

FUGITIVE SWEETHEART

By

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FADE IN:

INT. AMTRAK TRAIN - DAY

DUANE LLEWELLYN (47), disheveled in a maroon sweatshirt and blue jeans, is at a window seat. He types on his laptop.

The CONDUCTOR (52), a relaxed black man, walks through the passenger car.

CONDUCTOR
Our next stop: Bethel, Colorado.
Bethel, our first stop in Colorado!

Duane quickly rises from his seat. He saves the work on his laptop and stores it in a briefcase, retrieving a suitcase from the compartment above him.

DUANE
That's my stop!

CONDUCTOR
Someone's getting off here today!

DUANE
Not much ridership here?

CONDUCTOR
(chuckles)
Let's just say it ain't Denver.

He leads Duane to the front of the car as the train slows.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)
Here to see a relative?

DUANE
Actually, a job interview. The local paper needs a reporter.

CONDUCTOR
Oh yeah, the Gazette.

Duane nods. The train continues to decelerate.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)
It can't be very big. Shouldn't they hire a kid out of college?

DUANE
(shrugging)
Today's J-school grads prefer the I-T stuff. Just as well for me.

The train comes to a stop, and the conductor enters the vestibule between cars. He gives Duane a "stop" hand signal to keep him in the front of the car.

CONDUCTOR
(shouts)
This is Bethel, Colorado. Bethel!

A few seconds elapse.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)
OK, sir, you can get off.

Duane enters the vestibule and turns right, not looking where he's going. He nearly stumbles down the stairs, not realizing the exit is two feet above the platform. The conductor grabs him and his luggage before he tumbles out.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)
(laughing gently)
This isn't Chicago or New York.

DUANE
Or Philadelphia, where I first
boarded before changing trains in
Chi-town.

He carefully walks down the final step, dusts himself off and looks over the railroad station and small town. The terrain seems surprisingly flat for Colorado.

CONDUCTOR (O.C.)
Last call for Bethel -- all aboard!

Duane gives the conductor a salute; a few seconds later the train leaves the station. He strolls down Main Street and passes the town's public library. None of the buildings are more than four stories high, and things appear quiet.

That changes when a stray baseball strikes the suitcase he's carrying and caroms back into the park where a few boys play catch. He turns to them, gently shakes his head and smiles.

INT. BETHEL HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Duane is at his laptop when his cellphone rings. It's old East Coast pal JIM LINDQUIST.

DUANE
Hey Jim, what's up?

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
That Wall Street wire service hired
me today. Start next Monday. I'm
not calling you too late, am I?

DUANE
(sighing)
No, it's not too late. I'm in
Colorado. Morning job interview.

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
Very good. Denver's a nice town.

DUANE
No, it's not Denver.

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
Colorado Springs?

DUANE
No.

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
Boulder?

DUANE
You're oh-for-three. I'm in a tiny
town named Bethel.

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
Wish ya well. When you come back
east, drop me a line.

DUANE
Any other openings?

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
None I know of. If something
breaks--

DUANE
Yeah, you'll let me know.

LINDQUIST (O.S.)
Take care. Good night.

The cell phone clicks off. Duane puts his hand on his
forehead in disgust.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - LATER

Duane takes a six-pack of beer from the refrigerated section,
then purchases it at the counter.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Duane opens a can from his room refrigerator, takes a sip and returns to his desk and laptop.

DUANE (V.O.)
No more than one tonight. Can't
risk a hangover.

INT. BETHEL GAZETTE OFFICE - NEXT DAY

FRANCINE WINTERGREEN (62), a sprightly, stylish blonde, is at her desk. She examines papers from a folder marked "Duane Llewellyn." Duane nervously sits across from her.

FRANCINE
I really like your clippings. Good
writing style. But aren't you, uh,
overqualified for this job?

DUANE
(shaking his head)
I've been at several medium-sized
dailies, no large metros. Newspaper
work is hard to come by today.

FRANCINE
You're sure this is what you want.

DUANE
I'm a newspaperman. It's in my
blood, as I know it is in yours.

FRANCINE
You're hired.

Duane smiles as he rises from his chair.

DUANE
Thanks. What's the starting date?

FRANCINE
Is two weeks from Monday too soon?

DUANE
Not at all.

FRANCINE
I'll call you at the hotel tonight
regarding salary, benefits, good
places to live in town and so on.

DUANE
Looking forward to it.

They shake hands.

DUANE (CONT'D)
And I must add, this terrain caught
me off guard. No mountains here,
just rising plain.

FRANCINE
(laughs)
All you easterners think you'll hit
the Rockies once you cross the
Nebraska or Kansas line. But this
is Colorado, too. Welcome aboard.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Duane sits at his desk and types on his laptop, a can of beer
at the far end of the desk. The phone rings at the table near
his bed; he walks to the phone, picks it up and sits at the
edge of the bed.

DUANE
Hello.

FRANCINE (V.O.)
Francine here, with the lowdown on
benefits. You'll like our health
plan. Cheap, but thorough.

DUANE
Well, that's a relief.

FRANCINE (V.O.)
We have a four-oh-one-K as well...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Duane's still on the phone, but in another position.

DUANE
Sure you can't do better?

FRANCINE (V.O.)
It's thirty bucks a week above
entry level, more than I'd planned
to offer. But I have faith in you.

DUANE
 (softly laughs)
 I appreciate that. The money's no
 deal-breaker.

He falls upon the bed, switching the phone to his other hand
 so the cord doesn't snap.

FRANCINE (V.O.)
 Any other questions, don't hesitate
 to call before leaving. Good night.

DUANE
 And good night to you, too.

She hangs up. Duane locks his hands behind the pillow.

DUANE (V.O.)
 Thirty a week more than she'd
 planned to offer, twenty a week
 less than my last job. But beggars
 can't be choosers.

He rises from his bed, returns to his desk and gulps down the
 rest of his beer, the can back on the desk. Time elapses, and
 the other four empty cans of the six-pack materialize. His
 laptop is still on, but Duane has fallen asleep at the desk.

INT. GAZETTE NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Duane -- newest member of the Bethel Gazette staff -- enters,
 notebook in hand. He spots Francine, then heads to his desk.

DUANE
 Apparently not much of a council
 meeting. Discussion was minimal.

FRANCINE
 (grins)
 That's our city council in action.
 Whether that should be one word or
 two is up to you.

DUANE
 I'll type it up. The news hole?

FRANCINE
 Approximately 12 inches.

DUANE
 By now I can shovel without making
 it too obvious.

FRANCINE

I'm heading home. The copy editor will finish up tonight. She just went out for a sandwich.

DUANE

Don't believe I've met her.

FRANCINE

She was off the past two days.

Duane sits at his desk, turns on the computer and opens his notebook as blonde SUSAN BIRCH (47) enters; he hears her footsteps, but doesn't see her. He's not looking her way as she is seated, the nameplate "SUSAN BIRCH" in front of her.

Duane continues to examine his notebook.

DUANE

Debate was deferred on rezoning the Merritt Avenue tract. That'll be my lead, maybe your headline.

SUSAN

So you're the new guy.

Duane glances at Susan and is stunned. Zoom into her face, zoom out to a brunette, teenage version of Susan, wearing a white, red and black basketball uniform.

INT. NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

STUDENT ANNOUNCER

At guard for the Blair M. Richards Raiders, a five-foot-five senior, number fifty-four, Eloise Kellogg!

ELOISE KELLOGG runs to center court, amid chants of "El-Kel, El-Kel," slapping the hands of her teammates.

END FLASHBACK

DISSOLVE TO Duane, staring at the present-day Susan eating her sandwich. She attempts to be oblivious.

SUSAN

Is something the matter?

DUANE

Er... no. What sandwich is that?

SUSAN

Turkey with bacon, blue cheese and guacamole on French bread. Sounds weird, but it works.

DUANE

I'll have to try that.

SUSAN

If you're into sandwiches, you'll love Chandler's. Nice prices, too.

She yells to MARCO PIRIANO (29), somewhat short and stocky, who's in the rear of the newsroom.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Hey, Marco. Sports nearly done?

MARCO

Just waiting on the Rockies box score from Milwaukee. Rox won 5-3. The other two pages are in.

Duane again stares at Susan, certain there's some sort of link between her and Eloise Kellogg.

SUSAN

We're going to press in twenty minutes. Will you please finish that story?

Duane is jolted back into reality.

DUANE

Why, sure. Let me crank it out.

INT. GAZETTE NEWSROOM - DAY

Francine emerges from her office and stands near Duane.

FRANCINE

So you finally met Susan Birch last night. As good a copy editor as I've ever had here.

DUANE

How long has she been here?

FRANCINE

A bit over five years. Heckuva wordsmith. Should be at a bigger paper, but says she's happy here.

DUANE
I won't give her ideas.

FRANCINE
Oh, and our budget meeting is in my
office at four-fifteen.

He rises and leaves the newsroom.

INT. GAZETTE EMPLOYEE LOUNGE

Duane enters just as Susan puts a pair of covered plastic
containers into the refrigerator.

SUSAN
Since you were going to ask, Mr.
Llewellyn, dinner tonight consists
of lentil soup as well as beef over
brown rice, plus gravy.

DUANE
Tasty.

He waves Susan toward a table at the far end of the room,
where they sit down.

DUANE (CONT'D)
Your diet's not what I'm curious
about.
(lowers to whisper)
You bear an uncanny resemblance to
someone I knew in high school.

SUSAN
Oh, really?

DUANE
(nodding)
Does the name Eloise Kellogg ring a
bell? That's Kellogg, as in cereal.

SUSAN
Ring a bell? None I've rung lately.
Never heard of anyone by that name.

DUANE
The basketball team's star guard --
we all called her "El-Kel." First
girl in school history to be named
athlete of the year.

SUSAN
Did that surprise you?

He's slightly taken aback.

DUANE

Huh? A little bit, yes, And she looked the way you could've looked some, er, time ago. But brunette.

SUSAN

(feigns a grin)

Never been accused of being a jock, or brunette for that matter. See you at the budget meeting.

She leaves, and a confused Duane walks to the soda machine.

INT. GAZETTE OFFICE, NEAR NEWSROOM - LATER

Francine sits at her desk regally and crosses her legs, the meeting not quite ready to begin. Across from her, all with notebooks, are Duane, Marco and Susan.

MARCO

(to Susan)

How's that roommate of yours doing? Hope she'll drop by the newsroom once her shift ends at Chandler's.

SUSAN

So you like Irina?

MARCO

Yeah.

FRANCINE

Okay, let's start.

(to Marco)

Loved your piece on the Little League coach's charitable work.

MARCO

Thanks. Enjoyed writing it.

FRANCINE

And Duane?

DUANE

Yes?

FRANCINE

Head to the station once we're done and pick up the police blotter, will you? Their computer is down.

DUANE

Will do. Then I'll get to the piece
on library renovations.

SUSAN

(to Duane)

By the way, I'm running the show
here tomorrow night.

She gives him an intimidating look. Francine turns to Duane.

FRANCINE

My son William is coming from
Denver. Wants me to sell the paper.
He'll bring lawyers to persuade me.

MARCO

You're not planning to, right?

FRANCINE

Not as long as I draw a breath. All
he wants is to keep the legal
notices that make us money. He'll
cut this to a weekly if he has to.

(beat)

Duane, how's your apartment search?

DUANE

Found a place several blocks from
here. Will be at the hotel for the
next week or so till things arrive.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Duane, under the blankets in the dark, remains confounded.

DUANE (V.O.)

I'm sure she's Eloise Kellogg! Yes,
it's been thirty years, but I'd
know her anywhere. She must still
be mad at me for what I wrote.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK, 1980S)

A student is reading the back page of the Blair M. Richards
school newspaper, the Raider Report.

On the sports page, just to the right of the lead story
headlined "Kellogg first girl named Athlete of Year" is a
column topped by the logo "Llewellyn's Tellin'." Its two-deck
headline reads, "'El-Kel' is talented, but is she worthy?"

MALE STUDENT #1

Duane says Eloise shouldn't have been named Athlete of the Year. I think he's nuts.

MALE STUDENT #2

He's got a point. She's nowhere as strong as most guys.

A female student overhears his comment.

FEMALE STUDENT

She's the best athlete at Richards, male or female. You're sexist.

MALE STUDENT #1

(to male student #2)

Would you gripe if a lighter-weight wrestler won it? After all, a heavyweight would pin him easily.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Duane, in his bed, remains confused.

DUANE (V.O.)

But why would Eloise want a new identity? Has she done something wrong? Is she a fugitive from justice, like a cat burglar...

Eloise, brunette, materializes at his bedside in a catsuit.

ELOISE

I'm no Julie Newmar, and hey, do you really want to get in trouble with the Bob Kane estate?

DUANE (V.O.)

Or been involved in robberies...

Eloise now is dressed like Faye Dunaway in "Bonnie and Clyde," holding a machine gun.

ELOISE

(in a Texas drawl)

I rob banks. Anyway, who needs Warren Beatty, er, Clyde?

DUANE (V.O.)
Or maybe she's just gone psycho...

This time, Eloise resembles Glenn Close from "Fatal Attraction," as she stands over a boiling pot.

ELOISE
(cackling)
Got a rabbit that needs cooking?

DUANE (V.O.)
(shaking his head)
I simply can't imagine Eloise doing any of these things. As much as she hated what I wrote about her, she's a sweet person.

With that, he tries to fall asleep, but can't. So he wakes up, walks to and turns on his laptop, and does an online search for Eloise Kellogg.

He first sees an obituary, with no picture, from a Brooklyn weekly some seven years earlier. It is headlined, "Eloise Kellogg, Erasmus Hall English teacher, coach."

The lead paragraph reads, "Eloise Kellogg, 41, an English teacher and assistant girls' basketball coach at Erasmus Hall High School, died Saturday in Brooklyn Heights."

DUANE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Maybe Susan isn't her after all.

EXT. MAIN STREET, BETHEL - DAY

Duane walks along in downtown, near Chandler's. He sees Susan draw closer alongside a towering blonde wearing a jacket and what looks to be a waitress outfit. He stops to talk.

DUANE
Hi... Susan. If you don't mind my asking, who's this with you?

SUSAN
Meet Irina Stepanova, my roommate.

Duane gives IRiNA (29) a mock salute.

DUANE
Oh yeah, Irina, the gal Marco's interested in.
(pauses)
Didn't divulge any classified information, did I?

IRINA
 (chuckling, with a slight
 Russian accent)
 No, not at all.

She points at the restaurant.

IRINA (CONT'D)
 Marco's eaten here a few times. I'm
 aware he likes me. I like him too.

SUSAN
 Have you dined at Chandler's yet?

DUANE
 Dined? Oh yes, the pheasant was
 wonderful. Seriously, the food is
 good, but I didn't see Irina. Six-
 foot blondes are hard to ignore.

IRINA
 Actually, I'm a hair over six foot.
 And yes, I did play basketball.

DUANE
 Not surprised.

SUSAN
 I'm dropping Irina off at
 Chandler's. See you at three.

With that, Susan and Irina enter the restaurant, while a
 still-perplexed Duane resumes his walk along Main Street.

INT. CHANDLER'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Duane enters and goes to the cashier's stand while Irina puts
 money into the register. She smiles at him, several hours
 since they first met.

IRINA
 Good to see you here.

DUANE
 On dinner break, and plan to get
 something to go. Got a menu?

Irina hands him a menu from a drawer beneath the register.

IRINA
 Our special today is a Cincinnati
 chiliberger, topped with grated
 cheese and onions.

Duane perks up and declines to open the menu.

DUANE

Does it come with fries?

IRINA

Yes. Seasoned fries, to boot.

DUANE

Then that's what I'll get. No drink
-- I have soda at the office.

IRINA

(yells to kitchen)
One Cincy chiliburger with seasoned
fries, to go!

DUANE

(lowers voice to whisper)
Before you wait on a table, I must
ask you a question regarding Susan,
and you've got to answer in the
strictest confidence.

IRINA

I... guess I can do that. What's
this all about?

DUANE

From your experiences with her, is
Susan who you think she is? Do you
think she's hiding something about
herself?

IRINA

No. Why would you say that?

DUANE

I dunno. Just something about her,
I guess.

(beat)

Again, forget I ever brought this
up, and don't mention it to her.

IRINA

You have my word.

EXT. BETHEL CITY PARK - NEXT DAY

Duane, in a sweatshirt and jeans, walks briskly through the
park when he sees Irina, in T-shirt and shorts, shooting
baskets. He walks over to her.

DUANE
So you still play basketball?

IRINA
(laughs)
Played might be more accurate.

DUANE
Were you any good?

IRINA
Okay, but that's in the past.

She sighs, then tosses the ball to Duane.

IRINA (CONT'D)
Care to shoot a few?

Duane shakes his head and throws the ball back to her.

DUANE
Got a few things to attend to.
Also, I have some rather bad
memories from basketball.

IRINA
Really? Were you hurt?

DUANE
In a way. This girl I knew in
school was a great basketball
player, but since she was a girl,
and I didn't know much then...

Irina begins dribbling, then stops.

IRINA
Go on.

DUANE
I publicly challenged her to a game
of twenty-one.
(beat)
Let's just say it wasn't pretty.

IRINA
How much "wasn't pretty"?

DUANE
(bites his lip)
Twenty-one to four, before about
fifty or sixty people after school
one day. It was humiliating.

IRINA
Let's walk over to the bench and
talk about it.

They sit near one of the baskets.

IRINA (CONT'D)
So you got your comeuppance.

DUANE
(sighs)
And how.

IRINA
(smiles)
I hope it taught you not to take
women athletes lightly.

DUANE
And the irony is I really liked
her. Ethereal face, wonderful sense
of humor, very intelligent. But
this male ego got in the way.

Irina pats Duane on the shoulder.

IRINA
Still looking for someone?

DUANE
I guess.

IRINA
Keep the faith. The woman you want
may be right under your nose.

She rises from the bench, picks up the basketball and begins
shooting again. Duane watches her for a few seconds, then
arises and returns to his walk.

DUANE (V.O.)
She's got a point.

INT. SUSAN AND IRINA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Susan puts on her jacket and leaves. Fifteen seconds after
she shuts the door, the phone rings, leading to a message on
her answering machine.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
This is for Susan and Irina, from
Charlene. Today, Dmitri was pa--

The apartment goes dark. The answering machine shuts off.

INT. GAZETTE EMPLOYEE LOUNGE - DAY

Susan eats at a table when Duane walks in with a sandwich bag from Chandler's. He goes to the refrigerator, pulls a can of soda, and sits next to Susan.

DUANE

Saw Mayor Dawson at Chandler's. He said state officials are coming Thursday to discuss a new access road to the interstate.

SUSAN

Can you get a story out of it?

DUANE

Not for tonight. But I'll call the state transportation department tomorrow morning to get the whys and wherefores.

He opens his bag and unwraps a sandwich.

SUSAN

So what's that?

DUANE

Turkey and chicken on sourdough with Gouda and Monterey jack cheese. They call it Poultryzilla.

SUSAN

(laughing)
That's Chandler's.

Duane lowers his voice to a near-whisper.

DUANE

I really haven't talked to you much about things beyond work, but I was wondering...

SUSAN

Wondering what?

DUANE

If you'd like to see a movie? Tomorrow, the four-plex is showing a film actually made for adults.

SUSAN
You're kidding!

DUANE
And they have a twelve-fifteen
screening that will let us get back
to the office by three or so.

Susan lifts her head, rolls her eyes, then nods.

SUSAN
You're on, but you have to talk to
that state rep in the morning and
report the details to me before the
movie starts.

DUANE
A fair exchange. And it's my treat.

SUSAN
I'll pay my own way. Oh, and don't
let on to the office about this.
Don't need to make it a big thing.

DUANE
It's a deal.

INT. MULTIPLEX LOBBY -- NEXT DAY

Susan is at the theater concession stand, receiving a tub of popcorn from the attendant while handing him a five-dollar bill. Duane is at her side, talking to her.

DUANE
The state highway rep thinks the
road will cost about eleven million
dollars for the mile of length.

SUSAN
Is the right-of-way already
purchased?

DUANE
Yes. Denver needn't buy any more
land to make all this come true.

SUSAN
You held up your end of the deal,
now I'll hold up mine.

She walks down a corridor and to the screen where they'll see the movie, waving her hand to have Duane follow her.

INT. GAZETTE OFFICE - NIGHT

The night's newspaper is gone to print; an assistant from the press room leaves a stack of papers on Susan's desk. Each staffer takes a copy, and after everyone else leaves, Duane does likewise, then looks straight at the standing Susan.

DUANE

You're off tomorrow, as am I. Have anything planned?

SUSAN

Not particularly. Got an idea?

DUANE

Thought I'd invite you over to my apartment, now that I'm settled in, and cook you some dinner. Man does not live by Chandler's alone.

SUSAN

Instead of seeing you, how about meeting for dinner and dancing at the Technique Club?

DUANE

Not familiar with it.

SUSAN

A former bank building three blocks from here converted into a retro venue. Dress casual.

DUANE

You're into dancing?

SUSAN

Irina taught me some dance moves. Want to try them out on someone, and you drew the short straw.

Duane pretends to mull it over for a few seconds.

DUANE

OK, if you promise me one slow dance with you. In return, I promise no kissing.

SUSAN

You drive a hard bargain, but be warned of my occasional two left feet. Meet me there at six-thirty. Again, dress casual.

INT. - TECHNIQUE CLUB - NIGHT

The club features high ceilings with chandeliers. Duane, in a shirt and tie rather than his usual polo shirt with pocket, sits with Susan, in a blue dress hemmed just above the knee.

SUSAN

Not much of a crowd tonight, but it is a Wednesday.

A WAITER hands them menus, and each begins perusing.

DUANE

You've been here before. What do you suggest?

SUSAN

If you don't mind eating seafood on Wednesday, try that part of the menu, the one area where they top Chandler's. The crab is quite good.

DUANE

Crab in Colorado. Amazing.

SUSAN

This place will grow on you.

INT. TECHNIQUE CLUB - LATER

Remnants of dinner on their plates -- crab cakes for Duane, roast chicken for Susan -- the two head to the dance floor.

SUSAN

Again, I apologize in advance for my dancing.

DUANE

I'm sure you'll be less of an embarrassment on the dance floor than you let on, thanks to Irina.

SUSAN

Let your eyes be the judge of that.

Some recorded up-tempo jazz begins playing, and Susan begins her moves. She is at least minimally competent at dancing.

DUANE

Mind if I join you?

SUSAN

Go right ahead.

Never much of a dancer either, Duane keeps up with the rhythms and acquits himself well, enough to impress Susan.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You're pretty good.

DUANE

To be honest, this isn't something I've had much experience with.

SUSAN

It's good enough.

The music slows to ballad mode, and both are surprised at the change. Duane puts out his hands as if asking for a slow dance, and following a second of indecision, Susan gives in.

DUANE

I know where I stand with you, so I won't hold you tightly.

SUSAN

You're doing fine.

DUANE

(humorously)

Again, we'll disavow we've been here.

SUSAN

That's so appreciated.

DUANE

For some reason, this reminds me so much of being back home in Jersey.

SUSAN

Hey, I'm from Jersey, too, West...ville.

Duane catches her pause, but bluffs.

DUANE

Oh, yeah, south Jersey, Gloucester County, near Philly.

SUSAN

Yep, we used to cross the bridge and go into town for cheesesteaks.

DUANE

So what brought you out here?

SUSAN
I needed a change.

DUANE
I needed work.

The song ends.

DUANE (CONT'D)
No more slow dances for me tonight.
I'll go back to my seat for a few
minutes and watch you have fun.

SUSAN
Don't tell anyone at the office
this, but you're a nice guy.

DUANE
Our little secret.

He heads back to his table.

INT. GAZETTE OFFICE - NEXT NIGHT

Duane writes a story on the school board meeting he had just
attended. Marco, chocolate bar in hand, passes his desk.

MARCO
Doing anything Saturday?

Duane shakes his head as if to say no.

MARCO (CONT'D)
Well, here's your chance. Irina and
I are going to the Rockies game
with the Nationals that afternoon.
I'd like you to join us.

DUANE
Yeah, sounds like fun.

He calls to Susan, at her desk.

DUANE (CONT'D)
Hey, Susan, how'd you like to visit
Denver Saturday for a Rockies game?

SUSAN
I dunno. Baseball, meh.

MARCO
Didn't Irina tell you she was
going? It's her first ballgame.

DUANE

Sorry your Phillies aren't in town,
but I'm sure you'll enjoy Denver.

MARCO

Afterwards we'll have dinner in
LoDo, right near the ballpark.

SUSAN

Oh, all right then, I'll go.

INT. MARCO'S CAR - DAY

Marco drives Irina, in the front passenger seat, and Duane and Susan, seated behind them, on the interstate towards Denver for the ballgame. All are dressed casually.

DUANE

So where are the tickets?

MARCO

Don't have them yet. We'll buy them
at the ballpark.

SUSAN

Then the tickets are on me.

EXT. COORS FIELD TICKET BOOTH - DAY

Susan stands in line for tickets, as Duane, Marco and Irina wait on the side. She hands a credit card to a ticket agent, signs a form, is handed four tickets and returns to her friends, distributing one ticket to each of them.

SUSAN

Here you go.

DUANE

(looks at his ticket)
Front row, upper deck in right?
It's so far from the action.

MARCO

You could've done much better.

SUSAN

We'll be to ourselves, far removed
from the crowd. What's wrong with a
little privacy?

DUANE

Oh, all right.

EXT. COORS FIELD STANDS - DAY

Duane, Susan, Marco and Irina have their area of Coors Field pretty much to themselves. It's the top of the first inning, and Washington's Juan Soto bats with two on and one out.

MARCO

(to Irina)

Watch out for this guy. He can hit 'em a long way.

DUANE

Great hitter. Remember the twenty-nineteen World Series?

SUSAN

So what do you think of being at a ballgame, Irina?

IRINA

It's quite enjoyable. More fun than on T-V.

MARCO

I'll buy us a beer in the top of the second.

Soto connects on a long fly ball to right that's easily going to be a home run, but how far? The ball draws closer and closer to the upper deck. Susan cups both hands, effortlessly catches the ball above her head and controls it securely.

DUANE

I don't believe what I just saw!
(turns to Susan)
And you say you're not a jock.

SUSAN

(nervously)
No, not really. Just my dumb luck.

She puts the ball inside her handbag for safe keeping.

MARCO

But what a fantastic catch!

DUANE

This is column material, Marco.

SUSAN

Never thought we'd catch a home run ball being so far from the action.

With modern-day cameras, her catch wasn't as far removed as she thought. Replays are shown on various highlight shows.

Here's one from the Nationals' broadcast feed...

TV ANNOUNCER #1

Look at this catch of Soto's home run made by that woman!

Another replay, this from the Colorado crew...

TV ANNOUNCER #2

The Rockies' outfielders couldn't catch it, but this lady fan did!

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS BROWNSTONE - DAY

One of the replays is shown on TV in New York, in a house Susan's former self once called home. That viewer is Eloise's ex, DMITRI VOLKOFF (49), swarthy and intense.

DMITRI

So... she's not dead after all...

He reaches for the telephone.

INT. DENVER RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Duane, Susan, Marco and Irina chat over dinner in an upscale steakhouse near Coors Field. Susan pulls the baseball she caught from her handbag; it now has Soto's signature.

MARCO

Still don't understand why you were so reluctant to be photographed with him after the game.

DUANE

He said he saw you catch it after rounding first base.

SUSAN

Hope no other paper picks it up.

MARCO

Not sure that's possible, but...

IRINA

Susan's a very private person.

MARCO

Too bad the Rox lost, but Irina,
wanna go to another game?

IRINA

Sure. I had fun!

Susan rises from her seat, winking at Irina.

SUSAN

Need to use the restroom.

IRINA

I'll do the same.

MARCO

OK. Want dessert?

IRINA

Thanks... but I'm full.

INT. LADIES ROOM, DENVER RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The restaurant is upscale, but its ladies room is rather utilitarian. Susan washes her hands in a sink when Irina enters the otherwise empty facility. They lock the door behind them and speak at a low volume.

SUSAN

Thanks for defending me.

IRINA

Someone had to.

SUSAN

Tomorrow's our seventh anniversary.

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS BROWNSTONE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

It's a rainy summer afternoon; a brunette Eloise reads the New York Daily News in her kitchen. The phone on the wall rings.

ELOISE

Volkoff residence.

A male with a thick Russian accent replies.

MAN

Tell Dmitri I'm picking up Tanya at two-fifteen at Grand Army Plaza and will have her back at four-thirty.
(hangs up)

ELOISE

Who's Tanya? And why would Dmitri need to know this? Is he having an affair?

Curious, she puts on her raincoat, takes an umbrella and leaves for Grand Army Plaza. Her watch shows it's 1:35.

EXT. GRAND ARMY PLAZA, BROOKLYN - DAY

Eloise emerges from the Grand Army Plaza subway station, sees it's still raining, and opens her umbrella. She looks at her watch; it's just past two o'clock.

A tall blonde woman named SVETLANA KOSYGIN (then 22), in a short dress, holds an umbrella. Eloise walks over to her.

ELOISE

Excuse me, but are you... Tanya?

The blonde is caught off guard.

SVETLANA

(in a Russian accent)
Uh, no... er, yes. Quick, hurry into the station, and I'll explain.

Eloise follows the woman she thinks is Tanya downstairs, as both fold their umbrellas. They stop in a corner of the station, out of sight from the stairwell.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)

You're not Vladimir, and I'm not Tanya. My real name is Svetlana.

ELOISE

Svetlana?

SVETLANA

Svetlana Kosygin. I need your help.

ELOISE

In what way?

SVETLANA

I'll tell you more on the train.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LADIES ROOM, DENVER RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Irina and Susan exchange memories over the sink.

SUSAN

All you told me about Dmitri. Not the man I thought I'd married. Prostitution? Loansharking?

IRINA

He seemed legit when we met in Russia. Said he could get me a U-S college basketball scholarship. Instead...

SUSAN

Nude dancing. Sex work. Had we not met, Vladimir would've picked you up and you'd still be whoring.

IRINA

I shudder at the thought.

SUSAN

Little did I know when I left my brownstone to investigate Tanya, I'd never come back.

IRINA

Glad you persuaded the witness protection program to keep us together in our new identities.

SUSAN

Now let's get back to Bethel.

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Dmitri's at his desk as the phone rings. It's NIKOLAI VASILIEV (38), a former aide of his who lives in Denver.

DMITRI

So did you see the footage from the Rockies game?

NIKOLAI (V.O.)

Checked it against the stills you sent us, boss. That woman indeed is your Eloise. And the blonde she sat next to is... Svetlana Kosygin.

DMITRI

Escaped from me the same time. So I guess both are in Denver.

NIKOLAI (V.O.)

I at first thought so too, but...

DMITRI

But what?

NIKOLAI (V.O.)

An image match on the man sitting near Svetlana found he's not from Denver but sports editor of a daily in Bethel, northeast of Denver.

DMITRI

Hmmm. Let's investigate further. Round up guys to team with me when I hit Denver. Fill me in then.

He hangs up the phone and smirks.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

So looking forward to seeing you again, dear Eloise.

INT. GAZETTE NEWSROOM - NIGHT

It's the following Friday night at the office, and Duane, Susan, Marco and Francine, all seated, have nearly finished putting together the Saturday paper.

FRANCINE

Ready to go?

SUSAN

Yep.

FRANCINE

Sports?

MARCO

All in and on time.

Francine grabs a phone and presses a button.

FRANCINE

Okay, Jack, print.

As presses are heard slowly PRINTING in the adjacent production room, Irina, still in her Chandler's waitress outfit, enters from a rear door. She hugs Marco at his desk and sits near him.

IRINA

Loved that column of yours today on Susan's catch.

SUSAN

The furor has died down, so I told him he could write about it now.

DUANE

Maybe we can go next weekend when the Dodgers come in.

MARCO

With better seats this time.

IRINA

Count me in.

Seconds later, a car ROARS into the rear parking lot. Before any of the five can rise to check what's going on, Dmitri, Nikolai and cohorts OLEG (40) and STANLEY (31) enter from the same rear door as Irina did.

The printing press continues to get LOUDER.

DMITRI

I want answers from Eloise Kellogg!

FRANCINE

Who?

Dmitri, near the production room door, holds a gun and aims it at Susan.

SUSAN

Uh, er, me.

(beat)

I... need to confess the truth.

She slowly glances at Francine.

FRANCINE

What truth?

SUSAN

My real name is... Eloise Kellogg.

Nikolai points his gun at Irina. His three cohorts coolly stare at the others.

DMITRI

And over there is Svetlana
Kosygin... or, should I say, Tanya.
She and Eloise were why I spent six
years in federal prison.

SUSAN

And you just got out? Nobody
alerted us.

DMITRI

Was paroled. Good behavior.

DUANE

What do you want from us?

Dmitri aims the gun at Susan.

DMITRI

Revenge!

He prepares to shoot Susan, but before he can, the production room door opens and a bundle of newspapers is tossed into the office, hitting Dmitri in the back of the head. As he falls unconscious, his gun lands behind a huge, heavy newsprint storage bin, inaccessible to anyone in the room.

Dmitri's unarmed comrades and Nikolai rush to his side to check on his condition. His intended targets watch them, unsure what they should do next.

OLEG

He's out cold! Take him out to
revive him.

He, Nikolai and Stanley lift Dmitri and hurriedly carry him outside as Susan, Duane, Irina, Marco and Francine remain immobile. Finally, Francine speaks, just as a car races away.

FRANCINE

So Susan, you're not who I thought
you were?

SUSAN

Nope. My ex, who I helped send up
the river, has tracked us down.

IRINA

She, and me.

SUSAN

Duane was one of my high school
classmates back in Jersey.

DUANE

And they got away without us
finding out what car they're in.

MARCO

They could come back. None of us
are safe here!

FRANCINE

Let's leave town. We're all off
this weekend, so we'll lay low for
a bit. All of you, hop in my S-U-V.

SUSAN

Those are gas guzzlers!

FRANCINE

Filled up this morning. C'mon,
let's go, and take some papers.

They rush out the rear door.

INT./EXT. FRANCINE'S SUV - NIGHT

A silver SUV races east along a Colorado interstate. Inside,
Francine drives, Susan's in the passenger seat, and behind
them are Duane (directly in back of Susan), Irina and Marco.

DUANE

So where are we going?

FRANCINE

If what Susan says about how they
found out is true, they're probably
going towards Denver. Therefore,
we're headed east.

SUSAN

I take blame for all this. Duane,
you were right all along about me.

DUANE

I have no feelings of vindication.

SUSAN

If I hadn't tried to catch that
baseball, none of this would have
happened.

IRINA

Why didn't the witness protection
program alert us about Dmitri?
That's their job.

MARCO

Guess it's off to a motel for us.

FRANCINE

I know a better, safer place.
Susan, please dial six-oh-five,
seven-five-two, three...

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

MONTE BONNEVILLE (67), silver-haired publisher of the Whitfield (South Dakota) Daily Telegram, sleeps in his double bed, near a clock radio reading 1:34 a.m. Near the radio is a portrait of his late wife, Augusta Bonneville. A calico cat sleeps nearby. The phone RINGS, and Monte answers.

MONTE

Hello, and why are you calling now?

FRANCINE (V.O.)

Monte? Francine Wintergreen, from last year's convention in St. Paul.

MONTE

That doesn't explain this call.

FRANCINE (V.O.)

I'm in danger, as are three of my employees and one of their friends. For our safety, we need a hideout. Can we stay at your place?

(beat)

For a few days? Please?

MONTE

Uh... yes.

FRANCINE (V.O.)

I know you've been alone since Augusta passed in April, just like when I lost Herb two years back. It'll be good to connect with you.

INT. FRANCINE'S SUV - NIGHT

As Susan holds her phone, Francine continues talking.

FRANCINE

Should be there sometime around noon -- me, two gals and two guys.

MONTE (V.O.)

Sure.

He disconnects the phone.

FRANCINE

It's settled, everybody. We'll spend a weekend in South Dakota. To be specific, the town of Whitfield.

DUANE

Why there?

FRANCINE

Monte Bonneville publishes the Whitfield Daily Telegram. We hit it off at a convention a year ago.

DUANE

Fine. Now for some shuteye.

MARCO

South Dakota's certainly out of the way. Who'll look for us there?

FRANCINE

Exactly!

MARCO

Oh, and Irina?

IRINA

Yes.

MARCO

I want you to know I'll stand by you. To the end.

He kisses her; she responds with an embrace and a kiss of her own. Duane looks on admiringly.

INT. FRANCINE'S SUV - LATER

It's 3:15 Mountain time, and the car is now in Nebraska.

Francine sees a rest stop and pulls the SUV there, alongside three large trucks.

FRANCINE

Duane! Wake up!

Duane rouses himself and carefully yawns so he doesn't hit the sleeping Irina.

DUANE

Huh? What's going on?

FRANCINE

You rested? My turn to doze off.
Can you drive an S-U-V?

DUANE

It's an automatic, so sure. Drove
my dad's station wagon as a teen.

FRANCINE

Good. Let's switch. Oh, we'll soon
be on Central time.

They open their respective car doors and meet outside as the
other three passengers sleep.

EXT. INTERSTATE REST STOP, WESTERN NEBRASKA - NIGHT

Francine and Duane stand alongside the SUV.

FRANCINE

Go east till you hit North Platte,
then turn north on U-S eighty-
three. Wake me when you see a place
to stop. I'll take it from there.

DUANE

Gotta get a soda from the vending
machine. Need some caffeine.

INT. FRANCINE'S SUV - LATER

Duane sips his soda as he drives; the digital clock reads
5:43 Central time. Susan, covered by a blanket except for her
exposed left leg and thigh, slowly awakens.

DUANE

(softly)
Good morning, El-Kel.

SUSAN

Ah, my old school nickname! So
you're driving now.

DUANE

Didn't startle you, did I?

SUSAN

No.

DUANE

Hope this doesn't sound creepy, but every time we passed a light pole, it'd reflect off your stockinged thigh. Helped keep me awake.

SUSAN

(smiling)

Enjoy the show?

She covers the leg with the blanket.

DUANE

You may have denied you're a jock, but you've always had athletic legs -- and, dare I say it, attractive ones, too.

She uncovers the leg.

SUSAN

Thank you.

DUANE

I want to apologize for everything dating back to high school. And that includes this current mess.

SUSAN

Unless you're secretly working for Dmitri, you're forgiven.

INT. FRANCINE'S SUV - DAY

It's 10:06 a.m., and Francine's again driving, on two-lane U.S. 83, as the car passes a "WELCOME TO SOUTH DAKOTA" sign.

Duane again is asleep, next to an awakened Irina.

FRANCINE

In the homestretch!

SUSAN

So, how long?

FRANCINE

Two hours. Susan, call the office so I can tell them where I am.

EXT. GAZETTE OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

It's 9:06 Mountain time, and the now-recovered Dmitri and his henchmen approach the Gazette newsroom and see the rear door inadvertently left unlocked by Francine.

NIKOLAI
Healthy, boss?

DMITRI
Minor concussion. A night's sleep
at the motel set me right.

STANLEY
Now to finish business. Let's
enter.

INT. GAZETTE NEWSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The office is empty except for receptionist PRUDY PRESTON (41), diminutive, mousy and red-haired, whose nameplate is on the desk. She's checking emails and initially doesn't notice Dmitri and cohorts.

DMITRI
Hey, you! Where do Eloise and
Svetlana live?

PRUDY
Who are you talking about?

DMITRI
Sorry. I meant Susan Birch and...

NIKOLAI
Irina, boss.

PRUDY
I don't know anyone named Irina,
but Susan is off today.

The office phone rings three times. Dmitri raises his hand to tell his colleagues to stay silent as Prudy answers.

DMITRI
Turn on the speaker. Now.

Oleg readies his pistol; Dmitri stares at Prudy.

DMITRI (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Don't let on.

Francine is heard over the speaker.

FRANCINE (V.O.)
Hello, Prudy?

Seeing Oleg's gun, Prudy pauses, then responds.

PRUDY
Yes, Mrs. Wintergreen.

FRANCINE (V.O.)
Wanted to let you know I'm spending
the weekend in South Dakota with my
pal Monte Bonneville. Spur-of-the-
moment thing.

Oleg's pistol draws closer to Prudy.

PRUDY
(nervously)
Whatever you say, ma'am.

FRANCINE (V.O.)
Should be back Monday. Bye.

Francine disconnects the phone.

DMITRI
That's all we needed. Return to
your work, but don't tell anyone
about this. Is that clear?

PRUDY
Yes, sir.

DMITRI
And so you won't tell the cops what
car we're driving, we'll lock you
inside the restroom down the hall.
Take her there, Oleg.

Prudy gets up, and with Oleg's pistol at her back, walks to
the restroom as ordered. Once she enters and shuts the door,
Stanley moves a large table in front of it.

DMITRI (CONT'D)
Let's go.

The gang hurries outside.

EXT. GAZETTE OFFICE

Dmitri and his henchmen prepare to enter his rental car.

DMITRI

"Spur-of-the-moment"? Don't think so, and I doubt she's alone. Stanley, find Monte Bonneville on your laptop. Off to South Dakota.

EXT. WHITFIELD BUSINESS DISTRICT - DAY

It's late morning as Francine's SUV rolls through the small South Dakota town.

INT. FRANCINE'S SUV - CONTINUOUS

All five passengers are awake, with Francine at the wheel.

FRANCINE

We're blocks from Monte's mansion.

MARCO

She's raved about him for months, but I've yet to meet him.

IRINA

As long as he gives us some safety.

DUANE

Hope this all cools down by Monday.

SUSAN

I have faith Dmitri somehow will find a way to screw up. Even as a husband, he was sort of bumbling.

DUANE

Just what did you see in him?

SUSAN

In retrospect, I don't know. He saw me play basketball at Rutgers and asked me out. I sort of liked him. He seemed rather... debonair.

FRANCINE

But didn't you think he was aligned with the Russian mafia?

SUSAN

Back then, there was no Russian mob to Americans, just former commies.

EXT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Francine parks her SUV at the Bonneville mansion, a two-story colonial at the end of a cul-de-sac. She rings the front doorbell while Duane, Susan, Marco and Irina stand behind her.

A few seconds later, Monte opens the door and hugs Francine.

MONTE

Glad you're here. Come on in, all.

All five enter.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM

The room, large and sumptuous, features family portraits, plaques and other memorabilia to accompany the sofa, three plush chairs and a large TV set. Monte, Francine and Duane each take a chair; Susan, Irina and Marco occupy the sofa.

MONTE

I'm still confused over this.

FRANCINE

We learned my copy editor Susan and her roommate Irina are in a witness protection program. But their cover's been blown.

SUSAN

My ex, who'd been led to believe I was dead, came into the office and tried to kill Irina and me.

IRINA

We need to, as you Americans say, lay low.

FRANCINE

And I thought this would be a good temporary refuge for us until things cool down.

MONTE

Wow. A story I'd love to print, but obviously won't. You're more than welcome to stay. Had lunch?

MARCO

No, not yet.

MONTE

Follow me to the kitchen for soup
and a sandwich.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S KITCHEN - DAY

The six eat lunch at a rectangular table, with Monte and Francine at each end, Duane and Marco on one side and Susan and Irina at the other. Duane turns to Monte.

DUANE

We've told you about ourselves, now
you return the favor.

MONTE

I'm a third-generation publisher.
Majored in journalism at the
University of South Dakota--

MARCO

A Coyote [pronounced ki-oat].

FRANCINE

Don't you mean ki-oh-tea?

MONTE

Nope, he's right. That's what we
call our athletic teams.

MARCO

South Dakota played a basketball
game at Colorado my senior year.

SUSAN

You learn something new every day.

MONTE

I took over the paper after my
father died thirty-one years ago.

IRINA

Can I get a refill of my Diet Coke?

Monte gets a 2-liter bottle of soda on the counter in back of
him, hands it to Irina, who pours it into her glass.

FRANCINE

Monte won an award for editorial
writing from the South Dakota
Journalism Association. He knows
his stuff.

MONTE

Francine and I are both widowed. We met in St. Paul last year and hit it off right away.

DUANE

It's new terrain for me. I'm from back east, and until I interviewed for this job, my only trip west was flying out to L.A. ten years ago.

SUSAN

When I played basketball at Rutgers as Eloise Kellogg, we made a few trips to the Coast. That's it for me.

IRINA

I've come to love the heartland.

MONTE

These are smart and gentle people here, not the bumpkins we're so often painted out to be.

MARCO

I'm impressed with your house, Mr. Bonneville.

MONTE

Call me Monte. It's pretty big, but rather empty now that the kids are gone -- Joe to Duluth, Sherry to Cincinnati--

SUSAN

Both in newspapers?

MONTE

Neither. Joe's an anchorman for the CBS affiliate, while Sherry's a high school English teacher. And after losing Augusta...

FRANCINE

Not easy. I know.

MONTE

We've got three empty bedrooms upstairs. Francine, you'll get the prime guest bedroom. You guys can share Joe's old room, and you gals Sherry's.

DUANE

But none of us packed any luggage.

MONTE

We have lots of old clothes in the closets, though I can't guarantee they'll fit. Especially for Irina.

IRINA

I'm used to that by now.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S REC ROOM - NIGHT

It's dusk at the Bonneville estate, and the room features a piano in one corner and an empty large square table in the center. Irina and Marco sit on one sofa, directly across from Francine, Duane and Susan. A refrigerator is at the back end.

Monte enters, carrying three large pizza boxes, and puts them on the table.

MONTE

As promised, pizza. One is cheese, one half bacon, half beef topping, one mushrooms and spinach. Dig in.

FRANCINE

Surprised none of us ordered pepperoni?

Monte gets paper plates from a cupboard, sets them near the boxes, then walks to the refrigerator as his guests surround the pizzas.

MONTE

Now for the two-liters.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S REC ROOM - LATER

The pizza boxes emptied, with Marco and Irina each seated and having a slice, Monte sits at the piano as Francine, Duane and Susan stand behind him.

SUSAN

So how did you two meet?

FRANCINE

Oddly enough, it was at a piano bar at our hotel in St. Paul.

MONTE

I had the guy play my favorite Sinatra song, not knowing it was hers too. Then I saw her for the first time. Smitten? Yes, sort of.

DUANE

Which one? "New York, New York"?
"Strangers in the Night"?

FRANCINE

It's the title song of my favorite album of Frank's.

She beams as Monte plays and sings "In The Wee Small Hours of the Morning."

MONTE

"In the wee small hours of the morning / While the whole wide world is fast asleep..."

Francine smiles at him.

MONTE (CONT'D)

"You lie awake and think about the girl / And never ever think of counting sheep..."

Marco and Irina lovingly trade glances.

MONTE (CONT'D)

"When your lonely heart has learned its lesson / You'd be hers if only she would call..."

Duane and Susan, now finished with their pizza and paying attention to the song, smile at each other.

MONTE (CONT'D)

"In the wee small hours of the morning / That's the time you miss her most of all."

SUSAN

It makes sense now.

FRANCINE

Certainly does, right? Now Susan, or should I now call you Eloise, how did you and Duane meet? If I'm not asking anything sensitive.

SUSAN

Hardly. We were put in the same homeroom as sophomores, since my last name began with a "K" and his with an "L."

DUANE

She was a damn good athlete. Not just one of the state's best prep basketball stars, but starting shortstop on the softball team.

MARCO

Did you date then?

Duane and Susan simultaneously laugh.

MONTE

Okay. And these other two?

MARCO

Met at Chandler's, a sandwich shop in town where Irina is a waitress.

IRINA

I was sitting at a table between shifts and Marco comes in. He asks for a menu, so I rise to get one from the counter.

MARCO

And she kept rising, and rising. Had me by nearly six inches.

IRINA

(giggling)

He took it in stride, didn't appear intimidated, as a lot of short guys are around me. And I liked that.

FRANCINE

Good.

MARCO

I've never minded looking up to a woman.

IRINA

He and I went to the Technique Club the other night--

MARCO

She wore three-inch heels with a little black dress, making her six-foot-three.

DUANE

Wow!

MARCO

She captured everyone's attention.

IRINA

And we slow-danced!

FRANCINE

A gender-swapped "Put Your Head On My Shoulder."

She and Monte smile, while the other four are confused.

MONTE

So was it a nice place to rest, Marco?

Marco gives a sly grin.

INT. DMITRI'S CAR - NIGHT

As evening falls on an interstate in central Nebraska, Dmitri drives; Oleg is in the front passenger seat; and Nikolai and Stanley are in back.

STANLEY

I'm going to catch a few hours' sleep -- I need it. But before I doze off, please answer this question.

DMITRI

Sure. What?

STANLEY

What in heck attracted you to Eloise?

NIKOLAI

Just know you may be striking a raw nerve with him.

Dmitri waves his hand.

DMITRI

It's all right for him to ask.
(sighs)

It was in ninety-two. I was a grad student at Rutgers, she was a junior. Went to a basketball game she was playing in. I was hooked.

OLEG

Was she a good player?

DMITRI

Definitely! She had dark hair back then, was a cutie. I was a business major, hers was English lit.

STANLEY

Interesting. And then...

DMITRI

We dated for three years, then married. Eloise knew I worked in the Russian community; she simply didn't know what type work it was.

STANLEY

And she accepted your--

OLEG

His what?

STANLEY

You know, his rather small--

Dmitri immediately stops the car, turns around and gives Stanley an intimidating look.

EXT. SHOULDER OF NEBRASKA INTERSTATE - NIGHT

Stanley, standing, watches the car pull away.

STANLEY

Hey! My laptop!

INT. DMITRI'S CAR - NIGHT

Dmitri turns to Oleg.

DMITRI

Call Alexei in Minneapolis and tell him to meet us in Whitfield.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S REC ROOM - NIGHT

Duane checks his watch; it's 10:45 p.m.

DUANE

I guess it's time for Monte's paper to go to press.

MONTE

Unlike you folks, we don't print on Sundays. If folks need the news tomorrow, the drugstore carries the Sioux Falls paper.

FRANCINE

The Sunday comics, coupons and supplements run on Saturdays here.

MARCO

Don't take this comment the wrong way, but being on the lam like we are is, well, rather fun.

Susan gives him an irked look.

SUSAN

Easy for you to say -- you're not the one being pursued. All you'll wind up as is collateral damage.

MARCO

Not making light of your plight. But I do feel this is bringing us together in a way I never dreamed possible.

IRINA

Hadn't thought of it that way, but you're right.

DUANE

It's just the six of us, with a story we can someday tell our grandchildren.

MONTE

You have grandchildren? What kind of oats have you sown?

DUANE

No grandkids today, but twenty-five years from now, I might.

FRANCINE

First, let's somehow survive all this.

IRINA

Since we're hundreds of miles from Bethel and the bad guys have no idea where we are, I feel rather... secure.

INT. DMITRI'S CAR - NIGHT

Dmitri, Oleg and Nikolai continue their journey through Nebraska.

OLEG

Poor Stanley. Poor, poor Stanley, now thirty miles from us.

DMITRI

He served his purpose, finding out where Monte Bonneville lives. We can take care of the rest.

(beat)

Let's take a rest break. I could use some sleep. One of you keep awake in case some cops come by.

NIKOLAI

C'mon, boss. Why don't you let one of us drive?

DMITRI

Nope. And don't dare pester me again... unless you'd like to join Stanley.

He pulls up to a rest stop.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Monte and his five guests are standing near the stairwell and four closed doors -- one for each of the bedrooms, including Monte's master bedroom -- and an open door between two of the other bedrooms, leading to the bathroom.

MONTE

OK, the room behind me is my master bedroom. Francine, the bedroom adjacent to it is where you'll sleep. Some of Augusta's clothes are in the closet. They should fit.

FRANCINE

Got it.

MONTE

The room on the left belonged to Joe; that's where Duane and Marco will spend the night. Bathrobes are in the closet in case you need 'em.

DUANE, MARCO

Fine.

MONTE

Next to it is Sherry's old room for Susan and Irina to sleep. Hope her old clothes fit each of you.

IRINA

How tall was she?

MONTE

Five-six.

SUSAN, IRINA

We'll see.

MONTE

Haven't had many guests of late, but the beds are pretty comfy. Sleep well, everybody.

They disperse to their respective bedrooms.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SUSAN AND IRINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susan and Irina sit at opposite sides of their king-size bed.

SUSAN

What you said earlier was right. I can feel the tension now. In a perverse way, it's indeed exciting.

IRINA

Yep. And unlike back home, we're sharing a big bed.

SUSAN

May as well see what's in the closet. With luck, there'll be some suitable nightgowns.

IRINA

Don't care about the style, just
about the fit.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SUSAN AND IRINA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Each are in nightgowns. Susan's is a stylish pink and fits nearly perfectly; Irina's is white, plain and barely long enough to fit her.

IRINA

At least I'm not sleeping in bra
and panties tonight. Oh, and you
look pretty good in that.

SUSAN

Does it work for you?

IRINA

Comfy enough.

SUSAN

It's off to bed. Sleep warm.

She flips the wall switch, the light goes out and they slip into bed.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, DUANE AND MARCO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marco examines himself before a full-length mirror. Duane pulls back the blankets on his side of the king-size bed.

DUANE

What are you admiring yourself for?
Take off everything but your
underwear, as I'll do in a minute,
and go to sleep.

MARCO

Dunno. Just felt like it, I guess.

Duane kicks off his shoes, then unbuttons and removes his polo shirt.

DUANE

Kinda unnecessary. Do that in the
morning.

MARCO

You're right.

Duane unbuckles his slacks, placing his clothes in the corner, as Marco strips to his underwear and leaves his clothes at his side of the bed.

Each slips into bed, keeping a few feet from each other.

DUANE

Hey, I know you're het.

MARCO

Even if I wasn't, I wouldn't be attracted to you. No offense.

DUANE

None taken. But this just seems weird to me. Haven't shared a bed with a guy since I was seven and my younger brother Edwin was five.

MARCO

I don't snore. Do you?

DUANE

Not that I know of. Had a slight case of sleep apnea a few years back, but not anymore.

MARCO

Well then, we may as well fall asleep.

Duane reaches for the lamp, turns the switch and the light goes out. He and Marco look away from each other as they try to sleep.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, FRANCINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Francine opens the door of Augusta's closet and discovers an array of dresses hanging from the rack. She examines a few, notes they're close to her size, but doesn't try one on.

FRANCINE (V.O.)

Never knew this lady, but she sure had style.

Instead, she picks up one of Augusta's nightgowns and places it on the bed. She slips off her shoes, then unzips the back of her dress and shakes out of it, leaving her in bra and pantyhose over panties.

FRANCINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Augusta, by wearing this, I hope I do you justice.

Francine carefully puts on the nightgown, then looks at herself in the mirror.

FRANCINE

OK.

She opens the door, leaving the bed untouched, and leaves the room.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY

Francine knocks on Monte's door. Clad only in his underwear, he answers.

MONTE

What do you need?

(beat)

Sorry. Should've put on my bathrobe, but I'm not used to having guests.

FRANCINE

Don't worry about it. May I come in?

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM

Monte sits in his bed, the covers pulled over him. Francine sits in a nearby chair, near the cat.

FRANCINE

Darling cat. What's her name?

MONTE

Felicity. She's eight. Augusta found her as a stray kitten.

(beat)

What are you here for? Nervous? Can't sleep?

FRANCINE

A bit on both counts, but no -- I just need to talk. First, let me say Augusta had a fine sense of fashion.

She sees her portrait on the table near his bed.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Beautiful woman. I know how much you loved her.

MONTE

I did. You'd have liked her too.
Her dad ran the town's movie
theater, which was one of our
regular advertisers.

FRANCINE

So you saw a lot of her.

MONTE

She took over the theater soon
after we were married, but...

FRANCINE

But what?

MONTE

A big theater chain bought land on
the outskirts of town, then built a
multiplex. She couldn't compete.

FRANCINE

How sad.

MONTE

Had a happy ending, though. We
donated the house to the town as a
performing arts center. It's named
the William Woodmere Center.

FRANCINE

For her dad?

MONTE

Yep.

Francine gets up, then sits at the edge of his bed.

FRANCINE

We're a dying breed, aren't we?
Small-town publishers, devoted to
journalism and community.

MONTE

Why I like you so much. You get it.

FRANCINE

The feeling is mutual.

Monte leans forward; Francine is at first reluctant to come
closer, but he waves his hand to her.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

I don't know if I should.

MONTE

Ten years ago, Augusta and I agreed that whomever survived was free to love another, that it would not diminish our eternal affection.

He shakes his head and sighs.

MONTE (CONT'D)

Of course, given actuarial tables, I thought I would go first.

FRANCINE

Herb and I always lived in the present, never discussed these things. But he'd want me happy, just as Augusta would for you.

Monte draws her closer.

MONTE

To the memory of Herb...

FRANCINE

And Augusta.

They softly kiss.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Monte and Francine snuggle in bed together after lovemaking.

Her pantyhose are on the rug at the side of the bed. They gaze at each other.

MONTE

Hope I was good enough.

FRANCINE

Of course you were, but it doesn't really matter, does it?

MONTE

What do you mean?

FRANCINE

When you have sex at twenty or so, it's all about the thrills. Sex at thirty? Performance. Sex at forty, at fifty? I'm not sure what. But at sixty? It's all about comfort.

MONTE
Did I comfort you?

FRANCINE
By all means.

MONTE
I'd appreciate it if you stayed
alongside me into the morning.

FRANCINE
OK, but first, some unfinished
business.

Francine leaves the room, a door closing is heard, and she
returns seconds later, then closing his door.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)
Didn't want to leave any trace of
this to my staffers.

MONTE
Of course. Publishers aren't
supposed to have sex lives.

FRANCINE
Unless you're William Randolph
Hearst.

Both laugh as she climbs into bed with him.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The clock reads 2:10 a.m. Irina is seated, sipping a cup of
tea, when Marco enters, clad in the clothes he wore all of
Saturday.

MARCO
What are you doing here?

IRINA
Was a bit nervous and thought this
would settle me down.

MARCO
But... tea?

IRINA
He had decaf.

He sits next to her.

MARCO

This will all blow over.

IRINA

Oh, I'm certain it will. But... my past?

MARCO

I know Irina, the lanky waitress, and now Svetlana, the talented basketball player. Tanya? Never met her. To my mind, she never existed.

Irina leans over and kisses him.

IRINA

Many men would have left me after learning of what I did.

MARCO

I don't judge.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, DUANE AND MARCO'S BEDROOM -
CONTINUOUS

The alarm clock reads 2:15 a.m. Duane, at the side of the bed closest to the door, gets up and doesn't look back at where Marco would be sleeping. He opens the door.

DUANE (V.O.)

Time to pee.

He leaves.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S KITCHEN

Irina finishes her sipping.

IRINA

There, my tea is done. So what'd you come down here for?

MARCO

By now, I forgot!
(laughs)
Let me walk you back upstairs.
Here, take my hand.

IRINA

So you're going to lead me.

MARCO
As we climb the stairs, I for once
get to look down at you!

IRINA
(deadpans)
Sure.

They leave the kitchen, Irina shutting off the light.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY

Marco, with Irina following, climbs upstairs. He opens his door and sees the bed is empty.

IRINA
So where's Duane?

MARCO
Not sure.
(beat)
You thinking what I'm thinking?

IRINA
You mean...
(giggles)

MARCO
Only if you want to. If not, forget
I ever brought it up.

IRINA
Sure. Why not now?

MARCO
If Duane barges in, we tell him
there's a nice sofa downstairs.

IRINA
Making love amidst danger.

MARCO
Heard it's the best kind of sex.

IRINA
Let's find out.

MARCO
OK, my sensual six-footer!

They enter the bedroom and shut the door behind them. KISSES and MOANS soon are heard.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY - LATER

A few seconds after a FLUSH, Duane opens the bathroom door.

He sees two closed doors in front of him, mistakenly opens the door on the right, and enters a darkened bedroom, the one where Susan and Irina had been sleeping.

Seconds later, Susan turns, slowly opens her eyes expecting to see Irina... and discovers Duane standing over her. Both are incredulous.

SUSAN

What in God's name are you doing in my bedroom? Are you planning to...

DUANE

Hell, no. I just entered the wrong room, that's all. Where's Irina?

SUSAN

Said she had to go to the kitchen.

DUANE

I'm really sorry about this.

SUSAN

Don't worry about it. We might as well chat till she comes back. So you've long been attracted to me?

DUANE

Yeah, that's true.

SUSAN

Irina told me you told her that.

DUANE

Confidential information! Speaking of Irina...

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, DUANE AND MARCO'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Marco is atop Irina, in the throes of making love. He rests his head on her breast as they take a break from passion.

MARCO

Until tonight, I've never had sex with a taller woman.

IRINA

Did you like it?

Marco smiles and kisses her.

IRINA (CONT'D)
Got my answer!

They resume having sex beneath the blankets, and their MOANS and SIGHS grow louder.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SUSAN AND IRINA'S BEDROOM -
CONTINUOUS

Duane stands at the edge of Susan's bed. Both can hear the sounds from the adjacent room.

DUANE
Think we know what they're up to.
(beat)
And that's all I plan to say.

SUSAN
So you're not interested in...

DUANE
Doing likewise? Would break every
employee/supervisor rule. Francine
would fire me. Goodbye, career.

SUSAN
You know we don't have to tell.
C'mon, sit on the bed.

DUANE
If you insist...
(sits at edge of bed)
...but that's all. Don't want to
get you in trouble.

SUSAN
Then forget that Duane Llewellyn is
being intimate with copy editor
Susan Birch, but instead is making
love to...El-Kel, Blair M. Richards
athlete of the year.

Duane gives her an uncertain look.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
You liked Eloise then, even if she
whipped your ass in basketball.

DUANE
(sighs)
But good.

SUSAN

Now you can score on her.
(beat)
And she won't mind it one bit.

DUANE

OK, then that's just what I'll do.

He carefully climbs into bed with her.

DUANE (CONT'D)

But Susan better not re-emerge and gripe about my technique. I admit I'm rusty.

SUSAN

I've sent her out of the room to edit some pages. You won't see Susan till morning... if at all.

DUANE

All right, then. I'm convinced.

After he pulls the blankets over him, Susan wraps her arms around him and hugs him.

SUSAN

Don't feel you have to perform magic. Just be yourself, soothing my senses at a time of danger.

DUANE

Oh, I like that. Me, coming to your rescue.

He slowly moves atop her and carefully begins making love.

EXT. DOWNTOWN WHITFIELD - DAY

It's 8:30 on a quiet, sunny Sunday morning in Whitfield.

Dmitri and his cohorts sit in the town square, not far from their car, waiting for Alexei to arrive from Minnesota.

OLEG

So what's he driving again?

DMITRI

He said it was a maroon Saturn.

NIKOLAI

That model's been defunct for years.

DMITRI

It's a car he says he likes
driving. Has about a hundred and
ten thousand miles on it.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Monte brews coffee in the kitchen, when Francine slowly
descends the stairs.

FRANCINE

Clever idea of yours not to come
down together, just in case one of
the young'uns already were here and
they might think--

MONTE

We...slept together!

FRANCINE

Didn't see any of them in the
hallway or bathroom. I'm guessing
all four still are asleep.

MONTE

Let them be -- they've had a tough
day, too. Like a bagel? I've got
vegetable cream cheese.

FRANCINE

Sure.

He walks to the refrigerator.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, DUANE AND MARCO'S BEDROOM -
CONTINUOUS

Marco, again in his clothes, gazes up at nightgown-clad Irina
and kisses her.

MARCO

You are incredible!

IRINA

As are you.

They embrace; Marco sensually kisses the back of her neck.

IRINA (CONT'D)

Ohhhh...I like that.

MARCO

One advantage to being short!

(beats)

I'm heading downstairs. Wait a few minutes before joining me for breakfast, OK? That way, no one gets any ideas about the two of us.

Irina nods.

EXT. DOWNTOWN WHITFIELD - CONTINUOUS

A maroon Saturn parks on the square, and ALEXEI EGOROV (30) steps out of the car. He's tall, beefy and dressed in polo shirt and jeans.

He checks the parking meter, sees Dmitri, Nikolai and Oleg, and walks their way. All three shake his hand.

ALEXEI

Free parking on Sunday. Not like Minneapolis.

DMITRI

So keep the car there and join us.

NIKOLAI

Any problem finding this place?

ALEXEI

Nope.

DMITRI

Saw a restaurant on the edge of town that's open. We'll make plans over breakfast.

OLEG

Then let's go.

They enter Dmitri's car.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Marco enters the kitchen and sits next to Monte and Francine; he's having toast, she a bagel with vegetable cream cheese.

MONTE

Glad to see you here.

MARCO

Duane should be down sometime soon.
Each of you sleep well?

FRANCINE

Yep. Augusta's bed was sooo comfy.

She winks at Monte.

Irina, still in her nightgown, descends the stairs.

IRINA

What a great night's sleep I had!

MONTE

Did you and Susan each have enough
room?

IRINA

Why, sure. She seemed happy with
it.

Now Marco winks at her.

MONTE

Good.

He points to the cupboard.

MONTE (CONT'D)

On the top shelf we have corn
flakes and shredded wheat. A great
girl like you should be able to
reach it.

IRINA

(chuckling)

I would hope so! I'll take the corn
flakes--

MARCO

And can you hand me the shredded
wheat?

IRINA

Of course.

She reaches for the shredded wheat box and places it on the
table in front of him.

FRANCINE

I guess down the road, we know
who'll grab things from the top of
the supermarket aisle.

Marco hunches his shoulders in discomfort.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Oh, come on, Marco, I wasn't poking fun at you being so much shorter than she is. You two make a cute couple.

IRINA

Think we do? Gee, thanks.

She sits next to Marco, placing her corn flakes on the table, then kisses him on the cheek, making him smile.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SUSAN AND IRINA'S BEDROOM -
CONTINUOUS

Duane and Susan, still in bed, are awakened by sunlight through the window.

DUANE

Uh-oh.

SUSAN

Huh? You were pretty good. In fact, I'll bet we were better than Marco and Irina were next door.

DUANE

Not that I plan to ask them, but we certainly were quieter! We better get up now, before Francine opens the door and finds us together.

SUSAN

Get dressed -- and hurry!

He gets out of bed and puts on his clothes. Susan also leaves the bed, but stays in her nightgown.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You go downstairs. I want to see if Francine's in her room. That way, she won't suspect us of.. .well, you know, what we actually did.

DUANE

Good plan. Going to breakfast together might be a giveaway.

Duane leaves the bedroom; seconds later, Susan does likewise.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Susan knocks on the door of Francine's bedroom. No answer.

Thinking her boss might be there anyway, she opens the door, and discovers the bed apparently hasn't been touched.

SUSAN (V.O.)

That's weird.

(beat)

Unless...

She opens the door of Monte's bedroom, and sees a pair of pantyhose on the rug at one side of the bed.

SUSAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Don't think those hose are his.

She smiles mischievously and steps downstairs.

INT. WHITFIELD RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

At a corner booth, Dmitri and his crew have breakfast -- Dmitri and Oleg on one side, Nikolai and Alexei on the other.

DMITRI

So we're all set over what we need to do.

ALEXEI

You don't want us to kill Eloise and Svetlana?

DMITRI

Not until I first get some answers from them on how they set me up. I returned from Detroit one day and found myself under arrest.

NIKOLAI

Never good.

OLEG

Alexei will like that tall young blonde. She's hot.

ALEXEI

Good. Dmitri, instead of killing Svetlana, I just might take her.

(beat)

If you don't mind.

Dmitri grins while sipping his coffee.

DMITRI

As you wish. My ex is my main concern. Everyone finished? Then let's go.

All rise from their seats.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Susan arrives and sits between Irina and Francine.

SUSAN

What a good night's sleep I had. So comfortable!

MONTE

Happy to be your host.

Susan turns to Irina and gives her a cat-ate-the-cream look; Irina initially responds in puzzlement, then opens her eyes wide as if she now understands.

SUSAN

Oatmeal?

MONTE

I have some maple and brown sugar microwave packets. Those OK?

SUSAN

Sure. I'll top it with one of your bananas, if you don't mind.

As Monte gets the microwave oatmeal from the cupboard, puts it in a bowl and pours milk over it, Susan faces Francine and gives her the same I-know-something-you-don't look she gave Irina. At first, the publisher doesn't get it.

Susan then discreetly points to her thigh, moving her hands as if she were putting on an invisible stocking. A second later, Francine comprehends her editor's motions and opens her mouth in surprise. Susan gives her a sympathetic smile.

The oatmeal now cooked in the microwave, Monte hands the bowl and a banana to Susan, just as Duane arrives from upstairs.

MONTE

So, what'll you have?

Duane examines the options available on the counter top.

DUANE

Corn flakes and a banana, please.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The women all have finished their breakfasts, while Duane is still in the middle of his.

FRANCINE
I need to go upstairs and change.

SUSAN
Irina and I need to as well.

DUANE
See you all later,

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Francine enters the room to pick up her pantyhose, unaware that Susan and Irina trail her. As the publisher lifts her hose from the floor, Irina and Susan enter, with the latter closing the door behind her.

FRANCINE
What are you doing, following me?

SUSAN
(smiling)
Relax, it's OK. I know you slept with Monte last night.

FRANCINE
(shaking her head)
Oh, Lord.

Susan turns to Irina.

SUSAN
And Irina, we heard you having sex with Marco.

Irina blushes. Francine is incredulous.

FRANCINE
What?
(beat)
And what do you mean by "we"?

SUSAN
(gulps)
You two aren't the only ones. Duane and I went to bed together.

The publisher grumbles.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Wintergreen, please don't discipline or fire Duane. He didn't pressure me into sleeping with him. Irina, was that also true for Marco?

The waitress nods. Francine relaxes and, in fact, begins to laugh.

FRANCINE

From a distance, this predicament is, well, rather amusing.

(beat)

Unless one of you gets pregnant. Did Duane or Marco use protection?

IRINA

Did you?

FRANCINE

I'm not having children anytime soon, dear.

SUSAN

We all were caught up in the moment of passion. And, in my case, I must say it was pretty good.

FRANCINE

We'll keep this our secret.

IRINA

Just to give us a little, what you call, leverage?

FRANCINE

Yep. And don't either of you worry. Duane and Marco's jobs are safe. Now off to our rooms to change.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Duane, nearly through with his cereal, chats with Marco and Monte.

DUANE

Wrote for two years at a daily in Doylestown, a bit north of Philly, then got a job as a copy editor for a magazine in New York City. Fun, but the traffic!

MONTE

Which did you like more, reporting
or editing?

DUANE

That was the problem. I liked 'em
equally.

MARCO

(smiling)

Why I prefer sports -- I get to do
both.

DUANE

Lucky you.

Susan, Irina and Francine slowly come downstairs, all dressed
in what they had worn the day before.

MONTE

You ladies could've put on our
family's clothes. I wouldn't have
minded a bit.

(beat)

Especially you, Francine.

The women sit in the kitchen, ready to join the conversation.

FRANCINE

Thanks for the offer, but--

Suddenly, all six hear a car come up the driveway.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Do you have guests dropping by,
Monte? Maybe we should all go
upstairs.

MONTE

No, I didn't invite anyone over.

A door loudly OPENS, then SLAMS. The six leave their seats
and rush over to the mansion's living room. There, near the
now-closed front door, they see Dmitri, Nikolai, Oleg and
Alexei, all holding pistols.

DMITRI

To borrow that movie cliché, we
meet again. Hello, my dear Eloise.

SUSAN

You're being facetious. You'd
better be being facetious.

FRANCINE
Just how did you find us?

Dmitri smiles.

DMITRI
We have our ways. Oh, and standard operating procedure is to put your hands up. Please do so.

All six gradually raise their arms.

DMITRI (CONT'D)
I have no intention to shoot you.
At least not right away.

SUSAN
What do you mean?

DMITRI
I merely want some information -- then we'll determine just what we should do with you. Oh, and Mrs. Wintergreen...

FRANCINE
What?

DMITRI
(chuckles)
I tracked you down with the help of your friend Prudy.

FRANCINE
You better not have hurt her!

DMITRI
Why would I do that? I hold no grudge against her, though as a precaution we locked her in the restroom so she couldn't monitor our getaway. Relax.
(beat)
In fact, to help all of you relax, I suggest you go upstairs. That looks like the master bedroom in the front of the house. Is it?

MONTE
It is.

DMITRI

Then that's where you'll stay for now. Nikolai, Alexei, please escort them upstairs. Then lock them in.

NIKOLAI

Sure, boss.

DMITRI

Nikolai, please remove any cellphones on their persons. Alexei, disconnect any landlines you see with a knife.

NIKOLAI

With pleasure. Form a line, people. Alexei, get at the other end.

Alexei and Nikolai draw their guns. The six captives do as they're told, with Monte in front facing Alexei, followed by Francine, Susan, Duane, Irina and Marco, who's got Nikolai behind him.

DMITRI

Very good, people! While you two set things up in the master bedroom, Oleg and I will look over the place.

MONTE

Planning on taking anything?

DMITRI

Not really why we came here, but now that you mention it, maybe we need to get the lay of the land. You may have some valuable stuff.

FRANCINE

Don't you *dare* rob him!

OLEG

In case you haven't noticed, ma'am, we hold all the cards.

DMITRI

(nodding)

And if it came to saving your property versus saving your life, I sincerely hope you'd choose the latter. OK, walk up.

With Alexei at the top and Nikolai at the bottom, the six captives slowly march upstairs.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Flanked by Alexei and Nikolai, the captives enter the bedroom and sit on the large bed -- Monte and Francine on the side nearest the door, Marco and Irina opposite them and Susan and Duane in between.

Noticing the room's eight new guests, Felicity -- who had rested on the rug -- hurriedly scatters into a corner.

Nikolai frisks all six, but finds no phones. Alexei slices the cord on Monte's landline phone.

MONTE

It's still early in the morning.
None of us are fully dressed yet.

NIKOLAI

I'll check all your drawers, and
your bathroom too. Might be some
phones hidden there.

MONTE

You won't find any here.

ALEXEI

You know we can't take your word
for it.

Monte sighs.

NIKOLAI

After I finish here, I'm going to
scour every room here for phones.
Downstairs, too.

He checks all the drawers in the master bedroom, then inspects the bathroom. Not a single phone can be found.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

You told the truth, old man. We're
going now, but don't think about
escaping. Alexei will station
himself in the hallway.

Alexei, gun in hand, poses to show off his muscularity.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)

Is that understood?

CAPTIVES

Yes, sir.

ALEXEI

Very good.

Nikolai and Alexei leave. The three couples stare at one another for several seconds, as Felicity returns to her usual spot on the rug.

FRANCINE

Should we turn on Monte's radio? I could use some music.

MONTE

Nothing on this time of day.

Susan turns to face Monte and Francine.

SUSAN

So this is where you two slept together last night.

The others are stunned.

MARCO

They did what?

FRANCINE

I thought we were keeping this secret, Susan.

SUSAN

Let's tell the truth -- we *all* had sex last night! We felt in danger, and needed emotional comfort.

MONTE

I got that from Francine.

FRANCINE

Thanks.

MARCO

Irina was wonderful.

IRINA

You too.

DUANE

(to Susan)

I enjoyed sharing a bed with you.

SUSAN

Likewise!

Duane begins laughing heartily, Monte and Francine follow, then Susan, Marco and Irina follow suit.

MARCO

It's all so absurd.

SUSAN

Isn't it?

FRANCINE

So *that's* how we soothed our psyches last night. What should we do now -- have an orgy?

The others stop laughing and instead give her incredulous stares.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

C'mon gang, I was merely being rhetorical.

MARCO

Never thought I'd hear my boss discuss having orgies.

All resume laughing, including Francine.

FRANCINE

I'll have you know Herb liked my sense of humor.

DUANE

Forget orgies. We have other, safer ways to show our passion.

He kisses Susan on the lips, and Monte follows by kissing Francine, as Marco then kisses Irina, though all six remain seated.

IRINA

As far as we need to go!

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SUSAN AND IRINA'S BEDROOM -
CONTINUOUS

Nikolai goes through the room and closets and finds Susan's cellphone in her pocketbook on a table. However, he overlooks Irina's handbag with cellphone, hidden behind the door, and leaves before he can spot it.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dmitri and Oleg each sit on Monte's sofa as Dmitri grabs the remote control and turns on the TV. A golf tournament is airing.

OLEG

Pretty cool place, eh, boss?

DMITRI

I bet this guy has clubs stashed in his garage. He looks the type.

OLEG

Yeah, Mister Chamber of Commerce and all that.

DMITRI

What they call the landed gentry.

OLEG

Check the TV. Perhaps there's porn.

DMITRI

This guy? He probably can't get it up anymore.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The laughter of the sextet (pun intentional) has been replaced by whispers, as they try to plan an escape.

DUANE

(to Monte)

You know this house better than we do. Any ideas how to get out?

MONTE

This wasn't a scenario Augusta and I envisioned when we built this place in nineteen-eighty.

FRANCINE

Like to think we can outsmart these guys.

SUSAN

On the surface, Dmitri is a shrewd businessman. And he does have a Rutgers degree.

MARCO

Like you.

SUSAN

But believe me, though he disguised his actual work from me all those years, he isn't all that bright.

DUANE

We probably could outwit him, but one false move and we're goners. Not worth the risk.

SUSAN

We'll have to devise some out-of-the-box thinking. Heck, something out-of-the-neighborhood.

IRINA (V.O.)

What can I come up with?

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - LATER

Nikolai wanders in from upstairs, holding several smartphones, and calls out to his comrades.

NIKOLAI

Got all their phones, and will join you. Want some snacks?

DMITRI

Yeah, and bring us each a beer while you're at it.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM

As Dmitri and Oleg continue watching golf, Nikolai comes in with two bags of potato chips and three large cans of beer, handing one of them to his boss and another to Oleg.

DMITRI

Monte likes light beer, I see.

(beat)

Wimp.

His cohorts laugh loudly.

OLRG

Is your place in Brooklyn like this? Without the big lawn, I mean.

DMITRI

You can't decorate a brownstone like one of these houses. Eloise was pretty good at it, but...

Nikolai takes a seat and opens the beer.

NIKOLAI

But what?

DMITRI

(taking a sip)

After I get what I need to know from her, she'll be in the past tense.

OLEG

So no more love.

DMITRI

Used to, but not anymore. With what she knows -- or may know -- she's too much of a danger to me.

(beat)

Look at that shot from the bunker! Right in the hole.

All turn to the TV to watch the replay.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Felicity leaps into Monte's lap and stares at Francine.

MONTE

You can pet her. She's comfortable around people.

Francine gently strokes the cat's head.

FRANCINE

Herb and I were always dog people. Cats are, well, too aloof.

MONTE

Not once you get to know them.

DUANE

Meanwhile, we have to plan a little something called our escape.

Irina stands up.

IRINA

I think that I have.

FRANCINE

You?

IRINA

(miffed)

Just 'cause I'm a waitress doesn't mean I lack a brain, ma'am. While all you folks were talking, I was doing some thinking.

FRANCINE

I apologize.

IRINA

Apology accepted.

(beat)

Now here's my plan...

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

The golf tourney over, Dmitri enters from the kitchen with a second can of beer, shuts off the set and flips it on again.

DMITRI

Once I finish my beer, I'm going to take a nap. Till then, I'll check the ball scores.

OLEG

You wouldn't have needed to nap had you rested overnight and let one of us drive.

DMITRI

You didn't pay to rent this car.

He opens the can and sips, as the humbled Oleg and Nikolai meekly watch.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY - LATER

Alexei sits at the top of the stairwell, pistol at his side and looking bored. The door to the master bedroom opens slightly, as Irina pokes her head out.

IRINA

You're Alexei, right?

ALEXEI

Uh, yes.

IRINA

Would a big strong guy like you please do me a favor?

ALEXEI
 (flattered)
 I suppose. But what?

In the background, SNORING is heard from downstairs.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The snores come from Dmitri, who fell asleep midway through his second can of beer. Oleg and Nikolai give each other "told-you-so" looks.

OLEG
 (whispering)
 Don't get me wrong, I like working
 for him. But every now and then...

Nikolai nods. Then, from upstairs, comes...

ALEXEI (O.S.)
 Hey guys?

Nikolai and Oleg rush to the base of the stairs, where they see Alexei with Irina, in her Chandler's waitress outfit. She smiles.

IRINA
 (giggling)
 How'd you guys like to play a game
 with me? The winner gets a
 tantalizing prize.
 (bats her eyes)
 Come on up!

Nikolai and Oleg accept her invitation, leave their guns at the base of the stairs and meet them at the top.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY

Oleg and Nikolai flank Alexei in the stairwell, as all stare at Irina.

OLEG
 So what's this all about? And why
 isn't she in the bedroom with the
 others?

IRINA
 We had what you call a falling-out.
 All of them look down at me--

NIKOLAI

Huh? You're taller than nearly all of them.

IRINA

Figuratively, since I'm a waitress, and they think I'm dumb! Anyway, I've chosen to switch sides.

She turns towards the door to yell at them, as Dmitri downstairs continues to snore.

FRANCINE (O.C.)

You traitor!

IRINA

Shut up, you hoary old newshound!

OLEG

(snickering)

Did you just call her a whore?

ALEXEI

Not at that age!

Both men laugh.

DUANE (O.C.)

Up yours, overgrown blonde!

The three Russians boo him.

IRINA

Go to hell, Duane -- I don't need to take your crap anymore, understand?

ALEXEI

That's right. Should we go in and rough them up? That would be so much fun!

IRINA

Part of me would like to, but...no, let 'em stew in their own juices. OK, let's get to the game I earlier mentioned. You've all heard of strip poker, right?

ALEXEI, NIKOLAI, OLEG

Sure!

Irina pulls a deck of playing cards from the pocket of her waitress uniform, then opens and shuffles it.

IRINA

Well, we're going to strip, without poker. I'll hand each of you a card, and the person who pulls the highest card has to remove a piece of his clothing.

The men are excited as Dmitri keeps snoring.

NIKOLAI

Will you be stripping?

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Duane, Francine, Narco, Monte and Susan stand close to the door, listening to Irina's spiel.

FRANCINE

(to Monte)

Glad you kept that deck of playing cards in the drawer.

MONTE

Sure came in handy.

IRINA (O.C.)

Of course I will -- once I find out which one of you wins! Then it's time for that prize I mentioned.

MARCO

Man, she's good.

SUSAN

Yeah, and boy, are they gullible.

IRINA (O.S.)

Oh, and no backtalk from you fools in the master bedroom!

She turns to the Russians.

IRINA (CONT'D)

OK, guys, let's start.

Dmitri's snoring shows no sign of abating.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, SECOND-FLOOR HALLWAY - LATER

The stripping game among the Russian trio is competitive, as all put their clothes in a pile near the bathroom.

Alexei is down to T-shirt, pants and socks, Nikolai in dress shirt and pants and Oleg in T-shirt and pants.

IRINA

All right, on to the next round.
Alexei, you draw first.

He removes a card from the middle of the deck and holds it near his chest.

IRINA (CONT'D)

Now you, Nikolai.

He does likewise.

IRINA (CONT'D)

And finally, Oleg.

He completes the round by taking a card

IRINA (CONT'D)

Reveal your cards, gentlemen.

Oleg has the five of clubs.

Nikolai has the seven of diamonds.

Alexei has the jack of spades.

IRINA (CONT'D)

You are this round's winner,
Alexei. Please remove your pants.

ALEXEI

Gladly!

He sits on the carpet to remove his jeans, then throws them onto the pile of clothes. However, he's momentarily several feet from his pistol and Irina grabs it, unlocking the door.

IRINA

OK. Now!

Her five fellow captives rush down the stairs over the two other surprised captors, and Francine and Susan take the other two guns from the foot of the stairs as they stand near Duane, Marco and Monte.

IRINA (CONT'D)

Hurry out!

MONTE

Not without you!

Irina aims her pistol at an embarrassed Alexei, rushes into her bedroom and grabs her handbag, complete with cellphone, from behind the door. She aims the gun at the Russian men.

IRINA

I don't want to use this -- but I
will if I have to!

Alexei lunges after her and the gun, but Irina leaps, tumbles down the stairs and lands next to her five cohorts.

DUANE

Run!

They hurry out, the undressed captors in pursuit.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM

Alexei, down to his underwear, rushes in to wake the still-snoring Dmitri.

ALEXEI

Wake up -- and wake up now!

DMITRI

What are you doing in your
underwear?

ALEXEI

Don't worry about that now --
they've escaped!

Dmitri gives Alexei a piercing glance.

EXT. BONNEVILLE MANSION - DRIVEWAY

To Francine's dismay, Dmitri's car blocks her SUV.

FRANCINE

Damn!

MONTE

Don't worry about that -- we'll use
my sedan. It seats six.

MARCO

Probably not very comfortably.

SUSAN

Right now, our lives are more
important than comfort.

They quickly enter, with Monte, Duane and Francine in front and Susan, Marco and Irina -- carrying her handbag -- in back. All three women still hold guns. As they enter, Monte hands Duane the keys.

MONTE
(to Duane)
Here, you drive!

DUANE
But this is your car!

MONTE
I can't drive fast!

They hurry in, with Duane in the driver's seat. He quickly backs out of the driveway.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S GARAGE

Dmitri and his cohorts are baffled.

OLEG
What do we do now?

DMITRI
Slow them down.

NIKOLAI
But how?

DMITRI
We create a diversion.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Dmitri is on the telephone.

DMITRI
Hello, state police? We'd like to report--

INT. MONTE'S SEDAN - LATER

With Duane at the wheel, driving as fast as he comfortably, legally can, the car rushes through a subdivision.

DUANE
Are they following us?

Irina, Marco and Susan look back from the rear seat.

MARCO

Don't see anything looking like
their car in view.

MONTE

This car's got a police scanner.

SUSAN

(to Francine)

Why doesn't yours have one?

Monte flicks on the police radio scanner.

SCANNER

To state police: Watch for a blue
Chevy sedan driving through
Whitfield, with South Dakota tags
P-W-four eight-five-seven.

MONTE

My license number!

SCANNER

The driver reportedly is in a sex-
trafficking ring.

MONTE, IRINA

What?

DUANE

I bet Dmitri phoned in a false
report and they took it without
investigating.

MONTE

We need a cellphone, and they
confiscated all of them!

IRINA

Except for mine.

She removes it from her handbag and gives it to Monte.

IRINA (CONT'D)

It should work like yours.

Monte calls the state police.

MONTE

Hello? This is Monte, from the
Telegram over in Whitfield. I and
five others just escaped from a
hostage situation at my house.

Duane reaches the end of the street and looks at Monte.

MONTE (CONT'D)

Turn left, you'll hit the highway in about half a mile... Officer, I heard a call on the scanner saying this car is being sought regarding sex trafficking. Not true!

INT. DMITRI'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

With a furious Dmitri driving, the four Russians rush from the house. Alexei left without putting his pants back on.

DMITRI

You fools! How could you fall for that trick?

ALEXEI

Tall blondes, boss, tall blondes.

OLEG

Can we still catch 'em?

NIKOLAI

They couldn't be that far away.

DMITRI

And unlike you bumblers, I've still got my gun. And pants.

INT. MONTE'S SEDAN - MOMENTS LATER

The publisher has ironed out the confusing situation with state police.

MONTE

So look for a silver car with four men inside. Those are the guys you need to pursue.

IRINA

One may be in his underwear!

SCANNER

Briefs or boxers?

IRINA

Briefs. White.

Monte shuts off the phone.

MONTE

Duane, turn right at the gas station and convenience store.

FRANCINE

Our lives are at stake. We can't stop for snacks.

MONTE

No, not that. Duane, park in the space at the side of the store. We should be out of the sightline from the bad guys. We'll all sit tight.

Duane guides the sedan into the space Monte suggested -- just beating an SUV to the spot -- and turns off the ignition.

DUANE

So now we wait.

INT. DMITRI'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Dmitri notices his tank is nearly empty.

DMITRI

Gotta stop for a quick refuel.

He enters the same gas station where Monte and his guests are hiding, although he doesn't see them.

Susan, still holding her gun, lowers part of her window and takes aim.

DUANE

Just what are you doing? I want to escape them, not kill them.

SUSAN

I'm not firing at them, but at the tires!

EXT. DMITRI'S CAR, AT CONVENIENCE STORE GAS PUMP

She fires at the rear tire, and it instantly DEFLATES.

Alexei, still in his underwear, rushes out from the other side, fearing for his life; Oleg and Nikolai pursue him.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE COUNTER

Dmitri's set to arrange his fuel purchase with a clerk when he hears GUNSHOTS. He quickly leaves the store.

EXT. MONTE'S SEDAN

Duane turns on the ignition and the car leaves the parking lot. Susan fully lowers her window while Dmitri, seeing the flat tire, fumbles with his gun.

SUSAN

Bye bye, Dmitri!

By the time Dmitri is ready to fire, the sedan is too far away, although all the passengers duck as a precautionary measure. Duane examines his rear-view mirror.

DUANE

The coast is clear -- he can't reach us now. Even better...

EXT. MONTE'S SEDAN - REAR-VIEW MIRROR.

A South Dakota State Police car, siren blaring, pulls up alongside Dmitri's car and two policemen step out.

EXT. DMITRI'S CAR AND SOUTH DAKOTA STATE POLICE CAR

The officers, both in their 30s, flank Dmitri.

OFFICER #1

So you're whom we're looking for.

DMITRI

Huh? My tire's been blown out, just after I called you guys to report a sex-trafficking ring!

OFFICER #2

We have every reason to believe the report we received was fraudulent.

The first officer frisks Dmitri, takes his gun and prepares to handcuff him, just as an underwear-clad Alexei returns to the scene.

ALEXEI

What's up with you, boss?

OFFICER #1
 (to Alexei)
 So you know this guy? And why
 aren't you wearing any pants?

Officer #2 handcuffs Alexei.

OFFICER #2
 We're taking both of you in for
 questioning. Oh, and we'll have
 your car towed as evidence.

Officer #1 opens the left rear door puts Dmitri in the police
 car, while Officer #2 does likewise on the right side for
 Alexei.

INT. SOUTH DAKOTA STATE POLICE CAR

Alexei glances at Dmitri, who has an urge-to-kill look but
 can't act on it because both he and Alexei are handcuffed.

Meanwhile, the officers occupy the front seats.

DMITRI
 (to Alexei)
 You are, without a doubt, the most
 inept, bumbling accomplice I have
 ever worked with!

INT. MONTE'S SEDAN

Duane no longer can see Dmitri and Alexei in his mirror.

DUANE
 Looks as if those two bad guys have
 been taken care of.

MARCO
 But what about the other two?
 They'll go after us.

FRANCINE
 It doesn't matter. We've got their
 guns.

MONTE
 And now that I'm pretty certain
 we're safe, let's return to my
 place. You ladies can take clothes
 we no longer need.

IRINA

We can also relax from what's been a very tense day.

FRANCINE

I'll call the office and let them know we'll leave for home tomorrow.

SUSAN

Tomorrow?

FRANCINE

(winks)

Yep. Three couples have some lovemaking to do tonight.

All in the car cheer as Duane turns the car around.

EXT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S DRIVEWAY - LATER

Monte's sedan and its six passengers approach the house. Once parked, the six get out.

MONTE

Ladies, take your guns inside and I'll make sure police get them as evidence against Dmitri.

IRINA

Good. I have absolutely no intention of ever firing a weapon.

MARCO

Pleased to hear that.

SUSAN

You should be. She doesn't get angry often, but when she does...

Monte goes to the front door and finds it's unlocked.

MONTE

Of course -- in our rush to leave, and their rush to catch us, who worried about locking a door?

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Monte steps inside, followed by the others. They discover Nikolai and Oleg standing in the living room, each brandishing a shotgun.

SUSAN

What are you doing with guns? I thought we--

MONTE

And how'd you get here? You're at least a mile and a half from the convenience store.

OLEG

Hitched a ride with someone from the neighborhood. And the guns? Found them in your closet.

Francine, indignant, turns to Monte.

FRANCINE

I didn't know you owned firearms.

MONTE

I go pheasant hunting each fall. South Dakota is famous for that.

MARCO

I once saw a photo of Clark Gable and Carole Lombard shooting pheasant here--

DUANE

Marco, shut up.

(beat)

So what do you want from us? Police have Dmitri and your underwear man in custody, if you hadn't heard.

OLEG

So that's where Alexei went!

FRANCINE

(whispers to Monte)

They're going to kill us.

MONTE

(whispers)

No, they won't.

Duane, standing next to Irina, grabs her gun and pushes it in Nikolai's face, striking him on the jaw. He falls to the floor, dropping his shotgun, which Duane grabs and throws at Oleg just as he prepares to shoot.

FRANCINE

(to Duane)

What the hell are you doing?

She gets the answer when Oleg pulls the trigger...and nothing happens. A split-second later, he is struck by the shotgun and also falls.

Susan and Francine, each holding their guns, stand and point them down at Oleg and Nikolai.

DUANE

That's what I was doing. Irina,
call police. Marco, tie them up.

Irina pulls out her cellphone and steps out of the room.

MONTE

There's rope in the garage.

Marco also steps out.

FRANCINE

I still don't get it.

DUANE

When Monte said they won't kill us,
I took it to mean the guns had no
ammo.

MONTE

And they didn't. I store the
bullets separately, in a secret
place, in case of something like
this.

DUANE

So I took our potential captors by
surprise.

NIKOLAI

Jeez, you're smart.

Duane stares down at him.

DUANE

No talking from either of you.

Irina returns.

IRINA

Police are on their way.

DUANE

(to Nikolai and Oleg)
Your pals will be happy to see you.

OLEG
Oh, up yours.

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Police take Nikolai and Oleg, both in handcuffs, out of the living room. Another officer carries all the guns as Monte, Francine, Duane, Susan, Marco and Irina look on.

SUSAN
Now I think we can say we're safe.

MONTE
Go upstairs and start putting the clothes you want to bring back to Colorado inside the S-U-V.

IRINA
You really don't have to do this.

SUSAN
Why not? It's possible a few of those items might fit you.

DUANE
Hey, let's get all this out of the way before we all have some celebratory sex!

FRANCINE
Which reminds me. Duane, drive to the pharmacy and buy some condoms.

She and Duane briefly stare at each other.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)
No, not for Monte, but for you, and for Marco. If I somehow get knocked up tonight, we've got the story of the century!

MARCO
She's got a point. I sense Duane and I are going to be extra frisky tonight with Susan and Irina.

Irina and Duane smile at him.

FRANCINE
I'd like to avoid paying maternity benefits if I can help it. At least for now.

DUANE
Your keys, please.

Francine tosses Duane the keys to her SUV, and he heads for the garage.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, MARCO AND IRINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marco and Irina, each with bare shoulders underneath blankets, cuddle and kiss each other.

MARCO
You're so good to me.

IRINA
When I was at my most desperate,
Susan filled part of the void. You
filled the rest.

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, DUANE AND SUSAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Duane and Susan, with the same status as their younger cohorts, also passionately cuddle and kiss.

SUSAN
Could we ever have imagined this in
high school?

DUANE
Yeah, you with a new name, hitching
up with the guy whose ass you
whipped in basketball!
(beat)
In retrospect, it's all OK.

SUSAN
Damn right!

They cuddle and kiss some more, then head under the covers. A few seconds elapse, followed by a SCREAM of joy from Susan.

SUSAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Francine was right. Wow!

INT. MONTE BONNEVILLE'S MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Felicity watches from a corner of the room, Monte and Francine also lay in bed together, although she's wearing a relatively modest nightgown and the blankets are only rolled up halfway.

FRANCINE
This is so wonderful.

MONTE
We really should come together in
our lives a bit more.

FRANCINE
I think I've got an idea. Let me
run this past you...

INT. BONNEVILLE MANSION, KITCHEN - DAY

Duane, Susan, Marco and Irina are having breakfast -- cereal for Duane and Irina, a bagel for Marco and toast for Susan -- when Monte and Francine enter and stand in front of the kitchen table.

FRANCINE
Monte and I have some news to
announce!

DUANE
And what is it?

FRANCINE
You tell them, Monte.

MONTE
Sure. She and I are joining forces.
First, our newspapers are entering
a joint operating agreement.

MARCO
Really?

MONTE
Sharing expenses on things like
newsprint and equipment will save
each of us some big money. We plan
a ten-year contract, once we
finalize particulars.

FRANCINE
Bad news for my son, who wanted to
slash expenses to bare bones when
he took over, but good news for my
employees -- and our readers.

Duane, Susan and Marco rise and hug Francine and Monte.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)
Now remember, he said "first."

SUSAN

So what's... second? Is there a "second"?

MONTE

Yes, there is.

FRANCINE

We're. Getting. Married!

Her three staffers cheer, as does Irina, who comes over to join in the group hug.

DUANE

But... who lives where? You're several hundred miles apart.

MONTE

Sometimes we'll live here, sometimes we'll live in Bethel, sometimes we'll live apart.

FRANCINE

But we'll always live in love!

The couple kisses passionately.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

I'll hold a staff meeting once we get back to announce the news. It's a new, exciting era for the Bethel Gazette!

MONTE

And the Whitfield Telegram!

INT. FRANCINE'S SUV - DAY - LATER

Francine drives the SUV past a "Welcome to Colorado" sign as Susan and Duane sit in the middle seat and Marco and Irina cuddle in the rear. All cheer the sign.

IRINA

Mrs. Wintergreen -- will you still go by that?

FRANCINE

(smiling)

Yes, professionally. Going by Francine Alexandra Zivalich Wintergreen Bonnevill... well, it's a mouthful.

DUANE

To say the least. I'd wear out my hand signing checks.

IRINA

Anyway, Marco and I have something to tell you. He and I have decided to join you and Monte in--

MARCO

Matrimony! We're getting married, just like you two!

Francine, Duane and Susan cheer; the latter two applaud.

FRANCINE

Great news! But... are you looking to hold a double wedding with Monte and I?

IRINA

We never brought that up. It'd be like marrying alongside our grand--

MARCO

What she means to say is that you and Monte deserve your own space, and we wouldn't want to distract from your celebration.

Susan turns to Duane.

SUSAN

Looks as if we're the odd ones out.

DUANE

Let's give 'em that double wedding! I have no ring and can't kneel, but Susan Birch, or Eloise Kellogg, will either of you marry me?

SUSAN

Yes!

FRANCINE

But which one of you?

She laughs, followed by Marco and Irina.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

There's a rest stop a mile away. Let's take a picture of our happy loving couples!

EXT. INTERSTATE REST STOP, NORTHEAST COLORADO - DAY

Francine's photo of Duane and Susan, and Marco and Irina, appear. The two couples hug and kiss.

EXT. GAZETTE OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Francine parks her SUV into a space marked "MRS. WINTERGREEN" and steps out, as do Duane, Susan, Marco and Irina.

FRANCINE

To the start of our new era!

But waiting outside the rear entrance are two men in dark jackets, WALLACE GARBER (41) and LEONARD HOPPER (37), each holding a briefcase. They stop Francine and friends before they can enter.

WALLACE

Are you Francine Wintergreen?

FRANCINE

Yes. Who are you? What do you want?

LEONARD

We're from the Federal Witness Protection Program.

He stares at Susan and Irina. Both appear nervous.

WALLACE

We've learned the cover of two in your party has been blown.

SUSAN

Yes, but it's all been resolved.

IRINA

Police caught the bad guys.

SUSAN

Can't we now get on with our lives?

Both program officials shake their heads.

LEONARD

Under our guidelines, it's not possible. You're still in danger.

WALLACE

You know too much.

DUANE, MARCO

Noooo!

FRANCINE

Duane was going to marry Irina, and
Marco was to marry Susan.

Both couples give her a "what?" look.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I mixed up our couples. I'm
nervous.

WALLACE

Orders are orders. Susan and Irina
are to be given new identities and
placed in a new location.

FRANCINE

Great -- I'm losing the best copy
editor this paper's ever had.

DUANE

Sir, can we join them?

Marco nods.

SUSAN

You mean, you'd leave the Gazette
to marry me?

DUANE

Sure. You're a special lady.

Marco looks up to Irina.

MARCO

I feel the same way about Irina.

LEONARD

This request is a bit unusual, just
as when Susan and Irina wanted to
stay together, but assuming you
pass a background check, sure.

FRANCINE

So suddenly I'm losing three
staffers, not to mention the best
waitress at Chandler's. Maybe we
should become a weekly.

DUANE

You'll find good people to replace
all of us. And not to make Monte
feel jealous, but--

He kisses the publisher on the cheek.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Thanks for giving me a chance, and
for changing my life.

SUSAN

Irina and I underwent a few weeks
of training to establish our new
identities. Now you will, too.

DUANE

I don't care what identity I'm
given, if I can share it with you.

WALLACE

All four of you will be put in a
Colorado Springs hotel while the
men undergo a background check. If
they pass, training will begin.

MARCO

The end, and a beginning.

SUSAN

Indeed.

The two couples individually give a goodbye hug to Francine
as Wallace and Leonard look on, then leave with the witness
protection officials.

INT. TOWNHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

SUPER: AZUSA, CALIFORNIA - ONE YEAR LATER

With Susan (now Krystal White) making dinner, Duane (now
Quentin White) examines his laptop.

DUANE

The Bethel Gazette posted pictures
of Francine and Monte's wedding.
They look so happy together.

SUSAN

Too bad we couldn't attend. Heck,
the feds wouldn't even let us send
them gifts.

DUANE

We have our own lives now. And good jobs at that magazine in L-A.

SUSAN

Even if commuting from Azusa to the Westside is a pain in the ass.

DUANE

At least we do it together.

The doorbell rings. Duane goes to the door.

EXT. AZUSA, CALIFORNIA TOWNHOUSE DOOR

It's Marco (now Eric Vickers) and Irina (now Valentina Vickers), their next-door neighbors. Irina is holding their infant daughter Alexandra.

DUANE

Krystal's got some nice dinner lined up -- turkey fricassee, with creamed spinach! Oh, and glad you're back from the road trip.

MARCO

Still can't believe I'm an Anaheim Ducks beat writer. As for Val--

IRINA

He remembers my name now!

MARCO

She'll return to waitressing once hockey season is over and I can look after our daughter.

Duane stares at the baby.

DUANE

Alexandra's getting so big. We know whose genes she inherited!

IRINA

I want her to get the basketball scholarship I couldn't.

MARCO

Only if she enjoys playing. I've promised never to pressure a child of mine into anything.

INT. AZUSA, CALIFORNIA TOWNHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Susan, still preparing dinner, waves at the visitors.

SUSAN
Oh, look at her.

DUANE
And speaking of children--

Marco and Irina look at Susan, who beams.

SUSAN
We're joining you in parenthood!

Irina and Marco hug the mother-to-be.

DUANE
We learned last week, but chose to
wait until Marco returned.

IRINA
Know anything more?

DUANE
It's going to be a boy.

MARCO
Have you chosen a name?

SUSAN
Yes, and it's in honor of the man
who made this all possible...

DUANE, SUSAN
Juan. Juan White!

DUANE
Thank you, Mr. Soto.

Susan pulls four sodas from the refrigerator, and she, Duane,
Marco and Irina raise a toast.

FADE OUT.