

DAY 3

Written by

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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.

EXT. PADUCAH TRAIN STATION - DAY

A scene from Winner, as it is being shot. A train comes to a halt and porters open the doors. A band is playing rousing Sousa MUSIC and a crowd of over a hundred await the arrival of IRENE PENET (Vanessa). The movie is a true story (not really) from 1953 of the life of a female Olympic star who comes home to Paducah.

Irene appears at the door and the CROWD goes wild. She can't believe her eyes. She smiles broadly. Tears well in her eyes, as she makes her way through the crowd. She pauses as people reach out to touch her and hand her flowers.

The path leads to a small ad-hoc stage with a banner running across the back: "Welcome Home Irene." The mayor stands front and center, holding a large gold key. Behind the Mayor stands Irene's family, happily CLAPPING their hearts out.

There are four small children and her husband ROY PENET (Les). We hardly recognize him at first. The makeup and wardrobe have shaved ten years off of him, and he is smiling big and filled with heart-felt enthusiasm.

The last twenty feet of her walk, Irene focuses right in on the one love of her life, Roy. As she approaches him, the tears begin to flow. She practically glides onto the stage and falls into his arms. They embrace with such passion we wonder if we're watching the same movie. The CROWD cheers. Irene pulls away and kisses the kids, then faces the audience and raises her arms high. The MAYOR approaches the mike.

MAYOR

Irene Penet... Irene...

He waits for the crowd to quiet down.

MAYOR

Irene Penet, in recognition of your years of hard work and perseverance, which have paid off with you winning an Olympic gold medal for this great country...

Another wave of CHEERS.

MAYOR

On behalf of the citizens of Paducah, Kentucky, I bestow upon you the key to the town. May it in some way show our gratitude for all you have brought to this fair town.

He hands her the key, the crowd starts CHEERING and the band starts up again. Roy and the kids stand beside her and they all hug.

JOEL (O.S.)

Cut. Print that.

The SOUND winds down, and we jump out of Winner and PULL BACK to reveal Joel and the film crew. The Assistant Director DICK takes the stage with his megaphone.

DICK

Thank you all. We're wrapped for the day.

Everyone scatters; the crew starts to wrap the set. Joel approaches Vanessa on the stage, beaming. Les is seated in a folding chair behind them.

JOEL
That was, that was beautiful
Vanessa. If this day is any
indication of how the production is
going to go, my God.

He sees Les and motions to him.

JOEL
Oh Les, can you join us for a
second?

Les stands.

JOEL
How do we feel about tomorrow? Are
we pumped?

VANESSA & LES
Sure, yes.

JOEL
Good. I'd like to do just a real
quick read-through in a couple of
hours in my room. Will that be
okay?

VANESSA & LES
Sure, fine.

JOEL
Great.

He's off. Vanessa turns and steps off the stage. Les watches
her glide away, then catches up.

LES
Say, Vanessa.

She stops and turns. Irene is gone and the ice is back. Les
feels the sudden chill.

LES
Um, I'm glad to be working with
you.

VANESSA
Me too.

She displays a small fake smile, possibly a hint of
sincerity, and turns away.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

ANGLE CLOSE on callsheet: "Winner, Day 2, Penet Home."

ANGLE ON Les sitting at the bar, with a bourbon rocks. He folds the callsheet and puts it in his pocket. The dimly lit bar has a few bored businessmen, sitting alone, watching commercials on multiple hanging TVs, and eating happy-hour weenies. The BARTENDER sweeps by.

BARTENDER
How you doing?

LES
I'm okay. Thanks.

BARTENDER
Listen, I hate to bug you, but aren't you Lester Ward?

LES
(Surprised)
Yeah.

BARTENDER
I thought it was you. My kid's got Men with Laser Vision on DVD. He says it's a classic. I don't know.

Les smiles.

BARTENDER
You here with the movie company?

LES
Yeah.

BARTENDER
Started filming yet?

LES
This was the first day.

BARTENDER
How did it go?

LES
Pretty good, actually.

BARTENDER
Got any guys with x-ray vision in it?

LES
No.

BARTENDER
Too bad.

He starts to move away.

LES
Hey, uh, I got a question for you.
Tell me honestly, what do you think
of Men with Laser Vision? You can
be honest. It's not my movie.

BARTENDER
Okay. I don't know. It's kind of
funny. Kind of dated, but
entertaining. Yeah, it's pretty
entertaining. I liked it.

LES
Thanks.

The bartender moves off to another bleary-eyed patron. Les looks at his drink. Then he belts the last of it and tosses a five on the bar.

ANGLE TIGHT on the glass, as Les walks away in the BACKGROUND.

MATCH DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. PENET DINING ROOM - NIGHT

ANGLE TIGHT on a similar glass filled with milk. WE PULL BACK to a scene being shot from Winner. Irene and Roy are at opposite ends of the table, wrangling four hyper kids as the family begins dinner.

ROY
(Projecting over the din)
Kids, kids, listen up.

The kids turn to Roy, notice the look on his face, and slowly calm down. Then, they bow their heads.

ROY
Heavenly Father, we thank you for
the bread we are about to receive
and pray that you bless this
family.

(MORE)

ROY (CONT'D)

And we especially thank you for bringing Irene back to us safe and sound, and for giving her the strength and courage to be the best skater and the best mom in the world. Amen.

THE OTHERS

Amen.

The kids and Roy turn to Irene with doe eyes.

IRENE

I love you guys. Thanks.

ROY

Well, enough of this. Let's dig in.

As they begin, Irene looks at the kids thoughtfully, then to Roy.

ANGLE HER POV as Roy attempts to eat while cutting up a piece of turkey for a youngster.

RESUME IRENE as she smiles.

INT. PENET LIVING ROOM SET - NIGHT

As Les slouches in a chair reading a paper, while the crew sets up. Vanessa comes up behind him.

VANESSA

So, what's going on back home?

LES

Same old shit.

VANESSA

I'll be glad when they lose the kids. They're giving me a headache.

LES

I know what you mean.

VANESSA

Ever have kids?

LES

Uh yeah. The oldest is almost twenty now. A girl. Woman, actually.

VANESSA
She live with you?

LES
Nah. They live with their mother in
Dallas.

VANESSA
Ever miss them?

LES
Hell, yes.

VANESSA
Too bad.

Joel breezes in tense and in his usual state of being upset.

JOEL
(Ignoring Les)
The DP is driving me fucking crazy.
I don't know what he's doing, but
it's taking a hell of long time, as
usual. I'm sorry about the wait. Do
you need anything?

VANESSA
I'm okay.

JOEL
This is the last fucking time I'm
working with that guy. I swear.

Joel breezes off.

VANESSA
Well, it looks like it's going to
be a while. I guess I'll go back to
the trailer. Do you want to run
lines for the next scene?

LES
Sure.

She turns and saunters away. Les stands, watches her for a
beat, smiles. Then, he drops his paper on the chair and
follows her.

INT. PENET HALL - NIGHT

A scene from Winner, as Irene steps out of a bedroom and
turns back.

IRENE
(To a kid O.S.)
Good night, honey.

She closes the door and exhales. Then, she walks down the hall. When she comes to the kitchen door, she stops and looks in.

ANGLE HER POV as Roy finishes the dishes.

INT. PENET KITCHEN - NIGHT

A scene from Winner. As Irene enters. She walks up behind Roy and encircles him with her arms.

IRENE
You about done?

ROY
Just a few more things. What a day,
huh?

IRENE
You don't have any idea how glad I
am to be back.

ROY
Ronny had a cold for a few days.
Billy forgot his lunch three times
and I had to leave work to bring it
to him. Janie, good God, I spent
most of my spare time driving her
all over the place - from clarinet
lessons to birthday parties to who
knows what. I can't wait until she
becomes a teenager.

IRENE
What about Lorie?

ROY
Yeah, Lorie, hmm. I like her, the
silent, independent type.

IRENE
Well, I'm back now.

He sets the last plate down, then spins around and returns the hug. They kiss.

EXT. PENET FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

A scene from Winner. As Irene and Roy sit on the porch swing, enjoying the quiet, warm evening.

IRENE
Roy.

ROY
Hmm?

IRENE
Sometimes I feel funny.

ROY
What about?

IRENE
Well, where I come from the woman stays home and cooks and raises the kids. I feel guilty sometimes thinking about you slaving in the kitchen while I'm off winning gold medals. It feels wrong.

ROY
I don't know.

IRENE
Roy, tell me the truth. Does it ever bother you?

ROY
I never think about it.

IRENE
But the other guys must tease you.

ROY
Hey, this is the fifties. Do you think we're living in the dark ages? Women vote now, drive cars, wear pants, run businesses, win gold medals...

IRENE
I don't believe you.

ROY
What do you mean?

IRENE
I mean, I don't believe you can really be that understanding.

ROY

Okay, well, here's how I was raised. I grew up on an Iowa farm where everyone worked. We didn't have time to think about who did what job and worry about how we would be judged by others. We just did what needed to be done. I won't say it's been easy with you gone, but we did what we had to. How could I expect you to stay here and do dishes and bring me my slippers? Irene, I'm in awe of you. You are not every woman. You are incredible and special. I would do anything for you, even if you weren't off winning gold medals, because... because you are my wife, you are very, very special, and I love you.

They hug and kiss tenderly.

JOEL (O.S.)

Cut! Print that.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal the film crew. The Assistant Director DICK walks in and faces the crowd.

DICK

We move on to the bedroom after lunch.

The crew breaks up. Vanessa stands, immediately dropping Irene. She faces away from Les as her assistant hands her a cell phone. Les remains seated, staring out past the CAMERA. Joel approaches Vanessa.

VANESSA

(On her cell phone)

Hi. No, everything's fine. Lunch just started. Mmm hmm.

She notices Joel standing there.

VANESSA

(On cell phone)

Excuse me, can you hold just a second?

(To Joel)

Yes?

JOEL

How are you doing?

VANESSA

I'm fine.

JOEL

From what I understand the bedroom set is ready to go, so we should be able to start right away after lunch. If it's not, I'm going to be very pissed.

He glances at Les briefly, then speaks quietly to Vanessa.

JOEL

Vanessa, are you going to be okay with the next scene the way we talked about it?

VANESSA

Yes, of course Joel. I've done this sort of thing many times.

JOEL

Good.

VANESSA

I just don't want a bunch of gawkers standing around.

JOEL

Oh, of course, closed set, absolutely. Thank you for everything.

He flies off. Vanessa turns to Les with a fake smile, which he returns. Then she is off. All lights go off, except for one distant work light. Les remains, staring straight ahead.

OVERLAP the VOICE of Dick.

DICK (O.S.)

Quiet please for rehearsal.

INT. WINNER BEDROOM SET - NIGHT

Vanessa is wearing a robe, lying on top of the bed propped up on one elbow. Joel and Dick stand at the edge of the set and watch.

JOEL

Okay, Les enter.

Les enters from the bathroom wearing a robe and sees Vanessa.

JOEL
And stop, look, camera moves around
here.

He indicates the camera arcing around Les to include Vanessa.

JOEL
Okay and walk Les.

As Les steps slowly toward the bed, Joel moves behind him with his hands held up to frame the shot. Les sits on the bed and slowly moves under the covers.

JOEL
Camera up and over the bed.

Indicating that the camera should crane up and look down on the bed. STEVE, the DP, looks worried and whispers to Jake, the key grip.

JOEL
(To Steve)
What's wrong now?

STEVE
Nothing.
(To Jake)
We'll use a jib arm and track along
here. Boom and dolly around to
here, dolly in and-

JOEL
Hold it, hold it, hold it. How long
is this going to take?

STEVE
Uh, we can be ready in, what...

JAKE
Half hour, 45 minutes.

JOEL
Screw it. We'll use the Steadicam.
I can't wait.

STEVE
What about the angle over the bed?

JOEL
Fuck. You have 30 minutes.

Joel turns away abruptly from Steve and approaches Vanessa.

JOEL
 (In earshot of Steve and
 Jake)
 I'm sorry.

VANESSA
 It's no problem.

JOEL
 They told me everything was ready.

VANESSA
 It's no problem, really.

JOEL
 We'll call you when the camera is
 set.

Joel and Vanessa step away from the set. Joel is fuming - too much coffee. Les comes up behind them.

LES
 Joel, I have a suggestion. Vanessa.

Joel is anything but receptive, keeps walking. Vanessa tags along.

JOEL
 What is it, Les?

LES
 The blocking doesn't feel right.

JOEL
 What's wrong with it?

LES
 It doesn't feel right for me to be
 walking to Vanessa in bed. It would
 make more sense for me to be in bed
 and Vanessa to walk to me.

Joel stops and faces Les.

JOEL
 (Extremely annoyed)
 Why?

LES
 For one thing, men are usually
 undressed and ready before women.
 For another thing, the camera would
 be following my hairy ass to the
 bed.

(MORE)

LES (CONT'D)

I think the audience would rather watch Vanessa's backside. Just my opinion.

JOEL

And you're entitled. But there's an important reason for sticking with the original plan.

Joel turns away.

LES

I think you're making a mistake, Joel.

JOEL

(Surprised by the
impertinence)

No Les, you're making the mistake. We're already behind for the day. I don't have time to deal with suggestions right now. Thank you.

LES

Can we at least try it the other way?

JOEL

What?

LES

I think it's worth giving it a shot. We can do it while they're setting up. No time wasted.

JOEL

Les, I didn't think I would have to explain the subtleties of the story to you. I want the audience to feel you are coming to her. You see? She is a gold medal winner. I want her to be in a position of strength. She calls the shots. She is a strong character. People come to her, not the other way around. Does that make sense?

LES

I can see your point, but it still feels wrong, unnatural.

JOEL

Well, watch the movie when it comes to a theater and you'll see what I mean. Okay?

Joel is seething now, turns away for what he hopes is the last time, but Les won't let go.

LES

Would it be okay if Vanessa and I try it the other way? To see?

Joel stops.

JOEL

Umm, well, no.

LES

Why not?

JOEL

Les, Vanessa understands what I'm after. I'm afraid you just don't get it. I really admire your work, but you... will just have to trust me on this-

LES

(Beginning to steam)

Joel.

(Beat)

Thank you for listening to my suggestion.

JOEL

I like to foster a feeling of openness on the set-

LES

Thank you for being open.

Joel steps away. Les turns to Vanessa.

LES

I'm sorry for wasting your time.

Les starts to turn.

VANESSA

Les.

He pauses.

VANESSA

You're right. I mean it's not really an issue of women's rights and equal treatment. Hell, women often take longer in the bathroom, no matter how many gold medals they've won.

LES

Right.

VANESSA

Let's try it.

He follows her back to the set and gets in bed. She goes into the bathroom.

ANGLE ON JOEL, who is standing on the other side of the stage and notices what they are doing.

RESUME THE SET as Vanessa walks out of the bathroom, repeating the blocking. As she walks to the bed slowly, the moment seems to click - everything seems right. She sits on the edge of the bed, they look in each other's eyes, and WE feel an electricity between them. They can feel it too. Even some of the crew members are drawn to the scene and smile.

Then Vanessa breaks the trance, looks away.

VANESSA

I like it. You're right. It's better. I'll talk to Joel. Maybe, uh... I think he'll come around.

She walks away. Les sits on the edge of the bed, then notices something across the stage.

ANGLE HIS POV Joel standing alone glaring at Les. When he sees that Les is watching, he turns away.

INT. BEDROOM SET - LATER

From the ANGLE of the Winner CAMERA on the bathroom door.

JOEL (O.S.)

And action.

The door opens and Irene enters wearing nothing. She turns and stops. Roy, also nude, is standing by the door putting something away in a dresser that was added for the shot. He turns to her and they come together and embrace. Even though both actors are well over 30, they both look good and complement each other physically.

They part. He takes her hand and pulls her gently to the bed. They get under the covers. The CAMERA CRANES up and over the bed, as planned. The two make love, with passion and longing - another moment that clicks.

SEVERAL CLOSER ANGLES, as the passion intensifies. The CAMERA PANS along the delicate, sensual lines of their nude bodies. The curves and folds move with the rhythm of their love-making. The scene is long, romantic, and beautiful, and we are drawn into the emotions that are happening right there between these two people.

FADE TO BLACK,
THEN UP ON...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - DAY

ANGLE CLOSE on today's callsheet: "Winner, Day 3, Town Square."

ANGLE FULLSHOT on the scene, which is set up to shoot. Les is waiting on the sidewalk with a baby carriage, smoking a cigarette. He folds the callsheet and puts it in his pocket. Two of the Penet kids are goofing around. Finally, Joel blows in with Vanessa.

JOEL

Sorry to keep you waiting. All right, here's what we got. You'll all start back there. Les, you're pushing the carriage along. Vanessa, you're on his left. You kids are kicking the ball around, okay?

Points to one of the kids.

JOEL

I'll give you a cue right about here and you kick the ball in the street. We got the bus coming up. Les, you run into the street to get the ball. You don't see the bus. When you get to this mark, you look back, oh shit, and we cut. Okay? Les we got you on a long lens, so you're in no danger from the bus. Vanessa, we'll get you running up to Roy in another angle. Any questions?

KID1
 (Indicating the other kid)
 Do you want him to play like he
 misses the ball or something?

JOEL
 (Annoyed)
 Hmm?

KID1
 Otherwise, what is my motivation?

Again, Joel is upstaged and this time by a kid.

JOEL
 Yeah, good point. Sure.

Joel breezes away.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - LATER

ANGLE FROM the Winner CAMERA with the LONG LENS. The actors
 are in first position awaiting their cue.

DICK (O.S.)
 (Through megaphone)
 Quiet for rehearsal, please.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Through megaphone)
 And bus...

A bus starts driving slowly down the one-way street.

JOEL (O.S.)
 And action.

The group starts moving down the sidewalk. The kids kick the
 ball. On their right, the bus approaches from behind them.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Ball.

Kid1 kicks the ball to the other kid. He misses and the ball
 goes into the street. Apparently without thinking, Les runs
 into the street after the ball. On his mark, he stops, and
 turns to the approaching bus.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Cut. Good. Let's shoot it.

ANGLE CLOSE on Les as he stands facing the OS bus. Wheels are turning in his head. After a moment, he turns away and walks out.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE from the Winner CAMERA, as the group waits for their cue.

DICK (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Picture up.
 (Waits)
 Roll sound.

SOUND GUY (O.S.)
 Speed.

The CAMERA ASST. moves the slate in.

CAMERA ASST.
 Seventeen apple, take one.

CLAP.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Cue the bus.

The bus starts.

JOEL (O.S.)
 And action.

The group starts walking. At the right moment...

JOEL (O.S.)
 Ball.

Kid1 kicks the ball in the street and Les turns. He freezes.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Les, the ball. Go after the ball.

The bus keeps coming.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Les, go. Come on.

The bus is too close.

JOEL (O.S.)
(Megaphone)
Cut! What happened?

DICK (O.S.)
(Megaphone)
Bus, back to first position.

REVERSE ANGLE of LES on the crew. The camera and crew are positioned half-way down the block. Joel is seated in front of a monitor with his megaphone.

JOEL
(Megaphone)
Les, what's up?

Les speaks in a normal voice into the microphone concealed under his clothes.

LES
I don't know.

JOEL
(Megaphone)
You feel okay? Need something?

LES
I'm okay.

JOEL
(Megaphone)
This another rewrite, Les? What's going on?

Les just stands in the same spot, staring at the street.

JOEL
(Megaphone)
What's it going to be, Les?

LES
I can't do this.

JOEL
(Megaphone)
What was that?

LES
I said, I can't do this.

JOEL
(Megaphone)
Can't do what?

LES
Sorry everybody. I can't die.

JOEL
(Megaphone, shouting)
What do you mean you can't die,
Les?!
(No response)
It's in the fucking script. You
have to die.

LES
I won't do it. I'm sorry.

Vanessa and the kids stare at him wide-eyed.

Finally, Joel stands, tosses his headphones down and walks the half-block to Les. He starts SHOUTING as he approaches.

JOEL
Les, I got to get this scene and
two other locations today. I don't
have the fucking time to deal with
this. Now quickly, tell me exactly
what the fuck is going on.

LES
I don't want to tell you how to do
your job, Joel.

JOEL
Thank you.

LES
But I'm not going to die.

JOEL
Why?

LES
It's wrong. I don't want to.

JOEL
What? Why?!

LES
Personal reasons.

JOEL
If you didn't want to die, why did
you take the part?

LES

My agent talked me into it. But it's wrong and it didn't really hit me until just now. I thought I could do it, but, I don't know, it took being here, at this moment to see it.

JOEL

(Grinding his teeth)
See what?

LES

That it's wrong. I'm sorry.

JOEL

What am I supposed to do, Les?

Dick approaches them.

LES

Well, you have some options.

JOEL

Like what, shoot myself?

DICK

Joel, sorry to break in, what, uh, where do we stand here?

JOEL

I'm fucked.

DICK

Do you want me to release the cast for now?

JOEL

Fuck, I don't know. Ask him?

Joel storms off back to his chair. Dick turns to Les.

DICK

(Working to keep it together)
Uh, what's going on?

LES

I can't die today, Dick.

DICK

Tomorrow?

LES
No, not at all.

DICK
Okay. Well, uh, what should we do here?

LES
Send Vanessa and the kids back to their trailers, I guess.

DICK
Then what?

LES
Well. I'd wrap it here and move on to the next location.

DICK
That would be your funeral.

They turn to Joel down the block, as he starts to throw a tantrum. He kicks over the monitors, chairs, and the script supervisor's cart. Papers fly everywhere. A burly grip grabs a large light before he kicks over.

Dick turns back, as the world comes to an end.

DICK
Ms. Townsend, kids why don't you go back to your trailers. We'll call you.

INT. TOWN SQUARE BAR - LATER

As Dick and Les sit at the bar. WE can see the crew wrapping the sidewalk set out the window behind them.

LES
You worked on "Sandpiper," right?

DICK
Yeah.

LES
Same thing. I'm the guy who put ten, fifteen years into a relationship just to get dumped in reel two. I worked hard, provided for that bitch Leslie, and she runs off with that lesbian chick in her little Corvette. I'm history.

DICK
It's tough.

LES
It's happened one too many times,
Dick.

DICK
But Les...

LES
I'm not asking for much. Pretty
decent actor, don't fuck up my
lines, hit my marks. I acted the
hell out of that bedroom scene last
night, don't you think?

DICK
You did.

LES
So, what is it?

DICK
Luck? I don't know.

LES
Luck. Yeah, that's it. Fucking
luck.

DICK
(Looking back out the
window)
Well, so Les, what are we going to
do here?

LES
I don't know. Just let me live. I
can go off to Chicago on a business
trip or something. I can bring
presents back to the wife and kids
later, you know?

DICK
I can't tell if you're serious or
not, man. But have you thought
about that?

LES
Well, it's not my problem...
anymore.

DICK

They can't let you live and they can't write you out of the script because it's a fucking true story. You can't rewrite history, okay? Your character gets hit by a bus and dies in Vanessa's arms. If you go off on a business trip, Vanessa sort of loses all her motivation for having a nervous breakdown and doing all that crazy stuff. There's no alternative, Les.

LES

It's just a movie. You'll find a way.

DICK

Joel needs the scene.

LES

Fuck Joel.

DICK

Do it for me, for the crew, for Vanessa, whatever. Joel is an asshole. Just get through this. You'll get your chance on the next show.

LES

Nah. There is no next show for me. I'm fucked now. I'll never work again after today.

DICK

Not necessarily.

LES

You don't know. I just want to exit with a shred of dignity.

DICK

Well, then the only thing we can do is try to cut around the shot.

EXT. FUNERAL SET - DAY

As the crew rigs Roy's flower-laden coffin over the grave. Joel is seated. BILL, the Producer, paces behind him.

JOEL

No fucking way.

BILL
I don't see any alternative.

JOEL
I need the shot. That's it. It's not my problem.

BILL
We'll have to recast Roy.

JOEL
That's crazy. I'd have to shut down production, reschedule everything. It'd be six months, a year before we could start shooting again, that's if I could get the backing together again and the cast. Vanessa is starting another movie right after this. What about insurance?

BILL
We got basic insurance. We're not covered if a below-the-line actor decides not to do his job. If a fucking bus ran over him, we'd be covered.

A light goes on in Joel's head. His eyes are fixed on the coffin.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

As Les holds his cell phone and sips a bourbon rocks.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MURRAY'S L.A. OFFICE - AFTERNOON

As Murray sits behind his messy desk.

MURRAY
I'm very, very worried about you.

LES
I can see why.

MURRAY
I'm sorry I talked you into doing this, Les.

LES

It's okay. It's not your fault.

MURRAY

You're right. It's yours. It's your fault and I'm getting my ulcers back. You've screwed your career and you're going after mine and the director's. What's with you?

LES

I'm not doing it to hurt anyone.

MURRAY

But you are. I talked to Joel and he said he won't press charges if you die tomorrow.

LES

Press charges? What charges?

MURRAY

How the fuck should I know?

LES

No matter what I do, I'm screwed. He's going to sue me for millions whether I die or not. It makes no difference to me.

MURRAY

If you do the scene, there's a chance. There is NO chance if you don't.

LES

Murray, this decision...

He takes a sizeable swig of his drink.

LES

It may seem arbitrary and foolish to you, but I really am at the point of no return. It took a lot for me to do what I did. Do you understand?

MURRAY

I understand you're not well. That's what I understand.

LES

You can think of it that way, but now I feel better than I've felt in a long time. I feel like I've made the best decision of my life. I finally stood up for myself and my dignity. I did something I feel good about.

MURRAY

Timing Les. You could've picked a better time to do this. You know? We could've found another part for you, got you set up with another director or writer. There are lots of ways to go. But this-

LES

I asked you Murray. For years I asked you to find me something better, something I liked. But you kept telling me there was nothing out there for me. I was too old, drank too much, I was typed, no one was looking for someone like me. You led me to believe I was lucky just to get any piece of shit that came along.

MURRAY

Les-

LES

You're my agent Murray. But you haven't been on my side for years.

MURRAY

I'm coming out there.

LES

Don't bother.

MURRAY

I'll be there tonight.

He hangs up.

INT. JOEL'S TRAILER - NEXT MORNING

ANGLE TIGHT on a Variety headline: "Ward refuses to die"

WE PULL BACK to include Bill and Murray, who are seated at a messy table eyeing Variety, as Joel paces around them.

JOEL

The screenplay cannot be rewritten. It's a fucking true story. I'm not going to make some Hollywood piece of crap and I don't have to.

MURRAY

I realize that Joel. I'm just...

JOEL

I'm not going to compromise the film because of some alcoholic fucking actor.

BILL

Murray, the scene with Irene holding Roy as he dies is very integral to the film. You got to understand that.

JOEL

I'm not playing games with this. I need the scene. I got to have it. Your actor is fucking everything up.

Joel stands and heads out the door, followed closely by Bill and Murray.

EXT. JOEL'S TRAILER, DINER SET - DAY

As Joel walks briskly down the sidewalk toward a train-car diner that is being prepared.

MURRAY

Joel, you don't have to tell me that. I know. I'm just trying to think of alternatives. You don't have the budget to recast and reshoot-

JOEL

I'm not going to recast anything.

Bill's cell phone RINGS. He hangs back as he takes the call. Murray tries to keep up with Joel.

MURRAY

Well then, you could use a double, do some green screen. There's a million ways to work around it...

JOEL
There's only one way to go.

MURRAY
I can only do so much here. If Les-

JOEL
Your job Murray is not to give me
excuses-

MURRAY
I can only do so much-

JOEL
Murray, your job-

MURRAY
I've tried.

JOEL
Then try harder.

MURRAY
He won't do it.

JOEL
Keep trying.

MURRAY
He figures you're going to sue him
whether he works or not, so-

JOEL
Tell him I won't sue him if he does
the scene.

MURRAY
Okay, that might work. I'll try
that.

Joel stops before entering the diner and faces Murray.

JOEL
Murray, do more than try. You read
me?

MURRAY
I'll need it in writing.

JOEL
Done. You talk to him. I'll get the
contract started.

Bill returns to the group.

BILL
Gentlemen. The backers read the
story in Variety.

Joel turns ashen.

JOEL
Jesus.

BILL
They're flying out tomorrow.

Joel punches his fist through a small window and SLAMS the
diner door open. Bill and Murray wince.

INT. VANESSA'S TRAILER - DAY

ANGLE ON Vanessa sitting at a table with her feet up, sipping
coffee and holding her cell phone. She seems fairly blasé
about the disaster, as she watches Joel, Bill and Murray out
her window.

VANESSA
It was supposed to be a closed set,
so I don't know how Variety got the
story.

SUSANNE is Vanessa's agent in L.A.

SUSANNE (V.O.)
(N.Y. accent)
I've been an agent for thirty years
and I thought I'd seen everything.
How you holding up?

VANESSA
Oh, okay. Disappointed. The first
two days went so well.

SUSANNE (V.O.)
How was it working with Les?

VANESSA
Not bad.

SUSANNE (V.O.)
Hmm. One more career in the toilet.

VANESSA
Yeah.

Vanessa looks at Variety again.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Les walks down a row of cheap rental cars, scanning license plates. He finds the right one and starts to unlock it. Murray walks up with a plastered-on smile, convinced Les has lost his mind. *

MURRAY

Hey Les, I've been looking all over for you. What's going on?

LES

Decided to go for a drive.

MURRAY

Good. Good. Mind if I tag along?

LES

Suit yourself.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

As Les drives his cramped white Geo through town with Murray.

MURRAY

Joel feels confident he will be able to finish the shoot even with the lost time.

LES

Good.

MURRAY

But he needs you to do your scene.

LES

Murray-

MURRAY

I know. I told him, he understands, but he was very insistent that the script cannot be changed and... there is no alternative.

LES

I'm sorry.

MURRAY

You're hurting a lot of people, Les.

LES

I know.

MURRAY

If you're worried about repercussions, Joel says he'll sign an agreement that he won't sue. You're in the clear. You can go in, finish your scene, and you're done. Just a couple of hours of work.

LES

I don't trust him.

MURRAY

Les, Joel is very sincere about this.

LES

That guy doesn't have a sincere bone in his body.

MURRAY

All right, he's desperate. He has plenty of desperate bones. The backers are coming out tomorrow. He needs to show them he's in control.

LES

Murray, if you think I'm just playing games, you don't understand.

MURRAY

I understand.

LES

I don't think you do.

MURRAY

What do you want? What can I do? More money, what? Whatever, you want. You got them cornered. They need the scene. I can probably get a million.

LES

It's not about extortion.

MURRAY

Les, it's about getting the fucking scene and they will do whatever it takes. That's what it's about.

Les pulls up and stops the car.

MURRAY

I know you're upset, very upset.
Things have been going wrong for
years. I realize that now. It's
time to turn things around for you.

Les gets out of the car. Murray follows him.

EXT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

As Murray and Les get out.

MURRAY

We can fix those things. We can do
it. You have the upper hand now.
It's your opportunity to call the
shots. That's what you want to do,
right. Call the shots. So, now you
can do it. What do you want? Name
it. Just name it.

LES

I want to live. I want respect.

MURRAY

Okay, I can get you money and maybe
respect, but I can't get you life.
Two out of three.

LES

Tell them, no. I can't do it.

Les walks to the building that he has parked in front of.

MURRAY

Les, what is this?

LES

The Quilting Museum. I was told
it's quite impressive.

Les goes inside. Murray is left flailing.

MURRAY

Les, Goddamn it!

INT. JOEL'S TRAILER - DAY

Joel is lying in a recliner with a wet towel over his eyes.
The lights off and shades drawn tight. Bill enters.

BILL
(Quietly)
Joel.

JOEL
What?

BILL
Murray says he won't budge. He's
tried everything.

JOEL
Tell him to try harder.

BILL
Joel, he really did try. I think we
need to do something else.

JOEL
My head is about to fucking
explode!

He sits up and flings the towel across the room.

BILL
Do you have any ideas?

JOEL
I am suing the shit out of him. I
don't care if it takes me the rest
of my life, I don't care what
swathe of destruction is left in my
wake, I am going to spend every
dime, every moment of my life
making sure he suffers for what he
has done. That fucking drunken
bastard thinks he can walk away
from this? "I'm sorry, I can't
die." Fuck him. He is so fucking
dead.

BILL
Joel.

JOEL
What!

BILL
Do you have any constructive ideas?

Joel thinks.

EXT. HOTEL PUTTING GREEN - AFTERNOON

As Les practices with a bucket of balls. Vanessa walks up, still wearing her make-up.

VANESSA

Les.

LES

Oh hi. How's the shoot going?

VANESSA

Fine. Well, actually, a little tense. Actually, it's pretty miserable. Joel sent me to see what I can do. I think he's pretty desperate. I don't know what to try with you. I don't really know what your problem is. But maybe we can talk. Do you mind?

LES

No.

VANESSA

You're a good actor, Les, damn good really. We did some good work together. Don't you think?

LES

Yes.

VANESSA

But you're throwing all that out now. You know that?

LES

Yes.

VANESSA

I guess I'm missing something here. Why would you do that?

LES

You're a great actor. You go from one good part to another, everything seems to fall into place, you feel good about your work. I wouldn't expect you to understand where I'm at.

VANESSA

I understand adversity and pain. I've had plenty of it myself.

LES

Okay. What do you do when you're in pain?

VANESSA

I don't know. Try to stop whatever is causing the pain.

LES

That's what I'm doing.

VANESSA

Hmm.

LES

I saw that bus coming at me and there I was again. Same old shit. Same old pain. Like hitting my head against the wall.

VANESSA

Seems like a rather self-destructive solution though.

LES

What would you do?

VANESSA

I wouldn't settle for a part I wasn't happy with for one thing. I'd tell my agent to find me something better.

LES

Yeah well, I've been trying that for the last, oh, 20 years. Sitting around, waiting. Waiting for the agent to call, waiting for the check to come, waiting for just something fucking decent to happen. That's far more self-destructive. It slowly tears you apart, or rather, you slowly tear yourself apart. The solution is to stop waiting. Stop believing them when they tell you that all you can do is stand in front of moving buses.

He takes a swing and the ball rolls neatly into the cup.

VANESSA

Good shot.

LES

Thanks.

VANESSA

Well, I don't know what else I can do. It's a shame things had to turn out this way. But, what are you going to do?

LES

Where you headed next?

VANESSA

Someplace in France. What about you?

LES

I don't know. I'm thinking of flying back tomorrow.

VANESSA

Then what?

LES

Haven't got that far yet.

He makes another successful putt.

VANESSA

You ARE good.

LES

Had a lot of practice while I was sitting around waiting.

EXT. HOTEL PUTTING GREEN - LATER

Vanessa is holding Les's putter, preparing to swing. Les is kneeling on the other side of the ball, watching her form.

VANESSA

How's this?

LES

Not bad. Now what you want to do is bring the club back carefully...

She follows his instructions.

LES

That's it. Pretend the club is an extension of your arms. Bring it back in one controlled motion.

(MORE)

LES (CONT'D)
Don't bend your wrists. Okay,
that's too far back. Right about
there.

He reaches over and gently adjusts her wrists.

LES
Keep your wrists straight, like
that.

He finds he can't let go of her hands. They are soft and delicate. She watches him. He runs his hands over her arms, then starts to move them over her body. One thing leads to another. He stands and faces her. He is tired of waiting. He closes his eyes and moves in. They kiss.

VANESSA
They're expecting me on the set. I
should go.

He goes in for another kiss, this time longer and deeper.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Les is in his usual position at the bar sucking on a Bourbon rocks. Steve and Jake are sitting at a table having a late-night snack. Steve notices Les, and points him out to Jake, who turns to look. Then, Steve stands and approaches Les.

STEVE
How you doing, Les?

LES
(Surprised)
Okay.

STEVE
Why don't you join me and Jake?
Unless you want to be alone. That's
cool.

LES
No, that's fine. Sure.

INT. HOTEL BAR - MOMENTS LATER

As Les, Jake, and Steve eat in SILENCE. After a long uncomfortable stretch...

LES
Why don't I just go sit over there?

STEVE

Why?

LES

Well, in case you guys want to talk.

STEVE

Hell, we don't want to talk.

More SILENCE.

JAKE

This is such a weird business. Every so often, I'll just be all absorbed in what I'm doing, and it hits me. Like some little thing will happen and I get this flash. I think, what the hell am I doing? Everybody else is pumping gas or, you know, working in a bank or something, and here I am, standing in the pouring rain, aiming a light at some guy dressed up in a lizard suit or something. You know?

STEVE

It happens to me every day. Every day.

JAKE

If you want to survive in this business, you have to learn to keep your perspective.

He glances at Les.

STEVE

And don't take it too seriously.

JAKE

Yeah.

LES

And have fun.

More SILENCE.

STEVE

Right, have fun.

LES

What's the point, if you're not having fun?

STEVE

Right.

LES

If all you're doing is going from one pointless situation to another, you just have to stop, because life is too fucking short.

STEVE

Is that it?

LES

That's it. That's all it is.

The light is dim, but candlelight is all Steve needs to see the sincerity in Les's eyes - no power plays, no political maneuvering, just simple human needs.

STEVE

It's a pleasure working with you, Les.

Les smiles.

INT. JOEL'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Joel is sitting on the edge of his bed, downing a couple of large sleeping pills. He's sick and worn down. Bill is standing over him.

BILL

I'm sorry.

JOEL

Yeah, everybody's sorry.

BILL

I'd talk to him, but, hell, what would I say?

Joel lies back and puts the wet towel over his eyes.

JOEL

It's a good story, isn't it?

BILL

Yeah, damn good, but...

JOEL

Then what's going on? Did I miss some detail? Did I not show enough commitment?

(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

Did I not push hard enough? Did I not pay enough dues? Did I not kiss enough ass?

BILL

I don't know. Joel, listen. I think you're making too big a deal of this shot. We can-

Joel pops up, tosses the towel.

JOEL

What?! Don't you turn on me. Goddamn it!

BILL

I'm not turning on you.

JOEL

I thought you understood.

BILL

I do, of course, I do.

JOEL

It sure as hell doesn't sound like it.

BILL

Joel-

JOEL

I thought we were together on this.

BILL

We are together.

JOEL

Bullshit! I have to live with whatever we get on film. Not you. Me.

BILL

That's not true.

JOEL

It's obvious, you could give a shit.

BILL

Joel, we got a problem and we have to deal with it.

JOEL

I told you how we're dealing with it. It's not my problem!

BILL

But you're making it your problem. You're letting it tear you up and destroy the production.

JOEL

No, you are. That drunken fuck Les Ward is.

BILL

Why are you accusing me?

JOEL

What did I do wrong? What am I missing?

Bill is beginning to lose it.

BILL

Joel... You need to sleep on it. Tomorrow-

JOEL

I need the shot. It's simple. I need the shot. Give me the shot and there will be no problem-

BILL

I know. You don't have to tell me. But we got this situation. It is the way it is.

JOEL

I know it is the way it is.

BILL

I don't think you do.

JOEL

What's that supposed to mean?

BILL

Sleep on it. Just... sleep on it.

Joel doesn't respond. Bill turns and walks out of the room.

INT. JOEL'S HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Something stirs Joel from sleep. His eyes pop open. He looks at the clock: 3:30 AM. He sits on the edge of the bed and turns on the light. His clothes are wrinkled, hair sticks out all over. He stands, loses his balance and sits back down. Then he picks up the phone, checks a list on the night stand, and dials. He listens while the phone RINGS. No answer.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATER

As Joel walks through the deserted room. He checks the bar first. It's closed. He looks around and wanders some more, then goes outside.

EXT. HOTEL POOL AREA - NIGHT

As Joel approaches the pool area. It's closed, the main lights are off. The area is illuminated only by the tiki lights in the planters. Something catches his eye by the pool.

He enters the darkened area and approaches a silhouetted figure sitting in a lawn chair.

JOEL

Hello Les.

Joel speaks quietly, respectfully.

LES

Joel. What are you doing up?

JOEL

Can't sleep.

LES

Neither can I.

JOEL

Mind if I sit?

Without waiting for an answer, Joel sits next to Les.

LES

If you're here to try to-

JOEL

I got to give it a shot, Les.
Right? I'd be a fool if I didn't at least try.

LES

But there's nothing more to say.

JOEL

Why are you... Do you know what I've been through for the past year to get this production rolling? Do you think all this was just handed to me? I've mortgaged my fucking soul to do something I believe in.

His voice starts to pick up intensity and he stops to allow himself to calm down.

JOEL

I had dreams. You have dreams. You know what it's like. Why do you want to fuck up my dreams? I just want to make a movie. I'm not trying to hurt anybody.

He starts to get a bit weepy.

JOEL

Why won't you let me do that?

Les turns to him, looks deep into his empty, damp, little beady eyes, and sees a hurt little boy.

JOEL

Les, can't you see where I'm at here? I'm beaten. You've beaten me. You've won. I'm fucked. The backers are coming tomorrow. They're going to see the mess we're in and close everything down maybe. I didn't do anything to hurt you, at least consciously. Did I? I'm just... you know... playing the game like everybody else. I thought I was doing everything right. Maybe... I made some mistakes... I have a lot to learn. That's how you learn, by making mistakes. You know. You've been around a long time. I'm just new... trying to figure it all out. It's new to me. So, okay, I admit I've learned a difficult lesson, but I'm a good writer and this is a good movie, and... Say something.

LES

I don't know what to say. I honestly didn't think the shot was that important to you. I thought I could just disappear and that would be it. I'm sorry.

JOEL

Sorry. Can you do me a favor, Les? Just as one human being to another. Can you just do me one favor? And I'll pay you back. You know. I'll make sure you're not forgotten. Can you do the scene for me? And I promise, I'll pay you back somehow.

LES

Joel, I'm sorry, I've been in this business long enough to know I can't trust you. Nothing personal. You can't trust anyone. I wish I could, but this business has a way of making people forget promises and turn against each other-

Joel explodes. He SHOUTS.

JOEL

Please!

It surprises them both.

LES

Did you say, please?

JOEL

Yes. Les, please do the scene? Please. I'm begging you. It would make me very happy.

Joel is so pitiful, Les can't look at him. He is SILENT and still for a long time, then...

LES

(Quietly, lifelessly)
All right.

JOEL

Did you say all right?

LES

Yes.

Joel is afraid to say something that will undo what just happened.

JOEL
Do you promise?

LES
I keep my promises.

JOEL
I am so deeply in your debt, you don't know. I... we'll shoot the scene first thing tomorrow. Is that all right?

LES
It's your movie.

JOEL
Great. Thank you.

LES
You're welcome.

Joel stands and skips away. Les slumps, stares at the ripples in the dark pool.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - DAY

As the crew finishes setting up the bus scene. The mood on the set is somber. No one talks. Morale is low.

WE find Les sitting slumped in a chair near the "Winner" camera, waiting. He has no expression, stares lifelessly off into the distance. Steve approaches the camera and looks on as an assistant threads a new film roll. Then Steve turns and notices Les. He leans in to him.

STEVE
How you doing, Les?

Without turning to Steve, Les attempts a smile. He appears so broken and hollow, Steve can hardly bear to look at him for more than a second.

Joel flies in, sees the group around the camera.

JOEL
(To Steve, shouting for everyone to hear)
What's the holdup now? I thought you were ready.

STEVE
We're changing film rolls.

JOEL
What?!

STEVE
We had 100 feet left. I didn't want
to take a chance.

JOEL
Why did this have to wait until
now?

STEVE
I don't know. I-

JOEL
Never mind. Jesus.

Joel storms off. Steve turns to Les again. Les is staring
straight ahead.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - DAY

The Winner scene is all set up again. Les, Vanessa, and the
kids are in position. In contrast to the prevailing lack of
enthusiasm, Joel is on a manic, coffee high now as he
approaches the actors with a big fake smile.

JOEL
(To Les, rubbing his back)
How you doing this morning?

LES
(No life)
Fine, thank you.

JOEL
Good. Everyone else good?

They nod.

JOEL
Excellent. We are good!
(Calling OS)
Okay, Dick, let's do it.

WE FOLLOW Joel as he runs back to his position behind the
monitor.

DICK
 (Megaphone)
 Picture's up. Everyone first
 positions. Quiet please. Roll
 sound.

ANGLE FROM Winner CAMERA on the actors waiting for their cue.

SOUND GUY (O.S.)
 Speed.

The CAMERA ASST. moves the slate in frame.

CAMERA ASST.
 Scene seventeen apple, take two.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (On megaphone)
 And bus.

The bus starts.

JOEL (O.S.)
 (On megaphone)
 And action.

The group starts walking. They have no enthusiasm. The kids
 kick the ball with no motivation. At the right moment...

JOEL (O.S.)
 (Megaphone)
 Ball.

The kid kicks the ball into the street. The CAMERA stops.

STEVE (O.S.)
 Cut.

ANGLE ON CREW, as Steve looks away from the viewfinder. Dick
 steps over to him. Joel leaps up and shoots daggers at Steve.

JOEL
 What the hell was that?

STEVE
 I called cut.

JOEL
 I know that. What happened? Was
 there a problem with the camera?

Joel steps over to the camera. Steve is tense, shaking.

STEVE

No. There was a problem with the actors. I didn't think-

JOEL

What?

STEVE

Their performances were stiff. They weren't in character. There was no energy. I didn't want to waste the film-

JOEL

(Furious)

You do not decide when we cut. Your job is to keep the fucking camera rolling.

STEVE

I didn't think you'd-

JOEL

Your job is not to think. That's my job. Do not stop the camera until I tell you to. Understand? Jesus!

Joel flies back to his chair. The crew is SILENT.

JOEL

(Shouting)

Roll the fucking sound!

DICK

(On megaphone)

First positions. Quiet please. Roll sound.

SOUND GUY (O.S.)

Speed.

ANGLE from Winner CAMERA as the slate goes in. After a long wait...

DICK

John, slate it.

CAMERA ASST.

Waiting for camera.

ANGLE ON CREW as all eyes turn to Steve, who is not looking in the viewfinder. Dick approaches him.

DICK
 (To sound guy)
 Save the roll.
 (Quietly, compassionately)
 Steve, what's the problem?

JOEL
 (Standing, livid)
 What's the fucking problem now?!

STEVE
 Dick, tell Mr. Mincus I would like
 an apology.

INT. LIMO - DAY

Bill and three nicely-dressed Asian men (the backers) are approaching the street barricade for the production, with big smiles. Apparently, the only backer who speaks English conversationally is MR. CHOW.

BILL
 So barring the loss of half a day
 of shooting, everything is on
 track. Joel is doing an excellent
 job. We're getting some beautiful
 footage. Vanessa Townsend is
 superb. We're so lucky to have her
 on the show.

The limo slows and a policeman moves a barricade and waves them through.

MR. CHOW
 And Lester Ward is still a problem?

BILL
 No, no, no. Lester Ward is no
 longer a problem. We just had a
 little misunderstanding, and
 everything's all taken care of.
 He's fine now. In fact, we're
 shooting his last scene right now.
 After today, he's off the show,
 and, uh, everything should run very
 smoothly now.

The limo pulls over to the curb, just behind the camera position. They notice a crowd around the camera, something's up. The backers have no preconceived ideas about what might be happening. Bill begins to sweat.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - DAY

Six crew people are huddled around the camera position, Steve in the middle. Les and Vanessa are seated. They are all watching Joel throw the biggest tantrum of his short career.

JOEL

(Shouting)

I am suing you and Lester fucking Ward and anybody else who refuses to do their fucking job. I have signed contracts and I'll make damn sure anyone who holds up this production pays for it dearly. I don't care how important they think they are. I have no fucking time to deal with this. Now do you have a problem with that?

Steve stands, faces Dick.

STEVE

(Quietly)

Dick, I can't work under these conditions.

Steve walks out.

JOEL

Oh, that's just fucking great.

He shoves a light over and it CRASHES and EXPLODES.

JOEL

Hey asshole, guess what, you're never going to work again! I'll make damn sure of that. I'm calling the unions and every production company in town. Your ass is toast.

One by one the crew turns and follows Steve, starting with Dick.

JOEL

What the hell's going on? All right, if that's the way you want it. Fine. I'm suing all of you. None of you are going to work after this. You hear me? I'm calling my attorneys right now. Your careers are so fucked-

The crew thins, and Joel sees the backers and Bill standing behind the camera position, staring at him.

ANGLE LES, VANESSA AND THE KIDS seated in another area watching the show. Vanessa rises.

VANESSA

(Quietly to the group)
Well, let's all go back to the hotel and locate our plane tickets, shall we? Kids. Les, you coming?

LES

In a minute.

She takes the kids' hands and shuttles them off.

RESUME JOEL, THE BACKERS AND BILL. After a long SILENCE...

BILL

Joel... umm, let's go talk.

Joel flies off in the opposite direction. Bill chases after him. The three backers and Les are the only ones left on the set. They turn to each other and attempt smiles.

MR. CHOW

Lester Ward?

LES

(Surprised)
Yes.

INT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - DAY

Les is standing by a grip truck with the backers, telling war stories. They hold cups of coffee or booze. Les is in his pitching mode. Crew members wrap the set in the background. Occasionally, the group has to move as equipment is brought through.

LES

Yeah, this would have been my 23rd full-length feature. I've done features, movies of the week, who knows how many commercials and industrials, but people just seem to connect me with that first movie.

MR. CHOW

Yes. Men with Laser Vision is considered a classic in Taiwan and you are still very popular over there.

LES
Who would have thought it?

MR. CHOW
Have you ever directed or produced films?

LES
Oh sure, lots of them. They're not big, but they all made money.

MR. CHOW
Tell me more.

LES
Well, let's see, in the early seventies I wrote and directed a little film about peace and love... mostly love.

MR. CHOW
What was it called?

LES
Well, I doubt you've heard of it.

MR. CHOW
Anything is possible.

LES
It was Denise's Pieces?

It doesn't ring with Mr. Chow.

LES
About a girl with a little something extra. Low budget, indie, quick turnaround, shot it in a motel on the strip. Then I did one where we strapped a camera to a donkey. I don't remember that one having a title. Experimental film. But most of my work has been on-camera acting and voice-overs.

MR. CHOW
How long did it take to produce Denise's Pieces?

LES
Let's see. Wrote it in one afternoon, not a lot of dialog in it, mostly action. Shot it in three nights.

MR. CHOW
You are multi-talented.

LES
Yeah, I guess I am.

MR. CHOW
A rich background.

LES
Yup.

MR. CHOW
(Losing the smile)
What is your opinion of Joel
Mincus's movie?

LES
It's all right. A little dull, but
it'll play well in art houses to an
older female audience, I suppose.

MR. CHOW
And Joel Mincus?

LES
Yeah. He's typical of many young
directors. They get lucky and start
believing their own press.

MR. CHOW
Has that ever happened to you?

LES
Nah. Never been lucky. I might
believe my own press if given the
opportunity, though.

Mr. Chow gets a big Cheshire cat grin.

INT. LES'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

As Les packs, he talks on his cell phone with Murray.

LES
No one knows. Bill and Joel
disappeared. Everybody else is
hanging around waiting for the
other shoe to drop. The Asian
backers are off somewhere.

(MORE)

LES (CONT'D)
All I know is I got a flight back
tomorrow.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MURRAY'S BEEMER - DAY

As he drives through sunny Hollywood.

MURRAY
So you think production's
cancelled?

LES
Yeah.

MURRAY
How are you holding up?

LES
I'm doing just fine.

MURRAY
Good. I guess you'll just have to
wait and see what transpires. When
you get back, we'll talk about...
you know... where we're at.

LES
I'm sure we will.

MURRAY
Les, I'm sorry about all this-

LES
Yeah, me too. We'll talk. See you.

Les hangs up and continues packing. Then he turns as he notices a folded piece of paper being slid under the door. He steps over to the door, picks it up, and reads it. He looks perplexed.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

As Les emerges from the side hallway and walks across the lobby to the front desk. He passes groups of movie people in WHISPERED conversations - sitting around, standing, holding plastic cups. He feels their eyes on his back.

He approaches the clerk.

LES

Excuse me.

HOTEL CLERK

Yes sir.

LES

(Referring to the note)

Can you tell me where the
Mississippi room is?

HOTEL CLERK

Certainly. It's down that hall to
the right.

LES

Thanks.

HOTEL CLERK

Have a nice time.

INT. MISSISSIPPI ROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A sign on the door reads: "Private Party, Invited Guests
Only." Les opens the door.

INT. MISSISSIPPI ROOM - NIGHT

As Les enters. The lights are low, people are milling and
talking, a four-piece jazz ensemble is playing, and most
importantly there appears to be an open bar. Les heads for
that.

The guests are cast and crew, still dressed in their working
clothes. He waves as he passes people. He notes a long buffet
table, decorated with palm fronds and a large punch bowl. In
fact, the whole room is decorated with palm trees and other
Hollywood movie stuff.

The bartender is dressed in a fancy monkey suit, mixing
Manhattans.

BARTENDER

Hi, what'll it be? Wait. Bourbon
rocks, right?

LES

Got it.

(Looking around)

What's all this about?

BARTENDER
Figured you'd know. Paid for by the
movie guys.

Les grabs his drink and turns away, runs into Vanessa.

LES
Evening.

VANESSA
Hello.

LES
Want a drink? Open bar.

VANESSA
(Perplexed)
Why not.
(To bartender)
How about a dry Martini?

The bartender nods and starts mixing the drink.

LES
(Sarcastically)
So, uh, this is nice.

VANESSA
I actually find it a little
disconcerting.

LES
I know. Did you locate your plane
ticket?

VANESSA
I did. I feel good about that.

LES
Any ideas?

VANESSA
I think they're going to bring in a
dozen Chinese Mafia thugs with
machine guns and finish us all off.

LES
Makes sense.

BARTENDER
Here you go, ma'am.

She grabs the drink. They turn to a lighted area, as the
VOICE of Mr. Chow broadcasts from the PA speakers.

ANGLE ON MR. CHOW.

MR. CHOW

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention for a moment, please.

All eyes turn and the group slowly quiets down.

MR. CHOW

Good evening, my name is Mr. Max Chow with Shingwa Film Production in Taiwan, the company that is bankrolling this movie. I was sent with two other gentlemen, Larry Chen and Bob Wong, to visit the set as you are filming. Unfortunately, we appear to have come at a bad time. Joel Mincus and Bill Moskowitz are no longer working on this picture, and we have decided to make a number of other changes as well. We hope you will bear with us and have patience. Production will start again very soon. We apologize for the delay. Please, have a drink and some food, and enjoy the party. Thank you.

RESUME LES AND VANESSA

LES

(Sarcastically)

Well, that explains everything.

Les turns and notices the two other backers standing next to him, smiling.

BOB WONG

Excuse me, Les. Will you please come with me to talk to Mr. Chow?

LES

All right.

INT. SERVICE HALL BY MISSISSIPPI ROOM

As the two backers enter with Les. Mr. Chow faces them, smiling.

MR. CHOW

Hello, Mr. Ward. Please, have a seat.

He points to four metal chairs arranged in a circle. They sit and face Les.

MR. CHOW

Les, we want to make you a proposal.

INT. VANESSA'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

Vanessa is seated on a sofa facing Les, who is pacing and highly agitated.

VANESSA

A proposal?

LES

Right? Okay. First. You got anything to drink?

She starts to get up.

VANESSA

Les.

LES

No, sit. I'll find it.

She sits. Les goes into the kitchen and rummages around.

LES

All right. This is what happened. They - the backers - want to keep production going, produce something. But they're not crazy about the script. In fact, they hate it now. Even if they did like it, Joel's contract wouldn't allow them to shoot it without him. Um...

VANESSA

There's some wine in the fridge.

He finds the wine.

LES

So I ask them, what do you want from me? And they say, well... Anyway first, don't ask me why, but Men with Laser Vision is really big in Taiwan. I'm this cult hero or something.

(MORE)

LES (CONT'D)

So, we're talking yesterday and I give them my standard pitch - you know, part fact, mostly fiction, the usual Hollywood bull - and they are actually impressed. Do you believe it? I know I can't.

He pours two glasses, downs one, refills it, and carries them back to the sofa.

LES

I've never impressed anyone in my life, including myself. So they sit me down and say, "Les, we want to make you a proposal." And I'm thinking, okay, they're going to give me a choice of being blacklisted or a firing squad. But they explain all this shit about Bill and Joel - Billy Joel I just got that - and then they say, "how would you like to produce a movie." And I say, "you don't mean this one"... And then my brain sort of starts spinning or something. And I don't know what happened after that, except that I do remember shaking their hands. So I think I may have agreed to something.

VANESSA

So let me get this straight. You're producing this movie now...

LES

And rewriting it, and directing it.

VANESSA

Why you?

LES

They think my name will sell tickets.

VANESSA

Do you know how to do all that?

LES

No. Yeah. I can do that. Sure. But I didn't think it would ever come up, so I never gave it much thought.

VANESSA

How are you going to do it?

LES

I don't know. It's all questions.
There are no ideas or anything.

VANESSA

Did they give you any clues about
what they're looking for?

LES

No. Yeah. They like Men with Laser
Vision. They want that.

VANESSA

But Les...

LES

I know.

VANESSA

Do you think they're crazy?

LES

Maybe they are.

VANESSA

Are you going to do it?

LES

I shook their hands.

VANESSA

But you can just leave and pretend
this never happened.

LES

But then...

He sits across from her.

VANESSA

What?

LES

I'm right back where I started.

VANESSA

Which is better than this.

LES

No. It's not really. It's no place.
I don't exist.

VANESSA
Maybe you could talk to your agent-

LES
My agent. My fucking agent.

He stands. It's all sinking in.

LES
We have a little over three weeks
to shoot a movie.

VANESSA
Mr. Chow knows that's impossible,
right?

LES
No, he doesn't.

VANESSA
Then he's either very crazy or very
stupid.

LES
He's not though. He's not. And
he... believes in me.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

As the door opens and Les enters. A BELLMAN follows carrying Les's bag. He hits the light.

BELLMAN
Where would you like your bag, sir?

LES
Um, the bedroom, please.

Les takes in the spacious new living area. He checks out a rental laptop computer on the desk. Then he notices a large basket of fruit on the kitchenette counter and reads the card. The Bellman returns.

BELLMAN
Will there be anything else, sir?

LES
No thank you.

Les tips him and he leaves. Then, he tosses the script on the coffee table and plunks down on the cushy sofa. He is wide awake. Thoughts are flying around wildly in his head.

He stands and walks to the desk, grabs the laptop. He checks it over, pushes buttons. Finally, something BEEPS and the screen lights up. He brings it back to the sofa and sets it on the coffee table.

He looks around, grabs the hotel phone and dials.

LES

This is Mr. Ward in 1206. Can I get a cup, no a pot, a big pot of strong coffee, hot, and, muffins or pizza or...?

(Beat)

Great, thanks.

He walks over to a long curtain and opens it. The curtain reveals a wide window overlooking the small downtown area. He takes a moment to look at the view from the top.

Then he goes back to the laptop and types something. He thinks a moment, then types some more. Then more. He laughs, howls. Soon the ideas are flowing like water and his fingers can't keep up.

INT. MR. CHOW'S SUITE - DAY

As Mr. Chow and the other backers meet with Steve, Dick, and a few other crew members.

MR. CHOW

As you can see, we have big plans.

DICK

Aggressive plans.

MR. CHOW

Yes.

DICK

Maybe a bit too aggressive.

MR. CHOW

It is possible.

DICK

(Smiling smugly)

Mr. Chow I've been in this business fifteen years, and I've never seen anything like this. Planning alone for a movie can take six months, production can take two, three months.

MR. CHOW

Yes, and we must do all of that in a little over three weeks.

STEVE

How are you going to do that?

MR. CHOW

With the help of all of you.

DICK

It's impossible.

MR. CHOW

I do not believe in attempting impossible things. I agree, it will be a challenge, but I am confident it can be done. I too have been in the film business for a long time, 27 years to be exact, and I have made a number of successful films given this amount of production time.

STEVE

In Taiwan?

MR. CHOW

Yes.

STEVE

Well, we do things a bit differently over here.

MR. CHOW

Yes. I am aware of that. You spend more time and a great deal more money.

DICK

It takes more than time and money to make a movie.

MR. CHOW

I agree.

DICK

Nothing against the Taiwan film industry, but... Ah never mind.

Mr. Chow stares at Dick for a moment.

MR. CHOW

Are you afraid of failure, Dick?

DICK

Well, I don't enjoy failing, no.

Mr. Chow leans in to him, and in the low, strong voice of a Kungfu master...

MR. CHOW

Then, don't fail.

INT. LES'S SUITE - DAY

As Les continues typing on the sofa. Coffee pots and dirty plates litter the tables. RHODA, a typist, is working on a computer at the desk.

RHODA

Excuse me, Mr. Ward.

Les is powered by five pots of coffee. He turns to her slowly, with glazed eyes.

LES

Yes. Wait.

He types some more, then turns to her again.

RHODA

I'm all done editing and formatting what you gave me.

LES

Page count?

RHODA

53.

LES

Good. I got 32 more for you.

She walks over to Les and inserts a thumbdisk in his laptop. As she saves his work, he leans back, rubs his eyes and YAWNS.

LES

More coffee.

He stands and walks to the kitchenette counter, checks the pots, grabs an apple from the fruit basket. Steve enters from the bedroom with a stack of pages.

LES

Hey, Steve, what do you think?
Brilliant shit, huh?

Steve thinks before answering...

STEVE

No. I wouldn't say brilliant.

LES

Can you work with it?

STEVE

The story is... very different, not what one would expect. I wouldn't say it's good though. It's... interesting.

Les picks up the hotel phone and dials.

LES

Does it suck?

STEVE

No.

LES

Can you work with it? Do we have a movie here?

STEVE

Maybe.

LES

(Into Phone)

Hi, this is... right... yes, please... four, no five more, and three, four cheeseburgers, fries. Steve, you want anything?

Steve wants to go back to LA.

STEVE

No.

LES

Come on.

STEVE

All right. Some kind of salad?

LES

And a big salad, like a... right with nuts and berries and tomatoes...

STEVE

No meat.

LES
No meat... what? Papaya?
(Steve shrugs)
Good. Thanks.

STEVE
Les, I don't know about this. This
is no way to make a movie.

LES
Steve, I know.

Puts his hand on Steve's shoulder.

LES
We're being tested. We can only
fail if we give up. We do this
thing, we WILL succeed. We will
create a fucking classic.

STEVE
You're kidding, right?

LES
In a way.

STEVE
What does that mean?

LES
It means...

Les shakes his head to get the bugs out.

LES
You know, I'm really tired. What
was the question again?

STEVE
Is this some kind of joke?

LES
Life is a joke.

STEVE
Les...

LES
Steve, the movie can be done if we
approach it with optimism.

STEVE
Fine.

Leading Steve to another sofa...

LES

Read the pages again and make notes this time. The goal is to turn the pages into a movie.

STEVE

I'm not a writer.

LES

I'm not asking you to be.

STEVE

Les...

LES

The salad's on the way. I got coffee coming. What else you need?

STEVE

Nothing.

Steve sits and Les goes back to the laptop. The cell phone RINGS.

LES

Hello.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. VANESSA'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

As Vanessa paces, while reading pages...

VANESSA

Les, I don't know.

LES

Which part?

VANESSA

Well, all of it.

LES

Okay.

VANESSA

I've never done anything like this.

Les stands and walks with the cell into...

INT. LES'S HOTEL BATHROOM - DAY

He closes the door and paces.

LES

I know. I've seen all your movies. You're a brilliant, brilliant actor. You can choose any part you want. This is crap. No one should ever even bother suggesting you do anything remotely like this.

VANESSA

Well, I wouldn't go that far.

LES

I'm not trying to kid myself. This is not some work of art.

VANESSA

You got that right.

LES

But it's got a message.

VANESSA

What?

LES

The message is...

(He thinks)

Vanessa Townsend can do anything and make it look good. I'm writing this for you. Is the dialog bad? I'll fix it.

VANESSA

No, it's all right. It's-

LES

The story, the rhythm, the arc, the plot points, not enough twists...

VANESSA

No, it's got the twists.

LES

What don't you like? I'll fix it.

VANESSA

It's what you're having Irene Penet do? It's not very realistic or...

LES

I know it's not realistic. But it could happen. And more importantly, the audience will have a good time. And we'll have a good time.

VANESSA

It's crazy.

LES

It's got to be crazy. It's got nothing else going for it.

VANESSA

Oh Lord.

LES

Is it entertaining? That's the big question.

She thinks, then resignedly...

VANESSA

It could be. Some might find it entertaining.

LES

Good. We'll build from there. Could you do me a favor and make notes? I promise, I'll fix things. I want you to be happy.

VANESSA

Sure.

LES

I know what you're thinking.

VANESSA

What?

LES

This is no way to make a movie.

VANESSA

You're right.

LES

I agree. (Beat) I have to get back to work. I got 30 more pages to rewrite.

VANESSA

Les, whatever happens, I want you to know, that I... admire you as a professional and a human being. But you're in over your head.

LES

Thanks for the honesty. That means a lot to me. I think you'll like the ending.

Steve opens the door.

STEVE

Excuse me. Les?

LES

Yeah?

STEVE

Aliens wearing tutus?

LES

(Thinking a moment)
It's a placeholder.

EXT. FIELD - AFTERNOON

As a tiny white GEO bounces down a muddy dirt road through an empty field. The car stops next to an abandoned barn and Les, Steve, Dick, and the Mayor of Paducah get out. The group follows the Mayor to the barn.

MAYOR

There it is.

LES

Nice.

Steve walks around it, lining up shooting angles with his hands.

MAYOR

The city took this land over when the owner died. The barn and everything else around here is earmarked to be demolished and turned into a park next time we get the budget. For now, it's all yours.

LES
(To Dick)
What do you think?

DICK
Looks good to me... as long as
we're covered legally.

MAYOR
You'll have fire, medical, police,
and whatever else you need. By the
way, I got a brother-in-law that
knows quite a bit about explosives.
Don't ask me any questions, but
he's available, if you need him.

DICK
He got any firearms?

MAYOR
I believe so. Give me a list of
what you need and I'll put together
a package.

Steve returns to the group.

STEVE
We can shoot back this way against
the sunset.

LES
Good. Well, I'm happy. Everybody
else?

Steve and Dick shrug.

LES
Done.

Les pulls a list out of his pocket and checks one item off.

LES
So, Mayor, you say you know of a
"dingy warehouse with old
electrical equipment"?

MAYOR
Yup.

They head back to the car.

MAYOR
An old powerhouse and steam plant.
You need to blow it up too?

LES
Wasn't planning on it.

Les turns to Steve.

STEVE
We could.

DICK
(Skeptical)
I don't know.

LES
Let's see how it hits us.

They squeeze into the Geo.

INT. LES'S SUITE - AFTERNOON

As a bellman sets a box on the coffee table. Rhoda tips the bellman and opens the box. It's filled with scripts. She takes one out and we see the title: "Laser Conspiracy!"

EXT. RIVERSIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

As two crew members, FRAN and PAOLO (make-up and costumes) eat dinner in a dimly-lit, outdoor restaurant overlooking a river.

FRAN
I don't have much experience with wounds. I can do blood okay.

PAOLO
Don't worry, I can help you. What kind of wounds?

FRAN
They need a few gunshots and a knife.

PAOLO
No problem.

FRAN
How are you doing with the costumes?

PAOLO
I'll drive around tomorrow and hit
the thrift stores. They want low
budget. They're going to get it.

A man appears, casting a shadow over them. They turn to him.

FRAN
(Tenuously)
Hi.

The man is Joel. He is dressed in black, and attempting to
act normal and friendly.

JOEL
Hi. Mind if I sit for a second?

FRAN
No.

JOEL
Well, how's production going?

FRAN
Okay.

JOEL
Who did they get to direct?

FRAN
Lester Ward.

Joel's eyes grow wide.

JOEL
Le... Les is directing?

FRAN
And rewriting.

Joel stops breathing.

JOEL
What? He's rewriting what?

PAOLO
Can't tell you anymore. We signed
an NDA.

JOEL
(Smiling)
Of course, I understand. So...

FRAN
What are you up to?

JOEL
What am I up to? Oh nothing.

He stands.

JOEL
Well, got to run.

Clearly upset, Joel flies off. Fran and Paolo turn to each other and shrug.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Steve, Dick, and Jake are sitting in a dark booth, drinking, feeling strange and lost. Sleep deprivation and panic are taking their toll.

STEVE
(He has forgotten)
When's call tomorrow?

DICK
Eight AM.

STEVE
What the hell are we doing?

JAKE
Laser Conspiracy with an
exclamation point.

STEVE
Jesus, last year at this time I was
wrapping on Singing Hearts,
nominated for a fucking Oscar, all
excited about going to Thailand.

DICK
I had three films at Sundance.

JAKE
Now, we're in Paducah. What
happened?

STEVE
Paducah happened.

JAKE

We can leave. Why don't we just leave? This is ridiculous. We don't need this.

STEVE

We could, but...

DICK

I don't know.

Dick smiles.

JAKE

What. Is this about Les?

STEVE

He seems so optimistic.

DICK

Yeah.

JAKE

You guys are pathetic.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - DAY

The crew has finished prepping and they are set to shoot. The scene looks the same as before, minus the neurotic vibe of Joel. The cast and crew are gathered around the camera, mumbling quietly. Les flies in and all eyes turn, the crowd goes SILENT. He stands on an apple box and faces them.

LES

I don't know what to tell you, but I feel I should tell you something. So let me just say this... I know what you're thinking. I'm not kidding myself. I'm not crazy. I don't expect miracles. I don't expect anything, really. This isn't the end of your careers. I'm not trying to make Citizen Kane. I just want us to, you know... make a movie, have a good time, be happy, whatever. So, uh, that's all I got to say. Let's make history.

A few smiles and CHUCKLES break out.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

The Winner scene (now Laser Conspiracy!) is all set up again. Les, Vanessa, and the kids are in position.

DICK (O.S.)
 (On megaphone)
 Roll sound.

SOUND GUY (O.S.)
 Speed.

The slate moves into FRAME.

CAMERA ASST.
 Laser Conspiracy, scene seventeen
 apple, take three.

CLAP.

DICK (O.S.)
 And bus.

The bus starts.

DICK (O.S.)
 And action.

The group moves toward the CAMERA, kids kick the ball. At the right moment...

DICK (O.S.)
 Ball!

The kid kicks the ball in the street. Then immediately, evidently without giving it a thought, Irene runs into the street after the ball. On her mark, she looks back and notices the bus.

WE jump into the finished Laser Conspiracy movie on a CLOSE ANGLE of the bus approaching rapidly, brakes SHRIEKING.

ANGLE ON Roy and the kids reacting, as Irene is hit by the bus O.S., KA-THUMP. The body flies across FRAME.

ANGLE ON Irene lying in a twisted heap on the street. Roy runs to her, kneels and cradles her in his arms. The kids approach tentatively. The bus driver and other extras gather around. Roy is destroyed, the tears flow. (Note that most of the lesser characters are members of the crew or are played by non-actors found at the locations.)

ROY

Irene, Irene. No! God, why her! Why didn't you take me instead?

PERSON IN CROWD 1

Look, it's Irene Penet.

PERSON IN CROWD 2

Irene Penet?!

The crowd repeats her name. Roy checks her pulse.

ROY

She's alive!

PERSON IN CROWD 1

(Whipping out a cell
phone)

Do you want me to call 911?

ROY

No, there's no time.

He gathers her in his arms and stands, looks around, approaches the bus driver.

ROY

I need to get her to a hospital
now. I can't wait.

The driver tosses his cigarette down.

INT. BUS

Laser Conspiracy. As the bus flies around traffic, through red lights, doing 55. The kids hold on tight. Roy cradles the unconscious Irene.

(Note that the baby carriage disappears. Details involving continuity are overlooked in favor of high concept in Les's movie.)

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Laser Conspiracy. As the emergency room doors fly open and Roy runs in holding Irene, followed by the kids. A NURSE rushes up to them.

ROY

It's my wife. She was hit by a bus.

NURSE
Bring her in here.

They rush into a treatment room.

INT. HOSPITAL TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Laser Conspiracy. As Roy lays her on a bed.

NURSE
My God. It's Irene Penet.

A DOCTOR rushes in.

DOCTOR
What have we got?

ROY
My wife. She was hit by a bus.

NURSE
It's Irene Penet.

DOCTOR
My God.

The doctor gives her a quick once-over with the flashlight in the eyes. Then he shakes his head.

DOCTOR
I'll be honest with you. She has suffered severe brain damage. We'll do all we can, but I can't promise anything.

Roy breaks down.

ROY
What's the bottom line?

DOCTOR
We won't know until we do more tests. She could walk out tomorrow good as new, or she could be a vegetable for the rest of her life.

Roy holds her limp hand.

ROY
A vegetable? Why? Why Lord? It doesn't make any sense.

EXT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Laser Conspiracy. As Roy holds an impromptu press conference.

ROY

She is a world famous Olympic star,
but she is also a close friend,
mother, and wife. She is so much to
so many. All we can do now is pray.

REPORTER 2

Will she ever skate again?

ROY

Only God knows the answer to that.
But I have a feeling, He still has
great things planned for her.
That's all I know. Thank you for
your support.

Roy turns and heads back inside. The reporters scramble to
get more photographs, SHOUT final questions. Two cops at the
door hold the crowd back from entering.

DICK (O.S.)

Cut.

The crowd breaks up.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

As the crew sets up a shot. Les sits in a metal chair,
looking over the script, as lights are focused on him (no
budget for stand-ins.) Steve approaches Les and sits next to
him.

STEVE

(Confidentially, calmly)
Les, can we talk?

LES

Sure.

STEVE

Nothing personal, but I don't want
my name in the credits.

LES

Sure. Are you upset about
something?

Steve tries to be honest without being confrontational.

STEVE

This movie is unbelievably bad...
in a good way, but still bad.

LES

Hmm, I can see your point. Is that
what's upsetting you?

STEVE

It's not the movie I signed on to
do, and it upsets me to be doing
something I don't believe in. You
understand.

LES

I do. Would it make you happy to
leave the show?

A guy holds a light meter up to Les's face.

STEVE

No, but I want to finish and get
home as soon as possible.

LES

I respect that Steve. Sorry you're
unhappy.

STEVE

I'm not unhappy, really. I just
have career to think about. You
know?

LES

Yup. Thanks for staying on.

Steve walks back to the camera.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Back to "Laser Conspiracy!" Roy sits in the metal chair,
dozing. It is late. The area is quiet; a janitor sweeps up.
After a moment, the doctor appears before Roy.

DOCTOR

Mr. Penet. Mr. Penet.

The doctor shakes his shoulder gently. Roy awakens.

ROY

Yes, what is it?

DOCTOR
(Subdued)
I have some good news.

ROY
What?

DOCTOR
Your wife is still unconscious, but there does not appear to be any damage... to her brain, and there is no sign of paralysis. We expect full recovery... when she finally comes round.

Roy jumps up.

ROY
Thank God. Can I see her?

The doctor holds him back.

DOCTOR
There's just one thing. During the accident, her optical nerves were severed.

ROY
What does that mean?

DOCTOR
She can no longer see.

ROY
You mean she's...

DOCTOR
Blind as a bat.

Roy's jaw drops.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

As Les confers in private with Dick and Steve. They SPEAK quietly so the doctor, who is going over his lines in the background, can't hear them.

DICK
Cut some more lines.

LES
I've already cut half the scene.

STEVE

It isn't working. The guy is just not an actor.

LES

I know. He's a doctor playing an actor playing a doctor.

STEVE

Tell him to keep his hands still at least. He's going...

Steve imitates the doctor's odd gestures.

LES

Okay. But if we don't get it on this take, we'll have to move on.

STEVE

Fine.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

As Roy holds Irene's hand.

ROY

If only... if only... Oh, who am I trying to kid. Doctor, is there any hope?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid not.

Roy droops for a second, then finds new strength.

ROY

No. I won't accept that. There has to be a way. There has to. I'll do whatever it takes.

DOCTOR

(Gesturing oddly with his hands)

But the nerves were severed. You don't understand-

ROY

(Threateningly)
Maybe I don't.

DOCTOR

There is no way to re-attach them - short of a miracle.

ROY
Then I'll take that.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Laser Conspiracy. The lights are low. Roy is seated next to the bed, dozing. Two suspicious-looking men, AGENTS ZORN and KRONER, enter wearing black suits and dark Raybans. They stand over Irene and eye her, then turn to each other and nod.

ZORN
Mr. Penet. Mr. Penet.

Roy startles awake.

ZORN
My name is Agent Zorn. This is Agent Kroner. I am sorry to bother you at this hour, but... can we talk?

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As Roy meets with the agents in a dark corner. They are very mysterious.

ZORN
As you can see, your wife is very important to us, to the nation.

ROY
I can't believe she never told me.

ZORN
It would not have been wise.

ROY
How did all this start?

KRONER
She was contacted in 1949 during competition in Stuttgart.

ZORN
She was one of several Olympic athletes who agreed to work for us. Most of them did very little.

KRONER

But Irene was special. She volunteered for hazardous duty, and performed several missions for us behind the iron curtain.

ROY

And she is still working for you?

ZORN

I... can't answer that. You understand.

They lean in to Roy.

KRONER

Mr. Penet, we have come here tonight to make you and Irene an offer.

ZORN

We have in our possession top secret technology that will enable Irene to see again. It is highly experimental and has never been tested on humans. But in Irene's case, she has nothing to lose.

KRONER

If you agree, our doctors can operate tonight.

ROY

What's the catch?

The agents glance at each other.

KRONER

Roy, what we are about to tell you cannot leave this... parking lot.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

As the crew wraps for the day. Dick approaches Les who is eating a candy bar, looking over the schedule.

DICK

Les, you got a moment.

LES

What's up?

DICK

Nothing personal, but I want my name removed from the credits.

LES

Sure. Are you upset about something?

DICK

Les... it hurts to work on this movie. I mean, it physically hurts.

LES

I'm sorry you're unhappy.

DICK

It's not really about being unhappy. It's more the feeling that I'm doing something terribly wrong, like drinking antifreeze. You know?

LES

I respect that Dick. Sorry. Thanks for staying on.

Dick pats him on the back and walks off.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As a team of top secret doctors work through the night on Irene's eyes.

ANGLE TIGHT as a surgeon scoops out one of Irene's eyeballs, dripping with blood and goo.

ANGLE TIGHT as gloved hands open a hermetically sealed lock-box, and carefully remove a mechanical eyeball with wires dangling from the back.

ANGLE TIGHT on hands working deftly on the mechanical eyes, as they stare lifelessly from Irene's eye sockets.

ANGLE ON TWO DOCTORS as they turn to each other and nod.

DISSOLVE TO:

WHITE

We HEAR distant VOICES that slowly get closer and more distinct.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
She's regaining consciousness.
Quick.

The talking stops.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Laser Conspiracy. ANGLE IRENE'S POV in bed, as she slowly focuses her new eyes. The two agents, Roy, and the doctor lean into her. The image is unreal in some way, digitized, too bright and clear.

ANGLE THE GROUP

ROY
Irene. Irene. Can you hear me?
Irene.

IRENE
(Groggy)
Roy. What happened? Where...

She looks at the agents.

ZORN
Hello, Mrs. Penet.

IRENE
What are you... What's going on?

Zorn holds his hand up in front of her eyes.

ZORN
Tell me, how many fingers am I
holding up?

IRENE
Three.

ZORN
(Smiling)
Good. Everything is fine. Rest,
Mrs. Penet. Just rest. There is
plenty of time to explain
everything.

She turns to Roy. He smiles and takes her hand.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

As the crew sets up for the next shot. Vanessa approaches Les, who is looking over his notes.

VANESSA
(Confidentially)
Les, you got a moment?

LES
Sure.

VANESSA
Nothing personal, but my anxiety is coming back.

LES
Tell me about it.

VANESSA
Can't we come up with a different solution?

LES
You're talking about the-

VANESSA
I really hate it. I thought I could have fun with it, but it's not happening for me. Can I get a complication from the surgery, a blood clot or something and just die?

LES
I don't know.

VANESSA
They could give you the operation. You could be the valiant husband who carries on to finish the job I started or whatever.

Les takes her hand.

LES
Vanessa, I want you to live. You have to live. Without you, everything would fall apart.

VANESSA
(Laughing)
The movie is so bad.

LES
I don't know. You think so?

VANESSA
Yes. It is.

LES
Maybe compared to some other
movies.

VANESSA
Compared to most movies.

LES
Come here.
(He leans in to her)
Just between you and me, I don't
think it's ever going to get
finished. I think they'll get back
to LA, start post-production, see
what a piece of shit it is and shut
it down, cut their losses. I mean
realistically. They would have to
be fools, right?

She calms down.

VANESSA
You think so?

LES
It's obvious.

VANESSA
Maybe you're right.

LES
If I were you, I wouldn't worry
about it. One more week and you're
off to France. I'm just, you know,
having a good time, fulfilling my
contract.

VANESSA
What if it they really do finish
it?

LES
The only way that would happen is
if...

VANESSA
The movie was good.

LES

And that ain't going to happen.
Relax, enjoy, hit your marks, and
it'll all be over soon.

VANESSA

How are you doing?

LES

I'm having the time of my life. I
swear to God. This is the
opportunity of a lifetime. It'll
never happen again.

VANESSA

But, Les, don't you think you're
wasting an opportunity?

LES

Think of it this way. I'm an
airplane. The engine's on fire,
hydraulics are gone, I'm already
going down in flames. I can either
crash into the side of some
anonymous mountain or I can take
out a heavily populated area, and
do some really spectacular damage.
I don't know. What would you do?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As Irene sits in a chair in the darkened
room, staring at a small stuffed bear on a table six feet
away. Roy and the agents are seated behind her.

ZORN

Concentrate, Mrs. Penet.
Concentrate.

IRENE

I am. Nothing's happening.

ZORN

I can't tell you how to do it. You
just have to try different things.

IRENE

It's no use.

ZORN

Maybe you're thinking too hard.
Just relax. Be very still.

(MORE)

ZORN (CONT'D)

Let it come to you. Think only of
the object you are staring at.

It is SILENT.

ANGLE TIGHT on Irene as her new eyes hold their gaze with
mechanical precision.

ANGLE ON the stuffed bear.

Her concentration tightens the focus closer and closer, until
the bear's face fills the frame. Then, red laser beams
project from each eye. Where the beams meet, an amazing
physical phenomenon occurs, like a void or vortex, and
everything caught in that intersection of hyper-energy
explodes in a spectacular (but inexpensive) ball of flames.

The four watch in awe as the bear is turned to charcoal in
less than a second.

IRENE

My God.

ZORN

I think you've got it.

She turns to Roy and smiles.

INT. VANESSA'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

ANGLE MEDIUM-SHOT of Vanessa lying in bed nude in a heavily
darkened room as she reaches an intense climax. Her breathing
slows, eyes open slightly. Les rises up into FRAME, kissing
her neck, arms, breasts. She puts her arm around him, and
still breathless...

VANESSA

My God. Where did you learn how to
do that?

LES

I've had lots of free time.

Les smiles and moves back down out of FRAME. Her eyes close.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Laser Conspiracy. As Roy helps Irene pack. A shift has
occurred in their lifestyle, which is reflected in their
choice of wardrobe. They are each dressed in sleek black,
ultra-mod hipster clothes, wear Raybans. Their SPEECH is also
cool and terse. Even their UNDERSCORE MUSIC is cool.

They finish. Irene grabs a bag.

IRENE
You ready?

ROY
Let's go.

She throws the door open.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Laser Conspiracy. As Roy follows close behind Irene. Envious eyes turn and watch as they make their way purposefully toward the elevators. Roy presses the down button.

The elevator doors fly open and a BAD GUY rushes into the corridor, brandishing a gun. He's scared and tense, cornered. He grabs a pretty, young nurse and shoves the gun against her head.

BAD GUY
(Shouting to everyone)
Everybody freeze!

Most people turn and stop, a few SCREAM and panic.

BAD GUY
I said freeze or she's dead!

The doorway to the stairs flies open and six cops rush in.

BAD GUY
(Turning to the cops)
Stop! Stay back!

The cops stop.

BAD GUY
Throw down the guns. Careful.

They do. Someone moves.

BAD GUY
I said freeze, I'm not kidding.
Unless you want to see her brains
sprayed all over the floor.

He scans the group, trying to figure his next move.

BAD GUY

Now, listen very careful. Me and little nursey are going to wait right here, just like this, until I get what I want. You...

Nodding to a cop.

BAD GUY

Call your friends downstairs and tell them we want an escort out of here.

The cop starts talking on his radio.

BAD GUY

The rest of you, sit down on the floor against that wall. Move real slow.

They start to move.

ANGLE IRENE as she slows. She is focused on the gun.

RESUME the group. The others sit, Irene remains standing.

BAD GUY

(To Irene)

I said sit, sweetie pie. Move it.

She continues staring.

BAD GUY

I'm counting to three, baby! One... two...

ANGLE IRENE as laser beams shoot from her eyes.

ANGLE BAD GUY and nursey, as the gun starts to glow red hot. The bad guy SCREAMS and drops the gun just as it explodes. The nurse stumbles away and cops run in and tackle the bad guy. The crowd GASPS.

While the focus is on the police action, Irene and Roy run out through the door to the stairs.

INT. PENET DINING ROOM - DAY

As the crew finishes lighting the set. Les is seated at one end of the dining table marking items on a schedule. Fran and Paolo approach him.

FRAN
Excuse me, Les.

LES
Hi.

FRAN
Nothing personal, but we were thinking it would be better for our careers if we had our names taken off the credits. If that's okay.

LES
Sure. Are you upset about something?

PAOLO
No, no, no, no no.

A BEAT.

FRAN
Well, maybe a little.

PAOLO
But it's strictly business. You know?

LES
I understand.

FRAN
Thanks.

LES
By the way, I thought the eyeballs looked really great.

FRAN
Really? Paolo helped a lot.

PAOLO
I've done a few appliances, but never an eyeball like that.

LES
It was very realistic.

FRAN
Did you like the nerves?

LES
Oh yeah.

FRAN
That was my touch.

LES
Tasty.

FRAN
Thanks. Well, I better go check on
the smoke. Thanks again.

Les nods and they back away.

INT. PENET DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Laser Conspiracy. A late afternoon dinner is set. Roy sits by himself, waiting, listening to POTS and PANS CLATTER in the kitchen O.S.

ROY
Need any help in there?

IRENE (O.S.)
No, thanks. I got it.

Something drops and breaks.

ROY
You sure you don't need any help.

IRENE (O.S.)
I'm just a little rusty, that's
all. It's been a while since I've
worked in a kitchen.

Irene enters, dressed like Betty Crocker, holding two plates with thick steaks.

IRENE
Tada.

She sets them on the table.

ROY
Wow, this looks delicious.

She sits.

IRENE
Tell me what you think.

Roy cuts into his steak.

ROY
Well, it's a little rare.

IRENE
I'm sorry.

ROY
No problem. I'll just pop it in the
broiler-

IRENE
No, no, you stay right there.

She takes the plate and stands with her back to Roy and the CAMERA. Then she holds the plate up in front of her face O.S. After a moment, smoke and SIZZLING sounds come from the plate, and she turns back, smiling, and sets the well-done steak on the table. They LAUGH.

ROY
You're amazing.

INT. BEDROOM SET - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As the two snuggle. They turn and lie on their backs, staring at the ceiling in thought.

ROY
What does it all mean?

IRENE
I have always felt there was some grand design behind everything that has happened to me - marrying you, achieving fame, winning the gold medals, even the accident. It has all happened for a purpose. I am destined for something far beyond what I can imagine, but I don't know what.

ROY
I feel the same way. I can't explain it.

IRENE
Roy, will you stand by me, no matter what happens?

ROY
It is my destiny.

They embrace, passionately.

INT. LES'S SUITE - NIGHT

As the door opens and Les drags in after a very long day. He hits the lights, dumps a worn paper sack containing his script and notes on the bar, and removes clothing as he shuffles toward the bedroom. He is so tired, he doesn't notice Joel sitting dramatically in a recliner holding a gun.

Joel stands and faces his back. Les doesn't see him, turns off the light and closes the bedroom door behind him. In the dark, Joel starts toward the bedroom and HITS his shin on the coffee table. He SHOUTS.

INT. LES'S SUITE BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Les reacts to the NOISE in the other room. With half of his clothes removed, he opens the bedroom door.

INT. LES'S SUITE - NIGHT

As Les enters and turns on the light. He sees Joel sitting on the coffee table rubbing his shin. Joel stands and points the gun at Les, again very dramatically. He is wound tight, speaks through clenched teeth.

JOEL

Hi, Les.

LES

Joel.

JOEL

How does it feel to be the big man?

LES

Okay, I guess.

JOEL

I'll bet.

He steps toward Les slowly.

JOEL

You know Les, I was thinking. I was thinking, what if we could bring things back to the way they should be, with me, a real director, making the movies, and Lester Ward, an alcoholic, piece of shit, not making the movies. What do you think? Then everything would be back to normal.

LES

Joel, what's going on?

JOEL

Someone has to do it, Les. This is just wrong. You have to be stopped. This laser conspiracy shit can't go on.

LES

Are you going to shoot me? What are you doing?

JOEL

I'm going to make things right again, Les.

INT. LES'S SUITE - LATER

Les sits in a dining room chair, his hands, feet, and mouth bound with duct tape. Joel pulls two bottles of cheap gin out of a shopping bag and pours a tall glass. Then he rips off Les's mouth gag.

JOEL

Drink up, sailor.

He attempts to force Les to drink, but most of it spills all over.

JOEL

Come on, Les. Think of it as just another night lounging around the old apartment, watching your bad movies on TV, and waiting for the phone to ring.

Les spits it at him and Joel brings the butt of his gun down hard on Les's head. He winces. Joel tapes his mouth up again.

JOEL

All right, get up.

Les stands.

JOEL

Walk.

Les looks at Joel and continues standing.

JOEL

What is it, Les? I said, walk.

He doesn't. Joel stuffs the gun in his face.

JOEL

If you try to pull any shit, I'm going to blow your fucking head off. Do you understand? You don't call the shots anymore.

Les tries to talk. He SCREAMS behind his tape gag.

JOEL

This is one fucking scene you're not rewriting, asshole. Walk!

Les tries to explain something, but Joel pushes him forward. He falls face down on the floor. From this angle Joel can see why Les didn't walk - his feet were tied.

JOEL

Fuck!

INT. CAR - NIGHT

As Les drives the rented Geo down a dark, deserted highway. Joel is in the passenger seat with the gun.

JOEL

Do you know what I hate more than anything?

Les shakes his head.

JOEL

Old Hollywood has-beens like you, who make it by sheer luck. The business is clogged with them, like wads of greasy fat stuck to the walls of an artery. All they do is sit there in their positions of power and make stupid decisions and golf all day. They have no talent, no brains. They have no clue what quality is. They have no taste. They don't know how to make movies. They don't know how to do anything useful. But somehow, who knows how, they keep making their shitty movies, and they keep getting promoted, and everything just keeps going their way.

(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

And people like me, real filmmakers, can't get their movies made because those wads of fat are right there in the way.

LES

I don't know where you get the idea I'm lucky.

JOEL

Les, without luck, you would be like every other shithead out there. You would be selling used cars or pushing a shopping cart down Ventura. There is nothing special about you. You are not an actor. You are just someone who got lucky.

Les's face tightens, but he says nothing.

JOEL

You are in the way, taking up space, blocking out less-fortunate actors who really do have talent and could actually bring something valuable to the art of filmmaking. But I don't expect you to understand.

Joel momentarily runs out of venom.

LES

If you didn't want me in your movie, why did you-

JOEL

I had no choice. The backers thought you would be a draw. You were lucky as usual.

LES

The backers?

JOEL

I shouldn't have compromised. Had I stuck by my decision, none of this would have happened.

LES

What are you going to do?

JOEL

As I said, make things right.

LES
By killing me? If you kill me, you
go to prison.

JOEL
Shut up.

LES
Maybe you're right. Maybe that is
the way things should be.

JOEL
I said, shut up.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Joel is pointing the gun at Les as they stand outside the car, which is positioned facing a fairly steep embankment leading down to a big muddy river.

JOEL
Okay, drink the rest of this.

He hands Les a half-full bottle of gin.

LES
No.

JOEL
Drink it!

LES
I don't want to. You're going to
kill me anyway, why do I have to
drink that?

JOEL
Fuck it.

Joel SLAMS the gun against the back of Les's head and he falls to the ground unconscious.

Joel puts the gun in his pants and drags Les to the driver side of the car. It starts to rain hard.

JOEL
Great. This is all I need.

He opens the driver door and stuffs Les in behind the wheel, positioning his hands to make it appear he is driving. Then Joel shifts the car into neutral, takes off the brake, closes the door, and goes behind the car.

Then, he pushes. The car starts to roll slowly. The front bumper moves past the edge of the road. The river churns far below. Joel pushes with all his weight, but the car is on a slight incline. It inches forward slowly, then back an inch. The front wheels approach the drop-off. The tires CRUNCH over the muddy gravel. The rain turns to hail. The front wheels start over the edge. Slowly. Suddenly momentum picks up as the wheels move past the mid point. Joel SHOUTS, LAUGHS. Then WHUNK!

The front wheels roll over the edge and the car frame lands on the pavement, stuck. Joel checks it out. He swears, kicks the car, pushes some more. He clinches so hard trying to move the car, he nearly gives himself a hernia. He stops and grabs his groin in pain.

He runs around the stuck car, kicking it, SCREAMING. He pulls the gun out and pumps rounds into the side of the car, until the bullets are gone. Then he tosses the gun in the drink. He sits on a guardrail, emotionally drained.

Les opens the car door and gets out, rubbing his sore head. Joel ignores him. Les checks the position of the car, checks Joel, notices he doesn't appear to have a gun.

LES
You got a cell phone?

Joel pulls one out of his pocket and hands it to Les. He dials and waits.

LES
(To Joel)
What the hell were you thinking,
Joel?

INT. CAR - NIGHT

As Joel drives Les.

LES
You were lucky.

JOEL
I know.

LES
So, don't ever give me any shit
about you being unlucky and me
being the reason for everything
going wrong in fucking Hollywood
and your life.

He rubs his neck.

JOEL
Les... can we forget this happened?

LES
I don't think so.

JOEL
Are you going to prosecute?

LES
I haven't decided. I should. I
should prosecute the shit out of
you.

JOEL
I'm sorry.

LES
What was that?

JOEL
(Louder)
I'm sorry.

Les gets an idea, his face lights up bright as Christmas.

LES
You know what? I am going to
prosecute.

JOEL
Les, please.

LES
No. You have to be stopped. You
need to take a fucking anger
management class or something. I
can't just let this go. I'm calling
the cops-

JOEL
No, please. I'll pay you back
somehow. I promise.

LES
Yeah? What's my guarantee? Your
word? That's a joke.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

As Joel sits in a lobby seat watching Les through an office window describe the whole evening to a couple of policemen. A third cop stands guard over Joel.

INT. PADUCAH POLICE STATION - MORNING

As a guard escorts Joel into a waiting room from the holding cell area. His hair is a mess, face is full of stubble. He holds a plastic bag containing his personal items.

He looks around the room, humble and lost. He spots Les in a plastic chair, reading the paper. Les doesn't look much better. It has been a long night. Les stands and approaches him.

LES
Come on. I'm due on the set in half
an hour.

Joel follows him down a hall to the outer door.

JOEL
What time is it?

LES
Six-thirty.

JOEL
Did you...

LES
Yeah, I bailed you out. Come on.

JOEL
Why?

LES
Joel, I think you're basically a
good kid. Just a little mixed up is
all.

JOEL
What are you going to do to me?

LES

Well, you've been released into my custody. I have to keep an eye on you, because you might just get rabbit in your blood and go high-tailing it to Mexico.

JOEL

Seriously Les, this is Kentucky. Are you going to pursue this thing?

LES

I think you need help.

JOEL

The only way to make the charge stick, is for you to testify against me. Is that your plan?

Les stops and looks Joel in the eye.

LES

Well... let's see what we can come up with.

Fear can be seen in Joel's eyes.

EXT. FIELD - MAGIC HOUR

Back to Laser Conspiracy. ANGLE WIDE as WE PAN from the distant lights of the city to the empty area next to the barn. It is dark and still, the SILENCE broken only by NIGHT BUGS.

After a moment, an EERIE, HISSING, RUMBLING SOUND comes from O.S. Then a strange green light is cast in a circle on the field from above. The light and SOUNDS become more intense. Then smoke and steam enter the top of the FRAME, building as it descends.

Then WE see it. The smoke is coming from a flying saucer as it lands. The darkness hides most of its imperfections, except for the swinging motion which makes it appear to be dangling by a wire from a crane.

It lands and the smoke dissipates.

CLOSER ANGLE on a panel on the saucer. It opens slowly and a dozen poorly-attired aliens emerge.

ANGLE on an alien as it aims a raygun at the barn. The gun makes a ZAPPING sound and the barn EXPLODES in flames.

ANGLE on the alien group as they head across the field toward town.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PADUCAH - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. The town is bustling uncharacteristically with activity as shoppers move along sidewalks and bulbous old cars pass by.

EXT. BUILDING ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As a boy BILLY GEORGE puts the moves on a girl SUE ELLEN (played by the hotel clerk and Fran the costume person).

SUE ELLEN

Jeepers, look at the view from up here. You can see all the way to the river.

The boy is more interested in examining her breasts. She slaps his hand playfully.

SUE ELLEN

Why Billy George, you cut that out. If my daddy knew what you was up to, he'd come after you with his shotgun.

BILLY GEORGE

How's he going to know, unless you tell him?

SUE ELLEN

If you don't mind yourself, I will.

BILLY GEORGE

Ah come on, just one feel.

SUE ELLEN

No way. I ain't one of them girls.

BILLY GEORGE

You know you like it. Come on.

SUE ELLEN

Well, all right. Just one feel, but that's it.

He reaches into her blouse. His eyes roll back in ecstasy. She sees something in the distance.

SUE ELLEN
What's that?

BILLY GEORGE
What?

SUE ELLEN
It looks like a fire. It's the old
barn. Look.

He looks, reluctantly. Then panics.

BILLY GEORGE
You're right. That's my pappy's
barn.

They stand and look over the edge.

SUE ELLEN
Look!

She points to the street below.

ANGLE HER POV as the alien posse comes down the street.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PADUCAH - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As the aliens walk down the middle of the street. A car turns and SKIDS to a stop in front of them.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. The driver's anger turns to fear when he sees the aliens.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PADUCAH

Laser Conspiracy. As the driver gets out of his car. He stands, doesn't know which way to turn. An alien points a raygun and EXPLODES the driver.

People on the sidewalk SCREAM and run in panic. The aliens follow them at an easy pace, and randomly EXPLODE them and other things.

EXT. BUILDING ROOFTOP - NIGHT

SUE ELLEN
We've got to do something.

BILLY GEORGE

But what?

SUE ELLEN

Look, they're headed for the old
power station.

They run to the other side of the roof.

INT. ELECTRICAL PLANT - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As the aliens explode the main door and enter. The room is filled with generators, transformers, and large control panels with blinking lights. An operator with a clipboard is taking readings from the panels. He turns and draws his gun. An alien EXPLODES him.

The aliens stop and appear to be communicating with each other. Then, they face the panel and extend their arms. Lightening bolts form between their outstretched fingers and the thick wires feeding into the panels. The lights dim as they suck the power out of the lines.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PADUCAH - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As lights dim everywhere and people continue to run in panic.

INT. PENET LIVING ROOM SET - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As Irene and Roy watch a news bulletin on TV. (Dick plays the announcer.)

TV NEWS ANNOUNCER

The creatures appear to be aliens, possibly from another world. There is no telling how many they have killed as they continue their rampage through the downtown. Two eye witnesses on the scene claim the aliens may have set fire to a barn.

Suddenly the announcer looks up as the lights dim. The lights also dim in the living room.

ROY

They're downtown.

IRENE

The power station.

ROY

Once they've taken over the power station, there will no stopping them.

IRENE

Let's go.

INT. ELECTRICAL PLANT - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As Irene stands on the electrical racks holding a hanging rope, facing the aliens, who are continuing to suck the power out of the wires with their extended arms.

Irene breaks character...

VANESSA

Les, this isn't going to work.

ANGLE including Les and the crew as WE jump back to reality.

LES

What?

VANESSA

I'm sorry I just can't see Irene Penet flying in on a rope. Can't I just walk in through a door?

LES

The scene needs scale.

DICK

How about if Roy kicks those doors open and Irene comes in and zaps them from behind?

STEVE

I can put some fog or smoke out there.

LES

Maybe with some heavy back light through the fog?

STEVE

Yeah.

LES

It has to be big.

STEVE

Oh, I can do big.

INT. ELECTRICAL PLANT - NIGHT

Back to "Laser Conspiracy" on the big main doors as they fly open, revealing a heavily-backlit Irene standing with arms akimbo. Roy moves off to the side. Irene steps in.

The aliens stop sucking the power and turn to face her. They start to go for their rayguns, but before they can position them, Irene explodes the aliens in machine gun-like fashion. The aliens are instantly reduced to charcoal.

Unfortunately, the heavy zapping saps all of Irene's energy and she collapses. Roy kneels next to her and holds her head up.

ROY
Irene, Irene.

He rubs her hands and she comes to.

IRENE
What happened?

ROY
You fainted.

IRENE
I feel really... weak.

ROY
You need rest.

He helps her up and supports her as they walk outside.

EXT. ELECTRICAL PLANT - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As Irene and Roy step outside. Sue Ellen and Billy George run up to them, followed by a small crowd.

BILLY GEORGE
Jeepers, what happened?

IRENE
They're dead.

BILLY GEORGE
Did you-

Suddenly the sky lights up, and they all turn toward the source of the light. The source, which is ten or so miles away, sends out huge electrical sparks that leap hundreds of feet in the air.

BILLY GEORGE
My pappy's barn.

ROY
What do you mean?

SUE ELLEN
The aliens set the barn on fire.

BILLY GEORGE
And that's where that light's
coming from.

IRENE
Let's go.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Laser Conspiracy. As Irene's car approaches the burning barn from the muddy road, followed by several other cars and police cruisers.

Irene stops. She and Roy get out and stare with mouths agape at the saucer, as it glows and sends up sparks. Others get out of their cars and form a crowd behind Irene and Roy.

ROY
What are you going to do?

IRENE
I have no choice.

A cop runs up.

COP1
Lady, get back in the car.

She turns to him.

COP1
My God, Irene Penet.

IRENE
Officer, stand back, please.

COP1
But...

IRENE
Please!

Irene and Roy approach the saucer slowly. They stand and face the open door.

After a moment, a heavily backlit alien form comes into view standing at the door. Slowly, dramatically, the alien approaches down the ramp. Irene and Roy stand their ground. The cop moves into position behind them.

The alien reaches the bottom of the ramp. We can make out the form, but can't see the face. No one moves. The tension is thick, as the alien stands confidently before the mob of humans. Finally, it SPEAKS, and miraculously it knows English.

ALIEN

We have come to your planet from a world far away. We mean you no harm, but fulfillment of our mission is far more important to the well-being of all creatures in the universe than the lives of a few humans.

He steps forward. The voice sounds familiar.

ALIEN

Therefore, I must warn you. If anyone impedes us in the execution of our duties, we will have no choice... but to destroy them.

Thee crowd GASPS.

IRENE

Tell us, what is your mission?

ALIEN

(Prophetically)
To take over and inhabit your planet.

The crowd goes wild.

ALIEN

(Shouting)
Silence!

The alien waves his arms and a LOUD ROAR and lightening erupt from the saucer. The crowd backs away. The alien lowers his arms and the ROAR stops.

ALIEN

(Intensely)
Let there be no mistake about it. You humans are nothing more than a mere annoyance to us.

(MORE)

ALIEN (CONT'D)

There is no benefit in wasting you, but we can and will take decisive action if necessary and we will prevail. Do I make myself perfectly clear?

The people turn to each other and nod.

ALIEN

Good, then let's get started.

The alien steps forward into the light and its face can be seen clearly. It is Joel.

ALIEN

The first thing we must do is clear a landing pad for the rest of our spacecraft. And that requires destroying everything within a hundred mile radius.

The crowd erupts again, SHOUTING and charging toward the alien. The alien raises his arms again and makes the frightening SOUND and lightening, but the people keep coming. Several men fire guns, but the bullets bounce harmlessly off the alien and saucer. The alien starts firing his raygun randomly at the crowd, exploding whole pockets of people. Finally, the crowd backs off. The alien is very upset.

ALIEN

(Shouting)

All right! Now I see how it is going to be. I was hoping we could work things out, but I have no choice. Too bad.

He turns his back to the crowd and raises his arms toward the saucer. The ROAR and lightening start and build to frightening levels. The earth shakes, people shield their eyes from the blinding light.

Irene forces her eyes open. Though she is weak, she concentrates on the alien with every bit of power she can muster. But the alien is not easily fried. He turns and faces her angrily.

ALIEN

Who are you?

She refuses to break her concentration.

ALIEN

I said, who are you?!

She steps toward him slowly. He aims his raygun at her and fires. Laser beams shoot from her eyes and meet the ray from the gun half-way. The two beams SIZZLE and sparks fly. It becomes a battle of will as the fireball at the center of the beams inches back and forth.

It seems the standoff will never end. Then, Roy steps toward Irene and takes her hand.

ROY

I love you.

BAM! Irene's beam suddenly gains strength and pushes the other beam back into the raygun. It explodes. The alien drops the gun and stares at Irene, mouth agape. Then Irene trains her gaze on the alien and toasts it instantly.

The lights and NOISE coming from the saucer fizzle out, the crowd CHEERS, and Irene and Roy hug. The charcoal mound still in the form of the alien, crumbles to dust.

The CAMERA CRANES up to a WIDE SHOT, the movie ends, credits start to roll.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - DAY

As cast, crew, and backers watch the credits. The temp MUSIC works well, and the group is pleasantly surprised. Everyone is smiling or laughing, including Murray.

Slowly, one by one, they start APPLAUDING, if not for the movie, for the fact that it happened and they somehow got through it.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - DAY

As Les opens the door of his old convertible. Murray approaches from behind the car.

MURRAY

Hey Les, good job.

LES

Thanks.

MURRAY

I didn't know you had it in you.

LES

I know.

MURRAY

(Proudly)

I might have a few things for you
to read next week.

LES

Murray?

MURRAY

Yeah?

LES

You're in my way.

MURRAY

(With meaning)

Not anymore, man. We're on the same
team now.

LES

No, I mean, if you don't move to
the side, I'm going to run over
you.

Murray smiles and moves.

MURRAY

Les, give me a call okay? No
actually, I'll call you. But you
can call me if you want. Either
way, we'll get in touch.

Les smiles at him, starts the car, and backs out.

MURRAY

(Calling to Les)

We haven't done lunch in a while.
Let's do lunch.

Les speeds off.

FADE TO BLACK.