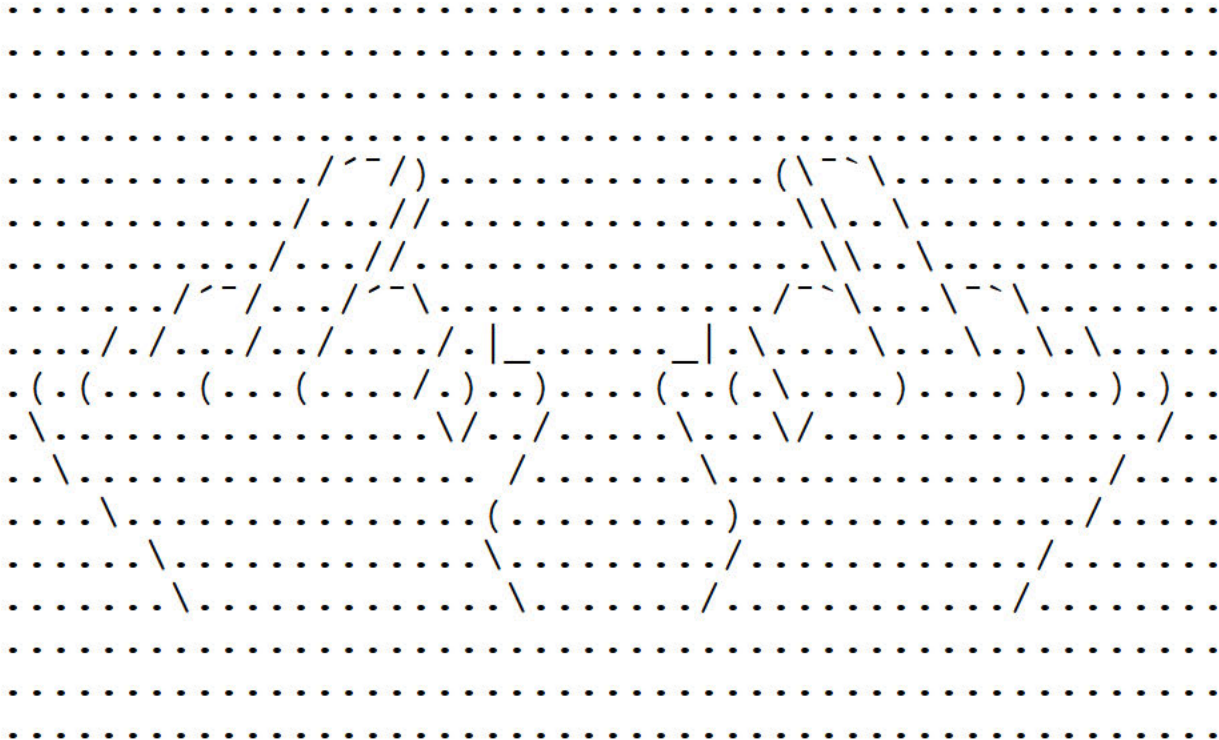


UNTITLED LAX MANDIS PROJECT

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A single **gunshot** echoes over black as we fade into...

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

South Central, Los Angeles. Chaos. Sirens. It's frenetic.

Dry heat sizzles off of cracked pavement as a **hooded figure** sprints into frame, sending gunfire behind him. A destruction of cop cars can be seen in his wake.

We fall back to Will **EVANS**, 30s, bruised in a tattered LAPD uniform, as he takes cover behind a lowrider.

EVANS

Stop! Stop now!

Evans is plain yet handsome. He feels like a cop and he is young, but not as young as he used to be.

Eva **CHAVEZ**, 30s, catches up to Evans as he exchanges gunfire. Eva's attractive, maybe not as attractive as she used to be, but she makes the uniform look good.

EVANS (CONT'D)

Nice of you to join me.

They have obvious chemistry.

CHAVEZ

You know me. Not one to miss a party.

EVANS

(serious)

You good?

She looks like she's seen better days.

CHAVEZ

Let's get this guy.

Evans sees the assailant fleeing again through the rear car window and continues his pursuit. And boy is this guy fast.

They race over cars and through the streets when a cop car suddenly screeches into frame and forces the figure down an alleyway. Dead-end. The figure clicks his gun empty, tosses it aside, and tries to scale the wall to no avail.

Evans catches up and tentatively approaches as Chavez takes cover behind the cop car.

CHAVEZ (CONT'D)
 (to Evans)
 Don't do anything stupid.

Evans winks to Chavez, but a bead of sweat drips down his face. He's nervous. We see the hooded figure from behind scraping at the brick wall. Desperate for an escape.

EVANS
On the ground! Now!

The figure suddenly gives up and starts to laugh maniacally. Chavez retracts her gun, as Evans creeps to within striking distance. His weapon hot.

The figure is right in our face now as he begins to turn around, lowering his hood, and that's when we see... that he's an **Orc!!!** Gray, peeling skin, dark eyes, bald head and slightly animalistic features with a shaved-off horn between his eyes.

ORC
 (still laughing)
 You don't get it, do you? Your
 time is done...

The Orc begins to change colors as he heats up from the inside. Evans looks like he's been sucker punched. He takes one last look back to Chavez, resigned, and she screams, helpless, as the Orc **EXPLODES** into a fiery ball!

We see the destruction and mushroom cloud from far above as we FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK:

JAY (V.O.)
 What the fuck...?

INT. BRONZE PICTURES - DAY

JAY, 30, Hollywood Creative Executive aspiring for more, sits at his open-air cubicle staring at a printed-out screenplay. Speechless.

The office continues to busily move around him, movie posters on the walls, (I think you know what it looks like), but Jay remains planted in his chair, dumbstruck, until Carl **PETERS**, 40, EVP Production, comes up from behind and breaks him out of his trance. He's eating a protein bar.

PETERS
 What are you reading?

JAY

It's the new Lax Mandis script.

PETERS

Another one?

JAY

I guess. Even his stupid title pages annoy me at this point.

PETERS

Didn't he have a movie come out this weekend? How'd it do?

JAY

BARNACLE? One man's struggle to live a normal life after a freak accident turns him into a cephalopod? It's actually doing really well...

PETERS

Hmm, I could really go for sushi today... So what's this new one? GOONIES in space? THE MARTIAN... on Earth?

Jay glances back at the screenplay in disgust.

JAY

I don't even know. It's like he's not even trying. It's like his dog took a shit and that piece of shit wrote this screenplay.

PETERS

It can't be that bad.

JAY

He never writes with any substance. And it's so painfully broad. But it also just doesn't make any sense. I mean - look - he put a Sudoku puzzle on page 49!

He holds up page 49 and there is, indeed, a Sudoku puzzle.

PETERS

I can never figure those out. Why are you still printing out scripts by the way? Don't you have an iPad?

JAY

I legitimately think I'm starting to go blind. I can't stare at a screen anymore. I'm sorry.

PETERS

Well it's not good for the environment, so no more printing. Who's the new intern again?

JAY

His name's Dave.

PETERS

Right! I like him. He smells like pancakes. Have him do coverage on that script and send me your thoughts asap.

Peters ambles away pretending to look busy.

JAY

(to no one)

Didn't I just do that?

Jay opens a blank email and addresses it to Peters. He writes in the subject line: UNTITLED LAX MANDIS PROJECT. He tabs down to the message box and holds for a beat, thinking.

He then pastes in the **smiling poop emoticon** and stares at it. It stares back at him. He stares back at it and we see the hint of a smile for the first time in Jay.

DAVE

You got anything for me?

Dave, 20, over-eager and not jaded yet, sneaks up on Jay. Jay minimizes the windows on his computer.

JAY

(unenthusiastic)

Check this script out and let me know what you think.

DAVE

Awesome! What a cool title page!

Jay shudders to himself.

JAY

By the way, did you get a chance to read that spec about Arthur Miller?

DAVE

Yeah - It sucked balls.

JAY

Really? You didn't find the world interesting or the connection between how the early years of the Cold War reflect similar themes to today's uneasy political landscape?

DAVE

I didn't understand anything you just said. Was the writer a friend of yours?

JAY

Don't worry about it. Thanks.

Jay goes to pick up another screenplay, on top of a seemingly endless pile, as Dave trots off.

But Jay shares a cubicle with **CINDY** and **KAREN**, both 20s, who work in the Publicity department, where the most minor of issues become life-changing crises. Cindy and Karen arrive at their desks, sandwiching Jay, and open takeout lunches.

CINDY

This is all bell pepper. It's insane how much bell pepper is in this Kung Pao. I'm literally going to die. I'm not even hungry.

Karen isn't paying attention to Cindy and is instead staring at her dress.

KAREN

I hate that this dress wrinkles. It wrinkles all day and it's stressful.

Jay puts his noise-cancelling headphones on and turns the volume up as far it will go before preparing for page one of a new screenplay.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Cheap beer. Jay is joined by **ZACK** and **JESS**, another exec and an agent trainee, early 30s, as they set up the lone pool table.

JAY

Thanks for coming out, guys.

JESS
Lady troubles?

ZACK
You have to have a lady to have
lady troubles.

JESS
Not necessarily true.

Jay breaks the rack. It's a decent break, but they won't sink a single ball the entire scene. Zack goes to line up his shot.

JAY
Just another one of those days
questioning my overall existence
and lot in life.

JESS
Is it Tuesday already?

ZACK
You have a lot?

JAY
I feel like Sisyphus.

ZACK
I'm pretty sure they have a cream
for that.

JAY
No, you know, the Greek myth. He
was the son of a King who was
forced to roll a massive boulder up
a hill, only to watch it roll back
down, repeatedly, and for eternity.

Beat.

JESS
Well that about sums up my life.

Jess and Zack clink glasses.

JAY
Isn't the definition of insanity
doing the same thing over and over
again and expecting a different
result? Like what are we *actually*
doing in this town?

JESS

Trying to make movies that are both culturally enriching and entertaining to the masses?

JAY

More people watched a YouTube video of a drunken panda wandering its cage than our last two releases combined.

ZACK

That was a great video though.

JESS

I love that panda. So what's the alternative?

ZACK

I guess you could always move back home, have a bunch of kids, and change your last name so that when you pop into someone's Facebook feed you're hardly recognizable.

JESS

That was oddly specific.

ZACK

That's all my feed is these days. I feel like I log into someone else's Facebook every day.

JAY

I'm serious, guys. Did you know that The Beatles recorded their last album - their *last* album - when they were just 29 years old.

JESS

I'm beginning to think I need a stronger drink.

A frustrated beat as Jay thinks of what to say, sincere.

JAY

Remember what Murphy said back when we were interns together?

INT. MURPHY'S OFFICE 2005 - DAY

Murphy, 50s, slick, but approachable producer with an air of confidence having survived 30 years in the business.

Big corner office. We cut into the POV of the chair facing opposite his desk, which is slightly raised so he's looking down on us as he declares straight into the camera:

MURPHY

Fuck all the actresses.

Murphy looks off-screen, confused, like that wasn't the line he was supposed to deliver.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Jay and Jess give a blank look to a grinning Zack.

JAY

What? No. No, he said...

INT. MURPHY'S OFFICE 2005 - DAY

Murphy addresses the camera again. Genuine.

MURPHY

This whole town likes to say no, kid. But if you're willing to outwork the other guy, treat people well, and stand by your opinions with both passion and conviction and you push through those no's until you get to a yes, well then, in time, you'll be running this place.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

We cut back to our trio.

JAY

And I believed him... But it's been ten years and what's changed? Instead of getting coffee, we're getting coverage, but it's all the same. When are we going to do something that matters?

JESS

You don't have to get coffee anymore?

JAY

And the quality? Suddenly, we're appealing to the lowest common denominator and competing with SnapChat for views?

JESS

No offense, but Murphy is a dinosaur. The guy was making movies in a different era. They were giving out three-picture deals like they were Tic-Tacs back then.

ZACK

Uh, dude, I'm pretty sure we're all going to be holograms in five years and none of this will matter. I say enjoy the ride.

JAY

That's exactly my point. My biggest fear is looking up from my phone one day and realizing life has passed me by: all these collective likes and posts turning into minutes, days, and weeks, and I can no longer distinguish between the digital self we project online and from what's real, where all the lines have become so blurred I don't even know who I am anymore.

JESS

What brought all this on?

Beat.

JAY

You guys read the new Lax Mandis?

ZACK

Fuck that guy!

JESS

Talentless assclown excuse for a writer!

ZACK

I heard he hates puppies.

JESS

I'm pretty sure he's not allowed within 500 feet of a school.

ZACK

It's like he falls asleep on his keyboard, wakes up, and goes: That's not bad.

JESS

I want to rub his face in his work and show him: This is what you did! Look at what you did!

Jess gets a little caught up in it. Jay and Zack stare.

JESS (CONT'D)

Too much?

JAY

You guys are really sweet. But why do people keep buying his stuff...?

JESS

Simple: People are idiots. Look - Don't let Lax Mandis cause you to have an existential crisis. That'd be the most effective thing he'd ever accomplished in his life.

JAY

I met on the YouTube job.

JESS

They could become a real player.

ZACK

You could turn Drunk Panda into a franchise!

JAY

I just don't want to crank out YouTube videos my whole life. I've always had a dream of making movies and that's not what they do. I mean, how do you create a compelling arc in 30 seconds?

ZACK

Give me your phone.

JAY

Why?

ZACK

I'm about to show you how to create a compelling arc in 30 seconds.

Jay hands Zack his phone. Zack begins typing.

JAY
How do you know my password?

ZACK
Don't worry about it.

Zack opens a dating app and begins swiping.

JAY
A dating app, really?

ZACK
Pass. Pass.

JESS
(to Jay)
You gonna be all right, chief?

JAY
Yeah... You know, living the dream
can be a real fucking nightmare
sometimes.

JESS
Welcome to Hollywood.

They clink glasses.

ZACK
Oh a match!

Jay and Jess look at the phone.

JAY
That looks like a head shot. I
can't date an actress.

JESS
Murphy would be proud.

ZACK
You realize if you say you're not
going to date an actress, you're
eliminating half of the dating pool
in Los Angeles, right?

JESS
Maybe she's working as an actress
to put herself through medical
school. Is that a thing?

JAY
I don't think so.

Zack types a response to the match.

ZACK
(reading as he types)
You're cute. Smiley face. Let's
hike Runyon and take selfies.
Send.

Zack hands back Jay's phone, proud. Jay shakes his head and motions for more beers from the bar. A lot of angry people look like they want to play pool.

I/E. JAY'S CAR - NIGHT

A tired Jay sits behind the wheel on Melrose stuck in traffic... because it's 11:00pm on a Tuesday night, so of course there's traffic.

A giant billboard for BARNACLE leers down on him from across the street (think Adam Sandler mugging to the camera with a crab claw for a left hand). Jay rolls his eyes and turns as the light changes green. He pulls into the garage of a nondescript apartment building.

INT. JAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jay slugs down the hall carrying a few scripts and his iPad. He shuffles past a few people holding beers, hanging out in front of an obvious party with music blaring. He continues to his door.

INT. JAY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jay enters. A nice studio, but a studio nonetheless. He doesn't bother flipping on the lights. He tosses his keys on his dresser, sheds his jacket, exhausted, and crashes onto his bed still in the rest of his clothes. Bass from the party next door creeps in through the walls.

The apartment is sparsely furnished, Ikea, we may notice a typewriter, but we definitely notice all the classic movie posters that dominate his walls as if he wished he were making films in a different era (Butch Cassidy, The Producers, Chinatown, Rocky, The Apartment, etc.).

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BRONZE PICTURES - DAY

We match cut to the movie posters hanging on the walls of Bronze Studios. Let's just say they're not Academy winners.

Phones ring as the day begins. Jay strides in, more energized following the previous night, and knocks on Peters' corner office door.

JAY

You wanted to see me?

Peters waves him in. His office is filled with memorabilia and contemporary art that nobody understands, himself included. A protein bar is on his desk.

PETERS

A couple new things came in this morning. We got a link to this foreign film people are loving, BLACK GARDEN, may be a new director to watch out for. And we also got a new Goldmeyer script. It is supposed to be in the vein of THE PLAYER, but about a Hollywood agent.

JAY

Ugh. I hate reading scripts about Hollywood. Pass.

PETERS

Could you check them out?

JAY

Course.

Jay starts to leave.

PETERS

Oh and what was the name of that Lax Mandis script again? LIGHT?

There goes Jay's energy.

JAY

DARK. It's a contained thriller set in a... closet.

PETERS

Is it like PANIC ROOM within a PANIC ROOM?

JAY
Sure. If that helps you. Oh, and
there are also orcs.

Peters stares at him trying to comprehend that last part.

PETERS
Whatever. I heard Tom Cruise is
attaching himself. Could you suss
it out and see what the deal is?

JAY
To that piece of shit?

PETERS
I think he's just misunderstood.
Scientology is a cruel mistress.

JAY
What? No, that's not what I meant.

Jay notices the script coverage is on Peters' desk.

JAY (CONT'D)
Is that the coverage?

PETERS
Oh, yes! Dave gave it to me
directly.

JAY
(more to himself)
That's annoying...

PETERS
Look! He even solved the Sudoku!

Peters holds up the Sudoku puzzle and heads with Jay towards the door. He picks up the protein bar and his gym bag on the way out.

PETERS (CONT'D)
I'm late for a meeting, but we'll
talk it all through later!

Peters jets off and leaves Jay standing at his assistant's desk.

JAY
Does he always take his gym bag to
meetings?

ASSISTANT

(Yes)

No?

JAY

That's what I thought. If you need me I'll be the one over there banging my head against the wall.

ASSISTANT

You got it!

JAY

By the way, did you ever read that Arthur Miller spec I gave you?

ASSISTANT

I'm not that into baseball.

JAY

It's not...

ASSISTANT

I've just been really busy.

He tries to look busy, but a Facebook window is visibly open on the Assistant's computer and CandyCrush plays out on his iPad. CandyCrush starts to make a noise. Jay stares at the assistant, who slowly reaches for the iPad to shut it off without breaking eye contact with Jay. He shuts it off.

Jay's phone buzzes to break the awkwardness. A Bumble reply from Liz:

"I love Runyon! Can I bring my purse dog? ;)"

Jay grins and lets out a laugh. The Assistant continues.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

We can get an intern to do coverage on that script if you want.

Jay's focus stays on his phone.

JAY

Don't worry about it.

He walks away, upbeat, typing out a reply. When the coast is clear, the Assistant snatches his iPad back and starts crushing that candy.

EXT. HIPSTER BAR - NIGHT

Pick one in Silver Lake.

INT. HIPSTER BAR - NIGHT

Lots of ironic hats and skinny jeans fill out the place. Jay and LIZ, 30, sit at the bar with elaborate cocktails. Mid-conversation.

LIZ

It probably wasn't until I watched the music video for Madonna's *Like A Prayer* that I knew I really wanted to be an actress.

Jay shifts in his chair. Can we get the check, please?

LIZ (CONT'D)

I'm messing with you. I don't know, there's something about the power of the stage and being in front of an audience that makes me feel alive.

She's sincere. Jay takes it in.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Plus I suck at math.

JAY

Fuck math.

LIZ

Look - I realize it's a bit crazy to want to act, but so's this town. And I know I'd always regret it if I didn't at least try, so I'm giving it a shot.

JAY

I'll drink to that.

They cheers their glasses. Jay looks around as the place begins to fill up.

JAY (CONT'D)

Wow. This place is really happening.

LIZ

Yeah. I'm surprised they let you in without a scarf. It's like you're not even trying.

A scarfy, skinny jeans couple walks by them.

JAY

Call me old fashioned, but I prefer the girls' jeans to be tighter than my own.

LIZ

You're a man of principle. So what about you then? You got my story.

JAY

I kill dreams.

LIZ

Is that a union thing?

JAY

(by rote)

I work in development for a company that finances and produces movies. Primarily, I'm the guy that decides if that screenplay you've been working so hard on in between shifts at Starbucks goes onto the next level. But most likely, I'm going to toss it onto a pile of countless others and tell you to come back when you have Bradley Cooper attached.

LIZ

Harsh. At least Starbucks has good benefits. So where does the money come from?

JAY

Q-tips.

LIZ

Q-tips?

JAY

The owner is the son of some billionaire. Apparently, there's a lot of q-tip money out there.

They laugh at the absurdity.

JAY (CONT'D)

He's never around. I honestly think he just wants to walk red carpets and hit on actresses.

LIZ

Who doesn't? Okay. I get what your job is, but there are a lot of other easier ways to make money. Why stick it out here for the Q-tip King?

JAY

That should really be our company name.

LIZ

I'm serious!

Jay doesn't like getting serious, but he relents.

JAY

Ah Well I guess the connection stems from my dad. He used to work in advertising and, when I was really young, he'd put me in his commercials and let me pretend to work the camera. This makes me feel close to him or like I'm following in his footsteps.

LIZ

That's really sweet.

JAY

Once upon a time anyway...

He starts to trail off.

LIZ

What do you mean?

JAY

Lately it feels like the whole industry has become more of a business with nobody willing to take a risk, you know? I try to think of what would make my father proud and I can't imagine what he'd say if he saw my name on something like BARNACLE...

LIZ

He'd be proud that you did something - That you put something into this world. And taught us all about the dangers of deep sea diving through toxic waters.

JAY

Thank you...

LIZ

Forgive me if this is offensive, but why don't you just quit...?

JAY

I can't. I don't want to believe I've spent the last ten years working towards nothing. And I can't pay rent on a quarter-life crisis. Plus I still have this foolish dream of seeing my name in the end credits just once.

LIZ

So why not produce on your own?

JAY

I would, but I actually haven't seen a movie through production yet and I feel like I need that experience first.

LIZ

Well it's all a means to an end, right? I'm waitressing my ass off right now and taking whatever parts I can. You have to do a few for them before you can do one for yourself.

JAY

Don't waitress your entire ass off. I kind of like it right now.

LIZ

Nice to have you back with us.

JAY

Sorry, you're completely right. But sometimes I can't help but feel like I'm continually pushing a boulder up a hill only to see it fall back down.

LIZ
Just be sure to move out of the way
as the boulder rolls back down.

Jay laughs to himself.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Sisyphus, right?

He lights up at that.

JAY
Yes!

LIZ
I would've much preferred to have
been Atlas. So much easier to
shrug off the world.

JAY
Yeah, he probably has serious back
problems though...

She finishes her drink. Jay's falling...

JAY (CONT'D)
How about one more?

They share a smile and then Liz looks apprehensive.

LIZ
I'd love to, but... this place
closes in an hour and I'm not sure
that's enough time for him to make
us another drink.

Jay laughs and motions for the bartender, who is splashing
the essence of an exotic tree leaf into a new concoction.
It's a spiritual experience.

INT. BRONZE STUDIOS - DAY

A big glass fishbowl of a conference room. More chairs than
people. Jay sits around a table with Peters, Assistant,
Dave, MARTIN, 30s/marketing, and KELLY, 30s/sales. Peters
has a protein bar.

Jay looks unengaged, doodling an image of Sisyphus getting
squashed by a boulder.

KELLY

Jon Snow is totally alive. My friend's cousin saw him at EP/LP last week and she said he still had his beard, which means they're not done shooting yet.

JAY

Or it means he likes facial hair.

PETERS

(ignoring Jay)
Interesting.

DAVE

I was reading some fan fiction online and there are credible rumors saying Peter Dinklage is going to have an affair with one of the dragons this season.

JAY

How would that even...?

DAVE

(dead serious)
Credible rumors.

LYLE

(off-screen)
Hello?! Does anybody work here?

The demeanor suddenly shifts and everyone straightens up.

PETERS

Shit. Is that Brannigan?

ASSISTANT

I thought he was in Spain.

KELLY

I thought he was in jail.

MARTIN

Oh no, they let him out.

KELLY

Oh good.

LYLE BRANNIGAN, 30s, is seen outside the glass walls of the conference room wielding a golf club. Confident in tattered jeans and flip-flops, he enters the room and perches on the table.

He could be confused for a homeless person, but instead he's the overweight billionaire Q-tip heir trying his hand in Hollywood.

PETERS

Mr. Brannigan! Didn't realize you were in town.

Brannigan's mind is elsewhere.

LYLE

She said she was 18...

PETERS

What's that?

He perks back up.

LYLE

Did you know that Dubai doesn't have an extradition treaty with the US? These are just things you learn on the road.

Beat.

LYLE (CONT'D)

Well what'd I miss? What am I interrupting?

PETERS

We were just going over some estimates for Cannes.

LYLE

Oh great! France. Now they DO have an extradition treaty with the US.

PETERS

Right... Uh... Kelly: How are the numbers projecting for ALIVE AGAIN?

KELLY

We should be able to hit our targets. Except in Japan.

MARTIN

Zombies don't do well in Japan.

LYLE

Why don't zombies do well in Japan?

KELLY

It's a cultural thing. They do better with ghosts and spirits and the like.

He's still confused.

JAY

Zombies are more Western. It'd be like if we were to make a movie about an American ninja.

DAVE

Can we? That sounds awesome.

LYLE

Do I smell pancakes? What if we make the zombie *also* a ghost?

JAY

I think that's a double negative...

Lyle stares.

JAY (CONT'D)

But we can certainly look into it.

LYLE

Great! What else?

Jay clears his throat and jumps in, trying to act casual, but with obvious excitement.

JAY

(in one breath)

I found this spec about Arthur Miller and Elia Kazan. It tracks their relationship from *Death of a Salesman* through their respective affairs with Marilyn Monroe and also their time in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee. It's a complex character piece that also captures the time perfectly and could really resonate with today's politics. I think it could be a real awards play and expand our brand.

Beat to the room. Peters looks nervous.

LYLE

Hmm... I like Marilyn...

Was that an answer?

PETERS

Jay: Did you take a look at that
BLACK GARDEN film I gave you?

Jay is still wondering about Arthur Miller, but...

JAY

Uh, yes. Russian film. It was
actually a really poetic and
nuanced portrait of a man coming to
terms with the end of his life;
wrestling his demons from the war
as he reconciles with each of his
estranged children. Beautifully
shot and paced. He's definitely a
director I think we should bring
in.

PETERS

He's coming on to direct the Lax
Mandis project.

JAY

He's a hack.

PETERS

This is a new project that's
getting a lot of heat right now.
Tom Cruise is starring and the
studio is looking for a partner.

JAY

Oh no.

LYLE

I love it already. What's the
pitch?

PETERS

It's kind of like PANIC ROOM set
within a PANIC ROOM. Right, Jay?

JAY

It's nothing like PANIC ROOM. It's
just a contained thriller set in
a... closet. I don't understand
what people are responding to.

LYLE

Well if it's contained at least we
can make it for a budget... Is the
closet a metaphor?

JAY

It's a metaphor for a bad screenplay.

PETERS

We'll bring them in for a meeting.

LYLE

Hmm. Great. Keep me posted. I left q-tips for everyone at the front desk by the way.

Lyle wanders out. The room sighs relief. Jay looks shell-shocked as his cartoon Sisyphus winks at him from beneath the rock.

INT. BRONZE STUDIOS - DAY

Jay hunches over his phone in his cubicle. Tossing a stress ball in the air.

JAY

I can't believe this is happening.

INT. THE AGENCY - DAY

We intercut back-and-forth with Jess on the phone at The Agency. Sleek, modern office building that they'll be paying off for the next 10 years. Jess sits in a bullpen and scrambles to keep up as people hurry around her and drop papers on her desk. She is stressed and only half-paying attention to Jay.

JESS

From what I hear a lot of people want that project, so who knows what will happen.

JAY

You could literally put the word "contained" in front of anything and people will get excited. It's a contained thriller set in the trunk of a car. It's a contained thriller set in an air balloon. Give me a break...

JESS

(distracted)

I've got a contained thriller in my ass right now.

Jay stops tossing the stress ball.

JAY

What?

A senior agent passes by Jess's desk.

SENIOR AGENT

Hey Jess - Were you able to do that thing?

Jess stops her scrambling to focus on the agent.

JESS

(incredulous)

That thing? Do you mean was I able to find a lead role for Vince Vaughn's second cousin? No, I wasn't able to do that "thing" and if I get assigned one more actor's cousin or nephew or gardener I may shoot somebody.

She says the last statement to the room with a smile, but no one cares. The senior agent stares blankly until.

SENIOR AGENT

That could actually be a great reality show. Celebrity Siblings: In the Shadows of the Stars... Thanks, Jess!

He rushes off.

JESS

Ugh, sorry, Jay. I feel you. But come out tonight! Some director is having a party in the hills and he invited the whole agency. There will be free alcohol...

JAY

There's no such thing as free alcohol. A hundred bucks says I'll end up talking to some quote unquote "digital influencer" telling me how his company is changing the game by optioning BuzzFeed's back catalogue.

JESS

That's the spirit. I'll text you the address.

We go back to Jay as he hangs up the phone.

CINDY

My sister discovered this new Kale-flavored vodka that's supposed to really exfoliate the skin. I'm obsessed.

KAREN

Do you think it would count for my juice cleanse?

CINDY

Definitely. We're going to be so skinny people are going to think we have an eating disorder.

KAREN

I literally may die.

JAY

Way ahead of you.

EXT. MANSION IN THE HILLS - NIGHT

It's obnoxious, but a nice view. Fancy cars litter the driveway and there's a giant waterfall in the middle with water spewing out of a tiger's mouth. Jay and Liz walk up to the door.

JAY

Well this guy's not overcompensating...

INT. MANSION IN THE HILLS - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Jay and Liz take a moment to survey the scene from the doorway. A mixed mid-level industry crowd mill about - most of them on cell phones.

In a room to their left, a group of people look like aliens as they demo new Oculus software and reach out to the sky as if they're on drugs. It's oddly sexual. Jay and Liz stare for a beat.

JAY

The future scares me.

LIZ

Drinks?

Jay refocuses and sees people outside.

JAY

Outside.

EXT. MANSION IN THE HILLS - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Pool. Obnoxious view continues. There's an ice tiger sculpture. Upscale crowd.

JAY

Wow. This is a classy affair.

A waitress approaches them with a tray of drinks.

WAITRESS

Jello shots?

JAY

I take back my last statement.

They both grab shots and cheers. It doesn't go down easy.

LIZ

Ugh. Tastes like college.

They immediately grab beers from another passing waiter to wash it down and Jay leads them over to Blake, 30, agent trainee, mid-conversation with two execs. Blake is upbeat.

BLAKE

So we've got the retreat in a few weeks and hopefully I'll get the official bump then, but things are great. I've got a handful of hip pockets at this point, but overall the partners have been supportive.

EXEC #1

Congrats. That's really great. We've got to say hi to the host, but let's catch up later.

BLAKE

Thanks! Sounds good.

The execs walk off.

JAY

That's great to hear, Blake. I knew things were touch-and-go there for a minute.

Blake says the following with a smile, still strangely upbeat.

BLAKE
Oh I hate my job.

JAY
But you just...

BLAKE
I'm completely miserable. I love it. I haven't had more than 4 hours of sleep in three years and they've been promising me a promotion for the past two. But who cares? Not this guy. Haha!

JAY
Well this is Liz...

LIZ
Nice to meet you.

BLAKE
Pleasure.

Zack and Jess walk up with beers.

ZACK
Jay! You made it!

JAY
Hey guys! Zack, Jess, this is Liz.

ZACK
The actress!

He goes in for a hug.

JESS
He can't do anything for your career.

LIZ
Oh I'm painfully aware.

JESS
I like her.

JAY
And do you guys know Blake? He works over at ITA.

ZACK
How do you like it over there?

BLAKE

Really great. Really solid people.

Jay and Liz share a look.

JESS

I need to find a bathroom.

LIZ

I'll join you.

They walk off. The guys look after.

BLAKE

She's cute. Significant other?

JAY

She's an other. I'm not sure how significant yet.

BLAKE

Lot of talent here, Zack. Should we try our luck?

Jay notices Zack took out his phone and is swiping.

JAY

Are you seriously on a dating app right now? These are some of the most beautiful women in LA.

ZACK

None of these girls want me or Blake to hit on them right now.

BLAKE

(deflated)
He's right.

JAY

You're not so bad...

Zack pauses from swiping.

ZACK

It's not that. It's more taboo to meet someone out or in a bar than it is online nowadays.

Zack scans the area and motions to a few girls at a side table.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Sure, Blake, you could approach that girl, maybe even say something witty, but she's still going to judge you along with her friends. Now, if she knew you were a Gemini, had a steady job, and liked cuddling up to Game of Thrones on a Sunday night, she may be down. Either way, you're both telling your friends you met at Whole Foods.

Zack goes back to swiping.

JAY

But you're none of those things.

ZACK

So? It's the internet...

Blake shuffles out his phone.

BLAKE

Which app do you like?

Jay rolls his eyes and takes another swig of his beer.

INT. MANSION IN THE HILLS - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Liz checks her makeup in the mirror while Jess fiddles with something we can't yet see.

LIZ

So how long have you known Jay?

JESS

We started in the mailroom at The Agency together years ago. He's one of the good ones. Not completely dead inside and still with a glimmer of hope that the industry can do good. It's kind of sweet in a sad way.

LIZ

That qualifies as one of the good ones?

JESS

This town has a twisted sense of humor. You have to stay grounded somehow - especially these days.

Jess bends down to snort a line - that's what she was doing - and then shoots back up. She collects herself and offers one to Liz.

JESS (CONT'D)

Bump?

LIZ

I gave at the office. Thanks.

Jess shrugs and goes back down to do another line. A couple of girls walk in.

GIRL #1

Can you believe Mandis bought this place off of the grosses for BRITE?

GIRL #2

I guess it also doesn't hurt when your dad directed some of the best comedies of all-time.

Jess and Liz look to each other and rush out.

EXT. MANSION IN THE HILLS - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Zack and Jay share blank looks as an animated TREVOR, 30s, rattles on. CARLY, 18, hipster chic, with her breasts popping out, looks bored as she texts.

TREVOR

It was hard to leave traditional film, but I'm working with a lot of digital influencers now, like Carly here, who have instant access to over a million followers. We're working on the first-ever feature film for Vine.

ZACK

Aren't Vines only 7 seconds long?

TREVOR

We're going to string enough of them together where it makes a narrative. It's going to be like an interactive choose-your-own adventure for a new generation. And then the finished film will be available on YouTube for download.

JAY

How'd you build your following?

CARLY
 (without looking up)
 I'm a life coach.

Beat as they process that nugget. Carly just wanders off, head buried in her phone the whole time.

JAY
 So what happens when these "loyal followers," i.e. what I can only assume are countless hormonal teenage boys, grow up and get jobs and don't have time for Carly's mindless selfies anymore? They can't really expect to maintain these audiences, can they?

Trevor and Zack are distracted as a few models walk by in short skirts.

ZACK
 No man, you're totally right...

Blake heads back over eagerly with an Oculus headset.

BLAKE
 Did you guys try the Oculus yet?
 It's virtual porn. They say it's a potential 50 billion dollar business.

Zack and Trevor fight over the Oculus trying to get a look.

JAY
 If that's not a sign of the apocalypse, I don't know what is.
 I need some air...

But they're not paying attention. And Jay wanders off just before Liz and Jess rush back up.

LIZ
 Hey! Where'd Jay go?

Zack and Trevor are distracted as they fight over sneaking peaks into the Oculus. Liz looks around.

JESS
 We need to get out of here.

ZACK
 (still distracted)
 We just got here.

JESS
(re the Oculus)
So does that count as a threesome
if you're both sharing it?

Zack immediately lets go.

JESS (CONT'D)
Idiots. This is Lax Mandis' house.

ZACK
Oh this is going to be awesome.

TREVOR
Mandis? Fuck that guy. I'm
convinced he gets his ideas from
fortune cookies.

The gang glances around the party looking for Jay. Liz gets out her cellphone and starts texting Jay.

Jay wanders to a side couch by the pool and plops down. He doesn't look so hot, but takes another passing Jello shot anyway. A few execs linger around him texting. He overhears the conversation of two people in front of him.

EXEC #2
It puts you in a virtual theater,
so it's just like you're going to
the movies, but without having to
leave your home!

JAY
(to himself)
I think I'm going to be sick...

A MAN sitting next to Jay can't help but laugh. Jay turns to him.

JAY (CONT'D)
Can you believe this? I'm scared
for what this town's future looks
like.

MAN
Right. Although you can't really
fight the future, can you?

JAY
But it doesn't mean you have to lay
down and rid yourself of all
creativity either.

MAN

True. But the secret to change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.

JAY

What is that? Plato?

MAN

I dunno, I read it on a fortune cookie.

They cheers their drinks as the execs continue in front of them.

EXEC #4

I'm really trying to capture an authenticity that I feel is missing in today's entertainment. We're inundated with all of these superhero movies, escapism for escapism, but nobody is doing anything that's really connecting with audiences anymore.

Perhaps some hope? Jay and the Man look intrigued.

EXEC #4 (CONT'D)

So I'm working on a film where we've pulled all of the most popular hashtags across social media and written the entire screenplay in hashtag. These are real people, using real hashtags.

The Man cracks up, but Jay can't help himself.

JAY

I'm sorry, I couldn't help but overhear. Did you say hashtag?

EXEC #4

I call it: hashtag hashtag.

He does the international symbol for hashtag with his hands. Jay is speechless. The Man is still laughing.

EXEC #4 (CONT'D)

Do you get it? Because it's a hashtag.

Exec #2 now does the symbol with his hands (because that's helping). Jay stands up, agitated and a bit tipsy, but he can't stop what's been building from coming out.

JAY

Oh, I get it. Years from now, when historians look back and wonder at what point did society decide to give up, they're going to point to this night, this conversation actually, as the night that all original thought came to die.

Exec #4 is taken aback and looks around for help.

JAY (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you? All of you? Can't you see how desensitizing these apps are making us? Virtual sex? We can literally go fuck ourselves now? And we wonder why people can't sit still for two hours in a theater anymore, it's because of people like Mr. Hashtag over here. Hashtag if you say hashtag one more time I'm going to beat you over the head with a hashtag until it knocks some sense into you.

EXEC #4

I actually don't know how that would be possible...

MAN

Come on, man, they're just having fun.

JAY

No! When did we become complacent to churn out the same recycled mindless garbage? Instead of taking risks, we're worried about how many likes we're getting as our heads are constantly bowed at a 45 degree angle to see how many people are validating our every thought. It's all bullshit. But we perpetuate the cycle until our attention spans are less than a second long and we can't focus on anything meaningful because we're too busy seeing what Zack had for breakfast in the hefe filter.

ZACK

(aside)

It was an acai bowl.

JAY

And it's polluting and seeping into everything we do and how we live. But is what we're gaining by looking at our devices really worth what we're losing by not being in the moment, connected to those around us? We're caught in a constant stutter step checking everyone's statuses, but that's not real. And the shit we're putting on screen these days?

Liz and Jess try to get Jay's attention to stop to no avail.

JAY (CONT'D)

End of Watch meets Lord of the Rings? Gravity Underwater? Barnacle? It's like we're literally reaching into the trash and gluing old screenplays together. And then we wonder why box office continues to go down while people would rather watch Carly for 7 seconds a day.

Carly looks up from her phone for the first time. Huh?

JAY (CONT'D)

Why aren't we demanding more from ourselves? We all got into this industry for a reason. Let's remind ourselves how good we can be when we make something real, something authentic, something that connects us, as people, and speaks to our hearts and minds. Something that doesn't have to be a sequel or a superhero. We're better than the sewer-dwelling Lax Mandis's of the world.

Jay, exhausted, pleads to a lost audience. Silence. Zack begins a slow clap, but Jess punches his arm to stop.

And, of course, the Man finally stands up to confront Jay. 6 foot 2 inches of douchebag, he is LAX MANDIS, lanky, overgrown man-child. Lax greets our hero with a smile.

LAX

Hi, Lax Mandis. I don't think I
ever got your name...

Lax puts out his hand to shake. Jay looks uneasy. His eyes narrow. He looks at the face that encompasses all that disgusts him with the industry and his insides begin to broil.

Jay stares daggers through that smug, privileged look on Lax's face. His crooked smile taunting Jay. Is he going to punch him? His fists clench. The crowd looks nervous.

Jay looks like this is his moment, his righteous moment where he finally rights all the wrongs in this world by telling Lax off in the most victorious of fashions in front of all of his peers... but instead he leans over and vomits into the pool.

Lax takes a step back and tilts his head sideways as Jay heaves.

JESS

(to a stunned Liz)

Well there goes that last glimmer
of hope.

Blake in full Oculus gear appears on the lawn in the background humping the grass. Oblivious.

EXT. MANSION IN THE HILLS - STREET CORNER - NIGHT

Jess, Zack, and a slumped-over Jay sit in a row on the curb. An Uber driver pulls up.

UBER #1

Are you Phil?

JESS

Not us.

ZACK

Uber is like a drunken bat signal.
You just have to be sober enough to
touch a button and, like magic,
Raul in a Toyota Prius suddenly
appears to take you home. Thanks,
Raul, I almost slept in that
bush...

JAY

Where'd Liz go?

JESS
She got an uber.

JAY
Fuck. I should call her.

JESS
Don't worry about it. We've all
been there.

JAY
Really? Because I just vomited in a
pool in front of all my colleagues.

JESS
Well I haven't been *there* there,
but I know how you feel.

Another Uber pulls up.

UBER #2
Are you Bryan?

ZACK
Not us.

The driver moves on.

JESS
So you let off some steam. Big
deal.

ZACK
Cheer up. I got you a souvenir.

Zack hands him an Oculus. Another Uber pulls up.

JESS
I don't think you were supposed to
take those.

JAY
I just want to go home.

Jess regards him.

UBER #3
Are you Carlos?

Zack is about to say something, but-

JESS
Yes, we're Carlos! Come on.

ZACK

What are the chances you're actually going to see him again anyway? Barnacle will be a distant memory by tomorrow.

Jess pulls Jay up and they all hop into the car. The Uber driver pulls away. A guy, presumably Carlos, is on his phone looking around.

INT. BRONZE PICTURES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Lax Mandis sits smug alongside Karl (the director), Peters, and Lyle. Karl is an intense Russian man in his 50s who looks like he doesn't speak much English, so he nods along instead.

Jay looks like he may throw up again, but is hanging in.

PETERS

Barnacle! Wow. Just wow.

LAX

(smug)

They said a comedic version of THE FLY couldn't be done -

JAY

(rubbing his head)

Nobody said that.

Lyle shoots him a look.

LAX

But \$120M later and we're already working on the sequel.

LYLE

Really great stuff. So tell us more about DARK?

KARL

When I read Lax screenplay, it like I little boy on countryside. The vast expanse of air and beauty as I run through the reeds, free... Until the soldiers came, took my mother. Helpless, I escape inward and use imagination to drown out the screams. Hiding for what felt like years as the terrors closed in around me.

Well that was unexpected. Lax jumps in.

LAX

It's like PANIC ROOM set inside a PANIC ROOM.

KARL

Yes, so much panic.

LYLE

Well we all couldn't be more excited to partner with the studio on this one. We think it's really special.

Lyle reaches over to shake Lax's hand. All smiles.

KARL

So much panic...

INT. BRONZE PICTURES - PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peters, Lyle, Jay confer. Peters has an energy bar. He's starting to look a little heavier. Dave hands coffee out to everyone.

PETERS

Did anybody else get any of that?

LYLE

It doesn't matter. It's Tom Cruise in a genre thriller. We'll sell the shit out of foreign and hope it hits in China. Are there any Chinese elements?

DAVE

Maybe you can make one of the Orcs Chinese?

LYLE

That's not a bad idea. Figure it out, guys. Now where the hell are those pancakes?!

Lyle leaves the room in a hurry with Dave.

JAY

It just feels like we're really reaching here with the screenplay.

PETERS

Tom Cruise signed on. An actor of his caliber wouldn't do it if it wasn't good.

JAY

I'm going to refrain from commenting on that.

They both look to the wall at a poster of a generic-looking action comedy starring Robert DeNiro called: Grandpa's Last Stand.

PETERS

Nonetheless. This is happening. Lax did have one kind of odd request though.

JAY

What...?

PETERS

He wants you on set.

Jay looks dead inside.

EXT. THE STEPHEN MURPHY COMPANY - DAY

A strip mall off Ventura in the valley. Dry cleaners, massage parlor, pet store, Subway, and a generic sign for The Stephen Murphy Company.

MURPHY

(V.O.)

You're asking me for advice?

INT. THE STEPHEN MURPHY COMPANY - DAY

Movie posters from the 80s/90s hang on the walls. There is a lifer assistant, CAROL, 50s, sitting outside the one office, which looks like it hasn't been updated in two decades. Carol plays Pokemon Go on her phone.

Stephen MURPHY, 60s, weathered from the industry and a bit resigned, sits behind his desk. Jay opposite.

JAY

You gave me my first internship back in college. You're the reason I thought I could carve out a career in this town. I really value your opinion.

MURPHY

Lean in close, kid, I'm going to tell you a secret.

Jay leans in. Murphy throws a script at his face.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Take the job! For the love of... I'm working in a strip mall in the valley. My phones aren't exactly ringing.

They're not. Although Carol is about to catch a Pokemon.

JAY

I hate pretending to be a cog in the machine. I feel like I'm perpetuating the same bullshit and whatever conscience I may have had is yelling at me to stop. At what point do we sacrifice our morals and righteous indignation and just... sell out?

MURPHY

This point. Right now. This is the point. Righteous indignation? Do I have to remind you, I'm working in a strip mall in the valley? I'm pretty sure guys are getting happy endings next door while I'm in here reading scripts by UCLA students reimagining old Disney properties. Beauty and the Beast from the point of view of the clock? Go fuck yourself.

JAY

The clock? I would've gone with the candlestick.

MURPHY

I am telling you, it is a slippery slope. You're in the game! Use this opportunity to learn how to handle a production on your own and then you can do your own thing. Just put up with it for a little bit longer.

JAY

You don't think I'm selling out?

MURPHY

What I wouldn't give to sell out.
I'd love to sell out. Instead, I'm
working in a strip mall in the
valley where the highlight of my
week is Marta at the Dry Cleaners
giving me a discount on my blazers.

JAY

It actually sounds like you have a
really nice community here.

MURPHY

What I wouldn't give to go back to
the 90s. When all you needed to
get something green lit was half an
idea and a cheap hook. Arnold
Schwarzenegger pregnant? We made
that movie. That actually
happened. You remember that,
Carol?

CAROL

(without looking up from
her phone)
You set women back 20 years.

JAY

But that's exactly my point.
What's changed? Rather, what are
we doing to change it?

MURPHY

Kid, you can't change it. This is
Hollywood. You just have to make
the most of it and put something
out there that hopefully sells some
popcorn. And do enough drugs in
the interim to swallow your pride
and get you through each day.

Jay gets up to leave and pauses at the door.

JAY

Right. It's a cliché, but my dad
used to say if you loved what you
did you never had to work a day in
your life, and if you loved who
you're with, then you wouldn't want
those days to end... I used to
really love this town, but it's
sure starting to feel a lot like
work.

MURPHY

Listen, I get it. And I wish it were different. I truly do. But heed my advice... or you could find yourself working in a strip mall in the valley where you're afraid to enter your office after hours because you're convinced the pet store is a front for the Russian mafia.

Jay exits, passes Carol.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Carol? How's the rest of my day look?

Still not looking up from her phone.

CAROL

You're speaking at UCLA at 3.

MURPHY

Fuck.

EXT. THE STEPHEN MURPHY COMPANY - DAY

Jay exits a bit defeated. A businessman leaves the massage parlor next door with a pep in his step.

JAY

(to himself)

Well that was a mistake.

BUSINESSMAN

Ask for Claudia next time.

Jay looks at him awry - awkward - as the businessman shuffles off. He stands there for a minute, not knowing his next move. A sign for Vlad's Pet Supply, featuring a stoic-looking Siberian Husky for a logo, gazes down upon him.

INT. THE DOG CAFE - DAY

Liz sits opposite Jay in a window booth. There's an adorable dog on Liz's lap as they share a coffee.

LIZ

This is great!

JAY

What are you talking about?

LIZ

You get to make a movie. Who cares what it is?

JAY

But it represents everything I hate. I just don't know if I'd be able to look myself in the mirror.

LIZ

Get rid of your mirrors then. Morals are overrated.

JAY

How's everything been with you?

LIZ

Good! I'm glad you called. Believe it or not, I actually got a couple of leads from that party.

JAY

That's really great. I'm glad something good came from it... And hey - I want to apologize for what happened. I'm not sure what came over me.

LIZ

It's fine. Usually you have to pay money to see entertainment like that.

JAY

Ha-ha.

LIZ

Look - We wouldn't be able to appreciate the highs if we weren't low now and again. It happens. But I am curious - do you often carry a soapbox around with you? It must get really heavy...

JAY

Okay, okay. Everyone's a comedian. Thank you for that. Why'd you choose this place anyway?

LIZ

All of these dogs are up for adoption - I thought it'd cheer you up.

Liz holds up her adorable puppy and tries feeding it coffee.

JAY

I think there's something wrong
with mine.

We now see the dog on Jay's lap and it's a mangy-looking mutt, fairly comatose. Jay lifts his paw, but it flops back down.

LIZ

You know... If Mandis is as bad as you say, why not use this experience to get closer to him and expose him for what he really is?

JAY

That's... That's actually kind of ingenious. Remind me never to cross you. And I do have an old friend at The Wrap always looking for dirt...

LIZ

See! So you get to learn how to make a movie and bring down the system at the same time. You can thank me on the red carpet.

Jay's dog sneezes and it freaks him out. They laugh.

FADE TO:

SUPER: ONE WEEK TO PRODUCTION (AFTER 7 WEEKS OF PREP WHEN THE DIRECTOR REALLY WANTED 12)

EXT. THE STUDIO - GATE 4 ENTRANCE - DAY

Jay pulls up to the security, who couldn't care less, playing Pokemon Go. Jay hands over his ID.

JAY

Here for DARK.

SECURITY

Stage 20. Park in the structure ahead, anywhere not marked reserve.

He hands Jay a pass that he puts on his dash.

JAY

Thanks.

Jay eases into the giant parking garage. First floor, a handful of golf carts line all of the spots. No worries. A big electronic speedometer clocks Jay's speed (10mph) over a sign that reads SLOW as he ascends to the second floor.

Jay navigates the second floor, but all spaces are marked handicapped. He speeds up to the third floor now, 12mph, all spots are marked as 1-hour and 2-hour temporary spaces. OK...

Slightly peeved, Jay circles to the next floor, 16mph: Reserved for the Studio. He hits the gas to the next floor, 17mph, sees a few open spots, pulls into one, marked Reserved for Electric Vehicles. You've got to be kidding me.

Jay backs up, and guns it to the next floor, 22mph, no open spots. He gasses it to the next, 45mph, he's on the roof now, cars lined up everywhere, but he spies one open spot towards the end. He veers into it, sees a handwritten paper sign: Reserved for Vince Vaughn's Cousin. Jay hesitates as he reads the sign (what the fuck...?) and decides to park in the spot anyway.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - DAY

Jay walks past various stages with a studio map in his hand. They all look the same. He turns the map over looking for clarity. At that moment, a studio tour tram slowly drives by. Jay looks up to see tourists ogle him. One raises their camera to take a picture of him. He looks around bewildered and more confused than angry.

The tram moves on just as a couple of zombies in makeup walk by and snap him out of it.

JAY

Hey, do you guys know where Stage
20 is from here?

ZOMBIE

Just around the corner past the
apocalypse.

Jay nods thanks and looks ahead. There is, indeed, a set of destruction and apocalypse being built ahead.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - DAY

Jay arrives at the stage for DARK. People hurry about. An elaborate closet is being constructed on the main stage. Lax Mandis walks past with a young, female PA and then does a double take at Jay and circles back, oddly enthusiastic.

LAX
There he is!

JAY
Here I am...

Lax puts his arm around Jay as they walk and talk.

LAX
Jay, I couldn't help but feel some tension these past few weeks and I'd like to clear the air. Do you know why I was hoping they'd send you?

JAY
Because you have a twisted sense of humor?

Lax stops in his tracks and laughs, a little too loudly.

LAX
What? No! I get it. I've worked in this business a while now. And haters are always gonna hate... hate, hate, hate, hate.

JAY
Are you quoting Taylor Swift right now?

LAX
But I think you're different. And what you said at my party really resonated. You know, before you decided to puke in my pool that is. It's hard to find people with your kind of passion anymore and I want this to be a positive experience for you.

JAY
Really?

LAX
Absolutely. And that's why I have a special job for you here. A job that's at the crux of this production, crucial to the flow and energy of everyone on set. Here it is.

They've arrived at craft services. CARLOS, 40s, mans the station and looks a little perplexed himself.

JAY

This is craft services.

LAX

Oh but it's so much more! Crafty Carlos is a microcosm for the entire shoot - pivotal to the well-being of everyone on set.

JAY

This is because I puked in your pool, isn't it?

LAX

Little bit.

Lax pats him on the back and heads off after another young, female PA.

CARLOS

Fuck that guy. Chilaquiles?

Carlos offers Jay some chilaquiles as he gets a text from Liz: **How's Operation Axe Mandis?**

Jay grins and types out a reply: **Enemy smarter than anticipated. Commencing recon and... chilaquiles.**

Jay sends the reply and overhears a conversation around the corner.

BRENT (O.S.)

Little Miss Sunshine meets...

STEVE (O.S.)

Speed.

Laughter. Jay goes to check it out and sees BRENT, TYLER, and STEVE, all around 30, lounging.

TYLER

I got this one. When their daughter wins a local beauty contest, a dysfunctional family must travel across the country to nationals without going over 50mph or the runner up's father will blow up their van.

BRENT

Dark.

Jay laughs and joins in.

JAY
What is this?

STEVE
Two movies get thrown out and then someone has to come up with a logline for them.

TYLER
Star Wars meets...

BRENT
The Hangover.

JAY
I'll go. Uhh... Two days before he is to marry Princess Leia, Han Solo, along with Luke and Chewbacca, go for one last bender through the galaxy that ends up with one of them frozen in carbonite.

More laughter all around.

STEVE
Nice. What's your name?

JAY
Jay. I'm with the financier. You guys?

STEVE
I'm Steve with the studio. That's Tyler, who works for Cruise, and Brent, who's with Mandis.

BRENT
Are you the guy that puked in his pool?

JAY
Sorry if you had to clean that up.

BRENT
I didn't, for the record, but that was pretty awesome.

JAY
So what's been going on here?

STEVE
They're about done constructing the closets and then we start shooting in a week...

They all look over to the main stage where a giant, walk-in closet is being constructed.

JAY

This all seems vastly unnecessary.
My apartment has a closet we
could've used.

BRENT

If you're looking for logic, you're
in the wrong town.

TYLER

Office Space meets...

STEVE

Swingers.

They all look a bit stumped. Jay looks around taking it all in, unsure.

INT. SOUL CYCLE - NIGHT

Jay walks in with Jess.

JAY

What am I doing here?

JESS

You're too stressed! This will be
good for you.

Zack strolls up wearing lululemon pants.

JAY

I didn't realize they made
lululemon for guys...

ZACK

Oh yeah man. Check out my butt in
this thing. This is amazing.

JAY

I'm actually trying to un-see it.

Publicity girls Cindy and Karen stride by into the room.

CINDY

Jay?! You do SoulCycle? Good for
you.

KAREN

Work, bitch.

They keep going. The gang enter after them.

INT. SOUL CYCLE - MOMENTS LATER

Jay is sweating, trying to keep up in the back of the room on a bike next to Zack and Jess. The instructor in front screams out directions as the Hamilton score plays over their conversation.

JAY

I immediately regret this decision.

Zack and Jess are unphazed. Jess actually sends emails on her blackberry.

JAY (CONT'D)

Guys, I'm not sure I'm into this anymore.

ZACK

I can hook you up with my lululemon guy. Non-chafing.

JAY

No, I mean, I'm not sure about this career anymore. I look around at the people in positions above me and I don't like anything that I see.

ZACK

China, man.

JAY

What?

ZACK

You know, China. It's fucking everything up.

JAY

What are you talking about?

Jess finishes sending an email.

JESS

You need to embrace the trends is all. This industry is changing every day, and the margins are getting smaller, so we all have to improvise a bit and adapt.

JAY

It's more than that. I think I'm getting disillusioned. I just don't know what else I'm qualified for after spending the last 10 years developing screenplays.

ZACK

Maybe you could write? Oh, maybe you could write about us?!

JAY

No, that's an awful idea. Nobody wants to watch us. We're horrible people.

JESS

And I hate movies about aimless twenty-somethings. Get a job.

ZACK

I've got a job and I still feel aimless...

JAY

I actually did try writing earlier this year. I had an idea about Arthur Miller I was working on.

ZACK

Football movies don't work overseas.

JESS

Why didn't you tell us you were writing? We could totally package that...

JAY

I wasn't sure how you'd react. Johnny was once a part of our group and now he gets looked down upon.

ZACK

Johnny gets looked down upon because he's selling used cars in the valley and has an unhealthy obsession with chia pets. I'd love to read your football movie, dude.

JAY

I just don't know when this turned into a job.

(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

I'm starting to think I should cruise, do the bare minimum. If I didn't care so much, none of this would be happening.

JESS

Well that's bullshit. Here's a thought: Why don't you actually try to make the movie you're working on good? It's hard enough to put something into production and you at least have a chance to make a difference. Why throw away your shot?

JAY

Nice Hamilton reference.

ZACK

Yeah. Just make sure nobody shoots you in the end...

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - DAY

Steve and Brent eat chilaquiles, but Jay is distracted as he holds a marked up script in his hands looking towards the director, Karl. Karl is pacing and mumbling inaudibly to himself by the main closet. There are now multiple versions of closets on the stage.

STEVE

I had to cut my cable. It was getting way too expensive.

BRENT

Oh same. It's ridiculous.

STEVE

Now I only pay for Netflix and Amazon. And HBO. I guess I also have Showtime. Oh and Hulu. But that's it. What about you, Jay?

JAY

What? Sorry guys, I'll catch up.

They shrug as Jay heads over to Karl.

JAY (CONT'D)

Excuse me, Mr. Karlovic?

KARL

So much blood.

JAY
I can come back.

KARL
What? Who are you?

JAY
I'm with the financier. Jay.
We've met multiple times.

KARL
Yes?

JAY
I was wondering if we could discuss
the screenplay.

KARL
What screenplay?

Jay offers him the screenplay and notes. Karl nods his head
along.

JAY
The screenplay for this movie...

KARL
What is this...?

JAY
See, I get that this is a genre
piece, but that doesn't mean we
can't delve into the psyche of
Cruise's character a bit and really
get to the root of his motivations;
what the orcs represent themselves
and perhaps highlight his abuse as
an orphan? Mr. Karlovic...?

KARL
This isn't my screenplay.

Karl tosses the screenplay.

JAY
I don't...

KARL
I write new piece. Where is it?
Full of passion and desire, and -
what's the word - genocide.

JAY
What now?

Jay looks around for help. Lax is in the background hitting on a young, female PA (surprise) and looks over as Karl becomes more agitated. He hustles over.

LAX
What's going on here?

KARL
What happened to revision?

LAX
(to Jay)
What'd you do?

JAY
I have no idea.

Karl is increasingly upset and begins making a scene.

KARL
My film! The trials of young man,
trapped in darkness, the war
encroaching just beyond his four
walls, but tormented by the guilt
of having to leave his mother on
the outside, not knowing if she
live or die, the struggle, the
blood! Where is my script! Where is
my mother!?

JAY
I'd actually like to read that...

LAX
Karl, we discussed this...

KARL
No!

LAX
Karlovic!

Lax suddenly begins speaking and arguing with Karl in Russian. Jay is completely at a loss and heads back to Brent and Steve finishing their chilaquiles. Steve doesn't have anywhere to wipe his hands though as it's quite messy.

STEVE
I didn't know Lax spoke Russian.

JAY
Neither did I. Although I kind of
feel like he's making half of it
up.

He is. And Karl looks askance on occasion before continuing to argue.

JAY (CONT'D)

I wonder what this means for the production.

KARL

(to Lax)
Fuck you!

STEVE

That could translate into anything.

KARL

I done!

STEVE

Same with that.

Karl storms up to Jay on his way out the door and hugs him.

KARL

(to Jay)
Thank you.

Karl exits. Everyone has stopped and stares at Jay, speechless. Steve wipes his hands off on Jay's shirt. Jay looks on helpless at an aggravated Lax. Brent slowly side steps away from Jay.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

A shot is slammed down inside a dive bar that rests just outside the studio. Jay sits alone in front of the empty glass. His iPhone on the counter buzzes. The bartender comes back around.

BARTENDER

You working on one of the films over there?

JAY

If you can call it that...

He glances at his phone, 12 missed calls. Peters texts him: Call me.

BARTENDER

What's it about?

Jay hesitates. He stares at himself in the bar mirror.

JAY

It's kind of like Panic Room.
Within a Panic Room... That ate
another Panic Room.

BARTENDER

Huh. So kind of like Inception
with a Hitchcockian twist? Cool.

Jay takes a second look at the bartender, who pours him
another drink and moves on. His phone vibrates. This time a
text from Liz: **Does the Operation needs reinforcements? I
look good in uniform.**

Jay finally smiles again, has a thought, and dials a number
on his phone.

JAY

(into phone)

Craig, it's Jay. You still over at
The Wrap? I may have something for
you...

I/E. JAY'S CAR - STUDIO PARKING GARAGE - MORNING

Jay idles in his car. He takes a deep breath, collecting
himself, and looks down at his phone pulled up to The Wrap
headline: **Trouble in the Dark? Mandis clashes with director.**

Jay puts his phone away and stares through his windshield
noticing a new parking sign: **Vince Vaughn's Cousin (Please
stop parking here)**. He takes a moment before shutting the
ignition off and exiting.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - MORNING

Jay pulls out his phone, takes a deep breath, and dials as he
makes his way towards Stage 20.

PETERS (V.O.)

Jay? Is that you? What's going on
over there? Where have you been?

JAY

Look, Peters, I can explain.

Jay can hear audible cheers in the background of the phone
call.

JAY (CONT'D)

Wait. Are you at the Dodgers
game...?

Intercut with:

INT. DODGER STADIUM - DAY

Peters, looking no worse for wear, sits in a suite with Dave sipping on a coke. Peters munches on an energy bar and has a foam #1 finger. Dave eats popcorn out of his lap.

PETERS

No... Listen, Lax told me whatever happened between you two is water over the bridge. He really wants you to learn from him and it'd be great to build this relationship for the company.

JAY

He put me in charge of craft services.

PETERS

What happened to Carlos?

JAY

No, it's just... he's fucking with me. But never mind that, sorry to go MIA last night. I can explain everything...

PETERS

TMZ already got ahold of some security footage. It'd actually be kind of comical if, you know, it weren't our entire company on the line. And somehow The Wrap is all over us, too.

Dave looks down at his phone playing Karl freaking out and flailing his arms on loop. He shows the video to Peters.

JAY

This is salvageable. And if we can't work it out with Karl, I've got a short list of great directors backed up looking for work right now that would be perfect.

PETERS

Whoa - Slow down. The studio already sorted everything out.

JAY

Really? Karl's coming back?

PETERS

What? No, that guy is probably in a bunker somewhere. Look, we all want to keep this thing moving along, so they went with the next best guy who knows the material.

JAY

Oh no. Please don't.

PETERS

He's already immersed himself with everyone, so it's an easy transition, plus it's an important relationship for the studio. And us, mind you.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - CONTINUOUS

Jay slows his pace as he approaches the stage entrance. A home run is heard over the phone along with massive cheering.

PETERS (V.O.)

Look, I gotta go. Try not to fuck things up. Again.

Jay stops in his tracks and stares at his phone.

JAY

Fuck.

LAX

Well look who it is...

Jay looks up to find Lax walking up to him, giddy.

JAY

Lax - I want to apologize for yesterday. I'm not sure how things escalated so quickly.

LAX

Apologize? Are you kidding? I could hug you. I've been dying to direct. I'm tired of watching other people fuck up my work.

Lax moves on and Jay tries to catch up.

JAY

Well that's not what I was expecting. In that case, could we talk about some of those script changes? I really think if we hone in on Cruise's motivation we could-holy shit, is that a tiger?!

A tiger wanders up and grazes against Lax's leg. Jay freaks out. Lax lights up.

LAX

Oh there she is. She always wanders off when she's off-leash. Come here, Petunia.

He feeds her a treat.

JAY

What the hell is a tiger doing on set?!

LAX

Petunia is my emotional support tiger. Yes, you are... This is a very stressful time for me, Jay. In case you don't remember, our director quit yesterday. I feel like you were there...

JAY

OK, but still, you can't have a tiger on set.

LAX

Sure I can. See? Here's my doctor's note.

Lax hands Jay a card.

JAY

This is a Starbucks gift card!

LAX

Oh well it's here somewhere. Now, what were you saying about my script?

Jay can't help but be distracted by Petunia who follows Jay's movements.

JAY

I just think... it couldn't hurt to... punch up some of the backstory.

LAX

Oh backstory, blah blah blah. Slows too much down. Right, Petunia? People want popcorn, Jay. They want entertainment, escapism.

JAY

No offense, but two 100 million dollar movies flopped this past weekend, I'm not sure popcorn is good enough anymore. Audiences are too smart.

LAX

That's misleading. Did you look at the Cinemascore?

JAY

OK. The Cinemascore says the studio is going to lose 100 million dollars... Look - Nobody should root for these movies to fail, but shouldn't we at least take notice and try to do something different...?

Lax is restless. Petunia growls.

LAX

Now you've upset Petunia. Bottom line, Jaybird, is the studio green lit this script, your boss green lit this script. We're shooting this script. If you have a problem, you can talk to the script supervisor.

JAY

Is the script supervisor-

LAX

It's Petunia.

Lax wanders off with Petunia. Jay lingers, helpless, and heads towards the trailers to find Steve, Brent, and Tyler playing cards.

JAY

Do you guys know Lax has a tiger here?!

BRENT

Oh shit, did he bring Petunia? She was supposed to stay in the car.

Brent rushes off.

STEVE

That tiger can read my thoughts.

JAY

How is this normal?

TYLER

Dude, how is any of this normal?

Good point. Jay's exasperated, but, defeated, he takes Brent's seat and joins them.

EXT. LA ZOO - DAY

Jay walks the grounds with Liz.

LIZ

I didn't even realize LA had a zoo! What made you want to come here?

JAY

It just came to me. So did anything ever come from those leads?

Some hesitancy from Liz.

LIZ

It didn't work out. They put me up for something else, but I'm not crazy about it.

JAY

Well one for them and one for you, right? They'd be lucky to have you.

LIZ

What about you?

JAY

I can't tell if Mandis is a sociopath or if he's just messing with me.

LIZ

So another day at the office?

JAY

I'm not sure what the point is anymore. Did you know The Beatles recorded their final album when they were all just 29 years old?

LIZ

Oh yeah? ...Did you know Dr. Seuss didn't write The Cat in the Hat until he was 54?

JAY

Huh? Really?

LIZ

You can't compare yourself to others in the arts. There's no straight line to success and there's no timeline for the creative process. And if there is, then it's on a giant broken loop.

Jay takes that in stride.

LIZ (CONT'D)

How's the war front going?

JAY

Collecting battle victories for now. But it is far from over.

They arrive at the gorilla enclosure. A tram pulls up near them and tourists take pictures. The gorilla just stares at Jay as Liz also raises her phone to take a picture. Jay flashes back to the moment on the lot where the tram tourist took a picture of him. It's eerily similar. The gorilla looks on helpless. Jay lowers Liz's camera, she doesn't know why, but is fine with it.

JAY (CONT'D)

This world works in mysterious ways.

LIZ

Yeah. That's why I prefer to live on another planet.

She walks off. He follows. There's almost a skip in his step.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20

Busy stagehands and production assistants scurry about. Jay idles trying not to get in the way as people hustle around him. Steve, Brent, and Tyler lounge nearby.

JAY
(more to himself)
Do you ever get the feeling you're
just in the way?

Jess suddenly walks up typing on her blackberry.

JESS
It's my job to be in the way.

JAY
Jess! What are you doing here?

JESS
I'm visiting the apocalypse next
door.

JAY
Well there's something you don't
hear every day. How's it going?

JESS
It's a zombie film from the
zombie's perspective... That's how
it's going. And someone keeps
parking in my client's spot. Kill
me that this is my life. I wish I
just repped writers...

Steve is reading something on his phone and chimes in.

STEVE
Did you guys see this? One of the
PAs died after an accident today on
the set of Lost Followers. She was
only 27.

BRENT
Wow. That's awful.

TYLER
Really puts things in perspective.

JESS
Shit... They're shooting Lost
Followers already?

Jess immediately gets on her phone.

JESS (CONT'D)

What the fuck, Benny?! You were supposed to tell me when casting started up again. Now what the hell am I going to do...

Jess storms off.

JAY

Good to see you, too.

Lax sidles up reading off his phone.

LAX

"Mandis Endangers Film Set with Endangered Animal." Do you guys know where the hell this is coming from?

JAY

(shrugging)

Maybe one of the crew was nervous having a live tiger loose on set? Just a thought.

LAX

But Petunia wouldn't hurt a fly. She's a rescue. They were going to put her down for maiming her previous owner - total misunderstanding by the way - until we intervened.

JAY

What was that last part?

LAX

Where is that cat anyway... Here kitty, kitty...

Lax walks off and the gang goes back to normal. Jay texts Liz: **Another win for the home team.** Jay puts his phone away and looks at all of the action happening around him.

He then notices a spindly young man rearranging set lights so that he can make shadow puppets on the wall. Jay rushes over.

JAY

Hey! What are you doing?

The spindly young man doesn't speak well and retreats into himself a bit.

SPINDLY

Hmmmm.

JAY

Hello? What exactly are you doing over here?

Steve notices what's unfolding and hurries over to gather Jay. They slowly walk away towards Crafty Carlos' table.

STEVE

You can't talk to Freddy like that, man.

JAY

Who is that guy? He's breaking down a day's work.

Brent and Tyler join them. Freddy goes back to making elaborate shadow puppets in the background, oblivious.

STEVE

He's a diversity hire.

JAY

Well he looks like he doesn't know what he's doing...

BRENT

Whoa. Racist much?

Lax overhears nearby and re-joins the conversation. (He was looking under a table for Petunia).

TYLER

Are you saying that because he's black?

JAY

What? No! Guys - I'm black.

Did I forget to mention that?

TYLER

Really? I thought you were just tan.

JAY

No - I'm black. And Radio over there is playing master puppet theater on our very expensive soundstage and we're losing the day's work.

LAX

Do we have a problem here, Jay?
I'm sensing some racial tensions.

JAY

Not at all! But look at him.

TYLER

(looking at the shadows)
Kind of looks like a swan.

LAX

Freddy!

Freddy walks over to Lax.

LAX (CONT'D)

Freddy, this is Jay. Freddy is part of the studio's new diversity initiative. Did you know that less than 1% of movies released theatrically last year featured a diverse lead and less than 1% of those were played by Denzel Washington?

JAY

I don't think you're calculating that right...

LAX

(talking over Jay)
We're all very supportive of Freddy's input and contribution. Here you go.

Lax feeds Freddy a treat and he wanders back to the wall for his puppet theater.

JAY

Did you just feed him your tiger treat?

LAX

I'm not sure I like your attitude, Jay. Do you not think Hollywood should be more diverse?

JAY

OK, yes, but you can't honestly pretend this is helping. It's a systemic problem if anything and this is just putting a band-aid over a larger issue.

(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

If we want to tell diverse stories, we need to find ways to support diverse voices at the outset of the creative process and not at the end when your script is written and the only thing you need is, apparently, shadow puppets.

TYLER

(again, at the shadows)
It's a dragon!

LAX

You're doing great, Freddy! Look, Jay, I don't know what your problem is. Everyone loves puppets. It's good for morale. Besides, you don't see Carlos complaining.

Lax walks off before Jay can respond. Carlos chimes in.

CARLOS

But what I really want to do is direct...

JAY

(to himself)
Where's Katzenberg when you need a memo?

Petunia gnaws on a plate of chilaquiles nearby on the ground.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - LATER

Steve, Brent, and Jay lounge by the trailers.

STEVE

It's this cool new speakeasy in Hollywood. The entrance is in a garage, then you walk through a fridge, and then you have to crawl through a microwave to get to the bar.

BRENT

That just seems like a lot of work for a drink.

Peters walks up with Dave in tow. Peters looks like he's put on some pounds.

PETERS

Hey, Jay. How we looking?

Jay does a double take at Peter's weight as he chomps down on another protein bar.

JAY

Good. They're just doing some run-throughs with Cruise.

Tyler hurries over to them.

TYLER

Uh, guys, Cruise won't come out of the closet.

DAVE

He'll come out when he's ready. My brother took years and then one day, bam, his ringtone is Britney and you can find him dancing Saturdays at The Abbey.

TYLER

No, literally, we can't get him out of the closet.

They head into the main staging area. A handful of elaborate closets and doors have been built. One main closet sits in the center and it all looks like one giant, interconnected puzzle. The guys sidle in.

Lax stands in front of the main closet mid-argument as a handful of stage hands pound on the door and try to get it open.

BRENT

Should we tell him it gets better?

STEVE

This is like R. Kelly's worst nightmare.

LAX

We're going to get you out of there!

CRUISE

(O.S.)

Fuck you, Mandis!

Lax is scrambling and walks away. He motions to Jay.

LAX

I give up. You wanted to produce. Produce.

JAY

What?!

CRUISE

(O.S.)

Who is that?!

JAY

Uh, Mr. Cruise. This is Jay with the financier. We've met multiple times.

CRUISE

You're trying my patience, Jay with the financier.

JAY

We're going to get you out of there.

(to the Stagehand)

What the hell can we do?

STAGEHAND

(to Jay)

It won't shimmy. It was supposed to swing back and forth here, but the hinges warped under the lamps, which for some reason were all pointed on this door.

Jay shakes his head as he looks over to Freddy, oblivious, who is petting Petunia.

JAY

Why can't we just bust it down?

STAGEHAND 2

It was a three-week build. This is all custom.

JAY

So's Tom Cruise.

CRUISE

(O.S.)

What's happening?

JAY

Fuck this.

Jay grabs a crowbar from the Stagehand.

JAY (CONT'D)

Stand back, Mr. Cruise.

CRUISE

(O.S.)

Wait, what?

Jay winds up and smashes through the door repeatedly. Lax was ordering chilaquiles from Carlos as he looks over and panics. He runs up. Cruise screams like a girl from the inside, but Jay makes a bigger hole and etches out enough room for Cruise to get through. Jay pulls him out. Cruise dusts himself off and looks at Jay like he may be nuts. Jay smirks a bit, proud of himself. One of the stagehands takes a selfie with Tom in the background.

JAY

Think of it this way, you can use the experience for the shoot. Sort of method in a way.

Cruise looks back at the smashed-in door and to Jay.

CRUISE

Huh? How about that?

Cruise calmly walks off and Tyler quickly follows behind. Lax steps up to Jay, who stills holds the crowbar. The stagehands struggle to put the closet back together.

JAY

I think I like this producing thing. You think he's all right?

Lax looks uneasy.

JAY (CONT'D)

I'm sure he's fine. He's probably fine. Right?

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - MOMENTS LATER

Lax, Jay, Brent, and Steve huddle around a table.

LAX

He's out.

BRENT

So out.

JAY

How can he do that now?

LAX

(reading off email)

Due to extenuating circumstances
and a hostile work environment
aided by one financier wielding a
quote-unquote crowbar at said
client's face - do you really need
me to go on?

Jay's quiet.

STEVE

I didn't realize force majeure
covered crowbars.

LAX

And to top it off another Wrap
article leaked from set.

Lax tosses his phone to the side in frustration. Steve reads.

BRENT

"Dark's Idea of Diversity? Mandis
Exposed."

LAX

These are beginning to piss me off.
I mean, they've got it all wrong.
I love those shadow puppets...

Jay texts Liz (Lax takes notice): **Victory sure builds an appetite. Dinner later?** The texting ellipses signifying Liz typing a reply shows up on Jay's phone. And then it disappears. Before Jay can think twice about it, Steve chimes in:

STEVE

OK, guys, but what are we going to
do here about Cruise? My bosses
are going to kill me.

LAX

Oh I already have the perfect
backup. We won't miss a beat. Big
action star.

(under his breath)

From the 80s.

There's a knock at the door. Tom Selleck, yes, that Tom Selleck, walks in.

JAY
(aside to Lax)
Were you just going down the
alphabet?!

TOM SELLECK
I gotta tell you guys, I really
connected to this script when I
read it. Because, well, I own a
closet.

The guys think he'll say more, but that's it.

LAX
Thanks, Tom. Go find your trailer
and settle in.

Tom walks out.

TOM SELLECK
(O.S.)
It's so dark! How'd it get so dark!

LAX
Isn't he great?

JAY
How is this okay?

LAX
It's a genre piece, so the actor
really isn't that important.

JAY
Said no one ever.

LAX
I think this is an opportunity to
do what Tarantino does so well and
revitalize an old actor's career.

JAY
OK, but I still wouldn't think
Magnum P.I. to be our first
choice... Did you speak to Peters?

LAX
You bet. And everything's back on
schedule. Isn't movie-making
great?

Lax wanders off and yells after a female zombie.

LAX (CONT'D)

So which parts of you aren't dead?

Jay frantically dials his phone. Lax tries hitting on the female zombie in the background, but she slaps him midway through Jay's conversation below.

JAY

Peters? So you have heard? ...Yes, Quigley Down Under had a certain neo-western charm to it, but I don't see how that's... uh-huh... Well how is Lyle okay with this? ...Dubai? Well can't someone...? ...Okay.

Jay hangs up. Lax shows up again. This time he's on one of those stupid hoverboards and literally does circles around Jay.

JAY (CONT'D)

I think my boss is in prison.

LAX

Turns out I have an opening in my dance card this weekend, Jaybird. I'd like you to join me.

JAY

You should know I don't put out on the first date.

LAX

We'll see about that.

Lax tosses an invite at his chest and it hits the ground.

LAX (CONT'D)

Parkour!

Lax jumps off his hoverboard and it rolls unceremoniously to the side.

JAY

That's not parkour. That's just park.

Lax wanders off anyway and calls out over his shoulder

LAX

Dress nice!

Jay picks up the invite and gives it a look: **Variety's Women in Entertainment Awards Gala**

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - EVENING

Cinespia screening - A John Hughes marathon. Jay walks Liz past tombstones towards the open grassy area in front of a giant wall where a film will be projected. He has a picnic basket and blanket in hand. There are a lot of people, but we'll pretend not as many as in real life because, seriously, way too many people go to this thing.

LIZ

When I go, I know I'll want people to get drunk, dance all over my tombstone, and then watch old movies until sunrise.

JAY

Rest in Peace is really just a suggestion here.

LIZ

I'm so excited. I've heard about these screenings, but have never been.

JAY

I remember you mentioning John Hughes on our first date and thought this would be fun. He did that film Breakfast at Tiffany's, right?

LIZ

Ha-ha. My brother and I used to watch Breakfast Club after school every day. Ironic, that we'd come home from school to watch a movie about detention, but it kept us close.

JAY

And where is he again?

LIZ

He's an engineer back in DC.

JAY

Oh a normal job. I wonder what that's like.

LIZ

Novel, right? We didn't have a lot in common except movies.

They come across a photo/video booth with a prop classroom stage set up.

LIZ (CONT'D)
We have to do the dance!

JAY
What dance?

LIZ
I'm going to pretend you didn't ask that.

Jay puts his picnic basket down and a Cinespia worker sets up the stop-motion video booth. Liz dons a red wig a la Molly Ringwald and Jay sports Emilio Estevez's letterman jacket. Liz tries to show Jay the dance (that side-by-side shuffle) as the video shoots them.

LIZ (CONT'D)
It's... You just... No, you put your feet...

Jay tumbles over laughing. Liz's wig falls off as she tries to help him. The Cinespia worker looks bored.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

Liz and Jay are cracking up looking at their dance video. They're set up in the grass on a blanket as Jay pours Liz a glass of wine. The opening credits to The Breakfast Club begin in the background.

LIZ
Thanks for this.

JAY
No, thank you. You've been so great. I feel like I've been droning on about Mandis lately and you're the only thing keeping me sane.

LIZ
I didn't want to jinx it.

JAY
He did invite me to some awards gala tomorrow night though.

LIZ
Should I be concerned?

JAY

Only if he asks me to dance.

They laugh a little loudly and get shushed by the person next to them. They do a double take because the person next to them is Judd Nelson (aka Bender), which makes them crack up even louder.

INT. FANCY BALLROOM - DAY

Jay double checks his invite (**Variety's Women in Entertainment Gala**) and walks in wearing probably his only suit. Classy affair, other people in tuxes, and tables spread about. Jay walks up to the bar, but is stuck behind a few guys mid-conversation.

GUY #1

So I'm on the 18th hole, it's all lined up, and I completely shank it to the left into a water hazard. I finally make it out of the hole 10 strokes later.

The guys around him all laugh. Jay looks bored as they block the bar.

GUY #1 (CONT'D)

I mean, I kill it at the driving range by myself, but whenever I get to the course I can't hit it straight.

GUY #2

So basically you're saying you're horrible with a group, but a pro on your own?

Guy #1 nods along in agreement.

GUY #3

That's funny. I'm the same way, but with sex!

They all laugh obnoxiously. Jay gives up and wedges his way to the bar to grab a beer. Lax shows up.

LAX

There's my little Jaybird, all grows up.

Lax straightens Jay's tie, he swats him away. Lax grabs a beer and he ushers Jay towards his table.

JAY

So how did you score an invite to this?

LAX

I love women in entertainment, Jay. I love women in politics, I love women on screen. I couldn't be more supportive of women. My dream is that one day there is a female version of me. We need female role models as strong as guys like us. Don't you agree?

Jay's not quite sure how to respond to that one. An Older Gentleman injects himself into the conversation.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Lax! Good to see you here. How are you?

Lax plays nice, but looks like he gets this a lot.

LAX

Hey there!

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You know, I go back a long way with your father.

LAX

Oh yeah? So do I.

Jay chuckles to himself. The Older Gentleman is oblivious.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Say hi to him for me, will you?

LAX

Of course.

Lax and Jay find their table and sit down.

JAY

That must get annoying.

LAX

Only as annoying as you let it.

Lax goes to clink Jay's glass, and they cheers.

LAX (CONT'D)

All of these people are trying to get something out of everyone else.

(MORE)

LAX (CONT'D)
It'd be funny if it weren't so tragic.

JAY
And what are you trying to get?

LAX
Laid.

Jay chokes on his drink.

LAX (CONT'D)
Hey, at least I'm honest about it. I'll admit and own everything I do. You think these people can say the same? That guy back there has been trying to get the rights to An American Vampire in Paris from my dad for the last ten years. It's pathetic.

JAY
Is nothing happening with that? That could actually be a cool revamp.

Lax smiles to himself.

LAX
You know, I can't quite put my finger on it. Are you one of those executives who wishes he was a writer?

JAY
What? God, no. I hate staring at a blank page...

I really do.

LAX
I know how you feel. My dad practically wrote my first couple of screenplays...

Jay is surprised at that reveal, but more so his openness.

LAX (CONT'D)
I had no confidence at first, but you just have to stick with it.

JAY

I did have a silly idea to write about Arthur Miller and Elia Kazan framed against the Cold War, but nobody cares about that stuff.

LAX

A-ha! So that's what it is. You're my regular Willy Loman.

JAY

Well that's not exactly what I was hoping for...

LAX

You've got to let go. This stress you carry is going to put you in an early grave. Look around. You don't see those zombies sweating the small stuff. Wow, they really are everywhere come to think of it...

There are, indeed, zombies dressed in suits at the gala under a "Women in Horror" table. Jay shakes off the image.

JAY

Right, but we can't all just be zombies. There has to be more value in what we're doing. If we spend our lives, 24/7, slaving away on these projects - shouldn't it be for something that's making more of a difference or impact with everything going on today?

LAX

Au contraire, my good man. Are you familiar with the Epic of Gilgamesh?

JAY

I always considered myself more in the vein of Sisyphus.

LAX

You crack me up. Gilgamesh, or G-money as I call him, was a demi-God King. And when his best friend dies, it freaks him out, and he goes off searching for eternal life.

JAY

I feel like this is the abridged version.

LAX

So G-money travels across the globe, through darkness and past monsters of all sizes, until our boy finds the ferryman. Now, the ferryman was rewarded immortality by the gods for saving humankind during the great flood, but the ferryman tells G-money to return to his homeland: seeking immortality is futile and he should be satisfied with the pleasures of this world. Gilgamesh is distraught, he's come all this way, spent half his waking life searching for nothing? But just as our G-man is about to depart - get this - the ferryman's wife convinces her husband to tell Gilgamesh about a miraculous plant that restores youth. A plant that you could probably get today on most street corners. Anyway, Gilgamesh is ecstatic, at last, he thinks. So he finds this plant and hurries back home to share it with his village. But one night upon the return, a snake steals the plant and, as it slithers away, it sheds its skin and becomes young again. So G-man, defeated, returns empty-handed; forced to now deal with his mortality. But what does he discover upon his return to the village? His city has actually flourished in his absence, and will long flourish after he is gone. He realizes that while he can't live forever, humankind will endure and that will be his legacy as King, and it's the closest thing to immortality he'll ever know.

JAY

So what? Am I Gilgamesh in this story?

LAX

G-man? J-man? Sounds like a match to me.

JAY

And our film set is the village...
and the film will live on in
eternity?

LAX

Now you're getting it. Let's enjoy
it while we're here. Don't go
chasing something that doesn't
exist. Now I admit I haven't been
the kindest to you, but I also
didn't throw up in your pool.

Jay is able to laugh at himself now.

LAX (CONT'D)

We're far along as it is, but if
you have any suggestions or
anything you think we should look
at to make this thing the best it
can be, I'm all ears. Nobody sets
out to make a bad movie. Take the
night to think about it and let's
talk about it tomorrow.

JAY

Wow. Really? That's very big of
you.

Jay looks more determined and smiles to himself. Is Lax
starting to grow on him?

LAX

Oh crap, did we miss the award?

They look to the stage where an Older Man is accepting an
award.

JAY

Did they really just give a "Women
in Film" award to a man...?

LAX

He's written a lot of great female
roles.

The Older Man finishes his speech at the podium.

AWARD WINNER

Women have a voice, too, and are
dominating more and more at the box
office.

(MORE)

AWARD WINNER (CONT'D)

It's important that they are heard and I can't tell you how much this award means to me and my beautiful wife.

The wife stands quietly to the side stage. Most of the crowd actually appears to be men. Jay and Lax share a sideways glance.

INT. ROOFTOP BAR - NIGHT

Jay, Blake, and Zack share a drink at the bar. Actors who have time to work out twice a day, but say they woke up like this fill out the swanky place. A folksy singer with a beard and guitar plays background music from the corner stage.

JAY

This could be a game-changer for me. I think we could really fix this script.

ZACK

Aren't you guys just a couple of days away from production?

JAY

Yeah, but there are still tweaks we can make to just add some depth here and there. It could make a real difference.

BLAKE

And did I hear you brought in Tom Selleck?

JAY

(defensive)

We did. But it could be a cool turn for him. Think of what Tarantino just did with Kurt Russell.

Blake and Zack roll their eyes a little and bite their tongue at Jay's change-of-heart.

ZACK

Happy for you, man.

BLAKE

Are you guys seeing all those Wrap articles about Mandis? Sounds like a joke. I don't know how you're doing it.

Jay adjusts in his seat, but doesn't say anything. Does he feel guilty? Meanwhile, the hipster singer starts a new song with a bit of a forced twang. The guys twinge at the sound and look up.

ZACK

Somebody call Mumford, one of his sons is on stage.

BLAKE

How's everything going with that actress?

JAY

Pretty great actually. Who knew. How's your love life?

A couple of beautiful girls pass by them.

BLAKE

I don't know. I mean, why can't I find a girl who understands me as well as the targeted ads on my social media?

JAY

Good luck with that.

ZACK

Have you tried PositiveSingles.com?

BLAKE

Isn't that for people who have tested positive for STDs?

Zack spits out his beer.

ZACK

Wait, what? I thought it was just for optimistic people.

Zack quickly checks his phone. Jay motions to a girl trying to get a drink at the bar.

JAY

She's cute, Blake. Why don't you buy her a drink?

Blake takes notice.

BLAKE

Come here often?

She laughs.

CUTE GIRL

Original. Are you here with the mixer?

BLAKE

Mixer?

CUTE GIRL

The young Hollywood mixer? I'm trying to be a writer.

BLAKE

Oh no, sorry, we're just in from out of town.

Cute Girl looks a bit confused and wanders off. Blake rejoins his guys.

JAY

What's wrong? No STDs?

BLAKE

Slowly put the drinks down, guys. We walked into a networking event.

The guys look around. Hollywood's aspiring finest awkwardly mingle with each other. Quick cuts of different conversations:

INDUSTRY GUY #1

So it's kind of like Groundhog Day set during World War II.

INDUSTRY GIRL #2

It's my own management company. But we also produce. Well we're looking to produce.

INDUSTRY GUY #3

Just signed him. You'll love him. His script reads like a young David O. Russell.

INDUSTRY GUY #1

Picture Bill Murray in Schindler's List.

INDUSTRY GIRL #2

We're open to everything. And by we, I mean me. It's just me right now, but we're open!

INDUSTRY GUY #3
We're really hoping it makes the
Black List this year.
(extreme close-up as the
last line is repeated)
Black List this year...

Back to the guys. They look stone-faced as they put down
their drinks and try to shuffle out the side exit.

JAY
No sudden movements.

ZACK
Nice and easy.

INDUSTRY GUY #4
Hey!

JAY
Ah!

INDUSTRY GUY #4
You here with the mixer? I just
started in the mailroom.

JAY
Sorry, we, uh- Did you say the
mailroom?

Zack comes to the rescue.

ZACK
We actually all work at Chipotle!

BLAKE
Eat fresh!

INDUSTRY GUY #4
Isn't that Subway's slogan?

ZACK
It's ours now! Bye!

They laugh as they make for the exit. Industry Guy is
confused, but moves on unphazed and earnest.

JAY
Were we ever that young?

BLAKE
We're such assholes.

Blake and Zack head out, but Jay hesitates for a beat at the door, looking back at Industry Guy #4 and the youthful, not-so-cynical aspiring dreamers. Do they remind him of anyone? He shakes it off and joins his guys who are waiting for him. There's a peeling, faded Barnacle billboard in the background.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - DAY

Jay has a handful of notes in his hand and one of Peter's protein bars. He finds Steve lounging in his usual spot by the trailers. Steve looks a little confused at his phone.

JAY

Hey, Steve. What're you doing?

STEVE

I'm trying to watch Amazon Prime, but I think I just ordered groceries by mistake.

JAY

Have you seen Lax?

STEVE

He's over by the dressing rooms. The orcs are in makeup today.

JAY

Cool. Thanks.

STEVE

By the way, dude, you shouldn't eat those protein bars. My brother used to eat them, but he was a ballplayer, so unless you're working out 12 hours a day, that's not going to be a good look for you.

JAY

Huh. Good to know. Thanks.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A few orcs sit in chairs getting the final touches done on their makeup. They look like the forgotten extras from Lord of the Rings. Jay walks in.

JAY

Hey guys. Has anyone seen Lax?

MAKEUP ARTIST GUY
He's around here somewhere.

A female orc enters through a side door. She gets closer to Jay and freezes. Jay does a double take.

JAY
Liz? Is that you?!

ORC LIZ
Hi, Jay.

She's apprehensive.

JAY
What are you doing here?

ORC LIZ
One for them, one for me, right?

MAKEUP ARTIST GUY
You're dating an orc? Cool.

His high-five goes unanswered. Jay pulls Liz over to the side.

JAY
But after all I've said about this guy, how could you even, I mean why?

Lax emerges behind them from the same door Liz came from. Jay looks back and forth between the two.

JAY (CONT'D)
Oh god. I think I'm going to be sick.

ORC LIZ
Give me a little credit, Jay. I'm not that much of a cliché.

JAY
But still, what about Axe Mandis?

Lax walks up and overhears that last part.

LAX
Axe Mandis? I prefer Climax Mandis if you know what I mean.

Lax high fives Makeup Artist Guy and keeps walking.

ORC LIZ

Truth is, I needed the money. I don't know how to tell you this, but I'm trying to move back to New York. I miss the live experience of theater and it's clearly not working out for me here.

She motions to her outfit. Jay looks like he may faint.

JAY

Can we please not do this while you're wearing that?

ORC LIZ

It took them three hours to put this on.

Jay takes a closer look at Liz.

JAY

Wait. Are you... Are you an Asian orc?

Liz rolls her eyes. She is, indeed, dressed as an Asian orc with some Eastern garb and makeup. (FYI: She's not an Asian actress). They're at an impasse. Frustrated.

JAY (CONT'D)

So that's it? You're just going to give up?

ORC LIZ

How can you say that? This town isn't what I thought it was, so now I'm making something happen for myself. Can you say the same?

Liz storms off. Lax saunters back up to a stunned Jay.

JAY

What the hell just happened?

Lax notices a handful of notes still in Jay's hand.

LAX

Women, huh. What are those?

JAY

These are the notes you asked for.

Jay is still reeling, but hands them over to Lax, who flips through them. Lax laughs.

LAX

I asked for these?

JAY

Yes! You asked me for my notes after the whole Gilgamesh speech.

LAX

Oh I was so high at that party. I didn't know which way was up. We start shooting in two days. Are you nuts? We can't implement these.

Lax presses the notes back in Jay's chest.

JAY

I don't get it. Why are you doing this to me? Why would you ask for me on set?

LAX

What? I didn't ask for you to be here.

JAY

Yes, you did. Because of spite for calling you out at your own party or whatever childish reason you have in your head.

LAX

Let's get something clear. I didn't ask for you to be here. In fact, you've caused nothing but problems since you've been here. But your company needs a physical body on set so that they can get official credit from the guild. They sent you here. Not me. You're just a placeholder. So stop thinking this world is out to get you. You're not Gilgamesh. You're just one of the pawns in the village who will be forgotten later. And I'm the snake. So fuck off and stop sabotaging my movie.

Lax leaves Jay shell-shocked. Makeup Artist Guy begins a slow clap, but no one joins in.

INT. IRISH BAR - NIGHT

Jay, Zack, and Jess drink at the bar.

JESS
Fuck that guy.

ZACK
That's the problem with dating today. You never know if you're in an actual relationship until you're married...

JAY
I didn't even know she was unhappy.

JESS
She sounds like a good actress. Should I sign her?

ZACK
You think she was seeing other people?

JAY
I don't think that was it.

ZACK
Well was she still active on the dating app?

JAY
Bumble doesn't show you when they last signed on.

Zack grabs Jay's phone.

ZACK
Uh, yes, it does. See, if you press this button, you can search by who's most active.

A handful of guys nearby overhear and whip out their phones.

ZACK (CONT'D)
Nope. Wow. You may have been in a relationship. I'm sorry, man.

One of the guys looking at his phone in the background freaks out and runs out of the bar.

JAY

We talked it through. She's going to be closer to her family this way and she did always love live theater. It just sucks.

He's despondent.

ZACK

Come on. Don't let reality ruin your day. There, there.

JESS

So what are you going to do about Lax...?

Jay gets an idea. He pounds the rest of his drink, opens an email on his phone, and starts typing away to Craig at The Wrap, subject line: **Like Father, Like Son**. The bartender makes his way over and Jay orders another round for the three of them.

DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN SIDE - DAY

Harsh winds blow across Jay's face as he struggles against a mighty object. We pull out to realize his back is to a massive boulder as he attempts to push it up the endless mountain. He sweats and shakes as his knees get weak. Suddenly, a slurping sound is heard like someone finishing a soda.

LAX

(O.S.)

Put your back into it.

Jay looks up to see Lax, casually perched atop the boulder drinking a coke through a straw. His legs dangle off of the giant rock. Jay tries to ignore him and turns around to push from another angle. Lax suddenly appears at Jay's side, examining the ground around him and checking the wind direction with his finger.

LAX (CONT'D)

Hmm. Slight cross wind south-southwest. Maybe try pushing up. Have you thought of that?

Jay turns around to ignore him, but Lax appears on the other side of him.

LAX (CONT'D)
Yeah, that's not helping. Here,
hold this.

Lax hands his soda to Jay. As Jay takes it, the boulder moves slightly opposite him and he jumps out of the way in time to see it roll back down the mountain. Jay and Lax look down and see it disappear into the fog as it continues to speed down the hillside. Jay looks depressed and defeated, but Lax just grabs his drink back and slurps again.

LAX (CONT'D)
Bummer.

Lax walks away.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. JAY'S APARTMENT - BED - MORNING

Jay awakens with the same depressed look on his face and a headache, rubbing his head. Typing on a blackberry is overheard.

JAY
Well that was a mistake.

The camera pulls out to find Jess next to him in bed.

JESS
What? Sorry, this client is
killing me.

Jess answers a call on her phone.

JESS (CONT'D)
(into phone)
It's not rehab! She has lupus, you
fucking jackals. There's a
difference. Leave her alone.

She hangs up.

JESS (CONT'D)
(to Jay)
Ugh. My client is back in rehab.

She gets out of bed, naked, and heads to the bathroom. Jay slinks back under the covers, pulling the blankets over his head.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - STAGE 20 - DAY

Jay sits rather comatose in a chair to the side as he watches the action unfold around him. Steve sits next to him. Jay still has a set of notes in his hands. He keeps refreshing The Wrap on his iPhone, but nothing significant shows up. Jay looks back to the set:

Workers prep for the day's shoot. Stagehands put finishing touches on the main closet. Tom Selleck melodramatically runs lines to himself. Freddy is still attempting to make shadow puppets, but the lights are at least all in place. Brent tries to wrangle Petunia away from the stage. The orcs do whatever orcs do, but Liz isn't there. Lax looks proud as he navigates through it all.

Jay looks back to his phone and then to the set. He looks like he's having an epiphany as something clicks internally and he feels refreshed. He takes a moment and a deep breath to himself before tossing his notes into a nearby trash bin. He rises from his chair.

JAY
(to Steve)
Take care of yourself, Steve.

Steve is playing Pokemon Go. Oblivious.

STEVE
You, too.

Jay makes for the exit. Lax does a double take as he watches him leave.

EXT. THE STUDIO - BACKLOT - CONTINUOUS

Jay exits the stage, feeling refreshed. Lax catches up to him.

LAX
Jay? Where you going?

JAY
I'm done.

LAX
What do you mean you're done? And here I thought we were just starting to have fun.

JAY

There's nothing on that set for me. And every day I am here it is just starting to feel more and more like work.

LAX

Of course it's work. This is work! What's it supposed to feel like?

JAY

I just know whatever the reason is I got into this business, it's not this.

LAX

Hey at least something happens in my films and it's not just a bunch of people sitting around complaining.

I don't know to what you're referring.

JAY

Look, Lax. I honestly don't care anymore. You do whatever you want to do. I just can't be a part of it. I'm sure Peters will send you another lackey soon. He'll probably smell like pancakes.

LAX

Well that's convenient timing. I know it was you, Jay.

JAY

What?

LAX

The Wrap? They called me this morning. You really think my dad wrote my first screenplay? I was testing you... And putting all of that in an email? Have you learned nothing from this town?

Jay laughs to himself. Resigned.

LAX (CONT'D)

All of those articles though... Is that what you really think of me?

JAY

I don't know. I think a part of me wanted it to be as simple as blaming you for perpetuating the industry's problems, when it was probably more me projecting and not dealing with my own complacency. But I do know that every second I stay on that set is a second I'm wasting.

LAX

And here I was just starting to like you. So be it, Jaybird. I'll miss you. We could've made magic together.

JAY

No, we really couldn't have.

Jay begins to walk away, but turns around.

JAY (CONT'D)

Oh, and I read up on your boy Gilgamesh. The guy was a tyrannical dictator who raped his women and didn't know what he had until it was gone. Have a nice life.

Jay walks off. Lax questions himself momentarily, but shrugs it off and heads back to set.

INT. BRONZE PICTURES - PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Jay stands in front of Peters, who is noticeably fatter. Peters uses a Q-tip.

JAY

I'll just get my things and be out of here.

PETERS

Cool.

Peters is watching the Dodgers game streaming on his computer.

JAY

I still don't get how Lyle is okay replacing Tom Cruise with Tom Selleck.

PETERS

Apparently, he owns the director's cut of Three Men and a Baby. This is all pocket change to him anyway.

JAY

And the studio?

PETERS

Still onboard, except they're now making it a faith-based film. Something about finding the light through the darkness. I don't know. You sure you don't just want to take a break?

JAY

I'm sure. Thanks. Oh, and I got you a going-away present.

Jay puts a box of protein bars on his desk.

PETERS

Thanks, Jay!

INT. BRONZE STUDIOS - JAY'S DESK - DAY

Jay walks down to his desk where Dave is already setting up his stuff. Dave pours syrup over a plate of pancakes. Karen and Cindy look disgusted.

JAY

Just getting the last of it.

Jay notices a picture frame with Dave standing next to Lyle on a beach somewhere.

JAY (CONT'D)

Is that... Lyle?

DAVE

Oh yeah, he's my uncle.

JAY

(laughing)

That makes sense. The nepotism in this town...

DAVE

Why? Who are you related to?

Jay thinks about it for a second before responding.

JAY
My dad. Enjoy the pancakes.

Jay grabs a box of his things and doesn't look back.

EXT. THE STEPHEN MURPHY COMPANY - DAY

Jay pulls his car into the lot. As he walks up, he sees Murphy coming out of the office with a woman.

MURPHY
Jay! To what do I owe the pleasure?

JAY
I'm done, Murph. Just wanted to say goodbye. I appreciate your advice over the years, but I've decided to go back home.

MURPHY
Bullshit.

JAY
Excuse me?

MURPHY
You came into this office not too long ago with a fire in your belly demanding more, to do some good. Now I admit, until I met Claudia here,

Claudia waves hello.

MURPHY (CONT'D)
I was beyond burnt out myself, just like you're feeling now. I was disillusioned and couldn't remember the last time I felt truly impassioned about the work. But the world needs outsiders calling each other out. This town needs people like you.

JAY
But what do you do when nobody wants to listen?

MURPHY
You speak louder.

Jay takes it in, unsure.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

I apologize for the last time we saw each other. I wasn't in a good place. But you're too young to be so god damn cynical. I know that fire still burns inside of you. You just have to find the right place to channel it. The real truth is, things were never easy in this town. The 80s, 90s - sure, we made some healthy profits - but it was always hustle and work that won out in the end. We're just living in a time now where everyone has the tools to be a great filmmaker. It should be more exciting than anything and, more importantly, it needs curators and creatives like us to bring something great and fresh to the table.... Now, this business may have written me off years ago, but I've still got some friends in high places. Promise me you won't go home just yet. I think I know the right spot for you. And it's not in a strip mall in the valley.

CLAUDIA

What's wrong with a strip mall in the valley?

MURPHY

Absolutely nothing.

Murphy kisses Claudia and they walk off. Jay stands there, admiring how Murphy seems to have it figured out, and thinks to himself.

INT. SYNERGY MEDIA - DAY

Open space offices bustling with activity. People of all ages and diversity. Some are editing, some are reading, some are collaborating, some are recording, but the energy all-around is positive and upbeat. Jay walks alongside Roy Davis, late 50s, as he gives Jay a tour.

ROY

We pride ourselves as a new type of management and production company.

(MORE)

ROY (CONT'D)

I took some time to figure out my next move after leaving The Agency, spent a lot of time in China, and eventually secured several rounds of financing from one of their top conglomerates. Sure, some of us wish we were still making feature films, but what's most important to us here is finding and reaching audiences in new and creative ways. You see, today's distribution models have changed. It's never been easier to consume or create content and, with that, comes the challenge of how do we, as a company, cut through the clutter and reach that audience? Our answer here at Synergy is simple: Content. Content has always been king. If you put something good out there, people will find it and they'll share it. But there has to be accountability and a willingness to put in the work and out-hustle the competition from the start. Now I truly believe that if we take good care of each other, good things will happen. The core team and culture here is most important to me.

INT. SYNERGY MEDIA - ROY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

They walk into Roy's office. Jay looks like a kid in a candy store as Roy takes a seat behind his modest desk. Pictures of family frame his office. A couple of vintage posters, including The Producers, look back at Jay.

ROY (CONT'D)

I want the talent to be the ones walking out my door each and every night. I want you to be as curious and as passionate as you've ever been as that's the only way we'll continue to adapt as a company and thrive. This industry is changing by the minute and there needs to be more of a sense of urgency amongst us all to drive it forward and be ready for what the model will look like in 5, 10, 20 years. I believe we have the greatest jobs in the world.

(MORE)

ROY (CONT'D)

But that drive and that passion has to start within each of us. Now, Murphy couldn't speak more highly of you and that goes a long way with me. We could have you starting with the development team immediately, but everyone wears a lot of hats here and you'll find your place soon enough. So how does that sound?

JAY

Honestly, too good to be true. I can't tell you how refreshing all of this is to hear. I won't let you down.

ROY

I know you won't. We'll see you tomorrow.

INT. JAY'S APARTMENT - BED - NIGHT

Jay lays in bed content for the first time in a while. He looks over at the matching Producers poster on his wall, smiles to himself, and rolls over going to sleep at peace.

EXT. SYNERGY MEDIA - MORNING

Jay strolls up to the imposing Hollywood offices. He wears a blazer and jeans and looks more put together than we've seen him yet. A couple of people rush out of the offices. That's weird.

INT. SYNERGY MEDIA - MOMENTS LATER

The elevator doors open on Jay and his heart sinks a bit. The desks are scattered, posters are coming off of walls, phones are being unhooked. Jay walks through like it's the apocalypse, not knowing what's going on. The mood is depressed as only a handful of people remain from the previous day. He grabs the shoulder of someone on their way out.

JAY

Hey, what's going on?

GUY

You didn't hear? The Chinese money fell through. It was never real.

Jay's weak in the knees.

JAY

That's impossible. What about Roy?
He must have a plan.

GUY

Oh he has a plan. There's a rumor
he's taking a job at BuzzFeed. The
prick. I gotta go. Good luck.

Guy walks out. Jay slumps down and the office continues to
unwind around him.

EXT. JAY'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

The rolling gate comes down on a U-Haul as Jay packs the last
of his belongings. Zack and Jess join him.

ZACK

Fucking China, man. What'd I tell
you?

JAY

It's for the better.

JESS

I could probably get you a job at
The Agency as a trainee. You sure
you don't want to stay?

JAY

I'm sure. But thank you.

ZACK

Man, what's happening to the world?
Growing up, we were told never to
talk to strangers. Now, all of a
sudden, they drive me around when
I'm drunk, pick up my laundry, and
bring me ramen.

JAY

I think that just means you're
drinking too much.

JESS

So what are you going to do?

JAY

I don't know. Travel a bit. I
need some time.

(MORE)

JAY (CONT'D)

We've spent our adult lives telling other people's stories. I'd like to write my own for once.

ZACK

That was the cheesiest thing I've ever heard.

Jess' phone rings and she answers. Zack and Jay just stare at her.

JESS

This is Jess... She was under the legal limit! We've been through this! ...Oh, wait, what? Really?! Thank you!

Jess hangs up. A bit speechless with restrained jubilation.

JESS (CONT'D)

My boss just tipped me off. They're promoting me on Monday...

The guys immediately go in to hug her.

JAY

Holy shit. That's amazing!

ZACK

Yes!

JESS

I never thought they'd actually do it... And you have to stay now. We have to celebrate!

Jay looks torn. But he needs to get out of this town.

JAY

I can't, Jess. I can't see all those people again. But this is so well-deserved. You'll do great.

Jess hugs Jay again.

JAY (CONT'D)

Thanks for being there for me, guys. You kept me sane for as long as was possible. I'll come back soon.

JESS

Miss you, Jay.

ZACK

Stay strong, brother.

Jay gets in the U-Haul and drives off into the sunset. I mean on Sunset. It's the closest way to get to the 405.

JESS

Think he'll really be back?

ZACK

Ten bucks says he has two kids, a desk job, and randomly pops up into my Facebook feed in about 5 years time.

Jess looks off in the distance at the receding truck, but then goes back to emailing on her phone as the two walk away.

SUPER: MORE LIKE TEN YEARS LATER

INT. JAY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Because people can afford houses in places not named Los Angeles. Pictures of Jay traveling the world line the walls. The pictures morph into him with a wife and kid and then we pan across a bookshelf with a few novels written by Jay himself: *The Birth of a Salesman* by Jay Michaels; *To the Edge and Back* by Jay Michaels; *Greek Mythology for Dummies* by Jay Michaels; *Home* by Jay Michaels.

A framed letter bookends the shelf with a picture of Jay, proud, in front of his latest release: "To My Favorite Client, Here's to Many More! -Jess"

We make our way to the kitchen where Jay finishes cooking and plates dinner. A TV plays on in the background as he brings the plates around to the table, already set. His young son comes running into the room with a package.

YOUNG SON

Dad! It came.

Jay opens the package and carefully inspects. It's a Super 8 camera.

JAY

Wow. She's beautiful. We're going to have fun with this.

The young son puts the camera to his face like he's filming just as Jay's pregnant wife walks into the room.

JAY'S WIFE

Hey! Not at the table.

JAY

(to his son)

We're going to have fun with this
tomorrow.

Jay winks to his son as he puts the camera away. He pulls the chair out for his wife who smiles to him. A quiet, contented moment as his family sits around the table. Life is good.

Until the TV pipes up in the background cutting into an "Inside Hollywood" style news report. Jay realizes the TV is on and gets up to turn it off, but pauses in front of the set.

FEMALE ANCHOR

We're back with prolific director, Lax Mandis, from such heralded films as DARK and BARNACLE. He joins us now ahead of the release of his latest picture about Arthur Miller. A bit of a departure for you, Lax. Tell us about this one.

LAX

My pleasure, Sally. Love those earrings by the way. Fabulous.

FEMALE ANCHOR

Oh, thank you.

LAX

This has long been a passion project of mine for some time. People called me silly for even trying to get it made, but there's something at the core of Arthur Miller's career and his tumultuous relationship with Elia Kazan that I think will speak true to today's audiences. Also, it's set against the backdrop of the Cold War, which as you know, was so cold.

FEMALE ANCHOR

(looking at her notes)

Right... And I didn't realize Arthur Miller had such a prominent football career?

LAX

Oh yeah. Hell of an arm.

Lax winks to the camera. Is he winking at Jay? Jay holds the remote, but is shaking a little.

JAY'S WIFE

Oh, honey, I like his movies. Did you ever know him while you were in Los Angeles?

Jay slowly looks up to his wife who has joined him. Jay's look is part concern for his better half and part PTSD of a time he'd prefer to forget. Before he can really think about anything more, he looks down at his hands, which slowly begin to emanate other-worldly colors.

JAY'S WIFE (CONT'D)

Jay, what's happening?

Jay looks confused himself. His wife slowly backs away. The room is getting smaller on Jay as we see his whole body is now changing colors as it begins to heat up from the inside. He looks straight at the camera with a blank face.

CUT TO:

EXT. JAY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jay's house sits among other cookie-cutter houses in suburbia... when it suddenly **EXPLODES into a fiery ball!!** We see the destruction and mushroom cloud from far above until...

JAY'S WIFE (V.O.)

Honey?

INT. JAY'S HOUSE - EVENING

We smash back into Jay's house. He's still standing in front of the TV holding the remote as his wife comes up behind him. Jay's Wife looks to the TV and back to Jay.

JAY'S WIFE

Honey? What's the matter?

Jay looks from the TV to his wife and kid.

JAY

Absolutely nothing.

He smiles, more confident than ever. Putting that time behind him, he shuts off the TV and kisses his wife. Jay tosses the remote over his shoulder onto the couch as he rejoins his family for dinner and we fade to black.

THE END?