

HANDYMEN

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE ACADEMY GROUNDS IN BISHOP CA - MORNING

The camera follows the grounds. First, it shows a fenced baseball field, jogging track and gridiron (few stands), and outdoor swimming pool. Then there are two buildings at a right angle, forming an L around a small well-sodded yard. One building is long and narrow and looks like a dormitory. The other is four stories, concrete and small. The air is a bit dusty and hazy, and an orange sun is out. Barren mountains rise in the background.

FRANK, 42, and BILL, 60, walk along the jogging track towards the buildings. From a distance, Frank looks like a young man. Both are dressed in gym clothes. The camera migrates from Bill's eyes to Frank, who in close-up looks visibly middle aged.

FRANK

So you came by to check me out?

BILL

You gave me a last chance out of this.

FRANK

And you still like to stare at me.

BILL

Well.

FRANK

Like you did once before.

BILL

Those were the days of innocence, before AIDS. I was a young vigorous man then, like you, well, just barely.

FRANK

With our lives ahead of us. Well, I'm an old married man myself now.

Frank manipulates his clothing, pulling up his tee shirt and now it appears that some object is taped to his chest.

They approach the building.

FRANK

And proud of it, you bet!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD AT ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

TOBEY, 28, SHEILA, 27, JOHN, 24, SYDNEY, 61, and ERICH, 17, watch Bill and Frank. Tobey is medium-height and muscular, John is very tall and crewcut, and Erich is short, slender and blond. Erich picks up a DV camcorder and takes another shot of the two men talking. Only Erich is in shorts, with shaggy legs. Then he turns to Tobey and Sheila and picks up the sparkle of their (now) wedding rings.

Tobey rolls down his athletic socks and peels off bandages on each ankle. Sheila puts her arm around Tobey, gives him a light kiss, and then makes an imitation break dance movement.

TOBEY

Sure, without a wife.

SHEILA

Careful with your own ring.

SYDNEY

You feel different, Tobey?

TOBEY

Being married? Not really.

SHEILA

He did better than a lot of men. He kept most of himself.

ERICH

I'll take the camera inside the building so I can follow the interview.

SYDNEY

Let's see Bill practice what he used to preach.

TOBEY

I don't think he'll have time for our little reunion. But then, neither will you, Sheila.

INT. WORKOUT ROOM AT ACADEMY - MOMENTS LATER

There are multiple workout stations and some medical monitoring equipment, like an electrocardiograph, with diagrams showing men doing stress tests.

Frank and Bill approach one corner, where there is a fancy desk with chair in front of it. Frank motions to Bill to sit down, and then keystrokes on his computer.

The camera quickly shows Frank browsing news reports on the volcano cleanup and then doing a Google search.

FRANK

Well, I see they've gotten most traces of your blogs off. I guess no girl friends -- pardon me, boy friends, can google you for dates now.

Frank leans back.

BILL

You know what I've given up.

FRANK

You're gonna be challenged here. You'll feel tired a lot, like you were in Army Basic. You'll learn to work, literally, to stay on your feet eight hours a day without bathroom breaks and balance a cash register at the end of a shift. You'll even take a turn at waitressing.

Tobey, Sheila, Erich, John, and Sydney enter now. Tobey nods at Frank, who makes a few keystrokes.

TOBEY

John, you may be the best subject. Syd is too old.

John strips to his shorts and stands on the treadmill. Sheila creams and sticks numerous electrodes on his chest, covering any hair, as John starts to jog.

FRANK

Axiom Financial, no. We suggested they cut you loose. And there's no commission for me now in this. No ponzi scheme.

BILL

It's your agenda now.

FRANK

And yours. You know as well as I do that the country needs a SWAT team to fix things, get things going after the next purification.

BILL

Suitcase nukes, or more explosions at Mono Lake.

FRANK

That's sure to happen.

ERICH

Or solar flares, or pole shifts. Or super storms.

BILL

I give up my own voice. On my own claims to social equality. I now surrender the debate to well-funded organizations.

FRANK

Bill, there won't be anything more to debate. And you were never equal, you enjoyed your submission. Even to Erich. The only way for you to rise up is to speak someone else's words. We'll give you the words. If you come to Handyman Academy, it will be your whole life. But you'll get on camera, make movies. That's what you've always wanted.

Frank watches the computer screen, which shows Tobey, Sheila and Erich setting up stuff and John doing the run. Some of the electrodes fall off his chest.

FRANK

You'll be handy with setting up this stuff. Even if you don't make it here, we'll use you in training films. You'll leave the showbiz to others.

Frank turns around and looks at the experimenters.

FRANK

Let's get this to work. Try someone younger.

BILL

But I chose them. I got to decide
who was best. Who could father.
That is good enough.

Now Sheila rips off Erich's shirt. Erich gets on the treadmill, as Sheila applies the electrodes. This time they stay on.

FRANK

You chose me once, and that was
good entertainment. Now see this.

Frank pulls out a large photo of men floating face up in a bubbly natatorium, broken into sections. The men are covered with electrodes. One of the men is Tobey.

FRANK

You see what happened after the
fire. You think he wants you now?

BILL

It doesn't matter. In my mind, they
were all family once.

FRANK

Go ahead. Tobey is waiting for you.
Tobey, not Sheila. He will prep
you.

Bill goes over to the exercise lab, passes the treadmill, and lies down on a gurney. Sheila approaches and unbuttons his shirt. Bill smiles.

FADE OUT.