

HIGH TENSION

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Two high rise window cleaners are chance witnesses to a crime while on the job. Together they must use their wits and skills if they are to escape from a masked assailant.

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUSPENDED SCAFFOLD - DAY

On the side of a California skyscraper, twenty floors up, two men stand on a swing stage scaffold. Both are wearing elbow length overalls and fall-arrest safety harnesses. They're window cleaners.

The older man on the left is ERIC. Under his hard hat is a receding hairline, and under his gloves are weather worn hands. He's white, but his skin is tanned from working outside.

His partner, HASSAN, is a younger Pakistani man. His short and shiny dark hair is clearly visible; he wears neither a helmet nor gloves.

The two men wipe their respective window panes with squeegees. Eric is slow, methodical, wiping at a constant speed in smooth arcs. Hassan wipes in faster strokes, and finishes his side of the window first.

HASSAN

Done.

Eric does not respond. Instead, he carries right on at the same pace, taking his time to reach the bottom. His side of the window is spotless.

Hassan looks over, and noisily CHEWS a large ball of gum.

Eric reaches the bottom, withdraws his arm, and effortlessly flicks the excess water off his tool into a bucket clipped to his utility belt.

Hassan's hand hovers over the "DOWN" button on the scaffold's centrally located control panel.

HASSAN (CONT'D)

Down?

ERIC

Ah, ah.

Eric gestures to Hassan's side of the window.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You got a streak there.

Hassan looks, and Eric is right. He huffs with exasperation and plunges his squeegee into his bucket to correct the mistake.

Eric takes the moment to look around and appraise the day.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Come on Hassan, it's not a
 competition. No points for speed
 here.
 Beautiful day. Hard to believe it's
 September.

Hassan wipes the streak away.

HASSAN
 Down?

ERIC
 Down.

Hassan holds "DOWN" and the platform WHIRS as it descends.

Hassan leans back and is about to spit out his gum, but is interrupted by Eric.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 You're not thinking of spitting
 that out.

HASSAN
 Flavour's gone.

ERIC
 Well don't. It could hit someone.

HASSAN
 It's labor day Eric, there's no one
 down there.

ERIC
 Pedestrians notwithstanding, it's
 rude. Besides, the wind could carry
 it onto a pane. Building manager
 sees chewing gum on the OUTSIDE of
 his skyscraper on Tuesday, we lose
 the contract. Government contracts
 don't grow on trees.

They reach the next floor. Hassan takes the ball of gum from his mouth and looks around for a place to put it.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Stick it to your bucket or
 something.

Hassan sticks it to the side of his own bucket. Eric seems satisfied and starts to wash his side of the window, but looks back with dismay as Hassan takes another foil wrapped stick of gum out a shirt pocket and pops it into his mouth.

ERIC (CONT'D)

MORE gum?

HASSAN

Want some?

ERIC

I've never seen someone chew so much.

HASSAN

Chewing's good. Your body can only hold tension in one part at a time. Keeps my limbs relaxed.

ERIC

And I notice you're not wearing gloves.

HASSAN

No gloves means better grip and control.

ERIC

No helmet?

HASSAN

Helmet restricts vision, and movement.

ERIC

What if something falls?

HASSAN

You did the rigging. Is something gonna fall?

ERIC

No, but you never can be sure.

HASSAN

I trust you Eric.

ERIC

(sighs)

I'm sorry you couldn't do the climbing competition. I really needed you here today.

HASSAN
It's fine. There'll be other comps.

ERIC
I do appreciate it.

HASSAN
What the fuck, labor day, double
pay, right?

ERIC
Yessir.

HASSAN
Done.

Eric finishes after Hassan, but this time its closer.

ERIC
Done.

Eric looks over to Hassan's window. It's clean enough.

HASSAN
Eh?

Eric raises his eyebrows.

HASSAN (CONT'D)
Down?

ERIC
Down.

Hassan holds "DOWN" and the scaffold descends.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A MAN wearing a crimson oni kabuki mask, surgical gloves, and a sharp suit SNAPS a padlock with a set of heavy duty bolt cutters.

He YANKS open the forcibly unlocked filing cabinet drawer and riffles hurriedly through the contents.

Behind him, the scaffold descends into view. Its shadow crosses him, and he turns to see what it is.

When Hassan sees the masked man he stops the descent and stares, dumbfounded.

INT/EXT. SUSPENDED SCAFFOLD

The masked man stares back.

Next to him is a black gym bag, a broken padlock, heavy duty bolt cutters, and a suppressed SIG Sauer P229 pistol.

He grabs the gun and points it at Hassan, Eric, then back to Hassan.

The window washers's hands fly up, and instinctively Eric takes a step backwards, bumping into the rear guard rail and rocking the scaffold.

The masked man makes the shape of a phone with his hand held to his ear, then flicks the gun sideways, gesturing for Hassan to toss his cellphone over the side.

Hassan calmly takes his phone out and drops it over the edge, never breaking eye contact with the masked man.

The masked man points to Eric, who's shaking. Eric tries to retrieve his phone, but between his shaking and his thick gloves, he fumbles and it drops to the floor of the scaffold.

Without thinking, Eric ducks to grab it.

The masked man FIRES, but the bullet passes just over Eric's head.

HASSAN

Fuck!

Hassan throws the contents of his bucket at the window, obscuring it. Eric slams "UP", and the scaffold ascends.

As the suds clear, the masked man becomes visible once more. Frustrated, he tries, and fails, to find an effective firing angle. He disappears from view.

ERIC

Jesus Christ! Who was that?

HASSAN

Not the building manager.

ERIC

Oh god, here he comes!

The scaffold reaches the next floor. Through the window the two men see the masked man burst through the door.

He paces towards them with the gun raised, carrying the gym bag in his other hand. It's not a stable firing position, and though he FIRES TWICE, both shots miss.

The scaffold rises out of sight.

HASSAN

Shit! Fuck!

Eric is breathing hard.

HASSAN (CONT'D)

What the fuck, what the fuck!

The scaffold rises to the next floor. The masked man continues in his pursuit, but he's losing the race. By the time he makes it into the room, the scaffold is just pulling out of sight.

ERIC

We're outrunning him.

HASSAN

That's great news Eric but why the fuck are we going up? We need to get out of here.

ERIC

We HAVE to go up.

HASSAN

Why?

ERIC

He's got bolt cutters, didn't you see? He could take out the winch cables, hell, he could even cut the lifelines. Even if he leaves those, you don't wanna be under this thing if it comes down.

HASSAN

So what do we do? We've got no way out!

ERIC

When we get to the roof, we barricade the door and wait for help. I've still got my phone.

Eric picks up his fallen phone.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hold that. I'm calling security.

Hassan holds "UP" while Eric dials.

The scaffold continues to rise, past offices, empty floors, and blinded windows.

Hassan keeps watch for the masked man, but he doesn't see a soul.

ERIC (CONT'D)
No answer.

HASSAN
Fuck security, dial 9-1-1!

ERIC
Right.

Eric dials.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Hello, police please. I'm at the Sacramento Courthouse, there's a man with a gun, he's broken into the building.
(pause)
I'm OK right now.
(pause)
No, he's not. I'm calling from a cell phone, I'm outside the building, there's two of us, on a scaffold, we're cleaning windows.

HASSAN
We're nearly there.

ERIC
Yeah. OK. OK.
(to Hassan)
They're coming.

EXT. ROOF - DAY

They arrive at the roof. Securely rigged load bearing supports suspend the scaffold over the parapet. The roof is cluttered with spools of rope, counterweight, pipes, and vent exhausts.

In the middle of it all the ROOF ACCESS DOOR stands out conspicuously.

Eric climbs out of the scaffold first, while Hassan holds it steady.

HASSAN

So how do we barricade it?

Eric looks around for something to use.

ERIC

Length of rope oughta do it.

Thinking quickly, Hassan grabs a coil of rope from inside the scaffold and tosses it to Eric.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Perfect!

Eric turns to start work on the door. At that moment it BURSTS open. Stunned, Eric falls to the floor.

In the doorway stands the masked man, gun held high. He sees Eric, and takes aim.

Hassan hurls his bucket at the masked man. The masked man flinches to protect himself from the incoming object, and FIRES a shot.

The bucket bounces off the masked man.

The bullet hits Hassan.

Hassan yelps with pain and surprise, and falls backwards off the scaffold.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Hassan!

The masked man takes steady aim at Eric. Eric stares up at the over-length combined barrel of pistol and suppressor.

MASKED MAN

Sorry pal.

SIRENS in the distance, getting closer. The masked man's posture slackens. He looks around quickly, trying to pinpoint the source of the sound, then runs over to a clear side of the building.

OVER THE EDGE

The masked man sees multiple cop cars parking haphazardly at the front of the building, and officers hurrying out of them.

He sighs.

MASKED MAN (CONT'D)
Nothing's ever easy.

BACK TO SCENE

MASKED MAN (CONT'D)
You. Get up. Take us down on that
thing.

The masked man gestures to the scaffold. Eric gets to his feet, but is too stunned to move at first.

MASKED MAN (CONT'D)
Now!

EXT. SUSPENDED SCAFFOLD - DAY

Eric climbs into the scaffold and clips his fall-arrest rope to the railing.

The masked man tosses in his heavy black bag, then climbs in after. He's unwilling to lower his weapon, making the maneuver slow and awkward. Neither is he used to how the platform shifts, and he grips a railing with his spare hand.

MASKED MAN
Down.

Eric reaches slowly for the panel between them, then holds "DOWN". They descend.

MASKED MAN (CONT'D)
Other hand on the rail, where I can
see it.

Eric complies. With one hand on the control panel and the other on the rail, he's forced to face the masked man.

The descent is steady. Neither man speaks. The winch motor WHIRS, and the nearby SIRENS cut through the GUSTS of wind.

Eric looks over to the building.

They pass the floor with the filing cabinet, and carry on to the floor below.

ERIC
Oh Jesus.

On the next floor down Eric spots the blood drenched body of a security guard lying sprawled on the floor. He covers his mouth with his rail hand.

MASKED MAN
Hand on the rail.

Eric grips the rail, as much to steady himself as to avoid antagonising the masked man.

On the next floor, two more bodies. Another guard, and a janitor. The masked man never takes his eyes off Eric.

The scaffold winds on.

On the next floor, something catches Eric's eye.

Stuck to the outside of the dirty window pane is a large blob of CHEWING GUM.

Eric looks at the masked man, who doesn't perceive the significance of this incongruity.

Eric's eyes flick down, and he sees that the anchorage of a 6ft fall-arrest line is attached to the bottom corner of the scaffold -- Hassan is alive, and he's hanging beneath the platform.

Behind the masked man a set of strong fingertips appear at the edge of the platform, gripping like a claw. Hassan is trying to climb up.

The masked man follows Eric's gaze and begins to turn.

ERIC
My phone.

MASKED MAN
(turning back to Eric)
What?

ERIC
I've still got my phone. Should I
drop it?

The masked man lunges towards Eric and holds the barrel of the gun to his temple.

MASKED MAN
Shut the fuck up.

Eric recoils and turns his face away, terrified. He lets go of the "DOWN" button and raises his hands.

The scaffold comes to a halt.

Hassan is forced to brace against the jolt of braking; he GRUNTS with the exertion of holding on.

The masked man turns towards the sound. Hassan has just about managed to hang on thanks to a decent one-handed grip on a railing. Blood streams from a bullet graze above one eye.

Eric seizes the opportunity and lunges for the gun with both hands. After a moment's struggle the gun goes off, FIRING a loose shot that RICOCHETS off a railing.

Hassan tries to climb in to help, but by now the platform is swaying too much, and he almost falls again.

The struggle continues, but the masked man is beginning to overpower Eric. As the two men wrestle for control of the gun, they lean on the control panel and cause the scaffold to rise.

Hassan can see that if he doesn't do something quickly, they'll both be killed. He looks up and sees the SAFETY LOCK on the winch that feeds the cables on his side of the scaffold.

Hassan summons what remaining strength he has in his arms and leaps for the handle on the safety lock, just barely managing to engage it.

With the cable feed locked on Hassan's side of the scaffold and spooling freely on the other, the whole scaffold begins to tip.

The masked man has one arm under Eric's chin, and is trying to choke him out, while also bringing the gun down to bear on him. With ebbing resistance, Eric tries to hold the gun away from his face.

The end of the barrel gets closer and closer, while behind them, the world tilts.

Just as the barrel comes to be in line with Eric's face, the masked man goes tumbling out over the side of the now nearly vertical scaffold.

But their ordeal isn't over.

Gripping the rail, Eric leans out and sees the masked man hanging onto Hassan's leg with one arm and, miraculously, the gun still in the other.

MASKED MAN (CONT'D)

Pull me up or you're fucking dead!

Hassan dares not make a move; the masked man is desperate.

Eric sees no alternative. He lets go of the railing, and for a second is in free-fall.

Eric's boot catches the masked man in the face.

The masked man falls, stunned, flailing and FIRING, hitting nothing but the ground.

Eric's fall-arrest line yanks him to a halt, and he bounces off Hassan, twisting, then finally settling with the two men dangling at roughly even height, hanging back to back.

HASSAN

You got 'em!

ERIC

We got 'em.

Armed police flood the floor next to the window cleaners, and they look out with astonishment.

Hassan waves at them.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You know, you really oughta wear your helmet.

HASSAN

That's probably a good idea, yeah.

The police don't seem to know quite what to do. A sergeant yells something at some subordinates who nod and hurry out of the room.

ERIC

Say, you don't happen to have some more of that gum do you?

HASSAN

As it happens, I do.

Hassan retrieves two sticks from a buttoned pocket, and hands one over his head to Eric.

FADE OUT.