

Basically Makin Money

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Four actors. Two men. Two women.

A street. Medium to bad neighborhood. There is an auto repair garage, called "Hip Tranh Auto." There is a pharmacy. There is an Abercrombie & Fitch.

Jackson walks out of the pharmacy. He couldn't find what he wanted in there. He sits down on a bench, and checks his line of sight to the auto repair garage. He has nothing to do, for a moment.

The first scene plays andante, like your basic Beckett rip-off. Lots of pauses and lost trails of supposed coherence.

Griffith enters. He has on a tall stove-pipe hat, and a somewhat military uniform. His costume is a bit fantastic, theatrical. Jackson, by contrast looks like a real-life delivery driver, or an employee at 7-11.

Griffith surveys the scene, and presumes to own it. He walks up to Jackson, pretending not to notice that Jackson is there. Then, Griffith makes a slow, theatrical show of noticing, gradually, that Jackson is sitting there. Finally, Griffith fixes Jackson with a stare. Jackson looks back.

Griffith
I'm the law.

Jackson
Hi.

Griffith
What are you doin'?

Jackson
git'n oil change.

Griffith
what.

Jackson
git'n oil change.

Griffith
what?

Jackson points with thumb at the garage. No effect.

Jackson
Oil change.

Griffith
Change a'yoil?

Jackson
Yep.

Griffith
Change a'yoil? At a gay-rage?

eb. Jackson
Must be rich. Griffith
eh. Jackson
Rich man. Change a'yoil gay-rage. Griffith
Ain' rich. Jackson
Change yussself. Griffith
Rich man got a driveway. Wrench. Bucket. Ain rich. Jackson
Loiterin. Griffith
Git'n oil change. Jackson
Bullshit. Griffith
eb. Jackson
Kina car. Griffith
Daewoo. Jackson
Bullshit. Griffith
eb. Jackson

Griffith
What are you doin?
Jackson
eh.
Griffith
Daewoo.
Jackson
Yep.
Griffith
Shit.
Jackson
My brother sells life insurance.
Griffith
What?
Jackson
Yep.
Griffith
You ain' got a license.
Jackson
eh.
Griffith
Sell shit.
Jackson
Nope.
Griffith
Loiterin. Solicitin. Daewoo! Shit.
Jackson
Have you given serious thought to the financial security of your family?
Griffith
Daewoo. Shit, kina car?

Jackson
For less than one dollar a day you can provide for
your family.

Griffith
Go fuck yesself insurance.

Jackson
In the event of a calamity.

Griffith
Solicitin is a crime.

Jackson
Em boys atta garage. They bought it.

Griffith
Bough insurance?

Jackson
Yep.

Griffith
You sold it to em?

Jackson
My brother sells insurance. Not me. Don't
endorse it, or recommend it. Nothing.

Griffith
Bullshit. You got the right to remain silent.

Jackson
Thanks.

Griffith
Ima run you in.

Jackson
Em garage boys, got a big policy. Big policy.

Griffith.
Why?

Jackson
Sa good question.

**The auto repair garage explodes.
In the shock of the moment,
Jackson runs away. Griffith is
staring at the wreckage, as dust
calmly settles on the scene.**

Griffith
Shit.

**Crossfade to little table at a coffee
shop. Jackson is sitting with a
small Asian woman named Bora.
Jackson's face looks different,
somehow. Bora is dressed
completely in Abercrombie &
Fitch, on the business upscale
end of the spectrum.**

Jackson
I told him I sold insurance. I spoke his language.

Bora
He didn't speak English?

Jackson
Not exactly.

Bora
Where is he from?

Jackson
No, he's from America. But like, Deep In. So he
talks good-ol-boy.

Bora
You're sure he won't. You know. Discover
something.

Jackson
He'll think it's insurance fraud. And he'll be right,
sortof. He'll investigate. Life Insurance scam. It
will lead him to the the local housing projects.
Works like clockwork.

Bora
Life insurance?

Jackson

Yeah. It's a simple question really. How do you get gang leaders, drug dealers, community activists, ministers, social workers, people who don't have much in common? Eh? How do you get them all on one list? You would think there's no way to get them all on a list. Names, date of birth, social security numbers, so the police can track them down. But I made a list. You sell some cheap life insurance? Those guys are not dumb. They sign up.

Bora

You actually sold life insurance?

Jackson

Technically, it was my brother.

Bora

I'm confused.

Jackson

It's part of the long-range plan. Remember, part of my fee was to get the police to crack down on the local population.

Bora

Okay. But can this guy trace it back to you?

Jackson

No way.

Bora

He saw your face.

Jackson

I was in disguise.

Bora

Really?

Jackson

Why not? What if one of those Cambodian car shop guys survived? Coulda I-D'ed me.

Bora

No! They're... not... Cambodian. They're Vietnamese.

Jackson

Well, they're dead. Ka-boom, baby.

Bora

I'm Cambodian.

Jackson

What's the difference?

Bora

What's the difference? The difference? The DIFFERENCE? That's very funny.

Jackson

(*whatever*) Sorry.

Bora

You know the Nazis and the Jews? They're all Germans, right? What's the difference?

Jackson

Oh. So in this case, which ones are you guys?

Bora

In this case. We would be the Jews. I'm a Cambodian. They were Vietnamese. You, you idiot.

Jackson

Do you want to go out some time?

Bora

What? Do you what?

Jackson

Like, for dinner.

Bora

What? I bang a thousand men, they never ask me out to dinner, why do I start with you?

Jackson

A thousand men?

Bora

I'm not. Not experience. I don't want dinner.

Jackson
Uhm. Can we back up to the first part of that sentence?

Bora
It's just a... What do you say? A turn of phrase.

Jackson
Oh.

Bora
Anyway. I don't think it's good idea. We should keep this just business.

Jackson
Because, like, in America, a turn of phrase is like, "Cat got your tongue?" Or, "up a crick with no paddle." So in native Cambodian, how does "I've banged a thousand men..." How does that translate?

Bora
We're done here, I think.

Jackson
Okay. But it's not just business. It's personal.

Bora
You mean you're going to . . . blackmail me?

Jackson
I mean I'm interested.

Bora
You got the internet?

Jackson
Yeah.

Bora
You look up Cambodian Sex Trade. Then. Tell me if you're interested.

Jackson
You were a whore?

Bora
I was a slave.

Blackout. Fade up on a big fancy office. Eliza sits behind an executive desk. She dangles a shoe from her foot, just like Katie Couric. She is on the phone.

Eliza
Yes. I heard the news. I understand one of our employees was involved. I'm handling it. That's right. Bora Soth. She runs the Abercrombie store. She hired somebody. Mr. Jackson. Apparently has explosives experience. Yes. Military I guess. No. No, we don't run strict background checks on the store managers, go figure. I'll handle it. They're coming to the office shortly. I know. I have no idea what the police know. They contacted me. A Mr. Griffith from the district police. Said he's going to stop by, they referred him to me. I'll handle it.

Crossfade to an elevator. Jackson and Bora are standing in it. Jackson is carrying a boombox.

Jackson
She said I had to come? Holy shit.

Bora
How many times you gonna ask?

Jackson
Holy shit!

Bora
Calm down.

Jackson
How did she know about me? I mean, I was holy shit! Incommunicado.

Bora
I don't know. She's an executive. They know stuff.

Jackson
Shit! This elevator is taking forever.

Bora
It isn't moving.

Jackson
Holy shit! Why not?

Bora
I didn't hit the button.

Jackson
Why not?

Bora
I want you to calm down first.

Jackson
Okay. What are we gonna tell her?

Bora
Just like the plan.

Jackson
Just like we planned. Okay. This is it! The song and dance.

Bora
Song and dance. It's a good market plan.

Jackson
I love you.

Bora
Well. Whatever. Just calm down.

Jackson
I looked up Cambodian Sex Trade on the internet.

Elevator door opens. Griffith enters. He pushes the button for the 39th story. They stand in silence for a moment.

Bora
Are you with the police?

Griffith
Officer Griffith mam.

Bora
Are you investigating the ... the explosion?

Griffith
Not liberty mam. Say. Nice boombox.

Jackson
Thanks.

Bora
I run the Abercrombie & Fitch store. Right next door. Oh my god. It was frightening. Terrorism. I can't believe it!

Griffith
Weren't terrorism.

Bora
It wasn't?

Griffith
Got me a perp. Got a good look at him.

Bora
You saw who did it?

Griffith
Yep. I seen em. Shifty. No good. His brother. They got a insurance scam.

Bora
I hope you catch him.

Griffith
At boombox. It got eight inch woofers?

Jackson
Ten inch. And twenty-K tweeters.

Griffith
Shit. Nice boombox.

Door opens. Crossfade to Eliza's office, which Griffith walks into.

Griffith
Your company owns a lotta property in that area.

Eliza
Yes.

Griffith
You been asked. Bout any life insurance?

Eliza
We deal in real estate, Mr. Griffith.

Griffith
Yep. But. You hear any. Any somethin bout life insurance?

Eliza
No. I don't know what you mean.

Griffith
I'm onna lookout. Insurance. Got me a perp.

Eliza
Okay.

Griffith
Mam.

Griffith exits, passing Jackson and Bora as they enter.

Eliza
Nice to meet you. I'm Elza Stephenson, corporate relations officer. Please sit down. Sit down. Sit down. Here's what we know. One or both of you planted a bomb in the auto repair shop. Just two doors from our Abercrombie & Fitch retail location. We have sufficient evidence, but we have a financial duty to investigate ... other options. The police, at the moment, seem to think it's some kind of insurance fraud. My investors are nervous and I find homicide distasteful. Please. Make me feel better.

Bora
We have a A song and dance.

Jackson
Allow me to introduce myself...

Eliza
I know who you are...

Jackson
I'm a consultant for what I like to call relationship marketing. Here's my card.

Bora
We have a song and dance.

Pause.

Eliza
Let's hear it.

Jackson starts the boombox. It's a standard, lame, techno beat. The ensuing little speeches have been rehearsed, to the music.

Bora
Once upon a time, there was a place called Demographic mountain. It was a very tall mountain, with peaks and crags. All the mountain was made of demographics. Trends. Percentages. It was a beautiful place.

Eliza
I'm already lost.

Jackson
Tell her about the skiing.

Bora (*gaining confidence*)
Okay. Think of Real estate as downhill skiing. Once upon a time, there was a little boy who loved to race down the mountain. He was the fastest boy on the mountain. His skis were made of yak-horn and nano-carbon foam. Whatever. One day, he was challenged to a race by a sickly little boy with glasses. First one to the bottom of the mountain wins. Whatever. Fast boy loses. Glasses boy wins. Why? Because Glasses boy made his own course down the mountain. Straight and true. No bumps. No curves. No problems. How did he do it?

Jackson (*super cheesy*)
Well? How did he do it?

Bora
The usual way. With dynamite.

Jackson
Dynamite!

Bora
Dynamite!

Jackson
They say Real estate is about location, location, location. But that's not true any more. Today, we make our own geography. It's all about demographics. Short-term irrational thinking. How to profit. A terrorist bomb excavates more metric tonnes of demographic than any other tool. It scoops out their tendencies and predilections. We're very fond of predilections. And you fill up that hole with what? What?

Pause. Music boom-cha.

Jackson
Come on. You scoop out their habits with, what I like to call, the steam shovel of terror. There's a big hole. And what do you fill it up with?

Pause. Music boom-cha.

Jackson
It's not a trick question. If people lose their culture, what do they fill it up with?

Pause.

Eliza
Okay, what?

Jackson
Retail!!!!

Bora
Retail!!!!

Jackson
Retail!!!!

Slow fade. Music slow fade. Lights up on Griffith, who is driving around a Little Tikes™ scooter car. Jackson enters. He has on his disguise from scene one, and he is driving a Step2™ plastic scooter car. He shoots his gun a lot at Griffith. Griffith shoots back. They drive around the stage chasing each other, and shooting. They crash. Jackson gets up, and shoots his gun in the air some more. Then he conspicuously drops a briefcase, and runs away. Griffith gets up, and shoots some in the direction of Jackson. He shoots a few members of the audience. Then he spies the briefcase. He opens it, reviews the entrails.

Griffiths
Documents. Insurance. Smokin gun.

Griffiths shoots his gun some more. Blackout. Fade up on a podium. Eliza is addressing the audience. She bangs a gavel.

Eliza

This ad hoc directors meeting of the Suburban Macro Investment Consortium is now in session. Thank you for attending on such short notice. I want to state, at the outset, that your capital investment in this project is not at risk. I realize some of you are alarmed at the latest news. As you know, an explosion occurred two doors away from the Abercrombie & Fitch property. I can understand your worry. But I assure you, our plan for buyout and development is on track. The surrounding property values will lower, and we will invest less of your capital in the buildout phase. That, ladies and gentlemen, is good news.

There is a facilitator out in the audience with the following questions written on slips of paper. The facilitator chooses an audience member, and has that person stand up, and deliver each question.

QUESTION 1

How can we secure profit when there's bombs going off in the neighborhood?

Eliza

This is the core issue, isn't it? And here's the core answer. Retail customers have no memory. No society. Brand, Ambience, Convenience? We have it, ladies and gentlemen. So maybe, maybe there was a bomb. In media terms, Terrorism. Families and small businesses will move away in droves. That's not our problem. It means Bigger parking lots for us. Retail thrives in a vacuum.

QUESTION 2

But if there are bombs in the shopping district, nobody is gonna come.

Eliza

Okay. I oversimplified. You can't bomb the shopping mall. But you can bomb next door. Or just down the road. Shoppers don't know their local geography. They drive off the highway, and into our controlled environment. It's a non-problem. In a few weeks, customers will proceed like it never happened.

QUESTION 3

People don't FORGET about terrorism.

Eliza

Uhh. True. People don't forget. Society has a memory, shoppers don't. For a shopper, it doesn't exist unless they see it five times on the television. So. If you can keep terrorism at or below the four-story threshold, everybody runs away. Except the shoppers. Because that bomb? It doesn't quite exist for them. It wasn't repeated enough on the TV.

QUESTION 4

What if the terrorism makes too much news?

Eliza

We generally choose to create these events during heavy news cycles. Like the run-up to the olympics, or political scandal. Or during a hurricane. Or at christmas time, when terrorism doesn't play well. Our target strategy is to highlight ethnic minorities, especially illegal immigrants, no more than four people at a time. No children, of course. And to marginalize buildings at or below a \$300,000 market cap. This is a sliding scale, adjusted against local rates, of course. And the more obscure the minority, the more free the hand with capital damages. Biggest bang for the buck. Because the real estate market? They have a memory. They still believe in 20th century economics. So the bigger a building that ... meets misfortune, the more you can expect to lower the local real estate prices.

QUESTION 5

And then it's safe to move in retail stores?

Eliza

It's best to already establish retail presence, before the bomb. I mean, the ... terrorist themed media event. It motivates people to proactively forget. We have established a short list of pioneer brands. If you open Abercrombie and Fitch, people will assume that the area is a trendy shopping district. Even in the worst parts of town. If, within the first year of operations, additional real estate can be controlled at favorable rates, that first shop is likely to be a loss leader for only two fiscal years. After that, follow-on growth is established, and the real estate investments made at year zero can be flipped for a fantastic yield.

QUESTION 6

Still, nobody will shop in a bad part of town.

Eliza
We insulate. Our big challenge is to insure that the lower quartile demographic continue to move away during the operations ramp-up. A combination of higher rents and perceived terrorism are the key motivators, along with increased pressure from the local police.

QUESTION 7

How do you make sure the police will crack down?

Eliza
It's complicated. We hire stunt drivers. Uhm. It involves insurance fraud. It's complicated. But, you know, there's terrorism going on, so the police are gonna crack down on SOMEBODY. Why not the poor people? I mean, assigning blame. It's not rocket science.

QUESTION 8

Are you saying our Consortium actually committed Terrorism?

Eliza
Well no. That's the beauty of it. We don't finance, plan, or execute terrorism. At least not under our present business plan. We just happen to profit from it.

Crossfade to cafe table. Jackson and Bora are seated there.

Bora
So. This is a date.

Jackson
Yep.

Bora
Okay. What do we do?

Jackson
We order dinner.

Bora
Are you paying?

Jackson
Sure.

Bora
I'd rather pay.

Jackson
Okay.

Bora
What else do we do?

Jackson
It's like a business meeting, except we talk about everything else besides business.

Bora
What else is there?

Jackson
In theory, nothing. But generally, you talk about your friends, your family, stuff you like to do, culture.

Bora
My father stepped on a landmine. He died in three places. So my mother sold me to a brothel. Upwards of one thousand men. The rough ones liked me 'cause I tried to fight back.

Pause.

Jackson
That doesn't matter to me.

Bora
It matters to me.

Pause.

Jackson
What. Uhm. What do you want?

Bora
Revenge. And then Justice. And then Utopia.

Pause.

Jackson
I wrote you a poem. I'm gonna read it to you.

Bora
Okay.

Jackson reads his poem. He is not a good reader.

Jackson
Getting the biggest Bang for your Buck
Is like
The Biggest Bang for your Buck there is.
I'm all about value, baby.
You are a gem, baby, reasonably flawless
Like a yellow carbuncle bought at a flea market
That turns out to be worth more than 50 dollars.
You are smart, and pretty.
And those are qualities that I like.
Also, you have great fashion sense...

Bora
It's Abercrombie & Fitch.

Jackson
I know.... "And you are nice.
In terms of market impact,
You are the loss leader of my soul.
When I am with you,
I am basically makin money."That's it.

Bora
That was beautiful.

Jackson
So. You wanna be my girlfriend?

Bora
I thought we already established that when I told
you I was paying.

Jackson
Oh. Okay.

Eliza enters and sits down at the table. Jackson and Bora are surprised.

Eliza
I have established a reasonable facsimile of
control.

Pause, with impressive music burst.

Bora
Facsimile?

Eliza
Illusion. I took your idea, and ran with it. I am,
appearances being what they are, in control of the
situation, provided, that is, that I can maintain
reasonable assurance that you two are not going
to repeat your . . . entrepreneurial pursuit of
homicide.

Jackson
That sounds like a value proposition.

Eliza
Considering the situation, we may arrange a
modest, regular stipend for this concession.

Bora
I am a businesswoman. Not an employee. Also, I
am a communist. I have seen men cut down with
knives, for the crime of hoarding currency.

Eliza
So... what are you saying?

Bora
You'll have to pay us a lot.

Eliza
Something can be arranged.

Griffith enters suddenly.

Griffith
Caught-cha. Y'all under arrest.

Pause.

Eliza
For what?

Pause.

Griffith

Loiterin.

Pause.

Eliza

But we're paying customers. And my company happens to own this cafe.

Griffith

Well. Goddammit. Customer. Cafe. Bullshit.

Eliza

Fine, fine. Will five dollars do?

Griffith

That'll be fine. Much obliged.

Eliza hands Griffith five dollars.

Griffith

Yer keepn America safe. Gummnt gotcher back.

Bora

Is he speaking English?

Jackson

He's a policeman.

Fade out. End.

QUESTION 1

How can we secure profit when there's bombs going off in the neighborhood?

QUESTION 2

But if there are bombs in the shopping district, nobody is gonna come.

QUESTION 3

People don't FORGET about terrorism.

QUESTION 4

What if the terrorism makes too much news?

QUESTION 5

And then it's safe to move in retail stores?

QUESTION 6

Still, nobody will shop in a bad part of town.

QUESTION 7

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