

Equal. Separate.

by

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FADE IN

EXT. - CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

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

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

SITE - FORM WORK

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

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

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

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

EXT. - HANRAHAN'S BAR - DAY

Ratty bar on a ratty street near the construction site.

INT. - BAR - DAY

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

TABLE

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

Pat yells to SOMEONE across the room.

PAT

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

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

They sit, each grab a beer.

PAT  
Ready?

CHRIS  
Ready.

They raise the beers and toast.

CHRIS  
It was a bitch today.

PAT  
A bitch today it was.

CHRIS  
Today I built the formwork.

PAT  
Today I built the brick shithouse.

CHRIS  
To the first sip.

PAT  
To the first sip past the lip.

BOTH  
With a maximum of zip. Whoo-wah!

They drink deep.

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

CHRIS  
On to the second, then.

They finish the beer, then sip the shot.

PAT

I think --  
(belches)  
I think my throat just released.  
(belches)  
Beer as roto-rooter.

CHRIS

Beer as confession.

PAT

Bitch of a day.

CHRIS

Bitch of a day it was.

DOOR OF BAR

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

TABLE

Chris and Pat watch him burrow his way in.

DOOR

He catches Chris' eye, blows her a kiss.

TABLE

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

PAT

(yelling)  
It's your IQ!

BAR

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

Then he disappears into the mob at the bar.

TABLE

PAT  
So --

CHRIS  
So --

PAT  
So -- Doherty --

CHRIS  
I know -- I know!

PAT  
He's getting worse.

CHRIS  
I'm handling him.

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

CHRIS  
I'm handling him!

PAT  
He's handling you.

CHRIS  
I told him --

PAT  
Like handling a pit viper.

CHRIS  
I told him --

PAT  
To Doherty, "handle" only means one  
thing --

CHRIS  
Yeah --

PAT

-- and it ain't the George Frederick  
fucking "Water Music" Hallelujah  
chorus.

Chris glares at Pat.

PAT

I'll shut up.

CHRIS

I told him --

PAT

Yeah --

CHRIS

-- one more pass of his hand across my  
ass --

PAT

Yeah --

CHRIS

-- and I was going to clamp it 'tween  
my cheeks and use it for a wipe.

PAT

Could be he'd like that.

CHRIS

And then I'd shit nails.

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

BAR

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

The crowd HOWLS.

TABLE

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

PAT

"Shit nails" -- good scum-back to that cum-chum. Useless, though.

CHRIS

What?

PAT

Words. With chuckleheads like him.

CHRIS

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

PAT

If you want to really shit nails --

Pat sips her shot.

CHRIS

Rest of a sentence go with that?

PAT

Talk to the steward. File on him.

CHRIS

File on Doherty.

PAT

Go to the union --

CHRIS

File for "hair-ass-ment."

PAT

The gut-bloated fat fucker --

CHRIS

-- for hair-ass-ment.

PAT

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

CHRIS

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

PAT

Your ass means a lot, honey.

CHRIS

Please.

PAT

It's the battleground.

CHRIS

It's big enough --

PAT

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

CHRIS

File.

PAT

It's your two by four.

CHRIS

And "you know, like I know" the follow-up -- you seen this! --

EXT. - WORK SITE - DAY

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

CHRIS (V.O.)

An "accidental" cinderblock --

CONCRETE WITH REBAR

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

CHRIST(V.O.)

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

INT. - BAR - DAY

CHRIS

-- or

(shows palm of hand)

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

BAR

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

CROWD

1 - 2 - 3!

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

TABLE

PAT

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

CHRIS

I got my boy to think about --

PAT

I got my kid, too.

CHRIS

You'd risk it?

PAT

I'm saying I'd at least consider.

CHRIS

You'd bat for me?

PAT  
Solidarity forever.

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

PAT  
What?  
(leans in)  
What is so hard?

CHRIS  
Easier for you.

PAT  
Why?  
Still looking.

CHRIS  
Color.

PAT  
Color?

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

PAT  
It ain't as bad --

CHRIS  
It?

PAT  
Color thing.

CHRIS  
Not bad?

PAT  
As bad.

CHRIS

As what?

PAT

Look at the laws.

CHRIS

As what?

PAT

Black millionaires now.

CHRIS

Pat -- don't --

PAT

Look at you and this job.

CHRIS

Are you hearing the undertone of that?

PAT

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

CHRIS

Then what are you -- Park it. I'm  
tired -- I can't do the curriculum  
today with you.

PAT

The curriculum?

CHRIS

Never mind.

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

I gotta go --

BAR

Doherty sees Chris stand up and slip her tool belt off the  
back of the chair. Her eye catches Doherty's. He sticks

both hands over his head, fingers spread out, then "counts down" from ten by folding a finger away with each number.

Pat does not see him do this.

TABLE

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

PAT

So fine.

CHRIS

What?

PAT

Fine.

CHRIS

Fine what?

PAT

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

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

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

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

PAT (O.S.)

Way up in the government -- way up.  
Multi-bazillion dollar athletes.

Chris turns to look at Pat.

PAT

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

CHRIS

Know what?

PAT

Bound to be sludge --

CHRIS

-- sludge --

PAT

-- in the engine of progress.

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

CHRIS

Slavery --

PAT

Gone.

CHRIS

Jim Crow --

PAT

Flown.

CHRIS

Affirmative action --

PAT

Affirmed. It's a new paragraph.

CHRIS

Better world?

PAT

By far.

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

CHRIS

Never guessed you for an -- optimist.

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

PAT

It doesn't always pay to run things  
down.

Chris picks up her own second shot, downs it.

CHRIS

Let me ask you then --

PAT

Anything.

CHRIS

A test.

PAT

Whoo-wah!

But Chris does not rise to the chant.

CHRIS

Your Leslie --

PAT

Yeah?

CHRIS

Your Leslie. My Jamie.

PAT

You mean --

CHRIS

I mean your new paragraph.

PAT

What?

CHRIS

I mean mix it up. I mean "mix"-  
cegenation. Well, optimist?

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

CHRIS

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

PAT

Um --

CHRIS

Any nouns or adjectives with that?

PAT

No.

CHRIS

No.

PAT

It wouldn't work --

CHRIS

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

PAT

Damn!

CHRIS

If the world smells so good to you --  
What?

PAT

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

CHRIS

And why?

PAT

The children --

CHRIS

Children?

PAT

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

In their background, Doherty dances.

CHRIS

Light coffee not your color?

CHRIS

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

CHRIS

Doherty?

PAT

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

CHRIS

And so Doherty wins?

BAR

Doherty stops dancing, looks at Chris.

TABLE

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

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

Chris hooks her eyes to Pat's.

CHRIS

You give it up to that?

PAT

It's protection.

CHRIS

So -- because we're gutless --

PAT

Gutless?

CHRIS

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

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

CHRIS

Is the office closed?

PAT

What?

CHRIS

Is -- the -- office -- closed?

PAT

Project manager's there, usually --  
paperwork.

Chris takes money of her pocket.

CHRIS

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

PAT

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

CHRIS

Back off!

Chris lays the money down very carefully.

CHRIS

(softer)

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

PAT

Chris --

CHRIS

Don't -- Don't start lying --

Chris straightens the money.

CHRIS

I used to be able to watch my back with you. That was the gift, Pat. No more.

In the space of two beers --

(unable to believe it)

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

Chris looks at Doherty's whale-like back lumped over the bar, then back to Pat.

CHRIS

The point of it all?

Pat says nothing. Chris leaves.

BAR

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

TABLE

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

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

FADE OUT