

Fade In:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A WOMAN (20s) lays in bed, face concealed by shadows.

A MAN (40s) sits by her side, holding her hand. His face is bruised, swollen and bandaged.

MAX

Who did this to you, Rhuella? Tell me who did this to you.

The Woman shakes her head and lets out a sob.

Even in the dim room, the motif is visible: rhubarb designs and colors throughout.

MAX (CONT'D)

Tell me, Rhuella. Who did it?

Rhubarb covers her face and speaks through splayed fingers.

RHUBARB

There was four.

MAX

Four men?

Rhubarb nods her head.

MAX (CONT'D)

Do you remember their names?

RHUBARB

(struggles to recall)

There was Mugsy. And Bruno. The Fat Man. And The Brain.

Max kisses her hand.

MAX

Good girl. Now get some sleep. You have a big show tomorrow.

He gets up, grabs a cane and hobbles to the door.

MAX (CONT'D)

We'll get them all, Rhuella. We'll make them pay for what they did to you.

He opens the door. The light reveals a tall man in his forties, badly beaten.

RHUBARB

Max?

MAX

Yes?

RHUBARB

Don't hurt Mugsy, okay?

MAX

I won't touch him.

He leaves her alone in the dark room. She breaths heavily and calls out, soft and slow:

RHUBARB

Annton...Annton...Annton...

Just outside, three car doors slam shut. A siren screams.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

A cop car, sirens blaring, tears down the street, followed by a white Cadillac decorated with blood-red rhubarb stalks.

INT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

Max, bloody bandage unravelling as he twists the wheel to keep pace with the cop car.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

The two vehicles speed through the grand, weedy entrance to Wellington Premier Estates, past the abandoned guard house and the dry pond. Once exclusive and opulent, this upper class housing development is now a lower class slum, the soaring mansions divided into cheap apartments.

Barefoot children jump away as the screeching cars stop on a cracked driveway.

TWO COPS get out. MAX pushes the door open with his metal cane and joins them. He wears a T-shirt with the words: Ask Me About the Rhubarb Way.

They approach a door with three deadbolts. One of the cops, a young guy called LOPEZ, bangs on the door. They wait. He bangs again.

LOPEZ  
You sure this is it?

In answer, Max whacks the door with his cane.

The other cop, an older guy named ROBERT, tries the knob. It turns. They step inside.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Robert flicks on a light. There's nobody there, but against one wall is gym matt, a punching bag, a cross-bow, and a sword.

Max and Lopez check out the BEDROOM. Robert goes to the Kitchen.

THE KITCHEN

Robert opens the refrigerator and pokes around. He sees a large plastic container. Something about it doesn't look right. He takes it out, holds it at arms length and pops it open to reveal dozens of dead grasshoppers. He looks closely - one the grasshoppers, still alive, jumps at his face. He drops the container -- the grasshoppers spill on the floor.

THE BEDROOM

Lopez and Max enter the bedroom. There's a mattress on the floor and a kennel big enough for a large dog. The kennel is made up like a crib, with lacy sheets, a pink blanket, a mobile and a doll.

THE KITCHEN

Robert opens the freezer -- it's packed with an assortment of animals: squirrels, possums, rats. He slams it shut. He's sweating.

THE BEDROOM

Max opens a couple of dresser drawers. Men's clothes. Women's clothes. Baby clothes. The fourth drawer is heaped with wallets, credit cards and driver's licenses. He grabs a handful and shows Lopez.

## THE KITCHEN

Robert opens the drawers carefully, holding his breath each time, exhaling with relief as he finds the normal assortment of dishes, cups and silverware. He comes upon a shoebox, takes it out and lays it on the counter. He moves closer to it and cocks an ear. He inches up the lid -- peeks inside -- and freaks! The box goes flying -- dozens of live scorpions scatter across the kitchen counter, onto the floor, on his pants and around his feet.

He curses and backs out, shuddering, brushing scorpions off his clothes.

Lopez comes running, gun ready. The scorpions run for cover.

                  LOPEZ  
          What in hell..?

Max hobbles out and tosses a handful of wallets and cards on the counter, scattering the scorpions.

                  ROBERT  
          Damn.  
                  (pauses)  
          Damn!

                  LOPEZ  
                  (to Max)  
          You didn't tell us this Mugsy guy  
          was a crazy freakin' serial killer.

Max sees a scorpion rustling towards his foot. He crushes it with his metal cane.

                  MAX  
          That son of a bitch was one of the  
          kidnappers. That's all I know.

                  ROBERT  
          The woman?

                  MAX  
          Maybe another victim.

                  LOPEZ  
          The baby?

Max spies a manuscript laying on a chair. He picks it up and shows it to the two cops. The title: *The Apocalyptic Cookbook: How to Catch, Kill and Cook EVERYTHING.*

MAX  
Maybe dinner.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

SUPER: A WEEK AGO

In the same kitchen, a young MAN slides behind an attractive WOMAN and takes two jelly jars out of the refrigerator.

DOUG  
Gloria, my love, which do you think  
is proper with sauteed grasshopper -  
- white or red?

The woman tosses him a disgusted look.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Are grasshoppers considered beef or  
chicken?

GLORIA  
Most people consider them insects.

She squeezes past him and grabs a package of ground meat.

DOUG  
Would you rather have beer? A nice  
cold beer to wash down some  
delicious hoppers.

GLORIA  
Forget the hoppers. That's where I  
draw the line. Tonight I'm eating a  
hamburger. Just a nice, normal,  
juicy hamburger. In spite of your  
gloom and doom predictions, there  
are still plenty of cows around.

DOUG  
Plenty now, sure. But there won't  
be when the radioactive shit hits  
the fan. You'll have to go to a zoo  
to see a cow.

GLORIA  
All the more reason to enjoy them  
now.

Doug lifts the lid off a copper pot and stirs the sizzling grasshoppers.

DOUG

Grasshoppers are a lot sturdier than cows. They thrive in almost any climate, survive radiation, toxic chemicals. When every other source of food is gone, they'll be there for us, baby. Then you'll beg me for some of my famous grasshopper stew.

Gloria slaps the meat into patties.

GLORIA

I'll beg you to kill me.

DOUG

Listen, if we're going to survive, we have to learn how to eat whatever else is going to survive. It's that simple. Grasshoppers are the Rambos of the insect world.

GLORIA

They're disgusting, ugly, vile little creatures.

DOUG

Morphologically speaking, they're like lobsters -- just a wee bit smaller. You like lobster, right?

GLORIA

A grasshopper is not a tiny land-lobster.

He embraces her from behind, kisses and gropes her while she tosses the hamburgers into a frying pan.

She elbows him.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Don't make me kick your ass.

He grins and kisses her neck.

DOUG

That's my girl.

She continues cooking the burgers. He continues cooking the grasshoppers.

DOUG (CONT'D)

So, white for the hoppers, or red for the burgers?

GLORIA

Sweetheart. Light of my life. I've eaten squirrels. Garden snakes. Your beloved Doberman, Nick. I even tasted those green crickets...

DOUG

Homorocoryphus.

GLORIA

Yeah, the gay crickets. I've eaten things that would make a vulture puke. I've done everything you asked. I've kept my end of the deal. But please, por favor, I beg you -- not grasshoppers.

Doug turns off the stove and moves the pot to a metal trivet. He takes a big whiff.

DOUG

You know, grasshopper is considered a delicacy by certain tribes in Malawi.

GLORIA

A delicacy? Well in that case, send them an invitation. I'd love to have some company for a change. I'm sure they'll be quite impressed.

Doug pours two glasses of white wine.

DOUG

They would. After all, this is not your common, everyday grasshopper. This is *Acanthacris Ruficornis* -- certified laboratory specimen. I'm proud to say it's the finest grasshopper money can buy. Fully pedigreed.

GLORIA

You do know how to impress a gal.

DOUG

Come on, Gloria. You tasted Nick, and he was a mutt!

Gloria shudders at the memory.

GLORIA

Poor dog. You should have just buried him.

DOUG

It was an opportunity. You're the one who agreed to help me with all this -- quote: survivalist crap.

GLORIA

I know what I agreed to.

DOUG

This isn't a game, Gloria -- it's about survival -- for us, for our children...

GLORIA

We don't have any children.

DOUG

We will.

Doug dips a fork into the grasshopper stew, takes a bite and chews it slowly. He swallows and smacks his lips.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Tastes just like chicken shit. Try it. Just a taste.

GLORIA

I'd rather eat chicken shit.

He fishes out a small piece and brings it to her lips. She sniffs it, makes the sign of the cross and takes a bite. She chews it for a moment, gags, and spits it back into the bowl.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Disgusting. You need to fry them or something.

DOUG

Not as tasty as the gay crickets, huh?

She takes a sip of wine, swishes it around and spits it out. She gulps down the rest.

GLORIA

Okay, you happy? I've kept my end of the bargain. When are you going to keep yours?

DOUG

I just need a little more time. A little more money. Once I have enough...



GLORIA

You have enough. We have enough.  
Doug, whether civilization  
collapses or not, I can't stay here  
any longer, cooped up like his.

DOUG

You're safe here.

GLORIA

Not from myself. I'm dying to swim  
in Lake Gloria. I want to get drunk  
and cry next to Benny's tombstone.

DOUG

You get drunk and cry all the time  
right here. Just hang in for a  
while.

GLORIA

Why? What's the point?

(pauses)

Sometimes I think Rhubarb is right -  
- it doesn't matter if you're good  
or bad -- if you live or die. It  
doesn't even matter if the world  
ends. Who cares?

Doug dumps the grasshoppers into a garbage pail.

DOUG

You sure know how to take all the  
fun out of doomsday.

They move to the living room and sit on the floor, use a wood  
crate as a table.

GLORIA

You going tonight? It's a full  
moon. There should be a lot of  
jumpers.

DOUG

Yeah, I'm going. I don't know if  
the full moon makes people crazy,  
or just easier to find the bridge.

GLORIA

Rhubarb holds a meeting every full  
moon. I may stop by.

DOUG

Are you threatening me?

GLORIA

I'm threatening me. I just don't want to be a burden any longer. I'll go to that happy hell Rhubarb talks about, and you, you can go back to being the lonely, pathetic, sexually deprived man I met -- but happy.

She gives him a gracious smile.

DOUG

Okay, Gloria, okay, okay, okay. Okay?

GLORIA

Okay. So when do we leave? Give me a date, or, find yourself a new date.

DOUG

After this weekend. Jordan hands out our bonuses at the company picnic. We'll split after that.

Gloria gives him a deep, grateful kiss.

GLORIA

Can I tell him what a little cockroach he is?

Doug shrugs.

DOUG

Speaking of cockroach -- we need to bring some kind of potluck dish.

GLORIA

Like what?

DOUG

Rattlesnake?

GLORIA

Too cannibalistic.

Doug gets up, grabs a towel and a thermos.

DOUG

I got to go.

GLORIA

I'll miss you.

DOUG

Me too.

GLORIA

I hope you don't get too many live ones.

DOUG

Thanks.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Doug winds his way past spectacular housing developments, now barren and crumbling.

At stoplights, beggars wear wrinkled suits and ties.

He enters a less formerly-affluent area. The homeless are thin and weathered, with mismatched clothes.

Then he continues to an even worse neighborhood, where entire families live in cardboard boxes.

At the stoplight, an old woman approaches. Her feet are encased in plastic supermarket bags. She holds out a shaky hand.

Doug cracks the window and offers her a dollar bill -- she snatches at it, but it blows out of her hand and sails down the street. In his rear view mirror he can see dozens of derelicts fighting for the money.

He turns onto a gravel road, ignores the 'dead end' sign, and parks in the rundown lot of an abandoned church.

He hikes down the embankment. There's a rowboat chained to a pillar of the bridge. He unlocks it and pushes it into the water, hops inside and rows to the center of the river.

He gazes upward. Looming over the bridge is a tall, dark office building. One bright window shines at the very top. It belongs to an expansive room with plush chairs and a conference table the size of a landing strip.

INT. BOARDROOM - NIGHT

TWO MEN are sitting around the table, taking papers out of their briefcases.

Sam (20's), pumps his fists, cracks his knuckles, taps his feet.

SAM

This is chock full of nuts, people.  
Crazy glue, you know? Why do we  
keep listening to his schemes? Why  
doesn't anyone challenge him?

The other man is Elwood, a heavy-set, jowly man in his  
sixties.

ELWOOD

Personally, Sam, and I'm only  
speaking for myself -- I still  
enjoy my balls.

SAM

What balls? We're both a couple of  
fucking pussies.

ELWOOD

So young, so bitter.

SAM

Volume off, man. Mr. Clean's here.

The door opens and Jordan Graye enters the room. He's a tall,  
thin man with a bald head.

JORDAN

Is it just my imagination, or does  
everyone stop talking every time I  
enter a room. Am I imagining it? Am  
I deluded?

He peers at each of his staff in turn, narrows his eyes as if  
trying to penetrate their skulls and look inside.

And from his P.O.V., he does:

Elwood's brain: fat and rust colored, rocking within its  
skull like a big, slow ship --

Sam's brain: round and fuzzy -- skittering about like a  
tennis ball --

Satisfied with his vision, he takes a seat at the head of the  
table.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, you're probably racking  
your brains to figure out why I  
called you here tonight.

(MORE)

JORDAN (CONT'D)

But before I tell you why, before I show you why, I have a question: How did the Jews survive for thousands of years? Against all odds, how did the Jews survive?

Nobody answers.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

I'll tell you why. Knowledge! Knowledge passed down from generation to generation -- from mouth to ear, sperm to egg, blood of the father to blood of the son. Knowledge! And that is exactly what this company needs to survive these dark...

He stops suddenly and presses his knuckles to his temples and screams in pain. Elwood and Sam politely wait for him to finish, like they've seen it many times before. When the screaming dwindles to a relieved moan, Elwood asks:

ELWOOD

You want me to hire more Jews?

JORDAN

No. Yes. But that's not the point.

He gets up and walks to the door.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to introduce you to the man who helped me make my first fortune. The man whose unique approach to knowledge is going to cut the balls off the competition. Please welcome Dr. Amos Gratman. Or as I like to call him -- The Ratman.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

SUPER: FIVE YEARS AGO

The Community Center is festooned with posters of white owls, bald eagles, manatees and the Redlands Sewer Rat -- a cute, furry rodent with a 'please don't kill me, mister' look in its beady red eyes.

The seats are filled to capacity.

A table with cookies and punch is set in one corner, run by GIRL SCOUTS in full uniform.

Up on stage, SIX PROMINENT CITIZENS sit behind a long cafeteria table.

On top of the table is a cage with two rats, separated by a wire mesh.

A nervous young MAN walks up to a podium, speaks into a squeaky microphone.

NERVOUS MAN

Hi. Hello. Every knows me. I just want to agree with the other speakers, and say that, uh, our beloved Redland Sewer Rat is an integral part of our ecosystem. Thank you.

Scattered applause. He leaves. A middle aged HOUSEWIFE steps up.

HOUSEWIFE

I think it would be a crying shame if my granddaughter can't go camping, like I did when I was her age, and enjoy the Redland Sewer Rat in its natural environment.

More applause. A dark-haired LADY with sunken eyes and a white turban steps up next.

WHITE TURBAN LADY

I believe in the transmigration of the soul. Any of us could die and be reincarnated in the body of a Redlands Sewer Rat -- how will we feel if people try to exterminate us?

She leaves the stage -- more chuckles than applause.

A PROMINENT CITIZEN comes from behind the cafeteria table and takes the microphone.

PROMINENT CITIZEN

I believe that's our last speaker, so, lets hear from the developer -- Mr. Jordan Greye.

Jordan walks on stage, greeted by polite applause, boos and catcalls. He wears blue jeans and a forest green T-shirt.

He clears his throat.

JORDAN

Ladies, gentlemen, families,  
children, thank you for letting me  
say a few words.

There are some murmurs. A BIG MAN in a checkered shirt stands up.

BIG MAN

That's enough words for you, buddy.

The crowd claps their agreement, then settles down and allows him to continue.

JORDAN

When I first considered building a development in your town, I did a lot of research. I learned all about the Redland Sewer Rat, and when I did, I was prepared to abandon the project. Then I discovered something startling about this animal. Something that made me reconsider. That *something* is what I've come here to share with you, and whether or not you vote in my favor, it's something you need to know. To that end, I have asked Dr. Amos Gratman, one of the country's foremost biomedical researchers, to explain what may well be the greatest crisis your community has ever faced.

Dr. Amos Gratman walks stiffly to center stage while Jordan takes his seat. He's a distinguished man with a jutting beard.

DR. GRATMAN

Ladies and gentlemen -- rats -- are my life. For more than twenty five years I have spent every day studying them, feeding them, breeding them -- loving them.

He strokes the top of the cage. They skitter about in their separate compartments.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

I want you to know that I would do everything in my power to prevent this man from building condos on land occupied by these incredible creatures - if - if I thought it would ensure their survival. Rats are so much like us humans. They have the same physiological systems -- digestive, nervous, immune, circulatory. They get the same diseases. They fear pain and value their lives. Now, I have studied at great length the Redland Sewer rat population that currently resides in the forty acres west of your city. I am sorry to report that their population has reached a critical mass. They've devoured the natural food supply and become cannibalistic.

He pauses to give the rumbling audience time to process the information. The Nervous Man stand up and raises his hand. Dr. Gratman acknowledges him.

NERVOUS MAN

Dr. Gratman, that sound highly unusual. Are you sure?

DR. GRATMAN

Oh, not unusual at all. Not for rats. Not even humans. When faced with starvation it's remarkable how similar their behaviors are. Remember what happened in North Korea during the 1997 famine? The Chinese living near the border refused to bury their dead until they decomposed to the point of inedibility -- the North Koreans kept digging them up and eating them. Even in New Jersey recently, when the garbage supply dried up, they found a bunch of homeless people eating each other.

The Nervous Man takes his seat.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

Suffice it to say, these little guys are starting to eat each other.

(MORE)



DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

And once a rat acquires a taste for the flesh of its own species -- well, it will actually come to prefer it. This is a common problem, actually, and scientists refer to those types of rats as Wolf-rats.

The Big Man in the checkered shirt stands up and shouts:

BIG MAN

Why should we believe anything you got to say? You work for this guy. You're his bitch.

The crowd murmurs approval and a few applaud. Dr. Gratman waits for silence. The big man takes his seat, smiling proudly and acknowledging the praise of his peers.

DR. GRATMAN

Thank you, sir. Thank you for being an intelligent, skeptical and level headed human being. I applaud you.

He claps his hands.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

Of course you should not believe me! Of course you should not take what I say on faith! I am a scientist, not a preacher. I demand proof, and I expect no less of you. That is why I have prepared a demonstration. If you will allow me.

He drums his fingers on the cage. The rats are alert, sniffing.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

I trapped these two yesterday, within the forty acres. Now watch.

He lifts the partition separating the rats. They jump back, then begin circling.

The audience strains forward. All they can see is a blur of gray fur and white teeth. Within seconds, blood splatters through the steel cage and spritzes onto the cafeteria table. The city leaders shove their chairs back. Drops of blood dot the stage floor. A woman faints.

Suddenly the fight is over, and one rat, triumphant, straddles the loser.

It sink its teeth into the dead rat, pulled a large chunk of flesh off the body, and devours it in a frenzy. A woman screams and a baby starts crying.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

(calm, pedantic)

As you have observed, these two rats, trapped at random, have already acquired a taste for their own kind. Now, it is quite possible that the rats will simply fight amongst themselves until the population is reduced, and only the strongest and most ferocious will survive. They will continue as a protected species, living in relative peace as your neighbors - until the next population explosion. It is also possible that they will leave the forest and seek other sources of food -- garbage, pigeons, squirrels -- any small, unprotected baby animal. Wolf-rats aren't very picky. Now I don't care if this man builds his condos or not. I am a scientist, not a politician. I have merely given you the scientific facts.

He leaves the podium and slips out a side exit. Jordan gets up and takes the microphone again. He faces the shocked audience, his hand resting on the cage.

JORDAN

I'd like to thank you for allowing me to present my side of this important issue. I'll respect your vote, whichever way it goes.

He bows humbly.

The only sound is the tearing and gnawing of the rat as it eats its brother.

The Prominent Citizen walks on stage and takes the microphone.

PROMINENT CITIZEN

(voice shaking)

How many of you vote to keep the Redlands Sewer Rat here in our fair city?

Not a hand is raised. The Big Man in the checkered shirt stands up.

BIG MAN  
I say, exterminate the little bastards!

The audience bursts into applause.

Jordan thanks the committee and exits the side door.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Dr. Gratman is waiting by his car. Jordan hands him an envelope.

JORDAN  
You deserve every penny. How'd you do it?

DR. GRATMAN  
Oh, it's quite easy. I trapped some rats last month and chopped one up, then fed him to his brothers and sisters. Then I starved them for a few days. Give me a call if you need wolf-bats, wolf-snakes, hell, I'll even make you a wolf-bunny rabbit. My motto is -- I can turn any animal into a cannibal.

JORDAN  
You just made that up.

DR. GRATMAN  
I did. You like it?

JORDAN  
I love it. I love it.

He suddenly winces and digs a knuckle into his temple.

DR. GRATMAN  
Are you okay?

JORDAN  
Yes. I get there migraines sometime.

DR. GRATMAN  
Have you seen a doctor?

JORDAN

Nah, they're all quacks.

DR. GRATMAN

Indeed.

JORDAN

But you, you're a genius. I could learn a lot from you.

Dr. Gratman pockets the envelope.

DR. GRATMAN

Please. Everything I need to know I learned from rats.

INT. GRAYE INDUSTRIES - DAY

An older Dr. Gratman wheels a large metal cage into the room, covered in a shroud.

Jordan narrows his eyes and tries to look through his head, to discover his brain.

And from his P.O.V., he does: Dr. Gratman's brain is composed of dozens of tiny, furry brains, all crawling over each other inside a tightly packed skull. Satisfied, Jordan sits back. Then he gets the pain in his head and digs in his knuckles to relieve it.

DR. GRATMAN

Greetings, gentlemen. Jordan has asked me to conduct a little demonstration that I believe will forever change your understanding of knowledge, information, and, I hope, rats.

With a flourish he removes the shroud, revealing a cage with two white, jittery rats trapped inside a small compartment. The rest of the cage is a maze with a chunk of cheese at the end.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

Both of these creatures come from a long and honorable line of rats, going back at least eighty generations. Genetically, there isn't a whit of difference between them. You say boo, they jump in the same direction.

(MORE)

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

They go to sleep at the same time,  
wake up at the same time, poop and  
piss at exactly the same time. They  
even wear the same clothes and  
drive the same car -- ha ha.

He pauses for a response -- Sam and Elwood chuckle politely.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

My point is - they are identical in  
every possible way. But, this  
beauty...

He points to one of the mice, which has the letters JJ  
painted on it's head.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

(an adoring tone)

...is a most amazing fellow. JJ is  
going to race this other rat, who  
is also a fine fellow. His name is  
Mickey. Now, keep in mind that  
neither of these rats has ever run  
this maze. Because they are genetic  
twins, they should complete the  
maze at exactly the same time.  
Let's see what happens.

Dr. Gratman opens the gate.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

Go!

The rats sniff for a moment, then JJ take off, followed by  
Mickey.

The two of them scamper down a corridor.

They dash into a dead end.

They backtrack and take separate paths back and forth through  
the maze, until suddenly JJ bursts through the exit. He grabs  
the cheese and sits on his haunches, munching, red eyes  
darting about.

Mickey shows up seconds later and patters angrily about the  
cage.

JORDAN

You snooze you lose.

Jordan reaches in and picks up JJ.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

You, however, are brilliant -- you are my new second in command.

He bends down and kisses the rat on its snowy head, then turns to watch the astonished faces of his staff.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Tell them, Amos.

Dr. Gratman takes the rat from Jordan and strokes it lovingly. The rat almost purrs.

DR. GRATMAN

As I mentioned, neither of these rats has ever run the maze. But JJ, impossibly, ran it faster. How? Why?

He scratches behind its ears.

DR. GRATMAN (CONT'D)

The reason JJ performed better than his competition is because this little guy has spent the last six months eating a steady diet consisting of the brains of other rats -- rats that had previously been conditioned to run the maze. The knowledge of how to run the maze was directly passed on to JJ through the simple process of digestion.

Jordan leans across the table and fixes his hard, beady eyes on the staff.

JORDAN

Imagine the possibilities. If it works for rats, it will work for humans. By simply grinding up the brains of our old employees and feeding them to the newly hired, we can dramatically reduce the learning curve and increase productivity.

Sam and Elwood don't say a word. Jordan scans their faces for approval or disagreement.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

What do you think, Elwood? From a Human Resources standpoint you must find the idea intriguing.

Elwood clears his throat.

ELWOOD

I'm not one hundred percent sure that all of our employees will agree to - uh - have their brains ground up. Or eat the brains of their coworkers.

JORDAN

That's a valid concern, Elwood. That's why we're going to offer a new employee benefit - free burial service. We'll call it Peace Of Mind Acres. Nobody will even know their brains have been removed. We'll stuff the skulls with spaghetti if we have to. And as far as eating the brains of their former colleagues, everyone eats at the company cafeteria. As for us, well, we're all professionals. My prediction is you'll be calling dibs on the best brains in the company. I've got my eye on Elwood. He's great with numbers, and his health is for shit. What do think, Elwood? Mind if I chow down on your brain?

Elwood's touches his head protectively. He glances at Sam, who keeps a poker face.

ELWOOD

No sir. I don't mind. You do plan to wait until after I'm dead?

JORDAN

Absolutely. If you insist. As for my brain -- as meaty a meal as there ever was --

He raps his head with his knuckles.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Bon Appetite!

As Jordan hands JJ to Dr. Gratman, Sam and Elwood pack up their briefcases. They're not particularly concerned by the demonstration. As far as crazy plans go, it's just one of many. Their plan is to ignore it until it goes away.

The full moon is clearly visible from the conference room, through the large plate glass window..

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Beneath the full moon, below the bridge, Doug waits on his little rowboat.

A DRUNK MAN appears on the bridge, staggers to the apex. He takes a last swig from a bottle, drops it and stares as it falls into the river.

He raises his arms to the sky and cries out:

DRUNK MAN  
I'm coming Diana -- save me a nice  
spot in Hell!

He grips the railing, swings his legs and plunges into the dark water.

Doug angles the boat towards the splash.

The jumper breaks the surface -- gasps for air. Doug rows closer. The jumper spots him.

DRUNK MAN (CONT'D)  
Get away from me!

Doug waits. The Man flounders and slaps the water.

DRUNK MAN (CONT'D)  
Help me!

Doug offers a hand and pulls him into the boat. He's wearing a black suit and a red tie.

DRUNK MAN (CONT'D)  
Who are you?

DOUG  
Nobody.

Doug starts rowing to shore.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
You know, jumping off a bridge is a  
very inefficient way to commit  
suicide.

DRUNK MAN  
That's what the Rhubarbs told me --  
tried to sell me one of their  
tickets to hell. But I didn't have  
enough for a ticket...and a bottle.



DOUG  
Yeah, I'd go for the bottle.

MAN ON BRIDGE  
So what are you, a good Samaritan?

DOUG  
Far from it.

He rows the man to the riverbank and tries to help him out.  
The man shrugs him off.

MAN ON BRIDGE  
Thanks for nothing.

DOUG  
Good luck next time.

He hears a loud splash. Another jumper.

He rows the boat towards the point of entry. In moments a  
body floats to the surface. He pulls alongside it and hauls  
it into the boat. Another MAN. He searches the pockets and  
checks the wrists and fingers.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Damn. Nada.

He tosses the dead body overboard.

Another splash!

Doug maneuvers the boat and picks up another floating BODY.  
He hauls it into the boat, takes a wallet and a ring, then  
dumps it back in the river.

He rows back and stares up at the bridge. It's deserted,  
peaceful, just lovely against the full moon.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

SUPER: SIX MONTHS AGO

The bridge against the full moon, lovely but not deserted.

A YOUNG WOMAN walks to the apex, stands for a moment and  
makes the sign of the Cross. Then she strips off her clothes  
and throws them in the river.

She runs her hands over her breasts and down around her hips, revelling in the naked freedom. Then she takes a deep breath and catapults over the railing.

She plunges into the river, then emerges a few feet from Doug's rowboat, treading water.

GLORIA

Damn!

She looks around, spots the boat and climbs inside. She sits naked on the bench.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Who are you?

DOUG

(flustered)

Uh, the night watchman. I'm the night watchman. I watch that building over there.

He points to the tall office building on the other side of the river.

GLORIA

I think you're watching me. Yes, I'm sure of it. You're staring right at my tits. Haven't you ever seen a woman's breasts before?

DOUG

Sorry. Here.

He takes off his windbreaker and hands it to her.

GLORIA

So, what are you doing, playing hooky? Are you sure you're a night watchman? Who do you work for?

DOUG

Jordan Greye. I mean, his company. It's the headquarters.

GLORIA

I need a night watchman. Yes. Someone to watch over me at night, so I don't get all freaked out and jump off a bridge. Do you ever freak out at night? I always freak out at night. And what's even worse is during the day. I always freak out during the day.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I need a day watchman. What do you do during the day? I'd be dead if it weren't for you. I think. Maybe not. I'm too good a swimmer. Too good a boater. Too damn good. That's okay. I'll kill myself tomorrow.

He rows her to the riverbank, gets out and pulls the boat onto the shore. He helps her out.

DOUG

I need my jacket.

His eyes are fixed on her as she scrambles up the riverbank. When she reaches the top, she turns around and removes the windbreaker, crumples it into a ball and throws it at him.

Although he knows it's coming, he can't take his eyes off Gloria's naked body. It hits him smack in the face. Gloria laughs and disappears over the ridge.

EXT. BRIDGE - THE NEXT NIGHT

Doug, in the center of the river.

A woman walks to the top of the bridge, sits on the railing and launches into a swan dive. She hits the river clean, surfaces and swims to Doug's boat. She climbs in and sits across from him. This time, Gloria wears a bathing suit. She pulls off her cap and shakes her hair.

GLORIA

Hi. So, what's new?

DOUG

What?

GLORIA

Are you watching the night? Isn't that what you do? You're a night watchman, right?

DOUG

Uh, are you crazy?

GLORIA

Duh. Aren't you? I'm Gloria. I never thanked you for rescuing me.

DOUG

Nobody does.

GLORIA

So why?

DOUG

You really want to know?

GLORIA

I put on my best suit.

Doug hands her a thermos. She takes a sip.

DOUG

Well, one night I was patrolling the grounds and I heard a splash. Someone jumped off the bridge. I dove in and pulled him out - it seemed like the right thing to do. The next night someone else jumped. It kept happening more and more, and after a while, I got tired of getting wet.

GLORIA

So you got this boat and decided to become a Superhero?

DOUG

Yeah -- The Scavenger! Look, I'm not a nice person. If you died, I would have searched your body.

GLORIA

Oh, you searched it plenty. You're searching it now, Mr. Watchman, Mr. Watchwoman.

DOUG

Sorry, I...

She moves across the boat and climbs onto his lap. He takes her wet body into his arms.

They kiss, and eventually make love, the small boat slapping the water. In the distance, someone jumps.

EXT. BRIDGE - SUNRISE

Gloria awakens. She sees Doug, standing in the boat with his back to her, practicing karate.

GLORIA

Morning, sailor.

He doesn't stop or turn around.

DOUG

Morning.

She gets up and balances in the small boat.

GLORIA

So, have you decided what to do  
with your *catch of the day*?

He doesn't answer.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Are you going to throw me back? I  
talk to much, right? You think I'm  
crazy? If you want I'll just jump  
out and swim home. I'm a good  
swimmer. Too good.

DOUG

I'll take you home, Gloria.

He grabs the oar and starts rowing to the riverbank.

GLORIA

I don't have a home, Doug. Do you?  
Or do you live in this rowboat?

DOUG

No, I have a home. It's about the  
same size, but it's got a roof.

GLORIA

Can I stay with you then? Just  
until you can't stand me anymore. I  
know how to cook. I can cook  
anything.

DOUG

I don't know...

GLORIA

Just for a while.

DOUG

How long is a while?

GLORIA

I don't know. A night, a year,  
maybe forever. The futures not ours  
to see, que serra, que serra, you  
know?

DOUG

That's where you're wrong, Gloria. Everyone knows the end of the world is right around the corner. It's been predicted in Revelations, by Nostradamus, Edgar Cayce. Even the Mayan calender ends next year. The future is ours to see, and it sucks.

GLORIA

Oh come on. It's not like the Farmer's Almanac -- June 10, rain, June 11, doomsday. Besides, this isn't Cuba. I can't imagine this country falling like some ancient civilization.

DOUG

Wrong again. The rise and fall of any civilization is as predictable as the life cycle of a Mayfly -- we rise, flourish, ripen, rot, then - bang! -- we're back on all fours, grunting in the mud.

GLORIA

If that what turns you on, love...

Doug pulls the boat on shore and chains it, then helps Gloria out. They walk up the riverbank.

DOUG

I like you, I really do, but my philosophy is -- trust no one, rely on nobody, because nobody cares anymore. The Street Freaks are starving, and the official policy is 'let them eat garbage.' Back in the sixties, everyone was outraged when they found out some old folks in Miami Beach were eating cat food -- now, they're eating their cats -- and nobody gives a shit!

GLORIA

Now you're making me hungry.

DOUG

I'm not joking. This isn't funny. There's nothing funny about the total collapse of civilization.

GLORIA

Okay, let's say you're right. How do you plan on surviving, Mr. Night Watchman.

Doug draws her close and whispers:

DOUG

I have a hidden cabin, in the mountains, in North Carolina. I've been stocking it with everything I'll ever need to survive.

GLORIA

Not everything. I bet I can think of stuff you forgot.

DOUG

I doubt that. I've been preparing this for years.

GLORIA

What about fabric? For curtains. And pillows? You probably forgot to get an extra pillow.

DOUG

I have a pillow. Why do I need more than one pillow?

GLORIA

For me, of course.

DOUG

Sorry. I'm a one man show.

GLORIA

Did it never occur to you that survival takes at least two? You know, Adam and Eve, Noah and Mrs. Noah? Otherwise you're not a survivor, you're just a hermit...just, pathetic.

(adopts a lecturing tone)

True Survivalism requires survival of the species, not just an extended existence for one member.

(she pauses)

Besides, you told me about your mountain retreat. So you either have to kill me or take me with you.

Doug seems befuddled and confused.

DOUG

You're uh, I didn't agree...

GLORIA

It's settled then. Now, we have to make our new life as comfortable as possible.

He feels himself being swept away and makes an attempt to gain control.

DOUG

We're talking survival, Gloria, not comfort. Only the necessities. Comfort is not a necessity. Anyway, I haven't agreed to spend life after doomsday with you. Or let you move in with me. I haven't even asked you for a date.

Gloria knows she has one chance to convince him -- one argument he can't refute. She embraces him and gives him her best kiss. When they break, she knows it worked.

GLORIA

We'll need fabric, thread -- oh, and plenty of shaving cream. You won't like me with hairy legs.

DOUG

No. No shaving cream! Nothing frivolous!

Gloria slaps his chest affectionately.

GLORIA

Just because it's the end of the world doesn't mean we have to live like beasts.

INT. DOUG'S APARTMENT - LATER

Doug opens the door to his converted apartment in the rundown Wellington Premier Estates. Gloria stops at the doorway and scans the furnishings: a mattress shoved into a corner, standing lamp, wood crate, manual typewriter, windows covered with aluminum foil.

GLORIA

Did you just move in?



DOUG

More or less, about five years ago.  
A little stark, huh?

GLORIA

I've seen cozier prisons.

She walks over and checks out a few of his books: Ditch Medicine -- Field Procedures for Emergencies; Traps, Snares, and Pathguards; Robinson Crusoe.

She picks up a typewritten manuscript: The Apocalyptic Cookbook: How to Catch, Clean & Cook EVERYTHING.

She lowers the manuscript and looks at Doug.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Really?

DOUG

It's true. There isn't a living thing on this planet that somebody, somewhere, doesn't eat?

Gloria leafs through the manuscript, crinkles her nose.

GLORIA

Have you actually eaten all these insects and snakes and, oh my God, scorpions?

Doug sits in the only chair, crosses his arms.

DOUG

Actually eaten them? No. So far I've just collected the recipes.

GLORIA

Well, that's not fair -- you're only pretending. A real survivalist doesn't believe something actually works until they test it. Since you're taking me with you, I'll help you cook them. I'm a good cook. I can cook anything.

She puts down the manuscript.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

When can we go? To your hideaway.

DOUG

I don't know, Gloria. I haven't agreed...

GLORIA

Yes you have. Think of me as one of your survival tools. You can use me to keep warm on cold nights. Tend the fire while you sleep. Take care of your sexual needs – for medicinal purposes only, of course.

DOUG

Why? Why me?

Gloria goes to him and sits at his feet. She looks up at him, leaving herself open and raw.

GLORIA

There are things in my past...too much pain, too much sorrow. You don't know, Doug. I wanted to go to Hell and be happy forever, just like that Spirit told Rhubarb, in her book.

DOUG

The Spirit that's supposedly been cooped up in Hell for six hundred years?

Gloria nods.

DOUG (CONT'D)

I heard about that. What does he know?

GLORIA

I don't know what he knows. But I feel like I've been cooped up in hell for six hundred years. I wanted out, until I met you.

DOUG

Gloria, I don't think I can make you happy.

GLORIA

I don't expect you too. I just want to be less sad.

DOUG

Will you quit all this talk about killing yourself?

Gloria zips her lips.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
You'll have to learn everything I  
know about survival.

She stands up and shows her muscles.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
How do you feel about Bruce Lee?

GLORIA  
(extremely serious)  
Bruce Lee was the greatest martial  
artist who ever lived, or ever will  
live, unto the end of the world.

She moves into a mock martial arts stance. Doug gets up and  
faces her.

DOUG  
You have much to learn,  
grasshopper.

INT. DOUG'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gloria grunts as she executes a series of hard punches. She's  
sweating profusely. Doug holds the focus mitt and lectures.

DOUG  
The key to surviving a street fight  
is surprise. You'll probably be  
fighting a larger, stronger man,  
but it doesn't matter. All men have  
knees, eyes, a spinal cord, a  
throat and balls. What you need is  
the element of surprise. Blow him a  
kiss, flash a tit, anything to  
distract him. Then, POW!

Gloria is wearing panties and a tank top.

She stops kicking and puts her hands on her knees to catch  
her breath

Doug gives her a disapproving grimace.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Let's talk about fear.

Doug tosses the focus mitt and puts on a pair of sparring  
gloves.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Fear can be very productive, because it keeps us from doing stupid things. But it can also immobilize us. We fail to act, to protect ourselves. Now, we can't train ourselves not to experience fear, but we can train ourselves to act, even when we're terrified. Are you listening?

GLORIA

Feel fear, overcome it. I hear everything you tell me, Doug. We have to overcome fear, and anxiety, and frustration, anger, depression, loneliness, boredom, lack of comfort - did I leave anything out?

DOUG

Survivors' guilt.

GLORIA

What?

DOUG

Survivor's guilt.

GLORIA

Yes. I forgot survivor's guilt.

DOUG

It's crippling.

GLORIA

Horrible.

DOUG

It can make people withdraw from the world.

GLORIA

Do crazy, dangerous things.

DOUG

Become isolated in their own skin.

GLORIA

Try to kill themselves.

For a tense moment they lock eyes. Each waits for the other to say something more. Not yet, though. The moment passes. Gloria puts on her sparring gloves and takes a boxing stance.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I'm just not a fanatic.

DOUG

I'm not a religious fanatic, or some tobacco spitting hillbilly, or a white supremacist. I don't know how or why or when things are going to fall apart. But I do believe it's going to happen, and I plan to defend myself, to defend you, or die trying.

They begin to spar.

DOUG (CONT'D)

No one expects to be mugged or raped or murdered. But it happens all the time -- now more than ever -- because of all the idiots who buy into this Rhubarb shit. They don't care who they kill, including themselves.

Gloria throws a couple of left jabs to Doug's face. He ignores them, then smacks her on the head. She put her hands down.

GLORIA

You're the only person I know who can argue and fight at the same time. Don't hit me for a second. I know what you're saying is true. I hereby acknowledge it for all the world, for all time. But I believe ignorance is bliss, and I need a little bliss. I want to be Miss Oblivious.

DOUG

Ignorance is death -- knowledge is survival.

GLORIA

Survival in a world of death and starvation and utter misery - your words, not mine.

DOUG

We won't be in that world. We'll be in our own little Eden.

GLORIA  
Then take me there.

DOUG  
We're not ready.

GLORIA  
Then take me for a visit. Give me something to look forward to besides getting the shit beat out of me every day.

DOUG  
Tell you what, grasshopper. When you're good enough to land at least one, solid punch, I'll take you.

GLORIA  
You mean it?

DOUG  
I mean it.

GLORIA  
Oh, baby, you are so good to me, so sexy...

She steps forward to kiss him -- he opens his arms to embrace her -- she lands a hard left hook. He grunts and doubles over.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Next weekend, okay?

DOUG  
(sucking air)  
Okay.

INT/EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Doug's truck puttters up a steep, gravel path. It comes to a tree, twisted around itself, limbs entwined.

DOUG  
I call this Two Trees Dancing. It's the first landmark.

GLORIA  
Dancing trees. Got it.

The truck pulls onto a narrow path. Branches scrape against the sides, then it stops next to a tree stump embedded in a large stone.

DOUG  
I call this Stoned Root. We take  
the next turn.

GLORIA  
Stoned Root. Dancing Trees, then  
Stoned Root. How much longer?

A large branch slaps the windshield as they burst into a clearing.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

Doug and Gloria get out and assemble a wire cart, then unload cartons of dehydrated fruit, powdered milk, soup, power bars, spices, oils, rolls of fabric, an old fashioned sewing machine and cases of tampons.

They trudge up an overgrown path until the road exits into a meadow and a long view of the Smoky Mountains.

GLORIA  
It's beautiful. It's so -- real.

They stop for a moment to watch eagles soar above the valley.

A lizard suns itself on a rock.

A frog croaks.

Gloria looks at Doug, knows what he's thinking.

DOUG  
Yummy.

GLORIA  
Yuck.

They trudge up the path, dragging the supplies, until they round a switchback and come upon a small log cabin.

DOUG  
Well, this is it. I call it Fort  
Benny.

GLORIA  
Our first home.

DOUG  
Our last home.

He unlocks the door, then walks around and removes a padlock from the shutters.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
We need to get some light inside,  
air the place out.

He opens all the windows.

GLORIA  
Who's Benny?

DOUG  
My brother.

Doug enters the cabin. Gloria follows.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Light streams in through the door and the two windows,  
revealing a cluttered room stacked with supplies.

Everything is in boxes, labeled with markers.

GLORIA  
Damn, Doug, this stuff must be  
worth a fortune. You're all set,  
aren't you?

DOUG  
Almost. I need to purchase some  
wind turbines. Then we can generate  
our own electricity.

GLORIA  
I thought we did.

She pulls him close and kisses him.

DOUG  
I'm with you, baby. But we can't  
run a toaster on our sex life.

GLORIA  
What a shame.  
(pauses)  
Do these fine accommodations  
include a bathroom?

DOUG  
Biggest one in the world.

He gestured to the mountain.

GLORIA  
Running water?



DOUG  
Come with me.

He leads her outside.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

Doug takes Gloria to a small pond.

DOUG  
Our own private swimmin' hole. It's  
called Lake Gloria.

GLORIA  
Wow, what a coincidence, that's my  
name.

He picks up a stone and skips it.

DOUG  
I'm just trying to make you feel at  
home.

GLORIA  
I love it, baby. I'm honored.

DOUG  
Come on. I want to show you  
something else.

He leads her to the entrance of a small cave. She peeks  
inside.

GLORIA  
Okay, Doug, I've seen this in just  
about every horror movie. I go in  
and you knock me out and sacrifice  
me on a big slab of stone so some  
dead spirit can live again. That's  
it, isn't it?

DOUG  
It where I buried Benny.

Gloria grabs him and hugs him, tears in her voice.

GLORIA  
I'm so sorry, Doug. God, I am such  
a bitch.

Doug makes light of it.

DOUG  
It's okay, how would know?  
(spooky voice)  
Now get inside. The hour is come.

The enter the cave.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Gloria walks to a large stone set on the dirt floor. Carved on one side: Benjamin Marks 1990 - 2010.

GLORIA  
I can picture you two building the  
cabin, drinking beer, smoking pot.

DOUG  
Not even our parents knew about it.  
You're the third person in the  
world to see it.

GLORIA  
What happened to Benny?

DOUG  
He got caught

FLASHBACK

EXT. BAD NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Doug and his older brother BENNY run from a gang of men dressed in black and red. A closer look shows the gang members have blood-colored rhubarb stalks printed on their clothes, and the word HELLBOUND tattooed on their skin.

Benny falls behind and gets overtaken by the gang. Benny tries to fight back, but they kick and beat him into submission.

Doug looks back to check on his brother, and sees the gang holding him up, a knife at his throat. Doug starts to run back, to help his brother, but Benny shouts:

BENNY  
Run!

Doug stops. He doesn't know what to do. Run back and try to help his brother, or run away and let him die alone? In one painfully long fraction of time, he struggles with anger, fear and shame.

BENNY (CONT'D)  
Run, you motherfucking idiot!

As a gang member slits Benny's throat, Doug turns and runs.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CAVE - DAY

Doug kneels by Benny's tombstone.

DOUG  
If I had gone back, they would have  
killed me too. It wouldn't have  
made sense.

He gets up and takes Gloria's arm, leads her out of the Cave.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

The two of them start hiking back to the camp.

DOUG  
If the same thing ever happens to  
the two of us, I want you to  
remember what I told you. Don't be  
a hero.

GLORIA  
You don't have to worry about that,  
Doug. I'm no hero. If it ever comes  
down to it, I'll run back and die  
with you.

DOUG  
That's not what I--

Gloria suddenly screams and jumps away, brushing at her blouse.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
What?? What is it?!

She slaps a grasshopper off her shirt.

GLORIA  
Quick! Step on it! Ugh. I hate  
grasshoppers.

Doug picks it up and examines it.

DOUG  
They're supposed to be edible. I wonder if I can get some...

GLORIA  
Get rid of it, please!

He flicks it away. They continue walking.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Doug, I'm serious, I'll cook for you, I'll die for you, but I won't eat grasshoppers for you. I don't care if I starve to death.

DOUG  
We both might starve to death if we don't cook something soon.

They reach Fort Benny.

GLORIA  
I'll see what I can throw together. I brought some new recipes.

DOUG  
Anything we can bring to the company picnic?

GLORIA  
Do we really have to go?

DOUG  
No. But I've been working there for the last five years. It seems an appropriate time to say fuck you and goodbye.

GLORIA  
We're leaving right after, right?

DOUG  
Right after.

GLORIA  
Okay, baby. We'll whip up something very special.

EXT. PICNIC AREA - DAY

The picnic runs at a high pitch, a fierce competition to demonstrate the highest degree of good spirits.

They grin too wide, slap each other's backs too hard, shake hands and nod with exaggerated certainty, like members of a cult.

Amidst this forced frivolity, a white limousine pulls up and parks next to a fire hydrant. Jordan, Sam and Elwood get out. Everyone abandons their games and hurries to the amphitheater.

Jordan walks towards a stage with measured steps.

From his P.O.V, the palm trees bend their trunks and curtsy as he passes; he dismisses them with a wave of his hand.

The grass shivers; he acknowledges their adoration with a nod of his head.

The flowers dance for joy; to them he offers a benevolent smile.

He jogs up the steps and takes center stage, gazes down upon his expectant audience. They don't say a word, but from his P.O.V. they're grunting and chattering like monkeys.

He squints his eyes -- their heads grow transparent, revealing dozens of hairy little brains, frolicking about.

He nods to himself, content that his 'power' has revealed their true nature.

He waits for silence, and the chattering in his head ceases. The brains become people again.

His voice booms from the speakers.

JORDAN

Welcome, monkeys and monkettes!

He raises his arms for applause. Everyone claps. He lowers his arms.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

It's been hell of a year for many of you. We've cut your salaries, fired your friends, eliminated your benefits.

He raises his arms for applause -- after a moment's hesitation, he gets it. He lowers his arms.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Thank you. My point is, we're still here. Why? Because we're a family.

(MORE)

JORDAN (CONT'D)

We've laughed, we've cried, we've seen each other naked. And isn't that what our company is all about - a bunch of laughing, crying, naked monkeys, all climbing the same tree, all reaching for the same coconuts?

He raises his arms and waits for the applause. The clapping is wildly enthusiastic in some pockets, polite in others. He lowers his arms.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

I don't know what the future will bring. I don't know how many of you will even have a job tomorrow. Hell, some of you could be dead by morning. But now is not the time to worry about tomorrow. Now is the time to worry about today. Enjoy the picnic, and I look forward to judging your homemade dishes. Thank you.

He steps away from the microphone.

An uneasy cheer rises up amidst whistles and shouts.

Doug and Gloria, hand in hand, watch Jordan, flanked by his Senior Managers, move down the long row of tables. Gloria gets distracted by a couple of SQUEALING CHILDREN. She focuses on a YOUNG MOTHER feeding her baby. A profound look of sadness comes over her face. Doug notices, then directs her attention to Jordan.

He tastes each delicacy, then marks a scorecard and moves on. Sometimes he instructs Sam or Elwood to take a taste.

Jordan gets closer to their table, stops for a moment and digs his knuckles into his temples. Then he moves on.

GLORIA

I hope he doesn't have security beat us to a pulp.

DOUG

This was your idea.

GLORIA

I'm reconsidering.

DOUG

Too late.

Jordan stands in front of their table.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
I'm Doug Marks your Night Watchman.  
And this is my wife, Gloria.

Jordan nods his head and dips a plastic fork into a pot of stew. He takes a bite, chews it thoughtfully, licks his lips.

He takes another bite, licks his lips again.

JORDAN  
Unusual flavor. Kind of a sweet,  
crispy -- I like it. I think I like  
it a lot. Sam, try this.

Sam grabs a fork, takes a bite, nods his shiny head.

SAM  
Oh yeah, cream of the crop, boss.  
Prime cut.

Elwood sniffs it and pats his belly.

ELWOOD  
Trying to lose a few.

Jordan takes another bite.

JORDAN  
Like bits of crispy chicken skin.  
What is it? Is it chicken skin?

DOUG  
No, it's something different. You  
really like it?

JORDAN  
I really do. What is it?

DOUG  
It's called Mbulika.

JORDAN  
Which means?

Doug defers to Gloria.

GLORIA  
We don't know, exactly.

JORDAN  
What's in it?

GLORIA  
Some salt, pepper, peanut oil,  
stuff like that.

JORDAN  
What's the main ingredient?  
Chicken? Beef? Rat?

DOUG  
No sir, not rat. That would be  
disgusting, right?

JORDAN  
So what is it?

GLORIA  
Tell him honey.

DOUG  
Well, the main ingredient in this  
particular recipe is a genetically  
purebred species of Macrotermes.

SAM  
Macrowhat? Termes? Sounds like  
termites. Tell me they're not  
termites. Are they termites?

DOUG  
Termites are considered the king of  
edible insects. You can't find a  
tastier insect.

SAM  
Oh man, I think I'm having a Malox  
moment.

He turns around, grabs his stomach and starts spitting.

DOUG  
Relax, Sam, it's no different than  
escargot. You eat escargot, right?  
Termites are a delicacy in Africa.  
We eat them all the time, don't we  
honey?

GLORIA  
It's my favorite.

She rubs her belly.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Just like shrimp.



Jordan bursts out laughing.

JORDAN  
I love it!

DOUG  
It's healthy, too. Pure protein.

JORDAN  
And people eat them?

DOUG  
Absolutely. In Africa they emerge from the ground at the beginning of the rainy season. Children catch them in mid-flight, pluck the wings and gulp them down raw. These are laboratory grown, of course, but still tasty.

JORDAN  
(to Gloria)  
Hard to cook?

GLORIA  
No, uh, quite easy. I just fry them in a cast iron pot. You have to remove the wings, but they're not like caterpillars or sand crickets where you have to remove the intestines.

JORDAN  
That's a real plus.

GLORIA  
Yes. You just fry them in peanut oil with a little salt and garlic.

Jordan reaches out and shakes Doug's hand.

JORDAN  
You know, I always thought of you as a bit of a retard, if I thought of you at all. I mean, what kind of brains does it take to be a night watchman? But you've got balls and you're not afraid of an unusual idea. I want to sell this stuff. What do you think Elwood?

ELWOOD  
It's a great idea, Jordan, really top notch.

(MORE)

ELWOOD (CONT'D)

But, do you really think people are going to eat this stuff? If they know what it is?

JORDAN

People eat snails, raw fish, cow brains and pig intestines. Why not termites? You try it, and then tell me how good it is.

He scoops up another forkful of termite and offers it to Elwood. Elwood's mouth starts to work, and he begins to tremble. He shakes his head.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Come on, Elwood. I need you to get behind this project. I don't want anyone on my team who's not a true believer.

ELWOOD

I take some to go. For later, when I'm not so full.

He pats his belly.

JORDAN

Try it Elwood. Take the fucking fork and take a bite. It's good for you. Probably lose weight, huh?

DOUG

You know any fat Africans?

JORDAN

No, not a single one!

Jordan holds the fork to Elwood's mouth and sticks it inside. Elwood takes a bite and starts chewing.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Now tell me the truth, have you ever tasted a better termite?

Elwood swallows and shakes his head.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

If you really think about it, the only reason people are starving is they don't eat enough insects. Doug, I'm promoting you, as of now. You're on my new Vice President of...something.

(MORE)

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Bright and early Monday morning,  
and bring lots of good ideas.

He moves on to the next table.

Doug reaches over and takes Gloria's hand, pulls her close.  
She gives him a lopsided look and quietly sings:

GLORIA

They're coming to take me away, ha  
ha, to the funny farm, where life  
is gay...

DOUG

A crazy man for a crazy world.

GLORIA

You're not going to work for that  
maniac, are you? We're still  
leaving, right?

DOUG

Of course. But maybe I should take  
the job -- just for a little while,  
you know -- just to make some extra  
money.

GLORIA

Doing what?

DOUG

I have no idea, but I've always  
wanted to be Vice President of  
Something.

SUPER: ONE WEEK LATER

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

Doug and Sam enter the auditorium wearing suits and ties.

The place is teeming with people in wheelchairs, on walkers,  
or helped along by friends and family.

Some have the word *hellbound* tattooed on their arms or  
foreheads, others the image of a *grinning skull* -- with  
*rhubarb stalks for crossbones*.

A display has two books for sale: *The Rhubarb Way*, and, *A  
Voice From Down Under*, both by The Supreme Channeler Rhuella  
Barbara Smith.

Doug and Sam enter and jostle for a good seat.

DOUG

Do you have any idea what we're doing here?

SAM

Jordan told us to listen and observe, so, you listen, I'll observe. Just do it, okay?

DOUG

Sure. So this is what all those jumpers were talking about.

SAM

What? What's a jumper?

DOUG

Nothing. Not important. This just seems like a colossal waste of time.

SAM

Welcome to the team.

The auditorium darkens. Blue lights play about the stage. As the crowd settled down, Max steps out and grabs the microphone.

MAX

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, welcome. I know a lot of you are new. Most of the people who attend one of our meetings don't return -- because they hear the message, and the message sets them free! I want to remind you that we have books and tapes for sale, and of course...

(He indicates several sexy women in tight, rhubarb-red outfits.)

Our *Rhubies* will be selling our Tickets To Hell, and giving away, absolutely free, Quick Will Forms, in case you decide to donate your assets to the Rhubarb Foundation. I want to thank you all for coming, and now, without further adieu, let's give a grand welcome someone who has ventured into the depths of Hell -- and returned -- The Supreme Channeler, Rhuuuuuu...Barb!

Max exits. The curtains part. Inspirational music.

Rhubarb charges up to the microphone.

She's an enormous woman, tall, wide and heavy. She wears a black cape decorated with thousands of glittery red studs in the shape of rhubarb stalks. The crowd goes wild and starts screaming:

CROWD

Go to Hell, Rhubarb! Go to Hell!

And Rhubarb shouts back in a huge voice:

RHUBARB

You all go to Hell! You can all go to Hell!

The audience applauds and laughs.

Rhubarb waddles back and forth with tremendous, sweaty energy.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

I do what I want and I don't care!

The crowd cheers.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

I do what I want and I don't care!

The crowd cheers louder.

She grabs the microphone and steps closer to the audience.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter what I do when I'm alive -- because when I die, I know I'm going to Hell. And that, my children, is true freedom.

She retreats to center stage and continues, this time in a quiet, prayerful voice.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Let me tell you a personal story. About my daddy. My daddy was a wonderful man, a model of the community. God fearing. Church going. Always put himself last. He and mama could have had a fancy house, a new car, vacations all over the world.

(MORE)

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

But instead they gave every little bit of extra money that came their way to the needy: United Way, Cancer, Veterans, the Homeless. I swear, our mailbox wasn't big enough to hold all the letters we got from people asking for money.

There's a little uneasy laughter, some knowing nods.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

After daddy had his stroke, he couldn't talk, couldn't walk, he couldn't wipe his own ass. All he could do was blink his eyes. Yes or No. Yes or No. The burden of caring for him was a nightmare -- probably what killed my mama.

Rhubarb chokes up, wipes her eyes.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Now for years I'd been trying to do some channeling, just sort of playing around. I never actually expected to contact anybody. Then one day, out of nowhere, this spirit talks to me. Says he's been in Hell for over six hundred years -- and he's having a wonderful time. He tells me that everything they teach about Hell in Sunday School is a damn lie. Our spirits live on in Hell, but it's not a suffering place. In Hell there is no crime, no sickness, no death. Now maybe it's not as good as Heaven -- whatever that's like. But not everyone aspires to spend their afterlife in a five star resort. For most of us, a Holiday Inn is just fine.

Some laughter and murmurs of agreement.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

I realized there was no point in daddy staying alive to suffer needlessly. So I told him about what I learned. I asked him if he wanted me to put his suffering to an end.

(MORE)

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

To this day, I can see the expression in his eyes -- the only part of him still alive -- the look of terror as they jiggled back and forth, back and forth, no no no no. He suffered for a long time after that. Years of Hell on earth. My children, let me tell you that I am not afraid to die. I am not afraid of going to hell. I want to go to Hell. Do you know where I'm going?

CROWD

You're going to Hell, Rhu!

Shouts and applause.

RHUBARB

And you're all going to Hell!

They cheer and laugh and whoop it up. Rhubarb silences the crowd.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

I'll be honest with you - I don't know about God. I don't know if he exists or what he does. But I can tell you what he doesn't do. he doesn't protect the innocent. he doesn't punish the wicked. Not in this life and not in the next. The truth is: there are Christians in Hell, Jews in Hell, Hindus and Muslims and Atheists. There are souls who suffered terrible misfortune and souls who led charmed lives, people who did good deeds and people who committed atrocities. Maybe there is a Heaven. Maybe you have to be good enough, pure enough, perfect enough to get there. But I've taken a long, hard look at myself, and I know one thing -- if there is a Heaven, I'll never get there. We try to be good parents, but we fail. We try to be good children, good friends, good employees, but we fail. Maybe you're special. Maybe you are so pious and so perfect you will get to heaven. But if you do, you'll probably leave your parents behind.

(MORE)

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

And your children. And your spouses, your lovers, your best friends. Because most of us regular folk, for you and me and the person sitting next to you -- we're going to Hell whether we want to or not. If you're depressed, if you're hungry or homeless or just sick of living, there's no reason to prolong it. End your suffering today.

Rhubarb bows and replaces the microphone. The audience cheers and claps.

A WOMAN in the front row stands up suddenly and shouts:

WOMAN

Why don't you get a ticket? What are you still doing here? We want you in Hell! Go to Hell, Rhu!

Others take up the cheer.

AUDIENCE

Go to Hell, Rhu! Go to Hell!

RHUBARB

Yes, I'll come with you. I will!

The audience bursts into applause and cheers. Hundreds of hands clap, hundreds of feet stomp.

But Max runs on stage and grabs the microphone. He implores the audience.

MAX

Don't encourage her, my friends. We need her for a while longer.

He hands her the microphone.

RHUBARB

Let me go, Max, let me die with my friends!

She hands it back.

MAX

We need you alive, Rhubarb. You gotta make the sacrifice.

He hands it to her.



RHUBARB

I want to go with my family, Max.  
These people are my family.

She hands it back.

MAX

Just a little while longer. We need  
you alive, to keep the cause alive.

He hands it to her and walks off.

RHUBARB

I do want to go with you tonight,  
my children. But I have a mission  
to complete. I can't go just yet,  
but you can. You're the lucky ones.  
Go now, and go in peace.

She hangs her head for moment, then steps backward a few  
paces to let the curtain close.

The audience applauds. Some are hugging each other and  
weeping.

The Rhubies come out and strut down the aisles, selling  
Tickets to Hell.

A Rhuby tries to sell Doug and Sam a Ticket to Hell. They  
decline.

RHUBY

(smiling, sincere)  
No problem, go to hell brothers.

On the way out, Doug notices a DRIED UP WOMAN in a frayed  
dress trying to force a ticket down the throat of her baby.  
The baby gags and spits it up. Her EMACIATED HUSBAND looks on  
with vacant, watery eyes. The two of them look like they  
barely survived a concentration camp.

As hard as the woman shoves her bony fingers into the baby's  
throat, somehow the baby manages to dig the ticket out with  
her tongue and spit it back.

The ticket drops on the floor -- the mother picks it up,  
dusts it on her pants.

DRIED UP WOMAN

(to her husband)  
Help me, damn it!

The Emaciated Husband pitches in, and together they try to  
open the baby's mouth.

EMACIATED HUSBAND

Maybe this ain't right, woman.  
Maybe this ain't right.

DRIED UP WOMAN

Shut up and help. Hurry. We got to  
get home before the tickets kick  
in.

EMACIATED HUSBAND

Maybe we ain't got the right.

DRIED UP WOMAN

You rather she grow up eatin'  
garbage, or starve to death or  
become a whore!

Doug is frozen by the scene. He can't believe what he's  
witnessing. Sam grabs his arm and pulls him towards the door.

SAM

Let's just get outta here, man.  
Come on, let's go.

DOUG

They're gonna kill that baby.

SAM

Nothing you can do. It's their  
baby. These people are desperate. I  
don't know what I'd do if I was  
that desperate.

Emaciated Husband grabs the baby's chin and tilts her head  
back, thumb and forefinger pinching the jaw on both sides,  
the way you give a cat a pill. The baby screams but her mouth  
gapes open. The Dried Up Woman sticks the ticket in her  
mouth.

DRIED UP WOMAN

Now you swallow this, you hear?

As she starts to push the ticket into the wailing baby's  
mouth, Doug grabs her wrist and twists it. She drops the  
ticket.

DRIED UP WOMAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Let me go!

DOUG

Come on, she's only a baby.

DRIED UP WOMAN

Get the fuck away from me!

EMACIATED HUSBAND

You ain't got the right.

DOUG

The baby deserves a chance.

SAM

Come on, Doug. It's not our business.

DRIED UP WOMAN

That's right, it ain't your business.

She wrenches her hand free and stoops down to grab the ticket.

Doug karate chops her neck. She collapses.

Her husband tries to throw a punch, but Doug's fist is already in mid-swing. It catches the man on his jaw and sends him sprawling into the crowd.

Doug picks up the screaming baby and sprints towards the exit, Sam right behind him.

EXT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Doug and Sam emerge through the exit, collide with a tall RHUBY.

TALL RHUBY

Go to Hell, brother. How 'bout some extra tickets for you and the ba...

Sam grabs the Tall Rhuby and throws her through the entrance, back into the auditorium.

They run towards the car, Doug cradling the baby like a football. Sam looks nervously over his shoulder at the crowd gathering around the unconscious Tall Rhuby.

They get in Sam's car and lock the doors. He floors it and screeches out of the parking lot.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

The baby is choking from crying so hard. Her face is red, the outfit soaked with sweat.

SAM

Listen, it's not too late, man. We can still return it.

DOUG

I lost the receipt.

SAM

Serious, man. You break it you buy it.

DOUG

If we take her back they'll break her for sure. I don't know what to do. Can you take us to my apartment?

SAM

That makes me an accessory.

DOUG

Or a Good Samaritan.

SAM

Either way, I'm fucked.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Doug and Sam watch as Gloria removes the dirty diapers and holds up the baby.

GLORIA

Oh my God, she looks like *five chickens for a dollar*.

She wraps the baby in a paper towel and scotch tape.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Can you guys go to the store and pick up a few things? I'll make you a list.

Sam touches the baby like it's the first time he's ever seen one up close.

SAM

It's amazing, isn't it?

GLORIA

She's amazing, Sam.

DOUG

We got to be real careful. If anyone's searching for a missing baby, they'll be watching for anyone unusual buying baby stuff.

GLORIA

Then don't look unusual.

DOUG

How do I do that?

GLORIA

I don't know, but do it quick.

Doug and Sam leave Gloria alone in the apartment. She holds the baby, looks into her eyes, and bursts into tears.

INT. RHUBARB HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

The room is decorated with rhubarb colors and rhubarb patterns throughout.

Rhubarb maneuvers her mountainous body into an oversized chair.

There are two soft knocks on the bedroom door.

RHUBARB

(weary)

Come on in, Max.

MAX

Beautiful job. Outstanding, Rhu. They loved you. Your best ever.

RHUBARB

No, not my best. I just don't have it anymore.

MAX

Nonsense. They loved you! They believe in you!

RHUBARB

Do you believe in me?

Max walks behind her and massages her thick shoulders.

MAX

I adore you, Rhu. I worship you.

RHUBARB  
You worship money.

MAX  
That too.

RHUBARB  
I don't do it for the money, Max.

He comes around and sits across from her.

MAX  
I know that.

RHUBARB  
I'm real tired, Max. I'm ready to die, ready to rest this fat old body.

MAX  
It's the sacrifice all prophets make, Rhuella.

RHUBARB  
Sometimes I feel we don't have the right to enjoy all this -- extravagance -- while people are starving.

MAX  
It's not your fault they choose to continue their miserable lives.

RHUBARB  
I know, Max.

MAX  
You are a true prophet, Rhuella.

RHUBARB  
Yes.

Max gets up and dims the lights.

MAX  
You want me to send someone to help you sleep tonight?

RHUBARB  
I don't know, I'm so tired, Max. I don't want to force anyone.

He lights a couple of candles.

MAX

Force them? No, never. They love you. They worship you. It's an honor.

RHUBARB

I'm fat and ugly, Max. They do it because you pay them.

He lights a stick of incense.

MAX

No. Don't ever say that. They fight over who gets to be with you.

He takes out a bottle of wine and opens it.

MAX (CONT'D)

They always tell me how good you are. How every other woman is a disappointment after a single night with the queen.

RHUBARB

Really?

MAX

I swear it.

He takes out a couple of wine glasses, pours some wine and places them on Rhubarb's night table.

RHUBARB

If you think they want me, then.

MAX

I do. It helps you sleep. And it means so much to them. Don't deprive them of that.

He turns on some soft music.

RHUBARB

Thank you, Max.

He smiles and kisses her forehead, then leaves the room and heads towards the kitchen.

THE KITCHEN

The CHEF and his ASSISTANTS are chopping, stirring, pounding.

A dark, handsome MAN in his twenties is removing cans from a grocery bag. He's big and thick-boned with curly black hair.

Max stares at him for a moment.

MAX

What's your name, son?

IZZY

Izzy, sir.

MAX

Izzy, you know who I am?

IZZY

Yes, sir. You're Max. Everyone knows you.

MAX

Izzy, I want you to visit Rhubarb tonight. Make her happy. You understand? Make her very, very happy.

IZZY

Aw, Jesus, can't you get someone else?

Izzy doesn't see it coming. Max slaps the man's face, hard. On the second slap, Izzy drops the groceries and falls to the floor.

MAX

You worthless piece of shit. After all she does for you.

IZZY

I'm sorry, man. Jesus, that hurt!

His face is red, mouth bloody.

MAX

I should grind you up for dog food. But Rhu likes your type. So you got about twenty minutes to fall madly in love with her. Or maybe you prefer fighting the rats for garbage?

IZZY

No sir.



MAX

I don't know about you, Izzy. Maybe  
I shouldn't take a chance.

IZZY

Listen, I can do it.

He stands tall and lets Max appraise him like a piece of  
livestock.

MAX

The more I think about it...

IZZY

I'm very good. Really. No problem.  
I'm sorry, I...

MAX

You tell her you got a split lip  
fighting another guy - for the  
privilege of being with her  
tonight. And you tell her you love  
her, you worship her. You got it?

IZZY

Sure. I'll give it to her just the  
way she likes it.

He pats his crotch.

Max turns his back on Izzy and walks away.

INT. RHUBARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A gentle knock on her door.

RHUBARB

(purring)  
Come in.

IZZY

Hi. I'm Izzy.

He stands in the doorway. She gives him a coy look.

RHUBARB

Hi Honey. Come on in.

He stands there for a moment, looking around, reluctant to  
enter. Her expression darkens.

IZZY

Sorry -- I'm nervous. I'm not used to being with someone like you.

He walks over to her bed and sits next to her.

RHUBARB

What do you mean, someone like me? Cause I'm fat?

IZZY

No, 'cause you're, you know, famous.

RHUBARB

(smiling)

Don't be nervous, Izzy.

She reaches out and strokes his arm, touches his bruised mouth.

IZZY

I got into a fight -- over who was gonna be with you tonight.

RHUBARB

You lose?

IZZY

No ma'am -- I won.

RHUBARB

Oh, poor baby. You shouldn't fight over me. Here, let me kiss it for you.

Izzy bends down and lets her kiss his bruised lips. He winces.

She gives him a few friendly kisses, then she suddenly jams her tongue in his mouth.

He jerks away -- she sees the flash of revulsion before it's replaced with a stupid grin.

IZZY

Sorry, I wasn't expecting -- I'm cool.

He goes to kiss her, but she backs away, her face a cruel mask.

RHUBARB

Take off your clothes.

Izzy stands up and takes off his shirt, then his shoes and slacks, and stands in front of her with only his underwear.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)  
Let's see what you've got.

He pulled down his underwear. Rhubarb smiles approvingly.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)  
Why don't you start on me?

She pulls her nightgown over her mountainous belly. He parts her legs and puts his mouth between them. Rhubarb breathes heavily, moaning.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)  
Yes Izzy, oh, that's good, mmmm,  
put it in, baby.

Izzy backs up and wipes his mouth. Rhubarb looks at his crotch, disappointed.

IZZY  
Sorry, I guess I'm nervous.

The word 'nervous' makes Rhubarb angry and disgusted, like she's heard the same excuse a million times.

RHUBARB  
I'm sorry you're...nervous. Come  
give mama a kiss.

When Izzy scoots close to give her a kiss, she slaps him across the face with her meaty hand, then knees him in the crotch.

Izzy screams and tumbles off the bed.

Rhubarb picks up the phone, pokes a number.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)  
Max!

In seconds, Max bursts into the room, followed by TWO SECURITY GUARDS.

Rhubarb hides under the covers.

MAX  
Throw out this trash!

The guards grabs Izzy and haul him out of the bedroom.

Max stares for a moment at the large, heaving mound under the cover. He turns off the light and sits on the bed, petting her and whispering that everything is going to be all right.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The two Attendants throw Izzy against the wall and work him over. They kick him a few more times as he lays on the ground.

A short distance away, a heavy-set man watches from behind a tree. When the two Attendants leave, he comes over and helps Izzy to his feet.

INT. DOUG'S APARTMENT - DAY

Doug drags a large dog cage inside. Gloria, holding the baby, is appalled.

GLORIA  
I sent you out for a crib.

DOUG  
I told you, we can't start buying baby stuff all of a sudden. If anyone gets suspicious...

GLORIA  
A dog cage?

DOUG  
You'll make it look pretty.

He drags it into their bedroom.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
How old do you figure she is?

GLORIA  
Six months or so. What's her name?

Doug shakes his head. Gloria leans down and brushes her lips over the baby's head.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
You think her parents are dead, Doug?

DOUG  
Dead, for sure. They took the tickets.

GLORIA  
Can we call her Maria?

DOUG  
No, that's a terrible name.

Gloria turns away, stricken.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
What? Were you set on Maria?

Her face is contorted by an intense, emotional pain.

GLORIA  
It's what I named my first baby.  
The one I killed.

FLASHBACK

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

A homemade raft in the middle of the ocean gets battered about by a powerful storm. Several people hold on for dear life, including Gloria, clutching a baby. An enormous wave capsizes the raft and sends everyone flying into the rough water. Gloria's baby is ripped from her hands. She screams and tries to dive into the violent water to find her, but she can barely stay afloat. She screams and screams as she swims toward the raft.

END FLASHBACK

Doug goes to her and take her in his arms.

DOUG  
I'm sorry. You never told me.

GLORIA  
I'll try not to break this one.

DOUG  
It wasn't your fault.

GLORIA  
It is. I should have held on tighter, or prayed harder, or died with her.

DOUG  
You did what you had to do, to survive. It's what people do.  
(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

Throughout history, during famines and draughts, people often sacrificed their children so they could live on and have more...

Gloria hugs the baby and quietly begins to cry. Doug feels helpless in the face of her grief.

DOUG (CONT'D)

How about Hope? Do you want to call her Hope?

Gloria pulls herself together.

GLORIA

Hope. Sure. It's all I've got.

He walks over to the mattress and lays down.

DOUG

I'm exhausted. I have to get to work early tomorrow morning.

GLORIA

I liked it better when you were home all day.

DOUG

Well, it's just temporary. I'm new, got to prove myself. You know how it is.

GLORIA

No, I don't know how it is. I'm not really sure what you do.

DOUG

We have meetings. We argue for hours and agree to all sorts of things, but nobody actually does anything, and then the next day we do it all over again. We need more money now -- we have a baby to raise.

GLORIA

But this is no place to raise a baby. Every day you read about someone getting killed or raped. And I can't stand to be alone, cooped up all day. You know how I get. I don't know how much longer...

He's getting annoyed by her constant complaining, and she sees it.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I just want to go out, okay? We can take Hope. Her parents are dead, nobody's looking for her, nobody cares.

DOUG

I don't know.

GLORIA

I got my figure back, so you don't have to be embarrassed. And no stretch marks. At the very least I deserve a good meal. I've been cooped up here for so long eating insects and amphibians and shit, I feel like a prisoner. You won't let me go out alone, and you won't take me out.

DOUG

It's dangerous out there.

GLORIA

I wouldn't know. I haven't been 'out there' for so long. Do people still drive cars? Have they evolved giant bald heads with big alien eyes?

DOUG

On the contrary, they've devolved. Like beasts in the mud, sweetie, beasts in the mud.

Hope suddenly starts making baby noises.

GLORIA

See, Hope wants to go out for dinner.

DOUG

Is that what she's saying?

GLORIA

She's very smart.

Gloria stands the baby on her lap, faces Doug, and manipulate her arms like a puppet.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
 (in a baby's voice)  
 Please, daddy dear, please take me  
 out for dinner. Pretty please with  
 sugar on it?

Doug laughs.

DOUG  
 Okay. Okay, okay. We'll go.

GLORIA  
 Oh sure, you do whatever the baby  
 says, but when I ask, we have to  
 stay home and eat bugs.

DOUG  
 We'll get some fresh air, check out  
 one of those trendy restaurants.

GLORIA  
 Great. You hold the baby while I  
 get dressed.

DOUG  
 I'm ready. All I need to do is get  
 my gun.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Doug, Gloria and Hope are seated outside a restaurant called  
 The Food Chain.

The waiter appears, a middle-aged man with a gray ponytail.  
 He wears an open leopard-skin vest, tight leather pants and  
 earth shoes.

RAYMOND  
 I'd like to welcome you to The Food  
 Chain. I'm...  
 (accent on the second  
 syllable)  
 Raymond.

He wears rings on each nipple, a gold bar through his  
 bellybutton and several studs on his face.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)  
 We have a whole new menu, new  
 decor, new everything. This place  
 is going to be hot again.

He does a little disco dance, singing:



RAYMOND (CONT'D)  
Hot hot hot!

Hope picks up a spoon and bangs it against the plates.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)  
Have you decided?

GLORIA  
Guide me, Raymond.

RAYMOND  
The escargot is a specialty. Fresh,  
plump snails, simmered in garlic.  
They're raised right here in the  
city.

GLORIA  
Thanks, but I'm trying to cut down  
on my insects.

RAYMOND  
Our wild garden salad is exquisite.

GLORIA  
Sounds wild.

RAYMOND  
It is. Everything's totally local --  
flowers, roots, weeds.

GLORIA  
I'll pass. What about Lobster?

RAYMOND  
No lobster, but our alligator is  
superb. Choice strips of alligator  
tail, marinated in...

GLORIA  
No! No...dinosaurs.

RAYMOND  
Fine. Whatever. Would you like to  
try our frog legs?

GLORIA  
No.

RAYMOND  
Rabbit?

GLORIA  
No.

RAYMOND

Well what do you want?

GLORIA

Meat, Raymond. How about meat? You serve meat, right?

RAYMOND

(giggling)

Whenever I can. But of course, we have great steaks.

GLORIA

I'll have a great steak. Rare, please. I want to hear it moo.

RAYMOND

I'm sorry, ma'am -- moos aren't allowed. Not after that family died last year. At least it wasn't here. The new law says we have to nuke the microbes. I can get you a nice steak, well-done.

GLORIA

Fine, Raymond. I love my steaks dry and tasteless.

DOUG

Make that two dry and tasteless steaks.

Raymond sniffs and walks away. Doug observed Gloria with a smug look.

GLORIA

You put him up to this, didn't you? I bet you paid him.

DOUG

Sure, it's all a big conspiracy.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Jordan and the Senior Management Team are seated around the conference table. Jordan appears calm and rational.

JORDAN

Gentlemen, I know I've proposed some wild schemes. You probably think I've been a little crazy? Forget all that stuff.

(MORE)

JORDAN (CONT'D)

We're not going to survive by eating our employees' brains. And we're not going to make a fortune selling termites. Sorry, Doug -- we have to be reasonable.

Doug and Sam search each other's eyes. Is it possible Jordan's come to his senses?

Elwood looks away.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

No, gentlemen, what we need is the wise, thoughtful council of some of the world's greatest financial geniuses.

SAM

That kind of top-of-the-line cost a lot of smackeros, Jordan. How can we afford?

JORDAN

We can't. That's why my new plan, which I believe is quite reasonable, is to kidnap Rhuella Barbara Smith. We're going to bring her here and make her channel some of the greatest dead geniuses in the history of the world. Our company's salvation, my friends, is waiting for us in Hell.

He suddenly winces and digs a knuckle into the side of his head.

DOUG

Are you okay?

JORDAN

Yeah, just a brain freeze. Nothing to worry about. What do you guys think?

DOUG

She's got security.

SAM

Like the Pope. There's no way, no how.

JORDAN

I have a secret weapon.

Jordan gives a nod to Elwood. He gets up and opens the door.

Izzy enters the room, his face still bruised and swollen. He hooks his thumbs in his belt and glares at everyone.

INT. DOUG'S APARTMENT - DAY

Doug is getting ready for work. The place is a mess. Gloria ragged. From the bedroom, Hope is rattling her cage.

GLORIA  
(wearingly)  
Your scorpions arrived yesterday,  
remember?

She holds up a shoebox with tiny air holes.

DOUG  
I'll fry them up later.

GLORIA  
I thought you wanted to cook them  
fresh?

DOUG  
I do. They'll stay alive for a few  
days. I need to get to work.

GLORIA  
It's Sunday. We're supposed to  
practice sparring.

DOUG  
Sorry. We'll practice twice as hard  
next Sunday.

Gloria kicks the sparring gloves into a corner. She picks up his manuscript.

GLORIA  
What about the Cookbook? You have  
written anything...

DOUG  
I will. I just need to do this  
for...

GLORIA  
A little while longer.

She tosses the manuscript.

DOUG  
Listen, we're making a lot of  
money.

GLORIA  
Which, according to you, will soon  
be worthless.

He struggles with his tie.

DOUG  
I don't have time for this.

GLORIA  
What about all those people jumping  
off the bridge?

DOUG  
I can't hang out under all the  
bridges of the world and save every  
idiot that wants to die.

GLORIA  
Like me.

DOUG  
I'm sorry, Gloria.

He tries to give her a hug -- she shoves him away.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
You don't understand. This whole  
thing is big. Bigger than anything  
I've ever done.

GLORIA  
Bigger than the whole world is  
going to collapse? Bigger than  
neighborhoods gone crazy, marauding  
bands of criminals, social unrest,  
race wars, chemical spills,  
radiation, murder, rape, looting,  
people on all fours grunting like  
animals in the mud? You start to  
make some money and now all of a  
sudden it's -- praise the Lord --  
civilization's gonna live!

Doug opens the door and steps outside.

DOUG  
I have to go.

GLORIA

No you don't. You don't have to go.  
You want to go. I'm dying here. I  
want us to go to Fort Benny, now,  
today.

DOUG

Soon. Real soon.

He shuts the door.

Gloria looks around. The tiny apartment is oppressive. She forces herself to breath. This is no life, not for her, not for her beautiful baby.

She gets on her knees and retrieves a book from under the mattress: The Rhubarb Way. She sits on the floor and opens it.

EXT. RHUBARB'S HOUSE - DAY

The outer gate opens.

Izzy whisper with the two guards. Rolls of money pass hands. The guards squat down and let him sprinkle liquid onto a rag and hold it to their faces. They slump to the ground.

Izzy gives the signal. Doug, Sam and Elwood skulk over and hide behind a brick wall.

IZZY

(whispers)

The other two are devoted Rhubies.  
We got to do it the hard way.

He steps out in the open.

IZZY (CONT'D)

Hey, assholes, go tell the bitch  
Izzy's back! And he wants to see  
her fat ass now!

GUARD 1

Hey, it's limp dick.

GUARD 2

How they hangin'?

GUARD 1

He must like gettin' his balls  
kicked in.

GUARD 2

Come here, we'll kick you in the balls. Hey, where are Tom and Andy?

IZZY

I kicked their asses.

The men pull out their tasers and move towards him.

Izzy slowly backs away. When they cross the wall, Sam douses them with pepper spray. They drop their weapons and claw at their eyes. Doug step over and subdues them with chloroform.

INT. RHUBARB'S HOUSE - DAY

They move surreptitiously through the house.

DOUG

Where is everybody?

IZZY

This is Sunday -- it's her Sabbath. She sleeps all day. It's when she channels Anton.

DOUG

The guy in Hell?

IZZY

Yeah, the guy in Hell.

DOUG

You really believe that shit?

IZZY

Of course. If I didn't I wouldn't do half the shit I do.

They burst into the waiting area. Max is gently closing the door to Rhubarb's bedroom.

He sees Izzy and tries to duck inside, but Izzy is too fast. He rushes Max, grabs him and throws him to the floor. He starts stomping on him, as if he were trying to squash a bug.

IZZY (CONT'D)

Bastard. You think you can slap me, like I'm a girl? Toss me in the alley like a piece of garbage? You son of a bitch, I'll kill you!

Max crawls into a ball and covers his face. Izzy keeps stomping him.

Doug grabs Izzy, puts him a wrist lock.

DOUG  
Are you crazy?

IZZY  
Let go of me!

Doug lets go and hands him a rope.

DOUG  
You don't have to kill him. Just  
tie him up.

Izzy stands directly over Max, untangling the rope. Max opens an eye, looks up and smashes his foot into Izzy's groin.

Izzy screams and collapses, sucking air.

Elwood puts a rag over Max's bloody face -- his eyes roll back, then close.

Izzy manages a shallow breath, uses it to cry out. Elwood sticks the rag over his face until his startled eyes close as well.

SAM  
Is he disposable?

ELWOOD  
He's garbage now. Come on, let's  
get Rhubarb.

RHUBARB'S BEDROOM

The door swings open -- Sam flicks on the light.

Rhubarb is startled awake.

RHUBARB  
Max! Max! Help!

They hold her down and place a wet rag over her face. In seconds she's snoring.

They struggle to move her heavy body out of the house, sometimes lifting, occasionally just dragging her by her arms.

They roll her down the steps and haul her across the walkway to a cargo van.

The three of them are barely able to lift her.



INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Rhubarb, asleep on a mail cart, surrounded by Jordan, Doug, Sam and Elwood.

Jordan sprinkles some water on her face. She grunts, sputters and blinks her eyes.

Jordan leans over and stares at her. He narrows his eyes, but can't penetrate the thick skull.

RHUBARB

I don't know who you people think I am, but I'm not the Antichrist.

JORDAN

The Antichrist?

DOUG

The Son of Satan. Ever hear of the Apocalypse?

RHUBARB

I'm not the Antichrist.

JORDAN

Is that what you think we think?

RHUBARB

Can I get up?

JORDAN

Help her boys.

They help her up and off the mail cart. She staggers to a chair.

RHUBARB

Aren't you the ones who threatened -  
- and I quote: 'to take down the  
beast, bring it low, and throw it  
into the lake of fire?'

JORDAN

Elwood, do we own any lakes of  
fire?

ELWOOD

No sir.

RHUBARB

You're not from the Christian  
Commandos?

JORDAN

No.

RHUBARB

God's Guerrillas?

JORDAN

No.

RHUBARB

Army of Allah?

JORDAN

No.

RHUBARB

Well, if don't want to save my soul-  
- or send it to hell -- you must  
want money.

Jordan narrows his eyes and tries again to penetrate her skull. Rhubarb squints back.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Is there something wrong with you?

He pulls back, troubled by his inability to see her brain. He digs his knuckles into his temple.

JORDAN

My wife was a great admirer of  
yours, actually. She read both of  
your books and wrote a lovely  
suicide note thanking you for the  
gift of a clear conscience.

RHUBARB

So you want revenge for your wife's  
suicide.

JORDAN

On the contrary, I should thank  
you. Saved me the trouble of  
killing her myself.

RHUBARB

So what are you -- gangsters?

JORDAN

(chuckles)

No, Miss Smith, we're not gangsters  
-- just very enthusiastic  
businessmen.

RHUBARB  
What did you do to Max?

JORDAN  
Max is fine. Would you like a  
drink?

He goes to a cabinet.

RHUBARB  
Whatever you're having.

He reaches for a bottle of Scotch. It's next to a handgun.

Rhubarb gives Doug, Elwood and Sam the once over.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)  
So who are you guys, his -- what do  
you call them -- henchmen?

DOUG  
Yeah, I'm Mugsy.  
(he points to Sam)  
This is Bruno.  
(he points to Elwood)  
And that's The Fat Man.

ELWOOD  
Hey!

RHUBARB  
And squinty over there, fetching my  
drink?

DOUG  
We call him The Brain.

JORDAN  
You have no idea.

He hands Rhubarb a drink. They click glasses before sipping.

Doug wanders over to the window, looks down at the bridge.  
The rowboat is still there, chained to a pillar. A woman  
jumps. He turns away.

RHUBARB  
So lay it on me, Brain.

Jordan pulls his chair around to face her, leans in close.

JORDAN  
I want you to do some channeling  
for us, Miss Smith. Getty.  
(MORE)

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Rockefeller. Greenspan. The best  
and the brightest dead geniuses you  
can find.

Rhubarb finishes her drink and jiggles for another.

RHUBARB  
Why didn't you just ask?

JORDAN  
I assumed you'd refuse.

RHUBARB  
I do refuse. You don't understand,  
I'm not a medium, I'm a channeler.  
I only channel Anton.

JORDAN  
Then tell Anton to talk to these  
guys.

RHUBARB  
No. Never. Why should I do anything  
for you? I don't need your money  
and I'm not afraid to die.

Jordan goes to refill her drink, but comes back with the  
handgun. He casually sticks the barrel against her temple.

JORDAN  
I hope you realize that I'm fully  
prepared to blow your brains out.

ELWOOD  
He means it, ma'am. He's crazy.

SAM  
A real loony tune.

DOUG  
Clinically insane.

JORDAN  
Hey, fuck you guys.

He waves the gun at them.

JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Fuck you all.

He jams the barrel against Rhubarbs head.

RHUBARB  
I'm not afraid to die.

She smiles and looks him in the eyes.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Trust me, I'm really not afraid to die.

He narrows his eyes and tries real hard to see her brain. And it happens. From his P.O.V., her skull appears, crumbles, then disappears, revealing a massive rhubarb-red brain. It beats like a heart, quivers in fear.

He lets out a triumphant laugh.

JORDAN

Ha! You're terrified! The Suicide Queen is afraid to die.

He cocks the gun.

Rhubarb tries to hold her smile, but she realizes it's true. The weight of the revelation breaks her composure. She flinches away from the gun and covers her face.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

What's it gonna be, lady? A little channeling or your big, fat, brain splattered against the wall. I've always wondered if brains really splatter.

He lowers the gun.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Or are you a fraud? Is this whole thing a scam?

She shakes her head.

RHUBARB

It's real, Brain. It's real.

JORDAN

Then, shall we get cracking?

RHUBARB

If I help you, will you let me go?

JORDAN

Of course. We have no reason to keep you, and I don't think we can afford to feed you.

RHUBARB

Then make it darker. I'll try, but  
no guarantees.

Doug goes to the door and dims the lights.

Jordan, Elwood and Sam take their seats.

Rhubarb closes her eyes and begins to breath deeply. After a  
while she begins to chant:

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

(slowly, rhythmically)

Anton...Anton...Anton.

JORDAN

Fuck Anton! Call Howard Hughes!  
Howard Hughes!

RHUBARB

Quiet! This is the only way I know.

She begins again.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Anton...Anton...Anton.

Slowly she falls into a deep trance and begins to speak.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Anton, it's me, Rhuella. I'm with  
friends. I hope you don't mind.

(pauses to listen)

I know, I long for that too. I'll  
be with you soon. Anton, my friends  
want to ask you some questions

(pauses to listen)

Why not? Please. Just this once. If  
you don't help, they'll kill me.

(pauses to listen)

Can't you just talk to them?

(pauses to listen)

Jordan gets up, shaking his head in disappointment.

JORDAN

Maybe you are a fake, but you just  
don't know it.

RHUBARB

Anton, these people, they think you  
aren't real. I have to prove to  
them you're real. Please, help me,  
Anton.

(MORE)

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

(pauses to listen)

What do you mean? You are real. You are.

(pauses to listen)

I don't understand. Who are you. Who's there? I don't know you. No, I don't. Who are you? Go away! Go away!

Rhubarb grips the chair. Her eyes bulge.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

I don't understand.

Jordan puts away the handgun, pours himself a drink.

JORDAN

My guess is you're a psycho, not a psychic. You've been channeling the voices in your head.

RHUBARB

You don't know what you're talking about!

JORDAN

I talk about a lot of things I don't know anything about, but I do know crazy. And you, my dear, are crazy to the core.

He turns to his managers.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Another brilliant idea, down the drain.

(to Doug)

Drop her off and get back here. I got a great idea.

INT. TRUCK - DRIVING - DAY

Rhubarb in the front seat, Doug driving.

RHUBARB

I wish I had never written the stupid book.

DOUG

I got one at home I feel the same way about.

RHUBARB

Don't you understand? I've encouraged people to kill themselves -- and it's all a lie. There is a Hell, and I'm going to burn there forever.

DOUG

You don't know that. I think all the religious books were written by crazy people.

RHUBARB

I hope so.

DOUG

Are you going to call the police?

She looks at him and shakes her head.

RHUBARB

And tell the entire world I'm a fake? Just drop me off a few blocks from my house.

DOUG

I'm sorry things happened this way. I'm sorry I was involved.

Rhubarb looks at him with a terrible, porcine sadness.

RHUBARB

I know what I look like, but it's not who I am. I feel like a little girl, living inside this huge, fleshy machine.

Doug stops the car. He leans over and kisses her pale cheek. She gets out.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Rhubarb begins plodding home. The truck drives off.

She comes within view of the house. Officers Lopez and Robert recognize her, rush over and start asking questions.

She shakes them off.

RHUBARB

I'm all right, I'm okay.



She walks up the steps. The door swings open. Max stands there, propped on a cane, cheeks bruised and swollen, head bandaged. He's missing a few teeth.

MAX

Jesus, Rhu -- you look like shit!

RHUBARB

I've been to Hell, Max.

She starts crying.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Hell.

MAX

It's OK, Rhu. Max is here. You tell me all about it. You tell me what they did to you. We'll make them suffer, I promise.

He follows her through the house, into the bedroom.

INT. RHUBARB'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rhubarb sits on the bed and starts to weep. Max takes her hand and kisses it.

RHUBARB

It's all a lie, Max.

MAX

No, don't say that.

He helps her lay down and covers her with the blanket.

RHUBARB

I don't know what's real anymore. Maybe Anton's not real. Maybe I'm not real.

MAX

They messed with your mind, Rhuella. That's all. Nothing has changed.

RHUBARB

It's a big, fat, ugly, lie, Max. And I'm a big, fat, ugly liar. They showed me that. I should be grateful.

MAX

No, they got to you, that's all. They brainwashed you. They're ruthless animals. Look what they did to me.

For the first time Rhubarb notices him. She reaches out and touches his cheek, looks at his ears and eyes, the bandages on his head. Her gaze falls to the cane across his lap.

RHUBARB

Poor Max.

She strokes his cheek.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Why?

MAX

Because I was trying to protect you, Rhu. They held me down and beat the shit out of me. I did it to protect you, to protect the truth.

RHUBARB

But it's not the truth. It's a lie, Max. I tried to contact Anton, and, something happened. They think I've been channeling myself all these years.

MAX

They drugged you, didn't they?

RHUBARB

Just something to make me sleep. So they could kidnap me.

MAX

Did you eat anything? Drink anything?

RHUBARB

They gave me some alcohol.

MAX

Who knows what kind of drugs they put in it? Who knows what they gave you when you were asleep?

RHUBARB

Yes, but it doesn't explain...I'm just so confused.

MAX

You were drugged, kidnapped and tortured. You just need a good sleep, Rhu. You need to eat. You'll feel better, I promise. We have a big show tomorrow night. I didn't cancel it because I had faith we would find you.

Rhubarb closes her eyes.

MAX (CONT'D)

Will you be up for it? We're counting on you, Rhu.

RHUBARB

I can do it.

MAX

That's my girl.

He kisses her forehead.

MAX (CONT'D)

We got one of the kidnapppers, and we're working him over now. But I need you to tell me what you know.

Rhubarb nods her head.

MAX (CONT'D)

Who did this to you, Rhuella? Tell me who did this to you.

Rhubarb shakes her head and lets out a sob.

MAX (CONT'D)

Tell me, Rhuella, who was it?

Rhubarb covers her face and speaks through splayed fingers.

RHUBARB

There was four.

MAX

Four men?

Rhubarb nods her head.

MAX (CONT'D)

Do you remember their names?

RHUBARB  
 (struggles to recall)  
 There was Mugsy. And Bruno. The Fat  
 Man. And The Brain.

Max kisses her hand.

MAX  
 Good girl. Now get some sleep. You  
 have a big show tomorrow.

He gets up, grabs a cane and hobbles to the door.

MAX (CONT'D)  
 We'll get them all, Rhuella. We'll  
 make them pay.

He opens the door.

RHUBARB  
 Max?

MAX  
 Yes?

RHUBARB  
 Don't hurt Mugsy, okay?

MAX  
 I won't touch him.

In the dark room, alone, Rhubarb breathes deeply and calls  
 out, soft and slow:

RHUBARB  
 Annnton...Annnton...Annnton...

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Izzy sits hunched over in the police car, coddling his groin,  
 flanked by Lopez and Robert. Max gets in.

IZZY  
 I want some assurances. I want  
 immunity. And I want some money,  
 too.

Max jams his cane between Izzy's legs. Izzy grunts and  
 presses his knees together.

MAX  
 I will personally rip your balls  
 off and make you eat them raw.

IZZY  
(to Lopez)  
Don't let him hurt me.

Lopez jabs his elbow into Izzy's face.

LOPEZ  
Oh, sorry, I was just stretching.

ROBERT  
I sorta feel a stretch coming on  
myself.

MAX  
Tell us what you know about Mugsy,  
Bruno, Fat Man and The Brain.

IZZY  
What? Who?

Max whacks him with the cane.

MAX  
Don't fuck with me!

IZZY  
I don't know...

Max whacks him again.

IZZY (CONT'D)  
Stop! Wait, okay, oh shit, there is  
a fat guy -- Elwood, and The  
Brain's got to be Jordan Greye,  
he's the leader. And two other  
guys, Doug and Sam. But I don't  
know about Mugsy or Bruno, I don't  
know.

MAX  
You know where they are?

IZZY  
Probably at the headquarters. Down  
by the river.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Izzy, pushed from the police car, tumbles to the ground. He's still handcuffed. The Two Guards that got pepper sprayed grab him and drag him inside.

Sirens blaring, the police car speeds away, followed by the rhubarb-decorated Cadillac.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Doug enters the boardroom. Jordan and the rest of the team are waiting.

JORDAN  
You dumped her in the river, right?

DOUG  
Not exactly. You said drop her off.

JORDAN  
Yeah. A cliff, a river. Do I have to spell out everything?

SAM  
You think she'll squeal?

Doug shrugs.

DOUG  
She thinks she's been a real bad girl. I don't know what she'll do. I think we should get out of here, though. I just came back to tell you I quit.

Jordan bangs the table.

JORDAN  
Bullshit. No one quits. You're in this. You're in deep. Don't think you can just walk away.

Elwood stands up shakes hands with Doug.

ELWOOD  
Good luck, Mugsy.

JORDAN  
What are you babbling about?  
Elwood?

ELWOOD  
I mean we're all quitting, Jordan.

Sam squirms and looks away.

ELWOOD (CONT'D)

(to Sam)

Hey, let's just get it over with.

SAM

This show is over, Jordan.  
Cancelled. Time to pull the plug.

ELWOOD

The company's bankrupt, and none of  
your crackpot schemes can dig it  
out.

JORDAN

Traitor! You're stinking traitors!  
All of you!

He presses his knuckles to his temple and screams. Doug opens the door and faces the room.

DOUG

I'll say one thing: you guys are  
underpaid.

He slips out and runs full speed down the corridor.

Jordan's staggers to the window, digging his knuckles into his head. He looks out and sees the bridge, and not far, a police car, lights flashing.

As he's staring, the sun drops behind the west side of the building, turning his window into a mirror. His reflection appears. He stares at it.

From his P.O.V., the skin grows taut, pulls tight around the nose, cheekbones and forehead. Then it stretches too far, cracks into dozens of pieces that shrivel up, revealing muscles, blood, veins, and finally -- his skull. He narrows his eyes and looks hard. The skull begins to vibrate, then explodes into fragments.

His mouth drops open. He stares at the reflection in horror.

His brain is only half a lobe, petrified, shriveled as a prune.

Sam and Elwood watch him, staring, frozen to his own reflection.

He doesn't even move when Lopez, Robert and Max enter the room. Sam and Elwood raise their arms in surrender. The cops start to cuff them.

Max hobbles over to Elwood.

MAX

You must be The Fat Man. Who's  
Bruno? Who's Mugsy? Who's The  
Brain?

Elwood points his chin at Sam.

ELWOOD

That's Bruno. Mugsy's not here.

Lopez cuffs Jordan and leads him to the door. He shuffles  
along, slack-faced, open mouthed, catatonic.

ELWOOD (CONT'D)

And that, believe it or not, is The  
Brain.

Max looks him over, stares into his blank eyes.

MAX

Now who wants to tell me where  
Mugsy lives?

INT. DOUG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Doug throws open the door to their apartment.

DOUG

Get the baby, let's go! Plan G -  
Get The Hell Out Of Here. Police  
are coming. We gotta split, now.

No answer. He checks out the apartment. No one.

He finds the Rhubarb Book, and underneath, a note. He reads  
it.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Oh, shit. Shit!

He sticks the note in his jacket, goes to the closet and  
grabs a duffle bag.

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

Gloria carries Hope, wrapped in a shawl.

GLORIA

(crying)

Such a good baby, such a little  
angel.



She walks to the center of the bridge and looks across the water.

She stands the baby up on the railing. Hope smiles and gurgles.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
I guess you'll have to go first,  
sweetheart. Don't worry, mommy's  
gonna be right behind you.

Hope reaches down and takes hold of Gloria's face, looks at her with serious eyes. Gloria kisses the little hands. She presses them about her face, wetting them with her tears.

Hope grabs her fingers and squeezes them.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Let go, sweetheart. Just let go.  
There's no life for you here.

The baby squeezes tighter.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
You can't hold on forever with  
those little baby fingers.

Gloria yanks her hands away -- the baby totters backward over the railing --

Gloria reaches out in a panic and grabs her just in time. She holds her tight, terrified at what she almost did.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

She hugs and consoles the baby. She feels only relief, and love.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
I guess that's the only way any of  
us can hold on, isn't it? With  
little baby fingers. All we can do  
is hold on as tight as we can and --  
hope.

She wraps the baby in her shawl and starts to leave.

TWO MEN block her way.

One has a tattoo of a skull with rhubarb crossbones.

TATTOO MAN

We watched you tryin' to throw that  
baby in the river.

The other man has the word Hellbound tattooed on his  
forehead.

HELLBOUND

You are not a fit mother.

Gloria backs away, clutches Hope. They come closer.

TATTOO MAN

You're not supposed to throw babies  
in the river!

HELLBOUND

Yeah, don't want to waste it.

They both laugh.

TATTOO MAN

You figure we can sell the baby?

HELLBOUND

We could try. If not, we can cook  
it.

They laugh again and move closer to Gloria. She backs up  
against the rail.

GLORIA

How about we make a deal, boys. I  
have some money, at home. You can  
follow me home and I'll give you  
the money.

The two men eye her suspiciously.

TATTOO MAN

You're lying.

GLORIA

(seductive)

I'll let you both fuck me right  
here, if you want.

HELLBOUND

We was gonna do that anyway.

GLORIA

Let me just put the baby down.  
Here. That's good. Now, I'm all  
yours.

She opens her blouse.

Tattoo Man whoops and rubs his hands together.

TATTOO MAN

There is a God, and he just gave us  
a nice piece of ass.

He reaches over and grabs Gloria's breast, then bends down with an open mouth.

Gloria raises her arm and swings her elbow down quick and hard, cracking his neck.

Tattoo Man howls and crumbles to the ground. He lays there in a ball, whimpering, blood oozing out of his mouth.

HELLBOUND

Bitch!

He pulls a switchblade and snaps it open. He slices the air with a few practice stokes.

HELLBOUND (CONT'D)

I'm going to kill you and then  
slice up that baby!

He lunges.

Gloria turns -- the knife plunges into her shoulder.

A gun fires.

Hellbound falls back against the railing, spins over it and falls into the river.

Gloria slumps to the ground, switchblade sticking out of her shoulder. Doug stoops down to check her out.

DOUG

How bad?

Gloria shrugs and winces at the pain.

Doug steps over to the first man, turns him over with his boot. The man's eyes are flickering white, his breath shallow, mouth drooling blood. Doug picks him up and throws him into the river.

He turns to Gloria again and removes the knife.

DOUG (CONT'D)

That must hurt like Hell, but it's  
really not bad. Can you stand?

GLORIA

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. We've got to call the police, right? We just killed two guys. It was self-defense.

He gets Hope and they began moving back to the car. He kisses the baby, kisses Gloria, kisses the baby again.

DOUG

Not the best time for the police, Gloria. I'm a wanted man. Kidnapping. The Rhubies are searching for my ass, too.

GLORIA

Jesus, we're a couple of fuck-ups.

DOUG

It's Fort Benny or bust.

GLORIA

I love you, Doug.

DOUG

I love you too. We have to hot-wire some cars along the way. We'll stay at Fort Benny for a year or ten, maybe come back if things cool off.

GLORIA

I'm sorry I'm such a lousy survivalist, Doug. I'll try to learn, I swear I will.

DOUG

Gloria, you left your homeland with nothing. You crossed the ocean in a rickety little boat, survived a shipwreck, lost your entire family, even your child. And you just fought off two men! You've done everything you had to do to stay alive. You know what that makes you?

GLORIA

Pathetic?

DOUG

No. It makes you a survivor. Hell, I'm a weekend warrior compared to you. You're the real thing.

INT. RHUBARB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rhubarb lays under silk sheets decorated with little pictures of rhubarb stalks.

Max sits on the bed and watches her. She breaths through her mouth and begins to speak.

RHUBARB

Anton, I am so unhappy.

(pauses to listen)

Yes, the pain. The shame.

(pauses to listen)

But I'm afraid. I'm so afraid.

(pauses to listen)

You never called me princess before.

(pauses to listen)

My father used to call me princess.

He used to tell me not to be afraid. That it wouldn't hurt.

(pauses to listen)

Is he there? Is he in Hell with you?

(pauses to listen)

I don't care anymore, Anton. I don't care. Let someone else take a turn.

Max rushes over and starts shaking her.

MAX

No! Wake up, Rhu! Wake up!

Rhubarb opens her eyes. Her expression is cold and calculating. The tone of her voice hard and sharp.

RHUBARB

Max Black.

She looks at her hands, whips off the sheets.

RHUBARB (CONT'D)

Shit! It's worse than I thought, the stupid cow.

MAX

Rhu...

RHUBARB

I know all about you, Max Black. It's time you learned about me.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - DAY

Fort Benny, covered in snow.

On a tarp the size of a living room, Hope runs in circles.

Gloria squats next to a laptop, swollen belly obvious.

Hope toddles next to her, stops too late and falls face down in the snow. Doug picks her up and sets her back on the tarp.

DOUG

What's the latest?

GLORIA

Well, it's official -- your company is out of business.

DOUG

It's official -- I don't care.

GLORIA

Your ex-boss had a brain tumor the size of a grapefruit removed. Your buddies are all in jail, and, oh yeah, civilization hasn't collapsed.

DOUG

It will, it has to. I still think we left just in time.

Gloria comes over and hugs him.

GLORIA

I do too.

DOUG

You'll see. There's probably millions of us right now, on mountains, or islands, or in the middle of nowhere, just waiting for the world to end.

GLORIA

And when it does, then what? We'll all just crawl out of our holes, greet each other and get along?

DOUG

I hope so.

The wind whips snow into their faces, blinding the three of them for just a moment. Hope shrieks and begins to cry.

GLORIA

We better get her in before those  
tears freeze.

She picks up the laptop and takes Hope inside.

Doug stands there for a while, surveying the blinding white  
landscape. Not a sign of life.

Gloria opens the door. It looks warm and cozy inside. She  
gives Doug an inviting smile. He enters the cabin and closes  
the door.

From outside, the cabin looks tiny and fragile atop the vast  
mountain.

Only sound of the wind and the snow and three deadbolts  
locking.

FADE OUT.