



FADE IN:

EXT. CITY - DAY

A drab environment. Skyline dominated by ugly, oppressive concrete buildings hidden behind a thick layer of smog.

On the walls of several buildings are electronic billboards. The screens feature an enigmatic, bald man sporting a goatee. This is VALENTINE [late 50's]. Arms folded, there's an aura of charisma about his cold stare.

Beneath the screens in scrolling pink text: *DECEMBER 25TH 2040... 50 DAYS UNTIL VALENTINE'S DAY...*

The sun doesn't penetrate the smog.

FADE TO:

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - DAY

A painting of the sun (minus smog). The full picture reveals a Pegasus with fiery hair, majestically flying towards it.

A hand gripping a paintbrush hovers over the picture. The brush lightly touches the canvas, adding the final touches.

This hand belongs to STEVE BURBANK [25], skinny, dark haired, unshaven but not scruffy. He relinquishes his hand and raises a wry smile, admiring his creation.

STEVE

There.

Steve walks across the windowless, sparsely lit room to a giant red button on the wall. He SLAMS his hand against it.

An alarm melodramatically sounds. A robotic arm clamps the painting, raising it high in the air. Another robot arm attaches a large sticker to it saying

RELAX!

The first arm twists until it's near a conveyor belt back where Steve first stood. The picture is placed on the belt, and slowly rolled through the open steel bolted door.

As the door closes and alarm quietens, a BLOOD CURDLING SCREAM is momentarily heard from wherever the door leads to.

Now in total silence, Steve wonders. Did he just hear that? He's quick to dismiss it though, getting back to work.

EXT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - DAY

Above the building's entrance is the Consecotech logo, and their slogan: *CUTTING OUT THE MIDDLE MAN*.

A PALE MAN [late 20's] is helped through the front door by a police officer (call him BAXTER). Pale Man limps, nursing his upper thigh area.

Behind them is an impatient Steve. Soon as a wide enough gap is formed, he wedges himself around Pale Man and Baxter, speed-walking to a nearby bench.

Sat there is BEN THOMAS [27]. Blonde, babyfaced, work clothes looking like a child forced to dress up for a wedding. He holds a bouquet of flowers, and a box of chocolates that look expensive just from the packaging.

BEN

Hel--

STEVE

Quick, before he sees me.

With that, Steve dashes away.

Ben picks up his belongings and lags behind.

EXT. CITY CENTRE - MOMENTS LATER

The city centre is bordered with shops, bustling with business. For every woman, there's at least three men.

In the middle, Ben and Steve are on a bench. Steve scoffs through a chicken sandwich rapidly while Ben is relaxed, sipping bottled water.

BEN

The way you sneak sandwiches 'round like that, I swear you're a spy or something. Had any job offers from Mother Russia?

STEVE

(chicken dangling out of mouth)

You wanna talk to my boss?

BEN

No, no. I'm good.

Steve finishes his sandwich before spotting

STEVE

Chocolate? Flowers? I know we're friends, but not like that.

BEN
You know who they're for. Got to
keep the average up and all that.

STEVE
I bet.
(goes to stand)
Right, I'm off--

BEN
Before you go, I need a favour. A
really, really big one.

STEVE
No.

BEN
Please?

STEVE
I'm not dating any more of
Sapphire's friends.

BEN
The others weren't that bad, were
they?

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD - FLASHBACK

(NOTE: The following flashback scenes are from Steve's point
of view, sat in the same position each time.)

Girl #1 is REBECCA [26]. Blonde with pigtails, orange skin
clashing with her neon pink outfit. Behind Rebecca is a
generic wooden wall, so Steve only has her to peer at.

REBECCA
Steve, I know this is only our
first date, but I want you to come
home and meet my...

She shoves a Polaroid of a POODLE in front of Steve's face.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
(pet talk)
Schnookums! Isn't he adorable? Yes
he is! Aww, I can't wait to go home
and give him lots of cuddles!

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD - FLASHBACK

Girl #2 is TYLENE [24]. Similar look to Rebecca, apart from
her rather expansive chest.

She moves a fork full of food towards her mouth, but her hand slips. The fork descends and STABS her left breast, which hisses and deflates.

Embarrassed, she covers it up in an attempt to maintain her composure.

Uncertain giggle. Composure gone.

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD - FLASHBACK

Girl #3 is RITA [age and gender debateable]. 'She' looks like a cross between the late, great Les Dawson and a serial killer.

Rita growls under her breath.

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD - FLASHBACK

And #4 is RICK [25], an effeminate man with a thin, twiddly moustache and sharp dress sense.

RICK

Don't tell me, you didn't like
Sapphire's girlfriends, and now she
thinks you're gay?

The P.O.V. perspective nods.

RICK

(mumbling to himself;
analysing fingernails)
Should tell her to stop setting me
up. Fifth time this month...

EXT. CITY CENTRE - CONTINUOUS

Steve answers Ben's question with a glare.

BEN

Point taken. But when Sapphire sets
you up, it's cause she wants you to
have the same unbreakable bond she
has with me.

(beat)

Besides, she'll dump me if you
don't come on a double date
tonight.

Steve sighs.

STEVE

What's her name?

BEN
What?

STEVE
My date.

BEN
Kaley, Kylie, Carly. Can't
remember.

STEVE
Ministry of Food, eight P.M.?

BEN
As always.

SMASH CUT TO:

PLASTIC LOVE

FADE IN:

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD - NIGHT

As well as wooden walls, this place has plastic plants, artificial one-hundred watt candlelight, and tables laid out like a jagged maze.

Wearing smart-casual clothing, Steve and Ben enter the restaurant. Ben, with the roses and chocolates in his possession, approaches the WAITER.

BEN

Table for four at eight for Thomas?

WAITER

Ah, yes. One of your party has already arrived. This way...

Waiter leads them to a nearby table. There is SAPPHIRE BOOTH [28], dolled in make-up, large golden hoop earrings, sour face exemplifying her unsubtle nature. Waiter senses she's pissed off.

WAITER

(leaving)

I'll get the hard liquor menu.

Ben goes to kiss Sapphire, but she snubs him.

BEN

Sorry we're late. Traffic. Here, I bought you these.

Sapphire's face further crumples when presented with the roses and chocolates.

SAPPHIRE

That it?

She takes the gifts, dumps them on the table, and turns her nose away in disgust.

Ben and Steve sit down during a patch of uncomfortable silence.

Then, Ben forcefully laughs.

BEN

(to Sapphire; badly acted)

As if I'd only buy you that!

Ben reaches into his trouser pocket and pulls out a jewelry box. The sound of the box clicking open grabs Sapphire's attention.

She spins around to see an Argos catalogue style golden bracelet caked in diamonique. She squeals in delight.

SAPPHIRE
It's beautiful!

Sapphire leans to Ben and hugs him. Head over her shoulder, Ben shoots a look of relief to Steve.

SAPPHIRE
Hey, there's Caitlin.

Breaking up the hug, she waves towards the entrance way.

SAPPHIRE (CONT'D)
Caitlin! Over here, girl.

CAITLIN HENNESSEY [24] is dressed in black, which emphasises her luscious, scarlet lips. Walking to the table, she runs her hand through her hair.

SAPPHIRE
Sit down.

Caitlin does as she's told, cracking an insincere smile while doing so. Before she's even able to blink, Sapphire throws the bracelet in front of her.

SAPPHIRE
Look what Ben got me.

CAITLIN
(unsure how to react)
That's. Good.

SAPPHIRE
It cost...
(to Ben)
How much?

BEN
One hundred and fifty-three credits.

Ben leans back, only to have his girlfriend stare daggers at him for some reason.

SAPPHIRE
Show her the receipt.

BEN
Oh, sorry.

CAITLIN
There's no need.

SAPPHIRE

Yes, there is.
(clenched teeth)
Ben?!

BEN

Getting it now.

Ben fishes out a scrunched up receipt from his wallet and hands it to Caitlin. She reluctantly unravels the paper and glances: *ROSES - 6CR, CHOCOLATES - 8CR, DIAMOND NECKLACE - 153CR, CONDOMS - 5CR.*

CAITLIN

(to Ben)
You must be in a great job.

BEN

I'm in telemarketing.

CAITLIN

What do you sell?

BEN

Telephones.

CAITLIN

Oh.

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD - MOMENTS LATER

The only change in scenery is that drinks have been served - four half-full glasses of red wine. Ben and Sapphire listen to Caitlin, while Steve is strangely distant.

CAITLIN

...so Dad took me to Valentineland a while back. I didn't like it. Too plastic. Anyway, I escaped for the day and found this rural village about five miles away. It was so beautiful. I want to go back there when I finish university for a while and do some paintings.

BEN

Wow, that sounds amaz--

SAPPHIRE

Well, me and Ben are doing something better than that. He's gonna get promoted to management, then we'll move into a yacht.

BEN

But I get sea sick.

Under the table, Sapphire THUMPS Ben's leg, causing the table to jump. The wine in their glasses comes close to spilling.

Rubbing his leg, Ben turns to Steve.

BEN
So Steve, how's work?
(to Caitlin)
He's an artist too.
(long beat)
Steve?

In a world of his own, Steve gazes towards Caitlin. She doesn't notice. A good thing considering a tiny bit of drool slips out of his mouth.

BEN
Steve!

He snaps out of the trance, wiping his mouth. Ben, Sapphire, and now Caitlin look at him weirdly.

STEVE
Ben, I'm off to the bathroom. You coming?

BEN
(chuckling)
And here's me thinking you were kidding about the flowers and chocolates...

Ben notices Steve's frown.

BEN
Sure.

INT. MINISTRY OF FOOD BATHROOM - NIGHT

In the future, public toilets are clean and sterile with no puddles of urine on the floor. Ben perches where the sinks are, as Steve paces back and forth in a frenzied manner.

STEVE
I can't explain it. I've never felt this way about a girl before. I barely know anything about Caitlin and yet I think I love her.

BEN
Ask her out then.

STEVE
I don't know how, I've never asked anyone out before. How did you get with Sapphire?

BEN
She asked me.

STEVE
What did she say?

BEN
"Buy me a drink and you can touch my boobs." And, well, you've seen them. They're the type of boobs you can spend hours rubbing your face against.

STEVE
I doubt that'll work.

BEN
Might do.

STEVE
("bullshit")
Really?

BEN
Fine. How about you relax? Clear your throat, take a deep breath, walk up and say...

INT. UNKNOWN - DAY

STEVE
Do you want to go out sometime?

On the yellow *47BW APPLICATION FORM* in front of Steve, he finishes writing *Do you want to go out sometime?* in the comments section. Steve is actually in the

STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS.

He hands the form to a bored CLERK. It takes Clerk a millisecond to find a problem with it.

CLERK
This is the wrong form. You need a 23GN to formally ask someone out.

STEVE
(pointing)
But the lady over there said to fill this one in.

CLERK
This is the form to have a baby.

STEVE
Maybe I should keep that one. Just in case.

CLERK

Then you better take this too.

Clerk hands him a blue application: *68MZ BREAKUP FORM - THINGS ARE GOING TOO FAST.*

STEVE

Clerk humour. Hilarious.

CLERK

You should see the guys in the tear gas department. They're a laugh riot.

Clerk fetches another piece of yellow paper, the 23GN form. The only difference to the 47BW is the name of it.

CLERK

Fill that in.

Steve gestures that the forms are the same. Clerk shrugs.

He picks a pen up from the desk, scribbles the 47BW out, and crudely scrawls 23GN next to it. He hands it back to Clerk.

STEVE

How long til I hear a response?

CLERK

One to two working days.

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - DAY

FIVE WORKING DAYS LATER

At his easel, Steve adds shading to a pencil outline of a tree.

He's interrupted by his boss DANIEL HUXLEY [48]. Stocky, sweaty, permanent Cheshire Cat smile. Instant buzzkiller.

DANIEL

Oi, a word?

STEVE

What's wrong?

DANIEL

What's wrong, *sir*. As a Consecotech crew member, I expect you to adhere to my working standards. That includes not bringing your bit on the side to work.

STEVE

Pardon?

DANIEL

There's some broad here to see you.
Make it quick, you're already
skating on thin ice.

Steve involuntarily grumbles.

STEVE

For the last time, I was gone for
ten minutes. It's my right to have
a lunch break.

DANIEL

No it isn't. And if you don't like
it, move to a democracy. Hippy!

Daniel strolls to the door and lets Caitlin in. He flashes a sleazy grin at her but she ignores it. Daniel then busies himself by admiring her from afar.

Caitlin walks to Steve.

CAITLIN

Hey.

STEVE

Hey.

CAITLIN

I got your form and... I accept
your request to be your girlfriend.

STEVE

Great! Great.

CAITLIN

(holding out hand)
Put it there.

Steve glances at Caitlin's hand. Eyes widen. Is he supposed to shake it? Does this make the relationship official? He moves his hand forward precariously.

He misses the target and the handshake is limp.

When their hands release, Steve exhales an embarrassed "ha". That's when he notices Daniel, back arched, eyes level to Caitlin's arse.

Caitlin turns too and is disgusted. Daniel stands upright, acting innocent.

DANIEL

Carry on.

CAITLIN

(to Steve)
Can't we talk somewhere else?

DANIEL

No.

Steve coughs uncomfortably.

STEVE

(to Caitlin)

So you wanna do something tonight?
There's a new rom-com out; Pete
Gaskell's Gone Oh Ria. I hear the
mandatory love interest is kooky
and quirky.

CAITLIN

(focused beyond Steve)

I don't like the cinema...

Admiring Steve's picture in progress, Caitlin moves closer to
it. She caresses the canvas.

CAITLIN

Is this yours?

STEVE

Yeah, I'm an artist.

CAITLIN

I know. Ben said while you were
drooling the other night.

Steve blushes.

CAITLIN

What are they for? I guess a place
like this doesn't want artistry.

STEVE

You know what? I have no idea. I
paint whatever pictures I want,
push a red button, and they're sent
away.

CAITLIN

(abruptly)

How about drinks at O'Willy's?
About ten-ish?

STEVE

Uh, sure.

Caitlin goes to exit when she remembers something.

CAITLIN

Before I forget, I have to give you
this. You know how it works?

She produces a DEBIT CARD from her pocket. Its surface is digitised with animated pink and purple splotches and other C.G.I. moving gently across. The centre of it says **OCR** in bold, silver lettering.

Steve takes the card.

STEVE

Yeah, I've got to spend a certain amount on you every month. Or else.

CAITLIN

Every fortnight.

STEVE

Fortnight? Since when?

CAITLIN

Five years ago.

(beat)

See you later then?

Caitlin finally exits. On her way out, she passes Daniel, who cocks an eyebrow at her. He's ignored again.

Meanwhile, Steve puts a hand to his head in disbelief.

STEVE

(to himself)

That went well. A deep well with jagged rocks at the bottom.

He looks back at Daniel. Daniel has found a PAIR OF BINOCULARS from somewhere, and is using them to ogle at Caitlin while she walks down the corridor. Seedy laugh.

When done, Daniel notices Steve eyeballing him.

DANIEL

(still wearing binoculars)

Back to work!

INT. O'WILLY'S BAR - NIGHT

The pub is packed to the brim, the consequence of New Year's Eve. Balloons, streamers, party poppers decorating the place. Crap dance music blares loudly.

Steve and Caitlin tussle through the crowd, hopping aside various PUNTERS swaying about merrily. The bar area is surprisingly quiet for such a packed place.

STEVE

What're you having?

CAITLIN

Gin and tonic.

Steve signals for the attention of the BARTENDER.

STEVE

Gin and Tonic, and a lager?

He hands over the debit card.

Bartender swipes the card on the cash register. The pink and purple splotches explode in glee as the *OCR* fades into *3CR*, blipping like a computer in a Hollywood film in the process.

INT. O'WILLY'S BAR - LATER

Steve and Caitlin are at a small round table in the corner. Their glasses are full.

STEVE

So how do you know Sapphire?

CAITLIN

We went to primary school together. It's funny, I hadn't spoken to her in nine years, but three weeks ago I joined that Friends Forever website. She adds me, and asks if I'm seeing anyone.

STEVE

And you said no?

CAITLIN

Eventually. I don't remember her being so bossy.

STEVE

Sour too.

CAITLIN

No wonder I felt awkward around her. Bad vibes, you know? Blessing in disguise though. I've been too busy with university to find a boyfriend.

STEVE

What course do you take?

CAITLIN

Business Studies. I wanted to do Drama, but Dad said that'd be a waste of three years.

STEVE

Isn't that the point of uni?

They both laugh.

CAITLIN

He's the one paying for it, so... I hardly attend anyway. Last time I went was... What's today?

STEVE

Friday.

CAITLIN

October.

Caitlin has a drink. When the glass is placed back on the table

FADE TO:

INT. O'WILLY'S BAR - LATER

Her glass is empty, and joined by additional pint, tumbler, cocktail and shot glasses. Also empty. Caitlin and Steve have entered the 'intelligent discussion' stage of drunkenness.

STEVE

...I believe before we're born, there's a machine in the clouds which let's us choose our personality and looks...

Caitlin doubles over in high-pitched laughter.

STEVE

I'm serious.

CAITLIN

If that...

(restrains laugh)

If that was the case, explain your boss.

Steve tries to think of a response. Nothing.

STEVE

Good point.

The bell at the bar rings.

BARTENDER

Ladies and gentlemen, it's almost midnight. If you could make your preparations please.

Commotion emerges as the MEN unveil presents from various hiding places. The WOMEN stand in anticipation of what they're about to receive.

Steve and Caitlin, on the other hand, don't move an inch.

Bartender switches on the television. A silent plain black and pink counter counts down: *13... 12... 11...*

WOMEN IN BAR

Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven! Six! Five!

Steve's eyes glaze in anxiety - *oh shit, oh shit*. He's forgotten about this tradition.

WOMEN IN BAR (CONT'D)

Four! Three! Two! One! Happy New Year!

The men officially hand over their gifts in a synchronised fashion. A crescendo of torn wrapping paper followed by

WOMAN 1 (O.C.)
Ooh, that's lovely.

WOMAN 2 (O.C.)
Diamonds? How did you know?

WOMAN 3 (O.C.)
Wonderful!

WOMAN 4 (O.C.)
The fuck is this?

Steve places a hand on Caitlin's shoulder.

STEVE

Oh Caitlin, I'm so sorry. I totally forgot. All I can give you is...

Steve pecks Caitlin on the cheek as if they're under mistletoe. He withdraws his head, waiting for a reaction.

Time stands still.

Caitlin turns to him. Face: deadpan.

Followed by a smile.

CAITLIN

It's perfect.

Her head moves towards his. Lips magnetise, connecting into a long, passionate kiss.

EXT. O'WILLY'S BAR - CONTINUOUS

A dazzling fireworks display fills the sky. Emphatic whistling precedes explosions of pink and green and orange.

The electronic billboards maintain the same Valentine picture, but the text says: *THIS FORTNIGHT'S COUPLE'S TAX AVERAGE: 191 CREDITS... WELL DONE...*

And in smaller text: *HAPPY NEW YEAR...*

EXT. ART GALLERY - DAY

At the top of the stairs, Steve and Caitlin can see the city in its smoggy glory. Choose not to.

Instead, Steve makes a face at the sign above the box office showing the gallery's prices: *SINGLES - 5CR, COUPLES 15CR*. Caitlin smirks.

CAITLIN

I have an idea.

She approaches the box office, manned by a TEENAGER too busy listening to his MP3 player to pay attention. Steve goes to follow. Caitlin gestures at him to stay back.

She produces a 5CR bill. Teenager grunts as he removes his headphones, clearly overworked.

CAITLIN

Single please.

Teenager presses a button. A ticket pops up. He tears it from the machine and hands it to Caitlin.

CAITLIN

Thanks.

As Caitlin heads into the gallery, she obviously winks at Steve. He nods in understanding and heads to the box office.

STEVE

Single too.

TEENAGER

Too?

STEVE

No, one.

Button pushed. Ticket pops up.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

The gallery's central theme: all the pictures are famous paintings with Valentine's head stuck over focal areas. The room is full of couples sporting LIME GREEN WRISTBANDS.

Holding hands, Steve and Caitlin admire unseen pictures.

STEVE

Legend has it, if you remove Valentine's head, there's someone else underneath.

CAITLIN

No, that's not true. Could you imagine these pictures without him?

From another angle, they're looking at doctored versions of Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe, Edward Munch's The Scream, and Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa.

They move to the next piece: a self-portrait of ~~Vincent Van-Gogh~~ Valentine.

CAITLIN

I know. How about we go to the park next and go on the swings?

STEVE

I haven't fit into those swings since I was twelve.

CAITLIN

And you let that stop you?

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.)

Hey!

A SECURITY GUARD, authoritative and bulky, storms up.

SECURITY GUARD

Where are your wristbands?

STEVE

Pardon?

SECURITY GUARD

(re: nearby couple)

All couples must wear those wristbands, and you're not. We don't take kindly to cheapskates.

CAITLIN

Just cause I'm a girl, and he's a boy, it doesn't mean we're together.

SECURITY GUARD

Mmm-hmm?

Security Guard sees how the two are holding hands. He raises his head, looking for another explanation.

CAITLIN

He's my pimp.

SECURITY GUARD

Get out.

MUSIC CUE: "PUG" - THE SMASHING PUMPKINS

EXT. ART GALLERY - DAY

Watched at the door by Security Guard, Steve and Caitlin gallop from the gallery, laughing.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Steve and Caitlin come across a vacant children's park. Beside the swings is a see-saw. They look at each other. An idea forms.

INT. APARTMENT (STEVE'S BEDROOM) - NIGHT

They stand eye to eye, next to a blank canvas.

Steve reveals a wet paintbrush. He marks the canvas with a black line.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Using a big stick, Steve draws on the beach surface.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin sits in a swing, swaying side to side. Steve goes to sit in the one next to her, but it's too narrow.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

The drawing is of a love heart.

Caitlin snatches the stick off Steve, and starts to scribble it out. Steve playfully tries to reclaim the stick.

INT. APARTMENT (STEVE'S BEDROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin adamantly keeps hold of the paintbrush despite Steve's jokey protest. She dabs the canvas.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Steve stands on the swing. Thrusting his body forward, the swing slips. He plummets to the soft wood chipping below.

While laughing hysterically, Caitlin mounts the see-saw. Steve gets to his feet. He sees Caitlin, who nods at him to join her.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin refuses to let go of the stick, so Steve wrestles her to the ground. They roll about on the sand.

INT. APARTMENT (STEVE'S BEDROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Steve drops the paintbrush.

He grabs Caitlin, and they tumble onto the bed.

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Still rolling, Caitlin finds her way on top. Their eyes meet.

EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

Steve and Caitlin on the see-saw. Up and down. Up and down. Up and down. Both giddy in delight.

Nearby, an OLD COUPLE on a 'posh' horse and cart ride stare in repugnance. To them, what they see is absurd.

Steve and Caitlin don't notice though. Up and down. Up and down. Up and down.

INT. APARTMENT (STEVE'S BEDROOM) - NIGHT

In bed together. Caitlin is asleep while Steve, arm around her shoulder, is wide awake. Wired.

STEVE

Wow.

Opposite them is the canvas.

The painting is of Steve and Caitlin holding hands. Stood in the middle of a field, back turned, glancing up at a strip of sugary pink sky. To the side is an upright house made of twigs and branches. Apart from the top of the sky, the painting remains uncoloured.

END MUSIC.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Resembles a university halls of residence. Objects strewn everywhere, crooked posters on the wall, used pots and cutlery populating the coffee table. Ben has somehow found room to prop his feet on the table too.

Coming out of the bedroom, Steve guides Caitlin to the door.

STEVE

Bye.

One last kiss and she departs.

Soon as Steve closes the door, he bounces up and down in exuberance.

STEVE

Guess what? I had sex last night!

Ben is blind-sided by Steve's bluntness.

BEN

That's not the sort of thing you announce, but good for you.

STEVE

Best minute of my life...

BEN

Things are going well between you two then?

STEVE

She's amazing. Simply amazing. She's a great girl. Sweet, funny, smart. My life was dull before her. I can't believe I was stuck in that same routine every day with nothing to look forward to. But now I do. You know what I mean?

BEN

Nope. Life was no different before I met Sapphire.
(looks at watch)
Speaking of...

Ben picks up the television remote, next to a white sock blackened in dirt, and changes the channel.

ANGLE - TELEVISION

A 24-hour news channel. Unnecessary C.G.I. EXPLOSIONS lead into a silvery, monolithic graphic saying: **FORTNIGHTLY COUPLES TAX REPORT.**

Another EXPLOSION takes us to the NEWS ANCHOR. Grey haired, droopy eyed, monotone delivery...

NEWS ANCHOR

The average Couples Tax for the fortnight ending January 14th is two hundred and thirty credits.
(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

The legal minimum amount is five percent below average, which means you must' have spent two hundred and eighteen credits this time. With Valentine's Day only thirty-one shopping days away, expect the average to sky-rocket in the next month.

BACK TO SCENE.

Ben takes out his debit card, fearing the worst. He's fine though: **264CR** blinks on his card in congratulations.

Steve is indifferent to his amount: **32CR**.

STEVE

Oh well.

Ben sees the card and panics.

BEN

Thirty-two?! How did you only spend that?!

STEVE

We love each other's company.

BEN

You're in big trouble!

STEVE

I'll be fine.

BEN

Don't you realise what happens? The police will come and hunt you down like a dog. They'll give you a ticket, and tell you you'll end up in court the next time you cheapskate on your girlfriend. Then the third time you break the law...

(dizzily)

I don't know what it is, but imagining it makes me feel sick.

Steve laughs.

STEVE

Really?

BEN

Yeah.

STEVE

How do you know?

With a lump in his throat:

BEN
I've had a ticket.

Steve is genuinely stunned by this revelation.

STEVE
You?! You broke the law?! Why
didn't I hear about this?

BEN
That's not the sort of thing I'd
announce.

(then)
Totally my fault though. I bought
Sapphire a two-hundred credit gold
watch. But it didn't go with her
work outfit so she returned it
without telling me. I should've
checked with her first before
buying the damn thing. In the end,
I was below average by five
credits.

Silence. Ben stands and heads to the front door.

STEVE
Ben, do you love Sapphire?

BEN
Course I do. I buy her many nice
things.

Dark expression on his face, Ben leaves the apartment.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

With a field on one side and busy road on the other, Caitlin
and Steve wander in mid-conversation. Their perkiness of late
is more subdued.

As they walk, folksy music that starts faintly in the
background becomes gradually louder.

STEVE
I've never seen Ben like that. He
knows Sapphire's only with him for
the money.

CAITLIN
Duh.

STEVE
Promise me, if we become anything
like them, let's end it.

CAITLIN

I'll go one better: if you buy me anything as tacky as Sapphire's earrings, I'll cut your balls off.

Steve smile is disrupted when he hears the music.

STEVE

Do you hear that?

CAITLIN

I do. Let's check it out!

They charge into the field.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Caitlin lights up, excited by what she sees.

CAITLIN

Woah...

The field is heaving with a couple of dozen HIPPIES (for a lack of better term). Couples hugging around campfires, acoustic guitars, hacky-sack, other humble activities. Think Glastonbury, except these guys aren't estate agents fifty-one weeks per year.

CAITLIN

Come on...

She impatiently leads Steve into the thick of it.

But as they join the hippies, a POLICE CHOPPER materialises from behind the trees, spotlight darted towards the crowd.

Caitlin holds down her hair because of the chopper's rotors.

On the ground, POLICE VANS and CARS surround the field. POLICEMEN pile out of them, their formation while surrounding the hippies clearly rehearsed.

COP IN CHOPPER (O.S.)

(through P.A. system)

Attention cheapskates, this is the police. Please form an orderly queue.

A RAGGED MALE HIPPIE and his GIRLFRIEND walk by.

RAGGED HIPPIE

Why us?

(spots object on ground)

Oooh, five credits.

(to Girlfriend)

Guess we're smoking tonight!

CAITLIN
Steve, watch out.

Steve doesn't see POLICE OFFICER 1 with a baton next to him. Baton prodded into Steve's ribs, forcing him into the aforementioned orderly queue.

Police Officer 1 forces Caitlin back to where all the FEMALES stand.

CAITLIN
What are you doing?

POLICE OFFICER 1
Surprise Couples Tax test.

CAITLIN
But why them?

Police Officer 1 scans Caitlin, head to toe.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Judging by those clothes, your
boyfriend ain't treating you right.

In the queue, Steve is confronted by PETE [35] behind him. Despite the hippy fashion, Pete is eternally angry, an image enhanced by his frown lines and crooked teeth.

PETE
The way love is taxed is bullshit.
The whole system needs to be
brought down.

STEVE
I agree, I guess.

PETE
I have a plan, me. My men will gut
Valentine, and choke him to death
with his own intestines.

Pete manically laughs. Steve looks extremely uncomfortable for some reason.

STEVE
Lovely.

Steve turns to the man in front of him: JAMES TRENT [65]. A hippy too, but kind faced, calm and collected, youthful for his age. He gently smiles.

JAMES
Don't mind Pete. He's the type they
make anti-drug adverts about.

Pete doesn't hear this comment. He's too busy punching himself in the face to notice.

STEVE
I'm Steve. Steve Burbank.

JAMES
James Trent.

STEVE
Do you agree with him? Bringing
down the system?

JAMES
Through non-violent means, yes. Out
of all the things they could've
taxed: pollution, inheritance,
cigarettes for kids; they tax
something you can only feel inside?

STEVE
It's a crock.

JAMES
This the first time you're in
trouble?

STEVE
Yeah. You?

JAMES
For this, ninth and counting. And
you know what? I'll continue
breaking the law. They may've taken
my manhood, but they can't take
away my feelings for my soulmate.

STEVE
How do you mean?

James is reluctant to answer. Luckily for him, he is beckoned
over by POLICE OFFICER 2.

JAMES
I'm up.

STEVE
Nice meeting you, James.

James steps forward. Police Officer 2's stern face brightens
when he sees who's approaching.

POLICE OFFICER 2
James... Again?

JAMES
What can I say? I love you pigs so
much.

POLICE OFFICER 2
And we love sweaty hippies.

JAMES
How's the wife and kids?

POLICE OFFICER 2
Yeah, they're doing great...

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - NIGHT

ANGLE - TELEVISION

Run-of-the-mill car advert. Car drives down an open desert road at speeds that can't be legally reached on a school run. The soundtrack is life affirming, wide-eyed, twee, indie. Probably sung by Zooey Deschanel.

BACK TO SCENE.

Ben and Sapphire watch the advert.

SAPPHIRE
Aww, I love that song.
(sharply)
Buy me that car!

Steve enters the apartment. He clutches a ticket scrawled with blood red writing; the word *WARNING* in clear view.

STEVE
You were right, Ben. They got me.

Sapphire stretches her neck to see the ticket.

SAPPHIRE
(to Ben)
Hey, remember when you got a ticket like that? So funny.

STEVE
What am I going to do?

SAPPHIRE
Spend more money. A girl must be spent on, darling.

STEVE
I'd love to. Caitlin deserves the world. But I'm an artist. The difference between us and hobos is they don't have to pay bills.

Steve crouches down, rubbing his head and neck.

BEN
There are two options, I'm afraid.

Steve looks up.

BEN

Go to the Relationship Office, fill out the form, and end it with Caitlin for now.

STEVE

And the second choice?

BEN

Do something desperate.

STEVE

Play the lottery?

BEN

Something less desperate than that.

INT. BURGERMANIA - EVENING

Steve wears a Burgermania uniform: bright yellow hat, apron, shirt, trousers - trimmed with red. Sat in the eating area, he watches the induction video on a wheeled-in television. CUSTOMERS watch on.

ANGLE - TELEVISION

A video of a colourful if basic animation, cute and childish. A large cartoon hand leads a small cartoon cow into a medium cartoon slaughterhouse.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Here at Burgermania, our Burger-U's and Burger-Roos are made from twenty-five percent beef, and seventy-five percent L-O-V-E.

Cow is herded into the slaughterhouse. The sound of RAZORS CUTTING and MOOING.

Quick scrolling text at the bottom: *NOTE - L.O.V.E. is a compound of Limonene, Octafluoropropane, Viagra, and Epichlorohydrin.* Text is hard to detect at full speed.

BACK TO SCENE.

Steve's face in disbelief. Welcome to Hell, kid.

INT. BURGERMANIA - LATER

Behind the counter, Steve miserably serves a CUSTOMER. He hands them their change.

STEVE

Have a Burgermanic day.

When Customer walks away, SEBASTIAN [34] confronts him. You can tell Sebastian is the team leader as his uniform is somewhat dignified.

SEBASTIAN

I love the way you don't make the customers feel welcome.

STEVE

Sorry, sir.

SEBASTIAN

This is supposed to be a positive experience. Adults and children work hard all day. They want to come to this place to relax, to be in a state of elation. Not a care in the world. This is their daily dose of ecstasy.

Long, long pause.

STEVE

What do you--?

SEBASTIAN

Smile, Steve! Smile!

Steve sighs. Forcefully skews a smile, resembling when Arnie attempts a smile in Terminator 2. Sebastian gives him a patronising thumbs up before heading into his office.

His smile drops when he sees his next customer: Daniel.

Daniel breaks out laughing, booming so loud that other Customers stop what they're doing for a moment. He's still lapping it up after reaching Steve.

DANIEL

So this is why you rushed off after work.

STEVE

Yeah, I need the money.

DANIEL

Why didn't you ask me for it? I have plenty of lawns to be mowed, cars to be washed, shoes to be shined...

STEVE

I still have my dignity.

SEBASTIAN (O.S.)

Steve, the milkshake machine's clogged up.

STEVE
 (at Daniel; coldly)
 I'm on it.

Steve goes to the machine. He pulls the lever but, despite the deafening feedback, no milkshake leaks out.

He opens the machine. Jigs about with the knobs and switches, twisting a plastic clog undone.

Suddenly, Chocolate milkshake SPURTS all over Steve, splattering his uniform and face! The colour and texture of it looks like manure.

Daniel uncontrollably laughs again.

Sebastian steps out of his office.

SEBASTIAN
 What's all the--

He sees Steve. Now he's laughing too.

Steve wipes milkshake off his face with his hands. Flings the excess sideways down.

MUSIC CUE: "CENTRAL" BY JOHN FRUSCIANTE.

INT. BURGERMANIA - NIGHT

Steve works the burger section. He hurriedly wraps a cheeseburger up and slides it into the front display area.

Repeats the process two more times. However, the wrapping for one of them comes undone, burger splitting apart on the display.

Cue Sebastian, grappling the demolished product.

STEVE
 Sorry.

SEBASTIAN
 Treat every burger like a baby. Be gentle, take your time. You don't want to commit involuntary burgerslaughter and do a stretch, do you?

Steve blinks in response.

BLEEP! A new order. On the overhead screen: *11 BURGER-ROOS...*

Steve squints beyond his station at the counter. THREE OBESE PEOPLE (husband, wife, child) are responsible for the order.

WOMAN ON COUNTER (O.S.)
We need eleven Burger-Roos.

Steve grits his teeth.

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - DAY

With bags under his eyes, Steve paints a new picture. It's not beautiful - an open grave, to be precise. Heavy emphasis on blacks, browns, and greys.

Colouring in the tombstone, his hand slips. A large squiggle goes beyond the sketch line. He grumbles in frustration.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - NIGHT

Steve opens the door to see Caitlin. He wants to smile, but he's stooped over and withdrawn. Caitlin's initial enthusiasm drains as she steps inside.

He presents a box of chocolates to her which, like Ben's were, seem expensive just from the packaging. Caitlin raises a courteous smile.

INT. BURGERMANIA - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian scrutinises Steve from a distance.

Steve grills burgers. An alarm bleeps. Popping open the grill plate, he grabs a spatula and flips them. The first few flips are fine, but the fourth patty breaks free.

It splats onto the dusty floor.

A moment of indecision, followed by picking the burger up. Steve approaches the bin.

SEBASTIAN

What are you doing with that?

STEVE

It went on the floor.

Sebastian storms forward. Snatching the burger off him, he throws it back on the grill.

SEBASTIAN

The heat will kill the germs.

STEVE

Will it?

Sebastian takes Steve's spatula and presses the contaminated food with some force, blackening the meat.

SEBASTIAN

Which one of us has been on a half-day hygiene course?

(beat)

Exactly.

He scoops the burger up and places it on a ready positioned bun. A slice of American cheese is placed on top.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin opens the DVD player slot. She places a disc in and shuts it.

CAITLIN

You'll love this. It's a documentary about--

Over her shoulder, she sees that

Steve has fallen asleep. He rolls over, trapping his left nostril against the settee. High pitched snore.

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - CONTINUOUS

Steve viewing the mistake on his picture. Daniel joins in, exaggerating his tut-tutting.

DANIEL

Another screw-up?

His employee pulls an angry face.

INT. BURGERMANIA - CONTINUOUS

A batch of twelve burgers, ready for dispatching.

The one to pay attention to is the contaminated burger, marked with a red sticker for some procedural reason. It's the last burger on the display, sliding to the front of the queue quickly as Obese Family's order is fulfilled.

BEN (O.S.)

One Burger-Roo please.

Steve hears this. He steps to the front, in time to see Ben receiving the contaminated product.

BEN

Hey Steve.

Before Steve can react, Ben has the burger out. Sinks his teeth into it. Ketchup drips to the ground. Relieved look from Ben.

BEN
Been starving all day. See you at
home?

STEVE
Yeah.

Steve watches Ben leave the restaurant, taking another bite.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

The lights are off. The only illumination comes from the television. Steve snores while Caitlin, alone, cradles her legs with her arms.

She gloomily acknowledges her boyfriend.

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - CONTINUOUS

Daniel takes off his glasses, blows on them, rubs them using his shirt. For a moment, his beady eyes are seen.

DANIEL
By the way, the million credit
contract from the state came
through. If you do overtime for the
next few weeks, I'll pay you ten
times your normal wage.

Steve doesn't react, for he knows what's coming next.

DANIEL
Oh wait, you can't! You're too busy
flipping burgers!

Grating laugh from Daniel.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

The evening ends. Barely awake, Steve dozily guides Caitlin to the door. She steps into the corridor and prepares for a kiss.

Without thinking, Steve closes the door on her.

INT. APARTMENT (CORRIDOR) - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin stands there, dumbfounded.

END MUSIC.

INT. FRENCH RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The restaurant is definitely more upmarket than the Ministry of Food. The design is art deco, classical music plays, and the food portions are strict.

In a suit, Steve edgily enters. Reluctantly behind him is Caitlin in a sparkling dress that doesn't suit her personality. Fear all over her face. They don't belong here.

CAITLIN
(low voice)
This doesn't feel right.

Steve ignores her, flagging down a FRENCH WAITER.

FRENCH WAITER
Would monsieur like a table?

STEVE
Monsieur would.

Grabbing a couple of menus on the way, French Waiter leads them to their table. Steve's urgency sees him walking side by side with Waiter.

INT. FRENCH RESTAURANT - LATER

At their table, Steve reads a menu as Caitlin looks at him. The evident atmosphere between the two is contradicted by the upbeat orchestral music.

CAITLIN
Can't we go somewhere else?

STEVE
Why? This is a nice place. A nice expensive place.

CAITLIN
This isn't us. How about the arcade? That's us.

STEVE
Do they still have that ski machine that eats up ten credits a go?

CAITLIN
No.

STEVE
Then no. I have an average to meet.

Caitlin drops the conversation.

French Waiter appears again, this time with a notepad open, ready to take orders.

FRENCH WAITER
Ready to order?

CAITLIN
No--

STEVE
Yes. I'll have the lobster, the
caviar, and your finest champagne.

FRENCH WAITER
(writing order down)
How common. And for you, madam?

Caitlin picks her menu up.

CAITLIN
Salad.

STEVE
(to Waiter)
With caviar.

Her eyes squint in anger.

CAITLIN
And a glass of water.

STEVE
(to Waiter)
Make that red wine. What's the most
vintage on the menu?

WAITER
Chrimieux, circa Nineteen Ninety
Eight. Not vintage, we just forgot
the bottle was in the pantry for a
few decades.

STEVE
That'll do.

CAITLIN
(loudly; to Steve)
What's your problem?!

French Waiter takes this chance to leave. Steve acts bemused.

STEVE
Nothing. Nothing's the problem.

CAITLIN
Then why are you treating me like a
whore?

STEVE
What?

CAITLIN

Throwing your money around like
it's no object. This isn't who I
fell in love with.

STEVE

You don't love me now?

Caitlin rises from her seat and storms away. Steve quickly follows.

EXT. FRENCH RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin steps out of the restaurant, wiping a tear from her eye. Steve practically shadows her.

STEVE

Come on Caitlin, there's no need to
cry.

CAITLIN

Isn't there?

STEVE

I don't know.

Caitlin hails a taxi.

STEVE

Where are you going?

CAITLIN

To bed. I've had enough for one
night.

STEVE

Great! You know, I've been slaving
away at two jobs, being treat like
dirt in one, crap the other. I
barely have time in the day to blow
my nose. And it's all because of
you. So stop acting selfish and get
back in here!

Steve pauses, realising what he just said.

STEVE

I'm sorry. I'm so stressed.

A taxi pulls up.

CAITLIN

Goodbye, Steve.

(to Taxi Driver)

How much to Wayland Road?

TAXI DRIVER (O.S.)
 Nine credits.

STEVE
 Wait a minute...

Caitlin climbs into the taxi, which drives off straight away.

Steve pulls his debit card from his pocket, flashing it in the air.

STEVE (CONT'D)
 ...Use this!

Taxi goes far in the distance before turning a corner.

A rumble of thunder followed by the heavens opening up. Rain pelts on Steve as he looks mournful.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - NIGHT

Steve enters, soaking wet. Sapphire, vegged out in front of the television and chewing bubble gum, nods at him.

STEVE
 Ben still got food poisoning?

SAPPHIRE
 Ah-ha.

From the bathroom, the sound of Ben vomiting.

Steve heads towards his bedroom when, unenthusiastically, he addresses Sapphire. As Steve takes a breath, Sapphire blows a bubble. It obnoxiously pops.

STEVE
 Sapphire, you're a woman--

SAPPHIRE
 (re: breasts)
 These ain't sugar bags.

Steve blinks.

STEVE
 Anyway, I got into an argument with Caitlin tonight. She doesn't seem to like the way I'm spending money on her even though I have to. What I can do?

SAPPHIRE
 Here's a tip for you, hon. When women say one thing, we mean another.
 (MORE)

SAPPHIRE (CONT'D)

Men are dumb, so it's our way to call you everything under the sun without you realising. For example: I think you're a smart guy. You get what I mean?

STEVE

Yes.

SAPPHIRE

See. I just called you thick and you didn't notice.

STEVE

I'm off to my room.

Steve goes to walk off.

SAPPHIRE

Don't leave, I'm only playing with you.

(then)

I'll give you a better example. If a woman claims sex doesn't matter, it means the man is crap in bed.

STEVE

(thinking to himself)

She's said that too.

SAPPHIRE

When Caitlin goes on about money, she's angry you're only spending money cause you were issued with that warning. You should've spoilt her rotten from the start.

STEVE

Seriously?

SAPPHIRE

Yeah. Why don't you go round and sort things out? Here, give her this...

Sapphire picks up a GOLDEN BRACELET from the coffee table. It's chunky and bling. Looks like it belongs around the neck of a hip-hop artist's bodyguard. Steve takes it.

STEVE

Thank you very much!

With determination, Steve exits the flat.

ANGLE - TELEVISION

The news channel. More unnecessary C.G.I. EXPLOSIONS leading into a monolithic graphic saying: **FORTNIGHTLY COUPLE TAX REPORT.**

Another explosion transitions to News Anchor.

NEWS ANCHOR

Before tonight's report, here's the story of Jake Trueblood, who last week scooped the lottery, winning nineteen million credits.

B-Roll of JAKE TRUEBLOOD [55] waving at the camera, alongside his wife AMANDA [54].

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.; CONT'D)

Jake used the winnings to buy his wife Amanda the greatest gift of all: Barbados.

Picture of the coastline of Barbados before returning to News Anchor.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Thanks to that, the fortnightly average has risen to four-hundred and thirty-seven credits, with the legal minimum at four-hundred and sixteen. Police reports indicate those beneath that will be arrested as soon as possible--

BACK TO SCENE.

A SWAT TEAM BREAKS INTO THE APARTMENT, SMASHING through the door and windows! Sapphire yelps in surprise as they enter, guns out, poised for action.

From the bathroom, Ben throws up.

SWAT TEAM MEMBER

(re: bathroom)

In there.

Two SWAT members go either side of the bathroom door. They RAM it off his hinges. There, they see the pathetic image of Ben, skin white-yellow like brie, head halfway down the toilet bowl.

They drag Ben into the living room and onto his feet. Delirious, head wobbling about, he could puke at any moment.

SWAT TEAM MEMBER

Where's Steve Burbank?

SAPPHIRE

(reluctantly)

He left a moment ago.

SWAT TEAM MEMBER

Damnit!
(to Ben)
Let's go.

SWAT Team Member grabs Ben by the shoulder, leading him out.

BEN

Sapphire... Help me...

Sapphire folds her arms.

SAPPHIRE

(nose in air)
Hmph. Where's my Barbados?

Ben's cheeks expand as he's forced away.

EXT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Steve's awed reaction shows this is the first time he's been here. Her house is a three storey mansion, a ye olde structure wrapped in vines. Garden's greenery clashes with the gloomy concrete city.

He walks down the long, pebbled driveway to the front door. He's about to knock when the heavy door creaks open. In her pyjamas: Caitlin.

CAITLIN

Yeah?

STEVE

How did you know I was here?

She directs his attention to the top of the door, and a shrub, and a plastic flamingo. Security cameras attached. The flamingo's eye whirs.

CAITLIN

I called security off.

STEVE

Thank--

CAITLIN

Why are you here? Or is trespassing another trait you hid from me?

STEVE

I want to apologise.

CAITLIN

Oh?

STEVE

Do you know how many girlfriends I've had? One. And that was at primary school. Sexually I've had nothing. Well, my flatmates at uni claim I got hammered and slept with some girl called June, but I...

Caitlin rolls her eyes.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Point is, I don't 'get' women. But after talking to one, I know what every woman wants. I got you this...

Steve pulls out the chunky gold bracelet. It shines dully in the moonlight.

CAITLIN

You don't get it, do you?

STEVE

Isn't it chunky enough?

Caitlin PUNCHES him on his arm.

STEVE

Ow!

CAITLIN

Take a look around, Steve! All my life, my Dad, boyfriends - they've treat me like a monster that feeds on material gifts. Mistaking me for someone like

(re: bracelet)

Sapphire.

(then)

They've never loved me, or bothered to get to know the real me. I thought I'd found someone different. Guess I was wrong.

STEVE

But--

Caitlin slams the door in his face.

Rejected, Steve slumps back up the driveway, placing the chunky gold bracelet into his trouser pocket.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE CAITLIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

When Steve steps beyond the drive, a SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON HIM. Above is the police chopper.

On the ground, a police car intercepts Steve. TWO POLICEMEN charge out, stampeding towards him.

Steve has no intention of running, holding his hands up without instruction. This doesn't stop the Policemen from grabbing their batons.

They CLOUT Steve in his ribs and arms. A STRIKES to Steve's face. His top lip BLEEDS as he struggles with keeping consciousness.

Collapses to his knees.

They force Steve onto his belly, where he's handcuffed.

As a Policeman's boot slams towards his face

BLACK OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. COURT - DAY

Traditional wooden design replaced with metal. The witness stand is a rotting cage. There's no jury, rather a PRESS PIT full of JOURNALISTS taking notes and photographs.

Defendants Steve and Ben (still ill) are in their section alone, prisoner uniforms over the clothes they were wearing the night before, excessively handcuffed.

SIX LAWYERS are prosecuting.

The JUDGE [56] sits in his normal position. Next to him: a replica of the Old Bailey Statue, except the face has been replaced with Valentine's.

JUDGE

I find the defendants guilty.

Steve and Ben are astonished. Ben tries to cover his hand to prevent vomiting, but the handcuffs restrict that. Luckily it's just dry heaving.

STEVE

But the case hasn't started!

Judge slams his gold plated gavel.

JUDGE

Mister Burbank, any more from you and you'll be charged with contempt.

BEN

He's sorry, your greatness.

JUDGE

Ben Thomas, the police say you were physically incapable of buying gifts due to illness. You're free to go this time, on the condition you're not sick all over the courtroom carpets.

A great weight lifts from Ben's shoulders.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

As for you Steve Burbank. I haven't seen such cheapskatery in all my years. You were one-hundred percent under the spending average this past fortnight.

STEVE

In all fairness, a lot of people were--

More gavel slamming.

JUDGE

Not to your degree, Mister Burbank.
(then)
I ought to send you to the third stage now. But the law states you have one more chance, therefore--

VOICE (O.S.)

Maybe you can, your honour.

One of the six lawyers stands up. Small in stature, weedy, nasal, Eton educated. Punchable face.

JUDGE

Go on.

LAWYER

(to Steve)
Mister Burbank, on what date did you receive your debit card?

STEVE

New Year's Eve.

LAWYER

Correct, and the spending period ended on that day. Therefore you were obligated to spend up to the average then too.

STEVE

But I never heard anything. Surely that's a fault with the system?

LAWYER

No Mister Burbank, it's your fault for not declaring it.

JUDGE

Mister Burbank, you're charged with withholding money and fraud. Your relationship with Caitlin Hennessey is hereby terminated. You're banned from having a relationship for five years, after which you will only use dating websites with this as your profile picture:

Judge presses a button. An image of Steve, red-faced, shirtless, inebriated and licking cheese sauce off his forearm is projected on the wall.

JUDGE

I also sentence you to a trip to The Machine.

Ben panics as Steve stays quiet. A GUARD grabs Steve and leads him away.

BEN

(hysterical)

What? Is he sentenced to death? What's The Machine? What's gonna happen? What?!

JUDGE

Mister Thomas...

BEN

(like a scolded child)

Sorry sir.

INT. HOLDING CELL - DAY

Frightened, Steve is lead to a series of holding cells by - so says the name badge - Officer Baxter. The one who accompanied Pale Man on page 2.

Baxter opens the cell door to the left, pushes Steve in, and slams the door shut.

BAXTER

Wait here.

Baxter walks away.

STEVE

(to himself)

Christ.

He throws his arms up. Steps backwards and sits on the bench in there. Hands shield face. Contemplating.

Then, an alarm clock goes off!

The cell next to him is a man sleeping on the bench, pillows and duvet and all. Man switches alarm off using a stray arm.

Man sleepily raises his arms, yawns, and sits up to reveal:

STEVE

James?

James Trent rubs his eyes and looks at Steve.

JAMES

Hey, if it isn't Steve. It is Steve, right?

STEVE

Right.

JAMES

How are you doing?

STEVE

I'm in a jail cell. Have you been here since the park thing? That was two weeks ago.

JAMES

(chuckling)
That? Oh no...

James gets to his feet and advances to the edge of the cell so he's closer to Steve.

JAMES

I'm three minor offenses removed from that. This time it's for 'distributing offensive materials'. You heard of The Bible?

STEVE

Is that the one where the book store owner dates a big movie star?

JAMES

Never mind. I'm guessing you're here for The Machine?

STEVE

Hey, wait! You know! What's The Machine?

JAMES

I'm not going to tell you that.

STEVE
What do you mean?

JAMES
Because you're better thinking the worst thing imaginable than knowing the truth. Trust me.

STEVE
The worst thing is... Death?

James motions to himself - "I'm standing right here".

STEVE
Good point.

Steve paces manically. His imagination is open to all sorts of possibilities now.

JAMES
Listen, when it's over and done with, come round and see me. My address is Five Yeomans Street. Bring your girlfriend with you.

STEVE
We're... Not...

JAMES
Oh. I'm sorry to hear that.

Officer Baxter returns. He opens Steve's cell and motions to him. Steve refuses to leave, gripping to the cage.

Baxter steps into the cell and pries him away with ease.

While James gives Steve a gentle nod, Baxter produces a black bag/blindfold. He wraps it over Steve's eyes. Unable to see, Steve struggles.

P.O.V. - STEVE

Total darkness.

STEVE
I don't want to go!

Footsteps indicate that they're moving along.

EXT. POLICE STATION (ALLEYWAY) - CONTINUOUS

Baxter guides blindfolded Steve down the alleyway next to the police station and into the building adjacent.

STEVE
Where are you taking me?

This building: Consecotech Industries!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES (UNKNOWN ROOM) - DAY

P.O.V. - STEVE

A flurry of sound-effects: DOOR LOCKING! RATTLING! SHUFFLING! CLUNK! BELT TIGHTENING! Steve squirms throughout, struggling in vain to escape.

BAXTER

Hey, relax!

Blindfold removed to reveal

RELAX!

Steve's poster of the open grave and tombstone now completed, *RELAX!* slogan added. It's stuck to the ceiling, reminiscent of the posters found at dentists.

BACK TO SCENE.

Steve's tied into an archaic contraption made of splintering wood. A combination of a rowing machine and ducking stool and a pulley system, his arms and legs are strapped down with belts. The Machine wired up to a familiar big red button on the wall.

Behind The Machine - a glass wall with a room behind it. TWO UNIFORMED MEN observe the scene from there.

Baxter stands over Steve.

STEVE

What's going on?

BAXTER

It's your right to have a demonstration first.

STEVE

Do I have to?

BAXTER

It's not your right to turn the offer down.

Baxter lifts a part of The Machine in between Steve's legs up. It's a MASSIVE RUSTY KNIFE WITH CLAWS ON THE SIDE.

For every inch the knife moves, Steve's arms are drawn closer together to his thighs thanks to The Machine's detachable parts. They hold him in place.

The knife is brought towards Steve's crotch.

BAXTER

Guess what the knife's aiming for.

Steve gasps.

STEVE

But I need that to make Steve
Junior with!

Baxter drops the knife back into the starting position. Steve pulls his arms, trying to loosen the straps.

The right strap ever so slightly comes undone.

Steve concentrates fully on that opening. Determination and desperation close to bringing him to tears.

Too late. Baxter struts to the giant red button.

Baxter pauses, salivating the moment.

BAXTER

Enjoy.

The BIG RED BUTTON IS PRESSED!

The Machine's arms detach and shoot towards the thighs. Knife pelting towards his crotch at immense speed...

But when the arms press against Steve's legs, it JAMS!

The knife stands millimeters away from his crotch.

Steve tussles with the right belt again.

BAXTER

What the--?!

Baxter approaches The Machine to analyse.

Steve's belt comes loose and he wriggles his arm, circulating the blood.

Baxter responds by going to Steve's eye level. He's PUNCHED IN BETWEEN THE EYES, flopping to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

STEVE

Yes!

The Two Uniformed Men disappear from their position.

Steve releases his left hand with his free arm, and works on the feet.

Baxter gets up, rubbing his face in the area he was hit.

BAXTER
You son-of-a-bitch!

Right leg is loosened, which Steve uses to awkwardly knock Baxter in the legs. Baxter goes off balance, wobbling backwards.

Fuming, Baxter rolls up his sleeves.

BAXTER
If that's how you want to play...

He storms forward.

Steve sticks out his foot, taking Baxter by surprise. Baxter trips and SMACKS head first on the edge of The Machine.

KNOCKED OUT.

Steve searches through his right trouser pocket.

There's the chunky gold bracelet! Looking back at The Machine, he puts two and two together. That's why The Machine jammed!

Baxter exhales a murmur. This motivates Steve to hurrying up unstrapping his left leg.

He crouches over Baxter. Rummaging in Officer's pocket, he finds the key to unlock the door with.

Smiling, he stands up and exits into

INT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES (CORRIDOR) - CONTINUOUS

Steve's jaw drops. This is his work place!

Across the hallway, Daniel's jaw also drops at the sight of Steve. Awkward staredown ensues.

UNIFORMED MAN (O.S.)
Stop!

Steve runs away, chased by the Two Uniformed Men.

EXT. POLICE STATION (ALLEYWAY) - CONTINUOUS

Unaware he was just here when blindfolded, Steve takes cover, hiding behind a wheelie bin.

The Two Uniformed Men swiftly run towards a CROWD OF PEOPLE.

Steve takes a moment before making his next move.

EXT. CONSECOTECH INDUSTRIES - CONTINUOUS

Acting like a spy, Steve moves in the ready stance, head shifting left and right, body as tight to the building as possible. The coast is clear.

He becomes casual. Walks into the daylight, whistling innocently. Whistling transforms to humming.

STEVE
(humming)
Do-do-do-do...

An ALARM sets off.

The electronic billboards above go from *16 DAYS 'TILL VALENTINE'S DAY...* to a picture of Steve's mugshot, and caption of: *WANTED D.O.A., D PREFERRED...*

Steve quietly shrieks and takes cover back in the alleyway.

EXT. POLICE STATION (ALLEYWAY) - CONTINUOUS

Steve dashes down the alleyway. His foot comes inches away from stepping on a RAT. This alleyway leads to

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

He hides behind a sign saying: *VALENTINE'S DAY CELEBRATIONS... ROADS CLOSED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 17TH AND APRIL 10TH... ACCEPT DELAYS...*

The street resembles a Thanksgiving parade. Makeshift stands have been built and pink/red decorations are hung up. There's plenty of hubbub as a dress rehearsal takes place.

Steve aborts an attempt at standing as a MAN DRESSED AS CUPID, with arrows made from SHARP FLINT, walks past.

When Cupid exits, Steve scuttles to the portable toilet.

A GREASY MAN urinates (with the door open) dressed in only his boxer shorts, his furry but unidentifiable costume leans against the portaloos outside.

Steve grabs hold of it.

EXT. CITY CENTRE - DAY

It's a non-copyrighted version of a Care Bear costume! Pink light projects from it's heart on it's stomach. Steve hobbles along, handing out leaflets to random members of the PUBLIC to alleviate suspicion.

STEVE
 (goofy voice)
 Don't forget about Valentine's Day!

PASSER-BY (O.S.)
 Hard not to.

STEVE
 Good point.
 (goofy voice)
 February fourteenth. Be there or be
 given a fixed thirty credit fine.

A draining noise. The pink light fades away.

Steve inspects the problem.

Then, he pulls out a pink coloured liquid capsule from the costume pocket. He CLICKS open the heart like a door, places the capsule in the designated slot. It activates and the light comes alive again.

STEVE
 Ah, that should--

He bends down as he has no neck. A SMALL CHILD hugs the costume's leg.

SMALL CHILD
 I wuv you Mister Lovebear!

STEVE
 (goofy voice)
 And I wuv you too.
 (normal)
 Please let go.

EXT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Steve wanders to the unimpressive apartment block. One last pamphlet handed out to an uninterested PERSON.

INT. APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - MOMENTS LATER

Just another day in the exciting life of Sapphire and Ben - they're watching TV. Steve enters in full costume, confusing his flatmates.

Until he takes the head off, anyway.

BEN
 Steve, what are you doing here?

STEVE
 Had my punishment. Free to go.

BEN
What happened?

STEVE
It was horrible. I-I don't want to
talk about it.

SAPPHIRE
Why have the police been 'round
looking for you again, then?

BEN
Never mind that, you're on TV!

ANGLE - TELEVISION

Steve's mugshot, flying towards the screen in a hastily cut
and DEMONIC fashion. C.G.I. devil horns and fire attached.

Beneath, the screen flashes *KILL* in bright red.

BACK TO SCENE.

STEVE
So much for state TV being
partial...

SAPPHIRE
Steve!

STEVE
I escaped, okay?

SAPPHIRE
Well, you can't stay here.

BEN
Hey, it's his house too.

Ben's voice trails off towards the end of that dialogue as
Sapphire screws her face up.

STEVE
I've got nowhere else to go.

Sapphire loudly exhales a sigh of dismay.

Steve retrieves the chunky golden bracelet from his pocket
and hands it to Sapphire.

STEVE
(bitter)
Thanks for this, by the way. You're
a credit to your gender.

He winks sarcastically before heading to his room.

She over-expresses shock to Ben.

SAPPHIRE
Did you see that?

BEN
Yeah.

SAPPHIRE
Do you believe that?

BEN
Yes--no. No.

INT. APARTMENT (BEDROOM) - DAY

Steve lays on his bed. Sulking, moping.

He sits up. Sees the painting he did with Caitlin, with the house made of twigs and branches, and pink sky.

Steve's eyes widen. An idea formulates.

Springing to his feet, he goes over to his easel.

Grabs the paintbrush and the pink paint.

FADE TO:

EXT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Steve rushes to the door, completed picture under his arm. Having run all the way here, he's pouring with sweat. He knocks before puffing and panting heavily.

The door opens. Steve's face drops.

STEVE
Daniel?!

Daniel Huxley is at the door, more smug than ever. He's bizarrely wearing a dressing gown and smoking a pipe.

DANIEL
Hello Steve.

STEVE
(stunned)
Why? What?

Daniel approaches Steve and puts an arm around his shoulder. He walks him back down the driveway.

DANIEL
I heard about your little predicament and... Well, I'm a kind man. A samaritan, in fact.
(MORE)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Poor Caitlin, what if she'd died alone from a broken heart because of your selfishness? That would've been wrong.

STEVE

Who are you kidding?

DANIEL

Okay, you got me.

Daniel grunts in satisfaction. Steve tries to breakaway from him, but struggles.

STEVE

We'll see what she thinks.

DANIEL

Ah ah ah! I don't think so.

He pulls out a sheet of paper from his gown. It's a folded and dog-eared official looking document.

DANIEL

Open it.

Daniel hands Steve the paper. Steve opens it and is baffled by what he sees. The banner shows this is from the State Office of Relationships.

STEVE

(reading)

Rebound Certificate?!

DANIEL

Ah ha.

STEVE

(reading smallprint)

"Rebound will be null and void in the inevitable case that the persons of the previous relationship fall back in love."

(then)

Let's see what Caitlin says.

By this point, they are beyond the driveway and

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE CAITLIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

DANIEL

Could do. But you're a bit of a fugitive at the moment.

STEVE

That won't stop me.

DANIEL

Bet it will.

STEVE

We'll see.

(then)

Tell me, how much do you know about
The Machine?

DANIEL

Everything. I helped design it. You
could say that's one of two things
I did to get where I am today...
Now if you excuse me, I'm going to
call the police.

(calling)

All cops are pricks!

In the distance are TWO COPS. They hear the comment and turn
around to see

Steve by himself.

EXT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Daniel waddles up the driveway.

EXT. OUTSIDE CAITLIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Cop 1 points at Steve.

COP 1

You! Stay right there.

Steve opts to run away.

EXT. YEOMANS STREET - EVENING

The street sign *YEOMNS STREET* is grubby and missing an A.

With the painting still in his grasp, Steve enters the scene.
Gasping and wheezing, looking back, scanning for the cops.
He's lost them.

Leans against the sign to gather himself for a moment.

He walks along the first couple of houses. They're borderline
dilapidated. Gardens are a mess, clogged with plastic toys.

Comes to the third house across - 5 Yeomans Street. It's
unkempt. Smudged windows. Weeds grow out of the cracks in the
pavement. White walls dirtied over time. Apple tree branching
over the garden next door.

Steve goes to the front door and knocks on it.

As the door opens, a waft of smoke billows out, causing Steve to cough. Within the smoke is James, cigarette in mouth. A normal cigarette.

JAMES

Steve, I knew you'd make it. Come on in...

Steve follows the instruction.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE (HALLWAY) - CONTINUOUS

James leads the way in front of Steve.

STEVE

I made it? Sounds like I'm part of some plan--

They turn the corner into

INT. JAMES' HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

A hippy war room! TEN HIPPIES including Pete and DRAKE [50] populate the area. A few of them around a wooden table analyzing documents. The rest too stoned to do anything.

The walls are littered with all sorts of documents; statistical data, tabloid newspaper headlines, logistics for the Valentine's Day parade, pictures of Valentine with cross-hairs overlaid on them.

Steve looks amazed.

STEVE

This is how you want to bring down the system?

James places a hand on Steve's shoulder.

JAMES

You got it. Are you in?

STEVE

Given my situation, I haven't got much choice.

JAMES

Excellent!

EXT. JAMES' HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - NIGHT

The room is dark except for a few strategically placed desk lamps to give it a serious and militaristic look. Everyone including Steve surrounds the table, focusing on James.

JAMES

Steve, what do you know about Valentine?

STEVE

How do you mean?

JAMES

You know, his background and such.

STEVE

Well, nothing. He's just a mascot, like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. Not really real.

JAMES

Kind of. He *is* the mascot you see on those billboards, but for himself. Valentine is the state.

James takes out a scrapbook out under the table and places it in front of Steve.

Steve views a cutout of a tabloid headline: *VALENTINE NOT SO SQUEAKY CLEAN*. Byline: *SECOND MISTRESS, FURNITURE MODEL, SPEAKS OUT*. The date: *OCTOBER 23RD 1987*.

STEVE

Squeaky clean?

JAMES

Apparently without the booming microphone for his speeches, he has a really high pitched voice.

STEVE

Wait, this is from the twentieth century! I thought this stuff was lost?

DRAKE (O.S.)

Not if you know where to find it.

Now Drake is seen. Glasses, long black beard with a grey streak through the middle. Resembles a doctor on an old BBC Schools science programme.

JAMES

Steve, this is Drake, our archiver. He's found information from the Forgotten Age from all sorts of sources. Basements, sewers, dumps.

Drake holds out his hand.

DRAKE

Pleasure.

STEVE
(glaring at hand)
Rather not.

Laughing, Drake relinquishes it.

DRAKE
From what we can find, Jack
Valentine was an MP standing in
this city. He had everything: the
youth, the charisma, the ability to
lie. Many tipped him to go a long
way.

STEVE
(re: paper)
Then this happened?

DRAKE
Turns out he was a womaniser too.
His wife Linda found out he was
sleeping with four other women and
divorced him for everything he had.
The whole thing was so public, Jack
started back at the bottom. No
constituency, no money, no respect.
Nothing.

STEVE
So how did he... You know... An
evil dictator?

DRAKE
The media is fickle. They moved to
more attractive scandals. Movie
stars snorting drugs, footballers
sticking things where they
shouldn't be stuck. Valentine flew
so under the radar, one day he
became Prime Minister. Just like
that. He used his new power to get
revenge. Britain turned into, well,
however you describe this... Linda
Valentine disappeared from the
public eye a quarter of a century
ago...

STEVE
There's one thing I don't get. Why
are men punished when it comes to
Couples Tax? Why not women?

JAMES
To put it plainly, Jack's a
misogynist. I have a reliable
source who tells me his way of
thinking is if you lie for long
enough people will believe it.
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Men are forced to jump through hoops by Valentine to date women, feed enough lies to them and they'll soon believe women are to blame for their financial woes.

Beat.

STEVE

What's the plan then?

JAMES

Ah, now you're talking.

James grabs a schematic from behind him and lays it on the table. A wirey blue outline of the Main Street area where Steve first wore the Care Bear costume. In the middle of the street is a large box: *VALENTINE STAGE*.

JAMES

(pointing at stage)

Based on previous years, Valentine will make his speech here.

(finger shifts right)

His limousine will park here, with bodyguards...

(jabs paper with finger a dozen times)

...Everywhere. And that's only the ones we can see.

James signals to another member of the team: PHILIP.

JAMES

Philip went last year and noticed lots of open windows. Could be snipers, could be lookouts.

PHILIP

Probably both.

JAMES

With that in mind, someone is needed to distract Valentine so we can get on the stage. All that's needed is a small amount of time. But...

(gravely)

It's a suicide mission.

Attention is paid to a large BAZOOKA in the corner.

STEVE

Is that a--?!

JAMES

Indeed. But it's rigged to shoot a million watts of light into the air using a liquid capsule. Problem is, it's still bazooka shaped. Chances of being shot at and killed are high.

(then)

But trust me when I say this, it's for a good cause. To end this tyranny once and for all.

James looks around.

JAMES

So... Any volunteers?

Everyone looks down, staring at the table, drumming their fingers nervously. Nobody puts their hand up.

James sighs.

MUSIC CUE - "DROWNING TOGETHER, DYING ALONE" - BLACK LIGHT BURNS

EXT. FIELD - DAY

From the floatiness and fuzziness, this is clearly a dream. Steve and Caitlin skip through the long grass. The sky is bright pink.

They approach a house made of twigs and branches. Looking through the glassless window, the house's layout is bare, just a table and two chairs. Steve and Caitlin see themselves sat at the table, laughing and hugging.

Steve steps inside, walking to the centre. He beckons Caitlin to come in, but she refuses.

On the outside, Daniel appears with an axe. He laughs in a cartoon-y, over-the-top, theatrical villain style. He starts CHOPPING. CHOP. CHOP. CHOP.

Almost zombified in movement and emotion, Caitlin stands at the window. Cold. Emotionless.

Steve wants to go to her, but he's been held back by

STRAPS. He's tied to THE MACHINE! He sees Daniel now stood inside, even though the sound of chopping continues.

A red button appears on the wall. DANIEL PUSHES IT.

The RUSTY KNIFE SWINGS TOWARDS STEVE'S CROTCH.

Outside, Caitlin walks away as the house COLLAPSES, to a crescendo of timber snapping.

In the rumble, no sign of Steve.

END MUSIC.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE (BEDROOM) - NIGHT

Steve leaps to a sitting position, sweating. Bad dream.

From a wider angle, it turns out he was sleeping on the floor, with seven others occupying floor and bed space. Four are in the bed.

Steve stretches his arms, stands, and tiptoes over two others to exit.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE (CORRIDOR) - NIGHT

The toilet flushes.

Steve steps out of the bathroom. He walks back to the bedroom when he hears:

JAMES (O.S.)
(on phone)
Minimal security? That's
fantastic... When can we pick her
up... Right now?! I'll see what I
can do.

Steve continues walking. James appears from the room next to the bathroom behind him.

JAMES
Steve?

Steve veers around.

JAMES
Up for an adventure?

EXT./ESTAB. QUIET ROAD - NIGHT

An unwashed white van races down the street.

INT. VAN (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

James drives up front with Steve as his passenger. He is twitchy, making his driving choppy. He takes a sharp right around a corner.

STEVE

James?

JAMES

What is it?

STEVE

What was it like? Going on The Machine.

JAMES

It hurt. A lot.

James takes a sharp left, screeching the tyres fiercely.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That happened six months ago now. Truth be told, I only got over it recently. It's quite an adjustment having to life without... You know...

STEVE

Your penis?

JAMES

(trying to cover up)
No, not my--?

He uneasily laughs in reference to the eight hippies including Pete sat in the back of the van. Flashes Steve an unappreciative look.

STEVE

Sorry.

JAMES

I'm lucky to have a loving and understanding soulmate. Who knows what I would've done without her by my side. That's why I'm determined to bring Valentine down. Love is not about money or application forms or, uh, you know. Without my soulmate, I'd die inside. You know what I mean?

STEVE

I do actually.

James takes a sudden left. Steve BONKS his head against the side of the car.

JAMES

I forgot. Does it hurt?

STEVE
(rubbing his head)
Yeah, you road hog.

JAMES
No, being without Caitlin.

STEVE
If anything, it hurts knowing that
Caitlin is forced to date a man
like Daniel. It doesn't matter
we're together, as long as she's
happy, I'm happy. Like you and your
(realisation hits)
...Soulmate...
(then)
Have I met her?!

JAMES
You will soon.

INT. VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Van pulls up on the curb. James rolls down his window, in time for another van driven by Drake to pull up next to him.

Drake winds down his window.

JAMES
Quiet journey?

DRAKE
Thankfully. I've circled around the
house. Security is light.

JAMES
How many?

DRAKE
Two guards. One front and back.
Armed. No other obstacles.

JAMES
I don't get it, why the hell are
they keeping her in a place like
that?

DRAKE
If it was more high profile, people
might start turning their heads.

JAMES
I guess. Cheers.

The van starts moving again while Drake drives off in the opposite direction.

James turns left.

JAMES
(to Steve)
Ready for a dress rehearsal?

Steve eyes widen.

EXT. PEMBARTON LANE (FRONT) - NIGHT

This is a suburban paradise. Bungalows, beautiful gardens, a car costing five-thousand credits in the drive, not a thing out of place. Utopia depicted by The Daily Mail.

At 2 Pembarton Close, as indicated by the postbox, Guard #1 stands. Call him MICHAEL. He chews gum like tobacco, while spooning an automatic rifle strapped to his shoulder.

Steve walks down the street, uncertain footsteps. He's not hiding the intensity of the situation very well.

He approaches Michael. Immediately finds the GUN POINTED IN BETWEEN HIS EYES!

MICHAEL
(snapping)
What do you want?!

STEVE
Uh, well, um, uh... Oh my... Uh, I'm the new paperboy and, uh, I, uh, get AM and PM confused... Please don't kill me.

MICHAEL
Aren't you a bit old to be a paperboy? And where's your paper?

Steve looks surprised. Michael is buying his story. Kind of. To the extent where his shins aren't blown off anyway.

STEVE
(coughs)
Did I say paperboy I--

From the back garden is Guard #2 - EDWARD.

EDWARD (O.S.)
What's going on?

MICHAEL
(to Edward)
There's some slow kid here. Don't worry, I got this.
(to Steve)
Go on.

STEVE

Well, I--

A YELP from Edward!

Michael jumps into action, cocking his gun and pressing it against Steve's head. Steve nearly shits himself.

MICHAEL

With me. Now!

EXT. PEMBARTON LANE (BACK) - NIGHT

Michael leads Steve in, gun remains pointed at head.

They see Edward out cold next to the pond.

MICHAEL

Who are you with?

STEVE

The paper shop around the corner.

MICHAEL SHOOTS STEVE IN THE FOREARM! Steve SCREAMS in slapstick agony. The pain to blood ratio is in favour of pain.

Michael goes for a head shot.

Pete leaps in and punches him in the back of the head! Michael is KNOCKED OUT.

As Steve nurses his wound with great verbal shock, he's surrounded by everyone else on his team including James.

JAMES

(to Pete)

I thought we agreed on no violence?

STEVE

I was shot!

PETE

(to James)

He was shot!

(looking around)

Who else I can punch? Anyone?

STEVE

Oh God! It's an amputation!

JAMES

(looks closer)

We'll have a look in the van. We need to get what we came for quick.

James rushes over and opens the door.

An OLD WOMAN [64] appears. Grey hair, gentle, slightly wrinkled face. Cautiously sticks her head beyond the door.

OLD WOMAN
Is the coast clear?

JAMES
For now. Have you got everything
you need?

Old Woman lugs a suitcase from next to her door. Now it's clear she's been expecting them.

James and Old Woman pause for a moment to kiss.

Then,

OLD WOMAN
Let's go!

INT. VAN (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

James drives alone at the front. In the back, Steve lays down, being nursed by Old Woman. He acts over-dramatically. Every breath in and out emphasises pain. He ghastly looks at his forearm wound, mouth wide open in horror.

James takes a sharp left, before taking a quick look at Steve's wound.

JAMES
Hang on. Is there even a
penetration point on that wound?

Old Woman shakes her head.

OLD WOMAN
No.

JAMES
Oh for... It's a graze, Steve.

STEVE
Have you ever been shot before?!

JAMES
Well--

STEVE
Have you?!

JAMES
A canister of tear gas bounced off
me once. That stung a lot.

STEVE

Exactly, you don't know what it feels like. And all so we can save this woman. Just who is she anyway?!

JAMES

(to Steve)
This is my girlfriend.
(to Old Woman)
Excuse him. He's not the best example of today's youth.

Steve hits the seat behind him out of pain and annoyance.

STEVE

Damnit, this hurts!

JAMES

It's been worth it. Trust me.

STEVE

I trusted you once and look at me!
Why should I trust you again?

James nods to the Old Woman - "tell him!"

OLD WOMAN

My dear, I'm Linda Valentine.

INT. JAMES' HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - NIGHT

Steve sat on a chair, with Linda stood over him.

Linda tends to his forearm. She dabs some damp cotton wool against the wound. He flinches.

STEVE

Ow.

LINDA

So James told me you escaped The Machine.

STEVE

Yeah. Though I don't know why I bothered. Might as well had the thing chopped off. Caitlin hates me now. I had the perfect thing and I ruined it.

LINDA

What happened?

STEVE

I misjudged her. I thought she wanted the whole world when she simply treasured our time together. But it goes against the Couples Tax and... I became just another person. Spending money on her.

LINDA

Consequence over conformity. Remember that.

Dabbing complete, Linda wraps a bandage tightly over the wounded area.

STEVE

How were you and James dating? With you under house arrest and all?

LINDA

That's simple. My last escape from the house was about eight months ago. I bumped into him, he took me in. Nothing more than that. We just blossomed together. I was soon found and taken back, but we've been communicating secretly through Drake since then. We send letters back and forth.

STEVE

That sounds awesome.

LINDA

More than awesome, Steve. James went that extra mile to proclaim his love. He even got one of those damn credit cards. A bit silly considering, but an act of defiance. One that exposed flaws in the system system, as they don't even have punishments in place after The Machine. He just gets a courtesy fine now.

(beat)

He was willing to do all that for me.

STEVE

Wow.

LINDA

Now if you want to win this Caitlin back, you've got to ask yourself this. What are YOU willing to do to show you love her?

Steve ponders this.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - DAY

Steve crouches behind a concrete wall. Bazooka and walkie-talkie laid next to him.

He peers over, looking at the ground below.

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

The Valentine's Day parade is underway.

Streets and makeshift stands packed with PEOPLE cheering and waving flags shaped like hearts.

There's a mock-up of the State Office of Relationships. A papier mache couple hug, delighted as a mannequin solidifies the relationship by rubber stamping the form. This is done though robotics, so the mechanics are simplistic and rigid.

Next is Cupid, satchel full of those flint arrows. He doesn't fire them for obvious reasons, just waving instead.

Behind him is a float of a woman and man in bed, delighted that a STORK (robotic) has appeared. Stork carries a bag, with the **CR** sign printed on it. Money spills out the bag. The float is called *TAX REBATE*.

P.O.V. - BINOCULARS

An army of CARE BEARS walk in military fashion, throwing paper love hearts left and right to spectators. They project rays of pink light from their stomach.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Steve bears the binoculars. Inspired by the Bears, he pulls out FIVE pink liquid capsules. He lifts up the heavy bazooka using his injured forearm. Yelping in pain, the capsules are thrown down the barrel.

The walkie-talkie SQUAWKS.

JAMES (O.S.)
(on walkie-talkie)
Steve, you copy? Over.

He retrieves the walkie-talkie, aggravating his arm just picking that up.

STEVE
I'm here.

JAMES (O.S.)
Are you in position?

STEVE
Yeah. What next?

JAMES (O.S.)
It's quarter past four now.
Valentine's due to make his speech
at about half-four so stand your
ground.

STEVE
(tongue in cheek)
Sir, yes sir.

Steve ends the transmission and goes back to looking through the binoculars.

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

POV - BINOCULARS

The parade enters the inflatable balloon portion. A blimp declaring this fortnight's Couples Tax average: **340CR...** *NEW VALENTINE'S DAY RECORD...* it blinks in pink afterwards.

Steve's vision wanders downwards until he gasps.

CAITLIN! She's alone, wandering. Like at the French restaurant, she looks completely uncomfortable by her surroundings.

A hand grabs her by the wrist. Daniel. He leads her to somewhere. She offers little resistance.

Daniel mouths something to Caitlin as they weave through the crowds. Chatty, casual, but a one-way conversation.

They come across a hot dog stand right below Steve's position. Daniel holds up his finger - "one!" - and waits for the VENDOR to serve it up.

Turns out this is a DIAMOND NECKLACE STAND. Using a pair of plastic tongs, Vendor grabs a diamond necklace from his stall like a hot dog and hands it over. Daniel pays with his debit card.

Daniel presents the gift to Caitlin. Caitlin rolls her eyes and shoves it into her pocket.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Steve drops the binoculars, picks up the walkie-talkie, and leaves his position.

EXT. BOTTOM OF BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

The sound of footsteps clattering down a set of concrete stairs. Steve exits the building, at the side entrance.

He's about to run forward when he sees...

In the distance, two members of security in suits (call him DEREK and ROGER). Backs turned to Steve, they are some of the hired muscle previously warned about. In between them, Caitlin walks past, unaware.

Steve charges down the other end of the alleyway and around a corner--

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

--down another alleyway.

A pile of cardboard boxes stacked to the side, the dirty bins and such show this is the back of a restaurant. He charges through them like a 1970's cop car.

He continues on--

EXT. STREET PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

The coast is clear at the end of this alleyway.

Steve stampedes down it and onto--

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

Steve puts his hands on his knees, knackered. He looks to left to see that

Caitlin is long gone, across the road and hidden behind the operators of the blimp balancing the string.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Hello Steve.

Steve spins round in fright. Lo and behold, his arch nemesis!

INT. OPPOSITE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

P.O.V. - BINOCULARS

This pair looks at the roof of the building Steve should be located. Nobody's there.

BACK TO SCENE.

James puts them down. He acknowledges Linda, who stands there with Pete and a couple of others.

JAMES

Nothing.

Linda gestures towards his walkie-talkie. He picks it up.

JAMES

Steve, where are you? The speech is in T-Minus ten minutes.

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

JAMES (O.S.; CONT'D)

(on walkie-talkie)

I repeat, the speech is in T-Minus ten minutes!

The walkie-talkie remains wrapped in Steve's hand. Daniel has heard everything. A sly smile on his face. The ball is in his court now!

Steve opens his mouth to speak. Nothing comes out. It takes him a moment to come up with something.

STEVE

I can explain.

DANIEL

Go on then.

Silence. Nope, Steve's got nothing.

DANIEL

Sounds like to me you're about commit a crime against the Powers That Be.

STEVE

In the same way you're committing crimes against grammar?

DANIEL

Now, now. Case you haven't noticed, it's advantage me.

STEVE

Please... If you let me get on with my own business, I'll give you anything you want. You name it.

DANIEL

Let's see, I make more money than you. Have a nice car. Nice house.
(MORE)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

And I'll be porking Caitlin when she stops acting fussy. Nope, you don't have anything I want.

Daniel thinks for a moment.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

But I can offer you something. How about your job back? Even better, a promotion.

STEVE

What?

DANIEL

You'll become my P.A. - mowing my lawn, washing my car, shining my shoes. The pay is less, but the prestige of working personally for me is priceless. Oh, and by accepting, you'll give up Caitlin forever. Agreed?

Steve doesn't want to answer.

DANIEL

It's that or I'll
(pointing at Derek and Roger)
Get these nice gentlemen's attention.

STEVE

Fine.

DANIEL

Great! One more thing, you'll get your own Company Girlfriend. Think like a company car, except... Well, she looks like a truck.

(looks around)

Ah, there she is.

(calling)

Hi honey!

Daniel waves to Rita (the 'Girl' from page 4)! Busy admiring the parade, even Rita's wave back has a hint of murderous intent to it.

DANIEL

Introducing the other thing I had to do to get a promotion: Rita.

(glumly)

The boss' daughter.

STEVE

We've met.

DANIEL

If you could hurry up with an affair so I can divorce her, that'd be great.

As Steve cringes at the thought, Daniel puts out his hand.

A moment of reluctance from Steve.

Then he shakes it, to the evil delight of his boss. Little does he realise Steve's fingers are crossed behind his back.

And little does Steve realise Caitlin is watching across the street, distraught at the events unfolding in front of her.

Steve heads back from where he came from.

JAMES (O.S.)

(walkie-talkie)

Steve, answer me! What the hell is going on?

Steve puts the walkie-talkie to his mouth.

STEVE

Sorry James. I'm heading back up now.

JAMES (O.S.)

(walkie-talkie)

That's fine, just get back up there now. He's due anytime.

From a distance, Daniel watches Steve. When he sees Caitlin's dejected look towards her ex, he smirks. He has an idea.

He walks over to Caitlin. She goes to turn her back, but Daniel rotates her around again.

DANIEL

Caitlin...

Daniel gets down on one knee and produces an engagement ring from his pocket!

Caitlin is horrified!

DANIEL (CONT'D)

You will marry me!

CAITLIN

What?

DANIEL

Right now!

Now Caitlin exerts great resistance as she's dragged along, heels scraping against the pavement.

CAITLIN

No-- No--
 (screams)
 STEVE!

Steve's attention is instantly grabbed. Sadly, so is everyone else's in a close proximity--

STEVE

I'll save you--

--especially of Derek and Roger. They recognise Steve.

DEREK

Freeze!

In one direction, Derek and Roger give chase to Steve. Random parade audience members dodge out of the way of the pursuit.

In the other, Caitlin - forced away by Daniel.

While waiting, Steve puts the walkie-talkie to his mouth.

STEVE

I'm out.

JAMES (O.S.; CONT'D)

(on walkie-talkie)
 You can't back out now.

STEVE

I've been spotted.

INT. OPPOSITE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

James looks disappointed.

JAMES

Understood. Get yourself to safety,
 over.

The transmission ends.

LINDA

The speech is due in two minutes.
 Without the bazooka, we have no
 plan.

JAMES

I need someone, anyone, to go
 across there.

James glances at Pete. Pete has distracted himself with a cigarette lighter. He's setting his sleeve on fire and wafting the flames out.

JAMES

Eureka!

EXT. PARADE - MOMENTS LATER

James dashes across the street towards the building, coincidentally passing Sapphire and Ben on the way.

Meanwhile, rapturous applause fills the air as a limousine with heavies surrounding it slowly rolls towards the stage.

This signifies the appearance of VALENTINE! Stepping out, he looks significantly older and shorter than the electronic billboards suggests. With aged caution, he wobbles against the limo, waving to the masses.

EXT. SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

The hoopla from the crowds celebrating Valentine's arrival gives Steve the window to lose Derek and Roger. He ducks within a sea of people, behind a *WE LOVE VALENTINE* banner.

They go the other way.

A moment later, Steve stands. He searches for Daniel and Caitlin. Nothing.

ROGER

There he is!

Shrieking, Steve exits the other way.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

James screeches onto the roof. Charges towards the bazooka, taking little care adjusting into position.

PING!

He withdraws the bazooka. Someone has shot a bullet hole through the lip of the barrel!

Sensing, he creeps his eyesight over the edge of the roof where he sees

P.O.V. - JAMES

A gathering of POLICE under the building.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Valentine walks up the several steps onto the podium with great effort. He waves at the crowd as their adulation begins to quieten down. He's all by his lonesome.

Another look reveals there are TWO GUARDS beside him, ONE at the stairs, THREE at the back of the stage, and SEVEN in the general vicinity.

He puts his glasses on and takes out a prepared speech from his pocket. A crumpled up piece of paper, which he irons out with his hand.

A light cough before starting.

(NOTE: Valentine's voice booms, full of bass. Peculiar that such a voice belongs to a man like this.)

VALENTINE

Thank you for the reception. You know, after so many years doing this, I wasn't sure if you'd be bored of me by now.

What should be a courteous laugh is a forced round of laughter. Valentine reacts pathetically to this. He's trained them that way.

VALENTINE

But we come back every year as one theme runs throughout our society - love. We've transformed it into a beautiful thing. And thanks to the Couples Tax system, men and women now know where they stand with each other. None of this emotion that once plagued and crippled the human spirit.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

As Valentine's speech continues (which can't be made out clearly), James dashes from the scene's entrance back into position.

The door is blocked off by a solitary plank of wood with three nails hammered in. Already uprooted before as the additional holes in the wood show.

BANGING on the door. Two of the nails fall without much force applied.

James hurriedly picks up the bazooka, hoisting it over his shoulder.

He steps to the edge of the building.

Looks down. It's a long drop to the concrete below.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Back to the speech.

VALENTINE

Soulmates. Togetherness. They're archaic terms. How can you base a relationship on concepts that don't physically exist? That's why we've evolved to this. A machine so powerful, the economy runs on it. And that's something to be proud of.

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

The end of the parade trail, as the floats and CAST MEMBERS have finished here. Office is in clear view and labelled.

Daniel drags Caitlin as Cast Members look passively on. Caitlin hits him a few times in the arms. It has an effect as he exclaims pain, but not enough to lose his grip.

DANIEL

Come on dear. No need to be like that.

CAITLIN

Up yours!

A STOMP to the foot, heel digging in.

Daniel finally loses his grasp.

Caitlin isn't able to run far before she's back in his possession. Right arm grabbed.

Then, a left arm grabs her. Caitlin glances up.

CAITLIN

Steve!

Steve stands dogged with a deadly serious look on his face. His bandaged forearm causes great pain, but he refuses to let go of Caitlin.

STEVE

(to Daniel)
Let go.

DANIEL

No, you let go.

CAITLIN

Both of you let me go!

Steve does.

DANIEL

No.

Just as Daniel starts dragging her along again, Caitlin drills him to a PUNCH IN THE FACE! Daniel goes down. HARD!

STEVE

Nice one.

CAITLIN

Don't think you're in the clear. You're not going to waltz in here and act like the hero after what you did. Acting like a pig with your money, shaking this fat prick's hand.

Daniel rolls on the ground in pain.

STEVE

There's a good reason for that, trust me. I'm in the middle of something. Something which would bring us together forever. In the way we want.

Caitlin gazes at the ground.

CAITLIN

I don't believe you.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Valentine's speech continues.

VALENTINE

...And that's why we must strive to raise the spending average. With love, we can finance wars.

JAMES (O.S.)

(shouting)

HEY!!!

Valentine, and by proxy everyone else, looks up to James' position. From a long way away, nothing about James is recognisable. Just a silhouette with a weapon.

JAMES (O.S.)

(shouting)

Do you wanna know what love really--

The wind picks up. James wobbles, and almost falls. He goes down to his knees.

JAMES (O.S.)
Bloody hell...
(standing back up;
shouting)
You want to know what love really
looks like? Try this for size...

JAMES aims the bazooka right at Valentine! The crowd gasp.

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

JAMES IS SHOT AT FROM A BUILDING ACROSS. It misses by a whisker, ricocheting against the wall he's standing on.

Several more bullets fire and miss. He changes tactic, removing himself from the wall and crouching down behind it.

Meanwhile, the door finally gives way!

A DOZEN POLICEMEN file through, positioning up a wall of fire.

James looks at them sorrowfully. This is it.

With his possible last act, he squeezes the trigger on the bazooka.

In slow motion, the missile flies high into the air, the opposite direction of Valentine.

It's A BALL OF LIGHT, tinged in the pink from Steve's liquid capsules.

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

The spectators look up in reverance.

So do Valentine's security guards. The pink light reflects in their sunglasses.

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin, Steve, and Daniel frozen. Looking at the pink.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Valentine too watches. Though his eyes track every detail of the light's journey, he remains unemotional.

Little does Valentine realise two people have entered the stage behind him!

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

The pink ball ascends high in the air.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

Almost from the point of view of the weapon. Pulsating in energy, the light has no intention of slowing down. It's truly a beautiful spectacle.

However, the journey comes to an abrupt end.

A head-on collision with a pigeon!

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

EXPLOSION!

The sky fills up. Dullish smog replaced with a sickly pink. Exactly the same shade as Steve's drawing and dream.

The crowd gasp and express wonderment. Specifically: "Awww".

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

Caitlin smiles, a tear in her eye.

STEVE

See?

CAITLIN

Oh, Steve.

She rushes over and gives him a huge bearhug, the strength of which surprises Steve. Followed by a kiss on the cheek.

Then, their lips lock on each other. As they slowly, agonisingly, go towards each other...

DANIEL

Let her go!

Without warning, Daniel takes the bow and arrow from Cupid nearby. Stretched out, one pluck away from deployment, the arrow is aimed right between Steve's eyes!

EXT. TOP OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The hum of pink decisively strong up on the building.

With the weapon still smoking, James drops it to the floor. It lands with a dull thud.

The dozen Policemen lower their weapons. The one stood at the front makes a hand gesture.

FRONT POLICEMAN

He's unarmed. You know what to do.

With that, several Policeman pin him to the ground. One prepares the handcuffs.

James struggles with all his might, but a PUNCH to the face soon eradicates that.

Meanwhile, one of the unused Policeman looks over the edge of the building. Colour drains from his face. Stuttering, he turns back:

STUTTERING POLICEMAN

G-G-Guys. We have another problem.

All the free Policeman see three figures stood on the podium below. One is Valentine, the two other are...

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Linda Valentine, stood with Pete!

LINDA

Hello Jack.

Valentine swivels around, caught off-guard.

Valentine's security, making up for being distracted, advances on her. Pete punches one of them in the face.

VALENTINE

There's no need for security.

(then)

Pleased to see you again, Linda.

LINDA

I highly doubt that.

VALENTINE

You're right. What do you want?

LINDA

(pointing upwards)

First of all, tell the police to let the man on that building go and bring him here.

Valentine grumbles.

VALENTINE

Fine.

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

Same as before.

Steve, frozen in fear.

CAITLIN
(to Daniel)
What the hell are you doing?

DANIEL
Offing your lover, what does it
look like?

DEREK (O.S.)
There!

Derek and Roger appear, seeing what's going on. They are
confused by the situation.

ROGER
What the hell?

STEVE
Now's not a good time.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

As Linda and Valentine stare at each other, the police lead a
groggy James to the stage.

VALENTINE
Now what?

LINDA
This.

Linda kisses James.

VALENTINE
Is that appropriate?

LINDA
After twenty years or so of being
under house arrest, it's the least
I could do. I mean, my God, why
didn't you just put me in prison?
At least I'd have company.

VALENTINE
There's the problem. You're like
any woman. Blab blab blab. Word
would get out what an insignificant
little man I am.

LINDA
 (re: the crowd)
 I dunno. You're doing a good job of
 that now.

Let's not forget about the thousands of people taking part in the Valentine's Day celebration. They stand there, silent, mouths wide enough to fit bowling balls in.

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

Derek points the gun at Steve.

CAITLIN
 Are you nuts?

DEREK
 (re: Daniel)
 This man here is doing a great duty
 for the state.

Daniel childishly gestures at Caitlin - an expression of "I am right, you are wrong".

DANIEL
 Does this I can... You know...?

He simulates letting the string on the bow go.

DEREK
 No, it does not--

All of the sudden, Caitlin pushes Derek into Roger. Roger tumbles into Derek. Derek tumbles onto the concrete floor.

With Daniel distracted, Steve wrestles the bow and arrow away from him, throwing it to the ground with a METALLIC CLATTER. Steve's position leaves him wide open for

Daniel to grip him on the injured arm. Steve screams in pain. Shuffles to the right, releasing himself from the hold.

Steve pushes Daniel backwards.

With a PRIMAL SCREAM, he shoulder barges Daniel. Daniel's body flies towards

THE PARADE'S MAKESHIFT POWER GIRD.

Daniel lands on it like an elephant landing on a coke can. Crushed. Sparks fly everywhere.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Linda and Valentine's reunion has descended into bickering. He counteracts her fiery nature by plugging his ears with his fingers.

LINDA

Then there's the Italian princess you slept with. The socialite and the hooker. At the same time. Yeah, I know about that one.

(then)

Was your penis always so small, or did you wear it down on rough things?

The microphone expels flickering feedback while the audience go "OOOOO", as if they're witnessing a sitcom.

VALENTINE

I've had enough--

As Valentine waves at the Guards, there's a power outage. A loud draining noise. Just in time for this:

VALENTINE

(in his natural squeaky voice)

Seize her!

Beat.

The moment of self-realisation. Valentine's mouth stuck open. Did they just hear him without his booming voice?

In the audience, stunned silence.

Until Ben lets out a single CHORTLE. This triggers an infestation of uncontrollable laughter. People keel over from laughing so hard. Some roll about on the ground. The collective sound of it is DEAFENING.

VALENTINE

Stop! All of you!

Do they compile? Do they fu--

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

As the power grid cracks and fizzles, Daniel picks himself up from the wreckage.

Derek grabs Steve. Locks his injured arm in a hammerlock, twisting it behind his back. Arrested.

DEREK

You're coming with us.

Roger watches the audience laughing in the distance.

ROGER
Uh, boss. Look at the stage.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

The laughter goes on and on.

Panicked, Valentine's eyes resemble a game of ping-pong.

VALENTINE
End this laughing now.

LINDA
The show's over Valentine. It's
time for these people to live and
love how they want.
(to the crowd)
What do you think?

An unanimous, liberating cheer from the audience.

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

Derek's moment of indecision ends with him letting go of Steve. If Daniel had coffee on him, he'd do a spit-take right now.

DANIEL
What are you doing?!

DEREK
Look at what's happening. I
seriously doubt he'll have any
charges to answer to.

Daniel exacerbates disbelief, arms out in shock.

VOICE (O.S.)
DANIEL!

The voice warrants immediate attention.

Everyone turns to see Rita. Godzilla-like, she storms into the scene, enraged.

CAITLIN
Who's that?

STEVE
His wife.

CAITLIN
(to Daniel)
You were going to have two wives?!

RITA

WHAT?!

Rita POUNDS Daniel in the stomach. The sheer force of the blow even makes the policemen wince.

Daniel falls to his knees, doubling over in pain.

The pain seems to subside quickly when Derek GRABS him.

DANIEL

What are you doing?

DEREK

You're under arrest.

DANIEL

Hey! You can't arrest me!

DEREK

Polygamy is illegal in any country.
Apart from Wales anyway, but
they're weird.

Daniel forcibly struggles.

EXT. PARADE - CONTINUOUS

The crowd disperses. The show is, indeed over.

Back with Ben, he bites his upper lip, elevating and lowering his toes anxiously. Anticipation. A big moment for him. Prepares for his speech by strongly coughing.

BEN

Sapphire, the last few years have
been horrible. Yeah, you heard.
That's why I'm--

SAPPHIRE

So this Couples Tax thing is over
then?

BEN

Yeah, but--

SAPPHIRE

In that case, I'm leaving you. Bye!

Sapphire nonchalantly waves at Ben before walking away.

Gobsmacked, Ben freezes on the spot.

BEN

But it was my time...

Sapphire approaches a stranger nearby, who is too busy stood at a burger van nearby analysing his order to notice her coming. This happens to be Sebastian.

She taps him on the shoulder.

SAPPHIRE

You'll do.

SEBASTIAN

What?

She lays one right on the lips. Sebastian firstly struggles. Then is assimilated.

Still watching, Ben nearly throws up.

EXT. PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

Valentine sees Linda and James kiss in full view. He agitatedly rolls his eyes.

VALENTINE

Well, I hope you're happy.

LINDA

You know, I think I am.

VALENTINE

You've just brought down an entire economy. The country is in ruins. But at least you stuck it to me, right?

LINDA

Don't worry. A sick mind like yours will figure something out.

They go to leave.

VALENTINE

You. Bearded guy.

This gets James' attention.

JAMES

You talking to me?

VALENTINE

Yeah. Watch her. She's like kryponite. She'd make Superman look like an arsehole given the chance.

James connects eyes with Linda. In facial gestures he says: "Should I believe him?" She laughs.

JAMES
 (gazing at Linda)
 Somehow, I think I'll be okay.

They finally depart.

Silence.

Alone on the stage, Valentine kicks the podium out of anger.
 He sees a person equally in despair up ahead.

VALENTINE
 Pfft... Women, eh?

He's talking to Ben, too shell-shocked to notice Valentine.

BEN
 But-- But-- But--

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

Roger and Derek hook either side of Daniel's arms, slowly but surely dragging him away.

Rita walks by Steve.

STEVE
 If you're so mad about Daniel, why
 did you go on a date with me?

RITA
 I CAN DO BETTER TOO!

Steve holds up his hands in innocence.

STEVE
 Woah, okay...

As Rita stomps away, Steve turns to Caitlin.

STEVE
 So... Are we... You know...

CAITLIN
 Back together?

STEVE
 Yeah.

CAITLIN
 Oh, I don't know. After
 everything...

STEVE
 I promise, if you take me back,
 I'll give you everything you want.

Caitlin sighs, facing downwards. She frowns. This was the problem in the first place.

Noticing his mistake, Steve stutters.

STEVE

...In an collaborative journey sort of thing.

She chuckles.

CAITLIN

That's what I love you about.
You're so imperfect, and you never
say the right thing.

(then)

If you did, it'd be quite boring.

STEVE

Yes, then?

Caitlin kisses Steve. The moment is sweeping, glorious, magnificent. In a world of their own. Absolutely perfect.

They continue a dreamy, everlasting gaze as they withdraw.

CAITLIN

Yeah.

CRASH!

DEREK (O.S.)

STOP!

Daniel's somehow escaped from Derek and Roger, who pick themselves from the floor.

Enraged, Daniel stomps towards the happy couple. But he stops at halfway, spotting something on the ground.

IN SLOW MOTION, Daniel grabs up the bow and arrow. Aims it.

Steve barely has time to react.

Caitlin gasps.

Daniel pulls the string.

The arrow slowly flies in the air.

It's target: STEVE'S CROTCH.

Arrow continues to fly...

Fly...

Fly...

A sadistic look from Daniel.

BACK IN NORMAL MOTION, the arrow swoops and--

BLACK OUT.

THUMP!

STEVE
AAARRGGGGHHHHH!!!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STATE OFFICE OF RELATIONSHIPS - CONTINUOUS

The arrow has gone into Steve's uninjured arm, which is literally inches away from his groin.

He blocked it just in time. In a certain sense, anyway.

As Steve and Caitlin look at the wound in horror...

Derek and Roger tackle Daniel. Grounding Daniel once and for all, they lay into him with a few stray shots to the stomach.

FADE TO:

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

THREE WEEKS LATER

All of Valentine's pictures in a bargain bin of sorts - 2 FOR 5CR. A couple of the faces are peeled away. Turns out there is someone else on the Mona Lisa.

Meanwhile, Steve (with both arms in slings) and Caitlin stand in front of a curtain on the wall. They're watched by GALLERY-GO'ERS, and Ben, James, Linda, and a few of the hippies.

STEVE
Thank you for coming. This is
Caitlin and mine's first - of many,
I hope - paintings. This is called
it Plastic Love. Caitlin, if you
can do the honour.

Caitlin pulls the tassel, revealing

The picture of them holding hands, back turned. The pink sky and the house made of twigs. Now more detailed than when Steve painted it. The canvas is wrapped in plastic shrink wrap.

Everyone in the gallery claps, before parting away into their own conversational groups.

Steve walks through the crowd, past James and Linda--

LINDA
Lovely picture, Steve.

JAMES
Nice one!

STEVE
Cheers.

--and up to Ben.

STEVE
What do you think?

BEN
It's great. Though why are you wearing yellow pants?

Steve squints back at the picture. Those are yellow pants!

STEVE
I have no idea...

Ben sighs.

BEN
That picture reminds me of Sapphire so much. I can't believe I was involved with someone like that. So hollow. So fake. And--
(jaw drops to floor)
Hello nurse!

In a trance, Ben approaches a nearby FEMME FETALE at the free buffet. Oozes sexuality just from smoking a cigarette.

BEN
Hi there.

FEMME FETALE
Buy me an expensive drink and I'll acknowledge you.

BEN
Okay!

Back with Steve, Caitlin approaches him.

STEVE
Everyone likes the picture then.

CAITLIN

Course they did. I had to perfect the painting for...

(re: Steve's arms)

Obvious reasons.

Moment of silence. Then,

CAITLIN

Do you think we will have a happy ending like in all those films?

STEVE

I thought you didn't like the cinema?

CAITLIN

I don't. But the sentiment. That moment in time where the stars align and everything is reassuringly perfect. This is it. But will it last forever?

STEVE

Not this moment, no.

CAITLIN

So we should split up now, as this moment will never be topped?

STEVE

No. This isn't Hollywood. There's this moment of creative fulfilment. The moment we get married. The children. The kids leaving home. Retirement. Dying. The normal mundane moments. Those unworthy of a snapshot moment. That's the time I'll relish the most.

CAITLIN

Same here.

STEVE

Well, this moment is about to pass. Maybe we should swing to the next one.

CAITLIN

You mean... get married?

STEVE

Yeah, what do you think?

CAITLIN

Are you kidding? Do you realise how expensive having a wedding is?

Steve and Caitlin smile.

MUSIC CUE - "(IT'S NOT WAR) JUST THE END OF LOVE" - MANIC
STREET PREACHERS

EXT. CITY - DAY

Skyline dominated by ugly, oppressive concrete buildings hidden behind a thick layer of smog, lightened by the remnants of the pink light.

BLACK OUT.

**PLASTIC
LOVE**

WRITTEN BY

CHRIS WILSON

PRODUCED BY
A. J. BLACK

CALLUM BLUE
AS STEVE BURBANK

TALLULAH RILEY
AS CAITLIN HENNESSY

RUSSELL TOVEY
AS BEN THOMAS

GEMMA ARTERTON
AS SAPPHIRE BOOTH

DEAN LENNOX KELLY
AS JAMES TRENT

MARK BENTON
AS DANIEL HUXLEY

WITH

PENELOPE WILTON
AS LINDA VALENTINE

AND

TERRY O'QUINN
AS VALENTINE

