

The Last Day of Comics

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Establishing.

Medium-sized in the Chicago suburbs.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Framed posters of old comic book movies are all on the walls.

Rows of comic books as far as the eye can see.

Comic Book Clerk and film school dropout COLTON (20s) puts a handful of comic books in a box.

He's tall and dorkishly handsome. An older Sri Lankan death metal band t-shirt hangs off him.

Colton stops and looks at a comic book.

It's of a morbidly obese superhero having tea with the King of England on top of the Eiffel Tower.

COLTON

Who's the audience for this?

JADE (20s) draws a comic book on a tablet computer.

She has long, dark hair and soul-piercing eyes.

A t-shirt with an older fantasy comic book cover on it clings to her curves.

Her eyes focus on the tablet.

A red-headed woman fights off an ugly serial killer.

Jade erases everything it.

JADE

I'm never going to finish this.

Colton puts the comic book into a box.

COLTON

What's wrong this time?

JADE

I can't get the Big Red Bastard right and it's killing me.

COLTON
He's a creepy, generic villain.

Jade puts the tablet down.

JADE
I hate it but I can't think of
anything else, either.

COLTON
Let's say you're making Vengeance
in Red, the movie. Who's going to
play him?

She thinks for a long moment.

JADE
A young Steve Buscemi type.

Colton places another comic book in the box.

COLTON
I love him.

JADE
Everyone does but he's also not the
most... traditionally handsome guy.

COLTON
And someone called the Big Red
Bastard probably looks kind of like
a... big ugly bastard.

JADE
But I need him to be on a date with
a woman, too, and a guy like that--

COLTON
Probably isn't a panty dropper.

She glares at him.

COLTON (CONT'D)
It'd be subversive if he was like
this handsome movie star type.

JADE
I'm already out there on this, I
need a little bit of mainstream
accessibility in it.

LENORA (70s) walks in.

She's short, thin, and looks her age.

Colton spots her. His eyes light up.

JADE (CONT'D)

I'm going to grab some fresh air.

Jade leaves.

LENORA

She always does that.

COLTON

Jade thinks you indulge me.

LENORA

She just has lousy taste in comics.

(beat)

The doctor is upping my dosage today, so I'll be there for an hour more than usual.

He sprints over to a box and opens it up.

COLTON

No one has even looked at these in about a year, so I can give you a deal on the series.

LENORA

Do I want that sort of commitment?

Colton takes out a comic book. It has monsters in a garage rock band on the cover.

COLTON

Scare Tactics is only twelve issues and has a proper conclusion.

Lenora looks at the cover.

COLTON (CONT'D)

DC just went for it with their Weirdverse for a couple of years and it didn't sell for shit. The comics are great, though.

(beat)

I need to pick your brain about something, if you wouldn't mind.

LENORA

Shoot.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY (1 WEEK LATER)

Poorly maintained in a sea of them.

A Black 1976 Pontiac Firebird Trans-Am is parked up front.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Colton types on an older laptop.

Several comic book-themed stickers are on it.

A movie script is on the screen.

His phone buzzes with a Facetime call from professional screenwriter GILBERT (20s).

A brand new, pressed dress shirt is tailored to him.

COLTON
I'm almost done.

GILBERT (FACETIME)
You're a fucking lifesaver, man.

A photo of Colton's girlfriend ERIKA (20s), her ex DAVID (30s), and their son Zachariah (5) is on the wall.

She's an All-American blonde.

COLTON
What does your boss have to say
about all of this?

GILBERT (FACETIME)
The producer loves my new spin on
the dialogue in this.

COLTON
Hit my Cash App and--

GILBERT (FACETIME)
My agent figured it out.

COLTON
If it's a legal thing--

GILBERT (FACETIME)
She said it's all good, as long as
you're OK with the whole shadowy
figure thing.

COLTON
You can thank me in your memoirs.

GILBERT (FACETIME)
I sent her the last thing I had
from you in film school. She wants
an introduction.

COLTON
My current WIP isn't ready.

GILBERT (FACETIME)
An agent at CAA wants to meet you
and that's what you have to say.

Colton saves the file.

GILBERT (FACETIME) (CONT'D)
Do you remember Kent?

COLTON
Did he give himself permission to
write something?

GILBERT (FACETIME)
This is his original.

COLTON
I was wondering why you suddenly
forgot how to write.

Colton emails it to Gilbert.

GILBERT (FACETIME)
I've got a couch if you want it.

COLTON
I've got my life here.

GILBERT (FACETIME)
Is something wrong with your old
man or what?

COLTON
It didn't work the first time, this
would be just more of the same.

GILBERT (FACETIME)
Film school and the film industry
are like two entirely different
beasts altogether.

(beat)
Say hi to the boys for me!

Gilbert hangs up.

Erika walks in and sits down next to him.

ERIKA
How come I never get to talk to
your friends?

COLTON
It's just Gil.

ERIKA
What does he do?

COLTON
He's a writer.

She looks at his laptop.

ERIKA
It looks like you're doing the
writing for him.

COLTON
He needed a favor.

ERIKA
So that's what you've been working
on when Zach's around.

COLTON
That's something of my own.

ERIKA
Can I see it?

COLTON
It's not ready.

ERIKA
Isn't this what all writers crave?

COLTON
What if you don't like it?

ERIKA
It's just me.

Colton looks around.

COLTON
You'll think it's silly.

ERIKA
Would Zach think it's silly?

COLTON
He's not my biggest fan.

ERIKA
He'll come around, I promise.

COLTON
It's called Scalpels and Silencers.

ERIKA
So it's like a medical thing?

COLTON
It's about a doctor who goes to jail and then gets out to find he can't practice anymore. So he winds up being one of those fix-it guys for the Russian mob while he tries to become a doctor again.

ERIKA
Why would he do that?

COLTON
His kid has cancer and he needs the money. It's about how he falls deeper and deeper into the life of being a gangster.

ERIKA
Now I want to read it because it sounds amazing!

Colton's phone buzzes with an alarm.

COLTON
I got to get to work.

They lightly kiss.

Colton leaves.

EXT. RANCH HOME - DAY

Freshly painted.

A Luxury Sedan is parked up front.

Through a bay window, we see Jade sitting at a table, drawing comic book panels in a well-weathered notepad full of them.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Straight out of Martha Stewart's dreams.

Jade's eyes focus on her pencil for a long moment.

A pair of mostly eaten toaster oven waffles and a mug of coffee are in front of her.

She looks over and sees her mug being refilled.

Her eyes see her boyfriend FRED (30s) carefully fill it up.

He's tall, dark, and handsome.

They lightly kiss.

His eyes look over to her notepad.

Fred sees a red-headed woman fight off a tall, handsome serial killer who looks an awful lot like him.

FRED

He looks familiar.

He walks over and grabs a mug out of a cabinet.

JADE

I'm trying something different.

Fred fills the mug up.

FRED

I thought you'd make me the hero.

JADE

Colton had an idea and I'm going to see where it goes.

Fred sighs.

JADE (CONT'D)

Every hero is always this tall, dark, and impossibly handsome guy. What if he was evil?

FRED

I'm not sure if I like being the bad guy in your comic book.

JADE

You're the hero in my life.

He takes a sip.

FRED
We've got an opening.

JADE
I'm happy where I am.

FRED
Our benefits are much better.

JADE
It gives me time to draw.

FRED
We could have lunch every day
instead of when I'm home.

JADE
I kind of like being at the store.
It gives me the motivation to
finish this and get it out there.

FRED
I can't wait until that's done and
everyone in the world wants a copy.

JADE
I hope you're right.

Fred takes a sip of coffee.

FRED
Why are you drawing with a pencil?
I bought you that tablet to make it
easier to do this.

JADE
I'm in a funk and I'm trying to
draw my way out of it.
(looks out the window)
I've got to get going.

They lightly kiss.

She leaves.

EXT. RANCH HOME - DAY

The Firebird pulls up.

Jade gets in.

INT. FIREBIRD - DAY (DRIVING)

Colton is behind the wheel.

The car takes off.

Jade looks at the drink holder.

Two coffee cups from a chain are in there.

She grabs one and takes a sip.

COLTON

What's the best song for karaoke?

JADE

Do I have to ask why?

COLTON

Erika refused to do it last night because they didn't have the exact right song for her.

Jade takes another sip.

JADE

I get that.

COLTON

You'd think between three hundred plus songs she could've found one.

JADE

You're also standing there, all alone, in front of a bunch of people. I can imagine she doesn't want to be the person who goes viral online for being way off-key for an Adele song.

COLTON

I suggested Baby Got Back but she took it as an insult.

(beat)

I had a couple of drinks in me.

She takes another sip.

COLTON (CONT'D)

It's a fun song and people will--

Jade laughs.

JADE

She doesn't have any back, that's what you did wrong!

COLTON

It's not like she'd be twerking in a rap video anytime soon, but I out-kicked my coverage on her.

She takes a longer sip.

Silence.

JADE

Anytime you spring for the Nitro shot, you need me to fix something.

COLTON

I can't be just nice and want to talk about 90s rap bangers.

JADE

Spit it out.

Beat.

COLTON

Erika wants to read my script. And probably an agent from CAA, too.

Jade sighs.

JADE

It won't get noticed just sitting on your Hard Drive.

COLTON

But it's not ready.

JADE

What draft are you on?

Colton thinks for a moment.

JADE (CONT'D)

That's not good.

JADE (CONT'D)

I got some great notes from some people on Reddit the other day that I need to implement.

EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY

Small businesses are all over.

A faded sign for Middle Coast Comics is in the center.

A Sedan is parked near it.

Colton takes his phone out and looks around. He smiles.

COLTON
It's New Comic Wednesday!

JADE
And your real girlfriend.

COLTON
Lenora is a black swan and you
should appreciate her more.

JADE
There are lots of people in that
age bracket who read comic books.

COLTON
But not the ones she does.

JADE
She indulges you.

COLTON
I can't help it that I have
immaculate taste in comics that she
leans on to make her choices.

Jade rolls her eyes.

JADE
Is Erika jealous of her?

COLTON
Hardly.

JADE
You've never missed a Wednesday as
long as she's been coming.

COLTON
That's purely a coincidence.

Both walk inside.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Jade looks at a calendar.

Today's delivery is crossed off.

Colton walks in.

JADE
No delivery today.

COLTON
What about next week?

Jade looks at the calendar.

She flips through several months. Nothing.

JADE
He doesn't need one of us if there
isn't a delivery.

Colton walks over to Terry's office.

TERRY'S OFFICE

Boxes of older comic books are all over.

A desk has a laptop covered in comic book stickers on it.

A large, framed photo of TERRY (60s) and his wife LISA (60s)
is hung on the wall.

Terry has long, graying dreadlocks and thick glasses.

Lisa is short with fiery red hair slowly going gray.

The door opens, revealing Colton.

He looks inside.

COLTON
Terry?

Jade looks inside.

He shrugs.

JADE
Maybe he's in the warehouse.

WAREHOUSE

Colton and Jade look around.

COLTON
Terry!

Silence.

JADE
Where do you think he is?

COLTON
Maybe he's having a senior moment.

Jade looks in either direction.

JADE
Fred's company has an opening.

COLTON
I'm flattered but--

JADE
It's for me.

COLTON
Oh.

Jade takes a deep breath.

COLTON (CONT'D)
What about Deviant Art? You could
draw full-time, commission only.

JADE
The only person who contacted me on
that site wanted me to do... things
no person should ever draw.

COLTON
It couldn't have been that bad.

Jade takes a deep, measured breath.

JADE
He wanted me to draw of former
President Trump and Hillary Clinton
as furrries in the middle of what he
called a Bunnywaffen orgy.
(beat)
When I said no the price kept going
up until I eventually deleted my
whole account.

COLTON
How much did he want to pay you?

JADE
He started at two grand and it just kept going up.

COLTON
There comes a point--

JADE
My dignity is worth more than that.

COLTON
It could've been something to do while you're working here.

JADE
I applied at NYC Art.

COLTON
No shit.

JADE
I'm still waiting to hear back but I keep thinking what Fred will say.
(looks around)
I keep thinking about everything that could happen, and I just don't want to know at this point. But I also want to know, too.

COLTON
You could give them a call and see if they've made a decision.

JADE
Then it becomes real, you know?

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Middle Coast Comic Store Owner TERRY (60s) walks up.

He has long, graying dreadlocks and thick glasses.

Two envelopes are in one hand, a coffee cup holder with three large corporate coffee cups in the other.

The top envelope has "Colton" written on it.

His eyes look inside and around.

He places a "Going Out Of Business" sign on a window.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Terry walks in.

All eyes turn to him.

Terry places the coffee cup holder on a counter.

Colton grabs one with a C on it.

He hands one with J written on it to Jade.

TERRY

I figured coffee should make this a
little bit easier.

Colton takes a sip of coffee.

Terry hands an envelope to him and then Jade.

TERRY (CONT'D)

I'm closing the store down.

COLTON

Fuck you.

TERRY

I'm not joking.

Colton opens his envelope.

A severance check and a letter of recommendation are in it.

COLTON

You aren't.

Jade looks at her envelope and then opens it.

The same things are in hers.

Colton sighs.

TERRY

I know this is shitty timing but we
wanted to do right by you guys.

(beat)

It's a month for every year you've
been here, plus the hours you'd
have worked for this week. We won't
fight you when you file for your
unemployment on Monday, too.

Colton looks at his check for a long moment.

TERRY (CONT'D)

We're going to do an impromptu going-out-of-business sale today. I will buy lunch and give you \$200 in cash if you're willing to stay and work for a full shift.

COLTON

What about Wayne and Zander?

TERRY

Last night was their last day.

Colton and Jade look at each other.

COLTON

So what, we just chill here?

TERRY

Everything is going to auction once we close down, so if you want to grab anything that doesn't get sold I'm more than OK with that.

Jade looks around and then to Colton.

JADE

Why?

TERRY

It's time... Lisa wants to travel the world and I ran out of ways to tell her no.

COLTON

How many comic books?

TERRY

Be reasonable.

JADE

What's for lunch?

TERRY

I'll let you guys pick.

Colton and Jade look at each other.

She gives him a thumbs up.

COLTON

Not like I've got anything else to do today.

TERRY

Wonderful!

(beat)

I'm going to handle some things in the office. We close at five today.

JADE

We'll figure out what's for lunch and yell at you.

Terry nods.

COLTON

I always assumed you'd fire me.

TERRY

Me too.

Terry walks into his office.

COLTON

So when are you going to tell Fred you want that job?

JADE

I have no idea.

Jade walks behind the counter and finds a chair.

COLTON

What's the name of his company?

JADE

You aren't going to apply.

COLTON

Technically I'll be unemployed.

JADE

Dreamland might have an opening. That is if you still want to work in comics.

She sits down and opens her notebook back to Vengeance in Red. Jade takes a pencil out and draws.

COLTON

Where's your tablet?

JADE

Every time I get to a point, I just delete everything. This way I have to finish.

Colton looks around.

COLTON
Is this working in comics?

JADE
It's not as glorious as they make
it out to be in the movies.

COLTON
Like, what, there's a Road House
but for comic book stores?

JADE
You should write it.

COLTON
I'm a crime thriller guy, not the
kind of guy who writes movies for
bouncers to beat off to.

JADE
What?

COLTON
You know, like Road House.
(thinks for a moment)
I could see it.

JADE
Oh, no.

COLTON
Comic Store starring Channing Tatum
as Blaze Maverick, a bouncer hired
to clean up the roughest comic book
depository in Nashville armed with
his fists and a doctorate in
Quantum Mechanics.
(throws a punch)
And don't go come back!

Jade stops and thinks.

JADE
Why would he be throwing someone
out of a comic book store?

COLTON
Because he didn't want to knock
five bucks off the price of a Green
Lantern special edition.

JADE
Depends on which Green Lantern.

COLTON
Hal Jordan, of course.

JADE
Blasphemy.

COLTON
Hal Jordan's books are always boring because he's been around since the fifties.

JADE
He's the original Lantern!

COLTON
But he's not cool.

JADE
When did that become a criterion for being a Lantern?

COLTON
There comes an age where no one can ever be cool and he crossed it. The only person who ever got to that age in life and remained cool was Bowie, of course.

Jade thinks for a moment.

COLTON (CONT'D)
He'd have been an awesome Lantern.

JADE
What about Dolly Parton?

COLTON
I said cool, not popular.
(beat)
Cool is a vibe, a notion, a thing that is only temporary because tastes change. It's a moment where you are just... that kind of guy.

JADE
So wouldn't Bowie have been lame at some point?

COLTON
He argued for black stars on MTV and knew them by name.

JADE

That's very progressive of him.

COLTON

There isn't a decade of his life where Bowie wasn't cool. Even in The Prestige, where he's a stunt cast for Tesla, he shows up and just kills it because--

JADE

He's cool.

COLTON

Exactly.

She looks up and gives him a thumbs down.

JADE

Weak.

COLTON

Still on Vengeance in Red?

Jade nods and resumes drawing.

Colton walks over and looks at it.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Why is Fred trying to kill her?

JADE

That's not Fred.

COLTON

Could've fooled me.

JADE

We're at the midway point and now she has to kill the Big Red Bastard.

He tilts his head.

JADE (CONT'D)

He thinks the River God Trellnor is telling him to kill women in a ritualistic manner.

Colton shrugs and wanders into the aisles.

He goes through some of the books.

COLTON
That feels like a final villain.

JADE
Her final confrontation is with the
Horse Face Killer, the big bad from
the first scene.

COLTON
That could be fun.

JADE
Fred thinks it's a bit much.

COLTON
The Crow was super fucked up and
then they made it less so for the
movie. This could be that way.

JADE
It has to be good enough so that
Margot Robbie would see herself in
the lead.

COLTON
The Barbie girl?

JADE
Dye her hair red and she'd be
perfect for this.

COLTON
Are you sure she'd even want to
take this? Barbie was kind of big.

JADE
Who wouldn't want to be a badass
killing serial killers with a sword
and all sorts of cool weapons?

Colton places several comic books on top of the box.

JADE (CONT'D)
He said--

COLTON
I need these to finish up the Kevin
Smith run on Daredevil.

JADE
Maybe you should wait.

He grabs them and puts them behind the counter.

COLTON
It's ten bucks.

She shakes her head.

COLTON (CONT'D)
If someone asks, I'll hand them
over. Happy?

Jade draws.

JADE
Would you mind stopping by the
thrift store on the way home?

COLTON
Clothes shopping?

JADE
I need a reference for the next
scene and I love that store.

Colton shrugs.

He looks into the comic boxes.

COLTON
What happens, does she buy a bunch
of clothes to kill people with?

JADE
It's assembling her Scooby Squad,
to set things up for the sequel.

COLTON
How many of these things do you
have in mind?

She thinks for a moment.

COLTON (CONT'D)
So far I'm down but the normies
might not be, just saying.

JADE
Three.
(beat)
The first one we meet her, she
kills Horse Face, and then she
winds up on the run from the FBI.
(beat)
The second we meet the guy pulling
the strings, and she kills him.
(MORE)

JADE (CONT'D)

But she gets caught by the cops and placed in an asylum.

COLTON

And what, it's run by an evil doctor or something?

JADE

He's the final bad guy and she has to kill him to complete the circle of everything.

COLTON

That sounds old school.

JADE

Blockbuster kind of old school.

COLTON

I barely remember that place.

JADE

When I was a kid, there was one next to the old Tower Records and three other stores.

COLTON

You sound like my dad.

JADE

Do you remember the first time you went to a place like this?

Colton thinks for a moment. He smiles.

JADE (CONT'D)

That feeling is just pure, unbridled magic. Think of how many kids are going to miss out on that because, instead, they're logging onto some app.

COLTON

But think of how much cool stuff is available because of those apps. I can log in and watch every movie in the Criterion collection for like ten bucks a month. That's insane!

JADE

I always thought that I'd have my first signing here, when Vengeance in Red is published and I've got all sorts of badass credits.

TERRY'S OFFICE

Terry types on his laptop.

COLTON (O.S.)
You know it started with all of
those Marvel movies, right?

JADE (O.S.)
This again?

COLTON (O.S.)
You know I'm right about it.

JADE (O.S.)
Seriously?

He sighs.

Terry closes the door.

He walks back to his laptop.

Terry's fingers type on it for a moment.

His eyes focus on it.

MAIN STORE

Colton places a handful of comic books on the counter.

Jade looks at them and groans.

JADE
Daredevil is one thing but--

COLTON
I bought these from someone my
first week here.

JADE
And you make fun of me for having a
dose of nostalgia.

COLTON
They're good books, too.

She places them on top of the other books.

JADE
The MCU did so much for comic books
that you're overlooking.

COLTON
For older comics.

JADE
People still come here.

COLTON
Terry told me about how people used
to have monthly pull lists.

JADE
They still do.

COLTON
But those are 1 or 2 books. I'm
talking like ten.

JADE
That's a lot.

COLTON
The more people saw Marvel movies,
the less they came here.

JADE
The movies were good, at least.

COLTON
Seriously?

She shakes her head and resumes drawing.

COLTON (CONT'D)
The scripts have to be Mad Libs at
this point.

JADE
Did we watch the same movies?

Colton wanders back to the comic aisles.

COLTON
The first Avengers film was two
hours of boredom, bad jokes, and
then forty minutes of just straight
green screen action and CGI.

JADE
That's called plot development.

COLTON
Or two hours of my life I'll never
get back.

JADE

Joss Whedon doesn't make movies anymore, for what it's worth.

COLTON

That's what makes it worse!

JADE

Are you a secret Buffy fan or--

COLTON

Every Marvel film after that was just tense dramatic moment ruined with just five minutes straight of bad one-liners.

JADE

That's overselling it.

COLTON

Guardians 3 has this great moment between Quill and Gamora where he talks to her about who she was. And then she points out that's not her. It's great and poignant... and then it's a five-minute stretch of bad jokes that just completely ruin it.

JADE

It wasn't--

COLTON

The only thing missing was a giant fart joke, to accentuate it.

Colton takes out several comics and looks at them.

He places one on the box.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Film one: The hero fights a villain with all of the same powers,

(beat)

Film two: A revelation that the past isn't what we assume it was.

(beat)

Film three: abrupt tone shift.

She stops and thinks.

JADE

You say all this and yet.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

An ANNOYING CUSTOMER walks by.

His eyes spot the "Going Out of Business" sign.

He walks inside.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

The Customer walks into the aisle.

Colton walks back to the counter.

COLTON

I'd never write a Marvel movie.

JADE

It's a job everyone would kill to do, don't lie to me.

COLTON

It's a shitty job.

The Customer goes through several comic book boxes.

JADE

If Kevin Feige walked in that door and said he wants you to do the fourth Guardians film, you can't stand there and tell me you would not take it.

Colton thinks for a moment.

JADE (CONT'D)

Liar!

COLTON

What?

JADE

You know you'd take the phat bag and run to the bank.

COLTON

It'd be a difficult decision.

JADE

That's such bullshit.

COLTON

And if someone wanted you to draw
some cape shit, would you?

JADE

I'd have to think about it.

COLTON

Double bullshit.

JADE

I'm more of an indie comic type but
if it's a good rate, I'd have to at
least consider it.

The Customer spots a comic book.

He takes out his phone and searches for it on the internet.

The Customer looks at the price and then his phone.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

This is three dollars at Dreamland.

Jade and Colton look over.

The Customer holds up the comic book.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER (CONT'D)

Why is it so much more expensive?

COLTON

Dreamland's is in worse shape.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

How do you know?

COLTON

They undercut the price because
they can't match on quality.

Jade glares at him.

JADE

(hushed)

Terry says we're supposed to--

COLTON

(hushed)

It's three bucks.

She sighs and resumes drawing.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

Would you guys price-match them?

COLTON

We don't price match from internet listings, sorry.

The Customer puts the comic back.

JADE

Cape shit?

COLTON

Ok, like someone offers you the chance to draw the Teenage Avengers for whatever the going page rate is at the time.

The Customer goes through some more comic books.

JADE

If I could pay the rent by drawing a comic book instead of here, well, that's the dream, right?

COLTON

Even for the indie comic type?

JADE

A year or two of drawing at Marvel probably sets me up to write on my own, crowdfund it, and--

COLTON

It's like being the guy who wrote Morbius. I mean yeah, it got made, but do you want to be the guy who wrote Morbius?

JADE

What sort of house do you think the check from Morbius bought him?

The Customer takes a comic book out.

He pulls it up on his phone and compares the price.

It's more expensive here.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

This one is ten dollars more here.

Jade looks up.

JADE

Let's see.

The Customer shows it to Jade.

COLTON

That's the alternate cover.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

It's the same comic book inside.

COLTON

But not the same cover.

The Customer puts it back and searches through the box.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Filmmaking is a collaborative to do
but the script is where it starts!

JADE

It's not like it's all his fault.
He could be banking those checks so
when he makes a preachy art house
film, guys like you would be--
(mocking Colton's voice)
--Oh my God, what a great film!

COLTON

You do my voice wrong.

JADE

I do it perfectly.

The Customer pulls out a comic book.

He looks at it.

A female superhero poses provocatively on the cover.

COLTON

That's more Shane Gillis.

JADE

I do your voice perfectly, you just
hate that you're wrong on this one.

He takes out his phone and searches for it on the internet.

The Customer looks at the price and then his phone.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

This one is like double the price.

Jade and Colton look over.

The Customer shows them the comic book.

COLTON

It's probably the only one that
doesn't have semen on it.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

Excuse me?

COLTON

That's from before the web was a
thing. I bet your average thirteen-
year-old looked at that and just
shot some of his web-fluid all over
that thirst trap of a comic book.

Jade puts her hands over her face.

COLTON (CONT'D)

I'm curious how many comic books
are still in circulation because of
Porn Hub's existence.

ANNOYING CUSTOMER

I'm never coming back here.

The Customer walks out.

Colton waves bye to him as he does.

JADE

What the fuck is wrong with you?

COLTON

Is this a real question or--

Jade looks around.

JADE

Terry!

Silence.

COLTON

(mocking her voice)
Terry!

JADE

I'm in the right here!

COLTON

You know he agrees with me.

JADE
I highly doubt that.

COLTON
It's why he's never fired me.

JADE
I assumed it was because you had pictures of him with something.

COLTON
So I'm not exactly employee of the month but--

JADE
I bet you couldn't make it through ten seconds without being a jerk to some customer.

COLTON
Oh, please.

JADE
Want to bet?

COLTON
No.

JADE
I bet the next customer who walks in will walk out because of some awful thing you say.

COLTON
I still don't like the implication of this bet.

JADE
That you can't be nice for a moment of your life?

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

A red SUV parks.

NANCY (30s) exits and walks in.

She's short and thin with a Karen-style haircut.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Colton grabs the Annoying Customer's pile of comic books and places them back in the box.

COLTON

That guy is the sort of person who makes working here the worst.

Jade resumes drawing.

COLTON (CONT'D)

In the end, I saved us some time that he would've wasted.

JADE

Or you were being a dick.

COLTON

Either way, right?

Jade sighs.

Nancy walks in and looks around.

NANCY

Do you guys happen to have a feminist section, by chance?

Colton and Jade turn to her.

COLTON

Are you looking for something specific or is it more--

NANCY

It's for my daughter. She's getting into comic books and I want to get her something for her birthday.

COLTON

How old is she?

Nancy looks around.

NANCY

Twelve going on middle-aged.

Colton looks to Jade.

JADE

I was into the X-Men at that age.

NANCY

She said she doesn't want anything
with a superhero in it.

Colton looks around.

COLTON

Anything else?

NANCY

She said it has to--
(takes phone out, looks at
a list)
--pass the Bechdel test.

Jade glares at Colton.

COLTON

Yeah, you don't want to do that.

NANCY

Why not?

Colton walks over to the far side of the aisle.

He goes through several books and takes one out.

It has an explicit sex scene on the cover.

The women recoil.

Colton puts it back.

COLTON

This passes the Bechdel test.

NANCY

That's pornography.

COLTON

Blaze Comics calls it for mature
readers only but I'd agree with you
on it.

Nancy shakes her head.

NANCY

I know it's just a phase but--

COLTON

I have an idea.

Jade takes a deep breath.

Her eyes look to Terry's office.

Colton wanders over to a different portion of the aisle.

He quickly searches and pulls out a comic book.

He shows it to Nancy.

Her eyes focus on it.

It features a female Conan the Barbarian-type hero killing hordes of monsters.

NANCY

That feels a bit like a superhero comic book.

COLTON

It's from Shadow Scribe Comics, which is an indie label that does all sorts of cool shit like this.

NANCY

Does it pass that test?

COLTON

That test is not what your daughter thinks it is.

NANCY

I Googled it but--

COLTON

Bikini Car Wash passes it.

Nancy looks at him oddly.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Yeah.

NANCY

She's trying to be a feminist and it's her whole... *thing*... now.

COLTON

She wants badass, empowered heroes but doesn't want to be pandered to. Most of what passes the Bechdel Test is going to just pander to her and that's not what she's asking for, either.

Nancy nods.

Colton points to the cover.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Sumatra is based off this legendary
Viking Queen named Lagertha. She
was this absolute force of nature.

Nancy looks at the cover.

COLTON (CONT'D)
It's a fifteen-issue run. The
writer wanted this to be his Conan,
the Robert E. Howard version.

Colton goes through the box.

Jade watches him closely.

He pulls out five more issues of the same comic book series.

COLTON (CONT'D)
We've got the first six, which is
the entire Coven Dragon arc. Anyone
who reads the series tends to stop
there because it just can't be
topped, hence why the series
petered out after fifteen issues.
(beat)
We're going out of business and
these have been here for a couple
of years. I'll do all of them for
the cost of the first.

Nancy looks around.

NANCY
Are you sure?

COLTON
Your daughter will adore this.

Nancy takes a deep breath and nods.

Colton walks to the counter and quickly rings her up.

Nancy hands him some cash.

NANCY
Both of the guys at Dreamland
weren't this friendly.

COLTON

They've got more Funko Pops on their shelves than comic books for a reason.

Nancy walks out.

Jade watches her closely.

JADE

Now why can't you be that way with every customer?

COLTON

She was nice.

JADE

And the other guy was what?

COLTON

She came in here looking to make a connection to her kid. That takes a lot of guts. He was a scavenger. I can respect someone trying to bond with their kid but that guy? Fuck him and the horse he rode in on.

JADE

Terry is going to be pissed you gave her that discount.

Both look to Terry's office.

COLTON

Terry?

Terry walks out.

TERRY

(to Colton)

What'd you say this time?

COLTON

Why is it always *that*?

Terry sighs.

TERRY

I was thinking of that new joint on Third Street. Longmore Barbecue.

COLTON

I could go for it.

JADE
How's their cornbread?

TERRY
Why?

JADE
Cornbread at a barbecue joint is like sweet and sour chicken at a Chinese place. If they can fuck that up, the rest of their food is going to be awful.

TERRY
Noted.
(beat)
Any suggestions?

COLTON
Ask if their spicy BBQ is spicy or just white girl spicy.

Terry walks back into his office.

The door closes.

Jade spots a TV.

She walks over and turns on a modern superhero movie.

Colton's phone buzzes.

He looks at it.

Colton has an email from "Samantha Worthington - CAA."

The subject line reads "Script / Meeting."

Colton mouths "holy shit."

He looks up and spots the TV.

JADE
I'm not changing it to whatever bad indie film you want to watch,

COLTON
I was hoping for Roger Corman's Fantastic Four.

Colton wanders behind the counter.

JADE
Seriously?

COLTON
It's historical and--

JADE
It was never meant to be watched.

COLTON
Which is what makes it so much
better than it should be.

JADE
You complain about whoring and that
is the ultimate whore job.

Colton yawns.

COLTON
That he went YOLO and made a ton of
choices because he was being equal
amounts of cheap and auteur make it
so fascinating.

JADE
That's fascinating and yet the
entire MCU is boring.

COLTON
He took risks, at least.

JADE
None of them paid off.

COLTON
But they went for it! The MCU is
all sanitized and boring because
they don't want to risk being bad.

JADE
They are good movies, for the most
part, you know.

COLTON
I want to see a film take a risk
and just lay it out there, like The
Rocketeer, instead of one more
generic loser in tights with
superpowers saving the day.
(beat)
It's why I can watch a film like
Super, or Defendor, or Sky High...
those films took risks an MCU film
would never touch.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

The Luxury Sedan parks.

Fred gets out.

A large FedEx Envelope package is in his hands.

He walks inside.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Jade sighs.

JADE

None of those are *that* good.

COLTON

But they tried, and that's the most important thing, at least to me.

A bell rings.

Jade and Colton turn to see Fred walking in.

A FedEx folder is in his hands.

Fred hands it to Jade.

It's already opened.

FRED

When were you going to tell me?

Jade turns to Fred.

Colton looks around.

COLTON

I'm going to take a smoke break.

Colton walks out.

Jade looks inside and pulls out an acceptance letter.

She skims it.

JADE

Full acceptance and a scholarship!

FRED

In New York.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS, DOCKS - DAY

Colton smokes.

His phone buzzes with a text from Erika.

"How's work going, baby?"

Colton texts her back: "Makes me wish I was back in bed with you, no lie. And tomorrow I'll have lots of time for that."

Erika responds: ":-)"

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Jade and Fred look at each other.

JADE

I don't see--

FRED

We never talked about this.

JADE

I didn't think they'd even let me in, to be fair.

(beat)

And why are you opening my stuff?

FRED

I thought it was your mom's thing and wanted to be sure.

JADE

And you had to come here and confront me about this?

FRED

As far as I knew you were just drawing for fun--

JADE

I'm actively querying on this.

FRED

Has anyone said yes?

JADE

I've gotten viewed, at least.

FRED

And what would art school do?

JADE

Open more doors and allow me to draw full-time instead of just here and there.

FRED

It's in New York.

JADE

We can make this work.

FRED

What about AI? I saw this video on Twitter today. A guy made this cool trailer for a movie.

JADE

No self-respecting artist would--

FRED

It made me think that I could do it. There'll probably be one for comic books next. I hate to say it but you might be spending four years trying to do a job that might be gone sooner than you think.

JADE

You are unbelievable!

Fred looks away.

He takes a deep breath.

Jade looks around.

FRED

I just don't want you to get hurt.

JADE

I haven't even decided if I'm going to take it yet!

Fred looks around.

FRED

Just let me know, I guess.

Fred walks out.

Jade sits down behind the counter, crying.

Colton walks in and over to the counter.

BEHIND THE COUNTER

Colton sits down and takes a deep breath.

Jade sobs.

He taps her on the shoulder.

JADE

He couldn't even be happy for me.

COLTON

If you need to take a minute--

She wipes the tears from her eyes.

JADE

I'll be fine.

Colton reaches over and grabs her hand.

Jade squeezes it.

COLTON

He's not for it, I gather.

JADE

What do you think?

COLTON

How much is out-of-pocket for you?

JADE

I got a full ride, plus board.

(beat)

And a twenty-thousand dollar stipend, too.

COLTON

Is it guaranteed?

JADE

Just for a year.

COLTON

They're overlooking the fact that you're an ugly crier.

Jade lets go of Colton's hand.

She smacks him playfully.

COLTON (CONT'D)

The truth is supposed to hurt you,
not me!

Colton laughs.

She playfully smacks him again.

COLTON (CONT'D)

I'm not the first guy you should
rush to when people have emotional
issues to talk about.

JADE

What happens when Erika cries?

COLTON

God had a sense of irony putting a
woman who's very sensitive with--

JADE

An asshole.

They look at each other for a moment.

He nods.

COLTON

I would say that I'm occasionally
insensitive but... that's fair.

JADE

How are we friends?

COLTON

Spend enough time with someone over
the years and it happens.

Beat.

JADE

He didn't say it directly but I'm
getting the feeling it's a "him or
me" sort of conversation.

COLTON

What are you going to do?

JADE

I don't know.

COLTON

At least you have a choice.

JADE
You quit film school.

COLTON
Technically, I flunked out.

JADE
Were you just not into it or--

COLTON
My first screenwriting course had this guy in it who refused to do a writing assignment for group because it involved a gun and he couldn't give himself permission to do so. And he said it in the most crybaby way, too.

JADE
You sound like a gym teacher.

COLTON
He was saying it because he wanted to be the sensitive artist around the girls and it's just the most chickenshit way possible. Even the teachers bought into it. I tuned out like ten seconds after that.

JADE
You gave that up for here, too.

COLTON
My first job after film school was working in construction. This is way more fun than that ever was.

JADE
If you could do it again--

COLTON
I don't know what I'd do.

She thinks for a long moment.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Plus there's the fun of dating.

JADE
How many Erikas are out there?
Because there isn't another Fred.

COLTON
She's the only who has ever passed
the Muppet test.

JADE
Which one is your favorite or what?

COLTON
Ok, you're allowed to remake one
movie with every single character
but one being played by a Muppet.
Which film do you choose and who's
the only human?

Jade sighs.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Mine is Con Air and Nicolas Cage.

JADE
No way.

COLTON
Oh come on, Fozzy Bear as Garland
Greene would be the best!
(Fozzy the Bear imitating
Steve Buscemi)
One girl... I drove through three
states wearing her head as a hat.
(makes wild hand gestures)
Wocka Wocka!

JADE
What was her choice?

COLTON
Pride and Prejudice.

JADE
That's a weird choice.

COLTON
Erika wanted the version with Kiera
Knightley in it because she is a
huge fan of Donald Sutherland.

JADE
The fact that she didn't just walk
out says a lot.

Beat.

COLTON
Her kid hates me.
(beat)
I asked for his permission to marry
her and he told me no.

She looks at him for a long moment.

JADE
He probably thinks you want to
replace his old man.

COLTON
Zach said David is his father and
I'm just the guy fucking his mom.

Jade laughs.

JADE
I know I shouldn't but--

COLTON
If it was anyone else, I would too.

JADE
He'll come around.

COLTON
David likes me, too, which makes
this all super hard.

JADE
If she loves you, that's all you
need right?

COLTON
You don't date a woman with kids,
you audition to see if you're ready
for a family.

JADE
And?

COLTON
She's my Mary Jane Watson.
(beat)
My Earth-616 Mary Jane, the best
one there is.

The front door opens.

MAIN STORE

Colton stands up.

Regular customers MIKE and SCOTT (both 20s) walk in and walk into the aisles.

Mike is tall with a dad bod.

Scott is short and hulking.

Both are film school friends of Colton and are dressed in brand-new dress shirts with matching ties.

COLTON

What's up, shit sniffers?

MIKE

We saw the sign.

COLTON

It doesn't mean you get to snap your fingers, Thanos.

SCOTT

Why the fuck not?

COLTON

Please show this place some dignity in its final days.

MIKE

If I was I'd ask if you guys still had Wolverine number one around.

COLTON

We put that up on eBay.

Jade stands up.

JADE

Someone spent ten grand on that.

SCOTT

Bull shit!

COLTON

It was right after Infinity War. The first one fell through but a week ago someone paid full freight.

MIKE

More like Infinity Bore.

JADE
I'm not dealing with this.

She leaves.

SCOTT
Is she still justifying Iron Man 3?

Colton shrugs.

MIKE
It's kind of nice to see a woman
who doesn't look like an alien.

COLTON
Pardon?

SCOTT
Every woman in Los Angeles has that
weird look where there's no fat on
their face.

MIKE
I had a theory about it that he
thinks is crazy.

COLTON
This ought to be good.

SCOTT
It is crazy.

MIKE
I'm thinking that all of the
plastic surgeons out there are all
secretly aliens and they're
preparing us for first contact by
changing famous women to look like
how the aliens look.

Colton thinks for a moment.

COLTON
That is crazy but it would make an
amazing comic book.

SCOTT
I'd adapt it to the movie.

COLTON
If you're going to do that, at
least bold your slug lines.

Scott takes out a comic book and looks at the price.

\$50.

He shows it to Colton.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Fifty bucks.

SCOTT
Going out of business and--

COLTON
It's worth \$50.

MIKE
Forty.

COLTON
This isn't Dreamland.
(beat)
Don't make me point out all thirty
ways that book is priced the way it
is, Scott.

SCOTT
Seems ten dollars too much.

COLTON
The backing board alone is worth
the cost of admission.

MIKE
Gil says hi.

Colton yawns.

COLTON
I spoke to him this morning.

SCOTT
He called you his script whisperer.

COLTON
You guys would've given him the
same notes.

SCOTT
Your notes on our pilot got us a
general with a guy we can't say.

COLTON
Congratulations.

SCOTT

They have our Script Rev but we wanted to wow them.

COLTON

So you're bringing in a special comic book?

SCOTT

We need something obscure, you know, like The Sculptor.

COLTON

The Sculptor wasn't obscure, it was just indie.

MIKE

We need something like that as our backup plan.

Colton thinks for a moment.

COLTON

Milk and Cheese.

They look at him oddly.

COLTON (CONT'D)

It was a comic that had a tiny run out of Wisconsin for almost like twenty years. We've got the series.

SCOTT

What's it about?

COLTON

A carton of milk and a head of cheese get into all sorts of fucked up adventures.

Scott shakes his head.

COLTON (CONT'D)

It'd be the Invincible for a more discerning set.

MIKE

No one's taking that sort of risk.

Colton sighs.

COLTON

Garth Ennis's Crossed.

MIKE

More mainstream accessible.

Colton looks around.

He walks over to a box and pulls out a spy comic.

COLTON

Jimmy's Bastards could do it.

Mike and Scott perk up.

SCOTT

Pitch me on it.

COLTON

A British secret agent has to fight his bastard kids to save the world. Basically, if James Bond never used a rubber with a lot of Catholic women and then had a small army of kids with daddy issues and nukes.

The Customer looks at Colton.

COLTON (CONT'D)

It's a great book.

MIKE

I'm not seeing the comps.

COLTON

The Kingsman meets Delivery Man.

Scott and Mike think.

MIKE

I'd watch that movie.

SCOTT

Me too.

Colton looks at Mike.

MIKE

How much?

Colton looks at the cover.

COLTON

Twenty-five is fair.

Both men place cash on the counter.

Colton rings them up.

SCOTT
If you're ever out west--

COLTON
I'll let you know.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

A GENERIC CUSTOMER walks up.

He looks at the "Going out of Business" sign.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Scott and Mike leave.

Terry walks in and looks around.

TERRY
Where's your partner in crime?

COLTON
Having... woman... issues.

TERRY
Like physical ones or--

COLTON
She was crying and you know how
that goes, right?

Terry sighs.

COLTON (CONT'D)
I grew up with four sisters and it
was nothing but that shit.

TERRY
I thought that'd make you more, how
do I put it, sympathetic.

COLTON
Jade's a little, you know, screwy
but my sisters were legit nutters.

Terry looks around.

TERRY
Please tell me--

COLTON
Fred started it, not me.

TERRY
Are you sure about that?

COLTON
How is everything my fault?

TERRY
It usually starts with something
you said and then it gets worse
from there.

Colton thinks.

COLTON
Fair enough.

The Generic Customer walks in and looks around.

GENERIC CUSTOMER
Can I use your bathroom?

Terry points to the bathroom.

TERRY
You got to jiggle the handle.

The Generic Customer walks into the bathroom.

COLTON
How come you never got that fixed?

TERRY
I did... twice.

COLTON
Could've fooled me.

TERRY
There comes a point where sometimes
things are meant to be the way they
are, I suppose.

Terry motions around.

COLTON
It's been pretty slow today.

TERRY
What are you going to do tomorrow?

Colton shrugs.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Three years here and--
(mocks Colton's shrug)
--that's it?

COLTON
What'd you expect?

TERRY
More than that.

COLTON
It's not like I'm going to turn
into Buff Bagwell and man-whore it
up for money.

TERRY
Wait... what?

COLTON
I thought you were a wrestling guy.

TERRY
Buff Bagwell was a sex worker?

COLTON
I was super baked one night and
turned the TV on to this reality
show called "Gigolos."

TERRY
Oh no.

COLTON
He was like a star on it as this
dude who plows women for money.

Terry looks around and takes a deep breath.

COLTON (CONT'D)
That's how you know it's bullshit.

TERRY
It's a reality TV show.

COLTON
And he was being paid by all of
these tens to sex them up.

TERRY
I have a hard time believing that
this is all real.

COLTON
Google that shit if you need to.

TERRY
If you're going to do that, you
should make sure to get paid first.

COLTON
I kept thinking that hell for him
is a pro wrestling fan, right?

TERRY
Oh no.

COLTON
(mock female voice)
Buff, show me your stuff!

TERRY
I hope you didn't spend days coming
up with that.

COLTON
Just an hour or so.

TERRY
That's... an improvement.

COLTON
Bored in the office?

TERRY
Shutting everything down is a
little depressing.

Terry wanders into the aisles.

COLTON
Are you taking anything out of here
or is it all to the auction?

Terry takes out a comic book and looks at it for a moment.

TERRY
My collection is at home.

COLTON
That's... good.

Terry puts it down.

TERRY
Six months ago I got a complaint
about you.

COLTON
What'd I say?

TERRY
It was something you wrote on
Reddit, I believe.

Colton curses under his breath.

COLTON
That's supposed to be anonymous.

TERRY
It had a link to your writing in
it. I was impressed.

COLTON
I don't know how I'm supposed to
feel about you reading something
that I wrote.

TERRY
It made me question why you're
still here and not doing it for a
living, Colton.

COLTON
I haven't gotten a sign that I need
to do something with my life.

TERRY
It's not the Bat symbol.

COLTON
How'd it happen to you?

TERRY
A light just went off in my head
and here I am.

COLTON
Then I guess I'm just waiting for
that light to turn on for me.

TERRY
Don't wait too long.

The Generic Customer walks in and into the aisle.

Colton watches him.

Terry walks back into his office.

The Customer takes out a comic book from a box.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

A truck pulls up.

Colton sprints outside and towards his Firebird.

A DELIVERY DRIVER exits his sedan with several bags of food.

He walks inside.

Colton's Firebird takes off.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Jade takes her phone out.

She pulls up Fred on her speed dial.

Her finger lingers over "Dial."

Terry walks in.

Jade looks up and spots the Driver walking in.

Terry motions to him.

The Driver places the food on the counter and leaves.

Jade opens a bag and pulls out a piece of cornbread.

TERRY

Now for the big test.

She takes a bite. It's delicious.

JADE

It's so worth it.

Terry reaches inside and takes out several takeout boxes.

Jade opens another bag.

Five drinks are inside.

She takes them and places them on the counter.

TERRY

They gave us too many drinks.

The two eat.

She stops for a moment.

JADE
I need some advice.

TERRY
Don't leave your boyfriend for that
chuckle fuck.

Jade laughs.

JADE
That's... not it.

TERRY
Thank Christ.

JADE
I thought you liked Colton.

TERRY
I do it's just... he'd out-kick his
coverage with you, just saying.

JADE
I don't know how to interpret me
wanting advice and that's the first
place you go.

TERRY
Whenever my daughter needs to talk,
it's always about a boy.

Terry takes a bite.

JADE
So I got an offer to go to art
school in New York.

TERRY
That's amazing!

JADE
Fred doesn't think so.

TERRY
What does he want you to do?

JADE
Get a job at his company and
probably become a baby machine.

TERRY
You can do that any time you want.

JADE
It's not that simple.

TERRY
It is.

JADE
We live together, we've spent so much time and--

TERRY
I wish I could be your age again.

JADE
Because you could eliminate all of your mistakes?

TERRY
It's your mistakes that make you who you are. I'd just want the chance to make them all again.

She takes a bite of her food.

JADE
That's... not what I was expecting.

TERRY
I know you're supposed to say I wish I could do things all over, and I'd do them differently, but my girls are my life. I wouldn't want to do it again without them.

Jade looks around.

JADE
I always thought I'd come back here and showcase my first comic.

TERRY
Do you know what I wanted to be when I was your age?

She shrugs.

TERRY (CONT'D)
A film projector.

JADE
That's unexpected.

TERRY

You get to watch movies all day and you're there to make sure they don't get fouled up. We called it the show because it was an event. All of my heroes were up there, on the silver screen.

JADE

I don't remember the last time I went to see a movie in the theater.

TERRY

Everything's digital now so that job is long gone.

Silence.

JADE

So I should do this, right?

TERRY

If that's what you want.

JADE

I need an old man's advice.

TERRY

Way to make me feel appreciated.

JADE

I just don't know what to do.

Terry thinks for a moment.

TERRY

Do you think they'll offer it to you again?

JADE

Probably not.

TERRY

Let's say you take it. What's the worst possible that happens?

Jade thinks.

JADE

I'd be thirty and looking to take a real job because I couldn't hack it as a comic book artist.

TERRY

But what a story, right?

JADE

Even if it ends badly?

TERRY

Everyone looked at me like I was a
crazy man for opening this place.

JADE

What was your plan back then?

TERRY

Set up the shop and pray a customer
or two comes in.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - DAY

An older SUV is parked in the distance.

Colton's Firebird parks in the driveway.

He knocks on the door.

Nothing.

Colton touches it.

The door opens up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Colton walks in.

COLTON

Erika?

The sounds of passionate sex pierce the air and then stop.

After a moment, Erika walks out in a bathrobe.

ERIKA

Honey, you're... here.

COLTON

I got your text.

Colton looks around.

ERIKA

What text?

He spots a pair of men's shoes in the kitchen.

COLTON
The picture?

A trail of men's clothing leads to her bedroom.

ERIKA
Oh, right, the picture.

COLTON
(yelling, at her bedroom)
Hey David!

DAVID (O.S.)
Sorry, man.

COLTON
It's not you.

DAVID (O.S.)
For what it's worth, your notes
were amazing. I queried a producer
with the new draft and we've got a
Zoom meeting set up.

COLTON
That's good.

Erika curses under her breath.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Him?

ERIKA
We've got Zach and--

COLTON
I get that.

ERIKA
I was texting both of you and--

COLTON
How many times?

DAVID (O.S.)
A lot!

Beat.

COLTON
Please don't, David.

DAVID (O.S.)
Just trying to help!

ERIKA
It's not working.

COLTON
And instead of being an adult, you
had to get closure by fucking him?

ERIKA
I know this looks bad but---

COLTON
Looks bad?

ERIKA
It's hard being a single mom!

COLTON
That's still not an excuse.

ERIKA
What do you want me to say?

COLTON
It doesn't matter anymore.

Colton leaves.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Terry and Jade eat.

JADE
What if I get there and fuck it up?
What if I go to art school and it
isn't what I think it is? I could
have torched everything with Fred
and be back here, working some job
I hate, when I could've been with
him and worked a job I hate.

TERRY
Or it could be everything you want
in life, if only for a moment.

JADE
Moments are just that.

TERRY

Take it from someone who has more of their moments in the rearview of life than in front of me. You don't get too many opportunities to chase a dream. After a while, I couldn't chase anything because I had kids and a mortgage. It'll happen to you, too, because life happens while you're making plans.

Colton walks in.

He goes behind the counter and sits down.

Terry looks over.

Tears are streaming down Colton's face.

TERRY (CONT'D)

You can handle him.

Terry goes back into his office.

Jade sits down next to Colton.

BEHIND THE COUNTER

Colton looks into the distance.

Jade taps him on the shoulder.

COLTON

I don't want to talk about it.

JADE

Noted.

Silence.

He looks up and spots the food.

COLTON

He couldn't even ask how I was doing, you know?

JADE

Most times you're discussing horrible shit with awful people.

COLTON

One of whom is you.

Beat.

JADE

Her?

Colton nods.

JADE (CONT'D)

Do I want to know?

COLTON

She was with her ex.

JADE

I don't know what to say.

COLTON

I thought she was the one.

Jade thinks for a moment.

JADE

Did you think this place was the only place you'd ever work at?

COLTON

Her, here... it's what I do.

(beat)

Life's easy because I know how to handle everything in it.

JADE

Is that what Fred wants from me? To be his purpose?

COLTON

You are his purpose.

JADE

How do you figure?

She stands up.

He follows her, wiping his tears.

MAIN STORE

Jade walks into the aisles, looking at books.

Colton follows her.

COLTON

He's old.

JADE

So?

COLTON

So he's thinking kids, fatherhood,
all of that... *with you.*

JADE

And here I am saying fuck that.

Jade takes three comic books out and places them on the box.

COLTON

He's got a song, right?

JADE

Huh?

COLTON

For karaoke!

JADE

I guess.

Jade takes out a comic book.

She looks at it for a moment.

COLTON

OK, Fred goes up to the DJ and
picks a song on karaoke night.

JADE

It wouldn't be something hip.

COLTON

What's your best guess?

JADE

His car is still tuned to the
factory presets.

COLTON

So he's the kind of guy who picks
Don't Stop Believin' by Journey and
it's completely unironic.

She thinks for a moment.

JADE

Tubthumping by Chumbawumba.

Colton thinks for a moment.

COLTON

It's going to be stuck in my ear
for the next month.

JADE

And it's the song he'd pick, I
guarantee it.

COLTON

You guys have a good thing and he
probably doesn't want to go through
all the bullshit. Like right now,
he knows the Konami code for you.
If this is Contra--

JADE

Please don't discuss my sex life
like it's a video game.

COLTON

He knows where your spread gun is.

JADE

Jesus Christ.

COLTON

How many people would know which
song he'd pick?

JADE

He was married before me.

COLTON

That Fred is willing to put it out
there again, for you, says a lot.

Colton spots the food and walks over to it.

JADE

I need some air.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Professional screenwriter KENT (20s) walks in.

Kent is short and thin with a pencil-thin mustache. He's one
of Colton's former college buddies.

A tailored suit clings to him.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Jade exits through the rear exit.

Kent walks in.

He and Colton catch eyes.

KENT
This is a shock.

COLTON
What are you doing here?

Kent walks up to the counter.

KENT
I'm looking for Terry, I think.

COLTON
I can grab him. Doing research or--

Kent takes his phone out and shows Colton an email.

A winning bid for "Wolverine #1" is up on it.

KENT
I was out here for a show and
thought I'd pick it up.

Colton looks under the counter.

He spots a locked cabinet.

The keys are in it.

COLTON
Terry must be losing his mind.

Colton unlocks the cabinet and takes out Wolverine #1.

A small folder of paperwork is under it.

Colton grabs that and places both on the counter.

Kent opens the folder up.

Paperwork to accept the comic book is in there.

KENT
My mother is pissed I bought this.

COLTON
Just had to have it?

Colton hands Kent a pen.

Kent goes through the paperwork.

KENT

I made my first big sale and I
always said I'd buy something big
with it.

COLTON

This is pretty big.

Kent signs it.

He hands the pen back.

Colton looks at Kent's signatures and signs.

KENT

So I get it or now--

COLTON

Did you pay on eBay?

KENT

I don't think I did.

Colton grabs a laptop and pulls up the store's eBay account.

He pulls up Kent's order.

"Collect Payment" is highlighted.

COLTON

We can do it there.

Colton presses it.

Kent's phone buzzes with an email.

Kent pulls it up.

A payment notice comes up.

He opens it up.

KENT

And on me.

Kent presses a button.

Colton looks at the laptop.

"Payment completed" comes up.

Colton hands him the comic book.

KENT (CONT'D)

I figured this would be reversed,
based on film school.

COLTON

You made it through, at least.

KENT

I went on Linked In the other day
and it's like five of us from that
screenwriting class are full-time
working professionals.

COLTON

That's... good.

KENT

Are you still writing?

COLTON

You know how it goes, right?

KENT

If you're ever in town--

COLTON

I'll say hi.

Kent exits.

Jade walks in.

JADE

Who was that?

COLTON

The Wolverine guy.

JADE

Who'd spend 10 grand on that?

COLTON

Mister Permission.

She shrugs.

JADE

I guess he gave himself permission
to buy that. Good for him, right?

COLTON

Fuck him.

Jade walks into the aisles.

She takes out several comic books.

JADE
Don't be bitter.

COLTON
I'm just surprised he was nice to me about it.

JADE
You are an acquired taste.

COLTON
I referred to him as Cunt and told him it was my accent.

Jade takes out a comic and shows it to Colton.

He gives her a thumbs down.

JADE
He must be doing well.

Jade takes out a comic and shows it to Colton.

He gives her a thumbs up.

She places it on a pile.

JADE (CONT'D)
Maybe he's the type that is very comfortable writing Morbius.

COLTON
It's his fault I got tossed out of film school.

JADE
This ought to be balanced.

Jade takes out a comic and shows it to Colton.

He gives her a thumbs down.

COLTON
There was a short film competition we all were a part of. You pair up with someone in the directing class, grab some actors, and then make something in 48 hours.

JADE

And what, his short film was better than yours?

COLTON

They won because they horse traded for it, not because they made the best film.

JADE

How do you do that?

COLTON

It was a jury of your peers, so you had to vote for the best without voting for yourself. That's a semi-reasonable way to do it, I suppose.

JADE

And what, he got everyone to vote for him?

COLTON

They all appeared on each other's blogs and podcasts to talk about their short films. It became about who could give you content and--

JADE

It's a short film contest.

COLTON

It should've been about who made the best piece, period, and nothing else should matter.

Jade takes out a comic and shows it to Colton.

He gives her a thumbs down.

JADE

You should've seen the portfolios of some of the people I know who got in.

COLTON

Didn't that piss you off?

JADE

Most success is that sort of bullshit horse-trading.

COLTON

It shouldn't be.

Jade takes out a comic and shows it to Colton.

He gives her a thumbs down.

JADE

This is a great comic.

COLTON

It's got a couple of great panels.

She places it on her pile.

JADE

I got my rejection the same week my mom got diagnosed. I wouldn't have gone, either way. Life finds a way of letting you know.

COLTON

Why'd you apply again?

JADE

Do I need a reason?

COLTON

I assumed you were OK with how things were right now.

She thinks for a long moment.

JADE

I had to know if I was good enough.

COLTON

I see your work all the time and--

JADE

And you'll always tell me I'm great no matter what.

COLTON

I'm a fan.

JADE

It's one thing for you to like it but... I just wanted to know if I was good enough for them. I hadn't even thought about going there until they gave me that offer.

COLTON

So you were going to what, turn them down or something?

JADE
Something like that.

COLTON
It took guts to put yourself out there, you know.

JADE
And look where I am because of it.

Both look around the store.

COLTON
It's just a fork in the road.

JADE
You're not the one staring at it.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

An SUV pulls up.

Lenora's son VINCE (50s) exits.

He's short, overweight, and balding.

His finger presses a button on his key fob.

The trunk opens, revealing a box full of comic books.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Vince walks in with the box.

COLTON
We're not buying anymore, man.

VINCE
I'm looking for Colton.

COLTON
You've got two guesses but it should only take you one.

Vince walks up and places the box on the counter.

VINCE
My mother said you were ruggedly handsome, like Thor.

COLTON
Chris Hemsworth is just pretty--

VINCE
With a beard.

Colton thinks for a moment.

COLTON
Lenora mentioned you a lot.

VINCE
Likewise.

They both look around.

Colton looks inside the box and then at Vince.

COLTON
I'm so sorry.

VINCE
Sunday, she went in peace.

Jade looks around.

COLTON
(to Jade)
Lenora had Neuroblastoma.

VINCE
I'm shocked she told you.

COLTON
Your mother said that she didn't
want any sympathy because she felt
that it was more like you were glad
it didn't affect you instead of
feeling bad for you.

VINCE
She was one of a kind.

COLTON
I've got cash if--

VINCE
I'm the executor of her will. She
wanted you to have them.

Colton goes through the comic books.

He spots the one he sold her last week.

VINCE (CONT'D)
It was on her calendar to come here
and talk to you.

COLTON
When's the service?

VINCE
We're having the wake tomorrow and
then the funeral on Friday.

COLTON
I'll be there.

They shake hands.

Vince leaves.

Colton goes through the box.

JADE
I'm so sorry.

COLTON
Lenora had great taste in books.

Jade walks over and looks into the box.

JADE
Those are all things you like.

COLTON
Exactly.

She walks back in the aisles.

Colton takes out a comic book and looks at it.

COLTON (CONT'D)
The last thing we talked about is
just screwing with me.

JADE
Was it something superhero-related?

COLTON
I recommended Scare Tactics to her
and then I wanted to pick her mind.

JADE
That's... a curious choice.

COLTON
I found this great indie film on
YouTube called Bandwagon. It's
about a band and they go on tour.

JADE

Sounds like your kind of movie.

COLTON

One of the songs just hit me, in a way really good music does, and I wanted Erika to hear it. I found it on YouTube, too! I play it and she just kind of went--

(mocking Erika's voice)

--that's nice.

JADE

Ouch.

COLTON

I told that to Lenora and she didn't say much about it.

JADE

It's because Lenora didn't like her and she didn't even have the misfortune to meet her.

COLTON

Misfortune?

JADE

I feel bad that it ended like it ended but you can do better.

COLTON

We've had dinner, all four of us, and not a word!

JADE

I was happy you were happy.

COLTON

Terry invited her to the Christmas party both years we were together!

JADE

He was being nice.

COLTON

Terry liked her.

JADE

Do you want to bet?

Colton gives her a thumbs up.

COLTON
(at Terry's office,
loudly)
Terry! We need you to settle
something for us!

Colton and Jade look at Terry's office.

JADE
He's not walking into this
particular minefield.

COLTON
I'll bet you every Kevin Smith copy
of Daredevil that he liked her.

JADE
And what if he doesn't?

COLTON
What's in your pile?

JADE
American Vampire Number Four.

COLTON
You already own that!

JADE
This has the variant cover by Jim
Williams, which is the only one I
don't have.

COLTON
Fine, let's make this interesting.

Colton takes his wallet out.

He looks inside.

COLTON (CONT'D)
I've got like five bucks and a gift
card to AMC in here.

JADE
How much is on it?

COLTON
Ten bucks, I think.

JADE
Why would you keep it?

COLTON
That's a matinee, easy.

JADE
That doesn't even cover the popcorn
for the movie!

COLTON
I would if the tickets weren't so
god-damn expensive.

JADE
It's why I stopped going.

COLTON
Plus every movie in the theater is
on Netflix six weeks later.

JADE
So why bother?

Silence.

COLTON
Fine, let's have Terry settle this
once and for all.

JADE
That I can agree on.

Colton walks over to the office.

He knocks on it.

COLTON
Terry, you here?

Beat.

Jade opens the door.

Colton looks in.

His jaw drops.

On instinct, he closes the door.

COLTON (CONT'D)
You don't want to see what's going
on in there.

Jade looks at the door.

COLTON (CONT'D)

Call 911.

JADE

What?

COLTON

He's dead and I remember what you told me about finding your mom.

Jade grabs her phone and calls 911.

Colton's eyes focus on the door.

It creaks open.

Colton sees Terry at his desk, dead.

Porn plays on Terry's laptop, his pants around his ankles.

EXT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY (1 HOUR LATER)

FIRST RESPONDERS wheel out Terry's corpse under a blanket.

A noticeable erection props it up.

INT. MIDDLE COAST COMICS - DAY

Colton and Jade look around.

JADE

What do we tell Lisa?

COLTON

He died of a heart attack.

JADE

And--

COLTON

Some things can be left unsaid.

Jade takes a deep breath.

JADE

We didn't get to say goodbye.

COLTON

I would've asked him to wash his hands first.

She glares at him.

COLTON (CONT'D)

What?

JADE

You worked for him for how long?

COLTON

Some of us handle death poorly.

JADE

I'm like this close to crying--

COLTON

We need to clear his browser history, for Lisa.

JADE

I don't want to look.

Colton walks into the office.

TERRY'S OFFICE

Colton sits down at Terry's desk.

He looks at the laptop.

Jade walks in.

JADE

So this is just between us.

COLTON

Everyone else can think he died at work on his final day, and let it be some sort of poetic moment about his life. Lisa deserves to not have those snickers at his funeral if they knew the truth.

JADE

Yeah.

Colton clicks on the computer several times.

His eyes open wide.

COLTON

I think he reached the end of internet porn.

JADE

Jesus.

COLTON
Terry was like a couple of hours
away from his screen going all
bluey with--
(robotic voice)
--you've reached the end of
internet porn, please go back.

Jade thinks for a long moment.

JADE
Cash your check.

COLTON
Wait, what?

JADE
When someone dies, they freeze
their assets just so their lawyer
can handle everything.

COLTON
I don't think Lisa--

JADE
It's not her, it's the bank.

COLTON
I feel a little sleazy even
thinking about that.

JADE
My mom has a five thousand dollar
annuity that still hasn't paid out.
That's what Fred thought he was
opening and well... yeah.

COLTON
Fuck.

JADE
I hate to be this girl but--

COLTON
You're right.

Colton takes his severance check out.

Jade puts her down on the desk.

Both take their phones out and quickly scan their check.

JADE
What do we do now?

Colton clears Terry's browser history.

COLTON
You'd do it for me, right?

JADE
What are you viewing that you want
your browsing history cleared after
you die?

COLTON
Nothing good but--

JADE
That was rhetorical!

Colton shrugs.

MAIN STORE

Colton and Jade walk in and look around.

JADE
So what do we do?

COLTON
Someone called Lisa, right?

JADE
The EMS people notify you when
someone dies.
(beat)
When my mom passed, we got a call
from their service. She probably is
about to get one of her own.

COLTON
So what do we do... here?
(beat)
I'll start making jokes to handle
it if she starts crying.

JADE
She's not my biggest fan.

COLTON
If I call it's going to be--

JADE
I'll handle it.

Jade walks into the back, her cell phone glued to her ear.

Colton is in the aisle, putting a handful of comic books in Lenora's box.

He looks around and then to the sky.

COLTON

I know I should be looking to the ground, based on the stuff you handled yourself too, but I'll give you that final courtesy.

Colton laughs.

A tear comes down Colton's face.

He wipes it off.

COLTON (CONT'D)

You were a great boss, the best I ever had. I should've told it to your face at least once.

(beat)

You knew, I hope you did at least.

Several more tears come down his

Colton wipes them away and looks around.

Jade walks back in.

JADE

She's going to the morgue.

COLTON

What do we do?

JADE

Take what we want, lock the place, and mail her the keys.

COLTON

I'm starting to feel guilty about taking stuff.

JADE

It's all going to auction after we leave here, if you want to buy what you want then.

Jade wanders into the aisles.

COLTON

It's one thing when he was leaving to travel the world but--

JADE

He wanted us to have them. I say we honor that final wish.

Both take comic books out.

COLTON

Is it weird that we never got that bet settled? I want to know.

JADE

I'm telling you, he wasn't a fan of Erika or Zach.

COLTON

Why Zach?

She thinks for a moment.

JADE

Oh, that was Lisa.

COLTON

Women love kids, right?

JADE

I don't.

COLTON

What about Fred?

JADE

Welcome to the latest fight.

COLTON

So he wants them and you don't?

JADE

Not now... maybe not ever.

Colton stops.

She looks at him.

Beat.

COLTON

You're better than this.

JADE

I've got the weekend to think about everything and--

COLTON
What's there to think about?

JADE
What about Fred?

COLTON
What about him?

JADE
We live together!

COLTON
This is the opportunity of a lifetime staring in your face and you're thinking about bullshit. I don't want you to turn it down for mediocrity in some corporate hell-hole and a graphic novel that never gets finished because you got busy pumping out crib midgets.

She thinks for a moment.

COLTON (CONT'D)
If he's who you think he is, he'll come back and beg for forgiveness.

JADE
And if he isn't?

COLTON
Then you get to be the biggest mistake he ever made.

Jade looks around.

COLTON (CONT'D)
Plus it'd make for a great comic book, too, and would be a lot more mainstream accessible than someone killing serial killers.

JADE
Hardly.
(thinks)
Would you take her back?

COLTON
That takes a bigger man than me.

JADE
Let's say she comes in and begs for your forgiveness.

COLTON

I'm OK being someone else's regret
for once.

Beat.

JADE

What are you going to do?

COLTON

I think I might try my hand out
west. I've got friends out there.

JADE

So this is it, huh?

COLTON

What do you want to do?

JADE

This has been a bit of a day.

COLTON

Terry always said the best way to
end things is to get wildly shit-
faced and cry.

JADE

I could be down for that.

COLTON

Where do you want to go?

She thinks for a moment.

JADE

O'Toole's has nachos and they don't
water down their drinks.

(beat)

If we can finish up in an hour, we
can just make the end of half off
mojitos too.

(beat)

I can handle Fred, at some point,
just not right now.

COLTON

Sounds like a plan.

They take comics out of the boxes.

FADE OUT.