

OLD, DUMB, AND UGLY

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. A RAMSHACKLE APARTMENT - THE BEDROOM - MORNING

A man who looks to be about sixty-five years old rises to the sound of a buzzing clock radio. This is MARTIN ARIIO. He has wild white hair and is clad in faded pajama pants and an old white shirt. His surroundings are clean and kempt, but clearly the result of intensely frugal living. After staring blankly for a few seconds, Martin taps a button on the clock radio. Nothing happens, and the buzzing continues. Martin taps the button a few more times, then grabs a pillow and clumsily tucks it around the radio's speakers. The buzzing sound is muffled, but not muted. Martin moves to rise from his bed.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE BEDROOM - MORNING

A man's feet slide their way into a pair of velvet slippers at the foot of a pristine white bed. As their owner rises, he is revealed to be identical in appearance to Martin, save for the fact that he wearing pajamas that match his slippers, and his white hair is much less unruly. This is MARKUS ARIIO, a millionaire philanthropist. He smiles contentedly, lightly taps a clock radio on a nearby night stand, then rises to his feet.

CUT TO:

INT. A RAMSHACKLE APARTMENT - AN EMPTY KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Martin squints at the label on a jar of instant coffee. Apparently deciding that he either cannot read or does not care about the instructions, he dumps an excessive amount of the brown powder into a chipped coffee mug.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE UPPER FLOOR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Markus sits at the head of an enormous wooden table, drinking black coffee from a dainty cup with gold filigree. He is reading something on a silver tablet computer.

Behind Markus, a figure clad in a dark suit and white gloves picks some discarded clothes up off the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. A RAMSHACKLE APARTMENT - THE BATHROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Martin stares at a dilapidated toilet with a plunger handle sticking out from the bowl. He sighs, then walks to a tiny, water-stained shower. The sound of Martin urinating becomes audible.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - A WALK-IN CLOSET - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Markus, now clad in a tailored suit, stands with his arms outstretched. The figure from before runs a lint brush over every inch of Markus's body. She is a young woman of Asian descent with a look of intense concentration on her face. This is CHARISE, Markus's live-in nurse and assistant.

CUT TO:

INT. A RAMSHACKLE APARTMENT - THE LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Martin sits down on a threadbare couch next to a pile of folded laundry. He looks through it, eventually selecting a pair of worn slacks. With grunts of effort, Martin moves to remove his pajama pants and don the slacks.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LARGE OFFICE BUILDING - THE ENTRANCE - DAY

A black town car pulls up to the entrance of a multistory office building. A crowd of REPORTERS, who have clearly been waiting for this moment, swarm forward. Charise exits from one side of the vehicle, walks around it, and opens the door for Markus.

REPORTER #1

Mister Ario! Mister Ario! Sir, any hints as to what ReliTech will be announcing tomorrow?

Markus responds with a confident, friendly smile.

MARKUS

No hints, I'm afraid! You'll all just have to wait for the gala.

REPORTER #2

Will it have anything to do with the recent rumors about...

MARKUS

(Interrupting)

Now, now, you know how I feel about rumors!

A THIRD REPORTER pushes his way through the crowd.

REPORTER #3

Mister Ario, what about...

Before the reporter can finish speaking, he erupts into a coughing fit, which goes on for several seconds.

MARKUS

Are you alright there, son?

The reporter, red in the face, nods.

REPORTER #3

What about...

He continues coughing.

MARKUS

I'd tell you to spit it out, but it looks like you're already working on that.

The reporter offers a strained smile.

REPORTER #3

I think I swallowed my cigarette.

MARKUS

Ah. Well. You're not supposed to do that.

The other reporters all start clamoring again. Markus raises his hands.

MARKUS (CONT'D)

Please, please! I know you're all eager for details, and I'd love to give them to you...

(MORE)

MARKUS (CONT'D)

but really, my wife will have my head if I spoil the surprise. You'll just have to wait until the gala tomorrow night.

Markus turns to enter the building, but stops and looks back as the third reporter attempts to speak again. Charise continues walking forward and holds the door open.

REPORTER #3

What about...

Before the reporter can finish his sentence, one of the others points towards the sky and shouts something unintelligible. Everyone scatters, except for Markus, who looks skyward with an expression of disbelieving alarm on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. A DINER - DAY

Martin squeezes an enormous amount of ketchup from a plastic bottle, thoroughly covering a small helping of scrambled eggs. Nearby, a waitress looks on with mild disapproval. This is LORI.

LORI

You know that stuff will kill you, right?

MARTIN

It's just ketchup.

Martin moves to take a bite, but stops when Lori speaks again.

LORI

Have you ever looked at the ingredients?

MARTIN

No.

LORI

Well, you should.

MARTIN

Thanks.

Lori continues to watch Martin as he brings a forkful of the eggs toward his mouth. Before he can eat them, Lori interrupts again.

LORI
It's full of free radicals, you
know.

Martin puts his fork down and looks at Lori with irritation.

MARTIN
What?

LORI
Yep. You might as well go swimming
in a nuclear power plant.

MARTIN
Are you suggesting that tomatoes
are radioactive?

LORI
I'm just saying. You should pay
more attention to what you eat.

Lori reaches into a pocket on her apron and pulls out a
check.

LORI (CONT'D)
Anyway, your credit card was
declined.

MARTIN
I haven't even given it to you yet!

LORI
Okay, well, it *will* be declined.
Cash only, sweetie.

Lori walks away. Martin watches her go, then dumps more
ketchup onto his eggs.

CUT TO:

EXT. A SUBURBAN STREET - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Martin exits the diner and begins walking down the street. He
passes the front window display of an electronics store,
where a news report is being shown on several televisions. No
sound is audible from the screens. A news anchor is
discussing something with a grave expression on his face, and
an insert of a piano is seen next to him. As Martin passes,
the image on the screens changes to show a picture of Markus.
Martin sees this from the corner of his eye, pauses in his
walk, and turns to look.

By the time that he has, though, the image has shifted again, showing an obliterated piano on a street, surrounded by police tape. Martin continues walking.

CUT TO:

INT. A BANK LOBBY

Martin walks into an upscale bank lobby, looking thoroughly out of his element. He approaches a desk in one corner of the space, which is occupied by a black man in his fifties. This is AUSTIN, a loan officer. He is staring intently at his computer screen.

MARTIN

Austin.

Austin quickly presses a button on his keyboard, then looks up from his computer screen and smiles.

AUSTIN

Marty! Hey, what's going on, man?
Hey...

Austin points a finger at Martin in mock accusation.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Don't you tell me you didn't like
those sandwiches I sent over.

MARTIN

Don't do that.

AUSTIN

Jeez, man, they were just
sandwiches. What do you have
against pastrami?

MARTIN

Not that. Don't call me "Marty."

With an exaggerated roll of his eyes, Austin responds.

AUSTIN

Oh, I'm sorry, "Martin." You know,
maybe you'd be in a better mood
without that stick up your ass.

Martin does not respond. Instead, he pulls up a chair and sits down opposite Austin.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
(Sarcastically)
Why, yes, Martin. By all means.
Please, sit down.

Martin stares impassively at Austin. Several meters behind him, near the entrance to the bank, an elderly JANITOR slowly pushes a cart full of cleaning supplies.

MARTIN
I need to take out a loan.

Austin offers an affected (but affectionate) smile of mock surprise.

AUSTIN
A loan? You? Mister frugal living?
Nah, you're messing with me. Hey,
let's make tacos tonight. What do
you say?

MARTIN
I'm serious, Austin.

Austin sighs.

AUSTIN
Come on, man, don't make me do
this.

MARTIN
I need money.

The janitor unfolds and sets up a yellow warning sign with a picture of a stick figure slipping emblazoned on it. He regards it for a moment, then glances over at Austin and Martin.

AUSTIN
Look, Martin, you're not exactly a
creditor's dream, okay?

The janitor shuffles over to Martin and Austin.

MARTIN
What do creditors dream about,
then? Spending millions of dollars
on special paintings?

AUSTIN
Special...? Okay, not quite, but...

The janitor, having arrived behind Martin, interrupts.

JANITOR
Wet floor.

AUSTIN
What?

The janitor gestures back at the yellow sign.

JANITOR
Wet floor.

AUSTIN
Okay. Thank you.

Austin watches the janitor start to walk away, then returns his attention to Martin.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Look, the fact is, nobody reputable
is going to give you a loan.

MARTIN
You could if you wanted.

AUSTIN
I don't own the bank, Martin!

The janitor walks back up behind Martin.

JANITOR
Not wet yet.

AUSTIN
What?

JANITOR
Soon.

Austin gestures pointedly at Martin while staring at the janitor.

AUSTIN
I'm with a client.

The janitor looks at Martin as though seeing him for the first time.

JANITOR
Hello.

MARTIN
Hi.

JANITOR
Wet floor.

AUSTIN
Thank you!

The janitor leaves again, returning to his cart of cleaning supplies. He detaches a rolling mop bucket from one side and starts wetting down the floor.

MARTIN
So, I'm a client now.

AUSTIN
Stop it.

MARTIN
I'm not doing anything.

AUSTIN
Stop it.

MARTIN
Give me a loan.

AUSTIN
You can't *bully* your way into a loan! Okay? Even if I processed an application for you, it would get rejected. You don't have any income.

MARTIN
I have my pension.

AUSTIN
What do you need a loan for, then?

Before Martin can answer, a shout of alarm and indignation is heard as the janitor slips and falls on the floor he was cleaning. He attempts to right himself, becoming thoroughly soaked.

MARTIN
This isn't exactly easy for me, you know.

Austin nods sympathetically.

AUSTIN
I get that, man. I really do.

He pauses for a moment, considering.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Look, if there's some kind of an
emergency...

MARTIN
My toilet's broken.

Austin stares at Martin with a look of incredulity, then starts laughing.

AUSTIN
Damn, man, so I wasn't wrong when I
said you had a stick up your ass!

Martin looks ready to say something, but Austin holds up a hand.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Okay, here, look. You head back to
your house. Stop off and get some
taco supplies. You can afford that,
right?

Martin nods.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Great. I'll pitch in when I get
there, and I'll see about fixing
your toilet. Just give me an hour
to finish up some stuff here.

MARTIN
I'd rather just call a plumber.

AUSTIN
I used to *be* a plumber, Martin.

MARTIN
Yeah, yeah, you used to be
everything.

Austin gives Martin a slightly hurt look, but does not say anything. Martin rises and walks past the janitor, who is still struggling on the floor.

JANITOR
Wet floor!

MARTIN
Yeah.

CUT TO:

INT. A RAMSHACKLE APARTMENT - VARIOUS

Martin enters his apartment carrying a brown paper bag. He deposits this in the kitchen, then heads to the bathroom. He pulls the plunger from the toilet, rinses it off in the shower, then places it in a small bucket near the sink. As he does this, Martin cocks his head as though hearing something, then sighs with resignation. He walks to his bedroom, where his clock radio is still audible from beneath the pillow. Martin yanks the radio's cord from the wall, replaces the pillow on his bed, then plugs the radio back in. He spends a few seconds setting the time and the programmed alarm, after which he hears a knock at his front door.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Martin! Hey, you in there?

Martin walks to the door and opens it.

MARTIN

It must be nice to be able to leave work whenever you feel like it.

Austin walks inside.

AUSTIN

It's not "whenever I feel like." Anyway, you're the one who's retired. I'll be lucky if I can ever stop working.

MARTIN

You're not working now.

AUSTIN

You know what I mean. Anyway, is the bathroom still through here?

Without waiting for an answer, Austin walks in the direction of the bathroom.

MARTIN

No, I moved it since the last time you were here.

AUSTIN

It's called a "conversational transition," and it's polite.

MARTIN

Seems like a waste of breath to me.

Austin walks into the bathroom and lifts the cover off the toilet's tank.

AUSTIN
Yeah, uh-huh. You go get started on those tacos, and I'll see what I can do about this.

MARTIN
Don't you need tools or something?

AUSTIN
They're in my truck. This looks like it's pretty simple, though.

Martin leaves and walks to the kitchen. He empties the paper bag, pulling forth various taco-making supplies, including a package of romaine hearts.

AUSTIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(Shouting)
Okay, yeah, I see the problem. Your fill valve is stuck.

MARTIN
Is that bad?

AUSTIN (O.S.)
(Shouting)
What?

MARTIN
(Shouting)
Is that bad?

Austin comes walking into the kitchen.

AUSTIN
Nah, man. I fixed it already. You're good to go now.

Martin continues preparing his supplies.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
See what I did there? "Good to go?"

MARTIN
I get it.

AUSTIN
Great audience.

Austin washes his hands in the kitchen sink. As he does this, Martin opens a nearby cupboard and removes a small paper shredder. Upon seeing this, Austin rolls his eyes.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Oh, come on. Are you still doing
that?

Martin plugs in the paper shredder, then pulls out a plastic bowl, which he places on the counter. He moves to open the bag of romaine hearts.

MARTIN
Tacos need shredded lettuce.

AUSTIN
You know they sell bags of that,
right?

MARTIN
Yeah, for thirty cents extra.

Martin feeds a leaf of romaine lettuce into the paper shredder. There is a whirring noise, and Martin catches the shredded lettuce in the plastic bowl.

AUSTIN
There's something wrong with you,
man. I can't watch this. Your
television still works, right?

MARTIN
Yeah.

Austin leaves the room. Martin continues shredding lettuce, then unplugs the paper shredder and pushes it aside. He puts a cutting board in its place, then rinses off a tomato and starts cutting it into slices.

AUSTIN (O.S.)
The hell is your remote?

MARTIN
Next to the television.

AUSTIN (O.S.)
That seems like it defeats the
purpose of having one.

Martin dices the tomato slices into small chunks. He moves to rinse off another tomato, but is interrupted by Austin.

AUSTIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Holy...! Martin! You're on the
news, man!

Rolling his eyes, Martin puts down the knife next to the still-untouched tomato and walks to the living room. Austin is standing in front of the television.

MARTIN

What?

AUSTIN

Check it out!

The television is showing the scene from the street. A destroyed piano is surrounded by yellow police tape. In front of this, a CORRESPONDENT is speaking to the camera. An insert image shows the smiling face of Markus Ario.

CORRESPONDENT

I'm standing here at the scene of a freak accident, which only moments ago, took the life of millionaire philanthropist Markus Ario.

AUSTIN

See, man? Wait... "Markus?"

CORRESPONDENT

While speaking with reporters about tonight's forty-second annual ReliTech gala, Mister Ario was crushed by a falling piano as it was being moved by crane from a delivery truck to the top-floor offices. Investigators are still unclear about why the freight elevator - which was reportedly out of commission - was not used.

AUSTIN

Okay, this lady is clearly a few screws short of an orgy.

MARTIN

Quiet!

CORRESPONDENT

This comes as a particularly shocking blow, as rumors have suggested that Mister Ario had intended to announce his retirement tomorrow evening. If true, it will likely be difficult for him to follow through on that now, as his corpse has been pulverized beyond recognition.

(MORE)

CORRESPONDENT (CONT'D)

It is also unclear as to whether ReliTech's ownership will move to a successor, or if Markus Ario will continue to lead the company from beyond the grave.

The correspondent stands in silence for a few seconds, after which her demeanor shifts entirely. She speaks to someone off-screen with an empty-headed, fascinated tone.

CORRESPONDENT (CONT'D)

Is that really a thing? Can he do that?

Austin turns off the television.

AUSTIN

Okay, what is going on?

Martin sinks down onto the couch, stunned.

MARTIN

He's my twin brother.

AUSTIN

You had a brother and you didn't tell me?

MARTIN

We don't... we didn't talk.

Austin pulls a smartphone from his pocket as he sits down next to Martin. He touches the screen with his thumbs for a few seconds.

AUSTIN

Damn, man! Markus Ario. Worth four hundred and fifty million dollars. That's a lot of dollars!

MARTIN

Yeah.

AUSTIN

So, why are you looking for a loan? Couldn't you have just asked him for some spare change?

Martin visibly stiffens, growing angry.

MARTIN

I don't need his money.

AUSTIN

Why not? He sounds like a generous guy.

MARTIN

He isn't. Wasn't.

AUSTIN

They called him a "philanthropist." It's been a while since I opened a dictionary, but...

MARTIN

(Interrupting)

But nothing! It was all an act. Markus was the most selfish, entitled asshole on the face of the planet.

AUSTIN

I thought twins were supposed to be close. You know... share thoughts and stuff?

Martin scoffs.

MARTIN

Yeah, well, sharing was never his strong suit.

AUSTIN

Care to elaborate on that?

MARTIN

No.

Austin blinks.

AUSTIN

What do you mean, "No?" Come on. Don't leave me hanging.

Martin does not respond.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I guess "not sharing" runs in the family. What's the deal with those tacos?

Martin laughs humorlessly and buries his face in his hands.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Alright, look, man... it seems like you have some crap that you need to get out. Hey, good thing I fixed your toilet, huh?

MARTIN

Are you done?

AUSTIN

Are you going to tell me why you never asked your millionaire brother for some of his compound interest?

MARTIN

What?

AUSTIN

Sorry. Banker humor.

Austin goes back to looking at his smartphone while Martin stares off into the distance.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Hey, look at this. There's a funeral for him happening tomorrow. Friends and family only. If we drive all night, we can probably make it there in time.

MARTIN

I'm not going to any funerals.

AUSTIN

Why not? You need a suit?

MARTIN

I have a suit.

AUSTIN

Great, then. Let's get going.

MARTIN

I'm not going.

AUSTIN

Give me one good reason why not.

Martin considers for a moment.

MARTIN

The tacos.

Austin laughs out loud.

AUSTIN

Look, man, I'll pay you back for what you spent. This is your brother's funeral, though! Even if he was the biggest jerk in history -

MARTIN

(Interjecting)

He was.

AUSTIN

- this is still your best chance to make amends.

MARTIN

"Make amends?"

AUSTIN

Okay, yeah, that didn't make much sense. Really, though. You have to do this.

MARTIN

Okay, fine... but I'm not going to cry or kiss his forehead or anything.

AUSTIN

Something tells me it will be closed casket funeral. Piano, remember?

Martin laughs with a mixture of sadness and mirth.

FADE TO:

TRAVEL MONTAGE - VARIOUS

Martin and Austin load a pair of overnight bags into a pickup truck, then drive off into the sunset. Austin offers Martin a bag of beef jerky. After biting into a piece, Martin makes a face and examines the bag, which turns out to be a package of dog treats. Austin laughs and Martin spits the masticated meat out the window. Night falls, Martin sleeps, and Austin downs a large energy drink. The truck's brake lights shine briefly as it passes an illuminated billboard for an organic farm, featuring a beautiful woman holding two tomatoes in front of her bare breasts.

Dawn breaks, and the truck drives through a medium-sized town which has the appearance of being midway through a transition to becoming an opulent metropolis.

FADE TO:

INT. AUSTIN'S TRUCK - MORNING

Austin nudges Martin, who is still sleeping.

AUSTIN
Hey. Hey, are you seeing this?

Martin wakes up and blinks his eyes.

MARTIN
Oh, damn it.

AUSTIN
What?

MARTIN
My alarm. It's probably going off by now.

AUSTIN
I don't know what that means. Anyway, look at this.

Austin points at the window of a restaurant as the truck passes. An enormous picture of Markus is present there, with the letters "RIP" written beneath it.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Those are all over the place. Seems like your brother wasn't such an asshole after all.

MARTIN
He could have fooled me.

The pair keep traveling for a few seconds of silence. Austin blinks, clearly feeling tired, and checks his smartphone.

AUSTIN
Alright, the cemetery is just up ahead. Do you want to stop somewhere and change?

MARTIN
What?

AUSTIN
You brought your suit with you,
right?

MARTIN
Yeah.

AUSTIN
Don't you think you ought to wear
it, then?

MARTIN
Alright, fine.

Austin nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. A COFFEE SHOP - THE PARKING LOT - MORNING

The truck pulls into a small parking lot outside of a coffee shop. Martin gets out, pulling his overnight bag with him.

MARTIN
Aren't you coming in?

AUSTIN
What, do you need someone to help
you change? I'll wait here.

MARTIN
Aren't you going to wear a suit?

AUSTIN
He wasn't *my* brother.

Martin shakes his head and approaches the coffee shop.

CUT TO:

INT. A COFFEE SHOP

The sounds of badly recorded jazz music drift through the air as Martin enters the coffee shop. A bell above the door jingles, catching the attention of a BARISTA standing behind a counter.

BARISTA
Good morning! What can I...

She stops in mid-sentence upon seeing Martin.

MARTIN

Hi. Can I use your bathroom?

BARISTA

Oh my god! I mean... yes, of course! It's right through there!

The barista gestures at a small awning at the back of the shop. Martin nods his thanks and moves towards it.

BARISTA (CONT'D)

You know, I knew it couldn't be true.

Martin stops in his tracks.

MARTIN

What?

BARISTA

It was just too... too *cartoony*, you know? I mean, don't get me wrong, I think it's hilarious now that I get it, but I don't think I ever really *believed* it.

MARTIN

What are you talking about?

The barista grins conspiratorially.

BARISTA

Don't worry, I get you. I won't tell anyone.

MARTIN

Oh, you think that I'm... no, see, I'm not...

The barista pantomimes zipping her lips closed.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

... Right. Thanks.

Martin walks into the bathroom. The barista leans over the counter, watching him go. Once the bathroom door closes, she immediately pulls out her smartphone and moves as though sending a text message to someone, a look of delighted anticipation on her face.

CUT TO:

EXT. A COFFEE SHOP - THE PARKING LOT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Martin, now clad in an ill-fitting suit, comes walking out of the coffee shop. He approaches the truck, where Austin has fallen asleep. The sound of Martin opening the door wakes him.

MARTIN

Alright.

AUSTIN

Hm? Oh, hey! Looking sharp, Martin.

He looks at Martin's unruly white hair.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I guess we should have found you a comb or something, too, huh?

Martin runs his hand over his hair, making minor progress in taming it. Austin starts the truck, puts it into gear, and pulls back onto the street.

MARTIN

This whole thing is a bad idea.

AUSTIN

Oh, now he gets cold feet.

MARTIN

I'm serious. I don't even have an invitation.

AUSTIN

You don't get invited to funerals.

MARTIN

Oh, yeah? "Friends and family only," right?

AUSTIN

That doesn't mean there's a guest list.

MARTIN

How do they keep people out, then?

AUSTIN

Why would they need to? Who the hell would attend a funeral for kicks, man?

MARTIN

Reporters.

AUSTIN
 (Scoffing)
 Yeah, that's front page news, right there. "Shocking developments: Dead guy still dead."

Austin furrows his brow in irritation.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
 Oh, now what the hell is this?

An enormous collection of cars is parked near a cemetery. People are exiting their vehicles and walking in the direction of what appears to be a large gathering.

MARTIN
 That guest list isn't looking so bad now, is it?

Austin sighs and pulls the truck to a stop.

AUSTIN
 Either you have a really big family, or else your brother had a lot of friends. You go on ahead. I'm going to try to find a place to park.

Martin hesitates, but opens the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CEMETERY - DAY

Martin falls into step several meters behind a small group of mourners, all of whom are looking incredibly despondent as they approach the cemetery. An enormous buffet table comes into view, which Martin eyes hungrily. The other funeral attendees make their way to a large expanse of folding chairs, each of which have been set up facing a podium. Several reporters and photographers roam the sides, causing Martin to scoff when he sees them. He approaches the buffet table and immediately begins sampling it.

ART (O.S.)
 Nice funeral, Tom.

Martin turns to see a young man with bright blond hair staring at him. This is ART SCHWARTZ, a criminal. Martin answers with his mouth full.

MARTIN
 Excuse me?

ART

Tom Sawyer. Don't you read?

MARTIN

Not as much as I used to.

ART

Yeah, I imagine that being dead cuts down on literary enjoyment. Of course, you're not really dead, are you?

Martin nods, understanding. He swallows before answering.

MARTIN

Oh, I see. I'm not Markus. I'm Martin, his twin brother.

Art quietly laughs, smiling broadly and with a hint of venom.

ART

Yeah, "twin brother." That's a good one. Really original. Well, "Martin," it looks like the service is starting. You should see about finding a seat.

Art walks away, leaving Martin standing by the buffet table. Martin shakes his head and resumes eating. A PRIEST walks up to the podium.

PRIEST

Welcome, everybody. It's so heartwarming to see such an enormous turnout as we pay our respects to the passing of a great man. If you'll just bear with me a moment, I'd like to begin with a piece that was prepared for this occasion.

The priest fumbles beneath the podium for a moment, eventually pulling forth a piece of paper. He clears his throat.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of these witnesses, to join...

A look of dawning horror crosses the priest's face. Martin smiles and continues eating, apparently amused.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Uh... to join with... each other.

A murmur runs through the crowd.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

To join each other for... for support and mutual understanding, as we... say goodbye to someone who was very dear to us. Markus Ario. We are here to join with Markus Ario in supporting his passing.

The priest stares blankly for a few seconds.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

And now, an apology. *Eulogy!* Read by Markus's longtime friend and associate, Phillip Armstrong.

The priest hurries away. A balding, overweight man in an expensive suit approaches the podium. This is PHILLIP ARMSTRONG.

PHILLIP

Well. What can be said about a man as universally beloved as Markus? I know I speak for all of us when I say that he was truly a friend and an inspiration to everyone he ever knew.

Martin rolls his eyes and bites down on a carrot.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Having worked with Markus for the better part of his career, I can personally attest to his generosity, his deep love of this community, and his sense of humor. He was, as I'm sure all of you know, something of a master of practical jokes. Nobody was safe! Not even his wife! Isn't that right, Wanda?

Upon hearing the name, Martin chokes on his carrot and begins coughing. The noise catches Phillip's attention, who looks out across the crowd and sees Martin pounding on his chest. Phillip looks shocked at first, then breaks out into a grin.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Furthermore, where Markus was concerned, nothing was sacred.

(MORE)

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

He was infinitely respectful, to be sure, but never shy about pulling his pranks in unexpected ways. Who could forget the time, for instance, that he secretly paid to have all of our police car sirens switched out with ice cream truck music?

Muted laughter ripples through the crowd.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

That was probably illegal, right? Or, how about when he hired that blimp to buzz around town, dropping travel brochures for the public pool? I know I wouldn't want to pay that littering fine!

More laughter breaks out. Martin finally manages to dislodge the carrot chunks from his windpipe, then stoops to catch his breath.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Still, for all of his jokes and capers, I think you'll agree... nothing yet has stood up to faking his own death and appearing at his own funeral! Well done, Markus!

Phillip gestures at the buffet table. The entire crowd turns around to look, then immediately breaks out into laughter and applause.

MARTIN

What? No, no! I don't...

Reporters rush over from around the crowd, all of them shouting questions. The same three reporters who had been attempting to interview Markus before his death are also present. The assembled mourners stand and rush over, too.

REPORTER #1

Mister Ario! Is this the punchline to your latest prank, or is there more to come?

MARTIN

You don't understand, I'm...

REPORTER #2

(Interrupting)

Is there a deeper message that you'd like to share with everyone?

MARTIN

What?

A third reporter pushes his way through the crowd. He has a bandage on his head.

REPORTER #3

I got hit in the face with a piano key!

The third reporter is shoved out of view. Martin stares for a moment, then holds up his hands.

MARTIN

Stop, stop, hang on! Hang on!

The hubbub dies down.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Look, you have it all wrong.

REPORTER #2

Then there *is* a deeper meaning!

MARTIN

What? No! No, this is all...

WANDA (O.S)

What my husband is trying to say...

A tall, attractive woman in her sixties walks into view, gently navigating her way through the throng. This is WANDA ARIO, Markus's wife.

WANDA (CONT'D)

... is that he is officially denying any rumors of his "retirement."

People from the assembled crowd make sounds of understanding.

REPORTER #1

So... so, that's death as a metaphor for... for moving on? And you're... not?

Martin stares at Wanda, his mouth agape.

MARTIN

Uh. Uh, yes. Yes, that's exactly right.

REPORTER #2

What about the piano?

MARTIN

What?

REPORTER #3 (O.S.)

You almost killed me!

WANDA

The piano, Markus.

MARTIN

Oh, uh, right. The piano. Well, uh, I just wanted say that, uh... that *like* a piano, anything could... fall from the sky at any minute?

People from the crowd make noises of understanding and agreement again. A few of them look skyward with wary expressions on their faces.

REPORTER #1

Miss Ario, are we to understand that you were involved in the prank from the beginning?

WANDA

Yes, of course.

She links arms with Martin.

WANDA (CONT'D)

As you all know, my husband and I share absolutely everything with each other.

The priest suddenly pushes his way in front of Martin and Wanda. He has a slightly manic smile on his face.

PRIEST

Me, too! I was in on it, too! Ha ha! I didn't *really* mess up! It was all part of the prank!

WANDA

There is, of course, much more to come... at tonight's gala, which will be held as planned.

Applause breaks out. Wanda escorts Martin to the parking lot, where a black town car pulls up. Charise steps out of the driver-side door, walks around, and opens the back passenger-side door. Martin is pushed inside.

MARTIN

Wanda, I'm not...

WANDA
 (Interrupting)
 We'll talk about this later.

Charise closes the door, walks back around to the driver-side door, and climbs inside. The car pulls away from the cemetery.

CUT TO:

INT. A TOWN CAR

Martin watches out the back window of the town car for a few seconds. Suddenly remembering himself, he whirls around to face the front.

MARTIN
 Hey, listen, this is going to sound
 a bit weird, but I need you to look
 for a silver pickup truck.

Charise glances at Martin in the rearview mirror, but does not respond.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 Hello? I really need to find my
 friend.

With a subtle motion, Charise touches a panel near the steering wheel. The car's doors lock. Martin eyes the handle nearest to him and lightly tugs on it a couple of times.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 Huh. Okay.

He casts a look back at Charise, then presses a button to roll down the window a few inches. Charise meets his eye in the rearview mirror. Without breaking eye contact, Martin rolls the window down a few more inches. Charise's gaze narrows slightly. Martin pushes the button several more times in a series of very brief taps. Each time, the window lowers a very small amount. Charise glares at Martin in the rearview mirror, then makes a big show of reaching over to her own window control panel. She presses a button, and Martin's window rolls down all the way.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 Well, now it's just no fun anymore.

Charise smiles, possibly hiding laughter. The car drives on.

CUT TO:

EXT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - DAY

The town car pulls up to the entrance of a large house. Charise steps out of the driver's seat, walks around to the back, and opens the door for Martin. He hauls himself out, unintentionally ignoring Charise's offered hand.

MARTIN

I don't want to seem ungrateful,
but... I mean, thanks for the ride
and everything... but I really need
to get in touch with someone. He's
in a silver pickup truck.

Charise closes the car door and stares up at Martin. For the first time, her expression shows some softness, as well as signs of quizzical amusement.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Silver. Pickup. Truck.

Charise still doesn't answer.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

He's a tall black guy, with...

Martin trails off, evidently thinking better of his own words. He rolls his eyes and shakes his head in self mockery, then turns to face the house.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Well. This is a big house, isn't
it?

CHARISE

Yep.

Martin whirls around.

MARTIN

You *can* talk!

Charise does not reply, offering only an amused smile.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Er... can't you?

CHARISE

Yep.

Martin blinks, startled. After a few seconds, the beginnings of understanding registers in his eyes.

MARTIN
Are you only talking when I ask you
a direct question?

CHARISE
Yep.

MARTIN
Why?

Charise looks ready to laugh, but suppresses it.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Hey, come on! That's a direct
question!

Charise still does not answer. A look of slightly disturbed
realization crosses Martin's face.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Oh, god, wait... do I have to give
you *permission* to speak?

CHARISE
Nope.

MARTIN
Oh. Okay, well, good.

Martin turns back to facing the house.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
So... yeah. Any idea when Wanda
will be home?

CHARISE
Nope.

Martin nods as though he was expecting the answer. A sudden
thought seems to occur to him.

MARTIN
Hey! Is there a phone I can use
somewhere?

CHARISE
Yep.

MARTIN
Where?

Once again, Charise does not reply.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 You're kind of arbitrary about
 which questions you'll answer,
 aren't you?

CHARISE
 Nope.

MARTIN
 What do you mean, "nope?"

Charise offers only a smile in response.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 There, see? Ugh, forget it. I'll
 find it myself.

Martin starts walking toward the front door of the house.
 Charise rushes forward and unlocks it with a practiced
 motion, then swings it open and steps aside.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
 Er, uh... thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS

Martin enters his late brother's mansion with a look of mild
 disapproval on his face. Charise follows him inside and
 closes the door, then stands a few paces back.

MARTIN
 Hey, did M... have I ever bought a
 bag of shredded lettuce?

CHARISE
 Shr... I don't know.

Martin nods, then ventures further into the house, with
 Charise following him. He comes into a large dining room -
 notably different from the one in which Markus had his last
 meal - and looks around. Nothing in particular catches his
 eye. He continues walking at a slow pace. Elsewhere in the
 house, a large clock can be heard chiming.

MARTIN
 I probably seem like I'm acting a
 bit weird, huh?

After receiving no response, Martin turns to look behind him.
 Charise has vanished.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Okay, bye, then.

Martin continues in his path, coming to a large living room. He gives the space a cursory glance, then notices a freestanding birdcage in one corner. A blue macaw is housed within. Martin approaches and stares at the bird, which keeps completely still. He glances down at a bowl of some dry pet food nearby, which he picks up to examine. The words "BIRDIE NUM NUM" are written on it. Martin snorts once and replaces the bowl where he found it.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Polly want a cr...

Before Martin can finish speaking, the bird's wings snap open. At the same time, it begins rocking mechanically on its perch, and a tinny recording of "Zoot Suit Riot" begins playing at the chorus. Previously unseen lights inside the cage blink in time to the music. Martin makes a surprised noise and stumbles backward, falling over the back of a couch and onto its cushions. After a few seconds, the bird snaps back to its original state. Martin climbs up from the couch and glares at the bird, then leaves the room.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE UPPER FLOOR

Martin climbs a set of stairs into the upper dining room. A portrait of Markus and Wanda is hanging on one wall, which he eyes with mixed emotions. He makes a point of turning his back on the portrait, which causes him to see a telephone hanging on one wall. With hurried motions, he approaches, grabs, and dials a number on the telephone. A male voice answers. This is Markus's ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Yes, Mister Ario? Well done on the prank, by the way, sir.

MARTIN

... Austin?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Yes, sir. What number?

MARTIN

What?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)

What number in Austin would you like me to dial, sir?

MARTIN
No, no, I'm... who is this?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Dave, sir.

MARTIN
Hi, Dave.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Hello, sir.

MARTIN
Um... where are you?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
At the office, Mister Ario.

MARTIN
Why does this phone connect to
th... to my office?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Are you feeling alright, sir?

MARTIN
I'm fine. If I give you a number,
can you call it?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Yes, sir. Or you can call from
there.

MARTIN
I tried that and I got you.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
You have to press nine first, sir.

MARTIN
What?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Press nine, then dial the number.

Martin looks at the phone, presses the number nine, then dials a number again. He listens to the receiver.

MARTIN
Austin?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
You have to hang up with me first,
sir.

Martin slams the phone against its cradle in frustration. When he removes it again, a dial tone is audible. With deliberate motions, he presses the number nine, then dials a number. The sound of the line ringing can be heard, followed by a click.

AUSTIN (O.S.)
Hello?

MARTIN
Austin?

AUSTIN (O.S.)
Martin!

CUT TO:

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

Austin is driving down a long stretch of road. No buildings are visible anywhere nearby.

AUSTIN
Man, what happened? Where the hell are you?

Martin looks around the house again.

MARTIN
I'm at my brother's house. You should see this place.

AUSTIN
Yeah, I'd love to. Where is it?

MARTIN
Oh, right, it's... uh...

AUSTIN
Martin?

MARTIN
Sorry, I don't actually know.

AUSTIN
How can you not know? How'd you get there?

MARTIN
My ex-wife shoved me in a car with a quiet Asian lady.

AUSTIN
Sorry, say that again?

MARTIN
I mean... she looked Asian. She sounded American, though. Not that she talks much.

AUSTIN
About your ex-wife, Martin! You were married?!

MARTIN
It's a long story.

AUSTIN
And then your *brother* married her?

MARTIN
Can we talk about this some other time?

AUSTIN
Okay, yeah, sure. Where am I going?

Martin walks to a window and looks out.

MARTIN
Uh... it's a big house with a long driveway. There's no gate or anything, though.

AUSTIN
Oh, yeah, that's helpful. What's the address? What street is it on?

Martin squints out the window.

MARTIN
I can't see the mailbox. I don't know.

AUSTIN
Well, find someone who does!

Martin glances back at the telephone cradle.

MARTIN
Okay, I'll call you back.

After peering at the phone for a moment, Martin shrugs and walks back to its cradle. He hangs up the phone, pauses for a moment, then removes it and dials again.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Hello again, Mister Ario.

MARTIN
Hi, Dave. What's my address?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Excuse me?

MARTIN
Uh... pop quiz. What's my address?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
... Sir, do you need me to get in touch with Charise?

MARTIN
Just tell me my address!

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
7031 Matlock Street. Do you need the city and state?

MARTIN
No, thank you.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
How about the zip code?

MARTIN
Thank you!

Martin hangs up the phone again, then quickly picks it up and dials Austin's number.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Dial nine, sir?

Martin angrily slams the phone against its cradle several times in rapid succession, then dials nine, and finally Austin's number. The lines rings, and Austin answers.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

AUSTIN
Well?

MARTIN
7031 Matlock Street.

AUSTIN
Matlock Street? Well, that's lucky. I must have passed your house a little while ago, then.

MARTIN

Yeah, great, just hurry, okay? Call me when you get here.

AUSTIN

Sure. What's the number?

Martin starts to look at the phone cradle, but Austin laughs, interrupting him.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm just kidding, man. My phone got it. I'll see you soon, alright?

MARTIN

Great.

AUSTIN

Don't touch anything.

Austin presses a button on his phone and pulls off the road, preparing to turn back the way he came.

Martin replaces the phone in its cradle and lets out a sigh of relief. He looks around the room again, apparently able to take in the sights for the first time. After a few seconds, he walks to an adjacent kitchen and begins idly looking through cupboards. As he closes one, Charise suddenly comes into view.

MARTIN

Gah! Oh, god. You again. Where did you go?

Charise does not respond.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Okay, "Where did you go?" is a perfect example of a direct question.

Charise still does not respond.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Am I missing something here?

CHARISE

Yep.

Martin narrows his gaze at Charise.

MARTIN

Are you only answering yes-or-no questions?

CHARISE

Yep!

MARTIN

Are we playing "Twenty Questions?"

Charise laughs out loud.

CHARISE

Well, we were. You made it in nine.

MARTIN

I never thought I'd feel so relieved to hear someone speak in complete sentences.

Charise laughs again.

CHARISE

I figured you'd appreciate the meta-humor in playing "Twenty Questions" about "Twenty Questions."

She holds out a paper cup with some pills in it.

CHARISE (CONT'D)

Here. I went to get your medicine.

MARTIN

Medicine?!

CHARISE

Come on, Markus. I know you've been feeling better, but you have to admit that you're a little off today.

MARTIN

"Off?"

CHARISE

See?

MARTIN

No, I really don't. How am I "off?"

CHARISE

You're more absent-minded, for one thing.

MARTIN

Absent-min... okay, look, this has to stop. I'm not...

Before Martin can finish his sentence, the telephone rings. Charise looks startled by the sound.

CHARISE
Who could possibly be calling here?

MARTIN
It's probably Austin.

CHARISE
Who do you know in Austin?

Martin rolls his eyes.

MARTIN
It's a person's name too, you know!
Jeez.

Charise presses the cup of pills into Martin's hand.

CHARISE
Look, take these, and don't argue.
I'll get the phone.

Charise leaves to answer the phone. Martin watches her go, then eyes the pills with a look of suspicious distaste. He picks one up and examines it, then glances over at a nearby sink. After looking to see if Charise is watching, Martin drops the pill into the basin. It makes a quiet clattering noise, which Martin hurries to stop with his hand. In doing so, he causes the rest of the pills to spill onto the floor.

MARTIN
Shit, shit!

Martin stoops and quickly gathers up the pills, accidentally leaving one behind. He carefully dumps the ones that he retrieved into the sink, then whirls around to look for Charise. She hangs up the phone and approaches Martin.

CHARISE
Your friend is waiting for you
outside.

MARTIN
Okay, thanks.

Martin starts to move, but then spots the pill that he missed on the floor. As he walks by Charise, he puts his foot over it.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Actually, uh... I think I'll wait
for him here.

CHARISE
I'll show him in.

MARTIN
That would be great. Thanks.

Charise leaves. As soon as she is out of sight, Martin bends to retrieve the pill. It has been crushed into several pieces, along with some fine powder. He carefully plucks the larger chunks from the floor and blows on the powder. A stained section remains on the kitchen tile.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Oh, god damn it.

Martin drops the pill remnants into the sink, then looks around the kitchen. He spies a towel hanging from a rack nearby, which he grabs. After wetting the towel beneath the faucet, Martin gets down on his hands and knees and starts scrubbing at the stained section of tile.

ART (O.S.)
Doing your own cleaning now, Tom?

Martin looks up to see Art standing above him.

MARTIN
You're not Austin.

ART
That's an astute observation,
coming from a dead man.

Art turns and looks over his shoulder, where Charise is standing.

ART (CONT'D)
You can go, Charise.

Charise nods and leaves. A look of realization crosses Martin's face.

MARTIN
Oh, you're Charise!

ART
You're on fire today.

MARTIN
What?

ART

I'm not Austin, she's Charise.
You'll be naming presidents in no
time. Let's start with Franklin,
shall we?

MARTIN

... Roosevelt?

Art laughs humorlessly.

ART

Right, right. Silly me! Franklin
wasn't a president at all!
Interesting that he still got his
face on money. Now: Where's mine?

MARTIN

Your... money?

Art grins broadly and spreads his hands.

ART

The fire continues! Look, Ario: You
want to play your little pranks,
that's fine. God knows the town
loves them. Don't start getting in
the way of my business, though. We
agreed on a schedule, and you're
going to keep it.

Throughout this, Martin has been growing more and more
evidently concerned. He opens his mouth to respond, but
closes it again and stares at Art with a slightly unhinged
expression on his face.

MARTIN

Right, well, of course. You know
me.

ART

I know your next death might be a
little bit more permanent if you
cross me.

Martin forces a laugh.

MARTIN

Right! Well! I wouldn't want that,
would I?!

ART

Probably not.

MARTIN
Right! Well!

A moment of silence passes.

ART
Were you going to say something
else?

MARTIN
Just that, uh... maybe we should go
over the agreement again. You know,
to make sure that I really live up
to every part of it.

Art stares at Martin, clearly suspicious.

ART
I don't know if you think you're
playing some kind of game or if
you're honestly going funny in the
head.

Art takes a step closer to Martin.

ART (CONT'D)
Let's be clear. I helped you limp
your way out of a tough spot, and
now it's time for you to make good
on our arrangement.

With a slightly irritated expression, Art looks around the
room.

ART (CONT'D)
What, you don't have a clock in
here?

MARTIN
A clock? Oh, uh...

Martin joins in the looking, eventually seeing numbers
displayed on a nearby microwave.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
Here! Found one!

ART
Right. You have until after the
gala. I'll be seeing you there.

Without another word, Art turns to leave. As he passes near
the telephone on the wall, it rings, causing him to jump ever
so slightly.

ART (CONT'D)

Who the hell would be calling you here?

MARTIN

What is it with you people? It's a phone! That is literally half of its entire purpose!

Art stares at Martin with a quizzical expression, then leaves. A few seconds later, the muffled sound of a door is heard. Martin rushes forward and answers the phone.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Austin?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

Austin is in his truck outside of Markus's house. He is watching Art leave.

AUSTIN

Yeah, man. Am I at the right place? Some kid in a bad suit just walked out.

MARTIN

Yes. Come inside, quick. I'll meet you downstairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - DAY

Austin climbs from his truck and slams the door. Art, who was about to get into the back seat of a waiting sedan, looks over at the noise. As Austin approaches the house, he waves jovially at Art. Art narrows his gaze and climbs into the car.

AUSTIN

Friendly people around here.

Austin shrugs and walks up to the door. He is about to knock when Martin opens it from the inside.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Hey, look at you! Come for the funeral and stay for will, huh?

MARTIN

The what?

AUSTIN

The will.

MARTIN

The wh... oh, no. God, this whole thing is a mess. Come inside.

Austin follows Martin into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS

As Austin enters the house, he slows and looks around.

AUSTIN

Damn, man. Your brother had good taste.

MARTIN

Yeah, whatever.

AUSTIN

No, I'm serious. This is all modern architecture, but it's made to look... you don't care, do you?

MARTIN

Not really.

AUSTIN

The point is, he must have had this house built for him, and paid a pretty penny for it, too.

MARTIN

Yeah, great. It sounds like he wasn't too careful about those pennies, though. Or something.

AUSTIN

(Not listening)

Uh huh. Hey, what's in here?

Austin walks through the house, taking a similar path to the one that Martin initially did. Martin follows him, clearly impatient. Austin eyes the bird cage, but gives it a wide berth. The pair eventually come to the stairway to the top floor.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Hey, does this go to the basement?

MARTIN
I don't even know if there *is* a
basement.

AUSTIN
It was a joke.

MARTIN
Oh.

AUSTIN
Who peed in your applesauce this
morning, man? If I had just
inherited a fortune, I wouldn't be
so freaking glum.

MARTIN
I didn't...

AUSTIN
(Interrupting)
Let's go check out that wine
cellar.

Austin starts ascending the stairs. Martin looks ready to
protest, but follows.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE UPPER FLOOR

As Austin comes to the upper floor, he looks around with a
big grin. He then freezes, seeing the portrait of Markus and
Wanda.

AUSTIN
Whoa. Is that the ex-wife?

MARTIN
Wanda. Yeah.

AUSTIN
Good-looking woman. Too bad you
didn't inherit her, too, right?

MARTIN
I didn't inherit anything!

Austin turns to face Martin, an expression of absurd
disbelief on his face.

AUSTIN
What? Come on. The long-lost twin
doesn't see a cent?

MARTIN
They think I *am* Markus!

Austin blinks, clearly surprised by what he's hearing.

AUSTIN
Whoa, whoa, hold on. They think
you're your brother?

MARTIN
Yes.

AUSTIN
Why? Didn't they see the news? He's
marinara sauce on the pavement! No
offense, sorry.

MARTIN
Why would I be offended by that?

AUSTIN
Well...

MARTIN
(Interrupting)
He was some kind of crazy prankster
or something. When I showed up at
the funeral, everyone thought that
he'd faked his death as a joke.

AUSTIN
Some joke.

MARTIN
Yeah. Anyway, I tried to tell
people, but nobody would listen.

Austin's face shows a mixture of emotions, uncertainty being
the most prominent. He looks back up at the portrait of
Markus and Wanda.

AUSTIN
How hard did you try?

MARTIN
What?

AUSTIN

I'm just saying... are you sure you didn't subconsciously go along with it? Maybe for... reasons.

Austin angles his head at the portrait.

MARTIN

No. No! No, I tried to tell her, but she just shoved me in a car and Charise brought me here.

AUSTIN

"Charise?"

MARTIN

I told you before, the Asian lady. I think she's my nurse or something.

Austin raises an eyebrow.

AUSTIN

"Your" nurse?

MARTIN

Look, whatever! She drove me here and she wouldn't talk because she was playing "Twenty Questions," and then this gangster showed up and told me to limp to the gala because I'm old and ugly.

AUSTIN

... Well, *there's* a sentence that nobody has ever said before. "Gangster?"

MARTIN

The blond kid.

AUSTIN

What does he want?

MARTIN

I don't know! He and my brother had some kind of deal, and I'm supposed to follow through on it!

AUSTIN

You mean your *brother* is supposed to follow through on it.

MARTIN
He thinks I am my brother!

AUSTIN
Did you tell him you weren't?

MARTIN
Yes!

Austin holds up his hands in apology.

AUSTIN
Alright, alright, calm down. We can figure this out. Where's Wendy?

MARTIN
Who?

AUSTIN
Your ex-wife.

MARTIN
Wanda.

AUSTIN
Right. Where is she?

MARTIN
I don't know that, either. She said we'd talk later, but she stayed at the funeral for some reason.

Austin scratches his head.

AUSTIN
Okay. What *exactly* did this gangster say to you?

MARTIN
He wanted money. He said he'd helped m... he'd helped Markus with something, and now Markus had to pay him for it. Or something. I don't know!

AUSTIN
A lot of folks probably want a rich guy's money. Did he say how much?

MARTIN
I'm not going to pay him!

AUSTIN

Why not? It's not *your* money. Or is it suddenly okay for you to mooch off your brother now that he's dead?

MARTIN

Did you forget that I'm not *actually* Markus? How would I even get his money?

AUSTIN

Oh. Okay, yeah, you have me there.

Austin walks over to a nearby couch and sits down. He bounces on the cushion a couple of times. Martin watches, then walks over and sits down, as well.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Okay, well, first things first. You need to call your ex-wife and tell her what's going on.

A sudden thought seems to occur to Martin.

MARTIN

She said she was in on it.

AUSTIN

What? With the gangster?

MARTIN

No, no, with the prank. She told the reporters that she knew about it.

AUSTIN

There were reporters there? Damn. I guess you win the guest list debate.

MARTIN

What if Markus isn't dead?

Austin stares over at Martin.

AUSTIN

Come again?

MARTIN

What if this was a prank? What if this whole thing with me taking his place is a part of it?

AUSTIN
What, like, he knew you'd show up
for his funeral?

MARTIN
Maybe?

Austin shakes his head.

AUSTIN
That doesn't make sense, man. Hell,
you wouldn't even know he was dead
if you didn't have a weird thing
about shredding lettuce.

He pauses for a moment, considering.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
The funeral happened pretty damned
quick, though. I don't know. Maybe
there is something fishy going on
here. Either way, you need to call
your ex-wife before anything freaky
happens.

MARTIN
I don't know her... oh, hang on.

Martin struggles to rise from the couch, then walks over to
the phone. He grabs it, then dials some numbers at random.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Yes, Mister Ario?

MARTIN
Hi, Dave. Call my wife, please.

ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Uh. Yes sir. One moment.

There is an audible click, a brief pause, and then the sound
of the line ringing.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT

Wanda is seated at a table, clearly involved in a social
lunch with a group of women. She laughs at something, then
reaches for her purse.

WANDA
Excuse me, just a moment.

Upon seeing her cellphone's display, a flicker of negative emotion crosses her face, but it is quickly suppressed. She answers the call with a broad smile.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Markus, dear! I hope you haven't
torn your good suit again!

Appreciative titters come from the other women at the table.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

Martin takes a deep breath and steels himself.

MARTIN
Wanda, hi. Listen. I'm not Markus.
This is all a big misunderstanding.

WANDA
Oh, yes, certainly!

MARTIN
What? Did you hear me? I'm Martin!

Wanda laughs aloud, putting on a show for the people at her table.

WANDA
Oh, Markus, you shouldn't have!
Yes, of course I'll wear it
tonight!

MARTIN
What are you talking about?! I'm
not Markus! I'm Martin!

Wanda looks at her watch - an expensive gold piece - as she answers.

WANDA
Well, I'll probably be home in half
an hour, and I'd be happy to help
you out with that.

More giggles come from the women at the table.

MARTIN
Wait a minute. You already knew.
You knew it was me.

Wanda laughs again.

WANDA
Yes, of course! How could I not?

MARTIN

Wanda, what the hell is going on?

WANDA

Half an hour, then. Forty-five minutes at the most.

Wanda presses a button on her cellphone and replaces it in her purse. She immediately turns back to her companions and offers a forced (but believable) grin.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE UPPER FLOOR

Martin replaces the telephone in its cradle, looking bewildered. Austin has approached from behind.

AUSTIN

So, I wasn't trying to eavesdrop, but that sounded pretty intense.

MARTIN

She knew.

AUSTIN

Yeah, I got that.

MARTIN

She's putting on an act.

AUSTIN

Yeah, I got that, too.

MARTIN

She's letting everyone think that Markus is still alive.

Austin rolls his eyes.

AUSTIN

Okay, so, when I said I wasn't trying to eavesdrop? I lied. The question is, what are you going to do about this?

Martin chews on his lower lip, a faraway look in his eyes.

MARTIN

Maybe this is my chance.

AUSTIN

What?

MARTIN
This. All of this.

Martin waves his hand around the room, circling the portrait of Markus and Wanda.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
This should have been mine.

AUSTIN
What, the money?

MARTIN
No, not the money. The life. The house with Wanda. All of that. Markus stole her from me.

Austin nods, clearly not understanding.

AUSTIN
Okay, we need to find something alcoholic in here.

Without waiting for an answer, Austin crosses to the kitchen and looks in the refrigerator.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Hey, look, champagne. The good stuff, too. I'll say it again, your brother had great taste.

Austin looks through cupboards, eventually pulling out two brandy snifters.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Wrong kind of glasses, but they'll do. Sit down.

Martin trudges over to the couch and wearily collapses onto it. Austin carries the champagne and the glasses over to him. He pops the cork on the champagne and fills each glass, one of which he hands to Martin.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Okay. Spill.

MARTIN
We were twenty-two.

AUSTIN
You and Markus?

MARTIN
Me and Wanda.

AUSTIN

But also Markus. Twins and all,
right?

MARTIN

Yeah. We were just married. Had our
own apartment. Markus was staying
in the guest room while he tried to
make his latest scheme pan out.

AUSTIN

"Guest room?" Jeez, man. In today's
economy, that's practically a
legend. Nowadays? We call that a
closet.

MARTIN

What?

AUSTIN

Yeah, that didn't make sense. It
should have been the other way
around.

Austin drinks deeply from his champagne.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Continue.

MARTIN

I came home early one day and found
them going at it on the couch.

AUSTIN

On the couch? It's like they wanted
to get caught.

MARTIN

Yeah. She didn't even try to pull
the "I thought he was you" card.
Didn't even apologize, really. So,
I packed a bag, moved out, and got
a job as a bus driver in another
city.

Austin waits in silence.

AUSTIN

That's it?

MARTIN

Yep.

AUSTIN
You haven't talked to them in over
forty years because of that?

MARTIN
Yeah.

AUSTIN
What about your parents?

MARTIN
They died in a house fire when we
were eighteen.

AUSTIN
This is some dark shit, man. Maybe
I should have found something
stronger.

Martin scoffs dejectedly.

MARTIN
I found out later that Markus's
stupid invention worked. Some
company in Japan bought it, and he
used the money to start his
company.

AUSTIN
Yeah, ReliTech? What do they do,
exactly?

MARTIN
Hell if I know. Something with
warehouses.

AUSTIN
That doesn't sound very "tech" to
me.

Martin does not respond. Austin drains the rest of his
champagne and then refills his glass.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
So, when you said that all of this
should be yours, what you really
meant is that you were jealous.

MARTIN
I'm not jealous.

AUSTIN
You sound jealous. Or, well.
Envious.

MARTIN

What?

AUSTIN

There's a difference.

MARTIN

Okay. Think about it, though:
Markus is dead, Wanda is pretending
that I'm him, the whole town loves
him... what's to stop me from just
moving into his life?

Austin considers this.

AUSTIN

I don't know. It seems wrong,
though, man. Also, what about that
gangster or whatever?

MARTIN

I'll turn him in. I don't know.
I'll deal with it. Maybe I'll pay
him off.

AUSTIN

Yeah, you and what money? You said
it yourself: You don't exactly have
access to your brother's funds.

MARTIN

Maybe not... but Wanda probably
does, and if she's willing to
pretend that I'm Markus...

AUSTIN

It just sounds messed up.

Martin looks down at his champagne, then drinks the whole
thing in one go.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

No kids or anything though, right?

MARTIN

Nah. There's a bird downstairs,
though. You should go offer it a
cracker.

FADE TO:

EXT. A WAREHOUSE

A car pulls up to a large warehouse. Two FLUNKIES in suits climb out from the driver and passenger doors. Art climbs out from the back. Without saying anything, the three walk toward the warehouse.

CUT TO:

INT. A WAREHOUSE

Two more FLUNKIES sit at a large folding table, each of them staring at their cellphones. A massive printing press sits idly nearby. Art approaches at a swift pace.

ART

You know, there's something
insanely cliché about criminals
playing poker in a warehouse.

FLUNKY #1

I'm reading the news.

FLUNKY #2

Yeah, you told us not to mess with
the merchandise, anyway. What would
we even gamble with?

Art pulls a folding chair over to the table and sits down. His two companions do the same.

ART

You could always play with real
money.

FLUNKY #2

Fat chance. Did we get it, though?

ART

Ario's money? No, not yet. He'll
have it for us tonight, though, or
he's a dead man.

FLUNKY #1

For real, this time.

Art stares at the first flunky.

FLUNKY #1 (CONT'D)

What? I told you, I read. It was a
pretty good prank, that bit with
the piano.

FLUNKY #3

I thought it was a bit heavy handed.

FLUNKY #1

Oh, really? Alright, genius, how would you fake your death?

FLUNKY #3

Me? I wouldn't. That's just cruel to everyone who cares about you.

FLUNKY #1

Not as cruel as staying around, eh?

Everyone chuckles.

FLUNKY #2

Car crash.

Everyone looks at the second flunky.

FLUNKY #1

What?

FLUNKY #2

I'd get a cadaver that looks like me, stick my wallet and crap in its pockets, then push the car off a cliff. I'd leave a bunch of empty liquor bottles and stuff in the car, too.

FLUNKY #1

Why?

FLUNKY #2

(Shrugging)

People love to gossip. They'd all want to brag about how they knew I had a drinking problem but never told anyone, and they'd disapprove enough to keep from asking questions. It's all about appearances, see?

Art taps his finger on the table, thinking.

ART

How much do we have printed?

FLUNKY #3

Ten million, give or take.

ART
Give or take what?

FLUNKY #3
Eh, well... some of the bills
didn't cut quite right, so we had
to burn them.

Art nods, still thinking.

ART
Right. Appearances again.

FLUNKY #3
Hey, where the hell would you get a
cadaver?

ART
What?

FLUNKY #3
Not you.

FLUNKY #2
Me?

FLUNKY #3
I don't hear anyone else talking
about it. Where would you get a
cadaver?

FLUNKY #2
Why does that matter?

FLUNKY #3
If your whole plan hinges on you
having a corpse that looks like
you, it's kind of important to
actually have a corpse, don't you
think? It's not like you can just
walk into a hospital and ask for
their leftovers. Anyway, have you
ever tried to lift a dead body?
They're not exactly light.

FLUNKY #2
Especially not one your size.

Everyone laughs again, save for Art.

ART
Hey, let me ask you something.

FLUNKY #1
You just did.

FLUNKY #3
No, he didn't.

FLUNKY #1
He said "Can I ask you something?"
That's a question.

ART
I said "Let me ask you something."
Get your ears checked.

FLUNKY #2
Not that there's anything between
them!

This time, nobody laughs.

FLUNKY #3
You're kind of reaching now, dude.

FLUNKY #2
Screw you. That was classic.

Art puts his hand on the table hard and quickly enough to
catch everyone's attention.

ART
Would you mess up your own car?

Everyone looks confused, glancing at one another for
clarification. Art leans back, looking satisfied with
himself.

ART (CONT'D)
I was part of this project a few
years ago that had a blind guy on
the crew.

FLUNKIE #1
What was his name?

ART
I don't know. Bob or something.

FLUNKIE #1
"Blind Bob."

FLUNKY #3
Shut up. Go on, Art.

ART

Well, we're all sitting around playing Poker one day - I know it's a cliché, I'm the one who said that - when Bob asks to play a hand. So, you know, we're all wondering how a blind guy is going to play Poker, but we deal him in anyway.

FLUNKY #2

Did he win?

ART

Stop skipping ahead.

FLUNKY #2

Sorry.

ART

We all sit there for a minute, see? And Bob starts talking. He says, "Hey, you guys all have cars, right?" So we say yeah, we have cars. "Let's say you have this old, beat-up, nasty looking car, but with a goddamned beautiful interior. I'm talking leather seats, mahogany wood, the works. Then, one day you meet this girl - this smoking hot hippie chick - and she thinks you're cool for having a clunker. She asks you out to a date that night."

FLUNKY #1

I like it when women are forward.

FLUNKY #2

Your mom is forward.

The third flunky smacks the second flunky upside the head.

ART

Anyway, we're all wondering where this is going, and Bob asks us the big question: "So, tell me," he says, "would you mess up the inside of your car before the date?" And we're thinking about this, and I can tell we're all wondering if our answer is going to say something about our hands or something. A few people say yeah, they'd mess up their car to get with the girl.

(MORE)

ART (CONT'D)

A couple others say no. And Bob, he sits there nodding, and he says, "Good. Good. Good to know. Now: Will somebody tell me what the fuck cards I'm holding?"

Everyone at the table laughs.

FLUNKY #2

So, did he win?

FLUNKY #3

It was a joke, genius.

FLUNKY #2

Oh. I don't get it.

FLUNKY #3

Why the hell did you laugh, then?

ART

(Interrupting)
Appearances.

Art stands up from his chair.

ART (CONT'D)

Anyway, I can't stay. I have to get things ready for that stupid gala tonight.

Art starts walking away.

FLUNKY #3

Hey, Art!

Art turns back around.

FLUNKY #3 (CONT'D)

What would you have said?

ART

What?

FLUNKY #3

To the question. Would you have messed up your car?

Art scoffs.

ART

I would have turned down the date.

Art walks out of the warehouse.

FADE TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE UPPER FLOOR

Martin is splayed out on the couch, and Austin is seated on the floor next to him. Two empty bottles of champagne are nearby.

AUSTIN

I don't know, man. I mean... I guess if I *had* to choose, I'd go with one of the green ones.

MARTIN

Green ones?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Have you seen them?

MARTIN

I've seen the show.

AUSTIN

Yeah, sure, whatever. You have to dig into the backstory, though. They have matriarchal society, see? The women are in charge.

MARTIN

I know what "matriarchal" means.

Austin turns and looks up at Martin.

AUSTIN

Okay, so what about you?

MARTIN

The ones with the pointy ears.

AUSTIN

What? Come on! That's the most boring answer ever! They're just space elves!

MARTIN

Hey, you asked.

AUSTIN

That shouldn't even count. That's like asking someone what their favorite pizza topping is and having them say "tomato sauce."

WANDA (O.S.)

Yes, well...

Martin and Austin snap their heads around to see Wanda standing behind them. Charise is waiting nearby.

WANDA (CONT'D)

... he never was particularly taken by exciting choices.

Austin looks from Martin to Wanda and back. Martin's mouth is hanging open in shock. Austin hauls himself to his feet.

AUSTIN

I'll, uh... I'll let you two have some space.

WANDA

Excellent idea. Charise, will you entertain our... guest, please?

Charise nods and escorts Austin from the room. Martin struggles to climb to his feet but slips against the material of the couch and nearly falls onto the floor.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Oh, no, please, don't get up.

MARTIN

Wanda, I...

WANDA

(Interrupting)

Forty-three years, Martin.

Martin seems to shudder slightly - either with pleasure or revulsion - at the sound of Wanda saying his name.

MARTIN

Yeah.

Wanda slowly moves to sit down next to Martin. Her voice grows fond and romantic.

WANDA

Forty-three long, terrible years.

MARTIN

Y... yeah?

WANDA

Oh, I can't tell you how often I've dreamed... how often I've wished...

Both of them move closer to one another. Martin looks thoroughly mesmerized, and Wanda's face is a picture of longing.

MARTIN

(Whispering)

Yeah...

WANDA

... that I could stuff a sock down that moron's throat and just be done with him.

Wanda's expression blinks into one of venomous distaste. Martin looks confused.

MARTIN

Stuff a... you mean Markus?

WANDA

Obviously.

MARTIN

I'm not Markus.

WANDA

We've established that.

MARTIN

So, how do you feel about me?

WANDA

I wish I could stuff a sock down your throat and be done with you.

Martin stares at Wanda, then scoots away from her.

MARTIN

Why? What did I ever do to you? It was you and Markus...

WANDA

(Interrupting)

Oh, don't give me that. You were both losers, but he was a loser with money.

MARTIN

He was broke when you left me for him!

WANDA

He wouldn't be for long.

MARTIN

How could you possibly have known that?

Wanda shrugs.

WANDA

Call it a calculated risk. If it didn't pan out, I could have always found another rising star.

MARTIN

Jeez, you're not just a gold-digger; you're like some kind of prospector.

WANDA

Not bad. I may steal that. In the meantime, you are going to fill your brother's shoes for as long as it suits me.

MARTIN

Okay.

Martin's response seems to surprise Wanda.

WANDA

What?

MARTIN

Yeah, sure, I'll do that.

WANDA

I confess, I didn't expect you to be quite so willing to go along with this.

MARTIN

Why wouldn't I? It beats what I've been doing. Yeah, you're an evil bitch, but this would just make you my evil bitch of a boss. I'd get to live here, right?

WANDA

Yes...

MARTIN
And I'd get all of Markus's money
and stuff?

WANDA
... Yes.

MARTIN
Yep. I'll do it.

A moment passes in silence.

WANDA
It's just that I had some rather
dramatic threats about having you
committed if you didn't go along
with it. Markus was insane, you
know.

MARTIN
I didn't. Did you kill him?

Wanda shakes her head, looking entirely sincere.

WANDA
No, I didn't. I needed him alive
and in charge of that company.

MARTIN
Why?

Although she opens her mouth to answer, Wanda catches herself
and offers a cold smile in response.

WANDA
You don't need to worry about that.

MARTIN
Okay.

WANDA
... Again, I expected more of an
argument here.

MARTIN
Nah. I don't really care. I can be
Markus, you can have whatever it is
that you get out of me being
Markus, and we can both live out
our lives without having socks
stuffed down our throats.

Wanda smiles humorlessly in response.

WANDA

I'm glad we're on the same page.
There are some things that you'll
need to understand before the gala
tonight, though.

MARTIN

If any of them have to do with
champagne, I'm all ears.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - THE DOWNSTAIRS KITCHEN

Austin is seated at a breakfast nook in the house's lower
kitchen. Charise is busy making a small meal of some kind.

AUSTIN

So, uh... I guess you know about...

Austin points his finger toward the ceiling. Charise smiles
in apparent understanding.

CHARISE

I've been Markus's nurse and
personal assistant for over a year.
Of course I know.

AUSTIN

Yeah. Yeah, uh... just to be clear,
what is it that you know, exactly?

Charise stops in her motions and looks at Austin quizzically.

CHARISE

What do you think I know?

AUSTIN

That's what I'm trying to
establish. What do you know
about...

Rather than finishing his sentence, Austin points a finger
upward again.

CHARISE

You can say his name.

AUSTIN

Should I?

CHARISE

Why shouldn't you?

AUSTIN
What if you don't know it?

CHARISE
Why wouldn't I know it?

AUSTIN
Ugh, what is this? Twenty
Questions?

CHARISE
No, Twenty Questions is where you
ask and answer a series of yes-or-
no inquiries while attempting to
determine a given idea. This has
been closer to "The Question Game."

AUSTIN
What's "The Question Game?"

CHARISE
You've really never played it?

AUSTIN
How could I know that if you won't
tell me what it is?

CHARISE
What does the name imply?

AUSTIN
What name?

CHARISE
What does the name "The Question
Game" imply?

AUSTIN
How am I supposed to know?! I'd
imagine it has something to do with
questions!

CHARISE
You lose.

AUSTIN
What?

CHARISE
That wasn't a question.

AUSTIN
What are you talking about? What
wasn't a question?

Charise laughs brightly and resumes cooking. Austin watches her for a few seconds.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Okay, no, honestly, you have to tell me about this question game thing.

CHARISE

Two players hold a conversation by asking questions of one another. The first player to make a statement loses. It's one of the games that I decided to play with Markus, to keep his mind going.

Austin points a finger at Charise and smiles triumphantly.

AUSTIN

Aha! You said "decided!" Past tense!

CHARISE

Yes...?

AUSTIN

That means you... aren't... currently deciding to play that game with him... which tells me nothing.

CHARISE

What would it have told you otherwise?

AUSTIN

Nuh-uh. No. Not only am I not telling you that, I'm not playing your question game again.

CHARISE

Are you sure? You're clearly a natural at it.

Charise slides a small plate of food in front of Austin and keeps one for herself. She immediately begins eating.

AUSTIN

Okay, so, you're a nurse. Why?

CHARISE

It seemed like the right career choice after getting my nursing degree.

AUSTIN
Why are you a nurse *here*?

CHARISE
I'm sorry, that's not something I
can tell you.

AUSTIN
What, like, nurse-patient
confidentiality?

CHARISE
Yep.

AUSTIN
Even though I'm clearly good
friends with the man who's upstairs
right now?

CHARISE
Are you?

Austin snorts defensively.

AUSTIN
Hell yeah, I am! Although, I was a
little bit surprised when he told
me he had a twin brother.

CHARISE
He doesn't have a twin brother.

AUSTIN
Yeah, he... wait.

Austin eyes Charise, whose expression betrays nothing.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Okay, seriously, you can't keep
doing that.

CHARISE
Doing what?

AUSTIN
You know. Being all detective at
me.

CHARISE
I'm not sure "detective" can be
used as an adjective.

AUSTIN
Oh, great, now you're being all
English teacher.

CHARISE
Well, you didn't like it when I was
being all nurse.

Austin laughs with equal parts genuine amusement and
frustration.

AUSTIN
Look, do you know his name or not?

CHARISE
Yes.

AUSTIN
You're sure?

CHARISE
Yes.

AUSTIN
So, if I told you that the man
upstairs was not Markus Ario, you
would say...?

Charise sighs and finishes eating her food.

CHARISE
I'd say you should eat up before
your food gets cold.

Austin glares at Charise, but takes to shoveling the contents
of his plate into his mouth.

AUSTIN
So, where were you earlier?

CHARISE
What do you mean?

AUSTIN
When I got here. If you're this
omnipresent medical support staff,
where were you?

CHARISE
Who's being all detective now?

Austin affects a comical voice of authority as he answers.

AUSTIN
Just answer the question, ma'am.

CHARISE
I mentioned the words "personal assistant," if you'll recall. I went to pick up his tuxedo, and then to get Mrs. Ario, when she called me.

Austin hastily finishes his food, then pushes the plate towards Charise. She takes it and deposits it in a nearby sink, along with her own.

AUSTIN
Hey, am I going to need a tuxedo?

CHARISE
For what?

AUSTIN
For this gala thing tonight. Everyone keeps talking about it.

CHARISE
You don't have one?

AUSTIN
I didn't know I'd be attending any gala things.

Charise washes the dishes by hand, then turns back to Austin.

CHARISE
You won't have time to get it fitted, but I can bring you somewhere that you can buy one.

AUSTIN
How about rent one?

CHARISE
I'm sure Mister Ario would be more than happy to buy you a tuxedo.

AUSTIN
Yeah. Yeah, "Mister Ario." Why don't you call him by his first name?

MARTIN (O.S.)
It's Markus.

Martin walks into view, accompanied by Wanda.

CHARISE

Oh, I'm sorry, sir... ma'am... I didn't see you there.

WANDA

That's quite alright, Charise. We'll need to be taken out for some last-minute preparations.

Charise leaves.

AUSTIN

Hang on. "Markus?"

MARTIN

Yeah.

AUSTIN

So, you're really going to...

WANDA

(Interrupting)

Dear, I don't believe you've introduced me to your, er... friend.

MARTIN

Oh, right. Austin, this is Wanda. Wanda, this is Austin.

WANDA

Charmed.

AUSTIN

Likewise. I guess.

WANDA

I'll let you two discuss things briefly... but dear, don't take too long. We still need to get everything ready.

Wanda leaves. Austin and Martin watch her go.

AUSTIN

Okay, what the hell?

MARTIN

I'm going for it. Markus is dead, and he never told anyone that he had a twin brother.

AUSTIN

Nobody?

MARTIN

Nobody. Wanda needs Markus to keep running the company for some reason, so...

AUSTIN

(Interrupting)

Hang on. What reason?

MARTIN

Something to do with stock prices, I think. I don't know. It's probably illegal, but nobody cares what rich people do, I guess.

AUSTIN

I hate that you're right.

MARTIN

Anyway, I can just swoop in and take Markus's place.

AUSTIN

You sound like you've done enough swooping.

Martin stares at Austin for a few seconds.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Okay, yeah, that didn't make sense... but the point remains. This is a mistake, Martin.

MARTIN

Is it?

AUSTIN

When you start tossing around terms like "probably illegal," yeah, I'd say it's a mistake. Not to mention that identity theft is *definitely* illegal.

MARTIN

Nobody would ever find out. Markus was going senile anyway, so nobody will be surprised if I'm "forgetful." Besides, look at the size of this house. Look at *all* of it. Back home, all I have is a run-down apartment and a too-small pension.

AUSTIN
That's all you have, huh?

MARTIN
Hey, wait, I didn't mean it like that.

AUSTIN
Yeah, I know what you meant.

MARTIN
You could move out here too, Austin!

AUSTIN
And do what? Be a live-in assistant? Retire? No, thanks. Do you know why I switch careers every five years, Martin? It's so I can keep learning and experiencing things. I appreciate the offer, but moving here with you just isn't my style.

A tense moment passes between the two men.

MARTIN
Well. I guess that's it, then.

AUSTIN
Yeah.

MARTIN
Are you still coming to the gala tonight?

AUSTIN
Yeah, I'll come. I'm leaving in the morning, though. I might have to switch careers sooner than expected if I stay out here much longer.

Martin nods solemnly, and the two men leave the house. Austin leans back in to look around one more time, then closes the door.

CUT TO:

INT. A BALLROOM - NIGHT

Crowds of well-dressed people mill around inside a large ballroom.

A live band is playing in one corner, tray-bearing waiters are offering hors d'oeuvres, and conversations are buzzing. At the front of the ballroom, a stage with a podium has been set up. Above the stage is a banner which reads "ReliTech 42."

CUT TO:

INT. A BALLROOM - THE STAGING AREA

Martin stares out at the assembled crowd. He is wearing a fitted tuxedo and a bow tie, and his hair has been styled. He is the absolute twin of Markus at this point. Behind him, Wanda is berating a waiter for something unknown. The young man moves off, thoroughly chastised, and Wanda approaches Martin.

WANDA

Are you all set?

MARTIN

I mean... yeah, I guess so.

WANDA

You have your speech notes?

Martin pulls a small stack of index cards from his inside pocket, smiles weakly, then replaces them.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Good.

MARTIN

So, do I just... do I stay here until the speech? How does this work?

WANDA

Yes, that's how this works.

Another waiter walks by, prompting Wanda to immediately adopt a forced smile and plant a kiss on Martin's cheek.

WANDA (CONT'D)

You'll be wonderful, dear!

MARTIN

Yeah.

WANDA

I'm going to go mingle. Come and find me after the speech.

Wanda leaves. As she exits the staging area, Phillip - the man who gave Markus's eulogy - spots Martin and approaches.

PHILLIP
Christ, Mark, you clean up nice.

MARTIN
Oh, uh... yeah. Yeah, you should see the other guy!

PHILLIP
What?

MARTIN
I have no idea. Sorry.

PHILLIP
Don't tell me you have the jitters!
I always figured you could do this sort of thing in your sleep.

MARTIN
It feels a bit like that.

Phillip looks confused, then nods.

PHILLIP
Ah, yeah. I've heard those pills can make you feel a bit foggy. Better than being demented though, right?

MARTIN
Demented?

PHILLIP
Or whatever the politically correct phrase is now.

Phillip looks around as though checking for potential eavesdroppers, then lowers his voice.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)
Listen, Mark, you can still back out of this, you know.

MARTIN
Back out?

PHILLIP
Nobody has signed anything yet. If you're having any doubts...

He trails off. Martin looks bewildered.

MARTIN

Doubts about what? Did someone forget to tell me something?

PHILLIP

Probably. We're a forgetful sort.

Phillip grins expectantly.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Forget it. If your mind is made up, I'm not going to be able to talk you out of it. The armored truck will be here with a police escort when you're ready.

Martin looks ready to say something, but Phillip interrupts him with a clap on the shoulder.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Besides, maybe it's a tax write-off, right? Call it a charity event! We'll work something out.

Phillip leaves. Martin watches him go, then yanks the index cards from his pocket and starts flipping through them. As he does this, Austin enters, clad in a vest and bow tie. His mouth is full, and he is eyeing a pile of morsels on a small paper plate.

AUSTIN

Hey, Mart... sorry, *Markus*. Do you want some of this?

MARTIN

What?

AUSTIN

I don't know what it is, but it tastes a little bit like lasagna. Only, like, lasagna inside of a donut.

Martin yanks the plate from Austin's hand and thrusts half of the index cards into it. He tosses the plate onto the floor.

MARTIN

Help me look through these!

AUSTIN

Hey, I was eating that!

MARTIN

I'll get you more later. Just look through my speech with me, hurry!

Martin goes back to flipping through the index cards.

AUSTIN

What are we looking for, exactly?

MARTIN

I don't know! I thought I read the whole thing, but now Phillip is saying...

AUSTIN

(Interrupting)
Who's Phillip?

MARTIN

He's Markus's... he's my business partner or something. I think he deals with all the money. He said something about an armored truck and a police escort.

AUSTIN

Oh, I get you. You think this is another prank? Like, the armored truck explodes and money goes everywhere?

MARTIN

Not exactly.

AUSTIN

Heh, and then the money turns out to have your face on it or something, and nobody is sure if they can actually spend it or not!

MARTIN

Yeah, that would be hilarious. I don't think that's it, though.

AUSTIN

Why not? Everyone thinks you're some kind of epic prankster, right?

At that moment, a WAITER walks by, slips on the discarded plate, yelps, and falls to the floor. His tray goes flying as well, covering the space with hors d'oeuvres.

MARTIN

Uh... wet floor?

The waiter climbs to his feet, clearly winded, but grins.

WAITER
Well played, Mister Ario!

MARTIN
Yeah. Uh. Right. Got you.

The waiter smiles again and offers a mock salute, then starts cleaning up the mess. Martin pulls Austin away and resumes speaking in a hushed tone.

MARTIN (CONT'D)
What if it's for the gangster?

AUSTIN
The blond kid you told me about?

MARTIN
(Sarcastically)
No, the other gangster. Yes, the blond kid! What if the armored truck is for him?

ART (O.S.)
It had better be.

Martin and Austin turn to see Art leaning against the wall near the door. Austin slides the speech notes in his hand into a pocket on his vest.

MARTIN
Does freaking everybody just hang out back here? There is an actual gala going on, you know.

Art smiles coldly and approaches Austin.

ART
Don't I know you from somewhere?

AUSTIN
Uh... no?

ART
Hm. Well, it's often hard to tell you people apart.

Martin and Austin exchange an incredulous glance, and a flicker of irritation colors Art's expression.

ART (CONT'D)
I meant service staff, idiots. I wasn't being racist.

MARTIN
He's not a waiter.

ART
Look, forget it. That insult was supposed to be the setup to a rather scathing joke, but you ruined it.

MARTIN
(Sarcastically)
I'm so sorry.

ART
(To Austin)
The point is, I do recognize you. You were hanging around the house this afternoon.

AUSTIN
Oh, yeah, right. I guess that was you. Hey, how was it going to go?

ART
Excuse me?

Austin shrugs.

AUSTIN
I mean, I kind of want to hear your joke.

MARTIN
Stop flirting with the bad guy, Austin.

ART
"Austin." Sorry, I've just realized that I haven't introduced myself. Art Schwartz, criminal.

AUSTIN
What, do you have that on business cards?

ART
I do, actually... and for all my bravado, I'm not actually the bad guy, Markus.

MARTIN
You threatened to kill me!

AUSTIN
That does sound pretty bad.

ART
That's business. It's the criminal
version of a contract, see?

AUSTIN
Say that again, but with that one
criminal accent.

Art sighs and rolls his eyes.

ART
(Imitating a 30s villain)
That's business, see? It's the
criminal version of a contract,
see?

Austin turns to Martin.

AUSTIN
I like him, *Markus*. It sounds like
you guys will be in business
together for a while.

ART
Oh, hopefully not. I'll just finish
up here and be on my way.

MARTIN
Finish up what?

AUSTIN
Not his comedy routine, I'll tell
you that.

ART
(To Austin)
It was an in-the-moment joke, okay?
You're wearing a vest and a bow
tie. You look like a waiter. I was
going to insult you, then tell you
to go wait on someone else while I
talked to Markus.

AUSTIN
Yeah, you're right, it's just not
funny now.

Art narrows his gaze at Austin very slightly, then turns back
to Martin.

ART

You, on the other hand, have a speech to deliver... and I'll await your other delivery immediately afterward.

Art starts to leave, but stops when Martin calls after him.

MARTIN

Hang on a second.

ART

For someone so obsessed with pranks, you really lack a flair for the dramatic.

MARTIN

What?

AUSTIN

He means calling him back after he said that bit about deliveries.

MARTIN

Okay, yeah, whatever. Listen, do you know why my wife wants to keep me alive?

Art looks incredulous.

ART

What kind of question is that?

MARTIN

One you can answer, I hope.

ART

No, seriously, think about the implications there. You're suggesting that your wife's default state would be one of wanting to murder you.

AUSTIN

Yeah, well, that's marriage.

MARTIN

It has something to do with stock prices, and it's probably illegal. Are you in on it?

ART

Now you're suggesting that every extra-legal endeavor must somehow involve all of the criminals you know, is that it?

MARTIN

Is that a "no," then?

ART

Be more specific.

MARTIN

No, you don't know why my wife wants to keep me alive?

Art rubs the bridge of his nose with his fingers.

ART

Look, Ario, not only do I not know what's going on between you and your wife, I don't care. If I had to guess, I'd say she was doing some insider trading. When the head of a successful company does something, stock prices respond.

AUSTIN

Is your company publicly traded?

MARTIN

I can't remember.

Applause becomes audible from the ballroom.

ART

Yeah, well, you'd better remember your speech, because it sounds like you're up... and remember our meeting.

Art walks away, toward the back door. Martin looks ready to say something more, but Austin stops him.

AUSTIN

Hey, let him have that one.

MARTIN

Whose side are you on?

Austin chuckles and gestures for Martin to enter the ballroom.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BALLROOM

Martin walks to the base of the stage, out of the light that is illuminating it. Phillip is standing behind the podium.

PHILLIP

Well! Thank you all for being here tonight. You know, when Markus first hired me, ReliTech was only three years old. I thought it was going to be a job like any other. I certainly didn't expect to be here thirty-nine years later, for the forty-second anniversary of the company... and the forty-second straight year of increased revenue!

Appreciative applause follows the statement.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

We've had some tough times, to be sure... but throughout them all, we've had Markus Ario to see us through. His humor, his devotion, and his brilliance have never steered us wrong... which is why I'm going to let him steer tonight. Ladies and gentlemen, Markus Ario!

The applause resumes with renewed gusto, and Martin hesitantly climbs onto the stage. He shakes Phillip's hand, then approaches the microphone.

MARTIN

Uh... hi. I guess I'm supposed to give a speech.

A few chuckles are heard from the crowd. Martin clears his throat and looks out across the audience. Austin gives him a thumbs-up. Martin nods, then holds his speech notes up to read.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Okay, uh... ReliTech was founded on two basic principles: Consumers will always need to buy things, and merchants will always need a place to store the things for those consumers to buy. Pause. That was an awkward sentence, wasn't it? Pause for laughter.

The assembled crowd laughs. Austin looks around with a pained expression on his face, then shrugs. Martin moves to another index card.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

But even after that setback, we continued to thrive. We... hang on, what setback?

Martin shuffles through his cards. With a look of dawning horror, Austin pulls half of the stack from his vest pocket. He holds them up - trying to be discreet - and Martin's eyes go wide.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Uh... of course I didn't mention a setback! Because... because setbacks aren't worth mentioning!

Light applause from the crowd punctuates Martin's statement.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

No, the only things worth mentioning are... uh, things that are good! I mean, you shouldn't lie about bad things, obviously, but there's no reason to focus on them, either.

Charise appears from the crowd, approaching the side of the stage. Martin waves her off.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

And since we're not focusing on bad things, we should... we should keep focusing on good things. Things like, uh... like happiness and... other stuff.

A quiet murmur goes through the crowd. Martin wipes his forehead.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Speeches are hard.

The murmur quickly turns to laughter.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

And after... uh, what was it? Forty-two years?

Martin cranes his neck to see the banner above him. The crowd laughs again.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Right. After forty-two years of success... of making lots of money... well, it's time to focus on more good things. I think we have some of them here tonight, right? All those little snacks and stuff? Yeah, go on and enjoy them! They're good! There's some spaghetti cake or something out there! Oh, and, uh... here's to another forty-two years!

Slightly hesitant applause breaks out, and Martin hurries off the stage. Charise meets him.

CHARISE

Are you okay?

MARTIN

I'm fine.

Austin comes running up.

AUSTIN

Are you okay?

MARTIN

Come on, people, it wasn't *that* bad!

AUSTIN

It was pretty bad.

CHARISE

How do you feel?

MARTIN

I just need some air.

AUSTIN

Are you sure, man? Maybe you'd rather stick around for a little while and have some food.

CHARISE

Food is good.

AUSTIN

Yeah, not air. Air is outside, and outside is a bad idea.

Charise stares quizzically at Austin.

MARTIN
 I'm just going to get this...
 whatever the hell it is... over
 with.

Martin struts toward a door at the back of the room and bursts through it.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BACK PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A black car is parked in the center of the parking lot. Art is leaning against it. No other vehicles are visible. Martin approaches, with Austin and Charise several meters behind him.

ART
 That sounded like a rousing
 success.

MARTIN
 What, the speech? I guess.

ART
 It must have run a little short,
 because I don't see my money
 anywhere.

Art looks over at Charise and Austin.

ART (CONT'D)
 Charise. Austin.

CHARISE
 What's going on, Art?

AUSTIN
 You two know each other?

CHARISE
 Of course.

Nobody says anything for several seconds.

AUSTIN
 Okay, maybe I should rephrase: *How*
 do you guys know each other?

CHARISE
 Art helped Markus with something
 last year.
 (MORE)

CHARISE (CONT'D)

He was around the house a lot. It was around the same time that I got hired.

MARTIN

Right. Of course. Art, while don't you, uh... yeah, tell Austin what it was that you helped me with.

ART

The hell is going on with you, Ario?

Martin shrugs. Art turns to face Austin.

ART (CONT'D)

Mister Ario here was in something of a tight spot a while back, owing to the sudden disappearance of some funds from his company coffers. I... assisted.

AUSTIN

What are you, an accountant?

ART

We've established what I am.

Austin throws up his hands.

AUSTIN

You know what? This is too much for me. You guys can all play your game, but I'm out.

Austin turns to walk away, but nearly runs face-first into Wanda.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Gah! Oh, hi, Wendy.

MARTIN

Wanda.

AUSTIN

Whatever. I was just leaving.

WANDA

Oh, I really wish you would stay. This looks like such an interesting gathering.

Austin looks down to see Wanda holding a small pistol.

AUSTIN

God damn it, is anyone here *not* a bad guy?

CHARISE

I'm not.

AUSTIN

Okay, great. I feel much better. Oh, wait, no I don't, because there's a gun pointed at me.

WANDA

I'm sure you've had guns pointed at you before.

ART

Now, that? That sounded racist.

AUSTIN

I wasn't going to say anything.

ART

Why not? You called me out on it.

AUSTIN

Yeah, but you weren't pointing a *god damned gun* at me.

ART

Fair point.

AUSTIN

Why don't *you* have a gun?

Art gives Austin a wholly disbelieving expression.

WANDA

That's an excellent point. Art, dear, please do disarm yourself.

ART

You know that I'm not here alone, right?

WANDA

Yes, no doubt your heavies are in the car, and no doubt they are armed, too. I wonder if they can shoot me before I can shoot you?

Before anyone can respond, the headlights of an armored truck become visible nearby. It is soon joined by two police cars, both with their lights off. Wanda hides her gun.

The armored truck pulls to a stop, and Phillip gets out of the passenger seat.

PHILLIP

Wow, quite the little party you have here!

MARTIN

I'm just now realizing that everyone says variations of the very same thing all the time.

ART

Blame the adrenaline.

AUSTIN

How's that?

ART

When you're in a state of heightened stress, your ability to recognize patterns is affected. More often than not, it's impacted negatively, but sometimes the reverse occurs.

Phillip laughs jovially.

PHILLIP

Well, aren't you a walking encyclopedia? I don't believe we've had the pleasure. I'm Phillip, and I'm...

WANDA

(Interrupting)

Save it, Phil. What are you doing here?

Phillip turns to look at Wanda, apparently shocked.

PHILLIP

Me? I'm here with the paperwork. You can't just turn over ten million dollars without someone signing *something*.

WANDA

Ten million dollars?

Phillip stares at Martin.

PHILLIP
Mark, you didn't tell her? That's
not like you.

MARTIN
Tell her what?

WANDA
Yes, tell me what?

AUSTIN
(Shouting)
Confused!

Everyone looks at Austin.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Sorry. Honestly, though, I'm
getting the feeling that Markus had
his fingers in a few different
pies, and now all the flavors are
getting mixed together.

PHILLIP
What do you mean, "had?" Mark,
what's going on?

Martin opens his mouth to speak, but catches Wanda's eye. She
shakes her head.

MARTIN
I, uh... I have honestly no idea.
I'm senile.

WANDA
Well, I'm sure you're about to
remember that you intended to
cancel the transfer of these ten
million dollars.

ART
No, he isn't.

WANDA
We've already discussed your
friends in the car, dear.

Art nods.

ART
Sure, sure... but what about my
friends in those cars?

Art waves a hand at the police cars. Both of them open their doors, and two of the flunkies from the warehouse climb out. They approach and stand on either side of Wanda.

AUSTIN

Great, now who are they?

ART

Friends of mine. I thought I made that clear.

AUSTIN

Not real cops?

ART

Not real cops.

AUSTIN

Gotcha.

ART

Miss Ario, if you'd be so kind as to drop your weapon now.

Wanda glares at Art, but bends and places her gun on the ground.

PHILLIP

Wanda! What is this?!

WANDA

Nothing, Phillip. Walk away.

Phillip looks around, mouth agape. He places his clipboard and keys on the ground, then walks away.

ART

Huh. Nobody ever does that.

AUSTIN

Actually, do you mind if I follow him? This whole criminal mishmash thing is upsetting my stomach.

ART

I'd prefer if you stayed, actually. You're a bit too knowledgeable about this whole thing.

AUSTIN

I'm really not.

MARTIN

Me, neither.

Art shakes his head.

ART

I'm not going to give you some explanatory monologue, if that's what you're expecting. Sometimes things just don't make sense to outsiders. Although, I'm surprised that... oh, what the hell is this?

Everyone follows Art's gaze to see Phillip charging at the group. The flunkies on either side of Wanda draw their guns.

PHILLIP

(Shouting)

I love you, Wanda!

Phillip tackles one of the flunkies. The other moves to help his companion. Wanda seizes the moment to stoop and grab her gun, which she shoots at Art. The car window behind him is blown out, and the doors on the opposite side of the car open. Two more flunkies tumble from the vehicle, and Art runs around to join them.

AUSTIN

Run, Martin!

Wanda fires another few rounds at the Art. Charise grabs Martin and shoves him toward one of the police cars. Austin runs ahead and dives into the driver seat while Martin and Charise huddle in the back. Austin starts the ignition.

ART

(Shouting)

Get to the truck, you idiots!

One of the flunkies wrestling with Phillip tries to move toward the truck, but Phillip grabs his leg and bites him. Wanda eyes the scuffle, then grabs the keys from the ground and runs toward the truck.

FLUNKY #3

Gaaaaah! He's biting me!

ART

Then rip his teeth out! Get that truck!

The two flunkies near Art open fire toward Wanda. Bullets ricochet off the armored truck. Back in the police car, Austin screams and ducks.

AUSTIN

They're shooting at us!

CHARISE

Try the radio! Call the station!

Austin scrabbles at the dashboard, finally closing his hand around the radio handset. He presses a button on the side, and his voice is broadcast through a loudspeaker.

AUSTIN

Help! Hello? Help! We need help!

MARTIN

That's the megaphone!

Another bullet ricochets nearby.

AUSTIN

Screw this!

Austin puts the car into gear and is about to start driving, when the armored truck pulls ahead of him.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

What the...?

MARTIN

Somebody's in the truck!

AUSTIN

Really?! I thought it was driving itself!

CHARISE

Follow it!

AUSTIN

Are you crazy?!

CHARISE

Armored trucks are equipped with lojack systems! Someone will be tracking it!

AUSTIN

What, and cop cars aren't?!

CHARISE

Not in a small town like this!

AUSTIN

You're making things up!

Charise presses a badge against the divider between the front and back seat.

CHARISE
Secret service.

Austin and Martin both stare at Charise.

AUSTIN
I knew you were too hot to be a
nurse. Real nurses are never hot.
Well, except for...

MARTIN
(Interrupting)
Do what she says, Austin!

Austin slams on the accelerator and follows the truck. Behind them, the other police car and Art's black car give chase.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CITY STREETS - NIGHT

A comical car chase takes place throughout the city. The armored truck smashes into several obstacles but continues in its path. Wanda is seen gritting her teeth behind the wheel. Art is riding in the passenger seat of his black car while one of his flunkies drives. The other police car is occupied by the other three flunkies. Phillip is nowhere to be seen.

MARTIN
You gave me medicine!

CHARISE
I gave you TicTacs!

AUSTIN
Red light! Red light! What do I
do?!

CHARISE
Turn on the siren! That switch!
There, there!

Austin flips the switch indicated by Charise. The police lights on the car come on, but rather than a siren, "Do Your Ears Hang Low" - like one would expect to hear from an ice cream truck - begins playing.

AUSTIN
What the hell?!

MARTIN
Markus did that.

CHARISE

Turn left! *Turn left!*

The illuminated police car skids around a turn and takes off in pursuit of the armored truck.

MARTIN

Where are they going?

AUSTIN

Your brother's house!

MARTIN

What? Why?!

CHARISE

Wanda must be driving!

MARTIN

How does that even begin to answer my question?

CHARISE

She's not thinking clearly! She's panicked, so she's trying to get somewhere familiar!

AUSTIN

That doesn't make sense!

CHARISE

That's human psychology!

Behind them, Art grits his teeth as he drives. He screeches to a halt at the intersection and watches the chase disappear into the distance.

FLUNKY #1

Why aren't we following them?!

ART

I'd love to, believe me. At this point, though, it's a better idea to cut and run.

FLUNKY #1

Run? Why? There's ten million dollars in that truck! That's our money!

ART

And we won't be able to *spend* any of it if we're behind bars.

(MORE)

ART (CONT'D)

We're going back to the warehouse
and cleaning up.

The flunky considers this, then points his gun at Art.

FLUNKY #1

Nuh-uh. Get out.

Art rolls his eyes, but exits the vehicle. The flunky moves over into the driver's seat, then speeds after the truck. Art watches the car leave. The second police car drives into view and comes to a halt. One of the windows rolls down.

FLUNKY #2

Which way did they go?!

Art points in the direction of the chase. The police car speeds away. Art walks to the other side of the intersection and lights a cigarette. A few seconds later, music becomes audible in the distance. Three more police cars speed by.

ART

(To himself)

Yep.

CUT TO:

EXT. AN EXPENSIVE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The armored car speeds by the house, then comes to a skidding halt. Wanda, visibly agitated, turns the wheel to head back in the direction that she came. Behind her, the car driven by Austin comes to a halt.

AUSTIN

What's she doing?

MARTIN

Turning around.

AUSTIN

I can see that!

The armored car labors in its turning.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

So, uh... secret service, huh?

CHARISE

Yep.

AUSTIN
I don't suppose you know what all
of this is about?

CHARISE
Sorry. I can't talk about an
ongoing investigation.

AUSTIN
Is that what you'd call this?

MARTIN
Hey, can you turn off that music?
It's getting on my nerves.

Austin reaches up and turns off the song. The exterior lights
die. Ahead of them, the armored truck is still being turned
around.

AUSTIN
The way I figure it, Wendy must
have been...

MARTIN
(Interrupting)
Wanda.

AUSTIN
You know what I mean! She must have
been doing something shady, and
Markus found out.

MARTIN
Or Phillip did.

AUSTIN
Right, yeah. That was weird, wasn't
it? Him just out of nowhere like
that?

MARTIN
Yeah. Hey, I thought I asked you to
turn that music off.

The sound of "Do Your Ears Hang Low" becomes audible again.
All three of them look back and see four police cars
approaching, three of which have their lights illuminated.
The black car is ahead of them.

AUSTIN
Shit!

MARTIN
Drive! Drive!

Austin brings the car into motion, swerving to avoid the armored car. Wanda watches them pass, sees the approaching cars, then slams her foot onto the truck's accelerator.

AUSTIN

What the hell is she doing?!

CHARISE

I explained that already!

MARTIN

Wanda, no!

Austin speeds to follow, but comes to a halt at the front of the driveway. Wanda drives the truck towards Markus's house, up the driveway, and directly into the front door. The front of the house caves inward, burying half of the truck. The black car smashes into the back of the armored truck, and the police car driven by the flunkies smashes into the back of the black car. The other three police cars all pull in around, and several uniformed OFFICERS climb out, weapons drawn.

OFFICER #1

Step out of the vehicles!

The driver and passenger doors open, and two flunkies tumble out, groaning. The third one pounds on the back window, apparently unable to open his door from the inside. The door to the black car opens, and the fourth flunky climbs out, hands raised.

OFFICER #2

That one... uh, he can just stay there for now.

OFFICER #1

What if he has a gun?

OFFICER #2

Oh, right. Hey, you! Open the door for that guy!

One of the injured flunkies reaches up and opens the back door of the police car. The third flunky hauls himself out.

OFFICER #1

Okay, now, hands behind your heads!

The flunkies all comply. Martin comes running up the driveway.

MARTIN

Is she okay?!

OFFICER #1
 Oh, Mister Ario! Hey, wait a
 second...

A broad grin crosses the officer's face.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
 This is all a prank, isn't it? Hey,
 guys, check it out! This is an Ario
 prank!

MARTIN
 No, no it isn't! Please, help, my
 ex-wife is in there!

Austin and Charise come jogging up behind Martin. As they do,
 more of the house groans, as though threatening to collapse.

OFFICER #1
 Now she's *really* in there, eh?

MARTIN
 Not a prank!

OFFICER #1
 Uh-huh. I getcha.

The officer touches the side of his nose with one finger.
 Charise steps forward, displaying her badge.

CHARISE
 He's telling the truth. It's not a
 prank. Have your men frisk everyone
 for weapons and clear the way for
 the EMTs.

OFFICER #1
 EMTs?

CHARISE
 Yes. Call for an ambulance.

The house makes another ominous noise.

AUSTIN
 And maybe an excavation team.

MARTIN
 Wanda!

Martin runs forward.

CHARISE
 Martin, wait!

As soon as Martin enters what is left of the house, the entire thing collapses. The truck is completely buried.

AUSTIN
Oh, shit. Martin.

A nearby officer rolls his eyes.

OFFICER #2
Come on. Faking his death twice in three days? He needs some new material.

Austin runs forward, looking at the rubble. Charise follows him.

AUSTIN
Damn.

CHARISE
Austin...

AUSTIN
Hey! Help! Somebody get me some help here!

CHARISE
Austin. He's gone.

AUSTIN
You don't know that! He could be hurt! He could still be alive! Help! Someone, help!

Austin digs at the rubble. Charise darts forward and stops him, then pulls him into a hug.

CHARISE
I'm sorry.

AUSTIN
Damn it. That bastard. That old, dumb, and ugly bastard.

FADE TO:

INT. A HOSPITAL ROOM - DAYS LATER

Television footage - which appears to be live, at first - is being played. A CORRESPONDENT stands in front of Markus's collapsed house. Behind her, men in hard hats shift rubble.

CORRESPONDENT

It's been a confusing and terrifying ordeal for the residents of this small town, discovering that millionaire philanthropist Markus Ario - who had recently faked his own death as a part of an elaborate hoax - has been crushed to death following the collapse of his mansion. The destruction occurred after an armored truck - driven by none other than Markus's wife, Wanda - crashed into the house.

Footage is shown of Wanda on a stretcher. She is alive and accompanied by a police escort.

CORRESPONDENT (CONT'D)

Mrs. Ario had attempted to steal the armored truck after learning of her husband's intention to invest in a new startup business venture. She has also been charged with several counts of insider trading and racketeering.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

What the hell does that even mean?

Martin is shown lying in a hospital bed. Several cuts and bruises are visible on his face. He looks over to see Austin standing in the doorway.

MARTIN

What? Racketeering?

AUSTIN

Yeah, man. You hear about it all the time, but nobody seems to know the definition.

MARTIN

It's basically "intent to continue engaging in criminal behavior."

AUSTIN

Huh. Now I know.

MARTIN

Charise told me.

Both men look back at the television.

CORRESPONDENT

In related news, four men said to be involved in a wide-reaching counterfeiting scheme were arrested last night at the scene. Their connection to Mrs. Ario is unclear at this time, but an anonymous source has suggested that she may have in fact been the ringleader of the criminal enterprise.

AUSTIN

Yeah, speaking of Charise... can you explain to me how a government agent is okay with the idea of you faking your death?

MARTIN

Technically, I'm faking Markus's death.

AUSTIN

Man, this whole thing is entirely too convoluted for me. He's actually dead, right?

MARTIN

As far as I know.

AUSTIN

At least there's that, then. You never found out what was going on with Wanda?

MARTIN

Charise told me that real life doesn't come with convenient explanations.

A knock at the door catches both men's attentions. They turn to see Art standing there.

AUSTIN

Uh oh.

ART

No, none of that.

Art steps into the room. He is carrying a bouquet of flowers and a wrapped box.

ART (CONT'D)

So, you're really not Markus Ario.

MARTIN

I tried to tell you that.

ART

You're right. You absolutely did.

AUSTIN

How are you not in jail?

Art laughs and deposits the box on top of Martin, who grunts in mild pain.

ART

Have you heard of the sunk cost fallacy? See, most people, when they get in over their heads, they try to keep swimming. They're already invested, so they try to make the most of it. Me? I know when to head for the surface.

MARTIN

How the hell did you even find me? Charise said...

ART

(Interrupting)

Charise has to play by government rules... for the most part.

AUSTIN

What does *that* mean?

Art looks at Austin, then hands the flowers to him.

ART

Here. These are for you.

Austin looks startled.

AUSTIN

Me? Oh, hey, I'm not...

ART

(Interrupting)

I know. Don't worry. There's more than meets the eye.

Martin stares at Art, then opens the box. Inside is a tacky sweater... and beneath it, stacks of hundred dollar bills.

MARTIN

What is this?

ART
Consider it an apology. I told you,
I'm not a bad guy.

Austin peers into his bouquet.

AUSTIN
How come I don't get money?

ART
It's wrapped in the paper, genius.

MARTIN
Is it counterfeit or something?

Art laughs.

ART
No... though it is the result of
counterfeiting. With your brother's
help, there would have been a lot
more.

AUSTIN
Okay, seriously, you have to tell
us *something*. None of this makes
any sense.

Art moves to leave.

ART
Sometimes it's better if you don't
know the full story. Things are
more interesting. Besides... that
way, you can pretend that you were
the main characters.

Martin and Austin watch Art leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. A HOSPITAL - DAY

Art smiles to himself as he exits the hospital. He gets into a brand-new black car. As he pulls away, Charise walks into view. She turns and watches the car leave with a quizzical expression, shrugs, and walks into the hospital.

FADE OUT.

CREDITS

FADE IN:

INT. A RAMSHACKLE APARTMENT - THE BEDROOM

Martin's clock radio is shown. Its alarm is still buzzing.

FADE TO BLACK.