

Dudley Charles and the Deadly Con

by
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Darkness.

NARRATOR

It is ironic that the primary form of communication between any two people, namely that of language, should be so fraught with gray areas.

Infographics representing the various rules and notable exceptions in the English language.

NARRATOR

While writers and English teachers consider this to be a strength, finding artistry in the fuzzy areas of the language, it is extraordinarily impractical for day to day use.

The infographics include quotes that are clever uses of language from literature.

NARRATOR

And the vast majority of English speakers usually find themselves tripping over the fuzzy bits.

(beat)

Take, for example, the word "con."

The infographics are now exclusively the word "con."

NARRATOR

It's simple. It has only three letters. And yet, aside from its use as a prefix, it has at least three different meanings dependinng on the context.

The word "context" appears with a slight emphasis on the "con."

NARRATOR

It can be short for "convict" as in...

We now see silent local news helicopter footage of a police manhunt.

NARRATOR

An escaped con has so far evaded LA county authorities.

Darkness, again.

NARRATOR

It can also mean "con" as in confidence trick, as in...

We now see silent local news footage of the standard talking head variety. Beside the NEWSCASTER is a silhouette graphic with the words "escaped con."

NARRATOR

The man was known for a number of fraud and con schemes.

Darkness.

NARRATOR

And it can also be short for "convention" as in...

INT. MARRIOTT HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

A banner sign reads "Welcome to WonderCon." GEEKS and NERDS at a comic book convention, some in costume.

NARRATOR

The comic con, where nerds and geeks dress as their favorite icons to commune with one another in geek culture.

We see, in rapid succession: a NARUTO walking with a VASH THE STAMPEDE, two CLOUD STRIFES comparing buster swords, a SPOCK from the original series taking tricorder readings, and a BOBA FETT standing with a squad of STORMTROOPERS.

NARRATOR

And all three of these meanings are about to become starkly relevant in the very near future.

A MAN IN ORANGE enters. That's the guy from the news! He quickly shuffles over to a crowd of X-WING PILOTS where he blends in.

Two nearby UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS watch with detached boredom.

Darkness again.

NARRATOR

By far the fuzziest word, however, is "love."

The infographics are back, this time about the word "love."

NARRATOR

For a word so immortalized in art,
poetry and pop music, it is clumsy
and imprecise. One can love one's
dog, or a particular movie or
television show.

The infographics keep pace with the narrator showing the dog,
movie and television show.

NARRATOR

A man may carelessly express
emphatic love for a song, or a car,
or a sports figure and yet freeze
up in the face of an attractive
girl.

Infographics show a sheepish male figure and a female figure.

NARRATOR

The word is the same, even the same
definition. And yet, only when in
that context does it carry with it
the baggage of the millennia of
art, poetry and pop music.

The infographics show examples of art, poetry and pop music.

NARRATOR

But "love" like "con" in all of its
definitions will enter into our
story shortly, as well.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

At the covered loading area, we see HAROLD VAN DYKE, young
professional in a hip suit with a messenger bag over his
shoulder.

NARRATOR

As is always the way, very little
of any of this will be apparent at
first to those most closely
involved.

A limousine pulls up. Harold gives it an expectant look.

NARRATOR

This was certainly the case with
Laura Clifton, star of a cult
favorite TV show "Earthbound" and
the horror movie "Shadow People."

From out of the back door emerges THE LAURA CLIFTON, beautiful, dazzling smile and like all starlets, shorter in person.

NARRATOR

For her, now, "love" is just a job, as in "love interest". Rumor has it that she is up for the role of Carol Danvers, girlfriend of the titular character in the upcoming Captain Marvel movie. She's hoping for a starring roll in a spinoff.

Following The Laura Clifton is DAVID SANDS, immaculate clothes and hair. He beams a salesman's grin at Harold.

HAROLD

Ms. Clifton? I'm Harold Van Dyke. With the studio. How was your flight?

LAURA

It was excellent, Harold. David managed to book a seat next to me so we spent the whole trip chatting and planning my career.

Harold looks at David. Recognition, followed by comprehension.

HAROLD

I'm sorry about that Mr. Sands. Unfortunately, the studio is only willing to fly out your client. They consider your trip to be a business expense of your agency.

David smiles jovially.

DAVID

Could any investment in Laura Clifton ever be wasted, Harold?

Laura smiles in response.

HAROLD

We've arranged for a room for you. A suite, actually.

He hands her a manila envelope.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Here's your room information, two room keys, a pass to the convention and an itinerary of the events.

DAVID

I suppose my suite is a business expense?

HAROLD

Yes, sir. Once again, I'm sorry. This event books up months in advance....

David's jovial face slips a bit into annoyed.

DAVID

Forget it. This is a big city. I'm sure I can find something.

HAROLD

...But I took the liberty of reserving a room under your name. It's a bit more modest than a suite, but it's here at the hotel.

LAURA

Outstanding, Harold.

HAROLD

If you please, Mr. Sands, I'll help you check in.

Harold holds open the door and they walk in.

NARRATOR

Checking in, as it happens, was also on the mind of one Dudley Charles, adjunct media studies professor at UCLA and professional adventurer.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

At the front desk, DUDLEY CHARLES accepts his key from the HOTEL CLERK.

Dudley is a mix of hipster, punk and preppy. He's soft, well-dressed and wears glasses, which is like code for "geek."

NARRATOR

Dudley's exploits were adapted into the upcoming film *The Cleveland Caper*. Right now, he's just another fan hoping for a weekend with his friends celebrating his favorite art form. For him, "love" was the love that all geeks have for superheroes, space ships, robots, ninjas and zombies.

He takes the key and joins RICO, the slightly portly friend and ISAAC, the wiry friend. Rico is dressed nicely, neatly, for his size. Isaac has an oversized anime-themed shirt and unfashionable jeans.

RICO

I need to get out of these shoes. They're not broken in, yet.

DUDLEY

Come, Rico. I think I know where they keep the painkillers.

He rolls his bag towards the hotel bar.

ISAAC

The bar? It's barely noon.

DUDLEY

I'm sure they're open, Isaac.

He continues and the rest follow him.

INT. HOTEL BAR - CONTINUOUS

The bar is a prefab British pub motif and is largely empty.

Dudley rolls up to the bar and flags down the BARTENDER.

DUDLEY

Whatever stout you have on tap and whatever these guys are having.

The bartender looks at the two stragglers. Isaac looks at Rico pleadingly. Rico gestures encouragingly.

ISAAC

Just water.

RICO

I'll have a pale ale.

The bartender nods tersely and goes about the business of preparing the drinks.

Isaac looks down the bar and sees The Laura Clifton drinking a bottled water.

ISAAC

Check it out. That's Laura Clifton.

DUDLEY

(sardonically)
The Laura Clifton?

RICO

Isn't she supposed to play Marvel Girl in the Captain Marvel Movie?

ISAAC

I heard she's up to play Romana in the Doctor Who movie.

Dudley comes out of his beer reverie to look at her.

Then at them.

DUDLEY

One: If she were in a Captain Marvel movie, she'd be Carol Danvers who is Ms. Marvel or she'd be Mary Marvel. Marvel Girl is an X-man.

He levels his gaze at Isaac. This kind of minutia is clearly distasteful.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

And B: If they were going to do a Doctor Who movie, they wouldn't do the fourth Doctor, even if Tom Baker was the best one.

He goes back to his drink.

ISAAC

He thinks he's better than us.

RICO

Dude, he is better than us.

DUDLEY

Boys, don't be so hard on yourselves. Everyone has their special abilities.

(MORE)

DUDLEY (cont'd)
I've got a finely honed mind. Rico has his impeccable taste in matters of style.

ISAAC
And me?

DUDLEY
Isaac, you are by far the most prolific and researched blogger on comics and geek culture.

Laura leaves the bar, still not having noticed the only three other people in it. Perhaps on purpose.

ISAAC
This trip isn't going to be like the thing in Cleveland right?

RICO
Dude. I couldn't handle that.

DUDLEY
You weren't even there.

RICO
Yeah, but Isaac told me about it and it sounded terrifying.

Dudley gazes at Isaac.

DUDLEY
Isaac exaggerates.

Dudley, only half-finished with his drink, signals for more.

As the bartender fills the order, Dudley looks at Rico.

DUDLEY
If you have a free hand, can you help me with my bags?

Rico absently nods and picks up the handle on Dudley's bag.

RICO
Sure, dude. Why?

DUDLEY
Please don't call me "dude."

Just then, the bartender delivers the other stout. Dudley pays for them in cash, picks them up in his two hands and shrugs.

RICO

Weak.

DUDLEY

Thank you. You're a gentleman and a scholar.

They walk out of the bar, Dudley with two beers and Rico pulling two suitcases.

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

There is an elevator open as they approach. They hustle towards it, Dudley lagging so as not to spill his drinks.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Dudley enters the elevator and sees his friends staring agape at The Laura Clifton flanked by Harold and David.

DUDLEY

Well, if it isn't The Laura Huntley.

RICO

Her name is Laura Clifton.

LAURA

I'm sorry. Do I...?

Dudley puts on a hurt look.

DUDLEY

Don't tell me you don't rem-

LAURA

Charles something. No, wait. Something Charles. Dudley Charles.

Dudley looks at the drinks in his hands.

DUDLEY

Oh, I'd offer you a drink, but I only have the two.

LAURA

I wouldn't want to inconvenience you.

Perhaps a bit harsher than she meant.

DUDLEY
Neither would I.

He takes a long sip for emphasis.

LAURA
Is this what the comic cons are all like? Like a frat party for geeks?

DUDLEY
Please don't judge the rest of my people by my behavior.

RICO
Yeah. He's much better than us.

Laura smiles, but a touch of her usual charm is tainted by annoyance.

LAURA
You haven't changed since high school.

DUDLEY
Of course I have. You heard my friend Rico. I'm much better. But you've changed some. At least your name.

LAURA
That was a guild requirement.

DUDLEY
And you couldn't just use your middle name?

LAURA
I hate my middle name.

DUDLEY
And your maiden name.

LAURA
I'm not married.

The elevator DINGS and Laura and crew get off.

DUDLEY
What a coincidence. I guess we have more in common than just a fourth period English class.

LAURA
You hate your middle name?

Dudley actually starts to go after her.

DAVID
Sorry. You'll have to catch up at
the reunion.

He lets the elevator doors close.

DUDLEY
That was three months ago.

RICO
Dude.

Dudley gives Rico a "don't call me 'dude'" look.

ISAAC
Did that just happen?

NARRATOR
In fact it did just happen. But in
the realm of awkward reunions, it
pales in comparison to our next
one.D

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

STEPHEN ALTAMONT radiates power, success and a veneer of
amiability over a solid foundation of douchebaggery. More
impressively, he radiates this while dressed in a hotel robe.

NARRATOR
Stephen Altamont came into his job
as a Hollywood executive by being a
top notch con artist. Now he works
for a major studio in charge of
their latest comic book franchise.

Stephen fumbles around in his terrycloth pocket for the key.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
In recent years, the studio Stephen
works for has begun to lose faith
in Stephen. The Captain Marvel
movie is a make or break deal for
Stephen.

Stephen gets the door open and goes inside.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Unbeknownst to the studio, Stephen
has chosen both.

INT. STEPHEN ALTAMONT'S HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Stephen is not paying attention to the room as he enters.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Have a good time at the spa?

Stephen starts at the unexpected voice.

STEPHEN
John?

JOHN FRIEZE, escaped convict, impromptu X-Wing pilot in an orange prison jumpsuit sits on the couch. He is thin, gaunt, but with a keen, intelligent and cruel face.

Stephen is clearly shaken to see him.

JOHN
Tada.

Stephen's face is a rainbow of negative emotions from red anger to yellow fear to violet incredulity.

STEPHEN
Jesus tap dancing Christ, John.
What the hell are you doing here?

John is cool, collected, gloating.

JOHN
I saw an opportunity and I took it.

STEPHEN
That is not the set up.

JOHN
I'm fuzzy on the plan, Steve-o.
Was it where I help you in this
scheme and you put my cut on ice
until my lease with Johnny Law was
up?
(colder)
Or was it just that you'd disappear
with my cut, too?

Stephen has regained some of his cool, despite wearing only a bath robe.

STEPHEN
You don't trust me?

JOHN

Prison doesn't instill trust in a person. Relax. We're almost done. Once we pull the trigger, I'm out. And you need me for this next piece. This was always my part.

Stephen sits down, defeated.

John gets up and fetches a hotel bath robe from a closet.

JOHN

I need some less conspicuous clothes. I'm going down to the spa. See that I have a bitching wardrobe when I get back.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - LATER

Laura and David walk towards Stephen's suite.

NARRATOR

Unfortunately for Laura Clifton, this disastrous reunion occurred very near to her own meeting with Stephen about her possible role in his next movie.

David leans in to speak quietly, so as not to be heard through the doors.

DAVID

Be careful with Altamont. Do you know what he did before he was a producer? He was a con man. He scammed investors with phoney movie deals during the nineties when everyone was looking for the next Tarantino.

LAURA

Cheap tabloid gossip.

DAVID

This is the straight dope, honey. They actually booked him, but couldn't bring it to trial.

Laura rolls her eyes.

DAVID (CONT'D)

He's got the same bag of tricks now.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

Elaborate scams, snow jobs and cons. He courts one actor to buy down the more famous guy. He hired a room full of actors to play agents and executives to make someone think he was in production already. That's called the Big Store con. He's a bluff artist in the extreme. And completely heartless.

LAURA

He sounds like a challenge.

She clearly likes challenges.

DAVID

Keep your ears up and your poker face on.

LAURA

(mock naivete)

I'm sure he's just a big pussy cat in person.

They knock on the door.

Harold answers and let's them in.

INT. STEPHEN ALTAMONT'S HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Harold gives Laura and David the "hush" sign and points to Stephen who is pacing and talking on his cell phone.

STEPHEN

Well, what kind of damages are we looking at if everything goes sour?

A significant look between Laura and David.

STEPHEN

I wasn't expecting it either. This person just showed up in my hotel room with all sorts of demands.

Harold walks over and leans in close to Laura and David.

HAROLD

(whispering)

Can I get you guys something?

They shake their heads in the negative.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

What if I said, "We talked about a deal, but there's no paper trail and I feel no obligation to follow through."

Laura tries to look like she's not eavesdropping.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Oh, that could work?

He looks up and notices Laura and David for the first time.

He signals to Harold.

NARRATOR

It was clear to Laura what was going on here.

Harold reaches Stephen and they begin talking. Mostly Stephen.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Something was going wrong with the Captain Marvel deal. And most likely, going wrong with her portion of the deal.

Harold nods and comes to them.

HAROLD

I'm sorry. Something just came up. He's really busy and we're going to have to reschedule.

LAURA

We can wait.

HAROLD

I'm afraid that isn't an option.

Stephen casts an annoyed look at them.

DAVID

What time would work for you?
We're free all weekend.

HAROLD

I can't say for certain. I'll call you with the details as soon as I know them.

Harold nods and ushers them out of the suite.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laura and David move away from the suite to convene.

DAVID

What the hell was that about?

LAURA

What kind of gossip are you? He was talking to his lawyer about contractual obligations and that he hadn't signed the deal. Then he looked at us. Significantly.

DAVID

I knew something like this would happen.

He punches the elevator button.

Laura rolls her eyes to the DING of the arriving elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Laura presses the button for her floor.

LAURA

No. No way this is over. Not like this.

DAVID

We may have to face the fact that you were never part of the plot. I mean, who announces something at WonderCon? You save that for San Diego.

LAURA

They flew me out here. That makes me part of the plot. Altamont can't be the final word on the subject. Who's the director?

DAVID

That guy who does all the comic book movies. He's here promoting his last comic book movie. Something Titans.

Laura's face lights up with an idea in time with the DING.

LAURA

That's perfect.

David is dialing his phone as they get off the elevator.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

David holds the phone to his ear.

LAURA
Who are you calling?

DAVID
Don't you think we should consult
your publicist before we do
something stupid?

They reach her suite and she starts to open the door.

She holds the door open for David and follows him in.

DAVID
(into phone)
Vic? We need your help. No, it
didn't. I'm going to put you on
speaker phone.

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

David presses a button and sets the phone down on a coffee table.

NARRATOR
They explained over the phone to
Laura's publicist everything they'd
seen. Laura did her best to
accurately act out Stephen
Altamont's exact words, duplicating
the inflections and everything.

He and Laura start talking.

INT. VIC WINSTON'S OFFICE - DAY

VIC WINSTON, older and dressed professionally, in an office decorated in comic book movie posters, listens on speaker.

VIC
If that's really what's happening,
then you don't actually have
anything to say about it. Either
he reschedules the meeting or not.

INTERCUT:

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Laura and David sit around the phone, which David has placed on the coffee table.

LAURA

Just sit around in this luxurious suite that someone else is paying for and wait for them to call?

VIC

That's a sound premise.

LAURA

That doesn't sound very challenging. David mentioned that the director of another comic book movie, the guy they have for the Captain Marvel movie is here.

VIC

Greg Peyton. He's promoting Teen Titans in San Francisco because the movie was shot there.

LAURA

And he's the go-to comic book guy, right?

DAVID

Oh, he's the nerd with the magic touch. Loves this stuff. Makes millions for the studios.

LAURA

Then my mission is to wow this guy and then he'll sell me to Altamont.

At his desk, Vic has stopped fidgeting and is now paying more attention to the phone.

VIC

Laura. Can you tell me the name of Superman's Kryptonian father?

LAURA

No.

DAVID

Wasn't it Brando?

VIC

Name any of Spider-man's arch villains.

LAURA

The guy with the metal arms.

DAVID

Vic, don't we get multiple choice?
Do I need a number two pencil?

VIC

Name any planet in the Star Wars
movies.

DAVID

Vic, I had no idea you were such a
dweeb.

LAURA

Does the Death Star count?

DAVID

No. That was more like a moon.

VIC

It wasn't a moon. It was a space
station. Laura, I love you to
death, but you aren't going to win
over Greg Peyton without being able
to speak with him about the part.

David, who had previously broken into the minibar for a jar
of macadamia nuts, looks up in mid-crunch.

LAURA

I love a good challenge.

DAVID

Hey! We're at nerd central. Any
one of these kids would be glad to
tell our girl all about Captain
whats-its.

LAURA

Like a date? But what will I wear?

VIC

That's not a good idea. Those guys
love the internet. If Laura starts
asking around about Captain Marvel,
it'll start a tidal wave of
internet rumors.

DAVID

Buzz is good, though, right?

VIC

In my experience, studios treat leaks very badly. The best way to disqualify Laura from even being considered for the Captain Marvel movie is to get a rumor started on the internet before she's cast.

LAURA

The date is off.

DAVID

What about that guy from the elevator?

Vic strikes a note of some concern.

VIC

What guy from what elevator?

LAURA

Dudley?

DAVID

Yeah. That guy was a nerd. And you know him from way back. Couldn't we get his help?

VIC

Who is this guy?

LAURA

Dudley Charles. We were in high school together.

VIC

Dudley Charles? I know that name.

DAVID

What? Is he famous or something?

VIC

The Dudley Charles from that thing in Cleveland?

DAVID

Oh, hey. Yeah. That was the guy.

LAURA

What thing in Cleveland?

DAVID

I have a writer who pitched that all over town.

VIC
Everybody did that month. It was
the flavor.

LAURA
What's the thing in Cleveland?

DAVID
Vic, let's say we get Laura
schooled up on Captain Marvel, how
do we get a to the director?

VIC
Listen. I've got a conference
soon. Get this Dudley in for a
meeting. Remember: discretion is
the watchword. No internet rumors.
I'll see what I can do about Greg
Peyton from down here in LA.

DAVID
I'll get my office on it, too.
Thanks, Vic.

David turns off the phone.

LAURA
I guess we have work to do.

DAVID
Macadamia nut?

INT. WONDERCON SHOW FLOOR - DAY

The floor of WonderCon is crowded.

VENDORS ply their wares: long boxes of comic books or exotic
action figures still in their original packaging.

NARRATOR
It was left to David to search the
convention floor for Dudley. A
daunting task for anyone.

GEEKS in their best super-hero shirts walk from vendor to
vendor, some rolling suitcases or travel dollies loaded with
comic book short boxes.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
WonderCon hosts thousands of fans,
spread throughout the convention
center.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Acres of them attend panels, wait in line for autographs, or shop at the vendors in the main hall.

COSTUMED GEEKS pose for pictures for passers by. STORMTROOPERS, various X-MEN, ANIME CHARACTERS as well as favorite JAPANESE VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS all circulate through the throng.

David Sands meanders through all of this, forced to look at each geek and managing a polite smile, or sometimes merely a look of dismay.

David sees a SLAVE PRINCESS LEIA and nods approvingly.

NARRATOR

In any adventure, a bit of luck is a necessary component. Eventually.

He keeps checking his phone, holding it in his hands, a storm-tossed sailor with his compass pointing home.

Mercifully, he spies Dudley looking at an assortment of original comic art on bristol boards.

DAVID

Dudley Charles?

DUDLEY

That's amazing! We have the exact same name.

DAVID

Oh, my name's not Dudley Charles.

DUDLEY

I suppose anyone could make that mistake.

(considering)

Except me.

He goes back to the bristol boards.

DAVID

No my name's David Sands.

DUDLEY

Glad that's all been cleared up.

David pauses momentarily in confusion.

DAVID

I represent Laura Clifton.

DUDLEY

Don't take this the wrong way,
David, but I've seen Laura and
you're a pale representation at
best.

Dudley starts walking to another vendor's booth.

DAVID

We'd like to have a meeting with
you.

DUDLEY

The last meeting I had with Laura
she didn't seem eager for another.

DAVID

Situations change quickly.
Hollywood's a fast-paced town.

DUDLEY

We're in San Francisco.

DAVID

I mean show biz.

DUDLEY

Wow. Do you guys really say "show
biz?"

David visibly checks his frustration. In the pause, Dudley
pulls ahead.

David chases after him and stops in front of him.

DAVID

Here's the deal: My client would
like to meet with you about a
business proposal. A job.

He indicates the nearest vendor.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You could buy this whole stand of
funny books for what this pays.
Are you interested?

DUDLEY

I don't even know what they sell
there.

David completely loses it, shaking his head in open dismay
and frustration. He mutters incomprehensibly, unable to form
a new plan of attack.

Dudley smiles a bit and comes to his rescue.

DUDLEY

Take me out to lunch and we'll
talk. I can't eat this con food.

David smiles weakly but victoriously.

NARRATOR

David was beginning to see where
Laura's distaste for Dudley came
from. But any success in Hollywood
comes with the ability to deal with
unpleasant people.

The two walk through the crowd.

INT. STEPHEN ALTAMONT'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Stephen writes on a piece of hotel stationary.

NARRATOR

In his Hollywood career, Stephen
Altamont hadn't really noticed a
pronounced need to deal with people
with unpleasant personalities. But
the people with the most unpleasant
personalities seldom do.

He gets up with the list and walks over to Harold, who is
working diligently on a laptop.

NARRATOR

After unsuccessfully trying to
discover a way out of his
entanglement with his partner in
crime, he'd resigned himself to
seeing it through. And at the
moment, that meant getting John
Frieze some fresh clothes.

Harold looks up at his employer as that employer hands over
the hotel stationary.

STEPHEN

Harold, I've had a business
associate surprise me at the hotel.
He's helping me broker a very big
deal and I need you to do something
for me.

HAROLD

What's this?

STEPHEN

Clothing, necessities. I need you to make that list happen.

Harold does not like the prospect of being an errand boy.

HAROLD

Your associate lost his luggage?

Without missing a beat, Stephen says...

STEPHEN

The seats may be first class, but the baggage handlers are all the same.

Stephen adds a reassuring smile for emphasis.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to have to ask you to do this. I honestly don't see you as one of those kinds of assistants. Just drop the bags off here when you get back and take the rest of the day off.

Harold takes the list and Stephen's credit card.

NARRATOR

In fact, Harold is exactly the kind of assistant Stephen Altamont would never hire.

He packs up his laptop and goes to the door.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Following Harold from the hotel suite and down the hallway.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Altamont was one of those cliched producers who hired assistants for their cup size more than their organizational ability. The only leg up he was interested in giving his employees was to help them out of their designer underwear.

Harold presses the button and waits for an elevator.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Harold was organized and professional.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And Harold's assignment to Stephen's office meant to Stephen that the studio had little faith left in Stephen Altamont. It was this fact which caused him to contact his old partner.

The elevator doors open, showing John Frieze relaxed and robed.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It was impossible for Laura Clifton or David Sands to have a proper context for what they overheard Stephen Altamont talking about. They were right in assuming that the project was in trouble, however.

The two exchange places.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - DAY

Modern or some would say European stylings abound in the restaurant: clean, sleek lines, bold, solid colors, and high prices for small portions.

NARRATOR

Laura and David had just finished explaining the situation, as they understood it, to Dudley over a very expensive lunch at a very trendy restaurant. But to Dudley, as an outside observer, none of it made any sense.

Dudley, Laura and David sit and chat over the remains of those small portions.

DUDLEY

None of this makes any sense.

DAVID

That's because you don't know Altamont's reputation. He's got a past.

DUDLEY

Yes. He was a con man. But he was just the pretty face. The other guy who actually went to jail was the brains in the operation.

DAVID
I suppose that's why he's in
trouble at the studio.

Dudley appears to file this information away.

LAURA
Please, Dudley, we're asking for
your help.

DAVID
What would it take to get it?

Dudley takes a savoring sip of wine.

DUDLEY
I don't think I could tell you.

LAURA
You like movies, right? And you
like comic books?

DUDLEY
Ah, but so many comic book movies
are so awful.

DAVID
And this will let you get in from
the beginning and help make it the
right way.

DUDLEY
I highly doubt that. Especially if
Altamont's the producer. Have you
noticed how few of his big budget
movies seem to come together? I
hope he was a better con man than
he is a producer.

There is a pronounced pause as David and Laura consider.

LAURA
It pays well.

DAVID
What?

DUDLEY
How well?

David drops his confusion to go in for the sell.

DAVID
More than you'd imagine.

DUDLEY

I can imagine quite a bit.

LAURA

If you help me, you'd basically be my manager for this project, which means you get a large percentage of the pay check. Something like ten percent?

DUDLEY

I don't have to sit hear and listen to my imagination be insulted.

DAVID

Fine. Twelve percent. It's a big studio movie, Laura's check will be in the millions. That means...

Laura interrupts him testily.

LAURA

What is your deal, anyway?

DUDLEY

My deal? Last I heard it was twelve percent...

LAURA

That's not on the table. You don't want to help us? Fine. We're done. I hope you enjoyed your lunch. We'll think of something else.

They start to get up.

DUDLEY

Is that what Laura Clifton does when things don't go her way? Or is this you playing hardball? It comes off as kind of "spoiled princess."

LAURA

Spoiled princess? Listen, here, Dudley Charles. Before I was an "overnight success" I had to work waiting tables to pay my way through college.

They still haven't gotten up.

DUDLEY

Is that the Laura Clifton biography? Because Laura Huntley's family lived in one of the big houses by the lake.

LAURA

Yes, my family had money. And they saved up a college fund for me. But they weren't going to spend it to send me to a liberal arts college to study acting. They told me I could have it when I went to law school.

DUDLEY

Is that why you changed your name?

Dudley's having fun with this.

LAURA

I told you that was a guild requirement. There was already a Laura Huntley in the Screen Actor's Guild.

DUDLEY

Maybe that's why your parents didn't want you acting.

And now Laura is starting to have fun.

LAURA

I wouldn't count on it.

DUDLEY

And what do you count on?

LAURA

I count on my people. They look out for me.

DUDLEY

Isn't that just because you pay them a percentage?

DAVID

No. It's because we believe in her.

Dudley and then.

DUDLEY

Okay. I'm in.

Laura smiles. Was Dudley leading them here the whole time?
They all stand up to leave.

DUDLEY
We said twelve percent, right?

LAURA
Is that where we landed on that?

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Busy, urban environment outside the restaurant.

Laura, David and Dudley step out of the restaurant.

And bump into Harold.

Who nearly drops his bags of clothes.

LAURA
Harold? What are you doing out
here?

Harold is uncomfortable, slightly embarrassed.

HAROLD
Oh. Ms. Clifton. I'm buying clothes
for Mr. Altamont. Actually for some
new business associate.

Laura glances at the bags, all from designer clothing
establishments.

NARRATOR
Laura saw the bags of designer
clothes and assumed that Altamont
was courting some diva actress with
gifts of expensive clothing.

Laura lays on the charm.

LAURA
Harold. I know what your boss is up
to. And he's not going to get away
with it. I believe in this project
too much.

HAROLD
I'm afraid I don't know what you're
talking about.

She turns to Dudley and David.

LAURA
The game is afoot!

They leave down the street.

NARRATOR
In the realm of accidentally
disastrous things to say to the
assistant of a former con man slash
Hollywood producer who is about to
make one last score, this rates at
about a solid seven.

INT. STEPHEN ALTAMONT'S HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Stephen rests easily on the couch and looks at Harold who has
set the bags down and is now talking to him.

NARRATOR
Harold told Stephen exactly what
Laura had told him in the street,
word for word, even doing his best
to match inflection.

HAROLD
And then she said, "The game is
afoot!"

STEPHEN
Was she with anyone?

HAROLD
Her agent. And another guy. He
looked like that guy from the thing
in Cleveland last year. Dudley
Charles.

STEPHEN
What thing? Who?

HAROLD
Yeah. It was him. We talked with
him to try to option the rights.

STEPHEN
The thing in...Oh. Yes. I
remember.

HAROLD
What would she be doing with him?
And what did she mean?

Stephen puts on a reassuring smile.

STEPHEN

I'm sure she was just being dramatic. You know actresses.

Stephen stands up and ushers Harold out of the door.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

As I remember, I gave you the rest of the day off. Go out and enjoy the city.

He closes the door behind him. His calm disappears.

STEPHEN

(to the room)

Did you get all of that?

John comes out from the bedroom and makes for the bags of clothing.

JOHN

What have you been doing? How did she get so hip to the score?

STEPHEN

I don't know. I just met with her today.

JOHN

Who's this guy from Cleveland?

STEPHEN

I don't remember. Look him up.

John pops open a laptop.

NARRATOR

John did look him up. A quick search on Google and Wikipedia told all one needed to know about Dudley Charles. John read all about the events in Cleveland, where Dudley Charles had spoiled a dastardly plot and became a media darling.

Stephen comes over to read over John's shoulder.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

John Frieze began to worry. If Laura Clifton had allied herself with Dudley Charles, she was a liability. The two of them could sink the whole plan.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Indeed, it sounded like they were well on their way. John needed to find out exactly what they knew so far.

INT. WONDERCON SHOW FLOOR - DAY

Dudley and Laura walk the floor. Laura has put on a hat and large sunglasses in an attempt to be nondescript.

DUDLEY

Okay. Everything you need to know about Captain Marvel's girlfriend.

LAURA

I can't be seen buying a bunch of Captain Marvel comic books.

DUDLEY

Goodness! We shan't besmirch your reputation, princess.

LAURA

It's not that. It could start an internet rumor or something. And that would get me fired before I even get hired.

Dudley struggles to follow that statement.

DUDLEY

Really?

LAURA

That's what my publicist says.

DUDLEY

He ought to know. Any ideas?

LAURA

You could do all the shopping for me.

DUDLEY

Where's the challenge in that?.

That strikes a chord.

LAURA

I do like a good challenge.

DUDLEY

Okay, then. We just buy a lot of stuff. Confuse the masses with a lot of noise.

They dip into a vendor.

INT. GOLDEN EMPIRE COMICS BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

WILL MORGAN, chubby, neck-bearded geek in an ill-fitting t-shirt that resembles the Flash's uniform smiles at Dudley and Laura. He types on a laptop.

DUDLEY

If I understand what your publicist said to you correctly, my job is fill your head with as much of my extensive knowledge as I can.

LAURA

Extensive, is it?

DUDLEY

Staggering.

Dudley and Laura flip through the comics in the boxes.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

And then you use this extensive knowledge to impress Greg Peyton, the director.

INT. CONVENTION SHOW FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Dudley loads the comics into a short box, which already has kind of a stack going.

They pop into another booth across the way.

DUDLEY

Do you have a plan for what to do when we're done with all of this studying?

LAURA

That's your job, too. You're my manager.

DUDLEY

I always have something in mind, princess.

Dudley and Laura continue out onto the showroom floor.

INT. WATCHTOWER HOBBIES BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

They end up in yet another booth, the walls of which are festooned with bagged and boarded comic books of note as well as boxes on tables and shelved below.

LAURA

Oh. A mastermind, are you?

DUDLEY

Without peer, so far.

LAURA

How sad. A Sherlock without a Moriarty. Batman without the Joker.

DUDLEY

Is that sad? I can do without the Reichenbach falls.

LAURA

A person is defined by the challenges they face. A hero, by the villains he struggles against.

Dudley turns to Laura, amazed.

DUDLEY

You've read my work.

LAURA

I found a couple of your papers on the UCLA website while David was searching the convention for you.

Dudley points to a couple of comics hung on the wall and the PROPRIETOR pulls them down for him.

DUDLEY

I am not without my challenges.

LAURA

And those are?

DUDLEY

You, for one, princess?

LAURA

Am I your Moriarty?

They step away from the proprietor.

DUDLEY

No. But your problem here is a challenge. You need to impress Greg Peyton. You need to know about Carol Danvers without people picking up on it.

LAURA

That's why we're spending all this money on all of these comics.

DUDLEY

Yes. Not only do we confuse the masses with noise, but you get to expand your knowledge of the comic book world. Now you'll know more than just Captain Marvel.

LAURA

You're cleverer than you look, Dudley Charles.

NARRATOR

At Dudley's behest, Laura bought a huge stack of comics and graphic novels. They bought the Captains Marvel, Ms. Marvel, Avengers, Superman, Green Lantern, Sandman, the Dark Phoenix Saga, Spider-man, Legion of Superheroes and the Fantastic Four; among others.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAYS - LATER

Laura and Dudley are visibly tired. Dudley sets the short box on a table. He shakes out his fingers.

NARRATOR

Dudley's ploy had worked. Not one of the copious internet rumor mills put Laura Clifton together with the Captain Marvel film.

LAURA

It's hard work in the biz.

DUDLEY

Do you guys really call it that?

LAURA

Only to people on the outside.

Down the way, we see Rico and Isaac.

Then Dudley sees them.

DUDLEY

Oh, great.

Then to his approaching friends...

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

Jughead. Reggie.

LAURA

Does that make me Betty or
Veronica?

A doubletake from Dudley is all he has time for before...

RICO

Where have you been? You missed
the DC summer event panel. We
waited for you and had to sit at
the back because of it.

ISAAC

I couldn't ask my question about
Batman.

Laura looks at them, bemused.

LAURA

What about Batman?

For the first time, Isaac and Rico notice that they're
standing, once again, within feet of The Laura Clifton.

Isaac stares, dumbfounded. Rico is more eloquent.

RICO

Ms. Clifton? Wow. I'm a big fan.

LAURA

Thank you.

DUDLEY

Isaac, Rico, this is Laura Huntley.
We were at school together.

LAURA

It's a pleasure, boys.

Rico shakes her hand. Isaac slumps shyly and waves.

RICO
I suppose you're out for dinner?

ISAAC
And you promised.

DUDLEY
Sorry. Can't. Work to do.

LAURA
We'd love to.

Again, Dudley shoots Laura a look of surprise.

DUDLEY
You have a lot of homework to do.

LAURA
But you have such lovely friends.

Rico smiles sheepishly.

DUDLEY
Are you sure, princess? These are
two dyed in the wool geeks.

LAURA
And you're not?

DUDLEY
I'm an elitist first and a geek
second.

LAURA
Maybe I chose poorly when I chose a
manager.

DUDLEY
I like to think you chose me for my
discerning taste.

LAURA
(dryly)
What about your magnetic
personality?

DUDLEY
Yes, I'm quite a catch.

LAURA
That was sarcasm. Or couldn't you
discern that?

DUDLEY

I can filter sarcasm at will.

LAURA

That explains a lot.

Isaac and Rico have retreated a few polite steps.

NARRATOR

In fact, Dudley's discerning taste, or what his friends called "being picky," led to Dudley choosing the restaurant.

INT. LOCAL SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - LATER

Dudley, Laura, Rico and Isaac sit at a table halfway through a meal. Laura is relaxed and charming. Dudley appears wary.

NARRATOR

Dudley, in his capacity as manager, offered to pay for dinner. He considered it a business expense. As well, it was the only way to get his less-than-picky friends to agree to the restaurant.

Rico and Isaac display varying levels of reserved and shy.

They all chat amiably.

LAURA

So, what is it about comic books? Is it the power fantasy? The hot girls in tights?

She looks at Rico and winks as she says...

LAURA (CONT'D)

Or the guys?

Isaac and Rico look over at Dudley.

RICO

That's his department.

ISAAC

Literally. He's like professor comic book at UCLA.

A waiter drops off another martini for Dudley.

DUDLEY

I'll send you my paper on the subject.

LAURA

You can't just tell me?

DUDLEY

It is my hope, princess, that you'll discover it for yourself when you do your homework.

That's not a good answer.

LAURA

Isn't this your thing, though? Aren't you "professor comic book?"

DUDLEY

That's my day job.

Laura is now enjoying her own martini.

LAURA

And what else do you do?

DUDLEY

I manage Laura Clifton.

LAURA

How's that going?

DUDLEY

She doesn't do her homework. She just wants me to tell her the answers.

LAURA

Typical Hollywood princess.

They're having fun. Isaac and Rico fade into the scenery.

DUDLEY

Is it? I've only managed the one.

LAURA

How'd you get the job then?

DUDLEY

I knew her in high school.

LAURA

It's all about who you know in this town.

DUDLEY
Which town?

LAURA
Hollywood.

DUDLEY
But we're in San Francisco.

LAURA
I mean "in the biz."

DUDLEY
Do you really call it that?

LAURA
I just did, didn't I?

They share a smile.

Rico smiles at the two of them.

NARRATOR
They retired for the night. Isaac and Rico followed Dudley to his hotel room to pick his brain about his day with the famous Laura Clifton.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dudley, shoes off and leaning back on the bed in exhaustion.

NARRATOR
Dudley was as evasive as ever, but years of exposure had taught his friends to be persistent. Dudley, however, had years of experience in not giving in, and more importantly, years of experience at not caring what others thought or expected of him.

Isaac and Rico sit in the seating area of the room and chat.

NARRATOR
In the realm of dishing hot gossip or insider information, Dudley was an utter disappointment.

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

We see the short box, half empty, with a great many of the comic books out and in piles on the coffee table. We see Captain Marvel comics, some Fantastic Four comics. A smattering of the good stuff.

NARRATOR

Laura Clifton, meanwhile, had work to do. "Homework" Dudley had called it, except that she was hundreds of miles from her home and instead was in a luxurious hotel suite.

Laura reads Avengers Annual #10 curled up on her couch. She is upright, paying attention, studying.

NARRATOR

Early in the process, she called Dudley to ask if comic books were always so cheesy in the dialogue and the plots.

She puts the comic away properly in its bag and board and goes for another.

NARRATOR

And Dudley, eager for the respite from talking with his nosey friends was happy to help.

Laura smiles at what she's reading, getting into the spirit of things.

A KNOCK at the door pulls her attention out of the book.

It's Dudley who steps in.

DUDLEY

You had a question about cheesy dialogue?

LAURA

One you could have answered on the phone.

DUDLEY

Yes but then I'd have to spend more time with my friends.

LAURA

I liked your friends.

DUDLEY
They're yours.

LAURA
I didn't say that.

DUDLEY
You had a question about the
hokeyness?

LAURA
Yeah. What's with the hokeyness?

Dudley opens his bag and pulls out a shaker, gin and
vermouth.

Laura raises an eyebrow.

LAURA
Have you had that with you the
whole time?

Dudley doesn't answer. Instead, He crosses to the suite's
bar which has an ice bucket.

DUDLEY
You know in old movies how married
couples always slept in separate
beds? And they couldn't kiss for
more than a few seconds?

LAURA
Yes. The old Hays code.

Dudley pulls a small jar of olives out of the mini bar.

DUDLEY
Comics have the same thing. It's
called the Comics Code.

Dudley mixes the cocktail.

DUDLEY
The code stated that there would be
no zombies. Nobody could use
"Horror" in the title. No nudity
or salacious depiction of women.

Dudley shakes the shaker.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)
And especially, there was no
glamorizing crime or the criminal
element.
(MORE)

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

Crime had to be punished by the forces of justice. And crime wasn't to be presented in a manner that could be replicated.

LAURA

What does all that mean?

DUDLEY

For one, criminals robbed banks with robots or freeze rays instead of guns and ski masks. Secondly, it led to comics being about superheroes fighting crime for the entertainment of kids.

LAURA

How does that explain-

Laura stops short, watching as Dudley produces two stemmed martini glasses from his bag.

LAURA

How does that explain the goofy dialogue?

Dudley pours the martinis and garnishes them with olives.

DUDLEY

The point isn't the dialogue. It's the metaphor. It's about people who choose to do the right thing.

Dudley sits on the couch and hands Laura a drink.

LAURA

The right thing?

DUDLEY

Someone like Lex Luthor uses his immense brain for personal gain and to destroy Superman. But Superman volunteers his powers and his free time to help people. He feels driven to, because he's a good guy.

LAURA

Isn't it about the power fantasy, though? The mild mannered, bespectacled reporter who carries a secret power? Not unlike an adjunct media studies professor.

DUDLEY
That's just my day job.

LAURA
And what do you do at night? Are you Batman?

DUDLEY
I am a professional adventurer.

LAURA
Oh, is that all? Is there good money in that?

Laura doesn't buy it.

DUDLEY
There's a lot of money in it, but I don't know if I'd call it good.

LAURA
And what does a professional adventurer do?

DUDLEY
Gets into scrapes. Saves the day. That sort of thing.

LAURA
Well, if you get me this job, you'll save the day.

Laura takes a sip of the martini. And really likes it.

DUDLEY
I mean save lives.

LAURA
My job is my life.

DUDLEY
That doesn't sound very fulfilling.

LAURA
But being a "professional adventurer" does. Do you carry a gun?

Laura still doesn't buy it.

DUDLEY
All guns do is shoot people.

LAURA
And you don't like shooting people?

DUDLEY
I hate getting shot.

LAURA
I can see where that wouldd be unpleasant.

DUDLEY
You don't believe me.

Laura smiles coyly.

NARRATOR
Laura didn't believe Dudley. After another martini, which was excellent, no doubt due to practice, Dudley went to his room and Laura went back to reading.

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE - MORNING

Laura comes out of the bathroom, made up, wearing new clothes and refreshed.

NARRATOR
Laura didn't sleep at all. And after hours of reading through the silver and modern ages, she had made a healthy dent in her box of research materials.

She picks up the hotel phone and dials.

NARRATOR
And after what she deemed to be a respectful hour, she decided to call her new manager and touch base over breakfast.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Dudley is asleep.

NARRATOR
Dudley, however, did not consider it to be a respectful hour.

The hotel phone RINGS a number of times.

He picks up the phone.

DUDLEY

Yeah? Laura?

(listening)

What the hell is breakfast?

NARRATOR

Laura assumed that Dudley did, in fact, know about breakfast and made plans to meet him in the lobby.

Dudley nods and grunts into the phone.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

Laura sits at one of the couches and looks up at the elevator lobby, looking for Dudley.

Instead, she sees John Frieze. And Frieze is obviously looking at her.

Recognition and suspicion flicker in her eyes.

She pulls a Journey into Mystery out of her bag to read, but glances up at Frieze between panels.

The elevator doors open and we see Dudley walk out, clearly sleepy, wearing his glasses and not properly shaven.

Laura stashes her comic and stands to meet him.

LAURA

I was beginning to think you fell asleep.

DUDLEY

Is that so wrong? People need sleep. My beautiful, complicated brain needs a restorative snooze.

LAURA

And what about pickling it with too many martinis?

DUDLEY

It's too early for a martini. Maybe a Bloody Mary.

They start walking for the door.

LAURA

It's the breakfast of champions.

Laura watches Frieze and sees him following.

Dudley follows her gaze.

DUDLEY

Too early to be chipper, princess.

Laura forgets about Frieze and turns her full indignation onto Dudley.

LAURA

Stop calling me "princess." How would you like it if I called you "tiger?"

DUDLEY

Cheesy but cute. I like it.

LAURA

I'd mean it ironically.

DUDLEY

Yeah. I can filter irony. At will. Haven't we been over this, princess?

NARRATOR

In fact, what Dudley said only the night before was "I can filter sarcasm at will." But it's a small point.

FLASH: Soundless, earlier scene in which Dudley says the above line.

INT. FANCY BRUNCH RESTAURANT - DAY

Dudley and Laura enjoy the remnants of a fancy brunch. Laura with half of a mimosa and some fruit and Dudley with the remnants of Hollandaise sauce on his plate and a Bloody Mary.

NARRATOR

Dudley had suggested eating at the hotel, but Laura wanted to eat further away, to test a theory.

John Frieze is also enjoying brunch nonchalantly a few tables away.

NARRATOR

And she was right, at least in so far as knowing that they were being followed.

Laura glances at him and back to Dudley.

LAURA
Don't look now, but we've been followed.

DUDLEY
That guy from the hotel? Is he still with us?

LAURA
You saw him?

DUDLEY
I see everything.

LAURA
He's following us and I think I know why.

DUDLEY
Is he a paparazzi or something?

LAURA
No. He doesn't have a camera. And he's dressed in designer clothes.

DUDLEY
Paparazzi don't wear designer clothes?

LAURA
Those are the same brands as the shopping bags I saw Harold with yesterday.

Dudley smiles a small, knowing smile, but still teases...

DUDLEY
That is amazing. You could be a detective. Like a fashion detective.

A look from Laura. She's not in the mood.

LAURA
It's obvious that this guy is the client that Altamont is wooing. I'll bet he's the agent of whoever is supposed to replace me.

DUDLEY

You think that Altamont bought some girl's agent a lot of clothes to woo this actress?

LAURA

It's the only thing that makes sense.

DUDLEY

But it doesn't make any sense.

Dudley pays the bill.

LAURA

You're new to this. Altamont has a reputation of doing unusual things to land stars for cheap. First he buys her down by parading me around for the part. Then he softens up her agent with fine clothes, all to save a couple million dollars.

DUDLEY

What do you plan to do then, princess?

LAURA

Aren't you the "professional adventurer?"

DUDLEY

Should we lose him in a high speed chase? Maybe we fool him with a clever disguise.

LAURA

That's it. We dress up in costume.

The hell you say.

DUDLEY

We what?

LAURA

There are loads of people in costume at the convention.

DUDLEY

Listen, sister. I draw the line at cosplay.

LAURA

What's "cosplay?"

DUDLEY
Costume play. Dressing up.

The get up to leave the restaurant and fall silent as they pass his table.

LAURA
Did you see that? He was definitely watching us. If we want to get close to Greg Peyton, we'll have to do it without that guy seeing us, or he'll spoil the whole thing. And that means cosplay.

DUDLEY
I will not play dress up.

EXT. FANCY BRUNCH RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Dudley and Laura emerge from the restaurant.

LAURA
Haven't you ever wanted to be someone else?

DUDLEY
Like going by my mother's maiden name?

LAURA
Or claiming to be a "professional adventurer?"

DUDLEY
I like who I am. I don't need to dress up as someone else.

LAURA
I think it's getting into the spirit of the con.

DUDLEY
I think it takes escapism too far.

LAURA
Well this isn't about escapism, it's about going incognito. Are you always this difficult?

DUDLEY
I'm a challenge.

LAURA
Come on. It'll be fun.

We see Dudley say the words "I doubt that" although he says them from behind Laura.

NARRATOR
Dudley doubted that.

INT. GAUD AWFUL VINTAGE GOODIES - LATER

Laura and Dudley peruse the poorly organized gear.

NARRATOR
In the relatively few blocks between where Dudley and Laura had brunch and the hotel there were no less than eleven vintage shops and costume or fancy dress shops containing everything Dudley needed to craft something resembling a geeky costume. Or two.

Dudley pulls out a brown trench coat and tries it on.

NARRATOR
At Gaud Awful Vintage Goodies, Dudley came across several options, but nothing was complete. He could almost make a Replicant Pris costume and a Deckard costume from Blade Runner. And he could almost recreate the fourth and fifth Doctors from Doctor Who.

Dudley grabs a few other items from the above listed costumes.

INT. MINT-AGE CLOTHES - LATER

Again we see Dudley perusing the clothing.

NARRATOR
And so, he decided to hedge his bets and try to make all the costumes. Surely, he thought, by the time they reached the hotel, they'd have found enough of the parts to make at least two complete costumes.

Dudley pulls out a mesh top ideal for the Pris costume.

NARRATOR

At Mint-Age Clothes, he found most of the rest of what he needed, including a very revealing mesh top for Laura.

He looks suggestively at Laura

She glares back.

NARRATOR

Dudley considered that he might have to explain to Laura just who exactly Pris was. Especially if he expected her to wear anything that might be considered transparent.

INT. VIDEO STORE - LATER

Dudley hands the Blade Runner DVD to the clerk behind the counter and he nods excitedly. It appears on the monitors above them.

We see Deckard.

We see Pris.

Dudley wanders off. Laura watches the movie.

And he returns with two Doctor Who DVDs, one with Tom Baker as the Doctor and one with Peter Davison.

We see Tom Baker's Doctor.

We see Peter Davison's Doctor.

INT. LUCY IN DISGUISE COSTUMES - LATER

Dudley shops for wigs. He has a brown, curly one and looks through the blonds.

NARRATOR

By the time they reached the convention again, they had all the pieces to make all four of the attempted costumes.

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Laura emerges from the bathroom in a complete Pris outfit. She is extremely close to the original, right down to the raccoon makeup and the blond hair, which is a wig.

Dudley smiles admiringly, already wearing his Deckard costume.

DUDLEY
You look just like her.

LAURA
I look just like some eighties punk band reject.

DUDLEY
That's what we're shooting for.

She throws a look at Dudley.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)
It's fun to play dress up. Right, princess?

LAURA
Wait till you start sweltering in that jacket, tiger.

Dudley smiles broadly to indicate filtered irony.

DUDLEY
Has your agent called us about meeting with Peyton?

LAURA
Us? Do we share a phone?

DUDLEY
Well, princess, how do you plan on finding this director if you can't count on your people?

LAURA
You're my people now, papa.

DUDLEY
Must I do all the work?

LAURA
That's how we do this.

DUDLEY
In "the biz?"

LAURA

You don't get to call it that, yet.

DUDLEY

I eagerly await my card.

(as though reading)

Welcome to "the biz." You may now call it that among your new peers. Secret handshake details to follow.

LAURA

We don't have a secret handshake.

DUDLEY

That's just what I'd expect someone with a secret handshake to say.

He gets up to head for the door.

DUDLEY

Come on, princess.

LAURA

That's "Pris." Not "princess."

NARRATOR

Finding a Hollywood celebrity at a comic book convention is next to impossible, even if one happens to be a professional adventurer and temporary career manager.

INT. CONVENTION SHOW FLOOR - LATER

Dudley and Laura wander around the show floor looking from booth to booth. They see celebrities signing things for long lines of geeks.

NARRATOR

Unless, of course, those celebrities are signing autographs or speaking at panels.

Dudley and Laura walk past them, checking for Greg Peyton.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, Greg Peyton was not currently signing autographs or speaking at any panels.

People notice the two admiringly, but no one sees Laura Clifton. They only see Pris the Replicant.

NARRATOR

On the plus side, however, Dudley's disguises appeared to be working perfectly.

They stop for a GEEK COUPLE who wants to take their picture.

NARRATOR

They were stopped several times for pictures, it was only geeks admiring the costume. No one saw The Laura Clifton, merely Pris the Replicant.

FLASH ON: The geek couple from above much later in their hotel room noticing that Pris the Replicant was Laura Clifton.

INT. CONVENTION INFORMATION STAND - LATER

Dudley picks up a schedule packet from an information booth.

INT. HOTEL BAR - LATER

Dudley peruses the schedule.

NARRATOR

Dudley was out of ideas and needed to reconnoiter.

He orders two beers.

Laura looks at him impatiently.

LAURA

Shouldn't we be out there beating the grass or the pavement or something?

DUDLEY

The only thing beat right now is me.

He gestures to the beer he's not drinking.

She looks at it incredulously.

LAURA

One lap around the convention tuckered you out, papa bear?

DUDLEY

Not "beat" as in "exhausted" so much as "defeated." I need to regroup and get the lay of the land.

She considers the beer.

LAURA

(eagerly)

Sounds like a challenge.

And sits at the bar to join Dudley in a beer.

DUDLEY

I am a professional adventurer.

Laura takes off the wig.

LAURA

Are you a crazy person?

DUDLEY

Maybe a little eccentric, but not crazy. Charming, I like to think.

LAURA

What's all this about being a professional adventurer? It was a cute, geeky delusion at first. But after all that stuff about not wanting to dress up because you don't have superpowers, it makes the "professional adventurer" stuff sound crazy.

Dudley smiles reassuringly.

DUDLEY

You heard about the thing in Cleveland?

LAURA

I got the Cliff's Notes version.

DUDLEY

And you would agree that was an adventure?

LAURA

I almost wouldn't have believed it, but I believe my agent and my publicist.

DUDLEY

A film company bought the rights to that adventure for a handsome sum. Thus, I had an adventure for which I was paid, making me a professional adventurer.

Laura buys it, somewhat. Probably not crazy. Check.

LAURA

Well there are no dragons here, tiger. So no need to pull the dashing hero card.

DUDLEY

I'm not so sure. There's something wonky going on.

LAURA

Is your spider sense tingling?

A doubletake from Dudley at the use of "spider sense."

DUDLEY

Something is tingling.

LAURA

Slow down, buster. Let's keep this professional.

DUDLEY

I was speaking professionally.

LAURA

Of your status as a professional adventurer?

Still sarcastic.

DUDLEY

That's right.

LAURA

I was being sarcastic.

DUDLEY

And I was filtering.

LAURA

Or maybe you just don't get people.

DUDLEY

They usually disappoint.

LAURA
Are you talking about us in the
biz?

DUDLEY
The biz?

LAURA
I can tell you don't like my
business.

Dudley finishes his beer.

DUDLEY
I mean everyone.

LAURA
You should try to be a little more
charitable.

Dudley changes entirely and gets excited.

DUDLEY
You're a genius.

LAURA
Pace yourself, Dudley.

DUDLEY
Let's get out of here before we're
too late.

INT. CONVENTION CHARITY AUCTION - LATER

Exactly what one would expect of an auction crafted from a convention-hosting hotel supplies. The same stackable chairs pointed to a dais. The same sectioned off convention room.

The CROWD has a roped off section at the front wherein the honored guests sit, COMIC BOOK ARTISTS and WRITERS as well as CELEBRITIES.

GREG PEYTON, stocky hipster in an ironic t-shirt, sits next to GWEN WEATHERBY, fetching and charismatic star of the big screen. She's smaller than she looks in the movies.

At the back of the room, with the RABBLE, Dudley and Laura enter, still in Blade Runner costume.

LAURA
I am a genius.

DUDLEY

Beauty and brains and a knack for
adventure. I'd better watch my
step around you, princess.

Dudley and Laura move to the roped off section.

A VOLUNTEER stops them as they try to cross.

VOLUNTEER

Sorry, folks. This area is for
guests of the convention.

DUDLEY

What about Laura Clifton?

VOLUNTEER

You're Laura Clifton?

Laura smiles warmly, putting on the charm through the Pris
makeup.

VOLUNTEER

How do I know you're actually Laura
Clifton and not some replicant who
looks like her?

LAURA

What? Listen, I'm Laura Clifton.

VOLUNTEER

Well, of course a Laura Clifton
replicant would be programmed to
think she's Laura Clifton. You'd
be implanted with her memories.

Dudley chuckles behind her.

John Frieze, sitting behind Greg Peyton and next to Stephen
Altamont, looks up and notices Laura with the volunteer.

LAURA

What's going on?

Dudley sees John.

DUDLEY

We need to go. The jig is up, uh,
Pris. Let's go before I have to
"retire" you.

He winks at the staff member and pulls Laura away by the arm.

She wheels on him as he drags her to a seat in the back.

LAURA

What the hell was that? A little
geek humor at my expense?

DUDLEY

Remember princess, we're wearing
these getups because we're
incognito. I'm not doing this to
participate in geek culture.

LAURA

But you are a geek.

DUDLEY

Not this kind of geek, sister.

He thumbs his jacket as he says it. It's very Han Solo.
Maybe he really is Harrison Ford. Or he thinks he is.

IN THE VIP SECTION,

John cranes his neck to see where Laura ran off to.

IN THE BACK,

Dudley notices the look and hunches down.

AT THE PODIUM,

The AUCTIONEER clears his throat politely.

AUCTIONEER

Our next lot was donated to us by
Greg Peyton, director of the
upcoming New Teen Titans movie.
And it is an original New Teen
Titans cover on bristol board by
George Perez.

AT THE BACK,

Dudley leans over to Laura.

DUDLEY

That's our ticket in. We buy that,
we can talk to your director.

LAURA

What does something like that go
for?

AUCTIONEER (O.C.)

We'll start the bidding at three
thousand dollars. Do I hear three?

Laura's jaw drops.

LAURA
(to Dudley)
Three thousand dollars?

AT THE PODIUM,

The auctioneer nods to indicate a bid.

AUCTIONEER
We have three thousand. Do I hear
thirty-one hundred?

Another nod.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
Thirty-one hundred. Do I have
thirty-two?

AT THE BACK,

Dudley raises Laura's hand.

AUCTIONEER
Thirty-two. Do I have thirty-
three?

Laura turns on Dudley in shock.

LAURA
What are you doing? Thirty-two
hundred dollars?

AUCTIONEER
I have thirty-three. Do I hear
thirty-four hundred dollars?

DUDLEY
Do you want Greg Peyton's
attention?

AUCTIONEER
Thirty-four hundred dollars. Do I
have thirty-five?

IN VIP,

John Frieze raises his hand.

AUCTIONEER
Thirty-five hundred. Do I have
thirty-six?

STEPHEN
 (whispering)
 What's your angle?

AUCTIONEER
 Thirty-six. Do I have thirty-seven
 hundred?

JOHN
 I'm the money guy. Remember? Don't
 sweat it.

AUCTIONEER
 I have thirty-seven. Do I have
 thirty-eight?

FLASH ON: Laura raising her hand.

AUCTIONEER
 I have thirty-eight at the back.
 Do I hear thirty-nine?

John raises his hand again.

NARRATOR
 And so they went on. Laura
 competing against John for the
 attentions of Greg Peyton.

Laura raises her hand.

John raises his hand.

Laura. John. Laura. John.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
 And Greg Peyton was flattered. He
 had never expected people to be so
 willing to give to charity.
 Especially on the order of...

AUCTIONEER
 Ten-thousand, five hundred dollars
 going once.

AT THE BACK,

Laura refuses to raise her arm again.

DUDLEY
 This might be our only chance.

LAURA
Nothing doing, papa bear. We've
got other avenues to pursue.

AUCTIONEER
Going twice.

DUDLEY
You're going to let him win?

LAURA
No. I've let him spend ten
thousand, five hundred dollars to
impress a director that I will
impress with my dazzling smile.

BACK TO SCENE:

AUCTIONEER
Sold to the very generous gentleman
in the third row.

AT THE BACK,

Dudley and Laura get up to leave.

IN VIP,

John smiles and glances to watch them leave. Beside him,
Stephen smiles at Greg Peyton.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Laura and Dudley walk quickly from the auction.

DUDLEY
These costumes are busted. They'll
never get us past that guy anymore.

LAURA
Did you see Gwen Weatherby in
there? I'll be she's the actress
they're courting.

DUDLEY
I don't think this is about an
actress.

LAURA
It's about me. And I'm an actress.

DUDLEY

There's something wonky going on.
I'm detecting wonkiness.

LAURA

Is that your professional opinion?

DUDLEY

I am a professional adventurer.

LAURA

You're barely a professional comic
book geek. And you won't be unless
I get paid and you get your ten
percent.

DUDLEY

Didn't we say twelve.

LAURA

Regardless, that won't happen if
that guy in there succeeds in
getting me out of the picture.

DUDLEY

The guy from brunch.

Changing gears somewhat...

LAURA

We need a better name for him.

DUDLEY

What? Like Chip? Or George?

LAURA

Why did you start with Chip?

DUDLEY

Why not?

LAURA

Who goes by Chip anymore? What's
that even short for?

DUDLEY

Right now it's short for "our tail
from brunch."

LAURA

I don't want to call him Chip. I
was thinking about a codename.

Dudley doesn't miss a beat.

DUDLEY
Like Pink Frog or Operation
Goodnight?

Laura is taken aback by Dudley's not missing a beat.

LAURA
Are these from comic books or
something?

Dudley shakes his head and considers.

DUDLEY
Let's pull from your world. We'll
call him MacGuffin.

LAURA
MacGuffin?

DUDLEY
It's a Hitchcock thing.

LAURA
Yes, I know the term. I just don't
think it suits the situation.

DUDLEY
Chip MacGuffin it is.

NARRATOR
At that moment, "Chip MacGuffin"
was getting nervous.

INT. STEPHEN ALTAMONT'S HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Stephen and John sit on couches, talking.

NARRATOR
He had indeed noticed Laura and
Dudley at the auction. And he had
noticed that their attentions were
focused on Greg Peyton. Stephen
didn't buy it.

Stephen gets up to fix himself a drink.

STEPHEN
I don't buy it.

JOHN
I'm not selling it, Steve-o. I'm
giving you the facts.
(MORE)

JOHN (cont'd)

Your starlet and that Cleveland guy were there and they were trying to get at your director.

STEPHEN

Why would she be doing that? And why would she be doing it in disguise?

JOHN

Isn't it obvious? They were trying to warn him about us. It's just like she said to your assistant. She's onto us and she's not going to let us ruin the project. She believes in it or whatever.

STEPHEN

What would Greg Peyton have to do with it?

JOHN

Didn't you tell me that the studio heads hired him? He's got ties up the chain. If they tell him, it gets out to your masters. And then we're back in the mess.

Stephen drinks heavily.

STEPHEN

Maybe we should call it off.

JOHN

We can't call it off. We're too close. We just have to keep her from your director.

John shudders a bit.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I can't go back to jail. You don't understand. I burned some Bridges.

NARRATOR

In this particular instance, the Bridges he burned were Kyle and Billy Ray Bridges, brothers in charge of the most powerful gang in San Quentin.

FLASH ON: KYLE and BILLY RAY BRIDGES, mean, tattooed, dangerous meth-cookers, missing teeth and bulked up in jail.

NARRATOR

He had promised them an escape from prison and a part in his job. But his actual escape plan involved tossing them to the wolves. Or more accurately, the police dogs.

FLASH ON: The Bridges Brothers being tracked down by dogs.

NARRATOR

John knew he couldn't go back to prison with those two still inside.

FLASH ON: The Bridges Brothers as prison bars slam in front of them, locking them in prison again.

NARRATOR

He just needed a plan to deal with Laura and Dudley.

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Laura and Dudley sit down at the couches, having undone some of their costuming.

LAURA

What's the plan, now?

DUDLEY

Get really drunk.

LAURA

That doesn't sound constructive.

DUDLEY

It will when we're drunk.

A KNOCK on the door pulls them out of their stupor.

Laura gets up.

Looks through the peep hole.

And admits David into the room.

DAVID

Why are you dressed like a hooker?

DUDLEY

Technically, she's a pleasure model.

DAVID
Oh. Like Pris.

LAURA
You know it?

DAVID
Blade Runner? Harrison Ford.
Directed by Ridley Scott. It's a
modern classic, kiddo. I had it on
laser disc.

LAURA
Wow. You're like an old person.

David is a little taken aback by this sauciness. He looks at
Dudley, suspecting he may be the culprit.

DAVID
Based on that ensemble, I suppose
you already have my news.

LAURA
What news?

DAVID
Greg Peyton's party?

DUDLEY
We know of no party.

DAVID
Then why are you...? Nevermind.
Greg Peyton is throwing a party
tonight.

DUDLEY
Oooh. Will there be cake and
clowns?

DAVID
Open bar.

DUDLEY
(almost interrupting)
I'm in.

David smiles.

DAVID
I assumed you already knew about it
because of the costumes. It's a
kind of nerd costume ball.

DUDLEY

It's a what?

DAVID

You're supposed to show up dressed like some geek character. Like everybody is here at the con.

Laura looks at Dudley and then back to her agent.

LAURA

We have to get into that party.

DAVID

I've already got you on the guest list.

LAURA

You're the best agent ever.

DUDLEY

What a team.

DAVID

Okay, Cinderella and wicked step brother, you've got to get ready for the ball.

EXT. HIP NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A BOUNCER shoos PEOPLE in front of a sign that says "Private Party."

Laura and Dudley show up dressed as the fourth and fifth Doctor Whos, respectively.

Laura has the multicolored scarf, Dudley's Deckard jacket, an appropriate wig and fedora.

Dudley has Peter Davison's familiar cricket outfit, jacket, and Laura's Pris wig only combed differently. He's missing the celery on the lapel.

David follows them as they approach the bouncer.

LAURA

Laura Clifton.

BOUNCER

(checking the list)

Yes. Have a good evening Ms. Clifton.

Laura smiles as the bouncer moves the velvet rope aside.
They enter the club.

INT. HIP NIGHTCLUB - CONTINUOUS

Loud MUSIC accompanies the usual revelry.

Hot STARLETS wear skimpy versions of superhero costumes.

Chiseled DUDES wear accurate, skin-tight versions of superhero and sci-fi costumes.

Laura looks at the hot starlets with a hint of regret.

She thumbs the large jacket and the scarf.

LAURA

How did Ron Baker deal with this
getup under those hot studio
lights?

DUDLEY

Tom Baker suffered for his art,
princess. I suggest you do the
same.

LAURA

I'm not a princess.

A haughty posture and a mischievous grin.

LAURA (CONT'D)

(English accent)

I'm the Doctor.

Dudley suppresses a smile.

DUDLEY

I'm not till I get to the bar.

DAVID

Oh? Was your Doctor an alcoholic?

DUDLEY

No.

They walk to the bar.

DAVID

So it's just you, then.

Dudley flags the bartender.

DUDLEY
(to bartender)
Bloody Mary.

Dudley looks at Laura and David looking at him.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)
I know, right? Bloody Mary?
That's a breakfast drink.

Laura chuckles.

And quickly stifles it.

DAVID
Time to go to work.

He disappears into the crowd, admiring an accurately costumed PSYLOCKE on the way.

DUDLEY
It's all business with that guy.
Relax. We're at a party.

LAURA
We're at this party to work.

DUDLEY
I'm just getting into the spirit of
the thing, princess.
(to the bar)
Do I need improbable cleavage to
get a drink at this party?

The bartender hears this as he's walking by, frantically making drinks.

BARTENDER
It'd help.

The bartender drops off the Bloody Mary.

Dudley removes the large, leafy celery stalk and wipes it thoroughly on the napkin and sets it down next to the drink.

Laura watches with some amused interest.

LAURA
I hear those things are good for
you.

Dudley pulls out a straight pin.

DUDLEY

They're good for something.

He pins the celery to his lapel, completing the costume.

LAURA

You could have just asked them for
a celery stalk.

DUDLEY

But what would I drink?

He sips at his cocktail.

He looks up to...

THE VIP SECTION,

And and sees John Frieze as Arthur Dent, Stephen Altamont as
Bruce Wayne, Greg Peyton, dressed as Clark Kent and Gwen
Weatherby, dressed as Starfire of the Teen Titans.

NARRATOR

Dudley quailed a bit when he saw
John Frieze and Stephen Altamont
talking with the director. It was
also not beyond his notice that
Gwen Weatherby was dressed as
Starfire, whom she portrayed in the
upcoming Teen Titans movie, the
very movie Greg Peyton directed.

They make their introductions all around, shaking hands,
kissing cheeks or merely nodding.

NARRATOR

A small portion of Dudley's concern
was due to the inaccuracy of the
Starfire costume, but mostly, it
was due to the proximity John
Frieze and Greg Peyton.

AT THE BAR,

Laura watches it all.

NARRATOR

Laura saw this as well.

LAURA

I knew it. I'll bet Chip MacGuffin
is Gwen Weatherby's agent. They're
up there right now hiring her to
play Carol Danvers.

AT THE VIP SECTION,

John, Stephen, Greg and Gwen are all seated at couches around a lit up table.

GREG

That was quite generous of you today at the auction. I had no idea you were so into George Perez.

STEPHEN

To be honest, we wanted to support the charity. But we liked to do it with your contribution. We're very excited about Captain Marvel.

GREG

It was still generous.

JOHN

It's a write off.

GREG

Ah. The bean counter.

John smiles. And then smiles at Gwen.

Gwen smiles politely back.

GREG (CONT'D)

As long as this doesn't come out of my effects budget. I've got a Kree-Skrull fleet battle sequence that will make the Star Wars trilogies look like puppet theater.

STEPHEN

Were you thinking CG? Or all physical effects like the original trilogy?

The way Stephen says this, he emphasizes the physical effects as preferential.

GREG

I like to do everything with physical effects.

JOHN

We'll have to front load those in the budget if you want them as physical effects.

GREG
Is that a problem?

JOHN
No. We prefer it. The more we can
spend this fiscal year, the better.

GREG
Great. I'll make sure your money
is well spent.

STEPHEN
And we'll make sure it's there for
you to spend.

GREG
I'm all a-tingle. Excuse me, I
need to see to the rest of my
guests. We can talk business when
we're not straining our voices.

They nod.

Gwen watches Greg go.

She looks at Stephen, and then at John. A polite smile.

AT THE BAR,

Laura watches John, Gwen and Stephen converse. From this
distance, it looks friendly, if a little business-like.

NARRATOR
Laura was feeling completely lost.
She had seen what to her was a
meeting between a director, a
producer, a rival lead actress and
that actress's agent engage in what
she thought was an amicable
discussion.

She sips at her drink, which is a Bloody Mary.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
She was certain that she had
witnessed the final nail in her
coffin.

LAURA
Well, that had to be the final nail
in our coffin.

DUDLEY
(to the bartender)
Two more Bloody Marys.

Dudley smiles comfortingly at Laura.

DUDLEY
I'm sorry, Laura.

The use of her name by Dudley grabs her attention.

LAURA
I thought we could really do this.
I wanted this.

DUDLEY
It would've been a big spin off.

LAURA
I actually liked the character.

DUDLEY
Really?

LAURA
I stayed up all night reading.

Laura reaches into the coat and pulls out a trade paperback of Batman The Killing Joke.

DUDLEY
I don't remember buying that.

LAURA
I got it myself. I was excited to be a part of this world. I'm sure Greg would've liked me.

DUDLEY
It's Altamont. He makes the rest of the slimy, dishonest people in your world seem almost wholesome.

LAURA
You don't like my world.

DUDLEY
I really don't, princess.

LAURA
Yeah, well, neither do I tonight, tiger.

Laura takes a sip of her Bloody Mary.

David shows up behind them.

DAVID
What's up, kids? Let's get out there and mingle. It's go time.

LAURA
We're out. Gwen Weatherby is getting the part.

DAVID
The girl in the orange paint?

David looks over at VIP admiringly.

When he turns back to Laura, he's all sympathy.

LAURA
We didn't have a chance.

DUDLEY
Slimy, smarmy, two-faced con artist. That guy is going to get his. He needs to be in jail.

LAURA
What did he do to you?

DUDLEY
He didn't do anything specifically to me. He is just a con artist who should've gone to prison.

DAVID
Someone did something. You've got a chip on your shoulder.

Dudley and Laura react a bit to the word "chip."

DUDLEY
That studio holds the rights to what happened in Cleveland.

DAVID
And you got paid for that, right?

DUDLEY
I was well compensated. I was even given "novelization" rights to write the book about my story.

DAVID
What's the problem? Writer's block?

DUDLEY

The last draft I read of the Cleveland Caper was absolutely nothing like what actually happened out there. They changed my name and had me running around with a gun like it was Die Hard.

DAVID

That's not what happened?

DUDLEY

I hate guns.

LAURA

All they do is shoot people.

Dudley finishes his drink and motions for another one.

DAVID

Is that it? You're mad that they screwed up your story?

DUDLEY

I passed on the novelization. I wanted to write what actually happened. But, when I sent it to a publisher, the studio threatened to sue. They considered my book a competing product.

Laura is genuinely concerned, bought in to Dudley's plight.

LAURA

That's ridiculous. It's autobiographical. I'm sure the first amendment would...

Dudley interrupts.

DUDLEY

No publisher is going to spend the money to win that fight. The studio would make sure it was a costly battle.

LAURA

Sounds like a challenge.

DAVID

That sounds like that studio.

DUDLEY

Every studio.

DAVID
But not Altamont.

DUDLEY
No. Alamont passed, but sent it to
another producer in the company.
I'm sure it'd be worse with him at
the helm.

Laura sips at her drink and broods.

Dudley slides off to get another round of drinks.

They don't notice Greg Peyton approaching from behind.

Greg laughs loudly, hands on his hips like Errol Flynn.

GREG
I love it! Tom Baker, right?

Laura comes out of her stupor.

LAURA
Yes. The fourth doctor.

GREG
I know. I'm a fan.

He holds out his hand.

GREG (CONT'D)
Of both Doctor Who and Laura
Clifton.

She smiles broadly and shakes his hand. She was right about
that "winning smile."

LAURA
I'm a big fan of yours, as well. I
can't wait to see Teen Titans.

GREG
Come to the premier.

LAURA
I will. Thanks.

Dudley arrives from the bar with another drink.

LAURA
Oh, yes. Greg Peyton, this is
Dudley Charles, my manager.

GREG

Nice to meet you, Doctor. I love it. Right down to the celery.

He points at the celery in Dudley's lapel.

DUDLEY

I find accuracy to the source material is important in costumes.

LAURA

And David Sands, my agent.

Greg shakes David's hand.

DAVID

We had hoped to talk to you about your next project.

DUDLEY

Captain Mar-vell of the Kree empire.

GREG

Yes. It's big. I was just telling Stephen Altamont and that accountant my vision for a Kree-Skrull fleet battle.

DUDLEY

Accountant?

GREG

Yeah. That guy with Stephen. I think he's the money guy.

Dudley sips thoughtfully at his drink.

LAURA

Accountant?

She turns to Dudley, amazed. Then back to Greg.

LAURA

That's fabulous.

GREG

Is it?

LAURA

It is for me.

GREG

You mean Carol Danvers?

LAURA

I think she's great. She's an icon. And, she's so human, despite having all of those powers.

GREG

You're a fan?

LAURA

I've got all her best work. Avengers Annual number ten. I've got her with the Starjammers as Binary.

NARRATOR

As Laura gushed about the part she was attempting to win, John Frieze was experiencing a moment of panic.

IN VIP,

Gwen Weatherby and Stephen talk around John Frieze as John stares at Laura and Greg across the room.

NARRATOR

Laura was talking to the director. This was precisely the situation he spent ten thousand five hundred of Stephen Altamont's dollars to prevent.

John grabs Stephen and nods him to the side.

STEPHEN

(to Gwen)

Excuse me, a moment.

They get up and walk to a corner of VIP.

John nods in the direction of Greg and Laura, calling Stephen's attention to them.

STEPHEN

You still think they're trying to spoil the plot?

JOHN

You've got to get them apart.

STEPHEN

Give her the part? I thought you...

JOHN
(interrupting)
Keep up, Steve-o. You have got to
get them apart. Separate them.

STEPHEN
What? How?

A sudden stroke of genius.

JOHN
Offer her the job.

STEPHEN
I thought you wanted to keep her
away from it.

JOHN
Just give her the part. Hurry.
Before they spill the beans. It'll
give them something else to talk
about.

Stephen wanders out of VIP.

AT THE BAR,

Dudley watches as Greg and Laura gush over Ms. Marvel.

GREG
This is great. I think you've got
a great angle. I'll talk to some
people and see if I can...

Stephen's arrival interrupts.

STEPHEN
Laura Clifton, there you are. I'm
sorry about that meeting yesterday.
I was hoping we could reschedule
before the end of the convention.

GREG
You were meeting with her?

STEPHEN
We considered her as top in the
running for the Carol Danvers part.

GREG
We were just talking about that.

Stephen really sells his feigned surprise.

STEPHEN

That's perfect. I say she's our girl. If Greg agrees...

Greg nods emphatically and says.

GREG

I think she'd be great.

STEPHEN

Perfect. Here's what I'm thinking. We draw up the paperwork tomorrow and we announce it at the press event here at the convention. That gives us a scoop to let the buzz build until Comic Con in San Diego.

Laura is beside herself.

LAURA

That's great.

DAVID

Fabulous. I'll call my office.

David pulls out his phone and starts to wander off.

STEPHEN

We'll meet tomorrow morning over breakfast. Nine o'clock good?

David nods over his shoulder.

LAURA

I'd love to. I'm so relieved. I thought you were courting Gwen Weatherby up there for the part.

STEPHEN

Really?

GREG

Oh, no. She doesn't really get the whole comic book thing. We just picked her because she looks good in orange paint and that costume.

Dudley chuckles appreciatively.

STEPHEN

Well, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to get back to this party.

Stephen wades back into the crowd.

GREG

Yes, I should go mingle. Laura.
It was a pleasure. I'll see you
tomorrow. You too, uh, dude.

Dudley hates being called "dude."

DUDLEY

Dudley.

Greg doesn't hear that as he's already wandered off.

Laura rounds on Dudley, elated.

She hugs him.

Surprised, Dudley doesn't quite know what to do with his
arms.

DUDLEY

Okay. Hey.

Still in the hug, Laura says...

LAURA

That was perfect. Thank you for
your help. I couldn't have done it
without you.

There's a pause. And then there's a moment.

Which is extinguished by an awkward silence.

DUDLEY

I thought it was all your winning
smile, princess.

LAURA

And a stack of comic books that
cost as much as the orthodontics
that gave me this smile, tiger.

DUDLEY

Money well spent, in any case.

Did he mean the comics? Or the smile?

LAURA

And to think, we had to work all
those angles to get around Chip
MacGuffin over there and he was
just the accountant.

DUDLEY

That's what troubles me, princess.

LAURA

You keep calling me "princess" and I'll keep calling you "tiger," tiger.

She probably meant that as a threat.

DUDLEY

That's why I do it, princess.

Laura notices Dudley staring intently at John.

LAURA

What's the matter? I got the part. Mission accomplished.

DUDLEY

Chip MacGuffin over there doesn't add up anymore. If he's just an accountant, why was he following us around?

LAURA

Maybe he just brunched at the same place.

DUDLEY

And he had all of those designer clothes that the assistant bought.

LAURA

Maybe the airline lost his luggage.

Dudley puts his drink down. He looks concerned.

DUDLEY

Something's wonky.

LAURA

What does it matter about Chip MacGuffin? I got the part. That means you get the ten percent.

DUDLEY

Didn't we say twelve?

LAURA

Not once you take out the cost of all of that research, tiger.

DUDLEY

Don't you think this is a little strange?

LAURA

Sometimes things work out. Isn't there any magic in your world?

DUDLEY

What like movie magic?

LAURA

You don't like movie magic?

DUDLEY

It's all a lot of simple tricks and nonsense.

LAURA

And what about other magic? What about something like love?

DUDLEY

Same deal, princess. Simple tricks. Nonsense.

LAURA

Nonsense?

DUDLEY

It's all people pretending to be something they're not, something they want to be, and not letting the mask slip until the last possible moment, when the other party is too invested to back out.

LAURA

You're very cynical.

DUDLEY

Yeah. I'm a challenge.

LAURA

No, you're impossible. I suppose you don't wear a mask.

DUDLEY

Nope. I'm like this all the time. What you see is what you get.

LAURA

And you don't like cosplay. I get it.

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)
Except that you go around claiming
to be a professional adventurer.

DUDLEY
I am a professional adventurer.

LAURA
You're delusional.

She pulls off the Tom Baker hat and wig and tosses them onto
the table.

And leaves.

NARRATOR
Unfortunately for Laura, Dudley was
right. The situation was decidedly
wonky. And what's more, it was
going to get wonkier.

IN VIP,

Stephen Altamont finds John Frieze brooding in a plush,
underlit booth.

NARRATOR
John Frieze was also convinced that
things might be going completely
south.

Stephen flops next to him with an enormous smile on his face.

NARRATOR
The threat of returning to prison,
and worse the Bridges brothers,
terrified him. He was willing to
do awful things for an awful lot of
money. He was willing to do far
worse to stay out of jail.

John glares at the smile. It does not lift his mood.

STEPHEN
It's all fixed.

JOHN
You offered her the part.

STEPHEN
Better.

JOHN
She's dead?

STEPHEN

Prison has made you dark.

JOHN

Chicks dig dark.

STEPHEN

Better in the sense that it was all a big misunderstanding.

John sits up. All ears.

JOHN

You have my undivided.

STEPHEN

She thought we were courting Gwen Weatherby for the part.

JOHN

Weren't you?

STEPHEN

No. That's what she thinks we were doing. That's why she wanted to talk to Greg Peyton. That's what she "knew" we were up to.

JOHN

And that's why she said that she believes in the project.

STEPHEN

Exactly. We didn't even have to hire her anyway. Although, I think we were going to. And Greg seems to like her.

JOHN

Too bad for the both of them, then.

Stephen shrugs cavalierly.

STEPHEN

They'll survive, I'm sure.

Something occurs to John.

He smiles broadly. He seems self conscious about letting Stephen see his smile.

John looks around at the party.

JOHN

We can pull the trigger on this scheme tomorrow.

STEPHEN

Really? What about our exit?

JOHN

All inclusive. I'll handle it.

STEPHEN

You'll handle it?

JOHN

I'll handle it. It's my trigger. I'll pull it. There's too much to get right. Don't worry. When have I let you down?

STEPHEN

When you got caught.

JOHN

Not this time, Steve-o.

NARRATOR

Stephen had an inkling of what John was planning. He resolved to push on without dwelling on any unpleasantness.

AT THE BAR,

Dudley has a martini in his hand and an empty martini glass beside him. He's at the bar. The Tom Baker wig and hat still rest on the table behind him.

NARRATOR

Dudley was all about dwelling on unpleasantness. He was certainly making the most of the open bar.

John approaches behind him.

NARRATOR

Even for a prodigious and experienced drinker like Dudley, he was beyond the point of useful brooding.

John sweeps up the wig and hat on the table.

NARRATOR

By the this time, his useful meditations on Chip MacGuffin had turned into what most people would describe as moping.

John bumps into Dudley rather violently.

DUDLEY

Easy does it.

John feigns drunkenness.

JOHN

Sorry. Open bar.

DUDLEY

Watch where you're going next time, Chip.

John doesn't really notice the name. He just keeps walking.

John holds his hand palm up, examining the hotel key card he's palming. He smiles and pockets the key.

Dudley returns to his drink.

AT VIP,

Stephen, David and Laura talk shop.

STEPHEN

I think we'd be willing to do that, David. I can have everything signed by tomorrow morning. You'll have a fax sent to your room, Laura.

DAVID

Isn't that kind of fast, Stephen?

STEPHEN

We want to have everything on paper before the press event tomorrow. We planned to do it yesterday at our meeting, but things came up.

DAVID

Are you guys in a hurry?

STEPHEN

You have us over a barrel, I suppose. Just go easy on us.
(MORE)

STEPHEN (cont'd)

I think we have a very equitable offer. I don't think we need to haggle or negotiate.

Just then, John shows up.

JOHN

You're not spending all of our money, are you, Stephen?

STEPHEN

Uh, oh. See what I mean, David?

JOHN

I don't want to get in the way here. Is there something I can do? Laura can I check that coat and scarf? It looks positively sweltering.

LAURA

You don't know the half of it.

She takes the coat and scarf off and hands them to John.

John walks away with the coat and scarf.

He surreptitiously rifles the pockets and finds Laura's hotel key.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dudley wanders towards his room. He's checking his many pockets absent mindedly.

From out of the shadows, John Frieze walks towards Dudley. John wears the Tom Baker wig combed in front of his eyes along with a different set of clothes. He looks like one of the Ramones.

He bumps into Dudley who isn't paying attention.

DUDLEY

Watch it, Joey Ramone.

John waves without turning around.

Dudley pouts drunkenly and continues to pat himself down. From the pocket most easily accessed by John Frieze, he pulls out two hotel key cards.

He tries one in his door.

It doesn't work.

He puts that one in his mouth and tries the other one.

That one works.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dudley pulls off some of his costume elements as he wanders towards the bed. He sets his key on the dresser along with other things from his pockets. The other key is still in his mouth, stuck to one of his lips.

He collapses onto the bed.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Dudley's cell phone RINGS and BUZZES loudly against the dresser. Dudley lifts his head semi-consciously. He doesn't open his eyes, however and goes back to sleep.

The hotel key from his mouth is stuck to his forehead.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - LATER

An insistent KNOCKING at his door pulls him out of his slumber. Once again, he wakes semi-consciously, the hotel key still stuck to his forehead.

The KNOCKING resumes.

Dudley heaves a sigh and stumbles to the door.

LAURA (O.C.)
(through the door)
Dudley. Open up.

Dudley opens the door and squints at the light from the hallway.

DUDLEY
I have some very important passing
out to do.

LAURA
We sign the paperwork tomorrow at
breakfast. I'll officially be
Carol Danvers.

DUDLEY

Awesome. I can see why that
couldn't wait until morning.

LAURA

You might want to be there, as my
manager. You'll be getting your
percentage soon after.

DUDLEY

Ten percent. Great.

LAURA

Didn't we say twelve?

Dudley wakes up a little bit at that.

DUDLEY

Is that where we landed on that?

Laura eyes the hotel key stuck to Dudley's face.

LAURA

I can't find my room key. I
thought maybe you had it.

Dudley glances around the room from where he's standing, a
very weak search.

DUDLEY

I don't see it.

Laura sighs and points at his forehead.

Dudley starts and reaches up to the key.

DUDLEY

Is this your card?

She takes the key.

DUDLEY

Tada. Magic.

Laura holds out the jacket and scarf from her costume.

LAURA

Here's your jacket. It doesn't fit
me.

Dudley tosses the jacket onto a chair.

LAURA

Also, I have a press conference tomorrow at eleven.

DUDLEY

Big day, princess.

LAURA

Stop calling me that.

DUDLEY

You're signing the paperwork tomorrow at breakfast on a Sunday?

LAURA

They wanted to push it through so that we could do this press event.

DUDLEY

Doesn't that strike you as odd?

LAURA

No. It sounds like my job.

DUDLEY

Nothing about this whole weekend strikes you as weird?

A pregnant, awkward pause ensues.

Dudley sags further against the door frame.

LAURA

Just you.

She retreats. Dudley shuts the door.

DARKNESS

NARRATOR

Dreams have fascinated the human race since the first human beings clawed their way into sentience. Perhaps they hold the key to our fates. Or perhaps the secrets contained in the infinite recesses of the human mind. Some believe that dreams are an exercise for the brain to arrange all of the information gleaned that day into useful structures.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

The bar is full of PATRONS, most of whom are GEEKS in costume.

NARRATOR

Are dreams just a jumbled repeat of the days events? Are they harbingers of the future? Do they represent the subconscious telling us something important? Or, was Dudley so inebriated that he was remembering parts of last night as a vivid and bizarre dream?

Dudley sits, drunkenly with Rico and Isaac. It's the night before and Dudley is still in his Peter Davison costume.

ISAAC

I thought you hated cosplay.

DUDLEY

I thought you hated bars.

ISAAC

These are my people. I'm comfortable around my people.

DUDLEY

Our people.

The people in the bar are eerily similar to the people they're dressed as. The cosplay is real on a surreal level.

At the bar, a dead accurate SPIDER JERUSALEM types furiously on a futuristic laptop, smoking, despite that being banned.

ISAAC

I thought you were better than everyone. Now we're your people?

DUDLEY

These people, I understand. We're simple. We believe in things. Ethical beings we, and not just corrupt little monkeys selling ourselves out, grubbing for gold.

RICO

Dudley Charles, you are anything but simple. Even when you're this drunk. Are you having trouble with the beautiful people?

Two STAR TREK GEEKS in uniforms beam out of the bar.

DUDLEY

The beautiful people are always trouble, Rico. I knew that. Still, buy the ticket, take the ride. Again.

ISAAC

So, what happened, then?

DUDLEY

There's something wonky going on, but everyone's getting their way, so no one questions it. She gets the part and we're all supposed to stand down. Mission accomplished. Res ipsa loquitur.

Dudley salutes.

ISAAC

Mission accomplished is good, right?

DUDLEY

Wonkiness is not good, young Isaac. The whole thing is fishy and now that everyone's getting their way, everyone is clamming up.

RICO

Is this about the job? Or the girl?

DUDLEY

The job is the girl. Or the other way around.

A very small HOBBIT gets a pint from the bar.

RICO

You know what I mean. That girl was pure, unadulterated charm distilled into a feisty, little package. Who wouldn't love her?

Dudley stands up in a huff.

DUDLEY

I think you misapprehend my meaning, sir.

Isaac mouths "misapprehend" questioningly.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

I am not some schoolboy, easily taken in by a stellar smile and a pair of playful, delightful eyes.

Rico mouths the word "delightful" questioningly.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

I am an adjunct media studies professor. And I am a professional adventurer. I have extensive experience in the wonky and the weird.

RICO

What are you going to do?

DUDLEY

When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Dudley awakes with a jerk.

NARRATOR

Pain and regret can take many forms. One of them is a hangover.

He holds his head in pain.

He cautiously turns his head to look out the window.

The sound of RAIN and the pale light it allows seep in through the window.

NARRATOR

Dudley was keenly aware that he needed to be somewhere. Worse yet, he was needed somewhere.

He looks down at the clock.

9:17.

NARRATOR

Hopefully he wasn't too late.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - MORNING

Laura, Stephen, David, Greg and John all sit together.

NARRATOR

Stephen was just filling Greg and Laura in on the details of the press event. He outlined what they were allowed to talk about and what they weren't allowed to talk about.

The WAITER arrives.

WAITER

Can I get anyone something to drink? A mimosa? Or a Bloody Mary?

Laura casts a remorseful glance at a Bloody Mary.

DUDLEY (O.C.)

I'll have a Bloody Mary.

Dudley arrives. He's unshaven and he's rushed here, still wearing glasses.

Relief and joy passes through Laura before she remembers she's still mad at him.

LAURA

I'm glad you could make it. I was beginning to think we'd lost you.

DUDLEY

I'm here to do a job, princess, and I take my obligations seriously.

Laura introduces Dudley around the table.

LAURA

Everyone, this is my manager, Dudley. He's helped me research this part.

DUDLEY

We've all met.
(to John)
Except you. Dudley Charles.

Dudley extends his hand.

John reaches out and shakes it.

There's electricity between them. An instant, hidden animosity. Sherlock Holmes meets Professor Moriarty at a party.

JOHN

John Froman. Good to meet you,
finally. I've read all about you.

DUDLEY

Lies and exaggerations, I'm sure.
Especially if you read the script
for the thing in Cleveland.

GREG

The Cleveland Caper? That was you?

DUDLEY

The real one was me.

GREG

So it wasn't really Die Hard in the
Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

DUDLEY

Not Die Hard, no. For one thing, I
was wearing shoes the whole time.

Laura chuckles and stifles it.

DUDLEY (CONT'D)

Besides, I hate guns.

LAURA

All they do is shoot people.

She means it sarcastically.

DUDLEY

And I hate being shot.

But he's filtered the irony and means it seriously.

Stephen seems to take it as a joke.

STEPHEN

That's the biz. People aren't
interested unless there's a
gunfight and a romantic subplot.

DUDLEY

Truth, Stephen, is stranger than
fiction. People are more apt to
believe the fiction.

STEPHEN

Fiction is our business. You want
truth, go to the press.

Said as though talking to the masses more than directly to Dudley. Still, Dudley responds...

DUDLEY

I'll keep that in mind.

Dudley shakes some Tabasco into his newly arrived Bloody Mary, stirs it with the celery and drinks deeply.

NARRATOR

Dudley was anxious to get out of the breakfast. He had work to do.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - LATER

The breakfast meeting breaks up. Dudley pulls Laura aside.

LAURA

Still think something is weird?

DUDLEY

I know something is weird.

Laura betrays some exasperation.

LAURA

Dudley. I'm grateful that you got me this job. And it's been great catching up after all this time...

Dudley cuts her off.

DUDLEY

Listen, I've got some things to take care of before the big reveal.

LAURA

Like a shower?

DUDLEY

That's one. I'll meet you in the lobby before you go over there.

LAURA

Sure thing, Dudley.

NARRATOR

Dudley had a lot more than just a shower in mind, but that was first on the list.

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL BATHROOM - LATER

Dudley emerges from the shower.

He gives himself a thorough shave.

And he puts in contact lenses.

INT. LAURA CLIFTON'S HOTEL SUITE BATHROOM - LATER

Laura goes through an extensive make up and hair ritual, preparing to meet her fans.

INT. HOTEL BAR - MORNING

Dudley, now without his glasses, dressed in the Tom Baker/Deckard jacket and carrying his laptop bag, sits at the bar and works.

He flips open the lap and winces at the brightness of the light.

NARRATOR

It was, for Dudley, the work of a moment to find all that he needed on Stephen Altamont. And from there, he discovered the that Chip MacGuffin who introduced himself at breakfast as John Froman, was actually John Frieze, escaped convict and former partner of Stephen Altamont.

Black coffee arrives next to Dudley and he grabs it blindly. He sips it idly, his attention rapt on the laptop's screen.

NARRATOR

Many people react to overwhelming pressure by shutting down, bit by bit. Dudley was one of those rare creatures who came alive under these circumstances. It is that fact that makes him a professional adventurer.

Dudley looks up and sees Laura entering the lobby.

He closes his laptop and stashes it in his bag as he leaves the bar.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Laura sees Dudley and nods in professional friendliness.

LAURA

You look nice without glasses.

DUDLEY

And you look especially nice this morning.

Laura smiles and warms up a little.

LAURA

You don't have to be here. You did your job. You can go and enjoy the convention, Dudley.

DUDLEY

I'm not going anywhere. You still need my help.

LAURA

I think I've done all the research I can do. You've been a big help and I couldn't have done it without you.

DUDLEY

I'm not talking about the job, princess. You're in trouble. I don't think you should be alone with Stephen or John.

LAURA

Is this some kind of chivalry thing, tiger? That's sweet, Dudley, really, but I can handle a guy like that.

Dudley can tell he's not getting anywhere.

DUDLEY

Let's just get you to the press conference.

LAURA

Out there? It's raining.

DUDLEY

That's the north coast for you.

LAURA

Do you know how long I spent to get this "effortless beauty" look right? I can't go out in the rain.

DUDLEY

Are you kidding me, princess?

LAURA

That's what it's like managing us princesses, tiger. Fetch me an umbrella so that I don't muss up my pretty.

DUDLEY

I suppose I should get you some rose petals to be thrown at your feet.

LAURA

Just the umbrella will do in a pinch.

Dudley looks nervously around the lobby.

DUDLEY

Fine. I'll go get you an umbrella. But you have to promise me you'll stay here in the lobby. Don't go anywhere with Stephen or John. This should be safe. It's public.

LAURA

Safe? What are you talking about?

DUDLEY

Laura, I think your life is in danger.

Laura stops for a moment at Dudley using her real name.

LAURA

Oh, my God.

She considers it for a moment before she snaps to reality.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You are like a crazy person.

DUDLEY

Laura...

The spell doesn't work again and Laura charges on.

LAURA

Why do I always pick the crazy ones? Is it me? Is there something wrong with me?

Dudley tries to interject.

DUDLEY

What's wrong with you is that you're in trouble.

LAURA

No. Something's wrong with you. You're not Batman and this isn't Gotham City. We're at a comic book convention and you're off your meds or something. If you want to save the day, get me an umbrella.

Dudley doesn't want to leave.

LAURA

I'm not going to go anywhere, tiger. How could I go out there without an umbrella?

NARRATOR

Dudley did the math. She wasn't going anywhere without an umbrella.

He turns and runs out into the street.

INT. CONVENTION SHOW FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Dudley races through the showroom to find a particular vendor. He dodges KLINGONS, STORMTROOPERS, a JOKER, and STARSCREAM.

NARRATOR

Dudley knew one place in the convention floor that sold umbrellas.

He finds the vendor selling light up lightsaber replica umbrellas.

NARRATOR

But on a rainy day like today, they were incredibly popular.

And he notices the line is around the corner.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

John Frieze shows up behind Laura.

She turns around a little startled, but then laughs at herself.

JOHN

I'll take you to the press conference. There's a staging area where we'll keep you until you're announced. You're kind of a surprise.

LAURA

I'm waiting on my manager. He's brining an umbrella.

John lifts up a lightsaber umbrella in Sith red.

NARRATOR

Incredibly popular.

He motions with the "after you" gesture and she follows.

INT. CONVENTION SHOW FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Dudley, still trapped in line reaches into his pockets and pulls out exact change, including tax.

He walks up and intercepts SOME NERD's purchase of a Jedi blue lightsaber umbrella. He throws the exact amount onto the table and runs off with the umbrella.

SOME NERD

(like Luke to Yoda)

Hey! That's mine. Give that back!

The vendor counts out the money, finds it to be the correct amount, shrugs and hands another Jedi blue lightsaber umbrella to the nerd.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Dudley races into the lobby and looks around.

There is no Laura.

He closes his eyes in frustration.

And he pulls out his phone type out a text message.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER BACK HALLWAYS - MOMENTS LATER

Laura and John wander the halls.

A buzzing causes Laura to look at her phone.

TEXT MESSAGE: Where are you?

Laura starts typing out a reply.

EXT. HOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Dudley looks around the street. Everyone has umbrellas, many of them the light up lightsaber replicas. He stands up on a crosswalk sign to get a better vantage. The whole thing looks like Blade Runner.

Dudley's phone beeps to signal the arrival of a text message.

TEXT MESSAGE: On my way. John is showing me the way.

Dudley grimaces at the message.

DUDLEY
Dammit, Laura.

He runs across the street, holding his unopened umbrella.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAYS - MOMENTS LATER

Dudley meets up with Harold and David outside the prescribed room.

HAROLD
Where is Laura?

DUDLEY
In trouble. We all are.

DAVID
What are you talking about?

DUDLEY
You want to save this movie? You want your ten percent?

DAVID
What's going on? What are you talking about?

DUDLEY

Can I borrow your phone? I need to tell Laura something.

David hands over his phone.

Dudley starts typing out a text message to Laura.

DUDLEY

Our client is in trouble. Stephen Altamont and his partner are running a big store con on the studio.

HAROLD

A what? That's ridiculous.

Dudley ignores Harold and keeps going.

DUDLEY

We can fix it. I need your help.

DAVID

I heard all about you, man. Delusions that you're Batman or something. What is it with you nerds?

DUDLEY

I don't have a lot of time to explain this, so get it right the first time. Just trust me.

NARRATOR

It was very difficult to David and Harold to accept the tale Dudley was spinning. It was even more difficult to listen without interrupting with disbelieving questions. Not being experienced adventurers like Dudley, they didn't sense any danger around them.

Dudley opens his laptop and shows them the news stories about John Frieze being an escaped convict.

NARRATOR

Luckily, Dudley is both an experienced adventurer and an adjunct media studies professor. Not only was he able to explain the situation, he was able to cite his sources.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER BACK HALLWAYS - DAY

Laura checks her buzzing phone again.

NARRATOR

Laura, likewise, wasn't inclined to believe Dudley. Which is why she wasn't answering his texts.

Laura reads a text message apparently from David.

TEXT MESSAGE: Totally lost and can't get a signal. Text me where you end up.

LAURA

Where are we going?

JOHN

We're going to a staging area, kitten. You're going to be a surprise until we bring you out on stage.

John holds a door open and leads Laura into a room.

Laura checks the room number and name of the room, typing in the answer to Dudley's question on her phone.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAYS - DAY

Dudley glances at David's beeping phone, still in Dudley's hand.

DUDLEY

Showtime. You know what you're doing?

DAVID

There's no way I'm doing this. This is crazy. Not everything is like that thing in Cleveland.

Dudley sighs.

DUDLEY

Fine. Don't do it. I'm going to go save the day. If you don't want to save the job on top of that, well, I'm sure Laura can shop for a better agent.

DAVID

You've been her manager for two days and you think you're going to get me fired?

DUDLEY

No. You're going to get you fired. Do the job. It's time to save a life.

Dudley tosses the phone to David.

Before he sees if David's caught the phone, Dudley runs off.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

Dudley races through a thick crowd of geeks. Some carry lightsaber umbrellas, still open and wet from the outside.

Dudley leaps up onto the base of a column to see over the crowd. Looks around. And dips back into the crowd.

INT. EMPTY CONVENTION CENTER ROOM - DAY

Laura stands around, clearly bored, expecting something.

LAURA

Isn't Stephen supposed to be here?
Isn't he supposed to give me my
final instructions?

JOHN

Steve-o never had the will to do
the really hard stuff. He was
always in it for the glamor. Never
the work.

John fingers something behind his back.

LAURA

What are you talking about?

Just then Dudley bursts through the door, completely out of breath.

John, startled, reaches behind him, under his coat.

And pulls out a gun.

Laura jumps as well, not seeing the gun as she turns to Dudley.

LAURA
Some entrance, tiger. Pace
yourself. You didn't miss
anything.

Dudley crosses to Laura.

He nods back at John to indicate the gun.

Laura GASPS.

DUDLEY
Looks like I got here just in time,
princess.

He reaches up to touch her cheek, smiling reassuringly. He
tenderly brushes back her hair over her ear, which falls back
in place as his hand leaves.

LAURA
What are you...?
(beat)
What?

He stands next to Laura to face John.

DUDLEY
I believe I have a part in this
little play Mr. John Frieze is
staging, don't I, John?

John smiles.

JOHN
I believe you do, Mr. Charles.

LAURA
Yes. Dudley, what is going on?

JOHN
I'd rather just get on with it.
It's such a cliché to have the
villain explain the plot.

DUDLEY
Shall I, then?

John acquiesces.

Dudley puffs up and enunciates.

DUDLEY
The man with the gun pointed at us
isn't a studio accountant.
(MORE)

DUDLEY (cont'd)
He's John Frieze, recently escaped
convict from San Quentin.

LAURA
Where does an escaped convict get a
gun?

JOHN
You'd be surprised, kitten.

DUDLEY
Johnny boy, here, used to run a
long con game with Stephen
Altamont. And it looks like he's
out to help Altamont scam the
studio out of millions. One last
score.

JOHN
The biggest.

Laura looks really confused.

LAURA
What kind of scam?

DUDLEY
The budget of Captain Marvel is
hundreds of millions, much of which
has been transferred to off shore
accounts in the nations the movie
was going to be shot in. And then
when the movie gets cancelled, he
and Stephen split up millions that
gets lost in the shuffle.

LAURA
Cancelled?

DUDLEY
Cancelled following the untimely
murder of its female lead.

LAURA
Is that why is Mr. Frieze holding
us hostage in room 215-B of the
Moscone Convention Center?

DUDLEY
He's not holding us hostage,
princess. He intends to murder us.

Laura, cool as a cucumber, gives a "moi?" look at John.

LAURA

How would he get away with that?

DUDLEY

He'll make it look like a murder-suicide. I play the part of the obsessed fan who has had a crush on you since high school. And, crazed fan that I am, I shoot you for spurning my affections.

LAURA

Would I spurn your affections? I've changed so much since high school.

DUDLEY

In my grief, I turn the gun on myself. The police will find some of your personal effects in my room.

LAURA

You have my personal effects?

DUDLEY

They were planted there, I assure you, princess. Mr. Frieze lifted our key cards from us at the party. And then planted them on me at the end of the night. That's how I had your room key.

JOHN

It seemed like the thing to do.

DUDLEY

It's clever. You rush through to get her signed to the movie and then pin her untimely death on me. Just one more tragic Hollywood death. The movie gets shelved in the ensuing tragedy and you get away with millions.

LAURA

And murder.

DUDLEY

Double murder.

LAURA

Double impressive, tiger. You figure this out all on your own?

DUDLEY

It must be said that John here figured it out first. It's his plan.

Laura smiles coyly at John.

LAURA

You're the smart one, then.

JOHN

In point of fact, kitten, I'm brilliant.

LAURA

But you forgot one thing. Dudley hates guns.

DUDLEY

All they do is shoot people.

JOHN

Now, there's an idea...

Dudley rushes to say:

DUDLEY

You shoot me from back there and you'll blow your murder-suicide ploy.

JOHN

Well, maybe it'll be a double murder with a suicide. One of Dudley's buddies. Isaac, is it? Or Rico?

That doesn't sit well with Dudley.

DUDLEY

I guess you've thought of everything.

LAURA

Oh, this is all really impressive. It's almost a shame that no one gets to know about your scheme.

JOHN

Maybe I'll write a book about it from a country with no extradition. I can double my money with the movie rights.

LAURA
Who do you think would play me?

JOHN
I really don't care, kitten.

LAURA
Do you really think you're ready?

JOHN
Prison has a way of changing a man.
I can do things I didn't think I
was capable of a few years ago.

LAURA
I wasn't talking to you.

John looks confused for a second.

He raises the gun to fire.

Dudley pushes Laura to the side, at the same time opening the umbrella at John.

Shots explode from the gun.

Dudley charges in. He twists his body behind the umbrella to avoid gunfire.

Dudley swipes at the gun with the open umbrella, which folds inside out with the force of the swipe.

The gun deflects down and fires into the floor.

Dudley's momentum carries him into John. They both fall over.

Every door of the room bursts open with COPS.

LAURA
Dudley!

As Laura looks up, her hair falls away, revealing a bluetooth headset.

FLASH ON:

Earlier, when Dudley brushes Laura's hair, and plants the headset on her ear, allowing her hair to fall over it.

INT. 911 CALL CENTER - DAY

An OPERATOR in a headset.

OPERATOR

Nine one one. Please state the nature of the emergency.

LAURA (O.S.)

(filtered)

What?

DUDLEY (O.S.)

(filtered)

I believe I have a part in this little play Mr. John Frieze is staging, don't I, John?

INT. CONVENTION CENTER HALLWAYS - DAY

David talks frantically on a cell phone with Harold watching on.

DAVID

At this exact moment, my client is being held hostage by a known accomplice of your employee. I'm sure you'll want to get out ahead of this scandal.

He paces back and forth as he talks.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You've got to fire Stephen Altamont. He's using Captain Marvel production to embezzle millions from your studio.

He listens for a second.

DAVID

No, no, no. You don't want to cancel the project. Right now, my client is on a nine-one-one call. The tape of which is going to get leaked to the press. And when it does, she'll be a real life hero. It'll be the lead story on every news station, paper, magazine, tabloid, blog and watercooler. It means millions in free publicity. And you've got the real life hero under contract to play the superhero in a movie. What do you think that'll do to the opening weekend.

David listens again.

And he smiles broadly.

DAVID

I'll take care of it on this end.
Just issue that press release.

He hangs up and tosses the phone to Harold.

DAVID

I think you've got a promotion.

INT. EMPTY CONVENTION CENTER ROOM - DAY

Dudley stands up and moves to Laura as the police take John down.

DUDLEY

You okay?

LAURA

Fine. You?

DUDLEY

I think I've been shot.

He checks his side.

He appears to have been grazed.

DUDLEY

I hate getting shot.

LAURA

I've still got nine-one-one on the
line. We can get you an ambulance.

DUDLEY

It's just a graze. I'll be fine.

LAURA

You saved me. You said I was in
danger. I thought you were crazy.
And you came in here with a plan
and saved me.

DUDLEY

It's what I do, princess.

LAURA

Well, it's amazing, tiger.

Dudley reaches up to the bluetooth headset in her ear. Again, it's a kind of tender moment.

Again there's a pause. Again a moment. There's a spark-
But Dudley's wound gets in the way. He winces at his side.

DUDLEY

Okay. Let's get you to the press conference and find me some first aid.

She helps him up.

INT. CAPTAIN MARVEL PRESS EVENT - DAY

A dais with a desk and several chairs with microphones in front of them.

Harold stands at the center talking.

NARRATOR

The police picked up Stephen Altamont outside the press event. John Frieze, desperate to not end up with the Bridges brothers, gave evidence leading to Stephen Altamont's arrest for fraud.

He introduces Greg Peyton.

Applause.

NARRATOR

The police had a number of questions for Laura, but so would the fans of Captain Marvel. So, with Dudley filling in the blanks to the police, Laura met her fans.

Harold introduces the HANDSOME ACTOR to play Captain Marvel.

Applause.

Harold introduces Laura Clifton as Carol Danvers.

Applause.

NARRATOR

Dudley was distracted by the detectives' questions and wasn't therefore able to give his full attention to the proceedings.

AT THE BACK,

Dudley answers questions to a pair of DETECTIVES with notebooks.

NARRATOR

What Dudley did see, however, made him proud.

AT THE DAIS,

Laura nods to the fans and to Harold who opens up to take questions.

NARRATOR

Laura had clearly been doing her homework. Not only did she express a clear knowledge of Captain Marvel as a property, but she had a remarkable understanding of the character of Carol Danvers throughout comicdom.

IN THE CROWD,

Isaac stands to ask a question. Rico sits next to him, beaming a smile.

NARRATOR

It was clear that she was winning over the fans. Video and transcripts of this press conference would end up on the internet that afternoon. And soon fans world wide would begin approving.

ISAAC

What is it about Captain Marvel that appeals to you?

AT THE DAIS,

Laura smiles at him and considers for a minute.

LAURA

What's great about comics are that they're our modern mythology. And our great folklore has always been about what's outside the edges of the map. We look out there and say "Here be dragons."

AT THE BACK,

Dudley stops talking with the detectives and looks up.

LAURA (CONT'D)

For most of the twentieth century, those edges of the map was space and the future promised by science. People like Jack Kirby filled those areas beyond the map with big ideas and bold mythologies. Nowhere so we see that more than in Marvel's cosmic stories. And Captain Marvel and Ms. Marvel are at the center of all of that.

IN THE CROWD,

Isaac smiles and sits down. Rico shoots a look back at Dudley.

NARRATOR

Dudley couldn't help but feel that Laura was getting her money's worth from his position as her manager. And not just because he saved her life and her most recent job. She was now cribbing his best lines from his academic papers.

AT THE BACK,

Dudley nods back at Rico, approvingly.

NARRATOR

Maybe it was the painkillers the EMTs had given him, but Dudley was proud of Laura. And kind of giddy. And there was more good news.

David grabs Dudley's attention.

DAVID

You certainly saved the day.

DUDLEY

And you saved the job. Well done.

DAVID

I did more than that.

Dudley looks intrigued.

DAVID

I managed to get the studio to drop the objection to your book about the Cleveland thing. You're free to shop it around to publishers.

DUDLEY

That's great. What's the catch?

DAVID

No catch. They were remarkably pliable once they realized that this whole WonderCon thing represented a sequel.

DUDLEY

A what?

DAVID

And they didn't want to upset you in case they wanted the rights to what happened here today.

Dudley smiles.

DUDLEY

You are cunning and devious, sir.

DAVID

I do my best.

NARRATOR

Dudley was, in fact, elated.

AT THE DAIS,

Laura continues to answer questions, along with Greg, the handsome actor and Harold.

NARRATOR

And yet, perhaps there was something more. Dudley wasn't one to admit it, even to himself, but he had grown quite fond of Laura in their time together.

AT THE BACK,

Dudley finishes up with the detectives and sneaks out.

NARRATOR

As her manager, he considered this unprofessional.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
But more importantly, Dudley didn't trust himself. He didn't want to be a victim to the natural charms of the Hollywood starlet class.

INT. HOTEL BAR - LATER

Dudley sits at the bar, halfway through a martini.

NARRATOR
Luckily, he knew the antidote.

Dudley drinks a bit of his martini while pecking at his laptop.

On the laptop is an e-mail to his editor at a major publisher and an attached first chapter.

Rico and Isaac enter the bar.

RICO
That girl is all charm.

ISAAC
What do you really think of her?

DUDLEY
I'm trying not to, Isaac.

ISAAC
Good.

Dudley looks at Isaac.

DUDLEY
Still. She's got a lot of spirit. I don't know. What do you think? Do you think a Hollywood princess and a guy like me...?

ISAAC
No.

Dudley smiles. And then notices Rico nodding "yes."

INT. DUDLEY CHARLES' HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Dudley packs up his things. He's back to wearing glasses.

A KNOCK brings Dudley to the door.

It's Laura.

DUDLEY
Hello, princess.

LAURA
Hello yourself, tiger.

Dudley smiles back, still filtering the irony.
But there is no irony.

LAURA
You left the conference early.

DUDLEY
You noticed. I had some loose ends
to tie up. And packing. I have a
flight to catch.

LAURA
Your flight isn't for hours. Rico
and Isaac told me.

Busted.

DUDLEY
I like to be prepared.

LAURA
It's ironic that in your haste to
pack early, you left out one
important thing.

DUDLEY
What's that?

Laura hands Dudley a cardboard tube.

LAURA
An original George Perez cover from
Teen Titans.

That's pretty awesome.

DUDLEY
Thank you. That's great.

LAURA
Thank you for saving my life and my
job.

DUDLEY
It was an honor to save the life
and job of The Laura Clifton.

LAURA

Call me Laura Huntley.

NARRATOR

There were no secret identities left. Dudley Charles the adjunct media studies professor and expert comic book geek had met Laura Clifton the actress and secured her latest job.

There's a pause. A moment. A spark -

A kiss.

NARRATOR

And Dudley Charles the professional adventurer had saved the life of Laura Huntley a girl with a sharp mind, a keen wit and a dazzling smile.

Dudley smiles down at Laura.

DUDLEY

Beauty and brains and a knack for adventure. I knew you'd be trouble, princess.

LAURA

Face it, tiger. You just hit the jackpot.

Another kiss.

NARRATOR

Chip MacGuffin, aka John Froman, had been discovered as John Frieze the escaped convict. Stephen Altamont the producer had been outed as Stephen Altamont the embezzler and con artist. There were no secret identities left, but there were surprises. Laura Huntley had a knack for adventure and, luckily for her, Dudley Charles was a professional.

FADE OUT.