

THE SNAKE

by

Steve Saylor

Steve Saylor  
409 Caballo  
Carbondale, Colorado 81623

(970) 963-1846

dvmovie@sopris.net

FADE IN:

EXT. SHORE - NIGHT

Fourth of July on Long Island's Hamptons. FIREWORKS EXPLODE high above the water.

Boats of all shapes and sizes are anchored along the inlet. One incredible YACHT dwarfs them all.

INT./EXT. YACHT

A boatload of revelers party the night away on this floating monument to conspicuous consumption, property of THORNTON (THORNE) STERLING THE THIRD.

Thorne Sterling, 40's, drink in hand, chats with his wife and another couple. He's big and brash, charismatic, just a little puffy around the edges.

JESSICA STERLING, 30's, stands beside him. A knockout, naturally. Statuesque, elegant, long blonde hair.

A shuttle boat arrives with more guests. The WOMAN next to Thorne remarks...

WOMAN

Thorne, don't tell me you invited the Fields?

THORNE

She's amusing, don't you think? And you have to give her credit. I mean, anyone who tries so hard...

WOMAN

That's an understatement. I'd say she's elevated the fine art of ass-kissing to a new level.

THORNE

You should watch and learn. She could teach you a thing or two.

He laughs, joking. Or maybe not.

EXT. BEACH ESTATE - NIGHT

This multi-million-dollar estate is but one of Thorne's many prized possessions.

The lavish beach house perches on a hill 100 yards back from the shore. Walls and fences encircle the compound. SECURITY GUARDS stationed at the gates.

In the distance, the sights and sounds of the Fourth of July. But around Thorne's estate, all is dark, quiet.

Enter two comely young lasses, early 20's, very sexy in their silky party dresses. The GIRLS walk a crooked path along the shore, laughing as they share a bottle of wine.

The young GUARD at the beach-gate calls out...

GUARD

You'll have to stop right there.  
This is all Sterling property.

GIRL 1

Thorne Sterling? Ooh, I'm  
impressed.

GIRL 2

C,mon, it's just a beach. Where's  
your holiday spirit?  
(sings)  
Every party needs a pooper...

GUARD

I'm sorry. Those are my orders.

With a devious twinkle in her eye...

GIRL 1

I suppose the ocean is private  
property, too? Any laws against  
skinny dipping?

Without waiting for an answer, they quickly disrobe and run toward the water. The guard strains to catch a glimpse on this moonless night.

EXT. OCEAN

As they tread water, we're suddenly aware of a BLACK SHAPE a short distance away. Dum dum dum dum... No, not a shark. It's a MAN in black scuba gear.

EXT. BEACH

After their swim, the girls walk back to their clothes, slip into their bra and panties.

The guard stands there, unflinching, taking it all in.

GIRL 1  
Don't you know it's impolite to  
stare?

GUARD  
In your case, it'd be impolite not  
to.

The girls wink at each other, approach him. On either side, they press up against him.

GIRL 2  
I imagine it gets lonely out here.

GUARD  
God forsaken.

She kisses him on the neck, strokes his chest. He's weak in the knees.

GIRL 1  
Let's do something about that.  
That is, if you're not married?

GUARD  
Not tonight.

The girls look at each other, smile, shake their heads.

GIRL 2  
They're all alike, aren't they?

They follow him to a concealed area behind the guard house.

EXT. SHORE

The MAN in the scuba gear slips out of the water. He removes his tanks, lets them float away.

He creeps toward the estate, carries a small, black bag.

EXT. GUARD HOUSE

He tiptoes through the guard house, out the other side.

EXT. BACKYARD

He stops in the shadows, removes the wet suit, takes off the mask, and for the first time we see...

RICHARD LONG, young, very good looking, eyes alive with mischief, simply thrilled with the danger of the situation.

Richard, now dressed in cat burglar black, shoves the wet suit into a bag and heads for the house.

The backyard is immense. He passes close to a sculpture of a FLAMINGO near the pool. Then it moves. It's real.

He approaches some small buildings near the house. A SOUND stops him in his tracks. GROWWLL. He looks to his right, sees A TIGER!

Richard breathes a little easier. It's inside a cage.

RICHARD  
Easy, boy. Shhh. That's it.

He creeps forward, sees two GUARDS chatting with the hired help in the kitchen. Nobody's working too hard.

Richard maneuvers around the house, tosses a rubber hook and rope onto the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY

The hook lands silently. Richard slithers up the rope.

He checks the door and windows. All locked.

He takes a glass cutter from his bag, works it around the edge of the window, and removes it.

Richard peeks inside, sees three lines of LASER LIGHT just beyond the window.

He takes out a contraption consisting of two mirrors, metal bars and clamps.

Richard hooks the clamps inside the window, adjusts the mirrors to the proper angle, then guides them into the laser light.

It works. The light on either side is reflected back. Richard has just enough room to slide between the mirrors.

## INT. MASTER BEDROOM

Richard packs up his mirrors, goes to work. He rummages through Thorne Sterling's desk, then Jessica's jewelry box. He pockets a HUGE DIAMOND RING.

## CLOSET

In the closet, Richard finds the SAFE behind a sliding panel. He takes another contraption from his case.

It's a mini-X-ray camera and screen. He plugs it in, then places it over the lock's tumblers.

He turns the knob and we can actually see the tumblers fall into place on the LCD screen. The safe opens.

The safe contains stacks of greenbacks, some official papers, a VIDEO CASSETTE.

RICHARD

Hmmm. This could be interesting.

Richard tosses the cassette into his suitcase along with the rest of the booty.

## BEDROOM

He takes a last look around the room.

RICHARD

Oh, one more thing.

He pulls a cloth bag from his case and takes out a small, black SNAKE. He smiles, gives the snake a little kiss.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Time to go night night.

Richard puts the snake UNDER THE COVERS, down by the foot of the bed, and pulls the sheets tight.

## INT. HOUSE

Moving quietly downstairs, he enters the dark living room, gazes around at the furnishings.

He approaches a painting, shines his light on the corner, finds the signature.

RICHARD

A Renoir. Splendid. I'll take it.

He lifts the painting from its hook.

INT. GARAGE

Richard enters the garage and gazes at the classic cars.

RICHARD  
What shall it be tonight? The  
Bentley, Jaguar... No, let's go  
with the Rolls.

He tosses the Renoir into the back seat of the Rolls Royce,  
jumps in the driver's seat.

Back to the suitcase for a small drill and some kind of mask.  
The drill loosens the ignition. Quick hot-wire. The motor  
purrs.

Richard pulls the latex mask over his head. It's the face of  
a young, blond man.

He presses the garage-door-opener, puts the car in gear.

EXT. FRONT GATE - NIGHT

Two more GUARDS at the front gate. Richard stops the Rolls a  
short distance away, TOOTS the horn.

GUARD 1  
Open the gate. It's Roger.

GUARD 2  
I thought the Sterling's were  
staying on the yacht tonight.  
Where's he going?

GUARD 1  
Maybe they changed their minds.  
Who cares? Just open it.

The electronic gate swings open. Richard drives out, waves  
to the guards as he passes. As the gate closes...

GUARD 2  
Is it just me, or did Roger look a  
little... weird?

GUARD 1  
Always looks a little weird to me.

INT. YACHT - NIGHT

Thorne and Jessica in the main cabin, along with a few  
remaining guests.

The CAPTAIN enters, interrupts...

CAPTAIN  
Excuse me, Mr. Sterling. Walters  
is on line one.

THORNE  
Not now.

CAPTAIN  
I told him you didn't want to be  
disturbed. But he says it's  
urgent.

Thorne excuses himself, walks to a phone by the bar.

THORNE  
(into phone)  
What is it? Yeah. Just get to it!  
What happened?

A hush falls over the guests. They pretend not to be paying attention. But every ear and eye is cocked toward the bar as Thorne begins a slow burn.

THORNE (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
Walters, you'd better be joking!

The rage that boils over is not to be believed. Thorne goes lobster red. The anger explodes into one SCREAMING...

THORNE (CONT'D)  
Goddammit!!

Thorne LASHES OUT with the receiver, HAMMERS it into the mirror behind the bar. It SHATTERS. Guests cringe.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Thorne's limo speeds through the front gate. The guards look at each other, uneasy.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The GUARDS and HIRED-HANDS line up in the living room. Behind them is the spot where the Renoir used to hang.

THORNE  
And you opened the goddam gate for  
him?! So he could just drive my  
Rolls right out...

GUARD 1  
We thought it was Roger.

ROGER, the blond-headed chauffeur, interrupts.

ROGER  
I was in town! You knew that!

GUARD 2  
But it looked like...

THORNE  
And the rest of you? Did you  
see... or notice anything at all?

Our easy beach guard is the first to shake his head No!

THORNE (CONT'D)  
You idiots listen to me. I'm gonna  
have you investigated. Every one  
of you. If this was an inside job,  
I'll find out. You will pay.

He motions to dismiss them. They scurry out of the room. A  
Police DETECTIVE is the only one left.

DETECTIVE  
I guess I'll be going, Mr.  
Sterling. If you find anything  
else missing, be sure to let me  
know.

THORNE  
Thank you, detective. And I'd like  
to keep this out of the papers...

DETECTIVE  
That could be difficult  
considering...

Thorne quickly cuts him off.

THORNE  
Let's just try, shall we?

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessica undresses as Thorne enters.

JESSICA  
Do you think it's the same person  
who robbed the Florida house?

Thorne shrugs. He chuckles ever so slightly.

THORNE  
Remember that asshole? Left a  
snake in the toilet?

JESSICA

Don't worry. I'll look before I sit.

She goes into the bathroom, turns on the shower.

THORNE

What can he do with that Renoir?  
It'll be tough to get rid of...

Thorne stops in mid-sentence, turns to the closet. He slowly shakes his head as if to say "no, couldn't be".

CLOSET

Thorne hurriedly opens the panel, dials the combination on the safe. Looks inside.

THORNE

Oh no.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thorne slumps in a chair. Jessica comes out of the bathroom in her satin robe.

JESSICA

What's wrong?

THORNE

My safe. He got in.

JESSICA

The one in the closet? How did he find that?

(no answer)

You don't keep much out here...

THORNE

Over twenty thousand dollars.

JESSICA

Isn't that what you call "petty cash"?

THORNE

I had a tape in there.

JESSICA

A tape? Of what?

Thorne doesn't answer. It begins to dawn on her.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

No, Thorne. Oh no... you mean the one with us...

THORNE

Yes.

JESSICA

But you said you erased that!

Thorne gets out of his chair, paces.

THORNE

I was going to. I just hadn't gotten around to it.

JESSICA

Oh my God. You mean to tell me some criminal could be sitting in front of his TV right now... watching me have sex?!

THORNE

And me, too!

The volume of their argument continues to escalate.

JESSICA

I'm sorry, but I'm not worried about you right now. You're the one who forced me to...

THORNE

I didn't force you!

JESSICA

Well, I didn't want to do it! But you begged me like some kind of dog...

They stand near the foot of the bed. We can see the SNAKE moving UNDER THE COVERS!

THORNE

Hey! I'm sorry, okay?

JESSICA

Oh, I imagine you'll be very sorry when you see your orgasmic facial contortions splattered all over the front page of the National Enquirer! I'll never forgive you for this, Thorne.

THORNE  
We'll find a way.

JESSICA  
Don't count on it. Turn out the  
light. I'm going to bed.

Thorne obliges, then sits on the edge of the bed. In the darkness, Jessica slips under the covers.

Silence, and then a SCREAM that would wake the dead!

CUT TO:

Another SCREAM. Yes, it's Jessica. But it's a shriek of ecstasy, followed by moans and groans of delight...

INT. RICHARD'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Richard watches that tape, sitting up in bed, having sex with a WOMAN we've never seen before nor will ever see again.

Richard stares at the TV as he goes about his pleasure.

RICHARD  
I bet you never, in your wildest  
dreams, imagined that tonight you  
would be screwing with the  
Sterlings.

WOMAN  
Who needs them? You're all I can  
handle.

She tries to turn his head back toward her, but Richard continues to stare at Jessica on the TV.

EXT. HARLEM STREET - DAWN

A dazzling sunrise above the enchanted city. The Harlem streets brim with trash and graffiti. It's quiet, nearly deserted at this early hour.

Parked on the sidewalk is what's left of a classic car.

ROLLS ROYCE

This baby is stripped! Tires, fenders, doors. Everything gone.

A couple THUGS peel away whatever "extras" this car once offered.

THUG 1

I am willing to negotiate for the  
gold drink holders. They would  
look so nice next to your bed.

THUG 2

What you want? The plate? Ain't  
gettin' the plate.

He tucks away the shiny New York license plate emblazoned  
with the gold inscription, "STERLING".

INT. RICHARD'S COTTAGE - MORNING

Soft JAZZ on the stereo. The Renoir rests on an easel by the  
bed. Richard sits in front of it, staring intensely. The  
woman has gone.

He sucks on the end of a lithograph pen, then deliberately  
begins to apply his strokes.

RICHARD

Jean Renoir, my friend, did you  
ever wonder what your women would  
look like had you been born a  
little further south?

Richard meticulously draws little black mustaches on all the  
women, hums along with "That Fabulous Face".

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - MORNING

Thorne's estate is quite impressive in the light of day.  
Tudor-style mansion. Manicured lawn.

Wandering the grounds is a menagerie of ANIMALS that would  
make Michael Jackson proud. Llamas, peacocks.

Some rather luxurious CAGES house a wolf, two bear cubs.

Jessica stands next to a caged COUGAR as the animal handler,  
MICHAEL, 30's, approaches.

MICHAEL

You better finish saying good-bye,  
Jessica. They're on their way.

JESSICA

Do we really have to let her go,  
Michael?

He joins her at the cage.

MICHAEL

You're doin' a good thing here, Jess. I don't think she would've lived without someone caring for her the way you have. But she's a big girl now. It's time to let her go.

JESSICA

What if she doesn't make it out there?

MICHAEL

This is a nice cage, but that's not gonna cut it anymore. This one was meant to be free.

Jessica meets his glance for a quick moment, then turns when she hears...

THORNE (O.S.)

Jessica! Where are you?!

Thorne comes outside, sees her, walks toward the cages.

MICHAEL

I guess I'll uh... go get the tranquilizer gun.

JESSICA

I don't think I can watch.

She meets Thorne halfway. A GOAT nudges him.

THORNE

Christ, I can't believe I live in a goddam zoo! Are you coming in with me?

JESSICA

I don't think so.

THORNE

I guess you'd rather hang around here with Tarzan and the fucking chimps.

Her eyes are showing some hurt. And a little anger.

JESSICA

I'm finally beginning to realize that I like animals more than I do people.

THORNE

Alright. I know you're pissed off about that tape. But no one is going to see it.

JESSICA

You don't know...

THORNE

He'll be calling with a price and I'll pay it. Whatever it is, I'll get it back.

JESSICA

I hope you're right, Thorne.

He puts his arms around her, hugs her gently.

THORNE (CONT'D)

Sweetheart, I know it seems as if things between us are... breaking down. And when that happens, you can either throw them away, or fix them. And I intend to fix 'em. I'm going to take care of you forever, Jessica. That's a promise.

Having put everything in order, Thorne gives her a kiss, walks toward the helicopter pad. The giant blades begin to whir.

He almost trips over the goat, shoos it away, mutters...

THORNE (CONT'D)

Christ, I don't know what you see in these things.

He can't hear her reply.

JESSICA

Companionship.

EXT. NEW YORK - MORNING

Lower West Side. Quiet Sunday morning.

Richard struggles to hold onto the large painting under his arm. The Renoir is covered in plastic.

INT. SUBWAY STATION

He enters the grimy subway station as a train pulls away, leaving the place nearly deserted.

EXT. STERLING PALACE - DAY

The helicopter touches down on the roof of the Sterling Palace, a fifty-story luxury apartment building in midtown Manhattan.

Thorne is greeted by his right hand man, FRANK CHAMBERS, 50's. Frank is short and stocky, rough on the outside. All business.

THORNE  
Have the police heard anything?

FRANK  
Yeah. Not much left of the Rolls,  
but they just found the painting.

Thorne ducks as he walks from beneath the blades.

THORNE  
I wanna keep this under wraps...

FRANK  
Forget it, Thorne. The press  
already knows about it. Every  
detail. It'll be on the front page  
tomorrow.

THORNE  
How the hell did...

FRANK  
Anonymous call. Had to be him.

THORNE  
Dammit, Frank. Who is this  
asshole?

Frank opens the rooftop door for his boss.

FRANK  
Let's find out, shall we?

INT. SUBWAY STATION - DAY

Thorne and Frank hurry down the steps to the subway.

THORNE  
Christ, it smells like piss...

FRANK  
Been awhile since you've been down  
here, huh, Thorne?

A small crowd is gathered up ahead. A couple POLICE OFFICERS keep them back from...

THE RENOIR! It hangs high on the wall amongst the graphic graffiti.

OFFICER

Hello, Mr. Sterling. We thought we'd leave it here until you...

THORNE

Thanks, fellas. Good job. Thank God it's in one piece.

OFFICER

Almost. Someone painted... Well, see for yourself.

Frank and Thorne move close enough to see the mustached women.

Once again, Thorne fumes.

THORNE

That sonofabitch. I'll...

FRANK

Forget it, Thorne. Ain't worth gettin' ruffled. Come on, let's go.

THORNE

Officer, could you have someone bring this over to the Palace?

OFFICER

You bet, Mr. Sterling.

Frank and Thorne hurry out of the station.

FRANK

We can fix the painting.

THORNE

I don't give a shit about the painting. You see what he's doin', don't ya, Frank? Playin' with me?

FRANK

Eh, screw him.

THORNE

Nobody does that to me and gets away with it. I'll have that bastard's balls on a platter...

FRANK

That's right, Thorne. We'll get him. We'll get him good.

They walk silently in anger for a moment. Then Frank grins. He shakes his head and chuckles...

FRANK (CONT'D)

Did you check out the mustaches on those babes? Geez...

Very slowly, Thorne breaks into a grin. They smirk like little boys looking up a girl's dress.

INT. APT. BLDG. - DAY

Richard climbs the stairs in a three-story walk-up. He stops on the third floor, uses some kind of gadget to pick the lock.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Richard slips inside. The apartment is unoccupied. No furniture.

He has a pair of binoculars stashed in the cupboard. He takes them out, walks to the window.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

A Mercedes with tinted windows pulls to the curb. Frank gets out, walks toward the lobby.

He returns, opens the passenger door.

FRANK

It's all clear.

Thorne hops out, dashes inside.

INT. BLDG.

Thorne doesn't take the elevator. He uses the back stairs, walks briskly up three flights.

He enters the hallway, knocks on 3B. The door opens.

ANGIE

Come here, sweetheart.

INT. ANGIE'S APT.

ANGIE pulls him inside. They kiss. She's in her 20's, blonde, curvy, fresh. A Miss Universe knock-off.

ANGIE  
How's my sexy little boy?

THORNE  
Bothered. Hot and bothered for my  
Angie baby.

More kisses. Big wet ones.

ANGIE  
I need you more than once a week.

THORNE  
We'll see what we can do about  
that.

RICHARD'S POV.

Across the courtyard, Richard can see them through the open venetian blinds, watches intently as Thorne unbuttons her blouse.

ANGIE'S APT.

Angie stops him, walks toward the kitchen.

ANGIE  
Let's have a drink, shall we?

THORNE  
So, how are the auditions coming?

ANGIE  
Well, I got called back for an off-Broadway, but I don't think I'll get it. God, Thorne, I wish you could get me a part.

THORNE  
I get you everything else, don't I?

ANGIE  
Yeah, but this is what I really...

THORNE  
Angie, honey, I don't have much pull in that arena.

Angie turns on some sexy MUSIC when she returns. She slithers toward him with a wink.

ANGIE  
Maybe I should do a little dancing for my baby. I want to be sure you're fully aware of my talent.

THORNE

Sweetheart, that's one thing that  
is perfectly clear.

She bumps and grinds against him. Thorne plays along, his behavior a little more down-and-dirty than we'll ever see with Jessica.

Angie begins removing her clothes. Thorne follows suit, gives her a lusty pout, looks mighty silly.

RICHARD'S POV

Richard has to laugh out loud at this spectacle.

Then he curses when Thorne dances over to the window and  
SHUTS THE BLINDS!

INT. BEACH HOUSE - EVENING

In the bedroom, Jessica slips out of her clothes, watches a local newscast.

REPORTER (ON TV)

Thornton Sterling's vintage Rolls  
Royce was taken for a joy ride last  
night and abandoned in Harlem...

Jessica doesn't seem to be upset in the least by Thorne's misfortune. In fact, she almost smiles.

INT. STERLING PALACE - NIGHT

Thorne is alone in his spacious penthouse that overlooks midtown Manhattan, watching the same channel.

REPORTER (ON TV)

... among other items taken from  
the Sterling home was an original  
Renoir that was found this morning  
in Times Square..

They flash a close-up of the Renoir-women sporting mustaches. Thorne gnaws on his lower lip.

INT. RICHARD'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Richard lies back in bed, watching a different channel, but it's the same story.

REPORTER (ON TV)

... that it could be the same  
person who burglarized the  
Sterling's Florida residence.

Richard has removed Jessica's large diamond from its setting. He rolls it gently across his lips, kisses it.

REPORTER (ON TV)

... might say he hasn't lost much, except face, perhaps. But that can be a humiliating experience for a man who doesn't like to lose.

EXT. PAY PHONE - NIGHT

Richard dials, waits.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Daily News.

RICHARD

I'd like to speak with a reporter.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Concerning...

RICHARD

The robbery. Thorne Sterling.  
(a beat)  
I'm the one who did it.

INT. PENTHOUSE - MORNING

Thorne drinks coffee in his robe. A buzzer sounds.

THORNE

Come on in, Frank.

Frank enters with a newspaper.

FRANK

Geez, you're not even dressed.  
Shall I cancel the nine o'clock?

THORNE

We'll be late. What's it say?

Frank tosses the paper on the table.

FRANK

The sonofabitch is givin' interviews. See what he calls himself? "The Snake Vows To Infiltrate The Palace." Look at this shit! "Anything you can make, I can take."

Thorne heads for the bathroom with his coffee and newspaper.

FRANK (CONT'D)

The reporter who talked to him just called, Thorne. There was something else... part of their conversation they didn't print.

THORNE (O.S.)

What are you talkin' about?

FRANK

Well, it's good news, I guess. I mean, you could look at it that way.

(pause)

He's giving back the diamond... but not for a few days.

THORNE (O.S.)

Why not?

FRANK

Well, he said that he um... he swallowed it and... after it, y'know, passed through, he was gonna send it back to you in a box.

Frank cringes slightly as he awaits a response from the bathroom. In a second, the toilet flushes...

THORNE (O.S.)

Shit!

INT. STERLING PALACE - DAY

Jessica returns from Long Island, exchanges pleasantries with the doorman. He escorts her to the elevator.

HALLWAY

She steps off on the 48th floor, walks to the private elevator which services the penthouse.

But it seems to be out of service at the moment as a few technicians install a new control panel.

JESSICA

What's going on, Howard?

HOWARD, 50's, beefy, military flat-top, is head of security.

HOWARD

I'm sorry for the inconvenience, Mrs. Sterling. It's a new security system. Your husband wants it installed immediately.

JESSICA

Can we go up?

HOWARD

We're not quite finished. I'm afraid you'll have to use the stairs. I'm sorry.

PENTHOUSE

More TECHNICIANS at the doorway. Security systems run amok. Jessica has to step over some power tools to get inside.

JESSICA

Jesus. Talk about being a prisoner in your own home.

She notices an elaborate BOUQUET of flowers on the table, walks to it, reads the attached note.

THORNE (V.O.)

Jessica, my love. Pencil in this date. Tonight, a quiet, romantic dinner at home, just the two of us. Love, Thorne.

She gazes out the window, doesn't seem all that thrilled.

INT. LINK'S STUDIO - DAY

Richard walks two flights down the dark stairwell. He KNOCKS on a metal door.

LINK (O.S.)

It's open.

Richard enters the sprawling artist's studio deep in the bowels of this decaying building.

The place is cluttered with sculptures of all shapes and sizes. Paintings. Statues. There's a row of latex masks on the wall, like the one Richard had used.

LINK (CONT'D)

Here's the man himself! You're a celebrity. A star is born.

LINK stops welding, turns off his blowtorch. He's in his 30's, long black hair, a beard, overweight.

RICHARD

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Academy.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

None of this would have been possible without the assistance of my dear friend and associate, Link, as in "missing".

LINK

So the mask worked?

RICHARD

Like a charm.

LINK

Beautiful job, Richard. Classy. You made Sterling look like a total idiot, that stupid rich fuck.

RICHARD

I knew you'd approve. How's our statue coming along?

LINK

Done.

Link leads him around the corner to a four-foot high, gold plated statue of BUDDHA.

RICHARD

Link, you've outdone yourself. It's absolutely beautiful.

They walk to it. Link pulls back on the Buddha and it separates at the base, hinged at the back.

Richard steps in, sits down cross-legged. The bottom half of his body is contained in the base.

Link slowly brings the statue forward, and it slips over Richard's head and chest. He's hidden inside.

LINK

You can secure it from the inside. I tinted the rubies in the eyes, so you can see out, but not in.

From Richard's POV -- it's like an infra-red scope.

He tilts back the statue, climbs out of the base.

RICHARD

I'm impressed. I really am.

LINK

You've got air vents there that slide open from the inside.

(MORE)

LINK (cont'd)

When they're closed, it's virtually soundproof. Any other equipment you'll need can fit back here.

Richard is busy counting hundred dollar bills.

RICHARD

I believe a little bonus is in order. Here you go. Fifteen thousand of Thorne Sterling's hard earned money.

Link caresses the greenbacks, and grins.

LINK

I've always said that asshole should do more to support the arts.

INT. STERLING PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

The ambiance befits a romantic dinner. Candlelight, soft music, the glittering skyline of Manhattan.

A MAN in a tuxedo serves the main course, fills wine glasses, then joins the CHEF in the kitchen.

THORNE

I hope to tie up the Ritz affair by tomorrow and be on my way Friday.

JESSICA

Where?

THORNE

Beijing. I think I've told you more than once.

JESSICA

Right. Your mission from God.

THORNE

Personally invited by their highest government officials, who want nothing more than to become raging Capitalist pigs...

Jessica raises her glass.

JESSICA

And who better to teach them?

THORNE

Exactly. With a big fat percentage off the top. You should come along.

JESSICA  
What about the auction?

THORNE  
What auction?

JESSICA  
And how many times have I told you?  
At the museum? The Wildlife Fund?

THORNE  
(sings)  
If I could talk to the animals...

JESSICA  
Don't start with that.

He calls toward the kitchen.

THORNE  
That'll be all for this evening,  
thank you.

The hired-help nod, cross to the door, exit.

Thorne rises, goes to Jessica, takes her in his arms.

THORNE (CONT'D)  
Let's put the animosity aside for  
one night. I love you, Jess. I  
want us to be the way we used...

JESSICA  
Have you heard anything about the  
tape?

THORNE  
No. Let's forget everything  
tonight. Let's be like kids again,  
huh? A couple innocent little  
kids.

JESSICA  
What? No cameras?

THORNE  
No cameras.

INT. BEDROOM -NIGHT

They're undressed, in bed. Thorne hurries through the  
motions.

Too fast for Jessica. He's left her far behind.

EXT. STERLING PALACE - DAY

Thorne and Frank exit the building, head for the limo.  
Howard catches up with them.

HOWARD  
Mr. Sterling. This just came for  
you.

Howard holds a small package in his hand. He sniffs...

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
I hate to tell you what this smells  
like.

Thorne puts an arm around him.

THORNE  
Howard, my man. There's a diamond  
in there somewhere. I want you to  
find it, give it a good cleaning,  
and get it back to the Mrs. And  
don't tell her where you found it.

Thorne and Frank smile as they continue toward the limo.

A GUY on the street yells...

GUY  
Hey, Sterling. Look out! Down by  
your feet! A snake!

Thorne flips him the finger, climbs into the limo.

INT. LINK'S STUDIO - DAY

Richard lowers himself into the Buddha, stashes a bag of  
equipment behind him, along with a fairly large backpack.

Link hands him a bag of liquid that's attached to a long  
straw, then prepares to close the statue.

LINK  
Sure I can't get you anything else?  
A magazine? Burger and fries to  
go?

Richard's not in the mood for levity. He motions for Link to  
seal the statue.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

The departure gate. Thorne cradles his cellular phone.

THORNE

... and I don't want you to worry, sweetheart. You won't be running into any snakes. No way in hell anybody's getting inside...

INTERCUT WITH STERLING PENTHOUSE

JESSICA

How could they? It's like Fort Knox around here.

THORNE

I wish you were coming, Jess. I'll miss you. Oh, I've got a surprise coming over this afternoon. Something to make you feel even more secure.

JESSICA

What is it?

THORNE

You'll see. I love you, darling.

JESSICA

Have a safe trip, Thorne.

Thorne hangs up, then joins Frank.

FRANK

Here come our hosts now.

Two Chinese MEN approach, shake hands. Thorne gestures to a woman standing nearby.

THORNE

And let me introduce my secretary who'll be accompanying me on the trip. Mrs. Kranz...

It's Angie, Thorne's mistress. She smiles, shakes hands.

As they proceed to the gate, Angie gives Thorne a pinch on the rear. He swats at her hand.

EXT. STERLING PALACE - DAY

The DOORMAN walks outside. Howard follows.

DOORMAN

He's got a note from Mr. Sterling, says to put it in the living room. But I wanted to check with you.

Link, and another long-haired MAN, stand in the back of the truck. Howard climbs in.

HOWARD  
What is it exactly?

LINK  
I dunno. The slip says a statue from China. From Dang Big Dong, or somethin' like that.

Link and his buddy laugh. Howard doesn't.

HOWARD  
Let's have a look.

They tear away the cardboard. The Buddha sits inside a wooden crate. Howard looks at the note again.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
Alright, let's take it up.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY

They dolly the crate into the living room. Nobody home.

Howard supervises as Link removes the statue from the crate.

When they leave the room, the air vents on the base of the statue slide open.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DUSK

Getting dark outside. All's quiet on the home-front.

Inside Buddha, Richard breathes quietly, eyes closed.

The front door opens. So do Richard's eyes. He hears voices.

JESSICA  
Thank you, Howard. You can put those in the kitchen.

HOWARD  
That gift I was telling you about is in the living room. And there's a little surprise from Mr. Sterling next door. I'll be right back.

The lights in the living room are switched on. Richard peers out through Buddha's ruby eyes.

Jessica ambles toward the statue, stares right at him.

She hears Howard returning. He tells someone to wait, then enters the living room.

JESSICA  
I don't like it, Howard.

HOWARD  
Not at all?

JESSICA  
If I lived in a Monastery, it'd be perfect. But not in here. I don't know what Thorne was thinking. Let's get it out...

HOWARD  
Tonight?

Inside the statue, Richard tenses, holds his breath.

JESSICA  
You could take it to the warehouse. Thorne can decide what to do with it when he gets back.

HOWARD  
Al and Jimmy have gone home, but I can get somebody to open...

JESSICA  
Oh, don't worry about it tonight, Howard. But first thing tomorrow.  
(Richard slowly exhales)  
Now what's the surprise?

HOWARD  
(whistles)  
Come here, boy!

Jessica's eyes widen as a DOBERMAN PINSCHER trots into the room and sits next to them.

Inside the statue, we can barely hear Richard whisper...

RICHARD  
Aw, shit.

JESSICA  
Oh, I don't know, Howard. To tell you the truth, I've never been that fond of...

HOWARD  
The trainer assured me that you have nothing to worry about.  
(MORE)

HOWARD (cont'd)

He's very smart. He knows he's here to protect you. Go ahead, shake hands. Mrs. Sterling, this is Butch. Butch, say hello to Mrs. Sterling.

Jessica extends her hand. Butch obediently shakes it.

JESSICA

Yes, he's very nice. But let's keep him in the hallway tonight...

HOWARD

Please, Mrs. Sterling. Your husband insisted he stay right here with you.

JESSICA

Okay. We'll see how we get along. Thank you, Howard.

HOWARD

If you need anything, I'll be here all night. And we'll have guards posted outside your door.

He exits. Jessica stands there, staring at Butch.

JESSICA

Well, fella. I guess it's just you and me tonight.

She heads down the hallway. Butch looks around, walks over to the Buddha. The air vents silently slide shut.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessica undresses, prepares for bed, looks in the closet.

JESSICA

Now where did I leave that robe?

LIVING ROOM

Jessica strolls into the living room in her bra and panties. Butch is right behind her.

She finds her robe thrown over a chair, stands in front of Buddha as she puts it on. Richard's eyes are wide open as he takes in the view.

Butch walks slowly around the statue, sniffs.

JESSICA

Do you like that thing, Butch? I'm afraid you're the only one who does.

(pause)

Why don't you sleep out here, okay, buddy? I'll see you in the morning. C'mon. Lie down.

Butch settles in next to the statue. Then... Lights out.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's dark, quiet. Jessica's sound asleep.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Butch is right where she left him, curled up by the statue.

Inside Buddha, Richard waits. His eyes light up when he sees the Doberman stand, walk into the kitchen.

He makes his move, reaches for the latch, raises the top.

Slowly, silently. The top of the statue comes to rest against the wall.

Richard rolls onto the carpet, stretches his sore legs. He reaches back inside for his bag and hears... GROWL!

Richard spins around, his eyes open wide, as...

BUTCH CHARGES AT HIM, the white FANGS literally glowing in the dark!

Richard grabs his FLASHLIGHT and, at the moment the dog LUNGES, he SMACKS him on the head with the heavy shaft!

Butch is momentarily stunned. In one quick motion, Richard topples him into the Buddha and CLOSES THE TOP!

Butch begins to bark. It's barely audible from inside the statue.

INT. BEDROOM

Jessica sits up in bed. She heard something.

JESSICA

Butch? Butch, come here.

No sign of the dog. She gets out of bed, puts on her robe.

## HALLWAY

Jessica creeps down the hallway, trying to be brave, not quite pulling it off. She tip-toes into the living room, stops, calls out softly for the Doberman.

Suddenly, TWO ARMS reach out from the darkness, encircle her from behind!

Richard clamps a hand over her mouth before she can scream.

His other hand holds a cloth which he places over her nose. She goes out like a light.

## INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

She's coming around. Jessica moves her head slowly from side to side, then opens her eyes. Everything's hazy, out of focus.

Richard has removed her robe. She wears only a sheer nightie.

She GASPS when a MASKED FACE appears above her.

The mask covers the top half of Richard's face, like something from an 19th century masquerade ball, more mysterious than it is frightening.

JESSICA  
ggrrbbmmmmaddww...

Her mouth has been taped shut.

RICHARD  
Just lie still. I think you're  
going to like this.

She couldn't move if she tried. Her arms and legs have been tied securely to the bedposts.

Richard rolls his tongue across his lips, then kisses her softly on her neck, shoulders, arms.

He moves down along her side, across her nightie. He kisses her legs, her ankles.

Jessica knows it's hopeless to fight. Her body goes limp. She closes her eyes.

Richard moves to her other side and works his way back up. He slowly removes his gloves as he whispers in her ear.

RICHARD

Relax, Jessica. I won't touch you anywhere you don't want to be touched. I won't degrade you. I just want you to feel again. To feel a man's slow, soft touch.

He caresses her outstretched arms with his fingertips, blows softly on her shoulders. A shiver runs through her body.

RICHARD

I know. That's good, isn't it. And I could do it forever.

Jessica opens her eyes, stares into his.

RICHARD

What else are you feeling, Jessica? Danger? That's the best. Nothing else like it. Don't resist it.

He runs his fingertips lightly across her breasts. A soft moan escapes her. He reaches for her mouth, removes the tape.

RICHARD

May I continue?

JESSICA

Please, no... I'll scream.

RICHARD

Okay. I'd like to hear you scream, Jessica. Then things would get really exciting.

JESSICA

I will. I'll do it.

RICHARD

Alright. Scream. Go ahead.

JESSICA

They'll come and get you...

RICHARD

I can't wait.

Richard picks up a small clock from the bedside table and, in a seemingly insane bit of behavior, HURLS it at the window.

The window SHATTERS! A shrill ALARM rings throughout the penthouse floor!

## HALLWAY

Two GUARDS spring to life, bang on the door.

## GUARD

Mrs. Sterling! Are you alright?!

They reach for their keys, pull their guns.

## BEDROOM

Richard locks the bedroom door, rushes back to Jessica.

He quickly unties her arms and legs, covers her with the sheets, and walks toward the balcony door.

## JESSICA

You're crazy. There's no way out.

His lips form a smile, and he speaks softly...

## RICHARD

Oh, yes. There's always a way out.

The guards are outside the bedroom door. They POUND on it, KICK it, about to tear it down.

Richard grabs his backpack and runs onto the terrace.

The guards KICK open the door, rush inside, guns drawn!

Jessica points to the balcony where Richard has climbed onto the railing.

In a crazy suicide leap, he PUSHES OFF and DIVES into the abyss, plunging toward the street 50 stories below!

The guards rush out in time to see him POP HIS CHUTE!

Richard pulls on the guidelines, directs himself to a perfect landing on top of a three-story building across the street.

He slips out of the harness, hurries down a fire escape, and disappears into the night.

The guards stand there, dumbstruck. One turns to the other and mumbles under his breath.

## GUARD

Wow.

They hurry back to Jessica.

GUARD

Are you okay, Mrs. Sterling? Did he hurt you?

Jessica takes a moment before answering.

JESSICA

No, I'm fine. He didn't touch me.

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Awhile later, the Sterling's apartment is filled with police, lab experts checking for prints, a DETECTIVE.

DETECTIVE

Excuse me, Mrs. Sterling. We've been able to get your husband on the phone. He wants to talk to you.

Jessica nods, walks to the phone in the kitchen.

JESSICA

Thorne?

THORNE (V.O.)

Jessica, thank God you're alright.

JESSICA

I'm fine.

INTERCUT WITH THORNE

Thorne is halfway around the world in a Beijing hotel. He and Angie lie side by side, naked, on massage tables, being worked over by some meaty Sumo-types.

THORNE

I can't believe that sonofabitch did it. And nothing's missing?

JESSICA

We haven't found anything...

THORNE

How about the safe in our bathroom?

JESSICA

No. Nothing, Thorne.

THORNE

That prick. He just wanted to show me... to prove that he could do it. Well, the game's not over, Jess. Not by a long shot.

JESSICA  
How's China?

THORNE  
Don't ask. The Third World sucks.  
I should get on a plane right now.

JESSICA  
Don't cut it short on account of  
me. I'll be fine.

THORNE  
Are you sure, my darling?

JESSICA  
Positive. I'll see you next week.

THORNE  
Alright, sweetheart. Love you.

JESSICA  
Yeah. Goodbye, Thorne.

Jessica hangs up, returns to the living room. She overhears one of the lab men speaking to the detective.

MAN  
We're still checking the bedroom  
for prints, but I don't think we'll  
find anything. This guy was good.

JESSICA  
(to herself)  
Yes, he was.

EXT. MUSEUM - DAY

Well dressed patrons-of-the-arts step out of their limos,  
climb the marble steps.

INT. MUSEUM - DAY

Paintings and sculptures fill the auction room. Jessica  
plays hostess to the fund-raiser, moving from one group to  
the next, smiling, shaking hands.

BUFFET ROOM

An adjoining room contains more art, food, drink, music.

Jessica approaches a group with some Latino blood.

JESSICA  
Roberto, Suzanne, nice to see you.

ROBERTO

Jessica, you look lovely, as always. You remember my cousins, Carlos, Jorge, Donna. I don't believe you've met our good friend from Brazil, Felicia Martine.

FELICIA, 30's, could be the girl from Ipanema. Tall and tan, long black hair, exotic features.

JESSICA

It's a pleasure, Felicia. Where are you from in Brazil?

FELICIA

Buzios. It's a little town near...

JESSICA

Rio. I've been there. It's beautiful. And you're just visiting New York?

FELICIA

Actually, I'm spending the summer at my family's estate in East Hampton.

JESSICA

How wonderful. I don't want to seem prying but... you're not married?

FELICIA

Not in the least.

JESSICA

Well, the bachelors must be beating down your door. As a matter of fact, I know a few that...

FELICIA

Thanks, Jessica, but no need. I'm seeing someone at the moment.

JESSICA

C'est la vie. I can hear their hearts breaking even now.

There's an announcement from the main room.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Come on, everybody. We're ready to start.

INT. MAIN ROOM - DAY

Jessica stands with Felicia in back of the room as the auction is about to begin.

DR. WALKER, 40's, dignified, handsome, passes by.

JESSICA

Felicia, meet doctor Alex Walker,  
world-class surgeon who somehow  
finds time to serve on the board of  
the Wildlife Foundation.

DR. WALKER

A pleasure, Felicia.  
(gives Jessica a hug)  
We're going to raise a helluva lot  
of money today, all because of this  
young lady here. And I'm afraid  
some of it is going to be mine.

JESSICA

See something you like?

He points to an erotic PAINTING of half-man, half-woman  
nymphs carousing in a forest.

DR. WALKER

I call it "Hermaphrodites In Heat".  
And I won't leave here without it.

He winks, they share a laugh, he exits.

FELICIA

Did I miss something?

JESSICA

It fits his... specialty. The good  
doctor performs sex-changes.

Felicia bursts into laughter, turning a few heads.

EXT. MUSEUM

Back outside. Here he comes. Richard, dressed to kill in  
black tuxedo, climbs the steps of the museum.

MAIN ROOM

Richard enters the crowded hall. He stands in back, on the  
opposite side of the room from Jessica.

AUCTIONEER

Ladies and gentlemen, our next piece is an exquisite, hand carved, gold-plated jewelry box donated by none other than Mrs. Sterling herself. We'll start the bidding at \$5,000.

A bid is made. Then \$8,000. \$10,000. The bidding begins to stall at \$12,000.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Very well, then. \$12,000 going once...

RICHARD

\$15,000.

Eyes turn toward Richard. Jessica glances at him. He stares right back at her.

FELICIA

Who's that?

JESSICA

I don't know. Never seen him before. He's gorgeous, isn't he? If you'd like to meet him, I'll see what I can do.

FELICIA

I'm not the one he's staring at, Jessica.

AUCTIONEER

15. Do I hear 17? Yes, we have  
17. Do I hear 20?

RICHARD

\$20,000.

Richard won't take his eyes off Jessica. She finally has to look away, almost embarrassed.

Others notice the way he stares at her. It's a little beyond the bounds of proper behavior.

AUCTIONEER

\$20,000 going once, twice, sold to the gentleman in the back.

BUFFET ROOM

As the auction continues, Richard strolls toward the buffet.

Jessica follows, joins him, offers her hand. He takes it.

JESSICA

Good afternoon. I'm Jessica Sterling.

RICHARD

I know. And it is such a pleasure to finally meet you face to face.

JESSICA

And you are...

RICHARD

Oh, that's not important.

JESSICA

But I'd like to know who paid such a high price for my jewelry...

Richard leans down and WHISPERS in her ear.

RICHARD

Just think of me as a secret admirer. One who will always treasure your possession.

Jessica steps back, takes a quick breath. There's something all too familiar about that whisper.

An older COUPLE approaches, interrupts.

MAN

Excuse me, Jessica. I'm afraid we have to be going.

Richard turns and slowly walks back toward the main room.

Jessica tries to bid the couple farewell, but she can't take her eyes off Richard.

MAIN ROOM

Jessica escapes the couple and follows Richard. He's nowhere to be seen.

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Jessica stands alone on her balcony. She leans over the railing, the same spot where Richard had jumped.

She smiles secretively, staring downward to the street below.

The intercom BUZZES. She walks back inside.

JESSICA

Yes?

MAN (V.O.)

I'm sorry to bother you, but someone has dropped off a letter for you that's marked urgent. They said you would know...

JESSICA

Alright. Send it up.

LIVING ROOM

A knock. Jessica answers it, takes the letter. When the door closes, she unseals the envelope.

RICHARD (V.O.)

My dearest Jessica. You looked at me as if you knew me. Do you? Will you come to me tonight? I'll be waiting. Drive north on 318 to the Hastings Exit...

Jessica looks up from the note. She takes a long moment to think about it.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

A quiet, rural road winds through the upper class neighborhood. The homes sit far apart, secluded.

Jessica checks the address on the letter, then steers into the driveway of a sprawling estate. There's a light on downstairs.

She parks, walks to the door, knocks. No answer.

She knocks louder. She tries the doorknob. It's open.

INT. HOUSE

She slowly steps inside and is surprised to find...

The house is totally empty, probably for sale.

JESSICA

Hello?

(pause)

I know you're here.

She walks to the hallway and tries to turn on another light. There's no bulb.

She creeps slowly down the dark hallway when suddenly...

TWO ARMS encircle her from behind! Jessica almost JUMPS out of her skin!

Richard, wearing that same mask, clamps a hand over her mouth. It's exactly the way he grabbed her the last time.

He spins her around in his arms, KISSES HER. She reaches up, pulls off his mask.

JESSICA

Jesus. Are you trying to stop my heart?

RICHARD

No. I'm just trying to get it going again.

She pulls his mouth to hers. They kiss passionately.

BEDROOM

Richard carries her into the bedroom. No furniture. Just twenty pillows in a pile on the shag carpet. He lowers her gently onto the pillows.

JESSICA

Are you going to tell me your name?

RICHARD

Not yet.

He kisses down her neck, shoulders, just like before.

JESSICA

I could've brought the police...

RICHARD

That's what made it exciting.

He unbuttons her blouse, slips it over her shoulders.

JESSICA

You really are insane, aren't you?

RICHARD

Yeah. You wanna go crazy with me?

INT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Thorne and Frank clear Customs. They walk down the hallway, underneath the "Welcome To New York" sign.

ANGIE

Thorne...

Angie's a few steps behind. Thorne slows his pace.

THORNE

We shouldn't be seen...

ANGIE

I know. But can't you come to my place tonight? She won't know...

THORNE

Angie, honey. I'm going home. I'll see you soon, okay?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

A huge, empty master bathroom. Jessica steps into the bubbling jacuzzi, sits next to Richard.

JESSICA

Whose place is this anyway?

RICHARD

I dunno. I just break into 'em.

JESSICA

And you're quite remarkable at it. But I'm sure you know that, don't you, Richard?

RICHARD

(startled)

How do you know my name?

JESSICA

You left your wallet in your shoe. I didn't think you'd mind if I...

RICHARD

Why, you little thief. See? We already have something in common.

JESSICA

Richard Long from the State of California. Date of birth, 2-18-69.

(beat)

Tell me one thing, Richard. Why did you decide to pick on Thorne?

RICHARD

Oh, I don't know. Because he's the biggest game in town. And if there was anyone who ever deserved a little public humiliation, it's that asshole.

Jessica laughs quietly.

JESSICA

I suppose that, being his loyal and obedient wife, I should defend...

RICHARD

What's to defend? He's a shallow greedy, cold hearted bastard who only knows how to take, to use people...

JESSICA

Sounds like you know him personally.

RICHARD

He's the kind of man who's incapable of loving anything except his money and his possessions. I don't know how you stay with him.

JESSICA

I don't think I will be much longer. I'm going to ask him for a divorce.

Richard perks up, takes her in his arms.

RICHARD

Really? Well, I've suddenly gained a world of respect...

Jessica kisses him on the mouth to shut him up.

JESSICA

This is the first time I've cheated on him. And the last.

RICHARD

Not if I have my way.

JESSICA

Do you always get your way?

RICHARD

No. Not always. Your turn now.

He leans back. Let's Jessica have her way.

EXT. STERLING PALACE - MORNING

Jessica stops in front of the Palace, gets out, leaves her car with the doorman.

INT. PENTHOUSE

She enters their apartment, walks toward the kitchen.

THORNE'S VOICE  
Morning, Jess.

She JUMPS, spins around. Thorne rises from his chair.

JESSICA  
You scared me, Thorne. What are you doing back already?

THORNE  
We decided to come home a day early. Where have you been?

JESSICA  
I spent the night out on Long Island.

THORNE  
I called the house. You weren't...

JESSICA  
Not there. I was with Felicia. Felicia Martine. She's a friend of the Perez family. I met her at the auction. We've become good friends...

THORNE  
... in a very short time. Did she have a party or something?

JESSICA  
No. She asked me to come out for dinner, and we ended up talking all... What's wrong? What are you thinking?

He walks to her, hugs her.

THORNE  
I'm sorry, Jess. It's just that I missed you last night.

JESSICA  
I'm sorry I wasn't here. But I'm glad you're back, safe and sound.

He kisses her. Wants more. She puts a stop to it.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Bad timing. I just got a visit  
from you know who. I feel like  
hell...

She holds her stomach and hurries down the hallway.

EXT. LIMO - DAY

Thorne's DRIVER, alone in the luxury limo, pulls into a  
parking lot.

Richard parks across the street. He smiles when the DRIVER  
DISAPPEARS inside a restaurant.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

The limo drives across the George Washington Bridge.

But now it's RICHARD at the wheel, moving his head to the  
LOUD MUSIC on the stereo.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A deserted area above the river. Richard parks the limo near  
the edge of the cliff.

He gets out, puts the car in neutral, gives it a push.

RICHARD

Time to conduct a little safety  
test...

The limo rolls toward the cliff, PLUNGES OVER the embankment,  
TUMBLES down the hillside, and CRASHES onto the rocks next to  
the river!

RICHARD

... and I'm afraid your car has  
failed, Thornton.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY

Jessica picks up the phone, dials.

JESSICA

Hello, Felicia. How've you been?

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - DAY

Felicia sits on the patio of her beach house, a book in one  
hand, a cordless phone in the other.

FELICIA

Jessica. So nice to hear from you.  
What's happening?

INTERCUT

JESSICA

I was thinking we should get together and... well, the opening night of the ballet is tomorrow. Thorne and I usually go. But he can't make it this time and I thought you might like to...

FELICIA

It sounds wonderful. I'd love to.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER - NIGHT

Jessica and Felicia, stunning in their evening gowns, climb out of the limo and walk up the steps.

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

Mrs. Sterling, over here!

A few PHOTOGRAPHERS snap pictures as the ladies walk by.

PHOTOGRAPHER 2

Where's Thorne tonight?

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

Hunting for snakes?

She ignores them, walks a little faster.

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Thorne paces around his living room, brainstorming with Frank and two other MEN.

THORNE

... so we put the bait in a specific place and we tell him where it is. I make the challenge this time. A public challenge...

MAN 1

But somebody else might steal it. How do we know it's him?

THORNE

We'll make it foolproof. Nobody could pull it off, and nobody's gonna be crazy enough to try. Except him.

MAN 2

We're gonna have to raise the stakes, make it awfully tempting...

THORNE

Any suggestions?

FRANK

Geez, he's already stolen jewelry, money, paintings. What's left?

INT. LINCOLN CENTER - NIGHT

Jessica and Felicia socialize in the lobby. The lights dim, the ballet is about to begin.

As they enter the theater, Jessica is startled to see...

RICHARD, in his tuxedo, standing with the ushers. He reaches out and grabs Jessica's tickets.

RICHARD

May I show you to your seats?

Jessica hides her surprise, tries to play it cool.

Felicia raises an eyebrow, smiles.

BOX SEATS

Richard and Jessica converse in a whisper as they enter the box.

RICHARD

I was hoping your husband would be with you. I'm dying to meet him.

JESSICA

You're demented...

RICHARD

I have to see you, Jess. Tonight.

He slips her a piece of paper as they take their seats, then he's gone. Felicia smiles devilishly.

FELICIA

Well, well, well. What a coincidence to see... um...

JESSICA

Richard.

FELICIA

Yes, sweet Richard. He certainly is daring. Is he as tasty as he looks?

JESSICA

Oh God. He's unbelievable. I was going to tell you all about him tonight, but he beat me to it.

FELICIA

You were going to tell me?

JESSICA

I used you as an excuse the other day. I'm sorry. But, you see, this is my first affair, and I may need some help.

Felicia laughs, takes Jessica by the hand.

FELICIA

Don't worry. I'll do whatever I can. I mean... a little fib now and then, an alibi here or there... That's what friends are for.

A sigh of relief from Jessica as the house lights dim.

JESSICA

Thanks, Felicia. I'm in your debt.

FELICIA

Forget it. You'll just have to tell me all the juicy details.

(pause)

So now. Unbelievable?

The lights fade to black.

JESSICA

Oh God...

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

JESSICA

Oh God, Richard...