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## one / rewind

"HEY, SUPERSTAR. WAKE UP," says my wife Sarah.

And I mumble something about just ten more minutes.

The lights snap on.

I curse, squint.

"This is an intervention," says the woman standing at the foot of my bed. But it's not my wife. The woman's skin is shockingly white against the black nylon ski mask.

Suddenly I'm wide-awake, jumping up, saying, "Who the hell are you? What are you doing in my hom—Ow!"

She tells me it's only on stun, and if I don't sit down, I'll be lying down. Ten thousand volts tired.

This new reality I've awoken to is slippery. My mind is racing, sliding every which way at once, but I know enough to sit back down on the bed. My entire left side is pins and needles, and I look behind me, reaching back to comfort Sarah.

The bed is empty.

My wife is gone.

I can still feel her warmth on the sheets, and a staccato pulse thump-thump-thumps in my neck. When I look up to ask where is my wife, I notice that besides the petite woman with cold blue eyes and bare lips, there are three men in my bedroom.

My throat is dry, sticking shut with each breath.  
Two of the men are videotaping me.  
They're all wearing black jeans, black tank tops, black  
ski masks, and my mind screams robbery.  
It screams home invasion.  
But the woman repeats that this is an intervention.  
“Where is my wife?” I manage to ask, my head tingling,  
my body going numb.  
Her bare lips smile through the mouth hole in her mask  
and her soft, calm voice tells me I surprise her with how honorable  
I am. But she doesn't say a damn thing about Sarah.  
I'm trying really hard not to lose it, but I am.  
I'm freaking out, hyperventilating.  
“Look,” I tell her, “if it's money you want—”  
She tells me step one is that I need to recognize there is  
a problem.  
I have no idea what that means, and I suddenly realize  
that these people, whoever they are, are insane.  
Her smile is real.  
She is getting off on this.  
My eyes tell my brain that she has a gun, that they all do,  
but this doesn't really surprise me. What *does* is that the guns  
aren't shiny and beautiful and sexy like on television: rather  
they're old and dirty and well used.  
I'm having trouble breathing now.  
She starts tossing Polaroids at me, flick-flick-flick, one  
after another. They keep flying at me, bouncing off me, and  
shocked, bloody faces stare up at me from the goose down com-  
forter.  
These are people I know.  
Bob, my agent.  
Karen, my publicist.  
Oh-God-Oh-God-Oh-God, I mumble.

She says step five is that there is no higher power.

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And she's really starting to piss me off with her calm, Buddhist, Zen Master, Self-Help, Twelve-Step bullshit. I say to her that they've undoubtedly tripped the condo's alarm system and that the police will be here any minute.

Her lips stop smiling.

She tells me that step five applies to them as well.

What can I say to lunacy like this?

I try to calm down, to breathe, to steady my shaking, twitching body, and I ask her, "What do you want from us?"

"Step one," she says, "is to recognize that there is a problem."

I say I do not understand, that she is not making any sense, and that the only problem I have is that there are four wackos with guns and video cameras standing in my bedroom and my wife is missing.

The woman tosses me a big black book, gold letters announcing the title as *The Big Black Book of Recovery: Twelve Steps to Recovery from Addiction to Western Civilization*, and tells me in a calm voice that my wife isn't missing.

"She is ODing on heroin in your bathtub."

"What? But Sarah doesn't do hero—"

"She does now," says the smallest of the three men.

Then he laughs too loud, crazed.

The woman tells me I'm going to have to memorize *The Big Black Book of Recovery*, because there will be pop quizzes along the way.

What do I do?

What do I say?

"Please . . . I'll give you whatever you want. . . . Don't do this. . . . Do you know who I am?"

She laughs, throaty, good-natured, completely inappropriate, then says, "Yes, we know who you are. You are the 124<sup>th</sup>

greatest on-screen presence of your generation.”

I can’t keep myself from shouting that I won a Golden Sphere for my realistic portrayal of a dyslexic single parent battling colon cancer.

All four of them laugh at me, not with me.

She tells me it was not all that realistic, but that I showed good potential and have been chosen to undertake the most incredible acting job of all time.

I’m barely listening, staring down at the Polaroids still scattered around me. The bruises. The blood. The look of surprise in their glossy, vacant eyes.

I ask if they’re dead.

And she says yes. She says my fingerprints are all over the place. On blunt objects, kitchen countertops, broken mirrors, bodies, genitals. She says there’s an FBI profile just for me.

The numbness, the shock. I am so tired, drained.

She says that I wet the bed until I was twelve.

“No. No, I didn’t.”

“Well, now you did.”

“Who the hell are you people? Why are you doing this to me?”

The woman tells me that her name is Deirdre, and that she’ll be directing me on the sets. Then she points to the three men standing silently in my bedroom.

The tall one is Derrick.

The medium one is John.

The small one is Joe.

She tells me they’ll be in charge of camera, sound, makeup, wardrobe, editing. She says they are also security. *Very* hands-on.

I want to scream.

I want to shout and argue, but my mind is blank.

Grasping in its darkness, I say, “I . . . I . . . I’m all booked

up. I just signed on for a new reality-TV series that starts shooting later this week.”

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But Deirdre mock laughs, as if she appreciates my effort, and tells me that eating a rat for a million dollars is not reality, that *this* is reality, the role of a lifetime, and if I can pull this off, then all of my backwards desires will be fulfilled—if I still want them to be, that is.

For a split second, I see all of my desires coming true. I look at Derrick and John pointing their cameras at me, and I know that once the tapes are shown on the evening news, my career will be launched like a satellite.

Superstar.

I say thanks, but no thanks.

And someone says, “Wrong answer.” It’s the little guy, Joe, I think.

Deirdre tells him something in sign language.

Little Joe rebuts.

Their silent conversation is long and vigorous, and then Joe walks into my master bathroom, shuts the door behind him.

My brain is coming to life again, as I try desperately to figure out what is happening here, how to get out of this, but I’m coming up with nothing.

The sound of water splashing.

A sharp thud.

Something I cannot discern.

And my heart is skipping like a record stuck on a drum solo.

I open my mouth to say something, anything, that I love my wife, that whatever it is they want, I’ll do it—if they’ll just *please* not hurt her.

But my voice is a faint squeak of air, and then I’m puking up warm acidic bile all over the colorful snapshots of death that litter my bed.

I am shame.

Impotent.

This is *real* terror.

Deirdre just watches me, studying me, so calm, with wide blue eyes and a playful smile peeking through the mask, with the stun gun pointed leisurely toward the thick cream carpet my wife picked out for us two years ago.

My mind begins to scream at me, telling me to do something, to rush her, to fight.

I feel my muscles tense, my weight begin to shift.

The bathroom door opens to my left.

Out staggers Little Joe, with my wife Sarah wrapped in a rug and slung over his shoulder. Her hair, darker than the usual ash blonde from the water it still holds, drags on the floor behind him, and he raises his other hand, pointing.

The loudest sound explodes, filling the room.

The picture window of New York's nighttime skyline shatters into ice-like spider webs.

And I cannot hear my own screaming, just a high-pitched ringing. My throat is burning as I watch the silent movie of Little Joe throwing my wife off of the 50<sup>th</sup> floor of our building.

Now I'm up.

Up and running.

Heading for the window, for Sarah, for death.

But electricity snaps, pops, enters my body, seizing it, as every muscle in my body locks up, then turns to mush, and I'm falling, praying that momentum will carry me out into the cool night air and put an end to this madness.

I can see I'm not going to make it.

As the darkness washes me away, I hope that by some miracle I will never wake again.