

the nice guys

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"For those complacent optimists who have not yet learned to live, as we do, in the kingdom of despair, that first quick glimpse of failure must always seem like a vision of death itself."

-- Memoir attributed to
S. G. Nechayev (1847-1882)

"You can forget about cataloguing my virtues. I hold them to a minimum so they're easy to keep track of."

-- JIM ROCKFORD from
The Rockford Files (1974-1980)

FADE IN: TV SCREEN - A BUNCH OF DAMN PUPPETS

A Kitty, A Dragon, A Talking Clock... all vying for the attention of the TV HOSTESS -- a pretty thing in pigtails. Her name? SUZY SHOEMAKER. The Hostess of "Bubble Barn."

WIDER - A CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A FOUR YEAR-OLD BOY watches "Bubble Barn" on TV. Rapt. Hypnotized... The puppets his personal friends.

MR. TALKY-CLOCK

Tick-tock, nine o'clock! Time for bed, dragon-head!

DRAGON

Suzy, why must I have a bedtime?

SUZY SHOEMAKER

Because, silly, the whole world takes turns sleeping. Our mommies know when it's our turn to sleep.

The kid watches, transfixed. And then:

BOY'S MOTHER (o.s.)

Brian! Dinner! Come pick up your toys!

After a beat, the boy stands, eyes never leaving the screen. Starts to move away -- but then stops again... Pause...

BOY'S MOTHER (o.s.)

Brian! Turn off the TV and get in here!

Brian starts to move again. Side-stepping. Slowly. Still transfixed by the television...

BOY'S MOTHER (o.s.)

BRIAN! NOW!

Brian hotfoots it out the door. CAMERA HOLDS on the now empty room. On TV the dragon puppet is singing a lullaby...

Pause. Pause. We HOLD... And then THE WALL EXPLODES-- Just DISINTEGRATES. The whole damn thing. Part of the CEILING going with it, as--

A LATE MODEL CAR

BLASTS into the room, moving impossibly fast. Showering DEBRIS. Trailing trees, brush...

It hurtles across the room. DETONATES obstacles. BLOWS them to splinters. Sweeps the place clean, doing 50, half on its side--

Then, just as promptly, DEPARTS.
Crash--! Sails OUT THE OPPOSITE WALL. Into the night.

Just like that. CAMERA PANS TO FOLLOW -- Peering out the
gaping HOLE, out and down --

Unbelievable. There it is, STILL GOING. Plunging down a
HILLSIDE. Tumbling. Chewing up huge GOUTS of dirt.

WHAM--! It slams to a STOP. A hundred yards down the hill.
Upside down. On fire... Stillness, then. Echoes, fading...

MATCH CUT TO: GRAINY NEWS-CAM FOOTAGE - HELICOPTER

Below, the swath cut by the car. It smolders, surrounded by
emergency vehicles. We HEAR:

NEWSCASTER (o.s.)

... In a statement issued today, Los
Angeles Coroner Edwin Meeks says suicide
is strongly indicated in the death of
Suzy Shoemaker last week. Analysis of the
wreck, seen here, revealed extensive
vehicular damage, but no evidence of
mechanical failure, say police sources.

VIDEO FOOTAGE - ON THE GROUND

The car, now being WINCHED up the hill by thick cables.

NEWSCASTER (o.s.)

Shoemaker, host of the popular cable
show, "Bubble Barn," was perhaps best
known as the daughter of Presidential
hopeful David Shoemaker. This latest
tragedy comes in the wake of a video
scandal -- over which Suzy is said to
have been distraught.

MORE VIDEO FOOTAGE - COARSER, GRAINIER

Suzy's FACE, ecstatic.

NEWSCASTER (o.s.)

This amateur tape, allegedly smuggled out
of Shoemaker's Mulholland home by a
workman, burst onto the internet last
month. It purportedly offers graphic
images of Suzy engaged in sex with an
unidentified male. According to Suzy's
aunt, Lily Shoemaker, Suzy was overcome
with, quote-unquote, "shame and
humiliation."

INT. PASADENA HOME - VIDEO FOOTAGE - DAY

AN OLD WOMAN appears, above a subtitled graphic:
Lily Shoemaker, Victim's Aunt.

MRS. SHOEMAKER

The man... that horrible person who put
that tape out there... he killed my
little Suzy. Killed her... as sure as if
he'd pulled the trigger on a gun.

VIDEO LIBRARY FOOTAGE - THE "BUBBLE" BARN SHOW

SUZY, smiling, surrounded by the cantankerous puppets...

NEWSCASTER (o.s.)

25 year-old Shoemaker, star of the cable
TV's "Bubble Barn" -- She will be dearly
missed...

ONSCREEN: Suzy and her puppets all waving, all calling out
"Bye!" "Be Good!" "See you next time!"

CUT TO BLACK. Pause, then--

INT. GRADE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CIRCA 1972 - LIGHTS DIMMED

The assembled kids (mean age of, say 7) all sit, eyes forward.

HEALY (v.o.)

When I was a kid, the world was
different. Things were innocent... Well,
maybe not innocent. But pretty harmless.

The kids are watching an ancient EDUCATIONAL FILM--
Subject: ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

ONSCREEN - A young boy holds up a white BEACH TOWEL:

NARRATOR (ON FILM)

Bart has a PLAIN towel.

The word "**adjective!**" appears on screen, DING..! And then
Bart is replaced by a little girl clutching a YELLOW TOWEL:

NARRATOR (ON FILM)

Sarah has a BRIGHT towel.

DING..! Another kid, another towel. This one multi-colored:

NARRATOR (ON FILM)

Jonathan has a GAY towel.

The classroom erupts in LAUGHTER... Apparently this is the funniest thing ever. One kid actually falls out of his seat.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON - PRESENT DAY

Run-down basketball courts. A bunch of sullen gang-bangers high five. The OLDEST ONE talks earnestly with a YOUNG GIRL.

HEALY (v.o.)

Now? Here? In L.A.? Innocent doesn't even enter in to it.

IN A PARKED CAR we reveal a kind-faced MAN, mid-thirties. For the record? JACKSON HEALY. He's watching the older gang-banger.

HEALY (v.o.)

Take this a-hole I'm watching. He's maybe 18, already he's got a system: get 'em while they're too young to know any better.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - THAT NIGHT

A bad house in a worse neighborhood. CAMERA drifts slowly towards a cracked window. As we HEAR people having sex:

18 YEAR-OLD (o.s.)

Come on, baby. Who's the man, baby?

YOUNG GIRL (o.s.)

... You are. You're the man. Oh, yes. You're the man. You! You!

ANOTHER ANGLE

Outside the house, in a CORNER SHADOW next to the window-- We can just make out the form of HEALY.

He stands there, hidden -- looking bored, eating peanuts. He pops them one at a time... Munches. Listening:

YOUNG GIRL (o.s.)

You're the man! You! You're my Bo-budda!

Healy pauses. Frowns: Bo-budda..?

YOUNG GIRL (o.s.)

Bo-budda! Bo-budda! You are! You!

Healy shrugs. Picks through his handful of nuts... Whispers to himself:

HEALY

... Yeah, but is he the man...?

YOUNG GIRL

Oh, yes baby! Yes! You're the man, baby!

Ah, that's better... Healy smiles as he finds a cashew.

HEALY (v.o.)

Love... Grand isn't it..?

(beat)

Me? I was in love once. June Miller.

FLASH CUT TO: A NICE RESTAURANT

HEALY sits across a table from a knockout BLONDE. They stare into each other's eyes. A beat. Healy starts to say something-- The blonde cuts him off:

BLONDE

Jack... I slept with your father.

The guy at the next table does a SPIT TAKE.

BACK TO SCENE

Healy dusts peanut bits off his hands.

HEALY (v.o.)

Marriage is buying a house for someone you hate... Remember that.

ANOTHER ANGLE - SAME HOUSE - LATER

The YOUNG GIRL we saw earlier exits. Gets on her bike. Rides off, alone... HEALY steps from the shadows. Stares after her.

HEALY (v.o.)

Yep, these days the world is an unromantic, vulgar place...

HEALY cracks his neck. Grimaces. Slips on a pair of BRASS KNUCKLES. Starts towards the front of the house--

HEALY (v.o.)

So I adjust.

Healy knocks on the FRONT DOOR. The 18 YEAR-OLD answers it.

HEALY

Are you the man?

18 YEAR-OLD

What..?

Healy slugs him. On the sound of a jaw CRACK!-ing we CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN BAR - HANK'S ALL AMERICAN - RAINY NIGHT

Through the rain-streaked glass we see Healy at a booth. Badly dressed (he's usually badly dressed,) in a SILVER LAMÉ SHIRT. An older man sits across from him.

HEALY (v.o.)

I don't have a job title. I'm not in the yellow pages... But if you've got trouble with someone -- someone's threatening you, someone's messing around with your underage daughter. Whatever--

The older man gives Healy an ENVELOPE. Shakes his hand. Leaves.

HEALY (v.o.)

-- You might ask around for me: Jackson Healy... If the name's familiar, it's probably on account of that business with that guy went nuts at that Denny's last year--

FLASH CUT TO: CHAOTIC IMAGES, RAPID SUCCESSION - ALL M.O.S.

A DENNY'S DINER. Everyone is on the floor. A PSYCHOPATH with a shotgun. SCREAMING. HEALY LEAPS across a counter, collides--! A shotgun BLAST perforates his arm... BLOOD. Movement. Chaos--

BACK TO SCENE - ANGLE ON BARTOP

We see THE LEARNING ANNEX magazine. The cover includes HEALY, with the caption: "Real-Life tough guy JACKSON HEALY can teach you how to protect yourself."

HEALY (v.o.)

I took the guy out and got shot for my trouble... I didn't even get paid for it.

PAN UP TO: SOME DRUNK GUY. Scowling at the magazine.

HEALY (v.o.)

Not to mention the fact that, to this day, some guys just can't leave it alone... They gotta measure dicks.

THE DRUNK casts his gaze across the room at Healy--

Who never even looks up. Sighs. Makes a big show of yawning, stretching. Gets up, heads for the hallway to the restrooms.

REVERSE ANGLE - As he passes CAMERA we see him calmly slipping on that same set of BRASS KNUCKLES. CUT TO:

EXT. MULHOLLAND DRIVE - GRAVEL TURNOUT - BREAKING DAWN

A canopy of CITY LIGHTS beneath a purple sky. Dazzling.

TWO CARS are parked up here. Healy's convertible, and a Ford. Healy leans against the Ford.

HEALY (v.o.)

Sometimes I feel okay about myself. Not often. Scotty, my AA sponsor, keeps trying to get me to quit this kind of work.

Inside the Ford is a WOMAN. Her face is in shadow, a cloth HAT pulled low. Intermittent glow of a nervous cigarette. She hands Healy a slip of COW-SHAPED NOTEPAD PAPER:

GIRL

Here's a name. And a description for you. He's been talking to all my friends, asking where I live. I'm scared.

Healy studies the slip of paper. Pockets it. The woman pulls an envelope out of her purse.

GIRL

... You'll take care of him?

HEALY

(taking envelope)

Consider it done.

Healy starts to leave, counting the money in the envelope-- Then stops. Turns back. Leans in the window:

HEALY

... Um, you're short.

GIRL

... I'm... What?

HEALY

You're twenty bucks short.

GIRL

Oh... I'm sorry... Here, ummm...

She fishes through her purse for some cash. Finds a twenty.

GIRL

... Sorry, here...

ANGLE ON MULHOLLAND

The FORD drives off. Taillights, receding. Healy watches it go.

HEALY (v.o.)

I've been thinking about what Scotty said. I could try for an investigators license. Become a detective, you know..? Those guys help people.

(beat)

Maybe then I'd feel good in the morning.

CUT TO BLACK. Then, over this, the sound of an ALARM-CLOCK.

INT. RESIDENTIAL HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

A HAND dangles limply from the edge of a porcelain TUB. WIDEN to reveal a tousled-looking MAN, 40-ish. FULLY DRESSED, immersed in water up to his neck. Dead asleep... Meet HOLLAND MARCH.

Somewhere in the house the ALARM-CLOCK continues to RING. Slowly, March's EYES open. He sits up, sloshing water. Winces. Puts a hand to his throbbing temple. Stops, frowns...

There is something WRITTEN on the palm of his hand. With a permanent marker, in an unmistakably feminine script:

YOU WILL NEVER BE HAPPY

March just stares at it: How the hell did that get there..? A phone starts RINGING now. Adding in with the alarm-clock.

March ignores it, tries to remember how he ended up in the tub with his clothes on. Somewhere an answering machine picks up:

ANSWERING MACHINE (o.s.)

Hi. It's March. Here comes the beep.

The beep comes, as promised. Followed by:

YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE (HOLLY) (o.s.)

This is your daughter speaking. You promised to take me to the mall today...

March waves a hand at no one in particular.

MARCH

Yeah, yeah...

YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE (HOLLY) (o.s.)

Also, I'm supposed to remind you that you have a surveillance in less than an hour.

March blinks. A beat, then:

MARCH

Oh, shi--

He's already leaping out of the tub... as we TIME-CUT TO:

BATHROOM - MORNING

March cleaning up. Shaving. He keeps NICKING himself.

MARCH (v.o.)

If I had to guess, I'd say about 80% of my clients are old people... I got a guy, runs security for a local retirement park... He kicks a few cases my way -- slam dunks, most of 'em.

INT. OLD WOMAN'S CONDO - LEISURE WORLD - DAY

March wears a professional smile. Writes in a little notebook while an OLD LADY relates her problem:

OLD LADY

It's my husband. Fred is his name. He's gone missing.

MARCH

(professional concern)

Missing..? I see.

OLD LADY

I'm terribly worried... Fred's just never been gone for this long.

March gives an understanding nod, writes--
Then he notices something out of the corner of his eye:

There is an URN sitting over the fireplace.
He squints at the PLAQUE affixed to it:

FRED MILLER.

A devoted and loving husband.

March frowns.

MARCH

Um... Mrs. Miller... Your husband Fred..?
Exactly how long has he been missing?

OLD LADY

Oh, let's see...

(furrows her brow)

Probably since the funeral.

March nods.

MARCH

I see... I see...

(puts away notebook)

Well, I can start today if you like.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HUSTLER STORE - NIGHT

March slouches in his car, watching through the window as a couple debates which dildo to buy. The man holds up several; the woman shakes her head.

MARCH (v.o.)

Some of the time it's a shit job, sure...
You peep in windows like Santa. You see
scumbags all over women like cheap
suits... There is, at all times, a cheap
suit all over you like a cheap suit.

(beat)

Plus, all the horrible stuff people tell
you, it's like being a priest, except you
don't get laid as much.

MARCH snaps pictures of the couple. Inside the store, the
WOMAN is shaking her head at another selection, obstinate--

MARCH

(to himself)

Honey, you're not gonna find one with a
breadmaker in it, just buy the fucking
thing.

He snaps another picture.

MARCH (v.o.)

But hey, no worries. I mean, it's not
like I deal with real criminals. It's not
like I ever see dead bodies...

EXT. BEL AIR SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

SUN, dazzling. March swings his '79 Z-28 Camaro to the curb.

MARCH (v.o.)

And sure, I've been called a con man --
but it takes work to do what I do. You
gotta put in the effort... Fact is,
sometimes things get pretty tricky.
Sometimes you gotta think on your feet.

He parks. Clambers out, looking starched, shaven and hung
over. Notices his hand again. YOU WILL NEVER BE HAPPY.

Faded, but still there. He scowls at it.

A BLACK CAT darts out of a nearby bush.
Crosses right in front of March... Out into the street.

Something very weird happens then.
As March watches the cat cross the street--

A CAR APPROACHES.

But it's okay. The car has plenty of time to avoid the cat.
Only it doesn't. Instead it deliberately veers TOWARD THE CAT.

PUSH IN ON MARCH as he watches, horrified. We HEAR the
impact; REFLECTED in March's windshield, something flung..!

MARCH (v.o.)

And sometimes you do see dead bodies.

March runs out into the street. Jumps IN FRONT of the car.
Forces it to swerve..! With a SCREECH, it strikes a curb. Halts.

MARCH

What the hell's the matter with you!?!

Now a WOMAN comes running from an opulent house, wailing
what we assume to be the cat's name (Jiji, if it matters.)

The DRIVER stumbles out. A heavy-set, middle-aged MAN.

MARCH

Are you crazy?! You went right for it!!

DRIVER

Okay, okay, take it easy. I... I'm sorry.
Really, I am. It's just, I've got five g's
on the Supersonics tomorrow night, and--
(motions)

And when I saw a black cat crossing right
in front of me... I guess... I guess I
kind of freaked, you know..?

March blinks. Utter disbelief.

TIME CUT - MINUTES LATER

March and the WOMAN head toward her house. He's cradling a
towel-wrapped bundle. Listening as the woman stutters and sobs:

WOMAN

... And I can't tell him Jiji just ran
away, his friend saw the whole thing. Oh,
God, this cat, it's... his whole life...

March pauses at her door, thinking quickly:

MARCH

How long until your son gets home?

EXT. WEST SIDE ANIMAL SHELTER - DAY

MARCH careens up in his Z-28. Leaps out holding a cardboard box.

INT. WEST SIDE ANIMAL SHELTER - SAME

THE COUNTER GIRL is a punkish-looking freak with pierced everything. She emerges from a back room holding a sleek, beautiful, very pissed off BLACK CAT.

COUNTER GIRL

I'm totally not supposed to do this. You sure you're not a psycho?

MARCH

Pretty sure. Here, go pierce something.

He hands over a stack of twenties. She passes him the cat. It yowls and squirms a little.

MARCH

Okay, buster, none of that... Maybe I should show him his buddy in the box.

(beat, looking cat over)

Um, listen, he looks really, um, alive and great and everything, but--

COUNTER GIRL

But what? You want another dead one? Listen, Mr. Psycho--

MARCH

No, look. It's very simple: I want him to look like he got hit by a car and survived... Get it?

COUNTER GIRL

So what, then? You gonna break his leg?

MARCH

No, no. But, aw, hell, can we... goop him up or something? You got any hair gel?

COUNTER GIRL

No. My hair naturally sticks straight up like an arrow, sorry... Such a good idea, too, 'cause a speeding car will usually gel an animal--

MARCH

That's very funny. You're very funny.

CUT TO: THE UGLIEST BLACK CAT EVER

It's hair is gooped in odd directions, and it's been rolled in dirt or gravel or both. It looks pissed. Also confused.

EXT. UPPER CLASS SUBURBAN HOME - FRONT PORCH

MARCH grins as he presents the cat to young JOHNNIE, age 9. The kid stands surrounded by several friends.

JOHNNIE

Yeah, it looks like my cat... Mine's dead, though.

March blinks. Not what he was expecting.

MARCH

Oh, well, then... Uh, here's this one. Like a new cat, a replacement--

JOHNNIE

Are you trying to sell me something? My cat's dead, mister.

KID

Plus, his dad gave him \$300 bucks!

JOHNNIE

I gotta go buy something now. Bye.

They head off across the lawn.

March watches them go. Sighs. Stuffs Mr. Ugly Cat back in his box. Starts for his car, as--

MAN

Ho. Excuse me, Mr... March, is it?

He turns in time to see a well-dressed, middle-aged MAN leave the porch and jog forward, hand extended --

MAN

Phil Hazeltine.

There's a \$50 bill in his hand. March waves him off.

MARCH

Forget it. Your money's no good here.

HAZELTINE

Mr. March, please. I truly appreciate what you tried to do for my son.

A PAW is darting in and out of the cardboard carrier. It swats March a good one.

HAZELTINE

Well... Hey, look, I'm having this Mardi Gras party tomorrow night -- would you consider coming? Least I can do.

March reaches his Camaro, opens the door. Tosses the box inside like a piece of luggage. It thuds down inside.

MARCH

Party, wow. Mmmmm. That's tough. I did have plans, but...

He looks thoughtful. CUT TO:

INT. MARCH'S CAR - LATER

He buzzes along, talking on his cel phone.

MARCH

... I'd say we've learned a couple of things. First off, Ma'am, if it IS your niece, she may be going by the name of Alice... And there's a better than even chance she plans to attend a costume party tomorrow night... What's that?
(grins)

No problem, Ma'am, I'm on it. In fact, I just got myself an invitation.

As he turns a corner, the breeze blows a FOLDER on the front seat. It flips open to reveal SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS --

All of the man we just saw. PHIL HAZELTINE.

MARCH (v.o.)

Yep. I'd have to say I'm happy with things as they are... Except for all the stuff I'm not happy about.

(pause)

But it's best not to think about that.

We see March look over at the pet carrier. He strokes it for a second, before realizing that he's petting cardboard. CUT TO:

EXT. HOLLYWOOD - PANORAMA - LATE AFTERNOON

The waning sun casts a mellow glow.

INT. HEALY'S ONE-ROOM APARTMENT - SAME

Our first glimpse of Jackson Healy's apartment. Small. Spartan.

It looks like a monk lives here.

HEALY enters frame, buttoning a dress shirt. Stops to sprinkle some fish-food into a saltwater aquarium... A daily "tear-off" CALENDAR sits next to the aquarium: **Your word for the day!**

Jackson tears off yesterday's page. Revealing today's word:

Equanimity \e·qua·nim·i·ty\, *noun*: The quality of being calm and even-tempered; composure.

HEALY

She accepted their problems with grace and he with equanimity.

Healy smiles, pleased with himself. Finishes with his shirt. Grabs his coat, exits the room... SLAM!

In the foreground we see something he forgot--
Something shiny... His BRASS KNUCKLES.

WITH HEALY - DRIVING - LATE AFTERNOON

Healy, on the way somewhere. Cruising up Laurel Canyon. As he nears a construction area--

POV HEALY -- UP AHEAD:

He sees a cute YOUNG GIRL. 13, maybe 14 years old--
Sees her snake beneath a chain-link fence.

Once inside, she stands. Dusts herself off.
Paces off 10 steps across the scorched, barren ground.
5 steps forward... 6 over, 3 back --

Healy, puzzled. This is really very odd behavior.

She SITS, then. Facing north. Takes out a BOOK.
Starts to read aloud. We have no idea why she's doing this.

ANGLE ON HEALY, GOING BY...

His gaze lingers a moment, curious. Then he turns the corner.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DUSK

HEALY pulls up. Checks a COW-SHAPED slip of NOTEPAPER... Gets out, whistling a jaunty tune. Crosses to a 50's-modern house.

He pats his coat pockets as he goes, looking for something:
His brass knuckles... Gone, shit. He shrugs it off... KNOCKS--

VOICE (O.S.)

Just a minute..! Who is it?

HEALY

Messenger service. Holland March home..?

The door opens -- revealing none other than HOLLAND MARCH.
Distracted-looking, shirt half-untucked. Eating an Oreo cookie--

MARCH

Hi.

Healy SLUGS MARCH full in the face.

March drops as though pole-axed.
Healy steps past him. Inside. Shaking his hand in pain...
Shuts the door. Looms over March. Poised like a dancer:

HEALY

Mr. March, we're gonna play a game.

MARCH

This is a mistake, you got the wrong --
OOOFF--!

HEALY

It's called, "Shut up, unless you're me."

MARCH

(gasping)
I... I LOVE that game.

Healy spots March's WALLET on a desk nearby. SLUGS him again
for good measure, then crosses -- begins idly flipping
through the wallet. Stops. Whistles low:

HEALY

You're a private investigator?

MARCH manages to sit up. Props himself against the wall.
Takes air in tight little sips.

MARCH

Look, take... take what you want.
There's \$200 there, it's yours.

HEALY

I told you, I'm a messenger.
(looks around)
Nice digs. You afford this on a p.i.'s
salary?

MARCH

At night I'm a superhero. What's the
message?

JIJI THE CAT has come out to see what's happening.

Healy pats him on the head... Then kneels down next to March--

HEALY

Stop. Looking. For Alice.

MARCH

Fine. Hey. 'Nuff said. Put a fork in me.
I'm done. Don't really put a fork in me.

Healy stands, tosses the wallet back on the desk.

HEALY

That's fine, Mr. March. Alice will be
happy to hear you got the message. Almost
done. Last thing..?

MARCH

You wanna know who hired me to find her.

HEALY

Bingo. Now, we can do this the easy way--

MARCH

Lily Shoemaker.

HEALY

Or we can do this the hard way--

MARCH

My client is Lily Shoemaker, she's an old
lady and she just hired me on Tuesday.

Healy stops, momentarily thrown. March spits blood.

MARCH

Anything else..?

HEALY

You just gave up your client.

MARCH

Well, I made a discretionary revelation--

HEALY

No, you gave her up, just like that. Some
poor old lady hires you and--

(stops, frowns)

Wait a minute. Shoemaker... Shoemaker..?

Like that chick from the kids' show?

MARCH

(nods)

The one who offed herself. The aunt is my
client. There. Happy? Go beat her up.

March supports himself on a coffee table... Stands. Slowly, painfully. Covertly slipping one hand UNDER THE TABLE--

TO THE .9MM VELCRO-ED HERE.

March liberates it in one smooth motion. Spins toward Healy... Only Healy isn't where he was, he's *dropped*, he's on the ground, foot lashing out -- KICKING THE COFFEE TABLE.

-- WHAM! -- the whole damn thing comes up from the ground. SLAMS MARCH in the face. Knocks him back on his ass.

Healy is on him in a flash. Grabs the gun. Pulls the clip out. Ejects the cartridge. Tosses it aside... Says, wearily:

HEALY

I'm sorry you didn't get the message.

MARCH

I get it now. I do. Like, 100 per cent.

Healy grabs March, hauls him up to his feet...

HEALY

That stuff about the Shoemaker lady, was that on the level?

March nods... Healy squints at him:

HEALY

You know what...? I believe you.

Healy spins March around. Wrenches his right arm up behind his back. Pins him against the wall.

HEALY

Listen, when you talk to your doctor, tell him you've got a spiral fracture of the right humerus... Got that?

MARCH

Wait, wait... Jesus, man, STOP.

HEALY

Deep breath.

Healy twists March's arm PAST THE BREAKING POINT -- CRACK! -- March screams as we SLAM-CUT TO:

EXT. MARCH'S HOUSE - DUSK

Healy comes out the front door. A YOUNG GIRL, carrying a grocery bag, is headed the opposite way, swigging a drink--

The same girl he saw in the FENCED-OFF LOT earlier. This, we will come to realize, is March's daughter HOLLY.

HOLLY
Hi. Want a Yoo-Hoo?

HEALY
A Yoo-Hoo..? Man, I haven't had one of those in about 10 years.

HOLLY
Knock yourself out.
(hands him one)
You a friend of my Dad's?

HEALY
Business associate. He's inside...
resting.
(vigorously shaking the bottle)
Didn't I see you crawling around an empty lot a few blocks over..?

HOLLY
... Maybe... I read there sometimes.

Healy nods. Takes a swig of his drink. Smiles.

HEALY
Damn, that's good. Thanks... Well, uh, see you.

The girl waves. Walks to the house. Healy crosses to his car.

ANOTHER ANGLE - WE SEE BUT HE DOESN'T

A late-model CROWN VIC parked by the curb -- Driver older, average-looking. Passenger, a dead ringer for Tom Cruise.

They watch as Healy climbs into his car. Takes another sip of his Yoo-Hoo... then drives off. CUT TO:

A WHOLE DAMN CASE OF YOO-HOO. CLINK!-ING as--

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Healy lugs it down the sidewalk on Sunset. Pushes through a small crowd of people waiting outside a COMEDY CLUB.

INT. THE COMEDY STORE - SAME

Busy night... A STAND-UP holds forth on the lighted stage.

RONNIE THE STAND-UP

... I never know what movies to rent so I end up just going by the titles... I rented that movie, uh, *Snatch* -- turns out it's about a robbery... I rented *Blow* -- turns out it's about cocaine... I was gonna rent *Julia Robert's Hairy Pussy*, but I didn't want to get burned again...

Drunk people laugh. A cocktail waitress rolls her eyes.

HEALY enters the club. Still carrying the case of Yoo-Hoo. Goes through an UNMARKED DOOR at the back of the room. Heads up a FLIGHT OF STAIRS to another DOOR--

Someone enters the stairwell behind him... Healy looks back-- It's the TOM CRUISE look-alike. Followed by his older buddy.

HEALY

Sorry, this area is private.

TOM ignores this. Steps up onto the landing next to Healy. The older guy closes the door at the base of the steps.

TOM

Wow. You got, like, an apartment up here or something?

HEALY

Guys, I'd love to chat, but I gotta be somewhere.

TOM

That's where you're wrong. You don't gotta be somewhere, pal.

OLDER GUY

You don't gotta be anywhere.

TOM

You gotta be here.

HEALY

What is this, a Zen class?

A BLUR OF SILVER

Flashes through the air.

TOM CRUISE has a STEEL BATON. He SWINGS it hard and fast--

Healy has no time to react. Hands full -- WHAM! --

It catches him on the side of the temple.

And down he goes. Yoo-hoo's SMASHING as we CUT TO:

AN OLD WOMAN'S FACE, DISTRAUGHT

Lily Shoemaker (the old lady we saw in the teaser) fills the frame... Looks like she's about to cry --

INT. PASADENA HOUSE - NIGHT

MARCH walks past camera. His right arm is in a CAST now.

MARCH

Mrs. Shoemaker, let's be reasonable; this is a high profile case, your niece was a TV star. The head medical examiner himself ID'd the body --

MRS. SHOEMAKER

Through dental records. Don't you see? Files can be switched, misplaced --
(beat)

I'm telling you, I SAW her, Mr. March. I didn't imagine it. Last week, I saw my niece *alive*.

(exasperated)

I... I thought you said you *found* her...

MARCH

No, Mrs. Shoemaker, I didn't. I said I was tracking the girl you saw; that doesn't mean it's your niece.

MRS. SHOEMAKER

Why won't anyone *believe* me?

MARCH

I'm sure if I produced her she'd bear a strong resemblance, maybe even uncanny...

MRS. SHOEMAKER

I'm telling you, I saw my Suzy. There was no mistake... I have a little more money--

MARCH

That won't be necessary.

MRS. SHOEMAKER

Maybe she'll attend this... this party you heard about, and you can--

MARCH

Mrs. Shoemaker, your niece is dead... She killed herself... I never should have taken your money in the first place.

The old woman starts to cry.

MRS. SHOEMAKER

Even if it's for nothing... Even if this Alice girl isn't my niece... I don't have anything else, do you understand..? Please, Mr. March -- please -- will you keep looking for her? For me?

March takes a deep breath... Considering. Then looks the old lady directly in the eye and says:

MARCH

No.

INT. MARCH'S CAR - SAME

March climbs in the passenger side. Slams the door. A pause. Holly sits in the driver's seat.

MARCH

Holly... Am I a bad person?

Holly picks at her nails, distracted.

HOLLY

... Yeah, pretty much.

MARCH

(nods, then)

Drive. Get me out of here.

Holly puts it in gear.

HOLLY

Did you solve the case, dad?

MARCH

... Sure. Yeah. Case closed.

INT. HEALY'S APARTMENT - SAME

WHAM--! Healy smacking against a wall. Then crumpling as TOM CRUISE enters frame. Looms over Healy.

In the background Tom's OLDER FRIEND is tossing the place. Emptying drawers. Throwing stuff... Tom kneels next to Healy:

TOM

Okay, sport, I'm asking you again... Where is Alice?

Healy makes himself sit up. He looks resigned, weary. He spots a pack cigarettes amongst the nearby debris.

Grabs it as a wave of LAUGHTER wafts up from the club below...

HEALY

... I told you... I just don't know
anyone named Alice... Sorry...

TOM

So I guess you LIKE pain.

Healy lights a cigarette. Shakes his head.

HEALY

Nobody likes pain.

The older guy stops what he's doing... Pipes in:

OLDER GUY

I know a guy who likes pain.

Tom looks back. Healy glances up, puzzled.

TOM

Right. That's helpful... Thanks, Steve.

TOM turns back to Healy, shaking his head... Then he KICKS
Healy in the chest. No warning -- WHAM! -- Folds him sideways.

A pause. Then, with effort, Healy hauls himself upright again.

TOM

You don't talk, we're gonna have to start
breaking your fingers. You understand.

HEALY

I understand.

The OLDER GUY calls out:

OLDER GUY

Got some kind of hidden cabinet here.

TOM stands, crosses the room. Starts pounding on the cabinet.

HEALY

Um, YOU WANNA BE CAREFUL WITH THAT --

They get the cabinet open. Inside is a heavy canvas BAG.

HEALY

You don't want to open that... That's not
mine. My friend wanted me to hold it for
him... Trust me, don't --

TOM ignores Healy, rips the bag open--

AN EXPLOSION OF BLUE PAINT. Just like one of those charges they hide with stolen bank money. Sprays every which-way-- Turns Tom's face an impossible, shocking BLUE.

At which point, through the floor, comes the BIGGEST BUZZ YET of LAUGHTER... Like a sitcom soundtrack.

HEALY

That's, um... that's not gonna come off.

TOM snarls. Savagely wipes his face on a kitchen towel. Crosses to the AQUARIUM, dips his face, scrubs --

HEALY

Tried to tell you.

Tom stops. His still-blue face dripping wet. Looks at Healy:

TOM

You tried to tell me..?

TOM reaches in the tank, grabs a TROPICAL FISH -- FLINGS it across the room... It SMACKS the wall wetly. Next to Healy.

HEALY

Come on, the fish...? Don't do that.

No dice. Blue-Face Tom just sneers, groping for another fish. Healy appeals to the older guy:

HEALY

Can you please tell this guy to act like a professional?

The older guy glances at his partner. Then shrugs: *Sorry, pal.*

Blue face finally gets a hold of a big yellow-striped number. Tosses it. It lands, squirming, in Healy's lap.

TOM

You're gonna eat that, bastard. Do it!!

HEALY

This isn't gonna help you... Do you get that? This is silly and unprofessional--

TOM

EAT THE GODDAMN THING!! NOW!!

HEALY

No.

Tom takes out an AUTOMATIC. Lets it dangle at his side.

TOM

Stand up.

Healy sighs. Gets to his feet. It's slow going. He's in pain. Stands in the middle of the room... Arms held loosely.

HEALY

Stop and think. Is this why you came here tonight? To make me eat fish? To shoot me?

Healy locks eyes with the kid. Gone is any trace of resignation. Of passivity. He suddenly looks... hard.

HEALY

You could have come in here. Beat up on me. Trashed the place... I wouldn't have cared... It's what I expected.

(shakes his head)

But you didn't do that. Instead you gotta piss me off. Make an enemy. Even if I did know something, there's no way I'd give it up to you. Not now... You blew it, moron.

(pause)

... Plus you look like a Smurf.

TOM RAISES THE GUN AND FIRES.

Healy knew it was coming. He's already in motion..! The bullet goes wide. Past Healy's shoulder... Keeps going--

OUT THE OPEN WINDOW

Hits a WOMAN in the APARTMENT across the street. Just like that. Her half-open window SHATTERS, pop--! Arm wound. She goes down with a YELP. Drops from sight.

The OLDER GUY knocks Tom's gun hand aside.

OLDER GUY

You stupid son of a bitch!

Now there are VOICES from across the way. YELLING. Healy scrambles for the door, bent on escape --

No need... His two VISITORS, outbound. They pile through the door, cursing. Clatter down the steps. HEALY, in no shape to follow, just stares after them. Helpless.

CUT TO:

A BEAUTIFUL BLUE SKY.

It's the start of another perfect day in the City of Angels. CAMERA PANS DOWN to find:

