

BAIT AND SWITCH

by

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1. FADE IN ON

A crystal ball against a black background. In it, a warped image is seen. The sounds of a television game show are heard, and after a few seconds we

ZOOM IN ON

The warped image of "Wheel of Fortune," which becomes clear as it fills the screen.

PULL BACK

The clear image, actually on a television set in the Shepards' living room in Ventura County, California. When just a little more than the TV set fills the screen,

CUT TO

Norman Shepard, drinking a Coke while slumped in his chair near a sofa, the light from the TV flickering in his glasses. As we

PULL BACK

Norman seated directly opposite the TV, he speaks.

NORMAN

Honey?

FEMALE VOICE

Yes?

NORMAN

What are those lovely parting gifts that losers get on game shows?

FEMALE VOICE

I don't know, Norman.

NORMAN

Maybe lifetime supplies of detergents or subscriptions to magazines they don't want or something?

FEMALE VOICE

Maybe. I don't know, Norman.

The TV switches to a Pepsi commercial.

HOLD ON

Norman watching TV for a moment, listening to the Pepsi song, then

2.

Norman and Joan's bedroom, a week later. They are both dressing up nicely, but are at the moment only half-dressed. Norman is in the middle of putting pants on over his boxers. The room's TV is on in the background, moving from a commercial into the "Entertainment Tonight" theme.

NORMAN

Joan. Oh Joan. "Entertainment Tonight."

He stops putting his pants on midway up his leg, sits on the bed and faces the TV, pants hanging around his knees. Joan continues dressing. Hers is the voice heard earlier.

JOAN

Norman, we'll be late for the optometrist thing.

NORMAN

It's okay. It's the same every year.

JOAN

And this is the same every night.

NORMAN

This is on every night, but it's not the same every night.

JOAN

Norman.

Norman concedes. He pulls his pants up and searches for a tie. He finds two on which he can't decide.

NORMAN

Honey, which do you like better? One or two? Better or worse? One or two?

Joan finds a third tie, hands it to him, and shuts off the TV.

3.

Norman, the next day, seated on a stool in front of a kitchen counter, eating a frozen dinner while watching the living room TV. A detergent commercial airs.

NORMAN

Honey?

CUT TO

Joan, in the living room, cleaning dust off the TV with a washcloth and store brand cleaner.

JOAN

Yes?

CUT TO

NORMAN

If something is better than the leading brand then why doesn't it ever become the leading brand?

CUT TO

Joan, who removes a small painting from the wall above and behind the TV. She holds it in one hand while she dusts the wall normally behind that painting with the other, dust having built up at the frame's perimeter.

JOAN

I don't know, Norman.

She replaces the painting.

CUT TO

Norman, pensive. He picks up the brownie from his dinner tray, and eats it.

4.

A city street, days later. Joan is on a bench reading a newspaper. When she comes across the TV listings, she sighs and takes in her surroundings.

CUT TO

A few of the various things she sees, ending with a sign in a second floor window. In cheesy fonts, it reads, "Ramona - The

Happy Medium - Fortune Teller - Palmreadings, Tea leaves, Tarot Cards - Know the Future!"

CUT TO

Joan's puzzled reaction. On an impulse, she decides to enter the building.

CUT TO

Ramona's room, cluttered with all kinds of Gypsy and occult paraphernalia. She whistles "Put on a Happy Face" as she Windexes her crystal ball, placed prominently on a covered table in the center of the room. Someone knocks on the door. Ramona stops cleaning, smiles, and rushes to the door. Upon opening it, we see Joan in the doorway.

RAMONA

(in a very fake accent)

Good afternoon, I am Madame Ramona,
Fortune Teller, and...

(as if a prediction)

... you wish to have your fortune told!

JOAN

Yes.

RAMONA

Ha! You see? I have read your mind.
Now sit down.

Joan sits at the covered table. Ramona finishes Windexing the ball as she speaks.

RAMONA

You are?

JOAN

Joan Shepard. I... I've never done this
before.

RAMONA

And at one time, even I had never done
this before. And see now! Don't worry
about one thing.

She tosses the Windex and washcloth under the table.

Now you tell me. Palms, tea leaves,

Tarot, what you want?

JOAN

What's easy?

RAMONA

I tell you what you want. You want tea leaves read. I got some herbal tea all ready, eh? You want some?

Ramona gets a cup and a teakettle, pours hot water for Joan, then puts a teabag in the cup. She dunks it up and down several times, smiling at Joan as she moves her head back and forth from the cup to Joan. She finishes.

Drink up.

Joan sips the tea.

RAMONA

No, no, no. Swallow it all. Future is impatient. Before you know it, bang! It is there. Waste no time.

Joan downs the cup. Ramona snatches it from her hands. She performs some mystical hand motions over the cup and mumbles a bit. She sets the cup down and lifts the teabag out, dangling it in front of Joan's face, then in front of her own. She develops an awestruck look.

RAMONA

Oh Joan. The tea leaves say to me that you... will receive... a message today.

CUT TO

JOAN

(after a pause)

That's all?

RAMONA

(pleased with herself)

A message.

(holds out her hand)

Five dollars.

Joan is exasperated and disappointed.

5.

Joan, pulling into her driveway the same night. Norman's car is already there. She exits the car and goes to the mailbox. There's a nice stack of junk mail. She leafs through it briefly.

CUT TO

Norman, inside, in the chair, watching TV. Joan knocks several times, calling to Norman.

NORMAN

Come on in.

Joan, fumbling, enters behind him and dumps the stack of mail on his lap. He goes through it, and one envelope catches his attention. He opens it and scans the letter.

NORMAN

Honey?

JOAN

Yes?

NORMAN

Have you ever heard of Telemax Ratings Corp.?

JOAN

No.

NORMAN

It's a new TV ratings company. They've got some new system where you don't have to fill anything out or do anything. They put a box on top of the TV and it can tell whose watching.

JOAN

And?

NORMAN

And we've been chosen as a test family for Telemax Ratings. They'll install it and everything, and we get 50 bucks a month for doing it. Somebody wants to know what we watch on TV. Somebody cares about what I watch. Joan, how about it?

CUT TO

An open cabinet in the kitchen. A hand is deciding between coffee and tea, both store brands. It picks coffee.

CUT TO

Joan, holding the instant coffee.

6.

An exterior of the Shepard house, several days later. Joan's car is not in the driveway. A van, upon which is written "Telemax Ratings Corporation," pulls in.

CUT TO

Norman, in lounging clothes, seated in the TV chair, watching "Gone With the Wind." A knock on the door is heard.

NORMAN

Honey, could you get that?... Honey?
Joan?... Come in, door's open.

In the background, two men in white overalls enter with a good deal of electronic equipment, cables, cases, etc. They are in a real tizzy.

MAN #1

Telemax Ratings.

NORMAN

(still glued to the TV)
Sure, come on in.

MAN #1

(looking a little frustrated at Norman)
Okay if we start upstairs-

NORMAN

Sure, come on in.

The men go upstairs quickly, suspiciously.

CUT TO

A closeup of Norman. We hear loud tinkering, sawing, and drilling sounds in the background while Norman continues to be absorbed with his movie. The movie breaks for a commercial. The camera follows Norman to the bathroom, and Norman closes the door behind him, leaving the camera briefly alone in the hallway.

CUT TO

The living room, empty. The upstairs noises stop. The men peek down from upstairs.

CUT TO

A camera which one of the men is holding.

CUT TO

POV shot from the camera, i.e., the image it sees. The image is in black and white with a time code. It shakes and jerks as it they men carry it, bounding quickly down the stairs. It approaches the television in the living room. It is swung around and placed on top of the television, so that it sees essentially what the television would see. The men are in front of the TV and thus in view, frantically placing the small black box, which goes out of view as it is placed next to the camera on the TV. They scurry with more equipment. They collect themselves. Man #1 looks at Man #2, who looks offscreen, behind the TV and camera. Man #2 jumps over the TV with his equipment. The working noises are heard.

CUT TO

Norman, on the toilet, whistling the theme to "Gone With the Wind" while reading TV Guide. The noise is faint in the background, but Norman doesn't hear it.

CUT TO

The camera's POV shot, Man #1 in view, drilling the sawing sounds persisting. Man #2 jumps back into the view, breathing heavily as if he'd just done something in a rush. Man #1 calming approaches the camera, takes it, lifts it from the TV, and moves it backwards, i.e., behind the television. He sets it down somehow so that the image is that of the living room from behind and above the television, the television itself in the extreme foreground with the box on top of it. He reaches down, and as he comes up, he is holding a large object, which begins to engulf the camera's image in blackness.

CUT TO

The van outside, screeching out of the driveway and speeding away. As they careen down the street like terrorists after a bombing, Joan's car passes them. She has seen them pull out of her driveway, which she then approaches and pulls into.

ZOOM IN ON

Her face, through the driver seat window, puzzled.

CUT TO

The van, off in the distance and rounding a curve.

CUT TO

The living room, the sound of a flushing toilet in the background as Norman enters with his TV Guide, still whistling. He looks at his TV and sees something he never did before. He stops whistling.

CUT TO

A closeup of the little box. It is black and has a lone red LED in the bottom left corner of its front face. The LED is on.

CUT TO

Norman, who smiles. In the background, Joan enters with grocery bags, one overflowing with frozen dinners, puzzled.

JOAN

Norman, what was that van doing here?

NORMAN

(glowing)

They were from the ratings company.
We're a Telemax family.

7.

The TV, a couple of weeks later, airing a Sears commercial, showing off various appliances and tools.

CUT TO

The reverse shot. The chair is no longer there, but instead there is a love seat, on which are Norman and Joan watching TV. The chair is off to the side. Joan is clearly bored.

NORMAN

Bobby's gone up to ten dollars for
mowing the lawn.

JOAN

Ten's a bit steep.

NORMAN

He said the lawnmower's going bust.

JOAN

Mm-hmm.

CUT TO

The TV, which has switched to a tampon commercial.

CUT TO

NORMAN

Those new tampons any good?

JOAN

I haven't tried them, and I have no urge to. Why don't you try them, Norman? It'd be fun.

CUT TO

The TV. The tampon commercial slices off in the middle, yielding blackness, which is quickly replaced by the logo for the afternoon classic movie.

CUT TO

NORMAN

I think we may need a new lawnmower.

8.

Norman, in bed, a week later, watching "Roseanne." Joan enters in bathrobe from the attached bathroom. She climbs into bed, looks at Norman for a while. He turns and smiles briefly, quickly returning to the TV. She turns to the TV.

CUT TO

The bedroom TV, on which is a box identical to the one in the living room.

CUT TO

The couple. They watch for a few seconds in which Joan turns back and forth from the TV to Norman.

JOAN
Norman?

NORMAN
What?

JOAN
I don't want to watch TV.

NORMAN
Sure you do.

JOAN
I really don't.

She grabs the remote and switches it off.

NORMAN
Why not?

JOAN
I just don't want to.

NORMAN
The show's almost over.

JOAN
I don't need to watch this.

NORMAN
Oh, come on, we're a Telemax family.
We've got to watch TV.

He takes the remote and clicks the TV back on.

JOAN
If I never really watched TV before, and
you're making me watch now because of
that little box, don't you think that's
wrong? They want to know who's watching
what, but they also want to know who's
not watching what.
(she gets up)
And I'm not watching this, okay?

NORMAN
Where are you going?

JOAN

To sleep on the couch.

NORMAN

No, don't.

JOAN

Why not?

NORMAN

Just don't.

JOAN

Shut it off.

NORMAN

(grudgingly)

Okay.

He does, and she climbs into bed. All that can be heard is crickets outside.

NORMAN

Good night?

JOAN

Night.

CUT TO

Norman's head on the pillow, facing off the bed into the camera, eyes wide open and sleepless, looking like a withdrawing addict.

HOLD ON

Norman. He gets restless.

CUT TO

Norman and Joan, medium shot. Norman turns over to check on Joan. He quietly takes the remote and turns the TV on. He reacts to its volume and quickly mutes it. He sighs a happy, relieved sigh.

CUT TO

The TV and its silent image, the only sound being the crickets from outside.

The front door, days later, from the inside. Norman enters, tosses his coat down, and enters the kitchen.

CUT TO

Norman and the refrigerator. He opens it and finds a can of Pepsi, which he opens on his way to the living room TV, once again in front of his lone chair, the sofa off to the side as before. He sits down, grabs the remote, turns the TV on, and flips the channels around.

NORMAN

Can't do this in a movie theatre.

He continues flipping around, settling on a rerun of "Magnum, P.I." He reacts with a sigh of satisfaction.

He gets comfortable in his chair, humming along with the theme.

10.

Joan, the same evening, on a street corner, waiting for the sign to change to "Walk." Spying around, she sees something.

CUT TO

The Happy Medium's place.

CUT TO

Joan, skeptical, laughing it off. She looks at her watch, has a change of heart, and flippantly enters the building again.

CUT TO

The inside of Ramona's place, Ramona and Joan seated opposite each other again. Ramona whistles "Zip a Dee Doo Dah" as she makes mystical gestures over her crystal ball.

RAMONA

I see that you will...

CUT TO

A jar of fortune cookies. A hand enters it and takes one. The camera follows the hand, which is Ramona's. It meets Ramona's other hand, which breaks the cookie and takes the fortune.

CUT TO

A closeup of Ramona's face, looking down at the fortune.

... "You will make new acquaintances."
Having some of hubby's friends over for
dinner?

CUT TO

JOAN
(laughing a bit)
Not likely. Norman doesn't have any
friends.

RAMONA
Well, at least he has his lovely wife,
eh?

JOAN
Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't. You'd
know.

RAMONA
Come. I read your palm, then.

JOAN
(getting nervous)
Uh, no thanks.

RAMONA
Come. I do it for free. For
friendship. Bang bang. One minute.

JOAN
Maybe next time.

She gets up, pays Ramona, and leaves.

CUT TO

Ramona, happy, continuing her song.

11.

Norman, the same evening, in the kitchen putting a frozen dinner in the microwave, still listening to "Magnum" and catching as many glimpses as he can. He starts the microwave and walks into the living room watching the show. The TV cuts to a commercial for under-the-cabinet appliances. Norman picks up his newest TV Guide.

NORMAN

(on his way to the bathroom)

Ah, you get all those under-the-cabinet things, you free up your counter space, and then you complain you don't have any space left under your cabinets.

The camera remains on the empty living room as he leaves the room, and the commercial cuts off in mid-sentence. A Sears commercial comes on, highlighting a new lawnmower. The front door opens, and Joan enters. She looks at the TV, turned on in an empty room, and she exhales in frustration. After a moment, she sits down in the chair and watches the commercial, which yields to one for the upcoming episode of "Babes." She smiles at its inanity. It cut off, switching to something new. Her eyes wander up above the TV.

CUT TO

The painting above and behind the TV, dusty once more.

CUT TO

Joan, who reacts to its regained dustiness.

JOAN

(announcing to wherever he might be)

Norman, it was your turn to dust last month.

She gets up and goes toward the kitchen.

CUT TO

Norman, whistling the "Magnum" theme on the toilet.

CUT TO

Joan in the kitchen, where she finds her dustcloth. The microwave is counting down the time for Norman's dinner. The camera follows her to the painting. She dusts its front.

CUT TO

The microwave clock, down to three seconds.

CUT TO

Joan, about to lift the painting off the wall.

CUT TO

The clock at two seconds.

CUT TO

Joan's hands on the frame.

CUT TO

The clock at one second.

CUT TO

Joan lifting the painting off the wall.

CUT TO

The clock at zero. It beeps.

CUT TO

The video camera's POV. The object placed by Man #1 is currently being removed, and once off we see that Joan is doing the removing. The microwave stops its beep. She looks directly into the camera puzzled. She backs away. The only sound is the TV once again.

CUT TO

Medium shot of Joan and a sloppily made hole, behind the painting's normal place, in which sits the camera, aimed straight out.

CUT TO

Closeup of Joan, puzzled.

CUT TO

The hole.

CUT TO

Medium shot of Joan and the hole. She turns the painting over and over, inspecting it, finding a small hole in its center. She is puzzled. "Magnum" comes back on. A knock on the door is heard.

CUT TO

Camera's POV. Joan approaches the front door, leaving the painting sitting on the chair. As her hand reaches for the doorknob,

CUT TO

The opening door, POV shot from Joan. Two well-dressed, smiling businessmen stand outside with briefcases. One holds a clean white cloth up to the camera, engulfing the screen. Joan tries to say something.

CUT TO

The businessmen carrying Joan, who has just been drugged and is now unconscious, over the threshold. They slam the door behind them. A toilet flushes.

CUT TO

Norman, coming back into the living room. He goes to the kitchen, gets his dinner and a fork, and brings it to his chair. He removes the painting, setting it down next to his chair, and watches "Magnum" as he eats, oblivious to what just occurred and to the hole in the wall ahead of him.

12.

FADE OUT

JOAN

(in darkness)

Where am I?...

It is later that evening. From the darkness, light appears. It comes from several TV sets, all playing different commercials, surrounding an easy chair from a moderate distance. Strapped into that easy chair is Joan. All that is seen is Joan and the television sets. Nothing can be divined of the dimensions of the room itself, which remains in darkness all around.

JOAN

I don't watch television.

CUT TO

Reverse shot from Joan, i.e., several of the TV sets with

blackness behind.

MALE VOICE

We know.

CUT TO

JOAN

Who's there?

CUT TO

The reverse shot. From the blackness, coming into the light, is a man in a suit, not one of the earlier businessman kidnapers. He seems in good spirits.

DEMVANDLER

How's the chair? Comfortable?

No response from Joan.

Welcome to Telemax. My name is Max Demvandler.

JOAN

Telemax...

He approaches her, but keeps a TV set directly in between them. He leans casually on it from behind. He speaks as if to a peer who has yet to learn something very interesting.

DEMVANDLER

Joan, tell me what you see on this television.

The television set turns off. The other sets around continue their soft din of sound, flickering on Joan and Demvandler.

CUT TO

JOAN

Nothing.

DEMVANDLER

Exactly. That's what you watch on television. Nothing.

JOAN

Am I here because I don't watch enough

television? Are you going to brainwash me or something?

DEMVANDLER

Oh, no, no, no. We're a ratings company. We wouldn't brainwash you. Let me rephrase. What don't you see on this television?

JOAN

(quizzically)

Anything.

DEMVANDLER

Let's be more specific. You don't see "Roseanne" right now because you don't like it. You don't see game shows because you don't want to. And you don't see tampon commercials because you don't need to. Do you have any idea what I'm driving at?

JOAN

(to herself)

You're my new acquaintance.

DEMVANDLER

Let me clarify. This television set receives its programming from a computer which is set up to give you exactly the commercials you want to see. You watch no television, you get no commercials. Of course, that makes advertisers a little upset, but you find out about their products in other ways, so there's no point in forcing you to watch. Companies are selling plenty. They just spend too much on advertising.

JOAN

I thought the point of advertising is to get people to buy things even if they don't need them.

DEMVANDLER

You see, Joan, the real trick is targetting. We could care less about TV ratings. Ratings just determine how much companies have to spend to

advertise to millions of people who don't want to see their ads. We find the few who do. Your husband mentions that he needs a new lawnmower, he starts seeing more lawnmower ads. You see a tampon commercial and say that you don't need any new tampons, so there's no point in showing you that commercial again. That's what efficiency in advertising is all about.

JOAN

And videotaping people? Spying on them? Kidnapping them? Is that what advertising's all about?

DEMVANDLER

Regrettable. But that was necessary once you discovered our camera.

(keeping her from jumping in)
Of course, we expect you to dust. We don't expect our employees to get behind in their schedule and rush a job. They've been dealt with.

JOAN

You killed them?

DEMVANDLER

You see, Joan, we're moving into the future. Cable, video, pay-per-view, they're all threatening commercial television in a big way, and by God, we're going to do something about it. By showing you only the commercials you want to see, you feel good about them. They're no longer an interruption. Instead of customizing programming, we tailor commercials. And what better way to do that than to get right at what you're thinking.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small computer chip.

We just completed this. A computer chip like this one will be implanted inside your brain.

JOAN

You're joking.

DEMVANDLER

Don't worry, chip goes in, you go out. You'll be home in time for "Nightline." We'll have the information right from its source, and you'll forget all about tonight's events. It's the most efficient and direct path to your feelings about the products you use.

JOAN

It's also the most direct path to all my feelings about everything that I keep to myself, things I don't-

He wheels a cart with a variety of surgical instruments up to the recliner.

DEMVANDLER

Trust me, we'll only look at what is pertinent to us.

JOAN

Trust you? I'm supposed to trust you?

He abruptly moves her recliner chair to an extreme reclined position.

DEMVANDLER

There is no alternative. You can't very well go back home knowing what you know. You might report us. This way, you won't remember anything to report. Think about it, Joan.

He begins to tighten the straps.

Millions of Chippers, across the nation, giving us all the information we need, not even knowing they're Chippers.

JOAN

How can you do this?

DEMVANDLER

We're not sure yet. It's going to be a big job. The bottom line is, even with the chip, we're not manipulating you,

telling you that you need to try some new breakfast cereal. We're simply manipulating your environment to make your life and our clients happier and more efficient. It's all quite altruistic if you think about it.

Joan laughs. Her smile grows somber, almost panicked.

JOAN

I really don't want anything to do with any of this.

DEMVANDLER

Unfortunately, wanting is not an issue right now. If you'll excuse me, I'll send in the surgeons.

He backs away into the darkness, out of reach of the television lights. The din continues.

CUT TO

Joan, dumbfounded at all that she has stumbled upon. The surgical lights come on and

WHITE OUT

13.

DISSOLVE TO

The Shepards' living room, later that evening. The din from the last scene has given way to a rerun of "The Honeymooners." Norman sits, watching TV, no other lights on in the room. Joan enters, in a bit of a daze.

NORMAN

(turning from the TV)

Honey. You okay? Where've you been?

JOAN

(approaching him, still dazed)

I'm fine. Long day at work.

She takes the painting at Norman's side and replaces it on the wall. He doesn't react to her at all. She sits down, alone on the adjacent sofa, viewing the TV.

CUT TO

Medium shot, encompassing Joan and Norman sitting in front of the TV. She is still dumbfounded, and stares more off into space than at the television, while he laughs at the program. The television lights flash on their faces, reflected in Norman's glasses. The image ripples, becoming more fuzzy.

PULL BACK

The warped image of the couple watching television, seen in a crystal ball against a black background. In the background, Ramona begins whistling "Put on a Happy Face," a happy little band backing her up.

FINAL FADE OUT

CREDITS ROLL AS MUSIC CONTINUES