

HARD CASE

Written by

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Based on, The Novel HARD CASE

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INT. RUN DOWN WAREHOUSE IN EAST OAKLAND, CA - NIGHT

John Harding, a six foot five inch ex-Marine, weighing almost two hundred and fifty pounds, fights a no holds barred fight in an East Oakland Warehouse with Jesse Brown, another fighter slightly larger than John. Their promoters make side bets. Tommy Sands, a guy Barack Obama claimed his grandma used to hide from on the street, handles John. Harding likes the pain, and Tommy doesn't mind seeing him take some. Tommy gives John the signal to go down, then later in the fight after more betting, the sign to take him out. John throws a left to Jesse's solar plexus and a right to his temple. The fight's over.

John watches Tommy's back while his agent collects their money. Tess Connagher, a lawyer John and Tommy does skip traces for walks up as John grabs a suited guy in the front reaching for a gun. John puts the guy on his knees by closing the man's hand in his powerful grip, stripping him of the gun. Tess yanks the guy's girlfriend's hair when she screams, quieting her. Tommy takes the gun, unloads it, and clears the chamber before handing it back to the guy. Some others escort him out. He won't be allowed back.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(watches the crowd while
speaking quietly to
Tommy)

You get our money, T?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Yeah, John. Hey, I thought I told
you not to bring the girlfriend
along when we're entertainin'.

CAMERA FOCUS ON TESS'S ACTION

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I heard that!
(She gives the gun
holder's blonde
girlfriend a helpful push
toward her boyfriend
before walking over)
You stink, Hard-head.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Sorry, Tess, I'll use more Sports
Stick next time.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Can we get out of here? We'll treat
slinky to a coffee somewhere else
but I think we need to go now.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Slinky?

(Tess starts in on Tommy
but John and Tommy are
already heading away
toward the parking lot in
the Embarcadero and Fifth
Avenue area of Oakland,
Ca. Tess follows, cussing
out Tommy all the way
over to their cars with
Tommy laughing at every
jibe.)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Voice over of Harding's
thoughts in first person)

I'm a killer. I don't take life too
seriously, mine or anyone else's.
Tommy keeps me in line like they
used to in the service. Tommy
trusts Tess to yank on my reins
when I do work for her firm if I
start going overboard on a case -
if she gets close enough. Tess and
me been around the block a few
times. She's seen the look. I don't
kill randomly but I've killed folks
no one knows I've killed. They were
dangerous. I'm not getting paid to
die. I listen to what Tommy and
Tess have to say where it concerns
my civilian life. I weigh the pros
and cons. Then I take care of
business.

DISSOLVE TO:
PAST INTERACTION
BETWEEN
CONNAGHER AND
HARDING

EXT. EAST OAKLAND - NIGHT
(voice over of Harding's
thoughts in first person)
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

One time Tess had a client - some slimy drug dealing pimp who wanted more from Tess than her services as a lawyer. When the firm kicked free of the pimp, Tess got her tires slashed, weirdo calls, and then her cat Pretzel was gutted. The pimp came around the next day at Tess's office asking how her cat was. She put me on the payroll through Tommy as a bodyguard. I do okay as a bodyguard but I'm better at killing. I gutted the pimp, quiet like, and heaved him over into a junk yard on East 12th Street. They didn't find him for weeks. I liked Pretzel too. I was careful. Oakland doesn't have CSI teams for dead pimps anyway. Tess asked me about it. I shrugged like I had no idea what happened to the guy. She didn't believe me. Her firm stopped using my services for a while. Like Tommy says though, we're unique. He can dress my white ass up in a tux or put me in street clothes and I blend real good in spite of my size. I secretly think Tess was mad because Tommy billed them for the weeks before they found the scumbag in the junkyard. Tess needed me again soon.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I'm riding along this time.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Shrugs)
I've got no problem with that. Just do what I say.

CUT TO: TWO AM
OUTSIDE A BAR ON
INTERNATIONAL
BLVD

INT. INTERNATIONAL BLVD BAR, EAST OAKLAND - NIGHT

Edward (Lucky) Rivera laughs at his buddy's joke, swilling down the rest of his beer. Harding walks up on him, and grasps his shoulder in a seemingly friendly way. Lucky glances up into Harding's eyes with stunned recognition.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF
Shit, John! I'm too small time for
you, man.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Are you packin', Lucky?

Lucky's friend starts to reach for Harding's arm, but Rivera waves him off in a hurried and worried motion.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF
Don't do it! I ain't packin'. John
won't open up if I go along, right
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
That's right, Lucky. C'mon with me
quiet and nobody gets hurt. I'm
going to pat you down real quick.
Be cool, and I won't have to
rearrange anyone's looks.

Rivera puts a cautioning hand on his friend and then meekly endures Harding's pat down.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF
Do you have to cuff me in here,
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Nope. I'll put a friendly hand
around you and we'll go get in my
Chevy. No need for any disrespect.

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF
(Nods his assent as
Harding guides him out of
the bar)

Harding gets Rivera to his car, finds out Tess is gone. He hears scuffling down the block a ways, Harding plastic ties Rivera's hands behind his back.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Lucky, stay in the car. Play times
over. You take off on me and I'll
hunt you down, cut your nuts off,
and shove them down your throat. We
clear?

EDWARD RIVERA, CAR THIEF
(Rivera leans back in his
seat)

Yeah, John, I got it.

Harding goes in search of Tess. He comes up on the young men slow and careful. John doesn't trust Tess not to turn him in if there's a body count. Harding's standing over the lovers before they realize he's there. He drop kicks one in the side. The man's ribs crack audibly. Second mugger pops up with some Bruce Lee moves. They mix it up a little with Harding breaking his jaw. John picks Tess up. She's looking pretty good, all mussed up, and biting her lip to keep from crying out. They drop Rivera off and Harding takes Tess to a 24 hour restaurant to calm her down. She's pumped up.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Sips her coffee with
shaking hands)

I... I've never seen anything like
that. I thought I was going to die.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
It's a bad area, Tess. I asked you
to stay inside the car

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Whispers under her breath
while meeting Harding's
gaze)

I know. I... I'm sorry.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Smiles)
Just so you know I'm billing you
for the extra time.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Nods and laughs uneasily)

DISSOLVE TO:
TESS'S HOME IN
PIEDMONT WHERE
HARDING TAKES
HER AND IS
INVITED IN.

INT. TESS'S HOME AFTER JOHN SAVES HER LIFE - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Good night, Tess. I'll let Tommy
know that Lucky's in custody.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Grabs Harding's arm as he
turns away)
Stay with me John.

CUT TO: TESS'S
HOME, A WEEK
LATER, WHERE
HARDING HAS BEEN
INVITED FOR
DINNER.

INT. TESS'S HOME AFTER JOHN SAVES HER LIFE - NIGHT

Tess gets John to have dinner at her house. She answers the door. They kiss, and nearly forget about dinner, but it goes downhill from there as they sit down for the meal. Tess has the table all fixed nice with candles and everything. She suddenly starts a monologue of things she doesn't like about him - it's you need to answer your phone, and I'm not comfortable with this, and I never did anything like go to bed with a stranger, and I need to know more about what you do. Harding eats his dinner, listens, nodding appropriately, and enjoyed her voice. Even when Tess complains her voice gives Harding chills. Not a whole hell of a lot in this world gives John chills of any kind.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
What do you think about what I
said, John?

CAMERA PANS FROM TESS TO HARDING'S REACTION THEN ZOOMS OUT TO INCLUDE BOTH

(Harding smiles, thinking
she's looking for some
kind of applause)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I don't answer phones. I'm sorry
you're not comfortable. No one will
ever know what happened the night
we picked up Lucky, not even Tommy.
Your firm already has my stat sheet
and qualifications. You have a
beautiful voice.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Tess blushes again. She's
unnerved by Harding.
Launching again, she
restates pretty much what
she'd already said.
(MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)
She looks down and adds
one thing Harding likes.)
No guy ever made me feel like you
did the other night, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Thank you.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Downturn at the mouth
with irritation creeping
into her voice)
Don't you have anything else to
say?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Sure, if it's on a different
subject.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Some things would have to change if
we continue seeing each other.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Think of it this way, Tess. We
could get to know each other first
before you try changing me. Maybe
I'm not so hard to take like I am.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You won't even talk to me on the
phone! I... oh hell... I don't know
what got into me the other night.
You're dangerous, John. I'm not
diving into a relationship with
some leg-breaker on a whim. I-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Harding stands up)
Why didn't you say so? Calm down,
Tess, I won't stalk you or
anything. Thanks for dinner. It was
great. Maybe we can do business
sometime in the future. No hard
feelings, right?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Tess runs around the
table as Harding tries to
make good his escape.)
Wait a second. I'm trying to be
reasonable here. If you'd-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Holds up his hands in
surrendering fashion)
Tess! Let's part company as
friends. Good-night.

FADE TO: THE
PRESENT WITH
TESS OFFERING TO
BUY HARDING AND
SANDS A BEER
AFTER THE FIGHT.
THEY PICK 'THE
FIRST AND LAST
CHANCE SALOON'.

INT. FIRST AND LAST CHANCE SALOON IN OAKLAND'S JACK LONDON
SQUARE - NIGHT

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Tess pulls a contract out
of her briefcase. Tommy
looks it over and laughs)
It's the standard fee, Tommy.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
That's fine for standard work, but
John here doesn't do standard work.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Over half the time he doesn't do
anything at all. Your fee for a few
hours work is too high.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Well then, thanks for the beer.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Tommy's my agent, Tess. You know
that. Sorry our way of doing
business doesn't suit your firm's
needs.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Blushes in anger)
Fine! What would it take to get an
exclusive on John's work?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

We don't do exclusive. One job from your competitors would be worth more than any retainer you could offer. We work case by case. I'll look over what you want done, price the job, and you decide yes or no, same as the last couple times we worked together.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Tess grabbed the contract and stuffed it back in her briefcase. She took out a folder and handed it to Tommy. Tommy laughed again.)

What?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Your firm issued a bond on this guy? Who the hell provided the collateral?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I can't discuss that. I take it you are familiar with Mr. Ali.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

(Sands jots down some figures on a piece of paper from a note pad he takes out, and shoves it back to Connagher)

Ishmael Ali's a stone killer and a psycho to boot. Anything he got caught doing is like a tiny portion of what he's done.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

That's more than we make on the case!

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Your firm made a mistake. We clean it up - you pay the piper. You don't like the tune, you're free to shop it elsewhere.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Tess stood up, gathered her things and walked out)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
That went well.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
We know where Ali hangs out. It's a
good gamble, T. If they don't find
another taker, we'll make a nice
piece of change.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
You can't kill him, John. We'll
never collect this playing 'Wanted,
Dead or Alive'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'd do Ali free.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
No you won't, John. We don't do
anything for free. You'll figure a
way-

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Tess sneaks up on Sands,
although Harding sees
her)
We'll pay it.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(Tommy stands up, showing
annoyance at Connagher
taking him by surprise)
I'll come by and pick up our
retainer tomorrow. See ya', Slinky.
Get some rest John. We have another
lamb tomorrow.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Good night, you pirate!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Some lamb. Bye, Tommy.
(Tommy leaves with a wave)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Why the hell do you risk getting
killed in those stupid street
fights?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I can't draw or paint, and everyone
needs a hobby. There's no why. We
make a lot of money and I'm good at
it.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
How are you going to find Ali and
bring him in?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
We'll manage, Tess.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Fine! I guess you can find your own
way home.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'll manage. Good-night, Tess.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Gives Harding a backward
wave without looking back
as Harding chuckles)

CUT TO: SITTING
IN TOMMY SANDS'
CAR OUTSIDE THE
BAR THEY KNOW
ISHMAEL ALI
HANGS OUT IN AT
THREE IN THE
AFTERNOON

INT. TOMMY SANDS' CAR - DAY

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(shakes his head while
watching the front
entrance with Harding
next to him)
I'll never understand why they even
allow that psycho Ali and his crew
in here.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
They're scared he'll come back and
burn the place down, T.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
The only reason I got a call is
they think he's going to wreck the
joint this afternoon.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I guess we better get on in and
save the day. I have Mr. Sparky all
set to rock and roll.
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
(Harding holds up the
Taser gun)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(Sands reaches back to get
his short barreled riot
gun)

You handle negotiations. I'll be
the complaint department.

Both men exit Sands' car and slip on long leather coats. Tommy slips the riot gun inside his while Harding does the same with the Taser gun.

FADE TO: THE
HEART AND DAGGER
SALOON ENTRANCE

INT. HEART AND DAGGER SALOON - DAY

John leads the way inside the quaint neighborhood bar, and spots Ali back at the pool table cowering some workmen having a drink after work. Harding walks back and fires the Taser needles into Ali, cranking up the juice, and then drops the gun to the floor. One of the three men with Ali throws a punch at Harding. John leans away from the punch before counter-punching with a left hook that drops his attacker unconscious to the floor. He gestures at the other two.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Save yourselves some pain, and stay
the hell out of this. We've come
for Ish here.

Harding picks Ali up off the floor along with his Taser, while Sands shows the other two his riot gun.

Don't follow us out, gentlemen. It
won't go well for you.

Harding heads for the door, nodding at the bartender he passes, with Sands backing out behind him.

FADE TO: INSIDE
TOMMY'S CAR WITH
ALI CUFFED IN
THE BACKSEAT

INT. TOMMY SANDS' CAR - DAY

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(Glances back at Ali who
has begun to groan)

CAMERA FOCUS ON A CUFFED AND GROGGY ALI, AND THEN BACK TO TOMMY.

Ali's cute when he's like this.
Want to juice him again or leave
him cuffed?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Let's keep him cuffed, T. He'll be
entertaining on the way to punch
his ticket.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(chuckles)
Okay, but lets leave the needles
in, just in case he gets annoying.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL
(struggles upright from
the backseat, lurching
back when he sees Harding
smiling at him)
What the fuck? You dead, man! You
dead!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You missed your court date, Ish.
It's just business. No need to make
it personal.

CAMERA FOCUS AGAIN ON ALI IN BACKSEAT

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL
Harding? Damn... you done me wrong
on the Castiel fight, cunt. Now you
pull something like this? You're
mine. I burn you and your whole
family!

CAMERA ZOOMS ON HARDING'S TASER GUN FOR A SECOND AND THEN ON HARDING

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Holds up the Taser gun)
Know what this is, Ish? This is Mr.
Sparky. Best you choose your words
more carefully.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Light him up, John. He sucks as
entertainment.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Harding fingers the
controls with Ali
cringing against the
seat)

That's not very professional, T.
Ish will just enjoy the ride in
silence, right Ish?

CAMERA FOCUS ON ALI AND THEN BACK TO HARDING.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL
(Clamps his mouth tight
shut and nods)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'll give you my Dad's last known
address. You can settle with him if
you want.

(John turns back around as
Sands chuckles
appreciatively)

CUT TO: OUTSIDE
THE USUAL
WAREHOUSE IN
EAST OAKLAND
USED FOR THE
PICKUP FIGHTS
WITH TESS
WAITING
IMPATIENTLY FOR
HARDING AND
SANDS

EXT. OUTSIDE THE EAST OAKLAND WAREHOUSE HARDING FIGHTS AT -
NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Waves at Tess as he and
Tommy walk out of the
warehouse entrance)

Hi, Tess. How come you didn't wait
inside and watch the fight?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(Puts an arm around a
cringing Tess)

She only comes inside when she
thinks you'll get your ass kicked.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
That's a compliment, T. She knew
I'd win tonight.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I have your check for the Ali
pickup, and I have another much
more important one on tap. It
hinges on Tommy's ability to keep
your price within the stratosphere.
I'm in the mood for an omelet.
Let's go to the Buttercup Grill.
They serve until eleven. I'll
buy... as usual.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Lucky you. John finished early
tonight. I'm hungry.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Let's do it then. Tommy and I came
over together so we'll meet you
there.

DISSOLVE TO:
TESS, TOMMY, AND
JOHN SEATED AT A
TABLE IN THE
BUTTERCUP GRILL
IN JACK LONDON
SQUARE. THEY'VE
FINISHED EATING.

INT. BUTTERCUP GRILL AT JACK LONDON SQUARE - NIGHT

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Let's cut to the chase and save the
usual banter for another time.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(Grins)
How may we be of service, Ms.
Connagher?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
John speaks Arabic. We have a
client's daughter coming to San
Francisco for a visit from Saudi
Arabia. Her Father wishes his
daughter protected. How much for
six days round the clock?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Voice over with John's
thoughts when he hears
Tess's declaration: Yeah,
I speak Arabic, Farsi,
Pashtu, Russian, Chinese,
French, and Spanish,
thanks to immersion
training with the Marines
and CIA over the years.
It's not on the stat
sheet Tess has on me.
Even Tommy only knows
about the Spanish. To my
credit, I don't blink. I
just smile amiably as I
rack my brain for how in
hell Tess could find
something like that out.
Tommy chuckles waiting
for me to deny it. His
face lights up when I
don't. He reaches for his
note pad.)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Oh, Slinky, the price of potatoes
just went up. Interpreter/Bodyguard
is a very specialized field,
especially with exotic languages.

(Tommy jots some notes
down. He tears out the
page and hands it to
Tess.)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Jesus H-!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Don't blaspheme.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I didn't have to tell you I knew he
spoke Arabic! You didn't even know,
Tommy. I... oh the hell with it... I'll
give them the figure.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Sounds good. I have to get home
tonight.

(MORE)

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Rachel's making me take the kids to
soccer tomorrow morning because of
my no account, lazy, shiftless
soul. You get some rest. We got
Rankin tomorrow night.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You should wear a mask during these
meetings.

CAMERA FOCUS ON TOMMY AND THEN BACK TO TESS AND JOHN.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Chuckles as Tommy waves
her off on the way out)
See ya', Tommy.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Well? Want to tell me how a woman
living in Saudi Arabia would know
to ask for you as a bodyguard by
name.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
And this lady's name would be?
(Voice over speaking
John's take on it -
Samira Karim. I knew it
had to be her but I don't
volunteer anything.)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Karim is her last name. She told me
you were her family's bodyguard in
Afghanistan until they could be
moved to Saudi Arabia. You saved
their lives.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
If you know the answer to the
question, why ask it? Another
thing, I wasn't alone in
Afghanistan. How did she know to
contact you?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
The State Department put her in
touch with me. They know right
where you are.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Voice over with John's thoughts - True, they still keep in touch, which is why I'm fluent in a multitude of languages, thanks to a one week intensive follow-up training gig every couple months. Tommy thinks I have a mistress in Virginia. They believe they own me. One day I may have to carve a couple of them up. For now, when they ask me to slip in somewhere occasionally, I do it without bellyaching about it. Usually I'm only used when no one wants to see a particular person ever again. This was a new wrinkle. If they contacted Tess, it must be voluntary. Samira was only a skinny eleven year old girl when I went along with them for the trip out of country. Some of us guys and the Northern Alliance had barely gained a foothold when it was decided Samira and her family were to be moved to Saudi Arabia for their protection. Her Father had been the catalyst allowing us to establish a presence in Afghanistan. The Taliban had reportedly sent assassination teams after them. We found out later how accurate our intel was.)

So, what do you want to know?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Everything. You can trust me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Trust you with what?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You really aren't some double digit
IQ leg-breaker, are you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Is that what you thought I was?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Can you answer a simple question
without asking your own?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Why should I?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Her lips tighten in
annoyance)
You're not going to tell me
anything, are you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
No.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I like you, John. It was my fault
we started off on the wrong foot.
Then, on top of giving you short
shrift, I badmouth you for killing
the drug dealer, knowing I could
have ended up like my cat, Pretzel.
Don't bother denying it. I knew
when they found him in the back of
the junkyard with his guts hanging
out it was your work. Thank you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Voice over of John's
thoughts - I never
figured to hide it from
her but I wasn't about to
admit we billed her firm
for a couple weeks
bodyguard work when I
knew the guy I was
protecting her from was
already dead.)

Believe what you want, Tess. I like
you too. We've been over this
ground before. I do things a
certain way, and you don't like the
way I do things. We're friends.
It's dangerous for you to start
playing Nancy Drew with my life.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Sips her tea)
Could we be more than friends,
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Seriously... I don't know. We don't
fit together well, Tess. Everything
I do pisses you off.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Blushes)
Not everything. I could change.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Grins, but stays silent.)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You don't believe me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Where are you going with this,
Tess? Want to go see a movie with
me, hold hands in the park, put
puzzles together in front of the
fire place-

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I want you to come home with me
tonight. I want to make you
breakfast tomorrow morning after
you've turned me inside out again.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I stink. Remember?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You're stalling.

(She chuckles, putting her
cup down and reaching
over to clasp Harding's
left hand with her
right.)

Don't play hard to get. Did you
really think I come out to watch
you get your brains kicked in on a
lark? I care about you and I... I
know you care about me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Let's compromise. I'll see you home
tonight, have a coffee with you,
and come over for breakfast first
thing in the morning.
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

I want you to think over our going into business together as I've mentioned in the past. I don't want our personal gripes to sour you on it. Like Tommy said, I have another fight tomorrow night. We can go out to dinner afterwards if you don't mind following me back to my place so I can shower first.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I'm still thinking over the business thing. Well, that's two strikes tonight.

(Tess sighed and waited as the waitress delivered their bill.)

First, Tommy gives me a price from an alternate reality. Then you give me the brush off. You're not one of those pugs who think sex will weaken their legs, are you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If it'll make you feel any better, then yeah, that's it.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

It doesn't.

(Tess stands up, tucking twenties in the folder with the bill.)

C'mon, princess, I'll make you some coffee at my house. Where the hell do you live? All I have for you is a post office box. I have some extra large t-shirts at home. You can borrow one.

CUT TO: OUTSIDE
THE BUTTERCUP
GRILL, NEAR
TESS'S CAR.

EXT. TESS'S CAR ON THE WAY OVER TO HER HOUSE IN PIEDMONT - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You know, I'm trying to cut down on the smell factor for you with a shower.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
(Harding opens Tess's
driver's door catching an
eyeful of leg when Tess
slides into her seat
behind the wheel)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You smell sexy.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Earlier, it was 'you stink, hard-
head'. Now, it's a pheromone?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I didn't know you knew a word like
pheromone.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Ouch!
(Harding hangs his head as
if hurt by Tess's verbal
barb)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
How come there is no John Harding
before the date you went into the
Marine Corps?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I joined from a little town called
Plano, Texas. We didn't have to
have a passport to join from there.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
No John Harding ever went to school
in Plano, Texas.
(Tess smiles over at
Harding sweetly.)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Harding waves her off.)
I was home-schooled.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I'll bet. Tell me something about
yourself.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'd rather hear about you. Hell,
there's not much to tell about my
life before the Marines. I didn't
have a record or anything before I
joined if that's what you're
fishing for.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I graduated in the top third of my
class at Harvard law slightly
before my twentieth birthday. I
have a chance to make partner at
the law firm before I'm thirty.
Your turn. How many languages do
you know?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
A few.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I speak French and Spanish
fluently.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Nice.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You speak French. Why does the
State Department know right where
to find you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm still in the Marine Reserve and
I'm not in hiding.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I know you killed a guy in the
ring.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
The ref was a little slow. It's in
the public record. Why don't you
ask me where I learned how to make
you sing out in that high pitched
voice just before-

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Shut up! I'm making intelligent
conversation and you start diving
in the gutter.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Sounds more like an interrogation
to me, Tess.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(There is silence for the
remaining moments until
Tess pulls into her
driveway.
(MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)
She uses her remote to
open the garage door, and
drives the BMW inside.
Tess shuts off the car.
She turns to John with
her hand on his arm.)
Sorry about the interrogation.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
No problem.
(Harding pats her hand)
Make decaf, okay?

CUT TO: INSIDE
TESS'S HOME IN
PIEDMONT

INT. TESS'S HOME - NIGHT

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
C'mon, I'll get you a shirt to take
in the bathroom with you.
(Tess hands the shirt to
Harding and goes into the
kitchen to make coffee.
Harding returns within
fifteen minutes, drying
his hair with a towel.)
How do you feel?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm okay.

Harding sits at her kitchen table. Tess brings over a tray
with full coffee cups, saucers, and all the makings. After
putting the tray on the table Tess sat down opposite Harding.
The doorbell rang. Tess gets a startled but knowing look on
her face.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Excuse me.

CAMERA FOCUS ON ENTRANCE-WAY BEFORE FOLLOWING THE NEW
ARRIVALS INTO THE KITCHEN.

Harding turns to watch through the kitchen archway leading to
the living room. He sees Tess open the door from where he
sits. She steps aside. Two large suits walk in the doorway
carrying briefcases. Tess leads them to the kitchen while
making calming motions at Harding with her hands.

It's not what it seems, John. I
know what you're thinking.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

If you're thinkin' All those neat
little redhead thoughts I had about
you just melted away, leaving only
a slight stinging sensation, like
when one of those meat eatin'
yellow-jackets porks you in the
woods... then you're right.

Harding locks eyes with the lead suit. His name's Dennis Strobert. He and Harding do government business occasionally. He's never pulled anything like this before on Harding.

Harding gestures at Strobert while turning to Tess.

I'll give Denny here the benefit of
the doubt. You, Tess... I'll have to
think on.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Hey, John. You ought to get a
phone, buddy.

Strobert's about six-two in height and only a small bit desk softened. Dennis looks a lot like an ex-Marine, crew cut sandy hair, and been around the block. He and Harding spent some quality time in Afghanistan together.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You call T and I get back to you,
just like always. Why all this? I'm
not in hiding.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

We don't deal with middle men
anymore, Harding.

Reddig's a little taller than Strobert and half again as wide, none of it in his stomach.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Calm down, Ben. John, this is Ben
Reddig. He's a CIA liaison from the
State Department-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Before you go on. Since when do you
use civilians as intermediaries?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

John, I-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm not talking to you, Tess.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Mind if we sit down, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
It's not my house. Why don't you
answer my question first?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Ms. Connagher's firm does some
contracting for us in a peripheral
manner.

(Dennis sits down next to
Harding.)

Reddig starts walking around behind Harding. Harding gets up.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You want to sit, Ben, go on over
across from Dennis. When you get
comfortable, keep your hands up on
the table where I can see them.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Do as he says, Ben. Sit over there
and tell John what this meeting's
all about.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT
I don't like you.
(Pokes his finger at
Harding, his voice a
growling threat)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
That phrase is on a lot of
tombstones. If you don't sit down,
I'm leaving. I like Ms. Connagher's
house as it is. I'd rather you
didn't die in it.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Sit down, Ben! I told you not to
make a scene in here, damn it!

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT
We shouldn't have to take orders
from street pugs.

Reddig sits down with attitude. Harding and then Tess sit
back down again.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT (CONT'D)
We want to know everything about
Samira Karim, Harding.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I haven't seen her since '03 when
she was eleven. If you know so much
about me you ought to know that.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

Listen you-

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
(Waves off Reddig)

What Ben here was getting at, John,
is did Karim keep in touch with you
after your last time seeing her... a
phone call or e-mail?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Not a word.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT

If that's true... why the hell is she
so hot about getting you to look
after her on this trip to the
states? What kind of relationship
did you have with her when-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
There was no relationship, moron!
When you speak to me, remember
something before allowing words to
spew out of your pie-hole - if you
make stupid comments like linking
me with an eleven-year-old girl I'm
going to break some important parts
on your body.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT
Are...are you threatening me? You
better get your boy in line,
Strobert.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
He's not my boy, Ben. If you ignore
his warning there aren't enough
people in this room to keep you
safe even if I was of a mind to try
and stop him, which I'm not. You
wanted this meeting. I told you we
could obtain John's help through
Ms. Connagher's firm without direct
contact.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

I...I presented John's manager with the body-guarding details.. The figure Mr. Sands gave me was within the range you were willing to pay, although it was very close to the maximum figure you gave me.

Ben sat with his fists clenched on the table. He ground his teeth to keep from shooting his mouth off. He wanted a go at Harding in the worst way. Ben gestured at Dennis before leaning back in his chair. Dennis went on for him.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Can you think of why Ms. Karim would single you out to look after her in the states, John?

Apparently, the Saudi's are on edge with her Father. He's still speaking out against the Taliban and Islamic extremists.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Her Father was a stand up guy. The Taliban wiped out Badee Karim's entire family. He escaped with his wife, two sons, and Samira to the Northern Alliance. Badee Karim helped us gain a foothold amongst the tribes at the beginning. There were so many attempts on his life the US decided to move him once we were established. We escorted him to Saudi Arabia where he was supposed to wait until the political turmoil cooled off to the point he could return home. I take it that won't be happening?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

So you were pretty close with the family then?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Me and three other company recruits had to spend a month in not much more than a cave with three families from the tribal area. Badee Karim's family was one of the three. My Pashtu was pretty good by then. I filled in a lot as an interpreter between our forces and the Northern Alliance.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
I see you've kept up on your
language skills

(Gestures at the folder he
had taken out of his
briefcase.)

Do you think Ms. Karim may have had
a crush on you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
It's possible. She was just a kid.
What the hell is the State
Department's interest in this and
why did you involve Tess's firm in...
oh... wait a minute. I get it. If
something happens to Samira while
I'm watching her then she asked for
me so your hands are clean. If the
State Department insists on Badee
allowing them to supply protection
it's on them if anything happens to
Samira.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
I guess you haven't had all your
brains beat out yet. Mr. Karim
continues to speak out. If he were
living anywhere but on our base in
Saudi Arabia, he'd be dead. Ms.
Karim has become very popular
abroad speaking up for democracy in
the Middle East and the evolving
place of women in Islamic society.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
She's a money maker for the cause.
We have a huge Afghan population
here in Northern California and
Samira is raising money for the
homeland?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
I believe you have the basics,
John. There are over 40,000
Afghani's living in the San
Francisco Bay area. It's not about
the money though. She'd be touring
all over America if this was about
money. Ms. Karim is passionate
about her cause. Being young,
vibrant, and fluent in English, she
shows the side of Islam we need
people to see.

(MORE)

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Her Father agreed with us about
California being the ideal place
for Ms. Karim's first public
appearance in the United States.
Mr. Karim also okayed his
daughter's choice in enlisting your
services as an escort.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I take it I won't be alone on this
then. The last thing you guys need
is a dead young Afghani woman
sympathetic to America. You just
need a scapegoat in case tragedy
strikes.

Ben begins an angry retort only to be hushed by a quick hand motion from Dennis.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Exactly. There is one more thing.
We've had reports from inside
sources in the community about a
cell operating in Fremont.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Using Samira as cover, I might hear
something since no one will know I
speak a few different dialects.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT
The girl's nearly twenty now. We
don't want you-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You need to get this clown some
life insurance with you as the
beneficiary, Dennis!

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
I'm thinking about it. We'll send
you a new satellite phone and
computer notebook with satellite
uplink. All data we get, you get.
You recon the spots Ms. Karim will
be speaking at and tell us where
you want our people situated. Any
cosmetic changes in accommodations,
call Ms. Connagher. Her firm will
handle them. Do we have a deal,
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I have a choice?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

We all have choices, John. Of course your country might need to call up a few Marine reserve troops to bolster our presence in Afghanistan. You knowing the language and all might put your name at the top of the list.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Of course if there was such a call up, I'd have to devote all my time to the Marine Corps. I would then forego anymore liaisons with certain agencies which will go unnamed. It might be a great trade-off. You know, Denny, now that I think-

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Fine... fine, you want the job or not? I'll give you the choice.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT

(Reddig launches out of his chair into Strobert's face)

What? You don't have the juice to offer choices. Harding does the fuckin' job or we ship his ass over to East Bumfuck, Afghanistan.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Dennis takes out his cell-phone and connects with someone.)

I tried to be reasonable. Tell Reddig here what rung on the ladder he is in relation to John Harding.

Dennis hands the phone to Ben, all smiles. Reddig takes the phone and turns away. He's heard muttering yes sir's into the phone. He then hands it back to Dennis. Red-faced, Reddig turns on Harding, poking his right index finger in his face.

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT

This ain't over by a long shot, Harding!

Harding stands up. Dennis catches a glimpse of his face and hops up out of his chair too, hands moving in placating fashion. Tess also moves out of her chair and backs away toward the sink.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
That's enough. Let's go, Ben.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Sit down and finish your coffee,
Denny. I'll walk Benji to your car
and let him have a go on the way.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
I knew this was a bad idea. Don't
kill him, John.
(Sits down)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Walk out front. Pick a spot you
won't get too dirty falling down
on. I'll be right out.

Ben throws a straight right hand at John. He catches it in his left. Reddig throws a left hook. Harding snags that one in his right. Harding has Reddig locked in position across the table. Reddig finds out he can't move or break John's grip - then Harding starts squeezing. The rage on Reddig's face turns into tight lipped pain in seconds as small crackling noises start issuing from his wrists.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
John?

Tess gasps for breath in the background. Harding releases Reddig. He falls back in his chair, holding his arms up like a surgeon waiting for a nurse to put gloves on his hands. Reddig weakly works his fingers, staring up at Harding in disbelief.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Still want some?

BEN REDDIG, CIA AGENT AND LIAISON TO
THE STATE DEPARTMENT
(Shakes head and looks
down)

Dennis helps Reddig up, steering him toward the door. He waves at Harding and Connagher.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
We'll be in touch. Think on it,
John. We need you on this.
"Goodnight, Ms. Connagher.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'll need some warning. I know you
won't want to advertise too soon
but can you give me some time to
recon the sites?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Would a week be enough between
speaking engagements?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Barely.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
I'll have a package for you
tomorrow through Ms. Connagher.

Strobert heads out. Harding picks up Tess's phone and calls a cab. As he walks toward the door, Tess catches up to him with a water glass of whiskey she'd poured for herself.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Wait! Stay tonight, John. I-

Harding grabs her shoulders gently, smiling into her face.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm not staying, Tess. You've been
used. It appears you've known my
background for quite awhile. Take
some advice, Tess. Don't let Dennis
talk you into gigs like the one
tonight. If your firm does an up
and up legal consulting service for
the government then there's no harm
done. Don't let it get beyond that.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I can take care of myself.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You thought that the night those
guys took you into the alley too.
I'm trying to tell you the same
hard put down could happen if
you're not careful with Dennis and
his little section of the
government.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Why you arrogant worm!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(laughs)
Good-night, Tess. I'll be fighting
at the same place tomorrow night.
Bring my package there.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
John! Wait!

Harding moves out the entrance and closes the door behind him.

DISSOLVE TO:
INSIDE OF CAB
HARDING CALLED
FROM CONNAGHER'S
HOUSE

I/E. INSIDE CAB ON THE WAY TO HARDING'S HOUSE - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Voice over of Harding's
thoughts)

I have a few problems to work out now. Allowing Tess to complicate them will not be one of the options. Samira's being used, but I serve only one master. My country takes care of me. I take care of my country. Sometimes I have to adjust the attitudes of people working for my country in relation to what I'll do for them. Everything has flaws. If I can keep Samira alive, while getting info on a terrorist cell, made up of guys who shouldn't have been allowed in America to begin with, then great, sign me up. The fact the idiots I'm working for think nothing of involving civilians and law firms in our business probably makes sense to somebody. Last, but not least, the thought has crossed my mind maybe one of the geniuses higher up has decided me and Samira are expendable for a greater cause. That doesn't work for me. Shipping out to Afghanistan for another tour is starting to be more appealing.

The cab pulls up in front of Harding's three bedroom house on Lyon Ave. Harding tips the cabbie well as sees he has company.

CUT TO: HARDING
GETS OUT OF THE
CAB TO FACE HIS
GREETING PARTY

EXT. OUTSIDE HARDING'S HOME ON LYON AVENUE - NIGHT

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Voice over of Harding's thoughts)
Tomorrow's Friday, still a workday.
I'm expecting even my questionable
neighborhood to be quiet.
Unfortunately, tonight was just not
my night. A six pack of mixed race
goons are waiting for me on the
sidewalk. I see a few of my
neighbors peeking out their doors
and windows. I grin appreciatively.
One of the guys is Ishmael Ali.
He's such an idiot. I don't know
how he got out but the last place
the moron should be is here. I
wave.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL
Told you I'd come for you, Harding.
We goin' to teach you some respect.

Harding moves in amongst them, seeing some recognition.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Should've tried this with a rifle,
Ish.

ALI'S COMPANION
(Backing away, his hands
up)
Harding... John Harding? I've seen
him fight over on the wharf. I got
no beef with him, partner. Unless
you plan on shooting him, you
better step off.

SECOND COMPANION OF ALI
(Reaches inside his
jacket)
I got that-

Harding's short right drops Ali's gun toting companion as if he were hit with a baseball bat. Harding spins back, covering the rest with the man's Glock 9mm automatic.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

What'd you guys plan to do in front
of my house? Did you all figure to
have a group stomp? This won't end
well for Ish here.

ALI'S COMPANION

We... we wasn't thinkin'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Anyone else packin'? Pull up the
shirts and jackets. Spin slowly
around.

Ali and his men do what Harding orders.

ISHMAEL ALI, MURDERER, CRIMINAL

Big man... holdin' us down the
barrel.

Harding grins. He pops the clip out and clears the chamber before heaving the clip onto the yard. He tosses the Glock to the one who saw him fight.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Hold this. I play this straight if
the rest of you keep your hands
where I can see them. Anybody else
takes a hand and I'll have to open
up. We clear?

The guys look down at their unconscious comrade and then over at the seething Ali. They're looking at each other for confirmation when the one who knows Harding nods in compliance.

ALI'S COMPANION

I'm cool with that. You want this
man, brother, here's your chance.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Beckons with his hands
toward Ali)
Come get some, Ish.

The raging Ali throws the first punch. Harding slips under and behind him. Ali's neck snaps with the sickening sound of life leaving its host. Harding drops Ali and steps away from the still twitching body. The neighbors have called the cops.

There are sirens drawing near. They hear the sound of a chopper too. Some of the guys are ready to bolt.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

If you guys run they'll probably stop you. Better put the piece on the sidewalk. Just tell the PD the truth.

CAMERA FOCUS ON THE ARRIVING POLICE AND FOLLOWS EARL TAYLOR TO ALI'S BODY.

The guy holding the Glock drops it. The friend Harding knocked out groans as he sits up. Harding holds his hands up. The others follow his lead as three squad cars drive up. The cops exit the first squad car, guns drawn, and their backups do the same. Harding knows the two cops in the first car. One is Earl Taylor. Earl and Harding were in the Corps at the same time. He starts laughing when he recognizes John, his white teeth gleaming in contrast to his nearly ebony skin. Earl puts his piece away. He moves over to get a closer look at Ali's body, still chuckling.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

(Crouches next to Ali.)

What have we got... oh my God...
(Stands and motions for
his partner.)

Did you know Ishmael Ali was out?

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE
OFFICER.

Oh hell no! John and Tommy just put him in. Damn! How the hell he get out and why didn't we get a warning? You do this, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Yeah.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

He pull a gun on you?

Earl bags the Glock.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No. The guy on the sidewalk tried to pull the Glock. I tossed the clip into the yard when I took it off him. Okay if I pick it up for you?

(Points at the clip in the yard.)

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

No, I'll get it.

(Bags the clip.)

Enrique does a quick check for weapons on Ali's buddies while another officer watches. Other cops spread out to knock on doors while Earl returns to the group, taking a better look at the crew. He recognizes all of them.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

(CONT'D)

What the hell you bunch doing
backing Ishmael Ali's play? The
murderin' son of a bitch could have
gotten all of you killed.

ALI'S COMPANION WHO BROUGHT THE GLOCK

If we spite Ali, he come over in
the night and torch the house.

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE
OFFICER.

Looks like Ali ain't torchin'
anymore places. Ding dong, the
witch is dead.

Laughter from the group at Rodriguez's observation.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

Sorry, John. We have to take you
in.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Turns, and puts his hands
behind his back)

I know.

(Looks at the group being
released)

It would be a good idea if I don't
see any of you bunch in the near
future.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

(Cuffs Harding.)

You want me to call Tommy?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No. He has to take the kids to
school. He needs his beauty sleep.

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE
OFFICER.

How about that lawyer lady you work
for? She's always around.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
No. I'll wait this one out on my
own. Thanks.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
(Guides Harding into the
patrol car.)

Suit yourself but you better behave
in lockup if it comes to that,
John. The city's still paying off
on the dental surgery for those
three gang-bangers you kicked the
crap out of the last time I had to
put you inside overnight.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Shrugs)
Those guys wanted to get romantic.
Let me stay home. You have my word
I won't go anywhere.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
You killed a guy. The coroner has
to be called. 'Rique and I have to
make out tons of paperwork. Even if
we could let you go, I wouldn't let
you sleep while I'm writing
reports.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'll sleep anyway.
Taylor and Rodriguez both laugh.

DISSOLVE TO:
OAKLAND POLICE
STATION

INT. OAKLAND POLICE STATION - NIGHT

At the station Harding gets a few hellos from cops he knows.
Some have watched him fight and made money. After a couple
hours sitting around dozing in his chair and helping
Rodriguez fill in his info. Earl returns to the desk, all
smiles.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
Good news, John. I hear if the DA
was in his office, you'd be
walkin'. As it is, we'll have to
keep you overnight until the DA
comes in tomorrow morning. It seems
Ali's lawyer screwed us in court on
some technicality.
(MORE)

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
It put one of the new prosecutors
on the hot-seat with the DA for
blowing Ali's conviction. The kid
knew Ali would go out and kill
somebody. He wanted to come over
and spring you himself but he's on
suspension.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Sounds good. I guess you're here to
escort me to my room, huh?

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
(Smiles)
We have a very entertaining crowd
in lockup tonight. The only thing I
can guarantee is there aren't any
weapons. A couple guys you know
will be sharing lodging with you:
Devon Constantine and Terry Nelson.

Harding walks with Taylor toward the cell he will be spending
the night in.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Oh goody.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
I figured you'd like the company. I
saw you fight Constantine. He never
fought again. You were a guest with
us because of Nelson the last time.
He harboring any bad feelings for
you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Nelson put the bangers on me the
last overnight stay you were
talkin' about. Tommy set up a sweet
gig with an out of town couple who
wanted to see Jack London Square
and the pier. So Tommy's drivin'
the limo. I'm doing the escorting.
Nelson walks up and tries a quick
pick and pull on my clients as they
get out of the limo. I hurried
around to tell Nelson to keep
moving but he's dumber than a bag
of rocks. I broke his arm.
Naturally, you gentlemen of the law
arrested me.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
You know how it is, John. We always
have to haul in the one still
standing, especially when the one
on the ground has to visit the ER.
It didn't help your cause when the
couple refused to press charges
against Nelson.

(Opens the cell door for
Harding and takes the
cuffs off.)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
They were scared. Tess got me off
quick but it cost me two freebies
with her firm. I hate freebies.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
(Laughs)
I'll check on you later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Thanks, Mommy.
Voice over of Harding's thoughts as he looks around the cell.
Constantine's over sitting on a
bunk against the wall. He gives me
a nod and closes his eyes. Nelson
hasn't seen me yet. He's jawin'
with a few of his jail brethren.
Nelson makes his appearance in a
detention cell at least once every
few weeks. I stay out of his view
range and find a spot I can keep an
eye on things. It looks like mostly
drunks. The cell smells like urine
and puke, just like home with my
Dad. A kid seventeen or eighteen
walks over hesitantly. He sits down
a few feet from me. I can see his
whole life is passing before his
eyes as he looks around the holding
cell. He has nearly black hair, cut
above his ears, and dark
complexion. From his features, I'm
guessing he has some Iranian blood.
Having spent some covert time in
Iran's border communities I
recognize a few similar features.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
What are you in for, Sir?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Misunderstanding. How about you,
kid?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
(Looks down)
I stole my Dad's Town car and tried
getting out of the state.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Did that once myself. My old man
whooped me one too many times. It
didn't go well for him. I ended up
in the Marines.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
I didn't hurt my Dad but if I had...
you know.. stayed any longer at
home, he would have killed me. He
gets smashed out of his mind about
half the week. Those are his good
nights. The bad ones are when he
doesn't have enough booze to get
smashed out of his mind.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Maybe we're related.

Kensington laughed. He remembered where he was, shutting up
instantly. It attracted Nelson's attention. When he saw
Harding, his eyes lit up. One of those smiles you see on a
snake formed but with crooked, missing, and broken teeth. He
whispered to his homey's and jay walked over slowly toward
Harding who leaned toward the kid.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Keep your mouth shut. No matter
what, stay seated.

CAMERA SHIFTS TO NELSON HEARING KENSINGTON LAUGH, AND SEEING
HARDING FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Terry Nelson walks over with his crew, eyeballing Harding all
the way.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER
What's so funny, pussy?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Talk to me, Nelson. I'm the kid's
attorney. I've advised the kid to
plead the fifth.

CAMERA FOCUS ON NELSON AND HIS CREW, AND THEN ZOOMS OUT TO INCLUDE HARDING AND KENSINGTON.

Nelson's friends laugh, but Nelson angrily waves him off.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER
Stay the fuck out of this Harding!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm on commission. My client is
simply following my advice. I have
some advice for you, Terry. Take a
hike before you get hurt.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER
What'd you call me? You talkin'
like you know me. You don't know
me... you-

Harding kicks Nelson's right ankle out. When Nelson drops forward, Harding meets his face with a right forearm snapped at just the right moment. Nelson flies to John's left, hits the bars, and slides to the cell floor, unmoving. His homey's don't know what to do so Harding helps them out.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Anybody still standing in this cell
when I finish counting to three,
party's with me like Nelson over
there. One... two-

Where there weren't enough seats, guys dropped their asses onto the cell floor. Harding looks around and smiles amiably.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Good. Now that the introductions
are over, you gentlemen go about
your business. Sorry for the
interruption.

Devon Constantine starts laughing. The rest of Harding's cell-mates at least give it a chuckle. Just like that, all the conscious guys in the cell are friends now.

CAMERA FOCUS ON EARL TAYLOR ARRIVING AT THE CELL.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
Damn it, Harding! Drag Terry over
to the door. He ain't dead, is he?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Nope, just terminally stupid.

Harding walks over to the unconscious Nelson, props him up, and begins slapping him.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

Wakey... wakey. The officers saw
you sleeping on the floor. They
wanted to make sure you're okay.
Get up and say hello or I'll punt
you over in front of them. Take
your pick.

Nelson scrambles away from Harding, and lurches to his feet.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER
I'll kill you man. Nobody do me
like this and live.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Ishmael Ali told me that. Now his
head's facing the wrong way on his
neck.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
Harding already adjusted Ali's head
tonight. Get over here, dumb-ass,
before he points yours the wrong
way too!

Nelson scrambles around Harding and to the cell door, presenting his hands to be cuffed. Taylor takes him out.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
(CONT'D)
No more adjustments tonight, John.
Hear me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Hey, we're all gettin' along fine.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY
You really staked Dracula. Never
figured anyone'd kill that crazy
son of a bitch.
(MORE)

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY (CONT'D)
Cats like him got nine lives, John.
Are you sure he's dead?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Ishmael's dead, Dev. When he hit
the sidewalk, black slimy mist
creatures poured up from the cement
and ripped his soul right down into
hell. Can I get an amen, brothers?

Amens and laughter rang out amongst the cell-mates.

DISSOLVE TO:
OAKLAND POLICE
STATION OUTER
AREA

INT. OAKLAND POLICE STATION

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You stink, Hardhead. When I saw
your write up in the Oakland Trib
for killing Ali, I figured you'd
need a bailout. You were a busy boy
last night.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Thanks. I need two more out on the
government's tab. Can you do that
for me, Tess? I'll make you my
famous hangover breakfast.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Rubs her forehead)
That obvious, huh? What's their
names?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Devon Constantine and Jafar
Kensington. I'm recruiting them for
our little Samira Karim job.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I need a favor if I do this for
you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Name it.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Hesitates, looks around)
I need you to come with me to a
school meeting this afternoon.
(MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)

My older sister's conned me into it. My eight year old niece Alice is having trouble with another girl bullying her and the girl's parents are taking a threatening tone. My Mom lives with Lora, and I'm getting rolled.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Features narrow in confusion)

One eight-year-old little girl is bullying another little girl? Gang-bangers I can help you with. My expertise with childhood consisted of my old man beatin' the crap out of me until I turned fourteen. I'm sure your sister has tried all the usual steps - call the parents, call the teacher, call the police? I'm sure you're not nudging me into whacking the little girl so what can I do?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Pleading tone)

I'm so tired of listening to my sister's whiney-ass voice I'm about ready to kill the girl and her whole family. Lora thinks I can somehow sue these people into making their eight-year-old behave. My Mom can't understand why I haven't already taken care of everything. Think about it, John. You look like Godzilla... even in a suit. The parents will take one look at you and stifle their kid until she's eighteen.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Runs a hand through his close cropped hair, annoyance plain on his face)

Fine. I'll do it, but I can't guarantee you'll like the outcome.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Perks up)

I'll be about forty-five minutes getting your guys out, and the low-down on consequences.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Mumbles as Tess walks
away)
You just rolled me.

DISSOLVE TO:
OUTSIDE OAKLAND
POLICE
DEPARTMENT

EXT. OAKLAND POLICE STATION - DAY

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Hands paper to Devon
Constantine)
Minor altercation at a bar. The
Owner says he'll settle for
damages. I took care of those on
John's behalf. I called
Kensington's Father. His Mom
answered. She says they won't press
charges but she sounded scared.
Anything I should know about?

Harding puts an arm around Kensington while smiling over at Devon Constantine.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Jafar here told me all about it in
the tank last night. Drunk Father
kicks crap out of son. Son splits
with the family car. Father reports
it stolen. The kid's half Iranian
and he speaks Farsi and Arabic. I
think I can use him. Want in with
us Dev?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY
(Shakes Harding's
outstretched hand)
I'm in. I know whatever the hell
you're doing, there's money in it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
It's legit. You'll be driving. Do
you still have your weapon permit
and security job?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY
How you know about that?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Tommy made some enquiries after our
fight. We wanted to make sure there
weren't any hard feelings in the
form of a drive by.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

(Laughs)

It's a damn tough way to earn a
buck. First you take a chance on
ending up dead fightin'. Then
you're lookin' over your shoulder
for weeks after wonderin' if the
pug you knocked out would decide to
get some payback. Yeah, I still
have my license. Thanks for
springin' me. I heard you knocked
out Jesse Brown. Think you can take
him on too. He and I were in the
Rangers together.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Didn't know that. Yeah, I can use
him. I'll have Tommy write up all
the details. Here.

John takes out five one hundred dollar bills, offering them
to Constantine.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

Buy something in the 'Men In Black'
fashion. Call Jess and tell him to
do the same. I'll reimburse him for
any clothes money.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

I got to get my car out of impound.
You know where to reach me.

Constantine nods at Tess, shakes hands with Jafar, and walks
off.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Stay out of the bars, Dev.

Constantine flips Harding off without looking back. John
turns to Jafar.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

The job involves body-guarding a
young Afghani girl named Samira
Karim. She's about your age. You'll
be escorting her while I keep her
safe. You're eighteen.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
I'll let you bunk in with me
whether you work with me or not.
Tess told me we have to get your
parents to sign off on it. Did you
decide whether you want in?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

(Smiles and nods)
I'm in, Sir. Will we be getting my
things now, Ms. Connagher?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Your Mom told me she'd have a bag
ready along with your computer by
the time we get over there this
morning. She said your Dad will be
sleeping it off for a while yet, so
now's the time.

DISSOLVE TO:
OUTSIDE
HARDING'S HOME

I/E. JOHN HARDING'S HOUSE - DAY

Tess waits outside her car as Harding and Kensington remove
Jafar's things from the car trunk.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You fought last night, killed Ali,
spent the rest of the night in
jail, ran around all day today, and
you're still fighting tonight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Gee, it doesn't sound as exciting
when you run them all off together
like that. What can I say? I'm like
the kid hitting himself in the head
with a hammer. His Mom asks him why
and he tells her because it feels
so good when I stop.

Jafar laughs, but Tess rolls her eyes and points at Harding.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Don't forget our school date. I'll
pick you up at two. Is that Rankin
guy you're fighting tonight
dangerous?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
He's the real deal. Rankin ran into
trouble on the Ultimate Fighting
circuit. He never paid any
attention to the rules. After his
fourth disqualification they told
him to take a hike.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Did he kill anyone?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Sighs)
No.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Then he's one up on you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I didn't break the rules. The ref
didn't stop the bout in time.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
You killed someone in the ring,
Sir?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Yeah, kid, but don't make a big
deal out of it. Choke holds are
dangerous stuff. If the other guy
doesn't tap out in time, there's
always a danger the ref will be too
late stopping it. I had the guy
underneath me and the ref didn't
see he was out. I let him go when
he went limp but it was too late.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Did he have any family?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
He probably had ten brothers and
sisters, Mom, Dad, grandparents,
uncles, aunts, cousins... how the
hell would I know?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Didn't you care?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I didn't kill him on purpose. These
guys are professional mixed martial
artists.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
They can kill with one strike. When
you get the guy down, you don't let
him up. Rankin could take me out
tonight and you can bet he won't be
asking around about my next of kin.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I'll see you at two, you unfeeling
robot. Rain check on the hangover
breakfast.

Tess smiles and hurriedly slips into the driver's seat. The car speeds away from the curb.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
C'mon, kid, I'll get you settled in
and give you the guided tour. Main
rule in my house: don't get
curious. You're eighteen, and we'll
be doing business together. I need
you on the straight and narrow.

John leads the way inside his house. He takes Jafar around so he can stow his bag.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
Very nice home entertainment
system.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Keep it that way. Do you have a
girlfriend?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
No.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Good. This young woman I'll be
looking after is around your age. I
don't need you to do anything
overt. I need someone her age to be
entertaining enough that the people
around us will be paying more
attention to the two of you rather
than me. I'll be up front with you.
There are some Islamo nut-bags who
want to kill her. This will be
dangerous.

John leads Jafar into his kitchen where he gets them both sodas, and they sit at the table.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

Are you recruiting me or talking me
out of it, Mr. Harding?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's John. I'm making sure you know
what you're getting yourself into.
I'll find you a place of your own
in a little while once I get you on
the payroll.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

Will you teach me how to fight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Fighting's for idiots but I'll
teach you how to avoid a fight and
when to fight if you can't avoid
it.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

You're not an idiot. Can I see you
fight tonight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No, I'm nuts. Maybe another time. I
don't know how the fight with
Rankin will end. I know how I want
it to end but you don't always get
what you want. I noticed your Mom
packed a notebook computer. I have
a DSL router. Do you have WiFi?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

Of course.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'll give you the router password.
Don't make me regret it. Let's get
cleaned up. I'm putting you in
school while we're rolling along
here. That way you can catch up,
and only miss a half day. I'll pick
you up after I get done being
Pseudo-Dad for Tess's sister's kid.
Will you be okay until around five?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

Sure. I'll do my homework in the library. I can get back here on my own though, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Okay, that works. I'll give you a key to get in and show you how to disable my alarm system. I have to put my suit on, so I'll go first.

DISSOLVE TO:
OUTSIDE SKYLINE
HIGH SCHOOL

I/E. SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL CHECK IN AND TROUBLE - DAY

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Looking around as he walks next to Jafar toward the entrance)

CAMERA PANS AROUND THROUGH JOHN'S VISION, SHOWING A VARIETY OF STUDENTS STANDING AROUND AT THE LUNCH HOUR OUTSIDE SCHOOL, FOCUSING ON A GROUP OF TEENS IN HOODIES AND PANTS DRAPED AROUND THEIR HIPS.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

Have any trouble with those guys by the entrance?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

Everyone does off and on. They claim to be Norteanos, illegal alien gang-bangers.

As Jafar and John pass into the entrance Harding's name is mumbled by the hoodie crowd.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT (CONT'D)

Good, they must know your rep, John. Maybe things will be better now.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Or worse.

They walk inside the office, where the secretary directs them into the Assistant Principal's office.

The Assistant Principal meets them inside the door with his hand out in greeting. Harding shakes hands with him.

STAN GUERERRO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT
SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL
I'm Stan Guererro. Can I help you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
My name's John Harding. I called
about checking Jafar Kensington
back into school. He's had some
trouble at home and will be staying
with me for the time being.

Harding hands Guererro the folder with Kensington's papers. After looking through it and copying the contact numbers, Guerero hands it back.

STAN GUERERRO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT
SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL
Everything seems to be in order.
You've been a very good student,
Jafar. I hope that won't change.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
It won't, Sir.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I have had a talk with Jafar. He
knows my hospitality depends on his
doing well here at school.

Guererro nods and smiles, jotting down a note and giving it to Jafar.

STAN GUERERRO, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT
SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL
Take this to your class after
lunch, Jafar. Thanks for coming in,
Mr. Harding.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You bet. Call me if there are any
problems.

John and Jafar leave the office.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Any suggestions on my Pseudo-Dad
gig working out grammar school
behavior problems?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

(Shrugs)

Call in sick. The dog ate my homework. Aliens beamed me up for experimentation?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Get away from me, smart-ass before I forget I'm your temporary guardian and dropkick you into next week.

Jafar walks away laughing. Harding heads out the entrance where he walks through the group of Norteanos. They follow him to the parking lot. The group starts laughing when Harding gets to his old Chevy and unlocks the door.

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Man, I thought you'd roll better. You John Harding, ain't you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

She's a beauty alright. Want to buy her?

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Saw that fight where you killed a guy on YouTube. It was fake.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I've heard that. I have the address of the cemetery where he's buried if you want to clear things up for me.

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Hell, you don't look so bad.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Straightens his collar)

Thanks. You're not coming on to me are you, Motor-mouth? I don't roll that way.

The teen leader's friends start laughing. The leader doesn't like his posse making light of him. Out comes a long bladed stiletto which Harding snatches out of his hand before he can even point it. John bends it into a ninety degree angle slowly and tosses it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

The next thing you reach for better
be edible. Run along kids. School
starts soon.

Harding grabs the leader by the chin in an unbreakable grip,
while his cohorts scramble back and away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

You look for payback on my friend
Jafar, your picture will end up on
the side of a milk carton. We
clear?

TEEN GANG-BANGER, NOTEANO LEADER

Yeah!

Harding releases him and he stumbles away after the
retreating thugs rubbing his chin to make sure all the bones
are in place. John waves.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Have a nice day at school, kids.
Remember, no talking in class.

DISSOLVE TO:
CORVALLIS
ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL IN SAN
LEANDRO, CA

I/E. CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARKING LOT AND SCHOOL - DAY

Harding is leaning on Tess's car, his arms folded across his
chest as Tess paces back and forth in front of him, glancing
at her watch every few moments.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Will you relax. You look great. If
the principal's a man, the other
parents won't have a chance once he
gets a look at you.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Stops to glance at John)

The principal's a woman as is the
teacher. You look good, John -
dangerous... but good. I wish Lora
and Alice would get here. Remember,
you're my fiancé.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Straightens away from the
car)

You don't mean with your sister
too, do you?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
No, just with the staff at the
school, so it won't seem like I'm
bringing along some hired muscle to
intimidate the other parents.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Chuckles)
Which would be the truth.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Did I not claim to be the biggest
hypocrite ever? Are you insulted to
be considered my fiancé?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Of course not. I'd prefer your
sister doesn't get the wrong idea
so when you get pissed off and stop
talking to me for a couple months
she won't think it's anything more
than business as usual. Did you
think about coming in with Tommy
and me on business.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Still debating that one, John. It
could get complicated with the
government ties.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Points at the diamond
ring on her finger.)
That's a nice ring I got you.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
(Blushes)
This is so ridiculous. I don't
know, John, I'll... oh, there's
Lora.

Tess waves at a late model tan Toyota Camry arriving in the parking lot. After it's parked, a little strawberry haired girl gets out of the passenger seat, slams the door and runs with open arms to Tess. A red haired woman locked up the Toyota with a remote as she approached us.

Lora looked like a slightly older version of Tess with a bit more sultriness, same height, good figure, long hair in a ponytail, and wearing a striking dark blue dress. She offers her hand to Harding with a welcoming smile.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
You must be John. I've heard a lot
about you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
If you heard it from your sister,
don't believe half of it.

Tess rolls her eyes as Lora laughs and Tess turns Alice around to face John.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
This is my niece Alice. Alice, this
is my friend, John.

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD
DAUGHTER
(Stares up at John for a
moment)
You...you're kinda big, mister.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Waves)
Hi Alice, nice to meet you. Did you
stay home from school today?

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD
DAUGHTER
Yeah, I'll come back tomorrow. Are
you going to the meeting with us?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Your Aunt Tess asked me to sit in
with you if that's okay.

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD
DAUGHTER
Sure. C'mon... I'll show you where.

Alice grabs Harding's hand and pulls him toward the school. Inside the school Alice walks Harding along the main hall with Tess and Lora chatting behind them to the office, where a startled young lady behind the counter stares up at Harding like he's a troll blocking the bridge entrance she's trying to cross. Tess moves around him.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

Hi, I'm Tess Connagher. My sister
Lora Radcliff and her daughter
Alice have an appointment with
Principal Willis.

CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SECRETARY

Yes, of course. I'll tell the
principal you're here.

The secretary disappears through a rear door and comes back with a tall black woman in a dark green two piece business type dress. She smiled engagingly at the group, recognizing Lora. She shakes hands with Lora.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

You're Lora. I've met you at a few
PTA meetings. I'm sure we can
straighten this misunderstanding
out quickly. Maria Tolver and her
daughter Michelle are waiting in my
office with Ms. Tolver's husband
and grandfather.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

Hi Carol. This is my sister, Tess
Connagher and her and her fiance,
John Harding.

Willis shakes hands with Tess and John. She then gestures for them to follow her.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

I'll try and make this meeting as
pleasant as possible. I'll take any
help I can get.

Alice clung to Harding's hand with both hers. As they entered the Principal Willis's office, the other little girl, Michelle, stared right at Alice with the malevolent look kids have no trouble summoning. A nervous looking brunette in slacks and blouse sat next to Michelle on her right. On the other side of Michelle sat a very surly looking guy in navy blue work clothes. Next to him sat a gray haired, rail thin man. He looked at Harding with recognition. He immediately stands and offers his hand to John.

ALEXI FIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

John Harding, is it not?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Shakes Fialkov's hand)
Yes, Sir. Have we met?

ALEXI FIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER
(Smiles)
We have a common business
associate, Van Rankin, who I
believe you have a meeting with
later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Smiles back)
You're right. Van and I will be
meeting later. It's good to meet
you, Sir.

ALEXI FIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER
Call me Alexi.

Alexii turned and knelt next to his granddaughter. The look
he gives her wipes the malevolent one off little Michelle's
face in an instant.

ALEXI FIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER (CONT'D)

Did you threaten this little girl, Mishy? Tell me truth.

MICHELLE TOLVER, ALEXI FIALKOV'S
GRANDDAUGHTER
(Nods)
Yes, Da.

MARIA TOLVER, ALEXI FIALKOV'S
DAUGHTER
Do you know this man, Papa?

ALEXI FIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER
(Holds up a cautioning
hand to Maria as he
straightens with a sigh
to face Principal Willis)
I am very sorry for all this
trouble. We will make sure my
granddaughter is polite and
respectful around all other
children from now on. Is that not
so, Mishy?

MICHELLE TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S
GRANDDAUGHTER

(Voice quivering)

Yes, Da.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Wonderful. Thank you for your
understanding.

TIM TOLVER, MARIA'S HUSBAND

Wait a minute! What about-

MARIA TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S
DAUGHTER

(Grabs her husband's arm
with a fearful look)

Don't Tim! It is as Papa says.
Michelle has misled us. Kids are
kids.

Alexi turns to face his son-in-law, who takes one look at
Alexi and shifts his gaze to the floor. Fialkov knelt down
next to Alice with a big smile.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I hope you and my granddaughter can
be friends from now on.

ALICE RADCLIFF, LORA'S EIGHT-YEAR-OLD
DAUGHTER

(Meets Fialkov's look
with a stunned one of her
own)

Me too, Sir.

Alexi straightened with an appreciative chuckle. He shook
hands with John, Tess, Lora, and Willis.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I hope we will meet under better
circumstances in the future. I
expect we will be meeting later,
John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I expect so, Alexi. Thanks for
clearing this up for us.

Fialkov nods and smiles, guiding his family out of the
office.

Tess and Lora were still in quasi shock at the surprisingly quick resolution of what they had considered a monumental confrontation. Principal Willis peers up at Harding with that look teachers give to the class clown.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Well, Mr. Harding, it was indeed
beneficial to have you here.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Thanks. I'm glad it worked out. May
I be excused now, Ma'am?

She laughed as did Tess and Lora. Alice giggled, more at the adults laughing than her understanding of John's adlib.

CAROL WILLIS, CORVALLIS ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Yes, John, you may go now. Stay out
of trouble. I don't want to see you
back in my office again.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Me either.

They file out of the office after the usual parting pleasantries. School was ending for the day so they sifted their way out to the parking lot through the streaming kids, teachers, and parents in a comfortable silence. Alice skipped along next to John, obviously happy with the outcome. In the parking lot, Lora hugged Harding long enough to draw the attention of passersby.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
I don't know how to thank you.

John pulls away reluctantly, the attraction for Tess's sister surprising him, and making the exchange a little awkward.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Thank Tess. This was her idea. She
set up a bomb in my big screen HDTV
to go off if I didn't come along.
She has the detonator in her purse.

Lora laughs, hugs a fuming Tess while Alice hugs John, and then moves over to her car. John and Tess watch as she drives out of the parking lot. Tess elbows Harding, which he blocks adroitly.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
What the hell was that for?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Dry humping my sister. I may have overreacted.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Ya' think?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
Deny your blood wasn't racing when Lora latched onto you like a wet sheet.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I can't tell lies to a future business partner. So, is this some kind of deal breaker?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
No. I've always been jealous of my sister. How come my fiancé tapped into those long bubbling over feelings of inadequacy to make me mental?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Laughs)
I would have been expecting you to be more upset with Fialkov knowing me. I know I am. I'll play the sister card on you later.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You're fighting Rankin tonight. Fialkov has a connection to him, and you're wondering if I've made the connection between his granddaughter threatening my niece, and him suddenly showing up to make everything better. I did. I detest coincidences.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
That makes two of us. Drop me off at home, Tess. I have to get some sleep before I find out about this coincidence. We'll toss around our business and sister sharing another time.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Nods and sighs)

Yeah, in the mood I'm in right now,
maybe that would be best.

DISSOLVE TO:
TOMMY AND JOHN
APPROACHING THE
ENTRANCE TO THE
EAST OAKLAND
WAREHOUSE WHERE
THE RANKIN FIGHT
WILL TAKE PLACE

I/E. EAST OAKLAND WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Here comes security, John.

CAMERA SHOWS EARL TAYLOR AND ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ APPROACHING THEM BEFORE ZOOMING OUT ON THE FOUR.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

We never thought you'd show after
last night's festivities, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm thinkin' of making a citizen's
arrest, Earl. How dare you two
officers of the law frequent an
illegal enterprise like this?

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE
OFFICER.

(Chuckles)

Hell, half the city council's in
there. You think they want their
BMW's and Lexus's getting broken
into while they're gamin'?

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER

Your lawyer emptied our jail out.
What's that all about? You and
Constantine going steady now?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I have some work for him and the
kid, Earl. Don't get jealous. How's
the under-cards going in there.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
Entertaining, but the big money's
not coming out until you get in
there with Rankin. Me and 'Rique
have a few bucks on you so don't
blow this for us.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
What's the line on my pug?

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE
OFFICER.

It's running three to one against,
Tommy. If John drills him too quick
there'll be a riot. Earl called in
a few more of the guys to reinforce
us if things get out of hand. You
are planning to dance a little
first, right John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Give me a second. I'm still
outraged at being someone's pug. In
answer to the question, no, I'm not
holding back. You guys seem to
think this is the WWF. I'm not
waltzing with Hulk Hogan. Besides,
I don't think you have to worry
about any quick endings. If Rankin
gets me on the floor, we'll be
there a while and I don't think I
can keep him from taking me there.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
Rankin weighs around three hundred,
John. I don't think letting him
take you down is a good idea.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Wow, am I glad you came out
tonight, Earl. He's a strategist,
ain't he, T? Write that down so I
don't forget it - bad idea for
Rankin to get me down.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
You know what I mean, smart-ass.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I know. Look, you worry about
winning those three to one odds.
I'll worry about how to keep from
gettin' killed while rolling around
on the floor with Godzilla.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
I'm glad you guys are here tonight.
We had a poor sport in front last
night packing heat.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
I heard. Last night is why we're
getting a nice wage tonight. I
think a few of the suits watching
last night didn't want to be
present at a gun battle.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm glad you're making out on this,
Earl. You do know Rankin's
connected, right? I met someone
today tied to Rankin: Alexi
Fialkov.

ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ, OAKLAND POLICE
OFFICER.

No shit, John? That mother's the
Godfather. The Russian mob doesn't
get feisty at the sporting events.
They come around a few weeks later
to your house and cut your nuts
off.

(Pats John's shoulder)
You can take out as many of those
pricks you want to. Call us if it
happens. Me and Earl will come over
and help you set up the scene.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'll hold you to it. We better get
inside, T. Rankin's probably
already claiming I'm a no-show.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
You're right, John. Let's go. See
you officers later.

EARL TAYLOR, OAKLAND POLICE OFFICER
Good luck, guys.

John and Tommy walk up alongside the line getting in. They
meet Jesse Brown who is working security at the entrance.
Jesse smiles hugely at John, sticking his hand out which John
grips.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
Damn, John... what the hell you hit
me with?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Attitude, Mr. Brown... attitude.
Did Devon call you about coming in
with me?

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
Yeah, thanks. I'm in. Paper say you
did for that psycho Ali last night.
Wish I coulda' seen it. My
manager's not happy with me. First
I get clocked and then you rough up
his business partner. I'll need
another job after tonight.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
He was going to do something I know
he would have regretted, Jess. John
helped him see the light. Then he
went and helped Ali into the light.
I'll get an employee packet to you
soon about our other enterprise.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
Thanks, T. You had a busy night,
John. The partner dropped a couple
large on me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Want a rematch?

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
No thanks. I thought I had you
pegged when you went down last
night, brother. I been watchin' you
for months... thought I knew all your
moves. Tell me you and T weren't
playin' me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I couldn't take any chances with
you, big man.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
Good. That makes me feel a little
better. Man, you got a hard road
tonight.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
That's why girls don't do it, Jess.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

You right about that. I put a few
bucks on you. Don't let me down. I
have to recoup my losses from last
night.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

T... mark that down. I have to try
and win tonight.

John and Tommy enter the warehouse as Jesse laughs at John's quip.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
(Inner thoughts voice
over)

Even with the cool outside air
rattling through cracks in the
sheet metal walls, a pungent mix of
sweat, cologne, perfume, rage,
anger and fear assaulted my nose. I
inhaled deeply. Walking into a
dirty cesspool of an arena like
this made my blood pound. It
reminded me of home, fightin' off
my old man and the bimbos he
accumulated. My fingers curled into
tight fists at my sides - nothin'
like memories of Pa to get me in
the mood.

CAMERA FOLLOWS JOHN AND TOMMY INTO THE FIGHT AREA, FOCUSING
ON THEM READYING FOR THE FIGHT AND CHECKING THE MAT.

Tommy takes charge of John's equipment bag. Harding stripped off his windbreaker as he walked. Tommy took it and handed him the light boxing gloves which weren't much more than the kind you punch the heavy bag with. John slips in his mouth-guard and puts on the gloves. The vocal crowd undercurrent lapsed into a whispering hum at sight of John and Tommy. They walked into the marked off fighting center, covered by a square dilapidated mat, stained with God knows what. It measured around thirty feet across. It hadn't been there for the fight with Jesse Brown the night before, but they drag it out for a ground and pounder like Rankin. It smells of the disinfectant they spray it with before wiping down the surface after each fight. Tommy checks it for slippage. He nods at John, indicating the mat's secured properly. The audience checks Harding out with excited speculation. Rankin's not there yet. The fighters are to stand around for a few moments so the final betting and odds can peak. John spots Tess opposite him.

She's standing next to Dennis Strobert. That sets off a few warning bells in John's mind. Dennis is grinning. Tess gives John a nervous wave. Harding doesn't respond.

CAMERA PANS TO RANKIN WALKING INTO THE FIGHT AREA

The crowd noise picks up noticeably. Rankin strides across the mat glaring at John. Easily three inches taller than Harding, he carries over three hundred pounds like a ballerina. His tank top bulges around hard muscle. Rankin has his long blond hair tied back in a ponytail. He points a finger at John and then swipes it across his throat, his facial scars glowing as he grins threateningly. The crowd reacts favorably. Tommy snorts and indicates he's going to work the bets. Rankin and Harding glare at each other while their handlers take care of the bets. Rankin keeps mouthing 'You're dead' silently.

The ref the promoters use for most of the big fights walks over to Harding, smiling amiably as he grasps and examines each of John's gloved hands. He's nearly as big as Harding with a scarred, splotched white face, and crooked bulbous nose. Jack Korlos's been around the block. He still has a brain despite over a hundred professional fights.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.

Hey John, didn't you just fight and
then kill somebody last night?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Yeah, Jack, that prick Ali wanted
to rodeo on the first date and you
know me, I'm a strict Catholic.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.

(Laughs)

I guess I don't have to tell you
but here it is anyway - no groin
kicks, eye pokes, or head butts.
Stop if I say to. You don't stop I
sap you. I won't stop anything
unless one of you goes limp. I'm
here to make sure neither of you
die. I haven't lost anyone yet, but
I have sapped a few. Clear?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
As a bell, Jack.

VAN RANKIN, RUSSIAN MOB FIGHTER
Hey grandpa! Quit cackling and get
your fuckin' job done!

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.
(Nods and turns)

Korlos walks over to a now nearly apoplectic Rankin. Rankin bridles at Jack's frisk but endures it with only a few bumps trying to throw the old man off balance. He may as well have tried knocking a cement stanchion off balance. When Jack finishes the frisk he gives Rankin the rule warning. Although Rankin knows the rules he shoots his mouth off anyway.

VAN RANKIN, RUSSIAN MOB FIGHTER
I'm killin' that punk tonight,
gramps! Stay out of it or I'll do
for you too!

Jack chuckles audibly in the hushed silence following Rankin's threat while stepping away and drawing out his sap in a split second.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.
Let me know how that works out for
you, Bluto. You don't stop when I
tell you to I'll crack your head
open like a giant walnut.

Rankin lunges at Korlos but his handlers dive in between to stop him.

VAN RANKIN, RUSSIAN MOB FIGHTER
I settle with you another time,
gramps!

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.
(Smiles and puts his sap
away.)
Yeah, you do that sonny boy... you
just do that.

Korlos backs to a spot near the mat's edge, splitting the distance between the two fighters. The crowd noise picks up, knowing the fight would be starting momentarily.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)
(Glances at Harding)
Ready?

Harding nods as Tommy pats his back and moves away.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)

(Glances at Rankin)

Ready?

Rankin growls, making motions as if he plans to bull rush Harding.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)

(Claps hands together)

Get it on!

Rankin runs at Harding, waiting until the last instant to lower his head for the take-down. John's knee smashes Rankin's nose to bloody pulp on the way down. Blood sprays everywhere when they hit with Harding twisting out from under after absorbing the painful landing. Rankin's up bellowing and spitting blood instantly when he can't keep John trapped under him. The crowd's screaming.

Rankin launches a flurry of kicks and punches, buying time to recover from his charge. Harding barely blocks a roundhouse kick to his head, but Rankin catches him with a glancing blow to the temple that staggers Harding. John ducks down and throws a left hook under his rib cage. Rankin grunts and breaks off the attack, backing away while keeping his hands up. Harding doesn't follow, still recovering from the slam to the mat.

Spitting blood, Rankin comes at Harding with a new sense of caution after the devastating body blow. Rankin fakes another roundhouse kick with his right leg. John takes the bait and he drops down for the grapple too fast for Harding to counter. John goes down under him without a chance to break his fall. Breath explodes out of Harding in a rush, compressed by Rankin's over three hundred pound bulk.

Harding whips over to his left, raking an elbow across Rankin's ruined nose. Rankin buries his head to the side avoiding more punishment. It gains John room to breathe. Rankin bucks left and right with real hurtful body shots. Arching backwards John blasts the top of his head with elbows he can't avoid. His body shots slow while he tries to duck away from the elbow shots. Rankin moves wrong and Harding smashes a left elbow flush on his skull, opening a scalp wound. It stuns Rankin long enough for Harding to slip out. Rankin tries to stop him, but they're both slick with his blood. John spiders over him, launching knees into his rib-cage while gasping air back into his own lungs. Rankin rolls away, scrambling to his feet.

The fighters circle while the crowd roars out its approval. Rankin throws jabs and left hooks with blood seeping down over his face. Harding counters with jabs to his nose, causing quick cover-ups. Rankin drifts too close. Harding's round house right leg kick smacks loudly into Rankin's side nearly pitching him to the mat. He stumbles to his right and John's left round house kick hits flush on his temple. Rankin crumples. A groan rumbles through the crowd. Harding's not a favorite. Racing over, John does a football kick into Rankin's left side and everyone in the place hears Rankin's ribs crack. The crowds howling, Tommy's cheering, and Harding moves in for the kill. Korlos races in to stop him. John nearly reacts with a body toss but awareness floods through him in time. Harding lets Korlos bear-hug him away from Rankin. Rankin lies still, breath rasping.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. (CONT'D)

You sane, kid?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Drops his hands to his
sides)

I'm back, Jack. Go ahead.

Jack hurries over to Rankin's side, gesturing for the med techs they have on hand. Tommy hands Harding a wet towel with a peroxide mix. The med techs wheel a gurney over with them and begin to carefully clean Rankin off. After putting a corset brace over Rankin's back, the techs ease Rankin over onto the corset face up. They make sure his ribs aren't in danger of puncturing his lungs before cinching the corset into place. The oxygen they give Rankin next begins to revive him.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Wipe off, John. You're covered in
blood. I'll give you a fresh one
when you get most of it sopped up.

John follows his advice. After stripping off his gloves, bloody shirt, gym pants and mouth-guard he wipes down real good in only his boxer shorts and tennis shoes. Tommy exchanges the bloody one for a fresh one. Harding repeats the cleaning, giving his face one last wipe before wrapping the stuff up in the towel. Tommy hands him a clean black t-shirt and loose jeans out of his bag. Harding's dressed a few seconds later with all the bloody stuff shoved in a plastic bag before depositing the mess in his equipment bag.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Thanks, T. That feels much better.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Lordy... Lordy, John, that was one
righteous set to. Rankin screwed up
rushin' you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Yeah, he did. He should have stayed
up. He hits like a cement truck. I
guess we don't have to worry about
the money tonight.

Harding points towards where Taylor and Rodriguez moved through the crowd with a few other OPD roving around the perimeter of the crowd. They're watching for sore losers like Jesse Brown's money backer from the night before. The sight of Rankin lying face down on the mat like he's dead quieted the crowd considerably. This is an ending hard to dispute. Tommy makes his money rounds, trading good natured talk with the losers. He doesn't gloat. Tommy pumps the fight when it means something but never when it's over. Connagher and Strobert approach John as he watches over Tommy.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
You're not going over to check if
he's dead?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
What for?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
I should have known compassion
wouldn't enter into your thinking.
Aren't you going to turn around and
say hi?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm enjoying the fragrance of your
perfume. I got Tommy's back until
he comes over with the collection
plate. You know that.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER
That was horrible, John.

John flexes his arms and bounces around a little, trying to stay loose. He glances back and nods at Denny Strobert who is chuckling over Harding's dispassionate attitude.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Not for me it wasn't. My sides are
achin' from Rankin's body shots on
the mat - thanks for asking. What
the hell you doin' here, Denny?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Can't I come see an old friend
fight?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Ahhh... that's so sweet. What the
hell you doin' here, Denny?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Making a delivery and an update,
John - nothing to get all paranoid
over. The gig's been moved up a
little with a slight addition I
need to talk with you about.
Besides, I figured you'd be happy I
kept Tess company in a rough crowd
like this.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I've left word. Anyone bothers her
when she watches me fight or screws
up her car I'll slice and dice them
like a Thanksgiving Turkey.

Tommy finishes his rounds. He's smiling ear to ear, holding
his money bag. Jesse Brown's with him. His smile's just as
big, gold tooth gleaming.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
(pats John's shoulder)
Thanks, John. I'm flush.

Brown keeps walking.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Hey, Jess... where's my cut?

Brown's shoulders shake as he walks away, laughing.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Hello, Slinky. Who's your
boyfriend? You cheatin' on John?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
(Shakes Tommy's hand)
We've talked on the phone a few
times, Tommy.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
I recognize your voice. John,
Rankin's coming around.

CAMERA PANS TO WHERE THE MED TECHS ARE WORKING ON RANKIN.

The med techs had Rankin sitting up. One of the promoters with a worried look brought over a folding chair. Three of them helped Rankin onto the chair. They had already cleaned away the blood. One of the techs removed the oxygen mask and felt Rankin's nose gingerly, eliciting a moan from Rankin. The tech shook his head, meaning Rankin needed more than a straightening. With ice packs held at the back of Rankin's neck, the techs braced him to his feet before helping him onto the wheeled gurney and strapping him in.

The crowd began to wander out in small groups. Except for some grinning gestures and waves from Taylor and Rodriguez, John was the target of some very malicious stares. Tommy nods and waves at all of them, gracious as ever. Harding keeps his eyes on their hands. There are no metal detectors, so the two partners are on their own. Tommy's packing under his shirt. He knows John will see a threat before he does. In most cases Harding can prevent a bad situation before Tommy has to intervene.

The med techs wheel Rankin out in front of where they're waiting for the crowd to thin. Rankin gives Harding a potent death stare for someone that has just gotten his ass kicked. Then he flips Harding off. Only Tess moving in front of him prevents Harding from moving to finish Rankin off.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Chuckles)

You tensed, John. What were you planning, an execution of a belted down invalid?

CAMERA SHOWS JACK KORLOS APPROACHING WITH TWO MEN.

Jack Korlos walks up with two other men. One's a short, fat white guy named James Bonasera. He's sweating even in the cool early morning chill, his bald head glistening. His partner, Ray Alexander, looks like Don King with slightly better hair. They promote the fights. Alexander and Tommy don't get along so he usually lets Bonasera handle negotiations with Sands and Harding.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Take Dennis outside, Tess. We'll find your car.

Tess tugs Strobert toward the exit without another word.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.

That was a great fight, John. It
took willpower not to let you
finish him off.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
Shut up, Jack!

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.
Eat shit, Ray.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Thanks, Jack. It would have spoiled
things if I had. I owe you one.

JACK KORLOS, REFEREE, SCARRED FROM A
HUNDRED PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS.
It was a pleasure watchin' you
work. See ya'.

Korlos walks away with a wave.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
Some big names dropped a bundle
tonight, Harding, mostly to you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Boo Hoo!

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
What's your point, Ray? You want us
to send flowers or somethin'?

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
Just sayin'. Business is business
and tonight's outcome set us back
in the goodwill department.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Boo, fucking Hoo!

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER
We could get shut down, John. You
know how some of these suits are.
They're all good sports until they
drop a bundle. Then all of a sudden
our sporting enterprise is a blight
on the city. Ray and I were
thinking maybe it would be a good
idea for you to take a break.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
Or maybe we could make a very
profitable deal. It's not like you
and Tommy don't use some
showmanship already.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Well damn, John, it sounds like
these gentlemen want you to take a
dive.

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER
Ray didn't say anything about
taking a dive.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
We get it. I'm not taking a dive or
engaging in any showmanship for you
two so we'll take a break. Me and
Tommy have a gig that'll keep us
busy for a while anyway.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
Fuck you, Harding!

John keeps Tommy from moving on Alexander. He glances around
at the darkened scaffolding in the upper warehouse area.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
C'mon T, let's get out of here. Ray
wouldn't be shooting off his big
fat mouth if he didn't have someone
with a bead on us.

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
You right about that, you cheap
pug.

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER
Calm down, Ray! I know Harding. We
won't always be standing here in
this warehouse with backup. He
killed Ishmael Ali last night.
Don't you read the papers?

RAY ALEXANDER, FIGHT PROMOTER
(Looks startled)
What? How come you ain't in jail,
Harding?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I was. Self defense. What say we
part now as business associates and
don't say anything else that might
get one or more of us killed?

JAMES BONASERA, FIGHT PROMOTER
Go on, John. We'll call Tommy if
things cool off in the future.

Harding nods his understanding. He grabs up his equipment bag and pulls Tommy toward the exit. When they reach the door, Tommy hands Harding his windbreaker and draws his 9mm Beretta automatic. They get down the street without incident to where Tommy parked. Dennis and Tess are waiting near Tess's BMW a little further away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You go ahead and split, T. How much
we take in tonight?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
It's the biggest payday yet, John,
nearly twenty-five grand.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Nice. Give me a little celebratin'
money, and I'll call you tomorrow
about our other gig.

Tommy fishes in his bag and hands John a fistful of hundreds and twenties.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
You be careful tonight. No more
executions, okay?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You never used to be this touchy-
feely, T. Ali had to die. He was an
exception.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
I'm referrin' to Alexander. I can't
stand the sight of that turd but
two killin's in as many nights will
get you a one way ticket to Folsom.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Me and Ray are golden, T. We're
just like brothers.

Tommy laughs, takes John's equipment bag, and gets in his car.

Harding watches him drive away, before walking over to join Tess and Strobert. Strobert meets him halfway with a packet, without Tess.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

The equipment's in my trunk. The Jack London Inn will be our home base. You have a phone now. Keep it with you, John. I've already heard about your new recruits. I screened them. All good choices, and I like that new kid. Coupling him up with Samira will free you for a little side work on the guy in that folder. We'd like Mr. Claude Chardin to go away. He's a pro in the Carlos the Jackal stature. A few of our guys died getting the info in that packet. He'll be behind anything you hear concerning attempts on Ms. Karim.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

What makes you think they won't blow Samira up with one of those religion of peace suicide bombers. They're shoving explosives up their ass and in their boobs now. Unless she's touring in an explosives proof bubble, why get an international assassin.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

He'll use Samira as a cover. We have intel he's in the country. We don't know who he's been sent after. Chatter has it he's linking up to the Fremont cell we told you about, possibly to trigger a much larger attack than crashing an airliner. Chardin has a multitude of aliases. He was born in Morocco of a French mother and Saudi father. Everything we know about him is on the disc inside the folder, including the only picture we have of him. Use the software we've given you to make up a few images of what he might look like in disguise. I threw in a bunch of networked Blackberries for your crew.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's nice of Samira to volunteer as bait for all these developments. I take it you have the sites you want checked out in the packet?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

This tour is her idea, John. I have Casey and Lucas ready to back your play on anything. They'll be at our building Z most times until this ends. I'll stop over early to talk with Kensington at your house in the morning. Bring him along to the Jack London Inn tomorrow night for a meet and greet with Samira.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Nods and smiles)

I thought you were under orders to shut down our local interrogation spot. You mean me, Lucas, and Casey are back in the interrogation business?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

You know how it is, John. Our fearless leaders are shocked... shocked I tell you, at what we have to do. We deal, they squeal. We'll talk more in a minute. I'm afraid Ms. Connagher has some bad news for you. I'll be by my car.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grimaces as he looks toward Tess.)

She wised up, huh?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Turns toward his car)

You might say that.

Harding walks over toward Tess. She leans against her car with head down until John gets next to her. Tess meets John's questioning look with a determined set to her features.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

What's up, Tess?

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

You're right. I'm not cut out for this stuff.

(MORE)

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER (CONT'D)

I took a job offer back East - a partnership in my old law firm. My Mom's going with me. That Russian mobster thing was the last straw for me. My Mom and I are leaving in the morning. We'll have Lora send our things later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

My business proposition really didn't involve the government.

TESS CONNAGHER, LAWYER

(Shakes her head)

Doesn't matter. You're too damn dangerous to be around, and my present law firm won't be dumping their government connection. This New York offer is too good to pass up. Why don't you come with me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grins)

I'd just bring trouble with me. Good luck, Tess. Have a safe trip East.

Tess gives Harding a quick hug, and slips into the driver's seat of her BMW. Harding watches her drive away before joining Strobert by his car. Strobert hands him a miniature satellite phone.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Sorry about that, John. Keep this with you. Get in. I'll give you a lift. Your phone already has all of Chardin's looks on it as do the Blackberries.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'm going to The Warehouse Bar, and kill the taste of Rankin's blood. I'll hang onto the phone. You drop the gear off at the house tomorrow. Don't scare away my recruit.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Get in.

DISSOLVE TO: THE
WAREHOUSE BAR IN
OAKLAND

I/E. THE WAREHOUSE BAR, A FAMOUS POLICE BAR IN OAKLAND, CA - NIGHT

Harding walks into the bar area, waving to a few police friends, and acknowledging congratulations.

CAMERA SHOWS ALL THE COP MEMORABILIA ON THE WALLS AND THE GAME ROOM OFF TO THE SIDE WHERE JOHN SEES ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ AND EARL TAYLOR PLAYING PINBALL. THEY GIVE HIM A SALUTE.

Harding continues on to the end of the bar that is closest to the rear exit. He sits down at the bar and smiles at the bartender that hurries over to him with Marla on her name-tag.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE
What can I get you, Champ?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Two Bud's and two double shots of
Jim Beam, Mar. Is it too late to
get a big Nachos?

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE
Not for you it ain't. I made five
hundred on you tonight. I was
sweatin' bullets until Earl and
'Rique busted in to give me the
news. They're back there playing
pinball.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Yeah, I saw them. Looks like
they're celebratin' too.

Marla nods, setting up two beers and two shots in front of Harding. He drains one shot, and then a beer. Marla replaces both.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE
Feel better?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Chuckles)
Bud and Beam kill the blood taste.
The Nachos makes sure it doesn't
come back.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE
I'm cleaning up. Just yell if you
want anything, Champ.

CAMERA PANS TO THE ENTRANCE WHERE LORA WALKS IN WEARING AN ANKLE LENGTH BLACK CASHMERE COAT.

Lora looks around, spots Harding, waves and smiles. She hurries over to the end of the bar and takes a seat next to him. John nods at her and polishes off another shot and beer.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
Hi, John. I heard you were
celebrating your win in... let's
see... Tess called it - fight club
for idiots.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Yeah, where's Alice?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
Staying overnight with a friend. We
already said our good-byes to Tess
and Mom. Tess told me about why she
took the job back East. I kind of
twisted a lot out of her about you.
They left the moment Tess returned
from your fight.

John sips another shot while Marla spots his empties and replaces them.

MARIA TOLVER, ALEXI FIIALKOV'S
DAUGHTER
Pace yourself, Champ.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Yes, Mommy.

Marla laughed, patted John's hand and went back to her cleaning.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
Well?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Well what? Believe what you want,
Lora. You know everything so what
is it you want from me? If you're
dopey enough to start playing games
with your daughter's life at risk,
then keep shooting your mouth off.
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
I suggest you forget everything
your sister told you.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
You're wound a little tight... even
with chugging what you're putting
down. I don't want anything from
you. I want a job application.
Alice getting used in a Russian
gangster's family scenario
convinced me it doesn't matter what
the hell I do, I can't protect her.
Maybe I could learn how from you.

John stares at Lora. She doesn't blink or look away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
For conversation's sake, why not
relocate to where your ex lives?
What exactly do you think you'd be
applying for, Lora?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
He lives in Arizona. I love the Bay
Area weather. I'm not moving to
that damn furnace. Tess probably
never told you but I have a
master's degree in psychology and-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Big whoop.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
And a BA degree in accounting. I
also worked five years for a law
firm in Boston as an intern during
my college years. In addition to
that I worked as an intern in
Washington D.C. for a couple of
years.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I have an associate who knows
business. What the hell would I
need with a bookkeeper?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
I don't look like an East Oakland
leg-breaker. You need an attractive
presence out front. I know what you
do and I don't care.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You know what Tess knows. Don't assume you know me. If you did, you'd be catching a ride East with her.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

(Giggles)

I saw the looks she gave us when I hugged you in the school parking lot. I also felt your interest rising, too, by the way. I know you need a lawyer. My expertise is I am a great recruiter of good talent. You want an up and comer with skill and no clients. I'll find one for you and act as go between. I'll work for a third what you planned on giving Tess. The rest can be used for our law associate - one who knows our business comes first. In the meantime I'll start working on my own law degree. Tess doesn't blame you for what's happened.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

That's good because it was her own damn fault she ended up in danger. She had delusions of grandeur like I see dancing around in your eyes. The business proposition was not related directly to her involving herself in my government relationship. She did that all on her own. What is it you're actually auditioning for, Lora?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

I see you as a guy who knows how to make money. This new business venture of yours in a place like Oakland could make a lot of money. I'm not independently wealthy. I owe my Mom a small fortune and I just lost my job as a medical receptionist. Tess claims you do a lot of things that would scare the shit out of me. Is it possible to work for you without getting involved with your extracurricular government activities?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

That's the plan. Your verbal resume is impressive, especially since you've dealt with politicians and lawyers. I'll go over what you said tonight after I get a good night's sleep, Lora. Give me your number and I'll call you with what I decide.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

Hey, are you dismissing me, Dark Lord?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Dark Lord?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

Yeah, you know, like in the video games with Darth Vader. If you blow up enough stuff you get a Dark Lord trophy. You sound like you're giving me the imperial bum's rush and you do look like what I'd imagine the Dark Lord would look like. I guess you don't play many video games.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I've seen 'Star Wars' and I object to being compared to Darth Vader. I'm more of a Han Solo.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

More like Chewbacca.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(In bass, gravelly voice)
The Dark Lord takes no disrespect from underlings! You will regret insulting the Dark Lord!

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

(Laughs along with a few people within earshot.)
For a guy who does what you do you're pretty funny.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Remember the part about forgetting what I do outside of the business you're applying for?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
(Bows her head)
Yes, Dark Lord.

Lora patted Harding's hand where it wrapped around his beer.
Then she held on to it.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER (CONT'D)
Why don't you come over to my place
tonight? You can do your comedy act
for me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'll call you.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
(Leans forward,
whispering)
Come home with me, John. I'll turn
your world inside out. No one's
laid a hand on me since my husband
dumped me for that teenage bimbo
he's living with in Arizona.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Wow.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
Don't make me beg, Dark Lord. I've
wanted you since the school parking
lot. I knew Tess would be too
stupid to hold onto you with both
hands. No strings attached. I'll
even sing 'Angel of the Morning'
tomorrow when you leave me.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Just touch your cheek before I
leave you, huh?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
You betcha'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Okay, maybe I am that easy. You'll
be gentle, right?

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
(Laughs delightedly,
pulling on John's hand)
C'mon, I'll show you.

John put two hundred dollar bills down on the bar, even though Marla rushed over to protest, keeping them clamped there.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Tip. Good-night, Marla.

MARLA BOWERS, BARTENDER AT THE
WAREHOUSE BAR, MIDDLE AGED AND BLONDE
Thanks, Champ.

Harding leads the way out the exit behind them. Three figures rush at them from the shadows. Harding runs at them. His right hook flattens the man on his left. Without pause, John pivots and launches a low sweeping roundhouse kick that buckles the knee of the man trying to move on him to his right. The attacker screams, falling on his side as Lora retreats to the building's wall. The stunned man in the center fumbles inside his jacket. Harding head butts him square in the face, following him to the ground and ripping the 9mm automatic out of the writhing man's coat. Lora gasps as John moves quickly over and pistol whips the man he hit first, who was getting up to his knees before searching him for weapons. He finds another automatic which he stuffs in his waistband. Harding then moved to the man screaming on the ground still clutching his gruesomely bent leg. John disarms him of another pistol.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
Sho...should I go in and get help,
John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
No, stay where you are. I recognize
this clown with the facial.

Straightening, Harding kicks the man with the busted leg.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Quiet down, Princess, or I'll do
your other leg.

The man looks up in horror at Harding and clamps his mouth and eyes tightly shut in pain. John then kicks the man in the center.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Get up, Timmy. I want to hear what
the hell you think you were doing
out here tonight. I bet Alexi
doesn't know about it.

Fialkov's son-in-law rolls awkwardly to his side, blood pouring from his shattered nose, and then to his knees.

After he's standing, covering his face, John goes through his pockets. He finds a cell-phone. Checking the phone, John smiles. He scrolls to a number and presses enter, lifting the phone up to his ear as he covers the three men.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

Yes?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Hi, Alexi. This is John Harding.
I'm at The Warehouse Bar in
Oakland. I have Timmy and two of
your men here. Tell me you didn't
send them.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

Never would I have done such a
thing, John. Have you killed them?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

No, but you'll need to send a van
and some men to collect them.
They'll live.

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I come now. Fifteen minutes. Thank
you.

John backs to where Lora is huddled against the wall without taking his eyes off the men in front of him.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's Alexi Fialkov's son-in-law,
the father of Alice's schoolmate
enemy. Still want in on my
business?

Lora puts her arms around John's waist, her face against his back.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER

More than ever.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Pats her hands clasped
around his chest)

That's the spirit.

CUT TO: VAN
PARKED RUNNING

IN THE STREET
WITH FIIALKOV
TALKING TO
HARDING

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WAREHOUSE BAR IN OAKLAND - NIGHT

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I am in your debt, John. No one will ever approach you again from my people. You were offered a deal by the promoters. Thank you for not taking it. I wish to take over the fight action here. My son-in-law lost much when you beat Rankin tonight. I found out he has been plotting with the promoters behind my back.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Smiles)

You had a bug at our meeting, huh? Did you plan on leveraging proof of their play with the fight crowd to take over?

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

I thought to cover both ends as always. Tim never thought you could beat Rankin. If my daughter and granddaughter did not love him, he would be part of a new parking lot. I have ears everywhere, and I know you have special problems moving into the area. You are not the pug people think. I will provide information necessary to protect our area of the world and your client. I do not wish my investment blown up here by these barbarians.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Interesting, Alexi. We would be grateful for anything you could provide. The school thing was cute. What was Timmy's plan for me tonight?

ALEXI FIIALKOV, RUSSIAN MOBSTER AND
VAN RANKIN'S MANAGER

The dolt thought to threaten your
friend's life to acquire your
agreement to the deal made to you
earlier. I will make this right.

Fialkov drove away with a wave as John watched. Only then
did Lora join him from where she had been waiting at the
wall.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
Did he use his granddaughter to
somehow intimidate you?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Either he did or Timmy. They must
have seen Tess and I together after
a couple of my fights. The Russians
are taking over the fight game
around here.

LORA RADCLIFF, TESS'S SISTER
(Tugs on John's hand.)
Come with me before you change your
mind. I want you inside me so bad,
I'm dribbling down my leg.

CUT TO: INSIDE
JOHN HARDING'S
HOUSE

INT. HARDING'S HOUSE IN OAKLAND - DAY

FOCUS ON JAFAR AT HARDING'S KITCHEN TABLE DRINKING COFFEE
WHILE WORKING ON HIS LAPTOP. HE LOOKS UP WHEN HE HEARS THE
FRONT DOOR OPEN. CAMERA PANS TO KITCHEN ENTRANCE-WAY AS
HARDING WALKS IN.

Harding walks into the kitchen with a slight wave.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Did you get my message about my not
coming home?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

(Nods)

I have been reviewing your fights
on YouTube. They even have the one
where you killed the guy. It has
nearly a million hits.

(MORE)

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
The new Rankin one is increasing by
the thousands every hour. You are
very popular.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Wonderful. I should have been
keeping an eye on that stuff.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

Mr. Strobert came over very early
and talked with me this morning. He
brought over papers for me to fill
out, and explained many facets of
what is done in the role I would be
working in. He told me he recruited
you in Afghanistan when you were
about my age.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Sits down with his own
cup of coffee)

Yeah, Denny and I go back a ways. I
want you in with me on my private
enterprise too. You'll be
introduced in slowly. If something
doesn't feel right with you, let me
know. I'm on a three man team with
a couple guys. We could use a new
face with computer savvy in the
field, especially with your
language skills.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

Mr. Strobert said you can teach me
many things about prepping for a
mission where we have to outthink
people like the ones after the
Karim woman.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Unfortunately, we have to throw you
in the deep end. Your main job is
to be a companion, and keep your
eyes open. You're training for a
support role.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

I am grateful for this opportunity.
I don't want to let you down.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Laughs)

You'll be fine. Did Denny drop off
my packet and gear?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

(Grins)

Yes, but he was a bit uneasy doing
it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Denny trusts no one. It's in his
DNA. He must like you.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

He saw my laptop open with your
YouTube fights. He knows about
them, and told me he has some plans
to talk over with you.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Sighs)

Figures. Go ahead and take my car
to school. The keys are on the hook
by the door.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

It would be much nicer if you
acquired a more James Bond type
vehicle.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Apparently the word clandestine
isn't in your vocabulary, kid.

CUT TO: HARDING
SITTING ON HIS
FRONT STEP
SIPPING COFFEE

I/E. HARDING'S HOUSE IN OAKLAND - DAY

CAMERA FOCUS ON HARDING AND HIS ATTENTION DRAWN TO A NEIGHBOR
LADY TWO HOUSES DOWN APPROACHING RAPIDLY.

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR

Hi John, I saw your fight with the
Russian bear on YouTube.

(MORE)

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR
I thought he crushed you when you
went down under him.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
He compressed me a little, Lucy.
How's the twins?

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR
Real fine. They start school next
year, thank the Lord. I need your
take on something. That no account
thug, Terry Nelson is at the
McBride house down the street. I
went to school with that piece of
crap. I'm worried about Darin. My
twins said they saw Nelson take
Darin inside the house about twenty
minutes ago. His Mom's workin' and
he's supposed to be in school.

John stood up quickly, putting his coffee cup aside.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Darin's a good kid. You're right.
There's no reason for Nelson to be
there. Go back inside, Lucy, and
keep the kids inside until I sort
this out.

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR
(Pats Harding's arm)
Thanks, John. The whole
neighborhood knows it's because of
you the 'bangers stay the hell
away.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Grins)
You know the old saying, if someone
wants to place a bomb in your
house, put one in his first.

Lucy Sparks cracks up while walking away, nodding her head.

LUCY SPARKS, HARDING'S NEIGHBOR
You alright, John! I'll keep the
kids inside. Anybody ask me about
'dat rat Nelson, I tell them
nothin'.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Mumbles to himself)
Let's see what you're up to now,
Terry.

Harding walks down to the McBride house, noticing the tricked out old Cadillac Eldorado parked in front. He went to the front door, standing off to the side, and knocked. Ten year old Darin McBride answered the door. Harding makes a quieting gesture, pulling the shocked Darin outside behind him. It took only twenty seconds before Nelson walked to the door. Harding's right fist smashes into Nelson's solar plexus with devastating effect. Nelson catapults backwards to the floor, writhing breathlessly on the floor.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
C'mon inside and tell me what this
is all about, Darin.

Darin scoots in past Harding, avoiding the gasping Nelson. Harding closes the door and drags Nelson further inside by the scruff of his neck.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Do you have any duct tape around?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
Yeah, John. I get it for you.

Darin goes into another room and returns with a half used roll of gray duct tape. Harding duct tapes Nelson's mouth, his hands behind his back, and his ankles. When he finishes, he turns to put an arm around Darin's shoulders.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Your Mom's a good woman, D. What
the hell you letting this scumbag
in your house for, and skipping
school?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
You know how it is. Nelson up with
the 'bangers. When I go along, I
don't get schooled.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Nods)
Okay... what's he want from you
today?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
He brought over a backpack he wants
me to deliver to somebody at the
Jack London Inn. Nelson say nobody
mess with me 'cause of my age.

CAMERA SHOWS HARDING'S LOOK OF SURPRISE AND THEN PANS TO NELSON, WHO IS STARING UP AT HARDING WIDE EYED.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Where's the backpack, D?

CAMERA PANS TO WHERE DARIN POINTS IN THE KITCHEN, ONE ROOM OVER FROM THE ENTRYWAY WHERE A BLUE BACKPACK WITH A YELLOW SMILEY FACE LEANS AGAINST THE WALL.

Harding gestures for Darin to stay still. He walks over to the bag, which has a silicone seal across the zippered top. Harding takes a knife out, slits the silicone seal in a line. He unzips it and sees a pulsating light inside a Styrofoam nest.

CAMERA SHOWS THE BUNDLED C4 EXPLOSIVES WITH ATTACHED TRIGGERING MECHANISM.

Harding zips the pack again, noticing for the first time Darin staring over his shoulder. Darin stumbles backward.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
That... that's a bomb. He... he-

John grabs the boy by the shoulders, smiling into his face as he crouches at his level.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Here's what we do, kid. I'm going
to take the pack and Nelson
somewhere special I know about. You
will be out of this. All you need
do is find me an old tarp or sheet
to wrap nitwit Nelson in... okay?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
But John... what about when
Nelson... oh... he ain't comin'
back, huh?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Glances over at Nelson)
No. Nelson's going away. You don't
give that any thought.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
I know just what you need to wrap
Nelson.

Darin runs off into the attached garage and comes back with an old, dust covered bed spread. Harding has Nelson's keys in hand.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Perfect.

John rolls Nelson into the bed cover, duct taping it into place. He straightens from the task and shows Darin his satellite phone.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Have you seen this guy before? I'm showing you different looks that may be the way he appears now.

Darin peers at the phone screen as Harding slowly shows him different looks. Darin points excitedly at the third photo.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR BOY

I saw that guy with Nelson. We was outside the store over on 38th and Penniman. A black van stopped across the street. Nelson ran over and jawed at that guy.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Good. Think D. What kind of van?

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR BOY

Ford... ah... Edge. Yeah... a Ford Edge.

Harding stands up, squeezing the boy's shoulder reassuringly. He then goes over and shoulders Nelson up effortlessly.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Stay inside today, D. If any of Nelson's 'bangers call, you tell them you haven't seen Nelson and you're waiting for his call.

Darin hugs Harding, who pats his shoulder.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR BOY
Thanks, John. I... I'm sorry about-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Never mind all that, D. I know how it is.
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
When I get clear of my crap with
Nelson, I'll make things better
around here. Talk to no one.

DARIN MCBRIDE, TEN YEAR OLD NEIGHBOR
BOY
(Grins)
If it get bad, I'll cry.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Chuckles)
That'll work.

John carries Nelson out to the Cadillac trunk, opens it, and heaves Nelson inside. He then gets into the driver's seat. Harding takes out his satellite phone, and connects with Strobert.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Strobert.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
New development. I'll let you in on
it if we can agree on the
conclusion.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Let's hear it.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Gang-banger, Chardin, IED. We meet
somewhere quiet for a discussion
and then the gang-banger moves on
to the happy hunting ground. If
you're not pleased with the
conclusion say so now and you get
nothin'.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
You must think I've turned into a
pussy in my old age, Harding. Lucas
and Casey are at building Z now.
I'll meet you there... okay?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Sounds good. See you then. I'll
take my present over now after I
alter it slightly.

CUT TO: BUILDING
Z, A WAREHOUSE
COMPLEX IN SAN
LEANDRO, OWNED
BY CIA

INT. BUILDING Z, SAN LEANDRO WAREHOUSE COMPLEX - DAY

Lucas Blake waves at Harding as John drives Nelson's Cad into Building Z. Blake closes the overhead door and locks it. Casey Lambert comes over to shake hands with Harding as he emerges from the Cad.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
LANKY TEXAN

Hey Gunny, how's business? Lucas here says you called Denny a pussy.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Grins)

I may have been a little overzealous about making sure Denny understood my guest in the trunk won't be returning anywhere outside the building other than a landfill. Denny may have taken offense to that.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
(Walks up from the back)

Damn right I did, meat. You're late. I scrambled my buddies here special for you. I hope it's worth it.

Harding walks around to the Cad trunk and opens it.

CAMERA FOCUSES ON TRUNK'S CONTENTS

Nelson squirms in the trunk. Harding picks him up and pitches him to the warehouse floor. Sweat poured off Terry's face. Harding rips the duct tape off his mouth taking skin with it. Nelson yelps, before going into a nonstop rant about brutality, black men, Rodney King, and defaming Harding's lineage back to the dawn of time. Lucas drop kicks him in the face and looks at Harding with his stern rebuke face.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
LANKY TEXAN

What'd you shut him up for, Lucas?
Damn... he was just getting funny.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

Why didn't you warm this sucker up,
John? We'll have to spend at least
fifteen minutes in preliminaries.

Harding hands Strobert the backpack from the trunk.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Sorry guys, but I didn't have a choice. Nelson here recruited a ten-year-old neighbor boy to strap this Chardin made bomb pack. The boy was to walk in Jack London Inn and get close to Samira Karim's room. The boy even knew the room number.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

Holy shit! Get him on the table. We don't know how much time we have. Were you able to bypass the trigger, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Shakes his head)

What'd you think, Denny, I'd haul a live bomb in here? When he checks, Chardin will get a live signal but that's all.

CUT TO:

INTERROGATION
ROOM INSIDE
BUILDING Z

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM, BUILDING Z - DAY

SURROUNDINGS SEEN THROUGH NELSON'S EYES AS HE COMES TO.

Nelson's eyes widen as he realizes he is restrained to a gurney in a plastic draped room with four figures looming over him in surgical type cover gear. He recognizes Harding.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER

Har... Harding? What... what's goin' on?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

This is Terry Nelson. He's a cheap gang-bangin' thug. I've picked up shells on the beach with more brains. He outdid himself this time.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

You mixed with the wrong guy. Now, you're going to tell us everything about Claude Chardin. In case you don't know his name, he's the one that gave you the explosive pack.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER
Man... I don't know shit about-

Casey cut Nelson's cheek with a scalpel in a slow deliberate shallow slice from his chin to eye. Nelson's squeal ended in a sobbing, guttural whine.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Look Nelson, you were going to outfit a ten-year-old boy with a bomb to blow up God knows how many innocent people. You ain't ever leavin' this place alive. My associates will get everything you know. How you draw your last breath is in your hands right now. Tell us everything you know about Chardin and this gig at Jack London and you can go out with a smile on your face.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
(Shows Nelson a hypodermic needle)
This is a wonderland hotshot, Mr. Nelson. Do as John suggests and you get it. Play dumb and in an hour you will be begging us to hear every detail.

TERRY NELSON, THUG, GANG-BANGER
Okay... okay... I know the guy. He... he said I'd make twenty thousand if I could get the kid up by the room. Dude didn't tell me why. He gave me ten thou' up front and told me what he wanted done. There... there's a cell-phone in a panel under my driver's seat. He only contact me twice. Honest, that's-

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Shut up! I'll be right back. Better start prayin' Terry. If that cell-phone ain't there with all you say I'm going to make you wish you were never born.

Harding returns with Nelson's phone. Strobert hooks it to a laptop already set up in the room. Minutes later Strobert gets up with his features betraying his excitement, and his clenched fists alluding to a controlled rage.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

We've got him. They triangulated
the signal to a boat at the San
Leandro Marina with Pakistani
papers. We have to move before he
suspects we're onto him. I found a
phone number that explains how
Chardin got this close. We'll deal
with that later.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's Reddig, Denny. Tell it
straight.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

(Swipes the air with his
hand.)

Later, John. Let's go get Chardin.
We'll settle all other accounts
later. I have an idea how to
approach the boat, but we'll need
the kid to lead us in. Do you think
he's up to the mark, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'll ask him. First I need to
fulfill my word to this asshole.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

You guys put on the EMT outfits.
We're taking the wagon over to the
marina and rescue poor old Claude
Chardin. I'll stick Tweety-Bird,
and pull the war wagon around
front.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

C'mon, John. Let's suit up. What'll
it be for making the world safe?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

9mm Tauruses with AWC Abraxas
silencers, and of course our
military grade flash-bangs.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
LANKY TEXAN

(Chuckles)

We only have one type flash-bang,
and it ain't those pussy civilian
crowd pleasers. Let's do this.

CUT TO: INSIDE
MADE UP
EMERGENCY
MEDICAL VAN AT
SAN LEANDRO
MARINA

I/E. SAN LEANDRO MARINA AND CHARDIN'S CRUISER - DAY

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You lead us down the pier with our gurney, calling out the name of Alda Jameson. She's part owner of the boat next to Chardin's. We want you to run up Chardin's gangplank with me right behind you. Someone comes out to see what's going on. You hit the deck and stay there. Clear?

Jafar stared at Harding without blinking until Lucas patted his shoulder.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,

5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

Step up. We need a hero, kid.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

Great, where do we find him?

General laughter at Jafar's remark.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT (CONT'D)

It is clear. I will do it, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Take us in, Denny!

With sirens blaring, Strobert screeched the fake EMT van to a halt in front of the pier leading to Chardin's Bertram Cruiser. The team exited in full EMT uniforms and caps. Casey raced ahead to the locked gateway, picking it open in seconds before holding it open for his teammates with Jafar leading. Jafar yelled out the name of Alda Jameson down the pier and onto the fantail of Chardin's cruiser. Harding worked the gurney onto the fantail decking with Lucas and Casey carrying medical shoulder bags. A short dark, clean shaven man in a brown suit came through the back hatch waving angrily at Jafar and shouting at him in heavily accented English.

Jafar hit the deck as Harding shot the man, and tossed two flash-bangs into the boat interior.

The team donned gas masks as the resulting explosions elicited screams. They secured the main deck through the smoky haze and chucked a couple more flash-bangs down into the lower ship area through the hatch. Casey and Harding secured the three guys writhing on the floor with blood coming out of their ears and nose while Lucas dragged the dead greeter inside. Casey and Lucas made sure the upper deck was secure before the Casey and Harding secured the six staterooms with Lucas watching the lower level access. Automatic weapons fire tore through the master stateroom's door as Harding kicks it in. He throws another flash-bang while diving out of the way.

They found Chardin trying to pick up the Uzi he'd dropped, his face twisted in agony as he fought to overcome the stun grenade. Harding kicked him in the temple, plastic tied his wrists, and slit both his Achilles Tendons. He then checked his dental work for any suspicious caps that he could bite down on and avoid interrogation with. Harding duct tapes Chardin to a chair in the room after tightly wrapping the assassin's Achilles Tendon slices.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
LANKY TEXAN

You didn't trust the hypo we
brought to keep him subdued, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'd just worry about him, Case.
Now... I ain't worried.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
LANKY TEXAN

Works for me. It's less blood than
blowing his kneecap off. We need to
cap him after the questions though.
He'd hold a grudge you crippled him
otherwise, and come lookin' for
payback some day when a suit let
him escape.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
My thoughts exactly. Let's go help
Lucas do the lower deck and get
this ship runnin' for the horizon
before somebody thinks that wasn't
fireworks.

When Casey and Harding get back to the lower deck access, Lucas throws another stun grenade further into the lower deck area, provoking more screams. Masks still in place, they found five more crew members, two of them dead from ruptured blood vessels.

After securing the lower deck, they bring Jafar back in. Lucas takes the boat out to sea while Casey sweeps the boat for tracking devices, and Harding begins prepping Chardin for interrogation. Jafar stays on the main deck.

CUT TO: MAIN
STATEROOM WHERE
CHARDIN IS BOUND
TO A CHAIR

Chardin's eyes watched Harding, dead dark orbs without expression or light. He waited while Harding checks the makeshift bandages binding his tendons before positioning a chair in front of him and sitting down. Harding then activates the video recorder aimed at Chardin.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
You've probably assumed recruiting
that dirt-bag Nelson for an
unwilling suicide bombing didn't go
well. Want to discuss the details?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN
Why did you maim me?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Professional courtesy.

Watches Chardin clamp down on the pain and rage.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Maybe you should have put your Uzi
into your pie hole instead of
pointing it at the doorway when we
came through. Hope is a risky
business. When dealing with the
public persona of America our
enemies think we're pussies. You're
duct taped to a chair with your
Achilles Tendons slashed because of
an error in judgment. You don't
care about anything. Tell us
everything and avoid some pain.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN
I have diplomatic immunity. I wish
to negotiate for my release. I know
of you, John Harding. I know how
you think.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Laughs)
No you don't. If you did, you'd be
begging to tell me everything.

CAMERA SWITCHES TO STATEROOM DOOR WHERE LUCAS ENTERS

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

Look what I found in Claude's
personal tablet up on the bridge.

SHOWS CHARDIN'S MOMENTARY SHOCK THEN PANS TO THE DIGITAL TABLET LUCAS SHOWS HARDING OF A WOMAN AND COLLEGE AGE GIRL WITH CHARDIN.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Well... a college age daughter.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

I flashed the picture to Denny. He
says she attends Vassar. You must
be very proud. Claude here never
figured on ever coming close to
getting caught, John. Otherwise,
he'd never have left a trace like
this for us to find. Think he'll
keep silent now?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
How about it, Claude? Want to avoid
mixing business and family?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN
I know you will not torture a
child.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA
Why hell no we wouldn't torture a
child, Mr. Chardin. We now know
your college kid and her Mom. If
such information should somehow...
you know... get leaked to the wrong
people it would be a real tragedy.
Right, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
You betcha'.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN
You would sign the death warrant
for an innocent woman and child?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You did that. We're giving you a way to keep them safe, while making up for being a cold blooded, soulless monster, responsible for probably hundreds of deaths, directly or indirectly. Start talking now. Me and Lucas give you our word no one will find out about your wife and daughter. We'll also make sure they get some of your ill gotten gains.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

(Spits on the floor)
Your word means nothing.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA

John and I are Marines. Our word means everything. We don't strap bombs onto children and blow them up in crowded places so as to kill untold numbers of innocents. If John says your wife and kid will be safe, make book on it. We'd kill our boss if he ever broke our word and he knows it.

Lucas held the picture of his daughter in front of him again. Chardin cared nothing for anything else living. He nodded.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

It will be as you say. When I stated that I know you, Harding, it was not a cheap ploy. I have something only I can provide alive. It is not something you can torture out of me. That information I will give you first. Will you then listen to my other offer?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

I'll listen, but I don't like your chances, Claude.

By the time Strobert arrives, Chardin has listed everything he knows about the forming of terrorist cells, his Iranian backers, and the fact Karim was a bombing for distraction. Strobert looks up from skimming over the digital transcript as Chardin finishes.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

What do you mean by distraction?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

If non Muslim blacks were involved in a suicide bombing it would have put everything in a state of chaos for at least a few months. I picked that idiot Nelson's crew because they were into everything but religion, and money was their God. Your authorities would have wasted precious time investigating the blacks, leaving the real threat to grow like wildfire.

CAMERA SHOWS THE SILENT FURY CHARDIN'S RECITATION PROVOKES IN THE THREE MEN SEATED AROUND HIM.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

You said you had something special.
Now's the time.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

Dubai will host a UFC event next April. Ahmed Quadir will be there to assassinate one of the Saudi royal family in attendance.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF

So what? Another terrorist backer bites the big one. I'll pass it along. Thanks.

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN

Harding knows what.

CAMERA SHOWS HARDING GET UP OUT OF HIS CHAIR, FISTS CLENCHED.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL

LANKY TEXAN

What's up, John? You know this Quadir guy?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

He's the one they sent after the Karim family when me and a few other company recruits were guarding them in Afghanistan. He caught Stan Donnelly down in the village, tortured and gutted him. We lucked out and a Warthog was in the area when Quadir's men attacked. It wiped them out, but not Quadir.

(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
Our embassy in Saudi Arabia got a
video of Stan's torture/execution a
few days later. You must know
Quadir, huh Claude?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN
(Nods)
Very well. He underbid me for the
Dubai hit, which is why I know of
it. I will identify him for you in
exchange for my life.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA
That ain't happenin'. John here
maimed you. We all know what you
can do, ass-hole. You die the
moment we check your info and your
family lives protected. That's the
agreement.

CAMERA SHOWS STROBERT WATCHING HARDING WITH A SLIGHT SMILE.

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
What about it, John?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Can you fix this mook up by April,
Denny?

DENNIS STROBERT, CIA OPERATIONS CHIEF
Yep. He won't be good as new, but
he'll be mobile. I'm thinking we
send you, Casey, and Lucas in early
through Saudi Arabia backroads with
Bambi here as your guide a couple
weeks before the fight. Claude ID's
the mark. You guys chill him, and
John meets his fight team at the
airport for a UFC bout if I can
make a little side deal with Alexi.
I recruited Stan.

LUCAS BLAKE, EX MARINE, VIETNAM VET,
5' 8" OF BLACK RAWHIDE FROM EAST LA
If John's in, I'm in.

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
LANKY TEXAN
(Leans into Chardin's
face)
(MORE)

CASEY LAMBERT, EX DELTA FORCE, TALL
Anything happens to John, me and
Lucas will carve you and your
family up and feed you all to the
pigs. You feel me, Ace?

CLAUDE CHARDIN, WORLD CLASS ASSASSIN
(Meets Casey's stare
unblinkingly)

I am done. If I may live to be a
part of my daughter's life for a
while, I will be the most valuable
asset you have ever had.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
I'm in. Let's do this.

CUT TO: DUBAI,
UAE

I/E. OUTSIDE CIA SAFE-HOUSE AND DUBAI HILTON - DAY

Harding, Blake, Lambert, and Chardin arrived at the Dubai CIA safe-house, all with beards, sun darkened skin, and Arab dress from their circuitous route through Saudi Arabia. Chardin was rail thin, and walked with metal canes. They changed to clothing already placed in advance. A limousine drops them off at the Hilton Dubai Creek Hotel. The rooms booked were adjacent to Quadir's reservation for two rooms so that no matter which one he slept in, Harding's team would have a room next door. They spoke nothing but Arabic while checking in sporting clean Arab dress, matching their Saudi passport identities.

Strobert's CIA assets working at the Hilton smoothed the way so when Quadir and his men checked in Lucas and Chardin were there. Recognizing Quadir, Chardin snapped a picture and sent it up to Harding's room. Casey stayed out in the hallway as if waiting impatiently for some sort of service after studying the picture Chardin had relayed to the room. Dressed in full flowing robes and his skin darkened, Casey could not be recognized even if Quadir knew who to look for. He exchanges Arabic greetings with Quadir and his crew as the former entered the room to Casey's left with one of his associates, while the other two entered the room on his right.

The team had already drilled tiny holes at floor level nearest where the night-stand stood next to the bed in either room. The tank with knockout gas had been brought up by Chardin, who pretended it to be an oxygen tank he had tubes from to his nose.

No one questioned it because of his already frail condition and canes. Quadir and his crew partied hard until three in the morning, gambling and drinking. Luckily, they had too much to drink, deciding to return to their rooms without company. Harding waited until only the sounds of sleep came from the audio pickup they had pointed at Quadir's room. An hour of the gas and it was show-time.

With a key-card for Quadir's room, Harding went in low and silent, avoiding security cameras already mapped out prior to their arrival. Harding slipped on a gas mask and checked the Iranian bodyguard before advancing on Quadir. He pulls up the bedclothes near his feet. Watching him carefully, John pulls Quadir's left foot over clear of the bed and covers. He injects the death syringe into a spot between Quadir's toes, keeping pressure on the spot until the heart no longer pumped blood. After positioning the foot back under the covers, Harding opens the sliding door leading to an outside veranda. He waits until the electronic sensor he has tests okay for the clearing air, before closing the veranda door and exiting the room.

Staying inside their rooms for the next day, the team waited through the harried noise and confusion when the guard figured out no amount of shaking would bring Quadir back from hell. Shortly after the body was removed the Iranian guards left. As Chardin had figured Quadir played his contracts close to the vest. His men had no idea who the target was or who to contact for information. They had none of the money collected for the hit. Without the man responsible for planning, the guards realized they were out of options and left.

The team checked out a day after they left, returning to the safe-house where Harding donned western clothes and shaved his beard. The others kept their disguises and left the way they had come, after Strobert confirmed the authorities ruled Quadir's death by natural causes. Harding received flight times for meeting his corner crew coming in the next day for the fight.

CUT TO: WEIGH IN
FOR THE UFC
FIGHT WITH
RANKIN AND
HARDING FACED
OFF FOR THE
CAMERAS

INT. DUBAI FIGHT ARENA - DAY

CAMERA SHOWS HARDING AND RANKIN POSED FOR PHOTOS, WITH TOMMY, JAFAR, JESSE, AND DEVON NEAR HARDING.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Smiles)

How's the nose, Van?

Harding turns quickly, jumping around with his hands up in the air while Rankin's trainers held on to him for dear life. Harding's crew walled him off from Rankin until the officials stepped in to end Harding's ploy.

CAMERA PANS TO WHERE ALEXI FIIALKOV IS SITTING NEAR THE FRONT. HE SMILES AT HARDING AND SHAKES A CAUTIONARY FINGER AT HIM. HARDING WAVES BACK.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

I saw some of the big names in UFC
checking Rankin out and I saw fear.
Did you have to poke the bear,
John... really?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

Jess and I haven't been in the sand
for quite a while. We had mixed
feelings about flyin' into this
area. Now this?

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

Yeah, John. You'll owe us some
weekends on your new yacht. Step up
and let a brother cruise. What's he
call that thing, T?

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

The Ungrateful White Bread, I
think.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

(Chuckles)

That prick looks like Godzilla. I
was startin' to feel good about
your chances after working with you
the last few days until I saw
Rankin up close. Damn! He brushed
against me near the scale and tore
my shirt and bruised the skin. Now
you went and made him mad. Are you
mental?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

(Laughs)

Might as well do the Dark Lord for him in the cage, you psycho. If you're lucky, you'll survive with a colostomy bag and breathing through a tube. If you don't survive where do you want your ashes scattered?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's all in the plan, guys. I appreciate the confidence you all have in me. Hey, Jafar, you're pretty quiet.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

(Holds his hand up to his face in a classic shun.)

You are dead to me.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Don't mind the kid, John. He's been in love with the Karim girl ever since our escort gig. I'm pretty sure she was in love with him too. He won't say it, but he wants you to take him to the base in Saudi Arabia to ask her Dad for his blessing.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Grins at Jafar)

What's in it for me?

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN DESCENT

I will watch out for Alice any time you and Lora want to be alone.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Deal.

FADE TO: OCTAGON
CAGE INSIDE THE
DUBAI FIGHT
ARENA

INT. DUBAI FIGHT ARENA - NIGHT

Rankin and Harding are on the bottom of the fight card as two nobodies in UFC deserve. They fought first. The arena is filled to capacity without an empty seat.

Harding enters the cage to the playing of the Marine's Hymn. Many in the crowd roared in appreciation. Once inside the cage Harding loosens up with his crew near him.

Rankin picked Black Sabbath's 'I Am Ironman'. Rankin stomps down the aisle toward the cage with every beat, his fists hammering forward in rhythm. Timed perfectly, Rankin stalked into the cage at Black Sabbath's declaration 'I Am Ironman'.

CAMERA SHOWS HARDING ENJOYING RANKIN'S ENTRANCE AND TURNING TOWARD TOMMY. THEN IT PANS TO THE CROWD WHERE HARDING SPOTS LORA SITTING NEXT TO ALEXI FIIALKOV. SHOWS HARDING'S STUNNED LOOK. SHE'S DRESSED IN A BLACK, OFF THE SHOULDER DRESS, BLACK HEELS, AND RED HAIR TIED BACK AT THE NECK. HE WAVES LIKE A THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD AT HIS FIRST DANCE.

Seeing the Rankin fight plans temporarily leaving the building. Tommy slaps Harding in the back of the head with attitude. He jams his face two inches away from John's in a rage.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Hello, Dark Lord? Get your fuckin'
head in the game!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Voice over of Harding's
thoughts in first person)
I saw Alexi give me a finger wave.
Apparently, I wasn't the only one
with a plan. When I turned to face
Rankin he was pointing at Lora,
blowing her kisses. The moment he
knew I was watching, he turned and
gave me the full death-ray eye
stare. That's the trouble with
cheap, no account, blowhard punks.
They don't know it's best not to
play with killers.

I closed my eyes. In a spit second
my mind's eye had me standing in
that Leavittsburg, Ohio hovel,
watchin' Pa circlin' me with belt
in hand while the rain pounded down
outside. I could smell the Mahoning
River slime that saturated the
house. I could smell his rage. I
smelled desperation. Oh mama, I'm
home again. I opened my eyes.
Rankin grinned.
(MORE)

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)

No matter how this turned out, I would make sure he wasn't grinning when it ended. The referee motioned us to the center. I have no idea what he said when Rankin and I stared into each other's eyes. I backed to my cage position when he stopped speaking. We didn't touch gloves.

Rankin moved forward in control. He shot out lightning bolts with both arms and feet. Harding blocked, bobbed, ducked, and measured for forty seconds. For all of that nearly first minute, Rankin tuned Harding up for the crowd's pleasure. When John's left leg strike smashed into the inside of his extended left knee, it wasn't nearly as pretty as Rankin's full bore attack, but it nearly put Rankin on the canvas. His eyes widened as he launched a flurry. A left hook caught Harding, and even pulling away from the punch couldn't keep him on his feet.

John flailed around as Rankin dove into full mount position on the attack. Harding absorbs the elbows, blocked a few, and managed a locked leg full guard. Rankin picks Harding up enough to slam him into the cage with his head down. Before Rankin can tie John up with his left and hammer fist him into oblivion, Harding slips his left leg out of locked full guard and around Rankin's right leg, while trapping his left wrist underneath, Harding rolled. Rankin couldn't stop being rolled but threw himself backwards to prevent the reversal. Both men leaped to their feet with the crowd roaring for blood. The buzzer sounds a moment later.

John's crew worked him over without comment until they staunched the flow of blood from the elbow lacerations on his head, washed off the mouth-guard, and cooled him with wet towels.

CAMERA SHOWING RANKIN MASSAGING HIS LEFT KNEE AND THEN HARDING'S SMILING REACTION.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

Nice knee shot, John. Can you smash it again?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Gulps a little water
Jafar serves him)

I'll get right on that, Jess,
thanks.

Jesse chuckles but Harding gets a grim response from the rest of his crew.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
How's your plan workin', Ace?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Five by five, brother. Five by five.

John tries to turn with the purpose of catching a glimpse of Lora. Tommy administers another back of the head slap.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
You eyeball your woman one more time and I'll bitch slap you right in front of this whole fuckin' crowd!

Tommy jams Harding's mouthpiece back into place.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Ten-four, T.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY
His left drops when he throws his right, John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Shit! Thanks, Dev.

Rankin clocks Harding with a right in the first few seconds of the second round and follows with a roundhouse left leg strike that cracks a rib. Rankin hears it and comes in with murder in his eyes. In a flash Harding is down in full guard blocking elbows. As Rankin draws back to strike, John smashes his rebuilt nose. Rankin immediately goes into a hug for a moment, avoiding further damage.

Harding immediately does double strikes under Rankin's rib cage until he pops out of the hug. Rankin's rebuilt nose takes an immediate right hand shot from Harding. Not figuring Harding quick enough to slip under and up quick enough, Rankin flinches back. Harding locks Rankin's right leg and rolls him, missing an arm bar by a split second. Harding keeps going to his feet. Rankin confidently throws leg strikes, targeting Harding's cracked rib, but another leg strike to Rankin's inside left knee nearly buckles it. Rankin throws the right when Harding feints another left leg strike. Rankin's left hand drops and Harding pops the rebuilt nose with a straight right hand. The new nose job gives and blood spatters down Rankin's front. When Rankin covers up, Harding smashes his inside left knee again.

Rankin drops with a grunt of pain. The round buzzer goes off a split second before Harding can drop kick Rankin's head into next week.

Harding's crew works him over when he returns to his corner, clearing the blood away. Jesse presses an ice pack to the rib area Harding points out.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER

Was it in the plan to get your rib
cracked that round?

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

It's an inexact science, T. That
feels good, Jess. Keep it right
there. He dropped the left and I
said hello to Mr. Nose, Dev.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY

(Chuckles as Jafar gives
Harding a swallow of
water)

We don't know how the judges will
score the rounds, John. It might be
one apiece or he took the first
two. That plan of yours better get
launched this round.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

Gonna' go get me some, Dev.

The referee tries to get Harding and Rankin to touch gloves starting the third and final round, but Rankin wasn't having any of it. His corner had staunched the flow of blood, but he favored his left leg. Rankin swung for the fences with both hands, hitting Harding's arms and shoulders with pile-driver blows, trying to keep him on the defensive until he got a clear head or rib shot. Unfortunately for Rankin his left dropped a tad too far. Harding splattered Rankin's nose again with a straight right. Rankin dropped for a takedown and Harding goes with him.

Rankin's full mount was too low. Harding kicks off into his sides. He pulls Rankin's right arm down tight against him, wraps his right leg, while reaching under and grabbing Rankin's left leg. Rankin's left knee gives out and Harding locks his legs around Rankin's head in a triangle choke. They lock eyes. Rankin realizes Harding has him with the referee hovering near the fighters, knowing the predicament Rankin was in. Rankin tries to tap out but Harding deliberately flips him, using his left leg, while closing the triangle during the flip. Rankin's neck breaks. Harding immediately pops up, frantically motioning for the referee.

The referee takes one look and motions frantically for the medics. Harding puts on an act of trying to administer to the fading Van Rankin.

They hook Rankin up to oxygen while inflating air harnesses to keep Rankin immobile. They don't want a death announced right in the cage. Harding does an award winning compassionate killer routine while they took Rankin away, even touching his arm soulfully as he goes by. The referee consoles John and does a quick solemn lift of his right arm as the winner. Then came the post fight interviews for the pay-per-viewers, with Harding and his crew bolstering John's initial act of accidental death.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA (CONT'D)
(Voice over of Harding's thoughts in first person)

Blah... blah... blah... Van ain't comin' back unless it's an appearance on Ghost-Hunters. My crew stayed near me the whole time commiserating with anyone who would listen about what a tragedy it was for the fight to end in such a way.

Outside the cage, Lora wraps her arms around Harding with abandon. They engage in a kiss so intense Alexi Fialkov pats her shoulder like an old uncle, pulling her away while promising Harding would be back soon. He gives Harding a slight salute. Security and Harding's crew rushes him back to the locker room. Rumors circulate about Rankin dying of his injury, so Harding and his crew are met by another host of reporters. They play the grieving card until the press is drawn away to the next fight.

Tommy shakes his head with facial features frozen in grim sorrow.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
You cold blooded, heartless monster.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Grins)
Whatever do you mean, T?

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY
You smiled when you broke his neck,
John.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
Did not.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT

(Laughs)
I saw it too, you sicko.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT

Most impressive! I will soon be
with Samira!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
If we're all done mourning for poor
old Van Rankin let me get my shower
so I can go see Lora.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
Go ahead, but because you couldn't
settle for a win, we'll all have to
have our sad faces on for the rest
of our stay. You can bet another
killing in the cage ain't going to
get you on the UFC's dance card
anytime soon.

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA
(Shrugs)
Shit happens. Hell, I always liked
the old, smelly warehouse fights
anyway.

JESSE BROWN, DEVON CONSTANTINE'S
FRIEND THAT JOHN FOUGHT
Not everything's about you, John.

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
You should have consulted with your
crew.

DEVON CONSTANTINE, EX ARMY
(Laughs uproariously)
Yea...yeah, you selfish bastard.

JAFAR KENSINGTON, TEEN OF IRANIAN
DESCENT
Most impressive!

TOMMY SANDS, HARDING'S MANAGER
(Slaps him in the back of
the head)
Shut up, kid!

JOHN HARDING, EX-MARINE, CIA

(Chuckles)

All I know is I have Lora waiting
outside the locker room with that
fine ass black dress on. Be
patient, baby, the Dark Lord's on
his way.

The End