

SINNER

An original short screenplay by

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DRAFT IV

FADE IN:

SUPERIMPOSE: Fremantle, Western Australia, 1891

JIMMY (V.O.)

Life's pretty funny really... The way things change at the click of a finger.

INT. SMALL PRISON CELL - NIGHT

A hand clicks its fingers and moves out of view.

Candle light dances as it seeps into the darkness. No windows, just a door.

JIMMY, 40, is partially lit. His face grim.

JIMMY

I had it all once.

Jimmy raises his head.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

What's the meaning of it?

Another man, CLAUDE, sits in a corner, barely visible in the shadows. He's late forties, sporting an unkempt beard.

CLAUDE

That's how it is, my friend.

JIMMY

I see... I just, never imagined something like this.

CLAUDE

(laughs once)

You really went to town didn't you, mate?

Jimmy forces a smile.

JIMMY

You can't talk. Take a look at yourself.

Claude doesn't react, remaining silent in the shadows.

Jimmy's face creases. He bursts into laughter.

A light flickers from a gap beneath the door. Jimmy notices and silences his laughter.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
(lowered voice)
So, come on. What's it all about?

A sigh is heard from the shadows.

CLAUDE
Well, a smart man once said, "life
is what happens to us while we're
making other plans."

JIMMY
I'm serious. Why do we live? [Beat]
Why do we die?

Claude sighs again.

CLAUDE
I guess that's something we'll
never know... There's bigger things
happening, my friend. Things we're
not capable of understanding.

Jimmy appears troubled.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
[Beat] But I can give a few good
reasons why we should live.

Jimmy listens intently.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Well, if nothing else than to
experience the beauty of this
world. To take the fresh air into
our lungs. To hear the chirping of
the birds in summer. To taste the
most succulent cut of beef or the
biggest and juiciest fish in the
ocean!

Claude pauses for thought.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
(almost a whisper)
Or to see the most beautiful woman
that ever graced your eyes. To
reach over and touch--

Claude stops as Jimmy shoots him a look.

Jimmy appears hurt. He looks to the floor.

Claude remains quiet.

The sound of a woman's choir fades in. They sing a haunting rendition of 'O, Come All Ye Faithful'.

Jimmy stirs, looking to Claude.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Ah, that'll be the choir. There's a Parish in the east wing. They're praying for you tonight, my friend.

Jimmy swallows hard.

Claude listens to the choir.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
When I was five my mother forced me to join the choir. Can you believe it? Five years old! I hated it.

Jimmy smiles, refraining from laughing.

JIMMY
I bet you loved every minute.

Claude lets slip a quiet laugh.

CLAUDE
The church, yes. Not the choir.

JIMMY
You went to church?

CLAUDE
Oh, yes. From a young age.

Jimmy looks to the floor.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
How about you, my friend? Are you a man of faith?

Jimmy looks up.

JIMMY
Not until today.

A woman sings a solo rendition of 'O, Come All Ye Faithful' as a strings accompaniment fades in.

Jimmy's eyes light up.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Wow, her voice. It's beautiful.

Jimmy's face beams as the angelic voice takes over.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

My wife... She's the most beautiful women I've ever seen.

Claude's eyelids twitch with unease.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

In the summer we'd travel to Porpoise Bay. She'd put a daisy in her hair... We'd stay on the beach for hours, until the sun went down.

Jimmy looks to Claude. They lock gaze.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You see I loved her more than anything... She was my world.

Claude nods.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You have to understand, if you love someone that much, that strongly, you're no longer in control. You're... You're at the mercy of a heart.

Jimmy's head twitches, his gaze dropping to the floor.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

So imagine coming home one afternoon.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Jimmy enters with a bouquet of roses under his arm.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Coming home early to surprise the one you love with a fresh bouquet of her favorite flowers... You look around the house but she's nowhere to be seen.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Jimmy looks around with bewilderment. He checks through an open window into the garden.

JIMMY (V.O.)
You think she's in the garden or
out shopping for groceries but--

A woman's giggles are heard as Jimmy looks towards a
staircase.

JIMMY (V.O.)
--you hear laughter coming from the
bedroom upstairs.

INT. SMALL PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Claude gulps.

Jimmy takes a long, hard breath.

JIMMY
You open the bedroom door, slowly.
Your eyes dilate, then focus. Your
heart begins to pound.

He looks Claude straight in the eye. Claude flinches.

INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

The naked back of a young, slender woman pulsates as a man's
hands reach up and cup her breasts.

JIMMY (V.O.)
A complete stranger is making love
to your wife, right in front of
your eyes.

Jimmy's face drops. A visible heaviness engulfs him as
pleasurable moans fill the room.

JIMMY (V.O.)
And worse... she's enjoying it.

Jimmy lifts his hand and clutches a chest of drawers to his
side.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Your hand moves all by itself.

A draw slides open and a hand reaches in for something.

JIMMY (V.O.)
You grab a loaded six shooter and--

Jimmy aims a gun towards the bed, a bead of sweat trailing down his forehead.

He fires; BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

INT. SMALL PRISON CELL - NIGHT

JIMMY
--your life is over.

Jimmy closes his eyes, letting slip a single tear.

Claude's eyes look to the floor.

[Beat]

The door to the cell creaks open.

PRISON GUARD (O.S.)
One minute!

Jimmy breathes erratic as the door slams shut.

JIMMY
(to Claude)
Will I go to hell for what I've
done?!

Jimmy stares at Claude with desperate eyes. Claude stares back with all seriousness.

CLAUDE
If you forgive men when they sin
against you, your heavenly Father
will also forgive you. But if you
do not forgive men their sins, your
Father will not forgive your sins.

Jimmy's face contorts with confusion. The choir begin to sing in unison again.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Matthew, chapter 6, 14-15. Just a
little passage that makes a whole
big difference to you.

Jimmy's expression is desperate, his eyes pleading for an explanation.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
You've already confessed your sin
to me... You've acknowledged that
you took a life.
(MORE)

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
You've expressed to the Lord that
you're aware of committing a sin.

Claude leans forward, his face more clearly defined in the candlelight.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
That, my friend, is the first step.

Jimmy nods with a little hope in his eyes.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
The next step is a little harder.

Jimmy gestures for Claude to continue.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
You have to forgive, in your heart,
the one that sinned against you.

Jimmy fights back tears, his eyes to the floor.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Jimmy? [Beat] Jimmy?!

Jimmy lifts his head.

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
I forgive you... I forgive you of
your sin.

The door blasts open and two PRISON GUARDS come firing in.

Jimmy stands in fright, tears streaming down his face. He looks to Claude.

JIMMY
(shouts)
I forgive you of your sin!

The Guards grab Jimmy by the arms.

Claude looks on with a friendly smile and a warm glow. The light through the open door casts him in clear view--

--he has six bleeding bullet wounds in his chest.

The guards spin Jimmy around and force him towards the door.

Jimmy looks over his shoulder--

--Claude has vanished.

Jimmy is shoved through the open door.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY

The Guards guide Jimmy along, cell doors drifting past them on either side.

The sound of the choir grows in volume as they walk.

EXT. PRISON COURTYARD - NIGHT

The choir can be heard clearly as the Guards walk Jimmy into the open air.

Jimmy looks up into the night sky. The stars twinkle and a full moon shines bright. Jimmy smiles.

A black hood is pulled over his head.

Everything goes black.

EXT/INT. DARKNESS

Footsteps are heard.

PRISON GUARD (O.S.)
Come on, lad.

More footsteps.

Jimmy's breathing pulsates.

The sound of footsteps on loose stone becomes a clatter. A door is heard creaking open.

Jimmy's breathing becomes heavy.

Footsteps clunk on loose wooden floorboards. A door creaks shut, blocking out the sound of the choir.

The footsteps stop.

Jimmy's breathing becomes erratic.

PRISON WARDEN (O.S.)
James Samuel White, you have been
charged with murder and are
therefore sentenced to be hanged by
the neck until you are dead.

Jimmy's breathing escalates, his heart pounding.

PRISON WARDEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Thereafter your body will be buried
within the precincts of the prison.
May the Lord have mercy upon your
soul.

Footsteps approach.

Jimmy is heard weeping, his heart beating like a drum.

Footsteps walk away.

Jimmy's heartbeat grows in volume as time drags on and on.

JIMMY (O.S.)
(crying out)
Oh Lord, please--

BANG, a trapdoor drops and the sound of rushing air hisses!

INT. SMALL PRISON CELL - NIGHT

A hand clicks its fingers and moves out of view.

A solitary candle flickers in the middle of an empty cell.

A pair of lips blow out the flame.

THE END.