

FADE IN:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - DAYBREAK

The first rays of the day ricochet off concrete and glass skyscrapers and lofts.

Sunrise fills a WESTBOUND TAXI so fast the CABBIE flips his visor down like it's Kevlar and the sun is shooting at him.

INT. ULTRA-MODERN HIGH-RISE LOFT - BEDROOM - DAYBREAK

Sixteen floors up, light spills through the vertical blinds.

In the bedroom, TWO BODIES sleep back to back in a luxe king-sized bed, each so close to the edge they're both in danger of falling onto the floor.

DEE-DEE-DEE-DEEEP! DEE-DEE-DEE-DEEEP! DEE-DEE-DEE-DEEEP!

The WOMAN groans. Minutes LATER...

DEE-DEE-DEE-DEEP! DEE-DEE-DEE- She SLAPS the alarm clock.

Now the MAN groans.

NINA JAMES, 36, her perfect body draped in a satin nightie, sits up on her side of the bed. Then she opens her eyes. Then cuts them back at her sleeping husband.

But he, CORY JAMES, 38 with a six-pack of abs, isn't asleep. He's just pretending to be. When Nina heads to the shower, he rolls onto his back, stares at the ceiling.

INT. ULTRA-MODERN HIGH-RISE LOFT - GOURMET KITCHEN - DAY

Nina pours herself some juice. She's in a designer suit and pumps, understated jewelry, chic hair and makeup. Cory walks up in a tailored suit, fumbling with his tie.

CORY

Can you...um...help me, please?

Nina nods, but brushes past him, HEELS CLACKING on the hard woods all the way down the hall and all the way back.

She holds out a tie that's already tied.

CORY

That one doesn't match.

NINA

This is your what, fifth or sixth interview? Obviously, it doesn't matter if your tie matches.

She holds the tie out farther. He grabs her wrist.

CORY

What happened to the "for richer or poorer" part?

NINA

The same thing that happened to the "in sickness and in health."

They both just went too far. He yanks his tie from her.

She yanks her arm from his grasp, grabs her attaché from the table, hurries for the door.

Fuming, he takes a deep breath and hurries after her. He opens the door in time to see Nina get on the elevator.

CORY

We gotta fix this, Nina.

She turns around, presses the button, puts on a fake smile as her eyes well with real tears.

NINA

You first, Cory.

Cory closes the door, throws the tie on the floor, walks to the floor-to-ceiling windows, glares down at the world below.

Then he looks up at the blue sky.

CORY (TO THE HEAVENS)

You gave me everything I ever wanted then took it all away. Why?

INT. THE HIGH-RISE'S UNDERGROUND GARAGE - DAY

Nina storms out of the elevator, crying. She unlocks the doors of her big Mercedes. The second she's in the car, she looks in the visor mirror. Raccoon eyes. Crap.

She immediately pulls out her compact. A KNOCK on her window scares the heck outta her.

Some GUY is standing beside her car smiling, hands up.

NEIGHBOR

Hey neighbor! Sorry to frighten you like that. I live in two-oh one. You live in the penthouse, right? Hey I locked my keys in the car...no OnStar. Think I could use your cell to call my wife?

Nina relaxes, lowers the automatic window with one hand while digging in her purse with her other hand.

NINA

Sure. Hold on-

She looks up to hand him her cell phone, just in time to see his HIS FIST SLAM into her face! Nina's out cold.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS, MAESTRO'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Cory is seated at a corner table in this upscale, white-tablecloth restaurant. WAITERS bustle to and fro while the lunch scene of ALMOST RICH and INFAMOUS is in full swing.

Cory checks his watch, just as STAN BRADLEY, 50's, tall, fair-haired and impeccably groomed, approaches the table. Cory stands. They shake, then sit.

STAN

Cory! It's been too long, my man.

CORY

Eight weeks and two days.

A BUSBOY beelines to the table, pours water into goblets.

CORY (TO BUSBOY) Thank you.

Stan, smug, arrogant, waits for the Busboy to go.

STAN

Sorry I'm late. New clients. I just talked them into letting me manage his business investments too, so we had extra paperwork.

CORY

Sounds like you haven't missed a beat since everything happened.

STAN

The books were audited, files were taken. A few people were let go. Then the S.E.C. just went away. Guess they got busy with Madoff's victims. Where'd you land?

CORY

No place yet.

STAN Ouch.

That's tough. Good thing you married well. Movie execs still make more than they deserve too, don't they? How is Nina?

CORY

She's good. But I just picked my Jag up from the mechanic and I haven't shown her the bill yet. Three grand to fix the electrical system. They claim it was tampered with. No warranty coverage.

STAN

Everybody has a hustle.

CORY

Which brings me to why I asked you to meet me for lunch, Stan. I've changed my mind. I'll take that severance pay you offered me.

A WAITER stops at their table, is about to launch into a hello-my-name-is-can-I-tell-you-today's-specials-

STAN (TO WAITER)
Give us a minute.

Again, Stan waits until the help is gone.

STAN (TO CORY)
You mean the "hush money"? I believe
that's what you called it.

CORY
No one ever asked me about the Ponzi
schemes going on at Donner Bradley
Investments, Mr. Bradley, so I don't
think it counts as hush money. I
didn't do anything wrong.

STAN
But you and Donner knew what I was
doing and you still cashed those
bonus checks. Doesn't your little
Bible that I used to see you
reading say knowing and doing are
the same sin?

CORY
I've made a lot of mistakes, and
if I could just go back--

STAN
You wouldn't work sixty hours a
week prying money out of blue-
collar hands to feed your white-
collar lifestyle? Yes you would.

The same Waiter approaches the table again, cautiously.

STAN (TO WAITER)
Get my friend anything he wants.

Stan gets up, pulls out a money clip, peels off a hundred.

STAN (TO CORY)
How about we consider this your
severance and call it square?
Say hello to Nina for me. Maybe
now you can get her pregnant.

INT. HIGH-RISE'S UNDERGROUND GARAGE - DAY

Cory parks his Jaguar in his spot, right beside Nina's Mercedes. He's surprised to see her car.

He gets out, heads for the elevators, checks his watch, and notices something on the ground...Nina's makeup compact.

He goes to pick it up, then notices her purse on the Mercedes' seat. The contents are spilled out.

Cory finds the key to her car on his key ring, opens her door and gets in...just as his cell PHONE RINGS. Caller ID says "Nina's Cell". Cory answers.

CORY (INTO CELL PHONE)

Hey. You're home early and your purse is still in the car--

NEIGHBOR'S VOICE (O.S)

Hello Cory, Nina's not at home.

Shock registers on Cory's face.

NEIGHBOR (CONT O.S.)

It's gonna drive you crazy wondering where she is. I know, because one night my wife just didn't show up--

CORY

Who is this?!

NEIGHBOR

I'm newly single, newly broke, newly insane because I'm single which happened because I'm broke. Which happened because of you. Oh, and I'm a neighbor. I think I'll borrow some of your sugar.

CLICK...Cory is stunned. He grabs Nina's stuff and runs for the elevator!

INT. CORY AND NINA'S PENTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Cory bursts in the front door, races from room to room.

CORY
Nina! Nina! Baby?!

Cory marches to the floor-to-ceiling windows, looks up at the blue sky accusatorily. He doesn't know what to do. He calls Nina's cell phone. It RINGS and RINGS. Then...

AUTOMATED VOICE (O.S.)
The MobileNet customer you have reached has disabled their voice mailbox. Please try your call--

Cory hangs up, grabs the cordless phone, dials 9-1-1.

CORY (INTO PHONE)
My wife, Nina James, is missing... Today...I understand that, but I got a call from someone who said he has her...Well he didn't say that exactly, but he was calling from her phone...No she's not having an affair! Someone's taken her!...He didn't say his name. He said...he said he's a neighbor.

Cory suddenly hangs up, runs out the door.

INT. OTHER FLOORS IN THE HIGH-RISE - CONTINUOUS

Cory bursts into the stairwell, descending the steps two, three at a time. He bursts into the hallway of the 15th floor, starts banging on the first door he gets to.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

CORY (YELLING THROUGH DOORS)
Nina! Nina!

He puts his ear to the door. Nothing. BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

Cory moves to the next door, POUNDS. Nothing. At the next, he POUNDS again. A moment, then an OLDER MAN calls out as he opens the door...

OLDER MAN
What in the sam dickens?!

The OLDER MAN is about 70, still fairly hearty. Cory approaches him respectfully.

CORY

Sir! My wife is missing. I got a call from someone who said he's got her. He said he's a neighbor!

OLDER MAN

Oh, you live on the top floor. I've seen you and your wife--

CORY

Sir, please just tell me, do you know anybody in the building who might be capable of something like this? Anybody? A guy whose wife just left him? A guy who could--

OLDER MAN

Calm down now, son. There's a lot of breaking up going on around here. Did you call your wife?

Cory takes a deep breath.

CORY

Yes sir. She's not answering.

OLDER MAN

Did you call the police?

CORY

Yes. They won't help until she's been missing at least 24 hours.

OLDER MAN

Okay. Well, did you call God?

Cory shakes his head at that one.

CORY

He's not talking to me right now.

OLDER MAN

Oh, he's always talking. We're just not always listening. You can't hear if you don't listen--

CORY

Thank you for your help, sir.

Cory runs for the stairwell. He takes the stairs down another flight. Door to door, BANGING on them, YELLING Nina's name. A FEW NEIGHBORS open their doors.

He makes it down to the 12th floor. The elevator DINGS. FOUR LAPD POLICE OFFICERS emerge, guns drawn.

LAPD OFFICERS (ALL)

Get down on the floor! Hold your hands where we can see 'em! Get down now!!

Cory drops to his knees, hands in the air.

CORY Officers!

I'm looking for my wife.
Somebody's taken her and--

OFFICERS

Quiet! Get on the floor!

The Officers don't pay any attention to what Cory's saying. They cuff him on the floor, stand him up. SGT. CRAMER takes Cory's wallet as the others push him towards the elevators.

CORY

Officer, please listen to me. My wife is in this building somewhere.
Please don't take me--

SGT. CRAMER

Cory James? Wow. Tell it to us downtown, Mr. James. We're kinda busy today.

INT. A VACANT CONDO - DAY

Nina is tied up to a cheap plastic chair, mouth taped shut.

Her abductor, the Neighbor, early 40s, pudgy, plain with a receding hairline, is in a matching cheap chair across a matching bistro table. There's nothing else in the room.

NEIGHBOR

Sorry about the cheap furniture.
My wife's butt would break out in
hives if she had to sit on these.

Nina looks around for signs of the wife.

NEIGHBOR

Oh, she's not here. She left me.
When your husband and the thieves
at Donner Bradley stole my money,
she took off with my heart and my
dignity. This is all I got left.

Nina's glare softens a bit.

NEIGHBOR

If I take that tape off your mouth
you can't yell, okay? Okay?

She nods. He moves to her, carefully removes the tape.

NINA

My husband was just doing his job!

He puts the tape right back on, holds up a finger. Shhhhhh. She
nods okay. She'll be quiet. He peels the tape off.

NINA

If you want money ask for a
reasonable amount, like fifty-
thousand. Cory can come up with
that. Maybe a little more.

NEIGHBOR

Even hostage negotiations are
affected by the recession.

Nina almost laughs.

INT. NEW LAPD HEADQUARTERS, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - DAY

Inside the new building are the same ol' COPS and BAD GUYS.

Cory is sitting in a traditional interview room, at a table
with two chairs and a two-way mirror. He keeps checking the
clock.

Sgt. Cramer enters with SPECIAL AGENT REGINALD KENT.

CORY

Sergeant Cramer, I've been here
for five hours now! My wife is--

SGT. CRAMER

Calm down, Cory. We believe you.

Cory signs with relief.

SGT. CRAMER

This is Special Agent Kent, F.B.I.
Seems like the timing of your
civil disobedience today has a
remarkable coincidence with the
timing of your professional
disobedience.

Huh? Cory's deflated. Agent Kent takes a seat across from him
as Cramer leans against the wall.

AGENT KENT

Two hours ago, the F.B.I., acting
on directives from the S.E.C.,
raided the offices of Donner and
Bradley Investments. Donner and
Bradley were arrested, as were the
C.F.O. and three senior bankers.
Two former bankers were arrested
at their homes, and one was arrested
earlier on unrelated charges and
is in this building. In this room.

Cory is about to panic, totally lose it. He suddenly just shuts
his eyes and bows his head.

CORY (PRAYING)

Forgive me, please, for my greed
and my pride. Forgive me for
drifting so far away. Do what You
will to me...but please...don't
let Nina, get hurt. I'm...sorry.

Cramer and Kent look at each other, wait for him to finish.

CRAMER

You said the man who called you claimed to be a neighbor. We checked your work files. Looks like you targeted some people in your building. The Thompsons in Unit 1109, Gary Lubensky in 924, the Mannings in 201-

A female ROOKIE in blue enters the room, hands Cramer a file. He reads the top sheet, hands it to Kent.

KENT

You sure have the L.A.P.D. working overtime today, Mr. James. The Thompsons are sitting down to dinner, no guests locked in the closet. Lubensky's at a Laker game, box seats. The Mannings separated, whereabouts unknown. No forwarding address. The condo was foreclosed on, gonna be auction--

CORY

Foreclosed...as in empty.

INT. VACANT CONDO - NIGHT

The hostage situation has changed. The Neighbor, Lou Manning, is listening to Nina as if they're old friends.

NINA

Making money changes people, just like losing it does. We were happier when we could barely pay the rent, when we had nothing. We talked a lot, laughed a lot more.

LOU

My wife and I shopped a lot. I was an electrician, she was my secretary. A few big contracts to rewire some condos, and she was my wife. The market tanked. So did our marriage. But I loved her.

NINA

Sometimes life has to sucker punch
you before you see the truth.

Lou takes out a POCKET KNIFE. Nina gasps! He holds up his hands, apologetic again. He approaches her carefully, cuts off the tape around her wrists...

BOOM!! The door crashes in! Cramer and a squad of LAPD swarm the room! They grab Lou, throw him to the floor. Cramer grabs Nina. Kent storms in. Cory's behind him.

Cory runs to Nina, grabs her, holds onto her for dear life. And she holds onto him right back.

Police cuff Lou and pull him up. Cory walks over to him. Lou flinches, but Cory isn't angry.

CORY

I'm so very sorry, for everything.

Cramer and Kent look at each other, lead Lou away. Nina's touched by her husband's humility, and sad for Lou. Cory goes to her, wipes a tear from her bruised cheek.

NINA

I'm crying 'cuz you wore that tie.

He smiles at his wife.

CORY

It got me the job.

She's ecstatic! They hug and kiss. Happier than they've been in a long time, just the two of them in the room...and nothing else.

FADE OUT.