

THE KING OF PAIN

By

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ON DARK

We hear music playing in the background. Soft. Contemporary. Contemplative music. Then --

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

FADE IN:

INT. MANSION - FRONT DOOR - EVENING

The music is turned down. Footsteps shuffle towards the door. A figure emerges and stands by the door, his back to us, hesitant to open it

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

The figure sighs and slightly opens the door enough to see his visitor. His back blocks our view of the opening.

JOSHUA (O.C.)

Can I come in?

The figure stands motionless, probably staring at his visitor.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

We talked a few minutes ago on the phone? I'm Joshua. Can I come in?

The figure nods and opens the door ever more slightly to allow the visitor to enter. He shuts the door quickly.

JOSHUA is in his early forties. Hair slicked back, neatly trimmed beard, dressed to impress.

He admires the architecture of the mansion as he looks around the ornately furnished house.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

Very impressive, Benjamin. Or is it Ben? May I call you Ben?

BEN looks much older than Joshua. He sports a scruffy beard with tousled hair to boot. A working class man who has reaped the rewards of his hard work.

BEN

Ben is fine.

Ben reaches into his back pocket and fishes out a pack of smokes.

(CONTINUED)

JOSHUA

Nice decor, Ben. Did you do it yourself?

Ben lights his smoke and takes a drag.

BEN

My wife did. She's into all this designer crap. Personally, I could do without it.

JOSHUA

(nodding in agreement)

You're telling me. My wife bought these hideous drapes from some high scale store. Apparently they're supposed to help accentuate the aura of the living room. Pardon me, the lounge room. How is it they always seem to see something we don't?

BEN

(amused)

Fuck if I know.

Joshua continues admiring the mansion, though his attention is focused on a particular hallway with two closed doors. Ben notices this.

BEN (CONT'D)

(pointing to the living room)

Why don't you have a seat, man?

JOSHUA

Sure.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Ben gestures to Joshua to sit. He then sits in a recliner opposite him.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)

So, what's going on with you, Ben?
How're you doing?

BEN

(shrugging)

I've been better.

He takes another drag of his cigarette.

(CONTINUED)

JOSHUA
Anything you want to talk about?

Ben stares at the burning tobacco on his cigarette, lost in oblivion.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Come on, Ben, talk to me.

Ben suddenly gets up and walks to a record player, the source of the music, which is playing at low volume. Ben slowly turns it up, staring at the rotating vinyl.

BEN
You ever heard of this song?

JOSHUA
What?

Ben glances back at Joshua.

BEN
This song. Have you ever heard of it? Joshua contemplates.

JOSHUA
Sounds very familiar.
(beat, then curiosity)
Sting?

Ben smiles as he fishes for the album cover.

BEN
Yep. Back in the day.

Joshua listens intently at the lyrics. He clicks his fingers in thought.

JOSHUA
What was the name of that band again?
(beat, bobbing his head to the rhythm)
The Police, right?

BEN
Bingo!
(revealing the cover)
Synchronicity. Came out in '83.

JOSHUA
(smiling)
Ah, yes. Year of the dawn of the moonwalk.

(CONTINUED)

BEN
(laughing)
Yes, that too.

He makes his way back to the couch. A short silence as they listen to the music.

BEN (CONT'D)
I get mesmerized every time I listen to this. The lyrics are simply fucking amazing.

JOSHUA
I think I was still in middle school when this came out.

Ben takes another drag, lost in the music.

BEN
There's just so much brilliance in this. Very dark. Jaded. Ethereal.

Ben mouths along with the lyrics. Joshua watches him intently.

JOSHUA
Do you mind if I bum a smoke?

Ben pauses and stares at Joshua for a moment. He smiles.

BEN
Sure thing.

He whips out his pack of cigarettes and holds them out for Joshua who takes one out. He leans in further and fires up his lighter. Joshua lights his cigarette and puffs away. They both lean back into their seats.

BEN (CONT'D)
So, what did you think of the song when you first heard it?

JOSHUA
Hmm. To be honest, I was probably still too young to appreciate the underlying metaphors of the song. Too focused on the chords and the drums.

BEN
Started a band, did you?

JOSHUA

The Blazing Saddlers. Contemporary
punk rock for the masses.

They both chuckle at it's absurdity.

BEN

How'd it turn out?

JOSHUA

(reflective)

Like every hundred amateur bands
started then -- down in flames
within months. Never meant to be.
They both take a drag.

BEN

So, now that you're an adult,
what's your take on it?

Joshua contemplates, then, a twinkle in his eye.

JOSHUA

You tell me.

Ben sighs.

BEN

I think it's about a tortured soul
living in a black and white world
of light versus dark, right versus
wrong, empathy versus indifference.

(beat)

I think, here's a man once shrouded
in a veil of excess and abject
complacency, who has finally woken
up to the harsh realities of this
unforgiving world. Seeing darkness
under the blinding sun.

(beat)

Not everything is as it seems.

JOSHUA

A ballad on internal struggle.

Ben nods as he takes another drag.

BEN

Pain manifesting wholly over bliss.
You understand this, yes?

JOSHUA

Trying to.

Ben leans in.

BEN

How's your Greek Mythology?

JOSHUA

Sub-par, at best.

Ben gets up and heads to the record player. He rewinds the disc, then lets it play. He turns up the volume full blast.

*"There's a king on his throne with his eyes torn out,
There's a blind man looking for a shadow of doubt,
There's a rich man sleeping on a golden bed,
There's a skeleton choking on a crust of bread..."*

He turns it back down.

BEN

(RE: Lyrics)

The man with the golden touch.

JOSHUA

King Midas.

Ben makes his way back to the couch.

BEN

He had everything -- wealth, fame, adoration. But it wasn't enough. He craved for something much more. The power to turn whatever he touched to gold. A wish granted to him by the Gods.

He takes a final drag before crushing the remainder into an ashtray.

BEN (CONT'D)

He thought it would bring him great joy. To himself and those around him. But he was clueless as to the consequences of such desire. How foolishly sentimental.

Joshua pieces together Ben's words. He takes another glance around the grandiose mansion before setting his eyes back on Ben.

(CONTINUED)

JOSHUA

He can't be blamed for wanting such a desire. It only makes *him* that much more human.

BEN

Desire has, and always will be the root of all suffering.

Joshua leans in.

JOSHUA

Ben, this isn't simply a black and white world. There's always room for gray areas. A sliver of optimism between darkness and the light.

Ben scoffs.

BEN

There's no such thing as a gray area. Only a fool allows himself to live in such a paradise.

Joshua once again looks in the direction of the hallway. Emphasis on the closed doors.

JOSHUA

And what of the fate of his loved ones?

(on Ben's silence)

Midas had loved ones, did he not?

Ben lights another cigarette, avoiding Joshua's look.

BEN

That he did.

JOSHUA

Ones he cherished dearly? Meant the world to him?

BEN

I suppose.

JOSHUA

(curious)

What was their fate?

Ben takes another drag, and stares into oblivion again.

(CONTINUED)

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Ben? What of their fate?

Ben stares deadpan at Joshua.

BEN
Gone! Lost to the depths as a
consequence of his desire.

An awkward silence ensues as they stare at each other, music still playing softly in the background.

Joshua puts out his cigarette in the ashtray and slowly gets up. Ben watches him intently, then gets up as well.

Joshua boldly walks towards the hallway, Ben flanking him from a distance.

Joshua comes upon the first door and opens it.

IN THE GUEST BEDROOM

JADEN (9) and EMMA (4) sit crouched in one corner of the bedroom. Emma is sobbing in her brother's protective hug.

Joshua looks at Ben disapprovingly. Ben just takes another drag.

Joshua then crouches down to a comfortable level.

JOSHUA
(to Jaden)
Are you the one who called us?

Jaden nods.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
You did very good. What's your
name?

JADEN
(whimpering voice)
Jaden.

JOSHUA
It's okay, Jaden. There's no need
to be scared. Who's the lovely
young girl you've got there?

JADEN
My little sister, Emma.

(CONTINUED)

JOSHUA
(to Emma)
Hi Emma.

Emma continues sobbing in Jaden's arms.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
It's going to be alright, Emma,
okay? You have a very brave brother
watching over you, do you know
that?

The sobbing Emma nods her head, face still hidden.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
That's good. Jaden will make sure
nothing bad happens to you, okay?

EMMA
I want Mommy.

JADEN
Where's Mom?

JOSHUA
She's here as well, I just have to
talk to her first, okay?
(to Emma)
Okay, Emma? Is that alright?

EMMA
I want Mommy. Where's Mommy?

JOSHUA
(to Jaden)
Just keep watching over her,
alright? You're doing a terrific
job. This will be over soon.

Jaden nods as he struggles to fight back tears of his own.

Joshua gets up and closes the door. He shoots Ben another disapproving look. Still the same deadpan look on Ben's face.

Joshua turns to the other door. He breathes in and exhales before opening the door to --

THE EXERCISE ROOM

Clothes are strewn on the floor next to workout machines, dumbbells and yoga mats. Joshua's eyes follow their trail only to see --

(CONTINUED)

SHARON (42) AND DAMIEN (33)

Both naked. Balancing themselves on stability workout balls. Around their necks, nooses -- Sharon's noose is connected to Damien's noose, supported by a workout beam screwed into the ceiling. One false move from either one, doom for both.

In Damien's mouth, Sharon's panties. In Sharon's mouth, Damien's underwear. Both are sweating profusely. Their hands are zip-tied to their backs. Sharon is in tears. Joshua notices bruises on Damien's face, chest, and abdomen. He's been worked over pretty good.

Joshua looks back at Ben, who now has a revolver in his hand, probably concealed in his back. Joshua raises his hands. This scares both Damien and Sharon as they both start fidgeting.

BEN

(amused)

Careful! You're liable to lose your heads.

(to Joshua)

Put your hands down. You're not my enemy today.

Joshua slowly and cautiously puts his hands down. Ben enters the exercise room.

BEN (CONT'D)

Allow me to introduce you.

(pats Sharon on the butt)

My dear wife, Sharon. Twelve years we've been together. Two wonderful kids who you've met, Jaden and Emma, my two treasures.

(pats Damien on the butt)

And this fine specimen is my wife's yoga/pilates/fitness instructor, Damien.

(to Sharon and Damien)

Guys, say hello to Lieutenant Joshua Lacroix of the L.A.P.D. A hostage negotiator to be exact. Isn't that right, Lieutenant?

Joshua ignores Ben.

JOSHUA

(to Sharon)

It's going to be alright, ma'am. Your kids are doing just fine in the other room, okay?

(CONTINUED)

Sharon tears up in gratitude, cries muffled by the underwear.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
(to Damien)
Sir, just hang in there, alright?

Ben starts laughing hysterically.

BEN
Yeah, Damien. Hang in there. You keep doing that.

Ben ushers Joshua out of the room.

BEN (CONT'D)
I worked hard to get to where I am today. All for her sake. For our kids sake. For my family's sake. And this is what the Hand of Midas brings me? Discord in my own home? A whore for a wife?

JOSHUA
Ben, listen to me. Whatever quarrel you have is with them. Not the kids. And even so, your approach to this is not only dangerous, but it's a felony. This has branched much further than a domestic dispute. This is intent to harm. If anything happens to them, that's an automatic upgrade to murder charges. Do you understand this?

Ben takes another drag.

BEN
I'm well aware of my actions, Lieutenant.

JOSHUA
Then what is it that you're doing here? Huh? Are you seriously contemplating taking their lives? You're not capable of that, Ben. What's your end game here?

Ben stares deadpan at Joshua.

BEN
I think it's time you left.

JOSHUA
Ben, listen to me.

Ben cocks his revolver.

BEN
(insistent)
Time to leave, Lieutenant.

Joshua sighs.

JOSHUA
Let me have the kids.
(beat)
Ben? The kids. Let me have the
kids. Your quarrel is with your
wife, not your kids.

Ben contemplates.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Ben, you know full well Midas got
his redemption, did he not? His
loved ones returned to normal. He
got a second chance to start anew
with his family. I'm trying to give
you that redemption. Throw us an
olive branch here, Ben. Let me have
the kids.

Ben stares intently at Joshua as he takes another drag. He
nods reluctantly.

Joshua opens the bedroom door.

JOSHUA (CONT'D)
Jaden, come on. Let's go, Emma.

Jaden helps Emma up as they walk toward Joshua.

JADEN
Dad?

Ben doesn't look him in the eye.

BEN
(softly)
Go with him, alright?

EMMA
Where's Mommy?

BEN
(softly)
Mommy's busy right now, sweetie. Go
with your brother.

Joshua leads them towards the front door as Ben stays rooted to his spot.

BEN (CONT'D)
Lieutenant?

Joshua looks back at Ben.

BEN (CONT'D)
(RE: music)
Did you know he wrote this song
after he separated from his wife?

JOSHUA
No.

BEN
(smiling)
Food for thought.

Ben takes another drag. Joshua stares at him for a moment before leading the kids out the door.

Ben walks over to the door and locks it. He then walks back into the living room, towards the player, and turns the volume up. He sits back down on the couch and stares into oblivion again, cigarette in hand, soaking in the lyrics.

FADE OUT.