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HOOK AND CHAIN

Lead Focused / Thriller / 4-5 min
Cast 3-4 Female x1 Male x2 Any x1

Desmond drives a tow truck on the night shift. He is winching up an illegally parked sedan when its owners arrive in a hurry and start offering cash. Something about the car is wrong and he has to decide how far by the book he is willing to go.

CHARACTERS

DESMOND (LEAD) - 30s to 40s, a tow truck driver, calm, tired, does everything by the book because the book has kept him safe.

CALLUM - 30s, the car's owner, friendly until he isn't.

VERA - 30s, with Callum, nervous and watching the exits.

DISPATCH - any age, a voice on the radio, can be read offstage or cut.

SETTING

A cracked parking lot behind a shuttered strip mall at two in the morning.

A cracked parking lot behind a shuttered strip mall. Two in the morning. A tow truck's amber lights turn slowly.

DESMOND, in a reflective vest, is winching a dark sedan onto the flatbed. Headlights sweep across him. A car stops. CALLUM and VERA get out fast.

CALLUM

Hey. Hey! That's mine.

DESMOND

(not stopping)

Evening.

CALLUM

Put it down. That's my car.

DESMOND

It's on private property with no permit after ten. Sign's right there on the pole. Big red one.

VERA

We were gone twenty minutes.

DESMOND

Sign doesn't say anything about twenty minutes.

CALLUM comes closer. DESMOND keeps one hand on the winch control.

CALLUM

Look. I'll pay the drop fee. Whatever it is. Cash. Right now.

DESMOND

Drop fee's ninety.

CALLUM

Fine.

DESMOND

Once it's on the bed it's not a drop fee anymore. It's a full tow and impound. Three-forty plus storage. And it's on the bed.

VERA

Then take it off the bed.

DESMOND

(evenly)

Ma'am, I'm gonna do my job the same way I do it every night, which is by the book, because the book's the only thing that keeps me from getting sued.

He tightens a strap. A soft, dull sound comes from the trunk of the sedan. Once. DESMOND's hand stops on the strap.

CALLUM

Suspension. It's old.

DESMOND

Sure.

He goes back to work. Slower now. He glances at his cab.

DESMOND

Where'd you say you were for twenty minutes?

CALLUM

I didn't.

DESMOND

Everything's closed. Nearest thing open is the gas station on Fourth and that's a walk.

VERA

Is this an interview?

DESMOND

Just making conversation. Long nights.

*The sound from the trunk again. Twice. Rhythmic.
DESMOND straightens up. He looks at CALLUM.
CALLUM looks back.*

CALLUM

(low)

Five hundred. You unhook it, you drive away, you never saw the plate.

DESMOND

I saw the plate. I photograph the plate. That's step one. It's already in the system.

CALLUM

Then delete it.

DESMOND

Can't. It goes to dispatch. Time-stamped. And that camera on my mirror there, that one, that streams. Live. To a woman named Rhonda who's been doing this nineteen years and doesn't like surprises.

VERA looks at the camera. CALLUM doesn't.

VERA

Cal.

CALLUM

He's bluffing.

DESMOND

Maybe. Wanna find out from the other side of a courtroom?

(beat)

Here's what I know. I know your car's been parked here since eleven-forty, because that's when the plaza manager called it in. So that's not twenty minutes. That's two hours and change. I know your suspension's fine because it rode up on my winch smooth as glass. And I know that whatever's in that trunk is knocking on the inside.

Silence. VERA takes a half step back toward their car.

CALLUM

You don't want this.

DESMOND

You're right. I don't. I wanna be home. I wanna take off these boots. I got a kid who wakes up at six whether I've slept or not.

(he steps to the cab door)

But I got a truck with a hook on it, and I got a radio, and I got a woman named Rhonda. And you got about four minutes of choices left.

He reaches into the cab and lifts the radio handset. He never takes his eyes off CALLUM.

DESMOND

Dispatch, this is Unit Six.

DISPATCH

(over radio, crackling)

Go ahead, Six.

DESMOND

Plaza on Marsh Road. Plate ending four-seven-one. I need police here. Not a patrol. Everybody.

DISPATCH

Say again, Six?

DESMOND

Everybody, Rhonda.

He sets the handset down and turns back to them.

DESMOND

(quiet, final)

I'd start walking.

CALLUM stares at him. VERA is already moving. After a long moment, CALLUM follows. Their car door slams. Tires. DESMOND walks to the back of the sedan and puts his palm flat on the trunk.

DESMOND

Hang on. Just hang on. I got you.

END OF SCRIPT