

Double Blind Test

A treatment for a full-length film

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Double Blind Test – A Treatment

Act I

The time is the present; the place is New York City – JFK airport to be exact. Tracy Shepard, a stylish woman in her 40s paces anxiously among other would-be airline passengers waiting on standby to board an early morning flight to LA. As a professional mediator on contract to two companies doing business in the fast-growing nanotechnology industry, she is due this morning to lead a meeting to resolve a dispute between the feuding high-tech firms: NanoNano and PicoTech. Consistently organized and reliably punctual, Tracy has arrived late to the airport, and her tardiness has put her seat in jeopardy. After cajoling the gate agent unsuccessfully to pull a dead-heading flight attendant off the plane, Tracy is ready to throw a fit when a ruffled, slightly overweight middle-aged man intercedes and makes a chivalrous offer. He is Fischer Cuttbate, a passenger on the flight to LA. “I don’t mean to butt in, but I couldn’t help overhearing your predicament, ma’am. I’d be happy to trade my seat with you for one on the next flight. I’m in no hurry.” Impressed by Fischer’s uncommon generosity, and a bit smug that she triumphed over the gate agent in the end, Tracy swaps tickets with Fischer and boards the plane. Tracy waves to Fischer as she enters the jetway in time to make her important meeting as her good-Samaritan saunters off to an airport bar.

In LA, Tracy enters a conference room and is met by Ron from NanoNano, a large man suffering from acromegaly – a growth disorder that distorts his hands and face. Tracy mentions she almost missed the flight, and Ron offhandedly replies that he’s aware of it. She’s about to inquire as to how he knows, but she’s interrupted. Tracy starts the meeting by introducing herself to the heads of the two companies: Matt Blankenshein of NanoNano, and Sumner Fogle of PicoTech. Matt is a confident, young entrepreneur accustomed to wealth and privilege, a man who sees no boundaries. Fogle is the opposite: a portly businessman in his sixties who cautiously, patiently worked his way to the top from the rank and file in staid companies of the past. Each man is accompanied by several executives, all men. The tensions in the conference room are high. Responding to a testosterone-fueled outburst contesting her credibility, Tracy makes it clear to all that this morning she’s the one in charge. She declares, “I could ask all of you to lay your cocks on the table and I’ll choose the winner with a ruler... or you can shut up for a nanosecond and let me outline a plan that no one will like but no one will completely despise either.” Unaccustomed to being berated – by a woman no less – the men shut up and take their seats like chastened schoolboys.

Tracy presents a compelling case to NanoNano and PicoTech on the financial and strategic virtues of accepting her proposals. Both companies compete in the fast-growing nanotechnology industry, and while the two battle each other they are vulnerable to competitive encroachment by upstarts. Not yet ready to capitulate, the executives argue and sling insults across the table, as well as at Tracy, but her methodical, even-keeled temperament prevails. In the end, Matt and Fogle agree on Tracy's resolution; deep down both CEOs recognize NanoNano came out ahead. After Fogle and his team somberly leave the conference room, Matt congratulates Tracy on her tenacity.

"Impressive, Ms. Shepard. You've got quite a pair for a lady." Tracy is unfazed by the cocky remark, for she's encountered Matt's type many times before in her mediation dealings: the brash young, full-a-cum, hot-shot son of privilege. Not that she finds Matt unattractive – quite the contrary. She remains cool. "I'm glad you're glad, Mr. Blankenshein." When Matt inquires about Tracy's next mediation gig, she replies playfully, "As I recall, it's a dispute over oil leases in Texas. Someone probably laid pipe where they shouldn't have." Tracy's double-entendre delights Matt. Later that evening as Tracy sips a fruity cocktail by the hotel pool, she takes a call from Matt who invites her to meet him the next day. She informs him that she's taking an early flight back to New York the next morning. Flattered and not wishing to burn any bridges, Tracy tells Matt, "Next time."

The following morning in LAX, Tracy walks onto a jet en route to New York City when to her surprise she encounters Fischer sitting in her row in first class. With more time now, she thanks him effusively for giving up his seat for her. She also emphasizes that tardiness is not one of her traits, blaming the late arrival on her usually-reliable limo driver. Fischer replies that giving up his seat really wasn't a big deal. "My meeting with the venture capitalists wasn't until the next day." The mention of "venture capitalists" intrigues Tracy who inquires to the nature of Fischer's business. He explains that he and his identical-twin brother Fletcher own a small bio-tech laboratory called RodCone that is developing a therapy for a rare eye disease: retinitis pigmentosa. Tracy is taken aback. This exact disease afflicts her widower father Charles, a former physics professor at Columbia University who is now completely blind and essentially house-bound in a modest New York apartment. She presses Fischer for information and learns that progress on the promising retinitis therapy is at a standstill because Fletcher opposes the infusion of cash from outside investors. Fischer expresses his irritation toward his brother's intransigence – especially because Fletcher is a hands-off partner who contributes little to the business operations, despite being a fifty-percent co-owner.

Concerned that a therapy capable of helping her father may never come to market, stymied by a dispute between the two brothers, Tracy offers her mediation services at no charge. Fischer insists on paying something for the effort, and he and Tracy settle on \$1,000. After shaking on the deal, Fischer invites Tracy to come by the lab's office sometime to hear a presentation on the retinitis therapy.

Back in New York, Tracy visits her father Charles in his modest brownstone apartment in Upper Manhattan. Sitting together in the living room, Tracy recounts her conversation with Fischer regarding the retinitis therapy, including the news that the progress has stalled due to the fraternal dispute. Charles implores Tracy to help mediate the dispute to which she replies, "That's what I hope to do. I'm planning to go to Jersey in a few days to meet with the brother." Later, while tidying up the kitchen Tracy discovers an old pistol in a cabinet drawer. Fearful that her father might one day descend deeper into depression and commit an act of suicidal desperation, Tracy stows the pistol in her purse.

Some days later, having decided to accept Fischer's offer to hear a presentation Tracy makes a trip to the lab offices where she meets RodCone's business director and their chief scientist. Fischer greets Tracy and escorts her into a conference room. The chief scientist proceeds to explain the nature of the disease and the technology behind the therapy. After the presentation Fischer reiterates his concerns about financing, and predicts his recalcitrant brother will refuse to meet with Tracy. Tracy informs Fischer, "Would it surprise you if Fletcher already agreed to meet with me?" Fischer is impressed. As Tracy prepares to leave, the business director says he will email the presentation file to her.

Back in her stylish Sutton Place apartment, Tracy finally works up the nerve to deal with the pistol she confiscated from her father's kitchen drawer. Following the instructions she located on the internet, Tracy safely pops out the clip. Sadly, she places the pistol and the clip in her closet. Returning to her computer, Tracy sees that RodCone's business director has emailed the presentation file as promised. She prints it out.

The next day Tracy shows up at Fletcher's rustic bungalow in New Jersey. After making Tracy wait on the porch while he finishes a phone call Fletcher calls her in, only to treat her shabbily. Believing Tracy to be one of Fischer's tools of persuasion, Fletcher challenges her motivations and credentials. Even after Tracy portrays herself as merely a disinterested party seeking

nothing more than a satisfactory compromise to the brothers' dispute, Fletcher behaves rudely, going so far to question her fascination with retinitis pigmentosa. "Why do you care so much about this? Does someone you know have retinitis or something?" Tracy snaps back at the dismissive provocation, putting Fletcher down hard with the facts of her own father's struggles with the disease. Tracy is about to storm out when Fletcher begs for forgiveness. He admits his demeanor was uncalled-for; his arrogance shamefully mounted as a shield against what he believed to be a crass ploy engineered by his brother. Haltingly, Fletcher implores Tracy to stay. Sensing contrition, or perhaps an opening to influence a weakened opponent, Tracy agrees.

Fletcher reveals some interesting news to Tracy: while Fischer and the lab scientists have been developing a therapy to address retinitis pigmentosa, Fletcher and an outside collaborator have been working on an actual cure for the insidious eye disease. Fletcher explains that a cure is better for the patient, but that a therapy which must be administered daily makes more money for the company. Fletcher contrasts his vision of producing a one-time cure with Fischer's greedy approach of milking suffering patients forever. And there in a nutshell is the real source of their dispute. He despises the venture capitalists that his brother wants to tap. "It's only money to them." Furthermore, Fletcher reveals his admittedly paranoid suspicion that Fischer is manipulating the lab's books to secure an advantageous position should the therapy prove a financial success. Tracy isn't sure what to make of things now. Perhaps her preconceived notions about Fletcher as a contrarian Luddite were misguided.

Noticing a vintage electric guitar in a stand, Tracy asks Fletcher whether he plays. He explains that he purchased the guitar many years ago. "It's the same kind that Keith Richards plays, a 1955 Telecaster." Fletcher proceeds to play the opening bars of a Rolling Stones tunes. Tracy is impressed by Fletcher's remarkable fidelity to the original.

On the train ride back to New York, Tracy thumbs through the presentation emailed to her previously. After reaching what should have been the end of the presentation, Tracy discovers a number of additional pages containing financial data marked "confidential." It appears they have been appended accidentally. Back home in front of her computer, Tracy concludes that Fletcher's concerns about corrupt finances were legitimate; someone at the lab has in fact been cooking the books to Fletcher's disadvantage. Determined to warn Fletcher of the deceit, Tracy arranges to meet him again.

Fletcher shows up the next day for lunch at a tony Manhattan restaurant. He's decidedly underdressed for the venue, sporting worn jeans and a flannel shirt. In contrast, Tracy arrives impeccably turned out. Tracy shows Fletcher her analysis of the confidential financial charts, but he seems distracted. He'd prefer to learn more about Tracy. Discussing art, Tracy tells Fletcher she owns an original Kandinsky painting. Tracy already knows that Fletcher is a fan of Frida Kahlo as evidenced by his derivative painting she observed on an easel in his bungalow. Fletcher reveals that his own mother went blind with glaucoma, and Tracy summarizes her academic background, but as time fritters away, she feels compelled to circle back to the subject of their lunch meeting: potential fraud at the lab. Finally, Fletcher concedes he should consult a forensic accountant.

A week later, Tracy is in hot West Texas mediating the dispute over oil leases she had previously mentioned to Matt. During a much-needed break from the childish behavior of the so-called professional company executives, she checks in with her assistant who informs her she received a call from someone at RodCone. Tracy returns the call and learns from the receptionist that Fischer is unable to pay the \$1,000 invoice for her mediation services. "The FBI raided our company and froze our accounts." Tracy asks to speak to Fischer only to learn he's on the lam – no one knows where he and his business director are. Tracy is floored.

Back in New York, sorting through a pile of mail, Tracy opens a letter from Fletcher that contains a note and a check. In the note he explains that he took Tracy's advice, hired a forensic accountant and discovering the depth of fraud, sadly called in the FBI to investigate. When he learned the FBI froze the lab's accounts he felt obligated to make good on Fischer's agreement to pay Tracy \$1,000 for her services.

Later, Tracy visits her father, but she's subdued. The stress of the Texas mediation shows through; furthermore, in light of the demise of the lab, she now regrets that she built up the promise of the retinitis therapy. Charles senses Tracy's downbeat mood and suggests she take a break from the rat-race. "Find a nice man. Fall in love." Charles's advice only deepens Tracy's sadness. Always working, constantly on the go, 40-something Tracy doesn't need to be reminded that she's long neglected her love life. She changes the subject, informing her father that the next mediation involves professional football – a dispute that includes a college player, his agent, and the New York Jets. Charles is more interested in the status of the retinitis therapy. She dances around the troubles facing the lab, noting that Fletcher has some better ideas about a real cure. "He just needs money to get it rolling," notes Tracy. Her father replies, "Money? That's all? Why don't you help him out,

Tracy?” Tracy demurs. She’s not an investment banker. But to keep her father hopeful, she quickly adds, “Believe me Dad, when Fletcher gets further along, I’d be happy to invest. Helping to run a real business with real products would be a breath of fresh air.”

Riding home in her limo from her father’s place Tracy receives a call from Fletcher. He rambles on a bit about being foolish for not confiding completely in Tracy. Finally, Fletcher gets to the point: he invites Tracy to dinner where he will explain everything to her. Although booked wall-to-wall with meetings and engagements, Tracy accepts his invitation.

Fletcher meets Tracy at an upscale Manhattan restaurant for dinner. In a complete turnabout from the sartorial debacle he suffered at lunch some weeks earlier with Tracy, Fletcher makes amends by showing up in a stylish suit and tie. Dinner is served, along with copious amounts of fine wine recommended by the sommelier. Fletcher and Tracy talk about the demise of the lab, the fate of Fischer, the future of the therapy. Despite the dismal state of affairs Fletcher is upbeat. With some prodding from Tracy, Fletcher finally reveals the reason he summoned her to meet with him. “I know I led you to believe I was just messing around, because I didn’t want anyone to know about it, but I’m on the verge of a real cure.” Up to this point, Tracy assumed Fletcher was light-years away from developing his visionary cure, but with success looking on the horizon, Tracy is ecstatic. Tracy learns that while Fischer was a profligate soul, Fletcher invested his inheritance and is now prepared to plow \$1 million into the cure. Tracy assumes a mil is sufficient to proceed but Fletcher corrects her, explaining that with new hiring, equipment and insurance costs he will need another million. And he surprises Tracy with his intention to meet with a venture capitalist firm the following day, despite his stated revulsion for their practices. “It seems that’s the only way research turns into a product,” comments Fletcher, “unless you’re a multi-billion-dollar pharmaceutical company.” Before Tracy, now modestly inebriated, can react to what appears to be a risky plan, Fletcher compliments her well-defined legs and sexy feet. The remark catches her off-guard, and for the first time in decades, she feels like a bashful, little girl.

After dinner, Tracy and Fletcher stroll the periphery of Central Park. Tracy kisses him and invites him home to check out her . . . Kandinsky. In the throes of making love, Tracy spots a truly remarkable sight: a snake tattooed on Fletcher’s penis.

The next morning, hungover and feeling quite washed out, Tracy struggles to get out of bed. Fletcher has already showered and gotten dressed. After fetching aspirins and water for Tracy, and

helping her to the window for a breath of fresh air, he reminds her of his meeting with the venture capitalist firm. Tracy fears Fletcher is ill-equipped to go toe-to-toe with the VCs who will undoubtedly strike a deal that disadvantages him. She offers – insists, really – to accompany him to the meeting. Fletcher is relieved to know Tracy the mediation expert will be there to support him.

Later in the afternoon, Fletcher and Tracy meet the VCs in a mid-town hotel conference room where they receive a decidedly one-sided offer. As Tracy suspected, the VCs peg Fletcher for a business novice and try to play him for a patsy. They challenge him on the wisdom of developing a cure when a life-long therapy seems more lucrative. Fletcher reacts angrily to this same line of reasoning that drove a wedge between him and Fischer. Sensing no worthy proposal is forthcoming, Tracy abruptly cuts the meeting off and sends the VCs packing. After the VCs leave, Tracy turns to Fletcher: “They’ll rip you off.” Fletcher is both angry and downbeat, at a loss now as to where he can secure funding. Tracy responds quickly, “From me, Fletch. Let me be your angel investor.” The unexpected proposal from Tracy brightens Fletcher’s demeanor ten-fold. “You’d loan me the money?” Fletcher asks. “No, Fletch, not loan. Invest. I would take an equity position.” They resolve to get their lawyers together to hammer out a deal.

A week or so later, the big meeting commences. Fletcher’s people propose a deal to Tracy that is essentially structured as a loan. Tracy reminds them that she’s interested solely in taking an equity position. She gets an offer of stock, but Tracy counters with an unexpected proposal whereby the new company would instead grant her stock options that if exercised after an IPO could conceivably make her the majority shareholder. Fletcher’s people recoil at the proposal, but she’s not yet finished. She also demands a seat on the board. They counsel Fletcher on the risks, but when he signals his satisfaction with the arrangement, they back off. The deal is sealed.

The next day Tracy lunches with her lawyer to go over the finer points of the deal. Her lawyer notes that Fletcher’s counsel wants to set up the first board meeting in a week, but Tracy reminds her that she’ll be out of town in the coming weeks on the big football negotiation.

Tracy hits the road to conduct shuttle diplomacy among the star college football player, his aggrieved agent, and the New York Jets front office. Things go poorly at first when the agent and the football player’s father get into it, but Tracy senses from the interactions that the agent is the most vulnerable of the parties. Later she meets him one-on-one and makes a monetary offer for him to go away. In an indignant response the agent threatens to go to the press with a smear against the

football player's father. Unimpressed, Tracy comes back with a claim that a techie she knows has already hacked into the agent's computer and found nothing that would support the agent's threat. She adds that the hacker, however, did discover some child pornography on his laptop. The agent vehemently denies it, but he soon understands that Tracy has the tools to make life pretty miserable for the agent if he doesn't capitulate. The mediation quickly wraps up when the agent grudgingly accepts some go-away money.

Act II

Back home at last, Tracy prepares for the board meeting. She's excited about getting the operation underway – and about seeing Fletcher again. After Tracy's driver drops her off at the lab building, Tracy notes the piss-poor condition of the lobby. She trudges up the stairs to the second floor and finds the door to the lab offices removed. She peers inside and finds the lab office a mess; it looks like a gut renovation is in progress. A spooky cleaning lady informs Tracy that the previous tenants left abruptly and the owner is prepping the space for a new tenant. Shocked, Tracy runs down the stairs, nearly tripping in her sexy heels, and heads for a nearby bistro where she orders a stiff drink and phones her lawyer. Within minutes her lawyer calls back with disturbing news: the phone numbers for Fletcher's people have been disconnected, the lab office had been rented month-to-month for the past four months, and Fletcher's bungalow in Jersey is available to lease. Realizing the worst, Tracy instructs her lawyer to collect as much information she can gather. She hangs up, gulps her drink and simmers at the notion that she's just been scammed out of \$1 million.

Tracy visits the FBI where she lays out for an agent the history of events leading up the scam. In the course of recalling the details it suddenly occurs to her that the financial information she thought she had received “in error” from RodCone's business director had in fact been planted purposefully to drive her to sympathize with Fletcher's situation. Angry, she recounts the story for the agent, including the fact that the FBI had raided the lab. The agent runs a quick computer check then informs Tracy that no such raid took place. The whole thing was a set up. The agent has Tracy work with a composite artist to develop a likeness of the twin brothers. In the course of developing a composite drawing, the artist questions whether Fletcher and Fischer were the same person. Tracy is taken aback, but she grudgingly acknowledges she has never seen them together. When the artist

asks if the con man has any distinguishing marks such as a tattoo, Tracy, too ashamed to reveal the snake on his penis, quietly replies, “None that I know of.”

Tracy’s less-than-encouraging experience at the offices of the FBI drives her to hire a private investigator. In her apartment with the PI, Tracy recounts the details of the sordid con game and makes it clear that she expects results from the PI. She offers a bonus for quick resolution. Like the composite artist, the PI surmises that the “identical twins” are actually one man. He goes on to postulate that Fletcher/Fischer employed a sizable gang to pull off the scam, including hiring people to take seats on the plane to LA the day she met Fischer to ensure first class was sold out when she arrived. Adding to the grim situation, he suggests possible involvement of her limo driver which would explain her uncharacteristically tardy arrival at the airport that fateful day. Most disturbing for Tracy though is the PI’s belief that someone connected to one or both of the nanotechnology companies in LA was part of the scheme. The monumental extent of the scam saddens and inflames Tracy. As Tracy escorts the PI to the door, she feels compelled to provide an added detail she’d kept from the FBI. “One more thing I forgot to mention. Fletcher has a snake tattooed on his... um, penis”. Trying not to react inappropriately, the diligent PI makes a note and departs. Tracy crumples in tears.

Time has passed without progress on the case. Tracy has lost her burning desire to mediate all sorts of disputes, preferring to walk the park, do crossword puzzles, spend time reading in quaint bistros in her tony neighborhood. With income flat-lining and her bank account depleted to the tune of \$1 million, Tracy puts her beloved Kandinsky on the auction block. A visit to her father’s place is somber. She hints that things are a bit down for the moment due to a bad investment decision. Always concerned for his daughter, Charles advises a stiff-upper lip. Tracy would rather make things right, suggesting a vague desire to seek and exact revenge. Back home after the visit with her father Tracy speaks to the PI who has no new news to offer. Discouraged, Tracy peruses news on the internet. She perks up upon spotting a small business item: NanoNano, Matt’s technology company, has successfully gone IPO.

The next morning, Matt takes a call from none other than Tracy – the woman who helped him resolve the ugly dispute with his competitor; the woman to whom he granted some early stock shares as compensation for her efforts. A sum now worth tens of thousands of dollars. After a bit of small talk, Matt invites Tracy to come to the new headquarters relocated to San Diego for an IPO party where she can meet the executive team. Recalling her PI’s assertion that one or more people

employed by the warring companies might be part of the scam, Tracy gladly accepts the invitation. It's an opportunity to ferret out some intel first-hand. She also looks forward to seeing Matt again; she felt some chemistry with the younger man during the LA mediation. And she caught him ogling her legs – a sure sign that romance is in the cards.

Seated with Matt and a handful of company executives at the party, Tracy makes mental notes of the topics her table-mates discuss, but nothing pointing to a lead is forthcoming. As it turns out, every person at the table is a frat-boy chum of Matt's or an arm-candy girlfriend – with the exception of Marilyn, Matt's VP of Human Resources. As the discussion moves to the vagaries of the stock market, Marilyn jumps at the opportunity to insert herself into the conversation. She commiserates with the others about her under-water stock options from a previous employer, but she remains optimistic for she is about to invest in a small biotech firm working on a therapy for acromegaly which could be a goldmine if successful. She mentions that Ron – the large man suffering from the disease whom Tracy first met the day of the mediation – brought the idea to her. Marilyn continues, referring to the scientist seeking her investment. "Calvin is close to a cure for acromegaly, but his twin brother won't help him get the money to move it along. His brother wants to develop a pill you have to take every day. Calvin's ready to go to clinical trial but he's stuck. He doesn't really want to deal with VC's."

Astonished to hear a tale eerily similar to the one that nearly ruined her life, Tracy can't help blurting out, "Marilyn, did this Calvin guy have a snake tattooed on his co...?" She stops just short of making a complete fool of herself at the table, belatedly substituting the word "collar" for "cock." Gobsnacked, Marilyn says nothing. Matt teases, "I thought you were going to say 'cock.' A tattoo on the dude's cock." The guests snicker while Tracy ardently denies the assertion. Despite the teasing, Matt is attracted to the stylish, older Tracy and he makes a point to get some private face-time with her after dinner. He mentions that he read an article about her in *Forbes* magazine which portrayed Tracy as a cunning, effective negotiator – even a bit Machiavellian. It's a trait Matt finds sexy. "I bet you could persuade a man to do anything you want," posits Matt, suggesting she's angling for a seat on the board. She responds that, in fact, the company could use someone like her on the board.

Impressed with Tracy's confidence and assertiveness, Matt invites her for a ride in his yacht the next day, but she must decline (again) as she plans to fly out early the next morning.

Tracy visits the women's room on her way out of the restaurant and runs into Marilyn who sheepishly confides that, yes, Calvin has a snake tattooed on his, um, cock. The women decide to retreat to a quiet bar to talk through this bizarre coincidence. Tracy explains her situation but Marilyn is reluctant to accept the idea that she too is the target of an elaborate scam. To express the full gravity to Marilyn, Tracy provides details, including the painful revelation of her own loss of \$1 million. Tracy describes some of Fletcher's quirky characteristics that bear a remarkable similarity to Calvin's behavior – including his guitar-playing prowess – which convinces Marilyn that the two men are one and the same. But whereas Marilyn is happy simply to have avoided a catastrophe, Tracy calls upon her to assist in the takedown of the con man. Marilyn demurs but Tracy is insistent. After Tracy learns that Marilyn was set to meet Calvin in the near future for dinner in Jersey to make a six-figure investment, she insists Marilyn go through with the plan. In this way Tracy can re-establish contact with her nemesis. Marilyn resists at first, but finally agrees to help when Tracy articulately elucidates the evils of letting a scumbag like Calvin continue his nefarious ways. Marilyn asks, "How are you going to get him to confess?" Tracy replies coldly, "I'm a professional negotiator, Marilyn. I'll negotiate for it."

Still in San Diego, Tracy calls Matt to let him know she decided to stay in town after all. Reinvigorated by the hope that she may finally take down Fletcher, and sensing potential romantic chemistry with Matt, Tracy proposes a rendezvous. Matt eagerly invites Tracy for a ride on his 130-foot Astondoa yacht. They visit Catalina and cruise by Coronado Island. Tracy remarks that the Hotel Del Coronado reminds her of Billy Wilder's movie "Some Like it Hot." The mere mention of the classic comedy encourages Matt to go off on the genius of Wilder. Tracy notes that her father is also a devout fan of the influential Hollywood director. A promising first bond is formed between Tracy and Matt. Knowing Matt has read the article in *Forbes* magazine about her, Tracy feels obligated to counter the cut-throat image portrayed in the magazine. She doesn't want Matt to draw the wrong conclusion about her personality. For the first time, Tracy allows her vulnerability to come to the surface. Matt gently places his finger on Tracy's lips, cutting her off. He leans forward and kisses her, then leads her to the master cabin.

Act III

Some weeks later, as planned, Marilyn has dinner with Calvin, and per Tracy's directions Marilyn has seen to it that her companion is thoroughly drunk. In his inebriated condition, Calvin will be easier for Tracy to deal with later.

Back at Calvin's home, he fumbles with his keys before finally stumbling in. Marilyn looks plaintively over her shoulder toward the driveway, then follows Calvin in, closing the door behind her. Calvin heads for the bedroom, stripping off his clothes as he weaves through the hallway. Marilyn goes into the bathroom, locks the door and calls Tracy. "Where are you?" whispers Marilyn. "Right where I'm supposed to be – parked next to your car." Marilyn enters Calvin's darkened bedroom where he's sprawled out naked, waiting for the services of his woman. But instead of hopping into bed, Marilyn informs the drunken Calvin that she has to go. She scoops up his clothing and makes for the door. Calvin slurs some words of protest, but he's too drunk to mount a case to convince Marilyn to stay. As Marilyn marches out the door Calvin calls out, "What about the money?" And after she leaves the house, he mumbles to himself, "What the fuck's wrong with that bitch?" to which Tracy, standing tall in the doorway, retorts, "The better question would be 'what the fuck is wrong with you?'"

Perhaps expecting his mark to show up one day to vent anger and seek recompense, Calvin (who is also Fletcher) casually informs Tracy that the money he scammed from her has long ago been split up and spent. Lying in bed in the dark, he asks her to lock the door on her way out. Tracy has other ideas. She flips on the light which temporarily blinds Fletcher. A moment later, when his eyes can tolerate the light, he sees Tracy pointing a pistol at him. It's the pistol she confiscated from her father's kitchen drawer months earlier. Suddenly, Fletcher is a bit more compliant. Given that the money is gone, he asks what she expects him to do. Tracy is ready with an answer. She tosses a paper bag onto the bed which bounces, suggesting heft. Fletcher takes up the bag and removes a pair of sheet metal cutters. As Fletcher confusedly handles the cutters, Tracy notes matter-of-factly, "I read somewhere that Keith Richards' middle finger is insured for one point six million." Suddenly it dawns on Fletcher: Tracy expects him to lop off his finger as penance for his sins. He pleads with her but she's adamant. "Put the fucking shears on your fucking finger. Now!" Fletcher complies, then pukes all over himself. As he stands there totally vulnerable, Tracy lays out the deal: cut off his finger or confess to his crimes on the video camera she has brought along. Fletcher begs, but when Tracy pushes him to cut off his finger, he becomes indignant. He's thinking about calling her bluff.

He taunts her, “You fell for a scam like a stupid schoolgirl.” Tracy takes the indictment personally and screams at Fletcher, “Cut off your fucking finger now or I will kill you! Or you can confess your--” She never gets to complete the demand, for Fletcher lunges at Tracy under the presumption that the gun ain’t loaded. In fact, Tracy also presumes it’s unloaded – that it’s just an intimidating prop she disarmed after taking it from her father’s house. But in an involuntary reaction to Fletcher’s sudden movement, Tracy squeezes the trigger and delivers a round through his throat. A round that she had no idea was present in the chamber when she popped out the clip. As Fletcher’s life wheezes out of the bullet hole, Tracy runs to the bathroom and throws up. When she regains her composure, Tracy slowly reenters Fletcher’s bedroom and observes the corpse splayed out, his tattooed penis exposed like a taunt. The vision enrages her. Tracy impetuously grinds the point of her stiletto heel into Fletcher’s shriveled scrotum. The act serves to inspire a plan for escape. Tracy rushes about Fletcher’s house wiping off doorknobs and furniture. When she’s convinced that evidence of her presence there has been thoroughly expunged, Tracy heads to her car where Marilyn has deposited Fletcher’s clothes, including the pair of pants containing his cell phone. Tracy bolts the scene and drives down the dark country road. After a mile, she pulls off into a pine grove. Tracy performs some jumping jacks, then makes a furtive 911 call using Fletcher’s cell phone. Breathing hard and adding a little-girl lilt to her voice, Tracy explains to the 911 operator that she’s just escaped from a rapist’s house after shooting him with his own gun. She adds that she’s now lost in the woods and believes that the wounded rapist is in pursuit. The operator instructs her to keep the phone active: “We can track your location with it.” Concerned that she might be hanging on too long, Tracy gives up a phony name then drops the still-active cell phone onto the pine needles. She gets back in her car and exits the scene. On her way back from Jersey to the Upper East Side of Manhattan, Tracy makes a detour where she tosses Fletcher’s wallet onto the curb of a street in a dicey neighborhood, hoping to confuse law enforcement. Eventually, she crosses the George Washington Bridge where in mid-span she tosses her father’s pistol out the window into the depths of the Hudson River.

Back in her apartment, Tracy examines her body as though looking for a wound. In the background, water fills the bathtub. Tracy climbs into the bathtub with a glass of vodka. Relaxed finally, she leaves a message on Matt’s phone: “I miss you. Call me when you can. I want to see you again soon. I need a hug.”

The next morning the news of the mysterious young girl who shot a would-be rapist is all over the TV. The coverage comports with the circumstances that Tracy strived to engineer.

Back in San Diego, Tracy the shareholder discusses company strategy with Matt the CEO. She raises the topic of a potential new market for Matt to consider – cosmetics made using nanotechnology – and takes the opportunity to raise a concern in Matt’s mind over the general lack of female representation in his executive ranks. “You may want to promote one of your women execs in advance of entering the female-oriented cosmetics market,” advises Tracy, knowing full well that Marilyn is the sole candidate in NanoNano. Matt agrees to look into it. Tracy leaves Matt to meet up with Marilyn. The last time Tracy and Marilyn were together was at Fletcher’s house in Jersey the night Tracy plotted to extract a confession from him. That’s what Marilyn thinks happened. Tracy is on her way to break the shocking news to Marilyn about the demise of poor Fletcher/Calvin, the vile con-man.

Tracy arrives at the restaurant to find Marilyn at the bar enjoying a cocktail. Tracy orders a stiff one. Marilyn is anxious to hear all about the juicy details of Fletcher’s drunken confession and the subsequent investigative actions of the FBI. She blathers on for a minute, imagining the look on Fletcher’s face when Tracy dropped in on him with video camera in tow. Finally, Tracy interrupts. “Things didn't go exactly quite as planned. He’s dead. I shot him. I had to shoot him.” As Tracy expected, Marilyn freaks out. “You know I didn't want to get involved from the beginning. Now you've connected me to a homicide.” Tracy explains how the police believe an anonymous girl killed Fletcher, and that so far things look as though the story will stick. Tracy adds that everything will be OK as long as Marilyn cooperates by staying cool and keeping her mouth shut, but Marilyn is not satisfied. She wants something from Tracy. “You need my cooperation? OK, you're a big-time negotiator, Tracy. Negotiate for it.”

Tracy, expecting this type of pushback from Marilyn, supplies something of value in exchange for Marilyn’s cooperation. Tracy had already planted the idea in Matt’s head. “What do you know about nanotechnology and cosmetics, Marilyn?”

Back in New York, Tracy, Matt and Tracy’s father Charles watch an old Billy Wilder movie – “Ace in the Hole.” After it’s over and Tracy retreats to the kitchen, Matt hands Charles a large engagement ring he intends to give to Tracy the next time she’s in San Diego. Charles is overcome

with joy, as he envisions his busy, type-A daughter finally settling down to experience happiness with someone who loves her.

One month later, Matt hosts another big dinner in San Diego for his employees and their guests to celebrate a superb year for the company. The band plays as the guests dine on fine cuisine. Tracy, Marilyn and several execs sit with Matt at the head table. One of the execs notes that Ron, who had departed NanoNano to take a job with PicoTech, had just been arrested for having child pornography on his company computer. Everyone at the table, with the exception of Tracy, is shocked at the man's ignoble downfall.

Matt taps a glass, capturing the attention of the room. The band stops playing. Matt informs the audience that NanoNano has just signed a huge contract with the government which will ensure healthy financial results for the foreseeable future. He adds that the cash flow will enable NanoNano to pursue research on rare eye diseases. The guests applaud; Tracy smiles with satisfaction. Matt then calls on Marilyn to stand. "I'm thrilled to announce that Marilyn Jenkins has been promoted to General Manager of our soon-to-be operational facility in Malaysia where we will commence our cosmetics operation." Marilyn accepts the applause from her peers. Matt goes on to encourage anyone who wants to speak to Marilyn to do so now. "Marilyn leaves for Kuala Lumpur tomorrow morning and we won't be seeing her much around here after that." Tracy smiles imperceptibly at the notion that Marilyn will soon be on the other side of the world, out of sight and out of mind.

After dinner Tracy retreats to the women's room and like before, she spots Marilyn in the mirror behind her. Marilyn, a bit tipsy and visibly agitated, declares, "I earned my promotion, Tracy. I suggested the idea of cosmetics with Matt a long time ago, just so you know." Tracy couldn't care less. But when Marilyn blurts out, "I don't want anyone thinking you had something to do with my promotion, like payback for saving your ass on that Calvin thing," Tracy loses it. She checks under the stalls for the tell-tale feet of others who may be in the restroom, finding no one. Irritated at Marilyn's loose lips, Tracy upbraids her. "You're a General Manager now, Marilyn. You got what you wanted. Don't blow it." Marilyn needs to know that Tracy believes she earned the promotion, but Tracy rebuffs the entreaty. Instead she strongly advises Marilyn to keep her trap shut, for which she will be rewarded. When Marilyn inquires as to the source of Tracy's ability to deliver rewards, Tracy announces that Matt has proposed marriage. Not only that, Tracy is taking a seat on the board. With that, she leaves Marilyn dumbfounded in the ladies' room.

A supremely satisfied Tracy dances with her dashing young fiancé as the company party winds down, secure in the knowledge that Marilyn will soon be half a world away.

Epilog

A year later, Matt and Tracy's father watch TV together. Wearing thick glasses as an aid to his partially recovered eyesight – thanks to innovations pioneered at NanoNano – Tracy's father enjoys seeing a movie for the first time in years. Just as Tracy brings in some sandwiches for her men, her phone rings. It's her former PI with some startling news: he's come upon a lead in the con game perpetrated upon Tracy. He's identified a murder victim with curious tattoo of a snake on his penis. Tracy tries to persuade the PI to leave the case alone as she no longer cares about it – at least that's what she wants to convey. Instead, Tracy's resistance to pursuing the lead strikes the PI as somewhat strange. She insists he drop the investigation, so he hangs up – but not before leaving her with the distinct impression he intends to continue pursuing leads regardless.

Tracy takes a seat with her father and new husband as they watch “Double Indemnity,” Billy Wilder's superb tale of connivance and downfall. Her mind is elsewhere – will the PI connect the dots? What else can she do but fret and wait? She asks her father the name of the movie. “Double Indemnity,” he replies, to which Matt adds casually, yet ominously, “A scam leads to murder.”