

THE COFFIN CORNER

SHE SMILED AS IF TO SAY, 'MAY THE BEST PSYCHOPATH WIN.'

A beautiful psychiatrist with a heart-breaking childhood hires a second rate Private Eye, with an equally tragic past, to find her missing husband. The husband has disappeared without a trace or any evidence of ever existing despite being gainfully employed as a bartender.

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Prologue

FADE IN: Distillery District, a partially redeveloped waterfront area where upscale professionals in renovated loft-style warehouses co-mingle with the drug dealers and prostitutes who rent the remaining decrepit two-story buildings. It's an area of contrast where money, entitlement and arrogance coexist with death, depravity and despair.

EXTERIOR: Distiller's Lane is an oversized alley named after the prohibition speakeasies and distilleries that once occupied the warehouses. It's lined with buildings that alternate between fancy condos and two story dumps with bars on the doors. The condos feature modern facades with armed doormen standing out front, while the rundown ramshackle hovels feature graffiti covered walls and lounging working girls.

Ninety-six Distiller's Lane is an obvious example of the seedier architecture of the district. It has a crumpling cement parget topped with one story of dented gray aluminium siding and a second level of deteriorating red brick. Two cockeyed windows, one with an air conditioner and one without, break up the grungy red brick. Each window is framed in ornate plaster moulding, an attempt by the original builders to put lipstick on a pig.

INTERIOR: Second floor one-room apartment at Ninety-six Distiller's Lane. A black-haired, gray-eyed, five-year old boy, and a blonde blue-eyed four-year old girl, who lives across the hall, sit on a cheap worn-out imitation oriental carpet playing Snakes and Ladders. A queen-sized oxidized brass bed covered in a cheap red and black chenille bedspread dominates the room.

On one side of the bed is a single nightstand with an ashtray, a lighter, and an open package of Virginia Slims. On the other side hangs a collection of German *Schandmaskes* and British Scold Bridles, a silent comment on the owner's self-loathing. The bizarre *objets d'art* add a surreal aura to an already uncomfortable environment. Beside the masks is a mirror that has lost much of its reflective silvering; below is a rickety wooden table covered in cheap chintz dime store fabric. The table is littered with assorted makeup, perfumes, and wigs in different unnatural colors, each haphazardly placed on bamboo wig stands.

The boy hears the sound of his drunken mother and her short-term paramour coming up the creaky wooden stairs. He quickly scoops up the pieces of the game and dumps them into their cardboard box. He grabs the little girl by the hand and takes her into the closet where they hide amongst the sleazy dresses, hooker boots, and boxes of life's random loose ends.

The closet is ventilated with slats that go halfway up the door. The two youngsters huddle together peering through the openings while the boy's mother entertains her customer. The woman is wearing a loose low-cut white synthetic blouse with no bra, a short red skirt, and matching six-inch backless stilettos.

The customer is small and delicate for a man. He moves in an effeminate manner. The boy is used to seeing his mother with larger, tougher looking men. In different clothes this guy could pass for a fairly attractive woman. He's wearing an expensive tailored chalk-striped business suit, white shirt, red tie, and Borsalino hat. He reaches for the woman and draws her close. The mother's drunken giggle gets serious in an instant.

MOTHER

First comes the money Honey;
then comes the sugar.

The boy's mother places her hand on the man's chest to push him away. As her hand touches the white Egyptian cotton shirt, she pulls back in surprise, then amusement.

MOTHER

You're a dyke... well ain't that
something. Nice pair of tits
under that expensive cotton.

The customer takes off her hat and the elastic holding back her long red hair. The crimson waves cascade down the back of her pinstriped suit.

MOTHER

Well this is going to cost you
a little extra honey. I don't
like surprises.

She places her hands on her hips and looks the customer straight in the eye. She speaks in a very business-like manner.

MOTHER

The money on the nightstand
now, or you can leave. I don't
do freebees... even for broads.

The boy and girl stare intently through the slats in the closet door. The little boy has seen his mother work many times before. He places a small hand over the little blonde's eyes but she removes it immediately. She snuggles closer to the boy and he wraps a tiny protective arm around her shoulders. Together, they watch the all too familiar scenario.

The customer walks over to the night table and reaches into her jacket pocket for a wallet. The boy's mother turns away as she pulls off her blouse revealing a nice but well-used body. She unzips her skirt and lets it drop to the floor. There is the sound of a click.

As she turns back to the client the blade in the customer's hand slices open her neck. Her eyes are wide with surprise, her hands go to her neck to try and stem the flow of erupting blood. She's dead before her body hits the imitation oriental carpet.

The little boy and his neighbour friend sit motionless, paralysed by what they've just witnessed. The little girl's blue eyes dance and dart with excitement. The sparkle in the boy's eyes fade as if a translucent window shade had been drawn over them.

The customer looks down at her handiwork watching as the dark red stain pools around the head of the boy's mother. She wipes the bloodstained blade with a white cotton handkerchief from her pocket. She puts the elastic back onto her hair and tucks the pile of red under the Borsalino. She leaves.

They'll be no more Snakes and Ladders tonight.

FADE OUT

The Coffin At The End Of The Line

FADE IN: The murder of the young boy's mother was the last in the series of similar crimes committed by the same redheaded killer. The murder of a bunch of prostitutes barely registered on the public's radar. Little or no pressure was put on the police to solve the case, as many influential citizens saw the killings as a welcome redevelopment initiative; that is, until photographs of the two little eyewitnesses hit the front pages.

Those images were the final nail in the coffin of the Distillery's trendy status. It was no longer hip to have drug dealers and working girls as your neighbour. The Yuppies fled in droves, abandoning their high-style Bauhaus lofts.

Over the next thirty years, memories faded. With District real estate prices at an all-time low, developers began buying the rundown properties. Slowly, buildings were re-renovated and a new generation of overpaid professionals moved in; but there were still pockets populated by the damaged souls that had no other place to go.

EXTERIOR: The Coffin Building was built in 1940, a beautiful example of Flatiron architecture taking full advantage of the triangular-shaped lot, where Distiller's Lane meets Pier Street.

The Coffin was built by Kelvin Coffin, a maker of fine rye whiskeys, as well as, a financial supporter of any politician willing to close his eyes to his various nefarious dealings.

The current owner is CHARLENE COFFIN, the Great Granddaughter of KELVIN COFFIN, and current Girl Friday to Private Investigator RAFFY RHEINHARDT.

INTERIOR: The top floor of The Coffin Building.

CHARLENE COFFIN exits the ornate Art Nouveau wrought iron metal cage elevator. The top floor of The Coffin is a single turret-style space with one circular office divided in half by a highly figured Amboyna panelled wall. In the middle of the exotic wood panelling is a black lacquer half smoked-glass door with Matthew's Thin lettering that reads "R.R. RHEINHARDT & Associates".

CHARLENE, who everyone calls CHARLIE, is dressed in a narrow black skirt belted at the waist with an unusual buckle, black high heels, and a tight black knitted sweater with crisscrossed laces halfway up the middle, revealing just the right amount of cleavage. The top lace is undone for maximum visual impact.

She has short-cropped wavy auburn hair, a bright smile, and a twinkle in her green eyes. She has an irresistible sunny disposition, and why not, she's rich, good looking, and works for a guy she not so secretly loves. She carries a black leather handbag and the morning newspaper.

She hears the muted sound of an electric razor coming from the inner office. RAFFY spent another night asleep at his desk. The top floor of The Coffin was set aside by her Great Grandfather as a downtown apartment where he entertained young ladies, or secretly met with underworld associates like Frank Nitti.

KELVIN COFFIN decorated the penthouse suite in an eclectic mix of Art Nouveau and Art Deco furniture, most of which was restored by CHARLIE so she could use the office as her own, that is, until RAFFY RHEINHARDT walked into her life looking for cheap office space.

CHARLIE busies herself making coffee and organizing her day. Her newly refinished half-circle Ruhlmann desk faces two beautiful Rennie Mackintosh chairs. Behind her is the door to RAFFY'S inner sanctum surrounded by two original signed Alphonse Mucha framed posters.

Once the coffee is made she takes it and the newspaper into RAFFY'S office. It's an intimate yet impressive half circle space with a large picture window encircling the room. RAFFY'S Macassar Ebony Ruhlmann desk faces two matching tub chairs in an unusual design that if viewed from the right angle, almost form two matching question marks. The view is extraordinary. From one of the chairs you can see the newly redeveloped waterfront, and from the other direction the entire Distillery District.

RAFFY is sitting at his desk finishing mowing his stubble with a electric shaver. CHARLIE places the coffee on a coaster, and the Morning Gazette in the middle of a handsome leather desk pad. The big black headline in The Gazette reads: "The Red Ripper Strikes Again". Underneath is a crime scene photograph of a seedy apartment with two detectives, and several uniformed policemen, surrounding a sheet-covered corpse.

CHARLIE

It happened again.

RAFFY picks up the paper, gives it a cursory look; then drops it on his desk as if it's infectious.

RAFFY

You should change your hair color.

CHARLIE

You don't like the way I look?

RAFFY

You look fine, but you shouldn't make yourself a target.

CHARLIE

I look fine? That's all you got. I look fine?

RAFFY

You look great. It's just... redheads are dangerous.

CHARLIE

Don't you mean redheads are in danger? And my hair is auburn not red.

RAFFY

You know what I mean. Just die it a different color next time.

CHARLIE

Jerk! It's natural, why don't you check for yourself if you don't believe me?

RAFFY

Nice talk.

CHARLIE

Anyway I don't want to change it, and besides, this RED RIPPER creep only goes after working girls.

She leans over the desk close to RAFFY'S face. The laces on her sweater strain to hold back their prized possessions.

CHARLIE

I'm not worried; I've got a big strong boss to protect me.

RAFFY

This is nothing to joke about CHARLIE.

CHARLIE kisses his forehead and straightens up.

CHARLIE

See... you do love me. Sometimes it just takes a little coaxing.

RAFFY

Don't you have some papers to file or something?

CHARLIE

Be nice or I'll raise your rent.

RAFFY

Raise it any higher and I might have to take it out in trade.

CHARLIE

Is that a threat or a promise?

CHARLIE smiles and heads for the door.

CHARLIE

Someday RAFFY, someday you'll realize what's right in front of you. Just don't wait too long.

RAFFY did love her but his past kept getting in the way. He hadn't been able to sustain a relationship with any woman for more than a month or two. CHARLIE was the only one he really cared about, but he just couldn't bring himself to act on his feelings.

FADE OUT

A Damsel In Distress

FADE IN:

INTERIOR: Offices of R. R. Rheinhardt & Associates.

CHARLIE is standing by a wooden file cabinet, stuffing finished client reports into their proper alphabetical place. Most of RAFFY'S business is second-rate stuff, divorces, runaways... that sort of thing. Occasionally a corporate espionage gig would land in his lap, but divorces seemed to be the thing that paid the bills.

The sound of the elevator clanging to a halt gets CHARLIE'S attention. The metal cage door opens and a young good looking blonde with a Veronica Lake hairdo and an expensive Katharine Hepburn style gray pantsuit walks in. CHARLIE turns to greet her.

CHARLIE

Hi there, can I help you?

The blonde seems startled by CHARLIE'S appearance.

VIRGINIA

You have very beautiful hair.

CHARLIE is a bit nonplussed.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

VIRGINIA

Aren't you worried?

CHARLIE

Worried? Oh you mean the maniac that's running loose... Maybe a little... but he seems to be more interested in working girls.

VIRGINIA

I'd be careful if I was you.

CHARLIE reaches for her waist and slides a portion of her belt buckle out to reveal a lethal-looking push dagger.

CHARLIE

Oh, I'm careful...

The door to RAFFY'S office opens. RAFFY gives CHARLIE a puzzled look...

RAFFY

Am I interrupting something?

VIRGINIA

Are you RAFFY RHEINHARDT?

RAFFY

How can I help you?

VIRGINIA

I need you to find my husband?

CHARLIE

Can I get you some water or tea?

The blonde shakes her head. RAFFY motions her to enter his office. He repositions the Macassar Ebony tub chairs so they form a v-shape, close but not too close, friendly but not intimate. He grabs his leather note pad as she delicately sits cross-legged facing him.

RAFFY

Best to start at the beginning. What's your husband's name?

Tears start to well up in the blonde's dazzling blue eyes. She fumbles in her purse looking for a tissue frustrated she can't find one.

RAFFY hands her a clean handkerchief from his pocket. He's seen this before, distraught wife, missing husband; it's all too damn familiar. What kind of heel would skip town on a gorgeous creature like this, he must be nuts.

He loved CHARLIE, but this dame was something else. The manly Hepburn getup couldn't hide the raw sexuality that lay just under the surface. There was something about this woman, something recognizable, something evocative, perhaps of an old flame; perhaps he was crazy.

It wasn't just his male testosterone clicking in. There was a connection, a need to protect her, but why? She was just another dame with the same sad tale of abandonment and no one to turn to for help; no one but RAFFY RHEINHARDT, the option of last resort.

VIRGINIA
His name is THOMAS, THOMAS
COLLINS. I'm VIRGINIA.

She reaches into her grey leather purse and removes a blurry picture of a small effeminate looking man in a chalk-striped suit and Borsalino hat. She hands the photograph to RAFFY. He looks at the picture and his blood runs cold. Whatever spark was left in his cynical eyes fade to a duller shade of gray.

RAFFY
Is this the best photo you
have?

VIRGINIA
THOMAS was camera shy. You
have to understand, he wasn't
like you, was delicate; people
thought he was gay, but I
assure you he wasn't?

RAFFY
You mean he is delicate.

VIRGINIA
Yes, yes, of course... I have to
remain hopeful that nothing
bad has happened to him.

Tears roll down her cheeks as she speaks, but still she manages to maintain her composure.

A thought flashes across RAFFY'S mind, was he being set-up, was the beautiful blonde a real damsel in distress, or was she a Black Widow Spider who already knew the fate of poor THOMAS COLLINS?

Why would a woman like this stick with a guy like him? The thought was gone in an instant. No, she needed his help; he wanted to help; he had to protect her.

CHARLIE won't be happy.

RAFFY

Did he have a job? Was he rich?

VIRGINIA

Yes and no: he was a bartender. He worked for an agency that sent him out to do special events. He specialized in making fancy cocktails that nobody ever orders: Funky Monkeys, Trojan Horses, and Flaming Giraffes, stuff like that.

RAFFY

Is there a call for that sort of thing?

VIRGINIA

If a distributor wanted to move some expensive stock they'd include THOMAS in the deal. He'd put on a show making these fancy drinks. He was very good at it, and some of them actually tasted okay. The Yuppies ate it up. I think I have a card from the agency...

VIRGINIA hunts in her purse until she finds the card and her chequebook. She hands RAFFY the card, places the chequebook on her lap, and haphazardly writes out a cheque in a distinct awkward handwriting. She hands it to RAFFY.

VIRGINIA

I assume that will do for a start. If you need more just call, my number and address are on the cheque.

RAFFY looks at the cheque: twenty-five hundred dollars.
VIRGINIA COLLINS, MD, ABPP

RAFFY

You're a shrink?

VIRGINIA

Yes, guilty as charged... is the cheque enough?

RAFFY

It will more than cover it.

She leans over and puts a hand on RAFFY'S leg.

VIRGINIA

Whatever you need, call me..
anytime, day or night.

CHARLIE has been listening at the door to the whole conversation. Realizing the meeting is over she moves back to her desk as RAFFY opens the office door.

VIRGINIA COLLINS shakes RAFFY'S hand in what CHARLIE feels is a more intimate manner than is appropriate for a woman distraught by a missing husband.

CHARLIE and RAFFY watch, as VIRGINIA COLLINS enters the elevator. Her blue eyes sparkle as they lock onto RAFFY'S. Her gaze shifts to CHARLIE as if challenging the competition.

As the wrought iron cage door closes and descends downward, CHARLIE notices an almost imperceptible smile cross VIRGINIA'S disappearing face.

CHARLIE senses there's more to this job than a simple case of a missing husband. She turns to warn RAFFY but he's disappeared back into his office.

FADE OUT

The Dystopia

FADE IN: The Dystopia.

INTERIOR: The Dystopia is a bar located on the first floor of The Coffin Building. The sound of syncopated industrial gears grinding metal against metal, adds an appropriate feeling of decay to the lost souls who populate the place.

The two-story room is shaped in a triangle following the contours of the building. The bizarre dark interior environment is patterned after the 1927 Fritz Lang sci-fi classic Metropolis. The walls are covered in Art Deco murals depicting the urban canyons of a sterile black and gray landscape.

In each corner of the triangular room stands an eighteen-foot tall silver female mummy-like cyborg, modelled after the movie's iconic busty automaton. Their arms form an L-shape as if holding up the cloud-painted ceiling.

There are no lamps or hanging light fixtures; only two synchronized mechanical searchlights in each corner of the triangle, constantly crisscrossing the room providing only fleeting images, as if watching the flickering frames of a silent movie.

The waitresses are dressed in silver metallic bras, panties and hula-like skirts of the same see-through shimmering fabric. Their heads are covered in matching silver sunburst headdresses. All wear heavy black eyeliner, and blank expressions. If they aren't serving customers seated at small round black lacquered tables, they're performing vaguely erotic mechanical gyrations.

At the base of the room is a triangular-shaped bar with another giant mechanical mummy standing on the apex helping to keep the sky from falling.

Two mad scientist inspired bartenders dressed in long charcoal gray coats, Einstein-styled white hair, and heavy black eyeliner patrol the bar. All in all it's a disquieting environment frequented by the hipsters and hookers who call the Distillery District home.

A slightly built effeminate man in a chalk-striped suit and a large Borsalino hat finds an empty stool beside a platinum blonde working girl.

TEDDY

What's your poison pal?

RED RIPPER

I'll have a Brass Monkey.

The bartender stares at the pretty little man. The hooker laughs.

TEDDY

We don't serve that kind of drink here.

HOOKER

Go on TEDDY... make my friend his drink. What's your name sweetie?

The little man turns and looks at the woman.

RED RIPPER

RED, my name is RED.

HOOKER

Well RED, what say you order me one of those fancy drinks, and after, we can find a nice quiet spot where we can get to know each other.

RED turns to the bartender and holds up two manicured fingers.

TEDDY

I never made those before, what's in them.

The little man pulls a wad of money out of his pocket and peels off five ten-dollar bills. He slides the bills across the bar. The hooker's eyes widen to the prospect of a worthwhile evening's work.

RED RIPPER

Bring me a bottle of your best vodka, light rum, and Galliano, some orange juice, two old fashion glasses, and a teaspoon.

TEDDY

You got to be kidding?

RED peels off another fifty bucks from his stash. TEDDY pockets the money and lines up the requested ingredients on the bar in front of the little man who calls himself RED.

RED RIPPER

There are several recipes for the Brass Monkey but this is my favorite.

As he talks he deftly pours an ounce of vodka and a half-ounce of light rum into each old fashion glass.

RED RIPPER

They say the drink was used by spies in WORLD WAR II as a way of identifying underground resistance contacts.

He fills the glasses almost to the top with ice from a bucket supplied by TEDDY.

RED RIPPER

It's bullshit of course.

He then carefully pours the Galliano from its unique tall bottle over the back of the spoon so it floats on top of the vodka and rum mixture.

RED RIPPER

The whole cockamamie story was invented by some hotshot adman as a way to sell more Galliano.

He pushes one of the drinks over to his new female companion who takes a sip.

RED RIPPER

But still, it's a mighty nice drink.

TEDDY shakes his head and leaves to serve another thirsty customer. The hooker finishes her drink in a hurry as she runs a hand up the leg of the little man.

RED stops her before she gets to the intended goal.

RED RIPPER

What say we adjourn to some
place more private?

The little man and his date head for the front door.

INTERIOR: The Why Not? Motel is a no-star hostelry at the edge of the district: a seedy place that specializes in renting rooms by the hour.

MARIA SANCHEZ is a hardworking woman that works as a maid at The Why Not? Cleaning up after the short-term guests was not something MARIA, with her strict CATHOLIC upbringing was comfortable doing, but it was a job; and it provided enough cash to survive in this alien environment. Her new life was not a step-up from her rural Mexican hometown.

The manager was *un libertino* that couldn't keep his hands to himself. He was always making rude comments she didn't really understand, but she knew enough to know they weren't very nice.

Her shift was almost over, one more room to clean and she could go home and soak her aching feet in a pail of Epsom Salts. She makes her way to the last room at the end of the hall.

The hangtag on the doorknob still read "Do Not Disturb", but it had been three hours, and enough was enough. They must have forgotten to remove the sign when they left.

She puts her ear to the door to listen for the sounds of fake moaning, or perhaps the rhythmic thud of a headboard, repeatedly banging against the faded wallpaper. Nothing.

The paper-thin walls of the room could not contain the sounds of even the most perfunctory sex.

She removes the passkey from her apron and enters the room. She notices a half-naked woman sprawled on the bed. She quickly starts to close the door, but stops.

Something is wrong, why didn't the woman move, or yell some obscenity at her. She just lay there as if unconscious, or worse.

MARIA slowly re-enters the room.

MARIA

Lady... are you okay? Lady can you hear me? It's time to go...

As MARIA gets closer to the bed she notices a large dark blotch of red emanating from under the woman's head. Her throat was slashed in what seems one quick violent motion. The woman looks up at MARIA with a dead-eyed stare, her mouth open as if to speak.

MARIA'S hands cover her mouth stifling a barely audible whimper. She crosses herself.

The *un libertino* pig will not be happy.

FADE OUT

The Man Who Wasn't There

FADE IN

EXTERIOR: RAFFY parks his restored vintage 1956 T-Bird in the lot on Pier Street down a block from his office. He walks east towards The Coffin, preoccupied with the days frustrating events. He was able to get a list of places THOMAS COLLINS worked, but after visiting a half a dozen bars forking over two hundred dollars in incentives, all he was able to ascertain was the guy showed up on time, did his fancy drink shtick, and took his pay in cash. Maybe CHARLIE had better luck tracing his birth certificate and driver's license.

Everybody had a paper trail no matter how hard they tried to cover their tracks. Something was up with this case; it wasn't shaping up to be your average disgruntled husband looking for a fresh start.

It was five o'clock and he was tired, time for a drink at The Dystopia before heading over to VIRGINIA'S office-apartment to figure out his next move.

As he reaches the corner he slams right into a man coming from the Distiller's Lane side of The Coffin. The guy is wearing a Tweed sports jacket with leather elbow patches and a matching shooter's shoulder patch. He looks like some kind of college professor, probably one of the trendy new residents visiting someone in the building. Both men politely apologize.

RAFFY opens one of the fancy brass double doors allowing the professor to enter. RAFFY heads to The Dystopia entrance for his drink, while the professor makes his way to the cage elevator.

INTERIOR: The Dystopia

RAFFY enters The Dystopia's Pier-side interior entrance. On his way to the bar he passes several shimmeringly silver clad waitresses who interrupt their blank stares long enough to give RAFFY a friendly wink of recognition. RAFFY finds an empty bar stool and signals TEDDY, the bartender.

RAFFY

Hay TEDDY, how you been?

TEDDY

You know RAFFY, same old bullshit: serving watered-down drinks to depraved losers and degenerate lowlifes.

Both men know each other well so they speak freely without insult.

RAFFY

What the hell TEDDY? You're supposed to be cheering me up. I'm the cynic.

TEDDY

You and everyone else in this mechanical mausoleum. It's the District you know. It gets to everybody after a while.

RAFFY

Cheer up my friend, I'm buying, what will you have?

TEDDY

How about a Brass Monkey?

RAFFY

A what?

TEDDY

Last night this guy comes in... Christ I thought he was a woman at first. Real pretty... not handsome mind you, pretty. A dandy, all dressed up in a fancy suit and one of those old fashion gangster hats from the twenty's.

RAFFY

Sounds like a guy I'm looking for... but that's unlikely. You get all kinds in here I suppose.

TEDDY

Don't you know it... anyway this dandy sits down beside ETHEL. You remember ETHEL don't you? The platinum blonde?

RAFFY nods. Everybody knows ETHEL, mostly in the biblical sense of the word.

TEDDY

So of course she gets all friendly-like, especially after the little guy pulls out a wad of bills that could choke Native Dancer.

RAFFY

So what happened?

TEDDY

The guy orders something called a Brass Monkey. Who the hell orders a drink like that in this part of town? This joint ain't no umbrella bar; and I'm not making no stupid sissy drinks. But the guy slips me a hundred bucks.

So what the fuck do I care, right? He gives me a list of ingredients, so I line them up on the bar. He starts making this drink, and while he's doing it, he's telling a story about spies and admen, or some such shit...

A grizzled old man with a mop of messy thinning white hair and a gray stubble beard carrying a stack of evening newspapers comes up to RAFFY.

POPS

Paper RAFFY?

TEDDY

POPS... how many times have I told you not to bother the customers?

RAFFY reaches into his pocket for a wrinkled five-dollar bill and hands it to POPS. The old man gives RAFFY the newspaper.

RAFFY

It's okay TEDDY, we all got to make a living.

POPS is searching in all his pockets as if looking for RAFFY'S change. RAFFY smiles.

RAFFY

Keep the change POPS. Buy yourself something pretty.

TEDDY

Okay POPS, you made your sale now get out of here before the boss sees you, and we both get in trouble.

The old man snaps the heels of his worn out shoes together in mock military salute. Instead of leaving immediately he takes a circuitous route to the door offering up the evening news to anyone whose nose isn't glued to a cell phone or the bottom of an empty glass.

TEDDY shakes his head in amusement. RAFFY puts the folded newspaper on the bar without looking at it.

RAFFY

This guy with the fancy drinks, his name wasn't THOMAS or TOM was it?

TEDDY

Nah... I think he called himself RED or something... to be honest I was more interested in the wad of cash he was flashing. So was Ethel.

RAFFY

RED... as in the RED RIPPER?

TEDDY laughs.

TEDDY

This guy? No way! Besides I doubt the RIPPER would go around advertising he was the killer.

RAFFY slips TEDDY one of his cards.

RAFFY

Do me a favor will you? If he ever comes in again, call me. He may be the guy my client is looking for.

TEDDY

You want that Brass Monkey? I watched how he made it.

RAFFY

I'll stick to a simple rum and coke if you don't mind?

RAFFY picks up the newspaper and reads the headline:

"RED RIPPER KILLS NUMBER FIVE!

Local prostitute found dead,
Body of Ethel MacKenzie found at The Why Not? Motel"

FADE OUT

The Professor

FADE IN

INTERIOR: The outer office of R.R. RHEINHARDT & Associates. The man RAFFY bumped into outside The Coffin, exits the elevator. CHARLIE is seated at her desk going over expense reports.

CHARLIE

Afternoon...

The professor approaches CHARLIE'S desk

PROFESSOR

Afternoon... I wonder if there's someone I can talk to about a murder.

CHARLIE looks up from her paper work. One hand instinctively goes to her disguised push dagger belt buckle.

CHARLIE

MR. RHEINHARDT is out but I can help you.

The man hands CHARLIE a card:

ROLLY ADAMSOM, PhD
Assistant Professor Visual Arts,
District College of Applied Arts of Technology

PROFESSOR

The woman who was killed last night was a friend of mine, and the police don't seem to be doing anything about it.

CHARLIE

You mean ETHEL MACKENZIE?

PROFESSOR

Yes ETHEL, that's right.

CHARLIE
ETHEL was a friend of yours?
Pardon me but you don't look
like someone who'd be
interested in...

The Professor interrupts.

PROFESSOR
Don't be so parochial, MISS_?

CHARLIE
MISS COFFIN, CHARLENE COFFIN,
but you can call me CHARLIE.

PROFESSOR
COFFIN... as in the Coffin
Building?

CHARLIE
Yes, I confess.

PROFESSOR
Wealth and beauty is a
disarmingly attractive
combination MISS COFFIN.

CHARLIE
To be blunt PROFESSOR ADAMSON,
ETHEL was kind of low rent for
someone like you. I would
think you'd go for a more
uptown sort of companion.

PROFESSOR
Perhaps... but I hired her as a
figure model. Doing what she
did, meant she had no problem
with some of the more explicit
poses I require for my work?

CHARLIE
For your work? Your work
requires pornographic poses?

PROFESSOR
I believe erotic would be a
more suitable label, if a
label is what you need to
attach to it.

CHARLIE

I see...

PROFESSOR

Actually I don't think you do. My special field of interest is erotic art and I like to keep my hand in... sort to speak.

CHARLIE

Yes, I bet you do; so no hanky-panky then, just posing.

PROFESSOR

Well to be perfectly frank let's just say I got my money's worth.

CHARLIE

And why exactly are you so interested in poor ETHEL. It seems like yours was strictly a business relationship. Besides, everybody is looking for the RIPPER. Why waste your money on a private investigator?

PROFESSOR

I cared about ETHEL that's all. She was a human being, not a piece of meat that you can just butcher and leave to rot.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his cheque book.

PROFESSOR

How much do you need to get started?

CHARLIE

I think you're wasting your money, and besides MR. RHEINHARDT is tied up on a big case right now.

PROFESSOR

What about you, could you look into it for me?

CHARLIE

Tell you what. I'll make a few calls, talk to the police and maybe TEDDY, the bartender at The Dystopia where she hung out. If I find out anything interesting, I'll let you know.

PROFESSOR

Will fifteen hundred cover it?

CHARLIE

That's too much...

The PROFESSOR writes the cheque and hands it to CHARLIE.

PROFESSOR

I insist.

He gets up to leave, but hesitates.

PROFESSOR

You're a very attractive woman MISS COFFIN. Would you consider modelling for some of my studies?

CHARLIE isn't really surprised by the proposition, he was obviously a wolf in professor's clothing, perhaps worse, perhaps he's the RED RIPPER, and this whole thing is a smoke screen or some kind of bizarre game of cat and mouse.

CHARLIE

I'm flattered... I think; but I'll stick to working with my clothes on, thank you.

The PROFESSOR gives CHARLIE a practised smile.

PROFESSOR

Don't knock it if you haven't tried it my dear. You'd be surprised how liberating the experience can be.

CHARLIE

Oh I think I'm just about as liberated as I can handle right now. I'll let you know if I find anything.

The sound of the antique elevator arriving on the top floor interrupts the awkward silence signalling the PROFESSOR that it's time to leave. He turns to see RAFFY RHEINHART exit the cage. The two men nod in surprised recognition. The rakish PROFESSOR ADAMSON disappears as the elevator descends down to the lobby where The Dystopia is located.

RAFFY

New client?

CHARLIE

I can handle it. Fifteen hundred bucks just to make a few calls.

RAFFY tosses the newspaper on CHARLIE'S desk.

RAFFY

You hear about ETHEL?

CHARLIE

It's all over the news... poor thing. The professor wants me to look into it for him.

RAFFY

The guy who just left?

CHARLIE

Seems he's some kind of art professor. ETHEL was his go to model, amongst other things.

RAFFY

Don't get involved. Give him back his money.

CHARLIE

It's just a few calls. Don't be such a worrywart.

RAFFY

Listen, I think the guy who killed ETHEL is VIRGINIA'S husband.

FADE OUT

Raffy and Virginia

FADE IN

INTERIOR: VIRGINIA COLLINS' condo apartment.

The security in the building is tight: a discreetly armed doorman and a concierge protect the residents from unwanted intrusions. RAFFY makes his way through the security maze up to VIRGINIA'S apartment. He finds Suite 960a and knocks.

VIRGINIA opens the door. She's wearing black satin lounging pyjamas with an untucked shirt open to the middle of her chest. The shimmering loose fitting black fabric reveals little while promising everything. Her peek-a-boo blonde hairdo hides half her face while framing the rest like a de Lempicka painting.

Her electric blue eyes dance and sparkle at the sight of RAFFY, at least that's the impression they give. Do they always look like that, or do they only dazzle in his presence? There is a silent connection between the two of them, something mysterious and deep, something visceral and dramatic.

She steps into the hall not waiting for him to enter. She kisses him softly on the mouth. RAFFY'S hands glide over the black satin in automatic response. His mind is racing not knowing where this is going. All he knows is neither of them are acting appropriately: she, the distraught wife, and he, the dispassionate investigator.

VIRGINIA

Come in, I've been waiting.

RAFFY

Is this how you greet all your visitors?

She laughs a sexy laugh.

VIRGINIA

Only those I care about.

RAFFY

VIRGINIA...

She puts a finger to his lips.

VIRGINIA

Don't say anything. I know you like me. We have a bond, something... something that goes beyond this whole business with my husband. I know you feel it too, so not another word.

She takes him by the hand and leads him to a white suede tuxedo style loveseat facing two matching oversized chairs. She curls up beside him and leans in close. He can't keep his eyes off her. The smell of her perfume is intoxicating; her eyes dance and sparkle with anticipation; the whole setup is almost too much to bear.

He thinks to himself...

RAFFY (IN HIS MIND)

... try to be professional.

VIRGINIA uncoils herself from the loveseat and goes to the black lacquer bar to make drinks. She doesn't ask what he wants. RAFFY watches every move hypnotized by the movement of the black satin as it slithers over her body. She reaches for a bottle of gin.

RAFFY

What are you making?

VIRGINIA

It's a surprise.

She pours 2 ounces of Leopold's Navy Strength American Gin into two glasses; she adds an ounce of lemon juice, a tablespoon of sugar, three ounces of club soda, and one red maraschino cherry topped with a slice of orange.

The ritual creation of the drinks is more of a performance than a mechanical making of refreshments. She delivers the exotic elixir to the coffee table placing them on matching white lacquer coasters painted with large black Chinese hanzi calligraphy. RAFFY'S heart is pounding like a jackhammer on a concrete sidewalk. He wants to escape but can't.

He forces himself to survey the room. The floor is some kind of exotic black polished hardwood partially covered by a white-on-white Chinese rug also featuring some exotic oriental hieroglyph.

The walls are painted white with black eight-inch wide mouldings. All the furniture except the glass coffee table is made of high gloss black lacquer, including the Steinway Baby Grand piano in the corner. The walls feature a number of Chinese calligraphy scrolls with large black hanzi glyphs painted on bleached white rice paper. The room is as dramatic as its exotic owner.

It strikes RAFFY that the only color in the room is VIRGINIA'S electric blue eyes and shimmering blonde hair. It's the kind of place you expect a movie star to live in, not an uptown psychiatrist.

RAFFY

Your apartment... I thought it was your office?

VIRGINIA smiles.

VIRGINIA

This is suite 960a; my office is 960b.

RAFFY

You've done very well for yourself.

VIRGINIA

I guess you can say I'm motivated. I tend to get what I want. You know what I want, don't you RAFFY?

Their verbal exchange exudes a sexual chemistry thick with tension and craving, both stifling and exhilarating. RAFFY feels he's being lured into a dangerous dark place. He pulls himself together and tries to exert some measure of control.

RAFFY

About your husband...

A flicker of disappointment crosses VIRGINIA'S face.

VIRGINIA

To business then... What have you found out?

RAFFY

Very little I'm afraid... he's a ghost, not even a driver's license.

VIRGINIA

He's a very private person.

RAFFY

Absolutely no photo
identification of any kind..
His booking agent and the
bartenders all remember him,
but that's about it. He showed
up, did his job, got paid in
cash and left. You're the only
one who actually knows him,
really knows him.

VIRGINIA almost smiles.

RAFFY

Did I say something amusing?

She reaches over and touches his hand.

VIRGINIA

It's just... what you describe
is so THOMAS, my little man of
mystery. You have to
understand he had a traumatic
childhood, and he never really
got over it.

As a psychiatrist, he's my
great white whale, a puzzle I
never was able to solve.

RAFFY

So he was your patient?

VIRGINIA

Well no, not technically, that
would be unethical, but I did
what I could to exorcise his
demons. Unfortunately I
failed. I'm afraid my failure
is what prompted his
disappearance.

RAFFY

Do you think he's capable of
murder?

VIRGINIA'S blue eyes betray a sense of excitement.

VIRGINIA

Murder? Why would you ask such a thing?

RAFFY

A woman was killed last night.

VIRGINIA

Yes, I know. I saw it in the newspaper; killed by that maniac that's running around. What does that have to do with my husband?

RAFFY

The thing is... ETHEL, the woman who was murdered was seen at The Dystopia with a small feminine man, in a suit and big hat. The guy made a big deal out of making some kind of fancy drink. Sounds a lot like your husband.

Now you tell me your husband had some psychological problems, problems you couldn't fix. I should report this to the cops.

A look of concern crosses VIRGINIA'S face. She draws him close by taking his hands in hers and pressing them to the black satin shirt. Their faces are only inches apart.

VIRGINIA

No. You can't, please don't..

Her voice is pleading, almost begging, but somehow he feels she's in complete control. Is he being played? She's been coming on to him since they first laid eyes on each other. Not the kind of thing you'd expect from a distraught wife.

Still... he can't resist her, she's like a drug, and he's hooked. He twists her hands behind her back and pushes her hard up against the corner of the couch. He kisses her passionately. She responds in kind. He breaks the embrace.

RAFFY

What the hell is this really about? Tell me now or I'm going straight to the cops.

Tears well up in her dazzling electric blue eyes. He melts at the sight.

VIRGINIA

THOMAS is different. I couldn't give him what he needed. I know he visited prostitutes. He needed a release. I failed him and he left me, but he's no killer. Please don't walk away from me. I need you in my life. I've been looking for you for years.

RAFFY

What do you mean you've been looking for me? Who are you?

Tears run down her porcelain cheeks. He can almost taste their salty mixture. She gets up and moves to the window overlooking the city. She looks out without facing him.

VIRGINIA

I don't know, don't ask me any more questions, leave if you must, I don't care anymore.

He gets up not sure what to do. He wants to stay but knows he should go. He should forget her, put her out of his mind, but he can't. He's like a junkie who needs a fix. She turns to face him; she's in complete control. He sees a tinge of anger mixed with excitement in her hypnotic blue eyes.

VIRGINIA

Well! Are you going? Or are you staying?

He hesitates but only for a moment.

RAFFY

I'm staying..

FADE OUT

Revelation

FADE IN

INTERIOR: The outer office of R.R. RHEINHARDT & Associates. The ancient elevator clangs to a stop with a characteristic jerk. The ornate metal cage opens and RAFFY enters the room. CHARLIE is standing by her desk.

RAFFY

Good morning sunshine.
Anything new?

CHARLIE turns as RAFFY approaches her. The look on her face warns him that something is up. She's uncharacteristically upset. Her mood is dark and angry.

RAFFY

What's the matter?

She tries to slap him but he instinctively catches her wrist.

RAFFY

What's got into you?

CHARLIE struggles to free her arm, but RAFFY won't let go.

CHARLIE

Bastard! How could you do it?
What's the matter with me?
Aren't I pretty enough? How
can you be so cruel?

RAFFY

What are you talking about?

CHARLIE

Let me go or I'll scream!

RAFFY

Scream. Nobody will hear you.

She collapses into his arms sobbing. Her head resting on his chest, tears dampening his day old shirt. Her fist pounds his shoulder but without conviction.

CHARLIE

You slept with her didn't you?
Why? So she's pretty, I'm
pretty, and not crazy...

RAFFY

Settle down... you know how I
feel about you?

She pulls away but stays close as if fearing if she moves
too far she'll lose him forever.

CHARLIE

She's dangerous RAFFY, really
dangerous. She's damaged...
crazy... I just know it.

She points to some papers on her desk.

CHARLIE

It's all there...

She called earlier, wanted me
to tell you how much last
night meant to her. She did it
on purpose; she did it to send
me a message.

I could tell from the minute
that bitch walked in she was
trouble. She's after you
RAFFY. You've got history.

RAFFY picks up the papers from the desk.

RAFFY

What is all this?

CHARLIE composes herself.

CHARLIE

VIRGINIA COLLINS is not her
real name. She was born PATTY
THOMPSON...

RAFFY'S face goes white.

RAFFY

PATTY THOMPSON? Are you sure?

CHARLIE nods.

CHARLIE

She changed it when she came
of age. She was traumatized
when she was a kid, witnessed
some kind of murder along with
a little boy. Their names were
withheld from the press but
your friend JOE GRIST in
homicide got it for me. You
know who the little boy was?

RAFFY ignores her question.

RAFFY

It can't be the same PATTY
THOMPSON, it can't.

CHARLIE

The little boy, you know what
his name is?

RAFFY can't speak. He's shaken.

CHARLIE

RUBEN RAPHAEL RHEINHARDT!
You're the little boy.

FADE OUT

The Great Hoax of 1874

FADE IN

INTERIOR: The Dystopia. To hash things out RAFFY and CHARLIE close the office and head on down to The Dystopia. CHARLIE'S forgiven RAFFY but that doesn't mean she's still not angry. She recognizes that RAFFY and VIRGINIA had a history that needed to be played out. And it wasn't over yet. Neither CHARLIE nor RAFFY knew what VIRGINIA'S real intentions were and what the disappearance of her husband had to do with it.

It's early but TEDDY was always willing to brew some fresh coffee, and maybe since CHARLIE was there, he could get the chef to whip up a couple of Tamagoyaki omelettes.

CHARLIE

The police reports said you and VIRGINIA both told the exact same story, kind of unusual, especially for two little kids?

RAFFY

We were children.

CHARLIE

And the guy looked, acted, and dressed just like VIRGINIA'S husband. I hope you don't think that's a coincidence?

RAFFY

There's something we didn't tell the police back then, something important.

CHARLIE

Why?

RAFFY

PATTY didn't want to, she said it would be our secret. She said it would give her nightmares if she had to repeat it. I just wanted to protect her.

CHARLIE

You still do.

RAFFY

You don't understand. I felt responsible. It was my apartment; it was my mother she saw murdered by another woman.

CHARLIE

What do you mean, a woman?

RAFFY

It wasn't a guy who killed my mother, it was a woman dressed like a man.

CHARLIE

And you didn't tell the police?

RAFFY

I just wanted to forget the whole thing but PATTY was all excited. Not upset or agitated, just excited, like it gave her a rush. I didn't understand it then, but now it makes sense. Her being a shrink and marrying some lunatic that looks like my mother's murderer, who seems to be re-enacting history over and over again. Her husband must be the RIPPER.

CHARLIE

But the original killer was a woman, not a guy.

TEDDY arrives at the bar with a couple of freshly made Japanese-style omelettes. He places them on the bar and tops up the two cups of coffee.

TEDDY

You two don't look too happy. What's up?

RAFFY

Remember the little guy that
picked up ETHEL?

TEDDY

Sure, the effeminate guy with
the big hat.

RAFFY

You said he made some kind of
fancy drink, remember?

TEDDY

Sure, a Brass Monkey or
something.

RAFFY

Did he use gin?

TEDDY

No, no gin, vodka, rum,
Galliano, and some orange
juice. Why do you ask?

RAFFY

Someone made me a drink
yesterday, gin, lemon juice,
and club soda.

TEDDY

Not much of a drinker, are
you? That's a Tom Collins.

CHARLIE

A what?

TEDDY

A Tom Collins, people order
them all the time. I prefer a
Vodka Collins myself but if
you like gin...

CHARLIE

That's strange?

RAFFY

I don't get it.

TEDDY

What's the big deal?

RAFFY

My client, VIRGINIA COLLINS,
aka PATTY THOMPSON... her
missing husband is TOM
COLLINS.

TEDDY breaks out in a big smile.

TEDDY

You've been played my friend.

CHARLIE

What do you mean?

TEDDY

Do you know how the Tom
Collins got its name?

RAFFY

I'm afraid you're going to
tell us.

TEDDY

Around 1874, New Yorkers were
running around town looking
for a Tom Collins. Supposedly
this guy was going into bars
and talking trash about the
customers. People were so
upset when they heard Tom
Collins was seen in a bar
close by, they would run out
to confront him. The whole
thing was a practical joke.
Even the newspapers got
involved by printing Tom
Collins sightings.

The local bartenders thought
the whole thing was great for
business, they even invented a
drink so when people came in
looking for Tom Collins, what
they got was a drink.

CHARLIE

Are you saying TOM COLLINS
doesn't exist?

TEDDY shrugs his shoulders.

TEDDY

You're the detectives. I'm
just a bartender.

CHARLIE

He has to exist, people know
him. He has a job; he works in
half the bars in town. He was
even in here, despite what he
called himself. He has to
exist. It can't be a hoax.

RAFFY turns to CHARLIE.

RAFFY

Oh it's a hoax all right. Call
JOE GRIST and tell him we know
who the RIPPER is?

FADE OUT

Game, Set, And...

FADE IN

INTERIOR: VIRGINIA COLLINS' condo apartment.

DETECTIVE JOE GRIST and a uniformed officer stand on either side of the door to apartment 960a with their guns drawn. GRIST'S partner VELMA DIME and another uniformed officer repeat the procedure in front of apartment 960b.

RAFFY RHEINHARDT is standing several feet back from the main action watching with conflicted anticipation. VIRGINIA must be stopped, but he didn't want to see her hurt, he still felt a need to protect her.

GRIST signals DIME and they simultaneously use passkeys to enter both apartments.

GRIST and the uniformed cop enter the black and white residence quickly searching each room. VIRGINIA isn't there. RAFFY feels a sense of relief tinged with disappointment.

DIME enters to check on what her partner found.

DIME

Anything?

GRIST

Nothing. You?

DIME

Gone.

GRIST

She must have realized RAFFY caught on to her game.

DIME

You've got to see her office.
It's kind of weird, especially
for a shrink.

GRIST orders the uniformed cop to stand guard outside. DIME takes her partner and RAFFY to the office next door now guarded by the other uniformed police officer. As RAFFY enters the office apartment he breaks out in a cold sweat.

Sitting facing each other on a well-worn oriental rug are two red and black chenille couches. On the wall is a large poster promoting the children's game Snakes and Ladders. Surrounding the poster on either side is a collection of bizarre German *Schandmaskes*, and even weirder British Scold Bridles.

Underneath the poster is a wooden table covered in a cheap chintz dime store fabric. On the table are three bamboo wig stands, two of which are covered with red male wigs. The third is empty. There's a closet in the corner.

DIME opens it.

DIME

Get a load of this.

Inside the closet hanging all neatly spaced are a series of chalk-stripped men's suits. On the shelf above are two Borsalino hats with space for a missing third. DIME reaches into the pocket of one and pulls out an old fashioned cigarette lighter and a package of Virginia Slims. GRIST turns to RAFFY.

GRIST

Even for a murderer, this nut-job is twisted.

The detectives continue their search while waiting for the crime scene techs to show up. RAFFY starts for the door to leave. GRIST stops him.

RAFFY is visibly shaken.

GRIST

I don't have to tell you to be careful, do I?

RAFFY shakes his head.

GRIST

And don't get lost. You're the key to this whole mess.

FADE OUT

Match

FADE IN

INTERIOR: The private office of RAFFY RHEINHARDT.

CHARLIE is checking to see if RAFFY left any reports on his desk that needed to be filed. She hears the clang and thud of the antique elevator coming to a rest on the top floor; she hears the creaking of the ornate metal door slide open, then shut.

She thinks to herself:

CHARLIE

It's over. Her rival is under arrest. Now she'll have RAFFY all to herself.

She stops herself from running to greet him. She combs a slender hand through her hair making sure every beautiful auburn wave is in place. She calls out.

CHARLIE

Everything okay, was she a problem?

No answer. She brushes non-existent particles from her Hepburn inspired trousers, a style she adopted with the arrival of VIRGINIA COLLINS on the scene with her obvious hypnotic spell over RAFFY. She takes a deep breath and heads for the outer office to greet him.

She hesitates; she doesn't want to appear too anxious.

She stands in the doorway between the inner and outer offices. She looks, but no one is there. Suddenly the open door slams into her body knocking her back into RAFFY'S office. She falls backwards over one of RAFFY'S Rulmann question mark chairs. She's upside down with her head and shoulders on the seat of the chair and her legs raised in the air over the back.

She struggles, failing to extract herself from the chair. She looks up into a pair of dazzling electric blue eyes. It's VIRGINIA dressed in a man's chalk-striped suit and a large Borsalino hat, with strands of red hair sticking out from underneath.

VIRGINIA is standing over her holding what appears to be a handle of some kind. There's the sound of a 'CLICK' and a six inch blade appears as if from nowhere.

CHARLIE kicks wildly with one leg knocking the blade from her attacker's hand. She wheels her other leg hard around catching VIRGINIA in the head knocking the Borsalino into the air.

The violent force of the kick knocks the chair completely over, propelling CHARLIE out of the question mark and onto the floor. She scrambles to her feet to face her deadly rival.

The two women face each other, arms posed like Wyatt Earp and Ike Clanton at the O.K. Corral. VIRGINIA slowly removes the red wig tossing it onto the remaining upright chair. They stare at each other for what seems a long time but in fact is only a second or two. Then CHARLIE hears the familiar click of the lethal switchblade releasing its steel.

CHARLIE reaches for her belt-buckle dagger but VIRGINIA is fast. She lunges forward with a quick outstretched arm aiming the blade directly at CHARLIE'S midsection.

CHARLIE quickly reacts, deftly sidestepping the attack. VIRGINIA'S outstretched arm lunges past CHARLIE, leaving her vulnerable to a counterattack.

CHARLIE grabs VIRGINIA'S wrist pushing it down hard while at the same time violently raising her knee into VIRGINIA'S elbow. The knife falls harmlessly to the floor. VIRGINIA cries out in pain.

VIRGINIA
(Screams in pain!)

VIRGINIA'S left fist wheels around across her body in a wild driving haymaker motion landing on CHARLIE'S jaw.

CHARLIE is propelled backwards knocking over the remaining upright question mark chair. She bounces off the chair careening head first into the ebony Ruhlmann desk. She moans in pain and falls to the floor face down between the two overturned chairs.

VIRGINIA'S right arm hangs worthlessly at her side. She grimaces in pain, her arm is probably broken. She stands over her rival for a moment surveying the wreckage. She gives her victim a slight kick in the side to see if she's faking. CHARLIE doesn't react.

VIRGINIA reaches down with her left hand and flips the unconscious CHARLIE over so she's facing upward. With her remaining good hand, she awkwardly removes CHARLIE'S belt-buckle dagger. She kneels on one knee over CHARLIE with the dagger posed high in the air ready to strike deep into CHARLIE'S chest.

A hand grabs her up-raised arm by the wrist from the back. Another arm wraps around her body pressing cold hard steel to her delicate neck. She struggles but it's no use. The force of her assailant's grip is too strong.

It's RAFFY. She yields into his body dropping the dagger to the floor. She is spent.

RAFFY twists her good arm around behind her back with one hand while the other maintains the pressure of cold hard steel against her neck. She whimpers in pain.

VIRGINIA

Kill me if you have too!
Do it RAFFY, do it!

RAFFY increases the pressure on the steel. A trickle of blood starts to run down her neck.

VIRGINIA

I love you RAFFY, ever since
we were children. It's okay, I
understand, you're better off
with her.

RAFFY lowers the dagger and wheels her around to face him. Despite the man's clothes and the shattered mind, she's still the little girl who curled up beside him in the closet of his mother's seedy apartment. Her electric blue eyes still sparkle and dance despite her obvious pain. He puts the dagger to her neck.

RAFFY

Make me a promise.

VIRGINIA

Anything!

RAFFY

Leave CHARLIE and me alone.
Get out of town. Get out of
the country. Lose yourself
where they can't find you and
never come back.

VIRGINIA

If that's what you want. If
it's what you really want.

RAFFY

It is. It's what I want.

RAFFY lowers the dagger and releases his grip. They stand inches apart just looking at each other. She puts her good hand behind his head gently pushing it forward. She kisses him, smiles, and walks to the door. She turns.

VIRGINIA

You could come with me you
know.

RAFFY

You know I can't.

VIRGINIA

Look after her then. She loves
you, almost as much as I do.

VIRGINIA turns and heads for the elevator. RAFFY sees her disappear down towards The Dystopia.

CHARLIE is standing behind him watching.

FADE OUT

EPILOGUE

FADE IN

INTERIOR: The office of R.R. RHEINHARDT & Associates.

RAFFY is in his office sorting through explicit divorce photographs trying to decide which ones are the most damaging to his new client.

CHARLIE is at her desk going through expense accounts. The cage elevator grinds to a halt and the mailman appears hand delivering a bundle of bills, cheques, and junk mail. They exchange good mornings.

CHARLIE quickly shuffles through the stack of envelopes until she comes across a postcard with an image of a Schandemaske. She flips the postcard over and reads.

CHARLIE

Dear CHARLIE,
I hope you are well and taking
good care of him. I think of
you often, especially when my
elbow starts to act up. In
retrospect I'm glad he has
you. I know you won't give him
my love, but think of me
occasionally when you're with
him. Forever - V

RAFFY calls out through his open office door.

RAFFY

Anything interesting?

CHARLIE unlocks and opens the top drawer in her desk revealing a dozen or so postcards from VIRGINIA, all displaying different shame masks; each one more bizarre than the next. She drops the new card on top of the others and relocks the drawer.

CHARLIE

No... just the usual junk.

RAFFY appears behind her. He bends over and kisses her neck.

THE END

