

THE SAVAGE CHOCOLATIER

an original feature screenplay by

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In the darkness, a gun fires.

FADE IN:

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

A wooden chair lies on its back. Blood drains from the body tied to it and pools on the sawdust-covered floor.

MAN (O.S.)  
Find him a comfortable ditch.

INT. TAXI - MORNING

ARCHIE CLARK (late 30s) throws an overstuffed messenger bag onto the seat and climbs in. A beefy white guy. Rough hewn face. Weary eyes. He stabs a slip of paper at the CABBIE.

ARCHIE  
This address.

He speaks with a distinct Canadian accent. Adjusts his tattered blazer and tie, unhappy with the look.

Notices the cabbie watching him.

ARCHIE  
You have a beef, buddy?

CABBIE  
You're The Enforcer - meanest bruiser in the NHL!

ARCHIE  
Watch the road.

CABBIE  
You were my hero growing up --

ARCHIE  
-- If I was The Enforcer, would you be picking me up at Greyhound?

A MONTAGE OF SCENES juxtapose with Archie's conversation with the cabbie:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
No. You'd pick him up at The Ritz.

A grungy Archie searches a dumpster.

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
Or the Capital Grille.

Archie sniffs a damp chunk of bread. Climbs into a dirty cardboard box and eats.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

Archie holds a cardboard sign: "HARD WORKER. HUNGRY."

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
If I was The Enforcer, I'd be on  
Easy Street.

A MAN leans from an SUV. Asks Archie a question. Archie lifts his shirt, exposing firm abs. The man likes what he sees.

LATER, IN THE SUV

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
I'd never have to work again.

The man tempts Archie with a twenty.

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
To scrounge for a living.

Archie checks the area, then pockets the money. The man unbuckles Archie's pants.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER - NIGHT

Archie sleeps in a cot beside rows of other vagrants.

CABBIE (V.O.)  
I suppose you'd be rich after, what,  
twelve years --

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
-- Sixteen.

An INDIGENT reaches for the messenger bag beneath Archie's bed. Archie grabs the indigent's wrist.

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
Sixteen hard years as an NHL fighter.

The indigent tries to pull away, but Archie attacks like a cornered bear. STAFFERS rush to separate them.

EXT. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

Archie steps into a cold drizzle, months of scruff on his face. Pulls on a hoodie with "EXETER UNIVERSITY" on the front.

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
But I'm not The Enforcer.

He breathes in the fresh air. Shoulders his messenger bag with resolve. Strides up the street.

INT. PAWN SHOP - LATER

CABBIE (V.O.)  
You think the Stanley Cup is heavy?

A PAWNBROKER studies an NHL Championship ring.

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
No, it's light as tin foil. In that moment it was ... I bet it was unreal.

PAWNBROKER  
Is this real? Who'd this belong to?

Archie shrugs. The broker hands Archie a wad of cash.

INT. FLOPHOUSE - LATER

Archie stares into a dingy room from the dingier hallway.

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
If I was The Enforcer, my life would be very different.

He hands the SUPER his rent.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

ARCHIE (V.O.)  
Very different.

Archie sits freshly shaved at a computer terminal. Ignores the disgust of the WOMAN beside him. Logs into a web site.

He studies the screen with trepidation - then exuberant joy.

INT. PAROLE OFFICE - DAY

Archie sits in front of his PAROLE OFFICER. Slides a sheet of paper across the desk.

ARCHIE

The job's in Exeter. I played college hockey there --

PAROLE OFFICER

-- That's three states away.

She studies Archie. Then her computer. Archie waits...

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STATION - PRESENT DAY, MORNING

CABBIE (V.O.)

People defy expectations, I guess.

Archie, in ruffled shirt and blazer, strides past hustlers and derelicts. Toward a cab. Reaches for the door.

ARCHIE (V.O.)

In every possible way.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATER THAT MORNING

Archie slams the door of the cab. Looks up at "COCOA POWER" -- the peeling pink facade of a shabby chocolate shop.

A WINO reclines against it.

Archie takes in the street. One sign shop with stunning flowerpots -- the other shops tired or vacant. A billboard at the end of the street stands bare.

Sunlight catches every flaw in Archie's outfit. He opens his wallet. Fingers one bill. Motions for the cabbie to wait. Rummages through his messenger bag.

A pair of BVDs drops to the pavement.

CABBIE

Have a nice life, Mr. Clark.

The cab leaves. Archie and the wino both grab for the BVDs. They grapple. Archie threatens with his fist as a PATRON leaves Cocoa Power.

PATRON  
HEY! LET HIM GO!

Archie puts up his hands. The wino shoves Archie into the gutter beside a UPS van. Throws his bottle at Archie. Flees.

Satisfied, the patron sashays away.

Archie climbs from the gutter. Straightens his clothes. Notices a wine stain and tries to wipe it off.

Pissed, he shoulders his messenger bag. Strides toward Cocoa Power. Grabs the door handle.

Sees the rainbow flag sticker on the window.

The door flies open, banging Archie's knee. MAX (30s), a studly UPS delivery guy, exits with an armful of boxes.

MAX  
Hold the door, would ya buddy?

He does. Max fires an appreciative smile at Archie. Archie returns it. Regards Max a moment. Then limps into:

INT. COCOA POWER - CONTINUOUS

Another PATRON elbows Archie out of the way as he takes in the chaotic scene.

A riot of SHOPPERS place orders at a candy counter. Others queue noisily at a marble-topped espresso bar. Frilly boxes of pink and brown, cellophaned hearts and red-foiled kisses jam glass shelves.

A fanciful Cupid holding bow, arrow and a "BE MY VALENTINE, BITCH" sign hangs suspended from the ceiling.

JOHNNY (early 30s), a compact Nordic dream in work shirt and pink apron - backs into Archie, arms loaded.

JOHNNY  
The shelter is up the street.

ARCHIE  
I'm a new hire, not a tramp.

JOHNNY  
Then you need a new tailor. Hold that door or get outta my way.

Archie steps aside. Surprised, Johnny shoves out the door – eyes glaring at the new hire.

Archie spots a tray of samples and devours four of them. Wipes his teeth with a napkin.

He approaches MIMI (19), a wispy sales associate, as she deftly handles the coffee crowd.

ARCHIE  
Looking for Vanessa?

Mimi points to VANESSA (50s) – a black force-of-nature who packs orders with grace and style.

ARCHIE  
Vanessa? Archie, the new marketing guy. Is there somewhere we can talk?

VANESSA  
Now? Hell, no.

She shoves a pink apron into Archie's hand. Assesses him with some trepidation.

VANESSA  
Lordy, I am a fool for starting a newbie on Valentine's Day. Can you even run a damn register?

ARCHIE  
Take money. Put in drawer. Repeat.

VANESSA  
Save the attitude for your mother. Card reader. Bar code scanner.

An overweight NERD steam rolls to the counter.

NERD  
Hey, muscle head! You got these Oreos in dark?

ARCHIE  
Milk and dark, sir. Two-piece and nine-piece but, honestly, don't you and your Warcraft buds deserve that heart piñata on the corner shelf?

NERD  
What...where? Oh, awesome!

The Nerd makes a beeline. Vanessa gapes at Archie.

ARCHIE

Your web site sucks, but the product info isn't bad.

VANESSA

Don't test me. And don't eat the samples. I saw your ass.

ARCHIE

I, uh...

(to a patron)

... Is that all, ma'am? Those truffle kisses are shouting your name.

EXT. COCOA POWER - EVENING

Archie exits with Mimi. She locks up.

MIMI

Get a drink with me?

ARCHIE

Sorry, I don't ... I gotta unpack.

Disappointed, Mimi accepts that and strolls up the street.

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER - LATER

A desperate place, perhaps a former flophouse. Archie plods to the desk. The MANAGER leers at him.

ARCHIE

You have room tonight?

MANAGER

Ten bucks. No food. No drugs.  
No sex - between residents.

Archie counts his funds. Pays the fee.

MANAGER

Oh, and the showers are broken.

INT. COCOA POWER - MORNING

Vanessa watches as Archie examines the facade outside. He strides in. Vanessa checks her watch.



VANESSA

Ten minutes early. You live close?

ARCHIE

Walking distance. This street has seen better days.

She judges yesterday's outfit. Gives him a sniff.

VANESSA

Did you shower?

ARCHIE

So, we switch from Valentine's to, what, St. Paddy's?

VANESSA

Get real with me. I did my research: career-ending injury, compensation fight with the Players Association. An assault charge.

ARCHIE

My new parole officer is up the street --

VANESSA

-- Shouldn't a person of your renown have two damn pennies to rub together?

ARCHIE

You hired me with all my flaws and warts. So what say we cut the banter and get on with it?

SHIPPING AND RECEIVING - MOMENTS LATER

Vanessa introduces Johnny. They shake hands gamely. Johnny scratches his neck, flexing his bicep for Archie's benefit. Archie notices.

ARCHIE

Yesterday was crazy, eh?

JOHNNY

Busiest day of the year, sport. It's all downhill from here.

THEN, THE PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

A shabby upstairs room. Shelves of ingredients, huge blocks of chocolate, tempering units and stainless work stations.

Vanessa introduces Archie to the small PRODUCTION STAFF. They are unimpressed.

THEN, HIS NEW OFFICE

A cramped closet overwhelmed with samples, binders and cookbooks. An out-of-date Apple rests on a beat-up desk.

VANESSA

Your home away from home.

Archie peers in with growing skepticism.

FINALLY, A STOREROOM

A windowless room. Old equipment and back stock pack one end. Light filters in from an attached washroom.

VANESSA

My former flat, now storage. What did I say the salary was?

ARCHIE

You didn't.

VANESSA

\$25K a year, ninety days probation, 40% off on product. It's what I can afford at the moment. Take it, or --

ARCHIE

-- I'll take it. And my past issues?

VANESSA

Are past. There's a lavatory so wash up. Today, you make coffee.

INT. COCOA POWER - LATER

Archie, now in a pink apron, hands Vanessa an espresso. She sips it. Adds it to the rejects on the counter.

VANESSA

Better. Try a couple more.

Mimi listens as she stocks shelves. Johnny delivers chocolate shamrocks to her. He slips behind the counter and sneaks a rejected espresso.

PETER (60s), an elegant man in a couture suit, strides in.

PETER

Vanessa, is it rush week? I just stepped over two PIKES and a Theta Chi -- wait, a new barista? I hope you belong to my church.

ARCHIE

I'm agnostic.

PETER

Mmmmm, pity. Hello, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Peter. Newbie's pretty in pink, eh?

ARCHIE

When in Rome, shipping boy.

PETER

You never really know a person until you know their favorite color -- and I don't imagine it's pink.

Archie shakes his head with a smile. Serves Peter an espresso as Vanessa shoos Johnny away.

ARCHIE

I'm Archie. Marketing guy and probable jack-of-all-trades here.

PETER

Wonderful! Are you master of one?

ARCHIE

One or two.

VANESSA

Peter runs a brand communications firm across the street.

PETER

Please. It's just a sign shop.

ARCHIE

Huh. Tell me more.