

FADE IN:

INT. WATER MAINS ACCESS TUNNEL -- DAY

A DRIP from the tunnel's arched stone ceiling SIZZLES on the lens of a halogen work lamp and boils away.

IN THE CONE OF LIGHT FROM THE LAMP

FIVE WATER WORKS EMPLOYEES ease a replacement length of PIPE into place with a block and tackle. One of them hammers at it with a SLEDGE, aligning the new pipe with the old.

MARK HERON

late 40s, threads bolts into the flanges joining the new and old pipes, then spins down the nuts by hand. There's an edge to Heron, but it's tinged with quiet hunger for approval.

The JOB FOREMAN, a little younger than Heron, helps with the nuts. Heron checks his wristwatch but continues working.

FOREMAN

Hot date?

Heron looks like anything but a candidate for a hot date.

HERON

I had to skip my break. But I'd still like to get my ticket.

FOREMAN

Oh yeah. I hear the jackpot's over twenty million.

(beat. Spinning nuts)

Sure, go on. We can finish up here.

Heron drops his wrench and starts down the tunnel.

OWENS

Hey Heron. You going to share any of that twenty million?

HERON

Sure I will, Owens.

OTHER WORKERS

"Hey what about me?"

(then all at once)

"Yeah, my ex wife is counting on that money." "Hey, I'm way nicer to you than Owens." "I's'll put away your tools for you, Mr. Heron, sir."

OWENS

Don't forget your friends!

HERON

(still walking)

Who?

The workers LAUGH. Hard to tell whether they're laughing at Heron's little joke or just laughing at him.

They keep working as Heron heads

DOWN THE ACCESS TUNNEL

and into the dark beyond the work lights. He climbs a ladder leading to an open manhole on

A BUSY CITY STREET

He emerges from the manhole, squinting against the afternoon sunlight. Parked in front of the manhole is a CITY WATERWORKS VAN. A FLASHING ARROW guides traffic around it.

Heron wends his way through heavy traffic to A CONVENIENCE STORE on the corner. He goes

INSIDE THE 7-11

Second in line for the register is JEFF ALDIS (early 30s) a man of conscience in the country of the blind eye.

Jeff stands behind

A DERELICT

who is first in line. He's a scarecrow in flared pants, face burnished by a life outdoors. The derelict sets down a shopping bag bulging with soda cans, then dumps A MOUNTAIN OF CHANGE onto the counter. He begins counting it out.

Heron joins the line behind Jeff while glancing nervously at A PIXEL BOARD above the register. A traveling display reads *2 MINUTES TO DRAW DEADLINE*. But the 2 changes to a 1 before our eyes.

Heron addresses THE CLERK, who looks as if he's stood there every day of his 50 years.

HERON

I want to buy a ticket before that draw closes.

CLERK

I'll get to you in a minute, sir.

MAN BEHIND HERON
Not at this rate, you won't.

Heron shoots the man a dark look.

CLERK
(to the derelict)
What is it you plan to buy?

The derelict looks around, confused, before turning back to the clerk.

DERELICT
I want the lottery. The Lightning
Lottery.

CLERK
Well you don't have enough here for
that. Even with the cans.

The derelict stares at the two piles, recombines them, and starts counting all over again.

HERON
(quietly)
Fuck.

Jeff sets his purchase, a BIG GULP, onto the counter and hands the clerk a ten.

JEFF
Just give him a ticket.

But when the clerk turns to the ticket dispenser, the derelict scrapes the change off the counter into his coat pocket and drags his bag of empties out the door.

The clerk hands Jeff THE LOTTERY TICKET and rings up the rest of his purchase. Jeff heads for the door, forgetting his drink.

HERON
Lightning lottery. Compupick.

The clerk moves to the dispenser, but the pixel board begins flashing "DRAW DEADLINE . . . DRAW DEADLINE . . ." and the dispenser locks.

The clerk gives Heron a helpless look.

EXT. PARKING LOT OF 7-11 -- DAY

Jeff catches up to the derelict, who balances the bag of empties on top of a shopping cart brimming with a bedroll and assorted junk.

JEFF

You forgot your ticket.

He holds it out to him. The derelict stops and is just about to take it when he leans forward and sniffs it, then recoils.

DERELICT

That one's bad.

The derelict pushes his cart away.

JEFF

Okay. . .

Jeff turns and is startled to see

HERON

standing stock still, holding Jeff's Big Gulp.

HERON

You forgot your drink.

Eyes still fixed on Jeff, he takes a long pull on the straw. . . and then walks away with it.

Jeff looks down at the ticket, opens his mouth to speak, but something tells him to leave it alone. He pockets the ticket.

INT. CPR CLASS FAVORING JEFF AND LOUISE -- NIGHT

Jeff lies on the floor of an ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL CLASSROOM where a course in CPR is underway. LOUISE TELFORD (30s), kneels next to him.

Louise is a crisis center counselor, but there's a vein of resentment in all that empathy--the price for giving too much of herself.

THE INSTRUCTOR (40s) paces among her paired students. Her grim delivery is belied by a curious smirk, as if she were keeping the best instructions to herself.

INSTRUCTOR'S VOICE

. . . now find the carotid artery, beneath the left ear--victims, you're unconscious so no helping--and feel for the fifteen-second pulse. If you don't have a watch there's a good chance your victim does. . .

She feels behind his left ear, inhales deeply.

LOUISE

Mmmm. What is that delightful scent you're wearing? Mackerél no. 5?

JEFF

Sorry. I was wearing a very old wet suit today and I didn't get a chance to shower.

LOUISE

So you're like a researcher there? At the aquarium?

JEFF

I was.

Still feeling for his pulse.

JEFF

They lost their funding for the position. Then one of our technicians went on leave and so. . . I took the job.

(beat)

It's just temporary.

(beat)

Until I'm fully unemployed.

LOUISE

Ooh. A man on his way down.

JEFF

Maybe I can avail myself of your services.

LOUISE

Let's hope not.

JEFF

Didn't you say you were some kind of counselor?

LOUISE

Yeah. At a crisis center.

JEFF

Well, give me another week or two.

LOUISE

Sshh. I can't find it if you're talking.

(beat)

There are days, I swear, if I could reach through the phone, I'd throttle

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)
 some of them myself. "I know he gave
 me a concussion--twice--but he's
 just so sweet when he's not, you
 know, breaking any of my bones."

Unconsciously, her grip on his throat tightens.

JEFF
 Easy champ. Maybe try going to your
 happy place.
 (beat)
 Have you ever been to--

LOUISE
 You want us to be here all night?

Yes. Definitely. But before Jeff can answer:

LOUISE
 There it is. I was starting to wonder
 if you had one.

They hold a look, counting the beats. The instructor stands
 next to them.

INSTRUCTOR
 And how are you two doing?

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Jeff unlocks the door to an AMC Pacer, a wisely forgotten
 experiment in automotive design. Headlights flare in the
 darkness around the lot and ENGINES START.

JEFF looks up at the HONKING of a small car's horn. He sees
 Louise drive out of the lot, waving to him. He watches her
 go, then gets into the car.

EXT. STREET FAVORING THE PACER -- NIGHT

Jeff's car drives through a quiet commercial strip in a
 suburban neighborhood.

INSIDE THE CAR

Jeff keeps looks down at a CLICKING SOUND.

THE ODOMETER

has finally reached 99999.9 miles, but it won't click over
 to 00000.0. The stubborn figure just TWITCHES in place.

NEWSCASTER'S (O.S.)

. . .UNESCO officials are predicting widespread famine in Northern Africa this summer unless a massive relief effort is mounted immediately.

(beat)

In local news, Lightning Lottery officials are still waiting for the winner to step forward and claim twenty seven million dollars owed to the buyer of a ticket purchased at a convenience store somewhere in the Fairview Slopes neighborhood. . .

JEFF

reaches into the glove compartment, fishes out the LOTTERY TICKET he bought for the derelict the day before.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE -- NIGHT

The Pacer pulls into the parking lot of a Chinese grocery where the STORE OWNER, an old Asian woman, ferries potted flowers from a bench into the store, preparing to close. Jeff goes

INSIDE THE STORE

He approaches a SCANNER bearing the Lightning logo and waves the ticket underneath it. Laser light scribbles across the ticket's bar code. The machine BLEATS a mirthless electronic rendition of *We're in the Money*. A message scrolls across

THE PIXEL DISPLAY

You're a winner! \$27,000,000

JEFF

stares at the display, incredulous. The store owner peers over his shoulder.

EXT. THE PACER -- NIGHT

Jeff's car creeps down a busy road at about 20 m.p.h., hazard lights flashing. Drivers pull around him, HORNS BLARING.

INSIDE THE CAR

Jeff clutches the steering wheel, his eyes darting between the mirrors and the road ahead.

Jeff whistles *We're in the Money* under the HONKING. He flicks on his turn flasher, then rolls down the window and makes a hand signal as well. No sense taking any chances now.

INT. JEFF'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

BLACKNESS, then a light on a bedside table clicked on.

Jeff sits up and reaches for one of several NEWSPAPERS spread over the comforter. He takes the ticket from a drawer in the bedside table and compares it to the newspaper results for the hundredth time.

He puts a hand over his mouth, as if trying to dam the joy building within him. He begins to bounce up and down on the bed. With each bounce, he goes higher,

HIS HEAD

comes to within an inch of the ceiling.

INT. WAITING AREA OF LIGHTNING LOTTERY OFFICES -- DAY

CLOSE ON the cover of a copy of VANITY FAIR. Someone is flipping through the magazine, which has been stamped "*DO NOT REMOVE FROM THE OFFICES OF LIGHTNING LOTTERY.*"

The magazine is lowered, revealing

JEFF

wearing A BANDAID on his forehead. He sits on a sofa, a highball glass on the coffee table in front of him. He turns another trembling page.

An AD for ROLEX grasps at him from the slick pages of the magazine. Jeff checks the CASIO on his wrist.

RHONDA, Prize Payout Clerk, comes into the room, which is furnished much like a REC ROOM with a bar, and approaches Jeff.

RHONDA

We're ready for you, Mr. Aldis.

INT. PRESS ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Jeff and the PRESIDENT of the Lightning Lottery corporation stand at a podium bearing the corporate emblem, A THUNDERBOLT. A FEW FLASHES go off as the president hands Jeff his check, pumps his hand. Jeff looks dazed.

EXT. STREET FORECLOSED NEIGHBORHOOD -- NIGHT

Blind houses line the street, their windows dark or boarded, lawns high and wild. Every house has a FOR SALE sign in front of it.

A PLASTIC BAG, tumbleweed of the petroleum age, scrapes down the pavement.

There is a PANEL VAN parked in the driveway of only ONE HOUSE, where a SOLD sticker has been slapped over the Realtor's sign.

INT. LIVING ROOM HERON'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The place is barely furnished, but what furniture is there looks good. Heron sits on an overstuffed couch watching an old CRT TV set.

ON THE SCREEN

CUT FROM Jeff accepting his giant check to A WALKING CAMERA following him from the doors of the lottery office to the parking lot, where he gets into his car. A reporter points a microphone at him through the driver's open window.

REPORTER (On TV)
 Interesting ride. Any thoughts of replacing it with something more stylish now that you're a millionaire?

JEFF (On TV)
 More stylish? This is an AMC Pacer. What could be more stylish than a classic like this?

REPORTER (On TV)
 A Ferrari?

HERON

approaches the TV and crouches before it.

JEFF (On TV)
 Yeah, now that you mention it.

Heron embraces him with a hand on either side of the TV set.

HERON
 That was my ticket, fucker.