

WEDDING RINGS AND G-STRINGS

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. LA BREA AVENUE - NIGHT

BEN CAMELINO (28) sprints down the middle of the street, clad in nothing but shoes and a G-STRING that glitters in the light of the street lamps overhead... the neon signs of seedy bars that Ben tears past... and the high beams and taillights of the HONKING CARS that he weaves in between.

As Ben dashes through an INTERSECTION --

SCREEECH! Ben stops and turns in the direction of the SOUND. He shields his eyes, blinded by HEADLIGHTS.

The CAR stops inches from his kneecaps.

Ben watches TWO COPS climb out of the vehicle. He looks down at himself. Beat.

BEN
Evening, officers.

As we FREEZE FRAME on Ben --

BEN (V.O.)
Plato once said that at the touch of love, everyone becomes a poet. So why did I become an asshole in a thong, running through the heart of Hollywood on a Saturday night instead? Simple... I blame my mother.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - 1985 - NIGHT

YOUNG BEN (8) sits Indian-style on the comic book-littered carpet, poring over an issue of Batman.

Behind him, Ben's mousy, haggard-looking MOTHER, and his flannel-clad, overweight FATHER (mid-30s) sit on opposite ends of the couch, staring at the TV and ignoring each other.

Ben's Father chugs a Coors, resting the can on the arm of the sofa. He rubs his gut with his free hand and BELCHES.

BEN (V.O.)
I was eight years old when Dad left us.

POP! Ben's Father suddenly DISAPPEARS, leaving behind only the impression of his butt on the sofa cushion and the beer can, which topples off the sofa arm.

Ben's Mother leans over and catches the can, her eyes never leaving the TV screen.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - SOME TIME LATER - NIGHT

Another night. Now alone, Young Ben sits on the couch, brow furrowed in concentration as he scribbles on a SKETCH PAD.

BEN (V.O.)

Mom took the change surprisingly well.

The front door flies open. Ben's Mother staggers in, a woman transformed with her SKINTIGHT MINISKIRT, STILETTO HEELS and IMPRESSIVELY TEASED HAIR. Very '80s. Very slutty.

She giggles as she clings to a MUSCULAR MAN in his early 20s.

BEN'S MOTHER

Ben? You still up?

BEN (V.O.)

Let's just say that after wasting ten years with the old man, she was determined to make up for lost time.

Ben hurries over, sketch book in hand. He proudly holds up his TRULY TERRIBLE DRAWING of Superman.

YOUNG BEN

Look, Mom! I made a drawing of --

BEN'S MOTHER

(ignoring the drawing)

That's great, honey. Now go brush your teeth. It's bedtime.

The muscular man begins to nibble at Ben's Mother's neck.

MUSCULAR MAN

You bet it is...

Ben's Mother giggles again and elbows the big lug.

Crestfallen, Ben closes the sketch pad. As he begins to trudge upstairs:

BEN'S MOTHER

Oh, Ben, say hi to, uh... Uncle Troy!

BEN (V.O.)

Uncle Troy. Yeah, right. Almost overnight, my immediate family seemingly exploded with male relatives coming out of the woodwork....

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF SHIRTLESS MEN

... All of them pumped, plucked, waxed and oiled to perfection, grinning at us and flexing their muscles. As each one flashes by, we hear:

BEN (V.O.)
 There was Uncle Andre... Uncle Antonio...
 Uncle Arturo... Uncle Alexei... Uncle
 Alfredo... I'll spare you the rest of the
 alphabet.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The light goes on. Young Ben sits up in bed in his superhero-dominated bedroom, listening to MUFFLED NOISE.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Young Ben shuffles out of his bedroom toward the bathroom. Somewhere MUSIC can be faintly heard.

BEN (V.O.)
 I always heard Mom talking about some
 place called the Pit Stop, a name that
 meant nothing to me....

He passes HIS MOTHER'S BEDROOM DOOR, which is OPEN a crack.

YOUNG BEN'S POV

Ben's Mother sits on her bed, watching as the crushingly handsome, impossibly buff SVEN dances in front of her, gyrating to the beat of the Clash's "Rock the Casbah" EMANATING from a BOOM BOX on the floor.

SHHHHTTTTP! Sven rips off his tearaway shirt and pants, leaving him clad in nothing but a BOW TIE, CUFFS and the tiniest of BIKINI BRIEFS.

YOUNG BEN

stares through the crack. His eyes go wide.

BEN (V.O.)
 ... Until that fateful night, when the
 words "meat market" took on a whole new
 meaning in my book.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Ben sits at the kitchen table, clad in superhero Underoos and eating handfuls of cereal straight from the box.

He looks over as a bleary-eyed Sven shuffles into the kitchen, wearing his bow tie, cuffs and WOMEN'S PANTIES.

He sees Ben staring at him and stops short. Beat.

SVEN

Got anything to eat in this joint?

Ben holds up the cereal box. Sven grunts and sits down at the table. He unsnaps his bow tie from around his neck, drops it on the table, then jams his arm into the box.

YOUNG BEN

Uncle Sven, why were you dancing for Mom last night?

Sven pulls out a fistful of cereal. He freezes.

SVEN

Why do you think?

Ben stares at Sven blankly. Sven sighs.

SVEN

Bill --

YOUNG BEN

Ben.

SVEN

Whatever. Let me give you a piece of advice.... If you ever wanna attract the ladies, the dance floor is the place to do it. Nothing drenches the beaver like a hot ass in action. Got it?

Ben nods.

YOUNG BEN

What beaver?

SVEN

Forget it, kid. Look, I gotta split.

Sven stuffs the cereal in his mouth, then stands up.

SVEN

(muffled, still chewing)
Tell your mom I'll see her later, maybe.

YOUNG BEN

Are you gonna give back her underwear?

Sven looks down at himself. Beat. He smiles at Ben, turns and struts out of the kitchen.

Young Ben watches him go, then looks down at the bow tie lying on the table. He picks it up.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A FISHER-PRICE TAPE RECORDER

A HAND reaches into the frame, inserting an AUDIO CASSETTE into the tape deck and pressing "Play."

BEN (V.O.)
I didn't really understand what Uncle Sven was talking about. Not yet, anyway.

WIDER

Young Ben stands in front of his mom, who lies asleep in her bed. He's wearing only his tidy whites and SVEN'S BOW TIE.

BEN (V.O.)
But I knew that he was on to something when it came to girls. There was only one of those in my life back then...

The Clash's "Rock the Casbah" begins to BLAST out of the tiny, tinny-sounding speakers.

Ben's Mother sits up, startled. Her jaw drops.

Ben BEGINS TO DANCE WILDLY to the music, twitching and thrashing like he's stuck his finger in an electrical socket.

BEN (V.O.)
... And I certainly got her attention. I'd like to say I got better over time...

MATCH CUT TO:

BEN

thrashing around to "Rock the Casbah", only now HE'S 27 YEARS OLD AND WEARING A TUXEDO personalized with Sven's bow tie.

BEN (V.O.)
... But I'd be lying.

WIDER

Ben whips around the DANCE FLOOR of a wedding reception area in a stunning, sun-drenched ROSE GARDEN.

SEVERAL HUNDRED WEDDING GUESTS stare at Ben in silent shock.

Only the groom, WAYNE SANDERS (27), cheers for Ben. WAYNE'S BRIDE pouts beside him.

WAYNE

Yeah, Camelino! Do it up!!!

BEN (V.O.)

Although much of my youth was spent trying, I never did attract the ladies on the dance floor.... Except once. It was at my buddy Wayne's wedding.

As Ben whips around, he scans the faces of his audience...

... and stops on RACHEL MATTHEWS (26), a beauty who's actually smiling at him. Ben freezes in mid-step, stunned.

BEN (V.O.)

The second I saw her, everything changed.

Her smile fades as Ben whirls toward her, arms outstretched.

RACHEL

Oh, no --

BEN

Oh, yes!

Ben grabs Rachel and drags her onto the dance floor.

Ben continues to rip it up, while Rachel attempts to sway her hips to the music. She has all the grace of a cinder block tumbling down a flight of stairs.

BEN

See? You're a natural at this, just like me... Rachel, right? I'm Ben.

RACHEL

Can you please let me go, Ben?

BEN

That depends. You busy next Saturday?

BEN (V.O.)

And that was that. I'd fallen in love.

Ben trips over her foot. As he tumbles out of the frame, we

MATCH CUT TO:

BEN

getting down on one knee, now dressed casually.

He stares up at Rachel, whose eyes are filled with tears.

Ben holds up a jewelry box and opens it... revealing a DIAMOND RING.

BEN

Rachel, the past year has been the greatest of my life. Will you marry me?

RACHEL

I thought you'd never ask.

BEN

So... that's a "yes", right?

Rachel nods. Ben leaps up, embracing his now-fiancee.

WIDER

As they kiss, we see that they're standing in the exact same spot in the ROSE GARDEN where they danced a year ago.

BEN

So where are we going to get married?

INT. OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ben, now clad in a dress shirt and ugly tie, sits in his tiny, cramped CUBICLE, frantically typing at his computer.

Wayne leans over the cubicle wall, staring down at Ben.

WAYNE

... The rose garden, huh? Sorry, dude. If I'd known Rachel was gonna want to get hitched where you two met, I would've picked Applebee's for your sake. You poor bastard.

BEN

Can we discuss this later, Wayne? I'm really swamped here.

WAYNE

Stop caring. Works wonders for me.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Camelino!

Ben turns to see the wrinkled, heavily rouged AGNES (mid-60s) storm into his cubicle, gripping a STACK OF PAPERS.

BEN

Good morning to you, too, Agnes.

She drops the stack onto Ben's lap.

AGNES

Legal needs these copied and collated in the next 30 minutes.

BEN

Do you think someone else could do it? I'm really under the gun with this database update --

AGNES

For Pete's sake, you're killing me.

WAYNE

We can only hope.

Agnes shoots a look at Wayne, who blows her a kiss. She snarls, then turns back to Ben.

AGNES

Just get it done.

INT. OFFICE - LATER - DAY

Ben hurries through the vast office, peering around the TOWER OF REPORTS in his hands as he ducks into cubicles, handing out copies. As he goes about his rounds:

VARIOUS COWORKERS

(overlapping)

Ben, can you forward that e-mail to me again? Ben, I need that file right now... How do you feel about working Saturdays, Ben? Ben... Ben... Ben...

WHOOSH! A GUY IN A SUIT darts out of a cubicle in front of him, brushing past and knocking Ben off-balance.

Ben flails backward, DROPPING the reports, which scatter across the floor. He stares down at the mess, then sighs.

INT. WATSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben sits in the tiny office, clutching a FILE and staring across the desk at MR. WATSON slumped in his chair -- a sad sack of a man in his mid-40s, broken by life.

BEN

Mr. Watson, I've been working on something in my free time that I'd love for you to take a look at.

Ben reaches across the desk to hand Watson the file.

BEN

It's a proposal for the Serenity Laxative TV campaign. I know I'm only in financial, but I thought maybe if I showed some initiative I could --

WATSON

That's great, Ben. Thanks.

Watson accepts the file and tosses it aside without giving it a glance. It lands in a trash can with a hollow THUNK!

Ben's shoulders slump.

WATSON

Oh, by the way -- a certain someone would like her afternoon walk right now.

"WOOF!" Ben looks down to see a TINY FROU-FROU DOG sitting at his feet, staring intently at him. She BARKS again.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Watson's little dog races along the lawn in front of the building, dragging Ben along as he clings to the leash.

The dog stops, looks around and squats.

Ben sighs, flicking open the BAGGIE in his other hand.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN - GAZEBO - DAY

A peppy female WEDDING COORDINATOR leads Ben and Rachel up the steps of a beautiful wooden GAZEBO in the rose garden.

WEDDING COORDINATOR

... First of all, I just want to say congratulations, and thank you for considering Rappaccini Gardens! Do you have a date in mind yet?

RACHEL

Preferably sometime this July.

WEDDING COORDINATOR
 Ooohhh, I'm afraid the rose garden is
 completely booked for the next year
 except for....

The wedding coordinator opens her PLANNER, scanning a page.

WEDDING COORDINATOR
 Ah-ha! We actually just had a
 cancellation. March 20th.

BEN
 That's only four months away. We can't --

RACHEL
 We'll take it.

BEN
 Maybe we should --

RACHEL
 No.
 (to the wedding coordinator)
 What would the price be for 200 guests?

BEN
 Hold on, now wait just a minute.

Ben sits on the railing of the gazebo, closes his eyes and
 takes a deep breath. Beat. He exhales and opens his eyes.

BEN
 Okay. I'm ready.

WEDDING COORDINATOR
 \$150.00 per person, plus an 18% service
 charge and sales tax. I should also
 mention that we have a \$38,000 minimum.

Ben keels over backwards, tumbling off the gazebo.

INT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Rachel eat at the dinner table with RACHEL'S PARENTS,
 both of whom radiate middle-aged prosperity.

MRS. MATTHEWS
 Well, I think the rose garden is a
 wonderful place to get married.

MR. MATTHEWS
 I'll say. So how are you gonna pay for
 it, Ben?

Ben glances around the table. All eyes are on him. Beat.
He finally clears his throat.

BEN

Well, um, we're exploring a number of possibilities, most of them involving the donation of various bodily fluids... I'm also looking into becoming a clinical trial test subject -- you know, where they feed you experimental drugs and wait to see if your head explodes --

MR. MATTHEWS

Aw, hell, son -- I was just kidding. Of course we'll pay for the wedding.

Rachel SQUEALS and throws her arms around Mr. Matthews beside her, showering him with kisses.

RACHEL

Thank you, Daddy! You're the best!

MR. MATTHEWS

Anything for my Sweetpea...
(to Ben)
... And you, I guess.

EXT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Ben and Mr. Matthews stand in front of A PAIR OF IDENTICAL SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES parked in the driveway of the gorgeous Matthews home. Both men hold bottles of beer.

MR. MATTHEWS

Look at these puppies -- 60 grand each. Bought them both the other day. Why? Because I could. I don't think I've seen my wife so happy since I pulled down my pants on our wedding night.

BEN

That's... that's terrific, Mr. Matthews.

MR. MATTHEWS

You know, I'm glad to have you in the family, Ben. Everywhere I turn, I'm surrounded by women -- Rachel, my wife... hell, even the dog is female. It'll be nice to have another set of balls around here.

BEN

Um, right...

Mr. Matthews begins to circle around the cars. Ben stays put, nervously sipping his beer.

MR. MATTHEWS

You seem tense, Ben. Relax. Tell you what -- if you try to stop thinking of me as the big, bad father-in-law, I'll try to stop thinking of you as that bastard who rams his Johnson into my little girl every night.

Mr. Matthews doesn't notice as Ben spits out a mouthful of Heineken across one of the SUVs, COUGHING. Ben frantically rubs his sleeve against the beer-soaked hood, sputtering:

BEN

It's a deal.

Mr. Matthews turns around to face Ben, who straightens up.

MR. MATTHEWS

Good. I want us to be pals. You know, we should do something -- a guy's day out. How do you feel about golf?

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The front door opens. Ben and Rachel enter the small, IKEA-dominated apartment filled with framed COMIC BOOK ART and bookshelves sagging under the weight of thousands of COMICS.

RACHEL

Ben, you hate golfing....

BEN

What was I supposed to say -- "No"?

RACHEL

Yes!

BEN

No! It's against the code.

RACHEL

The code? Ben, he's my father, not a Freemason.

BEN

The guy code. I can't let on that I don't like sports. He might think I'm --

RACHEL

-- A girly man?
(flashing her engagement ring)
(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT.)

I think you've put his mind at ease in that respect.

BEN

Look, I just want to make him happy. He is paying for the wedding, you know.

RACHEL

Ah, the truth comes out...

BEN

Plus, you know how you're always saying I should be open to new experiences? Perfect opportunity. I'll learn something. Maybe I'll even enjoy it.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

Mr. Matthews strolls across the vibrant expanse of green, golf club in hand.

Ben trudges behind him, lugging an enormous bag of CLUBS. He plops it down and watches as Mr. Matthews positions himself over the golf ball lying nearby.

Mr. Matthews winds up, then WHACKS the ball...

... which arcs into a SAND TRAP. Mr. Matthews sighs.

MR. MATTHEWS

You like your job, Ben?

BEN

I --

MR. MATTHEWS

Neither do I. 30 years I've worked in the same office, selling insurance day in and day out. Some mornings I just want to tear off my clothes and run naked through the claims department.

BEN

Can't say I've ever --

MR. MATTHEWS

Instead I just put away a quart of Scotch a night. You know what keeps me there?

BEN

An open bar in the conference room?

MR. MATTHEWS

A sense of duty. I had a family to feed.
And so will you soon.

BEN

Oh, Jesus... Rachel's pregnant?

MR. MATTHEWS

Don't be so literal, Ben. Point is, I know you're a young man. You probably got all these crazy dreams, and you're thinking that you'll stick with this job until your rock band hits the big time.

BEN

But I don't have a --

MR. MATTHEWS

Well, I got news for you -- don't bother. 99.9% of Americans bust their humps nine to five, five days a week, 50 weeks a year. What makes you think you're any different?

Beat.

MR. MATTHEWS

I'm waiting, Ben.

BEN

Oh. Um.... Nothing?

Mr. Matthews smiles and smacks Ben on the shoulder, nearly knocking him over.

MR. MATTHEWS

Exactly. I've really enjoyed this talk, Ben. Let's go get a drink.

INT. STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

A buxom WAITRESS glides across the packed club, making her way through the throngs of SWEATY CUSTOMERS toward

BEN AND MR. MATTHEWS

who sit slumped across their table alongside the catwalk, now totally wasted and staring, glassy-eyed, at the TWO FEMALE STRIPPERS slinking around onstage in front of them.

BEN

I -- I can't go home like this.

MR. MATTHEWS

Neither can I. We have no choice but to stay and keep drinking.

The waitress drops off two beer bottles. As she leans down to collect the empties, Ben moves to take hold of a fresh bottle. He misses and grabs one of her boobs instead.

WHACK! She winds up and slaps Ben.

Mr. Matthews springs into action, reaching for his wallet.

MR. MATTHEWS

Okay, maybe it's time to leave.

(to the waitress)

Check, please. If you forgive my idiot friend, I'll make it up to you...

He hands a CREDIT CARD to the waitress, who stomps away.

BEN

Thanks for the drinks, Mr. Matthews.

MR. MATTHEWS

No problem. I mean, hell, if I can blow forty grand on my daughter's wedding, what's a few rounds of beer?

BEN

Please -- no math problems right now.

The waitress walks back to the table, bends over and whispers in Mr. Matthews' ear.

She hands him the REMAINS of his CUT UP CREDIT CARD.

Mr. Matthews motions for her to give him a minute. The waitress shakes her head and slinks away.

BEN

Don't they usually bring it back in one piece?

Mr. Matthews quickly pockets the plastic shards.

MR. MATTHEWS

I don't know what you're talking about. You know... it's traditional for a young man to pay for his first drunken escapade with his new father-in-law.

BEN

I've never heard of that.

MR. MATTHEWS

You weren't married before.

BEN

But Rachel and I aren't --

MR. MATTHEWS

All right, Ben, I'm gonna level with you... I'm broke. I'm in debt. Everything you see in my world is an illusion, courtesy of Mastercard. This? This is the final straw, the last indignity in a lifetime of indignities. I'm... I'm a loser. You hear me? A loser! A broke loser!

Mr. Matthews buries his face in his hands, WEeping.

BEN

Well, if you put it that way...

Ben takes out his wallet and reaches in. He pulls out LINT.

BEN

Hmmmmmm...

MR. MATTHEWS

Got any credit cards?

BEN

All maxed out.

MR. MATTHEWS

Of course they are.

BEN

We're in big trouble, aren't we?

CRASH! Ben and Mr. Matthews look over their shoulders as A SCUFFLE ERUPTS IN THE BACK OF THE CLUB.

The massive BOUNCERS alongside the stage hustle over to break up the fight between TWO PATRONS.

Ben watches them a moment, then turns back to look at the dancers onstage. Beat.

BEN

I have an idea.

MR. MATTHEWS

I'm not washing dishes, Ben.

BEN

I'm about to do something. When I do it,
you get the hell out of here. I'll meet
you out front. Have the car running.

Ben grabs his beer, downing it in three gulps. He shoots to his feet, nearly falling over in the process.

MR. MATTHEWS

But --

BEN

Trust me, Mr. Matthews.

Ben lunges for the catwalk before Mr. Matthews can grab him.

The two dancers look over, startled, as Ben clambers onto the stage and begins to flail around to the beat of the MUSIC.

All eyes are on Ben as he sways and staggers down the catwalk, unbuttoning his shirt.

He takes it off, revealing his HAIRY CHEST. He dangles the shirt over the head of an increasingly amused WAITRESS.

AT THE BACK OF THE CLUB

CALDWELL, a ponytailed, middle-aged man in a sharkskin suit, carefully watches Ben thrashing across the stage.

He doesn't notice as Mr. Matthews rushes past him, making a beeline for the exit.

Caldwell scans the club, watching as the WAITRESSES and OTHER DANCERS begin to HOOT and WHISTLE while

ONSTAGE

Ben continues to lurch around like a man possessed.

After a moment, the strippers onstage break into a smile and saunter over, grinding against Ben as he dances.

The SONG suddenly ENDS. Ben continues to dance until he realizes that the music's over. He looks around, baffled.

The WAITRESSES and DANCERS in the club SCREAM and APPLAUD.

Ben turns toward the crowd and takes a bow...

... just as a massive bouncer barrels into view, tackling him to the floor.

EXT. STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

The front door flies open. Ben sails over the pavement, landing in a heap by the curb.

After a moment, he slowly gets to his feet.

Ben looks around in a daze, watching the traffic flow up and down Hollywood Boulevard. He begins to limp away.

MAN (O.S.)
Not so fast.

Ben stops and whirls around, struggling to keep his balance.

Caldwell emerges from the club and saunters toward Ben.

BEN
I'm sorry. Please don't throw me again.

CALDWELL
What's your name, kid?

BEN
Ben.... I'm Ben.

Caldwell reaches into his jacket, pulling out a BUSINESS CARD. He hands it to Ben.

CALDWELL
Nice to meet you, Ben. Carson Caldwell,
Caldwell Entertainment. You put on quite
a show in there.

Ben sways as if he's about to pass out.

BEN
Uhhhhhhh...

CALDWELL
You got something, kid. I don't know
what the hell it is, but you got it.

BEN
Home. I gotta go --

Ben turns to leave. Caldwell takes hold of his arm.

CALDWELL
I'd like to offer you a job.

BEN
Doing what?

CALDWELL

I want you to dance.

Ben stares at him a moment, then begins to prance across the sidewalk. Caldwell stops him.

CALDWELL

Not here, kid. I got a little club on La Brea called the Male Room. Don't worry -- it's strictly for the ladies. No gay stuff, not that there's anything wrong with that. Whaddaya say?

Beat. Ben doubles over, THROWING UP at Caldwell's feet.

SCREEECH! Mr. Mathews' SUV pulls up to the curb.

Mr. Matthews gets out, hurries around the car and grabs Ben. He looks at Caldwell and shrugs.

MR. MATTHEWS

Lightweights.

Mr. Matthews drags Ben to the SUV, stuffs him into the passenger seat, climbs behind the wheel and roars away.

INT. OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ben sleeps at his desk, head down on his keyboard. Out cold.

AGNES (O.S.)

Camelino!

Ben's bloodshot eyes snap open. He bolts upright, wiping the drool off his face and looking like somebody just scraped him out of the gutter.

He whips around to see Agnes looming over him. The old biddy tosses a MANILA FILE onto his lap.

AGNES

Sorry to interrupt your beauty sleep. Make ten copies and pass them out to legal. Right now.

BEN

If I say yes, will all four of you go away?

Agnes shakes her head and stomps off.

INT. OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - LATER - DAY

Ben types frantically at his computer while Wayne sits on the edge of his desk, reading a NEWSPAPER.

WAYNE

Oh, no... He wants to be your friend,
doesn't he?

BEN

He does.

WAYNE

Christ, you'll never get rid of him now.
On the other hand, I wish my father-in-
law would take me to strip clubs. Think
you can get him to spring for a hooker?

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Ben sits with Rachel and her parents, eating dinner. Mr. Matthews grips his wine glass like his life depends on it.

RACHEL

... So the cake is going to cost \$1,000
for three layers.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Three? What about four?

RACHEL

Well, a fourth layer will add another two
hundred dollars to the total.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Rachel, in this day and age, you only get
married once or twice... maybe three
times, tops. But we want you to get the
wedding right the first time, at least.

(to Mr. Matthews)

Right, John?

Mr. Matthews pours himself another glass of wine, smiling tightly.

MR. MATTHEWS

Of course, dear.

RACHEL

Fine, so we'll go with the four layer
cake for twelve hundred dollars. Now,
the D.J. is going to cost --

MRS. MATTHEWS
D.J.? What about a band?

RACHEL
A band would cost a fortune.

MRS. MATTHEWS
So... what's your point?

Mr. Matthews knocks back his drink, then looks around.

MR. MATTHEWS
Would you excuse me a moment?

He gets up and lurches out of the kitchen.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

Ben walks down the hall and stops at A CLOSED DOOR and knocks. No response.

BEN
Mr. Matthews? Are you okay?

Beat. Ben tries the door, which swings opens. He steps into

THE BATHROOM

It's empty. Ben looks around...

... then notices the words "PARDON THE MESS" scrawled in RED LIPSTICK across the MIRROR, with an ARROW pointing in the direction of the OPEN WINDOW.

EXT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ben pops his head out the window, staring off-screen.

BEN
Mr. Matthews!

MR. MATTHEWS

stands on the LEDGE beside the window, a SUICIDE NOTE scribbled on TOILET PAPER pinned to his Polo shirt and flapping in the breeze. He glances over at Ben.

MR. MATTHEWS
Oh, good -- a witness....

BEN
You can't kill yourself, Mr. Matthews.

MR. MATTHEWS
Really? Watch me...

BEN
No, I mean you really can't kill
yourself. We're only two stories up.

WIDER

Mr. Matthews can be seen standing on the ledge that runs
along the side of the apartment building -- sure enough, the
building is only two stories tall.

BEN
You'll probably just break a leg.

MR. MATTHEWS

looks down at the ground and sighs.

MR. MATTHEWS
That's all right. The wife will finish
me off.

BEN
Why are you doing this?

MR. MATTHEWS
Because I never learned to tie a
hangman's noose in Boy Scouts.

BEN
I mean in general. Is it because you're
broke?

MR. MATTHEWS
I'm not just broke, Ben. I'm unemployed.
Laid off. Oh, I'm sorry -- according to
H.R., I've been downsized. Selected out.
Non-retained. Pick your euphemism.

BEN
Transitioned out?

MR. MATTHEWS
That's a good one. Bottom line, I
haven't cashed a paycheck in months.

BEN
So why are Rachel and Mrs. Matthews in
there planning a \$38,000 wedding?

MR. MATTHEWS

I promised my little girl the wedding of her dreams, and by God she'll get it.

(beat)

And my wife doesn't know I'm out of work.

BEN

Look, I can help you.

MR. MATTHEWS

You got a gun?

BEN

I'll... I'll pay for the wedding.

MR. MATTHEWS

Are you kidding? Rachel says you can't even balance your checkbook.

BEN

You just have to trust me.

MR. MATTHEWS

You don't understand. Rachel looks up to me. When she finds out --

BEN

Rachel won't know. No one will. It'll just be our secret.

Beat.

MR. MATTHEWS

You promise?

BEN

I promise.

Ben holds out his hand. Beat. Mr. Matthews finally sighs.

MR. MATTHEWS

You got yourself a deal.

Mr. Matthews leans down to shake Ben's hand. They shake...

... just as Mr. Matthews LOSES HIS BALANCE. He lets go of Ben and TUMBLES OUT OF VIEW, SCREAMING.

Ben leans out the window, staring down. Beat.

BEN

Told you you'd only break a leg...or two.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON BEN

as he lies on a COUCH, staring into space.

BEN

I've got to tell her. I've got to tell Rachel that her father can't pay for the wedding. But then I'll have betrayed the trust of Mr. Matthews. He'll kill me. Of course, if I'm dead, then I won't have to come up with the money myself. Problem solved. But not really. I can't have that on my conscience, even if I'm deceased. Is this making any sense?

WOMAN (O.S.)

You're --

BEN

I know, I know. I'm rambling. Sorry.
(beat)
I'm going to have to take a second job. Or maybe I need to take a first job that pays better. But doing what? I'm an administrative assistant. I have no real skills. Frankly, it's a wonder that I've made it this far in life. But is it my fault that I haven't found my niche yet?

WOMAN (O.S.)

You need to make a decision.

BEN

All right, I guess it is my fault. Maybe it's time to settle on a niche. But I suppose I already have -- I mean, I've worked in the same shitty office for five years now. If that's not a niche, I don't know what is. Maybe I just need to accept my lot in life. If only it were a more lucrative lot.

(beat)

I could always ask for a raise. I've never done that before. Jesus, I think that's it. Don't you? How are we doing on time, anyway?

WIDER

We see that Ben is lying on a couch in a DEPARTMENT STORE SHOWROOM made out to look like a LIVING ROOM.

A middle-aged, clearly irritated SALESWOMAN stands over him, tapping her foot.

SALESWOMAN

The store closes in ten minutes, sir...

Rachel storms into view, gripping a SCANNER GUN.

RACHEL

There you are! What happened? One minute you're next to me in housewares, and the next, you're gone.

BEN

I guess I got lost. It's a big store.

RACHEL

I need one of those kiddie leashes for you. Now come on -- we still have to register for sheets and towels.

Rachel pulls Ben to his feet and drags him away.

INT. OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ben sits at his desk, breathing heavily.

Wayne pops up from behind the cubicle wall.

WAYNE

What's wrong, dude? You look like you're going into labor.

BEN

Psyching myself up to ask for a raise.

WAYNE

Good luck. Let me know if you want to borrow my kneepads.

INT. WATSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben sits across from Mr Watson, utterly aghast.

BEN

You're... you're firing me?

WATSON

Of course not, Ben. You're being... transitioned out. Think of it as me giving you the opportunity to explore new and exciting career paths.

BEN

But what about this career path?

WATSON

Look, you're a nice guy, but I got the word from corporate that we have to tighten our belts this year. Frankly, I can get more for less.

Beat.

BEN

Mr. Watson, I want to make it up to you. I'd like to start over.

WATSON

Start over?

BEN

Sure. Pretend that you've just hired me.

Watson stares at him. Beat.

WATSON

That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard.

BEN

Sir, having worked here half a decade, I find that very hard to believe. What's an entry level salary these days?

WATSON

I was going to pay some poor desperate schmuck thirteen an hour.

BEN

I'll do it for ten.

WATSON

That's insane. You can't live on that.

BEN

No, you're right. Make it ten-fifty.

WATSON

Twelve.

BEN

Eleven.

WATSON

Eleven-fifty.

BEN

Eleven-twenty-five. Don't make me beg, Mr. Watson.

Beat.

WATSON
Fine. \$11.25 an hour.

BEN
And not a penny more.

Watson holds out his hand.

WATSON
Ben, welcome aboard... again.

Ben shakes his hand.

INT. OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Ben trudges into his cubicle. He flops into his chair as Wayne pops into view again.

WAYNE
How'd it go?

BEN
I should've brought the kneepads.

Wayne nods and drops out of sight.

WAYNE (O.S.)
Hey, you want anything in the machine?
I'm making a Twinkie run.

BEN
Yeah, hold on.

Ben reaches into his pocket, pulling out his wallet. Something flutters to the ground.

He picks it up -- it's the battered, barely legible BUSINESS CARD that Caldwell gave him at the strip club.

Ben stares at it, then looks up at something tacked to the wall of his cubicle...

... SVEN'S OLD BOW TIE.

INT. BEN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Ben drives, cell phone to his ear.

BEN
(into phone)
Hey, honey, it's me. I'm gonna be a
little late tonight... Yeah, overtime...
(MORE)

BEN (CONT.)
 How's your dad, by the way... Two weeks
 in traction, huh?

EXT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben walks down the street toward a CLUB -- "THE MALE ROOM."

Several MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN smoke by the front door as one
 HEAVY-SET LADY jabbars on:

HEAVY-SET LADY
 ... So my husband tells me I'm gaining
 too much weight. Like he's one to talk --
 asshole looks like a goddamned Sea World
 attraction when he's lying by the pool.

She glances over as Ben slips past the group.

BEN
 Excuse me...

HEAVY-SET LADY
 Hey, sweet cheeks, when are you going on?

The women CACKLE as Ben enters the club, head down.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben hands the BOUNCER his I.D., steps through the threshold
 into the club and stops. He looks around.

The place is packed with WOMEN of all ages and sizes, doted on
 by a team of scantily clad WAITERS serving drinks.

A RIDICULOUSLY HANDSOME MALE DANCER struts around onstage,
 clad in nothing but a G-string. The crowd goes nuts.

An increasingly nervous Ben watches the man dance to a
 POUNDING BEAT. Ben slowly shakes his head, muttering:

BEN
 No way... No --

Ben turns to go, almost smacking right into CALDWELL. The
 club owner checks his watch and grins, shouting:

CALDWELL
 Right on time! I like that in an
 employee!

INT. THE MALE ROOM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Caldwell leads Ben down a narrow hallway as the BASS from the
 club's P.A. THUMPS through the walls.

CALDWELL

You'll be working the eight-to-two shift,
Tuesday through Saturday.

They approach a GRIZZLED OLD JANITOR hunched over and pushing a broom down the hall.

CALDWELL

How's it going, Eddie?

Eddie looks up and GRUNTS. For a second, he and Ben lock eyes as they pass each other.

Caldwell whacks Eddie on the back, nearly knocking him over.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Four uniformly chiseled, blandly handsome MEN in their early 20s mill about the room in various stages of undress, lifting weights, trying out dance moves, plucking their eyebrows...

... and, in the case of CHAD (22), watching himself in a mirror as he meticulously brushes his stunning HEAD OF HAIR.

Chad stares at himself a moment, then begins to brush his immaculately sculpted CHEST HAIR.

Everyone turns to see Caldwell enter with Ben.

CALDWELL

Boys, I'd like to introduce you to Ben,
the new guy I was telling you about.
Show him the ropes, make him feel like
part of the family, would ya?
(to Ben)
See you in ten minutes.

BEN

What's in ten minutes?

CALDWELL

Showtime, kid.

Caldwell slaps Ben on the ass, then leaves.

Ben turns back to the amused dancers. Beat.

BEN

There must be some kind of mistake.

Chad steps forward, fluffing his hair.

CHAD

No mistake, chief. Mr. Caldwell says you're a natural.

BEN

Anything feels natural after ten beers.

CHAD

You're not pushing out on us, are you?

BEN

Me? Of course not. I just thought maybe I should only observe tonight.

Chad glances over his shoulder at his smirking buddies, then turns back to Ben.

CHAD

You wanna observe, huh? That's cool. We'll get you a nice table by the stage... with the rest of the ladies.

BEN

Terrific. Think I could get a spot off to the side so I'm not in anybody's way?

Chad sighs and steps forward.

CHAD

Look, Bob --

BEN

Ben.

CHAD

Chad, actually. Bob, I'm gonna be honest here. We're counting on you tonight.

BEN

Why?

Chad stares at him blankly -- clearly not the response he expected. He glances back at the other dancers, who shrug.

CHAD

Because... You're the man, man! You know?

BEN

No, I don't. Could you please explain?

Chad takes a deep breath, then flashes his brilliant white teeth in a tense smile.

CHAD
Just... trust me. Whaddaya got to lose?

CUT TO:

THE SIDE OF THE STAGE

We see the SILHOUETTE OF BEN standing in the shadows with Chad, watching as ANOTHER DANCER struts across the stage to POUNDING TECHNO. Clearly Ben is in some kind of costume, but we can't tell what it is.

The club is packed with WOMEN drinking and HOWLING.

Ben turns to Chad.

CHAD
Ready, chief?

BEN
No.

D.J. (O.S.)
And now, ladies, we'd like to introduce our newest addition to the Male Room. Put your hands together for... Rawhide!

Chad slaps something onto Ben's head -- a COWBOY HAT.

CHAD
That's you, pardner... Now giddyap!

Chad grabs Ben and smacks his ass, shoving him into

THE SPOTLIGHT

Ben stumbles into view, limbs flailing as he hits the stage with a GIANT THUD.

He scrambles to his feet, revealing his COWBOY OUTFIT: a too-small VEST over his bare chest, his PINK COWBOY HAT and FURRY CHAPS that reveal his BARE ASS.

The GIGGLING begins at the edge of the stage and ripples back all the way to the exit.

Panic overtakes Ben -- his face glistens with flop sweat as the audience's LAUGHTER nearly drowns out the MUSIC.

AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE

OTHER DANCERS hurry into view, crowding around the delighted Chad to get a better view as

BEN

begins to dance tentatively, stiffly, like a robot.

He reaches for the HOLSTERS at his sides, pulling out a pair of WATER PISTOLS. He pulls the trigger on one, shpritzing a weak stream of WATER across the stage.

The crowd LAUGHS EVEN LOUDER.

Ben stops, looking around helplessly, then dashes toward the other side of the stage, away from Chad and the dancers.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Ben storms into the hallway from the dressing room, now dressed in his street clothes again. Even from here, the AUDIENCE LAUGHTER can still be heard.

Ben turns to see Caldwell strolling toward him. The club owner chuckles, wiping tears from his eyes.

CALDWELL

Excellent work, kid!

BEN

They're laughing at me, Mr. Caldwell.

CALDWELL

You bet they are! Nice job, Ben. I'm really proud of you.

BEN

But... but I sucked.

CALDWELL

I know! You were fucking awful!

BEN

Wait a minute -- you want me to be fucking awful? What am I, comic relief?
(beat, realizing)
I am comic relief, aren't I?

CALDWELL

Hey, everyone needs a good laugh once in a while. Think of yourself as the appetizer before the main course, like shrimp cocktail or one of those tiny little hotdogs wrapped in pastry.

BEN

So that's what I am to you -- a wienie?

CALDWELL

C'mon, Ben, you didn't think I hired you
for your dancing talent, did you?

Beat. Ben stares at Caldwell, seething.

Caldwell BURSTS OUT LAUGHING, gripping his stomach.

CALDWELL

Kid, you're a riot even off the stage....
Now get outta here before you kill me.

Ben turns and storms down the hall.

CALDWELL

See you tomorrow!

Ben rushes past Eddie, the janitor, who watches him shove
open a FIRE DOOR and disappear into the night.

Eddie shakes his head, then begins pushing his broom again.

INT. BEN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Ben sulks behind the wheel.

EXT. BURGER JOINT - DRIVE-THRU - NIGHT

Ben sits in the middle of a long line of cars snaking through
the drive-thru of a fast food restaurant.

He finally inches up to the payment window. The dead-eyed,
pock-marked CASHIER stares at Ben.

CASHIER

Maxi-Burger with fries? Two-forty.

Ben reaches for his back pocket. His eyes go wide as he
frantically pats himself down.

BEN

Oh my God....

CASHIER

Two-forty.

BEN

I... I don't have my wallet.

The cashier stares at him, perplexed. Beat.

CASHIER

Then why'd you order?

BEN
I thought I had it.

CASHIER
So, like... why didn't you check before
you ordered?

BEN
Because I thought I had it, genius!

EXT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben's car SQUEALS to a stop outside the club. Ben climbs out of the car and sprints toward the front door.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Chad and the other dancers watch themselves in a mirror as they try out a SYNCHRONIZED DANCE ROUTINE. The other guys struggle to keep up with Chad.

Chad stops and whirls around to face them, scowling.

CHAD
Enough! Christ, it's like coaching the
Special Olympics. Take it from the top
and get it right this time.

Chad notices Ben standing in the threshold.

CHAD
Hey, look who's back! Maybe he's not
such a spineless pussy after all.

BEN
Don't worry, I am. Have you guys seen a
wallet lying around here somewhere?

Chad walks over to him.

CHAD
Maybe. Wanna dance for it, twinkle toes?

MAN (O.S.)
Leave him alone, Chad.

Everyone turns to see Eddie the janitor standing in the doorway.

CHAD
Buzz off, Eddie. Don't you have a puddle
of sweat to mop up or something?

Eddie limps toward Ben and Chad.

EDDIE

I asked you to leave him alone.

Chad struts over to Eddie until their faces are inches away from one another. He stops. Beat.

CHAD

Make me, old man.

Eddie grabs Chad by his hair, mashing the palm of his hand into the impressively sculpted coif.

CHAD

Not the hair, man! Not the hair!

EDDIE

Will you leave him alone now?

CHAD

Okay, okay!

Eddie lets go. Chad backs away with a whimper, then sprints over to a mirror and begins fussing with his hair.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eddie limps out of the dressing room, followed by Ben.

BEN

Thanks, Eddie.

EDDIE

No sweat, kid. Don't worry about Chad -- punk wins Strippapalooza once and thinks he's God's gift to male exotic dancing. Try winning it five times in a row.

BEN

Strippapa-what?

Eddie jerks his thumb toward a garish POSTER tacked to the wall beside them: "THE 30TH ANNUAL STRIPPAPALOOZA EXOTIC DANCING COMPETITION... GRAND PRIZE -- \$40,000."

EDDIE

Strippapalooza. You should enter.

BEN

I don't think so. The only reason I'm even here is that I'm missing my --

Eddie reaches into his coveralls, pulling out a WALLET.

BEN
Oh, great. Thank you very --

Ben moves to take the wallet from Eddie, who whips it away from Ben's grasp.

EDDIE
Not so fast. There's something you have to do first.

Beat.

BEN
Sorry, Eddie, but I'm engaged. You're a little old for me anyway --

WHACK! Eddie smacks Ben on the head.

EDDIE
No, you idiot! I want you to give it another shot out there on stage.

Beat.

BEN
Can't I just blow you instead?

WHACK!

BEN
Ow! Look, I'm not getting up there again. No way.

EDDIE
Yes, way. But this time, you're gonna listen to what I tell you to do.

CUT TO:

THE SIDE OF THE STAGE

Now dressed as a FIREMAN, Ben stares out at ANOTHER DANCER prancing around in the limelight as MUSIC BLASTS.

BEN
I can't do it.

Eddie shuffles up next to him.

EDDIE
Of course you can. You know what your problem is?

BEN
Lack of talent?

EDDIE
You're trying too hard. That makes you
too self-conscious.

Eddie reaches into his coveralls, pulling out a garish,
reflective silver MASK, which he ties around Ben's eyes.

EDDIE
Remember, it's not you out there -- it's
whoever the audience wants you to be.

BEN
This is crazy. Whoever the audience
wants me to be shouldn't be out there to
begin with --

Ben starts to walk away. Eddie grabs him, pulling him back.

EDDIE
Ben? Shut up.

Ben complies. Eddie pulls him close.

EDDIE
Repeat after me. I own this stage.

BEN
Do I really own it? It seems more like
I'd be borrowing it for a few minutes --

EDDIE
Ben.

Beat.

BEN
I own this stage.

EDDIE
(nodding)
I want you to focus out there. Listen...

Eddie cocks an ear. Ben mimics him.

EDDIE
Clear your mind. Stop thinking. Listen.
Nothing exists but you and the music.

BEN
How would you know?

Eddie closes his eyes and sways to the beat.

EDDIE
Just trust me... You feel it?

Eddie opens his eyes and watches Ben begin to bob in place.

EDDIE
Good...

BEN
I own this stage... I own this stage...

EDDIE
That's right.

The SONG ENDS. The dancer onstage takes a bow, then hustles into the wings, passing Ben and Eddie.

EDDIE
Nice work, Raoul.

D.J. (O.S.)
Watch out, ladies -- hot stuff is on its way. Say hello to... the Fire Marshal!

Ben begins to bob harder, breathing heavily.

BEN
I own this stage...

EDDIE
Now go!

Eddie shoves Ben out into

THE SPOTLIGHT

Ben stumbles into view, shielding his eyes under the harsh light as the WOMEN in the audience CHEER.

Ben glances over his shoulder at

EDDIE

who points at him, then awkwardly SHIMMIES in place.

Behind Eddie, Chad walks into view, staring in disbelief as

BEN

turns back to face the crowd. He closes his eyes and bobs to the SONG BLARING out of the P.A....

... then begins to THRASH AROUND, slipping into the groove of the MUSIC. He tosses aside his helmet.

The CROWD SCREAMS as Ben struts down the catwalk, slowly unbuttoning his fireman's coat.

He rips it open, revealing his bare chest. Ben pulls off the coat and whips it into the crowd.

Ben hops on one foot in time with the music, removing his shoe. Tosses it away. Hops on the other foot, taking off the other shoe. Flings it over his shoulder.

EDDIE

ducks as the shoe rockets past his head...

... smacking into the face of CHAD, who stands behind the janitor. The dancer keels over, out cold. Meanwhile...

BEN

stares out into the darkness, unbuckling his belt to the DANCE BEAT as the crowd CLAPS in time with the MUSIC.

He pulls down his pants, revealing his BOXERS.

The crowd GOES NUTS.

Ben tries to strip off the pants, then gets his legs tangled. He keels over, hitting the ground with a CRASH!

... but rolls onto his back, whips off the pants, then rolls back onto all fours and crawls over to the edge of the stage.

Ben gets up on his knees, thrusting his pelvis at the LADIES in front of him. ONE OF THEM holds out a TWENTY.

He leans in. The woman stuffs the bill into his boxers.

ANOTHER WOMAN does the same. THEN ANOTHER.

As he collects his cash, Ben grins like the proverbial kid in the candy store.

AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE

Eddie, Caldwell and the other dancers watch Ben take a bow. Chad is conscious again and rubbing the LUMP on his temple.

Caldwell shakes his head, incredulous.

CALDWELL

What the hell is this?

EDDIE
Looks like your cocktail wienie might
turn out to be a hunk of prime rib.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits on a weight bench, counting the DOLLARS that he plucks
out of his boxers.

EDDIE (O.S.)
Need this?

A WALLET sails into view, smacking Ben in the head.

BEN
Hey!

Ben grabs the wallet, then looks up see Eddie standing there.

EDDIE
I like your style, Ben... in a completely
non-gay way, of course. You're the real
thing. Not one of those mercenaries.

BEN
Huh?

EDDIE
There are two kinds of dancers in this
business, kid. Most guys are in it for
the money. Then there are the artists.

BEN
And you're saying I'm an artist.

EDDIE
That's right.

Beat.

BEN
No... I'm really in it for the money.
(re: the cash in his hands)
Not that there's a whole lot of it at the
moment.

EDDIE
That can change, kid.

BEN
Sure. At this rate, I should be able to
pay for my wedding in, oh, ten years.

EDDIE
Not if you win Strippapalooza.

Ben stares at Eddie a moment, then glances back at the STRIPPAPALOOZA POSTER on the wall behind him.

EDDIE
We have six weeks.

BEN
"We"?

EDDIE
I'll train you.

BEN
But you're a janitor, Eddie.

EDDIE
And you're an asshole if you mention that again. I helped you tonight, didn't I?

BEN
Beginner's luck.

EDDIE
Hardly. \$40,000, Ben. Think about it.

Beat. Ben frowns.

EDDIE
Something wrong?

BEN
Hold on, I'm still thinking about it.
(beat)
What's in it for you?

EDDIE
The satisfaction of watching you wipe the stage with Chad's ass. And five percent of the winnings.

BEN
Make it seven.

EDDIE
Ten.

BEN
Fifteen.

EDDIE
Deal.

Ben smacks himself in the forehead.

BEN
Damn it, I went the wrong way again! Can
I call a do-over?

Eddie begins to turn away, MUTTERING to himself.

BEN
Okay, okay! Ten percent.

Eddie turns back to Ben and holds out his hand. Ben takes it. They shake.

EDDIE
Any questions?

BEN
You promise this isn't some creepy
seduction thing?

EDDIE
Go home, Ben. We start tomorrow.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The front door opens and Ben squeezes inside. He tiptoes across the dark living room, then notices Rachel sitting on the couch, glaring at him.

BEN
Rachel, what are you doing up this late?

RACHEL
Oh, I don't know -- maybe worrying about
my fiance, who refused to answer his cell
phone all evening.

BEN
Oops.... He must've been so busy that he
forgot to check it.

RACHEL
Ah, so he's either an inconsiderate jerk
or just an idiot.

BEN
Maybe a little bit of both. But he's
cute, right?

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Rachel climb into bed.

RACHEL

What were you working on all this time?

BEN

You know that Serenity Laxative TV campaign that I came up with?

RACHEL

Of course -- "It's smooth sailing from here." I love that slogan.

(beat)

They accepted it?

Beat. Ben finally smiles. Rachel SCREAMS, hugging him.

RACHEL

That's amazing, Ben!

BEN

Well, it's not official, but we'll see what happens. I gotta warn you -- I'll be working late for the next couple of months. Really late.

RACHEL

That's okay. See, I knew you weren't wasting your time. I'm so proud of you...

She leans down and kisses Ben.

After a moment, Rachel pulls back, SNIFFING the air. She leans toward Ben again, sniffing.

RACHEL

Do I smell cigarettes and... perfume?

No response -- Ben's already asleep, SNORING away.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Ben lies in bed beside Rachel. The ALARM GOES OFF on Ben's side. He doesn't budge.

Rachel crawls over Ben to hit the alarm. She kisses him.

RACHEL

Morning, pookie... Up and at 'em...

Ben GRUNTS, burying his head under his pillow.

Rachel pulls away the pillow and hops out of bed.

Ben drags the pillow back over his face.

INT. BEN'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Ben drives while talking on his cell phone:

BEN
 (in a hoarse voice)
 This is Ben Camelino. I was up all night
 bleeding out of my... eyes, so I think
 it's best if I stay home today. I'll try
 to make it in tomorrow. Thanks.

He hangs up.

EXT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ben pulls up to a CRUMBLING OLD BUILDING in an industrial section of town, parking behind a decrepit '76 CHEVY MONTE CARLO covered in a glaze of MUD so thick, the car looks like it's been dipped in chocolate.

He gets out, checks the slip of paper in his hand, then approaches the front door. He RINGS the bell.

EDDIE (O.S.)
 Morning.

Ben looks up to see Eddie leaning out of a window above.

BEN
 Can you let me in?

EDDIE
 No.

BEN
 No?

Eddie disappears for a second, then reappears, holding a PLASTIC BUCKET. He LETS GO of the handle.

EDDIE
 Bombs away!

WHACK! The bucket smacks Ben on the top of the head.

BEN
 Ow!

He rubs his head and picks up the bucket, then looks up in time to see a PLASTIC BOTTLE DROPPING TOWARDS HIM.

Ben raises the bucket and catches the bottle, which we see contains CAR WASH POWDER.

He looks up to see a CAN OF TURTLE WAX hurtling toward him. He raises the bucket again. THUNK!

A moment later, a SPONGE drops down into the bucket. Beat.

Ben lowers the bucket, then looks up as a SHAMMY CLOTH flutters down onto his head. He rips it away.

BEN
 What the hell?
 (re: the Monte Carlo)
 You don't really expect me to --

EDDIE
 There's a hose around the side of the building. Let me know when you're done, and don't skimp on the hubcaps.

Eddie disappears inside again.

Ben turns and looks at the car. He sighs.

INT. OFFICE - BEN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Agnes stomps into Ben's cubicle, folder in hand.

AGNES
 Camelino, legal needs --

He's not there. Sighing, Agnes throws down the folder on his desk, then searches around and finds a Post-It pad.

She pulls off a Post-It and sticks it to the folder, then grabs a pen and starts to write, but the PEN IS DRY.

Agnes tosses it aside, searches the desk and finds another. That one's ALSO DRY.

AGNES
 No wonder you don't get any work done around here...

Agnes searches the desktop, then opens the desk drawer...

... REVEALING CALDWELL'S BUSINESS CARD advertising the Male Room. Agnes picks it up. She frowns even more than usual.

EXT. EDDIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DUSK

Eddie sticks his head out the window to see Ben sitting on the curb next to the GLEAMING MONTE CARLO, which looks like it just rolled out of the showroom.

EDDIE

Nice work.

Ben looks up.

BEN

All right, let's have it.

EDDIE

What?

BEN

The Karate Kid moment. The valuable lesson about dancing and life that I've learned after busting my ass all day.

EDDIE

What are you talking about? I just didn't want to blow a hundred bucks to have my car detailed. Now come on up.

INT. BUILDING - FREIGHT ELEVATOR - MOVING

Ben stands in the elevator, watching through the steel mesh as floors zip past while he ascends.

The elevator stops. Ben slides open the door and steps into

A HALLWAY

Ben makes his way down the dingy hall, stopping at a GIANT METAL DOOR. He knocks on it. After a moment:

EDDIE (O.S.)

It's open.

Ben pulls open the door and slips into

EDDIE'S APARTMENT

... A gigantic LOFT filled with BATTERED OLD FURNITURE and dominated by an ENORMOUS MIRROR BALL, now covered in cobwebs and dust, hanging over the DANCE FLOOR in the middle of the loft. It's like time has frozen in 1976.

Ben turns to face ONE WALL, which features FIVE GIANT CHECKS, along with HUNDREDS OF WOMEN'S PANTIES, every single one carefully mounted like a trophy. And in the middle of the wall...

A POSTER

...featuring a YOUNG, HANDSOME MAN dressed in nothing but a bow tie, shirt cuffs and a G-STRING with "EDDIE" spelled out in sequins across the front pouch. His hair is feathered, '70s style, and he sports a Freddie Mercury-style moustache.

BEN

You gotta be kidding me.

EDDIE (O.S.)

You gotta be kidding me.

Ben turns to see Eddie limping over to his side.

EDDIE

What, you think I learned about male exotic dancing through osmosis?

BEN

Were you any good?

EDDIE

Good? I was the best! Who do you think won Strippapalooza five times in a row? Not that the competition was called that back then, of course...

CUT TO:

A THEATER MARQUEE

It reads, "THE FIRST ANNUAL MANTASY ISLAND CONTEST!!!"

WIDER

A LINE OF WOMEN dressed like extras from Saturday Night Fever snakes out the front door of the Male Room and down the block. Welcome to Hollywood, 1977.

Eddie's brand-new Monte Carlo SCREECHES to a halt outside the club. The ladies SCREAM with delight as YOUNG EDDIE (early 20s) climbs out of the car, dressed in a polyester leisure suit and wearing aviator sunglasses.

He slides across the hood of the Monte Carlo and struts toward the club. The women swarm towards him.

He holds up his hands, stopping them in their tracks.

YOUNG EDDIE

Easy, ladies. I promise to give each and every one of you my undivided attention after the show, even the fat chicks.

The crowd parts. Eddie saunters inside.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Young Eddie struts down the hall, nodding to FELLOW DANCERS as he passes them.

YOUNG CALDWELL (late 20s) catches up with Eddie, dressed in coveralls and gripping a broom -- HE'S A JANITOR.

YOUNG CALDWELL

Hey, Eddie, you get a chance to think about that proposal of mine?

YOUNG EDDIE

I don't think, man. I'm a doer.

YOUNG CALDWELL

Great. So you'll do the smart thing and invest in the club with me, right?

YOUNG EDDIE

Look, Caldwell, you go buy the Male Room. Me? I'm gonna dance.

(pointing to the floor)

By the way, you missed a spot.

Eddie struts away. Young Caldwell watches him go, crushed.

CUT TO:

BLACKNESS

Suddenly a SPOTLIGHT illuminates Young Eddie standing on a stage. A DISCO TRACK BEGINS TO PLAY.

Eddie whirls into action. The AUDIENCE SCREAMS at his feet, reaching up for him as he removes his outfit piece by piece.

He rips off the last of his leisure suit, revealing his "Eddie" G-string. The ladies go nuts.

Young Eddie LEAPS INTO THE AIR, PERFORMING A MIND-BLOWINGLY COMPLICATED JUMP KICK as we

MATCH CUT TO:

A RAGGED OLD SCREEN

... On which SCRATCHY OLD FILM FOOTAGE of Young Eddie doing the jump kick is projected.

Young Eddie lands perfectly.

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - PRESENT - NIGHT

Eddie and Ben sit beside A RICKETY OLD 16MM PROJECTOR in a DARK CORNER OF THE LOFT, watching the screen.

The FOOTAGE CUTS TO Young Eddie receiving a GIANT CHECK and a CROWN, which is placed atop his head.

He waves to the women in the crowd, who rush the stage and fling PANTIES in his direction.

Eddie sighs as the film reel runs out.

BEN

Wow.

EDDIE

Tell me about it. I used to get more pussy than a litter box.

BEN

What happened? Something with your leg?

Eddie grabs Ben, pulling him close as he snarls:

EDDIE

Who the devil you been talking to, kid?
Who's been talking about my leg?

BEN

Nobody! Eddie, you walk with a limp!

Beat. Eddie lets go of Ben.

EDDIE

I do, don't I... All right -- let's get started.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A RECORD PLAYER

A HAND reaches into the frame, dropping the needle on some vinyl. After a moment, CHEESY DISCO FILLS THE AIR.

WIDER

Eddie leans over the STEREO, nodding his head to the BEAT of the music.

He straightens up and hobbles over to Ben, who stands in the middle of the dance floor.

BEN

So are you gonna show me your big move?

EDDIE

Don't worry about it yet, okay? We're gonna start with the basics.

BEN

Why?

EDDIE

Because you've got to unlearn what you've learned.

BEN

But you said you liked my style.

EDDIE

I lied. Now shut up and follow me.

Eddie begins to shuffle to the beat.

Ben watches him a little bit, then imitates his shuffle.

Eddie stops.

EDDIE

What are you doing?

BEN

Following you.

EDDIE

Follow me, but do it right.

BEN

I thought I was doing it right. I was following you.

Eddie smacks Ben.

EDDIE

I'm crippled, asshole! Follow me but don't imitate me. Got it?

Ben shrugs, then begins to move again.

Eddie nods his head as he watches.

EDDIE

Pretty good, but...

BEN

But what?

EDDIE

Your threads, kid. Sure, you can dance,
but you gotta break hearts just walking
into the room. Luckily for you, I've got
a wardrobe full of heartbreakers.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

The stage is empty as a DRUMBEAT BEGINS.

D.J. (O.S.)

Ladies, get ready to burn, baby, burn.
Coming to you straight outta the disco
inferno, say hello to... Disco Boy!

Ben bursts into view, now wearing his MASK and a HIDEOUS
GREEN LEISURE SUIT from the '70s, complete with bell bottoms.

He struts down the catwalk to the beat of a CLASSIC DISCO
TRACK, pulling off his jacket as the CROWD SHRIEKS.

Ben shimmies along the front of the stage as he unbuttons his
polyester shirt with the flared collar, scanning the faces of
the WOMEN CHEERING for him...

... then freezes as he finds himself staring down at AGNES,
his dreaded coworker. She sits at a front table, clutching a
drink and staring up at him with her usual sour expression.

Ben quickly recovers, shimmying in the opposite direction.
He turns away and tears off his shirt.

Agnes watches Ben, disinterested... until it hits her.

AGNES

Camelino...?

She looks around. There's a BACHELORETTE PARTY going on at
the table next to her -- one of the GIGGLING GIRLS takes a
photo of the trashed BRIDE-TO-BE, then moves to stick her
DIGITAL CAMERA in her purse. She misses.

The camera DROPS TO THE GROUND.

Agnes stares at it a moment. She looks around, then leans
down and snags the camera. No one notices.

Agnes fiddles with the camera a moment, then raises it and
takes a snapshot of

BEN

as he whips around to the music, wearing only his THONG.

The SONG ENDS. The CROWD HOOTS AND WHISTLES as Ben takes a bow and rushes

OFFSTAGE

Eddie watches as Ben hurries over to him.

EDDIE

Looking good, kid. Polyester suits you.

BEN

I don't know, Eddie. This isn't me.

EDDIE

Of course it isn't. You're selling fantasy. Why would any woman bother to pay five bucks at the door for reality? They get that at home for free. Reality's got its feet on the coffee table, polishing off a six-pack and watching Monday Night Football.

Caldwell barrels toward Ben, trailed by Chad.

CALDWELL

You know, I ought to fire your ass, Camelino. I hired you to suck...

(beat, brightening)

... But the ladies love you. Who am I to argue with our target demographic?

BEN

Thanks, Mr. Caldwell.... I guess.

CALDWELL

Chad better watch himself.

Caldwell whacks Chad's ass, CHUCKLES, then strolls away.

Chad steps toward Ben, glaring.

CHAD

There's room for only one number one around here, asshole.

BEN

Then you better learn to count to two.

CHAD

No, you better learn to count to... to... you know... whatever, Poindexter...

Chad struts away.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben drags himself through the front door, dead tired.

Rachel lies on the couch, wrapped up in a bathrobe. She looks up at Ben, smiling provocatively.

RACHEL
Hi, pookie.

BEN
Hey.

He shuffles past, barely acknowledging her, and heads into

THE KITCHEN

Ben opens the refrigerator, pulling out a beer. He closes the door, revealing Rachel, who tears open her bathrobe, revealing LINGERIE underneath.

RACHEL
Hi, pookie.

BEN
Hey, honey. How was your day?

He pops the beer, takes a sip and wanders out of view.

IN THE BEDROOM

Ben slides into bed. Rachel climbs in after him, leans over him, then plants a kiss on his cheek. Beat.

Ben SNORES, out cold. Rachel sighs, flopping onto her back.

RACHEL
So that's how it is now...

INT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Mrs. Matthews washes dishes while Rachel dries them. Mrs. Matthews glances out the window above the sink.

MRS. MATTHEWS
Oh, sweetie, look... Ben and your father are bonding again.

EXT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

While the two women watch from inside the house, Ben strolls down the path through the garden, pushing Mr. Matthews in his WHEELCHAIR; we see that the older man has CASTS on both legs.

With his back turned to the house, Ben reaches into his coat and pulls out an ENVELOPE, which he passes to Mr. Matthews.

MR. MATTHEWS

How much?

BEN

About five hundred.

MR. MATTHEWS

That's it?

BEN

I'm doing what I can, Mr. Matthews.

MR. MATTHEWS

Well, do better, Ben. These credit card bills are killing me. Are you two planning a wedding or funding the invasion of a small country?

INT. WATSON'S OFFICE - DAY

The door opens. Ben steps inside to see Mr. Watson slumped behind his desk, his dog lying in his lap.

Agnes stands beside him, smirking.

BEN

You wanted to see me, Mr. Watson?

WATSON

Ben, we have a little problem.

Agnes looks down at Ben's crotch.

AGNES

A big problem, actually.

Watson motions for Ben to sit in the chair in front of the desk. Ben crosses the room and sits down.

BEN

What might that be?

Watson turns to Agnes, who holds up the PHOTO OF BEN that she took at the Male Room.

WATSON

Would you care to explain this?

Beat.

BEN

You mean I get a choice?

WATSON

Ben, this is a very well-regarded company. That reputation is made by the individuals who work for the company.

As he speaks, MR. WATSON SUDDENLY MORPHS INTO MR. MATTHEWS, while AGNES TURNS INTO MRS. MATTHEWS.

MR. MATTHEWS

Some mornings I just want to tear off my clothes and run naked through the claims department.

Ben blinks.

BEN

Excuse me?

Watson and Agnes -- now back to themselves -- stare at him.

WATSON

I said, that reputation is made by the individuals who work for the company. You represent us both in the office and outside of it. Do you understand?

Beat. Ben takes a deep breath.

BEN

Well, sir, there's where you're wrong.

Watson and Agnes both raise their eyebrows.

BEN

You know something? I show up, I do my work, and I go home. During that little eight-hour window of hell, I play by your rules. But after that, whatever I do is none of your business.

WATSON

I'm sorry, but --

BEN

No, Mr. Watson, I'm sorry. Sorry that I've spent five years having my soul ground to a pulp. Do you really think I enjoy getting out of bed at 7 every morning?

(MORE)

BEN (CONT.)

Do you really think I enjoy dealing with cold coffee and spreadsheets and the petty rivalries and sleazy affairs the worker ants indulge in to fill the emptiness of their sad lives?

(grabbing his tie)

Do you really think I enjoy wearing this... this fucking noose designed by Jerry fucking Garcia?

WATSON

Ben, calm down --

BEN

No, Mr. Watson, I think it's you who needs to calm down. You know, relax. Loosen the sphincter a little.

(to Agnes)

You, too, Agnes. Maybe then we can finally remove the stick up your ass.

Agnes's jaw drops.

WATSON

Now wait just a minute --

BEN

In fact, I think everybody needs to lighten up around here.

Ben leaps to his feet, wrenching off his tie and loosening the top button of his shirt.

He ties the tie around his head, then races out the door into

THE OFFICE

Ben looks out at the sea of cubicles and screams:

BEN

Enough!!!

Everyone stops working. All heads turn toward Ben as he takes off his shoes, flings them aside, then CLAMBERS UP ON TOP OF A ROW OF FILING CABINETS.

BEN

It doesn't have to be like this!

He reaches down, grabbing a RADIO from the desk of a startled WOMAN, and CRANKS THE VOLUME.

DANCE MUSIC BLARES as Ben puts down the radio and struts across the cabinets, UNBUTTONING HIS SHIRT TO THE BEAT.

BEN

This company does not own you!

Watson huffs and puffs alongside Ben as he dances, while Watson's dog darts between her master's legs, YIPPING madly.

WATSON

Camelino, get down here this instant --

Ben pulls off his shirt, dropping it on Watson's head as he continues to dance.

BEN

You are not your job! Take control of your own lives!

Ben UNBUCKLES HIS PANTS, then PULLS THEM DOWN.

The women of the office GASP at the sight of his LEOPARD-SPOTTED G-STRING.

Wayne, Ben's friend, breaks into a giant grin as he APPLAUDS.

WAYNE

Awwww, yeah!!!

Ben hops from foot to foot as he pulls off his pants, which he then whirls above his head before letting them fly.

BEN

Brothers and sisters, join me in revolution! You have nothing to lose but your ties!

Ben rips the tie from his head and tosses it at Watson, then turns to face the office. The SONG ENDS.

Several dozen white collar workers stare up at him in silent, slackjawed disbelief as Watson's dog BARKS at their feet.

BEN

Now who's with me?!

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

The front door flies open as a SECURITY GUARD heaves Ben -- still only wearing his G-string -- to the sidewalk.

ANOTHER GUARD flings Ben's clothes beside him. The two guards stride back into the building.

A moment later, a MEEK LITTLE WOMAN carries out a BOX OF BEN'S PERSONAL BELONGINGS and places it beside him.

WOMAN

It was nice working with you, Ben.

The woman glances over her shoulder, then reaches into the box and pulls out a PEN and a PAD from the box. She scrawls something on the pad, then hands it to Ben.

WOMAN

(whispering)

Call me.

The woman hurries back inside.

After a moment, Ben gets to his feet. He looks around at the PEDESTRIANS eyeing him as they hurry past, the MOTORISTS craning their necks to get a look at the nearly naked guy standing there as they drive by.

BEN

What are you looking at? So I'm a stripper. So what?

(yelling)

I AM A STRIPPER AND I'M PROUD OF IT!!!

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE

As A CHEESY DISCO SONG BEGINS TO PLAY, we see a SERIES OF SHOTS, including...

- Ben at the Male Room, dressed in his mask and leisure suit while dancing for a crowd of SCREAMING WOMEN.
- Ben lying in bed, pillow over his head as Rachel grabs him by the foot, trying to drag him off the mattress.
- Ben and Rachel kissing, both of them dressed for the office. They climb into their respective cars. Ben waves to Rachel as she pulls out of the UNDERGROUND GARAGE... then climbs out of his car and undoes his tie.
- Ben watching Eddie, who points to a DIAGRAM of NUMBERED FEET DEMONSTRATING DANCE STEPS on a giant BLACKBOARD.
- Ben leaping across Eddie's loft like a gazelle.
- Ben analyzing more HOME MOVIE FOOTAGE with Eddie.
- Ben at a GYM, staring at himself in a mirror as he practices a variety of manly expressions while working out.
- Ben watching the FOOTAGE of Eddie performing his jump kick.

- Ben leaping in front of a mirror. He tries to attempt the jump-kick and collapses to the floor, clutching his leg.
- Ben sitting at home, leg up on the coffee table, taking notes as he watches an old episode of Soul Train.
- A tuxedo-clad Ben watching himself in a full-length mirror as he dances. He looks over to see Rachel and a SALESPERSON staring at him -- they're in a TUXEDO SHOP.
- Ben dancing at the Male Room. Chad watches, jealous, on the side of the stage.
- Ben handing Mr. Matthews another ENVELOPE. Mr. Matthews, now hobbling on CRUTCHES, peeks into the envelope and smiles.
- Ben prancing across Eddie's dance floor, which LIGHTS UP as he moves. Overhead, the MIRROR BALL revolves. Eddie watches from the side, nodding like a proud coach.
- Rachel climbing into bed. She turns to Ben, who lies beside her, fast asleep.

INT. BAKERY - DAY

A troubled-looking Ben follows Rachel as she inspects a row of WEDDING CAKES.

RACHEL

My God, this one looks like a diabetic coma waiting to happen...

Rachel turns to Ben, noticing his concerned expression.

RACHEL

What's wrong?

BEN

I was wondering -- you'd believe in me no matter what I did for a living, right?

RACHEL

Of course I'd believe in you.

BEN

No matter what?

RACHEL

No matter what... Okay, you're being a little weird, Ben.

BEN
Rachel, I have something to tell you...
(beat)
I'm... I'm a... I'm a lover of you.

She stares at him a moment, perplexed.

RACHEL
Well, I'm, uh... a lover of you, too.

She smiles tightly, gives him a peck on the cheek, then turns back to the cakes.

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - DAY

Ben attempts Eddie's move but tumbles to the floor.

BEN
Damn it!

Eddie limps onto the dance floor as Ben gets to his feet.

EDDIE
Don't worry, kid. Give it time.

BEN
Time? Eddie, I've given it six weeks!
What am I doing wrong?

EDDIE
You're impatient. Dancing is like sex,
kid. It's all about rhythm, flow,
timing. And right now, you're --

BEN
A premature ejaculator?

EDDIE
Exactly. You're thinking too hard.
Don't try the move... be it.

BEN
Fucking hippie.

Eddie smacks Ben on the forehead. Ben winces.

EDDIE
Stop talking, too. Just relax. Let go.

Ben sighs, then checks his watch.

BEN
Speaking of going, I gotta get out of here. Rachel's got something planned tonight.

EDDIE
What?

BEN
Dunno. I know better than to ask.

Eddie stares at Ben.

BEN
What's wrong?

EDDIE
Take off your shirt.

BEN
Whoa! Now hold on, Eddie. I'm flattered and all, but --

EDDIE
Don't be a knucklehead. It's not what you think. C'mon, it'll just take a second.

Beat. Ben sighs, then pulls off his shirt, revealing his HAIRY CHEST.

INT. DANCE REHEARSAL SPACE - DAY

A DANCE INSTRUCTOR glides among the handful of ELDERLY DANCERS awkwardly shuffling to the CLASSICAL WALTZ wafting out of the speakers overhead.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR
One-two-three-one-two-three...

He makes his way over to Rachel and Ben, the only students not old enough to collect social security.

As Ben drags Rachel across the room, it's amazing how smooth Ben has become.... and how hopeless Rachel still is.

The dance instructor takes hold of Rachel's waist from behind, trying to get her to move properly.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR
Relax, Rachel. Just let go and flow with the music. One-two-... No, it's one-two-three-... No, your feet have to go -- Rachel, don't -- oh, forget it...
(MORE)

DANCE INSTRUCTOR (CONT.)

(to Ben)
 Good work, Ben....
 (re: Rachel)
 ... and good luck.

The instructor moves on.

RACHEL
 Since when do you know how to dance?

BEN
 What are you talking about? I've always
 been an excellent dancer.

RACHEL
 Right. And I've always been an excellent
 neurosurgeon.

The SONG ENDS. Everyone turns to the instructor.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR
 Okay, folks, this next one is a little
 faster, but I think you can handle it.

He hits the CD player. An UPTEMPO WALTZ BEGINS TO PLAY as
 the class lurches into motion again.

RACHEL
 Great. I can't even keep up at half the
 speed.

BEN
 Just relax, honey. Clear your mind.

Ben begins to bob to the music as he dances with Rachel.

BEN
 Stop thinking. Listen. Nothing exists
 but you and the music.

He draws closer, grinding up against her.

RACHEL
 Ben...?

Ben lets go of Rachel, swirling around her.

He whips around, jamming his pelvis into the backside of the
 nearest OLD LADY.

OLD LADY
 My goodness!

Her HUSBAND looks over at Ben, frowning.

HUSBAND
Do you mind...?

Ben has already moved on to the next COUPLE. He begins to tug at his shirt as he grooves against ANOTHER OLD WOMAN, who's clearly enjoying the experience.

EXT. DANCE REHEARSAL SPACE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rachel storms out of the building. Ben follows.

RACHEL
What the hell was that?

BEN
What are you talking about?

RACHEL
That little spectacle back in there. Are we practicing for our first dance or auditioning for Chippendales?

BEN
I don't think they'd hire you, honey. Your boobs are too big. On the other hand, there are some guys I've seen with pecs like --

Rachel stops and spins around to face Ben.

RACHEL
What's gotten into you?

Beat.

BEN
The music...?

We hear the SOUND of A WOMAN CLEARING HER THROAT.

Ben and Rachel look down to see a little old lady -- the second one he danced with -- waddling past them.

The old lady BLOWS BEN A KISS, runs her tongue across her lips, winks, then shuffles off into the night.

Ben turns back to Rachel, who glares at him.

BEN
Don't worry. She's not my type.
(beat)
Oh, c'mon, Rachel. Lighten up.

RACHEL

I am so... so... so fucking turned on
right now.

She lunges for Ben, grabbing him as she plants her lips on
his. As they stagger out of the frame, we

CUT TO:

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Rachel tumble into view, still kissing as they grope
one another in the throes of passion.

Ben breaks off the kiss, looking bewildered.

BEN

I thought you were mad at me.

Rachel grabs his face and kisses him again.

BEN

(muffled, still kissing)
Guess not....

Rachel fumbles for Ben's shirt buttons.

RACHEL

I don't know why, but the way you moved --
it was so... sexy.

BEN

(muttering)
Nothing drenches the beaver like a hot
ass in action...

RACHEL

What?

BEN

Nothing. Oh, honey, I should warn you --

She wrenches off the shirt, revealing BEN'S NOW COMPLETELY
HAIRLESS CHEST. Rachel stops, staring at it.

RACHEL

Oh... my... God.

BEN

Yeah, I meant to tell you about this.

RACHEL

You shaved your chest...

BEN
Not exactly.

CUT TO:

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - FLASHBACK - DAY

Ben stands ramrod straight and minus a shirt, his bare chest covered with WAX-LINED LINEN STRIPS.

Eddie grabs the edges of the linen and WRENCHES THE WAX OFF BEN'S SKIN. Ben HOWLS.

BACK TO:

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ben shudders.

BEN
I don't know how you ladies do it.

Rachel circles around him, running her hand across his equally smooth shoulders and back.

RACHEL
You look like a Ken doll.

BEN
Anatomically correct, of course.

She comes around, staring at his chest again. She leans in, rubbing his belly.

RACHEL
Is that a six-pack?

BEN
Not really, but give me a few weeks.

Rachel flops down on the bed.

BEN
You okay?

RACHEL
About as okay as a woman can be after learning that her fiancé has just come out as a... metrosexual.
(beat)
Are you seeing someone else?

BEN
What?!

RACHEL

Well, you know -- usually the only reason a guy like you cleans up and gets into shape is when he's trying to get laid.

BEN

Aw, honey. I know you give it up at the drop of a hat --

RACHEL

No, you dope, I mean when a guy is single and trying to impress somebody.

Beat.

BEN

Well of course I'm trying to impress somebody.

Rachel buries her head in her hands and begins to WAIL.

RACHEL

I knew it!

BEN

No, no, no -- I mean you!

She looks up, sniffing.

RACHEL

Really?

Ben drops to one knee in front of her.

BEN

Of course. I... I just want to look my absolute best for the wedding. For you.

RACHEL

Oh, Ben...

She leans in, grabbing him in an embrace. Ben rests his head on her shoulder. Beat.

Ben begins to SNORE, his head still on her shoulder.

RACHEL

Ben...? Ben?

She shakes Ben as he SNORES, dead to the world.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben towels off, staring at the STRIPPAPALOOZA POSTER in front of him as Chad wanders over.

CHAD

Nice wax job, Brent. You look like a shaved gorilla.

BEN

Just wait until the competition, Chad. We'll see who's the primate then.

CHAD

Ooohhh, listen to Joe College with his big words. You gonna spell me to death?

Chad notices Eddie glaring at him from one corner of the room, broom in hand.

CHAD

What are you looking at, old man? Go refill the tampon machine in the ladies room or something.

EDDIE

If I were half my age, you wouldn't have even finished that sentence.

CHAD

Yeah, well, if I were half my age, I'd be, uh... wait, I fucked that up. If I were half your age... No, that's not it. Maybe if you were half my age...?

EDDIE

Save the fractions for math class, Archimedes. You're going down next week.

CHAD

(re: Ben)

Against Burt here? I don't think so. And you? 30 years ago I'd be nervous.

BEN

Think fast -- how old would you have been 30 years ago, Chad?

CHAD

Shut up, geek.

(to Eddie)

30 years ago I'd be nervous. But now? You're nothing but a washed up has-been. A loser. L-O-S... Ummm... L-O-S...

BEN

Want me to finish it off for you? E-R.

CHAD

How do you spell "shut the fuck up," man?
I'll see you on the dance floor.

(to Eddie)

I'm gonna win Strippapalooza again,
Eddie. That's a promise.

Chad stalks out of the dressing room.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben stands at a urinal, taking a leak. Behind him, Eddie can be seen kneeling in front of one of the toilets -- his ass sticks out of the stall.

BEN

What happened, Eddie?

EDDIE

Aw, you know -- somebody around here was
raised in a barn.

BEN

No, I mean your career.

Beat. We hear a SLOSHING SOUND, then:

EDDIE

Well, after I broke my leg, I couldn't
dance anymore. Always hoped I'd be able
to make a comeback, but here I am,
cleaning up somebody's piss.

BEN

It's never too late.

Eddie chuckles as he slowly gets to his feet.

EDDIE

Ah, I had my time in the spotlight. I
may work behind the scenes now...

Eddie emerges from the bathroom stall, wearing rubber gloves
and clutching a disgustingly filthy TOILET BRUSH.

EDDIE

... But hey -- it's still show business.

CUT TO:

A STUNNINGLY HANDSOME MAN IN A TUXEDO

struts down a CATWALK to a THUMPING BASSLINE as a CROWD OF WOMEN CHEER. Seconds later, a GORGEOUS WOMAN in a WEDDING GOWN glides into view behind him. Are we at a strip club?

WIDER

Nope -- it's just the fashion show at one end of an enormous BRIDAL EXPO. The vast CONVENTION HALL is packed with BOOTHS manned by armies of wedding vendors who swarm around scores of manic brides-to-be and their companions...

... such as Ben, who stifles a yawn and checks his watch.

Rachel stands beside him, wearing a jewel-encrusted TIARA and a VEIL and staring at herself in a mirror at one booth.

RACHEL

Where's my mother? She has to see this.
It's exactly what I've been looking for.
In fact, I didn't even know that this was
what I was looking for until now.

BEN

How much is it? Ten bucks? Twenty?

Rachel checks the PRICE TAG dangling in front of her eyes.

RACHEL

Five hundred dollars.

Ben's jaw drops as Rachel stares at herself again.

RACHEL

It's perfect.

BEN

It's five hundred dollars! You... you
can't get it, Rachel.

RACHEL

Ben, now is not the time to assert your
male dominance.

BEN

But it's... it's technically part of the
wedding dress, isn't it? You know -- the
dress that's bad luck for me to see
before we get married.

Rachel's expression falls. She sighs, taking the tiara and veil off her head.

RACHEL

It is... Darn it, you're right.

As Rachel turns to put it back, Ben lets out a sigh of relief...

... then watches in horror as Mrs. Matthews reaches into view, plucking the tiara from her daughter's hands.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Don't be silly, dear. You can buy it.

BEN

But it's part of the dress.

MRS. MATTHEWS

It's not part of the dress.

BEN

Yes, it is.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Since when have you become an authority on bridal fashion?

Ben reaches out for the tiara, grabbing one side of it.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Ben!

BEN

Mrs. Matthews, please!

She grips the other side, holding tight as he pulls.

SNAP!

They stare down at their respective halves of the broken tiara. Ben notices that Mrs. Matthews got the veil.

BEN

Does that mean you get to make a wish?

A SALESWOMAN wanders over, doing her best to maintain the smile glued to her face. She taps Ben on the shoulder.

SALESWOMAN

Cash or charge?

Ben's shoulders slump.

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - NIGHT

Eddie, dressed in a Hugh Hefner-style smoking jacket, opens the door to his loft, revealing Ben.

EDDIE

I know that look. Lady trouble, right?

Ben nods. Eddie steps aside as Ben storms into the loft, ripping off his jacket and tossing it aside.

BEN

Fire up the disco ball, Eddie. It's time to rock.

INT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rachel and Mrs. Matthews place stamps on a mountain of wedding invitations.

RACHEL

I don't understand what Ben's problem is.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Don't worry, dear -- you have the rest of your life to learn the hard way.

RACHEL

He's been really distracted lately. We don't talk anymore. We don't...

MRS. MATTHEWS

-- You don't screw the way you used to?

Rachel clamps her hands over her ears.

RACHEL

Mom! Ewwww!

(beat)

No, we don't.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Welcome to the club.

RACHEL

What if he doesn't want to get married anymore? I mean, it's not like he's doing much to make the wedding happen.

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - NIGHT

As MUSIC PLAYS, Ben whips across the dance floor.

He leaps in the air, PERFECTLY EXECUTING EDDIE'S JUMP KICK.

Ben lands on his feet, stunned.

BEN
I did it...

Ben looks over at Eddie, who blinks away tears.

EDDIE
Ready to win Strippapalooza, kid?

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - LATER - NIGHT

Eddie limps over to Ben, who guzzles a bottle of water.

EDDIE
I got something for you, kid. A gift.

Eddie hands him a GRUNGY OLD SHOEBOX. Ben takes it gingerly.

BEN
Aw, you shouldn't have.

EDDIE
Shut up and open it.

Ben takes off the top of the shoebox. He reaches in...

... then pulls out EDDIE'S OLD G-STRING. The sequins that spell out "EDDIE" have begun to fall away and it looks like several thousand generations of moths have made a meal of it.

Ben holds it up between two fingers, trying in vain to conceal his disgust.

BEN
This is really... really...

Ben notices how proud Eddie looks. His expression softens.

BEN
... Thoughtful of you. Thanks.

EDDIE
Welcome. Looks pretty good, considering it's been in storage for 20 years.

BEN
Maybe you should have washed it first.

EDDIE
Washed it? Bad luck.

Ben holds it that much farther away from himself.

Eddie claps him on the shoulder.

EDDIE

Can't wait to see you in it, kid.

Eddie limps away.

Ben watches him go, then turns his attention to the G-string. He gingerly rubs it against the sleeve of his shirt, then inspects it again.

He sniffs it a little, then begins to COUGH VIOLENTLY.

ACROSS THE LOFT

Eddie stands in front of the giant poster of himself as a younger man wearing the "Eddie" thong. Ben wanders over.

BEN

What happened, Eddie? Really.

Beat. Eddie sighs.

EDDIE

It was 1983...

CUT TO:

INT. THE MALE ROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Young Eddie, now in his late 20s but still wearing the disco duds, carefully combs his feathered '70s hairdo in the mirror of the DRESSING ROOM.

Young Caldwell (early 30s) walks up behind him, sporting the red vinyl-and-zippers look of Thriller-era Michael Jackson with a Flock of Seagulls haircut. A terrifying combination.

YOUNG CALDWELL

You know, Eddie, maybe it's time to update the wardrobe.

Young Eddie turns around, eyeing Young Caldwell's outfit.

YOUNG EDDIE

I don't know what you're talking about, Caldwell.

YOUNG CALDWELL

That's Mr. Caldwell to you, Eddie. After all, I'm your boss now, right?

Young Eddie grunts and brushes past him.

CUT TO:

THE MALE ROOM STAGE

Young Eddie shuffles into the spotlight, looking out at the sea of MADONNA AND PAT BENATAR CLONES in the audience.

He glances up with a scowl as a CHEESY '80s DANCE TRACK begins to BLAST out of the SPEAKERS above.

EDDIE (V.O.)
Times were changing. Breakdance,
flashdance, "Safety Dance"... Too many
dances, none of them the Electric Slide.

Eddie sighs, then breaks into his dance routine... which clearly hasn't changed since the days of "Stayin' Alive."

EDDIE (V.O.)
Lotta guys tried to keep up. Not me,
kid. I was who I was, like it or not.

The crowd begins to BOO and give him the finger. One CYNDI LAUPER LOOKALIKE at the front of the stage screams:

CYNDI LAUPER LOOKALIKE
Disco still sucks!

Eddie continues to groove, trying to ignore the jeering.

EDDIE (V.O.)
I'd either dance my way or not at all.

He LEAPS INTO THE AIR, performing his signature jump kick. He WHIRLS AROUND, grace personified....

... until he glances up at the DISCO BALL revolving above the audience, REFLECTING LIGHT throughout the club.

A RANDOM BEAM OF LIGHT REFLECTS STRAIGHT INTO HIS EYES.

Eddie SCREAMS as he raises his hands to his face, blinded. He plummets toward the stage in agonizing SLOW MOTION.

SNAP! Young Eddie collapses onto the stage and grabs his ankle, eyes closed tightly, still SCREAMING.

EDDIE (V.O.)
Turns out it was not at all.

BACK TO:

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - PRESENT - NIGHT

Ben stares at Eddie.

BEN
That's the saddest story ever.

EDDIE
I dunno, Bambi was a real bummer, too.

BEN
I'm sorry, Eddie.

EDDIE
Hey, you can't be number one forever.
Life is full of ups and downs.

BEN
Yeah, but it's been one big down for you
since then.

EDDIE
Not anymore, kid. The day I met you, I
saw something that I'd never seen in
anyone before.

BEN
Complete and utter desperation?

EDDIE
Redemption. When you get up there
onstage and win Strippapalooza tomorrow
night, things will be different.

Eddie grins. Ben nods. Beat.

BEN
How?

Eddie smacks Ben.

EDDIE
Blast it, kid, we were having a moment!
Why'd ya have to spoil it with logic?

Ben's cell phone RINGS. He walks over and picks it up.

BEN
(into phone)
Hello?

WAYNE (FILTERED)
Hey, it's Wayne. Remember me?

INT. WAYNE'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Wayne, Ben's former coworker, drives. Ben rides shotgun.

WAYNE

So what's up, dude? It's been ages since I've seen you. I mean, last time I saw a little too much of you, but still...

Ben points out the windshield.

BEN

Funny you should say that. Turn in here.

WAYNE

Why?

BEN

Quick errand. I'm trusting you, Wayne.

INT. ADULT STORE - NIGHT

Ben wanders through the THONG SECTION of the store, examining the selection of G-strings. Wayne trails behind, stunned.

WAYNE

You've got to be kidding me.

BEN

I'm dead serious. You are not to say a word about this to anyone.

WAYNE

No one would believe me even if I did. I mean, I'm a fairly open-minded guy and all... but stripping?

BEN

I know, I know. At first it was just to pay for the wedding, but then I realized that this is it. This is what I was meant to do with my life. I'm not just a dancer. I'm... I'm an artist.

WAYNE

You mean you've taken up painting, too?

BEN

No, dipshit, I mean that after all these years, I've finally found a way to express myself. When I'm onstage, I get to do what I want. I get to be me.

WAYNE

It's like something out of a comic book.
By day you're Ben Camelino, mild-mannered
office drone --

BEN

Ex-office drone.

WAYNE

-- But by night you unleash the studly
alter ego you never even knew you had in
you. You're like... Stripper Man.

BEN

Disco Boy, actually. I feel like I
should tell Rachel, but I can't.

WAYNE

Why not? Because she'll think it's
creepy and weird and make you stop?

BEN

Something like that.

WAYNE

She'd be right, of course, but hey --
it's your life.

Ben holds up a TIGER STRIPED G-STRING.

BEN

What do you think about this?

WAYNE

Oh, it's you. It's so you.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rachel rushes around the apartment, looking dressed to kill.

Ben stands at a mirror, wrestling with his tie.

RACHEL

Pookie, have you seen my blush?

BEN

Nope.

She darts into the bathroom.

Ben looks down as HIS CELL PHONE RINGS. He looks around,
then picks up, whispering:

BEN
Hello?

INT. EDDIE'S LOFT - DAY

Eddie lounges in his vintage egg-shaped chair, phone in hand.
INTERCUT AS NEEDED.

EDDIE
It's me, kid. Nervous about tonight?

BEN
No. I'm too busy dreading my impending
dinner with the in-laws.

EDDIE
Eat light. Stick to salad.

Ben notices something lying on the ground...

... HIS NEW TIGER-STRIPED G-STRING.

BEN
Damn it...

EDDIE
C'mon, it's not that bad. You can pig
out after the contest.

Rachel enters the living room.

RACHEL
Pookie --

Ben dives for the thong, landing on top of it.

RACHEL
Jesus, are you okay?

BEN
I'm fine, just fine. I'm okay, really!

Still lying on the floor, Ben shoos Rachel away. She
reenters the bathroom, eyeing him strangely.

Once she's out of view, Ben grabs the thong and stands up.
He creeps past the bathroom into

THE BEDROOM

Ben glances over his shoulder again and tiptoes over to his
CLOSET, then says into the phone:

BEN
Anyway... What's up?

EDDIE
Nothing. Just wanted to remind you that
the contest starts at 10 p.m.

BEN
I know.

EDDIE
Don't be late.

BEN
I won't. I promise, Daddy.
(beat)
Eddie?

EDDIE
Nobody's ever called me "Daddy" before.
Well, nobody who wasn't writhing in
ecstasy under me.

Ben opens the closet door and pushes aside the rack of dress shirts, ties and slacks.

BEN
I was kidding, Eddie.

Ben TAPS THE BACK WALL OF THE CLOSET. CLICK! A FALSE DOOR SWINGS OPEN, revealing...

...A RACK OF G-STRINGS, SVEN'S OLD BOW TIE and A SHELF OF LOTIONS, OILS AND OTHER SKIN CARE PRODUCTS.

RACHEL (O.S.)
Who is it, Ben?

BEN
(calling out)
My, uh... boss from work!
(into phone)
I gotta go.

Ben tosses the thong into the hidden space, then shuts the false door.

EDDIE
Hold on, lemme say something... You know,
Ben, I never had kids of my own. None
that I know of, anyway. But I just wanna
tell you that... I love you like a son.

Behind Ben, RACHEL WALKS INTO THE ROOM.

BEN
I, uh... I love you, too, Eddie.

Ben slides his clothes back and shuts the closet door, then turns to see Rachel. He LETS OUT A YELP, dropping the phone.

RACHEL
What was that about?

Ben snaps up the phone off the ground and hangs up.

BEN
What?

RACHEL
Did you just tell your boss that you loved him?

BEN
Did I...? Oh, no -- I told him that I'd dub him a mix tape!

RACHEL
We don't have a tape player, Ben.

BEN
Oh, right. Well... then I'll just have to tell him I can't do it after all.

Ben notices that the closet is ajar. He shoves it closed.

BEN
Shall we go?

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ben, Rachel and her parents eat dinner in the posh restaurant. An uncomfortable silence hangs above the table.

Mr. Matthews notices Rachel glaring at Ben, who continually glances at his watch.

MR. MATTHEWS
What's the matter, Ben? Got a hot date or something?

BEN
Sorry. I'm just, uh... concerned with the ephemeral nature of time.

MR. MATTHEWS
What?

Mrs. Matthews clears her throat, nervously grinning from ear to ear as she turns to Rachel.

MRS. MATTHEWS
How's the wedding going, honey? Anything you need help with?

RACHEL
(still staring at Ben)
How about a lie detector test...

Mr. Matthews looks from Rachel to Ben and chuckles.

MR. MATTHEWS
Boy, somebody turn up the thermostat or something -- sure is frosty around here!

BEN
Is it? I didn't notice.

Ben glances at his watch.

RACHEL
Look at it again and I swear to God, I'll take your arm off.

BEN
Sorry, I'm a little anxious about going to work tonight. Big assignment.

RACHEL
What big assignment? The laxative project?

MRS. MATTHEWS
That reminds me, Ben -- I tried calling you at your office the other day, and I was told that you no longer work there. When did that happen?

Rachel's eyes slowly widen.

RACHEL
Yes, Ben, when did that happen?

Ben stares at Rachel and her parents. He opens his mouth and shuts it, looking like a dying fish gasping for air.

Ben's CELL PHONE RINGS. He leaps to his feet.

BEN
Would you excuse me a moment?

INT. RESTAURANT - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben bursts into the men's room, phone to his ear.

BEN

What's wrong, Mr. Caldwell?

CALDWELL (FILTERED)

Ben, we're in deep shit here. Raoul set his hair on fire during his torch juggling routine. Can you come in early and cover the rest of his shift?

BEN

But I was hoping to rest before the contest tonight --

CALDWELL (FILTERED)

You wanna even enter the contest? Then get your toned ass down here or else!

CUT TO:

THE TABLE

A bewildered-looking Rachel and her parents watch Ben hurry back over to the table.

BEN

I'm afraid I have to take off. There's an emergency at work.

RACHEL

But --

BEN

Sorry, no time to discuss. You can get a ride home with your folks, right?

(kissing Rachel)

I'll see you later. Love you, honey.

(to Rachel's parents)

Mr. and Mrs. Matthews -- a pleasure, as always.

Ben sprints out of the restaurant.

INT. BEN'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Ben speeds down the street. He checks his watch.

Ben's CELL PHONE RINGS. Ben glances at it, then shuts it off and places it beside him.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rachel storms into the apartment, flinging aside her purse and cell phone.

She stomps into the BEDROOM. Throws open the closet. Shoves aside the hanging clothes. She stares at the REAR WALL of the closet. Beat.

Rachel feels the wall, then PUSHES IT.

CLICK! The false door swings open.

Rachel's jaw slowly drops as she stares inside the hidden compartment. She BURSTS INTO TEARS.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - LATER - NIGHT

Rachel cries as Mrs. Matthews sits beside her.

MRS. MATTHEWS

You're sure? You're sure he's having an affair?

Rachel nods.

MRS. MATTHEWS

But how do you know?

Rachel reaches behind the sofa and pulls out a THONG and a bottle of LOTION.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Oh my God... He's seeing another man?!

RACHEL

I don't know what to do, Mom.

Mrs. Matthews sighs.

MRS. MATTHEWS

I think you need to step back from the situation and clear your mind.

RACHEL

With what? A bullet?

MRS. MATTHEWS

Better -- a girls' night out. Have you ever heard of the Male Room?

RACHEL

It sounds like either a gay bar or a strip club. Why would you know about --

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT.)
(suddenly getting it)
Mother!

MRS. MATTHEWS
There's nothing wrong with looking, is there? It's not like I sleep with those stunning examples of manhood with their tight buns and giant, throbbing --

RACHEL
Ewwwww, gross! Stop!

MRS. MATTHEWS
-- Muscles, dear. Giant, throbbing muscles.

RACHEL
Whatever. What does Dad say?

MRS. MATTHEWS
He doesn't know. Just like I'm not supposed to know about his fondness for titty bars.

RACHEL
This is way, way too much information for me...

MRS. MATTHEWS
Rachel, I hate to break it to you, but after thirty years of marriage, there isn't much in the way of surprise in the bedroom anymore. Your father and I still love each other, of course, but what's wrong with indulging in a little fantasy now and then?

RACHEL
You tell me.

MRS. MATTHEWS
Honey, you need to relax. Come on, it'll be fun. Wait until you meet Disco Boy...

RACHEL
"Disco Boy"?! Mother, I am not --

MRS. MATTHEWS
Zip it, young lady. You're going to meet Disco Boy and that's an order!

INT. THE MALE ROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben begins to take off his shirt, then stops and looks around as Eddie limps toward him.

BEN

Damn it... I forgot your lucky G-string at home, Eddie.

EDDIE

Don't worry about it, kid. I got something else for you instead.

Caldwell bursts into the dressing room.

CALDWELL

What the hell is this, a coffee klatch? Eddie, go clean something. And Ben, get your ass out there! A couple of ladies want a private dance with Disco Boy.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Rachel and her mom sit in a booth along the side of the club.

BEN

stares at them from across the club, slack-jawed and wearing his leisure suit and mask. Caldwell stands beside him.

BEN

I think I'm going to be sick...

CALDWELL

What's your problem? They're hot!

BEN

They're... my fiancee and her mother.

Chad comes up behind Ben and Caldwell.

CALDWELL

Yeah? Awesome. I'd sure like to be the meat between those buns...

As Chad begins to strut toward Rachel and Mrs. Matthews --

BEN

All right, all right! I'll do it, okay?

CALDWELL

That's the spirit, Ben. And hey, look on the bright side -- you know you can score with at least one of them.

Ben sighs, then brushes past Chad and walks toward

THE BOOTH

Rachel and her mom sit there, sipping fruity cocktails. Mrs. Matthews bobs to the music while Rachel slumps beside her.

RACHEL

This is not my idea of fun.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Tell me that after two more cocktails.

DEEP MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Hello, ladies.

They look up see Ben sauntering toward the booth, his head cocked at an odd angle away from them.

He takes off his jacket, waving it in front of his face like a matador as he says in a painfully fake DEEP VOICE:

BEN

I hear you're looking for a dancer.

MRS. MATTHEWS

You came to the right place, big boy.

Rachel buries her face in her hands.

Ben flings away the jacket and begins to dance to the BLARING MUSIC. As he sways and prances, he waves his hands in front of his face, frequently turning his back to the women.

Mrs. Matthews sways as she knocks back the last of her drink.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Wow, is that strong. I feel so light-headed and... horny...

(to Ben)

Come on, hot stuff! Lose the clothes.

Ben shoots a glance at Rachel, then turns to Mrs. Matthews.

BEN

Oh, you don't really want me to --

MRS. MATTHEWS

Now!

Ben whirls around, ripping open his shirt.

Rachel leans over to Mrs. Matthews.

RACHEL
Can we go home now?

MRS. MATTHEWS
Oh, Rachel, don't be such a wet blanket.
We're only looking, remember?
(to Ben)
The pants! Off with the pants!

Ben flings his shirt away, then reluctantly pulls down his pants, revealing his GLITTERING G-STRING.

He tosses the pants aside.

Mrs. Matthews motions for him to draw closer.

After a moment's hesitation, Ben dances over, trying to turn away from Rachel as he approaches Mrs. Matthews.

Mrs. Matthews grabs Ben and attempts to pull him onto her lap, much to Rachel's horror.

RACHEL
Mother! What happened to just looking?!

Ben falls to the floor and shouts, in his normal voice:

BEN
Ow! Damn it!

Rachel stares down at Ben a moment.

RACHEL
Ben?

BEN
(with a deep voice again)
No, my name's, uh... Brad. Really.

RACHEL
It is you, isn't it?

As Ben gets to his feet, Rachel reaches out and grabs Ben's mask, pulling it off his face.

Mrs. Matthews' eyes go wide. She drops her cocktail glass.

Ben stares at Rachel. Beat.

He finally grins weakly, shrugging.

BEN
Uh... surprise?

RACHEL
You are an asshole.

BEN
Rachel, I --

Rachel grabs Mrs. Matthews, jumps up and storms away.

EXT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben bursts out of the Male Room onto La Brea, wearing nothing but his G-string.

He looks around wildly, then sees

RACHEL AND MRS. MATTHEWS

getting into Rachel's car across the busy street.

BEN

rushes to the edge of the sidewalk.

BEN
Rachel, wait!

He takes a deep breath...

... THEN DASHES INTO TRAFFIC.

SCREEEECH!!! Cars SLAM to a stop as Ben dashes in front of them as he races across the various lanes.

CRASH!!!! OTHER CARS smash into the stopped cars from behind.

RACHEL

sits in her car, watching in horror as Ben dodges traffic while sprinting toward her.

RACHEL
Are you crazy???

Ben reaches the car, panting.

BEN
Honey, please don't do this. Let's be reasonable here.

She glances down at his G-string, then looks up at him in disbelief.

RACHEL
Are you fucking kidding me?

Rachel hits the gas, lurching out of her parking spot into the street.

Ben tears after her, passing HONKING CARS and WHISTLING PEDESTRIANS.

As Ben runs, an OLD CADILLAC pulls up alongside him. The ELDERLY DRIVER peers out at Ben.

DRIVER

Hey, sweetness, you want a ride?

Ben flips the guy off, then bolts ahead of the car as

RACHEL

finally stops at a RED LIGHT.

Ben catches up with her, gasping for breath:

BEN

You said... you'd believe in me... no matter what I did...

She looks at him. Her expression softens...

... just as the RED LIGHT turns to GREEN.

VROOOM! Rachel takes off.

Ben sprints after Rachel as she zips away, trying in vain to keep up with the car.

He doesn't notice as he dashes into an INTERSECTION.

BEN

Rachel!!!

SCREEECH! Ben stops and turns in the direction of the SOUND. He shields his eyes, blinded by HEADLIGHTS.

The CAR stops inches from his kneecaps.

Ben watches TWO COPS climb out of the vehicle. He looks down at himself. Beat.

BEN

Evening, officers.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Ben stands in one corner of the holding cell, still only clad in his G-string and staring in terror at the half-dozen or so TATTOOED THUGS looming in front of him.

BEN

So... anybody got a deck of cards?

INT. RACHEL'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Rachel grips the steering wheel, livid. Mrs. Matthews just looks baffled.

RACHEL

I can't believe it, Mom. He lied to me all this time.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Look on the bright side of things....

Rachel stops and turns to Mrs. Matthews. Beat.

RACHEL

Well?

MRS. MATTHEWS

I'm working on it. Don't rush me.

Rachel turns her attention out the windshield. She frowns.

RACHEL

What the hell...?

EXT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Rachel's car pulls into the wide driveway...

... just as TWO SCRUFFY MEN climb into the Matthews' matching SUVs parked in front of the garage.

Rachel and Mrs. Matthews get out, watching as the men back the cars down the driveway.

One of the men smiles and waves to the women as he passes.

The SUVs back into the street and ROAR away.

INT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Mr. Matthews slumps at the bar in the corner of the posh LIVING ROOM. He pours himself a glass of bourbon, stares at it...

... then finally sighs. He pushes aside the glass and raises the bottle to his lips.

The front door flies open as Rachel and her mom storm inside.

MRS. MATTHEWS

John, come quickly! Someone just stole the SUVs!

MR. MATTHEWS

It's hardly stealing when I give them the keys, dear.

Mrs. Matthews and Rachel stop short.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Excuse me?

MR. MATTHEWS

They were gonna get the damn things sooner or later. Might as well lend a hand and save them the trouble.

Mr. Matthews turns to his wife and daughter, raising the bottle of bourbon.

MR. MATTHEWS

Here's to bankruptcy!

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Ben looks at the TWO DRUNKS standing on either side of him.

BEN

All right, let's take it from the top. Juice, careful with that elbow. T-Bone, don't get ahead of the beat. Ready? One-two-three-four --

Ben and the drunks launch into a SYNCHRONIZED BREAKDANCE ROUTINE while the thugs in the cell CLAP RHYTHMICALLY.

A couple of prisoners cup their hands to their mouths, making BEAT BOX NOISES in time with the rhythm.

We hear the JINGLING OF KEYS, then a CLANGING SOUND.

Ben and the drunks stop dancing. The clapping ceases.

The thugs part, revealing EDDIE limping toward the cell as a COP opens the cell door and steps aside.

EDDIE

Great Scott, kid! Do you know what a pain in the ass it was to find you? Now c'mon, we've only got half an hour.

BEN

An hour till what?

EDDIE
The contest, doofus!

Beat. Ben sighs.

BEN
Oh, yeah. That.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Eddie storms out of the station, not breaking his stride as Ben struggles to keep up.

BEN
Eddie --

EDDIE
Forget it, kid. I don't want to hear it. You don't want to enter Strippapalooza anymore? Fine. See if I care. In fact, you're seeing it right now!

BEN
Eddie --

EDDIE
I mean, shit -- what else am I gonna do with my time except pour my heart and soul into training some pussy who gives up when his fucking girlfriend dumps him? Hell, I can't wait until the next candy-ass comes my way -- what am I gonna do with myself until then? Get a life?

BEN
Eddie!

Eddie stops and whirls around.

EDDIE
What?!

BEN
You're not limping anymore.

Eddie stares at Ben a moment, then looks down at his bad leg. He stamps it a few times.

EDDIE
It's a fucking miracle.

Realization dawns on Ben's face.

BEN

You've been faking it all along...

EDDIE

What are you talking about?

BEN

After you fell, you didn't want to go back onstage. You pretended that your leg was ruined and you couldn't dance anymore. You were afraid to fail again.

EDDIE

Did you have your brains gang raped out of you back in that cell?

BEN

Just admit it, Eddie.

EDDIE

Well what if I did fake it? I told you that you can't be number one forever. It was my choice to go out the way I did.

(beat, catching himself)

If I faked it, of course.

BEN

I may be a quitter, but you're a phony. A coward. And I believed in you.

Beat.

EDDIE

Well I believed in you, so we're both shit out of luck right now, aren't we?

INT. RACHEL'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Mrs. Matthews and Rachel sit on the couch, staring in horror at Mr. Matthews standing in front of them.

MR. MATTHEWS

Mary, I have to confess something --

MRS. MATTHEWS

(sighing)

I already know you're out of work, John.

Mr. Matthews blinks, stunned.

MR. MATTHEWS

You... you knew?

MRS. MATTHEWS

Of course I knew! How else could you explain that farmer's tan if you weren't playing golf eight hours day?

(to Rachel)

I hope you're taking notes, dear.

Mr. Matthews checks his tanned arms.... Damn it, she's right.

MR. MATTHEWS

But... why didn't you say something?

MRS. MATTHEWS

And risk damaging your fragile male ego? No thanks. It was easier to keep spending money and hope that I'd finally guilt you into finding another job. Maybe that theory doesn't work so well, but it's sure been fun to test it.

RACHEL

At least until they repossessed the SUVs.

MR. MATTHEWS

You stay out of this, young lady. This doesn't concern you.

RACHEL

Of course it does! We've got a wedding in less than two weeks, don't we?

(beat)

Don't we, Dad?!

MR. MATTHEWS

Sure we do! I'm, uh... just not the one who's actually paying for it.

Beat. Rachel stares at her father, confused. She turns to the equally baffled Mrs. Matthews, who throws up her hands.

MRS. MATTHEWS

You're on your own with this one, Rachel.

Rachel thinks about it a moment. She finally looks up.

RACHEL

Ben?

Mr. Matthews nods.

MR. MATTHEWS

How he's been doing it, I have no idea.

Beat. Rachel turns to Mrs. Matthews. They suddenly get it.

RACHEL AND MRS. MATTHEWS
 (simultaneously)
 Oh my God...

EXT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben emerges from the apartment, clutching the sequined "Eddie" G-string. He walks back down to Eddie's Monte Carlo, which is parked out front.

Ben places the G-string into the palm of Eddie's outstretched hand. Eddie glares at him a moment.

EDDIE
 I got something for you, not that it matters anymore.

Eddie reaches into his back seat and picks up something, then flings it at Ben.

Ben catches the object: a G-STRING with "Ben" spelled out in sequins, just like Eddie's old thong. And just as hideous.

EDDIE
 Thought you should have your own. After all, you're your own man. Always were.

BEN
 Eddie --

Eddie hits the gas, zooming off into the night.

Ben watches him go. You can almost see his heart break.

INT. BEN AND RACHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ben trudges into the BEDROOM, new thong in hand, and heads for the closet. He opens his hidden compartment and stares at his thong collection. Beat.

Ben looks down at the G-string in his hand, then tosses it into the compartment. He moves to shut the secret door...

... and stops. He reaches in and pulls out the "Ben" thong.

He stares at it again, then looks at SVEN'S OLD BOW TIE lying in the compartment.

EXT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben's car SCREECHES to a stop in front of the club -- the marquee reads "TONIGHT ONLY! STRIPPAPALOOZA 30!"

A LINE OF WOMEN can be seen snaking out the entrance.

Ben tries to make his way past the wall of women.

BEN

Excuse me... Excuse me...

He tries to squeeze past a HUGE, BEEFY WOMAN who snarls:

BEEFY WOMAN

Hey, asshole, wait your turn in line!

She grabs his face, tossing him to the sidewalk.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben bursts into the club.

The place is packed with WOMEN SCREAMING as a RUGGEDLY HANDSOME DANCER prances across the stage.

At the lip of the stage, we see a TRIO OF FEMALE JUDGES taking notes.

The BLASTING MUSIC ENDS. The dancer finishes his routine and the judges hold up their scores: 5, 8, and 3.

The dancer bursts into tears and shuffles off the stage.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Ben make his way through the hallway, which is packed with MALE DANCERS chatting and flexing for one another.

Ben stops short as Chad struts into view ahead of him.

CHAD

You ready to get your ass kicked, chief?
You ready to get it on? You ready to --

BEN

Chad, come here a second.

Ben gestures toward a DOOR next to them.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - NIGHT

The door opens. Ben leads Chad inside the cramped space, then shuts the door behind him.

BEN

Okay, we're alone. You can drop the macho bullshit now.

CHAD

Shut up, Poindexter. I'm gonna --

BEN
-- kick my ass. Got it. But why?

CHAD
What do you mean, why?

BEN
I mean, is that all there is to Chad?
Dancing and being an asshole?

Chad thinks a moment, brow furrowed. Finally:

CHAD
Yes...?

BEN
I don't believe it. Where's the inner
Chad? The essential Chadness of Chad?

Beat. Chad stares at Ben, then sighs.

CHAD
Sometimes... Chad doesn't like himself.

BEN
Good. Now we're getting somewhere.

CHAD
Sometimes Chad wishes he wasn't a dancer.

BEN
Let it out, brother. Let it all out.

CHAD
I mean, sure -- I may be good-looking,
ripped and hung like a bear, but on the
inside I'm, like, crying and shit. My
soul is, you know...

BEN
Tormented?

CHAD
Totally, dude.

BEN
So what do you want really want to do?

CHAD
I... I always wanted to be a poet.

BEN
Man, you already are a poet. You just
don't know it.

CHAD

Wow... Are you a poet, too?

BEN

Not like you, Chad.

CHAD

But I can't read.

BEN

My point exactly. Now go home and forget this dancing stuff. Follow your heart, Chad. Follow your heart.

Chad begins to sniffle. He wipes tears from his eyes.

CHAD

Thank you, Biff. Can I have a hug?

BEN

Of course you can, big guy.

INT. RACHEL'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Rachel drives, Mrs. Matthews sits beside her. Mr. Matthews leans forward from the back seat, turning to Rachel.

MR. MATTHEWS

Please don't be mad at me, Sweetpea. I wanted to tell you the truth, but I didn't want to let you down.

RACHEL

So you lied to us and hoped for the best?

MR. MATTHEWS

Hey, it works for the Federal Government.

INT. THE MALE ROOM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Ben hurries over to the REGISTRATION TABLE, where a BORED WOMAN sits.

WOMAN

Name?

BEN

Ben Camelino.

The woman scans the registration book.

WOMAN

You got the last slot tonight, Disco Boy. Sign here.

Ben grabs a pen and goes to sign the book, then frowns.

BEN
This can't be right.

CUT TO:

THE SIDE OF THE STAGE

Eddie limbers up, dressed in an IMMACULATE WHITE LEISURE SUIT over a black shirt with a flared collar, Travolta-style.

Ben rushes over, still dressed in his street clothes.

BEN
Eddie, what are you doing?!

EDDIE
This is called stretching, Ben.

CALDWELL (O.S.)
Eddie, what are you doing?!

EDDIE
Is there an echo in here?

Ben and Eddie look over to see Caldwell approaching, gripping a MICROPHONE and a SHEET OF PAPER.

CALDWELL
You can't enter the contest. You haven't danced in 20 years.

EDDIE
Watch me.

Caldwell stares at him a moment, then finally shrugs. He raises the microphone to his mouth, reading:

CALDWELL
(into microphone)
And now, ladies, put your hands together for Old School Eddie!

BEN
Eddie, please don't do this...

Eddie turns to Ben.

EDDIE
You worry about yourself, kid. I gotta go to work.

Ben and Caldwell watch as Eddie heads for the stage. Caldwell checks his own pulse and shakes his head.

CALDWELL

I don't know who's gonna have the heart attack first -- him or me.

OUT ON THE STAGE

Eddie struts into the limelight. A VINTAGE DISCO TRACK BEGINS TO PLAY. Eddie sways his hips to the beat...

... THEN GRABS THE COLLAR OF HIS SUIT AND PULLS.

SHHHHHHHPPPP!!! It's a TEARAWAY JACKET AND SHIRT.

Eddie then RIPS OFF THE PANTS, leaving him dressed only in his shoes and his old "Eddie" G-string.

It's the first time we've ever seen him undressed, and he is absolutely ripped. Middle-aged Eddie has the physique of a 20-year-old bodybuilder.

BEN AND CALDWELL

stare in disbelief as SEVERAL DANCERS crowd behind them, trying to get a better view.

EDDIE

works the stage like he never left it. The crowd GOES CRAZY.

As the MUSIC reaches its climax, EDDIE LEAPS INTO THE AIR, PERFECTLY PERFORMING HIS PATENTED JUMP KICK. It's like 1977 all over again.

AT THE JUDGE'S TABLE

The three judges clap wildly. They hunch down, furiously scribbling with their Sharpie markers, then raise their score cards: 10, 10, 10.

Eddie takes a moment to bask in the AUDIENCE APPLAUSE. The blissful smile on his face says it all.

He finally takes a bow and trots off the stage.

Ben steps in front of him.

BEN

That was amazing, Eddie.

Eddie stares at Ben, then nods and brushes past him.

THE FRONT DOOR

Rachel enters the club and makes her way through the crowd, followed by Mrs. and Mr. Matthews, the latter of whom looks around in disbelief.

MR. MATTHEWS

Good God...

CALDWELL'S VOICE (FILTERED)

And now it's time for the Male Room
favorite... Disco Boy!

BACKSTAGE

As Ben moves toward the stage, Caldwell grabs his shoulder.

CALDWELL

What are you doing, kid? You're not
going out looking like that, are you?

Ben looks down at himself -- he's still dressed in his STREET CLOTHES. Ben looks up at Caldwell.

BEN

Sure I am.

Ben takes the microphone from Caldwell and heads onto

THE STAGE

Ben walks into the spotlight as MUSIC STARTS TO PLAY.

BEN

(into microphone)

Um, excuse me -- can you kill the music a
second? Just a second.

The MUSIC FADES AWAY.

BEN

My name is Ben. You know me as Disco
Boy. I usually wear a mask, but once I
take off my pants, I'm sure you'll
recognize my ass.

The CROWD CHEERS. Ben waves them into silence.

BEN

But I'm not Disco Boy. I never was.
That was just a fantasy, and I know you
ladies are here for that, but sometimes
reality is better.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT.)

Sometimes reality means that we don't get what we want, or do what we want, or get to be who we want to be, but that's okay. How we deal with that disappointment shows us who we really are. Does that make any sense?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Hell, no!

BEN

Thank you, ma'am. I guess I'm trying to say that at first I was doing it because I had to. I was doing it for someone I love. Someone I'd do anything for.

OUT IN THE CROWD

Rachel stares at Ben, her eyes brimming with tears.

BEN

I don't know if she loves me anymore, but I'm still here. I now know that this is who I am. This is what I do. I'm not ashamed, and I'm not going to hide anymore. But I'll always love her.

Ben nods to the D.J. The MUSIC CRANKS AGAIN.

Ben bursts into motion, dancing like he's never danced before, pulling out all the stops as he whips off articles of clothing until he's down to his "BEN" THONG.

The audience is loving every minute of it.

Ben slows down to a near-crawl, bobbing his head in time with the MUSIC. The audience begins to CLAP to the DANCE BEAT.

Ben closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath...

... then launches into a SPASTIC, RUBBER-LIMBED DANCE ROUTINE that simultaneously looks ridiculous and majestic.

Ben gallops around the dance floor, looking very Camel-like.

The AUDIENCE SHRIEKS ITS APPROVAL... including Rachel and Mrs. Matthews, who clap and whistle along with the women around them. Mr. Matthews just shakes his head.

AT THE JUDGE'S TABLE

The three judges raise their score cards: 10, 10, 10. Just like Eddie's score.

Ben takes a bow, then trots

OFFSTAGE

Eddie stands there, arms crossed and glaring at him.

Ben stops in front of him. Mentor and pupil stare at one another. Finally:

EDDIE
What was that last bit you did?

BEN
Something I've been working out on my own. I call it the Hump.

Eddie nods. Beat.

EDDIE
Good job, kid.

ON THE STAGE

One of the judges steps forward, microphone in hand.

JUDGE
For the first time ever in the history of Strippapalooza, we have a tie for first place. We the judges have decided that in order to crown the new Strippapalooza King, our two contestants -- Old School Eddie and Ben, the artist formerly known as Disco Boy -- will face each other man to man.... Get ready for a strip-off!

INT. THE MALE ROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Ben, still wearing his thong, stands at one side of the stage. Eddie stands on the other side, majestic in his own G-string.

The two men turn to glare at one another. A SONG BEGINS.

The two launch into action, thrashing to the beat. Sweat flies. Limbs flail. Hips sway. Crotches thrust.

The two are a study in contrasts: what Ben lacks in finesse, he makes up for in pure energy.

On the other hand, Eddie is smooth as silk... but showing his age. He struggles to catch his breath as he dances.

Ben glances at Eddie as the two continue through their respective routines.

For a second, their eyes lock.

Ben nods, then grins slightly.

He LEAPS INTO THE AIR, PERFORMING EDDIE'S JUMP KICK.

Ben whirls around in mid-air, drops toward the stage...

... AND KEELS OVER the second he hits the floorboards. Ben rolls onto his back and lies there.

The crowd GASPS.

Just then, one of the judges storms into the limelight.

JUDGE
(into microphone)
We have a winner -- Old School Eddie!

The AUDIENCE SCREAMS AND APPLAUDS.

Rachel begins to push her way through the crowd, trying to get to Ben as women rush the stage.

Caldwell hurries over to Ben.

CALDWELL
Kid, are you okay?

Ben watches as the other two judges walk out onto the stage, carrying a GIANT CHECK FOR \$40,000. They hand Eddie the check, then place a CROWN on his head as "Dancing Queen" by ABBA begins to PLAY.

Ben smiles.

BEN
I'm just fine.

Ben gets to his feet, brushes himself off...

... then sees Rachel waving to him from the lip of the stage, caught in the crush of women SCREAMING for Eddie.

Ben stares at her a moment, dumbfounded. Caldwell finally nudges him.

CALDWELL
Well are you gonna help her or am I?

Ben snaps out of it. He bends down, grabbing Rachel's hand and pulling her onto the stage.

BEN
Rachel? What are you doing here?!

RACHEL
You are absolutely insane, you know that?

BEN
I'm... I'm an artist.

RACHEL
Right, an absolutely insane artist.
(re: Eddie)
You let him win, didn't you?

Ben looks away. Rachel takes hold of his chin and leans in. They kiss.

At the SOUND of SNIFFLING, they look over to see Caldwell standing next to them, BLUBBERING like a baby.

CALDWELL
This is so goddamned moving... You got a tissue or something?

Rachel reaches into her purse and pulls out a Kleenex. She hands it to Caldwell, who loudly blows his nose.

As Ben and Rachel move to step off the stage --

EDDIE (O.S., FILTERED)
Not so fast, you two.

They turn to see Eddie standing on the other side of the stage, microphone in his hand and watching them.

EDDIE
(into microphone)
Come here a second.

Ben and Rachel glance at each other, then approach Eddie.

EDDIE
(into microphone)
I just want to say that young Ben here was trying to win this contest to pay for his wedding to that beautiful young lady beside him. I don't know about you, but I can't imagine a more romantic gesture.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
How 'bout a three karat engagement ring?!

EDDIE
 (into microphone)
 Aside from that. Ben, I admire the hell
 out of you. And that's why I'm giving
 you... this.

Eddie hands Ben the GIANT CHECK. The audience GASPS.

BEN
 Eddie, I can't --

EDDIE
 Shut up and take it. Consider it my
 wedding gift. Sure as hell beats a
 skillet or some shit like that, right?

Beat. Ben lunges at Eddie, wrapping him in a bear hug.

Ben lets go of Eddie and turns to the stunned Rachel.

BEN
 Did you hear that? We can have the
 wedding!

Rachel stares at him a moment, then leans forward and
 WHISPERS into his ear.

BEN
 You sure?

Rachel nods. Ben hands her the giant check. She turns to
 look down at

MR. AND MRS. MATTHEWS

who stand at the front of the stage, staring up at her.

Rachel holds out the check for her father.

RACHEL
 We want you to have this, Dad.

MR. MATTHEWS
 I... I can't.

Caldwell leans forward, sniffing.

CALDWELL
 I'll take it if he won't.

Rachel ignores him as she stares at her stunned father.

RACHEL
 Use it to pay off your debts.

MR. MATTHEWS

But your wedding... the rose garden...

RACHEL

Forget the rose garden. Forget the big wedding. The only reason I even said I wanted the big wedding was because you wanted it for me.

MR. MATTHEWS

But I only wanted it because I thought you wanted it. What about the wedding of your dreams?

RACHEL

Daddy, I'm going to marry Ben. That's the wedding of my dreams.

Scores of women -- including Rachel's mother -- BURST INTO TEARS all over again.

Mr. Matthews takes hold of the giant check.

MR. MATTHEWS

Thank you, Sweetpea.

(to Ben)

Ben, I... I can't talk to you looking like that.

Ben shrugs. He turns to Caldwell, whispering in his ear.

Caldwell listens a moment, then nods. He walks over to the edge of the stage and crouches down to Mr. Matthews' level.

CALDWELL

So, Mr. Matthews... Ben tells me that you're looking for a job.... Ever consider investing in a reasonably profitable adult entertainment venture?

Mr. Matthews thinks a moment, then glances at Mrs. Matthews, who breaks into a giant smile. He turns back to Caldwell.

MR. MATTHEWS

Oh... what the hell. Always did want to own my own business.

He passes Caldwell the giant check. Caldwell extends his hand, beaming. They shake.

CALDWELL

Welcome to the world of male exotic dancing, partner.

Ben turns to Rachel.

BEN

So what are we going to do now?

RACHEL

We'll figure something out... assuming you still want to get married, of course.

Eddie CLEARS HIS THROAT as he taps Ben on the shoulder. When Ben turns around, Eddie gestures to the ground.

Ben turns back to Rachel and drops to one knee, looking up at Rachel as Eddie sticks the microphone in his face.

BEN

Rachel, will you marry me, um... again?

Eddie swings the microphone toward Rachel. Beat.

RACHEL

Of course I will, you dope.

Mrs. Matthews and all the women in the club begin to SOB, passing packets of tissues to one another.

Caldwell WAILS, wiping his nose with the sleeve of his suit.

Ben springs to his feet and grabs Rachel. He leans forward. As their lips meet...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. THE MALE ROOM - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER - NIGHT

Ben kisses Rachel, only now HE'S WEARING A TUX (with Sven's bow tie) and SHE'S IN HER BRIDAL GOWN.

WIDER

The Male Room has been transformed into A GIANT INDOOR ROSE GARDEN. FLOWERS are everywhere, the club's tables are neatly arranged... but the disco ball continues to glitter overhead.

Ben and Rachel stare into each others' eyes as they dance, alone, to Bette Midler's "The Wind Beneath My Wings" while SEVERAL HUNDRED WEDDING GUESTS watch.

Ben's buddy Wayne is there, along with Caldwell... several Male Room dancers (tugging at their collars and looking confused when they don't give)... Mr. and Mrs. Matthews...

... and BEN'S MOTHER -- now in her mid-50s but still dressed for a night on the town.

She glances at Eddie standing beside her, watching Ben and Rachel. Eddie finally notices her staring. She smiles.

BEN'S MOTHER

Hello, sailor. I'm Janice, mother of the groom.

EDDIE

How do you do? I'm Eddie, surrogate father of the groom.

BEN'S MOTHER

And what do you do, Eddie?

EDDIE

I'm a jani -- I'm a male exotic dancer.

Ben's Mother looks him over, smiling even more broadly.

BEN'S MOTHER

Really...

ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Rachel is as clumsy as ever, but Ben doesn't care. He just smiles and holds his wife tight as she TRIPS over his feet.

RACHEL

You realize of course that I'm going to have to get a night job now, just to keep you company.

BEN

That's okay, maybe you can become a stripper, too. We'll be a husband and wife duo --

Rachel flails backward, almost taking Ben down with her.

Ben pulls her back upright.

BEN

Or maybe not...

D.J. (FILTERED)

All right, you new wavers, this one goes out to the studly groom...

Just then, THE CLASH'S "ROCK THE CASBAH" comes POUNDING OUT OF THE P.A. Wedding guests swarm onto the dance floor.

Ben whips Rachel across the floor. He looks over to see

EDDIE

hold out his hand for Ben's Mother, who smiles and takes it.

As Eddie leads Ben's Mother out onto the dance floor, he grins and winks at

BEN

who grins and nods back.

Rachel stops dancing and backs away.

Ben holds out his hand, still swaying his hips.

Rachel shakes her head, smiling.

The wedding guests clear the dance floor, forming a circle around Ben as he begins to bob harder and harder to the music. The guests CLAP in time with the music as Ben tenses up, then takes hold of his collar.

SHHHHHPPPPPPP!!! Ben rips away the tux, revealing his G-string, which we see has the words "JUST MARRIED" stenciled across the front pouch.

The place GOES NUTS as Ben whirls around the dance floor.

WAYNE

(shouting)

Hump! Hump! Hump!

Soon OTHER GUESTS CHANT for the Hump.

Ben obliges. The GUESTS APPLAUD WILDLY, holding out DOLLAR BILLS. Ben snatches them as he prances past.

He gallops past Mr. and Mrs. Matthews, who dangles a bill for Ben to grab. Mrs. Matthews smiles at her bemused husband.

MRS. MATTHEWS

Don't worry, you'll get used to it.

Meanwhile, Ben notices Rachel as she motions him over.

Ben saunters toward his wife, thrusting his pelvis at her.

Rachel's hand lashes out, grabbing Ben by the G-string. She stares at him solemnly...

... then smiles and tucks a TWENTY into his thong.

Ben pulls her close.

BEN

You ready to do the hump, Mrs. Camelino?
And I'm not talking about the dance.

RACHEL

Ready when you are, Mr. Camelino.

They kiss.

FADE OUT.

THE END