

**ZUGZWANG**

by

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## ZUGZWANG

### Characters

MARTY, 30s-40s, single, a successful urban professional.

DEVIN, 30s-40s, single, his elegant date.

SAX, 20-30s, solidly built, a passer-by who doesn't.

### Time

Present.

### Setting

A city street.

**ZUGZWANG**

*MARTY and DEVIN, well-dressed for an evening out, walk arm in arm down a quiet city street toward his car.*

DEVIN

*(Warmly.)*

Did you have to tell that awful joke?

MARTY

Which awful joke. There were so many.

DEVIN

When you ordered.

MARTY

Hey, it was an innocent question.

DEVIN

Please. Asking for sashimi "medium well."

MARTY

I'm just a country mouse at heart, what can I say.

DEVIN

That pretense is wearing thin.

MARTY

You laughed.

DEVIN

I shouldn't have. It encourages you. Your sense of humor was entirely lost on the waiter, poor man.

*SAX approaches the couple from the front. He's wearing a sweatshirt with the hood down, and clutching an unlit cigarette. MARTY pulls out his car keys, which jingle in his hand.*

MARTY

Small price to pay to see the sparkle in your approving eyes.

DEVIN

I'll have to work on my control then.

*SAX stops MARTY, waves the cigarette.*

SAX

Got a light?

*SAX puts the cigarette in his mouth, expectantly.*

*MARTY tries to steer DEVIN past SAX, putting his arm around her protectively.*

SAX (CONT'D)

Hey!

MARTY

Leave us be.

*SAX grabs MARTY's sleeve. MARTY tugs at it, but SAX pulls him closer.*

MARTY (CONT'D)

Nobody wants trouble.

SAX

But somebody wants a light.

MARTY

Let go of me.

SAX

A light.

MARTY

I don't smoke.

*The two men glare at each other. DEVIN looks on uneasily. After a tense moment, SAX releases his grip on MARTY's arm, smoothing the wrinkles in the fabric.*

SAX

All you had to say, pal. You don't have to be so touchy.

MARTY

Fuck you.

SAX

Like that.

*DEVIN digs in her purse with a sense of urgency.*

DEVIN

I think I might have one.

MARTY

One what?

DEVIN

A lighter. Or a matchbook from the restaurant.

SAX

Thanks for looking. That's very high class of you.

MARTY

No. Devin, please--

SAX

--Hey, relax, tight ass.

MARTY

Devin, stop. You don't need to do anything for him.

DEVIN

Marty, just a second.

SAX

Yeah, Marty, mind your own business. The lady and I are communicating.

*MARTY attempts lead DEVIN away, but she stops him and hands SAX a lighter.*

DEVIN

*(Nervously.)*

Here.

MARTY

Jesus Christ. What'd you do that for?

SAX

It's called being polite. Make a note of it.

*SAX lights his cigarette, examines the lighter appreciatively.*

SAX (CONT'D)

Nice lighter.

DEVIN

It was a gift. From my father.

SAX

Man has very good taste in smoking accessories.

MARTY

All right, you're a connoisseur. Give it back.

SAX

I said it before: I don't like your tone. Marty.

DEVIN

That's OK. Keep the lighter.

MARTY

What?! No.

DEVIN

It's just a lighter. No big deal, really. I'll get another.

SAX

Hey, thanks, sweetheart.

MARTY

You're not going to give this shit your father's lighter. I won't let you.

*DEVIN tugs on MARTY's arm.*

DEVIN

Let's just go.

MARTY

*(To SAX.)*

Give it back.

SAX

*(Enjoying this.)*

Maybe I will. Maybe I won't.

*MARTY explodes, grabbing for the lighter, which SAX yanks out of reach.*

MARTY

Give it up, you sonofabitch!

*MARTY and SAX grapple briefly, then MARTY falls back from a punch to the stomach. DEVIN grabs MARTY's jacket from behind and pulls him away.*

DEVIN

Marty! Forget the lighter! Let's just get in the car and go.

*While MARTY nurses his aching gut, SAX steps closer to the unseen car, peers at it.*

SAX

This your car?

MARTY

*(With cold outrage.)*

You. Motherfucker.

SAX

Sweet Benz.

DEVIN

Please. Let us go.

SAX

What do you say, Marty? You wanna leave?

MARTY

Fucking asshole.

SAX

You got a mouth on you, Marty. That's not smart when the balance of power is not in your favor.

DEVIN

*(Quietly, almost in tears.)*

Please.

SAX

Hold on...it's Devin, right?

*DEVIN nods.*

SAX (CONT'D)

Devin, your boyfriend is not an unfamiliar visitor to our community. In fact, we get a lot of his kind of Benz-driving-Remy-drinking-Armani-suited little shits around here. They come into the neighborhood to eat at those fancy new expensive diners that sprung up just for downtown types like him to slum around in with their...slutty dates--present company excluded, no offense.

DEVIN

*(Shakily.)*

No...no offense.

MARTY

You fuck, I ought to--

SAX

--You ought to, but you won't. And you know why? Because the last thing you scumbags like is getting your hands dirty.

MARTY

Are you finished?

SAX

Almost. 'Cause I know how to end this.

MARTY

Good. It's been a pleasure.

*MARTY, still hunched over, moves to go.*

SAX

Whoa, dude. You haven't heard my terms yet.

DEVIN

Terms?

MARTY

You want money? Here. I got a hundred bucks.

*MARTY reaches for his wallet.*

SAX

Who said anything about money? I've decided to trade up.

*SAX wiggles DEVIN's lighter between his fingers.*

MARTY

What are you talking about?

SAX

A simple exchange. One that lets each of us walk in the other's shoes for a while, so to speak. I return the lighter...

*SAX tosses the lighter to MARTY, who bobbles it briefly.*

SAX (CONT'D)

And you either let me drive your car--

MARTY

--What?! It's an SLK!

SAX

Yeah, with the V-8, it looks like.

MARTY

You can't take my car!

SAX

Well, you have a choice. That's why I said "either." So I drive your car--you'e welcome to ride along--or...I drive your girl.

DEVIN

Drive me--?

SAX

--As in crazy. Just a little kiss, sweetlips. Nothing more.

*DEVIN gasps.*



MARTY

You're insane you think I'd agree to that!

SAX

No, not insane. Well, maybe a little. But mostly just tired of you one-percenters coming up here and lording it over us natives like we're dog shit on your Gucci loafers. All I want is to even the score--just a teeny bit. Either I get a drive around the block in your SLK or a kiss from your classy companion.

*(To DEVIN, graciously.)*

With or without tongue, as you prefer.

DEVIN

Marty, give him your keys.

MARTY

This is bullshit. We're leaving.

SAX

Not without your decision. What'll it be, hotshot, your car, left with maybe a scratch or two, or your girlfriend, left maybe wondering what she sees in you.

DEVIN

Marty, what are you waiting for? Give him the keys! Marty!

*A frozen tableau. Fade to black.*

THE END