

Coma Girl
written by
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FADE IN:

INT. HOPE'S PSYCHIATRIC OFFICE - DAY

In the sparsely furnished office sits HOPE, 22, absorbed in a professional journal, "Psychopharmacology." A worktable and computer to one side of her and an empty psychiatric couch on the other. Her conservative blouse and knee length skirt enhance her profession demeanor.

Responding to RING TONES, she takes a healing breath, dons a Blue Tooth in her ear and works the computer mouse. Her smile is enchanting. Her voice both charms and reassures.

HOPE

Good evening, Mearden. So, bring me up to date. What's happened since our last session?

(Listens)

Yes, it will be a little sad, but I hope this is not just what I want for you. It's something you should want for yourself.

(Smiles)

Okay, good! So, where should we go with this today?

(Reacts)

Oh, that's quite straight forward! I like that attitude. Okay then.

(Intense looks)

If we met at a business function and we're engaged in pleasant conversation and I did this...

She lets down her hair.

HOPE (cont'd)

What would that signal to you?

(Listens)

Okay, right. But, I also might be thinking I might never see you again but wouldn't it be heaven to spend one night with you.

(Waits)

Women do have such thoughts, Mearden, believe me. It gets all pent up in us. Here's what you might see next. Pretext. We both know what's going on. Watch.

She crosses her legs and leans back.

HOPE (cont'd)

It's a bit warm in here don't you think? Your room is on the second floor! I bet its got a great view.

She looks away and releases another button on her blouse.

HOPE (cont'd)

Thinking? Oh, nothing. Well, I'll tell you. Pastry, I could really go for some right now, like a crème filled ladyfinger or even a cannoli.

(Surprised)

Coffee and dessert in your room? Oh, that sounds so delicious.

She moves to the couch and reclines, her blouse is open now and she shows off her legs.

COMPUTER SCREEN - MESSAGE BOX

"MEARDEN: I'd love to see your ladyfinger."

Attached to the screen, a webcam automatically moves to follow and focus on Hope.

BACK TO SCENE

Hope plays to the camera as she removes her bra.

HOPE (cont'd)

Yes, I'd love to. But first you've got to do something for me.

FREEZE FRAME - HOPE'S FACE ON COMPUTER SCREEN

Whorish, lurid and grotesque.

HOPE (V.O.) (cont'd)

My name is Hope Parsimony. I'm twenty-two years old. This is the story about how a girl in a coma saved me from myself.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. DOLOROUS VILLAGE - STREET - DAY

Dawn in a neighborhood still asleep. Every house a Cape Cod. A few are well maintained, most are not.

WELCOME SIGN

"Dolorous Village - Where the American Dream Meets Reality," over a backdrop painting of a beautiful sunrise now blistered and faded.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - DAY

A disheveled Cape Cod with a lawn burnt to a golden crisp. The bow window panes are covered with plastic "stained glass." In a scrawny garden, a MADONNA statue stands under a precariously angled window air conditioner.

FRONT DOOR

The door opens by itself, an invitation to enter.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

All the charm of a dated dentist's office waiting room.

GIFT SHOP/CLOSET

A Dutch door, top open, into a closet shelved with tacky souvenirs.

KITCHEN

A disgusting mess.

HALLWAY

An incongruous addition of institutional painted block walls, vinyl tile floors and stark fluorescent lighting.

OFFICE

DR. MEARDEN MORDANT, 40's, sloppy and unshaven, sits glued to his computer screen surrounded by a thick haze of cigarette smoke. He snuffs out a butt in an ashtray the shape, size and piled as high as a football.

Medical trappings surround him, most notable a patient monitoring device BEEPING condition stable.

A metal framed window looks into an adjoining bedroom.

BEDROOM

A pink and white lacy heaven with a raised hospital bed where TINSEL TARTUFFIONI, 21, lies in a coma. Her make-up, meant to look angelic, is instead quite macabre.

Floor-to-ceiling window doors open to...

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - PATIO

Crumbling concrete deck and busted furniture.

SWING SET

Broken and rusting.

SHRUBS

Overgrown and filled with litter.

STOCKADE FENCE

Gray and rotting.

ERIC, 20's, tall with large facial features that cast him as a comical loner, pushes a lawn mower at a fallen down fence section staring at Tinsel's bedroom.

TREE

A low branch resplendent with dozens of dream catchers incorporating religious symbols including Crosses, Stars of David, Crescent and Stars, Yin and Yang, Buddha's Eye, a Grateful Dead Steal Your Face, etc.

TRAIL HEAD

Opens into the woods.

WOODS PATH - MOVING

A gentle, dreamy ride "back-in-time" begins with twists and turns over rolling terrain.

RABBIT

Sprints across the path.

POND

Filled with blooming waterlilies sparkles in the sunset.

PATH

Climbs a rocky slope under a darkening tree canopy.

DOE

Stares and then darts off up the path.

EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT

Around a bonfire, a group of TEENAGERS drink beer, shove each other, laugh and clown around.

ERIC, 16, sits quietly on one side of the fire watching the others. He focuses on TINSEL, 16, who leans up against a tree flirting with...

COLLIN, a handsome jock, who has Tinsel cornered.

Eric looks at Tinsel. She shoots back a "don't you do this to me" look.

Collin catches the exchange and sends Eric a "you never had a chance" smirk.

MOVING

Sucked backward at high speed, away from the waterfall and down the trail.

DOE

Runs backward.

PATH

The rolling curves of the woods become a blur.

BACKYARD

Just a nanosecond.

TINSEL'S EXTERIOR DOORWAY

Crashing into the bedroom. The patient monitor ALARM BLARES.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - MEARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Mearden jumps out of his chair and bolts out of the room.

THROUGH INTERIOR WINDOW - BEDROOM

Tinsel convulses violently. Mearden quickly prepares and administers a hypodermic. He's not in a panic but under intense pressure.

MEARDEN

Oh, crap. Don't do this to me
Tinsel. Not now.

COMPUTER SCREEN

Hope stretched out on the psychiatrist's couch, an annoyed look on her face.

BACK TO SCENE

Tinsel limp and lifeless. Her face in plain view. The patient monitor emits a constant flat line TONE.

SIDE BY SIDE - COMPUTER SCREEN/INTERIOR WINDOW

Hope seen on screen and Tinsel through the window are dead ringers for each other.

HOPE

(Filtered)

Mearden? Are you still there?

INT. PSYCHIATRIC OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

HOPE

Take your time, Mearden. At three
ninety-nine a minute it's your
party.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Mearden checks his wristwatch.

MEARDEN

Oh, shit.

He rifles around his desk to find a pad and marking pen. He
scribbles something and dashes off.

LIVING ROOM

Mearden bolts in, peels back the plastic stained glass sheet
on the window and peeks out.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET

CARS and passenger TRUCKS begin to park on the street out
front.

FRONT WALKWAY

VISITORS, among them a RABBI, a NUN, a MOTHER AND FATHER with
a SON and DAUGHTER, TWO ELDERLY WOMEN and an ELDERLY MAN, all
make their way from the cars toward the house and up the
walkway.

To their surprise, the front door opens, Mearden quickly
tapes up his makeshift sign and slams the door shut in the
face of those who have made it to the door stoop. They read
the sign.

INSERT - SIGN

"NO VISITORS TODAY - TINSEL RESTING"

BACK TO ACTION

RABBI

How tired can she be? She's been
in a coma for five years.

MOTHER

That's not a nice thing to say!

As the others turn away disappointed, the Nun rings the DOOR BELL.

Mearden opens the door. The visitors turn back toward him.

MEARDEN

Yes?

NUN

Is at least the gift shop open?

MEARDEN

No.

NUN

Why not?

MEARDEN

Ah, it's Sunday.

Disappointed faces, but as Mearden waves them away the Rabbi raises his hand.

MEARDEN (cont'd)

What?

RABBI

It's not the Sabbath for me. I came all the way from Lakewood.

Mearden thinks.

MEARDEN

Okay, you can shop.

SON

Hey, why does he get to shop?

RABBI

You've been shopping on my Sabbath for three thousand years, okay?!

MEARDEN

Five thousand years. It's Sunday. I can't let Christians shop today.

NUN

We've only been Christians for two thousand years.

The others nod their heads; the Nun has a point.

ELDERLY WOMAN
 (Indicating the Rabbi)
 Why can't we give him our orders?

Mearden smiles. He quickly reaches for something and returns with an order form on a clipboard.

MEARDEN
 But we're only doing this once.

Mearden hands the Rabbi an order form.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mearden closes the door and pinches his eyes.

RABBI (O.C.)
 Okay, how many want Tinsel dream
 catchers?

Visitors' ad-libs (O.S.): "I do!, I do!" "I want three key chains!"

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Schlocky inspirational MUSIC swells.

SUPER - "Tinsel Never Ending"

In soft light and a heavenly mist, Tinsel lies in her lacy bed in her lacy room. Her face, in soft focus, is unidentifiable and angelic.

INT. INTERVIEW SET

FARAH TARTUFFIONI, 40's, Tinsel's mother, in over done make-up and dress that is too loud and revealing.

FARAH
 It occurred on my beloved
 daughter's birthday. It was her
 sweet sixteen and never, never,
 never been...

Farah tears up and is handed a tissue from off camera.

SUPER - "Tinsel's Mom - Farah Tartuffioni"

FARAH (cont'd)
 The waterfalls are, to this day,
 the Lord's splendid realm.

EXT. THE WATERFALLS - DAY

In the sun's harsh light the falls are an unremarkable run-off spill in an ugly trash canyon.

FARAH (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Tinsel adored nature. As a toddler
 we would venture hence and remove
 the unsightly rubbish left by those
 disrespectful of God's creation.

INT. INTERVIEW SET - FARAH - CONTINUED

Farah leans toward the O.C. interviewer to share her suspicions.

FARAH
 Unfortunately, it is also in close
 proximity to, how shall I say? A
 less desirable area of the
 community. I believe what happened
 that fateful day shall forever be a
 mystery, but I have my suspicions.

BACK TO STORY

INT. HOTEL - HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Heavy drapes darken the room, but morning light spills through the creases. A bulky THUG in an expensive dark suit gently serves coffee to the poker players SLICK, RED NOSE, PUNCHY, and SALLE who is the boss the others defer to.

A fifth player, a gentle soul with sad eyes, Father REBAS, 70s, is in the cat seat coveting a large pot.

REBAS
 I'll see your thousand and I'll
 raise a thousand.

Red Nose folds and slides his cards toward the pot.

Slick calls the bet and tosses in a pile of chips.

A cell phone on the table in front of Rebas VIBRATES. The other players look to Salle for a reaction.

A slight shake of Salle's head tells them it's okay. They take a breath and relax.

REBAS (cont'd)
Call. Three very pretty ladies.

SLICK
Sorry Father, cardiac arrest.

Slick lays down his hearts flush.

Rebas picks up the phone and takes the call to the living room section of the suite.

Salle nods to Slick, who pulls in the winnings.

REBAS
Father Rebas.
(Listens)
It's my day off, Dr. Mordant.
(Wide-eyed)
I'm on my way.
(To the players)
Salle, would you have my account totaled in my absence?

Rebas strains to lift his black physician's bag and hurries out of the room. The Thug follows him.

SALLE
(Calling after)
Sure thing, Father.

PUNCHY
Salle, he comes here week after week. We don't even have to let him win now and then?

SLICK
Yeah, what's with that?

SALLE
He was in line to be Monsignor. He would win that parish raffle Cadillac every third year like clockwork.

Everyone has a good laugh as cards are dealt, coffee sipped.

SALLE (cont'd)
Remember those altar boys in the news?

SLICK & PUNCHY

Oh!

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Thug waylays Rebas.

THUG

Father, a moment?

REBAS

Yes?

THUG

Next payment. Better make it at least ten. Okay?

Rebas nods and walks off.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mearden, Farah and Rebas suck down cigarettes as they sadly look down on Tinsel's body.

REBAS

Tinsel, bless her soul, gave the world a special gift for five years, Farah.

FARAH

Father, Tinsel left us long ago, but now she's left us with nothing.

Mearden reaches for Farah's hand to comfort her.

MEARDEN

She is now pure intelligence, cosmic consciousness.

FARAH

Cut the crap. Ask the cosmic counter intelligence what the fuck do we do now.

REBAS

I'll call the proper authorities.

MEARDEN

No.

FARAH

Whatever are you saying?

REBAS

In that case, I better get back to the rectory.

FARAH

Don't you abandon me in my hour of need! Anyway, you haven't been allowed in the rectory since Little Jimmy Warren filed suit.

REBAS

Must you call him little? He's a twenty-seven-year-old man now.

Mearden burns Rebas's arm with his cigarette.

REBAS (cont'd)

Ow! Why'd you do that?

Mearden takes a photo of Hope out of his pocket and places it on Tinsel's body.

MEARDEN

I don't want you going soft on us now.

Farah snatches it up, takes a close look. Tears fill her eyes, and she hugs Mearden.

FARAH

I love you.

Rebas grabs the photo for a close look.

REBAS

May the Lord spare us from prosecution.

FARAH

Isn't that persecution, Father?

REBAS

No, in this case, I'm afraid it's prosecution.

Rebas stabs his cigarette in Mearden's arm.

MEARDEN

Ouch! That wasn't fair.

REBAS

(Waving the photo)
This is ridiculous!

Mearden snatches the photo from Rebas and grins.

MEARDEN

This is a plan that will work!

Farah, furious, patty-slaps the men and begins to cry.

FARAH

Stop it! Stop it. Tinsel's dead.
Now show some respect.

(Pause)

I'm starvin'. Who wants scrambled
eggs?

Both men raise their hands.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - LATER

The top of a large freezer chest is opened. Hands and arms belonging to Farah, Rebas and Mearden work quickly to remove packages of frozen food.

Tinsel's shrink-wrapped corpse is unceremoniously dumped into the emptied freezer.

Farah's bejeweled hand writes on the shrink wrap.

"Tinsel Tartuffioni -- June 18, 200X"

FARAH, MEARDEN & REBAS

All look down into the freezer.

FARAH

Tinsel, baby, I love you. Don't
you think ill of me. This was good
enough for Disney and DiMaggio.

REBAS

It was Ted Williams, not DiMaggio.

FARAH

Ted Williams? Don't be stupid,
Father. It was a famous baseball
player's head they froze. Huh?
How ridiculous is that!?

Mearden grins at Rebas.

MEARDEN

I think she's right.

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO - CONTINUED

EXT. THE WATERFALLS - DAY

A group of VOLUNTEERS, Farah, Rebas, Mearden comprising the bulk of the party, merrily remove litter. What was previously seen as "trash canyon" is now a pristine gorge waterfall bathed in shafts of heavenly morning light.

SUPER: "Dramatization"

FARAH (V.O.)
We carry on by doing Tinsel's work.

VOLUNTEERS

Standing in a row, surveying their success, all sobbing dramatically.

BELOW THE WATERFALLS

An ACTRESS playing TINSEL, 16, in a costume that hints at virginal innocence, lies unconscious in the stream.

FARAH (V.O.) (cont'd)
That day is forever etched in our memories.

INT. INTERVIEW SET - FARAH - CONTINUED

FARAH
I remember one day, Tinsel discovered a burlap pouch of kittens left to suffer a watery demise at the pond's mercy. But how, oh, how can I explain the unexplainable?

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Actress playing TINSEL, 8, cross-eyed looking at a large dragonfly that has landed on her nose.

SUPER - "Dramatization"

FARAH (V.O.)
She ran like the wind out of the backyard. I yelled.

Farah, playing herself as a happy housewife, humming a tune while hanging clothes to dry, looks over to see Tinsel watching the dragonfly circle around her head.

FARAH (cont'd)

Tinsel!

Tinsel follows the dragonfly down the woods path. Farah runs after her.

FARAH (cont'd)

Tinsel!

EXT. POND PATH - DAY

Actress playing Tinsel, 8, points at a sack in the water.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET - DAY

Actress playing Tinsel, 8, holds four fur ball kittens.

NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE

Actress playing Tinsel, 8, knocks on a neighbor's door. A FAT UGLY MEAN MAN answers. Tinsel shows him the kittens. He takes one, kisses Tinsel on the cheek, holds the fur ball to his face and is himself transformed into a big happy pussy cat.

INT. INTERVIEW SET - FARAH - CONTINUED

Dramatic and amazed.

FARAH

Now, you must understand, the pond resides a-near-ways through the woods. How in creation's name could she have possibly heard those little pussies' terrified tears?

MEARDEN (O.C.)

Good question.

BACK TO STORY

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - MEARDEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Mearden has cleaned up very nicely. On his computer screen, Hope appears sitting in her office chair.

HOPE
(Filtered)
On time for your appointment. What
a good boy!

Mearden types.

ON SCREEN

"Can we go to Video & Voice mode?"

HOPE

HOPE (cont'd)
You're going to show yourself?

COMPUTER SCREEN - MESSAGE BOX

"Mearden: Yes"

HOPE (cont'd)
Okay.

INTERCUT LIVE/COMPUTER SCREENS AS NECESSARY

MEARDEN
I'm going to send you details about
me.

HOPE
That's not necessary.

MEARDEN
My real name, address, background.

HOPE
I know where this is going and the
answer is no.

MEARDEN
Would it hurt to hear me out? You
hold all the cards. I have no way
of tracking you down.

She takes off her glasses.

HOPE

It's your money.

MEARDEN

Thanks. I know you're studying psychology. I've seen the books you read and you're better than most working therapists.

An awkward silence; Hope is not biting.

MEARDEN (cont'd)

Okay, here's what you'll find about me. A checkered past as a board certified psychiatrist and an abundance of noteworthy research on altered states of consciousness, still occasionally quoted to this day. But who cares... Here's the thing, I've got an incredible natural experiment situation, just incredible.

HOPE

Incredible means not to be believed.

MEARDEN

A chance here, please?

Hope shrugs.

MEARDEN (cont'd)

For a very peculiar reason, which I will explain in full if you should decide you would like to know more, I believe you are the person who can make this mind-boggling piece of seminal research happen.

HOPE

I am?

Mearden nods.

HOPE (cont'd)

What's the subject?

MEARDEN

Magical thinking.

Hope stares at Mearden's face, searching it.

HOPE

Send your info, but if it doesn't
check out you're blocked.

MEARDEN

Okay.

The screen goes blank.

Voices sing in four part harmony, kind of.

CHORUS (O.S.)

Someone's singing my Lord,
kumbaya...

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO - CONTINUED

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Two hands hold candles in the darkness, then four, then
eight, then...

Just ten people singing in front of the house and they
include Farah, Rebas, Mearden, the Fat Ugly Mean Man, the
actresses who have played Tinsel at various ages and all of
the VIDEO CREW identified by the equipment they still hold.

Farah attempts to recruit NEIGHBORS, who are looking on in
wonder. They resist.

CHORUS

Someone's singing my Lord,
kumbaya Someone's singing my
Lord, kumbaya Oh Lord,
kumbayah
Kumbayah my Lord, kumbayah
Kumbayah my Lord, kumbayah
Kumbayah my Lord, kumbayah
Oh Lord, kumbayah

FARAH (V.O.)

I do not know why. I do not
know how. But new friends
started to arrive in the
guise of kind strangers.
Tinsel seemed to be telling
me, let them in, let them in,
let them in.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

One after another PIOUS WOMEN touch Tinsel's (present age)
forehead and then their lips.

FARAH (V.O.)

Suddenly, my house was a museum of
love and grace.

(MORE)

FARAH (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Many of them wanted to touch
 Tinsel. For most it was a
 blessing, but for some...

Until one WILD-EYED WOMAN, excited by Tinsel's cleavage,
 grabs her breasts.

FARAH (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Well, let us just say we had to set
 limits.

INT. INTERVIEW SET - FARAH - CONTINUED

Farah anticipates the question.

MEARDEN (O.C.)
 When did you first notice there
 were miracles happening?

FARAH
 I would have to say immediately.
 Though I admit at first I did not
 recognize them as such.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT WALKWAY - DAY

A frail, old blue-haired woman, MARY, helped by Rebas,
 visibly quakes as she slowly makes her way to the front door.

FARAH (V.O.)
 They were tiny miracles. Like
 little tingles of heavenly love.

SUPER - "Dramatization"

A frail man, JOE about the same age as Mary exits the house
 and freezes in his tracks.

JOE
 Mary? Is that you?

MARY
 Joe? No, it can't be. Joe!

They quiver and shuffle toward each other.

JOE
 Mary. It's been twenty years!

MARY
 Twenty-two... and forty-seven days!

They meet, embrace, and then lock up in a serious bout of suck face. Yuck!

BACK TO STORY

INT. HOPE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Hope wears a tattered robe and a scowl as she sips from a cracked coffee mug and surveys her life.

The "set" that is her Psychiatrist Office.

Near her a piece of foam on the floor, her bed.

Next to her, both the kitchenette and a toilet.

She picks up the remnants of last night's work, scanty lingerie from the psychiatry couch.

STREET NOISES blare through the apartment's only small window. She slams it shut.

Standing on a towel at the kitchen sink, she tests the water and drops her robe to begin her morning sponge bath.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Hope weaving through tables and patrons carrying a tray of drinks over her head.

Hope scribbles an order while acknowledging that another table wants her attention.

Hope sets a bus bin down on a chair next to a large table filled with dirty plates, glasses and garbage. She picks up five-dollar bill left as a tip and stuff it into her apron pocket.

INT. LECTURE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Hope is one of a hundred STUDENTS taking their seats. Disheveled from her restaurant job, she drinks an extra large coffee to stave off exhaustion.

The PROFESSOR takes the podium and begins the lecture.

PROFESSOR

Tonight we're going to start with
barbiturates.

(MORE)

PROFESSOR (cont'd)
 They have been used to treat depression among other mental ills, but they are not without their risks. They are contraindicated with other drug classes in which adverse events may include coma and death.

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO - CONTINUED

INT. INTERVIEW SET - FARAH - CONTINUED

Farah makes an effort to recover from crying.

FARAH
 Then there were a multitude of more common blessings some might call miraculous.

MEARDEN (O.C.)
 For example?

FARAH
 Oh. Cancer remissions. Divorce reconciliations. Terrorist cell arrests. Lost pets would arrive on the same days as their owners. Nothing earth shattering, really.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

VISITORS surround Tinsel's bed. They are of every color, religion and walk of life including a FIREMAN, a MARINE, a MOSLEM CLERIC, a NURSE and a MEMBER of the Band AC/DC, or perhaps MARILYN MANSON. They are all so stereotyped it looks staged, because it is!

FARAH (V.O.)
 On occasion, but ever so rarely, I'm overwhelmed and I think I cannot continue this endeavor. And then I look at the people. Just look at them! They need her!

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD

VISITORS from the previous scene hang Dream Catchers on the large limb of the backyard tree.

FARAH (V.O.)
And a small voice, and I like to think it's Tinsel's voice, says no, the good work must continue. This is what sustains her. Bless her soul.

BACK TO STORY

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

With lusty glee, Mearden watches a replay his earlier session with Hope.

INTERCUT COMPUTER SCREEN/MEARDEN AS NECESSARY

HOPE
Pastry, like a crème filled ladyfinger or even a cannoli. Coffee and dessert in your room? Oh, that sounds so delicious.

Enthralled, Mearden unbuckles his belt, zips down his fly and settles back in his chair.

HOPE (cont'd)
Let's get comfortable. This is our special time together.

He glances up and looks through the window at Tinsel's empty bed.

Hope spreads her legs...

Annoyed, he stretches for a light switch and darkens Tinsel's room.

RING TONES announce an instant message.

MESSAGE BOX

"Hope: Are you there Mearden?"

MEARDEN

Mearden pauses the media player with a click of his mouse and types back a reply.

MESSAGE BOX

"Mearden: Hi Hope! Wow. Great to hear from you!"

"Hope: You know my fee scale. Does the research job pay well?"

MEARDEN

MEARDEN
(To himself)
Doctor, we are back in business.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT

As day turns to night, Eric shuts down his lawn mower and wipes the sweat from his face and stars at the sign taped to the front door of the house: "NO VISITORS TODAY - TINSEL RESTING"

Eric marches up to the door, takes the sign in his hand to rip it down, but reconsiders and rings the DOOR BELL. Rebas opens the door.

REBAS
Eric. How are you?

ERIC
Fine, Father. How are you?

REBAS
Well, thank you.

ERIC
May I come in?

REBAS
Ah... I'll step out. I could use some air.

Rebas and Eric sit on the stoop.

ERIC
I haven't been able to see Tinsel for over a week now. How bad is she?

REBAS
I think... well, I don't really know.

ERIC
An infection?

REBAS
Probably. Eric, though your loyalty to Tinsel is to be commended, it's been five years and the chances are...

ERIC
I know, but I'll always love her.

REBAS
Yes, but...

ERIC
And she loves me.

REBAS
So you've told me.

ERIC
Why doesn't anyone believe me?

REBAS
You know, I was in love with a woman that would never be mine for many, many years. When we were finally together, it didn't work. She was not at all the person I had imagined her to be.

ERIC
And then you became a priest?

REBAS
Well, not exactly in that order. Eric, everything is going to be alright. God cares for us. Hey, don't I owe you quite a few bucks for cutting our grass?

ERIC
You can keep the money. I do it for Tinsel. Know what I think when somebody says everything is going to be alright? They're a lying sack of shit.

Eric stands. Rebas tries to hold him back, ignoring the insult. Eric walks off.

REBAS
Eric, you don't mean that.

ERIC

Fuck you.

REBAS

That's not nice to say to an old man.

ERIC

Or a priest, or anyone.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rebas comes back inside. Farah is camped out on the sofa in robe and slippers, hair in curlers. She watches television and sucks on a cigarette.

FARAH

Get rid of hawk head?

REBAS

Not for good and not for long.

FARAH

Tinsel would never give him a shake of her hair.

(Finally looks at Rebas)

She was wild about that handsome...

Rebas has done this bit with Farah before.

REBAS

Not to mention rich...

TOGETHER

Football player.

FARAH

What was his name?

REBAS

Collin Jakes.

FARAH

Right. Collin, yes, Collin.

Rebas strains to pick up his heavy physician's bag, then stops and puts it down with a THUD.

REBAS

Do you know why Eric cuts our lawn?

FARAH

Yeah, sure, you pay him.

PROMOTIONAL VIDEO - CONTINUED

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Home movie footage, BABY TINSEL under the tree Christmas morning opening presents.

FARAH (V.O.)
Tinsel. Because I love Christmas
and the twinkling lights and the
ever so hopeful music.

INT. INTERVIEW SET - FARAH - CONTINUED

Weepy and dramatic.

FARAH (cont'd)
Decorative Christmas tinsel is
passé now. But why? Perhaps
people do not care to pick it up
when it falls from the tree.
Perhaps they did not care to find
it lurking in the dusty corners
long after the glow of the holidays
departed.

EXT. WATERFALL - DAY

Angelic light surrounds actress playing Tinsel, 16, standing
at the top of the rock face. A flowing nightgown drapes like
wings from her outstretched arms.

FARAH (V.O.)
But for me, it is like plucking a
piece of innocence and purity and
light from out of the darkness. I
believe that is why Tinsel remains
with us to this day.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM

The soft-focused, unrecognizable image of Tinsel in her lacy
bed.

SUPER - "Never Ending Tinsel - The End..."

SUPER - "...or is it?"

BACK TO STORY

INT. COFFEE SHOP - TABLE - NIGHT

On a LAPTOP COMPUTER, Hope watches as the image of Tinsel fades to black. In the b.g. a WORKER mops the floor.

Hope closes the laptop computer and removes a headset.

She looks blankly at Mearden, seated on the opposite side of the table. His intense gaze demands to know her thoughts.

HOPE

Wow.

MEARDEN

Yeah.

HOPE

Farah is... wow!

MEARDEN

Yeah, she's out there.

HOPE

You're doing her?

MEARDEN

Well, yes.

HOPE

What kind of creep are you?

MEARDEN

Point taken. I'm risking all my karma here.

HOPE

Really?

MEARDEN

I've studied all sorts of *neo-surf* phenomenon, but man oh, let me tell you something about the power of perfect mind-body coordination!

HOPE

The power of positive thinking?

MEARDEN

Hope, Tinsel has the psi juice, the psychic pow, the morphic resonance rumba, the naturopathy knack, the bioharmonic bam, astral body bay watch, the chakra shimmy, the hypnologic gotcha!

HOPE

I read a couple of your papers in
the Journal of Ouija Board
Research. Have a nice afterlife.

MEARDEN

Okay, then just hear the postulate.

She grudgingly sits back.

MEARDEN (cont'd)

We have a chance here to calibrate
positive belief, magical thinking,
call it what you will with
uncontaminated outcome.

HOPE

This is the biggest crock of shit
I've ever heard. I don't know what
you're up to...

Hope grabs him by his necktie and pulls.

HOPE (cont'd)

...but you're not going to waste my
time. You want my services,
fifteen thousand dollars in this
bank account by Tuesday close of
business.

She stuffs a scrap of paper in his shirt pocket.

MEARDEN

I can get the Board to approve
maybe a thousand a month.

HOPE

New York is expensive. A graduate
degree in psychology is expensive.
Life, today in this world, is very
expensive. Ten thousand, five up-
front. I've got to keep my
apartment.

Mearden produces a prepared contract and slides it with a pen
across the table to Hope.

EXT. DOLOROUS VILLAGE - SIGN - NIGHT

Mearden's beat-up SPORTS CAR crawls by.

INT. MEARDEN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

As Mearden downshifts, he also dims the car's lights. Hope, in the passenger seat, sees the road before her go dark. She turns and gives Mearden an inquisitive look. He cracks a quick smile and turns back to the road.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The garage door opener rattles to life as Mearden's car makes the turn into the driveway.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The lights are bright. The drapes are closed. Rebas and Farah rise from their seats as Mearden enters carrying luggage, Hope in tow.

Farah hugs Hope and is overcome with emotion, tearing up as she breaks the embrace but holds Hope's hands tightly.

FARAH

Hope. Welcome! We need someone just like you working for us.

HOPE

Nice to meet you, Farah.

MEARDEN

Hope, this is our spiritual advisor. He's God's glue that keeps us all together, Father Rebas.

Rebas takes Hope's hand and kisses it.

REBAS

Hope, it's a blessing to have you with us.

Smiles all around. Then awkward silence.

HALLWAY

Hope and Mearden walk. A fluorescent lamp at the far end of the hall lights their way.

TINSEL'S ROOM

With the lights are dimmed, the window curtains closed, the room looks to be an oversized virginal coffin.

Hope enters first and Mearden follows carrying her bags.

HOPE
This must be Tinsel's room.

MEARDEN
That's right.

HOPE
Where's Tinsel?

MEARDEN
Infections are a constant problem. Right now she needed more care than we could give her here. So, for the time being she's in the hospital.

HOPE
Oh.

MEARDEN
Do you remember me telling you that for a specific reason you were the perfect person for this project?

HOPE
You said peculiar. I remember because peculiar seemed a very peculiar word to use.

Mearden smiles.

MEARDEN
Let me show you something.

Mearden hands a photo of Tinsel over the bed to Hope who looks at it and becomes confused.

HOPE
I don't remember this photo. How did you get this?

MEARDEN
Well, how peculiar of you to ask. You see, that's not a photo of you. That's Tinsel.

Hope tosses it onto the bed like it's infected with anthrax.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
 Isn't that amazing?! It's perfect!
 A direct connection between the
 researcher and the subject. Nobody
 gets a chance like this. Their
 innermost thoughts, whispered right
 in your ear!

Hope smolders.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
 What? Is something wrong?

Hope lunges across the bed and grabs the back of Mearden's
 shirt as he flees.

Rebas and Farah arrive at the door to the room, breathless.
 Rebass stops Farah from entering.

FARAH
 Violence upsets me so.

Hope pummels him as he hoists himself up onto the bed.

Hope grabs his privates from behind and drags him back down.

REBAS
 I think it best they work this out
 for themselves.

HALLWAY

Rebas and Farah light up cigarettes, stepping aside to avoid
 Mearden as he comes flying ass first out of the room.

FARAH
 Darling, I do believe your fantasy
 girl has become quite a harsh
 reality.

Farah smiles, pats his cheek and leaves him.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Farah takes a seat, not too close, beside Hope on the sofa.

FARAH
 Hope, would you care to return
 home?

HOPE
 Yes.

FARAH

But then I must insist you return our money.

HOPE

No. I was brought here under false pretenses.

FARAH

Oh, yes, a pretext, like you were telling Mearden when you were stripping for him on the computer.

HOPE

I quit my job. I sublet my apartment. I've got nowhere to go.

FARAH

I always told my Tinsel, there are only two categories of girls, smart girls and stupid girls. Most of my life, I was a stupid girl. I think you're a smart girl. Won't you give this a chance to work?

HOPE

There's just something too sick about this. Do I get a bathroom?

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S BATHROOM - LATER

Hope, taking a hot shower, is in heaven.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - LATER

Hope comes out of her bathroom ready for bed. Mearden can be seen through the interior window to the office.

MEARDEN

(Filtered)

Hi.

HOPE

Hi. Are you okay?

MEARDEN

Not really.

HOPE

Good.

Hope goes to open the curtain.

MEARDEN

Ah, ah! Don't do that. Naughty, naughty. You're in a coma. Remember? We can't let people see you moving about.

HOPE

Some privacy, please?

Mearden lowers a set of mini-blinds on the Office/Bedroom window and sets them closed.

MEARDEN (O.C.)

Good night, Hope.

She climbs into the bed with a book.

HOPE

Shut that off too, Dr. Mordant.
(To herself)
What a...

OFFICE

Mearden is a limping, bruised mess.

Rebas enters just in time to hear...

HOPE (O.C.) (cont'd)

(Filtered)
...dirt ball.

MEARDEN

She loves me.

REBAS

They all do.

He is about to switch off the microphone in Tinsel's room.

HOPE (O.C.)

I wanted you to hear that.

TINSEL'S ROOM

Hope, sitting up in Tinsel's bed, lit only by a reading lamp. She looks around the large coffin of lace. It creeps her out and she buries her face in a pillow.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is spotless now. Hope takes a seat where Rebas has set breakfast. He stops his work at the sink, pours her coffee and sits with her.

HOPE
Thanks. Where are they?

REBAS
Went to visit Tinsel.

Hope eyes the physician's bag on the counter.

HOPE
So, I'm handed off to you?

REBAS
Pretty much, yes. You broke his coccyx.

HOPE
Good. Are you a doctor?

REBAS
No. Are you staying?

HOPE
They still want me?

REBAS
I never said this. We need you.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Hope, in Tinsel's bed, tries to both make herself comfortable and look comatose. She examines several facial expressions in a handheld mirror.

Farah scurries to Hope, all a flutter, puffing on an extra long.

FARAH
Are we ready?

HOPE
The cigarette.

Farah ignores her and keeps puffing.

FARAH
You can move a bit, but only now and then.

(MORE)

FARAH (cont'd)
 You can even open your eyes.
 Tinsel's eyes were wide-open lots.

Hope grabs the cigarette out of Farah's mouth and flicks it to the floor.

HOPE
 You smoke around Tinsel?

Farah picks it up off the dirty linoleum and takes a last drag before crushing it out under her foot.

FARAH
 Your eyes can open, close. You can take a nap, if you can.

She tries to peck Hope on the cheek, but Hope pushes her off.
 From behind the office window Mearden calls in.

MEARDEN
 (Filtered)
 Okay, just an hour or two, Tinsel.
 Let's see how it goes.

Farah is just about out the door.

FARAH
 There's a nice crowd out there waiting to see you, Tinsel.

HOPE
 Great! Just one thing before we start. I want ten percent of the take.

FARAH
 Take?

HOPE
 You heard me.
 (Shouting)
 Mearden, did you hear me? The take!

MEARDEN
 We have a deal, Tinsel!

Hope hops out of bed and starts dancing around the room, singing louder and louder.

HOPE
 I'm awake, and I feel so refreshed!
 Is it Saturday, Mommy?

Farah slams the door shut.

HOPE (cont'd)
Oh, I do hope it is. I've been so
looking forward to collecting
garbage at the falls.

FARAH
Not funny, Missy!

OFFICE

Rebas tries to hold back a smile.

MEARDEN
(To Rebas)
Wipe that George W. smirk off your
face!
(Intercom)
Tinsel, darling, can we talk about
this later?

Mearden and Rebas watch Hope's dancing get more exuberant.
Farah, boiling with anger, looks into the office.

FARAH
Mearden, don't you dare call her
darling!

BEDROOM

Hope pulls the curtains to one side and looks out the window
but Farah quickly pulls them shut.

HOPE
(Laughing)
Shit! What the hell happened to my
garden?

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD

Eric takes a break from mowing the lawn when he catches sight
of the curtains swinging erratically in Tinsel's bedroom
window.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM

Mearden enters.

MEARDEN

Five percent.

Hope sits on the edge of the bed and swings her legs like a playful little girl.

HOPE

Twenty.

Hope plays the precocious child, rubbing herself against Mearden; she's hit a nerve again with Farah.

FARAH

You brazen little hussy!

HOPE

I think I have a pretty good idea about what's going on here.

MEARDEN

Twenty is beginning to sound okay.

FARAH

Mearden!

Hope grabs the curtains again, threatening with a devious smile.

HOPE

Twenty percent. Less than a full cut, since there are four of us now.

FARAH

Ten. And you stay away from Mearden.

Hope moves.

MEARDEN

Fifteen. Give her fifteen!

FARAH

Will you take fifteen?

HOPE

No smoking in Tinsel's room.

Nods of agreement.

HOPE (cont'd)

One night a week in a hotel.

Less enthusiastic nods.

HOPE (cont'd)
I'm there when the money is
counted, and I get my cut in cash.

FARAH
Yes. Anything else? We have a
waiting room filled with pigeons...
pilgrims out there.

HOPE
Transfer the remainder of my
salary.

MEARDEN
No.

Hope puts on a big frown.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
Okay, but do you understand what
this means? You're in!

Hope extends her hand to seal the deal. Mearden extends his
hand and Farah slaps them both down.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - LATER

From the office, Mearden and Farah give the thumbs up. Hope
humors them with the same, then slips into her coma act.

TINSEL VISITORS/HOPE - INTERCUT AS NECESSARY

Hope reacts to some visitors, still as if in her coma, but in
a way they might interpret as her communicating.

PRINCESS WIFE exhales a sad pout as she sits next to the bed.

PRINCESS WIFE
So, now he's got me driving a three
series. All my friends have a Benz
or Lexus, so nice. A three series.
A seven, yes. A five, maybe.
Three. I don't feel safe in it. I
don't.

NANCY & SUE

Two Southeast Asian women, stand on opposite sides of
Tinsel's bed. They start out talking to Tinsel, but...

NANCY

My boyfriend, Sinn, I love him so.
But he not love me. *Tell God he to
love me.*

SUE

But, Nancy, Sinn he so short.

NANCY

No, Sue. Sinn, he five-four.

SUE

Sinn? He no five-four. He five-
two.

NANCY

Sinn, maybe he five-five. Nung, he
short. He five-two.

SUE

My Nung! He no short. He tall.
He five-four.

STRESSED-OUT BUSINESSMAN

BUSINESSMAN

So, I come home and this college
kid has his head between my wife's
legs. I waited outside.

OVERLY MADE-UP ELDERLY LADY

ELDERLY LADY

I adore la mode, couture. Get a
load of this, Tinsel.

She shows off her matching bag and head wrap.

ELDERLY LADY (cont'd)

Tell God, when I die, in heaven I
want to be an absolute babe!

NANCY & SUE

SUE

Sinn he don't love you.

NANCY

Soon he love me. When last time
you saw Nung?

SUE

I see Nung just Sunday. You no see
Sinn since September.

NANCY

September! I see Sinn sooner you
see Nung.

OBESE WOMAN

Sneaking bites of candy.

OBESE WOMAN

I'm doing E-Harmony now. You
wouldn't know, Tinsel, but it's
internet dating. I don't post a
photo. He'll need to get to know
me before he even sees me.

BUSINESSMAN

BUSINESSMAN

They finally finish. And you know
what she says to me? Remember,
Jimmy, you're responsible for your
own happiness.

PRINCESS WIFE

PRINCESS WIFE

Money just seems to slip through my
fingers.

Wagging her wrists heavy with jewelry and fingers covered in
rings.

TWENTY-SOMETHING JERSEY GIRL

JERSEY GIRL

What really makes me feel better is
looking at myself in the mirror for
two or three hours. Did you ever
do that, Tinsel?

BUSINESSMAN

BUSINESSMAN

So, I started paying for sex. It
made me feel a little creepy.

(MORE)

BUSINESSMAN (cont'd)
 But, all things considered, it's a
 very good value.

NANCY & SUE

NANCY
 Sinn come visit me all the time!

SUE
 At the fruit market, that where you
 see Sinn. He not visit you. He
 buy bananas.

NANCY
 Sinn ask me out. After work
 cocktails.

SUE
 You no sip with Sinn. Sinn see you
 say REJECTED!

NANCY
 Nung never know you. Nung see you
 say NO WAY!

PRINCESS WIFE

PRINCESS WIFE
 This is how you fix it, I tell him.
 You buy a new one! It's just a car
 for Christ-sakes! Oh, sorry.

BUSINESSMAN

BUSINESSMAN
 So, the doctor tells me I'm dying.
 But like, he was mean about it.

JERSEY GIRL

JERSEY GIRL
 Our first date and he's already
 starting to bug me. His car has a
 gray interior. Gross.

PRINCESS WIFE

PRINCESS WIFE

I finally get him to come to my sister's birthday party for her youngest daughter. I told him, please, be anybody but yourself.

NANCY & SUE

SUE

Nung know my number.

NANCY

Nung no know you number.

SUE

Sinn send me ring tones.

NANCY

Nung call me plenty, phone sex.

SUE

Lunch order, no phone sex.

BUSINESSMAN

BUSINESSMAN

But there's nothing they can do now. It's in an advanced stage. A lot of great men died of syphilis.

GREEK WOMAN IN BLACK

Praying the rosary in Greek. Farah interrupts.

FARAH

Honey, do you know any English. Everything your saying is just Greek to her.

NANCY & SUE

SUE

Nung, he five-two. Sinn, he so wonderful, he five-four.

Pause, then to herself.

NANCY

He no five-four. He five-two.

ELDERLY WOMAN

ELDERLY WOMAN

And, I'm worth it!

She stands, flashes open her trench coat showing-off every inch of her nearly naked body strapped in trendy bikini with every possible accessory.

FARAH & MEARDEN

At the foot of Tinsel's bed. Mearden wears a broad grin.

FARAH

Okay, Hope. Everyone's gone.

Hope stares at them a bit dazed.

MEARDEN

It's okay.

Hope let's out a monstrous primal scream of frustration.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A studious looking Hope sits at the table her nose in a book.

Rebas sets a plate of dinner in front of her.

HOPE

Thank you.

REBAS

Part of the deal. So, here we are again.

HOPE

This is like living in some kind of space station crack house. Why are you the one who keeps getting stuck with me?

REBAS

I've been meaning to tell you, there's some exercise equipment in the basement.

HOPE

Really?!

REBAS

Farah bought it before she discovered liposuction.

He pulls up a chair.

REBAS (cont'd)
 Alright. Here's the take for the
 afternoon and here's your cut.

Rebas has Hope's money separated with a paper clip.

REBAS (cont'd)
 You wanted to be alone. Trust me
 this time?

Hope nods as she counts the bills.

HOPE
 Forty-seven, fifty. I made more
 waiting tables. So, that's what,
 like something over three hundred
 total?

REBAS
 Three hundred and seventeen dollars
 and sixty-seven cents, but who's
 counting?

HOPE
 Okay, but that was what, fifteen
 people and it took over two hours?

REBAS
 The number of customers is one
 variable, but so is the quality.

Hope give Rebas a skeptical look.

REBAS (cont'd)
 Your first visitors were hand-
 picked to be easy on you. A
 lonely, selfish lot more annoying
 than psychologically destructive.

HOPE
 Destructive?

REBAS
 You're goal is to be a doctor,
 correct?

HOPE
 Yeah.

REBAS
 You want to help people?
 (Hope nods)
 (MORE)

REBAS (cont'd)
 Or is it the money?
 (Hope winches)
 Don't be ashamed, our society is
 all about money. Did you
 understand what Mearden meant when
 he said you're in?

HOPE
 Share of the profits or not, I
 would still be in, wouldn't I?

REBAS
 Grief, desperation, pain, real
 pain, they all pay very well.
 You'll see it and you'll feel it.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Farah arrives home in her mini-van, well dressed and her hair
 in a fresh new hairdo. She's feeling radiant as she grabs a
 number of shopping bags.

ERIC'S FRONT LAWN

Seeing Farah and shutting down his lawn mower.

ERIC
 Mrs. T!

Eric jogs over to her.

FARAH
 Eric, you sweet boy. I do not care
 to be addressed in that fashion.
 The salutation, Mrs. T, has
 connotations you may not be aware
 of but of which I do not cotton to,
 young man.

ERIC
 Okay, Mrs. Tartuffioni. People are
 visiting Tinsel again. Is she
 better? Can I see her?

FARAH
 She still does not fare well.
 Those were some very special
 visitors, Eric. And they really
 didn't get too close to her. I'll
 let you know.

Farah smiles and nods as she retreats for the house.

FARAH (cont'd)
Oh, Eric.

Eric turns in anticipation.

FARAH (cont'd)
You left some huge grass clumps in
the back. Let's get them picked
up, please.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hope peeks through the peeled back stained glass plastic
sheet on the window to see Eric.

ERIC (O.S.)
Tell Tinsel I say hi. Please!

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - LATER

Hope sits in a day chair and indulges Farah in an exhausting
review of her shopping finds.

FARAH
Okay, so that concludes the new
nighties. Now...

Hope holds up what can only be described as a virgin-whore
negligee, white but ever so revealing; it's appalling.

FARAH (cont'd)
...on to some incognito apparel and
Hope's day-off clandestine
sundries.

HOPE
You'd have your daughter, who's in
a coma...

FARAH
She's not in a coma. She's in a
quiescent oneiric state.

Farah shows off a series of the sexy clothes, each more
offensive to Hope than the last.

HOPE
So, you think it's appropriate for
your daughter in her quiescent
oneiric state to be seen by
hundreds of people wearing just
this?

FARAH

So, you don't think it's to Tinsel's benefit to be desired? Let me tell you, sweetie, your web cam performance... wow!!! I was embarrassed for you. But you know what? Real money is printed with a marriage license.

HOPE

Well, then, who's the cute geek with the big beak?

FARAH

What? Oh. Eric.

HOPE

Who's Eric?

FARAH

Nobody. Lives next door. Had such a crush on Tinsel.

HOPE

Before the accident?

FARAH

Well, yes. Now, just because you can't be looking like Tinsel when you're in public that doesn't mean you can't look just fabulous.

Farah plops a "big hair" wig on Hope.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Hope has come to do some info snacking on the sly, so she keeps her eyes and ears open as she types in a search on Mearden's computer:

"Father Thomas Rebas, Little Falls, NJ"

She peruses a newspaper story.

INSERT - NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE HEADLINE

"CHARGES DROPPED IN CHURCH SEX ABUSE CASE"

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Rebas and Hope eat dinner at the table.

HOPE
Are you a pedophile?

REBAS
Well, how refreshingly blunt. No. I'm worse. I turned a blind eye. I got rid of the problem. He was sent elsewhere. Fresh meat; no warning.

Rebas has lost his appetite. He scrapes a nearly full plate into a garbage can. Hope shrugs with a sly smile.

HOPE
Hey, what's in the bag?

REBAS
Nothing really. May I give you some advice? Don't wait until you get to the place where I am now.

HOPE
What place is that?

REBAS
The place where there are many regrets, few options and redemption becomes as necessary as sleep.

Hope rolls her eyes and laughs it off. Giving up, Rebas pulls the physician's bag off the counter and leaves.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Through the interior window to Tinsel's room, Mearden and Farah watch Hope performing as Tinsel.

Hope seems to be twitching, which is distracting a BALD MAN from his prayers.

BALD MAN
(Filtered)
So, Darlene, it's been three years since you passed on now.

TINSEL'S ROOM

BALD MAN (cont'd)
Anyways, do you remember Vera? You must. Vera, she was your best friend.

(MORE)

BALD MAN (cont'd)
Well, me and her have been... how
can I put this? Keeping company,
and...

Hope twitches. The Bald Man stops, startled.

BALD MAN (cont'd)
Oh, no. Don't bring that up again.
It was twenty-five years ago, for
Christ sakes!

OFFICE

Hope twitches and then nearly jumps. Mearden and Farah shoot
each other a concerned look.

BALD MAN (cont'd)
(Filtered)
You never stop, do you? You keep
bringing it up and bringing it up!
It was a bachelor party!

MEARDEN
(To Farah)
Get him out of there.

TINSEL'S ROOM

BALD MAN
How many times do we have to go
over this? I didn't go near her!

Farah escorts the Bald Man out closing the door behind her.

MEARDEN
(Filtered)
What's wrong?

HOPE
I don't know. I'm having these
little tingles.

OFFICE

MEARDEN
Can you do a few more?

Farah steps back in.

FARAH
What's wrong?

Mearden shrugs. Farah leaves and Mearden brings up the porno he was watching before she came in.

HOPE
(Filtered)
Yeah. Maybe I've just been lying
here too long.

TINSEL'S ROOM

THREE WOMEN enter and, one by one, have a moment with Hope.

PIOUS WOMAN
I just pray that you get better.

Another woman takes her turn.

FUNNY WOMAN
Tinsel, I need some help with my
daughter. I'm afraid she may be
considering sexual activity. Oh,
who the hell am I kidding, she's a
total slut.

On Hope's forehead a drop of blood has formed.

FUNNY WOMAN (cont'd)
I don't know what to do. Nothing
but a miracle is going to change
her. So, here I am.

She gives up, and the next visitor takes her place. The drop of blood on Hope's forehead is now running.

WORRIED WOMAN
Please bring my son home safe...

Worried Woman sees the blood, stops cold and stands.

WORRIED WOMAN (cont'd)
It's the stigmata!

The other women scream.

PIOUS WOMAN
Her hands...

OFFICE

Mearden looks up from his Internet pornography to see the women gesticulating wildly through the interior window to Tinsel's room. He flips a switch to hear what's going on.

PIOUS WOMAN (cont'd)
 (Filter)
It's on her hands too!

 FUNNY WOMAN
 (Filter)
Check her feet! Check her feet!

Mearden runs out of the office to rescue Hope.

TINSEL'S ROOM

Worried Woman pulls off the linens from the bottom of Hope's bed.

 WORRIED WOMAN
They're bleeding too!

More screams. Mearden rushes in and quickly ushers the women out of the room.

 MEARDEN
Okay, I need you all to leave now.

 PIOUS WOMAN
I'm so excited. I've got to get home and tell my husband.

 MEARDEN
Thank you. Come again soon!

Once they leave he slams the door and closes the curtains.

 MEARDEN (cont'd)
Clear!

Hope bounces out of the bed, takes a look at herself and starts to scream. Mearden covers her mouth.

 MEARDEN (cont'd)
It's okay.

Hope hyperventilates as she opens the bathroom door to examine herself in a full length mirror.

 MEARDEN (cont'd)
This is unbelievable! You've obviously been somehow transformed.

Hope raises her nightgown to examine her legs; she's bleeding in several places.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
Are you religious at all?

Hope continues her self-examination and finds something on her leg she needs to look at closer.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
Hope, this is going to make us both famous! Whatever the explanation, situational hypnotic suggestion, self-delusion or even bona fide possession, you have the stigmata!

Hope has something in her fingers and turns to him furious.

HOPE
I don't have the stigmata you quack!

She shoves her hand in Mearden's face holding something between her fingers.

HOPE (cont'd)
I have bedbugs!

She squeezes her fingers popping the bug and spraying blood over Mearden's face. Hope storms to the bathroom and slams the door behind her.

MEARDEN
You're not HIV positive, are you?

FARAH (O.C.)
Who was in that bed?

Mearden cringes and turns with an innocent look to Farah.

FARAH (cont'd)
You went cruising for pros again!

Farah pops him with an upper cut to the chin and he goes down.

FARAH (cont'd)
(Yelling)
Father Rebas, get in here!

Rebas sticks his head in.

FARAH (cont'd)
Be a dear and arrange some medical care for the good doctor.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Hope finishes a strenuous workout. She paces back and forth in front of the large white freezer chest to cool down.

On top of the freezer, a foam mattress is now a makeshift bed.

Hope notices that the freezer is padlocked, checks the bolt. It's locked.

She jumps up and sits on her temporary bed on top of the freezer chest. Bored, she surveys her surroundings and spots something out-of-place in the ceiling joist.

She stands on the freezer and removes a plastic bag containing a DIAPHRAGM COMPACT and CONTRACEPTIVE JELLY.

HOPE

Tinsel, you hot little bitch!

Looking again at the ceiling joist, she removes a brightly colored DIARY, the clasp type popular with teenage girls. After handling it for a moment, she decides to return it to its hiding place.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET - DAY

Rebas steps out of his late model Cadillac with two large bags of deli.

He is immediately ambushed by a pack of reporters and TV crews shouting questions about Tinsel's condition and the stigmata event.

REBAS

Good morning!

Rebas raises his hands holding the bags, the press corps quiets.

REBAS (cont'd)

You were expected. May I suggest we have a civilized chat on the back patio? Coffee and bagels will be served.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The curtains are drawn and Hope readies herself in bed. Standing before the bathroom door mirror, Farah applies make-up.

FARAH

You look pale. I fear you are going to photograph poorly.

HOPE

I look real. Like someone who is bedridden in a coma.

FARAH

I want Tinsel to look her best.

HOPE

Okay, but just a little.

Farah goes to work on Hope's face.

FARAH

Talking to you, looking at you, it hurts, and even though it's pretend, sometimes I forget and it's like having Tinsel back. But then, you do not treat me like the mother I am who loves you.

Farah turns Hope's head, examining.

FARAH (cont'd)

Oh! You're going to get to show your good side.

HOPE

Fuck me. This better make us a shit load of money.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - PATIO - CONTINUOUS

The press corps, now seated in folding chairs are a polite audience, sipping coffee and eating bagels. Mearden and Rebas stand ready to field questions. MOE SEGALMAN, 50, as hardboiled as a suburban reporter can get, looking clownish and in suspenders and a wide tie, takes the lead.

MOE

Moe Segalman, Passaic Courier. More than one eyewitness claims to have seen Tinsel spontaneously have an occurrence of stigmatic bleeding. Dr. Mordant, how do you account for this?

MEARDEN

We don't have a medical explanation for it.

(MORE)

MEARDEN (cont'd)
The event is over and Tinsel shows
no marks or ill effects.

TV REPORTER
Father Rebas was this a trick?

REBAS
Though all miracles are in the eyes
of the beholder... No. It was no
trick.

MOE
Was it Tinsel's blood?

MEARDEN
It is a scientific certainty that
it was the blood of the young
woman...

Mearden points to Tinsel's room.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
...lying in that bed.

Mearden holds up a vial of blood. Cameras get the shot.

Farah opens the curtains allowing the reporters a view into
Tinsel's room. She smiles, blows kisses and waves.

The reporters rush the set of window doors to photograph
"Tinsel."

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE

Mearden paces as he scrutinizes Hope performing as Tinsel
through the interior window to the bedroom.

TINSEL'S ROOM

With the curtains open, Hope looks out the window doors. Her
first visitors, an ELDERLY COUPLE, kneel to pray at Tinsel's
bedside.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Hope's POV across the patio, to the break in the stockade
fence.

EXT. ERIC'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Eric mowing his backyard, looks away from where he's going and stares toward Tinsel.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A SAD OLD MAN stands beside Hope for his short moment with her.

A set of LED lights: GREEN switches to RED. The Sad Old Man sees this and takes his leave.

HALLWAY NEAR TINSEL'S BEDROOM DOOR

Another set of LED lights: mounted on the doorframe switch from RED to GREEN, signaling a MOTHER and her DAUGHTER to enter.

Behind them is a long line of VISITORS that stretches down the hallway to the...

LIVING ROOM

The living room is a beehive of VISITOR activity.

Forms are being filled out on clipboards.

Farah is in her glory greeting those who have come to visit Tinsel.

Rebas controls the front door. A SERIES of VISITORS who enter hand him envelopes which he discreetly deposits in a LOCK BOX labeled "DONATIONS."

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT WALKWAY

The line of waiting VISITORS continues out the front door of the house and down the walk.

STREET

TWO clean-cut VALET BOYS wearing Tinsel T-shirts greet cars as they approach the house, opening doors for the new arrivals, and driving the cars off to be parked.

Another VALET BOY pulls up with an EXPENSIVE CAR for departing guests, a well-dressed YUPPIE and his WIFE. The Valet Boy is palmed a twenty-dollar tip.

Down the street, CARS carrying Tinsel visitors continue to arrive forming a long line along the curbside.

Across the street...

NEIGHBOR'S FRONT YARD

A WORKING-CLASS GUY, wearing his favorite rock and roll T-shirt, pushes a heavy, old lawn mower on this hot summer day. He looks over to the Tartuffioni house activity and shakes his head in disbelief.

He spots Father Rebas in the TARTUFFIONI front yard and hustles toward him.

WORKING-CLASS GUY
Hey, Father! Can I have a word?

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Near the door to Tinsel's room. A well-dressed gangster, PROLIX, 29, adorned in heavy gold chains, is the last person waiting his turn to see Tinsel.

Mearden steps out of the office and confronts him. They look each other over.

MEARDEN
You carrying?

PROLIX
Listen to the white boy. Straight up, don't mean no harm here.

Mearden holds out his hand.

MEARDEN
You really want to see her?

Prolix opens his jacket and Mearden removes a 9 mm pistol. The LED light has turned GREEN. Mearden gives him the nod to go in.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Prolix looks over Hope, his tough guy act intact seeing Mearden watching through the window.

PROLIX
I gots to give you you props, you a fine-looking girl.

He pulls up a chair next to the bed and sits with his back toward Mearden. His cool veneer quickly turns to heaving desperation.

PROLIX (cont'd)

I passed some heavy green to the God man for you show. You understand me? I'm jammed, baby, real jammed. Not my fault, but it is my problem. Corner kid ran out with a lot of goods. If I don't show, Bruno gonna tap me dead. Or worse, he may take out my kid sis Emma.

Prolix cries, begging now.

PROLIX (cont'd)

Me or her. And she's flying straight and low. Not fair. You my last hope. If you could have deus ex machina me, things be different.

Prolix sees a tear fall across Hope's cheek. He smiles, relieved.

PROLIX (cont'd)

Thank you, Tinsel. Thank you so much. You all right. You sleep tight.

HALLWAY

Mearden hands Prolix back his pistol. Prolix secures the gun and leaves.

PROLIX (cont'd)

That's love. That's pure love right in there.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rebas enters with the Donation Box.

Rebas dumps the box out on the kitchen table as Mearden, Farah and Hope look on. To their delight it yields a pile of cash, checks and envelopes fat with money. Nothing but smiles all around.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Eric sneaks up to the window-doors at Tinsel's room and tries the handle. It's locked.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hope sits in bed reading. She hears the window door latch RATTLE and springs up to investigate.

INTERCUT WITH EXTERIOR OF TINSEL'S ROOM DOOR AS NECESSARY

Eric has come prepared with a thin metal slim jim and goes to work on the door latch.

Hope parts the drapes just enough to see Eric and hustles back into bed, lies down, closes her eyes and waits for him.

Eric having no success jimmying open the door latch.

Hope waits listening to the RATTLING latch as Eric works to get in...

More jimmy work noise, still nothing...

Hope realizes this is taking way too long.

HOPE

Damn it. Get in here.

Finally, she slips out of bed, reaches her fingers through the drapes crease, releases the lock on the door latch and quickly hops back in bed.

The lock opens for Eric, success!

He peeks inside Tinsel's room and...

TINSEL'S ROOM

...checks to see that nobody is in the office through the adjoining window.

Eric slides inside and goes to Hope's bedside.

ERIC

I cut the grass today.

(Pause)

I still miss you.

He strokes her forehead lightly and then moves her hair back from the side of her head.

As he bends over to kiss her lips, he sees something on Hope's neck. Confused, he backs off and leaves the room.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Working-class Guy sits proudly atop a gleaming new garden tractor pulling a trailer that seats FOUR SENIOR CITIZENS.

SIGN

"TINSEL WATERFALL TOUR \$5"

TRACTOR

Putt-putts its way down the woods path.

TINSEL'S ROOM - WINDOW DOORS

Hope fast asleep and snoring. VISITORS at her bedside.

BACKYARD

Eric at the fence staring at Hope's room.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Hope on treadmill, bored, has a thought and stops the machine.

Hope mounts freezer chest and snatches the DIARY from its hiding place.

Back on the treadmill, she flips through mostly blank pages, occasionally finding some notations.

INSERT - DIARY PAGES

Doodle hearts, stars, "Eric" and various notations of time, i.e. "10:30" etc.

Pages flip to a long handwritten entry.

HOPE

Reads the diary while she walks.

EXT. MEGA SHOPPING COMPLEX - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Major commercial suburban sprawl at its worst.

INT. MEARDEN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Mearden drives but he can't take his eyes off Hope who is dressed in the sexy clothes and wig Farah provided.

HOPE

The road. Look at the road. Don't forget your driving.

Checking her look in the visor mirror.

HOPE (cont'd)

Did she make me look like a whore, or what?

MEARDEN

On Park Avenue, yeah. In New Jersey, no.

HOPE

According to Farah, I'm suppose to dress like this and not get any action. What is that? A recipe for acute latent female schizophrenia?

EXT. HOTEL - LOBBY DROP-OFF - CONTINUOUS

Mearden's car pulls up to the front of the hotel.

INT./EXT. MEARDEN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Hope collects her things from the back seat.

MEARDEN

The multiplex is right there, there's a nightclub over that way, and we passed the mall and outlet center on the way in. Phone calls and mini-bar are on your dime.

She opens the door. He gently stops her.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
Hey, can we be friends?

HOPE
Can you stop being an oversexed
jerk?

MEARDEN
No.

HOPE
Look, this has turned into a pretty
good deal for me.

MEARDEN
Well, good, good.

HOPE
I've actually been thinking. We
might be able to spice up the act a
bit.

MEARDEN
Well, Hope Parsimony, I'm starting
to see you in a whole different
light.

She gives him a knowing look and gets out of the car.

He watches her walk to the hotel entrance, stunning!

INT. HOTEL - LOBBY - AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINE - DAY

Hope seals a cash deposit in an envelope, the ATM sucks it up
and she checks her balance.

ON ATM SCREEN

"AVAILABLE BALANCE: \$14,382."

"ON DEPOSIT BALANCE: \$16,975"

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT WALKWAY - DAY

Farah opens a roadside mailbox, collects the mail and heads
back for the house. Eric runs over to her.

ERIC
Mrs. Tartuffioni, okay if I visit
Tinsel?

FARAH

Eric, may I be completely honest
with you?

(Eric shrugs)

There's not a reason in God's great
plan for you to ever see Tinsel
anymore if there ever was, which I
doubt.

She turns her back on him, climbs the stoop steps and enters
the house.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A mostly WHITE CROWD, young, energetic and perhaps a bit
pretentious. The milieu is hedonistic fantasy.

BAR

Hope fits right in dressed in a little black cocktail dress.
She orders a drink by shouting in the ear of a PUNKETTE
bartender.

Getting her drink, Hope pays with a hundred dollar bill,
tipping big. Punkette whispers into Hope's ear and Hope nods
approval.

Punkette introduces Hope to a GROUP OF REGULARS at a nearby
table.

IN THE CROWD

Prolix sticks out in this field of white, but he's obviously
an insider. He glad hands club patrons who are his
customers. They're so happy to see him they sing his name.

PROLIX' CUSTOMER

Proooo-licks!

He whispers secret jokes in the ears of those he meets. They
get big laughs.

Looking closer we see his hands are busy elsewhere. Like a
practiced magician he spirits packets of pills and powders
into pockets as he expertly palms payments.

TABLE

Hope and the Group down a tray of shots with a cheer.

BAR

Punkette has a beer ready for Prolix as he approaches the bar.

He notices Hope. He points her out to Punkette, who shrugs an "I don't know" and then screams over the MUSIC.

PUNKETTE

Visiting.

Punkette rubs her thumb and fingers together.

PUNKETTE (cont'd)

Money.

A fetching woman, BEAUTY, greets Prolix with a caress to his face.

DANCE FLOOR

Hope dances with a HANDSOME GUY.

Prolix brings Beauty to the dance floor. Seeing Hope again he does a puzzled double take.

Hope spots Prolix looking at her. She turns away to leave the dance floor, stranding Handsome Guy.

Prolix follows Hope, much to the chagrin of Beauty.

BRUNO, 29, Prolix's nemesis, dressed in all black, weaves through the dance floor like a ghost.

Hope and Bruno approach each other and exchange a quick glance.

Hope turns to watch Bruno after he glides by her. A REVOLVER appears in his hand from down his sleeve. To Hope, it looks as if he snatched the gun out of thin air.

Prolix works his way through the crowd, his eyes on Hope.

Bruno steps in front of Prolix.

Two quick SHOTS from Bruno's gun take down Prolix.

Hope sees Prolix go down and dives for cover.

A SCREAMING MOB rushes to escape.

Bruno, his back to the crowd, fires TWO SHOTS shattering MIRRORS before slamming his way through a nearby FIRE EXIT crash door.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Behind a police barricade, a couple of UNIFORMED COPS have corralled the CLUB'S PATRONS to be interviewed.

Hope is next up. And confidently struts over to DETECTIVE TONY STENDER, 33, crew-cut rookie gold shield.

Stender eyes Hope's ID and then her.

HOPE

It's a wig.

She shifts it showing her blond hair.

STENDER

Did you see the shooter?

HOPE

I don't think so.

STENDER

Did you know the victim?

HOPE

I don't think so.

STENDER

Talk to him?

HOPE

No. Absolutely not.

STENDER

Buy from him?

HOPE

Nope.

STENDER

Brooklyn? Where are you staying?

Hope points to the hotel.

STENDER (cont'd)

Visiting? Friends? Family?

HOPE

Job interview.

STENDER

Where?

HOPE

Van Sant Pharmaceuticals.

STENDER

Did you get it?

HOPE

My appointment's tomorrow.

This makes sense, so he hands her back her ID.

STENDER

Welcome to New Jersey. Here's my card if you think of anything that might help.

She takes the card and walks off.

STENDER (cont'd)

Good luck tomorrow.

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

As Stender approaches a curtained MEDICAL BAY, a CRASH TEAM rushes Prolix out on a stretcher.

STENDER

Doctor! The EMTs said he was stable!

A SURGEON, bloody from the emergency procedures, turns to Stender.

SURGEON

Shit happens, Tony. You want words? It maybe now or never.

Stender catches up to CRASH TEAM and gets in Prolix' face.

STENDER

Give me something kid.

PROLIX

Coma girl.

The Crash Team slams through swinging doors to a Surgery Suite leaving Stender behind.

Stender throws his hands up in the air, and slaps them down.

STENDER

What the...?

Stender looks into the surgery suite, then plops himself down onto a set of hallway waiting chairs.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET - DAY

Early morning. A black SEDAN parks in front of the house.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

A man's finger held on the doorbell button.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Rebas, in a robe and half asleep, opens the door to find two black suit officials, XANG and SALADO, sporting PLASTIC ID tags on their lapels.

XANG

Mr. Tartuffioni?

REBAS

No, I'm Father Rebas. There is no Mr. Tartuffioni. May I help you?

SALADO

We're with the New Jersey Department of the Treasury. May we come in?

Rebas frowns and opens the door to them.

REBAS

I suppose you would like to see the books?

XANG

We can start there.

EXT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

A bleary-eyed Stender forces himself out into the early morning light. He take a last bitter sip, crushes a Styrofoam coffee cup and tosses it in a trash can.

Moe Segalman crashes out the doors to catch up to him.

MOE
Hey. Are you Detective Stender?

STENDER
Yeah.

MOE
You're on the nightclub shooting,
right?

STENDER
Murder. He just died. You got
something?

MOE
No. I'm Moe Segalman, Passaic
Courier.

STENDER
Moe, give me a call in the
morning... In a few hours, okay?

MOE
Sure. But can't you at least round
this out for me?

STENDER
You know what I know.

MOE
Which is? I need verification.

STENDER
Off the record.

Moe shrugs.

STENDER (cont'd)
Four shots. Prolix took two.

MOE
Paul Leckie?

STENDER
Right, Paul Leckie. We've got no
witnesses that could make an ID, no
weapon, no shell casings, and no
other hard evidence to go on.
Frankly, Moe, we're stumped.

MOE
Thanks Detective.

STENDER

Sorry I couldn't give you more.

MOE

That's all I need for a story.

EXT. MEGA SHOPPING COMPLEX - ACCESS ROAD - AMBULANCE - DAY

An Ambulance cuts and weaves its way through traffic, lights flashing and siren blaring.

INT. HOTEL - HOPE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

In bed, Hope wakes with a scream as her room door slams open and the TWO UNIFORMED EMTs rush toward her.

The male EMT holds her down and the female EMT sticks a hypodermic in her buttock.

EXT. HOTEL - LOBBY DROP-OFF - LATER

The EMTs exit the hotel pushing Hope on a stretcher.

Hope is strapped tight. Her eyes roll as she begins to lose consciousness.

Before going under completely, Hope focuses her eyes to see that Mearden and Farah are the EMTs. They push her into the rear of the ambulance as she blacks out.

INT. POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

Stender doesn't have time to put his coffee down before his boss, POLICE CHIEF HANSON, 50s, is on his back.

HANSON

Stender! In here.

CHIEF'S OFFICE

Stender stands before a closed door. The Chief tosses the PASSAIC COURIER on the desk for Stender to see.

INSERT - FRONT PAGE HEADLINE

"POLICE STUMPED IN NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING"

BACK TO SCENE

HANSON (cont'd)

"We've got no witnesses that could make an ID, no weapon, no shell casings, and no other hard evidence to go on. Frankly, we're stumped." Is this guy quoting you correctly?

STENDER

It was off the record.

HANSON

Off the record?

Hanson lays heavy hands on Stender's shoulders.

HANSON (cont'd)

Son, "off the record" only works in the movies. Please, don't make me sorry I promoted you. Find that shooter.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET - DAY

Mearden backs the Ambulance up to the garage.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Hope, in bed, regains enough consciousness to see the serious looks of the state officials Xang and Salado as they tower over her.

Mearden and Farah, now in their civilian attire, come into view and smile at her lovingly.

She notices an INTRAVENOUS TUBE AND NEEDLE taped to her arm before falling back into unconsciousness.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Rebas is preparing breakfast at the counter when Hope enters.

HOPE

Who were they?

REBAS

And a good morning to you too. I made you breakfast.

Hope takes a seat at the table.

HOPE

Good morning. Sorry. Who the fuck were they?

Rebas puts coffee and eggs in front of Hope.

REBAS

New Jersey treasury agents. We're organized as a charity. To do good works. Pay for Tinsel's medical expenses. Last year we sent Bibles to starving people in Africa. You get the idea.

HOPE

Why didn't you send them food?

He joins her at the table with his coffee.

REBAS

It was a joke. We didn't send them anything. The authorities come by now and then to make sure everything's on the up and up.

HOPE

An ambulance? And why did they need to drug me?

REBAS

Precaution. It would be in bad taste but not unheard of for one of those investigators to inflict a bit of pain.

HOPE

Why not just tell them Tinsel's in the hospital? Isn't Tinsel in the hospital?

REBAS

With hundreds of people coming here to visit her?

HOPE

This is getting complicated.

REBAS

My child, this is not complicated. This is very serious business.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The Farah, Rebas, Mearden and Hope meet around the kitchen table. A flip-chart pad is set up on an easel.

HOPE

We can create a psychographic cross reference, donations received correlated with key words and phrases from the donors' correspondence. Cluster analysis will then be able to predict, among those requesting visits with Tinsel, which will have the highest probability of cash value outcome.

MEARDEN

Impressive.

FARAH

This is way beyond me, but it sounds good.

REBAS

You've certainly given this some effort, Hope.

MEARDEN

Okay, let's move on to ancillary revenue streams.

Hope stands.

HOPE

Here it is, one word: crystals.

FARAH

A Tinsel crystal collection! I love it.

REBAS

Miraculous oil. It could ooze from the walls or drip off the dream catchers.

Mearden shoots Rebas a look.

MEARDEN

Sounds a bit too Catholic, Padre. We made a marketing decision to go ecumenical with Tinsel and it has served us very well.

REBAS

Hokum, twaddle and hooey have never failed with our market before.

Rebas shoots Hope a serious glare. Hope shoots back a malevolent look.

HOPE

Okay. Let's run with that. Maybe we should be taking what now looks like old hat Christian shtick and repackaging it in a more user friendly, mega, pandemic-geo-religious, politically neutral, New Age wrapping.

MEARDEN

Yes! That's it.

FARAH

A new age of miracles!

Rebas gives Hope the raised eyebrows and forced smile of fatherly disappointment.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE - LATER

Hope is busy working at the computer. Rebas appears.

REBAS

I brought you a coffee.

He places it on the desk.

HOPE

Thanks.

Rebas indicates a chair.

REBAS

May I?

HOPE

Okay.

REBAS

May I ask you a question?

HOPE

Sure.

REBAS

How does this all end up?

Hope gives him a puzzled look.

HOPE
This? This whole thing?

Rebas nods.

HOPE (cont'd)
When Tinsel comes back. When I'm
tired of it, I guess.

REBAS
Oh. I wonder if that's true.

Rebas wears a tight-lipped smile as he leaves.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD

A beautiful sunny day and the Tinsel visitation session this afternoon has the look and feel of an elegant garden party, Farah playing the social butterfly.

The Tractor Tour is loading passengers when...

Eric blasts through the gap in the fence from his backyard, dragged behind a self-propelled lawn mower gone haywire.

Visitors scream as a terrified Eric tries his best to control the dangerous piece of equipment.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Visitors turn to watch the backyard antics allowing Hope to surreptitiously watch Eric's wild swings through the screaming crowd.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

The lawn mower drags Eric everywhere. Somehow, it even launches over low shrubs and patio furniture.

The lawn mower targets Farah. Eric struggles to shift its direction to no avail, his arm frantically waving at Farah to move out of the way.

Farah runs for her life, the lawn mower in hot pursuit.

Farah gets a high heel caught and crashes to the lawn.

Eric trips and loses hold of the maniac machine.

Farah crawls crab-like backward trying to get away but the mower screams toward her and finally...

Lifts off the ground and flies over Farah, up, up, and away!

Eric's grin is as wide as the Jersey Turnpike.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Hope can no longer hold in her hysterics and a snorted guffaw sneaks out.

Concerned, her Visitors turn to look at her.

Hope rolls her eyes back into her head, fills her mouth with a thick tongue and contorts her face.

The Visitors, satisfied that nothing is unusual about "Tinsel" go back to gawking at the lawn mower outside.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Farah stumbles to her feet, a mad woman screaming toward Eric.

Eric just smiles as he works the Radio Control unit of the Sky Cutter model lawn mower airplane.

The startled crowd flees as the mower makes a quick turn and swoops back down toward the party.

Just as Farah is about to catch up to Eric the Sky Cutter roars up behind her and snips her big hair, which turns out to be a wig, off her head.

The crowd moans. Farah's not very pretty bald.

EXT. PATERSON, NJ - DAY - ESTABLISHING

From the distance, beautiful brick buildings of a bygone era of wealth.

EXT. PATERSON, NJ - MARKET STREET - DAY

The street scene is a not-so-thriving predominately African American community. A CORNER KID sells a bag of drugs in the littered street. A POLICE CAR cruises by, windows sealed. Disaffected YOUNG BLACK MEN with little but time on their hands loiter nearby. SENIOR CITIZENS sit with vacant stares watching the world go by.

UNMARKED POLICE CAR

Stender gets out of his car, goes to an apartment building entrance and searches the buzzer buttons.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

Stender knocks on an apartment door. From inside NORMA LECKIE, 50s, Prolix's mother, answers.

NORMA (O.C.)
Who is it?

STENDER
Detective Stender, Mrs. Leckie,
Paterson Police.

INT. LECKIE APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stender and Norma face each other across the kitchen table. She reeks of anger and impatience.

STENDER
Did you know Prolix was dealing
drugs?

NORMA
His name was Paul, Detective. Paul
Leckie.

STENDER
Sorry.

NORMA
Of course I knew. He lived here
with me. Here's a little secret,
drug dealer is just like any
another job. It doesn't pay that
well unless you're the top dog.

STENDER
Right. Yeah, of course. I'm going
to get the guy that did this, Mrs.
Leckie.

NORMA
Bruno? Yeah, right.

STENDER
Who's Bruno?

NORMA

His boss. The guy that killed him.

STENDER

How do you know that?

NORMA

Everybody knows that, Detective. Emma, his sister, told me he was left holding the bag when some stupid kid ran off with a lot of stash.

STENDER

Can anyone substantiate this?

NORMA

Man, you are as dumb as a box of rocks.

STENDER

Mrs. Leckie, I'm just trying to do my job.

NORMA

Nobody, not in their right mind, is going to rat on Bruno.

STENDER

Thank you, Mrs. Leckie, thank you.
(Stopping)
Did Paul ever mention a coma girl to you?

NORMA

Do you read the papers?

STENDER

I been told I should catch up on that.

She searches a pile newsprint, finds what she's looking for and tosses it toward him.

NORMA

Stupidest thing. The coma girl who answers prayers! Ha! Give me a break. His sister told me that Paul believed this bull crap.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

A hot buggy night. Eric wipes sweat from his face and neck as he approaches Tinsel's bedroom door, his slim jim at the ready. To his surprise the door is unlocked, so he slips inside.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Fast asleep, Hope snores loudly.

Eric goes to her side and gazes in wonder, fitting his words between her breathy snorts and pops.

ERIC

The last time I was here, I didn't
kiss you good night. Sorry. I
hadn't seen you in a while and I
was confused.

He strokes her forehead lightly and bends over to kiss her. His lips lightly brush hers and he closes his eyes to let the kiss linger.

When he opens his eyes he finds Hope looking at him, her face soft and kind.

This can't be, but he's in another world and doesn't move.

Hope's hand touches his face and very gently covers his mouth with her fingers.

She brings her mouth up to his ear.

ERIC gazes at the nape of her neck, just behind her ear, a spot usually covered by her hair.

Again, a flash of recognition and confusion jolts Eric. He turns sad and his eyes squeeze back tears.

HOPE

Take me somewhere we can talk.

Eric nods, takes Hope's hand and leads her from the bed.

EXT. WOODS PATH - NIGHT

Eric and Hope run hand-in-hand, ghostly shadows between the trees in the moonlight.

EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT

Eric skids to a stop. It's as if he's taken on his human shell again. He looks distant, an average young man in sneakers, jeans and a T-shirt. Tears well in his eyes as he stands facing Hope.

He touches quickly behind her ear like a child afraid of getting burned.

ERIC

Tinsel had a birthmark back here.
You're not Tinsel. Where is she?

HOPE

Don't get upset. She's in the
hospital.

ERIC

The hospital? Why?

HOPE

Like always, she's got an
infection.

ERIC

She never goes to the hospital.
Who told you that?

HOPE

They did.

ERIC

(Distraught)

They're lying or you're lying!
What's going on? Who are you!
Tell me, now!

HOPE

Okay, okay. My name is Hope. I
never knew Tinsel.

ERIC

What did they do with her!?

Hope becomes confused and upset.

HOPE

Do with her? I don't know. Eric,
I really don't know. Please, stop
yelling. She must be somewhere.

ERIC
Why should I believe you? Who the
fuck are you?

HOPE
I'm just working for them.

Eric marches off.

HOPE (cont'd)
Where are you going?

Hope runs after him.

HOPE (cont'd)
Eric, don't get me in trouble,
please. You don't even know me.

ERIC
I'll think about it.

He walks off.

HOPE
Farah hates you. I'll help you
find Tinsel.

He stops.

HOPE (cont'd)
We need each other, Eric.

He turns to her.

HOPE (cont'd)
There's something I need to tell
you.

He comes back to her.

HOPE (cont'd)
There's a freezer chest in the
basement. It's padlocked.

EXT. PATERSON NJ - MARKET STREET - DAY

EMMA LECKIE, Prolix's little sister, 19, dressed for success,
wears a determined look as she exits the apartment building.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Stender sits across from a confident Bruno who checks his expensive watch.

STENDER

That money he owed you. That's a motive a jury will buy into big time.

BRUNO

Like I been saying, No lo sé. Tony, I've given you half my day. I'm a busy man. Am I under arrest or not? The newspaper says you got nothing.

Stender opens the door for him.

STENDER

Don't believe everything you read in the papers.

Bruno rolls his eyes, "whatever."

EXT. SUBURBAN HIGHWAY - BUS STOP - DAY

At the Dolorous Village welcome sign a public bus stops and then pulls away. Emma is left behind. She checks a scrap of paper, looks around to get her bearings and heads off.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MEARDEN'S CAR - DAY

Farah beside him in the passenger seat, Mearden backs the car out of the driveway.

EXT. ERIC'S FRONT YARD - DAY

Eric mows the lawn and waves and gives a big smile to Farah and Mearden as their car passes by on the street. He does an exaggerated impression of the lawn mower as out of control to razz Farah.

STREET - MEARDEN'S CAR

Passing Eric, Farah fumes and gives Eric the middle finger.

ERIC

Eric smiles.

SIDEWALK

Emma checks the address and makes her way up the walk to the Tartuffioni front door.

Emma is about to push the doorbell button, but then decides to just HAMMER on the door with her fist.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rebas hears Emma's HAMMERING. Hope pokes her head into the room from the kitchen and exchanges a look with Rebass.

Rebas peels back the plastic stained glass to see Emma.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Rebas opens the door.

REBAS

Are you okay? Is something wrong?

EMMA

My brother came here for help from the coma girl. May I come in?

Rebas opens the door to her.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Emma enters, wary of her surroundings.

REBAS

Please, sit down.

Emma does.

REBAS (cont'd)

Can I get you something?

KITCHEN

Hope is pressed behind the closed kitchen door, listening.

EMMA (O.C.)
No. Thank you. My brother Paul,
people call him Prolix, was here.

LIVING ROOM

Rebas sits and listens.

EMMA (cont'd)
I gave him the money, the money he
gave you to see the coma girl.

REBAS
Tinsel.

EMMA
Ah-huh, Tinsel. He came to see her
to save his life. Now he's dead.
She didn't do anything for him.

REBAS
I see.

EMMA
I work as a waitress. I was saving
that money for college. It just
isn't right you taking the money
and she not doing anything.

REBAS
I see. Paul made the donation
willingly?

EMMA
Ah-huh.

REBAS
What is your name?

EMMA
Emma.

REBAS
How much did he give?

Emma is prepared and hands Rebas a carbon copy receipt.

EMMA
Three thousand dollars. I gave it
to him to save his life.

REBAS

Emma, we don't promise results. We don't promise anything. What people receive from a visitation with Tinsel is... intangible, not material. Do you understand?

EMMA

Ah-huh. I understand. Give back the money.

KITCHEN

Hope raps on the door to signal Rebas.

LIVING ROOM

EMMA (cont'd)

Who's that?

REBAS

Someone who works here. Excuse me.

EMMA

Of course. Just come back with my money.

KITCHEN

Rebas slips in. He and Hope whisper.

HOPE

Let's give it back.

REBAS

We don't give it back.

HOPE

This time we do.

REBAS

It will be a problem.

HOPE

Either way, believe me.

REBAS

Do you have that kind of cash sitting around here?

Hope shakes her head no.

REBAS (cont'd)
With Mearden around, neither do I.

Rebas pulls out a fat wallet. Hope does the same.

HOPE
How much do you have?

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT WALKWAY - LATER

Emma storms away from the house to a waiting TAXI. She yells to anyone and everyone.

Eric shuts down his lawn mower and takes notice.

EMMA
They're frauds! They took my money
and they won't give it back.
They're just stealing your money!

She breaks down crying and gets in the cab.

EMMA (cont'd)
This is not enough. You still owe
me two thousand dollars you piece
of shit!

She slams the door and the taxi takes off.

Eric walks over to the Tartuffioni House and rings the doorbell. Rebas answers.

ERIC
What was that about?

REBAS
Nothing.

ERIC
Yeah, sure. I want to see Tinsel.
Is there any reason I can't?

Rebas motions him into the house.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Rebas shows Eric in and leaves. Hope is in Tinsel's bed.

HALLWAY

Eric sneaks a peak to see that Rebas has made the turn into the house.

TINSEL'S ROOM

Eric strides over to Hope.

ERIC
Okay. He's gone.

HOPE
Do you have the tools?

ERIC
Yeah, here.

Eric takes a small bag from his pocket and hands it to Hope.

ERIC (cont'd)
Tinsel's not in any hospital around here. I checked.

HOPE
Oh, God.

ERIC
Why don't you just get out of here and then I'll call the police?

HOPE
They'll catch me, Eric. I need to get something on these assholes.

Eric hears something, checks the hallway.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rebas returning.

INT. TINSEL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eric gives Hope the quiet sign. Before she goes back into her Tinsel act, she waves an envelope at Eric and he snatches it from her as Rebas enters.

Eric assumes a melancholy demeanor and pretends to finally notice Rebas behind him.

ERIC
I'm done, Father. Thanks.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT WALKWAY - DAY

Eric exits the house and sprints over to his lawn mower. He takes Hope's envelope from his pocket.

INSERT - ENVELOPE

"To: Justin Kase"

BACK TO SCENE

Eric rips it open immediately.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mearden is clearly in charge as he sits down to meet with Rebas and Hope.

MEARDEN
What's up?

HOPE
We made a refund of a thousand dollars, against a three-thousand dollar donation. She was the sister of one of Tinsel's visitors who died. It was the right thing to do.

MEARDEN
Okay. Let's think this through. Hundreds of people come here to pray with Tinsel for sick, dying people every week. And guess what? Eventually, they all die!

Rebas turns to leave.

MEARDEN (cont'd)
She couldn't have returned money without your help, Father.

REBAS
I must be slipping. Perhaps it's time I left the organization?

MEARDEN

No argument here.

REBAS

I'll talk to Farah.

MEARDEN

Just get the hell out.

Red-faced, Rebas nods. The weight of his physician's bag pulls him lopsided.

REBAS

Take care of yourself, Hope. I...

Unable to finish his thought, Rebas shakes his head and leaves. Mearden and Hope are silent until they hear the front door SLAM.

MEARDEN

I guess you're on your own tonight.
Is there anything you need before
Farah and I go to see Tinsel?

HOPE

No. I'll be okay.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hope peaks out the bay window to see...

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mearden backs the car out of the driveway, Farah beside him in the passenger seat.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The lights come on and Hope descends the stairs.

She pulls a chair up to the freezer chest and lays out PICKS and TENSION WRENCHES on the lid.

She goes to work picking the lock on freezer.

Working both tools, she gives it a pull, but nothing happens.

She stops to listen, hears a CAR pass by and then just the SINGING OF INSECTS outside. Satisfied she goes back to work.

She tries the lock again, no dice. Takes a moment to listen for noises again, but hears nothing out of the ordinary.

BASEMENT STAIRS

Mearden stands silently watching Hope.

HOPE

At work again on the lock.

MEARDEN

Hi.

Hope gasps. Mearden gags her mouth and nose with a cloth.

MEARDEN (cont'd)

Don't you know? That only works in the movies?

He produces a bottle of ETHER and pours it on the rag.

Hope quickly gives out and goes limp.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hope as she lies in bed, dizzy and helpless watching Mearden and Farah set up an automatic intravenous machine.

MEARDEN

Payback's a bitch, Hope. My turn to renegotiate. Here are my terms. You get to play Tinsel. You get no pay, and no time off until death do us part.

Farah finishes strapping down Hope's wrists, immobilizing her.

FARAH

Now, who's the smart ones? I was wrong. You're a stupid girl.

Mearden switches off the light as he and Farah leave.

Hope's eyes roll up into her head.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Tinsel strokes Hope's brow to calm her, then sits, opens her diary and reads.

TINSEL

Dear Diary, my name is Tinsel. I'm sixteen years old. I know it's a silly name, but I like it. I don't have to do homework. Not because I'm smart. Mom says I don't need to do it. That it's a waste.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

A dreamy formal waltz. Hope dances with Eric. Bruno glides by with a smile and seems to magically produce a REVOLVER.

Hope sees Prolix coming through the swirling dance floor setting his sights on her.

PROLIX

You alright. You sleep tight, coma girl.

Two quick POPS from Bruno's gun take down Prolix right at Hope's feet.

TINSEL (V.O.)

I'm very popular. My mom makes sure I always look pretty and sexy.

TALL HANDSOME WELL DRESSED MEN surround Hope. Everyone else has disappeared.

TINSEL (V.O.) (cont'd)

I'm never to think there's anything in this world I don't deserve.

INT. HOPE'S PSYCHIATRIC OFFICE - NIGHT

Hope plays webcam girl, looking at the camera, tugging down her skirt and letting it ride back up, biting her lip slightly, shifting and exposing her lacy bra and cleavage.

TINSEL (V.O.)

Mom says most people are fools. I'm never to feel bad about getting what I want.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - PROLIX

PROLIX

I gots to give you you props. Are you Hope or are you Tinsel? Could you have deus ex machina me?

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tinsel confesses as she closes the diary.

TINSEL

Boys give me things and she loves it when they do. Sometimes I like. Sometimes I don't.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

Stender, a pile of files on his desk, checks one then another, but has no luck connecting the dots. His phone RINGS.

STENDER

Detective Stender.

EXT. GAS STATION - PUBLIC PHONE - DAY

Eric, very nervous, holds the phone receiver.

STENDER

Hello? Hello?

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY

ERIC

Coma girl. Go see the coma girl.

Eric panics, then hears Stender's question as he hangs up.

STENDER

What?

ERIC

Fuck.

Eric redials.

Stender's phone RINGS and he picks up.

STENDER
Detective Stender.

Eric catches his breath and get his courage.

ERIC
Go see the coma girl.

STENDER
Go see the coma girl. Why?

ERIC
Just go see the coma girl.

STENDER
Who are you?

ERIC
She needs help. Will you do it?

STENDER
Yeah, coma girl. Why not?

Eric hangs up.

Stender shakes his head.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - DAY

Mearden changes a setting on the intravenous machine.

MEARDEN
Sleepy time.

Hope curses him through the gag.

LIVING ROOM

Farah tidies the room to receive Tinsel's visitors, singing a happy tune as she works.

TINSEL'S ROOM

Mearden steps just outside the patio door and adjusts a "Gift Shoppe" directional sign.

LIVING ROOM

Farah opens the front door to greet VISITORS.

TINSEL'S ROOM

Hope loses consciousness.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hope opens her eyes to see Tinsel who reads from the diary.

TINSEL

My dad owned a gas station. He was shot and died in a hold-up when I was seven. Mom says we lost everything.

EXT. CHURCH - STEPS - DAY

Farah, in a red dress, beating on a coffin, swearing, furious. PALLBEARERS push her off. MOURNING WOMEN struggle to pull her away and hold her back. She calms down, they release her, and she makes another run for the coffin.

TINSEL (V.O.)

She wants to make sure I don't end up like her. No loser boys! That's what she says.

EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Tinsel cornered by Collin at the tree.

TINSEL (V.O.)

She means Eric. So I have her convinced that I'm in love with Collin.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tinsel continues to read looking Hope right in the eyes.

TINSEL (V.O.)

But it's not true.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Detective Stender takes a close look at Hope who is unconscious.

STENDER

Tinsel, can you hear me?

Farah, arms folded on her chest, watches through the office window.

Stender blocks Farah's view and jabs Hope with a large straight pin. No reaction.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Farah shows Stender to the door.

STENDER

I'm sorry to have troubled you,
Mrs. Tartuffioni. How long has
Tinsel been in a coma?

FARAH

She's not in a coma! She's in a
quiescent oneiric state, Detective.

STENDER

Forgive me. Have a good day, or
whatever it is you like to have in
this situation.

EXT. STREET - NEAR DOLOROUS VILLAGE SIGN - DAY

Stender drives his sedan toward the intersection with the highway.

Eric, frantically waving, jumps out in front of Stender's car.

Stender slams on the brakes, swerves to miss Eric but clips him.

Stender jumps out of the car and jogs over to Eric.

ERIC

Shit. You got me right in the
shin.

Stender helps him up and Eric walks it off.

ERIC (cont'd)
 Why are you leaving? Didn't you
 see her? Didn't you talk to her?

STENDER
 Are you the asshole who called me?

ERIC
 Yes.

STENDER
 Get in the car.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Mearden takes Hope's blood pressure as she nods off. He hears the FOOTSTEPS of approaching Visitors in the hallway and finishes his work as the first Visitors enter.

Hope attempts to regain her senses in vain.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. POND - NIGHT

Hope pops up from below the water gasping for breath.

TINSEL (V.O.)
 I'm not to suffer fools. Mom
 believes the biggest fool is Eric.
 A fool in love.

Eric extends his hand from a boulder at the pond's edge to Hope who is struggling to stay above water.

TINSEL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 This is what my mom doesn't know...

Eric manages to grasp Hope's hand.

TINSEL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 When I'm old enough, I'm going to
 marry Eric. I'm not going to be
 some rich wife whore. Eric is
 smart and he likes solving
 problems.

ERIC
 I won't let you go.

Hope, still in the water, catches her breath as she holds onto Eric's wrist and he holds hers tight.

TINSEL (V.O.)
Eric will take good care of me. I
love him. I love being with him.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - DAY

Tinsel, at the open patio door turns to Hope just before she leaves.

TINSEL
If I told my mother any of this she
would think I'm really screwed-up.
She would just kill me. Maybe I'm
a stupid girl.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Eric standing over Hope, freaked-out, shaking her.

ERIC
Hope! What have they done to you?

Hope, in a crazed delusion, tries to grab Eric but is frustrated by the restraints on her wrists.

HOPE
Justin Kase! And bring scissors.
We'll need scissors!

ERIC
Let me get you out of here.

HOPE
No. Too fast. I'll die.
Scissors!

Hope slips back into unconsciousness.

EXT. DONUT SHOP - PARKING LOT - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Stender's car parked in front.

INT. STENDER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Eric and Stender sip coffees while they chat.

ERIC
They must have drugged her.

STENDER
What if she is Tinsel?

ERIC
I'll bet she doesn't have the
birthmark.

STENDER
If it's Hope, why shouldn't I
arrest her right now?

ERIC
Go ahead, but then she won't
testify in the shooting.

STENDER
What if I just arrest you?

ERIC
For what?

STENDER
I'll think of something.

ERIC
Cool. At least then you'll have to
find out about Tinsel.

STENDER
You've got all the answers. Good-
bye.

ERIC
So, will you do it?

STENDER
When you have it set-up, call me.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - FRONT - DAY

Visitors leave as the sun sets.

EXT. SUBURBAN HIGHWAY - FIRE TRUCKS - NIGHT

Late, all the stores are closed. The trucks, lights blazing and sirens screaming race by.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Eric removes Hope's gag and shows her a pair of scissors. Hope smiles.

Eric cuts Hope's restraints.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET - MOMENTS LATER

FIRE TRUCKS roar up and stop. The FIREMEN jump out and rush the house.

Lights switch on inside the house.

FRONT DOOR

Mearden and Farah step out of the house in their bathrobes, as the Firemen rush in.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

The Tinsel Tour Garden Tractor, driven by Eric, slowly pulls the trailer where Hope is seated, dressed in a beautiful, white flowing negligee.

The tractor disappears into the woods.

Firemen run into the backyard searching around the house.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - TRAIL HEAD - NIGHT

An Ambulance stands ready. Stender waits impatiently, looking down onto the trail.

On the trail, a light flickers.

Eric emerges on the tractor. Hope sits up right, smiling and snipping the scissors in the air like the Statue of Liberty.

TWO EMTs run toward Hope and help her onto a stretcher.

Stender, incredulous, shakes his head.

ERIC
Can I go with her?

STENDER
Why not?

Eric runs to get in the Ambulance.

EXT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - STREET - NIGHT

Firemen come out of the house. One signals to Farah and Mearden.

FIREMAN
All clear.

Farah and Mearden walk into the house.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Farah and Mearden make a mad dash to the hallway.

HALLWAY

Mearden and Farah running to Tinsel's room.

TINSEL'S ROOM

Mearden and Farah run into the room and stop dead in their tracks. The bed is empty. The restraints are cut and the patio door is open.

INT. HOSPITAL - ROOM - DAY

Hope is sitting up in bed, having recovered nicely. Stender shows her a mounted photo line-up. She doesn't hesitate.

HOPE
(Pointing)
That's him.

Stender has a second photo line-up mounted and ready.

He looks it over.

INSERT - PHOTO LINE-UP

Photos of five nearly identical men including Bruno.

BACK TO SCENE

He shows her the line-up and just like that...

HOPE (cont'd)
(Pointing)
That's him.

STENDER
You saw him pull the trigger.

HOPE
Both shots. So, Tony, do we have a deal?

STENDER
You were never a con-artist coma girl?

Stender considers.

STENDER (cont'd)
Let's see if you're right about Tinsel.

Hope flirts with a sexy smile. Stender grimaces.

INT. INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Mearden and Farah arrive in their best business attire. A RECEPTIONIST greets them, behind her a busy open office area.

RECEPTIONIST
May I help you?

FARAH
Yes, we're here to see Mr. Art Anderson. We have an appointment.

RECEPTIONIST
Art Anderson? You have an appointment with Arthur Anderson?

MEARDEN
That's right.

RECEPTIONIST
Hey, Cherelle! You'll love this.

CHERELLE pops her head up to look over a cubical wall.

RECEPTIONIST (cont'd)
They're here to see Arthur
Anderson!

The heads of more IRS WORKERS pop up.

CHERELLE
They are? Well, he's not here, but
maybe they'd like to speak with his
assistant, Morgan Stanley?

MEARDEN
Is there a problem?

Quiet giggles and tight smiles from most of the WORKERS. A
CLERK manages to keep a droll tone.

CLERK
No. Cherelle, don't you remember
Mr. Stanley left for Africa
yesterday. I guess they could talk
to Ernst Young.

The IRS Workers can no longer hold back, the laughter builds.
Recognition registers on Mearden's face.

FARAH
Fine. Tell Mr. Young we're here.

The entire office goes into hysterics. Farah looks to
Mearden.

FARAH (cont'd)
What?

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Stender and Hope approach the freezer chest. Hope stands
aside as Stender takes a BOLT CUTTER to the lock.

They open the lid and peer in, then look at each other.

HOPE
She labeled and dated her?!

STENDER
Okay, let's get this pastry in the
toaster and see if she bakes up
light and flaky.

HOPE

Ah! Why would you say something like that?!

EXT. OFFICE PARK - PARKING LOT - DAY

Mearden slams the door as he gets in car. Farah, straining in her tight dress and heels rushes to catch up and get in.

INT. MEARDEN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

FARAH

What?

MEARDEN

What kind of notice did you get from the IRS?

MEARDEN'S CAR

Tears off onto the street, screeching, burning rubber.

FARAH

A phone call.

POLICE CAR

Takes off after Mearden's car, FLASHING LIGHTS & SIREN blaring.

MEARDEN

A phone call. Fuck, Farah, they don't just call.

MEARDEN'S CAR

Pulls over. Mearden pounding the steering wheel. The police car in the b.g.

FARAH

Why are you so upset?

MEARDEN

How fucken' stupid are you!? Hey lady! Something's wrong!

She drives an unwavering right roundhouse into his eye - WHAM!

FARAH
I guess that makes you right.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Hope rifles through a file cabinet to find the contract she signed. She hands it to Stender who looks at it and promptly sends it through a PAPER SHREDDER mounted on a wastebasket.

Hope grabs him and kisses his cheek.

STENDER
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The light comes on. Mearden runs down the stairs and finds the freezer lock is busted, the lid open and nothing inside.

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - TINSEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Farah enters the room and switches on the light. She SCREAMS at the sight of Tinsel's shrink-wrapped body in the bed.

Mearden runs in breathing hard.

MEARDEN
Oh, fuck.

TWO UNIFORMED POLICEMEN appear at the patio windows. One Cop raps on the glass with his flashlight.

POLICEMAN
(Through glass door)
Open up, sir. Now!

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rebas exits the elevator. He is dressed in his clerical garb, his black physician's bag in one hand and a melancholy smile on his mouth.

He comes to the door of the poker suite and knocks.

The poker game Thug opens the door and silently waves him in.

REBAS
I'd like a moment with Salle.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

The Thug nods, goes over the poker game, and whispers in his boss's ear. Salle calls over without turning.

SALLE

Father, we've got a spot open. Sit in!

The players are in a somber mood; they mumble unenthusiastic greetings.

REBAS

Salle, just a moment of your time, if that's okay?

SALLE

Deal me out.

Salle stands and meets Rebas halfway, kisses him on the cheeks, and walks him to a private corner.

Salle (cont'd)

What gives, Father? You don't look so good.

REBAS

It's nothing. I have your money. All of it.

SALLE

You've been paying. You're way below your marker. What's wrong, Father?

REBAS

Nothing. I'm going out of town. Thank you, Salle.

Rebas takes a large envelope out of his jacket. Salle takes it and hands it off to the Thug.

SALLE

Have a nice trip, Father. Come back and play!

Rebas leaves. Salle goes back to the game.

Salle (cont'd)

The best ones only last so long.

YOUNG PLAYER

What happened?

SALLE
He got religion!

INT. TARTUFFIONI HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Hope, in her Jersey Girl wig disguise reaches up into the rafters, removes Tinsel's diary, opens it to a page she knows well and hands it to Eric.

TINSEL (V.O.)
Dear Diary, my name is Tinsel. I'm sixteen years old. I know it's a silly name, but I like it...

Eric pages through.

TINSEL (V.O.) (cont'd)
This is what Mom doesn't know... When I'm old enough, I'm going to marry Eric. I'm not going to be some rich wife whore. Eric is real smart and he likes solving problems.

Eric closes the diary, snaps the clasp closed, carefully puts it back in its rafter hiding place and turns to leave, not able to face Hope.

HOPE
Eric, I'm really sorry.

Eric turns to her and slowly removes the wig. She moves to hold him but he is overcome with grief. He gently moves her away and retreats up the stairs.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - DAY

Rebas surrenders the pink slip for his late model Cadillac to a SALESPERSON who hands him a check.

Physician's bag in hand, Rebas walks off the lot.

EXT. STREET - MAILBOX - DAY

Rebas removes an envelope from his jacket and posts it.

EXT. SELF STORAGE WAREHOUSE - DAY

Rebas enters the facility near a sign that simply reads "Self Storage"

INT. SELF STORAGE WAREHOUSE - DAY

Rebas finds his locker, one among scores along a bright, frigid corridor. He unlocks it and rolls up the steel gate.

INSIDE LOCKER

A single old CARDBOARD FILE BOX stuffed full.

INT. UPSCALE LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Rebas waits patiently, his physician's bag by his side and the cardboard file box on his lap.

A LAWYER and a PARALEGAL approach. The Paralegal takes the file box. The Lawyer greets Rebas and leads him back to his office.

INT. POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

Stender does paper work at his desk.

Bruno, handcuffed, is lead out of an INTERROGATION ROOM by a UNIFORMED OFFICER.

A TELEVISION mounted on the ceiling is tuned to NEWS 12 NEW JERSEY, an all-local news station.

INTERCUT - LIVE ACTION/TELEVISION AS NECESSARY

The Lawyer and Paralegal are seen descending the steps of the COURT HOUSE. They are rushed by the PRESS.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

The church sex scandal story was reignited today when lawsuits seeking millions in damages against some ten clergy on behalf of twenty-seven victims were filed in Passaic County Superior Court.

AMIE VIGOR

It appears attorneys for the victims were handed a lay-up. A former clergyman has come forward with damning documents of sexual abuse and overt efforts to protect the guilty.

A DEFENSE ATTORNEY and PROSECUTOR exit the INTERROGATION ROOM. They exchange a few words before the Prosecutor approaches Stender and shakes his hand.

PROSECUTOR
Took the plea. Murder two. Twenty
to life. Good work, Tony.

The Prosecutor moves on to the Chief who waits in the doorway of his office.

EXT. BUS STATION - BUS AT PLATFORM - NIGHT

Rebas boards the bus, his physician's bag in hand.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Rebas takes a seat. Places his physician bag on his lap and opens it.

INSERT - INSIDE BAG

Empty.

BACK TO SCENE

Rebas closes the bag, leans back in his seat and closes his eyes.

INT. HOPE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hope enters with her hands full, turns on the lights, drops her bags and sorts through the mail. A #10 envelope attracts her attention and she rips it open immediately. Inside is a CASHIER'S CHECK for twenty-five thousand dollars.

A Post-it note attached to the check reads, "Don't wait. Rebas"

INT. DINER - BOOTH - NIGHT

Hope, dressed in a conservative business suit, rises from her seat upon recognizing Emma, dressed in her interview best, entering the diner. They meet and shake hands.

HOPE
You must be Emma. It's a pleasure
to meet you.

EMMA

Ms. Parsimony, thanks so much for seeing me.

HOPE

Please, call me Hope.

They sit in the booth across from each other.

HOPE (cont'd)

Well, Ms. Leckie, I'm proud to tell you, you've been selected to receive the first-ever Parsimony Foundation Scholarship.

Emma is flabbergasted.

EMMA

What! I thought this was just an interview!

HOPE

I'm afraid not. Twenty-five thousand dollars to cover tuition and college expenses first, then...

Emma tears up.

A WAITRESS arrives, pen in hand.

WAITRESS

Are you ready to...?

Emma can contain herself no longer. She lunges over the table that separates her from Hope, throws her arms around her, squealing with joy.

Hope is astounded by the reaction and the bear hug. Her eyes well up, her throat tenses.

The Waitress smiles.

WAITRESS (cont'd)

I'll be back.

INT. JAIL - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Mearden and Farah both in prisoner jump suits sit at a table with a bookish IRS AUDITOR. He works on a LAPTOP COMPUTER and turns it so they can look at the screen.

AUDITOR

So, if you were to write me a check right now, the IRS will close the books for seven hundred, thirty-four thousand, six hundred, seventy-three dollars and nine cents.

MEARDEN

And you would not press tax evasion charges?

AUDITOR

That's right.

FARAH

And if we do not have the means to pay at the present time?

AUDITOR

Well, interest and penalties are accumulating at approximately. Hmmm... four hundred dollars a day, roughly twelve thousand dollars a month. Where is Tinsel now?

MEARDEN

She's dead.

FARAH

(Correcting him)

Mearden! She has slipped into an alternative space time continuum. Why do you ask?

AUDITOR

Because the IRS has both perpetuated and managed profitable corporate operations to reclaim taxes owed.

MEARDEN

No crap?!

AUDITOR

Oh, yes. For example, the Mustang Ranch in Nevada.

FARAH

The whorehouse?

AUDITOR

A viable concern in the sexual services industry. But, with Tinsel off traveling...

MEARDEN

Back-up. What if we had a similar,
shall we say spiritual services
attraction?

AUDITOR

The IRS is here help. I'm
listening.

INT. HOPE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hope's psychiatric office set.

COMPUTER SCREEN - OFFICE SET

Hope comes into view. She wrestles with the video camera,
shaking the picture violently as she pulls it from its mount.

She places the camera on a table.

Hope walks back into frame carrying a heavy mallet in both
hands. She turns her head sideways and peers into the lens
with a big smile.

HOPE

Thank you, Tinsel.

She raises the mallet over her head and whips a big fast
swing down.

The computer image flashes to the Blue Screen of System Death
and the error message: "NO VIDEO FEED".

HOPE

Sits in her "Psychiatrist Chair" and writes.

HOPE (V.O.) (cont'd)

Dear Eric, the last time we were
together I wore a wig on purpose.
I wanted you to see me, not see me
as Tinsel but you pulled it off.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - MAILBOX - DAY

Eric finds Hope's letter and rips it open.

HOPE (V.O.)

You didn't know me at all, but
still you helped me. I owe you.

(MORE)

HOPE (V.O.) (cont'd)
But here I am asking for one more
favor. I need to see a lawn mower
fly again.

EXT. ESCARPMENT PLATEAU - DAY

The sea pounds the rocks and beach at the base of the
escarpment

Atop the plateau, in a lush green field, Hope and Eric
standing near each other. They look to the heavens, smiling
as they operate the radio controllers in their hands.

In the sky above, a Red Lawn Mower and a Green Lawn Mower fly
teasing each other in a playful, graceful dance of turns,
loops, rolls, dips and spins, all quite hypnotic and surreal.

FADE TO BLACK.