

THE LIGHTHOUSE

Based on a True Story

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. STEEL FACTORY - FURNACE ROOM - NIGHT

A quick BLAST of yellow light, white at its center. Noxious brown smoke lifting past us. We see towering furnaces, scarred black from their fate. A heat that could melt skin.

EXT. STEEL FACTORY - FREIGHT YARD - DAY

Through the silver light of dawn, we find a freshly minted steel I-BEAM, strapped in and dangling, thirty feet above a freight train. Sinking toward a waiting flatbed.

MOMENTS LATER -- it's dropped onto the stack with a sharp CLANG that doesn't raise an eyebrow.

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN (MOVING) - DAY

The I-Beam rides open-air, crossing the hills of Pennsylvania.

INT./EXT. HUDSON RIVER BARGE (MOVING) - DAY

Covering the expansive deck of the BARGE, identically stacked pyramids of steel beams. Finishing their long journey together.

Heading toward --

EXT. NEW YORK CITY (1930) - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

From the shores of New Jersey, we look across the Hudson to the island of Manhattan. Sitting silent, preparing itself for glory and greatness as the center of the known universe.

In 1930 though, despite one or two tall buildings, it's not much to marvel at.

EXT. BANK OF MANHATTAN BUILDING - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

An obvious work in progress. A steel skeleton that already stretches higher than any other building on the planet. The typical lunch hour crowd encircling the work site's fence line, watching the commotion.

About halfway up, teams of BRICKLAYERS work quickly, adding skin to the skeleton. Four inches at a time.

EXT. BANK OF MANHATTAN BUILDING - 68TH FLOOR - LATER

Up at the top of the world. TOM COLEMAN (40's) tightens a bolt the size of a fist. NED SHEUSTER (30's) stands a few feet away, urinating into a silver bucket as he releases a satisfying yawn.

TOM
 (wipes at his cheek)
 Piss down wind, will ya, Ned? We talked about this.

Ned shakes out his last few drops.

NED
 (looking over the edge)
 Those brickburners down there are lucky I'm hitting the bucket at all. Can barely see straight.

TOM
 It's abuse is what it is. Hand me the twelve gauge, will ya?
 (as Ned hands it over)
 How long's it been since we been able to actually look up at a bird?

NED
 This shift's eleven hours, one before that was twelve, right?

TOM
 (cranking the wrench)
 Thirteen. And the hell we say anything. You hear how many floors went up over at Chrysler yesterday? Let me have a finishing cap...
 (as Ned hands it over)
 Four! In a single goddamn day.

NED
 How's that even possible?

TOM
 Hell if I know, but I do know what it means for us.

NED
 We're not sleeping this month...

TOM
 Exactly. Lemme see the soddering tip again...
 (as Ned hands it over)
 (MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)
 Truth is, we're fucked, Ned. With a
 capital shove-it-up-your-ass.

FROM BEHIND NED - A single I-Beam moving INTO FRAME, lowering
 toward them. Tom notices it.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Incoming.
 (jumping up, waving it in)
 Okay, easy now...

The towering CRANE, itself a wonderment of engineering, sits
 adjacent to the scaffolding. Its LIFTING HOOK still attached
 by a long steel line to the moving I-Beam.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Okay, Neddy. Tie me off.

NED
 Tom, why don't you let me take it?

TOM
 Because I always take 'em in, and I'm
 smart enough not to mess with
 tradition at seven hundred feet. Now
 tie me off.

As Tom speaks, he throws on his anchor vest - essentially a
 piece of canvas strapped on like a life vest, but with the
 critical difference of a spooled piece of cable attached to
 the back. The loose end of the cable has a carabiner hook on
 it, used for attaching to fixed beams.

Ned moves through the routine, grabbing the cable and pulling
 it to a nearby beam. He wraps it around once, about to hook
 it off -

TOM (CONT'D)
 Ned, buddy, you forgetting something?

Ned pivots his head, his confused, bloodshot eyes trying to
 remember.

TOM (CONT'D)
 The rivets?

Ned shakes his head, clearing the cobwebs.

NED
 Sorry, Tommy. I'll call down for some
 coffee after this one.

Ned releases the hook, quickly jumps over to the toolbox.

CLOSE ON THE HOOK - the cable runs through it, but the small gate that locks it in was left open. The cable teeters on the point of the carabiner hook.

Ned crouches at the toolbox, grabbing the forgotten rivets, but as he does -

CLOSE ON THE HOOK - the teetering cable tips off, the hook immediately unwrapping, falling limp.

Ned squats, ready with the rivets. But as he does, he hears a TAP...metal against metal. And then another. He turns his head to see the hook swinging loose. A confused expression as if the sight doesn't make sense. But then, all at once, it does -

The I-beam swings in close. Tom reaches out for it.

NED (CONT'D)
Tom, no! Wait!!

But it's too late. Tom's already pitching forward.

He reaches desperately for anything, finding only air. His face contorting into confused horror, every nightmare from his past twenty years converging at once. Ned's eyes go wide, trying to scramble to his feet, but powerless now.

SLOW MOTION - On Tom as he slips below Ned's sight line.

ANGLE FROM ABOVE as Tom falls. Arms and legs kicking, his eyes pleading wildly.

Ned looks over the edge, screaming down for his friend. Nothing else to do.

END SLOW MOTION - Tom's body is a blur, gravity doing its worst. It CRASHES through the wooden floor thirty floors below, too much force to be stopped. Missing every bricklayer, sucking rubble into the void, before disappearing from our view in a silent dust cloud.

AT STREET LEVEL, anxious pedestrians rush toward the chaos from every angle.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK TIMES OFFICES - NIGHT

The offices are quiet, but one office is still lit, still pursuing all the news that's fit to print. Inside the office:

WILL VAN ALEN (mid 30's), clean-cut and handsome, is tense at the moment, his jaw muscle flexing as he sits across a cluttered desk from LARRY HOPKINS (mid-50's). Larry taps a pen against his cheek, studying Will's face.

LARRY

Just like that...you want me to print that you're giving up...

WILL

A man fell seven hundred feet yesterday, Larry.

LARRY

Wasn't one of your men.

WILL

I don't care.

A beat of silence before Larry shakes his head.

LARRY

I do, Will. This dogfight you're in...it's the best story this place has covered in years.

(lights a cigarette)

You really think you'll ever get another shot at something like that?

WILL

(meets Larry's eyes before)

I still need you to print it, and it needs to hit in a week or so.

LARRY

(a beat; exhales)

Fine.

As Will stands, steps toward the door.

LARRY (CONT'D)

But this whole thing, it's not about who ends up with the tallest building in the world...

(off Will)

It's about who becomes immortalized and who becomes forgettable. And I guess you just answered that.

Off Will's tired eyes, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ECOLE DES BEAUX ARTS (DORM ROOM) - DAY

PULL BACK from these same eyes...

Younger now, their boyish innocence still intact. They belong to the sunlit face of a man looking out a window: Will Van Alen, now in his early 20's. His eyes scan the horizon, but what he actually sees is a secret known only to him.

SUPER: *Paris, 1923 - 7 Years Earlier*

WILL'S POV: The Eiffel Tower, a mile away, dwarfing every other structure within sight.

The door swings open behind him. Meet HARRY TANNING (24). Thinning hair and the first signs of a belly, his confidence has never suffered from his physical shortcomings.

HARRY

Ah, my ruminating roomie. Was hoping you'd be here.

WILL

(not looking over)

Harry.

(then)

Pleasurable evening?

HARRY

(flopping down onto his bed)

You missed out yet again, Will. Pack of crazed Turkish women on holiday. Made for a very respectable Tuesday night.

Harry takes a swig from a flask, notices Will not listening...

HARRY (CONT'D)

You know...it's my belief that your introspective tendencies are clearly the result of one thing.

WILL

Get dressed. We need to be there in thirty minutes.

HARRY

And that one thing is clearly this: you're going to miss me. Terribly.

(then)

Three years is an unnaturally long time for two grown men to share living quarters this cozy.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

And the fact is, after we graduate, you're going to be lost without my guidance.

Will smirks, finally turns from the window to face Harry, who's switching out one blazer for another.

WILL

You seriously undervalue clarity in human conversation, Harry. What are you trying to say?

HARRY

I'm suggesting a partnership, old friend. We join forces back in the states and make a splash as the newest architecture firm to take Chicago by storm. Tanning and Van Alen.

WILL

Van Alen and Tanning.

HARRY

Ha! There's my tiger. We'll bed the most beautiful women, eat in the finest restaurants, drink obscenely expensive wine...

WILL

And I thought a partnership meant actually doing some work. Are my sleeves too short?

Harry places a hand on Will's shoulder, leans in close. Eye to eye...

HARRY

We will design structures even the gods are not worthy of. Or, at least you will. I'm comfortable with my creative limitations, so I'll do all that businessy stuff you won't have time for.

Will's face is noncommittal. But he's listening...

WILL

Why Chicago?

HARRY

Chicago, Boston, San Francisco. They're all equally in need of some real taste. You choose...

Will chews his lip, considering all of this. Harry grins, messes Will's hair.

HARRY (CONT'D)

But not now. Your interest is piqued,
so my job here is done.

(then)

But yes, your sleeves are too short.

Harry opens the door to leave. Suddenly face to face with a man standing there: ALAN REYNOLDS (50), his closed hand raised to knock. Looking out of place among the students.

Harry grasps Alan's shoulders with passionate conviction, kisses this stranger on each of his cheeks:

HARRY (CONT'D)

Greetings, kind stranger! The
pleasure was entirely mine!

And with that, Harry walks off. A perplexed Alan looks toward Will.

WILL

Don't mind him. Can I help you with
something?

ALAN

Sorry, I'm just having trouble
tracking down a student here. Name of
William Van Alen...?

WILL

And you'd be?

ALAN

Alan Reynolds. I'm here from New
York.

Will wrangles on his school blazer, smiles.

WILL

Problem solved, Alan.
(Will extends a hand, they
shake)
You mind a stroll?

EXT. ECOLE DES BEAUX ARTS CAMPUS - MINUTES LATER

The pleasant serenity of academia. Stucco and leaded glass stand poised above manicured grass and stone walkways. The Eiffel Tower looming in the distance.

Will and Alan walk together, several paces behind the moving, energized throng of Will's CLASSMATES.

ALAN

I'm here, Will, because I'm building a premier forty-five story hotel on the corner of Lexington and forty-second street. You won't find a more prized piece of land on the planet.

WILL

Congratulations. I know that corner well.

ALAN

I assumed you would.

(pulling a sheet of paper from a pocket; reading)

Will Van Alen, born and raised in New York City, studied at the Pratt Institute where he excelled from start to finish, graduating at the top of his class before winning a scholarship to come to lovely Paris, where he has continued to be showered in awards and praise.

(folding up the paper)

Did I miss anything?

WILL

I'm also an above average swimmer.

ALAN

I want to hire you, Will. As part of developing this hotel, I'm assembling an architecture team from the finest talent available.

WILL

Ahh, but there's the kink.

(off Alan's face)

I'm not available.

ALAN

(a bit thrown)

Oh...I assumed with your school being an ocean away that nobody had recruited you yet.

WILL

Starting my own firm actually. With another student here. His brilliance is...

WILL'S POV - within the heart of the throng, just ahead, Harry sits atop the shoulders of another student, flapping his arms like an eagle.

WILL (CONT'D)
...indescribable.

ALAN
Really... I'm impressed. That's a lot for a man your age to bite off.
(extending his hand)
I can't say I'm happy about it, but I guess there's no reason to waste any more of your time...

Will shakes Alan's hand, mulling something.

WILL
Could you stand a bit more walking, Alan?

INT. PALAIS DES ETUDES - MINUTES LATER

Soaring buttresses and stained glass that demand silent reverence from the uninitiated. One of the finest examples of French Court Gothic architecture in the world.

The peacefulness is crushed as the scores of rowdy students stream in, Will and Alan bringing up the rear.

Alan doesn't try to hide his awe, his neck craning in wonderment as he takes in his surroundings.

WILL
Amazing, right?

Will and Alan continue down the center aisle, toward the pews where Will's classmates are restlessly milling. They find a space of their own, off to the side.

ALAN
So?

WILL
So... I want you to hire my firm to design your hotel.

ALAN
Ahh. And I assume I would be client number one?

WILL
Ensures you a permanent, special place in our heart.

Alan chuckles.

ALAN

Okay, let me play along. Why would I use an unproven, outside firm of recent graduates when I can just create my own hand-picked team?

WILL

Because my unproven firm will live or die by how we perform for you. And because I am moving back to New York, Alan, and I can either work for you or I can design the hotel across the street from yours.

Alan watches Will's eyes, taking him seriously now.

ALAN

And your fees?

WILL

I assume you brought a written offer for me? For the job?

Alan pulls a sealed letter from his breast pocket.

ALAN

I did.

WILL

Then I accept. But instead of getting a single employee, you get an entire firm, dedicated to building you the most glorious hotel you haven't even imagined yet.

Alan taps the envelope against his cheek, considering this. After an extended beat, he holds it out for Will. Will takes it.

ALAN

Well done, Will. I guess you have yourself a client.

Will inspects the offer letter. After a beat, he pulls a pen from his back pocket.

WILL

You forgot to sign it.

ALAN

No, no.

Alan pulls his own GOLD PEN from his breast pocket.

ALAN (CONT'D)
 (scratching his signature)
 I only use this one. At least for
 occasions worthy of it.

The two men shake hands. As they do, Will finds Harry in the crowd of students. Harry is watching them curiously, meeting Will's eyes. Will just winks.

FADE TO:

INT. OFFICES OF VAN ALLEN & TANNING - DAY

An expansive loft. Too big of an office for the paltry number of workers. Quiet. Four APPRENTICE DRAFTSMEN (20's) sit at their angled drafting desks. Pencils, T-squares, and protractors at work. At the center conference table, Will and Alan Reynolds stand over an unrolled blueprint.

ALAN
 (re: blueprint; pointing)
 This is good. But I'd like to open
 this space up a bit.

Will scribbles some notes.

ALAN (CONT'D)
 Where's your other half been lately?

ANGLE ON Harry's office. A few piles of papers on the desk, but no Harry.

WILL
 Out trying to make our young firm
 less reliant on you, I'd presume.

ALAN
 And? How's he doing?

WILL
 He'll get there.
 (shifting the
 conversation)
 I'll make sure we get these changes
 in for the next round.

Alan grins sympathetically. Keeping his thoughts to himself.

A couple of quick KNOCKS at the main office door before CRAIG SEVERANCE (40's) ENTERS. Severance is movie star handsome in an expensively tailored suit.

CRAIG
 Knock, knock? Anyone home?

WILL

I'm sorry, I don't believe we had any appointments scheduled today.

ALAN

(moving toward Craig)

My fault, my fault. Will, this is Craig Severance. I asked him to meet me here.

Will watches Alan and Severance exchange a friendly handshake.

WILL

(sotto; annoyed)

Guess we're done here...

Severance approaches Will, offering his hand and a warm smile. Owning the room as he typically does.

CRAIG

And you must be Alan's brilliant new architect.

(off Will)

Alan has shared some of your plans with me. Hope you don't mind. You have a gifted eye.

WILL

Very kind of you. In the business, I assume.

CRAIG

More on the financial side, but we all have our roles, right?

ALAN

(cutting in)

So, unfortunately, Craig and I are going to be late for our lunch reservation.

(putting on his coat)

Maybe you two should set up a meeting?

CRAIG

Love to.

(to Will)

Do you ride?

Will looks from Craig to Alan, then back to Craig.

WILL

Do I ride...what?

Craig smiles, amused.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Craig sits atop a gorgeous SILVER MARE, handling the majestic animal with experienced grace. Will's HORSE is less stately, struggling to tolerate its clumsy rider.

We join Will in mid-thought:

WILL
(animated)
...I'm not dismissing the practical Vitruvian view, but there are vernacular concerns and canonic examples of functionality as well...

CRAIG
(light)
If you say so...

WILL
I'm boring you.
(then)
What was your question again?

CRAIG
I believe I asked, 'So you're an architect?'

Will nods, embarrassed.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
I love seeing your passion, Will, but I'm sure you've figured out that our chance meeting had nothing to do with chance.

WILL
And what does it have to do with?

Craig smiles at Will's bluntness.

CRAIG
You've been at this, what, eight or nine months now?
(off Will's silence)
And how are things so far with your school friend...Harry, is it? How's the partnership...

WILL

Well, he does all the sales and Alan's still our only client, but he'll find his sea legs. If he's anything, he's tenacious.

CRAIG

Surely you aspire to more than a single client and a few underworked draftsmen...

WILL

And why are you sure of that?

Craig notices Will's defensiveness.

CRAIG

I apologize. There's nothing wrong with enjoying a small boutique firm. Nothing at all. Please forget I even mentioned it.

They clip-clop in silence for a few moments, Craig waiting for Will to speak first...

WILL

I can't deny that Harry's client development efforts have fallen a bit short.

CRAIG

And do you know why that is?

WILL

I think he was counting on his last name to unlock more doors than it has. His father is quite the powerful lawyer apparently.

CRAIG

Ah, success as a birthright. Lucky for you, that's not how it works.

The two men's eyes meet.

WILL

We should probably head back, I've a good amount of work-

CRAIG

Can I be honest with you, Will?

WILL

If it will get me off this creature any faster, then by all means.

CRAIG

(smiles, then)

Harry is your friend, I understand that. But starting a new firm in New York is beyond difficult. It takes a lot more than the right last name.

WILL

Such as...?

CRAIG

Well, first off, it takes genuine ability. I've seen your work, so I know you're covered there.

(then)

But you also need a person who belongs to the club.

WILL

There's a club...

CRAIG

There's always a club. One that requires membership and without which, you're an outsider. And outsiders are always running uphill. Eventually you'll just die of exhaustion.

WILL

All due respect, Craig, I don't tire easily.

Craig grins at Will's innocence.

CRAIG

Look, Will. Alan's project fell onto your lap because of your talent, but I promise that that's unlikely to happen again.

(they meet eyes)

Decide quickly how serious you are about all of this. Alan likes you and he wants to help.

(then)

Our meeting wasn't an accident, but it's up to you what you do with it.

Hard as it is to hear, Will is listening. Off him...

INT. EAST SIDE TAVERN - NIGHT

Prohibition has turned this tavern into a mild-mannered eatery. Will and Harry sit at a table together, each of them working on sandwiches. Harry holds up his glass of water...

HARRY

(through a full mouth;
thick with sarcasm)

Mmm. Water. Nothing tops off a meal more completely than a cup of invigorating water.

(takes a drink)

Delightful!

Will is used to Harry's odd outbursts. He lets it go, not in the mood to play along. A beat.

WILL

So, how did your meetings go today?
Any nibbles?

Harry's not listening, still examining his water glass.

HARRY

It's literally liquid nothingness.
(reaching into his breast
pocket)

But luckily for me, I've got a guy.

Harry withdraws a small silver flask. He lifts his water glass, spots a potted plant nearby -

HARRY (CONT'D)

(pouring the water in)

Because...I...am not...a plant.

He pours the hooch into his empty glass, takes an adoring gulp.

HARRY (CONT'D)

I'd offer you some, but your lack of tits precludes me from even considering it.

Harry takes another drink.

WILL

So you had, what, the shoe company and an apartment developer? Think we have a shot with either one?

HARRY

Does it honestly not annoy you? Are the Baptists and Methodists and all of the other ists so insecure that we should be denied a few drops of liquid barley now and then?

Will's annoyance is growing, unable to even look at Harry.

HARRY (CONT'D)

This country is truly on the brink of destruction when these religious zealots can dictate an amendment to the U.S. Constitution -

WILL

Harry! Enough!

(off Harry's surprised face)

I don't care about the water or the eighteenth amendment or the religious zealots! WE don't have the luxury to care about any of that! Your sales are what's going to keep our firm alive until Alan starts building his hotel. And so far, those sales have been zero...

Harry takes a drink, watching Will.

HARRY

Someone had a shitty day.

WILL

No, my day was fine. It was a fine day. I just want you to tell me about your meetings with the shoe store and the developer. Jesus...

HARRY

My, my...so testy. You just had to ask.

WILL

I did.

HARRY

Did you?

(off Will's stare; a beat)

Huh. Well, the bastard at the shoe store wouldn't meet with me, insisting that I was late, despite the fact that I know for certain our appointment was for eleven, and not at ten like he thought.

Will stays expressionless, part of him expecting this.

WILL

And the developer?

HARRY

Going with a different firm. Nice
gent though, I'm pretty certain I
finagled a couple of invitations to
his beach house for us at some point.

Will nods, a beach invitation hardly what he had in mind.

HARRY (CONT'D)

We're young, partner. Drink your
water and be merry. Opportunity is
everywhere.

Will forces a half-hearted grin, lifts his glass.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Will walks alone, hands in is pockets. Lost in his
contemplations.

His thoughts are jarred short by a loud CLANG in the
distance. And then another... Will looks over to see, at the
edge of the park, a building being erected. Hundreds of men
working together to create something real.

Will can't take his eyes off it.

INT. OFFICES OF VAN ALEN & TANNING (MAIN AREA) - DAY

The four young draftsmen pretend to work, all of them
actually watching the nearby COMMOTION from the corners of
their eyes.

REVERSE on the source of their entertainment: Through the
glass wall outside Harry's office, they see Harry holding a
table lamp and SHOUTING at Will. Harry cranks back his arm,
about to throw the lamp.

BACK ON THE DRAFTSMEN, cringing with anticipation. All of
their necks jerk back in unison at the sound of a loud
CRASH...

INT. OFFICES OF VAN ALEN & TANNING (HARRY'S OFFICE) - SAME
TIME

Harry points at Will, his eyes accusing and hurt.

HARRY

I didn't suspect this kind of disloyalty from you, Van Alen! But I should have.

WILL

And what does that mean?

HARRY

Brooklyn boy rises up, has a shot at the inner sanctum. Takes a better man than you to turn that down.

WILL

That's unfair.

Harry notices a pile of papers on his desk, pushes them violently to the floor. Will continues to stand calm, feeling for his friend.

WILL (CONT'D)

And I'm not trying to part ways here.

HARRY

My name is coming off the door. A new one is taking its place. What else would you call it!?

Will tries to place his hand gently on Harry's arm.

WILL

Harry, please.

Harry pushes Will's hand away.

WILL (CONT'D)

I want you to stay. Bringing on Craig Severance is good for us.

HARRY

It's good for you.

WILL

No! Us!!

(containing himself)

He has access, he can get meetings we can't. This firm will fail without that, do you understand?

HARRY

I understand that I'm now an employee in a firm I co-founded.

WILL

He wouldn't agree to any other structure. I tried to conv -

HARRY

You didn't! You didn't try!

Will looks down at the floor. The silence lingering for a few moments.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Reconcile this, all of this, however you need to so that you can sleep at night, Will. But I'm being replaced.

(Harry moves toward the door; turns back)

And you let it happen.

Harry leaves. Off Will...

TIME DISSOLVE:

EXT. CORNER OF 42ND STREET & LEXINGTON AVE. (NYC) - DAY

SUPER: *Six Years Later*

Snow falling, bundled pedestrians walking quickly to their destinations. An obviously older Will stands motionless - peering through a theodolite (essentially a sort of telescope used for surveying), set on a tripod. He lifts his head from the eyepiece, inspects the land before him --

WILL'S POV - A huge hole. Thirty to forty feet deep, and three-hundred feet long and wide. FENCING set around the perimeter.

To the side of Will, and unnoticed by him, a woman (MEG BAGLEY, 30) holds a HASSELBLAD CAMERA, pointing it toward him. She snaps his photo. The FLASH catches his attention.

WILL

Why did you just do that?

Meg tilts her head at him. She's beyond pretty, radiant actually. Her porcelain skin flushed from the cold.

WOMAN

Because I wanted to take your picture...

(she walks toward him)

Your eyes say intelligent, but now I'm thinking maybe not so much.

WILL

I realize you were taking my picture.
My question is why...

WOMAN

Because it's what I do.
(extends a hand)
Meg Bagley.

Will takes her hand. Confused, but drawn in. The woman oozes confidence.

MEG

This is where you say your name.

WILL

(clumsy)
Oh, yes. Sorry. Just been a busy morning, and my normal surveyor is sick so if these measurements are going to get done, it's going to be by me.

Meg nods, eyebrows raised with amusement.

MEG

Understood. And...who might you be again?

WILL

Oh, right, keep doing that. Will Van Alen. Architect.

MEG

Ah, and did you design this beautiful crater, Will Van Alen Architect?

WILL

(smiles, then)
I'm afraid so.

MEG

Well, it's one of the finer holes I've ever seen. You're very gifted.
(then)
You plan to fill it with anything, or is this just a really bad plan to trap a few thousand innocent New Yorkers?

WILL

(without spirit)
Yeah, I don't know. Someday. These things take time. Especially this thing...

She punches him playfully in the arm.

MEG

Just a little joke, William. Don't
you go dark on me!

(light; re: the
theodolite)

Now tell me what your little
riggetyroll here does.

WILL

(trying to focus)

Nothing fun, I'm afraid. Just
measures angles that I need.

(stepping aside)

Here, have a look...

She does. As she looks:

MEG

Uh huh. And what do you do with these
angles once you've measured them?

WILL

I use them to draw pictures and build
a model of a building...to show
people.

MEG

Interesting. You know, my nephew does
that...

WILL

Your nephew's an architect.

MEG

My nephew is seven.

Will grins, embarrassed. Meg watches him curiously. Tilting
her head.

WILL

Yeah...well, I was seven once.

Meg's face shows amused confusion. This grown man, so
awkward. She likes it.

MEG

Okay, Will Van Alen Architect, I'll
be seeing you. Keep up the good work
on our little pit here.

She turns and walks off. Will offers a quick, hopeful wave to
her back. His face suddenly falls to utter despair as she
goes.

WILL
 (sotto)
 I was seven once.
 (then)
 Unbelievable...

INT. OFFICES OF SEVERANCE & VAN ALLEN (DRAFTING ROOM) - LATER

The tripod slung over one shoulder, Will walks into the large drafting room, now a bustling area filled with sixty DRAFTSMEN - moving about, sketching at their desks, conferring in small groups. The steady din of success.

Will's eyes land on one particular worker: Harry.

CLOSE ON HARRY - Eyes focused as he works at his desk amidst the clamor.

Will hesitates, then starts walking toward him. As he approaches, another draftsman gets to Harry first, Harry and the other man sharing a laugh.

Will stops and turns toward his office...

INT. WILL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Will leans the tripod against a wall. Before he can even turn around --

CRAIG
 (routine update; quick)
 You're back, excellent. McConnell is bringing in a possible restaurant in Chelsea. Meeting's at three today, I'll be in it. If it happens, we're gonna need at least three new men. Maybe an additional intern. The pitch for the Winter Garden Theatre got moved to next Monday.

WILL
 (beat of silence; looking up)
 You forgot the Stadler account.

Craig is surprised that Will has been listening..

CRAIG
 What about it?

WILL
 Harry closed it. Finished the deal last night.

CRAIG

Harry did... Huh...

(then)

Well kudos to good ol' Harry for actually doing his job.

Will smirks, letting Craig have his little jab.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Grab your notes and the latest numbers. Alan's coming in to talk about his hotel.

WILL

Really...

CRAIG

Yes, really and truly.

WILL

Did he give any clue as to why?

CRAIG

Partner, he's been our *largest* client for almost seven years, so he can come in and talk to us anytime he wants. I know it's hard to keep revising the same plans over and over, but trust me, he pays us very well for your time.

Craig takes a seat on the edge of Will's desk, shifting into parenting mode -

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Building a hotel is about a bit of compromise, Will. Settling on what's agreeable. We're designing something that weary travelers will be coming to for years, looking for comfort. And the first person who needs to feel comfortable is Alan.

Will leans back in his chair, eyes on his window view. Craig sees Will's discontent.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Sorry to be the one to say it, but hey...that's why we're a great team, right? One of us has to keep things pragmatic.

WILL

Yeah, of course.

CRAIG

Alright, good man. So grab what you need and let's go keep our biggest fish happy.

WILL

I'll meet you in there, just need to do one quick thing.

INT. OFFICES OF SEVERANCE & VAN ALLEN (DRAFTING ROOM) -
MINUTES LATER

Will sidles up beside the desk of DOROTHY (20's), a young, pretty secretary.

WILL

Dorothy, hi, have you seen Harry around? I spotted him earlier.

DOROTHY

I'm sorry, Mr. Van Allen. He went off to lunch with a potential client, and...

(checking a scheduling
book)

...then he's off-site at two consecutive sales calls.

WILL

And after that?

DOROTHY

(still consulting her
calendar)

Let's see...oh, dinner at Clancy's.

(looking up to Will)

With a potential client.

Will tries to cover his surprise.

DOROTHY (CONT'D)

Did you want me to pass on a message?

WILL

Um, no, that's fine. No message.

Will walks off, toward the main conference room.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Will and Craig sit beside each other, papers on the table in front of them.

Alan Reynolds pushes into the conference room, shakes the unmelted snow from his shoulders and hat.

ALAN
How we doing, boys?

CRAIG
Outstanding, Alan. We have the new budgets based on the changes, plus Will personally drafted the latest -

Alan raises a hand, stops him.

ALAN
Not that kind of meeting.

Alan calmly hangs up his coat, then sits, leaning forward with eyes on Will. A beat before:

ALAN (CONT'D)
(pointing at Will)
Your new design. The one you had sent to my home yesterday.

CRAIG
(holding up his hand)
Wait...what?
(turning to Will;
accusing)
Why didn't I know about this?

Now Alan holds up his hand, retaking control.

ALAN
Hold on, Craig. This design, Will, it's...how do I say this right?...not your usual. I need to hear what you were thinking.

CRAIG
Surely you won't hold one set of designs against us, Alan, especially considering all of the good work we've done -

ALAN
(eyes still on Will; firm)
I'm talking to Will right now. Just Will.

Craig sets his jaw. Two sets of eyes bearing down on Will now. Will considers his words before speaking.

WILL

Okay...

(then)

I guess I figured I'd give you another option.

ALAN

Is that it?

Alan and Will lock eyes. Alan knows that there's more.

WILL

(a glance at Craig before)

No, that's not it... I was thinking that you didn't show up at my door in Paris so that I could design something common...or safe. Since when has Alan Reynolds chosen the path more taken?

(to Craig)

And I was thinking that I didn't choose to start my own architecture firm to design something common...or safe.

Craig smiles nervously, condescendingly. This kind of passion unsettling to a conservative man of business.

CRAIG

Your passion is commendable, Will, but I'm sure Alan -

WILL

(interrupting; eyes on Alan)

You can feel the tides shifting, can't you, Alan? The restlessness for something worth looking up to...

Will stands now, energized...

WILL (CONT'D)

Enough of the old! The ornamental stonework and the overbearing self importance...it's done, it's tired. Let's use glass, let's use light. I found a nickel chromium alloy they make in Germany called Nirosta...it's spectacular, shines brighter than the sun. No other building in the world uses it, but we will. It's time...

(turning to Craig now)

Let's change things.

Alan taps his chin, listening. But then a grin creeps through.

ALAN

Julius Caesar referred to something he called his moments of clarity. His *vicis de expedio...*

(then)

I recently had one.

Alan pauses. Off the silence -

CRAIG

And...what was it?

ALAN

You just heard it.

(standing)

Will, I couldn't have said it better.

Alan begins putting on his coat.

WILL

So, what are you saying, Alan?

ALAN

I'm saying, churn the cement! Order the steel and that nickel chromium stuff! It's time to build, boys.

Will can't hold back his grin, silently savoring the moment as Alan ties off his scarf. Alan moves toward the door, fingers on the handle before looking back at Will.

ALAN (CONT'D)

(warm)

Always knew you'd get there...

Alan leaves. As Will absorbs the news, Craig silently stands and moves toward the door. He also turns back toward Will.

CRAIG

Don't ever send new plans to a client without telling me first, got it?

Will's eyes meet Craig's. A side of his partner he hadn't seen before. Craig leaves before Will can respond.

INT. B TRAIN (MOVING) - LATER

Will sits, shadows crossing his serene face as the train shakes its way north.

INT. B TRAIN (MOVING) - LATER

Will hasn't moved.

TRAIN OPERATOR (O.S.)
Next stop, Atlantic Avenue!

Will's brain breaks from its trance at the sound of his stop. He rises from his seat. The train slowing...

CLOSE on Will's face - something swirling, like a dream that's close to being remembered.

The train stops, doors sliding open. As passengers move to get off, Will lowers himself back into his seat.

EXT. WESTCHESTER COUNTY, NEW YORK - DAY - ESTABLISHING SHOT

The sun's rays slanting over the snow-covered farmland. A black passenger train cuts through the whiteness. It continues on, away from us, disappearing in the blinding gold of the late afternoon sun...

EXT. OSSINING, NEW YORK COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Still carrying his briefcase, his collar turned up against the biting cold, Will walks down the center of a long, unpaved road. Snow falling gently, his STEPS the only sound...

REVERSE on Will's destination: Sing Sing State Penitentiary. From this angle, a forbidding fortress of grey stone, bordered by two rows of high fencing.

A moment later, Will walks INTO FRAME, continuing toward the grey walls, past the stoic SIGN for the prison.

INT. SING SING STATE PRISON (VISITING ROOM) - DAY

KA-THUMP! Steel slamming against steel. Will shifts his weight in a government-issue metal chair, his hands resting on his lap. Surrounded by drab green cinder-block walls.

Another KA-THUMP! And a moment later, Will hears a door open behind him. He rises to his feet, turns to see a GUARD holding the arm of TERRY VAN ALEN (upper 30's). Behind the tired eyes and thinning hair, there's an unmistakable kindness. He wipes his hand down his mouth, exhales slowly as he sees his baby brother.

Terry turns his face toward the guard.

TERRY

You mind, Bob? It's my kid brother.

Bob considers it, gives a quick nod, lets go of Terry's arm.

Terry steps toward Will, stopping in front of him to take a close look.

WILL

You look good, Terry.

TERRY

You look like hell, little man.

Will lets out a cathartic burst of laughter. A beat, and then the two brothers embrace each other.

CUT TO:

MINUTES LATER --

The two of them sit, facing each other. The tension gone.

TERRY

(casual; lighting a
cigarette)

Second visit in five months. I'm gonna start thinkin' you care.

WILL

Honestly?

TERRY

You don't remember? You were here in August.

WILL

I meant, are you honestly sticking it to me already? I just got here.

TERRY

Relax, will ya? I was just teasing ya. Honestly...

WILL

Sorry. I'm sure I'm just tired from the trip...

Terry casually waves it off, lights a cigarette.

WILL (CONT'D)

You look thin. Are you eating enough?

Terry smirks.

TERRY

I get your letters, so I know you're a busy boy, Will. How about you tell me why you're here.

Will meets his eyes, unsure whether to share his good news...

WILL

We're starting construction. On the hotel.

TERRY

(blows out smoke, then)
Oh, yeah? Good for you, kiddo.

WILL

(can't hold back)
It's actually happening. Six years I've been waiting for this, but to finally hear it...

An extended beat. Terry just grins back, not offering much. Terry snuffs out his smoke with his shoe.

TERRY

You're happy, that's good.
(standing)
C'mon, you want to take a walk? I only get an hour to breathe real air and I don't want to miss it.

EXT. PRISON YARD - MINUTES LATER

Surrounded by other drab-colored prisoners huddled in small groups, Terry and Will walk the perimeter of the wall.

WILL

You don't belong here, Terry.

TERRY

Is that right?
(calling to a nearby guard)
Hey, Gus! My brother said I shouldn't be here. Alright with you if I leave?

Stone-faced Gus doesn't respond.

TERRY (CONT'D)

I don't think Gus's alright with it.

WILL

You were an eighteen year old kid.
And if you hadn't done it, I would
have gotten around to it.

They come to an opening in the wall, blocked only by wired
fencing. New York City faintly visible down the Hudson River,
in the distance...

TERRY

You see that?

Will follows Terry's gaze.

TERRY (CONT'D)

(eyes fixated on the
distance)

Every day I march out here, do my
little walk around the yard, just
like we're doin' now. And every day,
I stop here and imagine all you're
workin' on down there.

(turning toward Will)

Maybe it's stupid, but it's good
enough, Will.

(beat)

Build your building. I'll know it's
there. And that'll be enough...

Will looks away, shakes his head.

WILL

It's not good enough.

(grabbing Terry's arm; a
beat)

But I have been looking into getting
you a new lawyer...

They lock eyes. Terry doesn't have the strength to buy into
Will's passion.

TERRY

So, listen, break time's almost up,
and I still need to collect on some
smokes a few of these bums owe me.

Terry pats Will on the face.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming up, kiddo. Let me
know when you finish that fancy hotel
of yours.

One last look into Will's eyes, and then Terry walks off toward another group of prisoners across the yard. Off Will...

INT. TRAIN (MOVING) - DAY

Will rests his head against the window, watching the landscape race by as he heads home. The muted orange of dusk lighting his face.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GRACIE MANSION - LATER

A magnificent black tie party. Glittering lights and VIPs fill the mayor's mansion. Alan stands just inside the entry.

ALAN

Mr. Mayor, allow me to introduce the men behind my architecture firm, Mr. Craig Severance and Mr. William Van Alen.

They each exchange quick handshakes with MAYOR JOHN HYLAN, a short mustachioed man. A miniature Teddy Roosevelt.

MAYOR HYLAN

Pleasure, gentleman. All of us are very excited about this.

ALAN

Not publicly, I hope.

The mayor pats Alan on the back. Country club LAUGHS all around...

MAYOR HYLAN

Oh, we know better than to steal your thunder with the newspapers, Alan. Haven't told a soul.

(to Craig and Will)

Enjoy yourselves, boys. Have a drink.

EXT. GRACIE MANSION - LATER

Craig and Will stand on the back patio, each holding a high ball. Taking in the crowd, sipping their drinks...anything to avoid each other's eyes.

CRAIG

So, everything is good?

WILL

Sure. Alan seems happy.

CRAIG

I mean with you and me...the partnership. Things have been sort of icy lately, I know you've noticed.

Will taps his glass against Craig's.

WILL

Ice under the bridge, partner.

Craig likes this, his mood lightening. He pats Will hard on the shoulder. Alan saunters up, still surveying the scene.

ALAN

Almost time to let the world know what we're up to, boys. I counted at least eleven newspaper reporters milling around.

WILL

How can you tell?

ALAN

They're vermin. I can smell 'em.

Alan's eyes drift toward the front entrance. His face brightens.

ALAN (CONT'D)

'Scuse me, boys. Someone I need to welcome.

Alan heads off. Craig and Will each swivel their heads, trying to spot the subject of Alan's attention.

WILL'S POV - It's Meg Bagley, the photographer, handing her shawl to a valet, revealing a stunning black dress underneath.

ON WILL. A curious grin crossing his lips.

CRAIG (O.C.)

We should move tomorrow's two o'clock meeting to three since we have -

WILL

(already walking off;
transfixed)

Excuse me...

He heads toward Meg, observing her as he approaches.

WILL'S POV: Her bright laughter, the gentle way she tucks a loose piece of her hair behind an ear. In mid-laugh, she glances over toward Will, meeting his eyes for just a beat before she's joined from behind by her date, JONATHAN PREWSTER (upper 30's). Jonathan's movements are awkward, as stiff as his half smile.

At the sight of Jonathan's arm wrapping around Meg's back, Will stops short. But it's too late, Alan notices him.

ALAN

Ah, Will! Wonderful! Look who's here!

As Will takes his final steps toward them, he and Meg exchange a lingering grin before Jonathan thrusts his hand toward Will.

JONATHAN

Hello. Jonathan Prewster. I'm a professor of archaeology. Columbia.

WILL

Um...hi. Columbia, really? Never been to South America, but I hear it's lovely.

JONATHAN

(missing it)
The university, of course.

WILL

Of course.

Craig wanders up, joining the group.

ALAN

Hey, the gang's all here! Craig Severance, meet Margaret Bagley and her date, Mr. Jonathan Prew -

JONATHAN

Doctor Prewster. Actually.

A beat as Alan recovers from the interruption.

ALAN

Right, well Margaret here is joining our elite little team. Was recommended by Will, apparently very talented.

CRAIG

You don't say.
(to Meg; cool)
(MORE)

CRAIG (CONT'D)

And what is your apparent talent,
Miss Bagley?

MEG

Alan hired me to photograph the
construction of his hotel.

CRAIG

(to Alan)

A photographer. I don't recall the
budget being so...flexible.

MEG

Really...Mr. Severance, I'd think a
man of your reputed business acumen
would be eager to have someone
tracking the construction of the
hotel...

(winking at Alan)

Hard for Alan here to miss a payment
when you can show proof of your
deliverables on film, don't you
agree?

A short, silent standoff between Meg and Craig. Craig grins
at her condescendingly.

ALAN

(re: Meg)

I like this one! She's got moxie! I
knew you wouldn't recommend some
invertebrate, Will. Well done...

(then, spotting Prewster)

Dr. Prewster, have you heard about
Will's design for the building?

JONATHAN

Um, no, I don't -

ALAN

Well, it's genius. And that's not a
word I toss around lightly. Pure
genius.

Will stares at his shoes, somewhat embarrassed by the praise.
When he looks up, he notices Meg's eyes on him. Alan spots
someone across the room.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Now, if you'll all excuse me, I do
believe I've spotted some fresh
vermin, so please eat and drink to
your heart's delight. For once, it's
not on me...

Alan heads off, all of them watching him go. The odd group of Will, Craig, Meg, and Jonathan are left behind. After an extended beat of uncomfortable silence -

JONATHAN

So I guess we'll just -

CRAIG

(already moving)

Yes, great, and I'm sure I need to go catch up with...somebody.

Jonathan leads Meg away as Craig moves off in a different direction. Will is left alone in the crowded room.

EXT. GRACIE MANSION (HALLWAY) - LATER

The door to the women's powder room opens, Meg appearing. As she turns, she spots Will. He's in his own world, staring up at the hallway ceiling, knocking on walls randomly. Meg watches him for a few moments.

MEG

Are you really going to make me ask?

WILL

I'm trying to get up to the roof.

MEG

Have you considered the stairs?

WILL

C'mon, Miss Bagley, I know you're more adventurous than that.

(glances at her)

Or, maybe you're not. Which is fine.

MEG

Or maybe I am! What are we looking for, Mr. Van Alen?

WILL

(knocks on a wall, then)

This place was built in 1799, so I'm betting a secret stairwell was added during the civil war.

MEG

So, you're just going to walk around knocking on walls like a mad person?

WILL

If you're embarrassed, there's plenty of cocktail chatter waiting for you.

Meg considers this. After a beat, she turns and knocks on a wall, her ear pressed to it.

MEG
How will I know when -

WILL
(looking up)
Thar she blows...

ANGLE ON THE CEILING in the hall - we see it. It's faint, but clearly a rectangular slit cut into the plaster.

WILL (CONT'D)
We're gonna need a chair.

EXT. GRACIE MANSION (ROOF) - MINUTES LATER

Will and Meg step carefully around the slightly sloped roof of the Mayor's mansion, their surroundings lit only by a single candle in Will's hand.

The muted mixture of party CHATTER and a STRING QUARTETTE from below hangs in the spring air.

WILL
So, do you want to see what really drives an architect?

Meg turns slightly, checking over her shoulder.

WILL (CONT'D)
Don't worry, I'll have you back to the Columbian doctor in a jif.

MEG
Okay...I'm game. Make me an architecture expert in five minutes or less.

WILL
No, not architecture. Architects.
(then)
There's a tremendous difference. Architecture is pure. Architects are vile egomaniacs.

MEG
Present company excluded?

WILL
Oh no, present company very much included.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

You're talking to someone who's designing a luxury hotel which I'm sure will change the look of this city forever. My ego is very clearly steering the ship.

Meg has reached the peak of the roof. She leans back against one of the chimneys.

MEG

Or perhaps you design buildings because you actually enjoy it?

Will considers this, meets her eyes for a beat.

WILL

Perhaps.

He holds up his candle, begins to scan the highest bricks on the chimney.

WILL (CONT'D)

This mansion was designed by a John McComb. And if he's like almost every other architect I've ever known or studied, then he carved his initials at the highest point on the structure.

MEG

You're not serious.

Will nods apologetically. He's serious.

MEG (CONT'D)

Okay then, I guess we're looking for a J and an M...

She begins to search as well. Will looks across the roof, toward the other chimney.

WILL

I'm thinking the other one may be higher.

They start to cross the roof toward the other chimney.

WILL (CONT'D)

Think about it. Hundreds of people are involved in putting up a building. But the architect's ego demands that his initials alone be at the highest point, immortality etched into his creation forever. Not exactly a healthy perspective.

MEG

I guess that could be considered a tad self-centered.

Will stands on his toes, scanning the bricks again. Meg restarts her search as well.

WILL

What your friend does...Jonathan, was it?

(off Meg)

It's really no better. Reducing all of the desires and hopes and fears of entire civilizations to a few clay pots on display at a museum. Seems rather condescending I think.

MEG

You don't find a certain romance in re-discovering what came before us? Imagining the lives we might have lived were it not for a bit of lucky cosmic timing?

WILL

I find it depressing.

Meg smiles at his honesty.

MEG

And what is that you find exciting, Mr. Van Alen?

A beat.

WILL

Imagining the future and then creating it. Filling in the blanks.

When Will glances over at her, she's watching him.

MEG

Filling in the blanks. I like that.

Will and Meg each let their eyes linger on the other, before each looking away. Back to searching the bricks. A few moments pass before -

WILL

Ah, here we go... Have a look.

MEG

No! You found it?

Will nods, holding his light up to one of the top bricks. And there, lit in the flickering glow, is a very clear "JM".

Meg giggles, proud of their find, enjoying the moment. Will watches her, smiles.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

Warm morning light reflecting on the Hudson. The soft announcement of today's potential...

EXT. CORNER OF 42ND STREET & LEXINGTON AVE. (NYC) - DAY

Craig and Will stand at the edge of the gaping crater. Looking down to see scores of DEMOLITION MEN, clearing the hole of debris. Prying boulders from earth's mantle, removing truckloads of dirt. It's still a hole, but it's becoming an orderly hole.

WILL

(sotto)

I can't believe it's happening.

CRAIG

Do you realize what our fees are going to be for this?

Will looks at him.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Enough to ensure our future for a very long time.

Craig smiles big, CLAPS his hands together. Will forces a grin, then scans the work site as if trying to find something.

WILL

Where's Alan? Odd he wouldn't be here on the first day, don't you think?

Craig shrugs, he couldn't care less. Will looks back down to the depths. From behind him:

MAN (O.C.)

'Scuse me?

Will and Craig both turn to see two MEN (40's) standing there. Each of them with the worn hands and faces of laborers.

LABORER #1

You know who we could talk to 'bout
gettin' some work?

CRAIG

Sorry, gentlemen. We've got
everything we need.

Craig turns back to the hole, already done with them.

WILL

You boys having trouble finding work?

LABORER #2

Job we were on shut down early.
Nobody else hiring at the moment.

LABORER #1

Foreman said the owner lost his
money, said the stock market
was...how'd he say it?

LABORER #2

Taking a shit.

LABORER #1

Yeah, that.

Will grins. He likes these men.

LABORER #2

Appreciate your time anyway...

Will nods before the two men turn, begin to walk off. Will
continues to watch them.

EXT. WEST 73RD STREET BROWNSTONE - LATER

Will stands at the front door of a gorgeous, four-story
brownstone, KNOCKING. No answer. He steps back, spotting an
open window one story up.

WILL

Alan!

Still no response. He steps back to the door and jiggles the
knob. To Will's surprise, the door opens easily.

INT. WEST 73RD STREET BROWNSTONE - CONTINUOUS

Will steps into the tiled foyer of the home, finds himself
facing a wide, steep mahogany staircase.

WILL
Alan! Hello? It's Will!

He begins to climb the stairs, unsure now...

WILL (CONT'D)
The door was open!
(a few more steps)
You here, Alan?!

INT. THE 2ND FLOOR PARLOR - MOMENTS LATER

Will turns the corner to find himself in a large, ornately decorated room. The large picture windows are open, curtains fluttering in the breeze. Puccini's *La bohème* PLAYS loudly on a Victrola...

And in the middle of the room is Alan: wearing a white, silk kimono, holding a long sword aloft as he performs a slow, meditative kata.

ON WILL - confused/engrossed as he watches the scene.

WILL
Alan?
(then)
You sent for me...?

Alan doesn't respond. Will steps cautiously into the room.

WILL (CONT'D)
Everything alright, Alan?

Again, Alan doesn't respond. Will stops, not sure what to do.

After a few final kata movements, Alan stops. He turns toward Will.

ALAN
Sorry about that. A kata's sorta like intercourse. Feels just awful to stop before the task is completed.
(remembering; a beat)
Here...

Alan tosses the sword to Will. It's a gentle lob, but still a reckless move. Will manages to catch it without cutting himself.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Real samurai sword from Honshu. Late twelfth century.

Will runs his hand along the sword's curve, hands it back gently.

WILL
It's beautiful.

ALAN
(holding it out)
And now it's yours.

WILL
What? Why...?

ALAN
Because it's just a *thing*, Will. The kind of thing that's kept me enslaved to the Rockefellers or the Vanderbilts or the rat-infested banks for far too long.
(placing the sword in Will's hands)
So, please, accept it as a favor to me.

Will takes the sword, watching Alan closely, seeing his instability.

WILL
What's going on, Alan? You didn't ask me here to shower me with gifts.

ALAN
I've always admired you. Respected you.
(off Will, waiting for more)
You're here because you deserve to hear from me what you'd probably hear from someone else soon enough.

Will freezes, watching Alan's face. Praying for a punchline that doesn't come.

WILL
Don't say any more, please...

ALAN
My life is controlled by the same wretched institutions that control the stock market, Will. When they bring down the exchange, they bring me down with it.

WILL
And the hotel?

ALAN

Something we referred to in the Great War as collateral damage. An innocent victim in all of this...

(off Will's fallen face)

Same as you.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICES OF SEVERANCE & VAN ALLEN (BOARD ROOM) - DAY

CAMERA PULLS BACK slowly...

Silent beams of morning sunlight cutting through the empty board room...

CONTINUE MOVING BACK...

INT. THE DRAFTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...through the drafting room, normally the epicenter of energy and action, but today...empty.

Abandoned desks, abandoned chairs, a few scattered boxes. The silent aftermath... CAMERA STOPS by the main entrance - we can see the entire office space now.

From opposite sides, Will and Craig both walk INTO FRAME, meeting each other in the middle.

Will extends his hand.

WILL

It's been a great ride, Craig.

Craig doesn't take Will's hand.

CRAIG

Have to turn the keys in, so make sure you don't leave anything behind.

Will lowers his hand. So this is how it has to go...

WILL

I'm all set.

(removing a gold pen from his breast pocket)

Found Alan's pen in my office though, so I'm going to run it by his place.

CRAIG

I'll save you the trip since obviously you haven't heard.

(MORE)

CRAIG (CONT'D)

(then)

Alan's dead.

The words hang in the air. Will stares back in disbelief.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

(casual)

Yep. Jumped. Climbed to his roof and jumped. Unsavory way to go out, if you ask me. Even for Alan...

(as Will takes in the news; a beat)

The stock market claims another victim. Guess you just inherited a pen.

WILL

How could he...? I just saw him. He seemed a bit off maybe, but still...

Craig shakes his head, grins condescendingly.

CRAIG

I should have realized this would be hard on you.

Craig sits on the edge of a desk.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

If I'm being honest with myself, I really do owe you an apology, Will. I tried to show you how things work, mentor you even, but I think, sometimes, certain people are just unteachable. Even now, I look at you, all emotionally bruised and sad for your friend, and I realize, you clearly weren't ready for this. Any of it.

(beat)

I guess I just have myself to blame. You're somewhat talented, certainly not unintelligent, but again, if I'm being honest, you're essentially an average chap who I threw into an extraordinary situation. And I feel bad about that.

WILL

You should feel bad about being an asshole, Craig.

CRAIG

(smiles, then)

Whoa, you're misunderstanding me,
Will! Part of me envies you! You'll
go on to design some nice
storefronts, maybe a lovely
children's museum or something like
that...and you'll be happy. That's
really where I went wrong -
forgetting that some people are
happier and better off in more,
what's the word...*realistic* settings.

Will smirks, shaking his head.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Look...I'm trying to apologize here.
(off Will's silence)
Anyway...

Craig reaches into his bag and removes a document. He hands it to Will.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

This officially dissolves the
partnership. Have your lawyers review
it, then sign and mail a copy to
mine.

Sickened by Craig's coldness, Will drops the document onto a table, and with Alan's pen, signs it quickly. He tosses it roughly back.

Craig catches it and returns it to his bag.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Okay. So that's that...

And with one last insincere grin for Will, Craig walks out.

ON WILL standing completely alone in the large office...

EXT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE (BROOKLYN, NY) - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

A row of second tier townhouses, their chipped paint facades set back a few feet from the sidewalk.

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

The inside is as unimpressive and unoriginal as the outside. Unwashed clothes spread around, unwashed dishes in the sink. Other than a photo of the Eiffel Tower, the walls are bare.

Standing in the kitchen, Will checks his icebox. Empty. He opens a cupboard. A single bruised apple.

Will moves to a window, pulls a curtain to the side to peer out...

WILL'S POV - Across the street, a line of people waiting...

Will lets the curtain fall closed, mulls his situation.

EXT. AVENUE M (BROOKLYN, NY) - MINUTES LATER

Will crosses the wide avenue, takes his place at the end of the long line he glimpsed minutes earlier.

Just ahead of him, a tall bear of a man (TED, 40's) turns his head slightly...

TED
Thanks, buddy.

When nothing more comes, Will leans forward -

WILL
I'm sorry?

TED
I'm not last anymore. Feels a little better, you know?

WILL
Happy to help...

An extended beat as Will stares straight ahead into Ted's shoulder blades. Not moving. Finally, Will taps Ted on the arm.

WILL (CONT'D)
Has the truck done the drop off yet?

TED
(without turning)
Nope. Should be here soon though.

After a long beat, Ted turns toward Will, extending his hand.

TED (CONT'D)
I'm Ted.

WILL
(shaking Ted's hand)
Will.

TED

You look like a smart fella. I can tell with people.

(analyzes Will's face)

I'm gonna say...doctor...no, accountant...

WILL

Sorry. Just an architect.

TED

Is that right? You probably know a bunch of the metal monkeys I see here every day.

WILL

Metal monkey...

TED

You know, metal...steel. Most of us been working sites together for years. These days I'd honestly work for pennies, just to have a rivet gun or a welding torch in my hand again. Shit, I think we all would...

Will nods, listening closely.

TED (CONT'D)

But hey, you gotta keep your chin up, right? Something good's always just around the corner.

Ted smacks Will on the shoulder. Will smiles, genuinely likes this guy. As he does, another man steps into line behind Will.

TED (CONT'D)

See? Things are already looking up. You're not last anymore.

INT. BROWN & BASTINGS ARCHITECTS (WAITING ROOM) - DAY

Will sits in the cramped waiting area. Every other chair filled with young men, most of them in their low 20's.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Van Alen, you can go ahead in.

Will jumps up, smooths his tie.

INT. BROWN & BASTINGS ARCHITECTS (OFFICE) - MINUTES LATER

Will sits across from JERRY BASTINGS (50), one of the top honchos at Brown & Bastings. Bastings reads from a sheet of paper.

BASTINGS

A bit overqualified, aren't you?

WILL

I'd welcome the chance to bring my design experience here, Mr. Bastings.

BASTINGS

You understand this is for an intern position...

(off Will)

An *unpaid* intern position.

WILL

Right. Well, I was hoping you might reconsider given the experience I -

BASTINGS

Let me stop you right there. The position is unpaid because we can't pay. Do you not read the papers? People are standing in food lines for chrissakes...

WILL

So I've heard.

EXT. SIDEWALK (OUTSIDE BROWN & BASTINGS) - LATER

Will exits the building, unsure which direction to walk since there's no place he needs to be.

HARRY (O.S.)

Will!

Will turns his head. Harry walking toward him...

HARRY (CONT'D)

Where've you been? I went by your place.

WILL

Why did you - ?

Harry glances up at the building Will just emerged from.

HARRY

Brown and Bastings? The lowest of the low. C'mon, let's get you out of here, I've something you might be interested in...

INT. TANNING PENTHOUSE - LATER

Harry leads Will into his parents' beautifully decorated penthouse. High ceilings, expensive furniture...

HARRY

Parents are away, so make yourself comfortable.

WILL

Are you living here?

HARRY

God, no. But I'm also too soft to rough it, as they say. So, when they travel, I come here to forget my lack of funds.

WILL

I feel terrible about that, Harry. But without Alan's hotel project, the firm just couldn't stay afloat.

Harry begins pouring two scotches from the bar.

HARRY

Exceptional segue, old friend. Exactly what I wanted to talk about. Come, sit.

Harry takes a seat on the plush sofa, looking very much at home. Will sits across from him, cradling his drink.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Turns out, dearly departed Alan sold the land for his hotel to Walter Chrysler right before he, well,...departed.

Will looks at Harry, who just nods.

WILL

And how do you know this?

HARRY

Chrysler employs a lot of lawyers. One of those lawyers likes to drink scotch with my father.

Will's face shows a tiny spark of hope, but it dies away quickly.

WILL

Doesn't matter. Man like Chrysler probably bought the land as an investment. He'll just sit on it for ten years.

HARRY

Possibly. Or...perhaps he's currently reviewing design options for the new Chrysler company headquarters and wants to break ground within sixty days.

(takes a sip; grins)

Scotch has a way of making men blabber.

Will stands, suddenly energized. He walks to the large picture window.

WILL

So, you think I should...?

HARRY

(reclining back)

Hotel...office building for a large, multi-national corporation...what's the difference? Your design is groundbreaking, Will. Knock down a few walls, take out the beds and put in desks. You're as good as done...

Will takes a sip, his face contorting at the strong taste. After a moment of consideration...

WILL

(grins; still looking out the window)

Okay. I'm going to do it.

HARRY

(standing)

Fantastic! But with one correction. We're going to do it. Tanning and Van Alen will rise like a phoenix, my amigo.

Will studies Harry's face. He's serious.

WILL

(grins)

Van Alen and Tanning.

Harry laughs. They shake hands.

HARRY
There's my tiger.

Harry walks back to the bar. When he reaches it, he turns back to Will.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Oh, and did I mention that the
deadline to submit designs is
tomorrow?

Off Will...

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE (BEDROOM) - NIGHT

Will sits at his inclined desk, working by candle light with intense focus. Erasing, drawing, flipping his T-square...

And then...Will's candle light goes dim. The candle burnt low enough to be a flat, amorphous blob.

WILL
No, no, no...

And with that, the tiny blue flame gives a final flicker...and goes dark.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSY STREET - LATER

The roads mostly deserted at this late hour. A single car drives by.

Will sits cross-legged under a single street light, his blueprints on his lap, working with the same focus and speed. After a beat, another car drives by - it's tail breeze blowing one of Will's papers into the street, forcing Will to chase after it.

EXT. CHRYSLER HEADQUARTERS (NEW JERSEY) - DAY

A turn-of-the-century brick factory. Utilitarian in every aspect. Completely forgettable.

Harry stands fifty yards away, hands in his pockets, pacing with nervous energy. Watching the front doors...

HARRY'S POV - Will emerges, walking toward him, empty handed.

As Will reaches him -

HARRY
That was quick. What'd Chrysler say?

WILL
Not a thing. Chrysler wasn't even there.

Harry falls in step with Will...

HARRY
But they took the plans?

WILL
They took the plans.

HARRY
So now what?

WILL
I guess now we go home and we wait...
(waving his hand)
Taxi!

The TAXI pulls over, Will and Harry each opening their doors. Looking over the roof at each other -

HARRY
(smiling)
I feel good about this.

WILL
You know...I think I do too.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT (DOWNTOWN, NYC) - DAY

The warehouse walls are all brick, the ceiling laced with exposed beams and pipes. Will moves through it, industrial tarps hanging from the pipes blocking the source of the VOICES we hear echoing ahead of us.

A bright FLASH of white lights up the walls around Will, a loud CRASH of glass immediately following...

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Okay, let's try it now with the girls up front.

Will pushes past his final hanging tarp, spots Meg up ahead.

Meg has her camera mounted on a tripod, pointed at an uncomfortably stiff, unsmiling FAMILY of four (mother, father, twin girls). She spots Will moving toward her -

MEG

Will?

WILL

I know you're working, but I can wait. Promise I won't be any trouble.

Will looks over at the waiting family. Mother and Father are not amused by the interruption, but Will gives a little wave to the twin girls, who each timidly wave back.

MEG

(nervously glancing toward the family)

I guess that's fine. But why are you here?

WILL

Oh, I want to show you something. But please...go back to what you were doing. Pretend I'm not here.

INT. WAREHOUSE LOFT (DOWNTOWN, NYC) - LATER

Will sits on the floor of the loft, behind Meg, hidden behind a newspaper he's reading.

MEG

(to the girls)

Please? Would you *consider* smiling for me?

The young girls shake their heads in unison. The handsome mother addresses the girls formally -

MOTHER

Do as I do, girls. A simple look of mild amusement will be fine.

The girls look back to Meg.

MEG

(stepping behind her camera)

Okay, great, let's give it a try. Nice smiles...or looks of mild amusement...on three. One, two...three!

ON THE GIRLS as their barely perceptible grins immediately fall away, revealing only miserable frowns.

The camera bulb FLASHES. Meg exhales, ready to give up.

MEG (CONT'D)

Maybe we can try something else-

Meg is suddenly interrupted by the sound of little girl LAUGHTER, the twins giggling uncontrollably. Meg looks at them, shocked and confused. Meg follows their gazes...toward Will.

Still hidden behind the newspaper, Will has constructed a silly origami frog and has it poking above the top of the newspaper, its mouth moving.

MEG (CONT'D)

Oh, okay...this is good...

Meg quickly lines up her camera, aims it toward the family. FLASH! She gets the shot.

Meg turns her head, looking back at Will. They meet eyes and she silently mouths "thank you".

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

Will and Meg stroll together along the walking path. Neither of them speaking.

MEG

So? Where are you taking me?

The two of them are approaching STANLEY (70's), an older man waiting for them on the path ahead. Will gives the man a little wave.

WILL

To meet Stanley, of course.

Meg raises an eyebrow, completely confused. As they reach the man, Will and Meg stop.

WILL (CONT'D)

Meg, this is Stanley Keebler. An old family friend of mine.

STANLEY

Old being the key word.

Still confused, Meg goes along with it, shakes Stanley's hand.

MEG

Pleasure to meet you.

STANLEY

(to Meg)

All the times he's come here, he's never brought anyone with him.

MEG

Is that right...?

WILL

Okay, okay...that's enough talking, you two. We all set, Stan?

Stanley unlocks a tall gate that blends into the wire fence running along the walking path.

STANLEY

Up you go now. Just watch your footing.

Stanley winks at Meg as Will leads her through the gate.

WILL

(to Meg)

If this is too much for you, we can just get coffee or something.

Meg knows she's being manipulated, shakes her head with a knowing grin.

MEG

Onward, Mr. Van Alen...

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - MINUTES LATER

At the top of the bridge's west tower, both of them take in the panorama, Manhattan's mini-skyline. Meg is awe-struck in spite of herself.

MEG

It's stunning!

WILL

It's not the highest view in the city, but it is my favorite. I figured someone with an artist's eye might appreciate it.

Meg's face is serene, silently appreciative. The golden sun crossing her face...

MEG

It really is breathtaking.

WILL

I admit, I also wanted to make sure you met Stanley.

MEG

(turning toward Will)
And why would you want that?

WILL

Because I'll need you to come back here at some point, possibly on your own.

(off Meg; a beat)

Alan's building is going to happen, Meg. And I still want you to photograph every step along the way.

MEG

But I thought when Alan died the hotel died with him.

WILL

The hotel maybe, but not Alan's dream of creating something...important.

(beat)

We'll be working for Walter Chrysler instead of Alan, and it'll be an office building instead of a hotel...but we're going to do something historic over there, Meg. And I want you to be part of it.

MEG

That's quite an offer.
(off Will's smile; beat)
When did all of this happen?

WILL

Well, it hasn't yet. Not quite at least...

(pointing)

But do you see the spot over there, just to the right of the Met Life Building? That's where the Chrysler building is going up. And once it's up, I want you to come back here and photograph it from this spot.

Meg studies his face. His conviction...

MEG

Alright, Mr. Van Alen, I accept. You have yourself a photographer.

EXT. AVENUE M (BROOKLYN, NY) - DAY

Sun setting over the long food line. Cradling his newly acquired sack of food, patting a few of his new friends (Ted among them) who are still waiting their turns as he passes in the opposite direction. All of this, routine for Will now.

STAY ON WILL as he crosses the street, moving toward his townhouse.

WILL'S POV - Up ahead, sitting on Will's front stoop, is Harry. Harry spots Will and stands.

HARRY

I don't suppose today's goody bag included a nice porterhouse...

WILL

Strangely, no.
(taking out his keys)
Skip lunch today?

Harry falls in behind Will, following him into -

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

HARRY

It's just the damn stress. I'm always famished.

WILL

I thought you were supposed to be the relaxed one.

Will flips open his mailbox, pulls out a stack of letters. Harry makes a move for them, but Will jerks them away too quickly.

WILL (CONT'D)

Let me put the food down first.

As Will lowers the small sack onto a counter, Harry tries again, this time snatching the mail from Will's hand. Will just rolls his eyes as Harry flips through the envelopes.

Stopping on the last, Harry freezes. This is the one.

WILL (CONT'D)

What?

HARRY

It's from the Chrysler Corporation. I had a feeling today would be the day.

Harry holds the letter gingerly, staring at it.

WILL
Well, go ahead then!

Harry holds the letter out for Will.

HARRY
You...

Will grabs it, starts to tear into it. After a beat, he stops himself, looks at Harry.

WILL
Question first.

HARRY
Honestly?!
(off Will)
Fine. Just be quick about it.

WILL
Why did you come looking for me?
(off Harry)
Once you'd learned about Alan selling his land to Chrysler, why would you bring it to me? You have to admit, things became kind of odd between us.

HARRY
Ahh. This.
(pulling up a stool)
Figured we'd get around to it sooner or later.

WILL
You could have taken that information to a hundred architects, to one who had something real to offer you. So why me?

HARRY
You know me, I'm just lazy.

WILL
Harry...

Harry meets Will's eyes. Sees that he's serious. A beat before -

HARRY
Fine.
(taking a seat, then)
I've got this second cousin, name's Daniel.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

He's only eleven years old, but the little kid loves planes. Always been his thing. He's never even been in one mind you, but still, just goes bananas for anything that flies.

(beat)

Now, do you think a trained, professional pilot would ever risk his neck and take off in a real plane with Danny beside him as his co-pilot? Or do you think he would do the obvious thing and send him off to play with the other kiddies?

Will grins, already getting it.

HARRY (CONT'D)

You didn't do the obvious thing, Will. You crawled into the cockpit with me, started the engine, and risked your neck with me beside you.

WILL

I needed a sales pro and you were willing.

HARRY

Oh, horse shit. I was a kid. And the only thing I was a pro at was riding your coattails. But I did develop a taste for flying...and now I'm ready to be a real co-pilot.

A couple moments of unspoken understanding.

HARRY (CONT'D)

So, open the damn letter, will ya?

Will nods, then rips into the envelope, pulling out the letter. His eyes immediately race over the typed words...

C.U. ON THE LETTER - we don't see it all, but we see enough:
"Reviewed your submission"..."Unfortunately"..."have selected a different firm to design"..."Good luck"...

Harry watches Will close his eyes in defeat. Without needing details, Harry slowly rises from his stool and puts on his jacket.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(forced enthusiasm)

Okay! The speakeasy on thirty-first street...you and I need to be there...now.

Will trods darkly past Harry, patting him on the shoulder as he moves toward the living room.

WILL
(defeated)
You go ahead. We'll talk later.

HARRY
No, no. None of that. This isn't the time to get down.

WILL
This...is precisely the time to get down. The most incomparably ideal time to get down I could ever imagine, in fact.

Will falls back onto his sofa.

HARRY
Well, I'm still insisting that you follow me. We can be there in ten minutes.
(Will doesn't respond)
Come on, where's your coat? I can -

WILL
(interrupting; firm)
Harry! I don't want to go with you, okay?

Harry absorbs the sting...turning and leaving quietly.

EXT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Meg checks a piece of paper in her hand, looking for an address.

EXT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Meg KNOCKS at the rickety wooden door. No response.

She KNOCKS again. This time the door pushes open a few inches. Unsure of whether to enter...but then she does.

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

MEG
(calling out)
Hello? Will?
(off the silence)
It's Meg!
(MORE)

MEG (CONT'D)

I have some test photos I wanted to show -
 (interrupted by the sound
 of WRETCHING)
 - you.

Meg raises her eyebrows in surprise. She steps cautiously toward the door down the hall - the source of the sound.

MEG (CONT'D)

Something you ate?

Another chorus of vomiting. She spots a mostly empty bottle of liquor on a kitchen counter.

MEG (CONT'D)

(soft)
 Or drank?

Meg pushes on the door, pokes her head into the bathroom to see Will lying awkwardly beside the toilet.

WILL

I can't even wallow in self pity properly.

MEG

Actually, I'd say you've got it down quite well.

INT. WILL'S KITCHEN - LATER

Will sits at his kitchen table, his haggard face cradled on his hand. Meg appears above him, places a cup of coffee in front of him.

WILL

I'm sorry I can't hire you after all.

MEG

Just drink. Slowly.

Will nods his appreciation, takes a sip. Meg scans the rejection letter, moves her gaze to Will.

MEG (CONT'D)

There'll be something else. Maybe this wasn't meant to be.

Will stares off, deep in thought. Meg watches his face, concerned, as she takes a seat across from him.

WILL

You know my brother, Terry. I owe him...everything. Not that he'd see it that way. But when we were little, he protected me - did what he had to do to make sure I was safe. No matter the consequences...

(beat)

I wanted to show him that it wasn't for nothing...

She reaches out across the table, touching his hand. As he notices, she catches herself, pulling back.

MEG

What was it that Chrysler didn't like about your design?

WILL

I don't know. Never met him...

MEG

(beat; shocked)

What?

Will shakes his head.

MEG (CONT'D)

(picking up the rejection letter; beat)

Then it's not over yet...

Off Will...meeting her eyes.

EXT. PRISON YARD (SING SING) - DAY

Will and his brother Terry sit on the ground, their backs leaning against the wire fence of the prison yard. They're playing a card game, taking turns tossing and picking up cards...

TERRY

She's right you know. It is just a letter.

WILL

So you think the CEO of one of the largest companies in the world should just happily drop everything to meet with some architect who thinks he deserves a second shot...

Terry tosses a card, looks up to Will.

TERRY
Sure, why not?

Will shakes his head, smirks at the ridiculousness of it.

TERRY (CONT'D)
So that's it, huh? Waving the white
flag?

Will is about to toss a card, but stops -

WILL
I thought you agreed that we weren't
talking about this.

TERRY
(holding up his hands)
Touchy, touchy. Throw your
cards...you're about to owe me a
dollar.

Will finishes his motion, tosses a card. A beat.

TERRY (CONT'D)
It is too bad though. I finally
coulda seen something you made.

WILL
First off...how about we actually let
it go... And second, you wouldn't
have been able to see it anyway.

TERRY
What are you talking about? We have a
clear shot to the city from here.

WILL
You see that rectangular building
there?
(pointing toward New York
through the fence)
Would have blocked it.

After a beat, Will looks up from his cards, eyes on Terry,
but his mind already someplace else.

His stare shifting to the distant skyline of New York...

TERRY
(re: the card game)
You gonna go or what?

But Will doesn't move. His mind churning, fixated now...

TERRY (CONT'D)
 Hellooo. Anybody home?

Without taking his eyes off New York, Will calmly lays down his cards.

TERRY (CONT'D)
 Four aces? You've gotta be kidding me.

Off Will...

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

Will struggles beneath the weight of an overloaded box of architecture text books. He unceremoniously dumps them onto his bed.

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

Sitting on the floor, his back against a wall. A thick textbook open on his lap, others scattered around him. He shuts his open book, tosses it with the others. Frustrated.

CUT TO:

INT. WILL'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

Will sits at his kitchen table, a clean sheet of white paper before him. He lifts his fountain pen and he begins to write:

WILL (V.O.)
Dear Terry...Despite everything you've done for me already, I'm once again coming to you for help. I need to pull something from myself that I'm not even sure is there...

EXT. ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL (NYC) - DAY

Will walks along Broadway, stopping suddenly at the iron gate of St. Paul's chapel. Drawn in...

WILL (V.O.)
My text books taught me formulas for optimum arch abutment ratios, but they said nothing of subtle beauty...

WILL'S POV - Slowly following the gentle curves of the buttresses that give flight to the chapel's stone exterior...

A drop of water accelerating as it follows the downward curve...

WILL (V.O.)
*...or a structure's delicate
 relationship with nature...*

INT. ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL (NYC) - LATER

With a WEDDING underway in the b.g., Will stands at the back of the nave, looking up.

PAN OVER the lofty ceiling of the chapel, supported by simple yet impressive columns...

WILL (V.O.)
*My teachers lectured about columnar
 load balancing and vertical stress
 supports...*

PAN OVER a towering, multi-paned storyboard of arched stained glass, luminescent...

WILL (V.O.)
*But they said nothing about the sun's
 powerful effect on a surface...*

ON THE WEDDING DRESS of the new bride as she says her vows, the fabric flickering with the blues and golds of the stained glass...

WILL (V.O.)
Or on the lives of real people...

ON WILL'S FACE - entranced by all of it.

EXT. FERRY BOAT (MOVING) - DAY

Despite the falling rain, Will stands at the bow. Passing beneath Lady Liberty, Will watching her ignoring stare drift by.

WILL (V.O.)
*How do you take lifeless steel and
 transform it into something animated?*

ANGLE ON THE STATUE OF LIBERTY from below - the serpentine peaks of her torch... The sharp triangular barbs shooting from her arched crown...

EXT. NEW JERSEY SUBURB - DAY

Two young BOYS, probably brothers from the looks of them, ride past Will on their bicycles. They dismount a few feet from him before playfully running off. Will watches them, then crouches down beside the bikes, running his finger along the smooth frame of one.

WILL (V.O.)
*I want this building to shine with
 hope, Terry.*

ANGLE ON THE BICYCLE - the streamlined chain guard... The curved, art-deco symmetry of the silver fender...

INT. PRISON CELL - SAME

Terry sits on the edge of his bed, holding Will's letter, soaking in each word.

WILL (V.O.)
*...the way you taught me to trust in
 it, rely on it. I want it to shine
 with the brilliant glare of hope...*

Terry's eyes move up to his small cell window, looking beyond the bars and the warping translucent glass...

WILL (V.O.)
...with love...your brother, Will.

INT. CHRYSLER HEADQUARTERS (CEO'S OFFICE) - DAY

Will wears his best three-piece, sitting in the waiting area of a large office suite, his oversized, covered poster board resting awkwardly on his lap. A SECRETARY sits poised at a desk nearby, ignoring him.

Will takes a sip from a glass of water, checks his watch, just as THE DOOR ACROSS FROM HIM OPENS...

Two men emerge from the inner sanctum: PAUL LUBERTAZZI (upper 30's) and WALTER CHRYSLER himself. Will leans forward with anticipation, ready for his moment.

The two men are laughing it up, chummy. They shake hands and Chrysler instantly turns back into the safety of his office. The door closes behind him.

Will is crestfallen. He settles back into his seat and glances toward the secretary who couldn't care less. Will rechecks his watch.

PAUL (O.C.)
 You that architect from New York?

Will follows the voice to Paul Lubertazzi, now standing near the exit door. Paul is a walking coronary, his belt sagging below a distended gut, an unlit cigarette in his hand.

WILL
 I guess so.
 (standing)
 Will Van Alen.

They shake hands.

PAUL
 Paul Lubertazzi. You're with me.
 Let's walk.

Paul pushes through the exit door. Will is confused, but on impulse, he grabs his poster board and hustles after.

INT. SHED - MINUTES LATER

The small brick shed is crowded with file cabinets, a desk, piles of papers.

WILL
 Can I ask who you are exactly?

PAUL
 Chrysler's builder. I oversee construction on anything he wants to put up.

Will watches Paul finally light his cigarette.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 (re: Will's poster board)
 So I assume we turned you down and that's some sorta last ditch effort to change our minds?
 (off Will's silence)
 Why don't you leave it with me? You seem like a nice guy, and hey, you never know. Maybe the firm Chrysler chose will like your work, hire you on.

Will looks down at his dripping wet poster board.

WILL
 I think I'll hang on to it actually.
 Thanks again.

Will nods politely, exits the shed...

INT. CHRYSLER HEADQUARTERS (CEO'S OFFICE) - MINUTES LATER

Will walks back into the waiting area of Chrysler's office suite. Chrysler's secretary lifts her eyes from her typewriter, less than happy to see him again.

Will approaches her desk, smiles innocently.

WILL

I'm just waiting for a friend to pick me up in his car, was hoping I could wait here.

SECRETARY

Actually, Mr. Chrysler prefers that this area be reserved for people with appointments...only.

WILL

Of course.

Will turns and heads for the exit door. The secretary watches him take a seat on one of the stoops, just outside. Will turns his head, gives her a little wave which she doesn't return.

FADE TO:

EXT./INT. CHRYSLER HEADQUARTERS (CEO'S OFFICE) - LATER

Will, still sitting on the stoop, straightens each leg, fighting the stiffness. He glances back toward the secretary's desk...watching as she finishes typing a document, pulls it from the typewriter. She stands, pulls her handbag from a drawer and walks off, down an adjacent hallway.

Will cranes his neck, watching her disappear. He jumps up, quickly heads into Chrysler's waiting area.

IN THE HALLWAY

About to enter the women's restroom, the secretary checks her handbag. Realizing she forgot something, she turns, heads back toward her desk.

IN THE WAITING AREA

Will crouches on all fours, beside Chrysler's door. And with one swift motion, he pushes his poster board, SLIDING IT into Chrysler's office. Disappearing into the inner sanctum.

THE SECRETARY'S POV - as she re-enters the reception area, she spots the back of a man, crouched on the floor, just past her desk.

SECRETARY
(not happy)
Excuse me.

But as she draws closer, she sees Will, crouched down, tying one of his shoes.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
Mr. Van Alen?

WILL
Oh, there you are. I just realized I never thanked you for the water earlier.

SECRETARY
(raising an eyebrow)
You're welcome?

WILL
(pleasant smile, then)
Okay, have a good day then.

Will turns, leaves through the doors and walks off. Empty handed.

INT./EXT. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In the living room, Will reclines on one of his sofas, his hand behind his head, staring at the ceiling. Across from him, Harry lights a new cigarette with his last one.

Harry takes a long pull on the smoke. The two of them, wallowing in the smoke and the silence. Pushing their brains for an idea.

WILL
We could start a taxicab service...

HARRY
Do you realize how large your pile of cabbage has to be to afford a fleet of cars?

WILL
Larger than ours I'm guessing...

A beat. Their desperate minds swirling.

HARRY

How about a delicatessen? You know, sandwiches...pickles...maybe a soda fountain?

WILL

Ah, I think that one's the ticket.
 (looking over at Harry)
 'cause when people can't afford clothes for their babies, what they really need is a good pastrami on rye.

HARRY

Don't forget the pickles.

The two of them start to chuckle. Pent up anxiety escaping from them in a spurt of laughter...

HARRY (CONT'D)

I do believe our ship is without a rudder, my friend.

An urgent KNOCK at the front door interrupts their solitude.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Ah, opportunity knocks...

WILL

(shakes his head)
 Probably God actually.
 (off Harry)
 The local church has stepped up their recruitment efforts lately.

Will walks from the room.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

Will opens it to see --

A BALD MAN with bushy, gray eyebrows and a stoic face. The man wears a black overcoat and black pants and holds a black porter's hat in his hands. The rain is careening down his smooth head.

BALD MAN

William Van Alen?

Will is trying to comprehend this figure before him. He forgets to answer.

BALD MAN (CONT'D)

You're him?

WILL
 (nods, then)
 I am.

The man gives a single nod of satisfaction, then replaces the hat onto his wet head and turns back into the rain. Will furrows his brow.

WILL (CONT'D)
 Wait! What was that?! If you're with
 the church, I'm not -

WILL'S POV - The man stops at a gleaming white CHRYSLER IMPERIAL L-SERIES SEDAN, parked at the curb. Even at night, in the rain, it sparkles.

Will watches the man open the car door, reach in, and pull out an umbrella. After opening it, he moves aside for the car's other passenger to step out.

ON WILL as he registers his real visitor. Questioning his own sanity. REVERSE to see Walter Chrysler moving toward Will's front door under the dry shelter of his chauffeur's umbrella...

Will quickly tucks his shirt into his pants.

CHRYSLER
 Sorry for the late night social call.
 I trust it's not too late?

WILL
 No, of course not, Mr. Chrysler. Not
 late at all. Nuh uh...no way is it
 late.

Will smiles stupidly at both men.

BALD MAN
 Perhaps you'd both be more
 comfortable indoors?

Will gets the obvious hint, steps aside quickly.

WILL
 Oh god, sorry. Please, come in, both
 of you. I'm just a blockhead...

Chrysler steps in. The chauffeur ignores the invitation.

BALD MAN
 I'll be in the car, sir.

He heads back to the car. And just like that, Will is face to face with Walter Chrysler in his dingy foyer.

CHRYSLER

This isn't a social call, so let's say we skip the awkwardness and get right to it. You game, Mr. Van Alen?

WILL

Of course, let's do that. I mean, I'm game. Definitely game...for that.

CHRYSLER

Still awkward, lad.

Will takes a quick deep breath.

WILL

Won't happen again. Would you like to come in, have a seat?

CHRYSLER

Another time maybe. I saw your design proposal for my parcel in New York. I liked it, it's bold.

WILL

Thank you. That's very kind of you.

CHRYSLER

I can't say I'm in favor of how you got your design to me, but it tells me one of two things - you're either a helluva persistent, resourceful sonofabitch, or you're the type that will lie and cheat to get ahead. I assume it's the former, or I wouldn't be here.

Will nods, offers a small grin. The silence hangs, Will finally realizing that Chrysler is waiting for more...

WILL

Yes! The former. Absolutely the former.

CHRYSLER

Okay, so that leads me to my next question.

(beat)

Are you mad?

WILL

Am I mad?

(thrown off)

Um, no. I believe I'm quite sane actually. Of course, a mad person would probably say the same thing, so-

CHRYSLER

You're proposing that my new headquarters become the tallest building on earth.

WILL

I am.

CHRYSLER

And what makes you capable of such an aspiration? I've already hired a very reputable firm you know...

WILL

Yessir, I'm aware of that. But that firm is based in Kansas City.

CHRYSLER

And why would that matter?

WILL

All due respect, Mr. Chrysler, you're not basing your company in Kansas City. You need someone expertly versed in New York.

CHRYSLER

And you're that someone?

WILL

Well...yes. I am.

Chrysler grins at Will's confidence, crosses his arms.

CHRYSLER

Prove it to me.

Will smiles nervously, assuming it's a joke, but sees that Chrysler is serious.

WILL

I'm not sure how I could prove it, sir. I was born here, and I've worked here for years, so I understand -

Chrysler waves his hand dismissively.

CHRYSLER

Just words...

Chrysler grins compassionately. Stepping toward the door.

CHRYSLER (CONT'D)

I commend you on your efforts, son.
I'll have my folks keep you in mind
for future projects.

Chrysler opens the door, about to leave. Will's eyes
searching for an answer as his dream slips away.

WILL

Pick a number!
(off Chrysler)
From one to one hundred. Please...

Chrysler squints through skeptical eyes, but he's curious
enough to let go of the door knob.

CHRYSLER

Okay. Seventy-three.

WILL

Seventy-three, very well. And if you
could humor me one more time, choose
a number from one to one thousand.

CHRYSLER

I assume there's a point here, so
I'll play along.
(then)
Four hundred and twenty-two.

WILL

(eyes on the floor,
thinking)
Four twenty-two, seventy-third
street. Okay...
(looking up; confident)
Four twenty-two, seventy-third street
is a classic nineteenth century
brownstone, but unique in its use of
both Roman and Greek influences.
There's a doric frieze above the
door, and the front steps are guarded
by two Roman lions, built to mimic
those at the New York Public Library.
Excellent choice, Mr. Chrysler.

After a beat, Chrysler actually chuckles. Impressed. Chrysler
eyes him for a beat, silently assessing him.

CHRYSLER

I'm going to give you a shot, Mr. Van
Alen.

WILL

That's...wonderful, thank you.

CHRYSLER

We'll see how wonderful it is. I want to come by your offices tomorrow and check out your operations. How many men do you have over there?

WILL

Gosh, I guess...
(thinking fast)
I'd like to say we're up to forty now? Give or take.

CHRYSLER

Very good. If I like what I see, we might have something to talk about. Call my office with the address, I'll be there at eleven.

Chrysler opens the front door, his trusty chauffeur waiting for him. And like that, he's gone...

Will shuts the door slowly. The surreality of the past three minutes sinking in.

INT. WILL'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Harry hasn't moved from his position on the couch. Still smoking, still reclined. He looks over as Will re-enters the room.

HARRY

Okay, you ready for this? An ice delivery service. Everyone needs ice, right?

(off Will's blank expression; a beat)

You hate it, fair enough, but you just need to hear this one out.

(off Will's frozen expression)

What? What's that look? Was it God?

WILL

Yeah, it sorta was.
(grins)
Our night just became so much more interesting.

Off Will...

INT. OFFICES OF SEVERANCE & VAN ALLEN (BOARD ROOM) - LATER

Still night, still pouring rain outside. We're back inside the deserted offices of Will's and Harry's ex-firm. Everything motionless and dark, everything silent, until...

A loud CRACK. Followed by a BANG...

And then -- A WINDOW SLIDES OPEN.

We watch as the drenched bodies of Will, and then Harry, ooze through the opened window, each of them flopping clumsily to the floor once inside.

They stand, looking around at the familiar surroundings.

HARRY

Can I have my old office back?

WILL

(looking around)

Well, since you'll probably be my cell mate soon, you can have any office you want.

EXT. 422 73RD STREET - SAME TIME

The white Chrysler Imperial slows, stopping in front of a brownstone. Walter Chrysler opens his door, steps onto the street. He peers in the direction of one of the brownstones.

CHRYSLER'S POV - A Greek FRIEZE stretching across the facade above the front door, TWO SCULPTED LIONS at the entrance to the front steps.

Chrysler smirks, then climbs back into the Imperial's back seat. The car drives off into the night...

INT. OFFICES OF SEVERANCE & VAN ALLEN (DRAFTING ROOM) - LATER

Will and Harry are moving quickly, rearranging desks, doing their best to make it look like a real office again.

WILL

It doesn't need to look perfect. Just lived in.

HARRY

Lucky it hadn't been rented.

WILL

The benefit of a shattered financial system. Nothing's rented.

Will straightens a desk just so, steps back to assess their work.

HARRY

Minor thing, Will, and I'm hesitant to bring it up when your scrotum has finally shown itself, but you did tell the founder and CEO of the Chrysler Corporation that you had forty men working for us, correct?

WILL

I said forty men, more or less.

HARRY

Right, well I think thirty-eight less might raise a wee bit of a warning sign, don't you?

The men's eyes meet for a beat.

WILL

Always stuck on the details, Harry. Leave this one to me.

MOVE IN ON THE WINDOW behind them

ACCELERATED TIME as the darkness outside changes from inky black to purple to blood-orange. Rain and clouds over the Hudson dissipating to reveal a golden sun, blue sky. New York brought back to life again.

PULL BACK FROM THE WINDOW

Harry is dressed in his suit now, his hair groomed. Pacing with nervous energy around the office. He hears the door CLICK, looks up to see -

WILL - standing in the doorway. His face blank, giving away nothing.

Then he swings the door open wider, and as Harry watches in disbelief --

A parade of FORTY MEN file into the office, each of them looking around as they enter, as if they were stepping onto a new planet. The last to enter is Ted (from the food line). He and Will shake hands.

TED

Two dollars for each man?

WILL

That's the deal... Ted, meet Harry.

Harry gives Ted a quick wave, still perplexed by what just happened. The office is suddenly bustling with men, all of them talking and laughing with each other. As Ted moves off to join them, Harry walks toward Will.

WILL (CONT'D)
Forty men, more or less.

MEG (O.C.)
And one lady, at your service.

Meg is standing in the doorway. Will looks at her, shocked.

MEG (CONT'D)
Harry called.
(off Will)
What? You can't have a working office without a doll like me to greet your clients.

HARRY
(to Will)
Are we insane?

WILL
Maybe. But we're getting this job. Understand? Now show these men how to act like architects...
(checks his watch)
...in the next twenty minutes.

INT. OFFICES OF VAN ALLEN & TANNING - LATER

ON THE CLOSED ENTRANCE DOOR. It opens and we're instantly face to face with Walter Chrysler, flanked by a couple of well-dressed, overeducated SYCOPHANTS.

REVERSE to see Meg, smiling her warmest welcome.

MEG
Mr. Chrysler. Welcome to Van Allen & Tanning. Please come in.

She steps aside and Chrysler enters. Taking in the office with a critical eye. Mr. Chrysler removes his coat, hands it to Meg. The sycophants pile their own coats onto Meg's waiting arms as well.

CHRYSLER'S POV - We see the men from the food line, moving about, sitting at drafting tables, using T-squares (seemingly correctly), pretending to analyze blueprints...

By all accounts, a successful, thriving firm. Chrysler nods to himself.

Just as --

WILL walks up urgently, his hand extended in a greeting.

WILL

(shaking hands)

Mr. Chrysler! Thank you for coming,
so sorry I wasn't here to greet you.
Busy, busy day.

SYCOPHANT #1

Perhaps we should get started. Mr.
Chrysler has a full day and we're
already four minutes behind schedule.

INT. THE BOARD ROOM - LATER

Will and Harry sit across from Chrysler and his two
followers. Behind Chrysler, the entire bustling office can be
seen through the glass wall.

Will talks budget to the three visitors...

WILL

...and we can secure bulk priced
steel from several mills in
Pittsburgh or keep some control over
variable shipping rates by going with
an outfit we know in Jersey...

And as he continues speaking, Will notices one of the food-
line men (who we'll come to know as CHIP) in the office
looking in at them, trying to get Will's attention. Looking
for feedback on how the meeting's going. Will shakes his head
slightly, hoping for Chip to go away...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE DRAFTING ROOM - SAME TIME

CHIP

(to everyone)

Hey, I think the car guy is giving
our boy a hard time!

Ted looks over from his drafting table across the room.

TED

Hey, Chip! Get away from there. Let
Will have his meeting!

But Chip ignores him...still motioning to Will. Waving his
arms.

WILL'S POV - In the outer office, Ted has come to the rescue, grabbing Chip by the ear and dragging him away from the board room.

Chrysler suddenly stands. His men follow his lead.

CHRYSLER

Okay, I've seen and heard all I need.

Will and Harry glance at each other, not knowing how to translate this. They both stand to meet their fate.

In the drafting room, the commotion has stopped - all eyes on the board room.

POV FROM THE DRAFTING ROOM - Will and Harry trading cordial handshakes with Chrysler and his handlers.

A moment later, Chrysler turns and heads for the drafting room. All of the men instantly spring to life, drawing inane circles with compasses or scrutinizing blank blue prints. Anything to look busy.

ON CHRYSLER as he moves through the drafting room with urgency. He takes his coat from Meg and exits with his two drones.

After the door CLICKS shut, the office is thick with anticipation. All eyes turn to Will and Harry. An extended beat of silence.

TED

Come on! You get it or not?!

Will is stone faced, shaking his head slowly, but he can't hold back the grin for long...

WILL

We did.

All of the men instantly explode with a roar of CHEERS and APPLAUSE. Will and Harry are suddenly surrounded by these bright-hearted men, their hair getting tussled, their backs getting slapped.

WILL'S POV - Standing apart from the others, but watching with a joyous smile, is Meg.

EXT. CHRYSLER BUILDING WORK SITE - DAY

Cement mixers pouring, men scurrying about in every direction. Construction is in high gear now.

Will and Harry are kneeling beside a slab of wet cement. They both have their hands pushed into the soft slab, leaving their prints. Their smiling faces are turned back to the semicircle of REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS surrounding them.

Standing with the photographers, Meg readies her camera.

MEG'S POV - Through her camera lens, Will and Harry leaving their hand prints. CLICK!

FREEZE FRAME IN B&W - The image of them frozen for the ages.

ON WILL AND HARRY as they remove their hands, cleaning them off with a towel.

REPORTER #1

How high are you planning to go, Mr. Van Alen?

WILL

Well, one of our elevator buttons is going to say 'Mars', so you'll have to do the math yourself.

The reporters all laugh along.

WILL (CONT'D)

No, no... The Woolworth Building is at 705 feet, and our plan right now is to go to 740.

The reporters scribble on their pads.

REPORTER #2

(confused)

Then what's your reaction to the plans for the Bank of Manhattan building?

Will and Harry share a quick glance.

WILL

(forced casual)

This city is growing so fast. Can't even keep track of every new development anymore.

REPORTER #3

Their designs are planning to top out at 840 feet. Does it bother Mr. Chrysler that his building will have to settle for the silver medal if they move forward?

REPORTER #1

One hundred feet is a significant shortfall, Mr. Van Alen.

CLOSE ON WILL - an awkward, forced grin as he takes in the news. Questions continue relentlessly.

REPORTER #4

Do you believe the motivation behind Severance's plans to be highest was to surpass you in particular?

REPORTER #5

Do you think there's a personal vendetta at play, Mr. Van Alen?

Will's eyes move in thought. Clearly caught off guard.

REPORTER #1

Are you saying you weren't aware that your ex-partner was planning to upstage you?

A beat. Will's had enough. He looks up, focused and direct.

WILL

Of course we knew. And my reaction is this: Our team has the brightest, most sought-after minds anywhere. Mr. Severance is more than welcome to make a horse race of it, but look around...it's a race he's going to lose. Thank you, gentlemen, that's it for today.

Will and Harry walk off. Meg stays behind, watching them go.

ON WILL, stone-faced as he walks.

WILL (CONT'D)

(eyes straight ahead)

Okay, first thing we do is raise our target height to something above 840 feet. Let Paul know when you see him.

(beat)

Then we have to get some bright, sought-after minds...quickly.

HARRY

I should say so.

EXT. TRAIN STATION (BROOKLYN, NY) - NIGHT

Will and Meg step off their train, onto the station platform.

WILL
So...have you thought about bringing
Jonathan by the site?

MEG
Would you like me to?

WILL
If you'd like to, then...I would like
you to.

Meg casts a sideways glance at him.

MEG
Well I can't.
(then)
He's in Ireland, excavating a
medieval castle.
(then)
Or so I hear.

This last bit causes Will to turn his head toward her in
surprise. He covers quickly.

WILL
Oh, I'm sorry...are you two no
longer...

MEG
(grinning)
Oh, shut up. You're being smug.

WILL
I'm not!
(beat)
What happened?

MEG
He received a grant to excavate some
castle on the coast of Ireland,
invited me to come along. All
expenses paid by the university.

WILL
But you didn't go.

MEG
Nope.

WILL
Huh. Do you think he'd consider
taking me?

Meg smacks him in the shoulder with the back of her hand.

MEG

I have family in Ireland, family I've always wanted to meet. And I also would have had endless time to travel, photograph a whole new part of the world.

WILL

But you didn't go...

Meg stops, looks into his eyes.

MEG

Am I insane?

WILL

Well, that all depends, of course.

MEG

On?

WILL

On whether you chose to not go, or whether you chose to stay.

MEG

There's a difference...?

WILL

A very large one.

They walk in silence for a couple moments.

MEG

I know my job is just to record the progress of the building's construction. But at the same time, how often does a person get a chance to record someone's dream as it comes true?

WILL

Mr. Chrysler would be flattered.

MEG

(smirks)

I'm not talking about Chrysler's dream, Will.

Their eyes meet for a moment before Meg looks away. The two of them continuing their walk, away from us.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - ESTABLISHING SHOT

The sun casting its morning haze over the city.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE (NYC) - DAY

Hundreds of pedestrians criss-crossing at this intersection of the world. As they do, more than half of them drop a dime into the hand of the NEWSPAPER BOY (16), snatching their morning NEW YORK TIMES.

As one BUSINESS MAN grabs his newspaper, we STAY WITH HIM...peering over his shoulder to see a C.U. ON THE FRONT PAGE HEADLINE:

"Chrysler Building Now Set to Reach 842 Feet"

And the subheading:

"Would be World's Tallest"

After another beat, the business man crumples the newspaper, stuffing it into a garbage as he passes. REVERSE ON THE BUSINESS MAN - it's Craig Severance. And he's not happy about the morning's news.

EXT. AVENUE P (BROOKLYN, NY) - DAY

Will walks down a neighborhood Brooklyn street, heading straight for --

Another long FOOD LINE of the downtrodden, half a block ahead. CLOSE on some of their faces...

Reaching the front of the line -

WILL

(to everyone on line)

Excuse me! Good morning, everyone! My name is Will Van Alen.

(off their tired eyes as they look over)

I realize we don't know each other, but I'm here offering work for anyone who wants to put in an honest day. The work is hard and the pay is average at best, but I promise you'll be contributing to something special. Something you might want to tell your grandkids about someday. All you have to do is follow me.

All eyes on Will, but nobody moving or reacting. Whatever Will was hoping for, it's not happening.

WILL (CONT'D)
Okay then! I'm going now!

Still nothing. Disappointed, Will starts to walk off...

And then, one by one, UNEMPLOYED MEN peel off from the line...following after Will.

EXT. CHRYSLER BUILDING WORK SITE - LATER

Paul and Harry are conferring near one corner of the work site. Meg stands off to the side, SNAPPING PHOTOS of the progress.

ANGLE ON THE BUILDING - a steel skeleton now rising twelve stories above the street.

ON HARRY - listening to Paul at first, but then seeing something over Paul's shoulder.

HARRY
Well, how about that...

Paul turns, following Harry's stare.

PAUL'S POV - Will has become the Pied Piper of Manhattan, leading DOZENS OF MEN toward the work site.

PAUL
(to himself)
What in *the* hell?

MEG'S POV - Through her camera lens: Will and the men filling the frame. CLICK!

FREEZE FRAME IN B&W - Will and the men walking toward us.

As Will and his followers reach Paul:

PAUL (CONT'D)
(to Will)
What is this?

WILL
The only way to win this race is to build around the clock, but I won't risk lives just to squeeze a few more hours out of the men we've got.
(re: the new men)
So, here you go...

PAUL

Don't suppose you've asked about their experience or skills..?

WILL

That's really the Foreman's job, and conveniently enough...that just happens to be you, so...

(off Paul; grins)

Plenty of work to go around though. I'll be back later with more.

Will gives Paul a supportive pat on the shoulder and walks off alone.

As Paul shakes his head, Harry pats him on the shoulder, just as Will did.

HARRY

You heard the man.

And Harry walks off too, leaving Paul to face the throng.

EXT. 5TH AVENUE - LATER

Eating a hotdog, Harry walks alone among the tourists and shoppers. ON HARRY as he spots something...then weaving through the slalom of moving pedestrians to get there.

It's a STACK OF NEWSPAPERS. Harry lifts the top one and we see what he sees:

The headline:

"In Race to Tallest, Bank of Manhattan Ups the Ante to 880 Feet"

And the subheading:

"New Height Would Leave Chrysler 38 Feet Short"

PAPER BOY (O.S.)

Hey, Mister, you gonna pay for that?

Harry drops it back onto the stack.

HARRY

No thanks.

INT. OFFICES OF VAN ALLEN & TANNING - DAY

PANNING SLOWLY ACROSS A DESK, we see a newspaper and it's front page headline ("...Ups the Ante to 880 Feet")...and then we settle on a BLUEPRINT.

CLOSE ON THE MASTER BLUEPRINT LEGEND - a hand ENTERS THE FRAME, using a pencil to cross off "842" and writing in "890" in its place.

WILL (O.S.)

There...

REVERSE to see Will holding the pencil. Behind him, Harry looks on, placing a supporting hand on Will's shoulder.

A moment later, there is a KNOCK at the closed office door. Will looks up as Paul pokes his head into the office. Will immediately notices the shaken expression on Paul's face.

WILL (CONT'D)

What is it? What's wrong?

Will already knows what's coming. Off Paul...

INT. CRAIG SEVERANCE'S BROWNSTONE - LATER

Craig Severance stands at his mini-bar, pouring himself a scotch, his back to Will, who sits in a chair by the oversized fireplace.

CRAIG

So, I assume you heard about the mishap today?

WILL

You make it sound like a bump on the head.

CRAIG

Taking the righteous path won't score you any points.

(takes a sip)

But if it makes you feel better to paint me as a demon, then feel free. I'm a big boy.

WILL

A man who worked for you died, Craig. After working his third straight double shift. You can't tell me you don't feel responsible.

CRAIG

Of course I take responsibility, and I take offense to the implication that I wouldn't. So, why don't we cut to it. What do you want, Will?

WILL

This competition that's bubbled up in the press...it's gotten out of hand. There doesn't need to be any more accidents.

CRAIG

We're both paid by men who would never settle for second place, so tell me how you think we're gonna resolve this. Don't expect me to roll over. It won't happen.

WILL

I'm offering a real olive branch here, just between us. We're building at heights that have never been attempted in the history of mankind.

(beat)

You agree not to add any more floors, and I'll do the same.

CRAIG

But the announcement I have going to the press tomorrow has me at 930 feet. Didn't you say you were at 890?

(off Will)

You'd be forfeiting - the title and probably your career.

WILL

I know what's at stake.

CRAIG

Then why do it?

WILL

Because we're both in uncharted waters, and I know you're going to try to win at any cost.

Craig holds out his arms ("guilty as charged").

WILL (CONT'D)

Then do we have a deal?

Craig quickly thinks it over.

CRAIG

I'll need you to give a quote in the Times, stating that you've topped out.

WILL

Done.

CRAIG

Good. Then I want you to talk with the reporter before tonight, and I want the story to come out in a week. Timing works better for me if it hits right before we open our doors. Fair?

WILL

Peachy. Anything else?

CRAIG

(takes a drink, then)
What about Chrysler?

WILL

I'll talk to him. Tomorrow.

CRAIG

Wish I could say I admire what you're doing. You'll come to see it was a mistake.

WILL

I'll show myself out.

As Will leaves, Craig shakes his head and takes another drink.

INT. THE METROPOLITAN CLUB (NYC) - DAY

Where the rich and rarified go to unwind...

Chrysler settles into his throne-like chair, looking perfectly at home. Will takes in the surrounding opulence like a wide-eyed child. Completely out of place and underdressed.

WILL

French baroque with Italian renaissance accents. Beautiful...

CHRYSLER

(not looking up)
It's nice.
(watching Will, then)
So how are things, Will?

Will nods, offers a benign grin.

WILL

Things are good. The final phase is set to begin on schedule.

Chrysler doesn't react. Instead, lighting his cigar.

WILL (CONT'D)

But there is something I was hoping to speak with you about. As you may have heard, a man fell recently...

CHRYSLER

Not one of your men...

WILL

No, sir.

(Chrysler relaxes)

But I think it happened because of this race, this crazed competition to be tallest.

Chrysler waves a dismissing hand.

CHRYSLER

Nobody's gonna hold you accountable for how they run things on another site.

WILL

I agree, but I do think we can ensure that neither site loses any more men.

Chrysler appears to be barely listening, examining the tip of his lit cigar.

WILL (CONT'D)

(nervous; sped up)

If we were to just stop the competition completely, build to the height that we've recently stated to the press instead of increasing it every time the other side increases -

Will is interrupted by a waiter, suddenly appearing above them.

CHRYSLER

(to the waiter)

Ah, bring me a bottle of the Macon Pouilly Fuissé Cabernet and an iced tea for my friend here. Oh, and some of that bread you had last time. That was damn fine bread.

WAITER

Very good, sir.

The waiter disappears. Chrysler turns his head toward Will.

CHRYSLER

Anyway...you were saying?

(beat)

About your brother?

Will is thrown, Chrysler's words hanging there. But Chrysler doesn't give anything away, unbuttoning his jacket, and relaxing into the chair. Off Will's confused face -

CHRYSLER (CONT'D)

You really think I'd hire an unknown to design the highest building on Earth...a building which, by the way, will have my name over the front doors...without first learning everything there is to learn about that unknown?

WILL

I guess not.

CHRYSLER

Look, I dislike surprises, but there's one other thing I loathe above all else...

(off Will's face)

Not winning.

WILL

But sir -

CHRYSLER

I knew all about that Bank of Manhattan tower that your ex-partner is designing downtown, even before I hired you.

WILL

Is that *why* you hired me?

CHRYSLER

I hired you for your talent, but I will say this: It didn't hurt. Your ex-partner's new employer is an ivy-league blowhard named George Ohrstrom. George wants the title of world's tallest for the same reason I do: Ego. For men like us, if you come in second, you'd might as well be two-hundred and second.

WILL

I'm not understanding how this involves my brother.

CHRYSLER

Simple. I hate George Ohrstrom. I try to use that word sparingly but I can use it with a clear conscience in this case. I won't bore you with the details, but I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that his building falls short of mine. It may be petty...

(stops to consider this)

...actually it's not petty, it's damn significant. He's a man of low character, and I despise that...so winning's gonna feel very satisfying.

(a puff on the cigar)

As for you, I'm well aware of your relationship with Severance and how things ended between you two. If I'm going to hate my counterpart in this little bake-off, I'd like my architect to have similar feelings for his.

WILL

Hate is a strong word.

CHRYSLER

Yes it is. It's strong and it's physical and it's real. Use it, Will. And if you need to find it first, then do that, quickly. But you will deliver on what you said you'd deliver. World's tallest, nothing less.

The waiter delivers the drinks.

WILL

I'd like to, Mr. Chrysler, I really would. But I can't be involved in a race where family men are dying, just so their boss can be first to the finish line.

CHRYSLER

You know what it takes to have a race?

(off Will)

Two sides.

(then)

It's only a race if you race him.

(MORE)

CHRYSLER (CONT'D)

I don't give an elephant's ass who finishes their building first. I care about which one, when all is said and done, is looking down on the other one. You understand me?

WILL

I do.

CHRYSLER

Well good then. Because it's in your interest to understand me perfectly.

(off Will)

You know, it's incredible the kinds of friends a man accumulates when his financial resources run deep. Governors, senators, judges who serve on prison parole boards...

(a beat; off Will)

Friends who are always happy to do a favor when asked.

(a beat, then)

With great risk comes great reward, Will. Make sure we win the real race, and your brother might just find himself with a second chance.

Will takes this in, a hopeful energy vibrating through him. Imagining his brother as a free man, holding back a smile.

WILL

(raising his glass)

To winning...

Off Will...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICES OF VAN ALEN & TANNING - NIGHT

Huddled around a drafting table with his four top ENGINEERS (30's and 40's), plus Paul and Harry, Will rubs at his bloodshot eyes.

ENGINEER #1

We could maybe use a damper to counter the wind stress. I've heard of that being used a couple times.

ENGINEER #2

Great, but we'd still be stuck with the structural load issue either way.

The others (except Will) nod in agreement. They've clearly been trying to tackle this for a while. A few moments of quiet brainstorming before -

PAUL

Top section already has us closing in at a seventy-four degree angle. Could we shift the design and just start moving up at ninety degrees from the 73rd floor?

ENGINEER #3

For a bit, sure, but enough to get over 930 feet, no way. The strain...
(pointing at the blue print)
...here and here would be a disaster waiting to happen.

Will meets Harry's eyes, both of them losing hope.

WILL

You four are my top engineers. Are you honestly telling me this can't be done?

Will throws his pencil at the table. The engineers fall silent, avoiding their boss's eyes.

ENGINEER #1

(timid)

The top section just has us coming in at too much of an angle to add more -

WILL

Do you think I don't understand the goddamn problem?! The point is to find an answer...which apparently you can't do! Not one of you!

Harry puts a calming hand onto Will's shoulder.

HARRY

(sotto; to Will)

Maybe we let these men get home to their families.

A beat. Will takes a breath and nods, knowing Harry's right.

WILL

(to the engineers)

I appreciate your hard work, gentlemen. But you should all get home now.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)
 (off their hesitancy to
 leave)
 It's fine. We're all tired and
 tomorrow'll be here soon enough.
 Go...kiss your wives, tuck in your
 little ones.

Will stands, pats each of them on the back as they head toward the exit. When the last one leaves, Will shuts the door softly, turning slowly to face Paul and Harry.

WILL (CONT'D)
 There's nothing to figure out.
 (then)
 We can't win...

INT. WALTER CHRYSLER'S BOARDROOM - DAY

Will and Chrysler sit at opposite sides of the boardroom. Will sits silently as Chrysler reads from the New York Times.

ANGLE ON THE HEADLINE: "Chrysler Architect Concedes Tallest Crown to Bank of Manhattan"

After a few moments, Chrysler looks up.

CHRYSLER
 Okay...just had to read it again to
 make sure I hadn't lost my infernal
 mind.
 (off Will)
 I thought I was pretty clear the
 other day on what I expected from
 you, so now I'm going to give you
 sixty seconds, and not a single
 second more, to explain yourself.

Off Will...

EXT. BANK OF MANHATTAN BUILDING - DAY

On a raised platform, Craig stands behind a microphone, extremely pleased with himself. Looking out on the thousands of faces staring back. Several streets closed off for the crowds, balloons in patriotic colors framing everything in site.

ON WILL, HARRY, AND MEG - standing a block away from the epicenter, the three of them leaning against another building, watching the hoopla.

MEG
 And he didn't fire you?

WILL
Believe it or not, no.

MEG
What did you say to him?

WILL
I told him to trust me.

HARRY
You told Walter Chrysler to trust you.

WILL
Yep. Told him I had a plan.

MEG
And do you?

WILL
Nope. Not a thing.

All three of them look toward the stage.

HARRY
Look at that arrogant ass. Why don't we just add another fifteen floors now that there's nothing he can do about it?

WILL
Craig's not an idiot. And he certainly doesn't trust me. He waited until we started construction on our top section...

MEG
Knowing you'd be out of options...

ANGLE ON Craig Severance - standing on the stage, waving triumphantly to the crowd.

HARRY
My god, I despise that guy.

ON CRAIG - on the platform stage, waving his hands to quiet the crowd.

CRAIG
Hello, everyone! Thank you for celebrating this great event with us today! My name is Craig Severance, and I'm very proud to have designed what is now...

(MORE)

CRAIG (CONT'D)
 (looking up toward the
 building's peak)
 ...the tallest building on the
 planet!

Loud APPLAUSE from the crowd...

ON WILL - squeezing his eyes shut as Craig's echoing voice continues on in the b.g.. After an extended beat, he can't take it anymore, striding off. Meg and Harry let him go...

EXT. CHRYSLER BUILDING WORK SITE - DAY

Morning sunlight waking up Manhattan.

Will approaches the works site's border fence, where he spots Ted and Chip, standing together, talking casually.

WILL
 Morning, Ted. How are ya, Chip.

Both men look at Will, neither one responding. And then -

The two of them start CLAPPING. Will raises an eyebrow - bemused, but continuing on his way.

And as he passes each WORKER, they all stop what they're doing and, one by one, join in the APPLAUSE. Men pause their conversations, they rise from their makeshift seats, they stop their hammers in mid-swing...and together, they create a standing ovation for Will.

The power of their appreciation growing in volume until it's echoing off the surrounding buildings.

ON WILL - taking in this sincere display of gratitude and respect. He looks up to the towering steel frame of the almost recognizable Chrysler Building to see hundreds of his MEN, joining in the CHEER, CLANGING their tools against the steel beams. Anything to make noise, louder with each passing moment.

WILL (CONT'D)
 (to Harry; shouting)
 What is this?

HARRY
 You give a damn about them, Will. And they love you for it.

ON MEG - clapping along with the rest. Winking at Will as he looks over.

INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Alone in his room, Will paces, desperation in every step.

WILL

What's the plan...what is it?...c'mon
now...

We stay with him as he paces...until, finally, he glances up. Freezing in his tracks immediately.

MOVING IN on Will's eyes. Fixated. Gripped by a thought.

REVERSE on what he sees: MOVING IN on ALAN'S SWORD, sitting on the floor in the corner of the room. Sleek and narrow, its point aimed toward the ceiling.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHRYSLER BUILDING WORK SITE - DAY

As Will rapidly signs a series of forms, a MAN approaches cautiously, fidgeting as he waits his turn. Will hands the forms to a waiting assistant, who hustles off.

MAN

'Scuse me, Mr. Van Alen? I'm sorry to
bother you...

Will turns. REVERSE ON THE MAN (It's Ned Sheuster - from the opening sequence) He looks frail, unable to maintain eye contact.

WILL

What can I do for you, friend?

NED

Name's Ned Sheuster, sir. I do
construction work. I was hoping you'd
consider bringing me on.

WILL

Any reason I shouldn't, Ned?

Ned looks down at the ground. The memory still hard for him.

NED

I worked alongside the same fella for
years and we were good pals -
(stopping himself; resets)
It's just...you may have read about
the accident in the papers...his name
was Tom Coleman...had a wife and a
young boy...

Will sees how hard this is for Ned.

WILL
 You good at keeping secrets, Ned?
 (off Ned)
 'Cause I've got a doozy for you.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRYSLER BUILDING FIRE SHAFT - MINUTES LATER

We're in the central core of the building. A heavy steel door opens, letting in a rush of sunlight to the fire shaft (essentially, a 600 foot vertical tunnel, with exposed stairs running along the wall, top to bottom). Will and Ned enter into the dimmed light of the shaft.

WILL
 C'mon, Ned, let me show you what
 you're gonna be working on.

Ned follows Will down a few sets of stairs until they stop at one of the stair landings. Will motions for Ned to look just past the railing.

As Ned turns his head, we see what he sees: The gleaming silver of a sharp point. It appears to be hovering there until Ned looks over the edge: The needle going down, widening gradually to its base over 180 feet below them.

Ned reaches out and touches the sharp point with his finger.

NED
 What is this?

Will puts his arm around Ned.

WILL
 You just touched what's about to be
 the top of the world, my friend.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LEXINGTON AVE. AND 42ND STREET (NYC) - DAY

The workers dissolving into curious onlookers and excited families - a few hundred people milling around. A BRASS QUARTET PLAYS a cheerful tune for the crowd.

Harry, Meg, and Will stand among the onlookers. Meg snaps a couple of photos.

MEG
 (forced optimism)
 It's not a bad crowd.

HARRY
 About a third the size of Craig's.

Meg elbows Harry.

HARRY (CONT'D)
 Which...is much more intimate. More
 sincere if you ask me.

Will's not listening, scanning the crowd, searching for a
 face. Ned comes running up, the spark returned to his eyes.

WILL
 Hey there, Ned. How are we doing?
 Everything set?

NED
 Twenty minutes, sir. Thirty, tops.

Will pats Ned on the shoulder. Ned heads off.

Will goes back to scanning the crowd. After an extended beat,
 he finds his mark. Will heads for him.

WILL
 Larry! Larry Hopkins!

Larry Hopkins (from the New York Times) turns, offering an
 indifferent wave as Will approaches.

WILL (CONT'D)
 Thanks for coming, Larry. I promise
 you won't be sorry.

LARRY
 Listen, I'm going to be honest with
 you. Even though I'm here, and this
 is one heck of a fine structure,
 it's unlikely The Times will do you
 any better than page seven or eight.
 'Second tallest building opens' isn't
 much of a headline. You understand...

WILL
 Front page tomorrow. You can thank me
 later.

LARRY
 Will, we already ran a story about
 you building a seventy-seven story
 building.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

And I'm standing here, looking up at a seventy-seven story building. I don't know what you think my angle's gonna be.

WILL

Have a little faith, will ya' Larry?

Larry laughs, checks his pocket watch.

LARRY

Okay. I like your spirit.

EXT. LEXINGTON AVE. AND 42ND STREET (NYC) - LATER

Will's eyes are focused on the top of the building. He checks his own watch, then looks back to the building. All nervous energy.

CHRYSLER (O.C.)

So, was I right to trust you?

Will turns to see Chrysler a few feet away.

WILL

With great risk comes great reward.

Chrysler grins, recognizing his own words.

CHRYSLER

Or great and total failure.

Will nods uneasily. He spots Larry, the reporter, off to the side, smoking and checking his watch. Will knows it's time to roll. He weaves through the crowd, taking his place at the microphone on -

THE PLATFORM STAGE

WILL'S POV - he spots Meg and Harry in the crowd. They each give him a reassuring nod.

WILL

(into the microphone;
nervous)

Well, this is it...hard to believe the day has finally arrived. So, um, thank you for being here. I know you've all read about the Bank of Manhattan Building, which happens to be the tallest building in New York...or anywhere else for that matter.

ANGLE ON CRAIG SEVERANCE - watching anonymously from the back of the crowd. Dripping with smug satisfaction.

WILL (CONT'D)

And I want to congratulate them on building something that will endure for decades...possibly, um, centuries. It's really a beautiful building, if you haven't seen it yet.

ANGLE ON WALTER CHRYSLER - glancing around, uncomfortable. Clearly disappointed in Will's performance so far.

WILL'S POV - One person in the crowd moving closer to the stage. It's Ned. Ned gives Will a simple nod.

Will looks out to the crowd. New confidence in his voice, which continues as we PAN OVER THE FACES OF THE CROWD, many of them, men who've worked on the site. Faces we recognize.

WILL (V.O) (CONT'D)

But you came here today to see this building. The Chrysler Building. A building that honors the ingenuity and success of Walter Chrysler...

(pause for polite
applause)

...but maybe even more so, honors the undying hope of all of you.

(beat)

At a time when our spirits have been tested and our families have been strained, we had no business creating a towering tribute to hope. A colossal monument to optimism for the future.

(beat)

And yet here it is.

The crowd CHEERS loudly.

WILL (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you...the new tallest structure ever built by mankind. Anywhere on earth.

Will turns his head, looking to the back of the crowd, exactly where Craig Severance stands. And he winks.

WILL (CONT'D)

(looking at Craig)

Take it away, boys!

ANGLE ON CRAIG - his eyes narrow. He forgets to breathe.

A SUCCESSION OF ANGLES - ON CHRYSLER, ON LARRY, ON MEG AND HARRY -- all of them looking skyward.

THE ENTIRE CROWD - all eyes looking up to --

THE TOP OF THE CHRYSLER BUILDING

Perched on the 75th floor, near the top, a DERRICK (a kind of crane with a movable pivoted arm used for lifting heavy objects) sits motionless, its line dipping down into the peak of the building.

And then...when nothing happens, everyone starts to look at each other. Confused. Chrysler squeezes at the bridge of his nose as MURMURS begin to spread through the crowd.

ON WILL - His eyes fixed on the derrick. Trying to will it to move.

ON MEG AND HARRY - Still looking up. Their faith holding fast.

HARRY
(sotto)
C'mon now...

AT THE TOP OF THE BUILDING

The derrick's arm moves. Barely noticeable at first, but we can hear the slight HUM of a motor. And then...a sharply pointed silver peak begins to poke from the top of the building.

ON THE CROWD - one by one, the faces begin to look back to the building's apex. Some of the people pointing with excitement.

Like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, the gleaming SILVER SPIRE rises. Foot by foot. Growing longer by the second. Finally pausing its growth 185 feet later.

ON WILL - exhaling the last seven years of stress. Closing his eyes with relief as the crowd ERUPTS with CHEERS behind him.

ANGLE ON THE CHRYSLER BUILDING - against a blue sky, the great skyscraper in its final form.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WALTER CHRYSLER'S EXECUTIVE OFFICE - DAY

Will and Chrysler sit across from each other, Chrysler's wide desk separating them. Will looks relaxed, at ease...

CHRYSLER

Well, my boy, you must be relieved to be done with me.

WILL

Congratulations on everything, sir.

CHRYSLER

Yeah, well...

Chrysler stands, moves to a window.

CHRYSLER (CONT'D)

I assume you're here for your fee.

WILL

No, sir. I mean, yes I do need to resolve that, but -

CHRYSLER

I'd prefer you just talk with my accountants on that. You understand, I don't handle those things personally.

WILL

Of course, that's fine. But I was hoping to talk with you about our deal.

Chrysler narrows his eyes, looking confused.

CHRYSLER

What deal is that, William?

WILL

The one involving my brother. His parole?

CHRYSLER

Ah, that. I remember we talked about that a bit. You understand those kinds of things take some time. I can't just snap my fingers and circumvent the United States judiciary system.

WILL

(growing nervous)

Of course, but, as you said, your connections...I mean, you mentioned friends with certain influence.

CHRYSLER

Oh, sure, sure.

(sitting on the edge of
his desk)

By the way, you had a chance to see
that plot of land over on 34th and
5th?

WILL

(wary)

I believe I've passed it by...

CHRYSLER

Don't know if you've heard, but a
group of political blue-bloods are
getting in the skyscraper business.
Constructing something they're
calling the Empire State Building on
that land.

Will nods. Uninterested.

WILL

I'm sorry, Mr. Chrysler, but I'm not
following how this applies to my
brother or our deal.

CHRYSLER

I just bring it up because I heard
they're planning to go to over twelve-
hundred feet. We're at one-thousand
and fifty if I'm not mistaken.

(a beat)

Cement's not even dry and we're
already looking at second place.
Disappointing, don't you think?

WILL

(growing in anger)

All due respect, but we're currently
sitting in the highest room on the
planet. We were the first structure
to go higher than the Eiffel Tower...

CHRYSLER

And you should be tremendously proud.
There's no reason to get excited
here. I just thought we'd hold the
title for more than a few months.

Chrysler stands, holds out his arm for Will to move toward
the exit.

CHRYSLER (CONT'D)

Anyway, I appreciate you stopping by.

Will stands, defeated, starts moving toward the door. But then it becomes too much to take. He stops suddenly, turns toward Chrysler's surprised face.

WILL

No! I will not be handled. We had an agreement! My half was completed as promised and in its entirety. I expect the same from you.

A beat. Then Chrysler smirks. Condescending.

CHRYSLER

Do you even understand what I do for a living? I push people to be better than they are. It's what I do, and I'm very good at it. You'll be relevant thanks to me, Van Alen. Your name might actually mean something to your great grandchildren.

WILL

You honestly believe I should be thanking you for my place in history?

CHRYSLER

I do, in fact. But it doesn't appear to be your intention to do that, so...

Chrysler opens his office door.

CHRYSLER (CONT'D)

Good day, William.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHRYSLER BUILDING (64TH FLOOR) - DAY

Will and Meg sit near each other on the building's gargoyle EAGLE HEADS (one of eight that look out over New York). The fact that they're 700 precarious feet above the earth apparently lost on them. A gorgeous sunset lighting the world around them...

MEG

(glancing up toward the spire)

So, Mr. Van Alen Architect, can you show me where you etched your initials into this fine structure?

WILL

Nope.

MEG

You're not going to make me climb up there and look for them myself...

WILL

I didn't do it.

Meg nods to herself, silently impressed. She watches him for an extended beat as he stares out over the city.

MEG

He hasn't paid you yet, has he?

WILL

(grins sarcastically)
Apparently, he didn't officially approve one of the major budget items, so he said it has to come out of my fee.

MEG

What's he talking about? What budget item?

A beat. Will pivots his head toward her.

WILL

The spire.

Meg raises her eyebrows, speechless.

She shakes her head, dumbfounded by the absurdity of it all. After a couple beats -

MEG

I'm so sorry...

Will nods to himself. Nothing else to say.

As a breeze flows past them, Meg hugs herself, trying to keep warm.

WILL

(starting to stand)
We should get you inside, let you warm up.

But Meg stays seated, takes his hand...

MEG

I'd love to stay a while more. I mean, if we can.
(off Will; beat)
Can we stay?

Will lowers himself to the spot beside her. He puts his arm around her, and then she rests her head onto his shoulder... And that's where we'll leave them, the world spread out in front of them. All of it, theirs...

FADE TO:

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Under the dim light of dawn, Will sits relaxed, his face serene as his train cuts north out of Manhattan...

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - SAME TIME

At the top of the bridge's west tower, Meg steps to the edge, hundreds of feet over the East River. Lifting her eyes, she spots the newest addition to the New York skyline.

She lifts her camera to her eye...SNAP. Fulfilling a promise...

EXT. PRISON YARD (SING SING) - LATER

Will moves across the prison yard, waving to a couple of guards he recognizes. One of the guards holds up a newspaper, calls out to him -

GUARD

Nice job, Mr. Van Alen! Was pulling for you the whole time!

WILL

Thanks, Jimmy. You seen Terry around?

JIMMY motions toward the cell block where a single file line of prisoners are frisked one by one before stepping outside to the yard...

JIMMY

Should be coming out any minute.

WILL'S POV - Terry steps into view, holding his arms straight out for the morning pat down.

Terry finally spots Will, holds his arms wide -

TERRY

Ain't I somethin'? Standing here with the man who created the tallest building in the whole damn world.

The give each other a quick hug.

WILL
Second tallest in less than a year.

TERRY
(*oh, please*)
What...that Empire State thing
they're puttin' up?

Will nods, Terry waves a dismissing hand at the air.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Who gives a damn about that? Who's
the tallest right now, Will? At this
very moment?

Will sees the energy in Terry's eyes, feeling it. He finally
smiles.

WILL
Okay...

TERRY
You're goddamn right, okay...
(*checks his watch*)
C'mon, follow me. You really need to
see somethin'.

As they walk --

WILL
You know, Terry, I just started doing
some work...I guess it's more like
giving advice...to the man who's
behind the Empire State Building.
(*off Terry's surprised
face*)
He's a good man. Maybe even an honest
one.

TERRY
(*smirks, then*)
Well, you should ask the good, honest
man to make his building a couple
hundred feet shorter.

WILL
(*smiles*)
Yeah...I'll have to do that.
(*then*)
Anyway, Terry, he's also a very
connected man. Maybe someone who
could help us...with all this.

TERRY
Don't worry about it, alright?

WILL

You're not understanding me. He was the Governor of New York, for starters. The guy knows everyone - every lawyer, every judge we could ever -

TERRY

Let it go, will ya?

WILL

Why? Why can't we at least try?

TERRY

Try? Shit, you can try all you want.

Terry stops, turns toward Will.

TERRY (CONT'D)

And who knows...maybe somethin' comes of it. But I won't live there, Will. I can't. I live right here, right now. Where my big-shot brother just built the tallest structure on God's green earth.

Up ahead, a group of about ten PRISONERS huddle together, smoking their cigarettes, passing the time.

Will spots the group as Terry yells out to them -

TERRY (CONT'D)

Yo, boys! Surprise guest of honor!

The group of about seven PRISONERS turn, smiling when they recognize Will.

PRISONER #1

Hey! Will!

PRISONER #2

(joking)

Look at this guy! I look at his face all year in the newspaper, now I gotta look at it in person too?

PRISONER #3

Congratulations, Will!

PRISONER #4

You were adopted, right?

(re: Terry)

No way you came from the same loins as this numbnuts.

Laughter and more pats on the back for Will. Somehow, Will's one of them now. Terry checks his watch again.

TERRY
 (to Will)
 C'mon, gotta keep moving. Almost time...

Terry keeps walking, toward the chain link fence, the one spot where the prisoners can see beyond the stone walls. Will hustles to catch up...

AT THE FENCE

WILL
 Terry, what are we doing?

Terry just holds his finger to his lips. And then...as morning's sunlight peaks above the horizon, lighting the faces of these two brothers standing side by side -

TERRY
 (sotto)
 Any second now...

Will watches Terry, following his gaze which is trained on New York in the distance.

And then it happens. Sunlight strikes the top of the Chrysler Building at the perfect angle, making it glow like a diamond. Terry's face reflects the glow, his mouth slowly curving into a peaceful, satisfied grin.

After an extended beat, Will finally turns to Terry...

WILL
 (getting it)
 Okay...

Terry puts his arm around Will's shoulder. The two of them viewing a distant New York...Chrysler as its centerpiece.

TERRY
 Okay...

And as Terry tussles Will's hair (like big brothers do), we SLOWLY MOVE UP...to a height where nothing seems so far from anything else. And the Chrysler Building looks out over all of it...

FADE OUT.

THE END