

GONE HOLLYWOOD

"Pilot"

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"Any resemblance
between persons
living or dead
and characters
in this fiction
is purely
fortuitous,
except that
famous people
appear under
their own names."

- Darcy O'Brien

TEASER

FADE IN ON:

A FLICKERING LIGHT, aimed at us, beams from a projection booth inside a movie theater. Our backs to the screen so we don't see what film's playing but between its elegaic score (Mascagni's *Intermezzo*) and the date which appears momentarily, it shouldn't be tough to guess.

1980.

American film is at a zenith.

Total domestic box office for the past year exceeds two billion dollars.

Next to automobiles and aircraft, movies are the U.S.'s third largest export.

They are the dominant cultural medium.

The words fade but the light flickers on.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE ALLEN RESTAURANT - NEW YORK - NIGHT

-- TRISH STARKS entering, mid-20s and currently a sensation on Broadway, the kind of fresh face which prompts theatergoers to whisper mid-act, "Who's that?" She's greeted by the MAITRE D' and led across the busy room (it's the post-theater rush) and a head or two turns her way as WE JUMP AHEAD TO MEET --

-- ROBBIE RIESE, 30, seated near the back. Fit and tan, he could be a movie star, only he lacks that which he reveres most and identifies best in others: talent. For a kid from mean streets, he wears Armani like a second skin, though his penchant for wide ties will be something to live down in later years. He chews ice from his Tab and flips through a Playbill when --

-- Trish arrives and Robbie launches to his feet, introducing himself and holding her chair as she orders a cocktail from a waiter. Then they sit and chat and WE HEAR NONE OF IT AT FIRST BECAUSE OF THE DIN IN HERE.

TRISH

-- some means of introduction, I've had flowers sent to my dressing room but --

ROBBIE

-- I try to be different --

TRISH
-- never a cactus, why --

ROBBIE
-- you're from the southwest --

TRISH
-- who told you that --

ROBBIE
-- Mike did --

TRISH
-- you know --

ROBBIE
-- who do you think told me to get my ass
on a plane and come see your show.

TRISH
Twice? You really saw the matinee too?

ROBBIE
Have the stub somewhere.

TRISH
You liked it that much.

ROBBIE
I liked you that much. Doesn't happen
often, witnessing a talent like yours for
the first time.

TRISH
Thank you.

ROBBIE
Thank you.

TRISH
But you're not Mike's agent, I met him.

ROBBIE
We represent a number of actors and
actresses who work with Mike, writers
too, so we're very much in each other's
lives. You've heard of Harding-Harris?

TRISH
I grew up in the desert, Mister --

ROBBIE
-- Robbie --

TRISH

-- not under a rock. Yes, I've heard of Harding-Harris.

ROBBIE

And I take it you're interested in working someday in film or television?

TRISH

I'm interested in owning a home some day.

ROBBIE

I don't see that being a problem.

TRISH

So if I want to "go Hollywood," I should sign with a major? Someone like you?

ROBBIE

You get to the point.

TRISH

I thought we were there. Sorry, it's, this isn't the first meeting I've taken.

Robbie's up to bat.

ROBBIE

No. You shouldn't sign with a major. Not starting out. There are advantages to a place as large as Harris: access to people and information and greater leverage when it comes time to make a deal. But what you really want at this point is one agent who represents you. Helps if they're a good salesman, of course, though your talent sells itself. And it's nice if it's someone with resolve, who's gonna take the no's and not flinch, cuz even with someone as good as you, there are always no's. What you want is a mirror.

TRISH

A mirror?

Robbie indicates one on the wall, framing them both; there's a reason he sat in this corner.

ROBBIE

It's easy to get lost in this business. There's a lot of money and people who aren't in it for the right reasons, who don't have your interest at heart.

(MORE)

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

"Here, do this TV show." "How 'bout a horror movie?" "You okay with a nude scene?" It's easy to get turned around. What you want is someone who sees who you are and what you are and reflects that back. So you don't forget. Someone you can look to and always find the best of yourself looking back.

Trish is momentarily spellbound. Which ends when a gaggle of CASTMATES stop by their table to say hi. Robbie isn't thrown though, they're actors and thus potential clients, and as Trish fumbles to introduce him, he rises and extends his hand and WE FINALLY CATCH HIS NAME:

ROBBIE (CONT'D)

Robbie Riese.

CUT TO:

A REARVIEW MIRROR as JACK DEVOE adjusts it to check his appearance. Mid-30s, a scion of Hollywood royalty with a great head of hair and mischief in his eyes. He sweeps white detritus from his nose before valets get his door.

NAT HOLLINS (PRE-LAP)

Jack! Jack DeVoe!

INT. BONAVENTURE HOTEL LOUNGE - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

The lounge revolves as ambitious young professionals (soon to be dubbed "yuppies") mix and mingle. Jack snakes a path through them to meet NAT HOLLINS at the bar; a VP at City National, Nat's hair and waistlines haven't kept pace with Jack's since their days at USC.

NAT HOLLINS

Jack. What in christ brings you downtown?

LATER

Jack slides a Harding-Harris envelope (its logo: two H's resembling film strips) across the bartop.

NAT HOLLINS (CONT'D)

A present? For moi?

JACK

Your birthday's so close to Christmas, I worry sometimes I'll miss it.

Nat withdraws his gift: "The Electric Horseman" on VHS.

NAT HOLLINS

A movie. Who coulda guessed. Clients of yours?

JACK

Some.

NAT HOLLINS

I missed this one. Betsy won't watch her but she loves him. Maybe she can...

(covers one eye)

This VHS or --

JACK

(overlapping)

-- guess how much that picture grossed in theaters last year --

NAT HOLLINS

-- I'll hafta see what we have, I think beta, the tapes Betsy brings home seem smaller --

JACK

-- sixty million dollars. Know what they're projecting that'll do? Twenty. That's a thirty-percent bump didn't exist two years ago.

NAT HOLLINS

So business is good, how wonderful for you. What're you having?

JACK

Water, I'm driving.

NAT HOLLINS

(that's no excuse)

So am I.

He signals for another round.

JACK

The industry's about to expand, Nat. A lotta new money flowing in --

NAT HOLLINS

-- and? --

JACK

-- and if this was 1848 or '47 and I told you a gold rush was coming and asked you for a pick and a pan --

NAT HOLLINS

-- what are you asking me for?

JACK

A line of credit. I have three agents committed, maybe a fourth. All we need is a little runway.

NAT HOLLINS

You wanna go out on your own?

(Nat thinks he's joking;

Jack's not, by a long shot)

Why? Harris is the IBM of your business and you're doing great. Whatcha wanna go fucking around with --

JACK

-- cuz the only way anyone ever made any money is by going out on their own. Now can I do this through City Nat or not?

NAT HOLLINS

I don't wanna take your home, Jack.

(Jack scoffs)

Hanging your own shingle's an awfully big gamble. Candy on board with this?

JACK

(a professional liar)

Of course.

(Nat's refill arrives' Jack sneaks a thirsty look at it)

Nat, there are two things I know. One: staying at Harding is the gamble. I do and it's twenty years until partnership. Maybe. It's a young person's business, I gotta do this now.

NAT HOLLINS

And the second thing?

JACK

You gotta get rid of that betamax.

A crowd chants "Joker! Joker! Joker!" before WE --

CUT TO:

INT. SOUND STAGE - HOLLYWOOD, CA - NIGHT

-- a taping of "THE JOKER'S WILD!" in progress, host JACK BARRY at the lectern. Cameras reposition while a live studio audience obeys an "APPLAUSE" sign.

On the periphery, steeped in shadow, stands a FIGURE. At first glance he looks middle-aged: shoulders rolled forward, arms folded Nixon-like, hands cupping elbows. But a closer look reveals ELI ZELLER to be well shy of 30. And acutely unexceptional; a flaccid hairstyle, horn-rimmed glasses and a gap between his front teeth are his only distinguishing features. Which is probably why no one here pays him much attention. Their mistake: in a few years he'll be the most powerful man in show business.

JACK BARRY

For four hundred the category is Colorful Names. "In the board game Clue, which suspect has a military background?"

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

(approaches Eli)

Mr. Zeigler? Mr. Cutshaw is ready for you. You are Mr. Zeigler, aren't you?

Whether Eli resents the fuck-up or is simply curious to hear the answer is anybody's guess.

ELI

Zeller.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

A burnt-out exec (CUTSHAW) reacts to Eli's ask.

CUTSHAW

-- well, how 'bout you go fuck yourself a little bit, I'm not giving Jack fifty-one percent ownership, he's already getting a fat royalty on licensing fees --

ELI

-- and despite stripping the show down, his margin continues to decrease --

CUTSHAW

-- which is a natural attrition on a show that's been on the --

ELI

-- because CTS is using "Joker" to hammock "Crosswits" and Jack should benefit from that. And this.

Eli, as passionless as he is meticulous, withdraws a pocket notebook and displays a number.

CUTSHAW

What's that?

ELI

The current total of Colbert's cash deals on "Joker" domestically.

CUTSHAW

(so?)

Looks about right.

ELI

Except a quarter of your deals are cash-plus. Not KTLA or local markets, not the big three, but regionally you've been augmenting revenue, mostly in the south.

Eli's accusing him of fraud. Cutshaw, busted, stalls.

CUTSHAW

You look like a kid, you know that? Can't Harding-Harris send someone with a damn driver's license? How old are you anyway?

He pats his coat for cigarettes and retreats out to --

EXT. SOUND STAGE - NIGHT

If there wasn't a Marlboro billboard in the way, maybe you'd see the Hollywood sign.

CUTSHAW

You know, Jack's lucky to have this show. He was in the wilderness a long time. We could pull the plug on this, I doubt he'd ever get another shot, not at his --

ELI

-- King World would be happy to step in and pick up the option.

CUTSHAW

You kidding? Jack hates their guts.

ELI

Not enough to stand in the way of majority ownership.

Negotiating against Eli is like sparring with a brick wall; there's no argument he's not prepared to counter.

CUTSHAW

You boys at Harris'd love that, wouldn't you? Commission this sucker twice.

(checkmated, he offers a cigarette; Eli demurs)

How'd you know? That we were cash-plus?

ELI
I called.

CUTSHAW
Those affiliates?

ELI
All of them.

CUTSHAW
Every -- ? That's --

ELI
Sixty-seven.

Cutshaw looks at him anew: who is this kid?

CUTSHAW
You're an ambitious little schlepper,
aren't you? What the fuck're you doing
stuck in daytime?
(it's a question Eli asks
himself some days)
What'd you say your name was again?

Off Eli: one day soon people will remember --

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS - MORNING

Dawn breaks over Rodeo Drive. All is quiet here, Giorgio's and other boutiques closed and dark.

On Brighton Way a CUSTODIAN hoses the sidewalk.

Around the corner from the Beverly Wilshire stands a BLACK GLASS BOX of a building, '909' affixed on its front, the H-H logo etched into its glass doors.

Welcome to the west-coast offices of Harding-Harris.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS - MORNING

First in are the INTERNS, most fresh out of ivy-league colleges and performing menial tasks for the first time in their lives: sorting mail, making coffee.

INTERN #1

(as he arrives)

Dammit! I got up at five to beat you in!

INTERN #2

(smirking)

Good of you to make it. Stop for brunch on the way or did you hit traffic?

They're interrupted when Eli Zeller passes by; clearly he's been here long before either of them.

ELI

(reviewing a contract, he doesn't bother looking up)

Morning.

INTERN #2

Morning, Mr. Zeller.

INTERN #1

(as Eli goes, he whispers)

He was still here when I left last night. Does that guy have a home?

OVER THE NEXT HOUR:

The office comes to life. It's a routine weekday at H-H and WE WATCH IT DEVELOP, occasionally audible DIALOGUE mixing with a rising cacophony of RINGING PHONES and TYPEWRITERS CLACKING.

Everyone who works here is neatly-dressed, college-educated and of Judeo-Christian descent, the majority of them male --

-- except in the LOBBY where comely RECEPTIONISTS greet visitors and mind the mainline: "Harding-Harris, good morning, I'll direct you. Harding-Harris..."

An ASSISTANT, new to her desk, tells a caller:

ASSISTANT

I'm sorry, he's on another call right now, may I take a message?

PHIL WAXMAN, 60s, happens past. A senior partner, he's an avuncular figure, H-H's in-house mentor.

PHIL WAXMAN

Morning, Stacy, how are you today?

ASSISTANT

Fine, Mr. Waxman.

PHIL WAXMAN

A word of advice, a tip I learned back when I was starting out. This was just after the Dawn of Man. Never tell a client your boss is speaking to someone else. Makes them feel second priority. Better to say "he's unavailable" or you "don't have him." Like he'd pick up only he's trapped in the elevator.

TWO AGENTS -- SAUL RESNICK (tv lit) and DOUG ETTINGER (feature lit), both 30s -- flank a water cooler. Saul's a neurotic; Doug, by comparison, is a cigar store Indian.

SAUL

He didn't call you, did he? I don't think he called me. My machine's broke --

DOUG

-- you should use a service --

SAUL

-- I don't want someone I don't know knowing my business.

(then)

Where'd you get that tie?

DING! The elevator from the underground garage opens and Jack DeVoe arrives to work. He crosses the lobby with the unrushed gait of a star player which, being a director's agent, he is. A LIT AGENT passes him --

LIT AGENT

-- Jack, take a look at the draft Picker sent over, it's gonna go --

-- but Jack doesn't break stride til he comes upon Saul and Doug at the water cooler.

JACK

Saul, Doug. Staying hydrated, I see.

SAUL

We were just --
(conspiratorially)
-- how's everything?

JACK

"Everything"? Everything's fine, Saul. Everything is everything.

SAUL

Did you talk to...?

JACK

(doesn't want to chat here,
not with Saul's poker-face)
Benny in yet?
(no)
My office in five.

A trolley distributes *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*. Eli emerges from his office to snag one of each.

HIS ASSISTANT

Left word for Mitch Clawson.

ELI

When he calls back, keep him on hold for thirty seconds. I want him impatient.

JACK

(squeezing past)
Zeller.

ELI

DeVoe.

They barely know each other, the workhorse and the bon vivant. As Eli returns to his desk, he clocks Saul and Doug breaking up their klatch; nothing suspicious about it but little escapes Eli's notice.

Across the bullpen: ABBIE JINKS, 30, talks on the phone in her office as she glues a broken heel to her shoe.

Born Avi Avram, she changed one name for the stage, the other when she wed; neither acting nor wedded life stuck.

ABBIE

-- look: we can go back and forth on this for weeks, play games, during which who knows what offers my client gets, or we can cut to it and you can say yes now --
 (as her assistant enters, she cups the phone)
 -- this isn't working --
 (not the ploy, the shoe)
 -- this, see if, what size are you? --
 (back on the phone)
 -- of course I'm being reasonable --

EXT. HARDING-HARRIS BUILDING - DAY

A Cadillac Seville stops and a pair of horse bit loafers step out, as *démodé* a shoe style then as it is today.

They belong to BENNY LANDAU, 60, as ruthless and dapper and as they come in a Savile Row and trademark thick-rimmed spectacles. Benny's been in the biz since he was a teen, has been an industry legend for most of his middle age, shook hands with presidents and mobsters alike, and while he sometimes misses the Hollywood of yesteryear, he wouldn't trade it for the power he wields today.

An INTERN scurries out to valet his car for him.

BENNY LANDAU

Gas it up. Better wash it too.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS - CONTINUOUS

Phil Waxman is crossing the lobby when he spots Benny outside. These two came up through the ranks together, have worked side-by-side over forty years and rare is the day they don't speak at length. Phil holds open the "HH" glass door as Benny ascends the front steps.

PHIL WAXMAN

"...down the stretch it's Landau and Seabiscuit, it's Landau, Seabiscuit..."

BENNY LANDAU

I knew that horse. Was an antisemite. Think it's going to rain today?

PHIL WAXMAN

On your parade? The sky wouldn't dare. Janet excited for tonight?

BENNY LANDAU

As a hummingbird. She vibrates. To keep her busy I let her handle all the floral arrangements for tonight. I gave her an unlimited budget...and she exceeded it.

(crossing the lobby)

Everyone here today?

PHIL WAXMAN

Max's still on holiday, Robbie's in the air, should land soon.

BENNY LANDAU

(as they pass reception)

Morning, girls. You all look fabulous.

He's a charmer.

INT. 707 - DAY

A Harding-Harris script cover closes as Robbie finishes his third screenplay of the flight. He stuffs it in his carry-on, withdraws a fourth and cracks it open.

WOMAN NEXT TO HIM

(40s, Anita Bryant-type)

Pardon me, I don't mean to pry but what is that? I've never seen anything typed like that before.

ROBBIE

You must not live in Los Angeles.

WOMAN NEXT TO HIM

Orange County.

ROBBIE

A screenplay. A movie script.

WOMAN NEXT TO HIM

I take it you're in "the biz?" Can I ask: why is it so crazy? All I ever read about is this movie going overbudget or that studio boss forging checks --

ROBBIE

-- David Begelman --

WOMAN NEXT TO HIM

-- so why is it? So nuts?

ROBBIE

Well, it's mostly comprised of artists.
And artists tend to be, should be a
little crazy. As for the rest of us...

He shrugs: who can say?

WOMAN NEXT TO HIM

"Crazy ballyhooey Hollywood." I salute
you. Can't be easy dealing with all that
degeneracy.

ROBBIE

(brought up short)
I'm sorry?

WOMAN NEXT TO HIM

Y'know. Show people. They're not known
for their scruples.

ROBBIE

I s'pose not. Still: they can suck a cock
like nobody's business.

That sends her back to her in-flight magazine. The plane
shudders through a cloud and Robbie peers out on the LA
basin: maybe it's an asylum but it's his asylum.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - AERIAL VIEW - DAY

The city passes underneath. At this elevation La-La
really looks like a place where dreams come true.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS - DAY

FLOATING OVER ITS BULLPEN, at full capacity now,
assistants rolling calls and typing cover letters and
binding scripts with brass brads --

-- FALLING INTO STRIDE WITH AN ASSISTANT escorting a
client to her boss's office, one of the proverbial "kids
with beards," a director trying his utmost to look like
the next Spielberg, Lucas or Landis --

-- CONTINUING OVER THE MAILROOM, the stomach of the
agency, where a senior trainee assigns messenger runs to
his phalanx of interns --

INT. JACK DEVOE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- UNTIL WE LAND ABOVE Jack, Saul and Doug, sprinkled
about the room. Jack's office is nicer than most, with
film posters for foreign classics on the walls.

DOUG

-- you haven't heard back from Robbie.

JACK

He's been out of town, we haven't --

SAUL

-- then why'd you tell your friend there were four of us? There're only three --

JACK

-- because at that moment four sounded better. And maybe we should get one more. Maybe two.

DOUG

Goldblatt might come. Seth Kuehn.

JACK

Abbie Jinks? Wouldn't hurt to have a woman. 'Specially when we announce.

SAUL

Eli Zeller?

JACK

Mr. Personality? No thanks. 'Sides he's Benny's boy.

Jack, scanning *Variety*, finds what he's after.

SAUL

Jack? Is City National gonna front us or not? What did your friend say?

JACK

That he'd get back to me. Relax, Saul.

SAUL

We're conspiring to commit professional treason. Against a man who will bury us if he finds out. Y'know? I like working in this industry. I like eating in this town.

JACK

(not as intimidated)

Don't think Benny is the force he used to be. Every dog has his day --

(a KNOCK at his door)

-- yeah?! -- and he's had his.

Waxman enters. The trio shifts, like caught schoolboys.

PHIL WAXMAN

Gentlemen. I interrupt something?

JACK

Phil. We were just debating the Calley job. Saul thinks it's gonna be --

SAUL

-- Melnick --

JACK

-- but Doug says --

DOUG

-- no chance.

PHIL WAXMAN

(knows they're snowing him)

You boys are like sons to me. Bastard, red-headed, prodigal.

(to Doug and Saul)

Came looking for him but glad to find you two schmucks. How much time you need in today's staff?

SAUL

Minute tops. Some OWA's.

DOUG

Less than that.

PHIL WAXMAN

Good. Now scram, I gotta talk to Dipshit.

Saul and Doug exit, glances exchanged as they go. Jack gestures to a chair but Phil waves it off.

JACK

What's wrong, Phil? Look like someone hid your Geritol.

PHIL WAXMAN

What's the first rule of show business? First thing I ever taught you?

JACK

"Presumption is the mother of all fuck-ups."

PHIL WAXMAN

After that.

JACK

"An actor killed Lincoln?"

PHIL WAXMAN

"Share information." We have three different deals with major clients pending at UA, need to know if they're going to be solvent next year or should we move them. So: you seen the picture?

JACK

Tomorrow. Seeing it right alongside the brass.

PHIL WAXMAN

Okay. Just don't leave us with our dicks in the wind to protect your client. What I hear about the overruns on this...

JACK

It's Michael's m.o., Phil. He's gotta make things a disaster so he can play the hero. It's gonna be great.

(as Phil lingers)

Is that all?

PHIL WAXMAN

What were you boys talking about, by the way? When I walked in here?

JACK

You, Phil.

Phil knows that's bullshit too but leaves amused. Jack's eyes fall on his "Le Mépris" poster where busty Brigitte Bardot gives him a withering glare.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Big enough to accommodate every agent in the building. A bespoke conference table with plush chairs surrounding it and fold-outs lining the walls for junior agents.

Eli is in the first heat to arrive for the staff meeting but he doesn't chit-chat with other early-birds, just finds a second-perimeter seat and uses the time to review to-do items in his pocketbook. Which is when Abbie plops down beside him; her loaner shoes are killing her.

ABBIE

Zeller. Bookmaking again?

ELI

Abbie.

(beat)

That's a new perfume.

ABBIE

Like it? Was a gift. To myself.
 (a surfeit of energy)
 Just found out: a client of mine's
 working with a client of yours. Dan
 Wilkins on "General Hospital"? And by
 "working" I mean more than working.

ELI

Dan's wife will be surprised.

ABBIE

As will my client's husband.

More agents file in, Jack included. Gregarious as always,
 he banter with associates before taking a front-row
 seat, one of the younger faces "at the table."

JUNIOR AGENT

(a game they play)
 Jack: 1947.

JACK

What category?

JUNIOR AGENT

Best picture.

JACK

"Gentlemen's Agreement."

JUNIOR AGENT

Never heard of it. One of your dad's?

Also in a prime seat: STANLEY MOSS, 40s, oleaginous and
 overtan head of the motion picture department.

STANLEY MOSS

-- not just rumors, gotta be half a dozen
 guys I know she blew back when, before
 she was anything. One of 'em told me this
 girl named Davis had given him the best
 head of his life. That's what people
 don't get about Ronnie: he's been very
 well tended in that department. When a
 man's got a foundation like that, there's
 no limit how far he can go.

Other agents titter but not Jack; he hates Moss. Phil
 leads in Benny and the room quiets. As he rounds the
 table to his seat, Benny taps Eli.

BENNY LANDAU

Come see me after this.

Abbie overhears this and whispers:

ABBIE

That a good "come see me" or a bad?

Eli pretends not to know. Phil starts the meeting from the head of the table opposite Benny.

PHIL WAXMAN

Good morning. Everyone here? I know we're all excited for tonight. The dinner starts at eight sharp. It's black tie so if you need to go home early to change... Before we get to departments, I'd like turn things over to the man of the hour.

Attention turns to Benny. Who needn't rise. Even if his foot was better, he's the king around here.

BENNY LANDAU

I want to thank everyone coming tonight. Means the world to me you'll be there.

(maybe, maybe not)

To start the day: a story. Some years back a producer client of mine, who will remain nameless, was tasked by Warner Brothers with making a new Tarzan picture. "Give it a new twist," they told him, so he delivered a draft in which Tarzan spoke completely in Yiddish.

(off laughter)

Point being: give 'em what they want. Even when they don't know they want it.

PHIL WAXMAN

(to the day's agenda)

Alright, let's start with TV...

INT. HARDING-HARRIS LOBBY - DAY

Through the glass doors: outside a cab pulls up and Robbie bolts out, overnight bag in hand. He rushes inside and his ASSISTANT, 20s, falls into stride.

ROBBIE

You get hold of Lisa yet? I cannot believe this shit --

ROBBIE'S ASSISTANT

-- she said she was packing --

ROBBIE

-- no, call her back, tell her don't move until I get into this, then call Vaughn, ask for a drive-on --

INT. HARDING-HARRIS CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A COVERING AGENT has the floor.

COVERING AGENT

-- "four high-school buddies in the 1950s look to lose their virginity." Writer is attached to direct. While over at Embassy is "Tijuana": "three high-school buddies in the 1960s venture south of the border to lose their virginity" --

STANLEY MOSS

Well, they can't both go. No one's gonna wanna come in second in that race. There aren't enough zit-poppers in the world.

JACK

(can't help himself)
I think there is.

Jack has spoken out of turn. Which doesn't thrill Phil.

PHIL WAXMAN

Your point, Jack?

JACK

(holds up *Variety*)
Today's. Home video report shows a 17% rise from last quarter. There are movies that lost their shirt in theaters going into the black cuz of this --

STANLEY MOSS

-- and that's a nice extra for everyone but it's not gonna change the business --

JACK

-- I think it will, I think pretty soon we'll be making movies just for this --

STANLEY MOSS

-- VCRs are a luxury item, Jack, they're never gonna go mass market --

JACK

-- that's what they said about TVs.

Which is when Robbie enters, under a head of steam.

PHIL WAXMAN

Robert. Welcome back. How was New York?

ROBBIE

Good, fine, listen: there's a fire I need to put out at Universal, mind if I...?

BENNY LANDAU

What is it?

ROBBIE

"All Night Long." The Hackman picture. Director called Lisa Eichhorn this morning and told her not to report today. Said it "wasn't working out."

PHIL WAXMAN

He fired her?

ROBBIE

That's how she took it.

DOUG

They're three weeks into production. That's crazy.

ROBBIE

I'm gonna drive over and get in Tanen's face about it. Shit, my car's at... Anyone loan me theirs?

STANLEY MOSS

That's the show Mengers' husband is directing, isn't it? The French fry?

DOUG

Belgian.

BENNY LANDAU

You sense her hand in this?

Robbie isn't sure. Jack sees an opportunity.

JACK

I'll take you. Got lunch in the valley anyway.

ROBBIE

You have a phone in your car?

Yep. As Jack rises and throws on his suit jacket, Eli scribbles in his pocketbook "Eichhorn/All Night Long" and Phil signals the Covering Agent to continue.

COVERING AGENT

At MGM: six friends in the 1950s gather routinely at an all-night diner --

INT. BULLPEN - HARDING-HARRIS - LATER

As the staff meeting lets out, Eli stops to watch Benny and Phil disappear into Benny's office. Abbie passes by.

ABBIE

Count to one hundred first. Don't want to seem too eager.

INT. BENNY LANDAU'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Like the carpet, framed photos are wall-to-wall. Name a show business icon of the past thirty years and they're hanging here somewhere, posed beside Benny.

BENNY LANDAU (O.S.)

...uh-huh, uh-huh, I like that. Wait, instead of "legendary," could you say "visionary"? First one makes this sound like a retirement party.

Benny's on the phone. Like his late pal LBJ, he's a master of the device and prefers to pace while chatting, like a caged lion. Meanwhile, Phil sits on a couch, a patient consigliere.

BENNY LANDAU (CONT'D)

Uh-huh, good. Wait, let me try that on...
(cups the phone, to Phil)
He says, "Benny's got a client list longer than Ethel Merman's Johnson."

PHIL WAXMAN

You'll be sitting next to Rabbi Schulman.

BENNY LANDAU

(back on the phone)
Better nix it, Franklin. Otherwise terrific. I love the Malden stuff.
(big burst of laughter at a final quip)
Thanks. I'll see you tonight.

He hangs up, instantly straight-faced. Eli's at his door.

ELI

This a good time?

BENNY LANDAU

C'mon in, kid.

(to Phil as he clips and
lights a Cohiba)

You should hear some of what he's got.
One line in particular...

(back to Eli)

Jack Barry phoned. Said you were aces
last night. Good work.

ELI

Glad to get him every penny he deserves.

BENNY LANDAU

Wouldn't go that far. Greedy sonovabitch
nearly wrecked game shows. Should count
his stars he's still in the business.

Benny slips into his private bathroom, as if Phil and Eli
aren't even there. Phil doesn't feel toward Zeller like
he does Jack and the others; he's not one of "his boys."

PHIL WAXMAN

You're coming tonight, right?

(Eli nods)

You're stag though. You're not married.

(Eli shakes his head; so much
for small talk)

Well, I guess I'll see you there then.
Benny? I'll come back later?

No reply so he goes. Not sure what else to do, Eli
peruses pictures on the wall: Benny with movie stars and
moguls. Then, as urine echoes from within:

BENNY LANDAU (O.S.)

Reason I wanted to see you. It's time,
I've decided, you move up a notch. How
would you like to have lunch with Merv
today?

ELI

Griffin?

BENNY LANDAU (O.S.)

You know another? Polo Lounge, one
o'clock. He's only one of our oldest,
most valued clients so don't fuck it up.

ELI

Thank you. I won't.

FLUSH. Benny emerges, zipping up.

BENNY LANDAU

Let him do the talking, it's what he's good at. You listen. Merv likes you, he's your account and you're off to the races.
(then, meeting over)
That's it.

ELI

One thing I wanted to mention. On another matter. I checked with business affairs: MCA's in arrears with us for last quarter.

BENNY LANDAU

So?

ELI

May give us leverage on the Lisa Eichorn issue. I know it's important to Robbie.
(Benny doesn't seem to follow)
"All Night Long."

BENNY LANDAU

(oh no: he followed)

Why would I want to piss off Lew Wasserman for the sake of a what's-her-name-again actress? Leave features to the feature guys. I know that's where the flash is, you're where the cash is. And with Merv? Remember to smile. He likes a sunny disposition.

Off Eli: charm isn't his strong suit --

EXT. FOUNTAIN AVENUE - DAY

Jack steers his Mercedes while Robbie uses its phone. An odd couple: one born to the biz, the other a transplant.

ROBBIE

-- I understand he said that and I understand how upset you must be but -- Lisa, stay where you are! It helps me if you're still! Yes, cuz in their minds you're still physically on the job, and as far as I'm concerned you are still on the job. I'm on my way there now. Yes, I will call you as soon as I know anything.
(hangs up, wound-up)
You taking Laurel?

JACK

Cahuenga's faster before lunch. You didn't hear a peep about this before today? No one called you?

(no and it pisses Robbie off;
Jack seizes the moment)

You think any more about that thing?

ROBBIE

What thing?

JACK

What we were talking about. Last week.

ROBBIE

Jesus, Jack, I got, I can't --

JACK

-- okay but just watch how much help you get during this. There's no support system at Harris, it's not an agency anymore, it's a housekeeping deal for fifty independent agents. And there's no fixing it. Only way forward is to tear it all down and start over. We can do that.

Robbie's preoccupied, so Jack leaves it at that. For now.

EXT. UNIVERSAL STUDIOS - DAY

A sign reads: "UNIVERSAL: Where Dreams Come True." A GATE GUARD waves the Mercedes through. They park outside an administration building and Jack gets out.

ROBBIE

Where you going? Thought you had a lunch.

JACK

You thought wrong, Butch.

INT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

They sneak in through a side entrance.

CREATIVE EXEC

Robbie, Jack, what brings you here?

JACK

We're taking P.J. to lunch, to celebrate his promotion.

CREATIVE EXEC

P.J. got promoted?

Jack puts a finger to his lips as they keep moving. Down a hallway to the studio president's office --

PRESIDENT'S ASSISTANT

Mr. Riese, Mr. DeVoe --

ROBBIE

-- Sandy, I apologize for this --

INT. STUDIO PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- and into a closed-door meeting of three people: NED TANEN, 48, Uni president, in business-casual; a BUSINESS AFFAIRS EXEC; and super-agent SUE MENGERS, 47, kaftanned, draped over a couch like Cleopatra, eating from a grocery bag of grapes. All surprised by the interruption.

NED TANEN

Well. This is unexpected.

SUE MENGERS

Hello, boys. Have a grape.

ROBBIE

What the hell, Ned? You fire my client three weeks into shooting and no call?

NED TANEN

Your client hasn't been fired. Yet. She's been put on hold.

ROBBIE

That's not what your director -- her husband -- said this morning. He told my client to pack her bags.

SUE MENGERS

Jean-Claude may have jumped the gun a bit, honey. He felt bad for the girl --

ROBBIE

-- I don't wanna hear you speak now.

(to Ned)

Tell me: what's going on?

NED TANEN

Streisand read it. She wants to do it.

JACK

You're joking.

NED TANEN

I'm not.

ROBBIE

That doesn't make sense. She's all wrong for the part.

SUE MENGERS

She was all wrong. Nothing a quickie rewrite can't fix.

JACK

I thought Barbra was off doing "Shtetl" or whatever the hell it's called.

SUE MENGERS

(glares at Jack; no love lost here between them)

That's taking a little longer to come together than we thought --

JACK

-- cuz no actor will sign on with her as director --

SUE MENGERS

-- so we thought why not squeeze in a picture in the meantime. Build up the war chest.

Robbie senses what that means. To Ned:

ROBBIE

How much?

NED TANEN

How much what?

ROBBIE

Are you paying her?

BUSINESS AFFAIRS EXEC

That's confidential information --

SUE MENGERS

Four million dollars.

That's a new record. For an actress or an actor.

ROBBIE

Ned, this was...this was supposed to be a quirky comedy. About everyday people. Your "Breaking Away." Now it's...?

SUE MENGERS

A huge hit. With hubby at the helm.

JACK

Does Hackman know about this yet?

SUE MENGERS

Gene didn't feel there was chemistry between Lisa and him --

ROBBIE

-- I'll believe that when I hear him say it. And stop answering questions you're not asked, lady.

(back to Ned)

You're really going to do this? Three weeks in?

NED TANEN

I need a Christmas picture: Streisand and Hackman.

JACK

You realize what this will do to our relationship, Ned. Not just us individually. The relationship between Harding-Harris and Universal.

NED TANEN

(calls Jack's bluff)

You know who phoned ten minutes ago? Stanley Moss. Head of features over at your shop? He called to pitch me names for Lisa's role.

Jack and Robbie trade a look: fuck Stanley Moss.

ROBBIE

Universal. Where dreams go to get raped.

SUE MENGERS

Don't be angry at Neddy, honey. This isn't his decision. It's not anyone's decision. It's The Way Of Things: money and business and box office. Nothing to be done about it.

She pops another grape into her mouth, victorious. Off Jack and Robbie, hoping she chokes on it --

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. POLO LOUNGE - DAY

Eli sits ill-at-ease at a two-top, a fish-out-of-water here among the old-guard and ladies-who-lunch.

Enter MERV GRIFFIN, 55, and the moment he appears the lounge pianist launches into "I've Got A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts" (Merv's sole hit as a big band singer in the 50s). Merv knows everyone here and as the maitre d' leads him to Eli, he stops at a table or two to say hello. When he finally sees where his lunch guest is seated -- in a discreet corner -- Merv stops: no, this won't do at all.

EXT. POLO LOUNGE - LATER

Merv and Eli are now ON THE PATIO, at a four-top, in view of everyone. They're well into their McCarthy salads.

MERV GRIFFIN

-- absolutely the most charming people you'll ever meet. Dinner parties where we never stop laughing. Regardless of your politics, and mine are all over the map, I think we'd be lucky to have them as First Couple. And it wouldn't hurt little ol' me to have a chum in the White House. We speak on the phone nearly every day.

ELI

You and the Governor?

MERV GRIFFIN

Nancy. Or "Mommy," that's what he calls her. Cute, huh? Thank you, Adolpho.

A busboy refills their teas. Eli notices stares from other tables; he's not used to being center of attention.

MERV GRIFFIN (CONT'D)

Now to you, Eli: where do you hail from? And how did you come to work in this business we call show?

ELI

Minnesota originally, Grand Rapids.

MERV GRIFFIN

Ooh, birthplace of Judy Garland.

ELI

Started UCLA law but interned at Harris
my first summer and never went back.

MERV GRIFFIN

Having too much fun in the mailroom, hmm?
With all those pretty girls?

Eli chose the wrong moment to take a bite.

ELI

(covers his mouth)

Sorry. I feel like I'm on your show.

MERV GRIFFIN

I apologize. Professional habit. I'm
nosier than Durante, that's what Orson
says. The reason I ask: lots of people
get into this racket for lots of reasons.
To get famous, to get rich, to get laid.
Anyone I work with, I like to know their
angle. So why did you enlist? Fame?
Fortune? Power?

ELI

(tries a smile)

All three?

MERV GRIFFIN

(laughs)

Good answer. 'Course, what keeps us in it
is the fun. That's what's sustained me,
from my days singing to my stint as an
actor -- boy, was that a mistake -- and
now making talk shows and game shows. If
it's not fun, why bother?

(the man does love to talk)

What sign are you? When's your birthday?

ELI

March eighteenth.

MERV GRIFFIN

Hmm, Pisces. A shrewd one. I'll have to
ask Joan about you.

(down to business)

Benny mentioned what a wonderful job
you're doing. Says you're the hardest
working agent he's seen since he was a
young man. Which is recommendation enough
for me. Anything you want to ask me?

Eli takes his swing.

ELI

Do you watch the evening news?

MERV GRIFFIN

National? I never miss Uncle Walter.

ELI

And then? What do you do?

MERV GRIFFIN

Have a little cocktail. Call a friend.

ELI

You turn off the TV?

MERV GRIFFIN

Nothing's on til 8.

ELI

What if you owned that hour in-between?
 "Wheel of Fortune"'s on its last legs on
 daytime, NBC's been threatening to cancel
 it for years. And "Jeopardy"'s been off
 the air for two. Why not syndicate them
 together and bridge that gap?

MERV GRIFFIN

(he's intrigued but)

We tried "Jeopardy" in the evening.

ELI

In prime time, against "Happy Days." Not
 at seven o'clock where its competition
 will be...

Merv stops him. He's just heard (what will prove to be) a
 billion-dollar idea. A grin spreads across his face.

MERV GRIFFIN

Ooh, I can't wait to hear what Joan has
 to say about you.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - AFTERNOON

A multi-level stilt home clinging to the edge of a
 canyon. Robbie pulls up in his MG.

INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - CONTINUOUS

A HOUSEMATE, 20s, greets him at the door.

HOUSEMATE

You're Robbie?

ROBBIE

How is she?

HOUSEMATE

One bottle in.

She points him in and he passes a gift vase of flowers.

ROBBIE

Who sent these?

HOUSEMATE

Your office, I thought.

Robbie checks the card: yep, Harding-Harris. Huh.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

A panoramic view of the city at sunset.

LISA EICHORN, 27, is curled up on a couch, eyes bloodshot. A lithe beauty, she's considered (along with Debra Winger) to be the next big thing, or was until this morning. Robbie taps on a glass door to announce himself, then steps outside. She doesn't acknowledge him, just straight-arms a wine bottle in his direction.

ROBBIE

I don't have a glass.

LISA EICHORN

Neither do I.

(she swigs from the bottle)

Is it true? About Streisand?

(he confirms it)

Are they turning it into a musical?

ROBBIE

Lisa, I promise you: what happened today will be a footnote in your career. In the near future it will be a famous anecdote about how badly this town can screw up. These are the same people who put "Star Wars" into turnaround.

She doesn't quite believe it. (And shouldn't.)

LISA EICHORN

You know what sucks? I didn't care a month ago. I didn't even like the script all that much. If they'd not hired me, I wouldn't've cared.

(lip trembling)

Fuckers made me care.

She breaks and he holds her. She looks up at him, half in-the-bag, and kisses him. He allows it, but only briefly.

ROBBIE

There've been enough screw-ups for one day.

So instead she rests her head on his shoulder. As they stare out at the view --

LISA EICHORN

This town.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BEVERLY HILTON HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

FRANKLIN LENNOX on the dais. 40, afro receding, he had a hit TV show once, a few movie credits, but he's funniest with a mic in hand. We join him mid-bit.

FRANKLIN LENNOX

I like New York in June.

(German accent)

"How about Jews?"

(himself again)

I like a Gershwin tune, baby.

(German accent)

"How about Jews?"

(himself)

I like potato chips, moonlight motor...

Shit, man, what do you want me to say?

His audience roars. Because this is the Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual Tribute Dinner and half the crowd are sons and daughters of Abraham. Movie stars sprinkle the room but mostly it's an assembly of agents, execs and spouses.

AT ONE TABLE

Jack and his wife CANDACE (30s, chic, like she stepped out of a "Charlie" ad) find their seats at one of several Harding-Harris tables. They trade hellos with everyone, including Saul who's here with a DATE too tall for him.

JACK

(to Abbie, beside him)

What'd we miss?

ABBIE

Salad course. You can have mine, it'll be back up in a minute.

JACK
Robbie here yet?

Abbie shrugs -- hell if she knows -- as Phil passes by.

PHIL WAXMAN
You're late.

JACK
So was Mother but look how I turned out.

A waiter offers Jack red-or-white and he passes on both.

AT THE BAR

Benny Landau reviews his speech on notecards; he's a little nervous, not used to being in the spotlight. His wife JANET (60, but she's had work) returns from the loo.

JANET LANDAU
You order my Collins?
(ugh; she'll do it herself;
he takes a deep breath)
How's your chest feel?

BENNY LANDAU
Like Hitchcock's standing on it.

Beyond them Robbie arrives, still in the suit he flew in, hence the only one here not in black tie. He can't sneak past Benny nearby so he doesn't try.

ROBBIE
Benny, sorry I'm late. Got stuck over at
Universal --

Benny stops him, in no mood for it.

BENNY LANDAU
Janet, you remember Robbie Riese, from
our talent department.

JANET LANDAU
Nice tux.

ON THE DAIS

FRANKLIN LENNOX
Tonight we honor Benjamin Landau,
president of the Harding-Harris Agency
and longtime supporter of the Weisenthal
Center. What can one say about Benny that
hasn't been said a thousand times before?
(MORE)

FRANKLIN LENNOX (CONT'D)

Except maybe: who knew Karl Malden had an ugly brother? Benny, I owe you my career, man. You made me. Found me in a strip club doing stand-up, put me on TV. Put me in movies. And now here I am making Karl Malden jokes about you. Uppity mother... Let me apologize.

(finds him in the audience)

Mr. Malden, that was outta line, I barely see a resemblance.

OVERLOOKING THE BANQUET ROOM

Eli stands, arms folded, elbows cupped, like at "Joker's Wild." He surveys the who's who crowd, a club into which he has yet to be invited. Robbie stops beside him. He and Eli came up together through the mailroom and he's the closest thing Eli has to a friend in the place.

ROBBIE

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hollywood be Thy name..."

(then)

Heard you had a big lunch today. Heard Dad's giving you keys to the Eldorado.

ELI

Just think: in sixty years this dinner could be for me.

ROBBIE

They're grooming you, you know that.

ELI

(isn't so sure)

Lisa get the flowers?

ROBBIE

(realizes)

Thank you. See you at the kids' table?

(Eli points: he's seated with the grey-hairs)

Like I said: grooming you.

BACK ON THE DAIS

FRANKLIN LENNOX

So we're here to honor Benny but we're also attending because of a common emotion: fear. I'm talkin' fear. They gonna honor Benny and you don't show up? Y'all can go back to selling waterbeds, like God intended.

WITH JACK AND CANDACE

As Saul wanders over.

SAUL

Any word? From your friend?

JACK

Saul, what're you doing bringing a date to this thing? Poor girl didn't even bring a book.

(under his breath)

Later. With Doug.

SAUL

He couldn't make it. His kid has the croup.

JACK

Then when he's better.

Jack shoos him away. Too late: Candace has overheard.

CANDACE

What was that about?

JACK

(Robbie's arrival saves him)

Look who it is! The man in the tan suit!

WITH ELI

Returning to his table, the youngest here by decades. The septuagenarian HOLLYWOOD WIFE beside him asks --

HOLLYWOOD WIFE

Tell me your name again?

-- when Benny summons him to his table. Eli excuses himself and goes. To be introduced to a network head? Congratulated on his lunch with Merv? No.

BENNY LANDAU

(hands him his glass)

This much gin, that much tonic.

He might as well be back in the mailroom. Phil clocks Eli's disappointment and stops him as he goes.

PHIL WAXMAN

That much gin, this much tonic.

AT THE "KIDS TABLE"

As Robbie pours himself a full glass of wine:

WAITER
Chicken or steak, sir.

ROBBIE
Neither.

He's going to drink his dinner. Jack notes his defeated air when a STUDIO EXEC drops by.

STUDIO EXEC
Jack, I caught George's film this week.
What he got outta those kids...

WITH BENNY

As entertainment lawyer ED HOOKSTRATTEN, 50, stops by.

ED HOOKSTRATTEN
Benny, bother you a sec?
(squats down beside him)
I don't want to spoil your good time but
I heard something today I thought you'd
want to know about. You know Herb Kress
over at City National?

AT THE BAR

Eli collects Benny's drink. Nearby stands an attractive YOUNG WOMAN, dressed to allure. On "the job"? Tough call.

WOMAN
Hi.

ELI
Here for the event?

WOMAN
Actually I'm crashing. Not too obvious,
is it? I heard there was an open bar
so... Don't tell anyone, okay?
(her secret's safe with him)
I'm Crystal, by the way.

ELI
Eli.

CRYSTAL
You on your own tonight, Eli? Need
company?

ELI

(she is a working girl, and a
fast-working one)

Alas, I have a drink to deliver. But do
me a favor: grab your next cocktail at
the lobby bar.

CRYSTAL

And you'll join me there?

No. A nice way of saying 'fuck off.'

ON THE DAIS

RABBI SCHULMAN gives the evening's invocation. Jack
decides this is a good time to slip out.

CANDACE

(whispering)

You can't go now.

JACK

I had knish for lunch.

Abbie watches Robbie drain his glass of wine.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - BEVERLY HILTON - CONTINUOUS

Jack's in a stall, though water doesn't pass and the
toilet doesn't flush. He emerges to tidy his nostril in a
mirror and wash his hands. Saul enters.

SAUL

So: you hear back from City Nat or not?

JACK

(exasperated; he can't get
rid of Saul)

A wise man once said, "There are only two
things that can ruin a man: wine, women
and financial catastrophe. And that's
just three, there are a lot more."

SAUL

They turned us down, didn't they?

JACK

400k LOC, with a 2-year moratorium.

SAUL

You're shitting me. For real?

Jack nods, lying. As Saul lets out a celebratory whoop --

INT. BALLROOM - BEVERLY HILTON - CONTINUOUS

Franklin Lennox is back on the dais.

FRANKLIN LENNOX

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a profound honor to present my friend, my mentor and an inspiration to us all, this year's Humanitarian of the Year: Benny Landau.

A standing ovation. A spotlight hits Benny, deeply upset by what Ed Hookstratten told him, but he covers it with a smile as he makes his way up to the dais.

On their feet: Phil notes something amiss about Benny --
-- while Eli observes Jack returning from the men's room with Saul in tow --

-- and Robbie spies Stanley Moss a table away. He has enough wine in him now that the street kid comes unleashed. He squeezes through the crowd to him.

ROBBIE

Stan! Thanks for the support with Uni!
You're a mensch!

STANLEY MOSS

(rolls his eyes)

We're an employment agency, Robbie. Our job is to employ our clients. If we don't, ICM will. And did.

From a distance: Robbie gets up in Stanley's face about it, and we can't hear his threat but can see Stanley's reaction to it. The ovation fades and everyone sits, leaving Robbie odd man out: standing, enraged, tuxless. He's drawing stares when Jack appears beside him to escort him back to their table.

JACK

C'mon.

BENNY LANDAU

There's an old Hopi Indian proverb:
"Those who tell stories rule the world."
What's it mean? I dunno, I'm Ashkenazi.

Off laughter --

EXT. BEVERLY HILTON - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Post-event, agents and execs mob the valet station, kiss-kissing goodbye. Stanley Moss drives away in his Beamer, furious, as Jack finds Robbie in the crowd.

JACK

You okay?

ROBBIE

(adrenaline subsiding, booze lingering)

I don't know how much longer I can go on like this.

JACK

You don't have to. We should talk.

Robbie's not on board yet. But he's close.

CANDACE

(their Mercedes is here)

Jack! We're holding everyone up!

Jack squeezes Robbie's shoulder, then dashes to his car.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

What was that about?

JACK

My darling wife, how would you like to be a very rich woman?

CANDACE

That's a funny way to ask for a divorce.

They drive off. Meanwhile, well-wishers congratulate Benny on his speech as he exits with his wife and Phil. Eli is there holding their limo door open for them.

BENNY LANDAU

Janet, I need a minute.

She gets in and Benny takes Phil aside. They confide in secret, Eli just out of earshot.

BENNY LANDAU (CONT'D)

Ed Hookstratten got a call today from City National. Apparently a VP there brought in a loan request from one of our people. Looking to start his own shop.

PHIL WAXMAN
 (outraged)
 Ed get a name?

BENNY LANDAU
 (no)
 Whoever it is said they had three or four
 other agents ready to jump ship.

They turn to the gaggle of agents. Could be any of them.
 Benny's eyes drift to Eli waiting dutifully by his car,
 an idea forming; he's the only one above suspicion.

Back at the valet stand: Robbie hands in his ticket.

ABBIE
 You okay to drive?

ROBBIE
 Sure. Just not well.

ABBIE
 (to the valet)
 He'll get his car in the morning.
 (to other agents)
 Who lives west of the 405?
 (no one; back to Robbie)
 Okay, Drinky, you're all mine.

From afar: Benny departs in his limo, leaving Phil and
 Eli behind. Phil asks Eli for a word and they enter --

INT. BEVERLY HILTON - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Phil has just explained Benny's marching orders.

ELI
 He thinks three or four?

PHIL WAXMAN
 All you have to do is find one. Benny and
 I'll handle it from there. Keep your ears
 open, tell us if you hear anything.

ELI
 (shocked by what he's heard)
 Of course.

PHIL WAXMAN
 And kid? Do yourself a favor and keep
 this to yourself.
 (Eli doesn't fully understand
 so Phil explains)
 No one likes a rat.

They bid each other farewell and go their separate ways.

MOVING WITH ELI

As he passes through the lobby, his mind turning.

He looks up to spot Crystal sitting at the lobby bar, her
hooked into a business traveller.

Her eyes rise to meet his and he simply nods good night.

He's not the type to live on the wild side.

Not yet anyway.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

A VIEW OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN, the little of it morning fog doesn't shroud, as WE HEAR A COUPLE FUCKING.

INT. ROBBIE'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Boilerplate beach pad: shag carpet, ropy plant hangers, driftwood on the walls. The folks having morning sex? It's Robbie and Abbie and it's not their first time; they've been surreptitiously fucking for weeks now. His clock radio alarm goes off and she pleads in rhythm:

ABBIE

Make. it. stop.

Robbie stretches to mute it, then turns back to find her face clenched, climaxing.

ROBBIE

Are you...?

ABBIE

No, I'm thinking of a deal point.

Robbie likes this girl; the sex is great and they can talk shop between bouts.

LATER

Abbie plucks up her outfit from last night strewn around the room while Robbie mixes Folgers, still in his boxers.

ABBIE

Should start bringing a change of clothes. Gotta stop for gas in this.

ROBBIE

You can borrow a shirt and shorts.

ABBIE

And return them to you at the office? No thanks --

(as he hands her a cup)

-- thanks.

ROBBIE

Anything on the docket today?

ABBIE

A tennis lesson at -- oops -- seven a.m..
Hadn't noticed that before. Get your
appendix out?

She indicates a scar on his abdomen.

ROBBIE

Almost. Kid in high school shivved me.

ABBIE

You're kidding.

(he's not)

Yeah, well, Bryn Mawr was like that too.
You get the guy back at least?

(Robbie just smiles: yes)

I should go. Want a ride? I can drop you
at your car.

ROBBIE

Lemme...

Robbie goes to dress. But before he throws on a shirt, he
looks at his scar again. And gets an idea. He knows what
he must do today. He buttons his Oxford with zeal.

INT. DEVOE RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - DAY

Candace readies their 5-YEAR OLD for school as a NANNY
feeds their INFANT. Jack enters, half-dressed/awake.

CANDACE

Look who's risen from the dead.

JACK

Morning, all. It's almost... Why didn't
you wake me?

CANDACE

(no dummy)

Why were you up until three? There's
coffee...

5-YEAR OLD

Why was Daddy up til late?

CANDACE

Cuz he was too excited to sleep.

(to Jack)

What time's your screening?

JACK

Ten. I'll have to hustle --

The PHONE rings and Jack picks up. Meanwhile, Candace explains the agency business to their child.

<p>JACK (CONT'D) Hello? -- Nat, good to hear from you -- no, thanks for trying me here -- uh-huh -- that's great news -- how much? (his face falls) -- cuz we were looking for -- yeah, I understand -- thanks, Nat. (hangs up, frowns) Shit.</p>	<p>CANDACE -- y'see, right now, if Daddy gets his client a slice of toast, he gets to keep <u>this</u> much toast for himself. But the people Daddy works for, they take <u>this</u> much toast, even though they didn't do anything to get the toast.</p>
--	---

CANDACE (CONT'D)
 What?

JACK
 I told a lie I gotta walk back.

CANDACE
 Thank God you've had practice.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS - ELI'S OFFICE - DAY

Eli makes a list on a pad: names of possible defectors. So far he's got a dozen, DeVoe and Resnick among them.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

He goes to his assistant (KYLE) and hands him the list.

ELI
 I want the expense reports of the agents on this list for the past three months. Go to Shelley on Mr. Landau's desk, she'll arrange it for you.

KYLE
 Why?

ELI
 What did I tell you about asking that question? I want you to flag any cost incurred outside Beverly Hills, the farther from the office the better --

KYLE
 (his phone RINGS)
 -- Eli Zeller's office --

ELI

-- also I want client lists for each of those names, and if you mention this to anyone you'll be out on your ass before the day's over --

KYLE

A Julie Grenfell to see you?
(Eli doesn't know the name)
She says you know her as "Crystal."

It takes Eli a moment to remember. Oh fuck.

ELI

She's here?

Across the bullpen, Robbie's on his way in, gas in his tank again. He raps on a below-the-line agent's door --

ROBBIE

Len, you got a run-down of what's shooting in town currently?

BELOW-THE-LINE AGENT

Like this month?

ROBBIE

Like today.

-- when Phil Waxman collars him.

PHIL WAXMAN

Robbie, got a minute?
(for Phil, always)
Moss spoke to me earlier, he said you two had words last night.

ROBBIE

Phil, I'll apologize to him, I was totally outta line.

PHIL WAXMAN

Stanley's fine, he's got thick skin. Obviously. It's you I'm worried about.

Just then Abbie passes by, nonchalant as can be.

ABBIE

Morning, Phil. Robbie.

PHIL WAXMAN

Abbie.

ROBBIE

Thanks again for the ride last night.
 (no one here suspects a
 thing; back to Phil)
 I'm fine. Yesterday was yesterday.

PHIL WAXMAN

Cuz I want you to know you're an
 important player here. And we value you.

Robbie's puzzled: something's up with Phil.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS LOBBY - DAY

In the light of day JULIE GRENFELL betrays no signs of
 her evening gig as "Crystal." She smiles as Eli emerges.

JULIE

Mr. Zeller. Nice to see you again.

ELI

"Julie." This is --

JULIE

-- unexpected, I can imagine. I won't
 take much of your time. Only a minute.

She holds up a watch to prove it. There's a lot of
 traffic here so Eli takes her aside.

ELI

How'd you find me?

JULIE

I called the main line and asked for Eli.
 Luckily there isn't more than one.

ELI

Why are you here?

JULIE

I'd like to apply for a job.

Is she kidding? No, she even brought a resume.

ELI

I thought you had a job.

JULIE

I want to intern here. I think I could be
 an excellent agent. You'll see I left off
 some recent work experience. But I
 suspect it'll prove valuable training for
 some aspects of this work.

ELI

Julie, I'm sorry: we only hire college graduates.

JULIE

(taps her c.v.)

B.A. in Sociology from Cal State.

She won't be gotten rid of easily. So Eli retreats.

ELI

I will pass this along to the responsible parties.

JULIE

Thank you, Mr. Zeller.

(off her watch)

See? Less than a minute. May I call you in a few days to follow up?

ELI

We'll call you.

JULIE

You have my number.

Pure trouble. She goes, passing Benny on his way in.

BENNY LANDAU

That a client?

ELI

Job applicant.

BENNY LANDAU

(admires her form)

Phil spoke to you, I assume, about what we learned last night. You're game for sniffing around?

ELI

I've already started.

BENNY LANDAU

Good. Merv called, told me your big idea. Thought I told you "to listen."

(Eli grins, anticipating a pat on the head)

Next time you run an idea like that by a client, you run it by me first. Merv's still my client.

Off Eli, not accustomed to being reprimanded --

EXT. PARAMOUNT WATER TANK - DAY

A night scene is shooting: the flashback in "Ordinary People" where Tim Hutton and his brother cling to their capsized sailboat.

Robbie steals onto set. It's controlled chaos as wind fans and rain machines and water-churners work overtime. Then, with a single word, it all comes to a halt.

BOB REDFORD

Cut!

BOB REDFORD, 44 and still in his movie-star prime, stands at a monitor, sleeveless puffy jacket over wool sweater. He pulls his earphones off his golden locks.

BOB REDFORD (CONT'D)

Let's re-set! Tim, 10-100 if you need to, this'll be a minute.

Robbie likes it here; he can still be swept up in the romance of movie-making. Redford, conferring with his DP, notices the man in the Armani suit hovering nearby.

BOB REDFORD (CONT'D)

My guess is you're not a grip.

ROBBIE

I know the difference between a c-stand and a butterfly frame but no. Robbie Riese, Harding-Harris, Mr. Redford.

BOB REDFORD

(an agent on set, that's all he needs)

Who are you visiting, Mr. Riese?

ROBBIE

You.

EXT. MGM STUDIOS - DAY

Leo still roars over Culver City but not like he used to.

Jack parks. Still groggy, he searches for a pick-me-up, first in his pockets, then in the glove compartment, then under his seat. Bingo: a vial of coke. Before he can get back to even though, a hand raps his window. It belongs to CLAIRE TOWNSEND, UA VP of development, already world-weary at 30, smoking a Newport 100 like it's a lifeline.

CLAIRE TOWNSEND

Little early in the day, isn't it? Who am I kidding, if Albeck wasn't here I'd hop in and join you.

JACK

Like old times. Don't think I'm blowing smoke, Claire, when I say: you look --

CLAIRE TOWNSEND

-- like hell? No one to blame but yourself. And your client.

They start toward the lot.

JACK

Know what I love about this lot? Munchkins shat here. Everyone get in okay?

CLAIRE TOWNSEND

First thing this morning. Eager to see what your golden boy's done with their thirty-five million dollars. You haven't seen any of this, right?

JACK

Not a frame.
(off her smoke)
I thought you quit those.

CLAIRE TOWNSEND

I did. And will again. Know what they say: "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Except for cancer: that shit'll kill you."

EXT. MGM STUDIOS - ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Outside a screening room a TRIO OF BUSINESSMEN is being held at bay by a uniformed SECURITY GUARD. They are ANDY ALBECK, 60, president of UA, plus STEVEN BACH and GENE GOODMAN, 30s, heads of production and distribution. They're all New Yorkers, more accustomed to boardrooms than backlots, and all more than a little pissed-off.

ANDY ALBECK

Young man, I am the president of United Artists and I demand to be allowed in.

SECURITY GUARD

I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Cimino's orders. No one is allowed without his permission.

STEVEN BACH

You don't understand. We rented this screening room. We pay your salary.

CLAIRE TOWNSEND

(approaching, with Jack)

What's going on?

GENE GOODMAN

Fucking Michael. Now he's locked us out of our own goddamn screening room.

STEVEN BACH

Jack, you wanna find out what the hell?

JACK

(to Guard)

Please tell Mr. Cimino Jack DeVoe is here. I'm his agent.

(playing politician)

I apologize, gentlemen. How was your flight in?

ANDY ALBECK

(won't be placated)

Jack, I know we've said it a dozen times already but this is the last straw.

JACK

I'm sure it's only a miscommunication, Andy, let me talk to him.

ANDY ALBECK

Was running three-hundred percent overbudget a miscommunication? Was going eighty-seven days over? Every time, Jack, you say that's the last time, that he's come to his senses. Why do I have the feeling that hasn't happened yet?

SECURITY GUARD

Mr. DeVoe? Mr. Cimino said to come in. But just you.

JACK

(fuck)

I'll be right back.

Jack ducks inside --

INT. SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- where MICHAEL CIMINO, 41, berates his EDITING STAFF. Cimino has the manic energy of the overworked/underslept.

Diminutive at 5'5" (which might explain his Napoleonic tendencies), he's also paranoid.

MICHAEL CIMINO

-- play both channels, they gotta hear the ambience of the, the horse hooves and the sheets in the -- Jack, Jesus, there you are, where --

JACK

-- Michael, what the hell? You put an armed guard outside the screening room?!

MICHAEL CIMINO

I had to! There are spies trying to get in, I swear to God! Lookie-loos from the trades, Joey chased one off yesterday --

JACK

-- fine but you're keeping the president of the studio and the rest of the brass waiting with their dicks in hand. You gotta let them in, now.

MICHAEL CIMINO

I will, I just... Can I ask one question first? Do I have to show it to them?

JACK

Michael, they paid for it, it's their property, you've stalled long enough --

MICHAEL CIMINO

-- cuz it's not totally done yet --

JACK

-- the time for this has passed. I'm going to escort them in now and when they enter, I want you to be the cordial, grateful, accommodating motherfucker I know you know how to be.

EXT. SCREENING ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Jack pops his head out, grin on display.

JACK

Sorry about the delay.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack leads in Albeck, Goodman, Bach and Townsend. Cimino turns on the charm as soon as they appear.

MICHAEL CIMINO

Fellas: apologies, you don't know what we've been dealing with, the security risks, I don't want anyone getting a glimpse of this thing before you.

(the suits aren't fools;
Cimino dotes on Albeck)

Please. This is still a work-in-progress. The sound's rough, it's a work print and still a little long. On "Deer Hunter" they wanted me to cut an hour out but look what happened there, Oscars galore. Anyway the final version will probably be about fifteen minutes shorter.

ANDY ALBECK

Michael. What's the running time now?

MICHAEL CIMINO

Five hours.

(the execs trade looks: did
he say "five"?)

Alright, here it is, the moment you've been waiting for. And waiting for. I gotta get back to editing so, y'know, enjoy and we can discuss it after.

Cimino exits. As they wait for the film to start:

GENE GOODMAN

Jesus. I have a lunch.

STEVEN BACH

Not anymore. Are we really going to --

ANDY ALBECK

Let's just...see what he has.

Albeck glares at Jack. As the lights dim and the projector begins, Claire leans over to Jack and whispers:

CLAIRE TOWNSEND

Relax. If this isn't the greatest movie ever made, everyone in this room is out of a job.

The title comes up, in big letters: "HEAVEN'S GATE."

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. BENNY LANDAU'S OFFICE - HARDING HARRIS - DAY

Robbie's in the hot seat, summoned to the woodshed.
Benny, behind his desk, lets Stanley Moss play bad cop.

BENNY LANDAU

We just got a call from Freddie Fields.
He was, to coin a phrase, fucking livid.
Says you snuck onto Redford's set this
morning and pitched him. That true?

ROBBIE

Yep.

STANLEY MOSS

What the fuck were you doing, Riese? He's
Robert-fucking-Redford!

BENNY LANDAU

Robbie, there's a tradition in this
business that if someone's unhappy with
their representation, nobody gets bent
out of shape if we talk to them. But we
don't go around poaching other agencies'
clients unless we want to stir shit.

Which was precisely Robbie's intent.

ROBBIE

There a rule says you don't get other
agencies' clients fired? Cuz that's what
happened yesterday. And one thing I
learned growing up is: someone hits you
and you don't hit back? Then they're
gonna keep on hitting you.

STANLEY MOSS

That's what this is? Payback for what
Mengers did?

ROBBIE

(absolutely)

Once a week I'm gonna cold-call an ICM
client until one bites. So expect a lot
of angry phone calls from Freddie Fields.

Benny and Moss exchange a look.

STANLEY MOSS

Not while you're working here you won't.

Robbie decides: then he won't be for much longer.

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - HARDING-HARRIS - DAY

Eli peruses Julie's resume; intrigued as he may be, he can't entertain hiring a call-girl. Kyle enters.

KYLE

Client lists and expense accounts.

Eli removes the latter from an envelope and reviews each item Kyle has flagged. Off what he sees, he whittles his list of suspects down to half-a-dozen. The empty envelope in his hand gives him an idea.

INT. HARDING-HARRIS - DAY

Suspect #1. A LIT AGENT is rolling calls when Eli taps his door, envelope in hand. The Lit Agent cups his phone.

ELI

Sorry. Dodger seats just dropped in my lap I can't use. Any chance you want 'em?

LIT AGENT

Thanks but I got a dinner.

ELI

(lingering)

Off chance you know anyone over at City National? Need to remortgage, curious if anyone has a guy.

LIT AGENT

(losing patience)

No, Eli. I don't.

IN MONTAGE: Eli tries the same gambit on other agents: baits them with Dodger tickets, then blindsides them with the "City National." No one balks at the name.

He enters one office to find an AGENT giving head to his buxom ASSISTANT. She and Eli trade looks, then he puts a finger to his lips and tiptoes out, her boss none the wiser. As he shuts the door behind him, a JUNIOR AGENT approaches, having overheard Eli's offer.

JUNIOR AGENT

Hey, I got nothing tonight, can I take those tickets?

(Eli hands him the envelope;
Junior Agent looks inside)

There's nothing in here.

Later: Saul is leaving a meeting when Eli stops him.

SAUL

Eli. What's wrong? "Price Is Right" get canceled?

ELI

Weird thing just happened. Got a call from City National Bank but it was a wrong number. Maybe the switchboard screwed up, I dunno. You didn't expect a call from them, did you?

SAUL

(easily flustered)

No, I -- Why would I? I don't know what you're talking about.

Eli watches him go: a prime suspect at last.

INT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - HARDING HARRIS - DAY

Back from MGM, Jack heads into the elevator. He holds the door for another DIRECTOR'S AGENT, returning from lunch.

AGENT

Thanks. Say, you were supposed to see the Cimino today, weren't you? How'd it go?

One thing Jack knows how to do is lie.

JACK

Phenomenal. Better than The Deer Hunter, I think.

DIRECTOR'S AGENT

(knows this game)

Must be a relief. After all the mishigas. That it was all worth it.

Off Jack's false smile --

JACK (PRE-LAP)

You motherfucking shithead!

INT. JACK DEVOE'S OFFICE - HARDING HARRIS - DAY

Off his "Grand Illusion" poster --

JACK

Next time you say you're going to be there at the end of the screening, be there! Cuz it looks like you're hiding, which is what you're doing!

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Yes, they're pissed! You delivered a five-hour, beautifully-photographed inert turd, why do you think? No, they're not going to fire you, not yet. Want to save your job, be in Albeck's office tomorrow at nine a.m.. Yes, you have to be there, Michael. Get some rest.

(hangs up; then:)

Fucking child!

(he looks up)

Shit. How much of that did you hear?

Robbie's in his doorway. He shrugs: not that much.

ROBBIE

I'm in.

JACK

(thrown)

You mean it?

(Robbie nods; Jack thinks)

You got anything tonight? I'd like to round up the troops, get started on this.

ROBBIE

Nothing that can't be moved.

JACK

Good. Thanks, Robbie.

A shared smile -- they're partners now -- and Robbie goes. Jack takes a deep inhale: he needed this win more than he wants to let on.

INT. BULLPEN - HARDING-HARRIS - LATER

While agents pack up for the night, assistants remain chained to their desks. As Phil Waxman heads out, he bids goodnight to everyone by name.

INT. ABBIE'S OFFICE - BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

Abbie's reviewing her call-sheet when her mind wanders, a (professional?) dilemma preoccupying her. Her phone rings once. Twice. A third time.

ABBIE

That's three rings!

(shit; her assistant must be in the loo; she picks up)

Abbie Jinks.

(her voice softens)

Hello, stranger.

She extends the cord to peer out her door. Across the bullpen she can see Robbie in his office peering back.

ROBBIE (OVER PHONE)

Hey. Listen, I have to cancel tonight, something came up. I'll ring you after maybe, see if you're still up.

ABBIE

Actually I was about to call you. Let's just plan another time, okay?

They agree with a smile before hanging up. Abbie returns inside, makes a decision and dials the phone.

ABBIE (CONT'D)

Hi.

INT. LOBBY - HARDING-HARRIS - DAY

Robbie knocks off for the day. He runs into Eli, waiting for the elevator, hands full of papers.

ROBBIE

Mr. Show Business. You're leaving early. Lotta homework?

Eli instinctively shields the client lists and expense reports from view. Which Robbie clocks.

ELI

I'll tell you about it someday.

ROBBIE

Super secret stuff, huh.

ELI

(no one's in earshot so he lowers his voice)

Can I ask you a question: has anyone --

DING! The elevator opens. Someone's already on board so Eli shuts up. They board.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Robbie makes small talk while they have company.

ROBBIE

Fun plans tonight? Besides...

He nods to Eli's "secret homework."

ELI
Dinner with a Viacom VP. You?

ROBBIE
(a fumbled pause)
Nothing. Just going home.

A talent Eli has: knowing when someone's lying. DING!

INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

They exit and once their fellow passenger is gone:

ROBBIE
What were you gonna ask me?
(Eli thinks better of it,
waves it off)
Sure?
(Eli is)
Enjoy Viacom.

Robbie heads to his car and Eli watches; he never had Robbie on his list but he does now.

EXT. BEVERLY GLEN - DUSK

Robbie drives north. He changes radio stations to music to clear his mind.

Eli tails him a few cars behind, news on his radio.

INT. JACK DEVOE'S HOUSE - DUSK

Jack hands a drink to Doug, here early.

JACK
Before anyone else gets here...I need to confide something in you.
(Doug nods: lay it on me)
I saw "Heaven's Gate" today.

DOUG
That bad?

JACK
It could actually bring down the studio.

DOUG
C'mon...
(Jack means it)
One less buyer in the world.

JACK

I think we should move up the time table
on our thing. Get out ahead of the blast.

Doug sits with this a moment. This business never fails
to surprise him.

DOUG

You gonna tell the others?

JACK

Of course. Maybe not first thing when
they walk in the door...

EXT. BEL AIR GATES - DUSK

Robbie enters the neighborhood, followed by Eli.

EXT. JACK DEVOE'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Saul is getting out of his car as Robbie arrives. They
shake -- welcome aboard -- and go in together.

Eli watches through his windshield, a distance back.

INT. JACK DEVOE'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Jack welcomes in Saul and Robbie.

JACK

You fellas find the place alright?

SAUL

Who could miss it? Christ, Jack, my
apartment could fit in this foyer.

JACK

My father bought it from George O'Brien
in the '40s when his life went to shit --
O'Brien's, not Dad's. Then Dad sold it to
me when he moved to Connecticut.

ROBBIE

You grew up here?

SAUL

Where's the fam?

JACK

Wife took the kids to a movie. "The
Shining."

(leads them to a LIVING ROOM
where Doug awaits)

Can I get everyone a drink?

SAUL

Whatever Doug's having. But hold the
grenadine.

ROBBIE

I'm okay.

DOUG

So this is it, huh? The four of us?

JACK

Actually we have one more coming.

Jack leaves everyone in suspense as he goes. Robbie takes
in a photo on the fireplace mantel: Jack's father, the
famous director F.W. DEVOE, clutching two Oscars.

EXT. JACK DEVOE'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Eli leafs through Ettinger's client list when a VW parks.
He's surprised by who it is: she wasn't on his list.

INT. JACK DEVOE'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The front door opens to reveal Abbie Jinks.

JACK

Miss Jinks.

ABBIE

Nice digs, Jack. House come with its own
zip code?

He leads her inside where the others have gathered.
Everyone's a little surprised it's her, none moreso than
Robbie. Now they know why they canceled on each other.

ABBIE (CONT'D)

(both salutation and
observation)

Men.

LATER

Jack sits down to commence the inaugural meeting.

JACK

I've talked to you each already about
what's wrong with our current agency.
What we haven't discussed is what's going
to be different about our new one.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Historically talent agencies have been subservient to studios: we've needed them more than they've needed us so we've been afraid to get on their bad side. Like what happened with Robbie this week. What I'm proposing is not simply another agency but a fundamental power shift.

(then)

How many of you have seen "The Battle of Algiers"?

SAUL

That's a movie?

JACK

(drops his head)

My god, I'm going into business with philistines.

DOUG

Once. In college. I was stoned.

JACK

The best film ever made about starting a revolution. Put it on your watch list. Cuz that's what we're about to do.

ABBIE

Will there be pipe bombs? I vote yes.

JACK

In the very near future I anticipate a significant growth in our industry, thanks to this little baby here.

(holds up a videocassette)

The business is going to expand and it will be a seller's market. The studios are going to need the agencies more than vice-versa and the power is going to shift from them...to us...to the client. We're going to put the artist in charge of the business finally instead of the other way around. Lady and gentlemen, I present to you for the very first time...The Artists Agency.

He holds up a logo he's had sketched. It's not bad. Off his four-person audience taking it in, impressed --

EXT. JACK DEVOE'S MANSION - NIGHT

It's dark now and Eli figures no one else is due. So he gets out of his car and heads toward Jack's.

INT. JACK DEVOE'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

A little later in the meeting.

JACK

-- when you're represented by us, you're represented by all of us, and not just at the signing meeting. As such, company profits will be split evenly between the five partners. Equal shares.

ROBBIE

How long do you anticipate? To put this altogether?

Jack and Doug trade a look.

JACK

I thought six months initially. To draw up a business plan, find office space, shore up our client lists. But I'd like to do it in three. Announce ourselves before Christmas and be up and running when everyone's annual coffers are full.

EXT. JACK DEVOE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Eli checks to see no one's watching, then slips into Jack's yard and peers through a window.

INT. JACK DEVOE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ABBIE

You think we're enough? Just us five?

JACK

For now. The more people we invite, the likelier we are to have a leak. If Benny discovers what we're planning --

ROBBIE

-- he knows.

(off Jack's look)

He knows already. At least, Phil does. Not who we are but that something's up. And if Phil knows, Benny does.

DOUG

Why do you think?

ROBBIE

The way he spoke to me today. He was sniffing around.

And suddenly Robbie remembers Eli's unfinished question from earlier and his "secret homework."

DOUG

Maybe...

JACK

...what?

DOUG

We could recruit him. Phil. I know it's a long shot but...

SAUL

Phil leave Benny?

Never. A KNOCK at the door.

ABBIE

It's them. Everyone hide.

JACK

I ordered pizzas.

(as he goes to answer)

But we should be on guard, prepared to play it cool if confronted by anyone.

DOUG

(indicating Saul)

Especially...

SAUL

What?!

Jack opens his door. Eli's standing there. The way the door opens, it blocks Eli's view of everyone else.

JACK

Eli. This is a surprise.

Doug, Saul, Robbie and Abbie trade looks. Fuuuuuuck.

ELI

Sorry to stop by unannounced.

JACK

I'll admit it's a little unexpected.
Halloween's a couple months off still.

ELI

I followed Robbie.

JACK
(stonewalls that)
Well, we're in the middle of something
right now so if you don't mind...

Robbie appears from behind the door.

ROBBIE
Hey, Eli.

Jack's not sure what to do now. So Robbie takes a chance.

ROBBIE (CONT'D)
Wanna come in?

Jack's mortified but realizes: this is probably the only
way forward. He opens the door wider for Eli.

JACK
Sure. Why the hell not.

Eli steps inside and into view of Doug, Saul and Abbie.
Everyone nods hello. As Eli turns back to Jack and
Robbie, our three protagonists standing in each other's
presence for the first time --

ELI
So...what're you guys talking about?

END OF PILOT