

INT. LES' BEDROOM - DAY

It appears that LESTER WARD'S alcohol-saturated brain simply stopped processing data at some point and he landed face down on his bed. Les is a middle-aged actor who has seen somewhat better times in his twenty-plus year career. The slapdash interior design of the room reflects the deteriorating mental state of the occupant.

The PHONE RINGS next to the bed. It continues RINGING, as Les slowly pries his eyes open. Finally, the answering machine gets it.

LES (V.O.)  
(On machine, lackluster  
delivery)  
Leave a message.

BEEP.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
(On machine)  
Les, it's me. Pick up.

Les struggles to unglue his eyes and move his arms.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
(Anger grows)  
Come on, I know you're there.  
(Beat)  
Okay, Les. Okay. All I got to say  
is your ass had better be on that  
Goddamn-

Les grabs the phone.

LES  
Yeah.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
Your plane leaves in an hour. Where  
the hell are you?

Les focuses on the clock.

LES  
I'm here. I'm there.

He stands and stumbles out of the room.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
What's going on?

INT. LES'S BATHROOM - DAY

As Les enters, cradling the cordless phone against his ear. He splashes water on his face and smooths his hair.

LES  
I'm getting ready.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
Right. You know, I don't have to do this.

LES  
I know.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
I'm putting my ass on the line here, Les. You know I am. I've got 15, 20 actors now who would give their left nut for this job, and you can't even get yourself out of bed.

LES  
Murray, I know. I'm up.

He looks at the mirror and hates what he sees.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
Catch that flight, Les, or that's it. You got it?!

LES  
Yeah, I'm sorry.

MURRAY (V.O.)  
Don't be sorry. Get on the fuckin' plane. Call me when you get there or don't call me at all.

SLAM.

INT. BURBANK AIRPORT CONCOURSE - DAY

Les shuffles through the crowd toward the gate, wearing the same clothes. His hair is greasy and slicked back. A woman rushes up to him smiling with two kids in tow.

AIRPORT WOMAN  
Excuse me. I'm sorry to bother you, but would you mind giving me your autograph?

Les stops, shows absolutely no enthusiasm.

LES

Uh sure. I'm in a bit of a hurry.

She is repelled by his breath.

AIRPORT WOMAN

Sorry. Here.

She hands him her ticket envelope and a green crayon. He scribbles quickly.

AIRPORT WOMAN

I loved you in that old movie about the x-ray eye thing.

LES

Men with Laser Vision.

AIRPORT WOMAN

Yes.

LES

Thank you.

He hands the envelope back to her.

AIRPORT WOMAN

Thank you, very much.

LES

Sure.

He shuffles off. WE stay with the woman.

AIRPORT KID

Who was that?

She tries to decipher the signature.

AIRPORT WOMAN

Umm, Lo... Les... Wod... Wob. Les Wob something. He's an actor.

The kid glances at Les.

AIRPORT KID

Oh.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Les is seated in coach, pressed against the window by a very LARGE MAN in the middle seat, who can't stop talking.

LARGE MAN

I've seen everything he's ever made, starting with his TV stuff. He's got to be one of the most under-rated actors in Hollywood. You've seen Die Hard, right?

LES

Yeah.

LARGE MAN

I've seen them all. Remember when he was climbing around in the elevator shaft. Geez. That's got to be one of the greatest cinematic movie moments in history. How many actors you know can do that?

LES

Of course they used a stunt man for a lot of it.

LARGE MAN

No. No way. Bruce does all his own stunts. That was him flying the airplane in DH2. And did you know he had a fear of flying?

Les downs his plastic glass of Bourbon.

EXT. SMALL AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

As passengers walk down the stairs from a turboprop plane. Les emerges, stewed. He weaves down the steps. At the bottom, he stops to get his balance. Then, he shuffles toward the gate. A sign over the gate greets the passengers in a stiff rain: "Welcome to Paducah."

INT. TAXI - DAY

A cheerful driver with a thick accent shouts over a tape of contemporary Indian music.

TAXI DRIVER

Don't you worry about the rain. It doesn't last very long this time of year.

(MORE)

TAXI DRIVER (CONT'D)

I hope you will get a chance to see the sights while you are in Paducah. You must see the Quilting Museum. It is quite impressive. All the actors and filmmakers are staying at the Downtown Suites. It is the finest hotel in town. How long will you be staying?

LES

Uh, three days.

TAXI DRIVER

Only three days. Too bad. You should stay a few days longer and see the town.

Les turns his eyes as a rain-drenched strip mall flies by the side window.

INT. HOTEL REGISTRATION - DAY

Les is waiting for the cheerful CLERK to finish fussing with the paperwork.

HOTEL CLERK

This your first time in Paducah?

LES

(Lifelessly)

Yeah.

HOTEL CLERK

Well, I hope you'll find your stay a pleasant one. The whole town is very excited about the movie production, as I'm sure you'll see. It's supposed to stop raining tonight, and be clear and warm. I can't guarantee it won't start again, but it is supposed to be clear for the next five days.

LES

I will actually only be here for three days.

The clerk looks at his computer.

HOTEL CLERK

That's funny, we have you down for the full three weeks.

LES  
Not bloody likely.

HOTEL CLERK  
Well, that's no problem. I'll fix  
it right up.

Smiling, he hands Les the papers.

HOTEL CLERK  
Here you go, sir. Your room is on  
the first floor, down that way,  
behind the elevators, down the hall  
next to the restaurant. Would you  
like help with your... bag?

LES  
No.

Les grabs the key and papers, and heads for the lobby,  
ignoring the end of the clerk's speech.

HOTEL CLERK  
All right, sir. Have a pleasant  
stay at the Downtown Suites. If  
there's anything we can...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

As Les crosses the lobby, he notices activity and a crowd,  
including news cameras, forming around a limo outside the  
hotel entrance. He stops and watches from a distance, lights  
a cigarette.

An underweight, nervous little man JOEL MINCUS, the  
writer/director of the movie, flies in from the elevators. An  
ASSISTANT follows him as he rushes across the lobby.

JOEL  
(To the assistant)  
Tell him, no. We start tomorrow at  
seven AM and I don't want to know  
about his fucking elbow or any  
other part of him.

JOEL'S ASSISTANT  
Okay. So, we're at the blue house  
through Tuesday?

They fly past Les toward the entrance.

JOEL  
 Tuesday, day two, yes. Then we're  
 at the town square for two days.  
 We'll need the Steadicam  
 throughout.

JOEL'S ASSISTANT  
 Bill said we could lose it  
 Thursday.

JOEL  
 He's wrong. I told him I wanted it  
 around just in case. He wasn't  
 listening as usual.

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE - DAY

As Joel breezes in and cuts through the crowd to VANESSA  
 TOWNSEND, the main passenger of the limo and star of the  
 movie.

JOEL  
 Vanessa, welcome to Paducah.

They hug and air kiss.

VANESSA  
 (Sarcastically)  
 Yes, my home town.

A reporter picks up on the comment and raises his hand.

VANESSA  
 No, not really.

JOEL  
 How was your flight?

VANESSA  
 Fine.

JOEL  
 Good. Can we talk a second?

VANESSA  
 Briefly. I've been running since I  
 guess it was yesterday morning  
 sometime.

He takes her arm and guides her into the lobby.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

They stop within earshot of Les.

JOEL

I just wanted to touch base and see how you are doing.

VANESSA

Fine.

JOEL

You got the latest changes?

VANESSA

Yes. I think so.

JOEL

Good. I want you to know that everything is coming together beautifully and looking just really fantastic.

He takes her hand.

JOEL

I'm so glad you're here. I don't know if I've told you but I feel so lucky to have you in my movie.

VANESSA

You have told me, thank you.

JOEL

I have been such a huge fan of yours for, well, since... for years, and I think this is going to be such an amazing experience. I'm so thrilled.

VANESSA

I'm glad to be here.

JOEL

I wrote every word of Winner with you in mind.

VANESSA

Thank you. It's a really good script and... I'm looking forward to working with you too.

JOEL  
Good. Get settled, relax. We'll  
talk later.

Joel turns away and finds himself face to face with Les.

JOEL  
My God. Les, I didn't even see you.

He shakes hands with Les, as he regards his attire.

JOEL  
So nice to have you on the picture.  
Sorry, I have to run.

Joel rushes back toward the elevators with the assistant.  
Vanessa approaches Les, offering her hand.

VANESSA  
Well, if it isn't Les Ward. Nice to  
finally meet you in person.

LES  
Vanessa Townsend, likewise.

It's an even match. She thinks he is a loser drunk, he thinks  
she is a stuck-up bitch.

VANESSA  
Well, I believe we work together  
tomorrow, eh?

LES  
First thing.

She looks him over.

VANESSA  
I'm looking forward to it. Excuse  
me.

She glides off to her entourage at the front desk. Les  
watches her.

INT. LES'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

ANGLE ON TV as a local news show plays an interview with  
Vanessa by the limo.

VANESSA

(On TV)

I can tell you it's a story about courage and overcoming adversity, themes that are very near and dear to my heart. We all face challenges, but there are those among us who must face extraordinarily difficult challenges every day of their life, and you just can't imagine how they do it. I feel honored that I was given the opportunity to portray such an individual.

ANGLE ON B-ROLL news footage of Vanessa and Joel talking.

REPORTER (V.O.)

And just who the individual is and most other details of the movie are veiled in secrecy, including the shooting locations. The young director Joel Mincus, whose first film "Hard Enough" won him critical acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival, explains why.

ANGLE JOEL. A cell phone RINGS OS in Les's room.

JOEL

It's a powerful story with strong emotional content. We are maintaining secrecy so the audience will get the most enjoyment from the movie when they first see it.

LES (O.S.)

Hello.

REPORTER

(On camera)

So if you want to see what all the fuss is about, you'll just have to wait until the movie comes to a theater-

The TV goes black. WE PAN to Les's reflection as he stands in front of a mirror holding the cell phone. The room has one double bed and a small table, with a view of a roof air conditioner.

LES

I'm doing just fine, Murray.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Good. Jesus, Les. Do you think I enjoy nagging the shit out of you? I just want you to... get through this in one piece. Okay? I know how you feel about the part. It's not great. But if you can do me just one favor and... just get through it. You know, put the bottle away, give them what they want, collect your paycheck and vamoose. Can you do that for me?

Les doesn't respond. He is fixated by the image of an old, has-been drunk in the mirror.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Les?

LES

Yeah.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Can you do that for me?

LES

Murray, regardless of what happens, I want you to know how much I appreciate all you've done for me all these years.

MURRAY (V.O.)

I know you do.

LES

No, you don't. You've kept me... alive... when I didn't give a shit.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Les, are you drinking now?

LES

No, Murray. Not a drop.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Is everything okay?

LES

I'm just telling you how much I appreciate you.

MURRAY (V.O.)

I know and I... thank you... so...

LES

Anyway, I just wanted you to know that. And it comes from my heart. I mean it, every word of it.

MURRAY (V.O.)

I know, Les. Listen, you're freakin' me out a little, okay?

LES

Sorry.

MURRAY (V.O.)

Are you sure everything's okay?

LES

Don't worry about me.

MURRAY (V.O.)

I wish you the best. Call me tomorrow. Let me know how things go.

LES

Okay.

The phone hangs up. Les turns as he sees a paper being slid under the door. He walks over and picks it up.

ANGLE POV ON PAPER. It reads: "Winner, Call Sheet, Day 1, Train Station.

OVERLAP the SOUND of a TRAIN WHISTLE.