

Equal. Separate.

by

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FADE IN

EXT. - CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Building site in full gear, loud and dirty, hard-hatted WORKERS scrambling everywhere.

In the crowd, obvious because they are two women among a herd of men, are PAT, Caucasian woman, and CHRIS, African American woman, about the same age. They work just as hard, and joke just as hard, as the men as they build form-work for concrete.

SITE - FORM WORK

Gut-bloated site supervisor DOHERTY passes by them, wearing a tee-shirt which says "Kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out." Chris stiffens as he puts a hand on her shoulder and whispers something to her.

Pat, face twisted in anger, pounds the business end of a claw hammer into the palm of her hand.

Doherty gives Pat a fuck-you smile and moves on, rubbing his gas-bag belly.

Pat and Chris flip a look at each other. Chris shrugs, and they get back to work.

EXT. - HANRAHAN'S BAR - DAY

Ratty bar on a ratty street near the construction site.

INT. - BAR - DAY

VOICE-LOUD, MUSIC-LOUD, crowded with workers.

TABLE

Pat and Chris, hard hats still on, put down two beers and two shots each, then unharness themselves from their gear.

Pat yells to SOMEONE across the room.

PAT

Yeah, I got a match—my ass and your face!

The “someone” gives her a friendly middle finger, which she returns.

They sit, each grab a beer.

PAT

Ready?

CHRIS

Ready.

They raise the beers and toast.

CHRIS

It was a bitch today.

PAT

A bitch today it was.

CHRIS

Today I built the formwork.

PAT

Today I built the brick shithouse.

CHRIS

To the first sip.

PAT

To the first sip past the lip.

BOTH

With a maximum of zip. Whoo-wah!

They drink deep.

PAT

Even shit-brewed beer like this tastes good cold, first guzzle—

CHRIS

On to the second, then.

They finish the beer, then sip the shot.

PAT

I think—

Pat belches.

PAT

I think my throat just released.

Belches again.

PAT

Beer as roto-rooter.

CHRIS

Beer as confession.

PAT

Bitch of a day.

CHRIS

Bitch of a day it was.

DOOR OF BAR

In walks fat-fucker Doherty, hair water-slicked, with a new tee-shirt: "Rehab Is For Quitters."

TABLE

Chris and Pat watch him burrow his way in.

DOOR

He catches Chris' eye, blows her a kiss.

TABLE

Chris looks away. Pat gives Doherty a middle-finger salute.

PAT
(yelling)
It's your IQ!

BAR

Doherty, laughing, makes an "O" with thumb and forefinger of one hand and slides the middle finger of his other hand back and forth in the "O," as if to say, "Fuck you."

Then he disappears into the mob at the bar.

TABLE

PAT
So—

CHRIS
So—

PAT
So—Doherty—

CHRIS
I know— I know!

PAT
He's getting worse.

CHRIS
I'm handling him.

PAT
The man who sprayed "Property of the Cunt" on your locker?

CHRIS
I'm handling him!

PAT
He's handling you.

CHRIS
I told him—

PAT
Like handling a pit viper.

CHRIS

I told him—

PAT

To Doherty, “handle” only means one thing—

CHRIS

Yeah—

PAT

—and it ain’t the George Frederick fucking “Water Music” Hallelujah chorus.

Chris glares at Pat.

PAT

I’ll shut up.

CHRIS

I told him—

PAT

Yeah—

CHRIS

—one more pass of his hand across my ass—

PAT

Yeah—

CHRIS

—and I was going to clamp it ’tween my cheeks and use it for a wipe.

PAT

Could be he’d like that.

CHRIS

And then I’d shit nails.

They pause, catch each other’s eye, and laugh.

BAR

Doherty, hands out to his side, makes a huge “O” with his mouth and pops it over the top of a shot glass. Then, shot glass clamped between lips, he snaps his head back and the liquor flashes down his gullet.

The crowd HOWLS.

TABLE

Pat and Chris peer over at the racket, see Doherty with his head tilted back and the shot glass pointed ceilingward.

PAT

“Shit nails”—good scum-back to that cum-chum.
Useless, though.

CHRIS

What?

PAT

Words. With chuckleheads like him.

CHRIS

I know. Wasted. I really would have to shit nails on
him.

PAT

If you want to really shit nails—

Pat sips her shot.

CHRIS

Rest of a sentence go with that?

PAT

Talk to the steward. File on him.

CHRIS

File on Doherty.

PAT

Go to the union—

CHRIS

File for “hair-ass-ment.”

PAT

The gut-bloated fat fucker—

CHRIS

—for hair-ass-ment.

PAT

You file—and it'll be like with a mule, a two-by-four
cranked between the eyes.

CHRIS

Her-ass-ment. His-ass-ment. My-ass-ment—

PAT

Your ass means a lot, honey.

CHRIS

Please.

PAT

It's the battleground.

CHRIS

It's big enough—

PAT

You know, like I know, the Dohertys of this fucking
world only obey hard objects against their soft parts.

CHRIS

File.

PAT

It's your two by four.

CHRIS

And “you know, like I know” the follow-up—you've
seen this!—

EXT. - WORK SITE - DAY

A patch of ground, a SOUND like a coming freight train, then a BOOM as a
cinderblock smashes into the dirt.

CHRIS (V.O.)

An “accidental” cinderblock—

CONCRETE WITH REBAR

Two-foot-long nasty rusted rebar sticking up through concrete—Chris' hard hat
falls out of the sky and bounces off the jagged ends.

CHRIS (V.O.)

—or I'll be a perforated sandwich on some rebar or, or—

INT. - BAR - DAY

CHRIS

—or—

CHRIS shows the palm of her hand.

CHRIS

—ten-penny Christ with a nail gun—bam, bam, bam!
Dee-nied testosterone is one dangerous bodily fluid.

BAR

Doherty and another WORKER balance shot glasses on the backs of the hands.

CROWD

1 - 2 - 3!

On "3," the two men pop the shot glasses up into the air, grab them, then down the shot. DOHERTY wins. Rowdy YELLS.

TABLE

PAT

No use fighting to get in if you can't get on—

CHRIS

I got my boy to think about—

PAT

I got my girl.

CHRIS

You'd risk it?

PAT

I'm saying I'd at least consider.

CHRIS

You'd bat for me?

PAT

Solidarity forever.

Chris looks into her glass of beer as if she were waiting for the Virgin Mary to appear.

What? PAT

Pat leans in.

What is so hard? PAT

Easier for you. CHRIS

Why? PAT

Still looking.

Color. CHRIS

Color? PAT

CHRIS
Out there, there's bitch, and that's you and me, we can handle that—and then there's black bitch, that's just me, and I get to be what the dog kicks when the dog gets kicked—

It ain't as bad— PAT

It? CHRIS

Color thing. PAT

Not bad? CHRIS

As bad. PAT

As what? CHRIS

PAT
Look at the laws.

CHRIS
As what?

PAT
Black millionaires now.

CHRIS
Pat—don't—

PAT
Look at you and this job.

CHRIS
Are you hearing the undertone of that?

PAT
You don't have it just because— I'm not saying that,
Chris—c'mon!

CHRIS
Then what are you—park it. I'm tired—I can't do the
curriculum today with you.

PAT
The curriculum?

CHRIS
Never mind.

Chris downs the rest of her beer: no Virgin Mary at the bottom.

I gotta go—

BAR

Doherty sees Chris stand up and slip her tool belt off the back of the chair. Her eye catches Doherty's. He sticks both hands over his head, fingers spread out, then "counts down" from ten by folding a finger away with each number.

Pat does not see him do this.

TABLE

Chris stares at Doherty's "count down," not sure what it means, knowing it means nothing good. It rattles her.

So fine. PAT

What? CHRIS

Fine. PAT

Fine what? CHRIS

PAT
You don't want to see the advances, fine.

Chris sits back down before Doherty reaches "one," but she can't quite take her eyes off him.

Doherty puts an exaggerated little-boy pout on his face, then laughs like the gut-bloated fat fucker he is and turns back to the bar.

Chris continues to stare into space, vaguely hearing Pat's voice behind her.

PAT (O.S.)
Way up in the government—way up. Multi-bazillion dollar athletes.

Chris turns to look at Pat.

PAT
Judge. Judges. Arts. Entertainment. Everywhere. Lot of crime, too, but hey—you know.

Know what? CHRIS

PAT
Bound to be sludge—

CHRIS
—sludge—

PAT
—in the engine of progress.

A beat between them, then Chris reaches over, grabs the rest of Pat's first shot, chugs it down, and puts the glass down gently.

CHRIS
Slavery—

PAT
Gone.

CHRIS
Jim Crow—

PAT
Flown.

CHRIS
Affirmative action—

PAT
Affirmed. It's a new paragraph.

CHRIS
Better world?

PAT
By far.

Chris takes Pat's second beer, guzzles it, puts the glass down very carefully.

CHRIS
Never guessed you for an—optimist.

Pat, surveying the three empty beer glasses, looks puzzled.

PAT
It doesn't always pay to run things down.

Chris picks up her own second shot, downs it.

CHRIS
Let me ask you then—

PAT
Anything.

CHRIS
A test.

PAT
Whoo-wah!

But Chris does not rise to the chant.

CHRIS
Your Leslie—

PAT
Yeah?

CHRIS
Your Leslie. My Jamie.

PAT
You mean—

CHRIS
I mean your new paragraph.

PAT
What?

CHRIS
I mean mix it up. I mean “mix”-cegenation. Well,
optimist?

The bar NOISE has lessened considerably as patrons have started to leave for their own after-work business. In the air is MUSIC: Marvin Gaye. Doherty, alone at the bar and soused, is dancing by himself to the music.

CHRIS
Whoo-wah. I’m getting your silence loud and strong.

PAT
Um—

CHRIS
Any nouns or adjectives with that?

PAT
No.

CHRIS
No.

PAT

It wouldn't work—

CHRIS

You know him. I know her. They know each other. They like each other. They like each other. Genuine lay-down-the-foundation like each other.

PAT

Damn!

CHRIS

If the world smells so good to you—what?

PAT

She wanted to, you know—Jamie. Go with Jamie. I said no.

CHRIS

And why?

PAT

The children—

CHRIS

Children?

PAT

If they had—children—wouldn't be a good world for them—

BAR

Doherty dances.

TABLE

CHRIS

Light coffee not your color?

CHRIS

People would see mixed race, they wouldn't see them! Eaten alive. I really believe that. I wouldn't. You wouldn't. But—well—Doherty would.

CHRIS

Doherty?

PAT

The likes of Doherty. Taking their sheets to the tailor.

CHRIS

And so Doherty wins?

BAR

Doherty stops dancing, looks at Chris.

TABLE

Chris looks at Doherty. Pat turns and sees what Chris is looking at.

Doherty takes his right index finger, slides it in and out of his mouth, then closes his eyes and runs the finger under his nose, as if he were smelling it. He lets out an operatic “ah!”, then laughs at Chris and turns away from her.

Chris hooks her eyes to Pat's.

CHRIS

You give it up to that?

PAT

It's protection.

CHRIS

So—because we're gutless—

PAT

Gutless?

CHRIS

—then Jamie and Leslie have to lose. Is that where all this we've done has got us to? Doherty wins again?

Chris stands, hooks on her belt, grabs her hard hat.

CHRIS

Is the office closed?

PAT

What?

CHRIS

Is—the—office—closed?

PAT

Project manager's there, usually—paperwork.

Chris takes money of her pocket.

CHRIS

You—you and Doherty—are not going to win. Jamie and Leslie are going to have a shot. I have some paperwork to do.

PAT

Let me go back with you. I'll back you up.

CHRIS

Back off!

Chris lays the money down very carefully.

CHRIS

(softer)

As you said, you have a daughter to get home to. I get this one on my own.

PAT

Chris—

CHRIS

Don't—don't start lying—

Chris straightens the money.

CHRIS

I used to be able to watch my back with you. That was the gift, Pat. No more. In the space of two beers—

Chris is unable to believe what she is thinking.

CHRIS

In the space of two beers we can't go back to the back we used to have.

CHRIS' POV

Chris looks at Doherty's whale-like back lumped over the bar.

CHRIS (O.C.)

The point of it all?

TABLE

Pat says nothing. Chris leaves.

BAR

Doherty sees Chris leave, and he immediately makes for the door.

TABLE

Pat sees Doherty move. She grabs her hammer from her belt and is up and out of her chair like a bolt. She intercepts Doherty at the door, stands in his way, delays him, gives Chris time to make her get-away.

The air fills with Marvin Gaye as Doherty laughs and dances in front of Pat.

FADE OUT