

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A man walks the brightly lit hall. Emergency room. Crash carts and people in various stages of dying and pain stacked in the rooms, alcoves, niches around the place.

DETECTIVE WALDO DONDERFELD is past 50, closer to retirement than promotion. A heavy man, he carries the weight of his past on his shoulders.

He stops at a nurses station. Asks for something. A nurse points him down a different hall.

He goes. A young ASIAN DOCTOR meets him. And a Uniformed Cop.

DONDERFELD

I'm Detective Donderfeld.

The Asian Doctor moves down the hall. The Uniformed Cop and Donderfeld follow.

ASIAN DOCTOR

His name is Ellis Proctor. Twenty eight male Caucasian, shot once in the head.

DONDERFELD

He asked for me by name? I've never heard of him.

UNIFORMED COP

Witnesses say a car pulled up. Proctor walked to the car, leaned down into the passenger window and was shot in the face.

ASIAN DOCTOR

(quieter)

Half his head was blown away. Look, there's little likelihood he's going to survive.

(they stop at the curtain to the E.R. room)

He said he wanted to confess. I thought he meant a priest. He told us to get you.

DONDERFELD

By name.

The Asian Doctor nods.

INT. HOSPITAL; E.R. TREATMENT ROOM - NIGHT

The Asian Doctor pulls back the curtain and walks in.
Donderfeld looks at Proctor, laying on the bed.

Face bandaged. Nose and mouth visible-- the rest is covered. And it's bloody. Tubes and wires in everything. This is a dying man.

Proctor fights for breath. Donderfeld walks forward.

DONDERFELD

Ellis Proctor?

The dying man turns his head. Tries to lift a hand.
Donderfeld steps in closer. Touches the hand. PROCTOR
SNAGS IT-- TIGHT GRIP-- DEATH GRIP.

PROCTOR

Donderfeld?

DONDERFELD

Who shot you?

PROCTOR

Stupid...
(then)
I'm sorry.

DONDERFELD

(leans in)
Who shot you, Proctor?

PROCTOR

(whispers)
John--- Saunders--

Donderfeld-- rocked-- snaps a look.

DONDERFELD

That's impossible.

Proctor laughs-- chuckles-- chokes. Blood spatters from his lips.

PROCTOR

She-- killed me--

DONDERFELD

Who? Proctor, who?

PROCTOR

I'm sorry-- George-- Waine--
I'm sor--

Air gasps from his lips. The monitors pop into ALARM MODE-- the Asian Doctor moves forward. Barks commands.

Donderfeld steps back. Proctor holds his hand in a death grip gone COLD-- and the detective has to pry the fingers loose.

Two nurses with a crash cart push in. Donderfeld turns and walks off. Behind him, they fail to raise the dead.

VERY SLOW FADE OUT:

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - DAY

Drab bureaucratic green. A guard escorts JOHN SAUNDERS-- 35+-- toward a single door on the left. John is chained and restrained.

They stop at the door. The guard opens it. Saunders enters first and--

INT. PRISON INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

-- stops just inside the door. He looks at the table. Surprise clouds his face.

Donderfeld sits there. Waiting.

SAUNDERS

Detective Waldo Donderfeld--
(laughs)
-- bet you thought I forgot.

DONDERFELD

I have a name people never
forget, John. Come on in.

No hand shakes. The guard walks Saunders to the other side of the steel table and locks him down.

SAUNDERS

I'm surprised to see you. Unless
you came to gloat, of course.
It's our anniversary, you and
me.

Donderfeld waits as the guard steps back to a wooden chair by the door and sits.

DONDERFELD

It has been a year, hasn't it?
Since I put you away.

SAUNDERS

Can we hurry this up? It goes bad in a place like this. When the cops call. Everyone here thinks I'm ratting them out for a pack of smokes. Got a cigarette?

Donderfeld digs out his pack.

DONDERFELD

When did you start?

SAUNDERS

When I quit worrying about my health.

Donderfeld takes one. Slides over the half pack. Produces a lighter.

SAUNDERS

You came all the way to see me to share your smokes?

Donderfeld lights up John's cigarette. Then his own.

DONDERFELD

Well, like you said. It's our anniversary.

SAUNDERS

Why don't you order pizza and some beer?

Donderfeld considers his next words carefully.

DONDERFELD

I want to hear the story.

SAUNDERS

I told you the story. Back when you arrested me. Didn't you write it down?

(bitter laugh)

I mean, I don't know if you noticed or not, but you fucking won, Waldo. I'm in prison for the rest of my FUCKING LIFE!

Saunders spits out the cigarette, tries to stand. The Guard starts up from the chair by the door. Donderfeld holds up a hand-- stops him.

SAUNDERS

YOU WANT THE STORY?

(MORE)

SAUNDERS (CONT'D)
I DIDN'T KILL THE GUY! I NEVER
EVEN MET THE SON OF A BITCH!

Donderfeld picks up Saunders cigarette. Holds it out for him to retrieve. Settled, somewhat, Saunders takes it back.

SAUNDERS
Come on, man. What else is there?

Saunders smokes. Donderfeld just waits.

SAUNDERS
I told you every thing and you
didn't believe a word of it.

DONDERFELD
We had a murder weapon with
your prints on it, you were
covered in the dead man's blood.
Your story was just so much
bullshit.

SAUNDERS
So you came to hear it again?
You had other evidence. You
ignored it because it hurt your
case.

He stubs the cigarette out in the palm of his hand--
violent-- angry-- smears the ash and black across the
knee of his prison issue clothes.

SAUNDERS
You wanna hear it? I got fixed,
I got framed, I got fucked. End
of story.
(turns to the guard)
Can I go back to my cell now?

The guard stands. Rattles his keys.

DONDERFELD
You've had a year to put it all
together.

The guard steps in close but waits.

DONDERFELD
Not the screaming version, not
the shouting version, not the
trial or the newspapers. From
the top, from the beginning,
leave out nothing.

Saunders looks at him.

SAUNDERS
I didn't kill him.

DONDERFELD
You were there.

SAUNDERS
Not to kill anyone! It was about
the money. It was only about
the money!

DONDERFELD
Tell me. From day one. John--
tell me.

And so John does...

EXT. THE CITY - DAY

Intercut VARIOUS cuts and angles:

A beat up mid-size blue Chevy heads for town. Saunders,
sloppy suit, drives to the office. The "office" is a rabbit
warren of lawyers on the edge of the courthouse district:
"PRATT LEGAL SERVICES".

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
God-- it was so long ago. A
lifetime ago.
(then)
Money was tight. I'd shut my
office, subbed out to a bunch
of ticket-fixers downtown.
Whenever they needed a cheating
wife or an un-zipped husband
followed, they were gracious
enough to give me the work.

EXT. WAINE MANSION - DAY

Saunders drives up to the gate and stops. He presses the
button, the gate opens.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
One day, I got this message-- a
phone number.

The drive beckons-- leads to a house barely visible on
the other side.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
I called and talked with a woman
who wanted to discuss her
troubles in person.

As Saunders drives, the house comes into view-- and what
a view it is:

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
So I went out to her place.
(sarcastic)
Some place.

EXT. WAINE MANSION; GARAGE - DAY

Saunders drives around the side, the garage area. He gets
out, looks around. A pathway leads to the back. He goes.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
I should'a smelt the bullshit--
right from the get go-- but all
I could smell that first time
was money. And I needed some.
Fast.

EXT. WAINE MANSION; SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Aqua marine blue, crystal clear; water bubbles from a
fake rock waterfall. The large backyard, landscaped, fenced
and private, heavy with green grass. A thick rose garden
lays along one high banked stone wall

An uncomfortable woman sits in a large lounge chair under
a wide umbrella. Several serving trays of food smolder in
the shade. A liquor cart trembles under the weight of
expensive booze.

CLAIRE WAINE, 50+, wrapped in a thick robe, watches as
Saunders approaches.

CLAIRE
Mr. Saunders?

SAUNDERS
Yes, ma'am.

She leans up, stretches her hand. He takes it-- a dead
fish. He sees himself in the reflection of her sunglasses.
He tries to ignore the cheap wig balanced on her head.

CLAIRE
I'm Claire Waine.

SAUNDERS
Nice to meet you.

CLAIRE

Serve yourself, won't you?

He regards the trays--

CLAIRE

I did invite you to lunch.
Please, I'll do most of the
talking, you'll do most of the
listening-- you might as well
eat while I lay out the caper.

SAUNDERS

Lay out the caper?

CLAIRE

My attempt at humor. I'm sorry.
It won't happen again.

He builds himself a sandwich-- plucks pickles and olives.

He spots her as she taps a small pill from an orange
prescription bottle. She sips tea. She shudders, tugs the
robe up closer.

SAUNDERS

I don't mean to be rude, Mrs.
Waine, but are you alright?

CLAIRE

Chemotherapy has its price.

He turns back to his sandwich-- hides his revulsion.

SAUNDERS

Sorry.

CLAIRE

Don't be--
(then, quickly)
Do you know the name of Waine,
Mr. Saunders?

SAUNDERS

W-A-I-N-E. I've seen it in the
papers a few hundred times.

CLAIRE

My husband was a public man,
did a lot for this city. He
died two years ago. He provided
for us quite nicely.

Saunders moves to a chair opposite her.

SAUNDERS

Us?

She reaches into the lounge bag by the chair. Pulls up a couple of photographs.

CLAIRE

My son, George, he's now twenty-six.

Saunders looks at the pictures, then at her-- *no way she's that old--*

SAUNDERS

You have a twenty-six year old son?

CLAIRE

Step son. I was Samuel Waine's second wife.

Saunders looks at--

THE PICTURES

GEORGE WAINE, a thin, wispy kid; the girl with him, NANCY STOVALL-- beautiful, in her twenties. They stand by this very pool. Nancy looks great. George looks grubby.

BACK TO SAUNDERS AND CLAIRE

SAUNDERS

Who's the girl?

CLAIRE

Nancy Stovall.

He hands the picture back: she ignores him.

CLAIRE

Keep them. They're yours.

SAUNDERS

Mine?

CLAIRE

She's the root of my problem, Mr. Saunders. George brought her home about six months ago. I think he plans to keep her.

She leans back-- and a shudder of pain ripples through her.

SAUNDERS

Are you sure you're alright?

CLAIRE

It passes--

(beat)

As you may well guess, time has real value to me. May I be blunt?

SAUNDERS

Float your boat.

CLAIRE

I think this girl is fucking my son because she expects to be paid for it, in the short term.

(beat)

I want to know everything there is to know about her.

SAUNDERS

What do you mean, in the short term?

CLAIRE

I expect to be dead in less than four months--

Saunders loses his appetite. He stands, moves to the liquor cart: looks back at her for approval.

CLAIRE

Help yourself-- please.

SAUNDERS

I'm sorry to hear that.

CLAIRE

The money passes to George at that time. If he marries this-- girl-- she'll get some of it-- when she's had enough of him.

SAUNDERS

(fixes a drink)

I don't mean to sound like a smart ass, and I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer, Mrs. Waine-- but experience has taught me that people like you-- well provided for-- have all sorts of lawyers who can solve these problems for you.

CLAIRE

One of those lawyers gave me your name. Besides, the idea is to prevent him from marrying the little tramp. Even with a pre-nup, or some form of contractual restriction, I'll still be dead in four months.

(disgusted)

George is such a little boy, he thinks love is forever.

She digs into the lounge bag, comes up with a manila envelope.

CLAIRE

This is everything I know. It isn't much. But it's a place to start.

SAUNDERS

(takes the papers)

What if I don't find anything?

CLAIRE

(lifts the lounge bag to her lap)

Ah, your fee...

SAUNDERS

(ticked)

What I meant was, what if she turns out to be a saint?

CLAIRE

She won't. Do you believe in woman's intuition?

SAUNDERS

Sure, like any coin toss. Fifty fifty.

CLAIRE

I believe in what I can see, touch, put hands on. And what I see, Mr. Saunders, is me-- fifteen years ago. As I said, I was Samuel's second wife. And I knew exactly how to become that second wife, and stay that second wife until he died. And so, when I see it in another woman-- I know exactly what I am talking about.

SAUNDERS

That's not intuition, Mrs. Waine.

CLAIRE

No, sir, it's not.

Claire digs, pulls up a rubber banded half inch of twenties.

CLAIRE

Will five thousand dollars be enough to get you started?

She hands it over--

CLAIRE

And no receipts please. It works better in matters of this nature.

(off his startled look)

The trouble changes, Mr. Saunders, but the procedure is straight forward. My number is on that envelope. When you have something to say, call me.

SAUNDERS

You're a very trusting person, Mrs. Waine.

CLAIRE

No I'm not. But you know there's more money beyond this, if you find something. So go find something.

Sudden pain taps her on the shoulder and she leans back.

Saunders steps back, watches her control her pain. He then turns, suddenly embarrassed. Eager to bolt.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)

She was right. I pegged her for a desperate woman, with the clock ticking and her little boy to protect from some evil female predator. That meant more money down the line.

EXT. SAUNDERS SHABBY APARTMENT - NIGHT

He steps out and heads for his car, carrying a small dark colored duffel bag.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)

I went back to my place to get
some gear and stake out the
girl's apartment. Big mistake.

RICHIE Z, a very black bookie, and his two very white
THUGS-- suddenly appear from the shadows.

RICHIE

Johnny Saunders--

Saunders backs off-- bumps into the thugs. One grabs the
duffel.

SAUNDERS

Richie, I was coming to see
you.

The other thug frisks Saunders--

RICHIE

Sure you were. I believe you.
We're pals, you and me, and you
wouldn't screw a pal.

SAUNDERS

Man, I'm good for the--

The thug finds the envelope and throws it to Richie.

RICHIE

You been avoiding me. And I
have issues with people who
avoid me, you understand?

Richie digs in the envelope--

SAUNDERS

I got three g's for ya-- right
there.

Richie grabs the whole wad--

RICHIE

Hey, you can't count, brother.
You got five for me.

SAUNDERS

I need some walking around money.

RICHIE

If I leave some of this behind,
I'd have to break your leg, so
you wouldn't be doing no walking
around-- if you see my conundrum.

Richie pockets the cash, hands the envelope back to Saunders.

SAUNDERS

Aw, Richie, come on.

RICHIE

You owe me six-- now you owe me one.

SAUNDERS

I can get it all, I just need a few--

RICHIE

You dance the jig, you pay the nig, you knew that when you came to me the first time, right?
(silence)

Let me hear you say it, Johnny--

SAUNDERS

Yeah, I knew that.

Richie Z laughs and walks off-- and his thugs smack him playfully as they pass him to leave.

INT. PRISON INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

DONDERFELD

Gambling?

SAUNDERS

Among other things.

DONDERFELD

Why didn't you bring this up at the trial?

SAUNDERS

You mean ask my bookie to stand up for me and be an alibi? You're kidding, right?

(beat)

Anyway...

EXT. FANCY APARTMENT CONDOS - NIGHT

Saunders sits in his car, up the block, watching the condos.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)

Flat busted again, and running a hide and seek off my squeaky
(MORE)

SAUNDERS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
credit cards did not appeal to
me. But what else could I do?

A car comes down the street. A new white BMW, convertible,
top down. Nancy slows, the garage door cranes open, lights
come on, she pulls in and stops.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
So I started gathering the four
one one on Nancy Stoval. Five-
ten. One fifteen, one twenty.
Dark hair. Nice car, nice clothes--

Saunders watches as she stretches from the car, long legs,
soft clothes. The garage door comes down.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
Looked good in them, too.

Lights come on. He comes up with binoculars. Watches as
she moves through the patio leading to the kitchen.

He watches as she punches up her messages on the phone
machine. Moves to the refrigerator. Pulls out a bottle of
water.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
She drank bottled water--

He watches as she moves out of sight. He swings the glasses
around, looks for her. Finds her in the next window.

She walks in. Bedroom. Walks past-- strips off her blouse--
closes the curtains.

SAUNDERS
And looked good half naked.

Saunders lowers the glasses. Stretches out in the seat.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
It was early, it was Tuesday,
as I remember, I had no place
else to go. I decided to hang,
see if anything would happen.
(beat)
Took about an hour--

EXT. FANCY APARTMENT CONDOS - NIGHT

The garage door opens.

Saunders snaps awake-- slouches low in the seat.