

UNDER CORAL

by

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EXT. ALBUQUERQUE, ROUTE 66 -- DAY

A car heads out of the city.

EXT. DESERT, ROUTE 66 -- DAY

The car turns onto a quiet side road.

EXT. THE JACKSONS' HOUSE -- DAY

The car pulls up outside the ranch-style adobe house.  
CASSANDRA 'CASEY' HUTCHINS (25, designer jeans, a clipboard  
under her arm) pops the trunk, takes out a can of paint.

INT. THE JACKSONS' HOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE -- DAY

The DOORBELL chimes. SUZY JACKSON (60's, tracksuit, pink  
trainers) comes to the front door.

EXT. THE JACKSONS' HOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE -- DAY

Suzy opens the door.

CASEY

Mrs Jackson?

SUZY

Yes.

CASEY

Congratulations Mrs Jackson! Your  
home has been selected from twelve  
other homes in this area. Is your  
husband home?

SUZY

Just what is all this about,  
young lady?

CASEY

Maam, I'm Casey Hutchins from  
Coral Roofing Systems.

(checks clipboard)

A Mister Arthur Jackson visited  
our website and requested further  
details on our state-of-the-art  
roofing system.

SUZY

Oh no, I'm sorry. I'm afraid  
there's been some kind of mistake.  
We're not in the market for a new  
roof right now.

She tries to close the door, but Casey wedges it open with  
her clipboard and talks through the gap.

CASEY

Won't cost you a cent, maam.  
Absolutely no obligation. And if  
you're happy with the result, CRS  
Inc will pay you for permission to  
use your house in our ad campaign.

Suzy hesitates, then re-opens the door.

SUZY

Well, if you think you can fix that  
leak in the living room, you'd  
better come in.

INT. THE JACKSONS' HOUSE -- DAY

Suzy leads Casey to the study, where ARTHUR JACKSON (60's,  
gaunt, bearded, Rasputin eyes) sits at a computer.

SUZY

Someone to see you, Artie.

CASEY

Mr Jackson?

(Arthur turns)

I'm Casey Hutchins from Coral  
Roofing Systems.

Arthur stares her down. Casey looks away and notices the  
posters: Che Guevara, Lenin, Fidel, Sandinista, Zapatista.

CASEY (CONT)

Wow! What are you planning here?  
A revolution?

ARTHUR

Black, red, green. I like the colors.

CASEY

I understand you're having a  
problem with water penetration?

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Casey, Suzy and Arthur gaze at a damp patch on the ceiling.

ARTHUR

Water's like the damn government:  
somehow it always finds a way in.

SUZY

Would you like some lemonade?

CASEY

Thank you, maam, no I'm fine.

EXT. ROOF -- DAY

Suzy and Arthur climb a ladder up onto the roof. Casey follows with the can of paint.

CASEY

Of course, out here in the desert,  
a traditional flat roof makes  
sense. But then on those thirty  
days a year when it actually  
does rain... OK, you've got a  
well-maintained roof here.  
Hot-sealed sixteen inch overlaps.  
Well up to code. For this  
technology to work though, the  
barrier has to be perfect. Thing  
is, there's always a flaw, and the  
water always finds it.

ARTHUR

Fine. OK. So how do we locate the  
flaw and patch it?

CASEY

We don't.

(she opens the  
can of paint)

Mr and Mrs Jackson, you're looking  
at the world's smartest paint.

ARTHUR

It looks just like that fancy  
crapola from the hardware store  
that we tried last year.

CASEY

Mr Jackson, this is a pro-active  
paint that's not available in

(MORE)

CASEY (CONT)

stores. This can contains a patented colloidal suspension of genetically modified coral, biologically engineered to locate cracks and leaks and permanently seal them by secreting an impervious layer of calcium carbonate.

ARTHUR

The coral's genetically modified?

CASEY

Yes it is.

Arthur sighs.

SUZY

Artie, it's not like we'd have to eat it.

CASEY

Sir, I wouldn't be selling this product if I didn't believe in it one hundred percent.

ARTHUR

Really.

CASEY

I have a masters degree in marine botany.

ARTHUR

Ha, well now I know you're full of shit because coral's an animal, not a plant.

CASEY

Plants, Mr Jackson, primarily the coralline algae, account for about ninety-five percent of the biomass of the world's so-called coral reefs. My thesis topic was biotic reef ecology. You're welcome to check my transcripts.

Arthur stomps off towards the ladder.

SUZY

He takes all this GM stuff very seriously, dear.

CASEY

(to Arthur)

How else are marine corals going to survive in a desert? Of course they're genetically modified. What did you expect?

ARTHUR

I'll tell you what I expected. Five hundred years ago, the Maya were using powdered oyster shells to repair cavities in people's teeth. These were miracle fillings. They never fell out. They bonded with the tooth and the bond grew stronger over time. That's the sort of technology I was hoping for.

He climbs down the ladder.

CASEY

Is that true?

SUZY

Let's go inside and have some lemonade.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Casey and Suzy sit on the couch and sip lemonade.

CASEY

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me up there. We're trained not to get upset.

SUZY

He can be a hard man to live with sometimes.

CASEY

How long have you guys been married?

SUZY

Can you keep a secret.

CASEY

Sure.

SUZY

We're not married. Arthur's a Godless communist. He doesn't believe in marriage.

CASEY

Wow. Are you OK with that?

SUZY

Listen, Cassy?

CASEY

Casey.

SUZY

Casey. We grew up in the sixties. They teach you about the sixties in school these days?

CASEY

Sure. Kennedy. Cuba. First man on the moon.

SUZY

Think a little closer to home.

CASEY

The summer of love?

SUZY

Honey, thirty years ago I was one hot mamma!

CASEY

I'll bet you were, Mrs J!

They laugh. Suzy pours more lemonade.

SUZY

Call me Suzy, hon. Ah. I don't know what went wrong. Kids today. You tell them you're not married and they're shocked! You're not shocked are you?

CASEY

No. Well, maybe a little. So tell me about Arthur. How did you meet?

SUZY

Oh, he was wild in those days. Handsome of course. Oh my, yes! And so romantic. He was arrested three times.

CASEY

Jeez, what for?

SUZY

This was the sixties, honey.  
Everyone got busted back then.  
We'd be demonstrating for peace  
or against the bomb or the war in  
Vietnam and the cops... 'Pigs' we  
called them. Pigs. One time they  
beat him up in the cells.

ARTHUR (OS)

And I still have the scars. You're  
welcome to check them if you want.

Arthur stands in the doorway. He crosses to the couch.  
Casey holds her breath. Arthur grins, breaks the tension  
and indicates a place on his forehead.

ARTHUR (CONT)

Here. You can't hardly make them  
out any more. Two faint white  
lines. You see them? They're  
really there, but  
(mock whisper)  
Suzy loves to exaggerate.

SUZY

Oh, you!

ARTHUR

You see? What I tell you? It's  
one of those things we look back  
at now and laugh about it.

They all laugh. But the laughter sounds forced.

ARTHUR (CONT)

Suzy, I need to have a few private  
words with Miss Hutchins here.  
Just the two of us. Man to man.

SUZY

Honey, OK. I'll be.... I'll see  
you in a little while.

Arthur waits until Suzy has left the room.

ARTHUR

You get Suzy to sign anything?

CASEY

We didn't talk about that. It  
would be a decision you'd both  
need to agree to.

ARTHUR

So you just sat here? Talking?

CASEY

There's nothing in the rules that says we can't be friendly.

ARTHUR

Really? Time is money. You ever hear of that?

CASEY

Look, Mr Jackson...

ARTHUR

You don't have any other prospects to visit today?

CASEY

Not today, no.

ARTHUR

So you thought you'd just hang out here with us?

CASEY

Fine. I can leave.

She stands. Arthur gets in her face.

ARTHUR

Are you wearing a wire, Miss Hutchins?

CASEY

What!??

ARTHUR

Are you wearing a wire?

CASEY

You don't think you're being a tad paranoid, Mr J?

ARTHUR

So show me.

CASEY

Did you do a lot of acid back in high school, Artie?

ARTHUR

Why do you keep changing the subject?

CASEY

You want to pat me down? You want me to strip and assume the position? A full cavity search, would that get you off? You're not afraid that all my buddies in the van outside would come busting in here?

A slow grin spreads across Arthur's face. He goes to the sofa, sits. He invites Casey to sit beside him. She folds her arms and remains standing.

ARTHUR

So how long have you been selling paint, Casey?

CASEY

About ten months.

ARTHUR

This what you went to college for?

CASEY

It's a filler.

ARTHUR

You make decent money?

CASEY

I do OK.

ARTHUR

No, really, what kind of commission do you get on a forty-five dollar can of genetically modified paint?

CASEY

We're not supposed to talk about that.

ARTHUR

Is that so?

A long beat.

CASEY

Are we done?

ARTHUR

Cassandra 'Casey' Hutchins.

CASEY

Yes?

ARTHUR

Area code 505 555 4105

CASEY

What?

ARTHUR

Your parents' phone number. You don't recognize it? The paint company has it on file as the emergency contact number for Casey Hutchins. You want to know what you're doing right now, 'Casey'? Because I just called your mom, and she told me you were given the day off work and you're out in the back yard shooting hoops and drinking beer with your unemployed younger brother.

(he lets this sink in)

Suzy likes you. She'll want to say goodbye. You'll find her up on the rocks behind the house. You be nice to her.

EXT. DESERT BEHIND THE JACKSONS' HOUSE -- DAY

Suzy and Casey sit on a rocky overlook.

SUZY

We have a son. Did you know?

CASEY

Yes. Eric.

SUZY

How did you know that?

CASEY

Arthur told me.

Suzy looks into Casey's face for a moment, then looks away disappointed.

SUZY

He's a few years older than you. He's an attorney. Ambitious. Corporate law. Wears a suit and tie. He's a great disappointment to his father.

CASEY

I can imagine.

SUZY

You didn't come here to sell us paint, did you?

CASEY

Eric may be starting work for a big defense contractor soon.

SUZY

A background check? Is that what this is all about?

CASEY

Suzy, Arthur got into some things when he was younger, things he maybe never told you about.

SUZY

You presume a lot, young lady. And obviously you have no proof.

CASEY

A man died.

SUZY

This desert has been here -- how long? How many bones beneath these sands? When our time comes, I'd like for us both to be buried out here. You think your government would allow that?

CASEY

That's not really my department, maam.

SUZY

No, of course. You're more concerned with other aspects of death.

Below them, Arthur exits the house, looks up, sees them. He starts up the path towards them.

SUZY (CONT)

Here comes Arthur. You'd better go.

Casey stands, squeezes Suzy's shoulder, walks away.

SUZY (CONT)

Ms Hutchins?

(MORE)

SUZY (CONT)  
(Casey turns)  
Leave us the paint, OK?

EXT. SAME -- LATER

Arthur sits down on the rock beside Suzy. They hold hands.

EXT. ARTHUR AND SUZY'S POV -- CONTINUOUS

Casey walks toward her car. An unmarked van pulls up. Two MEN IN SUITS get out, talk with Casey, get back in the van.

Casey takes two more cans of paint from the trunk of her car, stands them in the road.

EXT. THE JACKSONS' HOUSE IN THE DESERT -- CONTINUOUS

Arthur and Suzy sit on the rocky overlook behind their house. Casey gets in her car and drives off. The van follows. Two cans of paint are left standing in the road.

THE END