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FOURTEEN MINUTES

an original screenplay by

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INT. SMALL DINER - AFTERNOON

A thin haze of smoke hovers above the cramped tables and booths, which are mainly filled with students from the Art Institute. The decor once bright and stylish is now as dull and worn as the cook behind the counter.

ARTIE MOSS, whose thick sweaty body moves gracefully across the hot grill, whips up plate after plate until he notices the unserved orders piling up on the side.

ARTIE MOSS

Justine!

The waitress, JUSTINE HARGROVE, pretty in an unkempt manner and a young student herself, ignores the orders by the grill as she focuses her attention on her sketchbook.

Her hand dances across the paper, capturing the unique features of a lone old man, JOHN CATON, who looks as weathered as the old book he's reading from. His shirt and tie are faded and hopelessly out of style. A threadbare suit jacket lies next to him in the booth.

Justine is completely focused on her subject and the drawing.

ARTIE MOSS (CONT'D)

How many times have I told you?
C'mon, we got customers here.

JUSTINE

One second Artie. I'm almost done.

ARTIE MOSS

Stop right now or you'll be done
permanently! Capice?

Justine stops drawing, looks down at the paper then back to Artie. She closes the sketchbook, then quickly opens it to the drawing and continues until Artie rips it from her hands. He flings the book across the diner, landing in the small booth by the old man.

JUSTINE

Artie! What the fuck? You didn't
have to do that!

ARTIE MOSS

I'm tired of telling you. This ain't
a class!

Justine peers around the diner then back to Artie.

JUSTINE

It isn't even a restaurant. Just
look at this place.

ARTIE MOSS
THAT'S IT! Who the fuck are you,
(mispronounces)
"Too-loose Lortreck!" Sketch on
your own time!

Artie pulls off his apron, comes from behind the counter as the diner grows silent.

ARTIE MOSS (CONT'D)
Which you'll have plenty more of
that now! You're fired. Get out!

Justine takes off her apron, throws it on the floor in disgust as she walks into the kitchen.

The old man picks up the sketchbook, taking notice as he glances through it. He places it under his jacket as he continues to nurse his tea and dry buttered roll.

Justine emerges with her backpack, glances around for the sketchbook but thinks better of looking for it as Artie stares her down with angry eyes.

EXT. GOWANUS CANAL, BROOKLYN - LATER

John Caton makes his way along the rotting canal, the water stagnant with a chemical sheen that glistens in the sunlight. He passes derelict warehouses and old tortured buildings, with barely a window showing any signs of life.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The last remaining streetlight outside the dilapidated factory, its illumination bronze and dull, casts long shadows across the studio. Papers rustle slightly from the warm breeze that flows through some broken windows.

A rat scurries across the floor, darting between the piles of old canvas and dried spilled paint that covers the floor.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The sheets are damp with sweat, not from the warm temperature but from the dream that keeps John tossing and flaying at the demons that torment his slumber. His snore is slight but punctuated by murmurs and frantic whimpering cries.

EXT. GOWANUS CANAL - LATER

A tricked out sedan, with overly ambitious paint and wheels, careens through the empty streets. The passenger leans out the window firing a pistol and taking target practice at whatever suits them.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The car filled with unruly teens, passes the lone streetlight and unloads various shots, trying to snuff out the last remaining sign of life. They miss it completely, stop the car and get out to take careful aim.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The gunfire mixes into John's dream and he is transported to another time and place.

EXT. JUNGLE FOREST, NORTH KOREA, 1951 - NIGHT - DREAM

A squad of U.S. soldiers fan out through the forest, carefully looking for the enemy hiding in the bush and trees. Proceeding with extreme caution the soldiers move down a path until one stops, strikes a match to light a cigarette. Suddenly a hailstorm of bullets are unleashed, lighting the forest brightly. The voices of men yelling is muted by the barrage of machine guns.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The lone streetlight illuminates the room in shades of amber. John claws at the blanket then jumps up completely startled as the light in his room suddenly goes dark. The sound of gunfire continues for a brief instance then falls silent as John makes his way to the window.

JOHN CATON

(yells)

Hey you punks down there! What the hell do you think you're doing?

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The street hoodlums look up at the window, amazed that someone actually lives in the rotting warehouse.

HOODLUM 1

Oh shit! What are you doing up there?

JOHN CATON

I live here, you moron!

HOODLUM 2

Fuck you, old man!

(points his gun)

I'll waste you, ya crazy old mother fucker!

The hoodlum fires off a quick array of bullets as a warning. John stumbles back into his room, ducks for cover.

The hoodlums laugh, taunting John as they make their way back to the car. Just before they can drive away, a glass jar flung from the window, shatters on the street with dried red paint.

John wails and screams, barking out orders to no one in particular.

The hoodlums are about to get out of the car but a rain of more jars, this time filled with liquid paint shatters all around them, covering the street in a kaleidoscope of color.

HOODLUM 1

Fuck this! I don't want that paint
shit all over my car.

HOODLUM 2

Man, I thought this place was
deserted. Who the fuck in their
right mind would be living in that
shit-hole?

HOODLUM 1

The fuck I know? Probably one ugly-
looking mofo. Like that fuckin'
hunchback from "Noter Dame".

The two men fire off some quick shots before they get back in the car. As it speeds away down the street, the glass jars continue their barrage for some time.

A rat runs across the freshly painted street, a trail of paw prints leads back into the desolate warehouse.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The floor is littered with shards of broken glass. The rat scampers across the room dodging between the shattered jars as if traversing a minefield.

Panting heavily, John is slumped against the wall, his fingers twitching nervously. His eyes are wide but vacant, haunted by an invisible terror only he can see.

The rat reaches him, sniffing curiously, but John ignores the pesky rodent.

INT. HARGROVE'S ART GALLERY - SOHO - LATE MORNING

The gallery is quiet, filled with numerous works of art but devoid of any customers. A fashionably dressed woman, ALYSSA BENNETT, carefully dusts around a sculpture. Her stylish high heels click noticeably as she crosses the polished marble floor to the next piece of hand-carved art.

The door opens slowly with a noticeable creak. Justine enters the chic gallery carrying her portfolio case which is worn and held together with strips of duct tape.

Alyssa takes notice, stops dusting and walks toward Justine.

ALYSSA BENNETT

(condescending)

May I help you? We don't permit loitering or browsing if you aren't a customer.

JUSTINE

I'm looking for-

FARLOW HARGROVE (O.S.)

(interrupts)

Alyssa! That creak is back again! Why must I keep repeating myself for the simplest of tasks?

The door at the rear of the gallery swings open brusquely to permit FARLOW HARGROVE his grand entrance. He carefully wipes a few crumbs from his impeccably tailored suit, dabs a thin trickle of sweat from his snow white hair.

Alyssa motions for Justine to leave.

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

My dear, please take heed to my requests. Is it so much to ask?

ALYSSA BENNETT

I'm sorry Mr. Hargrove. My apologies. I will take care of it as soon as I escort this young woman-

Farlow looks over at Justine disapprovingly. She catches his look, stares down at the floor shyly.

FARLOW HARGROVE

Yes, please escort...

Farlow walks back to his office.

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

...My niece to the ladies boudoir to freshen herself. I will meet her in my office shortly after I finish the breakfast you so rudely interrupted.

The door slams shut with nary a sound.

ALYSSA BENNETT

I'm sorry.

(MORE)

ALYSSA BENNETT (CONT'D)

I didn't know you are Mr. Hargrove's niece. He rarely speaks of his family.

JUSTINE

I'm not surprised. He rarely speaks to me either.

ALYSSA BENNETT

Here, let me show you where the ladies room is.

Justine ignores her, walks to the office door and lets herself in.

INT. HARGROVE ART GALLERY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The interior of the office is stark and cold, complementing the icy demeanor of Farlow himself. He finishes biting into a scone, sips on a cup of coffee and motions for Justine to sit down.

FARLOW HARGROVE

(smugly)

Well, Justine, to what do I owe the honor of your presence this time?

JUSTINE

I'm just as pleased to see you too, Uncle Farlow.

FARLOW HARGROVE

Then we do share a common bond. Even after all these years.

Farlow smiles thinly, but without any hint of warmth.

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

How long has it been now?

JUSTINE

You know how long. Two years. The time before that was almost three.

FARLOW HARGROVE

Actually it was four. As you get older you do seem to come around more frequently.

JUSTINE

(sarcastically)

I miss your company.

FARLOW HARGROVE

As I do yours. But why are you really here? You still can't touch your trust fund for quite some time.

JUSTINE

(tersely)

Why not? I need the money to continue in art school. I need it now not ten years from now!

FARLOW HARGROVE

Do we need to relive this all over again?

JUSTINE

I bet you weren't this hard on my Dad.

FARLOW HARGROVE

No, you're wrong. I was much harder.

JUSTINE

You don't understand. I'm good. Real good. It's in my blood. It courses through my veins just like his.

FARLOW HARGROVE

I'm sure it does and it's my job to make sure it stays there instead of pooling on a lonely bathroom floor.

Farlow relaxes his posture, slumps down into his chair.

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

I won't lose you like I lost him.

JUSTINE

You already have.

FARLOW HARGROVE

Justine, you can't live your life like he did his. It won't bring him back. It doesn't work that way.

(smiles)

Come work for me here at the gallery instead.

JUSTINE

He would've wanted me to live whatever life I chose. My choice, not yours.

FARLOW HARGROVE

Be reasonable.

Farlow opens a desk drawer and pulls out an envelope, hands it Justine.

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

Here, take this. It's two tickets to the upcoming Art Exposition.

JUSTINE

Thanks.

FARLOW HARGROVE

Spend some time with me. I'll teach you the business and one day this will all be yours. I think you'll do quite well here.

Justine looks around, sneers at a particularly outlandishly ugly piece of contemporary art.

JUSTINE

(laughs bitterly)

You want me to sell others people art? Exploit their body of work. I'm not a pimp!

FARLOW HARGROVE

It's better than being a whore because all artists eventually succumb to their desires.

JUSTINE

How can you be so sure?

FARLOW HARGROVE

Trust me. You'd be surprised to find what really drives the creative spirit.

(with a sardonic grin)

Wealth and fame can be an intoxicant more powerful than you could ever imagine. Eventually every piece of your precious work will be like turning a trick.

Farlow glances sadly at a photo on the desk of a young beautiful couple holding a little girl that looks like Justine. He places the photo face down on the desk, not willing to look upon the once happy family anymore.

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

If you follow in both your parents' footsteps, that's exactly what you'll become. Even your mother who had everything going-

Justine stands up, an angry wash fills every pore of her body as she desperately tries to maintain her composure.

JUSTINE
 (abruptly cuts Farlow
 off angrily)
 I told you to never speak of her! Ever!

FARLOW HARGROVE
 You need to face the truth sometime, Justine.

JUSTINE
 Fine, but just not today.

Justine grabs her bag and portfolio case and walks towards the door.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
 Once again, thanks for the lovely conversation, Uncle Farlow. I'll show myself out, I don't want to be late for class. At least while they'll still let me.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - MORNING

The postman leaves the warehouse, makes his way down the street, shakes his head at the paint smears across the street.

John sweeps the street of the broken glass, stops to slowly study the asphalt canvas with a perplexed look.

POSTMAN
 Hey Mr. Caton! How are you today?
 (teasing)
 Is that a new piece of art or something?

JOHN CATON
 (annoyed)
 Does this look like artwork?

POSTMAN
 Hard to say. Ya never can tell.
 Some people might call it art.

JOHN CATON
 That's why you're a steward of negligible correspondence
 (condescending)
 And I'm the artist.

The postman stops in his tracks, turns to confront John, who is back sweeping up the broken glass on the street.

POSTMAN
 Artist? Oh my mistake... I thought you were a street cleaner.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT HALLWAY - MORNING

The hallway is dusty and dim, cracked peeling paint snakes across the bare walls in patterns of faded color. John comes in from the street, holding a broom and a pail filled with broken glass. He looks down, notices the small paw prints of paint leading up the stairs, fading as they reach the top.

JOHN CATON
Damn fool kids. Wasted my paint.

He places the pail and broom against the wall, walks over to check his mail. The mailboxes are all empty, badly tarnished except for the one labeled "Caton." John Caton tosses all the junk mail on the floor, which covers the corner of the hallway with unopened envelopes, many of them bills and postcards.

One envelope catches his attention. He rips it open and struggles to read the contents in the dim light from a lone lightbulb, which hangs from a frayed cord.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Jesus, I didn't even think he was still alive. He must be at least...I guess about my age.

John reads the letter, the words coming in and out of focus.

CLOSE UP: LETTER

Dr. John,

We've been trying to reach you in regards to your designs. Ms. Smythe is re-releasing her favorite bed sets and would like to use your seasonal patterns from 1976. The repeat artwork has been long lost and we are hoping you could provide us with digital scans of the originals. Please contact the...

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
Blah, blah, blah...Who gives a shit.
He never did much for me except take his commissions. Screw him!

John is about to toss the letter when the bulb flickers on and off, then completely off. John is bathed in the darkness of the hallway.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
Well, nothing wrong with a little something to at least keep the lights on.

John trudges down the darkened hallway and up the stairs, his footsteps echo in the empty warehouse of his life.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - LATER

Large skylights bathe the studio in the bright light of the afternoon sun. Easels and drawing tables filled with tubes and brushes of dried out paint are scattered about, the floor is covered in layers of paint splatter and dust.

John is frantically pouring through piles of artwork and designs. He casually tosses each drawing aside without a hint of care in his search, dismissing the artwork without concern.

JOHN CATON

They have to be here somehow.

John continues his search, stops instantly to glance down at the artwork, which is ghastly in color and design.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ! What the hell was I thinking.

He is about to fling it when he notices some writing at the bottom of the artwork.

CLOSE UP:

A PERSONAL NOTE WRITTEN IN PERFECT ELEGANT PENMANSHIP.

"John! This is simply wonderful and will make a terrific addition to our catalog. I've enclosed two tickets to the premiere. Please come by to say hello.

(Signed)

Allie, 1973

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

From what I remember, this thing's about as bad as that movie she was in.

John tears at it angrily, tosses the shredded pieces aside with particular disgust.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Too bad I wasn't drunk when I painted this, at least I'd have an excuse.

John continues his search until he finds the missing artwork at the very bottom of his last pile.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Found it, you bastard! Hiding out 'til the very end.

John looks at the piles of paintings strewn about the floor then back to the painting in his hands.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Well that was torture.

He looks over the artwork carefully, notices some blemishes and walks over to the large drawing table.

He reverently opens a weathered case, filled with pristine brushes and beautifully crafted drawing instruments. He handles the brushes with care, gently touches it to his mouth with the look of a heroin addict getting a taste of a fix.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

A little touch up here and there for the talented Miss Allison Smythe, then all will be good in the world.

John opens some of the paint jars, flakes of paint fall on the table, the pigment is long dried out.

With a deep sigh he walks to one of the large windows, glances out at the urban decay surrounding him, through pained eyes.

INT. CLASSROOM - ART INSTITUTE - AFTERNOON

The shades are pulled down tightly, an occasional sliver of sunlight peers through across the students and strikes the projection screen at a sharp angle. The hum of the projector is broken by faint whispers and a snore here and there.

An older bespectacled man, PRESTON WILCOX, walks across the front of the screen, obscuring the images of various paintings as he makes his way down the aisle. Although quite bald, his remaining hair is long and tied in a ponytail which is in contrast to the dark blue suit he wears with authority.

PRESTON WILCOX

At this point in time, the artists begin a phase of constant re-invention and competition. Periods are developed and discarded at an ever increasing rate.

As Preston Wilcox continues his stroll through the class, he taps and awakens a student who is dozing.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

Pointillism, expressionism,

He pulls a video games device from the hands of another young man while continuing his lecture. He hits a few keys to score some points, shows it to the student who smiles sheepishly then shuts it down and places it down on the desk.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

The era of disposable commodity driven commerce that defines art is now beginning in earnest...

Justine sits towards the back of the room, her hair covers the earbuds of an iPod as she doodles earnestly.

Preston stops walking, glances down at the sketch and yanks the earbuds out of Justine's ears. The loud but tinny sound of techno music catches the student's attention.

Justine looks up, startled and embarrassed.

JUSTINE

What the...? oh, sorry Mr. Wilcox.

PRESTON WILCOX

Once again, Ms. Hargrove, you can't seem to focus on the class at hand.

JUSTINE

A bad habit, I know. I just like to draw and-

PRESTON WILCOX

Well, I at least you're in the right place for that.

(waves his hands
across the room)

One would think, I suppose, wouldn't one? This is an art institute, at least when I last checked this morning.

The class snickers at his snide levity. He holds up the sketch, which is of himself and looks down at Justine.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

Hmmm, I hadn't realized my shoulders hunched a bit.

JUSTINE

They don't, it's just from this angle...I guess...uh...I didn't mean to offend you.

PRESTON WILCOX

My dear young woman, never apologize for what you see. After all, an artist hasn't been executed for a bad portrait since Henry VIII.

JUSTINE

(humorously)

I guess I'm safe then?

PRESTON WILCOX

From death possibly, a failing grade
is another matter.

Preston walks back to his lectern, still holding the drawing.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

(looks back at Justine)

I think I'll keep this, after all
you never know what it will worth
when you become rich and famous.

The class laughs again, Justine slinks ever lower in her
seat.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

Oh, and one more thing. I can
appreciate your art but not your
music. Please refrain from bringing
that horrible useless noise to my
lecture hall.

The slide projector flips to a different painting but the
low buzz of the school bell signals the end of the lecture.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

(to the class)

Remember! You have only a few weeks
left to identify your artist of choice
and prepare the dissertation that
will determine your final grade this
semester.

(sternly)

For those of you graduating this
semester, no matter what you may
think, failure is not an option.
Take it lightly and you'll be taking
it again next semester.

The class empties out quickly, Justine remains seated, alone.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

And please, pick an artist you can
learn from. Someone unfamiliar.
Spare me the obvious DaVinci or
Warhol.

(pointedly)

And God forbid you bring me anything
by Devvon Hinkel. There's a world
out there of limitless talent and
possibilities. Don't be oblivious!

Preston Wilcox looks out over the empty hall, his eyes meet
with Justine's for the moment, then turn away. He collects
his papers and shuts down the projector.

Justine gathers her composure, walks up to the lectern.

JUSTINE

Dean Wilcox? Can I speak to you for a moment?

Preston Wilcox stops, looks up from his papers.

PRESTON WILCOX

Well certainly, Miss Hargrove.

JUSTINE

I ...uh...wanted to apologize. I meant no disrespect by doodling-

PRESTON WILCOX

(interrupts)

Don't apologize for your talent.

(smiles)

After all, before I became the pretentious old coot you see standing before you, I was an artist myself. Believe me, I was reprimanded far more severely for doodles far less compelling.

Justine smiles at the thought.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

The world of art has changed much since I sat in this very hall.

(remorsefully)

Laptops replaced easels, programs and coding delineate color and movement. So, Miss Hargrove don't apologize ever for your abilities or your talent.

JUSTINE

Thank you. I won't.

PRESTON WILCOX

(smiles)

Besides it's refreshing to see someone think with their fingers.

He gathers all his belongings, walks off the lectern, followed by Justine.

JUSTINE

Oh!, Dean Wilcox? I did have question?

PRESTON WILCOX

Yes Justine?

Justine is surprised he informally uses her first name.

JUSTINE

I know you oversee the artist work study program and I know it's very late in the semester but I just lost my job and I need to make some money and...

PRESTON WILCOX

It is late and all of our positions have been long granted.

JUSTINE

(pleading)

I'll do anything. Scrub the sculpture room floors, polish the computer terminals, model for the life-drawing class...

PRESTON WILCOX

Let's not get carried away, besides you modeling for life drawing might be too much of a distraction for the young men in our institute.

JUSTINE

(smiles thinly)

I'm really in a bind. I need to pay my rent by the end of the month, let alone have anything left to eat.

PRESTON WILCOX

Well, let me assure you, regardless what the people portray, there's nothing romantic about the starving artist.

JUSTINE

Tell me about it.

Preston Wilcox walks towards his office, stops and faces Justine.

PRESTON WILCOX

I'll see what I can do.

JUSTINE

Thank you, Dean Wilcox. I appreciate it.

EXT. ARI'S PAN AND SCAN CAFE - AFTERNOON

The store, starkly white and devoid of any warmth, is bustling with activity as technicians hover over computers and monitors.

The door opens slowly as John Caton enters, unsure of where he actually is. He carries a well worn portfolio case, which he cradles protectively.

John approaches a young technician behind the counter, whose hair is in a long pony tail with a trendy beard, tattoos and body piercings.

TECHNICIAN

What can I do for you?

JOHN CATON

I don't know. Is Ari here?

TECHNICIAN

I'm Ari.

JOHN CATON

No, I must be in the wrong place. Ari was a man a little younger than me. I used to come here for my transparencies.

TECHNICIAN

Oh, you must mean my Dad. He's no longer here with us.

JOHN CATON

Too bad. He always did such a nice job on the processing. Really knew how to push the chemicals.

(looks around the store)

Do you know where I can reach him?

TECHNICIAN

Heaven, I suppose. He died a few years ago.

JOHN CATON

Sorry to hear that. I need to get a data...uh, digital...

(looks down at note)

Digital file made of...

John shakes his head unknowing, hands the technician the note.

TECHNICIAN

Okay, do you know the format? Embedded colors and at what resolution?

JOHN CATON

The what and the what?

TECHNICIAN
Format and resolution? Do you know
what they are?

JOHN CATON
I haven't got a clue.

John's gaze is fixated on the tattoos and body piercings of
the young man, with much disgust.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
What the hell is that thing?

TECHNICIAN
Excuse me?

JOHN CATON
(points to a grotesque
piercing)
That thing on your neck. It looks
like you swallowed a tool chest.
Does all that stuff rattle when you
walk?

TECHNICIAN
It's body art.

JOHN CATON
Art?

TECHNICIAN
Yes. The body is the temple of the
soul and I am expressing my innermost
chi and shaping it in physical terms.
(proudly)
A living sculpture. What do you
think?

JOHN CATON
It looks like a monument to bad taste.
(points to an ugly
tattoo)
I've seen better tattoos drawn by a
blind man with broken fingers.

TECHNICIAN
(angrily)
What are you? A critic.

JOHN CATON
God forbid I should sink so low.

The technician, his pride and chi in chaos, returns to the
task at hand.

TECHNICIAN
 Forget it, but I can't help you
 without that info. Any idea?

John shakes his head no.

TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)
 When was the last time you made your
 files here?

JOHN CATON
 (annoyed)
 When you were nothing more than a
 sperm swimming in one of your Daddy's
 balls.

TECHNICIAN
 (interrupts)
 Hey! Old man! No need to be rude!
 I'm just trying to help.

The technician cuts John an angry look, crumples up the note
 he is holding and points to the door.

TECHNICIAN (CONT'D)
 Are you always this pleasant?

JOHN CATON
 Yes!

John grabs his portfolio case and walks out the door in a
 huff as the crumpled note hits him in the back.

INT. OFFICE OF PRESTON WILCOX - LATER

The office is cavernous and pretentious with large overstuffed
 leather chairs facing a heavy wooden desk. Bookcases line
 the walls, an untouched easel sits in the corner with a slight
 layer of dust on the unfinished canvas.

Preston enters, makes his way around the furniture and sits
 at his desk chair which faces out, overlooking the campus.

JOHN CATON (O.S.)
 Well, well, you've done pretty good
 for yourself the last few years, but
 that unfinished painting, Is that to
 impress the students with your vast
 talent or just yourself?

John Caton sits in one of the large chairs, his body hidden
 from view.

PRESTON WILCOX

(surprised)

No, I don't need to impress any of my students.

Preston turns and faces John Caton who sits with his overcoat and beret still on.

JOHN CATON

Oh, that's right.

(sarcastically)

You're one of the "Deans" of this fine institution. Whatever good that'll do for the future of art.

PRESTON WILCOX

It's nice to see you haven't lost all your worldly charm over the years.

John Caton takes his beret off in a sign of respect, walks towards the easel, wipes the dust from the canvas with his finger.

JOHN CATON

If you would've even attempted to paint something like that for me I would've thrown you out on your ass.

PRESTON WILCOX

You did throw me out, remember?

JOHN CATON

Of course I remember, but you kept coming back. You were certainly a tenacious little fuck.

PRESTON WILCOX

There was nobody better to learn from. Isn't that what an apprentice is supposed to do?

JOHN CATON

Only in the best of circumstances, yes.

PRESTON WILCOX

Then you taught me well.

JOHN CATON

Really?

(glances over to the painting)

Are you trying to insult me?

Preston Wilcox, ignores the comment, walks over to John to shake his hand. He motions for him to sit down but John walks to the window instead.

John looks out over the campus filled with many students carrying computer bags, but only a few actually carry a portfolio case with paintings or drawings.

PRESTON WILCOX

What can I do for you, John? It's been many years since you would even set foot here.

JOHN CATON

I need to ask you a favor.

PRESTON WILCOX

Hell has truly frozen over then.

(grins slightly)

Well, certainly but that depends on what it is.

JOHN CATON

I'm lost...I don't understand this new world.

Digitizing...files...email? What the hell happened?

PRESTON WILCOX

(smiles)

The 21st century happened. You've been cooped up in that fortress of solitude of yours way too long. The world has come and gone, blossomed into something new and different.

JOHN CATON

I have a commission to get out but haven't got a clue how to get it to them. I was thinking that maybe you could arrange for a student to-

PRESTON WILCOX

(interjects)

To come work for you? I don't know. That didn't go too well the last time. Am I correct?

JOHN CATON

(angrily)

No you're not correct. I asked for an art student, instead you sent me a dilettante. A patron of unwanted conjecture.

PRESTON WILCOX

No, it was her father who was a critic, she was just an art student but nevertheless a student who

(MORE)

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)
 could've done much for your much
 maligned career.

JOHN CATON
 I wasn't seeking help for my "much
 maligned" career, only someone who
 could assist me, learn from me. Not
 some expostulated waif whose total
 sum knowledge of art...

John holds up his fingers indicating the small size.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
 ...I could fit in a thimble. Question
 after question, retort after retort.
 Who has the time for such foolishness.

PRESTON WILCOX
 That's what apprentices do, they ask
 questions. I did. Nothing wrong
 with that. It's how you answer them,
 that is the problem.

JOHN CATON
 Problem? What problem?
 (paces back and forth)
 Imagine me, ME! Having to justify
 my work to the daughter of some
 opinionated fool who has nary the
 talent to paint but the gall to
 question my own abilities.

PRESTON WILCOX
 Your ambivalence to contrary opinions
 is world renowned, but you need not
 have sent her screaming and hysterical
 from your studio.

JOHN CATON
 Oh please, she needed to be tougher
 than that if she's gonna survive in
 this world. I was doing her a favor.

PRESTON WILCOX
 I'm sure she was quite grateful for
 the experience you showered upon
 her. Well, at least the years haven't
 mellowed you in the slightest.

JOHN CATON
 Spare me the sarcasm. You know better
 than that.

PRESTON WILCOX
 That I do.

JOHN CATON

So tell me this.

(sits back down)

Did my talented young "apprentice" ever make it as an artist or did she take the path of least resistance and follow in her daddy's knock-kneed footsteps?

PRESTON WILCOX

Neither. She's a professor at Rhode Island School of Design.

John breaks out in a maniacal laugh.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

You find that amusing?

JOHN CATON

Actually, no. I find it quite sad.

(regains his composure)

Funny though it might seem, for those who can't, end up teaching.

PRESTON WILCOX

Really? Like me?

JOHN CATON

No, not like you. I taught you well and you learned well. I never understood why you made this choice.

PRESTON WILCOX

It looks like we do have something in common. I never understood why you made yours either.

John stops smiling at the thought, pulls Justine's sketchbook from the pocket of his overcoat, hands it to Preston.

JOHN CATON

Here. There's a student in this school. A young woman. I can't pay her monetarily but can offer an opportunity...

(his voice trails off)

To...learn...

Preston flips through the sketchbook, smiles as the pages turn.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Do you recognize the work?

PRESTON WILCOX

Why yes, I do. A Miss Justine Hargrove to be exact.

JOHN CATON

Obviously Miss Hargrove knows a thing or two about drawing but does she know anything about computers?

PRESTON WILCOX

Everyone here does. Now you need to know math as well computer programming to be an artist.

JOHN CATON

Math and art? Has the world completely gone mad?

They both chuckle at the thought.

PRESTON WILCOX

Fortunately she lives comfortably in both worlds. You might be interested to know her father was-

JOHN CATON

(dismissively)

I'm not. Just send her over. We can start immediately.

PRESTON WILCOX

I don't think that's a good idea. It might end badly.

JOHN CATON

For who? Me or her?

PRESTON WILCOX

I'm not sure.

Preston hands the sketchbook back to John, who takes it as places the beret back on his head and walks out of the office without even a goodbye.

Preston walks over to the easel, removes the painting, closes the easel and places them both in a small closet.

EXT. GOWANUS CANAL, BROOKLYN - MORNING

The streets are deserted, the surrounding buildings worn and empty, devoid of any life except for the scampering of unseen critters. Justine nervously makes her way to the warehouse where John Caton's studio is located.

As she enters the darkened hallway she can hear a man screaming, followed by the sounds of things crashing.

JOHN CATON (O.S.)
 Hermes! HERMES! Get back here, you
 rat bastard! This is no time to be
 playing games.

INT. JOHN CATON'S BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Justine stops in her tracks, then slowly walks up the creaking
 staircase until she hears the sound of breaking glass and a
 hysterical scream.

JOHN CATON (O.S.)
 No! Hermes! That's one of my
 favorite brushes, it's not a toy!
 (beat)
 Give me that thing! I mean it!

More glass shatters followed by a large crashing noise.

JOHN CATON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You'll be out on the street where
 you belong if you don't listen to
 me! Now, come here! Hermes!

Justine runs up the darkened stairs and enters the brightly
 lit studio loft, her eyes blinded to the sudden change in
 light.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT STUDIO- CONTINUOUS

John is trudging quickly across the vast loft, yelling at
 seemingly no one. He finally stops, tries to catch his breath
 and is about to keel over when Justine runs to his aid.

JUSTINE
 Mr. Caton? Are you okay?

JOHN CATON
 (gasping for air)
 I...uh...my....brush...that...

Justine helps John to one of the stools, steadies himself
 and sits down.

JUSTINE
 You better sit down.

JOHN CATON
 Thank you Miss Hargrove.
 (catches his breath)
 I have to apologize. This was not
 quite the introduction I was going
 to make. I hope that little episode
 with Hermes didn't frighten you.

JUSTINE

I was a little concerned, especially
after I heard the glass shatter.

John points to various jars of dried paint that are smashed
on the floor.

JOHN CATON

Oh those? They're of no use anymore.
(sadly)
All old and dried out, like everything
else here.

JUSTINE

Dean Wilcox said you were...are...a
pretty famous textile designer.
That sounds exciting.

JOHN CATON

It isn't, I assure you.

JUSTINE

He also mentioned that you are a
bastion of artistic knowledge, someone
who can inspire-

John holds up his hand, motions for her to stop talking.

JOHN CATON

What did Dean Wilcox really say?

JUSTINE

That's it, that's what he said.

Justine looks away, drops her head to hide her embarrassment.

JOHN CATON

If we're going to be acquaintances
then you're going to have to be far
more truthful or a much better liar.

JUSTINE

Truthfully, I'd prefer not to say.

JOHN CATON

I insist, after all, in the truth
there is all that really is.

She looks back up at John, still a little nervous.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(annoyed)
Oh for God's sake, out with it girl!

JUSTINE

He said you were once a great talent,
that you might've been one of the
greats if things had gone right.

JOHN CATON

Yes, but what did he really say?
Preston is not one to mince words,
tragic as they may be.

Justine regains her composure, looks directly into John's eyes.

JUSTINE

He said you were exactly that. A
tragic figure wasting away in a hovel
of dirt and squalor. That you're a
nasty old narcissist, selfishly
opinionated with little regard for
others.

John looks deeply into Justine's eyes, focusing directly into her soul. She remains rigid, even a little frightened.

JOHN CATON

Go on. There's more, I'm sure.

JUSTINE

He called you "Icarus." Said you
flew too far and too close for your
own good.

Justine is startled by the loud bellowing laughter of John Caton, who stands up and whoops it up in a deranged maniacal cackle.

JOHN CATON

(excited)

Oh he's so right! Icarus!

John starts to flap his arms like a bird as he dances around Justine like a mad dervish, which makes her laugh with a mixture of fear and bemusement.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

How could I have never realized that.
So right! I am ICARUS!

(screaming)

I'm flying...soaring like a bird...higher
and higher...TO THE SUN!

John stops abruptly, a sad look comes over his face as they both regain their composure.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Burning...

He takes Justine's coat and computer bag, brings her over to the large drawing table where his designs are spread about.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

Any other words of wisdom from my esteemed colleague?

JUSTINE

Dean Wilcox said to tread lightly. There is great promise in what you can teach me, but I need to be careful.

JOHN CATON

Of that you do. Yes, be very careful.

Their eyes meet, John's stare intense and quite intimidating but Justine doesn't turn away.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Good! It seems we understand each other then.

John brings over the drawings, spreads them out across the drawing table.

Justine unpacks her computer bag, powers up her Apple laptop and takes out the electronic pen and tablet. She also takes out a digital camera, snapping photos around the studio and focuses in on John.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

JUSTINE

Just taking some warm up shots. The light's perfect in here, so I can shoot the artwork instead of scanning.

Justine aims the camera directly at John.

JOHN CATON

(covers his face)

Please don't do that!

JUSTINE

It's okay, you're not Amish or something are you.

JOHN CATON

Don't be silly.

JUSTINE

I always like to shoot photos of some of my figures.

JOHN CATON

I'm not one of your figures.
 (points to the
 paintings)
 These are.

Justine puts the camera down protectively, looks over the artwork, wrinkles her nose in disapproval but stops immediately when she notices John looking at her.

JUSTINE

Uh...sorry. These are interesting.
 Quite nice if you ask me.

JOHN CATON

I didn't.

JUSTINE

Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you.

JOHN CATON

You didn't, but you're right.
 (tosses the artwork
 aside)
 They're shit. Work not even befitting
 a "Salon des Refuses." I don't even
 know why I bother.

John sits on a stool by the desk with a forlorn look as he looks out into the studio.

Justine reaches for the camera tentatively as John covers his face and blindly waves his hands away from the lens.

JUSTINE

Why don't we get down to shooting
 the artwork for the files.

Justine adjusts the artwork in the light, tries to focus to get the best image.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(under her breath)
 Now I know what it's like for the
 paparazzi.

JOHN CATON

Paparazzo? What's that asshole
 have to do with anything?

JUSTINE

Who?

JOHN CATON

I just said who. "Paparazzo!"

JUSTINE

You mean they.

JOHN CATON

What "they" are we talking about?
I'm talking about a "he." I went to
school with that jerk in Italy. The
one they called "paparazzo"

(moves his fingers

like a buzzing insect)

Because he buzzed around like a
mosquito. Don't tell me he spawned
a son?

JUSTINE

No, there's thousands of them. Here,
let me show you.

Justine opens her laptop, searches on the internet and finds
items on the paparazzi.

John looks at the laptop in amazement.

JOHN CATON

What is this thing? It's not
connected to anything?

JUSTINE

It doesn't have to be. It's wireless.
My uh... boy...friend...Travis hooked
me up with a wireless card, pirated
of course, since he believes the
internet should be free to all.

JOHN CATON

The uh...internet? Is it like radio?

JUSTINE

Radio? You really have been cooped
up in here too long.

(points to the screen)

See! You can find almost anything.
Here's things on the paparazzi.

Justine scrolls through various topics on the paparazzi as
John looks on. She clicks on a news item about a funeral
for a famous art gallery owner.

JOHN CATON

Stop! Wait! Let me see that.

CLOSE UP: Scroll down screen to show story on funeral of
Cassandra Conroy and her partner in mourning, Petra Tse.
There are pictures of the rich and famous people who were in
attendance at the gallery.

EXT. GALLERY C - AFTERNOON

The sidewalk is crowded with gawkers as photographers mill about, some jostling to get in a better position near the closed doors of the prestigious art gallery.

A TV satellite truck and a few police cars are parked near the entrance. The policemen clear the street as limousines begin to pull up.

The door of the first limo opens, a leg clad in stylish shoes and stockings peeks out as one of the officers reaches in to assist the woman. The photographers push forward, angling for the best shot.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Here ya go, Ma'am.

PETRA TSE exits the car, adjusts her exquisitely tailored black dress which emphasizes her figure in just the right places. Her silken white hair is coiffed perfectly, a black veil covers it slightly in mourning.

PETRA TSE

Please officer, I am far from being a Ma'am. I'm not that old am I?

Petra smiles at the officer, her skin thinly lined with age but beautifully radiant nonetheless.

POLICE OFFICER 1

I'm sorry, Miss...uh....
(nervously)
Oh man, I'm such a dipshit.

PETRA TSE

I'm known to have that effect on people sometimes.
(quizzically)
Your accent, Brooklyn?

POLICE OFFICER 1

Born and bred. Bay Ridge. 20th Avenue and 87th. Ever been to Brooklyn?

PETRA TSE

It's been a long time.

Petra walks to the entrance of the gallery but hesitates when she notices the sights and sounds of a police escort approaching the gallery.

A large SUV jockeys for position as police officers wave off the waiting limousines and their annoyed occupants.

One of the officers opens the door and out steps MAYOR RANDALL BENNETT, a handsome silver-haired man accompanied by a beautiful flaming-haired young woman, SHEILA VON OSRY. A large cheer erupts from the crowd, amid a few Bronx cheers

MAYOR BENNETT

Oh, Petra! May I be the first to offer my condolences. Cassandra was loved by all.

PETRA TSE

Mr. Mayor, how good of you to come.

SHEILA VON OSRY

Of course we will all miss her charm.
(icily)
She had such a way.

Petra eyes furrow, her glance cutting, her lips drawn into a frosty smile.

PETRA TSE

That was Cassie.
(sarcastically)
She loved you too, Dear.

MAYOR BENNETT

It's always tough losing a soul mate. Why, when my Helen passed I thought my world had ended.

PETRA TSE

Instead you found yourself in the arms of this beautiful..."creature."
How fortunate. I should be so lucky myself.

Petra kisses the mayor on the cheek, ignores Sheila as she walks towards the gallery.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

If you'll excuse me, I do have guests coming and everything needs to be perfect. Cassie would not approve otherwise.

Mayor Bennett and Sheila make their way into the gallery, followed by other arriving guests.

The paparazzi continue their photographic assault.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT STUDIO- CONTINUOUS

John slams the lid of computer down, his breathing is heavy.

JUSTINE

Are you okay Mr. Caton? It looks like you saw a ghost.

JOHN CATON

Perhaps I did.

Justine takes the laptop, disconnects the internet and grabs her camera.

JUSTINE

Why don't we just get to work. It's getting late and I don't want to walk home alone in the dark.

JOHN CATON

Yes, you're right. Time is running out I suppose.

EXT. ARI'S PAN AND SCAN CAFE - DAY

John and Justine walk out of the store and amble down the street.

JUSTINE

See that wasn't so hard.

JOHN CATON

Are you sure that's what he wanted?

JUSTINE

Absolutely. You saw for yourself.

JOHN CATON

I don't how. It seems so wrong. You're supposed to feel it, even taste it. How can I look at something on a TV set and be expected to judge it.

JUSTINE

You mean a monitor...
(corrects herself)
Oh! Nevermind. It doesn't matter.

JOHN CATON

You're right it doesn't matter.

JUSTINE

Why are you dismissive of your work? You must care for it otherwise why bother.

JOHN CATON

If it was my work then I might.
(MORE)

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
This is nothing but the work of a poltergeist.

JUSTINE
Then why don't you paint something new that way-

John stops, turns to Justine and holds out his hand.

JOHN CATON
(interrupting)
You've been very helpful Ms. Hargrove and I do so appreciate your help.
(with false sincerity)
Very nice meeting you. Good luck.

John shakes Justine's hand and walks away.

JUSTINE
Mr. Caton!

John ignores her, continues on his way.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
MR. CATON!

Justine runs after John, steps in front to stop him.

JOHN CATON
For the love of Jesus, what is it girl?

JUSTINE
My lessons. Dean Wilcox said you would critique my work and give me advice. That was the arrangement.

JOHN CATON
Oh yes, it was wasn't it. Well let me give some advice right now.

John pulls a faded handkerchief from his pocket, wipes his brow.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
Go home. Forget everything you've ever learned about art.

John places the handkerchief back into this pocket.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
Then forget about me.

John turns away as Justine grabs his arm, somewhat forcefully, which surprises them both.

JUSTINE

That's not good enough! I need to work with you otherwise I won't get paid and get my school credits.

JOHN CATON

Lesson number two. The clients get to change the rules when it suits them.

JUSTINE

That's not fair! I held up my part of the bargain.

JOHN CATON

Fair? Is that what you're after Ms. Hargrove? What's fair?

John pulls the handkerchief back out of his pocket as sweat accumulates around his forehead. His eyes narrow, glaring with intensity.

JUSTINE

Yes, You promised!

JOHN CATON

Oh, so now it's promises you're after. You really do have a lot to learn.

JUSTINE

Look Mr. Caton, this is really important to me, I don't want to beg-

JOHN CATON

(interrupts)
No, you really don't.

John walks away.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Goodbye Ms. Hargrove.

JUSTINE

That's it?

John continues down the street, Justine runs after him and grabs him by the arm.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Who do you think you are? I did what you asked me to do and I want to get paid!

JOHN CATON

Have you been listening to me?

JUSTINE

Professor Wilcox was right about you. You're nothing but a pathetic old man who paints ugly pictures and wallows in his own shit.

(emotionally)

Well fuck you! Do you think you're the only one in this world who's been fucked with?

Justine lets go of John's arm.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Well let me teach you something. You're not!

Justine turns to walk away.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Asshole.

John claps his hands in mock applause, rushes towards her and dances around in his dervish way, clapping in mock applause.

JOHN CATON

Now that's what I'm talking about, Ms. Hargrove. Heh heh!

John prances around Justine.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

You do have passion.

(points his finger)

Passion and spunk is good. It fuels the spirit. I like that you're not afraid.

JUSTINE

Should I be?

JOHN CATON

Of course, you should!

(out of breath)

Whew! Come by tomorrow.

(calmly)

We'll begin. Bring your wares.

JUSTINE

My artwork?

JOHN CATON

Bring whatever it is you have.

(dismissive)

I'll be the judge if it's art or not.

John ambles down the street, and is lost among the people who pass him by.

EXT. JUNGLE FOREST, NORTH KOREA 1951 - NIGHT - DREAM

The last burst of gunfire ends, a voice garbled in pain, calls for help. A soldier creeps quietly through the underbrush, peering through the fog of war, looking for his fallen comrade.

SOLDIER 1
(raspy and in pain)
Please... help me...

SOLDIER 2
(whispery)
Clemens? Is that you?

SOLDIER 1
(painfully gurgling
his words)
Sarge?

SOLDIER 2
No it's-

Hysterical screaming in Korean breaks the whispering conversation, as an enemy soldier leaps from the underbrush, tackling the soldier before he can answer his injured comrade.

The two enemy combatants roll across the woods, locked in a deadly embrace for survival.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

John thrashes his arms frantically, rolls back and forth across the bed. He is too close to the edge and falls off, landing with a loud thud.

INT. JOHN'S WAREHOUSE LOFT STUDIO - MORNING

John pores through Justine's portfolio, paintings strewn about on the desk and floor in various piles. He stares at one in particular, grimaces slightly and places it away from the others. He tosses the beret he is wearing down on the table, somewhat frustrated by the ordeal.

JOHN CATON
Okay, Ms. Hargrove. Would you like
to share anything else?

JUSTINE
(looks around)
That's it for my paintings and
illustrations. I do have my computer
graphics work.

JOHN CATON

Spare me that. I'm not interested
in anything done by some fool machine.

JUSTINE

Then that's all I have. What do you
think?

JOHN CATON

As I said before, you do have passion.

JUSTINE

And?

JOHN CATON

You do have something. Not sure
what it is but it's there.

JUSTINE

Can you help me?

JOHN CATON

Maybe we should see what Hermes
thinks. He's a pretty good judge.

John glances around, rummages through the menagerie of things
strewn about, dropping paint jars, spilling over his brushes.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Hermes!

(turns to Justine)

Don't just stand there girl, we've
got to find Hermes.

JUSTINE

Who are we looking for? There's
nobody here.

JOHN CATON

(ignores Justine)

HERMES!

John continues his search but to no avail, as Justine goes
through the motions of looking for nobody.

JUSTINE

Mr Caton? I don't think there's
anyone else here but us.

JOHN CATON

I'm sure he's here. He's just toying
with me. He can be that way
sometimes.

JUSTINE

(affable)

Maybe he's a "pigment" of your imagination?

JOHN CATON

Don't be silly. Sometimes I don't know why I even put up with his shenanigans. He should be out in the street, where I found him!

John sits back down at his large drawing table. Justine joins him, notices that John's beret is moving by itself down the table.

JUSTINE

Mr Caton? I think there really is a ghost here. Look!

The beret flips over to reveal a large rat, his fur is multi-colored like an abstract painting, with smears of bright colors.

Justine screams, falls over herself as she tries to get away from the rainbowed rodent.

JOHN CATON

(snickers)

That's no ghost that's Hermes!

JUSTINE

(hysterical)

Hermes is a rat?

JOHN CATON

Please don't call him that. He likes to fashion himself as an artist.

JUSTINE

Are you crazy? He's no artist.
HE'S A RAT!

JOHN CATON

Actually, I do tend to agree with you. He's more of a critic than an artist. Shame what a modicum of talent will do to the ego.

JUSTINE

You're crazy, you know that.
(points to Hermes)
You and your "artist" friend.

Justine gathers her paintings, and stuffs them in her portfolio.

JOHN CATON

Hmmm, I thought you'd be less judgmental of people.

JUSTINE

I'm not judgmental of people, only rats. Especially large ones.

Hermes dips his head sadly.

JOHN CATON

You've insulted him. He is sensitive to a fault sometimes.

JUSTINE

Maybe you've been trapped in here too long. I think you need a dose of reality or fresh air.

Justine grabs her coat.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

(mumbles)

An artist rat. How crazy is that?

JOHN CATON

It's not crazy. In fact, Hermes is published in an artist journal and placed first in a national competition. More than I can safely about you.

JUSTINE

Don't be ridiculous. You painted something and signed his name.

Hermes becomes agitated at the thought, leaps off the table, and climbs up on another desk.

JOHN CATON

I would never do such a thing to Hermes. He has his pride.

John pulls a magazine from a cabinet near the desk, hands the journal to Justine. The cover announces the winners of an amateur national painting competition.

Justine flips through the magazine, comes upon the list of winners and their paintings. The first place prize is awarded to "Hermes" from Brooklyn, New York.

JUSTINE

So? Doesn't prove he painted it.

JOHN CATON

Maybe you should tell him then.

Hermes is running up and down a canvas, paint dripping off him as he squirms across paint tubes, smearing pigments in splashes of vibrant color.

Justine rubs her eyes, staring disbelief as she witnesses the rat's bold artistic sensibility.

JUSTINE

I don't believe this.

JOHN CATON

Neither do I. Hermes gave up painting years ago. Perhaps you're his muse. He does seem quite taken with you.

Hermes completes the canvas, approaches Justine, sniffing at her approval.

Justine tentatively pets the rat, who rubs against her hand in a show of affection.

INT. SMALL INTERNET CAFE - NEAR SCHOOL - EVENING

The air is filled with a cacophony of multiple conversations as waitresses carrying trays and plates meander between the obstacle course of tables and chairs.

Justine is trapped in a small booth, wedged between her boyfriend TRAVIS PARKER, 22, whose trendy goatee and clothes seem a bit too forced and DEREK TAYLOR, 21, wearing a Hawaiian shirt and wire-rimmed glasses. Both are typing away on their laptops.

TRAVIS PARKER

When are you going to get it?

DEREK TAYLOR

When you admit that you're just as much a whore as Zuckerberg.

TRAVIS PARKER

"Zuck" is not a whore, he's more like a pimp. It's the pimps that make the money from the whores not the other way around.

DEREK TAYLOR

Semantics. I believe you get the point. I thought you aren't interested in money.

TRAVIS PARKER

Every revolution still needs a bankroll. It costs a lot to overthrow the one-percent and drive a Tesla.

DEREK TAYLOR

And how do you plan on generating the exorbitant cash flow you so desire. From selling pirated wifi logins?

(sarcastic)

That's a future.

Justine rolls her tired eyes in disgust.

JUSTINE

Can we please not go down that road again? You've been watching way too much "Fight Club."

TRAVIS PARKER

(ignores Justine)

It's a start.

(to Derek)

You should talk, Mr. Pixar. After slaving away on your cartoon day after day, night after night, do you plan on giving away your animated opus for free?

DEREK TAYLOR

(contemplating)

No. I plan on marketing the shit out of it and grossing millions.

TRAVIS PARKER

(laughs)

I thought so. You worship at the temple of Lassiter and I want to change the world.

DEREK TAYLOR

Just like Apple and Pixar. Mr. Jobs would be so proud!

JUSTINE

(sarcastically)

Oh sure, you're both just like Steve Jobs. Get a grip!

Justine grabs her backpack, tries to squirm out of the booth.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

I gotta go.

TRAVIS PARKER

Why, you just got here?

JUSTINE

No, I got here two hours ago and you've been sitting here with your fellow code monkey typing away, talking shop and ignoring me. I got things to do.

TRAVIS PARKER

Like what? More paintings? I haven't seen you in weeks. You spend all your time hanging out with that old man. Who's ignoring who?

JUSTINE

I told you. I'm on the verge of something.

TRAVIS PARKER

Verge of what? There's no future in what you're doing. You better get going on your html project. I can help you. Wanna see what I made?

Travis shows Justine and Derek his laptop which plays a video of an animated Van Gogh painting. The colors swirl in a ballet of pigment and brush strokes.

TRAVIS PARKER (CONT'D)

This the future of art. It's all in the programming.

JUSTINE

(remorsefully)

How sad.

Justine squeezes out of the booth.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Oh! Are we still on for the Art Expo? It's coming up. My uncle gave me the passes.

TRAVIS PARKER

I don't know.

(demeaning)

Painting is so analog.

Derek grabs the laptop, opens up the file to reveal the digital programming pages.

Justine walks away, lost among the crowd.

DEREK TAYLOR

Hey! Let me see that!

TRAVIS PARKER

(calls out)

Justine! Don't leave! I'm sorry...

(to Derek)

Hey! Careful with that! That's my senior project!

DEREK TAYLOR

Wow, I'm impressed. It's a digital masterpiece! Almost as good as mine.

(whispers in awe like
the Little Green Men
Pixar character)

"The code is our Master."

DEREK TAYLOR AND TRAVIS PARKER

(mimicking the same
Pixar characters)

"The "Coooooooooddddddeeeeeee."

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - MORNING

John paces back and forth behind Justine, attempting to say something but thinks otherwise, as Hermes follows his moves.

She is ever so delicately applying a careful brush-stroke to the canvas.

JOHN CATON

Get on with it girl! Don't think with your brain, use your heart. Let it flow from your fingers to the canvas.

Justine stiffens, her strokes even more tentative.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

No! No! NO!

John can't stand it any further, knocks the painting off the easel in frustration.

Hermes sniffs at the fallen canvas, lifts his leg and pees a thin stream over the dripping paint.

JUSTINE

Hermes! Stop that! I thought we were friends.

JOHN CATON

Hah! You can't be friends with a critic.

Hermes nuzzles against Justine, apologizes for his transgression. She returns the gesture, petting him affectionately.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Are we done here Ms. Hargrove?

John scoots the rat away. Justine looks at various canvases she painted previously, piled around the table.

JUSTINE

Just stop hovering over me! I was doing better before.

JOHN CATON

Maybe you'd like Hermes to teach you now. You're thinking too much again. You're forcing it. The worst thing you can do.

JUSTINE

I don't know any other way to do it.

JOHN CATON

Let's try something else then.

John grabs a brush and stares at the canvas, eyeing each and every corner. He starts out tentatively, mimicking Justine.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(maniacally)

Free yourself! Dance the dance!

In a manic display of prowess and energy, John covers the canvas with broad strokes, along with small dabs of accented color. He dances along with his paint, swirling and spinning until he is out of breath.

JUSTINE

It's beautiful.

JOHN CATON

(panting))

Don't be silly. This is only a warm up exercise. Every musician must warm up before he engages into playing a symphony.

John takes a used old canvas, props it on the easel and hands a brush to Justine.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Go ahead. Your turn.

Justine smears paint all over, splashes of pigments in a loose amalgamation of color. Out of breath, she stops to take a moment to relax.

JUSTINE

Okay. I'm ready.

JOHN CATON
Have at it then.

She looks the over the canvas, beginning with broad strokes but slowly devolves back into her bad habit of measured movements.

John becomes agitated and annoyed.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
No! No! NO! Close your eyes! Do anything to break through that wall.

Justine keeps at it but it's apparent she's lost.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
When a plane is about to break the sound barrier the flight is the most turbulent. Once past the barrier the flight is majestic and smooth!

John musters up his emotions in one last plea.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
Do it! Break past that barrier that holds you back!

JUSTINE
I'm trying! I'm sorry!

JOHN CATON
Save your apologies for someone who appreciates them. I don't care.

Justine place her brushes down, breathing heavily.

John points at Justine's heart, his bony finger pokes her somewhat forcibly, she backs away slightly.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
I want to know what it is you have in here.

John grabs a palette knife, brandishes it menacingly at Justine.

JUSTINE
(nervously)
Easy there, Mr. Caton...

JOHN CATON
What say you if I cut your veins? Will it flow blood or cadmium red paint? Just what is your life's essence?

John tosses the knife down, grabs Justine hands, looks them over, caressing them.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

I want to know what your hands feel.
The touch of empty dry canvas awaiting
the lovely caress of pigment, spurting
forth out of a tube, releasing your
creativity in a moment of bliss!

PETRA TSE (O.S.)

Even after all these years, I thought by
now you would have tried a different
pickup line than that sorry old thing.

Justine, startled, pulls her hands away as a shadowy figure appears by the door.

PETRA TSE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Of course, by now, I would've thought
you were dead.

JOHN CATON

Who's that?

PETRA TSE

Has it been so long that you forget?

John squints at the shadow, attempts to recognize the voice.

JOHN CATON

I forget nothing. Is that you Lilith?
Have you come to tempt Adam once again?

PETRA TSE (O.S.)

Don't flatter yourself.

Petra steps in from the hallway, over dressed for such bleak surroundings. John squints, his vision focuses on the woman before him.

JOHN CATON

Ah! So it is you "Paula".

PETRA TSE

After all these years, must we still
continue this charade?

JOHN CATON

It doesn't matter to me what you call
yourself. "Paula"...Petra...Judas!

PETRA TSE

My, it still stings. Does it now?

JOHN CATON

I told you once before that it makes
no difference to me who caresses
your face, kisses your mouth or
spreads your legs.

PETRA TSE

(laughs)
Picking up where we left off without
missing a beat.

Petra opens her elegant purse, pulls out a jeweled cigarette case and lights a cigarette.

She offers one to John, who politely refuses. Instead he pulls out a pack of unfiltered Camel cigarettes from his desk, lights one up with a slight cough.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

I never understood how you can smoke
those unfiltered things. So brutally
honest.

JOHN CATON

It's an acquired taste. Like many
things in life.

Petra smiles thinly, closes the cigarette case and place it carefully back in her purse.

PETRA TSE

(matter of fact)
Cassandra is dead.

JOHN CATON

Dead...alive...who cares?

PETRA TSE

You do, of course.

JOHN CATON

Now, who's flattering who?

John stares down Petra to make his point.

Justine wipes her hands with a towel, tries to clean off the excess paint that stains her fingers. She approaches Petra to break the icy moment.

JUSTINE

Hi! I'm Justine. A student of Mr.
Caton.

PETRA TSE

And just what is...

(MORE)

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

"Mr. Caton" teaching you? The seduction of art or the art of seduction?

JUSTINE

I don't know what you mean. I did some work for him and he's repaying me with some art lessons. That's all.

PETRA TSE

You don't need to justify anything to me. You're not the first one to fall under his spell.

JOHN CATON

"Paula", for God's sake she's just a child.

PETRA TSE

I was once also. But that was a lifetime ago.

JUSTINE

(awkwardly)

Maybe, I should just go. This seems a little too "personal" for me.

Petra holds out her hand to Justine.

PETRA TSE

I'm sorry, we weren't formally introduced.

(to John)

Please do the honors.

JOHN CATON

Sorry for my lack of manners. "Paula" meet Ms. Hargrove. Ms. Hargrove meet "Paula", my wife.

Petra shakes Justine's hand.

PETRA TSE

(glances at John)

Please call me Petra. I prefer that.

JUSTINE

(to John)

You're married?

JOHN CATON

No, I'm just not divorced.

PETRA TSE

What's a piece of paper between
husband and wife worth anyhow?

Justine grabs her portfolio case, packs up her belongings.

JUSTINE

I really think I should go. It seems
you two have a lot to catch up on.

(to John)

I'll see you tomorrow.

PETRA TSE

Oh!, don't leave on account of me.

JOHN CATON

(to Justine)

Thank you, Ms. Hargrove. That will
be fine.

JUSTINE

Okay. Say good night to Hermes for
me.

John nods as Justine walks out of the loft, her footsteps
echo down the stairwell as she approaches the bottom.

PETRA TSE

So this is really what you've made
of yourself?

JOHN CATON

It's a living.

PETRA TSE

It's a death sentence. Surrounded
by filth, decay and...

Petra spies Hermes darting across the floor, as he makes his
way through the loft.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

...Was that a rat?

JOHN CATON

No. That was an associate of mine.

Petra lifts her legs from the floor, curls them under her
body to avoid any other rodents that might appear.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

So "Paula", of what do I really owe
this visit to?

(MORE)

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(laughs)
 Don't tell me you're looking for
 back alimony! Whatever I have is
 yours.

PETRA TSE

Cute.
 (looks around the
 loft)
 Don't be ridiculous. I do have an
 offer to propose to you however.

JOHN CATON

You have nothing I want.

The sound of a car honk interrupts their conversation. Petra
 gathers her things.

PETRA TSE

Probably true, but there is something
 I want from you.

Petra takes a long drag on her cigarette then stubs it out
 on the paint stained floor.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

My soul.

She walks out of the loft.

FADE OUT:

EXT. JUNGLE FOREST, NORTH KOREA, 1951 - DREAM

The enemy combatants are still locked in a death struggle,
 their rifles kicked away during the fighting. The North
 Korean pulls out his pistol but it is knocked away by the
 American soldier, who grabs his own gun and fires point blank
 at his adversary.

SOLDIER 2

Got you, mother fucker.

The North Korean is knocked backwards by the impact of the
 bullet, landing face up in the underbrush.

The American treads carefully towards his adversary to make
 sure he is dead.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - NIGHT

Sleepily, John slowly makes his way across the loft to his
 easel. He lights a cigarette, flexes his fingers and dips a
 brush into some paint.

His hand shakes slightly, his strokes are arthritic but slowly the empty canvas is covered with color.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - EARLY MORNING

As dawn breaks, John lights up his last remaining cigarette, the ashtray overflows with butts.

He takes a lasting look at the painting, applies a few more strokes of color.

Hermes joins John, spies over his shoulder from a stool.

JOHN CATON

Well, my friend, what do you think?

The rat circles the canvas, back and forth, elicits a small yelp then pees a small puddle on the floor.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Fuckin' critic!

(swipes at Hermes)

Get out of here!

John looks over the canvas himself, throws it down in frustration.

Exhausted, he makes his way to the bedroom and collapses fully dressed on the bed. He tumbles into a deep sleep.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - MORNING

The loft is noticeably quiet as Justine unlocks the door, a loud snoring emanates from John's bedroom. Hermes rushes over, rubs his colored fur against her boot.

Not wanting to wake John, she closes the door, grabs a broom and heads down the stairwell.

JUSTINE

(whispers)

Hermes! Come with me. Let's surprise Mr. Caton by cleaning up the hallway.

The rat twitches its pink nose and leads the way.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Justine sweeps away the years of decay that cover the hallway expanse. She gathers the multitude of unopened envelopes, postcards and junk mail and places them in a pile by the staircase.

Hermes sniffs at the envelopes but panics when he hears two cats outside the door. He knocks the pile down and runs back up to the safety of the loft.

JUSTINE

Hey! Don't be a 'fraidy rat!

Annoyed, Justine picks up the fallen mail once again. One of the aged envelopes, its glue no longer bonding, falls open and out tumbles a few dollars, some in large bills.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

What's this?

Justine reaches for another of the aged envelopes, notices the address is some place in North Korea but the return address is John Caton, Brooklyn. The envelope is stamped "Return to Sender"

Justine tears open the envelope and finds more money inside. She opens envelope after envelope, but the story remains the same. They're all filled with cash. A lot of cash.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

John tosses in his sleep, his body twitches as he mumbles incoherently.

EXT. JUNGLE FOREST, NORTH KOREA 1951 - DREAM

The American soldier approaches his vanquished enemy but is startled in fright as the North Korean soldier jumps up, a large bayonet knife in his hand. They are both locked in a desperate conflict.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - LATER

John tosses in his sleep as Justine quietly rummages through various drawers of the aged worn furniture. She comes upon old photos, some of Petra and John in their younger days.

JUSTINE

They seem so drawn to each other.
You can just tell.

Under a pile of old newspapers, some dating to the Korean War, Justine finds a weather-beaten sketch book. The cover has a bullet hole through it, which stops about halfway through the thickness of the book.

She flips through the book, comes upon a photograph of a Korean soldier, his wife and two young children.

EXT. JUNGLE FOREST, NORTH KOREA 1951 - CONTINUOUS

The two soldiers continue their struggle, the knife is knocked away and the American makes a desperate dive for it. The Korean soldier lashes out furiously in a bid to escape but is tackled.

The American's helmet is dislodged, revealing the young face of John Caton.

JOHN CATON

Take this you bastard!

Grabbing the knife, John plunges it through the chest of his adversary.

Before the life drains from his body, the Korean reaches into his pocket, hands the American his sketchbook, which has a bullet lodged into it.

KOREAN SOLDIER

(mumbles in broken
English)

You...take...

A photograph of the soldier's young family falls out as the soldier drifts off to embrace the angel of death.

KOREAN SOLDIER (CONT'D)

...This...Ahhhhhh!!!!

JOHN CATON

(his breath heaving)

My God, what have I done?

He collapses on himself, drained physically and emotionally from his ordeal.

Screaming voices in Korean break John's stupor, he quickly looks for his rifle through the underbrush and scampers back to safety.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Justine looks through the sketchbook, which is filled with designs and color renderings. They bear a remarkable resemblance to the textile designs she digitized for John.

JUSTINE

I don't believe this.

Justine grabs the sketchbook, and compares them to John's textile designs. They are copied or clearly influenced.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

I think he's stolen the artwork from
whoever this is.

Justine takes the sketchbook and envelopes, hides it in her portfolio case.

John awakens, joins her at the drawing table.

JOHN CATON
Good morning, Ms. Hargrove.

JUSTINE
Good afternoon, Mr. Caton.

John looks through the window, acknowledges the time of day.

JOHN CATON
I don't know what came over me.
It's not like me to sleep so late.

JUSTINE
I'm sure you were probably pretty
shocked when Petra showed up.

JOHN CATON
There's very little in this world
that shocks me.

JUSTINE
Still, having your ex-wife appear-

John's eyes grow dark.

JOHN CATON
She's not "ex"-anything and it's
none of your business.

JUSTINE
I'm sorry...

John waves her off, implying the conversation is over.

JOHN CATON
Why don't we get on with today's
lesson then.

Justine places a canvas on the easel, her strokes firm and
deliberate.

Hermes joins them, sits by the tubes of paint as he looks on.

JUSTINE
Mr. Caton? Can I ask you a question?

JOHN CATON
If you must.

JUSTINE
Where did you study textile design?

JOHN CATON
Why? Does it matter to you? Are
you checking my credentials now?

JUSTINE

No, I was just curious, that's all.

JOHN CATON

Okay, if it will keep you quiet and address your curiosity, then all right.

(pauses)

I didn't study textile design anywhere. It's an acquired talent.

Justine's strokes become ever firmer, the colors are losing all sense of control.

JUSTINE

(angrily)

That's one way of putting it.

JOHN CATON

Do you have a point to make, Ms. Hargrove?

JUSTINE

Yes!

John points to the canvas, which is a cacophony of color with no form or structure. It's a complete mess.

JOHN CATON

Where are you going with this?

Justine grabs the still wet canvas off the easel, gathers her belongings.

JUSTINE

I'm going home!

Justine storms out of the loft, her footsteps are loud as she proceeds down the stairwell. The door slams behind her.

INT. KOREAN VEGETABLE MARKET - AFTERNOON

The market is old but immaculately kept. The aisles are filled with produce of all sorts, carefully arranged.

An older Korean worker peers through the sketchbook as Justine looks on.

JUSTINE

Can you tell me anything about whose book this is?

The worker flips through the pages, looks over the the writing on the back of the photo of the young family.

KOREAN WORKER

It's clearly the work of some artist.

JUSTINE

I could've told you that. What about the writing on the back of the photo?

KOREAN WORKER

I can make out a few things but the writing is pretty faded.

Points to the Korean handwriting.

KOREAN WORKER (CONT'D)

It says "With all our love, Stay safe"

Justine takes the sketchbook, opens to a page that has more writing on it.

JUSTINE

What about this?

KOREAN WORKER

I'll try but it's been many years since I've even read anything in Korean.

JUSTINE

Please try. It's important.

The worker's lip move as he struggles with deciphering the text. After some time he shows Justine the page.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - SOUTH KOREA 1951 - AFTERNOON - FLASHBACK

A young Korean man flips through the sketchbook, writes down an address in English, hands it back to John Caton.

KOREAN MAN

(with thick accent)

This place. Very far away.

The Korean man points to the paper.

KOREAN MAN (CONT'D)

You write to here.

John nods, reads the scrawl which is borderline legible.

JOHN CATON

(in broken Korean)

"Kamsa hamnida." Thank you.

John hands the man some American dollars, who at first refuses but nods his appreciation.

KOREAN MAN
 (with thick accent)
 Thank you too. Kamsa hamnida.

The Korean man tosses John an apple, and sends him on his way.

INT. KOREAN VEGETABLE MARKET - PRESENT - CONTINUOUS

The Korean worker reads further, stops and points to the page.

KOREAN WORKER
 It says that this drawing should be sent to...sorry, I can't make out this name...for a new project er.... I mean pattern...artwork? No, design.
 (reiterates)
 This drawing should be made into a new design pattern.

JUSTINE
 New design pattern?

KOREAN WORKER
 Yes. That's right.

JUSTINE
 Anything else?

He squints hard, tries to decipher the faded handwriting.

KOREAN WORKER
 I think it says something about money...No, a fee. It looks like he's asking for payment. I really can't make out how much.

JUSTINE
 It doesn't matter anymore.

KOREAN WORKER
 Are you sure? My grandmother might be able to translate it.

JUSTINE
 No, that won't be necessary.

Justine reaches in her bag, pulls out her wallet but the Korean worker waves her off.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
 Let me give you something for your time.

KOREAN WORKER

No it's not necessary
 (winks)
 I think a young student like yourself
 can use the money more.

JUSTINE

You got that right. I guess I owe
 you one then.

KOREAN WORKER

Fair enough.

They shake hands, Justine picks up her portfolio case to
 leave.

KOREAN WORKER (CONT'D)

(calls out)
 Hey! How about a painting to decorate
 my store? Maybe when you're rich
 and famous I can sell it.

JUSTINE

(laughs)
 We'll have to see about that.

The worker picks up his broom. The floorboards creak with
 every step he takes as he sweeps away the day.

INT. GALLERY C - AFTERNOON

The conference-room is beautifully designed with exotic
 furniture as much on display as the valuable paintings that
 line the walls, all rare originals.

Seated around a table that is more sculpture than furniture
 are an entourage of gallery associates. They are sipping
 glasses of fine wine, a tray of finger food lies untouched.

Petra slowly glides across the room, her heels click in a
 sharp cadence with every step.

PETRA TSE

How many times in how many languages
 would you like me to repeat myself?

An overly tanned man, RICARDO D'FRANCISCO, his accent as
 thick as the "Geek chic" glasses perched on his sculpted
 nose, rises to make a point.

RICARDO

My dear Petra, we recognize the
 emotional strain you are under since
 poor Cassandra passed on, but please
 don't make haste with your decisions.

PETRA TSE

My dearest "friend" Ricardo, Cassandra was far from poor. As her lawyer, you should know better than anyone.

RICARDO

You would think that, but she hid many things from me, as she had from you. Important things.

PETRA TSE

Exactly. That's why we are.
(to the assembled)
Is that correct gentlemen?

SHEILA VON OSRY

(laughs)
Not everyone here is a gentlemen.

Sheila Von Osry stands to make her presence known.

PETRA TSE

Of course. I stand corrected but you shouldn't.
(to Sheila)
Please take you seat behind every other vulture that is here to pick over the bones.

SHEILA VON OSRY

Don't be so dramatic. It doesn't suit you.

PETRA TSE

Oh yes, that's right. You're the "drama-queen" actress here or so I've been told.

SHEILA VON OSRY

There's no need for that tone. Why if it wasn't for me-

Petra glares at Sheila with a stare that could melt an iceberg into a puddle in seconds.

PETRA TSE

(interrupts)
We wouldn't even need to be here. It was your so-called friends, rock stars, rappers, actors and hedge fund thieves that reneged on their obligations. To this gallery. To Cassandra and me.

SHEILA VON OSRY

It was my husband's patronage that first put you on the map. Remember that. You'd be selling shoes in a discount store if it wasn't for Randy.

PETRA TSE

You mean Helen. Randall wouldn't know art from dog shit. He wouldn't know beauty from the beast.

SHEILA VON OSRY

(with disdain)

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and I'm sure it's been many years since you've been beheld a thing of beauty.

PETRA TSE

Maybe, but I'm looking at the beast right now.

RICARDO

Enough! You can't blame this all on Sheila. These times have been tough on many of us.

PETRA TSE

Spare me how tough it is when we're sitting in a room surrounded by the finest art money can buy and sipping from decanters of expensive liqueurs.

RICARDO

That's my point. People will spend but they're looking for bargains.

Petra paces up and down, as the Warhols, Dalis and other works of artistic wealth peer down on her.

PETRA TSE

Bargains? Does this look like a WalMart?

RICARDO

Of course not. Unfortunately, you and Cassie bought high. Way too high in many cases. You got burned in the market, the same as everyone else who bought stocks, mortgages and leveraged themselves to the hilt.

PETRA TSE

(annoyed)

We are not like everyone else.

An older man, BENSON HAMMONS, his immaculately tailored suit evokes an air of nothing but business bravado, flicks the edge of a glass with a manicured finger for attention.

BENSON HAMMONS

That's where you're wrong. Cassie, you and everyone else in here are just like everyone else.

PETRA TSE

And what is your advice my trusted counselor?

BENSON HAMMONS

You have to liquidate. Sell.

PETRA TSE

That's it? For the money I'm paying you I expected at least something other than the obvious.

BENSON HAMMONS

I can't change the facts. They are what they are.

Petra's carefully applied complexion turns beet red, her eyes aflame with fire.

PETRA TSE

Everybody out!

Everybody seated at the table nods and files out of the room, except for Benson Hammons.

SHEILA VON OSRY

(sarcastic)

As usual it's always a pleasure to see you. You have my condolences.

PETRA TSE

You've already paid your respects to Cassie once before.

SHEILA VON OSRY

It wasn't Cassandra I was referring too.

(cynically)

Shame how all things age, wither and die.

Paula's fists clench in anger, she shudders as she desperately tries to regain her composure.

PETRA TSE
 (her accent is thickly
 Brooklyn and angry)
 I earned my position through hard
 work and sweat not horizontally on
 my back.

SHEILA VON OSRY
 (grins)
 Then I'll be thinking of you tonight
 when I'm on my back, in my bedroom,
 in the penthouse of the Plaza.

PETRA TSE
 Get out you fuckin' bitch!

SHEILA VON OSRY
 Of course, we'll see you at the fire
 sale. Randall does love a bargain
 when he can get one.

PETRA TSE
 I'd sooner torch this place than see
 you get one thing from me.

SHEILA VON OSRY
 Is that a threat?
 (to Benson)
 Take note counselor. We wouldn't
 want to see Ms. Petra Tse reside in
 prison for arson, now would we?

Sheila struts out of the room, like a lioness after a fresh
 kill. The door closes behind her with a sustained thud.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - AFTERNOON

Justine opens the door, expecting to find John but the loft
 is quiet and deserted. The only sign of life is Hermes, who
 scatters when he hears a cat meowing from outside. He heads
 directly for safety under the careful eye of Justine.

She empties her backpack, piles up the envelopes and
 sketchbook she procured with John knowing.

Hermes rubs his body against her in comfort as she scratches
 his multicolored fur.

Justine folds her arms, defiantly waits for John to arrive.

INT. GALLERY C - CONTINUOUS

Benson comforts Petra with a fatherly embrace, although their
 age is separated by mere months. She sits down, her body
 limp and exhausted.

PETRA TSE

I'm getting way too old for this
shit.

BENSON HAMMONS

Did anyone ever tell you that when
you're angered your Brooklyn accent
is quite charming.

PETRA TSE

I never noticed. It's been quite
some time since I had reason to be
angry.

BENSON HAMMONS

If I didn't know you so well, I'd
really believe that she gets to you.
(in a fatherly tone)
I know you're going through a lot.
Are the treatments getting to you?

PETRA TSE

No more than she is.

Benson walks across the conference room, admires the
exceptional paintings hanging.

BENSON HAMMONS

They are quite beautiful. Each one
a moment in time. Too bad, I never
really appreciated what you see in
them.

PETRA TSE

There's always time. They live
forever in eternity.
(sighs)
Gifts from the Gods, sowed by the
hands of man to bestow their riches.

BENSON HAMMONS

A shame that half of them died
penniless.

PETRA TSE

Then we'll have something in common.

BENSON HAMMONS

(snickers)
You're not penniless. Your funds
are temporarily under duress.

He continues his stroll, stops at the Warhol, gives it a
perplexed and unsavory look.

PETRA TSE

What's the matter, not feeling the
Andy?

BENSON HAMMONS

It looks like a bad t-shirt. Why do
people make such a big deal over him?

PETRA TSE

Why are certain mediocre musicians
famous and other more talented live
and die in obscurity? Who knows?

BENSON HAMMONS

I thought Andy said everyone would
have their fifteen minutes of fame?

PETRA TSE

I think everyone has a chance for
their fifteen minutes but it doesn't
guarantee they ever get it.

Benson stops at a particular painting, mesmerized by the
color and technique. He looks at the signature, but doesn't
recognize the name.

BENSON HAMMONS

This one, I never really noticed
before. Something new?

PETRA TSE

No, just something I decided to dust
the cobwebs off.

BENSON HAMMONS

(reads the name)
"Sofio Cattano." It's quite
remarkable but I don't recognize the
name.

PETRA TSE

Most people wouldn't.

BENSON HAMMONS

Well, did he get his fifteen minutes?

PETRA TSE

(solemnly)
No. He never made it past fourteen.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Hermes entertains Justine, breaking her dour mood but suddenly
he stops when the meowing seems louder. Even closer.

JUSTINE

You really are a 'fraidy rat, you know that.

Hermes runs around in circles then darts towards the darkened side of the loft. Justine chases after him.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Hermes! Don't be scared. That cat's nowhere near here.

Propped up on an easel facing the window is a painting Justine had never noticed before. She touches the canvas tentatively, the paint still fresh and vibrant. On the table near the easel is an overflowing ashtray filled with ash, with more cigarette butts strewn about the floor.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

The paint's not even dry. Mr. Caton must've been up all night smoking like a chimney.

Justine carefully looks over the painting, amazed at the technique.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

This is amazing. I've never seen anything like it.

Hermes breaks her concentration and she chases after him but he scoots under the door of room hidden in the shadows of the loft. The door is closed but the hinge and lock are open.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Hermes? Are you in here?

Justine slowly pushes the door open, squints to adjust her eyes to the dark. She fumbles around the wall, her fingers grasp a lightswitch.

A singular bulb illuminates the room, which is filled with paintings, bathing them in a faded dusty glow.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

What is this place. I've never even noticed it.

Justine slowly makes her way through the trove of artwork. She pulls a particular painting forward and looks at the signature, which reads "Sofio Cattano."

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Who's "Sofio Cattano?"

A silhouetted figure appears by the door, the bright light of the loft behind him masks his features.

He's holding a small book and a pointy palette knife.

JOHN CATON

Why, I am.

FADE OUT:

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - LATER

John paces back and forth as Justine looks on, angry and yet ashamed for being caught. Hermes joins him, follows his every step.

The envelopes and money lay strewn on the table.

JOHN CATON

When I told you to break through, I didn't mean "breaking and entering." I had no idea you were a thief, Ms. Hargrove.

JUSTINE

I'm not but I can't say the same for you.

JOHN CATON

What are you getting at?

JUSTINE

Well, I'm not the one with somebody else's drawings and a pile of money.

JOHN CATON

First of all, it's not my money. It never belonged to me.

JUSTINE

Well, it's in your hallway.

JOHN CATON

(snickers)

Are you planning on calling the authorities? Look at the envelopes. See who they're addressed to.

Justine takes one of the envelopes, looks at the address.

JUSTINE

It's somebody in Korea.

JOHN CATON

Correct. This is his money then. Not mine. I can't help that he didn't keep it.

JUSTINE

What about the sketchbook?

JOHN CATON

What about it? Are you a detective now or are we just playing twenty questions?

JUSTINE

I think you owe me an explanation at the very least.

JOHN CATON

I owe you nothing Ms. Hargrove, other than the barter we've, under the circumstances, just concluded.

JUSTINE

You stole his ideas didn't you!
(accusingly)
You stole them and pocketed the money for yourself. I counted over \$68,000.

John breaks out in a fit of hysteria, regains his composure.

JOHN CATON

(laughs)
Sure, look around you. See how much I profited from these stolen ideas. Besides I would've thought I made more than that.

JUSTINE

It's a matter of principle. Admit it. You stole his designs.

JOHN CATON

No, Ms. Hargrove. I didn't steal his designs.
(remorseful)
Only his life.

John sits down, rests his weary soul.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(remorseful)
Did you ever watch the Angel of Death do his magic? Make a life disappear?

JUSTINE

(nervously)
Did you murder him? Are you some kind of freaky serial killer?

JOHN CATON

Don't be ridiculous. I was a soldier. Doing what duty called me to do.

(MORE)

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(wipes his eyes)

Quick and painless, they said. But for who? Not me. Like Prometheus I am bound by my deeds, and it eats away at me day after day, only to come back at night, haunting me for all eternity.

JUSTINE

I'm sorry. It must be so terrible to take a life.

(beat)

Both my parents died. By their own hands in fact.

JOHN CATON

Sadly, Ms. Hargrove, we are both victims of circumstance.

JUSTINE

What's with all the envelopes of cash?

JOHN CATON

Blood money. He had a livelihood, a family and children, for God's sake. I took that away.

John takes one of the envelopes, opens it to let the faded money fall like withered leaves on a dying tree.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

So I took up his craft. What he couldn't accomplish in death I would in life. I'd copy the designs from his sketchbook, the very ones he did, and send his family the commission. I knew where he lived so I kept sending money. At first the envelopes never came back but as the years wore on, they slowly started returning. Like grim reminders of what I'd done.

He wipes his eyes, tries to focus.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

So I just kept sending them anyway. I got a map of Korea, picked out towns I thought they might live, hoping if the letters didn't come back then I'd know where they went. But they all kept coming back. So they piled up downstairs.

(MORE)

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

It wasn't my money to spend so I left them there to rot, along with me.

JUSTINE

I'm sorry Mr. Caton. I didn't mean to bring up the past.

(affably)

But sometimes it does help to open up about things.

JOHN CATON

All you succeeded in opening up is Pandora's box.

JUSTINE

Wait! What about all these paintings?

John closes the door to the small room, opens it slightly for Hermes, who darts from the shadows.

JOHN CATON

I'm closing the lid on that right now.

He carefully locks it, pockets the key and walks away.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Good bye, Ms. Hargrove.

INT. CLASSROOM - ART INSTITUTE - AFTERNOON

The large colorful faces of Marilyn Monroe bathes the room in a rainbow of hues, her expression is timeless. A student, DANIEL HUSTON, is dozing, lulled to sleep by the darkened room and the soft hum of the slide projector.

Preston Wilcox turns on the light, taps the sleeping student to awaken him from his nap.

PRESTON WILCOX

Okay, class. Here's where we'll stop for today. Many of you have already turned in your artist of choice for the final exam. Time is of the essence.

Preston opens his ledger, looks over a list.

PRESTON WILCOX (CONT'D)

Just a few students remain.

(calls out)

Daniel Huston?

DANIEL HUSTON

I'm choosing "Pizarro."

PRESTON WILCOX

Is this art history or world history, Daniel? It's "Pissarro." Pi-SSarro. With an "S." The other Pi-ZZarro, with a "Z," conquered the New World. Or are you not sure who you're writing about at this juncture in time?

DANIEL HUSTON

No, I'm sure Dean Wilcox. It's the one with the "S."

PRESTON WILCOX

Of no doubt.
 (looks through the list)
 Justine Hargrove? I'll need your artist of choice.

JUSTINE

(calls out)
 Sofio Cattano!

Unsure of what he heard, Preston peers over his glasses, focuses on Justine.

PRESTON WILCOX

I'm not sure of who you mentioned. Please repeat it.

JUSTINE

I said I I'm going to report on "Sofio Cattano!"

The class looks surprised, faint whispers of curiosity move across the room.

PRESTON WILCOX

Are you sure of this? There aren't many published works of his. I know of only two. Both hidden away in a gallery, rarely on display. In fact, he's been relegated to being nothing more than a footnote at best.

JUSTINE

I'm fine with that. I've seen his work.

PRESTON WILCOX

Interesting...Very interesting.

JUSTINE

I've made my decision.
 (MORE)

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

I'm going to find out all I can about "Sofio Cattano."

PRESTON WILCOX

Very well, Justine. The decision is yours. Let me remind you how little time is left.

JUSTINE

I'm aware of how much is left.

The school buzzer rings, the students gather their belongings, paintings and palettes, to file out of the classroom.

PRESTON WILCOX

(calls out)

Justine? May I see you?

JUSTINE

Of course.

PRESTON WILCOX

This is a difficult subject. You may want to reconsider your choice.

JUSTINE

Dean Wilcox? You asked us to be daring in our choice of artist.

PRESTON WILCOX

Yes, you are correct but this is not an easy subject to understand. Why don't we discuss an alternate choice?

JUSTINE

Right now I don't have a choice. I've come too far.

PRESTON WILCOX

Very well, I do hope you find what you're looking for then. It'd be tragic if the journey were to end in failure.

JUSTINE

Like Icarus?

Preston nods, his eyes focus on Justine with concern.

PRESTON WILCOX

It's one thing to fly close to the sun, it's another to be blinded by it.

INT. HARGROVE ART GALLERY - AFTERNOON

The gallery is quiet and empty, Farlow Hargrove, with Justine in tow, walks through the carefully placed artwork, adjusting each and every painting ever so slightly.

JUSTINE

Is there anything you can tell me about him?

FARLOW HARGROVE

As I've said before, it was a long a time go and the exhibition opening didn't last very long.

INT. GALLERY OPENING - 1961 - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Painters and patrons, the famous and infamous, tour the gallery, whispering and murmuring their thoughts and judgments of the bountiful displays of art.

A young Petra, stylishly dressed to the nines, makes her way through the throng, chatting and laughing with everyone she passes, making them feel important.

Glancing across the room she finally spots Sofio, dressed in a suit as uncomfortable as his demeanor, standing alone and dragging on cigarette after cigarette. She makes way her towards him.

A young man appears, broom in hand to sweep away the cigarette butts that litter the floor.

SOFIO CATTANO

Jesus Christ, Preston! Will you stop already. You're my apprentice. I'm not paying you to be a janitor!

PRESTON WILCOX

You're not paying me to be an apprentice either.

SOFIO CATTANO

(nasty)

One day that mouth of yours will get you into trouble.

Petra gently takes Sofio's arm, warmly caressing it reassuringly.

PETRA TSE

Why do you torture him so? He worships you.

SOFIO CATTANO
He's supposed to. It's part of the
job.

PETRA TSE
He really is a lovely young man.
Very talented and quite handsome.

SOFIO CATTANO
(teasing)
Paula, If I didn't know better, I'd
say you were trying to make me jealous.

PETRA TSE
Would that I could.
(reminding)
And please, Paula's a distant memory,
Petra is who I am supposed to be.

SOFIO CATTANO
Paula...Petra...whoever. I know who
you are. That's all that really matters.

PETRA TSE
I know.

Petra squeezes Sofio's arm affectionately, stops to caress
his cheek.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)
You are my muse. My one. How could I
ever think of being with another man?

SOFIO CATTANO
(smiles)
As you are mine. Forever.

Petra looks eye to eye with Sofio, her gaze is direct and
threatening in its meaning.

PETRA TSE
Look! I've worked really hard and
busted my ass to get you this exhibit.
You haven't exactly endeared yourself
to them, make this one count.

SOFIO CATTANO
I know. You've always seen to that.

PETRA TSE
Then stop tormenting yourself. What's
done is done. Live in the moment.
(sighs)
Just relax...and don't fuck it up!

Sofio shudders as he looks out at the gallery.

SOFIO CATTANO

Please, do I really need to speak with these "philistines?" Look at them all. Brillo boxes and paint drips. You call these men artists?

PETRA TSE

You may not, but everyone else here does. That's what counts.

SOFIO CATTANO

Okay. I'll try to be my charming self.

Petra releases her grasp, pushes Sofio along.

PETRA TSE

Don't do that!
(calls out)
Just be nice!

Sofio finds himself surrounded, a lone fish swimming amongst the sharks that now encircle him.

INT. GALLERY OPENING - 1961 - EVENING - FLASHBACK CONTINUOUS

Petra, charming as ever sips a fine glass of wine, standing with a very attractive young woman, HELEN BENNETT, who scans the room, focusing on some of the luminaries present.

HELEN BENNETT

You must be very proud of Sofio.
This is quite the event.

PETRA TSE

Thank you Helen. And I understand that congratulations are in store for you and Randy, or should I say Congressman Randall Bennett.

Helen nods, the two women click their glasses in a toast of good fortune.

HELEN BENNETT

I must add one of these paintings to my collection. So unusual, very different from anything I've ever seen.

PETRA TSE

(giggles)
Then why not add two?

HELEN BENNETT

Two? I'm not sure...

Helen looks across the room, scanning the paintings until she notices a Randall Bennett, whispering and flirting with a young attractive woman.

HELEN BENNETT (CONT'D)

(matter of fact)

Two it is.

PETRA TSE

Wonderful. You are building quite the collection.

HELEN BENNETT

Actually Randy is.

(downs her drink)

Every time he sees a thing of beauty he has to have, I see one also.

Mine however will last forever, while his will eventually wither with age.

Their conversation is abruptly interrupted by loud yelling, followed by a profound gasp that goes through the crowd. Many people quickly make for the exit, clearly upset.

Petra stops a man and woman before they can leave.

PETRA TSE

What's going on? This is my gallery exhibit.

MAN

Well, you better hurry before that lunatic destroys it.

PETRA TSE

What do you mean?

WOMAN

He's crazy! Must be drunk or on something. You know how these artist types are.

Petra frantically makes her way to the center of the maelstrom. One of the large painting lies in tatters, hacked to an unwelcome death.

Preston is desperately trying to wrestle away the large bayonet which Sofio brandishes with authority and purpose.

PRESTON WILCOX

Stop! You're ruining the work!

SOFIO CATTANO

(struggling)

If God could destroy the earth he
created in a flood, who am I to be
denied the same self satisfaction!

Sofio struggles to reach for another painting, his fingertips
stretching, but Preston pulls him back from the brink of
disaster.

SOFIO CATTANO (CONT'D)

(yells)

TROGLODYTES! Who are you to question
me and my work!

PRESTON WILCOX

Please! Give me the knife before
someone gets hurt.

SOFIO CATTANO

Not if that someone is that critic
from the Times!

Petra grabs an empty wine bottle by the neck, swings it like
a baseball bat and knocks Sofio out cold.

INT. HARGROVE ART GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Farlow stops his meandering, makes one final adjustment to a
particular painting.

FARLOW HARGROVE

That was the last anyone ever saw of Mr.
Cattano.

JUSTINE

That's it?

FARLOW HARGROVE

As far as I know. His wife left
him, took up with a woman of all
things. They both went on to found
the "Gallery C," to much acclaim.

(mutters)

"Gallery to the Stars" they called
it or some such nonsense.

JUSTINE

And all his paintings?

FARLOW HARGROVE

Gone. No one ever saw him or his work
ever again. Vanished like the wind.

(MORE)

FARLOW HARGROVE (CONT'D)

(lost in thought)

I never saw such fire and brimstone
in one man. Such passion and devotion
to his craft. A real shame.

JUSTINE

Like my father?

Farlow's eyes well up with emotion.

FARLOW HARGROVE

There was no one like your father.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT HALLWAY - MORNING

The knocking on the front door is loud and insistent but the
deadbolt secures it tight.

An Italian opera plays on an old turntable, the sound is
scratchy but the music is divine in its grandeur.

John sits perched on his stool, hums along to the music,
faces an empty canvas with trepidation. He wets a brush
with a dab of paint, slowly brings it to the canvas but stops
abruptly as the knocking grows louder.

JUSTINE (O.S.)

Mr Caton?
(beat)
Mr. Caton!

JOHN CATON

Oh! For the love of God...

JUSTINE

Mr. Caton! I need to speak with
you. Five minutes. Give me just
five minutes.

John shuffles to the door, unbolts the lock to let Justine
in.

JOHN CATON

Okay, Ms. Hargrove. You have your
five minutes.

Justine composes herself, prepares to make the presentation
of her life.

Justine pulls an art magazine out of her backpack, hands it
to John. On the cover is of photo of Justine's parents,
posed in front of an arrangement of paintings.

The young woman, striking in her looks, cradles a very young
girl in her arms.

The young child, Justine herself, proudly brandishes her finger painting, which seemingly fits with framed art surrounding them. Behind them stands a young Farlow Hargrove, immaculately dressed, his hair black as coal.

The text on the cover reads "A look at art's new first family."

JUSTINE

(points to the cover)

Those were my parents, along with my uncle. They had just opened the gallery, my father being hailed as the new crown prince of art.

JOHN CATON

The kiss of death bestowed on the unsuspecting.

JUSTINE

They were inseparable, bound together in a gordian knot. Or so they thought.

(indicates her mother)

She died a few days after this was printed. My Dad found her, an electrical cord around her neck hanging in a shower, clutching a note.

JOHN CATON

I'm sorry.

JUSTINE

My uncle never told me the contents of that note, only that it drove my Dad to the brink. And eventually past that.

(on the verge of tears)

He...they... left me. Selfish bastards. They only thought about themselves. They only really loved each other. Not me.

JOHN CATON

I'm sure your parents loved you deeply. It's hard to understand when-

JUSTINE

(quizzically)

Mr. Caton, is it like that?

JOHN CATON

Is what like what?

JUSTINE
Your muse? Someone like that.

JOHN CATON
Yes it is.
(hesitates)
I mean, Yes, it was.

JUSTINE
How do you know?

John reaches to comfort Justine, but pulls back, unsure of what to do.

JOHN CATON
Because when it is the one, you will do anything for them. Anything.
(pointedly)
Sometimes the journey is beautifully blissful, other times it can take you to the heart of darkness. Either way, it will test you. Twist you in directions you never even thought to go. Pull you ever deeper into the depths of your soul.
(deep breath)
And you'll both succumb, the good and the bad. One of the few absolutes in this world. That and death.

JUSTINE
I see. Just like that.

John nods reverently, acknowledges the point.

JOHN CATON
Ms. Hargrove, while I am sympathetic to your situation, what is it that you really want from me?
(smiles)
After all, I'm way too old to be your boyfriend.

JUSTINE
I want you to teach me. I'll be your apprentice. A real apprentice.

JOHN CATON
I've taught you what I know.

JUSTINE
I don't want to learn from you Mr. Caton. I want to learn from "Sofio Cattano!"

JOHN CATON

I don't know who that person is anymore.

JUSTINE

Please. There aren't many artists left in this world. Real artists. Like you.

(quivers)

Like my father.

JOHN CATON

Ms. Hargrove, those paintings were completed eons ago, when the world was young. When I thought not to be mortal. It's not like that.

Justine points to the painting by the locked room, the oil still slight wet and glistening on the canvas.

JUSTINE

Yes it is. This one you completed only a few days ago.

JOHN CATON

A case of mistaken identity.

JUSTINE

Please, you've brought me this far, I can't turn back.

(pleads)

I'm so close. I can feel it.

Justine's fingers flex and tremble, reaching for the thought.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

It's within my grasp.

JOHN CATON

I'm not the man.

John looks at his watch.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Your time is running out.

JUSTINE

It is for both of us.

(points to the painting)

If you didn't think you could, then you wouldn't have done this. But this is just a warm-up. Just practice before you paint that great symphony.

JOHN CATON

Ms. Hargrove-

JUSTINE

Tell me I'm wrong, and I'll go away.

Justine stares him down, her eyes never more focused and direct. The goal within her sights.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Tell me you're not that artist.

(dares him)

In the truth there is all that really is. Isn't that right?

JOHN CATON

It is.

JUSTINE

Then you just answered my question.

(matter of fact)

You'll teach me and finish the work you started.

JOHN CATON

(smiles)

You leave me little choice.

Hermes peers from between the paint jars, darts across the table, his fur wet with paint. He rolls back and forth over some canvas, covers it with bold streaks of color.

JUSTINE

Hermes!

JOHN CATON

It looks like you may have some competition though.

John picks up the colorful rat, nuzzles him, smearing paint on himself.

Justine watches as John and Hemes perform a dance macabre, lost in the epic music of opera.

FADE OUT:

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - LATER

The easels face each other by the window, capturing the natural light, affording them the opportunity to work privately or at least see what the other is doing.

Hermes sits between them, watching their every move.

The soft refrains of an opera rises and falls, matching John's brushstrokes, flowing in time with the song, painting the music. His hand steady and sure, the first time in many years.

JOHN CATON
 (whispers to the canvas)
 Lovely. I know you're in there.

Justine looks on, her canvas blank except for a few dabs of color.

JUSTINE
 Mr. Caton?

John eyes her down, annoyed at the interruption.

JOHN CATON
 What is it now Ms. Hargrove?

JUSTINE
 This music. Don't you have anything
 with a beat. It's putting me to sleep.

JOHN CATON
 If a beat is what you want, then
 listen to the rhythm of your heart.

JUSTINE
 Can I put on some of my music? Just
 to get me going. You know, warm up.

JOHN CATON
 If it will refrain you from
 conversing, I'm willing to do almost
 anything.

Justine opens her laptop, plays a song with a catchy beat, the volume loud. She dances in front of the canvas, picks up her palette and brush, and begins to lay down some color.

JUSTINE
 See! It's working.

Hermes joins her, his body writhing on some paper in streaks of colorful paint, enjoying the musical beat.

John looks on, shakes his head at the noise, goes back to his easel.

JOHN CATON
 This is horrible.

He goes back to his painting, his train of consciousness broken by the Justine's music.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)
 (rolls his eyes to
 heaven)
 Why have you forsaken me?

Frustrated, John turns the volume of the opera louder, hoping to drown out Justine's music.

His painting becomes stronger, pulling in energy from the music.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Now, this is better.

Realizing her music is being drowned out, Justine turns the volume up, the two different musical styles combine, blending together in a mashup of classical and hip hop, clashing at first but soon complementing each other in a brand new sound.

JUSTINE

I'm not sure where to go with this.

John peers over his shoulder, looks over at Justine's easel, grabs a brush.

JOHN CATON

Remember, white is the absence of color, but you're not adding color, you're subtracting the white, freeing what lurks behind.

Together they work on the canvas, at first serious but soon playful and free, following the course of the musical themes and beats.

Laughing and dancing between each other, the painting metamorphoses from a cacophony of color to something distinct and tight, merged together as one.

JUSTINE

It's remarkable. I never even saw it coming to this.

JOHN CATON

That's when you know you've crossed over. It just happens. Like freeing a genie from a bottle.

JUSTINE

It's magical.

Exhausted they sit down, admiring their efforts.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Petra stands at the entrance of the loft, softly applauds their efforts. She walks towards them, pushes the door but it doesn't close all the way.

PETRA TSE

That was quite the show.

She spots Hermes, grimaces at the sight.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

Is this the art institute you aspired to? Teaching hapless girls and wayward rodents?

Hermes scampers away, not sure if it's the sound of a cat's meow or Petra's comments that scares him.

JOHN CATON

For God's sake Paula, call before you just decide to grace me with me your presence!

PETRA TSE

Call you on what? You don't own a phone.

JOHN CATON

Precisely the point. I don't want to be interrupted by nuisance purveyors of meaningless drivel, always trying to sell me something.

PETRA TSE

Is that what I am to you now? A meaningless saleswoman?

JOHN CATON

Haven't you always been?

PETRA TSE

That's true, when it was your work I was trying to purvey.

Slowly Petra walks over to the easel, looks it over, with a critic's eye.

Justine backs away slightly, Petra smiles thinly, acknowledging the young woman.

JUSTINE

I know this looks awkward and...

PETRA TSE

Yes, you're right. It is awkward.
(points to the painting)
Next time work a little tighter with the sable brush.

JOHN CATON

Wonderful, now you're a critic too.
(grimaces)
You know I hate critics as much as I hate salespeople.

PETRA TSE
Some things never change.

JOHN CATON
No, they don't.

PETRA TSE
That's where you're wrong. I did a great job selling you, you did a horrible job selling out.

JOHN CATON
I told you I was never interested in becoming an Andy or Jasper or any of my so-called contemporaries.

PETRA TSE
True, you wanted to be even more.

Anger courses through John's body, fueling the fire in his eyes.

JOHN CATON
(angry)
And I should've been!

PETRA TSE
Yes, you should have.
(acknowledges)
But you're here and they're there.
All you had to do was play the game.

JOHN CATON
It wasn't a game.

PETRA TSE
It's all a game. You took it to heart. You listened to their bullshit diatribes and worse, you actually started to believe them.
(stubs out the cigarette)
Critics criticize and painters paint, each in an orchestrated ballet of mutual condescension.

JOHN CATON
Why should I give them the pleasure.

PETRA TSE
Because you had to.

JOHN CATON
Who are they to pass judgment on me?

PETRA TSE

Jesus Christ, even after all these years, you're still the same. A hard-boiled ego, with the thinnest of shells, ready to crack!

JOHN CATON

Is that so?

Petra pulls up a stool, sits between John and Justine.

PETRA TSE

Don't put yourself on your own pedestal of hypocrisy. You all want the same things. To be loved, to be worshipped or even worse, to be popular.

JOHN CATON

Is that what you thought I was after? Popularity?

(laughs)

So my paintings could one day be turned into trinkets and all kinds of disposable crap? That's not the legacy I wanted.

PETRA TSE

What do you call what you've been doing the last thirty years?

John looks away, avoiding Petra's stare and the truth.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

Wallpaper, pillows and bedsheets? The very things people sleep on, fuck on and eventually turn into rags to wipe the shit off their hands. That is your legacy.

JOHN CATON

(shaking in anger)

No! That was his, not mine.

PETRA TSE

No! You made it yours! I was never sure who really died that day, you or him.

(sadly)

Now I know.

JUSTINE

(to Petra)

Please, stop!

PETRA TSE

Why? It's only a few shorts steps
before he reaches the conclusion.

JUSTINE

So you can take his work and sell it
at that gallery of yours?

PETRA TSE

They're worthless.
(points to John)
At least while he still has breath
in him. He saw to that.

JUSTINE

You're just like my Uncle Farlow.
You're not an artist you just don't
get it.

PETRA TSE

(quizzically)
Farlow? Farlow Hargrove? Is that
your uncle?

JUSTINE

Yes, why do you know him?

PETRA TSE

Yes, and that would make you the
child of...

JUSTINE

Yes, they were my parents.

Justine looks over to John.

PETRA TSE

My mistake, It does seem you do have
some good judgment left in you.
This young woman has a pedigree that
would make your own ancestors blush
with envy.

Petra spies Hermes on the table, trailing what looks to be
red paint.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

I'm not so sure I can say the same for
your esteemed colleague over there.

JOHN CATON

Don't be so judgmental. I raised
him since I found him frightened and
scampering alone in this world.

(MORE)

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(firmly)

Besides, at least he doesn't hide who he really is. He's proud to be a rat, what's your excuse?

(points to the red smear)

See, he's already at work on a new project. I'm sure he could fetch a tidy sum for your fine establishment.

JUSTINE

Mr. Caton! That's not paint...

(cries out)

It's blood!

A cat, hidden by the door, scampers off, leaves a trail of bloodied paw prints.

JOHN CATON

Oh my God!

(screams)

HERMES!

EXT. WAREHOUSE ROOFTOP - EVENING

A trashcan filled with broken pieces of old lumber aflame, burns brightly. Its ashes flicker among the stars of the night sky.

John, surrounded by Justine and Petra, clutches a small old paintbox, the name Hermes is painted on the side. He opens it one last time and places a small tube of paint within it. He gently lies the makeshift coffin on top of the burning wood, a funeral pyre to his dead colleague.

JOHN CATON

"I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of them that behold thee."

The box slowly scorches then erupts into flames, illuminating the night in a shower of sparks and soft smoke.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

May the fire cleanse your soul and serve as a beacon for the angels to find you.

(sniffles)

Have a safe journey my friend.

John wipes the tears from his eyes.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Would anybody like to say something?

Justine and Petra look at each other, unsure of what to say.

JUSTINE

I'd like to say that in his brief time here on earth, he always remained true to his craft.

JOHN CATON

Paula?

Petra freezes up, lost for words but swallows deeply to force the words from her mouth.

PETRA TSE

(sympathetically)

I'm sorry, I didn't really know him well...I hope...I...uh...closed the door...I mean...this isn't a door closing but rather a new door opening for a better life.

JOHN CATON

Nicely put. Thank you both.

John bows his head in prayer and thought.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. May you be blessed in the next life as you were to me in this life.

JUSTINE

Maybe Hermes will be reincarnated into a real artist in his next life.

PETRA TSE

That would be ironic.

John smiles at the thought, nods in approval.

JOHN CATON

He certainly had the talent. If God were truly benevolent then he would see it so.

The pyre burns brightly, consuming all within it, until the flames extinguish and turn to simmering coals.

The evening begins to deepen, the night sky harkens.

JUSTINE

It's getting late and I wanted to catch up with Travis at the school cafe.

JOHN CATON

Off with you then, Ms. Hargrove.

(MORE)

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(snidely)

You wouldn't want that Dean of yours to fail you. He could be such a prick when he wants to be.

JUSTINE

I guess. Well, good night Mr. Caton. Ms Tse.

PETRA TSE

Please, I'm not that old to be so formal. It's Petra, remember?

(shakes Justine's hand)

Good night Justine.

Justine smiles, walks down the stairwell, her footsteps echo away.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

Why do you always say that about Preston? He's been respectful to you and still you treat him as nothing more than your apprentice.

JOHN CATON

Because that's what he'll always be as long as I'm alive. My apprentice.

PETRA TSE

And when you die, what will he be? Or do you plan on cheating death the same way you cheated life?

JOHN CATON

I plan for nothing. Preston can be the man he always wanted to be.

PETRA TSE

And when I die, what will you be?

JOHN CATON

Alone.

A piece of wood suddenly catches fire, burning brightly.

John takes a cigarette, lights it from the flame, takes a deep drag. He offers one to Paula who politely refuses.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Why are you here Paula? Come to play the Black Widow?

PETRA TSE

Cute.

She takes out her own cigarette, a marijuana leaf stamped by the filter and takes a long drag, holding in the smoke then exhales away from John.

John looks surprised but doesn't acknowledge anything.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

If we're meant to spend eternity together, I want at least a few months here on earth with you.

JOHN CATON

What makes you so sure we'll be together in eternity?

PETRA TSE

As sure as the sun will rise in the east and set in the west.

JOHN CATON

Are you the Angel of Death coming to whisk me away to Heaven's Gate?

John puts his hand to his ear, the sound of a distant car horn blast captures his attention.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(teasing)

Listen, is that Gabriel blowing his trumpet? No, probably just a cab. So much for what you know.

The flames flicker one last time, then fade away.

PETRA TSE

I wasn't talking about you. It's me.

Paula drags on the marijuana cigarette, offers it up to John, who denies the gesture.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I forgot, this wasn't your weapon of choice. You prefer your shot in a glass, with a dash of lime and twist of futility.

JOHN CATON

Cut the crap Paula. I'm past indulging in the past.

PETRA TSE

It doesn't do much anyway. I can't even get stoned anymore.

(MORE)

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

(quivering)

I have something, something bad and they don't know what will happen or how long I've got.

John looks on concerned, remaining stoic but his eyes betray the truth.

JOHN CATON

What do you want from me?

PETRA TSE

(takes a deep breath
and another drag on
the joint)

I want you to come with me. See the world, like the bohemians we once were. Do you remember?

JOHN CATON

Would that I could forget.

PETRA TSE

I want to travel where the great masters once trod. Arles, Tahiti, Rome, Paris...

(excited)

Oh! How much fun we had in Paris! Don't tell me you forgot Paris?

A thin smile breaks across John's face but his emotion is short-lived.

JOHN CATON

(contemplative)

I'm too old Paula. My body aches. I have a hard time just riding the subway...

(laughs)

...and you want me to traverse across the globe? One of the more ridiculous things I've heard in a long time!

PETRA TSE

I'm serious.

(smiles)

You know I hate to travel by myself.

JOHN CATON

Let me be. Please!

(annoyed)

Just let me be.

The fire dies out, enveloping them in darkness except for the faint glow of the cigarette as John draws deeply.

A faint honk of a car breaks their silence. Petra tosses her cigarette into the trashcan.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Gabriel?

PETRA TSE

That's my car. I have to get going.
 (kisses his cheek
 slightly)
 I will wait for you. Even if it
 takes forever.

John stubs out the cigarette.

JOHN CATON

It just might.

EXT. MYRTLE AVENUE - EVENING

The street is busy with students from the campus and the neighborhood folks.

Justine bounds down the street, excited as she reaches the entrance to the internet cafe she frequents with Travis. She looks through the window, sees him at a table and rushes in.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT - LATER

The warehouse is dark except for the bulbs that illuminate the easel propped up by the window. The lights of the city twinkle like stars in the night.

A perpetual cigarette dangles from John's lips, his brush strokes deliberate and fast as he works the color over the canvas with distinct purpose.

The strokes slowly begin to form a face that is clearly Petra's, rendered in pigments of hues and tints.

INT. SMALL INTERNET CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

Justine make her way through the busy cafe, takes a seat across from Travis who is clearly immersed in his computer.

She plops her belongings down, jolts Travis away from his laptop.

JUSTINE

(very excited)
 I'm so glad you're here! I've done
 it! I Made the biggest leap in my
 painting. It's so wonderful...

Justine notices a portfolio case on the chair next to Travis, looks around the cafe.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Oh, is Derek here? I'm ready to tackle that coding project.

TRAVIS PARKER

Justine? I need to...

JUSTINE

I know I haven't been around lately but now that I've...

A young attractive female student, KRISTEN PHILLIPS, sits down next to Travis, grabs his hand.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Travis? Who is this?

KRISTEN PHILLIPS

(points to Justine)

Yes Travis, who is this?

TRAVIS PARKER

Justine, I didn't know you'd be here.

JUSTINE

Obviously!

(snidely)

Let me guess, you're helping her out on her html project. Is that your new pick up line?

(sarcastic)

"Hi, would you like me to code you?"

KRISTEN PHILLIPS

Don't be ridiculous.

TRAVIS PARKER

She's helping me. She really knows her stuff.

JUSTINE

I bet she does.

(sadly)

You know how busy I've been with my painting. Couldn't you just wait for me?

TRAVIS PARKER

I waited long enough. What did you expect me to do? Wait forever?

Justine grabs her belongings.

JUSTINE

Something like that.

She makes her way through the cafe and out the door.

EXT. PASSPORT BUREAU - DAY

The street is crowded with pedestrians as John, dressed in a suit thirty years too late, exits the bureau office.

People walking faster than him, bump and jostle him. He is somewhat confused by his surroundings.

A hand reaches out, touches him on the shoulder, which startles John.

JOHN CATON

What the...?

JUSTINE

Mr. Caton? Are you all right. It's me, Justine.

JOHN CATON

Yes, of course. Ms. Hargrove. I was surprised, that's all.

JUSTINE

I just wanted to say that I can't thank you enough for everything you've done for me. I really feel I've-

JOHN CATON

Good to see you. I'll be on my way.

With great difficulty, John tries to make his way into the crowded sidewalk, like a car trying to enter a busy freeway.

JUSTINE

Mr. Caton? I'm heading over to the Art Expo, maybe you'd like to join me.

JOHN CATON

I don't think so.

JUSTINE

It's my treat. My uncle gave me two tickets and since I need only one...

JOHN CATON

It's very kind of you. I do appreciate the sentiment.

JUSTINE

I understand, I just didn't want to go alone.

Justine walks away, makes her way into the crowd, as John watches her.

He contemplates for a thought, then chases after her, forcing his way through the milieu of people.

JOHN CATON

(out of breath)

Okay. I'll go with you.

JUSTINE

Really?

JOHN CATON

I'm not doing it for you, you understand, but I haven't been to a exhibition in many years. I believe it was my last show with Paula.

(grins)

It'd be good to see what the art world is up to. To see what they're made of today!

JUSTINE

(hesitates)

Maybe, this isn't such a good idea. I think I better go work on my finals.

JOHN CATON

Nonsense. You're coming with me!

John laughs his maniacal cackle, takes Justine's arm and escorts her down the street.

INT. ART EXPO - LATER

The exhibition hall is a large cavernous venue, filled with various mini-galleries of contributing artists and sculptors, all arranged with lesser known artists on the perimeter and the great masters in the center.

Justine and John meander through the hall, as much a showcase for dealers as it is for the living artists to promote and hawk their work.

JUSTINE

This is so cool. My uncle is here somewhere but I haven't spotted him.

(to John)

What do you think? Pretty impressive.

JOHN CATON

I'll decide when I'm impressed.

JUSTINE

I'm sure you will.

They pass many different artists of varying skill and talent, all of which leave John somewhat bewildered, amused or indifferent.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Oh, look. This is Devvon Hinkel's gallery. He's considered the world's greatest living artist.

At center of the exposition is a raised platform, which contains the exhibit of the notorious DEVVON HINKEL, whose work is all about shock value and the absurdly grotesque.

His clothes are self-designed, with belts of leather straps mixed with fine silk and are as ostentatious as his art. His bald head is tattooed to look like an eight ball from a pool table. He is surrounded by his entourage of sycophants and beautiful people.

DEVVON HINKEL

As been my custom for many years , I have prepared a new series to be unveiled here at the exposition.

Waves his hands over the crowd, pontificating a sermon on the mount for all to listen.

DEVVON HINKEL (CONT'D)

Today I give you...

At a signal, two of his assistants, dressed in outrageous clothes, pull back the covering to reveal his latest creation, a series of black velvet posters of dogs playing pool, a haunted ship and a large cartoonish snake.

DEVVON HINKEL (CONT'D)

Rhapsody in Black.

Farlow Hargrove and Petra Tse are in different parts of the crowd, which breaks out in applause and cheers.

A middle-aged woman, elegantly dressed to flaunt her wealth, whispers to Farlow Hargrove as they both applaud softly.

WOMAN

Lovely, simply lovely. If Lichtenstein could do comic art, Hinkel has clearly surpassed the master.

FARLOW HARGROVE

He's the master of something.

WOMAN

I must have one.

(MORE)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I especially love the dogs. I've never seen anything so clever.

FARLOW HARGROVE

It might be costly.

WOMAN

Please, when did that ever stop you. I want what I want before anybody else wants this.

Farlow bends to kiss the hand of his client.

FARLOW HARGROVE

As always, you are quite the patron of the arts.

WOMAN

Tell Devvon it's for me.

(whispers)

He'll give you a discount!

She turns and walks away, dismissing Farlow with a wave of her hand.

INT. ART EXPO - CONTINUOUS

John unable to see through the mob, slowly snakes his way to the front, followed by Justine who grows increasingly nervous.

JUSTINE

Mr. Caton, I think we should go back. You're not going to appreciate his work and it's very crowded.

JOHN CATON

If this man is the world's greatest artist then I need to see for myself.

John emerges from the crowd near where some of Devvon's paintings are propped up on display. The painting is amateurish, and is distinctly ugly.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

(laughs loudly)

You've got to be kidding. Is this a joke or something.

A security man takes notice of John, watches him with interest.

JUSTINE

Let's move on, Mr. Caton.

Justine takes him by his arm, leads him away, towards the main gallery area.

John stops at a particular painting that is both horrid and devoid of any talent.

JOHN CATON

This is absurd. Who taught this man to paint?

He takes particular notice of brush hairs left on the painting, denoting a real lack of professional care. John rubs his finger on the painting, trying to pick them off.

The security guard, a large imposing man, rushes over.

SECURITY GUARD

Hey! Old man! Don't touch that!

JUSTINE

Mr. Caton! Leave that alone. It's very valuable.

JOHN CATON

I'll be the judge of that!

Justine tries to pull John away but he firmly resists.

He successfully pulls off some of the bothersome hairs, removing some of the paint with it, which he ignores.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Brush hairs!
(yells out)
This man left brush hairs in his painting!

He holds the hair up for all to see.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Show some care for your work! Jesus Christ is this amateur hour or what?

Devvon takes notice of the commotion, motions for his underlings to restrain John.

The security guard beats them to it, grabs John forcefully and tries to handcuff him.

Justine runs to John's aid.

JUSTINE

Leave him alone, you asshole!

SECURITY GUARD

Didn't you see what he did?

John desperately wrestles free, which enrages the security guard.

JOHN CATON

Get your stinking hands off of me!

Devvon's assistants grab John, tackling him and creating a melee in the process. More security personnel join in, which creates mass confusion.

John grabs his chest, grows limp and collapses to the floor.

JUSTINE

Mr Caton! Oh! My God!

(screams)

MR. CATON!

Justine cradles his head, pushes away anyone who comes near them, especially the security guards.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Call an ambulance! Please!

A pair of hands reach out to Justine which she beats away until she realizes it's Petra Tse.

PETRA TSE

Justine! It's me, Petra!

JUSTINE

Please! He can't die!

PETRA TSE

Don't worry, I've called for help.

INT. NEW YORK HOSPITAL - LATER

The emergency room is chaotic, with patients on stretches and beds are treated by doctors and nurses on their mission.

Justine and Petra walk quickly through the throng of people lining the hallways of the hospital corridors, searching for John. They arrive at the nurses station.

PETRA TSE

We're looking for John Caton. He was brought in from the Art Expo.

The nurse looks at her charts, checks the computer.

NURSE

He was admitted to ICU a short time ago.

JUSTINE

Is he okay?

NURSE

I'm sorry, the computer doesn't give us the patient status.

PETRA TSE

Where can we find him?

NURSE

Take the south elevator to the fourth floor.

Justine runs to the elevator as Petra tries to catch up.

INT. HOSPITAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - MOMENTS LATER

The hospital floor is whisper quiet, the head nurse in conversation with one of the doctors as Justine and Petra approach the desk.

PETRA TSE

Excuse me, we're looking for John Cation?

The head nurse stops talking as the doctor continues his rounds.

HEAD NURSE

Let me see. Cation?

(beat)

Yes, he's here. The cardiologist is in with him now.

JUSTINE

Then he's alive!

PETRA TSE

Can we see him?

HEAD NURSE

Only immediate family.

JUSTINE

We're his family.

HEAD NURSE

When we brought him he was somewhat coherent, gave us the names of his family.

(looks at her screen)

There's a Paula Cannizzarro listed as his wife and a Justine Hargrove...it says, apprentice?

PETRA TSE

Yes, that's us.

HEAD NURSE

Okay good. I just need to see some identification. For security purposes, you understand.

Both Petra and Justine hand the head nurse their identification, which she looks over.

HEAD NURSE (CONT'D)

This says Petra
(mispronounces)
"Tisissy".

PETRA TSE

It's Petra Tse.

HEAD NURSE

Well the chart doesn't list a Petra
(slowly)
"Tisissy." Only Paula Cannizzarro.

PETRA TSE

(angrily)
It's pronounced "See."
(repeats)
"See" as in Cannizzarro! I'm Paula
Cannizzarro!

HEAD NURSE

Are you Petra or Paula? We have to make sure or security will have our asses...I mean necks. Mr. Caton was specific.

PETRA TSE

(in her thick Brooklyn
accent)
Fucking John! He's gotta bust balls
even when he's dying.

Petra quickly rummages through her pocketbook, finds her old social security card and passport, with a dated photo of her and hands it to the head nurse.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

Here!

HEAD NURSE

(skeptical)
Do you always carry your passport
around?

PETRA TSE

When I'm traveling I do. Now can I
see my husband?

Petra and Justine make their way to John's room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAYS LATER - LATER AFTERNOON

The room, trying hard to feel like anything other than a hospital, is nicely decorated with comfortable furniture and colorful bedsheets, the pattern the very one John produced for the Allison Smythe Collection.

The blinds are open, bathing the room in warm sunlight as John seemingly sleeps soundly.

Standing in an alcove by the door, Petra and DOCTOR REARDEN, a stately man with snow white hair, converse in whispers.

DOCTOR REARDEN

We can't say for certain if it was a heart attack or not, or just his reaction to the stress of the incident, but the fact remains he's getting older and there's no way to tell if he'll have another episode any time soon.

PETRA TSE

Is that the best you can do?

DOCTOR REARDEN

Yes. His heart did sustain some damage and it will be touch and go for awhile.

PETRA TSE

How long is that?

DOCTOR REARDEN

I can't give you a definitive answer to that. We're mere mortals not soothsayers.

PETRA TSE

Anything else to be concerned about?

DOCTOR REARDEN

Yes. Keep him away from those Camels! That's certain to kill him.

JOHN CATON (O.S.)

(raspy)

Like hell you will!

John stirs, tries to sit upright in his bed. Petra comes over to help him.

PETRA TSE

You have to be a better patient than that. Doctor Rearden is only looking out for you.

JOHN CATON

I can look out for myself. If my cigarettes were gonna kill me then the worms would have been feasting on me a long time ago.

The doctor checks John over, listens to his heart.

DOCTOR REARDEN

You're a tough man, Mr. Caton. That's for sure. I just want what's best for you.

(looks at his chart)

I have some other patients to check on. I'll see you later.

JOHN CATON

Not if I'm gone from here. Which I intend to be shortly.

Petra waves goodbye to the doctor, holds John's hand tenderly, gently caresses the talent within his fingers.

PETRA TSE

You're not going anywhere, especially without me.

JOHN CATON

What choice do I have? The sun still sets in the west.

Dusk slowly arrives, bathing the room in a warm crimson light.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NEXT DAY - AFTERNOON

Petra sits along side John's bed, as Justine paces back and forth by the window, waiting for the nurse to finish her tests.

The nurse takes John's temperature and blood pressure, but he is clearly agitated and annoyed.

NURSE

Are you sleeping well?

JOHN CATON

Who can sleep with you waking me up every hour to ask if I'm sleeping?

NURSE

(smiles)

Try not to get so excited.

JOHN CATON

The sheets! Please you have to do something about these sheets.

NURSE

Again, with the bedsheets Mr. Caton? They're so much nicer than that drab hospital green. Don't you agree?

JOHN CATON

I'm not going to die here, wrapped in this godforsaken floral pattern as my shroud.

(very annoyed)

Just change them!

NURSE

NO! The sheets aren't going anywhere and neither are you. You just need some rest.

(to Petra)

Is he always this pleasant?

PETRA TSE

(chuckles)

Always.

The nurse finishes up, takes her medical equipment rack and wheels it out the door, waving goodbye.

JOHN CATON

And don't wake me! Remember I need my rest!

John flips the TV remote, changes channels until he comes upon an educational teaching show on painting. The teacher wears a red beret and holds a large palette in his hands.

TV TEACHER

Now here we take our finger and slowly form a happy little bird who tweets his morning song.

JOHN CATON

Look at this idiot! Is this where you want to end up?

John grabs the remote, clicks the TV off.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

My apprentice! A finger painter!

JUSTINE

I'm not going to end up a stupid "finger painter." Not after what you taught me.

JOHN CATON

Do you think after one lesson you're now some great master! There's no discussion. You're finishing your school work.

PETRA TSE

Justine, he's right. Dean Wilcox was here this morning and mentioned you're in danger of failing some classes.

JUSTINE

I don't care about that stuff anymore.

JOHN CATON

Well you better. If that pompous ass fails you then he'll blame me.

John tries to sit up but is wobbly and weak.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

And then I'm going to have to listen to his relentless tirade of bullshit on the matter. No thanks. Do your classwork!

PETRA TSE

It's only for a short time. Work hard for the next week or so, make Dean Wilcox happy.

JOHN CATON

I think I need to rest.

John closes his eyes as he lays back down on the pillow, props back up to push the sheet away, then drifts off.

JUSTINE

(to Petra in a whisper)

I'm worried about him. He doesn't look good.

PETRA TSE

(whispers)

He's been through a lot.

JUSTINE

Okay, Mr. Caton. I'll work on my finals, but after that, can we continue our lessons.

JOHN CATON
(sleepily)
Class dismissed.

EXT. ART INSTITUTE - 2 WEEKS LATER

It's the last day of the semester and the campus is filled with students, some laughing playfully, some teary and crying.

Justine walks alone, her portfolio case and computer bag weigh her down. She crosses paths with Dean Wilcox.

PRESTON WILCOX
Well, Justine it looks like you did well enough this semester. Somewhat lacking in your coding exercises but enough to pass.

JUSTINE
Thanks, Dean Wilcox. I appreciate all you've done for me.

PRESTON WILCOX
I hope the journey was rewarding for you and not a lot of smoke and mirrors.

JUSTINE
No, it wasn't like you said, like...

Justine notices a plume of smoke softly rolling from the top of John's warehouse, like a beacon.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
...Icarus?

Preston also takes notice of the black plume in the distance.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
Smoke... Burning!

Justine drops her bags, runs desperately through the campus and down the street, homing in on the smoking beacon.

INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER

Taking the steps two by two in the stairwell, Justine passes floor after floor, finally arrives at the rooftop.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Out in the center of the tarred rooftop, Petra Tse stands in front of three trashcans, each burning the remnants of paintings, art supplies and other worldly possessions of John Caton.

Petra notices Justine but continues to feed the fire all the remaining remnants of John's life.

With the life sucked out of her, Justine approaches the smoking refuse.

JUSTINE

Is he...?

PETRA TSE

Gone? Yes, a week ago.

JUSTINE

You should've called me.

PETRA TSE

To do what? Mourn him? He would've hated that more than anything.

JUSTINE

I was just starting...
(emotional)
It's not fair.

PETRA TSE

It never is.

Petra places the last painting of John's textile design in the burning pyre.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

That's the last of it.

JUSTINE

Where is he...you know, buried?

PETRA TSE

He's not. He was cremated, along with everything else. Just the way he wanted it to be.

Petra and Justine stand silently, watching the embers slowly die out to ash.

JUSTINE

I feel so empty. Is everything gone?

PETRA TSE

Almost. The warehouse is to be condemned, besides who'd ever want to live here?

(smiles)

I took the liberty of leaving you some of his brushes and whatever else I thought John might want you to have.

JUSTINE

I appreciate it. Thank you Petra.

PETRA TSE

It's Paula. Petra died, along with my gallery and everything else.

They hold out their hands to shake but instead embrace warmly, nodding in understanding to each other.

A car honk breaks their moment.

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

That's my ride. I have to go.

Petra takes one last look around

PETRA TSE (CONT'D)

(in thick Brooklyn
accent)

Time to get the hell outta Dodge!

Justine waves as Petra walks quietly down the stairwell and away from the life of John Caton forever.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT STUDIO - LATER

The loft is deserted and drafty, the wind blows softly through the panes of broken glass as Justine slowly walks amongst the memories.

A lone easel stands watch, upon which some brushes and an urn have been placed.

Justine picks up some of the brushes, smells the dry paint encased from years of use.

JUSTINE

If only this brush could talk. What stories it could tell.

A gust of winds blows open the door of the small closet and it continues to slam back forth, beckoning Justine.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

I better close this.

Before she can close the door, a strong wind blows the door wide open. A sliver of light from the window illuminates the room, which is filled with all of Sofio Cattano's original paintings.

Justine flicks the light switch on, stares at amazement at the treasure trove of art. She notices a yellow post-it placed on the paintings, takes it to read under the light.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)
(perplexed)
Fifteen minutes?

FADE OUT:

INT. CATTANO INSTITUTE OF ART - ONE YEAR LATER

A "Welcome" banner flutters outside of the building which displays the name, Cattano Institute of Art, rendered in streaks of color meant as a homage to the artist.

The entry gallery is beautifully designed, a testament to the work of Sofio Cattano, with his greatest art on display. A plaque commemorates the memory and achievements of the deceased artist.

Preston Wilcox walks the gallery, checking the paintings and making everything just perfect.

Justine enters the building, carries the urn with the ashes of John Caton.

PRESTON WILCOX
Justine! Isn't this wonderful.
(excited)
It's everything he always imagined
it could be.

JUSTINE
(looks around)
It certainly is.

Preston proudly displays one particular painting, the very one he once saved at the gallery fiasco many years ago.

PRESTON WILCOX
This one was always my favorite.

JUSTINE
It is beautiful.

PRESTON WILCOX
Don't worry, these are prints. The originals are way too valuable to be put on display. Your uncle has cleverly seen to that.

JUSTINE
(nods knowingly)
It's a shame Mr. Caton didn't live long enough to see how much his real work is now appreciated.

PRESTON WILCOX

Funny how his death made the world realize his life. It happens to the best of them.

JUSTINE

I think he would laugh at the absurdity of it all.

PRESTON WILCOX

Maybe, but this school will be a testament to his purpose. It's what he really wanted. You've given him a second chance.

JUSTINE

It was a group effort.
(holds up the urn)
The three of us.

The door opens, a young man, HERMAN FLUGEL, 23, approaches, his comfortable clothes streaked with paint stains.

HERMAN FLUGEL

Dean Wilcox?

PRESTON WILCOX

Ah yes, Mr. Cahill. You're a tad early but welcome nonetheless.
(to Justine)
Justine, Let me introduce you to Herman Flugel, one of the first students to enroll at the Cattano Institute of Art.

Justine switches her hand holding the urn, to shake hands with Herman, whose arm displays a tattoo of a pair of wings.

JUSTINE

Welcome aboard Herman! Nice to meet you.

HERMAN FLUGEL

Nice to meet you also. Dean Wilcox mentioned that you studied under Sofio Cattano. You must be pretty good if he chose you.

JUSTINE

(smiles)
I only had a couple of lessons but Dean Wilcox here was his one true apprentice.

PRESTON WILCOX

Justine is too modest. It was her idea to set up the institute.

JUSTINE

Just repaying back a debt I owe. That's all.

(to them both)

If you don't mind I'd like a few minutes alone before the rest of the crowd shows up.

Preston Wilcox looks at the urn in Justine's hand, beckons Herman Flugel to follow him.

PRESTON WILCOX

It's very fitting, after all, his spirit will live here.

(to Herman)

Come, I could use some help in the office.

As the two men leave the gallery, Justine opens the top of the urn, says a silent prayer, her lips mumble along. She shakes the ashes across the gallery, a fine dust fills the air.

Justine is startled to see something fly out of the urn, looks down and picks up a used Camel cigarette butt. She turns the urn upside down, which is filled with the remnants of old smoked cigarettes that now litter the floor.

JUSTINE

Son of a bitch!

INT. JUSTINE'S APARTMENT - LATER

The large apartment is a combination art studio and living area, with large windows that overlook the city.

The computer by her desk displays a website focusing on famous artist locales from around the world. Justine turns page after page of her art history book, taking spurious notes.

She writes out check after check for large sums of money, placing each one into an envelope addressed to either John Caton or Sofio Cattano, at each and every city listed on her compiled list.

INT. KOREAN VEGETABLE MARKET - BROOKLYN - AFTERNOON

The owner of the Korean market is hanging an original painting by Sofio Cattano alongside a faded calendar and a black light poster of dogs shooting pool.

He looks at the painting, shakes his head in displeasure, turns it upside down and replaces it back on the wall. He nods and smiles, proud of his efforts.

His wife returns, arms holding shopping bags, points to the painting and scolds him.

KOREAN WIFE

What is that?

KOREAN MERCHANT

It's a gift from that young woman.
She said it was valuable.

KOREAN WIFE

What does she know?
(in Korean)
Take down that ugly painting! You
want to drive customers away, Stupid?

She takes one of the bags, pulls out some bedsheets and shows them to her husband. They are all the works of John Caton.

KOREAN WIFE (CONT'D)

Now here's something pretty to look
at.

The Korean merchant protests, reluctantly takes the painting off the wall and places it in the back room where no one can see it. He grabs his broom and sweeps out the small market.

EXT. JUSTINE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - WEEKS LATER - EVENING

The building is an old reconditioned warehouse, modernized with structural steel visible and accents of brick throughout the lobby.

Herman holds the door open for Justine, who carries a large case, which accidentally bangs against the wall.

HERMAN FLUGEL

Hey! You better be careful with that!

JUSTINE

I know, it's one of the originals.
I'm bringing it to a private
collector. What do you think about
this one I picked?

HERMAN FLUGEL

Your choice, since they're all yours
anyway.

JUSTINE

(hands Herman the
case)

They aren't really mine, they belong
to the school. I just manage them.

Justine walks towards the mailbox alcove, Herman takes the
case and follows her.

JUSTINE (CONT'D)

Hold up, I need to pick up the mail.

HERMAN FLUGEL

Well, if this one sells like the
last one, you can keep the institute
going for the next hundred years.

JUSTINE

(shudders)

I think I'd be pretty ugly and really
shriveled by then.

HERMAN FLUGEL

We'd both be, so what does it matter?

JUSTINE

What makes you so sure we'd be
together a hundred years from now.

HERMAN FLUGEL

Because who's counting years when
we're talking about eternity?

JUSTINE

Smart answer.

They both embrace, kissing tenderly.

Justine's mailbox overflows with envelopes, all unopened and
scattered across the floor, which they both collect.

HERMAN FLUGEL

Maybe you should give it up already.

JUSTINE

I can't. I need to know.

EXT. TAHITI BEACH - AFTERNOON

The beach is tranquil, lush with palm trees and gentle waves
that lap at the crystalline sand.

Petra Tse, dressed in a native sarong and carrying two
coconuts with straws, slowly makes her way down the beach,
taking in the warm sun and the sound of whistling birds.

A young woman, semi-nude with lustrous ebony hair blowing softly in the wind, sits on the trunk of a fallen palm tree. A fire pit is dug into the sand, crackles with flames as some meat cooks slowly on a spit.

PETRA TSE

Hey! Are you trying to make me
jealous or are you just a dirty old
man?

John Caton, his paint stained hands delicately trace the features of the young woman onto the canvas perched on an old easel.

JOHN CATON

If beautiful young women were good
enough for Gaugin, then they're good
enough for me.

John dabs paint on the brush from his palette, adds some finishing touches and admires his handiwork

He takes the painting off the easel, hands it to the young woman who smiles broadly at her gift. She kisses him on the cheek and runs down the beach, painting in hand.

Petra hands him one of the coconuts, they toast and sip the warm milk.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Besides, I'm too old to do anything
except to paint them.

PETRA TSE

(laughs)
Just keep it that way. You weren't
too old last night.

JOHN CATON

Must be the fresh air.

Petra reaches into the pocket of her dress, pulls out an envelope and hands it to John.

PETRA TSE

Here.

JOHN CATON

What's this?

PETRA TSE

(surprised)
It came this morning.

John looks over the envelope, takes note of the return address, rips open the sealed correspondence.

As he unfolds the letter, he doesn't notice a piece of paper that falls out and lands on the sand.

He reads the letter, shakes his head and chuckles to himself.

JOHN CATON

It's a note... from Justine.

PETRA TSE

Justine? How would she even know?

JOHN CATON

(grins)

She was my apprentice.

Petra takes the letter, reads it through and also chuckles.

PETRA TSE

Isn't that wonderful!

JOHN CATON

I never thought I'd live to see the day.

PETRA TSE

Well, aren't you the lucky one. Not every poor dead artist gets a chance to see themselves become rich and famous.

JOHN CATON

She said something about a check.

He spies the fallen piece of paper, but the wind picks up, sends it down the beach until he lunges for it.

Turning it over, John sees that it is a check for ten million dollars, the price of the painting Justine just sold. John smiles, then breaks out in his maniacal laugh and madly dances around the fire.

He takes the check and drops it into the flames, watches the edges scorch, then catch fire as the ashes blow away in the wind.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Ashes to ashes.

John takes Petra's hand, kisses it gently, a slight breeze wisps through her hair.

JOHN CATON (CONT'D)

Come on, the sun's setting. It's your turn to sit for me.

PETRA TSE

Don't you ever get tired of me posing?

John takes in his view of paradise, smiles at Petra as she positions herself on the fallen tree trunk.

JOHN CATON

The light's just right. I don't
want to lose what little left there
is.

The sky is bathed in the brilliant colors of the setting sun.

John works his brush across the painting as a bird flutters above, its wings caught in the bright glare, reaching for the skies, like Icarus in flight.

THE END