

MY SO CALLED WIFE

By

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PILOT EPISODE

FIRST DRAFT

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TEASER

INT. EZRA KLINE'S LIVING ROOM. DUSK.

EZRA KLINE, early 30s, sits on a couch, a half-empty bottle of vodka in his lap. Most days he exudes an easy-going, Jimmy Stewart-like appeal. Not today. Today there's an EXTENSION CORD WRAPPED AROUND HIS NECK like a noose, a NASTY CUT under his chin, tears running down his face. Just behind him, a chair is splintered in a dozen pieces.

There's an URGENT BANGING ON THE FRONT DOOR.

EZRA
(slurred)
GO AWAY! KILLING M'SELF!

The banging doesn't stop; Ezra takes another swig of vodka.

CUT TO:

A TITLE CARD - SIX MONTHS EARLIER

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

In the cocoon of a warmly-lit bedroom, two bodies move together in perfect sync. A murmur of the WOMAN'S VOICE speaking French - we don't understand the words, but we get the drift - delight, surprise and, finally, ecstatic release.

CUT TO:

Ezra and AVA, his wife of 28 days, lie in bed together, happily entwined, catching their breath. Ava is Belgian, 30s; she has a warm, easy charm and sexy poise.

EZRA
It's amazing how we just seem to
fit.

AVA
Quand il me prend dans ses bras, je
vois la vie en rose.

EZRA
Exactly.
(beat)
What did you say?

AVA
'When he takes me in his arms, I
see the world through rose colored
glasses.' Edith Piaf.

EZRA
'Hit me baby, one more time'
Brittany Spears.

He leans in and kisses her. Here we go again...

CUT TO:

Close on a beautiful GOLD ANKLET as Ezra fastens it on Ava's ankle. They're still in bed, following round 2.

AVA
So tell me, my sweet, the 28th day anniversary present - it symbolizes what exactly?

EZRA
In the kabbala the number 28 is the symbol of the wanderer, who after many years in the dating desert, finally stops his wandering. And so we give a gift associated with the foot, finally at rest.

AVA
(laughing)
You are so good at the bullshit!
What am I going to do with you?

EZRA
Exactly what you've been doing,
until death do us part.

Her fingers plays with the gold anklet. She looks up at him.

AVA
I love this, Ezra. Vraiment. Merci.

EZRA
Hey, just remembered, I have one other little surprise for you, it arrived at the office today.

CUT TO:

Close on a TV SCREEN - their professionally-made wedding video (retro-cool, shot on 8mm) is playing. Ava and Ezra sit on the couch watching, laughing, sharing a bowl of popcorn.

AVA
I can't believe how drunk your brother was, my God --

We intercut with the shots of the wedding - family and friends. Ezra's older brother JOSH, 30s, careening around the dance floor.

EZRA

Drunk, not drink. Look, he's totally making a pass at the back-up singer -

AVA

And your father, he looks jealous.

We see ARTHUR, the family patriarch, watching Josh flirt with the hot back-up singer. Arthur's wife, LANIE, sits down next to him and gives him a loving smack.

EZRA

Busted! Oh my god, look - I got your Aunt Catherine to smile.

On the screen, an ebullient Ezra 'dances' an OLDER WOMAN woman in a wheelchair around the floor - she's enjoying it despite herself.

AVA

Incroyable, you actually made her *laugh*.

The CAMERA pans to an OLDER MAN, watching from the sidelines.

EZRA

Mr. Ellis is checking her out! You know what? We should set those two up.
(Ava frowns)
What, I'm serious.

Ava stands up, blocking the TV, reaching out her hand.

EZRA (CONT'D)

What are you doing, I can't see -

AVA

Viens, mon coeur.

EZRA

But I'm enjoying this -

AVA

Did you know that according to Belgian tradition, the number twenty-eight represents seven times four, seven being the days of the week, and four being the number of times a young couple are supposed to fuck on the their 28th anniversary day.

Her hand reaches down into his boxer shorts.

EZRA

Who am I to stand in the way of
tradition?

She pulls him up off the couch and towards the bedroom. We
PUSH IN on the TV screen - where Ezra and Ava stand at the
dais, toasting their eternal love - as a tinkling, eerie
melody begins to play...

MY SO CALLED WIFE.

END OF TEASER

ACT 1INT. EZRA AND AVA'S KITCHEN. MORNING.

Close on a to go COFFEE MUG with postage stamp pictures of Paris, London and Rome that says 'TRAVEL THE WORLD!' Ezra grabs the mug and his car keys and hustles to the front door.

AVA (O.S.)
Mon coeur...?

Ezra turns to see Ava, gorgeously tousled and wearing Ezra's shirt from last night. She cups his face in her hands...

EZRA
I'm insanely late, my sweet --

AVA
Shh. I just wanted to say... all of this, this house, the money you make for us, you sweet Ezra. I don't take any of it for granted.

Ava kisses him tenderly. Lingers on his lips for a beat...

AVA (CONT'D)
(smiles)
That's all.

She turns and walks back into the house. On Ezra, watching her... *that was weird.*

INT. EZRA'S CAR. MORNING.

Ezra drives through downtown Indianapolis, feeling on top of the world. An EMERGENCY SIREN wails close by; he slows down and says a little prayer as an AMBULANCE races past...

INT. LOBBY. KLINE BOOT AND HEEL. DAY.

Ezra arrives at the offices of the family shoe company: Glass walls, marble floors, the hive-energy of a successful business. Ezra sees CAROL, the receptionist... crying.

EZRA
Hey, what's the matter?

Before she can answer, PARAMEDICS rush a GURNEY towards the exit - MR. ELLIS, the older man we saw in the wedding video, strapped in, shirt open, oxygen mask over his face. Ezra's brother, JOSH (mid-30s, golf shirt, golf attitude), follows.

JOSH
Shit, man, you're way late. Have you talked to dad?

Ezra stares at the gurney being pushed onto the elevator.

EZRA
Is that Mr. Ellis?

JOSH
Is. Was. Hard to tell. He collapsed
in the kitchenette. Almond milk
everywhere.

EZRA
Jesus. Is he going to make it?

JOSH
Touch and go.
(shrugs as the elevator
door closes)
Hey, we get old, we die.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICES. MOMENTS LATER.

They walk and talk past cubicles, towards Ezra's office.

JOSH
I asked Gabby to get you the
accounting department roster. If
Mr. Ellis croaks I'd rather hire
from within than pay some
headhunter. And even if he doesn't,
we might want to make a change -
(Ezra stares at him)
Oh, don't give me your sensitive
face, Ezra, please.
(looks down the hall and shouts:)
GABY!!?? GET OVER HERE!

EZRA
(startled)
God, Josh, do you always have to -

JOSH
What? Yell at your work wife?
You're certainly not gonna.

They head into Ezra's office - it's nice, if unremarkable. Pictures of Ezra and Ava hang in tasteful frames. GABY, late 20s, appears in the doorway. She's an executive assistant, incredibly capable, way cuter than she knows, and has carried a torch for Ezra for some years... an open secret.

GABBY
Hey. Hey Ezra. Any word on Mr. Ellis?

JOSH

Coin flip. All right, kiddies,
Pebble Beach is calling, I'm outy.
Ezra, text me on Mr. Ellis; Gaby,
don't seduce my brother, he's
married and already punching way
above his weight.

Josh heads out. They roll their eyes - Josh's teasing isn't new to either of them, especially on this subject.

EZRA

Poor Mr. Ellis, such a nice guy.

GABBY

I know... is he married? Kids?

EZRA

No idea. I don't think I ever saw
him out of the office except at my
wedding.

GABBY

(nods)

I danced with him. Total charmer.

They think about Mr. Ellis a moment longer, Gaby steals a look at Ezra.

GABY

So, how'd the anklet go over?

EZRA

(having fun)

Wouldn't you like to know...

GABBY

Okay, so it either went really well
or really badly.

(he just smiles, she blushes)

Okay then, I guess it went really
well! And today's present is number
29, right? A courier dropped off
the ownership papers this morning,
so the present is a go. Just pop by
my desk on your way out.

EZRA

Perfect. Thanks, Gaby, you know I'd
be lost without you.

She smiles - if only that were true. Ezra's cell buzzes, he fishes it out of his pocket.

GABBY
Need anything else?

EZRA
(looks up)
Mr. Ellis... is dead. He died.
Shit.

GABBY
Oh geez.

They stand there, in shocked disbelief, the news still settling, when Ezra's intercom screams to life:

OLDER MALE VOICE
(on intercom)
EZRA!!

Gabby and Ezra jump out of their skin.

OLDER MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
(on intercom)
Ezra stop flirting and please get
your skinny ass to work, and by
work I mean *IN MY OFFICE. NOW!*

Ezra and Gabby look through Ezra's glass-walled office into the MUCH BIGGER GLASS-WALLED OFFICE where ARTHUR KLINE (early 70s, fit, charming, brutal) shouts into his intercom.

EZRA
Okay, got to see the old man, I'll
grab those papers from you later.

ARTHUR
(on intercom)
I heard that, dummy!

Off Ezra... *whoops.*

INT. ARTHUR KLINE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur sits behind his desk, imperiously. Ezra sits opposite.

ARTHUR
Did you hire a new head of accounting?

EZRA
I found out he died two minutes ago -

ARTHUR
Which is why I had Josh tell you to
have it lined up. It's called
thinking ahead.
(before Ezra can disagree)
(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Sixty-three years old. Drops dead making a latte. Shit. When I go, I hope it's laying on top of your mother --

EZRA

Jesus, dad --

ARTHUR

Or whatever. I'm not going out making a frickin' latte.

EZRA

I'm sure you'll have a very masculine death.

ARTHUR

Don't patronize me. I'm strong like bull. Wanna wrestle?

EZRA

Not particularly.

ARTHUR

(slightly effeminate)
Not particularly.

They stare at each other. Arthur shakes his head. Ezra wonders how this ended up being his life.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You and Ava seem pretty happy.

EZRA

We are, thanks.

ARTHUR

Don't fuck it up.

EZRA

Doing my best.

ARTHUR

Does she ask about me? Does she wonder if I still make love to your mother?

EZRA

WHAT IS HAPPENING RIGHT NOW?

ARTHUR

She might want to know if her needs will be met as you get older -

EZRA
(gets up)
Okay, you know what - that's enough
of this conversation. Weirdo.

ARTHUR
'Weirdo.' 'Old man.' You know what
my father would have done if I had
called him names?

EZRA
Kicked your ass. Yeah, PopPop was a
real badass.

ARTHUR
He sure as hell was - unlike his
pussy-ass grandsons.

Through the glass doors, Ezra and Arthur see a delivery man
with a HUGE BASKET OF FLOWERS entering Ezra's office.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Who the hell is sending you flowers?

INT. EZRA'S OFFICE. DAY.

EZRA opens the card: *Thank you for your years of patronage.
Good luck with everything! Best- Ellie Singer, First National
Bank.* Weird. Ezra picks up his phone, dials.

EZRA
(into phone)
Hi, Ezra Kline calling for Ellie
Singer... Yeah, she sent a very
nice present, but I have no idea
why. Thanks, that'd be great.

He hangs up, dials another number. After one ring, Ava's
voicemail picks up.

EZRA (CONT'D)
Hey, sweets. Looking forward to
celebrating tonight - *twenty-nine*
days of wedded bliss! Love you.

CUT TO:

INT. PET STORE. AFTERNOON.

A CAVALIER KING CHARLES PUPPY stares up at us, huge pools for
eyes, *irresistible*; it licks Ezra's face. On the counter: an
array of high end dog accessories - cage, food, collar, etc.
The store clerk, a tatted-up TEENAGE BOY, runs Ezra's credit
card.

TEENAGE BOY

I hope your wife likes surprises.
My mom's boyfriend bought her a
ferret for her birthday, that was a
shit-show, man.

EZRA

Ava's going to love this guy.

TEENAGE BOY

(stares at a screen)
This says your card's no good.

EZRA

Are you sure?

TEENAGE BOY

'Declined. Error 457289.'

EZRA

That's weird. Okay, try this one.

He hands the kid another credit card; as he runs it -

TEENAGE BOY

This other time, this lady bought her
kids a Shitzu, hid it under the sofa.
I guess she was thinking it would
peek its little head out of the
pillows and surprise them or
something. Except her slob son
plopped his fat-ass down to wreck
some X-Box and broke its back. *Woops.*
(off the screen)
Nope - this one too.

He looks at Ezra with a mix of suspicion and sympathy.

EZRA

That's not possible.

TEENAGE BOY

Come back tomorrow, I guess?

EZRA

No, we have to make this work, I--

TEENAGE BOY

Closing in ten minutes. Sorry.

EZRA

It's our 29th day wedding
anniversary, just let me--

TEENAGE BOY

I don't think that's a thing, man.

Ezra tries to not strangle this kid.

CUT TO:

Ezra's on his cell now to the credit card company. The puppy is barking at him, picking up on Ezra being stressed.

EZRA

(for the 100th time)

- no, I didn't take thirty-thousand dollars of *cash* out on my credit card. If I *had* taken it out, I wouldn't need to *use my credit card right now...* I will talk to the fraud department after you --

TEENAGE BOY

Hey, I got to close in 5 minutes...

EZRA

(into phone)

You know what, never mind.

He angrily hangs up; now every dog in the place is barking.

TEENAGE BOY

Amazing how they pick up on negative energy.

EZRA

Amazing. Is there an ATM around here?

TEENAGE BOY

End of the plaza, at Forever 21.

EZRA

Could just hold on 5 minutes before you close up, I'll be right back.

TEENAGE BOY

(not pleased)

I guess.

EZRA

Great. Thanks. You'll fall in love someday. You'll get it.

TEENAGE BOY

Thumbs up.

Ezra looks at the little puppy, who's still yapping.

EZRA

I'll be back for you in a minute.

Her reaches to comfort the puppy - it growls and then nips his hand.

EZRA (CONT'D)

Fuck!

EXT. ATM. STRIP MALL. AFTERNOON.

Blood seeps through the paper towel wrapped around Ezra's hand as he punches in his code: **CURRENT BALANCE:0**. WHAT. THE FUCK. Something very strange, or very bad, is happening.

EXT. STREET. DUSK.

Ezra weaves through heavy traffic, the blood widening across the paper towel. He presses a button on the steering wheel.

EZRA

Call Ava!

It rings once, then...

PHONE

The number you have reached is no longer in service. Please check the number and dial--

He hangs up, trying to hold it together...

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS. LATE AFTERNOON.

He speeds through his neighborhood - kids playing, parents arriving home. One of them angrily gestures at Ezra as he drives by - *SLOW DOWN*. Ezra ignores him.

He screeches into his driveway, behind Ava's Honda Accord... *thank god she's home...*

INT. EZRA AND AVA'S HOUSE. AFTERNOON.

Ezra rushes through the front door.

EZRA

Ava?

He looks around; the house feels strangely vacant, silent...

EZRA (CONT'D)

AVA!? HONEY??!

He hustles down the hallway, into the bedroom. Everything seems fine, but... the closet light is on.

He opens the door - everything is as it should be, and yet...
He sweeps away a bunch of Ava's clothes on hangers, revealing
a SAFE.

It's open - AND IT'S EMPTY.

EZRA (CONT'D)
(dizzying panic)
Jesusfuckingchrist.

CUT TO:

Ezra bursts into the kitchen, punching 9-1-1 into his cell.

EZRA (CONT'D)
Yes, I think we've been robbed. My
wife's car is here but she's... I'm
worried she's been kidnapped or --

He stops mid-sentence. Written on the REFRIGERATOR DOOR, in a
familiar lipstick scrawl:

www.mrsezrakline.com

He walks to the fridge, staring at it.

911 DISPATCH
Are you in danger? Are you safe?

Ezra hangs up.

CUT TO:

Ezra sits at the kitchen island, tapping in the URL... A home
page comes up - a Victorian wallpaper pattern and CLICK HERE.

He clicks... and then: AVA APPEARS ON THE SCREEN. She sits on
the other side of the same kitchen island; it's like she's
actually across from him. She just stares at him, something
sympathetic, almost sad, in her expression...

AVA
Hi, Ez.

Ezra stares into his wife's eyes...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOINT. EZRA'S KITCHEN. A MOMENT LATER

Ezra can barely breathe.

EZRA

Hi, Ava.

AVA

(on computer)

You must feel very confused.

EZRA

What the fuck is going on --

AVA

(overlapping)

The credit cards, the checking account, the safe. It's a shock.

He realizes that he's not actually talking to her.

AVA (CONT'D)

But all those things, all that money, is gone. And the sooner you accept it, the better for everyone.

INT. NONDESCRIPT HOTEL ROOM. SAME.

Curtains drawn, a bit of sunlight leaking in, the sound of an airplane taking off. Ava stands at the bathroom sink, staring into the mirror. She opens a box of hair dye and gets to work.

AVA (V.O.)

There's no easy way of saying it, my dear - but here it is: you will never see me again...

INT. KITCHEN. EZRA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Ezra stares at the screen, as Ava talks, the color draining from his face as he tries to understand what's happening.

INT. ANOTHER HOTEL ROOM. DAY.

Mr. Ellis, the accountant for Kline shoes, sits on the bed. He wears boxer shorts and socks - and is decidedly not dead.

AVA (V.O.)

You will ask yourself many questions as you come to terms with this new reality.

Mr. Ellis picks up the pieces of a disguise lying next to him and carefully begins to apply them to his face.

INT. APARTMENT. SAME.

Aunt Catherine sits in her wheelchair, drinking a cup of tea. She glances at the clock on the wall. Sighs...

AVA (V.O.)
 You will replay every moment we
 shared, think about every person we
 met along the way..

INT. AVA'S HOTEL ROOM. DAY.

Ava, in her underwear, her hair in a shower cap. She uses scissors to cut her old clothes into pieces.

AVA (V.O.)
 Most certainly you'll blame
 yourself for what has happened.
 Don't. You are a good man. Perhaps
 that is the only true thing to hold
 onto. You are a good man, Ezra
 Kline. If you weren't... well, I'm
 sorry to say it, but this probably
 wouldn't have happened to you.

She starts to TAKE OFF THE ANKLET Ezra bought her. The clasp is tricky. She stops and looks at it, the trace of a smile as she remembers Ezra giving it to her. She leaves it on.

INT. KITCHEN. EZRA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Ezra stares at the screen, at Ava, her words providing little comfort.

AVA
 You will feel so many emotions in
 the coming days. Anger.
 Humiliation. Doubt. What will you
 tell people, your friends and
 family? All anyone needs to know is
 this: We broke up. We rushed into a
 marriage, hardly knowing each
 other. Language barriers, cultural
 barriers. And people will accept
 this - but still you will want find
 me, to punish me.

Push in on Ezra - we can see she is right, about everything.

AVA (CONT'D)
 Ezra. I want you stand up now and
 go and open the freezer door.

A beat. Part of him doesn't want to agree to do anything she says, but what choice does he have at this point?

He opens the freezer door - inside is a thick, official-looking manila envelope.

AVA (CONT'D)

Now listen to me very carefully. If you call the police, if you enlist anyone to help find me, or try to find me yourself... *know this*: One: You will fail. You will NEVER find me. And two: if you ignore this warning and do try, everyone in your family - everyone in the world - will see what's in that folder.

He takes out a sheaf of papers and photographs, his eyes widening. We don't see what he sees, but it's clearly another gut-wrenching shock.

Ava looks out at Ezra from the screen. Silent for a moment. He stares back at her.

AVA (CONT'D)

This is the hardest part, Ezra, saying goodbye. You must move on with your life. You are a wonderful man, with a great heart. And you will find love again.

EZRA

But...

AVA

Goodbye, Ezra Kline. Salut. I wish you luck. I wish you happiness.

A slight hesitation as Ava (virtually) gazes into Ezra's eyes; is she a tiny bit choked up?

AVA (CONT'D)

I'm a better woman for knowing you.

The screen goes black. Ezra stares at it, pale as a ghost.

INT. EZRA'S BEDROOM. MINUTES LATER.

Ezra rifles through Ava's drawers, shelves, hanging clothes... searching her myriad personal possessions for any kind of clue... nothing.

He paces, he shouts... he notices an indentation on the bed, exactly the shape of a suitcase. He kneels in front of it.

EZRA
(sotto)
Where did you go...

CUT TO:

Back in the kitchen, Ezra re-enters www.mrsezrakline.com, presses return - same Victorian wallpaper, same CLICK HERE... but when he does, a cat video with cute music comes up. *FUCK.*

After a beat, Ezra grabs his phone, his car keys, and bolts.

INT. EZRA'S CAR. DUSK.

Ezra speeds down a street lined with quaint apartment buildings, presses a button on the steering wheel.

EZRA
(voice breaking)
Call Aunt Catherine.

It picks up after one ring.

PHONE
The number you have reached is no longer in service. Please check the number and--

EZRA
Mother. Fucker.

EXT. APARTMENT. DUSK.

Ezra hits a BUZZER over and over on the apartment directory.

BUILDING MANAGER
(through intercom)
What?!!

EZRA
I need to talk to you about Catherine Malveaux. Right away. It's an emergency.

INT. AUNT CATHERINE'S APARTMENT. DUSK

The BUILDING MANAGER opens the door to the apartment and follows Ezra inside. Ezra paces around, looking for anything.

BUILDING MANAGER
Nice lady. Said she was going on a trip, would be back soon.

Ezra sees an EMPTY WHEELCHAIR, a cold cup of tea beside it.

EZRA
She left her wheelchair.

BUILDING MANAGER
(considers this, shrugs)
Maybe she got better?

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL. DUSK.

Ava slides her passport to the AIRLINE CLERK. Her hair is blond and curly now, she's dressed liked a business executive - there's something nondescript about her; you might not be able to accurately describe her twenty minutes from now.

AVA
Hi, I'm booked on the one o'clock flight to Chicago.

No French accent whatsoever; Ava is American.

AIRLINE CLERK
Sure. Name and photo I.D. please.

As she hands over her driver's license.

AVA
Maddie Jonson. No H in Jonson.

AIRLINE CLERK
Thank you, Maddie. Are you a Madeline or a Maddison?

AVA/MADDIE
Just Maddie, actually.

They smile at one another.

INT. AIRPORT. DUSK.

Boarding pass in hand, Ava, now known as MADDIE, walks through the terminal, right past a transformed AUNT CATHERINE, who is in the midst of checking in for a different flight at a different airline. Their eyes meet for the barest of moments.

Maddie walks into the TSA security fast lane, failing to notice a MAN checking in his golf bags, one line over - IT'S EZRA'S BROTHER, JOSH; he stares at Ava curiously as she disappears from view.

INT. AIRPORT BAR. DAY.

MADDIE sits drinking a Jameson on the rocks. She fingers the anklet Ezra gave her, smiles to herself, a little pensive.

JOSH (O.S.)

Hey there.

Maddie almost spit-takes - Josh is suddenly in the seat next to her, staring at her intently. Does he recognize her? She wants to bolt, but holds his gaze.

JOSH (CONT'D)

How you doing today?

MADDIE

Another day. Another adventure.

JOSH

Honestly, you look a little sad.
Where you heading?

MADDIE

Into the world on a big jet plane.

JOSH

(to bartender)

Can I get a Heineken and another of
whatever she's got there? Thanks.

MADDIE

I haven't decided if I'm having
another yet.

JOSH

Humor me.

MADDIE

Are you humorous?

JOSH

(smiling)

I'm meeting a bunch of old college
friends in Pebble Beach. I need
some female attention before the
bro-fest.

MADDIE

And how'd I get to be the lucky
girl?

(she takes a look around
the empty bar)

Ah. Beggars, choosers. That bit.

The BARTENDER drops the Heineken and second Jameson.

JOSH

If this place was jammed, I still
would've picked you.

MADDIE
Why's that?

JOSH
Oh, come on. You *know* you're
gorgeous.

MADDIE
A woman likes to be told.

JOSH
You're gorgeous.

MADDIE
Thank you.

They stare at each other. It's getting charged.

JOSH
You look like someone I know.

MADDIE
(playfully weary)
Oh, boy, here we go.

JOSH
No, no! You really... wow. You
could *not* be more different, but
you really look like my *sister-in-*
law. My brother's wife.

MADDIE
Right. So you want to fuck your
brother's wife?

Now it's Josh's turn to almost spit-take.

JOSH
Whoa! I never said I wanted to--

MADDIE
So, you *don't* want to fuck me?

JOSH
I never said that either, I--

MADDIE
- hmm. You're not saying much at
all then, are you?
(she smiles, leans closer)
Let me help you...

JOSH
Um, sure.

MADDIE

Repeat after me: We're just two
strangers in a bar.

JOSH

We're just two strangers in a bar.

MADDIE

We will never see each other again.

JOSH

We will never see each other again.

She brushes her foot along his calf...

MADDIE

I like your foot brushing my leg.

JOSH

I like your foot brushing my leg.

MADDIE

I've always wanted to take a woman
to an airport hotel.

JOSH

I've always wanted to take a woman
to an airport hotel.

MADDIE

(leaning closer)
We could do that right... now.

JOSH

We could do that right... now.

They are so close to kissing...

MADDIE

(quieter, more intense.)
I've always wanted to fuck my
brother's wife.

JOSH

Um...

MADDIE

Say it.

JOSH

*I've always wanted to fuck my
brother's wife.*

MADDIE
(she smiles; a whisper)
Let's go across the street and
fuck.

He can barely stand it.

JOSH
(a whisper)
Let's go across the street and
fuck.

He waits for the kiss, it's unbearable... until Maddie HOPS
OFF HER BARSTOOL.

MADDIE
(full voice)
Sorry. Can't.

She throws back the rest of her drink, leaving the second
drink untouched.

JOSH
What... whaa?

MADDIE
Gotta jet, as they say. Nice to
meet you...?

JOSH
Um, Josh. I'm Josh. But -

MADDIE
Bye, Josh.

JOSH
Wait, I... didn't even get your
name.

MADDIE
No. You didn't.

She puts a twenty dollar bill under her glass and walks away.
Josh can only watch, dumbstruck, erect in his pants. Just as
Maddie turns the corner, a flash of light catches Josh's eye -
- SUNLIGHT BOUNCING OFF THE ANKLET THAT EZRA BOUGHT HER.

JOSH
Holy shit.
(calling out)
Hey! HEY!

He fumbles for some cash and tosses it on the bar, runs out.

OLD MAN

SHIT!! I'm so sorry.

(looks around helplessly)

Can someone help us, please...?

Blood steams between Josh's fingers as he tries to stand, but his SHOE SLIPS on the BLOOD-STAINED FLOOR and he FACE-PLANTS again...

A CROWD gathers as Josh catches a last glimpse Maddie, on the moving sidewalk, floating into the distance and out of sight.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREEINT. PLANE. MINUTES LATER.

Maddie is settled in her first class seat, reading a *something awesome and ironic and telling* magazine as the flight attendants ready the cabin for take-off.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Miss, excuse me? Could you just...

Maddie looks up. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT is helping the same OLD MAN from the terminal, pointing at the seat next to Maddie.

MADDIE

Oh, yes. Of course.

She unbuckles and stands up as the old man struggles into his seat. He settles. She sits back down.

OLD MAN

Thank you very much.

MADDIE

You're welcome.

The flight attendant moves away. Maddie never looks up from her magazine, pulls a COMPACT out of her purse and places it on the arm rest between them.

MADDIE (CONT'D)

Bad hair day?

The old man grabs the compact, flips it open - sees that his FAKE MUSTACHE and PROSTHETIC NOSE are practically flapping off his face.

OLD MAN

(sotto)

Goddamn it.

He presses the disguise back in place, and we realize that it's MR. ELLIS (also known as MAX, part of Maddie's crew).

MADDIE

You look pretty good for a dead man, Max.

MAX

Hardy har-har. I almost crapped my pants holding my breath on that gurney --

MADDIE

That would have been realistic -
dead men often crap their pants.

MAX

What the hell were you doing with
Josh Kline? You coulda fucked us...

MADDIE

Easy, now. Dumb luck, he spotted me
in the bar.

MAX

And you just *had* to play with him.
You had to take it as close to the
flame as possible; and with you
that is *always* too goddamn far--

MADDIE

I take it too far? Did you have to
break his nose?

Max takes a breath to calm down.

MAX

Yeah, well - I always hated that
little shit.

They both smile. The plane begins to taxi. Max turns to her.

MAX (CONT'D)

So. How much did we get?

Her smile just gets wider, as the plane TAKES OFF.

CUT TO:

INT. KLINE BOOT AND HEEL. DAY.

Ezra sits at his desk, unshaven and sloppily dressed. He
stares into the distance.

Gaby stands unnoticed just outside the doorway, watching him,
concerned. She's almost knocks but chickens out and retreats
to her office.

EZRA'S POV:

Arthur and Josh in Arthur's office. Josh's nose is bandaged,
his eyes black. The two men talk heatedly. Josh turns and
looks through the glass at Ezra. He gestures: GET IN HERE. In
response, Ezra presses a button on his desk and the lights in
his office go out, leaving him in total shadow.

ARTHUR
(on intercom)
Ezra. Get your ass in here.

EZRA
(barely audible)
Coming.

He doesn't move. Off Josh and Arthur, waiting impatiently.

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE. MOMENTS LATER.

Arthur sits behind his desk, apoplectic. Josh paces. Ezra sits quietly opposite his father, a folder in his lap.

ARTHUR
(mid-rant)
She took *all* your cash, took cash
maximums on *all* your credits cards--

EZRA
Yep.

ARTHUR
I talked to Ellie Singer at First
National. Did you know she also
took a SECOND MORTGAGE out on your
house? Huh?

EZRA
Yep.

ARTHUR
She even took the Bar Mitzvah bonds
Bubby and Zadie gave you.

EZRA
All seventy-five dollars?

ARTHUR
IS THAT THE POINT?
(silence)
Is it?

A beat.

EZRA
Nope.

ARTHUR
I swear to god, Ezra, say something
other than 'Nope' or 'Yep,' or so
help me --

EZRA
(turns to Josh)
What happened to your face?

Arthur and Josh share a look.

ARTHUR
Tell him.

JOSH
I saw Ava. At the airport. *Dressed
as someone else.*

Ezra is finally alert...

EZRA
Did you... talk to her?

JOSH
(slight hesitation)
No. I was following her and then
I... lost her in the crowd.

EZRA
Good job, Nancy Drew.

JOSH
Yeah. Well, the truth is I was
attacked before I could --

EZRA
She attacked you?

JOSH
No! This old man with a --

EZRA
You were attacked by an old man?

ARTHUR
SHUT UP. Both of you.
(silence)
Here's what we're gonna do. We're
gonna find her. We're gonna get
your money back. And we're gonna
crucify that French bitch.

EZRA
Belgian.

ARTHUR
What?

EZRA
She's Belgian.

ARTHUR

Don't talk to me like that --

EZRA

- or that you stole the patent for the Kline heel from Uncle Joe and then somehow got him committed to a *mental institution*? Which part will nobody have to know? Because, according to Ava, if we try to find her, ALL OF IT comes out.

Arthur can only stare at his son. Enraged, humiliated, powerless. Ezra stands.

EZRA (CONT'D)

Maybe you and my-so-called wife have more in common than we thought, huh? Fucking liar. Cheat. Fraud.

ARTHUR

(softly)

You can't talk me like that -

EZRA

Yes I can.

Ezra grabs the folder off the desk and turns to leave.

EZRA (CONT'D)

(not looking back)

I quit.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOURINT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Ezra sits on the couch watching the wedding video, his face blank. The DOORBELL RINGS. He ignores it. It RINGS AGAIN. He doesn't move.

We see Josh's face peering through the tiny stain-glassed window in the front door. His bandage is off but his nose is still swollen, his eyes still blackened.

JOSH
(through the window)
Ez! Hey man... open up.

Ezra reaches for the phone...

JOSH (CONT'D)
Ezzie, you're better than her, man!
Let's get you on your feet.

Ezra dials a three digit number...

WOMEN'S VOICE
(through phone)
*911... please state the nature of
your emergency.*

EZRA
(matter-of-fact)
Someone is trying to break into my
house. 429 Fullerton Parkway.

911 DISPATCH
Are you in danger, sir?

EZRA
I may be, yes.

911 DISPATCH
*We have a unit in your neighborhood.
They are on the way. I'll stay on
the line with you while --*

EZRA
Thank you.

He hangs up.

JOSH
Come on, Ezra. Let me in.

EZRA
(still watching the video)
I just called the police.

JOSH
What?

We hear a POLICE CAR SIREN in the distance. It's getting louder, closer... Josh turns towards the sound.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Shit.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. HOTEL AGAVE, SANTA BARBARA. NIGHT.

Maddie sits on the balcony of a not-very-nice, hip-despite-itself motel, the freeway whooshing close by. She finishes rolling a joint. Sighs, and lights it.

CUT TO:

She lies on her still-made motel bed, flipping through channels, some vending-machine food spread out around her. It's a small-scale version of Ezra's funk. While not despondent, she seems a bit... vacant.

She stops flipping when she lands on Judy Holliday and William Holden in 'BORN YESTERDAY.' ON THE TV:

BILLIE DAWN
How about the story of your life?

PAUL VERRALL
Oh no. Much too long... and mostly untrue.

Maddie smiles and sinks into her pillows to watch.

CUT TO:

A RINGING PHONE rouses Maddie from a deep sleep. It's morning.

MADDIE
Hello? (listens) Already? No, that's fine, I'll be there. As usual. Tuesday, got it.

She hangs up, digs around for her cell phone: a text comes in with an address. She writes it down. Then takes the phone apart, removes the SIM card and CRACKS IT in half.

CUT TO:

EXT. EZRA'S HOUSE. DAY.

A beat-up Corolla pulls up to the house and Gaby gets out, carrying a couple of bags of groceries and a plant. She knocks on the door. Waits. Rings the bell. Nothing.

INT. EZRA'S LIVING ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Ezra is on his knees in front of the television, the wedding video playing. At first, it appears as if he's trying to climb into the TV - a new low point for him, perhaps - until he hits a button on the remote and the image jumps back five-seconds. Ezra is mesmerized.

ON THE TV:

Ava and Ezra DANCING, LAUGHING. The camera lazily pans around and finds Aunt Catherine sitting in her wheelchair, smiling and watching. MR. ELLIS WALKS UP TO HER, leans down and WHISPERS INTO HER EAR. She nods, whispers a few words back. He walks away.

Ezra hits the button. It plays again...

TAP. TAP. TAP. Ezra WHIPS AROUND and see Gaby's face in a sliver of exposed living room window.

GABY

(muted by the window)

Ezra! Hey, it's me. How are you?

Dumb question. Sorry.

(holds up a bag of groceries)

I brought you some --

But Ezra is already up, scrambling towards the front door.

CUT TO:

Ezra opens the door, grabs Gaby and pulls her inside.

EZRA

Perfect timing.

GABY

Really? I've been out there for like -

EZRA

Look at this.

He clears off a section of the couch as she clocks the enormous mess. He presses the remote and the same five seconds plays, as many times as we need for the sequence...

EZRA (CONT'D)
(pointing at the t.v.)
How weird it *that*?

Everything seems weird to her - especially the crazed look in Ezra's eyes, and maybe the smell.

EZRA (CONT'D)
I mean, is that an interaction of two people who don't know each other?

GABY
I'm sorry, I don't understand -

EZRA
Ava gone. Aunt Catherine gone -
WITHOUT HER WHEELCHAIR.

GABY
Her wheelchair?

EZRA
And Mr. Ellis is dead! Or is he?

GABY
(patiently)
Ezra, he had a heart attack in the office. An ambulance came and took him away.

EZRA
Did we ever see a death certificate?
A stranger texted me the news. It could have been anyone!

Ezra grabs a bag of chips, stuffs his mouth full.

GABY
I saw him lying on the floor - his face was red, he was barely breathing -

Ezra coughs, a spray of chips coming from his mouth - he starts to gag. He lurches around the room, frantically motioning to Gaby. She leaps up to help him...

GABY (CONT'D)
Oh my God, oh my God! I can do the Heimlich maneuver, let me just -

He snaps out of it. Stares at her - she's so gullible and trusting.

GABY (CONT'D)
That's not nice.

EZRA

I was demonstrating a point.

GABY

Potato chips are bad for you?

EZRA

Nothing is at it seems! Nothing!
Maybe... maybe Aunt Catherine is
really married to Mr. Ellis and
they were controlling Ava somehow.
Maybe Mr. Ellis stole information
on the company and dad and --

GABY

What kind of information?

EZRA

(trying to pull it back)
Huh? Well, you know... why else
would she do it? Huh? Why did she
leave? I don't understand. Money?
She didn't need money! My wife is
gone. SHE'S GONE!

They stand there in silence.

GABY

(gently, lovingly)
This isn't good, Ez. You're not...
well. You may never know why Ava
left, but... people fall out of
love. They do dramatic things.
Especially Europeans.

Ezra slumps onto the couch, the air coming out of him.

GABBY

Listen - why don't I clean this
place up a bit, or maybe just call
in a hazmat team. And you take a
shower. Or I can have the hazmat
team clean you up as well.

Ezra looks up, he can't help but smile.

GABBY (CONT'D)

Come on. Off you go. Let's get you
out of her for a few hours. A nice
dinner. A bottle of wine. A good
cry. Just us girls.

Another smile from Ezra as he shuffles off to the shower. Gaby
looks around the room, sighs. The wedding video still plays.
She picks up the remote, clicks it OFF with determination.

EXT. LA PETITE CHOU. EVENING.

A perfectly iconic little bistro. Through the warmly lit window we see Gaby and Ezra being led to a small table.

GABY (V.O.)

Ezra... um, this French restaurant you've brought us to, does it happen to be the French restaurant where Ava worked when you met her?

INT. LA PETITE CHOU. CONTINUOUS.

Ezra shrugs helplessly.

EZRA

I'm sorry.

She smiles tightly, this is killing her.

GABY

It's okay. Maybe it's like a boil, you just need to bring it to a head and pop it. Get all that... Ava puss out of there.

(he frowns at the analogy)

Sorry, I call 'em like I see 'em. Let's do this: tell me about the night you met. Who were you with?

EZRA

No one. I used to come here by myself. Bring a book, order a bottle of wine and usually get the duck. And for a couple of hours imagine that, finally, I was living in Paris.

GABY

You wanted to live in Paris?

EZRA

Oh yeah. Always. I had this fantasy that after college I'd travel through Europe, getting odd jobs, meeting fascinating people. And then, after a few years of bouncing around, I would end up in Paris and start to write.

(she listens, moon-eyed)

Standard fantasy fare.

GABY

No, I think it's incredible. Did you ever go?

EZRA

Nah. Started working for the family to save up some money; Josh crashed his stupid car and I stayed for a couple of months. Which turned into a couple of years. Which lasted forever... until I met Ava. Then she kind of... became Paris for me. Does that make sense?

She nods, it makes total sense. Because Ezra is Gaby's Paris, even if he still doesn't get it.

GABY

So you'd come here for dinner -

He nods, and is about to continue his story --

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(interrupting)

Excusez-moi...

Ezra looks up at the waitress - it's AVA, soft-lit, a little in and out of focus. As always, she has a disarming charm and an easy, radiant beauty.

AVA

I'm sorry to interrupt your... reverie.

EZRA

My reverie? No, that's all right.

A long beat, he seems transfixed.

AVA

(smiles, a slight blush)
Mon dieu, I think that you are staring at me.

Yes, he is staring at her; he snaps out of it.

EZRA

Sorry.

AVA

Don't be sorry. May I bring you some wine?

EZRA

Wine. Yes. Please. I usually order the, um--

His mind goes blank, he's staring again.

AVA
How about I choose one for your
liking?

EZRA
That sounds... amazing.

AVA
Tres bien.

A beat. Now she's staring at him.

AVA (CONT'D)
You have a very kind face.

She turns and he watches her walk away.

GABY (V.O.)
That's what I thought when I met
you. A kind face.

Ezra looks over to Gaby, back in the present.

GABY
Did you ask her out that night?

EZRA
Yeah, right. I came back for dinner
four nights running. It became kind
of a joke when I'd arrive. Every
night the same table.

Quick shots -- on four successive nights -- Ezra being lead
to his table, he and Ava talking, laughing, the fourth night
he shares a glass of wine with her while she serves him.

EZRA (CONT'D)
The last night, I got there as
close to closing as I could and
after I left, I waited outside the
restaurant until she finished.

CUT TO:

EXT. LA PETITE CHOU. NIGHT. TEN MONTHS EARLIER.

Ezra stands outside the restaurant, nervous. Ava comes out
and sees him. She doesn't say a word, just smiles. She walks
over to him... a strand of her hair falls across her face. HE
REACHES OUT AND MOVES IT AWAY FROM HER EYES, her lovely face
in the late-night half-light. He starts to say something but
she stops him with a kiss. She folds herself into him.

CUT TO:

INT. LA PETITE CHOU. EVENING. PRESENT.

Ezra remembers, his eyes welling.

EZRA

I'm sorry. I'm just, this is so...
pathetic.

She tentatively places a hand over his; he lets her.

GABY

It's okay, really.

EZRA

No, it's not. Fuck Ava, fucking
conned me. Fuck Paris and all of
that romantic bullshit. I've spent
so much time thinking about the
future - 'when I get to Paris,'
then 'when I quit my job' and 'when
I marry Ava.' Shit. I just want to
be... here. Now. You know?

GABY

(nods)

I have an idea. What do you say we
get hammered?

EZRA

I say... yes, let's get totally
fucked up.

EXT. LA PETITE CHOU. NIGHT.

Ezra and Gaby stumble out of the restaurant, laughing, giddy.
He looks at her.

EZRA

Come here.

Gaby gulps a little and steps towards him. He gazes at her.
Reaches out and GENTLY PULLS A STRAND OF HAIR SO IT FALLS
ACROSS HER FACE-- just like Ava, although Gaby doesn't
realize that. He smiles at her, encouragingly. And then, just
like that, she jumps onto him like a drunken teenager and
kisses him - a total contrast to what happened with Ava.
Gaby's been waiting for this moment for years.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVEINT. EZRA'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

They spill through the front door, groping and kissing and disrobing.

INT. BEDROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

In bed, hot and heavy. Gaby mewling with pleasure. Ezra working hard. Too hard. He stops.

GABY
(kissing him)
It's okay, it's okay, it'll get
hard, I'll make it hard -

EZRA
It's not you -

She stops kissing him - she knows exactly what the problem is - it's not who she is, it's who she isn't.

EZRA (CONT'D)
Maybe if you... no, never mind.

GABY
Is it kinky? Is it super weird?
It's okay. You can trust me, Ez.

EZRA
Maybe if you talked with an accent?

She stares - not what she was expecting.

GABY
Okay, yes. I mean oui. Oui, baby.

They start kissing again, Ezra's getting into it now, moving on top of her as she continues with the accent.

GABY (CONT'D)
Oui, like zat. you are so very
strong, you make me so very... *chaud*.

EZRA
(whispers)
It's a little too French, the Belgian
accent is, um... softer, breathier.
Did you see 'In Bruges?

GABY

Right, okay. You are so very hot
and so very beautiful. Oh God, mon
dieu...

She's actually ecstatic to be in bed with him - she's not
even acting the accent now.

EZRA

Now talk a little dirty, but still
with the accent...

GABY

You are making me so wet, so very
wet. I want you, Ezra... I want you
maintenant, in my wet, hot, pussy!

He's momentarily taken aback:

EZRA

Um, I like that, but honestly...
she would never say 'pussy'.

GABY

But you said dirty.

EZRA

Dirty, not... *vulgar*.

She kisses him, moves against him, a little frantic, she
doesn't want this to stop.

GABY

I want you inside me, deep inside
me.

EZRA

That's good, keep going, almost
there...

GABY

Oui, you are getting so big and
hard. I feel it. I want, I want...
(searching for the words)
I want you take me in ze butt!

He stops again, incredulous.

EZRA

What! No! She's not into that. And
neither am I.

GABY

I'm not either! Jesus, I was just
trying to help.

EZRA

I know, but how is anal sex *less*
dirty than saying 'pussy!?' Jesus.

She starts to cry.

EZRA (CONT'D)

Oh my god, Gaby, I'm sorry, I'm so
sorry.

It's a total disaster. He tries to comfort her, but she
pushes him away and starts to gather her clothes.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANTA BARBARA. DAY.

Establishing shots of the city, like a Chamber of Commerce
tourist film - sunny and happy, upright citizens going about
their business. High end shops and busy restaurants.

A good-looking YOUNG COUPLE walks down the street; the
boyfriend catches a glimpse of a drop-dead gorgeous GIRL
walking by; he winks at her, she smiles back, he looks away
before his girlfriend notices.

INT. APARTMENT. SANTA BARBARA. EVENING.

Empty except for a card table and chairs. Around the card table
is the gang - Maddie, Mr. Ellis (real name Max) and Aunt
Catherine (real name Sally). Max sifts through a thick dossier.

MAX

- his name is Gary Heller and he's
the managing director of Santa
Barbara Trust, the largest private
bank in the city.

He hands Sally/Catherine a photo.

SALLY

Wow, a real looker.

She passes the photo on to Maddie - Heller is an overweight
guy in his 40s, whose expensive suit can't compensate for the
used car dealer glint in his eye.

MADDIE

Are you kidding me? This is worse
than whatshisname, that A-hole in
Albuquerque.

MAX

Tony Hearn, yeah, he was no picnic.
So what's the play, same as
Indianapolis? Worked like a charm.

SALLY

No way am I rolling around in a
wheelchair for another year. Look
at these biceps --

MAX

(playful)

I like a lady with big arms. How
about a straight-ahead family deal.
Maddie's the wayward daughter, in
recovery or some shit, visiting her
retired parents. I got lonely
playing sad, old Mr. Ellis.

(off Maddie's expression)

What's that face?

MADDIE

After the Klines, I've had enough
family for a long while.

SALLY

Who'd you hate more, the brother or
the father?

MADDIE

Josh was just obnoxious, like a
toddler with a driver's license,
but the dad was a real prick. And
Ezra...

(beat as she thinks about it)

Well, he made the job easy.

Max opens another envelope, sorting through a pile of credit
cards, check books, social security cards. Holds one up:

MAX

Florence Burns...

SALLY

I'm guessing that's me.

MAX

No, actually, it's me. Jesus
Christ, is he serious? Florence?

Sally and Maddie enjoy this.

MADDIE

You can go by Flo.

SALLY

Or Florian. Although Flo *is* nice.

MAX

No, it's not. Why would the Doctor give me a name like that?

MADDIE

Maybe he's punishing you.

SALLY

Punishment?

They laugh.

MAX (CONT'D)

(a little panicky)

That's not funny, not fucking funny at all. Did he say something? Was it the airport incident? I shouldn't have broken that asshole's nose.

MADDIE

Relax, Max, you always get so riled up, he's just having a bit of fun.

MAX

Fun? The Doctor? Give me a break.

MADDIE

What's my name?

MAX

Saffron Keyes. And Sally, you're... Vivian Sternwood.

SALLY

Very Raymond Chandler. I like it.

Max whistles, looking through a stack of papers.

MAX

Guy's put away a shitload of savings. Almost two million. Where'd he get so much money? He only makes... 300K a year.

SALLY

You'll find out, Max, you always do.

MADDIE

I say we run the tri-pod, no connections at all.

MAX

Lonely, very lonely...

CATHERINE

(looking through a file)
His housekeeper just quit and moved
to Sacramento. Maybe that's my play.

MAX

What about you, Maddie, what are
you thinking?

She looks at Heller's photo again and frowns.

MADDIE

This guy would fall for a slug as
long as it was wearing a dress and
a push-up bra. I think I'm going to
make this one fun for me. Yeah.

MAX

Fun for you?

MADDIE

You'll see.
(re: the dossier)
Any juicy bits screaming out to
you, Max?

MAX

He was engaged for a year to a
woman named Jenny Lane. Then he
found out she was screwing his best
friend. No love connections since -
(holds up a photo)
- except for the occasional 25
dollar hand job in the Safeway
parking lot.

MADDIE

(hating this job already)
Classy -

MAX

(shakes his head)
The information the Doctor gets on
people. Used to be I'd have to
spend three weeks going through
someone's garbage before I could
even get up and running -

MADDIE

Yeah, tell us about the old days,
Max. Tell me how hard it used to be
and how easy I've got it.

He looks at her, almost hurt.

MAX

What is it with you? I get the Chinese take-out you like. A nice bottle of Perseco. And you're picking on me, the both of you!

Maddie laughs, gets up and kisses him on the forehead.

MADDIE

I'm sorry, Maxie, you know I'm teasing.

Max frowns. When he's not looking, Maddie gives Sally a 'watch this' wink.

MADDIE (CONT'D)

Hey, Max. Clear something up for me. When you ran the Templeton double play in Boca in '86. What did you guys take - a million dollars?

MAX

A million six fifty.

MADDIE

No! No way. From that Sullivan guy? He ended up in jail?

Max has perked up, considerably. As Maddie puts out some plates and cutlery, Sally opens up the take-out containers and uncorks the wine.

MAX

No, no, no. You're mixing up... it was Francis Delvecchio, owned a chain of exotic bird stores outside Boca. But they were actually a cover for a Ponzi scheme he and his cousin Tony were running in Long Island. Oh, man, these guys were *so ripe*...

They dig into the Chinese food as Max continues the story; suddenly they're like any other family on a Sunday night.

CUT TO:

INT. EZRA'S HOUSE. DAY/NIGHT.

The living room is now part frat-house, part mental institution. Sheets taped over the windows; empty vodka bottles, dirty clothes piled on the dining room table. On the wall - post-its and diagrams, printed freeze frames from the wedding video; it's like Carrie Matheson off her meds.

Ezra sits unshaven, undressed, unglued. The wedding video plays for the thousandth time. He mouths along to the toasts:

EZRA
(in unison with the video)
Until death do us part... you may
kiss the bride... MAZEL TOV!

He hits the '30 seconds back' button...

EZRA (CONT'D)
(in unison with the video)
Until death do us part... you may
kiss the bride... MAZEL TOV!

CUT TO:

SUPER: ONE WEEK LATER

He hasn't moved. The wedding video is FREEZE FRAMED - Ezra and Ava laughing right before the 'Mazel Tov!' PUSH IN on Ezra, staring at the screen - despair, catatonia setting in.

And then - an idea.

CUT TO:

SUPER: TEN MINUTES LATER

Ezra sticks his head in the oven. He tries to press buttons on the outside of the oven while keeping his head inside.

OVEN AUTO VOICE
*Please close oven door before
selecting temperature.*
(Ezra presses a button)
*Please close oven door before
selecting temperature.*
(presses another button)
*Please close oven door before
selecting temperature.*

EZRA
(in oven)
ARRRGHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

CUT TO:

SUPER: 27 MINUTES LATER

Ezra sits on the kitchen floor, by the cabinet under the sink, a bottle of DRANO in his hand. He unscrews the top... sniffs it... *repulsive*.

EZRA (CONT'D)
Oh, man. No way...

CUT TO:

SUPER: 11 MINUTES LATER

Ezra stands in the garage, attempting to tie an ORANGE EXTENSION CORD into a noose. He's terrible at it.

EZRA (CONT'D)
And the snake... goes around... and
then into... the hole!

He pulls. It comes apart in his hand.

EZRA (CONT'D)
FUCKER!!!

CUT TO:

SUPER: 6 MINUTES LATER

Ezra sits in front of the computer, orange extension cord in hand. He types 'HOW TO MAKE A NOOSE WITH AN ORANGE EXTENSION CORD' into YOUTUBE. He clicks a link.....

YOUTUBE VIDEO
*Erstellen Sie eine Schlinge für
Selbstmord ist einfach. Bereiten
Sie Ihre Angelegenheiten. Befolgen
Sie diese Anweisungen.*

Ezra tries to follow the weird German instructions.

CUT TO:

SUPER: 20 MINUTES LATER

Ezra stands on a WICKER CHAIR, the extension cord draped over a ceiling beam and wrapped around his neck. He is DUCT TAPING A PLASTIC BAG AROUND HIS HEAD.

YOUTUBE
*Nun Schritt einfach von der Leiter
und in den Abgrund.*

We hear a CRACKING SOUND. Ezra looks down, alarmed...

CUT TO:

SUPER: 9 MINUTES, 26 SECONDS LATER

The chair is SPLINTERED into a million pieces; the plastic bag is torn and discarded;

WE ARE BACK TO THE TOP OF THE SHOW: Ezra on the couch, crying, drinking, the extension cord around his neck, a nasty RED MARK from the duct tape under his chin.

An URGENT BANGING ON THE FRONT DOOR.

EZRA
GO AWAY! KILLING M'SELF!

The banging is FRENZIED. Ezra sloppily gets up...

EZRA (CONT'D)
RELAAAAAAAAAX! COMING!
Jesusfuckingchrist.

He drags himself to the front door, vodka in hand, the extension cord dragging from his neck behind him. He throws the door open:

EZRA (CONT'D)
WHAT!?

REVEAL: A MAN, RICHARD, late 30s, in an expensive but out of style suit, too much hair gel and cologne - the great high school QB on the down-slope, looking like he hasn't slept in a week. But all Ezra sees is THE FBI BADGE...

EZRA (CONT'D)
Oh, uh... yes, sir?

RICHARD
F.B.I. There's a problem with your wife. May I come in?

Richard doesn't wait for a reply, pockets the badge as he pushes through the door and into the house...

Off Ezra...

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIXINT. EZRA'S HOUSE. MOMENTS LATER.

Ezra follows Richard into the house...

EZRA
Hey, wait a minute -

Richard ignores him, taking in the chaos, clocking Ezra's state, the extension cord still wrapped around his neck.

RICHARD
What's going on in here?

EZRA
Hmmm? Oh, I was... *housework*.

A long beat as Richard stares at the extension cord around his neck.

RICHARD
Are you Ezra Kline?

EZRA
I am. Yes.

RICHARD
Married to Ava Kline?

EZRA
Well. I... yeah.

RICHARD
(increasingly agitated)
You don't sound exactly sure. Are we talking about this Ava Kline...

He pulls a NEWSPAPER CLIPPING from his jacket pocket and holds it up - it's Ezra's WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENT and there's a photo of a smiling Ava and Ezra.

EZRA
That's her.
(eyes welling)
Is she... *dead*?

RICHARD
What? No, bro, no, she's not dead, who said anything about dead. I need to know if she's here. In this house. Now.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
(Ezra shakes his head)
Then where is she?

EZRA
She's gone. She left me. Took
everything.

Richard stares at him, like he's about to explode.

RICHARD
SHIT. Seriously? She's gone?
GODDAMN IT. When did she leave?

EZRA
A month ago. Who the fuck are you?

RICHARD
What? I'm F.B.I, bro, F, B, fucking
I. Did she leave a video? A kind of
website video thing?
(Ezra nods, suspicious)
I need to see it --

EZRA
Stop calling me 'bro.' And I want
to see that badge again.
(Richard stares at him)
You're not F.B.I.

RICHARD
Whatever. I need to see the video.

Ezra shakes his head 'no'.

EZRA
What is this? Where is she??

Richard gets in Ezra's face.

RICHARD
I need to see that video. NOW.

EZRA
Where IS SHE!?

Richard grabs Ezra by the shirt and pushes him against the
wall; Ezra struggles.

RICHARD
I DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE IS! LET ME
SEE THE VIDEO!

Ezra pushes back, kind of SLAPPING at Richard's face.

EZRA
WHERE IS SHE? WHERE IS SHE!?!

RICHARD
OW, FUCK.

They GRAPPLE and SLAP at each other, they PULL HAIR. It's a fight, yes, but more like a playground scuffle than a brawl. Finally, Richard lands a good shot to Ezra's stomach. He drops and Richard pins him to the floor like an older brother, knees on his shoulders. He gets in his face:

RICHARD (CONT'D)
STOP IT! JUST STOP!

Ezra is breathing heavily, but becoming subdued.

EZRA
(almost broken)
Who are you?

RICHARD
SHE'S MY WIFE! Just like you. You hear me, asshole?? She's my wife.

Ezra is wide-eyed, dazed. Richard rolls off him, spent from the fight and from the admission. Ezra sits up, wiping blood from his mouth, breathing hard.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
We married the same woman, man. She took us both.

EZRA
Oh my god --

RICHARD
Yeah. That fucking whore is --

BAM! Ezra PUNCHES Richard in the face. He falls out of frame.

EZRA
Never call her that.

CUT TO:

EXT. SANTA BARBARA TRUST. DAY.

A classic bank building from the 30s, right out of an Edward Hopper painting.

INT. SANTA BARBARA TRUST. SAME.

CAMERA follows a pair of shapely legs - high heels clicking across marble floor, a FAMILIAR ANKLET catching the sun - into an airy corner office. We PAN UP and see the nameplate on the desk - GARY HELLER, MANAGER - and then to his face... Like in his photo, Heller is overweight, badly dressed, unctuous - but there's an unkind hardness in his eyes that the photo failed to capture.

HELLER

Please, have a seat... Ms. Keyes.

REVEAL: Maddie, now made-over as SAFFRON KEYES - blond hair, push-up bra, sexy tattoo of a serpent that can be partially glimpsed on her left breast; she's Judy Holliday for the new millennium, 'Born Yesterday' meets Katy Perry.

HELLER (CONT'D)

So, you're here interviewing to be my assistant--

SAFFRON

Assistant? No - I'm here to sell you Girl Scout cookies. Would you like to try one?

(reaching into her bag)

They're super delicious.

A beat - he realizes she's kidding and laughs drily.

HELLER

You're funny. You got me. Okay--

SAFFRON

(a tiny squeal)

Mostly people say 'adorable' or 'klutzy' or 'hot'. A boy I once dated said I was 'feral', which I had to look up in the dictionary. It means 'akin to a wild animal' and derives from the Latin word 'ferus'. But people rarely call me 'funny', so thank you very much.

HELLER

You're welcome. But if you come to work for me you'll need to talk less.

Saffron reacts; this guy may not be as easy as she imagined. He looks over her resume.

HELLER (CONT'D)
Philadelphia Savings Bank. Montclair
Insurance. Good references. What
brings you to California?

SAFFRON
I've always been kind of a free
spirit. Every few years I like to
try new places, new faces.

HELLER
Well, banking is serious business.
Not really for the 'hippie' type.

SAFFRON
Hippie? Oh, no, Mr. Heller. I'm
very very serious.
(makes a 'very serious' face)
HARUMPH!

Heller just stares at her. She stares back, still fake
serious. After an excruciating pause, he barely smiles.

HELLER
Are you an actress or comedian or
something?

SAFFRON
I did some modelling when I was
younger, but -

HELLER
(waves dismissively)
Don't need to hear your life story,
I just want to make sure you're not
working here to try out your cute
little jokes. Or that you really
want to be somewhere else.

SAFFRON
Oh, no sir. I want to be right
here.

HELLER
Good.

His eyes flit over her - it's unnerving.

HELLER (CONT'D)
Your duties would be clerical,
secretarial... and anything else I may
need.

SAFFRON
Understood.

HELLER

And if you were to fail in any of those duties... well, I'd have to have you killed.

(she stares at him; he half-smiles)

See. I can be funny too.

SAFFRON

Oh! Yes, sir. Very funny. Got me!

HELLER

Oh, you'll know if I get you!

SAFFRON

That's funny too!

He looks Saffron over again - almost like he can see right through her dress; it's enough to make her want to run out of the room and take a shower. There's a knock on the door.

HELLER

Oh, Burns, come in - perfect timing.

Saffron looks over as MAX (now MR. BURNS) enters in a Brooks Brothers suit, grey trim mustache - he's already working at the bank.

HELLER (CONT'D)

I'd like you to meet my new assistant, Saffron Keyes.

SAFFRON

(squeals with excitement)

Seriously? Are you sure? Don't you want to check my references or ask me some more questions about my last job or my favorite color? Green obviously, this is a bank after all.

HELLER

I get a feeling about people, Ms. Keyes, and I have a very good feeling about you.

CUT TO:

Saffron sits at Max's desk, a few minutes later.

SAFFRON

That picture didn't do him justice.

MR. BURNS

If you can please sign there and there. And I'll need your social -

SAFFRON

Didn't get close to capturing the the oozing sleaziness. Maybe you're not the only one the Doctor has it in for.

Mr. Burns glances over at the female BANK EMPLOYEE one desk over, nosy about the new employee.

MR. BURNS

Thank you, Ms. Keyes. Our work day starts promptly at 9, ends at 5.30. I sincerely hope you'll be happy working at the Santa Barbara Trust.

CUT TO:

EXT. EZRA'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

Ezra and Richard lie on lawn chairs in Ezra's typically suburban back yard. They have make-shift ice packs and paper towels on their cuts. They're both into the vodka now. The flickering blue glow of TV sets pulse from the windows of the neighboring houses.

RICHARD

- it's not like I was looking to get married, or fall in love. I wasn't even *lonely*. Real estate in Scottsdale was booming and I was the biggest game in town. And I mean I was getting a *ton* of pussy. One day this older woman comes into the office looking for a condo sublet. Usually I don't show properties myself, especially rentals - but her niece was with her... and holy shit, man. She was beautiful and like, *really* smart. Classy. And for some crazy reason - totally into me. Like from the second we met, we had this... rhythm. Even though she was like this super-cultured new Yorker -

Ezra looks like he might puke.

EZRA

New York? She wasn't... from another country?

RICHARD

She was from another universe, bro. Upper East Side Manhattan. Private schools, the whole shebang. Anyway. I found the aunt an apartment that same day. Boom. Took Alice out for dinner the next night. Bang. Married her four months later. My buddies said it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Probably was. Until it wasn't. Three-months later - poof. Gone. Just this internet link to a video and some, you know, some information about --

EZRA

- about what would happen if you tried to find her or went to the authorities.

RICHARD

Yeah, exactly. So, I watch the video, then I try to watch it again, but now it's a video of--

EZRA

Cute cats --

RICHARD

Whales mating or some shit --

They sit there. Not at all liking the similarities of their stories.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

All my money. Gone. Had to shutter the business. Brutal. After about six months of sitting in my own filth, just like you are now, bro, I figured screw it. I'm gonna find this bitch myself.

Ezra tries to process all this new information.

EZRA

So Ava pretends to be this classy girl from New York City, Alice -

RICHARD

Bro, stop right there. Ava doesn't exist. Alice probably doesn't either. She's a con artist. And so is her 'aunt.'

Ezra shakes his head like Richard's a total idiot.

EZRA

You don't understand. This woman. Our marriage. The way we were with each other. You can't *fake* what we had. Maybe she and her aunt were in trouble or needed help or money or whatever. But, Ava wasn't, isn't... because, she... she...

He struggles to keep it together; Richard shakes his head.

RICHARD

She what? She *completed* you? Made you feel *whole*? Yeah, well, join the club, man, join the fucking club.

EZRA

That's NOT WHAT I'M SAYING.

RICHARD

Relax, bro.

EZRA

Don't fucking call me bro. It was REAL. REAL love. REAL Ava. And I'm going to find her.

Richard shakes his head.

RICHARD

You poor bastard.

Ezra stares daggers.

EZRA

How did you find me?

RICHARD

Dumb luck. No money. Couldn't go to the authorities. I spent every day for a year at the stupid Scottsdale public library going through every wedding announcement *in the country*. Micro-fiche. Found her picture. With you.

EZRA

So... dumb luck.

RICHARD

Yeah. I'm not doing that again.

EZRA

There's gotta be a better way.

They stare at each other.

EZRA (CONT'D)

We should just get in my car. Go on the road and track her down.

RICHARD

Jesus, are you for real? TRACK HER DOWN WHERE?? Any clue? North... South... East... West?

EZRA

(chastened)

Maybe we could hire a private--

RICHARD

Right. How much cash do you have?
(Ezra, chastened again.)
Mmm-hmm. Look - first things first. We need to figure out a way to get some cash. And then we have to formulate a plan.

EZRA

You're right. Money, we need money.
(looks up)
But how the hell do we trick people into giving us money?

Off the two of them, thinking...

EXT. STREET. SANTA BARBARA. MORNING.

Saffron steps off a bus across the street from the bank. She walks to the corner and waits for the light to change. She can see her new boss already at his desk, working as he eats a cheese Danish, flecks of the pastry falling on his pricey suit.

The light turns green. She doesn't move.

INT. STARBUCKS. MOMENTS LATER.

Saffron sits at a counter by the window with her latte, lost in thought.

MAN

Excuse me, do you mind if I...

She looks up and sees a good-looking MAN, mid-30s, holding a coffee and a morning paper.

SAFFRON

Oh, not at all...

He sits down across from her. There is something immediately pleasing, pleasant about him. They sit there in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. EZRA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ezra and Richard sit on the living room floor like eighth-graders, writing in notebooks as they plow through a pile of con-artist movies: *Oceans Eleven...* *The Lady Eve...* *House Of Games...* *The Sting...*

Currently, the 'pigeon drop' con from *The Sting* is playing, Redford stuffs a package down the mark's pants.

ROBERT REDFORD

Toughest guy in the world wouldn't search you there. Go!

Ezra pauses it, jots down something in his notebook.

EZRA

Good one.

RICHARD

So good! Just like the Western Union one in *House Of Games*. We could run that for sure.

EZRA

Yes!

Off these two, trying to learn a new craft.

CUT TO:

INT. STARBUCKS. SAME.

Saffron and the MAN sit by the window, drinking their coffees. Just outside the window a YOUNG MOTHER struggles to get her kids in the car. The younger sibling, a six year old GIRL, argues with her nine year old BROTHER, who won't share his ice cream, despite the mother's urging. When the mother turns to put her bags in the trunk, the GIRL pokes her brother with her Barbie. He immediately turns and smacks his sister in the face. She screams and begins to cry:

GIRL

MOMMY, EVAN HIT ME! IN THE FACE!

The last straw - the mother turns furious, grabbing her son roughly by the arm, and tossing his ice cream cone to the sidewalk.

MOTHER

That's it, you are done, Evan.
You're grounded for the entire
fucking weekend. Got it? Now get in
the goddamn car -

She turns away, ignoring Evan's protests. The daughter, still crying, shoots Evan a wicked grin. The MAN sitting next to Saffron shakes his head.

MAN

And I keep thinking I want to have
kids.

SAFFRON

I don't know, I find that kind of
inspiring.

MAN

Inspiring?

SAFFRON

That little girl has potential. If
I were her mother I'd give her a
prize, she's going to be good.

MAN

Hmm. At what exactly?

SAFFRON

Taking care of herself. Getting
ahead. It takes some people a long
time to learn a trick like that.
This one is ahead of the game.

MAN

But don't you think there's a
healthier way for a young girl to
assert herself? Not very
progressive or feminist of you.
(she shakes her head, smiles)
What?

SAFFRON

Nothing. Just... you remind me of
someone -

MAN

- charming and intelligent, I hope.

SAFFRON

And kind-hearted. But a little
naive about the true nature of
humanity.

MAN

I'll take it as a compliment. But don't mistake me for someone who is naive.

(extends a hand)

My name's Patrick, by the way.

SAFFRON

Saffron.

SAFFRON/PATRICK

(simultaneously)

Nice to meet you.

They both laugh. It's charged.

SAFFRON

Um, I got to get going. First day at the new job! Wish me luck.

PATRICK

You don't seem like you need luck. But... good luck.

(as she gets up)

I'm here most mornings. You'll recognize me - the guy with a newspaper, latte, and an appealing naivete about human behavior...

EXT. STARBUCKS. MINUTES LATER.

Ava comes out of the Starbucks and heads across the street towards the bank. She sees Heller in his office, but now she's ready for him.

She takes one last look back at the Starbucks - and sees Patrick watching her. He smiles a sweet but slightly mischievous grin, waves to her. She melts just a little - and waves back.

And realizes she may be in real trouble.

CUT TO BLACK.

END PILOT