

EAST GREETTS WEST

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. TAXI, MORNING

Beijing in the morning sun, just as dawn breaks into day. COYNE (30) is travelling in a dirty, Chinese taxi. Through the window, the cold, dead landscape around Beijing airport segues into more individually Chinese scenes: fleets of bicycles rolling down the street, groups of onlookers watching two people play chess, an old man fixing a bicycle, a child running down the street in ass-less pants.

As we get closer to the center of the city, the feeling shifts. From pictures of the old guard, we transform into modern Beijing: young punks skating past a Subway restaurant; crisp men and women carrying briefcases and walking crisply; crisply sexy women talking on their mobile phones and gesticulating wildly; the sun gleaming off of huge sheets of glass framing the CCTV building; and, finally, the SOHO international district.

The taxi slows down as it enters a residential section. It pulls up to a curb and Coyne gets out. He's dressed casually and is only carrying a small duffel, an under-filled backpack and a laptop bag.

EXT. SIDEWALK, MORNING - CONTINUOUS

Coyne steps out onto a less than busy sidewalk and pulls his earphones out, one after another.

The taxi pulls away and Coyne pulls a mobile phone out of his pocket. He dials a number, then puts it to his ear. After a second he looks disappointed and pulls the phone away.

COYNE

God bless technology.

He looks around, trying to figure out what to do next. The buildings near him don't seem to be much help - restaurants, cigarette shops and beauty parlors.

He spots a red phone sitting on a counter. Shouldering his bags, he walks over to the phone and smiles at the woman behind the counter.

COYNE (CONT'D)

Um, excuse me. Can I use your phone?

(Note: all instances of Chinese will be enclosed in brackets. The text will appear as subtitles.)

STORE CLERK  
[I don't understand].

Coyne points to the phone, then points to himself. He makes the universal sign for using a telephone - pinky and thumb extended and near his ear. The woman smiles and nods her head vigorously.

Coyne picks up the phone and puts it to his ear. He looks at the dial pad and realizes he doesn't know the number.

He reaches in a pocket and pulls out a small wad of American money. He shakes his head, puts it back and starts pulling things from all of his pockets. After a few tries, he finds a small piece of paper with a phone number written on it.

He pushes in the top of the phone to reset the dial tone, then dials it quickly.

COYNE  
Hey, I'm downstairs.

There is a short pause.

COYNE (CONT'D)  
Approximately twenty feet from where the taxi used to be, but isn't anymore.

Another pause.

COYNE (CONT'D)  
In a store that has a name I can't read because, at some point in the last twelve hours, I suddenly became illiterate. I don't see words anywhere, I see art and bad tattoos everywhere. Just come outside and look for the white guy that seems lost. I can wait.

A short pause.

COYNE (CONT'D)  
Yeah, there's a gate. There's a ton of buildings behind it and they all look the same.

He shakes his head in frustration

COYNE (CONT'D)  
All the way to China and you can't even meet a guy at the airport.  
(MORE)

COYNE (CONT'D)  
I'll be waiting on the sidewalk. Be quick.

He hangs up the phone and begins to walk outside, but the woman stops him.

STORE CLERK  
[Hold on a second]. Money.

COYNE  
How much?

He starts going through his pockets again, until he finds a pile of renminbi (RMB).

The store clerk holds up two fingers. Coyne hands her a five yuan note.

She sorts through her drawer and gives him back his change. He looks at the jiao and snorts.

COYNE (CONT'D)  
Is this Monopoly money? Fantastic

He picks up his bags and walks outside. When he gets into the sun, someone yells.

LJ (O.S.)  
First door!

Coyne looks up to see LJ (29) sticking his head out of a sixth floor apartment window.

LJ (CONT'D)  
Push 0-6-0-4. I'll ring you in!

COYNE  
You are one hell of a lazy bastard, you know that!

LJ  
Better than being an ugly one! Now get up here! There's someone I want you to meet and if you aren't quick you'll miss your chance!

Coyne starts heading around the building.

COYNE  
After I meet them, I'm throwing you out that damn window!

Coyne disappears through the gate.

CUT TO:

INT. LJ'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LJ snaps a cell phone shut. He walks over to the door and cracks it open. In the background, HIPS (26) comes out of the bathroom in a robe, drying her hair with a towel.

HIPS  
He's here?

LJ  
Yeah. He's in the elevator.

Hips walks into the bedroom. LJ takes a cigarette out of a pack with his mouth, lights it and exhales.

LJ'S FRONT DOOR, CLOSE

The door opens slightly and Coyne peaks in. He sees LJ, then pushes the door open.

LJ steps up and Coyne drops his bags on the floor. LJ picks him up into a big hug.

COYNE  
Been a long time.

LJ  
No shit. I was wondering how long it would take you to get off your ass and visit.

Coyne takes a step back and looks around. The apartment is nice and spacious, but cluttered and well lived in.

COYNE  
Nice place.

LJ  
It's not bad. Comes with an extra bedroom, so you can stay as long as you like.

Hips exits the bedroom

HIPS  
Although living with this one can sometimes be a chore.

She extends a hand to Coyne.

HIPS (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm Hips. You're Coyne. Now we know each other.

Coyne shakes her hand, then she walks away, gathering things as she move around the living room: a purse that looks like an old carpetbag, keys on a beaded hemp string, a sleek cell phone with enough decoration to make a teenage Japanese girl proud.

HIPS (CONT'D)

If you need any help getting around, just get my cell number from LJ and give a call. He...

She points at LJ.

HIPS (CONT'D)

...barely leaves the house so I don't know how much help he'll be. Whatever. I have to go to work. We'll get to know each other better at dinner tonight, I'm sure. I'm also sure that LJ didn't tell you about dinner, so now you already have something to talk about while you unpack. It was nice meeting you. Gotta split. You two be good.

She goes out the door and closes it behind her, leaving Coyne dumbfounded for a moment.

COYNE

We have many somethings to talk about, dinner being only one. But I would rather start at the beginning. Who, or what, was that.

LJ

That was Hips. She's been living here awhile.

COYNE

And you haven't mentioned her because?

LJ

It hasn't been that long of a while.

COYNE

How long?

LJ  
About two days.

COYNE  
Wow.

LJ  
Yeah.

COYNE  
Does she have a real name?

LJ  
Probably. I've never bothered to  
ask.

COYNE  
Wow.

LJ  
Yeah.

COYNE  
Is she always like that?

LJ  
Yeah.

COYNE  
Wow.

LJ  
Yeah.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP, MIDDAY

Coyne and LJ are sitting at a small table against a wall. A cup of coffee sits in front of LJ, Coyne is holding his aloft.

COYNE  
(snobbishly)  
Nice, atmosphere. Great decor.  
Quality coffee and affordable  
prices for the low-budget traveler.

Coyne lifts his cup upwards towards LJ, pinky splayed noticeably.

COYNE (CONT'D)  
 Coyne critiques gill give The  
 Bookworm five stars.

A golf clap erupts from LJ.

LJ  
 Although, by local standars you  
 can't really describe it as  
 affordable. Not horribly expensive,  
 but definitely not cheap.

Coyne holds his cup aloft again.

COYNE  
 Four stars, with apologies.

LJ  
 Nice.  
 I like to come here and unwind  
 after a trip.

COYNE  
 That's right. You just got back a  
 few days ago, didn't you?

LJ  
 Yeah, I was in DongBei for most of  
 a week. Next week I get to go to...

(as if announcing a game  
 show prize)  
 The beautiful metropolis of  
 Pingyao!

COYNE  
 I take it you're familiar with the  
 place?

LJ  
 I've been there twice. It was  
 really interesting the first time I  
 was there. The city... well, part  
 of the city has been pretty much  
 unchanged for a few hundred years.  
 Lots of little places to get lost  
 and things to see. The first time I  
 was there I spent a week visiting  
 old houses and tourist spots and  
 banks. The amusement wore off after  
 two days.

COYNE  
 Banks?

LJ

Yeah. Their claim to fame is being the birthplace of banking in China.

COYNE

Not really Knight's Templar, Crusades type excitement then, eh?

LJ

You're still the observant one. Anyway, I went back about a year later for a festival assignment for a different travel rag. Now, the first rag wants me to go and write a piece on how much it's changed since the last time I was there. More international, or modern, or something. I'm doing it more as a favor than anything. The editor needs a few thousand words for his next issue, so I figured what the hell.

COYNE

Not a project you're looking forward to?

LJ takes a sip of his coffee, then shrugs his shoulders.

LJ

Meh, I'll show up and look around, but I won't spend too much time on it. I can just recycle some of the old things I've written. Rearrange some of the words, add some new metaphors, warm and serve. I've done it before. Hell, I've only been to the city twice and I've written nine articles on it.

COYNE

So, why go this time?

LJ

Like I said, a favor. The editor at this rag needs someone in the city. I think it has more to do with them seeing a journalist than a journalist seeing them.

COYNE

What's after that?

LJ

A few weeks off. I need a nice vacation. I'll hang out with you and get in trouble for a while.

COYNE

I'm glad you're thinking of me.

LJ motions to WAITRESS. She comes over.

WAITRESS

What can I get you?

LJ

A piece of that scrumdiddlyumptious cheesecake.

(to Coyne)

You want anything?

COYNE

I could go for another cup of coffee.

LJ

Two more coffees and two cheesecakes, then.

COYNE

No cheesecake for me, thanks.

LJ

Don't worry. I plan on eating them both.

COYNE

Glutton.

LJ

[Thank you].

WAITRESS

[You're welcome].

They relax and sip their coffee for a few seconds. LJ lights a cigarette.

COYNE

When did you quit?

LJ

Quit what?

COYNE

Reachin'.

LJ

What?

COYNE

For the stars. Slackers have no reach.

LJ

Two pieces of cheesecake equates to slacking how?

COYNE

Two pieces of cheesecake equates to around seven hundred calories. Building your articles like you are working with Leggos equates to slacking.

LJ

It's an article for a travel rag - one of those "for the serious expat" kind of things. It's really no big deal.

COYNE

Writing is your art. It should always be a big deal.

LJ

I think you're failing to remember one very important fact.

COYNE

What's that?

LJ

Writing is your art. You love to write. It's my job. I like writing because it's not too difficult and it pays the bills. Music is my art.

COYNE

Said the musician who wasn't. Okay, so it's my art. But that just makes it doubly offensive, because it's personal. Didn't you start writing for travel magazines because you thought there weren't ever any articles worth reading?

LJ

Yeah.

COYNE

So why do you want to write an article that's not worth reading?

LJ

You need to unplug, constipated boy. It's just an article. If the magazines wouldn't publish shite, I wouldn't provide it. Bud they do, so I don't see why I shouldn't use that to my advantage every now and again.

COYNE

My dad used to say that how well you did a job defined you more than what job you did.

LJ

My dad used to say that your dad was a cliché-spewing ass.

COYNE

He still is. But I like him, which is more than I can say about your old man.

LJ

This is true.

The two take a break from their banter while Waitress delivers their order.

LJ (CONT'D)

You haven't changed a bit.

COYNE

Nope.

Coyne hides his smirk behind his coffee cup as he takes a drink.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY, MIDDAY

Hips walks out of a classroom. CASEY (26), sporting clean, preppy clothes with a freshly laundered look, meets her in the hallway and they walk into the breakroom together.

INT. BREAKROOM - CONTINUOUS

COCO (23), a young, well-dressed Chinese girl, is sitting at a table, smoking a cigarette. Hips and Casey sit down next to her. Casey gives Coco a big hug.

CASEY

Another day is done; now it's time for fun.

HIPS

You are chock full of wit, aren't you?

CASEY

(to Coco, ignoring Hips)  
You're coming tonight, right?

COCO

[Of course].

CASEY

Good.

She turns to Hips.

CASEY (CONT'D)

And I know you'll be there.

HIPS

[Of course]! Plus one.

CASEY

LJ's buddy not make it?

HIPS

He just got in this morning, but he'll be there. LJ won't be joining us. He said he doesn't like my friends.

CASEY

Good thing your friends don't like him, either. So, is his little friend a hottie?

HIPS

Depends on how you define hottie.

CASEY

Worth sleeping with.

HIPS

Probably. I saw him for about a minute and a half, so I'm not an expert.

CASEY

I'll trust your incredible on-the-fly judgement. Tonight may actually be interesting.

COCO

[You people are crazy].

HIPS

[Of course].

CASEY

What time do you have to meet him?  
Got time for a smoke?

HIPS

Sure. Let's go outside where it's more comfy.

The three girls get up and grab their purses and bags. Hips pulls her mobile phone from her purse as they exit.

EXT. SMALL PARK - CONTINUOUS

Hips, Casey and Coco are sitting on a bench. Casey is digging through her purse while Hips talks on the phone. The park is empty except for the three girls.

HIPS

Just wanted to remind you about tonight. Where can I meet you guys at around six?

While she pauses to listen, Casey pulls out a joint and lights it.

HIPS (CONT'D)

(to Casey)

My little Boy Scout. Always prepared.

(to the phone)

I was talking to Case. You're never prepared, that's why you need someone like me in your life.

A short pause.

HIPS (CONT'D)

Okay, tell him what to expect as soon as you hang up. I don't want him to go into apaplectic shock later.

Yeah, okay. See you then. TTFN.

Hips snaps her mobile phone shut and takes a slow drag off the joint, relishing it.

CASEY

No "I love you" or goodbye kisses or anything?

Casey falls against Coco, putting her wrist against her forehead.

CASEY (CONT'D)

Lawdy me, love is surely dead.

HIPS

We've been together all of 48 hours. You got me fucked up if you think I'm about that.

Hips tilts her head back and exhales into the sky.

HIPS (CONT'D)

Thanks, I needed that.

CASEY

No worries, get me back tonight?

HIPS

Surely. Going to pick up now. You need?

CASEY

[Of course].

HIPS

Kay. Catch you on the flip side.

CASEY

Toodles.

COCO

(singing)

Toodles Mr. Jim, you cherry picker.  
Toodles, I say so long.

CASEY

You never fail to astound me.

COCO  
 (still singing)  
 Hear that your graves a little  
 warm, you stickler. Sing 'em all  
 our happy song. It's today...

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT LOBBY, EARLY EVENING

Hips and Coyne walk into the busy lobby. As soon as they make it through the door, HOSTESS approaches them.

HOSTESS  
 Ha-lo. Two?

She proudly holds up two fingers, a broad grin spread across her face.

HIPS  
 [No, we're with the party for the  
 English school].

HOSTESS  
 [Your Chinese is very good]!  
 [Follow me].

Hostess leads them through a crowded restaurant; aisles filled with waitresses, busboys and screaming children; tables filled to capacity with families and extended families and groups of businessmen drinking profusely.

They reach the back of the room and turn into a hallway filled with doors. She reaches one and stops beside it.

HOSTESS (CONT'D)  
 [Right in here].

HIPS  
 [Thank you].

HOSTESS  
 [You're welcome].

Hips and Coyne open the door. Loud conversation erupts and they disappear inside.

CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Two tables are filled to capacity with people, mostly foreigners but with a few token Chinese faces mixed in. Coco is sitting on one side of Casey. SINGSING (28) and BIDDY (63) are sitting across from them. Two seats beside Casey are empty. Hips directs Coyne to them.

Before sitting, Hips bellows loudly and grabs a glass and fork, tapping them together like a bell. A few people, most noticeably those near Hips, give her a bit of attention, but very few stop talking or eating.

HIPS

Everybody, this is Coyne. He's been in China almost twelve hours.

A few people give half-hearted hellos and nods or waves.

HIPS (CONT'D)

Coyne, this isn't everybody, but it is everybody else here.

Hips sits, pulling Coyne down with her.

HIPS (CONT'D)

And most of them have been here way too long. If I tell you everyone's name now, you'll just forget them all. Introducing people one or two at a time is so much better, don't you think.

COYNE

Actually, I've never really thought about it like that, but-

HIPS

You should. You should think about everything. That's the problem with this world, everybody's too busy doing to bother with thinking.

Casey extends her hand towards Coyne, pulling him away from Hips' tirade.

CASEY

Hi, I'm Casey.

COYNE

Pleasure. I'm -

CASEY

Coyne. I know. Since it's my birthday and you came to the party with my best friend, I got filled-in in advance.

COYNE

Um...Oh...Uh... Happy birthday. I didn't realize.

HIPS

Surprise!

Coyne laughs along with the girls.

CASEY

She wanted to throw me a surprise party, but since work is paying for the dinner I knew about it a long time ago.

HIPS

We work together.

COYNE

I gathered.

CASEY

So when LJ said you were landing today, Hips thought it would be a good idea not to mention the coincidence until now, so that it would still be, essentially, a surprise.

COYNE

Fun. So everybody here works with you?

CASEY

Or is related to our school in some way, yes.

HIPS

The real party starts after.

SINGSING

(singing)

Because, after the party is the after party...

CASEY

If you're too jetlagged to go out, I'll understand.

(MORE)

CASEY (CONT'D)

I'll resent you the rest of my life, but I'll understand.

COYNE

Actually, I slept rather well on the plane. I'm feeling quite chipper.

HIPS

Good. [Cheers]!

Coyne looks at her, puzzled. She holds up a small shot glass.

He still looks puzzled. Casey holds her own shot glass up, then points to the table and the shot in front of Coyne.

Coyne catches on and picks it up.

HIPS (CONT'D)

White wine. [Cheers] means "dry glass." Or cheers. One is literal, the other is right. Either way, drink!

Without giving him time to think, Hips, Casey and Singing empty their glasses. Coyne quickly does the same.

A split second later, his face explodes in the reality that is baijiu.

COYNE

That's wine?

HIPS

Literally translated, yes.

CASEY

Actually, no. It's baijiu. It is to China as vodka is to Russia or tequila to Mexico.

Hips wiggles in her seat.

HIPS

Or rum to Jamaica.

COYNE

Or bourbon to Kentucky.

CASEY

He catches on quick.

CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - LATER

Half-filled dishes cover the table. Everyone is slowly eating and the conversation has become much more subdued. There are a few seats that are empty, a sign that it's late and people are trickling out.

Coyne is at one table, along with Hips, Coco, Singsing and Biddy. Casey is at the other table, drinking toasts with her coworkers.

COYNE

Isn't Chinese supposed to be one of the most difficult languages to learn?

HIPS

[No way]. [Chinese is easy]. You just need to practice.

SINGSING

She speaks it practically fluently. I know a smattering, but I don't know enough to say smattering.

COCO

[Smattering].

SINGSING

Shenme say what?

COCO

That's how you say smattering.

SINGSING

Ah, I've been here two years and I can't even repeat what you just said.

COCO

[You need to] practice.

Hips gets up suddenly and runs over to where Casey is drinking.

HIPS (O.S.)

[Cheers]!

BIDDY

For some people it's easy, for others it's hard. It depends on your skill with languages. I've picked up almost nothing since I've been here.

COYNE  
How long has that been?

BIDDY  
Nearly five years.

COYNE  
Wow, that's quite a while.

BIDDY  
I haven't really tried to learn any, though. I'm too old for that shit.

COYNE  
You're never too old.

BIDDY  
See how well that cliché holds up when it's directed at you.

Biddy dismissed Coyne and starts to nibble at a piece of bamboo.

Singsing, obviously drunk, leans towards Coyne.

SINGSING  
So, Coyne, what brings you to China? Going to join our merry band of English teachers?

COYNE  
At the moment, I'm only here for a visit. Who knows, though. It might be time for a change.

SINGSING  
What kind of work do you do back home?

COYNE  
I'm a movie critic and sports writer for the local newspaper.

SINGSING  
Sounds like a good gig.

COYNE  
It would be, except that I hate sports. I love movies, and writing about them is always cool, but if I want the job I have to do both.

(MORE)

COYNE (CONT'D)

It pays well enough, but I'm pretty worn out on high school football and college wrestling. I'm just afraid that if I try something else, I won't be able to go back.

BIDDY

Then you shouldn't. Teaching English overseas is great for a little while, but you have to plan for the future. You don't get social security working in a job like this. No 401K, either. That's why I waited until I retired.

She motions towards Singsing.

BIDDY (CONT'D)

I keep trying to explain that to this one, but sometimes he can be thicker than a vault door.

COYNE

SSI isn't on the top of my "things that I should be worried about" list. I'm not even so sure it's on the bottom.

BIDDY

You should be. You sound just like him. What will you do when you're my age.

SINGSING

Social security won't be there when I'm your age. Haven't you heard?

BIDDY

Hogwash. You need to read the news instead of just listening to rumors and regurgitating crap you read on the internets.

SINGSING

Besides, social security doesn't give you enough to live on, anyway.

COYNE

All of that is moot. I'm not worried about it because I'm not worried about it.

BIDDY

You should be. Don't you want a family?

COYNE

Not at the moment. I don't think I'm ready for that yet. But in the future, sure.

BIDDY

What about them? Shouldn't you worry about their future, even if you can't be bothered to think about yours?

COYNE

Frankly, I resent being told what I should or shouldn't do by someone that just met me. I do want a family, yes. I plan on having a wonderful family - the same as everyone else. A beautiful wife, loving children, maybe even a dog. But just because I have a dream that's similar to most people doesn't mean I need to conform to some standard of how best to live my life.

BIDDY

Why does your generation say conform every time you don't like what you're being told?

COYNE

The sixties and seventies were a long time ago, ma'am. My generation doesn't overuse the word "conform." We overuse words like extreme, networking and metrosexual.

HIPS (O.S.)

Metrosexual died in 05!

BIDDY

What in creation is metrosexual?

COYNE

I'm metrosexual. But that's a tangent. My point is, the way I want to live my life doesn't need to fit some preconceived standard.

(MORE)

COYNE (CONT'D)

Personally, I don't want to spend my time so focused on surviving the future that I forget about living in the present.

BIDDY

You can do both.

COYNE

I can. And I am. But it doesn't feel like enough for me. The way I'm going, I'll retire with a comfortable life, and hopefully a beautiful family that loves me. And that's what most people want out of life, but I would like to think that I'm not most people.

COCO

What do you want, then?

COYNE

That's the problem - I don't really know. I think part of the reason I came on this vacation was to try and figure that out. But I do know one thing - I don't want to just do what I'm expected to do. I don't want to spend the best years of my life following someone else's game plan.

BIDDY

And when you don't figure it out, you'll look back at all the wasted time and wonder why you didn't do what you should have done in the first place.

COYNE

IF I don't figure it out, that's fine. I'll just look back and be satisfied that I spent my time looking for the answer instead of giving up and settling for what was convenient.

BIDDY

And they say there aren't any romantics left in the world. Too bad romance can't buy you bread.

COYNE

It can if you're a writer. But it doesn't really need to. That's what work is for. I would much rather live for my work than work so I can live.

Singsing raises his fist in a cheer. In the process, he knocks over his drink, a few glasses and a half-full liter of beer.

SINGSING

Hurrah!

WAITER rushes over to begin cleaning up the mess. Singsing tries to help, but just ends up making a bigger mess. After a moment, he realizes he doesn't have a napkin or paper towel, so he grabs the waiter's tie. Without hesitation, he begins mopping up the spilled beer.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR, LATER

Coyne, Hips, Casey, Coco, Singsing and some of the people from the dinner are crowded around a few tables.

EVERYONE

Happy birthday!

Everyone does a shot.

Casey and Singsing start poring over a long list of shooters. Hips, Coyne and Coco sit across from them.

HIPS

Yummy. That was called?

CASEY

The screaming orgasm.

COYNE

And what's next?

CASEY

How about a good old fashioned buttery nipple?

HIPS

I love having my nipples buttered!

CUT TO:

INT. BAR, LATER

Singsing is talking to Coyne, while Coco seems content to just sit and listen. Hips and Casey are dancing with a few other people near the table.

SINGSING

How long do you plan on being in town?

COYNE

I really have no idea. My visa is for a month. My return ticket is open return. I guess the only correct answer there is "not more than a month."

SINGSING

Sounds like my kind of vacation.

COYNE

I'm thinking of it more as a self-evaluation.

SINGSING

You're not near old enough for a mid-life crisis, my dude.

COYNE

It's not really a crisis either. Just, well, I can't really explain it. It's interesting. I'm ready for a change; I just haven't figured out what kind of change it should be.

SINGSING

You think you'll find it in Beijing?

COYNE

Probably not, but I won't rule it out. I hope to at least figure out which direction I need to look.

Casey and Hips bound up to the table. Hips passes shots out to everyone, while Casey bellows at the top of her lungs. It sounds awful.

CASEY

Happy! Happy birthday to me!

She picks up a glass and motions for everyone else to do the same.

CASEY (CONT'D)  
Happy birthday to me!

She pushes her glass into the center of the group, forcing everyone to toast with her.

CASEY (CONT'D)  
And to you!

She snaps her head back, emptying the glass in one quick motion. Singing starts dancing with the girls and they pull him away from the table.

FADE TO:

INT. BAR, SHORT TIME LATER

Coyne and Coco are alone at the table.

COCO  
What does tangent mean?

COYNE  
Pardon?

COCO  
Tangent. When you were talking to Biddy, you said you were a metrosexual, but that was a tangent.

COYNE  
Ah, that. A tangent is when you find your conversation changing topics because you mention something that changes it.

COCO  
Like, "to diverge from?"

COYNE  
Exactly.

COCO  
Ah. [Smart]!

They pause while Coyne takes a sip of his drink and lights a cigarette.

COCO (CONT'D)  
So, what is metrosexual?

COYNE

How did I know that would be your next question?

Coyne pauses for a few moments and takes a drink. He looks like he's going to say something, then stops and takes a drag from his cigarette.

COYNE (CONT'D)

Generally speaking, a metrosexual is a vain man.

COCO

Oh.

She thinks it over.

COCO (CONT'D)

You don't seem vain to me. But I guess I don't really know you that well.

COYNE

Well, I think some people mistake vanity for being sure of oneself.

COCO

I see. And you are sure of yourself?

COYNE

Most of the time.

Coyne takes another sip of his drink. Coco pulls a cigarette out of her pack and puts it up to her lips. Coyne immediately proffers a lit lighter.

COYNE (CONT'D)

But it's a little more than just vanity.

COCO

Explain it to me.

COYNE

Well, people have pretty strong beliefs about what kind of things men and women should and shouldn't do.

COCO

I think that's true wherever you go. But give me an example of what you mean.

COYNE

Well, men are supposed to like sports and cars and action movies and guns and manly things like that. Women are supposed to like fashion and opera and ballet and cooking and the like.

COCO

That's the same as it is here.

COYNE

Well, let's take fashion as an example. The fashion industry has always been considered a very feminine industry, even though the most famous designers have predominantly been men. The men that do work in the industry, on any level, are generally thought to be gay. Because being gay is an excuse for acting womanly. Men should dress nicely, and take care of their appearance, but they shouldn't follow fashion - you know, worrying about colors and cuts and accessories and fabrics and shit.

COCO

Then why are there so many men's fashion magazines?

COYNE

Because a lot of men really like fashion. If you would have looked around twenty or thirty years ago, you would have had a hard time finding any. Until the nineties, men weren't really allowed to admit things like that. They still get messed with for it, but it's much more acceptable to like fashion now. Or get your hair styled instead of just cut. Or get a manicure.

COCO

What's that?

COYNE

Having your nails done.

Coco grabs his hands and starts inspecting his nails. He laughs.

The three dancers return suddenly. Hips is half carrying, half dragging a semiconscious Casey. Singsing looks as if he's trying to help, but since he's the drunkest of the bunch he just seems to get in the way.

HIPS  
Party's over, kids.

CASEY  
But I'm not done yet! Next, KTV!

HIPS  
Oh, god no, love. You are entirely too drunk for that. My ears can't bear that pain right now.

CASEY  
I sing good!

HIPS  
You sing well. When you're sober. When you're drunk, some alcohol demon takes over and you sound like a Linda Blair Speak-N-Spell.

CASEY  
(imitating a Linda Blair  
Speak-N-Spell demon)  
I kissed a girl and I liked it! The taste of her cherry chapstick!

(in her normal voice)  
See! Not done!

HIPS  
Yes, you are, hon. Coco and Singsing take you home, go sleep.

CASEY  
Sleep! My favorite!

COYNE  
Lead the way. By the way, what, pray tell, is KTV?

HIPS  
Karaoke

COYNE  
Home sounds infinitely better.

HIPS

It's not as bad as you think.  
Unless everyone is already this  
trashed when you get there.

COYNE

I'll take your word for it.

They exit slowly. Coyne and Coco hang back, gathering purses and cigarettes and jackets and other sundry objects.

CUT TO:

INT. LJ'S LIVING ROOM, LATER

LJ is sitting on the couch, writing in a notebook. Hips and Coyne walk into the apartment, startling him.

He sticks a pencil in the notebook to mark the page and closes it. Coyne and Hips take off their shoes.

LJ

Have fun?

COYNE

Interesting people. I enjoyed myself.

HIPS

You should have came?

LJ

Nah, I had things to do.

HIPS

You always have things to do, but you never do anything. Next time, you go. No nookie for you tonight. Me sleepy; go bed.

LJ

Ok, goodnight. I'm going to get him settled anyway.

HIPS

TTFN! I had fun.

Hips walks into the bedroom. She gives a small wave as she exits.

COYNE

Me, too. Thanks for taking me out!