

10%MAX

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Based on the novel by John Selby

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EXT. RANCH-LAND FOOTHILLS NORTH OF MORRO BAY - DAY

A solo male TRESPASSER (30s, professional) crouches mostly-hidden on a granite outcropping overlooking a small box canyon high in the coastal foothills. He's spying on a newly-built hideaway estate right below him. There are no other houses - this is back-country and the main house, guest cottages, gardens and swimming pool look out of place.

Two black SUVs and a Ford pickup are parked in the circular drive, nothing unusual about that - but why the electric-wire 8-foot security fence, guard house, and those two-dozen SATELLITE DISCS aimed intently up toward the heavens?

The intruder snaps off photos - then glances behind him down to the east - at an old ranch-and-vineyards operation spread out way below. He sees nothing moving, so he returns to watching the compound right below him.

INT. RANCH HOUSE KITCHEN - SAME TIME

An elderly woman, MARCI HADLEY (70, tough, kind) is looking right at the intruder through binoculars. She disappears and a moment later an old weather-beaten cowboy, CHRIS HADLEY (72, grumpy old guy, takes shit from nobody) comes and looks through the field glasses.

CHRIS

(to Marci)

Now who the hell - never should have sold that land to Jackie. I'll go scare the idiot off.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT STEPS - CONTINUOUS

Chris comes stomping fast down the steps of the old ranch-house with 30-30 rifle in hand.

EXT. TRAIL UP THE HILL - CONTINUOUS

Chris is on his horse, heading at a fast lope up a cow path toward the top of the ridge.

INT/EXT. TRAIL UP THE RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Marci is following Chris through the binoculars as he heads up to the top of the ridge.

She watches as the wild cowboy on his black horse comes out right behind the intruder.

He fires a loud-crack warning shot over the intruder's head - not to kill him, just to scare the guy off.

But as Marci watches, with a smooth quick move the intruder pulls out a pistol and fires right at Chris. Hit by the bullet, Chris falls off his horse and rolls out of sight.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

GRETTA KARBIN, America's president for over a year now, is sitting in her office talking with just one person, a sincere devoted man of around 35 - JAMES WATSON.

GRETTA

So then - I am willing to say yes, go ahead. But James, you've brought into this room something that perhaps should never enter here.

JAMES

Isn't that why you keep me around?

GRETTA

(stern)

I don't keep you around, we work together. But this scheme - you are asking me to play God.

JAMES

I'm coming to you with something important that someone I trust has come to me with. It scares me to death but we simply must do it.

GRETTA

So - fine, go run that test, I agree to their secrecy terms - but then you come right back to me with evidence. Only then will I make the final decision.

JAMES

Thank you for trusting me. And hey, how about one of your elicitor words for this situation?

Gretta has a deeper side to her. She pauses, looks out the window - then back to James.

GRETTA

In fact a particular virtue does come to mind. Let's give this hair-brained idea - you called it the Touch?

JAMES

That's it.

GRETTA

Well let's attach the simple yet exalted virtue of kindness to this project, and hear me - if it's not aiming us toward an ultimate act of kindness, you must cut it dead.

James doesn't respond, he just quietly nods and walks out.

Gretta taps a console and several TV screens come to life on the wall - showing multiple terrorist atrocities happening around the globe -

In walks HARRY FITZ (54, a careful Chief of Staff). He stands almost at attention but also relaxed.

GRETTA (cont'd)

Close please.

He gently closes the door - then turns back to her, still fifteen feet from her desk.

GRETTA (cont'd)

You're following the news of course, let's update in ten. For now, just one question.

HARRY

Fire.

GRETTA

Would you trust my man James with the wellbeing of your family, of your mental health, maybe even the future of the whole world?

HARRY

Oh it's James again - that's a seriously obtuse question, and we have other things right now to -

GRETTA

(interrupting)

Would you consider it an ethical act of kindness to nudge just one person, or indeed an entire population, secretly in the direction of enhanced peace and cooperation?

HARRY

But of course - this very minute, just look at those screens.

GRETTA

But - and there's always a but - would you do that act of kindness without asking permission, and hopefully without anyone ever even knowing?

HARRY

(slight edge)

Well you've certainly been talking to James.

GRETTA

I obviously value his flashes - but please be ready to move him out of commission within minutes if necessary.

HARRY

That would be a pleasure.

INT. LECTURE HALL - NYU CAMPUS, NY - DAY

A young professor, JACK HADLEY (35, slender, athletic, confident) is giving a psych lecture. He's casual but also professional, fully engaging his students.

JACK

What I want you to reflect on over Spring Break is that new Chinese fMRI research showing in depth how the amygdala, when registering a fear jolt, can instantly override the prefrontal cortex, shifting you into raw flight-fight mode. And before you return, no groaning allowed, write me three or four pages about an incident in your own life where this happened, okay? You can - ugghh!

Jack bends forward slightly as if a jab of pain has suddenly grabbed his innards - then he recovers slightly.

JACK (cont'd)
 Sorry, hold on. I think I'm coming
 down with something - I hope it's
 just the flu. I need to head home -
 sorry! Enjoy your vacation.

INT. CAR ON CROWDED NY STREET - DAY

Jack is driving fast in city traffic - but he doesn't look sick at all. He takes the turnoff for La Guardia Airport.

His phone rings. The name on his dashboard: Marci Hadley.

JACK
 (impatiently)
 Marci.

INT. HADLEY RANCH HOUSE - DAY

Marci is standing looking out the kitchen window up to where Chris got shot. A police ATV roars into sight up there.

INTERCUT -

MARCI
 (very upset)
 I hope I'm not disrupting you.

JACK
 No, I just faked sick so I could get
 a jump on things. Can't talk now, I'm
 almost at the airport.

MARCI
 You're coming home early?

JACK
 Europe first, got some business to
 get done with Teddy.

MARCI
 Well that's exactly what I'm phoning
 you about.

JACK
 (tensing)
 Why - what's up?

MARCI

It's terrible. I just happened to see a man up there above your new place this morning. Chris went out with his gun to chase the guy away. Now Chris is down at the hospital with a bullet hole in his shoulder. The sheriff is running all over on ATVs trying to find the shooter.

JACK

Fuck. And what about Chris?

MARCI

He's a tough old goat - bullet didn't ruin anything serious. But Jack, are you doing anything illegal up there?

Somebody honks behind Jack - he drives on.

JACK

Illegal? Of course not.

MARCI

What if the police get a search warrant?

Jack hesitates, thinking it through.

JACK

Uhm, no need for that, I'll phone the woman in charge there to let them in. All they'll find are a few nerds working on broadcast software, nothing to hide except from our competitors.

MARCI

I understand - I trust you. I just don't trust your wheeler-dealer partner.

JACK

Marci, Teddy's my friend, my partner in some tech things, he's coming out for Easter by the way. Let the cops in but tell them we want our peace and quiet over the holidays.

MARCI

Sheriff Walden was just up here asking if we have any idea why someone would sneak around taking pictures of your new buildings.

JACK

No idea at all. Look, I gotta catch a plane. Phone if Chris gets worse. I should be there day after tomorrow.

He makes a bad lane change, gets honked at, follows the sign to the airport.

EXT. LA GUARDIA AIRPORT - RUNWAY - SAME TIME

The back wheels of a big company jet touch the runway.

INT. JET - CONTINUOUS

In a plush in-flight office, Woody Guthrie is singing gritty Dust Bowl Blues on the jet stereo while MSNBC and Fox News etc, run without sound on multiple wall screens.

TEDDY KAPELHOF (36, inherited wealth, pudgy but tough) is on the phone cutting a deal. On one of the screens we see the phone conversation:

TEDDY

Ralph, I've had it on this, I'm not budging. I don't need this and you do. I don't want to hear about your problems, just sign the agreement - today. I'll be gone for a couple weeks, talk later. Gotta catch this.

The screen shifts to the face of James Mueller.

TEDDY (cont'd)

Jimmy, there you are. How'd it go? We're all set on my side.

JAMES

Well. uhm, you know her.

TEDDY

(impatient)

No I don't know her.

JAMES

So she listened and gave us the initial green so yeah, we're on. Come grab me in three, we have loads to talk over. I assume you're picking up your scientist - I need to take this call. See you at the airport. Random acts of kindness abound.

TEDDY

What?

But James is gone. Teddy sits staring at the blank screen, then looks over to the news coverage of current carnage. He turns off Woody Guthrie's dust-bowl blues.

TEDDY (cont'd)

(to himself)

Kindness? Fuck it all. We go do it.

EXT. SMALL-JET SECTION OF THE AIRPORT - DAY

Jack walks fast over to the company jet and heads up the silver stairs to the open door.

INT. JET - CONTINUOUS

Jack enters Teddy's plush fly-high office.

TEDDY

Hey Jack - on time - good. What's new on your side?

JACK

Something slightly crazy. A guy was snooping around Touch Quarters, uncle Chris went up to check him out - and the snoop shot him. He'll be okay but the snoop took off. Now what the fuck?

TEDDY

(tensing slightly)

Ah. And hello to you. I'll get Wayne on it. Go grab yourself a drink, you look like you need one. Dinner in half an hour, casual dress, got a new chef on board, she's dynamite.

A thin man with thin lips and a slight limp, WAYNE VANGO (40s, ex-SEAL, on top) appears from the front cabin.

TEDDY (cont'd)

(to Wayne)

You heard Jack's story?

WAYNE

(neutral tone)

Yeah. Not good. I'll phone Cynthia and get someone on it pronto.

TEDDY

I want you to go out yourself.

WAYNE

But - you might need me tomorrow.

TEDDY

Do as I say, please me. Jump off this rocket. I assume you also heard what James in Washington had to report. We're plugged in. Meet us in DC when we come back through, we should have live cargo for inspection and we might seriously need you.

Wayne scowls, then shrugs - turns and leaves. The outside door is closed behind him and sealed. Jack pours himself a drink as the interior ambiance of the plane rumbles slightly as engines rev for takeoff.

Jack takes a comfy strap-in chair. They eye each other as the jet roars for takeoff.

TEDDY (cont'd)

So yes, you heard - we're green, headed to grab James and then to who knows where, he's coordinating all that. Feel okay to you? He's an oddball but he's our guy, fifteen DC years - pure gold.

JACK

And what about Ursi?

TEDDY

I stopped by her guru's monastery yesterday, met with the guy again. No worry, we hold all the cards. He pushed to come with us to California but I politely told him he's now peripheral.

They're quiet a moment.

TEDDY (cont'd)

I assume no news regarding Mahee. She's been missing for a year now, you know she's done for - they don't just grab hostages and not do anything for a year. Let go, buddy.

JACK

Tell my heart that.

TEDDY

So I lost Dianne, you lost Mahee,
we're equally motivated.

JACK

This is still about revenge for you?

TEDDY

Jack, deep down everybody runs on
revenge. We're tribal animals - but
no, sorry, I'm off key there. Been
one hell of a day up in the great
blue yonder. But no, what we're doing
is not about revenge at all. As
you've been saying all along, it
simply must be done. This was your
idea after all - well, Ursi's and
your dad's. Now we deliver the coup
de grace - the ultimate act of
kindness, as James put it.

A gently-dinging bell rings, three times.

TEDDY (cont'd)

(grinning)

Ah, time for dinner. Surely the world
is unfolding as it should.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROAD TO AN OLD MONASTERY - EUROPE - DAY

Flying over the forest between Germany and Switzerland,
we're following a curvy back road along a rushing stream
past woods, meadowlands, small dairy farms. A private side
road leads way up to several ancient granite buildings.

Up just beyond the monastery buildings, a young woman exits
a rustic cottage: URSULA TRAEGER (36, Swedish, brilliant but
also athletic). Smartly dressed, she walks down a foot path
toward the stone buildings.

A man of around 50, DAMEK (slender, alert, strong - maybe
mystic) is standing at a secluded overlook above the main
buildings. Ursula joins him - they stand side by side
looking across the canyon.

DAMEK

(in a stern East
European accent)

Ursi, you are dressed quite
inappropriately for a trip into
Muslim country.

(MORE)

DAMEK (cont'd)
And you failed to appear at morning
meditation. Are you in clear space?

She doesn't respond.

DAMEK (cont'd)
Beware of stumbling at this seventh
tone. We have moved very far very
rapidly with this. There is a time to
be soft and a time to be hard. We
both know what time this is.

URSULA
(back at him)
Damek, are you yourself feeling
worried or upset this morning?

He turns, looks up slightly into her eyes.

DAMEK
If I have a concern, it is that I've
just learned of a possible government
visitation in the next days.

URSULA
But we're now entirely clean. The
fMRI machines and so forth, they are
entirely gone from here.

They both see a sedan pull up in the parking lot below.

DAMEK
So then - I shall await your return.

URSULA
I heard you you met with my funder
yesterday while I was gone.

DAMEK
Yes. I have him where I want him for
now. He has no real fight in him.
Trust me. Go now - keep your heart
non-attached. Strive with calm
passion toward our higher goal.

Ursula nods and walks a few steps - then pivots toward him.

URSULA
Damek, have you no comment at all on
what happened between us last night?

He hesitates a moment.

DAMEK

You were simply nervous about today.
I understand and forgive.

She eyes him hotly - then heads down to the awaiting car. He watches her get in and drive off - he's not fully pleased.

INT. TEDDY'S JET - BASEL AIRPORT - LATER THAT MORNING

Ursula comes walking fast into the plane - still dressed as if on her way to Paris or Prague. Jack stands and she comes right into his arms for a hug. She only nods to Teddy, no hug. A third man in the plane is introduced -

TEDDY

(formally)

Ursula, meet James Mueller, old-time Stanford buddy. We grabbed him in DC just now. As you know, he's been our point-man these last two months and now he's the designated rep of our dearly-beloved president.

James takes Ursula's hand rather seductively and kisses it in formal royal style - but she pulls her hand back from him, scowls, turns away.

INT. JET - SHORT TIME LATER

As the jet climbs for altitude headed east, Teddy, Ursula, James and Jack sit comfortably into swivel chairs around a small conference table.

JAMES

(dominating)

So then - we are now locked in up front to Air Force coordinates. You're not to raise the window shades - where we're headed is not your concern. We get there, we observe your Touch Treatment, we confer with the data analysts - and we return as if we never went. Let me update you on our test subject. Your treatment must entirely transform him or this project is immediately cancelled - understood?

JACK

(impatient)

Go on - who is this guy?