

DIRTY CITY

An L.A. Crime Story in Two Acts
by Ken Love

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CHARACTERS

MARTHA

White female. Mid-twenties.

PETE

White male. Early twenties. Martha's brother.

MARION

Black Male. Twenties.

CAT MAN

Black/Japanese American male. Thirties.

BILLY POPE

White male. An Australian. Thirties.

TRINA

Hispanic female. Mid-Twenties. Billy's girlfriend.

DEE

Black female. Early twenties.

*Note: Actors playing BILLY POPE and MARION also double as
DETECTIVE ONE and DETECTIVE TWO as well as DIRTY
COP ONE and DIRTY COP TWO*

PLACE AND TIME

Los Angeles. Early to mid-1980's.

*“A Spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down
The medicine go down
The medicine go down
Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down
In a most delightful way.”*

for Asia & Chris

ACT ONE

(Darkness. Lights rise slowly on Martha sitting in an interrogation room as two detectives grill her)

DETECTIVE ONE

You know what we want. Now be a good girl and give it to us.

MARTHA

You sound like a fucking pimp.

DETECTIVE TWO

And you've gotta nasty mouth.

DETECTIVE ONE

You're not helping yourself.

MARTHA

That's the thing – I don't know how. Not when I know absolutely NOTHING!

DETECTIVE ONE

Quit feeding me that. You're white and over twenty-one. Which means you're not stupid.

MARTHA

But I don't know anything. I've never even heard of this . . . person.

DETECTIVE ONE

In other words, you're in the habit of sleeping with people you don't know?

MARTHA

I did not sleep with him! I mean . . . Just let me go.

DETECTIVE TWO

Go? Are for real?

DETECTIVE ONE

You're in the system, honey. Your ass is marked for life.

MARTHA

Then let me make my call.

DETECTIVE ONE

Co-operate with us, and maybe –

MARTHA

I swear to God – I swear on my life . . .

DETECTIVE TWO

What do you know about the Cat Man?

MARTHA

Nothing – I mean . . .

DETECTIVE ONE

What?

MARTHA

He'll kill me!

DETECTIVE ONE

We can protect you.

(Martha scoffs)

Something funny?

MARTHA

Yeah: I'm white, over twenty-one and not stupid. Which means I didn't just prance off some avocado farm, alright?

DETECTIVE ONE

If you can give us anything on the Cat Man, maybe I'll . . .

MARTHA

Just let me make my call.

DETECTIVE ONE

Did you hear anything we said?

MARTHA

LET ME MAKE MY GODDAMNED CALL!

(Detectives fade. Pete enters and offers Martha cocaine from a mirror. She inhales both lines through a rolled hundred-dollar

bill. She pours and swallows a shot of vodka)

Early one morning, about four, maybe five AM, I think, while making the slow descent from a coke induced high . . . I noticed my face floating in the mirror . . . and nothing else! Nothing underneath! Just my head, suspended in two-dimensional glass! In “Kings Row” Ronald Reagan, seeing that his legs had been amputated, yelled – *Where’s the rest of me?* I stared at my head, amorphous and in orbit – with nothing underneath! WHERE THE FUCK WAS THE REST OF ME?

(Martha laughs)

Once upon a time, “Mary Poppins” was my favorite movie. Dad took me and Pete to see it when we were kids.

(He offers her two more lines, which she also inhales)

PETE

I hated it.

MARTHA

I know. You squirmed and whined through the whole damn thing.

PETE

Shut up!

(Martha laughs)

MARTHA

Years later, I still feel like flying over the dirty city, the smog and the wind filling my opened umbrella . . . as I fly. Just like Mary Poppins.

(Martha pours another shot of vodka and drinks. She makes two more lines of coke and inhales. Fade on Pete)

We auditioned for a production of “A Midsummer Nights Dream” in high school. A girl I knew, Eva Simmons . . . she got to play Titania. I was her understudy.

(She lights a cigarette and smokes)

Lucky for me, Eva would end up smitten with a very bad cold just before we opened. So, I'd play Titania, my first lead role! Ever!

(She pours another shot and drinks)

My first part before the camera was a local commercial for a fast-food restaurant. I'd just turned sixteen. Sid was thirty-seven, I think, at the time, with four "Galaxy Chicken" joints in the area. A fifth was opening and he wanted to make a splashy announcement with a commercial. Sid was known in the community. He coached little league, was a Kiwanis Club member, and there'd even been talk of a plan to run for a seat on the city council. He also happened to have a daughter with whom I went to school, and who was also a fellow member of the drama club. Which meant Sid knew me or knew of me.

He'd seen me in "Midsummer". Later, he asked if I wanted to do a TV commercial. Sure! Great! WOW! This should be exciting!

Well, on the day of the shoot, just after we wrapped, I had to excuse myself to the bathroom. And as I stepped out, Sid happened to be standing at the door, sporting a pathetic smirk that looked like a scar just ripped on his face. He'd already sent the crew and everyone else home, so with nothing to come between him and his dirty shenanigans, he pushed me back inside and pinned me to the wall, then shut the door with his foot. I could feel him unzipping his pants. For some crazy reason, as young as I was, I was able to hold onto myself well enough to think. When I could see that his fly was opened, I pushed inside with my hand and grabbed his cock, then dug my nails into the flesh. I told him if he knew what was good for him, he wouldn't scream. And I swore to God that if he didn't leave me alone – I'D RIP IT OFF!

Needless to say, I scared the shit out of him. He was a good boy and backed off. And for a days work, I took home a check for three hundred bucks. I think I scared myself, too, 'cause right after, I went home and puked until I felt disemboweled. As insane as it sounds, though, thanks to Sid, not only did I shoot my first TV commercial, but I was also acclimating myself for the predators that who would, as sure as night consumes the day, infest the azure waters of Tinsel Town.

(Pete re-enters)

PETE

I decided to stay in San Diego for a while, where my sister and I were raised, and – after graduating from high school – go to UCSD where I’d major in philosophy. I was drawn to the existentialists – to Nietzsche, Sartre, and the like. I’d been smoking dope since my teens. Sporadically – if there is such a thing where using dope is concerned. Cornered by this uncompromising method of thought, I needed a refuge. Which meant I’d have to smoke (and drink) more – more than I’d be able to get my hands on. It didn’t help. The darkness lingered like the unrelenting gloom of nuclear fallout. I was so distressed that one of the maids at our dorm took notice, a Hispanic woman. She came to me and said she’d been a practicing Christian since she’d been a girl and handed me the King James Bible. Then told me to read the New Testament, to read the Gospels, as well as the teachings of Jesus.

I’d been so miserable that I immediately did as asked. But just as I was about to take the dive head-first into the noxious “church” thing – Marion emerged from the past and back into my life!

(Marion enters singing a 1960’s R&B tune. Martha rises, and they embrace)

MARTHA

You were my first real boyfriend.

PETE

He’s your stepbrother, Martha.

MARTHA

No, he was my first boyfriend.

(He sings, kisses her, then notices Pete reading the Bible)

MARION

I know you ain’t trying to peruse the Good Book, cuz.

PETE

What if I am?

MARION

I been knowing Pete for a long time. We done smoked a-plenty dope and raised a-plenty hell. Back in the day, we courted the

devils bitch something hard. And anybody who's been puttin' it up the devils woman's pooter shooter that much ain't one to read nobodies Good Book.

PETE

People change. Besides, maybe you don't know me as well as you think.

MARION

Put that Bible-book down, man. And let's smoke some of this gold I just copped.

PETE

C'mon, I'm trying to kick.

MARTHA

Pete, what's wrong?

PETE

Whatever it is, I'll deal with it. Now leave me alone.

MARION

Cuz . . .

PETE

Marion, I'm busy.

MARION

Take a break.

PETE

When I'm ready.

MARTHA

Little brother, you look tense. Out of it.

MARION

You been reading that Nietzsche shit again?

PETE

Not since I started reading this.

MARTHA

Would you like a girl? I mean, do you need to get laid?

PETE

SHIT! MARTHA! PLEASE! Don't talk to me like that. You're my sister!

(Marion laughs)

Just let me alone. Please.

MARION

Listen, cuz –

MARTHA

Petey . . .

PETE

WILL YOU GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME ALREADY
AND LET ME READ MY GODDAMN BIBLE?

(Silence. After a moment, they all
laugh)

MARION

I knew it. He ain't ready for no church.

MARTHA

Poor little Petey.

MARION

Roll with me for a little bit.

PETE

Marion . . .

MARION

C'mon, man! Let's go for a ride.

PETE

Where?

MARION

No place particular. We'll just ride.

MARTHA

What about me? And what about that party you're taking me to tonight?

MARION

I ain't forgot about you, Sistah Martha. I'll swing back and get up with you later. You come on to this gig, too, Pete, as a matter of fact.

PETE

I don't think so. These days, I can't be around any of that stuff.

MARION

Gon and come to this gig with me and your sister, man. Some treacherous muthafuckers might be lurking about the joint. Ergo, you'll wanna tag along just to keep your peeps on your sis, right?

MARTHA

Later that night, we'd all go to a party where I'd get to meet one of those treacherous fucks, a part black-part Asian pretty boy who called himself the Cat Man.

(Cat Man enters, pours a shot of Martha's vodka and drinks. He kisses her, then exits)

Marion really was my stepbrother. As well as my very first lover.

(Marion begins to sing another sixties R&B song)

Oh, yeah! Sing to me, baby. SING!

PETE

Damn! You're good. Have you ever thought about –

MARION

No dice, bruh. The world's got too many singing niggers as it is.

PETE

You'll remain the singing dope peddler instead.

MARTHA

The Gene Autry of dope dealers.

MARION

And get rich doing it.

(Fade on Marion as he sings)

MARTHA

If only you'd lived.

(Silence. Fade on Pete)

Our dad had an affair with a black woman when Pete and I were kids. Her name was Nona, Marion's mom. Dad was a Naval officer whose ship was home ported in San Diego. For too often, he'd be away from home and out at sea on his ship. Every two years, he'd be gone for a whole six months on an overseas tour of the Western Pacific. Lucky for us, he finally got sick of it and requested shore duty. They gave him an office job on base at the Naval Station. It felt great to have dad ashore and at home. For good, this time.

(She pours a shot of vodka and drinks, then lights another cigarette)

He took the family to the movies on weekends. It was our ritual, like going to church on Sunday for some people, I guess. I fell in love with "Mary Poppins" the first time I saw it. And I made dad take me back again, seven times, as if I needed to convince myself of something eternal and pure. I'd memorize all the songs. And dad would even get me the soundtrack album for Christmas.

Inspired, I would make the decision to be an actress. And one day fly over the world and everything in it on an opened umbrella. Just like Mary Poppins.

PETE

Dad liked comedies.

MARTHA

He loved them.

PETE

And we loved sitting in the theater and hearing him laugh.

MARTHA

You'd feel such contentment when he laughed.

PETE

All was right with the world . . . for as long as dad could laugh.

(Pete takes a swing of Martha's vodka from the bottle)

MARTHA

I knew something terrible was up when mom stopped going with us to the movies on weekends. She'd stopped speaking to dad. And would inevitably take it upon herself to treat myself and Pete like a couple of unruly brats, which we weren't. I recall the first time she'd hit Pete, for nothing out of the ordinary – not really. He'd asked some innocuous kids question. And she slapped him. Little Petey couldn't even bring himself to cry, for being so put off

One day, mom would leave us. Dad was alone at the breakfast table with his coffee that morning. He said that mom was gone. Then he gave us the reason why she'd left. And the cause of her pain and unhappiness for the past month. And how he absolutely refused to allow her to take us away. She'd just have to visit from time to time. Then he told us all we needed to know about Nona.

(Pete is now riding with Marion in his red Cadillac convertible)

PETE

A red Caddie. Typical.

MARION

Fuck you.

PETE

C'mon, man –

MARION

I know. You's repeating something my mom's told your ass about niggers.

PETE

Actually, she used the word *black*.

MARION

Don't make no never mind. The sentiment's the same, right? Niggers love red and they love their Cadillacs.

PETE

Something like that.

MARION

If you won't my step, I'd smoke your swine ass.

PETE

No, you wouldn't.

MARION

Keep pushing it, whitebread.

PETE

You're no killer, man. There's not a murderous bone of the 206 you got in your body.

MARION

Don't kid yourself.

PETE

Alright, who have you ever killed?

MARION

None of your damn business. Besides, it ain't nobody you ever rubbed elbows with.

PETE

Good.

(Marion sings a few bars of an R&B tune)

MARION

How serious are you 'bout this Bible shit?

PETE

As serious as I need to be. There's something gnawing my ass, man. And I've got to stop it before it kills me. Or, worse.

MARION

In other words, life and shit got you fucked up?

PETE

If you wanna put it that way.

MARION

I told you – I can fix all that.

PETE

No, Marion. The most you'd do is make me blind. That's it. You are a purveyor of contraband, my brother. You ride high with the

thought that you give, but the truth is you do nothing but take.
Until the eyesight is gone.

MARION

Damn, Pete! You sound like some half-assed preacher.

PETE

I'm serious.

MARION

Jesus Christ!

PETE

Don't swear, bruh.

MARION

Naw, I'll tell you how it is: I'm gon have to take your holy-fied ass
to the highest mountain top and tempt you.

PETE

Oh, you know that story?

MARION

I know of it.

PETE

You're saying you're the devil?

MARION

No, what I'm saying is that I got to intervene and save you.

PETE

I think you got it backwards.

MARION

Okay, maybe *save* ain't the correct verb. I think what you need is
what every black man starves for and values even more than his
next breath.

PETE

But I ain't black –

MARION

Liberation!

PETE

From what?

MARION

Of what. Which would be your *mind*, bruh. I'm fixin' to free your white, sorry self from all that holiness. It ain't nothing but another kind of jail, the way I see it. That shit has had the black man in bondage from the time your people visited the dark part of the African continent, then dumped his black ass on this North American mud pile. And now it's got you.

(Pete laughs)

Laugh on, but when I get through, you gon be humping the devils daughter instead of his wife.

PETE

Sure.

MARION

Alright. Take a look to your right.

(Dee appears, a beautiful young black girl. She wears a tight fitting mini dress, high heels, et al. Her hair is set 1980's style)

PETE

You ain't serious – you're gonna bribe me with a whore?

MARION

She ain't hooking, man. She just robbed a bank.

PETE

Robbed a – WHAT?

MARION

Her and her boyfriend. They was making the break when the heat showed up. The boyfriend got nailed. She got away.

(Dee steps toward them)

Get in.

(She does so)

DEE

Wha' chu think?

MARION

Oh, yeah! I see Trina did your hair good, girl. You something to look at now.

DEE

I was always something to look at.

MARION

Before you was just something to fuck, you mean.

DEE

Niggah fuck *you*!

(Marion laughs)

MARION

I got somebody I want you to meet. This here is my stepbrother, Pete.

PETE

Hi.

MARION

He's gon fall up in this party with us tonight. And when we do, I want you to wrap your fine self on his arm like the serpent did Eve when he winked at her.

DEE

That won't be no problem. Cute as he is.

PETE

Please.

MARION

She paid your ass a complement, man.

PETE

What of it?

(Dee abruptly kisses Pete)

Alright, thank you.

DEE

Fuck all that. You know your ass want a piece of this.

PETE

Awfully abrupt, aren't we?

MARION

What she's trying to say is – all this and more can be yours –

PETE

If?

MARION

Come into business with me.

PETE

As?

MARION

My managing partner. My network is growing. And I need somebody well versed in “Reaganomics” to look after my money. Preferably *white*.

PETE

Then you need to dig up an accountant, or an MBA. I'm a philosophy major.

MARION

I know – I know. You done read your Nietzsche – your *God is Dead*, and all that other bullshit –

PETE

And got totally fucked up by all of it, too.

MARION

But you done also read your Adam Smith and your Milton Friedman.

PETE

That don't make you a businessman. In fact, it doesn't mean jack.

MARION

I need help with my operation, Pete. Now I can slide you a G a week to start.

PETE

A thousand a week!?

MARION

I told you – my network is expanding.

(Dee kisses and fondles him)

What's more . . . you get all the perks. You'll cease to know what unhappiness is 'cause you won't give a shit. Which is your problem.

PETE

And I guess this is the part where I'm supposed to say *get thee behind me*.

MARION

And if I did, all I'd do is kick you in your swine ass.

PETE

I'm gonna pray for you, Marion.

MARION

You bet' not.

PETE

When we got to the party, Marion and my sister went in while Dee kept me in the car for a while longer.

MARION

Yeah, she my little black mamba. But gon and take her, cuz. You's the one needs corrupting. Not me.

(Fade on Marion)

PETE

Marion had driven by and saw Dee crouched behind an abandoned car with a gym bag full of money. He stopped and offered her a lift. And, as she got wise to what he was about, told her story. He drove her to his flat and screwed her like a man with one minute to breathe. Then he let her shower and change into some clothes he'd taken back from an ex-girlfriend after he'd thrown her out. Dressed and powdered, he dropped her at Trina's Salon to get her hair done. Then instructed her to wait outside for him when she'd finished.

What's your name?

DEE

My name is Dee.

(She kisses him, then moves to
fellate him as lights fade)

(Martha appears)

MARTHA

When mom left, dad would introduce us to Nona. After a while, she'd move in, then marry my dad. All without the presence of Marion. It'd be a little over a year before we'd finally get to see him.

PETE

I'd listen to Nona talk to dad about her *estranged* son. And how difficult it all was to know that your child – who had brains and so much potential – was throwing his life away selling drugs. And how afraid she'd become of him.

(Marion appears)

MARION

My own moms – scared of her only child. Ain't it a bitch?

MARTHA

Nona had worked at the diner which was just outside the main gate of the base. After I'd grown up a little, dad would confide that – from the beginning – a very special and warm place had opened in his heart for this woman. There'd been a sweetness about her that mom would never be able to touch. It hurt so to hear my own father speak in such a way about my mother. Yet, it was gratifying, I guess, in the fact that he trusted his daughter enough to expose such thoughts.

PETE

That Sunday afternoon when we first got to meet her, she went to the movies with us. We saw a comedy. And I still hear her laughing – laughing with my dad. Right then, I knew everything would be okay, 'cause I was listening to my dad laughing with his new girlfriend at the movies.

MARTHA

Before mom had split, during the week, dad would leave home earlier than usual to make it to the diner when there weren't too many customers, so he'd have plenty of time to talk to Nona. He would come to need and love the smile she gave him whenever he stepped through the door. Within a week, she told him about Marion, whom she'd had out of wedlock . . .

(Marion and Pete are sitting on a curb at night, sharing a bottle of cheap liquor)

MARION

You know what? The whole world and all the muthafuckers in it would be better off if everybody – EVERYBODY'D just quit fucking to procreate and take to cloning. That's right – CLONING! Leave the bearing and the raising and the heartache and the heartburn of families and kids to science. Let science and genetic engineering and, for that matter, social engineering deal with this shit and leave all us mortal muthafuckers alone to fuck till will get silly in the head.

PETE

If you're referring to what your mother said . . .

MARION

She told your pops she was afraid of my ass?

PETE

I think she's scared of what you might do.

MARION

You saying there's a difference?

PETE

I . . . I don't know.

MARTHA

Marion began to stop by every so often to say hello to his mom. And dad made it his business to be with her while he was there. Just in case.

MARION

Your pops don't like me.

PETE

Dad's concerned, Marion. That's all.

MARION

Why can't he bring himself to even speak to me?

PETE

Maybe he's cautious.

MARION

Or maybe he don't like niggers.

MARTHA

It didn't take long, though, for Marion to warm to Pete. Inevitably, he ceased to worry with those futile attempts at courting his mothers good graces. He would now latch on to Pete. As if he were a brother. Which he was. Kind of.

MARION

Try this. It's gold. From Mexico.

(Pete takes the joint and tokes)

PETE

Damn!

MARION

I know.

(Pete takes another hit)

Like I say – let science deal with the bullshit of procreation and the human dilemma. And let human beings reduce themselves to good times and their decedent nature.

PETE

You're a hedonist.

MARION

No, I'm a prophet.

PETE

No. I'll tell you what it is: you're either full of shit . . .or, you're high.

MARION

Fuck you, whitebread. And pass that damn joint.

(Marion takes the joint and smokes)

PETE

I dig you, man.

MARION

And I you, step-bruh. Now, listen – you be cool, and I’ll let you hang with me. I’ll even introduce you to some of my partners in crime.

PETE

Sweet.

MARTHA

Pete would go to college and fall out of touch with Marion. They wouldn’t see each other until the end of his sophomore year when he’d convince Pete to come to L.A. and go into the dope business with him. And quit college.

PETE

I can’t tell dad. He cannot know that I quit school. I swear . . . it’d kill him.

(Pete recedes into the darkness)

MARTHA

At the party, I tried like a junkie in need to latch onto Marion’s arm. But it was clear that the last thing he wanted was to chill, even at a party. He broke from me, then busied himself with two other brothers to talk business, while I attempted with utter futility to avoid the Cat Man.

(Cat Man approaches)

CAT MAN

What’s this? You trying to avoid me?

MARTHA

I’m with someone.

CAT MAN

You know who I am?

MARTHA

I have heard of you, but –

CAT MAN

There's chicks woulda broke five or seven bones to get next to this. What's your problem?

MARTHA

I'm with someone.

CAT MAN

You from around here?

MARTHA

I live in Los Angeles, yes.

CAT MAN

How come I ain't never seen you around? And wha' chu doin' up in here by yourself?

MARTHA

I told you, I'm –

CAT MAN

Ain't you with nobody?

(Silence. Martha takes out a cigarette. Cat Man lights it for her)

MARTHA

I see your entourage of female escorts are getting restive.

CAT MAN

Now that's insulting. They ain't escorts. They're very close associates of mine.

MARTHA

Is that why they watch me with such bad intent?

CAT MAN

Don't worry 'bout them bitches. They just looking out for me.

MARTHA

Or, to see if I measure up? Oh, that's your job, isn't it?

CAT MAN
What's your name?

MARTHA
I'd rather not say.

CAT MAN
Why not?

MARTHA
It's not your business.

CAT MAN
I ain't trying to get personal. Anyway, what's in a name?

MARTHA
My name is Martha.

CAT MAN
Martha? Damn! What is something as fine as you doing with a old womans name?

MARTHA
Ask my mother.

CAT MAN
Martha!

MARTHA
Look – fuck you! Okay?

(She rises. Cat Man stops her)

CAT MAN
WHOA! Slow down, baby doll. Slow down, now. That's the way.
How 'bout a drink?

MARTHA
I'm fine.

CAT MAN
I know that. Now wha' chu drinkin'?

MARTHA
Would you please leave me alone? *I'm with someone.*

Anybody I know? CAT MAN

Does it matter? MARTHA

It might. CAT MAN

(Marion enters)

Well, look-ee here! If it ain't the Cat! MARION

My man! CAT MAN

(They hug)

What's this? You trying to tap my woman? MARION

Your . . . ? This you, man? CAT MAN

Every inch of skin. You damn right! MARION

Well, I'll be mutha . . . CAT MAN

Could we go now? MARTHA

We just rolled up in here. What's your problem? MARION

I hope I did nothing to make the lady feel uncomfortable. CAT MAN

This half-Jap nigger didn't scare you, did he? MARION

Can we at least go and sit somewhere else? MARTHA

CAT MAN

On the other hand, I just love it when I can put a bitch on the run.

MARTHA

Excuse me?

MARION

Chill, sweet meat. Cat Mans words are worse than his bite.

(Cat Man laughs)

Would you believe I once worked for this wanna-be thug?

CAT MAN

Gave you a scholarship, matter fact.

MARION

Which I turned into the start of my career.

CAT MAN

And didn't take long for the young nigger to establish himself, seeing as I taught him everything he know.

MARTHA

The Cat Man was a big-time mover of heroin, probably the biggest in Los Angeles. Wherever he went, he was accompanied by a gaggle of gorgeous women, sort of like Hugh Hefner without the pajamas. He acquired his moniker from a murder he'd committed when he was only fourteen: a rival gang member had threatened his mother. Harvey Allen Willis, his name at the time, mauled him to death with the claw end of a hammer – the long, deep gouges in the flesh like the marks left by a big cat.

Hence the name – Cat Man.

MARION

Look here, we gon run to where this food is at. I'll get up with you later.

CAT MAN

Do. And let me know when that woman on your arm done wore out her welcome. She can always find a home on my doorstep.

MARION

He something, ain't he?

(They exit. Lights rise on Dee and Pete)

PETE

What are you gonna do with all that money?

DEE

I don't know. I ain't thought on it much.

PETE

How much was the take?

DEE

I ain't counted it yet.

PETE

Don't you think you should?

DEE

What's the rush? That money ain't going nowhere.

PETE

I suppose not.

DEE

All this was Floyd's idea. I don't claim to know shit 'bout robbing nobody's bank. That was Floyd's department.

PETE

Floyd being your boyfriend?

DEE

That's right. I didn't do nothing but hold the gun on them folks. He was the one that got the money.

PETE

So, Floyd planned the whole thing?

DEE

Um hm.

PETE

Don't you worry about him?

DEE

Why should I?

PETE

He's your boyfriend.

DEE

But he a jailbird now. And I sure as shit ain't one to sit pretty for nobody locked up. Besides, why I got to moan and fret when I got all this scratch to play with?

(She kisses him)

Now what about you? You need a woman?

PETE

I don't know. What are you offering?

DEE

I want somebody to look after me. To help keep the po-lice from sniffin' at ass, if you know what I mean.

PETE

Maybe you oughta stick with Marion.

DEE

He done give me to you.

PETE

That doesn't mean I'm gonna adopt your ass.

DEE

And I ain't about to be nobodies' child.

(Another kiss)

PETE

What am I getting myself into?

DEE

The time of your life, daddy.

(Fade on Dee and Pete)

MARTHA

I studied acting for three years in San Diego at the Academy for Performing Arts, then made the sojourn north. A month after landing in L.A., I found an agent. Dad was sweet enough to get me going with a stake, about four grand. He told me to use it wisely. I sure appreciated the help. “Just promise me you’ll come back a star,” he said.

Sure, dad. I promise.

I settled into a one-bedroom flat in Hollywood. Then, hustled myself into a blur. Over time, I did manage to rack up a few credits, albeit nothing major or career building: student films, experimental shorts, a couple of low budget non-union films that went straight to video, a featured extra spot on a commercial or two, etc., etc.

I’d also enslave myself with a part time job answering the phone at a law firm. And within six months of lifting that damned receiver again and again *ad infinitum* – repeating the same eight words like some busted machine, all I wanted in this dark world was to tear out a lung in exchange for the chance to bail. I’d come home late in the day and drown myself in vodka until my brain was floating in it.

Every so often, I’d treat myself to getting my hair done at Trina’s Salon, which was a block from where I lived.

(Trina enters)

TRINA

You look like you could use a hit. I got some shit in the back. It’s in my purse. Help yourself.

MARTHA

Trina introduced me to coke. I’d make an appointment and visit the salon, slip into the back to do a few lines . . .

(Martha makes two lines of coke and inhales them. Then sits for Trina)

. . . then plant myself in a seat to let Trina could do her thing.

(Trina begins combing and styling Martha’s hair)

TRINA

What's got you so down in the shitter? Where's that frisky Martha I like so much?

MARTHA

She's suddenly getting a premonition of things to come.

TRINA

Martha, c'mon. You're not just young, but you look young. And good enough to O.D. on. Ergo, whatever's gnawing at your ass can't be so bad.

MARTHA

I hate my job.

TRINA

Who doesn't?

MARTHA

You.

TRINA

Well, you wanna work in a hair salon? Be my partner?

MARTHA

I don't know shit about hair.

TRINA

You can learn.

MARTHA

You mean go to cosmetology school?

TRINA

It's what I did.

MARTHA

Sure.

TRINA

Oh, I see. It ain't good enough for you.

MARTHA

Fuck you, Trina.

TRINA

Chill, baby. I'm just messing which ya.

MARTHA

I know.

TRINA

You want another hit, sugar?

MARTHA

Please.

(Trina makes two lines on a mirror, which she holds up to Martha as she inhales)

TRINA

Now, let's see – you need a gig to keep your ass fed before you make the big time and finally have the means to say fuck it. Something that won't drive you bat-shit, right?

MARTHA

Yeah. Like truck driving, maybe.

TRINA

Or the circus.

MARTHA

Doing what? The trapeze?

TRINA

No. Being a clown.

(They laugh)

Or the dancing bear.

MARTHA

On coke!

(They laugh. Then silence)

Dammit, Trina! What the fuck am I gonna do? When I audition, I feel as if I'm smacking my head on a wall. And the few acting jobs I get pay shit. So, I gotta work. The thing is, I can't stomach even the thought of, year after year, holding on to some interim, obligatory Mickey-Mouse *job*. What am I gonna do?

TRINA

Well, other than locate a sugar daddy –

MARTHA

Which isn't a bad idea.

TRINA

Uh uh! I already drove down that bad road. Trust me. You're better off leaving that one alone.

MARTHA

Sure.

(Silence)

TRINA

You got a lot of friends, don't you? I mean, good friends? Folks who won't fuck you?

MARTHA

Yeah. I guess.

TRINA

And they all get high, right?

MARTHA

Pretty much, yeah. What are you getting at?

TRINA

Well . . .

MARTHA

What?

TRINA

You ever think of doing a little business? Y' know, like . . . *selling?*

MARTHA

My ass?

TRINA

No! I'm talking about a little shit. On the side. Nothing big time. Just a little side business type thing.

MARTHA

You mean sell dope? Really?

TRINA

It's just an idea, baby.

MARTHA

I don't know. I mean . . . Jesus, I'd have to mix with a lot of lowlifes and scumbags and . . . I don't know, Trina.

TRINA

No, listen, I'm not talking about selling crack or even horse. That shit is evil. And to deal it you got to congregate with some evil motherfuckers. I'm talking about something a little more genteel. Something where the clientele is a bit higher end.

MARTHA

In other words, sell *blow*?

TRINA

Just a little here and there. That's all. You'll start with the folks you know. They'll pass the word. And from there, you build yourself a network. Again, nothing grandiose, but enough to keep you from starving and off the damn street.

MARTHA

What about the cops? What about jail?

TRINA

Sweetheart just keep your customers and your business tight and close to your tits and you won't have shit to keep you up at night. In fact, my boyfriend will advise you.

MARTHA

And what is he? A coke dealers consultant?

TRINA

He deals, baby. Big time. He got me this salon, in fact.

MARTHA

And I take it he's doing well?

TRINA

Like I say, he's big time. The real thing. With all the decadent trimmings. I'll bet your ass has even heard of him.

MARTHA

And he is . . . ?

TRINA

Nope – uh uh. We'll get to that. I'll tell him about you first. And when it's cool, I'll set up a time for the two of you to meet. Okay? Between now and then, though, just do me a favor –

MARTHA

I know. I won't say shit to anybody.

TRINA

Not even your mama.

MARTHA

Yeah, right. My mom.

(Martha rises from the chair)

It all sounded so cool on paper. I'd keep my own hours instead of punching some clock. I'd do business with fairly decent people, not street dreck. Which is the one reason why I'll never work with Marion. And I'd make real money while pursuing what I loved.

Only, I hated the fact that I'd have to carry a gun. Trina bent my ear about this later.

(Trina hands Martha a gun, which she takes and slips into her purse)

TRINA

Chances are you'll never have to cap nobody. But it's always good to tote a little insurance, y' know?

(Fade on Trina. Martha makes two lines of coke, then inhales them)

MARTHA

Would that the road to acting success could be as unfettered. An early gig had been a student film. Two Turkish emigres studying film at USC wanted me in their short. Interestingly enough, during the shoot, I'd enjoy my first bad brush with the law, i.e. getting busted: while driving to complete the final scene one night, the cops pulled me over for running a stop sign. Upon uttering something particularly nasty to one of the cops, I was told to step out of the car, at which time they busied themselves with a search. They would uncover, in my purse, a few grams of coke. I'd spend the night in jail, get charged with a misdemeanor, and miss the shoot. Luckily, the scene didn't require dialogue. Which enabled the Turkish "Warner Bros." to finish with a stand in, who was filmed from the back.

I came very close to getting busted again during another shoot, though not for coke this time, but . . . I'd been cast as the lead in a very low-budget independently produced straight-to-video horror film, something about vampires. I played a lesbian who was sexually attracted to a French woman who happened to be a vampire. The final scene, as far as I can remember, was to begin as a banquet, then digress into a kind of perverted, sex crazed, blood-drenched orgy. I made it clear early on to the director and all others involved that I wasn't taking off my clothes. I refuse to do porn and I won't concede to nudity unless I get a very high advance. They agreed, or at least they seemed to.

I'd been so coked-up that day, I haven't even the vaguest recollection of getting through it. However, upon the directors final shout of "cut," I noticed suddenly that my clothes were off! I was naked! And covered in movie blood. What's worse was that I felt like I'd been . . . *penetrated!*

Convinced that somebody – either one of the extras, an actor, maybe even some jerk from the crew – had fucked me without my knowledge, I screamed and yelled myself into insanity. And they all laughed. Which made me even crazier. I ran outside, naked and dripping in movie blood, screaming until my lungs were flat . . . then finally chilled when I realized where I was – in the middle of the street, where I'd brought the whole world to a complete standstill. Some kind soul brought a blanket and covered me, then walked me back inside. I think I heard the director say they'd call the cops if I didn't *behave*.

All I wanted was to kill somebody.

(Lights rise on Billy Pope. He is sitting and watching TV)

TRINA

Billy, this is Martha. I told you about her.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, but . . . are you – *you're Billy Pope?*

TRINA

I told you my man was big time!

MARTHA

The name of Billy Pope was known by anyone in Southern California who'd done even a gram of blow. He was mid-level as far as dealers went, but his "mafia" was spreading like cancer. He came here from Australia about five years ago with a rock band that fronted him as a singer. They were panning for the big time and Billy started selling dope just to survive, until the dope business became bigger than anything that could be imagined with music.

BILLY

Let me start by saying that the only reason you're in this house at all is because of Trina. She knows you. And she can vouch for you. Otherwise –

TRINA

She's knows that game, honey. It's okay.

(Silence. Billy stares her down)

BILLY

Have a seat. Care for some blow?

MARTHA

Sure.

(Billy makes a few lines which Martha inhales. It affects her profoundly)

Oh, my . . . SHIT!

TRINA

Do you see the stars, baby? Up close? And the planets?

MARTHA

I see my life . . . a hundred years from now.

TRINA

Are you still an actress?

MARTHA

Oh, yeah!

TRINA

What movie are you in?

MARTHA

“MARY POPPINS!”

(Trina laughs)

BILLY

Christ . . .

MARTHA

Billy . . . this shit is . . . its profound!

BILLY

It'd better be. It's from Bolivia. Uncut.

MARTHA

You're known for your shit!

TRINA

My man!

BILLY

Of course, what you'll be selling will have to be cut.

TRINA

Adulterated.

BILLY

As they say. If you want to maximize your take, that is.

MARTHA

Sure.

BILLY

Now why would a nice white American girl such as yourself want to dirty herself in this racket?

MARTHA

I'm not so white. I've got a black boyfriend.

(Again, Trina laughs)

Besides, I need money.

TRINA

And aside from having a fine ebony lover, she's got a lot of good friends, too.

BILLY

Friends are one thing. But, what of your enemies?

MARTHA

I don't think I have any.

BILLY

Of course, you don't. Your tiny world is peopled with family, the friends who adore you, and the few cockroaches who merely *annoy* you. Do you know who they are?

MARTHA

Well . . . come to think of it, one, or two, maybe. For instance, there's this nosey little bitch who lives downstairs from me –

BILLY

Find out all you can about her. Once you start to sell blow, as you see the take get bigger and bigger before your eyes, you will cease to have people who merely dislike you. You'll have enemies. Mortal enemies.

MARTHA

Look, I don't want this to turn into a . . .

BILLY

I know. You're not looking to start a Mafia. What you'd like to have is a little mom and pop type thing. Without mom and pop.

MARTHA

Correct.

BILLY

Well, be forewarned, that it doesn't matter if you're IBM or selling cookies from the boot of your car. You'll have real dragons prowling your universe. Not the same scumbags, mind you, that your average crack or H dealer has to contend with. They're bullshit compared to the monsters who haunt the purveyors of coke. The money is serious. And so are the adversaries.

TRINA

In other words, the cops will be the least of your worries. That is, once you start to make real money. And with that, there'll be motherfuckers laying and waiting in every corner of the dark night to steal your money and your shit. And maybe even cap your ass. So, watch your back. And hold tight to that piece I got you.

BILLY

Are we scaring you, Martha?

MARTHA

Yeah, you are.

BILLY

Good. *Fear is the beginning of wisdom.* Proverbs 9:10.

TRINA

Amen.

BILLY

As you can see, I read the Bible. Like every other good American.

(Martha takes another hit of coke)

MARTHA

And maybe I should, too.

BILLY

Do. Now, listen – start by dealing with your friends, and only your friends, before you even think to widen your network.

MARTHA

Sure.

BILLY

What do you have to start with?

MARTHA

Well . . . how much can I get for five hundred?

BILLY

Five hundred *what?*

MARTHA

Dollars.

(Trina laughs again)

BILLY

If you wanna fuck around, go buy a vibrator.

MARTHA

Fine! I get it. You're serious.

BILLY

As a goddamned disease.

MARTHA

Alright . . . I can give you a grand.

TRINA

You still shooting blanks, baby.

MARTHA

C'mon. I'm just starting.

BILLY

And I have to eat.

MARTHA

So, what kind of money are we talking about?

BILLY

Five, maybe four grand would be enough to start a conversation.

MARTHA

Jesus Christ, Billy! Four thousand dollars? That's all the money I've got.

BILLY

I thought you said she was serious?

TRINA

Sweetheart, four grand will get you a quarter of a key. You get that, I'll show you how to cut it. And when you sell it, guess what? You make nine, maybe even ten G's. Tax free. Which means you made back your investment, plus brought in a profit, to boot!

BILLY

Now do you understand the metrics?

MARTHA

Yeah, I do. The thing is . . . Okay. But I've gotta go to the bank. A grand is all I have on me.

BILLY

Be back here with cash in hand no later than eleven AM tomorrow morning. And don't make me wait.

MARTHA

Deal.

BILLY

As said, Trina will show you how to cut it. And how to bag it.

TRINA

I'll walk you through it, sugar.

BILLY

Now, if you don't want the pigs to nail you, avoid doing anything stupid. For instance, if someone you don't know wants to cop, tell him or her that you don't know what the fuck they're talking about. If they're persistent, use whatever means necessary to send them the fuck out of your air space. Understand?

MARTHA

Got it.

BILLY

Last thing: if you do screw up and get pinched, you don't know me – I don't know you. Suck it the fuck in and take the collar like a grown up. Do not go for any kind of bullshit deal that the cops or the D.A.'s or whoever might broach for ratting me out. Do not get suckered in with some promise of protection for your pretty little ass. I know people on the inside and out who will find you and cut

you in a very vital place, then watch as you bleed to death. And allow me to inform you, Mary Poppins, that women in the knick are no different from men. In fact, they're fucking worse.

MARTHA

I understand.

BILLY

And please – please – if you should get the urge to fuck someone, either locate that spade boyfriend of yours, or fuck yourself. Just do not ever try to fuck me. Because *I* will find you and cut you in a very vital place, too. This time, however, I will sip on a glass of cognac as I watch you bleed to death.

TRINA

Other than that, baby, you'll be great!

BILLY

Of course, you will. As long as you read and understand the fine print.

(She nods)

Good. Now, how 'bout a drink? And another hit of this blow?

MARTHA

Sure!

(Fade on Billy and Trina. Marion enters, singing, with Pete)

Back home, every so often when Marion would stop by to see his mother, I'd notice him. I was afraid of him, initially. I couldn't stand how he looked at me.

MARION

Damn, Pete! Your sister is *choice!*

PETE

Be careful, man. She's your sister, now, too.

MARION

Not by blood, though – Excuse me. I know you. Ain't you somebody's sister?

MARTHA

He'd been in a car with a few of his friends that day as I walked home from school. I wanted to ignore him. Then he told whoever to stop the car. He got out and walked beside me.

MARION

C'mon, now. Why you gon do your family like this? Your own stepbrother, at that?

MARTHA

I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be rude, but –

MARION

What's the problem?

MARTHA

Nothing. There's no problem. I only . . .

MARION

You scared?

MARTHA

Should I be?

MARION

Of your own family?

MARTHA

Mothers have been known to eat their young.

MARION

And I ain't nobody's mama. Now, c'mon. We ain't even had a chance to get to know each other.

MARTHA

You're right. We haven't.

MARION

Wanna get a soda?

MARTHA

Uh . . . Sure.

MARION

That's the way.

MARTHA

We had a drink together. A soda. As stepbrother and stepsister.

MARION

You ain't got nothing to be scared of. Not no more. Okay?

(Martha nods)

How you like your stepmom? Getting used to her?

MARTHA

I like Nona. She's sweet.

MARION

That she is.

MARTHA

Is it all true? . . . What she said?

MARION

'Bout me selling dope? Yeah. I ain't ashamed to say I do a little business, here and there.

MARTHA

She says you're wasting your life.

MARION

And I say she don't know everything. Even if she is my mom.

MARTHA

But she's concerned. She loves you.

MARION

Yeah, I can see you got a lot to learn.

MARTHA

What do you mean?

MARION

Listen, I got the mother-wit to look after myself. I was born with it. And let's leave it at that. Alright?

MARTHA

Sorry.

MARION

Don't be sorry. You cool.

(They laugh)

Can I walk with you from school tomorrow?

(Martha laughs)

What's up?

MARTHA

Nothing. It's just . . . You don't have to, like . . . beg me.

MARION

I ain't begging. I was just trying to . . .

MARTHA

It's no big deal. You can walk me home from school. It's just that, from now on, if you are – in fact – my stepbrother, you won't have to ask again.

MARION

You saying you ain't afraid of me no more?

MARTHA

Didn't you tell me there wasn't a reason to?

I let him walk me from school every day, always making it his business to stop at the corner which was just up the block from my house. He didn't want dad to know we'd been . . . acquainted.

MARION

Your father can't stand me.

MARTHA

Why do you say that?

MARION

I can feel it. That man has yet to say a lone word to me since he started banging my mother. Naw. The muthafucker don't like me. He can't stand my ass. And I swear, I can feel it.

MARTHA

Do you want me to talk to him about it?

MARION

Naw. Don't say shit.

MARTHA

One night he took me to the movies. I told dad I'd be out with a friend. After the movie, we sat in the park and shared a fifth of vodka Marion had hid under his belt.

MARION

Damn, girl! You drinking that shit like you know your business.

MARTHA

Liquor isn't exactly foreign to me. Sometimes I sneak around with a few of my girlfriends and shoot back a few.

MARION

You better watch yourself.

(They laugh. Then Marion rises and sings a '60's R&B love song)

MARTHA

Do you have a girlfriend?

MARION

I got plenty girlfriends. And a woman.

MARTHA

There's a difference?

MARION

Yeah. But I ain't telling you.

(He resumes singing. When the song ends, Martha kisses him suddenly, long and slow)

Didn't you hear me? I got plenty girlfriends. And a woman, too.

MARTHA

I don't care.

MARION

Well, ain't we supposed to be related?

MARTHA

Yeah. Just not by blood.

(They kiss again)

I went to the prom with Tommy Ellsworth. He played Varsity football, ran track, and had been accepted at Pepperdine University. A girl like me should have felt privileged to have been asked to the prom by a young man with such prospects. At some point, though, during the festivities, I cut out and went to meet Marion. He got us a room at a motel. And I swear, he made me feel like it was our wedding night.

(Pete enters)

PETE

I dig working with you, man.

MARION

Told you the scratch'd be good.

PETE

It ain't just the scratch –

MARION

Wha' d' you mean? It ain't nothing but the scratch.

PETE

I know, but . . . what I'm saying is that I dig being with you.

MARION

Alright, I appreciate that, but . . . Listen, don't get too hung up in all this brotherly-love-suck-my-dick bullshit.

PETE

I didn't say I was –

MARION

Metaphorically speaking, man. Look, this shit is all about business. And money. Always the money. Business and money before love and pleasure. You dig?

PETE

Yeah. I'm righteous.

MARION

Stay righteous. 'Cause I dig you, too.

(They hug)

MARTHA

On the way to see me one night, the cops had pulled him over. Later, I read somewhere that it was all over nothing, really.

MARION

What can I do for ya 'll? What's the problem? I won't speedin', was I?

MARTHA

Cops in Los Angeles were pulling young black men over indiscriminately then. They didn't need a reason, as far as they were concerned. I mean, they're the police, right?

MARION

What did you say? Go ahead! Say it so I can hear it!

MARTHA

I recall hearing that Marion had mouthed off to one of the cops.

MARION

I want to know what your swine-pig ass said! SAY IT, GODDAMMIT!

(A gunshot is heard, echoing through the darkness. Martha covers her ears. Instant blackout on Marion. Only his humming is heard)

MARTHA

They said that Marion had overheard something a cop said under his breath, that he was –

PETE

Just another spook hood. If that's true, let's face it: the cop was right. Although I think what pissed Marion off wasn't the fact that the cop called him a spook hood. He didn't want to be *just another* spook hood. Y' know?

MARTHA

Maybe.

(Marion hums, then ends the song)

All I know is . . . they didn't have to kill him. If they'd seen drugs, or thought he was some kind of hood . . . why not arrest him? But they shouldn't have killed him. There was no need to.

PETE

No, there wasn't.

MARTHA

Nona cried into the rain at the funeral. I put my arm around her, making an attempt at what I thought was comfort. But could only wail through the misery with her.

(Martha is weeping. Pete comforts her)

(Lights fade. End Act One)

ACT TWO

(Lights rise on Martha preparing lines of coke, then inhales a line. Then another. And chases them with a shot of vodka)

The first real love of my life: Marion.

(She begins to sob)

Gone for good.

(Cat Man enters to make a speech)

CAT MAN

For our departed brother. For *my* brother. Brother Marion!

MARTHA

Cat Man threw a memorial party for Marion at his house, to which I was invited, personally, by the man himself. He surprised me by having his limousine pick me up.

CAT MAN

Another black man cut down by the swine in blue, by L.A.'s *finest* – the devil's minions! The gut-groveling dogs of oppression!

(Pete enters with Dee on his arm.
Martha joins them)

I say that now is the time for all people of color to take back their communities – take them back and run the PIGS *OUT!* And show this so-called *man* that he is nothing but mortal breath in body. Let us show that we the people are not afraid. We people of color do not study fear. We people of color live and remain a people of action! And of peace!

(A recording of Marion singing a solemn gospel song is heard)

Godspeed, Brother Marion. May love take you to that other life.

(Cat Man ends the speech, then steps down to greet and hug Pete. The recording continues underneath)

Sorry 'bout Marion, big Pete. I loved him.

PETE

Thanks, man

(They part. He notices Martha who enters the scene crying)

MARTHA

Thanks for the limo ride over.

(Cat Man notices Dee)

CAT MAN

Do I know you?

DEE

My name is Dee.

CAT MAN

But do I know you? Or did Brother Marion –

PETE

She knows me. And that's all that counts.

CAT MAN

In other words, since the brothers dead and gone, you taking up the slack.

PETE

No, man. It ain't like that. Besides, he was already spoken for – remember?

(Pete hints toward Martha)

Listen, before the day is up, I need to holler at you.

CAT MAN

And before the day is up, I'll let you know when to holler.

(Pete and Cat Man exchange "daps".
Pete then hugs Martha)

PETE

I'll call you later, okay?

(She acknowledges. Pete then exits with Dee. Marion's singing fades. Martha is pulling herself together)

CAT MAN

You alright?

(She nods)

By the way, my apologies. I sho didn't mean to be crude.

MARTHA

It's okay. You can't help yourself.

CAT MAN

At times, no. They tell me Marion was your stepbrother.

MARTHA

Yeah. I guess.

CAT MAN

Ain't that a bitch? You and Marion – all up in the family!

MARTHA

Tell me something: did you have to work at being an asshole, or is it strictly hereditary?

(Silence. Then Cat Man laughs)

CAT MAN

Damn!

MARTHA

You didn't know one goddamn thing about us. That much is clear. So, spare the commentary.

CAT MAN

And I got to say that it's equally clear that you didn't have the brother as well figured as you'd like to think.

MARTHA

I loved him. And it's all that concerns me.

CAT MAN

And he loved you, too. Something fierce! Yet still had enough juice in the bottle for about five, maybe six other chicks spread over town. Each one just as hot and dangerous as you. Oh! This surprises you, I see?

MARTHA

You're so full of shit.

CAT MAN

Or, perhaps, I ain't the only one who can't help themself.

MARTHA

I'm going home.

CAT MAN

Already? We still got more celebrating to do.

MARTHA

I thought this was a memorial?

CAT MAN

And we done *memorialized*. Now it's time for the situation to get righteous.

MARTHA

What do you mean?

CAT MAN

I'm talking 'bout you and me.

MARTHA

I'm leaving.

CAT MAN

Let me get the limo. My driver will run you. In fact, I'll go which ya.

MARTHA

Thank you, but I'll call a cab.

CAT MAN

Naw, I ain't having that. I ain't letting you run off in some cab. I got my pride, woman. As well as my rep.

MARTHA

I could give a shit.

CAT MAN

I do! And I said you ain't rolling outta here in no cab.

MARTHA

Look, I'm not your wife. Or, for that matter, your bitch!

CAT MAN

However, you are – and will remain for many, many years to come – *the* woman of choice on this side of the track. Gangsta hot! You know what I'm talking about. Any man walking in God's glory and big enough to call himself a man would sell his soul and his private parts to the devil's mama for the mere opportunity of showing even a shred of kindness to you.

MARTHA

I thought you were done with that bullshit speech?

CAT MAN

Sweetheart, this ain't no speech.

MARTHA

Then it's just bullshit?

CAT MAN

C'mon, now. To hell with all that grief, pull your nose out the damn air, and let this half-Jap nigger go ahead and see that you get home. The right way.

MARTHA

Either I'm succumbing to vulnerability, or you actually mean well this time.

CAT MAN

On this, right down the line.

MARTHA

My gut's telling me no, but . . .

CAT MAN

Fuck that gut. Listen to that rap beating out your heart. And tell me what it says?

(Silence)

That's what I thought. Now c'mon. Before I get pissed off.

(Martha laughs in spite of herself, then allows Cat Man to take her arm, then lead her offstage)

(Pete enters)

PETE

With Marion gone, I needed a job. He had intimated that if he should ever get smoked, his stash was mine – he'd willed it to me, but to go the Cat Man if I wanted to keep working.

(Cat Man enters with two drinks, one of which he gives to Pete. He takes it and they both sit)

CAT MAN

Did you know I'd hired an accountant? No shit. One of them two thousand-dollar suit types. He was slick with the money, too – knew his shit like a dog sniffing out a cat. I usta call him my Ebenezer, my Scrooge – you know who I'm talking about.

(Pete nods)

Anyhow, you know the Feds ended up shutting him down? That's the truth – busted him, then tossed his old ass in the pen for a ten year sentence. They suspected that he'd been managing accounts for racketeers. And found evidence of fraud and conspiracy. They told him if he'd cheese on some of the clients, they'd let him walk. Scrooge didn't say shit. Not only was the muthafucker an ace with money, he had a loyal streak in him.

PETE

Or, perhaps, he was just scared.

CAT MAN

Or, smart. Nevertheless, none of them cocksuckers fucked with me, or any of his other *clients*. But they sho as shit put it up Scrooge's ass. Good and hard.

Now, listen: I done already hired me another Scrooge, but he's gon need help. You be his side arm, and I'll shoot you a point over what Brother Marion was paying. Every week. Cool?

PETE

I'm with it.

CAT MAN

Now I got a question for ya. That fine black thing wrapped on your arm today – what do she call herself?

PETE

Her name is Dee.

CAT MAN

Dee! What's she all about?

PETE

I can't say, man.

CAT MAN

What's this? The li'l bitch didn't up and kill nobody, did she?

PETE

No, nothing like that. I just . . . I can't say.

CAT MAN

Alright. I can respect that. There's shit of a certain type that needs to remain on the lowdown, I guess. Only . . . if you'd be so kind as to do a nigger a favor and . . . let him tap it sometime.

PETE

What? Are you serious?

(Cat Man smiles and holds a steady gaze upon Pete. Fade out)

(Lights rise on Martha downing a shot of vodka)

MARTHA

As said, once I made the decision to plant myself in L.A. to work as an actress, I was determined never to remove my clothes in front of the camera – never to display nudity, partial or otherwise. Yet, after two and a half years of beating a trail into the L.A. concrete and wearing myself thin, I'd come to the point where I just didn't give a shit anymore.

I'd been offered a part in another low-budget, independently produced straight-to-video movie called "Band in Black": A gang

of evil bikers terrorize a small town that would soon be rescued by five gorgeous chicks who'd recently escaped from their evil pimp. At the climax, the five of us are inside, berating the sheriff and his two deputies for being such pussies. All this gets interrupted when the bikers show up outside to take us on. To their surprise, we emerge topless, wearing only G-string bikini bottoms and go-go boots. And each of us slinging a machine gun – our weapon of choice! I yell, "EAT THIS, FUCKERS!" And we mow that whole gaggle of bikers down in a blaze of blood and heat. When it's all done, one of the girls throws down her weapon and waves the American flag. And the towns folk come out of hiding, cheering and applauding and waving tear-stained handkerchiefs.

The End.

I'd fucking had enough.

(She pours another shot and drinks,
then lights a cigarette)

I copped my quarter of a key which I would soon cut to a little over that. Trina, true to form, was sweet enough to show me how to cut it.

I refused to deal out of my apartment, or stash shit in it. Since I carried a membership at the local gym, I could stash my shit and my cash in a locker. Sure, I'd considered putting the money in the bank. My gut, though, said I'd be asking for trouble if I did.

As for a place to deal, I sent word that if anybody needed blow, they should come to see me at the Le Hotte Club, a disco in Sherman Oaks. The door person was a cute English lady who happened to be the wife of the owner, as well as another of my friends. She was willing to allow me to plant myself at a table upstairs in the V.I.P. lounge, toward the back. At closing, I'd slip the door lady and her husband a small percentage. Then off I'd fly into the thick night air to the gym to "deposit" the evenings take in my locker – until the day when that locker became too small to accommodate what I'd made.

(Fade in on Pete US with the Cat
Man. He pours a glass of red wine.
Martha is on the phone)

And give me a reason, and a very good one, as to why I should go to dinner with you?

CAT MAN

Alright. 'Cause I asked.

(He brings out a knife and cuts a tiny incision into his trigger finger, then lets a few drops of blood fall into the glass of wine)

MARTHA

I don't get it. Why me? When you've already got a flock of pet birds hovering over your cock, as it is?

CAT MAN

Watch your nasty mouth, girl. I'm up here trying to be a gentleman. Goddammit!

(He then pricks Pete's finger and holds it over the glass)

MARTHA

Oh! I'm special! Is that it?

CAT MAN

In so many words, yeah.

(Cat Man now drinks from the glass, then offers to Pete, who also drinks)

Beautiful and special to where I can't sleep at night. Much less put it to one of my other chicks.

MARTHA

Oh, you poor thing.

(The ritual completed, Pete and the Cat Man hug)

CAT MAN

How 'bout it?

MARTHA

Am I gonna regret this later?

CAT MAN

That's up to you and what you want.

MARTHA

And since you're so good at playing with my head, what do you think that is?

CAT MAN

Everything, sweetheart. You want it all. With no strings attached. Just like me.

(Fade on Martha as she hangs up)

To brotherhood, Pete.

PETE

To brotherhood. And blood.

(Fade on Pete)

(Fade in on Martha, removing her clothes, then getting into Cat Man's bed)

MARTHA

In the movie "Love Me or Leave Me," Doris Day is a young woman who aspires to be a singer. She encounters a small-time hood, Marty Snyder – played by James Cagney – who is so taken with her that he offers his help in realizing her dream of a singing career. And she falls for him. Along the way, he pulls every string, every rope and muscles and pushes any and all who would dare stand in his or her way. By the stories end, he's managed to make enemies of everyone, including the woman he wished to help . . . the woman he loved.

(Cat Man enters in a silk robe with two drinks, one of which he hands to Martha. He then climbs into bed with her)

Cat Man could do nothing for me professionally, or – for that matter – emotionally.

So why had *I* fallen for *him*?

CAT MAN

You must have a shit load of pent-up tension in you, girl. When we was going at it and you hit that high note – DAMN! I thought I was gon have to call 9-1-1.

MARTHA

Sorry.

CAT MAN

For what? Shit. If anything, I'm impressed with myself. Whoever said it gets better with age knew what the hell he was talking about.

MARTHA

I suppose.

CAT MAN

What's wrong?

(She shakes her head)

You wanna talk about it?

MARTHA

What's this? Are you a shrink, too? Among other things?

CAT MAN

Quit fucking with me. Now what's got you? I don't know what, but something is sitting heavy on your head.

MARTHA

It's nothing you can help with, believe me.

CAT MAN

You seeing any scratch off them coke deals, yet?

MARTHA

How did you . . .

CAT MAN

I know it all when it comes to dope in this town, sugah. Not one ounce of contraband moves around here without my knowledge.

MARTHA

My! Such an informed and powerful man.

CAT MAN

It's a turn on, ain't it?

MARTHA

Maybe. And on that note, maybe it's time for me to go . . .

(She starts getting out of bed when
Cat Man stops her)

CAT MAN

Uh uh! I can't allow that just yet.

MARTHA

You're pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?

CAT MAN

A man who ain't is a man who ain't worth knowing.

(He kisses her deeply)

MARTHA

What about those other women?

CAT MAN

You ask too many damn questions.

MARTHA

And if I were black, you'd tell me to stay out of your business.
Wouldn't you?

CAT MAN

Baby, please – PLEASE! Let's not complicate this shit.

MARTHA

What do you want from me?

CAT MAN

All you can give.

MARTHA

Which is too much.

CAT MAN

I didn't ask for everything. I believe what I asked for was what
you're willing to give.

MARTHA

That's all? For a man like you? I ain't buying it.

CAT MAN

You's a tough one, ain't you?

(She scoffs)

I'll ask again: what is your problem?

(Silence)

MARTHA

Alright – I'm tired. Okay? Tired and sick to shit of everything.
Maybe I want the world and every lost soul in it to just . . .

CAT MAN

What?

MARTHA

Nothing. In fact . . . fuck it. Fuck it all.

CAT MAN

Such words from a Reagan supporter.

MARTHA

For your information, there are certain things that even a Reagan
disciple can't remain blind to.

CAT MAN

Damn, woman! Do you need a hit?

MARTHA

Please.

(He offers her coke, which Martha
inhales into each nostril from a tiny
spoon)

CAT MAN

Hit it again. Go 'head.

(She does the same with two more
tiny spoonful's)

How's the acting business treating you, by the way?

MARTHA

I'm ready to quit.

CAT MAN

That's what's up your ass!

MARTHA

Not for long, if I can help it.

CAT MAN

You've been at this acting thing for how long – two, maybe three years? And you gon chump out already?

MARTHA

I don't know how much more I can take.

CAT MAN

Well, I don't know shit about acting or Hollywood. But I'll tell you this: if you throw in the towel now, *you* won't know shit, either. You get where I'm coming from?

MARTHA

I guess. Sometimes, though, I think of my mom and dad. And how they'd feel about their daughter if they knew what she was really doing out here. Calling herself an actress when she's nothing but a coke dealing crook.

CAT MAN

Your life and what you do ain't your mama and daddy's business.

MARTHA

That's probably true, but –

CAT MAN

But nothing! You're a grown goddamn woman. And your mama and daddy, whoever they are, will accept it or cut you lose.

MARTHA

And if they cut me off, I couldn't deal with it.

CAT MAN

Then you might as well die now, 'cause you ain't gon be fit to deal with nothing else.

MARTHA

And your parents?

CAT MAN

I never knew who the fuck my daddy was. They tell me he'd been in the Navy. That's where he met my mama.

MARTHA

My dad was in the Navy.

CAT MAN

Ain't that something? Anyway, to answer your question, when mama died, I had her remains sent to Japan, her home. And there she lays buried. Out of sight. And the fuck out my business.

And, alright, to answer the question as to what I want from you, it ain't a question of want, but *need*. You hear me? Not one of them bitches in my train can hold fire to you. When a nigger gets that primordial spasm for a piece of trim, they fulfill their purpose. Then recede into the black night. But you, girl . . . you something else entirely. Around you, a muthafucker just might get the need to live right. And that ain't no shit.

(Cat Man rises, then exits. Lights fade on Martha)

(The sound of Marion's singing is heard as lights rise on Pete dancing slowly with Dee)

PETE

The Cat Man is my brother in blood, now. Which means I'll do anything for him. Any goddamned thing.

DEE

Even give him a piece of your woman?

PETE

He can always get a piece of you. As long as you leave me the heart.

(Lights rise on the Cat Man, wearing the same silk robe. Dee kisses Pete, then steps into Cat Man's awaiting arms. Fade out)

(Martha enters)

MARTHA

Following a year of dealing, I now had what you'd call a network. Once I'd reached my comfort level in this business, I let my friends pass the word among their friends, and so on. Eventually, I outgrew the locker at the gym. I would now rent a small storage space, something about as big as a good-sized walk-in closet, where I banked my stash in plastic bags.

Soon, I was able to afford a new car and a bigger wardrobe. I moved out of Hollywood and put a down payment on a condo in Santa Monica. The money had gotten so good that I almost considered bailing on my acting career, until my agent called to tell me of a young Hispanic filmmaker preparing to shoot an independent movie. I said I wasn't interested in making a career of playing shitty roles in straight-to-video movies for shit money. She said she understood but convinced me to take a look at the script, anyway, saying that it wasn't your garden variety independent bullshit. This thing had real meat, as she put it. And the part, which happened to be the lead, was something which might even get me noticed.

And she was right. The script was good. Damned good! The director-screenwriter was a kid fresh out of the UCLA Film School named Alejandro Somoza. The story would be set during the 1920's in Los Angeles. Yes, I'd play a whore, but not the kind I'd been familiar with. This woman was an *odalisque*, which is French for a girl in a harem, and which – by the way – was the title of the movie: a melodrama concerning a woman awaiting a lover away at sea and having to sell herself while she waits.

What's more, Alejandro's parents, being very well-off, were footing the bill. And nothing would be spared for production.

I met Mr. Somoza for lunch. "I've seen you in a movie that's best left unmentioned," he said. Then he had me read a few lines from the script. He said he liked what he heard. Then offered me the part without hesitation.

(Martha is now sitting in the V.I.P. lounge of Le Hotte Club. Dirty Cop One and Dirty Cop Two enter)

Wednesday night shift at the Le Hotte Club. The evenings take had been great. I felt even better. And I couldn't wait to go and dance with this beef-cookie who looked like Jean-Claude Van Damme. Just as I was ready to shut down for the night and throw myself at him –

(The cops sit by her on opposite sides)

DIRTY COP ONE

So . . . is this it?

DIRTY COP TWO

Yeah. Is this it? Is this the place?

MARTHA

The place for what?

DIRTY COP TWO

Watch that tone, now. Is that the way to rap to a paying customer?

MARTHA

I'm sorry, but I haven't a clue as to what you want, or . . .

DIRTY COP TWO

We here for the dope, baby.

MARTHA

Excuse me?

(The cops show their badges)

I have nothing to say . . . I mean, I don't know. I just . . . I think –

DIRTY COP ONE

Hey-hey! Cool down, baby. Relax. We're not here to bust nobody.

DIRTY COP TWO

So, quit shivering.

DIRTY COP ONE

Yeah. Calm down. Have your drink. Go on.

(Martha drinks it down)

That's the way. You got nothing to fear. At least, not from us.

MARTHA

What do you want?

DIRTY COP ONE

Let's say we've come to negotiate.

MARTHA

Negotiate?

DIRTY COP TWO

A percentage.

DIRTY COP ONE

Yeah. You know – a cut.

MARTHA

Of what?

DIRTY COP ONE

Hey! You wanna get slapped in the mouth?

DIRTY COP TWO

If not, then don't insult our intelligence.

DIRTY COP ONE

Ergo, when we ask a direct question, you give us an in-kind direct response.

DIRTY COP TWO

Or we toss your fine ass in the knick.

DIRTY COP ONE

After we take a piece of your ass.

DIRTY COP TWO

Each.

MARTHA

Alright. Point taken.

DIRTY COP TWO

Good girl. Now, what's your take here on the nights you deal?

MARTHA

Well, um . . . on a good night, a really good night . . . um, three, maybe three and a half. Grand.

(Dirty Cop Two is writing in a small notepad)

DIRTY COP ONE

And you're here three nights a week, right?

MARTHA

Yes.

(He tears off a slip from the pad and hands it to her, which she takes and looks over)

DIRTY COP TWO

Starting tonight, stick this percentage of your nightly take in an envelope, then slip that envelope under the door at this address.

MARTHA

Damn!

DIRTY COP ONE

Consider it a tax.

MARTHA

Jesus . . . !

DIRTY COP ONE

Better yet, incentive. A little something to keep your hot ass free of the hard-head Hilton.

MARTHA

Why not cut the crap and just bend me over the table and do me?

DIRTY COP ONE

C'mon, now. Have some respect. We're married men.

MARTHA

No doubt with families to feed.

DIRTY COP ONE

Now you get the picture.

DIRTY COP TWO

And quit looking so down in the chops.

DIRTY COP ONE

If it'll help, look upon all this as a business expense, as overhead.

MARTHA

And if I should decide to cut back on those expenses . . . ?

DIRTY COP ONE

Do nothing without approval from the board of directors.

DIRTY COP TWO

And in closing, a word of advice: do not ever play a cop for a fool. See, too many folks out there think cops are stupid. Don't you be one of them. You will only succeed in pissing us off. And, honey, the last thing you want in this cursed world is to piss off a cop. That could prove dangerous.

DIRTY COP ONE

By the way, I love what Trina did with your hair.

(They exit)

MARTHA

Dirty cops, notwithstanding, a week later, Saturday afternoon, the *good* cops, i.e. narc's, took it upon themselves to raid my condo. They flashed a warrant, and for two hours, ran through and all over it like mad rats. Since I kept nothing on my person or in my house, they turned up nothing. Except my unregistered gun, which they confiscated. I was taken in and fined for possession of an unregistered firearm. Then sent home, which pissed them off.

(Lights rise in US limbo to reveal
Detective One and Detective Two)

DETECTIVE ONE

I guess you think you're smart, huh? Always a tap step ahead of the cops. Always. Damn!

DETECTIVE TWO

I can't wait to finally nail your fine ass.

DETECTIVE ONE

You ain't as smart as you'd like to be, honey.

DETECTIVE TWO

Just remember that the law of averages favors the police. It always has.

DETECTIVE ONE

And do not begin to think you'll ever be smart enough –

DETECTIVE TWO

Or pretty enough –

DETECTIVE ONE

To change that.

(Fade on detectives)

MARTHA

I found out from the nightclub owner and his wife that the two dirty cops were shaking down every dealer within a one-hundred-mile radius. And something told me they weren't making any contributions to the poor.

Two and a half months later, I'd wrapped on Alejandro's movie, which had a premier at a theater in Westwood. For the first time, I went out and bought an evening gown. Alejandro asked to escort me. And we stepped arm-in-arm down a red carpet. His parents had spared no expense! He introduced me to them, and we all sat together during the screening.

The film was wonderful, the best goddamned thing I'd yet done in my career. There was grand applause at the end. For which, I cried. My days in Tinsel Town would not turn out to be a bust, after all.

And as if that weren't enough, the film got reviewed the next morning in the L.A. Times Sunday Edition. The film, the direction and . . . and the lead actress were praised. I cried again. Into my coffee. Then, I called dad.

As for dealing, I made the decision to get out – dirty cops be damned! I did, though, want to leave with a splash, i.e. make *one last score*. I would go for broke and cop ten whole keys from Billy and cut them into twenty keys. Once sold and combined with what I already had in plastic bags in my storage space, I'd have enough to possibly invest in a business or two. Or maybe even real estate! Lots of real estate, in fact!

Since my condo had been raided, and seeing as the dirty dick duo had corrupted my current place of business, I made the decision to change venues: I'd stop dealing at the club and work out of a

coffee shop in Venice, which just happened to be outside of the one-hundred-mile jurisdiction of the two bad cops. I managed to pick up new customers through this contact, which was great! In a few months, though, once I'd amassed my stake, I'd be out of the life for good!

One week following the premier, my agent called with terrific news.

(Lights rise on Dee and Pete at opposite ends of the stage, each on the telephone)

DEE

Pete? . . . Pete, this is Dee.

PETE

Where the hell have you been? Do you know what time it is?

DEE

Baby, I'm in the shit!

PETE

What's wrong?

DEE

I'm in jail, Pete. Them cops finally nabbed my black ass. For that bank robbery.

PETE

Fuck . . .

DEE

Can you help me out?

PETE

I . . . yeah. Yeah, sure. I'll help you. How much do they want to bail you out?

DEE

Bail ain't the worst of it.

PETE

What are you saying?

DEE

Pete . . . baby . . .

PETE

What are the cops threatening you with, Dee?

DEE

Them cops ain't the problem. I'm scared of the Cat Man.

PETE

The Cat Man? . . . Why?

DEE

He might find out I know something.

PETE

Did they ask you about him?

DEE

I . . .

PETE

Yes, or no?

DEE

I'm scared.

PETE

Oh, Jesus . . .

DEE

You got to get me outta here!

PETE

Okay! Look, sit tight. And don't say shit to anyone else. Not even those lunk-headed cops. I'll talk to him. Just don't say anything. And stop worrying.

(Fade on Dee. Cat Man enters)

CAT MAN

How you wanna play this?

PETE

With a cool head. She doesn't know anything.

CAT MAN

You sure 'bout that?

PETE

What could she know? Other than our dick size?

CAT MAN

She knows what I do.

PETE

And who doesn't?

CAT MAN

The cops.

PETE

Give me a break! They're as onto you as the thought of the next shot of pussy is on your brain.

CAT MAN

They can't *prove* shit, though. Now, Dee might not know the ins and the outs of the operation, so to speak. But it don't mean she can't do some damage. Maybe even irreparable damage.

PETE

Cat Man, Dee doesn't know jack.

CAT MAN

Once they start to sweatin' her, she'll get to squealing louder than a bitch going tantric. Meaning she'll say anything to keep her ass out the joint. Might even turn some shit over on you. I know bitches like Dee, man.

PETE

What do you wanna do, smoke her?

CAT MAN

Come to think of it, I ain't one to come between you and your woman. This is on you.

PETE

And I say we chill. I got a line on Dee. I trust her.

CAT MAN

And you gon learn there ain't a bitch that draws breath who a man can trust. Especially somethin' as low as Dee.

PETE

C'mon –

CAT MAN

A muthafucker in this racket has got to watch his bases. And his back. Anything can happen. And mark my word, it usually does.

PETE

A man like you – paranoid?

CAT MAN

Fuck that. And while we're at it, FUCK YOU! Now, your blood-brothers livelihood just might be in jeopardy! Straight up! What's more, he might be looking at jail time up into the next goddamn life. Or, worse. And if I go, your ass will damn sure go, too.

PETE

I'm not gonna kill anybody –

(Cat Man scoffs)

I'll talk to her.

CAT MAN

Just don't talk too long. A muthafucker can lose his resolve when he gets to talkin' too much.

And don't forget about your oath. Promises were made. *In blood.* We got each other's back, even after death. Or did you forget that already?

(Silence. Cat Man exits. Dee fades in)

DEE

What's wrong?

PETE

Nothing. I just . . . We need to talk.

DEE

That's all?

(He kisses her)

PETE

What did you say to the police?

(Silence)

C'mon, now. What?

DEE

They . . . they said they don't give a fuck about me. Wouldn't even sweat me about robbing that bank. All I had to do was cheese on the Cat Man.

PETE

But you know nothing. Right?

DEE

I . . . I –

PETE

What did you say? . . . WHAT, GODDAMMIT?

DEE

I – I tried to make some shit up. They won't goin' for it, though. Then . . . then they said they can make it so I'd sit in jail for twenty years. Or longer. On account of when we robbed that bank . . . Floyd had to shoot somebody. A woman. And they said that woman . . .

PETE

What did you tell them?

DEE

The night I was with Cat Man . . . I – I think I heard him talkin' on the phone with somebody 'bout how everything's . . . getting' ready to be set right . . . and –

PETE

You little BITCH!

DEE

They made me tell it. What else was I s'posed t' do?

PETE

Do you have any of that bank money left?

DEE

Wha' chu mean? . . .

PETE

Yes, or no?

DEE

A little bit. I think . . .

PETE

Shit.

DEE

Most of its gone, though.

PETE

Alright, listen: I'll give you some money to leave town.

DEE

Where I'm going?

PETE

Just take it and get the fuck outta town!

DEE

But I ain't got nowhere to go.

PETE

FIND SOMEPLACE! Out of the city limits and out of the state.
Out of state, out of sight, out of mind. Got it?

DEE

What about you?

PETE

I'm good. I'll deal with Cat Man.

DEE

Or he gon deal which you.

PETE

Shouldn't you be getting your shit together?

DEE

It's either you or me, Pete.

PETE

I said I'd deal with it.

DEE

You think you can bullshit the Cat Man?

PETE

What do you care when I'm trying to help your black ass?

DEE

I should've went to jail with Floyd.

PETE

That's stupid.

DEE

Maybe so, but . . .

(She kisses him)

Take care of business, baby.

PETE

What?

DEE

If I stay here, or if I blow, I'm a dead bitch, either way. And I ain't about to do you like I did Floyd. I must be foolish in the head, but . . . I done come to love you, Pete. That ain't no shit. Now go ahead and . . . and see to business.

(She kisses him again, then steps
DS)

PETE

I remembered the oath . . . The oath the Cat Man and I had made in blood. We each drank wine sweetened with each other's blood. It was our *Oath of Omerta*. Kind of. Obviously, neither of us were Italian, but Cat Man believed a ritual was necessary to ensure loyalty. And I agreed with him.

DEE

Just don't do me in the face. Aw'ight?

PETE

He didn't believe in God, the Saints, Jesus or the Virgin Mary. He chose, instead, to bleed in that which he would imbibe in. And engage in something like a baptism, I guess.

(Pete walks over to Dee and aims a concealed gun at her head)

Jean Paul Sartre said that murder was abstract. You pull the trigger, and afterwards, you don't understand what happened.

DEE

I got your heart, Pete . . . and you got mine.

PETE

It all sure as hell felt abstract: the blood and wine were still in my head. As was the oath.

DEE

I guess this is what being in love is like.

PETE

Yeah. 'Cause . . . I love you, too.

(He closes his eyes and fires. Instant blackout)

(Lights rise on Martha)

MARTHA

An assistant production head at Columbia Pictures saw the initial screening of Alejandro's film, then passed the word to a producer-director team who had been preparing to move on a project he'd been involved with. At his behest, they would see the film. It played for a limited engagement at an art house movie theater on Wilshire Blvd. Having read the script they were moving on, and upon seeing me in the film, this man from Columbia Pictures saw me as someone with whom they should take a look at before casting began. Impressed with what they'd seen, they got hold of my agent who mailed me a script, which I was told to read. If I liked what I read and was interested, a lunch date would be set.

I read that damned script in one sitting. This would be a crime story – film noir, set in San Francisco, in the present. Two major stars would sign on to play the leads. I would be cast in a supporting role as the *femme fatale*, the prickly, volatile girlfriend of one of the leads. The scenery-chewing part. The type of role that gets a girl noticed!

We met for lunch in Beverly Hills. After which, a date was set for a screen test with the leads, which satisfied everyone. An offer would be made, and I would accept.

I'd be away and on location in San Francisco for a little over a month. Which meant I had to temporarily shut down my business.

When I returned, I got my groove back, then resumed the operation. As planned, I copped the ten keys from Billy, intent on making that last big score. Everything had been flying on an upward incline so well, with no head winds, as if the world were floating on that big umbrella . . . until –

(Dirty Cop One and Two suddenly break in)

DIRTY COP ONE

You're an ungrateful and inconsiderate little bitch, do you know that?

MARTHA

Did you not see the doorbell?

DIRTY COP TWO

We ain't here to make nice.

MARTHA

As if you'd know how.

(He grabs her)

Does the fact that I am a woman in any way temper your penchant for brutality?

DIRTY COP TWO

Not particularly, no. The fact that you're a woman just pisses me off more.

(She wrests her arm from him)

MARTHA

Cops.

DIRTY COP ONE

You know, that was a nice little racket you had going on at the club in Sherman Oaks. Why'd you let that go?

MARTHA

I want to get out.

DIRTY COP TWO

Out of what?

MARTHA

I don't want to deal anymore.

DIRTY COP TWO

No shit?

MARTHA

It's the truth.

DIRTY COP ONE

Then why'd you just cop ten keys from Billy Pope?

MARTHA

And may I ask . . .

DIRTY COP TWO

We're the police, baby. Which puts us a step below God. We know everything.

MARTHA

And I guess that's supposed to scare me.

DIRTY COP TWO

It'd scare me.

DIRTY COP ONE

What's your plan for all that dope?

MARTHA

Would you believe me if I said I liked it in my coffee?

DIRTY COP TWO

You got a wise mouth. Chicks with wise mouths don't end up well.

MARTHA

Be careful, officers. Remember, you each had mothers.

DIRTY COP ONE

And what would yours think to see her darling daughter in L.A. dealing flake?

DIRTY COP TWO

I'd be ashamed.

MARTHA

Okay, can we cease with the baby talk and get to the point?

DIRTY COP ONE

The point?

MARTHA

Yeah. Like, what the fuck do you want?

DIRTY COP ONE

As stated, you impress me as an ungrateful, selfish and inconsiderate white bitch.

DIRTY COP TWO

You just gon quit the club and set up shop in somebody elses jurisdiction . . .

DIRTY COP ONE

. . . without informing us? Talk about rude!

DIRTY COP TWO

After all we've done for you? Shit. I'm hurt.

MARTHA

I told you – I'm about to quit the life.

DIRTY COP ONE

Then what's with the ten keys?

MARTHA

I . . . I don't know yet.

You're lying.

DIRTY COP ONE

(He grabs her by the hair)

Tell me again – what do you plan to do with all that coke?

DIRTY COP TWO

Fuck it, man. Let's just take it and go.

DIRTY COP ONE

You heard him. Get the shit and give it to us.

MARTHA

What do you mean?

DIRTY COP ONE

Wasn't I plain enough?

(He slaps her)

How's that? Understand now?

MARTHA

I paid good money for that shit!

DIRTY COP TWO

Consider it a loss.

MARTHA

Fuck you!

(He hits her again)

DIRTY COP TWO

We can do this all night.

DIRTY COP ONE

Not me. I'd just as soon torture this bitch blind.

DIRTY COP TWO

Woman, if I was you . . .

MARTHA

OKAY! Alright! You win.

DIRTY COP ONE

We always do. Now, c'mon. Give it up.

MARTHA

It's not here.

DIRTY COP TWO

What?

MARTHA

I don't keep shit in the house. I never have.

DIRTY COP ONE

Where are holding it?

MARTHA

If you want it . . . I'll get it.

DIRTY COP ONE

When?

MARTHA

Tomorrow afternoon. I'll get it and give it to you in a public place.

(Dirty Cop Two laughs)

DIRTY COP ONE

How 'bout we go get it tonight? The three of us?

MARTHA

That would be unacceptable.

DIRTY COP TWO

Bitch, fuck you! Don't be telling us what's unacceptable to your ass.

MARTHA

Look, I go alone to get it and give it to you tomorrow, or you get nothing. You hear me? Nothing!

DIRTY COP TWO

Now she gon raise her goddamn voice –

MARTHA

I'm not bringing you out there to take my dope, jack my stash, and kill me! That's how it will end up. And you fucking well know it! Now the deal is I go alone. I meet you in a public place with the ten keys, which amounts to approximately five hundred thousand dollars in uncut product. I'm certain that enterprising gentlemen like yourselves will find the means to increase that value to a million. Or more. But I get it *alone*. And I give it to you tomorrow at noon in a public place.

DIRTY COP ONE

And that public place would be . . . ?

MARTHA

Hermosa Beach. On the pier. At noon. Lunchtime. Got it?

DIRTY COP ONE

Fine. We'll see you there at noon. But, if we have to come looking for you again, there'll be no words exchanged.

(The dirty cops exit)

MARTHA

I got an early start. I got to the storage space in less than twenty minutes. It hadn't occurred to me that I'd been speeding until I pulled into the driveway, which I nearly missed. God help me if I'd been pulled over.

Then, as I entered the code, unlatched the door, and switched on the light –

(Lights rise on the two detectives in US limbo)

DETECTIVE ONE

You know what? You turned out to be a pretty damn smart girl, after all. Don't you think so?

DETECTIVE TWO

I got to tell you, these dope peddlers are full of surprises. There ain't never a dull moment with you motherfuckers.

DETECTIVE ONE

C'mon! Watch your language. You're in the presence of a lady. And a damned smart one, at that.

DETECTIVE TWO

A storage locker. What brains!

MARTHA

Five black-and-whites had pulled up to the door, there lights flashing to the crazy rhythm of some silent, dreadful tune.

(The detectives approach, one of them getting a chair and placing it DS. He gestures for Martha to sit, which she does)

DETECTIVE ONE

Make it easy on yourself and tell us about the Cat Man.

MARTHA

I don't – I mean . . .

DETECTIVE TWO

You ever noticed how hot a chick looks when she lies?

(Detective One laughs)

Man, it gets my mojo to working.

MARTHA

Please, I know nothing. Now . . . just let me go home.

DETECTIVE TWO

Go home? Are you shitting me? As much dope and ill-gotten scratch as you had in that storage can? All that, plus parting your legs for the biggest dealer of contraband on the West Coast? You think your ass is just gon dance outta here like Doris Day singing *sera sera*?

DETECTIVE ONE

Give us what we want, and we'll see what we can do.

MARTHA

What can I give you when I know absolutely NOTHING?

DETECTIVE ONE

Miss, the fact that you're here makes you as vulnerable as a rabbit at hunting season, if you can catch my drift.

MARTHA

What are you saying?

DETECTIVE ONE

It's very likely that Billy Pope and the Cat Man know you've been pinched.

DETECTIVE TWO

Which, in turn, makes you one weak and susceptible bitch.

MARTHA

Susceptible to what?

DETECTIVE TWO

Now she gon play ignorant.

DETECTIVE ONE

Talk to us, and we can protect you.

MARTHA

No. I'm not falling for that.

DETECTIVE TWO

Get wise, woman. Even if you do get lucky and make bail, are you so naïve as to believe you gon step from here and resume life as usual?

DETECTIVE ONE

You'll get so preoccupied with watching your back, it'll make you crazy.

DETECTIVE TWO

Girl, you in the shit. You done fucked up. Bad. This is the worst thing that can happen to a dope peddler with big-dick contacts like yours.

DETECTIVE ONE

We're you're only hope, baby.

DETECTIVE TWO

The end of the road.

MARTHA

Listen . . . just let me make my call.

DETECTIVE ONE

Didn't you hear what we said . . . ?

MARTHA

LET ME MAKE MY GODDAMN CALL!

(Fade on the detectives. Trina enters
Martha's condo)

I used my one phone call privilege to call Trina. I had to know what was up with Billy and if he had a plan of action. She understood and said she'd come for me.

TRINA

I posted bail, but the money I put up wasn't mine.

MARTHA

Are you saying Billy –

(Cat Man enters)

CAT MAN

I took care of things, baby. Ain't nothing to worry over. I'm gon look after you.

(He kisses her. Then gazes at Trina)

Would you excuse us, please? It's cool. I just need to holler at your girl for a little bit.

(Trina exits. He looks around)

Nice digs. Right by the beach, even.

MARTHA

With all the heat on me, I can't say how much longer I'll be able to enjoy it.

CAT MAN

Ain't no sweat. You'll stay with me.

MARTHA

No.

CAT MAN

Come again?

MARTHA

I said . . . I won't be one of your goddamn concubines.

CAT MAN

Girl, I'm offering to renew the lease on your life. Them cops are leaning hard on everybody I'm kin to. Including you. And they ain't raising up till somebody cracks.

MARTHA

I didn't tell them anything.

CAT MAN

Not yet.

MARTHA

Look . . .

CAT MAN

For schooling those pigs about me, I bet they'll lighten the load on them coke dealing charges, won't they?

MARTHA

I told them nothing. I don't know anything.

(He laughs)

Listen . . . I'm getting out of the life. I'm gonna quit dealing. Besides, things are starting to move for me. In a big way. I just got back from San Francisco. I was shooting a movie and . . .

CAT MAN

You'll get to all that, sweet meat. You'll get to that. In time. Right now, we need to discuss your priorities.

MARTHA

To what?

CAT MAN

Who, sweetheart. To *who*. Now, listen – I'm gon hook you up with a lawyer I know, a cat who is nothing less than a snake in the pit. He's got the system tied around his dick. And, believe me, he knows how to work it. Of course, you might have to feel a little of

the strap on your ass. But I'll bet my monkey stick you won't do no time.

MARTHA

And you'll offer all this for . . . ?

CAT MAN

Just let the Cat Man look after you. Like his own.

MARTHA

I'm not sure I like the sound of that.

(He kisses her)

I mean, will this debt ever be paid? Will this obligation come to an end?

CAT MAN

Sure, it will. It'll stop when you either get too old . . . or, when I snap your neck after getting plain sick of you.

(Another kiss. Then he sits)

MARTHA

What are you doing?

CAT MAN

Waiting for you to pack your shit. And don't take all night doing it.

MARTHA

Y' know, it . . . it may take a while.

CAT MAN

No, it won't. Just throw some things in a bag and let's go.

MARTHA

What is this? Are you afraid I'll skip out the back?

CAT MAN

I just like keeping my peeps on what's mine.

MARTHA

Are all your other girls so lucky?

CAT MAN

You gon get to packing, or what?

MARTHA

Listen, if I'm going, I need some time. To get my head around this. Please.

CAT MAN

Be out in thirty minutes. I'll be in the car. And don't piss me off by making me come back in here after your ass.

(He exits. Trina re-enters)

TRINA

As soon as we heard you'd got pinched, Cat Man called Billy. He said not to sweat nothing. And that he'd see to everything.

MARTHA

What's going on with Billy?

TRINA

Right now, he's just feeling the itch.

MARTHA

And is he scratching?

TRINA

Straight up, sweetheart – did you spill anything –

MARTHA

Trina, you know me better than that.

TRINA

Well, did they ask who you got your shit from?

MARTHA

Ironically, no. They were too preoccupied with sweating me about Cat Man.

TRINA

What's up with him?

MARTHA

He said he'd help me.

TRINA

You mean you let him buy your ass.

MARTHA

No! I won't let him do that. I can't. Things are starting to break for me. I just shot a movie. Something big. No bullshit, this time. I mean . . . it's starting to happen.

TRINA

And what about those dirty-ass cops?

MARTHA

Why didn't you tell me about them?

TRINA

How could I? Those dick-lickers drag their pig asses to the shop once a week to get there take from Billy. They shake everybody down, baby. And we all knew the time would roll around when they'd up and visit you.

MARTHA

The cops would be the least of my worries!

TRINA

I know, baby. I just . . . I didn't wanna shake you up too much. Y' know?

MARTHA

Well, thanks for not doing me any favors. Speaking of which – Oh, God! I was supposed to meet them at Hermosa Beach today.

TRINA

For what?

MARTHA

To give them the ten keys I got from Billy. See, I want to get out of the life. But I needed to make a big score before I did. To avoid them, I moved to another spot, to Venice, to deal. Without telling them. Eventually, they caught up with me and demanded the ten keys. I said I'd meet them. I got busted. And . . . Oh, Jesus! I didn't show.

TRINA

Shit . . .

MARTHA

C'mon, Trina. I got busted! It couldn't be helped. They'll see that, won't they?

TRINA

All they'll see is way to smoke your ass.

MARTHA

Why?

TRINA

You mean you got to ask?

MARTHA

I'm trying to get out! Why would they want to –

TRINA

Martha, those damn cops were on your payroll! You can't just shut down and fly off like . . . Mary Poppins.

(Billy enters)

She didn't say nothing, Billy –

BILLY

Get out. Wait in the car.

TRINA

No.

BILLY

Get out of here, Trina.

TRINA

You don't boss me. I'm not going nowhere. Not till I'm ready.

(He grabs her arm)

BILLY

Leave before I kick your ass through the floor.

(She wrests herself from him)

TRINA

Fuck you! You don't come at me that way.

BILLY

You want an excuse, don't you?

TRINA

Billy, she didn't say nothing. And even if she did, what's she gonna tell?

BILLY

And what are you? Her fucking lawyer?

TRINA

Just leave her alone.

BILLY

I'd like to hear from Martha.

MARTHA

When the cops grilled me, your name never came up.

BILLY

You're saying this visit was unnecessary?

MARTHA

Unless you'd like to sit and shoot the breeze.

(Abruptly, Pete enters on edge and perspiring)

PETE

I remembered . . . I remembered I'd taken the blood oath. An oath of brotherhood. Of loyalty. Of sacrifice. A promise to defend my brother and all that is his at any cost. I remembered that. Even, Martha, at the cost of my life.

(He pulls his gun and aims it at Martha)

MARTHA

Petey! . . . What are you doing?

TRINA

Did Cat Man put you up to this?

PETE

The exact same thing happened to Dee. The heat finally nailed her for that bank job. And my brother . . . my beloved brother in blood . . . I made a stand for him. Yeah, I loved her. But I . . . I smoked her, anyway.

(Pete laughs. Cat Man re-enters. Pete notices)

It's either you or her, man.

(Cat Man gently reaches for the gun)

MARTHA

Petey . . . baby, I'm your sister.

PETE

NO! SHUT UP –

CAT MAN

Shh! It's cool, li'l brother. Everything's cool.

(Cat Man takes the gun and kisses Pete's forehead)

Brotherhood is one thing. But you Sister Martha . . . girl, you are and will remain something else entirely.

(He shoots Pete in the chest. Pete falls to the floor)

MARTHA

PETEY! NO! NO! Oh, God! NO!

(She kneels by him, cradling him in her arms as she weeps desperately)

BILLY

Let's get the fuck out of here.

(He is pulling Trina by her arm and they exit. Martha is in agony)

CAT MAN

Martha . . . Sweetheart, I did this for you. I won't 'bout to let nothing step between what was made for us. Nothing. Not even blood.

MARTHA

Go to hell! And fucking rot there!

CAT MAN

I'm handing you my heart, Martha. And you just gon stomp on it?

MARTHA

And when I've thrown it in the goddamned sewer, it will no longer be difficult to cap my ass, will it?

CAT MAN

If I didn't know better, I'd say you was asking for it.

MARTHA

Perhaps. I ain't gonna beg, though.

CAT MAN

Still got some pride, huh?

(He moves to the exit, then stops)

I'll give you a week or two to deal with your shit. Then I'll be back. Cool?

(He exits. Martha lays Pete down, then rises and moves DS)

MARTHA

I sat on the floor holding my dead brother, lost to time and feeling. An hour after the Cat Man left, the two dirty cops dropped by. They stared at me and my dead sibling for a few minutes like a couple of dumb mutts. And left.

I haven't seen them since.

I went home to San Diego to tell dad face to face what had happened to Pete. I told him everything, all the sordid details of what my little brother and I had been involved in. Nona cried as if she were crying again for Marion. Dad said nothing. Not then, not during the funeral. And not to me. Ever again.

I decided to play the opportunist and take the Cat Man up on his offer, allowing his lawyer to represent me. I don't know how he worked it, but he somehow managed to get me off with probation and one year of community service. He couldn't play the race card because I wasn't black. So . . . he played the sex card – *don't ask*. The two detectives, who were present, made cut meat of me with their looks.

I quit dealing and, before it started to affect my career, did what I had to get off coke. I joined a program. Got clean. And stayed clean. I'm not apologizing for what I did. I'm only saying that dope or anything relating to it was no longer in my best interest.

Oh, yeah – that part in the movie did make my career. I even ended up marrying one of the leads. Yes, he knows what I did. And what I've become. I wanted this man to love me wholly. And I promised myself I would never lie to him about my life.

(Cat Man enters)

CAT MAN

And I'm proud of the fact that I played a part in giving this story a happy ending.

(He motions to kiss her. She averts)

Something wrong?

MARTHA

The stories not finished.

CAT MAN

Come again?

MARTHA

You heard me, motherfucker. I'm gonna kill you.

(Silence. Then, Cat Man laughs)

You killed my little brother. You've got to answer for that. It won't be today. Not even tomorrow. It could be six weeks from now. Or, a year, five years, or twenty years into the future. Either way, expect me to visit your sorry ass on some dark L.A. night . . . and kill you.

(He suddenly stops laughing and studies Martha)

CAT MAN

You're a goddamned fool. Or you're serious.

MARTHA

Honey, I've never been more serious about anything in my life.

CAT MAN

Shit. And I might be just as crazy, but – y' know what? I'm gon wait and see if you got the nerve to do it. Yeah. I'm gon wait.

(Cat Man exits)

MARTHA

And something tells me he'll have no problem with the arrangement at all.

Imagine that – Mary Poppins, eschewing her umbrella to fly over the dirty city . . . on a broom! As the angel of death!

Sounds like my next movie, doesn't it?

(Black out. End of play)

