

"FIRST PAST THE POST"

by

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FADE IN

EXT. INNER CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Storefronts with modest apartments above. Automobiles at the kerb that must have looked second-hand, even when they were new.

On the sidewalk, a bustling mix of ages, races, and levels of the lower economic strata.

In their midst, DANIEL POST, late thirties, grizzled and heavysset, making slow progress toward a nearby apartment building.

Though faded, his designer casuals are at odds with the prevailing style (Wal-Mart) of the people around him.

Daniel's face looks worn, too. Not ugly. But give him 15 years, and he'll be Walter Matthau.

Hefting a bulging grocery sack, Daniel twists and turns. Peers closely at the faces, as they pass by.

Some zoom into clarity, as he picks them out, from the crowd. Hard stares. Vacant looks. But no recognition.

Satisfied, Daniel pauses at the apartment building entrance. Nods to himself. And enters.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

It's nondescript. Not neat, not shabby.

Daniel eyes the elevator door, as it opens. Looks inside the car. Mutters to himself.

DANIEL  
...sitting duck...

Shakes his head. And enters a stairwell.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Daniel trudges down the hall, toward Apartment 310. He stops, abruptly. Flicks his head from one side to other, and back.

There's a large package at the door, wrapped in brown paper, with a prominent white label on it.

Staring at it from the doorway of the apartment opposite is MARCUS HAMMOND, a bright-looking African-American boy of about 10.

MARCUS  
Been watching it for you.  
The package.  
Case someone tried to steal it, you know?

DANIEL  
Really.

MARCUS  
Yep.

An expectant look.

DANIEL  
So. You think maybe that might be worth something to me?  
Like a tip, maybe?

MARCUS  
Well...

DANIEL  
Okay. Here's a tip.  
Go to school.

MARCUS  
It's Saturday.

DANIEL  
Oh. Well, okay.  
Here's another one.  
Don't eat goat cheese pizza.

MARCUS  
Why?

DANIEL  
'Cause it's got lots of cholesterol in it.  
And it tastes horrible.

He hunkers down for a closer look at the package. Marcus peers in over his shoulder, as they both study the label on the parcel.

No return address. Only the words:  
Mr. Daniel Post  
YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

DANIEL  
How long has it been here?

MARCUS  
I dunno. Couple hours, maybe.

DANIEL  
D'you see who delivered it?

MARCUS  
Nope.

Daniel straightens up. Unlocks the apartment. Goes in, leaving the door slightly open.

MARCUS  
Hey! Aren't you--

Daniel's back. Without the grocery sack. Instead, he's got a hand-held fluoroscope with him.

MARCUS  
What's that?

Daniel doesn't answer. Distracted, he passes the device over all the sides of the package.

Satisfied when it doesn't blow up, he picks up the parcel, takes it into the apartment, and shuts the door.

MARCUS  
Hmph.

INT. DANIEL POST'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's not sleazy, as you might expect. Modern fittings, clean rugs, throw pillows on the couch. Hi-tech entertainment center.

Everything in stark contrast to the building, and the neighborhood outside.

Daniel marches the package past the grocery sack on the kitchen counter, to the bedroom beyond.

INT. DANIEL POST'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rumpled sheets. Cuddly toy bunny on the pillow, with a tag round its neck saying "Get a job!" in a feminine hand.

In pride of place opposite is a desktop computer with a screensaver running. Gooseneck lamp throwing light over a pile of magazines and news clippings occupying most of the table top.

Daniel plunks the package on the bed.  
He goes over to the computer, hits a key, then types a password.

The screensaver fades. Daniel's got his blogging software up. A banner graphic in a distinctive font that looks like a newspaper masthead:

THE POST

Getting My Hands Dirty, so You Won't Have To

Daniel turns and leaves the room.  
He's back a moment later, with a bunch of magazines, and some Twinkies. He sets these on the table, then turns to the package. Unwraps it, carefully, pulls out the first object, and

DANIEL

What the..?

It's a Betamax video cassette. Yes. Betamax. Labelled "PLAY ME, NOW."

In the box on the bed is a clunky-looking gizmo: a Betamax video player with attached viewing screen.

Daniel plugs it into a wall socket, turns it on, pops the tape in, and presses PLAY.

He unwraps a Twinkie, and takes a bite, as the opening credits roll.

The words: Zephyr Films Presents "The Postman Always Comes Twice"  
Starring Biff Porkins  
Introducing Cassidy Cummings

give way to a standard no-budget porno flick, with a gimmick.  
It's supposed to be a film noir pastiche.

To the sounds of grunts and moans, Daniel's attention wanders.  
His eyes snap back into focus, suddenly, and he leans in close to the screen.

DANIEL

Holy sh--

He fumbles on the player for a PAUSE button. Finds it.

There on screen is an attractive if glassy-eyed teenage girl, vamping it up unsuccessfully in a Lana Turner-esque platinum wig.

Frantic now, Daniel rummages on the desktop. Finds what he's looking for: a copy of TIME Magazine. Holds it up, next to the screen.

The girl on the screen IS the woman on the cover of TIME - give or take 25 years:

"Woman of the Year. And America's First?  
Senator Charlene Hendricks bids for the White House"

Stunned, Daniel resumes the tape. He leans forward. Again. Almost horizontal, as he looks from the screen to the magazine cover, and back.

DANIEL

Oh. My. God.

INT. HENDRICKS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A hive of activity.

VOLUNTEERS and CAMPAIGN OFFICIALS bustling, cold-calling, collating statistics, and generally doing what those fine folks do.

Two women pass through the masses, a moving front of calm within the storm.

CHARLENE HENDRICKS, shapely, mid-forties - but you wouldn't know it. Her tasteful do is artfully tousled. She's wearing immaculate sweats, campaign button prominent, and carrying a small soccer ball. Photo-opportunity casual.

Beside her is DEANDRA BARBER, mid-forties, African-American. Sleek and chic in her executive power suit. Another one who's effortlessly defying the sands of time.

A volunteer approaches.

VOLUNTEER #1

Miz--?

DEANDRA

No.

Now, an official.

OFFICIAL

Deand--

DEANDRA

Tell him I'll call back. Tomorrow.

A volunteer, and an official.

VOLUNTEER #2

Can--

OFFICIAL #2

When are--

Deandra cuts them both off, with a single raised hand.

The two women move on, toward a screened-off section of the hall.

DEANDRA

And, you've given some thought to...  
that other matter?

A stern look from Charlene.

CHARLENE

Deandra.

DEANDRA

Okay.

FRANK YATES, a hefty Secret Service man in his early thirties, is standing post, at the door.

CHARLENE

Hey, Frank.  
Not giving you sleepless nights, I hope?  
We'll still make your Christmas list?

FRANK

Senator. Miz Barber.  
Letter to Santa's gone through, already.

CHARLENE

Good.  
The Piper at home?

FRANK

Yes, Ma'am.

They pass through a door, in the partition.

INT. HENDRICKS CAMPAIGN HQ LOUNGE - DAY

A little island of Suburbia: kitchenette, lounge, small den.  
An Inner Sanctum for the Senator.

There's a TV in the lounge, showing cartoons. Sprawled on the couch in front of it is PHILIPPA "PIPER" HENDRICKS, age 10. Dressed in complementary sweats to her Mom.

She turns from the action on the television. Studies her mother in silence. Doe-eyed. Expressionless. Samara Morgan deadpan.

PIPER

Senator Hendricks.

Charlene approaches the couch, cautiously. Circles Piper, like she's a dangerous animal. Regards her gravely.

CHARLENE

Philippa.

They look at each other, stone faced, for several seconds. Piper cracks first. They've played this game, before.

Charlene flips the soccer ball in the air. Catches it. Spins it on her index finger, Globetrotters style.

CHARLENE

Soccer practice. You up for it?

PIPER

Yup.

CHARLENE

Been practicing the chip shot?  
Big game's in two weeks, right?

PIPER

Uh-huh. We're gonna kill 'em.

She scrambles off the couch. Turns to Deandra, a hand raised in a cut-off gesture identical to the one Ms. Barber used earlier.



PIPER

Hey, D.

DEANDRA

Hey. And how's The Piper, this morning?

PIPER

She's good.  
You're coming with us, right?

DEANDRA

Sorry, sweetie. I can't.

PIPER

But, you were gonna show me how to do that  
back flip again. Please?

DEANDRA

Someone has to stay here, and keep this  
circus on line. Besides, you've got ol'  
Frank, here. I'm sure he's got lots of  
interesting moves on him. Don't you, Frank?

FRANK

(Wha--?)  
Umm. Well...

PIPER

Great.

That being settled, she grabs him by the hand, and leads him  
toward the door.

Deandra, a hand on Charlene's arm, holds her back.

DEANDRA

And what do I say, if You-Know-Who calls?

CHARLENE

Tell him...  
Tell him "Thanks for the interest. But, no."

With a cryptic smile, she exits.