

Fade In:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A WOMAN lays in bed, face concealed by shadows.

A MAN sits by her side, holding her hand. His face is bruised, swollen and bandaged.

MAX

Who did this to you, Rhuella? Tell me who did this to you.

The Woman shakes her head and lets out a sob.

Even in the dim room, the motif is visible: rhubarb designs and colors throughout.

MAX (CONT'D)

Tell me, Rhuella. Who did it?

Rhubarb covers her face and speaks through splayed fingers.

RHUBARB

There was four.

MAX

Four men?

Rhubarb nods her head.

MAX (CONT'D)

Do you remember their names?

RHUBARB

(struggles to recall)

There was Mugsy. And Bruno. The Fat Man. And The Brain.

Max kisses her hand.

MAX

Good girl. Now get some sleep. You have a big show tomorrow.

He gets up, grabs a cane and hobbles to the door.

MAX (CONT'D)

We'll get them all, Rhuella. We'll make them pay for what they did to you.

He opens the door. The light reveals a tall man in his forties, badly beaten.

RHUBARB

Max?

MAX

Yes?

RHUBARB

Don't hurt Mugsy, okay?

MAX

I won't touch him.

He leaves her alone in the dark room. She breaths heavily and calls out, soft and slow:

RHUBARB

Annton...Annton...Annton...

Just outside, three car doors slam shut. A siren screams.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

A cop car, sirens blaring, tears down the street, followed by a white Cadillac decorated with blood-red rhubarb stalks.

INT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

Max, bloody bandage unravelling as he twists the wheel to keep pace with the cop car.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

The two vehicles speed through the grand, weedy entrance to Wellington Premier Estates, past the abandoned guard house, the dry pond, soaring mansions divided into cheap apartments.

Barefoot children jump away as the screeching cars stop on a cracked driveway.

TWO COPS get out. MAX pushes the door open with his metal cane and joins them. He wears a T-shirt with the words: Ask Me About the Rhubarb Way.

They approach a door with three deadbolts. One of the cops, a young guy called LOPEZ, bangs on the door. They wait. He bangs again.

LOPEZ  
You sure this is it?

In answer, Max whacks the door with his cane.

The other cop, an older guy named ROBERT, tries the knob. It turns. They step inside.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Robert flicks on a light. There's nobody there, but against one wall is gym matt, a punching bag, a cross-bow, and a sword.

Max and Lopez check out the BEDROOM. Robert goes to the Kitchen.

THE KITCHEN

Robert opens the refrigerator and pokes around. He sees a large plastic container. Something about it doesn't look right. He takes it out, holds it at arms length and pops it open to reveal dozens of dead grasshoppers. He looks closely - one the grasshoppers, still alive, jumps at his face. He drops the container -- the grasshoppers spill on the floor.

THE BEDROOM

Lopez and Max enter the bedroom. There's a mattress on the floor and a kennel big enough for a large dog. The kennel is made up like a crib, with lacy sheets, a pink blanket, a mobile and a doll.

THE KITCHEN

Robert opens the freezer -- it's packed with an assortment of animals: squirrels, possums, rats. He slams it shut. He's sweating.

THE BEDROOM

Max opens a couple of dresser drawers. Men's clothes. Women's clothes. Baby clothes. The fourth drawer is heaped with wallets, credit cards and driver's licenses. He grabs a handful and shows Lopez.



MAX  
Maybe dinner.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

SUPER: A WEEK AGO

In the same kitchen, a young MAN slides behind an attractive WOMAN and takes two jelly jars out of the refrigerator.

DOUG  
Gloria, my love, which do you think  
is proper with sauteed grasshopper -  
- white or red?

The woman tosses him a disgusted look.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Are grasshoppers considered beef or  
chicken?

GLORIA  
Most people consider them insects.

She squeezes past him and grabs a package of ground meat.

DOUG  
Would you rather have beer? A nice  
cold beer to wash down some  
delicious hoppers.

GLORIA  
Forget the hoppers. That's where I  
draw the line. Tonight I'm eating a  
hamburger. Just a nice, normal,  
juicy hamburger. In spite of your  
gloom and doom predictions, there  
are still plenty of cows around.

DOUG  
Plenty now, sure. But there won't  
be when the radioactive shit hits  
the fan. You'll have to go to a zoo  
to see a cow.

GLORIA  
All the more reason to enjoy them  
now.

Doug lifts the lid off a copper pot and stirs the sizzling grasshoppers.

DOUG

Grasshoppers are a lot sturdier than cows. They thrive in almost any climate, survive radiation, toxic chemicals. When every other source of food is gone, they'll be there for us, baby. Then you'll beg me for some of my famous grasshopper stew.

Gloria slaps the meat into patties.

GLORIA

I'll beg you to kill me.

DOUG

Listen, if we're going to survive, we have to learn how to eat whatever else is going to survive. It's that simple. Grasshoppers are the Rambos of the insect world.

GLORIA

They're disgusting, ugly, vile little creatures.

DOUG

Morphologically speaking, they're like lobsters -- just a wee bit smaller. You like lobster, right?

GLORIA

A grasshopper is not a tiny land-lobster.

He embraces her from behind, kisses and gropes her while she tosses the hamburgers into a frying pan.

She elbows him.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Don't make me kick your ass.

He grins and kisses her neck.

DOUG

That's my girl.

She continues cooking the burgers. He continues cooking the grasshoppers.

DOUG (CONT'D)

So, white for the hoppers, or red  
for the burgers?

GLORIA

Sweetheart. Light of my life. I've  
eaten squirrels. Garden snakes.  
Your beloved Doberman, Nick. I even  
tasted those green crickets...

DOUG

Homorocoryphus.

GLORIA

Yeah, the gay crickets. I've eaten  
things that would make a vulture  
puke. I've done everything you  
asked. I've kept my end of the  
deal. But please, por favor, I beg  
you -- not grasshoppers.

Doug turns off the stove and moves the pot to a metal trivet.  
He takes a big whiff.

DOUG

You know, grasshopper is considered  
a delicacy by certain tribes in  
Malawi.

GLORIA

A delicacy? Well in that case, send  
them an invitation. I'd love to  
have some company for a change. I'm  
sure they'll be quite impressed.

Doug pours two glasses of white wine.

DOUG

They would. After all, this is not  
your common, everyday grasshopper.  
This is *Acanthacris Ruficornis* --  
certified laboratory specimen. I'm  
proud to say it's the finest  
grasshopper money can buy. Fully  
pedigreed.

GLORIA

You do know how to impress a gal.

DOUG

Come on, Gloria. You tasted Nick,  
and he was a mutt!

Gloria shudders at the memory.

GLORIA

Poor dog. You should have just buried him.

DOUG

It was an opportunity. You're the one who agreed to help me with all this -- quote: survivalist crap.

GLORIA

I know what I agreed to.

DOUG

This isn't a game, Gloria -- it's about survival -- for us, for our children...

GLORIA

We don't have any children.

DOUG

We will.

Doug dips a fork into the grasshopper stew, takes a bite and chews it slowly. He swallows and smacks his lips.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Tastes just like chicken shit. Try it. Just a taste.

GLORIA

I'd rather eat chicken shit.

He fishes out a small piece and brings it to her lips. She sniffs it, makes the sign of the cross and takes a bite. She chews it for a moment, gags, and spits it back into the bowl.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Disgusting. You need to fry them or something.

DOUG

Not as tasty as the gay crickets, huh?

She takes a sip of wine, swishes it around and spits it out. She gulps down the rest.

GLORIA

Okay, you happy? I've kept my end of the bargain. When are you going to keep yours?

DOUG

I just need a little more time. A little more money. Once I have enough...

GLORIA

You have enough. We have enough. Doug, whether civilization collapses or not, I can't stay here any longer, cooped up like his.

DOUG

You're safe here.

GLORIA

Not from myself. I'm dying to swim in Lake Gloria. I want to get drunk and cry next to Benny's tombstone.

DOUG

You get drunk and cry all the time right here. Just hang in for a while.

GLORIA

Why? What's the point?

(pauses)

Sometimes I think Rhubarb is right -  
- it doesn't matter if you're good or bad -- if you live or die. It doesn't even matter if the world ends. Who cares?

Doug dumps the grasshoppers into a garbage pail.

DOUG

You sure know how to take all the fun out of doomsday.

They move to the living room and sit on the floor, use a wood crate as a table.

GLORIA

You going tonight? It's a full moon. There should be a lot of jumpers.

DOUG

Yeah, I'm going. I don't know if the full moon makes people crazy, or just easier to find the bridge.

GLORIA

Rhubarb holds a meeting every full moon. I may stop by.

DOUG

Are you threatening me?

GLORIA

I'm threatening me. I just don't want to be a burden any longer. I'll go to that happy hell Rhubarb talks about, and you, you can go back to being the lonely, pathetic, sexually deprived man I met -- but happy.

She gives him a gracious smile.

DOUG

Okay, Gloria, okay, okay, okay. Okay?

GLORIA

Okay. So when do we leave? Give me a date, or, find yourself a new date.

DOUG

After this weekend. Jordan hands out our bonuses at the company picnic. We'll split after that.

Gloria gives him a deep, grateful kiss.

GLORIA

Can I tell him what a little cockroach he is?

Doug shrugs.

DOUG

Speaking of cockroach -- we need to bring some kind of potluck dish.

GLORIA

Like what?