## **1. TWO BROTHERS**

"There's so much fungus that I can't see the bottom of the pool."

You're so coked up, that you don't know the bottom from the top," the pool boy informs him.

"Boy, you need more chlorine."

This is a minor emergency. His pH balance is all screwed up. He doesn't need more chlorine. He needs soda ash to correct things.

This begins as a tale of two brothers. My name is Benny. My bother is Ramon. My brother has always loved horses. The Kentucky Derby on TV is about as close as I want to get to a horse. He learned to ride bareback at 6. From that moment on, his life was set. He became an expert rider. His reputation was known everywhere in our village.

For my part, I hate horses. I hate the smell. I should know; one of my first jobs as a kid was cleaning the horse shit out of the barn.

I grew up watching American television. Old stuff. *Happy Days. Charles in Charge*. I have always wanted to visit Coney Island and the site of the first McDonald's.

When I learn my brother and I have a chance to move to the United States, I am elated. This would be the opportunity to change my life for the better. How can this ever have happened to someone like me?

From early on, they have been talking about my brother.

"That boy can ride."

He soon becomes an adept polo player. The word spreads far and wide of his skill. "He could have a career as a champion!"

As a premier polo player, Ramon has the chance to hang around the American Club. It is near a US military base in our country. There is a whole community that resembles a suburb of San Diego.

Ramon befriends Americans and Europeans. He gets to know everyone. He is so charming that they invite him to all the right parties. He is a virtual star. A *Tom Cruise*!

One day a couple of well-dressed Americans are intently eyeing my brother

"He's met everyone. He knows loads of arms dealers. Who do you think loves polo? People with money. Arms dealers. We could recruit this kid into the CIA."

"Are you serious Montag? It would be nuts."

"He's can play like the dickens. He meets everyone who is anyone. He already has the perfect cover."

The idea turns into a plan. Pretty soon my brother will would be transformed into a sought-after spy. They make him an offer.

Ramon balks, "I don't want to move to America by myself."

'We'll give you money, women, party favors. What more do you want?"

"I want you to let me move my brother with me.

"Are you crazy? Who the hell is your brother?"

"My brother Benny. No, Benny, no Ramon."

I think that is a trick on Ramon's part. He has every intention of going to the US. But we have shared this dream since we were kids. So he has to look out for me. It is a family tradition. They want Ramon so badly. He knows it. He probably could have asked for Nicole Kidman,

and they would have got her for him. These guys take no prisoners.

Here comes Benny to America.

When I arrive in the US, they take me to a military base for a process of debriefing. It's as if I'm some kind of plague and they're afraid to let me in the country.

"I don't know about this guy. He doesn't really meet the criteria. Is there any way that we can just send him back." The one agent is looking off into the desert horizon.

His equally faceless partner is looking at my papers, "His brother made some kind of deal to get him in here. It would be bad diplomacy to break our word. His brother might stop cooperating. He's our secret weapon right now."

"Even if we had an open door immigration policy with his country, he'd have a hard time getting in here. What kind of marketable skills does he have?"

"He speaks English like a native. And he can crack jokes. I'd say that he has a leg up on a lot of the people born here."

"It's not like we don't have enough of his type already in the country. What kind of job can he do."

"I think that his brother's going to get enough money on his own for a family."

"This is never good policy. If he can't be independent, he's going to be a burden." "We've got our orders."

They take me to a small theater. They plan to do a debriefing there. It is more like a decontamination. I am some kind of space-age insect that they need to exterminate before I infect the whole county.

They have a battery of question that they are running on me.

"It's like the SAT."

"The SAT?"

"You 've seen it in the movies."

"Yeah, that thing that high school kids worry about."

I think that I am temporarily confusing STD and SAT. It all sounds pretty much the same. A sexually transmitted disease and a college aptitude test. Both give me the feeling that something has gone dreadfully wrong with America's youth. Never fear, Benny is here to take you back to the right path.

I smile. The administrator is not very friendly. I saw a driver's license examiner act this way on *Happy Days* once. I think that I know what to do. It's just that I was never given a book to study before my test. On *Happy Days*, I think that they ate hot dogs before the exam.

"Could I have a hot dog before my test?" I ask meekly.

"This is not a test. You have nothing to worry about."

I can feel the inspectors ready to walk around my brain with small brushes, and I'm told that I have nothing to worry about. I feel like I'm sweating, that I'm going to say the wrong thing. What is the right thing? I love America.

"These questions are not meant to confuse you. Just give us the first idea that comes in your head. There is no right and wrong. This is like taking an opinion poll."

They always say that opinions matter in the US. I should feel honored that I am being asked these questions.

"I am a little thirsty. Can I have some water?"

For some reason, they are shining a light on me. The administrator motions to an assistant.

"Get him some water," he orders.

The assistant comes back with a bottled water, and he hands it to me. He then goes back to sit next to his supervisor.

"As I've told you, I want you to be completely relaxed. Just tell me what you think. Feel free to speak your mind."

If I'm going to feel free, they could start by turning off this interrogation lamp. This is probably how they start to soften up dangerous criminals. I am no danger to America.

I am expecting questions about two trains traveling to Chicago, and what is the length of the hypotenuse of a triangle with a base of six inches. I am surprised by the first question.

"What kind of topping do you like on your pizza?"

I answer quickly, "Pepperoni with extra cheese."

This seems like it's going to be easy. But they still have the light shining in my face.

"Benny, you don't seem relaxed. You have to be relaxed for these questions."

Under the circumstances, I try to relax. He belts out the next question: "Would you rather have roast chicken or fried."

I think KFC. "Fried!"

"Would you rather drive a Lexis or a Crown Vic? Do you want Corn Flakes or Captain Crunch? Do you want paper or plastic? What side do you butter your toast on? How do you like your eggs? What kind of school do you want to send your kids to? Do you believe in prayer in schools? What do you think about evolution? Are you worried about global warming? Who is going to win the Super Bowl? College or Pro? Talk shows or reality shows? Have you ever watched the show Cops? Cherry pie or apple pie? Are you hungry yet?"

"I am hungry."

"We're finished the questions. Welcome to America, Benny."

"Does this mean that I can leave the base and catch up to my brother."

"Hell no! We have load of other tests for you."

They serve my food in my room. It is pizza and a hamburger with a coke. They give me a Snickers bar for dessert. I am still quarantined from the rest of civilization. I feel like I have some kind of disease.

"You do have a disease."

"Who are you?"

"Benny, I'm your conscience. You're going to need me when you're in the States."

My confinement is already getting to me. I am seeing things. I am surprised that they don't keep me in Alcatrazz. This is so much less glamorous.

They do let me use the swimming pool. I am supervised. But it lets me loosen up after my first round of interrogation.

The next day they wake me up at six. The desert air is still cool when they lead me to the interrogation room.

"Don't I get my breakfast first?" I wonder. I think they think of my breakfast as some kind of trick to help with the questions. These people are daft. And I wanted to come to this country. It's as if America is this illusion that only exists on TV.

Someone has found an old episode of *Saved By the Bell*. They are showing it to me and checking on my responses.

"What is this for. To see if I'm some kind of pervert. All you guys watch this show. I mean the girls are all grown up now."

"Benny, you are here as a guest. You're not supposed to question our methods. This is all very scientific."

Next I expect episodes of Jerry Springer and American Idol.

"What do you want, Benny?" The administrator asks me. "Some *Seinfeld*. Some *Friends*."

I stare back at him numbly.

"This is not entertainment. This is science."

I mumble to myself, "I know what some people in the administration consider science." "Benny, we can't hear you."

"I was just clearing my throat."

I don't think that I give them the kind of response that they expect.

They whisper among themselves, "This boy isn't queer."

"Can we keep him out if he is?"

"I don't think that this is the Army."

"What is that supposed to mean."

The three of them now turn to me. I feel like they've just come out of a football huddle and are preparing to tackle me."

"Hut one!"

"What does that mean, Benny."

"That's a joke."

He has no sense of humor. None of them do. As they go on break, I can hear them all laughing. I wonder if one of their diodes has come loose.

After lunch, they have more questions to ask. Some of them appear to relate sexual orientation to visits from space aliens. These guys are some real kooks. I hope that they really aren't running the country. I wonder how Scott Baio or Erik Estrada would handle this. I sit up straight and give them what they want.

I think the intent of all this is to wear me down until I finally ask to be sent home. But I am waiting to walk down the streets paved in gold. I am waiting for my earthly reward. I am still a young man! I want to live in America!

"You seem to be quite an upstanding guy. We are proud to have you come live in our country."

They are finally letting me go. I know that they want to ship me back in the next plane. But they have their orders.

"Just remember that your visa is like a gift. The laws here are meant to be obeyed. We can ship you back whenever we like."

They take me to a civilian airport nearby. I have my bags with me. They have arranged a flight to LA. Ramon is supposed to meet me when I get in.

Ramon is waiting outside LAX in his shiny new BMW convertible. He really looks like a spy. That's my brother.

"Great to finally have you hear, bro'. Sorry about all the hassles."

"I guess they have to be safe here. They already have enough TV junkies floating around."

Ramon smiles. "Just don't mess it up for me.""

They have him staying in a small place with a pool. For me it is like the playboy mansion.

"Where are the girls?""

"What do you mean, Benny?"

"I thought that they'd give you girls to come here."

"I do work. I have a job."

"What kind of work.""

"Very hard work."

"In a factory.""

"No!"

"In an office."

"I have an office, but I'm not there a lot."

"What do you do?"

"I mostly go to parties. It's tough remembering the names of everyone that I meet. Btu that my job."

"A real skill."

"I'm still playing polo. I'll have to take you out to the club."

I am excited. I have my own room. And I'm going to get to hang out with movies stars.

"Benny, you've got to remember. None of this is going to last. You need a plan. I didn't bring you here to watch TV all the time. It's OK to lounge around a few days. But the whip's going to crack eventually."

I feel like he's talking to one of his ponies.

Ramon ends up going to a party that night. I am too zonked out from the interrogation. The next morning I wake up a little late. Ramon is eating a late breakfast. I look outside at the pool the pool.

"Who is that, Ramon?" I feel like I am staring at a Playboy model come to life, air brushing and all.

"She's a temptress."

"Seriously, who is she?"

"I told you that she's being groomed for a mission in Bermuda. She's going to be a temptress. More accurately, she's an SPA a sexually provocatively agent

"You're joking me."

"For real. 'You know yourself that spies have no real sense of humor." I smile back at my brother. "She's a great agent. She studied Comparative Literature at Yale. She knows five languages. Wow!"

After eating I wander out to the pool. She is sitting on a float.

"Hi, I'm Benny. I'm Ramon's brother."

"I figured that. He told me about you. I'm Wanda."

"Wow! He told me that you went to Yale. What are you doing working for the agency."

"I want to help my country." She gives me the biggest smile.

Ramon calls me aside. I'm sure that he is going to lecture me on making moves on his

girl.

"Benny, I need you to do a few things."

I am expecting a top secret mission.

"Can you go around to all the rooms and gather the garbage. And then take it out for pickup. Another favor. I've got some dishes left over from last night. Can you take care of them as well.

"No problem. I thought that you had a really secret mission for me."

"Maybe another time. I just need you to do those things. I don't want the place becoming a mess."

"I thought that you had a maid."

"I do. But she only comes in twice a week."

"I don't mind doing a little bit to help."

"I have to go off to the club and practice. I'm going to drop Wanda off as well. Sorry that she couldn't hang around longer to chat. You'll probably see her at the party tonight."

"Are you having a party?"

"No, you're going to come to a party with me. Just be ready around 7."

"Of course."

"I'm going to shower and change at the club. See you then."

I gather the garbage after he leaves. Then I finish the dishes. The rest of the day is mine to lounge around the pool. Life is wonderful.

I have a nap and am dressed and ready when Ramon honks to pick me up.

"Dear brother, you look great. I guess you got a little California sun."

"Yes, I am indeed a little sun-kissed."

We both laugh. It seems like old times at home. Only he didn't have a BMW then.

The party is a crowded affair at this mansion. There is this pool that is three pools connected by a small channel. Bridges traverse the waterways.

"I feel like I am in Venice."

"Remember, Benny. You need to behave."

I see Wanda talking to some nerdy types. I want to rescue her. I walk over and they are talking about minute budget details. This is awful. One of the guys recognizes me as Ramon's brother.

"I'm Steve. Come let's get a drink."

"Whose party is this?"

"Some Hollywood director. He makes these action pictures. Get these ex-military types as consultants."

"It looks like Hugh Heffner's house." We both laugh.

"This is the price of freedom."

"I guess it is."

Steve takes me in one room where they're cutting lines.

"Go ahead," motions a very official looking guy. Steve seems to be coaxing me as well.

"I don't really feel that I should. I'm a guest in this country. I feel that I should obey the

laws."

"Go ahead Benny. It's OK," Steve informs me.

"That all right. I don't like to get too excited. Blow just makes me jittery. I start saying the stupidest shit."

I am trying not to insult anyone. They all laugh at me.

"I think that we'll have to deport him before he turns us all in."

I feel totally embarrassed. They are all roaring with laughter.

"You need a drink, boy." One of the older chaps put his arm around me.

"Don't let them make fun of you. You're just watching out for yourself."

He takes me to the bar for a good stiff whiskey.

"This is great stuff, my man. Welcome to America."

I look over at Wanda, and she is giving me the eye. The next thing she is making out with one of the nerdy guys. I am looking for Steve, looking for my brother.

"I'll have another whisky."

I keep to myself for most of the party. I get a little trashed. My brother finds me to take me home.

"Thanks for doing nothing to embarrass me."

"Thanks for taking me to the party. It was great."

For a second day in a row, I don't wake up until 11. Ramon is not up. He drags himself out of bed at 2.

"Well, old boy. That was fun last night. I wish that I could have brought some cuties

back. Tonight maybe. Drinks after work. I'll see you around 9. I need a little vacuuming." "No problem."

"Also the bathrooms. I wish that you could do some outside work. No problem though." "I'll help you out."

Again, it only takes a couple of hours to straighten the place out. I slack off for the rest of the day into the evening hours. This is really the life.

Ramon takes me to this really hip watering hole. There is a doorman who ushers in patrons. People wait in a long line to have the chance to rub shoulders with celebrities. Ramon passes right through.

"This is wonderful."

"Yes, it is."

"Remember what I said last night, Benny. Be a good boy."

Everyone I talk to seems to have an agent. I feel left out. When is Ramon going to get me in a movie. I wait by the bar for a drink. I am in a casual conversation with one guy who writes scripts.

"Would you like peanuts or pretzels?"

"Is this a trick question?." I remember the interrogation.

"Do you want some peanuts with your drink."

"Great!"

"I've got this one picture in development. It's sort of a low rent James Bond."

"I love James Bond."

"This guy is an American spy. Something patriotic to the core."

"Cool!"

I see a girl at the bar. She is in a delightful black dress with sort of a box cut on the straps. Her hair is in a stylish black bob. She seems to be beckoning me over.

"Hi, my name is Benny."

"I'm Louise." She gives me a great smile. "So what do you do?"

I want to tell her what I do, but I can't just say that I live with my brother. Worse, I can't say that he's a spy. I just stand there staring at her. She waits for me to say something. The silence is unbearable.

Finally I manage to say something, "I write scripts."

"Wow!" Her eyes light up. "I've done some acting."

"Really."

"I was an extra in an Oliver Stone epic." I feel like I am hanging around with a true Hollywood starlet. "Tell me about your script. When are they going to make it?"

I have nothing more to say.

Steve is over in a corner. He's my guardian angel. He sees me go down. He comes in to rescue me. I tell him of my dilemma.

"You've got to tell them that it's in development. Say with Miramax. They do more unusual fare."

"Thanks, Steve. You're my savior."

I seen another girl. A blonde. She is shaking her head to the music. I catch her eye. She smiles and waves me over.

"I'm Benny."

"Benny, Benny. I'm Grace."

"Are you an actress?"

"No, I do hair."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a writer."

"Would I know anything that you've done."

"I've got a script in development with Miramax."

She is impressed. She wants to hear more. She pulls out a cigarette. She waits for me to light it. I don't have a lighter but the bartender comes to my rescue. I need the time to think.

"Tel me about the script."

"It's about a blackmail scheme that goes bad."

"Who's blackmailing whom?" she seems interested.

"Some petty crook tries to blackmail a crime boss."

"Does the crook get killed?"

"I hope not. It's based on my life."

"You're not a crook."

I laugh. It makes her smile, "I never have been!"

She looks at me to buy her a drink. My brother has been giving me some spending money. "Let me get you a drink."

"I'll have a vodka with orange juice."

This is all going to well. I feel like Charles in Charge! What could go wrong.

"Do you have a card?" she asks.

"I left them in my other jacket."

"I hope that you didn't leave your money in that jacket too."

"Hardly."

She really seems into my ideas. We are getting along so well.

"Well, it's been nice talking to you."

My jaw is wide-open. "What?"

"My fiancee is calling me over. Nice meeting you."

On the way home, I am wondering out loud, "I thought that it was a singles bar."

"It's mostly singles in there, Benny. But it's just a bar. How did you do?"

"I met one girl who wondered what I did. I told a second that I wrote for the movies. But she was engaged."

"Everyone's an actor in LA."

"I'm learning that."

"And everyone is available for a price."

"That seems a little cynical for me."

"Benny, this is the real world. You grow up quickly here. It's not like home."

I am realizing that.

After pitching my silly script idea, I find it totally ironic that my brother actually embroils me in a blackmail scheme. This is completely crazy. There's this arms dealer's wife. And Ramon is making a play for her.

"I'm going to bring her by to the house. I've got the infrared camera all rigged up. I just need you to operate it. She won't see a thing. I'll have on some soft music. All you are going to have to do is photograph us having sex."

"That has to be the stupidest ideas. Why don't you just set the camera on automatic?"

"I need to get the shot right the first time. I can't rely on the fact that it might go wrong. I won't have this chance again."

"This is the most perverse thing that I've ever heard of. Besides, I'm you brother."

"That's the whole point. At least, I can feel comfortable that I know it's you there. We need the pictures. This guy is getting entirely out of hand. Only if the wife is in our corner can we put him down to size."

"He's got to know already that his wife's a whore. You're acting like a stud for Uncle Sam."

"Why do you think I was hired in the first place?" I am looking out at the pool wondering if this is all worth it.

"It makes no sense."

"Benny, she's pretty hot. You're going to get off just watching."

"I'm going to be watching my own brother. This does not seem like a man's thing to do. "This is for your new county."

I feel disgusted just describing the whole situation.

For some reason or other, he wants me hanging out by the pool when he shows up with her. I think that will make her suspicious. But I follow his lead.

He's got it rigged up that I can film from the other room through a two-way mirror. I

guess that he's thought about everything. He tells me that he wants me to shoot her face but to avoid getting his.

"That may be tricky."

"You've got to do something right."

I think about all the things that I could do wrong. Just losing my nerve seems like number one.

When they come in, I'm in a robe by the pool. It's a cool night, but still comfortable out there.

"This is my brother, Benny," Ramon tells her.

"Great meeting you. I'm Shari!"

She looks as if she's been living in the sun all her life. Maybe too much. She has platinum blonder hair. Sort of a Marilyn Monroe thing going on but a little trashier. She gives me a big smile. She's hanging off my brother, but I'm sure that she winks at me.

I wait until Ramon takes her back to the bedroom. I hide just as Ramon has told me. I feel like I am watching one of those graphic movies. My brother moves like some kind of expert. I am completely embarrassed to watch this scene, but I work to rally my nerve.

After a while I start to ignore the fact that it is my brother. I am getting in to watching her. I have become even more perverse than him.

The utter coldness of the whole scene is a turn on. I almost feel too distracted to film this. On the other hand, it give me a sense of power. The camera stays on no matter what. There is no loss of will power. For the time being, I feel omnipotent. I am bringing them both to life.

I have come to Hollywood to become a start. Now I am directing a movie. I have achieved success. I finish my work. Ramon and Shari are chilling out on the bed. I head back to the pool. That only seems appropriate. I get a drink and settle back on the lawn chair.

"Benny, come on in. She thinks your rather cute. She'll have a round with you."

"I'm not going take my brother's sloppy seconds."

"It may be the best chance that you have while you're in America. Look at her. She is fine."

"She actually appeals to me less after watching her."

"What are you looking for? A pure American girl. They don't exist. Everyone here watches too much TV. Girls want to be porn stars."

"That's repulsive."

"I'm telling you that you need to practice. It's only going to fall off if you don't use it." "Thanks, but no thanks."

I am imagining Mary Ann from *Gilligan's Island*. There's got to be someone wholesome like that. Even Joanie from *Happy Days*. Scott Baio would never slink into the bedroom like that. I've got my pride.

The next day my brother congratulates me for a job well done.

"The agency is going to be able to use your work. You should have taken the chance when I offered it to you. But no harm done."

I now feel that I have a job. I am paying my own way.

"I really felt weird watching you."

"I bet that you learned a few things."

"I tried. But I actually felt a little sick. You are my brother. I never thought of you that way. I don't know if I'll ever be able to get that image out of my head."

"Don't worry. You'll forget."

I question the operation, "You said that Shari's husband is an arms dealer. What if he finds out? He's an *arms* dealer, meaning that he can have us killed."

"The whole point is that we blackmail Shari so that he doesn't find out. Besides, I work for the CIA. We can do whatever we want."

I wish I could do his job. He acts like an angel of God. And he gets whatever he wants. He should have asked for Nicole Kidman when he had the chance.

Ramon invites me out that night for drinks to celebrate our feat. The agency looks at the footage, and it is just what they need.

"Are you glad that you came to America."

"This is the best thing that could have happened to me."

"You can get anything that you want in this country if you just put your mind to it. This is the land of opportunity."

"I go into *Home Depot*. I've never seen so many toilets in one place. It is truly the land of plenty."

I hardly think about my homeland. I have stepped into a movie set, and the lights are flashing on me. I can hardly wait until I see my name in the tabloids. Then I know that I have finally made it in America.

The next day I am in for a rude awakening. I have graciously consented to Ramon's requests to get thing taken care of around the house. But to add insult to injury, he now he has a long list of chores printed out for me.

"I had has a list of chores printed up for me at the agency."

"Is this done on government time?"

"Just one of the perks of working for Uncle Sam."

I feel like part of an extended family. I am finally home!

"Do you have rubber gloves for me. With all these visitors in this place, I feel that I should only protect myself when I'm cleaning the toilets and other such things. I don't know what kind of germs have been in this place."

"No problem. Any other questions."

I do feel that he is imposing on me. "Does this mean that you're not going to do any work around the house."

"You're living here for free."

"You wake up in the afternoon. They give you money for playing a kid's game. You could at least cut me a little slack."

"If you have a skill to sell, I'm not stopping you. Where there's a demand for what I do, you can't complain about me servicing that demand."

"You said it yourself. You're a stud for Uncle Sam."

"I think those were your words. Anyway, if you can do better, if you have something to sell, all the best to you."

"I don't think our parents would like you to turn me into your house boy."

"Are you going to do the tasks that I've asked."

"I'll help around here. I'll do what I can."

I think he realizes that he came on a little heavy. I am sure that he is trying to get back at me for my parents favoring me when we I was five or six. He'd always complain about me watching too much TV. But when he wasn't out riding, he'd be doing more of the same himself.

Even though I hang out with him at night, I still get up a couple of hours earlier. This gives me the head start that I need to finish the *tasks*. I pretend that this is special work for the government. After al, we're all working towards the same ends. I am cleaning for freedom, getting rid of the noxious enemies that could affect our happy home.

I begin to understand what is at the heart of the American Dream. It's not just about having a house. A castle. It's about disinfecting it against any kind of foreign influence. This give me a new sense of purpose. I really am doing something important.

As I run the brush along the rim of the toilet bowl. I think that this is the last frontier, this is life or death for the world as we know it.

I turn my work into a system. I want to get it done as quickly as possible so that I can still have my time to float by the pool. Around mid-afternoon, I am again sitting with a rum drink and soaking up some rays. Where ever my brother is, he is protecting my right to do just what I'm doing.

Later I find a copy of the *Scarface* DVD. I pop it in the player and settle in to the ful experience. I need to learn to adapt. I speak the dialogue and make all the silly faces. When Ramon gets home, the film is almost over.

"You see what happens to people who think that they're bigger than the law." Ramon has a point!