coffee.

EDDY(CONT'D)

Say, that's good.

VINCE

I spend real money on two things: coffee and cleaning products.

Eddy nods, looking around at the very clean apartment.

VINCE(CONT'D)

Say, I heard a rumor the other day, in regards to your boss.

EDDY

Oh?

VINCE

Word around town is Dogman's thinkin' about retirement.

Eddy tries to hide his surprise.

EDDY

Who told you that?

VINCE

You know Anna Newberry?

EDDY

No.

VINCE

Well her wife is Nicky Hasbin's

brother, and he told her that Nicky said that he overheard Dogman talking to some guy about possibly taking his place at some point in the near future.

EDDY
Is that right?

VINCE
Straight from the horse's mouth.

EDDY
He say who Dogman talked to?

Vince thinks.

VINCE
No he didn't.

Eddy stares into his coffee, thinking, and looking a little DISAPPOINTED.

Eddy is startled out of his thoughts when Vince CLAPS.

VINCE(CONT'D)
Well! Down to business.

EDDY
Yeah, sure.

Eddy reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a baggy full of WEED.

Vince puts his hand up.

VINCE
No, not today.

EDDY
What, you on a cleanse?

VINCE
No.

EDDY
Vince. If you're about to tell me you dragged me all the way out here just so you could waste my time, don't.

VINCE
No, Eddy I wouldn't do that. I don't need weed--

EDDY
Well weed's what I got, if you need
somethin' else you can talk to
Manuel--

VINCE
I need a gun.

Eddy is caught off guard.

EDDY
You what?

VINCE
I need a gun. You got one?

EDDY
What the fuck you need a gun for?

Vince opens his mouth, but Eddy cuts him off.

EDDY(CONT'D)
No, you know what, I don't wanna
know. I don't even have a piece on
me.

VINCE
What about yours?

EDDY
My gun is *my gun*. It ain't for
sale, and even if it were, it'd be
way outta your price range.

VINCE
Five hundred.

That gets Eddy's attention.

EDDY
Five hundred? You even got that
much?

VINCE
In the safe.

Eddy thinks.

EDDY
Okay.

Vince seems genuinely relieved.

VINCE

Thank you.

Vince goes to a little ELECTRONIC SAFE and punches in the code. He takes a out a WAD of cash and counts it. When he finishes-

VINCE

Hey Eddy?

EDDY

Yeah?

VINCE

I only have four hundred.

EDDY

You said five.

VINCE

C'mon, man, you know I'm good for it. Could you spot me the cash, or could I start a tab?

EDDY

Do I look like a fuckin' bartender? Does Dogman own a fuckin' bar? You said you'd pay me five hundred, those were your words.

VINCE

Please. I need it.

EDDY

I'm gonna ignore the implications of that statement, and repeat myself in case I wasn't clear. Come up with another hundred, or I'm gone.

A moment passes, and Eddy starts for the door.

VINCE

Wait! Wait.

Vince goes to a JACKET lying wadded up on a chair. He REACHES under it. Eddy WATCHES him closely. Vince GRAB'S something, and just as he pulls it out-

BAM BAM BAM BAM.

Eddy holds the smoking pistol. Vince falls to the floor in a BLOODY MESS.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - LATER - DAY

A SLEEK SEDAN with tinted windows pulls up. DOGMAN HUGH(42), a HUGE BRITISH MAN, gets out of the back seat.

He pauses to survey the building, then enters the apartment complex.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - SECONDS LATER

Dogman walks to one of the apartment doors, where a HENCHMAN IN A SUIT stands guard. The henchman steps aside as Dogman enters.

INSIDE THE APARTMENT

EDDY sits in the nearby recliner. His shirt and blazer now BLOODSTAINED. He slowly rocks back and forth, the pistol still in hand.

The CORPSE lies in a pool of blood on the floor.

Dogman surveys the scene.

DOGMAN

It's been a while since I've dealt
but I don't remember it being that
difficult.

EDDY

He wasn't buying drugs.

DOGMAN

Then what was he buying?

EDDY

He wanted to buy my gun.

DOGMAN

What for?

EDDY

Don't know. He said he needed it.

DOGMAN

And what did you do?

EDDY

I told no can do. And then he
offered me five hundred dollars.

DOGMAN

And you took it.

EDDY

I would've but he came up a hundred short. When I told him he couldn't have the piece he started to reach under that jacket. So I shot him.

DOGMAN

For reaching under his jacket?

EDDY

Look, he seemed desperate. I thought he was gonna pull on me.

Dogman bends down to the body, pulls something out of the dead hand. It's a WALLET.

DOGMAN

Pull what? If he had a gun what did he need to buy one from you for?

He opens the wallet, takes the money out, a sizable wad, and tosses the bloody wallet into Eddy's lap. He puts the money in his pocket.

Eddy stares at the wallet.

Dogman goes to the door and knocks twice. Two more HENCHMEN come inside, carrying PLASTIC and other BODY-DISPOSAL equipment. They begin the cleanup process as Dogman and Eddy talk.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

You alright, Ed?

EDDY

He ain't the first guy I've killed.

DOGMAN

I'm a-fuckin-ware o' that, Ed. I'm not concerned about your moral wellbeing. In fact, the worse state it's in, the more use you are to me. I'm simply concerned, and I hope you can understand, by the fact that your first fucking reaction to seeing a man reach under a jacket was to cut him in half. So I'll repeat myself. Are you alright? Because if you aren't, then I'm here as your friend, and I will do everything in my considerable power to help alleviate your burdens. But if you are alright, then I'm here as your

boss, who's already had a long fucking week, and who's longest standing employee has just ventilated one of his longest standing customers.

EDDY

I'm alright.

DOGMAN

Are you sure?

EDDY

Yeah. I'm okay.

DOGMAN

Well then don't take this the wrong way, but that's not exactly a fucking comfort. I'm not calling you a liar, because I don't doubt you're telling the truth, but I think you might be fooling yourself into thinking you're telling the truth. Because if you do something like this,

(indicates body)

and still claim to be of sound mind and body, then that fucking concerns me. Do I need to be concerned, Ed?

EDDY

No.

DOGMAN

Are you sure?

(off body)

Because I think Vince here would disagree.

Vince is being rolled up into plastic by the henchmen.

EDDY

I'm sure. It was a mistake.

DOGMAN

You're fucking right it was.

EDDY

I'm sorry.

DOGMAN

What do you mean?

He doesn't sound reproachful, merely curious.

Eddy looks at him, confused.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

When you say sorry, what do you mean?

EDDY

I mean I'm sorry I fucked up.

DOGMAN

That's nice, Ed. But you don't need to tell me you fucked up. I know you fucked up. And I know you know you fucked up. I knew it the moment I walked in here, and I'll still know it the moment I walk out. The question isn't whether you're sorry. The question is what you're willing to do to make it right.

EDDY

Anything.

DOGMAN

The fuck you mean, 'anything?' You gonna make my fuckin' meals for a month? You gonna scrub my fuckin' toilet?

Eddy, opens his mouth--

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

(indicating cleanup crew)

Say yes, and Ian and Phil will be working overtime. Or better yet, I'll call your old man, and he can come down here and kill you himself. What would he say if he could see you right now? I thought he taught you about self-respect. Do you know how you earn respect in this line of work? You own up to your mistakes. You take the consequences. But you do it without becoming someone's bitch. Are you a bitch, Ed?

EDDY

No.

DOGMAN

No what?

EDDY
No, I'm not.

DOGMAN
You ain't what?

EDDY
I'm ain't someone's bitch.

DOGMAN
You ain't *anyone's* bitch. Now I believe you, but you're doin' a poor fucking job of convincing me. In this line of work, you say what you mean, and you don't make promises you can't keep.

EDDY
I'm sorry.

DOGMAN
Fuck sorry!

A beat.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)
It's like I said. The question isn't whether you're sorry. The question is, what're you gonna do to make up for it?

Dogman is about to leave when Eddy speaks up.

EDDY
Vince said you were retiring. Is that true?

Dogman thinks for a moment, like he's weighing his options.

DOGMAN
The thought had crossed my mind.

EDDY
He said you had someone in mind to take over when you're gone.

DOGMAN
I do.

EDDY
Who?

Dogman dodges the question.

DOGMAN

You'll know when it suits you. Just know the empire will be in good hands.

Dogman leaves.

Eddy watches him go, wearing a DISAPPOINTED frown.

INT. DINER - LATER - MORNING

Eddy sits across from a young man, MATHIS MASON(25), who looks like he just got out of bed. As Eddy talks and nurses a coffee, Mathis disinterestedly eats his breakfast of eggs and bacon.

EDDY

So he reaches under this jacket, and I don't know what he's got under there, could be a gun--

MATHIS

But weren't you selling him a gun?

EDDY

Yeah.

MATHIS

So why would he be buying a gun if he had one in his jacket?

EDDY

You tell me, smartass, the point is he coulda had anything in there. Maybe a knife, maybe a sharpened fuckin' toothbrush, I don't know, and I'm not about to stake my life on it. So his hand goes in his jacket, I don't know what he's got in there, so I shoot him.

MATHIS

You shot him.

EDDY

I shot him.

MATHIS

Shot him dead?

EDDY

Mm-hm. And you know what he had in his jacket?

MATHIS

What?

EDDY

His fuckin' wallet. He was grabbing some extra cash to make up the difference.

MATHIS

Fuck.

EDDY

Yeah.

MATHIS

And this all happened this morning?

EDDY

Yeah.

MATHIS

Within the last two hours or so.

EDDY

Yeah.

MATHIS

Well, gosh. Are you alright?

EDDY

I'm high strung. I'm ill at ease.

MATHIS

How so?

EDDY

I don't know, I'm just nervous all the time.

MATHIS

You piss anybody off lately?

EDDY

Not that I can think of.

MATHIS

You should try marijuana. Takes the edge off.

EDDY

Doesn't that stuff make you paranoid?

MATHIS

Not if you do it right.

EDDY

Well thanks, but no thanks, you can keep your filthy habits. Dogman wouldn't like it anyway.

MATHIS

You do everything Dogman tells you to do?

EDDY

He's my boss. So yeah. You don't have to drug test for your job?

MATHIS

I'm unemployed.

EDDY

Very impressive.

MATHIS

I may be poor but my prospects are rich.

EDDY

Yeah, except you can't buy groceries with prospects.

MATHIS

Maybe you should see a doctor.

EDDY

I tried that. They told me I was depressed.

MATHIS

Are you?

EDDY

I got no reason to be.

MATHIS

That's not what I asked.

EDDY

Alright, fine. Am I depressed? No. Do I get depressed sometimes? Sure, who doesn't?

MATHIS

You know they have prescriptions for that now.

EDDY

That's an artificial solution. I don't do artificial solutions.

MATHIS

Why not?

EDDY

Because artificial solutions don't solve the problem, they just cover it up. Solving a problem and pretending it don't exist ain't the same fuckin' thing.

MATHIS

There's a significant amount of science that says otherwise.

EDDY

Fuck all of them. All those studies try to paint everybody with the same brush. If some depressed people take medication and it works, great, I'm happy for them. Just don't expect me to follow suit.

MATHIS

So you are depressed.

EDDY

I didn't say that. I'm just--Dogman came this close to lettin' me go.

He holds his fingers a little bit apart.

MATHIS

For doin' the guy?

EDDY

For shootin' the guy, yeah. It's bad, sure, but it's not the end of the world. You'd think I wiped out one his major revenue streams. The guy brought in maybe a couple hundred a month. What's that worth? A slap on the wrist, maybe?

Mathis is very agreeable.

MATHIS

If that.

EDDY

But nobody in this business
deserves to get fired for something
like that.

MATHIS

It was a mistake.

EDDY

Damn right it was a mistake.

MATHIS

But I gotta say, and this is one
friend to another, did you ever
consider maybe Dogman has a point?

EDDY

What do you mean?

MATHIS

I don't mean anything. Just that
there's more to life than playin'
second fiddle to Dogman Hugh.

EDDY

Easy for you to say, you never
worked for him.

MATHIS

I may as well, number of times I've
covered your ass.

EDDY

You never covered my ass.

MATHIS

Yes I have--

EDDY

You've never covered my ass because
my ass never needs covering. At
most you've politely assisted my
ass. Credit where credit is due.

Eddy sips his coffee.

EDDY(CONT'D)

What the fuck was I talking about?

MATHIS

Why you like playing second fiddle
to a limey.

EDDY

Easy on the derogatory terms, alright, and it's fuckin' archaic, anyway. You're too young to talk like that, it's like watching my grandmother play with her iPad, okay, it's fuckin' dissonant.

MATHIS

I thought your grandma was dead.

EDDY

Should we all be so lucky. I don't know, I guess it's because out here,

(indicates diner)

I'm just Eddy Truman. With Dogman, I'm Eddy fuckin' Truman, son of Mr. President and right hand to the fuckin' bossman. You know, I'm somebody.

Mathis nods, agreeing with the sentiment.

MATHIS

If it makes you happy. How'd you do it anyway?

EDDY

Do what?

MATHIS

Convince Dogman to let you stay on.

EDDY

I asked him. He said yes.

MATHIS

Just like that?

EDDY

He asked me to run an errand. I was hoping you could help me out, if you don't mind.

MATHIS

'Course I don't mind, Eddy, you know that. What's the job?

EDDY

Some lady stole some money from Dogman. He wants me to get it back.

MATHIS
It's a stick up?

EDDY
B n E.

MATHIS
When?

EDDY
Tonight. Ten o'clock.

MATHIS
I can't do it.

EDDY
Why not?

MATHIS
I got a date.

EDDY
A date? Who the fuck wants to date
you?

MATHIS
I don't know. It's a blind date.

EDDY
That explains it. Reschedule.

MATHIS
No.

EDDY
Why not?

MATHIS
Life does not pause and resume at
your whim, my friend.

EDDY
Well if it goes that late just tell
her you got a thing.

MATHIS
And what if I'm having a good time?

EDDY
Let's not get ahead of ourselves.
Listen, I gotta run. I call you
with the details. See you at ten.

Mathis consents with a smile as his friend departs.

INT. DOGMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

We are inside the belly of the beast: Dogman's office, located in the back room of a bar. He sits across from us in a LEATHER CHAIR, slightly raised so that he LOOMS over us. He talks to SOMEONE offscreen.

DOGMAN

Everyone is the hero of their own narrative. I read that once, in an article about how people assess risk. It's a way of organizing the world, of rationalizing all the good things that happen to people, and all the bad. It's the idea that the reason we survive, the reason we can face hardship and still live to see the sunrise, is because in our own story, we're the protagonist. It's what they call a fallacy. If you get on a plane, you take it for granted that that plane is going to stay in the air. If you didn't know that was going to happen, if you weren't a hundred and ten percent sure that was going to happen, you'd never get past the boarding ramp. And yet planes do go down. Not often, but it happens. And when it does, you read about it in the paper, maybe see a story on the news, but you don't swear never to fly again, because that would be irrational. Instead, you tell yourself that that's the kind of thing that only happens to other people. Because you're the hero, and the hero doesn't die. The problem is, you're limited by your perspective. To you, everyone is someone else. Which means that to everyone else, you're just another somebody.

We see a TERRIFIED MAN sitting across from Dogman, looking like he wants to curl up and wink out of existence.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

I'm going to give you something, Steven, that most men never get. Perspective. A few hours ago, you thought you were the star of the show. You thought you were Babe Ruth. In baseball, you can hit

three out of ten and still be great. But this ain't fucking baseball.

Dogman stands. Two HENCHMAN flank the terrified man on either side.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

Now, I can't blame you for thinking you'd get away clean. You have your narrative, and I have mine. It's just that yours didn't play out quite the way you intended. And in mine, you don't get a second chance.

INT. DOGMAN'S BAR - MINUTES LATER

At this hour, the bar is closed. NICKY, the bartender, is the only occupant. He wipes down the counter, cleans glasses, etc.

We hear the door open, and MARY ANN HAYES(30's), enters. She looks good for her age, and walks like she owns the place. She carries a SMALL DUFFLE.

NICKY

Morning, Mary Ann. What can I get you?

MARY ANN

Wouldn't happen to have any prospects hiding under that counter, would you? Young, rich maybe. Handsome doesn't hurt.

NICKY

Afraid not, and if I did you can be damn sure I'd keep him for myself.

MARY ANN

Fair enough. How 'bout a cigarette?

NICKY

Now that I can manage.

He gives her a smoke, and then lights it for her.

MARY ANN

(through cigarette)
Thanks.

NICKY

What do you need a man for, anyway?
You seem to be doin' just fine to
me.

MARY ANN

Yeah, well strong and independent's
all fine and good, but they forgot
to include lonely in that equation.

NICKY

What about Cassie?

MARY ANN

You ever tried to carry on a
conversation with a nine-year-old?

NICKY

My interactions with children are
limited to my nephew who's a
toddler, but he's not much for
chit-chat.

MARY ANN

Well, I'll tell you, it's kinda
like playin' guitar, or makin' a
pie crust. Anyone can do it, but it
takes a real expert to do it right.

They share a chuckle.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

Where's the boss?

NICKY

In the back takin' out the trash.
Should be out soon.

MARY ANN

Thanks Nicky.

Nicky goes back to his work.

Mary Ann makes her way to a corner table. She sets the
duffle on the table and opens it. It's filled with CASH.

She takes the cash out one stack at a time, counting each
stack and arranging it on the table.

Dogman enters from the backroom. His hand are covered in
BLOOD. Mary Ann takes note of this.

DOGMAN

Throw us a towel, will you Nicky?

NICKY
Sure thing, boss.

We watch from Mary Ann's perspective.

Nicky tosses Dogman a towel. He wipes his hands off as he exchanges a few more pleasantries the bartender.

Mary Ann places the last of the stacks back in the bag just as Dogman arrives at her table.

DOGMAN
Morning, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN
Your laundry.

DOGMAN
Clean or dirty?

MARY ANN
Clean.

DOGMAN
Give us a peek?

Mary Ann opens the bag. As she does, she casts a look of VEILED DISGUST at Dogman's hands. The towel is now dyed RED.

The look goes UNNOTICED by Dogman. He looks inside the bag and smiles.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)
Hey Nicky, fetch me a glass of water, will you?

He takes a seat across from Mary Ann.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)
You watch baseball?

Mary Ann shakes her head.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)
Cubs are in the world series for the first time in one hundred and eight years. You know what else happened one hundred and eight years ago?

MARY ANN
What?

Nicky brings a glass of water.

DOGMAN
(to Nicky)
Thanks.
(to Mary Ann)
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance kid
were killed in Bolivia.

Dogman dips the towel in the glass and wipes his hands. He squints as he works to get the blood out from between his fingers.

MARY ANN
I thought that was never confirmed.

DOGMAN
Maybe not, but it's the consensus
among the experts on the subject.

A beat.

Dogman stops his wiping and looks at Mary Ann.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)
You know I've been thinking. Most
guys in this business don't last as
long as I have. They say don't push
your luck, and I'm a firm believer
in leaving luck right where it is.
Mine's been good, and I aim to quit
while I'm ahead. But I can't retire
without ensuring that what I've
built here isn't going to go to
waste. I have a legacy to protect,
and I want to know that I'm leaving
it in good hands. Your hands to be
exact.

Mary Ann looks up. She wasn't expecting this.

Dogman stands.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)
I know it's a lot, so I'll give you
time to think it over. But don't
take too long.
(off money)
Take care of that for me, will you?

He winks, casually tosses the bloody towel on the table, and leaves.

Mary Ann looks at the towel, then at the bag of money. She's made up her mind.

INT. MARY ANN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - EVENING

We are in Mary Ann's bedroom. From the size of the room and quality of the furniture, the house is very, very nice. As for the state of things, VARIOUS GARMENTS are scattered about the floor, despite the EMPTY HANGERS in the closet. The DUFFLE BAG of money sits on the bed.

Mary Ann herself contrasts her environment. She is halfway through the process of getting dressed. She applies makeup and does her hair. But oddly, her choice of clothing is a simple JEANS AND T-SHIRT.

When she's fully dressed, Mary Ann goes to the duffle. She looks at it for a few seconds, like she can't figure out what to do with it.

Distantly, the DOORBELL rings.

MARY ANN

Cassie! Julian's here! Could you get the door please.

Finally, she grabs and shoves the bag on the top shelf of her closet, all the way to the back. As she does it-

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

Cassie!

We hear the voice of a young girl answer. She sounds irritated, in the way of nine-year-old defiance.

CASSIE

I'm going!

DOWNSTAIRS

CASSIE HAYES(9), answers the door. She has a cell phone in her hand.

JULIAN(18), the babysitter, stands on the doorstep.

JULIAN

Hi Cassie!

CASSIE

My friends call me Cassie. My acquaintances call me Cassandra, and Mrs. Vierhout calls me Miss Hayes. I don't call you Julie, because I wouldn't presume to imply that level of intimacy between us. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm in the middle of an important call.

Without waiting for a response, Cassie turns and SPRINTS back upstairs and to her room.

CASSIE'S ROOM

She runs in the room, closes and locks the door as fast as she can, and hops on the bed.

It's the room of a typical nine-year-old girl. Lots of BRIGHT COLORS, and posters of her favorite animated movies. There's a sizable bookshelf on one wall, and a walk-in closet that looks like it could be a whole other room. It's filled with clothes and stuffed animals.

CASSIE
(into phone)
Davis?

INTERCUT WITH:

DAVIS'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

DAVIS(9) hides under a blanket fort, phone to his ear.

In stark contrast to Cassie's room, Davis's is the room of a typical nine-year-old boy. He has posters of Star Wars and other such titles, and his closet, considerably smaller, is filled with boys' clothes and action figures.

DAVIS
I'm here.

CASSIE
My mom will be gone soon. Julian's here.

DAVIS
Can you get rid of her?

CASSIE
Negative. I'll have to leave when she's not looking.

DAVIS
Darn. That's gonna make this harder.

CASSIE
Don't worry, I can do it. Let's go over the plan again.

DAVIS
Right. We meet at Honey's. I'll

leave first, since my house is farther. When I do, I'll send you a text, and that's your go-ahead.

CASSIE

Perfect.

BACK TO:

MARY ANN'S HOUSE - FOYER

Julian awkwardly hangs out in the foyer, admiring the house. Mary Ann comes downstairs.

MARY ANN

Hi Julian.

JULIAN

Hi.

MARY ANN

She disappeared, did she?

JULIAN

Ran off, almost as soon as I got here. I get the feeling she doesn't like me all that much.

MARY ANN

Join the club. Well, come on in. I'll be outta here in a minute.

IN THE KITCHEN

MARY ANN

There's a pizza in the freezer for supper, lemonade and orange juice in the fridge. Can I get you anything now?

JULIAN

I'm alright.

Mary Ann goes to the sink and starts washing dishes.

Julian goes to dry them.

MARY ANN

That's alright.

JULIAN

Oh I don't mind. My roommate does all the dishes, so in a way I kind

of enjoy it.

MARY ANN
How'd you score that deal?

JULIAN
Well I cook all the meals, so it's
a trade-off I guess.

MARY ANN
I didn't realize kids your age
still knew how to cook.

JULIAN
Depends on what you consider
cooking. I don't claim to be any
kind of gourmet, but I have an
uncanny ability to not fuck up
pasta.

They laugh.

MARY ANN
Can I ask you a question?

JULIAN
Sure.

MARY ANN
Let's say you were a guy. A few
years older than you, let's say.
Would you find me attractive?

Julian looks at Mary Ann, noticing her makeup and hair.

JULIAN
Are you going on a date?

Mary Ann smiles, embarrassed.

JULIAN(CONT'D)
You are! How old is he?

MARY ANN
(mumbles)
Twenty-five.

JULIAN
Goddamn, are you serious?

MARY ANN
Is that weird?

JULIAN

It's fucking badass is what it is.
I'll be lucky if I'm not going gray
by the time I reach your age.

MARY ANN

How old do you think I am?

JULIAN

When you're eighteen, anything over
twenty-one is considered elderly.
But to answer your question, I'm
not a guy, and I'm not twenty-five,
so to try and find an answer as
such would be scientifically
inadvisable. But if you want my
opinion, as me, you're fucking hot.

Mary Ann doesn't quite know how to take that. She gives a
quizzical look.

MARY ANN

Thanks.

She checks her watch.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

I'd better go.

IN THE FOYER

Mary Ann gets her purse and keys. Julian sees her to the
door.

MARY ANN

If you don't mind, keep a close eye
on Cassie tonight. We haven't been
on the best of terms lately, and I
just want to make sure she doesn't
burn down the house or anything.

JULIAN

No problem. I also have an uncanny
ability to prevent nine-year-olds
from committing arson.

MARY ANN

Right. Okay, see ya.

JULIAN

See ya.

Mary Ann leaves.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX PARKING LOT - EVENING

A lone VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE occupies the lot, engine idling, its red paint-job GLEAMING against the light of the setting sun.

Sitting in the front seat is MARY ANN HAYES, wearing her jeans and t-shirt.

MATHIS enters the frame, walking toward the car, wearing a NICE SHIRT, TIE and SLACKS with white TENNIS SHOES. He leans down to look through the window of the Volkswagen.

MATHIS
Mary Ann Hayes?

Mary Ann smiles.

MARY ANN
Mathis Mason?

MATHIS
Yes ma'am. Uh, you can call me Matty. Did I overdress?

MARY ANN
And you can call me Mary Ann. As for the clothes, they'll be irrelevant in a moment. Hop in.

As Mathis slams the door the screen goes BLACK.

INT. MARY ANN'S CAR - MINUTES LATER

Mary Ann SINGS along with the radio. She has a pleasant voice. Every now and then she glances at Mathis and smiles to herself.

Mathis looks anywhere but at his date. He messes with his tie.

MARY ANN
You look nervous.

MATHIS
I am.

MARY ANN
You know, being nervous is the most egotistical thing a person can do.

MATHIS
You're sayin' I have a big ego?

MARY ANN
You're sayin' I'm wrong?

MATHIS
I'd like to think so.

MARY ANN
Alright. Why are you nervous?

MATHIS
Because I'm on a date.

MARY ANN
But *why* does that make you nervous?
(pause)
Because you're worried about what I
think of you.

MATHIS
I suppose so.

MARY ANN
Ergo, if you didn't think so highly
of yourself you'd have no reason to
be self-conscious. The only way to
really get over your nerves is
realize that everyone is just as
wrapped up in their own vanity as
you are, and that not a single one
of 'em, not a single soul on this
Earth, gives a flying fuck about
you, because frankly, they don't
have the time.

A beat.

MATHIS
Well that is a comfort, especially
comin' from the woman about to buy
me dinner.

MARY ANN
Eases some of the tension though,
don't it?

EXT. HIGH NOON SALOON - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

The restaurant could have come straight out of an 1800's era
photograph. It has the shape and feel of a good ol'
fashioned SALOON.

A big wooden sign over the swinging doors reads: THE HIGH
NOON SALOON AND RESTAURANT.

As the Volkswagen pulls up, a "stableboy" approaches. He opens the door for Mary Ann and gives her a ticket, then drives the car away.

Mathis, open-mouthed, stares at the restaurant exterior, taking in every detail.

Mary Ann marches right past him.

MARY ANN
Wait till you see inside.

INT. HIGH NOON SALOON - SECONDS LATER - NIGHT

She wasn't lying. The saloon looks like it could have come straight out of an old western movie. It's nearly filled to capacity, with COWBOYS and COWGIRLS in chaps and vests, LADIES in frilly dresses and dangling floral purses, and SALOON GIRLS in stylish corsets filling every corner of the room.

A BAND plays on a raised dais, and beneath them enthusiastic couples dance the two step.

A SALOON GIRL(20's) in pique 1850's western saloon fashion greets the couple. She has an EXAGGERATED southern accent, and's peppy as can be.

MISS KITTY
Howdy folks, how many this evening?

Mathis, gaping and smiling at everyone and everything, doesn't answer.

Mary Ann smiles at him as she answers.

MARY ANN
Two. We have a reservation, under Hayes.

MISS KITTY
Alrighty Miss Hayes, if you'll follow me this way, I'll show you to the wardrobe.

Miss Kitty leads them through a side door marked WARDROBE. Inside are two other doors, marked COWBOYS and COWGIRLS.

Mary Ann touches Mathis on the arm and smiles at him.

MARY ANN
I'll see you in a minute.

MISS KITTY
I'll wait right here.

Mary Ann disappears through the door marked COWGIRLS.

Mathis turns to his own door. It creeks open like the Gates of Heaven, revealing racks upon racks of 19th century getup: there are BOOTS and SPURS, CUTAWAYS and CRAVATS, CHAPS and CHINKS, DUSTERS and DERRINGERS, bowler, gambler, and cowboy HATS, the whole shebang.

Mathis stares, more in awe than ever, craning his neck just to see to the top of every shelf. If angels were real, they'd be singing.

INT. HIGH NOON SALOON - MINUTES LATER

Mathis comes out of the changing room, wearing a stylish grey GAMBLER'S outfit, complete with hat and short spurs, same as what we saw him in in the previous chapter. The spurs jingle when he walks.

MISS KITTY
Well if you ain't a cowboy, a card shark, and a gentleman all on one stick. What's your name, handsome?

MATHIS
Mathis. Uh, you can call me Matty.

MISS KITTY
Well save a dance for me, Matty. That is if your lady don't mind.

MATHIS
To be honest Miss, I wouldn't know.

Mathis smiles nervously and looks at the floor.

MISS KITTY
Look at you all-overish. Is it your first date?

MATHIS
I just met her today.

MISS KITTY
Well, I don't pretend to be wise in the ways of courtship, and I don't condone pourin' a whole trough o' wisdom down your ear at once, but I do know that no man ever won a woman while slumpin' like a sack o'

potatas.

Mathis looks at her for a moment, then taking her meaning, STRAIGHTENS his shoulders and raises his chin.

MISS KITTY(CONT'D)

That's it, get those eyes up. And keep 'em there, 'less you got a mind to be romancin' the dance floor.

The dressing room door opens, Mary Ann leans in the doorway. She wears a 19th century high society dress, BLOOMING with elegance. A STYLISH HAT sits cockeyed on her head, and a little purse dangles from her fingers, which are raised in front of her to show off her SEQUINED GLOVES.

She walks forward and does a little pirouette, beaming.

Mathis smiles.

MARY ANN

What do you think?

MATHIS

You look like Maureen O'Hara.

MARY ANN

I'll take that as a compliment.

MISS KITTY

I'll show you to your table.

They weave through a maze of tables and jovial patrons.

Mary Ann turns more than a few heads.

They sit down.

MISS KITTY

You go ahead and start gettin' familiar with the menu there; you can grab your drinks from the Whiskey Trough. I'll be back in a jiffy.

As the waitress prances away-

MATHIS

I'll grab us some drinks.

MARY ANN

(looking at menu)

Okay, I'll have...an Unforgiven.

Mathis leaves.

Mary Ann watches him go.

STRANGER
You look very pretty, Miss.

MARY ANN
(still watching Mathis)
Thank you.

AT THE BAR

The bar is full. Mathis has to squeeze between two COWBOYS.
A sign above reads: THE WHISKEY TROUGH.

BARTENDER
What can I get for ya?

MATHIS
An Unforgiven for the lady, and
I'll have...a Martin's Apple Juice.

The dancers go wild as the band plays a gung-ho rendition of
'The Ballad of Jesse James.'

A BIG COWBOY, very drunk, turns to Mathis.

BIG COWBOY
How old are you?

MATHIS
Twenty-five.

BIG COWBOY
You ever kill a man?

MATHIS
No sir.

The cowboy nods in approval.

BIG COWBOY
Good for you, son.

The cowboy goes back to his drink. Mathis turns away,
confused.

BACK AT THE TABLE

Mathis sets the drinks on the table and sits down. They both
take a sip.

MATHIS

How is it?

MARY ANN

Old bitter and deadly. How's yours?

Mathis offers his glass, she takes a sip.

MARY ANN

Sweet.

MATHIS

Just like me.

She giggles.

A beat.

MARY ANN

Oh, you weren't here so I went ahead and ordered for you. You don't mind.

MATHIS

I don't?

MARY ANN

You do not.

MATHIS

But wouldn't my minding depend on what you ordered?

MARY ANN

It's called a White Fricassee.

MATHIS

You wanna tell me what that is?

MARY ANN

Nope.

MATHIS

Why not?

MARY ANN

If I tell you what it is you'll start imagining what it might be like, and based on that assumption you'll start wondering whether or not you'll like it, and by the time it gets here it won't matter how delectable or otherwise the food might be, because you'll have

already made up your mind. But if I don't tell you, it remains unknown, and the dish speaks for itself.

MATHIS

But isn't prior knowledge just as likely to enhance the experience as to ruin it?

MARY ANN

Prior knowledge begets expectation, and expectations are never met. You can only experience something for the first time once. Let your knowledge enhance it on the second, or third time you do it. But to really understand an experience, you have to have it in its purest form.

MATHIS

'Purest' meaning without expectation.

She shifts in her seat, getting comfortable.

MARY ANN

You ever had sex?

Mathis smiles and looks down.

MATHIS

Uh, yes.

MARY ANN

Was it spontaneous, or did you plan it with someone?

MATHIS

It was planned.

MARY ANN

With who?

MATHIS

My girlfriend.

MARY ANN

What was her name?

MATHIS

Ashley.

MARY ANN
Who initiated?

MATHIS
She left a note in my locker with
the time and place. We met up after
school.

MARY ANN
So between finding the note and
sealing the deal was what, a few
hours?

MATHIS
The whole day.

MARY ANN
You pay much attention in class
that day?

MATHIS
Less than usual.

MARY ANN
Because you were busy thinking, all
damn day, about having sex with
Ashley.

Mathis nods and sips his drink.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
What'd you think about?

Mathis chuckles, nervous.

MATHIS
That is a line I do not wish to
cross.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
You must have had prior notions.
What it would feel like, how long
it would last. Would she let you
put it in her mouth.

Mathis makes a conceding gesture, embarrassed.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
So how was it?

MATHIS
Good.

MARY ANN

How good?

Mathis wants to answer, but can't seem to find the words.

Mary Ann helps him out.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

It was the best feeling you've ever had. Your mind was blown it felt so good. It was so good, you actually forgot about Ashley for a moment because you were marveling at how good it was. It was the best feeling you've ever had. Except for the sex that you were having before, all day, up here.

(taps her head)

How many times did you fuck Ashley that day? A hundred? A thousand? A hundred thousand? And every single one was absolutely perfect. Except the one that was actually real. Because nothing that's real, not sex, not a meal, not the dessert that comes after, will ever be better than what we hoped it would be.

Miss Kitty reappears, bearing food.

MISS KITTY

Two white fricassees.

MARY ANN

Thank you.

MATHIS

Thanks.

Mary Ann watches Mathis take a bite.

MARY ANN

Verdict?

Mathis makes an "ok" with his fingers.

MATHIS

Simply, divine.

Mary Ann smiles.

We leave our friends for a moment to observe the DANCE FLOOR.

The singer sings, the dancers dance, enthusiastic as ever, and there are more of them now than there were earlier. They cover the whole dance floor.

The song ends. Sweaty dancers thank their partners. Some leave the floor, others remain hand in hand, anticipating another song.

The singer, a grizzled old cowboy with an impressive handlebar mustache, speaks:

SINGER

I wanna thank ya'll for comin' out
to our little frolic tonight. We
sure do appreciate there's still
folks out there who just like to
have a good time. This next song
goes out to all our young couples
out there who'd rather die than
take 'er easy once in a while.

The band starts to play Robert Earl Keen's "The Road Goes on Forever."

Back with Mathis and Mary Ann, the latter suddenly stands and holds out her hand.

MARY ANN

Come on.

Mathis looks at her for a beat.

MATHIS

I'm still eating.

MARY ANN

It'll be here when you get back.

Another beat.

MATHIS

I can't dance.

MARY ANN

I'll teach you.

Mathis looks at the dancers, whooping and cheering, in ecstasy.

MARY ANN

If you don't dance, with me, to
this song, you may as well kiss me
goodbye right now.

Mathis takes a breath, and takes her hand.

Mary Ann, BEAMING, leads him to the dance floor.

Mary Ann leads. Mathis is awkward, moving his feet out of time, every now and then tripping over himself.

He laughs nervously.

MATHIS

Sorry.

They dance, Mathis watching his feet, Mary Ann guiding him. It's clumsy, awkward.

MARY ANN

Stop watching your feet. Look at me.

Mathis looks Mary Ann, she looks back. She smiles. He smiles back. It gives him CONFIDENCE.

Gradually, Mathis gets a feel for the rhythm. He begins to assume control. They dance faster, and then faster, as the song picks up the pace, reaching its CRESCENDO.

The song ends, Mathis drops Mary Ann into a one-armed dip.

She comes up laughing. They make eye contact, and Mary Ann stops laughing. Mathis has his hands on her waist. Their mouths get closer, and closer. And then...

GUNSHOTS. But quieter than they should be.

Mathis jumps. They both turn towards the commotion.

A GANG of "bandits," wearing bandanas, push their way through the crowd, whooping and hollering, firing blanks into the air, filling the space with gun smoke. We realize it must be the restaurant staff as we catch a glimpse of MISS KITTY among them.

They move among the crowd, "robbing" the patrons, the money going into hats, pockets, and purses.

Miss Kitty turns her GUN on Mathis.

MISS KITTY

And how 'bout you, cowboy?

Mathis smiles shyly, confused. Mary Ann gives him a nudge, nods toward Kitty's purse. Mathis pulls some money from his jacket and drops it in.

MISS KITTY
Thank you kindly.

Miss Kitty turns and points her gun at the singer.

MISS KITTY
(mock threatening)
Now give us somethin' snappy,
Milton, double-time!

MILTON
Yes ma'am.

As Milton and the band get ready, the bandits whoop and holler and start grabbing any partner they see.

A particularly BIG BANDIT grabs Mary Ann's hand and starts leading her away, much to her amusement.

Mathis grabs her other hand. He isn't smiling.

The bandit turns.

He walks up to Mathis, towering over him.

He tugs his bandana down.

BANDIT
(mock menacing)
You gotta problem, boy?

Mathis doesn't back down, but he doesn't retort either. He's not sure what to do, and then we realize that the music has stopped.

MILTON
Gather round, folks, it looks like we've got ourselves a dispute. An' you all know how we solve disputes in the High Noon Saloon. Get these boys a coupla' smoke wagons.

Somebody hands Mathis a HOLSTER AND PISTOL. He looks at Mary Ann. She nods encouragement.

The CROWD circles up around the duelists.

MILTON
Take a few steps back now, give each other some breathin' room.

Mathis and the bandit back away, never breaking eye contact.

MILTON

Now ya'll know the rules. As arbitrator I will count to ten, at which point you may draw and fire. Any man who draws before I get to ten will lose by default. Are we clear?

The bandit nods, Mathis nods, never breaking eye contact.

The restaurant is silent. The sound of WIND WHISTLING from outside.

MILTON

One. Two. Three.

Mathis's hand CREEPS toward his pistol.

The bandit's fingers TAPS an unsteady rhythm on his hip.

MILTON

Four. Five.

CU: The bandit's eyes. They're steady, calm.

CU: Mathis' eyes. Sweat on his brow. A drop rolls into his eye. He blinks.

MILTON

Six. Seven.

Mary Ann bites her thumb, smiling through her teeth.

Miss Kitty, bandana off now, clasps her hands in front of her.

MILTON

Eight.

CU: Mary Ann biting her thumb.

MARY ANN

(to herself)

Come on, Matty.

CU: Mathis' hand, steady next to his gun.

WIDE: Mathis and the bandit across from each other, totally still.

MILTON(O.S.)

Nine. Ten!

Mathis draws and FIRES. A BANG, a splash of RED. The bandit

goes down.

The room is silent. Mathis creeps toward the bandit. He rolls over. RED PAINT.

MILTON

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner!

Cheering from the crowd. The band strikes up again. Miss Kitty takes Mathis' gun and holster.

MISS KITTY

Nice job, cowboy. You can go ahead n' keep that suit.

She leaves.

Mathis turns. Mary Ann smiling. Mathis smiles back. He sidles up to her, offers his hand.

MATHIS

May I have this dance?

Mary Ann takes his hand.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Mary Ann's red Volkswagen pulls in. Mathis gets out. He leans on the window for a second, saying something we can't hear.

He turns. The car pulls away.

He walks up to Eddy, in his car. Eddy gets out of the car.

EDDY

What took you so fuckin' long?

Eddy goes around to the passenger side, gets in. Mathis gets in the driver's seat.

MATHIS

(matter-of-factly)
I had a date.

EDDY

What are you wearing?

MATHIS

Tell ya on the way.

Mathis starts the car, they pull out of the lot.

INT. EDDY'S CAR - LATER - NIGHT

Eddy rides shotgun. He wears his same blazer and white shirt, professional but efficient. His hair is slicked back, very neat.

Mathis drives casually, one elbow leans on the window sill, the other hand rests on top of the wheel. He smiles to himself as he drives.

EDDY

Lemme just, make sure I got this right.

MATHIS

Okay.

EDDY

She asked you out.

MATHIS

Yes.

EDDY

She took you out?

MATHIS

Correct.

EDDY

She paid for your meal?

MATHIS

You know it.

EDDY

And you met this broad where?

MATHIS

She put an ad in the paper.

EDDY

She put an ad in the paper.

MATHIS

Yeah.

EDDY

What, like in the classifieds?

MATHIS

(shrugs)

I don't know, somewhere.

Mathis digs in his jacket to retrieve a NEWSPAPER CLIPPING. He hands it to Eddy.

Eddy reads:

EDDY

'Needed: A cowboy to share a night out at the High Noon Saloon. Don't worry if you can't dance, I don't mind playing teacher. The meal's on me. Give me a call if you're interested, and we'll talk it over. My number's at the bottom. I'll see you there.'

(to himself)

I'm gonna have to renew my subscription.

(to Mathis)

You gonna see her again?

MATHIS

Nothing's set, but, I told her I'd give her a call.

EDDY

Well you better do that 'cause what you got there is what back in my day we used to call a keeper.

Mathis smiles.

MATHIS

We still call 'em that, asshole.

THE STREET

We see Eddy's car park on the street, across from a LARGE SUBURBAN HOME. The house is isolated as the property extends a considerable distance on either side. The owner is clearly WELL-OFF.

IN THE CAR

MATHIS

That's the place?

EDDY

That's the place.

Eddy stares at the house. The house stares back. Through the window, we can see that SEVERAL LIGHTS are still on.

MATHIS

So what're we waitin' for?

EDDY
What time is it?

Mathis checks his phone. Eddy does the same.

MATHIS
'Bout ten.

EDDY
'Bout ten? I got 9:46.

MATHIS
Yeah, about ten.

EDDY
No, not about ten. Exactly 9:46.
Have you ever listened to anything
I've said?

MATHIS
I--

EDDY
No, you haven't. Because if you
had, you'd know that punctuality is
the most important tool in any
professional's repertoire.

MATHIS
Yeah yeah, so I rounded up by a few
minutes, big deal.

EDDY
No, you rounded up by thirteen
minutes. Not a few, thirteen.

MATHIS
Fourteen.

EDDY
What?

MATHIS
Fourteen minutes.

EDDY
Even worse. If I had acted on the
false information that you had
given me, it could have blown the
whole operation. Do you understand
that?

MATHIS
I'm sorry.

EDDY
Do you understand that?

MATHIS
Yes! I'm sorry, alright? It won't
happen again.

EDDY
Good.

A beat.

MATHIS
So what're we waiting for?

EDDY
Every night around ten she goes for
a jog.

MATHIS
Uh huh. Who told you that?

EDDY
Dogman.

MATHIS
And you trust him?

EDDY
What's that supposed to mean?

MATHIS
Nothing.

EDDY
Nothing? Nothing? Cause it didn't
sound like nothing.

MATHIS
Alright, all I meant--you been
working for the guy what, eleven
years?

EDDY
That's right.

MATHIS
Eleven years, and he's still got
you running his late night errands?

EDDY
What do you mean?

MATHIS

He's never thrown you a bone, never done you any favors.

EDDY

What do you mean?

MATHIS

I mean, you been with the guy for eleven years, and you're still in the same place you were when you started.

EDDY

You wanna climb the ladder, you gotta earn your way to the next rung, that's what Dogman says.

MATHIS

Yeah but don't you think you have earned it, Eddy?

Silence.

MATHIS(CONT'D)

All I'm saying, is I don't know if he's got your best interests at heart, that's all.

EDDY

(sarcastic)

Oh, and you do.

MATHIS

Of course, man. We're friends.

A beat.

EDDY

(grudgingly)

Thanks.

Mathis digs a JOINT out of his jacket.

Eddy, watching the house, turns at the sound of the lighter.

EDDY

What the fuck are you doing?

MATHIS

What's it look like?

EDDY

Put it out.

MATHIS

Hey, fuck you man, you know what I pay for this stuff? I'm not gonna waste it.

EDDY

You shoulda thoughta that before you lit up in my car.

MATHIS

The window's down, what's the big fuckin deal?

EDDY

Do you know how many people, on average, are killed in car accidents every year? Three thousand. And of those three thousand deaths, approximately ten percent are the direct result of a drug-related incident. That's three hundred people, every year, killed because of that shit, and I'm not about to be added to that list.

MATHIS

You read that on the internet?

EDDY

So what if I did?

MATHIS

Well whopty-doo, look at you, welcome to the twenty-first century grandpa. And if you had any idea what you were talking about, you'd know that there is no conclusive evidence whatsoever to suggest that drivers with cannabinoids in the blood system are any more likely to be involved in a fatal car crash than anyone else. Where'd you read that, anyway?

EDDY

I don't know, some website.

MATHIS(CONT'D)

That's what I thought. So don't come at me with your statistical bullshit until you've got some real evidence to back it up--

EDDY

Alright, take a breath, Jesus. You have your narrative I have mine, let's just forget the whole goddamn thing.

A beat.

MATHIS

(apologetic)

Do you want me to throw it away, Eddy?

EDDY

No, it's fine.

MATHIS

I'll throw it away if you want me to.

EDDY

No, it's very expensive, I wouldn't want you to do that.

A beat.

MATHIS

Thanks.

Mathis proceeds to smoke his joint.

Eddy watches the house.

EDDY

Should be any minute now.

A beat.

MATHIS

Who is this gal, anyway?

EDDY

She used to work for Dogman.

MATHIS

But she stole from him.

EDDY

Right.

MATHIS

How much?

Eddy is hesitant.

EDDY
I shouldn't tell you.

MATHIS
C'mon now, you know my lips are
sealed. I won't tell a soul.

EDDY
It's not that I don't trust you.

MATHIS
Great. So tell me.

EDDY
No.

MATHIS
Fine, I'll guess, and when I get
close, all you gotta do is nod your
head. Okay?

Mathis, having fun with this, turns toward Eddy, who bows
his head in a conceding gesture.

MATHIS
Ten grand.

Eddy JABS his thumb up.

MATHIS(CONT'D)
Twenty grand.

Eddy's thumb again.

EDDY
Way up.

MATHIS
A hundred?

Eddy's thumb.

MATHIS(CONT'D)
Five hundred?

EDDY
Six.

Mathis whistles, admiring the thief.

MATHIS
How'd she pull it off?

EDDY

No one knows. Dogman's a lotta things but careless isn't one of 'em. So whoever she is, she'd been planning it for a long time, and she's damn smart.

MATHIS

Not smart enough.

EDDY

Yeah, well, like I said, you have to get up pretty early in the morning if you wanna put one over on Dogman. Gotta pull a fuckin' all-nighter to get the drop on him.

Eddy clearly admires his boss.

EDDY(CONT'D)

No one knows how Dogman found out who did it. But he did, and she's gonna pay.

MATHIS

So are you...?

Mathis makes a FINGER GUN and puts it to his head.

EDDY

No no, I just get the money.

A beat.

Suddenly, the door of the house opens. Eddy STRAIGHTENS in his seat.

EDDY

Right on time.

We watch from a distance as a figure, a WOMAN, dressed in JOGGING GEAR, leaves the house and starts jogging down the sidewalk.

Once she's out of view...

EDDY

Alright, you be ready to scam on a dime, I'll be back in ten minutes, tops.

Eddy gets out of the car, turning his head, searching for onlookers, and jogs toward the house.

We remain in the car with Mathis. He watches, never taking his eyes off his friend.

AT THE HOUSE

Eddy tries the front door. Locked. He goes around the house, eyes peeled for an entry point. He sets his sights on a window a little bit above him. He climbs up to it, pushes it, it's open.

Just as he's about to climb through, he comes face to face with a young girl - CASSIE HAYES. She's wearing dark clothing, carrying a PINK BACKPACK that looks full, and was apparently about to climb out the window. They stare at each other, neither quite sure what to make of the situation.

BACK AT THE CAR

Mathis turns on the radio, changes the station a few times, settling on something country-ish, and not from this century, reminiscent of the gambler's suit he's wearing.

He sits back, eyes closed, smiling, every now and then sucking on his joint.

After a short time, A SCREAM. High pitched, faint, from the house.

Mathis is startled. He watches the house anxiously. Nothing.

Sounds of vague commotion, and then Eddy BURSTS out the front door, a writhing figure in his arms.

As he approaches we see that he's carrying Cassie. She screams protests and swings her arms and legs, trying to fend off her captor.

Eddy reaches the back door of the car.

EDDY
Start the car.

MATHIS
What the fuck, man?

EDDY
Start the car.

Mathis starts the car.

By this time Eddy has shoved Cassie into the back seat and climbed in with her. She flails and kicks and it's all he can do to keep her from escaping.

EDDY
Hold her legs!

Mathis awkwardly turns in his seat, reaching back to hold Cassie's legs.

Eddy, using a pair of EAR BUDS as rope, ties Cassie's hands together. He then tears his own SHOELACES out and binds her legs together.

EDDY
Gimme your bandana.

MATHIS
Why?

EDDY
Just give it to me!

Mathis does.

EDDY(CONT'D)
Now drive.

Mathis SLAMS the accelerator, the car tires screech.

Eddy uses the bandana to gag Cassie, muffling, if not entirely preventing, her screaming.

When it's done, Eddy climbs into the front passenger seat, leaving Cassie curled up, gagged, hands bound, in the back seat.

They drive for a few beats in silence. Mathis keeps looking at Eddy.

EDDY
Don't worry. It's all part of the plan.

EXT. BACKROAD - LATER - NIGHT

Eddy and Mathis stand on the road, illuminated by the headlights of Eddy's car. Inside the car we can see Cassie, tied up, flailing and screaming.

MATHIS
How is *this* part of the plan?

EDDY
Listen--

MATHIS

No you listen! You came to me, right? You came to me, asking for my help, and I said yes, because that's what friends do, and because I didn't know it would involve a fucking kidnapping!

EDDY

I didn't know it would either!

MATHIS

I thought you said it was part of the plan!

EDDY

It is part of the fucking plan!

A beat.

EDDY(CONT'D)

Look, I had no choice, alright? She made me.

MATHIS

She made you.

EDDY

Yeah, she made me. She saw my face, what was I supposed to do?

A beat.

MATHIS

Why didn't you just tie her up, then go find the money?

A beat.

EDDY

Well I didn't think of that.

MATHIS

Of course you didn't. Of course you didn't!

EDDY

Well if I'd known you were so fuckin' smart I'da sent you in instead.

MATHIS

I coulda done a damn sight better than you did.

EDDY
Yeah?

 MATHIS
Yeah.

 EDDY
Well alright then, you're so smart,
what do we do now?

 MATHIS
What--now?

Eddy nods.

Silence.

 EDDY
Yeah, that's what I thought. Now,
if you'll let him, the professional
would like to illuminate you as to
his plan.

Mathis holds out his hand in a "go ahead" gesture.

 EDDY(CONT'D)
Look, the way I see it, gettin' the
kid is just as good. This way, we
can exchange the kid for the money.

 MATHIS
You wanna ransom her.

 EDDY
Well, if you wanna put a label on
it.

 MATHIS
It's ransom.

 EDDY
Alright, fine, Jesus, yes, we
ransom the kid.

A beat.

 EDDY(CONT'D)
So whaddya think?

 MATHIS
I don't know, man.

 EDDY
C'mon, what else are we gonna do?

A beat.

MATHIS

Alright.

EDDY

Yes! That's my boy.

MATHIS

Don't call me that.

A FEW MINUTES LATER

Mathis sits in the drivers' seat, still parked on the roadside. Cassie seems to have either calmed down or worn herself out. Eddy gets in the car.

MATHIS

So?

EDDY

She didn't answer.

MATHIS

She didn't answer? So do we call back or what?

EDDY

No need, I left her a voicemail.

MATHIS

You left her a voicemail?

EDDY

Is there a fuckin' echo in here? Yes, I left her a goddamn voicemail.

MATHIS

Alright, no need to raise your voice.

EDDY

Well I wouldn't have to if you didn't question me at every opportunity.

Mathis raises his hands defensively.

MATHIS

So what do we do if she doesn't call back?

EDDY

Why do you gotta be such a pessimist all the time?

MATHIS

I'm not a pessimist.

EDDY

Yes you are.

MATHIS

I'm not a pessimist. I'm a realist.

EDDY

In my experience they're the same fuckin' thing.

MATHIS

They're not the same thing.

EDDY

Both viewpoints stem from the notion that the worst possible outcome to a situation can and will happen. That's negative thinking, Matty, and it won't get you anywhere. I'm a practitioner of positive thinking. As in, I'm positive she's gonna call back, I'm positive we're gonna get that money, and I'm positive we'll both be in bed before midnight.

MATHIS

Yeah, well what happens when she doesn't?

Eddy's phone RINGS.

Eddy gives Mathis an "I told you so" look.

He answers the phone like you'd answer a call from your mother.

EDDY

(into phone)

Hello.

Mathis rolls his eyes.

Eddy listens for a few moments.

EDDY

Yeah, she's right here.

(pause)
Oh, sure.

He twists in his seat, points his phone at Cassie.

EDDY(CONT'D)
How do I pull up the camera?

MATHIS
You have to swipe up.

EDDY
Swipe up where?

MATHIS
From the bottom of the screen.

EDDY
It's not working.

MATHIS
Let me see.

Mathis grabs the phone, snaps the picture, and sends it.

He gives the phone back to Eddy.

EDDY
(into phone)
Uh, yeah, did you get it?
(pause)
Okay.
(pause)
Yeah, okay. We'll see you soon.
Bye.

Eddy hangs up. Mathis stares at him.

EDDY(CONT'D)
What?

MATHIS
We'll see you soon? We have her
daughter for Christ's sake.

EDDY
What was I supposed to say?

MATHIS
I don't know. This whole thing is
fucked.

EDDY
Negative waves, Matty.

Mathis starts the car, they pull away and we are...

INT. EDDY'S CAR - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

DRIVING along a tree-lined road. Mathis drives. Eddy MUNCHES on a bag of peanuts. The radio plays.

Cassie, in the back seat, slips one of her hands out of the ear-buds rope. She checks to see if either one of her captors has noticed. They haven't. She unties her feet.

EDDY
(to Mathis)
Peanut?

The car approaches a stop sign.

As they slow down Cassie JUMPS out of the car, backpack and all.

Neither Mathis nor Eddy hears the door open over the sound of the radio, but they hear it slam.

EDDY
What the fuck?

Mathis sees Cassie running away in his rearview mirror.

MATHIS
What the fuck, I thought you tied her up?

EDDY
I did tie her up!

MATHIS
Then why ain't she tied up?

EDDY
I don't know, just get after her!

Mathis puts the car in reverse and gives chase. As they get closer Cassie VEERS OFF into the woods.

The cars screeches to a halt. Eddy, moving at an impressive rate for his age, dives out of the car to give chase.

EDDY
(to Mathis)
You go ahead, I'll catch up!

MATHIS
You want me to go by myself?

EDDY

She's gonna be there any minute,
and if we don't meet her she's
gonna think we stiffed her, just
go!

MATHIS

What if you can't find her?

EDDY

Negative waves!

Mathis gets in the car and drives off.

EXT. WOODS - SECONDS LATER - NIGHT

Cassie RUNS through the moonlit woods. She trips and falls,
gets up and keeps running.

Eddy gives chase.

EDDY

Hey! Get back here!

He jumps over a log, runs through a puddle.

CLOSE on Eddy's shoe, the one without laces.

EDDY

We're going to take you back! We're
going to take you back to your mom!

The LACELESS SHOE comes off. Eddy trips and falls down a
small ravine. He tumbles head over heel until he comes to
rest at the bottom of the ravine. His jacket and shirt are
RUINED, covered in mud. He has leaves on his face.

Cassie watches from behind a nearby tree.

Eddy lies motionless.

Cassie sneaks toward him. She leans over him. She pokes him
with her toe.

Eddy opens his eyes, shakes his head. He sees Cassie, tries
to stand, but his ankle won't hold him.

Cassie backs away, but doesn't flee.

CASSIE

Are you really going to take me
back to my mom?

EDDY

Yeah. Just come with me, I'll take you right to her. She's waitin' for us right now.

CASSIE

I don't want to.

EDDY

What?

Eddy looks at Cassie's full BACKPACK, her DARK CLOTHING.

EDDY(CONT'D)

Are you running away?

CASSIE

Maybe.

EDDY

How come?

CASSIE

She doesn't understand me.

EDDY

Who, your mom?

Cassie nods.

EDDY(CONT'D)

I'll tell you something, no one understands anybody. It's the way of the world. If everybody understood everyone else, we'd all get along perfectly, and that'd just be boring.

A beat.

EDDY(CONT'D)

So what's the plan, then? You climb out the window with a bag full of granola bars, maybe some fruit snacks. Use your allowance to buy a bus ticket?

CASSIE

No. I'm running away with Davis.

EDDY

Who's he, your boyfriend?

CASSIE
My soul mate.

EDDY
Your soul mate. How old are you?

CASSIE
Nine.

EDDY
Nine--do you even know what a soul
mate is?

CASSIE
It's the person you want to be with
for the rest of your life.

EDDY
You don't wanna be with any one
person the rest of your life, trust
me.

CASSIE
Do you have a wife?

EDDY
I did.

CASSIE
What was her name?

EDDY
Robin.

CASSIE
Why'd she leave?

EDDY
What makes you think she left?
(pause)
She got tired of me. Just like
you're gonna get tired of Davis. Or
he's gonna get tired of you.

CASSIE
No he won't.

EDDY
It happens to everyone. Even
couples who stay together for sixty
years. They won't say it, but
they're tired of each other
alright, they're just too stubborn

to admit it.

CASSIE
Maybe you and Robin just did it
wrong.

Silence.

EDDY
Where are you supposed to meet
Davis?

CASSIE
Honey's Ice Cream Parlor.

EDDY
I know the place. Too far to walk.
How you gonna get there?

CASSIE
I was gonna take my bike.

EDDY
Kind of a moot point, now. I
suppose that's my fault. Say, I got
a better idea. How 'bout we make a
deal. I got my car parked not too
far from here. I can drive you to
Honey's. But first, you gotta give
me something. Now I don't expect
this to make any sense, I'm taking
you to your mom because she's got
something for me, a lotta money.
But she won't give it to me unless
she sees you first. So what say we
take you to your mom, and when she
sees you with me she'll give me my
money, and then I take you to
Honey's Ice Cream Parlor, and you
can meet your boyfriend.

CASSIE
Soul mate.

EDDY
I'll take you to meet your soul
mate, then. I get what I want, then
you get what you want. How 'bout
it?

Cassie thinks. She looks at Eddy with a CAUTIOUS eye.

CASSIE
Shake on it.

They do.

EDDY

Great, now help me up.

Cassie "helps" Eddy stand. He limps.

Eddy's phone rings. The screen reads: DOGMAN. Eddy silences the phone and puts it in his pocket.

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

It's a long bridge, perfect for an exchange.

Mathis's car sits at one end. He fidgets and watches the other end of the bridge.

ANOTHER CAR arrives, stopping across from Mathis. A figure gets out of the car. Mathis does the same, and approaches the figure cautiously. She is SILHOUETTED by her car lights, impossible to make out, until...

The woman blocks the car lights, suddenly throwing the shadow from her face, and we see her: MARY ANN HAYES.

She stares at Mathis, surprised, then confused, and then her face adopts a somber expression, one of SAD AMUSEMENT.

MARY ANN

This is why I smoke.

She lights up.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

(to herself)

Small fuckin' world.

Mathis looks at her, his face guilt-ridden.

MATHIS

Mary Ann--

MARY ANN

It's Miss Hayes.

She takes a drag.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

So you're the one who took my Cassie.

MATHIS

If I'd known it was you--

MARY ANN

You wouldna done it? That's a real comfort. Is she here?

MATHIS

Well, no.

MARY ANN

Where is she?

MATHIS

She's with my partner. They'll be here any minute.

MARY ANN

Your partner. He the one who left me--

MATHIS

The voicemail, yeah.

MARY ANN

What kinda kidnapper leaves a voicemail?

MATHIS

Eddy likes to be thorough.

MARY ANN

So you're the brains he's the muscle, that how it is?

MATHIS

I'm his driver.

MARY ANN

You work for Dogman.

MATHIS

I'm just a friend of Eddy's.

MARY ANN

And you're okay with what he does for a living?

MATHIS

He doesn't make a habit of kidnapping people if that's what you mean. And I owed him a favor.

MARY ANN

Some friend.

She means it.

She takes a drag on her smoke.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

So other than kidnapping nine-year-old girls what do you do?

MATHIS

I don't kidnap nine-year-old girls.

MARY ANN

Oh, maybe you have another word for it.

MATHIS

No, I'm not denying that I did it, but I'm saying it's something I *did*, not something I *do*. I don't *do* it. I do my laundry. I do my dishes. But I don't play guitar, I don't go on dates with beautiful women, and I don't kidnap their fucking kids. I *did* it, as a favor to a friend.

MARY ANN

You know what they call that?

MATHIS

What?

MARY ANN

A mistake.

MATHIS

You don't have someone you'd do anything for? Someone you owe so much you couldn't turn 'em down if you wanted to? You tellin' me you can't understand that? 'Cause if you can't then I feel sorry for you, if you don't have anybody like that.

MARY ANN

Eddy sounds like a real gem. Maybe I should buy him dinner.

MATHIS

I'm sure he wouldn't object.

A beat.

Mary Ann looks at the ground.

MARY ANN
 (softly)
 I do.

MATHIS
 You do what?

MARY ANN
 I do have someone like that, like
 you said. Someone I'd do anything
 in the world for.

MATHIS
 Who?

MARY ANN
 You took her from me.

Mathis looks at the ground, angry and ashamed.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
 Did you know my favorite food is
 apple pie?

MATHIS
 (irritated)
 No I did not.

MARY ANN
 When I was younger I'd help my mom
 make apple pie. You know how you
 tell a bad apple from a good one?

Mathis is wary, but he goes along with it.

MATHIS
 No.

MARY ANN
 Well, me neither. But every now and
 again she'd take one from me, cut
 it open and show me it was bad
 inside. I asked her once how she
 could tell and you know what she
 said?

MATHIS
 What'd she say?

MARY ANN
 She looked at me and said, "It just
 takes practice." Well, I practiced,
 but I just never did learn how to
 spot a bad one. Not until I cut it

open anyway.

MATHIS

If you're trying to tell me a second date is out of the question, I already had that figured.

MARY ANN

No, I just got to thinkin' after you enlightened me about the difference between something you did and something you do. Got me thinkin' that maybe you don't think you're a criminal because you don't make a habit out of crime. After all, it isn't what we say, but what we do that defines us, don't you think?

MATHIS

You've seen *Batman* too, huh.

Mary Ann smiles.

MARY ANN

Guilty pleasure. Speakin' of, do you know why *Batman* wears a mask?

MATHIS

Why're you asking so many questions?

MARY ANN

I hate silence. So, do you know why *Batman* wears a mask?

Mathis frowns at her, slightly suspicious.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

It's not a trick question.

MATHIS

To protect the people he loves.

MARY ANN

That's certainly part of it but it's hardly the whole story. Bruce Wayne wears a mask because he knows there's certain things he can't do as Bruce Wayne. And that's why when he goes out every night to do battle with the undesirables of Gotham City, he doesn't go out as Bruce Wayne. He goes out as *Batman*.

Sometimes you get these dissenters who say Batman isn't a real superhero because he doesn't have any superpowers. But they forget the power of the mask, and that power is anonymity, the greatest power of all. Bruce Wayne isn't defined by what he does, but by what he doesn't do. And Batman represents everything Bruce Wayne would be capable of if he didn't have to worry about his image. So maybe it's not what we do that defines us, but what we'd be willing to do if we thought no one was watching.

A beat.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
Anyway, just a thought.

She STOMPS out her cigarette.

MATHIS
So what now?

MARY ANN
Where's your partner?

MATHIS
He'll be here.

MARY ANN
Guess we'll just have to pass the time. I don't suppose you brought a deck of cards?

Mathis smiles a small smile, hopeful.

MATHIS
Afraid not. We could turn the car radio on, have a dance, forget our differences.

Oddly, Mary Ann smiles.

MARY ANN
You stay right where you are.

Mathis is, very inappropriately, FLIRTATIOUS.

MATHIS
The penalty box?

MARY ANN
Something like that.

She leans on the bridge rail, looking out over the water.

MATHIS
Eddy told me you stole six hundred
thousand dollars from Dogman. Is
that true?

MARY ANN
It is.

She looks at Mathis.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
You can count it if you want. It's
in the trunk.

MATHIS
I believe you.

MARY ANN
Just thought I'd offer, in case we
were operating under a mutual level
of trust.

MATHIS
I'm not quite sure how to ask this,
but I was at your house earlier
this evening, as you now know, and
I couldn't help but notice that
it's--fairly substantial.

MARY ANN
You wanna know why I stole the
money when I so clearly do not need
it.

MATHIS
That's about the gist of it.

MARY ANN
Tell you what, I'll be honest with
you. I stole that money for the
same reason anybody steals
anything. Because I thought I could
get away with it. And maybe it was
wrong, I don't know.

Mathis chuckles.

MATHIS
You afraid you might be a bad

person?

Mary Ann shrugs.

MATHIS(CONT'D)

Stealing money from a gangster
doesn't seem so bad to me in the
grand scheme of things.

MARY ANN

When I got your partner's message--

MATHIS

Eddy.

MARY ANN

When I got his message, there was a
moment, only a moment, where I
considered not calling back. I
thought maybe I'll just leave
Cassie with them. She'd probably be
happier that way, anyhow. Never
seemed like she had much use for
me. Although, I guess I never made
much of an effort to understand
her. I spent all my time thinking
about how if she weren't around,
I'd be out having a drink with the
gals, or sharing dinner with some
handsome gentleman. 'Course I never
seriously considered leaving her
with you, but what does it say
about me that even for a second, I
thought Cassie being taken might be
a blessing rather than a curse?
Makes me wonder if my caring for
her was ever anything other than
obligatory. But, the more I thought
about it, the more I realized that
it's true: sometimes you don't
realize just how much you love
someone until they're gone. And
that's when I realized how angry I
was.

Mary Ann reaches into her purse. She pulls out a snub-nosed
REVOLVER.

Mathis regards with surprise, but also a notable lack of
FEAR.

She points the gun at Mathis.

MARY ANN
Where's Eddy?

MATHIS
He'll be here.

MARY ANN
Bullshit. If he was gonna be here
he woulda been here. Where is he?

MATHIS
Mary Ann, I can only imagine what
you must think of me after what
I've done to you, but you gotta
believe me. He's on his way.

Mathis looks her right in the eye. It's like he doesn't even
see the gun. He's telling the truth.

MARY ANN
You don't think I'll do it.

MATHIS
I think you'll do whatever you
wanna do. And that is what I have
come to admire so greatly about
you, even in the short time we've
known each other.

MARY ANN
Oh Matty. Don't go soft on me now.

MATHIS
I'm serious. Before tonight I'd
woken up every day for the last
five years, and the first thing I
did on every one of those mornings
was think of a reason to get out of
bed. That's 1,826 mornings. Well,
1,827 with the leap year. Thinking
back, I don't know how I ever made
it through all of 'em. But then
tonight when I met you, I was
happier than I'd ever been. Because
I knew right away that tomorrow
morning I wouldn't have to think of
a reason to get outta bed, because
I'd already have one.

Mary Ann smiles cautiously. She seems genuinely sympathetic.
She doesn't lower the gun, but she seems to relax a little.

MATHIS(CONT'D)
That dance sure was nice, wasn't

it?

MARY ANN

You do wear that suit well.

Mathis smiles.

Mary Ann lowers the gun.

MATHIS(CONT'D)

Mary Ann, you can kill me or you
can kiss me, but baby don't do
both.

Mary Ann takes a step toward him. Slowly, she puts one hand on his shoulder. He takes her other hand in his. Out of nowhere, "Steal Your Heart Away" by Watkins Family Hour starts to play. They dance.

Slowly, at first. They dance in place. And then faster, their smiles growing until they're both simply radiant. Mathis leads Mary Ann into a spin. She twirls gracefully, laughing all the while, and we see that she is suddenly BACK IN THE DRESS she wore on their date. It twirls as she spins.

She marches back to her partner, hands on her hips. She winks.

Their path leads them to the car. Rather than go around, Mathis steps right on top of it, and dances right over the top and hops down the other side. Mary Ann follows him, but when she gets to the roof she takes Mathis's hand and hops from the car roof to the bridge railing. With impeccable balance, she dances a few steps on the rail before hopping down again. Mathis kneels so that she can use his knee as a stepping-stool.

Laughing, she spins into his arms. He removes his hat, and puts his hands on her hips.

CLOSE on their faces as they kiss. The kiss is long, and passionate.

The lovers pull apart and suddenly we are back in the real world. Mary Ann is back in her REGULAR CLOTHES.

MARY ANN

Not bad, cowboy. It's a shame.

Mathis's eyes form a question that is never answered.

BOOM.

The GUNSHOT cuts off the music.

Mathis looks down at the BULLET-HOLE in his chest, directly over his HEART. He looks at Mary Ann, more confused than anything else. And then he falls. His hand still clutches his hat. BLOOD drizzles into it.

Mary Ann looks at him for a second, then gets in her car and leaves. Mathis's UNBLINKING eyes stare straight up.

EXT. ROAD - LATER - NIGHT

Cassie and Eddy walk along the roadside. Cassie leads the way, Eddy LIMPS a step behind.

EDDY

You know when I was your age I was playing cowboys and Indians, or cops and robbers. Or video games. I barely knew girls existed. What's the deal with you and Davis?

CASSIE

There's no "deal." We want to be together. It's simple.

EDDY

Being with someone for a lifetime is a lot of things, but simple ain't one of 'em.

CASSIE

That depends on how you think about it.

EDDY

And how do you think about it?

CASSIE

Davis and I are friends. We like each other, and we like being around each other. That's when we're the happiest, and we want to be happy the rest of our lives.

EDDY

Good luck with that.

CASSIE

You're very cynical.

EDDY

That's a big word for you, isn't it?

CASSIE
I read a lot. What's your excuse?

EDDY
I used to be a professor at a
community college.

CASSIE
Why'd you quit?

EDDY
What makes you think I quit?

CASSIE
Did you?

A beat.

EDDY
I wasn't happy there.

CASSIE
So you did something else that made
you happy?

EDDY
More or less.

CASSIE
How can something be more and less
at the same time?

EDDY
How can you be so small and still
so fuckin' annoying?

A pause.

EDDY(CONT'D)
I'm sorry, that was uncalled for.

CASSIE
It's okay. Are you alright?

EDDY
Tell ya what, if one more person
asks me if I'm alright I'm gonna
shoot him in the mouth.

A beat.

EDDY(CONT'D)
But I'm fine. Thanks.

CASSIE

No problem.

EDDY

You know I ran away when I was a kid. Got all the way to the stop sign at the end of our street before I realized that in my hurry, I forgot to pack snacks. So I went to the general store. The owner was this real old guy, or least he seemed it then. He gave me some food, and told me I could spend the night and he'd buy me a bus ticket the next day. In the morning I went downstairs to find my parents waiting for me. He'd called 'em. I was so mad. But, I know now of course it was for the best. God knows where I woulda ended up otherwise. Probably, starvin' in some ditch, freezin' to death because I was too stupid to pack a jacket. My point is, before you can pull off a stunt like this, you need a plan. You and Davis got a plan?

CASSIE

You don't need to try and talk me out of it. Davis and I have it all figured out.

EDDY

I'm not tryin' to talk you out of anything. Just bein' realistic.

CASSIE

We are realistic. We have it all figured out.

A beat.

CASSIE(CONT'D)

Do you work for Mr. Dogman?

EDDY

You know Dogman?

CASSIE

Mom takes me to work sometimes when Julian's busy. Mom said Mr. Dogman is a bad man. He's always nice to me. Do you think he's a bad man?

EDDY
I s'pose he's bad sometimes. When
he has to be.

CASSIE
No one has to be bad.

EDDY
Yeah, sure. Your mom tell you that
too?

CASSIE
No.

In the distance, a bridge, with a LONE CAR parked on it.

EDDY
There it is.

As they get closer, Eddy's face turns to confusion. He limps
fast as he can to the scene.

EDDY
Matty? Matty!

Lying by the car is Mathis's BODY, a single bullet in his
heart. Blood pools.

CASSIE
Is he dead?

Eddy kneels by the body.

EDDY
Matty?
(to Matty)
What happened? What happened?

THE CORPSE doesn't answer.

After a time Eddy looks away. He stands and grabs Cassie by
the arm.

CASSIE
Hey!

EDDY
C'mon. You're going home.

CASSIE
What about Davis?

EDDY
Your soul mate can wait one more

day.

Eddy pushes her in the car, gets in, they drive away.

INT./EXT. EDDY'S CAR - NIGHT

Eddy drives. He is furious, distraught. Cassie, sensing his fury, sits quietly in the back seat.

CASSIE
Are we almost there?

EDDY
A few more blocks.

Cassie takes this in.

The car pulls up to a stop sign. All at once, Cassie grabs her backpack and gets out of the car. She SPRINTS away.

EDDY
Hey!

Eddy gives chase in his car. Cassie cuts through residential lawns. Eddy goes around the block to head her off.

Cassie circumvents the car. Eddy SCREECHES to a halt and gets out. He limps after as fast as he can.

Eddy catches up to find Cassie outside HONEY'S ICE CREAM PARLOR. She paces back and forth, looking around anxiously.

Eddy stops to watch, out of breath.

CASSIE
Davis? Davis!

No one answers. Cassie sits on a bench. She sniffles, DEVASTATED.

Eddy watches for a minute, and then goes to sit at the far end of the bench. He clears his throat.

CASSIE
Why didn't he come?

EDDY
Could be any number of reasons.
Maybe he forgot his toothbrush, had
to go back for it.

Cassie is oblivious to the attempt at humor.

CASSIE

He said he would be here. He promised.

Her BEWILDERMENT is etched in her frown, as her little mind tries to make sense of the world.

CASSIE(CONT'D)

We had it all figured out.

EDDY

I'm sorry.

CASSIE

No you aren't. You didn't do anything.

EDDY

No, I s'pose I didn't.

CASSIE

Then why'd you say sorry?

EDDY

Because I thought it's what you wanted to hear.

CASSIE

Do you think that's why Davis promised? Because he thought it's what I wanted to hear?

EDDY

Maybe.

CASSIE

How do you tell when someone actually means what they say, and when they're just being nice?

Eddy thinks for a moment.

EDDY

When you see Davis next, look him right in the eye, and ask him if he wants to be your soul mate. If he does, if he really does, he won't look away.

Cassie thinks about this.

EDDY(CONT'D)

We'd better get you home. You're mom'll be worried.

Cassie nods. The pair walk back to the car.

EXT. MARY ANN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary Ann's car is parked in the driveway.

Eddy's car parks on the street. He and Cassie get out. As they are about to walk up to the house-

DOGMAN(O.S.)

Hello Ed.

Eddy jumps and turns.

EDDY

Dogman.

Dogman cranes his neck, getting a look at Cassie.

DOGMAN

Is that Cassie Hayes?

Cassie steps forward. Dogman crouches, to be eye level with her.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

Did you ever figure out that word problem we worked on?

CASSIE

The one with the squirrels and the nuts?

DOGMAN

Yeah, that one.

CASSIE

It took longer than I thought it would, but it got the right answer.

DOGMAN

Good.

(off Eddy)

What're you doing with him?

CASSIE

He's bringing me home. He kidnapped me so that he could exchange me for the money that Mom took.

DOGMAN

Is that right?

Dogman looks at Eddy, but keeps talking to Cassie.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

(to Cassie)

Why don't you go and wait by the car. I'll take you inside in a minute.

Cassie complies. She seems to trust Dogman.

DOGMAN

Kidnapping, eh? That your idea of moving up in the world?

EDDY

I was just doing what I thought was right.

DOGMAN

That's what worries me.

Eddy looks at the ground, crestfallen.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

Eleven years ago I made a promise to your father that I would keep you on in his stead. I've kept my promise. Always thought that was a strange way of puttin' it, if I'm honest. How can you keep something that doesn't exist? A promise is just words, and words are just, hot air. Hardly steel chains, are they? Still, that promise has kept you where you are for eleven years. Do you know why?

EDDY

Why?

DOGMAN

Because it didn't. I didn't keep you on because of no promise, and I have all the respect in the world for your father, but the fact is, he's in for life; he can't touch me anymore than I can touch him. I kept you on because, if I'm frank, you're a nice guy, Ed, and I felt sorry for you. I still do. Because you've got heart, Ed. You've got ambition. But when you go to a junkie's house to sell him a pistol and wind up killin' him with it, it

might be time to acknowledge that your aspirations exceed your ability. You understand my position.

EDDY

Yes.

DOGMAN

You'll never be where I am. You'll never even be where I was. You'll always be right where you are. Best you come to terms with that. Cassie!

Cassie comes trotting over. She and Dogman start walking toward the house. Then Dogman stops and calls back to Eddy.

DOGMAN

You oughta know: if you were anyone else, we would've had this conversation ten years ago.

INT. MARY ANN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SECONDS LATER - NIGHT

Mary Ann makes coffee. Her eyes are RED. She might have been crying. She lights up a smoke.

The BAG OF MONEY sits on the table.

She hears the front door open. She tucks her REVOLVER in the back of her pants.

A second later, Dogman and Cassie enter.

MARY ANN

Cass?

Cassie runs up and hugs her mother.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

How did you get here, what are you doing with him?

Dogman looms in the doorway.

CASSIE

It's a long story.

DOGMAN

One for another time.

Dogman looks grave.

MARY ANN

Why don't you go on to your room
Cassie. I'll be up soon.

Cassie leaves.

DOGMAN

(off cigarette)

I thought you stopped doing that.

MARY ANN

Recent events have conspired
against me. Coffee? I'm havin' mine
with a little bourbon.

DOGMAN

Just the coffee, thanks.

She drops two sugars, puts a spoon in, and gives him the
cup. He stirs it.

MARY ANN

Money's all there.

DOGMAN

That simple, eh?

Mary Ann takes a drag as she pours a CONSIDERABLE amount of
bourbon in her coffee.

MARY ANN

That simple.

Dogman opens the bag wider for a better look.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

You can count it if you like.

DOGMAN

That's alright. I trust you.

He smiles a smile somewhere between sarcastic and genuine.

He takes a seat at the table. He pushes the other chair out
with his foot, offering it to Mary Ann.

MARY ANN

I'll stand.

DOGMAN

You know I spent the last twelve
hours trying to figure out what I'd
done to you to deserve this kinda
treatment. Maybe it was something I

said, I thought. Or maybe you weren't happy with your compensation, but looking around I can't imagine that's the case.

He indicates the very nice home.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

After a long time I finally realized that it wasn't something I'd done. It was you, and only you. So why'd you do it? I've always treated you right, haven't I? Took care of your husband after you left him? I helped Cassie with her bloody story problems for Christ's sake.

Mary Ann looks at the floor.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

Mary Ann, I will sit here, until you tell me, and I will not leave, until I know.

After a moment-

MARY ANN

We've always gotten on pretty well, haven't we?

DOGMAN

Yes we have.

MARY ANN

You've always done right by me.

DOGMAN

I'd like to think so.

MARY ANN

But you're Dogman Hugh. There's not a soul in city that doesn't shiver when they hear your name. And when you work for Dogman Hugh, you never get to stop being afraid. So I thought, take the money and run. By the time he figures it out, you'll be far, far away.

DOGMAN

So you're afraid of me.

He nods to himself, seeing her reasoning.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

I guess this won't come as too much of a surprise, then.

He pulls out a PISTOL and lays it on the table.

Mary Ann regards it with calm acceptance.

DOGMAN(CONT'D)

You know I can't let this go.

Mary Ann sips her coffee.

MARY ANN

Do you know what 'persona' means, Dogman?

DOGMAN

Enlighten me.

MARY ANN

It's Latin, for 'mask.' We all wear masks of our own, but it's not so much a physical thing, more of a-- projection, or a hologram, like in Star Wars? It's the version of ourselves that we want other people to see. Now this, tough-guy look, and the John Wayne swagger, right down to that pistol in your hand. It's all part of your mask. And you tell yourself you can't let me go because to do that you'd have to take your mask off, wouldn't you? But you're afraid to do that. Might be the only thing you are afraid of but still, you're afraid. So you tell yourself that you have no choice but to shoot the unarmed single mother in her own kitchen. All because you're afraid people might start to suspect that you don't have the biggest dick in the locker-room after all.

Dogman CLENCHES his jaw. He looks angry, and yet he doesn't reach for the pistol.

He stares at Mary Ann, right in the eye, for a few seconds. And then-

The sound of the front door opening. Dogman turns to look.

Mary Ann pulls out her snubbed-nose revolver and FIRES. The

bullet lodges in the wall right by Dogman's head. He instantly reaches for his own pistol but just as he TAKES AIM-

EDDY

Hey!

Eddy has his own gun to Dogman's head. Dogman holds his gun on Mary Ann. She points her gun at Dogman.

Without taking his eyes off Mary Ann-

DOGMAN

Ed. We both know you don't have what it--

BOOM. Eddy pulls the trigger. Dogman's head EXPLODES, painting the wall red.

Eddy and Mary Ann stare at the sight for a second. Mary Ann turns her gun on Eddy. Eddy does the same.

MARY ANN

Are you Eddy?

Eddy nods.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)

You came into my home, and you took my daughter.

EDDY

I was gonna give her back.

MARY ANN

For six hundred thousand dollars.

EDDY

Yeah, that you stole. If you hadn't taken that money none of this woulda happened.

MARY ANN

If you want it so bad then take it. Take it and get out of my fucking house.

EDDY

It's not that simple.

MARY ANN

It never is with you tough guys.

EDDY

You killed Mathis. He was a friend
of mine.

MARY ANN

He had it coming.

EDDY

You oughta know all about that.

CLOSE on the guns, still pointing at each other.

MARY ANN

You really wanna walk this line?

EDDY

I'm afraid I don't have much choice
in the matter.

It's a showdown. Neither party moves. Eddy's finger
twitches. And then-

CASSIE(O.S.)

Mom?

Cassie enters. She sees Dogman's corpse and stops.

Mary Ann hides her gun behind her back and kneels.

MARY ANN

Cassie, don't look at that. C'mere.

Cassie goes to her mother, who wraps her in a big hug.

Eddy realizes he's still pointing his gun at her, and lowers
it.

CASSIE

I tried to run away.

MARY ANN

What?

CASSIE

I thought you didn't want me
around.

MARY ANN

Oh, Cass. Of course I do. Of course
I do.

CASSIE

(off Eddy)

He helped me get home.

MARY ANN
Is that right?

Cassie nods.

Mary Ann stands.

MARY ANN
Thank you.

EDDY
She's a smart kid.

Mary Ann smiles and pats Cassie on the head. Cassie winks at Eddy. He returns a small smile.

EDDY(CONT'D)
Dogman was gonna make you the bossman, then.

MARY ANN
He was.

EDDY
You take him up on it?

MARY ANN
What's it look like?

Eddy gives a "good point" look.

MARY ANN(CONT'D)
You still wanna shoot me?

Eddy takes the hint. He starts to leave, then remembers the money. He takes the bag from the table, and leaves. Mary Ann fusses over her child as we pull away.

INT. MARY ANN'S HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT

We hears the soulful sound of the Dropkick Murphys' *Amazing Grace*.

Eddy LOOMS over Dogman's lifeless body. A couple GOONS come and stand behind him. Eddy gives them the nod. They start to wrap up Dogman's body.

Eddy oversees the whole process.

Amazing Grace continues playing into the next scene.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A small funeral service. A MIDDLE-AGED couple cries together. A few others stand close by. The pastor speaks.

And then, up on a knoll, we see a figure watching. As we get closer, we see that it is Eddy, wearing a SHARP SUIT. He looks better than he ever has. Neater, more confident. A MAN IN A SUIT waits some distance behind him, next to a BLACK SEDAN.

Eddy sheds no tears, but his eyes still weep.

MINUTES LATER

The service is over, the attendees have departed, leaving only the lonely grave.

Eddy approaches. He has something in his hands, something we can't see.

He walks up to the grave, looking at the tombstone. It reads: MATHIS MASON.

Eddy looks at the grave. He nods to himself. He looks down, still nodding.

He kneels and places something on the headstone. When he stands, we see that it is Mathis's COWBOY HAT, perfectly clean, no blood to be seen.

Eddy waits another second before departing, leaving the hat to rest on the TOMBSTONE, tilted down, covering Mathis's name. It looks like a cowboy who tilts his hat down to take a nap.

INT. BAR - LATER

Eddy enters the bar. NICKY, still tending bar, gives him the nod. They exchange a word, and Nicky tosses him a pack of CIGARETTES.

Eddy makes his way to the back room.

IN DOGMAN'S OFFICE

The room is EMPTY. Eddy takes in the scene. TWO CHAIRS, Dogman's leather throne, and a wooden one across from it, with Dogman's desk in between.

Slowly, Eddy makes his way to the far side of the desk, crossing the boundary. He caresses the leather chair, getting a feel for it. And then slowly, ever so slowly, he

sits down.

He sits in it upright, staring straight ahead, as though expecting someone to come walking through the door. And then he relaxes.

He leans back, getting comfortable in his new THRONE. He lights up a smoke, and takes a puff. He smiles a self-satisfied smile.

THE END

Critical Essay

When I completed the first draft of *Dogman's Ensemble*, then called *The Opportunists*, I realized that although I had a film with a pretty decent (entertaining) plot, something just didn't feel right. The film felt empty somehow, like there was some crucial element that was missing. It didn't take long before I discovered the problem. At this point I had just finished reading *Screenwriting 101* by FilmCritHulk, a book that forever transformed the way I view cinema and marked my transition from casual consumer to ardent student of film. The simple brilliance of *Screenwriting 101* is how Hulk emphasizes that what makes a story work above all else is *drama*, i.e. a series of events that are presented in such a way that gives a story emotional or thematic significance. As I read that first draft of *The Opportunists*, I realized that my script lacked drama, because I had focussed too much on the plot and not enough on the story. The distinction between story and plot seems fickle at first glance, and most people who do not make a habit of studying storytelling would probably use either term interchangeably, but when you set out to write a story of your own the distinction becomes an essential tool in your kit.

When I decided I wanted to pursue screenwriting I knew that the first thing I had to do was *understand* screenwriting, and I soon learned that that meant understanding storytelling in general; for although there are hundreds of mediums, all stories operate under similar rules. That is not to say that all stories are beholden to a strict set of guidelines, but more that all dramatic storytelling operates under the same universal circumstances. Take painting, for example. When an artist sets out to create a painting there are a few choices he must make right off the bat, like what the subject is, what surface he will paint on, perhaps what message he wants to send. Even

as the artist goes he finds himself facing choice after choice, such as what color to use, and where to use it, what level of realism or lack thereof he wishes to invoke. He has to consider each part of the painting in relation to the whole, because every inch of the work is going to reflect on every other inch. The parts make a whole. Just like all painters use colors, a painting tool, and a surface to paint on, all writers must make similar use of structure, plot, story, and characterization. These are all broad terms that encompass literally infinite possibilities, but the point is that they are universal elements without which stories (narratives) would not exist.

So, without further ado, these are the distinctions between story and plot as I have come to understand them, and as I have utilized them within *Dogman's Ensemble*.

The first thing to understand is that story and plot are constantly working in relation to one another. They are intimately related, they resist separation. And yet here I am, attempting to do just that, because it is so damn necessary to understanding how a story functions. It's the reason scientists dissect animals. In order to understand how a thing works, you have to cut it open and look inside. And much like the inner organs of any given organism, let's say a person for now, a *plot* sustains a *story* by providing a physical structure, a framework that allows the story to adopt a recognizable and accessible form. If any element of the human body exists in solitude, like the brain for example, it dies. It cannot sustain itself. It is reliant on the rest of the system. Similarly, a scene in a movie cannot simply exist on its own, because it must exist in relation to the rest of the film in order for the viewer to understand it. Mary Ann's killing of Mathis has no impact if we don't see their relationship develop beforehand. The scene requires *context* in order to operate effectively. The plot is how the story operates on a mechanical and logistical level. It is like a net that a writer casts in order to wrangle a story into a recognizable and accessible form.

So, if plot is composed of the organs and the skeleton, then story is what we might call the “soul.” And I don’t mean to suggest that each of us contains some kind of spirit, or ethereal reflection that exists in any physical sense, but “soul” in the sense that we all have *desire*. For example, in *Dogman’s Ensemble*, the plot entails Eddy going on a mission to retrieve some stolen money for his boss. But the story arises from Eddy’s *desire* to prove his worth to Dogman, and thus earn his way up the corporate ladder. Whether it be desire to achieve some particular goal, to be with some particular someone, our soul is defined by our desire, which in turn gives us *meaning* or *purpose*. Meaning and purpose arise from the desires of the characters, which in turn make up the heart of story. They are as close to a definition of something which is quite frankly undefinable as I am going to get. To attempt to get any more specific would be an exercise in futility.

If we consider plot as the mechanism by which story is delivered, then we next need to understand how it does that. This is the question I asked myself countless times when planning my rewrites of *The Opportunists*. As I said earlier, my story had a decent plot, but lacked anything in the way of a good story. As I dissected the problem, I realized that it was because I had chosen to put plot before character. The result was that many things *happened* to my characters, but almost none of them as a consequence of a decision that the character made.

There is a reason that the first rule in any screenwriter's toolkit is to make sure their characters *want* something. What we want gives us purpose, and the actions we take in order to get what we want are what will ultimately define us. If a character in a film lacks this desire, we as human beings fail to connect with them. It’s true. Take the recent *Doctor Strange* movie. It may be critically acclaimed, but I dare you to go back and attempt to define what that guy even

wanted. The obvious answer is to say he wanted to find a way to heal his hands, and this is certainly true. But almost as soon as he meets the Ancient One this goal becomes a moot point (evidently you can't heal injuries of that caliber with magic), and Strange is then zipped from one dimension to another by forces far greater than himself, leaving him little of anything resembling agency. He makes perhaps two or three major decisions in the film, and everything else simply *happens* to him. The result is that Dr. Strange (the character) is not very interesting, leaving the success of the film to the exciting world of sorcery and crazy visuals. No one likes a hero who can't think for himself, the notable exception being Jeff Lebowski.

There's a saying that goes, "If you want to carve a horse, cut off everything that doesn't look like a horse." It's one of those sayings that tends to get attributed to one artist or another under various rewordings, but for obvious reasons, I prefer to assume it was the personal sentiment of Vincent Van Gogh. I kept the quote in mind through the rewriting process, and the question became: how do I make my movie *not Dr. Strange*? It forced me to reexamine my characters. Why were they there? What was their purpose? Many of them failed to provide answers to either of these questions, so the characters were either changed or cut. Most were cut. As a beginning screenwriter, it was a powerful lesson. It's very easy to get too attached to your work, but it's the ability to see past your own personal connection and understand that not everything that you write is going to remain in the final draft that separates the pros from the amateurs. Almost none of *The Opportunists* survives through *Dogman's Ensemble*. The only two characters who remain are Mathis and Dogman himself. Other than that, I scrapped almost everything, and gave careful consideration to how I was going to start the second draft, which really might as well have been a first. I decided to start with character.

Mathis became a depressed post-graduate with few prospects, surviving on his parents' charity and having lost any motivation to take initiative. He's a twenty-five-year-old kid who like so many others bought into the idea that life only gets better as you go on, and now that he's done with school he feels like those promises were never fulfilled. He's depressed. And because he's depressed, he's convinced that nothing he can do will ever change his predicament. He's apathetic. He doesn't take initiative because he thinks it won't help. It's all he can do to make it from one day to another. All he *wants* is to feel like life matters again.

And that's when he meets Mary Ann Hayes. I can't even remember now how she was born, but she quickly became my favorite character. She's a single mother who works for Dogman, and though she'd never show it, lives in constant fear for her own life and the life of her daughter, Cassie, because she knows what Dogman is capable of. Even so, her relationship with her daughter is complicated. She feels that Cassie is responsible for the disintegration of her social life, and though she knows it's wrong, Mary Ann resents her for it. So when I considered the question of what she wants, I realized that Mary Ann was an example of a character who thought she wanted one thing, but really wanted another. In the film she admits her resentment of Cassie, but it is only after her daughter is kidnapped that her love for her daughter is revealed, manifesting in a terrible anger. At the beginning of the film Mary Ann wanted both her old life back and to escape Dogman's hold. By the end of the film, she only wants her daughter returned to her safely. She is a character who is not transformed so much as revealed.

Cassie herself presented an interesting challenge, because writing children can be so damn tricky. It was a constant struggle to decide whether or not I was walking the right line between a child's simplicity and the simple wisdom that all children possess. I eventually found a way

around this line by making Cassie something of a savant. She is sophisticated for her age. She is confident in herself. As she says, “We have it all figured out.” “We” refers to herself and Davis Miles, who is, according to her, her soul mate, which she in turn defines as the person you want to be with forever. It’s a strange coupling of the simplicity, hope, and wisdom that define a child’s mind. When asked what they wanted to be when they grow up, some nine-year-olds would tell you they want to be happy. Cassie would tell you she wants to be happy *now*, and she doesn’t see why that shouldn’t be an option, leading her to make a plan with Davis to run away together.

Dogman also presented an interesting dilemma. His want is more specific to the story contained within the film: he just wants the money that Mary Ann stole. But in order to make this simple motivation interesting, I realized that Dogman needed to become more than just a looming antagonist. In the first draft of *Dogman’s Ensemble* he was a character who relied entirely on tropes in order to survive. That is to say, his character was defined by the assumptions that a viewer already brings to the table. It is when characters begin to operate outside our initial assumptions that they become interesting. The assumptions of the viewer are inescapable, so it becomes the writer’s job to manipulate those assumptions and use them to his advantage. So in my rewrites, I brought Dogman down to earth. He became almost a father-like figure who cares about his employees. The only cruelties he commits are those he believes to be totally necessary. Other than that, he believes taking care of the people who work for him is what’s ultimately going to inspire loyalty. But in the end, Dogman is a business man first, which is what leads him to finally break his bond with Eddy toward the end of the film, because Eddy has by that time become too much of a liability. So because I had to break out of these tropes, Dogman ended up

being one of the most layered characters in the film, since I had to make up for lack of want with depth of character.

Lastly, there's Eddy. Of all the characters, Eddy's dramatic need, as Syd Field would say, is the most clearly defined. He is someone who has the drive and determination to rise in the ranks of Dogman's organization, and yet after eleven years the latter still has him running the crime boss equivalent of errands. As Dogman tells him, his "aspirations exceed his ability." It is only within this story that Eddy finally begins to realize that perhaps his patience and hard work and order-following simply aren't paying off, and it destroys him.

These characters formed the basis of what would become *Dogman's Ensemble*. Their wants and needs work in tandem with plot in order to create a larger *story*. The story only manifested once I started to write for character rather than for plot. It is within the characters and their choices that the soul of a film is contained.

To close out his essay, I will address a personal dilemma that arises whenever I question the choice of screenwriting as a career option. That is to say, I have asked myself over and over again why I want to write screenplays, and more directly, why do I want to tell stories at all? There is no question that storytelling is every bit as important as any other profession. Stories themselves are essential to how we organize our world. The ancients didn't invent stories about the stars simply because they felt like it, but because they were driven to answer the question that I believe drives all of us: the question of *why*. The constellations were their answer to why the stars existed. It's indicative of our inherent struggle to understand our world. Some might say that as science progresses and we are able to answer more and more questions about the natural world using the scientific method that stories will no longer be necessary. I disagree, partly because I

have given this a fair amount of thought, and partly because I can't afford not to. My future livelihood depends on people's dependence on stories. The relationship between knowledge, science, and stories and how one might eliminate the necessity of the other is a topic for a whole other essay, so for now I will simply address what I have come to believe are my own motivations for writing.

When I was a kid used to spend all my recesses pretending I was a Jedi, or a cowboy, or maybe a Jedi. I spent the majority of my time pretending I was something I could never be. I still do this to this day, only instead of going outside and battling invisible enemies with a wooden lightsaber, I write stories. I write them not because I wish to reveal some greater truth about the human condition, but because *I crave the fantasy*. It is what attracted me to film in the first place. For me, films are an escape. They throw me into a world that adheres to rules like structure, character, plot, and story. A world that I can make sense of, and even if I can't I can relive it over and over until I do. So when I write, I am creating my own escape through fantasies. My career goals involve packaging these fantasies and selling them to (hopefully) millions of people. A fantasy, by definition, isn't real. People who sell things that aren't real aren't always well regarded in our society. Think of fortune-tellers, or old-timey snake-oil salesmen. Perhaps filmmakers are the modern-day equivalent of snake-oil salesmen. But then again, everyone knows that what they see in a movie isn't real. No one's telling them it is. Still, it worries me. It's a question that I don't know if I'll ever find an answer to. But whatever the role that stories will play in the future, I am confident that they will always be necessary if for no other reason than one simple truth:

People will always need an escape.

Sam Feldstein
Honors Thesis
14 Nov. 2016

Annotated Bibliography

Coen, Joel and Ethan Coen. *The Big Lebowski*. Screenplay. 1998. http://web.mit.edu/putz/Public/big_lebowski.txt.

The greatness of *The Big Lebowski* is difficult to define. Perhaps it's greatest attribute is that it proves that a film can be as weird as you want and as long as you do it right it will be well received. But "doing it right" is such a nebulous concept that it brings right back to our initial problem: what makes *The Big Lebowski* so great? Or to put it another way, what did I learn from watching this film? I think the answer may be my notion of the genre-less film. Now, I acknowledge that *Lebowski* is a clearly a comedy, and nobody could argue with that. Having said that, it's also a noir film, a western, and mystery. And how it manages to be all these things so successfully is baffling, until one realizes that it is because the film is none of these things, but rather a conglomeration of genre elements that are combined with a way that is seamless and functional. When I set out to write my own script, I wanted it to defy genre. I wanted it to be hard to pin down, to commit to the story first and genre second, so that no one tone would permeate the whole thing. The ability of the Coens' to handle multiple genres at once led me to adopt an overall humorous slant on a fairly bleak story in my own work. As a result, I think my finished script will adopt multiple layers of meaning, which is a characteristic that all great films share.

Donner, Richard. *Lethal Weapon*. 1987. DVD.

When it comes to action films that deserve to be taken seriously, *Lethal Weapon* is at the top of the list. Because unlike so many modern blockbusters, *Lethal Weapon* is actually about something. This is action writing with a purpose. Shane Black, the screenwriter, has such an understanding of violence can be utilized to serve a larger point. I like violence in movies. I find it compelling, interesting. And when a movie does it right, it becomes more than just a box office draw. My film contains only a few violent moments, but I want these moments to be startling, riveting, and tragic, something that Shane Black has mastered with every movie he's written. Violence, just like sex or any other carnal/primal urge, shouldn't be avoided or written off as unworthy of notice in a work of art. Instead it should be embraced by way of what it reveals about character. There is a way to use violence correctly, and anything is acceptable as long as it serves a purpose.

Field, Syd. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*. Random House, 2005.

Considered by many to be *the* screenwriting guru, Sid Field's book nevertheless advocates a rigid paradigm that allows for little experimentation, even as Field himself purports to encourage "outside-the-box" thinking. Nevertheless, *Screenplay* is not without value. Much of the book revolves around Field patting himself on the back for his invention (or recognition, perhaps) of the paradigm that according to him all screenplays follow, but the author nevertheless shines when he forgets himself and delves deep into a film for which he holds great admiration. Then the true diamonds appear in the rough, as Field dissects each film thoroughly and concisely, explaining his take on *what about the script* makes the film great. And therein lies *Screenplay's* greatest asset: its vast consideration for not only the theory but the practice of screenwriting, and its focus on teaching the reader how to apply its lessons to his or her own work.

Film Crit Hulk. *Screenwriting 101*. Badass Digest, 2013. eBook.

Film Crit Hulk's (his pseudonym/twitter handle) book could be considered a reaction to Syd Field's original 1979 work. He considers Field's view to be old fashioned, and even attacks it as being responsible for hundreds of poorly constructed films over the decades due to its emphasis on three-act structure. Ironically, Hulk pulls his solution from the 16th century, championing Shakespeare's five-act play structure as the ideal (but by no means the only) dramatic structure. Hulk examines five-act structure thoroughly and comprehensively, and his book has without a doubt been the single greatest influence on my own work, as well as the way I view films. But the greatest value of the book might not even be in its analysis of film and storytelling in general, but rather for Hulk's sheer and infectious enthusiasm for the subject, as he not only delves into the mechanics of screenwriting, but indeed spends a majority of the book examining the art of the storytelling itself and why human beings are so compelled to engage in the art of drama.

Nolan, Christopher and Jonathan Nolan. *The Dark Knight Trilogy: The Complete Screenplays*. Opus Books, 2012.

The films of Christopher Nolan are always laden with thematic elements, and perhaps none more so than *The Dark Knight*. This is the film that I studied in order to learn the differences between what happens in a movie, and what a movie is about. If you were to describe the plot of *Dark Knight*, it would be something like Batman and the Joker play a viscous game of cat and mouse that leads them through a winding path of destruction, tragedy, and redemption. The Joker blows up a hospital. That's part of the plot. The Joker challenges our notions of stability, and forces us to look inward at ourselves and question who we really are and what we're really capable of. That's what the movie is about. And what's more, it's done so well that the inner logic becomes a moot point. And that's what great drama is all about. It's supposed to take over and become the only thing that matters. And that's exactly what the *Dark Knight* does so damn well.

Pegg, Simon and Edgar Wright. *The World's End*. 2013. Script. <http://www.horrorlair.com/scripts/The-World's-End.pdf>

As a source of inspiration alone this film stands out from the others on this list, but it is also an exemplary film that manages to become so much more than it appears to be. Being a slapstick comedy first and foremost, *The World's End* doesn't seem like the type of film where one might expect to encounter high drama or emotional catharsis. And yet it is in my mind one of the most emotionally affecting films of all time, in part because the emotional fallout is so unexpected. And despite that lack of expectations, the dramatic moments still work flawlessly, which isn't easy to pull off, and exemplifies the mastery of the script. By watching this film I learned the importance of layered characters, as well as using character as a way of turning the gaze of the audience inward, to themselves.

Furthermore, this film also showed me how movies can operate on more than one level, i.e. serve more than one function, or multiple at a time. Because even though it does have these elements of emotional catharsis, *The World's End* works perfectly fine without them. It is a film that is able to cater to a wide range of audiences because its slapstick elements make it so accessible.

Ritchie, Guy. *Snatch*. 2000. DVD.

There is no question that this movie lacks what some might refer to as artistic merit. However, its popularity alone is evidence enough that it holds more than enough merit in other places. For me, this movie is priceless because of the way it balances an ensemble cast. None of the characters are particularly compelling, none of them even have a whole lot of depth. But what they do have is a lack of brains, which is applied by Ritchie to hilarious comedic effect. When I began writing my film I had an ensemble cast in mind, so I watched this movie in order to study how the script balances its characters, and makes one as interesting as the other so that we aren't disappointed when we have to cut away from someone. I realized that the movie works because while it's convoluted, the film brings its characters together in ways that are absolutely hysterical, even if the characters themselves never interact. Ultimately, lack of depth of the characters is most likely what keeps this film from being great as opposed to good, but as a comedy it couldn't work any better. It is what it is, as I like to say, and though my film is no longer as comically focused as it once was there is still plenty I can learn from *Snatch*.

Spielberg, Steven. *Jurassic Park*. 1993. DVD.

Though I did not read the script for this film, there is much to be gleaned by how the film operates on a dramatic level, and it is useful to speculate on how I might apply the lessons I learned from this film to my own work. Similar to Nolan's films, Spielberg understands that to make a good film is to prioritize drama. Again, movie logic comes into play. Key moments of the film don't work on a purely logistical level, but they work so well on a dramatic level that it just

doesn't matter, even after one becomes aware of the logistical errors. And bear in mind that the goal isn't to con the audience in some way, or trick them into paying attention to the wrong thing. The reason the logic doesn't add up is because the director isn't concerned with it, and therefore the audience isn't either. For example, when the t-rex attacks the kids in the car, it makes no sense that the dinosaur was even able to climb out of its enclosure. And again at the end when the t-rex eats the velociraptor, there's no way it was able to get into the building without making a whole lot of noise. But these moments work so beautifully on a dramatic level that it just doesn't matter. So, when doing my own writing, I will sometimes find that I get hung up on a scene because I am trying to make it work logistically in my head. Now I realize that what I need to do is think of the most dramatic thing could happen, what *needs* to happen for the story to work, and then *make* it happen. The goal isn't to dispense with logic, but rather to prioritize drama, at the expense of logic if necessary.

Tarantino, Quentin. *Pulp Fiction*. Screenplay. 1993. *The Internet Movie Script Database*

No self-respecting student of cinema wouldn't include *Pulp Fiction* in their annotated bibliography, but alas that is not a reason in itself, so let's get down to business. You can learn more about screenwriting from studying *Pulp Fiction* than you can from most screenwriting books. Most people (notice how I separate myself from the masses) would immediately cite the surface level attributes of *Pulp* as being responsible for its greatness. And yes, while the structure is unique and the various are interesting and amusing, these are only the makings of a good film.

Pulp Fiction is a great film, and its great because of how much attention its pays to the *story*. This is a film that is about something. About many things. As it applies to my own work, *Pulp Fiction* helped me understand the distinction between plot and story. Plot simply refers to the events that happen, e.g. Mia Wallace overdoses on heroin, Vincent shoots Marvin the face, Butch's girlfriend forgets his watch at the apartment, etc. And given *Pulp's* vignette style method of storytelling, this film might have been dangerously close to becoming a meaningless display of violence and black humor. But instead, it's about Butch discovering a part of himself that he didn't know existed. It's about Jules discovering the path to redemption. It's about Vincent not learning anything at all, and being punished for it. *Pulp* taught me how to create characters that we hardly know anything about, and yet that still have a massive level of depth to them. A great story makes a great film. Great characters make a great story. *Pulp Fiction* has great characters.

Tarantino, Quentin. *Reservoir Dogs*. Screenplay. 1992. *The Internet Movie Script Database*.

I couldn't help but include a second Tarantino screenplay on this list because there is one major aspect of his work that merits the study of multiple of his films: the dialogue. Dialogue is above all my favorite thing to write, whether in a screenplay, a short story, or anything. And giv-

en that dialogue is often cited as the most difficult thing to write, it behooves one to study the filmmaker who is commonly thought to be the master of dialogue. The rules are fuzzy on what makes good dialogue, but if there is one thing that most screenwriters can agree on it is that dialogue, if nothing else, should always move the story forward. Tarantino's screenplays are so interesting because his dialogue doesn't always necessarily do that, or not directly anyway. Rather, his characters tend to have casual conversations, making it feel more like you as an audience member are simply eavesdropping on a day in their lives. And Tarantino does this so well that it absolutely moves the story forward simply by revealing character. The art of revealing character is a delicate one at best because it all comes down to subtext. And subtext is so hard to master because it *literally isn't there*. Subtext is everything that's implied by what a character says and how he interacts with the other characters. The opening scene of *Reservoir Dogs* is a masterwork of character interaction, and it's had a huge impact on how I approach dialogue in my own writing.

Yorke, John. *Into the Woods: A Five-Act Journey Into Story*. The Overlook Press. 2014.

Another proponent of five-act structure, Yorke's book is a thorough analysis of storytelling as it applies to the screen. I have gone back and forth on the question of whether or not to outline my films before I write them numerous times, and with the help of this book I have come as close to a cardinal rule as I can get: no matter what you write, you need to have a goal in mind. Five act structure emphasizes specific pivotal moments within a dramatic work. As a writer, these pivotal moments become your goals. When you take them one at a time, and treat them each as its own separate narrative, the sum of the parts makes a magnificent whole. This is what five-act structure, and Yorke, advocate, and if you look at Shakespeare's work it starts to make a whole lot of sense. Every act was punctuated by a hugely dramatic occurrence, designed to move the story forward and heighten the stakes. So when I turned this five-act lens on my own work, I began to realize that I needed something more specific to occur in each act. The characters couldn't just talk forever. Eventually something had to happen to force them into a dramatic situation. It seems obvious, but then again most things do when it comes to screenwriting.