

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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Fast Company

Carla Ching

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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FAST COMPANY was commissioned and developed by the Ensemble Studio Theatre/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Science and Technology Project and received its New York premiere on March 17, 2014.

It was workshopped and developed in the 2013 Pacific Playwrights Festival at South Coast Repertory and originally produced by South Coast Repertory on October 11, 2013.

FAST COMPANY was first produced by South Coast Repertory Theatre (Mark Masterson, Artistic Director; Paula Tomei, Managing Director) in Costa Mesa, California on October 11, 2013. The production was directed by Bart DeLorenzo with dramaturgy by Kelly Miller, scenic design by Keith Mitchell, lighting design by Tom Ontiveros, costume design by Ann Closs-Farley, original music and soundscape by John Ballinger, projection design by Jason H. Thompson, fight consultation by Ken Merckx, and magic consultation by Alfonso Aceituno. The Production Manager was Joshua Marchesi and the Production Stage Manager was Jennifer Ellen Butler. The cast was as follows:

BLUE Jackie Chung
FRANCIS Lawrence Kao
H Nelson Lee
MABLE Emily Kuroda

FAST COMPANY was originally an EST/Sloan commission and a revised version was produced by Ensemble Studio Theatre (William Carden, Artistic Director; Paul Slee, Executive Director; Graeme Gillis, Associate Artistic Director and Program Director of the EST/Sloan Project) in New York City on March 17, 2014. The production was directed by Robert Ross Parker with dramaturgy by Lindsay Firman, scenic and lighting design by Nick Francone, costume design by Suzanne Chesney, props design by Travis Bell, sound design and original music by Shane Rettig, fight choreography by Michael Chin, magic consultation by Ruy Iskandar, and science advisement from Gabriel Cwilich and Qingmin Liu. The Production Manager was Joe Lankheet and the Production Stage Manager was Rebecca McBee. The cast was as follows:

BLUE Stephanie Hsu
FRANCIS Christopher Larkin
H Moses Villarama
MABLE Mia Katigbak

CHARACTERS

An Asian American Family

BLUE, early to mid 20s – the Ivy League student

FRANCIS, mid to late 20s – the magician

H, late 20s to early 30s – the sports writer

MABLE, 55 to 60 – the con man

SETTING

New York City

Rio de Janeiro

Providence, Rhode Island

Hollywood, California

AUTHOR'S NOTES

– indicates a cut-off

... indicates a beat or trail off

/ indicates an overlap in dialogue

For Christopher

Scene One

Pig-In-A-Poke

(In an art gallery in New York, BLUE pores over glass cases containing rare comic books. H loosens his tie. She peers at the array of comics, lit like diamonds.)

BLUE. *Fantastic Four #1. The Amazing Spider-Man. The Incredible Hulk.*

(H opens the glass case with two keys. He reaches in and pulls out the Fantastic Four. Hands it to BLUE who holds it up to the light in its plastic sleeve.)

Your fabrication work is getting better.

H. Excuse me, my fabrication work has always been *awesome*.

BLUE. Frankie told me about the Ai Weiwei vase copies you made for the Mexico City job.

H. That was not my fault.

BLUE. The mark picked them up to see what her half mill was buying and the wet paint ended up all over her hands, her fur coat, her wig. Blew the whole job.

H. It was raining. Stupid humidity kept the paint from drying.

BLUE. Lucky for you, there's no rain in the forecast today. So...where is she?

H. I believe what you're looking for is over here.

(He goes over and uses the two keys around his neck to unlock a specially lit case.)

BLUE. *Action Comics #1. Superman's first appearance in the comic sphere –*

(She picks it up.)

BLUE. (*cont.*) 1.5 million feels good in my hands.

(**H** pulls out a second comic from under the counter.)

H. That one's only worth about \$8.16 plus tax. Your million dollar baby is over here.

(*He hands the second comic to BLUE. She looks at them side by side.*)

BLUE. That's fucking incredible.

H. Can you tell them apart?

BLUE. No.

H. So what was that about my fabrication skills?

(*She looks at each one and compares them.*)

BLUE. Okay. It's kind of awesome –

H. Kind of? Look at the slight fold on the cover. And the barely perceptible color bleed on the corner of the title. Just like the original.

BLUE. She's perfect.

H. Almost. Ink saturation. True paper degradation. There are some things I can't fake. It looks great till you take a magnifying glass to it. And this guy has a trained eye. So, make sure you show him the real one, get the signature of sale and the money before swapping in the copy.

BLUE. Right.

H. Now, run through it. I'll be The Mark. Remember the points to hit –

BLUE. Flattery. Flirtation. Misdirection.

(*BLUE puts the original in the display case, the copy under the counter. H transforms himself into "The Mark": a young, super wealthy, Asiaphile comic collector. Stretches his hand out in introduction.*)

H. (*as The Mark*) Ms. Wong. (*in Cantonese*) Néih hóu ma?

BLUE. (*as Ms. Wong, in a flawless Hong Kong accent*) Mr. Jamison. Your Cantonese is excellent.

H. I've traveled all throughout Asia. I love all things Asian.

BLUE. *(falling out of role)* Gross!

H. He's an Asiaphile. And rich and entitled. You have to be prepared for anything.

BLUE. *(back in role)* I'd love to hear all about your travels sometime.

H. Perhaps over drinks tonight?

BLUE. Perhaps. But first...

(BLUE takes out the original copy of the comic.)

I am proud to present *Action Comics #1*. Rated as 9.0 Condition, by the Certified Guarantee Company. You have exquisite taste.

H. Can I? Touch it?

BLUE. Of course.

(H uses a jeweler's eye piece to examine the comic carefully.)

H. Just gorgeous. Ink's good. Paper's good. And you have the certificate of authenticity?

(He uses an ultraviolet light to scan the certificate.)

BLUE. You'll notice the CGC seal and barcode right there.

H. Good. Let's consider this bad boy bought so we can move onto...other things. Where do I sign?

BLUE. Here, here and here.

(She closes the case so they have a surface to write on. Presents him with papers and a pen. While he is busy fumbling with papers, she slips out the copy and holds it in front of the original.)

[Projection: The Swap]

(Freeze for a moment on BLUE pulling the switch. Clunk! BLUE drops the original into her bag and stands holding the copy in front of H.)

H. *(out of role)* You better practice that drop.

BLUE. (*out of role*) Shut up.

(*He signs. Hands her a briefcase of money.*)

Pleasure doing business with you.

(*She hands the fake comic to H.*)

H. The pleasure is all mine.

FRANCIS. (*offstage*) So you were going to slip him the copy.
And keep the original. Classic Pig-In-A-Poke.

(*H freezes.*)

BLUE. That was the plan.

(*Lights up on FRANCIS' Laboratory of Magic in Hollywood, California. The walls are lined with books on magic. An architect's table might hold plans and notes in code. In the middle of it all is a pillar of ice, upon which leans FRANCIS.*)

FRANCIS. You were Inside Man? I heard you've been playing
The Lure.

BLUE. I've moved up.

FRANCIS. Good, because nobody respects –

BLUE. I moved up.

FRANCIS. Well, it was a good set-up. So, what went wrong?

BLUE. It went according to plan. Except when I went to
show the mark the original, it was gone.

FRANCIS. What happened to it?

BLUE. One of my guys...

(*FRANCIS looks at her: What? Spit it out.*)

One of my guys stole it.

FRANCIS. One of *your* guys stole it?

(*FRANCIS starts laughing.*)

You let someone steal from you on a job you were
running? What kind of con man are you?

BLUE. Like you've never made a mistake before.

FRANCIS. Not like this! Not a 1.5 million dollar mistake.

(BLUE gives him the look of death and paces.)

If you're running a crew, you have to know if something feels wrong.

BLUE. I'm not in a place to be lectured –

FRANCIS. Wrong with The Mark, wrong with the team. If the air's a degree too warm, you have to know –

BLUE. I know.

FRANCIS. All you have is your gut, fast hands and faster thinking. Hands and thinking, you can learn. But if you don't have the gut –

BLUE. I have the gut.

FRANCIS. Do you?

BLUE. ...

FRANCIS. Start at the beginning. Don't leave anything out.

BLUE. Okay, but if you start being all judgy and shit, I'm not talking anymore.

FRANCIS. If you didn't fuck up, I wouldn't have to be judgy.

(BLUE slaps her hand over her mouth.)

That was cute when you were six, but now it's just sad.

(BLUE shrugs.)

Okay, I won't judge.

(BLUE takes her hand off her mouth.)

BLUE. Thank you.

FRANCIS. Laugh, I will though. Laugh my ass off.

BLUE. My therapist said I have to learn how to draw lines.

FRANCIS. You're in therapy?

BLUE. I feel hurt sometimes –

FRANCIS. You feel what?

BLUE. I feel hurt when you tell me I've "shit the bed" or "fucked up royally." I need you to use constructive language with me.

FRANCIS. Constructive...*what?*

BLUE. Would it kill you to not be a dick?

FRANCIS. What's the first rule on a job?

BLUE. No feelings.

(FRANCIS gives her a "See?" look.)

But we aren't on a job. We're analyzing a job.

FRANCIS. That went wrong. On your watch.

(BLUE slaps her hand over her mouth. FRANCIS takes a deep breath.)

When I say...things that are difficult to hear, I'm just trying to help you.

(She pulls her hand off her mouth.)

BLUE. *(plaintive and earnest)* Just help me without being rude. Please.

FRANCIS. No rudeness. Okay. I can do that... The beginning. I need every detail so we can find where you...

(FRANCIS catches himself. BLUE's eyes are on him like lasers.)

So we can find where...

(He chooses his words carefully.)

Things went wrong.

(BLUE evil eyes him and goes back to the beginning, pacing.)

BLUE. Do you know who Jason Manheim is?

FRANCIS. The guy in the exploding helicopter movies?

(BLUE nods.)

I heard he's a real nut job.

BLUE. He's...complicated.

FRANCIS. I heard he collects guns. Has these former Hong Kong Triad as his security team.

BLUE. All those things are true. You add that to him having a nasty temper and he's a guy you don't want to fuck with.

FRANCIS. Tell me you didn't.

BLUE. ...

FRANCIS. Blue!

BLUE. I wouldn't have except he's also a big comic nerd. He has a really valuable collection and the crown jewel of it is *Action Comics #1*.

FRANCIS. What's that?

BLUE. The first comic Superman ever appears in. There are only ten copies in good condition worldwide and Manheim has the best one.

FRANCIS. How do you know all this?

BLUE. We might've dated. For a second.

(Before FRANCIS can protest –)

You said. No judging.

(FRANCIS just shakes his head at her.)

This weekend is the Oscars, so we knew he'd be in LA and this would be our chance to steal it. Jason has his whole comic collection on display in his office. High security frames. So, we were gonna boost the original *Action Comics #1*, sell it to The Mark, and then pull a Pig-In-A-Poke –

FRANCIS. Swapping the original for a copy and sending the buyer home with the fake.

BLUE. Then we'd return Jason's original to his office and he'd be none the wiser. In and out. Clean.

FRANCIS. So you were just borrowing it?

BLUE. Right. Just a borrow.

FRANCIS. Who was The Mark?

BLUE. A douchebag trust fund collector.

FRANCIS. Who roped him?

BLUE. Redheaded Johnny.

FRANCIS. I hate that guy. He cheats at cards.

BLUE. Who do we know who doesn't cheat at cards?

(FRANCIS gives her a look.)

The rest of us have to cheat. The rest of us aren't as good as you.

FRANCIS. Maybe it was Johnny.

BLUE. If it were, he wouldn't be in the can.

FRANCIS. True. Who else was on the team?

BLUE. Lazy Slade helped set up the store and was driving getaway.

FRANCIS. You used Lazy? Oh, Blue. Why do you think they call him that?

(BLUE puts her hand over her mouth.)

Is it Lazy?

BLUE. He got pinched by the cops too.

FRANCIS. They gonna give you up?

BLUE. No.

FRANCIS. How do you know that?

BLUE. They're just not.

FRANCIS. Why, you sleep with them?

(BLUE gives him a look.)

Blue!

BLUE. What?

FRANCIS. That doesn't buy you loyalty.

BLUE. I've promised them that their cut is waiting for them when they get out. If they keep it shut.

(FRANCIS tries to shake off how creeped out he feels.)

FRANCIS. So then who's left? Roper, Driver, Inside Man... your Fixer. Fixer must have lifted the comic *before* the mark arrived. Who's The Fixer?

BLUE. I'm down one hundred grand in set up, my crew's in the can, I need to get the original back in Manheim's office by Monday morning –

FRANCIS. Who was The Fixer? Find him, find the comic.

BLUE. I'm not in a place to hear "I told you so," I just need you to –

FRANCIS. You didn't fly 2500 miles to play Twenty Questions so –

BLUE. Frankie, it was H.

(Beat. FRANCIS' eyes go wide.)

FRANCIS. Fucking H was your Fixer? You had a score like this going on and you called H and not me?

BLUE. You said you were out. "Out" means out for most people.

FRANCIS. I am. Out. But H?

BLUE. You always said he was the best Fixer.

FRANCIS. I also told you that you can't trust him farther than you can throw him. Wait. Your whole crew is in jail, right? That isn't an accident. H needed you all out of the way. So he sicced the cops on them.

BLUE. But why didn't he send them after me?

FRANCIS. You can't rule that out. He still might. *(beat)* Can you be tied to the steal at all?

BLUE. Shit.

FRANCIS. What?

BLUE. Fingerprints. H and I went in as maintenance crew to lift it out of his office.

FRANCIS. And you didn't wipe the place down?

BLUE. I was gonna do it when we put the comic back! Oh, shit... Manheim's gonna kill me... He's gonna have his Triad guys kill me –

FRANCIS. No one's going to kill you. If you replace the original before he gets back.

BLUE. But, I don't know where it is! I need a cigarette. Cigarette?

(She goes for the pack in her hoodie pocket.)

Dude. Where's my pack?

(He makes the pack appear out of thin air.)

FRANCIS. What, these? Misdirection, B. You're getting slow.

(She takes out a cigarette. Lights it.)

BLUE. He broke code. You never turn on your own crew. Why would he do that, Frankie?

FRANCIS. Go back. Think. Were there any other clues?

(Lights shift to the gallery. The sound of a rewinding tape and H and BLUE are back looking at the comic.)

H. Look at the slight fold on the cover. And the barely perceptible color bleed –

FRANCIS. Yeah, I got all that. Anything else?

BLUE. Well, later, he said –

H. You know, you're talented. And this job could make you. No more rinky-dink jobs in B-market towns –

FRANCIS. *(offstage)* Stop. Where's he looking?

(H freezes. FRANCIS walks into the gallery.)

BLUE. Left.

FRANCIS. Looking right is generally conjuring a memory, remembering something true. Upper left quadrant means he's inventing...making shit up. He doesn't believe a word he's saying.

BLUE. That I'm talented or that this job could make me?

FRANCIS. Probably both. Think like a Roper. What else do you see?

(BLUE scans H.)

BLUE. I don't know. He's gained a little weight.

FRANCIS. What else?

BLUE. Bags under the eyes. He hasn't been sleeping.

FRANCIS. Good. Also, the weight and the sallow skin says he's eating junk.

BLUE. Which he does when he's depressed. Spaghetti-Os. Peanut butter straight from the jar. And...his nails are bitten down. Oh, shit.

FRANCIS. And when does he bite his nails?

BLUE. Shit. Shit shit shit shit shit. Goddamnit!

(Lights down on H.)

FRANCIS. Homework, B. Before every job, you get the full run down on the whole crew. How much they have in

the bank, their rep on other crews, their predilection for coke or prostitutes. Anything that makes them a liability.

BLUE. But he's our fucking brother!

FRANCIS. Especially because he's our brother! Strike that. My mom shacking up with your dad doesn't make that sack of shit my brother.

BLUE. Not even in a *Brady Bunch* way?

FRANCIS. Not even.

BLUE. So, I'm not your sister, then?

FRANCIS. You're different.

BLUE. Am I?

(FRANCIS considers her carefully.)

FRANCIS. Yes, and because you are, I'm telling you: Never. Trust. Anyone.

BLUE. Even you?

FRANCIS. Even me.

(beat)

If you ran the check, you'd know he's in to Jimmy for quite a bit of money.

BLUE. He swore to me he was clean! I specifically asked him –

FRANCIS. A grifter is always grifting. And a gambler's always gambling. He came to me a month ago. Asked for a loan.

BLUE. You should've told me.

FRANCIS. You should've asked.

(BLUE's crushed. She should have known better.)

BLUE. You give him any money?

FRANCIS. If I did, would we be here?

(BLUE paces.)

So, if he's into Jimmy for that much and has no cash flow –

BLUE. He's gonna try to liquidate and make tracks.

FRANCIS. 10 to 1, yes.

BLUE. Help me get it back? Before H disappears.

FRANCIS. I can't.

BLUE. Why?

FRANCIS. I have a thing.

BLUE. A thing?

FRANCIS. The day after tomorrow.

BLUE. Move it.

FRANCIS. Can't. It's a live TV appearance.

BLUE. Card tricks actually paying the bills?

FRANCIS. Card *effects*. And no, it's not cards.

BLUE. Then, what? Walking through fire? Locking yourself in a refrigerator? *(beat)* Oh, my god, are you locking yourself in a refrigerator?

FRANCIS. It's a pillar made of ice.

BLUE. What?

(He waves grandly towards the ice pillar, goes up and sits inside.)

FRANCIS. It's part of a *Dateline* special on Magic in relation to perception and cognition. I'm gonna sit in a pillar of ice for three days –

BLUE. Close-up magic with cards and coins, fine. But, the carnival sideshow endurance bullshit –

FRANCIS. Whatever, you don't understand. You've never tried to understand why I –

BLUE. Why you walked away from something you were truly gifted at. No, I don't. Some of us have to work at it. Work hard. And you just...piss it away.

FRANCIS. I don't like the life. Or the company.

(BLUE takes this as a slap to the face. She starts gathering her things.)

BLUE. I shouldn't have come here. It's my fuck up. My responsibility. I'll fix it.

FRANCIS. Good.

(As BLUE makes for the door –)

BLUE. Maybe I'll hire The Dentist to find H.

(And she's gone. FRANCIS calls after her.)

FRANCIS. You'll what?

(She reappears.)

BLUE. You heard of him? Young guy who extracts the truth out of liars. Recovers missing things from thieves. Extremely effective. He's a gun for hire. I'll hire him.

FRANCIS. B. You heard what he does to people?

BLUE. I've heard what he does. I'll hire The Dentist to go to work on H until he gives it up.

FRANCIS. That guy is an animal. You do not want to go down that road –

BLUE. You're my first and last ask, Frankie. If you say no, I have to do things the hard way. Help me.

FRANCIS. I don't like what this work turns me into.

BLUE. I know. I wouldn't ask if I had any other way.

FRANCIS. (beat) I'll help you on one condition.

BLUE. Anything.

FRANCIS. You get out of all this.

BLUE. (crushed) Anything except that.

FRANCIS. This is the *last* con.

BLUE. Frankie, I'm good at this. It's the biggest job anybody's pulled in the last three years.

FRANCIS. And you screwed it up.

BLUE. If we get it back –

FRANCIS. You can retire a legend.

BLUE. Frankie!

FRANCIS. Find another angle. Find something else you're good at. I've seen people sell themselves off piece by piece in this business. Before they even realize they've sold everything.

BLUE. I'm not like you.

FRANCIS. You want my help? This is the last job.

BLUE. What if we don't get it?

FRANCIS. Then, I won't stand in your way. But if we get it, this is the last one. Say it.

(BLUE tries to think of any counter, but she's out of moves.)

BLUE. Jesus. If we get it back...

FRANCIS. This is the last one.

BLUE. *(mumbling)* This is...the last one.

FRANCIS. Mean it.

BLUE. I mean it!

FRANCIS. Good. *(beat)* So, I have an idea.

(BLUE leans in conspiratorially.)

BLUE. Yes?

FRANCIS. You're not gonna like it –

BLUE. What?

FRANCIS. *(beat)* We're gonna have to call Mable.

BLUE. No. N-O. Big no.

FRANCIS. I can rope him.

BLUE. I can be The Fixer. Do the set-up.

FRANCIS. But for the rest of it, to plan it? To find the right angle to rope H? We're going to need Mable.

BLUE. She'll undermine me.

FRANCIS. It's your crew. Run it. *(beat)* Look, this is your mess. If you have a better idea of how to clean it up... *(looking at his watch)* Thirty-nine hours and counting...

(BLUE hems and haws.)

BLUE. Fine. Call Mable.

(FRANCIS takes out his phone. Dials.)

FRANCIS. It's Francis. Yeah, sorry, I've been on the road... Are you in Vegas? No...no, I'm fine, but I'm here with Blue. She's run into a bit of a scrape.

(The sound of screaming on the other end of the line.)

Stop.

(FRANCIS pulls the phone away from his ear. Lets her go on for a second. Then –)

Are you finished? I'm not doing this on the phone.

(She rails on.)

Mom!

(She finally goes silent.)

How soon can you get here?

(BLUE buries her head in her hands.)

(Lights.)

Scene Two

Inside Man

(Lights up on FRANCIS' Magic Lab. BLUE has her hand over her mouth. MABLE is drinking red wine. FRANCIS is holding a lit cigarette, watching it burn.)

MABLE. *(to BLUE)* This is why. This is why I didn't teach you. Some have the head for it. Some have the seventh sense. If you don't have either of those, you just end up waist deep in shit.

(MABLE notices the hand over BLUE's mouth.)

What are you doing?

FRANCIS. You're being critical.

BLUE. *(forcing her hand down)* My therapist told me I don't have to deal with negativity and criticism, that it's bad for me –

MABLE. Your who?

BLUE. I have to go to therapy because of you!

MABLE. You want me to censor myself?

BLUE. Look, Mable –

MABLE. I didn't come all this way to help you to be told how to act.

FRANCIS. Mable –

(MABLE downs the rest of the glass.)

MABLE. Thank you for the wine. I'll see you at Christmas.

(MABLE picks up her purse and wrap and starts to leave.)

FRANCIS. *(to BLUE)* Do you want him or don't you?

(BLUE vacillates. Nearly at the door, MABLE fumbles with her purse.)

MABLE. Who stole my cigarettes?

(FRANCIS produces the cigarettes out of thin air.)

FRANCIS. You should quit, M. They're bad for you.

(He tosses the pack to her. She continues leaving.)

BLUE. It's a big take, M.

MABLE. *(without turning around)* How much?

BLUE. A mill and a half easy.

MABLE. You had a score this size going on and you didn't call me?

BLUE. Oh, now you want to work with me?

MABLE. What's with the tone? Are you using a tone with me?

BLUE. What is that, huh? You let the boys run on your crew, but you always left me at home. Because I didn't pass your stupid test –

MABLE. The test isn't stupid. The test works –

BLUE. Who leaves a kid on Rockaway Beach? No money, no map. Just "find your way home."

MABLE. Two days. Two days it took you. H did it in three hours. Frankie did it in two –

BLUE. But I got there –

MABLE. Missing both of your mittens and one of your shoes. It was sort of pathetic –

BLUE. I was ten!

MABLE. And here you are again. Fucking up. So are you going to tell me that I was wrong? *(beat)* I was trying to save you from yourself.

BLUE. I learned. On my own. Worked my way up. In a second-tier town. The hard way.

MABLE. Not working any of the respectable roles, but as The Lure? Do you know what kinds of girls play The Lure?

BLUE. I've worked my way up.

MABLE. Who works Boston, anyway? And Providence?

BLUE. I'm in college. It's my cover.

MABLE. *(surprised)* You're in college? What are you studying?

BLUE. Economics.

MABLE. Good. Go be an economist and leave this work to the professionals.

BLUE. I'm not going anywhere. This is *my* job.

MABLE. Maybe. But you're staring down the barrel of the job of the decade and who do you have to invite to dig you out of the hole?

BLUE. Frankie's idea. *Not* mine –

FRANCIS. I said we needed one more –

MABLE. You don't just need one more. You need me. Who else would play Inside Man? (*to BLUE*) You?

BLUE. I am not taking any more shit or any more lip from you, Mable. You are walking into my score, this is my crew.

FRANCIS. B –

(BLUE holds up her hand to quiet FRANCIS and stays laser focused on MABLE.)

BLUE. So either behave or take a walk.

MABLE. I could probably do this job in my sleep.

BLUE. Maybe. But I have the intel. And I am cutting you in on it. And I know for a fact that even *you* have never been in on a job this big. So, which is it? You gonna behave, or you gonna walk?

MABLE. Can we dispense with the theatrics and –

BLUE. Mable! Behave or walk?

MABLE. Jesus Christ. It's your crew. I'm just here to play.

(MABLE sits back down and FRANCIS pours her another glass of wine.)

Well, you've done your homework, right? He's in to Jimmy for over three hundred grand.

FRANCIS. Three? I thought it was two.

MABLE. If he had just kept away from gambling –

FRANCIS. You had him running jobs in Atlantic City when he was thirteen.

BLUE. Counting cards in Blackjack when he was seventeen. What did you think was gonna happen?

MABLE. You two turned out fine.

(FRANCIS and BLUE exchange looks.)

FRANCIS. Barely.

MABLE. I told him, only play twenty-one where you can count cards or Hold 'Em where you play the man, not the house. But he had to do sports betting where you have absolutely no control over the outcome.

BLUE. We have to move fast because we think he's going to liquidate and run. And we only have Francis for twenty-four hours.

MABLE. Why?

FRANCIS. I have a thing.

MABLE. You running another job?

BLUE. No. A thing *on TV*.

(FRANCIS gives BLUE the look of death for joyfully blowing up his spot.)

MABLE. Oh. Still stunting, are we?

FRANCIS. They're not stunts! If you watch this time, then you'll get –

MABLE. Why should I watch you hold your breath in a kiddie pool and call it magic?

FRANCIS. Why should I come home at Christmas and pretend that I like your dried-out turkey? Because it's what you do.

MABLE. So sensitive. You were always so sensitive. That's a liability –

FRANCIS. You're unbelievable –

BLUE. Okay, everybody put your gloves back on. We're working. You put your feelings on hold at work. Right?

(FRANCIS slumps down dejectedly into a chair.)

FRANCIS. Right. I am pressing pause on my feelings in the name of business.

BLUE. We need your help taking this asshole down.

MABLE. This is your brother.

BLUE. He's not. He's dead to me.

MABLE. You mean that?

BLUE. I do. Business is business and he broke code. Dead to me.

(MABLE looks at BLUE with surprise and concern.)

MABLE. *(beat)* When did you become so cutthroat?

BLUE. When I started running a crew.

FRANCIS. So, what con are we running? We're talking about conning a con artist. It's not going to be easy.

BLUE. I was thinking about this last night. The cons are going the way of the dinosaur.

FRANCIS. What?

MABLE. We use the cons because they always work.

BLUE. No, people have started to get wise. They've been warned about identity theft and Ponzi Schemes. Have you ever Wikipedia'd "Confidence Trick" or "Long Con?" They're all there – The Rag, The Spanish Prisoner, The Pig-In-A-Poke, The Badger Game, The Glim Dropper. All of them.

MABLE. It is harder out there now than it has been. It's true. You really have to look for the dumb ones.

BLUE. So, the question is, how do we get the upper hand? H already knows the cons. He'll see those coming from a mile away. So we need an edge.

MABLE. Like what?

BLUE. I've been doing some reading for school that I think can help.

FRANCIS. For school?

BLUE. I've been reading Game Theory.

MABLE. What's Game Theory?

BLUE. It's a branch of Applied Mathematics –

FRANCIS. I hate math.

BLUE. If life is a game, it shows you how to predict what people are likely to do and act accordingly to win. Like

right now. I predicted Francis would balk because he hates math.

FRANCIS. I do. I hate math.

BLUE. So, Francis thinks if he's grouchy enough –

FRANCIS. Stop wasting my time. Can we just pick a con?

BLUE. I'll take him on like I usually do and this will devolve into an insult contest –

FRANCIS. Thinking isn't your strong point, why don't you leave the planning to the professionals?

BLUE. You're not a professional anymore, you left to become a cheesy magician.

FRANCIS. At least I didn't manage to screw up the con of the decade and let 1.5 mill just walk away.

MABLE. Children!

BLUE. (*grabbing ahold of herself*) But instead of calling him an asshole –

FRANCIS. Oh, I'm the asshole?

BLUE. I'll politely ask you to just let me show you.

MABLE. Well, hurry up. Twenty-four hours and counting.

FRANCIS. Mable! You said we run the cons because the cons work –

MABLE. But she's right. We need an edge.

FRANCIS. How are you possibly entertaining –

MABLE. I just want to hear what her plan is. Do you mind?

(FRANCIS *throws up his arms and walks away.*)

FRANCIS. (*to BLUE*) You didn't get me.

BLUE. No, but I got Mable. Which was the plan all along.

FRANCIS. What?

BLUE. Watch and learn: we'll start with a classic con set up and then give it a game theory twist. First, Frankie will rope him.

MABLE. Straight rope?

BLUE. Straight rope.

(Lights shift. FRANCIS's laboratory melts away. FRANCIS takes out three different cell phones, chooses one and dials.)

BLUE. Tell him, "The goose flies but the coyote runs."

FRANCIS. Really?

BLUE. That's the code he's using on the market right now.

MABLE. What kind of code is that?

(Special up on H, answering the phone.)

H. Yeah.

FRANCIS. *(in an Irish accent)* The goose flies but the coyote runs.

(H freezes. Back to MABLE and BLUE.)

MABLE. You used that accent on the Vegas Job.

FRANCIS. *(with an Indian accent)* The goose flies but the coyote runs.

MABLE. Kansas City Job.

FRANCIS. *(in a Texan drawl)* The goose flies but the coyote –

MABLE. The Boston Diamond Grab.

FRANCIS. Shit. *(in a Japanese accent)* The goose flies but the coyote –

BLUE. Why are your Asian accents terrible?

FRANCIS. *(trying to do a better Japanese accent)* The goose flies but the coyote –

MABLE. Haven't you learned any new ones?

FRANCIS. No, I've been retired. B – you have a voice modulator on this thing?

BLUE. Yeah. Here.

(FRANCIS plugs his phone into BLUE's computer. He messes with the pitch of his voice until he sounds like Ving Rhames –)

FRANCIS. The goose flies but the coyote runs.

H. Every goose I've ever met was a coward.

FRANCIS. That's why you should never trust a goose.

MABLE. Less imposing.

FRANCIS. (*fiddling with the dial until he sounds like Steve Buscemi*) That's why you never trust a goose.

H. How can I help you?

FRANCIS. I have a client who is looking for a rare book. A book that I understand you are in possession of.

H. I already have a buyer.

FRANCIS. He will pay 1.3 million dollars.

H. He is aware that is way below market value.

FRANCIS. He knows. But he also knows it's a stolen commodity. You must be having trouble getting rid of it.

H. The other buyer is a longtime client who is willing to pay market value. 1.5 million. And the fact that it's stolen doesn't bother him.

(**FRANCIS** covers the mouthpiece.)

FRANCIS. What's the move?

BLUE. Offer more.

(**MABLE** gets a better idea.)

MABLE. No, wait. Offer less.

(*back to the phone call*)

FRANCIS. 1.2 million.

H. You're offering me less?

FRANCIS. I don't believe you have another buyer. And my offer was more than generous. But, I'm feeling less generous by the second. 1.1 million. I could keep going lower. One million dollars –

H. Stop. Stop. One million.

(**H** sighs. **FRANCIS** gives **MABLE** a thumbs up. **BLUE** is silently pissed that she didn't come up with it.)

FRANCIS. Wonderful. Let me see when he might be able to meet you.

H. I'm afraid I'm on a bit of a tight timeline.

FRANCIS. Then, how about swinging by my office in Hollywood tomorrow? About 9 pm?

BLUE. You want me to fabricate an office overnight?

(FRANCIS covers the phone.)

FRANCIS. That a problem for you?

BLUE. Asshole... I'll get it done.

(back to the phone call)

FRANCIS. My secretary *(nods over to BLUE who gives him the finger)* will be in touch with the address.

MABLE. Tell him there will be an authenticator present –

FRANCIS. He'll have an authenticator present, so please bring the book.

H. An authenticator?

(H is bummed. This isn't exactly what he'd planned for. He'd hoped to sell a copy.)

MABLE. It's the only way we can insure that he brings the real thing and not a copy.

FRANCIS. There are so many copies on the market.

BLUE. Nice.

MABLE. You're welcome.

(BLUE shoots MABLE a dirty look.)

FRANCIS. That won't be a problem, will it?

H. No problem at all.

FRANCIS. Perfect. If it all checks out, we'll have ourselves a deal.

H. One million dollars.

FRANCIS. Yes. One million.

H. One more thing. I only work in cash.

FRANCIS. Is there any other way?

(H hangs up. Lights shift.)

MABLE. So let's say that H has been successfully roped.

FRANCIS. And I get H to that meet. Then what? We'd normally pick a cover. Banker. Billionaire. Art Dealer.

Go in as someone other than us and liberate the mark of the goods. But, he knows all of us.

[Projection: The Con]

BLUE. And we're going to use the fact that *we know him* and *he knows us*. I'll go in...as me.

MABLE. As yourself? We don't do that.

FRANCIS. We always use a cover.

BLUE. It has to be me.

MABLE. Why?

BLUE. A: He'll never see that coming. And B: Only I can leverage what I'm going to tell him. This is the Game Theory part. We run a Psychological Game.

MABLE. A what?

BLUE. We play on the fact that he cares what we think about him. That he wants us to think he's a good guy.

MABLE. How?

(Special up on H holding the briefcase with the comic. BLUE walks into the scene with H.)

[Projection: The Psychological Game]

BLUE. *(to MABLE and FRANCIS)* I'll play his guilt. The fact that we're family. *(to H)* You knowingly screwed me over. You're my brother.

H. I know, B. I wish I could take it all back.

BLUE. Then, make it right.

H. How?

BLUE. Give it back, and I forgive you.

H. Really? You'll clear the slate?

BLUE. Yes. All you have to do is give me the comic back.

H. Of course. Here.

(H lifts the briefcase towards BLUE.)

FRANCIS. You think he's gonna just hand it over? Just like that?

(Lights down on H.)

BLUE. If I do my job right.

FRANCIS. It's risky. We've never run anything like this before. Look, I could do a Pig-In-A-Poke in my sleep. Even get out of a jam if any number of things goes wrong. But a Psychological Game? You don't know the variables, the exit strategies –

BLUE. Do you have a better idea?

FRANCIS. Stick with a classic con: Rent a safe deposit box. Tell him to drop the comic in it, and if it checks out, he'll receive a key to a storage locker where the money is. None of us ever has to show our faces.

MABLE. It's a modified Pig-In-A-Poke.

BLUE. But then the storage locker has no suitcase full of money when he gets there? You really think he's that stupid?

FRANCIS. I think he's desperate. A desperate man becomes very stupid.

MABLE. Blue's crew, her call.

FRANCIS. No. All our necks are out. I want a vote.

BLUE. Fine, but I get two votes because I'm running this.

FRANCIS. Do not!

MABLE. Seems fair. She's running it, so she has twice the risk.

BLUE. They're coming after *me* if we fail. And I have a hundred grand sunk into this thing.

FRANCIS. (*grumbling*) Fine.

BLUE. Two votes for Game Theory. If one of you comes over to my side, I win. Francis?

FRANCIS. Cons.

BLUE. Mable?

MABLE. Hmm...

FRANCIS. Mable. We do the cons because the cons *always* work.

MABLE. Con.

BLUE. Really?

FRANCIS. 2-2. We're tied.

BLUE. Fuck.

MABLE. It's a stalemate.

BLUE. Look, there's a classic tie-breaker that's been used to settle disputes when things were at an impasse. It also happens to be Game Theory.

MABLE. Flip a coin?

BLUE. This is better than that. Because instead of being totally random, we have choice.

(BLUE raises her fist. They stare at it.)

MABLE. What the fuck is that?

(The rock slowly becomes a sheet of paper. The paper slowly becomes a pair of scissors. The scissors start snipping.)

FRANCIS. *(incensed)* You want to decide how to get H using Rock-Paper-Scissors?

BLUE. You afraid you'll lose?

FRANCIS. Excuse me. Who beat you at Super Mario Brothers? Chess. Checkers. Monopoly. Poker –

BLUE. Yeah, but –

FRANCIS. Candy Land. Chutes and Ladders. Connect Four. And, lest you forget... Hungry Hungry Hippos.

BLUE. So, play me. What are you afraid of?

(She puts out her fist in readiness.)

FRANCIS. I'm afraid of nothing.

(He puts out his fist. MABLE follows suit.)

MABLE. I love this game.

BLUE. Ready? On "go." One-Two-Three-Go!

(And they do. But MABLE fucks up and shoots a beat after "Go!")

Mable!

FRANCIS. What's so hard to understand about "One-Two-Three-Go?"

MABLE. Sorry.

FRANCIS. You did that so we'd show our hands and you could calibrate how you'd shoot in the next round to beat us.

MABLE. Did not.

FRANCIS. Did too! You don't think I know your little moves after all these –

MABLE. I'm on your team.

FRANCIS. I don't care. You know what? Since you can't play fair, you're disqualified –

MABLE. Oh, come on!

FRANCIS. For your cheating ways.

MABLE. But I want to play!

FRANCIS. *(to MABLE)* No playing for cheaters! *(to BLUE)* You and me. Ready?

BLUE. Ready.

FRANCIS. *(to BLUE)* On "Go."

(They ready their fists.)

One-Two-Three-Go!

(FRANCIS throws rock. BLUE throws paper. She celebrates.)

Fuck!

BLUE. Psychological Game it is. Set up the meet, Frankie. I'm gonna go meet H and get us this comic back.

FRANCIS. Two out of three?

BLUE. No!

(Lights.)

Scene Three
Pigeons and Lambs

(Lights up on a darkened office in Hollywood. A doorbell rings. The sound of the door being buzzed open and H enters.)

H. I'm sorry I'm late. I got your message about moving the time up, but I –

(MABLE turns on the lights.)

MABLE. Hello, Henry.

H. Mable.

MABLE. Surprise.

H. *(beat)* Have you lost weight?

MABLE. Are you losing more hair?

H. Nice to see you too.

MABLE. We missed you at Christmas.

H. Yeah, sorry about that. I had a thing going.

MABLE. You could've called –

H. In South Africa.

MABLE. Were you in jail?

H. Might've been.

MABLE. I suppose you get a pass, then.

(H looks around. For cameras. For a sign of anyone else.)

H. So, I gather you've heard.

MABLE. That you broke code, yes. With your sister?

H. I needed big money. Jimmy was threatening to break my knees –

MABLE. Oh, they're always threatening to break your knees –

H. Yeah, and then they do it. You saw what happened to Little Stevie –

MABLE. You never, ever break code. Cross your own crew. All you have is your reputation.

H. This was supposed to be the last one. I was gonna pay off Jimmy and take what's left and move to Costa Rica –

MABLE. Costa Rica?

H. Live in a tree house –

MABLE. A tree house?

H. Be in the middle of nowhere. Away from TVs and the internet and casinos and tracks. Be by myself. Totally alone. It's the only way I can think to stop. And stay stopped.

MABLE. You're finally getting out of gambling?

H. Everything, Mable. I'm getting out of everything.

MABLE. The cons too?

H. Cons too. I was trying to finally go straight.

MABLE. (*incredulous*) Why?

H. I lose more than I win. That's no way to live.

MABLE. So defeatist. That's not the man I raised. I can't believe you want out. You're such a talented Fixer.

(H *side-eyes* MABLE.)

H. You always nitpicked every detail of every piece of every job I ever worked on.

MABLE. I never told you how good you were because I didn't want it to go to your head. It's your eye for detail. Your capacity to learn anything –

H. A little about everything. You always said, "A jack of all trades, master of none."

MABLE. I just didn't want you to get overconfident. But, Henry – you're good. The short list of capable Fixers is gonna get a lot shorter if you leave the game.

H. Really?

(H *is genuinely moved by* MABLE's *confirmation of his talents.*)

MABLE. But when you get rattled, you get sloppy. Your Achilles heel. Like just now.

H. What?

MABLE. What is Rule #1 about planning the long con?

H. “Research the Mark.”

MABLE. And?

H. When you think you’ve done enough research, research more. Find every weakness.

MABLE. And in this case, the mark was...

H. We researched Jason Manheim thoroughly –

MABLE. No, dummy. Not on that con. On the other one. Where the mark was your sister.

H. No, wait, they’re only the mark if you plan to con them. I didn’t plan to take it. Not from the beginning. Jimmy just started coming down on me. Making threats. I was in a corner.

MABLE. And at that point, you forgot to execute Rule #2.

H. “Secure the exit.”

MABLE. If you’d written a better exit, you wouldn’t have gotten caught. Found an accomplice and blamed it on them. Told her someone stole it from you and sent her on a wild goose chase to find it. So many things. It’s like you wanted to get caught.

H. Maybe I did. Because then I’d really be done for good. And I am now, right? Done. A code breaker? No one’s gonna work with me now. *(beat)* I’m finally free.

MABLE. Henry, Blue knows it’s you. She’s called Francis –

H. Francis knows?

MABLE. And they’re coming for you.

H. What did they say to you?

MABLE. Blue said that what hurt her is that you were a crew and you did this to her. Even more than your being her brother. She trusted you.

H. She said that?

MABLE. She did.

(H turns this over in his mind.)

H. She did not. She’s never said that earnest a thing in her whole fucking life.

MABLE. Her words, Henry, not mine. She said if you do this, you're dead to her.

H. (*spooked*) Dead like, she's not talking to me anymore? Or literally dead, like she's gonna put a hit on me?

MABLE. She's thinking about hiring The Dentist.

(*H goes pale.*)

H. Jesus Christ.

MABLE. That'd make Jimmy look like a trip to the circus.

H. She wouldn't. Would she? Why would Blue send that animal after me? I'm her brother.

(*H paces.*)

MABLE. She says that Jason Manheim's people are onto her. Found her fingerprints on the frame.

H. Goddamnit! I told her to wipe down that frame.

MABLE. If she can't come up with the comic, she's gonna have to run. (*beat*) You really screwed her, Henry.

H. I didn't mean to. I just...didn't know what else to do. Do they know that you're here?

MABLE. (*carefully*) No. I just thought you should know that they're coming for you.

H. If I don't sell it and pay Jimmy...

MABLE. Well, it sounds like you're out of options. So take it and go.

(*H looks at MABLE, surprised. She's gonna let him walk.*)

H. Why does everything I touch turn to shit, M?

MABLE. Some of us never clear the big money, Henry. We can chase it all our lives, but we're not destined for... Costa Rica sounds nice. A tree house sounds nice.

(*MABLE starts for the door.*)

H. Mable.

MABLE. Yes?

H. Wait.

(**MABLE** turns.)

Here.

(**H** takes the briefcase and slides it over to the other side of the table. **MABLE** opens it. Takes out a comic book in a plastic case.)

MABLE. *Action Comics #1.* This little thing. Causing so much trouble.

H. Give it back to Blue for me?

MABLE. Are you sure?

H. She shouldn't have to run. This is my mess. I'll run.

MABLE. Why don't you give it back to her? You tell her.

H. I'm gonna have to make tracks to dodge Jimmy. I'm gonna have to move fast.

MABLE. Still, you can –

H. Mom. (*beat*) Just, tell her...tell her I'll make it up to her one day.

MABLE. You're sure?

(**H** nods. **MABLE** takes the comic and slides it in her purse.)

You have Disappear Money?

H. (*sheepishly*) No.

MABLE. Jesus Christ. You always carry Disappear Money. Just in case.

H. Things have been tight lately.

(*She reaches inside her bra and pulls out a wad of cash.*)

MABLE. There's about five grand there. That should get you started.

H. (*startled by her gesture*) I can't.

MABLE. Don't be so fucking proud. Take it.

(**H** pockets the money and grabs **MABLE** in an unexpected hug.)

H. Thanks, M. I'll get it back to you.

MABLE. Nevermind that.

(She breaks the hug, grabs him by the elbows looks him dead in the eye.)

Keep your head up. And watch your back. Go.

(H withdraws quickly and moves towards the door.)

If you see your father out there...

H. Yeah?

MABLE. Tell him to write sometime. *(beat)* And he still owes me ten grand.

(H smiles furtively and exits out the front door.

MABLE checks her watch, grabs her purse, and bolts out the front door as well.)

(A minute goes by. BLUE arrives through the back door. Picks up her phone and dials.)

BLUE. Yeah, I'm here. No, not yet, you know he's always late. I'll meet you and Mable at the van when it's done.

(She takes her place in the chair and waits. And waits.)

(Lights.)

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