

HARD YAKKA

Written by

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FADE IN

INT. BACK ROOM OF A BED LINEN STORE, DAY, BUT YOU CAN'T TELL.

SUPER: Perth, Western Australia, 2003

A woman stands on a stepladder with her back to us, struggling to gather a large pile of bedsheets encased in slippery plastic. A man looks up at her with a gaze that's all too familiar to a woman in her position.

The woman is NATASHA (30), complex but one of the good guys. Her insecurities flare up and briefly make her a bad guy, but rarely for long.

The man is COLIN (41), born to be business casual. He derives his powers from the badge he wears on a lanyard and would be invisible if not for his deadly serious mustache.

COLIN

Whatcha doing on this mysterious holiday again, Tash?

NATASHA

I've told you a million times already, it's between me and my travel agent.

She steps off the ladder with an unwieldy pile of bedsheets, trying to contain them. Colin makes no effort to help.

COLIN

Is that Ken next door then? I'll have to pop around and -

Colin is interrupted as Natasha's armload of products falls to the floor.

She crouches and gathers the products into her arms again, muttering. Natasha looks up and meets Colin's eyes as he leers down at her.

COLIN (CONT'D)

As long as you're down there, I could use a bit of help myself.

Natasha stands quickly with arms full and makes eye contact.

NATASHA

I'd love to help you with that sometime, but I'm afraid it'd get stuck between my fucking teeth.

Her phone rings, and without breaking eye contact she drops the packages back to the floor and pulls it from her pocket.

COLIN

Come on, Tash, what did I JUST say
about all your long personal calls?

She ignores him, quickly stepping out the back door into an alley and slamming the door shut. Just as she pulls a cigarette and lighter from her secret spot behind the dumpster, the phone stops ringing.

She deflates, lights up and looks at the phone in her palm.

It rings again. Suddenly Colin's never existed and this alley is a paradise.

NATASHA

Hello, beautiful boy! How are you!?
Are you even half as excited as I
am?

She sparkles as she listens, bursting into warm laughter.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

I know, I can't believe it either!

The back door opens and Colin sticks his head out.

COLIN

Tash, there's a line at the
register and you know we're short
today -

NATASHA (TO COLIN)

I'm on smoko, leave me alone!

She shoves the door shut, pushing Colin back into the store and leaning against the door.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Sorry, that was just my stupid
boss.

She listens, bouncing as Colin shoves the door's other side.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Hang on, sorry. Can I call you back
from home in about thirty minutes'
time? I'm just about to leave work
and these international minutes are
murdering my mobile bill ... OK,
bye, baby - I can't wait to see
you!

She opens the door and Colin stumbles into the alley.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

I'm starting my holiday as of now -
you can fuck right off with your
line at the register.

COLIN

But Tash, you're closing tonight!

NATASHA

Everyone that closes this shop has
a cunt, Colin. It stands to reason
that you'd also close the shop if
you **are** a cunt, Colin. Now if
you'll excuse me, I'm off like
prawns in the sun.

Natasha quickly gets into a small and dusty silver Daewoo
parked by the dumpster and pulls away.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE ON A SUBURBAN STREET, DAY.

Natasha's car pulls into the driveway and she hurries inside
with a 6-pack of Emu Bitter. Seconds after she shuts the
front door, a spotless black Lexus pulls into the driveway
followed by a silver Mercedes.

A man dives from the Lexus, crouching to avoid detection and
frantically waving the other car away.

This is ADAM - mid/late 30s in an expertly tailored suit with
piercing eyes. In 2008 he'll deeply respect the guys that
trigger the US housing crisis. He thinks being a big-time
real estate agent in a small-time city makes him happy, but
he's not normally this frantic.

The Mercedes' window drops to reveal a woman behind the
wheel. She's forgettably gorgeous, new money blasting from
her pores.

ADAM

Shit, shit, we can't do this while
Tash is here. I'll call you later,
I promise, but you need to go,
quickly.

WOMAN

You said you weren't married!

ADAM
YOU'RE married!

CLOSE ON: A TERRIFYING DIAMOND WEDDING RING ON HER HAND.

WOMAN
Call me later.

We see her car pull away as Adam walks toward the house.

CUT TO:

EXT., BACK PORCH OF THE SAME HOUSE, DAY, THE INDIAN OCEAN
GLITTERING IN THE BACKGROUND

Natasha sits at a table scattered with empty beer bottles.
She's holding a entering numbers from an international
calling card into a large cordless phone.

As the phone rings, she reaches down and grabs a beer from an
ice bucket at her feet, effortlessly opening it with her
lighter. She takes a deep swig and sighs, smiling.

NATASHA
Well hello again, baby! ... Awwwww.
Yeah good now, just had a bit of
sexual harassment from my manager
and ran into my loony ex at the
shops - a normal afternoon for
Perth ... It's all a bit easier to
take knowing that in just two days
I get to put my hands all over you,
beautiful boy!

Through the porch window, we can see Adam enter the front
door. He calls out as he makes his way toward the back of the
darkened house.

ADAM
Tash? TaaAASH? NATASHA LENEGAN?

He sees and hears her on the phone through the back window
and tiptoes forward, just in time to hear her say

NATASHA
Give me the address to your hotel
and I'll be in the lobby with a big
bow on my dress, just for you to
unwrap.

Adam's eyes widen, surprised. He drops to the floor,
crouching below the window and aggressively eavesdropping.

INTERCUT: NATASHA ON THE PHONE / ADAM REACTING TO WHAT HE
OVERHEARS

NATASHA

What do you mean, staying with me?
How on earth would you even get
that idea? ... Is it completely
unrealistic to want a boyfriend
that is funny and creative and
smart AND doesn't need me to
nurture him into adulthood?

She's quiet for a minute or two, and she relaxes. Her smile
comes back.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

My god, when I clicked on your
message through that stupid
website, I had no idea what I was
getting myself into ... OK, OK.
I'll meet you in the airport, and
we'll figure it out together. Bye
sweet boy.

She hangs up and turns to go back into the house, bumping
into a stunned Adam standing behind the screen door.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

(rattled) Jesus Adam, how long have
you been there?

ADAM

I know I've been working a lot
lately, but I sense that we're
drifting apart.

OPENING CREDITS:

INT. IMMIGRATION CLEARANCE DESK, PERTH AIRPORT

A man/woman (doesn't matter) in an Australian Border Force
uniform sits at a desk inside a plexiglass booth.

BORDER AGENT

Next, please step forward.

JEFF (our other lead) steps up. He's in his late 20s, tall,
broad-shouldered with art-school glasses and zero physical
grace. He's smart, kind, a little naive and so dedicated to
an artist's life that he's basically unemployable.

JEFF

Is this ... am I in the right place?

BORDER AGENT

That's what I'm here to determine.
What's the purpose of your trip?

JEFF

Well, I'm sort of visiting a
friend, but I'm also here to
research and write a book!

BORDER AGENT

Who's your publisher?

JEFF

I'm kinda writing the manuscript on
spec, haven't actually sold it yet.

BORDER AGENT

What's this book about?

JEFF

Well, it's an adventure travel book
based on my adventures in
Australia. All I gotta do is come
in and then write the thing, the
concept and main characters are
rock-solid in my head.

The border agent looks quizzically at Jeff and begins writing
in a small notebook without breaking eye contact.

BORDER AGENT

How long do you intend to stay?

JEFF

I've got a three month visa, but
the work decides how long it takes.
If my friend asks, or uh, if the
research demands, I'll stay longer.

The border agent scribbles with more intensity.

BORDER AGENT

And where will you be staying while
you develop this masterpiece?

JEFF

Well, I'm meeting my friend in a
hotel for a few days at first, and
then she's probably going to invite
me to stay with her.

BORDER AGENT

What's the hotel's name and
address?

JEFF

She said she wanted to surprise me.

BORDER AGENT

What's your "friend's" address?

JEFF

Oh, hang on, I've got it right here.

Jeff slides an envelope with the address on it to the agent. The border agent flips the envelope over to reveal a large pink lipstick smooch on the back.

BORDER AGENT

Looks like your friend's really looking forward to your visit.

What is your occupation?

JEFF

If you want what I did for money back in Richmond, put "graphic artist," but playing drums 'occupied' my soul. My friend says that based on all my letters I'm really a writer and so I'm kinda here to focus on that.

BORDER AGENT

Do you have anything to declare?

Jeff raises his right hand in a mock-swear and says

JEFF

I solemnly declare that I will respect all the laws and customs of Australia during my visit.

Unimpressed, the agent reaches for a large metal stamp.

BORDER AGENT

Right, just walk through that door there for return processing.

JEFF

Return ... return processing! WHAT? What are you talking about?

BORDER AGENT

You're not sure where you're staying, how long you'll be here, or what you even do.

(MORE)

BORDER AGENT (CONT'D)

We've got people pouring over our borders and getting straight onto the dole and we've got enough no-hopers of our own as it is.

JEFF

Wait, wait! Oh God. Look: I met this woman from here on the Internet a few months ago. We started emailing each other, and then calling each other on the phone, and writing all these love letters to each other. And it's just built and built and she says I'm the most fascinating person she's ever heard of and I feel the same way about her! She's funny and wild and cool and I've never left the US before and I don't want to die wondering what life would be like if we'd never met for real.

The border agent is stunned.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Haven't you ever wanted something so bad that you just had to go for it and figure it out along the way? This is a real romantic adventure, and she's right out there in the arrivals area!

The border agent softens.

BORDER AGENT

Do you at least have a return ticket to prove you intend to leave?

JEFF

Uh, no.

BORDER AGENT

You're doing this with a bloody one-way ticket!?

JEFF

I sold my drums and my van and my vinyl collection just to get here. Round trip was prohibitively expensive.

The border agent sighs, shaking his/her head.

BORDER AGENT

Look, I'll let you through, but I'm flagging you in our system. If you're here 48 hours after your visa expires, we'll come find you. If we catch you working off the books, we'll handcuff you onto the first plane back to the US. You'll have to call your sweetheart when you land to tell her why you missed dinner.

JEFF

OK, OK. Thank you so so much. I promise, you won't have any trouble from me!

The border agent slides Jeff's stamped passport and documents back to him and says

BORDER AGENT

Ah, no worries, mate, I don't want to be the one to stop true love. Plus, these rules are more for Asians and Arabs anyway.

JEFF

Did you just ... say that?

BORDER AGENT

Say what?

JEFF

Nothing, nothing.

He stands there for a beat.

JEFF (CONT.) (CONT'D)

What do I do now?

BORDER AGENT

Anything you like, so long as it's through that door and it doesn't take a job from an Australian.

The agent gives Jeff a big grin and a thumbs-up.

BORDER AGENT (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Cheers, mate! Hope she shows up!

JEFF

Oh, she's gonna show up!

It dawns on him that he could get intercontinentally ghosted.

JEFF (CONT.) (CONT'D)
She's not gonna just not show UP!

INT. ARRIVALS GATE, PERTH AIRPORT, DAY.

Jeff walks down the entry ramp and stops, unable to pass through a sea of people welcoming loved ones.

Couples hug and reunite, kids hold up 'Welcome Home' signs for parents. Everyone in this room is meeting someone who loves them.

She's still not there. Then, all the way at the other side of the human ocean, we see a mop of blonde hair bouncing up and down, waving.

Jeff sees her and tries to barge his way through the crowd, but he's penned in. He jumps, waving to Natasha, who's still jumping and waving back.

He tries one way, then the other, trying to make his way through the crowd. Finally, he puts his hands to his mouth and shouts in a loud, deep voice

JEFF
Everybody moooooove!!!

The crowd parts, giving Jeff a clear runway to sprint across the room.

Jeff and Natasha embrace, finally, holding each other tight. Then, finally, after months of buildup, they kiss.

They pull back to look at one another and laugh.

INT/EXT. PERTH AIRPORT, DAY

QUICK CUTS

-- JEFF AND NATASHA, MAKING OUT BY THE BAGGAGE CAROUSEL

-- JEFF AND NATASHA, MAKING OUT IN THE TAXI LINE

-- JEFF AND NATASHA, MAKING OUT IN THE BACK OF A MOVING TAXI.
THE DRIVER IS ANNOYED.

-- FALLING INTO BED

-- A MILLION STARLINGS BURSTING FROM A TREE INTO THE SKY,
SWOOPING AND WHIRLING.

FADE TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Jeff and Natasha are lying in bed, very obviously post-coital. Natasha pulls out a cigarette and lights it, blowing smoke into the air.

JEFF

Shouldn't we go outside for that?

NATASHA

We should, but I'm not gonna, I just want to stay right here with you.

She rolls over, making deep intense eye contact with Jeff, holding the silence.

Jeff meets her eyes and strokes her hair.

JEFF

I just wanna stay with you as long as I possibly can.

Natasha pulls back.

NATASHA

About that ... I was pretty put off that you'd just assume you'd be living in my home straight away.

JEFF

You sent me a letter that said how great it would be to wake up together in your bed and eat breakfast on the porch with that view of the ocean. So yeah, it kinda led me to believe that I would be welcome in your home when I got here.

NATASHA

I can't believe you didn't think to ask!

JEFF

Well, you sent me another letter that said ... hang on ...

He pulls a letter out of his bag (the same one from the airport).

JEFF (CONT'D)

(reading from the letter)

"You're the most fascinating and funny guy I've ever known, and I don't think Australia's even capable of producing a guy that can tick off all my boxes like you do, you're the guy I've been dreaming about."

After that one, I didn't think I had to ask.

NATASHA

Did either of those letters mention that I wanted a boyfriend as another life project?

JEFF

Honestly, you've been saying you want me here for months and then I've been here 5 hours and now you're pulling back and I can't tell WHAT you want.

NATASHA

I want to love a man so much that my family gets jealous and my friends think it's gross. I want him to take care of me and not smother me and need my help all the time!

JEFF

People help the people they care about!

NATASHA

Right, well, I cared about my mum so much that I spent my own childhood raising three of her kids while she stared into space!

JEFF

You ... never mentioned that before.

NATASHA

It never came up!

JEFF

Let's just breathe a little here.
This is a big deal for both of us,
and I think we're getting the
jitters.
If we work out together long-term --

NATASHA

What do you mean if we work out
together long-term!? I'm not
upending my entire life here just
so some guy can come stay with me
for a month or two and then bugger
off home like he's leaving an
amusement park!
If you're coming here, you're
putting in the time to really make
this work!

JEFF

I'm already right here in the bed
next to you! And I don't have
anything left to go back to!
You're the lead role in the biggest
story of my entire life and one day
people are going to pay money just
for a chance to read about it or
watch it on TV or see it in the
movies or something, and they're
gonna ache for the chances they
wasted.

NATASHA

Have you ever even written
something like this before?

JEFF

Well no, but that's what editors
are for.
My point is, we get to actually
live this and it's going to be
fantastic, I just need to be here
by your side and then we create
this story together just by living
and loving each other.
That's what I really want to do,
and I'm pretty confident that your
friends will think it's gross.

NATASHA

(softening) Why did you bring that
letter all the way from America?

JEFF

I wanted a little reminder that someone wanted me and believed in me just in case things got hard and I didn't believe in myself. And I needed a copy of your address to get through customs.

Natasha rolls over and stares deeply into Jeff's eyes.

JEFF (CONT'D)

What?

NATASHA

I have to tell you something. It's just a bit intense and it seems so soon, considering we only just met in person today. But I feel like I've known you for years and it just seems right, you know?

JEFF

OK, what is it?

NATASHA

Jeff, I ... I ... I think I ...

She pauses, choking up.

JEFF

It's okay, it's okay, it's gonna be okay.

NATASHA

I think I ... need a fucking beer.

She laughs hysterically, thrilled with herself.

INT. PUB -- NIGHT

Jeff and Natasha are seated at the bar. There are two empties in front of Natasha, none in front of Jeff.

A group of large, dusty men in high-vis gear are nearby, hitting it hard. They're getting loud and sloppy.

JEFF

We kinda scooted past it at the hotel, but - you never told me that thing about raising your siblings before. That's a big deal.

NATASHA

Yeah, it's just really hard to talk about until it flies out sometimes.

JEFF

It's OK. But is there anything else you're not mentioning?

Natasha picks up her third beer and drains it.

NATASHA

No, I think that should about do it.

ADAM appears from behind Natasha and drops his hands on her shoulders, startling her.

ADAM

Well, well, little sister, here's that mysterious American artist I've heard so little about!

NATASHA

This is Adam, my older brother. We live together when he's not shagging someone in their own home.

ADAM

Why is it that we're living together, Tash? Wasn't our childhood enough to sour us on relatives?

NATASHA

Oh, I just thought you'd benefit from seeing at least one woman's face on a regular basis. Someone's got to be a recurring female lead in The Adam Show.

ADAM

Yes I suppose, but who am I to deny career-launching cameos to so many aspiring actresses?

Adam turns to Jeff, extends his hand.

ADAM (CONT.) (CONT'D)

It's good to finally meet you. I'd say I've heard great things about you but I really haven't as Tash has kept this entire thing a secret.
What do you do, Jeff?

JEFF

Well, I play the drums - and for a while I led a band that featured two chickens on toy pianos. Now I'm sort of transitioning into long-form narrative non-fiction. We'll have to see how this story unfolds.

ADAM

A jack-of-no-trades. Tell me, Jack: which of these trades is the least lucrative?

NATASHA

Fuck off, Adam. Why don't you just pretend he's a girl and hide your true personality until you lose interest?

ADAM

If you're going to let him follow you into our home, the least you can do is let me play with him a little.

JEFF

No, it's alright, I understand, he's just being protective. A lot of empty people can't understand passion unless it's monetized. When you're a real artist, a job is a joke that you play on the world. Giving a shit about your day job is for suckers that listen to top 40 and watch reality TV.

Natasha's brow furrows, puzzled. This perspective is new to her.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Plus, I figure I've got enough money to stay here for two months and figure some stuff out, maybe more if I really stretch it.

NATASHA

You promised you were going to stay longer than that!

JEFF

Everything in the US is either built or cooked by immigrants - it's got to be similar here, right?

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

They gave me some heat at customs about it, but I bet it's fine.

Adam and the workmen raise their eyebrows.

NATASHA

No, no, if you get caught working off the books in Australia you're chained into a school bus and deported immediately.

WORKMAN

They fine the business ten grand per illegal worker, too.

NATASHA

Adam's friend Crusty owns a removal business and he always needs workers. He may be able to help and keep it quiet.

ADAM

Are you sure you'd want your new guy working closely with a former flame?

NATASHA

A few tipsy snogs at school hardly count as a burning romance.

ADAM

Buried coals can burn for a long time.

JEFF

Who is this guy, a college boyfriend?

NATASHA

He's one of Adam's mates from school - high school, not uni.

JEFF

What are the public schools like here?

ADAM

I don't talk to those people. But why are we really even talking about you working?

(MORE)

ADAM (CONT'D)

This is a holiday for you, and I reckon a tall broad bloke with an accent like yours could plow a trench right across Cottesloe and the Western Suburbs.

The workmen snicker and Adam plays to them.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Objectively, I'd rate Tash a strong 7-8. And if I was traveling all the way from America I wouldn't hitch my wagon to the first seven to give me a root.

He snickers and toasts the construction workers, taking a big slug of whiskey. Before he can swallow, Natasha slaps the whiskey from Adam's mouth.

The workers laugh as Adam's eyes widen and he clenches a fist. Natasha steps behind Jeff and claps him on the shoulder.

NATASHA

Well, I'm going to the ladies', I'll leave you two to sort this out.

JEFF

Wait, wait, whoa, let's calm down here, what the hell is going on?

NATASHA

(furious) You tell me. I was going to ask you if you wanted to stay with us for a while, have a proper romance and learn to do some man's work.

So while I'm having a slash, you can decide if you feel up to putting in some hard yakka and helping me prove my cunt brother wrong.

She leaves.

JEFF

Jesus Christ - does she do that a lot?

ADAM

She starts a lot of stuff for guys to finish - when she's not with someone, I get stuck with the job.

(MORE)

ADAM (CONT'D)

That'll be one benefit of having you here.

JEFF

Look, I'm sorry that I'm such a surprise to you. I'd have told you I was coming myself if I knew how.

But I'm here now, and I just want to make your sister happy. You don't have to like me, but don't you love her?

ADAM

That's a strong word, but I suppose

...

JEFF

If this preserves your brittle masculine armor, OK. But she's told me all about how much you love each other for months.

Can you give me a break and help me out so she can have a little happiness for as long as it lasts?

Adam thinks for a moment, then softens, giving Jeff a silent handshake. He winces.

ADAM

I'll give it to you, you've got a tradies' grip.

JEFF

I've been waving paintbrushes and drumsticks around for ten years.

ADAM

Ok, look. Crusty's good for some work and Tash's ex Guppy's a stonemason that's always hiring and firing a stream of no-hoppers. There's no reason you can't be one of them.

JEFF

Hang on, working for her actual ex-boyfriend? Is he cool?

ADAM

Well, she broke his nose in a fight when they split up and he's still a dear family friend. But nobody's going to take too kindly to your little "job is a joke" philosophy.

JEFF

I can let that go for now. I don't care what I do - it's all material.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

In Australia we fucking work, mate.

The construction crew toasts each other as Natasha returns.

NATASHA (TO WORKMEN)

How about you drongos give us a bit of privacy, hey?

ADAM

It's OK, we're just celebrating Jeff's new life as a hardworking dogsbody. This one's my shout.

What are you having, Jeff?

JEFF

Oh, I'm good, I'll just have ice water this round, kinda pacing myself here.

NATASHA

In Australia, it's rude to turn down a drink when someone shouts a round.

JEFF

In America, it's rude to make people drink. Didn't you have "know when to say when?" "Just say no?"

Natasha, Adam, and the entire construction crew look at Jeff with blank disapproval. Adam grabs Jeff's empty glass and sniffs it, turning to the bartender.

ADAM

He'll have another bourbon rocks.

FADE TO:

EXT. FRONT PORCH OF NATASHA'S HOUSE, MORNING

Jeff and Natasha are at an outdoor table, drinking coffee. Natasha's smoking and snickering at Jeff, who's wearing a tank top and a pair of incredibly short khaki shorts.

JEFF

Are you for real with these? What did you say they were called again?

NATASHA

(smirking) They're called 'stubbies,' and all proper Aussie working men wear them when it's hot!

JEFF

They're stubby alright, the legs are about a quarter inch longer than my actual sack. If the mercury rises, my balls are gonna drop and I'll shoot brain all over my first day on the job.

NATASHA

You'll be right - just watch out for redbacks.

Jeff raises an eyebrow.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Don't you have redbacks in America? They're these little poisonous spiders that live in garages and attics around Australia. They hide in old furniture, cardboard boxes, the sort of stuff you're likely to encounter as a removalist.

JEFF

How poisonous are we talking here?

NATASHA

Dunno, you're a big bloke, you've got a lot of blood to dilute the poison. You probably won't die, just severe pain and vomiting and heart palpitations for a week or so.

She reaches down to tap her cigarette into an empty beer bottle at her feet and stops, looking under the table.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Look, there's one just there.

Jeff jumps, yelping like someone who's just seen a venomous spider next to their leg. Natasha laughs and flicks it away.

A moving truck pulls up in the driveway and honks its horn.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

(laughing) Go on, you don't want to keep Crusty waiting!

(MORE)

NATASHA (CONT'D)

You'll be fine, just pay attention
and have a great first day at your
new removing job!

Jeff jogs up to the truck, and looks back waving as he opens
the door and leaps in - right into the driver's lap.

CRUSTY (THE DRIVER)

Easy there, mate - we drive on the
other side here.

CRUSTY is in his mid thirties, blonde and broad and it's hard
to tell if his face is red from a lax approach to sunscreen
or a vigorous approach to alcohol. His nose is either burnt
or peeling, always.

Jeff clammers awkwardly over Crusty's lap and settles into
the passenger seat. Natasha waves, blowing big kisses at the
departing truck.

Crusty sees Natasha's display in the rearview, looks at Jeff
and his outfit and sighs.

INT. MOVING TRUCK, DAY [DRIVING]

CRUSTY

Done much removing before, have
ya? You've sure got the stubbies
for it.

Jeff turns, and we see Crusty grinning wide and wearing a
perfectly reasonable pair of board shorts.

CRUSTY (CONT'D)

Mate, I'm not sure what Tash told
you, but nobody wears those unless
they're a dad that's trying to
shame his kids.

JEFF

Well, I guess it's a chance to even
out the tan lines on my scrotum.

CRUSTY

Tash tell you anything else, about
the job, or ... me?

JEFF

She seemed to think I could figure
out how to carry boxes on my own.
Although, come to think of it, she
did say that you'd shared a moment
or two way back in high school.

CRUSTY

Aw, no, not ... not that. I'd nearly forgotten all about that, it's barely worth mentioning. But ... she did bring it up herself?

JEFF

Just like, in the broader context of talking about the actual job at hand.

CRUSTY

Not to worry, that's ancient history, certainly it is to me, anyway.

Crusty looks out the window for a beat.

CRUSTY (CONT'D)

This job ought to be a piece of piss. The Anglican Church has just hired us to empty out a house they rent to people that are just out of jail.

They've probably just found a place of their own, and I reckon they can't have accumulated too much stuff, what with the prison time and all.

JEFF

Hey, uh, it's not like, a huge deal, but you don't think there's gonna be any, uh, redbacks there, do you?

CRUSTY

Not sure, mate, but probably! They're all over the place. Scared of them, are you?

JEFF

I'm sure I can handle it, ah, I, ah, got it under control.

CRUSTY

One thing though, ay? Let me do all the talking, right?

This is hush-hush vis a vis me hiring you and the authorities, and your accent could raise the wrong eyebrows.

Jeff makes eye contact and nods, giving a thumbs-up.

EXT. DINGY ROW HOUSE PORCH- DAY

Crusty hammers the front door with a fist. Jeff plucks a note from the ground and reads it, handing it to Crusty.

INSERT - THE NOTE

"BACK SOON, GONE TO THE CHEMIST"

The note is scrawled and shaky, 'chemist' trailing off.

CRUSTY

Looks like the chemist got to her first, ay.

He pulls a phone from his pocket and makes a call.

CRUSTY (CONT'D)

G'day, we're just at the job and we can't get into the house. Do you think you could send someone around to unlock it for us? ... Righty-o, then, we'll just wait in the truck.

Crusty hangs up, nods to Jeff and they turn towards the truck. They're surprised by two men standing uncomfortably close, blocking the walkway with arms crossed.

BAZ and KEV are twin pillars of prison muscle with horseshoe mustaches and stares as powerful as their matching mullets.

Their necks, faces and hands are encrusted with crude tattoos, including blurry teardrops next to one guy's eye.

BAZ

G'day, I'm Baz, this is me associate, Kev. It seems you're having a bit of trouble gaining access to the premises.

CRUSTY

I'm not sure what you're on about mate, but we're the removal company hired by the church. Who are you with?

BAZ

Kev, why don't you access the residence while I explain our allegiance to these gentlemen?

Baz throws an aggressive friendly arm around Crusty's neck, pointing at Jeff and up the walk.

BAZ (CONT'D)

Let's let Kev focus. We're not with an official removal company as such - we more specialize in the retrieval of valuable items.

Crusty's eyes widen. Jeff is confused. He starts to ask a question, then thinks better of it.

We hear a tremendous banging smash. PAN TO Kev, kick-stomping at the door lock with all of his weight.

BAZ (CONT'D)

The resident here has defaulted on a significant short-term loan from our employer. Ordinarily the Coffin Cheaters are not lenient creditors. The boss figures at the rate she's going she'll be off our hands in six months' time anyway, so why incur the cost of disposal?

JEFF

Whoa, whoa ...

CRUSTY

Let him finish!

BAZ

We're here to, ah, liquidate what we can get and chalk the rest up to the cost of doing business.

CRUSTY

What are we talking here exactly?

BAZ

We get jewelry, electronics and white goods, you get the rest.

We hear a tremendous splintering smash from the front door.

KEV

Give us a hand here, ay, there's something blocking the door!

Baz jogs over to help push.

JEFF

Crusty, what the fuck is going on here?

CRUSTY

The Coffin Cheaters are a nasty gang of bikies, and they've sent their repo guys over to grab what they can sell from our mystery resident because killing her's too much trouble.

JEFF

Does the church know about this?

CRUSTY

Not sure, but I reckon this isn't exactly an outreach success story.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROW HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Baz and Kev strain to push the front door open. Something heavy is behind it, gradually giving way as both men put their weight into a big shove.

They look inside the darkened house with a reverent sort of horror.

KEV

Fuuuuuucking JEEEsuuus ...

BAZ

(to Crusty) Hey, you're gonna want to have a look at this!!!

Crusty, Jeff, Baz and Kev peer into the darkened house. It's packed with hoarded crap - clothing twisting through piles of magazines, DVDs, restaurant supplies, and stolen makeup.

Picture the blended contents of several large department stores used to render the hive from 'Aliens'.

CRUSTY

This is what it looks like when God gives up.

INT: ROW HOUSE, DAY - NOT THAT YOU COULD TELL

Baz and Kev gingerly carry a washer/dryer through the living room as Jeff and Crusty pack boxes and large plastic bags.

Jeff pulls a large semi-pro digital camera from his backpack and begins moving around the room and snapping photos.

JEFF (TO HIMSELF)

Ugh, there's not enough ambient light in here but the flash is gonna wash everything out ...

He turns the flash on and snaps a few, the bright light startling Crusty.

CRUSTY

Pardon me for asking, mate, but what the fuck are you doing?

JEFF

I'm just snapping a few pics for reference later. When I write about this I'm going to want to remember every part of this sculpture.

CRUSTY

This is art to you, mate?

JEFF

Isn't there something so beautiful about the filth that comes from consumer chaos?

CRUSTY

I'm paying you to fucking remove that beautiful filth, not document it. Now put that camera away before those Mad Max extras see something they can sell for real money.

Crusty glares at Jeff as he works.

INT: ROW HOUSE, DAY - A SHORT TIME LATER

Crusty bends down. From his POV we see several biomedical sharp disposal containers overflowing with used needles.

CRUSTY (TO JEFF)

Mate, you'll want to have a look out for these needle containers, ay, wouldn't want you to ...

Jeff silently raises a hand. Several needles stick out of his work glove like porcupine quills.

CRUSTY (CONT'D)

Fucking hell, mate, what a nightmare. I reckon just put them in this thing as best you can.

Jeff delicately pulls the needles from his glove with an exaggerated, exhausted patience. Over Jeff's shoulder we see a woman rise like a silent zombie from a pile of debris, staggering and struggling to regain consciousness.

Crusty points, his mouth moving silently. Jeff looks over his shoulder and locks eyes with the woman, then jumps and emits a shattering scream.

She's unaffected by all this, totally comfortable in chaos.

CRUSTY (CONT'D)

What are you doing here!?

WOMAN

It's me house, innit? You must be the removalists. Lemme put on a cuppa and I'll give you a hand.

She leaves for the kitchen, and we hear her say warmly

WOMAN (CONT'D)

G'day Baz, Kev, how ya going?

CRUSTY

What did I tell you about keeping quiet? I'm fucking serious mate, this could be real trouble!

JEFF

I'm standing over here with an accidental Freddy Krueger hand made of AIDS needles and you don't think I'm already in trouble? Does pure terror have an American accent?

CRUSTY

Just ... try your best here, mate.

Jeff sighs, shaking his head.

INT: ROW HOUSE, DAY - LATER

Kev and Jeff carry a large, wobbly IKEA bookshelf.

KEV

Easy now mate, this is gonna work a treat in the lounge room, goes perfect with me drapes.

INSERT

Jeff's gloved hand and arm, carrying the bookcase.

(MORE)

INSERT (CONT'D)

A large insect scurries out of the bookcase and up Jeff's arm.

JEFF

REDBACK REDBACK REDBACK!!!

Jeff hurls the bookcase to the ground, pawing frantically at his arm. The cheap bookcase shatters completely and we see a lapdog-sized cockroach scurry away.

KEV

Oi, now how can I keep my floor free of me readin' materials?

He steps toward Jeff with malicious intent.

Crusty sighs - his deception shattered with the bookcase.

CRUSTY

Look, he's American, OK? They're like pugs: sweet but fucking useless. Maybe this one a bit more than the rest, but let's calm down.

BAZ

Why the fuck are you in Perth working as a removalist, mate?

JEFF

I met a girl online and came here to have an adventure, but I really wasn't planning on all this.

CRUSTY

Wait, what? You met Tash on the internet?

KEV

I'm pretty sure that's fuckin' weird, ay, but you're *really* not supposed to be here workin' under the table.

JEFF

Are you *really* supposed to be stealing to help a biker gang's heroin dealer cut his losses?

Baz and Kev step even closer to Jeff with even more menace.

The woman from the living room floor enters.

WOMAN

Excuse me?

Baz, Kev, Crusty and Jeff turn to face her. She's standing, facing the arguing men and we see her from behind as she unties her tracksuit pants and pushes them down to mid-thigh.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Does this look infected to you?

CLOSE ON a bubbling, pustulent open sore at the joint of her thigh and pubic region with spreading gangrenous tendrils.

All four guys recoil in stammering horror. As they step backwards, a woman calls from the other room.

VOICE

Hello? We're here from the church.

Two nuns enter, gentle and confused. One sees the exposed, pulsing wound and takes the woman by the arm.

NUN #1

Oh my dear, that's infected. Let's get you off to a doctor.

The room stands there in stunned silence. Baz, hands shaking, pulls out a cigarette. Crusty bums one from him.

FADE TO:

EXT: BEACH ON THE INDIAN OCEAN - SUNSET

The sky is filled with romantic pinks and oranges, a soothing fire reflected below on the gently undulating ocean. Actual fucking dolphins are leaping out of the water.

Adam and Crusty sit next to one another on the sand as Jeff and Natasha frolic in the waves.

ADAM

(laughing) ... threw it right on the ground, did he? Reckon he got his fancy camera out to document that bit?

CRUSTY

Ah mate, I was cracking the shits. I was ready to give him the flick and finish the job solo.

ADAM

I'm sure he'll get better at it, given time. He seems smart enough.

CRUSTY

What, keep hiring him? After today?

ADAM

Well, yeah. I mean, look at them out there. He might be useless, but she's still my sister.

From Crusty's POV we see Natasha rocking her swimsuit in the surf and smoothing her hair from her face. He's transfixed until Jeff bursts from the water behind her.

Crusty shudders, his moment spoiled.

CRUSTY

I just thought she'd go for more of a ... true blue Aussie, I guess.

ADAM

If we can keep finding him casual work, she stays happy and we can probe his weaknesses a bit.

CRUSTY

Easier to protect her if we keep him close, too.

ADAM

That's the way.

Jeff and Natasha approach from the ocean.

NATASHA

So, how'd he go his first day removing?

CRUSTY

Yeah, he's got the basics down alright, just needs to leave the artmaking in his studio. The real finesse will come with time.

JEFF

I'm sure I'll learn to evict junkies for nuns and argue with biker repo men much more efficiently with practice. Still, I could do a lot worse than ending a brutal workday in the ocean with a cold beer in one hand and hot new Aussie girlfriend in the other.

Crusty blinks.

CRUSTY

I believe you mean "hot new Aussie girlfriend" ... that you met on the Internet.

NATASHA

Psssh, nooooo, why'd you go and say a cunt thing like that? Why would I need to meet boys on the Internet when I could just go and get a fucking mail-order husband?

Crusty smiles broadly. He's nailed her and he knows it, but he's letting it drop for now.

CRUSTY

(to Jeff) Mate, it's slow for me at the moment but I'll ring you if I've got anything on. You may want to get a few other things going, but I'll keep you in the rotation.

Crusty shakes Jeff's hand and heads into shore.

Once he's out of sight, Natasha slips from Jeff's arms and stares at him, confused and genuinely hurt.

NATASHA

Why would you tell him something like that? He'll be blabbing it around the pubs tonight and it'll be in the fucking society pages by Friday!

JEFF

So what! We met, I'm here, this great big romantic story is really, actually happening and who cares what anyone else thinks?

ADAM

People will be gobbling this one right up, especially after last time.

JEFF

What do you mean, last time!?

END CREDITS:
JET'S "ARE YOU
GONNA BE MY
GIRL"