

STRANGER IN HER SKIN

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A MAID dusts surfaces in a hotel room. She wears a head scarf and is usually seen from behind to obscure her face. Her hand stops at the t.v. counter and picks up the remote. There's a significant pause, and her hand places the remote back on the counter. She resumes cleaning. TV is left switched off.

This same maid goes through other rooms in the hotel, dusting, arranging, cleaning.

A sudden BOOM sound goes off, startling her. She hears a strange hissing sound coming from around the corner...

...Smoke wafts out from the closet where sits the HOTEL SAFE, threatening to grow bolder and embody something substantial, like a genie. But the maid gets to the door in time and shuts it all the way. She presses her ear carefully against the door. The hissing sound has gone away.

Same maid is seen at beside near same t.v. She picks up the remote and stares at switched off t.v.

TV SCREEN.

We're so close that the borders of the unit are beyond our own screen. Channel Surfing. Random moving images flit past us, pausing sometimes to register some action, then move on to the next one.

Stop at scene set in a hotel room. AN ARGUING COUPLE gesticulate passionately at each other, though it's clear the volume level on screen is being tamped down, and their words are barely audible.

[The maid's hand controlling remote can be intermittently scene through the first couple of these channel changes]

Channel surfing. Stop at a scene in another hotel room. PLAYING KIDS hop on the bed. They immediately jump off and pretend to be well-behaved when another adult enters.

Channel surfing. Stop at a scene in another hotel room. AN OLDER MAN is on the phone listening intently. He looks as if he's been crying a while. He drinks liquor straight from the bottle.

Channel surfing. More random images whiz past us than before. One is of a woman shooting a man in the front seat of his car and then casually abandoning his corpse, which lingers on the border of the frame while the murderess's retreating figure remains reflected on the car's rearview mirror.

Stop at an empty hotel room scene.

A classy confident ingénue type, elegant and smartly dressed, who upon first glance would likely be pegged and dismissed as a strikingly pleasant if vacant looker born of privilege, fresh, callow and high spirited--though concealing expertly a cynical old-soul that houses a core of slippery scruples and nimble cunning--enters from presumably the outside hall. She disgorges her suitcase on a nearby bed then walks to and from this bed area, unpacking some items each time. We are stuck looking at this from seemingly one fixed position.

Eventually this woman walks towards US and holds a HAND TOWARDS OUR SIDE OF SCREEN. She retracts hand and holds up a pocket mirror, revealing the top part of a man's UNMOVING HAIRLINE. Then she looks at her MIRROR.

THE MIRROR IS ALL FOGGED. She wipes some of that away with her finger.

CUT TO:

This same MAID FROM EARLIER wipes clean with a cloth a large bathroom mirror. Looks at herself momentarily then faces us. She bears a strong resemblance to the ingénue we just saw a moment ago.

CUT TO:

LOW-RESOLUTION IMAGE from corner of front seat of car looking at the driver and lone passenger riding shotgun. There will be cuts to another low-resolution image angle on this same front seat which will later reveal that this is the same INGENUE from earlier. This is LO.

LO

That was a really nice dinner

MARK

I'm glad you liked it. I guess it would have been more impressive if I had cooked it myself.

LO

Well, you spent money for it. In a way, that actually is more impressive. Getting something by working hard for it is kind of overrated anyway.

MARK

Yeah...and working hard is harder to do, too. Now that I think about it, I'm really relieved that I didn't make the dinner myself.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

Especially since I don't know how to cook. Which is honestly the only real reason I took you out.

LO

I'm still very impressed. I'm sort of in awe of you in a way.

MARK

Thank you. That's so awesome. That's nice. It's actually a relief, too, that you are saying you like what I did. It's kind of like confirming that maybe you like me, too. Do you? You don't have to answer that, because it seems like you may have already did. I'm sorry, just ignore me, I'm just running my mouth. What I meant to say for real was...Did I already tell you, thank you?

LO

Are you nervous?

MARK

You're kind of scary to me, maybe that's why. But also you're so beautiful. So both feelings cancel each other out—or I think I mean the opposite of that. I'm just high-strung in general. I'm sorry. There I go running my mouth again.

LO

I think what you said about me being beautiful was very sweet. So I'd like to thank you.

(A short silence)

LO (CONT'D)

You've had a lot of bad experiences with this going out, haven't you?

MARK

(laughs)

That may be putting it mildly.

(catches himself)

Whoa, I hope that came across the right way.

LO

(promptly)

It did.

MARK

Because I don't want to look like
some kind of lonely loser.

LO

I wasn't even thinking..

MARK

I'm definitely not.

LO

Absolutely. And I'm one of your
good experiences. You can trust
me.

MARK

I know. There's something about
you. I usually have a good
instinct when I take a first look
at someone, I knew you were gonna
be different. In the best way.

LO

(distracted)

Mm-hm. So you still have the...you
know?

MARK

I do?

LO

I believe so.

MARK

Oh, yeah. You want me to pay you
now?

LO

Now. Later. Sometime before the
evening's over. Now that I think
about it, sooner's probably better.

MARK

(laughs nervously)

Yeah, that would be pretty
embarrassing if we spent the whole
night wining and dining, falling
into a tumble, and then in the end,
I skip out on the check..

LO

No.

MARK
(still laughing nervously)
No what?

LO
(firmly, though smiling)
No, that would not have happened.

MARK
But you know I'm good for it.

LO
I know.

MARK
Five hundred for the evening?

LO
(firmly but still sweetly)
Twelve hundred.

MARK
You sure? That much, huh?

LO
That much.

MARK
I thought I understood it
differently when we spoke earlier.

LO
(affable)
You did understand differently,
that's why I'm correcting you.
Exact same figure I quoted to you
earlier.

MARK
I just could have sworn...but yeah,
that's fine.

LO
You wanted more than a sit-down for
drinks and an air-kiss.

MARK
Yeah.

LO
I know you, you plan ahead, you
probably brought more just in case.

MARK

I did and mentioned what I thought
I heard was less, just in case I
thought it was less.

LO

But it's not.

MARK

You're right. It's not. And now
we both know it. And uh, right,
here you are.

LO

(laughs)

Whatever you like. You paid for
it, now I bring it.

MARK

Like full on...yeah...

LO

Anything you want.

MARK

(breathing hard)

Good...

LO

Maybe we leave you with a big happy
smile on your face in the morning.

(Mark fishes out a tacky
money clip holding a wad
of bills)

MARK

You don't mind large bills? Kept
to just the real important
presidents: Grant, Cleveland,
Franklin, Washington...maybe him
not so such.

LO

That's prize currency.

MARK

See, I carry light. I'm not
stupid.

(LO suddenly seems to
lunge for him, and Mark
flinches)

MARK (CONT'D)

Oh, shit...
(LO kisses all over his face, strokes his body, nuzzles his head and neck, really giving a persuasive impression that she wants him. Mark thaws quickly enough)

LO

Easy.

MARK

Oh, I'm good. You don't have to stop.
(She nods. Mark breathes hard, enjoying the moment. He is about to say something else, but she puts some fingers to his lips to get him to quiet down.)

LO

Excuse me.

MARK

Hm? Oh, all right.

LO

I'm just looking for something.

MARK

Something that I might be interested in for instance?

LO

I don't see how, but if it does, then it does.
(LO's search through her purse seems to be much longer and more involved than Mark is comfortable with)

MARK

Are you trying to go for a gun? Is that what you're doing? You're some kind of twisted serial killer, aren't you? I knew it!

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

I asked like a lot of people before trying this "girlfriend service", and they told me those kinds of companies are always shady, taking advantage of lonely guys and also, you know, guys more like me, chiseling them out of everything they own in the world, and sometimes the cops don't even recover the bodies...

LO

(simultaneously with
"taking advantage of
lonely guys")

All right, quit soiling your shorts, it's just I think I got something important I need to check, just give me a minute...

LO (CONT'D)

See, look?

(holds up cell phone)

That's all it was.

MARK

That's all you were looking for?

LO

Mark, relax. I'm just checking my messages. I told you.

MARK

Sorry, I thought that sound...I thought you changed the radio station...

LO

Yeah, that's my, you know...

MARK

Your ring tone, I get it. I just didn't...at first. It caught me off guard; tune was...

LO

What? Catchy?

MARK

Not the word I'm was looking for. Sounded more like a countdown, do you know what I'm talking about...?

LO

So are we all back to being cool now?

MARK

Of course, yeah. That's like a big relief, too. But, you know...Especially since we're about to have this kind of tender moment together and alone and all--isn't picking up your phone now kind of, tacky?

LO

You're losing sight of what's important. Your life is not in danger. The world is not falling apart.

MARK

Sorry, you can tell I've got a big imagination.

LO

I'm definitely not a serial killer. And I've figured out all that about your imaginative reach already a long while ago...We don't have a serial killer problem in this city. We don't get that kind of people settling down here. Now, it's true, though, I do have a gun.

(casually reveals said
weapon amongst the other
contents of her purse)

But I only use it if I have to...and serial killers...well, granted, I guess a lot of them FEEL they have to, if you count psycho obsession as "have-to" sort of reason...

MARK

Hold on, back up. You're telling me you're packing?

LO

Sure. What's wrong? I'm licensed for it.

MARK

Yeah, but for like a little get-together?

LO

I told you already, it's for self-defense.

MARK

You expected a whole team of marauders to bust in on us? That looks like some kind of hand automatic thing.

LO

Well, a get-together does imply more than a couple, and the truth is...Mark, you weren't supposed to know this just yet, but it looks like the cat's out of the bag.

MARK

Yeah, gun, too.

LO

Yep, that, too.. And my badge. And these bad boys...
(holds up handcuffs)

MARK

I can't lie, I'm a little...

LO

...titillated?

MARK

No.

LO

Caught you blushing.

MARK

Not the word I was...Really, now, my head's all scrambled.

LO

You should be off-the-charts apeshit, because you're under arrest. And the rest of my squad that's been camped out around the corner, they're ready to storm your hoopdee and pound you into ground beef.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

(LO uses her phone to scrub through a voice-recording audio file of earlier this scene, then she scrubs even further back to new snatches of dialogue like " You'd do more than that?...Anything?...Would you take off your clothes?...It'll have to be an add-on. Extra. I repeat, that will be extra, at least twelve hundred...")

LO (CONT'D)

See, I knew it, I did tell you the right amount earlier.

MARK

But that's not what I said...Not really...

LO

(holding up and playfully waves her phone recorder)
That's not what God heard.

MARK

This can't be for real.

LO

This all real. I'm really shackling you down now. That's real currency you just handed me in absolutely unambiguous exchange for sex. And I'm a real vice offer holding this real gun you don't want to mess with. Ever done Russian roulette with a pistol?

MARK

I've never played in a casino.

LO

Good, you're not a gambling man, I've got your full attention.

MARK

(aggrieved)

Oh my god. Everything is falling apart.

LO

Well, listen up first; that's not true at all. Not yet.

MARK

Wait just a second, will you? I need a second to think about all this.

LO

I can give you a second to think about this. And then right after, I'll have to bring you in.

MARK

(whimpering)

All the music school bills, sucked down the toilet...My parents are gonna be so disappointed in me... It's all over...

LO

I thought you said you were in medical school.

MARK

I don't know. Whatever. I got, you know, like matriculated someplace.

LO

When you get accepted into a nice school, you should actually go to class. Can't party and chase girls all your life.

MARK

I know, I swear, I'll be a good boy scout from now on. Chasing girls isn't even like me, ask anybody.

LO

After I'm finished, you can't ever say I never did you a solid.

MARK

Oh please. I'll take whatever you got. Yes, do me please.

LO

We can't go backwards anymore, Mark. We have to move forwards.

MARK

I know. I meant, I'll take your deal.

LO

Do you even know what I'm offering?

MARK

It doesn't matter. If you told me you're gonna take that gun and blow my brains out, I'll take that, too. Put me out of my misery.

LO

I wasn't gonna do that.

MARK

Aw, fuck me.

LO

I was gonna suggest, that I let you go. You're free to go.

MARK

So you're not gonna do me a favor and blow my brains out?

LO

Can we move past that already? I'm saying I'm cutting you slack. But with, you know, conditions. You have to remember that I did you a solid; don't let me ever catch you breaking the law ever again, don't do things like flooring it through red lights, don't pay for sex...

MARK

No no no, I'm through with that shit. I don't even think scoring anymore. I'm as eunuch as a Ken doll with its balls sawed clean off. I swear to you on a stack of Bibles, I'll never even...See, I'm even looking you straight in the eye...

LO is already out the door.

LO

Bye, Mark, you have a nice life.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME

This is no longer a lo-res surveillance image, but a "regular" head-to-toe view of LO walking away from the vehicle and heading towards us until her face fills the frame in c-up and FREEZE FRAME.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - EVENING

The TV screen inside sustains the freeze frame from the last scene. Then the channel surfing from the earlier scene with the MAID continues.

Move towards view on maid who finally sets the remote down and heads towards the bathroom.

ON THE WALL MIRROR, she sprays some glass cleaner on her own image and wipes it away...

This glass image turns into a pocket mirror, in which LO's thumb wipes away HER FOGGED REFLECTION. She looks unsatisfied.

LO

(o.s.)

How can you do this to me? I'm not ready for a child.

A tense LO rushes into the bedroom part of the suite and starts rummaging amongst her things. When her back turns towards us, it is evident she's found what she's looking for. After a moment, she turns around and walks towards us heavily, and by doing so, obscuring what's in her hands. It's clear that even though we can hear her, she's not speaking at the moment.

LO (CONT'D)

(o.s.)

How can you do this to me? I'm not ready for a child?

A MAN'S EYES stare back at us, unblinking, vacant.

CUT TO:

The MAID finishes cleaning the mirror. She notices something from the corner of her eye.

On the bedcovers, she sees an OPEN LUGGAGE BAG. Inside are women's clothing and intimate accessories. Her hand appears in c-up, revealing this is HER POV. Her cleaning glove has TORN UP a little from the previous task.

As this maid examines the contents of the luggage while standing (but not touching anything yet) she retrieves a new pair of cleaning gloves from her pocket and showily blows into each of them, as if about to perform surgery, before slipping them on...

CUT TO:

DARK DESIGNER GLOVES slip onto LO's hands and crinkle noticeably as she clenches and straightens them.

LO's POCKET MIRROR nudges the still man's MOUTH. The smooth surface remains UN-MISTED. The mirror is moved away and in its place, LO's LEATHER GLOVED HAND clamps on his nose and mouth. There's a jerk from the body out of frame. *

A handcuff encircles a pale skin man's wrists. The limb goes limp. *

HOTEL CLOSET. The door opening frees us from MOMENTARY DARKNESS, and we get a c-up of the MAID staring at us. Pull back to show the same handcuff dangling from the clothes bar, the other cuff latched but encircling nothing.

The TV SCREEN shows LO'S FACE filling the frame, smiling triumphantly. She backs up a little to show she's wearing a a camisole or something similar sexy but classy sleepwear.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

A FROWNY-FACE is crudely drawn on a white piece of paper and taped to a pillow. Lo's obscure outline is glimpsed as she paces in front of this. During the following monologue, we will settle on Lo's face, the same made up on and setting we just saw on the t.v. in the previous scene.

Lo makes herself up for a somewhat casual date while staring at herself in the mirror. It appears as if someone is actually replying to her softly throughout this speech, but the camera gradually reveals she really is just alone in the room.

Another activity of note: Lo discreetly slips an object underneath her blouse and seems to affix it to her midriff-- though what it is and where exactly is not shown yet.

LO

It was really nice of you to take me out. No, you don't have to get all worked up about not making dinner. I eat out all the time.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)
 Don't let it bother you. You're
 doing fine as a date. You open
 doors. You're polite. It's cool.
 Trust me. You're doing fine as a
 date. Really.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

The JOHN, a pitiful older man, has begun sobbing uncontrollably.

Lo is seated next to him, her outfit completed from what was prepared earlier. She eyes him interestedly, steadily.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The maid finds cell phone amongst the guest's belongings. She scrubs through a few files, which we can tell because of snatches from older version of "date" scene are heard with different men--cut to snippets of Lo dressed differently while speaking to these different men.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSINESS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

PRYCE is a suited high-ranking office man who is first seen from the back surveying a city-scape through a poster-sized window. Lo enters, wearing a more business-style, more smart than severe, suit and skirt combination, hair made up tastefully and pretty, and rather more make-up than we will usually find on her. It's clear from her expression this is the first time she's been here.

PRYCE
 (o.s.)
 So how did you find out about this
 position?

For the following scene, PRYCE's disembodied voice will utter questions, while we see Lo respond with her dialogue and PRYCE's counter-reaction muted. They seem to warm up to each other gradually.

During some of the lines below, PRYCE is actually seen diegetically finishing some of his questions to Lo, who answers silently as before.

PRYCE (CONT'D)
(v.o.)

Do you have to work anywhere else to make ends meet?

Are you happy working where you are?

So where do you see yourself in the five years?

How would you feel if you were given a chance to get a promotion to a position with some real teeth in it? Comparable pay and benefits package, of course...

I don't know anything about you.

Tell me where you're coming from. No, I don't mean geographically.

What's going on in that special little mind of yours?

Tell me about the best moment you've ever had in a relationship.

At some point PRYCE rises from his head position at the table and walks behind Lo, who is seated and taking dictation on a laptop. His hand slyly brushes against her hair, an act that doesn't appear to faze Lo.

During the following monologue, we actually see the scene as she describes it with the actor playing Mark--but NOT Mark the character--this time with Lo looking like she's his peer, dressed and behaving suitably like a NAIVE COLLEGE FRESHMAN.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STATE PARK - DAY

Everything from the cinematography to not-Mark's confident personality and Lo's sweet aura should help indicate that this is all a story, not a flashback to a real event.

LO
(v.o.)
I remember he was so easy to talk to.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

He told once I was the best thing that ever happened to him, and it didn't scare me at all...He dared me to go jump in the water, and of course, I said, you first...It looked like we were gonna stay like that all afternoon waiting for the other one to make a move...And then that's when he said there's really only one way to decide...

An impromptu game of rock paper scissors follows, where for the first couple plays, Lo and not-Mark show identical hands. On the next play, Lo plays paper, and not-Mark plays rock, and she envelopes his fist. A moment of affectionate looks pass, whereas neither lets go, and then this somehow leads into a not-so-intense but still involved grade-school game of mercy.

LO (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

I never knew how our hands ended up where they did; I could tell he was really struggling, and I was barely exerting myself! And then I realized it was because he really cared about me, he couldn't stand the idea of hurting me.

The couple fall into each other's arms and share an unironically totally out-of-character kiss and embrace.

BACK TO:

INT. BUSINESS CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME

The dialogue here plays normally now, lines attributed directly to the speakers. PRYCE leans back casually but still imperiously in his high chair, Lo retains her meek subordinate secretarial role.

PRYCE

Well, that was cornball. Sorry.

LO

It didn't really last. But it was beautiful when it did.

PRYCE

How about now you can tell me the darkest moment that's ever happened in your life?

This one question gives Lo pause, but she retains her composure. She smiles back, reserved, not answering yet.

EXT. LO'S ROOM - DAY (ACTUALLY SEVERAL PLACES OUTSIDE AND IN)

Lo should be reclining somewhere with a cell phone hands-free device attached to her ear. Despite monologue nature, this should not be done in one unbroken shot. Lo should be presented in different in clothes and settings, similar to what was done earlier, throughout this monologue, to emphasize that she has made this call several times before and is quite practiced at it. (It might actually be a good idea to repeat a line but changing the kidnapped child's name!) She is used to there being no deviation from this template she's set herself.

LO

Hello? Is this Neil's mother?
Hello, Mom, this is the Good Samaritan. How are you today?
I'm the one who's got your kid now.
You know, he had a little accident.
Not too bad. Skinned his knee.
But it's all right. I kissed it
and made it better. Neil has such
lovely skin, you know that.

LO waits to listen to some outcry from the other end of the line.

LO (CONT'D)

Calm down, Mom. It's no use
getting bent out of shape. He
can't even speak to you anyway.
Oh, why? Well, that's because
Neil has this tape across his
mouth. But don't worry, he can
hear you. Let me put the phone
down next to his ear. You can tell
her how much you love her.

She holds phone in mid-air, next to no one; indecipherable voice is heard; eventually she returns the phone to her own ear.

LO (CONT'D)

I just want you to know, Mom, your
little boy is very brave. He
didn't cry at all when I cut off
his clothes. Sssshhhhh! Mom,
what did I just tell you? You got
to keep it together.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

Now what I'm about to tell you next is very important, so please don't interrupt me. I just said, don't interrupt me.

LO has to wait some more as another prolonged response from the other end plays out and winds down.

LO (CONT'D)

Mom, you really need to listen to me. I can't talk to you if you keep screaming above me like this. It gives me a headache, and I can't focus. Mom, I'm warning you, if you don't chill out right now, I'm gonna split the little prick's head open.

LO takes the cell phone and slams it into her own hand. No stress on Lo's part though.

LO (CONT'D)

Did you hear that, Mom? That was my fist denting Neil's face. And I'll do it again every time you interrupt me. Are we cool now? Can we talk again? Mom? You still there?

LO waits another for another hesitant answer.

LO (CONT'D)

Good. Now is there something you want to tell Neil? He can hear you. What do you want to say to her?

(pause)

That's fine. Go ahead and say it. Tell him to relax.

(pause)

Now tell him it's safe to listen to anything I say. Tell him if he goes along with me quietly, everything will be all right. Go ahead.

(pause)

Thank you. That's very good, Mom. I think the kid is now much calmer, now. I'm gonna give you a couple street names in a minute. You need to make sure you write this down and the amount in cash you will need.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

If you're even a minute later than the time I give you...well, don't be surprised if you never hear back from me or Neil ever again. You understand?

(pause)

Yes, he knows you love your baby. And by the end of tonight, you'll be able to tell it to his face, because you're going to do everything I say, right down to the last detail. Be prompt, don't forget anything I say, or you will find your son in a drawer the next time you see him. Make sure the bills are in 10's, 20's, 50's. And one more thing, and it's really important, if you ever want to see your son again...Hold on a second, I need to take this.

A hysterical screen blares from the phone, but a calm tap from Lo's finger ends that instantly. Ear still pressed to phone, she waits a moment.

LO (CONT'D)

Yeah? What do you want? I'm on the line with someone important. Is there a reason you've been letting call waiting run so long, instead of leaving a voice mail...? So full then? Why don't you leave it at my answering service, you should have gotten it at the same place you got this number. No? Well then, here, grab a pen and write this down, because I'm only gonna say this once. It's 555-Go Fuck Yourself. And I'm not the one you think you're calling anyway.

She taps the phone again and resumes her earlier deceptively pleasant demeanor.

LO (CONT'D)

Hi there! Sorry to keep you on hold so long. But I'm back, and, uh...What was I gonna tell you? I lost my thought, but you know that's okay. I'll text the address after I hang up. In the meantime, stay positive, and remember what I told you before. Bye.

She actually just hangs up and puts away the phone. Stop at her silent, her satisfied face. Show same satisfied face, silent, at each setting already presented.

BACK TO:

INT. JOHN'S ROOM - EVENING

Same FROWNY-FACE PILLOW returns. Although it starts out jokingly, LO's exchange with this propped up 'mannequin' takes a turn to disturbing the longer it transpires, to the point where kisses turns to bites, and her light touches turn to clawing and heavy blows.

There should be some brief glimpses of the actual terrified male victim's eyes and bound wrists as this scene continues.

All throughout, it's clear Lo is patient, undisturbed, relishing her power.

LO

Well, hello...You don't mind if I take this seat, now do you?

Hey, settle down. We're just having each other's company, like we always do. Just trying to clear the air. You're a good man, you know. Sure, there's a woman out there waiting for you, and you'll find her. Maybe one day. Maybe not today, I guess. So think of this as a new start.

Wow, that one hit a nerve, didn't it? I don't mind. I like a fighter. You should give yourself a break, let go. You can wriggle all you want, you still aren't going to get your way.

So you've got some kind of problem with me? Is that what you're trying to say? Here. Take your best shot. Oh, yes. Nice. This, I like.

I think now, it's time to cut it loose down there. This is probably your first time. Yeah, mine too. Just settle down.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

I know you want to go down with pride. Well, you put on your brave face as long as you want, I'll take my time. But if you can cry out a little, just a little whimper, I might...I might just get it over quickly.

What do you say, lover?
Got quiet all of a sudden now,
didn't it?

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. LOCAL PARK - DAY

LO sits at a bench and recites to an offscreen listener.

LO

How you can you do this to me? I'm
not ready for a child.

LO rests her head in her arms, regains her composure and tries again. She's trying a different voice, accent.

LO (CONT'D)

How you can you do this to me? I'm
not ready for a child.

LO takes a deep breath, stares straight ahead and makes another game attempt.

LO (CONT'D)

How you can you do this to me? I'm
not ready for a child....

Lo turns and finds a little boy, NEIL, has spotted her.. No dialogue between them.

Instead LO makes a hammy, terrified face. Amused, Neil imitates her.

Lo surveys the area carefully before getting up and walking towards the child. She uses her phone to take a picture of his still posing terrified face.

When he drops the act to grin back at her, she slaps him somewhat lightly, like on the ear or near the back of his neck. He looks upset for a moment.

LO (CONT'D)
Just trying to stay real. Come on,
you're not gonna sulk on me, are
you? We still cool? High-five?

He looks back at her steadily, studying her practiced act.
Lo lifts her palm up to him, expectant.

CUT TO:

INT. LO'S ROOM - EVENING

A FULL SYRINGE in close-up dispenses some liquid into a glass tumbler. Lo enters the room and walks past it towards her purse in the background.

Lo uses her smartphone to scrub through several video files in which distressed men seem to plead back at us. She enlarges the image of one particular young one who doesn't look much more than 20 years age.

Lo puts this down and reaches for the old fashioned land-line hotel phone and dials. She holds the receiver to her ear and waits.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

The maid is busy wiping down surfaces with all-purpose cleaner and a rag. She straightens up and walks towards her hotel phone and picks up.

MAID
Hello?

She waits, while listening.

INT. LO'S ROOM - EVENING

Lo also waits with the phone at her ear.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

The maid still waits for an answer.

MAID
Hello?

INT. LO'S ROOM - EVENING

Despite what she's saying here, there should remain a smug, amused look on Lo's face all throughout.

LO

Hold on there. No, just stop talking please. That's right, I'm speaking to you. You just asked me the same question three times in a row, and I gave you the correct answer each time.

She picks up a half full wine glass and sips.

LO (CONT'D)

See, you know what your problem is? You don't listen. I want to know your name. Good. Again please. Spell it. Yeah, last name, too. Now I want to know the name and number of your corporate office. I don't want to know the name of your immediate supervisor, because you're all in-tight with whoever that is. I want to know your real head office. I want to make it clear that it's not the hotel, it's just you, I've got a problem with. I'm gonna see to it that everyone above you knows that you are the worse customer service agent I've ever spoken to.

She waits and watches t.v. while sipping on her glass. Then she dials again.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

The puzzled looking maid continues to wait. After a moment, she hangs up.

INT. LO'S ROOM - EVENING

LO

Hello? Hi this is the same guest from Rm 372. Do you know what happened to the front desk agent who was just on the phone?

(listens for a while)

Really?

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

You think she at least clocked out before she...Well, I'm sorry to hear that...Well, could you at least leave her a message and tell her I was just messing with her.

Yeah, she sounded so wound, up, so I thought I'd lay into her a little, just to loosen her up...Oh well, if she's gonna say those kinds of things out loud, then we should let the lesson stick...(laughs) You know what I just realized? She and I talked round and round in circles for at least 20 minutes, and in the end, I still got what I was asked for right at the beginning. If she'd just went out and did what I asked her up front without arguing, we could have saved each other all this head-ache...

She hangs up and laughs out loud. She's drunk from mirth, not so much from the alcohol, to be honest.

DISSOLVE TO:

Hours later. She's dressed much more seductively, more bedroom wear, half dressed, wearing chemise or a collared polo blouse as a make-shift robe, though she's still alone. (There should be two glasses and a wine bottle prominently displayed somewhere in another room, maybe two plates set up as well)

LO (CONT'D)

Yeah, I know. That's not any way to run a motel. Well, you let the maid know what I think, because that's just not something I tolerate. Definitely not enough for me to want to come back, if you get my drift. Oh, you will talk to her then? Exactly. Who knows how many hours that door was left wide open for anyone to walk in; I could have lost everything in the world. I understand, but I hope you understand my situation, too. Great. We understand each other. So I can expect this little incident will never happen again.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

Maybe even comp the charge from the receipt altogether, but we'll just let the general manager make that call, once she gets an earful from me, shall we?

LO hangs up. She takes some duct tape and uses it to tape the same knife under her shirt again. She then puts on a long sleeve blouse to conceal it.

She also takes her mini-recorder and has it positioned just underneath the bed.

She stares at the door waiting for her next prospective john. Some time passes.

DISSOLVE TO:

LO checks her make-up in the mirror again. As she moves past the hallway, she thinks she hears a strange sound.

She stops, takes a deep breath and sits down on her bed calmly.

There's silence. LO looks on edge for the first time.

LO (CONT'D)

Hey, can we talk about this for a second?

Her hand reaches for the knife taped to her leg. She gets up and begins to slink back to the bathroom door. Her right hand hovers close to the handle of her knife.

She moves into what appears to be a vacant bathroom area.

She goes to the shower curtain with seeming certainty of what's behind it. She turns on the faucet and pretends as if she's about to wash her face again, but instead, she yanks the shower curtain open.

The bath area turns out to be empty as well.

LO walks out of that room and is about to go for her purse out near the lamp when it's clear that the presence that was waiting for her was out near the bed area all this time. She stands up straight, looking at this mysterious figure in the eye.

She glances down on the bed. Right in the center is the fake badge she had used to deceive Mark in the earlier scene. It dawns upon her that she's the one who is not a step ahead this time.

Lights go out.

The closet door opens--this is all viewed from inside though, cleaving open the pitch black space. Lo looks at us from outside, a wry smile creeps onto her face.

She backs away, then boldly turns her back away from the closet. She considers for another moment, then faces the closet again. She makes a "come over" motion with one hand.

The closet's occupant finally emerges; it's a man wearing a MASK. Not a large man either, medium to short height, slight build, only intimidating because he has no face. His body language is almost bashful as he approaches her.

She grins, shakes her head and turns his back to him. He bolts for the door, but just as he reaches Lo, she elbows him in the face, sweeps his legs and socks him in the face.

Quick cuts follow of her running and striking him several times in the body with expert speed. He goes down on the floor in a motionless heap.

Lo looks exhausted now, sweating, as she takes a seat on the table nearby. She reaches for the glass tumbler, makes as if to lift it to her lips, then changes her mind. She focuses on the man's face.

Her hand moves towards his mask.

But then Lo gets distracted by a bulge in his back pocket--a pair of handcuffs. She expertly applies them to his wrists.

MOMENTS LATER:

Lo and the masked man have now switched places, Lo is unconscious on the floor but facing upwards. The man stands over her now, studying her face. Even more exhausted than Lo was, he goes to the washroom. His gait reveals pained joints.

With his back turned towards us, he starts to remove his mask...

Lo has managed to work her way to a standing position, though she's hobbled by her ankles tied together and her wrists cuffed. She surprises the masked man from behind and wrestles him awkwardly to the floor by force of her body canvassing his. He somehow shuffles her off and throws her on the bed. She looks at him defiantly.

Switching to her POV, her vision of the man fades.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

The TV SCREEN briefly replays the action of preceding scene of Lo freeing herself and beating up her invader but from a different angle and seen from a farther distance.

In the foreground the MAID resumes cleaning.

ONSCREEN, we go beyond the earlier scene to Lo grabbing the man by the SCRUFF and dragging him towards a clear spot on the floor so that she can make him kneel and talk.

Onscreen only, we end on a prominent c-up of Lo's triumphant dominant FACE as she tears the man down verbally, but it's somewhat undermined by the fact that we're witnessing this once-removed from the maid's position and at a canted angle.

MOMENTS LATER:

INT. LO'S ROOM - LATER

LO is now tied to a chair and is silenced securely with a strange but evidently quite secure ball gag. She wakes and turns her head as far as she can. Once inured to her situation, she tries to scream for help. She struggles with her bonds, trying to find the knife that she had kept ready for situations like this.

She turns her head to a side and sees the FAKE BADGE she'd brandished in the earlier scene with Mark.

She imagines herself finally freeing herself and pulling the gag out of her mouth herself. She sees an INTRUDER dressed in black and well-masked walk through the motel door and deftly lets fly the knife at the intruder's chest, which it hits dead center. The intruder drops dead. She smiles, self-impressed.

CUT TO:

But then we return to reality; Lo is still tied up and gagged, struggling to free herself. For some reason, her bound hands cannot find the knife that would normally be there near her back.

The man with the MASK returns, looks her over curiously.

Lo returns his studied gaze, especially his exposed eyes, trying to determine if those same eyes are familiar...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ASH'S ROOM - DAY

ASH is a very young man, a lapsed believer, forced to scramble for the last scraps of sanity in a confused world in which he frankly doesn't feel he's made up. He's made a date with destiny, but it's going to lead sideways beyond even his soured view. He is dressed conservatively with a polo shirt and slacks, but his tie is loosened considerably, and the impression one gets at first is that he's been sleeping in these clothes for a while.

ASH

(to himself)

God said to Noah after he destroyed all that was living in the world...I mean, in Genesis, God said to Noah after...Genesis: God said to Noah after he destroyed...He said: "Be fruitful and replenish the earth."...He said to Noah..."For now in spite of everything, I firmly believe people are good at heart."

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

LO and Ash are now together in this same hotel room. LO wears a short cute dress for the first part of this scene. (Evidently this all happened several weeks before the scene of her kidnapping described earlier) Ash leads LO to the bedroom but stops her just short of reaching the blankets.

ASH

Excuse me. They didn't do this right...

He walks over and smooths out the sheets. She is about to step forward, but he stops her again. He walks to the other side of the bed and smooths out the sheets. He repeats this movement about four or five times before it is clear to LO that a trigger has been pulled and it will take a while before a flame within peters out. No final smoothing is shown, just implied.

Later at the same bed, Ash sits at one corner, still anxious. LO looks over at him, smiling hopefully; she's been with this kind of guy before.

LO

You know, He will strike you dead just for thinking like you did.

ASH

What?

LO

Oh, yeah. Your mind is an open book, remember?

ASH

You like messing with me, don't you?

LO

I know, it's not funny. I'm sorry.

ASH

No, you're right. Solomon prayed to God...

He's lost his train of thought and has to "jump-start" to get back in gear.

ASH (CONT'D)

He prayed to God. Solomon did. His deepest wish: "Please give me wisdom; make me pure in every sense—just not yet!"

LO

(smiles nervously)

Um, you're okay, aren't you?

ASH

Suffering fortifies character. The gloom in this life makes the next one SHINE. Every second of hurt...that's worth a line of eternity's...That's what they say.

LO

What who says?

ASH

(to himself)

They. You know. The people who know what they're saying.

LO

I'm afraid you lost me, kid. May want to back up a little.

She moves towards him. He flinches.

ASH

I'm sorry. I thought I was ready.

LO

You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

ASH

No, I want to do this. I just got to feel it...Feel it right first-- Hold on...

(to himself)

The Lord proclaimed to Moses...Exodus: The Lord went to Moses and Moses heard, The Lord said...The Lord proclaimed..."Moses, This is your God. What I say is the law...And from this point on...The law says...God's Law states...

(stammers)

"When there is a will...There is a way."

EXT. CHURCH - LAST WEEK

Now properly dressed in a suit and tie and groomed for mass, Ash leaves the church steps and carries his Bible to the parking lot.

Across the street, he sees LO in the playground, looking as extreme-Goth as one can without actually tilting into full-out party costume. She makes eye contact with Ash and seems to blow a kiss at him.

Ash instinctively looks behind him, as if wondering if she means someone else then looks back, quizzically, as if considering. She smiles back.

BACK TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - PRESENT

LO

You all right?

Ash nods back, non-committed.

She kisses him, this time being the assertive one in the couple, and even gently pushing him back so that she can get astride him. It's innocently sensual, not overt yet, but just as Ash looks as if he's about to relax and stay in the moment, she pulls back.

ASH
So wait. Is that all?

LO
You only paid so much. You
remember what we agreed to?

ASH
(resigned)
I remember. I guess, I was just
thinking....

LO
(amused)
Thinking what?

ASH
Gospel according to Luke...Christ
said...In Gethsemane, the soldier
found Christ, surrounded by his
sleeping disciples...Christ Said to
the soldiers...
(losing train of thought)
He said..."A deal is a deal."

LO gathers her things and is ready to go out the door when
Ash gets up suddenly and blocks her way. LO laughs.

LO
So is there something you want to
tell me?

Ash belches, to his own surprise.

ASH
You smell really good.

LO
Like how exactly?

ASH
"Like a day old attar drowned in
blood."

LO
Ah, now that is...a singular,
vivid...confusing fragrance. But
honestly, it was really nice
meeting you...

ASH
(before he realizes what
he's saying)
Please don't leave!

LO

You haven't been drinking, have you?

Ash gazes at his shoes, betraying, mournful.

LO (CONT'D)

Don't get me wrong. It's just a question. Not judgment. Look, I didn't want to say anything at first, but I've really been under the weather all week, and I've been trying to hold back the past hour...

ASH

(back stammering)

Oh, for you, ma'am, I'd endure the Seven Plagues!...I'll give you anything you want, if you just stay another hour...I promise...No more verses...I'll be good...

LO

Are you sure you're all right?

ASH

I feel like...I'm hearing things...people tell me one thing...then they say another...I don't know what...they say I could have...

LO

These people who say things, are they in this room now? Will they pick up your ticket for you? Sometimes the great thing about being on your own is when you make the right choice without having the committee in your mind. I think I've given you an experience you can carry with you the rest of your life. That's worth so much now. Trust me, you'll thank me later for not letting you spoil it.

She takes his Bible and hands it to him. He takes it, looks steadily at it, gets tearful. He holds it up high and slams it into the floor.

ASH

NO!

The outburst does surprise LO, but she's seen it all from guys with inner demons and waits it out patiently.

ASH (CONT'D)

(groveling)

I don't want to be pure anymore...I'm tired of living in my head...Waiting out hurt for some kind of grace...What's it gonna take, huh? I don't have anymore money, but maybe there's something I can do...What can I do? What do you want? I'll do whatever, just don't...Don't go anywhere...please.

LO's gaze turns to the make-shift crafted cross necklace around his neck. She boldly reaches out and fingers it.

LO

You told me earlier that your mother made this just for you.

ASH

She said I'd always be looked after, as long as I kept it near me.

LO

You still think that's true? Now?

LO steps back, as if daring him, gesturing to this whole scenario and making a silent presentation of how far he's strayed from his principles at this moment.

LO (CONT'D)

Don't be afraid to be honest with yourself.

ASH

I remember what she said.

LO

I believe that's what she said to you. But what do you believe for yourself now?

ASH

Would you like to see me again this weekend? Like the way real people do it...?

LO

Let me start off first by saying, I really respect you...

ASH

I've learned a long time ago to expect the worst when women get serious all of a sudden and then start out by saying how much they really respect you.

LO

Well, if you'd just given me a chance to finish, you would have known for sure what I really feel about you.

ASH

If you mean to tell me no, then just say it.

LO

You don't even know what I would have said. So what's the point?

ASH

You all think you're letting us down easy by circling around your point and flattering us about how admirable you see our "character" , you don't realize how much worse than it is just telling us what you mean flat out.

LO

Is that what you want to hear then? You want me to say no? Why don't you tell me what you want me to do then, since you've clearly made up your mind about us already.

(Her dare gives Ash serious pause.)

LO (CONT'D)

You can't even bring yourself to commit to your resolve. Yes, stop looking at me that way, you heard right.

ASH

Would you really have...?

LO

I don't know. Thanks to your shooting off your mouth before you stopped to think, I guess we never will.

ASH

I can't take this...I wish I had known...is there nothing I can do?

LO

You really think it's possible to just start over after you've laid all what you've got on the line?

(Tears brim in his eyes as he shakes his head and then gets on his knees, cowering)

LO (CONT'D)

What would you think if I told you how deeply I pity you right now?

(After Ash shows he's willing to disrespect his faith to LO)

ASH

You don't really think very much of me, do you?

LO

In all seriousness...You expect others to respect you, even though you don't have very much respect for yourself anyway. I'm not like everyone else...I don't really think about you enough to consider you one way or another in the first place, if it's any consolation.

Ash removes the cross necklace from his neck and places it in the Bible and shuts it. He then goes to LO and puts his arms around her, feeling consoled for the first time in a long time.

Suddenly he disengages from LO, goes back to the Bible with the cross, puts it in a drawer and shuts it, as if making really certain that it's far far away from him. He looks back at LO, sweating profusely, like he's just been carrying a ton of weight for miles and now the burden has just been lightened.

BACK TO:

INT. LO'S ROOM - EVENING

Lo remains the Masked invader's prisoner, still gazing at him helplessly. Though still concealing his identity, the man speaks with Mark's voice

MASK

I'd like for you to return the
money you stole from me.

He now pulls out the knife which LO had been reaching for all along. He uses the duct tape which had been used to conceal the knife to now attach the knife to her exposed thigh leg.

LO attempts to speak. He gestures for her condescendingly to give it up.

MASK (CONT'D)

I used to be a good man. There was just...say, a part of me that felt incomplete...It was just something between two people...I never wanted to hurt anyone...But you had to go twist it all around...You made me hate myself...I can't just let that go.

LO stops trying to talk.

MASK (CONT'D)

So first, I will need a little help from you. Will that be all right? Nod, if you mean yes. Or just die, for no.

DISSOLVE TO:

LO is now ungagged. Despite her dire circumstance, LO looks and speaks considerably cheerfully.

LO

Yes, everything's fine. I really didn't mean to alarm everyone and I'm just so sorry about that. I mean that. Please don't hold this against me, I really love staying at this motel. I mean, hotel. Because a motel is the kind of place where you park your car just outside your room.

If it's not already clear by this moment, then it should be made quite clear now that it's someone else holding the phone to Lo's mouth, as she is actually still tied down. A hand that is not her own strikes her softly but still sternly, like a strict warning to "wrap this up now".

LO (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm glad you see how I can feel this way.

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)

Well, you never know what sort of
creeps you run into this time of
night.

The man has removed his mask, revealing himself as MARK. He
hangs up the phone for LO.

LO looks up for a second while catching her breath. She
notices Mark moving to re-gag her.

LO (CONT'D)

Nobody twisted your arm and made
you go out and pay for a date.
Plenty of guys score without even
having to haggle a price. But your
ego's so fragile, you just want a
shortcut, and then you act all
surprised when you learn there's a
trade-off. Here's a free tip: for
the real stuff, need to give love,
to get some. Got that, you sad,
fragile misanthrope? Everybody's
got an angle. Your problem is, you
make it too easy for others to size
you up. Did you ever look deep
inside yourself realize that if it
weren't me, it'd be someone else
for sure? What are you planning on
doing to me anyway? You going to
rob me and kill me in cold blood?
You think owning me will prove you
just grew a new pair of balls? You
think you can throw your weight at
me with this adolescent psycho
mental hand-job, you don't even
have the...you can only dream you
have the very teeth to bend me out
of shape. I don't even care what
you do to me! See? You can bruise
me, but you can't break me. I don't
care. I flatten a line-up of guys
better than you any given week!

(spits on floor)

You're small, I'm still tall. So
there, crushed your payback,
served it back. How do you like
that? You want to impress me:
first, brush off my dust and lift
your head, that's right, look up.
When you can hold eye contact with
what's in front of you, Mr. High-
and-Fly, you still paying
attention?

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)
Eyes ahead at 12 o'clock? Good,
why don't you suck my dick?

Lo throws back her head, howling with laughter.

LO (CONT'D)
Blistering, aren't I? Have I got
you seeing stars already? Well,
when your vision's back to 20/20,
go pick your pasty cupcake ass up,
and disappear.

Mark only shakes his head, partly in disbelief and partly out
of amusement at her nerve.

LO (CONT'D)
Oh, I get it. You want me to give
the money back to you, don't you?
You probably stalked for me days on
end, spent all that time gearing
up, just to have your moment in the
sun, and now what? Well let me
remind you, I didn't steal anything
from me, you gave me that money by
your own choice alone, so it's
mine, fair and square. I don't
have to give it back. You've made
your choice. That's a fact, and
you can't un-make that.

Mark's gaze has wandered here a little, but upon hearing the
last sentence, he pivots sharply and shoots back a dagger-
riddle stare at her.

LO (CONT'D)
What? Is there still some reason
you haven't turned into a puff of
smoke yet?

He lifts an eyebrow.

LO (CONT'D)
Fine, I left your money clip in my
purse. My thumb drive's in there,
too, so you can track it. Use the
app on my tablet behind you...

He smiles at her, folds his arms.

LO (CONT'D)

How about we agree we both acted
way out of line to each other, and
patch up: split down the middle, go
our separate ways, never look back.
Good deal?

MASK

You're also talking about the
money, aren't you?

LO

(shakes head)

Sure.

MASK

By down the middle, you mean 50/50?

LO

In all fairness, if you think about
it, the percentage should skew
towards me, since when you factor
planning and labor...

He side-eyes her. Her speech stutters.

LO (CONT'D)

Wiser move to keep options open.

His side-eye holds.

LO (CONT'D)

Which is why half each works fine.

He sighs while seeming to consider her suggestion.

LO (CONT'D)

You're not seriously proposing...?

He looks up thoughtfully, bites his lip.

LO (CONT'D)

(no hesitation)

Sure. All yours. That's how it
was from the start anyway, wasn't
it?

He returns glance with an "are you kidding me?" look.

LO (CONT'D)

You're nursing a grudge, are you?
Let's be grownups...

(MORE)

LO (CONT'D)
Some character assassination now
and then...fortifies the soul...

Her words catch in her throat. He notices, smiles.

LO (CONT'D)
So in a way, yeah, you're welcome.

DISSOLVE TO:

Seen only from behind now, Mark types on the laptop. From behind him, we find Lo gagged again, watching, plotting, stewing. Eventually he turns to face her.

MARK
Easy now. You'll pull a muscle
that way.

LO breaks down in tears. Mark watches for a while. Then he gives applause. He makes a "just a little too much" gesture then gets up to go.

MASK
Like it or not, sweetheart, you're
sitting this out...

He notices that her gaze has drifted elsewhere, so he seizes her chin and yanks it back so she faces him again. His voice fires up to a ferocious, practically nuclear level of livid here, mouth frothing, veins popping.

MASK (CONT'D)
The hell are you looking at?! Be
polite! That means, you show me
full attention when I am (loses
train of thought, sputters,
exasperated)...I swear...Before
this night ends, I'll have you
broken, if I have to tear your shit
up limb from limb to do it!

Lo gasps, looks genuinely shook up. He takes a deep breath and recomposes himself.

MASK (CONT'D)
As I was saying, like it or not,
sweetheart, you're not bouncing
anywhere for quite a while. It's
you and me together and this whole
long ass night. Maybe if you let
the mood settle naturally, we can
even get cozy...It doesn't have to
be so bad.

(MORE)

MASK (CONT'D)

I can even put something over your eyes, if it helps to pretend I'm someone else.

Lo whimpers some more; it should be left vague whether her distress is genuine or her craft has improved.

MASK (CONT'D)

Ssshhh. Let's not argue. You've probably dicked over a whole score of guys through the years, what's it matter if one of them leaves you with a scratch?

Lo drops the act, startled. That didn't sound like Mark's voice at all there. But he's already replaced the mask on his head now, before she can confirm her suspicions.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK LANE - SEVERAL DAYS AGO

Decked out in exercise clothes, Lo jogs down a path.

No one's around, and no much sounds aside from her controlled breathing.

The path bends at a right angle, and as Lo adjusts to the new vista, she sees ANOTHER MAN standing nearer the curb ahead.

Lo continues to jog steadily, staring straight ahead, as if this new person in the scene is just outdoor wallpaper.

The man's face turns...is that MARK?

Lo's gaze involuntarily switches down, continues jogging.

After she makes considerable yardage, she stops to catch her breath and look at her watch. She makes a natural discreet pivot while furtively glancing behind.

There seems to be NO ONE there in the path she just left.

Lo keeps on running.

She leaves the path at a more forested area and hikes across a ditch until she finds a series of an older construction site near the waterway.

Lo surveys the area skillfully, looking as if she's just on a leisure cooling hike, until she finds the spot she's looking for.

She lifts a full sports bag from one of the shelves near the site and carries it away with her.

INT. LO'S CAR - SAME

Her vehicle is NOT one we've seen her drive before. The same sports bag sits on the passenger seat while Lo drives.

She notices an OMINOUS TICKING SOUND like a timer or metronome. Lo can't help but glance at the bag at times while steering.

EXT. STREET CORNER - SAME

At one block, the car stops at a sign, and the sports bag gets TOSSED OUT.

EXT. LO'S CAR - SAME

As Lo drives on, she can't help but notice that the same ticking timer sound is still going on. She looks at the towels she used to wrap the BUNDLES OF CASH.

EXT. ABANDONED SITE - SAME

Lo finds a secluded enough wooded area and places this TOWELED BUNDLE in a ditch. She uses to cover it with dirt so that she can remain standing and look around.

INT. LO'S CAR - SAME

As Lo drives, she can't help but notice that the timer sound still hasn't gone away. Even when she was jogging, she really wasn't sweating that much, but now rivers of perspiration are visibly breaking up the make-up on her face

EXT. LOCAL PARK - SAME

A MAN carrying a tackle box walks to his car in the public lot. He sees a pair of woman's feet sticking out from underneath another vehicle.

He glances at her curiously and then heads to his own car.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSINESS CONFERENCE ROOM (PRYCE'S) - DAY

Back to the same earlier time when Pryce employed a younger Lo as his assistant, youthful hairstyle and dress.

PRYCE

I suppose you can't tell me about
the darkest moment in your life?

LO shakes her head coyly. There could be a flash cut to a dark close-up of LO in the dark with a gun in her mouth, sweating profusely, or lying very flat on the floor, distressed, but that should be a near subliminal view.

PRYCE (CONT'D)

Too personal?

LO

Don't have one.

PRYCE

That's impossible. There's no
person alive who's ever lived a
charmed life.

She smiles self-satisfied, leaning back.

Pryce imagines striding confidently towards her, leading her by the hand from her chair, linking fingers, pushing his face into her hair and kissing her passionately...

But we return to reality, he's still sitting at the head of the table while Lo studies her computer and glances on occasion at him with arid professionalism.

PRYCE (CONT'D)

(sighs, smiles back)

All right then.

Eventually she comes on to him, sitting on the table, allowing his hand to slide down her skirt. PRYCE breathes heavily.

PRYCE (CONT'D)

(musically)

I see London...I see France...

He finds the micro-audio-recorder hidden under her skirt, pulls it up and shoves it in her face.

PRYCE (CONT'D)

How much were you planning to
squeeze out of me in exchange for
this?

There's a small scuffle where PRYCE somehow wrests LO's arm behind her, holding her helpless.

PRYCE (CONT'D)

You don't need to fight me. I'm not planning on turning you in. The world's more interesting with you in it. And if I ever need you again, I'm sure I can...

At this point, LO wriggles out of his grip and socks him in the jaw expertly. It doesn't faze PRYCE, who back-hands her in the face right back. Without missing a beat, LO pulls the gun that she's had tucked under her waist all this time and jabs it in his chest, which doesn't scare PRYCE. It actually seems to please him.

LO

Don't tell me. You were gonna say you like a girl with a lot of fight in her.

PRYCE

Uh-uh. I'm not opening up to you anymore. Not today.

LO pockets her gun and walks out of the room backwards, keeping him within her view always. He turns to the window, back facing her, as if to reassure her, and waves good-bye with the back of his hand.

PRYCE (CONT'D)

(voice over)

You know where to find me, if you really want to know more about me...

(pause)

And I think I can figure out where to find you, when I want to know more.

LO

So you think.

BACK TO:

INT. LO'S ROOM- EVENING

Other pictures of rather distressed women on pillows but with their names like labeled on them, like HANNAH, EMILY, NORA, RUBY, SARAH on them. One of the pillows has a BLANK SHEET on it.

ASH

You can't nick me anymore with that slick sassy tongue you've got...See, I've gone through your things...Now that I've got you mouthed sealed up right, you'd better start listening, see, I've got a record of what God heard.

Ash plays the very same audio recording of his bedroom encounter with Lo, when she convinced him to give up his mother's gift in exchange for a little physical affection.

QUICK MONTAGE: Security camera images of single men going on a date with Lo and being confronted with the "bust". They all look distressed, pleading, some weep.

ASH (CONT'D)

When your mind is going from being stifled in an echo chamber, all you have left is to pray, you go beyond the pale and touch numb, but no, all you've done is set a new high bar in hurt—and before you start to (trailing off, losing train of thought)...before you realize what...before you see the light ...before you know...before...before you know you know you know you know you know—motherfucker! Look what you did! I don't know whether to shit or go blind...(hyperventilating)...Let me touch down for a minute....straighten out my thoughts...please...I've got to get a good grip on myself ...dialing back to one hundred percent now...OLO...I think I'm back...You and I, lady, we will walk through the lake of fire, hand in hand; but I ask you this first, how did you turn me in the first place? (sneering, almost spitting) With all your "sorry for you" and "sorry things turned out like this" and "whatever makes you happy"! "Whatever you want"?! Yeah, you talk a mean game, but I've got you where I want you now, wrapped up and muzzled like they do to any mangy untrained bitch who'd better know her place or get put to sleep.

He rubs his index fingers together like flints working to strike a spark.

ASH (CONT'D)
Shame on you!

Ash lifts his head and looks Lo straight in the eye, who returns his level gaze with a shit-eating grin. She's not tied up, now dressed as she was before in the same room.

Ash's resolve seems to waver he seems to back down...

He turns around and reveals he's a different man with a MASK. He picks up a box-cutter, or it some other retractable BLADE and moves towards Lo while holding it.

Lo stiffens, alarmed.

He stares at her for a while.

He moves the blade towards her skin, her eyes widen in fear, she gasps again involuntarily...But really, he's cutting the cords that bind her ankles down.

He pulls her up and props her so that she stands in front of him facing him, using both his arms to hold her. Then he starts moving to and fro with her, something like a slow dance with no music. He looks into her eyes soulfully.

At first Lo tenses up, wondering if this is a sick fantasy that will soon tip into bloodshed. But after a long enough moment, she realizes he's in more of morose daze, not heated like before, and goes along, matching his tone and stride as best she can.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM- AFTERNOON

The MAID holds up different clothes from the suitcase on the bed, even doing a stylish pose for each one.

BANG!

BACK TO:

INT. LO'S ROOM- EVENING

BANG! Gunshots blasts ring out, as the gun fires into the "pillow girls" that the masked man arranged near him earlier. The man leers eerily at the helpless Lo.

MASK

You want to rag on me so bad, don't
you; you're thinking, "what a
looney tunes...he's killing paper."

For a tense, eerie moment, Lo sees the flesh-and-blood
presence of all these YOUNG GIRLS sitting together, eyes
closed with bullet wounds on their heads...

The masked man pulls out a FAMILIAR GYM BAG. He opens it and
reveals several PAPERBACK BOOKS filling up the inside. In
doing so, he's also placed THE GUN on an available surface,
which Lo notes for herself.

MASK (CONT'D)

I wasn't really thinking I'd come
to this, you have to understand,
but I have to ask you another
favor. It looks like I came across
some unexpected...on my last trip
out with your directions...Hey!

He notices that Lo's gaze has drifted, but not so much to
avoid him but because she's caught sight of SOMEONE ELSE IN
THE ROOM skulking in a corner. The masked man turns her face
back to him again.

MASK (CONT'D)

I thought we went over this
already. Now I lost my train of
thought again...

The hider finally reveals himself...It's MARK! He's not
dressed up though like last time, wearing a track suit sort
of get-up. Naturally this rules him out as the Lo's current
captor, which throws her into a sort of mental whiplash.

MASK (CONT'D)

So you caught the draft, too, huh?
I tried to reset your HVAC, but I
think it's on the fritz. There's
only one other way I can think of
to warm things up, but I know you
definitely won't like it.

During the above line, Mark makes his way across the room.
Lo is careful this time, only letting her eyes follow him.

A moment passes. The masked one feels a strange vibe and
looks as if he means to turn.

Lo decides on a new tactic: she suddenly relaxes, sighs
contentedly.

She vamps as hard as she can while still bound, making come-hither gestures with her face and body, hands feeling up the cushion surface, breathing deeper.

At first, the masked man seems taken in, wondering if this is some strange mental lapse from being abducted so long. She beckons to him some more with her eye lashes, even murmuring something soft and inviting sounding to him. He moves towards Lo.

Mark accidentally brushes against a table and knocks something over.

The masked man turns around all the way.

Lo makes wild if barely discreet "over there" gestures with her eyes and face in the direction of the un-minded gun.

MARK

You! Hey! Get away from my girlfriend!

Lo shakes her head furiously, as if frantically trying to convey that he's exposed himself too soon. Then she stops short when she hears the last part.

Through the gag, she tries to tell him about the gun.

Mark also stops short, looking confused. The masked man turns around. They stare each other down. A long moment.

Suddenly the masked man rushes for the gun. Mark also sees where he's heading, and they both dive at the same time.

MARK (CONT'D)

Aw man, why didn't you tell me he had a gun?!

THE FOLLOWING LINES ARE DISEMBODIED SNATCHES OF DIALOGUE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE TWO GUYS. It should be obvious that neither is really much of a fighter, as neither throws expert hits that land all that solidly on the other. There's more hair pulling and unmanly shrieking and wild thrashing, and at certain points, the two even mutually decide to take a short break in order to recover and start again. Since the action is supposed to be chaotic, some improvisation can be allowed here, though the lines written here can be used to fall back on throughout this spastic farcical free-for-all.

Hold on a minute. I think he's hurt.

No, I think I'm all right.

I'll break it, I'll break it.

All right, now I don't feel good at all.

What's wrong?

You want me to shoot him?

Shoot me?

All right, just so you don't think you weren't trying, so you'll feel better, I'll aim for your ass.

You'll do what where?

I said, I'll shoot you in the butt.

(Lo makes a muffled scream)

Wait a second...He was trying to tell me something.

I was saying, how is that supposed to make me feel better?

(There's a gunshot and the masked man's real screaming follows.)

There. It's done. That's all there is. It's over. We're good now. Agreed?

Not really...

You need help?

Nah. Got a ride.

I guess I won that one. I'm not used to that, you'll have to excuse me. I should do it more often...

Wait, what did you say?...Oh, you want me to let you out of...all that.

(thinks hard)

Yes. All right, yeah, I got a good idea. I've just thought it through. First I'm gonna leave you here like that...Now I knew you were going to be like that when I told you...but let me finish...This all will make a lot of sense once I'm done with what I've got to say.

I really did have a thought there...Yes, and I just totally lost it there...Sorry...Anyway, the police are already on their way. Or I'm sure someone called it in, like "shots fired" a while back. I think.

So you just hang on here....and well, you know what I mean, they'll sort this all out. And look, you've even got the cuffs on for the cops.

(He exits, and she screams for him to return. A long silence. Then he reenters, and she looks hopeful)

I forgot to tell you why I came here, you know, in the first place...you were my first love. All right, I said it. It just sounds so super awkward...Never mind...And they say the bravest step is just putting yourself out there...Yeah, uh, well, have a nice one...(shakes head to himself)

He leaves her again. Lo's devastated face has fallen the space of a canyon, gaping at the maw of the bottomless trench beneath. Staring bloody daggers, the way her head rocks the gag with its buckled web-like straps, now out-fierces any Halloween fright-mask.

CUT TO:

INT. MAN'S CAR - DAY

We're back to the day Lo was out jogging and found a gym bag, decked out in the same exercise gear.

The same MAN WHO SPOTTED THE PAIR OF FEET STICKING OUT FROM THE CAR is now driving with Lo riding shotgun.

He makes what appears to be a sudden stop, as a horn from another car is heard when he brakes and Lo's gaze whips back to him.

The scrambles to open the door and flee, but he's so panic-struck, that he can't get it open and just gives up.

LO

Relax, I just want a ride. Once I get to where I need to be, you're free to go...

MAN

I have a wife and a little boy. They'll start looking out for me if I don't even call soon. I've only got \$30 in my wallet, but you can have it all.

LO

All right. If you behave, you'll live to be able to tell your family that you weren't trying to make it with me. Good deal?

They travel. The man is sociable and can't help but give a travelogue while they stop at places. She makes him hand over his wallet.

LO (CONT'D)

That's a nice necklace. I have one kind of like it, but yours is nicer.

(This should be Ash's necklace, to be revealed later than this scene. She suggests they trade, so in a sense she's not really taking anything.)

MAN

My mom gave it to me as a gift when I left home.

LO grins. The man sighs and starts to hand it over but she stops him.

LO

It's all right. I was just messing with you. Relax. I just want to get where I'm going, that's all.

He notices that she's cold.

MAN

You can take my coat, it might help.

LO

(smiles)

You wouldn't be trying to distract me?

MAN

It's just cold out there, and it looked like the right thing to do.

LO

That's considerate.

He seems to talk to himself.

LO (CONT'D)

What was that?!

MAN

Nothing.

LO
Are you praying?

MAN
I said, I wasn't saying anything.

She asks his name finally, and he tells her. She tells him a name, which should be established earlier is not her real one.

LO
I know it wasn't the best of circumstances, but I honestly enjoyed your company. I'll be getting off here, so you can head out and call your family and tell them you're safe.

MAN
I don't really have a wife and kids. Not even a girlfriend. My folks passed when I was in school. I don't know why I just said that, I figured since you were being honest with me, I ought to be the same. But you were very kind to me, and I appreciate that. Thank you.

LO
You don't really have a family of your own?...I sort of guessed that already. No ring, pictures in your wallet. Oh, and you said you had about \$30, but there's over a \$100 here and some credit cards. You're probably not even religious, either...But it's understandable, you're scared, you felt since loners don't get as much sympathy, you had to say something to protect yourself.

MAN
I'm sorry.

LO
You were probably checking me out, too, weren't you?

The man looks at the floor, silent.

LO (CONT'D)
No need to be ashamed. Anyone
would have done the same in your
place.
(pauses thoughtfully)
Still, it really wouldn't have made
a difference.

EXT. MAN'S CAR - SAME

His car is parked. Lo gets out and takes her towed bundle with her. We do NOT follow her as she leaves much distance between her and the car, just continue to look at the still vehicle.

We should barely make out the silhouette of someone in the driver seat that is not moving.

BACK TO:

INT. LO'S ROOM- EVENING

Lo waits, still tied up, every tiny sound now amplified in her nearly empty room. She sees the same GYM BAG she thought she jettisoned several days ago, lying in a rumpled heap on the floor, tantalizing her.

She hears the TICKING return. She strains against her bonds but to no avail.

The ticking sounds like it's getting LOUDER. She wonders if the countdown is near the end. (It should be underlined that not only is this sound foregrounded, but the beat should be spaced further apart, like expanding time)

Finally it stops, and seemingly Lo's own heart skips a beat. She waits in silence, shutting her eyes, only the sound of her halting breathing dominating the soundtrack...

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

ON TV, a car or building explodes spectacularly. It should sound tinny and dialed down, like hearing it second hand, twice removed.

We pan away to the bedroom yards away, where the MAID discreetly and skillfully folding and putting away the guest clothes that she had spontaneously felt like posing with.

Although the hotel flat-screen is often visible, the camera focus and framing should stay more on the maid as she cleans.

ENDING CREDITS CAN ROLL DURING THIS PART. During the few times we can make out what's going on behind her, we see the following:

1) Lo's child victim depicted earlier returns to spook her. However, he ends up actually finding the handcuff key and drops it near Lo's seat. Lo has to strain and wriggle a lot but she ends up freeing herself.

2) Now with more clothes on, Lo runs outside and carries the same gym bag down an empty street. Just as a car slows down and goes into reverse in order to trail Lo as she walks.

3) Lo and a new STRANGE MAN together at a restaurant table talking and laughing, sharing drinks. He walks her to her car and they seem to share a closer moment together. They both go inside the car together.

In order to clean a corner of the room, maid shuts the door on us, leading screen to...

CUT TO BLACK