

THE BLACK CLOUD

"Pilot"

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COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

EXT. PONCE DE LEON FEDERAL BANK - NEW YORK - DAY

High-intensity action MUSIC begins as we PUSH TOWARDS the front of the building. A power line looms above the bank; a transformer gives off a SPARK.

INT. PONCE DE LEON FEDERAL BANK - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON a ticking wristwatch as it counts down. Suddenly it stops. A finger taps the watch face as we WIDEN to reveal JULIO, a nervous, sweating bank robber.

JULIO

My watch just died.

Hearing a commotion from outside, he yanks back the blinds and peers out the bank window to see a whole slew of COP CARS and SWAT VANS.

JULIO (CONT'D)

(shouting off)

Orelay! We gotta move. Now!

PABLO -- scary, bulging muscles, prison tats -- thrusts an Uzi at three TERRIFIED HOSTAGES.

PABLO

Do exactly like I say or I'll blow
your f--

(KABLAM!)

--ing heads off!

The hostages flinch as a SOLID METAL VAULT DOOR, recently blown off its hinges, spins across the marble lobby floor like a demented toy top.

Two more bank robbers, TOMAS and ERNESTO, heave bulging canvas sacks out of the wreckage that was the vault.

JULIO

Okay, let's do it!

Julio hoists a GRENADE LAUNCHER to his shoulder and pulls the trigger -- WHOOSH!

EXT. PONCE DE LEON FEDERAL BANK -- CONTINUOUS

BRAVE COPS dive for cover as the shot finds it's mark -- KABOOM! The SWAT VAN explodes in a massive fireball.

Using the hostages as human shields, the bank robbers dash from the building with weapons blazing. The grenades and the high-caliber bullets are just the beginning ...

Ernesto wields a FLAME THROWER, holding back the cops as his cohorts toss the sacks of loot into the GET-AWAY VEHICLE.

Seriously outgunned, cops cower behind their squad cars as their vehicles are cut to ribbons by the fusillade of bullets.

Amidst all this chaos, an unmarked SUV careens into the parking lot and skids to a halt. We BOOM up to meet FBI SPECIAL AGENT ROBERT RYAN as he emerges from the car. Calm, cool and probably well-hung, this is a man's man. And, yes, he always works alone.

Robert speaks into an earpiece as he gathers his weapon and enters the fray.

ROBERT
(into earpiece)
-- Negative, they've got them pinned
down here.

O.C. We hear the whooshing sound of the flamethrower.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
What? I can't hear you over the flame
thrower! ... That's right, one of them
has a flame thrower!

Bullets hit the smoldering cop car in front of him -- thwock, thwock, thwock. He dives, hitting the asphalt with a perfect roll, and returns a few rounds with his 9mm.

Glancing sideways, Robert makes eye contact with a wounded AFRICAN AMERICAN NYPD OFFICER pinned down nearby. Robert scrambles over to him, and ties a tourniquet around his arm.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Robert Ryan, FBI.

NYPD OFFICER
(wincing with pain)
Lt. Holland.

ROBERT
Fill me in.

NYPD OFFICER
Alarm sounded 17 minutes ago. Four
perps. Heavily armed. They're
demanding a plane, and safe passage to
Mexico. And there's something else ...

The Cop passes Robert a pair of BINOCULARS.

NYPD OFFICER (CONT'D)
The cafe next to the bank.

ROBERT'S POV -- THROUGH BINOCULARS

Scanning the cafe, he lands on a COFFEE CUP as it spills onto a table. Pulling back and focusing, we land on a LONE FIGURE sitting by the window, oblivious to the mayhem unfolding next door.

Meet BERNIE BROWN, a mild-mannered man with an air of melancholy about him. He fiddles with the volume control on the large NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES that cover his ears.

BACK ON ROBERT

He lowers the binoculars, confused. Behind him, more cop cars are riddled with bullets.

ROBERT

You think he's got something to do with this?

NYPD OFFICER

He's just been sitting there relaxing, like he's at a James Taylor concert.

ROBERT

(incredulous)

You ever been to a James Taylor concert?

NYPD OFFICER

What. You're saying just because I'm black I can't go to a James Taylor concert?

ROBERT

I'm not saying that you can't. I'm just saying ... why would you?

Robert adjusts his binoculars and takes another look.

Headphones firmly in place, BERNIE downs his coffee and drops a modest tip on the table, then nods sheepishly to the COFFEE SHOP CLERK lying on the floor crying hysterically. Bernie pushes out through the door and into the street where the battle rages.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What the hell is he doing!?

Bernie skirts the edge of the deadly skirmish like it's a pile of dog shit that he doesn't want to step in, not the hell fire it really is, and digs into a bag for something that he pops into his mouth, chewing furiously.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What's in that bag?

Bewildered, Robert passes the binoculars back. The cop takes look.

NYPD OFFICER

I think it's a Cheese Danish.

ROBERT

Cheese Danish?

NYPD OFFICER

Yeah. You know. A pastry with a sweet, soft cheese filling. Despite the name, their actually quite delicious.

Robert shoots him a look. A bullet hits the door, ending the conversation.

ANGLE ON THE FOUR BANK ROBBERS

Each of them clutches a shrieking, terrified hostage in one hand and a weapon of mass destruction in the other -- the flamethrower blurting out plumes of fiery death, the grenade launcher pumping out one whoosh after another, the Uzi thwack-thwack-thwacking ...

Bernie trundles right through the action, snapping down his Danish with astonishing alacrity. Flummoxed, the bank robbers stop firing as they stare him down.

Suddenly, it becomes eerily quiet and tense. The ensuing silence is shattered by the CAWING OF A CROW from above.

ANGLE ON THE TELEPHONE POLE

The CROW lands on the high-voltage line.

BACK ON THE GROUND

We hear a loud POP. Everyone looks up. A beat later, the singed crow plops onto the asphalt -- dead. The robbers exchange wary glances.

ERNESTO

(sotto to his cohorts)

El Malocchio!

Bernie shrugs self-consciously and holds out his paper bag, a peace offering of sorts.

BERNIE

Danish? It's delicious.

In the BG, the police officers beckon wildly for Bernie to run to safety.

COPS

Hey, buddy! Over here! Get out of there!

Scowling, Ernesto points his flame thrower at Bernie, but before he can pull the trigger ...

UP ON THE TELEPHONE POLE

The transformer EXPLODES in a shower of sparks! The high-voltage line SNAPS ...

Crackling with energy, the line snakes through the air, missing Bernie by inches, and connecting with Ernesto, who is blown backwards OUT OF FRAME. A fireball ERUPTS from his flamethrower's tank.

Robert takes the opportunity to take out Pablo, the guy with the Uzi. Lt. Holland drops Tomas with one shot.

Robert moves in, pointing his gun at Julio, who drops his weapon and raises his hands.

As the cops secure the area and hustle the hostages to safety, Bernie hurries to his car, an old yellow VOLVO with duck tape holding up the bumper and a SMILEY FACE sticker affixed to his rear window.

Robert slaps the cuffs on Julio, then turns to watch Bernie shift into gear and pull away, memorizing the license plate as the Volvo chugs off.

ROBERT

Got you.

ACT ONEINT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

A SURVEILLANCE PHOTO of Bernie is tossed onto the metal table. We TILT up to reveal Julio, a defiant smirk plastered across his face.

ROBERT

Who is he?

JULIO

I don't know, homie...your accountant?

ROBERT

Oh, so you're not going to cooperate?

JULIO

Yo, I robbed that bank, man. I'm guilty! You got me. But I don't know the dude.

ROBERT

Julio. You're a Mexican citizen with known ties to the Juarez Cartel caught robbing a bank in New York City. You don't have a lot of options here.

Julio scowls, tight-lipped.

ROBERT

Let me be clear. I don't give a rats ass about the bank. I know it's owned by a rival cartel and you guys are just working out some kinda beef. What I do care about is the American Ambassador your boss kidnapped last week.

Robert slaps another photo of a distinguished looking DIPLOMAT on the desk.

JULIO

I ain't telling you a damn thing about nothing! Whatever you think you can do to me, they'll do me worse.

Robert rolls up his sleeves.

ROBERT

Usually this is the part where I call in my partner and he plays the role of the "bad cop."

Robert walks behind Julio.

JULIO

Sounds kinky.

ROBERT

Unfortunately for you, I don't have a partner.

SLAM! Robert smashes Julio's face down onto the metal table. Julio shrieks in pain, blood gushing from his nose all over Bernie's photo.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Admit it. The gringo at the bank is your inside man!

JULIO

Ahhh! Cabron! I told you, ese, he was some dude who just wandered through.

ROBERT

So you got nothing for me on this guy?

JULIO

All I can tell you is that he gave Ernesto the Malocchio.

ROBERT

The Malocchio?

JULIO

The Evil Eye, man!

Robert stares Julio down, then snatches the bloody photo of Bernie from off the desk and exits frame.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Robert talks with FRED MURPHY, another FED.

ROBERT

He's telling the truth. He doesn't know him, and he's not saying squat about the Ambassador.

(beat)

Nice tie by the way.

MURPHY

Thanks. My fiancée bought it for me. We have a *really* strong relationship. Did I mention that she went to Harvard?

ROBERT

Repeatedly.

Embarrassed, Murphy goes back to business.

MURPHY

I told you, Ryan. The guy's a non-lead. We got the perps. Let it go. The DEA can sort it out. Let's just focus on the kidnapping. *That's* our jurisdiction.

Robert gives his colleague his best smoldering stare.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Oh, right. I forgot. You don't let things go. By the way, love the intense smoldering stare. Must work great in gay bars.

Murphy smiles. Robert doesn't.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Yeah, I figured that. So, I ran the plate on your guy's Volvo. Name's Bernie Brown. No sheet, no priors. No nothing. Guy's cleaner than a nun baptized in Purell.

Robert's stare is unflinching. Murphy removes a PIECE OF PAPER from his coat pocket.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Hmm. Is that an address? I think that is. Oh, and wait...

Murphy produces ANOTHER PIECE OF PAPER.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

A search warrant? Wow. Where did that come from?

Robert snatches the papers from Murphy's hand.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

There's nothing to this schmo. He's a citizen.

ROBERT

Great. So I won't need backup.

Robert slings his coat over his shoulder and exits FRAME.

MURPHY

(calling after him)

You're welcome! I'll tell the fellas down at The White Swallow you'll be smoldering in late tonight!

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A steep driveway leads up to a CABIN off in the distance. Robert parks his SUV at the bottom of the hill, watching TWO MEN unload supplies from a GROCERY.COM TRUCK into a large shed.

ROBERT

Excuse me. You guys know Bernie Brown?

The delivery guy drops a sack of potatoes into the shed and turns.

DELIVERY MAN 1

Why, you a relative or something?

Robert flashes his badge.

ROBERT

Yeah, I'm his Uncle Sam.

(sizes the men up)

Why are you putting the groceries here? Why don't you go up to the cabin?

The delivery guys exchange wary glances. Robert notices.

DELIVERY MAN 2

Yeah, that. There've been some ... incidents.

This piques Robert's curiosity.

ROBERT

Incidents? Has he threatened you?

The delivery guys laugh.

DELIVERY MAN 1

Bernie? Nah. He's a teddy bear.

DELIVERY MAN 2

Look. Bernie's a good guy. Wouldn't hurt a fly. But if I were you, I'd keep your distance.

ROBERT

Yeah? And why's that?

DELIVERY MAN 2

Flys ... seem to get hurt around him.

EXT. ISOLATED CABIN - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Gun drawn, Robert slips around the side of the cabin. Back against the wall, he glances in the window. Living room's empty.

Robert steps onto the porch, pushing through a bouquet of WIND CHIMES as if he were hiking through brush, and raps his knuckles lightly on the front door, testing its density. Just as he's about to kick it in, a thought occurs to him:

He turns the doorknob and the door opens. It's unlocked.

INT. ISOLATED CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Robert steps into what can only be described as a den of tranquility. A stereo fills the room with the sounds of a burbling stream. Crystals adorn most of the flat spaces. A stick of incense smolders in its holder.

Robert scans Bernie's bookshelf, filled with titles like "The Calm Before The Storm," "Keep It Cool!," and "Transcendentalism for Dummyz."

Over Robert's shoulder, we see through a large, sliding glass window to the wooden deck beyond, where Bernie has been practicing Tai Chi NAKED for the entire scene. Neither man is aware of the other.

Robert glances up at a GIANT DREAM CATCHER, constructed from planks of wood and thick rope, hanging from the ceiling. It's a little much.

Finally, Robert turns to see Bernie on the deck, and dives for cover behind the couch!

EXT. BACK DECK -- MOMENTS LATER

Bernie, wearing his noise cancelling headphones, is in the middle of a slow, awkward Tai Chi routine and utterly oblivious to the world around him.

BERNIE
(repeating back instructions)
Wave hands to the clouds, carry ball
to the shoulder --

Bernie raises his cupped hands to his right shoulder, which brings his cheek in contact with the muzzle of Robert's gun. Startled, Bernie gasps with fear as he steps back to consider Robert, who calmly indicates for Bernie to remove his headphones. Bernie complies.

ROBERT
I liked it better when you were waving
your hands to the clouds. Put 'em
behind your head.

Again Bernie does as he's told. We HEAR the sounds of deck boards creaking portentously.

UNDER THE DECK - CONTINUOUS

A few SCREWS holding the deck together slip from the rotted wood and drop into the abyss below.

BACK ON THE DECK - CONTINUOUS

Bernie glances down at Robert's feet. Robert glances down at Bernie's business area.

ROBERT
(smirking)
Guess you're more of a grower, not a --

CRACK! The deck boards beneath Robert's feet give way, sending him plunging OUT OF FRAME ...

EXT. HILLSIDE -- CONTINUOUS

Robert free-falls amidst a cascade of rotted deck wood. He hits the ground with a violent thud, then proceeds to tumble head over heels down the rocky ravine.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Robert's SUV is parked where he left it. Birds chirp. It's quite peaceful. Suddenly, Robert TUMBLES INTO FRAME, landing WHOMP! -- directly onto the roof of his SUV.

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. BERNIE'S CABIN - SOMETIME LATER

Robert opens his eyes. Bernie leans over him with a cup of something hot.

BERNIE
I made a pot of Chamomile tea. Would you like some?

Robert sits up, winces in pain.

ROBERT
What happened to me?

BERNIE
You fell through my deck. I guess I have termites. You're here because of that bank robbery, aren't you?

Robert reaches for his gun. Not there.

ROBERT
Where's my weapon?

BERNIE

It's next to the Vishnu.

ROBERT

Vishnu?

BERNIE

The Hindu god of peace.

Bernie nods to a makeshift altar. Robert staggers over to the table, rubbing his head.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

But you shouldn't be here. It's not safe.

Robert ignores him as he snatches up his gun and examines it. The clip is missing.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

I threw the bullet holder thing-y into the woods. Sorry, guns make me nervous. I'd really like you to leave now. I'm not feeling very copacetic.

Robert checks the chamber and points the gun at Bernie.

ROBERT

You forgot to check the "bullet holder thingy" called the chamber. Any weapons in the house?

BERNIE

No. I just told you, I don't like guns. Please, you have to understand. You're not safe here with me.

Robert glances out the window cautiously.

ROBERT

Why? You got some friends hiding out there in the woods?

BERNIE

Friends? No. I don't have any friends. Or associates ... or cohorts, or anyone for that matter. You're welcome to ask around if you don't believe me.

ROBERT

This is what I know. Earlier this morning two men died, and one is in custody. And you just happened to be in the middle of all of it. So my question to you is: Were you involved?

BERNIE

No.
 (beat)
Yes.
 (beat)
Not the way you think.

Robert is confused.

ROBERT

I'm listening.

BERNIE

Look, Mr. Ryan, sir? It's complicated.
Could we talk about this over e-mail
or something when you get back to your
office?

ROBERT

Are you mocking me?
 (beat)
And how do you know my name?

BERNIE

I went through your wallet while you
were unconscious.

Bernie hands Robert his wallet and watches anxiously as he
examines its contents.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

I didn't take anything. And for the
record, I would never mock a member
of the law enforcement community. I
just *really* wish you weren't here
right now --

BLAM! Robert's gun discharges. The bullet ricochets
throughout the room, severing the cord holding the dream
catcher. Bernie lunges at Robert, knocking him out of the way
just as dream catcher crashes to the floor. Recovering,
Bernie and Robert survey the wreckage.

ROBERT

My finger wasn't even on the
trigger...

BERNIE

I wouldn't blame myself if I were you.

ROBERT

Really? Who would you blame? If you
were me.

Bernie hesitates for a second.

BERNIE

Just don't beat yourself up over it.

EXT. CABIN IN THE WOODS -- MOMENTS LATER

Robert marches Bernie from the house, headphones awkwardly wrapped around his neck and connected to a WALKMAN clipped to his belt.

BERNIE

Are you a Taurus? I only ask because they're notoriously confrontational.

ROBERT

I gave you your Walkman. Now shut up.

BERNIE

I bet you are. When were you born?

Robert stops short, and stares Bernie down.

ROBERT

You can't get inside my head. I'm not falling for your act. Got that, "Malocchio?" I. Don't. Scare.

BERNIE

Malocchio?

ROBERT

The Evil Eye. Your associate Julio told me all about it.

Bernie is confused. Robert pushes him forward.

BERNIE

Listen, aside from the whole pointing-the-gun-in-my-face-and-dragging-me-out-of-the-house thing, you seem like a stand-up guy. I'd hate to see you get hurt again.

ROBERT

(dripping with sarcasm)
I appreciate your concern.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Bernie begins to panic as they approach Robert's smashed car.

BERNIE

Wait! Okay, stop. I'll tell you everything.

Robert stops, giving Bernie a chance to spill it.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

I have this ... condition.

ROBERT

Condition?

BERNIE

Terrible things happen to people around me. That's why that bank was robbed and all those people got hurt today. I *knew* I shouldn't have stopped for that Ice Blended Mocha!

ROBERT

What the hell are you talking about?

Bernie motions back to his cabin.

BERNIE

That's way I live here. Like this. Alone. I'll tell you what, here's what I think. Just uncuff me, let me go back to my cabin, and no one has to know. I won't tell on you. I promise.

ROBERT

Wow. That's a relief. And thanks for sharing. Really.

BERNIE

You're welcome?

ROBERT

Now, I'm gonna be honest with you. We're gonna get in my car, you're going to keep your paranoid schizophrenic mouth shut, and I'm taking you in for questioning. Because when I have people in handcuffs who refuse to cooperate, sometimes, terrible things happen to them, too. Are we copacetic now?

Bernie resigns himself to his fate.

BERNIE

Not really. But could you at least put my headphones on? I get nervous when other people drive.

Robert drops the headphones over Bernie's ears and presses the play button on the Cassette Walkman.

AIR SUPPLY

(muffled)

I'm all out of love, I'm so lost without you ...

Robert lifts one of Bernie's headphones and inquires:

ROBERT
Air Supply? Seriously?

BERNIE
(unapologetic)
I love Air Supply.

ROBERT
Of course you do.

Robert helps Bernie into the passenger seat, then moves around the car and climbs behind the wheel, slumping to avoid the man-sized dent in the roof above him. He glances over at Bernie -- the passenger side is completely undamaged.

Irritated, Robert cranks the key in the ignition, throws the shift into reverse and peels out. Bernie shouts over the music.

BERNIE
You might want to drive more
carefully!

Robert ignores him, coming to a stop at the end of the driveway. He glances both ways. All clear.

ROBERT
Happy?

Bernie emphatically shakes his head "no."

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Tough shit.

Robert punches the accelerator ...

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

... and pulls onto the road just as a GIGANTIC TRUCK hauling TREE TRUNKS roars around the blind curve and T-BONES the SUV.

ACT 2INT. FBI OBSERVATION ROOM - LATER

Robert wears a NECK BRACE and some bandages over the cuts on his face as he talks with ELEANOR WILLIS (40s), the Bureau's no-nonsense Director.

ELEANOR
And nothing happened to him?

ROBERT
Not a scratch.

Behind a ONE-WAY MIRROR, an ELDERLY DOCTOR takes Bernie's blood pressure.

ELEANOR
Okay, let me see if I got this. You're telling me that bad things -- calamities, tragedies, accidents, etcetera, are visited upon those who ... touch him?

ROBERT
You don't have to touch him. It's more of a proximity thing. From what I can tell, his "strike zone," for lack of a better word, is somewhere between 100 to 300 yards.

ELEANOR
Is he a threat to us right now? Should I evacuate the building?

ROBERT
No, that's the thing. This effect is muffled when he's feeling ... copacetic.

ELEANOR
Copacetic? You're going to have to walk me through this.

ROBERT
(searching)
Calm. Balanced. One with the environment. Talks about karma a lot. He loves the Weather Channel. Watches a lot of golf. His favorite movie is "The Sound Of Music" -- but he always turns it off just before the Nazis invade Austria.

Eleanor studies Robert. Is he putting her on?

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Music seems to soothe him. He loves Air Supply. Anything by Donovan makes him happy. *Except* "Season of the Witch."

(beat)

Witches scare him.

ELEANOR

Stop it right there.

ROBERT

I'm just telling you what I've learned so far.

ELEANOR

And he has no control over any of this?

ROBERT

Not that I've seen. Although I have noticed that the magnitude of the effect seems to correlate with his degree of anxiety or stress, or whatever you want to call it.

(nods towards the mirror)

Take a look.

INT. MEDIAL EXAMINATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The doctor prepares to take blood from Bernie.

BERNIE

(warily)

I have a problem with needles.

DOCTOR

It'll be over before you know it.

But just as the Doctor attempts to insert the needle, it slips from his hand, impaling his foot.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Argh!

Wincing, the doctor withdraws the hypodermic needle from of his foot, releasing a MINI-GEYSER OF BLOOD from his loafer.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Thirty years practicing medicine, never done that before.

BERNIE

I wouldn't beat yourself up over it.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM- CONTINUOUS

Eleanor looks to Robert.

ELEANOR
You're saying he caused that? Doctor Schwartz is a year from retirement. I call what I just saw a senior moment.

ROBERT
I was skeptical at first, too.

Eleanor thinks.

ELEANOR
Fine. Prove it.

ROBERT
Excuse me?

ELEANOR
You want me to believe? I'm from Missouri. Show me. *Really* show me. Make him do something.

Robert thinks, grabs a phone, and hits a button.

ROBERT
(on phone)
Hey Doc, let's hold off on the blood test for now. What I really need to know is if his prostate is acting up.

INT. MEDIAL EXAMINATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Doctor is on the other line.

DOCTOR
No problem, we can do that.

He motions for Bernie to turn around and drop his pants. Bernie seems confused, but complies. The Doctor snaps on a latex glove, limps over and begins the examination ...

... and nothing happens.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eleanor gives Robert a steely look; he feels the heat.

ELEANOR
I would think two fingers up the Hershey Highway might induce some stress.

Robert tugs at his neck brace as he attempts to figure the angles. Murphy enters the room with a few cups of coffee.

MURPHY

How's it coming?

ELEANOR

(teasing)

Looks like Bob's been conned by Mr. Malocchio. "Oooh, look at me. I rain misfortune upon those within my 'strike zone.'"

Murphy and Eleanor share a laugh at Robert's expense. Suddenly, Murphy's Blackberry PINGS. He checks it, and his face goes slack.

MURPHY

What the --?

(turns to them)

My fiancee just broke up with me. By text. She went to Harvard. We had a *really* strong relationship!

Murphy storms out, leaving the door open. In the hall we see:

A SECRETARY breaks a heel, stumbling OUT OF FRAME just as a FILE CLERK dumps his cart, spilling top secret files across the floor; a MAINTENANCE GUY lugging a ladder slips on the loose papers, and lands on his back, his ladder smacking the File Clerk in the face ...

Reacting to the mayhem, Eleanor turns to Robert.

ELEANOR

Jesus. Looks like we dodged a bullet.

The secretary, carrying her broken pump, limps around the two fallen men, and hands Eleanor an URGENT MESSAGE. Eleanor's face goes white.

ROBERT

What's wrong?

ELEANOR

It's my daughters school. They're sending her home with head lice.

She regards Bernie with new-found respect.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

He plays rough. I like that.

INT. ELEANOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Robert drops a PHOTOGRAPH of a depressed woman onto Eleanor's desk.

ROBERT

That's Delores Brown. His mother. She gave birth to him in a port-a-potty at the last Big Bopper/Richie Valens/Buddy Holly concert in Clear Lake, Iowa in 1959.

ELEANOR

The *last* Buddy Holly concert? How is that relevant?

ROBERT

-- not quite sure.
(helping her follow the bouncing ball)
However, it was the day the music died.

ELEANOR

Excuse me?

ROBERT

That plane crash? You know ...
(sings)
Bye, bye Miss American --

Eleanor holds up a hand.

ELEANOR

What else do we know about her?

ROBERT

Not much. She died during childbirth. A couple of months later Bernie's father was convicted of tax fraud. As a result, Bernie spent his formative years bouncing from orphanage to orphanage. What happened then, we don't know as the records were destroyed in a fire. What we do know is that he was never adopted, *and* the last orphanage was located on Three Mile Island.

ELEANOR

The Three Mile Island?

ROBERT

That would be the one. He received a fairly large settlement and has been living in isolation for the past thirty years. Bernie's father was exonerated based on DNA evidence and released from Leavenworth six months ago.

ELEANOR

There's a little ray of sunshine!

ROBERT

Not really. He died of a brain aneurism three weeks ago.

ELEANOR

You're kidding?

ROBERT

I wish I was.

ELEANOR

And that's why Bernie was at the bank?

ROBERT

Correct. He was cashing a life insurance check for a whopping \$13,000.

Murphy barges in. It's clear he's been crying. A lot.

MURPHY

(barely holding it together)

We acquired some fresh intel on the Juarez case. Little Javie just pulled a prestige down in Chinatown.

ELEANOR

Can you say that again. In American?

MURPHY

Yeah, right. Um ... Antonio Baptista's nephew just used his Amex at a dim sum joint down on Mott Street. Turns out he's staying around the corner. I got an address.

Robert gives Murphy a pat on the back and starts to follow him out.

ELEANOR

Might want to try flowers, Murph. Bob'll catch up with you in a minute.

Nodding, Murphy dabs his eyes and leaves. Robert notices the mischievous look in Eleanor's eye.

ROBERT

What?

ELEANOR

Take him with you.

ROBERT

Murphy?

ELEANOR

No! Bernie.

ROBERT

Bernie!? Why would I do that?

ELEANOR

Call it an experiment.

Robert ponders the sheer insanity of what his boss is suggesting.

ROBERT

I almost died just bringing him here.
(points to neck brace)
Twice!

ELEANOR

There's always a learning curve! Seems to me you've really got a read on this guy now. Just keep him ... copacetic.

Robert shoots her a look. She can't be serious.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

I know, we're off the map on this one. But this'll be good for you, Bob. You've been working alone for too long.

ROBERT

Oh, come on! He's a civilian, for christ's sake.

ELEANOR

It's true. But who knows? Maybe you just stumbled on a game changer. The ultimate smart bomb.

ROBERT

He's a weirdo, not a weapon!

ELEANOR

Do this for me, Bob. If it works out, you can write your own ticket at the bureau. Hell, next year, you might have my job.

Robert ponders this.

ROBERT

He'll never go for it. The man's like a groundhog. He's afraid of his own shadow.

ELEANOR

Then don't tell him. Everybody needs something, Bob. What does Bernie Brown need?

ACT 3

INT/EXT. ROBERT'S SUV - CHINATOWN - LATER

Robert's beat-up SUV pulls up in front of a decrepit Chinatown building. Bernie is confused.

BERNIE

I thought you said we were getting Chinese food?

ROBERT

We are. I just needed to make a quick work stop first. Want to come up with me?

BERNIE

Who's up there?

ROBERT

Just some low-rent tax evader. An in-and-out thing.

BERNIE

It'd be better if I stayed in the car. I feel okay here.

Robert turns to leave. But before he goes:

ROBERT

Look, I want to apologize for what I put you through back there. I really want to be your friend.

BERNIE

Really?

ROBERT

Yeah. Truth is you're not the only one who's isolated himself his entire life. I just do it different. Frankly, I just wanted the company.

Bernie nods, straddling the fence. Robert climbs out and starts to walk away, then:

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Hey, do me a favor. Keep the windows up and the doors locked. It's a pretty sketchy neighborhood.

ANGLE ON BERNIE

He's scared shitless.

INT. DECREPIT STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Bernie sticks to Robert like glue as they climb a shabby flight of stairs.

BERNIE

When you say the *best* soup dumplings in the city, do you mean just Manhattan, or all five boroughs?

ROBERT

That's a *really* good question. I'll have to look into that.

Robert pauses in front of a heavy, padlocked door marked "ROOF." Loud NARCOCORRIDOS MUSIC can be heard from the other side. Robert quietly begins to pick the lock.

BERNIE

You're not a big knocker, are you?

ROBERT

Wouldn't want to eliminate the element of surprise. They call them tax evaders for a reason.

The lock CLICKS.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Hang back for a second.

EXT. ROOFTOP DECK - CONTINUOUS

JAVIE, (20s), the spoiled nephew of a drug kingpin, salsa dances shirtless with TWO ASIAN STRIPPERS who seem to be having a hard time with the Latin rhythms.

Over by the door, Javie's BODYGUARD barely has time to turn around before Robert strikes a sharp blow to his carotid artery, dropping him to the floor like a bunch of broccoli.

Robert trains his gun on Javie, and calls out to Bernie.

ROBERT

Come on out, Bern! I want you to meet somebody!

Bernie skulks onto the roof, nervously glancing around. He stops under a free-standing UMBRELLA.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Bernie, meet Javie. Javie, meet Bernie.

JAVIE

Fuck you, pendejo!

BERNIE

Um ... it's nice to meet you, too?
(to Robert)
I thought you said he was a tax
evader.

ROBERT

He is. Among other things.

Something catches Robert's eye behind Javie -- a GIANT CRANE lifts I-BEAMS to the roof of the building under construction next door. Robert smiles, turns his attention back to Javie.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Okay. There's two ways this can go down. Option one, you tell me everything I need to know about your uncle's whereabouts so that we can safely recover the Ambassador. Or, option two -- and I really don't recommend this one -- I sit back and let you and Bernie work it out.

Bernie looks at Robert with alarm.

BERNIE

What?

What?

JAVIE

Robert winks at Bernie.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(sotto)
Work with me here.

Smirking, Javie shoves the strippers aside and steps over to Bernie, who timorously holds his ground. Javie fakes a punch. Bernie flinches, then closes his eyes as he tries to maintain his cool.

BERNIE

Nam myoho rengo kyo, nam myoho rengo
kyo ...

JAVIE

Yo, what the hell's this fool mumbling
about?

ROBERT

Don't know. Some kind of Buddhist
chant?

Javie snorts with derision and gets into Bernie's face.

JAVIE

Oh shit! What you gonna do, bitch? You
gonna get all non-violent on my ass?

Javie laughs at his own joke.

STRIPPER

He's a pussy, Javie. Kick his ass!

Javie turns fiercely upon the Stripper.

JAVIE

Was anyone talkin' to you, Hiroshima!?

Wounded by his words, Hiroshima, the stripper with the unfortunate name, hangs her head in shame.

JAVIE (CONT'D)

(to Robert)

This guy? Seriously!?

ROBERT

Seriously.

JAVIE

Well, in that case, I think I'm gonna have to take option two.

ROBERT

Fantastic. I'm excited to see what happens.

Robert holsters his gun. Javie turns back to Bernie and cracks his neck from side to side before launching into a series of Kung Fu maneuvers intended to impress us and intimidate Bernie.

He makes the requisite bad-ass Bruce Lee vocalizations, but by way of Jalisco.

JAVIE

Orelay, I might be Mexicano, but you come down and mess with Javie in Chinatown? You get yo ass busted Bruce Lee-style, esse!

Suddenly, we hear the sound of something WHOOSHING towards us. Everybody turns to see ...

An errant I-Beam SWINGS right between Javie and Bernie, lodging itself in the side of an abandoned building, stopping it cold. Robert frowns.

ROBERT

You missed.

BERNIE

I didn't mean to.

JAVIE

Now Javie's vengeance is gonna rain
down on you from above, vato!

Suddenly, the UMBRELLA snaps shut around Javie's head, arms,
and torso like a Venus Flytrap. It's a heavy contraption, and
Javie shouts angrily as he careens this way and that.

JAVIE (CONT'D)

(muffled)
Get it off! Get it off me!

Javie loses his balance and stumbles headfirst over the edge
of the roof, plummeting like a top-heavy dart.

ROBERT

Didn't see that coming.

BERNIE

Me neither.

EXT. CHINATOWN ALLEY - DUMPSTER - MOMENTS LATER

Robert and Bernie approach a dumpster, where Javie's feet and
the umbrella pole stick straight up from a mountain of fetid
garbage. Robert grabs Javie's feet and pries him free from
the umbrella. He's not a happy camper.

ROBERT

Let's try this again. Option one, or
option two?

Despite the pain, Javie backs away from Bernie as if he was
the devil himself. From overhead, we hear the GROANING OF
METAL. All three men glance up to see several tons of wrought
iron FIRE ESCAPE shifting ominously directly above Javie. He
turns to Robert with desperate, pleading eyes.

JAVIE

Option one! Option one!

INT. SHANGHAI JOE'S RESTAURANT - LATER

Bernie is so excited he can barely focus on his dumplings.

BERNIE

Did you see that! He told you
everything! And it was because of me.

ROBERT

I've been a field agent for a long
time, Bern, but I've never seen
anything quite like you.

Bernie slurps his soup, distracted by the sights and sounds
of the restaurant. If it wasn't clear before, it ought to be
now -- Bernie doesn't get out much.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What does it feel like? When it's happening?

BERNIE

(shrugging)

Kinda hard to explain.

At a table nearby, a WEALTHY TOURIST and his TROPHY WIFE begin to argue.

WEALTHY TOURIST

No! This entire fiasco was your idea. I didn't even want to come to effing New York!

Robert and Bernie pause for a second. The Tourist's voice rises as he loudly berates his wife. A BOTTLE of Sriracha sauce falls off of a nearby table, and rolls harmlessly beneath someone's chair.

WEALTHY TOURIST (CONT'D)

It's typical you. You never think, you're a materialistic pig, and you're vapid!

UNDER THE CHAIR somebody's foot shifts, accidentally kicking the BOTTLE of Sriracha back into play.

ANGLE ON BERNIE -- He can't take his eyes off bottle.

Meanwhile, we TRACK with the bottle as it rolls across the center of the restaurant floor perilously close to the black-shoed feet of harried WAITERS treading all around it.

WEALTHY TOURIST (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Brittany! You just hit the trifecta of stupid!

At the tourist's table, the trophy wife begins to cry. Meanwhile, Robert notices Bernie growing increasingly uncomfortable.

WEALTHY TOURIST (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

Oh, boo hoo for you ... I'm the one footing the bill for all this crap!

Bernie braces himself as a WAITER carrying a family-sized BOWL OF STEAMING SOUP hurries straight for the BOTTLE ...

Suddenly, a CUSTOMER directly across the aisle pushes out his chair to stand up, sending the bottle skittering out of range but simultaneously ramming the waiter, spilling the scalding soup directly into the lap of the Wealthy Tourist, who SHRIEKS in pain.

Robert pauses, spoon poised. Did Bernie just cause that?

BERNIE

I think we should go now.

Nodding, Robert digs in his pockets and drops some money on the table. As he and Bernie head for the exit, Bernie glances back at the tourist's table.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

You wanted to know what it feels like?

Robert follows Bernie's gaze. The Wealthy Tourist is doubled over in pain, threatening lawsuits and hurling abuse in all directions.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

It feels like that.

INT. ROBERT'S SUV - MOMENTS LATER

Awkward silence as they buckle up. Suddenly, Bernie turns to Robert with new-found resolve.

BERNIE

Take me with you. To Juarez. That's where you're going, isn't it? To rescue the Ambassador?

ROBERT

Bernie, listen --

BERNIE

Wait. Just hear me out. I've been cooped up in that cabin for almost my whole life, just trying to keep myself from causing bad things to happen. But today I felt like I finally had a purpose. Sure, little Javie isn't gonna walk right, and he's probably got a bad case of velumiphobia --

ROBERT

Velumi-what?

BERNIE

Fear of umbrellas. Learned about it on the Weather Channel. The point is he's a bad guy, right? And maybe I helped stopped him from doing bad things. So, that's gotta be a good thing, doesn't it?

Robert gives Bernie a hard look; he's deeply divided.

ELEANOR (V.O.)

I gotta hand it to you, Bob. We're taking law enforcement to a whole new level ...

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - DAY

Robert walks and talks with Eleanor toward a waiting BOMBARDIER BD-700 GLOBAL EXPRESS (It's so cool, Bill Gates has one!).

ELEANOR

Let's just hope the Chinese don't have their own version of him. With their population base, I suppose it's only a matter of time. I just can't believe you got him to go along to Juarez to help recover the Ambassador.

ROBERT

I didn't. It was Bernie's idea. He's pretty excited, too. He's never been on a plane before.

ELEANOR

Bob, all I can say is, if you get this right, the sky's the limit.

Bernie walks a few paces behind them, staring at the jet in amazement. Robert nods ahead to where FOUR FEDS are boarding the plane.

ROBERT

What do I tell them?

ELEANOR

Nothing. We're keeping a lid on this until we know what we're dealing with. They've been briefed that it's their job to help deliver the asset ...

ROBERT

... the asset?

ELEANOR

... to deliver Bernie into the target zone while you grab the Ambassador. That's all they know. Period.

Robert shakes his head -- he can't believe he's doing this. Bernie joins them.

ROBERT

You sure about this?

BERNIE

I've never been more sure of anything
in my entire life.

ELEANOR

See that, Bob. A true patriot.

Bernie smiles and offers his hand for her to shake. She regards it with trepidation.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

Sorry. Flu season. I got a thing with
germs. Good luck to you ... or, not!

She laughs. Bernie frowns, then follows Robert into the plane. Donovan's "Mellow Yellow" kicks in on the SOUND TRACK as ...

EXT. THE BIG BLUE SKY - DAY

The jet cruises along at 42,000 feet.

INT. GOVERNMENT JET - CONTINUOUS

Bernie, wearing his headphones, gazes out the window at the cumulonimbus clouds floating beneath him, singing along quietly.

BERNIE

*...I'm-a just a mad about Saffron,
she's just mad about me. They call me
Mellow Yellow. Right, right, slip...*

Robert notices the other agents staring curiously. He taps Bernie on the shoulder. Bernie lifts his left headphone.

ROBERT

Yeah, I was just thinking maybe you
could keep it down a bit.

Bernie looks around anxiously.

BERNIE

I'm sorry, was I making a scene?

The plane jerks slightly, hitting some LIGHT TURBULENCE. Sensing Bernie's mood changing, Robert hastens to mollify him.

ROBERT

No, not at all. You're good, pal.

The turbulence subsides. Bernie starts to put his headphones back on, then:

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And by the way, it's "quite, rightly."

BERNIE

What?

ROBERT

The lyric. To "Mellow Yellow." You were just singing "right, right, slip."

BERNIE

It's not "right, right, slip?"

ROBERT

No. It's "quite, rightly," just spoken in a halting, staccato manner.

BERNIE

Are you sure about that? Because, I've been listening to that song for, like, ever, and I even once spent an entire night with my ear propped up next to my speaker, and I'm pretty sure --

ROBERT

(tersely)

It's "quite, rightly." But if "right, right, slip" makes you happy, then you sing "right, right, slip" ... but with that beautiful inside singing voice of yours.

(pats him on the back)

'Cause it's all about making sure you're happy, buddy.

BERNIE

Buddy?

ROBERT

Yeah. Buddy.

Robert pats him on the back. Bernie smiles, then rewinds his Walkman and listens for few beats. Amazed, he nods to Robert.

BERNIE

Huh. You're right!

From a few seats back, the four feds watch Bernie warily. AGENT MICHAELSON turns to AGENT DEKOFF.

AGENT MICHAELSON

That's the asset?

Bernie begins to sing along to the music, still much too loudly.

BACK WITH THE FEDS

Dekoff turns back to Michaelson.

AGENT DEKOFF

We're fucked.

Up-tempo ACTION MUSIC kicks in for a MONTAGE ...

EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ AIRPORT - RUNWAY

The Bombardier touches down.

EXT. CIUDAD JUAREZ AIRPORT - OUTSIDE TERMINAL - DAY

Robert, looking very 'operative chic' in aviator sunglasses and a hip Hawaiian shirt, scans the area.

We PAN to Bernie, sporting a SOMBRERO and a dreadful gift shop T-shirt adorned with a cactus man wearing sunglasses, and the words "I (HEART) Mexico" emblazoned on it.

BERNIE

I've never been to Mexico before.

ROBERT

Really? Couldn't tell. From here, you look like a real live Mexican, amigo.

Bernie nods, feeling pretty damn cool in his undercover outfit. A taxi pulls up and the team piles in. The last to enter, Bernie has some trouble negotiating the confined space of the cab due to the width of his sombrero.

BERNIE

Sorry, sorry about that, sorry ...

Agent Michaelson shakes his head incredulously as the cab speeds off.

INT. SAFE HOUSE - LATER

The music continues as the feds suit up for battle: loading their weapons, donning disguises, prepping an armored SUV, etc. We PAN to Bernie, who watches Robert meticulously assemble a sniper's rifle.

BERNIE

I wanted to tell you this earlier, but I really, really, really like you, Robert.

Without looking up, Robert replies nonchalantly:

ROBERT

Thanks, Bernie. I like you, too.

Bernie continues.

BERNIE

I haven't had a real friend before,
and if this is what it's like -- you
know, flying on planes and going on
top secret missions to foreign
countries with the kind of guys who
really used to scare the piss out of
me in the orphanages ...

Robert makes sure his scope is calibrated properly.

ROBERT

Uh huh ...

BERNIE

I guess what I'm trying to say is --
(beat)
Robert, I think I love you.

Robert lowers the rifle and looks Bernie in the eye. A couple
of the other agents exchange looks.

ROBERT

Did you just say ... love?

BERNIE

I did.
(beat)
But we don't have to dwell on it.

Michaelson has heard quite enough.

MICHAELSON

Bob, got a moment?

ROBERT

Sure.

Robert steps over to Michaelson, who turns his back to
Bernie.

MICHAELSON

Okay, what is the deal with that guy?
I "love" you? I "LOVE" you!? We are
about to drop this dipshit into the
most dangerous operation I've
personally ever been a part of, and I
just want to know what the hell I'm
supposed to expect here. Is he gonna
"love" the bad guys, too?

ROBERT

Don't worry about Bernie. He's been
working undercover for a long time.
It's made him a little ... odd.

Michaelson glances at Bernie, who is wearing his headphones while cautiously studying the clip from Robert's handgun.

MICHAELSON

No shit. You ever work with him before?

ROBERT

Yeah. Yesterday. It went --

(beat)

Let's just say I've never seen an agent manhandle a perp the way Bernie did. It was ... unbelievable.

Bernie fumbles the clip. It hits the table with a THUD. Everyone turns, and Bernie acts as if he had meant to do that. Michaelson turns back to Robert.

MICHAELSON

If any of us die because of that freak, I swear to God I'll put a bullet between --

Robert elbows Michaelson in the gut, lest Bernie should hear.

ROBERT

Trust me. You really don't want to go there with him. Copy?

MICHAELSON

(in pain)

Copy.

Bernie finally succeeds in jamming the clip into the handle of the gun. *CLICK!*

BERNIE

Hey, Robert! I got the bullet holder-thingy to stick in the -- what's this part called again?

Michaelson and the others feds shoot Robert dumbfounded looks. Robert does his best to ignore them.

ROBERT

The mag.

(beat)

Nice work, buddy.

Bernie beams.

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ACT 4

34

I/E. TAXI -- ANTONIO BAPTISTA'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Another beat-up Mexican taxi pulls up in front of a sprawling mansion, stereo blasting ...

AIR SUPPLY

*I'm all out of love. I'm so lost
without you ...*

Bernie climbs from the cab and notices ARMED CARTEL SOLDIERS patrolling the perimeter of the mansion.

BERNIE

Um, Robert? How are we going to get past all those guys with guns?

ROBERT

It's being taken care of.

Robert checks his watch, then quickly turns and points in the opposite direction.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Hey, Bern, check it out!? Is that a Quetzal?

Bernie turns to look.

BERNIE

That would be pretty remarkable, Robert, since we're in Mexico and according to the Nature Channel the Quetzal's habitat has dwindled to a few hectares of rainforest in Costa Rica.

While Bernie talks, the cartel soldiers are PICKED OFF with brutal efficiency by unseen, silenced sniper fire. The soldiers fall out of FRAME like ducks at the arcade.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

(turning back)
Huh. The guards are gone.

ROBERT

Would you look at that? Let's move.

Robert turns to pay the taxi driver, but he's already peeling out.

BERNIE

Hey, I need my Air Supply!

The CASSETTE flies out the open window as the taxi speeds away, landing in the dust at Bernie's feet.

EXT. ANTONIO BAPTISTA'S MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

The massive backyard is festooned with BALLOONS and PINATAS. CHILDREN ride on PET ANIMALS (burros, elephants, etc.) in a circular area. A FIRE BREATHER entertains the guests. This is quite an extravagant Quinceanera.

We land on the birthday girl, MARTA, tubby and pimply-faced, as she dances cheek to cheek with a handsome MEXICAN BOY. We CUT TO the REVERSE to see his face; he is clearly unhappy with the situation.

To his relief, the young man is tapped on the shoulder by another equally-attractive MEXICAN BOY, who wants to cut in. WIDEN to REVEAL a LONG LINE OF BOYS waiting to cut in. All seem under extreme duress.

ACROSS THE DANCE FLOOR, sitting on a dais on the temporary stage, is ANTONIO "EL DIABLO" BAPTISTA, 60s, the scariest drug lord in Juarez. Kneeling before him is yet another handsome 15-year-old MEXICAN BOY.

EL DIABLO

(subtitled)

...when you dance with my Marta, you will tell her that her eyes sparkle like the sun, her teeth are like white gold, and her skin is smoother than the finest silk. And then you will kiss her on the cheek.

(beat)

But not too close to the lips, or I will murder your entire family.

The Mexican Boy kisses El Diablo's ring gratefully.

MEXICAN BOY

(subtitled)

Thank you, uncle.

ANGLE ON THE MARIACHI BAND

Agent Knight, wearing the traditional Traje de Charro, strums a guitar as he harmonizes with the rest of Mariachis. He gives a slight nod to ...

Meanwhile, Agent Dekoff moves through the crowd dressed as a waiter, carrying a platter of delicious beef tacos.

EXT. MANSION - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Robert and Bernie approach the party.

BERNIE

By the way, what exactly is a Quinceanera?

ROBERT

It's like a Bat Mitzvah, but for Mexican people.

BERNIE

That's cool.
(beat)
What's a Bat Mitzvah?

ROBERT

It's like a ... you know what, let's stay on task.

Robert pops an earbud into Bernie's ear.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Can you hear me?

BERNIE

Uh ... you're standing right next to me. Of course I can hear you.

ROBERT

No, Bern. The earpiece.

BERNIE

Oh, yeah. Wow. Stereo.
(loudly)
Can you hear me?!

ROBERT

No need to shout, Bern. I got you loud and clear.

BERNIE

This is so cool!

ROBERT

Ready to do this?

BERNIE

Guess so.
(beat)
What am I doing again?

ROBERT

You just be you. Have a good time. Mingle.

BERNIE

Okay, but I don't ... really know how to mingle.

ROBERT

That's what I'm counting on, buddy.

BERNIE

Buddy. I just love it when you say that.

ROBERT

(awkward)
Great.

Bernie heads into the party. Robert turns and high tails it out of there like he's just dropped the A-bomb over Hiroshima (the city, not the stripper with the unfortunate name).

EXT. MANSION BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Self-consciously, Bernie walks through the center of the party, populated primarily by cartel henchman and their families.

The mariachi band plays a happy tune as kids dash about waving sparklers. Nearby, PYROTECHNICIANS prepare a FIREWORKS display. Everyone's having a good time ...

Suddenly, the MUSIC STOPS. All eyes turn to Bernie. Bernie adjusts his sombrero and checks his zipper. It's tense. He puts on his friendliest smile, waves, and says:

BERNIE

Hola!

Bernie continues through the CROWD. Everyone he passes gives him a hostile stare. Bernie pretends not to notice as he murmurs into his earpiece.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

Robert! I think they might be on to me.

INT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Robert races through the lavish house searching rooms for any sign of the kidnapped Ambassador.

ROBERT

(to Bernie)
Copy that, Bern. Michaelson, you got eyes on Bernie?

EXT. MANSION ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Michaelson watches Bernie through the scope of his weapon.

MICHAELSON

Copy.

EXT. MANSION BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

El Diablo waves TWO LIEUTENANTS over.

EL DIABLO
(subtitled)
Find out who the gringo is and then
kill him.

ANGLE ON BERNIE

Clapping off-rhythm with the mariachi band, Bernie turns to a GRANDMOTHER with white hairs poking from her chin.

BERNIE
Would you classify this as World
Music?

Scowling, the Grandmother spits a stream of tobacco juice on the ground and walks away.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
Guess not.

INT. MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Robert kicks in another door -- still no sign of the Ambassador, but something catches his eye.

A TRAIL OF BLOOD leads across the floor to a wall. Robert steps over to the wall, places his hands on it, and pushes. A concealed door swings open...

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Bernie walks towards the Sundae Bar, talking under his breath.

BERNIE
(into earpiece)
Can anyone hear me? Hello?

As Bernie tries to adjust his earbud, it pops out and bounces across the patio, where it is crunched under a BLACK SHOE. We TILT up to reveal El Diablo's lieutenants blocking Bernie's path.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
Oh boy.
(struggling)
Hola, me llamo estoy ... Bernardo? Tu
eres hablos Engles?

The lieutenants stare machetes at Bernie.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
No? Uh, la fiesta es muy bonita. Tu
... como se dice "having fun?"

LIEUTENANT ONE

We speak English. Who else is with you?

BERNIE

With me? Nobody. Other people? No. None of those. I came alone. Yeah. By myself. So-lo-mente!

Unnerved by their silence, Bernie feels compelled to fill it.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

So, it's my first time in Mexico. True story! And whenever I travel, which isn't that often, by the way, I like to get a feel for the place by hanging with the locals. So, I heard the cool tunes and figured I'd check out the scene.

(beat)

You guys want to get a sundae with me?

The lieutenants share a look.

LIEUTENANT ONE

(subtitled)

Either he is the bravest man I have ever seen, or he is -- and I apologize for being politically incorrect -- 'retarded.'

INT. MANSION - HIDDEN ROOM

Gun drawn, Robert slips down stairs into a basement. Across the room, he spots a GUARD making out with a FEMALE GUEST. Directly behind them is a PADLOCKED DOOR.

ROBERT

(sotto into mic)

I've got a twenty on the Ambassador.

EXT. UP ON THE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Michaelson responds.

MICHAELSON

Good timing, because we lost communication with the asset.

BACK WITH ROBERT

As he creeps up behind the guard ...

ROBERT

Give me a sec.

... and presses his gun to the man's temple. The heavy petting stops.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Open it.

The guard fumbles open the padlock. Robert shoves the guard and his girlfriend into the room, and nods to the AMERICAN AMBASSADOR -- the middle-aged man we saw in a photograph earlier in the story -- handcuffed to a chair.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Mr. Ambassador. Agent Ryan, FBI. I'm here to take you home.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Bernie, lost in the Macarena, is oblivious to the fact that the two lieutenants are about to blow his brains out from behind.

ON THE ROOF

Michaelson watches through his scope.

MICHAELSON

(into mic)

Bob. Crunch time here. Is the asset gonna do ... whatever the asset does? Because if not, the pinatas aren't the only things about to get whacked.

INT. STAIRWAY - CONTINUOUS

Robert hustles the grateful Ambassador up the stairs.

ROBERT

(into mic)

He's probably feeling copacetic.

MICHAELSON

What?

ROBERT

(into mic)

Listen to me. You're going to have to scare him.

MICHAELSON

Fine. How?

ROBERT

I'm gonna need you to improvise on this one.

EXT. MANSION ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Michaelson scans the party until ...

SCOPE POV -- A colorful BUNCH OF BALLOONS fills the scope.

ANGLE ON BERNIE

As he Macarenas with growing fervor, we hear the balloons POPPING! Bernie practically jumps out of his skin, then notices the two guns pointed at his head.

LIEUTENANT ONE

(subtitled)

Prepare to die.

MUSIC CUE: Enrico Morricone's theme from 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.'

Bernie's eyes go dark ...

BERNIE

I'd be careful if I were you. Guns scare me. You won't like me when I'm scared.

The lieutenants smirk. And then it begins:

CLOSE ON a mariachi's GUITAR STRING as it snaps, whacking the HORN PLAYER in the eye. Hitting a sour note, the horn player reels backwards off the stage, and his TRUMPET bashes a FIRE BREATHER in the back of the head ...

The fire breather belches flames directly onto the head of CARTEL SOLDIER who happens to be showing off his machete juggling skills to his GIRLFRIEND ...

The soldier's hair goes up in flames! Horrified, he accidentally flings a MACHETE thirty feet into the air ...

We TRACK WITH the machete as it reaches its apex, and plummets back down to earth, directly toward Bernie and the lieutenants. It slices the PINATA dangling between them neatly in half, spilling candy everywhere ...

DOZENS OF SCREAMING CHILDREN dive for the candy, knocking the lieutenants aside and sending their guns scattering.

ON THE ROOF

Michaelson pulls back from his scope, awestruck, trying to wrap his head around what just happened.

MICHAELSON

(into mic)

Ryan, do you copy? Something *really* weird is starting to happen out here.

ROBERT

Good! Get the team out now!

MICHAELSON

What about covering the asset?

ROBERT

The asset's fine, trust me. If you want to live, put as much distance between you and Bernie Brown as possible.

Curious, Michaelson takes another look through his scope.

SCOPE POV -- The HUMAN TORCH lurches about, setting everything he touches on fire, including a low-hanging banner that reads, "Feliz Cumpleanos, Marta!" (featuring a picture of Marta's face photo-shopped on a much skinnier girl's body). The banner bursts into flames and drops down ...

... setting Marta's dress on fire! She screams as El Diablo rises from his chair, barking orders to his men ...

EL DIABLO

(subtitled)

We're under siege. Kill them! Kill them all!

Suddenly, every able-bodied man, woman and child whips out their weapon of choice: guns, big guns, bigger guns, nunchucks, etc.

ON THE ROOF

Michaelson's eyes go wide. He yells into his mic:

MICHAELSON

Party's over. Everybody clear out NOW!

Michaelson scrambles off the roof like a bat out of hell.

BACK WITH BERNIE -- He eyeballs the instant bloom of weaponry.

BERNIE

Um ... Robert, if you can hear me, you're probably a little too close.

A SCARED YOUNG CARTEL SOLDIER spins around trying to figure out who to shoot -- BLAM! -- his gun accidentally discharges into the fountain ...

The single gunshot sets off the crowd, and everyone starts firing blindly into the hills and accidentally at one another. Cartel soldiers drop like flies, pinatas explode and candy FILLS THE FRAME like confetti on New Year's Eve ...

EXT. FRONT OF THE MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Michaelson skids up in the heavily-armored SUV. Robert hustles the ambassador across the front lawn and helps him into the vehicle, followed by the rest of the team. But as the SUV roars off, it WIPES FRAME to reveal that Robert has stayed behind. He's going back for Bernie.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

The compound is in flames. El Diablo rushes to Marta and manages to rip off the portion of her dress that is still on fire ...

The burning fabric lands on the pre-set FIREWORKS DISPLAY. And, as if on cue, FIREWORKS erupt in a violent cacophony ...

Bernie watches the party clear out as rockets whiz around him. Stray fireworks set the roof of the mansion ablaze. Amazed at his own power, Bernie fails to notice El Diablo walking up behind him, raising his weapon ...

Robert races into the party, pushing past fleeing guests in a desperate bid to save Bernie.

ROBERT

Bernie!

Bernie turns towards Robert's voice, but his cheek connects with the muzzle of El Diablo's gun.

EL DIABLO

(fearful)

Who are you?

Bernie scans the area for whatever might be coming next. His eyes land on Robert, who nods his head encouragingly: He's got a clean shot ...

BERNIE

(distracted)

I'm Bernie. Bernie Brown.

(beat)

I'm not actually on the guest list.

TIME SLOWS DOWN as El Diablo begins to pull the trigger and Bernie closes his eyes ...

And with that, TIME ROARS BACK as the ELEPHANT from the petting zoo careens through the FRAME, trampling El Diablo under foot.

Bernie opens his eyes to find Robert gazing at him with awe.

We CRANE OUT to reveal HELL ON EARTH. The blast zone can literally be seen as a perfect circle, and out of the center of it, Robert and Bernie walk away unscathed ...

BERNIE (CONT'D)

This is why I never go to parties.

ROBERT

Duly noted.

TAGINT. FBI HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - DAY

Robert opens the door and shows Bernie his swank new office.

ROBERT
And these are the new digs that came
with the promotion.

BERNIE
Sweet! Nice Feng Shui!

ROBERT
Really?

BERNIE
Oh yeah, you're facing East. Good
flow.

ROBERT
And see that desk?

BERNIE
Yeah?

ROBERT
Belonged to Mr. J. Edgar Hoover. Solid
teak.

BERNIE
Wow! They must really like you.

Eleanor knocks on the open door.

ROBERT
Madam Director. Please, come in.

ELEANOR
You look good in this office, Bob.

Bob smiles proudly.

ROBERT
Thank you.

ELEANOR
No, thank you!

She motions for the men to be seated; Robert sits behind his desk, as Bernie takes a spot on the couch.

Eleanor begins to sit next to Bernie, but as she bends her knees, she thinks better of it, and leans against the edge of the desk instead.

Eleanor smiles at Bernie for a moment.

BERNIE

What is it? Did I do something wrong?

ELEANOR

Not at all. In fact, you did everything right. Mr. Brown, I asked you to come here today because I'd like to formally offer you a position at the Bureau.

BERNIE

You want to me work here?

ELEANOR

We believe you'd be a significant asset, and as such, you'd be tackling some of our most challenging assignments. And because of the delicate nature of your ... whatever it is ... we'd be treating your involvement with the utmost secrecy.

BERNIE

Like, as in top secret?

ELEANOR

No, as in like, super top secret.

BERNIE

Namaste! Did you know about this, Robert?

ROBERT

I had no idea. But, congratulations, Bernie.

Eleanor turns to Robert.

ELEANOR

And congratulations are in order for you as well, Bob. You're going to be his full-time partner.

ROBERT

What!?

ELEANOR

Think of it as a task force of two. We're calling it "Operation: Black Cloud."

(to Bernie)

No offense.

BERNIE

None taken.

ROBERT

Wait, Eleanor, you said it would be a one-time thing, and --

ELEANOR

Bob, you think you got the office and the pay bump just because we like you?

ROBERT

No, but you said --

ELEANOR

I lied. I do it all the time. For example, I actually think this office makes you look like a well-trained house cat. But you didn't hear me say that when I came in, did you?

Robert is speechless.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

Hell no. Because I wanted something from you, I appealed to your vanity. Believe me, I didn't make Director at the FBI because of my affinity for the truth.

Bernie raises his head.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

Yes. Bernie.

BERNIE

Sorry to interrupt. You're saying if I take this job, Robert and I will go on more dangerous missions together?

ELEANOR

Correct. And, we'd be paying you handsomely for your efforts.

(fake whispers)

Don't tell Bob, but you'd be making a hell of a lot more than he does.

BERNIE

Cool!

(then)

I mean, that's not fair.

ROBERT

Eleanor, can we get back to the "you lied to me" thing for a second?

ELEANOR

Sorry, Bob. That ship's sailed.

Eleanor hands Bernie a heavy manila folder labeled "Operation: Black Cloud."

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
This offer is non-negotiable and expires in twenty four hours. I hope you make the right decision.

With that, Eleanor heads for the door, but before she leaves:

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
And God bless America.

She's gone, leaving Robert and Bernie alone together.

ROBERT
She lied.

BERNIE
You lied to me, remember?

ROBERT
What?

BERNIE
When we went to get soup dumplings you took me to see little Javie without even asking if it was okay. You used me.

ROBERT
I did. You're right. And I'm sorry about that.

BERNIE
It's okay. But if we're going to work together, I just think you should know I have issues with lying.

ROBERT
Issues?

Through the office window, we see a LARGE CRANE hoisting an I-BEAM onto the roof of a nearby building under construction.

BERNIE
When I find out that somebody's lied to me, that lie just sort of festers and builds up inside of me ... Ah, never mind.

Bernie holds up the manila envelope.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
I should boogie. I got some thinking to do.

Bernie heads for the door. Suddenly concerned, Robert stops him in the hallway. The two men frame the office window, giving us a view of the crane ...

ROBERT

Wait, Bernie. I just wanted to clarify. You're not still mad about my little lie, are you? I mean, we're ... copacetic, right?

Bernie's on the fence about this one.

BERNIE

(thinks)

Yeah ... No ... Uh, I'm pretty sure we're okay.

ROBERT

Good. That's good. Thanks, Bern.

In the BACKGROUND, we see the crane malfunction, sending the I-Beam whooshing toward us! Oblivious, Robert gives Bernie a friendly pat on the back.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

C'mon, I'll walk you to the elevator.

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Robert escorts Bernie towards the elevator, when ...

WHAM! The building shakes from the impact. The I-Beam crashes through Robert's office, ramming J. Edgar's teak desk through the wall into the hallway behind them.

Shocked, Robert turns to Bernie. Bernie shrugs apologetically.

BERNIE

I guess now we're copacetic.

DRIVING MUSIC kicks in on the SOUND TRACK as we ...

SMASH CUT TO:

Our TITLE slams into FRAME: "THE BLACK CLOUD."

END CREDIT