

## Royal Flush

FADE IN:

EXT. SANTA BARBARA - DAY

on a beautiful Saturday morning. The sky is very clear and bright blue. It's going to be a hot day, but the temperature is still pleasant.

The atmosphere of this medium-sized California coastal town is very peaceful, quiet, laid-back. A feeling of the 1960s still lingers in the air. The people are mellow. They don't care much for their big city neighbor, Los Angeles.

CAMERA PULLS IN on JESSE'S CAR, moving through the traffic.

It is a second-hand yellow Toyota, darting between the other cars like a firefly. It stands out among the large American cars that lumber along the tree-lined streets.

CLOSE-UP on JESSE

who is an attractive, athletic blonde woman in her late twenties or early thirties. She conveys spunk, and a sense of humor. She is wearing a pastel-colored outfit that looks stylish, but was probably purchased at Wal-Mart. She is the kind of woman who, once she makes an emotional commitment, will stick by it. She is intelligent, decisive, and her head is set squarely on her shoulders.

FAVOR JESSE'S CAR again as it approaches a small, outdoor shopping center. In a corner, squeezed between an Italian deli and a dry cleaning store, we SEE a small shop that looks like it has known better days.

CAMERA PULLS IN on the store. A hand-painted sign in the window identifies it as the "ROYAL FLUSH COMICS" shop.

EXT. ROYAL FLUSH COMICS - DAY

Jesse parks the car, gets out and walks towards the store.

INT. ROYAL FLUSH COMICS - DAY

The inside of the shop is filled with racks and racks of plastic-wrapped comic books, rows of shelves carrying cardboard boxes filled with comics filed in no apparent order, etc.

The air has a dusty quality to it. A few superhero posters adorn the walls, adding some color to the surroundings, but unsuccessfully hiding the places where the plaster has fallen.

SEVERAL KIDS in the b.g. are going through the racks, picking out the latest stuff and swapping superhero gossip.

CLIFF stands behind a glass display counter which is filled with rare comics and luxury reprint editions.

He is a very portly man, with a warm complexion. He is dressed in jeans, and wears a funny rabbit T-shirt that says "Captain Carrot Lives!" Because of his large size, Cliff relies heavily on his sense of humor to charm others. But, he is no buffoon. Behind his easy-going expression, his

mind sees all the angles of a situation and can quickly calculate its potential for profit or loss. Cliff is very loyal to his friends, and will do anything to help them—up to a point.

He smiles as he adds up a customer's tab.

CLIFF

There. That'll be \$320.

(he laughs)

No, I seem to have made a mistake. It's only \$10.55.

THE CUSTOMER is obviously familiar with Cliff's favorite joke. He pulls his wallet out to pay.

CLIFF

Have you seen the latest "Wonder" books?

We only got a few this week. I put one aside for you.

Cliff pulls a brightly-colored book from under the counter and hands it over to the Customer.

CLIFF

Beautiful stuff. Great story.

The Customer starts leafing through the pages.

ELLIOT suddenly appears from behind a row of boxes. He is a tall, lanky man in his mid-thirties, with dark, curly hair. In spite of his unshaven and rather unkempt appearance, he radiates charm. He is a very attractive, almost rakish, man. Like Cliff, he is dressed in jeans and a T-shirt.

He is a child of the 1960s. He skates through life, without having taken on the usual adult responsibilities. He has never had to hold down a nine to five job. Like his partner, Cliff, Elliot eats, breathes and sleeps comics. He is, however, more generous. He is the type of person that would let a customer get by without paying if he couldn't afford to.

ELLIOT

(excited)

Hey, Cliff, you'll never guess what I just found!

Cliff leaves his customer and walks from behind the counter.

We SEE that Elliot is standing a few feet away from a desk, previously hidden by the shelves. The top of the desk is covered with 3x5 index cards, a few books and a huge stack of comic books.

Elliot shoves a comic book in front of Cliff.

ELLIOT

Guess what. Will Rensie was really the guy that drew all the "Protector" stories during the War!

CLIFF

(genuinely interested)

Wow! That's why all the girls looked so gorgeous.

ELLIOT

Yeah... That's what made me suspicious in the first place. Rensie was always real secretive about his work. He never signed any of his stuff. It makes his art awfully hard to track down!

(a beat)

He came in on "The Protector" when Sullivan was drafted. He started to ink his stuff and then...

Jesse suddenly enters the shop, interrupting Elliot's explanations.

JESSE

Hi, honey! Hi, Cliff!

(to Cliff)

I've come to collect your partner for lunch.

Elliot looks at his watch, dumbstruck.

ELLIOT

My God! It's already 12:30! It can't be...

He looks at Jesse apologetically.

ELLIOT (cont'd)

You sure you can't have lunch alone, honey?

I've been trying to finish the chapter of my book on the '40s, and I still have all the '50s comics to index...

He points at the stack of comics.

JESSE

(upset)

This morning, you said that we'd have lunch together. We never see each other anymore.

You're always at the shop...

ELLIOT

OK, OK! No problem. It's fine... I can finish it later.

He walks back to his desk, puts the stack of comics away on a shelf and grabs his jacket.

ELLIOT

(to Cliff)

If you need me, I'll be home all afternoon.

They leave the shop together.

Cliff then turns towards the Customer who, by now, has almost read the entire book.

CLIFF

You like it?

CUSTOMER

Well, the art isn't very good...

Cliff raises an eyebrow.

CUSTOMER

(quickly)

...but I'll take it.

Cliff beams.

CLIFF

That'll be another \$7.95.

EXT. SANTA BARBARA - DAY

Jesse's car enters a modest looking, residential area. Jesse is at the wheel.

INT. JESSE'S CAR - DAY

The atmosphere in the car is a bit tense. Jesse obviously wants to say something, but hesitates. Finally, she starts.

JESSE

Bennett asked me to do some overtime this afternoon.

ELLIOT

(annoyed)

What! But you just said that we didn't see each other...

JESSE

(interrupting)

I know! I know! But we need the money.

Do you think it's easy for me? You know how much you brought home from the shop last week? You know how much groceries cost?

And I only buy the necessities!

ELLIOT

Business has been kind of slow lately.

JESSE

Business is *always* slow in that shop. Besides, anything you do make, you spend on more comics.

Elliot becomes agitated.

ELLIOT

(emotionally)  
But I love comics!

JESSE  
Well, *I* love nice clothes, but you don't see me buying them all the time.

ELLIOT  
It's not the same thing. Comics don't cost as much as clothes. Anyway, Cliff gives me a break.

A pause.

Jesse takes this opportunity to discuss something that has been bothering her for some time.

JESSE  
Ah! While we're on the subject of Cliff, if you didn't invite him to dinner so often, things would be easier.

ELLIOT  
Honey, he's my best friend! Besides, he likes you so much.

JESSE  
If you ask me, the only thing he likes is that fancy car of his.

Elliot rushes to defend his friend.

ELLIOT  
That's unfair! He doesn't have anyone to spend his money on.

JESSE  
Well, I'd like some fancy things too! Look at this dump we live in. I want a house of our own!

ELLIOT  
(feeling guilty)  
I know, sweetheart. You know how much houses cost. We don't have the money for the downpayment. Just wait a little longer until I get my book published.

JESSE  
I'll believe that when I see it. You've been working at it for five years now.

ELLIOT  
(hurt)  
I'm not goofing off! It takes a lot of work. This book is going to be the most comprehensive history of comics ever written. I want us both to be proud of it when it's done.

Jesse immediately regrets her jibe. She doesn't want to make Elliot feel that he is not pulling his own weight.