

Greenlit

Written by:

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INT. ELLIOT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Keys fumble. The door swings open and ELLIOT (30s, decent guy, desperate dreamer) stumbles in with TRISH (20s, entitled, Instagram model). He flicks on the lights.

It's not overly shabby, just small and cheap. IKEA couch, second hand coffee table, film posters tacked to the walls.

TRISH
(disparaging)
...This is your place?

ELLIOT
Yeah?

TRISH
I thought you were, like... a director or whatever.

ELLIOT
I- I am.

She raises an eyebrow.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Well, I'm about to be... We start shooting my movie in three weeks.

TRISH
Mmmhmm...

ELLIOT
No seriously, we are! Rowan Ashford is starring in it.

Her disgust magically transforms into attraction.

TRISH
Shut up. Rowan Ashford?

ELLIOT
The one and only.

TRISH
Okay, that's fucking hot.

Trish drops her purse and closes the distance, hands sliding up his chest.

They start making out, tumbling onto the IKEA couch. As it heats up, she bites his lower lip harder than he expects. He winces jerking backwards.

ELLIOT

Ow! Fuck.

She laughs and winks at him. Her eyes feral.

TRISH

Oh shush, you're fine. I need to tinkle.

She hops up, wanders down the hall, and starts peaking into open doors looking for the bathroom. Elliot helps her out.

ELLIOT

End of the hall.

TRISH (O.S.)

(calling back)

I woulda found it! Don't go anywhere you!

Elliot touches his lip. Yep, blood, but nothing serious.

ELLIOT

(to himself)

Jesus...

He exhales, heads to the kitchen and grabs two beers from the fridge.

EXT. ELLIOT'S BALCONY - MOMENTS LATER

Elliot steps out onto a narrow, crappy little balcony. Rusted rail, dead plant, everything covered in a thin layer of dirt, and of course, a view of his dingy neighborhood.

Beyond the rooftops though, a faint view of the HOLLYWOOD SIGN. For a moment, he soaks it in. This is it. The moment before everything changes.

He glances down his block at a BILLBOARD advertising a dramatic film starring ROWAN ASHFORD. His character looks ragged and haunted. Elliot smiles and holds his beer out to the actor. His actor. Then...

A SCREAM from inside jolts him back to the present.

TRISH (O.S.)

ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME!?

Elliot rushes inside.

INT. ELLIOT'S APARTMENT / HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Trish storms out of the bathroom, phone in hand, mascara running down her cheeks.

ELLIOT
Hey, you okay? What's going-

TRISH
No, I'm not okay! My boyfriend just dumped me over a fucking text because some psycho bitch tagged me dancing with you in her story.

ELLIOT
...Boyfriend?

TRISH
Ex-Boyfriend now, so thanks for that! Why does my life always have to suck!? Ruined my relationship for some not even yet director?

ELLIOT
I mean, we barely even made out.

As she continues to spiral, her eyes shift to the balcony.

TRISH
I'll make him regret it.

Determined, she marches through the sliding door. Elliot scrambles after her.

ELLIOT
Trish, wait, hey-

EXT. ELLIOT'S BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

She swings a leg over the railing. Elliot lunges, wraps his arms around her and drags her down. They fall backward through the doorway onto the living room floor.

INT. ELLIOT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

She thrashes violently as Elliot holds on for dear life.

ELLIOT
Jesus Christ! What are you doing!?

TRISH
LET GO OF ME!!! FUCKING LET ME GO!

ELLIOT
ALEXA! Call 911!

A small SMART SPEAKER in the kitchen lights up.

ALEXA (O.S.)
Calling 91-

TRISH
ALEXA, CANCEL!

ALEXA
Call canceled.

ELLIOT
Will you stop!

TRISH
Let me go! RAPE! RAPE!!!

Instinctively, Elliot throws up his hands letting go.

ELLIOT
No one is trying to rape you!

Trish scrambles to her feet again bolting for the balcony. Adrenaline spiking, Elliot dives, just managing to grab the back of her shirt. He pulls back hard. She's yanked off the railing and crashes hard onto the patio.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Oh fuck! Sorry.

Out of steam, she begins to sob. Elliot keeps one hand on her while dialing 9-1-1 on his cell.

INT. HIGH END REHAB FACILITY - INTAKE LOBBY - NIGHT

Clean floors and soft lighting. A place that charges extra to refer to itself as a wellness retreat instead of rehab.

ROWAN ASHFORD (30s, ruggedly handsome, A-list actor) wearing sweats, hoodie, and a baseball cap fills out an intake form.

BROOKS (30s, corner cutting hustler) stands next to him watching. Irritated but attempting to keep calm. Rowan hands the NURSE his form.

NURSE
Great. Be back in a minute.

She walks into the back. Brooks clocks SECURITY at the front door and leans in whispering.

BROOKS

I get it. And what do I know? Maybe you do have a problem. Which is why I say we check you in right after we wrap. Huh? How's that sound?

ROWAN

I'm checking in, Brooks. If I'm not using, I'll get sick. I wouldn't be able to act if I wanted to.

BROOKS

(recalculating)

Okay, okay. So we'll step it down. I talk to my guy, get you lighter stuff. Use enough to coast through the shoot, then come back here for the whole vegan monk thing after.

Rowan gives him a stern look.

A STAFF MEMBER (40s, large) approaches.

STAFF MEMBER

Mr. Ashford, we're ready for you.

Rowan grabs his duffle and starts to move, Brooks grabs him.

BROOKS

Wait! Just- Let's think about this.

The Staff Member's massive hand removes Brooks grip with ease, all while remaining professional and polite.

STAFF MEMBER

Sir, visiting hours are in the afternoons. You can come back then.

BROOKS

What's a few more weeks!?

ROWAN

Probably enough to kill me.

Rowan turns and follows the Staff Member down the hallways and through the automatic doors. Brooks calls out.

BROOKS

We can do shorter days! You can sleep between takes!

NURSE

Sir, you need to leave.

Clenching his jaw, his eyes stay focused on Rowan until the doors close behind him. Then Brooks turns and leaves.

EXT. REHAB FACILITY - PARKING LOT - PRE-DAWN

Brooks bursts out the doors, pissed, digging his phone from his pocket. He dials while mumbling to himself.

BROOKS

Fucking great. The one junkie that doesn't procrastinate his sobriety.

After a few rings, someone picks up.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hey, yeah it's Brooks. I know it's a bit early, hope I didn't wake ya.

EXT. ELLIOT'S BALCONY - DAWN

Looking wrecked, Elliot watches as a PARAMEDIC on the street below shuts the back of an ambulance, climbs inside and pulls away. Sirens whoop, then fade out. He exhales, relieved.

ELLIOT

Holy shit...

Before being able to appreciate the end to his traumatic night, his phone buzzes. Screen reads: BROOKS. Top corner shows 4:45am...

Hesitant, he picks it up.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

...Uhh hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BROOKS' CAR - DAWN - CONTINUOUS

Brooks eats a McGriddle while driving, winding through the Hollywood Hills.

BROOKS

Morning, sunshine.

EXT. ELLIOT'S BALCONY - DAWN - CONTINUOUS

ELLIOT
Why are you calling so early?

BROOKS (O.S.)
Because I care... Also because
Rowan Ashford just fucked us.

ELLIOT
What?

BROOKS (O.S.)
Mother fucker just checked himself
into rehab. Voluntary inpatient for
the next 30 days.

ELLIOT
N- no. He wouldn't- we start
shooting in three weeks.

BROOKS (O.S.)
Yeah. I reminded him of that.
Several times.

ELLIOT
So what's this mean for the movie?

BROOKS
Well, nearly all our investors have
a clause saying, "if Rowan bails,
we can too", so...

Elliot goes still.

ELLIOT
They're pulling out.

BROOKS
I'd bet my mother's life on it.

Elliot grabs the railing to steady himself.

ELLIOT
Brooks, I quit my job for this.
Told my parents we were locked.
Told everybody we were locked.

BROOKS
We were. Till our guy decided to
fuck us in the ass.

ELLIOT

If I don't have this, I- I've got nothing... How am I going to pay rent?

BROOKS (O.S.)

You being evicted yet, right?

ELLIOT

...Did you know Rowan was using?

BROOKS (O.S.)

It's Los Angeles man, everybody's hiding shit... Usually drugs.

Elliot sinks into a cheap plastic chair, overwhelmed.

ELLIOT

So, that's it? We're done?

BROOKS

Not done. Pivoting. We still got your great fucking script right? Rowan was just a rocket booster. He's gone, so we find a new one.

ELLIOT

Who? It was a miracle you got him!

BROOKS

I am a miracle worker Elliot. That's what I do. (beat) Why don't you go lay down. Give me some time to make some calls and figure this out. I'll touch base in a bit.

Brooks hangs up. Elliot lowers the phone. The neighborhood just waking up. Commuters heading to work.

He looks back at the Hollywood Sign. It's still there, yet somehow seems further off. His gaze drops to the pavement five stories below, where Trish nearly took a header. The idea of jumping no longer seems so crazy.

INT. DARIUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

A South L.A. TRAP APARTMENT doing its best not to fall apart.

Blinds half-broken. Newspaper over the windows. Fast-food bags, ashtrays, and Amazon boxes doubling as end tables.

On the coffee table: a DIGITAL SCALE, EMPTY BAGGIES, and a pile of POWDER.

DARIUS (late 20s, calm, dead-eyed businessman in a hoodie and slides) sits wearing black LATEX GLOVES, weighing and bagging product while watching 90 DAY FIANCÉ.

Next to him, his little brother JAYDEN (12, skinny, sharp, too comfortable in this environment).

JAYDEN

You said after the last episode we could watch something else.

DARIUS

The mother fucker just got to the States. How the fuck you gonna change it now, you know he's gonna do some crazy shit.

Jayden sulks.

JAYDEN

Never go to a second location.

A knock at the door. Instantly, Jayden and Darius are on full alert. Darius quietly grabs a Glock off the table and moves to the door, while Jayden casually pulls a sawed-off from under the couch and pumps the action.

DARIUS

(mouthing)

Mute it.

Jayden does, then Darius leans in, checking the peephole... He exhales annoyed.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

(to himself)

This motherfucker.

He unlocks and opens the door. Brooks stands there smiling.

BROOKS

My favorite entrepreneur.

Clocking Jayden and his shotgun, he raises his hands.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Oh shit. Jesus kid.

DARIUS

Jayden. Chill.

Jayden lowers the sawed off. Darius steps aside waving Brooks in and locks the door behind him. Darius leads him into the kitchen.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

(to Jayden)

Jay, finish baggin' that shit man.
 (to Brooks) So you already need to
 re-up on your movie star's
 "vitamins"? 'Cause if dude keeps
 going like that, he won't be much
 longer.

BROOKS

No, he's uh... On a little hiatus.

DARIUS

That mean rehab or dead?

BROOKS

Rehab... For now.

Darius nods, unsurprised.

DARIUS

So then what you here for?

BROOKS

Opportunity.

Darius gives him a look... Of course. He waits, bored.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Right now you got, what, three,
 maybe four spots like this going?

DARIUS

Why?

BROOKS

Because you're good at it. You're
 smart. You got systems. Overhead...
Risk... What if you were able to
 put some of that money into
 something less risky. Where it
 could just grow and turn into more?

DARIUS

You tryin to sell dope to a dealer?

BROOKS

I'm trying to cut you in on a film.
 Elliot's script, the one I told you
 about. Well with Rowan out, the
 suits are on edge. If you step in,
 keep the train moving, you got a
 piece of something that can't get
 raided. Diversify your portfolio.

Darius stares, then hits the table and laughs.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Seriously Darius, the script is killer. You'd like it. It's violent, and gritty. In a way it's about guys like you-

DARIUS
You don't know guys like me.

Brooks pauses, worried he hit a nerve.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
Straight up? I don't know the film business man. I know this business... What happens when someone don't pay. When someone gets cute... When I cut a batch with enough fetty to take out a decade long user, I know people I ain't seen before gonna to be lining up outside my door to get a taste. (beat) Point is, I put money into shit I can control. I don't want to be responsible for you.

Brooks nods, accepting defeat. He sets down his empty bottle and pushes himself up from the table.

BROOKS
Okay. Yeah. I get it. Had to ask.

Brooks moves towards the door.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
You hear about anyone looking to put money into something besides powder, you send them my way.

DARIUS
They're not gonna be the type of people you wanna owe Brooks.

Brooks closes the door behind him. Jayden peaks in from the living room.

JAYDEN
Did he say, "portfolio"?

DARIUS
Yeah.

JAYDEN
He sounds broke.

Darius snorts.

DARIUS
He is.

INT. BROOKS' CAR - MOVING - MORNING

Brooks drives, phone on speaker, eyes dead but wired.

BROOKS
(into phone)
I'm telling you, it's not a bump,
or a funeral. Rowan's out, we plug
in a new name and stay on schedule.

INT. SOME PRODUCER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A tired INDIE PRODUCER at his desk, already shaking his head.

INDIE PRODUCER
Brooks, every investor I know hears
"rehab" and runs for the exits. I'm
not putting my guys in the blast
radius.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

An overworked ASSISTANT answers at a cluttered desk.

ASSISTANT
Denton Management.

INT. BROOKS' CAR - PARKED - DAY

BROOKS
Hey, it's Brooks, I'm calling about
a package. Feature, prestige, had
Rowan Ashford circling-

ASSISTANT (V.O.)
We heard about Rowan. He still on?

Brooks hesitates.

BROOKS
We're actually looking at
alternatives at the moment.

ASSISTANT (V.O.)

Then my boss passes. Sorry. They want "sure things" this quarter.

Click. Call ENDS.

Gritting his teeth, Brooks scrolls through his phone and finds another number.

INT. SMALL POST HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

A POST SUPERVISOR sips coffee, phone to his ear.

POST SUPERVISOR

Brooks, buddy, I love ya, but I just had a guy pull his doc 'cause his subject went to rehab. Investors are skittish as hell right now.

INT. BROOKS' CAR - PARKED - CONTINUOUS

BROOKS

So point me towards someone who isn't skittish. Someone who likes buying low and selling high.

The Supervisor thinks for a beat.

POST SUPERVISOR (V.O.)

You want real money right now? Might wanna try trash TV. (beat) You talk to Jordan lately?

This hits a nerve. Brooks closes his eyes.

BROOKS

Jordan Banks?

POST SUPERVISOR (V.O.)

Yeah. His show, Kings and Queens. Just bought by Netflix, already on Billboards all over. Guy's gotta be loaded. Probably going to have more back-end coming his way from the first season than your whole budget.

Brooks stares ahead, hating his life right now.

BROOKS

...Alright. Thanks man.

POST SUPERVISOR (V.O.)
 Yep. Good luck.

Click. Call ENDS.

Brooks bangs his forehead lightly on the steering wheel.
 Pulls out his phone, thumb hovering over a contact.

Contact: Jordan Banks - smug little headshot

Brooks groans.

BROOKS
 Of course it's fucking him.

He taps the number anyway.

INT. ELLIOT'S APARTMENT - EARLY AFTERNOON

Elliot sits on his laptop, scrolling EMAILS:

- Subject: Due to Principal Talent unavailability...
- Subject: Need update on Rowan Ashford situation!

ELLIOT
 Oh my God...

His phone buzzes. Screen: TANYA SHIELDS.

He answers, bracing for impact.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
 Tanya-

TANYA (V.O.)
 Don't freak out. I'm freaking out,
 but you don't freak out.

ELLIOT
 Too late Tanya, what's going on?

He paces.

TANYA (V.O.)
 Everyone's calling asking the same
 thing, "Is Rowan Ashford still in
 the picture?"

ELLIOT
 And?

TANYA (V.O.)
I'm saying "no", because I don't like being sued. Four investors have already pulled out and two others are about to.

Elliot drops onto the couch.

ELLIOT
Jesus... So all the money is about to be gone?

TANYA (V.O.)
Most of it, yeah. There will still be about 40K in the pre-prod account until the original start day for development, but when the production doesn't move forward, it'll be wired back to Greybridge.

ELLIOT
So it's there, it's just not ours.

TANYA (V.O.)
Correct. It's a security deposit, not a birthday check. Anyone touches it for anything that isn't your movie, legal's gonna show up with torches.

Beat.

ELLIOT
You talk to Brooks yet?

TANYA (V.O.)
No, thank God. Has he talked to you?

ELLIOT
Says he's "in meetings", trying to figure out a "fix".

TANYA (V.O.)
Of course. Listen, no new contracts, no "fixes", or "pivots" without contacting me first okay?

Elliot stares at the floor.

ELLIOT
Got it.

TANYA

We're not done, okay? The script is still great. Rowan going to rehab doesn't take that away from us.

A tiny beat. That hit him harder than she intended.

ELLIOT

Yeah. Thanks.

TANYA (V.O.)

I'll keep you posted. Don't have a breakdown on Twitter.

She hangs up.

Elliot sits there, phone in hand, staring into the void.

EXT. UPSCALE BISTRO - PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Parked in a row of shiny Teslas, Brooks checks his hair in the reflection of his beat-up sedan's window.

His phone rings. He answers.

BROOKS

Yo, what's up?

ELLIOT (V.O.)

We're screwed. Absolutely screwed.

BROOKS

Cool. Specifics?

ELLIOT (V.O.)

Tanya says all the investors are pulling out. Everyone heard about Rowan in rehab, nobody wants to touch us.

BROOKS

When God closes a door, he opens a window. Isn't that a saying?

ELLIOT

There's no window Brooks. By the end of the day, the only thing we'll have left is that forty grand sitting in the pre prod account.

Brooks straightens up.

BROOKS

Wait, hold up- we have that, in
like an actual production account?

ELLIOT

Yeah, but when we don't start
filming on time, we lose that too.
(beat) What are we going to do?

Brooks glances towards the entrance of the restaurant where
some lunchtime execs are getting seated.

BROOKS

Been on the phone all day. Yeah,
people are nervous, but they're
still picking up.

ELLIOT

That's not a plan.

BROOKS

It's the beginning of one. I'm
about to walk into a meeting with
someone right now who has money.
Real money. TV money.

ELLIOT

Who?

BROOKS

Doesn't matter, just chill out for
now. I'm handling it. Go rewatch
one of your little, "movies that
made you wanna do this". By the
time the credits roll, I'll either
have good news or... You know, a
fun new hurdle for us to jump over.

INT. ELLIOT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot nearly smiles.

ELLIOT

You promise, you're not
bullshitting me?

BROOKS (V.O.)

I'm absolutely bullshitting you.
But I'm gonna handle this. I'll
call you after this meeting. Don't
jump off anything in the meantime.

ELLIOT

I'll try.

Click. Call ENDS.

EXT. UPSCALE BISTRO PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Brooks spots JORDAN (late 30s, polished) passing his keys to the VALET.

BROOKS

Jordan. Man. Look at you.

They shake. Jordan clocks the car behind Brooks, files that away.

JORDAN

Brooks. Good to see you.

BROOKS

Appreciate you making the time.

JORDAN

Come on, before they give our table to someone with real money.

INT. UPSCALE BISTRO - AFTERNOON

The two sit at a small two-top. Water glasses, coffees, and menus they don't look at.

A beat of surface-level pleasantness.

JORDAN

So. I've been hearing your name around.

BROOKS

Oh yeah? Good "hearings", I hope.

JORDAN

Depends on your definition of "good". (beat) Heard you landed Rowan Ashford on a project?

BROOKS

Landed, attached, committed. He loves it. Said it was the first thing in years that felt worth getting out of bed for.

Jordan nods, watching him.

JORDAN

And...then he checked himself into rehab?

Brooks' smile flickers.

BROOKS

He checked himself into... a wellness environment, retreat spa thing... You know how it is.

JORDAN

My friend at the agency just called it rehab. But I guess the investors would call it, "time to pull out".

Brooks exhales, dropping some of the act.

BROOKS

People panicked. It's emotional, not rational.

JORDAN

Well, people are emotional, and investors are people. They're just also rich. (beat) Sooo what exactly are we doing here? You want me to invest? Make some calls?... Stage an intervention outside Rowan's facility?

Brooks leans in, eager.

BROOKS

I'm looking for a partner. One who understands upside. You more than anyone know how fast something can go from "no one gives a shit" to "everyone's throwing money at it." That's you right now.

Jordan raises an eyebrow, amused.

JORDAN

So, you've watched Kings & Queens?

BROOKS

You kidding me? Watched it, studied it, could do a dissertation on it. You my friend are about to be stupid rich.

Jordan Shrugs, half-smile.

JORDAN

It's been doing pretty well. Got lucky casting a few psychos.

BROOKS

Exactly. That's my point. Psychos are cheap. Toss them in a box with a couple of cameras, some booze, and you're printing money. Same here. My feature doesn't need a Marvel budget. I'm not asking you to buy a yacht, just rent us a fishing boat.

JORDAN

...You know why I really took this meeting?

Brooks dons a boyish grin.

BROOKS

Because you missed me?

JORDAN

Because when I heard Rowan checked into rehab, I knew you'd try to spin it into an "opportunity". I was curious which version of you I'd get. The guy from film school? Or the unhinged guy who almost got me banned from a network for that stunt you pulled.

That stings. Brooks shifts in his chair.

BROOKS

Seriously? You mean the stunt "we" pulled, that I took the heat for?

JORDAN

You took the blame for something you mostly did. Come on Brooks, you're not a martyr. You're just consistent. (beat) Look, I don't have anything against you. You're... pretty damn entertaining. But you're asking me to do, what? Put my shiny-new reputation on top of a feature that just lost its lead, with a producer known by everyone in town for cutting corners? That's not happening.

Brooks stiffens. Attitude nearly petulant.

BROOKS

Wow... I bet you could turn this whole production around with one call... But no, you won't do it.

Jordan laughs, genuinely tickled.

JORDAN

Brooks, I don't know who you think I am, but I doubt I could get my own brother a job if I wanted to. (beat) I mean, I'd literally never do that, because he's a useless dope, but I hope you understand what I'm saying. There are rules. Lawyers. Optics. The guy who swoops in on a collapsing passion project to save the day. That's not me.

With a tight jaw, Brooks nods.

BROOKS

Loud and clear.

JORDAN

But if it makes you feel any better, I did pay for your coffee.

He stands, drops an extra twenty on the table for the tip and pats Brooks on the shoulder.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Good seeing you, man.

While Jordan moves towards the exit, he scans the room for any important people before leaving.

Brooks sits there, staring at the twenty. Processing the conversation.

Out the window, Jordan walks to his car. On the way, he stops to pull out his phone, then takes a photo aimed upward. Brooks leans forward to see a massive KINGS & QUEENS BILLBOARD across the street. A montage of beautiful, unhinged contestants wearing crowns, showering in champagne.

BROOKS

(mutters)

Congrats, you locked a bunch of psychos in a house with booze. Stroke of fucking Brilliance.

A beat. Then:

Something clicks.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Okay... Yeah. Okay.

Brooks pockets the twenty and heads out. Newly optimistic.

INT. ELLIOT'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The dark room lit by the glowing TV screen.

On screen: A SCENE from a serious, artsy film. A character stares out a window, orchestral score swelling.

Elliot sits on the couch, half-watching, half-dead inside. A stain on his shirt. An empty takeout box on the coffee table. His PHONE lights up. More emails. He ignores it.

A KNOCK at the door.

He lays down closing his eyes. Maybe they'll go away.

More knocking.

ELLIOT
Yeah?

BROOKS (O.S.)
It's me. Open up.

Elliot drags himself up and opens the door. Brooks stands there, buzzing with energy.

ELLIOT
Hey.

BROOKS
You look like shit.

ELLIOT
Thanks. Come in.

Brooks steps inside, noticing the TV.

BROOKS
That one of your, "films that made me wanna be a filmmaker"?

ELLIOT
It's Children of Men.

Brooks shrugs apathetically. Elliot mutes it and sits back down. Brooks doesn't sit. He's too amped.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Tanya called. Again. Investors are all gone.

BROOKS

Except for 40 grand.

ELLIOT

Until the first, then that'll be gone too.

BROOKS

Hate to break it to you partner, but we're not done.

ELLIOT

Brooks-

BROOKS

Listen. We can't make the movie the way we thought we were going to, but we can make it.

Elliot looks at him, wary.

ELLIOT

Meaning?...

BROOKS

We use that development money from Greybridge to buy ourselves a parachute.

ELLIOT

It's specifically for my film. Tanya said, we can't touch it or-

BROOKS

Or they get mad, send us scary emails, whatever. Look at the reality, Elliot. Our investors are gone and in three weeks, that money disappears too. Only question is if it does something for us while we have it.

Elliot shakes his head.

ELLIOT

It's still theirs. It'd be like stealing.

BROOKS

It's reallocating. Temporarily.

He shifts into pitch mode.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Just hear me out. We take the forty. We make something cheap and easy that can actually turn a profit. We sell that. We pay Greybridge back, keep the upside and make your movie our way.

ELLIOT

(staring)

Cheap and easy... That turns a profit?...

Brooks holds for effect. About to burst. Then...

BROOKS

A reality tv show.

Elliot lets out a humorless laugh.

ELLIOT

But- we don't make reality shows.

BROOKS

No. We babysit actors and wait two years for some executive to decide if we get to have a career. How's that been working out?

Brooks gestures to the apartment. There's a beat.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

You think Jordan's some kind of genius? He locked a bunch of emotionally unstable 20 somethings in a mansion with liquor and recorded it.

ELLIOT

I don't know who Jordan is.

BROOKS

He's a dipshit. Point is, we can figure that out as we go and make six episodes of a mindless, moderately watchable show.

ELLIOT

So, what are you talking about, exactly? Because, "make a reality show" is not a plan.

Brooks leans forward.

BROOKS

Alright, here's the plan: Find a cheap place outside the city. Somewhere nobody gives a shit about. Rent it for peanuts. Cast some lunatics. Maybe even throw in a recognizable face if we can afford it. Wire the place with cameras we'll return from Amazon, do a Costco run, stock the place up, and boom! No crew, no unions, no catering. Just them, each other, and something to fight over.

ELLIOT

Like what?

BROOKS

I don't know yet. Love, money, fake social media clout. Who cares, we'll workshop that later. Point is, they go in and we get a week's worth of chaos to cut into episodes we can sell. It costs us practically nothing, while the potential upside is... insane!

Elliot stares at him, incredulous.

ELLIOT

And you want to fund this with Greybridge's forty thousand.

BROOKS

No... I want to save your movie with their forty thousand.

He points at the TV.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

You still want that? A career? The interviews, the festivals... To spend your life creating art?

ELLIOT

Obviously, yeah.

BROOKS

Then you need a win on the board. Right now, on paper, you're the guy whose project imploded because his lead went to rehab.

(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)

That is if they know you at all. You get one more "almost," and you're radioactive. But if you walk into that next meeting as "the guy who created some batshit reality show everyone hate-watches"? Well, now you've got some pull.

Elliot searches for a strong objection to his logic, but fails.

ELLIOT

We don't even have a concept.

BROOKS

We have 3 weeks and forty grand. That's the concept.

ELLIOT

This- this is insane. If anyone finds out we used that money-

BROOKS

Then I'll be on the hook. Not you. I'm attached as the producer of record. The paper trail leads to me. I'll sign every sketchy thing.

Elliot looks at him.

ELLIOT

And you're okay with that?

BROOKS

I mean, I'm not stoked about any of this. But I didn't crawl through fifteen years of PA jobs and crime doc bullshit to get taken out by one guy's drug problem. If we do nothing, we definitely lose the money and the movie. If we do this, sure, there's risk. But at least it's a shot. I'd rather die swinging than just give up.

That lands. Elliot sits with that notion. He glances at the muted TV. Images of a crumbling world, both epic and tragic. Then he comes back to his own.

ELLIOT

We could go to jail.

BROOKS

I highly doubt that. On the other hand, we could get the lives we always dreamed of. And hey, worst case scenario, you'll have a hell of a prison script.

Elliot snorts.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Look, man... It's this, or we wait around and hope some other addict with an Oscar gives us a call... Which do you think is more likely.

There's a long beat as Elliot weighs "insane" against "doing nothing". Finally, he exhales, defeated.

ELLIOT

...Okay.

BROOKS

Okay, yes?

ELLIOT

Okay we try. We try. But if it starts getting sketchy, I'm out.

Brooks grins, clapping his hands together.

BROOKS

Beautiful. I'll take it! You start drafting a casting post. Look for people who are unhinged, or emotionally volatile. I'll call my location guy about something off the grid and handle the gear.

Elliot watches him whirl around the room like a human hurricane, then grabs his laptop.

ELLIOT

(mutters)

We're actually doing this.

BROOKS

Damn right we are. Welcome to reality, baby!

EXT. BAKERSFIELD DESERT - NOON

Music Cue: The Big Rock Candy Mountain by Harry McClintock

Ariel shot of a beat-up U-HAUL turning off of a lonely two-lane road and onto one made of dirt. As the rental truck bumps along, dust plums up behind it.

The surrounding desert area is... well deserted. The further we zoom out, the isolated vast nothingness grows.

Super: One Week Later

Super: Bakersfield, CA

ELLIOT (O.S.)
This feels like a place where
people get murdered.

INT. U-HAUL CAB - DRIVING - CONTINUOUS

Brooks drives. Elliot rides shotgun, starring out at the dirt and tumbleweeds surrounding them.

BROOKS
Who would want to murder us? We're
just a couple of reality show
producers.

ELLIOT
Right. Classically known as "great
people".

Brooks follows the gps and turns down a rutted ACCESS ROAD.

Up ahead: a SINGLE TWO-STORY APARTMENT BUILDING in the middle of nowhere. Stucco walls. Metal bars over all the windows. No neighbors. No trees. Just dirt, bushes, and sky.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Jesus.

BROOKS
Look at that... Production value.

Brooks pulls up and parks. Engine ticking in the heat. They step out. It's quiet. Wind. A far-off truck on some other road. Elliot stares at the building.

ELLIOT
Why is there one apartment building
in the middle of nowhere?

BROOKS
I didn't ask.

A beat-up SEDAN rolls in, tires crunching gravel. It parks beside them. GLORIA (60s, Mexican, floral blouse, gold jewelry, full of energy) steps out. Beaming with excitement.

GLORIA
Yay, you found it! I was afraid
you'd get lost and die out here.

She laughs like that's charming.

BROOKS
Gloria?

GLORIA
Sí, mijo. And you are the big
Hollywood boys?

Brooks flashes his "I'm legit" grin, sticks out a hand.

BROOKS
That's us. Brooks. This is Elliot.

Gloria shakes Brooks' hand, then her eyes land on Elliot.

GLORIA
Ay. You must be an actor, huh?

ELLIOT
Uh... No. Writer-director.

GLORIA
Pff. Waste of a face. You should be
on big posters!

Brooks moves in for a free compliment.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
(to Brooks)
And you're the producer.

BROOKS
Sure I'm not an actor?

GLORIA
Pffft. Nooo!

Gloria laughs, waving away the preposterous notion. Hurt more than he'd care to admit, Brooks forces a smile.

BROOKS
Cool. Cool. So you wanna let us in?

GLORIA
Of course! Come. I show you.

Gloria gestures toward the building holding her set of keys. They follow her. Gloria rattles quickly through sentences.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

This was gonna be a big project. Eight buildings. Pool, gym, dog park, everything. My husband was the developer. But, market crashed, banks got scared, he got sick...

She shrugs.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

We only finish this one. Two units. Too far for anyone to buy so... I just lock it up. Put bars on to keep out squatters and meth heads.

They reach the METAL SECURITY GATE over the front door of UNIT A: CAST UNIT. Gloria unlocks it, then the front door.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

They step inside.

It's... surprisingly nice. New-ish laminate floors. Fresh paint. Furnished. A thin layer of dust, but nothing lived-in. Gloria walks to the THERMOSTAT, and flicks it on.

GLORIA

AC works. Just need a minute.

The A/C UNIT HUMS to life.

Elliot wanders through the small kitchen, the living room, then down a short hallway. A BATHROOM, BEDROOM, & a BEDROOM + BATHROOM combo. Bunkbeds in both rooms.

He takes the space in.

ELLIOT

(to Brooks, low)

Honestly... This could work.

BROOKS

I think so.

Gloria watches them with pride and hands over the keys.

GLORIA

The second unit is just on other side. Same layout.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Fire pit in front, shed along the side, grill, just filled the tank. If you use it, move away from the unit. It's very dry out here.

Elliot and Brooks give a fair nod. Then Elliot holds up his phone. No bars.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Ah! I usually get reception near the road you turned off of. If you need anything give me a call.

ELLIOT

Oh... Alright.

GLORIA

When you're a big famous director, you remember, you start in my apartment, okay?

Elliot smiles. He desperately wants that to be the case.

ELLIOT

I will.

GLORIA

Good. (beat) Okay, Hollywood boys. Make something good!

Giddy, she takes her leave. Brooks and Elliot stand in the middle of the empty living room, taking it all in. Brooks grins, shifting into work mode.

BROOKS

Alright. Let's wire this bitch up like we're the NSA in a goddamn casino!

Elliot chuckles, struggling to believe this is real.

INT. CAST UNIT - LATER

The front door is propped open. Brooks hauls a stack of AMAZON BOXES, drops them just inside and starts to rip them open. Inside: SECURITY CAMS, CABLE, POWER STRIPS, LAV MICS. Elliot sweeps dust into a pile with a battered broom.

BROOKS

Okay, cameras in every corner, bathroom in the back of the unit will be their only off camera area, so that one stays clean.

(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)

We'll mount these high up.
Hopefully they forget they're here.

He tosses Elliot a small LAV MIC still in plastic.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

These are sixty bucks. Don't care
if they break, just don't lose
them. We're returning all of it.

ELLIOT

At what point does that become
fraud?

BROOKS

(scoffs)

Elliot, between me and Amazon, I
don't think I'm the villain.

He heads down the hall with a camera and a drill.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONFSSIONAL - LATER

Brooks attaches sound proofing foam panels around the
bathroom, gaff tapes the toilet seat down, and sets a tripod
up for the cast to speak privately to.

INT. CAST UNIT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He exits the bathroom, writes "CONFSSIONAL" on masking tape,
then sticks it to the door.

BROOKS

When they're sad, horny or about to
punch each other out, this is where
they'll come to overshare.

From the hall:

ELLIOT (O.S.)

What if they try and use the
toilet.

BROOKS

I'm hoping the big camera pointed
at them will remind them of the
room's purpose.

INT. CAST UNIT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Multiple CAMERAS are now mounted in every corner. Black cables snake along the ceiling and down into WALL HOLES they've punched through the into UNIT B: CREW UNIT.

Elliot stands in the middle of it all, slowly turning to see the web of surveillance they've constructed. He looks... conflicted. Impressed yet unsettled.

Brooks steps in from the hallway, wiping sweat with his shirt.

BROOKS

Once we get feeds in unit B, we're golden. We'll tidy up in here, then be all set to lock up our cast like rats in a cage.

Elliot turns to Brooks with a perturbed expression.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Relax. We're not torturing anybody. They're getting paid to drink and talk shit on camera. I'm joking.

ELLIOT

Yeah. I know. Just... a bit weird seeing everything all wired up.

Glancing at the barred windows. The apartment feels smaller.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Feels... very real now.

BROOKS

Good. Reality. That's the genre.

Brooks heads for the door.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's go make sure Mission Control works before the zoo gets here.

Elliot takes one last look around the room, the cameras, the bars, the multiple boxes of food and liquor piled in the kitchen. It really does feel a bit like a giant hamster cage.

He follows Brooks out.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - DUSK

The sun sinks behind the distant hills. The lone apartment building sits in the middle of a barren desert. Not a soul for at least a few miles in every direction.

Brooks and Elliot sit around the fire pit eating hotdogs.

- PEEK INSIDE CAST UNIT: empty rooms, silent cameras watching no one.

- PEEK INSIDE CREW UNIT: monitors flicker between different angles of the vacant cast apartment unit.

FADE OUT.

INT. CREW UNIT - LATE MORNING

Daylight leaks through cheap blinds.

A folding table has become "MISSION CONTROL": multiple MONITORS showing different angles of the CAST UNIT, a laptop, a couple of LABELLED HARD DRIVES, empty coffee cups, and a WALKIE TALKIE LABELED "CREW".

Elliot, already dressed, checks a MIC PACK. Brooks clicks through camera feeds.

BROOKS

Bedroom one, bedroom two, living room, kitchen, confessional... All systems are go.

ELLIOT

Transpo arrives at noon. Before then we need to do a final sweep, and test the gimbal and drone for the intro footage.

BROOKS

Let's knock out the walk-through first, just in case the circus comes in early.

They head out.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - CONTINUOUS

The sun beats down. Brooks and Elliot step outside UNIT B. Just the U-HAUL sits in the dirt lot. They walk a few steps toward UNIT A, checking the barred windows and cable runs.

ELLIOT

You think they're gonna care about the bars?

BROOKS

The contract said "a remote, secure location". We're providing remoteness and security. Lawyers love us.

An OLD HONDA ACCORD turns onto the property, bouncing toward them. Elliot checks his watch.

ELLIOT

Two hours early? Also, I thought we ordered sprinter vans?

Brooks winces, remembering.

BROOKS

Oh. Shit. Right. Forgot to tell you. I brought on an extra hand for crew.

ELLIOT

W- what? Why?

The Prius stops. BARRY (late 20s, soft, cargo shorts, vape) pulls himself out, stretching like he just got out of bed. He squints at the building.

BARRY

Yo. This the reality thing?

ELLIOT

That's our "extra hand"?

Brooks heads toward him. Elliot follows behind.

BROOKS

Barry, right on time. This is Elliot.

Barry gives Elliot a limp wave. Elliot forces a nod.

An awkward beat.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Well, thanks for agreeing to help us with the shoot. Should be fun.

BARRY

Yeah... anywhere I can take a shit?... Because I gotta shit.

Brooks points towards Unit B.

BROOKS
Right in there.

Barry grabs his backpack and heads inside.

ELLIOT
Who the hell is that.

BROOKS
Barry. Jordan's brother.

ELLIOT
Jordan as in... Kings and Queens
Jordan?

BROOKS
Yep.

ELLIOT
You said Jordan was a dipshit.

BROOKS
He is.

ELLIOT
But... his brother is cool?

BROOKS
Never met him, but heard he's a
dipshit too.

Elliot glitches.

ELLIOT
So... Why?

BROOKS
Strategic decision.

Brooks talks as they head into Unit-A for the final walk-through.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

BROOKS
Plan is simple. I call Jordan,
super respectful, "Hey, can we tag
our show 'from the creators of
Kings and Queens'"? He says no. Of
course. 'Cause he's a prick. Cool.
(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)

I tell him no problem, in that case we'll be going with option B. "From the brother of the creator of Kings and Queens". The idea of people googling his dipshit brother, then associating the two... That might make Jordan just worried enough to give in.

They walk from room to room as Brooks explains. Elliot struggling to make sense of any of this.

Finishing the walkthrough, Brooks nods.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Looks good.

They start to walk out.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

If one of the Coen brothers was a lazy dickhead, you think they'd still have all their prestige?

Elliot just looks at him.

ELLIOT

You've put an alarming amount of thought into this scheme Brooks. It's genuinely a bit concerning.

BROOKS

I put an alarming amount of thought into making this work and not going back to fetching lattes.

ELLIOT

And... ethics just don't exist in your world?

BROOKS

Ethics are for people who already made it. We're still standing outside the party.

(beat)

Look, your movie either lives or dies this month. That's the only moral math I care about.

Elliot shakes his head deciding to let it go.

ELLIOT

I don't know anything about this plan. Okay? Seriously.

Brooks pats his chest.

BROOKS

Done. You're the tortured artist.
I'm the scumbag middleman. That
dynamic is fine with me.

The two exit the CAST UNIT.

INT. CREW UNIT - SHORTLY AFTER

Brooks and Elliot sit at the Monitoring Station. Barry sits on a FUTON behind them, watching. He looks bored. Brooks gestures to the monitors.

BROOKS

Alright, Barry, here's the deal.
These are our feeds. This laptop is
the brain. These are the drives.
You're gonna help us monitor, swap
cards, and dump footage to these
labeled bad boys.

Barry's face immediately tightens.

BARRY

Oh, yeah, uh... I'm not really a
"computer guy".

Elliot blinks.

ELLIOT

What does that mean?

BARRY

I'm just not good with them. Every
job I've had around them, stuff
happens. I crashed a POS system at
Foot Locker, I wiped a hard drive
at my uncle's dental office... I
just don't want to delete all the
footage.

They both just stare at him.

ELLIOT

Why would you delete all the
footage?

BARRY

I don't know. I hope I don't.

A beat. Then Brooks pivots.

BROOKS

Okay. Cool. New plan. No computers for Barry. Elliot and I handle anything with buttons. You handle physical stuff.

BARRY

Okay, I can do physical stuff.

BROOKS

Great. Carrying things, grabbing food, keeping an eye on the cast if we have to step out. If we tell you "go do X," you go do X. Cool?

BARRY

Okay.

BROOKS

Great. For now, grab the rest of the Amazon boxes from the truck, stack 'em there.

He points at an empty corner. Barry stalls, then, slowly shuffles outside. Elliot watches him go.

ELLIOT

That's your leverage against a successful showrunner?

BROOKS

The more embarrassing he is, the more likely this'll actually work. I'm more confident now than when I had the idea.

Elliot shakes his head, turns back to the monitors, adjusting one slightly.

ELLIOT

If that works, I'll never doubt you again.

BROOKS

Hey, that's growth. Alright. One idiot brother, six future cast members. We're in business.

Outside, through the window, we see Barry struggling with a single medium-sized box. He drops it.

ACT TWO

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - DAY - "SHOW OPEN"

A DRONE SHOT glides over dry, empty desert landscape.

TITLE CARD: "LOCKED IN - PILOT"

The lonely APARTMENT BUILDING sits completely isolated in the middle of nowhere Bakersfield.

SMASH CUT:

CONFESSIONAL - SLATER

Bright background. Ring light catch in his eyes. SLATER (late 20s, shredded, "alpha-bro") leans into the lens.

SLATER

Name's Slater. Entrepreneur.
Visionary. Alpha. Whatever word
you'd use for a "guy who refuses to
be average".

Quick FLASHES of him flexing, doing push-ups, posing in a mirror.

SLATER (V.O.)

Most guys go on reality shows for
clout. I'm here to build my empire.
If a few girls fall in love with me
along the way... honestly, that's
their problem.

CUT TO:

CONFESSIONAL - GARRET

GARRET (mid-20s, sharp, expressive, great hair) sits with his legs crossed, half amused.

GARRET

I'm Garret. Actor. Slash bartender.
Slash professional bad decision
maker.

FLASH: Garret dancing at a gay club, screaming karaoke, taking a selfie with a drunk girl.

GARRET (V.O.)

I've done enough unpaid theater in Hollywood. If I'm gonna emotionally spiral, I might as well do it on camera and get followers out of it.

Gives a smug head bob.

CUT TO:

CONFESSIONAL - AMELIA

AMELIA (mid-20s, dark eye makeup, vintage band tee) sits relaxed, unbothered.

AMELIA

I'm Amelia. I act. Mostly background work, some indie horror, and then some weird art stuff no one watches.

FLASH: Amelia on a tiny stage, covered in fake blood, screaming in a theater school production.

AMELIA (V.O.)

I'm kind of fascinated by worst-case scenarios. Earthquakes, cults, pandemics... So being locked in a random apartment with strangers for a week honestly feels... on brand.

She shrugs, almost amused.

CUT TO:

CONFESSIONAL - RANDY

RANDY (late 20s, Down syndrome, backwards ball cap) bounces in his seat, buzzing with energy.

RANDY

My name is Randy. I like girls, partying, and UFC.

FLASH: Randy at a club, hyping up a circle of friends, then in a gym hitting pads.

RANDY (V.O.)

The casting post said "looking for a crazy cast who likes to party". That's me.

He throws a quick shadowbox combo at the camera, grinning.

CUT TO:

CONFESSSIONAL - HUDSON

HUDSON (late 40s, sun-baked, old stunt man) sits with a stoic half-smile, cigarette behind his ear.

HUDSON

Uh hey. I'm Hudson. I used to light myself on fire for a living.

FLASH: Old photos/clips of stunts: crashes, falls, flames.

HUDSON (V.O.)

Couple years ago I sold my house and moved into the woods. Figured I'd die out there. Then my agent called and said "wanna live in an apartment a week and get paid?"... First I heard from the guy in over 2 years.

CUT TO:

CONFESSSIONAL - NELE

NELE (late 30s, "aging Paris Hilton," surgically polished) sits in a designer tracksuit, hair perfect, tight smile. A tattoo on her arm reads, "Queen B".

NELE

You already know who I am.

QUICK FLASHES: Clips from an old reality show she was on: screaming matches, throwing drinks, pulling hair.

NELE (V.O.)

Ten years ago, I was the moment. I trended weekly. Now brands act like they don't remember my name. So I'm here to remind them.

She stares dead into the lens, smile fading just a touch.

BACK TO:

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - DAY - "SHOW OPEN"

The drone swoops in toward the barred windows.

TITLE CARD:

"SIX STRANGERS. ONE WEEK. NO WAY OUT."

Music SWELLS—

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CREW UNIT - DAY

The same "show open" plays on a MONITOR, timeline scrub bar visible. Music tinny through cheap speakers. Brooks sits at the laptop, editing. He pauses on Nele's hard stare.

BROOKS
(to himself)
Oh yeah, you're gonna be a problem.

Elliot looms behind him, watching the cut.

ELLIOT
"Six strangers. One week. No way out."? Does that come off... too kidnap-y?

BROOKS
We locked them in an apartment.
There's a massive padlock on the gate. I think it fits.

He hits spacebar. The cut rewinds a few seconds, plays again.

ON SCREEN - AMELIA'S CONFSSIONAL

AMELIA (ON SCREEN)
...being locked in a random apartment with strangers for a week honestly feels... on brand.

Brooks points.

BROOKS
See. She gets it.

Elliot rubs his face, restless.

ELLIOT

This is just the intro. We still need an actual show to sell. Can't have forty minutes of people eating Doritos and having small talk.

Brooks swivels in his chair, looking at the wall of LIVE FEEDS on other monitors:

- LIVING ROOM: Slater doing push-ups.
- KITCHEN: Randy exploring cabinets.
- BEDROOM: Garret unpacking clothes, already making one of the rooms his own.
- HALLWAY: Amelia walking, looking at cameras, clocking everything.

BROOKS

Relax. They just need booze and time. Booze and time, and people start magically making content.

ELLIOT

Think they'll hate being locked inside the whole week?

BROOKS

Yeah. And when they do, they'll talk about it. Talking leads drama. Drama turns into episodes. Episodes make money. Circle of life.

Elliot watches Amelia on a monitor. She glances up at the camera, like she's staring right at him. He shifts, uncomfortably.

ELLIOT

Just... make sure we're rolling on everything.

Brooks nods then snaps his finger, turning to Barry. He's laying on the futon playing a game on his phone.

BROOKS

Barry. B-Roll. Take some videos with your phone every now and then for us to use for social media.

Barry nods, focus drifting back to his game.

INT. CAST UNIT - AFTERNOON

The show has officially started. Suitcases and beers cracked open. Slater stands in the middle of the living room, shirt off, checking himself out in the black screen of the TV.

SLATER

Alright, I call this couch.

Randy, buzzed, flops right up next to him with a full drink.

RANDY

We're couch brothers. This is the party zone.

SLATER

Dude. You're, sitting on my lap!

CONFESSIONAL - RANDY

Still hyped, cheeks flushed.

RANDY

I like Slater. But he's kinda dumb.

FLASH: Randy and Slater chest-bumping, almost knocking each other over.

INT. CAST UNIT - AFTERNOON

Garret exits a bedroom. Spots Hudson lighting his pipe at the edge of the couch. He stops.

GARRET

Are you going to smoke that in here?

HUDSON

What tipped you off?

GARRET

This is a shared space.

HUDSON

Son, when I was a baby, my mother smoked 4 packs of cigarettes a day. You'll be fine.

Garret stares until Hudson sighs and moves to the dining room near the window and opens it.

CONFSSIONAL - GARRET

Garret, a little buzzed, relaxed.

GARRET

The cast is... interesting.

FLASH: Slater flexing, Nele rolling her eyes, Amelia staring out the window.

INT. CAST UNIT - AFTERNOON

Randy hops on the coffee table. Glasses and a bottle in hand.

RANDY

Who wants shots?

SLATER

Pour 'em up.

Randy jumps down and heads to the kitchen. Amelia drifts to the fridge and opens it: cheap BEER, BOTTLED WATER, CONDIMENTS, and TONS of TV DINNERS.

AMELIA

Does this fridge belongs to a divorced dad?

GARRET

You mean, along with literally everything else in this place?

Randy pours shots for everyone. They hold them up, cheers, and down the hatch.

RANDY

WOOOOO!

GARRET

Okay, so far I like... two of you. By the way, I used all the hangers.

CONFSSIONAL - NELE

Glass in hand, trying to look composed.

NELE

I mean, it's cute. Very "first-season-of-a-show-that-gets-canceled" energy.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - SIDE - EVENING

Brooks stands at a small GAS GRILL pulled away from the unit, flipping BURGERS. Smoke curls up into the night sky.

Inside, the cast crowds the window, watching him like zoo animals. Randy licks his lips.

BROOKS

Welcome to the first official
"Locked In" cookout!

He slides a BURGER onto a paper plate, curls it and passes it through the bars to Randy. He instantly goes to town.

RANDY

It's like we're in Shawshank.

HUDSON

Shawshank had a higher craft
services budget.

Brooks chuckles, slapping another patty on the grate.

In the background, BARRY wanders the lot, filming everything on his PHONE, vertical, shaky, grill, building, random dirt.

BROOKS

Y'all got beers, you got burgers..
all we need now is entertaining
emotional collapse and we got
ourselves a show.

Amelia takes her burger, deadpan.

AMELIA

Is there a veggie option?

BROOKS

Uhhh... We get ketchup!

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - NIGHT

It's dark out. The sound of drinking games and socializing is heard from inside. Smoke from Hudson's pipe drifts through the bars. Barry wanders nearby, filming more B-ROLL.

From the window, Hudson stares at him film a tumbleweed, bewildered.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Sitting around the living room, the cast plays a game.

GARRET

Alright Randy, your turn to ask a question.

Randy looks around at his fellow cast members.

RANDY

Amelia! Truth or drink. Hmmmm...
What's the most fucked up thing
that's ever happened to you.

GARRET

Jesus Randy.

Amelia thinks.

AMELIA

When my mom was dying of cancer,
we'd sit out on our patio and watch
a herd of deer graze behind our
house. Turned out they all had
Chronic Wasting Disease.
Essentially their brains were
rotting. Over two months they died
off. The last one staggered over to
our deck and smashed it's own head
open on the concrete until it's
brain spilled out of it's skull.
(beat) My mom died shortly after.

The entire cast stares in horrified silence.

CONFESSIONAL - AMELIA

She gives a small, unapologetic smile.

AMELIA

I don't mean to kill vibes. But I
do think about death a lot...

INT. CREW UNIT - LATER IN THE NIGHT

Brooks and Elliot stare at the WALL OF MONITORS as one by one, lights go out in Unit A.

On SCREEN: Randy rolls off the couch onto the floor and doesn't care. Amelia kills the lamp in the girl's room.

Brooks leans back in his chair, satisfied.

BROOKS

There you go. We got drunk bonding,
a sad backstory, a guy almost broke
his neck falling off the couch.
That's a show.

Elliot can't help a small grin. They stand to turn in.

ELLIOT

Yeah. I mean... It's not nothing.

BROOKS

What'd I say. You lock some people
together with alcohol, they'll be
entertaining.

He claps Elliot on the shoulder.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Get some sleep. I'm sure day two's
gonna be a hoot.

TITLE CARD: DAY TWO

INT. CAST UNIT - MIDDAY

Scattered about the apartment, the cast does various
independent uninteresting activities. It's quiet and dull.

In the living room, Randy is belly-down on the rug, tracing
shapes into the carpet. Garret adjusts an old antenna on top
the tv. The screen just shows static.

Nele sits at the dining table, knee bouncing hard. Hudson
near the window carves a LARGE PIECE OF WOOD he's scavenged
from some dismantled furniture. SHAVINGS all over the floor
around him. Slater watches, half spacing out.

SLATER

Is it a club?

HUDSON

Huh?

SLATER

Is that a club?

Hudson holds it up to show him.

HUDSON
Shillelagh.

RANDY
What's that?

HUDSON
(louder)
It's a Shillelagh

SLATER
What's a Shillelagh?

HUDSON
It's a club.

SLATER
Oh... Cool.

NELE
Are we... Supposed to be doing
something? Like, what the fuck.

No one responds.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot sits hunched at the monitoring station, watching the boredom unfold from six angles. He moves the bar on the timeline speed running through the day's footage. They got nothing.

The door opens behind him. Brooks steps in from outside.

BROOKS
Hey.

Elliot glances over.

ELLIOT
I thought you were in the bathroom.

He turns back to the screens.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Nothing's happening, man. They're
just... Sitting around.

Brooks steps up next to him, studies the screens.

BROOKS
Yeah, they're flatlining. (beat)
So I turned the air off.

ELLIOT

...What?

BROOKS

Outside unit. There's a breaker for it. I flipped it.

Elliot just looks at him.

ELLIOT

Why?

BROOKS

Because it's boring. If they're comfy, they nap. If they're hot, they bitch. Bitching is conflict.

Elliot stares at the monitors. The cast doesn't yet notice.

ELLIOT

That's... kind of messed up.

BROOKS

I can assure you most reality shows do way worse. Producers poke.
(beat) The second we get something usable, we'll flip it back on.
Alright?

Elliot turns back to the screens looking uneasy.

INT. CAST UNIT - LATER

The mood has soured. The air feels thick and sweat glistens on everyone.

Slater and Randy sit across from each other on the floor, each with a red solo cup between their legs playing a half-hearted game of beer pong. Randy misses. The ball rolls away. Neither attempt to retrieve it.

On the couch, Garret fans himself with a paper plate and stares hyper focused at Hudson, whittling shirtless while hocking dip spit into an empty beer bottle.

Garret's POV: In slowly zoom in to see the bottle move to Hudson's lips, then spit dribble inside. As he pulls his mouth from the opening, a drop of dip spit falls from his lip in slow motion, lands on his hairy belly, then roll down until pooling in his belly button.

Garret gags.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot watches the monitors, jaw tight. Brooks sitting next to him, leaning back in his chair. Elliot stands.

ELLIOT
Alright, turn it back on.
Everyone's getting pissed.

BROOKS
That's the point. Get 'em riled up
to actually do something.

Screaming emanates from their speaker.

NELE (O.S.)
THAT'S FUCKING IT!

Elliot and Brooks share a concerned look.

INT. CAST UNIT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nele pounds on the front door of the apartment.

NELE
I said I want to get the fuck out
of here!

A low HUM kicks back on. Everyone looks up at the a/c vent.

RANDY
Oh my God, yes.

We hear the sound of multiple locks turning, then the front door opens. Elliot and Brooks step inside.

NELE
You two think you can lock us in a
sauna and call that a show? Call me
a car, I'm done!

Brooks gestures to the vent now humming once again.

BROOKS
The A/C is working again, look.

NELE
I still want to leave.

She walks past the two heading outside. Brooks turns to Elliot speaking quietly.

BROOKS

Can you smooth things out in here,
maybe make a list of things we can
get to make their stay better. I'll
go deal with her.

ELLIOT

(relieved)

Yes.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - CONTINUOUS

Brooks hustles after Nele.

BROOKS

Nele, hold up! Can we talk real
quick?

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot writes the cast requests on a note pad.

HUDSON

Wood varnish. High gloss.

ELLIOT

Okay, got it. Hey, where did you
get the wood by the way?

Elliot points to Hudson's club.

HUDSON

Back of the couch.

Elliot leans to see the couch lining has in fact been cut.

ELLIOT

Oh... Please don't do that.

RANDY

Can we get some frozen pizzas?

ELLIOT

I think there's a ton in the
freezer.

RANDY

Nice!

INT. CREW UNIT - LIVING ROOM

Nele sits across from Brooks at the dinner table in the production apartment. She's calmed down. Barry still on the futon behind them.

BROOKS

I just feel like there may be something else going on.

NELE

The show isn't a good fit. I thought it could help me, give me some time away from my usual life, but I was wrong. I need to go.

Brooks cocks his head curious about what she's getting at.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - EARLY EVENING

Elliot exits Unit A and starts heading back to Unit B. Brooks intercepts him.

BROOKS

Yo yo, we gotta have a chat.

ELLIOT

I agree, because I don't think a (looks at list) Dewalt Sliding Table Saw is in our budget.

BROOKS

She's an addict.

ELLIOT

What?

BROOKS

Nele. She wants to leave because she's about to be going through withdrawals and is freaking out.

ELLIOT

It wasn't the heat?

BROOKS

Probably didn't help. But no. Said she signed up to try and seclude herself so she wouldn't have access... She also said she'd stay if we gave her drugs.

Elliot lets out a shocked laugh.

ELLIOT
Okay. Obviously we can't do that.

BROOKS
Well, if we did, she's agreed to help us out. Create some drama, do whatever we need.

Elliot stares at Brooks confused.

ELLIOT
Wait, you want to pretend to bribe her with drugs?

BROOKS
Or... we just give her drugs.

ELLIOT
How would we even get drugs?

BROOKS
I have some. In my bag.

ELLIOT
What! Why do you have drugs!?

BROOKS
Rowan gave me his stash before checking into rehab.

ELLIOT
Oh... But- we can't give drugs to the cast. That's insane.

BROOKS
What are our options? She walks, we lose our only moderately famous cast member. If she stays, she cooperates and we got a real show.

Elliot shakes his head.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Look at the math, man. No Nele means no drama, no show. We eat the cost, the investors want the money back, and your movie dies...

Elliot softens and sighs.

ELLIOT
Jesus Christ... I hate this.

Brooks nods in agreement.

INT. CREW UNIT - NIGHT

Brooks writes "mission directives" on a piece of paper, folds it and hands it to Nele along with a little bag of powder.

INT. CAST UNIT - NIGHT

The cast sits around the living room. The front door opens.

NELE

Surprise bitches! I'm back!

The cast stares at her with unenthusiastic confusion.

Begin Montage:

Note: The "Super:" on screen text is written in Brooks' handwriting.

- Int. Cast Unit - Bathroom - Morning

Nele enters the bathroom. Grabs a baggy and folded piece of paper from Brooks outside the window, then he leaves.

Nele pours some powder on the toilet tank, makes a line and snorts it.

- Cast Unit - Living Room - Afternoon

Super: Hudson's Shillelagh goes missing.

Hudson argues with Garret.

GARRET

No one stole your stick. Like, literally who would want that?

HUDSON

Well it was right here, and now it ain't.

- Int. Cast Unit - Bathroom - afternoon

Brooks hands Nele a new mission and leaves. She sprinkles powder, forms two lines, and snorts them.

- Int. Cast Unit - Living Room

Super: Get into a heated debate with Randy.

Randy paces.

NELE

I just don't think he was that big.

Randy stares, dumbfounded.

RANDY

He's a GIANT! His name was Andre
the Giant!

NELE

Camera angles can be deceiving.

- Cast Unit - Bathroom - Evening

Nele snorts another line.

- Crew Unit - continuous

Brooks and Elliot watch the monitors amused. They fist bump.

- Cast Unit - Bathroom - Morning

Nele enters the bathroom. A note and baggy are left on the
windowsill. She snorts three lines back to back.

End Montage:

INT. CREW UNIT - LATE MORNING

Brooks enters whistling happily.

BROOKS

Okay, today, Nele is asking Garret
why he hasn't come out to his
parents. Could be deep and touching
or be a blow up. Let's see how our
artist runs with it.

ELLIOT

Alright, sounds good. (beat) Huh?

BROOKS

What? What's up?

ELLIOT

Amelia and Garret are waiting to
use the restroom. Nele's still in
there.

BROOKS

Could be taking a dump? (beat) I'll
go check on her real quick.

INT. CAST APARTMENT - OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM

Randy walks up to join Amelia and Garret in the cramped hallway outside the bathroom.

RANDY
What's taking her so long?

Amelia knocks on the door.

AMELIA
Nele, we really have to go!

No response. Garret knocks harder.

GARRET
Don't make me piss in the sink! I
won't become one of those people!

RANDY
Oh yeah, the sink!

Randy heads off towards the kitchen.

Commotion from the living room as Brooks and Elliot burst in.

BROOKS
Clear the area guys, please?

Everyone moves aside. Brooks kicks the door. Then again. Both he and Elliot start ramming it together.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door flies open. Wood splinters off the frame. Brooks and Elliot move in towards Nele's body crumpled between the toilet and tub. She's completely limp.

BROOKS
Fuck...

Brooks sees half a line of powder still on the tank. He brushes it away. Elliot checks for a pulse.

ELLIOT
Got a pulse. Hey Nele! Wake up!

No Response. The cast members peer in curious and concerned.

GARRET
We need to call an ambulance!

AMELIA
There's no service out here.

Brooks looks at Elliot.

BROOKS
Hospital?

ELLIOT
Yeah.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - LATE MORNING

Elliot and Brooks wrestle Nele into the cab of the U-HAUL.
Barry stands to the side filming B-Roll and drinking a Coke.

BROOKS
Barry. We need to take Nele to the
hospital. You're in charge till we
get back. Got it?

Barry stares doubtful.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Great. Be back soon.

Brooks slams the door and peels out.

INT. CAST UNIT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The cast sits around looking a bit shaken up.

RANDY
Is she sick? Will she be okay?

Garret pats Randy on the shoulder.

GARRET
She'll be alright.

HUDSON
I wouldn't be too sure about that.

Garret gives Hudson a scolding look.

HUDSON (CONT'D)
She didn't have much color. People
don't last long in that condition.

AMELIA
I would have to agree...

GARRET
 Forgive me, didn't realize ya'll
 were doctors!

INT. U-HAUL CAB - CONTINUOUS

Brooks drives erratically down the desert road. Elliot holds Nele's body upright between them. She's dead weight.

ELLIOT
 If she stops breathing we need to
 start compressions right?

BROOKS
 Is she not breathing!?

Elliot puts his hand up to her nose and watches her chest.

ELLIOT
 I- I don't know, I can't tell.

BROOKS
 Jesus Christ. We're coming up on
 the turn off. Find me the nearest
 hospital. We'll say she must've
 snuck the drugs in herself. We
 didn't see anything.

Elliot pulls his phone out of the glovebox and turns it on. Brooks feels Nele's neck for a pulse. His expression blank.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
 Hurry up Elliot!

Once on, Elliot's phone begins to DING non-stop.

ON SCREEN: A wall of texts & missed calls from Tanya.

Elliot scans the messages in disbelief.

ELLIOT
 What the hell?

BROOKS
 What? What is it?

ELLIOT
 Tanya says... there's a bidding war
 for my script.

Brooks does a double take. His mind whirs. Then... He stomps on the break. All three thrust forward.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

What are you doing!?

Brooks breaths hard, but speaks eerily calm.

BROOKS

We... We need to think.

ELLIOT

We need to get her to a hospital!

BROOKS

If this was just an OD, yeah. We'd get her there, say, "we had no idea she was using" and done, but... Elliot, I doubt she'll make it to the hospital.

ELLIOT

You don't know that.

BROOKS

Her pulse is faint. Best case? She doesn't die until she's at the hospital, headlines will still read, "reality star overdoses on indie shoot." You think anyone will green light your movie after that?

ELLIOT

Your running PR scenarios through your head? Are you a sociopath!?

Brooks' voice drops, calm. Calculated.

BROOKS

Not just PR Elliot. This could end us up in jail. (beat) I don't want her to die. But let's consider the consequences of how we handle this... No one forced her okay? She did this to herself. Are you okay with throwing away your career for her choices?

That lands hard. Elliot's stomach drops as he stares at Nele.

ELLIOT

So... What are you saying?

Elliot's phone starts to vibrate. Call from: Tanya.

BROOKS

Take the call. Don't mention the situation. We'll go from there.

Elliot stares at his phone. Mind spinning. He opens the door and steps out. Brooks watches as he paces in front of the U-Haul, then answers.

ELLIOT

(outside)

Hey, sorry- yeah sorry I'm here...

Brooks glances at Nele's lifeless body slumped beside him. He folds over the steering wheel, taking slow deep breaths.

Outside, Elliot's eyes flick back to the cab while he finishes the call. Finally he nods, ends the call, and climbs back in.

Brooks straightens up, staring forward.

A heavy beat of silence. Then...

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

They said this could-(he swallows)
This could launch everything. The movie. Me as a director. All of it.

Brooks turns and studies him.

BROOKS

Okay. Good... That's good.

Elliot looks at Nele.

ELLIOT

If we got her to the hospital, you honestly don't think she'd make it?

BROOKS

... I think she'll be gone any minute.

Elliot sighs, folding his face into his hands. Then sits up.

ELLIOT

So what? I mean- I don't even know how...

He takes a deep breath and turns to Brooks.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Jesus... Do you actually think you can make this go away?

Brooks holds his gaze. Nods slowly. No charm. No fluff.

BROOKS

I think so. Produced crime docs for three years. Know what they'll look for. What they won't check twice... Yeah... I think I could.

ELLIOT

If we do this... This is it. No more shortcuts, or sketchy shit.

BROOKS

Yes. 100%.

Elliot studies him for a beat, then hangs his head. Numb.

ELLIOT

Okay.

Brooks takes another breath. Turns the key. The U-Haul rumbles back to life.

BROOKS

What do they need from you?

ELLIOT

Tanya says the execs want to get on a call as soon as possible.

BROOKS

Okay. Find the closest Starbucks. I'll drop you off and handle this.

Elliot looks back at Nele one more time.

ELLIOT

Fuck... I'm sorry.

BROOKS

Yeah man. Me too... Let's make it worth it.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - DAY

The U-Haul pulls onto the property. Angled so the cab is hidden from Unit A's windows.

Inside, Nele's corpse is slumped in the middle seat. Hoodie. Sunglasses. One arm propped up unnaturally with duct tape.

Brooks kills the engine and hops out mid-fake argument.

BROOKS

No, I can't "make them reshoot the whole show" because you don't come off as your best self Nele!

He slams the door like she's just said something insane. The cast watches him from inside. He gives an exasperated shrug.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(calling out)

Don't worry, Nele's back to her old self. But she's decided to leave.

He heads into Unit B.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

The four remaining cast members stand at the window.

GARRET

Were they just arguing?

HUDSON

...That's what it looks like.

Brooks emerges from Unit B carrying Nele's suitcase and loads it into the cab and gets inside.

The U-Haul swings around passing Unit A's window. They catch a glimpse inside: Hoodie, sunglasses, a jerky, half-assed wave.

INT. U-HAUL CAB - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Brooks tugs on a crudely rigged fishing line attached to Nele's right arm.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Randy waves back.

SLATER

Jesus. She looks like shit.

They all stares as the U-Haul leaves the property.

EXT. NELE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - REAR ALLEY - LATE AFTERNOON

The U-Haul idles in a narrow alley. Brooks checks the sight lines. No one around.

He hops out, climbs up the fire escape ladder, and peers into a SECOND-STORY WINDOW. Nele's apartment. It's dark and empty.

He grabs her PHONE and KEY RING, heads to a back stairwell door, unlocks it and slips inside.

INT. NELE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

It's a stylish but trashed one-bedroom. Clothes and empty bottles everywhere.

Brooks moves fast, leaving her PHONE on the counter, KEYS on a hook by the door, small baggies of powder on the coffee table. Then, he wipes everything with his sleeves.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD DESERT - DUSK

The U-Haul sits parked off a dirt access road. No houses, no lights. Just bushes and dirt. The back ROLL-UP DOOR is open.

Further out, Brooks hacks at the hard ground. Nele's body lying next to him.

He drops the shovel and drags her body into the shallow grave.

INT. U-HAUL - NIGHT

Brooks pulls into a Starbucks parking lot. Elliot waits at a table outside. He walks over and enters the cab. He takes a breath before looking at Brooks.

ELLIOT

So?

BROOKS

All taken care of. Cast saw proof of life, sent texts to friends and family from her apartment, left drugs in her unit.

Elliot shakes his head trying to process. Brooks pulls out of the lot.

ELLIOT

Wha- okay... What if someone finds the body?

Brooks

Who? One of the hikers trekking out in the middle of Bakersfield's desert? We're good, alright?

Elliot nods, starting to calm down.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Thought to edit her confessional footage to make a goodbye recording for the cast, but all of it was her complaining about how everyone sucks and smells bad.

Elliot huffs out a small, dark laugh.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

How'd things go on your end?

There's a beat of silence. Brooks looks over to see Elliot holding back a smile. He can't hold it any longer.

ELLIOT

...It's happening.

BROOKS

Yeah!?

Elliot nods. Brooks punches the cab roof in celebration.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

YES! FUCK YEAH!

ELLIOT

They want me in LA tomorrow for a meeting to work out the deal.

BROOKS

Great.

ELLIOT

You're cool with that?

BROOKS

Of course I am. We'll both go.

ELLIOT

...What about the shoot?

BROOKS

This is and always has been the goal. Barry can deal with it again. This is our priority.

Elliot nods as they turn off onto the bumpy dirt road.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - FIRE PIT - NIGHT

Brooks exits Unit B with a beer. He joins Elliot sitting by the fire pit. Elliot gives him a nod.

BROOKS

Cast is crashing out for the night. Apparently Barry had them doing some corporate training activities all day. Like trust falls and shit.

Elliot cocks his head curiously. Brooks shrugs.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Fuck if I know man. Doesn't matter too much anymore. Thank god.

Elliot takes a beat then looks at Brooks earnestly.

ELLIOT

Hey... Today was awful. On multiple levels. But... You did what you said you'd do. You.. handled it. (beat) I appreciate it.

Brooks looks at Elliot. Caught off guard. He nods.

BROOKS

I've got you man. I believe in you and your film.

They sit in silence for a moment.

ELLIOT

From here on out though, we do everything above board.

BROOKS

Yes. That's all I want. Clean.

Elliot nods and stares into the fire.

INT. CAST UNIT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

In low light, Hudson watches them from the window.
Thoughtful. Suspicious. He leans back and lights his pipe.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. STUDIO LOBBY - DAY

Inside a glossy, modern corporate lobby. Framed posters of hit movies adorn the walls.

Brooks wears a suit. Elliot's in jeans, a somewhat nice shirt and sneakers. Both wear VISITOR BADGES.

Tanya strides in accompanied by a STUDIO ASSISTANT. She looks sharp. In her element.

TANYA
(to the assistant)
Thanks, we're good from here.

The assistant peels off. Tanya turns to Elliot and Brooks. Her professional smile disappearing the second they're alone.

TANYA (CONT'D)
You two look... Not homeless.

She hugs Elliot then turns to Brooks. He smiles.

BROOKS
Good morning to you too.

TANYA
You hung up on me mother fucker.

BROOKS
What? No, I thought-

TANYA
I was mid-sentence. Telling you about how stupid your "little reality show experiment" was and how it could tank his career.

BROOKS
I must've misunderstood. I'm sorry.

Tanya stares at him.

TANYA

If you ever hang up on me again, I will personally make sure your name never crosses a studio desk again.

Brooks takes it in. She's serious. He nods.

BROOKS

Got it. No more misunderstandings.

Tanya exhales and shakes it off. She turns to Elliot.

TANYA

So, despite you going AWOL, I smoothed things over. They're excited. They love the script.

Elliot gives an appreciative nod.

TANYA (CONT'D)

Let's go, dummies. Elliot, pretend not to be nervous.

Together, they head down the hallway.

INT. DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A long table. Floor-to-ceiling windows.

DANA (40s, Development VP, casual swagger) and MARCO (late 30s, producer, enthusiastic) sit with water bottles and printouts of ELLIOT'S SCRIPT.

Elliot, Brooks, and Tanya enter.

DANA

There they are. You must be Elliot. I'm Dana.

Everyone shakes everyone's hands.

ELLIOT

Yeah. Hi. Thank you for— wow this is surreal. In a good way.

Dana smiles, turning to Brooks.

DANA

And you must be Brooks. We've heard a lot of... things.

BROOKS
Surely it's defamation, but hey,
good press, right?

ELLIOT
You won't find a harder working
producer.

Marco leans across, to shake Brooks' hand.

MARCO
Marco. Big fan of anyone who makes
my job easier. (beat) Alright.
Let's talk about this thing.

Dana nods and they all sit.

DANA
So, I know you spoke with Marco
yesterday, but I need to break some
news... We absolutely loved it.

Elliot exhales a breath he didn't realize he was holding.

ELLIOT
Oh. Wow. That's-

MARCO
It feels big, but intimate. Very
commercial without feeling stupid.
And the characters. They're all
nightmares, but in the best way.

DANA
You have a real voice. It's dark,
but not, "I hate the world" dark.

ELLIOT
That's- yeah, that's what I was
going for, I think.

Brooks leans forward.

BROOKS
It's the kind of movie people talk
about after. You know what I mean?

Dana points at Brooks with a wink.

DANA
Couldn't have put it better.

She flips a page in the script.

DANA (CONT'D)

We have thoughts. Nothing crazy. Some structure, some tone stuff, some "Can we not spend six pages in a hallway," but plainly? We want to be in business with you.

Tanya can't help a small fist pump under the table.

TANYA

(to Elliot, low)

See what I've been saying?

Marco glances at his notes.

MARCO

We're thinking, we set up a follow-up tomorrow, just to walk through ideas and make sure we're on the same page then we can put the formal stuff in motion. Sound good?

ELLIOT

Yeah! Yeah, absolutely. This is our number one priority.

BROOKS

Tomorrow is wide open. Cleared everything the second this meeting was on the books.

DANA

That's what I like to hear. Glad we finally got ahold of you!

MARCO

Yeah, we heard you were doing some sort of "experimental project" somewhere?

BROOKS

Yeah, that. That's more of just, an artistic exercise.

TANYA

You know how it is with these creative types, always wanting to break the mold. Try something new.

Marco and Dana nod intrigued.

DANA

I love that. The eccentrics always have the most promise.

INT. STUDIO HALLWAY - LATER

The meeting is over. Everyone's loose and casual as they walk toward the elevators together.

DANA

Hey we're grabbing lunch around noon, couple of folks from marketing, maybe legal. You all wanna join? Totally optional. But it's a good chance for people to start putting faces to the name.

Unsure, Elliot turns to Brooks who claps him on the back.

BROOKS

We're there.

ELLIOT

Yeah. Of course. Wouldn't miss it.

DANA

Great. See you in a bit. My assistant will send times for tomorrow. Again, great to finally meet you Elliot.

ELLIOT

Same. Really. Thank you.

They leave as Tanya, Elliot and Brooks enter the elevator and the doors close. Tanya takes a breath and turns to Elliot.

TANYA

You did great. (to Brooks) And you... were almost tolerable.

Brooks bows.

BROOKS

I have my moments.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - EVENING

The sky is streaked orange as the dusty U-HAUL pulls onto the dirt property. Elliot and Brooks hop out and start heading towards Unit B.

Elliot glances at Unit A. The lights are on, but it's quiet.

ELLIOT

What do you think they're up to?

BROOKS
(shrugs)
My bet? Absolutely nothing.

They reach the door to Unit B and enter inside.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

The room is lit purely by the glow of the monitors. In the back of the room, Barry lays on the futon watching something on his phone. He looks up at them and nods.

BARRY
'Sup.

Elliot waves while Brooks just stares at him, annoyed.

BROOKS
What are you doing?

Barry turns his phone. He's watching Netflix.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
You have service?

BARRY
Drove out to the main road and
downloaded some shows.

BROOKS
You're suppose to be watching the
cast...

BARRY
They're not doing anything.

Brooks sighs and moves to the monitors. Barry isn't wrong.

The cast lays about the living room. Garret and Randy stare at a fuzzy antenna show, Amelia naps on the couch, Slater flicks cards at a salad bowl, and Hudson smokes his pipe and idly stabs a kitchen knife into the table.

They look restless and over it. Brooks shakes his head.

BROOKS
Jesus Christ. (beat) Whatever.
Anything happen at all while we
were gone?

BARRY
I drove out to the main road-

BROOKS
(pointing to the screens)
Anything with them.

BARRY
Nah, not really.

BROOKS
They good? They all look pissed.

Barry shrugs carelessly and starts to put his air pods back in, but then...

BARRY
Oh, they did all go into the bathroom at one point. You think they were doing something sexual?

Elliot and Brooks stare at him curiously.

ELLIOT
What?

BARRY
I mean, that would be the weirdest group orgy ever, but ya never know.

He chuckles to himself at the idea. Brooks walks over and removes his air pods. Barry looks at him irritated.

BARRY (CONT'D)
Hey!

BROOKS
What were they doing in there?

BARRY
How should I know?

BROOKS
The bathroom window is 15 feet from here. You didn't think to check?

BARRY
No. It's the bathroom. It's private.

Brooks stares at him, baffled.

BROOKS
Run it back please, Barry.

Barry huffs and drags himself off the couch.

CUT TO:

Barry sits at the monitors. Elliot and Brooks stand behind him on either side. He plays back the footage.

On screen, Hudson murmurs something into Amelia's ear. She then goes whispering to the others. Garret nods. Randy replies loudly-

RANDY
(on screen)
Okay!

Slater scoffs continuing to curl a gallon of water.

SLATER
(on screen)
I'm good.

Slater remains in the living room while the others head into the bathroom and close the door. Mics off.

Elliot glances over to Brooks who shares a disturbed look.

BROOKS
How long were they in there?

BARRY
Like 30- maybe 40 minutes.

Brooks hangs his head in frustration.

BROOKS
Fast-forward until they come out.

Barry does. After 43 minutes, the bathroom door opens and the cast exits. Hudson first, glancing right at the cameras as he leaves. Barry stops the recording.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
What the fuck...

BARRY
See what I mean? Could be making
secret alliances, but would be
crazy if they were making out.

Barry turns to the two with an amused expression. Brooks and Elliot's exchange a troubled look.

CUT TO:

INT. CREW UNIT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elliot sits on the bed on the verge of a panic attack while Brooks paces in front of him.

BROOKS

Let's not jump to conclusions. They could be talking about anything.

ELLIOT

We're supposed to be in LA tomorrow for the notes meeting.

Brooks stops pacing and thinks.

BROOKS

You go. Lock in that deal. I'll stay here.

Elliot nods anxiously.

ELLIOT

You think they know?

BROOKS

I have no fucking clue what they're doing... Think you should get some sleep. Got a big day tomorrow.

Again Elliot nods.

INT. STUDIO ELEVATOR - MORNING

Elliot stands alone, laptop bag slung over his shoulder. He fidgets with the strap. He's uneasy.

BROOKS (V.O.)

Today, we're handling business, okay?

ELLIOT (V.O.)

Yeah.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Brooks sits at the monitoring station. Stoic. Locked in. Like a predator hunting.

BROOKS (V.O.)

You smile, you nod, you say "great note".

INT. STUDIO ELEVATOR - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

The elevator dings and the doors open. Dana and Marco stand there waiting for him with welcoming smiles.

DANA
Welcome back Elliot.

MARCO
Soon you'll know this building like
the back of your hand. You ready?

Elliot masks any concern with an even bigger smile.

ELLIOT
Yes. Very excited. Let's get
started!

He exits the elevator and the three walk together towards a conference room.

INT. CREW UNIT - NOON

Brooks lazily spins a coin on the monitor table, half-watching the feeds. Another dead day.

Slater makes a sandwich, Hudson whittles by the window, randy sits beside him, scribbling. Garret and Amelia both hunched over notebooks.

Brooks eyes the three writing. He zooms in but all their pages are angled away from the camera's view. He gives up.

Barry wanders back from the kitchen with a bag of chips and glances over at him.

BARRY
Could've gone back with Elliot. I
would've had this handled.

BROOKS
Mmhmm.

Brooks watches Slater head to the bathroom.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
I'm going to step outside for a
second.

Brooks heads to the door as Barry crashes back down onto the futon, phone in hand.

EXT. SIDE OF CAST UNIT - MOMENTS LATER

Brooks quickly moves towards the barred bathroom window, staying out of sight of the others in Unit A. He raps his knuckles on the bars.

BROOKS
Psst. Yo. Slater.

INT. CAST UNIT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Slater sits on the toilet, pants around his ankles. He startles, glancing at the window to see a shadow.

SLATER
Dude! What the- I'm taking a shit.

BROOKS (O.S.)
Yeah, sorry, just wanted to ask you something.

Slater gestures to his surroundings.

SLATER
Okay, but like-... can this wait?

EXT. SIDE OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Brooks leans against the wall near the bars, keeping his face out of view.

BROOKS
Relax, I'm not looking. Just...
What's going on in there?

INT. CAST UNIT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Slater looks around, baffled.

SLATER
I-... I'm fucking shitting!

BROOKS (O.S.)
No, god dammit. In the apartment!

Slater rips off a strand of toilet paper

SLATER
Oh, like nothing. Good luck selling
this.

(MORE)

SLATER (CONT'D)

Randy's gotten boring, Hudson's a psycho old boomer, Nele's... You know... Gone.

EXT. SIDE OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The last word hits Brooks. He hesitates to respond. Then the toilet flushes. Slater's face appears between the bars.

SLATER

You know this is a really weird thing to do right?

BROOKS

I know. Yeah. (beat) Hey, what was with that cast conference in the bathroom yesterday?

Slater shrugs.

SLATER

Oh, I think they're just going stir crazy. Hudson's got this theory you guys killed Nele or something.

Brooks' stiffens.

BROOKS

Why would he think that? We told you what happened.

SLATER

Yeah man, I know. Honestly, she was a bitch, so whatever. But Hudson's like, "Oh, I've seen people like that before and they don't just bounce back". I don't know.

Brooks forces a laugh.

BROOKS

Right. Weird... One more thing. What's everybody writing?

SLATER

Amelia asked everyone to write down what they remember from the day Nele left. Garret's probably writing a whole dramatic monologue.

BROOKS

Did you? You know, write anything?

SLATER

Nah. They can do their little murder mystery thing. Won't matter when they get home and find out she's fine, right?

Slater starts to walk off then pauses.

SLATER (CONT'D)

Hey.

BROOKS

Yeah?

SLATER

You're not going to be doing this every time I take a shit, right?

BROOKS

No. Won't happen again.

Slater gives him a long look, then disappears. Brooks pushes off the wall and heads back toward Unit B, brain spinning.

INT. CREW UNIT - EVENING

The monitors glow in the dim room.

On screen: Amelia is still writing furiously in her notebook. Hudson stares out the window. Garret and Randy sit in front of the tv.

Brooks sits in his chair staring, like they're lit fuses. Barry sprawled out on the futon behind him. The front door opens offscreen. We hear FOOTSTEPS.

ELLIOT (O.S.)

Brooks?

Lost in thought, Brooks doesn't respond. Elliot steps into frame. He's buzzing.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Dude. It happened.

Brooks finally tears his eyes from the screen turning to him.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

They made an offer. Tanya says it's a generous one. They're sending the contract over tonight... We're making a movie man!

He smiles, waiting for the excitement to land. Brooks just nods, brain clearly somewhere else.

BROOKS
Cool. Grab the keys.

ELLIOT
...What?

Brooks stands and heads out the door. Thrown, Elliot follows.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

Brooks walks to the beat-up shed and yanks open the door. He enters and emerges holding a large gas can. Elliot stops.

ELLIOT
Why- what's that for?

BROOKS
Field trip.

He heads toward the U-HAUL.

ELLIOT
Brooks, I just drove 3 hours and we literally just sold my movie. Can we just-

Brooks glances at Unit A. Hudson watches them from the living room window. Brooks doesn't break his stride.

BROOKS
Talk in the truck.

Clocking Hudson's stare, Elliot's excitement turns to unease. He hurries after Brooks.

INT. U-HAUL CAB - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

Once in, Brooks tosses the gas can between them, turns the engine and pulls onto the dirt road. Elliot tries to regroup.

ELLIOT
Tanya thinks we can close by the end of the week. This is it man. We did it.

BROOKS
And now we gotta make sure no one takes it away.

Elliot frowns.

ELLIOT
What are you talking about?

BROOKS
They're writing it down.

Beat.

ELLIOT
...Who is? Writing what down?

BROOKS
Our little ensemble cast. Hudson,
Amelia, Garret, and fucking Randy.
They think we lied about Nele. They
think we "did something" to her. So
they're documenting everything to
build a case or some shit.

Elliot's throat goes dry.

ELLIOT
You're sure?

BROOKS
I got intel from the dumbest man on
our show while he was taking a
shit... But yeah, I'm sure. So
We're going to go back and make
sure there's nothing left for
anyone to find.

Elliot recoils.

ELLIOT
But- you already buried her, right?

BROOKS
Yeah, but if they get dogs, cadaver
finding tech, or- whatever, I want
to make sure we're covered. We're
too close Elliot. Too close.

Brooks stares straight ahead, jaw tight. Elliot looks from Brooks to the gas can, then back to the dark road. The U-Haul rattles as it drives deeper into the desert.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD DESERT - NIGHT

Two flashlight beams sweep past rocks and tumbleweeds under a half-moon. The U-HAUL idles nearby.

ELLIOT
You sure this is even the spot?
Everything looks the same arou-

BROOKS
Over there.

Elliot follows him toward a small ravine. Brooks slows, then stops.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
...Shit.

Elliot steps up beside him. The ground has been dug up and disturbed. Claw marks, scraps of fabric and a few pale, gnawed bones. Elliot puts his hand over his mouth, horrified. Brooks crouches studying the scene.

ELLIOT
Oh my god.

BROOKS
Coyotes, I think. Must've dug her up, ate some, then dragged away the rest.

ELLIOT
Jesus. So, what? She's just... Out there? In pieces?

Brooks stands, wiping his hands on his jeans.

BROOKS
Yeah. (beat) Kind of a lucky break.

Elliot stares at him.

ELLIOT
How is this lucky?

BROOKS
No neat body or intact grave. Just some bones in a desert full of other dead shit. If anyone ever found this now, they'd probably just think it was some animal.

Elliot swallows, shaking.

ELLIOT
We should've taken her to a hospital.

BROOKS

She'd still be dead Elliot... She would. Only difference is we could be in jail and your movie would never get made. Is that what you want?

Elliot doesn't answer for a moment, then shakes his head.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

That's not what I want either. We didn't do that because it wasn't the right move. Now we're here. (beat) Anyway... Point is, nature seems to have taken care of it. Nothing left worth burning.

They turn, heading back to the truck. The U-HAUL's headlights swing across the ravine as it pulls a U-turn and rumbles away.

Coyote yips echo in the distance.

INT. CAST UNIT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Toilet flush. Sink turns on and off. The bathroom door opens. Randy steps out, drying his hands on his shirt and starts towards the living room, then stops.

A low GROWL. Wet, tearing sounds come from just outside the bedroom window.

Randy drifts over and peers out.

INT. CAST UNIT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The rest of the cast is half-comatose. Hudson smokes, Slater tosses a ball in the air, Amelia writes, Garret fumbles a card trick. Randy appears in the doorway, whisper-yelling.

RANDY

Guys. Guys. There's a dog outside. Come see the dog.

Garret looks up.

GARRET

A dog?

HUDSON

Coyote, more likely.

Garret shrugs unenthusiastically and stands up.

GARRET
 Alright. I'll see a coyote.

He follows Randy back into the bedroom.

INT. CAST UNIT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Randy and Garret creep back up to the window and peer out.

POV - OUTSIDE VIEW FROM WINDOW

A mangy COYOTE, half-hidden against the wall tears at something just out of view.

BACK TO SCENE

Garret squints, leaning in and whispering.

GARRET
 Oh yeah, look at that.

He watches trying to see what it's eating.

GARRET (CONT'D)
 What do you think it's got? Maybe a Jackrabbit or something?

Hudson steps in behind them, speaking at normal volume.

HUDSON
 What is it?

Randy and Garret both turn to shush him, but it's too late. The coyote jerks and bolts into the darkness. Hudson watches it run off. He frowns, then leans closer to where it was chowing down. His eyes narrow.

Amelia joins them.

AMELIA
 Is it still there?

RANDY
 No. Hudson scared him!

Amelia groans, moving towards the window then stops, seeing Hudson frozen, staring.

AMELIA
 Hudson?

No answer. Garret leans in beside him, looks out-
He recoils.

GARRET
Oh my fucking god.

Randy and Amelia push their way up to the glass.

POV - OUTSIDE VIEW FROM WINDOW

Laying in the dirt, a HUMAN FOREARM. Skin dirty and chewed. Fingers ragged or missing altogether. Half of NELE'S TATTOO "Quee-", still visible.

BACK TO SCENE

Amelia covers her mouth. Randy's face twists in confusion.

RANDY
Is that, like... an arm?

Slater saunters in.

SLATER
What are you all freaking out about now? Lemme guess, it's Lassie?

He looks out the window. His smirk fades.

SLATER (CONT'D)
What the fuck. Holy fuck!

Hudson glances up at the camera staring down from the corner.

HUDSON
Bathroom. Now.

INT. CAST UNIT - BATHROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

The cast stands crammed into the tiny bathroom, all rattled, their minds racing.

Randy looks at the others, his voice low.

RANDY
So Nele... lost her arm?

Garret puts a hand on his shoulder.

AMELIA
Nele's dead.

SLATER

Fuck.

Randy's face crumples, then tears up.

RANDY

I don't like this anymore. I want to go home.

HUDSON

We all need to get out of here.

GARRET

So, let's go. We tell them we're done and want out. Now.

AMELIA

We're locked in here.

GARRET

Yeah, so what? Fuck the show. One of the cast is dead, and they lied about it.

HUDSON

She's saying, if they know we saw the arm... How can we be sure they'll open that door.

That lands. Slater looks from face to face, genuine fear creeping in.

SLATER

Jesus christ.

The silence is heavy as they realize the dumb reality show is over. They're trapped.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. UHAUL CAB - NIGHT

Dust trails behind as the U-Haul pulls back into the Bakersfield lot. Brooks drives, wired. Elliot stares ahead, hollow.

BROOKS

Worst case? Anyone comes asking about Nele, we say she'd been asking for drugs the entire shoot as well as on the drive back. We dropped her off, that's it.

(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(beat) Her friends, her family,
maybe even medical records will
back up her drug use.

Elliot says nothing.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

By then- I mean, you heard those
execs. They're in love with the
script. That's real... This? This
will just be... something in our
rearview mirror.

Elliot forces a small nod.

As the truck rolls to a stop, they spot Barry sitting by the
fire pit eating a microwave breakfast burrito.

They hop out.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - CONTINUOUS

Barry stands, brushing scrambled eggs off his shirt.

BARRY

Hey.

BROOKS

(already annoyed)
What now...

BARRY

So... everyone is saying they wanna
leave.

Brooks freezes.

BROOKS

Leave? Leave what, Barry?

BARRY

The show. The apartment. The whole
thing. They're all saying they want
out.

Beat. Then, Brooks' temper spikes.

BROOKS

Jesus Christ, Barry, what the fuck
did you do?

Barry throws his hands up, genuinely confused.

BARRY

Nothing. I was watching Young Sheldon.

ELLIOT

You're suppose to be watching them.

BARRY

You didn't say that when you left.

BROOKS

Know why? Because you're fucking useless Barry!

Brooks exhales hard, then reins it in, flipping back to "producer mode".

BROOKS (CONT'D)

I'll go talk to them.

He storms off toward Unit A.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(calling back/venting loudly)

Great producing work, Barry! Real fucking grade A shit!

Elliot lingers a moment. Barry just raises his eyebrows, as if to say, "what's his problem?". Elliot gives him nothing back and heads into Unit B. Barry trudges after him.

EXT. CAST UNIT - FRONT WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Brooks steps up to the barred living room window. Inside, Hudson sits in his chair, pipe unlit. The rest of the cast is scattered about, all icing Brooks out.

BROOKS

Evening, folks. Heard you wanted to chat.

Hudson turns to him with a cold, flat look.

HUDSON

We'd like to leave the show.

Brooks blinks.

BROOKS

All of you?

Hudson nods. Beat. Brooks clears his throat.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
Okay... Can I ask why?

HUDSON
We've just been running the
playback in our heads. Not much of
a show. No drama, story, no point.
So we're calling it. You don't need
to pay us. We all walk away clean.

Brooks studies him. He's not buying it.

BROOKS
Wow. That's... very considerate.
Unfortunately, that's not how it
works.

Hudson's eyes harden.

HUDSON
How does it work?

BROOKS
You signed on for a full run. Which
we built a budget around. Location,
crew, insurance, equipment-

He ticks them off on his fingers.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
If you pull the plug early, that's
a breach of the contract.
Production would have come after
you for the any losses. (beat)
We're talking low to mid six
figures. Each.

Randy's head snaps up.

RANDY
What?

Hudson stares at Brooks for a long beat... then laughs out
loud. Big and genuine. When finished, he shrugs.

HUDSON
If that's the price of leaving,
that's the price. We want out.

Brooks' smile tightens.

BROOKS
You're all happy to owe three
hundred grand because you're bored?

HUDSON

I'm saying we're not staying locked
in here anymore. We've decided.
It's done.

A long beat. Then Brooks shifts gears. Chipper as ever.

BROOKS

Alright! Yeah. Fair enough. I'll go
talk to the team. See what we can
do about paperwork, then get you
all out of here as soon as we can.

No one thanks him. No one smiles.

HUDSON

We'll be ready.

Brooks nods once, then steps away. His his face tightening
the moment he's out of sight.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot stands watching the monitors. He turns to Barry, who's
back on the couch playing a game on his phone.

ELLIOT

When did they start asking to
leave?

BARRY

Mmm I dunno. Fifteen minutes ago?

Elliot drags the timeline back.

On-screen: The cast in the living room... then all
disappearing into the bathroom together... then, earlier, all
crowded around the bedroom window.

He backs up to them arriving at the window, hits play and
turns up the volume.

RANDY (V.O.)

There's a dog.

He fast-forwards until the other cast members are there. He
hears muffled reactions overlapping. Then...

RANDY (V.O.)

...Looks like an arm.

Elliot freezes the frame: All of them staring out the window.

The room is silent as he processes.

Brooks enters. He's keyed up. He sees the frozen image.

BROOKS
What's that?

Elliot rewinds two seconds and plays the line again.

RANDY (V.O.)
...Looks like an arm.

Elliot stops the clip and turns to Brooks.

ELLIOT
Randy saw a coyote and brought
everyone over to look. (beat) I
think it had Nele's arm...

Brooks becomes still. His eyes locked and unnerved.

BROOKS
Shit.

Barry finally looks up, completely lost.

BARRY
Wait what? Nele's arm? Like her
actual arm-arm?

No one answers him. The WALKIE on the table crackles.

GARRET (V.O.)
You guys coming? We'll sign the
documents once we're out.

Elliot looks at Brooks, panic rising.

ELLIOT
They know Brooks. They know. What
are we going to do? We can't keep
them in there, but if we let them
out-

Spiraling, he can't finish his sentence. Barry stands,
uselessly focused for once.

BARRY
...What's going on? I feel like
somethings going on.

Brooks eyes Barry, clenching his jaw. Then grabs the walkie
off the table.

BROOKS
 (into walkie, casual)
 Copy that, Garret. Paperwork after
 you're out. I'll be right over.

He drops the walkie and grabs the ring of keys off the table.
 His eyes cold and calculating.

ELLIOT
 What are you gonna do?

BROOKS
 Don't know yet. Gonna try and buy
 us a little time.

BARRY
 Are we... trying to keep them here
 against their will?... (beat) Wait,
 is that the show?

BROOKS
 God dammit Barry, will you please
 shut up.

Again, Barry lifts his hands utterly baffled by the outburst.

EXT. CAST UNIT - FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Brooks walks past the living room window. Hudson watching as
 he approaches the metal gate at the front door.

HUDSON
 You opening it?

Brooks holds out the keys and jingles them. He slips one into
 the metal door lock.

BROOKS
 Alright, here we-

He attempts to twist. Nothing. Hudson leans closer to the
 glass.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
 What the-?

HUDSON
 What?

BROOKS
 Damn things being an asshole.

He makes a show of it. Rattling the gate, shoving his shoulder into it. Grunting.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
C'mon... God- seriously!?

Hudson stares daggers. Garret appears next to Hudson.

GARRET
Just open it!

Brooks throws his hands up as if he's utterly perplexed.

BROOKS
I'm trying! The lock won't turn!

Hudson's done.

HUDSON
Bullshit.

BROOKS
Look, I'm trying my best here.

GARRET
Is that even the right key?

BROOKS
Yes, it's the right key. (beat)
Might have to call a locksmith.

Hudson fumes

HUDSON
You mother-

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot and Barry watch the cast crowd the door, shouting. Brooks continues his, "oops, broken lock" routine.

GARRET (V.O.)
You're fucking lying.

BROOKS (V.O.)
I wish I was, Garret. Don't you think this is embarrassing for me?

Barry turns to Elliot.

BARRY

Hey, you guys have anything lined up after this? Maybe with that big movie of yours.

Elliot turns to him, dead-eyed.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Just... I'd like to be considered. Think we're a good team.

Elliot turns back to the screens in silence.

EXT. CAST UNIT - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Brooks finally "gives up" and steps back from the door.

BROOKS

Look, it's late. We're in the middle of nowhere. First thing in the morning, we'll get a locksmith out here and pop that door open.

They all glare at him.

HUDSON

You do what you're gonna do, Brooks... We're done talking.

Brooks holds his gaze for a beat. His face now blank.

BROOKS

Okay.

He turns and walks away towards Unit B.

INT. CREW UNIT - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens. Brooks steps in looking wrecked. Elliot and Barry look up. Brooks avoids their eyes.

BROOKS

We gotta talk... All of us.

CUT TO:

The three sit around the sad, sparsely furnished living room. Silence. Brooks stares at them, then zeros in on Barry.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Barry, what do you want out of life?

BARRY
Like... In general?

BROOKS
Yeah. In general.

BARRY
I dunno. Just... like... money I
guess? Maybe a Tesla.

Brooks' jaw twitches, but he nods forcing a smile.

BROOKS
Money and a car. Okay. Grea-

BARRY
Actually no. A Bronco. Like the one
OJ drove, but one of the new ones.

Brooks closes his eyes to reset.

BROOKS
Okay. Perfect. (beat) It's time we
spoke openly about our situation.

ELLIOT
Brooks-

BROOKS
We're all in it now. We need to be
on the same page. (to Barry) Barry,
Nele is dead. She was an addict and
OD'd on our way to the hospital.

Barry swallows, glancing at Elliot who looks away.

BARRY
Yeah, she looked... bad.

BROOKS
It was bad. And this is happening
right when Elliot's script is about
to be greenlit.

BARRY
(to Elliot)
Oh, wow... Congrats man.

Elliot nods, uncomfortable.

BROOKS
Right. Huge opportunity. And Nele
dying nukes all of it. The movie,
us, everything. (beat) I panicked.
(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Dumped her body. Thought that was the end of it... Then tonight, a coyote shows up eating her arm.

Elliot winces.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

So, we've got studios drooling over Elliot's movie, and five people locked in an apartment who think we killed their friend and want to take everything from us... (beat)
So, we have a decision to make.

Elliot shakes his head, at the end of his rope.

ELLIOT

Of course. We always do with you... Because everything you touch, turns to shit.

Brooks turns to him, trying to keep his composure.

BROOKS

I get you're stressed, but do you really have to do this now? I'm trying to keep things moving in a positive direction for us.

ELLIOT

You've never once pushed something in a positive direction.

That one stings. Brooks actually looks hurt.

BROOKS

I've done more for you and your film than anyone in LA ever would.

Elliot lets out a bitter humorless laugh.

ELLIOT

Are you delusional? You emailed a PDF to a few people. They liked my script so they jumped on. Literally anyone could have done that.

BROOKS

You think Rowan read your script and what? Saw the face of God? Sure, he liked it. But he signed on because I was feeding his drug habit and leaning on him.

(MORE)

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(beat) I think it's a good script Elliot, I do. But it's not some holy document that brought all of Hollywood to their knees. Having "talent" doesn't cut it here.
(leans in) The only reason your movie was going anywhere is because of all the shit I've been doing for you behind the scenes.

Elliot's glare wavers as he processes this new information. Barry looks between them. It's quiet and awkward.

BARRY

Okay, so... Elliot's got this big thing. But, where do I come in?

Brooks takes a moment, making sure his point landed. Then he turns to Barry.

BROOKS

The studios are talking "franchise", "universe", all that bullshit. You know what that means?

BARRY

Uh...Money?

BROOKS

Money. Credits. Careers. Elliot won't be "some guy with a script" anymore. He'll be the guy who wrote the next big thing. Anyone standing next to him when that happens? Their life changes too.

Barry can't hide a little grin.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

But the second those five walk out that door? That's gone. Cops get involved. Lawyers. Everything.

BARRY

Well... I didn't do anything.

BROOKS

Doesn't matter. You were here. On the payroll. Cameras, drugs, a dead cast member. You think a DA is gonna buy "I'm too dumb to know what's happening"?

Barry stares.

BARRY

You'd tell them I wasn't involved
though, right?

BROOKS

I think we'll have our own problems
to deal with Barry.

As that lands, Barry gets quiet. Brooks holds up a finger.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

So, option one. We open the door.
They leave, the studio pulls out,
we all likely do twenty years. Who
knows, maybe we'll get a Netflix
doc where we look like assholes...

He raises a second finger.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Or... Option two... We accept that
this is a nightmare of a situation.
We do something none of us want to
do, and then spend the rest of our
lives actually living them. The
place is old, wired like shit, in
the middle of nowhere... Places
like this catch fire. People die.
It happens.

Elliot's head snaps up.

ELLIOT

You could actually do that? Be okay
with killing them?

Brooks takes a beat.

BROOKS

No. I'd never be "okay" with it.
But can I live with it instead of
rotting in a cell while I throw
away the one shot I had?... Yeah. I
can. Call me selfish I guess.

Elliot shakes his head.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

What about you? You want to spend
the next 20 years in prison instead
of living out your literal dream?
See how the news destroys your
family... (to Barry) You want a
bunk bed instead of a Bronco?

Barry looks between them, then lands on Elliot.

BARRY

I mean... He kind of has a point.

Elliot shoots him a look, then stares at the monitors. The cast in the living room. Completely unaware of this debate.

ELLIOT

I won't help burn it down. I'm not... doing that. (long beat) But I can delete footage... And I won't stop you...

Brooks sighs, annoyed but accepting. He gives a nod.

BROOKS

Fine... It's best we act now, before anything else changes.

Decision made, he stands.

BARRY

I'll help Elliot with the footage.

BROOKS

Barry, you bring absolutely nothing to the table. You're helping me. Lets go.

BARRY

Oh, I really don't-

One look from Brooks shuts him right up. Barry drags himself to his feet and begrudgingly follows Brooks. They shut the door behind them.

Elliot stands alone for a moment, then moves to the monitors in a haze. It all feels like insane nightmare. He grabs a hard drive, then collapses in the chair, burying his face in his hands.

ELLIOT

(quiet, breaking)
Fuck. What the fuck.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Brooks and Barry stand outside Unit B. Two silhouettes in the dark.

Brooks scopes out the property while formulating a plan.

He sees lights on in Unit A, but no movement. The U-Haul parked across the dusty lot. Then turns back to Unit A.

He leans toward Barry, whispering.

BROOKS

Alright. Start piling anything dry against their walls. Brush, wood, trash, whatever you find.

Barry nods, turning to go. Brooks grabs his sleeve.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Don't be seen. Stay low. Avoid the windows.

Barry nods again and half-jogs off. Brooks angles away from the building, staying in shadows as he heads for the U-Haul.

He eases the cab door open, reaches in, and pulls out the gas can, then starts rifling around for something else.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(muttering)

Where's the fucking lighter...

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

The cast sits in the living room, on edge but getting tired.

Hudson smokes at the window, staring out. Something catches his eye.

HUDSON'S POV - Barry hustles past with an armful of junk, dumping it along the exterior wall.

Back on Hudson, squinting.

HUDSON

The hell's he doing?

Barry crosses back, the way he came. Moments later, returning with tumbleweeds and broken down cardboard boxes.

Garret and Amelia join him at the window. Garret's uneasy. Amelia's already putting it together.

GARRET

Ummm, what the hell is he doing with that crap?

AMELIA

They're going to light it...

She turns to the cast, dead serious.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

They're going to burn the
apartment.

Hudson's eyes widen. Garret swallows, glancing at the camera
in the corner.

HUDSON

Show's over. Take down the cameras.
Now.

The three instantly get to work, yanking cords and ripping
cameras off the wall. Amelia grabs a pot from the kitchen and
starts whacking ones out of reach. Slater clocks the chaos.

Slater

What the hell are you guys doing?

AMELIA

They're going to burn us all alive.
Start taking out the cameras.

For a half second, Slater looks amused. Then, sees the
reality on their faces, and jumps to help.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot watches the monitors, horrified, as one by one, the
feeds go offline.

ELLIOT

No, no, no...

Another screen goes black. Then another. Panic blows past his
guilt and he bolts out the door.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - MOMENTS LATER

Brooks is halfway between Unit B and the U-Haul when Elliot
sprints up, frantic and breathless.

BROOKS

Hey, where's the ligh-

ELLIOT

They're taking out the cameras. All
of 'em. They know something's up.

Brooks stops. Panic in his eyes shifting to calculation.

BROOKS

Fuck. Okay. Okay. Fuck.

He scans the yard. Spots the old gas grill sitting against Unit A, and points to it.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

There. Grill's got a starter. I'll soak the walls. You, get a stick or anything and light it.

Elliot freezes.

ELLIOT

I don't-

BROOKS

It's that or you walk around dumping gas, Elliot. Come on!

Elliot glances from the can to the grill.

ELLIOT

I'll do the grill.

Brooks gives a tight nod and disappears around the side of Unit A with the gas can.

Elliot moves to the grill and twists a knob. The hiss of gas. He hits the starter. CLICK. CLICK. WHOOMPH.

A line of flame jumps to life. He stares at it, then scans the area for something to burn.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Inside the unit is a chaotic scramble. Cameras hang by cords and lay shattered on the floor. At the front door, Slater kicks the lower half while Randy slams a chair into the top.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - CONTINUOUS

Brooks hustles along the outside of Unit A, splashing gas in streaks at the base of the walls.

The metal security door rattles with every kick from inside. He doesn't slow down. Rounding the corner, he spots a shape in the window. Someone carving at the wall around the bars.

He ducks a little lower, continuing to pour the accelerant.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Leaning over the counter, Garret hits the butt of a kitchen knife with a saucepan to chisel away pieces of the wall in areas securing the bars.

He pauses for a moment, and sniffs the air.

He climbs onto the counter, peering out the window.

GARRET

...Brooks?

The pounding on the front door slows. All eyes shift towards the kitchen. An awkward silence.

BROOKS (O.S.)

(casual, unsuspecting)

...Yeah?

Garret follows Brooks' lead in playing dumb.

GARRET

...What're you doing out there?

Beat.

BROOKS (O.S.)

Just fixing some shit. Seems like the cameras went down... Pretty loud in there. What are you doing?

GARRET

...Nothing.

Beat.

BROOKS (O.S.)

Yeah. Same.

Everyone knows it's bullshit. They go right back to smashing.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENT - GRILL - CONTINUOUS

Hands shaking, Elliot holds the end of a dead branch in the flame until it catches. He pulls it back, staring at the burning tip like he's not sure what to do next.

Brooks rounds the corner, dumping the last of the gas. He sees the lit branch and points to a dark, wet spot on the wall.

BROOKS

Good. There. Hit that spot there.

ELLIOT

(hesitant)

Brooks... Can you-

BROOKS

Just fucking do it, man!

Elliot swallows, moves to the area, then touches the flame to the wall. FWOOM! Fire races up the siding. In an instant, the flames are towering.

Elliot stumbles back, staring. Numb.

ELLIOT

Can I go?

Brooks' full attention locked on the blaze.

BROOKS

Yeah. Go. Wipe everything.

Elliot turns, hurrying back to Unit B.

Brooks drops the gas can, picks up a piece of half-burning debris from the ground, and starts walking the perimeter again, this time touching flame to soaked sections of wall and Barry's piles of tinder. The fire quickly spreads.

INT. CAST UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Smoke starts to billow in through the open windows.

AMELIA

(mutters)

Smoke.

At the front facing window, Randy tugs on the bars, staring at the growing orange glow outside.

RANDY

Guys...

Slater joins him, peering out to see fire crawling up the outer wall.

SLATER

Oh my God. Fire. FIRE!

Amelia rushes out of the bedroom with an armful of t-shirts, tossing them around. Randy fumbles to catch one.

AMELIA

Cover your faces. It'll help with the smoke.

RANDY

Like ninjas?

AMELIA

Exactly. Like ninjas.

Hudson joins them, grabbing a shirt.

HUDSON

Got through some of the wall in the back. Whole place is cinderblock and rebar. We won't be able to punch our way out.

Amelia sprints to the bathroom. They hear the sound of running water. She returns with two soaked towels, handing one to Hudson.

AMELIA

We need to move to the bedrooms. Fire hasn't reached there yet. We'll split up, seal the door gap with the towels, and work on the windows. First room to get out alerts and helps the others.

They all nod in unison. Randy, Garret and Amelia head into one room, Hudson and Slater into the other.

INT. CREW UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Elliot frantically deletes footage from drives. The door bursts open. Brooks stands with Barry on his ass.

BROOKS

Elliot, let's go. Fire's spreading to this unit.

ELLIOT

I didn't finish-

BROOKS

The fire will finish it. Move!

Elliot hesitates, then stands to follow them out.

INT. CAST UNIT - GIRL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Amelia stuffs the wet towel under the door cutting off the incoming smoke.

Garret slides open the window and analyzes the bars covering it. A bolt on the left side of the metal frame (the half still shielded by glass) is loose.

GARRET

Got a loose bolt over here. We need to break this glass.

Immediately, Randy grabs a lamp and SMASHES it straight into the window. Both shatter. Glass flies everywhere.

GARRET (CONT'D)

JESUS RANDY!

Randy yelps, reeling back, clutching his forearm. A jagged shard cut a deep opening. Blood pours out.

RANDY

Oh no! Ow! Ow!

Amelia grabs a sheet off the bed and presses it onto the wound.

AMELIA

You need pressure. Randy! Hey! Look at me.

He does... He's already losing color in his face.

RANDY

I'm scared.

Garret works desperately at the wall hammering the the knife with the pan, chipping away bits of concrete around the metal brackets.

GARRET

If we can get one side free, we might be able to bend the whole thing.

Amelia eases Randy down onto the nearest bed. Nele's. He sits on something hard under the blanket. She pulls out Hudson's Shillelagh, frowns and tosses it on the floor.

Randy's eyes unfocus. His hand slips from hers, limp.

AMELIA

No... No, no, no...

Garret glances back, sees Randy, sees Amelia's face. The reality hitting them both.

GARRET

Fuck...

Amelia takes a breath, refocuses and swallows it down. She stands, grabbing the shillelagh.

AMELIA

Which corner?

Garret points. She steps up, rears back and SLAMS the club into the lower left corner. Larger chips of cinderblock break off. She hits again. And again.

INT. CAST UNIT - BOY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Using the broken leg of a chair, Slater tries to prying the bars off. They don't budge.

Hudson watches, listening to the fire roar outside the room.

SLATER

We're going to die here... We're actually going to die.

Hudson pulls the shirt over his face, moving to the door.

SLATER (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

HUDSON

Propane tank on that grill outside. Going to try and make us an exit.

SLATER

That's insane! What if it doesn't work!?

HUDSON

Then we die anyway. You hear it go off, see if you can go through the wall.

Slater just stares.

SLATER

Hudson, you'll-

With a sly crooked smile and a casual two-finger salute, Hudson opens the door and disappears into the smoke.

Slater stands alone, trembling. Staring at the closed door.

EXT. OUTSIDE LIVING ROOM WINDOW - MOMENTS LATER

The grill sits against the unit near a window. Flames running up the walls on either side.

Through the bars, Hudson's arm reaches out, grabs the frame of the grill and drags it closer. His hand finds the tank sitting underneath, his fingers blindly working at the valve.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - HILL - CONTINUOUS

40 yards away, Brooks, Elliot and Barry sit on a dirt hill, watching the building burn. Elliot hugs his knees, staring at the ground.

BROOKS

It's almost over. (beat) When the fire dies down, we'll need to cut the lock off the metal door... Say it got jammed.

BARRY

I got bolt cutters in my trunk.

Brooks looks over, for once, pleasantly surprised with Barry.

BROOKS

Okay. Nice.

INT. CAST UNIT - GIRL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Garret now swings the shillelagh, pounding at the corner. A small crater now forming as the wall crumbles away. Amelia presses on the bars. They flex outward just a little. She looks closer. Both bolts on the left side are free.

AMELIA

The bottom bolts out!

They both push together. It's a damn sturdy set of bars.

Then... A VIOLENT BLAST.

A shockwave of smoke and debris tears through the unit, shaking the whole structure.

They're thrown to the floor, ears ringing.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - HILL - CONTINUOUS

A fireball erupts from the building. All three stare, horrified in awe.

BARRY
Holy shit...

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - CONTINUOUS

VIEW FROM ABOVE: Both units fully engulfed, roofs caving, black smoke flooding from the enflamed ruins.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD APARTMENTS - HILL - CONTINUOUS

The three continue to watch as sections of the burning structure collapse. The faint sound of sirens wail in the distance. Barry exhales.

BARRY
Guess that's it...

BROOKS
Yeah, think so. (beat) Why don't you go cut that lock before EMS rolls in.

Barry nods and heads down, moseying over to the property.

Brooks glances over at Elliot. His eyes are hollow. Brooks attempts to be comforting.

BROOKS (CONT'D)
There was no other way. We all know that... All we can do now is make it count. That's how we move forward... We owe it to them.

The phrasing rubs Elliot the wrong way. He turns to Brooks, anger flaring underneath all the numb. Then-

WHACK!

Brooks' body drops like a sack of potatoes.

Elliot flinches, panicked. He turns to see Amelia and Garret behind him on the slope of the hill. Soot-streaked faces, torn clothes. Wild-eyed. And despite it all, still very much alive...

Garret grips the shillelagh tight, staring like a mad man.

Elliot stumbles backwards, slipping on loose gravel and falling on his ass. He starts pleading.

ELLIOT
Hey. Hey now, wait!

Garret stands over him, raising the club above his head.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Don't! Just please! Wait on sec-

Garret brings it down hard as Elliot tries to shield himself.

CRACK!

Elliot screams out, clutching his now shattered forearm.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
JESUS! AHHH! FUCK!

He rolls to his stomach trying to crawl away, then collapses. He flips onto back, cradling his arm, sobbing in pain.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
Please. P- please don't. I didn't-

AMELIA
Didn't what?... Lock us in there?
Lie about Nele? Set us on fire!?
Give us one good reason why we
shouldn't kill you.

Elliot glances at Brooks' crumpled body, then back to them. Terrified as he mentally scrambles for anything.

ELLIOT
I CAN GIVE YOU BOTH CAREERS! FAME!

They hesitate, primarily out of confusion.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
You're both actors, right? Want to
be household names?

A beat. They exchange a look.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)
My film! My film was just greenlit.
Funded by a major studio. I swear.
You can both star in it. Lead
roles. Red carpets. All of it.
Please, I'm begging you.

The two stare down at him, weighing their options.

In their periphery, a line of flashing lights from emergency vehicles closes in.

INT. SOUND STAGE - DAY

Super: One Year Later

A MASSIVE soundstage hums with activity.

One half: FUTURISTIC CITYSCAPES, multi-level platforms, and a towering wall of LED screens cycling neon skylines.

The other: Organized chaos. Crew, Crafty, wardrobe, lighting rigs, cables, etc.

Off to the side, a small PRESS SETUP in front of a CAPTAIN LASER 2 backdrop. Three chairs, cameras, and boom mics.

In the chairs:

Garret: Decked out in full, high-end superhero armor, complete with a cape and chrome chest plate.

Amelia: Dressed like a futuristic spy, sleek tactical gear and a fake mechanical eye.

Elliot: In black jeans, a T-shirt, and a fitted jacket.

They banter and smile like lifelong friends.

An ENTERTAINMENT HOST (early 30s, polished), sits across from them, mid-interview.

HOST

Well, with the first Captain Laser blowing up the box office, and now the "Beam Pose" challenge taking over TikTok, it's clear your fans will be thrilled to finally get a peek at the sequel.

AMELIA

They should be. It's wild. Fans are going to lose their minds.

GARRET

If they don't, I'm giving every one of them a stern talking to.

Polite laughter. Elliot smiles along.

ELLIOT

We're just really excited to share it and promise not to disappoint.

HOST

Fantastic. (beat) Now, on a more serious note, we're approaching the anniversary of the tragic event that, for a lot of people, bonded the three of you in the public eye.

A subtle stiffness grows between them, then dissipates.

HOST (CONT'D)

The Bakersfield fire... Is that something you're comfortable talking about?

A beat. Then all nod.

GARRET

Yeah. It was... the worst night of our lives. We lost friends. Coworkers. (beat) But... I think we've stayed sane by taking that awful experience and turning it into something that matters, ya know? Creating stories about survival. Triumph of the human spirit.

The Host nods sympathetically.

AMELIA

We're grateful for what this year has brought... but yeah, it was rough. Afterward, people really wanted a villain. Someone to blame. But the truth is, sometimes, horrible things just... happen.

HOST

There's still ongoing litigation with the property owner. Gloria Morales, is that right?

ELLIOT

We can't comment on anything ongoing... but, yeah. We're hoping there's some sort of accountability that comes from it.

Amelia and Garret's smiles tighten, then reset.

HOST

Of course.(beat) Okay, last question. When fans watch Captain Laser II, what do you hope they walk away with?

Elliot takes a moment before answering.

ELLIOT

That life is messy and complicated... but still beautiful.
(beat) The worst night of your life can lead to finding people who end up being like family.

He turns, gives Amelia and Garret a warm look of endearment. They return it. Gentle smiles, a nod, Amelia places her hand on his arm.

The host smiles and nods.

HOST

So true (beat) Cannot wait for people to see this movie.
(to camera)
Captain Laser II: Eclipse Protocol hits theaters next summer. From the sound of it, you might want to buy your tickets early.

The Camera Op signals cut. Mics lower.

HOST (CONT'D)

Thank you all. That was perfect.

Assistants swoop in to unclip everyone's lav mics. Like a switch, Garret and Amelia's smiles vanish. They stand and walk off without looking at Elliot.

ELLIOT

(calling out)
That was good guys. Thanks.

Garret scoffs and rolls his eyes.

GARRET

Can you believe that?

AMELIA

The thing about "accountability"?

Garret nods.

From the side of the stage, Brooks hustles over to them, tablet in hand, headset around his neck. He's had a full on producer glow-up. Sharper clothes, better watch, etc.

BROOKS

Hey, real quick, they want you two on a VFX plate before lunch, then we're flipping the set—

They stop and turn. Starring daggers through him.

He sighs, rolling his eyes.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Oh, come on. We're still doing this?

Silence.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

So how am I supposed to communicate with you when both of your assistants call out sick? Want me to email your agents and pretend they don't know we're on set together?

Amelia crosses her arms.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Alright. Look... I just hope one day you'll be able to forgive me.

He gestures around to the giant set, the crew, them.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

You know... For making all your dreams come true. Can't be easy.

Garret snaps. Launching forward.

GARRET

You—

Amelia catches his wrist and squeezes it. Garret pulls his arm free, but doesn't swing. He steps forward, lowering his voice.

GARRET (CONT'D)

We're here in spite of you. Not because of you. Understand?

Brooks' expression shifts back to "professional producer" mode.

BROOKS

Right. Good talk. Five minutes to set.

He peels off, already back to talking into his headset.

INT. SOUND STAGE - VIDEO VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Elliot flips through pages of the script making notes.

MANDY, (early 20s, an overly eager PA) hovers nearby holding a COFFEE CUP.

MANDY

Mr. Miller?

ELLIOT

Yeah?

MANDY

Cold brew, splash of oat.

He takes it and nods.

ELLIOT

Oh. Thanks, I appreciate it.

Mandy glows. Stalling.

MANDY

I just wanted to say... I love your work. Read all your scripts. The first Captain Laser got me through a real rough patch, so, thank you.

ELLIOT

Well thanks. Happy to hear that.

Beat. She continues to linger.

MANDY

I write too actually. Not like you, obviously, but... I have this script. It's kind of like a grounded sci-fi-

ELLIOT

Mandy, right?

She nods, beaming.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

We're in the middle of a shoot, and I'm barely keeping up with my *own* pages. If I get into other people's work, the studio is probably gonna have me killed.

She nods too fast.

MANDY

Totally. Yeah. Sorry-

ELLIOT

Tell you what. Keep us running on caffeine and help stay on schedule. That's how you can get noticed. Scripts come later.

MANDY

Right. Coffee and call sheets. Got it.

She forces a smile and backs away.

Brooks strides up.

BROOKS

There's our golden boy.

Elliot doesn't stop working.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

PR called, they want you on the lot walkthrough with the foreign press later. You cool to do another 15 minutes of how "surreal" your life is?

ELLIOT

Uh no. My parents are coming by later. First time on a set. Going to take them around between setups.

Brooks perks up.

BROOKS

Oh shit. I'll clear my schedule. We can all grab coffee, show them stage Twelve, maybe swing-

ELLIOT

What? No. Why would you do that?

Brooks blinks.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

My parents don't need a tour with
my producer. Keep your
appointments. We're already behind.

Beat. Brooks nods.

BROOKS

Understood, "Boss".

He turns and heads towards the stage doors. Mandy hustles up
beside him, clutching a stack of paper.

MANDY

Hey, Brooks? Second AD asked me to
get you to initial the new-

BROOKS

Just leave it on my chair.

MANDY

They wanted to get these-

BROOKS

Mandy. Chair. Thanks.

He doesn't break stride. Mandy stops there, flushed.

EXT. BACKLOT/SOUND STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

A GOLF CART idles outside. Barry slumped behind the wheel,
headphones in, watching NETFLIX on his phone.

Brooks climbs into the passenger seat.

BROOKS

Let's go. Stage Five.

BARRY

Which one's Five again?

Brooks stares at him.

BROOKS

The one we've been shooting on for
three months. Big number "5" on the
side.

Barry glances around, lost. Brooks sighs, and points ahead.

BROOKS (CONT'D)

Straight, then take a right.

He drops the cart into gear. As they lurch forward, Barry's phone slips off his lap, bouncing onto the asphalt. They continue to drive off, oblivious.

Mandy hustles out the doors, stack of documents in hand.

MANDY
Wait, Brooks!

She scans the lot. No sign of him. She groans, turns and nearly steps on the phone.

MANDY (CONT'D)
Whoa-

She crouches, picking it up.

MANDY (CONT'D)
Hey, did anyone drop a phone?

A GRIP dragging cables blows past her.

GRIP
Not mine, sorry.

She looks around. No one has time for her. She taps the screen, the phone opens. No lock screen or passcode needed.

MANDY
Okay, guess I'll just... Figure it out.

She opens PHOTOS, looking for someone she recognizes.

- Blurry photos of CRAFTY
- A bird in a tree
- A dopey selfie of Barry on set.

She snorts.

MANDY (CONT'D)
Of course.

She sees a folder labeled, "Bakersfield B-Roll". She taps it.

CREDITS ROLL over PHONE FOOTAGE:

- Video of a tumbleweed rolling slowly in the desert.
- A close up of a beetle walking over cracked dirt.

- Barry's shaky POV: The Bakersfield apartments. Bars on the windows. Cast laughing, drinking, playing games.
- Hudson smoking at the window, glaring into the lens.
- Video of the industrial lock on the front door.
- Video of Nele's unconscious body being carried out to the U-Haul.
- The apartments as fire is starting around the side. Barry packs tinder against the walls breathing hard.

BARRY (V.O.)

This is so fucked up dude. Holy
shit.

- Brooks running around with a gas can dousing the building.
- From a distance, the whole property is up in flames. Sirens blare in the distance.

BROOKS (V.O.)

We didn't have a choice...

SMASH TO BLACK.