

THREE CARD MONTE

written by

Daniel Gardina

[daniel@danielgardina.com](mailto:daniel@danielgardina.com)

FADE IN:

EXT. HENDERSON JEWELRY STORE - SOUTH BEACH - DAY

Businesses and restaurants fuel a hot spot of the city.  
TRENDY TEENAGERS. ROLLERBLADERS. TROPHY WIVES with poodles.  
Amid the bustle, a BLACK SEDAN parks at the curb.

OUTSIDE THE CAFE NEXT DOOR

A MAN (late 30s) reads a newspaper. He lowers the sports page  
to view TWO SUITS exiting the sedan. One of them carries a  
nondescript BRIEFCASE, the other acts as protection.

The Man folds his paper and walks their direction.

JEWELRY STORE

A BLIND MAN saunters down the street. Sunglasses. Tweed hat.  
Briefcase. Cane. He nears the Suits when--

BAM!

A ROLLERBLADER (20s) plows over the Suits and Blind Man.

The Blind Man's briefcase KNOCKS Suit #1's case out of his  
hand. The luggage lands side by side. Save for the TRAVEL  
STICKERS covering one, they're identical.

It's pandemonium.

BLIND MAN

What happened? What do you want?

SUIT #1

Hey, watch where you're going!

ROLLERBLADER

I'm so sorry. It was an accident.

Everyone's concern turns toward the Blind Man.

Unnoticed, the newspaper Man PEELS OFF THE TRAVEL STICKERS IN  
A SINGLE SHEET. He sticks it to Suit #1's case, then  
continues walking. There and gone in three seconds.

ROLLERBLADER (CONT'D)

Everyone all right? You okay, sir?

BLIND MAN

Where's my case? I need my case.

ROLLERBLADER  
I didn't see you there.

SUIT #2  
You okay, buddy?

Suit #2 helps the Blind Man to his feet.

BLIND MAN  
It has stickers all over it.  
They're priceless to me.

Suit #1 picks up both cases. He hands the Blind Man the one with the stickers.

SUIT #1  
Here you go, pal.

BLIND MAN  
Oh, thank you, thank you.

SUIT #2  
Watch where you're going next time.

ROLLERBLADER  
I will. Sorry again.

The Rollerblader skates off one way, the Blind Man heads the other, and the Suits enter--

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

Suit #1 opens the briefcase in front of the STORE OWNER. His expression turns to shock, then anger. The case is filled with TACKY, PLASTIC DIAMOND RINGS.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The Blind Man shuffles along, all shook up. But as soon as he rounds the corner...

He whistles a happy tune and walks in a normal stride. He collapses his walking stick. Slides it in his pocket. This is MONTE BERMAN (40) with a prize-winning smile.

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

Ultimate confusion inside.

OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS

Monte drives past in his pristine '67 Corvette Stingray. The Suits run out, looking for the thieves.

INT. CORVETTE - DAY

On the passenger seat, the other briefcase holds SIX POUCHES filled with REAL DIAMONDS. Monte closes the lid and smiles.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Monte drives triumphantly until a SIREN wails behind him.

MONTE

Shit.

The police cruiser pulls him over. He slides the briefcase under the seat before OFFICER JOHN approaches.

INSIDE THE CORVETTE

OFFICER JOHN

License and registration, please.

Monte gives it.

OFFICER JOHN (CONT'D)

You know how fast you were going?

MONTE

Exactly 35.

OFFICER JOHN

Watch it there.

MONTE

Sorry.

INSIDE THE POLICE CAR

His PARTNER fiddles with a Rubik's Cube as the RADIO squawks to life.

DISPATCHER (RADIO)

Code 211 committed at Henderson Jewelry Store in South Beach.

(MORE)

DISPATCHER (RADIO) (CONT'D)  
 Suspect is a white male, 40s, seen  
 driving an older model Corvette,  
 red. License plate unknown.

The Partner stops playing with the cube. He looks at the  
 Corvette, then opens his door.

PARTNER  
 John...

The Partner waves Officer John over. Monte watches the  
 discussion in the rear-view mirror. When he sees John UNCLIP  
 HIS HOLSTER, Monte's eyes widen.

He starts the Vet. SPEEDS away. The officers dash to their  
 cruiser.

Monte drives, suppressing his panic.

EXT. MONTE'S HOUSE - DUSK

A large, Spanish style home. Monte pulls up. Rushes from the  
 car with the briefcase.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - DUSK

Monte lifts a couple floorboards. Beneath lies a HIDDEN  
 COMPARTMENT. He slides the briefcase inside. Returns the  
 boards. Replaces the rug.

ABBY (O.S.)  
 Daddy, what's happening?

Monte turns to see ABBY BERMAN (8) in her nightgown. She  
 gazes from the doorway.

HALLWAY

MONTE  
 Hey, Abby, darling.

They hear SIRENS approaching. He kneels down to her.

ABBY  
 Are you in trouble again?

MONTE  
 (breaking the news gently)  
 Yes, sweetie.

ABBY

You said you weren't going to get into trouble anymore.

MONTE

Don't worry. Some men are just coming to talk to daddy.

ABBY

When will you be back?

POUNGING on the front door.

OFFICER JOHN (O.S.)

Police! Open up!

MONTE

I love you, Abby, darling. You know that, right?

She nods. They hug.

The front door BURSTS open. POLICE rush in and separate father and daughter. Officer John handcuffs him.

ABBY

Daddy!

MONTE

Everything's going to be all right. I'll be home soon.

The cops lead him outside. The world goes silent as--

EXT. MONTE'S HOUSE - DUSK

POLICE LIGHTS flash. From the front door, Abby watches Monte duck into a cruiser.

ABBY'S MOTHER approaches from behind. She picks up her daughter as they watch the cars pull away.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

A DETECTIVE tosses a duffle bag full of money and jewelry on the table. Not the diamonds.

DETECTIVE

Didn't think we'd find these?

The unexpected reality hits Monte.

MONTE

Honestly. I've never seen those  
before.

DETECTIVE

Try again.

Monte wants to defend himself. Realizes he can't.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Monte sits behind the defendant's table with his LAWYER.

MONTE

I've told you that bag isn't mine.  
Someone's setting me up.

LAWYER

They're going to find you guilty,  
unless you hand over the diamonds.  
Maybe then we can make a deal.

MONTE

Like the last deal you got me? No  
thanks.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Monte, standing before the JUDGE, accepts his sentence in  
stride.

JUDGE

Montgomery Berman. Having been  
found guilty of two counts of  
robbery, resisting arrest, and  
parole violation, you are sentenced  
to nine years imprisonment. This  
court is adjourned.

The Judge BANGS his gavel.

BLACK OUT.

SUPER: NINE YEARS LATER

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

Scattered letters and pictures of Abby adorn Monte's wall. She ages in each photo, the oldest being about 14.

In the corner sit decks of playing cards and well read copies of Shakespeare and Machiavelli's The Prince.

Monte finishes a letter to "My Darling Abby" as the squeaky wheels of a cart move down the hall.

PRISONER (O.S.)  
Mail...mail.

Monte hastily seals the letter as an older PRISONER with the cart reaches his cell.

PRISONER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
Mail.

Monte hands him the letter along with a small package.

MONTE  
One last shipment for you.

PRISONER  
I don't have anything to give ya.

MONTE  
It's on me. Going-away present.

PRISONER  
You'll be all right?

MONTE  
I have something waiting for me on  
the outside.  
(playfully)  
Now get out of here.

Prisoner nods, walks off.

EXT. MONTE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A black SPORTS CAR sneaks around the side of the house. Abby (now 17) has grown into a beautiful, young woman. She jumps out and hurries toward the house. The car takes off.

She rolls down her skirt and wipes off her make-up before sneaking through her bedroom window like a pro.



INT. ABBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Monte's letter sits on her nightstand, next to a framed PICTURE of a younger Monte, Abby, and her mother.

She hesitates. Reads the letter anyway. With an ambiguous expression, she stows the envelope in a SHOEBOX under her bed. It's full of similar notes.

She HEARS someone coming down the hall, so she scurries into the bathroom. SUE CONNOLLY (40s), the very definition of prim and proper, pokes her head in the door.

SUE

Abby?

BATHROOM

Abby quickly rinses with mouthwash.

ABBY

In here.

BEDROOM

She exits the bathroom in pajamas and dramatically yawns.

ABBY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I was just about to jump in bed.  
Gotta get up early for school  
tomorrow.

SUE

Another busy day?

ABBY

The usual.

Abby slides under the covers. Sue helps tuck her in, but something's nagging at Sue.

SUE

I've been good to you, right?

ABBY

What do you mean?

SUE

I did right these last few years?

ABBY

(sympathetic)  
Aunt Sue...

SUE  
I just hope I was able to guide you  
down the right path.

ABBY  
You did.  
(beat)  
What brought this on?

SUE  
Nothing. You know me. I trust  
you'll always do what is right.  
That you won't lose your way.

Both women smile.

ABBY  
I promise.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Monte's released. He pauses to savor his newfound freedom.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Through the window, Monte takes in the sights of South Beach.  
The cab reaches a stoplight.

In the adjacent car sits TONY (40s), Italian, skinny, nicely  
dressed. He does a double take when he sees Monte.

The cab drives off before he can react.

INT. MONTE'S HOUSE - DAY

The large front door opens to reveal Monte with a huge grin.

MONTE  
Daddy's home!

SUE  
(displeased)  
What are you doing here?

MONTE  
I-- I'm back. I was released today.

SUE  
You can't just stroll by like this.

MONTE  
I called you last week. You told me  
to shave before I came.

Showing off, he rubs his hand over his smooth cheeks. Sue  
looks him over. Finally...

SUE  
All right. Come in.

She walks off.

MONTE  
Nice to see you, too.

Monte closes the door. He notices a ROSARY on the console  
table but quickly dismisses it.

SUE (O.S.)  
Abby's at school right now. She'll  
be home in a little while.

He walks farther inside. CATHOLIC SAINT ICONS line the wall.  
His confusion grows.

SUE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
You need to be very cautious when  
you see her again. You've been away  
for a long time.

MONTE  
Of course.  
(curious)  
What's been going on here while I  
was away?

SUE (O.S.)  
Oh, you know. Just a few  
modifications.

THE LIVING ROOM

Monte enters and--

MONTE  
JESUS CHRIST!

Standing before him is an OVERTLY LARGE JESUS STATUE.

An elaborate shrine surrounds the focal point, flanked by smaller Mary and Joseph statues.

Monte stands in amazement. Sue reappears wearing a NUN'S VEIL. He SCREAMS. Any pleasantness is gone. She's now a hard-nosed, mother superior. She slaps his arm.

SUE

There will be no taking the Lord's name in vain in this house.

MONTE

The Lord?

SUE

Yes, the Almighty Jesus Christ who died for your sins.

MONTE

Uh, Sue... I'm Jewish.

SUE

Sure. For six months.

MONTE

But the effort was sincere.

SUE

Hmh.

She walks off. He follows.

MONTE

And when did you become a nun?!