

# **BLEACHED**

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*We are all of us one sky...*

**BLUE SKY, WHITE CLOUDS**

...the sky rapidly gets brighter, whiter as we hear...

Contents being SHUFFLED about. Restless FOOTSTEPS.

Frantic PACKING. FABRIC on FABRIC. Followed by a ZIPPER.

And finally... the CLICK, CLICK of latches as we--

FADE IN, FROM WHITE:

INT. UPSIDE RECOVERY CENTER / HALLWAY -- DAY

An endless white hallway fades into a sterilized horizon; symmetrical rows of doors with silver locks flank a buffed, white tiled floor.

But one door is open... two suitcases wait outside.

Then a third suitcase SLIDES into the hallway--its owner off screen, still in the room.

WALT (O.S.)

The Romans used to call Yemen,  
*Arabia Felix*. Means "Happy  
Arabia".

BURNHAM (O.S.)

What's that, the Middle East?

WALT (O.S.)

And that's the Romans... They lived  
in an age of decadence and to them  
happiness was someplace else.

EXT. UPSIDE RECOVERY CENTER -- DAY

STAFFERS with eerie smiles as bleached and void-of-warmth as their white uniforms and plastic name tags, wave goodbye to

Renowned game show host, WALT ERKINS (mid 40s), cell phone to his ear as he descends the stairs.

STAFFER

Congratulations again, Walt!

Walt spins around and mouths, *I'm on the phone*.

Walt has a healthy skin tone and weight of somebody newly sober--paired with the fidgety anxiety of a restless child.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. AGENCY / BURNHAM'S OFFICE -- DAY

BURNHAM (40s), his expensive suit flatters an average build and his agent-speak flatters his insecure client, Walt.

Burnham cradles the phone between his neck and shoulder while unravelling a green yoga mat on the floor, but one end keeps curling up.

BURNHAM

The truth is hard for some. But not you.

WALT

I'm walking out the same gates I entered two months ago. This journey feels like a big U-turn, like I walked through a mirage.

BURNHAM

You're a hero now. Show some heart.

WALT

A hero to whom? And all I've done is pour my heart out.

Walt paces the sidewalk. A STAFFER appears at the top of the stairs with his luggage, she descends precariously.

WALT

(shields his eyes)  
God, it's bright out here. Did you find that address yet?

BURNHAM

It's in the Middle East, can't be that hard. You need to be thinking about your presentation. You have less than an hour to get to the hotel.

WALT

I told you days ago--

BURNHAM

Walt, it's the biggest turn out ever for this event, in all its ten years. You're proposing Friday. Maybe your top priority shouldn't be to mail a letter to Nigeria.

WALT

*Yemen.*

BURNHAM

Did you rehearse enough?

More newly-sober PEOPLE descend the stairs. They shake hands, exchange hugs and pledges of continued support.

Walt plugs his free ear and crosses the street.

WALT

You only rehearse if you're faking something. Never ask me that.

Burnham fumbles with the yoga mat, ironing out each rebelling corner with his palm. A framed poster behind him reads:

*Have you found your spine?*

*P.S. It's not the thing you're sitting on.*

Accompanied with a diagram of a spine that resembles a serpent winding up a man's back.

BURNHAM

Listen, a car is coming for you with a gentlemen inside who'll be profiling you, okay? A puff piece.

WALT

(not listening)

Hm-mm.

BURNHAM

And he knows not to ask about the breakdown. Mention it, nothing.

A BLACK TOWN CAR approaches from around the corner. Walt hurries to meet it. The staffer with his baggage catches up.

WALT

Hallie's pulling up. And she even remembered tinted windows. You'd think she saw the ring already.

BURNHAM

Hallie? I said it was--

WALT

(sincere)

How do I look?

BURNHAM

You--

Walt absently hangs up, just as the staffers were old news, now a shinier object demands his attention.

Walt tucks in his already tucked in dress shirt.

WALT

(re: luggage)

The trunk is fine.

STAFFER

I need to give--

WALT

Thanks, but I don't need the diploma or certificate-thing.

The staffer CLOSES the trunk and hands Walt a SEALED INTERNATIONAL ENVELOPE.

STAFFER

This can't get to Yemen without you.

WALT

(stunned, beat)

Thanks. A little something in my room for everyone--dinner's on me.

Staffer smiles, then turns and rolls her eyes.

Walt waves at the car's tinted windows, opens the rear door and--

INT. LINCOLN TOWN CAR -- CONTINUOUS

CARTER SINCLAIR (20s) grins, extends his hand. Carter's argyle sweater and fitted slacks convey an image of contrived sophistication.

Carter also possesses the uncanny ability of transcribing notes without having to look down at his notepad.

CARTER

A simultaneous and equally deserving welcome and congratul--

WALT

Whoa, I apologize, wrong car--

CARTER  
Your agent set this up. He was--

WALT  
Right. The fluffer? I guess the  
puff piece starts here.

CARTER  
(clears throat)  
I'm merely here to observe and  
gather insights for your comeback  
profile.

Walt is about to get in--but recoils.

WALT  
Comeback? Who's calling it that?

CARTER  
*Mea culpa*, they're calling it a  
profile. I inserted 'comeback' for  
dramatic flair.

Walt finally gets in, they shake hands.

Carter jots notes while maintaining the conversation with  
alarming proficiency.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
Carter Sinclair. Think of me as  
the well-dressed fly on the wall.

Walt, a bit frazzled, collects himself and sees they're not  
moving. He notices the DRIVER whose hands are ten-and-two on  
the wheel, ready for take off.

Somehow, Carter already has half a page worth of observations  
and insights.

WALT  
(re: the driver)  
Who is he...?

CARTER  
Ours. And paid for.

Walt reaches for his seat belt. Carter watches Walt do this,  
and as soon as it CLICKS SECURELY--

CARTER  
(to driver)  
On to the hotel, sir.  
(to Walt)  
(MORE)

CARTER (CONT'D)  
 And if you need to rehearse,  
 please. I'm not even here.

CUT TO BLACK:

**TITLE:** "BLEACHED"

EXT. THEATER / BACK ALLEY -- DAY

NAD  
 I have never been more sure of  
 myself!

NAD JARVIS, a lithe looking mid-fifties television  
 personality, plays host to a gaggle of REPORTERS.

Nad takes a deep drag off a cigarette and exhales in the  
 reporter's faces. Their only discernible reaction is an  
 involuntary twitch of a random nose.

REPORTER #1  
 What do you say to those who  
 describe your career as dead in the  
 water?

NAD  
 Dump a body in a lake and it'll  
 come bubbling back up.

REPORTER #2  
 You've been slogging for--

NAD  
 I was dumped in a very deep lake.

Nad exhales again--a red-tipped nose in back twitches.

NAD (CONT'D)  
 By the way, I'll be a featured  
 speaker at this week's--

REPORTER #3  
 Can you tell us what's on tap for  
 Friday's show?

NAD  
 (irritated)  
*Reality Optional* host Walt Erkins  
 is joining me, fresh from rehab.  
 And with a very big surprise.

REPORTER #1

Is it true your ex-wife will also be a guest?

NAD

Per the legal system, she's not my ex yet. Clarification for the--

REPORTER #2

Is Walt actually clean? Will he reveal what led to his breakdown?

Nad exhales a final breath in three rapid bursts, directing an all-engrossing plume of smoke at the questioners-- twitching a few beaks to his delight.

NAD

Unfortunately I have to return to my duties inside--

Reporters holster their notepads, start dispersing.

NAD (CONT'D)

Although there is something...

They light up, pens and eyebrows raise in anticipation.

NAD (CONT'D)

I will be a featured speaker at this week's F.P.O.A. convention...

But by the end of his sentence, Nad is speaking to himself.

INT. THEATER / BACK ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Nad steps inside, sets the cigarette pack on a tiny shelf by the door. Scribbled on the wall above it: *In Case of Press* with an arrow pointing down to the shelf.

Nad grabs a felt tip pen and amends the note to: *REQUIRED In Case of Press.*

He checks his watch--with its wide band and large head, it's an unmistakable signature piece of his, a *Nautic* watch. He adjusts it, as if it irritates him.

NAD

(to his watch)

Can't you lie to me just this once?

A PRODUCER with a head-set and clipboard makes a beeline for him. They make haste down the hallway.

PRODUCER  
Third truckload of flowers just  
arrived.

NAD  
Which color?

PRODUCER  
White.

NAD  
Which white?

PRODUCER  
Off-white. Off-white, sorry.

NAD  
Did you get a hold of Dally yet?

PRODUCER  
Not yet, sir.

NAD  
If we can't book my own wife for  
Friday, we'll be an even bigger  
joke than what's being said--

They round a corner and are greeted by a well-oiled crew  
constructing a fantasy wedding set on a sound stage.

NAD  
Now this is love.

Nad is entranced, losing himself in the myriad wedding  
decorations; white wreaths, pearl balloon bunches, bouquets  
of all sizes, etc.

Nad unfolds a photograph from his pocket, an image of a  
wedding, its likeness being replicated by his crew.

PRODUCER  
Enough to melt your heart, sir.

NAD  
At least the sheet of ice over it.

Nad winks at the producer, then steps over, around and  
underneath the decorations, verifying their placement against  
his photo, and does so with grace... a ballet of sorts.

Then stops to conduct the hanging of a giant wreath:

NAD  
Up, up, up. Higher, higher. Stop.

And disappears offstage.

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- DAY

Nad stands at his window overlooking downtown Los Angeles.

TOBIN (30s) enters. Tobin's gut extends beyond his comfort zone--until he loosens up a belt notch or two.

Tobin looks concerned, but tries a positive spin:

TOBIN

The set is looking outstanding.  
Walt is gonna flip.

NAD

Do you find it ironic that the  
dictionary can define happiness,  
but it can't tell how you to get  
it?

TOBIN

You didn't actually look in there  
for that, did you?

NAD

Who cares if it's a noun.

Tobin looks over at Nad's computer... on screen is a blog  
entitled: *A Lesbian Life In Yemen.*

Nad is still staring at the passing traffic.

NAD

Dally left me because she got this  
notion that I'm boring, out of  
adventures. Her words.

TOBIN

But you've done the same thing  
every day for the last thirty  
years. You haven't changed. So  
that leaves her.

NAD

I told her that.

TOBIN

She's a bitch with a book. You're  
on TV, dummy. What'd those  
reporters say?

NAD

Lots... but I'm the last person  
they want to know anything about.

TOBIN

You just need to do something news  
worthy again.

NAD

Walt gets back into the press by  
overdosing and coming out of rehab.  
And they call that heroic?

(beat)

You know I walked down the street  
the other day and not one young  
person recognized me.

TOBIN

They have to know who you are  
first.

(re: Nad's reaction)

But you still have an audience.

NAD

Had. Now I feel like I'm just a  
vessel for trivia to pass through.  
I'm like an automatic door at the  
super-market.

TOBIN

Reliable. Useful.

NAD

Automated, predictable... Maybe  
that's why I haven't done my own  
shopping since Dally left... *shit!*

Nad clutches his watch like it bit him... or was it a pain  
down his left arm?

Tobin looks worried as Nad adjusts his watch to a looser  
setting.

TOBIN

You're a TV host, Nad. All you're  
responsible for is what the camera  
sees. Smile up.

Nad smirks... blossoms into a full, reassuring grin.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- DAY

Carter points to a passing billboard:

Walt's face (but not his smile) is partially obscured by the new airtime for what's touted as "THE BEST GAMESHOW. PERIOD."

CARTER

That is a powerful smile. Not many could pull one off like that.

Walt says nothing, watches it pass with a sigh.

Carter SNEEZES into his sleeve. Again Walt says nothing, but lowers his window for a moment, then raises it.

Carter looks annoyed. His eager-to-please front now dented.

CARTER

Your show is--

WALT

I thought you were going to be a fly on the wall.

CARTER

Even flies make a buzzing noise.

Walt starts scratching his knuckles instinctively, the comfort tic when you're too old to suck your thumb.

A low flying JETLINER gets Walt's attention.

CARTER

(clears throat)

Your show is lauded as innovative in eschewing the standard five day format of other game shows in exchange for one two-hour live show per week...

Walt DIALS his cell. Carter sees this as competition and speaks faster:

CARTER (CONT'D)

...Your new season is airing on Mondays, instead of Tuesdays which you've had your whole career. Is such a radical change a sign of fading popularity and if so, would it be fair to say the dwindling audience is due in part to a waning genre of which you are the figurehead of?

WALT

The only day of the week I care  
about is Saturday.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. AGENCY / BURNHAM'S OFFICE -- DAY

Burnham is seated at his desk, readjusting an ice pack on his lower back while TYPING furiously... reaches for his phone.

An eager young ASSISTANT is on his knees picking up shredded pieces of the green yoga mat from earlier.

BURNHAM [INTO PHONE]

How's my favorite--?

WALT

I've been out of rehab for twenty-two minutes and still no call from *Courtland Skies* congratulating me. How would it look if I suddenly lost this endorsement deal?

A car full of LAUGHING, HAPPY-SEEMING PEOPLE drives alongside Walt. He stares a moment, then looks away, plugs his ear.

Carter JOTS something down.

BURNHAM

They've been sponsoring you your entire career, Walt--you're gold. Although, I have been receiving a ton of interest from lots of exciting new companies--

WALT

I don't want other endorsement deals. Nad Jarvis has *Nautic Watches* sponsoring him.

BURNHAM

*Nautic* is not what they used to be--

WALT

*Courtland Skies* is an association I will not give up. It's defined me for as long as I, and most, can remember.

BURNHAM

Smile up, stay focused. Hard part's over. You at the Hyatt yet?

Walt watches the JETLINER fly out of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / LOBBY -- DAY

Beyond lavish, beyond ostentatious... Where cash drips off the decor and delusions wax the floor.

As enormous banners trumpet the event:

*WELCOME FUTURE PERSONALITIES OF AMERICA!!  
Tenth Annual F.P.O.A. Convention*

PUZZLED PEOPLE masquerading as said "Future Personalities" flash their lanyards to a SECURITY GUARD at a ballroom door.

VAL (40s) sprightly, aura of a weather girl, awaits entry...

VAL

Am I too late for Walt Erkins?

SECURITY

It's a packed house, you might get lucky.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / BALLROOM -- DAY

The EAGER EYES and STRETCHED SMILES of hundreds of aspiring male and female personalities soaking in Walt's sermon.

In the very back row, Val stares with rapt attention.

WALT

Plastic is the most malleable, sustainable substance on earth. But, perhaps most remarkable is that plastic will outlive us all. That's right. We--you and I--are mere shooting stars in the sky of this plastic universe. So, let's learn what we can. Because like all stars, we began dying the day we were born.

Walt paces the stage contemplatively; this is his domain.

Behind him reads: *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PLASTIC: Or How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Start Resonating*

WALT (CONT'D)

F. Scott Fitzgerald famously declared, "there are no second acts in American lives." To which I say: Sure, F, but some of us are sailing right along on our first, resonating with every minute of it.

Walt brings up a slide on the Big Brother-like screen above.

SLIDE: A water bottle bobbing along the vast ocean blue.

WALT (CONT'D)

This plastic bottle is estimated to have been thrown away some thirty years ago. Still here... Still intact... That's called tenacity.

Val opens a Moleskine, transcribes diligently. Carter, also in back, looks on with doubt.

SLIDE: A baby seal caught in the plastic rings of a six-pack.

WALT (CONT'D)

Small, weak animals stuck in plastic. Sad? Frequently. But this illustrates just how brutal the competition is. Whether you want to use your personality to become the next Fortune 500 CEO, a television host, or simply a more vital person--remember plastic.

(beat)

Why? It rose to prominence in the 50s and every piece of plastic that ever was here, still *is* here. Sure plastic can change, adapt... but its soul remains intact.

Walt's eyes scan the back row... falls on Val's section.

WALT (CONT'D)

Many of you know I just completed rehab treatment, but my personality remains unscathed. And so does my relationship with premium brands like *Courtland Skies*.

(beat)

Change without compromise.

Val's face flushes. Walt pretends to hear something offstage.

WALT (CONT'D)

What's that? "Oh, but Walt! What about all the natural elements already found on Earth? Why can't we be like those?"

(next slide)

Let's break them down: Water? It's all over the place. No consistency. Some model that is!

(next slide)

Trees? Bold phalluses of the Earth? Sounds strong. Virile. Don't get fooled, stay alert. It's not a coincidence that people who can't form a strong bond are called wooden.

The audience LAUGHS. Val among them.

LAST SLIDE: A close-up of the same, sad looking baby seal caught in plastic.

WALT (CONT'D)

Finally, as we close today...  
Answer me this...

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SUITE / BATHROOM -- NIGHT

WALT'S REFLECTION as he washes his face at the marble sink.

WALT (O.S.)

...Who looks like the quitter in this picture?

SPLASHES his face again. His aged reflection sizing him up.

INT. HYATT REGENCY HOTEL / SUITE -- CONTINUOUS

Walt TURNS on the light and JUMPS at the sight of Val waiting in his bed. Her heels on the floor beside her.

WALT

How the hell did you get in here?

VAL

Tenacity.

WALT

No, no, out. Let's go.

VAL

Not up for a little fun?

WALT  
I'm getting engaged in three days.

VAL  
Then why isn't she in here with  
you?

Walt's eyes can't help but trace the contours of her body  
beneath the silk sheets...

VAL (CONT'D)  
Hell of a presentation you gave,  
Mr. Host. Come on... I want you  
resonating inside me.

Fighting every urge to bite the forbidden fruit, Walt walks  
over to the door. UNLOCKS it.

Val begrudgingly gets out of bed, gets dressed.

VAL  
Trying to be a good man to your  
future wife?

WALT  
That's right.

VAL  
How long you been with her?

WALT  
Five years.

VAL  
One of my girlfriends fucked you  
two years ago. Asshole.

She SLAMS the door on her way out. Walt sighs, it's probably  
true.

Walt looks at the now unmade bed where she was... then sits  
at a table overlooking the balcony and twinkling LA skyline.

Walt runs his hand along the tabletop... it's made of wood...  
or is it imitation wood?

Walt KNOCKS on it a few times. Listens closely.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SKY BAR -- CONTINUOUS

A moody, midnight bar that provides patrons with the kind of lighting and view that makes one feel a little less lonely.

Nad sits with DALLY (40s). A BARTENDER brings their tab.

Dally's much-envied mid-forties figure is guarded by the disarmament her piercing eyes inflict on the weak... but said eyes are hidden behind bold, designer sunglasses.

BARTENDER

Good to see you both.

NAD

Thanks, Frank.

TWO PEOPLE push by Nad and take the adjacent bar seats.

NAD

Don't stay here. Come back home.

DALLY

It's not my home anymore.

NAD

It's not a home at all if one person's living in it. Please.

DALLY

There's a lot going on outside your own little world, Naddy.

NAD

I'm starting to realize that.

Nad attempts to take off her sunglasses. She leans back.

DALLY

Uh-uh, I'm sponsored now. Gotta look like my author photo.

The two people look over at Nad... it's Walt and Carter.

Walt and Nad exchange a glare. Walt starts to speak--

NAD

(interrupts)

Save it for Friday's show.

Nad storms off in a huff. Dally reaches for her drink, nearly knocks it over--lifts her sunglasses, then grabs it.

WALT  
(re: Carter's look)  
It's bad luck for the guest and  
host to talk before a show.

The bartender sets down two glasses for Walt. Carter eyes Walt as he raises a glass of gin to his nose... but sips only the tonic.

Walt reads a blog on his phone entitled *A Lesbian Life In Yemen*, the same one on Nad's computer.

Carter looks over his shoulder, but Walt quickly closes it, attempts to draw Carter's attention elsewhere.

CARTER  
What was that on your--

WALT  
(re: his two glasses)  
Pills weaken your stomach lining.  
I never had a drinking problem, so.

Carter nods, like it's no big deal. Flips his notepad open.

CARTER  
That was some presentation earlier.

WALT  
I don't want to talk about that.  
In fact, let's tilt the spotlight.  
Tell me about yourself.

CARTER  
Okay... um, I'm a Francophile.

Walt immediately regrets inviting this type of conversation. He stares into his glass of gin.

WALT  
So, you... love hotdogs.

CARTER  
What?

WALT  
Francophile? Frankfurter.

CARTER  
Somebody with a deep admiration for  
all things French. Culture, food.

WALT  
 France-ophile. Jesus. Okay.  
 Alright... so what makes you that?

CARTER  
 Well, I think we all have a country  
 in our heart. Some are part Roman,  
 Parisian, Japanese.

WALT  
 Don't you have to live there to be  
 that?

CARTER  
 You just have to love it. Hence  
 the word.

WALT  
 Gotcha. And you love France.

CARTER  
 I love France.

WALT  
 Any particular reason? I've never  
 been, I can't stand cigarettes.

CARTER  
 I've never been either, though I  
 hope to go one day. It's more a  
 spiritual connection now.

Walt nods, but is completely lost. He SHOOTs his gin.

WALT  
 Okay... feel free to shoot me some  
 of those questions if you got 'em.

CUT TO:

INT. NAD'S MANSION / OPULENT BATHROOM -- NIGHT

NAD'S REFLECTION in the vanity mirror as he practices his  
 smiles... ultra-wide... then down to a smirk.

He opens the medicine cabinet revealing rows of PRESCRIPTION  
 PILL BOTTLES... grabs one.

TOBIN (O.S.)  
 Nad! Groceries down here!

Nad JUMPS, oval remedies scatter the counter-top into the  
 sink. He PLUGS the drain at the last moment.

NAD  
Just leave 'em on the counter!

TOBIN (O.S.)  
Alright, I'm locking up! Good luck  
at the convention tomorrow!

Nad waits for the sound of Tobin's EXIT. POPS a few pills.

INT. NAD'S MANSION / MASTER BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Framed photographs of Nad and Dally from years past are throughout the room. Nad looks exactly the same in each picture, while Dally's expressions grow more wistful, aloof.

Nad turns each one around, his nightly ritual...

NAD  
Good night, Dal.

Nad appears out of place in the opulence of his own room. Like an old, dusty museum piece in need of a proper curator.

Nad slips into bed, and brings up the blog, *A Lesbian Life in Yemen*, on his phone. Begins reading in the dark...

NOTE: Ahdia speaks in an Arabic/English dialect with a vigorous tone.

AHDIA (V.O.)  
"Bazaar Slang" posted on 25 August:  
Today marks the fifth day in a row  
we were called "tiffs". Walking  
through the bazaar hand-in-hand  
with Nazirah again prompted so many  
closed-minded locals to yell slurs  
at us. Always the derogatory names  
most of us first hear in our early  
teens...

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SUITE -- NIGHT

Walt uses the pull-out couch as a bed... the rustled sheets that Val contaminated on the actual bed haven't been touched.

Walt reads the same blog on his phone in the dark.

AHDIA (V.O.)  
...Deflecting the first few slurs  
made us feel vaguely heroic, but by  
the end of the grocery run we felt  
worn out, ashamed and angry.  
(MORE)

AHDIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

Who would have thought holding hands with your lover would spark such lunacy? Who could have foreseen the effect that two tiny palms rubbing against each other would have on so many people? A blazing inferno can start with the tiniest spark.

WALT/NAD (TOGETHER)

(whispers)

Stay strong, Ahdia.

As they each close their phone... lights out.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / BALLROOM -- DAY

Nad struts the stage, demonstrating a formidable amount of confidence before a packed house. A banner reads:

*"Personalities as Products... Products as People"*

Unlike Walt, Nad doesn't need a sideshow--his personality is everything.

NAD

There is a host inside all of you. A host is a personality at its peak. A personality turned to eleven. It can take you to television, like it did myself, it can take you to the head of a Fortune 500 company, it can even take you to the moon.

Walt and Carter crack a door in back, peek inside.

NAD (CONT'D)

The Apollo 11 mission sent two astronauts to the lunar surface, but only one took that first step. Neil Armstrong asserted himself, wielding his fuckin' personality like a weapon to be first.

(beat)

(MORE)

NAD (CONT'D)

Some of you may be thinking, "But Nad, second or not, it's still the moon!" I ask you: What were Buzz Aldrin's first words as he made history becoming the moon's number two man?

CRICKETS from the audience. Nad smiles, *he's killing.*

WALT

(sighs)

The moon? Shit... he's good.

CARTER

Look at 'em all.

The audience is mesmerized... nobody is taking notes because nobody can move. Nad wipes sweat from his brow.

NAD

Let's review. That barista who just told you to have a nice day? Host! That server you think likes you, but won't see you outside the restaurant? Host! Your wife when she says till death do you part? Fuckin' host!

(goes for the kill)

You when you tell your spouse how amazing she looks in that unflattering outfit? That was you being a host! Amateur moments? Maybe. But multiply all those micro-encounters by a million... and that's the difference. That's what I do. I'm a host.

INT. HYATT REGENCY / HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Walt closes the door to the ballroom, which has now EXPLODED INTO APPLAUSE.

WALT

(beat)

We both started young. I've always looked to him as sort of a model for this kind of racket.

CARTER

Some people think you're better. That you've surpassed him.

WALT

I'm in game shows. I'll always be in game shows. Him, he has guests every night, monologues full of jokes, presidential candidates... I get interrupted by a buzzer.

CARTER

He had all that, you mean.

Carter starts to jot something down, but Walt stops him.

WALT

That was off the record.

CARTER

But--

WALT

That's why he gets the big brands. But he's still a prick.

Walt, worried he forgot something, starts patting his suit.

CARTER

You gotta fill me in on that brand thing. I was in the bathroom and these two guys at the urinal were arguing over what brand they hope to endorse...

WALT

Some find companies easier to get along with than people.

CARTER

They looked nineteen.

Carter sees Walt frantically searching his pockets, then the floor.

CARTER (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Walt takes off running down the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SUITE -- DAY

Walt rushes inside, sweating. He scans the room, sees a MAID changing out the towels in the bathroom.

Carter is right behind him, taking frantic notes.

WALT  
(to maid)  
Did you see, uh... Hey, did you  
find a letter? An envelope?

The maid folds a towel, shrugs.

MAID  
Sorry?

Walt checks all the dresser drawers, the night stand...

Walt pulls out the couch-bed. His letter to Yemen falls out.

WALT  
Thank God.

Walt grabs it, irons out the folded edges. Places it  
securely inside his suit coat.

CARTER  
What was that?

WALT  
(to maid)  
And can I get new bed sheets?

The maid stares at him blankly.

WALT  
New bed--  
(to Carter)  
Any Spanish in your heart?

Carter shakes his head. Walt holds up the bed sheets.

WALT  
New these please.

The maid smiles in recognition.

INT. HYATT REGENCY / HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Walt and Carter leave the suite, down the hallway.

CARTER  
I didn't catch what that was.

WALT  
(matter-of-factly)  
My letter to Yemen.

CARTER  
To who?

WALT  
*Arabia Felix.*

CARTER  
(writing)  
Felix...

Walt sizes Carter up, decides he's harmless enough. Removes the letter from his inner suit-pocket.

WALT  
Has to do with an online journal I started reading during treatment.

CARTER  
*A blog.* Continue.

WALT  
Reading it got kinda addictive. This girl, Ahdia, chronicles her life as a lesbian in an oppressive Arabic city. It's outrageous.

Certainly the last thing Carter was expecting to hear.

WALT (CONT'D)  
What?

CARTER  
No nothing. This is good.

Walt eyes Carter's notepad with apprehension. Calls the elevator.

WALT  
Well, don't make it about that.

CARTER  
Can I--

Carter reaches for the letter--but Walt moves it.

WALT  
In treatment we had to write a letter to a hero or the closest we could find. And then mail 'em.

CARTER  
Why some lesbian in Yemen?

WALT  
 (chuckles)  
 She'll never read it.

Carter looks at Walt, not buying his response. They step onto the elevator. Walt brings up the blog on his phone.

CARTER  
 You know you bypassed an entire country of heroes.

WALT  
 Here or in France?

CARTER  
 I can think of at least four I'd send mine to.

WALT  
 Fuck up first and then count how many.

Carter appears perplexed, starts to speak, but stops.

WALT (CONT'D)  
 Whoa--shit. Look at this.

...as the doors close, Walt hands Carter his smartphone.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- DAY

Nad is listening to a taped recording of the EXPLOSIVE APPLAUSE from earlier. He looks at Tobin with red eyes.

NAD  
 A good round of applause can be better than sex.

Tobin pats his back--seems at ease that his boss is back in high spirits. Nad rewinds the tape, plays the APPLAUSE again.

TOBIN  
 (smirks)  
 Oh, and Buzz Aldrin's people called. Insulted that you would have the gull to belittle the accomplishment of an American hero.

Nad smiles... a genuine grin.

NAD  
 Guess whose people didn't call?  
 There can only be one.  
 (beat)  
 And I owe it all--

Tobin lifts his chin up, expecting praise...

NAD  
 --to someone I've never even met.  
 Somebody daring enough to let me  
 get to know her... without feeling  
 the need to know me in return.

TOBIN  
 Sir?

NAD  
 I've forgotten what it's like to be  
 on the other side. It's thrilling  
 to be an anonymous observer.

Tobin looks distressed as he puts two-and-two together.

TOBIN  
 That gay broad, isn't it?

NAD  
 Don't call her that. Wait, you  
 read her, too?

TOBIN  
 You have the damn thing up all the  
 time. Though God knows why.

Nad turns on his computer monitor... the blog is up... He casually refreshes the page.

NAD  
 Because there's more going on than  
 just what the camera sees.

TOBIN  
 Not in your life there isn't.

Nad's jaw drops as a new post catches his attention.

NAZIRAH (V.O.)  
 "ALERT: The True Cost of Bread". I  
 am Nazirah, I haven't seen my  
 lover, Ahdia, in three days and  
 fear she has been kidnapped by  
 armed security forces.  
 (MORE)

NAZIRAH (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Her home was left a wreck, her door  
ripped off its hinges, her window  
shattered--a ransom note left  
behind...

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- DAY

Walt is looking over Carter's shoulder at his phone. Walt's  
anxious, his letter to Yemen clenched in his hand.

NAZIRAH (V.O.)  
...Her captors have not identified  
themselves, but it is clear. The  
government considers her a threat  
to the stability and order of the  
country. Her blog is illegal and  
they want her silenced. They are  
asking for a large sum of money to  
be delivered to an address in a  
remote location if I ever want to  
see her again. More to come.

WALT  
I told you there's an uprising  
going on. It's dog-eat-dog.

CARTER  
(beat)  
You were right. She'll never read  
it.

Walt looks down at his letter, distressed.

WALT  
I never thanked her.

CARTER  
She never knew you.

The town car SCREECHES to a halt as an SUV cuts it off--their  
driver YELLS in an obscure language.

Carter leans against the window, scribbles down the  
offender's license plate.

Walt is oblivious as he absorbs all this.

WALT  
(sotto)  
How am I going to find you, Ahdia?

As if on cue, Walt's CELL rings.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. AGENCY / BURNHAM'S OFFICE -- DAY

Burnham is on the phone at his computer. The framed poster of the serpent spine on the wall is now crooked.

WALT

Uncanny timing. Something startling just happened.

BURNHAM

Then you've heard. We need to get aggressive. *Courtland Skies* is grounding you.

This jars Walt back to reality.

WALT

Hold on, what? You said I was gold.

BURNHAM

You are. They don't value gold anymore. Blind mother--

WALT

Why the hell did I get sober then? I can do everything else high.

BURNHAM

Have a little more respect for yourself.

WALT

That new CEO hates me. Harvey wouldn't have let this happen.

BURNHAM

The tooth paste people are excited to meet with you.

WALT

The who? It's dog-eat-dog in Yemen and you want me to endorse something disposable?

BURNHAM

Something universal. Forget about that place. I'm sure a lot of folks over there are starving, but you can take comfort in knowing this is a major loss for you, too.

Walt wistfully stares out the tinted window again: Obnoxious billboards of all sizes and products sweep the landscape.

WALT

They didn't even call me.

BURNHAM

And where are you? You have a signing at the Hyatt with Nad.

WALT

Was on my to *Courtland* to talk to the couriers about my letter--

BURNHAM

Worry about what the camera sees, Walt. Who's on camera? Hm?

WALT

(sighs)

I am.

BURNHAM

And what do you see when you stare directly into the lens?

WALT

Vague outline of my reflection.

BURNHAM

Thank you.

Burnham CLICKS OFF. Walt sighs, conflicted.

CARTER

Next U-turn, driver. Back to the Hyatt.

WALT

No, no. Make a left up here anyway.

They take the next corner and *Courtland Skies* imposing headquarters slides into view.

CARTER

What are you doing? Your agent--

WALT

Having more respect for myself. I think.

The town car stops at a red-light and Walt LEAPS out of the car, onto the street.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREETS -- CONTINUOUS

Walt shields his eyes from the blinding rays of the sun as he bumbles through traffic. Cars SWERVE and SKID to a stop.

Walt finally makes it to the sidewalk a la *Frogger*, a bit disheveled and looking surprised he actually did it.

More CAR HORNS and SKIDDING get his attention and he sees Carter less gracefully dodging traffic, notepad in hand.

The town car driver is mortified and YELLS in his native tongue, holding up traffic in his own lane.

CARTER

Shoot!

Carter, nearly there, extends his hand. Walt pulls him to safety. Walt can't help but smirk.

WALT

All this for a puff piece?

CARTER

(out of breath)

All this... for an airline company?

Walt heads inside with Carter in tow.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- DAY

Tobin is pacing back and fourth... loosens his belt a notch. Nad is rereading the latest blog post, solemn-faced.

TOBIN

You don't know her. You've never been further than New York City. It's been ages since you've been on the 405.

NAD

That's why this is so perplexing.

TOBIN

You're going to be late for your signing.

NAD

I have to find her. Somehow.

TOBIN

Why?

NAD

Look how intense just her personality is, how vividly she comes across. Imagine what she'll be like in person... or on television?

TOBIN

You have a wife who has fallen out of love with you--

NAD

And this is how I'll win her back. I haven't forgotten what it was like to have astronauts, presidents on my show... but Ahdia may have the most complete personality I've ever encountered.

TOBIN

That's how you'll get Dally back?

NAD

That's right.

TOBIN

Do you hear yourself? What's your plan? Start down Wilshire Boulevard for clues? Fly to the Middle-East armed with charisma?

Nad walks over to his globe, takes a moment to locate Yemen. Then "walks" back to Los Angeles, two fingers at a time.

NAD

This girl could do anything, Tobin. They kidnapped her. Why? Just for being *her*.

(beat)

I don't know what I'm going to do yet.

TOBIN

Sir, when I was hired, you told me that I might be joining a sinking ship, but it was my job to keep it at least pointed in the right direction. Was it not?

Nad smiles, rotates his autograph-signing wrist. Tobin arches his back, winces at a pain in his lower spine.

NAD

Well, unfurl the sails because  
we're picking up wind.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HEADQUARTERS / LOBBY -- DAY

An expansive five-star hotel-like lobby with relaxing hues of gold and baby blue.

A theater screen looms above playing a masturbatory montage of in-flight luxury; people sipping on highballs, attractive couples sleeping with warm, padded neck-pillows, etc.

A LIVE PIANIST plays a JAZZ NUMBER in the waiting area.

CARTER

Whoa.

Walt looks at Carter, *I told you.*

WALT

I'd come in here after a stressful  
day and just hide out in the lobby.  
(savoring it)  
Like one of those secret forts  
you'd make as a kid.

Walt and Carter approach reception. A banner above reads:  
*Giving The Sky Its Signature Look Since 1965*

RECEPTIONIST

How may I help you reach your  
target destination, sir?

WALT

A ticket to Dillard Stanton's  
office please.

The receptionist recognizes Walt.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh... I'm afraid there aren't any  
flights departing from the lobby--

WALT

Cut the metaphor and call whoever  
you need to call. Where's Harvey  
Forrest? I'm not leaving.

RECEPTIONIST

Harvey isn't exactly...

WALT  
Get on the horn.

Walt starts scratching his now-raw knuckles. Carter is taking copious notes.

The receptionist reluctantly picks up the phone.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HQ / SEVENTH FLOOR -- DAY

Walt steps off the elevator and is immediately struck in the neck by a paper airplane.

Walt opens his mouth wide in pain, but doesn't make a sound.

A SOUR EMPLOYEE runs up.

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
Our new prototype for a paper  
model. Cutting costs.

Carter CHUCKLES.

Walt grabs the paper plane out of his collar, CRUMBLES it up and marches forward.

WALT  
Where's Harvey Forrest?

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
Moved to the corner.

WALT  
Corner office?

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
He's unable to take visitors.

Frustrated, Walt notices a packed conference room, takes off in that direction.

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HQ / CONFERENCE ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

DILLARD STANTON, distinguished mid-fifties, charms the room.

DILLARD  
...And we take pride in our  
diversity in the workplace and  
consistency in the airspace.

All the EXECS are entranced, Dillard's personality is mighty.

Walt and Carter peer in through the glass window. Walt tries the door handle, locked. Dillard recognizes him.

DILLARD

Must be filing a complaint. A tad too much baggage for one flight?

The room LAUGHS in unison, like an eerie applause. Dillard opens the double oak doors.

DILLARD (CONT'D)

The man whose smile endorsed our sky for many years. I don't think we've been formally introduced.

WALT

We haven't.

Dillard looks at Carter assuming Walt will introduce him, but he doesn't.

WALT (CONT'D)

There's a rumor we're no longer sharing skies?

DILLARD

Rumor? It's been official for over an hour now.

Walt suddenly notices the execs in the room, but keeps going:

WALT

Just like that? I started hosting *Reality Optional* at twenty-one. I'm in record books. If you recall, it was a very big deal--

DILLARD

Back then it was.

WALT

And since that very first season you--all of you--have been a proud sponsor. For every year since.

Walt literally starts to tear up. Dillard is unfazed.

WALT (CONT'D)

I was a kid... I felt like I had been shot out of a canon... but CS was always looking out, never gonna let me disgrace the family.

DILLARD

You managed to find a way.

WALT

You can't just walk out when times are tough. What if we all did that?

Amazingly, Dillard chokes up a bit--though one can't be sure.

DILLARD

This is a new era, Walt. No longer will the success of products rely on the endorsements of the prominent ones, the well-knowers whose turbulent lifestyles so often countervail the values we work to instill in our brand.

WALT

You need people. Products need personalities.

DILLARD

Not in my vision. The company, the brand, assumes a life of its own--which in turn makes it a person thereby validating itself.

(beat)

That's why people work for companies, Walt. Individually we're flawed, but together we can fly. That's why it doesn't make sense for us to rely on one personality anymore, no matter how strong it thinks it is.

Dillard stares down Walt.

Walt looks around at the execs' vacant faces, who seem to be agreeing if only by default--not unlike the corporatized expressions of the staffers at the rehab center.

WALT

If you start calling yourselves people, what are we supposed to do?

DILLARD

Buy a ticket and fly with us.

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HQ / ELEVATOR FOYER -- DAY

Walt and Carter approach the elevators. The sour employee walks past them with a stack of papers, glares at Walt.

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
Enjoy your descent.

Walt pretends to step on the elevator... and as soon as the employee is out of sight returns to the floor.

WALT  
Follow me.

CARTER  
What are we doing?

Walt crouches down low, moving clumsily along a cubicle wall... a child playing espionage.

Carter sighs, follows suit.

They zigzag along undetected... from one support column... to another...

Just as they approach a corner, Walt motions to stop.

TWO LAWYERS hurry by, oblivious.

LAWYER #1  
They always get more when--

LAWYER #2  
--they deserve less, we'll fix it.

With Harvey in sight, Walt and Carter sprint to--

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HQ / HARVEY'S CORNER -- CONTINUOUS

HARVEY FORREST, an elder on the arched end of a once prominent and sturdy spine, hunches over a small desk meticulously folding paper airplanes.

HARVEY  
Craft... Craft.

Harvey folds over a paper wing. Licks his finger for a precise crease.

HARVEY  
...And pride.

Admires his finished plane, then sends it flying in a random direction.

Walt and Carter duck as a plane soars overhead... Harvey starts a new one.

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
Mr. Forrest, here are the raw  
materials you requested.

HARVEY  
Attention to detail...

Harvey gives them a once over and nods.

Walt is in a state of shock as he notices the same absence in  
Harvey's expression as the execs in the boardroom.

WALT  
Is this some sort of joke?

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
What are you--? Fine. You wanted  
the truth, here he is.

WALT  
What happened?

SOUR EMPLOYEE  
He believed in change without  
compromise. Still does apparently.

WALT  
Harvey, it's me. It's Wally.

Walt is deeply disturbed watching Harvey, in what's clearly  
not a corner office, merely a corner. Pushed off, forgotten.

Walt looks in the direction of the conference room where  
Dillard is now clearly wiping away a tear as he gestures  
wildly, sermon-like to the nodding executives.

WALT  
(to Carter)  
He used to be... upright. Or was  
it always like this?

Carter doesn't know what to say.

WALT (CONT'D)  
You ever fuck around with drugs,  
Carter?

CARTER  
(red-faced)  
Not really.

WALT  
So this looks normal to you?

Carter is at a loss... as another plane soars overhead.

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HQ / ELEVATOR -- DAY

Walt and Carter take the elevator back down. Walt scratches his knuckles and stares at his Yemen letter, defeated.

Carter is busy on his smartphone, shakes his head.

CARTER

Can't trust any institution that  
has to pay rent.

WALT

You know everything?

Carter pauses, as though considering it.

CARTER

I hope not. I have a whole lot of  
years left, they'd be pretty boring  
if I never learned anything new.

This catches Walt off-guard, but serves only to annoy him at how correct that sounded.

WALT

Don't write about Harvey. I'll  
have your job if you do.

CARTER

Somebody beat me to it. Weeks ago.

Carter hands over his phone. Walt skims a news article.

WALT

His wife? How did I not...?

CARTER

They're doing the guy a favor.  
(beat)  
Says he was the brains, she was the  
personality.

INT. COURTLAND SKIES HQ / LOBBY -- CONTINUOUS

Walt and Carter exit the elevator and cross the lobby.

WALT

I'd sit in here waiting for the  
Dexteral to kick in. I'd spy on  
the people outside.

CARTER  
You'd get high in here?

WALT  
I did it to soar. Just to be a  
viewer... is nice.

Walt falls in a stuffed chair, gets swept up in nostalgia...

Outside, PEOPLE on their phones hurriedly pass. Some pause to check their reflections, but take their next few steps even faster as if making up for lost time.

Walt's smile fades, not offering the same high it once did.

Carter picks up a magazine off a glass table: *The Cumulus Quarterly* with Walt on the cover beaming at a shimmering CS plane on his shoulder, the good angel.

A headline reads: *Frequent flyer Walt Erkins reveals his must-haves for the sybaritic traveller!*

CARTER  
"Which champagne tastes best at  
30,000 feet?" You know that?

WALT  
I used to think stuff like that was  
important.

CARTER  
...Can I ask if you're nervous  
about the proposal tomorrow?

Walt TIGHTENS his grip on his letter.

WALT  
If I'm jumpy it's because a hero of  
mine was just kidnapped.

CARTER  
I'd like to ask Hallie some  
questions for the profile.

WALT  
It's puff. Make something nice up.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / BALLROOM -- DAY

AUTOGRAPH SEEKERS form two massive lines for their chance to see Walt and Nad wield their Sharpies like pros.

Walt looks over at Nad who is clearly enjoying himself, laughing with fans and posing for pictures.

Walt sighs, couldn't fake it if he tried. A MOTHER holding her CHILD is next.

MOTHER

Hi! Can you please sign this?

WALT

Happy to.

Trembling with excitement, she hands him a *Courtland Skies* advertisement of Walt snoring while soaring in a company plane, captioned with: *You'll pray for a delay...*

BABY

Plastic man. Plastic man.

WALT

(forces a chuckle)

Teach your son those words?

MOTHER

You did! He's been saying them since yesterday.

She nuzzles her baby. The baby smiles.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Look how happy he is. Do you ever get tired of smiling, Mr. Erkins?

CAMERA FLASHES reflect into Walt's eyes from Nad's table.

WALT

(wincing)

Been at this nearly two decades.  
Feels like I'm always smiling.

MOTHER

A gift.

WALT

No emotion required. No energy.  
(smiles convincingly)  
It's a muscle.

The mother checks her baby, concerned.

MOTHER

How so?

WALT

Smiling is the most shallow form of displaying happiness. It's not associated with what's going on in here.

(taps his heart)

Two different sets of muscles control them, two wildly different motivations inform them.

MOTHER

Wh-what are you saying? My baby isn't happy?

WALT

I'm saying, that's the point. I don't know him. How would I know?

(beat)

On second thought, take the smile at face value. Stare at one too closely and you'll realize most people have awful teeth.

Tears swell up in the mother's eyes.

Walt rubs his forehead, knows he crossed the line. He looks down at the CS poster.

WALT

Who's this to?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / HALLWAY -- DAY

Walt EXITS the men's room, pacing on his cell.

BURNHAM (O.S.)

Did you tell a mother that her baby looked depressed earlier?

WALT

You believe I would do that?

BURNHAM (O.S.)

Yes, because there's another report that you told her it had awful teeth. That's the one I'm choosing not to believe.

Walt crouches down in a quiet corner, plugs his free ear.

WALT

I'm not dealing with this, Burnham. You said if I got sober I'd be in control. Everything feels like it's slipping away.

BURNHAM (O.S.)

That's just the overflow. You're nit-picking.

WALT

I'm in there signing *Courtland* shit, they don't need me. They don't need anyone apparently. Who needs anyone anymore?!

BURNHAM (O.S.)

There is a company that wants you--

WALT

Do I look like a fool?

Walt hears something... looks behind him and sees Carter SCRIBBLING MADLY... also crouched behind him.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. STOCKTON TOOTHPASTE / BOARDROOM -- DAY

Walt listens to a presentation given by BINNDER JORDAN (50s), wiry body frame and wispy gray hair. His assistant, LEE (20s) sits with his hands underneath the table.

In the center are two small objects covered by black cloths.

Carter is in the far back corner taking notes. Behind him is a bland corporate logo: *STOCKTON TOOTHPASTE: Why Change?*

BINNDER

Simplicity in oral care. Where some see gingivitis, we see opportunity. Where others see cavities, we see a hole-lotta possibilities.

Carter rolls his eyes. Walt is TAPPING impatiently.

BINNDER

But self-awareness is important, so we asked ourselves: What is wrong with Stockton Toothpaste today?

Binnder waits for an answer. Walt lifts his hands in a weak surrender.

BINNDER  
Exactly! Nothing. It's literally  
all it can be... and so are you.

Binnder winks at LEE. Taking his cue, Lee removes a small firecracker, lights it and tosses it on the table. It CRACKLES, like a Wild West shoot-out...

Walt is STARTLED, knees the table. The second clothed object TOPPLES OVER. Lee sets it upright.

Binnder dramatically removes the first cloth to reveal a large set of dentures.

BINNDER  
Given your history of abuse, Walt,  
your rehab--and now your daily  
struggle to stay clean. You're the  
living embodiment of our industry.

Lee takes out another firecracker, gets ready to light it. Walt looks uneasy.

BINNDER  
A universality to all things;  
nature, people, plastic... But as  
you say, only one of these lasts  
forever... Pair yourself wisely.

Walt watches Lee light another CRACKLER.

WALT  
(realizes)  
Plastic lives on because... it  
can't die.

Unable to hear over the CRACKLING, Binnder gives Walt a thumps up with a brighter, whiter smile.

Binder whisks away the second cloth revealing a mirror--now reflecting a CRACKED IMAGE of Walt.

BINNDER  
Remember Walt, tomorrow is one  
giant cavity, waiting to be filled!

Walt stares at his fragmented reflection as the air fills with a POP! POP! POP!

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SKY BAR -- NIGHT

Carter sits at the bar, checks his watch concerned--no sign of Walt. The CROWD tonight is older; a married-couple-on-a-date-night vibe.

BARTENDER

You're taking up space, son.  
Justify it.

CARTER

How's an orange juice?

BARTENDER

And what?

CARTER

Straight is fine.

BARTENDER

I'm not a baby-sitter. If you're too young to drink, don't sit at my bar, but if you're too young to know how, then here.

The bartender hands Carter a drink menu.

CARTER

(red-faced)  
Thank you, sir.

BARTENDER

Frank. Call a bartender by name or nothing.

Carter looks at the menu, intimidated.

The lights dim... SCATTERED APPLAUSE as a karaoke singer steps on stage, though it isn't clear who it is yet.

The opening strings play for Frank Sinatra's *You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You*.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

*You're nobody till somebody loves  
you / You're nobody till somebody  
cares / The world is the same, you  
won't change it / As sure as the  
stars shine above...*

The menu could be in braille, until Carter spots a French wine he knows nothing about.

CARTER

I'll, uh... the Bordeaux, Frank.

Recognizing the singer's voice, Carter turns around and sees Nad on stage giving ol' Blue Eyes a run for his money.

Frank slides Carter his Bordeaux.

BARTENDER

You know who that is?

Carter nods quickly, eager to please the bartender.

CARTER

Nad Jarvis.

BARTENDER

Well, you're too young know what a sight this is. A shooting star moment for guys my age.

Carter smiles, sips his wine. SNAPS his fingers along with the crowd...

As Nad CROONS, everyone gets momentarily transported... that warm forgetting-feeling...

NAD

*Nobody / Nobody / You are nobody  
'till somebody cares / You might be  
the king / You might be possess all  
the world and its gold / But gold  
won't get you happiness when you're  
growing old...*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SUITE / BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Walt is curled up on the floor, clutching his stomach.

Carter ENTERS the suite.

CARTER (O.S.)

Walt? I was at the bar! I thought that's where you wanted to...

The bathroom door is open. Carter peers inside and sees Walt on the floor, traces of vomit around the toilet seat.

CARTER

Walt! What happened?

Walt WINCES in pain. Carter spots a mostly empty bottle of gin floating in the tub.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Do you want me to run down and--

WALT

Flush... that... damn thing.

Carter hesitates, steps over him and FLUSHES the toilet.

Walt MOANS, forces himself upright into a seated position.

Carter hands him a few tissues. Walt dabs his sweaty forehead and nods *thanks*.

WALT

...We connect with people... People we don't know and can't see... feel close to us. Hosts have something.

CARTER

Are you okay?

WALT

I will be... if we start... with the easy ones.

CARTER

Oh, no--

WALT

One word answers... and such.

CARTER

No, no. We can do these tomorrow.

WALT

I can do it now.

Walt tilts his head back and closes his eyes.

CARTER

Should I call someone?

Walt SLAMS his FISTS against the wall of the tub.

WALT

Do you have your fucking question sheet or not?

CARTER

I do.

Carter fumbles around through his papers. Walt grows impatient.

CARTER (CONT'D)

It's here.

WALT

If you delayed every interview because you had to look for your notes, you wouldn't last long enough to find them.

Carter stops, looks at Walt.

WALT (CONT'D)

Lucky I don't toss you out.

CARTER

Are you--?

WALT

Thick skin... need to get organized and have thicker skin if--

Carter exits the bathroom, then re-enters, numb with anger.

CARTER

Okay, I wasn't going to mention this because it didn't feel right--

WALT

Takes you getting mad to get interesting.

CARTER

Ahdia is not in Yemen.

Walt opens his eyes, stares solemnly at Carter.

CUT TO:

INT. NAD'S MANSION / OPULENT KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Tobin is taking inventory of all the food. Much like the rest of the house, the kitchen is ostentatious yet dusty, neglected.

Nad appears in the doorway, still in the dark.

NAD (O.S.)

I took the stage.

Tobin JUMPS.

TOBIN

Jesus, Nad. What do you mean, what stage?

NAD

You're nobody till somebody loves you. But if you got nobody, you can love yourself and work outward.

Nad enters, though there's something slightly off about his appearance.

TOBIN

I missed your karaoke?

(beat)

Wait... Did you re-part you hair?

NAD

Yes, and something occurred to me. We only know about Ahdia's kidnapping because of her lover. She paired herself wisely.

Nad RUNS his hand through his hair, then again to fix it. For the first time Nad is not sporting his *Nautic* watch.

TOBIN (CONT'D)

Your watch, it's--

NAD

Too tight.

TOBIN

Try a looser setting.

NAD

That's not what I mean. If I can't move forward, I'll at least rebuild myself at my peak and try again.

TOBIN

You've done the same thing for thirty years. When was your peak?

Nad removes the b/w photograph of the wedding set from his pocket. He unfolds it completely to reveal it's of him and Dally, years prior...

With his hair, in fact, parted the way it is now.

NAD

Somewhere along the way I re-parted my hair, my life. Somewhere I interpreted the opposite as normal.

TOBIN

You're having a breakdown.

NAD

I'm emerging from one. If I come out and my hair is re-parted America will gasp. Small changes lead to big things.

(beat)

And what better way to ignite serious change than with a million tiny sparks? Bring that list and come with me.

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE -- NIGHT

The MELODIC HUM of ordered chaos; products being SCANNED, carts SQUEAKING and kids WHALING.

Nad leaps from one colored tile to the next, avoiding the white ones. Tobin is not amused.

SHOPPERS walk by, nobody notices Nad. Instead they scan the shelves anxiously, hostage to their shopping lists.

TOBIN

I can get what we need, you shouldn't be out this late. Walt's proposing tomorrow night. Your own wife hasn't even guaranteed she'll be on and--

NAD

That's only because she'll barely talk to me.

TOBIN

You shouldn't have taken off your watch. I think it was holding you together more than you think.

NAD

...Ahdia was kidnapped. We're all hostages to our own vices, but to someone else's? That's tragedy. Like the lifespan of a fruit.

Nad and Tobin wander in the fresh produce section. Nad examines a red apple.

NAD

Its purpose clearly defined  
alongside the others on its tree.  
Only to get intercepted by humans  
at their peak. Tragic.

Nad BITES into the apple. Tobin checks his watch.

TOBIN

Maybe its purpose is to serve our  
needs. Our hunger. What happens  
if it goes unpicked?

NAD

It thrives.

TOBIN

Rots.

Nad stops chewing, stares at his apple. Tobin bites his lip.

TOBIN

I think you should know something  
about your little Arabic concubine.  
I had one of the IT guys take a  
look. She's not in Nigeria.

NAD

That's because she's in Yemen.

TOBIN

She's not there either.

CUT TO:

INT. HYATT REGENCY / SUITE -- NIGHT

Walt is clutching his stomach as he slowly moves about the  
room, evidently still in pain, and a little drunk. He drinks  
from a bottle of Malox, antacid medication for the stomach.

Carter is at the desk, peering over his notes.

CARTER

You were twenty-one when you  
stepped in front of your first  
studio audience. What was that  
like?

WALT

Forget about those. How can you be  
so certain that address is here, in  
Los Angeles, USA?

CARTER

I told you. Because of her blog's IP address.

WALT

But how, what does that mean?

CARTER

*A Lesbian Life in Yemen* was last updated from Los Angeles, California, USA.

WALT

I've had my agent on this for weeks, how did you--

CARTER

I know a thing or two about tech.

Walt looks down at his Yemen letter. Swigs his Malox.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Think of an IP address as... like the return address on your letter.

WALT

My God. Kid, that's the address.

CARTER

Right, okay. So, there's only like eleven more questions I have--

WALT

No, no. That's where she is... where the kidnappers want the money dropped off.

CARTER

Wait, what?

WALT

You young people might know more about tech, but that's only because you don't have this yet.

Walt points to his gut.

CARTER

A weak stomach lining?

WALT

Experience.

Carter looks back at his page of unanswered interview questions.

CARTER

(sighs)

I have to get some sleep. I'll be back in the morning. We'll do the rest of these questions, go to Nad's show... and I'll go write a hell of a puff piece.

Walt is too preoccupied to hear any of that. He goes to the window, stares out at the view.

Carter shrugs, packs up and LEAVES.

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Like Walt, Nad is staring out his office window at the same city. A POST-IT note of the LOS ANGELES ADDRESS stuck on the window in front of him.

Also like Walt, it appears Nad is mentally mapping the route.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HYATT REGENCY / SUITE / BALCONY -- NIGHT

Later that night, Walt is leaning against the rail, drinking Malox. He winces as he moves to a chair, brings up Ahdia's blog on his phone.

Sits upright when he sees there's a new post.

NAZIRAH/AHDIA (V.O.)

Still no word from Ahdia or her captors. A half-written post was all that she left behind. In a fit of rage, Ahdia lashed out at God, she said "of course he [sic] hates homosexuals, if you're queer you know at an early age. What you don't know is that the world expects you to grow up straight. You're allowed to know, but not allowed to tell... if that's not the greatest burden of all, surely it's the most peculiar one."

(beat)

Ahdia closed with summing up her life: "Live. Fuck. Apologize.

(MORE)

NAZIRAH/AHDIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't want to be inspiring, I  
want to be left alone enough to  
feel like an anonymous observer,  
like everybody else seems to be...

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Nad is back at his computer reading over the same post.

AHDIA (V.O.)

I don't want be the face of a new  
movement. I want to buy fresh  
bread at the shop around the corner  
instead of having to walk three  
miles to the only place that  
chooses to look the other way. My  
money is just as dirty, my stomach  
just as empty. How different are  
we? Ask a mosquito.

(beat)

I'd rather die of malaria because  
at least I know it wouldn't be  
personal. Flesh is flesh. I could  
rest assured knowing that I had  
been randomly selected by a  
mosquito as opposed to brutally  
targeted by a man."

Nad tilts back in his chair, absorbing it all. Runs his hand  
through this hair, then again to fix the part.

CUT TO:

EXT. HYATT REGENCY / ENTRANCE -- DAY

The town car idles outside the main entrance. Moments later,  
Walt emerges from the hotel looking showered and refreshed.

INT. TOWN CAR (IDLING AT HYATT) -- CONTINUOUS

Walt enters. Carter looks eager, pen and notepad in hand.

CARTER

Morning, Walt. Big day ahead--

WALT

Indeed. Slight change of plans.

Walt hands Carter the LOS ANGELES ADDRESS on hotel  
stationary. Carter recognizes it immediately.

CARTER  
No, no. Walt we can't.

WALT  
You want a story? A real story?

CARTER  
We need to stay on course. This is insane.

WALT  
Insanity is doing the same thing day after day and expecting your life to change.  
(to driver)  
Go to this new address.

Walt hands the address to the driver.

CARTER  
You're proposing tonight, okay, what if we're late or get shot?

WALT  
I thought journalists were supposed to be unbiased?

CARTER  
It's a puff piece! Profiling your proposal on Nad's show tonight.

Carter looks at Walt react with childlike sincerity and wide-eyed anticipation as the town car TAKES OFF.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
What if it's all a big disappointment?

WALT  
I was so worried in there. You don't know.

CARTER  
In the hotel?

WALT  
Treatment. That everything would be the same when I got out.  
(all smiles)  
This is different.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- DAY

Nad is watching a YouTube video feed of Dally being interviewed by REPORTERS, in her sunglasses of course.

Uploaded only a few minutes ago. We see Ahdia's blog open in another page behind this one.

DALLY

*Modern Oddities* is a book of essays about the absurdities in contemporary, urban life. Sadly, in these times, we place value in people making no sense at all, while the person wishing to offer their two cents is deemed an elitist. The two-cent mind-set is now the one-percent. Beware, my darlings!

REPORTER #1

We hear there's going to be a chapter on people who host television shows and how to survive a marriage long enough to get divorced and--

DALLY

--and still retain your sanity. Yes, I heard that rumor as well. I don't mind the singing in the shower, it's the crying I can't bear.

Nad asks questions, taking Dally's answers as if they were addressed to him...

REPORTER #1

Your books are always mired in controversy? Is that planned?

NAD

Won't you continue to love me?

DALLY

(winks)

Oh, yes. Always. I'd also like to announce that this is the first book I'll be publishing without my former surname "Jarvis". Just... Dally!

Dally presents the cover: a close-up of her face and bold sunglasses.



INT. GAME SHOW SET (FIRST/ONLY FLASHBACK) -- DAY

THREE CONTESTANTS stand at podiums on one end of an elaborate, flamboyant set. Walt's podium on the other end. Together they flank a GIANT SCREEN.

WALT (V.O.)

It started with a fall.

Walt is helped off the floor by THREE COLLEAGUES. Walt is thinner, more gaunt, greyer around the eyes.

PRODUCER

You okay, Walt?

WALT

A-okay.

STAGE MANAGER

What was that?

WALT

My knee gave for a second.

INTERN

Water? Coffee?

PRODUCER

Are we sure?

WALT

I am. Are you?

Walt brushes himself off and moves to the center. His colleagues clear the stage.

WALT

(addressing camera)

Sorry about that, we're live folks, anything can happen... I think they're buffing these floors with the same stuff Dick's using on his head!

A BALD PRODUCER in the corner blushes, shrugs at the audience. They LAUGH, back on track.

Despite his appearance, Walt is displaying an exuberance we haven't seen before. He moves with grace to his podium.

WALT

Alrighty right, next clip!

ON SCREEN: Footage from a police car's dash cam in the midst of a high speed pursuit of a blue pick-up.

The truck takes a sharp turn and tumbles over a few times before bottoming out and catching fire. The DRIVER crawls out, alive.

The video stops. The audience reacts.

CONTESTANT #1

What is real?

A slot on Walt's podium SPITS out a card.

WALT

Yes! Happened on March, 3rd 2005  
in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Nasty  
one, that was a nasty one.

APPLAUSE.

CONTESTANT #1

'Kay... Air Show Antics for \$2,000.

All eyes on the screen... except Walt who pretends to be distracted, obvious he doesn't want to see what's playing.

ON SCREEN: Two planes cruising in mid-air... one positions itself below the other... the upper PILOT leaps from his cockpit but misses the lower plane, and falls out of frame.

GASPS are heard.

CONTESTANT #1

What is real?

WALT

(relieved)

Fake! That was our stunt guy  
Boomer McMillan. Good ol' Boomer.

The second podium lights up, indicating the next contestant's turn.

CONTESTANT #2

Dash Cam for \$3,000, please.

ON SCREEN: A particularly nasty crash. The CHUGGING of a locomotive, a car left in pieces.

The audience REACTS.

CONTESTANT #2  
 (hesitates)  
 What is fake?

Walt, left shaken by the images on screen, slowly turns the card over fearing the answer...

WALT  
 (winces)  
 Oh, I'm sorry... Incorrect! That was Leonard Durning in 2009. He was 42. Survived by three kids. Due respect to kin.

Walt is losing his cool, pats his sweaty forehead.

The third podium lights up. The contestant looks at the category board, a kid in a candy shop.

CONTESTANT #3  
 Uhhh... Animal Attacks!!

Walt shuts his eyes, anything but that one.

WALT  
 ...Amount?

CONTESTANT #3  
 Go big or go home, right?! \$5,000!

The audience goes WILD. Walt stares at the floor again.

ON SCREEN: A vicious attack in progress, something out of Roman colosseum times. The DEEP ROAR of a lion, followed by the shouting of MEN...

The lights come up. Contestant #3 is in deep thought.

CONTESTANT  
 What is...

Walt stares in disbelief at the now blank screen. Starts to wobble, his legs jelly... COLLAPSES again.

PRODUCER  
 Go to commercial, that's it!

Instant pandemonium. The STAFF rush the stage, circle Walt.

WALT (V.O.)  
 One person thought I was having a seizure... but it was the opposite. I finally felt relaxed.

Attempts to get Walt upright are impossible, his body responds with doll-like physics.

His unblinking gaze fixed on something in the distance.

WALT (V.O.)

I felt like a feather. Mental zero gravity. I couldn't take my eyes off this blinking neon sign in the corner... a sign I'd never seen from that angle. It was oddly soothing.

WALT'S HAZY POV: A blinking neon sign hanging beside a corridor that reads:

*Disappear Here / Disappear Here / Disappear Here*

PARAMEDICS push through the crowd to Walt.

WALT (V.O.)

It wasn't until they were shining a light in my eyes that I came around... Suddenly, they strapped me to a gurney.

As Walt is carried out, it's evident the neon sign is part of a much larger advertisement for a line of cruise ships.

WALT (V.O.)

Apparently I kept repeating those neon words while I was rushed to the hospital. The way a bum begs for food on the verge of passing out, they told me.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- DAY

Carter stops writing mid-sentence, absorbing the weight of Walt's story. Tries to refocus.

DRY SOUNDS of their car on a road with loose gravel...

CARTER

And, and what did they find in your system? Only pills?

WALT

Blue ones and yellow ones.

CARTER

What effect were you trying to trigger?

WALT

Something new, something else.

CARTER

But why those? Taken at random?

WALT

Blue and yellow. I thought, blue and yellow can't be too bad they make green.

Carter glances out the window.

CARTER

When does the new season start?

WALT

Next week. Mondays now, apparently.

CARTER

Are you...?

WALT

I'll be a married man soon. Being tied down is a good thing. Responsibilities keep you grounded.

CARTER

Then can we talk about Hallie for a minute?

Walt is scanning the street signs.

WALT

I have a better idea.

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING / PARKING LOT -- DAY

Walt's car pulls into the lot of a Vision Impairment Center.

WALT (O.S.)

Park around the side.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Here?

WALT (O.S.)  
Not by the main entrance. Around  
the side. Out of sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE OF THE OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

Carter curiously follows Walt alongside the building where there are no doors, only windows.

In the distance, their driver drags on a cigarette.

WALT  
I know we're pressed on time, but  
it's important I do this.

Carter nods, too confused to speak.

Walt climbs up a partial hedge underneath a large window, it's obvious he's done this before.

CARTER  
Walt.

Walt suddenly ducks his head, out of sight.

WALT  
(whisper)  
Down. Get down. Quiet.

Walt peers in the window again.

WALT (CONT'D)  
This room'll be buzzing with  
activity in a minute.

CARTER  
What are you looking at and why  
aren't we walking through doors and  
using entrances?

WALT  
This is where Hallie works.

CARTER  
That only answered about ten  
percent of what I was asking.

Walt gets frustrated.

WALT  
If it isn't obvious, Carter,  
Hallie and I broke up.

Walt is saddened to hear himself admit this.

Carter looks ill.

CARTER  
You're not together?

WALT  
Haven't seen her in over two weeks.  
I needed to get a glimpse.

Carter flips through his pages as though he's missed something.

CARTER  
But... tonight?

Walt gives Carter a knowing look. Then he lifts his head up slowly to the window.

Overcome with a sudden sense of camaraderie, Carter crouches down by Walt. Refocused, anxious.

CARTER  
What do you see?

WALT  
Caretakers.

CARTER  
Mm-hmm.

WALT  
Everybody's seated around a table.  
A staff member is reading to them.

CARTER  
Mm-hmm.

WALT  
They're following along with their  
hands...

Walt looks down at Carter and his notepad.

WALT  
Are you writing all this?

CARTER  
Of course.

Carter answers with a tone that implies there's only one answer.

WALT

Oh.

Walt peers inside again.

CARTER

Can I see inside?

WALT

I'll describe her to you.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING / MAIN AREA -- CONTINUOUS

A woman who can only be HALLIE (early 30s) enters. She's delicate, yet firm. The patient type that listens intently even if she already knows the answer.

MEN and WOMEN sit around various tables listening to a SPEAKER at the head of the room. The speaker runs through slides of astronomy; planets, star formations with braille equivalent.

Hallie walks among them, adjusting their hands. They're learning to read.

WALT (O.S.)

You know they have to relearn everything? You think you know the layout of your house? Close your eyes and move around.

(beat)

In return, the blind are blessed with a deeper intimacy. They sense her energy that much more. Their nerve endings react to her in a special way.

Walt melts as he watches Hallie adjust various hands, an intimacy he yearns for.

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

I helped out here once, and they could tell who was who just by the way you walk into a room.

EXT. SIDE OF THE BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

WALT

Alright.

Walt climbs back down. One of the wooden ledges splits, and he FALLS to the ground. Branches CRACK, leaves SHAKE.

WALT

Dammit!

CARTER

Whoa, you okay?

Walt clings to the side of the building, glances around... all is clear.

WALT

That fall was off the record.

Walt looks back at the hedge. No longer climbable.

WALT

I got my glimpse. Let's go.

They cross the parking lot to the cab. Walt limps the first few paces, shaking off the pain of the fall.

CARTER

Let me make sure I have this properly: You planned the proposal, you guys broke up and you're afraid to call it off?

WALT

Negatory. We broke up, then I planed it. Recovery is not as sunny as it sounds. I had to have hope.

CARTER

She broke up with you in recovery?

WALT

I ended it.

CARTER

This gets worse.

WALT

I knew she wouldn't do it for that reason, so I pulled the plug.

CARTER

But people are counting on this proposal. Why do I feel like I'm the crazy one here? Talk to her now, we have time.

Walt stops, faces Carter.

WALT

I need to be a hero before she  
takes me back. That much I know.

CARTER

Why do you need to be a hero?

Walt starts walking again. Carter thinks, then catches up.

CARTER (CONT'D)

You haven't even apologized?

WALT

My apology is being built on a  
sound stage in Burbank. Do you  
know a bigger, more sincere apology  
than a proposal? It says  
everything you could hope to say--

CARTER

Without saying any of it.

WALT

--all at once.

Walt looks at him.

CARTER

I didn't mean to say that.

WALT

Carter, let me tell you something  
about your place: At your age, life  
is very much your parent's doing;  
when you get to mine, the blame  
shifts.

(beat)

I was this close to cancelling  
earlier, I didn't know what the  
fuck I was going to do. Now  
there's a way for everything to  
work out. Good coincidences and  
addicts are rarely bed buddies,  
know what I mean?

Carter nods, opting to keep quiet.

WALT (CONT'D)

For an unbiased journo, your  
opinion seem to rear its ugly head  
at odd junctures. Just remember  
you're a speck, all of us are.

Carter remains mum, hastily SCRIBBLING to keep up. Walt gets caught up in the feeling of having his words transcribed:

WALT (CONT'D)  
 Tiny dots in the universe.  
 Remember how we connected them in  
 those little books as kids?  
 Foreshadowing.

Carter underlines something numerous times. They arrive at the car.

WALT  
 Now... let's go rescue Ahdia.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER -- DAY

The wedding set is coming along: blindingly white offset slightly by pearl.

Nad is busy tweaking a bouquet of flowers while squinting at his reference photo.

An INTERN approaches him carrying a bulging trash bag.

INTERN  
 Sir--

The intern stops short, startled by Nad's opposite hair-part. Stares a moment.

NAD  
 Yes?

INTERN  
 You wanted me to bring one copy of every publication denouncing our show and predicting its demise?

NAD  
 That was quick.

INTERN  
 We're on a lot of covers.

Nad peeks in the bulging bag at the entertainment rags commenting on his embarrassing ratings. One has a picture of a toilet that isn't a coincidence.

NAD  
 (lying)  
 No, dammit. I said get every copy  
 of every publication and burn them.

INTERN  
 (swallows hard)  
 'Kay.

NAD  
 And get that bag outta here. It's  
 damaging morale. This is our  
 comeback. A rebirth anew.

The intern nods, lugs the bag away. Producer hurries over to  
 Nad.

PRODUCER  
 Sir, the *Nautic* people are here for  
 your check-up.

NAD  
 Perfect.

Nad starts walking off stage, but is intercepted by Tobin who  
 grabs his naked wrist. Tobin now has a back brace on.

TOBIN  
 Nad, they'll notice.

NAD  
 Let them.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER / MEETING ROOM -- DAY

Two *Nautic* REPS, Jakob and Wendy, sit opposite Nad and Tobin.

The reps are nearly identical with their blonde hair and blue  
 eyes. The sleeves of their chic turtlenecks are pushed up  
 just enough to reveal the massive heads on their watches.

JAKOB  
 Nad, Nad. You've become unruly.  
 Put your watch back on, please.

NAD  
 I don't think so.

JAKOB  
 Why take it off?

WENDY

And don't tell us you showered.  
It's water-proof.

Nad rotates his wrist.

NAD

Got a little heavy.

WENDY

Put your watch back on. If you go  
out tonight, and you're not wearing  
it...

JAKOB

You are not allowed to leave us.  
Read the contract. But we can  
sever ties in a second.

NAD

That doesn't sound like a proper  
relationship.

WENDY

The viewers aren't going to trust  
you if we pull out. It'll cause a  
ripple effect. First your viewers,  
then your friends and family...  
then more viewers.

Nad looks a little less relaxed.

JAKOB

Who validates who here? We came  
simply to wish you luck...  
(to Wendy)  
Why is he doing this?

WENDY

And what is this, this deal with  
your hair? Did you cut it?

Wendy and Jakob study the new part. Nad shrugs innocently.

JAKOB

Will somebody tell me what the hell  
is going on?

TOBIN

(shrugs)  
Well, sir--

WENDY

Tobin is still wearing his. Nad, that wedding set out there looks marvelous. Why are you throwing all this away?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THEATER / BATHROOM -- DAY

Nad splashes his face with cold water. Looks at his worn reflection in the mirror.

Reaches into his pocket, swallows a few more pills.

AHDIA/NAZIRAH (V.O.)

This is Nazirah again. Still no sign of Ahdia, and I fear the worst. Ahdia was organizing a "Pink Riot" and fear her kidnapping had something to do with it. She told me to post the following should anything happen to her. I believe now is the time. In what may be her final words...

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- DAY

HOMELESS PEOPLE are camped out on sidewalks in front of a row of boarded-up stores that all have "LIQUIDATION SALE" in their windows.

Walt and Carter pour over the latest post.

CARTER

Hang on a sec. This is new.

They read together.

INT. THEATER / NAD'S OFFICE -- DAY

Nad follows along on the computer. Tobin paces behind Nad growing concerned, glancing at his watch and rubbing his lower spine.

AHDIA (V.O.)

These hot afternoons make Yemen's landscape look dry and corpse-like, especially parts of the hills that are dug out for agriculture that look like the exposed entrails of those that wish us dead. Them first.

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- DAY

Walt and Carter finish reading:

AHDIA (V.O.)

I look forward to a time when I am able to admire the beauty of my land again, but they have violated my world, hijacked my imagination, and stolen my sight. If you are reading this, my time may never come, but yours still can.

CARTER

Maybe this is worse than we thought.

CUT TO:

INT. TARGET STORE -- DAY

A super store for the serious consumer. SHOPPERS cling to carts--it seems in strange way, the carts are leading them.

Walt and Carter enter, hurry past a row of CASHIERS.

WALT

Walkie-talkies at...?

CLERK

Fourteen on the left. If we still carry them.

WALT

Thank you.

(to Carter)

Come on, we have to hurry.

INT. TARGET STORE / AISLE FOURTEEN -- CONTINUOUS

Walt and Carter peruse the electronics aisle.

CARTER

We do have cell phones, Walt.

WALT

This is a walkie-talkie thing.  
What if we don't get service? The  
enormity of what we're undertaking  
demands... an exacting  
intelligence.

Walt is too preoccupied to engage Carter's question seriously.

CARTER

What if one of the walkie-talkies  
break?

WALT

Here we go.

The walkie-talkies are stashed away at the end. Gray,  
industrial looking radios offering hundreds of frequencies.  
Walt doesn't know what any of it means.

Then Walt spots a bright blue pair, more a child's toy with a  
graphic of two kids playing with their fort, a wall between  
them. The range says 20 feet. Walt picks it up and stares.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- DAY

Walt and Carter back in the car. Walt's CELL goes off,  
answers it.

BURNHAM (O.S.)

Incoming amendment to the agenda.

WALT

(sighs)  
Yes?

BURNHAM (O.S.)

You are on fire today! Everybody  
wants you now that you're freed  
from *Courtland's* shackles. I'm  
texting a new address to your  
driver. We're in an ice age buddy  
and you're the only flame in sight!

WALT

Whose address?

BURNHAM (O.S.)  
 A killer endorsement opportunity.  
 I won't spoil the surprise.

WALT  
 Burnham, we're cutting it too close  
 here. Maybe I should fly solo for  
 Nad's show? No sponsors.

BURNHAM (O.S.)  
 Bad idea. Too risky to stand on  
 your own so soon after treatment.

Walt closes his eyes, visibly detaining his temper.

BURNHAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 I'm giving you choices here, Walt.  
 We'll have something before  
 tonight.

Burnham HANGS up. The town car driver's phone BUZZES with  
 Burnham's text message. He look to Walt for marching orders.

CARTER  
 We have to go.

WALT  
 Quiet down.

CARTER  
 Your agent is attempting to rebuild  
 your career, way more than you  
 could possibly know and you're  
 telling him to screw.

WALT  
 What do you mean "way more than I  
 could possibly know"?

CARTER (CONT'D)  
 You're not even telling him to  
 screw, you're misleading him.

Walt looks down at his blue walkie-talkies, hesitating.  
 Carter is SCRIBBLING extra loud in his notepad.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER / ELEVATOR -- DAY

Nad and Tobin stand in an elevator. Nad anxiously watches  
 the floor indicators light up as they descend.

TOBIN

Exactly! The show. Your wife.  
You're nuts to leave now. What if  
we can't get back in time?

NAD

If *Nautic* wants to drop me, fine.  
Won't they be sorry when I rescue  
this poor girl and I'm not wearing  
my watch.

TOBIN

I think they'll be relieved.

NAD

There's a special reason all this  
is happening today. I'm seeing  
dots... connecting things.

TOBIN

Seeing dots is a symptom of a heart  
attack.

The elevators doors open to a parking garage. Nad steps out  
quickly. Tobin limps after him.

NAD

You don't have to come, but I have  
been waiting a long time for the  
sun to shine.

TOBIN

There's no way in hell I'm letting  
you out of my sight.

Nad pats Tobin on the shoulder.

NAD

It's not in me just to fade away,  
Tobin. If I'm going down, I have  
to be swinging.

Tobin TIGHTENS his back brace.

CUT TO:

INT. SOCK'RATES OFFICES -- DAY

Walt and Carter sit on opposite ends of an open lobby area.

It's a shop-class layout where EMPLOYEES wear socks on their  
hands testing the durability of various prototypes on  
different simulated surfaces.

HANNIGAN (30s) steps into the lobby, removes a pair of socks from his hands, lifts his eye goggles and greets Walt.

HANNIGAN  
Come on back, we're thrilled to  
have you.

WALT  
(formal/cold)  
Thank you. Great to be.

Hannigan leads Walt and Carter through the workshop. It's evident that *Sock'Rates* is a company that sells socks.

The three of them settle around a metal table away from the activity.

HANNIGAN  
I know you have a big night ahead  
of you, Mr. Erkins so I appreciate  
this.

Walt closes his eyes a moment, then opens them and nods his head.

HANNIGAN  
(clears throat)  
Socrates never wrote anything down--  
all we know about him and his  
cognitive prowess was passed on to  
us by his students. Plato being  
his most famous pupil.

Walt nods absently.

HANNIGAN (CONT'D)  
Our reputation is reliant on others  
as well. Socrates lived in a time  
when wars were openly declared,  
fought on battlefields where the  
outcome was decidedly hard and  
true.  
(beat)  
Today, wars are ongoing, fought at  
all times on all terrain. Walk  
into any retail store and you'll  
see evidence of it. How to  
distinguish one product from  
another?

Walt brings his hands to his head, feigning emotion. Carter, unimpressed, listens to Hannigan with doubt.

Hannigan's eyes narrow, sensing Walt's apathy, but carries on.

HANNIGAN (CONT'D)

We're not deluding ourselves. We understand the need to be aggressive. Plato was instrumental in shaping our perception of Socrates... will you be our Plato, Walt?

Walt drops his head briefly.

HANNIGAN (CONT'D)

Walt?

WALT

Okay. Cut the shit. Cut all this shit. You wanna make money, I wanna make money. Fuck it. Where's the contract?

Hannigan reluctantly slides the contract over to Walt.

Carter stands up, but sits down again--fighting the urge to speak his mind.

Walt picks up the contract, weighs it his hand.

WALT

Nice and light. First indication.

Walt removes a pen from his inner suit pocket.

WALT (CONT'D)

(to Carter)

Lesson one in adult life: compromise. The world couldn't go on if everybody got their own way, society would crumble.

(beat)

If plastic were human, it would have to change to stay alive.

Walt barely looks at each page as he thumbs through it.

WALT (CONT'D)

Looks good. Looks good.

Hannigan is displeased.

HANNIGAN

We sign winners.

WALT  
 (winks)  
 And I've never admitted to losing.

CARTER  
 (to Walt)  
 Just wait a sec, will you?

HANNIGAN  
 You give a speech about compromise  
 while signing our contract?

WALT  
 (ignoring both)  
 The date is... ah, that's right.

Walt pens in the date. Just as he moves to the signature line, Hannigan SNATCHES the contract away.

WALT  
 Haven't signed it yet--

HANNIGAN  
 Whose side are you on?

WALT  
 What did I miss here?  
 (points to Carter)  
 What'd he say?

HANNIGAN  
 Not him. You.

WALT  
 Come again? Come on, hand the damn  
 thing over so we can all rejoice in  
 celebra--

Walt reaches for the contract but Hannigan moves it out of his reach.

HANNIGAN  
 Not only have you insulted us, but  
 you might want to consider  
 apologizing to the makers of your  
 suit. I've never seen a man shame  
 so many brands in one sitting.

A beat.

Walt LEAPS from his chair tackling Hannigan to the floor-- the day's aggression finally has a proper target. They tumble and trade body blows. The sounds of FABRIC RIPPING heavily outweighs the sounds of FLESH PUMMELING.

CARTER

Walt!

Carter attempts to break it up but takes a poorly aimed kidney shot from Hannigan and goes down hard.

WALT

Dammit, kid! Get outta here.

Hannigan sends a lethal blow to Walt's gut while his attention is on Carter. The force of the blow knocks Walt back on the table with the contract.

Everybody groans, clutching their respective limbs, Walt especially. It's over because nobody has any fight left.

EXT. SOCK'RATES OFFICES -- DAY

Walt exits, letting the door close on Carter who pushes it angrily.

They don't speak as they slowly, awkwardly descend the stairs to their cab. Wincing in pain at each step they move like wounded warriors, emerging from battle.

CARTER

I couldn't let you do it. Fuck sponsors.

Walt holds up his hand for silence... but he nods, understanding.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF LOS ANGELES -- DAY

The town car drives through the dry empty deserts of Los Angeles--not quite out of the city, but enough for the dreamer to feel further away than they actually are.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- DAY

They arrive at the gate of a modest apartment complex. Entry code required.

DRIVER

It's in here. Need an entry code.

WALT

Isn't there a rule about rentals?  
Can't we go in like cops?

The driver shakes his head, sympathetically.

WALT

I just moved in and forgot--

DRIVER

You don't have to lie me.

Walt is taken aback, a little ashamed.

WALT

We'll have to tail behind someone,  
if that's okay.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- DAY

Their car IDLES around the corner.

A jeep leaves the complex from the "exit" side. The town car ACCELERATES just as the gate is closing.

Walt reacts with excitement.

WALT

That's what I'm saying here! Yeah!

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- CONTINUOUS

Rows of symmetrical apartments; gray cracked driveways, shared garages and overgrown weeds on the periphery of the landscape.

The town car winds through streets within the complex that wholly resemble each other, a modern labyrinth--the suburban equivalent of the vapid corridors from the opening scene.

INT. TOWN CAR -- CONTINUOUS

They finally arrive at an unremarkable set of stairs. The driver turns around, nods at Walt.

WALT

Countless people pass by everyday  
without the slightest notion of  
what's going on inside.

CARTER

What is going on inside?

WALT  
(beat)  
Take off your shoes.

Walt breaks open the walkie-talkie package, excited.

CARTER  
What, why?

WALT  
It'll be quieter.

CARTER  
(sighs)  
Are you taking yours off?

WALT  
If you do yours, that'll cut out  
half the noise. It's my thing.

Carter sighs again and kicks off his dress shoes.

WALT  
If anything happens, be ready.

DRIVER  
You got it.

WALT  
When we get out, reconfigure the  
car this way.

Walt gestures a getaway position for the wrong end of the street.

Carter gets the driver's attention and motions the opposite way. The driver nods, understanding.

Walt hands Carter one of the blue walkie-talkies.

CARTER  
Walt.

Walt looks at him. Carter nods to the apartment.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
You know you'll know, right?

WALT  
(beat, in radio)  
Copy that.

Walt nods, satisfied.

WALT (CONT'D)  
Culture is worth a little risk.

And with that, Walt KICKS the door open and the two of them tiptoe up the driveway.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX -- CONTINUOUS

Walt surveys the property, attempting to find any discernible clues: an obvious deployment of psuedo-detective skills learned from television.

Walt points to a mostly-crushed soda can on the stairs but says nothing.

They arrive at the door. Walt looks at Carter, back at the town car, then KNOCKS and steps out of sight.

Moments later, BARRY (20s) answers the door sipping a homemade fruit smoothie. Barry has lose-fitting jeans and the type of faded T-shirt one usually wears to paint.

At first Barry doesn't see anybody, then he notices Walt and Carter on either side of the door.

BARRY  
God.  
(beat)  
You're Walt Erkins.

Walt is frozen in shock, looks at Carter.

BARRY  
(glances around)  
If this is one of those things where you come to the door with a camera and stuff, I'm not interested.

Walt looks past Barry, into the house.

BARRY (CONT'D)  
This isn't... is it?

Walt looks at Carter, confused, tongue-tied. Carter opens to a fresh page in his notepad.

CARTER  
We're investigating something. The IP address to a *A Lesbian Life In Yemen* led us here. You know anything about that?

Barry turns white. SUCKS THE STRAW of his now empty fruit smoothie.

CUT TO:

INT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- MINUTES LATER

The walls are covered with hundreds of photographs depicting a panoramic view of Yemen's landscape: desert and sky. The mural, from left to right, fades from morning into night.

Elegant graffiti on the opposite wall in big letters:

*LIVE. FUCK. APOLOGIZE.*

Carter sits on a faded sofa. Barry is in the kitchen cutting up fruit for a new smoothie.

Walt paces in between. All three adrenalized.

BARRY

If you're hoping for an apology, or something... then get out.

WALT

Or maybe you're some sick stalker.

BARRY

Please--

WALT

How could you just make up a person? An Arabic lesbian? And make everyone else look like such idiots.

BARRY

It's not about you, that's the whole point.

WALT

I cared about that girl. Ahdia.

Barry freezes up, takes offense.

BARRY

As if I don't? Why do you think we started that blog?

CARTER

We?

WALT  
Sick amusement.

BARRY  
That says more about you than it  
does me.

WALT  
What I am left with? You pull the  
curtain back on this touching  
story... you seem like some  
asshole.

BARRY  
I pulled nothing back. You showed  
up here.

WALT  
You let her get kidnapped! Like  
we're all supposed to sit here...

BARRY  
(faintly touched)  
You came out here because you  
thought she was kidnapped?

Walt HITS his fist in the palm of his hand, angry.

The phone RINGS.

BARRY  
Please, I need to get that.

WALT  
Leave it. You're not telling  
anyone I'm here.

Walt confronts him in the kitchen.

WALT (CONT'D)  
When you replace someone else's  
voice with your own, you suck the  
life out of it. You think I'm  
interested in Ahdia's life, "as  
told by you", you fuck? You fooled  
us, but most of all you're fooling  
yourself sitting there...  
(looks at his workspace)  
...behind dusty, shoddy blinds,  
amidst old take-out containers  
probably a month--

Barry splits an apple with way more force than necessary.

BARRY

Go shove off somewhere you fu--The most I'll ever be able to achieve is shit most people can piss on and that infuriates me.

Barry loads the blender with cut fruit.

BARRY (CONT'D)

But I'm a good soul, and I'm finding my way.

WALT

Sure are.

Barry RUNS THE BLENDER, forgetting to put the lid on--it SPLATTERS EVERYWHERE; Barry's face, the walls and cabinets, and Walt's suit covered in a gloppy red fruit.

Faces aghast. The phone RINGS AGAIN, but no one reacts.

Barry starts hyperventilating, looks at the mess not knowing where to begin.

Walt is in temporary a state of shock.

BARRY

I have to sit down.

Barry, clearly shaken, takes a seat by his computer.

Walt stays in the kitchen, cleans himself with a rag.

CARTER

(beat)

I know what that's like, Barry. I wanna be a French journalist some day.

WALT

This is great.

CARTER

(ignores Walt, to Barry)

The past two days I've had to follow this guy around and in doing so, come to terms with the fact that it will probably never happen for me. And instead, I'm doing an article for an over the hill game show host.

WALT  
Over the hill my ass.  
(points at Barry)  
He recognized me. *Him.*

BARRY  
You could care less about me.

WALT  
And look at the billboards if you  
want proof.  
(accusingly)  
You said it was a comeback profile.

CARTER  
And I said I added 'comeback' for  
dramatic flair.

Walt knows he's right.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
Or were too busy sulking over how a  
meager company is willing to pay  
you slightly less for an  
endorsement? You wanna talk about  
not making sense? God-almighty  
I've wondered what your face would  
look like if I ever had the balls  
to say that.

WALT  
I'm having your shitty job. A good  
journalist remains unbiased. I've  
told you that.

CARTER  
Mister integrity.

WALT  
A French reporter? You didn't even  
wanna take your shoes off.

Barry looks at Carter's socks, hadn't noticed before.

CARTER  
Well, news to you again: I don't  
really have a job.  
(beat)  
I'm a tech intern for the magazine.  
They sent me 'cuz I have  
journalistic aspirations, but I'm a  
tech intern. Guess everyone on the  
payroll was too busy for the great  
Walt.

WALT

(beat)

Oh sure. They send an intern and a car? Lies.

Carter bites his lip, knows he shouldn't say...

CARTER

Burnham, your agent, took care of the car.

Walt's legs get wobbly, feels light-headed. Barry tries to keep up.

WALT

(beat)

What a fucking nightmare all this is.

BARRY

(beat)

If you want to get people to look at themselves, you have to trick them into thinking they're looking at something totally different first.

(beat)

A lesbian girl in some part of the world you've barely heard of? It's as disarming as it is poetic. This isn't a scam, it's a wake up call.

Walt stares at Yemen's landscape on the wall. Barry starts to get angry, defensive.

BARRY

Who's to say she's fake? There could be a girl over there who's story resembles Ahdia's exactly. There's a lot going on--

WALT

Then shame on you for making her up. If there are so many girls over there, why do they need some overweight, white fuck to talk in their place?

Barry sits on the couch, stunned.

Walt heads to the front door. He runs his arm along the mural, TEARING Yemen's landscape as he goes.

BARRY  
 (stands)  
 Don't--

WALT  
 Don't ever tell anyone about this.  
 I never came here.

CARTER  
 (to Walt)  
 Oh, and by the way, all our driving  
 around the city today and I only  
 saw one billboard of you. *Uno.*

WALT  
 Because you're blind.

Walt SLAMS the door on his way out.

EXT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

A PLANE SOARS overhead as Walt descends the stairs.

He picks a potted plant and HEAVES it against the shared garage with a loud THUD. It falls to the ground, fully intact, and rolls a U on the driveway--the garage unaffected.

Walt gets in the town car.

INT. TOWN CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Walt scratches his knuckles, blood trickles out. The driver notices his fruit-stained suit.

DRIVER  
 Okay...?

WALT  
 (loud)  
 Huh?

More of a deflection than an actual answer.

Walt's CELL rings. He reaches for it anxiously, relieved at being freed of the awkward moment--

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. AGENCY / BURNHAM'S OFFICE -- DAY

Burnham stands at his window, overlooking LA's skyline. The framed "spine" poster from earlier is noticeably absent, a dusty squared outline remains.

BURNHAM [INTO PHONE]  
How'd it go with Sock'rates? I  
hear those guys are hardcore.

Walt massages his temples with his thumb and index finger.

WALT  
It's under consideration.

BURNHAM  
Well, forget it! Oddly enough you  
were right, my friend. If  
*Courtland Skies* reached out all  
those other brands would fall to  
the wayside.

WALT  
What?

BURNHAM  
CS wants to talk to you. I can't  
guarantee anything, but they're not  
calling you back in to fire you a  
second time, that's for sure.

WALT  
There's no way. I made a scene  
earlier. Dilliard Stanton was  
meeting with all these people--

BURNHAM  
That was the board. They couldn't  
believe how great you looked.  
Healthy, etc. Apparently you went  
on about people as communicators or  
something--told you treatment was a  
good idea.

WALT  
They said all that?

BURNHAM  
I'm sure they're overpowering  
Stanton on this, but who cares? So  
forget who you saw today, looks  
like you'll get the chance to soar  
again, Wally.

Walt is in disbelief. Looks down at his red-soaked suit.

BURNHAM

I know you're on your way to Nad's studio, but you need to swing by Courtland first.

WALT

Wow...

BURNHAM

If you look as healthy as they say, I think this is going to be a hell of a year.

Walt sighs at Burnham's veiled attempts at preserving his client's ego.

Carter emerge from the house. Walt sees him approaching.

BURNHAM

Everything else good?

WALT

As it should be apparently.

BURNHAM

Okay, see you in Courtland's sky!

Burnham HANGS up just as Carter gets inside. Tension is high as they both do their best not to look at each other.

Walt finally notices his bloody knuckle.

WALT

God da--

Walt raises a fist, but doesn't slam anything.

WALT (CONT'D)

Driver, hand me a handkerchief.

The driver looks around, pats his own jacket.

The driver POPS the glove compartment: a single auto manual.

DRIVER

Uh...?

WALT

Pass it.

Walt takes the manual, opens to the middle and "books" his bloody knuckle. Stares out the window...

Moments later, a taxi passes by with a MAN Walt recognizes. The man does not see him.

WALT  
Randy...?

The taxi continues up the street, stops once, then drives around a corner.

STATIC on the walkie-talkies startles Walt. TWO KIDS are playing nearby, using the same channel.

Angry, Walt gets out of the car and THROWS his radio.

From his new vantage point, he sees a car SPEED through same "exit" side he used to enter the complex.

Followed by another car... cars too nice to belong here.

Walt's mind races as he gets back in his town car.

CARTER  
What is it?

Suddenly he leaps out, back up to Barry's place.

CARTER (CONT'D)  
What now? Dammit.

Carter runs after him.

INT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Walt enters, the door unlocked. Barry is on the couch, lifts his head up.

BARRY  
Oh, no. No, no--

WALT  
Wait a second. This is serious--

BARRY  
I want you out.

Carter appears behind Walt.

WALT  
I'm trying to tip you off.

BARRY  
Go screw.

CARTER  
Walt, what are you doing?

WALT  
(to Barry)  
Look out your balcony.

Barry hesitates, then walks over to the back window. Walt follows him.

BARRY  
What?

THROUGH THE BACK WINDOW

Cars are lined up around the corner from the gated entry, in the same way Walt's car was earlier.

The idling cars wait for an opportunity, then SPEED through the "exit" side.

Barry turns white.

WALT  
Unless you're ready for more house guests, you'd better think of something.

BARRY  
(beat)  
I don't care about them. I don't care. I just want you out of here.

WALT  
Fine. But here.

Walt reaches in his suit and removes the INTERNATIONAL ENVELOPE.

BARRY  
What the hell is this?

WALT  
A letter I was supposed to mail to Ahdia.

Barry takes it. Walt starts to leave when a KNOCK on the door startles them.

They all trade looks. Carter, the closest to the door, peers through a crack in the blinds.

CARTER  
It's... that author lady.

BARRY  
Shit! Let her in.

Barry rushes to the door.

WALT  
Who?

Dally, Nad's wife, storms inside.

DALLY  
(to Barry)  
What the hell is wrong with you? I  
kept calling.

Barry turns red, stays silent.

It takes Dally a moment to register Walt and Carter... then  
the red, gloppy fruit stains everywhere.

DALLY  
This place looks... nevermind. In  
a moment.

Dally takes a deep breath, refocusing her anger. She marches  
up to Barry.

DALLY (CONT'D)  
A kidnapping, Barry? Have you  
completely lost it?

BARRY  
I didn't agree with where you were  
taking her.

DALLY  
You were sloppy. You used "miles"  
in one of her posts earlier. She  
doesn't even sound Arabic anymore.

Barry looks down at the floor.

DALLY (CONT'D)  
I nearly choked when I read that.  
Ahdia can't die--

BARRY  
She won't. We can use that, she'll  
get freed.

DALLY  
Will she now? I'm firing you--

BARRY

I got tired of okaying each post with your publisher. This is bigger than that, much bigger. Did you read the paper today? Another car bomb went off in Yemen--

Carter peers out the front window.

CARTER

Uh... This has to be seen to be believed.

This gets everybody's attention. They all turn to Carter.

THROUGH THE FRONT WINDOW

Cars are parked every which way, PEOPLE stand around anxious, confused. Some point up the stairs.

A few stand out in their gray suits and black ties, TV hosts like Randy, whom Walt recognized. There are no TV camera's however, these are mostly regular folks, private people on a secret mission.

Dally is still peering through the blinds.

DALLY

It's all falling apart for the wrong reasons. You tipped it too far.

(beat)

You're telling me all these people are here for Ahdia? Hm?

Dally turns around, notices Walt and Barry chatting quietly in the corner.

Carter is, once again, taking notes.

DALLY

What are you discussing? And who are you two?

CARTER

(matter-of-factly)  
Carter Sinclair, would-be journalist. Renowned game show host Walt Erkins.

Carter flips to a new page.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Let me ask you, what did you hope  
to accomplish by--

Dally ignores Carter, walks over to Walt and Barry.

DALLY

So much for putting the spotlight  
on Yemen. You've got a bunch of  
concerned lunatics on your  
driveway.

BARRY

They're not lunatics.

DALLY

Let's think about this a minute.

Walt moves to the front door.

WALT

Forget it. Ahdia did die... to me  
at least. But I can try to save  
her for them.

DALLY

Don't you move!

EXT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Walt steps outside, GASPS are heard as he walks to the top of  
the stairs.

The chatter subsides... Walt looks down at the crowd,  
searching for the right words... They look up at him with  
wide, eager eyes.

WALT

I know... why you're all here. I  
was here for her, too. But--

CITIZEN

What's it like in there?

CITIZEN #2

How is she?

Walt hesitates, decides to go for it:

WALT

Alive.

More GASPS.

CITIZEN #2

I knew it! We're not too late.

WALT

But, she lives on elsewhere.

(beat)

That IP address that you followed here... is a proxy. A front, a false lead to protect her true whereabouts.

MURMURS from the crowd. Walt scans the crowd for Randy, he finds him on the outer edge, biting his nails. He's a red-faced, balding man with a suit one size too small.

WALT

Randy, how, why are you here?

Randy shrugs, embarrassed.

RANDY

I don't know... same as you.

INT. NAD'S TOWN CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Nad and Tobin sit idling in a town car watching this take place. Nad is eating an apple.

TOBIN

Isn't that... Randy or what's his name? Isn't he taping that God-awful show today? Who are the rest of them?

EXT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Nad exits the car and tosses the apple aside.

Tobin grips his watch defensively as he watches Nad approach the crowd.

NAD

Why do you have blood on you, Walt?  
And your suit's all torn.

All heads turn at the sound of Nad's voice.

WALT

Nad? This... it's a fruit smoothie.

NAD

Your hand! Look at his hand.

People suddenly notice Walt's bloody knuckles.

WALT

I scratch my--it's raw skin.

NAD

Don't bullshit me, Walt. You're hoarding whatever's up there.

CITIZEN #3

What's really going on?

WALT

It's some old lady scared out of her mind from all this commotion. Let her be.

NAD

We have a right to know what's going on inside.

WALT

I just told you.

CITIZEN

He wants to take all the credit!

WALT

There's no credit to be had.

Walt looks back at the door, distressed.

CITIZEN #2

Let us in!

NAD

Come on! We'll push down the door if we have to.

Nad pushes through the crowd. People start crowding the stairs.

INT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Dally looks at Carter and Barry. They grow anxious at the SHOUTS of the unruly crowd.

EXT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Dally emerges... the crowd gets quiet again.

At the sight of her, Nad suddenly looks vulnerable. Then he looks at Walt... then Dally.

Walt realizes what Nad's connecting.

WALT

No, no. It's not--

Nad suddenly charges up the stairs to Walt. They WRESTLE briefly. The rest of the crowd looks on, horrified.

NAD

(to Walt)

My wife you asshole?

DALLY

Nad! This isn't it at all!

NAD

I was going to have both of you on my show tonight. How much of a fool do you take me for?

WALT

It's not about you!

Dally attempts to break it up.

DALLY

Nad, enough!

NAD

Don't stick up for him! I was going to propose to you again.

The DOOR OPENS once more...

Nad has Walt pinned down, but freezes as he looks up to see Barry step out. Dally is still staring at Nad.

Nad looks down at Walt, gets off him but doesn't help him up.

NAD

Who are you? And where's Ahdia?  
We're going inside.

BARRY

If that's what you want.

Nad looks around at everyone behind him, feeling like the unofficial leader.

NAD  
It is what we want.

INT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Carter is SCRIBBLING in his notepad to keep up.

BARRY (O.S.)  
I want you all to know something first... beware, that once you walk through this door... you will have your answer.

EXT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

BARRY  
You may like it, you may regret it... but you'll know.

As this sinks in some are saddened, some nod understanding... the way children react when they piece together the truth about ol' Saint Nick and wonder what the next Christmas will feel like.

People trade looks, WHISPERS are passed. Two people in the back turn around and leave.

A long beat. A few more walk away. The crowd is thinning, though some remain.

Nad watches them walk away... gets frustrated.

NAD  
It'd be unwise to stop us now.

Nad PUSHES the door open--

INT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Nad walks to the center of the living room. Starts breathing heavily as he scans the room.

A few more people walk in after him.

Nad looks at the computer, the fruit stains on the couch... suddenly humiliated. He starts HYPERVENTILATING, clutches his left arm, he goes down.

NAD'S HAZY POV

The "*LIVE. FUCK. APOLOGIZE.*" banner on the wall, in and out of focus. The torn Yemen landscape on the opposite wall.

People rush over to him, his body responds with rag-doll physics.

FADE TO WHITE:

FADE IN:

INT. BARRY'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Barry is alone in his apartment. He sits down on the stained couch, removes Walt's letter to Ahdia. Cuts it open.

WALT (V.O.)

Dear Ahdia...

CUT TO:

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

Nad is in the back of a SPEEDING ambulance, an oxygen mask on his face. He looks up at Dally, who is sitting next to him.

WALT (V.O.)

I'm not sure if this will ever get to you, but that might be why it's easier for me to write. I am writing from America and have been an avid reader of your online journal.

DALLY

Pills again, Nad?

NAD

If I make it... I'll be a hero, right?

Dally has a stern look on her face, but she RE-PARTS Nad's hair tenderly to the opposite side.

Nad reaches up to her face, removes her sunglasses.

WALT (V.O.)

I don't quite understand all the problems that plague your country;  
(MORE)

WALT (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
a lot of the political corruption  
is over my head, but I have no  
doubt conditions are tough for you.  
And your sexuality can only serve  
to complicate things.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR (CITY STREETS) -- NIGHT

Walt and Carter sit in back. They stare out the window, a  
silent ride.

WALT (V.O.)  
They say everybody needs a sponsor.  
Someone that validates them in a  
way they can't do for themselves.  
Your post about the harsh realities  
of buying bread made me sick, the  
way people can treat one another.  
I have a certain skepticism toward  
others that I sense in you, too.

Walt checks his phone, sees Burnham calling. IGNORES it.

CUT TO:

EXT. VISUAL IMPAIRMENT CENTER -- NIGHT

Walt's car pulls up. Walt and Carter stare at the entrance.

WALT  
If this works out... I'll send you  
to France.

Carter is speechless. Walt gets out of the car. Starts  
walking up to the doors, but stops and turns around.

Carter lowers the window. Walt, turns to say something, but  
stops himself and continues on.

CARTER  
Walt! Wait, what is it?

WALT  
I was gonna say, I'll go too, but  
no. That's your country.

CARTER  
It might be yours, too.

Walt gets serious as he realizes what lies ahead of him.

WALT (V.O.)

I really enjoy reading the posts about you and Nazirah. It makes me laugh. I guess couples argue the same way on one side of the world as they do on the other.

Walt hesitates, then opens the doors to reveal...

STARS, PLANETS... OUR GALAXY being projected on an enormous screen. All heads in the room turn, Hallie among them.

WALT (V.O.)

That's why I've been feeling this skepticism toward people fading away. If I can't get along with them here, where can I go? In the mean time, I look forward to your next post. Sincerely, Walt Erkins.

The doors close behind Walt... we tilt toward THE SKY.

WALT (V.O.)

P.S. Oh, I found out the Romans used to call your homeland *Arabia Felix*, means "Happy Arabia". But I've been thinking that from a distance everything must look better. That mirage-effect that's fooled us for centuries... But no matter where we go, we're all under the same sky.

(beat)

So, look up from time to time... and I will, too.

...the sky rapidly gets brighter, whiter as we--

**FADE OUT.**