

SILVER FLAKE

Written by
Francis Rose

Address
Phone Number

TEASER

INT. LEE'S OFFICE - MORNING (FLASH FORWARD)

LEE RUST, (50s), a burly cowboy CEO, a poses at a stuffy desk.
A tatted PHOTOGRAPHER flits around him.

PHOTOGRAPHER

So when the camera's on, I'm gonna
have you turn your chin slightly to
the right...and head up?

Lee rotates, mugs for an invisible camera.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

Perfect! That's a nice angle. We
wanna define that jawline.

She styles a hardcover beside him. On cover: In the Vice of a
Conservative: The Goldwater Delusion. By Dr. Henry Choi.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

I heard he's on his way.

LEE

Only took him four days. You'd
think I invited him to a Proud Boys
shootout, right?

Lee glances at the book jacket, sags his jowls at the AUTHOR
BIOGRAPHY. The photographer backs to the door.

PHOTOGRAPHER

This set looks good. I'll just wait
out front in case he can't find the
room.

Lee rummages in a desk drawer.

LEE

Thanks. Close the door?

INT. LEE'S HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Fussy bookworm, DR. HENRY CHOI, (30s), Korean-American, flicks
dust off his glasses. He slogs past framed business
magazines, colonial lithographs, taxidermy hunting trophies.

HENRY

(To himself)

Barry fucking Goldwater.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)
You want it? Okay! I'll take my two
million, thank you.

He stops at Lee's partly-closed door, adjusts his tie.

INT. LEE'S OFFICE - A SECOND LATER

Lee tosses a pistol in his hands. Beat.

LEE
It's open!

Henry peeks in the door crack, spies the pistol. His foot
nudges the door open.

HENRY
Hi...Lee?

He glances back.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Is that an antique? Original Luger
maybe?

LEE
Yeah, he's my last asset. I'm
broke, got terminal ball cancer.
Come on in, come on in.
(waving the pistol, manic)
My lawyer promised me this job
would get me off the IRS watchlist.

He TAPS the pistol against his thigh. Henry inches a foot
over the threshold.

HENRY
Well, whaddya know. I'm not quite
flush either.

LEE
You don't think I've got it worse?
Didn't you go to some big
name...Harvard?

HENRY
Right. Yes...and I agree. Being
indicted's not ideal.

Lee raises the pistol.

LEE
Good. You get it. You can go tell
your partners outside.
(MORE)

LEE (CONT'D)

There's no point dragging me to
kangaroo court for some not even BS
I pulled years ago.

Lee drops the pistol to his groin. Henry GASPS.

HENRY

Oh, great! It's not for me-

BANG! Henry bellyflops, hands over head. Lee faints
backwards. Blood leaks between his legs. He revives,
GAGS...and BANG! He shoots his temple.

MAN (O.S.)

Henry!

A blonde man (bowl cut, kevlar vest) waves from down the
hall. Henry pops up to run. BOOM. He trips on Lee's corpse,
soaking his face in blood.

END TEASER

ACT I

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - EVENING

Henry bounces his legs at a conference table. Enter severe bohemian TAMMY ERNST, (60s), ready to pounce. She drops in the opposite chair.

TAMMY

Tammy. Nice to meet you.

HENRY

Hi. Tammy. It's been a while, I know. We met at the DNC?

They handshake. Tammy SLAPS a book on the table (Waterboarding Washington: Foibles, Failures, and F*ups in Iraq).

HENRY (CONT'D)

That's as depoliticized as you're going in the inflammatory pundit market.

TAMMY

Is that a new job title? I thought we were going with political scientist.

HENRY

You know research is just capitalism for the antisocial. You've gotta inflate the title little bit, right?

He laughs. Tammy frowns as she slips a voice recorder, notebook from a pocket.

TAMMY

We'll say twenty on the clock. And so you're aware, my team is hounding me to get a quick statement. For readers who may be-

HENRY

Come on, they're not gonna be traumatized by hyperbolic virtue signaling.

He eye-rolls at an EXIT. Tammy COUGHS.

TAMMY

I assume you didn't see The Spectator op-ed yesterday?

HENRY

Nah, I'm more of a news buff...

TAMMY

Greg Gutfeld claims you plagiarized In the Vice of a Conservative: The Goldwater Delusion.

HENRY

Wow. So, it took him six year to misread 300 pages? That's gotta be some kind of record.

TAMMY

Well, he maintains you improperly attributed quotes from his 2018 Cato Institute Colloquium transcript.

HENRY

To Barry Goldwater! So, he didn't read.

TAMMY

I mean, he specifically points to passages-

HENRY

Who cares! He missed a whole chapter. Recycled cold-war rhetoric as a lazy hallmark of post-modern conservative narratives?

Tammy jots in her notebook and waits for Henry to break. Beat.

TAMMY

Dr. Choi, is there anything else you want to clarify?

HENRY

No, I'm not on record. I'd really just like to move on to my recent work, time permitting...

TAMMY

By all means...

She eyes Henry's pit stains. He folds his arms.

HENRY

Okay. Thanks. And actually, here's a thematic bridge. Take what happened in 2003. The American public clearly has a high tolerance for intellectual gaffes-

Tammy puts up a hand.

TAMMY

Maybe can we unpack that metaphor? Is plagiarism a gaffe?

HENRY

I mean, America doesn't incarcerate footnote felons. Or we'd probably both be serving twenty to life, right?

He forces a smile. She doesn't reciprocate.

TAMMY

Then would you say profiting off stolen scholarship is a performative antic in your brainy-bro pseudo-culture?

HENRY

No! My God! My core reader base is dying on medicaid hospice. They're not filling my FAFSA coffers.

Tammy glares at the back of his book.

TAMMY

Only 39.99.

HENRY

Yeah, that's the Trudeau number! It's 19.95 USD. Which, frankly, is more than in range for your parent-sponsored readers. Guaranteed, they're ironically snorting off my face. Which is fine by me.

BEEP-BEEP. Tammy checks her recorder.

TAMMY

Battery check...keep going. You believe there's a qualitative distinction between your base and my base?

HENRY
Yes? You don't? Is that a trick
question?

TAMMY
I'm not the inflammatory pundit.

Henry reaches below the table for a water bottle.

HENRY
Excuse me...

THUD. His forehead strikes the table, his feet kick the
bottle. He rolls up his wet pants, reveals mismatched socks.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Oh, mother fucking fuck-

Tammy jabs the recorder OFF.

TAMMY
Dr. Choi?

HENRY
I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said-

TAMMY
No, no we'll have to cut in post.
That's all.

She smiles at him over her notebook.

INT. ERIC'S PARK SLOPE OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Henry slumps behind the arched shoulder of his editor ERIC
TOUSSAINT, (50s), Black, invariably anxious.

ERIC
At least you wedged in our
Guantanamo rant...

He crams stray papers in a shredder on his desk. Beat.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Guess. How many mea culpas did
Garret call me to say he sent in
your name in the last five hours?

HENRY
Why? PR is like half his job!

He GROANS into a forward fold. Eric shakes his head.

ERIC
Walk me through this move...?

HENRY
CIA memory suppression technique.
It's how they forget who's been
bombed-

Eric points at the SHRED button. Henry stands upright.

HENRY (CONT'D)
So I read the room! Guantanamo
wasn't the right chaser for
whatever bender Tammy was on.

Eric shakes his head, opens his laptop. On screen is a SLATE
article: Myth of the Ivory Tower Nice Guy: Ethical
Transcendence and Phallic Intellectualism in Political
Science.

HENRY (CONT'D)
She's gone off the deep end. She's-

ERIC
Nope. The first amendment won't
save you. You say that outside of
here, you're asking for the
chauvinist label.

HENRY
I'm just pointing out. Nothing in
that title's click-baiting girl-
boss fems or populist incels! Who's
her audience?

Eric elbows him.

ERIC
Do you need need to answer to them?

HENRY
I don't wanna sound like a question-
dodger.

ERIC
Who do you think is remembering a
question. And evaluating the slight
chance you may not have answered
it?

HENRY
Oh, I don't underestimate
Tammy's free tote-bag subscribers.
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)
They've gotta have literate
assistants.

Eric CLAPS his desk. Henry jumps. Eric steadies him.

ERIC
See? Everyone knows Tammy's crowd
is comically misinformed. They have
no business criticizing whatever we
put out. But sometimes it's
healthier to be jaded. Why do you
talk about what you write?

HENRY
Right, I get that interviews,
podcasts, news spots...they're just
mutual attention posturing
sessions. Believe me, I'm fighting
toxic integrity every day!

Eric nods, almost to himself. He looks up at his shelf
sagging with bestsellers, literary editor awards.

EXT. SUBWAY TUNNEL - LATER

Henry races down a staircase headed DOWNTOWN as a train
SQUEALS to the empty platform. The doors open onto...

INT. SUBWAY CAR - CONTINUOUS (TRACKING)

A crammed car of artsy yuppies.

Henry's POV: Eyes tail him as he fumbles to a free spot.
BOOM. The car LURCHES, flinging him against the grimy doors.

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING - LATE NIGHT

Henry schleps to the door of a dull brownstone.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Henry enters a pre-war studio stuffed with books, Ikea. A
skinny kid in an XL suit, ALEX ARONOWITZ, (30s), patters in
the kitchen, pours coffee in a plastic wine glass.

ALEX
I saw the Tammy diatribe.

HENRY

Great. Cause I'd really like to join corporate America. Maybe tomorrow? For job stability? I could be your intern?

He slides the glass at Henry. Henry smiles weakly in return.

ALEX

Sorry, I know you too well to hire you.

HENRY

But we're not related enough for nepotism!

ALEX

Well, more importantly, as a writer-

HENRY

Begins every self-indulgent, writer cliché!

ALEX

Then stop self-indulging. I say you have a civic duty to flip truth to power.

HENRY

Ugh, Alex! That's called liberal arts propaganda. I'm never gonna bar all the radical chic trust-funders from my slice of the NPR-verse!

ALEX

You can. You have a choice.

Alex leans towards Henry across the narrow counter.

HENRY

Not when they're paying my rent share!

ALEX

I disagree. Where you funnel your donations from is an ethical decision. I offered to cover you...

Henry pouts. Alex steals back the coffee, sips. Beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

And is Tammy not a radical chic trust-funder?

HENRY

Wouldn't say fully dyed in the Good
Will cashmere. I bet Tom Wolfe
would still call her a legitimate
journalist.

ALEX

But do you see her dismantling
elitism from a Bed-Stuy walk-up?

HENRY

That's not why I threw a tantrum,
you know, euthanized my career-

ALEX

It could be. Rewrite the narrative.

He wiggles a brow. Henry nods uncertainly.

INT. BROOKLYN DELI - MORNING

Henry, Eric huddle at a back booth. Henry droops his head
over an untouched sandwich.

ERIC

Eyes up! You earned a New York
Times front page apology from an
unexclamatory Gutfeld.

HENRY

He's taking it seriously. Cause
it's a once in his lifetime
opportunity.

ERIC

Oh, fine. Discount the win. Tammy
hasn't peeped, I haven't had to
take my emergency melatonin...all
is well!

HENRY

She isn't retracting either.

ERIC

For good reason! Some pissy PA
leaked the audio from her recording
and you've been anointed, hero of
the common sense dandies. All over
is it Twitter...X? Whatever...

HENRY

But that's gotta be some cancelable-
sim. In fact, let's check.

He reaches for his cellphone. Eric blocks his hand.

ERIC

Garret said he inked you four
option queries for an IP sale on
Barry Goldwater. Were you planning
to say something? To the one guy
who's hand-held every damn sentence
you've written since grad school?

Henry flails, recoils from the counter. Eric shakes his head.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Bull, Henry! Politely...bull!
You're sitting on producer heroine.
Anyone in your seat would be
wetting themselves right now.

HENRY

That's the image you went with? You
know, I've got PTSD!

Eric 360s the room, stares down onlookers. Beat.

ERIC

Listen to me, since you're not
listening to your agent or your
manager or your lawyer.

HENRY

I will. When they stop poaching
Mike Pence from Simon and Schuster.

ERIC

Just...listen. We're all trying for
you. Out here, you don't have-

HENRY

Yeah, dopamine. I'm chronically
deficient, ask my family.

ERIC

That I knew, obviously. I was also
thinking...you don't have a self-
aware audience in this town. To
people like Tammy, you're an
ingrate.

HENRY

How. I'm punching the shit outta
myself down, too. In-jokes aren't
like a novel concept.

ERIC

And that's why you need a broader audience, maybe international...

HENRY

You mean the old country of my people?

ERIC

No! No, I wasn't going in that vein-

Henry cracks a dark smile. Eric exhales.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Visualize for a second, yes? You crank out an eight episode series...that makes what, 500 pages? You can do anything afterwards. Consult, podcast, get an au pair for Alex...

HENRY

That's what I'm supposed to want?

ERIC

You don't know? I thought everyone liked power for no responsibility!

Henry pushes his plate away.

HENRY

No! I'm not gonna be high concept studio POW. You know, my mother force fed me Barton Fink every Halloween before I stopped calling.

ERIC

But you don't have to Barton Fink. I'm saying go into the process as a final victory lap. For the cash generated by the Avenger Guardian League of Starships? Hollywood can spare a dime to get you an Emmy.

HENRY

You think Barry Goldwater'll give the AGLS oligarchy a run?

ERIC

Honestly, not a chance. But that's not the point. You're making baby-boomer, college-degree fluff. It's a totally different product.

PING. Eric rises to a BEETHOVEN'S 5th ringtone.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Give me ten minutes...

HENRY
Well...wait...is that Garret? Are
you colluding with him? Did he tell
you-

Eric shrugs, waves, backs away.

EXT. DELI SIDEWALK, WILLIAMSBURG - MINUTES LATER

Eric paces, shouts into his cellphone over traffic.

ERIC
Garr? Hey, hi. We were...yes. I'll
run it by him. Projection
is...really, that high? No,
absolutely...uh-huh. Talk to you
soon!

He mouths YES, claps his own shoulder. Beat.

Eric's POV: Henry motions frantically in the front window.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Henry enters, frets over a laptop. Alex sprawls on the futon.
He tosses a book(Income Liability Violations) at a trash bin.

ALEX
You look constipated.

HENRY
Bracing for an IP sell out.
Stagnating a shit. Same muscles.

ALEX
I gather Garret found you a Zero
Motel?

HENRY
Apparently. Nathan Lane, Broderick.
He thinks I'll get a whole producer
bidding war. He said my work's in
the zeitgeist for disillusioned Gen-
X intellectuals. They're not
watching live-action Lincoln,
Watergate, JFK porn.
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Enter Barry Goldwater: Cautionary tale of a mildly stable self-appointed genius. It's unscripted but secretly scripted?

He props his laptop on Alex's chest, paces. Alex squints, scrolls.

ALEX

Huh...Thurston For-grass? Did I butcher that?

HENRY

I mean, if the final syllable isn't silent? Oh boy...

Alex giggles.

ALEX

And he wins your first impression rose?

HENRY

Dunno yet. But I read somewhere...he's like the Michael Moore of foreign agitprop coup documentaries. He did the BBC Bosnian Revolution special.

ALEX

Okay. That was better than insufferable.

HENRY

Cause he's not pulling some Eurotrash, literati gimmick.

ALEX

No, right, he seems...I always forget where you stand. Is being authentic peak inauthentic now?

Henry plops on the coffee table in front of him.

HENRY

Ken Burns authentic? Art house film school authentic? The connotations are different.

ALEX

It says he lives in Silver Lake. Is that the zip code with the highest unproduced screenplay per capita quotient?

HENRY

Not Silver Lake, LA! There's also a Silver Lake wasp-hole. In like Clambake Connecticut? I can't decide if that's any less off-putting, but...

Alex SIGHS and shimmies upright, suddenly series. Henry lunges to grab his laptop before it falls.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Oh no...tell me.

ALEX

I feel like an enabler of unhealthy co-rumination right now.

HENRY

So? I've already decided for us. I'm taking any deal he offers.

ALEX

But do you have an estimate for what you see your net IP revenue valued at?

HENRY

Should I? We're meeting for the first time this weekend. It's just casual...Eric's driving.

ALEX

Of course he is. Garret wants commission. Eric wants prestige. You are their proverbial vehicle for getting what they want. You owe it to yourself to care! Why throw away years of work?

Henry stands and paces for a beat.

HENRY

I have no expectations. Really. Any payout's a good enough proximate end. If it buys us a few more months here...

He collapses back on the table. Alex frowns at the laptop.

ALEX

Promise me, before you sign anything-

HENRY
I promise. There will be no signing
of things!

ALEX
Thank you.

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING - DAWN

An Aston Martin SWOOSHES to the curb. Alex waves in an open
ground window. Eric HONKS and waves back.

ALEX
Hey! He's coming...
(Re: Aston Martin)
Are you...okay?

ERIC
Ha! That's what Dan Kahneman asked
me. I'm calling it a divorce
anniversary gift. From me to me.

Henry emerges on the steps in a suit. Eric pats the dash.

HENRY
And what does Thurston drive?

He slips in the passengers seat. Eric jerks a thumb at
Henry's seatbelt. Henry GROANS but complies.

ERIC
For that, you can pump gas round
one!

INT/EXT. ASTON MARTIN, HIGHWAY - MORNING (TRACKING)

Eric, Henry barrel down the parkway to BULLS on PARADE.

HENRY
Is this the country club playlist?

ERIC
It is. Straight from the golf moms
of Bergen, New Jersey.

INT/EXT. ASTON MARTIN, RURAL CONNECTICUT - LATER (TRACKING)

Eric drives slowly past colonial mansions nestled in the
woods. Henry reads aloud from a Hollywood Reporter magazine.

HENRY
 ...snagged the property in 2010 off
 a Coppola. Not named Cage. For 10.5
 million...forge on?

Eric winces but motions for Henry to continue.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 The ranch-style evokes the
 aesthetics of a symbiotic union
 between industrial man and organic-

ERIC
 Wait, where's my "boho mountain
 oasis" chic?

HENRY
 (Scanning the page)
 Nope. We've got, "Usonian oasis"!

ERIC
 I dress up prose for a living. But,
 really, what is that?

HENRY
 Semantic gatekeeping? By a barista
 with an axe to grind?

ERIC
 I'm sure he's earning minimum wage.

Eric purposely sharp-turns down a bumpy backroad.

EXT. THURSTON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Henry, Eric amble to a stone gate. BEEP. The gate opens on a
 riverfront craftsman ranch topped with solar panels.

ERIC
 10.5. You wonder where the zeros
 went...

HENRY
 It's eco, negative waste. He's a
 DiCaprio philanthropist!

Eric shoots him a frown as they trek closer to the door.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Oh! Want me to call bull on myself?
 Cause on the turnpike you took that
 dive...

ERIC
I meant don't be a prick. Not play
Pollyanna. What is the devil really
telling you.

HENRY
Greenwash tax write off?

ERIC
Better...and here, slow down.

He stops to check his cellphone. Henry backtracks.

HENRY
We're doing the minute late power-
move!

ERIC
Nope. Two minutes, minimum. He said
he's leaving the door open...I
guess we're not guests?

HENRY
No, of course, it's cause we're
family!

INT. THURSTON'S HOUSE, HALLWAY 1 - MINUTES LATER

Henry trails Eric down a white hall, wincing at an IMDB list.

ERIC
I'm not CPR-certified...

HENRY
He executive produced the Veggie
Tales Christmas propaganda! The one
on the ADL's watchlist?

ERIC
It's a credit.

HENRY
Not an atheistic one!

ERIC
Everyone pads the resume. He's been
producing for thirty years...

[illegible]

Eric halts at an intersection. Henry peers around the corner.

INT. THURSTON'S HOUSE, HALLWAY 2 - CONTINUOUS

Grande dame MERLE STRATTON, (60s), cheek kisses a buttoned-up assistant AJ MOLINA, (20s), Mexican-American.

MERLE

Bye honey. K? Come to Ojai next time! We'll do that hair bath spa.

She struts off, purposely huffing as she passes Henry, Eric.

MERLE (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

She disappears down a side staircase. AJ turns her back on the drama. Beat. Eric EH-HEMS.

AJ

You're Thurston's 1:30?

ERIC

We have a noon meeting scheduled.

A meditation CHIME drowns him out. AJ walks to a far glass door, calls over her shoulder.

AJ

I'll go check, see if he can make room for you!

Henry, Eric share an eye-roll and follow her.

INT. THURSTON'S HOUSE, HALLWAY 2 - CONTINUOUS

Henry peeks inside. Henry's POV: Aging hipster THURSTON FORGRASS, (50s), stares at a blank wall in an austere, beige lounge.

AJ

He's finishing a quick past-life regression. It'll be a few minutes.

Eric rolls his sleeves, flashes a Rolex. AJ takes the hint.

AJ (CONT'D)

52 years is a lot to process.

Eric SNORTS. Henry checks the IMDB list again.

HENRY

He's not 47?

AJ

Oh, on IMDB-Pro? They don't verify age. And he's got a babyface. It's all the buccal collagen...

Eric inches closer to the door. AJ blocks him.

AJ (CONT'D)

One thing...we ask everyone to do six-feet in closed spaces. Thurston doesn't want us over-vaccinating for any reason, so...

HENRY

(To Eric)

It's 1963?

ERIC

We stay on the fringes, that's nothing new.

AJ peers in the doorway. Eric pulls Henry aside.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Ready?

HENRY

Well, I didn't finish The Art of the Deal.

ERIC

Genius is 99% performative. You talk fast, throw in some jazz hands. You'll be fine.

HENRY

Pulled from central casting?

He jazz-hands. Eric laughs. BUZZ. AJ opens the door. Thurston waves at a mortified Henry. Eric razzes Henry's shoulders.

END ACT I

ACT II

EXT. THURSTON'S OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON

Henry hunches across from a day bed. Thurston lays back, feet propped on a table atop In the Vice of a Conservative.

THURSTON

Welcome, welcome. Brooklyn boy...

HENRY

Hi...yeah, I'm from Bed Stuy.

THURSTON

Course, very familiar. I used to slum it in Park Slope. That's how I feel like...I don't know, I knew we'd have similar sensibilities?

Henry over-nods. Thurston prods a quote on the book cover ("Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice!").

THURSTON (CONT'D)

And, I meant to tell you, this is top notch stuff. Got that solid log-line.

HENRY

Really. I actually debated going that divisive on a cover.

THURSTON

Nah, it's great, you wrote that? I meet so many Hollywood inbreds regurgitating the same PC Marvel shit. Then you walk in with your...just like original voice? It's almost Sorkin-esque.

HENRY

Sorkin? I mean, thank you. Santos '06 was my first election.

THURSTON

2006, huh? So you've been around the block.

HENRY

Just the cable block.

THURSTON

Damn! Sharp too. I'll tell you what. My balls are in your court. It's your play, really, wherever you see Barry Goldwater heading.

HENRY

I thought an option agreement was the first step.

THURSTON

That's all you want? One and done? Cause I'll tell you, your SEO factor's peaking. We had Napoleon, Oppie, Franklin. Who's the next?

He trails off to his point sink in. Henry eyes the door.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

I'm happy to lump sum you upfront for your rights, if you're into the whole union talk. At the same time, it's just like...

HENRY

You think I'm undervaluing my IP potential?

Thurston shrugs.

THURSTON

Forget what your handlers tell you. Right now, this is your deal or no deal. From my end, there's a fuck ton we should be mining as a creative unit. But you've gotta feel us, intuitively.

HENRY

Okay. I mean, ton in terms of...?

THURSTON

See I don't write, I'm reverse-dyslexic. That's why I'll pay you to slap some political rant together. I shop it to my silicon investor buddies and we go straight to distribution, no issue.

BUZZ. Henry's pocket blinks with a text from ALEX. Thurston looks away. Henry tents his hands over his lap. Beat.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

What're you thinking...

HENRY

Well, I was just wondering. What do I net if I sell and call it a day?

THURSTON

Uh...not much. And you'd lose writing creds you may wanna cash in at some point when cable dies.

HENRY

So, if I stay on...?

THURSTON

You earn the privilege of incubating our precocious-

KNOCK. AJ appears in the door holding a NON-DISCLOSURE (NDA).

THURSTON (CONT'D)

(Mouthing to AJ)

Not, no...go, just get...go!

Thurston waves AJ off.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

Fuck! Sorry, she double-booked me!

Henry eagerly pops from his seat.

HENRY

No...problem.

THURSTON

Hang on. I have a few minutes. Think about us, yeah? Come back tomorrow with a spark-notes one-sheet. A little explainer for the team. Let's get you writing by next week.

He extends a hand. Henry folds his arms.

HENRY

Is this...insemination?

THURSTON

Oh! Could be. With consent, of course.

Henry shakes his hand. AJ KNOCKS again. Thurston waves her in.

THURSTON (CONT'D)
And since we're doing the deed
here. If you can just sign...

Behind AJ, Eric shoots Henry a questioning thumbs up.

INT. ECONOLODGE LOBBY CAFE - NIGHT

Henry stresses over hand-written DRAFTS in a dated hotel lounge. Eric (in gym clothes) enters, panting.

ERIC
Man. What was the assignment?

HENRY
Well, he wants a one sheet by
tomorrow. Which means a full
outline.

ERIC
You don't know that, necessarily.

Henry paces, flips papers.

HENRY
Overdeliver or jaywalk the
Verrazano. Either way, you'll never
be caught underselling. That's the
formula I was weaned on.

ERIC
And to think I came to share a
nice, vending-machine side chat
with my second all-time favorite
client.

HENRY
Second?!

ERIC
I'll give you first live one, since
Mondale.

Eric gently pushes Henry into a chair and sits across him.

ERIC (CONT'D)
How was he? Don't say okay.

HENRY
All right.

ERIC
Can we dissect that terminology?

HENRY
For your Slate connections?

ERIC
Hey! I still bring up my old
byline.

He picks up a draft, pretends to write. Henry laughs.

ERIC (CONT'D)
And you didn't answer me.

HENRY	ERIC (CONT'D)
I like that he likes the idea	No, no, no! No more of the
of me. Liking him.	will he won't he, does he
	love me self-conscious
	schtick. He's only the
	middleman!

HENRY (CONT'D)
But Garret's really angling for me
to lock down 15%, right? If I can't
cater to the middleman? I'm a
pointless golden calf.

ERIC
No, we're not rehashing the
"Imposter Henry" routine right now.

HENRY
I'm serious. That was his label,
verbatim. Wanna see the email he
sent me?

Henry shuffles a paper stack. Beat. Eric pries the stack
away.

ERIC
Do we think Garret's read the
bible?

INT. YACHT LOUNGE - AT THE SAME TIME

Thurston, Merle gossip over a sashimi boat and a pill bag
labeled OZEMPIC. She leers at the bag.

THURSTON
Woah, easy, it's not even a half
gram coke.

MERLE

Fuck that! Coke stopped working for me. The postpartum chicken crepe thighs keep coming back. No matter how many lasers I stick up there.

She scrunches a palm. He hands her a single pill and glances out at the sunset.

MERLE (CONT'D)

You're that broke?

He passes her the bag, then layers ginger on a salmon slice with a fork.

MERLE (CONT'D)

You ignorant heathen! It's a fucking palate cleanser.

She dangles the bag suggestively. He ignores her.

MERLE (CONT'D)

No...?

THURSTON

I'm on dry July, so...but anyways, yeah. What's uh, what's going for you?

MERLE

Mmm. Mark finally dropped his alimony request. That covered SAG. Now I've gotta deal with AFTRA

She stretches to cup her bouncy backside. He smirks at her.

MERLE (CONT'D)

Dick! I'm pre-menopause in Tribeca.

THURSTON

That matters for lady writers? You're not an actress.

MERLE

I thought it might be an age thing. After Lance cut my pilot? He made up some BS excuse because I declined the Hallmark sensitivity read. I told him, it's Hallmark, do they care? Tina Fey doesn't do one. Why am I being persecuted?

THURSTON

You're not. And from a producer's standpoint, like it makes sense-

MERLE

That the standards are different for blondes? That's ridiculous?

Thurston unzips a laptop bag at his feet, pulls out a folio labeled: UNTITLED GOLDWATER.

MERLE (CONT'D)

I'm sure you worked hard. Landing a male privilege gig!

Thurston slides the folio to her. She wanders to the deck rail. He mimics a pushing motion at her back. She speed-reads the folio's contents.

MERLE (CONT'D)

TV-MA Barry Goldwater? Who's he gonna do his 50s? Sandy Day O'Connor?

THURSTON

Nobody, it's unscripted! I'm pitching a documentary...for adults.

Merle shakes shakes her head. Thurston joins her.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

Is it so bad to say I like the house unmortgaged? Dinners cooked by a sapphic vegan model? Italian underwear? Were you expecting me to be a tax cheat?

MERLE

You want money for no effort gimmicky-

THURSTON

Low effort. It's a balancing calculus. How much oomph do I drop in the initial pitch to maximize investor interest?

Merle smiles coyly. He lunges away from her.

MERLE

I won't touch. But hear me out,
what if...if you make me a co-
writer. I can work a marketing
angle.

Thurston feigns interest in the Ozempic. Merle SCOFFS.

THURSTON

Hmm?

MERLE

Think about it. Hollywood loves a
feminist ally. When he's on a power
trip!

INT. THURSTON'S HOME GYM - NIGHT

Thurston, in cobra pose, plays a voicemail on his cellphone.

AJ (O.S.)

Hey! Got hold of Delaney. She's in
the Google calendar for tomorrow...

INT. DELANEY'S PENTHOUSE LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Thurston, Merle wait on a cowhide sofa in an industrial loft.

MERLE

Your ex-wife needed to be involved?

THURSTON

She's a free second opinion.

MERLE

Anything else?

He mock frowns at his crotch. She swings a pillow at him. He
yanks it from her grasp. A side door opens. Enter alien-
faced, pale model DELANEY KRANKOVIC, (40s), in all black.

DELANEY

Can we...? I have big meeting in
twenty.

THURSTON

With the aesthetician or the dog
walker?

Delaney SNORTS and slinks through the door.

INT. DELANEY'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Thurston, Merle face Delaney in her utilitarian chic office. She flippantly sorts a resume pile at her desk.

DELANEY

You have tons of options. It's a cattle call. Some of these kids are delusional.

MERLE

Then help me understand, why are we dragging in more bodies?

She nudges Thurston for backup.

THURSTON

Right, like if it's whoever's kid's improv hookup. Sure, give him a coffee runner gig before law school but-

DELANEY

You're establishing a writer pedigree.

MERLE

(To Thurston)

I've never heard anyone in the industry use that terminology.

Thurston shrugs. Delaney passes him the culled resume stack.

DELANEY

It's a pitch tactic. Investors get off on knowing how many writers suffered for the sale.

Merle grabs the stack and begins flinging resumes aside.

MERLE

Jesus...this is...no! Who are these man-children! I want it down on a fucking Vanity Fair cover. I campaigned for another dried uterus in the writer's room.

THURSTON

We'll figure it out later.

(a hand on her wrist)

All right, Gina Davis? Deep breathe in-

MERLE

Oh, do not patronize me!

Merle drops the stack. Delaney catches Thurston's gaze.

DELANEY

Check this one.

She hands him a final resume. He reads aloud.

THURSTON

Bennet Laird. Dartmouth, religion studies, 2019. Runs social for a biotech clam harvesting startup in Windsor, New Hampshire?

He flips to a photo of round-faced BENNET sporting a blonde bowl cut. A bolo adorns his Korn band tee.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

He even comes with cute accessories!

He shoves the photo at Merle. She flinches.

MERLE

Ew, he's possessed! Little albino of the corn!

THURSTON

He looks part-Swinton. Do we get family perks if we can say he's her-

Delaney COUGHS. Thurston abandons his thought.

DELANEY

He wrote a horror short that placed at Cannes. Terrence Malik gave him a nod.

MERLE

His parents paid for that!

DELANEY

(To Thurston)

Remember my girlfriend Jodie? She left William Morris for a boutique lit agency in Greenwich Village. They signed him last month.

THURSTON

(To Merle)

How do you feel about clam boy? I'm curious...

He teases Merle with Bennet's picture. She brushes him off.

MERLE

Give him a trial draft, call it an unpaid internship.

THURSTON

Huh...yeah, we can say it's like...it's for industry exposure.

DELANEY

Can't. That's illegal. Under Connecticut state law.

MERLE

Not if he's part-time. Everyone does it!

Delaney frowns at her wall clock.

INT/EXT. ASTON MARTIN, THURSTON'S DRIVEWAY - LATER

Eric parks to the side of the house. Henry watches a Ducati motorcycle rocket past his window, up the drive.

HENRY

35 an hour! It's a turtle crossing!

He cranes out of his seat to get a better look. Eric yanks Henry's shirt down.

ERIC

You're done projecting?

HENRY

I wasn't!

ERIC

He's not another wise guy on the paper.

HENRY

How do you know?

ERIC

What writer would choose that ride!

Henry twists in his seat again.

HENRY

Robert Persig?

ERIC

Fair. Or maybe young Hefner? But,
really, that's about it.

Henry can't help but smile. He eases back, a little calmer.

EXT. THURSTON'S PATIO - AFTERNOON

Thurston paces before Merle. BEEP. He picks up his cellphone
(speaker).

AJ (O.S.)

Guess who's here!

THURSTON

Is it the FBI?

MERLE

Shut up! I haven't shoplifted since
2001! I don't even talk to Winona
anymore.

Thurston waves her away. She pulls a face at him.

AJ (O.S.)

Wade Charmin, like the toilet
paper? He said you know him?

THURSTON

Is he coming to kidnap my writer
babies?

MERLE

(Whispered)

That's why the FBI...

AJ (O.S.)

He asked about the charcoal
sanitizer in the gym bath. I lied
it's not cruelty free. Was that...

THURSTON

You're fine, it's just when he's
out I don't-

AJ (O.S.)

Shit! I think...oh, shit he's done!
He's heading over.

THURSTON

Okay. Tell him you booked us for a
drag bar later! He'll run for the
border!

AJ (O.S.)
 Yep...hold on...coming now!

MERLE
 (Shouting)
 Babe, please! Don't internalize
 that misogyny!

THURSTON
 (Under breathe, to Merle)
 You call a Stanford grad babe?

Thurston raises the cellphone out of her reach.

THURSTON (CONT'D)
 You know what? Tell him we're in a
 creative session. He can wait in
 the guest lounge.

AJ (O.S.)
 Got it!

THURSTON (CONT'D)
 Thanks, AJ.

INT. THURSTON'S DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Henry scans the beige room over his laptop. On screen: DRAFT
 I. He spots his NDA in a trash bin.

INT. THURSTON'S HALLWAY/DINING ROOM - AT THE SAME TIME

Thurston, Merle lead Bennet to the dining room/workspace.

THURSTON
 You'll meet the other writer, he
 used to do op-eds for some French
 magazine...

MERLE
 (To Bennet)
 The Paris Review.

Bennet nods. Thurston slides back a pocket door and points to
 Henry as if he's inanimate. Henry lowers his laptop.

THURSTON
 He's cranking out a For Dummies one
 sheet. A quick something to shop
 around. Next week, when we get the
 green light from investors, he'll
 script a rough pilot.

BENNET

And what about a show bible? I can maybe start some of the fact-checking, that's kind of my wheelhouse, so...

THURSTON

Don't worry, we've got the luxury to skip a few steps. Our finance team's all like math-y, hedge fund wonks. They're don't need craft details...

Thurston points an elbow at Merle, Bennet in turn.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

(To Henry)

Co-writing wardrobe consultant.
Development intern.

HENRY

Cool. Hi...hey. Do you wanna read-

THURSTON

I'm good. You do your thing. I think micromanaging cockblocks creative flow. But, as long as you're hands-on...

HENRY

Oh...okay! I'll just...I guess I'll finish in private, then.

Thurston grins, closes the door. Bennet covers his mouth to hide a laugh.

EXT. THURSTON'S PATIO - EVENING

Washed-out sleaze WADE CHARMIN, (60s), rambles over a green juice. Thurston corners him. Merle watches from a macrame swing on the sidelines.

WADE

It's crazy. I lost a Berlin Wall retrospective at IFC. Then I was living off the girlfriend's mumblecore residuals. Couldn't even get in with the third-tier shit streamers! Boobi-Tubi-Lubi. God, they're all named for sexualized muppets!

THURSTON

Ugh, there's too many clogging the landscape, right? And it's like streaming's such a verticalized, narrow market now...

He glances helplessly at Merle. She cozies up to Wade.

MERLE

By the way, I ran into Art Hemple from Paramount over the 4th? He said you have cameo in that American Masters tell-all for IFC?

WADE

I've been signed on since the 90s! But I'm tired of pretending. Lately, I tell everyone I'm semi-retired. Doing some healing work. That's always safe.

MERLE

Mm, don't knock it. Healing's so important, too. Like Rumi said, you have to self-nurture the inner child wounds or you're gonna burn out. Especially in our industry!

She wraps an arm around him. He stares catatonically down his juice bottle neck. Beat.

WADE

I know. I'm at that low where I can't keep feeding my ego, hand to mouth. My sister-in-law's a urologist at Beth Israel. You won't believe what she told me the other day.

Thurston snickers. Merle glares at him over Wade's head.

WADE (CONT'D)

She'd rather I fuck my prostate with cheap steak and Trader Joes' pinot than amphetamines and a twenty-something Bachelor reject!

THURSTON

(Laughing)

Man, I just...sorry, I need a minute on that one...whew!

WADE
Exactly, laugh! It is pathetic!
Forty years starving out here. I'm
being cannibalized by these pink-
haired dropouts. They wore diapers
to 9/11!

Wade coughs green foam on the patio. Merle GASPS and flinches
aside. Thurston slaps Wade on the back.

INT. THURSTON'S HOUSE FOYER - AT THE SAME TIME

Henry peers out the front windows at Thurston, Merle, Wade.

BENNET (O.S.)
Hey!

HENRY
Hi?

Bennet bolts downstairs to Henry's side. Henry tenses.

BENNET
Hi. I wanted to...ask? I've just
never written a heavy political
lens piece before.

HENRY
This isn't All the President's Men.

BENNET
That makes a lot of sense. You're
visioning more of a kind of anti-
hero lens on Barry Goldwater?

HENRY
Does anti-heroism sell?

He pivots to the front door. Bennet nods, prattles on.

BENNET
Well, that's sort of my issue with
high concept character-driven
content. Most of my current work
leans, kind of more naturalistic?

Henry drops a hand on the front door.

HENRY
Look. I'd tell you to save your
resume. But I don't wanna sound
disingenuous.

BENNET

Oh no, I don't hear it that way.
Thurston, the whole team, they're
sort of very problematic. And isn't
functional mania expected in
entertainment?

HENRY

I mean, incompetent narcissism is
just endemic to all human groups.
You learn that in your 30s...

BENNET

Totally, I'm sure. Like I read this
Joan Didion quote on meeting
crazies with her husband. She had
something about a studio head
smacking assistants with corncobs?

HENRY

Well, unfortunately, Thurston's
keto.

BENNET

Right, uhm...I actually didn't know
that about him.

HENRY

He said it on a Joe Rogan.

He folds his arms. Bennet shrinks back. Henry softens.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But maybe you'll get lucky. He'll
pull a squash on you.

BENNET

Yeah, that would, uh...that would
be fun-

KNOCK. Henry opens the door. AJ ignores him and shoves an NDA
at Bennet.

AJ

(to Bennet)

Thurston wants you to sign before
you clock out.

Henry slip past AJ. Bennet waves at him with a dopey grin.

BENNET

Bye?

Henry pauses, then guiltily glances back.

EXT. WEST SIDE HIGH-LINE PARK, NYC - DAWN

Delaney speeds up her jog to avoid an encroaching shadow.

DELANEY

Excuse me...?

She spins, keys pointed. Bennet hightails to an EXIT sign. BOOM. He trips at the head of a concrete stairway. A notebook falls out of his bag.

DELANEY (CONT'D)

God! Bennet? Are you...you dropped-

She rushes over to help him. Too late. He scurries away. She picks up his notebook.

INT. DELANY'S PENTHOUSE LIVING ROOM - LATER

Delaney opens Bennet's notebook. Scrawled on a dog-eared page: CALL MOM, LAWYER RE: CONTRACTS.

EXT. ECONO LODGE BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Eric neatly packs a designer suitcase. Henry frets on the bed, head buried in a stack of typed DRAFTS. His cellphone PINGS.

ERIC

Make a new friend?

Henry reluctantly checks the text, shakes his head.

HENRY

(reading)

Thurston sent a contract. And I'm not allowed to psychoanalyze him, Garret? I've played along. Exchanged the requisite, highbrow dick jokes. Which one of us is exhibiting greater psychological disturbance?

ERIC

It is a chicken or egg question, isn't it..

He attempts to pry the cellphone away. Henry holds fast.

HENRY

What am I supposed to be asking right now?

ERIC
Is this Pandora's contract.

HENRY
So I'll just open it in the morning.

ERIC
On a Sunday in Fort Green Park with Alex? That would be a tragicomic disaster. I would be negligent!

HENRY
I'm not holding out until Monday.

ERIC
Then...

Lost in thought, he fixates on refolding his clothing.

HENRY
What.

ERIC
I say do it now. See what you're earning for your blood.

He gestures at a draft streaked with blood. Henry frowns at a cut on his palm, then hunches over his cellphone. Beat.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Good...ugly?

Henry leans back on the pillows. Eric watches intently.

HENRY
At this rate? I'd give him a transfusion if he asked.

Eric bounces over to celebrate. He and Henry clasp hands.

END ACT II

ACT III

EXT. THURSTON'S YARD - NIGHT

Henry face-times Alex on his cellphone as he crosses the lawn to the back patio.

HENRY

Take a complimentary goji laxative
from his spa toilet?

ALEX (O.S.)

No, thank you. I want my car back
from the man with a nearly expired
4-point license.

HENRY

Says the gentleman with a DUI.

ALEX (O.S.)

It was an accidental Zolofit
overdose. Are you staying
overnight?

HENRY

I'm gonna stay as long as it takes
to worm my way into more credit.
You know, I may be eligible for a
WGA card which-

ALEX (O.S.)

But I thought you earn sole credit
for a pilot based on your book?

Thurston appears on the patio. Henry lowers his cellphone.

ALEX (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Who did he bring in? And where is
he getting funds to finance more-

HENRY

I've gotta go...

ALEX (O.S.)

Ask him to about a retainer and-

Henry hangs up, then waves back at Thurston.

EXT. THURSTON'S PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Thurston guides Henry to a fire pit. A snappy flame immolates his DRAFT. On the side bar are three cocktails.

THURSTON

I forgot to text you. Bennet's out for the week.

HENRY

Out as in sick?

They sit on either side of the pit.

THURSTON

Eh, he claims he twisted an ankle. It's always like a gotcha situation. You ask, you're being ableist. I go by don't ask don't tell. That's still a law, no?

HENRY

Well, not since the Obama years...I think 2011-

WADE (O.S.)

Wake up! Up, get up!

Henry, Thurston turn as Wade lumbers onto the patio. He grabs a cocktail on his way over.

THURSTON

(To Henry, whispering)
Old producer buddy. He was snubbed by Rocky Mountain Robert Redford. I figure, I'll let him in on a cut of the profits.

Henry nods. Wade takes a seat besides Thurston.

WADE

We've got investors.

THURSTON

Atta-Wade! Who'd you harass?

WADE

Dough boys. Sons of high net worth individuals. They bikram at my CompleteBody off Van Houten-

THURSTON

Slow, slow down, how high are we talking?

WADE

Figure heading the innovative spirit department at A24? They're always high on something...

THURSTON

But you swear, they're your actual personal contacts? They wouldn't revenge sue us for a B- Barry Goldwater?

WADE

I'm not worried. They just need us to legitimize them. Give them access to intellectual creds mommy forgot to buy with her trophy wife allowance.

THURSTON

(To Henry)

Feels like the jury's still out. What're you getting from this?

HENRY

Do you want a verbal Rorschach?

THURSTON

You're here for the night, give us the full roast. It's unpaid child labor. But hey, welcome to the industry!

Thurston wanders to the bar and grabs two cocktails. He passes one to Henry, the other to Wade. Henry sips, stands.

HENRY

Okay. Here goes.

(pacing before the fire)

I'm seeing two insecure shit lords floundering on the public intelligentsia scene. They think they're gonna one up the cool, red diaper Ivy kids. Maybe redirect cultural cachet to old-guard, centrist rationality. But really, they've got no idea what they're talking about. They're no more evolved than their audience.

Wade appraises him with an impressed smile.

WADE

Damn! That's completely, hundred percent. How'd you get there?

HENRY
Experience? My dad was Bush Sr's
legal advisor.

Thurston laughs and raises the third cocktail. Wade copies.

THURSTON
Told you, he's a fucking goldmine!

Henry blushes and lifts his glass.

EXT. NJ COUNTRY CLUB GOLF COURSE - MORNING

Henry, Alex study a GOLF FOR BUSINESS book under a side tent.
A few feet away, Eric takes newbie practice swings.

ERIC
I asked the nephew at Netflix last
night. He said he's never heard of
a Charmin. It may be a stage name.
Granted, any prick can grab a loan
and stick producer on his door.

HENRY
Well, he talked up a package deal
with his friends at...maybe IFC? I
was out cold.

ALEX
What did his package look like?

HENRY
Alex! After one night? You're not
the only one who wants a resume and
a credit check first!

They share a laugh. Eric shakes his head, then drops his club
to join them.

ERIC
He was probably ass-talking under
Vicodin not oath. Give me the
general impression.

HENRY
Functionally manic? To quote the
intern.

ERIC
You think he's functional. Then why
isn't he in the trades? Unless, is
he producing classified secrets
from Siberia?

HENRY

He's got an Assange beard...

Eric gives in and laughs. Alex scrolls on his cellphone.

ALEX

Ooh, this is interesting. He was our 1995 Razzie co-winner. For co-producing The Scarlet Letter.

HENRY

So he knows Roland Joffé.

ALEX

There you go! You can claim an official six degrees from whoever Roland Joffé is...someone I assume AFI deems relevant.

ERIC

That's his entire history?

Alex cringes. Eric drumrolls Henry's shoulders. Beat.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Just rip it off, Alex. How bad are we-

ALEX

(whispering)

Globe Theatre Greats. Episode 4:
The Rise of Kevin Spacey.

Henry crumbles, head in hands. Eric averts his gaze to the golf course.

INT. UPSTATE NY SPA - AT THE SAME TIME

Delaney, AJ dangle their feet in a grotto filled with fish.

AJ

I found this in the office.

She hands Delaney her cellphone. On screen is a list of CONTACTS. Delaney stares at a bolded entry: LEE RUST.

AJ (CONT'D)

He left over twenty messages. I didn't know who he was.

DELANEY

Thurston's main US donor. He always wants a spot on the social impact-y, political projects. You called him back?

AJ frowns, bows her head.

AJ

I was planning for today but I wasn't sure how formal I had to be, like is he a serious investor or...?

DELANEY

He runs the largest drive-through liquor empire outside of Salt Lake. Be an uptight bitch.

AJ

Because...does he not have funds?

DELANEY

Less than last year. He's still on the Forbes 500. Next time, look up corporate stats.

Delaney dangles AJ's cellphone above the water.

DELANEY (CONT'D)

Call him today. Tell him we'll do a brunch at Osteria Scala next week. I can take business out to LA.

AJ leans towards Delaney and drops her voice.

AJ

Are you like...interested in him?

DELANEY

His name. When we start a bidding war? He brings the redneck gentry, the Koch brother wannabes...

AJ

And you really think they'll shill out for a pro-welfare state propaganda shockumentary?

DELANEY

(surprised)

They have no idea what they're spending on!

She tosses AJ's cellphone back. AJ smiles to herself.

INT. BOOKSTORE COFFEE SHOP - AT THE SAME TIME

Merle skims Henry's book at a communal farm table. Thurston waves from the counter. He pays cash for a coffee.

MERLE

Hey! Lose the Centurion card?

He shrugs and slips into the seat facing her.

MERLE (CONT'D)

What's new?

THURSTON

Bennet asked to be part of the pitch session for next week.

She lifts the book over her face.

THURSTON (CONT'D)

What.

MERLE

You could've consulted with me. I want Bush-adjacent political scientist as my co-writer!

THURSTON

He knows, he's hyperaware. Probably had to be to beat out a gazillion other copies of him. That's why I say we put clam boy on the pedestal first, get the testosterone flowing.

MERLE

Did you learn that trick from Delaney?

He pulls her book away. She frowns at him.

THURSTON

I'm grabbing drinks on Saturday with Lee Rust.

MERLE

Rust? Charlottesville's finest canned beer prince?

THURSTON

The only. He moved back to Greenwich last month, which means one thing.

MERLE

Two things. He's spending his disposable income. And I'm banned from the boys' yacht club invitational.

THURSTON

I can't say anything. He's allergic to legs over twenty-five. I'll bring you a doggy bag. How's that sound?

She flicks a lipstick-stained napkin at him. He ducks with a good-natured grin.

INT. DELANEY'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Delaney shrieks at a young man in a cheap pantsuit.

DELANEY

You're not explaining why you can't start a preemptive counter.

TAYLOR HULL, (30s), drags his scuffed loafers on the concrete. AJ enters silently and slips behind Taylor.

TAYLOR

How about...can I set up another consult with Jake? He would be able to speak more to the technicalities of IP contract violations-

DELANEY

Now you're wasting my time. What I need is for you to draft the agreement we discussed. Period.

TAYLOR

I understand. But Jake would still be listed as your originating attorney. I can't send legal docs in his name without his approval.

Delaney looms over his chair.

DELANEY

Taylor, this isn't some major ethical dilemma!

TAYLOR

I'm sorry...I can try to talk with Jake tomorrow and see if we can cobble together a joint copy-

DELANEY

Exactly. That's what I've been requesting for the last two hours.

AJ

When you're done, send everything to the dkassist1 email. I'll take care of forwarding.

Taylor swivels around, searching of the source of her voice.

TAYLOR

Thanks...thank you.

DELANEY

Any time tomorrow morning is ideal.

TAYLOR

Uhm, I think I have meetings until 11, but I can shoot for-

DELANEY

Then get it in by noon, no big deal.

TAYLOR

Of course.

Taylor GULPS. Delany beams aggressively at him.

INT. BALTHAZAR RESTAURANT, NYC - NIGHT

Henry, Alex trade quips over a gold leaf donut with green jam.

ALEX

What am I missing about the appeal.

HENRY

I thought you'd be all over new age Gerber fusion.

Alex cuts the donut and harpoons a slice with his knife.

ALEX

Speaking of truly infantile things, what does Thurston want from you?

HENRY

Barry Goldwater: The Barry Goldwater bio.

ALEX

Implying...

Henry frowns. Alex CHOKES down his donut slice.

HENRY

Barry fucking Goldwater! I don't think there's gonna be commentary on the travesty of conservative disinterventionism. No soap-box, teachable moment for me.

ALEX

Huh...remind me, when did you step off the soapbox?

HENRY

Come on.

He shovels in a mouthful of donut.

ALEX

Stop! That was my M.O. Be an original!

Henry SWALLOWS. Beat. Alex stews.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Did he cut your deal?

HENRY

Not yet. Didn't have the decency. He's just replacing me with the intern.

ALEX

Oof. Is said intern of the wunderkind variety?

HENRY

Yup, in a geeky heshier cowboy costume. He's got a two-page niche oeuvre. And I usually respect trading on the optics of being a made-for-PBS nebbish. That was my 20s, before the fall of Woody.

ALEX	HENRY (CONT'D)
Between the two of us, are you really claiming the nebbish title?	Fine. You want Woody? Take him!

Henry takes another donut bite. Alex contemplates a jelly stain on the tablecloth between them. Beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Would you like the young pretender deposed?

HENRY

What? Fuck, Alex, no! There's negative Shakespearean allegory here. I just don't want him to be disillusioned.

ALEX

He made it through the same door you did. Ten years earlier. I doubt he would be...

HENRY

But there's still a pretty wide cognitive rubicon he's never gonna cross. He hasn't grasped. We're commercializing pedantry!

ALEX	HENRY (CONT'D)
Really. What happened to research integrity? Fidelity to scholarship? I was under the impression that was part of your philosophy...	Forget it! Forget it!

Henry shovels in another donut mouthful and POPS up.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Dinner's on Garret's %15 commission.

ALEX

It is? And all you ordered was overpriced bread. Are you cut out for the big leagues?

HENRY

So you want me to quit! Let the Tammy's of the world teflon coat your little bubble-

ALEX
Actually, I could care less what
you do at this point!

HENRY
Then what're you-

ALEX
I think Thurston brainwashed you at
his aggro-mancult bonfire! You sell
to him, you-

Henry stomps off. Alex deflates as onlookers GAWK at them.

INT. JERSEY CITY BAR - NIGHT

Bennet skirts a thin crowd to a dim, run down bar counter.
The scruffy BARTENDER looks him over.

BARTENDER
I need this job, man.

BENNET
Do a vodka Red Bull?

He holds up his license.

BARTENDER
Gotcha, all right 32. You have
cash?

Bennet purposefully flashes bills, a TFG card. The bartender
notices.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Damn! You're working for TFG
productions.

BENNET
I uh...yeah, I applied for a part-
time pipeline editing gig. But I
haven't heard from back from
recruiters, so not yet, exactly...

The bartender slides over his drink. Bennet sniffs, sips.

BARTENDER
Man, I can't believe he's still
scumbagging around. I'll tell ya. I
PA'd for Thurston way back when, up
near Seattle.

BENNET

That was his one-shot era?

BARTENDER

2002! Washington rolled those artist tax breaks? I drove him in my camper to pitch Mothers of the Dustbowl.

BENNET

Dustbowl...I don't think I've seen that one.

The bartender beckons him closer.

BARTENDER

Cause it's a dummy title. There's no documentary. My friend was the Berkley sociologist moonlighting as our non-union script doc. Two weeks in, Sonya's hoarding porta potty pipes, calling our team a sleeper cell.

BENNET

It was that bad.

BARTENDER

Oh, I joke, but no, it was worse! The deal was chop her dissertation into a pitch for a sham lump sum. And investors were throwing capital into mass-market faux-feminism, even then! Thursty made out, big time. Below the line? We all got shafted.

BENNET

Is that why, sorry, I'm guessing you quit?

BARTENDER

Mm-mm. The 'rents had to get me deprogramed. I went back to school, started bartending. It's been 17 years. My gut says Thurston had us all blackballed. At least on this coast. And now I'm too old to try

LA.

Bennet slumps on his barstool. Beat.

BENNET

Then do you think, should I rescind my resume?

BARTENDER

Nah, I would still keep your options open. Just square away your finances. Dustbowl was Thurston's first unscripted venture. Maybe he's changed, given he's not in jail or doing jokey period pieces like the guys in that 80s Alan Alda flick...Sweet Liberty?

He refills Bennet's glass with a sympathetic nod.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

He's pretty legit.

INT. ERIC'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Eric pours over paperwork. RING. He answers the desk phone.

ERIC

Hello, this is...Alex? Are you...you're not driving!

He reaches into a drawer for an energy shot.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Do not call him...no! Both of you need one legal driver! Pull over or hang up...yes, confirmed, I will be there!

INT. BENNET'S NJ STUDIO/OFFICE - AT THE SAME TIME

Bennet squats at a makeshift desk behind a desktop/monitor. On screen: Eric's CONTACT page. He dials a flip phone.

ERIC (O.S.)

You have reached the office of Eric Toussaint after hours. Please do not leave unsolicited requests for-

Bennet SLAMS the phone face down on the desk.

INT/EXT. HATCHBACK, NYC HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING (TRACKING)

Alex shoots a rusty Pontiac hatchback through rush hour traffic. Eric death grips his knees in the passenger's seat.

ERIC

Where did you track him.

ALEX

Some sort of experiential cabin rental service? It was hard to follow their marketing schema. The website HTML only loaded half a page of what looked like trees that give you dog tick rashes in terrible places.

ERIC

You're sure?

Alex shrugs coyly. Eric fumbles in a dop kit at his feet for a Benadryl pack.

INT/EXT. HATCHBACK, CABIN RENTAL SITE - MORNING (TRACKING)

Alex swings to a compound of lakeside cabins. Fashionably sweaty hikers mill around the central lot. Eric scans the crowd.

ERIC

What are the chances anyone here knows a Black editor or a rabbi's son?

ALEX

Slim...to none.

He slows to the OFFICE. A BREAK sign hangs in the doorway.

ERIC

Should we wait in the shade?

ALEX

Or we could try No.8. I saw the curtains were drawn...very Henry.

ERIC

Okay. We knock. Say kombucha Barbie with park ranger security on speed-dial answers. We...?

ALEX

I think I can pull an RFK canvasser distraction. If you want to stay in the car.

Eric glance uneasily at Cabin 8 for a beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Should I drive past again?

ERIC
No, let's just go...

EXT. CABIN 8 - MINUTES LATER

Eric KNOCKS on the door. Alex peers through the curtains.

ALEX
Aha! I see shoes!

Eric squats to study the electronic key lock.

ERIC
I should call Di.

ALEX
Oh! Are you no longer persona non-grata?

ERIC
We've been...talking. She installed my key lock, so...

ALEX
Well. Before you humbly make that call, may I?

ERIC
Please. By all means.

Eric steps aside and watches incredulously. Alex rips the door open by the handle.

ALEX
He was paranoid that locking doors could be a first sign of paranoia. Can you fault that logic?

ERIC
Nope!

They leave their shoes on the threshold rug.

INT. CABIN 8 BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alex eyes Henry's cellphone on a rickety nightstand. On screen, 10 voicemails, a text from NO NAME: CALL ASAP!

ERIC

Give me a minute with him.

Alex reluctantly acquiesces. Eric opens a side door to...

INT. BATHROOM - SECONDS LATER

A vintage granny chic bathroom. Henry writes on a laptop in the pink tub. Eric rips back the shower curtains.

ERIC

This is how you're career goes out?
Or do you just have a bath thing.

HENRY

I guess I'm quasi-bath-curious.

Henry pats the tub's side. Eric perches on the ledge. Beat.

ERIC

Bit's over. What're you doing.

HENRY

I wanna know. How far into the
system can I get with Barry
Goldwater?

ERIC

You saw the number on the contract.

HENRY

Oh yeah, it's perverse. But I'm not
in this for the cash. I've decided.
I want airtime! My own awards
shelf, podcast, under-60 fan group-

ERIC

Say it all you want. I admit, I was
wrong. You're not pulling the
spotlight off the idiot despots.
They're stringing you along!

HENRY

So, why does it matter? As long as
I'm selling Barry Goldwater: The
Douchebag Litmus Test! You benefit
too!

Eric opens his mouth, suddenly stung.

ALEX (O.S.)

I think you would more than pass!

Henry SLAMS his head down onto his knees. Eric reaches over to stop Henry's laptop from falling.

ERIC

Hey...hey. Look, Garret didn't want our team to lose momentum after Tammy-gate. That's why I suggested, we change tactics, give you another obsession to-

HENRY

Wait...did you...? Oh, fuck! God! You Truman-showed me? Were any of the IP offers real? Is this-

ERIC

Yes! Of course, they all were. You earned the bid-

Henry panics and BANGS his head against the tiles. Eric pulls him away from the wall. KNOCK.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Alex?

ALEX (O.S.)

Stop screaming!

INT. CABIN 8 BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Henry rips open the bathroom door. Alex trips backwards into the nightstand. Henry offers him a hand up.

ALEX

Did you sign anything from Thurston?

HENRY

I mean, not in full? I initialed an

NDA.

Eric watches them from the doorway. Alex slips Henry his cellphone, whispers.

ALEX

Were you aware he's roping you into an investment fraud scheme?!

HENRY

Me? How! No! I'm just selling my book rights.

ALEX

Selling them to a guy who happens to run a Ponzi empire could still be possibly misconstrued? Check your messages.

Henry slowly sinks onto the bed. Alex drops down besides him. Eric looks questioningly from one to the other.

EXT. WAWA PARKING LOT - EVENING

Henry, Alex wait for Eric outside the hatchback in Wawa parking lot. Henry scrolls on his cellphone.

HENRY

Wasn't there already an actor? He pulled the mother of all faux movie sale scams? There were a gazillion bombshell articles about him.

ALEX

Is it possible to hold a monopoly on a method of defrauding people?

HENRY

No idea. But Thurston's not stupid enough to copycat.

ALEX

I think ruling out that possibility is stupider. You should call the tipster when we get back.

HENRY

Yeah. I guess no one's an original in the business, right?

Alex laughs. Eric leaves the store front with a coffee tray.

ERIC

What's going on?

Henry, Alex exchange a quick glance. Alex shrugs. Henry stows his cellphone.

END ACT III

ACT IV

INT. THURSTON'S DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Thurston massages his feet at the table. Enter Merle with an annotated EP 1 DRAFT. Thurston glances at her notes.

MERLE

Don't fucking crib!

He reaches below for his own marked copy.

THURSTON

I felt the tone went a tad heavy-handed. Like I was thinking, do we want such a politicized Barry Goldwater? Even for a docuseries...

MERLE

I'm for the corporate lib-speak. The tone is college-educated preachy. You feel better about yourself for watching. We're pandering to people who have money!

THURSTON

I'm not against that aspect. But I'm also stuck on, is the vibe pushing...pedantic?

MERLE

Isn't that the point? We're letting our audience self-select?

TICK. She frowns at a wall clock (3:06) and lounges on the table in front of Thurston.

MERLE (CONT'D)

Where's my PHD?

THURSTON

I told him any time before 3.

MERLE

He's not coming, is he?

Thurston shrugs. She plays this little piggy with his toes.

MERLE (CONT'D)

Do you think Delaney wants to make him an offer?

THURSTON
Why was she dumping clam boy on us.

MERLE
Doesn't her friend rep him? It's a
quid pro quo, sisters in the
Hollywood trenches move.

THURSTON
She's not that philanthropic.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE DINING ROOM - AT THE SAME TIME

AJ listens at the door.

MERLE
She's going after-

THURSTON
She is. All she wants is a bidding
war. I married her, remember?

INT. THURSTON'S DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

AJ descends on a tense crossfire. Thurston nods at her.

THURSTON
He's on his way?

AJ
Unclear. Also, Wade left another
message?

MERLE
(To Thurston)
Ew, you pity fucked Wade?

THURSTON
That's not...no, we're still a
workplace until 10PM!

MERLE
But afterwards?

AJ SHUFFLES her feet to grab Thurston's attention.

AJ
Sorry, I let him go to voicemail.
And I clocked out, so I'm gonna
run?

THURSTON
Great, fine... see you Monday!

AJ ducks to the hallway. Thurston rushes to shut the door.

MERLE
How was what I said offensive?

THURSTON
Don't...she's listening to us!

INT/EXT. HATCHBACK/MOUNTAIN ROAD - EVENING (TRACKING)

The hatchback crawls down a narrow cliff. PING. A glare fills the windshield.

ALEX
Can you please turn-

PING. He releases the wheel to wipe his eyes.

ERIC
Alex! Drop your foot!

ALEX
I would, if I weighed enough to-

THUD. The wheels spin off road into a muddy, rocky ditch.

EXT. ROADSIDE DITCH - MINUTES LATER

The hatchback leans sideways. Eric shines a keychain light on a Triple A card. Henry mops glass from Alex's forehead.

ERIC
Tow truck's scheduled. Alex, how're
you-

Alex waves, GROANS, and spews blood on Henry's pants.

EXT. DELANY'S ROOFTOP DECK, NYC - EARLY MORNING

Delaney stretches on a yoga mat. AJ approaches with a contract.

AJ
Taylor's sending a revised version.

DELANEY
And what about last night?

AJ
Surprise, surprise, Henry was a no
show. Didn't even call.

DELANEY
He has their number.

AJ
(Playing innocent)
Cause hasn't he...he's definitely
called before, right?

She steps closer. Delaney grabs the contract, scans the pages.

DELANEY
Did you send Lee the Zoom link?

AJ
Sorry, I was busy at my real day
job.

DELANEY
Just CC Taylor on the next email.
Make it explicit we have legal
counsel.

AJ
Sure, will do. And you also want to
be-

Delaney drops the contract and bends over.

DELANEY
Absolutely don't put my name down!
I don't need to look too available!

She shakes her head at AJ between her legs.

INT. WALK-IN CLINIC - EVENING

Henry, Eric wait anxiously in a rustic minute-clinic hallway.

ERIC
I've never bought into signs from
the universe, manifesting. But
maybe this detour...? I don't know,
the timing is a little uncanny.

HENRY
You mean, is this my retribution?

Eric wanders to the window of an EXAM ROOM. Beat.

ERIC

Look. I'm done pretending I know what answer you need from me.

HENRY

Come on! Lobotomizing my best friend for fame? How many lashes is that?

ERIC

I'm not judging you. I orchestrated the Rube Goldberg as my own vanity project! I should be able to stomach how it plays out.

Henry joins him. They watch an EMT bandage Alex's forehead. Alex sucks on a lollypop.

ERIC (CONT'D)

See? He's fine. But just promise me, if you crash and burn, don't tell anyone I'm your editor.

HENRY

Well, if I crash and burn, will you still do pro bono coffee dates?

Eric drops a hand on his shoulder.

ERIC

I prefer The French Laundry.

HENRY

Deal.

INT. THURSTON'S DINING ROOM - AT THE SAME TIME

Thurston watches Wade roll joints on Henry's book cover. Merle faces the windows opposite the table.

THURSTON

You asked them already?

WADE

Jeff's biting. Still working on Paul. His thing is, will the title get a van-life Joan Didion to blow him in the Guggenheim tampon retrospective?

THURSTON

That's it? Low stakes...

WADE

Paul's not a big content guy.

THURSTON

Well then, I'm calling it early. I think we're solid on the deliverables.

They share an inside snicker. Merle fumes. Beat.

MERLE

What's so funny? You think you're winning smart-ass Jenga? Shitting bricks to the top of the tower?

Thurston cautiously approaches her side.

THURSTON

You know when you go to The Union club? You meet these trust fund tzars. They're talking up some Iran-Contra puff piece they optioned off a me-tooed CNN anchor? And it's like how're we subverting that genre expectation with our pitch.

MERLE

What're you talking about? Who gives a fuck about a two minute pitch? You have to have a viable product!

THURSTON

Oh, we will. I think we really have something good, this time.

Wade offers her a joint. She elbows him off.

WADE

I'll tell you what Bob Iger used to say to me. The magic's not bull and games if one kid's hooked early.

MERLE

But we're not defrauding children!

THURSTON

We just tack on VFX unicorns, we'd probably net more.

MERLE

So we're just scamming off actual taxpayers?

THURSTON

Aren't you a writer? Scam isn't the best word choice...

MERLE

Do you prefer grift? Where's our proof of concept? What is it we're actually taking checks for?

THURSTON

Eh. Think of checks like promissory notes.

WADE

And the expectation is we need time.

THURSTON

Right? Slow in our lane equals artisanal. Some smart guy sat on his ass and really thought about our content's messaging. We're not farming out to a Tom Cruise cameo and a full-frontal.

He pats her elbow. She tenses and twists in his grasp.

INT/EXT. HATCHBACK, HIGHWAY - LATE EVENING (TRACKING)

Eric floors past an AUTO-BODY to the INTERSTATE.

HENRY

One more. It's alive in the ditch.

ERIC

And you trust a hashead hiker to Fedex it back to you?

ALEX

Here.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Alex, you're caving!

Alex sighs and passes Henry his cellphone.

EXT. ROADSIDE DITCH - AT THE SAME TIME

Henry's cellphone PINGS in the ditch. On screen message from NO NAME: It's Bennet! CALL NOW!

INT. DELANEY'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Delaney power-poses into her computer screen (split between Lee, Taylor). AJ takes notes facing the desk.

DELANEY

You'll receive the draft tonight.
But for right now, our next step is-

LEE

You're sending the pitch out
already? Is the writer attached?

DELANEY

Taylor, why don't you take that
one.

Taylor jolts and waves, covering his screen with his palm.

TAYLOR

Hi? I'm representing the team at
large. The writer's contract is
almost done, I have a few more
edits and then-

LEE

(To Delaney)

I'm not following him.

DELANEY

It's essentially signed. He wanted
to play Thurston's side. I said go
ahead. Come back. You net twenty
percent more with us.

LEE

And he's what my early equity's
covering. An overpaid fact-checker?

DELANEY

More or less. Just don't lead with
that when you two meet.

LEE

Really? Is that necessary?

DELANEY

You pick the turf. I'll have my
assistant forward his contact info.
I want us all on the same page.

She snaps and points at AJ over the screen. AJ makes a note.

LEE

Del, no, we're a hierarchy, not a
fucking socialist co-op. He works
for us, he can reach out to me!

Delaney holds up a finger. AJ takes her cue and rushes to
Delaney's side.

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Henry naps on the futon. Enter Alex, tie undone. Henry stirs.

ALEX

Guess what? I quit today.

HENRY

You...huh? As in...forever?

Alex squishes on the futon's edge.

ALEX

I called it an indefinite hiatus
but...I thought about your
contract. At least it buys you some
version of a dream. And then I
decided. I want that chance too. In
my lifetime?

HENRY

Real estate compliance officer
isn't topping the cremation urn?

Alex collapses into a shivering ball besides him.

ALEX

I talk to myself about municipal
zoning restrictions at the urinal
on my twenty- minute break. So you
tell me. Am I on a path to
salvation?

HENRY

I'm not either.

Alex abruptly rise. Henry GROANS and falls back in a fetal
position.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I wasn't-

ALEX

You were. Finish your monologue.
Why are you so unfulfilled?

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Because as far as I can tell, your job entails showing up in gingham, saying big words, and being fawned over by people who look like our parents while the sadists from high school throw roses at your feet!

HENRY

That's called being objectified!

Alex yells over his shoulder as he stalks to the kitchen.

ALEX

Objectified is preferable to invisible!

INT. HENRY'S APARTMENT KITCHEN - LATER

Alex spies a printed email Re: CONTRACT on the counter. He glances back at Henry with a worried expression .

INT. SUBWAY CAR - AT THE SAME TIME

Bennet (slick hair, dark suit) squeezes through a packed mob.

FEMALE SUBWAY OPERATOR (O.S.)

Next stop Bedford-Norstrand.

The doors RATTLE open. Bennet hangs back to scan faces.

EXT. HENRY'S BUILDING - EVENING

Bennet pokes the doorbell. DING. Silence. He KNOCKS. Alex's bloodshot eye fills the peep-hole. He scrounges in his pocket.

BENNET

Hi. Is Henry Choi here?

He holds up a PI LICENSE. Alex opens the door (chain intact).

ALEX

Does he need a lawyer?

BENNET

Not immediately. And I'd like to speak with him first.

ALEX

He left an hour ago.

BENNET
He didn't mention a destination?

Alex pulls the door in. Bennet slips his hand past the crack.

BENNET (CONT'D)
Everything we discuss is
confidential...between us?

ALEX
I know what confidential means.

BENNET
Can I come in and wait?

He steps closer. Alex reluctantly peels back the door.

EXT. DRIVEWAY TO LEE'S HOUSE - EVENING

A golf cart WHOOSHES up the drive to a new construction,
coastal mansion on a cul-de-sac.

EXT. LEE'S HOUSE FRONT - SECONDS LATER

Bennet, AJ chat with the PHOTOGRAPHER outside her van. The
golf cart sputters to a halt before them.

BENNET
Henry!

Henry tumbles out. The caddy tosses Henry's work bag on the
lawn, then speeds off. Henry drops to his knees, breathless.

BENNET (CONT'D)
Hey!

He runs to Henry's side. AJ waves at him.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY VAN - CONTINUOUS

Henry panics, rocks in the backseat. Bennet talks at him.

BENNET
Once Cheryl takes the picture,
you'll see AJ in the hall. She's
with our team. She gives you a
wave? That's when you want to
initiate the money talk.

HENRY

And say what? I come in peace? Take me to your motherlode? He probably thinks I'm a North Korean spy!

BENNET

You say you know their about the scheme and you want in as a confederate. Just keep it friendly.

Henry squeezes his eyes shut. Bennet softens his voice.

BENNET (CONT'D)

Bottom line is you received an electronic document sent by Taylor Hull. From Coen&Coen LLP? Thurston was a listed party.

HENRY

Okay, but...who cares? I got an at midnight. I didn't even open the attachment. All I did was print it.

BENNET

Henry. That's irrelevant. You verbally assented to receipt of a legally binding agreement. Add all the details you want. But as far as the law is concerned, you knowingly considered promoting questionable financial activity.

HENRY

Can I say I was a little buzzed and maybe too embarrassed to call my lawyer?

BENNET

Again, that's a conscious choice you made. And I'm sorry. Being hung-over and insecure doesn't meet the legal threshold for cognitive impairment.

HENRY

Then, I was blackout drunk. Doesn't alcohol stay in the system for-

Cheryl KNOCKS on the window. Bennet nods at Henry.

BENNET

Here you go. This is your Redford moment.

HENRY
Redford moment?

BENNET
All the President's Men! You're
officially undercover, Woodward.

INT. LEE'S HALLWAY - MORNING (PRESENT, FROM TEASER)

Henry's POV: The hallway blurs and narrows, constricting
Henry in distorted tunnel leading to Lee's door.

END PILOT